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Made in Thailand

Shirley Fulfils Her Life's Dream

by Shirley Hogue

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Dr. Sanguan Kunaporn

All bookings okay, passport sorted out, Bank Draft and Travellers Cheques, Credit Card for emergencies. Now where is the Valium®, gonna need that ... not the fear of Surgery in an unknown land, but an absolute fear of flying in an aircraft that is bigger than a four storey block of flats. Hmmm, there is no way that 200 tonnes can fly, but it's too late for alternatives. S.R.S. is scheduled for 10th December and it's now the 8th. Wow that went so fast.

... [Dr. Sanguan] immediately calmed every trembling bone in my body. I think, for the first time I was really certain that I had made the right decision to come to Thailand.

Great, seat 42C, right next to the loo, that is considerate, seat belt kinda tight, but that's okay, I can handle that too. Oh Shit, we are moving, and backwards. As I look out of the porthole I can see the terminal disappearing and we are setting up for take off, or a least that's what the pilot is talking about. Shit I hope he is right, but I'm sure that he's done it before, or maybe the apprentice is gonna fly the thing.

These are the things that make the thought of facing Sex Reassignment Surgery rather insignificant to a novice air traveller, but if you are used to flying, you better try and find your

own solution. Good luck!

An overnight stopover in Bangkok, and a one hour domestic flight we disembark in Phuket. The first thing that you notice is the heat and humidity, quite heavy after the climate of Australia.

After collecting my baggage and clearing Customs I was met by a sweet little guy in a pair of neatly pressed pants, and a shirt that was as white as his smile, holding a sign with my name printed on it. He immediately took all my baggage and led me to an awaiting limo that he was driving. Kidding that didn't piss the taxi drivers off at the airport.

Anyway, this was my first encounter with Dr. Sanguan Kunaporn's driver. He couldn't speak much English, but he was doing better than my Thai, so between all of it we managed to formulate a crude sort of communication.

I spent the first night in the Royal Phuket City Hotel where I was contacted by Dr. Sanguan, himself, to arrange for my admission to hospital in the morning.

At 10:00am I was once again chauffeured to the hospital, through the tiny winding streets of a city that had a Dutch and French influence, but hadn't seen a coat of paint since the 1950s, however the whole place had a charm of its own, that would ultimately change all of my ideas of Asian life and culture. After arriving at the Phuket International Hospital, I was treated to tea, and then comfortably seated in the lounge area, where I finally met the man that was about to be the facilitator of what had been a life's dream.

I was totally stunned by this man, and his nature. He was more than I had expected from the photographs at I had seen on the Internet, with a demeanour that immediately calmed every trembling bone in my body. I think, for the first time I was really certain that I had made the right decision to come to Thailand. His physical examination was quite extensive, but he seemed to be making sure that there were no unseen factors that would create any problems during the surgical procedure.

After all of this, a wheelchair was summoned and I was taken to the room that would be my home for the next six days. "Room" was an understatement. It was a suite, with neat furnishings, an ensuite, refrigerator that was fully stocked with drinks and bottled water, and a balcony that overlooked the largest fish pond that I had ever seen, where I would feed the coy carp and catfish after my surgery. It had colour cable television and air conditioning that I could regulate to my comfort level, quite unlike the standard no frills systems that our Aussie hospitals have. The service that I was receiving was nothing short of five star. I really felt like royalty.

The next day I was prepped and taken to theatre, and surprisingly enough I had no fear. The nerves had disappeared and I found myself in an atmosphere that was totally calm, and without any drugs to induce this feeling of euphoria. A cannula was placed in my hand and a drip was inserted to facilitate the happy juice that would soon send me off with the fairies, (no pun intended). All I can remember was saying, "nightie night" then it was "zzzz".

I vaguely remember the surgical team waking me, as had been the procedure during previous operations, but I must have fallen asleep again, waking later in the I.C.U., to a full meal of sandwiches, and orange juice. I couldn't focus on it at all, and dropped more than I managed to get into the hole that I was sure was a mouth, but then again, it may have been my ear. Who knows. In any case I wore the meal in the true fashion that was expected.

