



## Book Proposal – Chapter List

### Chapter 1 – Lost in Mong Kok

January 14, 2005. It was a bright and clear day in Hong Kong. I was driving for the first time in my life a Caterham Super Seven. This thirty-year old car was lent to me by the boss of the Hong Kong Automobile Association for a photo shoot. “It doesn’t have a windshield. Did you bring goggles?” he asked me when he handed me the keys. I hadn’t.

Since I never drive in Hong Kong, I promptly lost my way on one of the many side streets of a district called Mong Kok. These streets are narrow and lined with small stores whose wares spill out onto the sidewalks. Peering into the stores you see golden buddhas under red lights; more often than not, the buddhas’ shiny foreheads reflect the bluish image of an always-on television. Looking up, you see laundry fluttering in the wind and television antennas erratically stabbing at the laundry. You also see air conditioners perspiring in an effort to provide a touch of comfort to the crowded inhabitants of Mong Kok. What you don’t see is the sky.

It was 1 o’clock. The roads and sidewalks were full of people, all in search of a quick lunch. Since I was directionally challenged at that moment, I didn’t at first notice what was going on around me: office workers in dark suits were snapping pictures of me and my car with their camera phones; elderly ladies looked upon us quizzically; retired men wore faces that betrayed dreams about could-have-beens; young ladies shed their aloofness and approached us; kids went gaga. But above all, they all smiled broad, indefatigable smiles. Which was when an idea shot through my head: Why not take a Seven on a driving journey through China?

Chapter 1 is about how this journey came about.

First appearance of three characters: Angie, Fred and John.

### Chapter 2 – 1968, A Bad Year

In November 1968, I was a third-grader in Austria on a school trip to Vienna, and China and I crossed paths for the first time as the city was hosting the “UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ROAD TRAFFIC” while I was there. China’s delegate to this conference blithely signed the Final Act of the Convention surely while sipping a fine Viennese blend and munching on a Sacher Torte, but never bothered to follow up: to this day, China has not ratified the Final Act of the conference.

This had several consequences that the weasel of a delegate had probably never considered. One of them was that people like me, simple folks who just want to go on a driving holiday in China, face a dire choice: either let themselves be sucked into the total perspective vortex of Chinese bureaucracy in order to obtain a Chinese driving licence legally or become party to the flourishing trade in fake ones.



Despite the temptation to spend a few dollars on a fake, I decided on the vortex. I hope the weasel choked on his Sacher Torte.

Chapter 2 is about my experience in the vortex.

### **Chapter 3 – It's not a Car. It's a Toy.**

I found my Caterham Super Seven R300 in Germany and called her Miss Daisy.

In order to import a car into China you need an import permit, and to secure that you need to have a China residence visa. But I don't live in China. Well, I do, but then again I don't: I live in Hong Kong which is not part of China. Or is it? I never know.

There were four options. I could 1) get a residence visa if I were employed in China, but who would employ me? 2) persuade somebody living and working in China to import the car on my behalf and then let me drive it, but who in their right mind would? 3) set up my own company and employ myself. 4) set up a Caterham dealership and then drive the demo. What should I do?

Chapter 3 is about the challenges of putting Miss Daisy on the road in China.

First appearance of four characters: Miss Daisy, Liu Zizhou, Mr. Zhang and Peter Carmichael.

### **Chapter 4 – What Do You Do When It Rains?**

Farewell to Hong Kong, my home of many years, and welcome to the roads of China.

Right from the start I learned that the Chinese have only three basic questions about topless Miss Daisy: 1) How fast? 2) How much? 3) What do you do when it rains?

Chapter 4 is about my first adventures and encounters on the highways and by-ways of China's eastern seaboard.

First appearance of one character: Oggy.

### **Chapter 5 – All Resistance is Futile**

Confucius wrote a lot. One of his exhortations was: Li. Yi. Lian. Chi. These four words guide the Chinese through life by telling them what's important in a person's character: Courtesy. Righteousness. Honesty. A Sense of Shame.

