



Scott. *This silver bull belonged to my Tata (Grandfather), Alagappan Solaiappan. He came to possess it whilst working as an Information Officer in the Malaysian army. I'm told that a Major of mixed Malay and Spanish-Philippine descent gave it to him in 1965 as a token of gratitude for the work he did during the secession of Singapore.*

Tata passed a decade ago. What I know about his life comes from his children's recollections and his personal papers. His work involved travelling to isolated villages to explain government policy. The last time we visited Malaysia, we chanced upon a bundle of his army records in the dented metal suitcase he brought with him from India in the '40s. I was surprised to learn that he spoke ten languages fluently enough to use them for his work.

I know it's a coincidence, but I like to believe that there's some connection between the ten swords in the bull's back and his talent for languages. He was a staunch proponent of Malaysian multiculturalism. Whatever its true story, this little bull reminds me of Tata's disdain for the boundaries between people, boundaries that have led to so much conflict in Malaysia's recent history.



Macushla. “...thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated. All our lives we come back to them in our daydreams.”— Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

This house in sub-tropical Queensland has evolved over time. Extensions changed its shape, and different people owned different parts. My grandfather purchased one part when he returned from World War II and by the time I was growing up, my family owned the entire house. It has a labyrinthine quality. I would wander its corridors, spending hours in its hidden spaces and rifling through drawers with my grandmother, conducting an inventory of objects and their histories. Among them, spoons and bowls with illustrious histories; a ceremonial sword carried by my great-grandfather; old books and maps; scrapbooks filled with notations of other lives. I would polish the spoons and the sword, in the vain hope of inheritance. The house was sold at the death of my grandfather and the funds distributed among his children. I have not been back to it since.



Elly. *Great Aunty Merna developed an eccentric and miserly reputation in her old age. We kids knew she was very wealthy, but Christmas presents comprised a two dollar coin in a tacky purse. Even the dementia nurse cost “too much”.*

This leopard faux fur choker and twin buttons were found on a top shelf in her Mt Eliza home, where she died, nearly a hundred years old. A lower shelf held genuine furs that my grandmother remembers her wearing as a younger woman, in her social duties as the wife of a respected dentist. These faux furs could never have been seen by his upper-class clientele, but careful wrapping belies their preciousness. What life did Merna live before she married into the Anglican gentry? They came from Bendigo, a population with the extremes of morality and fortune that a gold-mining town brings its citizens. What plebeian deprivation did she put away with her leopard faux fur accoutrements?

My grandparents cared for Aunty Merna in her late unreality, visiting frequently. From them and Aunty Merna, I learned filial piety, and that a long life may take us to many different places – those that come after us may never know where we have been.



Helen. *I started my tusk collection when my family lived on our coffee and copra plantation in Bougainville. I was fascinated by the ornaments of tusks, teeth and feathers which the locals wore for ceremonies. Dad traded cigarettes and cash for a small necklace. Then my flamboyant Kow Fu (mother's brother), an antique dealer from Hong Kong, gave me a heavy antique cuff made of silver and ivory.*

When I was at university in Armidale, a friend, Jenny Shaw-Cross, invited me to visit her uncle's property. Bill Shaw took us hunting for feral pigs that were damaging his crops. I knew the pigs had to be exterminated, but was sickened by the ferocity of the dogs and the terrified squealing of the pigs. Bill hacked the tusks off one of the big boars and gave them to me as a souvenir. These tusks look like teeth, showing signs of decay and age. I could have polished them as the New Guinea natives and Chinese jewellers do, or kept only the most perfect specimens. But I decided to leave them as they are - with all their traces of a life well lived.



Nasim. *I was new to Australia that university year, 2005. Adelaide felt like a toy town – not lived in.*

I guess I got along with my Professor, or perhaps he had some empathy towards my ‘foreign’ experiences. But it all became twisted, and I dropped his course. I was suddenly formally accused of a University breach of honesty by his colleague. Then there was that continuous stream of anonymous deliveries: roses every week on Friday...for months. I watched them die: again and again. I couldn’t leave Australia fast enough.

A year later I came back briefly to collect possessions I had left in dorm storage. I was devastated my favourite music folios had disappeared. But there was that vaguely familiar brown box. I had tried to block it all out...but there it was.

