

# Basic English in southeast Asia

BY AARON BLEASDALE

A university degree just isn't what it used to be. In the 1960s, perspective employers were scrambling to snatch up any graduates they could get their hands on, but times are different now. Back then, Canada was in the midst of an economic boom that would last for almost 30 years. Employers couldn't find enough people to fill all the new positions that were constantly becoming available.

Today, however, this surge of growth has petered out, and so has the demand for new people in the workforce. Now a university graduate, instead of a life of comfort and security, will more than likely leave university with a huge debt and

in one of these countries. In Taiwan for example, it is standard to make between \$20-25 Canadian per hour. The Asian currency crisis has taken its toll, but right now, whose currency isn't dropping? One can easily save \$1000 a month and, if one works harder, as much as \$3000 — and all by using one of your most basic skills.

The kind of work provided varies from place to place. Many teachers end up in a classroom teaching people from all walks of life. Whether they are business people, students, hobbyists or children, everyone is learning English. It is possible to work in a privately owned night school, or in high tech schools and universities, or even to do one-on-one sessions.

For most, teaching English isn't a career, and some even find it boring. But it sure beats the old standbys of flipping burgers and waiting tables.

There are some hazards to beware of, though.

First and foremost, it is essential that you not sign a contract from home. Many are lured into terrible teaching contracts by the promise of a free plane ticket and accommodation.

Well, the tickets and accommodations are usually legitimate, but they in no way offset the advantage of being able to shop around to many different schools. Once you enter a country under contract with a school, they have a lot of control over you and have the ability to overwork you and treat you poorly.

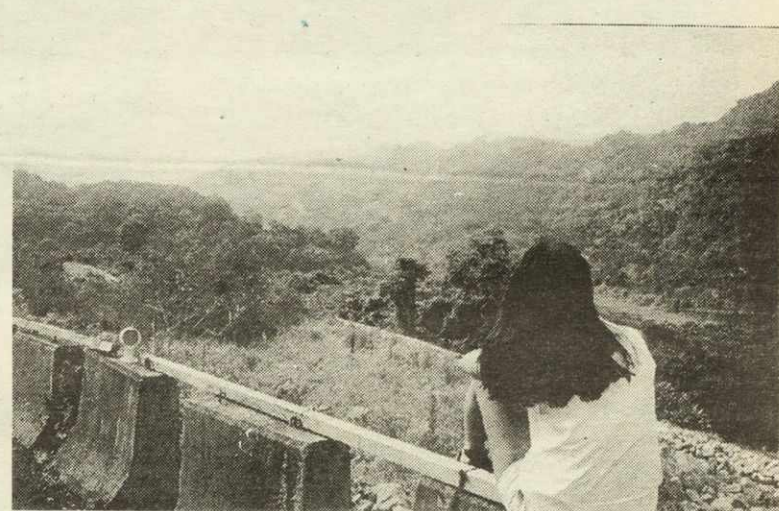
Get a loan if need be, but if you are planning on teaching overseas, enter the country without having already signed a contract. You'll no doubt find better arrangements once there.

Another important thing to remember is to get a visitor's visa for the country you intend to work in *before you leave Canada*. If you arrive at customs without one, you will usually only be given two weeks to a month before you have to leave the country, which is not enough time to find a job and get the paperwork needed to give you a worker's visa, which you will need to stay in the country. Another

possibility is getting a student visa which allows you to stay in the country so long as you are studying at an officially recognized post-secondary institution — but you will have to enroll before you leave Canada.

Schools are increasingly seeking teachers with university degrees. It is quite possible to find work without one — but if you have one, bring it along. An Education degree is a plus, but not a necessity. The demand for teachers is so high that it takes a while to adjust to being in an environment where you have the power to dictate your own terms to the market. Unlike Canada, it's very much an employees market for English teachers in southeast Asia.

If Canada isn't offering you very much right now, leave. There



The mountains of Taiwan, one of the many sights seen in Aaron's overseas travel. Photo by Aaron Bleasdale.

are greener pastures. There are places where your skills will be appreciated. It's a great way to travel and if you've got a debt, why

stick around not paying it off?  
Aaron Bleasdale is a Dalhousie graduate teaching English in southeast Asia.



Sunshiny faces from a morning kindergarden class. Photo by Aaron Bleasdale.

