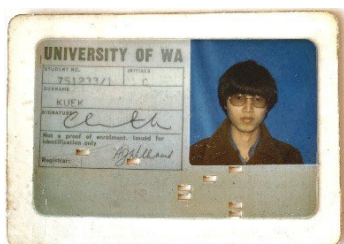


7 Dr Quack



UWA student card issued in 1975. Note the punch holes which indicates the level of computerization then

While at St Thomas More College at the University of Western Australia (1975 – 1977 inclusive), I would rub shoulders with fellow residents from all parts of the world who studied all manner of things. From the Jesuit priests who administered the College to fellow under- and postgraduates, the place was certainly intellectual enough if one sought it out. I was particularly impressed by the sprinkling of PhD candidates amongst us and how like everyone else they were (they were not particularly aloof, or absent-minded, or indeed explained things to you via formulaic equations). Little did I know that in

a few years I would join their ranks as a PhD candidate. I had never really aimed to enrol in a PhD but in my final (4th) year, my Honours supervisor Dr Denis Kidby informed me that he had a scholarship available via a research project grant he had won. He asked if I wanted the position. With nothing else planned after finishing my BSc(Agric)(Hons) I decided to take on the PhD candidacy in 1979.

One of my first thoughts upon starting my new career was how terrible it would be to be addressed as Dr Quack (meaning of fraudulent nature) upon completing my doctorate. Indeed, in my years in Perth to that point, my family name had been pronounced in a variety of different ways. My matriculation mathematics teacher called me “Kuke” as in cucumber. A local



PhD work in 1982

pharmacist in Leederville where I once sent some colour photographs for printing, had written down (unbeknownst to me) “Keogh” as my family name and called that out when I was there to collect my prints. This was not as bad as my friend Tan Jook Foi from West Malaysia for whom the same pharmacist had written down on a prescription bottle for the latter, “Tim Gok Fos”. There were just not so many Asians in Perth for Australians to be familiar with in 1974. I suppose that now they can order their favourite Asian dish at eateries with full and proper pronunciation.

Anyhow, the real reason for writing this section is my beef about the usage of the honorific “doctor”. Hear ye all, the term doctor does not mean a physician. The word comes from the Greek language and means “teacher”. This may sound odd until you put it all in an academic

setting. “Doctor” is an honorific by which universities recognize postgraduates who gain their highest award by course enrolment. It is never granted for undergraduate degrees which is what medical students graduate with. A PhD is an abbreviation for Doctor of Philosophy, a postgraduate investment of some three or more years of independent research under supervision. One presumes that originally, PhDs would end up teaching at university, hence the meaning of the word “doctor”. Now here is the beef: Why should the profession of medical graduates be one where their trade is proclaimed by an honorific? Why do we not say “Garbage Man Jones” or “Bus Driver Smith”? Every man (or woman) and his (or her) dog can be known as a doctor (of the kind related to the medical profession) these days. This is why we have dentists calling themselves “doctor”, as do chiropractors, and maybe even podiatrists. But the one which cuts the cake is vets being called ‘doctors’. What I would like to see, if we indeed have to use honorifics, is that the medical people be called “Physician Jones”, or “Dentist Smith”, or “Dog Quack Taylor”.

So, the next time you hear people question why PhDs should be called doctors “when they are not”, you can demonstrate that you are learned by saying that it is the PhDs who should be called doctors and not the quacks.



In UWA PhD regalia in the Oxford style⁷

College was also the place where memorable events of the seventies are remembered such as the takeover of Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge and Year Zero in 1975, because a fellow Moron (that’s what St Thomas More residents were affectionately called) from that country was to lose touch with his family as a result and not know of their perilous fate because his father was a magistrate. Vietnam fell to the communists in the same year, decades after French and US efforts made no difference to a cause which was driven by nationalism rather than by whether peoples would be better off under capitalism or communism. 1975 was also the year of the first ever dismissal of an Australian Prime Minister by the Governor-General Kerr (or “cur” as some would have it). We all had our ears glued to the radio listening in on the events played out live in Canberra. And in 1977, in the Common Room of the College, I read that Elvis Presley (he who sounded so seemingly accessible and local on Sarawak radio to a young boy) had died in his toilet.

