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A Week in our Life at AIIAS.pub.pdf

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A WEEK IN OUR LIFE AT AIIAS 2007
It was beginning December 2006, when Ngaire and I flew from Alberta, Canada, to the Philippines for a five-month stint of volunteer service at AIIAS, the Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies. The AIIAS library faced a crisis of leadership early that year when two librarians—Felipe Tan and Annette Melgosa—left permanently for the United States. I arrived to replace Hernan Hammerly from Argentina, who was completing nine months as volunteer library director.

During my brief tenure of five months as director I was to manage the library, lead in developing a strategic plan, mentor two campus librarians for leadership, and teach an intensive summer course in Indexing and Abstracting. A large shipment of new library shelving, which Hernan had ordered from an American supplier, was scheduled to arrive by early February, but in fact was delivered just three days before my departure in May. Thus, Megumi Flores, who was appointed the new library director, was left with much to accomplish within a short time.

Our work in the Philippines was not without some play time. During the Christmas break, in company with Ron and Anne Bissell, we flew to the island of Palawan—“last frontier” of the Philippines—to enjoy the colorful reefs and fish; and after March graduation, we spent two weeks in Cambodia and Thailand, again with Ron and Anne. Look for separate stories about those travel experiences.

Five months of volunteer service was a fulfilling and invigorating experience. We grew to love the people of the Philippines. What follows is my diary of one typical week during our AIIAS stay.
It’s just getting light when the bedside alarm goes at 5.45, our rising time on weekdays. Already there are lights in nearby cottages. By the time we’ve downed two glasses of water, visited the bathroom, and exchanged PJs for shorts and runners, the sky is bright and alive with a new day. It’s time for our morning jaunt around the gently rolling campus, enjoying the cool sweetness of the morning. There are numerous paths through and around the campus, but we usually choose the mile-long perimeter trail. It is a popular trail for walkers and joggers, so we exchange many greetings along the way.

Our walk takes us past most of the 36 staff homes, built as 18 duplexes. The campus is attractively landscaped, dotted with red-roofed buildings. It is truly a garden setting, adorned with trees, exotic shrubs and colorful flowers. Just now bougainvillea is in peak bloom, in vibrant colors. A morning breeze ruffles the fronds of coconut trees silhouetted against the sunrise.

Back home it’s time to shower and dress for breakfast and morning devotions. Our breakfast is fairly traditional, with cereal, juice, toast and fruit. Finding good cereal is not easy, and deceptive packaging means that big boxes of cornflakes or cheerios are barely half filled when you open them. Glenys Perry brought us a packet of Weet-Bix when she and Graeme flew back from Aussie just after New Year.

The work-day begins at 7.30 with a combined worship in the amphitheater of the Administration Building for all the office people, including library staff. I usually play the piano for them. Then the library opens for the day, and Ngaire has one or more student papers or dissertations to read and mark with corrections.

Chapel service at 11.00 this morning is interesting and amusing. Each semester about 40 new students from various countries sign up for English language classes, and today’s chapel is taken by that group. Keep in mind that these are adults, already with earned degrees from their home countries. After practicing their new English skills with a song service, seven perform a skit illustrating the problems and frustrations experienced by newcomers to the language. Lots of laughter, but the last item takes the cake. Five adult students from Africa, Vietnam, Mongolia, Japan, and Argentine, dressed in their native costumes, form a line across the platform. They sing lustily, with actions, “Love in Any Language”, backed by the recorded voice of Sandi Patty. At center stage a Chinese student, dressed in formal concert attire, mimes Sandi, with head and body gyrations. It’s a scream. Welcome to the unique world of AIIAS.
“Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies” is more than a mouthful, so everybody knows the place as AIIAS (pronounced I-us). Some of the residents call it the “New Jerusalem”, enclosed as it is by a secure wall that protects from the noisy outside world of buses, trucks and jeepneys.

