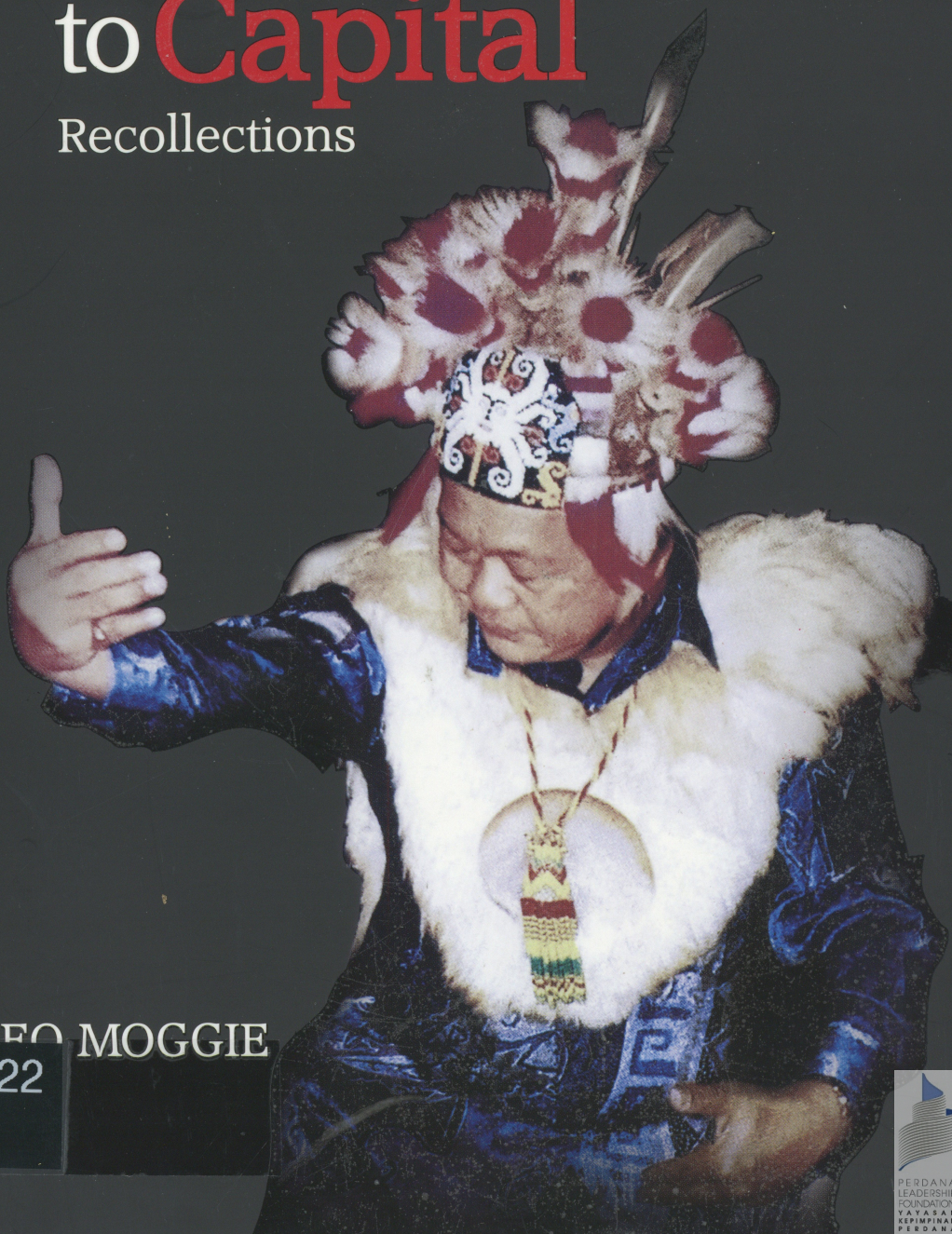
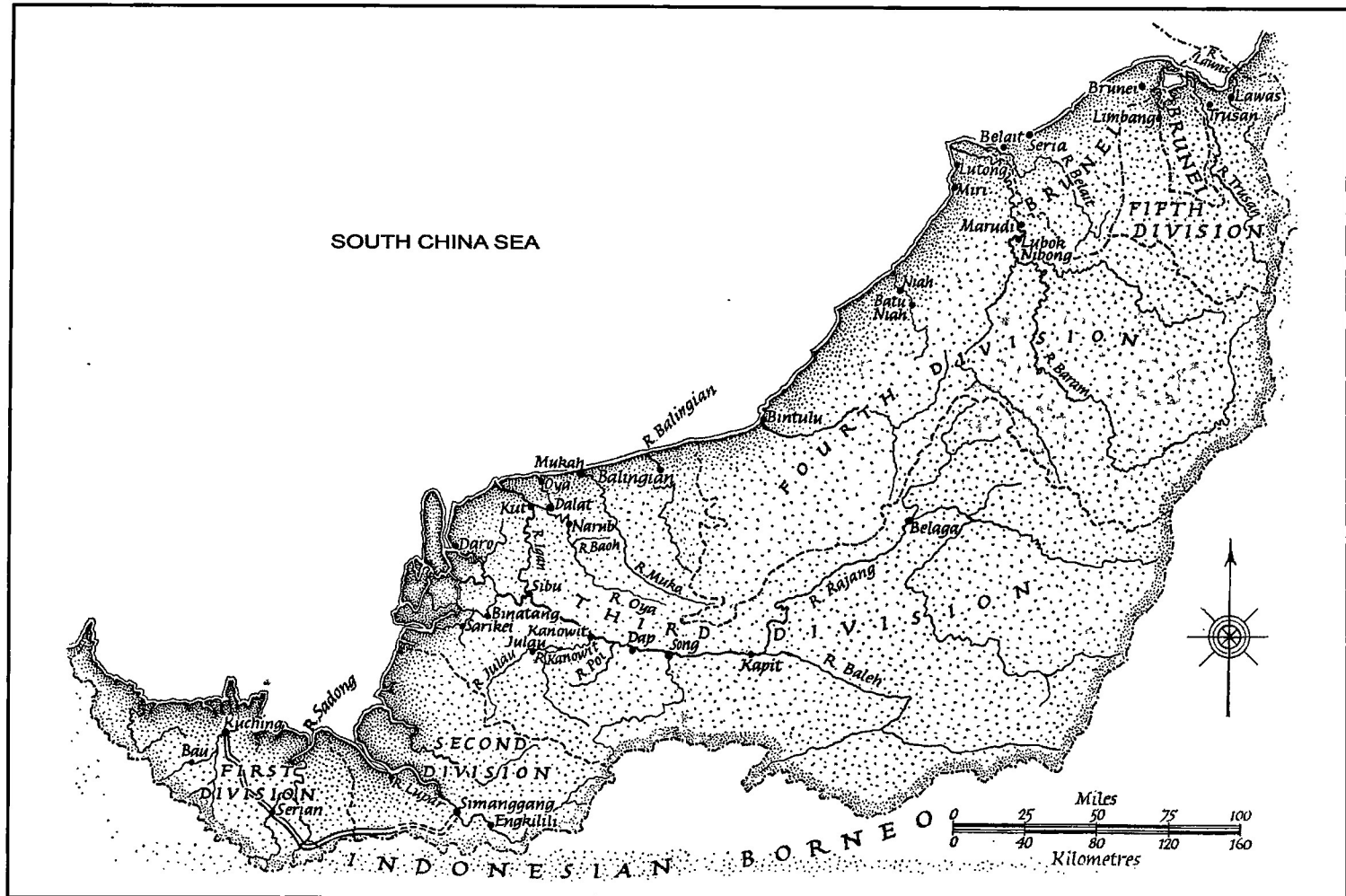


