

# Coming to Terms

(Extract from a Journal of a Cruise)

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(Omitted)

I didn't remember when the idea of going on a cruise came about and I definitely did not remember why I decided to go on it. I had promised myself the trip to attend Nikita's commencement was the last trip I would ever take. It was an obligation and I dearly loved my granddaughter.

One of my ambitions in life was to go to South America for it was the only major continent I had not had the pleasure of visiting. Had I gone there I would have been able to brag about having been to all the popularly inhabited continents. But, I did not join Veronica when she went. (I suspected that she was delighted at my absence.) To me packing and lugging things around was an extremely unpleasant thing to do.

(Omitted)

## Vancouver

**May 20, 2015, Wednesday**

It was a very special day. Felix came and took us on a short ride to Forest Lawn Cemetery in Burnaby. After a little fumble, due to my error of using our last name to search, we found the graves of my sister Frances and her husband W.T.

Did I cry? No. I was not even sad. It had been close to 20 years since her murder. The sense of loss had slowly but relentlessly dissipated. Looking back, it was very hard for me at the beginning. She was a little mother to Albert, our brother, and, to a lesser extent, Aileen, our sister, but she and I were closer. She was most kind when I was recuperating from my lung surgery. She was the apple of our father's eye. She grew up very shrewd and, at times, scheming, manipulative and suspicious. (Later, I even had reason to believe that there was a mean streak in her.) She and her husband W. T. were very successful in their business and became very wealthy.

On the other hand, I was my mother's son, open to others, naïve and gullible. I was sent to a teacher's college. Not much was thought of me.

Then Felix took us to pick up his wife Anita and proceeded to visit H S Lee and his wife Mary.

They lived in a nicely appointed house – luxurious by my standard. In Honolulu, we are still living in the old Hong Kong style. No decoration to speak of and the furniture is functional. Never makes the *Good Housekeeping*. Lived-in like an old shoe. I do not even try to defend our lack of finesse. There is no green-eyed monster lurking around, I must insist. Coming from humble circumstances, and totally convinced of the power of karma, I know my lot.

It was during our chat that secrets revealed. I was the first to disclose that while Felix and I were serving at the Driving Tests Unit (I, the boss), we had a spate of external troubles, staff getting beat up by unsuccessful test candidates. Naturally, the staff were edgy and convinced that there was a conspiracy against their safety, possibly mob-related.

Then through the vigilance of the staff we caught two persons who impersonated others in driving tests. They were apprehended and convicted. I seized upon a suggestion from Felix and introduced the measure of retaining licenses after tests. After that, we never had imposters taking tests for others any more. My acknowledgement of his contribution pleased Felix very much even though it was water under a very far-away bridge.

Then I also related another incident. Earlier, when a colleague, Mr. Woo (RIP), came in to tell me that all the serving officers had written a joint letter of complaint about the work (not against me as the new head) to be submitted to Government Headquarters, and Woo asked me if he should sign the letter. He felt uneasy because we were both serving in the CAS together. I told him that if he did not sign it he would not be able to survive the animosity of his colleagues. He would be totally ostracized. Also, by then, personally, I did not really care because I found the job very complicated and I was frustrated by circumstances quite beyond my control. (Grave doubts of my own self-efficacy.)

To my surprise, Felix revealed that actually he was the one who drafted the letter. I had no memory of the letter. I doubt if I had seen it. As I said, by then I had already ceased to care. Mentally, I had resigned to an early departure from the job. In the event, however, things turned out well and luck was on my side. My tenure at that unit was (gloating now) generally considered a success by my boss, my staff and peers. On this occasion, our open confession was good for our souls, as the Catholic Church had taught me.

(Omitted)

## **The Cruise**

### **May 22, 2015, Friday -- 1<sup>st</sup> Day**

Transport to the dockside was pre-arranged and we left at 11:00 a.m. A lot of people and the customs and immigration process was quite tedious. Without doubt the company and staff had done this innumerable times and we went onboard without mishap notwithstanding the cumbersome and lengthy routine.

