

REFLECTIONS

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After 5 years of teaching in a secondary school where I enjoyed being with students and participating in their activities, I became a professional librarian in 1976. In the early years of librarianship in Malaysia, local librarians had to obtain their professional qualifications from abroad, until library schools were established in Malaysia from 1968 onwards. I began my PPM (Persatuan Perpustakaan Malaysia = Library Association of Malaysia) part-time course in 1972 and took The Library Association (British) examinations. Only 10% of the class of 70 students made it to the end. At this juncture, it is fitting to recognize the role and achievements of the pioneer Malaysian librarians who established PPM in 1955 with the objectives of pursuing librarianship as a recognized profession by the Government, setting up the National Library and State Public Libraries, and working towards the establishment of library schools in universities. For them, it was “ask not what PPM can do for you, but what you can do for PPM” to enhance the profession. I am grateful to all my mentor librarians. I had served as the PPM Coordinator for Library Science courses that prepared Malaysians for professional examinations run by the British and Australian Library Associations in the latter half of the 1970s. These courses were discontinued after Malaysia established its own library schools, and the Associations became professional accrediting bodies.

I joined the U.S. Embassy in 1976 as the audio visual librarian in the Lincoln Cultural Center (LCC) which was located in a double-storey bungalow house diagonally opposite Ampang Park. LCC was under USIS (U.S. Information Service) which was located in the U.S. Embassy at AIA Building. At the end of that year, LCC Director Mrs. Chooi-Hon Ho resigned and migrated to Australia. She was replaced by a former director of the National Library of Malaysia Ms Kim-See Ch’ng who later became the Library Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore until her retirement. I was lucky not to be around during the Japanese Red Army seizure of the U.S. Embassy in AIA Building in 1975.

The technology of that time was 16mm film (motion pictures), manual typewriter, audio cassettes and wireless file. Over the last 37 years, film was

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replaced by video (starting with the notoriously unreliable open reel tapes), typewriter by word processing (starting with the green Wang monitors), cassettes by CDs (and CDs by pen drives), and wireless file by internet. The wireless file and cables would come in by telex at night and the technician collected them the next morning and distributed the hard copies to the USIS officers. You need to experience all these tools to feel what work life in the office was like then.



1976 : USIS/Lincoln Cultural Center

In 1976, I was sent to learn from the audio visual unit in USIS Bangkok, Thailand, which was many times larger than USIS Malaysia. In 1977, I visited Europe (including UK) and had consultation at an America House (Haus) in Frankfurt, Germany and the USIS Library in London. I attended audio visual and computer courses at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. We used slides and audio synchronization and punch cards, not sure if this means anything to the current generation. I was impressed with the English teaching program at AUA (American University Alumni) Center, Bangkok (10,000 students quarterly), noting that English language teaching is a current major pursuit in Malaysia.

Politically, it was after the end of the Vietnam War. President Gerald Ford had taken over from Nixon. I had my experience with the Vietnamese boat people who survived the extreme ordeal in the South China Sea and landed in Malaysia and other neighboring countries--it was the survivor of the fittest--an estimated 250,000 perished. We went to show films at the refugee camp. With a capacity of 4,500, Pulau Bidong (off the coast of Terengganu) housed around 40,000 at the peak in 1979 in an area the size of a soccer field. Some 10,000 had to be repatriated back to Vietnam when Pulau Bidong was closed in 1991. Altogether,

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some 250,000 Vietnamese refugees transited Malaysia to settlement countries. Malaysia saw the majority of the landings compared to neighboring countries (total of some 1.25 million refugees). In 2007, I had the opportunity to visit Pulau Bidong which was recovering from the environmental disaster. It was solemn indeed. Compared to the current refugee situation, the boat people did not manage to enter and reside in Malaysia.

It was also the time of the genocide committed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Estimates of up to 3 million Cambodians were killed. Response from the international community, including ASEAN, was slow. It was a terrible time for the Cambodians. Lacking present day instantaneous communication and global publicity (the Vietnam War was fought on the American TV screen, but no journalist was there to file daily reports on the Cambodian genocide), the rest of the world, including Malaysia and its neighbors, was consumed with its own pursuit of happiness. The rest is history.



