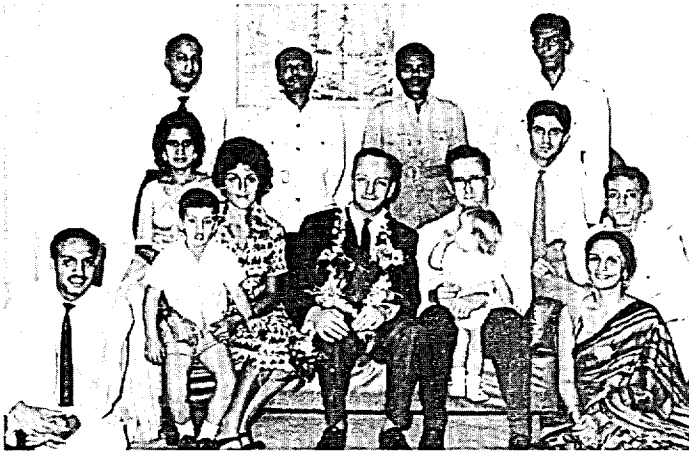


SHAHBASH BOMBAY!

By Bill Brett

Why pick India for my very first winter break? Well, it's a place one should be able to return to. With several million people you stand a fair chance of finding one face there you knew when all was young. And 25 years should sit lightly on a country with 5000 years of high civilization and a reputation of being indulgent. Besides it was the best of the lot, wasn't it? Well, one of the best. Besides you met your Meme there. Oh! Right! Yes indeed, that counts for something.



Trade Commissioner and staff, 1963

Bombay airport? Well there has been a change. It looks like J.F.K. Where do we declare our currency? Not necessary? Has there been an earthquake or something? What has happened to the Reserve Bank of India? Not like them to give up. What? Customs is waving us through? Well I never...

So it's into the city in Lady Bhiwindiwalla's car. We sniff for the metaphorical dirty diaper that

Arthur Koestler said swathed the face on the way into Bombay. Not so. I won't say I miss it but it's not the same. Ah, there it is, but just a whiff, and there are no figures squatting and straining in the fields. Just as well, since the fields are gone too. But there is that light mephetic haze. Can it be? Smog? Yes, definitely smog, industrial fog with a pale sun burning through, like a pinchbeck Turner, we'll feel it soon. Here we are lodged in the flat at Kemp's Corners. I used to get out of my car blocks from here just for the pleasure of walking past here to my own flat at Westfield Estates overlooking the Arabian Sea. It hasn't changed that much but I'm not quite sure that I approve of that monstrous fly-over. And there are fewer saris. Now there is a loss to mankind. And fewer dhotis, those loose diaphanous diaper-like, knee-length cottons which swathed the Brahminical shanks. Less regrettable perhaps but still of the place and climate. And are the beggars fewer and less aromatic? Less importunate? Yes, I think so. Yes, definitely. And where are the Sadhus?—Those ash strewn holy men—often to be seen serenely contemplating the life to come. Perhaps a loss only to the purist, but I should like to have seen just one.

Well, here I am back in Bombay society. I am prepared to overlook almost anything just to be among these charming, poised people. I have never come upon a more civil society. Familiar faces by the acre. Here is my dear Sikh friend, Anup Singh, absolutely regal. She is having a few old friends over.

And whose party is this? Such opulence! If it were a princely house I would have said at least 15 guns. But no its not that and it is not the old Bombay money, not of the commercial communities. Neither Birla nor Tata. This is the new money from the industry that was seeded in my day, and from shipping. Let us not forget the high tech India is



Bill Brett was the Canadian Government Trade Commissioner in Bombay from 1962-1965. He and his wife, Karin, returned to India for a visit this past winter.