

Chapter 3

Family, Education and Travel: 1960 to 1969

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A Growing Family

We had settled quite well into our flat at 45 High Street, Lincoln. The flat was at the south end of Lincoln which made cycling to work each day to RAF Waddington quite easy and Phyl could also do most of the shopping that we needed in the immediate area. We rarely travelled away from Lincoln in those days, but an exception was to John Defoe's wedding, when he married Cath, at Barking in May 1960. John left the RAF the following year, but we did manage to visit them both at Felixstowe, while John and Cath were stationed at RAF Bawdsey. They also came to visit us in Lincoln and we remember our first family trip to the seaside, at Mablethorpe, where David objected to the sand on his bare feet. David was growing up quite quickly and, on the 12th of February 1962, our second son Michael was born. We didn't know it at the time, but our third son Stephen was to be born three years later. Although we still had a reasonable amount of room in the flat, we started to think about a possible move to a new home. RAF Waddington, like most other RAF stations, had a waiting list for personnel to move into Married Quarters; at the very junior rank of Senior Aircraftman I was about 258th on the waiting list, so that was not an option for us!

While we were living in Lincolnshire, my only mode of transport was a bicycle. As a family, we either used the bus or, very infrequently, the train. The only time that this caused a problem was when I was on training courses in Somerset or Wiltshire and then trying to get home to Lincoln to see the family at weekends. Weekends normally started at lunchtime on Saturday, but we had to be back again by Sunday night - not much time for such a long return journey, and travel by train was out of the question, because of the expense. The usual option was to get a lift from a fellow student who was coming in this general direction in his car; if that happened then we would share the cost of the petrol. The closest place to Lincoln that I ever managed

to get a lift to was Coventry, from a fellow student; I then hitch-hiked the rest of the way home. At other times I would hitch-hike the whole way; that wasn't too bad in daylight on a Saturday afternoon, but it wasn't so much fun on a cold, wintry, Sunday night! One Saturday afternoon a very large car glided to a halt in front of me and the chauffeur wound down the window. I was invited to climb inside and was offered a lift for a few miles along my route. The lady in the back of the car asked me why I didn't travel by train; she thought that it was not the right thing to do for servicemen to hitch-hike, as it gave the public a wrong impression of the Services!

On the third anniversary of our move into the flat, at a rent of £3.25 per week, I realised that by the end of the three years we had nothing material to show for the £500 that we had spent. Moreover, although we just managed to pay all our bills each week, there was nothing left over to put into a savings account. I mentioned this, in passing, the next time that I went to work. The following week I was surprised when Dennis, whom I worked with, asked me if I would be interested in buying an old house. Dennis and Mavis lived at 22 Albany Terrace, in a row of terraced houses in Bracebridge, just off Newark Road, and about two miles south of Lincoln City centre. Dennis had just heard of an empty house in his terrace that was about to go on the market for sale; the house had belonged to an old lady of 92 who had recently died. Dennis was fairly sure that the old lady's son wanted to sell the house quickly and he thought that it would not be very expensive. We hadn't even thought of buying a house at that stage, because I was not earning much money and we had no savings. However, we thought that it would do no harm to make some enquiries. After a few more weeks, we found that the house was going onto the market for an asking price of £500. Without going into too much detail, Phyl and I both thought that we couldn't really go wrong, because we had already spent that much on rent during the last three years. The house needed a lot of work doing to it, but I was fairly good at turning my hand to most odd jobs. We took the plunge and decided that we would try to buy it, but none of the Building Societies that we spoke to were interested in giving us a loan. Eventually, to our relief, we found that Lincoln City Council were willing to give mortgages to first time buyers on low incomes. The next problem, and it seems almost unbelievable in this day and

age, was trying to raise the 10% deposit; we agonised over how we could raise £50 at short notice. I still don't know how we managed, but I think that we just tightened out belts for a few months until we had saved the £50. Having raised the deposit the City Council arranged our mortgage, to be paid off within ten years and we were now classed as "house-owners"! Shortly after organising our mortgage, the City Council abandoned that scheme, but I never understood why, as it was the only way that people like us could get a foot on the house-owner's ladder. Before we move on with the story, I should explain the size, location and the state of the house when we bought it.

Number eight Albany Terrace was the fourth mid-terraced house in a line of twelve small houses; there were two rooms downstairs and two upstairs. A similar row of odd numbered houses was on the opposite side of an open area that resembled a road. The front door opened onto that area, but it was very rarely used. The main entrance to the house was through the back-yard, with an outside toilet and coal house, and then through the back door that led into a small kitchen and then into the living room. Albany Terrace was at the top end of Victoria Street, on the right-hand side, and the turning into Victoria Street from Newark Road was easy to find because of the Gatehouse Pub on the corner. The terraced houses were in a complex of similar buildings south of the Lincoln Gasworks, before reaching the junction for Brant Road and Hykeham Road. We were now living about two miles from the centre of Lincoln and we sometimes used the busses to get into town. An advantage for me was that it was not quite so far to cycle to RAF Waddington, although there was still a steep hill to climb, but I now used the route from Brant Road rather than Cross O'Cliff Hill. The state of the house could be described as "interesting and challenging"! When we bought the house it was in a very poor state of repair: the only amenities connected to the house were water, gas and main drains to the toilet in the yard; there was no electricity. In the kitchen there was a gas tap and a yellow, shallow sink beneath the single window; in the corner of the kitchen, opposite the back door, was a coal-fired copper boiler. The two downstairs rooms both had gas lights and lead-grate fireplaces, as did the two bedrooms upstairs. There was a steep staircase in the centre of the house, between the front and rear

rooms. The bedrooms had not been used for many years, but the gas light fittings were still on the walls and the lath-and-plaster ceilings in both bedrooms had collapsed onto the floors many years earlier. The day that we moved into the house the front-room floor caved in, because of dry-rot in the floorboards. Well, what did you expect for £500?

We worked extremely hard for the next six months making the house habitable, with the help of friends from work. The front-room floor was replaced with recycled wooden planks from old packing cases and the lead-grate fireplace in the main room was replaced with a second-hand tiled fireplace. The other three lead-grate fireplaces were boxed-in to conceal them. The ceilings in the bedroom were reconstructed by screwing pan-tile laths to the ceiling joists and then covering the whole area with sheets of tinfoil, for insulation, before fixing dozens of chamfered, hand-painted hardboard tiles to the laths. We arranged for mains electricity to be connected to the house and I decided to fit wall lights in the bedrooms, to make them cosier. I cut grooves in the bedroom plaster walls for the wall light wiring, on either side of where the double bed would be placed and then, to my dismay, the whole of the plaster on that wall collapsed onto the floor - it was hard work getting the wheelbarrow up and down the stairs to clear that mess! We also decided to completely strip the small kitchen and then to knock through the external walls to the outside toilet and to the coal-house; we could then build a new shower and toilet room as well as improving the kitchen. It was at that stage that I was told I was to be detached back to RAF Locking on another fairly lengthy radar conversion course. Reluctantly, we then employed a small building firm to complete the last task of building the shower-room extension, while I was away on the course, at a cost of an extra £300.

