

# **From Penang to Vietnam**

Interview of Dr. Seng Kar Ooi

By Alex Jin

April - May 2022



April  
26,  
2022

It begins with my  
being born in  
Malaysia on the  
Island of Penang

Penang...

Dr. Ooi  
Texas

Boston

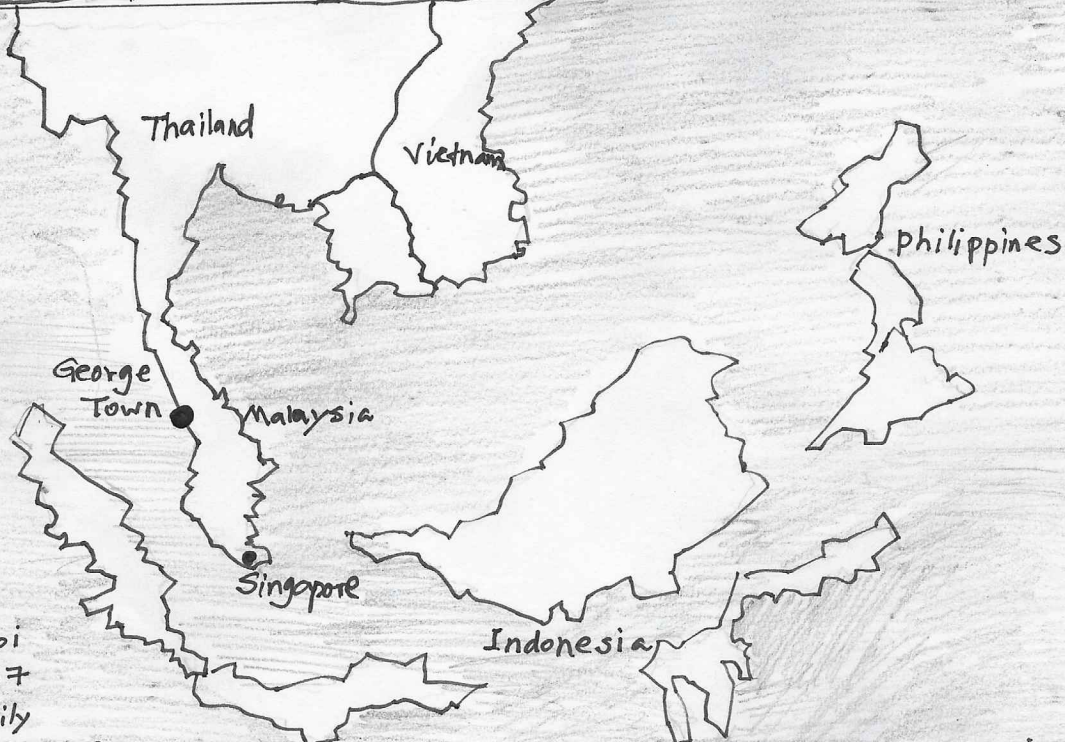


George Town, Penang

- 4th largest city by population (Malaysia)
- British Crown Colony: 1867-1957
- Japanese Occupation: 1941-1945



Seng Kar Ooi  
Born Dec 1937  
Hokkien family  
George Town, Penang



Formative Years:  
1937-1956

- Attended the Wesley Methodist Church in George Town with friend Keatjin
- Families too poor to afford automobiles, so rode bikes all the time w. Keatjin



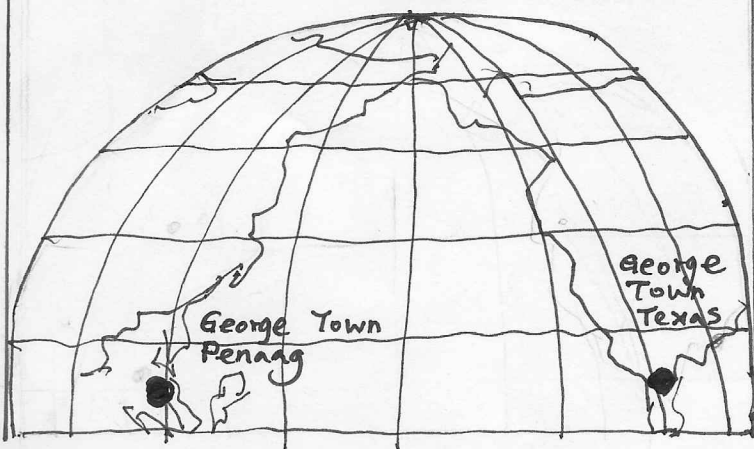


Summer 1956  
 Graduated from high school  
 Awarded scholarship to attend  
 Southwest University  
 in Georgetown  
 Texas

