Margaret H. Aung-Thwin second from left (with scarf), waving goodbye as Burma’s first Fulbright scholars board their Pan Am flight. 1954 (photo courtesy of USIS)
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During my first year as an undergraduate at Cornell, I took beginning Indonesian with five or six other students. One day one of my fellow students reported having been asked by a Burmese lady if she, my classmate, wasn’t interested in studying Burmese as well. The woman had apparently been hired to teach Burmese, but since no one had signed up to take it, she was obliged to spend her days in the basement of Olin Library cataloguing Burmese books. I couldn’t add Burmese to my course load at that point, but I was curious to see what it looked like and went to find some Burmese books in the Wason Collection. The following year I was studying in Paris and when a French anthropologist urged me to study Burmese rather than Malay at Langues O (on the grounds that Denise Bernot was a much better pedagogue than the Russian woman who had fled the Bolshevik Revolution by heading southeast and getting involved with a Malay prince), the memory of that beautiful writing, as well as the knowledge that there was some nice Burmese lady who could teach me when I got back to Cornell, persuaded me to do so. I have been known to claim that it was in order to undertake comparative work in island and mainland Southeast Asia that I set about as an undergraduate at Cornell learning Indonesian and Burmese, but that is a self-aggrandizing rewriting of history.

The nice Burmese lady was Margaret Aung-Thwin, and in the fall of 1969, Bob Taylor and I started our studies with her. We were of course both immediately charmed. There was at the time no good Burmese-English dictionary. Judson’s nineteenth century tome was useful, certainly, but hardly sufficient. There was no good textbook either: Cornyn and Roop’s volume, again, was better than nothing but hardly adequate. Still, Sayama made class fun, and she encouraged us warmly in our efforts. This mattered particularly because twice a week we were subjected to R. B. Jones’s pedagogical ministrations, which were as vinegary and demanding as Margaret’s were sweet and supportive.
Outside class, Margaret was an important, if self-effacing, presence in the Southeast Asia Program. I helped spoon the fat off the huge pots of Burmese chicken curry she prepared for the annual SEAP dinner, as well as join in singing the Burmese anthem while she played the piano as part of that evening’s entertainment. She told wonderful stories and got other people to tell their stories at all the potlucks and other gatherings people had during the year and during the following summer, when Bob and I continued to study Burmese with her. Her children would pop up from time to time. She and Maureen were my very first dinner guests (ever). I was teaching myself to cook and they said very nice things about the spaghetti and meatballs I created using the I Never Cooked Before Cookbook I had bought. (They lucked out: the other recipe I relied on was tuna fish casserole with potato chips sprinkled over the top.) My repertoire has widened over the years, but no guests have shown themselves to be more gracious than they were that evening in 1969.

I could go on. Any of us who knew Margaret can start reminiscing about happy times we had with her, and it’s hard to stop us. Her warmth, her charm, her remarkably varied experiences, her delight in the human comedy: as the tributes that follow in this issue attest, she was an unusual combination, at once a self-effacing yet vivid presence, and a gentle soul. We will all miss her.

The contents of this issue, devoted to Margaret’s memory, consist of several different kinds of material. A number of her friends from different periods of her life have written tributes to her, and these appear as a running thread throughout the issue. But Anna Allott made the good suggestion of reprinting Margaret’s preface to her translation of Not Out of Hate, and Margaret’s daughter, Maureen, has sent along some vignettes Margaret wrote. So we have the pleasure of reading Margaret’s own prose, some of it academic, and some of it more personal. Maureen has also provided a chronology of Margaret’s life, some wonderful photographs, and a delightful piece she, Maureen, wrote about traveling with her mother. I hope that the many readers of this issue of the Bulletin who knew Margaret will take pleasure in these materials, and that those readers who were not so lucky will nevertheless find it of interest to learn about a woman who meant so much to people, many of them Burmanists but by no means all, on a number of continents. -- The Editor

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Margaret Aung-Thwin

Maureen Aung-Thwin has been good enough to provide the following biographical summary of her mother’s life.
– The Editor

Margaret’s grandparents:

- Her maternal grandfather, Saw Htoo Hla and grandmother, Naw Dah Khu, came from the hills and were owners of many elephants.
- Her paternal grandfather, John O’Farren Hodgson, was from Yorkshire and served as a teacher in the British colonial army; he married an Arakanese nurse called Ma Pru in Calcutta.

Margaret’s parents:

- Her father’s full name was John Farren Hodgson. Her British grandfather named him John O’Farren Hodgson but he dropped
the “O.” John Hodgson’s job was Permanent Way Inspector of the Burma Railways.

- John Hodgson first married Miss Mary Ann Cryer on June 26, 1912. They had two children, Thomas (Tom), in 1913, and Florence (Flo), in 1914. Mary Ann died in 1915.
- John Hodgson then married Margaret’s mother, Naw Thet Po, a Karen lady from the delta, in March, 1919.
- Their first child, Margaret Hope Hodgson, was born Dec 20, 1919, in Peinzalok.
- They had thirteen other children (eleven survived) between Margaret’s birth and her mother’s death, at age 50 in 1945. Four of Margaret’s siblings and their families survive her: Edna and Fanny in Burma, and Ralph and Howard in Australia.
- 1924 Margaret, age five, starts at the American Baptist Mission boarding school in Moulmein. Margaret also starts piano lessons at age five.
- Margaret is a swimming champ all through school.
- 1930s Margaret attends Judson College. She loved school and was famously against boycotting classes to protest British rule, a strike led by then student leader Aung San in 1936.
- 1942-45 WWII, and the Japanese occupation of Burma, interrupts her studies. (She finishes her BA after the war is over.)
- 1944 During the war, Margaret marries U (aka Moses) Aung-Thwin, a widower with two young sons who worked variously as a journalist, a YMCA official, and a Scoutmaster, and was later headmaster of a school in Kalaw, Shan State.

- 1945 John Aung-Thwin is born.
- 1946 Michael Aung-Thwin is born.
- 1948 Maureen Aung-Thwin is born.
- 1949/50 Margaret receives her BA from Judson College.
- 1954-55 Margaret goes on a Fulbright fellowship to the USA.
- 1955 Margaret’s marriage is over.
- 1955/56 Margaret receives a Bachelor of Education from the Institute of Education, Rangoon.
- 1957-59 Margaret teaches at the International School in Rangoon.
- 1959 Margaret and her children leave Burma for Kodaikanal School in South India, an American boarding school, where she teaches first grade and piano.
- 1964-66 John, Michael, and Maureen graduate one by one and proceed to college in the USA.
- 1967 Margaret is hired by Cornell University, where she teaches Burmese and serves as the “native informant” for linguist Prof R.B. Jones.
- 1972 Margaret gets an MA in Education at SUNY Cortland.
- 1973 Margaret is hired as Director of Adult Education by the Miccosukee Tribe in southern Florida, where she learns to drive.
- 1983 Margaret leaves the Miccosukee.
- 1984-1988 Margaret, now retired, visits her children and grandchildren and housesits Maureen and Louis’s apartment in NYC while they are in Hong Kong. She volunteers teaching in a NYC adult literacy program and travels to Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Australia.
- Margaret translates Not Out of Hate, by Ma Ma Lay.
• Margaret gets a translation grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.
• 1988 Margaret moves to Montreal and lives with John’s family outside town, then eventually in a three-unit –”all Aung-Thwin”—house in town, below two grandchildren (and some great-grands) who live upstairs.
• 1988-2011 She enjoys her sunset years traveling, participating in aquafit exercises at the Jewish Community Center pool, and taking McGill University’s Institute for Learning in Retirement classes on Jane Austen, the Brontes, memoir writing, and poetry, attending concerts, and spending Christmas/New Year holidays in Sanibel Island, Florida, with Maureen.
• December 2009 Margaret celebrates her 90th birthday in a big party in Montreal. (Similar parties were held in NYC and Montreal for her 70th, 75th, 80th, and 85th birthdays.)
• November 2010 Margaret survives a heart attack, pneumonia and mystery infection in a Montreal hospital.
• December 2010 Margaret celebrates her 91st birthday in Montreal.
• February 2011 Margaret comes to New York, ostensibly for an annual check-up with her favorite NY cardiologist, Dr. Joseph Tenenbaum, who determines that she has a late stage cancer of unknown origin. Hospice is arranged in Maureen’s apartment and on April 8, 2011, Margaret goes to heaven.

Margaret’s ashes are interred in the Trinity Church Cemetery and Mausoleum on W. 155th Street and Riverside Drive in Manhattan, and in a special spot on John and Evie’s property on the Ottawa River, in Grenville-sur-la-Rouge, Quebec.

Besides her four siblings, three children, and two step-sons, Margaret is survived by beloved daughters-in-law Evie and Maria. (Louis Kraar, her favorite son-in-law, died in 2006). She is also survived by five grandchildren (Kira, Mila, Christopher, Maitrii and Amita), five great-grandchildren (Skylar, Xavier, Maxim, Lily, and Shan), and numerous nieces, nephews, grand-and-great-grand nieces/nephews—and of course her many dear friends—all around the globe.

The Best Chicken Kaukswe

Doug Bail met Margaret long before anyone else whose words appear in this issue, so it seems appropriate to start with his tribute to her. Then follow the fond reminiscences of his daughter-in-law, Jo, illustrating how Margaret was able to generate and sustain friendships across generations. – The Editor

Margaret and I met in Burma in 1945 towards the end of WWII, when I was serving with the Field Security Service with the 14th Army. We were part of a group in conversation, and when it broke up, I found myself talking about English literature to a quiet, softly spoken Burmese woman (who spoke perfect English), as if we had known each other all our lives. Little did we realize that this was the start of a loving friendship which would last all our lives. Our children and grandchildren keep in touch to this day.