I found the room acceptable. Space-wise, it was about the same as a room in B. P. House in Hong Kong, not much room to swing a cat in, but then who would do that in a ship anyway. It suddenly occurred to me that one should always say "boat" instead of "Ship". Outside, we were quickly corrected by the staff that we should say "deck" instead of floor or level, bow was the front and stern was the end. I was amused and fully expected they would spout words like port and starboard. Somebody should insist on saying "head" instead of "restroom". Capt. Hornblower, where are you?

The first order of the day was lunch, buffet on Deck 10. I had learned in my younger days that a buffet was not an occasion to gorge oneself, but to show restraint, and leaving food unconsumed was wasteful and constituted bad manners.

The afternoon was a muster drill. We had a lecture on safety, alarms and mustering points for, God forbid, abandoning ship. I was utterly annoyed that a lot of people were chatting incessantly drowning out the instructions which was very important to me – a man who had been trained to deal with emergencies in Hong Kong, Australia and the US. It was doubly maddening when the instructions were delivered in Mandarin. Not a word was heard.

We found Shirley, Clement and we were introduced to Clement's sister Annie and her husband, Henry, who looked vaguely familiar. (Later we learned he officiated at Catherine's wedding at Hale Koa.) He was a physician, trained in Australia.

Very kindly, he asked why I had to wash my eyes before joining them. I had redness on my right eye which was the good eye. The left was suffering from macular trouble. It was with some effort that I restrained myself from asking Henry vexing questions about my eye. I knew that physicians were averse to what was sometimes termed curbside consultations. I would rather have him as a friend than a free source in health matters.

The dinner was a multicourse affair, starting with escargots which I had not had for years since we moved to Honolulu. Gone were the days when we entertained guests at home on Cloud View Road when Veronica showed off her cooking skills, and I revealed the humbling incompetence of an aspiring sommelier. Diabetes had also put a sorry end to all that. Actually, I hadn't had such a meal for a very long time and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Our waiter, a Filipino by the name of Jay, was too ready to please. Any dish picked by anyone was an "excellent" choice. By his magic words we became the most discriminating gourmets instantly, disdaining everything but the very best.

Tonight's entertainer was a standup comic. He must be aware that it was an international audience. Jokes had to be universal and not too US-centric. The last show of that kind we went to was Jay Leno's gig at the Waikiki Shell, oh, so very long ago.

### **May 23, 2015, Saturday (Cruising)**

We were getting familiar with the meals routine. Plenty to eat and opportunities to exercise self-restraint. I always remembered the Catholic teaching that every time one resisted temptation one gained divine grace, requisite for a happy afterlife, and at buffets one had opportunities galore and grace by the shovel.

The rest of the time just flitted by. I remembered playing ping pong with Annie and Clement for a while. A minute or two of play warmed me to a surprising degree. If I didn't stop I would be awash with sweat. I left them to their game and repaired to some restful pursuit.



This was our first formal dinner. I did not care if the dinner was formal or not. I had made a firm commitment to myself that damned if I had to pack a jacket of any sort. After all, I had not worn a necktie in this century and I was not going to compromise my sartorial comfort for the silly reason that some people wanted to dress up funny.

It was again Jay who took care of us. By then, Clement had caught on to his fake laudatory appraisal of our selections, and “excellent choice” became our inside joke. But, Jay maintained his dead-pan demeanor assuring us that we all had exemplary tastes. We, of course, absolved his sins of obsequiousness in consideration of his sense of humor.

Tonight’s entertainment comprised sketches of Broadway shows. A troupe of rather youthful performers, all competent, but none would shine. Songs and dances forgettable. A bit loud. Luckily I had not brought along my hearing aid, it would be most uncomfortable.

I suddenly realized that I had not felt the movement of the boat at all, even being a bad sailor.

### **May 24, 2015, Sunday (Ketchikan)**

Today, we berthed at Ketchikan. The plan was that we all went up on float planes for sight-seeing. We were all bundled up with warm clothing ready to combat the onslaught of freezing temperature. I never knew what would constitute sufficient protection against the cold and how cold it could be. Suffice it to say that I was uncomfortably warm with hat, shoes, down vest, etc.

