

The happy ghosts of Kajang



By **David Christy**
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A hill of earth, home to creatures. Now a hill of concrete, home to humans. God bless Kajang. FILE PIC

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THE four of us grew up between two cemeteries, one with row upon row of tombstones marching up a verdant hill, and the other with gravestones neatly arranged on a gentle and green slope.

In that time two score years ago, Kajang was still asleep, for quietness ruled the land and its people. But of the spirits, we younglings knew not their ways. Except that they could be anywhere.

It was about then that I one day walked on a lonely road that led to town. Jalan Padang Tembak was but a meagre line on the earth, fringed and shadowed by surly trees with limbs long and languorous.



The satay HQ of the world.

At a place of rest, I sat and looked up. Long did I gaze before I beheld the most terrifying sight of my young life, one that planted the seed of a near-unending nightmare. A human head in flight!!

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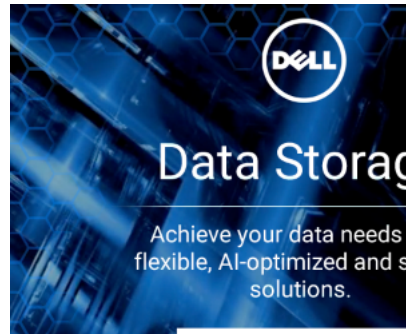
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KAJANG BAZAAR



But before we examine this supernatural chapter in Kajang's tale, let us consider a less frightful landmark.

We children heard about the bazaar from our parents' conversations, and much did we wonder. Our little minds imagined it to be a grand place. And so we felt when we finally came upon the wooden edifice, notwithstanding its faded name proclaimed on a jaded facade.

A short road to the National Cinema and Sum Bus station halved the bazaar, and made it seem bigger than it actually was.



The iconic Bomba station, built in 1956, is no more too. NSTP PIC (1991)

This creature was filled with the energy of woman and man, old and young. Along its throbbing veins sat sellers of food, shoes, toys, magazines and clothes, and tailors, barbers and cobblers. The expectant uncle-and-aunty traders, who parked themselves on low stools in front of their shops, were mainly Chinese.

And yes, there was also the town's premier Chinese restaurant, Tai Wah, where wok clanged and pots were 'fired up' and waiters in constant movement and conversation. Mention must be made, too, of the 'makan shop' which was reputedly Kajang's first mamak joint ever.

To this place Papa went often, scooping up his little ones to join him in the expedition. Wow! What a journey it was for Kenneth, Daniel and me, either riding on his thunderous Triumph or in the formidable Borgward Isabella.

The kids that we were loved the toy shop the best. Before the age of Toys"R"Us and computers, it was the Kajang child's heaven. Well do I remember parting with 10 sen for a plastic car or Ultraman figurine. (The lithe Ultraman Jack was on Malaysian TV.) And perhaps a ringgit for a company of little cowboys and Indians.

Embossed on every other toy was the label, "Made in Hong Kong". I had wondered, what clever people they were to invent these trinkets of joy. This, of course, was before Deng Xiaoping started building the real factory of the world, and before Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad put Malaysia on the road to industrialisation.

Even as boys were drawn as in a trance to the magical toy shop, men and women crowded around peddlers of an assemblage of goods in front of the bazaar. The men possessed strange accents, and we were told they journeyed here from foreign lands.



Foh Hup – the byword for transport in those days. NSTP PIC (1992)

Every weekend did they come, and many unusual things did they say, but only one word from the alien lips survive in my greying memory. "*Lelong*".

They sold radios, pots, bags, clothes, clocks and what-not to the highest bidders. But cheap the goods remained, said Papa.

The sellers endured for a long time, but as is the fate of many, vanished with the tides one day, never to return.

As did the bazaar. It was consumed by tongues of wicked fire and drowned by Sungai Jeluk's angry waters, yet it rose again and again. But against the machinations of modernisation, it had neither the wits nor the will to escape. So closed a chapter in Kajang's history, and in our young lives.

SHAW BROTHERS' SUN CINEMA

Ah, TV had only just gone colour. But our old faithful remained; a TV-in-a-cupboard black-and-white set, nestled in the hall in the cottage-like 151, Jalan Reko.

The 'colour' cinema was only five minutes away, though, and it did not take long for us to be drawn into its cavernous hall.

But we didn't often go to it, always adhering to Papa's dictum, "study first, study last". If after this exertion time still remained, the joys of leisure were free to be pursued.



Alas, the sun has gone down. NSTP PIC (1969)

In fact, Kajang had two cinemas. Both were inelegant buildings, but poetry and prose were often to be found inside.