Margaret’s ability to communicate was extraordinary. She called it “being on the same wavelength.” She visited the UK several times and loved touring the Lake District and the Scottish border country. In the US we travelled to California, New
England and to Florida, where Margaret’s former pupils of the Miccosukee Tribe in the Everglades, received her with smiles and cries of joy. That is how her many friends remember her: How fortunate we were.

PS: She made the very best chicken kaukswe.

Doug Bail

Hearing Margaret’s Voice

Jo, Doug Bail’s daughter-in-law, sent the following letter to Maureen after learning of Margaret’s death. Touching in itself, it is particularly valuable in that it contains an email message that Margaret sent to Jo. So we get to hear Margaret’s voice once again.

– The Editor

We were all deeply saddened when Doug called to tell us the awful news about Margaret and my heart was breaking for him too. They were friends for so many years and held each other in the deepest affection. From the very first moment I was introduced to your mother I felt so much warmth, kinship, love and a true connection that made me feel as though we had been friends for years. Age was immaterial because your mother had such an easy way which stemmed from her genuine interest in everyone and everything. She appeared to live to give, whether it be sharing her wonderful food, her time, her attention, her love and little gifts from home that she thought you might enjoy. I have a lovely Indian brass plate on my wall in our kitchen that your mother insisted I have. When I see it I smile, and whenever I think of your mother I smile.

When I gave birth to the twins, Doug and Margaret came to visit us in hospital and came again when we were back at home. Although I felt completely out of my depth in those early days and a complete amateur as a mother, Margaret was full of encouragement and told me that I was doing a great job. It was just what I needed to hear at the time and I loved her for it. It just helped to give me a bit more confidence in my abilities at a time when I was bordering on deranged with the sleepless nights.

Work commitments and “stuff” meant that we only really managed to have snapshot periods with Margaret when she was over in England, but each time felt as though that it was just yesterday when we last saw each other, so comfortable was our reunion.

She always took such an interest in the twins and what they were doing. I liked to send her my letter at Christmas just to update her on what we were all doing and she said she enjoyed keeping tabs on where life was taking us. I once found a 3D card one Christmas which your mother particularly liked and she mentioned that she liked to get it out at Christmas with the decorations, which touched me greatly.

This was the last email I received from Margaret and her loveliness shines through, as always…

Darling Jo,
Thank you, thank you, and thank you, so much for the cards at Christmas and my birthday and the nice things you sent. I apologize for not writing to thank you sooner. I have no excuse except that I get more and more eccentric the older I get and cannot do things on time.

I have not stopped thinking about you ever since the mystery parcel arrived before
Christmas. It was so sweet of you. I tried to guess who sent it and what it was and how long I would let myself enjoy the torture of not knowing. Over here we always seem to have to write the sender’s address just in case the address or zip code is written wrong or the people have moved, so we seldom have the chance to enjoy being tantalized. I was glad I had this chance of being a child again of wondering about the mysterious parcel, until I succumbed and opened it.

I was so surprised to see the toffee (my favorite Thornton’s licorice) and was very moved that you remembered. I had not thought about it for years. It was lovely and reminded me of England and you.

Thank you, too, for thinking of me on my birthday and for the lovely card and beautiful things you said about me. The family gave me a very enjoyable 90th birthday party. We went to the Thai restaurant near here and managed to have the place to ourselves for the early afternoon. There were four generations of the family and friends of mine, new and old, and we were about forty people in all. It somehow managed to become one big group and happily on the same page, which at times does not happen in social groups. One of the things that got us off together was that we got roped into doing things that involved everyone (like going around the room getting each person to tell an anecdote or something they remembered about me). It got off to a good start and everybody became eager to participate. The anecdotes were all very funny and had really happened. I, myself, thoroughly enjoyed the ribbing and sometimes even helped out with the telling. Then Chris, one of my grandsons, had made a CD with messages from people who could not be with us. They managed to have some of my family from Australia and Burma and Hawaii and England, and friends and students from all over the States and Germany and even Africa. I was very happy and felt like they were all there at the party. I was very moved by all of it.

Thank you for your annual letter about the family, as usual wonderfully written and always interesting, (and beautifully typed). When I read about the twins, I always remember how small they were that first day they were born, with Geoffrey being able to fit a baby into a palm of his hand. And I also remember when the twins were very little and were put to bed at night, they used to keep each other company by “talking” by making baby word-like sounds from one crib to the other. They always had a lot of things to tell each other about their day.

With lots and lots of love to all of you as always, Margaret

She was sensational but I know you don’t need me to tell you that. With love, Jo, Geoff, Sophie and Jamie

Joanna Bail

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Teaching in Rangoon

Jessie Khoo tells us a bit about Margaret’s experiences teaching in Rangoon, when they were colleagues, and then meeting up with her again many years later. – The Editor

Memories of Margaret

I met Margaret in 1954 when she returned from her Fulbright year abroad, through her good friends and teacher colleagues—U Ba Shin, U Chit Ko Ko and Christabel Sein—from Central State High School, where they all taught. I joined the school as an English
teacher and soon became part of their “gang.” Being a state school, the medium of instruction was in Burmese, except for the math and English classes.

Our high school classes were all between 7 a.m. and 12 noon; the middle school classes were in the afternoon. When our classes were done, we almost always went to the cinema, which was a few blocks away. We were all mad about movies. I often accompanied Margaret home by bus to where she lived in Yankin, where I met two of her sisters, Fanny and Violet. I also met Daw Aye Kyaing, another teacher friend of Margaret’s who lived in Yankin.

Then Margaret decided to get a specialized education degree, which was required to teach professionally. (She already had a BA.) At that time in Burma the education levels were very high. In 1965, after Ne Win nationalized all the private schools, everything except English was taught in Burmese. We could use both English and Burmese for the teaching of science, because of the scientific terms, which were not in Burmese. The private schools also changed their names. For example, Methodist English High School became Dagon #1. Also, we all—students and teachers, boys and girls—had to don green and white uniforms of traditional Burmese aingyi and longyi.

Margaret then went to teach at the International School on Kokine Road, but I didn’t see her again until 2000 on a trip to New York to visit family. I don’t remember quite how we re-met, but I remember her taking me to Maureen’s office and Barnes and Noble. She loved books.

More recently, a few years ago I found out that Maureen was friendly with my cousin Jane’s husband, Professor Ronald Findlay from Columbia University. So I asked if they could re-connect me to Margaret. Ever since then we tried to see each other whenever she was in town. This past February, on her last visit to New York, I visited her for entire Saturdays and we talked about old times. I saw her a week before she died, and was very glad to be able to join the family when they put her ashes in a niche in a cemetery in upper Manhattan. That’s where I also re-met Joe and Lynn Silverstein, whom I hadn’t seen since 1954.

Before Margaret died, she offered to buy me a train ticket to come and visit her in Montreal. I’m sorry we never made the trip together, but I’ll always remember her as my good friend.

Jessie Khoo

Man-eating Tiger

Margaret wrote for a course on memoir writing she took at McGill University’s Institute for Learning in Retirement. Her stories tell us a bit about her childhood in Peinzalok, life as a young mother in Rangoon and living in the Everglades of Florida. – The Editor

One of my earliest childhood memories is when I was three and living in Burma with my family, in the central part called the Dry Zone. I remember one very hot sultry night my brother, age two, and I tossing and turning and not being able to sleep, and my mother telling our nursemaid to let us sleep on cool mats in the front room. I remember the maid having to put up a mosquito net over us on the mat and my brother dropping off to sleep almost immediately.
I was unable to sleep because it was a very strange night. The front door was open and lots of people were coming and going. I especially noticed many women. The night outside was dark and lit by the flare of torches held aloft in people’s hands. The torches were fire-brands. The yard and the air were thick with smoke and anxiety along with a low hum and hub-bub of voices in the background. The people were from the servants’ quarters and from a village a mile away. They were all waiting for their men and my dad to return from a trip to get a man-eating tiger that had been troubling the village. There was nothing but arid scrub-land and jungle all the way from our house to the village, and the men had left at the crack of dawn and were not home yet. My dad, who worked in the Burma Railways, was the only official for miles around, and he owned a double-barreled shotgun.

The villagers had come to see my dad on more than one occasion, complaining of the tiger which had carried off first a goat and then a cow. But when it killed a man, my dad decided he had to go and shoot the tiger. I sat up unobserved under the mosquito-net taking in the strange events of the night, the lateness of the hour, the many strangers, the hub-bub of voices, and most of all the palpable air of anxiety that hung thick in the air, strong enough for a three-year-old to feel.

After a while the barking of dogs could be heard a long way off in the distance and then again a barking of dogs and a silence, each time a little nearer. Then we heard the sound of cart wheels creaking and the dogs around the house started up as the ox-cart with my dad and the men approached the house. I was shooed back into bed as I got up to look out into the dimly-lit scene of several men sitting bunched up in the cart. My dad in his khaki clothes and tropical hat got off and sent the cart immediately on to the small hospital infirmary half a mile away as two or three men had been badly mauled by the tiger. I either remember rather vaguely or imagine I did, that their distraught wives followed the cart on foot accompanied by a couple of their family dogs.

