

There is one picture that I carry with me everywhere, it is that of me, my siblings and parents emerging from the Modern Studio in Brickfields in 1959 after my fourth birthday.

The flash from the mounted camera hit my eyes with such intensity that I remember blinking fiercely in the split second that it took to etch our family portrait on film.

I don't know where the photograph taken in Mr Lau's ancient studio is 50 years later, after the mild-mannered and middle-aged proprietor of the only photo studio in our area smiled his way into becoming our family photographer.

It was a sunny day, I remember, and my feet itched from the prickly socks that my mother had persuaded me to wear to fit into the shiny, new, brown leather shoes that she had picked for me.

Add to this the hot velvet shorts with suspenders that wound their way over a checked shirt that chafed my neck, and you had a sweaty little boy waiting to return to his familiar hand-me-downs.

We got into the black Austin 10 which had gunny sacks smelling of kerosene as floor mats for the short ride back to the corner government quarters that my father had brought the family to in 1949, after years of living in rented wooden houses.

The two-lane Brickfields Road then was chock-a-bloc with traffic, a lone Sikh policeman standing dangerously in the middle directing cars, motorcycles and bicycles into Rozario Street where we stayed.

This, then, was Brickfields in the 1950s, and even into the next decade, little changed in the slow-moving lifestyle that people of that day enjoyed.

The Brickfields of the 1950s and 1960s was a child's delight with hours of fun. BALAN MOSES takes a walk into time to the halcyon days of his childhood

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BRICKFIELDS was a safe cocoon



The 80s fashion, complete with short pants and bow tie, is evident in this farewell ride given to headmaster S. Ratnasingam of La Salle Brickfields which opened in 1961.

In Brickfields, a child of that era had it all: games that children today don't know; food that cost a fraction of what it does now and far tastier to boot; and, school life that was never short of fun and sports.



crete sidewalks.

A string would be wound through a hole in the centre and we were in action trying to cut the other person's string.

One "game" I will never forget involved taking pieces of a substance that looked like coal that was found along railway lines and passing them over the back of someone's head: the effect was always painful and often elicited a punch in return.

As for the food, those were the days of 15 cent packets of mamak mee at the two stalls in Chinese shophouses along Brickfields Road, 10 cent roti canai and five cent nyonya kuih that an Indian carried in metal containers that swung on the sides of a *kanda* stick.

Which Brickfields old boy worth his salt can forget the dhoti-clad mamak who sold rojak and mee rebus with a mobile stove hung precariously from one side of a *kanda* stick with the other holding his cutting board and ingredients.

Suffice to say that there was never a dearth of food, the variety changing over the day from breakfast to supper — everything brought to your doorstep.

Then there were the Tarzan movies screened in the hall of the La Salle school where all

The photograph of us stepping out of the studio, unfortunately, is only in my mind, unlike that of my daughter and wife which I carry in my wallet.

But the sepia tones of that picture in the recesses of my mind refuse to fade, as may al-

so be the case with others who grew up in Kuala Lumpur or the little towns that hugged the trunk roads north, south or east of the peninsula.

But Kuala Lumpur was a little different, being the federal



The Lido cinema, which was very much a part of the Brickfields scene, has since been demolished for a bank building.

administrative capital and business hub of the young nation.

Old timers will remember the glitter of lights at the BB Park in Jalan Bukit Bintang beckoning those out for a little nightlife while the pasar malam in Kampung Baru attracted Malays, Chinese and Indians alike with its myriad varieties of food.

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I remember "kaunda kaundi" played in the sandy com-

pound of the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, the large white marbles in our pockets that looked very much like giant eyeballs, the colourful kites that soared over the area and the game of "thachi" that the girls played on badminton courts.

There were also the little cards that we used to cup in the small of our palms and then do something like a high five with an opponent, the winner being the one whose card fell with the picture side up.

We had a unique game that involved hammering metal bottle caps razor thin and then sharpening their sides by rubbing them against the con-

tributed 10 cent had ample space on the sandy floor to whoop their delight at Johnny Weismuller's antics.

The old-world Brickfields began its slide into history in the 1970s when the first condominiums came up where sawmills and kampung had existed.

Today, there are a clutch of buildings that still remind many of the rich history behind Brickfields.

They include the Buddhist Maha Vihara, the Vivekananda Memorial Hall, the Lutheran church, the government housing called the Hundred Quarters, the Holy Rosary Church, the Methodist Girls Primary School and the Sri Kandaswamy Temple.

My memories of Brickfields can be summed up in a line: it was a safe cocoon where almost everyone knew each other by name if not by sight, most finding a sense of security in the familiarity of the area



The Vivekananda Ashram as it was in the 1980s has since been spruced up.