I thought I had no problem with any of these, until I started staying with Chinese families along the way and their courtesy smothered me. Now I think it entirely possible that China could win World War 3 using no more persuasive a weapon than their overpowering hospitality. I for one have already surrendered.

Chapter 5 is about my first home-stay.



## Chapter 6 – Middle School

Chapter 6 is about my visit to a junior high school in Jiangxi province. Listless students come to life in two hours of a class that I teach in English and during which they tell me about their dreams and their fears.

First appearance of one character: Honghong.

## Chapter 7 – Waltzing in the Streets

Heading west-south-west, the country gets poorer and more original.

I end up stuck in the mud, both with Miss Daisy and with a water buffalo, but thankfully not at the same time.

Of pig farms, small tea plantations, silk worms as pets, calligraphy artists, and local delicacies: pigs blood, stinking tofu, and jet fuel sold as wine with 53% alcohol content.

Wandering through the cities and finding, among many other oddities, “California Beef Noodle King”. California is known for a lot but not, to my knowledge, for beef noodles. But California Beef Noodle King does well in Chongqing because of the Chinese people’s fondness for anything that’s Western. Oddly, this infatuation with foreign goods is at the same time strongly resented by many proud Chinese.

The language gap: it’s as wide as the Grand Canyon. It leads to misunderstandings and bewildering mumbo-jumbo such as this description of an exhibition in a hotel lobby: “In order to thank the new old guest, the guesthouse decorated corridor invites the national senior painter work to bestow for into goes visiting the person. Because these works have the very high collection value, therefore the unification did has mounted, presently depends on presents as gift the picture card and Fang Kazhi must pay mounts the cost to spend then receives.”

Mingling with the people of rural China: the air of indefatigable diligence in small shops, the steamy and spicy atmosphere in food stalls, the charming exuberance in small parks or along tree-lined streets at the crack of dawn when the Chinese, 9 or 90 years old, exercise in large numbers and invite me to dance the Viennese waltz with them.

First appearance of one character: Netfriend.

## Chapter 8 – In a Strip Club

Chapter 8 is about my visit to two Chinese national parks. There is immense beauty in the mountains of Hunnan, Guangxi and Guizhou province. What a pity it is all highly commercialised. The visitor feels like the patron of a strip club: beauty is within your reach, but heaven forbid, don’t touch it.



### **Chapter 9 – Rhythm of Life**

China has 57 official minorities, one of which is called Miao. Chapter 9 is about my visit to one Miao minority village. I listen to the stories of their resistance fighters, mostly women, who struggled well into the 1950s against the Communist “Liberation Army”.

“Smoking is good for you” a 104 year old Miao lady tells me as she sucks her fag and exhales a cloud of bluish smoke over her 4-year old great-great-great-great-great son.

### **Chapter 10 – Up-Sale**

Chapter 10 is about an adventure in a Chengdu massage parlour.

### **Chapter 11 – 17% Oxygen**

Looking anywhere but east from Chengdu, you see mountains rising. They are the mountains of Tibet. I drive south, then north-west into the region of mythical Shangri-La. My wife Angie joins me for a few days in the Yading National Park, one of Sichuan’s most beautiful. She succumbs to altitude sickness. Her oxygen level drops to 17% as she lies unconscious in her bed and nearly dies.

Chapter 11 is about what happened in Yading.

### **Chapter 12 – Hitch-Hiker**

UFO, otherwise known as Miss Daisy, makes appearance in Western Sichuan to give a lift to an 18-year old, gorgeous Tibetan girl. Soon after, we’re stopped by the local police. What am I doing with her, they want to know, and what is it with this rocket on wheels? Is it North Korean?

Chapter 12 tells the story.

### **Chapter 13 – Fifteen Minutes**

On the way north, I stumble upon one of the most beautiful stretches of road I’ve ever driven on. I enjoy fifteen minutes of driving bliss. When it’s finished, I know I’ll pay for so much pleasure sooner or later.

