

## Women on the Go · Carol de Saint Victor

THE THREE PIECES that follow were written or recorded during the academic year of 1990–91, when I taught at the Mara Institute of Technology in Malaysia under the auspices of the Midwest University Consortium on International Activities. The first is a letter I wrote to my family, the second is an essay I wrote specifically for *The Iowa Review*, and the third is a transcription of a taped conversation with a woman I met in Malaysia. The first is about a Hindu ritual, the second is about Malaysia's largest remaining rain forest, and the third is about a Catholic nun who was born in Germany and has spent sixty of her eighty years in Asia. I am the writer of the first two, the recorder of the third. All three pieces document experiences that characterized that extraordinary year: observing people performing what were for me unimagined feats, walking over terrain utterly different from any I had seen before, and listening to the stories of people who had lived lives I had read about but had never felt the truth of until then. In each case I felt what it was to be a traveler—a foreign person in a foreign place, who most unexpectedly finds herself discovering new dispositions of old emotions in her own well traveled soul. The letter and the essay that follow were attempts at expressing that heady experience travelers have often written about, have probably more often felt than expressed. The third piece is one I offer in the spirit of contemporary thinking about Westerners and their centuries-old enterprise of appropriating the East. "Westerners," James Clifford says, "have for centuries studied and spoken for the rest of the world; the reverse has not been the case."\* This piece attempts the reversal that Clifford asks for, one in which the Western gaze is relaxed, and the Asian story is listened to.

The differences among these three pieces are too numerous and too obvious to linger over. There is, though, one connection among them that might tell us something about travel—why we do it, what it does to us. In each of these, I realized long after they were completed, a woman is tested, is—as the third piece most grandly reveals—put on trial. In each, a woman must call forth something from herself—a realization about herself, a power in herself she did not know she possessed—in order to get

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\* *The Predicament of Culture*, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 256.

through, to come to terms with, to transcend an experience that threatens her sense of herself, her understanding of her place in the world, and, in one case, her very existence. We are—the metaphor is apt—always on trial, and travel, I would say, alerts us to that persistent fact of our lives. A Western woman observing a Hindu ritual of human mutilation, that same woman walking through a rain forest, and another woman accused, imprisoned, and mistreated for things she did not do—these are the trials of these pieces. And in each case, the woman, as if in a flash, appears to apprehend something about herself that she did not know before. She may try to express what she learned in that flash, or she may not: she may simply acknowledge that it happened. It is the kind of experience that tests a speaker's language as well as her mettle. It may be the kind of experience that foreign places hold out to us, that urges us, at some level of our being, to leave the comfort of home and set out once more for other times and new places.

Shah Alam, Malaysia  
Jan. 30, 1991

Dear Ones:

It's 3 A.M. here, & I just got home. I'm not accustomed to late nights, & when several American friends first mentioned we might go to Batu Caves, about 30 smelly highway miles away, for the Hindu festival of *Thaipusam*, I wasn't sure I was up for it. Not go until 9 or 10 P.M.? Be prepared to stay until 1 or 2 A.M.? Also, I didn't think I wanted to see zealots mutilate themselves in states of religious fervor. An Indian-Malaysian friend, Sugu, said that *Thaipusam* is observed in its original way only in Malaysia—not even in India. But then, Carol, she taunted me, you may find it too non-Western, too strange. So what could I do? I'm in the only country in the world where this ritual is publically performed, and this, doubtless, is the one chance of my life to see it. So I went. And now how do I explain what it was, or how it affected me? I won't be able to do either. Do you remember how the *Michelin Rouge* ranks fine restaurants in France with stars? As I recall this is how they are described:

One star: highly recommended  
Two stars: worth a detour  
Three stars: worth a trip

*Thaipusam* tonight was, to me, three-starred: maybe all by itself worth my trip to S.E. Asia.

Ursula & Walter Vollmers (neighbors & he a colleague, a physics prof.) & their guests from home, Fran & Mike, picked me up at a few minutes after 7 P.M. I got to hear a bit of old CNN news — the war, the oil spill, the madness — before I left my apartment. We drove to Kuala Lumpur, parked near the railway station where we met Bob & Barbara Greenler (from Wisc.; he a physics prof., she a therapist), Joe & Marie (from Iowa; speech profs.), Carl Shinnars (physics, Wisc.) & Susan Parks (pol. science, Wisc.), & where we bought 40-cent tickets to Batu Caves. When the train pulled into the station, people on the platform threw packages through the windows onto the seats to reserve their places. We sat four on a seat intended for three, wide enough for two. The aisles filled, & soon after, the train began its slow trek northward. Though the Caves are only a few kilometers from K.L. the train ride took about an hour. There were no lights in the train, which made it easier to look at and into squatters' hovels along the track: tin houses, with wood or linoleum or dirt floors, & no chairs; people sitting or lying beneath pale yellow bulbs & next to the flickering blue light of television. There was a full moon, & it was a clear beautiful night. I could see rich green foliage growing close to the track: thick-trunked palm trees, huge-leafed bushes, &, along the way, groups of dark-skinned Indians, in stark white attire, waiting for a train, watching others pass by on their way to the Caves. I sat facing the direction we had come from, & though the young Indian woman next to me seemed not to lift her eyes from her lap, I was constantly straining to see what we were coming to. I had been to Batu Caves once before, during the day, & had been disappointed: a dreary spot, with hundreds of steps ascending a tall & not very pretty stone outcropping, to the interior of the outcropping, the main cave, large, damp, too dark to be seen & too light to suggest mysteries of the unseen. Probably a terrific setting for a Wagnerian opera, Carl Shinnars had said, &, he added, he didn't like Wagner. There had been monkeys on the stairs: small, agile, friendly monkeys, who made the excursion & the hot climb less than a total loss. From the train, from my strained vantage point, I saw the site of the Caves. It was illuminated; above it, nebuly clouds circled the full moon; & all seemed unreal: the stone was lit in such a way as to make it appear to be clouds too, or some

such vaporous, earth-free substance. As the train slowed down I could see dozens, maybe hundreds of stalls, & at least two ferris wheels. *Thaipusam* was a carnival, or so it appeared, from the train, to be.

We stepped off & made our way through a labyrinth of stalls piled high with pyramids of neon-bright sweets & deep-fried savories. We made our way toward the stairs to the cave, & then walked beyond them, toward the river, where pilgrims, we had been told, began their *Thaipusam* ritual. Groups of drummers were scattered about, & we moved from one arena of percussive summons to another. Some suppliants were in the river submerging themselves again & again in mud-colored water, & others stood on the bank, dousing themselves with ladles of water taken from a large cistern positioned like Pisa's tower, bending toward sacred water. Nearby we watched who I presume was a priest prepare powders of various colors which he applied to the foreheads of pilgrims. A young couple presented their swaddled infant to the priest, who then placed a thumb-print of grey ash on its forehead. The parents put the infant in a sling hanging from ten-foot-long sugar cane stalks. They placed the stalks on their shoulders & made their way into the crowd, the father in front, the mother behind, the baby invisible between them. I watched a young man as consciousness seemed to leave him, while drums throbbed, & my heart began to beat with the drums. Five or six companions were chanting to the young man as a priest held him by his black thick hair & pulled him to & fro, until his eyes began to roll & his legs began to dance. Then the young male attendants, chanting all the while, led him beneath a wooden platform on which were mounted colored streamers attached to an umbrella, the high item on the platform, & from the platform were suspended fifteen or twenty chains with, at the end of each of them, a metal hook about three inches long. Under the full moon & the stone uprising, beneath the platform, the young pilgrim sat quietly, as if aware of nothing that could be felt or seen or heard, while his attendants attached the fifteen or twenty three-inch metal hooks to his bare back & chest. Nearby a young woman attended by only two other women was being chanted into a trance. Behind us, a boy, perhaps ten or eleven years old, closed his eyes, fell limp, as a priest touched his forehead with ash, spoke to him, pulled him toward him by his hair, & pushed him away, pulled & pushed, & the boy's slender legs awkwardly moved forward & back. The woman danced about like a dervish; the young boy seemed to be paralyzed, stunned into immobility, movable only by an exterior force.

Walter wanted to follow the young man, & so we left together, to walk the half mile or so to the steps, & then up nearly three hundred steps to the entrance of the cave. Incense everywhere, drums everywhere, thousands of people (virtually no Chinese or Malays—only Indians & a few whites), the full moon, the illuminated outcropping of stone that seemed to look different, as a cloud does, every time I looked at it. From a distance the steps themselves looked unreal: three sections of steps, separated vertically by stone balustrades: the left, for non-pilgrims climbing slowly to the cave; the right, for non-pilgrims coming down from the cave; the middle, for pilgrims, whether ascending or descending: men & women, of all ages, some mutilated, many not, some carrying elaborate, colorful arrangements of wood & flowers, many carrying silver urns on their heads; all of them barefooted; many men wearing only white shorts; each pilgrim attended by helpers, whether a few or many. I followed a young woman who I presumed was the mother of a young boy in a trance. She & a younger boy still—a younger brother perhaps—were leading the semi-conscious adolescent pilgrim to the steps.

