

The Bangkok World

By Denis Horgan

Photography by William Harting

From Bluefoot Books

West Hartford, Connecticut – It was a long season of war, of exotic adventures, of Asian aura, beauty and mystery – and, especially, of newspapering such as cannot ever happen again. Denis Horgan, as a very young man, found himself suddenly in the middle of it all – as an Army officer with the Vietnam war, helping search for a missing millionaire in the jungles of Malaysia, ultimately as editor-in-chief of the Bangkok World only a few years from when his grandest achievement with newspapers was delivering them from his bicycle.

"The Bangkok World" – with the evocative and powerful photography of William Harting – recalls an age that was so wondrously unique, so special to its time as to be part of history yet, at the same dazzling moment, so exquisitely personal. Penetrating, reflective, funny, smart, bemused, 'The Bangkok World' captures those elusive days with so much of the spark and energy that created them.

"A great war scalded the fantastically lovely region just beyond Thailand's elephant-head margins, and occasionally within, as well," Denis Horgan writes of those moments.

"Vast drama played out across the cultures; diplomacies writhed to no end knowable to anyone not an insider playing that particularly winless sport; economies soared and flattened on international developments, worldwide conflicts, on seeming whimsy; peoples' existences ended violently and no one could convincingly explain quite why; ancient ways of life collided with new ones like carnival cars, except with so much more consequence; opportunity such as can never quite exist again in that special way opened up, winked shut: opportunities for adventure, for involvement, for escape, for joy, fascination, mayhem and anxiety all together. Great grown-up games were being played – and somehow, amazingly, I was part of them."

Denis Horgan was sent to Southeast Asia in 1966 as a 24-year-old lieutenant in the United States Army as part of the great, madly escalating war ravaging Vietnam and the world around. Assigned to a small isolated signal site in the deep northeast of Thailand, he soon was hauled from that job and, quickly, found himself as aide to the commanding general of troops there. In one seeming fluke development after another, his contact and perspective on the Vietnam war sharpened.

When Jim Thompson, a famous American expatriate who had resurrected the Thai silk industry, vanished in the jungles of Malaysia, Horgan was part of the effort to find him. This ultimately led to his becoming editor and publisher of The Bangkok World, an English-language newspaper. It was a vibrant time for newspapering -- one likely never to be seen again. Mystery. Intrigue. Fun. Amazing stories, one after another.

He took over a newspaper whose most recent editor had been driven from the country -- and whose founding editor only recently before had been murdered. "It was, you see, – or, more likely, as you have *never* seen – a newspaper put together entirely in handset type. Just like in Ben Franklin's day. Well, in Ben's day if Poor Richard had Thai typesetters who didn't really know a 'C' from a 'G' or that the humpy thing the writer had meant to be an 'n' was not precisely the same thing as the upside-down 'u' that their nimble fingers extracted from the large type trays, character by character."

The paper was put out by a Pequot's crew of writers and editors, scoundrels and geniuses, pirates and exiles, poets, madmen and so many others often whose sole journalism experience was committed at The Bangkok World. But it worked.

Denis Horgan's fascinating memoir of those amazing years and their times speaks to an experience that may very well be gone forever in an age when newspapers wither, when people get their news from their wrist watch and watch movies on their engagement rings. This was old fashioned journalism, old fashioned newspapering, old fashioned triumphs in the daily miracles of the business. Old fashioned but so rich, so colorful, so much fun.

And Denis Horgan was there.

To meet Denis and attend an Author Talk, check out <http://thebangkokworld.com/> for appearances and events.

Denis Horgan is a longtime, award-winning columnist for the Hartford Courant and author who has worked for newspapers in Boston, Dublin, Washington, D.C., and as editor of the Bangkok World in Thailand. He has been an Army officer, a reporter, an editor, a columnist, a publisher and a copy boy. Beyond his journalism, he has written books of essays, fiction, short stories and, now, memoir. He was born in a taxicab.

See: TheBangkokWorld.com

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