

A TEACHER'S LOT



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by Michael Baxter

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Fifty years in the service



Maps showing places I have taught.



Introduction.

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Introduction

Someone said “There’s no such thing as a free lunch”true, but you can get to travel around and work in most of the provinces of New Zealand, and then eight different countries and have someone else foot the bill. My wife Linda and I did just that. I am writing this ‘auto-biography’ for the sole purpose of sharing some of my life experiences as a teacher in the hope that others will do the same sort of thing. Living in different countries will broaden your perspective on life and certainly make you a more tolerant and understanding person.

I welcome any feedback using mbaxternz@yahoo.co.uk I have many photographs including class and staff photos available for anybody who would like them.

Back in the late ‘sixties’, teachers did not get a pay rise unless they had completed three years of country service, so after three years teaching in Auckland, it was time to go and learn about cows, sheep and have our own chooks in the country....Country meaning as in farmland, ‘out in the sticks’, ‘up the wop-wops’ and other such vernacular.

Throughout this book, I do not mention anyone’s full name (for fear of being sued or being beaten with my walking stick), but I do use forenames and an initial so any of my ex-colleagues will know who I am talking about, and will be able to think.....”I remember him/her!”

Chapter 1

North Shore Teacher’s College, Auckland, NZ. 1965-66

To start, North Shore Teacher’s College, was a misnomer. It was in Mount Roskill in 1965 but moved to Northcote in 1966. To earn a ‘Teaching Certificate’, one had two years of lectures from 9.00 a.m. to 3.30 p.m. and a year in a hand-picked class known as your probationary year. My first fortnightly pay-check, was in a fact a cheque for nine pounds seven shillings and a penny, which I could easily exchange into real cash with an on-site, payday bank officer from the ASB. In those days you did not have to give blood/swear allegiance/have ID to turn an Education Board cheque into the folding stuff.

Coming from Westlake Boys High School to N.S.T.C. where the women outnumbered the men by a 5:1 ratio was the nearest thing to a boy in a lolly-shop. I met my future wife at a N.S.T.C. dance when I was in my PA year.

At college, or the 'Marriage Bureau', as it was often referred as, everybody chose two subjects to specialise in (5 lectures a week), then two Curriculum subjects (three lectures a week) and two leftovers (one lecture a week). I took science/physical education as the specialist, then mathematics/art for curriculum, and music/geography. Education/English were compulsory.

The lecturers were a pretty good lot and gave me a lot of confidence to go out into the big wide world of teaching. Don H., especially, who was my tutor teacher, absolutely savaged me for my first 'critic lesson'. "A Std 4 at Westmere." "Yes Don, I was 'glued' to the podium, yes Don I didn't rove, yes Don I won't answer the questions for the children in the future." Being shot down in flames first time up was a necessary wake-up call, so thanks Don!

My second section at Glenfield Primary P4 with Mrs Nan. taught me a lot about toddlers. Over enthusiastic P.E. specialist as I was, I would spend my lunch-time playing soccer with the kids. Didn't realise the young kids do not re-act very quickly, and when I kicked a ball rather hard some poor 7 year old boy copped it fair in the face, blood everywhere, screaming like a Banshee, he ran off to Mrs Nan to complain about the ruffian teacher. He only had a blood nose! I was nearly drawn and quartered at the ensuing post-mortem.

I was the proud owner of a silver-pigeon motor scooter, which meant I had relatively easy access from our family home in Northcote to College in Mt Roskill. I say 'relatively' because putt-putting over the four-lane harbour bridge (the Nippon Clip-ons were not added to the bridge until 1969) was no easy task during a force 3 gale. If the wind got too dangerous, motor -cyclists were stopped at the toll booths (these existed until 1984) and were wheeled into the back of a truck. When the truck was full, we were whisked over in style and released by the Marina. Approaching the top of the hill by Karangahape Road was fine and a scooter could easily sidle between two buses if there was a red traffic light. However, if the light turned green and I had not squeezed to the front of the queue and was still between two buses, my life was in serious danger. Before turning right, a bus would veer a little left to make the turn easier, the gap between those diesel demons was about a metre, but with the wide veering both sides of my steering wheel were clipped by bus. Nearly had to go back home and change my under-pants. After that experience, I always rode behind the buses and choked on the black fumes instead.

The following year the N.S.T.C. actually moved to the 'shore' where it survived as a Teachers' college for the next 38 years then it was disbanded when teacher training was changed to become an Auckland University Course.

The final piece of road was not named when we first went there, so four ubiquitous students decided to make a signpost for it. Armed with a bag of concrete mix, a steel pole and a quasi-signpost with the words, 'OSBORNES' WAY no exit' emblazoned on both sides, our proposed prank became a reality late one Sunday evening. May it be noted this was meant to be a compliment and not an insult to our beloved leader. For anyone who thought this was like a reference to some maniacal dictator as in South America would be completely wrong as we had nothing but respect and admiration for the man. The sign actually stayed up for quite a few weeks and was once written into directions on a route map for outsiders coming to a conference held there.

I was given a leather thong which was held together by a sombrero and worn around the neck. Thinking it would be a pleasant change from those 3 cm skinny ties we wore in the 60's I adorned myself with it and went off to lectures. I didn't even survive wearing this past morning tea-time as I was summoned into the Deputy Dean's office.

"Michael, you are in the teaching profession now and as such, our standard of dress must be of the highest respectability, such neck attire is not professional and I ask you not to wear that thong around your neck again whilst at college." Sorry Eric, but at that point I wanted to change the name on our street-sign!

Chapter 2.

Probationary Assistant, 1967, Beach-haven Primary, Auckland, NZ.

Twenty-nine standard twos awaited me at the beginning of 1966.P.A.(Probationary Assistants) were always given a small select class to begin their careers. I say small because the following years my class sizes were 35-41 kids. These numbers were great fodder for political parties to play with and over the years changed from 1:35 in the 1980's to 1:30 ten years later and now to a supposed 1:16. It may be noted at this point that any child who had severe

learning difficulties was put in a “Special Class” and they had specialist teachers and a lower teacher/pupil ratio. I have always taken my hat off to these dedicated professionals for their task was enormous....they were a different breed: tough, extremely caring and often very protective. As far as handicapped children go, they were few and far between.

My first Headmaster (The word ‘Principal’ was not used for another ten years), was Andy N. He was a tough Dalmatian no-nonsense sort of a guy. Every lesson had to be pre-planned for the week ahead, handed into Bruce the Deputy-Head, signed and returned. Any lack of detail, short-cuts, errors and you were summoned to the boss’s office and admonished accordingly. “We run a tight ship here, this planning does not have clear specific aims, go back and fill them in,” Andy would bellow.

Chapter 3

Teacher, 1968-69, Windy Ridge Primary, Auckland, NZ.

The new Headmaster here (Don B) was fresh from a local intermediate school. Most of the planning was done for you, so the job started to show signs of life.

One class, I took on a bus trip to the Chateau and surrounding area. A visit to the trout hatcheries, a power station, then to our cabins at the Chateau. What a treat for us Aucklanders. When we went to bed, the mini golf course in front of the Chateau was green, the next day it could not be seen being covered in a great white blanket. It had snowed overnight, and for the first time in most of our lives, we made snowballs. I think I was more excited than the kids.

Pretty significant times. I was over the Moon and got married, and the Americans landed on the moon, in both cases one giant step.

Chapter 4

Teacher, 1970-71, Cheviot DHS, Canterbury, NZ.

There's something about farmers' kids that makes them so different from their city counterparts. They are not usually possessed with ownership, they are very matter of fact about life, they don't squirm or scream when I tread on a cockroach on the classroom floor, nor do they stand on desks when a rat or mouse appears on the scene. Perhaps it's because they are always expected to help out on the farm and have seen Dad slice up an animal for the deep freeze, whatever it is, they are great to teach.

I had played rugby in Auckland for fifteen years, the last three of which in the 3rd and 4th grades at Takapuna. We would play against teams of University lawyers, university doctors, university architects, the Fijian Army and an assortment of other clubs....strictly social, kick off at 3p.m. then (for home games) into the clubrooms for one bottle of beer maximum. It was 1969 when the drinking age was lowered from 21 to 20 and most of our team were borderline for legal drinking. I joined the Cheviot rugby club thinking it would just be a fun game, nothing too serious, wrong. There were only two grades, junior and senior. I was too old for the juniors so elected to play seniors. Pre-game training on the beach at Gore Bay was enjoyable so by the time our first game came along I was fit and ready.....ready, no!, Bob (Captain) told me off for not wearing a tie to the match, "We try to keep standards Michael." Hadn't heard that since T.C.

After the game there were speeches.

"I'd like to thank the St Johns for their attendance, and the ladies for putting on such a lovely spread, also the referee and the ball boys....etc etc

"I would like to thank Brian Ford (The Kaikoura wing and later All Black) for only 'nearly' breaking both my arms and legs in a tackle that could only be likened to Ferrari crashing into a wall. Crikey, these guys played for keeps, as I had already scored the try split seconds before the 'Flying Nun' hit me at full pace.

We had a very likable All Black in the Cheviot side affectionately nick-named 'Hoppy' (Alistair Hopkinson) who would always ask the half-back to go in front of him and me to follow behind when we first ran onto the field. He was a giant to start with, but wedged between two shrimps he appeared to the opposition to be of 'Goliath' proportions. The All-Black trials were

coming up to pick the team to tour South Africa so Hoppy was told to “keep it clean” to enhance his selection chances. Front page of the Sunday paper was a photo of a Sonny Liston uppercut executed by our star prop during the first scrum of the Possibles vs Probables game. He was selected anyway and brought back some great tales of his fun-loving adventures.

One story that always stands out in my memory was what happened at the first ‘after match’ function. Danie Craven got up and spoke at great length in Afrikaans, then said all the same things in English.