By the time I got to the top of the stairs I felt quite faint—it was the heat, the crowd, the noise, the incense, the incredible display of will or faith or whatever it is that makes it possible for people to choose to suffer, to leave the world I & other non-pilgrims occupy, & enter another sphere. I found a rock where I could sit for a few minutes. The smoke from several fires rose in huge black clouds to the narrow outlet to the sky. I wanted out. Fran, Mike & I left first, made our way down the hundreds of steps, with thousands of observers. We found a stall where we could sit & sip a cold soft drink, & wait for the others, who arrived, one or two at a time, & we said little to one another. It was nearly midnight, & the Vollmers & their guests wanted to leave. I chose to stay with the Greenlers & Joe & Marie. We first found a place where we could have a beer, where we talked for a while about it all: were some of the pilgrims faking it? Probably, we agreed. We decided to go back to the river before we left. I wanted another look at the place where the trances were induced. That area was much more crowded than before. We could scarcely move on our own: had to move with the crowd. And the noise of the drums was, or seemed to be, more intense, louder, than when we first walked to the river. We stood a little above a spot where several men & a few women had their cheeks and tongues pierced with skewers that priests sterilized over a small

fire. Cheeks & tongues. But no blood. No apparent pain. Skewers as thick & long as those I have forced through chunks of edible flesh. The insistent beating of drums & chanting of companions. The pilgrims stood by themselves, put forth their faces & tongues, stood quietly while the priest gored them, through one cheek, then the other; while the priest stretched his suppliant's bloodless cheeks apart on the metal rod on which, now, the pilgrim's face appeared to rest. I, who am squeamish about blood & pain, wanted to see each move of each pilgrim, each insertion of thick hot metal into those dark cheeks & tongues. I did not want to leave. There was nowhere else I wanted to be, nothing else I wanted to do but watch this mutilation, this unspeakable spectacle.

And then, sometime later, Bob touched my shoulder: he said it was time to go. He led us back to the road where the pilgrims began their trek to the stairs of the cave. We walked beside a young man whose tongue had been pierced with a metal skewer, & whose back had been pierced with several hooks: his companion walked behind him & held the chains in his hand, pulling them taut so the young pilgrim must have felt, I thought, the pain in his back &, perhaps, felt the pain in his tongue less. He stopped, turned around, stood still for what seemed a long time, very close to me. His mouth was filled with a milk-colored liquid. And then his tongue began to spew forth a stream, a long stream, of what looked like thin milk. After a while he began to dance—lifting one leg parallel to the ground in front of him, then putting his foot to the ground, then lifting the other leg—& all the while the thin milk spewed from his mouth, around the skewer that pierced his tongue. I stepped aside to allow another pilgrim, who was being rolled on the road by his companions, to find his way to the steps, turning over & over on himself. In stalls on either side of the road men were having their heads shaved, & vendors were hawking vegetarian cookbooks, balloons, tapes, photographs, food, especially sweets. We walked toward the bus stop (the last train had left at 1 A.M.), & stopped to watch a group of young men dance feverishly to three or four drums: it could have been a scene in the States, & yet it was, it seemed, an inseparable part of what was going on only there, only that night. And on the bus: drummers still, & young men dancing as they held on to the bar overhead. The hot night air burst through the windows, blistered our faces, blew our hair, billowed under our loose shirts. Just before the conductor arrived to collect tickets, the dancing drumming

men jumped off the bus, waving & shouting to us as they disappeared in the darkness we left behind. We were the last to get off, in quiet downtown Kuala Lumpur, where we got a cab to take us to the Greenlers' car. And we drove home, along the stretch of federal highway that earlier was double-lined with cars, where now we watched for occasional headlights approaching us, taillights leading us west, toward the Straits of Malacca.

I don't know what to make of it: I don't know that I should try to make something of it. I am so very far from most that is familiar to me, & much of what I see every day I wonder about, do not understand. At this moment at my desk in my apartment in this far-away place, I am reminded of the first time I saw a bullfight, with Pierre, in Béziers, in the south of France, another far-away place. I remember I was repulsed by what I saw: I wanted to get away & at the same time I could not *not* watch the piercing, the goring, could not *not* be fascinated by the sight of pain inflicted & the feel of pain accepted. I imagined, that late summer afternoon in the Roman arena of Béziers, that I was watching an ancient theatrical spectacle out of which Clytemnestra & Agamemnon & Abraham emerged: emotions of loathing & disgust & horror—emotions themselves loathsome, disgusting, & horrible, welled in me, took me over, &, then, flowed out of me. So I am reminded of that sun-drenched afternoon in the Midi this pale early morning in Shah Alam, & another memory returns, the historical memory of spectacle's origin in prayerful rites. I saw things tonight I don't particularly want to see again, but I also had confirmed in my mind the fact of uncommon human will and fear and faith in transcendence. I didn't expect to understand much of what I was to see tonight, nor did I expect to see so much.

I've scribbled this down. I won't read it over. Just send it off.

Much love,  
Carol

Kuala Lumpur  
22 April 1991

Ramadan, the month of Moslem fasting, was about to end. Moslem astronomers kept vigil to determine the arrival of the new moon and the begin-

ning, therefore, of Hari Raya and the Moslem new year. For me, the end of Ramadan coincided with another kind of anticipation: I was leaving for Taman Negara, the largest rain forest in peninsular Malaysia and maybe the oldest undisturbed forest in the world. For 130 million years its growth and decay have continued uninterrupted by ice, volcanic flow, or oceanic submersion. The area became a national park in 1939, when sultans of the three states of Pahang, Kelantan, and Terengganu gave 4,300 square kilometers of the peninsula's highest and least developed land to the nation, thereby protecting it from large-scale logging operations of the kind that have destroyed close to half of Malaysia's forest cover in the last hundred years.

Before dawn we drove the length of Klang Valley, Malaysia's industrial corridor and most densely populated region. There was little traffic. Normally the fifty-kilometer drive on the Federal Highway connecting the port town of Klang to Kuala Lumpur takes two hours, and one may drive for long stretches in low gear through the smelly black discharge of motorcycles, diesel-fueled busses, lead-gasolined automobiles, and overloaded lorries. That morning, alongside the highway at foodstalls lit by pale yellow lamps, night drivers were enjoying their last meal before another long hot day of neither eating nor drinking nor, for the most resolute Moslem, swallowing their own spit. In another hour this four-lane highway would be jammed with vehicles, and the world's fourteenth most polluted city would work on becoming one of the top ten. There are few indications the government wants to deal with the problem. During the month of August, when a thick haze enveloped this area, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Development assured us that what we saw and breathed was harmless dust. University of Malaysia scientists could not provide a reading of aromatic hydrocarbons because their instruments for measuring them were clogged. In more normal times the level of inhalable particulate matter is higher in this area than the permissible standard set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Lead, arsenic, and cadmium float about day and night, and the cloths with which I wipe the surfaces in my small apartment look like a mechanic's rags. Malaysia has the fastest growing economy in S.E. Asia, perhaps in the world, and the priorities of its present government are to become a world industrial power and to quadruple its population by 2020.

We drove through K.L. and headed toward the Tembeling River,

about four hours north by a two-lane highway that passed through familiar terrain: groves of tall graceful rubber trees and of dark gloomy oil palms, both nineteenth-century imports, both important parts of Malaysia's export economy; *kampongs*, or villages, of rattan-walled houses on stilts, situated on bare anemic-looking soil from which, miraculously, sprout plants with enormous thick leaves and trees with large blossoms and fruit. Everywhere too is the familiar trash: garbage strewn and piled about, some of it in plastic bags; abandoned vehicle parts, plastic containers; styrofoam. There are here more vehicle repair shops than grocery stalls, more oil-stained concrete parking areas than sidewalks. I think of the Indian physicist Vandana Shiva's observation that Western science is the instrument of continued colonization. I think too of my own dilemma: I grieve for this naturally blessed land, and I long for my old Buick with its air-conditioned, smooth, noiseless, polluting ride.

The urbanized and Westernized landscape gives way to more forest, more hills, fewer vehicles, fewer villages. The forest is leaves, the leaves are always green, and from there one begins to discern variation. It has been here that I have had two recurring hallucinative experiences: one, the feeling of physical diminishment as I look at enormous tropical leaves; and two, the impression of nature reversing herself when I see a forest's relatively few red leaves and realize that, here, red leaves are young and the green are mature.

We arrived at the Tembeling jetty shortly before noon, which left time for lunch before the boat departed, at 2:00. We climbed the nearby hill to an open restaurant where I had noodles and squid (40 U.S. cents), two finger bananas (5 cents), and a 7-Up (80 cents). I am learning to live without beer through the perpetual Iowa August that is Malaysia. From where we sat we could look up the broad expanse of a tributary of the Taman Negara river system. It was a view I had come for. Across the river was the edge of the protected land. This might be my only visit to this oldest and most serene place, with one of the world's greatest preserves of flora and fauna, where, further into the interior, there still live *orang asli*, aborigines who are animists, having escaped the world's messianic and proselytizing religions, who are, still, unurbanized and unwesternized. If travel is, for some of us, movement back in time, this had to be my ultimate trip.

We threw our haversacks and backpacks into the bow of the longboat

and took our places, two across, on wooden planks that let us ride at water level. A tiny canopy protected us from the sun. Our pilot was a young Malay who sat in the stern, crouched, his hand on the Motorola outboard. Another young Malay, all muscle and skin, rode in the bow. His job was to watch for debris and check the water level, which, we were told, was neither too high nor too low: we probably would not have to get out of the boat and push it up the several rapids between the Tembeling jetty and Kuala Tahan, our destination sixty kilometers inland. The sun was still high so that the four masses that filled my view—the sky, the river, the two swathes of forest on either side of the river—appeared to have been colored with lightly held crayolas: pale blue, pale brown, green. At first, the only discernible movement was of the river, still colored with the soil of the highlands and mountains, where the annual rainfall is more than thirty-eight meters. How could one estimate the volume of water we saw or the expanse of forest? How noticeable would it be if, here, a hundred acres of forest were to disappear in the next minute, as does disappear every minute worldwide?

