

# Paradise Imports for Thai crafts

By ALICE J. PITRE

What is like to be twenty-six, female, and alone in Thailand? Nancy Davidson knows. This past August, Nancy spent two weeks in Changmai, Thailand, a twelve hour train ride north of Bangkok. There, for countless hours she sought the perfect items to satisfy the customers of Paradise Imports, a business of her very own here in Fredericton.

The trip was not her first. After high school in Bathurst, Nancy's wanderlust took her to a kibbutz in Israel, and then on to spend two months with the Bedouin in the Sinai Peninsula. In 1981, she returned to study anthropology at UNB, but not being a very disciplined student, after a year and a half, she was gone again.

This time, in the company of her friend, John, she toured Europe, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Nepal, Thailand, and India. In August 1986, "searching for a place to call home," they again visited northern India, Thailand, and Australia. This time, however, they came to appreciate the benefits of life in Canada. The food is good here, and the weather is great,

she says, so Fredericton has become her home.

In Thailand, however, they had met an American buying jewelry to resell in the States. Why not? they asked, and Paradise Imports was born. Now, most Saturday mornings since June, Nancy has set up her booth in the Boyce Market to offer Fredericton a little of the beauty of Thailand. She sells silver jewelry, including rings of malachite, lapis, mother of pearl, and black onyx. The silver is not treated with a rhodium finish like most of the silver available today.

Her other specialty is a variety of lacquered boxes. These acacia or monkeywood boxes, lacquered black, are delicately hand painted, and often shaped like animals or birds. As well, Nancy sells cross-stitched handbags, made from bits of old and new fabric. The supply is limited however, by the Canadian import quotas on clothing, handbags, and shoes.

When Nancy is buying, she inspects each piece individually, unwilling to send home anything that is flawed. She feels confident selling because she has done all the work

herself. "Really, what I'm doing," she says, "is selling myself. I tell the people how I've seen these things being made." It makes her feel good, she says, in a way that money cannot. She smiles, and her pride is evident as she explains that she is the only woman in the area doing her own buying. Her tastes are different than a man's tastes, and the people are appreciative of that.

Nancy has no plans to open a shop, however, because that smacks too much of permanence, and she enjoys her carefree life. Because she has no overhead, her prices can be lower, and the beauty of the Thailand craft can be available to more people. Another benefit of the business is that there is no one looking over her shoulder to tell her what to do. She sells in Bathurst, as well, and has had booths at the Fredericton Exhibition, and the recent Women's Trade Fair, November 2nd to 14th, she will be located in Regent Mall.

Nancy loves to travel, and she emphasizes that the travelling led to the business, rather than the other way



Nancy Davidson sells beautiful Thai jewelry at the Market every Saturday.

around. She feels fortunate to be able to travel in this way, and make an income while doing it. But travel is a long term goal, she says, and one for which few people are willing to make sacrifices. How many people, she asks, will pack it all up, and leave with a backpack and four pair of underwear? For most it's just too scary.

Nancy stays in guest houses, travels on local buses and

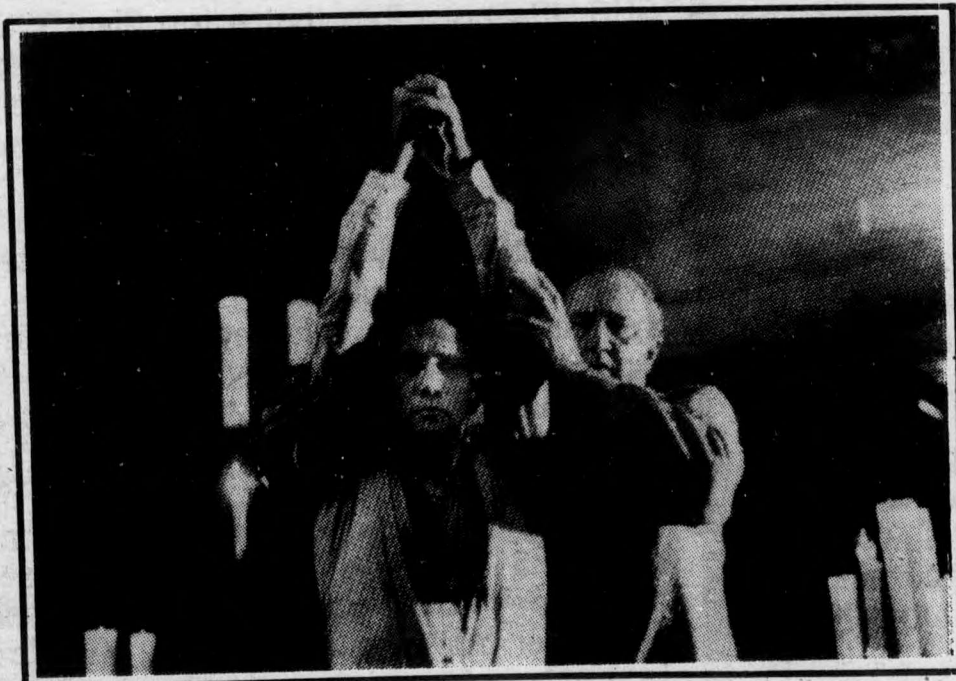
trains, and eats the local food. The people in other cultures are not like we are, she says, mentioning how self-absorbed and materialistic North Americans are. She feels that if people travelled more, there would not be as much hatred and prejudice in the world today. She herself has experienced an immense inner change. Seeing the leprosy and death rampant around the world, yet finding the people content with their way of life, is enough to change one's attitude.

Travelling is a very personal thing, Nancy has discovered, and it's hard to explain to others what it means to her. Somewhere in Nancy's future there may be a return to university, and a family of her own, but there is still a lot of the world to see. She would like to go to Korea, and to make an extended trip to Africa. In the new year, though, she has definite plans to return to Israel and Thailand for a monthlong stay.

So what is it like to be twenty-six, female, and alone in Thailand? "A fantastic high," says Nancy, "and I was treated like a queen!"

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