From Longhouse to Capital

Recollections



BY MOGGIE
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Map of Sarawak in the 1960s.

From Longhouse to Capital

Recollections

LEO MOGGIE



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Cover photograph by Tan Sri Dr Rais Yatim

Note to the reader: Titles of honour, office or religion conferred on the people named
in this book, as at December 2016, have not been included in the body of the book to
facilitate ease of reading but are given in the index. No disrespect is intended.

Some older spellings such as “Rejang” instead of the present “Rajang” have been used.
These were the versions the author grew up with.

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Preface

When my granddaughter Didi saw me reading Sidney Poitier's *Life Beyond Measure: Letters to My Great-Granddaughter*, she suggested I try writing my own book. That was sometime in 2011. She reminded me several times after that. I did give it some thought, but only seriously decided to put pen to paper about three years ago.

This is not a memoir. It is a series of recollections. I have never kept a diary apart from the ones that my secretary, when later I had one, maintained to remind me of my daily appointments.

The recollections in this book are drawn from memory and written in 2015. They are only as good as I remember them, but obviously age and the passage of time may have affected my recall. I apologise for any imperfections.

The book is a personal journey. It is not intended to be a historical record. Obviously, it reflects a personal bias.

Several people have helped me along the way. Azizah Mohamed, who for many years was my press secretary at the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia and at the Chairman's Office of Tenaga Nasional Bhd, was always helpful when I wanted some information checked and was also ever willing to read various drafts as they were typed. Chong Huck Joo, Masnee Idawaty Abu Bakar, Siti Noor Sabrina Mahadi and S. Balakrishnañ in my office have also assisted. Sabrina, in particular, has typed various drafts. I must record my thanks to all of them.

I am especially thankful to Noor Azlina Yunus for editing the manuscript. Her professional advice has been invaluable. My thanks also go to Jessica Gurmeet Kaur Sidhu for reviewing the final draft, particularly from the perspective of her legal training and experience. Thank you also to Ms Kay M. Lyons for preparing the index. Any mistakes and shortcomings are mine alone.

My wife Liz has been a great support to me over the years. She must have found being the wife of a politician trying at times, but she never showed any hint of it when I was still in politics. She agreed it was worthwhile for these recollections to be written and published. She was a history teacher during the early years of our marriage and she has never abandoned her interest in the subject. Didi's occasional reminders and Liz's encouragement led to the actual writing of the book.

I am lucky to have had parents like my father and mother. This book is therefore dedicated to their memory as well as to the rest of my family.

Leo Moggie
March 2018

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1

The Longhouse

Bad news travels fast. My niece Rose Sendal telephoned from Kuching on the evening of 26 July 2011. A text message came from my nephew, Nelson David (known in the family as Dennis), in Sibü. Rumah Perpetua Lika, our ten-year-old longhouse of twenty-nine families, had been completely razed to the ground by fire earlier that evening, the result of a small child playing with a cigarette lighter up in the loft of her family unit or *bilik*. It was a great tragedy for the permanent longhouse dwellers whose standard of living is, to say the least, poor. The families lost everything—old family photographs, antique jars, old gongs, traditional farming implements—that was part of the heirlooms of a typical rural Iban family.

