

The Baby Elephant

When we arrived at Cha-Am, I didn't know what to expect. We hopped off the Super Luxury Air-Conditioned Touring Coach (which are similar to Greyhound but having stewardesses the same as airlines and on trips of any length, they serve food and drinks.)

We stepped out into a pretty hot day (the bus made a special stop to let us out.) We found the beach and bungalows that were about a kilometer or two away. There were bunches of other volunteers that had also just arrived for the language training seminar and were trying to rent a song thaew (usually a Datsun pickup with two rows on the back with a canvas roof to protect from the sun.) We paid a Baht and a half or about seven cents and were on our way.

The bungalows were nice. I say nice in that they were adequate in the traditional Thai attitude of basic, functional living/housing.

A friend and I settled in and took a shower (the shower Thai style is to use a cup and dip and pour... different but quite refreshing.) We were both anxious to go chat with the elephant we had seen on the way in. He was owned by the bungalows and lived in a corral (which we later learned was more of a psychological retention than an actual prison, when he ran through the restaurant after a basket of bananas.)

He was four years old and stood about three feet in height with his ivory about six inches long. We found certain types of wild grass to be of his liking as well as the bananas, of course. When approaching, he would use his trunk to sniff all over you in a ticklish fashion.

My attraction to species of animals is such that I watched him for a couple of hours just to try to distinguish different activities. Eating, dirt-bathing (after a human shower), pacing, sleeping all fascinated me. Bananas, he would peel before eating. Sleeping was similar to cattle except for the head, that must lie on its side due to the trunk.

I got drunk one night and grabbed a bunch of bananas and headed for the corral. Two other volunteers headed me off. We played with Jalay Mongkon for a couple of hours. A light rain came up from the ocean, but we stayed with him in the rain for a little longer. He seemed to be relaxed in our company but did little as look up as the rain got heavier and we ran for cover and the bungalows.

After the Thai language seminar was over and a bunch of us were piled into another song thaew, I looked back and saw him eating a banana and wondered what he wondered about.