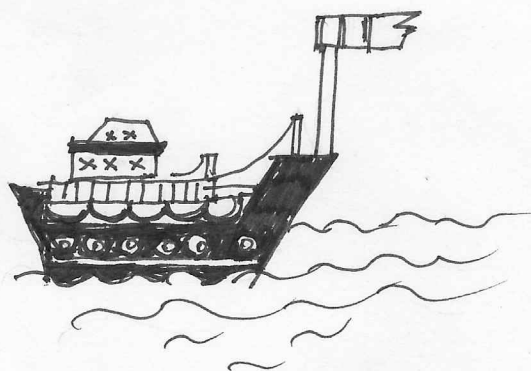


Scholarship!  
 Two-year  
 program at  
 Southwest  
 University

Admissions officer: we need  
 a foreigner from Southeast  
 Asia w. a church connection



Thailand



- August 1956  
 Boarded Stella Lykes (a cargo ship weighs  
 8,000 tons) as one of its four passengers,  
 because family unable to afford a Pan-Am flight  
 ticket
- Six weeks later, arrived at Southwest University  
 w. 2 suitcases and a few US \$ in pocket.  
 School thought I wasn't coming...

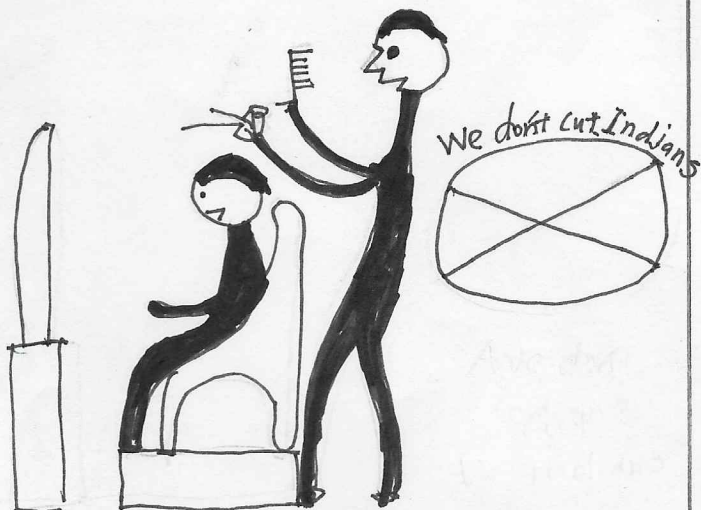
That was  
 very uncomfortable



### 1956-1960 Southwest University Transcript



Biology	A
English	A
Math	A
...	A



Due to my dark complexion, I was  
 once rejected at a barber shop - I  
 was mistaken as an American Indian.

