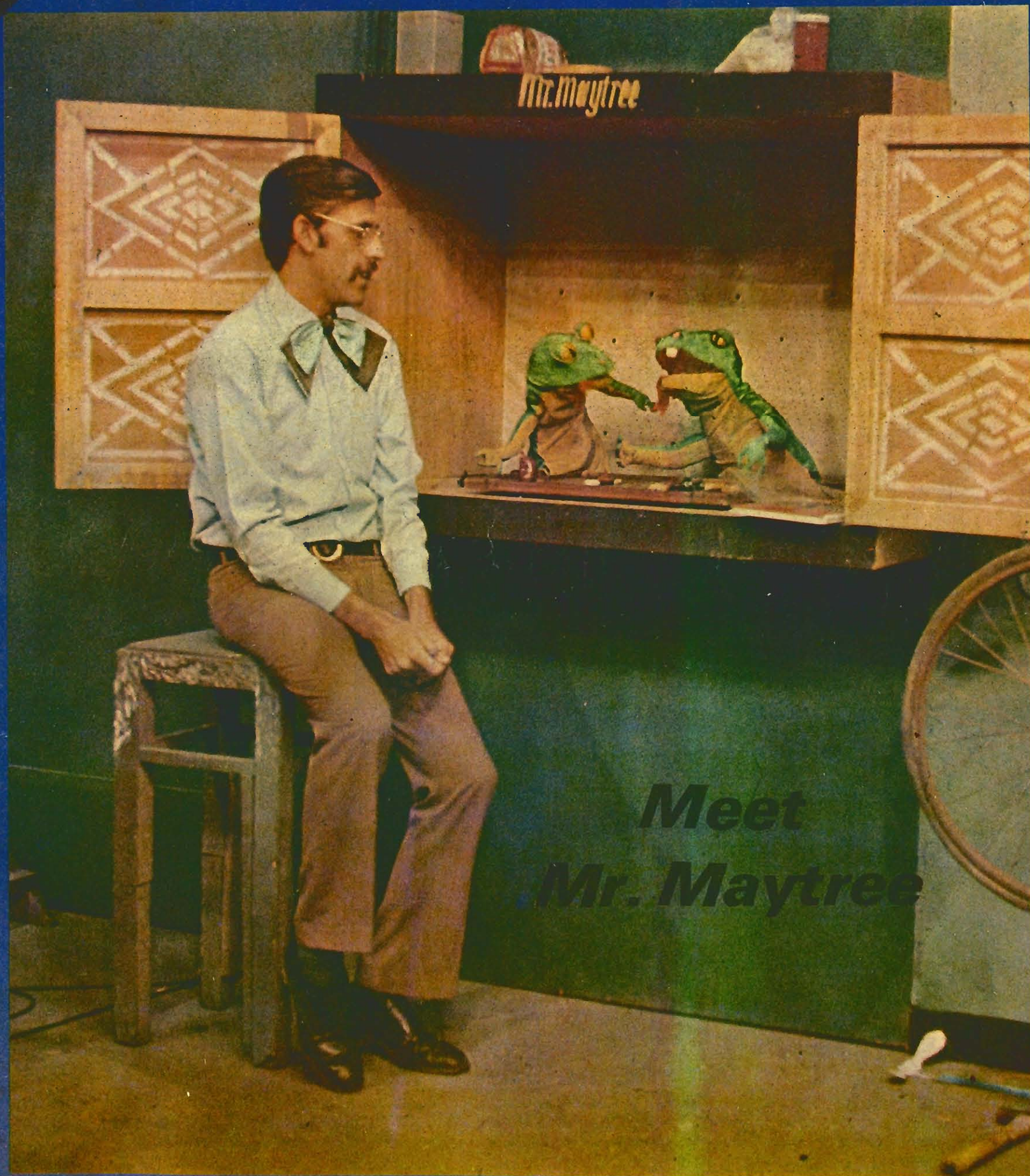


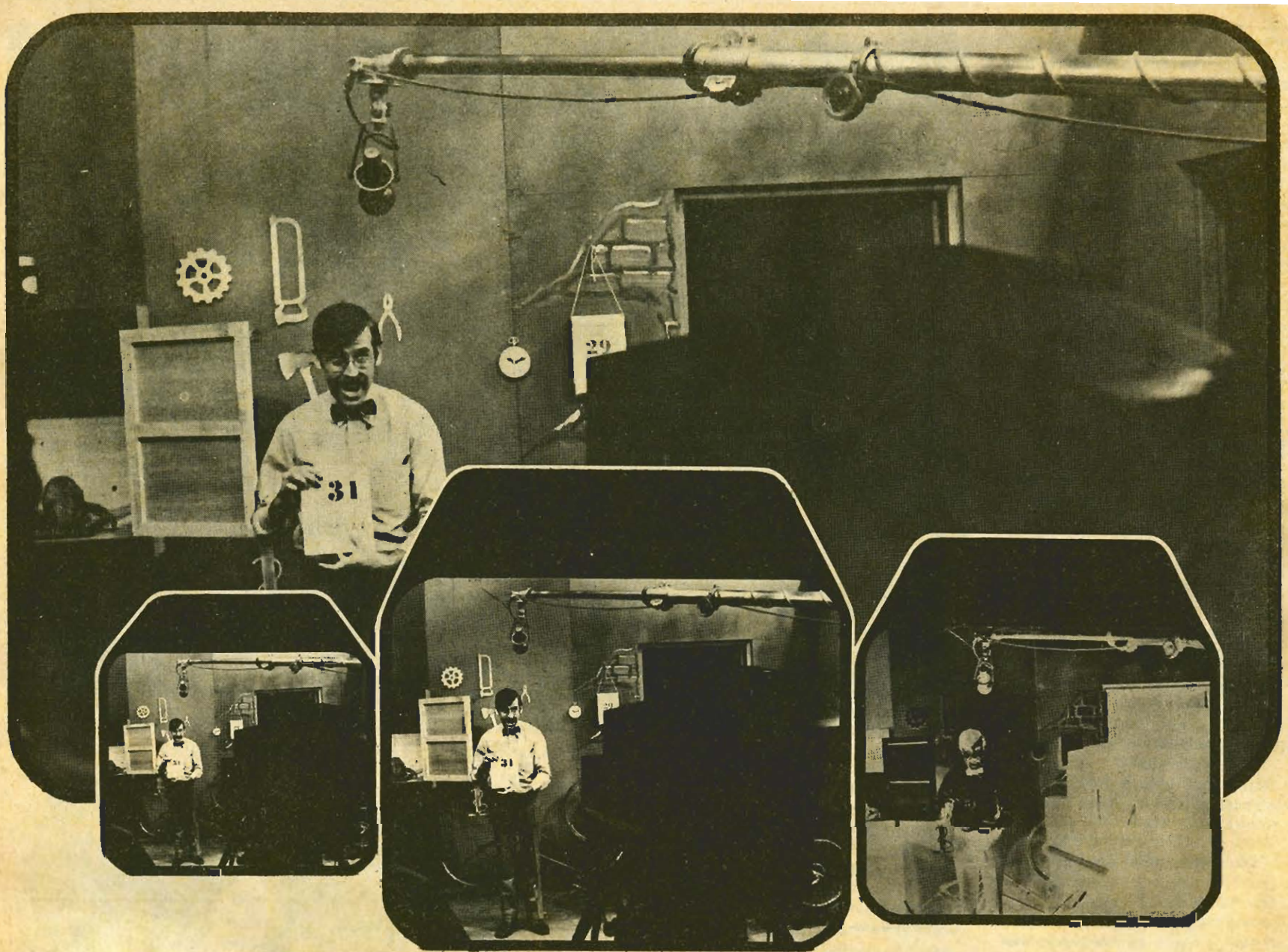
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*Meet
Mr. Maytree*



SESAME STREET COMES TO THAILAND

WHO'S Mr. Maytree? Why, he's the old man with the moustache and bow-tie who fixes bicycles on Sesame Soi, Bangkok, and the star of an exciting new educational television series that will be broadcast over Channel 4 next year to more than 100 elementary schools in the greater Bangkok area.

Besides Dan and Ernie, two "jingjok" puppets who live in a cupboard behind the tea, Mr. Maytree - played by Bob O'Keefe - has a whole bagful of film and television tricks for teaching English to "prathom" 5 children.

It's a sort of Thai "Sesame Street".

The spark behind the project is Mrs. Boonsom Chatikanon, Head of the Education Division at the Bangkok Municipality and Director

of Educational Television there since its establishment in 1965.

