

SECTION I

HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN



Her Majesty Queen Sirikit graciously signs the Siam Society's Welcome Book at the dedication of the Library, 13 January 1962.



Her Majesty Queen Sirikit with Her Majesty Queen Ingrid of Denmark at the dedication of the Library of the Siam Society, 13 January 1962. The Library was dedicated in the presence of two kings and three queens: Their Majesties King Bhumibol Adulyadet and Queen Sirikit of Thailand, Her Majesty Queen Rambhai Barni, and Their Majesties King Frederik IX and Queen Ingrid of Denmark.

# HER MAJESTY QUEEN SIRIKIT

BONNIE DAVIS

MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL  
THE SIAM SOCIETY

Her Majesty Queen Sirikit was born Mom Rajawongse Sirikit Kittiyakara on Friday, 12 August 1932. Her Majesty, the daughter of General H.R.H. Prince Nakkhatra Manggala Kittiyakara and Mom Luang Bua Kittiyakara, is descended from a long and illustrious royal lineage.

At the age of four, M.R. Sirikit was enrolled in kindergarten at the Rajini School. During World War II she transferred to the St. Francis Xavier Convent School because it was closer to her home and considered safer. During the years her father served as the Siamese Ambassador to several countries in Europe, M.R. Sirikit continued her education in England and France. Proficient in languages and music, she at one time considered becoming a concert pianist.

It was in Europe where the young bachelor King of Siam met the lovely M.R. Sirikit—a meeting that not only changed her life forever, but in time, the lives of thousands of Thai people as well. Their engagement was announced in 1949, after months of rumors, speculation and hope at home. The young couple returned to Siam early in 1950 and were married on 28 April at Sapatum Palace, home of Her Majesty Queen Sawang Wattana, paternal grandmother of His Majesty the King.

On his Coronation Day, 5 May 1950, His Majesty elevated his beautiful consort to the full rank and title of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit.

Their Majesties the King and Queen have four children, one son and three daughters. Their first child, Princess Ubolratana, was born in April, 1951 in Switzerland, where His Majesty was continuing his formal education. Their Majesties returned home to Thailand in December, 1951. The Kingdom rejoiced, and the celebrations for His Majesty's birthday on 5 December were especially festive, for after almost twenty years there were again a King and Queen in residence in the Royal Palace. His Royal Highness Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn was born in Bangkok on 28 July 1952, the first son born to a reigning King of Siam since 1893. Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn was born on 2 April 1955, and Her Royal Highness Princess Chulabhorn on 4 July 1957.

Although she was very young when she became a mother, Her Majesty soon became the role model for Thai mothers. Since 1976 the Queen's birthday on 12 August has been celebrated as National Mother's Day in Thailand. Once asked about her favorite hobbies by a television interviewer in the United States, Her Majesty replied, "Looking after my children." The Royal children were brought up to be aware of their duties as citizens of Thailand as well as members of the Royal Family. They were also taught to use their time

wisely, and Her Majesty often read to her children to encourage them to read worthwhile books for pleasure as well as learning.

Early in the reign Their Majesties the King and Queen began visiting rural villages and provincial areas of Thailand so they could meet their people, learn about their lives, and let them know they cared about their welfare. They were amazed to find people waiting for them everywhere they went—along roadsides, at village markets and temples. Many had travelled on foot for days from areas where there were no roads, and often bringing with them small tokens or gifts they hoped to present to their King and Queen. Hand woven cloth, choice fruits and vegetables, and frequently flowers which soon became very wilted in the heat. Everything was graciously received by Their Majesties—nothing was refused. His Majesty once remarked that whatever else happened, they would not go hungry!

Her Majesty Queen Sirikit is the only Queen of this country to visit every province. When His Majesty entered the monastery for a short period, following the traditional custom of all young Thai men, Her Majesty served the Kingdom as Regent while the King was absent from the throne. After His Majesty the King again assumed the duties of Sovereign, the title of *Somdej Phra Borom Rajini Nath*, or "full reigning Queen," was bestowed on Her Majesty.

Being born Royal isn't altogether the easy and idle life that many believe it to be—at least not in Thailand. There is total commitment to the job at hand; always public expectations to fulfill, formal and often tiring ceremonial duties to perform, all in the task of trying to please everyone, disappoint no one, and keep smiling.

That first trip of the Royal couple to visit their people expanded to become annual visits to widely separated regions of the country. As time passed they saw that the lives of the people were becoming worse instead of better; clearly something had to be done. In trying to find solutions to rural problems, at one time Their Majesties were spending close to eight months of every year away from Bangkok. As soon as the Royal children were old enough, they too accompanied the King and Queen. To see their Royal Family visiting them gave the people hope, but more than hope was needed.

While His Majesty the King worked with the farmers to improve their lot, Her Majesty the Queen turned her attention to helping the women find ways to supplement the family income. The ideal was to keep the family together and for the women in the household to earn money while working at home.

Thailand has a rich heritage of arts and handicrafts, and each region has its own distinctive styles and types of crafts. In the Northeast Her Majesty admired the hand-woven fabrics, and encouraged the women to weave material for sale. Silkworm projects were set up and Her Majesty supplied looms and weaving material as well as equipment and supplies needed for other crafts. A market was guaranteed at fair prices, and often, when the need was great, payment was made in advance. In the South the old craft of Yan Lipao vine weaving was revived and expanded. In many cases all it took to make an item popular was to have Her Majesty seen wearing or carrying it.

Once these projects took off the financial burden became too great to be borne alone, so on 26 July 1976 the SUPPORT Foundation under Her Majesty's Royal Patronage was formally established. SUPPORT is the acronym for Supplementary Occupations and Related Techniques. During its formation period Her Majesty sometimes worked around the clock arranging details, and personally provided a substantial amount of the "seed money" to get it started. In the sixteen years of its existence the SUPPORT Foundation has grown like a wild banyan tree with its limbs and branches covering and protecting wide areas. Expanded far beyond Mudmee silk and Yan Lipao handbags, crafts now include leather carving, pottery making, mat weaving, and many others.

While the workers—young and old, male and female, physically sound or disabled alike—have benefited financially and pridefully from their work, the nation has also benefited

by the preservation or relearning of many old indigenous arts and crafts. A few of these, one of them *kram*, were so nearly lost that Her Majesty asked elderly retired craftsmen to come to teach at the SUPPORT schools.

Her Majesty Queen Sirikit has a rare eye for seeing beauty in the simple things of life that many never notice at all or take for granted; an odd-shaped basket may become a design for pottery, or a certain kind of short-lived beetle with its iridescent colors can become a brooch or be used in other decorative ways. Queen Sirikit has said, "Before urging the villagers to make anything we must be certain that the products will be marketable, not for charity alone. ...We must put them on their way so they can stand on their own feet."

The interests of H.M. Queen Sirikit are limitless—not only for people, but for wildlife conservation, reforestation and preservation of precious watersheds, and sustainable use of natural resources, for they balance life. Her Majesty is President of the Thai Red Cross Society and grants her Royal Patronage to many worthy charities. Her life might be compared to a well-cut diamond; each facet reflects the compassionate care and interest of the Queen in her country, its culture and history, and the lives and well-being of the Thai people.

Her Majesty Queen Sirikit honored The Siam Society many years ago by graciously consenting to become a Vice-Patron of the Society. The President, Council and membership of The Siam Society proudly join together in wishing Her Majesty good health and a long and happy life on her auspicious 60th (Fifth Cycle) birthday.