A bit of chaos at the dockside. All sorts of groups, all sorts of tour guides and a lot of hustle and bustle. Our group was disappointed because the morning mist and fog prevented the planes from flying. Late on, perhaps, when the mists dissipated, the guide said. I was secretly pleased for I was never quite at ease with small planes, what with all those aerial accidents in Hawaii.

So we decided to take a cable car ride to the top of a hill. That was more to my liking. The ride up was pleasant and in less than 10 minutes we got to the top, a reminder of the Victoria Peak tram topside station.

We went out to the back of the station house to admire the scenery.

It turned out that Alaska was a land of surprises for me. The first was the warmth of the weather, the second was the greenness. (More surprises to come in due course.)

In front of my seat was a circular flower bed. Plants and flowers surrounded a spread of big totems. Obviously, it was built for tourists like us to pose for photographs. Dutifully, we did.

Then Veronica, Shirley and Annie walked around the circle of totems. I sat on a bench by the door and quickly started to shed my warm protective gears. It was bearable only when I was down to one shirt.

The abundance of vegetation highlighted my ignorance. The mountains were green with abundant trees, each growing to impressive heights. Against the blue sky and wisps of white clouds, the trees draped a green mantle over the entire mountain range stopping only when it reached the highest white snowy tops. They were tall, luxuriant and majestic. One must rid, from mind, the misconception of Alaska being always covered with snow and white nothingness.



The totems were a bit too touristy for me. The coloring was modern. I always thought that in ancient times, people had only primitive dyes and colors. In scout activities, we had learned to use berries and flowers and soil to color things. The colors were crude, sometimes nothing more than smudges of hues. Those on the totems were too vivid and bright to have come from primitive artists.

I remembered back in 1956, I had a professor who taught me Chinese history. He said that the Chinese people went through a period of totem worship. I did not know if he was serious or not when he said some historians postulated that the Hsia (夏) people had actually claimed to be descendants of some kind of worm-like ancestors for the name of their leader Yue (禹) had the worm (虫) radical in it. I did notice, however, that totems in Alaska often had, on top, the figure of a bird with a sharp curved beak. That suggested to me that probably the people had traced their origin to birds or revered some such deities. Later on, I was told that bald eagles and ravens were birds they identified with.

Then we went inside the station and walked around the second floor of the building which was a museum of sorts. Henry was the historian walking around and absorbing from the pictures and writings on the wall. I sat comfortably immobile on a chair.

We went down to the cable car stop and saw a sign which called the cars 'funicular'. One of us asked about the word. I remembered instantly that I had learned it from a fellow teacher back in 1960. Mak was young and fancied himself a man of arts. He bought a lot of long-playing records. He introduced me to the lively Italian song *Funiculi Funicula* which went "*funiculì, funiculà, funiculì, funiculà, 'ncoppa, jamme jà, funiculì, funiculà!*" To my embarrassment and frustration, I was unable to even hum it. How long ago was I the heart and soul of rousing campfires and cheerful singsongs! Sadly, I had lost the knack, completely.



Then we took a shuttle to Creek Street. We stood next to the eponymous creek with very fast flowing clear water. I would describe it as a horizontal waterfall. Going up the creek as the cliché had it would be very strenuous and even unsafe. We wandered from shop to shop. There was even a Chinese restaurant. We went into a shop that sold all kinds of salmon products. Like Costco, free samples were to be had. And, have I done, rather greedily. Very tasty.

Then we returned to the boat. Well, one could not just saunter in. It was like checking in at the airport, except we didn't have to take off our shoes.

Dinner that night was very much like the previous evenings. Unlike the *lady who was a tramp*, ours was dinner at 6. Jay did the same routine and praised our excellent choices. Clement had his fun. As a matter of fact, Clement, told me for about the fourth time that the trip was a basement bargain. \$100 a day, food and lodging! With a show thrown in every night and plenty of other activities, it was a steal and we ought to be belting out alleluias to the greater glory of Celebrity.