My elder sister Lika is the head (*tuai rumah*) of Rumah Perpetua Lika. The longhouse was about an hour's drive from Sibü Airport and about half an hour's walk from the site of Rumah Nyumboh where Lika, our elder brother Sendal and I were born and grew up as children.

Born into an Iban Family

The birth certificate I have, albeit a late registration, records my date of birth as 1 October 1941. But really, people who lived in the rural areas in Sarawak at that time generally did not know their actual dates of birth. Indeed, the date of my birth was not likely to count for much in the routine of rural life. My mother insisted that I was born at the beginning of the weeding season, the year the Japanese came to Sarawak. I was therefore apparently nicknamed “Jepun”.

The arrival of Japanese soldiers is something that is generally remembered, even in rural Sarawak. The Japanese landed in Miri at dawn on 15 December 1941. In the afternoon of Christmas Day, Japanese troops captured the Kuching airfield. The weeding season in the Kanowit district was usually around the last quarter of the year. October 1st was thus as good a choice as any for a date of birth for the purpose of documentation, as even rural Sarawakians later on needed to adapt to officialdom. It is an easy date to remember, not a reflection of my parents anticipating an important date in the history of modern China when Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People’s Republic of China at a ceremony at Tiananmen Square in Beijing on 1 October 1949.

Rumah Nyumboh, Sungai Bejait, Ulu Bawan, Kanowit District, Sarawak, was a typical rural Iban longhouse of the time. It was a wooden structure on stilts. The posts and roofing were made of ironwood (*belian*). The flooring was of hardwood timber slats lashed together with rattan strips. Modern-day facilities were non-existent but that was never significant in my recollections of my longhouse childhood. Some families had fighting cocks tethered near the doors to their *bilik*. Above the fireplace in our part of the *ruai*, the covered verandah running the length of the longhouse that served as a common gallery, hung a few blackened skulls, a reminder of the headhunting past of the Iban. The longhouse was on top of a hill, with Sungai Bejait, a small stream,

at the bottom where the longhouse residents fetched water. Here, too, as young kids, we frolicked about and in the process learnt how to swim. The longhouse was nestled among a mix of mature fruit trees. Slightly further away were rubber trees. Beyond that was secondary jungle, or *temuda* in Iban, an area that had been cleared for shifting cultivation in the past but was not yet ready for another round of farming. Nyumboh, the *tuai rumah*, was my maternal grandfather.

Rumah Lika was one of the three offshoots of the former occupants of Rumah Nyumboh. As families grew in size, they split into groups and built new longhouses. Rumah Lika could be said to reflect the sort of modernisation that is being seen among the rural communities in Sarawak. It had piped water and proper sanitation. It was accessible by a sealed road. Before being connected to the grid, electricity came from a small diesel set, jointly owned by the inhabitants of the longhouse. It was built in the same basic design of the traditional Iban longhouse of my childhood days.

Nyumboh's real name was Umpau anak Weng. The family version has it that he was quite naughty, even mischievous, as a child, and they nicknamed him "Nyumboh", the Iban word for the pig-tailed macaque. The name stuck. Government documentation recorded him as such. Nyumboh was relatively well travelled in the context of his surroundings and time. He had crossed the border to Dutch Borneo, now Kalimantan, and travelled down the Mahakam River, at a time when mutual suspicion between the Rejang Iban and the Kayan across the watershed was yet to be completely removed despite a peacemaking ceremony between the Kayan and Iban in Kapit in 1924.

My father's father, Bagong anak Long, on the other hand, was a much quieter person. An accident while felling a tree when he was a young man had left him with a bad limp. While Nyumboh

would hold court in longhouse discussions (*berandau*), Bagong would be busy repairing his fishing nets or his farm implements.

I never knew either of my grandmothers. My father's mother, Luncha anak Manjan, died when my father, Irok anak Bagong, was in his teens. Father was an only child and had to learn to look after himself from an early age. As a young man he must have been noticed as someone who worked hard and was sensible. After a short-lived earlier marriage, he married the *tuai rumah*'s daughter, a girl some years his junior. When we were growing up as children, Father was already a deputy *tuai rumah*. He used to deputise for his father-in-law Nyumboh in dealing with the government and in assisting him arbitrate in disputes not only involving the occupants of our longhouse but also neighbouring longhouses in the Ulu Bawan area.

My mother, Anggol anak Nyumboh, was the second eldest of seven siblings, three boys and four girls. Her mother died before I was born. As a young girl, she engaged in normal activities that Iban girls of the time occupied themselves with. She helped look after her younger siblings. She learnt to weave mats using *bemban*, a plant that grows in marshy areas. She was competent in weaving the traditional Iban ceremonial textile *ikat* or *pua kumbu*.

According to custom, an Iban child is named after a relative at least one generation removed. I was probably so named, but I do not know who either Unggie or Munggie was, and it is not a common name. The registered version, Moggie, is definitely easier for non-Iban to pronounce. My full name is Leo Moggie anak Irok. Four doors (*bilik*) along from our family unit lived Imban and Inap, a brother and sister, neither of whom had ever married. Iban of those days, and to a certain extent today, were always concerned that there should be someone to care for them in their old age. When I was possibly about two years old, my

parents generously gave me to this “couple” to be brought up as their own. I have been told that as I kept finding my way “home”, the idea was eventually abandoned.

