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Life as a Child in the Foreign Service

After a brief stay in D.C. so Daddy could confer with USIS we headed to New York, and boarded a BOAC Stratocruiser. Travel by plane in 1951 was not the norm it is today, and most certainly not easy. Jet planes were not in commercial use at that time. The trip to London



was 15 hours, with stops in Newfoundland, Ireland and Scotland for refueling or due to bad weather.

The Stratocruiser was a gleaming aluminum prop plane, carrying up to 100 passengers. It consisted of two floors; the upper floor had seats and berths with real sheets in case you wanted to take a catnap. I say catnap, because any turbulence would mean vacating the berth, and strapping yourself in a seat, Pj's and all. Downstairs by way of a central winding staircase was a lounge, where you would find people smoking, playing cards and partaking of a cocktail or two, We were served on real china plates with real silverware and crystal by stewards in white dinner jackets.

I was not someone you wanted to be seated next to on anything that moved. It was in my diaper stage that my parents discovered that I suffered from motion sickness, and so conferred with a pediatrician as to what to do. He suggested that a brown paper bag be place inside my diaper against my stomach. Although it sounded crazy, my mother decided to give it a try. And it worked. And so the trip around the world began with a brown paper bag secured in my panties. It took me until I was a teenager to discover that not everyone wore brown paper bags when they traveled.

London in 1951 was cold and dank when we arrived. We were not prepared for the cold, much less a sky filled with ash from the coal heat. London seemed to still be on the mend from the war, but Daddy was in his element. He had spent time in London during WW II as a liaison pilot. He dragged us everywhere despite the cold, showing off a city he loved.

Onward we went through Egypt, Pakistan, and India slowly making our way to Bangkok. Each stop had a story I later heard, and each stop we got sprayed with DDT. Any time one disembarked to stretch one's legs, they were in a white fog of spray. Days and nights passed, until we finally arrived in Bangkok. My mother later said she could recall nothing about the first few days after arrival, as she fell face down on the bed, not to be woken for three days.

The house we eventually called home was given to us out of desperation. We had lived in the Princess Hotel for several months, until a non-attached diplomat took pity on us, and offered us temporary accommodations

in his house. From there we moved to a house that was out of our budget, until the embassy took pity on us, and offered us a 3 story wooden house, actually on the site of where the U.S. Embassy sits today. The couple living in the house were being transferred, so Mom and Dad set up an appointment to see the place, but did not anticipate what awaited them. The diplomats had a gibbon named Moo Moo and could not take him to their new assignment so they decided to leave him with us. They assured my parents he was not a problem. He had a cage in a fake tree outside the master bedroom, and would rattle his cage around 5 A.M, at which time they would let him out to roam until they got up. Apparently he also liked to sit on the diplomat's shoulder

when he shaved in the morning. Needless to say Moo Moo was moved to a tree outside, and never once sat on my Dad's shoulders when he shaved. Moo Moo's life and ours were about to change.



My sister Judy, mom and me in our new house

The house sat on acres of land, with klongs running through the landscape. A bridge crossed a small

stream to the servant's quarters. Huge barrels were set on the bridge collecting rainwater for our wash. The only other house on the property sat at the opposite end of the park-like expanse, and turned out to be a house of "ill repute". The purple mosquito netting was a hint, my mother said.

Life in Bangkok was so different than what it is today. The French were in Vietnam, and we had to have a trunk packed and ready with essentials for evacuation in case the war spread across the border. The roads were filled with sam-lors, driven by Chinese coolies and there were no more than 100 cars in Bangkok. Not quite the same as today.

I did not go to nursery school, but my sister Emilie did.



The Floating Market