

LOCAL NOISE

Unkle Ho

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Unkle Ho, Tony Mitchell, Nick Keys

Summary:

“My uncle got locked up for 20 years for writing a letter saying he wanted to go to Hong Kong for a better life, and they got the letter, opened it up and then framed him for some other things instead, and they put him in jail for 20 years. When they brought him out, they finally said, ‘Sorry we did this to you’ and they gave him a job. But he couldn’t stay in China, so he came to Australia, and now he works as a prison warden.”

This 2005 interview with Elefant Traks co-administrator and The Herd producer Unkle Ho took place just after the release of his debut solo album *Roads to Roma*. Unkle Ho talks about his family history, his travels and its influence on his sampling, his method of music production and running of Elefant Traks in general.

About:

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Local Noise is an ARC-funded research project from the University of Technology, Sydney. Its focus is on Australian hip-hop, and the localisation of hip-hop in different cultural, societal and educational contexts.

UH: Unkle Ho

TM: Tony Mitchell

NK: Nick Keys

TM: So you basically came up with Elefant Traks did you?

UH: Oh, it was started off by a few people, but mainly by this one guy, Kenny Sabir [Traksewt], and I got involved really early on and was on the first CD and helped do artwork, and driving missions and postering missions at night. Slowly it grew, some people left, other people joined and now it takes on current formation.

NK: What is Kenny doing these days?

UH: Kenny is working for IBM now, he's just had a baby, he's married, so he's a busy man, so it's up to the other guys now, but he was a very big part.

TM: And you're originally from Hong Kong is that right?

UH: Yep.

TM: And do you speak any Cantonese?

UH: I speak a bit of Cantonese, yeah.

TM: And have you been back to Hong Kong?

UH: Yeah, I've been back many times. My mum is from Taiwan, so every time I go to Hong Kong I go to Taiwan as well, to visit family there.

TM: Have you had much connection with the hip-hop scene in Hong Kong or Taiwan?

UH: Not really, I only really started getting into hip-hop in the last six or seven years, when I was a kid you were only in HK for two weeks at a time, and you were hanging with your parents the whole time, so it's pretty hard to suss out the scenes over there.

TM: You travel a lot in Europe, and you actually got a lot of your samples from your travels?

UH: Yeah, I got a few of them from the trip.

TM: And you spent a bit of time in the Czech Republic?

UH: Yep. One of our band members, he was running a hostel there, and it was just free accommodation in a beautiful town...

TM: What part of the Czech Republic?

UH: Český Krumlov. It is like a town that's two hours south of Prague. It's got the second biggest castle in the Czech Republic, and the town centre is a full UNESCO protected area, it's all cobblestones and really awesome buildings that have been preserved for ages, and all the restaurants and hostels are in all the really nice old buildings. It's situated on an S-bend in the river, with the town in the centre of the bend, so it's pretty scenic as well.

TM: Sounds great. And did you hook up with any of the Czech scene when you were over there?

UH: Yeah, I went to a couple of gigs, but I think it was still in its kind of infant stages at that point.

TM: You picked up some samples though, like your gypsy samples, they mostly came from there?

- UH:** That influence, yeah, and the interest sort of grew from there. There was a local gypsy band that played at people's weddings and birthdays and stuff, and they were awesome.
- TM:** And who's the guy from The Herd who runs the hostel?
- UH:** He's back now, but his name is Simon Fellows, he's Bezerkatron, the third MC from The Herd.
- TM:** Yeah, right, so he was there for quite a long time?
- UH:** Yeah, he was there for a couple of years. And he speaks fluent Czech. We've got a new song on the new album [*The Sun Never Sets*] that we're working on at the moment with him rapping in Czech, and Ozi Batla rapping in Spanish, and Tim [Urthboy] rapping in English. It's like a full gypsy track that just speeds up and up and up.
- TM:** Fantastic. I was in New Zealand a couple of weeks ago, and a friend of mine runs a radio show, so I played the first track. My friend's Pakistani, so he was really interested in all the samples cause there's so many different samples on that first track [of *Roads to Roma*]: there's Middle-Eastern stuff, South-Asian, Eastern European stuff and it goes from one to the other. This is the single I take it?
- UH:** Yep.
- TM:** And you've made a video for it?
- UH:** Yep.
- TM:** And does the video kind of reflect the different kinds of music sampled?
- UH:** Um... a little bit, not much. We were on a pretty tight timeline, but the video is available on streaming from the internet.
- NK:** It's done by Tom Spiers who's day job is doing animation for Mythbusters.
- UH:** Yeah, he just got that job. Yeah, he's very very good.
- TM:** It's a terrific track, and a great album, I really like it. Is it going to be marketed outside Australia?
- UH:** We are just working on Australia now, but the promo's been going pretty cool with it, so once we've finished The Herd album we'll probably start getting it out there overseas. It's really hard, because you really need to be face to face with people in order to spruik your stuff.
- TM:** Yeah sure. I think it's a really distinctive hip-hop album, you don't come across many hip-hop albums that have such a wide range of samples. With the samples – as you say in the shout outs: the talented strangers I've sampled from – it's all pretty unknown stuff, is it?
- UH:** Yeah, pretty much.
- TM:** And obviously Apsci and Urthboy did these tracks especially for you. Did Apsci do their stuff for you in the States?
- UH:** Dana, who did the singing, she was in town and I got her into the studio, but Raph, he sent his vocals as an MP3 to me. I mean, we'd been talking about doing it for ages and they've had that beat for a long long time, and I finally said 'I need that beat now, because I've got to go to master in a week'.
- TM:** Right. I was intrigued by the title 'A Scottish Tale', cause I couldn't really identify any Scottish music in there?