We moved from one side of the river to the other, the pilot following the hand signals of the bowman to the deepest water, away from sandbars, rocks, and occasional tree trunks. The river was not nearly so deep as the Mississippi nor nearly so wide, but it reminded me more of that larger river than of the Iowa River because of its unbroken exposure to the sun and the long stretches of straight flow. Occasionally we saw a *kampung* on high ground above the left bank of this river which separates the Park from privately owned land. Betel-nut palms towered over the small houses and huts, some with rattan walls and some with loosely placed plank walls, some with thatched and some with tin roofs. Near the shore beneath the *kampungs* women in sarongs washed clothes and dishes, and naked children waved to us, yelled Hello, and then thrust themselves into the river. At quieter spots a few men fished, and seemed not to see us. With the help of the woman next to me and my guidebook I identified a few trees: the *kerayang*, a tall tree with a straight whitish trunk and, at the very top, fine grey-green foliage reminiscent of a locust; the red river fig, whose berries birds appreciate; the *bungar*, with clusters of mauve blossoms shaped like hydrangeas. I had hoped to see long-tailed macaques and white-handed gibbons, but did not: my eyes were not trained to see forest creatures who did not choose to be seen. We did see on sandbars several

monitor lizards, some two meters long, which, as we approached them, scurried clumsily into the brush, their legs moving like those of awkward crawling infants. We saw herds of water buffalo cooling themselves in water that came to their necks. And we saw many brilliant blue-feathered kingfishers that glided ahead of us and along the river banks.

We arrived at the jetty of Kuala Tahan at 5:30, and we walked up the ninety-two steps from the wharf to the retaining wall of the camp, where a marker indicated the flood level of January 1971. It was difficult to imagine: the river then was about thirty meters higher than it was now. All the land and most of the flora we could see would have been submerged.

We spent four days in Taman Negara and I took more than a hundred photographs. The undeveloped film still lies on my desk here in Shah Alam. When I have them developed I will have a hundred falsely colored, slightly blurred, and otherwise disappointing shots of these living things: a buttressed tree, with wall-like roots two meters high and ten meters long; a strangler fig gradually suffocating a giant hardwood *meranti*; vines that climb, fall, and circle about; palms stretching upward and thrusting their leaves into the canopy; rattan; bamboo; a termite hill; epiphytes; a wild banana tree; scarlet earth-ginger; a black lily; the bowman of the boat that took us further inland, stripped to his jockey shorts, as he looked back at us, smiling, visibly wondering why we were there and if we were all right; the voluble Chinese who came to Taman Negara every year to fish, and would continue to do so until he was sixty and no longer able, he predicted, to help pull the longboat up the rapids; hornbills; hanging parrots; my friend Bob Greenler helping pull our boat up the rapids; my friend Barbara Greenler with her arms thrust upward to signal to me, from the seat in the front of the boat, that she was having a good time. There were four photographs I did not try to take, and those are the ones I want to remember here.

#### FIRST SHOT: FROM THE BLIND

The blind looked out over a rectangular expanse of grassland in the center of which were a salt-lick and a small pond. All around was the forest, and straight ahead, perhaps five or six kilometers away, hills pressed against the evening sky. An occasional bird flew high above, and all around us were the noises of animals we could not see—birds, monkeys, insects. With binoculars we could see a mass of reddish-brown move, but

always partially hidden, inside the forest at the foot of the hills across from us: probably a sambar deer. As the warm colors of the sky shrank to a swirl of coral light on a few clouds just above and to the left of the hills, a wild boar sauntered toward the pond. He walked about in the water and then sank into it, with what we imagined was a groan of pleasure. As he walked off toward the forest we lost sight of him, night having descended and there being no moon yet. Now it was time to wait in the darkness and at ten-minute intervals scan the field with a torchlight in the hope of seeing eyes reflecting light back to us. It happened sooner than we had expected. Within twenty minutes our light found five pairs of fluorescent eyes. I looked through binoculars and let my eyes adjust to the very dim light, and what I saw then is the photo I mentally take here: a black and white image of deer who seemed to return my gaze and not be disturbed by our light. They walked to the pool, too softly to be heard. They lowered their heads to the water, looked again into the light, and walked off to the forest.

#### SECOND SHOT: IN THE FOREST

We walked in the forest for hours, from early morning until long after dark. My guidebook assured us no visitor had ever been bitten by a poisonous snake in Taman Negara, which perhaps explains why I could stand still and watch a long slender black snake cross my path just at my feet, and why I could retract my hand slowly from the tree stump I had reached toward to keep my balance where a much more beautiful blue-green snake stretched, his head poised in the air, his tongue seeking my hand. In the soft mottled light of day, however, we were usually more aware of animals by their noises than by their appearance: cicadas, geckoes, frogs, grasshoppers, monkeys, and animals whose noises I could not identify: the circular saw, the nine-note rag, the do-re duet, the staccato waltz, the squeal, and endless unpatterned melodies. At night my torchlight caught the still brilliant spots that were spiders and pairs of eyes of lemurs and other tree-dwellers. Once, not fifteen meters away, my light found the face of a catlike creature, with short pointed ears, with circles of black and white around its throat, large black spots on its white coat, a long tail. It was as large as a German shepherd, and for just a moment I thought it was a jungle cat. It did not move, and then it did, to its left, in the direction it was headed when it stopped for my light. I did not know whether or not

it was dangerous, and I did not choose to turn away. I walked as quietly as I could, to within six meters of it, and stopped, either out of fear for my safety or of its disappearing. Again, the caught expression, asking: What are you doing here? And then it turned, without a sound, and disappeared.

During the day I was at times more conscious of the light than of what was lit: patterns of light and shadow melted down leaves, light shafts broke, then continued to the forest floor. At one moment I had the impression that the life-crammed scene around us was, because of the peculiarities of light and surface, about to transform itself into an abstraction of color and form. For a moment I did not see leaf and trunk but oval and cylinder: that is my second shot.

### THIRD SHOT: UPRIVER

We left the broad sun-filled Tembeling and entered the small water route, the Trenggan, where the light reminded me of the forest. Enormous trees arched over the water forming a canopy which the sunlight penetrated here and there. The shade made seeing easier. But here, the light was even more spectacular: shafts of light fell to the water's surface, and then reached up to the underneath branches and leaves of the overhanging trees. Light cast about on the river's surface and on the trees' undersurfaces: spirals, swirls, and lattices of light moved ceaselessly. We could see small fish from time to time; birds whooshed close to the river's surface, as if to pick up bits of floating light; fallen trees caught in the shallow waters lay on their own reflections, forming symmetrical configurations that reminded me of Georgia O'Keeffe's skeletons. Then, to one side, something red appeared just beneath the surface of the water, a circle of red about fifty centimeters in diameter. Blood? Whatever it was broke the water's surface and seemed to spew bubbles, red bubbles, upward. Then it sank below the surface. We could see it was a school of small red fish, each about ten centimeters long. *Toman bunga*, our guide said: flower fish. Baby *toman bunga*, he said. Big *toman bunga* were about sixty centimeters long, he indicated. Later, at the camp, I searched for the fish in a book, but could not find it. A forester told me the *toman bunga* is a carnivorous fish, and very aggressive: it can bite off one's finger. It is a fighter fish, but not good to eat, he said. The forester seemed indifferent to or unaware of the phenomenon we had seen. When we descended the Treng-

gan to return to our camp, the pilot turned off the outboard as we approached the spot where we had seen the flower fish. They appeared again, and for a few minutes we stayed close to them as the pilot back-paddled. The fish bubbled many times through the river's surface, like a giant carnation. One of those times is my third photo.

#### FOURTH SHOT: INTERIOR

We arrived at the point on the Trenggan beyond which our guide would not take us. The rapids to this point had tired us out. A dozen times or more we had climbed out of the boat to walk up the rapids while our boatmen and Bob Greenler pushed and pulled the boat over the rocks to deeper water. Several times we stopped while the pilot replaced a broken pin in the outboard. At our furthest point there was a clearing on a cliff above the river, where campers could stay overnight and where we could eat the lunch we had brought with us. Four Chinese businessmen from K.L. were there when we arrived. They shared their strong sweet coffee with us after we had lunched on peanut butter and crackers and mango juice, and our boatmen had cooked rice and a fish they dipped from the water beneath an overhanging tree. We could see downriver, the dark tunnel of water and foliage we had struggled through, but upriver was hidden from us by a stone outcropping just north of where we had lunch. Barbara and Bob stretched out for a nap under a bungar tree. This might be my last chance to walk in the forest and so I forewent the pleasure of dozing off to the sound of water washing over rocks, and took off. Here in the forest, as near our camp at Kuala Taman, tree roots and buttresses served as step retainers on the path that led into the dappled noon light. Already I anticipated the longing I would later feel for those sounds and shadows. I did not mind that I had not seen a white-handed gibbon or one of the fewer than one hundred elephants still left in peninsular Malaysia, or that it had not rained while we were in the forest or on the river, or that I hadn't seen a tree platform where the Batak aborigines of this area leave their dead. I had seen and heard and felt, as my aunt used to say she had eaten, a sufficiency. I had not seen—I had not expected to see—a Batak on a forest walk. The Batak would be no less wary than the other creatures who chose to escape my gaze, or who, having caught it, rejected it. I felt as if I were saying goodbye. The trip had been spectacular; it still was. The path descended now, and I followed it until I could see, below the path

and through a few trees, part of a sandbar, and I could hear water. I decided to take a photo of this most interior place, and I imagined what it would be as I slid down the drop-off to the sandbar: the rapids, the shore opposite, a piece of the sandbar in the foreground. I lost my balance, fell to the sandbar, stood up, and was about to reach for my camera when I lifted my eyes to the watchful eyes of a short dark broadchested man with curly copper-streaked black hair. He was standing in the middle of the river, he wore a loincloth, and he held on his shoulder a red plastic bag filled, I guessed, with fish. He did not smile, he made no sound. I stood still because I could not move. That is my last photo, of the Batak fisherman and me. He turned his head and gazed downriver and walked away.

I watched him for what may have been a minute, maybe much longer. I could not yet retrace my steps or relocate myself in real time. I felt as if I stood there as so many of us have done for centuries, looking at someone we would speak to, trade with, help, change, study, destroy. I was not the first Westerner he had seen: there was no surprise in his eyes. I was not the last one either. Another time he or his son would stand in this river, I thought, and one of my children or one of their generation will come sliding down that incline, and the encounter will be different. Before he disappeared from view I turned back to the forest, climbed up the incline, and found my way back to the bungar tree and the Greenlers.

