

Administration at Columbia University in New York. These US Naval Officers were preparing to administer the Marshall and Caroline Islands when they were recaptured from the Japanese. We lived in New York (where our son was born) until August 1944 when we went to England and Michael was posted to the Borneo Planning Unit (as an Army Colonel) in preparation of re-occupation of Borneo.

Preparation.

I did not have any preparation for my first colonial posting - our first joint posting was to Malaya. I had gone to New Zealand in 1946 with by now, two children, and stayed with my parents who had retired from Fiji. Michael came back from Borneo on leave and we all went to Malaya in May 1947. The children and I were amongst the first families to return to Malaya partly because of an acute housing shortage. We lived for three months in a hotel which I found very difficult with two small children. I had an amah to look after them, partly because their bedroom and ours in the hotel, were on different floors. After a short time I changed to a Malay ayah when I found Amah gossiping on the filthy Railway Station platform, instead of taking the children to the Lake Gardens with their friends! Ayah had had a very hard time during the war and had lost her husband. One of the things that I remember was that the only clothes she had were made of khaki material although they were still the traditional sarong-kebaya. Amah on the other hand, still had her black trousers and white jacket, always immaculately laundered. Rice was rationed and they found it hard to afford enough food for their families. At first we did not know about shortages because we had all our meals in the hotel, but soap for instance was very hard to get. We had no car but were sometimes able to hire an ex-army vehicle which the government had taken over to take us to the Swimming Club and to other houses. Otherwise we travelled round the town in tri-shaws.

After three months we were allocated a share in a house occupied by a (senior administration officer) bachelor and this was even more difficult except that we had a garden for the children and it was cheaper. The only thing was that we also shared servants and the cook took no notice of anything I said. The hotel despite the allowance we received was very expensive and we spent far more than our salary and allowance on accommodation and food. We had our own servants too, to do our personal work and look after the children when we were out. I mostly took care of them myself as did others - very different from pre-war. I remember coming home at night to find Ayah lying on the hard wooden floor between the childrens' beds (they were 2 and 3 then) all sound asleep, she holding their hands under the mosquito nets.

Becoming a Resident Commissioner's Wife

We spent five years in Malaya, moving from Kuala Lumpur to Perak after fifteen months. We were very sad to leave KL as we only had the lovely house to ourselves for three months, after we became the principal tenants. Michael had been in the Secretariat and was transferred to Kuala Kangsar in Perak so that he had a better opportunity to learn Malay in which he had to pass an exam. Kuala Kangsar was the "seat" of the Sultan of Perak although only a small town, 30 miles from Ipoh, the State capital. By this time the Emergency had started and we had to travel by train with all our belongings including the car, as the roads were not safe. We had been able to buy a car but had to take what was allocated - any colour so long as it was black! Michael was Assistant District Officer, working on lands and also with the Police and Military.

After six months, by which time Michael had passed his Malay exam, we were transferred to Batu Gajah only 12 miles from Ipoh, and the headquarters of the District of Kinta. Michael was Chief Assistant District Officer at first, working again in Lands. Kinta was the tin mining area, supplying a quarter of the world's tin and was the largest District in Malaya. We went on leave later and returned to Kinta where Michael then became District Officer. Sungei Siput, where the Emergency actually started, was in this District. Michael was much involved with the Briggs Plan and Squatter Resettlement by this time. This was a plan to prevent the Chinese growing rice from being made to provide supplies to the terrorists. They were moved into armed camps and went out by the day to work in their rice paddies. There were a great many Police and Army in the area and it was a big operation. Michael had "a price on his head" and we had to have a guard on the house which was a bit unnerving - the children remember it to this day.

We were very happy in Batu Gajah. The DO's house was very large and there was a lot to do in Red Cross, Girl Guides and other welfare work as well as entertaining. The children by this time had started at a Montessori School in Ipoh run by a friend (another Administration wife) for her own and a few other children. Needless to say we were posted back to Kuala Lumpur at the end of 1951 and again had to start off in a hotel as houses were still in short supply. We were eventually allocated a house that had been taken over, not a nice government house but one that had been taken over from Chinese owners because it was empty. They did not care for this at all and we were subjected to a lot of harrassment especially as it was in a Chinese area of the city. I felt quite unsafe.

Michael was back in the Secretariat at Principal Secretary, Personnel. After about six months he was offered the Resident Commissionership in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. It took a lot of heart searching because he was also offered personally by Sir Gerald Templar, now High Commissioner, the acting position of British Adviser of Johore. Michael felt that he had had "acting" posts before and preferred to become a substantive Resident Commissioner - even though it meant a lower salary, cost of living in the Pacific being lower (I am not sure that it was) For my part I felt that we had been lucky that none of us had been murdered and at that period in the Emergency Johore was the worst part of the country. Apart from Michael having been a target of the Communists, we knew that I had driven through an ambush on one occasion at least. On one of the school trips taking the children to Ipoh it transpired that an ambush had been laid for someone else, on a hillside overhanging the road I travelled on. Several mothers shared taking the children to school and although we did have a Sais with us and one of the mothers carried a gun (Michael thought this was not wise so I did not) it wasn't entirely safe, but on the other hand we had to try and lead as normal a life as possible.

So, in 1952 we left Malaya - separately. I went to New Zealand (where my family had by this time retired) to put our children - aged 7 and 8 years - to boarding schools. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands was extremely isolated with no air transport and the only means of travelling was in phosphate ships to Ocean Island or Nauru (not in the Colony) and then by Colony ship to Tarawa, the capital.