

Thai journal – Vol 27: Milestones

The Game of the Name

First, I want to return to something I touched on in volume 25. Thai sentences typically end with a polite word, “krup” for men and “ka” for women. On many occasions I have heard Cindy, or other women for that matter, speak to young boys and add the work “krup” (sawatdee, krup) rather than “ka” (sawatdee, ka) after their sentences. I have questioned Cindy closed about this hoping to trap her in some salacious admission. She has been nothing if not elusive, avoiding my snares.

The way she explains it is this way. Since children learn by listening first and then imitating, with young boys the mothers use the male word “krup” so that the child would repeat that. With a young girl, the mother would use “ka”. Rats! Foiled Again!

Well, then, what about this? Cindy refers to my mom and dad as grandma and grandpa. She says that that is so Warren and Derek will refer to them as grandma and grandpa. Pretty devious, right? Also very effective, because I find that I also refer to my mom and dad as grandma and grandpa.

Milestones – Engagement



The owner of the bungalow we rent has a daughter who has just graduated from Chiang Mai University. Her major was English and she wants to teach it. She just got engaged to a guy who is of mixed Thai, Australian descent who lives in Perth. Just how did they meet in the first place? That's a whole other story. We were invited to the engagement ceremony, but as Cindy was out of town at the time, I went alone.

The reception was a gala event held at a local hotel. This could very well have been a wedding reception. The whole thing started with a local custom whereby the family of the groom marched in procession down the hall to the reception room and presented the family of the bride with a banana plant and a sugar cane plant. Boy, I call that getting off light. At that point, I think I would have grabbed the bride-to-be and gotten the heck on out of there. But noooooo, they stayed around for the more substantial obligations. These included such things as rings, bracelets and assorted other goodies.

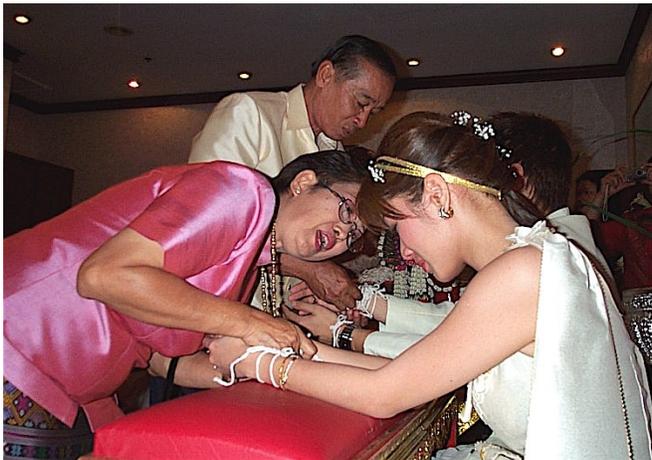


Speaking of rings and things, the young couple began by exchanging rings. Engagements vary in length, but tend to be longer than those in the west. I believe this one will be around two years. The groom told me that he wants to get together a nest egg from his job in Perth, Australia. The bride is intending to seek a master's degree in English in Australia. I tried to convince her to go to the US, but she was adamant. I wonder why? I really don't know what the dowry is in this arrangement. Unlike in the west, the family of the groom provides the dowry over here. This works out well for us because if our landlords had to provide the dowry, we might well have seen a sudden and perhaps substantial increase in our rent.

Respect for elders is huge in eastern cultures and Thailand is no exception. A big part of this ceremony had to do with getting the blessings of elders and friends in both families.



In the picture on the right, the prospective bride and groom show respect to the groom's father and mother. In the picture on the left, the mother and father (who you can't see in the picture) extend their blessing by placing their hands on the heads of the engaged couple. I found this to be a quite powerful ceremony.



Then it was time for well-wishers to join the parents for further blessings and gestures of good luck. There is not a religious aspect to the engagement, but there is one for the wedding. As we have yet to attend a wedding, I will have to report on that another time. There is, nevertheless, a lot of superstition involved in selecting the most auspicious dates for both an engagement and a wedding. Nothing is left to chance, so to speak. One of my most vivid memories early in my Peace Corps days was going to a wedding. Everything was going along handsomely until about 4:45 in the afternoon. Then the bride and bridegroom disappeared. "Where have they gone?", I asked. I was told that the fortune tellers had deduced that 4:45 PM was the auspicious time to consummate the marriage. I don't recall when they returned.



In the top picture on the left we see one of the relatives of the groom offering best wishes as well as some seasoned advice while tying a piece of string around the bride's wrist for good luck. Had someone offered me some advice, like suggesting frequent use of the two most powerful words in the English language, "Yes, dear", I might have spent far fewer of our 34.5 years of marriage in the dog house. The final picture shows the engaged couple along with the mother and father of the bride. Notice all the string on the bride's wrists, looking like a couple of casts.