

Chapter 7 - Singapore

(1983 to 1986)

Contents

Visiting the UK, 2014.....	148
Moving to Singapore.....	153
Home Making in Singapore.....	158
Singapore Visitors, Summer 1983.....	160
Lecturing	163
Settled In	166
Trips out of Singapore.....	167
Summer 1984.....	170
Planning our Return to the UK.....	171
Memory Litter Bin.....	172

(15th July 2013 – Woodlands Farm, Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire.)

Visiting the UK, 2013



Picnic in the garden, with secret agent 608.

I don't think there is much point in continuing with my Granddad's Stories of the past whilst Gek and me are actually here now, in the present, with you guys in Tetbury. So, I will write up our time together over this summer of 2013 instead.

The weekend just passed, Isaac came to stay with Gek and me for two nights in the apartment we are renting here in Stinchcombe. Jamie was spending the weekend with his Dad, whilst Noah was with Anna away at a Beaver Scout camp. The three of us had a great time together, spotting rabbits, fox cubs playing in the fields and hot air balloons, amongst other things. Isaac, you had your first go at taking a video and you didn't say "erm" even once, which is quite impressive. The subject was an abandoned rabbit warren in the garden of the place where we were staying. A wildlife presenter in the making, I

would have said. I hope the video has survived, I loaded it onto our website with a link to Isaac's video archive. I would love to know if this was the first of many.

Gek's ankle is still not 100% right. She had twisted it on our last day at Emerson College and it has made walking any great distance a no – no for her but we did get out in the car to see the view from the edge of the Cotswold's overlooking the Bristol Channel. On a visit to Stinchcombe Hill the day before Isaac came to stay with us, I thought I had left my detachable camera lens on a bench up there after doing a lens swop. I only discovered the lens was missing at breakfast the next day when Isaac was with us. He immediately saw how upset I was and asked if there was anything he could do to help. Isaac, you brought tears to my eyes, I must confess. You were only five years old and yet you could immediately empathise with my distress. I decided to go back with you, Isaac, after breakfast to the spot where I thought I must have left the lens. You suggested that if we found the lens up there, we would have to celebrate. We decided on ice creams all round as being the most appropriate reward to ourselves. As it turned out, the missing lens wasn't at all missing but only hiding in my camera bag. Gek



Ice Creams on the hill.



Fox cubs in the field.

found it whilst rummaging around in the bag looking for something else. Well, never mind we decided to have ice creams anyway.

(18th July 2013 – Woodlands Farm, Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire.)

Yesterday we gave each of you a compact digital camera. A black camera for Jamie, a blue one for Noah and a purple one for Isaac; it seemed to go down well. We had picked you all up from school at 3 pm and driven over to Western Birt Arboretum. I haven't gotten the results of your first goes at random picture taking yet but this weekend we are to stay at your place whilst your mum goes up to London for a quilting session and I will do some photo selection then.

Gek and I are off to Wales again next week and then on to Dorset before returning to this lovely apartment we have here in Stinchcombe for the final seventeen days of our stay in the Cotswolds. We are having a lazy day today ahead of a busy week next week.



Newark Car event.

(23rd July 2013 – Travel Lodge, Caerphilly, Wales.)

After a weekend with Noah and Isaac at your home, 15 Priory Close in Tetbury, Gek and I moved over to Caerphilly to look for a location where we might like to live when we return to the UK in a couple of years' time.



T'was a hot day!!

The weekend stay with you was all about Lego building, first a new set that Isaac had just delivered through the post. Noah was very good at helping Isaac to put the new model together after which we went on to general Lego building on a wider scale: a town. On the Sunday, we motored over to the National Trust property at Newark Park where there was, by happenstance, an Austin Car Club Rally. It had been very hot out. The both of you totally collapsed asleep across the

car's back seat on the drive home.

(4th August 2013 – Woodlands Farm, Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire.)

Back in Stinchcombe. The week away in Wales was very productive, confirming the original impression that Gek and I would like to settle in Caerphilly if and when we return to set up a home base in the UK. On Friday, your aunty Polly came to stay with us here at the

apartment and yesterday we all met up at Lacock to visit the National Trust property, Lacock Abbey. And a good time was had by all, although the weather wasn't exactly kind to us, bit damp was it.

It is going to be an interesting and lively week this week. On Tuesday, we are going to take a river cruise from Gloucester Docks onto the River Severn, Thursday we visit the Morgan Sports Car Museum and factory in Malvern Link, and we end the week on Saturday at Silverstone Race Circuit to watch Morgans and Bentleys race. Loads of photo opportunities for us all. It is very interesting to see the different ways in which you three lads handle your cameras and the types of images you like to capture.



Lunch in Lacock.

	<p>Jamie, you are into objects and seem to find an arty take on almost any every-day, almost mundane things, such as a scooter lying in the driveway, or a lonely sweet on a tabletop. Another focus of your camera work has been the garden with interesting images of the shapes in bushes and trees.</p>
	<p>Isaac, you have taken to the video format, big time. Following on from your first attempt at making a wildlife documentary in the garden here at Stinchcombe, having your own camera has set you free to talk to camera at every opportunity. Well, not quite all the time!! You did get in some nice shots of cars and people in between starring in and directing your own movies. Always a "CUT!!" at the end. Makes me smile every time.</p>
	<p>Noah, you are continuing to go for detail with images of engine parts from the Classic Car show we all went to at Newark Park. We are still waiting to hear if the lady curator at the sculpture exhibition we went to the other week is going to use any of your photographs in the organisation's 2014 calendar. What a start to your photography journey to have your first ever pictures in a year calendar!! I think there is every good chance it will happen. Fingers crossed on that one. (Didn't happen but you</p>

got into the last 50 from which the final selection was made. Well done to you.)

(28th September 2013 – Penang.)

Back home in Penang after our 19-week trip to the UK and Spain.



Start of the river cruise.

It has been over a month and a half since I wrote anything up. Mind you, we have been in the midst of effecting a change, not country this time, just of our apartment here in Penang. But change is change, is great. Gek is selling this Relau apartment where we have been staying for the last three years and we are moving to a much posher condominium called 1 Sky. This new place has more facilities such as a swimming pool, gym etc. It isn't far from here; in fact, we have been watching it being built over the last three years from our Relau home. Three

weeks from now and we should be moved in. Hopefully.

And so, to catch up with our last week in the UK with you guys. Seems an age ago now, I can't believe it has only been five weeks since we left Stinchcombe.

The Tuesday river cruise was enjoyed by all, just Isaac and Noah with us this day. The river trip was only 45 or so minutes but we did go around the canal museum and have lunch in the new Gloucester dockside shopping mall area.

Thursday saw us at the Morgan factory taking an official tour around the workshops. I have been coming to the Morgan factory for over 35 years now, from the time I first started the Morgan rebuilds back in 1974. The place hasn't changed that much over the years, the cars are the same, apart from the recently developed Aero 8 and its derivative, the cars having been built here since 1911. Back in the days of my first visits to the factory, you could just turn up and ask



The place to be, the Morgan Factory.

permission to wander at will around the buildings and chat to the guys working there. Today, things are a little more formal with a visitor centre including a museum and guided

tours, which charge a nominal amount per head. Isaac, you seemed to be taken with the three wheelers. Three wheelers were the original Morgan, and some would argue even now, the only true Morgan – ‘3 wheels good, 4 wheels bad’. The three wheelers have always been quick, but the new breed of the beast must be quite terrifying to put the pedal to the metal in for the first time. Naught to sixty miles an hour in 4.7 seconds in an open topped car that is the size of a bathtub and has one wheel missing at the back.