⁷ Whenever I appear in my PhD regalia with my Oxford mortarboard (also known as a trencher) on, there is often muttering and wondering by the curious uninformed if I was ever awarded a doctorate. This is because they think that the Tudor bonnet (a flat cap) is PhD headwear whereas mortarboards are bachelor degree headwear. In fact, at my *alma mater*, the University of Western Australia which adopted the University of Oxford regalia, male undergraduates do not wear a mortarboard at graduation (only female graduands do) which means that whenever males in regalia are seen with mortarboard, it indicates that they have a postgraduate degree such as a masters or PhD (PhD gowns are distinguished by the two broad scarlet satin facings running the length of the gown).

8 The march of time as marked by technology

We often hear people refer to "the good old days". I am fairly sure that "good" is inversely proportional to the degree of responsibilities attached to a person. In transiting from childhood to youth to adulthood, our responsibilities grow, our innocence disappears, and we become less care-free. This is why the past looks relatively good.

Radio, language and culture

That time marches on is revealed by the things we see and use in our lives. When I was growing up (until I left for matriculation overseas), there was no TV service and radio was the means of hearing about the world around us (local AM radio and SW radio for international stations).



Our family's Telefunken stereo record player/radio looked like this

Radio made things appear rather immediate and intimate. As a very young boy I thought that Radio Sarawak had many bands and people went there to play for or to speak to us. Thus, Elvis Presley was a local. But, there were also real people there such as Auntie Mildred who compered "Children's Corner" - something we kids tuned to on Sunday mornings. Later, radio became utilitarian and less magical as we learnt that my Uncle Roch (who was trained at the BBC) worked at the station (later reading the news). Since Radio

Sarawak was started when the state was a British colony, a lot of radio programs were sourced from the BBC. I grew up listening to shows such as "My Word", "My Music", "The Navy Lark", "Take It From Here", "Sherlock Holmes", "The Paul Temple Mysteries", and "Round The Horn". This, western movies, plus an English schooling made me a W.O.G. (Westernized Oriental Gentleman) with a western outlook rather than the typical Chinese boy moulded by Confucian mores.

Being caught between two cultures is not unusual and it has happened in many societies where one dominant culture has imposed its system of education, bureaucracy and traditions upon another. I was born a British subject and I grew up singing "God Save the Queen" (Elizabeth, and not Victoria as some looking at my age might jest). One can see many examples of people like me across the old British empire although we are surely a breed which will die out. But, I am well aware that we "bananas" (an epithet which says "yellow on the outside and white inside") can be looked upon with disdain (or more mildly, laughed at) by the Chinese who have been brought up more traditionally. This is akin to the term "coconut" being used to describe those who are of a darker complexion but who exhibit incongruously western behaviour. Of the worst kind of accusation is for African Americans to be called "Uncle Tom"

or “Aunt Jemima”. Regardless, I would not change my mixed cultural upbringing in any way even if I were able to acquire a time machine and can go back to 1955.



Clem in Qing Dynasty garb complete with queue

In many ways it is a pity for a descendent from the Kueks of Swatow not to even be able to speak and write in Mandarin - the language of the educated in China. However, I am prouder to be Teochew/Hokkien than I ever will be to be a Mandarin speaker. Misguided social engineering in Singapore caused local dialects such as Teochew and Hokkien to be abandoned such that the Singapore Chinese now speak to you in Mandarin. I find that quite foreign. And that would be the correct feeling to have - Mandarin is a foreign language from the north of China. One only has to see how proud the Cantonese of Hong Kong are of their dialect that they use it in favour of Mandarin. My natural language

is English and I am very glad that it is. By a different twist of fate, I could be a neederlandophone, francophone or Hispanophone, depending on which colonial power ended up controlling Sarawak/Borneo instead of the British (from 1839 by the Brooke Rajahs and by the UK from 1945 until 1963). And if Grandfather had migrated to Thailand instead of Sarawak (as another branch of the family did), I could have been brought up Thai (as most of the Chinese there are).

