

# **I Walked Away:**

**An Expatriate's Guide to Living In Thailand**  
**Completely Revised, Updated and Expanded**



**By Michael Ziesing**

I Walked Away: An Expatriate's Guide to Living in Thailand  
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Finally, there are the Saints. I owe a debt of gratitude so great that I fear I can never repay it. From my heart, I thank my Mom, Noel, Big Mike, Patty and Marvin, Ken, Bill and Arlene.

I dedicate this book to my son Matthew, who reminds me daily that moving to Thailand was the right thing to do.





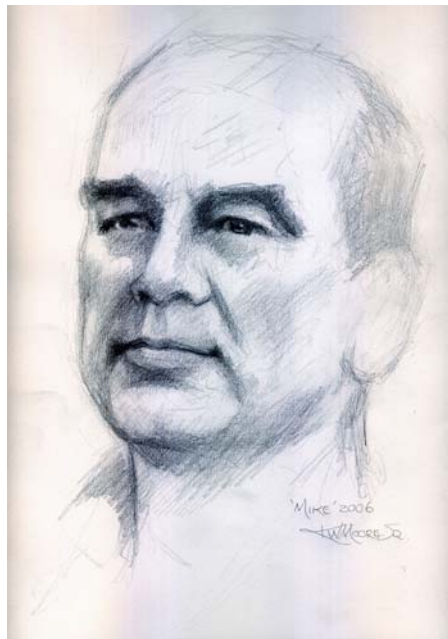
## About the Author

Michael Ziesing was born in El Paso, Texas, the son of a career Army officer and former Army nurse. As a boy, he lived all over the USA, as well as Germany and Italy. He never lost his wanderlust.

He has been a chef's assistant in a Chinese restaurant, farm worker, construction worker, psychiatric aide, Navy hospital corpsman, sailor, flea market entrepreneur, bookseller, publisher, philosophy professor, publican, ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher and website editor.

He graduated from Moorhead State University (Minnesota) in 1971 with a B.A. in Philosophy, and did his graduate work at the University of Connecticut, graduating with an M.A. in Philosophy in 1972.

He is the author of *The Scarlet Q*, and co-editor (with Mike Gunderloy) of *Anarchy and the End of History*. He was the editor of the long-running anarchist periodical *Instead of a Magazine*. He has also written several academic articles on the subject of ESL.



Drawing by K.W. Moore, Sr.



## Introduction

By Mike Gunderloy

I don't know where in Thailand Mike Ziesing lives. Nor do I know whether he has a couch in his little house there, although I rather doubt it.

However, I do know two things with the utmost certainty. The first is that the door's not locked. The second is that if Mike were to ever come home from a trip to his have visa renewed and find me sleeping on the (probably non-existent) couch, he'd greet me warmly, offer me a beer and not be all that surprised by my presence.

You see, Mike is one of those truly good friends that the lucky person will pick up in the course of a life. We got to know each other rather well when we were both gadding about what passed for the U.S. anarchist movement in the late eighties. We edited a book together, we drank beer together, we slept in the same hotel room from time to time. The drive from Boston down to Willimantic (where he lived) was always a wonderful one for me, because I knew at the other end there was a kindred spirit and a cold beer. That's an excellent combination. The good vegetarian food was an added bonus.

Of course, time change, and most of us change with them. Mike and I both drifted away from the "movement" (which, in retrospect, doesn't seem to have been moving so much as running in place) and have gotten on with our lives. Am I surprised that he's in rural Thailand, the possessions of his previous life spread around the community? No more that he will be to learn that I'm in rural Virginia, writing computer software for a living and surrounded by more stuff than ever before in my life. We've each continued on our own paths to peace and prosperity, and although I no doubt find it much easier to buy a variety of beer than Mike does, I think on the whole he got the better of the deal.