After the factory visit, we took to the Malvern hills for a walk in the fresh air, a beautifully clear day with views from the top of the ridge all the way into Wales to the west and the Cotswolds to the east. Gek stumbled as we reached the top of the hill and twisted the same ankle she had twisted before in Emerson. Down she went and we all thought we would have to carry poor old Gek back down the hill to get back to the car. Isaac, your immediate reaction was to get down with Gek trying to help her, saying we should not have really come up the hill with Gek’s ankle being so dodgy. Another display of sincere concern and your natural reaction to want to help someone in trouble. You are a little gem.



After very carefully stepping our way back down to the car, we drove into Tewksbury to find an ice cream shop. We also visited the Olde Bear Inn, the oldest pub in Gloucestershire but more significantly for us, the pub that your Great, Great Granddad Wilson visited in 1939 whilst on his cycling tour from Leamington Spa to Bridgenorth. We still have the photograph in the Whitworth Gallery that he took of the pub almost 80 years ago.

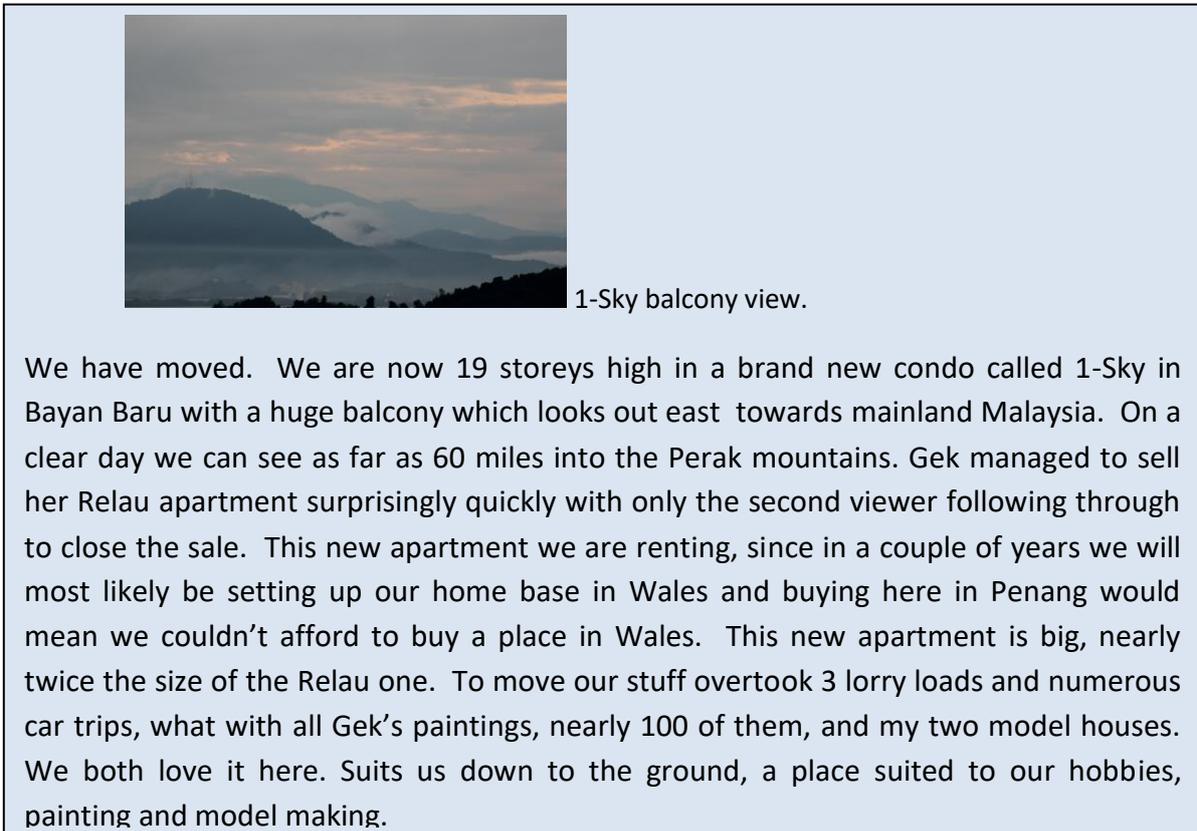
And to the grand finale, a day out at Silverstone. The event? Morgans racing Bentleys, of course. Again, it was a revisit for me. I first came for this annual meeting in ‘97 or it might have been ‘98 and it is still just as exciting. The best bit is that you can walk around practically the whole of the Silverstone site, including the pit area, without restrictions. This





was a club day and essentially there are not many of the visitors from the general public as most of the spectators are Bentley Owners Club or Morgan Sports Car Club members, giving the event a more friendly and welcoming feel. A lot of the people go there every year to meet up with old friends for a day together with their car of passion. Not sure you guys enjoyed the day as much as I did though. It didn't seem to take long before boredom set in and anything would do as a distraction. The two-hour drive home did involve an emergency stop to give all

three of you a bollocking for acting the 'rubber pig' as my Dad used to say. Why so insufferably noisy and just acting stupid? What young lads do when they are together. Well, I guess you cannot win them all.



(15th December 2013 – Singapore.)

Moving to Singapore

It seems very appropriate to be restarting my stories here in Singapore, thirty-one years almost to the day that Jenny first arrived here to take up her new Job at Ngee Ann Polytechnic. Jenny had been recruited directly from ICL to be one of the first three ICL company employees to go to Singapore to start up a brand-new computer teaching

department on the Ngee Ann campus using ICL computers. The new facility was to be called The Centre for Computer Studies or CCS for short. Jenny left from Heathrow on or about the 22nd November 1982. I accompanied her to the airport to see her off and she was so excited about going to the Far East that I don't remember us being particularly emotional about our imminent separation. Only the time spent away from the children was an obvious concern for her, but we would all be together again in a couple of months and with a new job to come to grips with, that time would fly by for Jenny.

I stayed up in London that night. I cannot remember what arrangements we had made to look after Anna and Polly, but I am sure it would have been Mandy to cover for us. The next day I attended a prearranged interview at the Singapore High Commission in London for a post as a lecturer in the same polytechnic as the one at which Jenny was to be based. Jenny's departure date and the job interview session at the High Commission being within 24 hours of each other was a complete coincidence. When at the interview, I mentioned that my wife was currently in the air to take up a post in Singapore at the new CCS, the interview was terminated with the advice to get in touch with the interviewer, Mr. Vasenwalla, when I eventually arrived in Singapore. The interview waiting room was the place where I first met Peter Creamer, a guy who would later become a lifelong friend.

And so back to Wales and the wait to join Jenny out in the Far East although with all the loose ends to tie up, the time passed very quickly. First and foremost was the sale of Pen cae Di. We had decided to sell up everything which meant putting the house on the market and disposing of all our furniture and the cars, except the Morgan of course. If it could not be packed into a suitcase, it wasn't to be kept. Again, happily things worked out really well with the sale of the house and the land getting a buyer almost immediately. We had the property on the market for around £26,000. When you think of it these days, £26k for a 300-year-old cottage on a remote mountainside with 9 acres of land seems a snip, but then I estimate the value in today's money was about £200,000 plus but still, thinking about it, it was very cheap.

Christmas was coming too, so that was also a distraction for us all. Jenny had never been keen on decorating the house for the Christmas period but this year I decided to pull out all the stops and more or less turned the upstairs living room in the cottage into a fairy grotto. Hanging lanterns, paper chains, a huge Christmas tree with loads of coloured lights, the full works. I also decided to buy the girls a Leggo train set. Very selfish of me you might think but the Anna and Polly really enjoyed playing with it and before we left for Singapore, I supplement this initial set with accessories to the extent that our luggage had perhaps too much room taken up with the Lego. But what the heck.