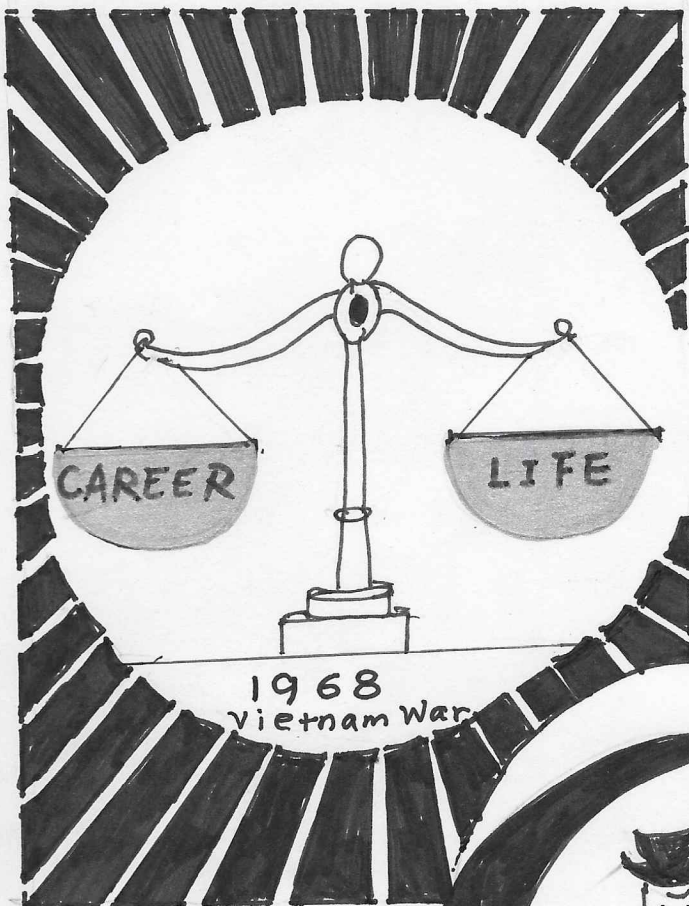
- 1960-1964 University of Texas Medical Branch  
 < 1st foreign medical student from UTMB >
- 1964-1965 Intern at Catholic St. Joseph  
 Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas. Fell  
 in love w. surgery despite diminutive stature  
 (5'3")
- 1965-1966 Surgical resident at Baylor Scott &  
 White medical center. Threat of deportation  
 because visa expires and deemed non-  
 essential by Scott & White thus risks  
 losing visa
- 1967-1968 General surgery residency at a  
 clinic in Honolulu, Hawaii.

Struggling to switch jobs due to  
 visa concern

Found passion in surgery







- 1968 Received a call from US government threatened to be deported if not agreed to go to Vietnam and join the army

- Background

- 1955-1975 Vietnam War

- 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Incident, U.S. military troops increased from less than 1000 in 1959 to 23,000 in 1964, and to 184,000 by the end of 1965 \*

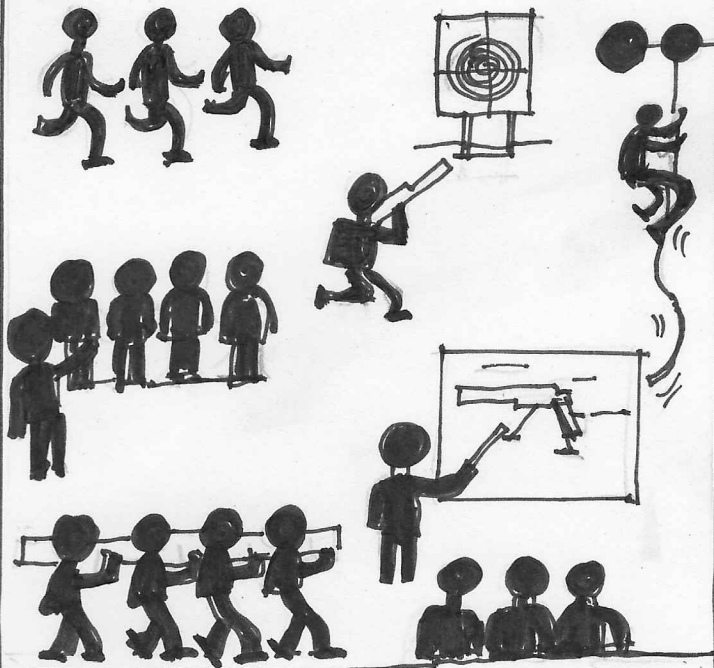
- During the next four years, US govt induced an average of around 300,000 young men annually - 158,156 of them eventually died \*

