

Ignorance about the Third Gender

Every Picture Tells a Story #8

Welcome to “Every Picture Tells a Story”; a weekly post about living in Thailand. Each week we’ll post a picture that illustrates some of the little things those of us fortunate enough to live here hold dear.



Last year I spent some time in the US. The hot news topic of the day was Kaitlin Jenner.

For those that haven't heard the story; it's about an American Olympic Gold Medalist named Bruce Jenner. Back when I was a teenager, he was the epitome of American manhood. He was tan and handsome. His wife was gorgeous. Bruce Jenner didn't just wind a Gold Medal ... he won the decathlon; the ultimate test of male athletic prowess. He was on the front of my breakfast cereal box.

Now Bruce says he's a girl. Apparently his manliness was all a rouse, and he's making some changes ... literally. It is the subject of every other television show. It is the top conversation from coffee shops to cocktail parties.

People are polarized on the subject. Many applaud “her” bravery for coming out. Some are repulsed. Most just don't

understand.

After 15 years in Thailand, I am amused by their ignorance. For a place that calls itself “the land of the free”, they sure are restrictive when it comes to sex and gender. Here in Thailand, a place many in the west call a third world country, they have transcended all those draconian gender rules.

Nobody snickers when you say “lady-boy”. Transsexuals don't have to hide who they are. You'll find them in all levels of society working in every career field. If you live in Thailand any length of time, you will inevitably interact with a transsexual person.

The difference is simple mathematics. Rather than force the transsexual population into one of two categories, Thais simply make a third gender. Transgender people are free to express themselves and society is richer for it. Some of those “free” countries out there could take some lessons from Thailand.

And that's the story this week's picture tells. It was taken at a light and sound show called Mimosa just south of Pattaya. Mimosa is a replica of a European village that features food, shopping and a music and laser light extravaganza for the whole family.

Every night at show-time, visitors gather in the village square to watch a series of performances that feature everything from Thai traditional dance to magicians and clowns. The atmosphere is like a big outdoor cabaret. There's singing and dancing and spectacular costumes ... there's a laser light show ... and there's a lot of lady-boys.

I was perched on one of the village square's balconies sandwiched between a trio of elderly Canadian ladies and a Dutch family of four. When the beautiful lead dancer pictured here appeared on stage, they all swooned with delight, cheering and clapping and taking pictures.

I wondered if any of them knew.

Orlando Barton