

AUTOBIOGRAPHY – by BRIAN JUDGE

A Scotsman Overseas

(An Exile Looks Back)



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Chapter 1 – Early Days

I am sitting on the balcony of my apartment on a coolish (for the tropics) evening in the centre of Kuala Lumpur looking out over the lights of the city at the KL Tower with its 180 degree viewing platform and revolving restaurant on top. To my left are the better known Petronas Twin Towers. All are illuminated. I often sit out in the evening, sometimes just me and the Famous Grouse, purchased from the local Chinese Medicine Shop and also in the early mornings accompanied by the sounds of the birds in the trees below.

In Autumn 2006, after retiring from work in Bangkok where I had been teaching Business and English at International Colleges I decided that I needed something new. Having lived in Thailand for thirteen years in all and throughout my stay travelled all over the country I felt that I was getting into a rut. So my choice was to either sit on the beach at Pattaya and await the old Reaper as many ex-pats seemed to do, or make a change. I opted for a move to Malaysia and have been living happily in Kuala Lumpur ever since. I had planned on obtaining some form of voluntary work but was unsuccessful in this. So I took to writing and this is my story.

I was born in Simpson's Memorial Maternity Hospital, Edinburgh on 30 March 1939, a second son to my parents - Thomas and Ann Judge. When I think back to my early childhood, my memory is not of skinned knees and dirty pants but of all the moments of discovery and first experiences. That was a time when I had no responsibilities and so much fun. My parents provided for all my needs, food, clothing, shelter and protection. When I awoke in the morning I couldn't wait to finish my breakfast and go out to find my playmates and just do whatever we chose. I was lucky to live in a happy environment but as I was growing up, I came to know the real world and the innocence of childhood began slipping away. My first realisation of this was when I was 5 years old. Our family had gone for our summer holiday and on the second day I began to feel unwell. We were staying in a small hotel in Rothesay. A doctor arrived, examined me and as I had a high fever I was taken by, as I remember, a very small ambulance to the local hospital. My condition was diagnosed as Scarlet Fever, a highly contagious disease at that time. Although penicillin was in existence it was not available in Rothesay. So I was isolated in this hospital ward mostly alone and would be there for six weeks. From time to time other patients would be brought in to the ward but none stayed for long. My treatment was to sit, mornings and afternoons for very long periods with my hands and feet in hot water, I can still remember the smell that came from that water. Does water have

a smell? – this stuff did. I think this was to encourage the skin to peel off. I don't remember receiving any medicine or drugs. I ate alone at a table in the middle of the ward each day. I was very lonely and missed my family. I had no friends and the nurses seemed never to be around much. In fact they taught me how to make my bed with 'hospital corners'. This saved them from doing it I suspect. My Dad had got word to me (no one was allowed near me in case they became infected) to ask if there was anything I wanted. I asked for a toy bus. My parents and brother had returned home to Edinburgh, the 'holiday' over and within a week my Dad had made me my bus and returned to Rothesay. But of course I never saw him. Also I was locked inside the ward, doors at both ends. But I eventually discovered an open window above the cistern in the toilet and being small I was able to climb up, put my bus through first, then squeeze through myself and down onto a coal box and then to the ground. I was out! Fresh air! Freedom at last, Wow! So good!..... but not for long!

I was spotted sitting on the lawn, re-captured and returned to my prison ward. Of course I was interrogated as to how I had managed to escape this high security wing. Looking back I suppose the nurses responsible for me were in trouble with the Matron. Then after six long weeks of captivity I was considered cured and my family returned to

collect me. I had survived a lonely imprisonment and had grown up from my carefree days of childhood which had gone forever.

My next memory was when I had just started at St. Ninian's Primary School, Edinburgh. One morning after arriving in the classroom we were told that an accident had happened the previous evening. One of the boys in the class, Billy Marshall had fallen from the Craggs on Arthur's Seat, a hill in the centre of Edinburgh and been killed. He had been a child full of life and had curly hair and although I did not know him well, I have never forgotten my first experience of sudden death and in his case in one so young.

A few years later, at the end of the term I received a prize, much to my amazement which was a reading book. Apart from a bronze medal for swimming this is the only time I was awarded anything throughout my entire school days. It was customary for the top three pupils to get a prize but on this occasion - I was about 8 years old, my book had written inside 'For application'. I had to ask my mother what this strange phrase meant and she said that I must be a 'good tryer'. That didn't appear to me to be much of an onerous position to be in. But looking back I wonder whether this young teacher had noticed something in me as throughout my life I have certainly tried and failed many times. I'd like to think so.