- Added fuel to the fire of the anti-war & anti-draft movement

\* michigantheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu

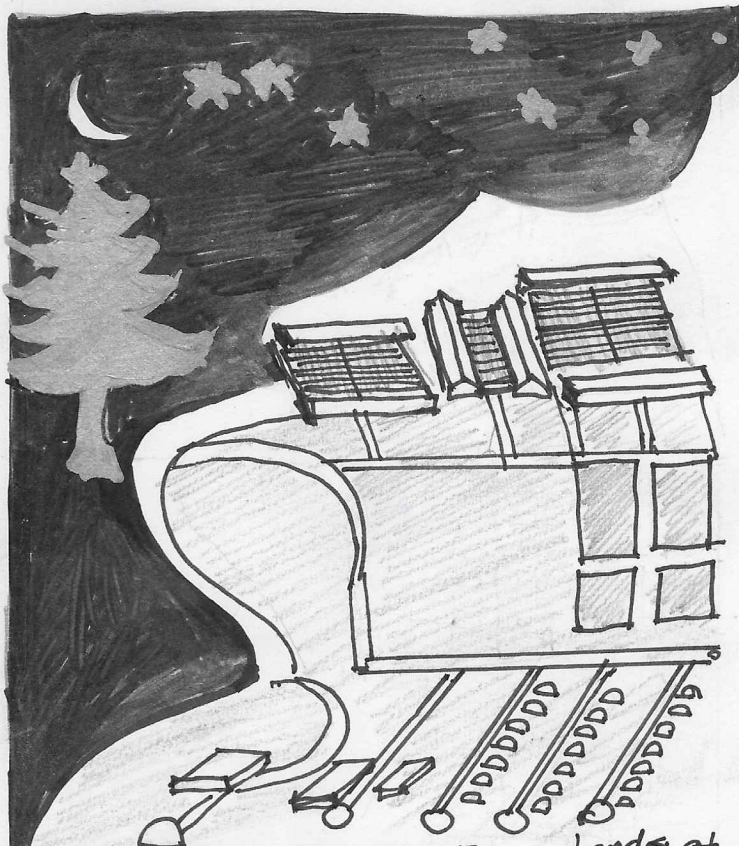
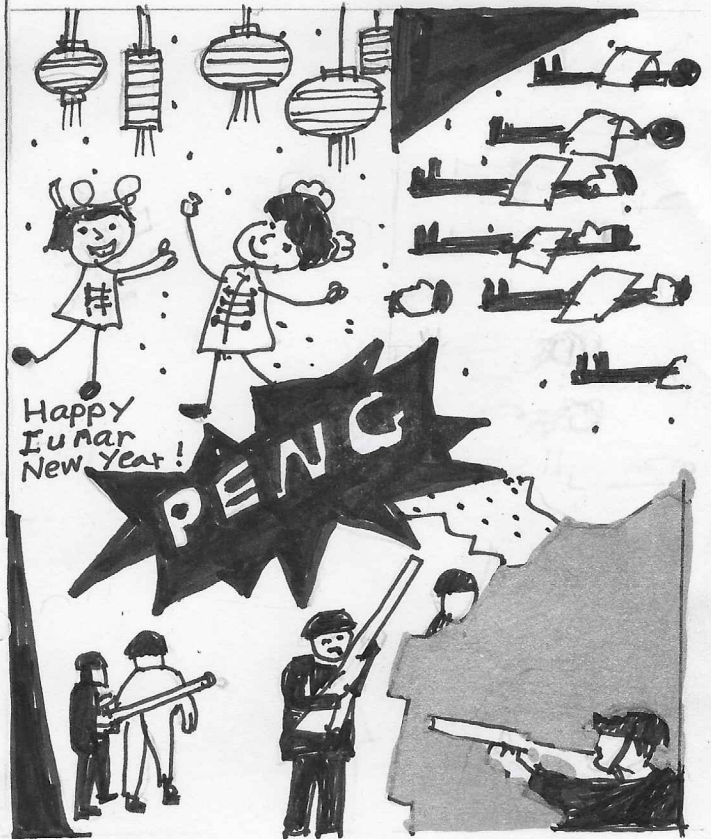