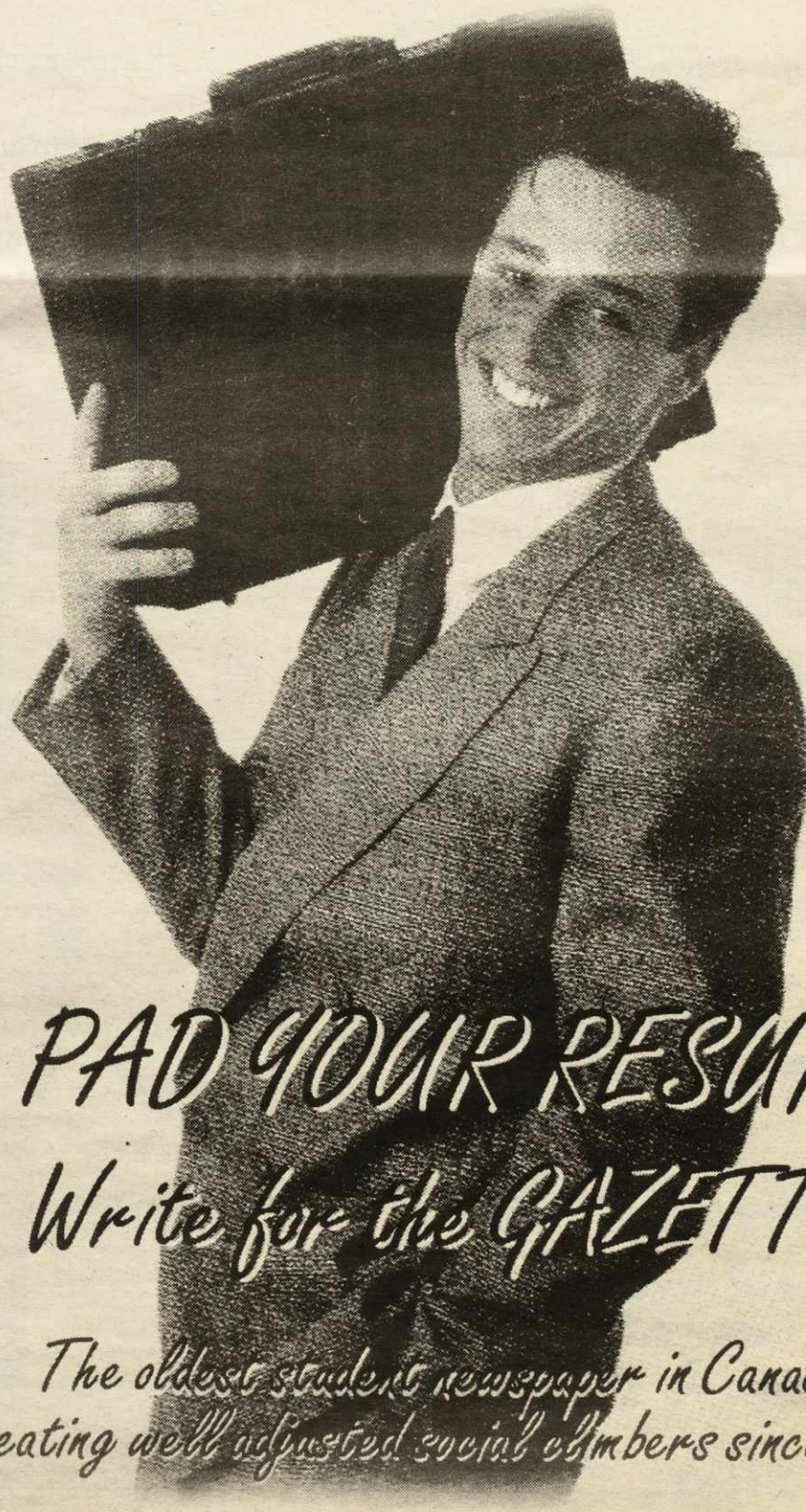
possibly only a minimum wage job with which to pay it off.

Increasingly, young Canadians are deciding to give up the job search altogether. Some are weathering the storm by staying in school longer, others are just hanging out.

Yet there are those who aren't simply opting out of the labour pool — they're opting out of the country. Surprisingly, they are drawing on a skill that most of us take completely for granted: English.

Speaking English is a highly marketable skill in the world today. There are more people who speak English as either a first or second language than there are people who speak Mandarin Chinese. And the number of speakers is constantly growing, as is the demand for teachers, particularly in southeast Asia.

Many young Canadians, most of whom are university graduates, are living and working in countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. It is possible to make quite a lot of money teaching



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