Now as an adult I am almost sure that there had to be more than one ox-cart as I saw a huge tiger being taken off a cart and spread on the ground. It was so many feet long from tip to tail. The villagers were all very excited and crowded around, more of them having arrived on the scene. I don’t remember any more of that night I must have been put back under the mosquito net.

I don’t know what was done or how, but the next day the huge tiger had been skinned and cut up and shared by everyone. Every scrap of the tiger had its uses. For example, the tiger’s claws and teeth were useful for ornaments on watch chains as was the fashion in Edwardian and Victorian England. The bones were dried and used as medicine. A small quantity of the meat when eaten for medical purposes served as a preventive measure for various ailments and provided other benefits. They say that the discovery and current use of Viagra will save the lives of many tigers, as a certain part of its body serves the same purpose. Tiger meat was especially recommended for young children who would grow up strong and be protected henceforth from all of childhood’s diseases.

My parents, of course, did not believe in any of this, but the cook kept a nice piece of steak and cooked it for my brother and me, probably after having persuaded my mother that she was depriving us of an unusual childhood benefit and making her feel guilty as if she were keeping us from being vaccinated or something.
I was told that my brother and I who were usually very conservative about what we ate (as are all children of that age) loved what the cook prepared and for a few weeks after we would ask for ‘tiger stew’. And from then on whenever my brother and I would fuss about eating a meal, the cook and nurse-maid would get us to eat by telling us it was tiger stew.

My dad kept the much prized tiger skin to give to his boss, who was an Englishman. I like to think that somewhere in a remote corner of England today there is a spot in someone’s drawing room which is forever Burma.

Margaret Aung-Thwin

Memories of a Long-time and Wonderful Friend

In light of the fact that the Fulbright Program for 2011 fell victim to Congress’s budget-cutting—the last-minute deal struck in late April eliminated so much of the Department of Education’s funding that that program as well as many other international studies grants were simply canceled—it is helpful to be reminded by Joe and Lynn Silverstein how important the program was to many of us who have done work in Burma, as well as to Burmese who came to the U.S., as Margaret did, and then became invaluable intermediaries between the two societies. – The Editor

1955 was a memorable year for my wife, Lynn, and me. I received both a Fulbright Scholarship and a Ford Foundation Fellowship for us to go to Burma to begin research on my doctoral dissertation and to study the Burmese language. This was the first of our many trips to Burma.

The Fulbright Foundation provided us with an apartment and its Assistant Director, U Htun Myaing, suggested Margaret Aung-Thwin as our language teacher. We took his advice and we found a wonderful teacher and lifelong friend.

Margaret, a teacher at the International School in Rangoon, was a skilled professional, fluent in English as well as Burmese. Just before we met her, she had returned from a long visit to the United States as a Fulbright Scholar. From our first meeting we became friends and she opened a wide door to Burmese life and culture as well as language which helped us feel at home and become acquainted with people we met at events and on bus rides and walks around the area in which we lived—Inya Lake and the University of Rangoon.

Lynn was pregnant with our first child when we arrived in Rangoon. With few new friends and no direct phone connection with New York, she didn’t have access to her mother and others whom she looked to for advice or support. No e-mail in 1955.

With three young children, two sons and a daughter, Margaret, in addition to our language lessons, quickly filled the role of close friend, freely offering good advice. The doctors and nurses took care of the technical advice but Margaret helped with the important information: caring for a baby in Rangoon!

As the day of delivery approached, we continued our language study. Margaret mixed our lessons with general conversation about how local expressions differed in our two countries, which were the best shops to just look and which the best to buy things. We looked forward to hear how Margaret interpreted local and foreign events, and pointed out reports found in local Burmese
newspapers which were not found in the English editions. She also told us about local food.

Lynn wanted to learn to prepare Burmese dishes and wanted to start with kaukswe. Margaret agreed, provided a list of ingredients and where to buy them. Despite Lynn and Margaret’s careful planning, the baby seemed to be on its way and we left all the food and took the pots off the stove. I checked the old car we rented to be sure it would run and the three of us rushed off to the hospital. There was no kaukswe that night! It was a false alarm. Lynn and I returned two days later. Margaret was teaching, but came as soon as she could and we rejoiced together with our beautiful new son, Frank (Maung Win Tin).

The telegram Lynn sent to her parents got stuck in the wires somewhere but finally got to them and her mother tried to phone but couldn’t get beyond India. Communications have improved somewhat since the 50’s.

There were many memorable events with Margaret, including a large party at her house. She brought her many friends together and everyone enjoyed the opportunity to talk and eat together. The memories are still vivid in my mind.

About that time, Margaret was troubled by the declining standards of education in Burma and she decided to take a teaching job in India so that her children could take advantage of the good schools which would be available to them. They could receive the education they needed to advance to high school and beyond.

When the time came for them to go to university, she moved again, this time to the United States. John studied in Massachusetts (Amherst) and Canada (McGill) and a little later his brother Michael went to college in Nebraska (Doane) and the University of Michigan. When Maureen was ready for college, she was admitted to Northwestern University, also in the U.S.

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Following our departure from Burma, Lynn, Frank, and I returned to Cornell where I completed my degree, and we then moved to Connecticut where I took a position on the faculty of Wesleyan University. At about the same time, the Asia Society in New York asked me to serve as the Director of its Burma Council. Shortly afterward, Maureen accepted a job at the Asia Society. We were very happy that, after all the time that had passed and we all made so many moves, we could be back in touch with Margaret and her family again.

In my position at the Asia Society, I was responsible for developing the intellectual program of the Burma Council. I suggested to Maureen, who worked with the Councils on their programs that I thought that Louis Kraar, a senior writer and reporter for Time and then Fortune magazine in Southeast Asia, would be an excellent speaker to invite to one of our meetings. I asked Maureen to contact and extend an invitation to Louis to speak to the Asia Society, and she carried out the suggestion. Maureen and Louis continued to see one another and the two eventually married. Maureen arranged to have their wedding on a small boat that cruised around Manhattan in New York harbor. I remember how happy Margaret was that evening. She was very pleased with her new son-in-law.

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With her family scattered and her children creating their own lives, Margaret looked for something new and different to interest and fill her life. She experimented with living
and teaching in Florida on an Indian reservation. Although she was a Burmese citizen, in ethnic terms she was part Karen and part Burman. She thought that her life experiences of being a member of the minority in her native land would be useful in helping to relate to the local Indian community. But while her job was challenging, it was not fulfilling. When her obligations in Florida ended, she returned to New York and lived for short periods with Maureen and Louis and then moved to Canada to be with John and his family. This kept her busy, but she wanted more.

Margaret had a good education and, as a teacher on two continents, had much to bring to any school that employed her. But teaching, whether of children or adults, was not enough of a challenge. When, in 1982, she attended a lecture at a Chicago meeting of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), she heard the British scholar Anna Allott read a paper on the Burmese novel. Among the things she learned was that there was no body of Burmese literature in English translation in libraries and bookstores. While Burma, under a former leader, U Nu, encouraged the development and circulation of Burmese books and other literature and encouraged the publication and circulation of local writing both inside Burma and abroad, there was no serious translation program to write and circulate foreign translations of Burmese writing. Therefore few people outside of Burma knew and read Burmese literature.

Upon learning this Margaret became interested and sought out Ms. Allott for more information. Following their conversation, she decided she would do something. She also learned that the AAS was starting a small program of translations of Southeast Asian literature. Margaret was familiar with much of Burmese modern literature and decided to become involved by translating a popular novel, *Monywei Mahu (Not Out of Hate)*, by Ma Ma Lay. She chose the book, she said, because it was written by a woman author and there were no Burmese novels in translation in the libraries and bookstores she frequented. Margaret had no experience or training in doing formal translations and therefore she had to teach herself how to do it. After years of off and on work, she completed the task. She also wrote a very short essay about her experience and pointed out that of the many difficulties she encountered the biggest was the absence of a good modern Burmese dictionary. A second was where to find a collection of Burmese literature. The copy of the novel she used was obtained from the Cornell University Echols Collection. The job of translating was challenging and drew upon her knowledge of Burmese and Western literature and the social issues that confronted the characters in the novel.

With strong encouragement from Maureen and Michael, she completed the translation as she taught herself how to bring to life a book written in one language and rewritten in another, keeping it as true to the original as if the translator was a native speaker of the second language. Did she think she succeeded? I never asked her.

Margaret never tried to translate another major Burmese novel, despite the pleasure it no doubt brought her to see her translation in print, available in libraries in cities where she lived and cited in bibliographies of major libraries around the world.

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Margaret was a remarkable woman of many talents and amazing accomplishments. She was a dear friend who cared, and even during the times we were separated by
distance we always felt close to her and will miss her very much, as we already do.

Josef and Lynn Silverstein

Notes on a Sister

Hazel Weidman was yet another American researcher who benefited from Margaret’s guidance, and enjoyed her friendship, in Rangoon in the 1950s. – The Editor

Margaret Aung Thwin has been a part of my life since my arrival in Rangoon in 1957. Upon the recommendation of USA Embassy personnel, she agreed to try to teach something of the Burmese language to me prior to my extended period of research in a wet-rice-producing village in Lower Burma. It took several months to locate the right village, a circumstance that gave us more time to be together. We became friends, and I was incorporated into her social networks of family and diverse sorts of friends.

Throughout my time in Burma, she guided me in profoundly important ways, acted as interpreter during periods when I was unable to find any single woman willing to live in the village with me, helped me track down and locate sequential interpreters and cooks when circumstances there made both recruitment and “staying power” somewhat difficult.