The family is rather vague as to when they first settled in the Ulu Bawan area. Early members of the family were already there at the time of the volcanic eruption of Krakatoa in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) in August 1883. My parents had heard stories from their elders of an event known as *lampong picah*, the term the Iban used to refer to the Krakatoa volcanic eruption, an event clearly embedded in the memory of those living at the time. Other than that, longhouse communities did not worry about the exactness of time. Their daily lives revolved around the cycle of shifting cultivation. The milestone of each part of the farming activity was influenced by the season of the year. The secondary jungle that was ready for the cycle of new planting was cleared and burnt during the dry season. This was followed by the planting of seeds and the weeding of unwanted growth so that the paddy could grow, ripen and be harvested. The farmed plot was left to fallow for a few years until the secondary jungle had regrown and was ready for another round of clearing. When there was no longer any fertile area to allow for a good harvest, the community moved to new areas. That was how the Iban spread their settlements throughout Sarawak.

Oral accounts claim the Iban migrated to Sarawak from the Kapuas valley in Kalimantan, Indonesia, in the mid-16th century. They settled in the Batang Lupar and Saribas river systems. From there, some began a new wave of migration to the Rejang valley, through the upper Kanowit and Katibas rivers. Others later went over to the Kemena, the Baram and the Limbang. My father’s great-grandfather, Libau anak Angie, came from the Lemanak, a tributary of the Batang Lupar. My mother’s side of the family came from the Skrang.

Longhouse Childhood

My memory of my longhouse childhood is rather hazy because I was in boarding school in Kuching from the age of twelve up until the time I finished secondary school, and I returned to the longhouse only once a year, during the Christmas school holidays. But interested readers can find detailed accounts of longhouse living in books such as Vinson H. Sutlive, Jr's *The Iban in Sarawak: Chronicle of a Vanishing World* and Erik Jensen's *Where Hornbills Fly: A Journey with the Headhunters of Borneo*.

There are, of course, snippets of memories. There were always people in the longhouse. The *ruai* served as a covered play area, where children amused themselves as children normally do, playing hide-and-seek and chasing each other, but always under the benign watch of the grandparents who were doing such chores as weaving mats, repairing old baskets or tending to the drying paddy on the uncovered verandah (*tanju*) in front of the *ruai*. Boys and girls played together. Some of these childhood playmates are still alive and, like me, are now grandparents. During the fruit season, my cousin Selunggang and other friends and I spent time climbing fruit trees to gather fruit, fishing in the small streams nearby and trying to trap birds that came to cool themselves by the water. At the right season, we accompanied the grown-ups in catching pigeons by raising a net to block their flight path, the prospect of having birds for dinner adding to the excitement of the catch.

Those who were old enough followed their parents and generally got involved in the day-to-day activities of the family. As children, we had fun while the adults planted paddy seeds, a process known as *nugal*, where the menfolk dibbled holes in the ground with poles while the women followed behind sprinkling seeds in the holes. The newly cleared hillside was burnt beforehand so that the ashes provided some fertiliser. The planting of seeds was always a festive occasion. Longhouse families took turns to

help each other with the planting and a general atmosphere of camaraderie prevailed. Likewise, during weeding and harvesting, families made reciprocal arrangements to complete the work. During certain periods of the paddy-growing season, families occasionally lived in temporary huts (*langkau*) close to the paddy fields. In the Kanowit district, the harvesting of paddy was usually over by the end of March or April. The longhouse community would enjoy a period of relative ease, when a few festivities celebrating the farming year usually took place before the next clearing season began all over again.

We were also involved in tapping rubber when the weather was fine. Our family smallholding was close to the longhouse, but even then we needed to get up before dawn so that the trees could be tapped when the morning was still cool and the latex flowed more freely. A specially designed kerosene wick lamp, with a protective tin shield, would be attached to our foreheads until the morning light was bright enough to do without. A small knife specially designed for tapping was used to make a slanting cut across the bark of the rubber tree. The cutting required a lot of care so that the knife just cut through the bark and not into the wood. The milky liquid latex would flow down the slanting cut into a small cup. When the heat of the morning sun was up, the latex would stop flowing and could then be collected from the cups, poured into tin buckets and taken to the collecting shed. Here, the latex was poured into an oblong tin container, where a small quantity of formic acid was stirred into the latex so that it would coagulate into rubber blocks. These were then pressed through a mangle to flatten them into thinner sheets for sale to rubber merchants.

Another snippet of memory of my longhouse childhood was listening to the conversation of the adults as they sat around a small fire when the evenings were cool. Not surprisingly,

conversations tended to centre on paddy planting and the damage to crops from animals and pests.

Sometimes relatives from other parts of Sarawak would come to visit. On these occasions, the adults would stay up until the early hours of the morning exchanging stories. One of the ways of showing hospitality was to keep visitors awake as long as possible. Rice wine or *tuak* would be served. Occasionally, there were visits from people known to be good storytellers, or *pandai ensera*. They were usually invited to narrate the ballads of Iban folklore, the story of the comic character Apai Saloi or of the cunning mousedeer Pelanduk, or the exploits of the heroes of that mythical abode known as Panggau Libau and the stories of Sengalang Burong and of Kling and Kumang. Through evenings like these, traditions were transmitted through the generations where a child grew up hearing the moral lessons of right and wrong and learnt who the heroes and villains were.