RAF Waddington and RAF Radar Courses:

Prior to buying the house, I had been detached to RAF Yatesbury, in Wiltshire, on the 10th of March 1960 on a Radar Fitters' Lead-in Course. I really enjoyed the course and received an A1 pass, with 88% on the final exams, before returning to RAF Waddington on the 11th of May. By the 30th of August I had been posted back to RAF Locking on a Ground Radar Fitter's Course. It was a long, intense period of study, but this time I really enjoyed it

and passed-out on the 27th of April 1961 to return to RAF Waddington as a Junior Technician. Two months later I was back at RAF Locking on a Precision Approach Radar (PAR) Course; that detachment lasted for two months and then I returned to Waddington with a new challenge. The Precision Approach Radar (PAR) was built by the Standard Telephones & Cables company. There were two versions of PAR; one was mobile, like a very large caravan, and the other was more like a pre-fabricated, lightweight building. Both versions were mounted onto a metal "A" frame which then sat on a circular metal rail, similar to a single-track railway line, on a concrete base. PAR was positioned to one side of the main runway, about halfway along its length. The PAR could then be rotated through 180 degrees, depending on the runway direction that had been selected for the aircraft to approach the airfield. There were two large, static, rectangular aerials; one for azimuth, to direct the pilot onto the runway centreline, and one for elevation, to direct the pilot onto the correct glide-path. The range of the radar was about 13 miles, as it was only used to guide the aircraft to a safe landing at the touchdown point of the runway, particularly in poor weather conditions. To scan the radar beam, one wall of the aerial wave-guide was driven in-and-out by a motor, instead of physically moving the whole aerial. All of the processed radar data was then transmitted across land-lines to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) tower where it was decoded and displayed on the PAR display consoles, ready for use by the ATC controllers. Each controller sat in front of the two radar screens and would use a radio to guide the pilot along the cursors marking the runway centreline and the glide-path. There were two separate channels for both the radar transmitters and receivers, so that one channel could be operational while maintenance work could take place on the other one. I remember one cold winter's day working on the PAR standby channel; I decided to go outside for a breath of fresh air and was amazed to find that I was looking up at a Vulcan sitting a few yards away, on its tail at the edge of the runway and next to a large snow bank. I think that it was at about that time when there were problems with Vulcan's internal fuel transfer system; whether that was the cause of this incident I don't know.

In June 1963 I returned to RAF Locking for yet another course; that one lasted for five months. This time the course was to include all Navigation Radar systems in use by the RAF, thus covering all options for postings to RAF airfields for the foreseeable future, and it was probably the best course that I ever attended. I remembered feeling disappointed when I returned from my Fitter's Course because the way that I worked on radar maintenance as a fitter was no different to the way that I worked as a radar mechanic. The Fitter's Course was mainly on theory but all our maintenance work was practical. It was after the Conversion Course that the two seemed to come together naturally; perhaps it was after going back to the radar theory again in depth that I really began to understand how everything worked. I had hardly arrived back at RAF Waddington when I was told that I was to be posted to a new station.

A Brief Description of the Royal Air Force

It may be helpful to those readers who have not been involved with the Royal Air Force to have a broad, simple overview of the structure of the RAF at this stage. We have already heard that recruits swore their allegiance to the sovereign. However, we couldn't expect the Queen to be involved with the detailed running of the armed forces; that is delegated to the government of the day who, in turn, are from elected members of parliament. Like most government departments, names and structures change from time to time but the overall picture does tend to remain the same. A simple example of such a change is that when my father joined the RAF in 1937 it was part of the War Office, under the control of the Air Ministry, but the names then changed, after the war, to become the Ministry of Defence and the Air Force Department.

Compared with the other two services, the RAF has had a relatively short life. Just prior to World War I the army formed the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the navy formed the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS); the combined air power of the army and the navy in 1911 was twelve aircraft and three airships. At that time the French had over 200 aircraft and the Germans possessed a fleet of thirty Zeppelins. Towards the end of the war, in 1917, both the RFC and the RNAS had expanded significantly and both parties

thought that their influence should be paramount in air matters. The prime minister then asked General Smutts, as an impartial advisor, to report on the matter. Smutts recommended the setting up of an independent service with an Air Ministry and an air staff. On 1st April 1918 Major General Sir Hugh Trenchard was appointed as the first Chief of Air staff and the Royal Air Force was born. By the end of 1918, the strength of the RAF amounted to about 27,500 officers, 264,000 other male ranks and about 25,000 women in the Women's Royal Air Force. At that time there were over 22,500 aircraft, including 3,300 in the front lines, and about 100 airships. In contrast, at the end of World War II the RAF had about 9,200 aircraft but more than 1,000,000 officers, airmen and airwomen. By 1990, the number of personnel had been reduced to about 83,200 officers, airmen and airwomen and by 2004 there were only 53,000 full-time RAF personnel, with warnings of more reductions to be announced. Having seen the birth and development of the RAF we will now look more at the structure.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) controls the three armed services comprising the Royal Navy (RN), the British Army and the Royal Air Force (RAF). There are also numerous Civil Servants employed within the MoD and one significant formation is the Ministry of Defence Procurement Executive, usually shortened to MoD (PE); their role was to be the interface between the armed forces, which need new equipment, and the procurement of that equipment built by industry; we shall hear much more of them later! The structure of the RAF, below the Air Staff at the MoD, was divided into Commands, both at home and overseas. The names of the Commands have changed many times over the years but typical examples for this book, during my early RAF career, included the following: the Overseas Commands, each with their own Headquarters (HQ), were the Far East Air Force (FEAF), Near East Air Force (NEAF) and Royal Air Force Germany (RAFG); Home Commands included Bomber Command, Fighter Command, Coastal Command, Transport Command, Maintenance Command and Training Command. The overseas commands were eventually disbanded and the home commands were combined during my time in the RAF to form Strike Command and Support Command. The formations below each Command level were called Groups and within each Group there were

clusters of RAF Stations. Each RAF Station would be organised into Wings, such as Supply, Operations, Engineering, and Administration Wings. Within each Wing there would be Squadrons; beneath the Squadrons were Flights and then Sections within each Flight.

The Officers Commanding MoD Departments, Commands and Groups were usually of Air Rank. RAF Station Commanders were usually Group Captains and the rest of the rank structure was fairly logical, with Wing Commanders usually being in charge of Wings, Squadron Leaders in charge of Squadrons and Flight Lieutenants in charge of Flights. A general exception at Station level was in the Operations Wing, which included the aircrew and aircraft squadrons, where the CO of each Squadron was usually a Wing Commander. The most junior officer ranks were Pilot Officer and Flying Officer. The non-commissioned ranks included Airmen, Junior NCOs (Corporals), Senior NCOs (Sergeants, Chief Technicians & Flight Sergeants) and, at the top, Warrant Officers.

RAF Lindholme

We were living in our newly refurbished house in Lincoln for about six months, after returning from my Radar Conversion Course when I was posted, on the 18th of November 1963, from RAF Waddington to the Bomber Command Bombing School at RAF Lindholme, near Doncaster in Yorkshire. As RAF Lindholme was a much smaller station than Waddington, we had the option of moving into an RAF "Hiring"; that was similar to a Married Quarter, but was rented by the MoD from the private housing sector. Our new home was a three bed-roomed mid-terraced house in Doncaster. In the meantime, because RAF Waddington was still very short of Married Quarters, we let our newly refurbished house in Albany Terrace to the MoD, as a hiring, for the princely sum of £3.00 per week. RAF Lindholme was about ten miles from our house in Doncaster. I would catch the bus to work during the day, but it was my job to maintain the ACR 7 airfield radar system until flying finished at night. There were no busses running at night so I either had a very long walk home, or hitched a lift from passing traffic - if I was lucky. All that I can remember of those journeys were the long, foggy nights and often arriving home in the early hours of the morning feeling very cold.