1980 : Secretary Library Association

In 1980, I was sent to the U.S. for FSNEP (Foreign Service National Employee Program) training. It was my first trip to the U.S. - Washington, DC, NYC, Indiana, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, California and Hawaii. Apart from consultations at USIA, other memorable visits included the Smithsonian museums, the huge bumpkins in Indiana, the Johnson Space Center, Santa Fe, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, Disneyland, Frisco and Honolulu. Unfortunately in

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Albuquerque Airport, New Mexico, I lost my camera with the photos of the Space Center and Sante Fe. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to watch the presidential debates (Jimmy Carter/Ronald Reagan). On the way home, I stopped in Tokyo, Japan for additional audio visual training. I was graciously hosted by my Japanese counterpart (Tom) in Nagoya. KL was served by the USIS Regional Audio Visual Center (RAVC) and the regional film library in Tokyo. This came in useful when I was asked to work with American RAVC Officer Kurt Wenzel and two USIS Tokyo Japanese audio visual specialists to design the sound and projection system in the Embassy multipurpose room in 1983. I returned to KL to see the change of LCC Director to Mrs. Sophia Lim who served until 2005 when Gerard George took over.

I got married to Emilia Chew in 1981, the same year that Ronald Reagan became President and Mahathir became Prime Minister. It was a tough time for foreign spouses who had to leave the country every three months to get a new visa. It was not funny when one had to leave his country with his spouse every three months. This ruling wrecked a good number of marriages. We made representations to then Home Minister Musa Hitam who was also Deputy Prime Minister. My MP then was Rafidah Aziz. The following year it was extended to a one-year spouse visa, renewable annually without having to leave the country, but one needs to parade the entire family in front of immigration officers during renewal time. I think it has not changed since then, but correct me if I am wrong (the last time was over 20 year ago when my Thai spouse got her permanent residence in Malaysia).

During the Carter Administration (which was much pre-occupied with the hostage situation in Tehran), USIA (U.S. Information Agency) changed its name to USICA (U.S. International Communication Agency). It was not flattering, so it was back to USIA after Reagan became President. It was the star-war Presidency leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. The Cold War officially ended in 1992.

In 1981, Malaysia had a new prime minister who was to be in power for 22 years. U.S. Congress suspended IMET (International Military Education and Training) to Malaysia in 1991 over the issue of first asylum to the boat people. This was restored in 1993. U.S.-Malaysia political relations for the next 21 years would remain cool, despite increasing trade, U.S. investments, military and security cooperation, educational ties and popular culture, among other things. In 1984, the New York Philharmonic cancelled the performance in Malaysia over a piece written by a Jewish composer.

In 1982, as the Chair of Library Services to Special Groups (PPM-Librarians Association of Malaysia), I went to Sweden on a study tour of librarianship for

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the visually impaired, senior citizens, hospital patients, prisoners, and other disabled users. I was asked to extend my stay by the Swedish Institute, but as my wife was recovering from appendectomy, I hurried home via Vienna, Austria. I came back to Malaysia to help set up libraries in various welfare institutions, including the Pudu Prison where I had the opportunity to enter without being an inmate. It was a sobering experience when the gates closed behind you. Pudu Prison is no more today.

The same year, we were told that the lease of the LCC premise could not be extended. We pleaded for one more year, so that we could move into the present Chancery building at 376 Jalan Tun Razak in 1983, but to no avail. So we packed and moved the 20,000 volume library to a two-storey bungalow behind the Chinese Embassy. We got an award for this terrific move. The following year (1983), we moved the LCC to the current location - a beautifully-designed library occupying the second floor (the designer won an award). The Embassy was officially opened by Ambassador Ronald Palmer and Congressman Jim Wright of Texas. Located inside the Embassy, walk-in visitors and usage of LCC dropped. We had to re-think our strategy - changed the name to Lincoln Resource Center (LRC) and embarked on physical outreach - taking our physical resources, including books and videos, to audiences in universities and government offices. We moved to an emphasis on elite audiences and away from public and youths, much to the regret of a professional librarian. Much has changed over the last 30 years. The U.S. Embassy was the tallest and biggest building in this location in 1983. Today it is hidden by much taller buildings. We can no longer see KLCC from the Embassy. There were only 2 shopping malls--Sungei Wang and Ampang Park then. Today, malls are everywhere in the city. I don't know most of the new buildings which are countless.