After about four hours, I began to regain my eyesight and all of the rest of the feelings in my body. The epidural was almost worn off, and I could feel everything that was usual to me prior to the surgery. That's when I had to check if the operation had been done, cause the feelings were all still where I left 'em, but yep, it was gone, and a large surgical dressing and a catheter was draining out of the centre.

After a day or so, in I.C.U., I was returned to my suite, where an enormous, beautiful basket of flowers dominated the scene. It was from Dr. Sanguan and his staff at the hospital. He had even brought his own personal V.C.R. and tape collection in so that I would not be bored. It was really amazing. Can you imagine that sort of service and care to detail in a Sydney Hospital, I certainly can't.

For the next six days, I would settle in and have all of my needs catered for before I could even think of them. For the first time in my entire life, I actually enjoyed a bed bath that was conducted each morning by the nursing staff.

There was no room for modesty, and for the first time, I felt that I was no longer ugly, as the thing that plagued my life had been removed, along with the inhibitions that had always caused me to cover myself whenever I was naked. It was the best feeling of all to be totally without anything that linked me to the physical male gender. It was sort of like a warm cosy feeling of contentment and security, rather than the overwhelming elation that I expected.

The only pain that I was experiencing, was caused by the catheter, which I had developed an allergy to, but that soon subsided after its removal. The epidural stem, although empty, was left in place in the event that further surgery was required after the dressings were removed, but all was okay and that was also removed, to allow me more comfort.

Although the surgery created minimal pain, I was given analgesics twice a day, and sleeping pills each night, to ease the discomfort from the arthritis in my back, which was agitated by the fact that I had been face up on a rubber mattress for almost a week.

A little bit of info if you are not given a mattress overlay, ask for one. It will allow you to sleep at night. Finally the dressings were to be removed completely, and I was watching Dr. Sanguan's face for a sign of the result. He smiled, and all of my fears were gone.

A mirror was given to me, and my first look at the creation between my legs was now visible. Shit was it swollen, but the bruising was minimal, all of the features were pointed out and I could imagine how it would appear after the swelling had subsided. Wow! What a feeling! (and that had nothing to do with a Toyota.)

On the 6th day, I was released from hospital, to return to my hotel for rest and convalescence, but had to be brought back to the hospital four days later for examinations and a photo session. Still all okay, but the camera had a flat battery. That was rectified at a later date, and the recorded evidence of a fantastic job was now in his archives.

I was taught how to dilate, and how to maintain and clean, what was commonly referred to as "the wound", but that was okay as well. After this I was returned to my hotel for the duration of my stay and to await my flight home. Nine days in all, but it gave me the time that I needed to check out the local customs and experience the cuisine that was on offer. It was truly an experience that I could recommend, and my new understanding of Thai culture was to be a refreshing wind that blew all of the prejudice and misgivings that had haunted me throughout the years of my adult life. It was a bonus that destiny had provided for me to enhance an experience that I will never forget.

My flight was on the 24th, with an interconnecting International 747 waiting at Bangkok as I arrived. I think that either the hospital or Dr. Sanguan had arranged for special treatment for me on the return journey, as I was allocated an entire row of seats with heaps of pillows, in an aircraft that was obviously fully booked. I have no real way of knowing whether this was the case, but if it was, then the man has some real clout, and it made the flight back to Sydney as comfortable as it could possibly be. I could actually lay down and sleep, which I did to make the eight hours between Thailand and Sydney seem like a breeze.

I was woken at 4:00am Sydney time for breakfast, and watched my homeland unfold below from an altitude of 37,000 feet, and the sight of Sydney appearing on the horizon was an experience of its own. Touchdown on the north-south runway, all the brakes on and the engines of the 747 in reverse thrust. Jeez, them things can really stop quick.

After the normal customs crap and the long walk to the barrier control of the terminal, I was greeted by my partner, Chris, and two of my closest friends, Ang and Lydia, who had travelled all the way to Sydney so that I would not have to get a train home. Then the tears started, and I guess that we made one hell of a scene, but what the heck, it was Christmas day, and it was the best Christmas that I had ever had.

Give it a try if you like. I don't think that you will ever regret it, if it turns out as wonderful as my own experience of being "Made in Thailand" I may get it tattooed just above the hairline, Ya never know.

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