Unmemorable was an apt epithet for tonight's show. The only thing that stood out was what Henry told me while we were waiting for the entertainment to begin. He was one of those whom we used to call 發燒友, meaning he was a fanatic of a hobby, a fevered pursuer of perfection. In his case, it was music. I had heard of people who spared no expense clinging to the vinyl long-play records, turn tables, etc. I always found them odd. But, little did I know I was talking to a high-octane fevered fan. "You don't change stylus (needles) any more, you just detach the head shell, and send it back for repairs and replacement", Henry explained. How much did a head shell cost, I asked innocently. Oh, it ranged from a few hundred Hong Kong dollars to a quarter of a million. Henry's own cost \$60,000! I blurted out that I would rather buy a car with that kind of money! Now, that got me stand up in respect -- figuratively. It wasn't the amount that awed me, it was the extent he would go to for his hobby. For me, my son Arnold's Father's Day gift of a pair of Bose speakers for my computer and Bose earphones were already ultimate items of luxury, almost sinful. I trembled in Henry Wong's august presence.

### **May 25, 2015, Monday (Icy Strait Point)**

Icy Strait Point was the day's stop. The night before when the cruise director said that, in comparison, Ketchikan was bustling New York to Icy Strait Point, I got the drift. I told the rest of the group that I preferred to stay on board and my blessing went with them. Veronica must have by then given up on me; I accepted that. She went.

Thirty odd years ago, somebody explained the book *Passages* by Gail Sheehy to me. I remembered that a part of the book suggested that men and women changed as they aged. Men tend to become less decisive, less active, more dependent and more hesitant to take a leading role as they grow older. Women, in exactly the opposite way, become more decisive, independent and aggressive. The problem with couples, married ones in particular, the role reversal stole on them without notice. The poor men fought a last-ditched battle to retain their alpha-male role whereas the women, like the proletariat in *Animal Farm*, overthrew the owners and drove them away. And, herein lies the fights and arguments among old couples. Those who learn to understand and adapt with patience and tolerance will be blessed with a harmonious life. Coming to terms is not a plain sailing journey, (on a cruise, every pun intended). As the famous 1952 song goes: *it takes two to tango*. Both partners of a marriage have to understand this shift in relationship and ease into the new roles. Unfortunately, learning novel behaviors is never an easy feat, particularly when you are long on the tooth.

Back to the cruise, left blissfully alone, I went up to the libraries on Deck 8 and Deck 9 that Henry had mentioned. There was only one Chinese book on the Deck 9. It is a book on Lao Tze (老子). It had

the sage's sayings with modern translation. I studied Daoism diligently at the Evening School of Higher Chinese Studies and was very familiar with his teaching. I even memorized snatches of his 道德經 by heart as we did the Gospel according to St. Luke in good old Wah Yan. I found there was a preface which gave a potted introduction to Lao Tze, nothing profound but nothing untoward either. I was attracted to three volumes of *Record of History* (史記), another of my favorite books, but they were in Japanese! There were a few Korean books, too. They were, of course, all Greek to me, borrowing from the Bard.

I found out that Deck 5 was a good place to retire to, because there were musicians plying their art. I ordered an ice tea and the wait staff gave me a very showy preparation of the brew. It was almost like the consecration ritual at mass. For \$8, though, it was irksome to say the least.

The show at night was a group of three African American singers. Very professional and I really enjoyed their show. It was more than just that, it was educational. They opened my eyes to the utterly amateurish and unsophisticated way I was leading entertainment gatherings as a scout leader. In my time, my skills were well thought of by many and had impressed good old Henry Ma to such an extent that he put me in charge of a series of campfires for youths from disadvantaged housing projects in the chaotic civil unrests of 1967. Literally, we were competing for the minds and souls of the youths. I had since been strutting around like a little peacock for being good at that until tonight. The singers at the stage had such impressive ways for audience involvement that (mixing metaphors, now) they plucked away the feather from my cap.

### **May 26, 2015, Tuesday (Juneau)**

I had to go to Juneau, the capital of Alaska. I could not come back and claim to have been to Alaska if I skipped Juneau.