The Christmas period was worst for Jenny, being separated from the children and all. This is pre-internet time and the only communication we had between her and the rest of us was a weekly telephone call, which wasn't exactly cheap back then. A couple of times Jenny raised the possibility of abandoning her new job in Singapore and coming back to Wales, but

by that time the house was already sold, and I had handed in my notice in at Valenite. With all doors closed or closing, the move to Singapore was our only real option now. Even Mandy had left for Africa. I had seen her and the kids off from Cardiff airport just before Christmas and they would not be coming back to Wales until after me, Anna and Polly had left for Singapore. Sarah and Emma would be back at their new boarding school in Cheltenham in January after the Christmas holidays.

Mark had agreed to garage the Morgan for me whilst we were out of the country and so early in the New Year, I drove the car across from G-C-G to Bridgend. With nobody around to take care of Anna and Polly whilst I made the trip, they had to come with me. Trouble was, it was mid-winter and the Morgan had no hood. The poor girls had to wrap up and curl up in the back of the car to hide from the freezing wind. Even so, Polly managed to fall asleep!! Mark did meet us halfway so that the girls could transfer to his 'normal' car and get themselves warmed up.

And so, eventually, the time came to leave Blighty and set off for Singapore, me, two little girls and three oversized suitcases. Since everything we still owned was to be taken to Singapore with us on this one flight, I decided to buy the largest suitcases I could find and stuff them with as many goodies as I could. As a result, the cases were quite a bit over the weight allowance for the airline but never mind, I would pay the excess. I also decided that going to the airport on public transport was a no-no and hired an estate car for the one-way trip, all extra costs for which Jenny gave me earache later but what the hell, this was likely to be a once in a lifetime adventure. Just before the end of January 1983, a few weeks before Anna's 6th birthday, I loaded the hired car, locked up Pen-ae-Di for the last time and set off for Heathrow, to exchange the panoramic view from our Welsh mountainside for a concrete box in a Singapore condominium.

Sarah and Emma by this time were back at school in Cheltenham and the night before our flight to Singapore I booked us into an hotel in town so that we could spend the evening with the two of them. After a Kentucky Fried Chicken dinner or it may have been a MacDonald's I took them to see ET that evening. Anna, Polly and I had already seen the film twice before, but it still made us all cry at the end of the film. Me and four young girls sitting in the cinema blubbing away, very embarrassing for those around us!!

The next morning, we left Cheltenham for Heathrow. The hotel reception asked the girls where they were off to next and were suitably impressed when Anna told them we were going to Heathrow to catch a plane to Singapore to be with her mum. We had only one drama on the way to the airport and one fright. Polly suddenly chirped up that she wanted to pee. At the time, we were bowling along the M4 and quite a long way to the next service station, but she said she couldn't wait. Trouble was, it was absolutely chucking it down with really bad visibility from traffic spray. The only option was to pull over onto the hard shoulder, seeking the shelter of an overhead bridge, for us to get out and have Polly relieve

herself by the side of the road. Nightmare. I had visions of us causing a major motorway incident but nothing untoward happened and we were soon back on our way again.

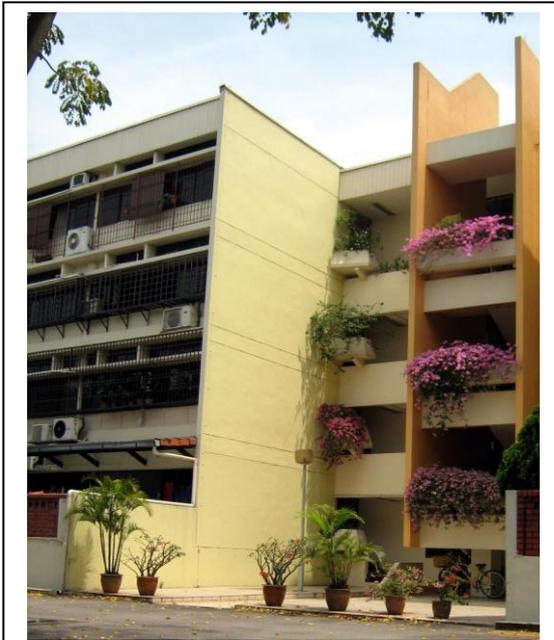
The fright came from the radio news. A cable car wire had become entangled with a drilling rig's tower in Singapore's Keppel Harbour, dislodging a couple of cars from the cable which fell into the sea and stranding the rest of the cars high above the water. Immediately you fear the worst. Jenny might have been on the cable car that day and was now stranded up in the air in Singapore or worse. As it turned out she wasn't, but she had contemplated taking a trip on the cable car that very day to distract herself from the excitement of our imminent arrival. A narrow escape.

In preparation for the long journey, I had put together a surprise package of new toys and games for Anna and Polly to keep them occupied on the long flight to Singapore. In those days, 30 years ago, there were no direct flights from London to Singapore. Even with a first-class carrier like Singapore International Airline (SIA), there were two stops on the way, one in Dubai and a second one in Calcutta, making the total journey time from push back in London to landing in Singapore over 20 hours. Of all the things I had collected for them, the only one that worked was the ET soft toy I had bought, all the other bits and pieces being discarded within minutes of taking off. Oh well, all the best-laid plans of mice and men.

The flight was pretty uneventful really with the only surprise being the soldiers carrying machine gun guarding our plane during our early morning stopover in Dubai. It was dark when we landed there but being all still wide-awake, we took the opportunity to stretch our legs with a walk around the Dubai air terminal. The soldiers skulked around us in the airport hall looking very sullen. I began to wonder if we were the enemy!!! At Calcutta I opted to stay on the plane whilst the cleaners went about their work. The three of us were getting a bit weary by this time, but I have to say the girls were both very well behaved and coped remarkably well with the newness of it all, flying, strange sights and sounds all around.

We landed in Singapore in the early evening just before dusk. Jenny was waiting at the arrival gate with our new neighbour's chauffeur to transport us and our luggage back to our new condominium home. As we emerged from baggage claim Jenny greeted us in excitement with the fact that Cliff Richard had been on our flight into Singapore and she had seen him. Whoopee I thought.... not. Cliff Richard was Jenny's pop idol in the 60's, she having been to a concert he held in the early day of his career at the Bolton Odeon. She soon calmed down though and refocused on the three dishevelled and weary travellers in front of her. By the time we were driving across town to the West coast, the night was upon us and it was completely dark. It wasn't until I visited the East Coast area of Singapore some weeks later that I realised that all the lights on the left side of the car that night were on the ships anchored offshore. On the evening we landed, they looked for all the world like streetlamps, so many ships lights ranked one after the other on the open water.

(7th January 2014 – Penang.)



Hong Leong Gardens Condo on the west of the island, our first home in Singapore.

Jenny had a pretty generous accommodation allowance as part of her remuneration package with her new job which gave her enough money to rent a rather nice apartment in a condominium in the West Coast area of Singapore. A condominium, in case you don't know, is a gated block of flats with additional communal facilities such as a swimming pool, gym, tennis courts, some even equipped with a golf driving range these days. Polly and Anna had a room each in the apartment and Jenny had set them up nicely with new toys and other goodies all ready for their arrival. As soon as the girls were put to bed and asleep, it was time for Jenny and me to catch up on the happenings over the two months we had been apart. Trouble was, I had been awake for over 48 hours and, without warning, I promptly fell

asleep sitting bolt upright on the sofa. That didn't go down too well with Jenny. I hadn't realized how exhausted I had become, having the girls to look after. I felt I couldn't sleep at all on the journey, not even on the flight. Lord knows what I thought could happen to them on a plane, but there you go, that is being a parent!



