

AROUND THE WORLD THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES



BRIAN J. FABBRI

WITH SASHA FABBRI



This book is a memoir reflecting the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Its story and its words are the author's alone. Some details and characteristics may be changed, some events may be compressed, and some dialogue may be re-created.

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Introduction

THESE MANY EPISODES IN a young girl's life, written initially from her own childlike perspective by her father and gaining substance and detail as she ages into a teenager, trace a journey through Asia, Australia, North America, and Europe. The journey exposed this young girl to a vast quantity of varied cultures, peoples, and languages, which incrementally helped her form a distinct vision of oneness with the peoples of the world. She understood and spoke a few words in many languages, studied several non-native languages in more depth, and generally learned different ways of communicating. She observed different styles of dressing, watched many ethnic and cultural performances, and gained an appetite for an extensive selection of diverse cuisines.

Seeing diverse peoples in their natural environment allowed her to notice small physical differences and perceive the ultimate sameness in people, especially children around her own age. She also absorbed many vast differences in terrain, temperature, humidity, and vegetation throughout the world and began to grasp its immense size and diversity.

Now, as an older teenager, she has had the opportunity to look back and read about these episodes of her life, some of which she may have forgotten, and to reflect on her adventures and experiences. Most importantly she was able to express in her own words how they shaped her life, her relationships with friends and classmates, and her understanding of people, cultures, and places. Her youthful exposure to the world and its people has helped her form a vision of how she might

make a positive contribution to the international community now, and more crucially, later, when her studies are complete and she embarks on her career.

Traveling through distant lands is never easy with a small child, and it often becomes more challenging as children age. However, the advantages that such exposure to a wider world than the one they initially grew up in outweigh any of the minor inconveniences that such travel necessitates. The exposure of children to different peoples, places, and cultures is particularly rewarding at a young age because it opens their minds to a limitless scope of possibilities to pursue.

The world becomes this child's stage, and its many evident problems become inspirations for this child to seek solutions for as she shapes her career path. Journey through these episodes, and they will eventually reveal how such youthful travel could enlarge a child's concepts of what's possible and extend their thoughts beyond the boundaries of their everyday life.

Along this fascinating journey through time and space, Sasha was accompanied by her mother, Natalia Shuman Fabbri, and her father, Brian Fabbri. Natalia was, and still is, a working mom managing huge international companies across the world, while her father recently retired from his role of international chief economist and professor. Both parents were highly academically motivated, having spent many years in advanced study, and both were highly appreciative of the profound role formal education would have on their child's future. Their careers reflected this, and it predicated their commitment to expand Sasha's education and global experience. Because he had the luxury of more time, Sasha's father was designated to be the author recounting this odyssey, sometimes in Sasha's words and often in his own.

Sasha begins this journey as a five-year-old girl who ventured from her home in New Jersey the day after her fifth birthday and moved to Singapore because her mother's career brought them there. This meant that Sasha had to advance from preschool, learning to read and write

in English, to listening to and speaking Mandarin in Singapore's pre-school. Mandarin was also taught as a basic subject throughout Sasha's years spent in kindergarten through the fourth grade. She supplemented her language learning by attending Mandarin classes during summers with her dad in Shanghai, China.

Life changed for Sasha again when her mom changed jobs, industries, and location. This time her mom's career progression brought everyone back to Fort Lauderdale in the United States. Dad's role was to find a suitable school for this precocious child that would continue to challenge her. His choice was Pine Crest, a nationally regarded private institution with a reputation for a challenging academic curriculum. Sasha started fifth grade in her new school and quickly adjusted to the new environment and school. She made many new American friends and soaked up the advanced curriculum easily. The most onerous adjustment was finding a Mandarin tutor in South Florida until her school began offering Mandarin instruction in the sixth grade. Middle school should have passed routinely for Sasha, but it did not because of COVID-19. The pandemic caused schools in South Florida to offer online instruction and therefore, for more than a year, classes were conducted at home on a laptop. Sasha overcame this impediment gracefully.