Annie, Henry, Clement and Shirley went to their plane rides and Veronica and I went to the city tour which would also take in the Mendenhall Glazier. Report to Bus 129, we were told. We got on it and off we went being driven somewhere. The first stop was a salmon hatchery. This time, I regretted that I had not brought my hearing aid along. I could hardly make out what the tour host said.

We looked up and found helicopters overhead. I urged Veronica to take pictures of them. The Chans and Wongs were in them. Which one, she asked. Never mind, just point and shoot!

Then we proceeded to Mendenhall Glazier. Needless to say we found the visitors' center, ubiquitous at all scenic points. We didn't go there but went along a foot path to the glazier. We were among a good crowd. The glazier was different from the one Paul Lam took us to in Canada. There, we stood on it. Here the glazier flowed into a body of water, or receding to create the lake, whichever the case. The water must be



icy cold. Somehow, what Geoff Fawcett, my old boss, once said came to mind. He said that during the Korean War, downed UN pilots had about four minutes to survive the icy sea, two minutes for the friendlies to get to them and two minutes for the rescuers to fish them out, beyond that, they expired.

We took some pictures. Obligatory. Then I returned to wait for Bus 129. Veronica walked on a little bit longer. We got back in time for a late lunch.

In the afternoon, the six of us, went up Mount Roberts. We looked down at the harbor and Douglas Island across the water. The cruise ships were like so many toy boats in a child's bathtub. Our trail up to observation platforms was nothing but a footpath. In rain or snow I would be reluctant to even try navigating uphill or down. Anyway, after the first platform I had had enough and Veronica and I walked gingerly down the trail back to the visitor center, leaving the Wongs and the Chans to continue their plucky adventure.

Another formal night. Some men were in jacket and tie. I was amazed how well people dressed especially the women. Needless to say I was still a bum at dinner. When I was young, I paid a lot of attention to how I fit out. I used to say that there were people who had no sense of occasion, inappropriately dressed. I recalled a man with a knit vest in mess kit? Well, now I was guilty to the unforgivable degree. Taken out and shot. But, hey, wasn't my name Ku for cool! Damned if I had to lug around so much junk just to appear appropriate. In my old age, comfort was appropriate. Nobody cared about what a short, plump old man looked anyway.

Tonight's show was another standup comic show. I am afraid I found it unfunny and offensive at times.

### **May 27, 2015, Wednesday (Skagway)**

Again, I did not go on shore. I went to my usual haunt -- Deck 5. I got talking to the guitarist. I loved guitar music but found that he and I did not have similar preferences. Yes, he had heard of Chet Atkins and Les Paul, but he didn't go for New Age flamenco music, not any of those I liked. I was surprised, too, that he was unfamiliar with Charo or her teacher Segovia, a world-renown guru of his own right. It was probably due to my mispronunciations of Spanish that I failed to make myself understood.

Tonight's show was a Russian couple, performing amazing acrobatic feats. Between acts, "sand painting" pictures were projected onto the screen. Sand painting was a new form of art to me. Not impressive, more like pavement chalk drawing. The Russian couple's act was spectacular and gravity defying. I relapsed into to my analyst's mode. How much time did they have to spend every day to hone their art? Pay? How long would the professional life-span be for such a performer?

### **May 28, 2015, Thursday (Cruising & Hubbard Glacier)**

Today there was no berthing at all. The highlight of the day was that we would be near the Hubbard Glacier and pieces breaking off from it would sail past in the form of icebergs, not the Titanic kind, just pretty little floats. We were told that to watch them we had to get up early. So, we got up at six and went topside.



missed them.

Yes, there were little icebergs, more like those in your whiskey than huge menacing mountains. The biggest I saw, from afar, was the size of a double-decker bus. Mostly, white and some had a tint of blue. Irritably, I thought they made the sea a bit “dirty” looking. After a while people lost interest and went away. The ice floats went on for hours. I found it annoying that suggestions were made that if we did not get up early, we might miss the boat (pun intended), or the boat

I went to the helipad on Deck 5. What did I see? More little icy floats.

Here was the occasion that I had to be helped in and out of doors and up and down steps. There was no way that I could pretend I wasn't frail and decrepit. Sad and disconcerting.

