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Bangkok: my very first slides
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I walk the Bangkok streets, the traffic crawls alongside me. I can not see well: the darkness of the night and too many lights collide, my weak eyes blur.

In the distance, the glow of a red dot draws me toward it. It appears higher from the ground than a car light, even higher than the lights of a tuk-tuks, the motorized rickshaw, and moving considerably slower. It is a tiny light in a big shadow. As I approach, it becomes clear that the red dot is a tail light swaying. And the lumbering shadow is an elephant. My first elephant up close, brought to the city by his owner to beg.

There are not many elephants on the streets and they only come out at night. But there are stray dogs, gangs of them. *Soi dogs* they're called. Their numbers make them seem scary. But they are shy with foreigners and, when spoken to, they seem to smile; an attitude they may have learnt from the Thais they spend time with on the streets.

Vendors of fruit, noodle, rice-sweets, chicken-on-a-stick, sausages and even fried beetles and grasshoppers cram Bangkok's sidewalks. In and around them are male and female seamstresses making repairs, cobblers, hawkers of lottery tickets, thread and toys, road sweepers, orchid sellers, fortune tellers, car-park attendants, barefoot monks in saffron sheets and security guards at various stages of alertness.

This Bangkok is a fascinating place with its tangle of traffic and animals and millions of residents that remains, despite the pollution of the canals and the skies, astonishingly tidy.

And yet, I see it all through a fog. But it's not just the humid air condensing on my eye glasses when I step out of an iceberg taxi. And it's more than the sweat that drips from my sweltering fair forehead or the monsooning rains drowning me. It is the fog of distance. Europe may be well behind me now, but there is the congestion of all the new sights and sounds and learning to navigate elephants, chains of automobiles and the staggering heat plus the new people and their culture.

I heave with excitement.