She is a graduate of England's Center for Educational Television Overseas (CETO) and, besides the English series "Meet Mr. Maytree", oversees productions in Thai, science, mathematics, social studies, and music.

The creator/producer of the "Meet Mr. Maytree" series, Michael Schmucker, studied film and television at New York University and the British Film Institute before coming to Thailand as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1969.

He spent his first year teaching English at Wat Bovornives

School in order to understand the problems Thai students have with English.

It took him more than a year to create and write the scripts for the "Maytree" series.

"A scriptwriter, a producer of educational television shows, has to satisfy two criteria--one educational, the other artistic--before he can make full use of the medium of television," says Schmucker.

"As education, ETV programs must present a learning experience to the student. Knowledge is transferred. The "Meet Mr. Maytree" series is designed to teach English to Thai students.

This determines the goal and content of each program.

"But how you present the material--that's educational television as art.

"The trick is to wrap up a piece of knowledge -- a vocabulary word, a grammar point--inside a funny scene or animated film and let the kids discover it themselves.

"It's like a Christmas gift: unwrapping it is half the fun.

"Levtovic (educational television expert Miroljub Levtovic) put it this way: 'Details cannot be told. They have to be reconstructed before the eyes and in the imagination of the viewer, transformed into a new audiovisual quality which makes possible a complete experience.'

"That's what we're trying to

By John Boyd-Weibel

do through the use of cartoons, films and puppets."

Once the scripts were done the Peace Corps assigned three more volunteers to the Municipality to form the production team for the "Meet Mr. Maytree" series.

Ren Fridell, with a Masters degree in film and journalism, taught grade 5 at Wat Sutat school in Bangkok, then joined cartoonist Ernie Geefay and artist/set designer Dan Curry on the project.

Fridell taught film, drama and journalism in the United States before coming to Thailand.

Geefay has extensive experience in the design and construction of audiovisual aids for education. Last year he worked on a special Peace Corps TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Seminar team that taught English courses throughout Thailand--in Songkhla, Pitsanuloke and Chiang Mai.

Curry, a Fine Arts Major, had exhibited his paintings in various art galleries and museums in the U.S., including the Guggenheim Museum in New York, before coming to Thailand as a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1969.

Both Geefay and Curry extended their Peace Corps tours an extra year to work on the television show.

Curry created the two puppets "Dan" and "Ernie" then, with the help of graphics artist Somchao Netprasert, built an animation stand for filming the cartoons.

The team also composed and recorded original music for the series.

There's a delightful mixture of art and education throughout the "Meet Mr. Maytree" series.

The vocabulary series "Mr. Z" features a boy with a pair of magic chopsticks who can leap over walls, make himself disappear and create anything he wants--from Cokes to vocabulary words--with a flick of the wrist.

"Magical swordfighting movies are very popular with Thai children (and adults) in Bangkok," explains Schmuecker.

"We want to adapt the humor and heroes of the 'Mr. Maytree' show to Thailand.

"We're taking the program out of the TV studio through the use of films, and using Bangkok itself as our set."

Program No. 1, "Magic sticks" features a 10 minute film called "Alphabet Trouble" which teaches the English alphabet. It introduces "Chopsticks" and "Mr. Z" to the Thai kids and the kids to such film tricks as fast motion (16 f.p.s.) and jump action photography.

"We shot the scenes against backgrounds that Thai children in Bangkok can recognize and identify with--the Dusit Zoo, the Chao Phya River, on Paholyothin street, near the Metro Theater on Petchburi Road, the Saturday-Sunday Market and Lumpini Park."

In one scene of "Alphabet Trouble" they had the star "Chopsticks" (played by Ernie Geefay) create a swimming pool--by jump action



Members of the graphics department (above) of the Bangkok Municipality try their hands at teaching "Dan" and "Ernie" how to say "sawadii." From left to right, Lert Pimsoguranont, Chachaval Siriyanonda, Panom Thawongit and Somchao Netprasert.

The star of "Meet Mr. Maytree", Bob O'Keefe, is a Peace Corps Volunteer on loan from Wat Bovornives School in Bangkok where he teaches English. In addition to drawing cartoons, Ernie Geefay stars as the boy with the magic chopsticks in the "Mr. Z" series.

photography--with his magic sticks.

