

10/85
Oct. 5, 1985

"Tau" Debriddhi Devakul
A Reminiscence by Francis Sayre Jr.

We called him "Tau", and from the moment he joined our family in America he was as a brother to me. Within a year of one another's age, we grew up together at home, in school, and at the wonderful summer camp in Maine we both loved so well. (Camp Enewonki)

Of course my sister, younger brother and I were proud of his long Siamese name - so hard to put into English - and the royal blood in his veins. Our father had worked with his father at the Foreign Ministry in Bangkok, and we had all gone to live there in the early 20's. So we children had enjoyed a glimpse of the splendor and beauty of our "new" brother's distant homeland. How far away it was in those days! We were glad that Prince Traitot had sent his son to absorb a Western education along with us, and we shortened his name with affection and respect simply to "Tau".

How perfectly he fitted into our family life! So easily and smoothly did he make the transition from one end of the world to the other that it is impossible to recall any traumatic events marking his settlement into the routine of dwelling in the home of a Harvard law professor, surrounded by the academic flavor of that community in Cambridge, Massachusetts. To be sure, it may have been easier for Tau since he was not the only Siamese (as the name was then) in our household. Sivawongse Kunjara was another who lived with us, older than Tau and me, and able to converse with Tau in his native tongue and tutor him a bit in English.

Thus my earliest memories of Tau are of two boys together: tangling our bodies in wrestling matches, and honing our minds among the visitors that came to our home from all over the world.

One of the landmarks of every American lad's life is, I suppose, the day when he acquires his first very own vehicle. Motorcycle or automobile, wheels become the instrument of mobility, and therefore greatly increased independence from parental or other supervision. In those days the second-hand market made it relatively inexpensive for a youth to fulfill this ambition. Thus it came about that when Tau and I were sixteen or seventeen we were each able to acquire a Model A Ford touring car in good running order. We were (in our own eyes) no longer boys, but men of the world who could proudly park their cars in front of the professor's residence awaiting embarkation to some lively scene where a little more of the world might offer its enchantments. I remember well, with just a touch of chagrin, how vastly superior was Tau's care of his chariot than was mine. He ended up with a much handsomer buggy, and safer too, thanks to his ever assiduous attention.

One year, I believe it was when my parents were travelling abroad - quite possibly on a mission for His Majesty the King of Thailand - Tau and I were sent to be boarders at the school we attended. Belmont Hill School was a small private institution recently established in a nearby suburb of Boston. Tau loved the place, and boys and masters alike loved him. Tau and I roomed together, the first occupants in a brand-new dormitory overlooking the athletic fields and school buildings set atop what was then a rural rise in the lovely wooded landscape. We would often lie

in bed after "lights out" talking in the darkness as Tau would recount what it was like to be a boy in his native land. He said he used to catch fish with his bare feet in the ditches and little ponds he used to frequent. He told me that if he had a son, he would send him to me in America just as he himself had come; and indeed years later Tau did just that, to the delight of my wife and I who by then were living in Washington. *That boy was named "TRC!"*

The winters were cold in Belmont, but Tau seemed to thrive on it. Indeed to everyon's admiration, he became the goalie on the school's ice hockey team. He looked pretty great in all his mountainous padding! That year is remembered by ancient alumni of the school as one of the best in its athletic history. Belmont's varsity hockey hit the big time by competing in the cavernous Boston Garden where only champions play. And there stood Tau in his cage nonchalantly fending off the pucks that came whistling toward him from the embattled ice.

Summers were another matter. Tau and I were privileged in that relaxed season to be campers in one of the tents that bordered a lovely field at a place called Camp Chewonki. Here some sixty or seventy boys and their counsellors lived mostly outdoors on a wooded peninsula jutting into the chilly coastal waters of the northernmost State on the U.S. eastern seaboard. Summer in Maine was an enchanting place of birds, pine and hemlock, friendly seals, and warm sunshine. Best of all however were the friends we made there-- friends for life, linked by the common experience of wondrous Nature, and the adventure of exploring all things of God's good making.

Today there are many men of mark all over the United States who vividly recall the friendly youth from so far away who starred in the colorful amateur plays we used to put on, who regularly took the prize for neatness at the morning inspection of tents, who painted his panel in the wood-shop with a nostalgic royal elephant unknown to the local foresters. Perhaps remembered best of all would be the canoe trips we often took on nearby lakes and rivers. Tau became an expert with axe or paddle. He quickly learned the self-reliant strength that it takes to live in the wild, and he relished the manhood it bestowed. I'll not forget Tau's smiling taunt to me when one day I inadvertantly rammed my canoe into a landing as he stood on the dock. "Hey Flank", he called, "why you don't stop?!" I think he deliberately mispronounced my name, the rascal.

When camp was over in the early Fall, we two boys would travel to Martha's Vineyard, where my family were wont to spend the summers, and where I now live in retirement. Here Tau and I - and Billy Palmer whose parents at Bangkok Christian College had also entrusted their son to live with us - used to roam out over the ocean in little sailboats, or even rafts of our own construction. Whether it was fishing or picnics on the beach, or just plain family around the dining table: there was always Tau, that quiet and considerate friend, that strong brother he had become.

After we finished school, Tau and I did not see so much of each other. For me the path, and hence the choice of university, led eventually to ministry in the Church. For Tau the route was in the direction of agricultural studies. Thailand would need that

kind of expertise, which presently he gained at the State universities of Massachusetts and Louisiana respectively. So was he prepared for his life-long association with the Department of Agriculture in Thailand, and as we all know ultimately for the inventive and often heroic role he played in his country's service in time of war and in time of peace.

I have a picture of Tau that I took of him with a tiny Brownie camera. It shows him sitting quietly in a chair in my father's study, aged perhaps twelve or so. Plainly that boy was ready; ready for whatever life would bring. He would meet it with courage and intelligence, and a certain native grace.

And so he did. I loved him, and I was very proud of him.

Francis B. Sayre, Jr.
(Retired Dean of
Washington Cathedral)