

Nancy's Harbor Hotel, 1977

In the seventies and eighties Kaohsiung was to Taipei, as Osaka to Tokyo, or Chicago to New York - where there's muck there's money. For several years I simply commuted between Taipei, Tainan and Kaohsiung by FAT or CAT aboard ancient Boeing 737s purchased 3rd hand from Australian domestic airlines long after they had been retired by EASTERN in the USA on "as needed" basis, after I had counted 400 round-trip flights I rented a house to use three days a week close to the airport and the Shao Kung harbour area, but after a few years I went back to "as needed", and stayed in a number of wonderful and woeful, quirky and exotic hotels. Nancy's was one of them. Carter was about to recognize the PROC at the expense of the ROC, but at that moment in time the ChiComms were still exchanging artillery fire with the Gimo's men, and America was standing-by.

Since 1954 the Pacific 7th Fleet based at Yokosuka also operated from the Zouying base at the N end of Kaohsiung Harbour. The Chinese Nationalists, having retreated from the Mainland to Taiwan in 1949, were enjoying a renewal of the close relationship between themselves and the US as the Korean conflict dissolved into unhappy armistice and the Dulles brothers turned their gaze towards Vietnam. Ship chandlers did well from the fleet and a group of them, including George Sung, Bronson Dong and others decided to invest some of their profits in the yacht building business. My client was their first customer. Amongst their many assets was a slice of Nancy's Harbor Hotel, at eleven stories one of the tallest buildings in Kaohsiung;

which were limited in height as a consequence of martial law and the imminent anticipated return of the Nationalists to Mainland China. Although, that didn't happen. In the years since the concrete was poured it had prospered mightily until 30th April, 1975, but from then on fell into an irreversible decline which saw the restaurants, gift shop, coffee shops - all the little inde-



pendent businesses that give hotels their flare - move out together with their decorations leaving only bare concrete shell behind, not only are the shops and restaurants gone, but some investors have even stripped their rooms.

Never refinished on the principle that if you're only paying for an hour or three, then "natural" was good enough. Ratings, NCOs and officers poured through Kaohsiung in truly staggering numbers on deployment and R&R, and given the paucity of entertainment most of them will have visited Nancy's Harbor Hotel at some point, probably more than once. In 1977 Nancy's boasted a truly wonderful bar of the same name, located deep in the bowels of the building, staffed by a resident platoon of fully fledged, amiable and highly experienced ladies of the night directed by a now retired but vigorous Queen. Sallies and engagements were undertaken in appropriately dimmed light and with a decorum appropriate to their status, age and experience. The walls, every inch of them, the ceiling and bar were covered with curling black and white snaps quickly being eclipsed with colour, with sailors laughing and pretty girls sitting side saddle on local 125CC motorcycles, hanging out in parks and beaches, ship pennants, caps, badges, helicopter tags, river boat decals, dollar bills and thousands of other mementos adorned the walls and ceilings. Upstairs, in the lobby, it is immediately obvious that this situation is probably terminal, decorations being noticeably absent, concrete walls partitioned with bare 3/4" ply separated a tiny lobby from the elevators with a small dusty breakfast cafe off to one side. The sailing and reporting times for USS vessels that appear to have already sailed displayed along with prominent invitations to call the Foreign Affairs or Military Police. Those dark stains on the entrance steps probably are dried blood, but after three days in clink the protagonists were probably ready to go again. The concierge undoubtedly has seen it all and is appropriately armed with a large club visible behind his chair. One elevator leads to Snow's on the 11th floor. This is a far more salubrious establishment than Nancy's, and with hints of disco. The walls are covered in dollar bills and in the girls' pictures they are smiling impishly, at a beach resort, dancing or dressed to kill and captured in a fashionable pose. Snow herself is an imposing Chinese woman of a certain age, usually to be found in a silk chi-pao, a respectable cleavage decorated with jade and pearls nesting on a bed of gold chains, scented with sandalwood and loosely covered in a silk shawl topped with a great swirling beehive of hair seized with lacquer, high above lovely eyes and handsome face. Her customers step gingerly when her gaze turns towards them, grown men quiver in fear.

Yes, she had that power. She is motherly and firm with her her girls who are roughly half the age of the basement crowd. Young, fashionable, exuberant, and eager. The booze is still watered down... but less so. Interestingly, many of the girls will marry out of the club, and weddings are celebrated with great joy and passion amid hopes for the same good fortune.

George is eager to please and offers me not only the use of a room at Nancy's which I accept, assuming as one must that certain fundamental expectations relating to the minimum dignity afforded a guest will be met, but also with the room-key came with an invitation to Snow's which is certain to help one sleep. It turns out that George's generosity is not limited just to the room and several night caps later the thought of sweet dreams and a firm bed calls. Now, George's "slice" of the hotel is ownership of rooms. Some investors put more into "their" rooms than others. George being one of the latter. Nonetheless, while spartan, it is adequate with a bed, excellent curtains, a door, a small bathroom and air-conditioning. Not being one to look a gift horse in the mouth I slept unconcerned until awoken a couple of hours later by a steady explosive pounding on the dividing wall, also conveniently 3/4" ply. The action is interspersed with excited cooing, slurping and then the banshee wailing of a well acted and convincing orgasm rising in volume from a tremulous snicker to a full blooded yodel, accompanied by the the delirious grunts and bed shaking conclusion with which every contract is consummated. The energy being transmitted through the wall was enough to slowly propel my bed with me on it several inches away from the wall. I lay there laughing for a while but dressed and headed back to Snow's rather than wait for Part the Second. Given the pounding this place has taken over the years it is a miracle that it stands.

Snow later married a former Harbour Master of the Port of Rotterdam. The club continued under her management but with Genever next to the watered down scotch. It's more than thirty years since I last visited with Snow and Dutch Tom...such is the landscape of memory.

TE,
Vancouver, January, 2021

Photo credit: Nancy's Harbor Hotel, circa 1971. Photo by James Harrison.