I did my share in promoting American Studies in Malaysia. It started off with the retreat in Golden Sands Hotel, Penang in 1982. In 1983, the Pro Tem Committee of Malaysian Association of American Studies (MAAS) was formed and MAAS was officially registered in 1984. Two leading scholars of American Studies, Professor K.S. Nathan and Professor Pamela Sodhy, served as President and Vice President. Later on, I served as Treasurer and Vice President under Philip Mathew and Munis Paran. I had the opportunity to attend the American Studies Conferences in Hyderabad, India, in 1989 and South Korea in 1990, when I was able to visit the DMZ. Unlike its broad scope in several Asian countries such as India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and even Vietnam, American Studies in Malaysia is more confined to subjects such as U.S. foreign policy and U.S. history. It finally took root at the American Studies Center established in UKM (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) in 2007. MAAS continues to organize relevant forums from time to time. MAAS was once a leading member of the

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Asian Federation of American Studies Associations (AFASA) which is now dormant.

The sad event of 1984 was the demise of my mother. The birth of my first son Christopher helped my father through this difficult time. The following year, I went to a reference librarian course in Manila, Philippines, with Sophia Lim and Gerard George. The Marcos era was coming to an end, so security was an issue. Guards carried machine guns in the hotel lobby. We were cautioned not to venture out of the hotel, so we complied. On hindsight, perhaps I should have been braver and got to see more of Manila on my own. On the way to the airport, I saw a mile-long queue of Filipinos waiting to buy air tickets at the terminal. It was kind of relief to be on the plane home. In 1986, Marcos went into exile.

My second son Raymond was born in 1986, and my daughter Teresa was born in 1988. In the 1987, I took up the Presidency of AEMEA (American Embassy Malaysian Employees Association). It was a position that no FSN (Foreign Service National = local employee) wanted at that time. Once I got on it, it was not possible to dismount until 21 years later, for the same reason - no FSN wanted it and the few who could volunteer were constrained by their work and supervisors. Finally, my senior colleagues Yee, Sugu and Ravi came to the rescue. I had the opportunity to work with the Embassy local employees and management. Supporting me were many AEMEA Board members over the 21 years. We went through good years and bad years in terms of funding for Embassy, USIA and other departments and agencies, including zero-based budgeting during the Clinton Administration. When I joined the Embassy, there was no job classification. Your grade depended on your supervisor, subject to HR approval. There was no FSN handbook. Overall, the Embassy management has been very supportive of FSN compensation, and things got better. We are now in the negative part of another cycle - sequestration. We began celebrating the three local ethnic/religious festivals in the embassy, so that the American community could have a hands-on experience. We had all three in one year, but after a couple of year, the financial and fatigue factors kicked in. Now we have only one per year - Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and Deepavali. There were many individual and group cases that I had to deal with, but this is not the place to list them. I am pleased that Embassy management and fellow colleagues extended their cooperation and appreciated my service and I was presented with a certificate of appreciation by Ambassador James Keith. My work with USIS/PA and at the Embassy has also been appreciated with the many awards such as the FSN (Employee) of the Year (twice 2007 and 1995) and Meritorious Honor. Most of all, it gave me the opportunity to serve my fellow colleagues and Malaysians well. My relationship with Malaysians, Americans and others will continue after I leave the Embassy, e.g., I am in contact with American officers and speakers of the last century, and of course my Malaysian and international

friends. I would remain in touch and appreciate being invited as a guest to the many upcoming events.