- UH:** That was more to do with a personal relationship thing that was happening to me – women-related, perhaps.
- TM:** Right, so it's not a music thing. Are most of the samples that you've got ones that you've picked up off records that you've got?
- UH:** Mostly from CDs. I'm pretty lazy, mainly because I don't have a record player. But yeah, I like the ease from CDs, and also from MP3s.
- TM:** Right, so you do a lot of your trawling on your computer instead of going around record shops like most DJs?
- UH:** Yeah. But every time I got to an op-shop I always go to the CDs and check out if there is any hidden gems. It's very hit and miss.
- TM:** In the last track, 'Prayer', was that a Muslim call to prayer?
- UH:** Yep, yep.
- TM:** Where was that taken from?
- UH:** That was recorded, field recorded in Morocco. Me and my other friend, we woke up at four am and in our hotel in Fez and just stuck out our microphone. And somehow it just fitted in with the song.
- TM:** Yeah, it works very nicely.
- NK:** On that song, it's a real journey track. I think that it's interesting that the accumulation of the song gets dirty and dirtier and then there is this grungy element, and a reoccurrence of this distortion that was at the very beginning in 'Grace of the Guru'.
- UH:** Yeah, that's interesting. With those sort of guitar samples, I guess I'm just into that sound. I tried to make them pop up in sort of unexpected places.
- NK:** I think it works really well. And you said in the interview in *Vertigo* [UTS student newspaper] that you listened to a lot of Pearl Jam and Soundgarden back in the day.
- UH:** And I'm proud of it!
- TM:** In the *3-D* interview you talked about a local group Michelangelo and the Black Sea Gentlemen?
- UH:** Basically, they are an acoustic gypsy band: double bass, accordion, guitar, violin and lots of singing. They are amazing.
- TM:** 'Cause there are quite a few gypsy bands around aren't there? Like Monsieur Camembert and those sort of people. So there's a kind of gypsy ethos in this album in a way, in the sense that the gypsies were nomadic and migrated from India, right across the continent and into Europe. And you get that same sort of diversity in the samples that you use. But it's very very different from the kind of stuff that you do with The Herd, a completely different genre almost. In terms of hip-hop, what kind of producers and groups have influenced you, that you've felt an affinity with?
- UH:** What got me into hip-hop in the first place was Shadow, so that's a pretty big influence there. Krush, and more lately people like lately Madlib.
- TM:** Did you see Krush last time he was here?
- UH:** Yeah, I've seen him a few times. Yeah, I guess I was just trying to do my own thing as well, and there are a few dub-y sort of beats on the album, so I was kind of listening to lots of dance hall and dub at

the time. So, it's not just strictly hip-hop.

TM: Sure, sure. It's almost not a hip-hop album is it?

UH: Yeah, I'm kind of torn, I'm not sure if it is, or if it's not.

TM: You kind of classify it as something else, something midway between hip-hop, electronica, world music and all kinds of things.

NK: And it fits in to none of those at the same time.

TM: Yeah, that's right. You weren't involved in an album that came out a couple of years ago called *Sonic Allsorts*?

UH: Oh yeah, it was in a *Cyclic Defrost*. No, no. I didn't get involved in that.