At the conclusion of middle school, another obstacle confronted Sasha: Her mom changed jobs again, bringing the family this time to Brussels, Belgium. This change was far more difficult for Sasha, who had grown to love Pine Crest and all the friends she had made there. As a teenager, leaving her friends behind was a very difficult challenge to overcome, one that she intensely resisted. The problems in her new environment were manifest. First, her new school in Brussels was not as rigorous as Pine Crest was and did not have an equally robust reputation among US universities. Second, it did not offer Mandarin, and thus Sasha was forced to enter first-year French as she started high school. And third, her classmates were no longer all American, but came from disparate nationalities speaking different native languages, which made

making new friends more arduous, even for a girl who had a gift for creating large numbers of friends in separate groups.

Sasha's unhappiness motivated a final change. Sasha's mom recognized Sasha's dejection and realized she would not live up to her potential living in Brussels. Natalia had to confront Sasha's despair, and she made the painful decision to send Sasha back to their home in Fort Lauderdale and to Pine Crest with her dad while she maintained her role in her new firm and continued to live in Brussels. It was a loving sacrifice for a mother to make, and the brave decision proved to be very beneficial for Sasha, who proceeded to earn high academic grades and form a happy circle of friends in her sophomore year back at Pine Crest.

As you travel through this book visiting countries in Europe, Asia, Australia, and North America, you will see how famous and magnificent historical sites, natural and man-made, come alive through a child's eyes. Each site is seen with its authentic cultural backdrop of clothing, sounds, languages, food, and ceremonies, which add texture and significance to the descriptions of these places. Such specific insights cannot be gleaned from learning about them even in the most well-written textbooks. Being there is indisputably more valuable than reading. Not only for children but for everyone—being present aids immensely in opening our eyes to the curious distinctions that make up our world. Sasha and her parents hope their family's journey will inspire you to follow them throughout this widely varied world and bring your children with you.



Singapore: The Modern Door to the Orient

THIS WAS THE FARTHEST SASHA would ever be from home. “Home” for Sasha, up to that point, meant New Jersey. But as her parents closed the door on emptied rooms and lugged their suitcases filled with more than a vacation’s worth of clothes, Sasha knew that home would soon be somewhere completely different. On the other side of the world, in fact. Sasha’s family was moving to Singapore for Sasha’s mother to take on her new responsibility of creating and expanding a pan-Asian business for her domestically focused employment services firm, Kelly Services.

For several centuries, Hong Kong was the door to the orient for Western nations to commence trade with China and the principal financial center for capital transactions and investment in Asian companies. That door began to slowly close after 1996 when the British withdrew and the Chinese government incrementally increased their control and authority over the island. As the hand of government was changing in Hong Kong, another independent city-state was rapidly gaining global attention: Singapore.

This modern island nation has achieved much in its fifty-eight years of existence: global respect for its institutions (because of its strict adherence to the rule of law); an absence of public corruption, drugs, and violence; a dedication to pursuing financial due diligence; and nurturing harmony among its diverse ethnic populations. In part because of its announced independence from global political influences, it has recently become the new financial center of Asia.

For these reasons, it was this country that Sasha's family chose over other, bigger and better-known Asian metropolises such as Hong Kong and Tokyo. A weeklong visit to each city was enough to convince them of Singapore's merits and long-term potential. It was a bilingual country—English and Mandarin were the two official languages—which made travel, communication, shopping, education, and relations with government bureaucracy manageable. Singapore was also a relatively safe country. The government established very strict rules from its earliest days forbidding drugs, guns, and violence. There was even a ban against chewing gum; using it was a punishable offense. Sasha hated being denied chewing gum and had to learn to live without it during her years in Singapore. Her craving for something sweet to chew on intensified once she realized that it was unavailable, and she tried to sneak gum into her life each time she left Singapore for a vacation or when she returned to the United States. Despite the lack of chewing gum, it was visibly evident that Singaporean citizens enjoyed their current economic prosperity, appreciated the political success the country achieved, and overwhelmingly believed in the destiny of their tiny nation. They voluntarily chose to uphold the government's rules.