In Doncaster we still had no luxuries such as central heating, but we did have more room and now possessed a television in the front room; the TV resembled a piece of wooden furniture like a corner-cupboard, but with a very small screen at the top end. We didn't use it very much, but I do remember watching a regular programme on Quantum Mechanics on Sunday mornings, wearing my very heavy RAF greatcoat to keep warm; that was another very cold house in the winter! I was at RAF Lindholme for about five months when I was promoted to Corporal, on the 27th of April 1964. Although we were only in Doncaster for about seven months we did have a few visitors to see us. Mum and Dad came over once and we had a day at Doncaster races, which Dad enjoyed. John and Cath also came to stop for a few days and we took our children to stay with my parents at Walcot Grange while we went off exploring the area for the day, in John's car. As Nottingham was very roughly between Doncaster and Walcot, we decided to explore Sherwood Forest, as none of us had been there before. Unfortunately, in those days there were no "brown signs" showing us where to go and the tourism business had not really started - we never did find Sherwood Forest on that trip! A few weeks later we were very surprised when I was told that I was to be posted to Singapore.

RAF Tengah, Singapore

I was posted to RAF Tengah, in Singapore, on the 1st of June 1964. RAF Tengah was the base for Javelin Squadrons when I arrived and, decades later, when ever I heard a Javelin's jet engines start up at air shows in the UK I could immediately hear, smell and feel the Singapore environment all around me - quite spooky! The Gloucester Javelin was the world's first twin-jet delta-wing all weather fighter aircraft and was designed to intercept bomber aircraft at high altitudes, at high sub-sonic speeds. The airfield radar that I was working on at Tengah was the same type that I was trained on at RAF Locking - on my Fitters' Course.

It is worth describing the system, in non-technical terms, because of its complexity and versatility. There were two similar configurations: CPN-4 and MPN-11, but the differences aren't important here, other than to say that I was trained on the former but worked on the latter; both were designed and

built by the Americans. In effect, the system comprised two large trailers on wheels to make them readily deployable. One trailer contained two diesel generators and an air conditioning unit for the radar systems; the second trailer housed all of the radar and communication equipment. Both trailers were mounted on a rotating frame, in the middle of the airfield similar to that described for PAR, so that the system could be turned to face the runway in use. The radar trailer had a central corridor running along the full length of it, with bays of electronic equipment on each side. There were two main radar systems; the first was a search radar with a rotating aerial on the roof; the second was a precision landing radar, similar to the PAR, with fixed aerials and moving wave-guides to scan the runway centreline and glide-path. There was also an Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) system and a complete set of VHF and UHF radio transmitters and receivers for the controllers to speak to the aircrew. There were three separate bays for Air Traffic Controllers to work from, each with his own search and precision radar displays and with direct access to all of the communication facilities. As you can imagine, with the radar technicians also on hand, there wasn't much room wasted; it could become quite hot, humid and crowded, hence the essential air conditioning equipment. That small, self-contained system was eventually replaced with modern Air Traffic Control Towers and numerous separate communication and radar sites spread either across or around the airfields. Some interesting visitors to Tengah at that time included USAF aircraft, which we understood were detached from Vietnam.

I arrived in Singapore during the "Indonesian Confrontation". I suppose that was a diplomatic way of saying that we weren't at war with Indonesia; it was certainly a very interesting time, for numerous reasons. Because of "Confrontation" our families were not allowed to travel with us when I first arrived. Therefore, I spent nearly four months living in a barrack-block before my family could join me. As soon as I was posted to Singapore, Phyl and the boys went to stay with my parents at Walcot Grange, but she also had a short break when she visited John and Cath in their new home at Flitwick. Eventually Phyl and the boys flew out to join me; quite an achievement for a young mum on her own with two children aged five and two years old, particularly on a flight that took over twenty-four hours from

London to Singapore! As many people of my generation will know, Singapore has a very interesting past. For those that don't know, I will paint a fairly simple pen picture of Singapore and the surrounding region so that we can follow the development of the island and understand why the British were so involved in that part of the world. The island of Singapore lies at the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula, between Sumatra, to the south and west, and Borneo to the east - about halfway between India and China and on an important trade route. The diamond shaped island is only about 27 miles wide and 14 miles from north to south, with the highest point only 581 feet above sea level, in the Bukit Timah area to the north-west of the city. The average maximum temperature for the year was 88 degrees Fahrenheit and the average rainfall was 95 inches per year; it had an average humidity of 70%. There were also about forty smaller neighbouring islands to the south that belong to Singapore. The main island of Singapore is connected to the Malay mainland by a three-quarter mile long, man-made causeway, crossing the narrow Strait of Johore. The Malay Peninsula is about 456 miles long, from north to south, and about 200 miles wide, from east to west at its widest point, covering an area larger than England and Wales. Malaya has about 1,200 miles of coastline and about three-quarters of the mainland are covered with dense jungle.

The first visitors to Singapore were probably the ancestors of Australian Aborigines, who passed through the island about 8,000 years ago on their initial migration. The name of Singapore comes from two Sanskrit words "Singa Pura" or Lion City, from the influence of the predominantly Indian inhabitants in its early history. In the 13th and 14th centuries, Singapore served as the headquarters for a Malay Buddhist principedom, but after a Javanese invasion in c1377 the Malays left and formed a new community in Malacca, to the north in Malaya. Singapore then fell into obscurity and became a base for pirates. In 1511 the Portuguese fleet captured Malacca from the Malays; this in turn was captured by the Dutch in 1641, because of its importance to their spice trade. In 1786 the British acquired Penang Island, off the west coast of Malaya, and established a new settlement called George Town. This was followed by the arrival in Singapore of Sir Stamford Raffles, in 1819, when the Sultan of Johore ceded Singapore to the British

East India Company. Raffles was a very clever man; he was predominantly self taught and he came from a modest family background. At that time there was a population of only about 150 fisher-folk living at the mouth of the Singapore River; half of the people were living in huts and the other half on boats. Within about six months of the arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles, with his plans to build a new major trading port, there was an influx of Chinese, Bugis and Malacca Malays and the population rose to 4,000. In 1824 the British traded Malacca, and other areas on the Malay Peninsula, from the Dutch in exchange for the British possessions in Sumatra.

A new British colony called the *Straits Settlements* was formed in 1826 and included Malacca, Penang and Singapore. Gradually, the British acquired control over more of the region so that they could protect their shipping lanes between China and India. The Sultan of Brunei ceded Sarawak to a wealthy English adventurer called Brooke, in 1841, giving him the title of *rajah*; Sarawak was then ruled as a self governing state until 1940. Sabah, also known as North Borneo, came under the control of a private trading company called the *British North Borneo Company*, also in 1841. Seven years later the British declared North Borneo and Sarawak to be British Protectorates. By 1911 the population of Singapore had increased to 300,000 and in 1914 Britain had either direct or indirect control over all the land that makes up modern Malaysia. It should be noted that the British did not just acquire those lands to protect their shipping lanes and to build new trading ports. In the 1800s they expanded tin mining in Malaya and towards the end of that century they introduced rubber trees from Brazil for rubber plantations; they also encouraged the Malays to farm for a living. As mentioned, the island of Singapore lies at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, linked to the mainland by a substantial causeway; that was the route taken by the invading Japanese forces in World War II, to the surprise and embarrassment of the British! After World War II there was a growing independence movement and this led to the birth of Malayan nationalism, which was opposed to a colonial status. As a result, in 1946 Britain dissolved the Straits Settlement and by 1948 the Kingdoms on the Malay Peninsula, plus Malacca and Penang, united to form the Federation of Malaya. The new status was of a partially independent territory, under British protection.

Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak became separate Crown colonies at about that time. The next major event was in 1951, with the proclamation by King George VI that Singapore was to be granted the status of a city of the British Commonwealth.

