

Update, April 2007,  
*Watching the Flag Come Down*  
(HOLO Books June 2007)

THE CLASSMATES AND OTHER DENIZENS OF THE BOOK

As usual, the gathering of the Classmates was the highlight of our Hong Kong visit. They came en masse to my booksigning – those with whom I had lunched in January 2006 when I researched the epilogue: Eva, Theresa, Grace, Bonnie, Shuk Yin, Cynthia, Ngan Ieng, Connie and Amy. And they arrived bringing with them Teresina, missing last year, a new Classmate, Pang Sin Har, and a gorgeous and extravagant basket of roses and orchids.

There was almost as much rejoicing in each other's company as in Derek's and mine, and there were many permutations of photographs taken, bringing Bookazine in Prince's Building to something of a standstill. At a certain moment during the excitement, Connie, getting her book signed, asked 'Do you remember me telling you about losing my wedding ring?'

'Indeed I do,' I replied. 'What's more, it's in the book!'

'And I told you my husband wouldn't buy me another.'

'Did he?'

She held up her bare hand and grinned, 'No'.

'And I remember how the big tears fell down your cheeks.' She nodded almost in delight.

But there were no tears at this gathering. Not only the Classmates came, but Linda Wong who ran the Women's Centre and now works for Rainlily the Rape Crisis Centre. She looked so well and was pleased to see the Classmates whom she also nurtured. Then there was Derek's team – Sheree, Emily, Alice and Cora, also bearing a bouquet, and cameras, and other friends who flit through the book's pages, and some who don't.

I met Pet the previous day and gave her a copy of the book in which she features so largely. She looked very much more bonny than last year, and admitted that she had been fasting then. She is just as committed to her spiritual journey.

When I was doing the index for the book, I had occasion to go through my *Stories for Eva* files looking for surnames of the Classmates. There I came across a folder, the contents of which I realised I had forgotten. Inside were essays that the Classmates wrote for me just before we left Hong Kong, following the instructions at the back of 'Eva' which asked them to write a 'Story for Susanna'. At the time, I corrected them, wrote a valedictory note to each Classmate, photocopied them and gave the originals back. Most of the stories were handwritten, some on foolscap which had not photocopied well. But one was typed in bold large letters which caught the eye; and I read it all these years later with particular interest because the author was senior Classmate Linda who has since died.

I mention Linda in a 'letter' and in the epilogue in connection with her beautiful Japanese doll which her brother threw on the fire when the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1937. When I first wrote about it, I made it clear that this was an instance of anti-Japanese feeling in Hong Kong. Now I realise that Linda and her family were living in China at the time.

I print Linda's story below (almost as she wrote it for me), not only to correct my error but also because it is such a startling, vividly told episode in her life – written in an English which enhances rather than detracts. This is my way of commemorating Linda.

*It was about forty-five years ago, I was only 19 years old. I remembered I was studied in a boarder school. The second world exploded, the Japanese broke the CHAN KWA railway. From that time I lose the connection with my family, and section of never forgot days began.*

*I changed to a boy's face and dressed up the army uniform, straw sandals, carried my daily needs on my back. Then we began to walk through about two provinces in China.*

*The rough vegetable cereal were our meal, the sweet potatoes were the best food. We stayed at back wood sometimes even slept up the pigsty. The enemy leave us about thirty miles. We ran at night in silently. That was a very good luck we can escaped from the enemy. This is the days I will never forgot.*

*Linda Luk 3-6-1997*

*My English is so poor, if you can understand what I wrote please correct the mistake. Thank you with all my heart.*

I doubt if I had the heart in 1997 to make many more changes than I have made here; I suspect I shed a quiet tear. I can't remember much from that time that I didn't write down, but I can still see Linda's face quite clearly in my mind's eye.

PS I am writing separately about Politics and the election of the Chief Executive in March 2007.