We left Taman Negara the next morning. We stood at the retaining wall of Kuala Taman and looked for a last time from that considerable height over the river and the forest. Across the river a woman washed clothes, and another swung a small net about in the calm water of a small bay, her gesture reminding me of a matador with his cape. Boats crossed the river carrying Malays dressed in dazzling colors to the landing beneath a mosque where Hari Raya was being celebrated. The worshippers stepped from the boats carrying their shoes and walking up the steep stairs to the mosque we could not see, and over loudspeakers the special prayers and chants of this day seemed to fill the air, and we could not hear the morning cries and songs from the forest behind us.

## SISTER LINA: INTRODUCTION

I first heard about Sister Lina through Richard Evans, a colleague at ITM/MUCIA. “Sister Lina has an interesting story,” Richard said, “or so I have heard. She is in her eighties, she was born in Germany, she spent many years in China, was imprisoned. She might be someone to talk to.”

Richard suggested I talk with Das, who serves as Sister Lina’s driver and contact person in her work with the poor in a nearby *kampong*, or village. Das told me Sister Lina was on vacation, and would not return for two or three weeks. I learned later, from the woman who drove me to my first meeting with Sister Lina, that she in fact was ill and did not wish for people to know she was hospitalized. When I at last spoke with Sister Lina, she expressed some uneasiness about being interviewed. Though other sisters in her order were encouraging her to meet with me, she was apparently fearful I wanted to write a laudatory article about her. “I am not a high person,” she said to me; “I do not want you to write that I am a high person, or a saint.” I assured her I did not intend to write anything about her life. I wanted to hear her account of her life, to record it, and to present it to readers in her words. I spoke with her twice by telephone. The second time she consented to a meeting.

Julie Lee, a Chinese housewife who had just completed several weeks of catechism with Sister Lina and was to be baptised at Christmas, telephoned me and offered to meet me at the bus stop in Petaling Jaya and drive me to the Franciscan Mission of Mercy Convent, where Sister Lina lives. A taxi-driver might have trouble finding the convent, she told me. As we rode from the bus stop to the convent, however, I suspected Julie had volunteered to meet me in order to caution me: I should not mention Sister Lina’s recent illness, and I should try to reassure her that I did not intend to write an appreciative article about her. “Sister Lina does not like to be praised. You will understand better after you have talked with her.”

We rang the bell at the gate through which I could see the convent. It was a quite ordinary-looking house by Malaysian standards, and by American standards too: a ranch-style house, perhaps thirty years old, surrounded by a closely trimmed lawn with here and there a profuse hibiscus or a bougainvillea. A sister in a short-sleeved light blue habit appeared at the doorway and walked to the gate. She walked with a quick step, but with a stoop, so that she appeared to be quite small. Her hair was white,

her skin fair, her eyes pale sky blue, her facial features sharp. “Come in, come in; it is very hot; do you want something cold to drink? Do you want that we sit here?” She led me through a room where there was an upright piano against one wall, photographs and posters on the other longer wall, and in the middle of the room, a few plastic-upholstered chairs arranged around a pressed-wood coffee table. We sat at a large dining room table from where I could see, beyond the wall of windows, the yard and a small white statue of St. Francis. I could not tell if it was her usual manner — the nervousness, the pressure to move, to speak quickly. I told her I appreciated her letting me come. I told her she could stop at any time: that I did not want her to feel uncomfortable talking to me. I would like to hear about her life, I told her. What follows here are her words, her sentences, pretty much in the order she spoke them. I have not edited away the occasional lapses in grammar, in tense, in usage. They remain, as bewilderingly minor reminders that English was the fifth language Sister Lina learned, and she learned it when she was more than fifty years old. What is not apparent in this written transcription are two aspects of her speech that remain most vividly in my memory. One, is the music of her speech. Her voice is a clear soprano, and she speaks slowly, carefully, giving each syllable attention, giving no syllable undue attention. Two, is how she marks many words and phrases she speaks with evidence of her long and rich linguistic history. *Germany* is *Chermany*, and *joy* is *choy*. At times she lapses into German and, more often, French, but only to retrieve particular words, as if something of her past is frozen in the language she inhabited at the time of the experience she is recounting. These words are italicized, and you should imagine them as flashes of linguistic memory which Sister Lina seemed not to notice. Quickness or nervousness, it turned out, was not characteristic of her speech. Rather, delicacy, attenuation, limpidity. Perhaps my most vivid single recollection concerning Sister Lina’s manner is of her laughter: as if fearful that I might exaggerate the suffering and pain of her experiences, she seemed eager to emphasize light moments, the attestations of *choy* in her life.

I visited Sister Lena three times — twice to record her story, and the last time to accompany her on her Sunday evening visit to a nearby *kampong* to talk with a few desperately destitute families, mainly women with their children, who receive food and clothing from Das as representative of the convent. The families live in tin and wood lean-tos, without electricity or

running water, on dirt or cement floors, with the barest suggestions of furniture or comfort. I stood back as Sister Lina and Das spoke with these young mothers whose husbands had abandoned them or were in prison, stood back and caught the eyes of bright-eyed, eager-looking children who seemed intrigued with my presence, a foreign woman they had not seen before. Our visit was cut short when Das lost the muffler on his car: the roadways we were traveling were pocked with cavernous holes. We were in a *kampong* that had originally been the site of a tin mine, and now was government-owned land that people could live on with the understanding that at any time they might have to move. Das stayed with his car. "We have no choice," Das said. "On Sundays, the repair shops are closed. But God will help us." Sister Lina and I walked to the main highway to hail a taxi. "I am so angry," she said: "a family so *pauvre*, with nine children, the husband has run away; another family, the father is involved in drugs, and I grow angry. But this is where I belong, with the *pauvres*. You see why I cannot leave now. There is so much work to do."

You must excuse my English. I do not speak very well. I do not speak correctly. I hope you understand my words. I did not learn English in school. I learned by hearing my sisters speak English. I hear words and I write them on pieces of paper. I take the paper from my pocket and study it, and then put it in my pocket, and when I have time, I look at the word again. I read, and the words I do not understand I look up in the dictionary. It is a very funny way to learn English, is it not? I have learned Chinese, French, English, and Bahasa. The Franciscan Mission of Mary is a French order, and I learned French when I entered the convent. I spoke French and Chinese in China. When I arrived in Malaysia, because there were many French sisters, I spoke French, and I had to learn Bahasa. That is when I learned English too. Many people in Malaysia spoke English then. In time, all the French sisters had to leave Malaysia. They did not have permanent visas and after ten or twelve years, when Malaysia became independent, they had to leave. So then only Chinese, Bahasa, and English speakers were here. I never speak German. Since I left Germany I have been the only German sister. I am the only German sister here.

I was born in Germany in March 1912 . Very young I wanted to become a sister. When I was twenty years old I entered a convent in Eichgran, near

Vienna, the Franciscan Missionary of Mary. That was in 1932, and already there was much trouble in Germany. All was in preparation for the War.

In 1932 I entered the convent, and in 1937 I was sent to Rome, and then to China, in the time of Chiang Kai-shek. But I must go back for you to understand.

I was the eldest of six children—four brothers and one sister, all younger—but they all died earlier. Everyone in my family is dead now, the family I knew before I left Germany. None of my brothers and sister entered an order, but our family was Catholic. My father was a *Goldschmidt*, and my mother was a housewife. My father was in the War, all four years. When my daddy went to the War I was two and a half years old, and my brother was three or four months old. My daddy embraced us all three, and my mom cried, and my father was very upset. I remember I said, “Don’t worry, Mama, I will stay with you.” He came back in 1918, and he was very sick for two or three years. I remember he had very bad rheumatism, but he recovered and took up his profession as a *Goldschmidt*. We lived near Stuttgart.

I think my mother’s parents died before I was born: I do not remember them. My father’s father died when I was very small, but I remember—I think—he was a very good man. I knew my father’s mother a little bit. She was against my entering a missionary order. When we were small we had much fun with her. I was the eldest of six and I was a little naughty. When we were in the garden in back of her house, we took a stick and pushed the fruit from the trees. My grandmother said, “What are you children doing?” She was furious. My mother was very different. She did not scold, but my grandmother did.

Sometimes when I was a young girl I thought I was preparing to marry. There was a young man. After the War we were very poor and there was a young man who was very wealthy. We were poor, and that is why I went to work in the *Magazin*—a *Magazin*, a large warehouse store. I worked in the office. The owner of the *Magazin* and his family liked me very much. They were very nice to me. I received a good salary too which I could share with my family. I was very happy about that. And there at the *Magazin* was a young man who fell in love with me. He was the son of the owner. But I did not know love for him. I was not in love with him. I just do my work. And then I went from my home to Vienna where I entered a novitiate. I was there five years, until 1937. My parents were very angry I

had entered the convent, especially my father. My father was very angry. When I was in China, my mother and brothers and sister wrote to me, but not my father. He wanted me to stay in Germany. I could have remained in Germany, sure, but the Father at my school—he was a Franciscan—convinced me to become a missionary. I don't know why he told me that. He didn't know me personally, he did not know my family. Very often I prayed and I went to confession. I had nothing in my mind to become a missionary. I don't know how it was. It was gradual, my thinking that I will become a missionary. In spite, I don't know how it was. I hid from my parents what I wanted. Just I prayed to God to tell me what to do. I wanted to escape—at first I wanted to escape telling my parents I wanted to enter a missionary order. I knew it would be very hard for them. Then I had really—I had such a certainty in me that I wanted that life. It was when I worked in the *Magazin*, when I was in the home of the owner, and they treated me very well.

I was very close to my mom. Oh yes I was very very close to my mom. She was the most important person to me. She was very good. Even as I told you, my father was very against my going to the convent. When I told them I wanted to become a missionary they were very angry, very sad. My mother told me, “We don't mind that you go to convent, but stay in Germany.” Then my mom said—she told me when I was very young I had pneumonia. I was very sick. They did not know what to do. There was no more hope for me. Then my mom offered me to Our Lady—that if Our Lady heard her, she would do with me what Our Lady wanted. My mom told me that just before I entered the convent. She said to me she said to my father, “We cannot go against her because when she was sick we promised that we give her to Our Lady Mary, and now she wants to go to the convent.” “Yes,” my father said, “go to the convent, but stay in Germany. Now she is so foolish. She goes to Missionary Institute and she will go God knows where.”