Because the day was spent at sea, there is not much to do. I went to Deck 5 and tried to finish the book *Edge of Eternity*, Ken Follett's last book of the so-called the *Century Trilogy*. The third book was disappointing. The first one was very interesting, talking about the miner's lot in Wales contrasting it with the nobility that owned the mines. The second book was about World War II. And, finally this one was on the cold war, rock and roll and the civil rights movement. Follett used a few families in England, Russia, Germany and the US as threads, weaving them together into a complex tapestry depicting momentous events of the century. I am afraid each book was less interesting than its predecessor.

Why is the last book so disappointing? I think it is because the events and personalities are known to us. And, we have our opinions formed already. Some of his descriptions support oft-repeated rumors, e.g. Jack Kennedy's callous exploitation of women, other events we already know the end results. There are no surprising twists and turns. And, in style, Follett seems to be in a hurry, not taking time to dwell in intricate feelings and other details. Gratuitous sex scenes actually repulse me.

Tonight was not a formal dinner night. However, people did dress up, especially the women. And dinner, which by now, was just another dinner. Like last night, Henry asked for his wine. Much was I tempted to join him, especially when he asked for a Riesling, my favorite white. After much spiritual struggle wiser counsel prevailed.



**May 29, 2015, Friday (Disembarking at Seward)**

The last day of the cruise.

As told, we had packed and left our luggage outside our cabins the night before. In the morning we had our usual breakfast, albeit less leisurely, but I actually had time for a quick shower. Thus fortified, I was ready for Alaska.

Then we gathered at the disembarkation point. As we walked down the gangway I had some debate with myself. Looking back, it was a pleasant experience. Would I wish to extend the stay? No. I think seven days would probably be enough for any reasonable person, unless one was looking for an onboard romance like the movies, or, had some kind of spacious stateroom.

The checking out was another well-rehearsed drill. We were soon out on our own and we were going to the train.

The City of Seward took care of us tourists. It had a free bus shuttle that went around the main spots. We got to the rail station in no time, bought our tickets for the 6 o'clock to Anchorage and checked in our luggage. The three porters were very friendly. I did not remember any more what we chatted about, Hong Kong or Hawaii. Anyway, we got on fine.

The next shuttle took us into town and we walked down what I would think was the main drag. We looked into shops. Nothing excited me. I was never a shopper anyway. In one of the shops I asked a sales assistant for a good place for lunch and she recommended Chinooks. The next stop was the Sea Life Center where I had a life-saving cup of coffee.

After wandering around the neighborhood for a while we repaired to Chinooks. Actually, as we made our way into it, we saw our recommender going there, too. I said to myself, "Ah, she is putting her money where her mouth is." We sat by the window as she had earlier recommended to take in the view of the jetties and boats, a scene rather like the yacht club at Causeway Bay, Hong Kong.

Forever inquisitive, I asked the waiter what chinook meant and if it had anything to do with the military helicopter. No, it was name for a salmon.

Unfortunately, my salmon sandwich was quite disappointing.

After lunch the party retraced its steps to the Sea Life Center. We strolled to a museum of sorts. I didn't go in to admire the display but sat outdoors to escape the warmth inside. The short walk totally exhausted me. Veronica accompanied me back to the rail station. And the rest of the party showed up not too long afterwards. Later, I figured out the reason for my poor showing at physical activities. I was ill-prepared for it. I normally did my daily 30 minutes of brisk walk on the treadmill with ease, but I was equipped for it. The heavy pair of jeans, thick shirts and carrying a bundle of warm clothing was too taxing physically.



The train ride was very good. I had had train rides in Hong Kong, China, France, England and Japan. This was the best. It thrilled me when the chief conductor in his uniform yelled out "Board!" just like they did in the movies and flung open the door to the platform.

We boarded accordingly. Would I meet Ingrid Bergman on this Oriental Express? The coach was clean and seats comfortable. Windows allowed maximum view. Off the train chugged. In each coach car was a conductor who explained the scenery. What we saw outside the window was spectacular. Abundant vegetation and tall majestic mountains with snowy caps. That was one of the surprising delights of Alaska to me – the greenness. White snowy land I would expect, but green trees, an endless sea of trees? If I were a giant the trees must have looked like stalks of wheat in one of those huge mid-western farms, swaying in the gentle breeze, sweeping to the farthest horizon and beyond.

