

EPILOGUE

Hong Kong pulsates in the multicoloured bombardment of a million neon signs. Breathtaking? No, that adjective I reserve for things in nature. But the energy of this city, it's almost as if it were breathing. Alive. The illuminated skyline across the harbour is but a pyrotechnic display of a fiery dragon restive beneath the island's bedrock. Sky-scraping steel and glass sentries stand guard around the ancient hills that form much of the island. Whether to preserve the sovereignty of the past, or to inhibit the infiltration of the modern I do not know. But the effect is an excited, if peaceful, cohabitation of the old and the new. My economist friends may look at this as some kind of equilibrium. For me, standing here on what was once, and now again, Chinese soil, the Taoist ying and yang seem a rather more appropriate analogy.

From the five-star comfort of my harbour-view room at the InterContinental, it's easy to forget that close to eight million huddle and toil in this city-enclave on the south China coast. Or that blood, lots of it, old and new, east and west, has watered the seeds that germinate into the contradiction that is Hong Kong today.

Almost two centuries ago the British Navy came in search of new markets, and collided with a civilization much older than hers. Fortunately for the Brits, this venerable giant was not only timeworn in culture, but also in its weaponry. Adding to their other spoils of war -- the Opium War, no less -- these seekers of new worlds snatched a piece of the old world. What they pilfered at the time didn't look much, for

Hong Kong then was but a barren rock with a few fisherfolk scattered about. With nothing to fall back on, the early settlers could only look forward with hope and prayers. And not a few cannons and navy frigates.

Since then, millions have sojourned to Hong Kong, many with little but hope and prayers, seeking new lives and a new history. Sojourners, because here in Hong Kong, permanence is only a fleeting notion. And many died fighting to preserve this ephemeral legacy. Through it all the city lives on, an occasional furtive glance at the past, but with feet planted in the present and arms stretching out to the future. Reality is a constant spin cycle. A never-ending time warp. The past constantly dimmer as each new brilliant neon sign is erected; history murkier as each new overlord proclaims its dominion over an indifferent population. One more interested in what tomorrow may bring.

I, too, have come to Hong Kong with hope and a prayer. But I have come not in search of a new live or a new history. Instead my quest takes the opposite path; I have travelled across the Pacific to know my past, and to rediscover my own history. And, perhaps, to one day proclaim my dominion over it.

MY STORY

Chapter 1: FATHER

There was a time when my father and I were very close. The passage of time alters many perspectives, and the past is merely an interpretation informed by the here and now. However, although it has been eight years since he and I last spoke with each other, I have clear and distinct images of my father and me in my mental film archives. Just memories now, but they are fond memories. Will they fade in time, as surely as do our own impermanent sojourn through life? Of that I have but a parenthetical interest. Fleeting as life is, each moment is a spark, a distinctly different one, that ignites ever so briefly, before it disappears into a dark and intangible abyss called “the past,” never to touch or be touched again. Favoured with an ability to physically relive the past, we may opt to pursue different paths, partake different options, or verbalize different thoughts, and perhaps engender a different present. Or not. Who’s to say? The older I get, the more convinced I am of our own insignificance, even irrelevance. We, children of an industrial-technological age, like to indulge ourselves in some megalomaniac arrogance of being instruments of change, masters of our own destiny. Fate is relegated to the ghettos of the ignorant and the unwashed. But fate, like time, beguiles us with its ephemeral substance; insidiously exercising its dominion over us. Auden was right, of course, we cannot conquer time.

How would my father see me now, I often wonder.

Would he be pleased that his son graduated Magna Cum Laude from Osgoode Hall Law School? Or that upon being called to the Bar, I opted out of a lucrative corporate law career and instead chose to work for Amnesty International? *Terar Dum Prosim* indeed. Would that I had mastered the conquest of time, I could show him and perhaps give him reason to be proud of me. But alas, fate had other ideas.

The morning after our big fight, my father was killed by a drunk driver. My last words to him the night before-- and they ring so loud today even after all this time, as clear as that moment when I slammed the door and shut him off, forever, as it turned out--were, "Stay the hell out of my life!"