We lived then in a 'steel house' in Findlay Gardens, two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bathroom. Deliveries of household

needs, e.g. groceries, bakery, coal, etc were made often by horse drawn lorries but my father who was an accountant in Younger's brewery had his monthly beer allowance delivered by truck. There were few private cars on the road due to wartime restrictions so it was a safe place for us children to play. We had a garden back and front and beyond the back wall was Craigentenny Golf Course although I was unaware of its true nature before I was born since during the war anti-aircraft batteries had been established there and later a prisoner of war camp appeared. A few years after the war ended the golf course was restored.

It was my parent's custom most Saturday afternoons to go 'up the town' or down to Leith and trail around the shops. My brother and I were taken with them. There were no particular items being sought. Sometimes we would return home, my mother having bought maybe two dish towels. Other times nothing at all. My father's delight being a handyman was to gaze into tool shop windows and drool over the various items on offer. I hated these excursions and to this day have little interest in shopping unless for a specific purpose and even less in window shopping. On one occasion when making our way home, I remember my mother wanted to buy something for our evening meal and whilst we all waited outside a fishmonger's shop in Easter Road she went inside and made her purchase. The meal turned out to be fish cakes and chips and possibly peas. When our dishes were served my father, mother and brother had two fish cakes

on their plates whereas I had only one. Well at that age everything must be equal and fair so I demanded to know why I had one fishcake to be told that the shop only had had seven fishcakes left. This excuse of course did not right the terrible wrong which had been done to me. My father quick as a flash took my plate into the kitchen and soon returned – this time it contained two fishcakes. Whilst the evidence before me seemed indisputable I was still tearful and not placated. Later I found out I think from my brother what had happened and of course father had sliced the one fishcake in two and placed them breaded side up to show two rather slim fishcakes. The tricks parents play on their children.

Of course Christmas and to a lesser extent birthdays were special times looked forward to with great anticipation but Hallowe'en was also an event in itself. In the early evening we would all get dressed up as cowboys, sailors, witches, etc., and off we would go to visit the houses of neighbours armed with our 'tumshies'. These were turnips of which we had cut out the insides and made a 'face' by cutting diamond shaped eye-holes, a triangular nose hole and a mouth with pointed teeth. Inside this we put a candle and there was also a hole in the top to allow the smoke to escape. To the turnip we then attached a long piece of string with which to carry it. Of course the heat from the candle meant that the tumshie had to change hands regularly.

Then and after gathering with other gang members we would knock on the doors. Whenever it was opened we started to sing ‘ Please to help the guisers, the guisers the guisers, please to help the guisers etc.....’ The result could vary. Some would listen to our offering then give us either small change or perhaps apples or oranges, others would demand another ‘proper’ song before rewarding us and some would just close the doors in our faces, doubtless the Scrooge household, but one particular house up at the top of the hill we always ensured we visited. I don’t know whether these people played cards every night or only at Hallowe’en but we would be invited in and after singing our songs beside the card table would financially benefit from whoever happened to be winning the current game. After all houses had been struck it was back to our house to share out the takings between all of us guisers.

Guy Fawkes night was another exciting time. For weeks prior to the fifth of November all of us boys would be gathering anything burnable and it had to be stored in a secret place and guarded – always the possibility that another gang would steal our hoard. After school the bonfire would be built usually at a junction near to the card player’s house up the hill. Early evening the fire would be lit and in those days we all had our stock of fireworks, bangers, catherine wheels, jumping jacks, sparklers and best of all, rockets. But we found that the authorities didn’t

always join in the spirit of the season as Fire Engines would tour the streets hosing and extinguishing our precious bonfires - for safety.

As a child I was extremely shy with strangers and not much good at organised games – always amongst the last to be chosen for any team and not therefore very enthusiastic about sports. I couldn't throw a ball. In fact ball games generally were beyond my ability. Even as an adult when I took up golf my performance was at best mixed and quite unpredictable. While successful golfers had no qualms about lifting great sods of turf from the fairway which would then be hurled after the ball, (and often not collected and replaced as was the rule) I was concerned about not disturbing nature and frequently therefore either missed or topped the ball. Outside the house I was just a typical boy, inside I could and was disobedient, cheeky and sometimes sulky and perhaps being the youngest had early feelings of inferiority. In any event although I was never then or now aggressively violent there were occasions when I acted out of character. I would be aged between 5 and 9 at the time when the following events occurred.

