



Matching Rungus necklaces for the happy couple

Celebrating 38 years of

By NAZRI NOOR

There are times when business in the hospitality industry goes beyond the act of simply pleasing and entertaining people, changing instead into a rare opportunity to touch the lives of guests through generosity and the sheer willingness to see the genuine smiles and happiness of two people in love.

Swedish national Bruse Nilsson came to Sabah with his wife, Sylvia Grant-Nilsson. The couple met many years ago on the island of Cyprus, when Bruse was a member of the United Nations and Sylvia a part of the British Army. The two have spent a significant amount of time in Borneo, picking the Palace Hotel as their last stop in a memorable trip that has lasted for several months. One of the last dates of their stay in Kota Kinabalu just so happened to be the 38th anniversary of their wedding day.

The couple traditionally take the time to celebrate this momentous occasion, but Bruse decided to take things a step further. He approached the Palace Hotel's management with a special request in mind: a surprise renewal of vows, to take place right on the hotel grounds. A significant number of hotel staff and management, as well as some friends the couple met during their stay, were invited to this private event. Sylvia had no clue that anything was happening, and was simply told by Bruse to wear something nice. "He is a very good liar," she later tells us, smiling fondly.

It is 5.15pm on February 25, 2010, the day before the Nilssons' anniversary. Stella Moluntang, the hotel's Communication Manager, is running about Palace's poolside, accompanied by a small army drawn from both the staff and the managerial team. In barely hours, the group has somehow managed to construct an arched dais for the couple, standing at the end of a red carpet strewn with the fragrant petals of local flowers. It is a first for Palace's current staff; they are nervous.

Soon other members of the team pile in, including General Manager Phang Joo See and Senior Food and Beverage Director John Malcolm, who is acting as the minister for the day. The team hurriedly rearrange ribboned balloons about the area and secure another basket of flower petals. At approximately 5.30pm, guest musicians Patrick and Elena begin to play "The Wedding March" on a guitar and a violin. Bruse walks down the aisle with a visibly emotional Sylvia on his arm. The plan is a success.

The ceremony carries on, and the couple receive personalised Rungus beaded necklaces as gifts. The two renew their vows as they hold each other's wedding bands,

promising each other many more years of love. Many of the guests watch the culmination of nearly four decades of marriage. The writer is also unexpectedly moved by the tears that make it difficult to breathe.

The Nilssons end the ceremony with a note of gratitude to their guests, with a sincere note of thanks in Swedish. "You have no idea what this means to me from the depths of my heart," Bruse says, well, citing Sabah's sunny weather and scenic views as factors that have contributed to their love.

Bruse and Sylvia carry on with the wedding, signing certificates, and giving a beautiful toast that easily sums up their relationship. "Over the years, I have learned a great deal about happiness because we prefer that sort of life here, so we decided to come to Sabah. Bruse says, "Never leave you, but always beside you."

When questioned on their decision to spend an extended period of time in Sabah, Bruse says, "I and I have been travelling for many years in Thailand, India, and other parts of the world because we prefer that sort of life here, so we decided to come to Sabah."

We often take for granted the natural beauty present throughout Sabah that people who don't even live here don't regularly. Bruse and Sylvia's relationship is intimate and special, but it has not and will not be the last. More and more, Bruse sees Sabah as a valued destination. To Bruse and Sylvia, Sabah is equivalent to paradise.

Most would associate the idea of taking natural vistas, with an image of a tropical island in mind. While the hotel does not have a view of the jungle right outside its swimming pool, they seem to consider "paradise" as a place with beautiful sights and ambiance. In Bruse's words, "I watch the people. Having worked for drug addicts since 1986, I learned a great deal about human nature. Not what you see on the outside, but what you hear when they open their mouths."

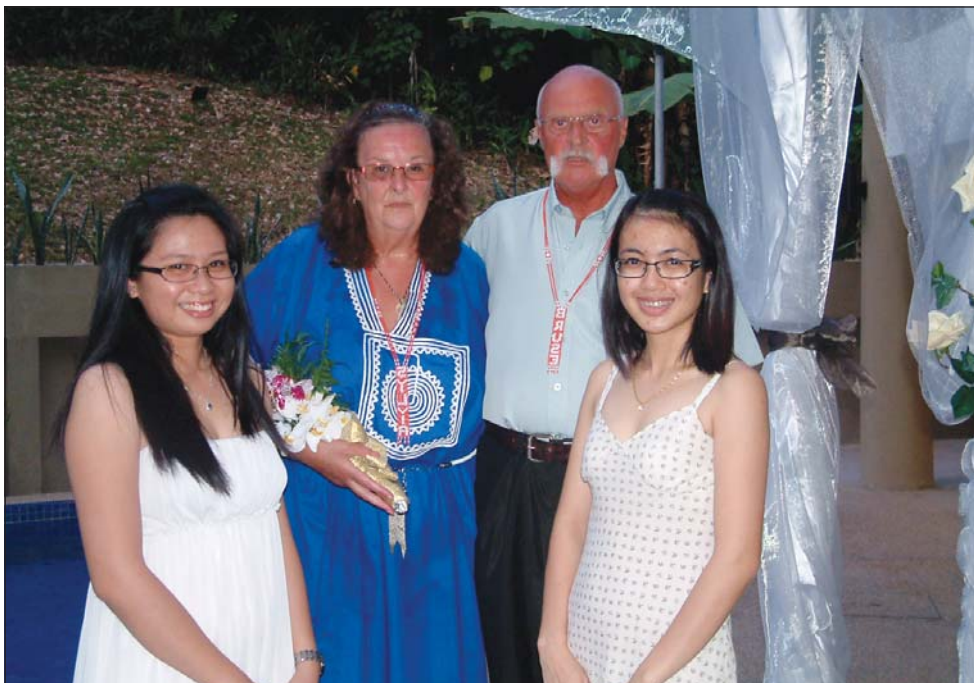
The couple have made lasting memories during the course of their stay, even with the help of the hotel's staff. Take the Philippine hostess working at the hotel, Bruse shares that Maylyn greeted them in the morning with a hearty "Hi Ma'am and Hi Bruse." The Nilssons' expressions and conversation with Maylyn leads one to think of a warm and friendly atmosphere.



Sylvia and Bruse renew their vows



A visibly emotional Sylvia leans lovingly on Bruse



Bruse and Sylvia pose for a photo with the staff and management of the Palace Hotel