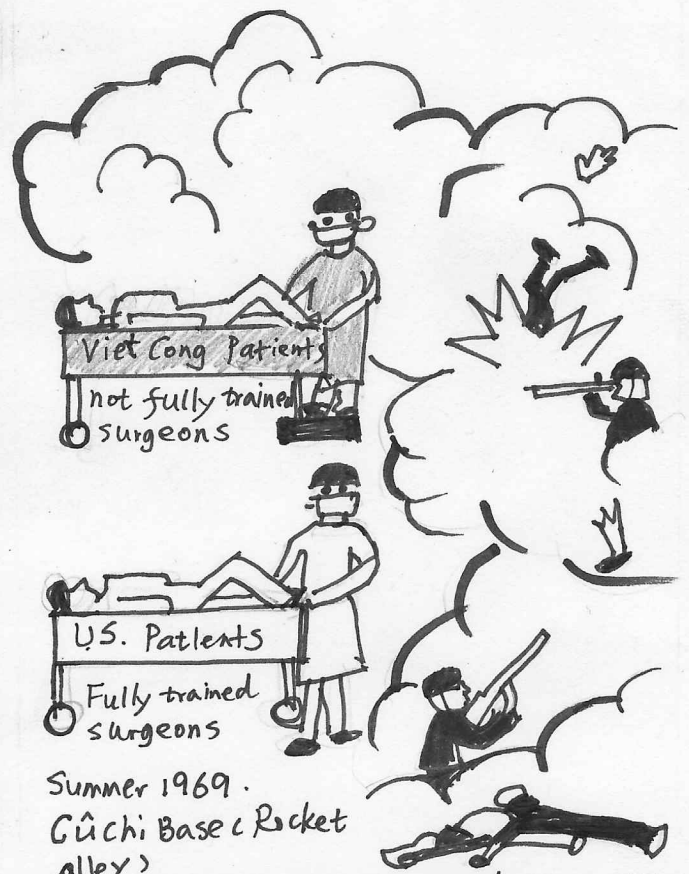


▲ Training at a base in San Antonio 1968

Jan 31, 1968  
Infamous Tet offensive on the Lunar Year Festival. US suffered large casualties. ▶



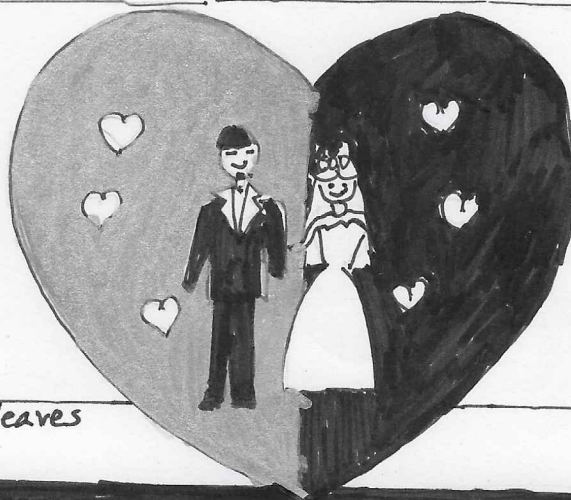
Dec. 24, 1968 Christmas Eve. Lands at Tân Sơn Nhứt Airport, Saigon, Vietnam, then to Long Binh Post. The only southeast Asian soldier stationed there. The base hosted 40,000 troops.



Summer 1969.  
Củ Chi Base (Rocket alley)

Remove fragments from grenades, save body parts, take care of trauma





Some how during my stay in Vietnam, my wife leaves me for someone else ☹️

**DAMN**

**SHE LEFT ME!**



- 1970 Shipped back to the US.
- 1970-1972. military service in the surgical department at Oklahoma. Got Citizenship very quickly
- 30<sup>+</sup> years in plastic surgery in Texas



## Conscription in Vietnam War

- Between 1964-1973.
- 2.2 mln American men drafted out of an eligible pool of 27 million. About 25% of the army in the combat zones were drafted.
- People didn't want the war \*

Anti-war Movement: nuclear, fear of death, moral-should USA get involved in the Vietnam War?