Before settling into fieldwork in earnest, however, and during Margaret’s “free” time, we played “tourist,” explored paths less well traveled by foreign visitors, enjoyed picnic gatherings in the countryside, visited tea shops, spent time examining the displays of street vendors, visited the zoo, and lounged beside Inya Lake or the Kokine Swimming Club pool – always with her children and a variety of good friends from different walks of life, and always with warmth and camaraderie generated by the presence of Margaret herself.

Our relationship deepened throughout the following 54 years, and our lives were always intertwined in one way or another. She was as dear to me as a biological sister and always will be.

Hazel Hitson Weidman, Ph.D.

A Tribute

Barbara Harvey is one of several people—including Bob Taylor and Barbara and Leonard Andaya, whose recollections follow, as well as myself—who first met Margaret when she moved to Ithaca in the late 1960s. – The Editor

Margaret was a wonderful friend: warm and caring, loyal, intelligent, and with just enough quirks to be really interesting. As one came to know her, one learned that she had left Rangoon and a disintegrating marriage, taking her three young children, to teach at the Kodaikanal International School in the hills of Tamil Nadu in southern India. Later, she moved her family to the United States, where she became a teacher of the Burmese language at Cornell University. This is where I met Margaret in 1968.

From our first acquaintance we felt ourselves on the same wave-length, as Margaret might have said. We found some similarities in our heritage: Margaret had an English grandfather and I had Scottish parents, so we were both comfortable with a certain British reserve. We also shared a characteristic, later described in one of my
favorite compliments, as a steel spine beneath a gentle exterior.

Having already had one career, I was older than many of my fellow graduate students at Cornell. Margaret and I lived in apartments near each other in the town of Ithaca, not near the campus in Collegetown. We frequently did our weekly grocery shopping together, stopping off to see if Claire Holt, whose apartment was on the way to the Co-op, needed anything. With her great capacity for friendship, Margaret had quickly become close to Claire, a distinguished art historian then affiliated with Cornell.

Margaret was a marvelous cook, and was generous with her invitations to sample her kaukswe and other Burmese specialties. Joan Taylor and I once tried to write down her recipe by watching her cook, but it was hard to specify amounts for a pinch of this and a splash of that, and a few “leaves,” as Margaret called whatever greens were at hand. Her guest lists mixed her students and assorted friends with several of Cornell’s distinguished professors, Oliver Wolters and D.G.E. Hall among them.

It is a tribute to Margaret and the independence of mind she encouraged in her three children that they have followed quite different life trajectories, each of significance and value, and each reflecting continuing ties to Burma.

Barbara S. Harvey

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Margaret, Bean Sprouts and Ohno Kaukswe in Ithaca

Robert Taylor, who has taught on the subject of Burmese politics on three continents, sends the following remembrance of Margaret’s time in Ithaca.

– The Editor

Margaret Aung-Thwin was my first Burmese teacher and created my first introduction to Myanmar cuisine. Though I had shared a house with a Myanmar member of the Voice of America (VOA) in Washington in mid-1960s, his cooking bore no relationship to what I now know to be Myanmar food. I studied with Margaret from 1969 to 1971, initially with Ward Keeler, and then on my own. Try as she might, my tin ear remained (and remains) deaf to tones and my ability to speak a foreign language much tested and usually failing.

The painfulness of my language classes, and the impenetrable explanations of Burmese grammar provided by R(only) B(only) Jones, were greatly compensated one deep winter Saturday night by Margaret’s cooking. Joan, my then-wife, and my daughter Emily, son Eddy, and I drove through the snow to Margaret’s modest flat for dinner. This was a culinary treat for me, often repeated over those two years, and an initial cooking lesson for Joan. Joan, who had served in the Peace Corps in Thailand, had, like me, never tasted Myanmar food. We were in for a treat.

It was a marvel to see how Margaret could improvise to create a genuine Burmese meal in Ithaca in the late 1960s. That was before the invasion of Chinese and South East Asian restaurants and “exotic” (to upstate New York Americans) foods in super markets. How to produce fresh bean sprouts was the first lesson. What are bathtubs for, one wonders? The English used to keep coal in them; Margaret sprouted beans! My first bean sprouts were delicious and I rarely took a bath again without thinking of those sprouts.
Joan then watched as Margaret finished off preparing the ohno kaukswe and before long I got to eat it for the first time. As they say, the rest is history, and I never looked back. I doubt if I have ever had it as good again, and I have had many a bowl since. Somehow, sitting on a stool in Yangon in the sun on a hot morning next to an open fetid drain, with a bowl of ohno kaukswe in my hand, as I have often done, always brings back memories of snow, freezing cold, ice on the windows, bean sprouts in the tub, steaming bowls of noodles, and wonderful Margaret. I don’t to this day know how to cook ohno kaukswe, but for a number of years after Joan used to produce it in Australia and England by the gallon according to Margaret’s recipe.

When she heard of Margaret’s departure from this vale of tears, Joan, too, recalled driving home in the snow from Margaret’s, our clothes reeking with the delicious smells of garlic, onions, coconut, chicken and bean sprouts from the tub and by the tub. Forty-two years later I can still taste them as I type this reminder of a wonderful time and a marvelous woman. I have know no kinder, or more generous, person than Margaret. No one can replace her.

Bob Taylor

A Wedding and More . . .

Barbara and Leonard Andaya, who have each had brilliant careers as historians of Southeast Asia, also trace their memories of Margaret back to the late 60s and early 70s in Ithaca. And they, like so many others, find those memories suffused with thoughts of good food and good times enjoying it. – The Editor

In the 1960s, long before the modern avalanche of TV cooking shows, most middle-class American families looked to the Fanny Farmer Cookbook for simple but appetizing recipes. Our copy, however, is rather special. On the fly-leaf is an inscription “To Barbara and Leonard, with best wishes for a very happy life together, love, Margaret Aung-Thwin.” Fanny Farmer includes many favorite recipes that we still use quite frequently, and we think of Margaret every time we take our copy from the shelf. Our memories are very specific because Margaret took on a unique role as we began our married life; she played the organ at our wedding at the Forest Home Chapel in Ithaca (June 7, 1969). As we think back over those Ithaca years, now well over forty years ago, we recall with some nostalgia the summer “pot-luck” evenings by the lake. On these and so many other occasions shared food and pleasant conversations helped create the feeling of community which was so central to the Cornell graduate experience, and of which Margaret was such an important part. Since we left Cornell in 1971 we have seen her only intermittently at conferences, but she was always the same – warm, concerned and always interested in others. Those days are long past, but our much-used cookbook, its pages now spotted with age, remains as our “souvenir”, reminding us that we were privileged to know a truly exceptional person.

Barbara and Leonard Andaya

What Would Margaret Do?

Louise Strauss and Margaret met up when they were both living in Florida and Margaret was working with the Miccosukee. As several people remark, and as the case of
the Strauss family demonstrates, Margaret became a friend to generations of people within a family, evidence of the deep goodness of spirit that everyone sensed in her. – The Editor

The love of my brain is anthropology but of my heart, it’s my family. In 1972, our daughters were four and six years old. We had just moved to Miami where their father was Professor/Doctor Strauss at the University of Miami Medical School and I, recently graduated from UCLA in social anthropology, was teaching the subject at UM. I found myself increasingly frustrated as I tried to balance professional responsibilities with motherhood—unable to enjoy either in its fullness. We decided to let motherhood dominate, so I looked for some way to keep anthro issues alive in my life.

I had heard about a tribe of Native Americans on a reservation out in the Everglades—about forty miles from our house. I decided to check this out, thinking I might make some connection that would give me the opportunity to get to know who these people were. So one day I drove west on the Tamiami Trail (Miami to Tampa highway through the Everglades) to the Miccosukee Tribal Office and asked if I might do anything to help with whatever they did. After a few flustered minutes, the office person said I could meet and talk with their Adult Education Director. We walked outside to a long building behind the office area. She took me inside, found and introduced me to Margaret Aung-Thwin. Margaret and I talked as she gave most attention to a group of Miccosukee women (dressed in traditional clothing) and pulled me into what she and they were doing. Who was this calm, soft-spoken, seemingly shy but self-confident Aung-Thwin? For thirty-eight years, I’ve been finding out.

Almost every week, I spent a morning with Margaret, talking about and doing whatever she was doing. For example, she brought a van load of women (all ages, in their colorful patchwork skirts) to our house—using our kitchen to prepare some sort of tea, sitting around, not talking much (some spoke only Miccosukee) but taking all in. Margaret explained to me that their going into a regular Miami house would be interesting to them since they lived in BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs)-designed houses and chickees (an open-sided hut with a palm-frond-thatched roof supported by hand-hewed cypress posts, and a bare earth floor). The traditional village chickee had a big, four-cornered raised platform for dry storage and sleeping, benches, and a food-preparation area with an open fire.

At first, Margaret lived in a nearby rented house but later moved into a trailer on the reservation, so she knew firsthand how life on the reservation was. I invited her to come to our house as frequently as she wished and she often did because, she said, she needed to get away from the intensity of Miccosukee life to keep all in perspective. Being in Margaret’s presence felt good. She was easy to be around, always respectful, unobtrusive, and helpful in unexpected ways. Gradually she became a vital part of our family, beloved by our daughters, Bernarda and Laurencia, their father, Jose, and me. She always called him “Doctor” or “the Doctor”. My mother came to live with us for an extended period and became actively waked up when Margaret visited. They had thoughtful conversations, obviously caring about each other. When she went back to Georgia, she and Margaret corresponded regularly. For my mother, knowing Margaret was a thrilling adventure since her life had included very few people from any place besides the South Georgia farming communities where she spent most
of her lifetime. She was an avid reader of historical novels; Margaret was like one of her books’ main characters in person.