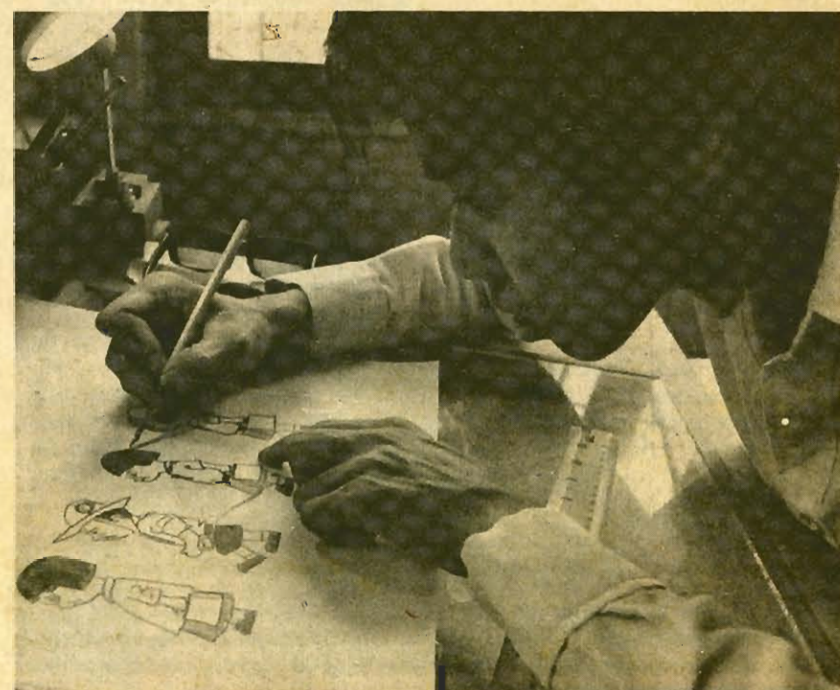
After taking a refreshing dip he spies a man reading an English newspaper and uses his magic sticks this time to extract the letters 'H', 'I', 'J', 'K', 'L', from the newspaper page. Each letter as it flies out of the page is shown for 15 seconds as a close-up on the TV screen and the Thai students watching the program see the letter, hear it pronounced and are asked to repeat the sound after the TV teacher says the letter.

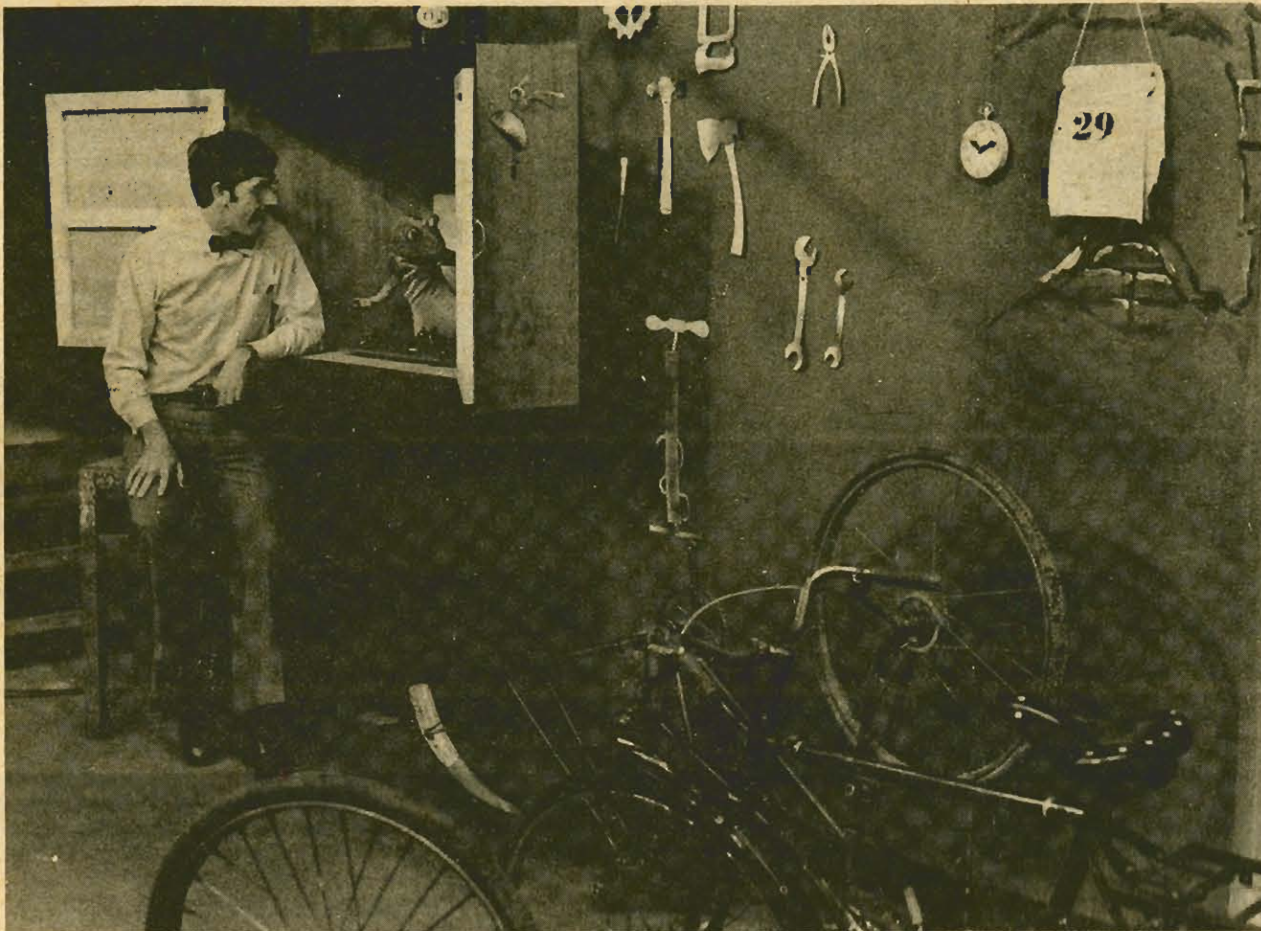
To end the 'H-I-J-K-L' sequence they had Geefay wave his Chopsticks and leap backwards off a second storey into the pool. The leap was shot with the camera upside down and put in right side up during editing.