Aeroplanes

One only has to look at the aeroplanes available through the years to note the passage of time. My first air travel was as a boy going to Singapore from Kuching on a Malayan Airways Douglas DC3.



Douglas DC-3

Many years later, the Australian part of my life began with my leaving Kuala Lumpur for Perth in 1974 on a Cathay Pacific Airways Convair 880.



Convair 880

Four-engined jet airliners grew from the days of the De Havilland Comet (Models 1 to 4). Four engines were thought through to the mid-70s to be more reliable in the event of engine failure during trans-oceanic flight. International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) regulations meant that airliners could only operate when they can comply with the one engine inoperative rule of being within the set flying time to make an alternative landing point – the *Extended-range Twin-engine Operations Performance Standards* (ETOPS). Later, ETOPS were extended to 120 minutes. Nowadays ETOPS (or now called *Extended Diversion Time Operations* [EDTO]) is as long as 180 minutes (specific aircraft may be granted ETOPS 370 as long as certain conditions can be met). This firmed the place of twin engine jet liners in replacing the less fuel efficient (per passenger-mile) four-engined jet liners. Accordingly, the jetliners which I have flown in have evolved from this (all in the event appropriate livery):



de Havilland Comet

To this:



Boeing 707

To this:



Boeing 747

To this:



Lockheed Tristar L-1011

To this:



Airbus 380

To this:



Boeing 777

To this:



Airbus 350

The latest such aircraft that I have flown in is the Airbus 350 on a flight to and from Kuala Lumpur to Sydney. Not many people know this, but MH operated a direct flight between SYD and KCH in 2005. It lasted only a few months due to lack of patronage. On the first and only time that I took that flight, only two passengers disembarked at Kuching (the plane continued on to KUL, its final destination). It was a strange feeling to be able to get around in Kuching after a direct flight from Sydney after so many years of needing to be either in Kuala Lumpur or Singapore on transit. Kuching felt like a big international city in those days.

Cars

Cars also reflect the march of time. More than just the advancement in the technology of the cars (engine efficiencies; materials of fabrication; passenger safety), they reflect fashion and trends. In my day, cars were more utilitarian: it was relatively unheard of for cars to be air-conditioned. It was also rare for cars to have automatic gears. Aerodynamic drag coefficients were not a concern and so cars took on shapes and outlines limited only by imagination and buyer tastes. Cars which had wing-like appendages and looked like they could fly were called “aeroplane cars” by us children. British makes were common in the early 50s and 60s. Then came the Japanese toy cars which were not thought of highly but now look at them and Korean cars today – they are the predominant car manufacturers.



But, going back to the 50s: the first car which my parents bought (on hire purchase) was an Opel Rekord (the following pictures are not of the actually family cars that I refer to). My father would let me “drive” the car (by sitting on his lap and helping to hold the steering wheel) when we got to the private road leading to our home. I do not have much memory of this car except its name, that it had a manual gear shift and no air conditioning (one



Opel Rekord

opened the forward quarter windows to direct a breeze into the car when it was moving.

I did not have a car in my own family until the mid-80s in Perth. There are two tribes in Australia viz. the General Motors Holden Commodore mob and the Ford Falcon mob. I belonged to the latter tribe. I have owned three Falcons over the years. The three

reveal the march of time in the evolution of the Ford Falcon over some ten years.



Ford XE Falcon 4.1 litres

This was the first: a brute of a tank (all the following are in the same colour and trim as seen in the pictures):

It was not much loved but it did its job as a first car and took us places much, much further afield on the road than we had ever been up to then.