I was only vaguely aware of what was going on and how activities associated with hill paddy farming, which had been part of Iban life for generations, dominated the routine of life. I can now recollect the deference the adults always accorded Meringai, a much older cousin of my father, whose family occupied the *bilik* next to ours. Meringai was always consulted before the start of each step in the farming cycle—when the clearing for the new planting was to start, and when the first harvest was to begin. Now, of course, one realises that traditional culture was based on respecting the balance of nature, a sense of harmony between the human world and the world of the spirits. The world of the spirits had to be propitiated with the required rituals and offerings. And in divining the right balance, the community was guided by what they believed to be messages from the spirit world, conveyed through dreams and the behaviour of animals and certain birds. Meringai's reputation as a skilful interpreter of these messages was

justified by the continuing good harvests that were enjoyed each year by the families in the longhouse.

Maintaining harmony with nature was manifested in other ways as well. For example, Iban society had a clear understanding in regard to the level of kinship at which marriage was allowed. At a certain level, it was considered incest and therefore prohibited, as in the case of first cousins. Further down the kinship line, where marriage was allowed but was not encouraged, certain rituals had to be performed. When Talut, a cousin from my mother's side and Kilat, a second cousin from my father's side, decided to get married, they had to undergo a ritual bath in the presence of the residents of the longhouse. A pig was slaughtered upstream from the bathing couple and some incantation was recited. The blood of the pig was believed to cleanse the bad vibes of nature.

On an occasion, such as before a young man embarked on his long travels or *bejalai*, a voyage of discovery to an unfamiliar land, a special ceremony would be performed. A pig would be slaughtered. Its liver would be displayed on a plate and passed around among the elders to examine what fortunes awaited the young man. Of course, even traditional society is not above hedging its bets. The pig for the ceremonial ritual would have been properly fenced and fed and specially looked after. The liver would be that of a healthy animal.

As a young boy I was, of course, not conscious of the meaning of all these events, other than being rather curious about the various rites that formed part of longhouse culture at that time and the prominent use of the pig as a sacrificial animal in longhouse rituals. These rituals are no longer part of present-day Iban society. Most people have converted to Christianity and Christian practice has simplified the way ceremonies are conducted.

Leaving the longhouse for boarding school at an early age meant that I was never fully immersed in the usual childhood

upbringing in a longhouse. But the time spent there during my early years and the school holidays was sufficient to imprint a memory of the life of a subsistence farming family and the need to be respectful to nature and the environment, to be part of a community and to be part of the routine of tending to the necessities of life.

2

Christianity and School Years

Education in Sarawak, even as late as the 1950s, was provided either by the Chinese guilds, the Malay religious schools (madrasah) or the Christian missions.

Between 1841 and 1946, Sarawak was ruled by an English dynastic family known as the White Rajahs of Sarawak. In 1839, the Sultan of Brunei gave part of Sarawak, then under Brunei rule, to English adventurer James Brooke for his help in putting down piracy. The expansion and maintenance of Brooke's rule to other parts of Sarawak was buttressed by the building of forts at various strategic locations where personnel were posted to provide some law and order. To someone like James Brooke who had grown up in 19th-century Victorian England, it also involved "civilising" an egalitarian, pagan native society through the influence of Christian belief.

Fort Emma, the first of the forts in the Rejang valley, was built in 1849, just below the confluence of the Kanowit and Rejang rivers. Apart from providing control, with the coming of Chinese traders the fort served as a nucleus for the development

of a bazaar at Kanowit. The strategic location of Kanowit at the confluence of the Rejang and Kanowit rivers also influenced the decision of the Catholic missions to establish their first church in the Rejang valley at Kanowit. Brooke's policy was to assign different zones to the different Christian denominations to propagate their teachings. This zoning was intended to pre-empt any potential conflict among the different denominations as they sought to convert the local inhabitants. Thus, Lundu, Batang Lupar, the Saribas River valley and the Krian River valley were reserved for the Anglican mission. The Rejang was earmarked for the Catholics, and later also for the Methodist mission.

In 1881, Charles Brooke, the second White Rajah, invited the Catholic Church to come to Sarawak. In response, the Missionary Society of St Joseph's (otherwise known as the Mill Hill Missionaries because of the location of its headquarters at Mill Hill, London) built St Francis Xavier's Church in Kanowit in 1883. Christian influence was expected to temper the temptation on the part of the natives to satisfy their restlessness in marauding ways. The early missionaries were also very practical people. They foresaw that the saving of souls would be better realised with the help of education and medical services.

Conversion to Catholicism

In the case of our family, the serious illness (possibly malaria) of my elder sister Lika, sometime in 1947, was the catalyst that led to our conversion to the Catholic faith, and also to my two siblings and me going to school. Traditional medicine did not have any effect. The longhouse shamans (*manang*) tried their best to cure her, but she showed no signs of improvement. As a last resort, and possibly at the suggestion of a relative, my parents took Lika to the medical clinic at the Catholic mission in Kanowit, which was run by the Franciscan sisters, among whom was the much-loved Sister Winifreda (Sister Frida).