The result--a magic two storey leap.

When Chopsticks creates the final letter, 'Z', in "Alphabet Trouble", it mistakenly ends upon the nose of "Mr. Z" who happens to open his door at the wrong moment. The film ends with a mad chase down Soi Aree with Chopsticks pulling off another magic escape over a 10 foot wall. The story doesn't end there. "Mr. Z" continues to chase Chopsticks until they become friends.

Like the successful American ETV series "Sesame Street", Thailand's "Meet Mr. Maytree"





The bicycle shop set of the "Meet Mr. Maytree" series where we find Mr. Maytree watching Dan and Ernie play a game of Thai chess.

also uses animated films to spark the interest of children studying English for the first time and help explain difficult words and grammar points.

In the animated grammar cartoon "Is this a Pencil?" capital letters shrink, small letters grow big, and words get bumped around until a question turns into an answer.

There's animated films to teach "This and That", the numbers 1-10, prepositions like "in", "on", and "under". To teach contractions, little "Drivo" like characters gobble up the letter "i" in "He is" to make the contraction "He's".

The animated film "This and That" uses proper cut-outs instead of ink drawings. Part of the program "Pens and Pencils", it presents a story about a little boy and girl who go out to pick flowers. When she points to a flower he picks one up, holds it in his hands, and says "This?". Unfortunately, she always changes her mind and points to another flower far away and says: "That."

The "Meet Mr. Maytree" series is designed to serve as a model English language ETV series but the same techniques can be applied to any ETV program in any subject—whether it's science, social studies, Thai or mathematics.

In December, the Peace Corps ETV team will join with a Thai team in the Municipality ETV Department to give a series of in-service training courses to the rest of the staff.

"We are trying to develop a series of practical, useful in-service training courses that are

directly relevant to the problems and the situation the Municipality ETV staff faces right now", Schmucker explains.

"This demands adaptability and flexibility on the part of both the teachers and the syllabus. ETV theory has to be brought down to the level of real needs.

"Right now, the Municipality doesn't need PhDs in mass communications to unravel McLuhan for the staff. It needs teachers who can train more people in practical production skills--

plains the role of the television in the classroom in this way:

"We're not trying to replace the teacher in the school. One 20 minute program of English a week is no substitute for five hours in a classroom with a real teacher.