I recall my mother sitting in our small living room having chastised me for some misdemeanour and I picked up the sweeping brush and poised it above her head at the same time threatening to drop it on her with no real intention of doing so. However the weight was such that I could not prevent it from doing exactly that. I don't recall my punishment

but later she said that she had really seen stars as happened in the comic books we used to read. My next victim was my older brother. We were in the back garden, it was summer time and we had erected the tent. My brother was at the kitchen door taunting me about something when I picked up the wooden mallet used for hammering in the pegs and threw it at him. Well contrary to my normal performance it sailed in a beautiful arc through the air and made a direct hit on his forehead much to his and my surprise.

One Christmas morning on opening our presents, my brother had received as his main present an air rifle. Unknown to me, my father had loaded it and on picking it up I pulled the trigger at which a dart flew out and struck my father just above his left eye. He was not injured luckily but quite why he had loaded it was never revealed. On another occasion he was trying out a new bakelite helmet – he was in the ARP at the time and he asked me to strike the helmet with a policeman's baton which for some reason we had in the house. I tapped him a few times without effect till I was instructed to really hit him so I banged it down with all my strength so hard that the baton broke and that was the end of the test. I don't know whether he felt much as the helmet was undamaged but the baton certainly failed it's test.

Many years later when I was visiting my brother's family in the west of Scotland, I and my sister-in-law with their three boys had driven

down to a park in the town of Gourock. I had recently bought them a boomerang and we were going to try it out. Alan, then about ten years old was told to run away to the other end to retrieve it. As he was running away from us I threw the boomerang and to my astonishment off it went twirling it's way in a sideways arc until it made contact with Alan's head – another direct hit. So far my sister has escaped any assault from me but who knows the future?

In 1947 we had our first 'foreign holiday' Well it seemed like that to me. My parents had to get passports. They had booked our trip to Northern Ireland. We travelled through to Glasgow where we boarded the N.I Ferry. The names of the ships going and coming were the Royal Ulsterman and the Royal Scotsman as I remember. We boarded at 6pm and sailed at 8. The first duty of my father was to seek out the Purser to obtain sleeping accommodation for our family of four which he eventually managed to do. We arrived in Belfast next morning to a wet and dreary city. After having some breakfast we travelled by train to Portrush, our holiday destination. Well the wind and rain continued throughout our holiday. We visited the Giant's Causeway of course by a tramway which was open to the elements and we also took a coach trip into the Irish Republic, the reason for the passports. My only memory of this was a woman sitting in front of us who had obtained nylon stockings, several pairs being worn on top of each other and chocolate which was

partially concealed (and melting) in the seating, amongst other things. These items were in short supply in Britain due to post war rationing. She was taken off the bus for questioning and never seen again.

The Boarding House in which we stayed was run by two spinsters. And their method of communicating with us guests was to pin postcards on the lounge wall on a daily basis. Instructions like – times for using hot water, when we may return to the place during the day, children's behaviour, etc. My dad said loudly while in the lounge one day that any more postcards and the owners would not be paid. The posting of postcards ceased forthwith.

It was about this time that I remember seeing my first pantomime. It was in the Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh and it was called 'Snowwhite and the Seven Dwarfs'. We went into what for me was this palatial theatre and took our seats in the stalls. Up above were two tiers where more people sat. Once the house lights went down and the curtains opened a night of pure fantasy and magic began. There was this pretty woman who lived in a forest and she came across the seven dwarfs, Then there was the wicked queen who was so vain and kept asking a mirror to confirm her as being the most beautiful in the world. Even at my young age I could see that this was not the case. The house in which the dwarfs lived was on a revolving stage and in one scene we saw the outside of it and next it was the inside. I was spell bound. This was better than Santa

Claus – he was some mythical character but this was for real. I had never seen such a spectacle before. And on our way home after the show in my state of pure ecstasy I said that I would like to play with the Dwarfs to which my mother laughed and told me that they were old men. Well, talk about a let down. She had destroyed all the magic with a few words.