Ron Burke, the All-Black team manager, replied, “Takapuna Te Kawata Waipunoumu, Tuahiwi, Wharetoa Waimate Kaingaroa. Tihaka Tongariro tui Waihi Ohau (plus a few other place names.), I will translate that into English, I would like to thank.....etc” For the rest of the tour, all ‘after game’ speeches were in English by both sides!

Bottom line, rugby is quite important in farming communities. One of our High School colleagues (Alan P.) was not a sports enthusiast and after a few beers was often threatening to go down to the local church, rip off the cross on the roof over the entrance and replace it with a rugby ball....such an act would have brought back lynching!

In my fifty years of teaching, I must have taught around 1500 pupils in a classroom situation and then you add in all the dozens of sports teams I coached plus elective groups etc making a rough total of 5000 students. From all that number I can only recall one pupil that ever went on to be famous (in the modern vernacular, a ‘Celebrity’) and that was Robbie Deans. All Black fullback, Crusaders Coach (2000-2007) and Wallabies head coach(2008-2013). He excelled in all subjects and of course was a wizard on the sports field at that early age. He was confident, mischievous and had a great sense of humour. I was cleaning my teeth in the classroom sink one interval to remove the morning tea biscuits, Robbie had come in early, saw an opportunity and pushed my head under the tap then ran off. It was all in fun so when the rest of the class came in, one slightly wet teacher got on with Spelling whilst a certain 10 year old sat at the back with a big smirk on his face. One unknown fact, he also won the “Bunny-hop” competition (With Karen G.) I had held in my class after a Folk-dancing module. The following year I taught Robbies’ younger brother, Bruce, who also made the All Blacks and Canterbury teams: another great talented kid, but never seemed to make the celebrity status of his older brother.

Living in a farming community was something special. Linda had gone through a difficult birth for our first daughter and was in hospital for a week. Every night of that week I was asked

out to have dinner at some-ones' place, this was really touching and never happened in the city.

The local scout-master was retiring and a talent-scout (excuse the pun) asked me to fill the vacancy. All of the boys were Cheviot pupils ranging in age from 10 to 16 years. I sent out requests to the farming fraternity and within a week had two dozen 3 metre- manuka poles. We didn't have any rope (or any scout funds at that time) so a farmer came in with a truckload of baling twine and a ropemaking machine. Three lengths of twine from one end of the scout hall to the other were attached to a template thing, an eggbeater gadget was twirled to twist the rope, and finally a handheld binder was run along the entire length to make rope of 1 cm diameter. This process could be repeated with three of these to make hawsers suitable for tug of war. So, in one night we had made enough rope to tie up the Titanic. This meant that teaching clove-hitches, sheep-shanks, sheet-bends, frapping, reef knots, clove-hitch and bowlines could all be put to practical use using the manuka poles. Building bridges, making and firing basketballs with medieval catapults, crossing rivers with tripod transporters, flying foxes over a creek, this was scouting heaven.

Long weekends and school holidays in the summer meant 'Scout Camp.' Usually on the longer camps I would have a 'Parents day', and Mums/Dads/Uncles/sisters would come out to our camp venue, admire the home-made camp gadgets, be subjected to blackened dampers and billy tea, followed by some sort of 'Scouting Demonstration.' This was fine until home-time, the camp was supposed to last another day but due to serious bouts of home-sickness a lot of the younger scouts burst into tears and wanted to go AWOL there and then. I guess their own cooking was not as good as Mums. Lesson learnt, at all future 'Parent Days' at camps the early afternoon was 'show and tell', then I would stage a distant activity for the scouts, and while they were out of range, I would ask the parents to leave immediately and I would say goodbye for them. Sounds cruel, but bawling boy scouts are no picnic and as the Boy Scout motto says, 'Be prepared.' and all hands were needed on the last day to tidy up and load up the poles, tents, and paraphernalia.

One Friday night the local girl guides were invited to an evening of competitive scouting activities with us....that was a fun first!

Chapter 5

Deputy-Principal, 1972-1974, Wyndham Primary, Southland, NZ.

My first semi-leadership role, and also the beginning of my anti-smoking campaign. It wasn't until 1990 that legislation banned smoking in the work-place, so for the next sixteen years it was a 'torrid/personal/ I have my rights ' battle with the 'Puffing Billies' of the staffroom. A total ban on airlines didn't exist ('because of the Japanese and Koreans') until 1997. My first Air NZ flight to America had a non-smoking and smoking section. The moment the wheels were up, the occupants of the row in front of me lit up. It made little difference going to the back of the plane so I settled for a wet handkerchief over my face, sort of a forerunner to the face-masks for covid 19, except a bright blue hankey gave me the appearance of either 'John Wayne' (cowboy film-star) or a bank robber depending on your school of thought.

Wyndham was basically a 'Freezing Works Town,' and many of our school parents worked at the Mataura works so I thought it would be good to see where Daddy worked. All the class were bundled into cars and away we went. I actually thought we were going to see the secondary processes but that didn't happen. Our guide took us straight to the slaughtering area. A 'Judas' sheep with a metal collar ID had been trained to run up the chute and the other sheep would follow. Judas was let out a side door for a handful of sheep-nuts whilst the other poor creatures were tipped onto their backs and 'gaaawshhh!' (that's supposed to be a slashing noise) The demise of the cattle was a little more humane with a quick stun to the brain with a captive bolt pistol, before the cut and slash bit. If any ex-pupils read this, it may make you feel better to know I still occasionally have nightmares over the whole process.

I considered it my duty to play rugby for the local Wyndham team and did so accordingly. Before our first match the coach said to me, "When their first-five gets the ball I want you to hit him so hard that he doesn't get up for the rest of the game." I thought wearing ties in Cheviot was serious enough, but training to become an assassin was a bit over the top. After three games I was the recipient of a broken nose, (not bleeding, broken and bleeding) two games later I was carted off to hospital to have my ear sewn back on. Was Mike Tyson living in Edendale? With our second daughter now well on the way it was time to hang up my boots.

Wyndham is situated between two rivers and a stream and had been subjected to flooding several times in the early seventies. Huge flood-banks of earth rising to the height of a house were built all along the entire Mataura River side to stop this threat.....well 'nearly' stop this threat. After heavy rain-fall and snow melt, the town siren shrieked through the night air, I now know what it was like for my mother living in London during the war. We turned on the local radio station.

"All Wyndham residents are advised to pack a bag of necessities, some food and water, turn off your electricity and head for higher ground immediately. There are evacuation centres atetc."

'Immediately, means there's time to put the tv on the dining table, photo albums on top of the wardrobe then skedaddle it.' I had to take my hat off to the volunteers whose job it was to walk along the top of the flood-banks armed with nothing but a torch and a walkie talkie.

"Ferry St watch to HQ , water levels at one metre from the top and rising, over."

Ferry St watch to HQ , water level at 50 cm from the top and stable."

Ferry St Watch to HQ , water level now 2 m from the top and receding, probably safe to sound the return to houses siren."

We had actually bought our first home in Wyndham. \$4000 for a four-bedroom Bungalow. We had tried to buy a \$9000 dollar house in Glenfield four years before, but the bank said our life savings of \$1000 was not enough!

Chapter 6

Principal, 1975-77, Rangitoto Primary School, South Auckland, NZ.

Nowadays I like to boast to fellow Aucklanders that I was once the Principal of Rangitoto School. To Jafas this is one of the crème de la crème of North Shore Schools. After several dirty looks, I explain that my 'Rangitoto' was a two- teacher school, half an hour East of Te Kuiti, Colin Meads country. It was perched up high in the Rangitoto Ranges. A few months before we arrived, a tornado had carved a path through the school's Western shelter-belt of 15 metre

conifers. Two trees had been twisted violently and snapped off a metre from the ground, and the Principal's garage, had been picked up and dropped 70 metres down the road.

The 'school-house' was on the Southern end of the main playing field, had three bedrooms, a garden and a rental of \$7.30 a fortnight. That's a far cry from today where teacher's houses are now market rent less 25%. Mind you, I'm not too sympathetic here as the modern-day teacher gets three times our salary for teaching half as many children.

The school playing fields were mowed 'country style.' Every couple of months or so a member of the school committee would drop off a small flock of sheep to keep the grass in trim. This meant I would walk the 200 m of wet sheep-dungy grass from school-house to school in gumboots and change into regular shoes until it was time to go home. It was also the same for the pupils most of whom had slippers to change into whenever inside.

It wasn't until 1991 when the Labour Government introduced what they called 'Tomorrows Schools,' abolished Education boards and brought in School Boards of Trustees. Sadly, they also took away the appointment and assessment of teachers by professionals (school inspectors) and replaced the entire system with appointments by farmers, lawyers, housewives and whoever else was on the B.O.T.

In the 70's, if some budding future 'Black Cap' sent a cricket ball through a classroom window, the school secretary would ring up the Education board and they would despatch the Board carpenter, usually within four days, to effect a repair. Boards also had painters, plumbers and electricians on call for emergencies. Would this happen in 2021?

Before this massive political blunder (B.O.T.), each school had a school committee which would meet each month. It was expected, (and welcomed) for the school Principal to put on supper at these meetings. So, after scrutinising the school finances, (getting money for school projects was like extracting wisdom teeth), I would present the Principal's report and tell them what they wanted to hear about their off-springs' achievements in and around the classrooms, this was followed by inconsequential mutterings, I would get my \$5 for mowing the inside school surrounds, and we would retire to the junior room to have supper.