As a professional librarian, I was actively involved in the Library (later Librarians) Association of Malaysia (PPM) from 1972, and went on to become its President (1993-1997), as well as the Chairman of the Executive Board of the Tenth Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL X) (1993-1996). I had earlier participated in the CONSAL V (KL) in 1981 and CONSAL VI (Singapore) in 1983, and CONSAL IX (Bangkok) in 1993. The highlight of CONSAL X was the one-week conference in Kuala Lumpur of 600 librarians from all over the world. It was officiated by then Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim. The National Library of Malaysia under its Director General Datin Mariam Abdul Kadir, provided the bulk of the resources. All this was made possible by the contributions of my fellow Malaysian librarians. In 1996 and 1998, I had the privilege of being a member of the Malaysian Librarians Association's delegation to the ILFA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) Conferences in Beijing, China and Amsterdam, Netherlands. I am glad I was succeeded by Rashidah Begum (Librarian of USM) as President of PPM. PPM projected its role in IFLA and Rashidah became the Chair of IFLA Asia-Oceania Section. The sad events of 1997 were the passing of my father and my mother-in-law.



1983 : CONSAL VI Singapore

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1993 : CONSAL IX Bangkok - Thailand Passing the Chair/Flag to Malaysia

In 1998, APEC was held in Malaysia. All the Embassy employees were involved in the POTUS (President of the U.S.) visit. Vice President Al Gore represented President Clinton. A small part of his speech at a business dinner upset the Malaysians. Subsequent days, we in the Lincoln Center received countless calls that jammed the phone lines. This event resulted in a down turn in bilateral relations for the next few years. I had the privilege of participating in two other POTUS visits later on - President Clinton APEC in Brunei in 2000 and President Bush APEC in Thailand in 2003. In addition to POTUS visits, Vice President Dan Quayle came to Malaysia in 1989 when I, as AEMEA President, had the privilege to greet him in the Embassy. I remember supporting the following State Secretaries' visits - George Shultz, James Baker, Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright, Colin Power, Condoleezza Rice, and Hilary Clinton. Too bad there was no POTUS visit to Malaysia during my 38 years here. The last POTUS visit was President Lyndon Johnson in 1966. There is a Kampung LBJ in Negeri Sembilan.

The U.S. scored many firsts in its space program during my time at the Embassy - unmanned spacecrafts to neighboring planets, the space shuttle era, and the international space station. We were saddened by the Space Shuttle Challenger tragedy in which 7 American astronauts lost their lives in 1986. During the First Gulf War in 1990-1991, the LCC was closed for 3 months. The LCC staff did data entry daily during this time, so we were able to automate the 20,000-item library catalog and circulation system within a few months. This was quite an

achievement. Tragedy struck on September 11, 2001. The destruction of life and property and symbol in New York City unfolded on our TV screens. Almost 3,000 people, majority Americans, including 372 foreigners (3 Malaysians), perished. America and the world were shocked. Condemnation and messages of comfort and peace poured in. Prime Minister Mahathir came to the Embassy to sign the condolence book. As AEMEA President, I represented the Malaysian employees to deliver brief remarks at the memorial service in the Embassy a little later. Security in embassies and air travel increased many folds after 9/11.

At the turn of the century, the Senate Relations Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Senator Jesse Helms wanted President Clinton to abolish three autonomous agencies - USIA, US AID, US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (US ACDA). US AID was spared, but USIA and US ACDA were merged into the Department of State in 2000. USIS became known as Public Affairs in the Embassy. During the next ten years or more, I followed through two important long-term projects - Legal Reform in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)/Mediation and Enhancing Civic Education. In 2001, I accompanied the first delegation of Malaysian judges and lawyers to California (San Francisco, LA and San Diego), with a consultation trip to Washington, DC, in between. For ADR/Mediation, State Department funded a number of American judges and lawyers to consult with the Malaysian judges, lawyers and legal scholars for a decade. Training was continued by the Malaysian Judiciary and Malaysian courts now have case management. At about the same time, the Center for Civic Education (CCE) in California worked with the Project Citizen Office at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) to develop "Projek Warga" for selected schools in various states. This project teaches students at the hands-on level - requiring students to identify an issue that they can handle, research it by interviewing officers/people concerned, and developing an action plan to present to local authorities. Topics include local issues such as traffic congestion before and after school, student safety, canteen food hygiene and sexual harassment. It has been carried out in several states. Civic education is back in the Malaysian school curriculum. In December 2012, CCE presented a certificate of appreciation for my contributions to civic education in Malaysia and worldwide. In 1998, I had assisted in organizing the International Civitas Conference in Malaysia and later helped nominate Malaysian participants to Civitas conferences and forums in other parts of the world.

