

A Tale of Two Postings

Stanley Fort SCS, Hong Kong (1985 to 1994) and Toucan SCS, Belize (1994 to 2003)

Surprisingly, although very different places to live, Hong Kong and Belize do have many similarities. They were both previously governed from London, consequently the language of government and the law is English. It is quite possible to speak only English and live comfortably in both places even though the majority of the population in each place prefer another language (Cantonese in Hong Kong and Spanish in Belize). They are both situated South of the Tropic of Cancer so are subtropical with average annual temperatures in the high twenties centigrade (30+ every day in the summer) and high rainfall (76 and 88 inches per annum, UK average is 40). They both suffer from extreme weather, Hong Kong has its Typhoons whilst Belize has its Hurricanes. Both their Histories contain long periods of pirates and privateers fighting over trade. In Hong Kong it was opium and tea in Belize it was hard wood for furniture and log wood for dyes. In both cases the Brits prevailed.

After that though the similarities are replaced by huge contrasts. Belize is 21 times the size of HK, but HK has 25 times more people! The GDP of HK was 126bn when that of Belize was 727 million. Hong Kong has a bustling and thriving business community with one of the largest entrepôts in the world. Belize is a small, poor country struggling to pull itself out of third world status.

Hong Kong has a full calendar of cultural, artistic, entertainment and sporting activities. There are Islands and Highlands to visit and walk across. There is a huge boating and sailing fraternity. There are shopping centres to die for, theatres, cinemas, beaches, bars, clubs, restaurants and the nightlife of Lan Kwai Fong and the "Suzie Wong" district of Wan Chai. There are no less than 75 McDonalds outlets! Hong Kong is a gateway to the Far East and Australasia.

Belize has few of these. It does, however, have the second longest barrier reef in the world with attendant coral islands and opportunities for paddling, swimming, snorkeling and scuba diving. It also has thousands of acres of primary rainforest studded with glorious jungle resorts offering tranquility and retreat along with trekking, bird watching, jaguar stalking (!), etc. There is not one single McDonalds. Belize is a gateway to The Americas (North, Central and South) and The Caribbean.

As for working in these two places the contrasts for us could not have been greater. Working for SCEA and the English Schools Foundation (ESF) in Hong Kong meant we

were two small cogs in two great teaching groups. SCEA had four primary and one secondary school, Sek Kong, way up in the New Territories close to the Chinese border, St Andrew's and Gun Club on the Kowloon peninsular and Stanley Fort, on the south side of Hong Kong Island. The secondary school, St George's was in main land Kowloon.

Stanley Fort, where I worked, had a head teacher, a non-teaching deputy, a teaching Head of Infants, a floating music teacher (!) and variously 12 to 14 staff accompanied by numerous ancillary, secretarial and cleaning staff serving 200+ children. Whereas Belize had one SCS primary school, Toucan School, comprising: one head, one teacher, two ancillaries, one secretary and one cleaner serving between 12 and 28 children.

A similarity in each theatre was the common thread that has run through English education for the last twenty years, that of change. The Hong Kong years saw the introduction of The National Curriculum closely followed by The Revised National Curriculum and SATs. The Belize years saw National Literacy and Numeracy Hour Strategies, IT Initiatives, a reduced national curriculum and other variations too numerous to mention, with all their attendant problems.

Life in Hong Kong was at least busy and at best hectic, so much so our live in Philipina maid complained that we were never home. But that was life in HK. As well as holding down two full time jobs we ran the Brownies and Cubs at Stanley Fort and a swimming club at Chung Hom Kok Club with a variety of adult coaches and helpers plus 120 members attending twice a week in the season. We belonged to four clubs, belonging to clubs is what Brits do when living abroad. I was a HKRFU rugby referee, I ran regularly with Little Sai Wan Hash House Harriers with whom running extended to various half and full marathons. We enjoyed going to The Hong Kong Sevens, I was pleased to be chosen as an assistant referee at The HK Sevens three years in a row. We ran the Repulse Bay Christmas Day swim for 7 of the 9 Christmases we were there, having over 300 attendees at one. The Hong Kong Arts Festival was a highlight of our year. Three weeks of the most fantastic theatre, dance and music that we enjoyed to the full. Ballet Rambert and the RSC were high on our list of must sees. One year we saw all 6 of Shakespeare's history plays in three days!

Life in Belize did not offer such excesses. When we went there in 1994 there were no cinemas, no theatres, no HK style clubs, few restaurants, no UK TV except on tape, only one UK style supermarket, and only three tarmac roads in the whole country. Belize had just been re-assessed as not being a third world country. However, we lived on a camp that was like an English country park with green grass and magnificent trees. We belonged to the Officers' mess and joined in with every event including running Burns Night suppers. We took every opportunity to visit jungle resorts such as Chaa Creek and Chan Chich. We enjoyed boat trips to the cayes, coral islands on the barrier reef, to swim, dive or just BBQ and chill out on the beach.

Now we find ourselves back in UK and living in Chesterfield. The differences are manifold and obvious, but the one similarity is ourselves. We continue to be active and involved. Although being hardworking, committed professionals when we were working we did not live for our work, on the contrary we worked in order that we might live our lives as we wanted to. Now that we do not have to go to work each day we still live our lives to capacity. Not a day goes by without a class or a meeting or a session at the gym or a visit to the many friends we made in Birmingham, Hong Kong or Belize and, of course, we are near our family once more.

We loved living in HK and Belize. We believe that we and our family benefited greatly from the experiences afforded us in those 18 glorious years.

So I say a very big thank to Service Children’s Education in all its manifestations.

Stanley Fort SCS Staff 1986



John
Comer
(Dep Hd)

Ann
Jones
(Inf Hd)

Cathy
Ogilvy

Jean
Dobson
(Sec)

Elaine
Patterson

Sheila
Tooke

Sue
Miller

Ann
McNorton

Ann
McDonald

Philip
Arrandale

Elaine
Jenkins

Robin
Lacey

Linda
Peat
(Sec)

Trevor
Shaw
(Head)

Denise
Davey

Paul
Speed
(Music)

**Toucan School Airport Camp Belize
Circa 1998**



L to R: Mrs Kettlewell, volunteer parent helper, a young lady in white who I do not know, our locally employed TA who was a Belizean teacher, Mr Arrandale, our 28 children aged 4 to 10 years, Sarita our locally employed secretary and Mrs Arrandale



Sergeant's Caye, Belize.