

American Peace Corps Volunteer Defeated By Dr M At Scrabble

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By Salmly Hashim

WASHINGTON, Oct 16 (Bernama) -- American Peace Corps volunteer Jim Wolter, who served in Malaysia in the 60's, was making concrete water-sealed latrines to help reduce hookworm infestation among villagers in Alor Setar, Kedah, when he was invited to dinner at the doctor's house.

"Here I was, a 22-year-old medical student busy making 'jamban', and the next thing I knew, I was having dinner with the town's most influential doctor, Dr Mahathir Mohamad (former prime minister, now Tun) and his wife, Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, at their home.

"They seemed to me the jet-set type, but very comfortable in their surroundings. They were very articulate...they could have been very comfortable chatting with President (John Fitzgerald) Kennedy at the White House."

Dr Mahathir, who was then active in Umno, later invited Wolter to his talks where he met with the former's constituents. Some nights, they played scrabble "and I was easily defeated by Dr Mahathir and his wife," said Wolter.

Wolter, now married to a Malaysian, Fong Moke Chee, later changed course and is now Professor of Education in Administration and Special Education at the Chicago State University. He said, he did not keep in touch with Dr Mahathir.

A total of 4,067 peace corps volunteers were in Malaysia between 1962 and 1983, serving in various parts of the country.

Malaysian Ambassador Datuk Seri Jamaluddin Jarjis recently invited the peace corps members to the Malaysian Embassy for a Malaysian-style buffet as they celebrated the Peace Corps' 50th anniversary. Many of the 'sukarelawan', (male volunteers) as they call themselves, came in their colourful batik shirts and tops, a few proudly wore kebaya and batik, and one came in his blue Baju Melayu complete with sampin songket and songkok.

Dona Boyce-Manoukian was in Malaysia from 1962-64, and served as a nurse at a health centre in Kuala Rompin, Pahang. She helped midwives deliver babies, and also assisted doctors in treating patients suffering from cholera.

She still remembers some Malay and blurted: "Terus ikut jalan ini ke rumah besar itu!" (Follow this road to the big house).

Manoukian, however, remembers the day the Malaysian flag was lowered when President Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas on Nov 3, 1963. "That was a sad day for me."

Lyn Juhl, who is still active in Malaysian-American activities in the Washington area, taught mathematics at Sekolah Menengah Rendah Kroh, Perak and lived with other male teachers -- Malay, Chinese and Indian -- "we got along fine, we ate, played and worked together. Life was simple then."

What Juhl still does until today is to hang out with other DC Hash House Harriers, an idea

brought to the US from Malaysia by Bill Panton who married a Malay woman, the late Aisha Panton. Panton set up the first Hasher Club in 1972 and currently there are 10 Hasher clubs in the area.

Frank Swetz was in Penang from 1964-1966. His experience in Malaysia changed his life.

He still remembers vividly a road accident he witnessed -- the driver, a Chinese man, was obviously in pain and crying in his car that was crushed. A Malay policeman held his hand and comforted him until help came.

"To me, that was a sincere gesture between two Malaysians who did not care about their race or the colour of their skin."

"I thought to myself, 'Isn't this great?,' said Swetz who grew up in New York.

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