By 1963 the population of Singapore was 1,750,000; it was the seventh largest city in the British Commonwealth and the world's fifth largest port as well as being the world's chief market in tin, rubber and pepper. In 1963, after years of discussion, it was agreed that Singapore would merge with North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and the eleven states of the Federation of Malaya, to become the new State of Malaysia. Unfortunately, President Sukarno of Indonesia objected to the formation of Malaysia and that started what was in effect to become an unofficial state of war for the next three years - but it was called, in diplomatic terms, "Confrontation". It will now be clear that the region was populated by a mix of people from many different races, traditions and customs, including Chinese, Malays, Indians, Pakistanis, Indonesians, Eurasians and Europeans; there were also many religious faiths, including Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Christians. The Chinese were the majority race in Singapore and dominated commerce and industry; elsewhere, the Malays controlled government and agriculture. Singapore was truly a multicultural society, but when I arrived it was during a period of very high tension, with race riots in parts of the city, probably inspired and encouraged by agents supporting Indonesia. Lee Kuan Yew was the Prime Minister of Singapore and he kept a very strong control over his country.

Settling In and Exploring Singapore

While I was waiting for Phyl to join me I had a very good opportunity to meet some of the people and to explore parts of the 224 square miles Singapore. The first important routine was to learn to take Paladrine tablets every day, to combat malaria, and to always sleep under mosquito nets; the second was to be aware of the heat and humidity and to pace oneself accordingly. The main forms of transport were either by pick-up taxis or by bus. Most of the pick-up taxis were Mercedes diesel cars that collected passengers along regular routes and then dropped-off the passengers wherever they needed to be; it would not be unusual to find seven

passengers, all unknown to each other, travelling together in the same taxi. Most of the busses had wooden bodywork with shutters over the unglazed windows that were usually kept open because of the heat and humidity. I visited as many areas and mixed with as many cultures as I could in Singapore and never felt intimidated by anyone in all of my journeys, even if I found out later that I had been exploring areas that were supposedly out of bounds to us. Those adventures included many visits to Chinese and Hindu temples and to Muslim mosques; just as interesting were the normal living areas and shops of the local people.

There were about 80,000 British troops based in Singapore in the 1960s, and they provided a huge spending potential. Their spending ranged from the rent for houses and the employment of domestic staff, to transport and to buying goods from local grocers, restaurants, bars, or for furniture and luxury items from the larger department stores. It was estimated that this represented about 23% of the Gross National Product of Singapore. The Chinese were the power house of the island and appeared to run most of the large businesses; many of the smaller businesses were run by Indian and Malay families. The single and unaccompanied Servicemen lived on-base, either in barrack blocks for the junior ranks like myself, or in the appropriate SNCOs' or Officers' Mess. When families were due to arrive in Singapore, the head of the house would start to look for a suitable house off-base, as there were never enough on-base Married Quarters available. When we arrived in Singapore the national "modernisation" housing programme was in full swing. In 1960 nearly half-a-million people were living either in shop-house slums near the city centre or in squalid attap settlements around the periphery. Within five years 50,000 new homes were built for people, including new low-cost high-rise flats. In addition to the changes in the city, small kampongs, or villages, of bamboo long-houses were being demolished across the island and the former residents were then moved into the flats in the city. It must have been devastating for many of those families, where several generations all lived together in a single long-house in a jungle clearing, to be moved into small high-rise flats in the middle of the city. In the meantime, the newly cleared kampong areas were being replaced with modern housing estates with electric-lit, tarmac roads; this was the chief

source of rented housing for Service families.

A few weeks before I expected Phyl and the boys to join me, I looked around for a suitable and affordable house; it was then "vetted" by the Service housing officials to make sure that they also considered it to be suitable. The next move was to hire the furniture, usually rattan, and then to find an "amah" or housemaid. That may sound like a luxury, but with the tropical humidity and temperature it was essential to have domestic help. We eventually found an attractive three-bedroom detached-house, with a small garden, on the new Thompson Garden Estate. The estate was in the centre of the island and we found a very pleasant Chinese amah called Catherine to help Phyl. The house was built of concrete, with small, glazed, mosaic floor-tiles; the windows had no glass, but were made secure by fitting decorative metal bars over the openings to allow the air to move freely, but to keep large unwanted visitors out; unfortunately it didn't exclude the smaller creatures that lived in the surrounding jungle, but we never came to any harm from them - just a few surprises! We soon got used to the small lizards that scampered across the ceilings and we appreciated their diet of mosquitoes, as that helped to keep the numbers of those annoying creatures down a little. Our neighbours were all charming and included Chinese, Indian and Malay families. We had a special treat one weekend when we were invited to Paula Bukam Island, just south of Singapore, to visit the family of Paul, our Indian landlord; we then had our first real introduction to Asian food. There was a saying among the Service families that you returned to England with either a camphor-wood chest or an addition to the family; we chose the later option and Stephen arrived on the 3rd of October 1965 to complete our family.

Living abroad, and with no other close family members, we tended to socialise far more than we did back in the UK. One family that we got to know very well was Barry and Val Bowden, who came from Cornwall, and their two children Anthony and Sandra. Barry had left RAF Lindholme just before I had arrived there, but we didn't meet him until he arrived in Singapore, just after me. We have remained good friends ever since. We soon settled well into our new home and I found an easy route to work, at RAF Tengah, which was about fifteen miles away to the north-west of the city. The pick-up taxis were

the best way to get to work, as they even managed to get through the floods outside the Singapore University when the monsoon drains couldn't cope. On one particular journey, after a very heavy downpour, the water was coming over the top of the taxi bonnet and lapping at the side windows, but the Mercedes diesel taxi just kept going and we all remained dry inside the car! While I am writing this I can suddenly hear and smell that route to work; there were always people cooking at stalls along the side of the Bukit Timah Road - wonderful! After my first year in Singapore I was suddenly taken quiet ill; Phyl telephoned RAF Tengah to ask for a doctor, only to be told that I had to report sick in person. She then explained that this was not possible; the doctor eventually came out and diagnosed a minor type of malaria. It was a difficult time for Phyl, as I was barely conscious for about a week, but eventually I recovered fully.

We explored Singapore as a family, regularly visiting a wide range of places including the sombre but beautiful Kranji War Memorial, built on a small hill off the Johore highway with wonderful views over the Straits of Johore and to the jungle covered hills of Malaya in the distance. The memorial was built and cared for by the Imperial War Graves Commission; it commemorates the 30,000 men and women who died in the Japanese attack on Singapore in 1942. Other attractions included the Jade Mansion with a priceless collection of over 1,000 pieces of fine, historical jade; the Botanic Gardens with avenues of trees, a miniature lake with water lilies, lotus blossom and orchids. The Van Kleef Aquarium was also another peaceful place to visit. In complete contrast, the gaudy Tiger Balm Gardens in the Paser Panjang area depicted many of the grotesque "wonders" of life after death, as well as scenes from Chinese mythology. Brightly painted concrete statuary represented the temptations, rewards and punishments of this life and the next - those images should have kept visitors on "the straight and narrow" path of life! The busy Singapore City waterfront, with its modern shops and banks, was in complete contrast to the Chinese boat-building yard off Kim Seng Road, with carpenters, wood-carvers and sail-makers all working next to their attap and wooden houses, set on stilts beside the water. The timber yards off the Nicoll Highway were always busy with sampans and junks loading timber on and off larger boats. Sometimes we

would see heavily robed Chinese priests performing their rites, next to the boats, to the noise of crashing symbols and bursting firecrackers, with the air hanging heavily with smoke from burning joss sticks. Another interesting, but quieter, view of life by the sea was along the East Coast Road with men fishing at night from kelongs - these were long lines of poles leading out to sea, with a hut at the end where a lamp was hung by the fishermen to attract fish into their nets.