The National Cinema, smack in the middle of the bazaar, showed mainly Chinese movies. I recall admiring large posters of kung-fu flicks on its walls, but never once did we set foot in the cinema.

Sun had English films, and in its bosom did I watch *Haathi Mere Saathi*, *The Spy Who Loved Me*, *Moonraker*, *Superman* and a host of B-grade stuff.

One story in that enfeebling last category was about a woman who lost her life to bandits. Now I cannot remember why Papa allowed me to endure this horror (horrible) film, but I know very well that the images haunted me for years to come.



The Kajang courts building was as popular as the town's parks! NSTP PIC (1956)

The woman literally lost her head. That many years ago, at a place of rest in Sun, it was her contorted face, bulbous eyes and bloodied tresses that I saw flying across the screen.

Yes, scary, dreary and merry were the moments of my young life in old Kajang, both in Reko and in Sungai Kantan.

But the healing arc of time and thought bends backwards and makes all of them happy memories. More may be written of these "happy ghosts", of the Kajang that was once asleep and the one that is now always astir. But that is for another time.

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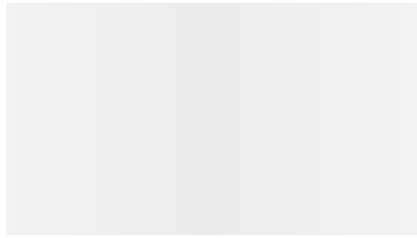


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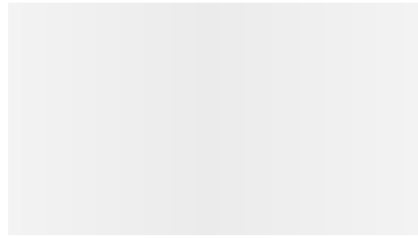
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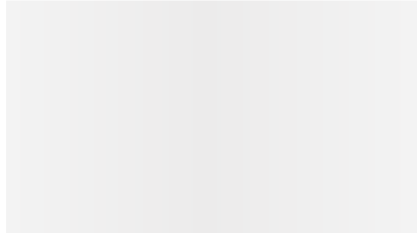
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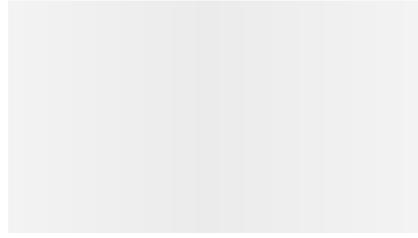
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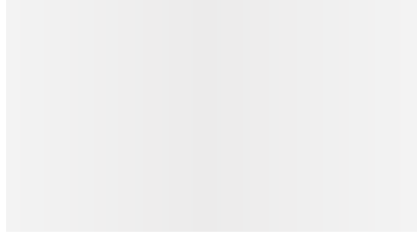
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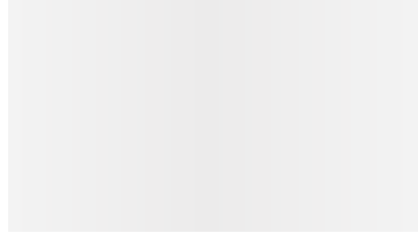
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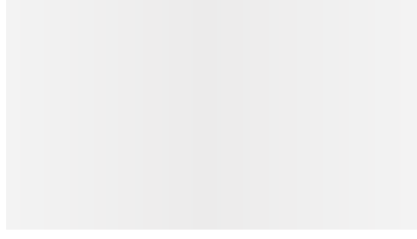
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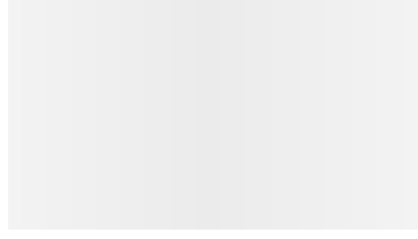
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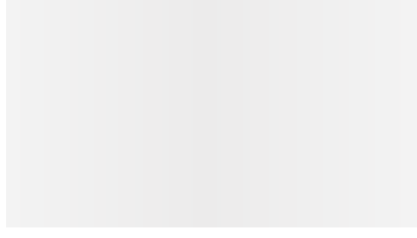
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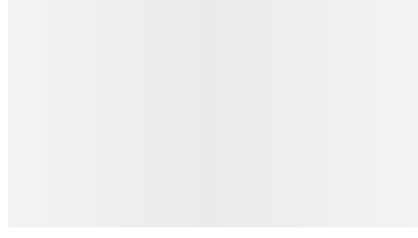
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