"We're trying to use television to stimulate learning, to stir up excitement in the English class, to enrich the Oxford textbook and the teacher's course with audiovisual materials the teacher hasn't the time or perhaps the skill to

Thailand doesn't need any more feasibility studies, conferences or panel discussions by international experts to meet and pontificate about potentialities of ETV in Thailand. We need good programs and we need them now.

scripturing, new ideas in set design and production, animated film-making.

"They have some highly skilled people with these talents already but their numbers are not enough. Other staff members need courses to upgrade their existing skills and develop new ones."

But looking towards his termination date from the Peace Corps--April 15 of next year--he admits that he's worried about getting the in-service training going.

"There's just never enough time."

Getting back to the "Meet Mr. Maytree" series, Schmucker ex-

produce.

"Mr. Maytree, Dan and Ernie's antics, the films, the cartoons--they give the English teacher something to talk about, enjoy, share and discuss with the kids.

"ETV isn't the cake, it's the icing.

"Of course, in an English language television series like 'Meet Mr. Maytree' you can do a marvelous thing--put a native English speaker, Mr. Maytree, into every English class in Bangkok."

Producing good ETV programs doesn't stop in the studio when the videotape is done, however.

As Professor Wilbur Schramm of Stanford University noted in

his book "The New Media: Memo To Educational Planners", "the most important discovery (from research done on the national ETV project in Columbia) however--supporting a great deal of research done under experimental conditions in developed countries --is that the amount of learning from television depends to a very great extent on what happens in the classroom before and after the broadcast."

From the very beginning of ETV broadcasting in 1965, the Bangkok Municipality, under Mrs. Chatikanon's direction, made a great effort to show classroom teachers how to fully utilize the TV programs.

Before the TV school year starts, teachers receive a "Teachers Handbook" with suggestions on what to do before, during and after a broadcast.

How is a film like "Alphabet Trouble" in program No. 1 "Magic sticks" used in the classroom? Take a look:

TEACHER'S HANDBOOK LESSON 1: "MAGIC STICKS"

Purpose:

a) Review -- to review the letters of the English alphabet in order to aid recognition and pronunciation of the letters.

b) Remember -- to provide a visual "hook" to help students remember each letter.

Before Broadcast:

a) decorate the room with English and Thai alphabet letters.

b) explain to the students that, unlike the Thai language, which has 44 consonants and 22 vowels, English only has 26 letters altogether.

c) construct out of thick paper or cardboard the English alphabet letters and give each child one letter before the program.

d) explain that when the TV teacher says, "Repeat!", this means that the students are to repeat the word or letter.

During Broadcast:

a) tell the students that, when their letter appears on the TV screen, they should raise the letter up so the teacher can see that they recognize it on the TV screen.

b) help the students to repeat the sound of each letter when the TV teacher says, "Repeat!"

After Broadcast:

a) talk about the vocabulary film: what did they see? what are "chopsticks"?

b) check each student: how did Chopsticks create your letter? what is your letter called? which letter came first?

c) have the class repeat the sound of each other's letters.

d) paste all letters in order above the blackboard.

Homework:

Assign students to find and cut out 5 examples of their letter from back issues of English newspapers you provide them with.

"It's not enough to make a good show," Schmucker explains. "You have to show the teacher how to use it, suggest ways they can integrate the program fully to their regular teaching materials."

Though the potentiality of educational television has been recognized by the government for a long time now, actual growth has been slow.

As far back as 1966, a UNESCO report on "Broadcasting in the Service of Education and Development in Asia" declared that in most countries in Asia, "the planning authorities responsible for social development schemes do not sufficiently see the enormous possibilities of television to aid economic, social and educational development."

Then in 1968 a UNESCO study mission produced a report on "Educational Radio and Television in Thailand" and recommended that "television be given the highest priority" and called for the setting up of an independent ETV center in Bangkok.

Commenting on the study, he says: "The Okkenhaug-Rowland study is comprehensive, sensible and incisive. It outlines in great detail the role educational television could play in Thailand's national development—from instructional programming on the primary school level, which the Bangkok Municipality is already doing, to teaching science and new mathematics on the secondary level, to teacher training, adult literacy and language courses, special courses dealing with health, hygiene and irrigation practices for farmers and villagers upcountry, cultural enrichment courses.

"In the Okkenhaug-Rowland report Thailand already has a sound blueprint for ETV development and with a few modifications it could be put into use—as a development plan—tomorrow.

"Thailand doesn't need any more feasibility studies, conferences or panel discussions by international experts to meet and pontificate about potentialities of ETV in Thailand. There is a danger of studying the thing to death.

