

# To Reap Joy

Achara Tangnararak, of Kanok Bannasan in Bangkok, Thailand, spoke with Kim Pettit about her passion to publish literature to strengthen Thai Christians to glorify God and fulfill the Great Commission in her country.

**L**ord, I am so scared," Achara Tangnararak prayed as she walked. "I am in my comfort zone. My pay is great. I am respected. I know what to do. I love what I do. Why are you asking me to do this?"

Tangnararak, editorial manager for Thai Wattana Panit, a secular organization that publishes English books and teaching materials for schools, had been asked to join Kanok Bannasan, the Christian publishing house founded by OMF International in Bangkok.

"There were many problems with the company," she recalls. "My first response was negative, though I was willing to act in an advisory capacity." Tangnararak understood the challenges Kanok Bannasan's director would face. The organization, founded by missionary David H. Fewster in the late 1950s, was floundering. Following Asia's financial crisis in 1997-98, this publishing company needed radical restructuring.

"In the next 18 months," recalls Tangnararak, "I met with OMF's field director many times. Many people were praying that the Lord would provide a Thai national director for Kanok Bannasan, but I always said 'No, I cannot do it. There are too many problems.'

"During several visits to see a dear missionary friend in Northern Ireland, I was able to spend extended times with the Lord. I asked him to guide me and direct me. I asked the Lord to help me be willing, if this was His will."

In 2002 Tangnararak became the director of Kanok Bannasan. She was the fifth director of this struggling company.

## Radical restructuring

"At times I have been overwhelmed," says Tangnararak. When she began, Kanok Bannasan had more than 20 people on its payroll. She set about creating an advisory board, while at the same time reducing the staff. Kanok Bannasan's employees now amount to eight people: a publisher/editor/translator, an artist, a desktop designer, a sales manager, a stock keeper, an accountant, an office manager, and a delivery person. Only six receive a salary at this time; Tangnararak is not among them.

Living by faith is not new to Tangnararak. "After graduating from university, I went to teach at a Christian school for three years, and then moved to Scripture Union, Thailand, where I was the editor for daily devotional materials. Later, I became so ill that I had to leave. Together with a missionary friend, we began writing Sunday school materials, which became God's opportunity to develop my writing skills. He allowed me to travel throughout Thailand to teach, encourage and train Sunday school teachers. During that time we had to rely repeatedly on the Lord to provide for all our needs—from the basics of food and rent, to luxuries such as a car and a photocopier. Those years increased my faith," says Tangnararak.

Nevertheless, the challenges of managing the publishing house through downsizing tested her faith. "I prayed," she says. "I remembered the story of Peter walking on the water. He was afraid, and said to Jesus, 'Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.' Jesus said, 'Come.'"

## Slowing production

"Kanok Bannasan's publishing program has a rich heritage," says Tangnararak. "We have a backlist of some 400 titles." However, in recent years the organization drastically slowed its publishing program. Kanok Bannasan now publishes approximately six new books a year, along with reprints. At present, backlist titles are revised as needed to coincide with upcoming events.

"We published Joni Eareckson Tada's testimony, *Joni*, in 1982," says Tangnararak. "To prepare for a Joni & Friends outreach in Thailand, we updated the book and published other materials such as *Joni's Wheel for the World*. We are doing the same thing with *The Bondage Breaker* and *Victory Over Darkness*, by Neil T. Anderson, getting them ready for a September 2006 release."

Other forthcoming titles are *My Utmost for His Highest*, by Oswald Chambers; *The Heavenly Man*, by Brother Yun and Paul Hathaway; *Sex: It's Worth Waiting For*, by Greg Speck; *The Five Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman; and books by James Dobson and Josh McDowell.

"Kanok Bannasan's core competency is Christian living and discipleship training," says Tangnararak. She sees publishing a Christian magazine for teens as a possibility in the future. The company also publishes prayer cards, booklets, a directory, and other materials for OMF.

## Revising revenue

Tangnararak had to find ways to raise additional income. To do this, she reassigned personnel. Two-thirds of

Kanok Bannasan's staff time involves its own resources; a third is spent on contract work for other ministries. The resulting revenue has helped to make Kanok Bannasan a financially self-sufficient company.

"Most other publishers work with denominations," says Tangnararak, "and some receive subsidies. The average price for a non-Christian book is 300 Baht (about US\$8.00), but Christian living titles sell for much less, 200 Baht (US\$5.20). Believers are used to paying less. Our Greek/Thai dictionary and other reference titles are an exception, selling for 1,000 Baht (US\$26.00), but of course development costs are much higher."

Retail prices are only two or three times higher than production costs. "We usually need a 3,000 unit print run to break even," says Tangnararak.

The organization had to raise prices and change its business practices. Where it previously offered books on consignment, sales are now on a cash-only basis. The year Tangnararak instituted the change was extremely difficult.

In tough times, she recalls her prayers in Northern Ireland. "At that time, I told God, 'I want to reap joy.'" The Bible says, "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him." (Ps. 126:5-6)

### *Rethinking distribution*

In Thailand, a country of 65 million, Christians comprise only 1.6 percent of the population. Ten active publishing houses serve a market of perhaps 400,000 evangelical Christians. There are only about 20 Christian bookstores, concentrated in the largest cities: Bangkok, the capital; Chiang Mai and Phutsanulok, in the northwestern region; and Hat Yai and Songkhla in the south.

