

# Couple Observes Buddhism's Nuances

6-D THE BIRMINGHAM (MICH.) ECGENTRIC April 25, 1963

Editor's Note: This is the 10th in a series of dispatches to The Eccentric from Donald Dennis and his wife, Margaret, as they make a seven-month trip around the world. Dennis teaches art at Bloomfield Hills High School; his wife is a visiting teacher in the same school system. The following letter was written on their way to Calcutta, India, after they had visited Bangkok and Rangoon.

THERE IS NO question in our

mind as to where the center of the Buddhist faith is after spanning the Orient.

Strong appearances of the Buddhist religion began in Japan, disintegrated some as we moved down to Singapore and then increased as we flew in towards the area of Thailand.

Leaving Bangkok for Burma, we lost some of the spectacular appearances of Buddha, but the lack of individual show was made up for by the increase in numbers of personal Burmese Buddha.

IN VISITING both Thailand and Burma, we confined our sightseeing to the immediate areas of the cities of Bangkok and Rangoon.

Border and inland unrest in Thailand, along with the wealth of temples and Klongs (canal constructions) kept us by choice in Bangkok while the police state restrictions of Burma quarantined us to the Rangoon area.

In both cases, however, we were perfectly content to explore these two centers of Buddhism and compare their artistic manifestations of the faith.

THE WORKMANSHIP and devotion to detail of the Siamese is the Western eye.

Lift your head in any direction and a golden pagoda points its way to the sky. Even a trip by water through the intricate network of the "klongs" exposes pagodas at every turn.

Color is everywhere.

Bite of glass, colored stone, tile and cement are placed in mosaic patterns around the base of the temples, while somewhere in the incense and candied interior you find an illuminated statue of the Buddha in jade, or gold, or cast bronze decorated with gold leaf and semi-precious stones. Sizes of these figures usually depend upon the imagination of the king who had influenced their construction.

One of gold leaf stands 108 feet high while another of jade is only about 20 inches high.

REGARDLESS of size, the Buddha gives the appearance of calmness to his followers.

Surround these temples with colorful carvings of figures representing protectors (men, monkeys, dogs, elephants and lions in the majority), add a few saffron-robed priests and devout followers kneeling at the altars or on the steps and you have the basic ingredients for these centers of the Buddhist religion.

UPON THE recommendation of Col. and Mrs. F. D. Thompson (Mrs. Thompson's parents are Mr. and Mrs. Allan B. Sumner of Lincoln Drive, Birmingham), we took the morning boat trip along the river and "klongs" of Bangkok.

For four hours we pushed through the sampan-filled canal, loaded with commuting natives, good peddlers and a host of other floating activity.

Sometimes our boat would be surrounded by native women in banana laden dugout canoes, all trying to peddle their delicious fruit.

THE CONTRAST between the green bananas, dark skins, bright clothing dyes, beetle-nut stained lips and gold teeth was impressive, especially with the green jungle foliage and brown river providing a background.

Everytime a wide spot appeared in the river, it seemed to be filled with this floating population, buying and selling their wares, or just passing the time of day while naked children bathed from the banks.

Everyone was friendly, and no one seemed to be in a hurry. When we finished our "klong" trip we knew that we had been exposed to the most interesting backyards of the Orient.

RANGOON WAS the next stop, and after bidding farewell to the Thompsons and Thailand, we headed for our last link with Southeast Asia.

The minute that we landed we were aware of a certain air of suspense that accompanies a police state, and the fact that our passports were exchanged for a 72 hour landing card didn't add to our comfort. It was the first time that we had been separated from the most valuable document in the world, and for three days, we had a constant reminder of what suspicion and fear can do to an otherwise friendly and happy-go-lucky population.

THE OUTWARD appearance of Rangoon is one of peddling, paddling and pagodas.

Peddlers are everywhere.

The Irrawaddy River snakes its muddy way through the city and is teeming with sampan paddlers who crisscross its wide expanse in a never-ending stream.

