

## Travellers Post

Travellers Post Change is a factor that we cannot avoid.

For as long as I can remember, I would always see different people in the marketplace. Everyone being a unique individual of different color, height, different eye color and different shade of hair, walking through the bustling emporium; flocking towards any store that displayed exotic merchandise. A child would normally be scared of any stranger, let alone an alien from a different country who is twice the average size of a grown native, but that wasn't the case for me.

Our household sold food to both natives and any foreigner who dare try our "strange" cuisine which ranged from paniki (fruit bat) to cakalang fufu (skipjack tuna), a popular dish from my hometown named Bitung. Father was raised by his father to set out to fish in order to feed a family of six. With me being the oldest and being the only male, I was the next in line to learn how to fish and keep the business going. Mother taught my sisters how to smoke the fish and plate it in a bamboo frame, teaching them at the same time to tend to customers who dropped by our house to retrieve an order.

To the north was the Celebes Sea, and to its south the Java sea, our Strait was in between as it served as the doorway to a huge world and at the same time tended to the adventurous travellers.. Me and my friends would chase and push out boats as they drove through the strait in order to gather some fish; pretending they were our targets for headhunting. Showing how courageous and capable we are in leading a tribe from our village—often pointing towards foreign boats as our next targets, possible our dreams. The strait was a strategic route that traders used to get to their destination faster, often avoiding traversing around our main island and often enjoying the small detour to our native culture.

But my views towards the world matured, practically morphing my body along with it—a body that is capable of supporting my two sisters and beloved mother. I can't place my finger to what the difference is then and now but there is much more tension towards me, not only because of the responsibility I had to take after the sea took away my father, but also towards the people going through the island. Kids were no longer allowed to play near the sand shores of the strait, travellers had no time to sit and eat and would often hurry their order to take out, everyone just became a bit more busy, worrying about themselves and their families as more and more Japanese people occupied the island.

At the beginning of the year, January of 1942, we heard the news that the Netherlands, which allied to the United States was about to intercept the Japanese, despite their present occupancy in the island. The battle commenced at the Java Sea, and brought itself to our strait; the US with their cruisers, the Dutch with their destroyers versus the Japanese land-based bombers.

At that instant, I remembered our native headhunting. As a child it was caped as only mere play but in reality it was a symbol for initiative; running along the peaceful strait has changed to running for our lives, pointing to our next target changed into pointing towards safety. I had something to protect, and I will not hesitate to kill anyone who comes between me and my family. They used our strait as vantage point for their tactics without deliberation from us natives.

I just hope and pray the peace of the strait would not be lost in this battle, and would continue be a home to future generations.

References:

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