

# Banned in Singapore

## *Escape from Paradise*

May Chu Harding, the co-author is interviewed in the October 2002 editions of *The Singapore Women's Weekly*, and *The Malaysian Women's Weekly*.



*Escape from Paradise* is a contemporary and true woman's story set in Singapore, Brunei, Australia, England, and the United States. It involves Singapore's flamboyant Tiger Balm family, and a second wealthy and mysterious family from Brunei with CIA connections, and the link between them, a young Singaporean woman, who had to resort to guerilla warfare to escape from the marriage. From her golden childhood in Singapore to the Royals of Brunei, to a million-acre ranch in Australia, to a Hollywood movie star, to the current Lord Chancellor of England, *Escape from Paradise* draws the reader into the ambiance of a

cosmopolitan Asia never touched upon by any other book...

*Escape from Paradise* brings something *new* to the reader—so informative that even the Singapore Chief Justice Yong Pung How, and former Malaysian Finance Minister Diam Zainuddin have purchased copies! In Singapore's National Library, nearly all of the 25 copies were always checked out. *Escape from Paradise* is not just a woman's story, but current history. Recently *Escape from Paradise* was banned in Singapore, and removed from Singapore's bookstores, and Singapore's National Library.

## **Formats Available**

*Distributed by the Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, Bertram Books (UK), Bowker Books in Print, and Bowker Global Books in Print.*

### **Trade Paperback**

Price \$19.95 USA, £16.00 UK , 6" by 9" Perfect Bound, 442 Pages, 66 Photographs, One Illustration (Map)  
Publication Date: November 1, 2001, ISBN: 0971092907

### **Ebook**

Microsoft Reader & Adobe Reader Formats \$8.95 (www.amazon.com),  
Adobe Reader Format (Read Aloud Enabled) £6.75 UK (www.amazon.co.uk)  
66 Photographs, One Illustration (Map), Publication Date: December 1, 2001, ISBN: 0971092915

## *Escape from Paradise Website*

The *Escape from Paradise* website (<http://www.escapefromparadise.com>) provides additional background on the book, sample text, photographs, reviews, and links to the various on-line vendors of the book.

## **The Authors**

### **May Chu Harding**



May Chu Harding, nee Lee, was born in Singapore. At the age of 18, she founded and published two professional trade magazines, *Development and Construction*, and *Banking and Financial Review*. May Chu is the great-granddaughter of Aw Boon Par, who, with his brother, developed Tiger Balm and founded the Chung Khiaw Bank with branches throughout Singapore and Malaysia, and the Sing Tao Group, publishing newspapers in Asia, Australia, the United States, and Canada. May Chu's native language is English, but she is also fluent in four Chinese dialects and Malay. Her family's palatial estates, Hong Kong's Tiger Balm Gardens, and Singapore's Haw Par Villa have become major tourist attractions.



May Chu at 18  
Interviewing I. M. Pei

### **John Harding**



John Harding was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He has spent most of his adult life abroad, including stays in Saudi Arabia (nine years), and Italy (seven years). John spent nine years in Singapore, and for three of them, was the only American expatriate in Singapore's civil service. John has held professorships at King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and at the Graduate School of Engineering of Pratt Institute of Technology in Brooklyn, New York. He also worked for the United Nations Development Programme in Kingston, Jamaica.

John's next book, *The Gulf*, is based on his experiences in Saudi Arabia. It is an adventure, and yet presents to the reader a **true** picture of Arabia both in life and thought—a valuable lesson for today's realities. The prose is in the same clear and lively style as *Escape from Paradise*. The first three chapters of the book are available for review.

## ***The Press, Reviews, & Comments***

### ***The Press***

On December 1, 2002, *Escape from Paradise* was featured on the front page of Singapore's daily newspaper, *Today*, and, later that day, on a MediaCorp radio talk show. MediaCorp is the owner of *Today* and is Singapore's largest media organization covering radio, television, and the press.

The October 2002 editions of *The Singapore Women's Weekly*, and *The Malaysian Women's Weekly* carried three page articles featured on the cover, entitled, *Tiger Lady*, about May Chu Harding, co-author of *Escape from Paradise*.

### ***Reviews***

*Escape from Paradise* has received an excellent review in the Fall/Winter 2002-2003 edition of *The Book Reader*: "***And this story, of the underside of paradise, has stories within stories as a woman manages to break free from a web of wealth and power in the dictatorship of Singapore and escape to America where the word 'freedom' takes on special meaning...She comes up against the Singapore legal system -- which may be legal, but its has a lot of hidden agendas...Americans have a saying: luck is a lady. And this lady and her subsequent husband have written a somber, very human tale of a woman's remarkable journey"***

***"This book out-Dallas, Dallas. No one has written so well of the other side of paradise ... your book deserves to be read..."*** Former Solicitor General of Singapore, Francis Seow. (The full text of this review is posted on the *Escape from Paradise* website. Mr. Seow is the author of *To Catch a Tartar : A Dissident in Lee Kuan Yew's Prison*, and *The Media Enthralled : Singapore Revisited*.)

*Escape from Paradise* was featured in the December 2001 Edition of John Austin's Hollywood Inside Syndicate, *Books of the Month*, and again in the September 2002 Edition under the title, *Censorship is Alive and Well in Singapore*.