We became exposed to Margaret’s completely practical side when she decided she needed a car to increase her off-reservation possibilities, bought and then learned to drive a stick-shift/no-power-steering subcompact Toyota. Thus the frequency of her visits with us increased, always including her taking over the kitchen at mealtime—to our delight. I watched what she put together and added to our pantry staples: turmeric, garlic, ginger, fish sauce, and basmati rice. I still try to copy her art-as do Bernarda and Laurencia. Unconsciously, I think, she always was very careful about all food-related activities. She scraped out and used the insides of bean and pea pods, and when she ate an apple, only the stem and seeds were left on her plate.

Besides bringing joy and quiet contentment to our family, she effortlessly embraced our cats and dog. In the 1980s when Jose had the opportunity to take a month’s sabbatical in Germany, Margaret volunteered to look after our house, plants, and animals, and did so without thinking of the responsibility as a big thing. Her friend, Douglas (from England), came to share the time with her. Two other friends came to visit them and brought two orchids in full flower as gifts. We still have them and they both flower every year at about the same time of the year, always reminding us of Margaret’s caretaking and generosity.

I’ll never forget the details of the day she came with her son, Michael, and his family. The activity of the day was his wife’s showing me how to de-bone a chicken! Her other son, John, and his family also came for a visit with us and at another time, her brother from Australia which, since he had no Asian features, prompted a prolonged discussion about their British father and their life as children in Burma.

Margaret’s emphasis on education was expressed in all she did. She stimulated (gently pushed!) Miccosukee Tribe members to take advantage of educational opportunities and helped find ways to make new experiences possible. For example, she asked us if we would let eighteen-year-old Renee Billie stay with us so she could be a UM student, and encouraged Minnie Bert, the Miccosukee Head Start Director, to spend time with me to talk about language challenges and her effort to successfully straddle Indian and non-Indian worlds. With Margaret’s encouragement, Minnie became nationally involved in bi-lingual/bi-cultural education. Later Minnie became the Tribal Court Judge, balancing Miccosukee “law” and county/state/US law. At a recent tribal event to honor her thirty years as the Judge, she acknowledged Margaret’s influence and said that much of what the tribe does now came from Margaret’s ideas about what could be.

Minnie and I now are continuing our 1970s conversations, trying to characterize the essence of Miccosukee life, focused on change, choices, and consequences. Whatever is published will be dedicated to “Margaret Aung-Thwin and All Other Young People.”

I have chosen to share the above incidents as examples of what my thirty-eight-year friendship with Margaret has included—each one separately special but, as a whole, powerful because they reveal Margaret’s essential nature. She consistently drew people to her—even the proud, self-contained, and reticent Miccosukee. Around anyone, she naturally lifted the level of thought and talk. She never called attention
to herself but her persona permeated us and made “ordinary” daily experiences feel extraordinary. For Margaret’s 90th birthday, Laurencia and Bernarda revealed the impact Margaret had on them: they had a Peruvian/Andean style knitted wool winter cap (peaked top, ear flaps) embroidered in the front with the phrase, “What would Margaret do?” (in the back, “WWMD”), which is what they and I think about when a difficult choice has to be made. Margaret thus continues to be a dynamic presence in our hearts and minds. By my definition, that means she has eternal life.

Minnie asked me to tell everyone that she assumed a leadership role with the Miccosukee because Margaret made her realize that she could. “Margaret saw how the Miccosukee Tribe could strengthen itself in specific ways long before the Miccosukee did and always believed in us. Her way of being fit with Miccosukee cosmology. All the time she prodded us to take advantage of education and experience opportunities, and many of us did because she wanted us to. In us, results were as she predicted: a wider and deeper view of what it means to be a Native American. Our Tribe thanks her for who she was and all she did for us and with us for many years. We still are implementing her ideas.”

Louise Massey Strauss, Ph.D

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Pete and Jerry

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This charming reminiscence reminds us that Margaret could write a story with the same unaffected skill with which she could tell one. It also gives us a few more details about her life among the Miccosukee in the Florida Everglades. – The Editor

I love Beatrix Potter’s books of animals which have personalities like humans and I enjoy New Yorker cartoons of animals in human predicaments. A couple of New Yorker cartoons come into mind as I write. There’s one of an important-looking owl pacing his office floor, dictating a letter to his diffident secretary, a little bespeckled hen who is asking, “Please sir, is it ‘To Whit’ or ‘To Who’?” Another depicts two dogs at a computer. The confident one operating it is saying to the other, “On the Internet, no one knows you’re a dog.” Then there’s the cartoon in a coroner’s office with the doctor and his assistants coming in for the report. They are all cats in medical garb with one laid on the table dead, with his tail dangling down on one side. They all look very serious and the coroner is giving the verdict of the cause of death in one word, “Curiosity.”

One of the Beatrix Potter stories that I love best is about the duck who is a good person but is a little naive about life in general. Jemima Puddle Duck, complete with bonnet and string bag, longs to be a good mother, is sweet-talked into laying her eggs in a secluded place suggested by a charming fox who promises to guard them for her. He is debonair and well-dressed and reads his morning paper after brushing the tree stump on which he sits with his bushy tail, while thinking of the lovely omelet he will eventually have. I never fail to be amused by all the lovable and droll characters that people her stories. I had never read her stories as a child, but discovered them only when I came to live in North America. I gave Beatrix Potter books to my grandchildren while they were growing up and got to know her stories by reading them aloud to them at bed-time or at any other time we liked, as the children and I never tired of them.
I don’t know whether or not the stuff that goes into creating these characters rubs off onto readers but I once had an experience similar in mood to Beatrix Potter and the New Yorker cartoons.

I lived for about four years in a cottage in the middle of the Everglades when I worked with Florida Indians. I rented the cottage from Pete and Jerry, a couple of real nice guys. One day the Park Rangers brought in a baby raccoon they had found whose mother had been killed. It looked quite repulsive—like a rat—about 8 inches long. Jerry was an expert in saving abandoned baby forest creatures like this one and giving them the tender loving care they needed. Jerry had a clean baby bottle, diapers and pins from the last raccoon he had tended several years ago.

The raccoon began to grow and to look quite handsome and managed to amuse himself all day long under an avocado tree that grew in the yard. He was attached to a branch of the tree with a string so he wouldn’t wander away, and given a small tub with a little bit of water for playing with, for he never tired of dipping his hands in water, an activity which seemed to make him feel secure for some reason. I was once the baby-sitter in the early stages. At night they brought him into the house. He spent his nights in a cage, like a baby in a crib, and played with his favorite toy, a plastic coffee scoop. He adored porridge for breakfast as well as cereal with chopped nuts and dried fruit in it, just like Pete and Jerry did. He became twice the size of a normal raccoon and had a nice face.

But sadly one day while the raccoon was playing under his tree, a young boy camper untied his string and it ran off into the Everglades and never came back.

One evening, several months later, as I was walking in the Everglades National Park alone with saw grass on either side of me stretching out for miles, I heard a noise and there was our “Sha-wit,” the Miccosukee Indian word for raccoon which we sometimes called him, about fifteen feet away from the paved road on which I stood. I froze as he also stood perfectly still. I looked into his eyes and he looked right back at me. No raccoon in the wild would ever do this, I thought to myself, and also he was twice the size of a regular raccoon except he looked thinner but tanned and healthier. When we had looked long and hard at each other, making perfectly sure there was no doubt who the other was, he made a clicking noise and two little half grown raccoons came and stood on either side of him, looking at me. I realized in a flash that our raccoon had been a female all along. As I stood dazed and incredulous it seemed to me that she said from her mind to my mind, “Tell Pete and Jerry that you saw me and that I am well and happy and have survived. These are my two boys whom I have named Pete and Jerry.”

Epilogue: They say that you should not let in daylight on magic. I went back and told Pete and Jerry about it that day but curiously, they did not react to it in any way except to look at me funnily. Now, years after the incident, I still try to fathom what they really thought. It comes to me that perhaps the raccoon was a male so my story made no sense to them.

Margaret Aung-Thwin, 3/21/95, Canada

Remembering Margaret Aung-Thwin

Even though most of us who knew Margaret personally will always remember her above
all for her winning presence, it remains true that most Burmanists will know her name because of the translation she made and published of the important mid-century Burmese novel, Not Out of Hate. The following section focuses on this important part of Margaret’s legacy, starting with Anna Allott’s reminiscences of her encounters with Margaret, one of which induced Margaret to undertake the translation project in the first place. – The Editor

[At first] I couldn’t remember exactly when or where Margaret and I had first met. I only had to take down off the shelf the modern Burmese novel Mon-ywei Mahu (Not Out of Hate, 1991) that Margaret translated and to re-read her charming “Translator’s Preface” for my difficulty to be solved. How and when we first met is all recorded there, and she recounts the occasion and what happened as a result far better than I could retell it. Her preface also reveals a great deal about Margaret herself, her humility and uncertainty about her ability to complete the project, and her determination to see it through in spite of difficulties.

As someone who has spent many years teaching Westerners from various countries to speak and read Burmese, I agree wholeheartedly that one of the main difficulties for learners and would-be translators was the lack of an up-to-date dictionary; not until 1993, with the appearance of the excellent Myanmar-Ingaleik Abeikdan, prepared by the Burmese Language Commission, was this difficulty overcome.