And it was like that. When I entered the convent, my father did not cry, he did not speak. My mom said, “Go in the name of Jesus.” I did not cry. I wanted to show my courage. My mother died in 1970. She was eighty-seven years old. She was always a very religious woman. My father died the year I came to Malaysia, in 1954. I was not home when my mom died, I was not home when my father died.

I took vows step by step. Novitiate vows, and then vows for three

years. A novice may leave the order. We are not bound. If after three years we are happy then we make vows for a whole lifetime, and we get this ring. It says I am the servant of Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. I was given the ring in China, where I took my final vows. I cannot take it off because I have rheumatism and my fingers are swollen. I was in the novitiate for two years and then I was sent to Vienna where I worked helping poor people, looking after sick people in their homes. More and more I knew I wanted to be a missionary – that was my goal. At the Institute we all were longing to be sent on mission.

Already times were difficult in Germany. All was upset – all this Hitler was started. Everywhere young people made processions – this I remember very well. We were very aware Hitler was not a good man. All my four brothers had to go to the War. None was killed. That was something quite – we were the only family in our town where all the brothers came back. One was in Russia in a prison; one was in Africa somewhere; one was in Germany; and one was in France. The last to come home was the brother in Russia. I received from my mother a letter I don't know how – this was already very late. I know that after the fighting he was in a Russian prison. One day I asked for a whole day not to work. I prayed the whole day for that brother. My mother said when he came back he was just like a baby, you know, and how he had to be fed – special milk, from a spoon. He was very very ill, but he recovered. After that he was all right. I have a photograph somewhere.

I was very young when I was sent to China. Usually sisters are not sent on mission so young. I arrived in China in 1937, after four months in Rome. We were sent out in May, our group. We were sent to *Naples*, and there we took a boat – *Koto Rosso*: I remember the name of it. It was a very big ship. I got very sick. There was such a big storm in the *Méditerranée* – you say *Méditerranée*? We had to lie down and could not leave our cabins. A very very big storm. It was more than one day. We were all sick, all vomiting. They gave us ice cream. Then it was all right and then we enjoyed it. In the Arabian Sea we saw the big fish – what is it? Not the high fish. A whale, yes, a whale. We could not see the whole whale. It looked big like a house. The ship made a wide round-round, and we could see the whale in the looking glass.

Some Chinese sisters met me when I arrived in Shanghai. We went up the Blue River to Chungking. I was in China fifteen years – during the

Second War and then during Communist rule. The last three years I was in China was when the Communists were in power. I was in prison for eleven and a half months. They said I killed babies. Before the Communists came in, two doctors came to visit us where we had an orphanage. . . . Actually I must go back.

After three weeks on the sea we arrived in Shanghai and there, after two months, some sisters came to awaken me during the night. They said, "Sister, you have to get up. You must go to Ichang. The War has started." So that night I was put in a boat on the Blue River and I was sent to Ichang, which is in Hupeh. Do you know where is Hupeh? I will show you on a map.

When I arrived the sisters met me. We lived together. We always feel at home with our sisters, no matter which country we are in. Everywhere we have the same customs. We are very community-minded. I had a very warm impression when I arrived in Ichang. I remember that very well.

During the days we worked in very large hospitals. We visited the very very poor in *kampongs*. I baptised many dying babies. When there were baby girls—many Chinese threw them away soon after they were born. We had no toilets—just holes behind the houses, and they threw the babies there, having put rags in their mouths to suffocate them. When I opened the door of our mission I could hear the cries of babies who were not yet dead, but some were dead already when we found them. The babies were wrapped in rags. I took the babies and carried them to the hospital, and that is why our orphanage was started. Many babies died in my arms. If they were still alive, I baptised them. We had girls only. They were abandoned as infants, sometimes when they were older. There were no boys. They don't give away boys, the Chinese—only the girls.

When I arrived in Ichang, Chiang Kai-shek was already fighting there. The hospital was filled with Chiang Kai-shek's wounded soldiers. In the midst of that troubled time I made my final vows. I also was caring for the children at that time, many of whom had very sore eyes, and I caught an infection. The pus was pouring down my cheeks for two months. In the middle of that time I made my final vows. The sisters laughed and said, "Sister Lina is a real victim." You understand, when we made vows we said, "I offer myself as victim for the Church and for Souls." It is very meaningful. Because of the infection I could not read anything. So I had to memorize what I had to say—all in French, not in German. The Institute

was founded by a French sister. We always spoke Chinese or French in China. There were some French sisters there.

After one year in Ichang with the wounded soldiers and the children, where I made my vows, I was sent to Suiting. I was sent with my superior, a Belgian sister. I was twenty-six years old. To go to Suiting from Ichang we had to—it was quite a complicated road. We had to go through the mountains. There were no cars, no vehicles. Two men carried each of us in chairs. The road was very narrow at times, and the mountains were very steep. We were told we could not go alone through these mountains because the bandits of Chiang Kai-shek were very awful there. They robbed and killed people. So in 1948 or 1949—I cannot remember the year—we set out. We had to pay money for escorts. We were more than thirty people. We all paid some money. The chair I sat in, the chair the two men carried, was all in bamboo, which is very strong. I had a little place for luggage behind me. I was very young and I was not afraid. My superior was very afraid, but I was not. I was so unafraid because I had just made my vows so I was peaceful in my heart, and I remember I was singing. Then at a very narrow place, where the road went steeply up and down and was very narrow, the two men who were carrying my superior refused to carry her further, and said she had to get down. My superior was, as you say, a little heavy: she was an older lady. The poor woman had to stay behind, but it was good for her that she did not go with us because when we got into the mountains and it was very very steep, the *brigands* who had been waiting for us started shooting at us. It was the worst thing that happened in my life. The worst experience. I was thinking, my life is finished. But still I was not afraid. I was peaceful in my heart. Also there had been a big storm the night before. The mud was so thick we could not run away, and then they were shooting down on us. Most of the businessmen were shot, many times they were shot, and they fell to the ground, and some did not fall but—it was as if the bullets fastened them to the side of the mountain. Myself I don't know how—Imagine: one of the men who was carrying me—I had jumped down from my chair and I was hiding behind it. It was useless but I did not know what to do, there was such shooting and killing. The man picked me up and carried me on his back. He told me in Chinese as he was carrying me, “We have to run like a snake; when we run like a snake we have more chance that we are safe.” I had no experience, I did not know what he meant, but he told me that.

Very often I pray for that man—how he thought of saving my life. It was a long way he carried me, it was a long time he carried me—about two hours, I think. I was not heavy at that time, but still. I did not see anything in back of us, I could not look back, I held on to that brave man, and we ran like a snake on that narrow path. We came out of the shooting and then up the hill, and there at last we met my superior. She was out of her—she was so—how can I say?—so afraid because she thought I was finished. When we got there the man put me down and ran away, and I could not say anything to him. I could not say thank you. I did not see him after that. I think of the goodness of that human being. He was not to save his own life. I was not heavy, but still he could have run much faster if he had not taken me with him. Really I will never forget that. I often pray for him.

Then I reached out for my superior, who was all alone, and she was crying. The two men who carried her chair had run away, so she was all alone. She screamed, “Lina, you are all right!” And then I turned to the man to say something. He said, “No, no, no, I must go,” and he went away. He wanted to save his life. My superior fainted. I was okay. I don’t know how long it lasted. Exactly, I don’t know. We set out in the morning very early, and it was noonday when that thing happened to us in the mountains. There was only one way out, only one way back.

When she fainted again, the Chinese people who came to us were so *charitable*. They brought her to their little house, their little hut, and there they gave us fermented rice—like wine—and they put an egg in it, and they gave it first to her, and she was all right, and they gave it to me too. I remember so well. The people said, “We are so afraid, we cannot keep you here because we will be in trouble.” I had my chair no more, so they put me in a wedding chair that they fetched from far away. You know in China the wedding chair is *comme* a box with very small windows. You can just barely see the bride in a wedding chair. So they pushed me into the wedding chair. I tell you something to make laugh. In the wedding chair there was a small stool over a small hole. I was to sit down on the stool because the bride is not very high, not very—how to say?—tall. But in the hurry-up of leaving that area the people forgot to put the stool in the wedding chair. They pushed me in, and I was sitting in the hole, and my feet were out, my feet were out the little windows, one on each side. Again my superior was so afraid, so upset, she was screaming from far in front of me. And I screamed too. I said, “I am here, Sister, do not be worried.” She

looked back to see me. I had no more shoes, I had lost my shoes in the battle. I lost everything. I had no change of clothes, only what I was wearing. But my superior saw my feet sticking out the windows and my toes wiggling, and she knew I was alive. There are always many things which make me to laugh afterwards—many things to make laugh in very bad things.

And so we went to Singling, to a parish place there. Maybe we could stay in the church there, my superior said. But when we arrived, it was so awful. Because there we saw all the dead people, all the people who had been killed by *brigands* on the mountain road. All the bodies were put on a car with two wheels—all the bodies were there, in a very large pile. It was awful—thirty bodies, maybe more. Everyone had been killed except the brave man who carried me, and me, and a Chinese father. He had jumped down from his chair, and he lie down in a ditch, where the water ran, and he remained there during the battle. The others who survived I do not know, but I know I saw many dead bodies, and I was so sad. When you see the blood of so many dead bodies, so much blood . . . That is when we were going to Singling, my superior and I.

In Singling the priest was very nice to us. He had a small wooden house, a very poor place actually. But he gave to us his place. He said the two of us could sleep in that bed and he will sleep outside. He was so nice. So we were there three weeks or four weeks. We were only half the way through the mountains. It was our destiny to reach . . .