### ***Comments***

C. V. Devan Nair, former President of Singapore: ***"It took me two and a half evenings to complete your un-put-downable book. It does speak volumes for you and John....the characters you depict became three-dimensional. A moving memoir that only a woman could have written, it is a unique contribution to the appreciation of a life in Singapore. Thank you for having written it."***

Glen Goei, who played the title role opposite Anthony Hopkins in the London Production of *M. Butterfly*, and is the writer and director of the Miramax film *That's the Way I Like It*, wrote the authors, ***"Bought the book from Select this weekend and can't put it down! It's a great read! And so nostalgic for me—the good old days!"***

## **Excerpts**

Singapore is a name of a dream, an imaginary vision of the Orient of colonial times, of leisurely lives, of verandahs, of all the things it isn't. There are no clouds on the horizon.

Well, almost none—the CIA claims that Singapore serves as a transit point for Golden Triangle heroin going to the West.

Singapore is Chinese. Singapore is safe. Singapore is making money.

It's not that Singapore isn't nice. It's not a particularly interesting or easy place, but it is nice. Singapore is slick on the surface—marble hotel lobbies stretch sky high. It is China in paradise, with a Manhattan skyline, where Chinese autocrats talk about preserving their core values from the onslaught of “pseudo-Western” culture. It is materialism run rampant—the most mercenary of environments—a Chinese dream—a contradictory clear win for Western-style capitalism.



I was born there in 1957, when Singapore wasn't Singapore, the country—it was still part of Malaysia. The world I knew as a child, and as a teenager, is a long-gone distant memory.

Most Chinese arrived in Singapore as coolies during the time of British rule. They were permitted to do only the most menial of tasks and were not considered acceptable even as house servants for the British—only Indians and Malays were good enough.

Still, over time, some Singapore Chinese families grew to be wealthy—most did not.

My family arrived in Singapore by a different route. We were not coolies and did not fit any of the popular Chinese stereotypes. We were not gloomy *Joy Luck Club* middle-class folks. We had no ancient faded family photographs of destitute peasants to gaze upon with simple pride. We were not humble. We were not obsequious. No one impressed us. No one had more than we did, or showed it off so grandly. We were flamboyant, irreverent, and loud. We came to Singapore from Burma, and arrived in style. We were already rich, very rich—we were the Tiger Balm Kings!

Our business empire grew from one simple product, an ointment called “Tiger Balm,” to newspapers in Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand, Australia, and Canada, and to banks in Singapore and Malaysia.

Our houses, the Haw Par Villa in Singapore, and the Tiger Balm Gardens in Hong Kong are now tourist attractions—free donations from our family for public pleasure and family aggrandizement.

No one had anything quite like what we had—but that was then.



As though they had never met, Dan Arnold introduced himself to Lynn explaining that he was an American, and further established his credentials by saying that he was an ex-CIA employee. All this Dan Arnold conveyed in somber tones to emphasize his importance and credibility.

Lynn went along with Dan Arnold's act, pretending herself that this was their first meeting.

Dan Arnold explained to Lynn, in even tones, that everything would be all right, and that “things were being done, including the possibility of a helicopter rescue” to get her husband and Hin Chew out of Brunei.

Lynn was already unsettled by the police raid of the night before. But now, Dan Arnold, the CIA, a helicopter rescue—and why?



I connected the dots—S. P., Dan Arnold, Bush.

Far fetched?

Was the shabby little Chinaman from Mumong with \$48 million in liquid assets far fetched? Was Anna Plains, larger than the state of Rhode Island far-fetched? Hin Chew’s detention in Brunei with his “life in danger.” Was that far-fetched? Was Alexander Irvine a mirage? Were Dan Arnold’s helicopters a fib?

For me, this was all much more than far-fetched—it was a nightmare.

Could S. P.’s connections, his world whatever it was, cause problems for me, if I tried to leave Hin Chew? Life with the Chungs was making me ever more isolated and alone, devoid of friends or allies. How could I escape from a family like the Chungs? I saw what Peter had done to Rosita.

And what were my chances?



The next thing I knew, and without any warning, Lillian was screaming at me, "You bitch, can't you do anything right? You only married my son because he's educated. You married him for his money, didn't you? You're good for nothing! My son should never have married you!"

In a total state of shock, I said nothing, and neither did Hin Chew.

"I demand that you beg me for forgiveness!" screamed Lillian.

I could feel my face redden with anger, and fighting back the tears, said, "I'm so sorry Ma, it will not happen again."

"That's not good enough!" Lillian shouted, "you will beg for my forgiveness on your knees!" I hesitated.

"On your knees!" she screamed, pointing at the floor.

To my eternal shame, I got down on my knees, and, with Hin Chew watching in silence, said, "Ma, please forgive me, it was all my fault."



I enjoy being provocative, not in a sexual way, but more as an agitator. I have always loved to be inquisitive, to see what makes a person tick. In the case of the approaching letch, what he deserved was some prodding and needling. I leaned over and threw a remark his way. I have no idea of what I said, but his reaction was as I expected.

He immediately left C. K.’s side to move in on me. Typical!

“Sorry, I couldn’t hear you from over there.” Yeah, sure, I thought, observing him. He was not too tall, and not too good looking, brown hair and eyes, and not too young. I’m John,” he said. “Hello, I’m Monicka.” It was great protection to have a name that wasn’t on any official document, and not in any telephone book.

(That’s how the authors met . . .)