Once Singapore was selected as their new Asian base, Sasha's dad immediately connected with several former colleagues who lived in Singapore, and they introduced him to the dean of the business school at the National University of Singapore, one of the most highly ranked universities in Asia. This introduction led to a lasting relationship with the business school that involved teaching classes, giving speeches on

behalf of the school throughout Asia, attending conferences in Singapore, interacting with guests at the university's school of public policy, and writing a monthly economic review that was distributed to the school's constituents.

Sasha's mom, while intensely busy jetting off to all the major countries in Asia—from Korea to India and everywhere in between—and building and expanding her company's profile in Asia, was also a member of the Singapore chapter of the Young Presidents' Organization. This interaction with other business leaders living in Singapore provided a wealth of opportunities for networking and attending educational and motivational conferences in Singapore. Her frequent travel schedule also afforded Sasha the opportunity to tag along with her to visit many cities, particularly those in China where her efforts to expand her company's business were largely based.

Sasha's parents also had to quickly find a preschool for Sasha to attend. The choices were copious, as Singapore stresses a high quality of education. They eventually chose a preschool called EtonHouse, and the environment proved very beneficial for Sasha. Of course, entering a new school is always somewhat stressful for youngsters, but Sasha adjusted quickly and looked forward each day to her new classes. The school was housed in a large colonial mansion perched on top of a hill near the Ministry for International Affairs. Sasha loved trying to climb the steps to reach her classroom faster than her classmates (which she often did!) and running with them through the extensive lawns that surrounded the building. It was a warm and inviting building for all who attended school there, and it spread its glow to the teachers and parents too. EtonHouse was filled with children of expats from all over the world.

In the years Sasha's family lived there and just before, Singapore was building its reputation as a trade and financial hub for Asia. Consequently, most major international companies were trying to build their presence in Singapore to participate in that growth. It created a continuous flow of new international students for Sasha to mingle with.



Sasha at EtonHouse preschool in Singapore

It was the first of many times Sasha would make friends with children from other nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.

This was also Sasha's first introduction to Mandarin, which was taught as the school's mandatory foreign language along with intense exposure to Chinese culture. Sasha's first Chinese teacher at EtonHouse went by the Western name of Crystal. This young woman would eventually become Sasha's Chinese language tutor, visiting her home every week. Chinese instruction beginning at five years old made an impression on Sasha, and she has continued to study Mandarin through her present high school years.

Chinese holidays were important events at the preschool, and they were well planned and celebrated along with a few key international holidays such as Christmas for the Westerners, the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival to honor the few Japanese children in Sasha's class, and many Indian Hindu holidays. All holidays were observed unusually early by American standards and were celebrated with colorful, culturally specific clothing, some with bands and parades, and many with fireworks. The biggest celebration, however, was for Chinese New Year. It was a very memorable event with children donning traditional Chinese outfits, singing songs in Mandarin, and indulging in traditional holiday dishes. For Sasha, Chinese New Year was symbolized by a large, family-sized platter of *lo hei*, a mélange of crispy fried noodles piled high over fish, dumplings, pineapple slices, mandarin orange sections, and cabbage in special sauces specific to each restaurant. While in Singapore, Chinese New Year celebrations were always enjoyed with Sasha's new friends and their families at a classic Chinese restaurant.

Many Singaporeans, however, preferred eating at the inexpensive hawker arcades. These tiny, family-run restaurants were bundled side by side and offered a vast array of foods such as fish, shrimp, prawns, rice, soups, sugar cane, stir-fry vegetables, egg rolls, and dumplings. They were always takeout only, as the restaurants were too small to fit tables and chairs. Usually the arcades had a central space filled with large common tables and chairs where people consumed their food. They were everywhere on the island, from parks by the sea to the downtown financial district. Sasha enjoyed the dumplings and egg rolls, but she most loved the lamb satay and begged to stop for a bite whenever she and her family (and sometimes friends) went bike riding on weekends past the hawker arcade in the vast park that extended almost to the airport along the sea.