TM: Ah, OK. 'Cause there were a couple of Chinese guys on it. It was a really interesting album, 'cause it had people from so many different cultures, including Curse ov Dialect, Vulk [Masedonski] doing his Macedonian track.

UH: Yeah, they are great.

TM: So you obviously feel quite an affinity with them, The Herd have hooked up with them on a number of occasions.

UH: Yeah, I think we've done a few shows with them.

TM: And Joelistics you know?

UH: Yeah, I went to school with him, which is quite strange, 'cause we have only crossed paths since we got into hip-hop.

TM: So it's kind of strange with your Chinese background that you're getting into this European gypsy stuff, it's kind of an odd mixture in some ways.

UH: I tried to sample some Chinese music when I was over there a couple of years ago and I bought some, but yeah, it just didn't really seem to fit with the hip-hop, and dub, and gypsy samples. So I gave up. I really wanted to though. Oh, there's a Japanese koto sample, but that's as close as I got.

TM: I think it would be quite hard to use Chinese music.

UH: Yeah, 'cause the tuning is quite different.

TM: And the tempo is quite slow isn't it? Mind you, a lot of tempos on your album are very slow as well, as you say. It's not hip-hop tempo, it's kind of 50 bpm, it's more ambient. So you're actually working on The Herd's new album at the moment. And is your role in that a production role?

UH: Pretty much. There's about three or four other producers, but I've got a few tracks collaborating with other people. So yeah, just record them, lay them out, add in different samples. So, we're furiously working away on that now.

TM: And that's sort of due out towards the end of the year is it?

UH: We're hoping to get it finished in two months time and get it out in September.

TM: Right. The thing that strikes me about The Herd is that they are incredibly industrious, they do lots of gigs around the place, they're always seem to be playing, it's amazing really how much they do. A very busy crew!

UH: Yeah, it's very busy. I guess we're lucky. People have offered us good gigs, it's pretty hard to turn them down and a few of the people don't have day jobs, so they kind of need that money to survive. Yeah, it's about half and half, half have day jobs, half don't.

TM: And you have a part-time day job?

UH: Yeah, just a graphic designer and a web designer, which comes in handy we need to do artwork. I don't have to pay anyone for my CD artwork!

TM: Did you do The Herd ones as well?

UH: Ah, no. We've got two people who can do it in The Herd.

TM: But have you done other CD artwork?

UH: I did the Urthboy artwork, and I've done a few in the past.

TM: This is really nice, I like the combination of images. Are these all images that you got off the internet?

UH: Mostly from books that I got from op shops, and scanning them in. I just tried to use the same sort of ethos of sampling for audio as sampling for original art.

TM: It's nice because it's sparse, it's not cluttered, there's not too many images.

UH: Just enough to keep you interested.

TM: Enough, and there's a great contrast between them too. I suppose it's obvious, but why did you call it *Roads to Roma*?

UH: It was originally going to be called *Roads to Rominy*, and Rominy is the technical name for gypsy, but Roma is also a name for gypsy as well. I thought well OK, people might not pronounce it properly or easily forget it, so I decided to shorten it and also to have that double entendre with Rome.

NK: And you were explaining to me at the gig the whole cultural aspects of the roads, of going out into the data cloud of music information...

UH: And how it always comes back.

NK: So sampling is in a way a collection of *Roads to Roma*.

TM: So yeah, it implies this sort of cultural pluralism and diversity, all roads lead to Rome.

UH: Or my hard disk!

TM: And the name Unkle Ho, where did that come from?

UH: It was after the Newcastle festival I was hanging out with the Ladies of the Jump Rope. I went out with one of them for a while, and there was this one afternoon after they performed and we were all just chilling out, and I kind of fell asleep on this sort of big cane couch, and all the girls just were sitting on the floor going 'Oh, look at our Uncle over there', so the name just eventually stuck.

TM: So, I guess, the inevitable question about Australian hip-hop. I read a quote of Bliss n Eso in *3-D* saying that they thought 80% of Australian hip-hop was shit, which I think is a bit cruel really. Do you think there is a lot of cultural diversity in Australian hip-hop? And that it is making it distinctive in a way that is different from hip-hop in other parts of the world?

UH: From a production sense, I haven't heard – I actually don't listen to that much Australian hip-hop,

but I get a lot through Batla and Urthboy and that – but most of the stuff I've heard is not too much like my stuff, they tend to stick the normal beat standards and samples.

TM: So probably someone like Curse is similar to you in the diversity of samples they use. But there aren't too many other people.