The inland reservoirs of McRitchie, Seletar and Pierce were surrounded by wild, tropical vegetation and were good places to have a relaxing picnic with the children. Although there were over forty different species of snakes in Singapore, only six types were poisonous and I only came across two of them - a King Cobra and, once at work, a Black Cobra. Flying Foxes, or Fruit Bats, were reasonably common and there was a wonderful variety of butterflies and moths. However, Phyl wasn't very impressed when a huge Atlas Moth appeared in the bedroom one night, while I was at work! In the city there were numerous shops, ranging from modern apartment stores to Chinese dried fish specialists and to many other trading and eating places. The Rochor Canal was probably best remembered for its atrocious smell, but it was also interesting to see the open air markets with second-hand clothes for the poorer people and a bewildering range of items for sale, recovered from the canal! A much more enjoyable experience was to visit the regular amah's markets, held in the streets at night, where almost anything could be found along the miles of colourful stalls lit by paraffin lamps. As a once in a lifetime treat, we also saw the last of the Sunderland flying-boats leave RAF Seletar, to return to the UK.

As a European Christian, I was very interested to see and understand as much as I could about other cultures, festivals and faiths while I was in Singapore. There was ample opportunity to do that because of the cosmopolitan make-up of the population and the presence of so many Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians, as well as other eastern religions. Naturally, I can't delve into all of that experience, but a few examples have been selected to give a feel for the different way of life that was going on all around us. There is a debate as to whether Buddhism is a true religion, as Buddhists do not worship a God; their goal is to understand

the true meaning of life. I suppose it depends how we define religion, but I have a huge respect for their sincere dedication and understanding of life, which can make our western culture seem very primitive. Buddhism first started after 623 BC, when an Indian Prince named Siddhatta Gotama was born. He was brought up in the lap of luxury, receiving an education befitting a prince; he married and had a son. However, he was an extremely sensitive and thoughtful man and he could not understand why a few people like himself were born into an affluent society while the majority lived in abject poverty. He decided to leave his wealthy home to try and really understand the meaning of life. After about eight years of self-denial and poverty, he settled on "the Middle Way" of life, after studying human nature and topics including suffering, ill will, lust, craving, cruelty, untruthfulness, killing, stealing, vain talk, sexual misconduct and happiness, from which he formulated his "Four Noble Truths" and his "Noble Eightfold Path". Most of his thinking was based on cause and effect as well as his theory of "Re-birth".

After his death at the age of 80,- and after 45 years of ministry, his thoughts were written-down in the *Tipitaka* by his disciples. That collection of his teachings is estimated to be about eleven times larger than our Bible. I can strongly recommend further study of this fascinating subject as it seems just as relevant today as it was 2,500 years ago, or perhaps even more so! It is worth remembering that Buddhism has never, in its 2,500 year history, ever been the cause of bloodshed or wars and that it still has a very strong following in the world, particularly in the far-east. Although there are large statues of Buddha in temples, and other places, they are not worshiped but are used as a focus points for meditation and as a token of respect to enlightened thinkers. During my travels I sometimes got the feeling that true Buddhism was influenced by other cultures and religions in some places, but perhaps I just didn't understand enough about this fascinating eastern-world.

Most Westerners are probably aware of the *Chinese New Year*, held in February, but I didn't really appreciate the significance of it until we lived in Singapore. During those celebrations, the Chinese people wore their best clothes and held "open house" for friends to celebrate the birth of a new span of life; traditional red banners decorated the entrances to their houses, while

interiors were appropriately decorated to welcome in the New Year. Special food was prepared and a portion was offered to the gods; fire crackers burst everywhere and highlights of the festival were the spectacular lion dances. Those awesome creatures, with wickedly gleaming eyes and snapping jaws, twisted and turned through the milling crowds to the sound of deafening music. The colourful lions were manipulated by a number of prancing men who carried the lion's mask and skin supported on poles. Less well known was the Buddhist *Vesak Day* that commemorated the birth, as well as the death and enlightenment, of the Lord Buddha over 2,500 years ago. The feast was observed by holding very large meetings, with hymns and prayers, at temples. At night illuminated floats paraded through the streets. Another Chinese tradition says that their ancestors return to earth, during the *Feast of the Hungry Ghosts*, to visit descendants. Gifts were put out for them in the form of paper effigies, bought from the many local specialist shops, and include models of everyday items ranging from houses and household effects to motor cars. The effigies were made from thin bamboo frames, covered in coloured tissue paper; they were taken to the temples to be burned, together with paper money and joss sticks, as gifts for the dead.

Although the specific festivals were interesting, the everyday hustle and bustle of Chinatown never ceased to amaze me. The area was always teeming with families and traders going about their daily business, under the colourful banners of washing, hanging from windows on bamboo poles. The whole air seemed to be alive with the noise of gongs and symbols, or the clicking and cries from games being played at mah-jong tables in the coffee houses. The variety of small shops and the cramped living areas were interesting, but I was surprised to come across "dying houses" in Sago Lane. I suppose those places were the equivalent of our "old people's homes" in the UK, but it was sad to see rows of bunks - almost like pigeon holes - with old people just lying in them. At least they had somewhere to go and someone to look after them when they could no longer look after themselves. It was the sudden and unexpected events that made those explorations of the city so interesting. One could turn a corner and then find a Chinese Opera in full swing, on a makeshift stage at the end of a street and with crowds of local people watching. The next street could be full of artists

painting huge posters, several metres long, advertising a new film that was about to be released. Then, from out of nowhere, a Chinese funeral would suddenly appear. Those were colourful celebrations with brass bands, or sometimes with Chinese orchestras, on the back of highly decorated lorries. The hearse would then appear, pulled by a long line of umbrella-carrying pall bearers; the hearse would be followed by barefooted mourners, in sackcloth and ashes, accompanied by loud displays of grief and weeping. The mood would then change again with more brightly coloured lorries, carrying enormous wreaths and decorated with more banners, and full of yet more people celebrating the event. There always seemed to be something new to see.

I have lost track of the number of Chinese Temples that I visited, but they were all different. The Pee Loo Shee Buddhist Temple, on the Jurong Road, is worth describing as just one example. A towering main gate led into the two acre temple grounds, surrounded by a wall. The temple had three main sections, built in traditional Chinese style. The first building was a palatial hall with an eighteen foot high golden statue of the Buddha and the side walls of the hall were covered with a thousand images of the Buddha, painted on colourful porcelain tiles. The second building had a statue of the God of Mercy, with smaller sculptures of other deities surrounding her. The Goddess of Mercy had eighteen hands, each holding a different object such as a sword, a bell, a magic mirror or other precious symbols. (Incidentally, there was another Temple in Tembling Road that was dedicated specifically to the Goddess of Mercy.) The third, innermost, section of the temple was devoted to ancestral worship. There were always people coming and going to the temples throughout the day. Many of the temples had fortune tellers, usually elderly Chinese ladies, as well as resident monks. The fortune tellers usually had a small, round tin full of what appeared to be thin bamboo sticks with pieces of flimsy paper attached to them. The tin would be shaken backwards and forwards and eventually one bamboo stick would start to rise up from the rest. The visitor would then remove that stick and the fortune teller would interpret what was written on the paper. Offerings would then be made to the fortune teller and to the temple; the fortune teller appeared to be rewarded with money and the temple offerings included flowers, joss sticks,

incense, cakes and sweetmeats. There would normally be a dedicated area outside the main temple door for burning offerings, such as paper money or paper effigies, to departed ancestors.