I have always been keen on basketball and started up a team made up from my pupils' parents which we entered in the local 'C' grade competition in Te Kuiti. We had a 50-50 win loss record so that was pretty good for a bunch of farmers who had never played in a competition before. I couldn't persuade the School Committee to part with some money to

erect two backboards on the school courts so I wrote to this new NZ gambling institution called The Golden Kiwi sports foundation, (the fore-runner to Lotto, which didn't start shelling out for 'needy' organisations until late 1987). To my surprise, they offered to pay for all the material as long as I could organise the labour. If it costs nothing, and you want something done, always ask a farmer! Once the posts and backboards arrived, they were put up in a week. I used this system at two other schools and can proudly say that according to Google Earth two of the setups are still standing.

The school 'is' the community, and Rangitoto was no different. During winter, on Tuesday afternoons before boarding the school bus, the senior kids would have to put all the desks to the side and put out the bowling mats. Tuesday was 'Bowls' night. Two of my Form Two boys always attended (Thanks Greg and Neil) along with a dozen or so parents and grandparents. My Mother would take me to indoor bowls at Takapuna RSA in the early 1960's, so to play the sport again was a real treat.

Winters could be very cold and frosty and it was the job of the senior boys to light the fires in the classrooms. Each room had a pot belly stove in which kindling was stacked and lit. When it was roaring away, teacher would throw in a bucket of coal.....or so I thought.....wrong! When heated, and before it is burning well, coal gives off 'coal gas,' which is very volatile and dangerous (ask any miner). Experience taught me that if there is not a constant flame to burn off the gas, and it builds up in the top belly part, it will explode. The lid would go flying towards the ceiling, and the whole classroom would fill with choking white smoke in seconds. With tears pouring out of stinging eyes, coughing and spluttering for fresh air meant all we could do was to open all the windows and let the cold air in and the smoke out. I wouldn't wish experience on anyone (except the taxman), so for future reference for pot belly owners, (I am talking fire here, not beer) only fill the left half the stove with coal, when that's burning well, add another half-bucket to the right side. That way a flame will always exist to burn up the gas, thus no 'KABOOMS!'

In summer it was also the Principal's job to keep the swimming pool chlorinated. I enrolled at the next swimming-pool maintenance course put on by the P.E. advisor and learnt all about PH levels, the dangerous chemicals and how to stop kids peeing in the pool. Chlorine came in powder form in huge 80 kg metal containers. We were told a story about a teacher who was smoking when the chlorine lid was off the container and a red-hot ash of cigarette fell into the mix and caused a massive explosion. Never knew if this was true or not but I certainly treated all the chemicals with respect after that.

Flocks of (wild) turkeys would wander around the neighbouring farms. Nobody actually claimed ownership of them so when a dozen of them decided to roost on the swimming-pool fence one weekend I thought it would be appropriate to ping a couple off for the pot. The next day when I secretly (didn't want any pupils to see in case they thought Daddy owned them) gave one to Helen T. (junior school teacher) she was very grateful.

Chapter 7

Senior Teacher, 1978-81, Hastings Intermediate School, Hawkes Bay, NZ.

Intermediates are vibrant schools, always something happening, from drunken miscreants (referring to a pupil here, not a teacher) to a pupil falling through the roof of the assembly hall. The teenage mind starting to think for itself, beginning to doubt their elder's advice and of course the over-zealous effect of multitudes of hormones.

Hastings Intermediate had umpteen playing fields available, three of its own and several on neighbouring Akina Park. This meant that whenever the sports-master (aka me) had to arrange a sports' afternoon against one of the other local Intermediates, there was enough room for four rugby, four soccer, two hockey, five netball, two basketball and even a chess team all to play in one afternoon.

Another fun feature of the Intermediate was to put on a dramatic show involving the Oscar contenders of the future. Who could resist the 'Wizard of Oz', 'Oliver' and my favourite 'Ole Time Music-Hall.' Nearly all the staff would pitch in in some way. For the 'Wizard', I was responsible for back-stage props and sound. How does one make the Wicked Witch of the West look as though she is flying as she cackles her way off the stage.....easy, one borrows a car hoist from the local garage, hides the handle from audience view with some boulders painted on cardboard, pumps away furiously and at the same time gradually drag the hoist and Witchy-poo off stage. In reality, she was only lifted about 70 cm in the air and she had to kick-start her broomstick, but the audience got a laugh and that was payment enough.

For the Music Hall presentation, my class had a 10-minute magic presentation. This needed a lot of practise in the weekends and a lot of construction. 'De Largo the magician'

(me) and his assistant, De Smallo (Chris) did the age-old 'Sawing a pupil in half,' followed by the appearance from an empty tube of various items of clothing and a finale act of hypnotically putting a pupil (Lisa) to sleep, raising her up to three metres above the stage, and finally shooting her down. Lots of noise, gasps and smoke and hopefully still a mystery for the crowd.

The Sunday before the show, we were rehearsing the dramatic Curtain drawback. I laid on the stage perpendicular to the audience. By my head was a metal container with a mixture of magnesium powder and Condys. Through the powder was some nichrome wire (as in a toaster) which glows red and ignites the powder-mix when an electric current is run through it. The curtains were drawn, the lights were out, my assistant (Brent S.) would turn on the electricity, POOF!!!, the audience would be temporarily blinded by the flash, and I would stand up with the illusion of appearing from nowhere, the spotlights would come on, and it was time for the first miracle of magic. Sounds good, but that's not what happened at rehearsal. The curtains were not pulled quick enough and the 'flash' set fire to them. I was pretty lucky the school hall did not burn down and managed to put the flames out by rolling up the curtain and smothering the potential disaster. Nobody seemed to notice that distinctive burnt smell at Monday assembly! Anyway, the show must go on, and we managed two evening performances without any hitches.

I said before, that intermediate kids were at that adventuresome age. At another rehearsal, Peter had come along to help. Unbeknown to me, he climbed up the ladder above the stage, and then went walkabout in the space between the roof and the ceiling. I'm on stage sawing a pupil in half and suddenly, kapoosh!, two dangly white legs appeared through the ceiling halfway down the hall, seven metres from the ground. I dropped the saw and ran to stand beneath him knowing full well if he fell there was no way in hell I would catch him, (I had enough trouble catching a rugby ball from high kicks let alone 35 kg of squirming human), "Lean forward, drag yourself up and find a beam to walk on!" It was to my great relief he somehow managed to do this and eventually scrambled back down onto the stage all in one piece but with a different skin colour! Magic practice was immediately cancelled and I took the hapless child home in the car to explain his near-death experience to his parents. My stomach still churns over when I see cops on tv shows having to inform parents of a passing. Be warned, be vigilant fellow teachers, this sort of life-threatening incident happened to me three times in my fifty years and not once was I negligent, kids are kids!

One of the legends at Hastings Intermediate had to be Norm J., a pipe smoking, jovial young fellow who had inherited an orchard but still carried on teaching as a hobby. Like all of us young guys, he coached a rugby team and turned up at Akina Park each cold Saturday morning to spur his lads on. One particular game, the opposition had a bloke in their lineout who was much bigger (and better) than all the others and he would catch the throw-ins then plough through Norm's team like a hot knife through butter. At half time, someone literally blew the whistle on this fellow and revealed he was a fourth former. What does Norm do? dons a team jersey and goes on at the start of the second half.

"What's going on?" enquired the ref.

"Well, if Heretaunga is going to have 'outsiders' in their team, then we will do the same," replied Norm.

This leads to further discussions with the opposition coach and the tall fellow left the field, followed by Norm. Thank goodness for that because if Norm did play, he would have had a heart attack as he was not in the state of match fitness.

There were two rugby teams in the Form Two section and at the 'Awards Assembly,' Norm proudly presented his own certificate to the other coach for being 'Runner-up' to the best F.2. rugby coach award. Classic 'kiwi a la Jones' humour.

Chapter 8

Deputy Principal, 1982-85, Welbourn Primary School, Taranaki, NZ

Welbourn was a delightful mix of kids of professionals, a few from the wrong side of the tracks, farmers, and business owners. The school coffers were bulging, and I was allowed to buy enough musical instruments for the whole class to have one each. The school music festival was coming up, I had the senior class, and it was expected that I would take our entry. Me, remember, the guy who took one period a week of the music elective at TC. There was mass singing which all schools sang together interlaced with school items (usually school choirs). I can manage party guitar and sing in the classroom, but this was professional stuff so I chose something that was easily manageable. We would belt out a Scottish melody made

famous by Paul McCartney viz. 'Mull of Kin Tyre' using recorders and percussion. Many of the class were talented musicians, so this tune was written up on a piece of manilla, a kid was given a baton, I strummed out the waltz- beat, and they did the rest.

The more nerve-wracking part was each teacher on the 'Festival Committee,' had to conduct the mass choir song they had nominated (and fought for). I thought the other mass choir items were out-dated and boring and chose a modern song "Sing C'est la Vie" by Sonny and Cher. Standing in front of a massed choir of 200 plus pupils at the Concert Hall waving your arms around like a loose scarecrow was a great experience but as I had rushed off the stage without bowing to the audience, I completely forgot I was supposed to sit the kids down and they were still standing when the next item came on. Thanks Allen P. for sorting that out.

Chapter 9

2nd Deputy Principal, 1986-87, 1989-95, Devon Intermediate School, Taranaki, NZ.

This was the last time I could use my grading mark given to me by school inspectors to get a job, from this job on I had to face either a mixed bag of non-professionals (Board of Trustees) or write myself out a glowing list of educational goals and purpose, accompanied by a plethora of testimonials and send the application 'Par Avion', or attend an overseas recruitment fair. I chose the latter.

There are two intermediate schools in New Plymouth and since my wife and I were teaching at them we knew every kid in town for eight years, so when we found out that a New Plymouth boy was courting our eldest daughter and we had never heard of him there was only one conclusion: he must have been a Catholic!

For three years I had the 'gifted' class, then this was dropped and things went back to luck of the draw classes.