By an unlikely chance, I can tell you of a far older memory of Margaret, from Rangoon in 1948-9, told to me by my oldest Burmese friend, now Mrs. Colleen Beresford, then Miss Colleen Rustomjee, born in Mandalay in 1929. Her father was Tom Rustomjee, the manager, both before and after the war, of the Mandalay Dyer Meakin brewery. I first met Colleen in Mandalay in early 1954 on my first ever study trip to Burma, and we have been friends ever since she came to live in England.

Colleen had spent the war at school in India; she and her mother and brothers had been flown out from Burma in April 1942, but her father Tom had walked out. In 1948-9 she was temporarily taking refuge in Rangoon from the fighting in Mandalay and was continuing her English studies at the university. She remembers Margaret, a somewhat older student, coming to classes heavily pregnant and then leaving as soon as the lesson was over. She also recalls that Margaret was one of the earliest to go to the USA on a scholarship. Many years later, in the 1990s, when Margaret was on a visit to London and attending a meeting of the Britain-Burma Society, Colleen recognized her and spoke to her—but Margaret did not remember Colleen at all. But then, older pupils usually do not recall much about younger ones.

Anna Allott

As Best I Can Remember*

Maureen and William Frederick deserve credit for wrestling Margaret’s translation out of her hands and seeing it through the process of publication, as Bill’s recollections make clear. – The Editor

*Many thanks to Maureen for supplying her original 1988 letter, and sharing her own recollections to help my poor memory along.
As best I can remember, Margaret Aung-Thwin came into my life nearly twenty-five years ago. I already knew two of her children, Michael and Maureen, and in late 1987 reconnoitered with them in Kyoto, where Michael had a fellowship. It was an interesting visit, especially since there was a lot of “catching up” over good food and sake, a great deal of informed talk about Burma, and a seminar and party with Aung San Suu Kyi present. But at some point Maureen showed me her mother’s translation of a short story by Burma’s most prominent female writer, Ma Ma Lay, and told me that Margaret had in fact translated one of her novels, the first Burmese novel to be put into English outside of Burma. I was immediately excited. At the time I was connected to both my own university’s Southeast Asia publication series and the Association for Asian Studies’ Translation Project Group, and was also busy with thinking how to utilize translations of Southeast Asian literature as major sources for my own lecture courses in the region’s history. The prospect of bringing a Burmese novel, especially “the first,” to the reading public was irresistible. I begged Maureen to send me the draft manuscript, no matter in what shape; if it was anywhere near as good a translation as the short story I had just read, I pledged to see that the manuscript was published.

That novel, of course, was Monywei Mahu (1955), to which Margaret had first been introduced by Anna Allott and which she had begun translating in 1982, choosing the title Not Out of Hate (as opposed to the more awkward possibilities referred to by other commentators such as Not Because of Hatred, Not That He Hates, or Not That I Hate Him). In January 1988, with Margaret apparently still hesitant about letting anyone see her work despite Maureen’s and Michael’s encouragement, Maureen sent me a note saying, in part, “What the hell, I decided to send you part of my Mom’s interminable Burmese novel, otherwise it’ll never see the light of day anywhere.” I thought the chapters were wonderful, urged that the rest be sent, and asked Margaret directly if she would let me work with her to bring it all into book form, a proposition to which she agreed when we met a few months later at the Association for Asian Studies conference in San Francisco. The whole polishing process took a couple of years, not only because there were numerous translation-type questions to consider (What to do about honorifics? How to handle explanatory notes? And what about spelling?), but also because we wanted to include some explanatory material—preferably by other authors—to put the novel into proper context, both in Burmese literature and in broader, perhaps even comparative, history. That took some time. But the whole experience was for me a delight.

Of all the authors I have worked with to bring books out in our publications series, Margaret was hands down my favorite. Not, mind you, because she was a pushover and agreed to all my suggestions unconditionally—which, truth be told, is not every editor’s dream. Margaret considered my suggestions carefully and without any apparent touchiness or what these days are referred to as “issues,” and then told me what she thought in straightforward terms. Where there were differences of opinion, we worked them out easily. She was often right. I learned a great deal in the process, and was very grateful for the experience. But what especially endeared Margaret to me was the way she approached what we called the Translator’s Preface. We took care of a brief mechanical note on names and spelling together, but I thought (and still think) that translators and the translator’s art are given
less credit than they deserve, so I asked Margaret to write something that would share with the reader what it was like to actually do the translation. The result was deliciously different from anything of its kind that I had read or imagined. It was totally disarming in its modesty, and totally affecting in its directness. All of this was spare and touching in a way most unusual for translators, who whenever they do get a chance to be noticed tend to the grandiose and dramatic, and I continue to appreciate both what Margaret had to say and how she said it.

After Not Out of Hate appeared in print in 1991, I didn’t see or communicate with Margaret very much, though we once in a while met up, usually with Maureen, at AAS meetings. My wife, Muriel, came along on several of these occasions, and we had some delightful times. I particularly recall, through a haze of soft-shell crabs and white wine, a hilarious lunch that nearly closed down Antoine’s in New Orleans. Margaret was swept along with the group and observed everything and everyone with a slight sense of alarm (the old-school head waiter had already smelled trouble and stuck our noisy party of six or seven in a back room with a door that closed). Throughout the meal you could see in her eyes a twinkle of participatory enjoyment but at the same time a dignified effort to analyze the suddenly rauccous atmosphere in which opinions came out of their scabbards, touchy political issues were raised, and Muriel and Maureen discovered a certain attitudinal sisterhood that was charged with energy. We weren’t thrown out, at least, probably because of Margaret’s presence, which was somehow miraculously both approving and disapproving at the same time, and I think we all tumbled out of the restaurant into the sunlight with a warm feeling that had little—okay, maybe a bit—to do with wine.

I am now looking at a photograph I came across for the first time just the other day on a camera memory disk that had gone unused for a very long while. It is August 2006 outside of Montreal, where a weekend birthday celebration is under way at the home of Margaret’s son John and his wife Evie. Margaret is seated in a jade-green flowered muumuu at the large table off the kitchen. It is late morning, I think, after a long, fun evening of eating (goose liver with fresh peach coulis!) and drinking (Poire William!) and telling stories, in which once again Margaret’s role was that of a kindly and quietly amused anchor person, tsk-tsking when one family member recalled a family event rather too extravagantly, quietly retelling the tale properly as she thought it should be told, and generally keeping us from flying off, Stephen Leacock-wise, in all directions. Margaret is smiling in a characteristically warm but clearly thoughtful way, enjoying herself but mulling it all over, and everyone around her is glad she is there. It is how I shall remember her.

William H. Frederick

Translator’s Preface to Not Out of Hate

As Anna Allott suggests, Margaret’s brief preface to her translation of Ma Ma Lay’s novel tells us much about Margaret as well as about her motivation in implementing the project. It is reprinted in its entirety here

The idea of translating Monywei Mahu (Not Out of Hate) began with my hearing Mrs. Anna Allott’s paper on the Burmese novel given at an Association for Asian Studies conference in Chicago in 1982. I was very excited as I listened to her discuss various Burmese authors and their works, none of which had been translated into English. I was amazed, also, that an English lady knew so much about Burmese literature while I knew next to nothing. Very impressed by her talk, I felt I wanted to try translating so that Burmese literature could be better known outside of Burma.

I went up to her after the panel discussion was over and told her how much her talk had affected me and that I wanted to try translating one of the novels she had mentioned. We soon decided I should do Monywei Mahu. I was attracted to this particular work because it was written by a woman and also because I was intrigued with the story of a Burmese woman who leaves her home and family to become a nun, in contrast to the Western version, in which the nun leaves the convent to live in the outside world. I later discovered, of course, that the nun was not the central character, and that in fact her role belonged more to the background of the story.

When I was ready to begin I could not find a copy of the novel, which at that time was next to impossible to get from Burma. So we arranged for Anna to xerox the first few chapters and mail them to me from England, and we could go on from there. Then I found a copy of the novel in Cornell University’s Echols collection.

Having never attempted such a project before, I just sat down in the kitchen, which had the best light, and day after day just worked on the translation. I did not anticipate some of the difficulties I encountered. Sometimes I would take all day just to cover half a page. I could not help being overly conscientious, treating the original as if it were Holy Writ or Shakespeare and looking up the meaning of every single word. At day’s end I felt like a little hen who had pecked and pecked at a kernel of corn all day and was still unable to crack it. I used to call up a Burmese housewife who lived in Manhattan to discuss Burmese medicine just so I could get the feel of it, but she herself was now more interested in Western medicine and had lost touch with the Burmese side of things. I felt culturally isolated working in a foreign milieu.

Another difficulty was that I did not have adequate dictionaries. The one I leaned on heavily was compiled by Adoniram Judson, the famous American Baptist missionary and scholar, who lived around the time of the British annexation of Burma. So the vocabulary was limited to words used in the nineteenth century, which presented a major problem. Just using Judson’s scholarly work excited me, however, and I feel a personal debt to him.

One of the first problems was to make up my mind who I was translating for. I decided that the high school boys of Government High School in Rangoon, to whom I had taught English in my first teaching assignment, would be my audience. I thought that it would be a change if they read a Burmese novel they already knew, in an English version. (This was when I started treating the novel like Shakespeare.) However the novel did not seem to hold up at all to this sort of English. At this time I met a friend who was teaching comparative literature at an American college and she
encouraged me to translate the novel for her students, an approach that was better.

