

After Bangkok

by Sho Botham

To look at him now, you'd never know he was wild when he was young. His laid-back easy nature fitting the casual, open neck shirts he wears, teamed with creased, sandy coloured but incredibly expensive, cargo trousers and barefoot shoes. He's often seen fumbling through his many trouser pockets never quite sure where he put his phone. His fairish hair has a styled unkempt look about it. There's an air of confidence about this man. He doesn't need a sharp suit or a perfectly pressed designer shirt. It isn't the clothes he wears. It's him. There's something in the way he strides effortlessly across the floor. You can't help but notice him and his ease of being.

As a child, Bob Beresford was always charging about at top speed and up to no good. His poor mother was never quite sure what state Bob would be in when he got home from school. There were lots of grazed knees and bumps and bruises from falling off his bike. Bob wore all of these like badges of honour. He was proud of winning yet another scrap on the way home from school or bumping head-first into a tree and falling off his bike, on the way home.

Bob continued rushing through life at top speed during high school. He headed East for his gap year. His mother worried at first when he said he wanted to explore the Orient and all things east. She knew he would keep in touch but she was anxious about him trying to live life at his usual pace in the hot humid heat as well as in the spiritual cultures he would be visiting. She didn't need to worry, about halfway through Bob's gap year, Mrs Beresford noticed a calmness creeping into her son's messages. No longer did she feel they were frenetic and dashed off in a great hurry. Instead, he began to mention the calmness of where he was staying, the scent of the flowers, the steamy heat of the jungle when he went on short hikes. It was as if Bob's life was slowing down. It was as if he was taking time to notice more of his surroundings. It was as if he was growing up.

Mrs Beresford pinned Bob's latest photos of his travels and explorations to the large map fixed to her noticeboard on the kitchen wall. She noticed how mature he looked in a nice caring way. He wore shorts and linen shirts in calming colours and he'd let his hair grow long and do its own thing. He was clean shaven and always had his small, trusty backpack with him.

On his travels, Bob found himself in Malaysia. He met two guys also on their gap years and the three teamed up and decided to travel a while together. Len was quiet and thoughtful. Zack was the opposite.

He was exactly how Mrs Beresford thought her Bob would turn out. Zack, ran everywhere. He walked at speed, he ate at speed, he slept at speed, deep and quickly, getting up in the middle of the night to look out at the lights all around them in George Town, Penang and breathe in the pungent smells of the colourful, island city. A large triple room was cheap and cheerful but at times, Bob wished he was back on his own enjoying his newly discovered slower pace of life.

Back home, Mrs Beresford told family and friends that Bob was calming down and enjoying having time to be still and look around. She was visibly less anxious knowing that Bob was opting for the quiet life. That was until the day she got the message from a hospital in Thailand. Bangkok. There'd been an accident. Bob and his two friends were in hospital. Mrs Beresford shook with fright when she heard. Her neighbour Marian sat with her waiting for news. The phone rang at midnight, it was six o'clock in the morning in Bangkok. It was Bob. He was alright. Len was alright but Zack needed surgery. He had broken his leg badly and he was in a sorry state. Zack's injuries shook Bob up. It was to meet Zack's fast pace of life that they'd hired two scooters to travel around Bangkok. Bob and Len shared one and Zack drive the other.

After Bangkok, Bob's fast days never returned. He arrived home, a matured, confident and more spiritual young man. And as so many before him, he found himself drawn to the calm of the Orient again and again to live, travel and work. Over time, its calming influences shaped the way he effortlessly crossed the floor with his charming, recognisable quiet confidence.