Once again, I started organising sports days. The emphasis had changed over the years from producing winners to maximum participation, so I introduced a couple of new races for the annual athletics day. Backwards race and gumboot race, sounds fun? No, disaster! We had

to call two ambulances to the school to cart off the non-walking wounded. Apparently, children this age have bones very susceptible to breaking and when someone falls over when running backwards (which many did) their bones go 'snap.'

The following year those races were deleted from the programme and replaced with egg and spoon. Also that year, Dean broke the high jump record, then couldn't get up. The high jump pit was 30 cm deep in sawdust but still not enough to break his fall. A month later when he returned to class, he showed me the x-ray of his fibula broken in two places, I wonder if he still holds the record?

It was time to retire from sports organisation as there were lots of 'up and coming' young bucks (Bryce) and one hind (Sorry Jenny G, couldn't think of a better word) who were chaffing at the bit to get the job. Incidentally, Jenny (30 years later) is now the current Principal(2021).

We had assemblies on Wednesdays and Principal John S. would have a full staff meeting, while I was alone in the hall with 500 kids for 15 minutes. Now what does one do to fill in 15 minutes? I would tell jokes, spreading them out as long as possible then when I saw a teacher walking up the hallway, throw in the punchline then ask the masses to stand. If there was so much as the faintest murmur when the staff came in, I would get the blame and have to order a lunchtime practise. Couldn't exactly say they were laughing at my jokes.

Friday assemblies were singing assemblies. There is nothing more rousing than a 500-voice intermediate choir and for the first couple of years Beryl P., would belt out tunes on the piano and the kids would sing their hearts out (or be brought back at playtime for practise). Sadly, she retired and it was a few months before Eileen M. came along. Now this lady could really sing, she had starred in local operettas (Little Shop of Horrors) and knew all the modern songs. Chris P. and I would help out on guitars, but it was Eileen's voice that really stole the day.

Beryl was also a great host for staff parties so when she left there was a great gap in the staff social calendar. Solution, lets organise a bus trip. I hired a bus to pick up staff from either their homes or the school car park, all and sundry were asked to wear a hat for identification purposes, then away we went straight to a pub, thirty minutes later back on the bus to Heather's house for soup, bus again to the next pub, then main course at Annes, then another pub, then we were dropped off at the South End of Pukekura Park, strolled through the park, gaped at the fountain of never-ending colours , strumming guitars and singing away, hopefully

the night strollers didn't recognise these mildly intoxicated revellers as local teachers, then exited at the Northern end to meet the bus and onto Jocelyns for dessert. Thanks to a very tolerant bus driver, he must have been as he allowed Carol to bring her fully grown Labrador with her on the bus.

Our second house in New Plymouth was close to the centre of town but also Pukekura Park which means native bush which means opossums. If you ever hear a loud 'scksck' sound at night and then next day find your lemons have had their peel eaten off them, you have an opossum problem. They had also damaged my apple trees and kiwifruit vines so it was time for action. I bought a live animal trap with a spring-loaded door that would shut if any creature took a bite of the strawberry jam and bread trigger. First setting: one blackbird, which was happy to be released, second day a hedgehog, third day a very unhappy and vicious cat, fourth day.....success, one large common brushtail opossum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*). Instead of being destined to be a 'Davy Crocket' hat, it died of lead poisoning and became fertilizer. This process was repeated several times and eventually we ended up with whole lemons.

Every country has night marauders, these are animals that find it easier to find food in rubbish bins and around human habitation rather than hunt. In N.Z. we have opossums, USA had raccoons, Brazil jaguars, Switzerland foxes, Papua cuscus, Indonesia voles and Thailand rats.

Santa, probably due to obesity, can no longer climb down chimneys, however an opossum can and on occasions does. If you ever do have this problem, I would suggest quickly open and close doors to form an escape route to outside your house. Never, surround an animal within a closed space, because if put in a life/death situation with no escape, even the smallest of animals will attack you. Rat bites are germ-ridden, opossum scratches are painful, and jaguar attacks can be fatal, but more on this topic when you get to the appropriate country.

Chapter 10

Teacher, 1988-89, Irving Elementary School, Oregon, U.S.A.

Ian B. from Highlands Intermediate was always organising teacher swaps with teachers in other countries. After much letter writing we arranged to swap jobs with two American teachers for one year. They were a teaching couple living in Eugene, Oregon USA. We swapped salaries, lived in each-others houses, drove each-others cars, Mike Reidy even played in my New Plymouth basketball team (got a bit of flak on my return for having a yank import in the team). It was a great arrangement and both parties still had some loose change in our pockets on return. Mike and Leah arrived in NZ two days before we left so had a chance to learn routes to school etc before we left, whereas we arrived in Eugene and were thrown straight into the deep end. Linda's school was fifteen minutes away and mine was twenty-five minutes- drive on the wrong side of the road in a strange Honda with everything on the opposite side to what I was used to. Basically, if the windscreen wipers were going, I was turning right, and if the indicators were going, the windscreen was a mess. If there were no traffic lights controlling an intersection, all cars had to stop, then take off in the order that they arrived. Interesting system which worked well until there were an abundance of cars waiting.

First day in the classroom was a bit of a culture shock. When you have had a strict Victorian upbringing like I had, it's very difficult to accept kids wearing hats inside, chewing with their mouths open, wearing jeans and sunglasses inside and slouching like the Fonz. Eventually a few compromises were established like a 'put your gum in here bin' at the door.

Coming from a school where every kid wore a neat uniform and only ate at lunchtime and playtime to a school which sold popcorn on Fridays to consume in the class, lunches were hot and served in a cafeteria, sugar-loaded soft drinks were bought by all and sundry, Jamie wherefore art thou?

My only previous experience with Americans was the loud mouthed, over confident bully type persona. This is a gross misrepresentation, in their own country they were extremely hospitable, kind and generous. Can't say I was over comfortable with their second amendment though, 'The Right to Bear Arms.' We went to several houses and one of the first things a male host would do would be to show me his gun collection. I saw drawerfuls of ammunition, sometimes dozens of rifles and pistols in one house. The first time I played golf, I hooked a ball into a neighbouring paddock.

“Michael, why are you climbing that fence?”

“To get my ball back, its over there”

“That’s risky, you might get shot at!”

I got the ball back but my playing partner wouldn’t let me do it again and gave me a pile of balls.

American English is quite different from Kiwi English. I had written a letter to our home in N.Z. put a stamp on it and asked the office lady to send it on.

“Morning Christine, could you please **‘post’** this for me?”

“No problem, she says turning around to **‘post’** it on the bulletin board, but why would you want to post it, it looks like a letter to me?”

“No. I don’t want it to be put up on the board, I want to send it to N.Z.”

“Okay, I get it, you want to **‘mail’** it to N.Z.”

In our American house there was a wetback in the kitchen and when the fire was lit and the water started gurgling, it made quite a noise.

“What’s that strange noise?” enquired a visitor to our kitchen.

“Aww that’s the wetback”, I replied.

“You have a Mexican in there?” was the puzzled response.

Mike has bought us tickets to see a baseball game, a basketball match and a College Football match. What you might say as the true ‘American Experience.’

The baseball game was relatively exciting to watch, but all the hoo-hah that went on between innings was a spectacle within itself. Stan J. who was with us said “ lets order a couple of beers. “

A two finger in the mouth whistle, followed by two fingers in the air. Twenty odd rows below us was the thumbs up signal and a baseball was hurled at us. The guy in front of me caught it in one hand and passed it back. It unscrewed into two halves, we put in a \$10 note and threw it back to the vendor down below. It came back with our change in it and was

returned once more. Meanwhile, two large beers in paper containers with lids were passed head over head all the way up the twenty odd rows to us. Now that's what I call 'service.'

The basketball was a pre-season game between the Oregon University 'Ducks' (our local team) and another team from Detroit. The stadium was something akin to climbing Mt Everest with steps going what seemed straight-up to such a height we were practically looking directly down on the players heads. What appealed to me was the use of 'time-outs' The moment the referee blew his whistle and signalled 'time-out,' the thirty-piece band stood up and belted out a rendition of some pop song. Months later, our daughter who was attending one of the local high schools got in the school band and became a regular when her school played another in football. Each Saturday of the playing season she would get on the yellow bus, clarinet in hand, to return 4-5 hours later all pooped out.

'College football' they called it, but to me it was one university playing another. Our next-door neighbour was going to the same game as us less than 1 km up the road but he still drove there because it was the accepted thing to have a 'trailer party' before the match. We arrived at this massive car park in his camper-van, unravelled the awning, laid out the table and chairs, hoisted up the Oregon Ducks supporter flags, festooned ourselves with green and yellow buttons, lit the barbeque and ate and drank ourselves silly before the game started. Eventually we staggered to our seats for the big 'Field March on'. I stopped counting after 70+ players in from the Ducks team came onto the field. The band played, the cheerleaders performed death defying gymnastics, the crowd hooted, tooted and whirred anything that made a noise, then of course the 'National Anthem' (absolute silence for this), then the noise again and the game got underway. Once again after every 'play' there was a 'huddle' and discussion on the next tactic. It is a wise coach who uses a mini-white board to explain the next 'play' because there is no way the players would be able to hear anything. Of the three sports, I could not pick my favourite to watch, all three had their highlights and wonderment. The enthusiasm and dedication to a particular team was just astounding and could only be summed up with "**This is America!**"

Chapter 11

Teacher, 1995-97, Shanghai International School, China.

A week before school opened John C. (Principal), took us to the local government bike shop. Apparently, there were six million bicycles in Shanghai, and after our visit there were six million and eighteen bicycles in Shanghai. Every large traffic-lighted intersection had policemen present to wave their arms and tell the traffic whose turn it was to go. Funnily enough, when you are with another fifty cyclists waiting for the next green light, it is not difficult to know when to move, but I suppose jobs for everybody is an important part of the scheme of things. Our school would supply free lunches for the police that controlled the intersection by our main gate, this was provided of course, if the school buses could sidle along the emergency lane (found in the middle of each major road) and get priority once the light was green.