Upon graduation from EtonHouse, Sasha was enrolled in the Singapore American School (SAS), which was regarded as one of the best full-time international schools in Singapore for first through twelfth grade. Mandarin lessons continued throughout Sasha's years at SAS, but

the competition to excel at Mandarin was quite intense since so many of Sasha's classmates were Chinese. The tables turned for some of them in other subjects though, since all children had to learn math and to read and write in English.

SAS was also filled with students from a broad swath of countries across the world, and this continued to push Sasha into befriending many children with different ethnic backgrounds. Her two best friends were Asian. One, Misa, was Japanese, and her parents, like Sasha's, came to Singapore to pursue business opportunities. Their friendship introduced Sasha to the fine art of origami and the homey taste of miso soup. Sasha's other best friend at SAS was Indonesian. She lived in a huge colonial house outside the business district. There Sasha encountered a trampoline, and a new passion was born, one that would propel Sasha into pursuing gymnastics and later competing at the local and national levels.

Sasha made many other friends in Singapore, and it seemed like friends were always coming and going because of the highly transitory nature of their parents' jobs. But the beautiful thing about having friends from all over the world, which Sasha would learn, is the adventure of visiting one another and traveling together. One such friend was Mia, a Greek girl who would later enjoy skiing with Sasha in Hokkaido. Mia also taught Sasha the pleasures of eating Greek food. There was a lively Greek restaurant called Blu Kouzina on Dempsey Road, an upscale collection of restaurants and art stores not far from where Sasha and Mia lived. The food there was so good that Sasha penned a poem about it and gave it to the owner, who framed it and hung it on the wall of his restaurant.

Society in Singapore made it very convenient to interact with all the other international expats through visiting the many Asian art exhibits in the various museums, attending the abundant live sporting events and outdoor concerts, and going to ballet performances and symphony recitals in the many theaters and concert halls. It seemed as though

every well-known global performer wanted to appear live in Singapore, and as a result, Sasha's family had numerous opportunities to enjoy many top-level international performances while living there. Singapore has become a cultural mecca with a plethora of performance and art spaces supported by the relatively high-income class of expats and native citizens.

Not everyone who lived in Singapore was wealthy, though. International business brought many wealthy executives to Singapore, and this produced a building boom that many Singaporean citizens took lucrative advantage of. It also created labor opportunities for people from less prosperous surrounding nations. For example, household assistants were abundant and relatively inexpensive. Singapore had a very open policy with regard to permitting workers from other countries in Asia access to temporary work permits. Most of the construction trades were staffed by Indian workers, and many Filipina women entered Singapore to work as domestic housekeepers. As native Singaporeans became wealthier, the demand for domestic helpers also rose. As a result, all of the newer, multistory residential buildings included a helper's room in every unit so the domestic help had a place to live and work. Sports instructors and academic tutors were plentiful, too, making it inexpensive to receive instruction in many activities that would be prohibitively expensive in the United States.

Sasha took complete advantage of the opportunities that Singapore provided, filling her days with extracurriculars. Her family employed a live-in housekeeper who cooked, cleaned, and occasionally babysat Sasha. Sasha began training in gymnastics, took swimming lessons, and received individual tennis and golf instruction once a week. To round out her after-school activities, Sasha started art classes, and took piano lessons and later switched to guitar lessons. She also trained in Tae Kwon Do and was quite advanced in it by the time her family left Singapore.

