



Shoes Were Not My Thing

by Sho Botham

You might think me slow. After all, it had taken me a year to tell the time. But you don't know all the facts.

Living on the road meant there was an occasional school here and there. But by the time I started to settle we'd be off again heading for pastures new. My mother never seemed to worry that I wasn't getting a formal education. When asked, she would throw her arms wide, looking all around and say this was my education. In a way she was right. The few short weeks I spent at some local school told me that my understanding of life was vastly different to the other children in the classrooms.

My dad's job took us all over the world. I was never sure what he did. All I knew was lots of people called him sir. This was the life I knew. I liked hot countries best where I could be outside in the blazing sunshine all day. I would be as brown as berry with white markings on my body in exactly the shape of my t-shirt and shorts. Shoes were not my thing. Mother was always telling me to be careful when she spotted my shoes discarded somewhere nearby.

When I got to 14 my parents decided to send me to school in England. After all those years of mother's arms being thrown wide indicating my education, it turned out she was lying. She did believe in traditional education and I was to be the victim of her lies. Her excuse was I needed to prepare myself for the world of work and the best place to do that was back home in England.

Why she still thought of England as home amused me. We hadn't stepped foot in England since I was seven.

During my sporadic times in schools no one had picked up that I couldn't read nor write. I didn't need to. I was outside in the dirt or at the river or talking to children who spoke other languages. I could talk in several languages.

My first week at school was dreadful. My second week, worse. By week three I was planning my escape and by week four I realised I had nowhere to escape to. I didn't know England. It wasn't my home. Give me India, Malaysia, Brunei, even Hong Kong. I could feel at home in any of these places but not England.

I'm not sure how I managed to hide my inability to read and write. It made my life very stressful. I never told anyone and didn't ask for help. I was always ill at exam times. I muddled through and my saving grace was that I was a good talker and a good listener. It was during that year at school I learned to tell the time. Forty years later people assume I can read and write because I can tell the time on my Rolex. If only they knew.