Oh yes there was another experience, so awful. In that parish at night a big storm, a very big storm came. There was such a flood. We were in bed, and suddenly my superior said, “What’s happening? All is moving here.” There was no electricity, of course. We could not see. Then the father knocked on the door and said, “Sisters, come quickly out; there is a flood and we must save our lives.” I had very little on me because I had no clothes. The father was very concerned. — Are you Catholic, Carol? Your name is Carol? But still you know a little bit about our Church. Well, we went to the church nearby, which was waterproof against the water. The father said, “We have to save the Holy Communion.” The Holy Communion is the Eucharist. We had to receive the Holy Communion, you see, because if we did not it would be taken in the flood. The father emptied all the Holy Communion Eucharist in the tabernacle, and we consumed the Host. After that we sat down, but the water was rising. Where to go?

We sat on the table, and then on chairs on the table. We did not know what to do when the water rose higher and higher. And then the people in the parish put a ladder against the belltower—where you ring the bell?—because it was concrete, it was not wood, and so it was safe against the water. That was the only place that stayed solid, and so the father said, “Yes, put the ladder against the belltower,” and we sat all night on the ladder and all day also. That was another experience that was very awful.

After that when the rain stopped and the water descended, we came down the ladder. We waited, and finally from Suiting there came two Chinese men, and they say they will take us to Suiting by boat. They knew how to go there safely. And so we arrived at last at our mission.

In Rome they had given to us clothing and other things to set up the orphanage, and all was lost. So we arrived with nothing. But the sisters were very happy because we were safe after our experiences.

We started again very poor. When I arrived there we started a dispensary for the poor. Another Belgian sister was there already, and I worked with her. Then I was sent to Chungking to learn midwifery, and after that we started a small maternity with twelve beds. I was in Chungking one year. Instruction was in Chinese, but the doctor was French, and he was very nice so I learned midwifery. There was no doctor in Suiting at that time so it was very difficult. No, I did not choose to be a midwife. My superior wanted me to be a midwife. You see, there was a very great need because so many women died bearing children. There was a very great need in that place. I liked to study in Chungking. There was a large hospital and a nursing school. I followed a little bit the nursing school, and I liked that too, but I was mainly learning midwifery.

The War was going on and there were some *bombardements* in Chungking, but not many. It was more in Peking and near that city. When we started our maternity in Suiting there were many *bombardements*: there were *bombardements* all the time. We were only two in the maternity—the Belgian sister and I. When the *sirènes* sounded, to announce the *bombardements*, everybody was very excited and would run away to the *kampongs*. But a pregnant woman would get a pain when she was excited and could not run, and we had to stay with her there. Even one time there was a big hole in the ceiling. The bomb did not fall on the ward, but nearby, and it made a hole in the ceiling of the maternity. Then there was a big rain, and I remember so well I had to deliver a baby while a woman held an umbrella

over us. I had to deliver the baby under the umbrella.

One thing in all this is, you get used to the life God gives you, so I am quite—that is to say, all through this, I was so aware that God was with me. I saw myself as an instrument of God. So I worked in Suiting during the War.

The War ended in 1945. After that the Communists started: I don't remember exactly when. In 1948—no, 1949—in Suiting the Communists came. Everyone was aware it was Communist time. It was very difficult. Before the Communists came we had managed to build a hospital with the help of two American doctors—a dentist and a doctor. They were so kind to me. They gave me instruments—they gave me a stethoscope so I could listen. I knew a little bit about the chest. The doctors came every two weeks, and they instructed me, and sometimes I had to do things if they were not there. Whatever had to be done, if the doctors were not there. They came with a missionary father. They came from far away, by helicopter.

Then a French doctor from Tibet became our sister. She came to us because starvation was growing, and then a Canadian sister, a staff nurse, came to us, and so the three of us were together in the maternity: the French doctor, the Canadian staff nurse, and I was just a midwife. At that time we had more beds—twenty or more. In spite of having nothing, people continued to come to us and we had to—we had to push. Women came from far away, sometimes without consultation. Sometimes they came and the *placenta* is coming out, the *placenta* is hanging in the middle. Things happen you cannot believe if you do not see. They just put something heavy to stop the blood, and they tie her on a chair, and they bring her to the hospital, and you have to remove the *placenta*. The Lord was with me. Sometimes I did not know what to do. I just said, “Lord, take my hand,” and he did.

I remember one woman who died. She came from far away. She had the baby at home. She was actually a heart case, and she was bleeding, bleeding, bleeding, and it did not stop. Then she died. The others, no. God is so good. I cannot imagine with so little things we did so much.

The Communists arrived in 1949 in our place. Immediately we were accused. We could no longer lock our houses. All dogs were killed. That was the first thing they did when they entered our place: we had three dogs, and they . . . They said we did not need to guard our houses, that they will guard us.

They searched us and searched us, always they searched us. Then there was the *Volks* trial. We were accused of killing babies, of taking blood and putting syphilis in it to kill people. We were accused of so many bad things. We were all put on trial: the Chinese father who fled Peking and worked as a nurse; Sister Doctor; Sister Nurse; and the Jesuit father who had come to give us retreat. But we had no retreat. The Jesuit father was caught and put on trial with us. The Communists searched for things to accuse us. They said we were *impérialistes*. They said we cause plenty of harm in China, and we must leave. The police came and we were imprisoned in our house. Then, in the morning, the police came and tied *ficelles* here [around the upper arms] and here [around the chest, with arms crossed]. Three were put in the big prison: the Chinese father, Sister Doctor, and Sister Nurse. The Jesuit father and I were put in the hospital in separate rooms, and we could not come out or do our work: our work was finished.

Then two weeks after we were put together for trial—a big *jugement* in front of the people. They took out bones from the cemetery and put them in front of us. They accuse us that all these people they found that we killed them. The trouble was they did not have enough bones from humans so they mixed them up with pig bones. I did not realize that, but Sister Doctor—we were tied up and on our knees, next to one another, and behind us each, a policeman with a gun, and when we move they stick us with the guns—we were there for hours, and the people had to scream and scream and scream against us. I do not blame the people. They did what they had to do. They announced on the loudspeaker: they said we were *impérialistes*, and all such bad things. In the middle of that, while we were on our knees, Sister Doctor told me, in French, “Those bones are bones of a pig.” She said, “I would like to throw a pig bone at their heads, if I had my arm free I would do it.” Then we had to sign—they untied our arms—that all they accuse us for is true, and we must sign or they will shoot us. If we sign, we will be expelled from the country. It was not true what they said, nothing was true. They untied us to sign, and Sister Doctor was fast enough, you know, she took a pig bone and threw it at the man and said, in Chinese, “You lie—you can see it is a pig bone.” They tied us up again and put us back in prison before we signed. So we did not sign the lies.

My superior was in the big prison with Sister Doctor and the Canadian nurse. I was in the police house with the French Jesuit father. In China,

you know, there are—how to say?—rooms under the roof, and that is where the Jesuit father stayed. I was in a room alone, but I made many friends. The policemen did not want to feed us so they say I am not as guilty as the others so I go to the hospital to beg money to buy food and cook something because the two sisters in the big prison were sick. Always I must go with my police guard. I was never free. I did not feel guilty so I got along well.

I bring the food to the prison. I have three stones together and charcoal and I cook in a large Chinese pot—like a black bottle one can cook in—I do not know the word in English. With that I cook the meal. This is all I have. Then I have with me a food carrier that was given to me. The father—how to say?—the father arranged a layer in the bottom of the carrier so I could hide the Holy Communion to take to my friends in prison. I had many friends—the guard, the policewoman—they knew what I was doing. I take some small pieces of cloth and I make a clean purse for the Host. Our previous priest was living in a convent with his brother. And then we had orphans, as I told you, and one of them was a—how do you say?—a hunchback, and she, when I had permission to cook for them, she brought something from the *kampong*, she say to the policewoman. The orphan was living with the priest and his brother. Many orphans lived with the priest and his brother. Actually she brings me the host the priest made with ordinary flour, but he made the Host and said Mass and that is what she brought to me. She came with a basket with all kinds of things but also the Host and wine. It was not actually wine but it was all right. The priest made it from a few grapes. After the Jesuit father consecrates the Host, the next day the police officer asks me to take food to the sick sisters. After I make friends with people there, the sisters may come out of their rooms, and I embrace them, and I whisper to them, “Jesus is with us.” I speak it in French because they spoke French. That is how I took the Host to Sister Doctor and the Canadian sister, yes. Later my superior was also in prison, but she was given a little better treatment. And then I brought three Hosts. I was with the Jesuit priest to say Mass in the evening. The good was that the policewoman was on my side but she had to seem to be against. She never say anything when I pray. She tells nobody. Even her husband does not know. Her husband was a nice man, but they were very afraid. If something comes up and they know they help us, they will be put in prison.

In prison we did not have water to drink. There were many cadavers floating in the river. There were many suicides: people cut their arteries and jumped into the river. Father said, "I will never drink that water." The police inspector said he would ask if we could have water from the hospital. He gave me a paper to take to our hospital to get water, two buckets of water, twice a week. This went on eleven months. I carry food and water, I prepare food, I pray. My work in the maternity was finished. The Communists took over the hospital, everything.

While I was in prison the police inspector's wife—it was time for her delivery. She had her first baby some years before in the hospital, and I had delivered it. She asked her husband—she refused to have her own people the Communists deliver her baby. Some Communists were very nice people. She begged her husband to release me to deliver her baby. Finally they came to say they want me for the delivery of the baby. And I said, "I am scared; I am only a midwife; if something happens, you will accuse me; I need a doctor—Sister Doctor." So each of us was escorted by a policeman to the police inspector's house. The delivery was normal, there was no difficulty. We were very happy, Sister Doctor and I, to be together. It was a real joy for us.