The moment of re-acquaintance with this object seemed to transcend all kinds of nightmares. It is loving and spiritual, voluptuous and womb-like - but also jagged: an embodiment of hope that accommodates the pains and flaws of humanity. I can’t let it go. But I never want to see him again.



Andreas. *This photograph is from one of my family photo albums. It depicts a couple from East Java who were close friends of my aunt. The picture was taken in the late 1940s after Indonesian independence, when my aunt lived in Surabaya with her husband after years of avoiding the war. My aunt told me that she kept the photograph as a memento of her friendship with the couple, one of which was her husband's cousin. It was common for couples to have their photo taken in hired wedding dress, as it was too expensive to have one made. My aunt later hired the same dress for her bridal photo. The timing and quality of the photo emit a sense of the interconnected nostalgia between the couples. The photo is a bridge reminding them of the moments they shared in Surabaya before my aunt's migration to Jakarta. In the late 1980s my maternal grandparents and their married children decided to live close to each other. Some settled in Bandung and the rest in Jakarta. Although I don't know the couple in the photograph, they have become a part of my identity through the inclusion of this memento in my family album.*



Adam. *This is one of three engraved combs. There are also three matching hairclips, with “Juanita”, “Ida” and “Leila” on them - the names of my grandmother and her two sisters. They were made by their uncle some time between 1930 and 1935. He was a silversmith and goldsmith by trade. These items were gifted to each of the girls as a coming-of-age present at their Bat Mitzvahs. This was the last time my grandmother and her sisters ever recall seeing their uncle. He died in 1940 fighting with the Free French Forces (Forces Françaises Libres) in World War II. My grandmother plans to bequeath the comb to my sister when she passes away. She never fails to remind her grandchildren about the significance and beauty of this comb. I’ve been told the same story a million times, but I have never felt so deeply moved by the power of this object as in this process of remembering. My grandmother continues to use her comb to this very day.*



Mai. *My maternal grandmother Gwen had a keen interest in family history. She was stoic and uncompromising, with a wicked sense of humour. When she died her tumour was the size of a football... yet she had told no one. Until I was 22 I wrote to Ma faithfully, no matter where I was. Later, at the rare times we spoke I always got a “God bless you”.*

In Somerset that final June she spoke to me for days about her love of nature, early school years, the polio epidemic, dirt roads and horse carts, backyard abortions, Sikh salesmen, and the ‘scary’ stories my great-great-great grandfather Captain Jeremiah Scannon had told her about Aborigines... at 88 she was extremely lucid. She showed me the spoons Jeremiah had given her; secreted away in the camphorwood chest alongside the letters I had stopped writing.

Ma told me Jeremiah was born on Navigator Island (now Samoa) in 1844 and went to sea aged 16, sailing to Boston, USA. He became a whaler and later a Captain, serving on 7 different barques, before settling in Tasmania as a Master in foreign trade in 1876. The Battery Point address where Jeremiah first lived is now an Indian restaurant.



Angela. *This is one of a set of six placemats handcrafted by my grandmother in 1979, each intricate and lovingly handmade for the whole family to use on special occasions. The fabric is velvet and the design has been made of golden embroidered silk strings. My grandmother was sitting at her home using her needlepoint skills when she first heard the news that Egypt had signed a peace treaty with Israel. She gifted the complete set of these placemats to my mother before passing away in 1999. It is an invaluable family heirloom and I love what the placemats represent. Firstly, that they were made by my grandmother; secondly, that she made them when the first Arab nation made peace with Israel, before the treaty was withdrawn by Israel in 1982. Their design incorporates the paisley Arabian motif that has been a symbol of freedom since ancient Egyptian times, and is now considered an emblem of hope for true democracy in Egypt.*



Harsono. *This wedding ring is made from 22 karat gold, shaped in a simple fashion due to limitations of money and time in an unstable situation. Because, in 1948 Indonesia was in a state of war, where the Dutch were invading in an attempt to recolonise it. So the preparations for the wedding, including the making of the ring, were very hurried and in a situation that was not normal. Although it is simple, this ring held much meaning for my parents. This gold ring was made in an uncertain economic situation, because of the war, so funds to buy a gold ring were extremely limited. I don't know for sure how my parents could, at that time, afford to buy a pair of wedding rings.*