It was no light undertaking in those days. They had to carry the sick child for at least two hours along the rough jungle path that led to Sengayan on the bank of the Rejang River. There, a longboat was kept in a *bansar* (rudimentary boat shed). They then had to paddle some distance down and across the huge Rejang River to the Kanowit bazaar on the opposite bank. The clinic was in the mission compound beyond the bazaar.

Sister Frida and the other nursing sisters saw that my sister was beyond medical help and informed my parents that she was not going to survive. This being the case, they asked permission to baptise Lika and administer the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, which is given to those who are gravely ill and, in most cases, expected to die. The story in the family goes that in an almost miraculous way Lika showed immediate signs of recovery after receiving these sacraments. My parents were impressed. They asked to take instruction to become Catholics. All our family members were soon duly baptised. Perpetua seemed to have been a popular choice as a Christian name among the girls in Kanowit at the time, so Lika was baptised Perpetua. My older brother Sendal was given the baptismal name Clement and I was given Leo, the choice probably influenced by the fact that the name of the parish priest in Kanowit at that time was Leo Barry (whom I was fortunate enough to visit in his retirement in Fremantle, Australia, in 1977).

A number of families in our area were also converted. They were taught simple prayers and catechism. Whether they fully appreciated or understood Christian theology hardly mattered. Their tradition recognises the existence of some supreme being, and replacing pagan rituals with Christian prayers made for a simpler way of living and managing traditional taboos. With prayers, there is no need to cancel going to the farm just because the call of an omen bird is heard along the way, a deer is seen at the edge of the paddy field, or because a dream the previous

night was considered unpropitious. My father was baptised as Joannes, and became known as Joannes Irok anak Bagong. From then on he was a conscientious practising Catholic, always saying a prayer before he did anything, at the same time keeping alive the cultural aspects of longhouse tradition he had grown up with. My mother became Annie Anggol anak Nyumboh. She was not as demonstrative in exercising her Christian faith, but she too kept true to her baptismal vow throughout her life.

Father's exposure to government officials in his role as deputy *tuai rumah* and his association with the Catholic priests in Kanowit helped him become aware of the importance of education. The only school in Kanowit at that time was St Francis Xavier's School run by the Catholic mission. My brother Clement Sendal was enrolled at the school in 1948 and later went to the Sacred Heart School, another Catholic mission school, in Sibul. He married Patricia Umos anak Keling, who was a trained midwife and later a community nurse. Clement worked in the Lands and Survey Department for some years before transferring to the Department of Agriculture until his retirement. He died in 2000. My sister Perpetua Lika went to the Convent School in Kanowit in 1950, then to St Elizabeth's Convent in Sibul. She taught in two rural village schools for a while until she married and followed her husband, David Jaun, as he served in a number of places in the country as a non-commissioned officer with the First Malaysian Rangers Battalion. She took over from our father as head of the longhouse after he died in 1998. I was the youngest of my parents' three children.

Starting School

I started my education at St Francis Xavier's School, Kanowit, in early 1950. The school provided an open floor space where each child could unroll his bedding at night and roll it up in the morning. Another simple covered space nearby, with earth

flooring, served as a place where the boys did their cooking and had their meals. Food was not provided and we arrived at school with a big sack of rice. About once a week, Father would make the arduous journey from the longhouse to bring Clement and me such items as he could provide—fish, sometimes a bit of meat from successful hunting trips and both wild and cultivated vegetables. Other parents did the same for their sons. During the weekends, we pupils foraged for vegetables such as ferns (*paku* and *meding*) in the nearby jungle.

We were taught arithmetic, English, reading and catechism. A typical day started with attending early morning Mass at the church before breakfast and classes. The church building suffered from the effects of the fighting at the end of the Japanese war, with bullet holes and a leaking roof. One of the memories I have as an altar boy for the Christmas Midnight Mass was seeing the church packed and the congregation putting up their umbrellas to keep dry when it rained. The hymn “Silent Night” was sung in full voice. Some among the congregation clearly believed in starting their Christmas festivities early and the coffee shops in the bazaar had obviously enjoyed good patronage for refreshments other than coffee.

I was not sure what to expect when, in 1952, at the end of my third year at St Francis Xavier’s, I was introduced to Father Dennis Galvin, who was Acting Principal of Batu Lintang School and Teachers’ Training College in Kuching. During his visit to Kanowit, he offered me a place in Primary Five at Batu Lintang, starting in January 1953. At that time, Batu Lintang was the only government school and teachers’ training college in Sarawak. The school provided proper boarding facilities and pocket money to cover necessary expenses, such as toothbrushes and toothpaste.

Mother was not pleased when I told her the news. She had never travelled beyond the longhouse except to go to the bazaar at Kanowit. She had no idea where Kuching was. To her, I was

too young to be away from home, to return only once a year for a month during the end-of-year school holidays. Father, on the other hand, had a more realistic view of things. To him, it was an opportunity not to be missed.

Father clearly foresaw the importance of education. He was always passionate about encouraging the families in our area to send their children to school. In the late 1950s, he persuaded the Kanowit District Council to build a primary school near our longhouse at Ulu Bawan, giving his own land on which to build the school, and was the chairman of the school committee for many years. Sekolah Rendah Kerajaan Ulu Bawan continues to this day to provide primary-level education for the children of the residents of a number of longhouses in the area.