Also I was once a member of the church choir which had been assembled early in December with the intention of us singing at Midnight Mass. I attended all the choir practices and on the 24 sang at Midnight Mass. In the middle of the service one feature was for the choir to process around the church. Next day my mother told me that my father had been in tears as we passed them singing our carols. At the time I didn't understand the emotional reaction involved which still affects me to this day. My mother I don't think shed a tear. She was caring and loving in her own way but not emotional.

In 1946, the then Lord Provost of Edinburgh proposed that the city host an annual festival of music arts and drama where international orchestras, actors, opera and ballet companies would perform. The thinking was to encourage an international audience and help to mend the divisions caused by the recently ended world war. This surprisingly came to be and my first memory of it was when my father brother and I attended the first Military Tattoo on the Castle Esplanade. The seating was on wooden chairs but the setting then as now was magnificent with

the floodlit ramparts of the castle as the back drop to the performance. The festival has since developed into the largest arts festival of its type in the world. A few years after World War 2 ended, what was to me a new sport took off in Edinburgh and around the country – Motor Cycle Speedway. My father had known it in his youth as ‘Dirt Track Racing’. It was he who took my brother and I to watch it and it turned out to be the most exhilarating thing I had witnessed so far in my life. The roar of the bike’s engines, the smell of the burning oil and the cinders trapped in my hair (I had hair then) after I returned home, it was all so noisy and dangerous and exciting. We paid one shilling at the boys gate, I don’t recall seeing many girls there, and that was exactly the amount of my pocket money at that time. The programme cost an additional sixpence and my pal, Eric who got one shilling and sixpence pocket money bought it and rather reluctantly shared it with me. Of course such was our enthusiasm that all the announcements over the Loud Speakers had to be faithfully recorded on the programme, regarding substitute riders, the result of each race and the time of the winner. It was all so engrossing because no sooner had we filled in all this vital information and had a post mortem on the race just completed than the next race would be starting. I remember my first visit to the stadium which was held at the site of the Edinburgh Thistle Football Club at Old Meadowbank. The oval track surrounded the football pitch. A young boy, perhaps 10 years old

emerged from the Pits dressed in full leathers and showing the yellow and blue insignia of the home team – Edinburgh Monarchs, got astride a small speedway bike and took off around the track in fits and starts. I think he completed two laps before disappearing back into the Pits. He was the Team Mascot although I didn't realise this at the time. I thought the show had begun. Next, four adult riders - two each from both the home team and the visitors then rode around the track very slowly. I was disappointed and remarked that the 'wee laddie' had ridden faster. I hadn't appreciated of course that they were just 'heating up' and proceeding slowly around the track towards the starting gate.

The drama was about to begin and the crowd was hushed in anticipation as the riders lined up ready for 'the off'. Suddenly, the tapes shot up and all four bikes roared forward towards the first bend as all vied with each other to get into the lead and if possible hog the inside of the track as at this point it was a great advantage as the followers then had to take an outside path in order to overtake those in front. This could be the most dangerous time when collisions or bikes rearing up could unseat and sometimes cause injuries. The tussle for the lead was watched avidly and the race was run over four laps. On completing the last, a black and white chequered flag was waved to show the riders that the race was over. In the event of serious crashes where the track could not be cleared immediately, the race would be stopped and a loud siren sounded to alert

the riders still racing but not involved. Officials from St. Andrew's Ambulance Service were always on hand to attend to any casualties. The blurb advertised all this as 'The Thrills & Spills of the Speedway' and for me it certainly lived up to its description. The performance began at 7.30 every Saturday night and ended at 9.30. Of course we became familiar with the local team members. The visiting teams came from all over Britain. After it was all over we walked home discussing what we had just seen and raving about the skill of our particular hero on wheels. While I became a regular supporter, my brother was outside the ground selling a cheap booklet called 'Speedway News' which was produced by one of our neighbours on what might have been his son's John Bull Printing Outfit. It was really basic.

In 1947, my nose was 'put out of joint' with the arrival of a baby sister, Rosemary who was a very welcome addition for my parents after two sons.

At this point it was becoming clear that our two bedroom house in Findlay Gardens was soon to be too small for the growing family. An opportunity arose in 1950 when my father's employers had decided to renovate a large mansion they owned which was located in the Grange district of Edinburgh, split it into four big houses and to offer it to their employees on a rental basis. We moved in and stayed for fourteen happy years.
