

**Tales from Tasmania – What goes around comes around . . .  
and sometimes in the strangest way  
by Bob Young**

One of the great truisms is that what goes around comes around. And often in the most unexpected and strange way.

A few decades ago when we moved to Lantau Island we were living in Pui O, unbeknownst to us a then predominately Communist part of the island, and as foreigners, we were having some difficulty merging with the village community-at-large.

Most Westerners in Hong Kong were regarded as an elite minority living in an artificial environment unconnected with the real Hong Kong and its people, and more often than not disliked by the locals and those Westerners who had made the effort and were accepted.

**Getting along with the locals**

We like to think we were part of those that made the effort to learn the customs and priorities of the community we lived in.

We were the only Western family living on Lantau at the time, apart from a couple of police inspectors and prison superintendents. However, things are much different today.

I had become quite proficient in Cantonese and was able to converse with the locals, while Ann had to resort to much grinning and nodding, along with some standard greeting phrases, at local functions we attended.

The breakthrough to true acceptance of us by the Pui O villagers came in a most unexpected way. One day I was going to the local bus company garage in Pui O. I had a management position with the bus company at the time. When I got there a crowd of locals had gathered, and I went to see what was up.

**Brownie point opportunity**

One of our mechanics, who had always kept an arm's length relationship with me, seemed to be in charge. He was a devout Communist and involved with the local branch.

He was telling the crowd his nine-year-old son, while swimming at Pui O Beach, had been attacked by three holidaying kwai-lo (foreign devil) British soldiers.

Somewhat selfishly, I saw this as a golden opportunity to right a wrong and gain local brownie points. I commandeered the garage's old war-time six-wheel-drive flatbed truck, and told the bus mechanics and villagers to get on board and we would go and look for the foreign-devil soldiers. They boarded armed with pitchforks, axe-handles and an assortment of handy items from the garage that could be used as weapons.

I was confident all this was just for show and that nothing more serious than heated arguments would eventuate.

### **Not quite fit, but still a marvel!**

I was more concerned at the moment about the old truck. It was an ancient monster that I knew from experience was hard to drive. I was mindful that any sudden lurch could spill my load of passengers onto the ground, and my master-plan would come unstuck.

The truck had no foot brakes (you stopped by putting it into first to slow it right down then applied the hand brake) and no second gear (you had to rev up in first, then double declutch into third). For all its faults, the old gal was still a marvel. We had made many a trip with colleagues from the garage up to the mountains of Ngon Ping, along steep jeep tracks. Our missions then were twofold: to catch fish in a small lake, and to help out some isolated Buddhist monks and nuns with their vegetable gardening.

We brought tinned goods from town for them, sacks of rice and oil etc, and in turn they made sure we left with some of their surplus fresh produce, notably the sweetest oranges we have ever tasted.

Some of the monks were getting on and seeing out their last days in tranquil and perfect feng shui conditions. They had devoted much of their time to erecting and maintaining their traditional graves in the most auspicious positions.

### **Not quite fishing**

The “fishing” was a bit of a misnomer. It involved no sport at all. The operation involved driving the truck around the lake, dropping people off at strategic points, each armed with a car battery (from the garage) and wires connected to each battery. At a given signal, everyone put their wires into the water, and stunned fish floated to the surface ready to scoop up.

This was done after the time spent with the Buddhist monks and nuns. We were sure they wouldn't have approved.

But I digress – back to the truck load of angry armed villagers I was driving down a deserted dirt track to the point on the beach where the incident in question had taken place.

We found the three hapless off-duty soldiers, and I asked them for an explanation. They claimed the boy was trying to drown a puppy dog and they had intervened. The boy said it was his pet puppy and that he had merely been trying to give it a bath in the ocean, despite the dog's objections.

I told them whatever the truth, to attack a young boy was unforgivable. I suggested they look carefully at the angry load of villagers on the truck and consider their options: A formal apology to the boy and his father, or face the angry villagers who at this stage had developed exaggerated ferocious mannerisms. They wisely chose the former and apologized in dramatic voice and gesture to the boy and his father.

That story got around quickly, and the boy's father and I developed a good friendship.

### **Protection money please**

Many years later we returned to Lantau and took over a popular restaurant on the island. The previous owners had been targeted by the local triads for not paying their protection money, as every business in the area had done.

These activities were largely unknown to Western businesses which operated on the mainland as they tended to cluster in what were regarded as Western areas away from the “real” world. We, on the other hand, were right in the middle of a local community and the only Westerners operating a business in the area.

Through local knowledge we found out that one of the triad leaders in Pui O was a young man nicknamed Big Duck. The same young man who years earlier I had helped as a young boy in an incident with three British soldiers.

Through his father, I arranged a meeting with him to discuss the situation. Big Duck remembered fondly the incident, and gave instructions that our restaurant was to be left alone and all triad members eating or drinking there were to pay all their bills.

And so it operated for all the time we were there. In fact some of the local triads were lunching at the restaurant one day when some other triad members from somewhere in Hong Kong started giving me a hard time. The local triads had words with them and told them to move on. Another local triad figure said to me:

“I can’t believe it – not only do you not pay for our protection, but now we are giving you extra protection against other triads, and all for free.”

We had established a “privileged position” with the local triads because of the help we gave a young boy many years ago, a young boy who had become Big Duck, an influential figure in the triads in Pui O.

It all goes to show that what goes around comes around. Sometimes in the strangest way.