Sure, there are those who will use the usual loaded terms to describe the lives of these two again anarchist. "Drop" and "sell out" come immediately to mind. I could make the usual academic arguments about the retreat being a means of advance, of about worldly success serving to show others that you're doing something worth emulating. But I won't. There eventually comes a time when you realize that changing yourself into a better person is more rewarding and more effective than trying to change others. Mike in his little house and I in my larger one aren't out there oppressing people. If everyone else could honestly say the same, the world would be a better place.

Oh, and Mike, if you're ever in Virginia, you're still welcome to crash on my couch buddy.

Mike Gunderloy  
"Claymont"  
Summer 1995



## Preface to the Current Edition

*I Walked Away* was published in 1996 after living in Thailand for about four years. It remained in print, without revision, until the publisher, Loompanics, closed shop.

I was always kind of surprised that the book stuck around and continued to be read. I still get emails from nice folks and have made a handful of friends as a result of the book.

A revised edition has been needed for sometime and this seems as good a time as any to do it.

Having said that, I think the essence of the book is still pretty much the same. I remember reading a review on Amazon that was pleasant but critical. The criticism centered around the fact that the book was basically little more than common sense.

I would agree with that. However, Thailand is a place where common sense is easily lost or ignored. It's also a place where common sense is different than in the west. Take my word for it, I know from personal experience the price that can be paid – in some cases, literally.

In addition, as mentioned in the original preface, the book was never intended to give technical details about visas, property ownership or other legal matters. Yes, these things are addressed here, but as with the entire book, from a personal and subjective viewpoint, not as an expert.

With the growth of the internet, it is easier than ever to find legal and technical information about residing in Thailand. I feel no need to reproduce it here.

I have always kind of thought of the book as a chronicle of my adventure. The adventure has continued for more than ten years after the book was written. Thus, the need for an update.



## Preface to the Original Edition

Many people dream of chucking it all, walking away and starting a new life in an exotic country. This is the story of how I did that and what I've learned. It is a true story, but it is frank and, to some extent, subjective. It is a story of the joys and pitfall of living life in a tropical, easy going, lovely country that is populated with beautiful people. It's the story of life as an expatriate in Thailand.

Some who dream of staring over in Thailand might envision moving to a tropical island, for example Koh Samui or Phuket — two popular vacation destinations in the South of the Country. It could be that others imagine a home in Chiang Mai in the North, a farm in Northeast Thailand, or even crowded, polluted, but always intriguing Bangkok. Thailand has something to offer everyone, even those who don't know the country.

In 1992, I left it all. From the United States, I moved to the island of Phuket in Southern Thailand. When I lived in Phuket, vacationers frequently told me they were jealous that I was able to do something they wished they could do. They often asked me a lot of questions about how I had been able to do it. Some of the questions were practical, some theoretical and some personal.

The purpose of this book is to share my experiences with those who dream about doing what I have done. In that regard, it is personal and intuitive. I make no claims about being an expert on Thai business law, customs, language or even culture. What I do have is an enthusiasm and respect for Thailand as well as a love of learning. I will share with you what I have learned, and some of the things I have done and seen during my adventure in Thailand.

For many people, including me, Thailand is an extraordinary place populated by delightful people who are always ready to have fun, to smile and who refuse to be seduced into the tight schedules and deadline so common in the West. For most of the year, the weather is gorgeous — if you enjoy a balmy, tropical climate. By and large, Thailand is an economical place to live. If you have been to Thailand, you have been fortunate enough to experience all this firsthand. If you have not been to Thailand, and you are grown tired of the hustle and bustle of the Western world, you should, by all means, give serious thought to visiting this enchanting country.

The aim of this book, however, is not to sing the praises of Thailand. Many other books do that quite well. Rather, what I to accomplish is to give you some insight into what it is like to live, and perhaps work, here. I hope to get you to think about what you are doing or yearning to do even if that involves saying things that you disagree with. In that regard, I have tried to pull no punches when it comes to the difficulties, as well as the joys, of starting a new life in Southeast Asia. You may not agree with some of the things that I say. That is fine. Certainly you must ultimately decide matter for yourself. It is, after all, your own personal journey. But I hope that you agree that if you want to live in Thailand, a new understanding and a new way of thinking are important.

