

feel for a country, and *Pacific Crossing* is a short book. It barely hints at the wonderful sites, the ancient culture and vastly divergent experiences to be enjoyed in Japan.

My Blue Country **Melling, O.R.**

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Age Range: 14+

196 pages



This book recounts Jesse McKinlock's experience as a member of the first Canada World Youth program to Malaysia in 1972-73, when she was 17 years old. She describes the bonding, and the clashes that group work entails, with precise accuracy. She also records her own inevitable transformation as she embarks on the journey to self-discovery that can only be realized through travel.

First, the group spends seven months together in two Canadian camps, one in Ontario and one outside Edmonton, to prepare for life as a group in Malaysia. With two Malay instructors, Jesse takes basic Malay language classes and learns

about the country's customs, climate, and social norms, all the while examining her own reactions to these foreign experiences, and tests her own threshold for ambiguity and suspending judgment of foreign things and people. Although many couples are formed, Jesse remains single, and thus forms friendships with many others in the group. This is also the perfect vantage point from which to observe the many alliances and conflicts that arise. Perhaps most importantly, meetings consist of seminars that explain how the Canada World Youth programs, CUSO programs, etc. help build a bridge between different societies to help foster mutual global understanding, and ultimately, help to promote peace in the world. To help them acclimatize, the group leaders had different activities, such as "Malay day", where everyone was required to speak only Malay or eat with their right hands.

When they arrive in Malaysia, Jesse sees how their preparation work has paid off. Although she experiences culture shock, she quickly adapts to her new surroundings and is fascinated by her new experiences. Despite all the friction among group members during training in Canada, they all adjust and meet their group leader's expectations. Jesse realizes just how valuable this is when she crosses paths with CWY members who had dropped out of the program for various reasons, among them wanting to "experience" Malaysia on their own, while staying at the group leader's house. This is a pivotal point in the book, because it forces her to acknowledge how much she's changed as a result of this experience, and how much she values the organization's work.

One of Jesse's defining experiences occurs when she meets Ahmed, a handsome Malay who introduces her to his social sphere. Through their intense, yet platonic, relationship, Jesse gets a rare glimpse into Malay society, and feels that she is fully immersed in the cultural experience. Jesse falls in love with him, but they both know they belong to different worlds. The book comes to a poignant end when Ahmed accompanies Jesse to the airport to return to Canada.

*Although this is a work of fiction, the author traveled to Malaysia with Canada World Youth in 1972-1973.