I ran into another problem when I worried about the wrong interpretation of actions set in a different social situation, and became defensive of Burmese culture. I kept explaining the action in parentheses (which got to be tiresome reading), but later these were skillfully turned into footnotes by my able editor. I also had problems with Burmese honorific terms, which if translated would puzzle and confuse readers. For example, a Mr. Joe Brown is addressed in English as “Mr.” by people outside his family, “Joe” by his wife, and “Dad” by his children. His friends would also call him “Joe,” while he would refer to himself as “I.” In Burmese, however, Mr. Brown would refer to himself in the third person, as “Your Dad,” “your Uncle,” or even “Joe.” The precise usage of these “I” forms would change depending on the age of the person speaking and whether a younger or older person was being addressed. My editor convinced me to stick for the most part to English personal pronouns to facilitate matters.

I also made some problems for myself by not agreeing with what the author was doing to the characters. I wanted to make them over and change the plot, but had to restrain myself. I became unable to identify with the book and actually stopped working on it for over a year. These and other difficulties delayed me further from completing my self-imposed task.

But for the kind encouragement of friends and family I would not have come to completion. Thanks to my daughter Maureen for her gadfly goading, and to my son Michael, for his help and encouragement in getting the first chapters typed. The friends I would like to thank are many, among them Anna Allott, for inspiring me in the first place and then being generous with her time and knowledge whenever I sought her counsel. I would also like to thank John Ferguson, the unflagging and hardworking secretary-treasurer of the Burma Studies Group, who encouraged this humble project from its infancy and got it on its way by taking the time to read many chapters. My gratitude to Euan Bagshawe, an Englishman who had to help me with the nun’s letter in chapter three, with its Pali and Buddhist exhortations. I felt that, although I blame the British colonial education system for my knowing Jane Austen but not Ma Ma Lay, things have been evened up a bit in this small project with the help I received from my two British friends.

Finally I was fortunate to find my very able editor, William Frederick of Ohio University, who offered to get the translation published virtually sight unseen after he read a short story of Ma Ma Lay’s that I had translated. Bill finally managed to see the project through with his consummate editorial skills and warm encouragement, so the elephant did not “get stuck at its tail.”

To all my friends who were enthusiastic and patient all along and who finally, tactfully, did not ask how the translation was going—many thanks. You can ask. It’s all over now.

Margaret Aung-Thwin
May 1990, New York

The Impact of Not Out of Hate

Ms. Wylma Robinson sent Margaret the following email message in August of last year. It conveys in a few eloquent words the gratitude many readers feel toward Margaret for undertaking the task of translating Ma Ma Lay’s novel. It seems a
particularly fitting way to honor this wonderful contribution of Margaret’s to people’s understandings of Burma. – The Editor

Mingalaba Daw Aung-Thwin,

Your email address was provided to me by Daw Than Than Win. I just completed a Burmese Language Intensive Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Daw Than Than Win was my sayama during this eight-week session.

I wanted to connect with you because, over my lifetime, I have read thousands of books but none had me frozen in one spot (the couch) from start to finish the way Not Out of Hate did. I felt as though the main character was sitting in front of me relaying her life’s story and that I didn’t want her to stop or leave until she was done telling me the whole story. And, clearly, a story with segments that so many of us women can empathize with ….

So it is an honor for me to be able to write to you and to say “Chezutinbadeh” for translating this great Burmese novel into English so that those of us who are still in the Burmese 101 stage can benefit from having access to the English translation.

As background, I was born and raised in Burma in the 1950s (a segment of my maternal heritage originates in Burma and my paternal heritage originates in Sri Lanka, then Ceylon). In the 1950s, my father, J. F. Samararayake, was an editor of The Burman newspaper and I have just completed typing his “Rangoon Journals,” which are filled with anecdotes of his experiences in Burma in the 1940s and 1950s.

Burma has always been instinctively my first love, hence my determination (albeit at this late stage in my own life) to attempt to study “My Mother’s Tongue.”

Wylma Robinson

A Reincarnated Burman

Margaret and Maureen were often roommates at Burma conferences held all over the world, a wonderful pair, Maureen’s inexhaustible energy contrasting with her mother’s serenity. Due in part to these continued travels, Margaret’s circle of friends continued to expand, even after she retired, as Paul Sarno’s remembrance of her indicates.

– The Editor

I met Margaret through Maureen and Louis. She was retired from leading the adult education by that time and was traveling round the United States and Canada having a great time visiting her children and grandchildren and staying in the former’s homes.

After I read her wonderful translation of Not Out of Hate, written by Ma Ma Lay, I asked naively, “Are there really Burmese like that?” referring to the husband in the novel. She just laughed. She also always gave a large chuckle when Maureen referred to me as a reincarnated Burmese, as no one could ascertain how or why I had such a passion for a country so far from my own.

I would see her at Burma Studies and AAS Conferences where she took a keen interest in all the panels. And, sometimes she would refer to her work experiences with the Miccosukee Native Americans.

I need not remark what an interesting life she had as a person who left her homeland
with three young children, achieved higher education abroad, became the first or one of the first Fulbright scholars from Burma, raised three so well-educated children and led a complete life in the United States. Of course, I am saddened to learn of her demise.

Paul Sarno

A Gift

Andrea Grimaud, one of Margaret’s friends in Montreal, wrote to Maureen about an incident that brings smiles to anyone who knew Margaret, or for that matter, anyone who knows about the ins-and-outs of gift-giving in Asia. – The Editor

Right next to my laptop I have a small journal. It has a thick black cardboard cover with a large metal spiral and a rough picture of William Shakespeare on it. Several years ago Margaret gave it to me as a little gift. I’ve kept a journal for years with some temporary lapses. Like these days: now in week four of a renovation. Soon to be over thank goodness. Anyway, it was some time later that I opened the book, and turning the first blank page I found that at some time she had started using it as a journal herself. That was on Dec. 23rd 1993.

[Here is what Margaret wrote in the journal. She has just described meeting a nice young man on a plane. – The Editor]

…and I took on the role of Asian grandmother. The other day I was so tired after a long day at the dentist that I was stretched out in the semi darkness in the front room of Louis and Maureen’s apartment when T.T.W. came back from somewhere. I was cold and asked her to please bring me my quilt from the other room. I experienced such comfort from the fact that it was brought to me and I did not have to go and get it that it came to me that at last I was enjoying what older people always do in Burma. In Burma when one gets older even 40 or so there is always a young person around to fetch and carry. The old ones even get little children to go to the kitchen and light their cheroots from the kitchen fire. Louis picked it up at once and after dinner said I’ve got to go and get my cheroot.

[Here are further comments from Andrea:]

She also wrote that she found the book awkward to write in and would keep it for recipes. Instead, luckily she gave it to me and I got to enjoy her little vignette. I’m so glad that she forgot to tear out the few pages she had written.

Andrea Grimaud

A Letter Regarding the Margaret Aung-Thwin Travel Fellowship

On April 6 of this year, Tamara Loos, as Director of the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University, wrote the following to Thane Maxwell, a graduate student at Cornell, informing him that he had received a fellowship named in Margaret’s honor. – The Editor

Dear Thane,

On behalf of the SEAP faculty, I am pleased to inform you that you have been awarded the Margaret Aung-Thwin travel fellowship for your travel to Yangon, Myanmar. Margaret Aung-Thwin taught Burmese at
Cornell University from 1967 until 1970. Now retired, Margaret resides in Montreal, Quebec and teaches adult literacy and translates Burmese literature. One of the novels she translated is *Not Out of Hate*. *Not Out of Hate* is the first Burmese novel to be translated into English and published outside of Myanmar. ....

Thak Chaloemtiarana, Tamara Loos’s predecessor as head of the Southeast Asia Program at Cornell, explained to Maureen when the travel grant was established that it is a supplementary grant for students at Cornell to carry out pre-dissertation or MA thesis field research. Students receiving a grant from the university’s Einaudi Center for International Studies also receive an additional sum from the Southeast Asia Program. The grant named after Margaret comes from that program’s endowment and is part of a set of named grants to honor retired SEAP faculty and staff.

Thak also explained that people wishing to honor Margaret’s memory could send gifts to SEAP in her name. The program would add the gifts to the endowment that supports these grants. Alternatively, people could send funds for the program to use for purchasing books on Burma in Margaret’s name. – The Editor

You learn a lot when you travel with your mother. I never knew mine had an identity problem until she came from New York to visit me recently in Asia. Neither did she. The problem was clothes, what to wear when you reenter your traditional culture zone after 21 years abroad.

In Burma, where we come from, everyone wears national dress. It is one of the few countries in the non-Western world that doesn’t equate modernization with Westernization (though Burma could hardly be accused of showing undue interest in modernization either). Citizens of neighboring Thailand, for example, consider it déclassé to don traditional outfits except on special occasions, and in Japan only brides and geisha seem to wear formal kimono anymore. For years after we left Burma my mother wore her skirt-like longyi with the Burmese blouse called aingyi. The only concession she made was to line the aingyis that were of transparent nylon, popular with fashionable ladies in Burma but scandalous to outside eyes.

My mother’s inevitable conversion to nondescript Asian-American couture took longer than most, for it isn’t easy to exorcise well-entrenched Burmese sartorial values. There are saffron and burgundies to avoid because the Buddhist monkhood has already laid claim to these colors. Certain hues connote age, while plaids are reserved for men only. Women, on the other hand, all seem to have been born with a penchant for purples and golds, whether or not they suit them.