The following day we went to see our classrooms. They were just shells, no equipment whatsoever, corners had been used as loo's, the place stunk! We all thought, this will never be like a school in seven days. But this was China, and when things need to happen, they do. Within six days every room smelt like rose petals, was completely furnished and had the appearance of a brand new, fully stocked, functional International School.

We were entitled to a school lunch but preferred to buy what we could eat from a local café. One day another café owner turned up with some free lunches for the teachers. "Yechh, this bread is full of sugar, what no mayo? where are the tomatoes? Have you got ham? There should be more lettuce etc." The café owner was scribbling down everything our translator had interpreted from our 'helpful comments.' The next day, I kid you not, we had the nicest filled rolls I had ever tasted. This was the way things were. If you turned up anywhere regularly, your needs were evaluated, catered for and fulfilled with pride. Instead of having barstools at the local pub, they had stools with horse saddles on them. These Americans would wander in, sit in the saddle and have a beer cowboy style.

First day in the classroom, I had the blackboard filled up with some maths problems and a spattering of spelling exercises. But as with many 'first days,' the class was going to write about 'What We did in our Holidays' I gathered some key words from the pupils, put up a few starters and set them off on their first English assignment. I wandered around, answered any

questions, and helped where-ever I could for the next half hour, then I noticed Nancy, sitting up straight, and beaming at me.

“Have you finished your story Nancy?, (Nod, nod) Great, may I have a look?” She had done all the Maths problems....and got them all correct. It was then I realised, she could not speak a single word of English. She was a very bright student and was conversing and writing fluently after six months, which I can say was a bit better than my Chinese which after four years never got better than taxi talk!

It always pays to share a few personal notes with your students. I told my class I played golf and two days later got an invitation from a parent to join him and two friends for a round. Not wishing to offend anybody I said yes and that Saturday got picked up in a Mercedes and taken to a five star course about 30 minutes away. Before tee-off we each had a bucket of balls to hit off as a warmup. The practise tee was a lake with four islands on it, each of a different distance from the tee area. Each island had a flag and distance marker (either:50 m, 100 m, 150 m and 200 m.) What amazed me was the balls floated. They felt and travelled like ordinary golf balls but when you missed an island, splosh, they floated to the surface and were carried by a slow current to a grill by the tee area for re-filling the buckets....Chinese ingenuity.

One holiday period, a school trip for all the teachers was arranged to visit the Great wall (One of only two man-made structures seen from space). We were a wealthy school and owned several buses, so we all got on board the biggest one for the 1300 km journey. Nine kiwis, nine Ockers, five Brits, and a few odds and sods and of course our Chinese office lady/interpreter/informer. Walking along the wall was an exhilarating experience and the sort of thing many people have on their bucket list. With such a large group it wasn't long before we got separated and our Gofer was panicking that Paul had disappeared. There's only two ways you can go on the Wall, and since he had not passed the front runners, he must be way back so Muggins volunteered to go and look for him. Remembering he was a twenty-five year-old sporty Australian I found him twenty minutes later; sitting on the Great wall of China listening on his transistor radio to the NRL (Aussie rugby league) final!!

Another even more awe-inspiring adventure was the trip to Xian to see the terracotta warriors. The sheer size and numbers of these buried artefacts are unbelievable:22,780 m² (approx.. three rugby fields), 8000 life-size warriors, all brandishing weapons and buried in military formation along with models of horses, chariots, not to mention acrobats and musicians, all to protect and entertain the first Chinese Emperor Qin Shi Huang in his afterlife.

The warriors ranged from 1.75-2.00 m tall, which is a bit of an exaggeration. In real-life, my 1.78 m is enough to tower over most people in any Shanghai Street. For those of you who are not squeamish, there is a museum of instruments of torture on the city of Xian Wall.



An easy train ride from Shanghai are the “Yellow Mountains”(Huangshan), If you are the adventurous type, I would recommend climbing the steps, (all 60,000 of them). Each step is hand carved into the rock, some of them 1500 years ago, much stronger than the wooden bridges you see in the photo. Now back in the 1990’s in China, if there was a sign saying ‘Photography Forbidden’, then you don’t take pics. Karen, a rather strong-willed Aussie teacher thought the fantastic scenery was something she wanted to show her mum. Three clicks later, two armed soldiers forced her at gunpoint to hand over her camera, the back of which was then opened and all the film which contained several weeks of photos was splurged onto the ground and trodden on.....lesson learnt! Incidentally, if you don’t like climbing steps or riding wobbly cable cars, you can hire two porters to carry you up the steps in a hammock dangling from a bamboo pole.

Chapter 12

Teacher, 1997-98, Kimbe International School, New Britain, Papua and New Guinea

I call it ‘luck’, others have a different name for it. Wherever we went, it was either just after a natural disaster or just before. Case in point, the Island of New Britain has a rather

active volcano at its Northern tip and it had spewed its guts and decimated several villages shortly before we arrived and not long after our departure, the surf got up and a tsunami wiped out several more villages. What I call natural population control. Unlike what happened in Indonesia and Thailand where we endured two military coups and several varieties of political unrest resulting in riots/deaths/shop-fires/mayhem/extra holidays.

Now Kimbe International school was really a school for the local Palm oil factory worker's children. Palm oil is one of the highest sources of income per hectare than any other crop. Many of the local inhabitants had small plots of land, grew a few palm-oil trees, picked the fruit, sold it to the factory, then spent the cheque on booze. Alcoholism was rampant and such a problem, that a law was introduced to forbid the sale of alcohol during the weekends.

Our school-house was actually on the school property, surrounded by a 3 metre fence for protection. The school paid for a sentry to patrol the grounds at night and make us feel safe. He patrolled the school grounds all right, and each night fruit from our trees and veges from our garden mysteriously disappeared.

I am not a dog-lover at the best of times but I was appalled to see many of the ex-pats had their own guard dogs and trained them to go into attack mode if a native was around. They paid locals to beat the dogs with sticks so the dogs soon realised these guys were unwelcome and were fodder fun.

Kimbe actually had a supermarket where we could buy flour bread toiletries etc., but for meat and veges I would go to the village market and barter vigorously to get a few pence off spuds, pork and fish. It wasn't the money, (pay cheques were 20% higher than NZ), it was the interactive fun. I have always enjoyed playing poker and paying 22 cents a kg for potatoes that were advertised at 25 cents was like winning a hand.

They say crime was rife in P & G , true, some clumsy oaf tried to pick my pocket and relieve me of my wallet outside the supermarket. I felt his fingers, turned around, but he was whistling Dixie and looking the other way. I left the matter at that. You don't pick a fight with a local with a bone in his nose when you have no evidence. When I came out of the shop laden with groceries, somebody had set fire to the grass by my car.....coincidence, I think not. I jumped in and drove off and smiled nicely at the supposed arsonists who gleefully waved to me.

One Saturday lunchtime we heard strange oi, oi oi noises coming from the common outside the school. One guy was being chased by fifteen or so others. Eventually he was caught, flung to the ground and stoned. After five minutes or so the pursuers were satisfied the unfortunate had left this world and they wandered off. An hour later four men came to the body, unceremoniously grabbed a limb each, and took him off the common. This no doubt was Jungle Justice, so I avoided involvement and certainly was not going to the local police station as a witness.

The school-kids were great. I have never taught such fit children. Their idea of a playground game was to chase somebody and tag them, the tagged would then chase some other kid at full pelt, tag them and so on. I was teaching 11-13 year olds, some were big and tough. One particular girl, would finish Mathematics, poke her pencil into her copious fuzz-ball of wire-like hair, go out to lunch, play softball, come back into the classroom, put her hand into her hair, find her pencil, and carry on with her work. Not once did she lose a pencil!

Another interesting facet of P&G life was malaria. Before leaving NZ we had various inoculations against half a dozen different diseases. One of the girls in my class had a few days off school as she was sick. The absence note informed me she had had Malaria but was fully recovered. She was from what might be described as one of the poorer villages and had never had a pill, potion, or visit to the doctor in her life and yet here she was over malaria in a week. I presume that her body defences had never been interfered with by anti-biotics and she had built up a natural immunity. Something to think about? I remember talking to a Kiwi soldier who had returned from the Viet-Nam war and he had had malaria for five years and was still suffering from the effects of it.

Every fortnight or so we would have an assembly in the assembly area. It could not be called a 'hall' as it was just a roof, support posts and a concrete floor. Having no walls meant air could freely blow about and so could the local fauna. The assembled mass had just sang the theme from the 'Titanic' movie, it was absolutely beautiful, and as I was wiping the tears out of my eyes the Principal got up to speak. Did the kids pay attention? Not a chance. Two enormous butterflies (each as big as my hand) decided it was the mating season and put on a delightful and colourful aerobatics display at the front of the stage. The insect's performance was absolutely mesmerising and I had no recollection of what the speaker was saying. To top it off, two month or so later, a duck, with ducklings in tow, decided to waddle past front stage, quacking loudly, I am sure she was saying "Hi kids, have a look at my wonderful children."

Chapter 13

Teacher, 1998-2001, Sekolah Tiara Banksa, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Civil unrest in Asia is just par for the course. In a nutshell, the locals were rioting against the Chinese who had immigrated to Indonesia, had worked hard and built-up successful businesses. Many shops owned by the Chinese were ransacked and burnt and basically it was pretty unsafe to be in certain places at certain times. This was not the only reason, as Political unrest and religious differences also came into the fray but I am not here to judge. The bottom line was many foreign teachers had left the country in fear and we, as a married couple with no kids, had little difficulty in finding jobs.