AIIAS came into existence when the Adventist Church decided to open a small university to provide advanced study opportunities for students living in countries where the costs of going to North America for further study are prohibitively expensive. About fifteen years ago, the Institute was established here on an old coffee plantation. We are about 50 kilometers south of Manila, on the lower slopes of what was once a very tall mountain. Taal Volcano was a huge one, towering 18,000 feet into the sky. It blew it’s top many moons ago, and now the rim of the vast caldera overlooks a big lake that contains a sizable island with a small but still-active volcano. The rim of the ancient caldera is about 10 kilometers from AIIAS, and it commands stunning views of the lake and surroundings.

Founded as a seminary, AIIAS has expanded and now offers masters and doctoral programs in theology, education, business and public health, to around 250 students from over 40 nations worldwide. Academic quality of the programs is high. Most of the 33 full-time faculty have doctorates from respected universities in America, Europe, South Africa, Australia and Asia. There is also a long list of adjunct faculty who come for short periods to teach specialized courses. The Leslie Hardinge Library, pictured below, is locally recognized as outstanding in its resources and services.

An elevation of around 1,000 feet brings slightly lower temperatures than Manila. During the cooler months of December through February there are almost always breezes blowing from the mountains. The winds are gusting early this morning as we circumnavigate the campus on our walk.
This morning’s jaunt takes us by the student apartment blocks and veggie gardens. In the shelter of the campus wall, small garden plots are cultivated by student families who supplement their basic food purchases with home-grown cabbages, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, yams, tapioca, and other crops native to their homelands. We greet a couple of African men who are watering their plots with garden hoses.

Since most students come with their families, the campus has no dormitories, but 14 towers or apartment blocks accommodate eight families in each one. A family unit contains bedrooms, living area, kitchen, bathroom, and a balcony which is a convenient place to string up a clothesline. There is no cafeteria or food service, but a small store stocks a range of groceries and pharmacy items, plus a few pre-cooked meals prepared daily by enterprising student wives.

Families mean children, so AIIAS operates a day junior academy with an enrolment of over 100 kids. Older children and college students commute each day about 30 kilometers to the Adventist University of the Philippines which enrolls about 5,000 students and operates a 12-grade academy.

Tomorrow the Home Economics teacher at the AIIAS academy will be away, so Ngaire has agreed to be the relief teacher. She does nothing by halves, so is involving two other faculty wives in a hands-on demonstration of planning a formal dinner. Tonight, we make Australian-style lamingtons for the occasion. Since the class comprises mostly boys, it will be quite interesting.

Upper Left: Lake Taal occupies part of the crater of an ancient volcano. Pictured is a large island in the lake, which itself contains a crater lake. This island is visited by boat, with a climb on foot or horseback to its summit, where Ngaire is sitting.

Left: From the island summit we have this view of a crater lake that occupies part of this island. Pictured is another smaller island — an island in a lake on an island in a lake on the large island of Luzon of the Philippines.
On a normal day, Ngaire prepares a lunch for the two of us, and we have dinner about six, when it is getting dark. But this is not a normal day. The Home Economics class goes from 12 till 2, and I’m conducting a planning workshop for all the library staff from 1 till 3. Before noon I walk over to the campus store and spend 40 pesos (about 80 cents) for a pre-cooked lunch in a foam container. Meanwhile, the three ladies are busy preparing for the class and the party which everyone will enjoy.

For supper, we have leftovers from the party. Then, leaving the house for an evening stroll, I carelessly close the door without taking the key. Never mind, we’ll meander in the direction of Oberholsters’ house, where Trevlyn is in charge of campus housing. She happily loans me a key, and I run back toward our cottage, taking a short-cut path behind Ron and Anne Bissell’s house. Suddenly Anne’s voice breaks into the darkness, “Help!” “What’s wrong, Anne?” “Well, the big screen has fallen off the kitchen window, and I’m holding it up, so it doesn’t crash onto the table. Can you help?”

I steer myself into her house, and we spend several minutes getting the large, heavy screen back into place. The guys who removed the screen for painting failed to replace the screws. Job accomplished, I’m finally able to complete the original errand of rescuing our house key and returning the borrowed one. Meanwhile, Ngaire has updated Trevlyn about several problems at our house. The washing machine is still awaiting repair, the television doesn’t work, and one of the burners on the gas stove malfunctions. It’s a typical short list of problems that abound here, and we admire Trevlyn’s courage and patience as she tries to keep tabs on everything that needs attention.
Thursday is the big market day at the nearby town of Silang. Some ladies are on their way there at 5.30 a.m., to be back in time for breakfast and the work day. Today, Ngaire and Anne go together in Bissell’s car, after breakfast.