When the delivery was finished Sister Doctor was put back in prison. I had to stay a little more to take care of the baby. Every day I had to go—the policeman came to walk with me—to bathe the baby and to see that everything was in order. With this we became a little bit friends, the police inspector's wife, the police inspector, and I. We cannot show on the outside but anyhow the feeling was there, between me and the husband and the wife. He said he could not say anything. He had to be against us. Everybody knows we do nothing wrong. The children know. I walk in the street with the policeman and the children say, "I know this sister and she is not an *impérialiste*. She gave me this or she did this for me." The tears were running down. Even the children know. It was very touching.

The policewoman was so poor. She had six children and she was pregnant. At night I delivered her baby in the police house, in the midst of her six children around. We had nothing—only paper. Lucky I had an apron—an extra apron—that was cleaner than the paper. I tear it in pieces to cover the cord. This was not complicated. We were on the floor. It was like that: it was not difficult. I was only afraid for infection. I had no injection for the poor policewoman still bleeding; I just press on the womb till it

contracts. These things seem to people from other societies—it seems nearly *impossible*, but it was okay. We became very good friends, the police-woman and I—good friends inside, but outside she could not show. Inside—no, not the prison: inside the heart.

After one year there was another big trial. They tied *ficelles* around our arms and chest and then behind. It was very painful, and the policemen held us from behind. They put big *placards* in front and behind—I do not know how to say—did you see *The Last Emperor*? I saw it and I cried the whole time, I could not control myself—it was exactly like that. We had to make signs and they march us around, with written on the signs our sins, why we are condemned, all the bad things we have done, they say, but it was not true.

After the trial we were to be expelled immediately. One week I was in the big prison with the others. In the middle of the night a big lorry came, and we were pushed into it. Then we arrived at the river. We were put in a boat, and we were two nights and two days on the boat. We arrived in Hankow, and from Hankow we arrived—it was the last town—I forget the name of it now. From there we were put in a train—the name is out of my head. After three days we were put in a train, and we arrived in—in Gallong, and there we came out. We had nothing. They searched us, even between the legs—it was awful. And then we see it is finished. We were examined, and then they took us out of the little house, and the policemen pushed us from the—what is the word?—from the border, yes, across the border. They just pushed us very hard. And there were three fathers from the mission and they invited us to tea. We were dancing and laughing, we didn't know what to do—we were free. You do not know the joy. The fathers sent us to our sisters in Gallong. Then we were sent to Hong Kong. We were three weeks in Hong Kong and Macao. Then Superior sent a telegram to say we are to come back to Rome.

I remember very well the scenes but I do not remember very well the dates or the names. I have pictures in my mind. It is very keeping in me when I think: it is very present in me. Before, I did not think so much, and then I cried and cried: I could not control myself. But now I feel very grateful to God for letting me experience all these things. When we were put on trial, we were tied down, aching everywhere, but the one thing in my mind—it is very clear in my mind—inside I had such a beautiful feeling. Do you know a little bit about Jesus, how he suffered and was put on

trial? I think while I am on trial, Jesus was put on trial, and put to death, and then put free. All these things became very clear in my mind. Then I think, I was so grateful I can feel a little bit of what Jesus felt. You feel you have been through this thing, and you want to help the people. I did not have a guilty feeling. I never hated. They have to do what they have to do, the Communists, and they know very well it is not true, what they say. I felt I had—I don't know—maybe I had a small part in the suffering of Christ suffering for us.

When you have faith, you have awareness that God is with you. I am not very clever, you know. I think you can see I am not capable of great things. I am just an instrument. Really it is not I. Do not think that. It is not I. I was put into situations. I did not ask to go to China. I did not ask the superior to send me to that place. I was just an instrument in the hand of God. That is why, please do not write that I am a great person: it is not true that. Just say I feel myself—the thing is, I accept God's grace. People do nasty things, and I do not hate because I accept God's grace. I have never felt hatred. I always excuse the Communists: they have to do it. It is the Communist tactic: they have to do it. It is God's grace I am in that situation. I tell you I am not a high person—I am only a midwife. My life is—I don't know—when you think of the *brigands* and how I was on the back of that man—why was I not shot down? You ask, Why I? Other people die. The great kindness of that man to bring me out and not just save his own life—it must not be easy to carry someone in a situation like that. All I think when I look back is that God protected us. It is not myself that is important: it is that I am God's instrument. It is a simple belief but it is my strength.

It took four weeks to return from China. After prison I was very thin. But after, I was all right. I was in Rome three months. We had no passports, nothing, just what we were wearing. Then we were sent to France in 1953. To *Paris*. After some rest I was working in a maternity. Our mission has a hospital there.

When I was in France my family came to see me. It was the first time after twenty years. My cousin who was a priest came and he said Mass. Everybody was crying. You understand—I was twenty years away, and I was never speaking German in all that time—not one word German in twenty years. So I mix up German with Chinese. I am ashamed but that is how it happened, you know. And when I started to tell them all the

stories of what we went through there, I mixed Chinese and German, And my mom say, “But Lina, we do not understand what you are saying.” Suddenly I realize I speak Chinese with them. And then I am embarrassed. And then she say, “You know, Lina, if you want to speak to us, you must speak German.” It was something to make laugh, is it not? Then after a long time I saw my father—tears were running down. My father had been blaming me the whole time because he was so unhappy. In *Paris* it was a kind of reconciliation. My father was paralyzed, and he sat in a chair next to my mom. Very very well I see them looking at each other, and my father is crying. It is the first time I see my daddy crying. And then he said, “We made a mistake. She is very happy our Lina.” Always when I remember that, it makes the tears fall. When I left Germany, my father was very against. And I could not write to them from China. They had in their mind that I suffered, but now they understood. Before, they did not understand.

And then we were told our mission was opening a foundation in Malaysia, and the bishop asked for sisters to go there. Since 1954 I am here in Malaysia.

At that time Petaling Jaya was very small. There were only five or six roads. This neighborhood was a tin mine, and all around were rubber estates. We started with just a small dispensary. After one year we managed to build a small maternity—twelve beds, I think. We received help from many people, and also from Germany. We had no orphans here—that was only in China.

Here, the situation was much much better—one hundred times better. We had food. We had very little money but it was much easier. I remember one day we had twenty dollars in the dispensary, and a sister said we will have a big joyful celebration. We had a big dinner. But we started very very poor. We take a vow of poverty, yes. If I do not have, I will not grumble. If I have, I enjoy. I accept whatever.

I was in Petaling Jaya twenty years. I came in 1954. When we started here we were in a very small place. There were three of us—Sister Doctor, who was with me in China, was here. She is still working. She was here—twenty years, fifteen years maybe. From here she went to Australia, then to Rome. She is still working as a doctor. She also is very—you know—“As long as it goes it goes.” I worked a long time with her. When the American doctors left Suiting, she came to help me. And then she came to Malaysia. We started together here.

Yes, I was here during Independence and the Riots. I don't remember the dates . . . the Riots, yes. We were working in the hospital day and night. I did not go out. We did not know what was going on outside. I remember there were so many bodies—Chinese, Malay, Indian, yes, but we did not care. I never make distinctions. I did not make distinctions in China, and I do not make distinctions here. I see people, the human beings who need help. I do not mind the religion of people. That is why we have good relationship with the Moslems. We don't care. We are all the same. I never ask, Are you a Moslem or a Catholic? We don't make distinctions.

In 1975 I was sent to Terengganu. I was in a village of very poor people in Terengganu. Then deaf and dumb people came to the convent, and I tried to teach them—to count and to sign. When I left, there was a big school. How things grow. When we come, nothing; then it grows. When I came to Petaling Jaya we started a very small maternity, and it was just for poor people. We had a big community in the beginning. We had over thirty sisters—nurses and teachers of all nationalities. Then after ten or twelve years, like I tell you in the beginning, one by one they had to leave. There were only two or three besides myself who were left, so we offered the hospital to the Medical Board. Always it was our intention to do that. In the beginning the hospital was just for poor people. Now it is a big hospital, and not just for poor people.

In missionary life we try to do much with very little. In small ways you can do quite a lot. On the east coast in Terengganu we were caring for people in their homes. Like now, we went into *kampongs* and we went to poor people. We go, we bring a little help, we talk, and little by little we help more and more.

My experience in Terengganu—how should it be that I teach deaf and dumb people to sign? I was not trained to teach deaf and dumb people. Actually I had a book on how to sign, and we learned to talk together—that is, we learned together to talk. Do you understand? I am not very good with explanations. We became very good friends, the deaf and dumb people and I. An American lady helped me. Her husband was an engineering consultant. Her children were grown up and she helped me very much. I worked five years there. The American lady writes to me once a year still.

There was a prison, or a home, for prostitute girls outside Terengganu. It is still there, but it is changed now. All these things were just starting

when I was there. The girlfriend of a very famous robber — Botak Chin — was one of the girls. The famous robber was beheaded some years ago. His girlfriend was a very pretty girl, and she loved him very much. She saw good things in him because he robbed rich people and helped poor people. But I say, “You cannot rob anybody — that is not nice.”

I tried to help those girls. I found most of them came from broken homes, so you cannot really blame the girls. I found in those girls so much good. I admired them very much, I must say. That is why I do not — cannot look down on people, because it is not their fault what they do. Very often when they are small they must bring money: that is very sad. I did not do anything but talk to them — to give them a little *morale*. “What is life?” I ask them. “How will you live?” I ask. I have to make them understand that with this life all is not finished, that there is another life. We have to prepare for the other life that comes. Really I enjoyed with them. The girls were there for at least three years. They looked for jobs, but many of them followed temptation. I talked to those girls with Christian background. [Malaysian law forbids non-Moslems to proselytise.] So I went with the Bible and then we discussed stories. I say, “You choose what stories we discuss.” And always they choose something like how Jesus treated the persecuted woman, how when Jesus died he forgave the one crucified on the left of him. All these things — how Jesus forgave. And then they ask, “Will Jesus do the same for us?” And I say, “Sure, sure. It is only how you —” They just wanted hope. I would just give them a little bit of hope. As long as we are in the world there is hope because God forgives. And so I was happy. Terengganu — I liked it very much.