A house and car came with the job as well as a 25% increase over NZ salary and more importantly the kids actually wanted to learn. With a dozen kids in a class this was teaching heaven. Not only that, besides the normal holidays we had what we called 'riot days.' If there was going to be a riot in town (Jakarta), the police Chief, whose kids were at our school, would ring the school and warn us of the forthcoming shenanigans. Straight away the telephone tree burst into action. Our school secretary rang four parents who each rang four parents who in turn each rang four parents etc and within ten minutes all the school roll had been contacted. Consequently, within half an hour all the cars/taxis/buses were filled and despatched homeward with occupants in time for morning tea. Teachers were also sent home which in my case usually meant a detour to the local golf course where I had bought a membership.

Golf in Indonesia is next to paradise. Many courses were family owned and with restricted membership. They still allowed casual golf but it was better in the long run to buy a membership (\$5,000-\$80 000) which you could sell when you left the country. This could be done through a broker or privately. After each game you played there was a course fee which you paid on leaving along with any beer/food etc. Caddies were compulsory and paid for separately. Hint, during Ramadan (Muslim fasting festival) try to get a Catholic caddie, because they will not be fasting. The caddies wear copious clothing, the temperature is close to 30'C and those following the fasting rules will not drink or eat anything for several hours and struggle to wheel a heavy golf trundler and bag in the blazing hot sun. Once, I turned around to ask my caddie "how far to the flag?"

"What caddie?"

“Where is my caddie? “

“What’s that heap on the ground 50 metres back?” She had collapsed from heat exhaustion accentuated by lack of food and water!

After golf, everybody hits the showers, a fresh change of clothes then into the lounge. All drinks and food are served at our tables, something I really miss now I am back in NZ. Labour is very cheap in Asia and ‘Emeralda’ where I played had a staff of 60-100 people. The staff at my local golf club in NZ was less than six not counting unpaid volunteer barmen.

After a round one day, we walked into the clubhouse and saw a guy lying on the bench seat by the entrance. “He’s had a tough round” we joked and headed off to the showers. As we were enjoying the 19th, we noticed an ambulance had turned up, then departed. Departed is the operative word, our bench sleeper had had a fatal heart attack whilst searching for his ball in the bush. When he hadn’t turned up on the green the rest of his four went looking for him, found him, realised there was nothing they could do, rang up the clubhouse to have him picked up then carried on with the rest of their round one player short.

On our first arrival at the school, a policeman came to talk to us. He said in no uncertain terms, “If you are driving a car in the country and are involved in an accident, do not stop, come straight to the police station.” As a Kiwi I could not even slightly understand this.

“Surely we are obliged to stop and try to help any injured people in the other car?” I enquired.

“If you stop, and locals gather around and see you are a foreigner, your life will be in danger.”

“That changed my tune.”

In the years to follow I saw the wisdom of his advice. One of the teachers on our staff was involved in an accident between him on his motorbike and an Indonesian on his motor scooter. Even though the Indonesian had gone through a stop sign and caused the accident, our stalwart teacher who had gone forward to help was mobbed and beaten but being a big fellah managed to run to shelter in a nearby large Hotel. The police arrived and worked out our guy was not at fault but just the same they strongly suggested he exit through the back door of the Hotel rather than face the crowd who were still outside hours later baying for blood. The police were kind enough to take the offending motorbike around the back for our fellow staff member to hightail it back to Cimanggis.

Usually, when going out into town for shopping etc, we would hire one of the school drivers, Mamat was a lovely young fellow of about thirty-five who knew all the streets of Jakarta and the associated dangers. Indonesian was the one language that was relatively easy to pick up and I could almost converse in. It did not have complicated he, she, you, him, me and all the other troublesome pronouns English suffers from. In Indonesian everybody was an 'it', no feminine, no masculine just 'it'. So late one night after playing pool and testing the local brew at the infamous 'Top Gun' in the equally infamous Block M, I asked "Mamat why do you always slow down from 100 metres out when approaching red traffic lights?" He replied "If car moving, difficult for man to rob us." One night while he was driving, he turned a corner too early and slightly nicked another car. He quickly ushered me out of the car and told me to walk away, which I did unseen by anybody. He then confronted the driver of the other car, admitted responsibility, swapped details, native to native, no problems! I was picked up thirty minutes later from 500 m down the road.

Our house was two-storied and quite comfortable with all the basic necessities. TV, oven, hot water in the showers, and a microwave. We hired a maid for cleaning and ironing, but we still preferred to do our own cooking. On the odd occasion I had to get up in the middle of the night and turn on the light to see what had made a particular noise. Usually there would be a scratchy scuttering of cockroaches (check your rulers; body length 6-7 cm) but one particular night, something had run over my face and woken me. It was now moving up the far side of the window-curtain, scurrying to get a foothold, this mystery thing was like a moving blob, 12 cm long and 5 cm wide. I smacked the lump, and it then fell down behind the dresser, which was then unceremoniously pushed hard against the wall. There was a squelching sound, followed by a soft thud to the floor, whereupon all was revealed. The midnight marauder was in fact a vole. A sort of cross between a mouse and rat.



How does the lady of the house deal with a similar such situation? It was early Friday night, (P&P), and I had not yet returned home. Linda had been watching tv upstairs and was going down to make a drink.... I say 'going' because she stopped dead halfway down the stairs.

Curled up in a loop, in all its glory was a pitch black 40 cm long snake. Don't panic, get the camera, take a photo, stuff a towel under the bedroom door, get into bed and leave the reptile for hubby, alias exterminator 2, to dispose of it. It wasn't until breakfast time I was shown the photo.



Another teacher tops this story with a tale of five kittens, then four, a month later three, another month then two. Keeping in mind mother cat and litter all lived inside the house but did have a walled grass area out the back. How can four kittens disappear? Believe it or not, this colleague swears he actually saw this happen. (I am sure he was not on drugs. A rather large snake came out of his toilet (the seat was up!), slither out the open back door, saw the remaining kitten, grabbed it, ignored mother cat's valiant efforts to save her remaining progeny, came back into the house, and disappeared down the loo.



The word orang-utan, when translated means 'person (of the) forest' and when Elizabeth brought one to school all and sundry were spellbound by its intelligent charm. It was wearing a nappy, which enhanced the human quality even more and was only a few months old. This got us really interested in these primates and later that year we had a trip to Kota Kinabalu which is an orang-utan rehabilitation centre for training them to live back in the wild. It was highly illegal to keep these animals in private collections, but sadly it is a sort of status-symbol to own one and many of the 'Rich' had their own mini-zoos.

Speaking of the 'rich', the staggering wealth of some Government officials, high ranking Police and Army is way beyond the comprehension of us Kiwi expatriates. One of our pupils was having his 6th birthday party. The entire school teaching staff were invited and it was held in the Ballroom of the flashiest hotel in Jakarta. Some of the performers from 'Disney on Ice,' were there along with the Who's who of Jakarta. Champagne and sumptuous food abounded and the 'birthday boy' slept through most of it. Another example of this wealth was the 18 year old at a certain American school who block-booked a section of a Boeing 747 and took her class and teachers to London for a few days to celebrate her birthday.

Chapter 14

Teacher, 2001-02, Haut Lac International School, Vevey, Switzerland.

Vous parlez Francais? I had studied French for one term in the third form and was asked to leave the class as progress had been minimal. Perhaps the beautiful Miss Helen G. shouldn't have worn those low-cut dresses as my mind (and eyes) frequently wandered off 'le subject.' Vevey was in the French speaking part of Switzerland, and the school was on the shores of the Lake Geneva. Beyond the lake was the snow-capped French Alps, a fantastic backdrop to look at whilst having our lunch in the school canteen.

On arrival at Vevey, we were first put up in a three storied farmhouse in the country about a fifteen-minute drive from the school. Originally, these houses were three stories because the bottom story was for the cows who could not find grass in the snow, so were kept inside and fed hay. Nowadays the bottom story has been turned back into human occupancy, often several generations in the one house. We were given the loan of a car until more permanent accommodation was found. After one drive into town the decision to move into town was easy to make. I had driven on the wrong (right) side of the road a few years previously when we lived in America but careering around corners on narrow roads with sheer cliffs on one side and hundred metre plus drops over a lake on the other, shattered my nerves. In America, we managed probably because the roads were so wide and traffic lights slowed things down, but driving here was really just survival behind the wheel.

On the second day we went flat hunting. Now, Switzerland was a huge step back in time, just like living in Takapuna in the 1960's. Most shops were not open at all in the weekend, professionals were not available, even land agents would not give up their two days end of week stint. An apartment was available, right in the middle of town and only a ten- minute walk from school. "We'll take it, where do we sign."not that easy! The landlord had to vet us (interrogate more likely) passports, bank accounts, testimonials, references, guarantees all had to be verified. The Swiss hate waste, so there were no such things as ready documents or contract papers. All were stored on computers and only printed if needed and of course as long as it was between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays. I sincerely hope this has not changed as NZ is grossly over shopped and workers need the weekend break.

Speaking of Swiss economy, I had gone skiing one weekend but before heading to the chairlift a visit to the local public loo was necessary. On entering the Men's door, the lights came on revealing a modern-day clean and hygienic facility...great. As skiers know when it is zero degrees outside you need to wear lots of clothes, so by the time I was halfway through the business all the lights went out...and I mean 'all' , it was coal mine pitch black in there. Saving on power bills by using timers I agree with, but trying to find a 10 cm door-handle in the depths of a coal mine by touch was not an easy task.

Unlike NZ where Post Offices have almost phased into non-existence, the Swiss Post Office at that time was the most important hub for business transactions. Insurance premiums, rents, rates, taxes, power bills were all transacted at the city P.O. I had bought a ticket in their local lotto equivalent and won 500 Francs. Where do I collect the windfall?, where-else. I queued up at the GPO and watched eagerly as the clerk counted out about 440 Francs..."Excusez-mois, cinq cent?"(500) I mutteredmuch smiling and laughter "impôt"..... I can recognise the word 'tax' in any language.