The Silang market covers a large space where hundreds of sellers display their wares and produce. Anne and Ngaire have their favorite stalls and sellers, and always come home with the trunk loaded with enough veggies and fruit to last an entire week. There’s a huge variety of vegetables; fruits include bananas, chicos, pineapples, ponkins, papayas, and mangoes—big ones with juicy flesh and flavor, selling as low as 40 pesos (80 cents) a kilo. Our diet here includes a large mango each per day. We are going to suffer from mango-withdrawal when we return to Canada.

About mid-afternoon I come home from the library, and we set off on our weekly shopping excursion to the big SM Mall at Pala Pala, about 15 kilometers down the road toward Manila. Buses rumble by the AIIAS gate every couple of minutes, Jeepneys even more frequently. Most buses are crowded, so we usually flag down one of the newer, air-conditioned models, paying as much as 30 pesos each for the ride.

The relatively new Mall has three shopping levels. Getting inside involves choosing the separate Male and Female entry points and being checked by the guards. I usually open my camera case for inspection, then he pats me around the hips to ensure I’m not concealing a weapon. The Mall interior is brightly-lit, spacious, busy with crowds of people, and extremely noisy. Many stores try to draw customers by playing very loud music, competing with adjacent shops. However, the entire place is spotlessly clean, including the toilets (Comfort Rooms here). Toilet tissue and paper towels are conserved by never being supplied, so one must go prepared. Conservation of water is also in vogue—the urinals are clean, odor-free, and waterless. The sign says that each non-flushing urinal saves 150,000 liters per year.

The Mall’s food supermarket has about everything one could need and a row of 25 check-outs, all busy with lines by evening, so we’ve learned to shop early and leave our bagged groceries at the market’s package counter while we explore the shops, including the big two-story department store. Ngaire wants a hair-cut before she leaves for New Zealand this weekend, so I leave her at the ladies’ salon. When I return, I can barely recognize her. She has had a complete makeover including washings, neck and shoulder massages, and all kinds of special treatments for 163 pesos (just over $6). When I had my haircut last week, I paid 80 pesos for a similar level of treatment, including the only scalp massage I’ve ever had. Of course, I could get a cheaper haircut at any of the sidewalk barbers.
Invariably, we eat at one of the two dozen or so Mall restaurants before catching a bus home. Several American chains are here: Pizza Hut, Shakey’s Pizza, Burger King, and Macdonalds. If we eat at Shakeys, we always order a basket of Mojos (like scalloped potatoes) with salad or pizza. The bus home is crowded as we rattle along in the darkness, but every conductor knows to let us off at AIIAS. Since there is a limit to how much we can carry this way, Ngaire sometimes goes with Anne on a supermarket excursion.

(Right: A “halo-halo” is a special kind of Filipino treat)

**FRIDAY**

There are no classes on Fridays, so it is a day for meetings and committees. Doctoral defenses are usually scheduled at this time. Since we’re launching a new five-year strategic plan for the Library, I chair the first meeting of a newly appointed Library Planning Committee today, with faculty, library, and student representatives.

At the house, Ngaire employs a house-girl for two hours each Friday morning for a complete cleaning. She speaks little English but does a thorough job. Ngaire pays her 50 pesos an hour ($2 for the visit) which will also be ample for her jeepney fares. It seems little enough pay, but some guys earn only 50 pesos for an all-day job at the market, plus some rice and a few left-over vegetables.