In April 1998, a number of Acehnese men entered the Brunei, French, Swiss and U.S. Embassies in Kuala Lumpur, seeking political asylum. Eight of them scaled the walls of the U.S. Embassy early one morning in a coordinated attempt. Just after I started work in my office, I heard a lot of noise and commotion outside. The guards tried to prevent their entry. The walls were not high enough. While other embassies permitted the Malaysian police to enter and arrest them, the

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eight of them were allowed to stay in the Embassy parking lot for about three months while their cases were being investigated. Part of the car park was cordoned off. A mobile toilet was provided. Embassy cafeteria caterer had to feed them every day. Then one morning, they were no longer there. We learned that in the wee hours of that morning, they were taken to the airport for settlement in another country. It was the tsunami of December 26, 2004 that settled the Aceh issue in Indonesia. In July 2000, the fifth round of the U.S.-North Korea nuclear missile talks were held in the Embassy's MPR. It was unusual to see North Koreans here. Security was tight.



1997 Chew Family in LRC

In 2003, I went to my second FSNEP training in Washington, DC, North Carolina and San Diego, California. The focus was on public diplomacy. I had the opportunity of watching the finals of “Project Citizen” Showcase in Washington, DC. It was also a time to re-connect with my Americans and Malaysian friends in the U.S. In 2008, I attended the Bangkok course on strategic communication for PD FSNs. The most visible result is the many SLR cameras owned by PA (Public Affairs) today. U.S.-Malaysia relations became warmer with the visit of SecState Condoleezza Rice to Malaysia in 2006, the meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Najib in April 2010, and visit of Sec State Hilary Clinton in November 2010.

What else have I been doing in Public Affairs? Apart from visiting speakers, there were many firsts. I organized the first ACYPL (American Council of Young Political Leaders) program for Americans to Malaysia in the mid 1990s. I was involved in the first ETA (English Teaching Assistant) program in Terengganu in 1995/96. It was of six months duration then. This has evolved into 75 ETAs in four states currently, and is expected to expand further next year. I helped with the two SELFs (Senior English Language Fellows) in Kedah and Terengganu in 2005/6 and 2006/7. I coordinated Ambassadors' visits to several states, especially Sabah and Sarawak. I had the opportunity to work with Mr. Daniel Claffey, the only officer designated for East Malaysia affairs so far. He retired in 2011 and the position was not filled. I helped with the alumni activities before the Cultural Exchanges Alumni Coordinator came on board. I have handled all (except one) the ten projects funded by the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) since its inception in 2001 from Malacca, Kelantan, Penang, and Perak to Sarawak and Sabah. I have also handled all the small grants for democracy and civil society, and other grants since 1995. I have coordinated cultural projects such as Jazz Ambassadors (jazz music), American Music Abroad (jazz and folk music), dance groups, photo exhibits, and sports exchanges. I have my fair share of nominees for the IVLP (International Visitor Leadership Program), SEAS (Symposium on East Asian Security), SUSI (Study of the U.S. Institutes), and numerous other cultural and educational exchanges programs of the State Department. The cultural programs have increased and so has the number of staff, over the last few years. We added a PDO (public diplomacy officer) in 2007.

Nowadays everyone in the Embassy would like to go on a working or private trip to Sabah and Sarawak. I am proud to say that I was a pioneer of the Embassy outreach to these two East Malaysian states beginning in the mid 1990s. We made full use of our American Fulbright Scholars and U.S. Speakers, followed by Embassy officers in the 21st century. The Embassy had planned to set up an office in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah but it did not come to pass.

There were many good Embassy and USIS/PA officer whom I have worked with. I worked under 14 Ambassadors, 12 DCMs (Deputy Chiefs of Mission), 11 PAOs (Public Affairs Officers), 13 CAOs (Cultural Affairs Officers), 11 IOs (Information Officers), and 3 PDOs (Public Diplomacy Officers). There were 5 Americans and 24 FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) in USIS in 1976 (10 were in LCC), today we have 4 Americans and 18 FSNs in PA.