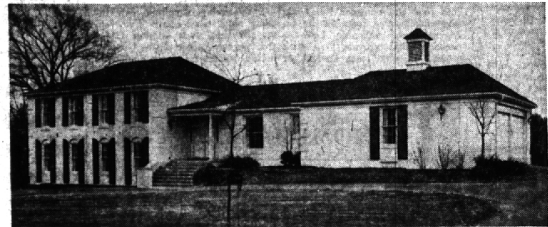
Pagodas again dominate the scene and in Thailand and Cambodia, saffron colored robes are the order of the day for those men devoting their lives to Buddha.

Back to back, Marmie and I were wheeled through the streets in a pedicab at the exorbitant rate of 50 cents per hour. The same rate applied for our sampan ride on the river.

You really haven't felt the Orient until you have bounced through on the many novel conveyances available for hire.

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## Potpourri

by JULIE CANDLER  
Special Writer



We stretched the Potpourri pipeline down to Detroit Saturday night. There we found Signe (Mrs. Gumar) Karlstrom and family at a nearby table, celebrating her birthday.

It was the first visit to the Impresario Theatre Restaurant for Mrs. K., of 701 Colonial Court, Birmingham, and Mrs. C. (that's me).

Both of us were soon wrapped in the polyester palms of the hands of miniature opera stars.

BEAUTIFULLY COSTUMED little "characters" (not puppets) fill the room with the sound of magnificent voices. They manipulate every listener's heartstrings with their wily motions to the taped music.

Their creator, Bill Fossler, has put together a formula of plastic and seed pearls, satin and wire. It bursts into colorful and captivating scenes of operatic fear and love, compassion and hate.

It's called "Opera in Focus," and there's nothing exactly like it anywhere else in the world. Inventor, director, manipulator, set designer and producer Bill Fossler said after Saturday's show that he had been trying for months to persuade Signe Karlstrom to visit the Impresario.

Mrs. K., who keeps opera in sharp focus in her life, was charmed like the rest of us.

"I hope she comes back again," said the versatile Mr. Fossler.

I have a hunch she will.

LEST OPERA get out of focus in your life, you can get the spring issue of Impresario magazine (no relation to the theatre restaurant) on the newsstands now. It's published by Booth-Ryan Associates, better known around these parts as Birmingham residents Stephen F. Booth and Granville C. Ryan.

There's a nicely done story about former opera great Marcella Lindh, who now lives in Detroit. The byline on the story goes to Martha V. Hurd, of 1021 Donnar Court, Birmingham, and the gracious Mrs. George W. Romney talks about Michigan and the opera in an Impresario interview by yer ole Potpourri Pipeliner.

A GREAT SEND-OFF greeted the Bloomfield Art Association European tour group Monday morning. As the group boarded an airport bus at the Birmingham Art Center, stay-at-home Kathie (Mrs. F. Chalmers) Smith and Jean (Mrs. Herbert, Jr.) Gardner unfurled a big banner which said, "Bon Voyage" and "Color Us Green." The word green was painted in a very jealous shade.

The farewell party-givers held the banner by two broom poles and tossed enough confetti to convince anyone that they meant what the banner said.

JEAN GARDNER says all the women travelers looked glamorous, including Barbara Brook, BAA gallery director who decided only ten days before that she would go along.

She got 24-hour service on a passport by paying double for fast handling. At 10:30 a.m. Monday, the pipeline tells us, Barbara was still shopping for clothes. At 10:45 a.m., the bus left for the airport.

If she stayed on schedule, Barbara and tour companions were in New York City at 2:30 p.m. From there they went to the important Armory Show of the cubists' cult. By 7 p.m. that same lovely day, they were airborne for Italy. Color me jealous.

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Duplication price, The COLUMBIA—\$33,900



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Duplication price, The GREENWOOD — \$35,350

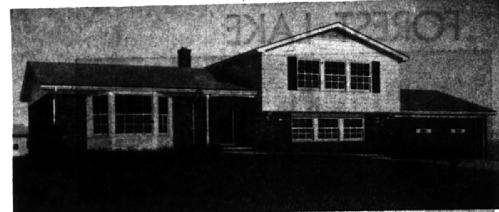


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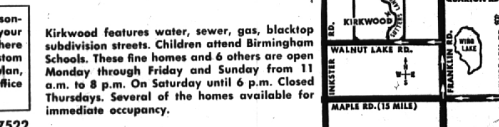
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