



ashley's avenue

By Ashley Murphy

I was nine years old and in the third grade when I was first introduced to the possibility of moving away from my hometown of Cleveland, TN. The decisions of my family, and myself, would have a great impact on my life, in a very good way.

Duracell was expanding and building plants in India and China, my stepdad was plant manager, at the time, of the Duracell plant here in Cleveland and his job required him to relocate to Asia for approximately two years so that he could oversee the construction of the plants.

My parents divorced when I just a baby, so there were several oppositions

and court hearings to determine whether it would benefit me more by staying in the United States with my dad and my stepmom or moving to Asia with my mom and my stepdad. Fortunately, the judge decided to ask me for my opinion on the whole situation, without my parents present to add influencing comments.

I remember sitting there across from the judge and telling him how nervous the whole move would make me and how difficult it would be leave my home, my family, my friends, and my school, but that I found the idea of moving to a different country very exciting and that I would love to have this once in a life-

time opportunity.

I left Tennessee with my mom and my younger brother in July of 1995 to meet my stepdad in Singapore, my new home for the next two years. It took almost an entire day of flights and layovers to finally get to the Singapore Airport. I was so glad to finally get off the plane and be on my way home. Our first couple of months in the country were actually spent in a hotel and a condominium while we waited for our furniture to be flown over from Tennessee, but then we moved into a gated apartment community.

I remember starting school about a month after we arrived. My parents were sending me to Singapore American School and I would be riding a bus everyday, just like here in the United States. It wasn't as frightening as I had thought it might be and everyone spoke English, because it is one of the national languages. The school followed the same school calendar that we have here in the United States and the city also followed several U.S. holidays. Singapore looked amazing at Christmas. While the climate never fell below seventy or seventy-five degrees, the city was still decorated for Christmas from every road to every building top and, in my opinion, outdid any display ever seen in Pigeon Forge and Gatlinburg, Tennessee!

School breaks were always fun and interesting.

My Two Years in Singapore

During Spring Break and Fall Break my parents would take us to other countries nearby for our vacations. I remember specifically going to Phuket, Thailand, Bali, Indonesia, and Perth, Australia. I had several chances to go to Hong Kong and India, as well, but didn't because I was afraid they wouldn't have American food. I had also heard some gruesome stories about India. I greatly regret not going now, because I recently realized I may never have the chance again to visit.

Food was also a big concern of mine when I was trying to decide if should move to Singapore. I was only nine, so you can only imagine how picky I was about what I ate. I was surprised to learn that there were several fast food restaurants that have chains, not only in the United States, but all over the world. My family frequently ate at McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Subway, KFC, and Burger King. I even had a Burger King right there at my school! Grocery stores carried several of my favorite foods as well: Pringles, Doritos, Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, Rice-A-Roni, and Coca-Cola products. Al-

though, I have to admit, once I was forced to try different ethnic foods I became very fond of the Japanese and Chinese styles of cooking.

Merlion Park, Singapore



At the time we were living in Singapore, it was considered one of the cleanest and safest places in the world due to their unusual, and strictly enforced, laws. Chewing gum was illegal, so we would always stock up on Big Red Gum when we came back to Tennessee and sneak it back in our luggage. Spitting on sidewalks or in any public place was considered an offense, as well as, smoking cigarettes or bringing cigarettes into the country, peeing in elevators, jaywalking, and, as outrageous as it may sound, failing to flush a toilet after use.

Singapore also uses very harsh, but very legal forms

of punishment if convicted of crimes. Crimes or offenses on the corporal level are punished by caning. Basically, officers will chain you face down against, what looks like, a ladder and beat you across your backside with a large stick, or cane. Crimes of the capital level are taken more seriously and, if convicted, a violator will be hanged.

Although these laws and punishments sound very extreme, they helped make Singapore the safe, beautiful place I remember it to be. My friends and I could skate around the apartment complex or go to the park a couple of blocks over alone without our parents worrying that we wouldn't make it back.

The weather was always warm and, for the exception of the rainy season, sunny. Although I have lost contact with all of my friends over the years, I always think about them and wonder where their lives have taken them. While I have forgotten a few details and happenings, those two years in Singapore were definitely two of the most memorable years of my life. I may never get the opportunity to go back, but if the chance arises, I don't think I would be able to say no.

- Do you have questions or comments for Ashley? If so, send her an e-mail: peoplenewsdesk@aol.com

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