West Coast Hawker Centre.

The next day was a time to explore. Down the road from our new home was the West Coast Hawker Centre, a place that we would become very familiar with over the next three years. This day was my first introduction to Singapore's hawker centres and 'street' food, which are still preferred places to eat to this day. The West Coast Centre is much the same now as it was back then in 1983, perhaps a little more spic and span than back then, but it still has the same sort of ambience that I felt on that first visit thirty-one years ago. Jenny also took us to Bukit Timah

Plaza along Clementi Road, a shopping mall, quite close to her new place of employment. Singapore was at that time building high-rise accommodation and shopping malls like crazy. A whole new town was being built just a few kilometres to the west of where we were

staying, the new Jurong Town. Not three days ago I had left a Welsh mountainside with lush, green fields to look out over and now I was surveying the concrete and clay of building sites. But the strange thing is I didn't baulk at the seismic shift in our circumstances. On the contrary, I embraced it. I have come to realise that change is really what I like, throw everything up in the air and see how things come back together again in a new future.

Then the jet lag did kick in strongly. Never having experienced it before, it was not a little frustrating for all of us. Jenny of course had to go to work each day, whilst I stayed home to look after the girls. Luckily, the three of us all collapsed together at the same time, which made life a little easier to manage.

When Jenny and I first planned this new life in Singapore, we had decided that I would stay home and be a househusband with all that entailed, cooking, cleaning, taking care of Anna and Polly, which for me was a dream come true. No more going to work for me. And so, I set about setting up 'home' for us all. Jenny had already arranged for a school place for Anna at Dover Court International School but Polly, at just 3 years old, was a little too young to be able to start at Dover court with Anna and so we found her a place in a local nursery. And I do mean local nursery, Polly being the only non-Singaporean infant there. She even started to learn Chinese along with the local children.

(23rd January 2014 – Penang.)

Home Making in Singapore

The first major event after our arrival in Singapore was Anna's 6th birthday. Having only been in the country for a couple of weeks, there hadn't been time for Anna to make new friends. Jenny organised a party from amongst her new work colleagues, making the event more a get to know the neighbours do than a child's birthday party. A couple of children did attend, a young lad who lived opposite us and children whose parents were Jenny's work colleagues, not ideal for a kid's birthday party but the milestone was celebrated in any case.

The next couple of months were spent settling in and exploring a bit of Singapore. At this time, we didn't have a car and getting around was by bus or by taxis, not very handy when there are two little ones with you. And then a fly in the ointment as far as me being a house husband was concerned. The Singapore immigration people would not recognise me as a dependant, dependant on Jenny that is, and would only offer me a six-month renewable social pass to stay in the country, i.e. my stay with Jenny and the kids was not a certainty. After six months I could be asked to leave the country. To avoid that possibility, we decided I had better get a job. Having already made the interview in London for a job at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, I followed through and was given a lectureship at the Polytechnic without much trouble. Back to the coalface again for me.

I started work at the Poly in the June, joining the mechanical engineering department as a lecturer on local terms. But before I could start the new job, our domestic arrangements

had to be rethought. This entailed employing someone to be with Polly and Anna after school and perhaps do the housework whilst Jenny and I were at work. To this end, we enlisted the help of Fatima, a local Singaporean, who took over my duties in the home. There was a little overlap time between Fatima joining our household and me starting work at the Poly, giving us time to 'bed in' the new arrangements. Overall the transition was pretty seamless, with Fatima picking up Polly for the nursery every day, and the two of us doing stuff around the apartment together.

But eventually I had to go to work. As luck would have it, I was joining the polytechnic at the end of the academic year. As a result, I was not thrown in at the deep end by having to lecture on the first day, unlike Jenny who effectively got off the plane and walked straight into the lecture theatre. The new academic year didn't start until the end of July, giving me over two months to prepare my lectures. Having been a failure at teaching at my first attempt in Ghana some fourteen years early, I was more than a little nervous at taking up teaching again. However, it soon became apparent that this was a completely different ball game. The polytechnics in Singapore are the equivalent of tertiary colleges in the UK, taking in students from 'O' levels onto three-year technical diploma courses, the equivalent of the British Higher National Diploma. And the numbers were different too. There was only one course in mechanical engineering in the Mech. Eng. department leading after three years to the Diploma with 800+ students in each year. This was technical education on an industrial scale. My allotted subject was 1st year mechanics, with additional lecturing/tutoring in drafting.

The early 80s saw the introduction of the first serious personal computers (PCs). We had had by this time, at home in the UK, a BBC computer for a couple of years which by today's standards had a minuscule memory chip of only 64 KB. The polytechnic had not gotten any of the new breed of computer and wasn't to have them in any numbers for a few years yet. All the lecture material was produced by hand on transparent slides for use on an overhead projector, projecting the notes on to a white screen at the front of the lecture room. Thankfully, chalk and blackboard had given way to marker pens and whiteboard by this time. My ineptitude with English spelling and grammar must have been apparent, with no spell or grammar checker at the click of a mouse, and I shudder to think back now how literary challenged I must have appeared to anyone reading my course notes.

Having 800 students in each year, all of them on a single course, meant having a number of lecturers, eight in total, involved in delivering one year of each module with a staff/student ratio in the region of 1 to 30. The polytechnic was at the beginning of a massive expansion exercise at the time of my arrival on campus with lecture halls and staff offices still being built for a planned increase in student numbers. The whole campus resembled a building site more than a seat of learning. I was not the only new member of the Mech. Eng. Staff. Several local engineers had been recruited to the department along with a couple of other expatriates, one of whom turned out to be Peter Creamer whom I met at the interview on

that cold, wintery day back in London. Over the first couple of months, Peter and I shared a make-do office in the old college buildings. With so many new staff around, there was a lot of camaraderie amongst us. Most of us new boys were also new to lecturing and this was going to be a feet finding year for most of us. Peter, for example, had left a research job at Rolls Royce's jet engine plant in Derby to come to Singapore. I am sure he was seen as a real catch for the Poly.



Once I had started work, our domestic life settled into more of a routine with the girls to get off to their respective places of learning, Fatima's jobs for the day to be decided etc. To make life a little easier, we decided to buy a small car, not an inconsiderable expense in Singapore, but with two salaries coming in each month we worked out that we could afford to buy a Suzuki. Suzuki only made one model at the time, a very small car, not much bigger than a 1960s Mini, but as an about-town car, it suited us down to the ground. The colour was a very bright yellow. Once we had the Suzuki, it became feasible for me to collect Anna from Dover Court when the school day finished at 1 pm. The school day started at 7:30 am and only had a morning session, making it possible for me to do the school run during my lunch break.

(31st January 2014 – Penang.)

Singapore Visitors, Summer 1983

Our first visitor to Singapore was Mandy who came in March with Dylan. They only stayed with us a couple of weeks, in which we managed to fit in a short excursion to Desaru on the east coast of Malaysia.

The summer saw a Ruth and Mandy with their respective families in tow, Ruth with Toby and Jacob, and Mandy with Sarah, Emma, Dylan and Peter come to visit, not to mention my Mum. Our apartment could not accommodate all these visitors at once, lord knows why everyone was invited to stay at the same time. And so, Mandy & co. decamped to the East Coast of Singapore and took up residence in a shore side bungalow, together with Jenny and the girls, leaving Ruth, the two lads and me to stay in our apartment and do the tourist bit around Singapore together. We visited the Bird Gardens, Sentosa and I think the zoo amongst other attractions.