Ford EAII Falcon 4.1 litres

In the mid-80s, the XE Falcon was traded in for a newer model. This car was a lemon with all sorts of issues with it, including an engine which in the later years would knock on (not stop even after ignition off). The head gasket was re-conditioned at one stage (a major job). It was moved to Sydney when we relocated there from Perth. In the mid-90s, this car was traded for a newer model.



Ford EF Falcon Futura 4 litre

This was the last family car before I moved out to Kuching in 2008.



Mercedes E240 W210

Nice comfortable car but its age necessitated the replacement of many parts through 4 years of ownership.



Mercedes C200 W204

Nowadays. Easily a better car than most which I have driven/owned.

Personal computers

This is a piece of technology which has constantly and rapidly evolved since it was first an offering in the early 80s. The Osborne 1 portable PC was one of the first personal computers on the market and it was the first PC which I used.



The Osborne used CP/M for its operating system. CP/M was similar to PC/DOS which later replaced it. This PC had 64 kB of RAM, two slots for 5 and 1/4 inch floppy disks (they were indeed floppy as in flappy and floppable), and a tiny 5 inch monochrome screen (green) which only displayed text (no graphics). Its processor was a Zilog Z80 which ran at 4 mHz. It was built into a large, bulky attaché case-like box and weighed an arm elongating 11 kg.

My introduction to computing via the Osborne included learning basic CP/M because it was needed to do file and system handling (WINDOWS came much later for me). I used the Osborne to write my PhD thesis at the University of Western Australia. It was probably one of the first thesis there to be written using a PC and certainly the first to be submitted as a dot matrix (8-pin) printed document (I had to get approval of the University to submit at variance to what was the normal practice then of theses produced using typewriters). The program which I used to write my thesis was *Wordstar*. The remarkable thing about the months of writing was that while writing using this program on the Osborne, the 5-inch monitor only displayed part of the width of each page. One had to scroll LEFT and RIGHT (not up and down as we do now to view more content) to see what was written. It was certainly a tedious thing to cope with but it was so much of an advance to be able to type one's own thesis and make the many edits to drafts during the writing. The then standard practice was to write something on paper many times over until one is happy with the version after which it is handed over to a typist who made a print which one then proofread. More typing was done as needed if editing was necessary.



5 and 1/4 inch floppy disk

That was in the mid-1980s. I got hold of my own PC for my post-doc project (a DOS machine) after that. Email first came in the form of a text program for me. Later, I used *Eudora* after I moved away from DOS and adopted Windows. I switched to *Word* from *Wordstar* after I started using *Windows*.

In the midst of all that, there was a short period (later mid- 1980s) when I was an Apple Mackintosh user because the research group which I was with was Apple-orientated.

Desktop computing has moved on in great strides since those days and I now use an i9 Alienware Aurora R12 for my computing for word processing, graphics and video production. I certainly did not choose it because of its (effeminate) looks. To support me on the move, I have also used laptops starting with what used to be the king of laptops, a Toshiba. That one weighed a ton, built like a brick, and is accordingly most suitable for its current use as a doorstop. My last laptops (more commonly referred to as notebooks when they are compact and minimal in size but not capability) have been Microsoft Surfaces and currently a Lenovo Yoga i7, a most compact and lightweight computer. All male users of laptops should be aware that since all computers generate heat which needs to be dissipated, despite their name, laptops should not actually be used on laps. This is because research has shown that this placement near the male nether regions can raise the body temperature there to the detriment of reproductive capacity⁸.



Alienware Aurora R12

This sounds plausible because research has also shown that raising the scrotal temperature by a mere one degree is enough to damage sperm. I reckon that all laptops should have health warning labels such as those which are found on cigarette packs.

DO NOT OPERATE OVER OR NEAR TESTICLES

⁸ "Is your laptop cooking your testicles?" (Jeolving, F. [2010] Reuters Health)