"We need good programs and we need them now."

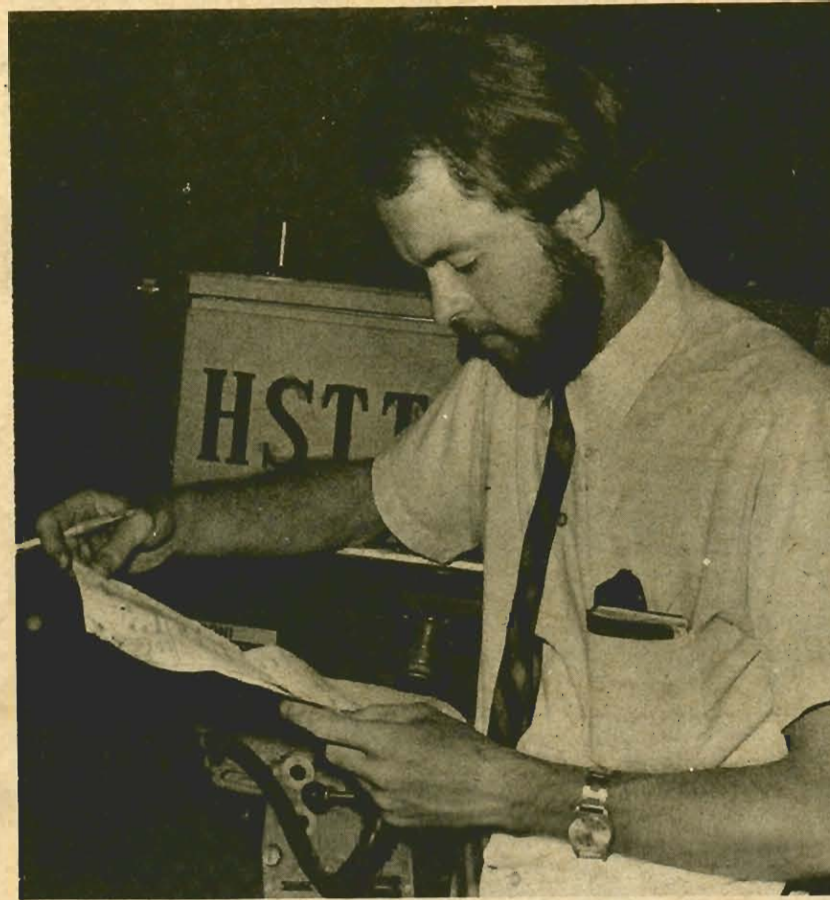
There's a tremendous amount of work and frustration involved in producing an educational television series like "Meet Mr. May-tree" however.

"We're already a month behind schedule on our videotaping."

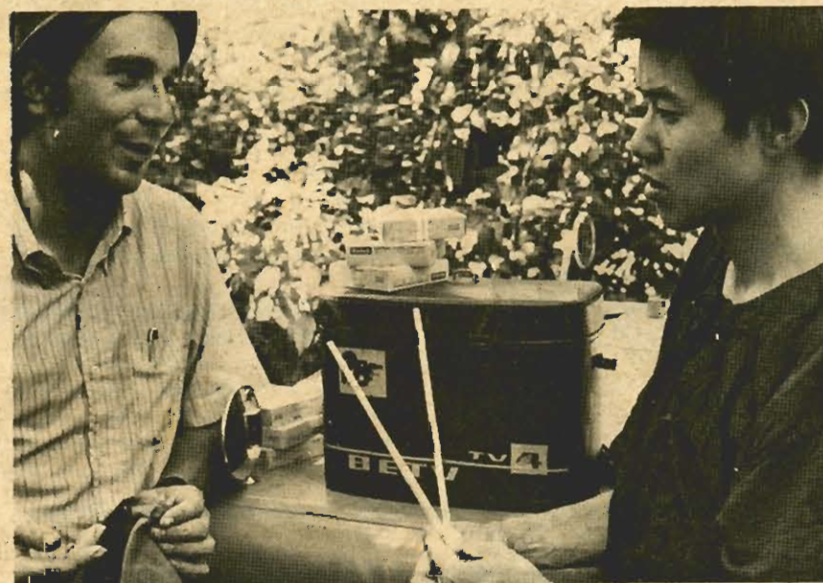
August was a month of disasters for the production team. The movie camera, used to shoot the vocabulary films, an old Bolex H-16, broke down and spent two valuable weeks in the repair shop. The camera came out and promptly broke down again—but not until 5 more rolls of film had been wasted.