UH: Yeah, I don't think so, I'm not the authority on it, but from what I've heard, there's not too much else. And from a rapping sort of standpoint, same as well, Curse or Dialect are pretty unique in that sense, rapping in Macedonian.

TM: But TZU are doing things that are really interesting as well...

UH: Yeah, totally.

TM: And quite unique in a way. Like, I don't think there are people in other parts of the world who are doing similar sort of stuff.

NK: I think it's probably got a lot to do with Australia's multicultural context as well. Like Joel did a CD for the Footscray community that he works for, *Temporary Reflection Visas*, which is the same kettle of fish as *Sonic Allsorts* essentially. It's kind of the traditional argument about social marginalisation, which is backed up by the numbers of people in hip-hop who have ethnic backgrounds to draw from.

TM: Yeah, we've talked to Maya, and Trey, and Hau and all these kinds of people.

UH: I think also, it's a very urban, city kind of music, that's where you sort of get most of the ethnic groups, rather than say, your country and western type music.

TM: Sure. Although that's changing with triple j getting out to kids in the country. And also, you've got the kind of work that Morganics is doing with Aboriginal communities and these Indigenous kids who are strongly into hip-hop. So that's kind of changing as well, even in quite remote and rural cultures you've got kids who are into hip-hop and who are rapping and doing stuff.

UH: Yeah, they are amazing. One of our guys, our guitarist, does workshops in the NT. He just flies in to this remote community, the plane flies off and he stays for a week, writes music with them, raps with them. It's great.

TM: Is he the 'Darwin connection' then.

UH: He's the 'Darwin connection' yes.

TM: Because there's some talk of hooking up with Culture Connect. I saw them play once in Adelaide, and they were really interesting. So there are things like that going on all over the country which are really quite interesting. I guess it's still on a very small scale in a sense. I mean, there is still that frustration with Australian hip-hop that no one's really broken through – 1200 Techniques, Koolism and the ARIA and Hilltop Hoods are about as far as it's got so far. And that's probably nothing compared to the rock scene.

UH: Yeah, it's still very rock dominated in Australia, and the major labels haven't really taken too many chances.

TM: But the other side of that is that you've got labels like Elefant Traks, who are basically collectives where the artists are doing it themselves, which I think is absolutely fantastic. And you've got other labels, Crookneck, Obese, Shogun, Invada. You know, all these labels that are emerging and doing really interesting stuff, even if it's on a pretty small scale. It's kind of this enforced do-it-yourself

ethos isn't it?

UH: Yeah, you can't rely on anybody else, you just have to do it yourself.

TM: Which seems to be very much your ethos as well, a do-it-yourself kind of thing with you and your computer, picking up samples from all over the place, and basically working on your own a lot of the time it sounds like.

UH: Yeah, I spend a lot of time sampling. I just spend days sampling, getting as much stuff as I can, and while that material is fresh in my head, a couple of days later I'll start writing music. I try not to write music straight away.

TM: And you usually perform with your trumpet player?

UH: Yep. So, I leave open a few channels here and there while I'm performing, so it doesn't get too cluttered.

TM: And one thing I meant to ask about was Clare Cooper, because she is on one of the tracks. Isn't she more an avant-garde musician?

UH: Yes. She runs the *NOW Now* festival and she is an experimental harpist. I've very good friends with her, I worked with her actually.

TM: Oh right, because she plays Chinese instruments as well doesn't she?

UH: She plays guzheng. Yeah, so there is going to be future collaborations with that scene for sure. I got a sample from her album, so I just stuck it in there.

TM: Oh, so she's not actually playing on the record?

UH: She's playing, but on her album, so it's a sample.

TM: Again, that's a sort of interesting connection which takes you outside of hip-hop, more of the avant-garde scene, which is something Curse has done a bit of. The first time I saw Curse they were on this bill with people like Kid 606, Pymen and people like that who had nothing to do with hip-hop whatsoever. I like that crossing genres sort of thing actually. So you might be in the *NOW now* festival in the future?

UH: They've actually asked me before, but it never eventuated. Yeah, I can imagine myself doing something there one of these days, non-beat related maybe. I try to not to restrict myself too much, and I think that scene is really interesting. It's kind of the most cutting edge thing out there, I think.

TM: Oh yeah, there is some pretty incredible stuff happening just in Sydney in that kind of scene, which again is very under the surface...

UH: Totally.

TM: You've really got to hunt it out. It's often quite hard to find. So, in five years time, ten years time, where do you think you'll be?