As part of setting up of our home, we had bought a video tape play from a downtown electric store, the receipt number for which was entered into a lucky draw, the top prize being an SGD 12,500 diamond encrusted watch. And guess what, we won it!!! What do you do with an SGD 12,500 watch? Why, sell it of course, which we duly did for a heavily discounted SGD 4,000. To close the deal, Peter and I accompanied Jenny to the buyer's apartment, somewhere at the top end of Orchard Road. Jenny was paranoid at having such a valuable item on her person, convinced that she was going to be robbed. She took both Peter and me along just to be on the safe side, not that Peter and I would have been much use if we had been held up by robbers.

We decided that since this was an unexpected windfall, we would treat ourselves and the Cooper family to a week's holiday in Penang. Mandy & co. had planned a motoring trip up the east coast of Malaysia in any case, and this money would give our family the opportunity to fly to Penang direct. Mandy & co. would now drive up the east coast and across the north to the west coast and so on to Penang Island. Since we had the money, we booked ourselves into the Bay View Beach Hotel, the same hotel Mandy had stayed in a few years earlier on one of her trips abroad on the 10% fares scheme afforded by Peters job at the time.

Soon after Ruth and the lads had left us to return to the UK, Jenny, me and the girls took a SIA flight to Penang. Nothing but the best for us this trip. Mind you, there were no budget airlines back then and no motorway up the west coast of Malaysia either, going by road from Singapore to Penang in the 1980s would take at least two days.



Polly and Mandy in the Bay View Beach hotel pool.

Penang had a totally different feel to it from Singapore and I fell in love with the Pearl of the Orient on the very first day we landed. The people were so much more relaxed and laid back compared to the, even then, crazy way that Singapore had of winding you up despite your best efforts to rise above the madding crowd and the intensity of a 24/7 working environment. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that 31 years down the road I would be writing this piece living in a Penang apartment overlooking the airport where I first landed on the island.

The Bayview Beach Hotel was the last hotel along the Bata Feringghi stretch of beach on the north side of the island. It is still there, although it has had a major makeover and is now called the Bayview Beach Resort. The original two storey hotel rooms are still on the site but are now the staff accommodation, with a multi-storey 'modern' hotel block having been built on what used to be the original, extensive hotel's grounds.

We all had a fabulous week, swimming in the hotel pool, walking the beach, eating at the local hawker stalls, visiting Penang Hill.... doing all the touristy things that people are still doing today. We also visited the Snake Temple, which is just down the road from where we are now living. Sarah claims she is still traumatized from a snake put around her neck by one of the keepers of the temple. Peter and I became a little stir crazy just staying around the hotel pool during the heat of the day and took a couple of excursions out on our own, one a drive around the south of the island and a second across on the ferry to Butterworth. In 1983 Butterworth was a very small and sleepy place, the main reason for its existence seemed to be the railway station where people travelling from Kuala Lumpur in the south or Thailand in the north would alight to catch the ferry to the Penang Island. The first Penang Bridge was at the very early stages of construction and in fact, I don't remember seeing any piles in the strait between the island and the mainland at that time.



Polly with Jenny on the steps of the Batu Caves, north of Kuala Lumpur

To return to Singapore, we had already decided that Jenny and I would rent a car in Penang and drive back down the West Coast of Malaysia with Mandy & co. The plan was to break the journey with a one-night stopover in the Cameron Highlands and a second-night stopover in Kuala Lumpur. The drive up to the Cameron Highlands on the old road was quite exciting.... for the driver that is, not for the passengers, who were all threatening to throw up at any moment. Such a twisty, turny road, but the pain was worth it, just to experience the cool and dry of the highlands after

the hot and humid coastal plains. It sure was a surprise to see the fireplaces in the older, mock Tudor black and white houses build during Malaysia's colonial days. We did the usual round of tourist visits to the butterfly farm and the tea plantations, before setting off next day back down the twist, turny road to join Route 1 again. Halfway to Kuala Lumpur it started to rain, not your normal splish splash rain hitting the windscreen, more like a gushing hosepipe continually douching the windscreen, a total white out. I couldn't even see the end of the car bonnet. At one stage, Jenny had to guide me with 'left hand down a bit, right hand down a bit' instruction from her looking out of the cars side window. I dared not stop in case some other car rammed me up the behind and I wasn't too keen on driving on either since I would only know of another car in front of me after I had hit it. I don't mind admitting, I was more than a little afraid. A very scary moment.

After ten minutes or so of this nerve-jangling drive, the rain stopped as abruptly as it had started, and we made it to the Batu Caves some eight miles north of Kuala Lumpur. It is

Granddad Stories.

quite a walk up the cave's entrance, something like 272 steps and poor little Polly was not at all happy that we had to turn around and go all the way down them to get back to the cars.

After the cave visit, we drove on into Kuala Lumpur and, following a good night's sleep, we left on the final leg of the journey south to Singapore. On the way, we called in at Malacca on the coast. After a stroll around the town and what remains of the 15th century Portuguese fort we got back to the cars to find that Mandy's motor had been broken into and their camera stolen, amongst other things. A trip to the police station was required to get a copy of a police report of the theft to send with the reimbursement claim from the insurance company. All this delayed our departure from Malacca, and it was not until after dark that we crossed the Causeway into Singapore. And it was in some ways good to be back.

(1st February 2014 – Penang.)

Lecturing

Once Mandy and co. had left for the UK and so on to Nigeria, our life in Singapore really began to be more routine, as in getting out of bed, seeing to the girls breakfasts, getting them off to school on the school bus, (Polly was now old enough to go to Dover Court with Anna), going to work etc..

I found that I did really enjoy lecturing, although it soon became apparent that I had made my overhead slides far too busy for me to lecture to, or for the students to follow. After a few weeks, I did a small sample questionnaire of one class to see where they gained most of their learning; the lecture, the library, other students or textbooks. The lecture as a source of knowledge came at the bottom of the list and caused me to totally rethink what I was doing. For this first year of lecturing, I was on a steep learning curve myself. The Poly did have teacher training courses which all new to lecturing staff were supposed to attend, but me being me, I decided to give the course a miss. I could work out this lecturing lark for myself, thank you very much. Peter went to the weekly sessions and came back on the first day not too pleased that he had been shown how to switch on the overhead projector (OHP). This only served to confirm my no show at these weekly does.

At the start of the second year at the Poly, I was given the job of year tutor for the first-year mechanics course. This gave me the opportunity to organise not only my own course delivery but also that of the eight other lecturers assigned to teach the first year's mechanics. A few issues had arisen over the previous year, which was not surprising given the number of staff involved in, delivering the same course material within a specified time frame. There were two main challenges, one was getting every class of students through the whole of the first-year curriculum before the time came to examine them. The second challenge was to dissuade the lecturing staff from 'leaking' exam questions to their own batch of students. Very unprofessional, of course, but there were strong indications that

this practice was going on, a lecturer's students scoring high on their lecturer's exam question being one such indicator. You would think that they would have known someone might notice such an anomaly.

To tackle the first issue, i.e. keeping all the eight classes on the same page of the curriculum each week, I decided to create a standard set of student notes in the form of a printed booklet. These notes also became the source of the lecture slides produced by the individual lecturers who had then to deliver sections of the notes on given weeks throughout the year. This approach seemed to work since at the end of the three terms not one lecturer in the team came at exam time saying that they hadn't completed the curriculum with their class.