Monsoon rain cancelled several days of exterior shooting. They couldn't find a machine shop in Bangkok willing to tool a piece of metal needed for the animation stand. One member of the Peace Corps team received a 1-A draft classification.

It took four days to locate plastic cells suitable for cartoon



Director of the Peace Corps ETV project, Michael Schmuecker, pauses during a run-through with the actors to recheck a shot.



Three rolls of film shot, and Dan Curry and Ernie Geefay take a break. Mrs. Boonsom Chatikanon (below), head of the Educational Television section directs a staff of 39 full and part-time ETV personnel at the Bangkok Municipality.



work. Finally, the fiscal year ended, wrapped in budgetary confusion and bureaucratic red tape, capping a month of frustration.

Instead of Aug. 12, the first program was taped on Sept. 16.

As if problems like these aren't enough to make Thai ETV producers tear their hair out more discouragements await them at the TV studio.

The Bangkok Municipality does not have any production facilities or studio of its own.

It rents time, space and personnel from Thai TV Channel 4. But Channel 4, cramped for space and burdened with a heavy, hectic schedule of live broadcasts, has only two studios, precious little space to store special ETV props and flats, and must squeeze in educational programs between 10 and 12 in the morning.

Because of these demands, the studio is not available for camera rehearsals and overworked directors usually show up about 20 minutes before broadcast—and their first look at the script.

The result is easy to imagine: technically poor programs and apathy among ETV scriptwriters and producers. But the problem of camera rehearsals—or better yet, the lack of camera rehearsals—is a problem like so many others that are just plain insolvable without more financial support.

"ETV programs would improve dramatically if we had enough money to rent the TV studio for two hours before each show and have a full camera rehearsal—with actors, directors, cameramen, sound engineers, everyone present.

"It's impossible to produce anything as complicated as an ETV show without practice.

"It's a team effort, like rowing a racing scull. If one oar is off stroke it's a chain reaction disaster. It's the same with an ETV team—scriptwriter, producer, director, actors, graphic artists, sound engineers, floor managers, light and microphone crews. There has to be a strong sense of rhythm and coordination, of confidence between members of the team built on hours of practice together—as a team.

"A camera rehearsal—or even better, money for our own studio and ETV production team that could work hand in glove with us—would eliminate perhaps two-thirds of the mistakes that make the ETV look so amateurish now: hastily constructed sets, tilted captions, unfocused zoom shots, music being faded in and out at the wrong time, confusing or physically unworkable TV scripts, the tendency to cover the situation with a safe, boring "long shot", and understandably nervous actors who see the props and set for the first time 15 minutes before they go on the air.

"Sometimes it looks like a Laurel and Hardy comedy during production, but it's sad. You see what the problems are, you see



Under the lights and camera of the Municipality's new animation film stand, another cartoon, created by Dan Curry and filmed by Ron Fridell is put together. This cartoon, using jump action, photography with colored paper cut-outs will become the grammar film teaching "this" and "that."

the Municipality ETV team, and the TV-4 production staff with great men like director Thanakon doing a tremendous job under ridiculous handicaps and you can't help but think—what a difference money could make."

Maybe "Meet Mr. Maytree" will do for educational television in Thailand what "Sesame Street" did for ETV in the U.S. — call the attention of the public and the people that hold the purse strings to the enormous potential of commercial television's starving stepchild: educational television.

"Until 'Sesame Street' came along, educational television in the U.S. was in the same fix as it is in Thailand today—begging for pennies," says Schmucker.

"It's a vicious circle. Governments aren't going to invest their nickles, baht or rupees until they see commercial TV quality in educational television programs.

"But how do you make programs like that in a few weeks, on \$200-\$300 U.S., with equipment that has to be begged, borrowed or stolen?"

"We need our own studio, our own production facilities," says Mrs. Chatikanon.

The problem is, how do you convince the people who hold the purse strings?

"We had more time than normal to produce the "Meet Mr. Maytree" series," says Michael, "and we were able to borrow people from other projects at times.

"But in return we hope to create the kind of program that will convince people educational television is not just an expensive toy but a powerful tool for national development."

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