The American culture of a three or four-year cycle is very obvious in the Embassy as well as in American government. As the term is limited, one wants to accomplish the goals within the short time frame, pushing the agenda and completing projects successfully are the driving force. But it is sometimes to the

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detriment of the successors and the ones who must remain behind. Many “innovative activities” are part of re-inventing the wheel, if you stay long enough.

My career success is due largely to the support given by wife and children over the years. Where possible, they were involved. So it is not surprising that my contacts and the Embassy’s colleagues and friends know my family well. They had the opportunity to accompany me to all the states of Malaysia - not too many Malaysians have that experience. In 2007, my children’s band played at the AEMEA (Embassy) Dinner & Dance. They got to know the ETAs, the SELFs, and many speakers, including a native American. The essence of public diplomacy is sustained and genuine people-to-people relations, which is why the Fulbright ETA program is a worthy successor of the Peace Corps in Malaysia. The Fulbright program is run by MACEE (Malaysian-American Commission on Educational Exchange), kind of PA’s sister office whose staff I have the opportunity to work closely with. Current U.S.-Malaysia relations is the best of the 55 years since Malaya attained its independence, and of course the best since I joined the Embassy. And this is a good time to retire.



Family Portrait in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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I am particularly honored by the many retirement ceremonies, including a session with the Ambassador and DCM, a lunch with my PA Office colleagues, a ceremony with the entire Embassy, a dinner with the Embassy program partners, and a high tea by PPM.

Chew Wing Foong
March 22, 2013

<p>Oh my goodness! Congratulations!</p> <p>Chew: You are an outstanding professional, colleague and human being and it was my great honor to serve and work with you while I was in Malaysia. You will be missed by those in KL but I think your impact goes even further. I am one of many Americans who became a better diplomat because of your patience, intellect and understanding. I learned a lot about leadership and tolerance by watching you.</p> <p>Thank you for your superb service on behalf of the United States Government!</p> <p>Joyce Barr Assistant Secretary Bureau of Administration Department of State</p>	<p>Dear Mr. Chew:</p> <p>Thanks for your message and congratulations on your retirement. Thanks also for your service to US-Malaysia relations. Your consistently hard work and conscientiousness greatly contributed to our efforts in Malaysia, and I thank you for your service. Working with you was rewarding and memorable. I am sure that Embassy Kuala Lumpur will miss you, but Riaz is a great choice as your successor. I wish him the best of luck, too. Please give my best to the great crew at the Embassy.</p> <p>Best Regards, David Shear Ambassador Vietnam/Former DCM</p>
<p>Dear Mr. Chew,</p> <p>Time really flies, and 38 years sound like a dream. Not many people can stay put in a job for that length of time. The fact that you have achieved this rare distinction speaks volumes about your dedication and contributions to your chosen career. We will certainly stay in touch. I would like to thank you for all assistance rendered during the tenure of your service.</p> <p>Kind regards,</p> <p>Dato David Chua Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce</p>	<p>Dear Chew,</p> <p>You have had a long and distinguished career, and, judging by your superb shepherding of me around the country, and your explanations and interpretations of Malaysian culture, a brilliant bridge between the two cultures. I remember with great fondness my two trips to Malaysia and travel with you there. You have helped to manage that complex relationship between the two countries. Warmest wishes to you and your family. May your retirement years be fruitful!</p> <p>Graham Fuller Former U.S. Speaker/State Department/CIA</p> <p>Dear Chew,</p> <p>So sad to see you go. We in SPARKS, SWEPA and IEC are so indebted to you especially me. You have brought so many projects to Sabah and because of you, the US Embassy has its presence felt here. Truly I do not think we will have that close a relationship with the US Embassy without you there. It is a great loss for us in Sabah with you going. Nevertheless I am sure our paths will cross again. You have such a friendly personality and have so many friends. Your friend, Datuk Adeline Leong, Former Mayor, KK and Sandakan/IVLP</p>