I went to the home for prostitutes because I was a good friend of the woman who was in charge of the home — a Malay lady in Terengganu. She was a very nice girl, and she was very high up in her work. She came to me and said, “Oh I am so happy you are here.” And I was thinking, what is this? And then she said there were six or seven Christian girls in the prison, and when I have time will I come to see them? Every week two or three times I went. One time she came to me and I was a little bit annoyed with her, I do not remember why, and she said, “You do not recognize me.” And I said, “I think I see your face — I think I know your face.” And she told me who she was. When she was a young girl she was in love with an American Peace Corps volunteer. At that time I was working at the maternity in Petaling Jaya. Then she became pregnant. Actually she

intended to go with the young Peace Corps volunteer to America, but when she got pregnant, she had to hide. The Peace Corps boy was twenty-four, and he was immediately sent home when it came out she was pregnant. It was in 1957 or 1959—perhaps it was later—I am not sure. Anyhow, she came to hide in the hospital until it was time for her to deliver. And the baby was given away to another family. Naturally after that, the poor girl—outside everybody knows about her pregnancy. So I was the one who looked after her, and then in Terengganu I did not recognize her. She was a very nice girl. When she told me who she was, I said, “Oh yes, yes I remember.”

I wore lay clothes to the prison because it was told to me—I don’t remember who—that I should wear lay clothes. But later my friend said, “It is all right for you to wear what you want. You come whenever you want.” Actually I remember now: it was the teachers at the prison who told me to wear lay clothes. “If you come, you must not come as a religious,” they told me. It was all right. It did not matter to me what I wore if I could do something for the girls.

They chose stories, and it was very surprising then, their questions and their answers. They were longing for someone who loved them, who forgave them. I said, “Definitely Jesus loves you and will forgive you if you give up this kind of life.” And they would say, “Whenever I get a good husband. But if the man knows our background,” they say, “he will not marry us.” Some did marry, but many went back to prostitution.

I was six or seven years in Kota Bahru. Kota Bahru was different. We had to do more with Moslems there. We talked to fishermen, but not as religious—just human beings. I never preach. I talk only if they wanted to talk. They sometimes realized our Savior would save anybody. We were out meeting people, but I was much more involved in church work there because the priest there was very often in outstation, and we had to make the liturgy, so I was quite involved in that.

I came back to Petaling Jaya one and a half years ago. Here, we work in *kampongs*. I work with poor people in Kampong Bradaril, near the cemetery, and Kampong Lindanghan. The work is interesting, sure. People of all races are there. For the moment they are mostly Indian. I do not speak Tamil but I am involved in a prayer meeting in spite of I don’t understand Tamil. Little by little we see the needs of the people, their misery. Very poor people who cannot manage—we buy food for them. A little boy does

not have shoes, a little girl is handicapped, a father is a drug addict. Many people help. I personally do not want that poor people come to me to say thank you. It is not my money. So I ask others to take things to the poor people. It just goes through my hands. I go to houses to see what is needed, but I do not take things. We do little things.

I have been here almost forty years. I was given the chance some years ago to go back to Germany. At that time, one by one the sisters went back. The superior at that time wanted me to stay here, there were so few of us left. She said, "I think you should stay here." So I'm the only one who stayed of those who came a long time ago. I don't mind. Now I feel I prefer Malaysia. It is my home—I am so long time away from Germany. I live here longer than I lived in Germany. And I am so at home. I live with the younger sisters, and they accept me as I am. We work together and pray, and we laugh together because we are Franciscans. We are quite lively together. I am the only old one here, but anyhow we laugh together. I belong here. I will not go to Europe again.

I have not gone back to China, no. There was no chance for many years, and now for me it is too late. When I came to Malaysia, I thought, it's not so far from China, and I can go back, but I did not go.

Abortion? In old times there were not so many, I think. I personally am against abortion. I spend so many nights with women who want abortion. Their husbands do not want babies, or they do not want babies, or something terrible has happened to them. Maybe they have too many children. I find when they have an abortion the poor woman has a stone in her heart and it is so heavy. She feels she has done a wrong thing. Her conscience is troubled. When you sit with people who speak what goes on deep down in their heart, they are very unhappy for having done things they are not supposed to do. Abortion is killing. When I see a very small face, it is life. Life is given by God. You have not a right to extinguish a life.

In China when I saw babies die, still I was not for abortion. They would kill the baby before it comes. They did awful things—just pull the baby out. In the time I was there, especially in the time of Chiang Kai-shek, many people smoked opium. It was very common, if the baby was crying, the mother opened the mouth of the baby and blew smoke into its mouth, and the baby sleeps. It was very common. The Communists were very much against opium.

It is a woman's—I don't know—of course I love babies. I love them but

I had to make my choice between marriage and giving my life to God. In spite of—I give my life to God. I prayed, I wanted to do God’s will, and this is what he wants.

I had a girlfriend when I was very young. We were very close. We loved to sing hymns and go for walks. I had—I was never worldly minded: it did not attract me. In spite of, I like to have a nice dress, but really I must say to live a rich life—it is not in me. My girlfriend is still alive. She is eighty-one. Whenever I saw her in Germany she said, “I should have followed you, Lina.” She also thinks I am bigger than she is, but that is not true: *plus grande*, yes, higher. I say, “You fulfilled your life in marriage, and I in religious life.” I do not personally feel I am extra-generous. I think God wanted my life like this, and so that is what I wanted. Actually, she had no children. She had three miscarriages: she could not bear children. She adopted two children, and she was very disappointed. The girl is good, but the boy wanted money money money, and he never worked. My friend had much suffering. She hadn’t much *chance* with her children, but she had a very nice husband. That is consolation.

No, I am not interested in politics. I followed what happened during the Gulf War, yes, on television. We prayed for—what is his name?—Saddam Hussein, that funny man-*lah* [The suffix *lah* is a Bahasa suffix which may be attached to virtually any word or phrase; it signifies an attitude rather than a precise meaning—something like *okay?* or *you see*, in English]. I pray for everybody. I pray Saddam Hussein will realize he is crazy and change his attitude. He is a *hypocrite*. Excuse me to say that, but, I don’t know—for politics, I am zero. I pray for all leaders, but I am very zero about ideas.

There are many changes in the Church, yes. I accept changes. The Church may change, as times change, but religion does not change. What Jesus teaches us never changes. When I was young, prayers were in Latin, and I had to learn Latin. But the Church is for all people, and it is better if people understand the words of the Mass. Otherwise, they will not know what the Mass means. I like to teach people about religion. I teach catechism: that is what I do now. I feel some fulfillment when I teach them about religion, and then it is up to them. I teach them so they can choose what they want. I say, “Before you join you must know, and then you choose.” Religion is something—religion is a free gift to God. God accepts me freely, and I must accept God freely. I see it that way. God does not

push anybody to follow his religion. God does not force. God gave us everything free. We are free people. We choose what we believe, what we are convinced about.

In my vows I said, "I offer myself as *victime* to the Church and the Souls." Souls: it means, all people. Now the old form is no more. Now is the new form, after Vatican Council. The new form is, "I dedicate myself, or I give myself—I do not remember which—to the Church." *Victime* is very harsh. *Victime* means I do not live for my own pleasure. It is not that I am unhappy. I have a happy life. But when I pray, I do not pray for myself. I pray for others—for people who suffer in the world, for people in airplane crashes and wars—we offer our prayers for these people.

Somedays we make small sacrifices because sacrifice too is my vow. For example, at table I may choose only a little of this that I like very much and more of that which I do not like so much. It is a little thing and in importance not very much—just a very simple thing. It is like that to live for other people. The religious—the missionaries—we should not live for ourselves. Why do I give up my life? Because I want to live for others. I am not miserable. I have great peace and happiness, and that is God's gift. If someone is nasty, I do not blame him. I say, Oh, maybe he doesn't mean that. But when I am a little bit hurt I go to pray to Jesus, and the hurt goes away.

Little by little when you feel you are attracted to religion, there comes a time when you need God. I see God as the creator of everything. God has the right to use what he created: everything belongs to him. And he wants us to go back to him. We know our life ends. From very young I felt that God would use me, that I belonged to him. My father was not a fervent Catholic, but he died in the faith. He died the year I came to Malaysia. I find God in many ways, and so worldly things do not attract me very much. Little by little each must find out. In your case, you have had many experiences, and maybe you have found out how God wants to use you. I do not want to say too much. Actually all things happen as God wants. God wanted to put me in many situations. It was not my doing. I accept. I only accept, and God helps me through. Faith—faith is to expect from God things *impossible* in the world. I don't know how to say that. Faith lets you expect things to happen which are *impossible* in the sight of the world. When I was on trial—I was fifteen years in the same place, and then I was rejected by people I had loved and served, and I felt great pain. But then I thought, that is what Jesus felt when he was rejected, and I was

happy to have a chance to feel in my heart what Jesus felt in his heart.

I am aware I do not speak English correctly. I do not care also. I have not the chance to speak much English. We have much work to do. Before, I was embarrassed to make mistakes when I spoke, but now I just say, it is not my language. Just so people understand, no? I never study English in school. I learn it when I have to learn it. The first time I spoke English was in Petaling Jaya in the hospital, in 1954. I learn fast, but it goes out fast also. When I say my prayers I mix German and English, and maybe French and Chinese: I don't know. But when it is something very—I don't know—maybe my words inside are German.

Sometimes I remember the situations God put me in. I think about the goodness of that man who carried me on his back to safety. Always I am grateful for what he did. Where is he? I did not see him again. He just put me down and ran away. He also was invited to that house, but he said, "No, no, I must run away."

I do not regret. I wanted to do God's will. If I lived my life over I would start again this way but I would make more effort. That is the only thing—to do better. I have great peace and happiness. It makes me happy to remember my father in *Paris*. I am happy that he understood I was happy.