Being selected to study at Batu Lintang was the real ladder in the journey of life that led to where I am today. I guess I was lucky. I had done well in my classes at St Francis Xavier's, taking turn for the top three places in class with two other boys: William Hii, the son of our class teacher, who was not a native boy; and Clement Ingun, who was much older than I was. He was to go to Batu Lintang a few years later as a Grade 2A teacher trainee and subsequently rose to be a middle-level Education Department official at the Divisional Education Office in Sibul until his retirement. I had good grades. I also had a brother and sister at the Mission School and Convent in Kanowit. The priests there must have realised the financial burden this put on our parents.

Batu Lintang, Kuching

The journey from the rural outback of Bejait, Ulu Bawan, Kanowit, to Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, was an introduction to the outside world. The riverboat trip from Kanowit to Sibul took half a day. As an eleven-year-old, I must have gawked at how big Sibul appeared to be.

Sited at the confluence of the Rejang and Igan rivers, Sibul was already a busy riverine town, a major hub of commerce and trade. The industrious Foochow people from Fuzhou Province in China, recruited by the Second Rajah in 1901 to set up an agricultural settlement in Sibul, and their descendants, contributed much to the growth of Sibul and continue to do so today. There were ships anchored in the middle of the channel—ships that connected Sibul and the Rejang hinterland with Kuching and places further afield, such as Singapore and Port Swettenham (now Port Klang) in the Malay peninsula.

The student contingents bound for Batu Lintang from the districts of Kapit, Kanowit, Mukah and Sibul were mainly trainee teachers, except for a few boys like me who were to attend the primary school. We boarded the MV *Rejang* with our little bundles of personal belongings. The MV *Rejang* was a big ship in the eyes of an eleven-year-old. Its steel hull was filled with various goods reeking of the pungent smells of rubber, pepper and rattan, adding to an overpowering mixture of stifling heat and murkiness. The boat went on its way to Binatang (now Bintangor) and then Sarikei, where at each town it berthed to pick up more passengers and cargo. Watching the loading of cargo kept us occupied. Towards late afternoon, the ship was ready to depart. With anchor raised and horn blowing, it took off down the Rejang to the open South China Sea on its overnight journey to Kuching. The ship made its way along the coast to Muara Tebas, then up the Sarawak River. As the dawn mists lifted, it continued its stately passage up the river, past Fort Margherita and the Astana on the right and the wet market on the left, and then berthed at the wharf in Kuching, just below the Brooke Dockyard.

The Batu Lintang School and Teachers' Training College campus was a collection of thatched longhouses that used to house prisoners of war and civilian internees during the Japanese Occupation. Under the British colonial administration, the

government began to introduce education and the camp buildings were converted for use as the first teacher training college and government primary school in Sarawak. (This transition is described in Julitta Lim Shau Hua's *From an Army Camp to a Teachers' College*.)

I joined Batu Lintang as a Primary Five student in 1953. The students in the class were all native boys—Malay, Iban, Kayan, Kenyah, Melanau, Bidayuh, Kelabit, Murut, Bisaya and Penan—from all over Sarawak. David Labang and Teri Maran were from the Kelabit highlands. Anthony Lawai was from Long Akah in the Baram. Oyong, the only Penan boy, was also from the Baram. There was Edward Panggil, a Bisaya from Batu Danau in Limbang; Yusof Abunawas, a Malay from Sibü; Solomon Buyong from Saratok; Frank Apau from Betong; and Johnny Mustapha from Simanggang.

The lyrics of the original Batu Lintang school song, sung to the tune of “Road to the Isles”, reflected well the student intake of those years. Some former students of Batu Lintang may recollect minor variations in the wording of the song from those given in Lim’s book as well as in Abang Yusuf Puteh’s *Who Shall Separate Us*, but the lyrics that remain etched in my memory are as follows:

It’s a far cry from Kuching to Brunei
For Dayaks, Ibans, Dusuns and Malays
And for Kenyahs, Muruts, Kayans far away
Yet all of us are gathered here today

• *Chorus*

From the Baram down the Rejang
From Kalaka do we come
From kampongs in the hills and in the plains
Through the jungle tracks with heavy loads

But hearts both light and free
As back we come to study once again

It's a long way that we have to come
From Mukah, Oya, Dalat and Betong
And from Lundu out across the open sea
And from Simanggang do we come
(Repeat Chorus)

Trainee teachers underwent two different levels of training. Those who had completed secondary-level education (Cambridge Junior Certificate), did a two-year course and upon graduation qualified as Grade 2A teachers to teach upper primary and lower secondary classes. Those who did not have a secondary school qualification would be categorised as Grade 3A trainees. They did a three-year training programme to qualify as teachers for various primary schools that were to be opened throughout Sarawak as well as in Brunei. Students from Brunei were also enrolled at Batu Lintang, both for teacher training as well as in the primary school, as Brunei had yet to open its own teacher training facilities and government schools in the mid-1950s.

Trainee teachers and schoolboys like us were billeted in various longhouses called “huts”. During the first year, I was billeted in Hut 19, later renamed Rumah Arni. The captain of Hut 19 was Arni Lampam, a lanky young man from Miri, probably in his early twenties. Although he boarded at Batu Lintang, he and a few other boys, including Abang Yusuf Abang Puteh and Awangku Idris, were already in secondary school and attended classes at St Thomas’s School in Kuching town. The school bus took them there each day. Arni was to be the first Malay boy from Sarawak to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Malaya in Singapore. He joined the Sarawak civil service when Sarawak was still a British colony and served in a number of districts before he was promoted to be Resident

in Simanggang, later in Limbang and then in Miri, and finally as Permanent Secretary in one of the senior ministries in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Upon retiring from the civil service, he joined Sarawak Shell.