UH: Um... I'd still like to be doing pretty much the same thing. Although I'd like to be doing music full-time, I don't think it's a sustainable thing, especially in Australia. And I also like doing graphic design, so if I was still able to work part-time and still releasing and writing music that would be great. If I was still doing this, and it was still sustainable, that would make me very happy. And also not just doing albums like that, but focusing on different genres as well, like more straight-up hip-hop and then more gypsy one, a more jazz sort of album. And recoding heaps of people, I definitely want to

do lots of recording, and being friends with Clare, she just opens up all these doors to all these awesome musos.

TM: That sounds really great. But at the moment you reasonably well off in that you are doing what you enjoy...

UH: Yeah, I couldn't be more happy actually, it's really awesome. I wish I wasn't that busy sometimes, but what else would you be doing?

TM: So your commitment to Elefant Traks is long-term as well?

UH: Yeah, like they're my best friends and we've built this from nothing and we've seen it work. When we put on a gig, we just know exactly what to do, and when we put out a release, everyone knows what to do. So there is that synergy that you can't really replicate anywhere else. And you can't do it yourself either, you need a crew.

TM: So, in the future, are Elefant Traks going to release stuff by other people?

UH: Yeah, we're always looking, but nothing had popped up recently, like we've got our releases for the year sorted, and we'll start looking for stuff for next year pretty soon.

TM: So this year it's the new Herd album...

UH: And Hermitude are putting out an album, and that's enough, five releases in one year is enough.

TM: Sure, sure. It must be a huge amount of work. I guess something like JB Hi-Fi has helped a bit?

UH: Yeah, it's interesting that they have embraced urban music. I don't know who's running it. All of the people working there are knowledgeable, and pretty hip, they're not just like clerks.

NK: Danielsan was saying the same thing, no one seems to know who exactly in JB Hi-Fi is pushing this Aussie hip-hop angle, but there is some kind of benevolent angel behind the scenes who is helping as much as they can.

UH: Yeah, it's weird. Maybe they see the way that music is going around the world, and you know, they want to jump on early, 'cause it's definitely a trend.

TM: Absolutely, because US hip-hop has been huge for ages, it's been the highest selling genre for a long time. If only Australian hip-hop could follow suit.

NK: But without the commercialisation, and the watering down and the wack videos like the NZ hip-hop has done. There is still interesting things in NZ, but...

TM: The majority is chart music. But it's pretty low-grade stuff.

UH: Yeah, the more money you throw at it.

TM: Well yeah, they got the major labels right behind them from the start, Universal or BMG.

NK: They have just exported the economic and marketing model of hip-hop that the Americans created which produces the same sort of annoying things that we don't like, culturally speaking. And that's what so interesting about Elefant Traks and independent labels, is that you can maintain that artistic integrity.

UH: For sure, we make every decision ourselves, and sometimes they are not economic based decisions, and having a distributor like Inertia who don't really question, they are just our distributor, so we give them the music and they put it out, they don't ever question our content and that makes it

pretty easy I guess.

TM: That's good. But I guess you must rely on selling a lot of your stuff at gigs?

UH: Yeah, we always have a store at every gig...

TM: Very organised I've noticed. [*Kaho laughs*] At the Park Jam, Elefant Traks were the only one who had it.

UH: Yeah, the amount of sales we get from the store almost match the amount of money we got from the gig, and that makes it totally worthwhile. And having such a big back catalogue now helps as well.

NK: It totally shows, in a political sense, different ways of organising and creating things in society, ways of production and consumption. You guys don't do the standard traditional major label to some international record store like Sanity or HMV where you kick back with the rider, smoking crack the whole time.

UH: Yeah. And the rent from our studio is \$150 a week, so that's seven CDs we have to sell, and if we can do that, that's immediate sort of money to pay off things that we need to pay for. It's really tangible.

TM: I think it's great, and I think that the political stuff The Herd do is great as well, because so much Aussie hip-hop is not making a statement about anything, is not really saying anything at all. I'm not saying that The Herd do that all the time, but they produce important tracks like '77%' and 'Burn Down the Parliament'. And actually make an impact too, because there was that whole controversy over that song.

UH: Yeah, we weren't really sure what to do on that song. So we thought 'Fuck it, put it out, let's see what happens'.

NK: I think it was a smart decision for the label also, because a lot of people, myself included in this, who weren't really into hip-hop at that stage, saw someone making a political message that they agreed with and starting getting into it that way.

TM: And it got all the publicity on triple j and in the press, and that sort of snowballed it. And then the shock jocks came out as well...