The school was owned by a family syndicate, two Irish sisters and their French and English Husbands. Vevey was the worldwide headquarters for many international conglomerates. The parents of our school pupils were mostly from Nestle', Rothmans or Tupperware, so any teacher presents came in the form of Ferrero Rocher chocolates in plastic containers.

The children were fantastic being mostly the offspring of high-flying executives. The school day was divided into two halves, and pupils chose either a French speaking morning with an English-speaking afternoon or vice versa. I taught in English the core subjects to the

English preferred pupils in the mornings and the minor subjects again in English to the French preferred pupils in the afternoon. Sounds odd, but it was very rewarding and lots of fun.

As the school was a rented concrete building there was no grass or play areas, but not a problem. For morning interval, we would walk the kids across the road to the park. Often, I would take softball gear and get a game going under the watchful eyes of the dog walkers and public at large. One hot day, (by hot, I mean Swiss hot....about 22°C), one of my pupils (who happened to be the bosses' daughter) decided to have a paddle in the fountain. Remembering it was a public park where locals would come for a picnic, have a glass of bubbly, no big deal in Europe. Unfortunately, a glass was broken and spread around the fountain floor completely invisible to unsuspecting paddlers. A sharp yell and blood everywhere were tell-tale signs for teacher Michael (In Europe nobody uses surnames) to pick up his star pupil and carry her back to the school for immediate medical attention. I really liked the dropping of surnames, especially since mine had harsh consonants, so I settled for a compromise for the rest of my teaching career to be called 'Mr Michael', except in Thailand where it was normal to be called 'Teacher Michael.'

When winter came all the school went skiing. At 10.30 we would have our morning cuppa then load the kids onto a couple of double decker buses, and slowly wind our way up to the ski-fields. I had bought skiing gear for a song at the local second hand store, so like the kids I having your own gear meant we could go straight from the bus, into the 'cabina' (a sort of oversized train carriage supported by wire), then straight onto the ski-fields. The children were already in graded ability groups of a dozen or so, each with an instructor and a teacher. When asked which group did I want to go with. Thinks, "the 'A' group is made up of mostly 11 year olds from my class, I will go with them, shouldn't be too difficult." I had been skiing once on Ruapehu in 1966 and again on Egmont in 1990.

"Okay lets go ', says the instructor.....two minutes later, "where's your teacher?"

I never knew that skiing slopes were graded according to difficulty: green for beginners, blue for learners, red for intermediates and black for experts. I had bought extra-long skis, which meant extra fast and more difficult to turn, and here I was on a 'black', death defying ski slope for 'experts' with a bunch of kids who were born with skis on their feet. No wonder I was left behind in the dust, or in this case 'powder.' Eventually I caught up with the group who were really sympathetic and gave lots of reassuring advice. Needless to say, I was demoted to 'B' group and the Red slopes which were more kinder. Falling over when the snow is soft and

powdery no big deal. Difficult sometimes to find your equipment when buried under 50 cm soft snow, but certainly not bruising, but this is not always the case. Sometimes snow melts then freezes again to form solid rock-hard ice, impossible to turn on and extremely painful to land on at speed. As the weeks went by, one learnt to recognise ice packs from a distance, and learnt to avoid them.

Near the end of the season, we were travelling further up the mountains as the snow was receding quickly. The last three trips were up to a plateau somewhere near the 4000 metre mark, crikey this was nose-bleed stuff, but still a wonderful way to spend a Wednesday afternoon.

When winter came, everything was so different. Our usual plod to school was now in semi-darkness, the river which we crossed over just before the school was frozen over, the footpaths were sometimes icy. But unlike living in Auckland, where I am frequently cold, this did not happen in Switzerland. The houses and apartments have wonderful heating systems, we had hot water radiators in every room (just like schools in NZ back in the 60's). The Swiss have a rule for everything. Regulations required all rented abodes to have the heating on at such and such a date and off at another. Farmers could only burn stuff on the last Sunday of the month. (I bet this rule has changed now!) On Sundays it was lovely to wrap up warm, walk along the lake waterfront, stop at a stall for a mulled wine,

Crime rate was very low in Switzerland. I think because everybody who worked got a decent living wage and there were capping rules on the amount of rent that could be charged. (Something for our NZ government to learn from). Our salaries were the same as the girl at the checkout at the super-market but still higher than in NZ by 15%.

Chapter 15

Teacher, 2002, Pan American International School, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

With a population of 1.3 million, Porto Alegre was quite a big city, at one supermarket we went to there were over 50 checkouts! We had worked with the Principal (John C.) in China, so we knew what it would be like under his reins. There was a rule however that led to

our eventual departure much earlier than expected. An employer in Brazil must pay an employee the equivalent of what they got at their previous job. So, our work visa would not be granted unless we were paid the same as we were in Switzerland. Since the cost of living was much cheaper in Brazil and the school already supplied accommodation, this was not going to happen, but more on this later.

Dear reader, If you ever have a chance to choose between a bottom apartment and the sixth floor, always go for the higher one. We had a typical Brazilian two-bedroom apartment, hot and cold running undrinkable water, terrace area surrounded by a two metre concrete wall. This was one of the very few concrete walls in the city that did not have jagged glass along the top to warn off potential robbers. I was in the lounge reading a book and looked up to see this gangly youth on our terrace. I quickly grabbed the nearest weapon available and started screaming blue murder at the vagabond who high tailed it over the wall to be attacked by the neighbours' guard dog. Satisfied I had protected my loved one and property from certain destruction/theft, I looked down at my hand to see a wooden spoon. That would have been really helpful if the intruder was armed.

The school was really just a converted three-story house with a tarsealed lawn. I had a grade eight (Form 2) class of about 15 Brazilians and one Argentinian. The kids were great, wanted to learn and generally did as they were told. Unfortunately, my classroom was close to the toilet. In normal situations, no big deal, but in Brazil...well different. All the toilets that I had come across in Porto Alegre were built using 50 mm pipes to remove the waste, (in NZ we use 100 mm), thus if anyone dared to flush toilet paper with the waste it would inevitably block up the system and regurgitate itself all over your shoes. Thus, the rule was, all used paper must be put in the bin beside the loo. The bins were emptied each afternoon after school but that was little consolation if somebody had not closed classroom/toilet doors. Enough said about the school WC. I had gone to a pub in town and used their little room and it must have been a reflex action or muscle memory but I inadvertently put paper in the bowl. Yes, it happened, a whoosh, followed by a gurgle and all and sundry spilt on the floor. I swear to this day it was an accident, but somehow the barman who had to clean it up might not agree.

The garden bar was an interesting system. When us four thirsty teachers sat down at a table, the waiter came over with four glasses then wrote down the reading (like a water meter) on the beer tap in the middle of our table. That afternoon we all poured our own beers

from the tap and when it was time to go, the waiter took a reading from our tap, made a quick multiplication on a calculator and gave us our bill....sheer genius!

Chapter 16

Teacher, 2004-10, Shrewsbury International School, Bangkok, Thailand.

I could wallpaper my walls with rejection slips from Thailand schools, so when I got this approval from Stuart M. at Shrewsbury International, plus an extremely welcoming letter, I was over the moon. A month later I found out the truth. When I was at Devon as a 2nd Deputy Principal I led a team with two ladies and this two metre Viking (Martin VR). Well, he had risen through the ranks, done a couple of online degrees and looked the epitome of a Principal. Tall, handsome, well built, and able to talk his way out of a paper bag. In the short space of twelve years, he had risen to the rank of Primary Principal at an International School. As luck would have it, he was in the office of the big chief who had on his desk a pile of applications and my name and photo were on the top of the pile. He instantly recognised my photo and said to Stuart, "I want this guy."

Two months later that massive Tsunami struck Indonesia and Thailand. One of the Shrewsbury staff was holidaying on Phi Phi Island at the time and was swept away and perished along with many others. My wife Linda filled the vacancy.

The school had everything. Small classes, British salary equivalent, (27,000 pound), children who wanted to learn, and I was given an open cheque to get the science laboratory in shape for the Junior school. Once again, the security guards were more interested in their own security and several lots of the pure copper weights I had bought for the lab mysteriously disappeared (probably to the nearest scrap dealer). Unlike tv cop shows where there are always video cameras pinning crimes on people, I could never mention this without proof, so I just stopped buying them. The school had one grass playing field for soccer or rugby, Kiwis would scoff at this and say so what? My next school in Bangkok had all concrete and they ran their 75 metre races on it, that's what.

Accommodation was a lovely two-bedroom apartment which we paid rent for which was balanced by a bonus. I think this was a tax dodge of some sort but who is complaining, not me. The cost of living in Thailand was considerably lower than NZ. Power and water were 2/3 the price extorted in Kiwiland. There was no hot water in the kitchen but there was in the showers.

As in nearly all apartment blocks in Bangkok, there was a swimming pool, a gym, dining, hair salon/barber, and a recreation room for table tennis. The gym had six treadmills, each with a tv and earphones with replaceable towelling ear-covers, plus numerous equipment for stretching/pulling/bouncing/lifting.

It was a bit disappointing for me to see so many kids at school doing nothing at lunchtime and breaks so I got permission to have Four -Square, Eden-ball and hopscotch markings to be done. Each day my class would roll out a 2 cubic metre cage filled with hoops, balls, padder bats for swing-ball. I had done a safety survey of injuries at school as recorded by the school nurse. After the ball games took off, the injuries from falling over steps were almost halved. It was interesting to note the teachers from England never gave up any of their lunchtime to play games with the kids, I was alone on that one.

