

She's what binds two nations

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BORN in Lancashire in the north-west of England, she has spent the last 52 years in Malaysia. Today, consultant Datuk Paddy Bowie, 82, considers herself a hybrid of sorts, an offspring of two distinguished breeds.

All these years, in official forms, she had been proudly filling in "Malaysian" for "nationality" and English for "race", she told some 50 people, friends and family who gathered for an investiture ceremony at the residence of the British High Commission in Kuala Lumpur.

Bowie was bestowed The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire last Monday. She was all smiles when British High Commissioner to Malaysia, Boyd McCleary, stooped to pin the Badge of Members of the OBE.

"It keeps the balance in my life. I was first recognised by Malaysia. They honoured me, a Mat Salleh woman, by giving me the title Datuk, 'grandfather'," she chuckles. "Now my roots have remembered me. It's balanced."

It had taken Bowie three days by flight to reach Singapore 52 years ago. Bowie imagined that she would come face to face with small-sized brown-skinned natives languishing under coconut trees.

A teacher, a trade relations director, a business consultant and then a prolific writer, Datuk Paddy Bowie has now been honoured by Britain, writes **RACHAEL PHILIP**.

Instead, what she saw surprised her, a seven-storey building in Singapore. Expecting to be blown away by culture shock, Bowie was instead greeted by familiarity. And she embraced it.

Bowie made Malaysia her home. She arrived as a teacher and taught English and law. Then she was employed by the Shell group of companies for 20 years.

"I was the first woman in the entire group to get on the board," she recalls. Bowie was the trade relations director on the main board of the company.

"That was the opportunity Malaysia gave me. A young country, she had no time to stop and worry about gender. If you are tal-

ented, you've got the job."

She set up Paddy Schubert Sdn Bhd in 1980. She is the managing director of the business consultancy firm.

She writes copiously and is showing no signs of slowing down.

"I am working harder than before. My lifestyle has changed. If before I could work late into the night, now I can't. Instead, I wake up earlier and am seated at my table by 5am."

She does four hours of solid

writing before leaving for the office.

Currently, she is working on many writing projects simultaneously. There's the book on Am-Bank, a biography on Tan Sri Balachandra Chakkingal Sekhar and another on the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority.

She is also producing and writing for films, and religiously sending her columns of political and business analysis to the *New Straits Times*, the British Malaysian Chamber of Commerce and a magazine called *Homme*.

"I have not reached intellectual menopause. Until that happens, I will continue to write."

When I asked her, the morning before the investiture ceremony, what she has done to receive the award, Bowie shrugs. "I don't know. They didn't tell me."

But she thinks it's due to her work acting as a middle person for trade missions between the two countries.

However, McCleary, in his speech at the investiture ceremony, said it all: "Paddy is the embodiment of that which binds Britain and Malaysia. Paddy is Britain-Malaysia. If it wasn't for her, we would not have the relationship we have today. This is thanks from her country, Britain."

■ rachael@nst.com.my