UH: Yeah, we all completely feel very strongly about it, so we didn't have any qualms about getting it out there.

TM: I guess that's one thing that you can do when you run your own label, whereas if you are beholden to a major label they probably would have snuffed it out.

UH: Inertia offered us a P & D deal, which is where you pay for the manufacture of our CDs. So basically, they would be giving us money upfront to put it out. And we could have done that too with the second Herd album, but we just decided to use our own money because we'd get a better return and also that control was really important for us.

TM: Do you have any idea what sales have been like for that album?

UH: So far we've sold 8 000 of *An Elephant Never Forgets*. And the first album has sold about 2 or 3 000. And most of those sales have come after the second.

TM: Yeah, I think I bought the first album after the second.

NK: Me too!

UH: Which is cool. The important thing is just to have longevity really, and hopefully that back catalogue can still keep on moving, which is what I'm hoping to do with my songs and stuff.

NK: Tony and I have talked to a lot of rappers, and the traditional thing with a rapper and their identity is quite parochial, it's about place, 'This is me, I stand here, this is who I am'-type scenario.

UH: And people are very staunch about where they come from.

NK: But with producing, there seems to be a different element to it in terms of identity construction. Because, like you say, you spend hours and hours on the computer, and you grab a whole bunch of samples and then you then crystallise it into something that is yours. I think it's interesting in terms of art and identity in society, there is this new trend of that sort of thing.

UH: I guess it's just really easy to do these days. You can go into any op-shop or record store and grab music from all over the world. And even on the internet, for a few of my songs, all I did was type in gypsy and got some songs and it was like 'Oh wow, there are some great samples there'. It's just the ease of access. If you have the ideas, and are interested in it, you can do it.

NK: Fully. It's interesting with samples. The typical thing would be that you download a George W. Bush speech, and you cut it up and get him saying things that he's not saying. So there is this re-contextualisation, this changing of meaning going on. So, it's kind of like Naomi Klein's idea of speaking back to culture, because commercialism is just a one-way saturation, and it seems to me that sampling is an artistic outlet for talking back.

UH: Yeah, yeah, totally. It's weird also, because it's the big multi-national companies that produce the computers and programs that allow the people to do that.

NK: Using their power against them.

UH: Yeah, using their tools against them.

TM: So, originally were your family from Taiwan?

UH: My father's from Hong Kong, and my mother's from Taiwan. My dad went to Taiwan when he was a kid to study.

TM: And were your grandparents from Hong Kong as well?

UH: I had grandparents in Hong Kong, and two in Taiwan as well. Yeah, on my mum's side there are a fair few generations in Taiwan.

NK: What's Hong Kong like to visit?

UH: Hong Kong. Yeah, it's pretty crowded, there's a few parts where you get out of the train station and it's completely organised. There's train's every minute basically, and it just feels like the Big Day Out everywhere you go.

TM: Yeah, there's incredible crowds, and the density of it.

UH: Yeah, the shops are open to 11, 12 o'clock at night, there's activity going on all night.

TM: Amazing signage everywhere. But most of Wong Kar-Wai's early films were shot around Mong Kok...

UH: Which is like the densest area.

TM: Which is a great kind of area where the markets are, and there is a real density of population, and

also quite a cultural diversity, there a lot of Indian people who live there, it's one of the poorer areas of Hong Kong, it's quite an amazing place to visit. There's incredible markets, this night market they have where you can go and see people singing Cantonese Opera on the streets which is great.

UH: And everyone lives in these tiny boxes which are the size of this office, and they have really flash computers and really flash stereo systems.

TM: Yeah, it is an amazing place; there is just so much street life. That's right, and that's when a huge amount of people emigrated out of Hong Kong, and came to places like Australia and Canada.

UH: That's why my parents came.

TM: The 1997 anxiety.

UH: My father already had quite a few relatives here. But also, my whole family has always been against the communist government.

TM: Well, there's always been big demonstrations in Hong Kong on the anniversary of Tiananmen Square, thousands of people.

UH: My uncle got locked up for 20 years for writing a letter saying he wanted to go to Hong Kong for a better life, and they got the letter, opened it up and then framed him for some other things instead, and they put him in jail for 20 years. When they brought him out, they finally said 'Sorry we did this to you', and they gave him a job. But he couldn't stay in China, so he came to Australia, and now he works as a prison warden.

NK: Wow.

TM: God.

UH: He's written a book about it as well.

TM: Is the book in English?

UH: No, it's in Chinese, but my sister and I have a plan to translate it. Because he's a great story teller...