In contrast to the Chinese Temples, the Sultan Mosque commanded a different type of attention, with its lofty and majestic domes. It was on the North Bridge Road, near the appropriately named Arab Street. The muezzin would call the faithful to prayer five times a day from the Mosque's minaret. The warren of streets that criss-crossed that area was famous for their textile- stores, with many varieties of colourful sarongs and Batiks. One of the Muslim festivals was Hari Raya Puasa, which marked the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. That was a time for prayer and thanksgiving in the Mosques. Muslims would dress in their colourful national costumes and visit their friends and relatives, as well as enjoying visits to other places of interest.

I had heard of the Hindu Festival of *Deevali*, or the *Festival of Lights*, commemorating the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon King Narakasura, before I went to Singapore. However, new to me was the *Thaipusam Festival* that marks the day when the Hindu Lord Subramanyam appeared to the world. This was quite an extraordinary festival and I think that it is worth recording some of my impressions and understandings here. Hindu devotees paraded through the streets, from one Temple to another, where they paid homage to the six-headed God, Lord Subramanyam. The purpose of the parade was for devotees to do penance publicly in what appeared to be a rather drastic way, compared with our way of life. Some devotees had the skin of their backs and chests pierced with hundreds of long, sharp, steel needles. The needles, about three feet long, were arranged to form a type of "halo" around the body; they were then held by steel straps at the needle's outer edges to form a hemisphere around the upper part of the body and head. The whole structure was then highly decorated with colourful tassels. If that was not enough, devotees would then have their tongues and cheeks skewered with silver arrows and they would wear nail-studded "sandals" on their feet, but with the nail points resting on the soles of their feet. Other devotees would have many different types of fruit hanging from their bodies, held by fishing hooks stuck into their chests

and backs. Another type of penance was to carry "kavadis" resting on their shoulders. Kavadis were heavy pieces of wood, liberally treated with sharp blades and spikes, making a semicircle over the devotee's head, and they were also highly decorated. The devotees would then parade through the streets, twisting and turning as they went and surrounded by dancing, chanting supporters. The air was full of the cries of religious ecstasy from the devotees, with a background of noise from trumpets, symbols and drums. When the procession reached the Temple, there would then be more spectacles of the famous fire-walking ceremonies performed by barefooted Hindus, who crossed strips of glowing charcoal without suffering any visible injury to the soles of their feet. Those were just a few of the sights and sounds of Singapore that we came across on our visits to the city. If I learned anything from all of those experiences it is that we are all human beings and the vast majority of the people that I came across, whatever culture, faith or religion they came from, were good, honest, tolerant and kind people. However, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end.

The unrest in Singapore started to grow again, after we had been living in our new house for about nine months. It was probably whipped up by the supporters of the Indonesian Confrontation. There were more riots between the races and our masters realised, somewhat late I think, that British service families were vulnerable to possible attacks, particularly as they were spread out at random across the island. We were then given two options: we could either move into high-rise flats in the centre of the city, or we could move into a small estate of newly built bungalows, with small gardens, in Johore, just across the causeway at the southern tip of the Malayan mainland. With three small boys we decided that there was only one real choice and we moved to a bungalow in Johore, where the jungle had recently been cleared to build the new homes. We soon settled down in our new home, but getting to and from work was now a little more difficult with having to cross the Johore - Singapore causeway each time. Barry and Val opted to move into the high-rise flats in the city, which for them had other advantages. With hindsight, I'm not so sure that the Johore option had been thought out too clearly by our masters, as Indonesian paratroops had recently been dropped into that area and there was no form of security

surrounding our new estate. Moreover, it wasn't long before there were regular reports of break-ins and burglaries on the estate, but nothing was being done about it by the authorities. Eventually, the residents organised themselves and a roster of night patrols was drawn up. When the Service executives heard about our actions we were given lectures about how we were not allowed to organise vigilante patrols! Eventually, after really listening to our concerns, they decided to patrol the area with police. Eventually, everything settled down and we enjoyed living in our bungalow and particularly with the garden for the children. We also visited the Kota Tinggi waterfalls, about thirty-five miles north of Johore Bahru, and the children enjoyed swimming in the South China Sea, off the golden beaches of eastern Malaya. By now David was attending school, in the Royal Naval Base just across the causeway in Singapore. However, things were about to change again, quite dramatically.

Singapore Leaves Malaysia

For some time there had been high level talks about the future of Malaysia between the Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew. We will probably never know the full details, but I wouldn't be surprised if there wasn't some pressure on the Malaysian Prime Minister from those supporting, and those wishing to end, the Indonesian Confrontation. For whatever reasons, one evening there was a dramatic announcement that Singapore was to leave Malaysia and it was to be totally independent. Lee Kuan Yew broke the news live on television and he was in tears; that was unheard of, as the Chinese are normally not emotional people. There are different versions as to why Singapore became independent; the Malaysian version was that Singapore wanted to leave; the Singapore version was that they were asked to leave. At our lowly level, we now found that we were living in a foreign country and we had to cross national borders each day, through immigration and customs, just to go to work. There were always long queues for passport checks and by the time we got through immigration the bus had gone and we would then have to wait for the next one to arrive!

However, it wasn't all bad news and we still had a good social life. One weekend, we decided to have a big party and the theme was "Cowboys and Indians". We took down the fence between our garden and the neighbour's bungalow to give us a larger area for the huge barbecue; the children were all put to bed in one bungalow while the adults used the other one for preparing food, etc. Many of our friends came over from Singapore and I wonder what the locals must have made of everyone in fancy dress going through customs and immigration dressed as Cowboys and Indians. Singapore's first National Day was celebrated on the 9th of August 1966 with a parade of about 23,000 people, followed by nearly sixty Dragon and Lion dancers. The theme was to unite the country and to get the population to see themselves as Singaporean and not as Chinese, Malay or Indian. It was estimated that 350,000 people watched the celebration parade, with fireworks and a Sea Dragon Float along the waterfront later that night. The formal parade included all walks of life, including the Singapore armed forces, politicians, trades unions, youth clubs and school children. I was there all day and what struck me most were the really happy, cheerful looking Malay and Indian youngsters compared with the very serious looking Chinese children; I just hoped that the Chinese children felt happier than they looked.

About two months after the celebrations I had some bad personal news and was flown back to England to see my mother, just before she died of cancer on the 13th of October 1966. I then returned to Singapore and a few weeks later we were packing, ready to return to England. As we had been living so far away from England for such a long time, we were given the option of choosing where we would like to be posted when we returned to the UK. We were advised to keep our choice as wide as possible so that they could fit us into the area that we wanted; for example, if we asked for a specific place and there were no vacancies there, then we would have wasted our choice. That made sense, so Phyl and I had a long discussion and we decided to make it really broad; we opted for the West Country. We knew that there were numerous RAF Stations in that broad area as it included Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, to name but a few. We could hardly believe it when my posting arrived: I was to report to West Raynham, in Norfolk - almost as far to the east of England as was

possible. A very important quality needed in the armed services is a sense of humour; we were naturally disappointed with the posting, but then reasoned that at least they got the "West" part of our request right! We arrived back in the UK in mid December 1966 and stayed with Phyl's Dad in Lincoln for Christmas before moving to Norfolk in January 1967. The weather was bleak, particularly after three years of tropical sunshine.

