

Introduction

A freighter called the *SS Marine Lynx* docked at a pier on the Shanghai waterfront. The passengers were mostly American missionaries. There were hundreds of them. A few vacancies were allotted to “civilians”: a handful of Chinese and one young, American, freelance reporter—Pegge. In the dark, confusion reigned as all waited to clear Customs and disembark.

“I can relive that first fear and dread of stepping ashore, even from the unlovely unhappy decks of the *Marine Lynx*, into the roiling unknown of Shanghai in 1946! I was overcome with my own aloneness. Along with the missionaries I too felt woefully unwelcome, unwanted and worse, *unnecessary!* I was a writer, but no one had sent me to China to write anything.”

Afloat in “nothingness” and filled with the “queasies,” Pegge received some valuable advice: “Don’t panic. Just don’t lose your passport. Keep it between your teeth if necessary, but for godsake, don’t let it out of your sight...You’ll be okay.”

Good advice. That passport, tightly secured, had a “mighty funny line.” The passport read “alias Pegge Parker.” “*Alias*, that’s a fine thing to call a byline!” Pegge observed.

Stepping out on her own was nothing new to Pegge Parker. Traveling on her own since she was 17, she had already logged many story-telling miles before her nighttime arrival in Shanghai. But crossing the big pond, with just enough funds for a one-way ticket, was really stepping out on her own! Off she went anyway, with a Panglossian philosophy. Things would work out. Go after the adventure—the stories would follow. That was Pegge’s lifestyle and her way of following her dream.

Pegge Parker started out as a teen reporter for a local Harrisburg newspaper, then moved on to the *Washington Times Herald* (now the *Washington Post*), and then to Arctic reporter for the Fairbanks, Alaska *News Miner*. But now with her brand new passport, alias Pegge Parker went on to China (where she covered the news before newsmen were barred from that country), Pakistan (where she became a Vice Consul at the American Embassy), India, and then Jamaica where for three years she was a Time-Life correspondent. NBC’s “Monitor” carried her radio reports from Cuba, just before the missile crisis.

The rich, the famous, and the not so famous—all of them interesting characters—walked across the path, pen, and Smith Corona of this freelance, foreign correspondent, who learned the job the hard way, by doing it. Good ol' on-the-job training.

Her interviews are a virtual Who's Who: the Kennedys, Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird, Princess Margaret and Lord Snowden, Billy Graham, Clare Booth Luce, Margaret Mitchell, Lillian Hellman, Errol Flynn, Ian Fleming, Oscar Hammerstein, Indira Gandhi, Castro, Batista, Peron, Trujillo, Duvalier, and many more.

Told with charm, sometimes with an edge, but always on point, this work *works*. It's fun.

Pegge met with the Dalai Lama; they walked and talked. But the real interest for Pegge was his mother, whom she called "Mama Lama"!

"Mama Lama was simply marvelous, responding to each new earthy, twentieth-century discovery in New Delhi with cries of delight.... Aggressive and acquisitive, Mama quickly collected a store of goods. But she really lost her head over automobiles. Off on her own one day, she bought a Ford station wagon with whitewalls, radio, and power steering. She must have paid for it with a brick of gold bullion, of which the Dalai had an impressive supply!

"When their state visit was over (Nehru told her alarmed and frightened son to go back to Lhasa and not cause trouble—above all, he was not to rock India's boat of friendship with the Chinese), Mama Lama wanted the station wagon delivered "FAB" (Foot And Back) straight to the capital of Tibet. When her son refused, she had a royal fit. The wagon could not go. It had to remain in Darjeeling with two other sons living there as quiet businessmen in the import-export business. It was at their home one day that I not only learned about the car but had a ride in it with Mount Everest climber Tenzing Norgay at the wheel."

There is a personal side to the Pegge Parker story. In China, Pegge met and married a young scientist from Boston, Doug Mackiernan, then an American Vice Consul stationed at a small consulate in the interior of China. They had twins, Mary and Mike, in 1948.

When China fell to Communist forces and Chairman Mao's regime came to power, Pegge and the kids were forced to leave. Doug Mackiernan stayed behind to close down his station outpost in Tihwa, China. Soon after, he was shot and killed on the Tibetan border while trying to make his escape out of China. The Doug Mackiernan part of this story didn't end there. Fifty years after his death, he was posthumously honored by the CIA. In a ceremony recognizing covert operatives lost in the field, Mackiernan was one of the anonymous stars inscribed

in both the CIA's Book of Honor and on their Wall of Honor. His death was in the line of duty.

Pegge later remarried. Her second husband, John Hlavacek, was Bureau Chief for United Press in Delhi, India. Three more children followed, one of whom is writing this introduction. How do you juggle *five* kids and a marriage while chasing stories around the globe and meeting deadlines? Being a career woman and mom was no easier then than it is today.



By the way, did Rhett go back to Scarlett? What did Margaret Mitchell tell Pegge Parker? And what did Pegge's hat have to do with the end of the story? Take a trip with Pegge Parker and find out.

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