We passed a glazier. We saw narrow waterfalls coursing down the hillside. The water must be cold and fresh and icy to drink, I thought, quenching the thirst of the animals in these woods.

On the left side we saw the ocean. I guessed it was the Pacific.

Suddenly the train stopped and an announcement came through that bears were spotted. We all strained our necks. It was a bit of pure luck that I saw two black things that moved. Bears, I yelled and pointed to their direction. Others quickly followed my finger. Shutters snapped. They were actually too far away, just two moving black dots. And, soon the train resumed its journey.

Our conductor was a young boy, clean shaven with short neat hair. He said Juneau was the political capital of Alaska while Anchorage was the financial center. He would be going to the University of Utah in August. My heart warmed up to such young people. They were the future of our country.

It was still bright when we got to Anchorage. I forgot what time it was, probably after 10:00 p.m. and we took taxis to the B & B. Clement reminded us that it was late and people might be asleep and we had to move bare foot inside the house. Henry was particularly kind at this point, without his help Veronica and I could never have been able to maneuver the heavy bags upstairs to our rooms, nor could we have moved them down on the day of our departure. That was when I came to terms with the cruel fact that the ravages of time would eventually reduce all of us to weaklings. Then I remembered that Henry had been in the scouts, too, 1<sup>st</sup> Kowloon. I remembered the troop at St. Andrew's church. They met at the TsimShaTsui Health Clinic. Once their scout leader, an Englishman (Ken Greenwood, if I recalled correctly), asked me for advice when he had some problems. He thought it was culture-related. Unfortunately, I was unable to offer any help to him.

Our bedroom was full of plants. It took us some maneuvering to get to the windows to work on the venetian blinds. After a quick shower, we retired. Looking out of the window, I saw the clear sky. By the time we hit the pillow, it was a bright 1:00 a.m. The theme song of the movie *North to Alaska* kept coming back to me. "The land of the midnight sun," Frankie Laine sang. Here I was, living it, the midnight sun. It was warm and I woke up sweating. Throughout the whole trip, I found that sleeping quarters were too warm. On this occasion, with only a T-shirt I still woke up soaked.

### **May 30, 2015, Saturday (Anchorage)**

It was the first time I stayed in a bed and breakfast (B&B). I woke up and went downstairs quietly and met a man about my age. "My name is Vic", he introduced himself to me and he was not

the owner he also said. He was preparing our breakfast. I found it puzzling that he had to go next doors to get food.



Breakfast was fruit and toasts and omelet, not opulent by any standard but healthy and homelike -- a stark difference from the onboard buffet. I enjoyed it. The dining table was built for four, not six. We had to jostle each other a bit. Self-introduction revealed that Vic was a retired attorney. He had just turned 80 a couple of days before.

After breakfast, Vic took us to the flea market. There were rows of tents, rather like the Flea Market at Aloha Stadium. As expected they were all selling the same sort of merchandise. I kept my eyes open for two things, a bear figurine and an Alaskan flag. Only one vendor had a bear, about an inch and a half long, made of some greenish stone. It wasn't intricately carved, but I liked it. I looked at it and fondled it. Finally, it was a \$40 I wasn't ready to spend.

Then, we decided to go to the museum. As we Chinese say, 路在口邊, all one needed was to ask. People were always ready to help and the Anchorage Museum was at the junction of 6<sup>th</sup> and C. Without much difficulty (and the help of an elevator) we found it and went inside. Clement and Henry bought tickets for the museum for the next day and today we would all take a free shuttle to the cultural village.

As the museum was very warm inside, I went out and sat on a long low ledge in the shade. There was another man there and I engaged him in conversation. Joe (not his real name) was a retired coal miner from West Virginia. Ah, I summoned up my knowledge of coal mining from Eric Twist's writing and Book One of Ken Follett's *Century Trilogy* in which he talked about mining in Wales. Joe talked about loaders, short wall and long wall. He probably had never been involved in a short wall endeavor. But, his stories were very interesting and validated those from Twist and Follett.

