On his first visit to a coffee shop in Singapore—where Ed Sheerin ’77 and his wife, Polly, have taught at the Singapore American School (SAS) for nine years—Ed was shocked to see that every table was adorned with a sign that read, 'No Studying.' “This is a culture that reveres academic rigor and achievement and personal responsibility for that achievement,” he explains. “But kids were always studying in coffee shops, which made it nearly impossible to get a table and have a ‘cuppa’ and a chat.”

Upholding the family tradition
Ed Sheerin’s road to teaching and Singapore took several twists, though his path to Assumption was clear. All the children of former Classics Professor Joseph Sheerin, Ph.D.—Ed, Frances ’73, Patrick ’76, Lucy ’81, Joseph Jr. G’83 and Paul ’88—attended Assumption. (In 1994, the Joseph E. Sheerin Merit Award was established as a memorial to Dr. Sheehan in recognition of his achievements.)

“I was most influenced by my father’s teaching style,” Ed admitted. “My brother Pat and I took his medieval history class because we were curious to see what he was like as a teacher. I gained a new appreciation and respect for my dad by seeing him in his element and was most impressed by his command of oral history. He was basically a storyteller. His style was lively and engaging and he brought history to life in a way that no textbook can. Years later I found myself using storytelling as an effective tool to engage elementary students.”

Sheerin credits Assumption with providing him with a good liberal arts education. “When I graduated, I had precious little idea of what to do with a degree in psychology and a minor in philosophy,” he said. “My philosophy and English professors, particularly Fred Bauer and Tom Puchalski, were really engaging. They taught me to think critically and to question what I read and what I believe, which provided me with a solid foundation for lifelong learning.”

Finding a personal passion
Through his twenties Sheerin struggled to find what he wanted to do professionally. While working with his two children in a cooperative preschool setting, Sheerin sensed his passion for teaching and returned to school in California to earn teaching credentials in early childhood education. He taught kindergarten and first grade in California for 10 years, was very involved in early literacy development, and also became an actor and storyteller in children's theater.

In 2000, Sheerin became the first classroom teacher to receive the ‘Acatemy’ Award for Literacy Development from the National Education Association in honor of Dr. Seuss. In that same year, he and Polly, who had become a teacher after several years of freelance writing and editing, decided to teach overseas.

Expanding their opportunities
Ed and Polly learned about SAS and decided to move the family to Singapore. The opportunities and enrichments have exceeded their expectations.

“We have been able to travel to so many places that we would never have been able to afford,” he stated. “From jungle walks to Himalayan treks, house-building in Cambodia to distributing art supplies in Indonesia, we have been blessed with a variety of experiences that have left their mark on us. We don’t take for granted the privileged existence we have enjoyed living in the first world. We have loved being immersed in Asian cultures and being exposed to Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu rituals and sensibilities.”

With the added resources and professional development opportunities available through SAS, the Sheerins have attended workshops with teachers from around the globe.

Missing family and cheeseburgers
But living in southeast Asia isn’t without its drawbacks. The Sheerins would like to be closer to their children and other family in the States. Both of their children graduated from SAS and now reside in California. Daughter McKinley is at UCLA and son Ian is an artist. Also, Ed longs for this short list: good cheeseburgers, big American breakfasts with a bottomless cup of coffee and Mexican food.

“At SAS I’ve fulfilled a lifelong dream of teaching art full time and I’ve developed my own artistic vision,” Ed said. “Teaching internationally is still one of the best-kept secrets. We’re taking off next year to pursue personal goals and dreams. When we return to teaching, we plan to explore opportunities in Europe or Latin America.”

Ed’s father would certainly be proud of his son who continues to add new chapters to a life story unfolding like an around-the-world adventure.