

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*It is a well-worn axiom which has always, and will always, hold true: The more one learns, the more one realises that there is to learn. One can never know enough; and, one would be foolish to be proud of one's knowledge because, in the grand scheme of things, the amount of knowledge that is able to be stored in one person's little brain is akin to the smallest grain of sand on a seashore. I do not mean to wax lyrical, but these thoughts came to me, only recently, having visited a Causeway Bay hotel which had been decorated in what management perceived as the Christmas spirit. As I learned, the decorator of the 9-foot tall Christmas tree and other bits and pieces of decoration, around the hotel, was organised by a European who had a liking for a rather dark blue colour. So, everything had a blue motif. The blue motif did not contrast well against the green of the Christmas tree or the dark wooden walls of the food outlets. Further, some of the blue decorations, hanging on the main doors, started to fall down. Nobody was hurt, but it went a long way to suggest that somebody had not done his or her homework. What made the situation very offensive to the sensitivities of many people was that, in certain parts of the hotel, the Christmas decorations assumed the outward appearance of a funeral parlour – dark, dismal and mournful with a photograph of the deceased, peering down at the coffin wherein is the corpse. It is without question that the European supervisor of the decorative effects to this hotel did not mean for this to happen, but his obvious lack of knowledge of Asian culture predicated the faux pas – sadly. Things, such as this, are not as rare as you may imagine, My Dear Grandchild, because they are only too common in Asia when ignorant foreigners think that they know as much as, or more than, local people.*

*There was a very good book called, 'The Ugly American', that became a best seller soon after its publication in 1958. It was written by Messrs Eugene Burdick and William Lederer and its political theme was about the arrogance and ignorance of Americans in Asia as they attempted to thwart the rise of communism in the most populace part of the world. Because of the arrogance and ignorance of Americans in Asia, their actions often resulted in gross errors of judgement. The book relates, inter alia, how Americans often act when away from home, having an innate propensity to be pretentious, loud and ostentatious, and to isolate themselves from the mores, the culture, and customs of the (foreign) people with whom they come in contact in foreign lands. Sadly, it is all too true. This lack of sensitivity to the ways of the local population, with whom they share common aspirations, antagonises and, eventually, ostracises them from the very people with whom they should be sharing life experiences and enriching their knowledge. One saw this when the United States sent more than 500,000 troops to Vietnam in 1965 in order, it was claimed, to stem the growing tide of communism in that country and, it followed, one was told, in Asia. It was a terrible blunder as history has recorded. I travelled to Vietnam, a few years ago, and visited the museum at Ho Chi Minh City. With a translator in tow, I learned the facts of the suffering of the people of this proud nation and how they were conquered over and over again, first, materially, by the Chinese Government, which ruled the country for more than 1,000 years until about 938 A.D. Known formerly as French Indochina, the French ruled Vietnam from 1885 until 1941 when the Imperial Japanese Army of World War II attacked the country and drove out the French. At the War Remnants Museum, one saw the chilling account of the Vietnam War of 1965 with its war machinery, weapons of combat, photographs and audio-*

*visuals. The museum offered visitors information on war statistics and it houses an extensive collection of tanks, bombs, aeroplanes of war and other war memorabilia. There is, also, an exhibition gallery, dedicated to war reporters, and the museum premises house a French colonial prison. The useless killing of Vietnamese civilians during the 1965 war was reckless and completely unnecessary. It was the result of poor intelligence on the part of the United States Government and a lack of understanding of the true situation in the country. Vietnam just wanted independence and the population was determined that it would not be ruled by a foreign power, again. Men die; ideas never do. It was the arrogance and ignorance of the Government of the United States that caused untold misery for this country of about 90 million people. Some of the people, whom I saw at this War Remnants Museum, were, actually, crying – and some of these people were Americans. It is a sad truth that man is the only living being on this world of ours that kills for the sheer joy of killing. He enjoys it. A sport of today is hunting and killing other creatures, not for food or for their fur, but for the enjoyment of stalking and, then, successfully taking the life of an innocent living creature.*

*Since man first started to think and, then, to fashion tools, mostly for the purpose of perpetuating his role on this planet as the most-intelligence, life-form, he thinks that he knows a great deal, but, in truth, he has learned very little of what there is to know. He still maintains that he knows most about nearly every topic ... as he continues to kill the very home in which he lives with pollution that is chocking the very lifeblood of Planet Earth. The accident in respect of the Causeway Bay hotel's Christmas decoration is but one tiny indication of man's ignorance, arrogance and insensitivity. In time, he will perish from this earth, no doubt, and, perhaps, it is for the best.*

*In the meantime, I have to prepare a bang-up meal for my fat Bo-Bo, The (loving) Frog of my life. I might as well enjoy the little life that is left for me and The Frog, don't you agree?*

*Chief Lady*

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