The shuttle came and we were the only passengers. On our way, the driver told me that he was an Eskimo belonging to one of the four main tribes. (I came back and found out that there are many tribes, certainly more than four.) He had only a few words of the old language. I guess it was the same with all minorities, the Manchus in China, the Hawaiians here and, in more distant days, the Jews of Kai Feng. The disappearance of minority languages was inevitable. None of my five grandchildren speaks Cantonese.

After a short ride we got to the cultural village and we had a very functional lunch, burgers and coffee. The burgers was very good, a bit of a pleasant surprise.

Then we joined a conducted tour. The tour conductor explained things as we went along to four types of accommodation. The so called long house was not impressive. The following dwellings were unusual. They could be called caves because the dwellings were cut into hillsides. Or, I suspected, they were built first and then covered with dirt and soil and grass and plants grew over them.

What intrigued me was how well-structured the caves were. I remembered the training we had in the CAS using struts and planks to shore up tunnels in our rescue work. I could readily see that the beams and uprights were, to a lay man, all in their right places. I asked about the period in which the caves were built. I thought I heard the mention of two, three hundred years. I had doubts. The Europeans would have already been there. Cave dwelling had to be much earlier than that. Also, it must have taken centuries for people to go from primitive methods to such advanced building technology. I asked about the tattoo on the tour conductor's arm. Did they have any cultural significance? No, she said. Again, I noticed the sharp-beaked eagle and raven featured in the decorations.



Here, I must do an aside for a moment like a stage actor. I found all the local staff very oriental in their facial features. I would not have guessed that they were Eskimos if I saw them anywhere outside Alaska. Perhaps it was the proof that migration from Asia to Alaska did take place when the Bering Sea was shallow enough.

At the end of the tour, we went back to the burger stand. There I told the owner that the burger I had for lunch was the best burger I had in Alaska. I meant it. It so pleased him that he gave me a glass of ice water and the cook came out to give me a large chocolate cookie. He was from Hawaii, too. As always my knack of striking up casual conversation with strangers stood me good stead.

We got back to the Anchorage Museum, much educated but tired. We walked along the main street and group split up. The Chans and Wongs went one way, and Veronica and I went to a dry good store. She bought material with salmon motif for her sewing fun. We eventually met up at Orso Restaurant at 5<sup>th</sup> and G. It was an Italian restaurant. The only thing memorable was that when we told the waitress that Veronica's halibut wasn't as good as expected, they took it off the bill, very decent of them.

Frankly speaking, of all the Italian restaurants we went to on the entire trip, none of them was as good as my favorite haunt Assaggio at Ala Moana. They were much pricier, too.

We took a taxi back first as we had to pack for departure. The taxi driver was from Nanjing. I had a chance to practice my limited mandarin again.

The rest came back walking from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> where the B&B was. Brave souls.

The rest of the evening was a gathering of the ladies and I had enough sense to stay away.

**May 31, 2015, Sunday (Homeward Bound)**

I was told by Veronica that our heavy luggage had already been moved to the ground floor by Henry and Clement. That should make an old man tearing up. I did not though, but their kindness was more touching than any other help I had ever had.

Breakfast was just like the day before. After that Vic took us around part the neighborhood and dropped off the others at the Museum for their tour. The two of us went back to the B&B. No teary goodbyes. But, I liked to think, as with Rick and Louis at the end of *Casablanca*, it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Credit must be heaped on Clement and Shirley who were the main driving force for the entire trip, organizing, encouraging and taking care of us, two old folks.

We got back to the B&B on 10<sup>th</sup>. There was a sort of fair in preparation in the playground across the street, we walked around and took some pictures.

Then Vic came and took us to the airport. It was very kind of him. Actually he volunteered to do so and told Shirley about it on the first day we got there. I did not think it was part of the service. It was just his kind heart. I felt so indebted to him.

We had a light lunch at Chili's at the airport and said goodbye to Alaska.