To tackle the second issue, giving their own students an unfair advantage in the exam room, I decided to change the way in which the exam papers were created. To this end, I asked each lecturer on the course to provide me with two or three specimen questions, giving me a collection of between 20 to 24 candidates for inclusion in the two-hour exam paper. As part of the process to select 4 or 5 questions from the 20/24 to include on the exam paper, I had the teaching team together and we went through each question in turn displayed on the OHP screen to make sure each question was set at an appropriate level and free of errors. This session also gave the lecturing team the chance to be part of the vetting process. After the editing process was completed and the corrections made to the questions script, Sarkar, the subject leader, and I chose the questions to be included in the exam, the final selection being only known by Sarkar and myself. And it worked. A fair to all exam.

This second year at the Poly also saw the opening of the new building to house the Mech. Eng. department, new 200-seater lecture theatres, new labs, workshops and new air-conditioned staff offices. Brilliant. Mind you, for the first few weeks in the new offices, the air conditioning was not working, neither were the lifts. After climbing up six storeys of steps in 30 deg C and 70% humidity, I was pretty well wetted all over by the time I reached my desk. Poor old Peter suffered more than I, he being a big sized guy, to the extent that he took to always carrying a towel with him to wipe away the sweat, not a pretty sight.

A couple of other contributions I made to the department were the design of some laboratory equipment and some computer-based teaching material. The lab equipment I designed, I had made in the department's workshops. New lab equipment had been ordered, but some items had been overlooked and rather than wait for a reorder, I decided we could make our own. Lab equipment was really overpriced, which was another reason to do an in-house job for ourselves.

Creating computer aided teaching materials was to be the beginning, for me, of a long association with the computer and using it to promote student centred learning, a term that wouldn't appear in the education sector's lexicon for at least another 20 years. Not that I

can claim any credit for the buss words but from that small class survey I had done at the beginning of my first term in the Poly, it was clear to me that top down teaching was, to say the least, not very effective at getting the students to learn. It was a few years later that I read an account of a survey done at a top US university, where they tested students' knowledge on the subject of a lecture as they were about to attend the lecture and tested them again after the lecture was delivered. And, yes you have guessed it. More students failed to understand the topic concerned after the lecture than before the lecture as given. It turns out the lecturer confused the students who already understood the lecture material. In effect the lecture had caused them to 'unlearn'.

My first computer aided teaching material was created on a BBC computer, the one we had at home. The personal computer was still a rarity in 1984, even in Singapore, and in any case was far too big and heavy to think of carrying into a lecture room. In this second year, I also had the opportunity to try to make my lectures 'entertaining' using two overhead projectors with notes on one screen and a working model projected onto a second screen to illustrate the principle I was trying to get across in the notes. Some years later, on a return trip to Singapore, I visited Singapore Poly where I met a lab technician who told me that when he was an SP student, he went with a friend to NP to watch me perform. For this first attempt at computer-based teaching material, I replicated this approach to explain what a free body diagram was to the students. Using a slide projector to show a photograph of a real mechanical object, for example a crane, next to a TV screen showing a computer-generated graphic of a free body diagram of the same mechanical object. The coding was done in BASIC which was very similar to the FORTRAN language I was already familiar with. I spent a couple of weeks going around Singapore photographing cranes and diggers as stars for my new free body diagram lecture. It was by today's standards very crude, of course, but it was a start. The other lecturers used the teaching material in their small group tutorials over a week, in a specially set up room. It seemed to go down well with both staff and students, although I didn't, and should have done, get feedback from either. My efforts did, however, get recorded in the Poly staff magazine, which was cool.

Looking at the students' backgrounds and the kind of influences they had growing up in Singapore, I came to the view that they seemed to have been remote from anything mechanical. They didn't seem to have mended their own bicycles or played with Mechano or Lego. All the learning in school had been from books. Perhaps I was being a bit hard on the Singapore education system, being as it was and still is examination driven. To address this issue, for a few students at least, I got involved in a Saturday morning student club for which I arranged to have a car previously confiscated by the police from drug traffickers at the causeway for the students to 'pull apart'. In the first year at the Poly, I gave a talk on Morgan cars and the factory in which they were made to the club, so this was a natural development, and also fun for me.

(7th February 2014 – Penang.)

Settled In



In the Botanical Gardens with Dylan.

I have to say it was at least eighteen months before I felt that being in Singapore was 'normal'. I have since found that for the first six months in a different country, you feel like you are on some kind of extended holiday. The next twelve months you start getting acclimatised to your new reality and after that, you accept your environment as 'normal'. This realisation happened to me as I was driving home from the Poly one day, when it came like a revelation 'Cripps, I live and work in Singapore!!!!'.

Mind you this, feeling of dissociation wasn't helped when the rental contract for the

apartment in Hong Leong Garden was due to be renewed and we decided that we would be better off somewhere else, i.e. in Tat Lee Court. The decision was triggered by the Hong Leong apartment owner wanting to increase the rent, an increase that would take the rent to more than the housing allowance that Jenny had as part of her employment contract. Tat Lee Court had just been completed and the asking rent was well within Jenny's allowance and to make the decision a no brainer, it had much better facilities. A bigger a swimming pool and a couple of squash courts. I think the squash courts decided it for Jenny.

And so, in the November of 1983 we moved about 1 km up the road. This coincided with Fatima having to leave us for family reasons. I was sorry to see her leave us, but it had to be. To replace Fatima, we employed a lady who was originally from Indonesia, Mehesra. Mehesra was a little more mature than Fatima, her family already having grown up and left the family home. She was with us for the rest of our stay in Singapore.

With the girls' school finishing at lunch time, I always made it a point to be home before 5 o'clock, lectures and tutorials allowing. This left time to take the girls out to the various attractions around the west of the island such as Tiger Balm Gardens, the Bird Park and the Chinese Gardens amongst others. I also got into the habit of visiting the West Coast Hawker Centre every Wednesday evening, just me and the girls, for dinner. We always went to the same Chinese food



Be afraid, very afraid.
Tiger Balm Gardens.

stall and ordered fried rice with a selection of other dishes, sometimes on the recommendation of the young woman who served us, including frog legs which subsequently became a favourite of ours. Satay was also a must have, with 20 sticks being ordered to share between us. After we left Singapore, I had the opportunity to revisit the stall in 1992 whilst on a working visit from Staffordshire University and found the same family still running it. And they remembered me. Not surprising, really, me and the girls being most times the only Europeans in the centre.

(12th February 2014 – Penang.)

Trips out of Singapore

After Mum returned to the UK, and the terms at the girls' school had started, Christmas came around very quickly this first year in Singapore. We decided that we both needed a break from the island and work and booked a fortnight Christmas holiday in Thailand. First, we flew to Bangkok where we stayed for a couple of days before taking the overnight train up country to Chiang Mai and finishing off the two weeks by spending the last few days of the holiday relaxing in Pattaya on the coast to the east of Bangkok.

Even back then, Bangkok traffic was notoriously bad. We hired a car with a driver for the three days we were there, and he really looked after us, he even brought us to his favourite eating place to meet his family. We did all the usual touristy things, going to the river market, visiting the temples etc. The contrast with Singapore's clean and tidy streets was



Burma Railway

quite disturbing. All seemed chaos. And yes, the traffic did live up to its notoriety. I really felt that we should take a trip out of the capital to visit what was left of the Thailand/Burma railway started by the Japanese during the Second World War. Tens of thousands of allied prisoners of war were sent from all over SE Asia to work on building of the line, a posting from which not many lived to tell the tale. Our journey to the railway was made by road in a small ten-seater minibus and on the way, we stopped off at a war cemetery dedicated to the fallen. It was very moving to see the English names on the head stones in a cemetery in such a foreign place. And so many of them. The grounds of the cemetery were immaculately kept, and you could not help noticing that tidiness within the cemetery gate contrasting with the surrounding urban area.

