



Our Hosts, The Malakun Family, Kota Kinabalu

“LAND BELOW THE WIND”

Family visit to Sabah, Malaysia, Easter 2013

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“LAND BELOW THE WIND”

Borneo is the third biggest island in the world. It is not far from Singapore and Australia. Sabah is in the top part of Borneo, next to Sarawak and it has a 900 miles coastline with the warm South China Sea and Celebes Sea. The country is very hot and has tropical rainforest, mountains and lots of beautiful flowers and plants, fishes and jungle animals.

Our family had a great holiday in Borneo thanks to our dad’s friend Clarence and his family. Clarence is an important man, a bit like an English Lord. In Borneo he’s called Datuk Seri Panglima Dr Clarence B Malakun JP and his wife is Datin Seri Panglima Sylvia Wong. They have 3 sons – Hugo, Mandela and Benjamin, and 4 daughters – Isabella, Rexanna, Noemi and Abigail. They live in a huge Villa and Clarence has his own crocodile, a herd of buffalos and some deer!

Long before we were born, Dad was a soldier in Borneo. It was 1965 and he was 18. There was a war called ‘Confrontation’ and English soldiers were helping the Malaysian people. Dad was on an island called Labuan and his job was to drop parachutes into the jungle with the soldiers’ food and bullets and everything they needed.

Our country helped Malaysia through other bad times in the 1950s and 1960s and the people did not forget us. In 2005 the King of Malaysia made a special medal called *Pingat Jasa Malaysia* to thank the soldiers for being brave and helping to keep Malaysia free. Dad went to Maidstone and was given the medal by a Malaysian Colonel who said “The people of Malaysia are very thankful to you all. It was 40 or 50 years ago when, as young men, you found yourselves in the jungle fighting not only the Communist Terrorists but also mosquitos, leeches and wild animals. It is an honour to meet you.”

Also a long time ago there was a big World War and lots of fighting in many parts of the world. A terrible thing happened in Borneo in 1945 called “Sandakan to Ranau Death Marches”. 6000 people died. They were prisoners of war. They were forced to march 134 miles into the jungle and they died along the way of starvation and sickness and other horrible things. Only 6 prisoners survived. They were Australians. 641 who died were British soldiers. Our army in England didn’t forget them either and in 2011 fourteen soldiers from Wiltshire went to Borneo and did the same march as a memory for the soldiers who died. They called the march “Sabah Salute”. The soldiers carried sacks of rice and they gave the rice to an orphanage.

Dad is in a soldiers' club called the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association (NMBVA). He lays a wreath for Borneo soldiers on Remembrance Day. He was very interested in "Sabah Salute" and he kept in touch with the people who were leading it. At the same time, 7000 miles away in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah's capital city, Clarence was also very impressed by what the British soldiers were doing. Dad and Clarence became friends and Clarence invited us to Kota Kinabalu.

In November 2012, we went with our Girl Guide Unit to the town's Remembrance Day Service. Dad gave us bunches of poppies and we had our photo taken with the Malaysian flag. We were taking the poppies to Borneo on behalf of the Girl Guides, our school and Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Mum had a bunch for the Royal Institute of British Architects and Dad had a wreath for NMBVA.

At Easter 2013 we travelled to Sabah. It was a very long flight. Clarence gave us a big guest house on his own estate (Taman Malakun) with a maid called Alaina and cars and everything else we needed. He was so generous. It was also a sad time for his family because his father-in-law and favourite uncle had died but that didn't stop him making it a great time for us.

We had a really packed programme. Here are just some of the places we went to and things we did:

- Laid poppies at Labuan War Cemetery and Kundasang and Sandakan Memorials, staying overnight at the Grand Dorsett Hotel in Labuan and Sabah Hotel at Sandakan.
- Kota Kinabalu National Park and Poring Hot Springs.
- Lok Kawi Wildlife Park where we rode a pygmy elephant.
- Sandakan Crocodile Farm, scary when a crocodile snapped at us!
- Sepilok Orang-utan Sanctuary – we adopted an orang-utan called Lumiyud.
- Agnes Keith House and the English Tea House.
- Visits to holiday resorts and adventure clubs, towns, cultural villages, mosques, museums, aquarium and an upside-down bungalow.
- Swimming, snorkelling and parasailing and shopping in huge malls and exciting street markets.
- Lots of restaurants and eating houses – noodles with everything, even breakfast!
- Karaoke...

Dad and Clarence are magistrates and Clarence is President of Sabah Justices of the Peace. Dad talked to them and afterwards we had a barbecue for everybody at Hugo's house where we tasted rice wine called *tapei*. It was horrible! We were invited to the Kota Kinabalu High Court for Mandela's "Call to the Bar Ceremony". He wore a black gown and white wig. Dad went to meet the big judge. Dad also went to Clarence's Uncle's funeral.

We visited a Government Secondary School (SMK Limbanak) and Chinese Medium School (SRJK(C) Yue Min) where we met Malaysian Girl Guides and were taught Chinese songs by children in the nursery. It was fun being with them and they were very happy to see us. We swam in the pool at a fantastic house called *Sinurambi* high in the rainforest, and we spent an afternoon with the Bukit Harapan Therapy & Orphanage Community where we danced the "*Gangnam Style*" and sang English Girl Guide songs with the orphans. The children were so friendly. They hugged us and it made us sad that they didn't have parents.

Dad said the trip brought back lots of happy memories. Borneo had a special place in his heart and he was not much older than us when he first came. Lots of things had changed but some things were the same – "the beauty of the rainforest, the mysterious mountains, white sands and clear sea, the heat and smells and, more than anything, the smiles and genuine warmth of the people..." We agree with him. Borneo is a wonderful place and the people are so nice.

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