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Travels with Mother

We conclude this issue devoted to the memory of Margaret Aung-Thwin with a wonderfully evocative piece Maureen published in Winds, the in-flight magazine of Japan Airlines. Fond but not sugar-coated (Margaret gets some things wrong, Margaret has bad moments), it shows us the comic side of coming to feel at home in the U.S. and Asia, but not necessarily at the same time. Margaret always loved a good story, including ones she told on herself, so I am confident she would approve of this loving tribute to her, one that we can all enjoy with a smile and a wistful sigh. – The Editor
With these rigid perceptions of fashion, it is a wonder any Burmese woman can successfully make the transition to Western dress. My mother’s already-eclectic tastes—she liked olive green, for example—became even more so when she left Asia. At first she clung to the longyi and aingyi. Keeping to one’s national dress in the West solves a multitude of “what-shall-I-wear” problems, and can also save a lot of money. But there are other prices to pay: some fellow Asians at the American university where my mother taught often expressed surprise at her fluent English. Evidently in the Land of the Free, too, longyis do not represent progress. What finally tipped the scales in my mother’s case, however, is that longyis do not do well in snow.

Burmese women generally find it more difficult than their sisters in other Eastern countries in adapting to dresses and skirts, probably because in Burma such outfits are worn only by pre-pubescent girls. My mother’s external metamorphosis started with an occasional Western top to match her longyi. Later she graduated to slacks and blouses, an ensemble that usually makes her feel at ease in the U.S., but, she discovered belatedly, not in Asia.

Contemporary Asians are ruthless adjudicators of appearance. Taste is usually secondary to the name of the brand or the number of karats hanging around your neck. When my mother—who doesn’t like labels or jewelry—returned to Asia last year after her long absence, she quickly realized that her Burmese identity had been misplaced somewhere between Rangoon and Rhode Island. To make matters worse, she had not brought with her any of her moth-balled longyis, yet suddenly she no longer felt at ease in her indistinctive slacks.

Hong Kong, her point of re-entry to Asia, was probably the culprit. The British colony sports the trendiest Western fashion with more flair than even Manhattan. So my mother’s desire to look Burmese in a sea of flamboyant Chinese was doomed from the start. She immediately decided she looked like someone’s amah. No, I reassured her, someone’s amah doesn’t speak English that well. Temporarily appeased, she combed the territory’s cut-rate shops to prepare for her next destination, Indonesia.

It was strange for me to see my mother so vulnerable. After all, she had single-handedly brought my two older brothers and me out of Burma for the first time in 1959—with 15 crates of books and household goods—to a place contiguous to Burma yet alien to most of us—India. All we knew then of our giant neighbor was that the inhabitants were clever and shrewd and there were lots of them. We made it through the arrival in Calcutta’s teeming harbor, the inexpensive hotel located in the city’s red-light district, and through three hot dusty days in the train toward our destination in the southern part of the enormous country that we soon fell in love with.

Evidently my mother had forgotten these earlier feats of lugging children and baggage through strange lands in strange clothes, for she panicked when the time came last year to journey back to the East by herself. “I can’t make it to Hong Kong from New York in one stroke,” she insisted, “I’ll have to break the journey,” and so she did, spending one sleepless night in San Francisco.

Ever since I became old enough to worry for both of us, my mother has preferred to travel with me, enjoying the reversal of familial roles. Accordingly, I insist she recuperate from jet lag in Hong Kong before setting off on our first joint sortie into Southeast Asia. I also try to make her pack her bags early
enough ahead so she can get a good night’s sleep before our departure to Indonesia. Naturally she doesn’t comply, gets overly tired and just before we leave asks, “Why are you forcing me to go to Indonesia?”

We decide she should wear a pair of beige slacks with one of her new Hong Kong blouses on the plane to Jakarta. At a brief stop at Changi Airport in Singapore we notice with chagrin that the uniform of the ladies cleaning the premises is identical to my mother’s outfit, even to the color of their blouses.

As soon as we arrive in Indonesia, my mother no longer asks why we came. It is her first Southeast Asian country since Burma, and she is thoroughly enchanted by the familiar flowers, smells, and the torpid heat. Even the roosters—the ones you can hear over the din of Jakarta—she insists are crowing in Burmese. But she still doesn’t know what to wear. Seeing some women in their traditional sarong and kebaya makes it worse. “Now I feel really out of it,” exclaims my mother, noticing that only men seem to be wearing slacks. Undaunted, she decides to put on her most feminine-looking blue and white batik print blouse over white trousers. It happened to be the one day of the month when the patriotic male citizenry of Jakarta also sport a pretty blue and white batik with a stylized garuda—the national symbol—with, of course, white slacks.

Before my mother’s ego totally disappears, we set out for Surabaya to visit an old friend. We take the S.S. Kambuna, a lovely cruise ship that hops along the northern coast of the archipelago. For $36 each we have a two-bed, first-class, air-conditioned cabin with meals included for the overnight journey.

Tired and hungry when we finally get settled on the ship, we head straight for the coffee shop on the upper deck. Although she tolerates Western food, my mother is happiest eating Asian—any Asian—fare. She is elated to find that the coffee shop is well-stocked with familiar-looking snacks, like sticky rice with prawn bits, microwaveable Chinese noodle-soup packets, and a strange fruit that’s often used for combating seasickness. The pulp of the oval-shaped fruit is consumed—Burmese-style, with salt and crushed chili peppers—leaving long spikey stems sticking out from its core, somewhat like a punk hairdo. Soon we are comparing fruit names with a fellow passenger, Indra, who alarms us by divulging the Indonesian word for the strange fruit. It is as risqué-sounding as our own earthy Burmese term for it.

My mother’s identity crisis stabilizes a bit, for every type of dress is flaunted on shipboard. Besides, we are too busy studying the precise method the Indonesians use to consume the communal breakfast of bread, butter, cocoa powder and sugar. Everyone handles the obviously colonial legacy in exactly the same manner: butter is carefully spread on two slices of bread; next comes a liberal sprinkling of the cocoa and sugar; the slices are then closed shut and cut with a knife and fork into six long strips. Nobody even accidentally cuts these creations in two, or five strips, leaves out the cocoa, or uses his fingers by mistake.

In Surabaya my mother is quite content to pass for an eccentric Indonesian lady. And I, for the first time, realize how much more relaxing it is to travel in Asia with a mother. Local folk display a joyous affection for a mother-daughter duo that contrasts markedly with the ambivalent courtesy shown me when I travel alone.

Our host in Surabaya takes us on a tour of a
clove cigarette factory in nearby Malang. My mother decides to wear a long batik gown she bought in Jakarta and is mortified when I tell her I think such things are worn by Indonesian women only in the privacy of their homes. She asks one of our guides whether that is true and is not convinced with the polite reassurance that, “Yes, it is worn at home, but it is OK here, too.”

Our next stop is the island of Lombok, where our contact, charming Mr. Hasibuon, almost misses us at the airport because he was cabled to simply expect “two ladies from America.” By now my mother had thrown caution to the wind and put on a Balinese sarong, which just happened to be the same thing in a different shade being worn by Mr. Hasibuon’s old cook who greeted us at his home. Lovable Mr. Hasibuon, a retired government officer from the Dutch days, manages to make my mother forget her clothing crisis by offering to name two tiny uninhabited islands after us.

By the time I finally put my mother on the plane to Perth from Bali, she had fortunately recovered most of her identity. In her favorite pantsuit and comfortable walking shoes, she was even looking forward to the long flight alone. I had merely mentioned that if I remembered correctly, our Burmese emigrant relatives in Perth all dressed like Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A.

Maureen Aung-Thwin

Final Note

I took up the editorship of the Bulletin after the tragic, untimely death of Daw May Kyi Win. Since the first issue I put out (with the invaluable formatting help of Jake Carbine and the support of Catherine Raymond, Beth Bjorneby and NIU’s Center for Burma Studies) in the fall of 2002, I have enjoyed assembling materials of various sorts, although I have often found it difficult to keep to a strict production schedule. But since I will be spending most of the coming academic year in Mandalay, I am now relinquishing the editorship. Jake Carbine is also stepping down from the position of Assistant Editor. I am happy to report that Pat McCormick has agreed to assume the position of editor. His long experience in Burma, his superb language skills, and his extensive contacts all make him an ideal person to take on the role of editor. I would urge readers of the Bulletin to contribute news about their research and publications to him so that we can all keep abreast of developments in Burma studies. His email address is pamcc@uw.edu.

Ward Keeler

MARK YOUR CALENDARS
International Burma Studies conference October 5-7, 2012 at Northern Illinois University DeKalb, IL USA
Check our website this Spring, 2012 for up to date information.
www.niu.edu/burma
Margaret's Parents in Peinzalok

Margaret and her children with friends in Rangoon in 1955. From left: Daw Aye Kyaing, Maureen, Eleanor Ferguson, Anne Ferguson, Margaret, Michael, John, Jessie Khoo (behind John), Sol Schindler, Lynn Silverstein, and Ray Ferguson. Photo by Joe Silverstein.
Attending Euan Bagshawe’s 90th birthday party, from the left: Sylvia Fraser-Lu, Sarah Bekker, Margaret, Barbara Harvey, and Euan. Maureen cooked kaukswe, froze it, then transported it by Amtrak – with Margaret—for the party.

Margaret and her three children (John, Maureen and Michael)

Margaret with three of her great grandchildren in Montreal, Canada.