Abang Yusuf Puteh also went on to become a successful student at the University of Malaya. He too joined the Sarawak civil service and quickly rose through the ranks to become a very effective State Secretary in Sarawak for most of the 1970s. He instilled discipline and a sense of excellence in the service during his time. Awangku Idris joined the Brunei civil service and as Pengiran Idris was his country's ambassador in Tokyo before his retirement.

As I recall, a typical day at Batu Lintang started with a wake-up bell at six in the morning. After a quick wash, the students gathered on the school field for morning assembly where the headmaster made some announcements, followed by some stretching exercises and a run around the school field. Then there would be about half an hour of activities assigned on a weekly rotation by the respective huts. Some boys cut the grass and generally kept the compound tidy. Others had a turn at cleaning the lavatories and bathing areas. Lavatories using the bucket system were situated in various cubicles in a number of sheds close to the bathing area. The night soil men emptied the buckets every morning.

Meals were prepared by the kitchen staff headed by Haji Kawi and Mohktar, after which classes resumed. Breakfast was usually bread or toast, tea or coffee, sometimes eggs and some fruit, usually bananas or papayas. If my memory serves me correctly, classes started at 8 a.m. There was a break for lunch. When school finished, students were expected to take part in various sporting activities. Dinner was followed by an hour of study time. After a full day of classroom work and various activities, the huts went silent very quickly when the lights went out.

Batu Lintang had a good influence on the students who studied there. The surroundings, the way the school was run, the friendships formed and the fostering of initiative contributed to a wholesome upbringing. It was not just about passing exams. More meaningful in later life was the experience of growing up where self-help and initiative were encouraged yet where clear rules for community living were expected, and accepted, as a matter of course. Those boys who experienced Batu Lintang in the 1950s benefited greatly from it all and became the responsible individuals they were in later life. For the shorter breaks at Easter or in mid-year, we used to visit places not far from Kuching. On one occasion, we spent some time in Santubong with the Sarawak Museum staff on an archaeological dig at the site of the early Chinese trading settlement there, a wonderful introduction to an appreciation of archaeological evidence in the reconstruction of past history. On another occasion, we were at Bako National Park assisting the Forestry Department who were setting up the park. I remember a scouting trip to Bau and Mount Singghi. We also observed the agriculture extension work at Tarat near Serian. At the end of the year, we went home for a month's holiday. For most of us, this holiday period meant helping the family to tap rubber or to look after the pepper garden or the paddy field.

I had five full and fruitful years at Batu Lintang, from Primary Five in 1953 up to the Junior Cambridge Examination at the end of Form Three, in 1957. We were not particularly academic students but we were most certainly well rounded in our outlook on life. We passed all the necessary exams. More important was the upbringing that helped mould our character.

The teachers were dedicated and are still remembered by the boys who were under their care. Father Dennis Galvin subsequently returned to duties with the Catholic mission and became the first Catholic Bishop in Miri in the 1960s. Father Douglas Rawlins was the Anglican priest attached to Batu Lintang

In this personal recollection of the main events in his life, Tan Sri Datuk Amar Leo Moggie brings to life the atmosphere of his early upbringing against a backdrop of nature and subsistence farming in the interior of Sarawak; his formal education in a number of boarding schools in Sarawak's main towns, separated from his family from a young age; his early career as a civil servant in Sarawak; and, after entering politics, his rapid rise to assemblyman, Member of Parliament, Sarawak state minister and federal cabinet minister.

Well known for his cool persona—composed, confident and down to earth—Leo Moggie's humble beginnings and his Dayak roots were to influence the way he performed his various roles and duties, initially as the district officer of Kapit where his main means of transport around his district was by longboat up often-treacherous rivers, his keen interest in the welfare of his constituents regardless of their native ethnicity, his loyalty to his political party colleagues and his ability to negotiate the shifting sands of Sarawak politics. In the way that the pages of a history book can never aspire to do, he conjures up the atmosphere and excitement of Sarawakian and federal politics.

These recollections also document the incredible changes and challenges that took place during the author's three tenures as Minister of Energy, Telecommunications and Posts (later Multimedia) and Minister of Works, among them the Bakun hydropower scheme, the privatisation of telecommunication services, the construction of the North-South and East-West Highways, the building of the Kuala Lumpur International Airport and the implementation of the Multimedia Super Corridor. The book is enhanced with a collection of photographs illustrating the author's personal and professional journey.



Tan Sri Datuk Amar Leo Moggie, born in 1941 into a humble family from a longhouse in Kanowit in the interior of Sarawak, is one of Malaysia's longest-serving cabinet ministers and one of its most experienced and well-respected Dayak leaders. Educated at Sarawak mission and government schools and at the University of Otago and Pennsylvania State University, he spent a decade in the civil service in Sarawak before entering politics in 1974. Over the next thirty years, he served in various capacities in the Sarawak state government and held three ministerial positions in the federal cabinet. He is currently the chairman of Tenaga Nasional Bhd.

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