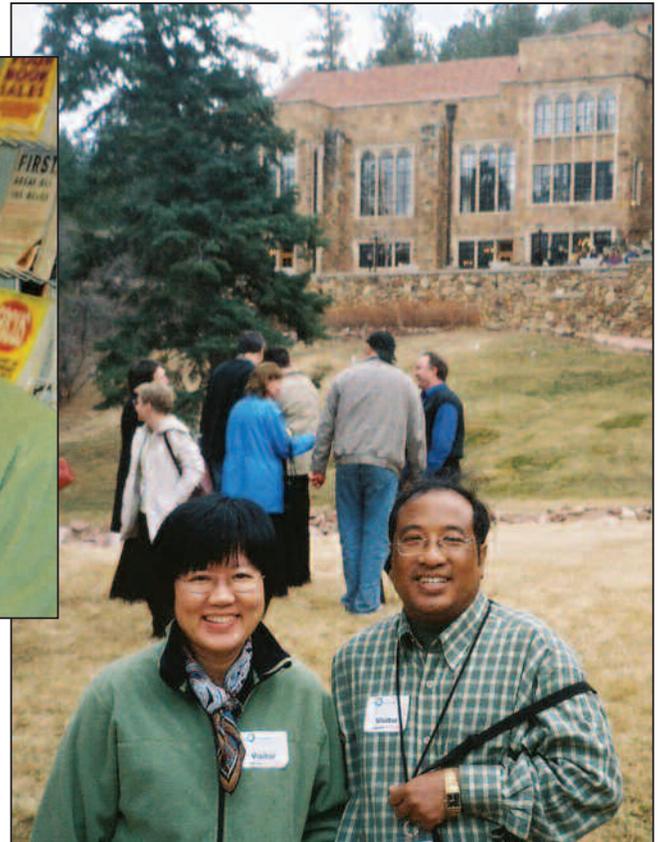


*Tangnararak attended two of Cook's International Christian Publishing Institutes: Strategic Leadership 2005 and Financial Administration 2006.*

"Previously," says Tangnararak, "our marketing and distribution efforts were passive. We sought to reach only book club members, stores, and individuals. Now we are reaching out to churches, Christian organizations, Bible colleges, Christian schools, and more. If we rely only on a few Christian retail outlets, we cannot serve the central and northeastern regions of the country. There are 400 churches in central Thailand, in rural areas. There are no bookstores there. Should I say these churches are nothing? To support the Church, to meet its needs and to build up believers, equip and evangelize, Kanok Bannasan had to change."

### *Sharpening focus*

"The Church in Thailand is still weak," says Tangnararak. "It is like a building without a foundation. Many have a very shallow Christianity. They see the Bible as a path to self-improvement and prosperity. They think you must be good so God will accept you, and that if you make a mistake in church, you had better not come back. There are numerous examples of pastors who want to be seen as super Christians.



*At Glen Eyre Castle in Colorado Springs, Colorado, U.S., Achara Tangnararak, Thailand, and Tarun Rangsa, Bangladesh, pose while Russian-speaking ICPI participants talk in the background.*

They teach and preach sermons to show off their knowledge of theological jargon and the Greek meanings of words, instead of giving practical, Bible-based help for people to uproot old habits and Buddhist ideas."

Tangnararak wants Kanok Bannasan's books to make an impact.

"In Thailand, everything outside of Buddhism is foreign," she says, "but we cannot compromise the Gospel. We must contextualize the Christian message so that Thai are truly changed, transformed by the Gospel."

"God is faithful," she adds. "With good leadership and supportive friends, we are moving forward. I praise the Lord for the spiritual growth and development we have experienced over the past years, but realize that we urgently need to be even more effective in the Lord's service. By equipping his people through quality literature and challenging his church here in Thailand to reach out to others, thousands more may come to faith in him." ❖



# From the Garage to the Auditorium

Kornel Herjeczki, of Harmat ([www.harmat.hu](http://www.harmat.hu)) in Budapest, Hungary, shares his personal experiences in Christian publishing.

**W**e were going to bed when someone knocked on the window. My father, a pastor, found two men standing at the door. They whispered, disappeared, and then my father came back, excited. "They brought Bibles," he said. With its lights turned off, a van came into our yard. We unloaded hundreds of Bibles and Christian books into our garage.

This happened 35 years ago in a small village in Hungary. While Bibles were officially available at that time, they were expensive, big and black—not

very attractive to young people or the unchurched. The smuggled Bibles were free, small, printed on very thin paper. The secrecy was understandable. A pastor my father knew was imprisoned for distributing smuggled Bibles. As for Christian books, each traditional denomination had its own publishing house. But the titles they published were severely censored. Imagine books where passion, commitment and truth were nearly eliminated, and all that remained was dull theology. (As I write now, I find it interesting that it is not only Communism that can create dull titles...)

## *Beginnings*

Nearly two decades later, God led a few people to the conviction that change was coming to Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe. Gerry Davey, Marsh Moyle and others who called themselves International Literature Associates were deliberately seeking people, on this side of the Iron Curtain, who could lead evangelical, interdenominational, self-supporting publishing houses that would produce quality titles. Some thought they were dreaming. But in 1989 the Berlin Wall collapsed suddenly, like the wall at Jericho.