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PUBLICATION: BANGKOK POST
KEYWORD: Krasae Chanawongse

HEADLINE: From small to tall

SUBHEADLINE: * Professor Dr Krasae Chanawongse, 67, is presently Minister to the Prime Minister's Office.

SUBHEADLINE: *He is also currently chairman of a wide range of organisations and bodies, from the Youth Development Bureau to the Office of Official Information and the drug addiction rehabilitation programme Duang Phen, as well as the Office of the Consumer Protection Board, the Office of the National Education Commission, the Zoological Park Organisation and the National Botanical Gardens Organisation.

SUBHEADLINE: * Dr Krasae is the first chairman to have been appointed to the nascent Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre's Board of Trustees.

SUBHEADLINE: * Among the highlights of his career, Dr Krasae was appointed Deputy Minister of Health in 1979, Deputy Governor of Bangkok in 1993, Minister of University Affairs in 1994, and Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1995.

SUBHEADLINE: *Among his numerous prizes and awards, he received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1973 for his work in community leadership.

BYLINE: Story by WANPHEN SRESHTHAPUTRA

I was born in Muang Phon, a small village in Phon district of Khon Kaen province, approximately 70 kilometres from the provincial capital. In my childhood, Muang Phon was only a tiny little village which by now has grown into a municipality.

My parents were Chinese and you could say we were among the poorest of the poor. As far as I can remember, my parents had no profession as such — the concept of work and employment was very different from it is now.

My father bred chickens and ducks. My mother, whenever the paddy fields would turn yellow and the harvest season came, loaded pla tuu (mackerel), betel and matches into a basket to go round and trade them for rice.

It was a very inforPublicationDate: 26-02-2004

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KEYWORD: Joe Cummings,

writer-Joe

Cummings, travel books author, Guidebook author

HEADLINE: Lonely traveller

SUBHEADLINE: Guidebook author Joe Cummings reveals what it's like to be

him and insists the impact of his writing is overstated

BYLINE: Story by

BYLINE: WANPHEN SRESHTHAPUTRA

BYLINE: Picture by

BYLINE: SOMKID CHAIJITVANIT

`Not all who wander are lost,' wrote JRR Tohappy to discover new things.

My parents sent me to work in a small tannery owned by relatives. The little

shop was selling cow and buffalo leather, which had previously been beaten,

tanned and treated with salt. I wasn't paid for working in this shop. Uncle

Shuu, as I would call this particular relative, would give me a little

amount of money at the end of the year, called ta yee in Chinese, around 40

baht the first year, 60 baht the second _ a sum that I would give to my

parents with great enthusiasm.

I was treated as an apprentice but what mattered most was that I was fed

three meals a day.

The shop was in the proximity of a railway station and I was later given

permission to sell water from a big reservoir to the passengers.

Whenever a

train would stop, I would come running! I could earn one or two baht a day

from selling water _ which was not as meaningless then as it is now.

After three years, Uncle Shuu left the province to settle down in Bangkok.

Consequently I went back to Khon Kaen to live with my elder sister.

She had

recently been married and thus I lived with her in-laws. Each evening, she

would take Chinese language lessons, and having nothing else to do, I started learning a bit of Chinese along with her.

Soon I was off for Udon Thani province to live with other relatives who owned a small grocery _ selling fish, sugar, coffee, oliang ... Knee-high-to-a-grasshopper _ I must have been 11 years old or so _ I was very good at grinding coffee and preparing oliang (iced coffee drink). In the neighbourhood near the market there was a Chinese school, which was teaching the Thai language as well. I attended school there for two to three years.

My father passed away about that time so I had to rush back to Muang Phon in Khon Kaen. There I worked with my elder brother selling drinks and newspapers. He was an agent of some Bangkok-based newspapers and thus had good connections with the capital.

I used to deliver newspapers, and in particular to a local school which taught Mathayom 1 through 6 levels. One day one of the teachers called out to me ``Noi, Noi! Why aren't you going to school?''

I said: ``I cannot, sir. I didn't even complete the P4 level.''

But this teacher was so kind that he offered to give me private lessons. So on the following day, there I was with the newspaper to be delivered, and also flowers and incense sticks in order to perform the wai khru ceremony.

He taught me every day, a bit of mathematics, science and English _ the ABCs. After a month or so, he felt a bit discouraged and complained that I couldn't understand anything! He asked the headmaster of the school to take over.

The school headmaster, Acharn Jaroen Pranassa, was extremely kind and determined to tutor me; one hour before the other students, one hour during the lunch break, before the other teacher would again take over in the evening.

Finally and little by little, I managed to pull myself up to M4 level.

This is to say that whenever one has compassion, sincerity and dedication, one really can help others. These teachers personified a model behaviour for me, and their example has inspired me throughout my life.

Then came another fundamental turn in my life, again as the result of

someone's good deed. A local politician and member of parliament, the late Dr Jaru Bootruang-suwan, was back in the province to campaign and attract votes. He became a regular customer at our small shop, which was selling newspapers and small stuff.

He needed someone to help him in his house in Bangkok. He asked me: ``Do you want to go to Bangkok?''

I almost ran away in the grip of emotion _ that was too much of a dream! He told my family that he needed someone to help in the house and that he would take care of my education.

The very moment he was going to the station, he again dropped in at our shop and inquired about me. He said, ``Are you ready?''

I came running off to the station and didn't bother to take anything with me, neither bag nor clothes _ I hardly had anything anyway.

My life changed completely.

I owe him my name, as I used to be called Kimchua, meaning ``little spring water''. He suggested the Thai name Krasae, which has the same meaning.

I was soon enrolled in the Amnuaysilpa school and was impressed by the style of the school and the attire of the teachers. I passed M5 and M6 and managed to reach the school's special class for top-notch students.

As some entrance exams were being held for the Triam Udom Suksa school, I applied, without knowing much about the reputation of the school nor having anyone pulling strings.

By then I had turned into a well-developed teenager and was applying myself to all sorts of school activities. I had this urge, in my turn, to try and help others. I became a kind of activist, or rather a leader acting through the students' committee.

One of my proudest achievements back then was to manage, thanks to sponsors, to put out the school's yearly newspaper, although there wasn't any budget available for it. This earned me the school's medal for most useful action.

After that came university life. Actually, I first applied to Thammasat University, to be among the first batch of students enrolling in the university's Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communications. I almost didn't become a doctor! The timing was very flexible and I was quite free to attend the classes whenever I wanted.

At the same time, I had applied to Chulalongkorn's Faculty of Medicine. For a year or so I was juggling between the two faculties. I was having a hard time. I dropped Thammasat the second year and after four years, completed my diploma at Chulalongkorn.

All the way through, I kept thinking about my native province. I was concerned by the fact that there weren't any doctors nor hospitals in that region at the time.

Many graduates are reluctant to go back to their native rural areas in order to practise medicine. They feel it is somehow degrading. But it is not, for sure. I have practised there for some 14 years and I know what I am talking about.

It all depends on how one looks at it. If one's outlook is narrow, our life will remain narrow. But one can also think that one is able to help others out of their misery ...''