

Tropical Affairs: Episodes from an Expat's Life in Malaysia

Author: **Robert Raymer**
 Publisher: **MPH Publishing**

ROBERT RAYMER is an American who followed his first wife, Noor Hayati, to Malaysia in 1985 and never left. In his years here (21 of them in Penang), he got divorced and remarried, and became father to three boys.

He also danced the tango in the Oscar-winning French film *Indochine* (1992), met legendary French actress Catherine Deneuve, and was an extra in three other Hollywood movies – *Beyond Rangoon* (1995), *Paradise Road* (1997) and *Anna and the King* (1998).

All this while, he never stopped writing and has numerous short stories and articles published both here and abroad. He also became a teacher of creative writing at Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

His first collection of short stories set in Malaysia, *Lovers and*

Strangers Revisited (MPH 2008) – a much expanded and revised version of his *Lovers and Strangers* (Heinemann Asia, 1993) – has been taught in universities and private colleges here and in a high school in Canada.

Tropical Affairs: Episodes from an Expat's Life in Malaysia (2009) is his latest collection of articles and non-fiction narratives culled from his experiences here.

The 60 shorts here recount episodes in his life where he reminisces on the events that have coloured his stay in this country, such as his faint brush with fame on the big screen (*My Four Days with Catherine Deneuve*; and *Close Encounters with Glenn Close*).

In his stint as a teacher, he writes about his attempts to fire his students with his enthusiasm and passion for writing (*A Campus Challenge*), and about writing choices (*Tree Methodology*; *Neighbours*, *a Suicide*, and *Making Choices*).

He also gives lighter vignettes of his struggles to become a writer

(*Books and Babies*; *Pens and Mischief*) and the comical situations he found himself in (*Writing in Restaurants and Other Odd Places*; *Unexpected Visitors*; *Cross-Cultural Dinners*; *The Night Hike*). Then, there are his more flippant articles (*Much Ado About Sleep*; *Eight Potential Places to Flirt*).

But when he talks about being a father, the tone of his writing shifts, becomes more introspective as he reflects on the awe and love he feels towards his first-born Zaini (*A Private Moment Between Father and Son*; *One Precious Moment*), and later his second child, Jason (*An Educational Walk*).

Raymer has dedicated this book to his three sons but it is Zaini who 'stars' in many of the articles, and this book is in part, a present to Zaini "so that he can perhaps appreciate how his life has enriched mine ...".

However, many of the articles here are not new, having appeared in part or as a whole in one or more publications. Some parts of a story are also repeated in others. A tighter selection could have been better.

Raymer now lives in Kuching with his wife, Jenny, and their sons Jason and Justin. – **Mei Choo**



Swimsuit

Authors: **James Patterson and Maxine Paetro**
 Publisher: **Little Brown and Company**

CRIME always seems all the more horrible when it happens in paradise. This is the scenario of *Swimsuit*.

A beautiful supermodel disappears from a swimsuit photo shoot at a glamorous hotel in Hawaii and events soon escalate into hell on earth.

Hours after Kim McDaniels disappears, her parents receive a phone call – not a ransom call, mind you, but disturbing enough for them to feel the worst.

They immediately board the first flight to Maui and begin the hunt for their daughter.

For one thing, there is no evidence whatsoever to point towards foul play. Kim's minders and the photo shoot people believe that she was taken off on a whim.

But her parents know better and ex-cop Ben Hawkins, now a reporter for the *LA Times*, smells a rat. He befriends the McDaniels and in the

face of the seemingly clueless local police force, starts his own investigation. It turns out to be the story of a lifetime for him.

This is no ordinary kidnapping for money. Neither is it a crime of passion. In fact, there is no emotion involved in the man responsible, making the events all the more terrifying and horrendous.

He is just setting the stage for his own production as his audience expects the best – and they won't be disappointed.

The action is fast-paced and the suspense keeps building up to a heart-pounding sense of

something about to happen, transporting the reader to a place where beauty and murder collide and horrors are revealed in an otherwise beautiful world.

Swimsuit is a page-turner and you just can't wait to find out what happens next. Although the finale is a tad too smooth and easy, a hint of mystery still prevails and you are left with a sense of foreboding even after closing the book one last time.

This is the work of a master storyteller and should keep you on the edge of your seat till the last page. – **Sharon Wong**