When Sasha wasn't in school or pursuing one of her many extracurricular activities, one might find her exploring the elaborate complex

of underground shopping that complemented Singapore's rapid transit system. Singapore experiences two monsoon seasons every year, and anyone who has lived through one knows it is imperative to conduct daily shopping underground during these rainy seasons. Therefore, soon after Singapore's rapid transit system was constructed, an immense tri-level shopping area was completed alongside it and above and below it. All the well-known department stores on Orchard Road had levels of merchandise on display below ground, squeezed in next to mom-and-pop shops, piercing and tattoo parlors, and inexpensive restaurants, giving Sasha and her friends an enormous variety of spots to explore. Here Sasha wandered, seeking out inexpensive jewelry, candy, hats, flip-flops, sunglasses, and cheap food. Sasha would lose her parents as quickly as they took their eyes away from her. Getting lost was a given in the multiple levels of shops and department stores. More than once Sasha would get on the wrong escalator, mistaking it for the one she had started down, and would end up well away from her chosen entrance.

On the more upscale side of things, Singapore boasted the Marina Bay Sands: a hotel with an infinity pool shaped like a surfboard on the top, a casino, an arcade of expensive shops, and fine-dining restaurants. Nearby were the twin botanic domes featuring plants and orchids of all Asian species in glass-sealed, climate-controlled enclosures. The adjacent colorful garden park contained more tropical trees and flowering plants, and a large hilly green park occasionally hosted live performances. There were also many museums specializing in Asian themes, and theaters that attracted artists from around the world. And too many high-quality restaurants to mention! A towering Ferris wheel and a beach that extended from midtown almost to the airport were among the city's most striking features. Sasha spent much of her time exploring these places and enjoyed taking relatives and friends to visit some of them. She even went there on school trips intended

to teach students some of the unique history of this vibrant, modern, first-world city.

Of course, the highly efficient transit system in Singapore, built to complement its world-class airport and airline, was a huge benefit to Sasha and her family as well. It made international travel convenient, affordable, and attractive. This was another key ingredient in their decision to choose Singapore over other potential homes in Asia, and it led them to entertain the opportunity to investigate as much of Asia as they could. It was always Sasha's parents' intent to travel as widely as they could and observe and embrace as many cultures as possible, with their distinct festivals, cuisines, and architecture, and to expose their daughter to all of it.

This jet-setting book filled with exotic places, diverse people, and magnificent landscapes began when Sasha's family moved to Singapore from New Jersey immediately following Sasha's fifth birthday party. However, this wasn't the beginning of Sasha's vagabond life. It just marked the beginning of recording her experiences and probably her first memories of her travels. Sasha's parents applied for her US passport before she was six months old, and she made her first international trip from the United States to Costa Rica that same month. She had also made several trips to Michigan when she first started to walk; had a fun-filled week on Hawaii's big island; visited Sarasota, Florida, where she had her first dinner alone with her father in a fancy adult restaurant; took a trip or two to Puerto Rico; and made two trips to Paris before the family left for Singapore. But Sasha's adventures were only just beginning.

About the Authors



"BRIAN FABBRI is a very good economist, if only we knew what continent he was on," wrote the head of trading at one of Brian's former firms on his annual review. It was an apt description that characterized most of his professional life as an economist for several large global banks. He had the privilege of being sent around the world to speak with governments, central banks, and investors about global economic developments and financial markets. As a result, he visited more than one hundred countries and discussed global economic affairs with professional people of all backgrounds. Brian was fortunate to be a professional economist during the great globalization era of the last decades of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. His profession whetted his appetite for travel, which he eagerly indulged in both professionally and privately. Travel led him to see different regions of the world, meet diverse peoples, and learn their cultures; it was these experiences that inspired him to share the world with his daughter.



SASHA FABBRI, a senior in high school, discovered her passion for international relations early on, as she grew up all over the world. Attending Pine Crest School, she excelled in world history and language classes, which shaped her aspirations for a future career in global business and her goal of making a meaningful impact on the world. Sasha is now ready to venture off on her own and start a new journey in college, but she wants to continue traveling the world with her family by her side.