RAF West Raynham

Although I was posted to RAF West Raynham there were no surplus married quarters on the base, so we moved into a bungalow at the nearby station of RAF Sculthorpe. In the past, RAF Sculthorpe had been used by the United States Air Force Strategic Air Command for their tactical bombers. The base was then deactivated and used as a USAF standby base for exercises. At the height of its activity there were over 2,000 American personnel on the base, but they were then reduced to a skeleton staff at deactivation; that left surplus married quarter bungalows, built by the USAF, for use by RAF personnel. The bungalows, for some reason called "tobacco houses" by the Americans, were large and had a peculiar heating and air conditioning system that, we were told, was based on a system used on ships that transported bananas across the oceans. The whole bungalow seemed to shake whenever it switched on! My duties at RAF West Raynham now included maintenance work on ground radio as well as ground radar equipment. I was due to leave the RAF in 1967, but then I decided to extend my service from nine years to twelve years; that gave us until 1970, to think about our future. On the 27th of April 1968 I was promoted to Sergeant and on the 15th of May I was awarded the "Clasp to the General Service Medal 1962: Malay Peninsula", for my service in Singapore and Malaysia. We soon settled into our new home and Stephen was christened in the nearby village church at Syderstone; my father and brother Paddy came down from Lincolnshire for the day and Barry, Val and their children stayed with us for the weekend.

After a few months, we realised that we were now living in quite a remote area of Norfolk and so, for the first time, we started to think about buying a car. Eventually, we picked-up an old Ford Anglia and both Phyl and

I started to take driving lessons; luckily, we both passed our driving tests first time. The car was in a pretty poor state when we bought it, as we could see the road quite clearly beneath our feet while we were driving. A few weekends of work, and a lot of fibreglass repair packs, soon seemed to remove the problem and we kept the car for several years! We could now explore Norfolk and visit friends and family who lived further away. The first long journey that we made in the car was to visit our friends, John and Cath, who now lived in Aylesford, in Kent; we had enjoyable days out visiting Canterbury, Dover Castle and a trip on the Dungeness railway. John and Cath then decided to move to St. Albans and we were invited to go and stay with them again. We loaded up the car and set for a long weekend, as I was quite confident with my driving by then. Towards the end of our journey I found that we were in the centre lane of a three-lane dual carriageway, full of traffic; I glanced at my speedometer and was horrified to find that we were doing sixty miles an hour - I didn't know the car could go that fast and the surrounding traffic wouldn't allow me to slow down. I tended to stay in the slow lane for some months after that.

Another advantage of the car was that we could explore the wonderful Norfolk coast, as the nearest point was only about ten miles to the north of us. Starting in the west there was the beautifully rich bird-watching area of the Wash, beyond Sandringham. Moving up and then along the coast there were the cliffs of Hunstanton. From there, travelling east, there was the most varied range of coastal habitat that anyone could wish for; it included miles of golden sands, salt marshes, pine covered sand-dunes, steep shingle banks, small fishing villages with harbours and, for those that wanted them, small seaside towns. We were in our element and spent nearly every weekend at the coast, particularly out of the summer holiday season. This was where I seriously started my bird-watching. I remember talking to an elderly lady at Cley one day when she asked me how long I had been a bird-watcher. I confessed that I had always been interested, but had only just started to take it up seriously. I was then surprised when she said that she envied me, because I had so much to look forward to; she hadn't seen a "new" bird for years. Now, many years later, I really understand her comments! Some of those new early sightings included Spoonbill, Bittern,

Dotterel, Avocet, Marsh Harrier and a whole host of wildfowl, waders and passerines. Now that we were used to driving we decided to have a more adventurous holiday, in Scotland. We drove as far as Lincoln on the first leg and stopped over-night with Phyl's Dad, as he enjoyed being with the three boys. In those days the main road twisted and turned through every village between Sculthorpe and Lincoln. We then set off again, from Lincoln, but broke-down crossing the Pennines, with a burnt-out clutch. Eventually, we reached Grantown-on-Spey, where we stayed in a bed-and-breakfast guest-house for a week. We had an exhilarating holiday exploring the Cairngorm Mountains and the surrounding area with the boys. We also had our first experience of watching Osprey fishing and returning to their nest.

Sculthorpe was in quite a remote area and there was very little for youngsters to do. Phyl and I decided to run a youth-club on the Station, to provide at least some activities for the young people. It seemed to be quite popular and we tended to let them make their own decisions and entertainment, with us providing the facilities and supervision that they needed. It had been running successfully for quite some time when, one evening, I noticed some odd behaviour from one of the boys and a strange sweet smell. I then became concerned that we just might have a drugs problem, but as I had no experience I was uncertain. We kept a close eye on things for the rest of the night and everyone went home quietly. I reported my concerns to my boss the next day and, after some discussion, he advised me to speak to the police and to seek their advice. I made contact with the local Police Force and they referred me to their drugs specialist. He soon made contact on the telephone and asked when we were going to hold our next youth club dance; he said that he would attend and would observe what was going on, if I could let him have tickets. That sounded reasonable, but I explained that we were only a very small youth-club and that we didn't sell tickets in advance, but just paid at the door. I offered to let him arrive with us, as a friend. What followed was like something out of a Monty Python sketch. He declined my offer and said that, as he worked "under cover", it was vital that no one should know who he was or what he was doing - including me. It was agreed that he would just turn up on the night, pay at the door like everyone else, and then just mingle discretely with the rest of the youth club

members; I was given strict instructions not to speak to him on the evening. I explained how that was going to be difficult if I was selling the tickets on the door, particularly if I didn't know who he was. However, we agreed to his suggestions and everything went to plan. On the night I wondered which of the new guests was the undercover man - he was doing a good job as I couldn't identify him. Then it all changed: about halfway through the evening the most outrageous "hippy" turned up, paid his money and tried to mingle with the crowd. All of the youngsters were extremely suspicious of this very loud character and wanted to have nothing to do with him. Eventually, everyone went home and the "undercover agent" never contacted us again, although I think we would recognise him if he reappeared!

A Change of Houses

After a year or so we were feeling uncomfortable in our bungalow with the "banana-boat" heating system. In the meantime, we were regularly travelling up and down to Lincoln, as we had put 8 Albany Terrace up for sale with an estate agent. We had decided that we would sell the house with all of the furniture in it, as we thought that would appeal to a young couple trying to set up home for the first time. The house had been valued at £1,200, which was not very much considering the amount of modernisation that we had done to it. We were quite pleased when we had an offer to buy it and all seemed to be going well until the buyer said that he was withdrawing because of the plans for the new by-pass that would be going through the old gas works. That was news to us, and to our solicitor; it turned out to be incorrect information, but by the time that it was confirmed the buyer had found another property.

We also travelled to Lincoln regularly to see Phyl's Dad and while we were there Phyl would pop round to the house with the brush and dustpan to make sure that it was looking attractive for any potential buyers. You can imagine her surprise when she arrived one day and someone opened the door and asked her what she wanted; two young men were living in the house and wouldn't let her in! Phyl then called me and eventually we had to call the Police. Apparently, a man had been released from jail a month earlier and had obtained the key to our house from the Estate Agent; he then

copied the key before returning it to the agent, telling them that the house was not suitable. He then moved in to the house for a few days before "letting" it to the two boys that we found, taking their rent in advance. The clothes-line in the yard was full of new shirts but the furniture in the house had been broken-up for fuel for the fire and both the gas & electricity meters had been broken into and had been emptied. The police told us that there was no point in pressing charges, as the young men obviously had no money, and the best thing to do was to let them go and then to sort out the house. We were not impressed, but agreed; we then spent the next few weekends sorting out the house ready for our next potential buyer. Eventually, we were made an offer on the house, but each time we approached the final stage of the sale the offer-price was dropped. By the time that the offer dropped to £800 we'd had enough and we instructed the agent to put it back on the market at the original £1,200. In the meantime, my brother Brian was about to be posted from RAF Waddington and so the members of the Sergeants' Mess were having a farewell party for him. A Master Aircrew member of the Mess rang me up and invited me to Brian's farewell but, as I was not a member of the Sergeants' Mess at that time, I thought that I couldn't attend. He then assured me that it wasn't a problem. During the evening the Master Aircrew member introduced himself and I then discovered that he was the mystery bidder for our house. He then gave me a long story about how he really needed my house as his son and daughter-in-law were living in a cold, damp caravan with a little baby and he wanted to move them into something better. The outcome was that we eventually sold the house to him, at a loss, for £950, but we were pleased to put it behind us at that stage and to make a new start in Norfolk. About a year later, Phyl's Dad sent us a newspaper clipping from the Lincolnshire Echo; the buyer of our house had just been heavily fined in court for having a string of rented houses in Lincoln that he had not declared to the Inland Revenue. We wondered just how mean some people could be and what they really got out of life. I suppose he thought that he was very clever with beating us down for such a bargain; we don't know whether he did have any children or any poor grandchildren, but what a sad way for him to live - just for the love of money and more possessions.