At sunset, about 5.45, the AIIAS bell rings to signal the beginning of Sabbath. It is rung again at 7.00 for the Vesper Program, which we usually attend. Tonight, it’s a concert by the International Ladies Choir, a group of about 40 singers representing nearly 20 nations and cultures. Led by a Korean lady, the choir presents an outstanding program of songs. During short breaks we are treated to a Korean Flute Ensemble and a pair of young musicians who play a violin/viola duet very professionally and with gusto. Music is one of the special blessings at all worship events here. Each national group has its own choral or instrumental ensemble. The participants often wear national costume, and the performance quality is usually excellent.
SABBATH

Sabbath services are held in the large gymnasium, which seats around 1500 when it’s filled. The acoustics are not very good, and the building is home to hundreds of chirping sparrows, so there is always competition for sound production. For the same reason, you avoid sitting directly under the ceiling rods. Money has now been raised and donated to construct a beautiful campus center which will include a church.

Divine service begins promptly at 8.20 with praise singing, followed by the welcome, music specials, prayer garden, children’s story, sermon, offering, etc. The liturgy includes special songs sung at specific parts of the program. Hymns are accompanied by piano and organ. Special music today included a Filipino singing group, plus voice and violin solos.

The Sabbath preaching roster includes the church pastor, religion faculty, and students who have been preachers and evangelists in their home countries. Today the service is longer than usual since it includes the baptism of five teenagers. As the service concludes they stand in a row across the front while the entire congregation lines up to shake their hands. They are truly welcomed into the AIIAS community.

Sabbath School follows, ostensibly starting at 10.30. Today the pianist has not arrived, so Pastor Higgins (from Canada) spots me in the congregation and calls me up to play for the hymns. The piano is a fine concert grand, so it’s a joy to play. I miss not having a piano in the house. It’s the last Sabbath of the month, so everyone with birthdays this month is invited to come to the platform. I join about 30 others who celebrate January birthdays. We stand while special music is presented, then we are each given a small wrapped gift. Mine is a small decorative candle. AIIAS is a beautiful community of people representing dozens of different cultures, all living, studying and celebrating life together in Christian harmony.

Separate Sabbath School classes are held all over the campus, finishing by noon. Today we are guests at Glenys and Graeme Perry’s house for lunch. We find Peggy and Steve Guptill there too, and Dr. Cairus from Argentina. His wife is in Buenos Aires having cancer treatment; she is on everyone’s special prayer list. Steve Guptill is the new president of AIIAS. They’ve just moved onto campus from the nearby compound of the South Asia-Pacific Division where Steve was education director for several years.
SUNDAY

Ngaire is flying to New Zealand today to spend about 17 days with her Mum at Rotorua and her sister in Auckland. One of the AIIAS vans is going to the airport this morning, also taking a couple who are flying out to Korea this afternoon. There is still enough room for Trevlyn Oberholster, Steve and Peggy Guptill, and me, so we’re on our way at 9.30 a.m. After goodbyes at the airport, the rest of us drive to the huge street market area of downtown Manila. It’s a very crowded place, where vendors compete with each other, and jeepneys try to inch their way through everything. We spend several hours being jostled there. I have nothing I want to buy, but Steve and I are the willing carriers for parcels of cloth and other things that the ladies acquire in the markets. We’re all glad to be on our way home in the air-conditioned van.

One lady says that she needs to renew her 3-year driver’s license soon. The remark is met with groans and laughter from the others. I don’t understand. Is it one of these all-day affairs that are typical of many procedures here? “Well, it can take quite a while,” Steve says, “but you lose your dignity when you have to go or renew your license.” He explains that in an effort to keep drivers in the Philippines drug-free, they require a urine sample, and it has to be produced live and watched, so there’s no cheating.

Peggy takes up the tale. “If you can’t manage enough in the container, they hand it back to you, ‘more please.’” Peggy said she and a friend were laughing through the ordeal, and the officer said, “Is this funny?” “Yes, we think it’s very funny,” they replied. Steve adds that if you are too embarrassed or pressed for time, you can sometimes pay a third person several hundred pesos to get the license renewed for you. That puzzles me. “You mean ...?” “Yes, the whole bit” says Steve, laughing.

Well, so much for keeping drivers drug free. This is a different world from North America. Never mind, we’ve enjoyed and survived another week at AIIAS.

Keith Clouten, Feb 2007

Left: Entrance to Quiopa Market, Manila. Right: Entrance to Fort Santiago, part of the historic Intramuros precinct in Manila.