The road part of the excursion ended at the infamous bridge on the River Kwai where we boarded a train to take us on to the end of the line. Part of the line follows the river, along a

cliff, the line being carried on wooden trestles clinging to a cliff face. The train was the ordinary local train and we few were the only foreigners aboard. At the end of the line was a small museum holding for posterity a record of the horrors of what took place here sixty years previously.

(15th February 2014 – Penang.)

Buying the overnight train ticket from Bangkok to Chiang Mai was quite a novel experience in itself. Not only the impact of the chaotic station forecourt with street food sellers, passengers and beggars all going about their business and demanding your attention but also understanding the difference between the types of tickets you could buy not being helped by the language barrier. But finally, we had in our hands four tickets for bunked accommodation on the overnight sleeper. We didn't really have a clue what that meant until we boarded the train one evening northward to Chiang Mai. It turned out that our bunks for the night sleep were above your day seats and were pulled down along with all the others in the carriage when the attendant deemed it time for us all to go to bed. Your individual privacy was guaranteed by a curtain you pull across the side of the bed by the carriage corridor. No bathroom, just the normal train carriage type toilet. No showers tonight girls.

Chiang Mai is a lovely place. We spent our time walking the walls, visiting the plantations for an elephant ride and the arts and craft centres to watch pewter peening and paper umbrella making. A day was also spent taking a tour up into the mountains to visit a tribal village. I was a little disturbed by the whole notion of the place as it seemed to me that the villagers were trapped in a living museum. I felt this again some years later when Gek and I visited Kunming in China where there is a whole tourist industry built around what I can only describe as a human zoo. Several of China's ethnic minority peoples have been placed here to demonstrate to visitors their ancient lifestyles etc. Something definitely not right about the whole concept, in my view.

The children in the Thailand ethnic village were clearly without any form of education or basic health care. I couldn't help noticing that quite a few of them had bad scarring on their legs from old sores. However, they all seemed very happy, running around the place barefooted and making the usual noises associated with cheeky cherubs that you can find anywhere on our planet. Our driver/guide for the day took us off the main tourist road through the village, which was lined with craft shops selling some locally made crafts but also the inevitable tourist tat brought in from elsewhere, to a see an old lady smoking opium. She was sitting cross-legged on an opium bed outside a hut on the edge of a field full of cultivated poppies. Well, we were not far from the 'Golden Triangle' where poppies and their related drugs were easy to come by.

We did buy a piece of cloth art showing cameos of village life in stitch work on it. Jenny wanted to bargain to get a better price but I strongly object to her even trying. How could

you as a rich foreigner even contemplate bargaining with the clearly poverty stricken old lady squatting in front of you for a piece of work that had taken at least a day's effort to make? Wake up, people don't live a demeaning life by choice. I still have the piece, a reminder of that sad, sad place.

Having "done" Chiang Mai, we boarded the train again for the overnight return trip south to Bangkok. Our fellow passengers that night were a strange mix. One particular couple, both Americans, caught my eye and aroused my curiosity. They were a youngish man and woman who seemed to me to be very furtive in their demeanour. I decided that they must be CIA agents returning from a mission to the Thailand/Laos boarder where there were still a number of refugee camps that had been set up during America's war with North Vietnam. I had bought a half bottle of whisky in Chiang Mai and decided to open it for a snifter on the way back to Bangkok, purely to help me sleep that night, you understand. Perhaps the amber nectar was making my imagination work overtime, but they did seem to be in cahoots over something.

A middle of the night heart stopping moment was when I woke to find Anna out of her bunk. She was walking up and down the carriage corridor looking for Jenny and myself and she obviously could not see us, both of us being hidden by the bedside curtains. At the time I woke up, the train had stopped in a station and if Anna had gotten down onto the platform to look for us, well, it just doesn't bear thinking about. Even now I shudder at the thought of what might have been. But, for whatever reason, I woke up and found Anna looking very sleepy and confused. After this close shave losing our kids, the nearest we ever came, both Polly and Anna joined each of us in our separate bunks. Neither of them was going anywhere without our knowledge for the rest of that night. I don't think any of us slept anymore after that.

Arriving in Bangkok in the early morning, we straight away took the coach to Pattaya. Whilst Pattaya had a reputation for rent boys and sex workers, there was a side to the resort that was family orientated and this was where we headed. We did venture into the red-light district, but only in the day light hours when Pattaya's waterfront had the look of any other seaside resort. The last days of the holiday were spent on the beach with the girls, enjoying the last hours of freedom from Singapore and work.

Following the Thailand visit, by March (1984) I felt the need for a change of environment, if only for a short time. One weekend, I proposed to Peter Creamer we take a day trip up the coast to Malacca with the girls. Jenny wasn't at all keen on going so it fell to my friend Peter to occupy the front passenger seat. Early one Saturday morning we four set off across the causeway heading into Malaysia. I really should have done a little more homework, as in how far Malacca was from Singapore and the state of the roads between the two towns. Today there is a motorway for most of the journey which now takes little more than two hours but back in 1984 the same journey could take more than 4 hours and it did. As soon as we arrived in Malacca and had lunch, we had to set off back to Singapore.

Since Peter couldn't share the driving, halfway home I was getting just a little tired and needed to take a break. But could we find a coffee shop to get some fortification? No, not a one for mile after mile, and then hope, what looked like a café by the side of the road. In we pulled only to find that the place we took to be café was in fact a wedding celebration. But this being a Malay wedding we were invited to join the feast and were treated as one of the guests. Peter fell into conversation with one of the elders and to his astonishment found the guy had known his father. This was not Peter's first stay in Singapore, he had been here as a young lad with his parents when his father was stationed there in the 1950s during the Malay Emergency. Peter's father had been the Regimental Sergeant Major for his outfit and the elder had been a soldier in the same regiment. Small world indeed.

(16th February 2014 – Penang.)

Summer 1984

Mum came out to stay with us to be with the girls whilst Jenny and I were at work in. Mum was always up for a trip to practically anywhere, and it didn't take much to persuade her to come to Singapore to stay with us. As I remember it, during her first stay, we just messed around the pool and took the odd trip out to the shopping malls and food courts. Sentosa was also a favourite destination for a day out.

Mum decided that this was a good time to take a trip right around the planet. She had already been to India and Nepal in 1982 on an organized tour that included taking a small plane flight around Mount Everest. Now, after staying with us in Singapore, she planned to fly on to Melbourne and stay with her brother, Frank, for three months and do some touring of the Australian east coast. From Australia Mum would then go to New Zealand to spend a further three months with her cousin, also called Frank, who lived and still lives in Blenheim. *(Gek and I visited Frank in Blenheim in 2012)*. After Blenheim she flew to Tahiti and then on home via San Francisco and New York. Mum was away from Darwin for nine months, fulfilling at the age of 65 a life's ambition to travel right around the planet.

During the summer holidays, we took a week break on the island of Rowa off the east coast of Malaysia. The five of us crammed into the Suzuki and drove up the east coast to Mersing from where we took the ferry across to the island. Rowa was a very small island having only one beach on which to build huts. The week was spent, snorkelling, windsurfing and reading. Well, Jenny spent the whole week reading. A very thick book it was too. When she wasn't reading, she was sunbathing, or it seemed that way.