Having eventually sold the house in Lincoln we started looking for a house in Norfolk. A new estate of houses was being built in the nearby town of Fakenham and we decided to buy a three bedroom detached house at No.1 North Park, about five miles north of RAF West Raynham. The central heating system was as simple as the one at Sculthorpe was complicated. It was a Huskvana Swedish system and comprised of a drip-feed oil burner in a brick cupboard in the centre of the ground floor, off the entrance hall; there were metal louvers from the brick cupboard through the walls to each of the surrounding rooms - and that was it! At least it didn't need much maintenance and it was extremely quiet. As ours was the first house to be built, the surrounding garden was a builder's tip, but covered with top soil. As we sorted it out, it became clear that this had been the site for most of the hard-core for the new roads on the estate of new houses; this should be taken as warning to other people not to buy the first house at the entrance to a new estate! I have always thought that hard work never did anyone much harm and the garden was very attractive by the time that it was finished.

We visited Phyl's Dad regularly, but one evening we had an urgent 'phone call to see if we could go and help him immediately, for a few days, because he was doing some building work on the house. That was not unusual, as I had previously helped him to build his garage and to convert the two downstairs living-rooms into a large single room, with folding doors between them. The only hesitation that I had was when I remembered the time that he asked me to "re-point" the chimney; the tall chimney was at the apex of the end wall of the house and the ladder ran out about six feet below the top of the chimney. He was a very persuasive man and I climbed the ladder holding the bucket of mortar and trowel in one hand, gripping the ladder tightly with the other. That was fine until I ran out of ladder to hold on to! Somehow, with gentle instructions from below, I managed to hang onto the wall and the chimney to finish the task; I kept thinking about the other "chimney" that I had climbed in the Lake District, many years earlier, but remembered not to look down this time! I have digressed, so we will return to the main story. When we arrived in Lincoln we found the back of the house sheered up with all sorts of props. Phyl's Dad had decided to knock down the internal walls to his out-houses so that he could make a very large kitchen.

He had also decided to move the outside doors and windows, but the upstairs bathroom and rear bedroom appeared to have objected to this plan. With a lot of hard work we managed to save the day and fitted suitable lintels, new windows and doors and then finished off the brickwork before we returned to Norfolk.

In 1969 my Dad's second eldest sister and her husband, Aunt Eileen and Uncle Fred, came over from Ireland for a holiday in England. They stayed with Dad in Grantham before stopping with us for a few days in Norfolk, as they wanted to visit Ely Cathedral. They then persuaded us to have a family holiday in Northern Ireland and to visit our other relatives over there, for the first time. We soon agreed and a few months later we travelled by train and then by the over-night ferry to Belfast. My Mum's brother, Uncle Jack, picked us up in his car and took us home for breakfast. He then gave us a conducted tour of all the trouble-spots in Belfast and terrified us by chatting over his shoulder as he drove through too many red traffic-lights. He then took us to Armagh where Phyl and I stayed with my Dad's eldest sister, Aunt Ruby, in her large house close to the Cathedral. As soon as we arrived we were told that everything had been organised and that the boys would have much better fun staying on the farm at Tandragee, with Uncle Fred and Aunt Eileen. The boys had a wonderful time and within a few days they were waking-up my cousin John at dawn to tell him that it was time to get-up and collect the cows for milking. Aunt Eileen said that she had never seen so many eggs laid by the free-range hens, because the boys were searching for them everywhere. The boys then decided to clean-out the cow-sheds and they were soon all busy scrubbing the floors. It was harvest-time so they also got used to travelling on the tractor and trailer and enjoyed building hay-stacks. After a few days we went to the farm to make sure that everything was alright, but the boys didn't have time to talk to us as they were having so much fun. Incidentally, Phyl said that she didn't recognise the boys in their scruffy, farm-yard working clothes!

In the meantime, Aunt Ruby lent us her car so that we could explore Northern Ireland but, because of the IRA problems, she warned us not to give anyone a lift. We travelled all-over the beautiful province and had a wonderful time. One day, we were on our way home from the Antrim coast

on a remote road when we saw a man, with a petrol-can in his hand, thumbing a lift; obviously he had run out of petrol so we stopped and gave him a lift. We tried to make polite conversation with him, but there was no response from the back of the car and we both started to feel very uneasy. We then remembered Aunt Ruby's warning! After many very tense miles on the lonely road, and with no sign of any other traffic, he suddenly told us to stop – miles from anywhere. He then got out of the car without saying anything to us; he shut the door and just stood by the empty grass verge. We hesitated, waved him goodbye, and then with fast-beating hearts, we drove away as calmly as we could. We didn't offer anyone else a lift during our holidays and I'm afraid that we didn't tell Aunt Ruby about that incident!

It wasn't until we got back to England that Phyl told me that she had fallen-out with her Dad for the first time in her life, just before we went to Ireland. Although I had got clearance from the MoD to visit my relatives in Ireland for a holiday, we had arrived there just as the "troubles" were reaching one of their worst periods. The head-lines in the daily news-papers in England were full of the bombings and shootings that were happening in Ireland everyday, and Phyl's poor Dad was convinced that he would never see any of us again. It was true that terrible things were happening everyday, but we never once saw any signs of it and we were touring around, innocently and probably naively, every day. It just confirmed to me that the problems were focussed on a tiny majority of people in very specific areas; the vast majority were decent, friendly and hospitable people. However, living in England and reading the papers or listening to the news gave a very different impression. We did arrive home safely, but Phyl's dad never said anything to me about his worries.

My Improving Education

My educational qualifications were still limited to four GCEs when I arrived at RAF Waddington as a radar mechanic in 1960; for the first couple of years I concentrated on learning my trade at work. I then completed my training as a radar fitter and, once again, put that into practice when I returned to RAF Waddington. I was beginning to realise that one day I would be looking for new work outside the RAF and decided to look at civilian

qualifications. I was advised that the best option would be to study for an Ordinary National Certificate (ONC) in Engineering. I made enquiries at the Lincoln Technical College, but was told that I would need to take a General Course in engineering first and then, if my marks were high enough, I could proceed to the ONC course. I enrolled for the course and attended classes and workshops at the college in Monk's Road, Lincoln. I was then posted to RAF Lindholme, but that was not a major problem as I transferred to Doncaster Technical College where I received credits in Mathematics, Engineering Science, Engineering Drawing and Workshop Processes & Materials. I was ready to start my ONC course when I was posted again, but this time to Singapore.

Chapter 3

Family, Education and Travel: 1960 to 1969