This book is written from the perspective of a divorced, middle-aged (and then some) man. If you have been to Thailand, you have some idea of what that might mean. I have not glossed over anything that accompanies the experiences of such a man. Political correctness might be OK for those who can afford the luxury of theorizing rather than doing. However, as a Westerner relocating to Thailand, the reality of everyday life is more important than the speculative agenda known as "political correctness." Consequently, I have opted for frankness in this book, rather than sugar-coated and comfortable political platitudes.

Further, political correctness is a relative notion. What is politically correct in the West might not be in the East. Those with a Western political agenda have no more right to tell Thais what or how to do things than other Westerners with an equally superior attitude. Thailand is their country and a fabulous one it is. Do-gooders claim to want to help Thai people improve themselves. Cynical redneck types think the Thai way of doing things is ignorant. Both of these sorts of people are wrong – no matter how well-meaning (or racist) their motives may be. I prefer to leave things to the Thai people and learn from them. You will find that to be the underlying theme of this book.

Thais tend to be somewhat fatalistic and accepting in their approach to life. Consequently they have not bought into the “recovery movement” so popular in the West. They are much less like to feel that they have been “victimized,” and are more willing to take responsibility for their actions and the consequences. They are not whiner and complainers. Psychotherapy is not big in Thailand, and I suspect that is because most people neither need nor want it. Thais recognize that everything is “up to you,” and this is a frequently heard phrase. In my view, one of the great lessons Westerners can learn from Thai people is the lesson of individual responsibility.

While I agree with those who hold that everything we say and do in life is, in some sense, political, I do not intend for this book to be tract on how we or anyone else should see the world. It is not a book about changing Thailand or the foreigners who visit or live here. It is a book about what is, not about what out to be. But, having said that, I need to add that it is a book about the way we – guest in Thailand – ought to behave. In my humble opinion, we must, in nearly all things, accept Thailand the way it is and adjourn our behavior and attitudes.

I remember getting a letter from someone who said that I was living my dream. I wrote back to and said that it was not so much a dream as an adventure. Adventures have dragons of assorted varieties. Sometimes they are unpleasant dragons of the type found in the West – bureaucracy, for example. There are personal problems, sickness and man other thing that are no fun. Thailand is not heaven and Thais don't claim it is. In this book, I will write a lot about the different dragons you will find. I will tell you how to avoid running into them if possible, and some of the things that you can do should you encounter one. In that regard, there are many things in the book that may seem negative or critical. And, of course, Thailand has problems like any country does. But I hope that I have avoided painting a negative or cynical picture of this marvelous country. I do not enjoy being around ex-pats who endlessly complain and criticize a country they freely chose to live. I elected to live here and I am free to leave anytime. I enjoying living here and do not have any desire to move away. I do, indeed, have a wonderful life. Those ex-pats who are found of being negative about Thailand need to take a look at their passport and see where they are from.

Sometimes it seems as though 90 percent of the letters to the Bangkok Post involve complaining about something in Thailand or telling Thais how they ought to do things. The things in Thailand need changing, and there are some, the Thai people are perfectly capable of doing themselves. Many of the problems that Thailand has – deforestation, destruction of coral reefs and even litter – are the direct result of Western values being imposed or adopted. More of the same doesn't strike me as particularly wise.

At the same time, as someone who is perhaps dreaming about relocating to Thailand, you need to be made aware of some of the difficulties that you will run into. Living in a place is not at all the same as vacationing in a place. Some of things that you liked as a visitor may annoy you as a resident. In addition, as a country with a

government, police force, food, customs, culture and language that you are completely unaccustomed to, knowledge and then patience are essential for you to live here successfully and happily. Patience you will have to acquire on your own. Maybe I can help you learn a little something. I hope so.



# Chapter One

## **Getting Started**

Some things in life

