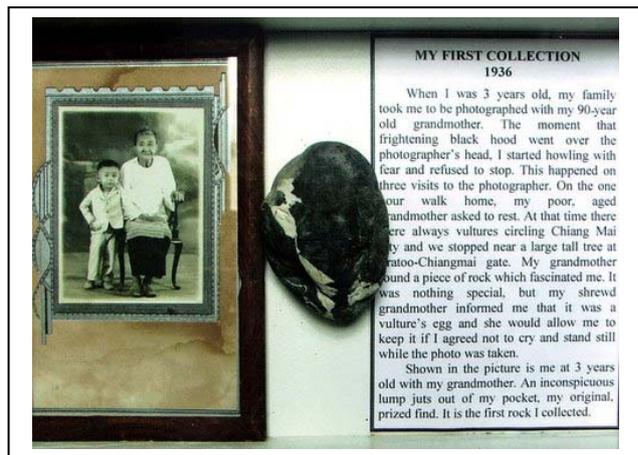


Manop's story: The Vulture's Egg

I, Mr. Manop Rattanarithikul, 82 years old (2012), hold the all-in-one role of owner, manager, and maintainer of this non-profit museum and its hidden treasures. You can enjoy this collection of eclectic rarities, which have been personally gathered by my honoring and enduring spirit for over 50 years. The purpose of conserving natural treasures within the museum is to encourage and inspire people to understand, reconnect with and care for all of creation – for the benefit of all living things, now and throughout all times of this wondrous world.

THE VULTURE'S EGG: The cornerstone and source of inspiration of the museum's collections.



In 1936, when I was 3 years old, my parents wanted me to have my photograph taken with my great-grandmother of 91 years. At that time there was only one photo shop in Chiang Mai, located at the corner of the Mae Ka Bridge, Tha Pae road. My family home was in Pratu Chiang Mai and about a 3 km distance from the photo shop. At that time we didn't have a car or motorcycle. Bicycle-taxis were the only means of transportation, but of these there were very few. If we wanted to go somewhere, most of the time we would have to walk.

When my parents took my great-grandmother and me to the photo shop that day, we had to walk along a narrow path at the base of the inner-city wall. This took us past the Pratu Chiang Mai gate, which was flanked on either side by very tall trees (some of which are still there). At the top of the trees, the branches were full of vultures, 30 or 40 of them. If you looked to the sky you could see even more of them, flying around by the hundreds. Just imagine the sight...the sound...! I remember the male vultures have red necks and heads, and are a lot bigger than the females. Along with the vultures, one could also hear many crows cawing loudly and see them flying over head. I myself love to see the birds flying in the sky.

When my parents brought me to the photo shop for the first time, the photographer arranged the chair for my great-grandmother and me at a perfect place to pose for the picture. Then they brought out the camera, which at the time required a large black hood to cover the head of the photographer. When I saw him with a black hood covering his head, I was frightened, thinking that he was a ghost, and burst into tears! I cried and could not have my picture taken.

The second time we went there, the same thing happened.

One day, I saw some big male vultures on the top of the “lamyai tree” and I watched them for a very long time. My father, observing this, told me that if I wanted to see them close-up, next time we went to get the photo taken he would bring me to have a look and perhaps I could even try to touch them. This pleased me very much. My father told me that he would bring me to see them only if I was brave at the photographers and did not cry again.

The day arrived. On the way over, my father and I went to have a look at some vultures near a garbage heap, where they always enjoyed their royal feast. While we did this, my great-grandmother rested under a big tree, a little way away from the smell. I watched the vultures happily, but was distracted when I suddenly noticed that my great-grandmother was cleaning something in a pond nearby. I ran over to her and asked her what she was doing. My clever grandmother showed me a beautiful rock, and told me that she had found a miracle vulture’s egg that had supernatural powers. She told me it was God’s gift for good boys. I wanted this “egg” badly, and asked her for it. She replied that I could have it, but only if I agreed not to cry at the photographer’s and have my picture taken. I promised, and all the way to the shop I pestered her to let me hold this fantastic treasure. When it was time for our picture to be taken my great-grandmother reminded me of my promise and allowed me to keep the egg in my pocket. Our picture was finally taken, and now hangs in the museum (item #13). You can see the inconspicuous lump that juts out of my pocket – my original, prized find! You will find this all-powerful rock on display in the museum. It holds many stories inside.

Since I believed in my Grandmother’s word, the power of the vulture egg was very real and the stone came with me everywhere. It was placed in my bag in the daytime and under my pillow at night. That is until I was married and when my first son was 2 years old, I moved the rock to a locked cabinet. My wife, son and I all shared a big bed, and I was nervous that my son may wake up one day when I was sleeping, find the rock underneath my pillow and try to wake me up with it by banging me on the head! From the year I received the position as a malaria field investigator of the Project of Malaria and Filariasis Control in Thailand I had to travel in the jungle villages throughout Thailand and neighboring countries to collect samples for my studies and research. I always carried that stone in my backpack, even if my duties took me to America, Europe and Africa. It was with me until I retired.

During World War II in 1943, there were many Japanese soldiers in the temples in Chiang Mai. The allied soldiers came to shoot at them overhead by plane. Everyone had to take shelter. At that time most people had Buddha images hanging around their necks. I, however, asked my father to make me a netted necklace in which to put the vulture’s egg. Since it was a rock, it was heavy, and swung against my chest, leaving red marks on my body and neck. When the planes would come I did not go to the shelter but instead watched them shooting. I trusted in the magic of the egg.

At the age of 25, in 1956, I worked in the malaria investigative department for the United States Operation Mission to Thailand (USOM). I had to move to Bangkok and when I had free time I studied in the Thammasat University, Faculty of Law. The

first year, I wanted to be class president and relied on the strength of my beliefs in the egg to help me when I delivered my speeches. I felt that the hearts of my family resided in the egg, and what do you know! As the unknown underdog I won the elections! Even when I started working at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., I carried the egg with me. I took it everywhere to collect mosquitoes. I always brought it in my bag for my confidence and good luck.

Now, the egg-like rock has become the first piece in my museum.

It is the light of inspiration that has moved me to share my collections with the world. Now it serves to protect not only myself, but the museum and all who see it!