Snorkelling was fun until Polly spotted a sea snake swimming along the sea floor which prompted a hasty retreat back on to the beach. We were a little more circumspect as to where we placed our feet when paddling in the shallows after that. I too had a bit of a scare. I decided I would like to have a go at windsurfing and hired a board from the beach boys for a couple of hours. After numerous failed attempts to stay up right on the thing, I at last got

under way and in my excitement, didn't notice that I was heading out to sea. When I did notice, I found I could not turn the board around and was in danger of disappearing over the horizon and being lost in the South China Sea forever. The only option was to paddle my way back to the island lying flat on the board. I was so intent on getting myself out of the mess I was in, it didn't even cross my mind to worry about what a passing shark might make of my padding arms. A close shave was survived but I never went on a board again. Once bitten and all that.

Planning our Return to the UK

1985 was the last year of Jenny's contract with the CCS and by default also mine with Ngee Ann. After a bit of soul searching, we decided that it would be best for us to return to the UK in November and restart our lives in the UK. The driving factor, I suppose was the girls' education. Whilst Singapore had excellent schools, I in particular felt that their futures would be better served if we returned to the UK earlier rather than later. Jenny was initially all for us extending our contracts but was persuaded by my arguments for going home this year. This meant that somehow, at least one of us had to get a job in the UK before we left for home. Jenny had the best chance of getting a new job and, indeed, she managed to set up three interviews in June at Polytechnics in Bristol, Glamorgan and Staffordshire.



Whitworth's and Cooper's in the Cotswold Hills.

This was to be our first visit back to the UK in two and half years and I, for one, was very excited about it. As we made our landing approach into Heathrow Airport, I felt quite elated. Cannot think why now. Strange. We hired a car for the period we were 'home' and took the opportunity to get out and about. As luck would have it, Peter and Mandy had recently bought a house in Cheltenham where Sarah and Emma were at boarding school and so June

found us living with the Cooper family again, but this time in Cheltenham. Mark brought the Morgan up to Cheltenham on a trailer to be stored in the Cooper's Cheltenham garage which gave me the opportunity to drive the little beauty around the Cotswold Hills.

Of the three Polytechnics that Jenny visited as prospective employers, she chose Staffordshire as the most appropriate, it being the biggest computer teaching facility in the whole to the UK at the time. Mind you, she was offered jobs at all three Polys, so there was really no problem in us returning to the UK at the end of the year. With a load off our minds we flew back to Singapore to work off the remainder of our contracts and set our sights on a new life in Staffordshire.

After Mum had left for the rest of her trip of a lifetime, our remaining time in Singapore was spent preparing to leave. We decided to ship the rattan furniture we had bought for the apartment back to the UK to allow us to at least move into any house we might buy pretty quickly. We had the usual round of good-bye parties and gatherings with the friends we had made in Singapore which was sad in some ways but exciting nonetheless to think we would soon be homeward bound

When Jenny had first accepted the job in Singapore and we knew the terms and condition of her contract, we calculated that we would be likely to return to the UK in three years with an extra £20,000 in our bank account. Well, to our surprise, a very pleasant surprise, we found we were going to the return to the UK with a tidy extra £85,000 in our bank account. Brilliant.

Memory Litter Bin.

1. **A Reunion** – During the last year working at Valenite-Modco in South Wales, I had been involved in an MSc student's industrial project from Swansea University. The Student was a young Singaporean and I found I still had his contact details when I arrived in Singapore. A couple of months after arriving on the island, we met up again. Sadly, it was the one and only meeting.
2. **Dylan comes to Stay** - Mandy was having problems finding a suitable school for Dylan in Nigeria. The problem was education, or rather the lack of it, in Kaduna, the town in northern Nigeria where Peter was working. Dylan was too young to join the girls at their Cheltenham boarding school and therefore had to be with his mum and dad in Nigeria. But unfortunately, there was no education to be had there being delivered in English. It was decided that Dylan would join our two girls at Dover Court while Mandy returned to Kaduna and set up her own school. Mandy was confident that she could garner enough support from other expatriated workers with families in the area to make the setting up of a primary education outfit viable. And so, for the next six months we became a family of five.

Of course, the slight complication of getting a permit for Dylan to stay with us in Singapore for six months, without his mother, never entered our heads. The immigration authorities could not understand how Mandy would leave her son with people who were not family members. Nowadays, of course, foreign students boarding in Singapore is commonplace but not in 1983. In the end we just kept renewing his social visit visa, whilst putting off the immigration officials with excuse after excuse as to why he could not leave to re-join his mum. Jenny was good at that.

With Dylan staying with us, I decided that we could do some manly things together, things such as building model ships and serious Lego constructions. I went as far as to go with him twice weekly to Tae Kwando lessons at a club which had training sessions on a local recreation area. This was well out of my comfort zone! Apart

from getting very hot and sweaty, in spite of the sessions being held in the evening, the red ants on the concrete tennis court club used for practice had a right good nibble at our bare feet. And in Tae Kwando, you are actually expected to HIT your opponent. No pussy footing around as in Taiji. No, you could actually get hurt in this game. We had all the right gear too, the martial art gowns and belts. In Singapore, if you studied a martial art, you had to register with the authorities, I guess just in case you were intent on holding up a bank with a threatened chop. Fortunately, or otherwise, for me, Dylan soon decided that T W D wasn't for him and to my great relief, we sold our martial arts kit and went back to computer games and swimming.

3. **A Brand-New Morgan** - Jenny had also bought a present for me on our arrival in Singapore, a deposit on a brand-new Morgan. The waiting list for a new car was then around 7 years and by the time came to make my production choices, we could no longer afford to buy it!!! But it had been a great thought.
4. **Anus Operation** – A couple of months before I left Wales for Singapore, I developed an abscess on my anus and very painful it was too. The local doctor who had served me so well when I first arrived in G-C-G all those years before recommended that I waited until I got to Singapore before doing anything drastic about it like having an operation to drain it as this would delay our departure if I had the operation now and then in Wales. Without going into too much detail, the thing did burst over the Christmas period, which gave me some temporary relief from the pain and was it painful. Yep it sure was.

For the first year in Singapore I put up with the condition by making sure it never sealed and kept on 'leaking'. Not nice. Anyway, in the second year I decide to see a doctor who referred me to the hospital. The operation was carried out with a local anaesthetic, which just numbed my body from the waist down. Being wide-awake for the whole ordeal was not helped by me being the subject of a medical student's practical demonstration on how to lance an abscess. I truly felt like the proverbial piece of meat with six pairs of eyes staring at my anus. Worst still, I could see what the surgeon was doing reflected in the chrome of the overhead lamp lighting his way with the scalpel.

After the operation, I was carted back to my exclusive ward with its single bed and own loo. After a couple of hours, the anaesthetic had worn off and I was in even worse pain that I had ever been with the untreated abscess. To help relieve the pain, the duty nurse injected me with a morphine-based painkiller, which didn't kill the pain, but put me on a high. I was so high I couldn't even tell the nursing staff that I was still in bloody agony. Man, I hate hospitals. And as for doctors, well.....

Just before we left Singapore, I visited the general practitioner who had referred me to the hospital. I had confided in him the problem I was having with my guts and when I mentioned that we were returning to the UK and be based around Stafford, he recommended a tutor he had had at medical school in the UK, a one Mr. Snow. Mr. Snow became a doctor I could respect and trust, one of a very few.