One could say Shrewsbury was a prestigious school, and offered scholarships for high school pupils of talent. It only took three pupil's fees to pay for my salary, so a scholarship was not to be sneezed at. We had golfers, tennis champions, flautists, pianists, singers all of world class on scholarships, so to watch or listen to them was an absolute treat. I had the pleasure of taking the golf team on several interschool competitions. Jan from my y6 class had won her age group at the world champs for two years in a row.

Bangkok, now here's a city to enjoy. Married teacher couples (with or without children) rent your Kiwi house out, earn a double salary, hire a live-in maid/babysitter, experience Bangkok. No wind!!!no sunburn (the pollution protects you), amazing nightlife, wonderful beaches only an hour away, cheap, regular and efficient transport system. There is a little flooding but who cares if you are ten stories up.

Sounds good doesn't it, but there is a downside. In my eleven years there, Bangkok experienced one military coup, two massive protests which went on for months, a king's death, and a few minor floods. I will deal with each event separately.

The military coup: The Prime Minister appeared to have his fingers in the till and did some other unpopular things so the army Generals said enough is enough, rolled out their tanks, put armed guards on every intersection, locked away any dissenters, and said “We are running the country now.” Fair enough, pledges were made to stop corruption, elections were held and lo and behold the army general was elected President. It made no noticeable difference to our lives, our school, my golf club, everything appeared normal and relatively safe, but not so with the next event, the Red-shirt protests.

Of all places to have a sit-in protest they chose the street running behind my golf club. (The R.B.S.C.-Royal Bangkok Sports Club) At the Silom end they built a wall of tires, wood, a car wreck and some Hooker Bins. The other end 500m away was just guarded with foot patrols. Hundreds of protesters were camped there, entertainment, food and shelter were all provided. It was a bit like “Rent-a-mob.” Certain politicians would offer whole villages a daily wage plus food and a free bus ride to join the protest. While we were playing golf behind the three-metre stone-wall, we could hear the speeches, enjoy the music, and carry on as normal. It was a bit hairy to get past the Silom guards, but with my helmet on and riding a motor scooter, and lots of ‘Sawadee khrup’, they let me through. This running the gauntlet twice a day, three times a week for a month or so presented no major problems. At night it was a different story, bullets were occasionally flying and under the cover of darkness some of the extremists got a bit extreme so it was better to just steer clear of the whole area. At one-point, Central shopping centre was set alight. The fire brigade arrived, a gun was put to the engine driver’s head, “If you get your hoses out you are dead.” So, they watched it burn. Eventually after many weeks, the army thought they had made their point and came in with their tanks.....end of story; Ninety people dead.

The yellow shirt protests, same reasons as above (unhappy with the political leaders) but quite a bit less violent. One could say the Red-shirts were the working class and the Yellow-shirts were the middle class. This protest was by the notorious road called ‘Soi Cowboy’, which could be described as a street of pleasure for the tourists. Several movies have been shot in part here, ‘The Hangover pt 2,’ Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason. I would thoroughly recommend visiting ‘Country Road’ bar. Fantastic band playing 1965-85 music, six pool tables, mini dance floor and indiscreet ‘bouncers.’

Chapter 17

Teacher, 2011-17, Sacred Heart Primary School, Bangkok, Thailand

A large concrete Convent school once a learning institution for one of the current royal family. 'Ideal Academy, ' (my employers) rented out two floors of one of the five story blocks. It was a sort of symbiotic relationship and our English teaching section of the school could use the hall, courts and cafeterias alongside our Catholic counterparts.

Most of the Ideal staff were Filipino with an itinerant sprinkling of Americans, Irish, Thais, South African, Kiwi, and Russian thrown into the mix. The teachers from the Philippines were great to work with. Their English was impeccable, they were very conscientious and best of all they loved to party and have fun. They organised the Christmas do's, with Pirate themes, gameshows, karaoke and other Fancy-Dress evenings. Coming from a country of high unemployment, they gave their everything into their job.

Class sizes varied from 12-20 with a 85% Thai roll which usually meant I averaged one-two foreign pupils each year.

One year I had only 12 girls in my class so what better way to teach English than to do cooking.

"I would like each pair to collect one cup of bran, one of flour, weigh out 50 g of butter..... etc."

"Excuse me Teacher Michael, our cup of bran is moving!"

Sure enough, amongst the flakes there were undeterminable larvae, probably of weevil origin.

"Don't worry about it, lots of people overseas eat insects, they're a good source of protein, unless of course you wish to go to the science room, get a pair of tweezers and remove each offender."

A few months later, my son-in-law and I were walking Sukumvit Road, and he purchased and consumed some fried grasshoppers. "Hmm, good, crunch, crunch, just like potato chips," he said. I didn't test his conclusion!

Every now and then there would be a special occasion assembly, and all of the school sat on the concrete beneath the roof of the two basketball courts. There were no walls, just a roof and post supports. Teachers were provided with plastic chairs, and the chief Nuns would sit up on a stage. Never forget the time Mother Superior (I assume) was addressing the throng, when one of the other hierarchy received a call, answered it and proceeded to chat on her cell phone for the next two minutes. Now this would be a banishment offence in some countries but in Asia, 'normal.'

Another assembly of note was the biannual visit of the fire brigade. The procedure was, sometime during the day, a warning bell would sound in every classroom using the intercom and everybody would use the stairs to calmly make their way to the basket-ball courts. To add a bit of real-life drama, one of the firemen went to halfway up the nearest building and set off some smoke bombs. Instead of a siren, our classrooms were played some music which to many did not sound like evacuation music. Consequently, many classes never moved and carried on with their lessons. Eventually, somebody on the courts realised there were many classes missing and sent runners to go find them. It took over half an hour for all and sundry to be on deck whereupon the fire-chief gave a very animated presentation about fire-safety. (Remember, I could not speak much Thai so I am making a few assumptions here). Meanwhile smoke still billowed from the fourth floor and many of the younger kids kept pointing out to the men in uniform that their school was burning down. To finish off this pyromaniacal episode, our exuberant fire-chief set fire to some petrol which had been poured into this 2 m² metal container. He then invited some twelve-year old girl to put out the metre-high flames with a fire-extinguisher, which she eventually did. Not wanting barbequed children on my conscience, if there was a real fire, I told my class to let the school burn and leave the fire-fighting to the professionals.

One aspect of Thai culture that I really loved was their respect for age. With me being the oldest teacher there, I was often given preference. Whether it was to have a seat, to make a return speech or to be served food, it was always 'age before beauty.'

Bangkok is one of the easiest cities in the world to travel around quickly and cheaply. The green and yellow taxis are always an interesting challenge. A tourist would think that a large percentage of the taxi-meters were broken, which gives a chance for the driver to negotiate an inflated price, of course there is nothing wrong with them and many is the time I have had to push the meter-start button and exclaim, "Oh great I have fixed it for you, it's working now." To do this you must sit in the front seat. Another useful ploy is to photograph

the taxi driver's ID certificate which, by law, must be on display. Often the certificate photo and driver are not the same person, but whatever you do stay friendly and laugh a lot and do not get aggressive with the driver. They often have a concealed means of defence which they are not afraid to use when threatened. On several occasions the driver would not accept my being a passenger when I gave them my home address. Taxi fares are set by the government and sometimes drivers would prefer several close trips to one long one as the baht/km rate is quite small.

This is not meant to be a Lonely Planet travel guide but there are several unpleasant occurrences that can happen to any traveller that I would like to mention. If you ever hire a jet-ski, car or motorbike, the first thing you do before signing the dotted line is to inspect the vehicle. If you see any dents whatsoever, photograph them and point them out to the hirer. Sadly, in every country I have been to there is a small percentage of rogues who will seize any opportunity to increase their income. I have seen jet-ski hirers call in the police to back up their claims for damages to a jet-ski. When you cannot speak the language fluently it is very difficult to argue with a gun-toting law-enforcer. I strongly suspect the money paid for this scam is often shared between the parties. Beggars abound on many street corners, but please do not fall for the baby-in-arms and sorrowful looks. By all means give them some food, but hang onto your money because the chances are high the beggar will only keep a small proportion of it as her handler gets the rest!

Another popular scam occurs in countries where one NZ dollar is worth 25-1000 times the local currency. The money changer can use legerdemain (a false counting method magicians use) or take advantage of the foreigner not being used to large numbers and conveniently miss out a column. I would always ask nicely, if I could count out the amount in front of him, if he refuses this, pick up your money and say thank you in your sweetest voice, and walk away. One final suggestion! If you open a bank account, and are given an ATM card ask to change it to a zero limit so that it cannot be used without a four-digit pin. In Thailand, ATM cards can be used up to a special limit without using a pin, so if you lost your card, or left it in a machine or a machine swallows it, the card finder can use it up to that limit each day. It is so easy for you not to realise your card is missing for a few days and by then you could be Baht10 000+ down.

There are two train systems the MRT and the BTS. For both of them it pays to buy a top-up ticket which saved a lot of queueing up time and a refund on the balance could be obtained if you were leaving the country. When travelling anywhere by train make sure you know the

name of the Terminus (Last stop), maps are freely available to help here. Some stations are two-tier with four departure points so it is easy to end up hopping on the wrong train in the wrong direction. (This is experience talking)

Chapter 18

Retirement

When I finally hung up my chalk after fifty years and went back to NZ, I found out the most devastating news. I was not entitled to receive superannuation! Despite working in NZ and paying taxes for 35 years, you have to physically be in NZ for five years before turning 65 to collect. A teacher has to eat so what could I do until my five years was up? Modern schools didn't want grey-haired staff, they have to pay them too much! Younger teachers are a much cheaper option, so I had to go out again into the big wide world and get a job or starve. Luckily, the local Noel Leeming had a vacancy and I started working there within two weeks of my arrival home.

It was not until the ripe old age of 73 that I finally got 'super.' I could write another book on life as a sales assistant, for those three years at NLG also had their share of experiences but I'll save that in case there's bubonic plague or some similar such reason for another lockdown.