Chapter 13 celebrates these extraordinary 15 minutes.

### **Chapter 14 – Dancing Around Miss Daisy**

My first visit to a Tibetan Monastery on the fringes of Tibet in Gansu Autonomous Region.

Then preparations for the 1,200km push to near the source of the Yangtze and into Tibet.



Pay-back day (sooner rather than later): the road leading up to China's highest mountain pass, Tanggula at 5,300m, is hellish and then, just before crossing into Tibet, Miss Daisy decides to have a heart attack. Riders on the Golmud-Lhasa train wave at us. Tibetan antelopes watch. The sun is setting. Miss Daisy is comatose. I am decidedly not having a good day. Chapter 14 tells what happened.

### **Chapter 15 – The Wild Mountain Goat**

Chapter 15 is about more driving challenges in Tibet. With the help of the Chinese military, Miss Daisy crosses rivers along China's longest national road, the G318, which runs for 4,600km from Shanghai all the way to the Himalaya base camp.

### **Chapter 16 – Where Few Big Noses Have Gone Before**

I have a permit to enter Tibet. But it is the wrong one. I am being detained by an opportunistic bureaucrat while he considers how much I'm worth.

Of all the complaints that the people of China have about their government, the one about the abuse of privilege by officials is the most persistent, the loudest and the most justified. I choose a few of the many examples for this chapter.

### **Chapter 17 – The School under the Milky Way**

I leave Miss Daisy behind and go on a 36 hour side trip to the remotest corner of China I visit on this journey, the source of the Yellow River in the Qinghai plateau.

Only four kilometres from this great river's source there is a school called The First School of the Yellow River. Its students are the children of yak herders who live within a radius of forty or so kilometres. The school dispenses food and shelter and lessons in Maths, Chinese and Tibetan to these poorest of China's poor children.

Since it is getting dark and the road is marshy and our four-wheel drive has already been stuck twice, I end up staying overnight in one of the yak herder's earthen home.

Chapter 17 is about this experience.

### **Chapter 18 – Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom and a Hundred Thoughts Contend**

On my way back toward Beijing, I drive through the cradle of China's civilisation, the area around Xi'an. I learn more about Chinese history than ever before and gain a tenuous understanding of the origin of differences between the Chinese and the Western mind.



### **Chapter 19 – Disillusioned and Inspired**

At last I get to meet Honghong and her husband and learn that at the age of eighteen she and her then-boyfriend, Wang Hao, get run over by a drunken driver; his drunkenness is bribed out of the police report; she loses her leg; Wang Hao decides to marry her in the face of vehement objection by his parents who, in traditional fashion, don't believe their son should marry a cripple; Honghong tells her story in a blog and becomes a minor celebrity blogger in China.

One story tells it all. China is a country which, on the one hand, drives me to despair because it is polluted and corrupt and full of inequalities. On the other hand, it fills me with inspiration because many of its people take their lives into their own hands and make the best out of miserable situations.

### **Chapter 20 – Heat**

It is early August and the temperature soars to 40 degrees at lunch time, and Miss Daisy has no air conditioning. By now, I just want to make it to the mouth of the Yellow River and declare success, but she keeps on failing at the most inappropriate times. What's more, I repeatedly get stuck in interminable traffic jams and come as close as I've ever done to suffering a heat stroke. But these moments of torment create opportunities for great conversations with truckers who are suckers for open-top girls like Miss Daisy.

### **Chapter 21 – Auction**

At last I've arrived back in Beijing where Miss Daisy is auctioned off at a gala charity event hosted by Mr. Yao Ming, China's NBA basket ball star. His commercial manager acquires her. The proceeds go to the China Youth Development Foundation. In a wonderful gesture, the new owner decides to donate her to that same foundation so that she can charm others into donating money at future fund-raising events.