TV allows greater access to uncensored information.

\* michiganthe.world.history.1sa.umich.edu



▲ mnapedia.org

Is conscription legitimate during the Vietnam War?

- Yes. Selective Training and Service Act in 1940.
- Active conscription ended in 1973.
- Conscription remains in place on a Contingency basis. (regardless of
- US Citizens, or undocumented and documented residents)

Is conscription fair during the Vietnam War

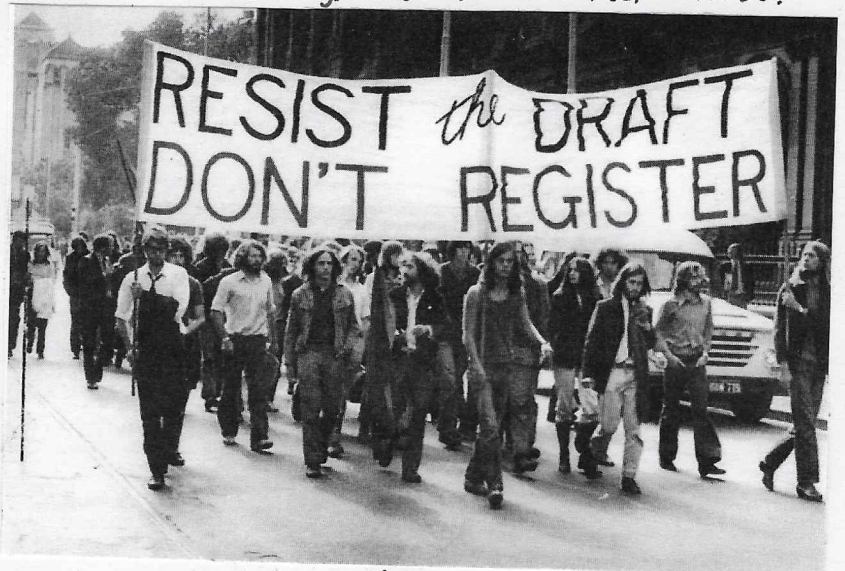
- Rich vs. poor
- Racial discrimination
- Particularly difficult for Asian Americans due to similarity of ethnic background w. the Vietnamese.



▲ Zinnedproject.org

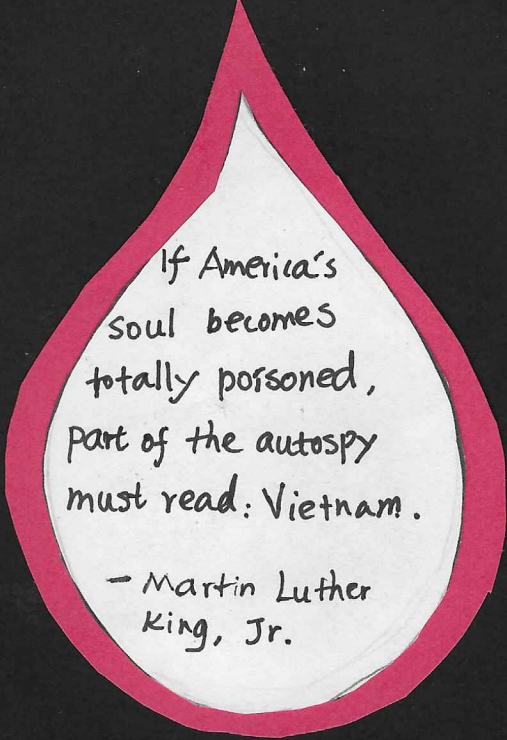
Is the conscription of foreign residents legitimate?

- Yes. It happens.
- Often with benefits of quick citizenship approvals
- Americans All = Foreign-born soldiers in World War I (volume 73, by Nancy Gentle. (2001) suggests that US war leaders tried to cater to the cultural and religious needs of foreign soldiers.
- Senkar's experience seemed to suggest the opposite "nasty threat"



▲ nlgmltf.org





If America's  
soul becomes  
totally poisoned,  
part of the autopsy  
must read: Vietnam.

- Martin Luther  
King, Jr.