

FOOT PRINTS

IN THE SANDS OF TIME



TOW SIANG HWA

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime;
And departing leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.

Footprints which perhaps another
Struggling o'er life's restless main –
A despairing shipwrecked brother
Seeing shall take heart again!

ADAPTED FROM "THE PSALM OF LIFE"
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Illustrations by Goh Seng Lim

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Last, but not least, Siegfried Steindl, General Manager, Hotel Equitorial, Penang, who made available every needful facility for the final days of the writing and assembly of this book.

Lovingly dedicated to

Cheng Im

my faithful yoke-fellow, lifelong inspiration,
and ever-available "Footprints sounding board"

and to our loyal daughters

Christine, Carol, Sharon

joint-heirs of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Tow Siang Hwa

FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I write the Foreword to this interesting and inspiring book. There are three reasons for my delight.

First, as Chairman of the National Heritage Board, I have been encouraging Singaporeans to write about their lives and about their families. Such books enrich our collective memories and the history of Singapore. Our history is more than the narratives of our professional historians. It is more than the narratives exhibited at our National Museum. The history of Singapore includes the people's history: accounts of the genealogies of our families and the lives of our people. Dr Tow Siang Hwa's autobiography, beautifully illustrated by Mr Goh Seng Lim, is therefore a valuable addition to our growing literature.

Second, this book reminds me of the debt which our nation owes to Dr Tow for his contributions to medical education and to the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology in Singapore. Dr Tow graduated from our medical school in 1953 at the top of his class, with four medals and the Queen's Scholarship. He trained for two years at the Queen's University in Belfast and passed his examinations for membership of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in London in 1959. He returned to Singapore and worked under the legendary Dr Benjamin Sheares at the Kandang Kerbau Maternity Hospital.

Under the leadership of Dr Sheares, Singapore's second President, Dr Tow was responsible for re-organising and upgrading the KK Maternity Hospital for recognition by the Royal College. This was achieved in 1963. This historic breakthrough enabled Singapore to train its obstetricians and gynaecologists subsequently in Singapore. The other contribution was Dr Tow's pioneering research

on molar or grape pregnancy. The publication of this path-breaking research on 200 cases of molar pregnancy led to the award of the prestigious William Blair Bell Lectureship to him by the Royal College in 1965. This achievement helped to put Singapore and the KK Hospital on the medical map of the world.

Dr Tow was appointed to the chair of obstetrics and gynaecology in 1965, only 10 years after he joined the department. Four years later, he resigned from the university to start the Tow-Yung Clinic with Dr Richard Yung. Dr Tow's motive was not to make money but to have more time for his church work. Dr Tow continued to practise medicine until his 80th birthday. He and his peers have played an important role in Singapore's development as the region's premier medical centre for women.

Third, this Foreword enables me to tell the story of our improbable friendship. We first met over 40 years ago at a university debate. The hot issue of the day was the government's proposal to amend the law to enable women to terminate their pregnancies for social and economic reasons. Up to then, it was a crime to terminate pregnancies except in cases of rape and incest. The result was that many desperate women would resort to illegal abortions, often at great risk to their lives. I led a team of university teachers to argue in favour of the proposition and Dr Tow led the team which opposed the motion. His team won the debate, but the law was liberalised. We have been good friends ever since, in spite of our differences. Dr Tow is a devout Christian. I am an agnostic. Dr Tow was one of my wife's teachers at the medical school. He delivered our younger son, Aun. My wife and I have often been the beneficiaries of Dr Tow's culinary expertise. I have many Christian friends, but few are as Christ-like as Dr Tow. He is truly a good and virtuous man. It has been a pleasure and honour to have been a friend of Dr Tow Siang Hwa and his kind and devoted wife, Dr Tan Cheng Im.

Tommy Koh
CHAIRMAN
NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

PREFACE

This book traces one man's odyssey of fourscore years on planet Earth. Lessons in life gathered in this experience of learning are shared in these pages with those who care to leave their make-believe world of perpetual health and youth, and spare a thought for life's ultimate realities.

"Footprints" speaks specially to the "now generation" to get off their cybercraft and come down to earth, and face the real life issues and the eternal future. Questions such as, "Where did I come from?" "What am I doing on planet Earth?" and "Where do I go from here?" demand an answer.

Reader, ponder these through.

Here is the story of one who heard the Creator's call. Thereafter it has been steadfast following – not without its ups and downs – but the way is sure and the end certain. Countless others have successfully travelled that way before. It is a great race to life. Hear the words of one who ran it to a triumphant conclusion:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses... let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1,2)

This book traces my travels from China – a babe in arms – to Nanyang, through growing-up years in Malaya, to the final settling down in Singapore, my home penultimate. It has been a long pilgrimage, now in its exciting last lap! Singapore,

country of my adoption, is my last stop and home – for now.

The wisest of men says, *A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps* (Proverbs 16:9). “Footprints” traces the way God’s unseen hand is leading me to my ultimate and eternal home beyond the reach of Earth-woes and death. The same is offered to mankind’s dying race, by the man Jesus who by His death destroyed... *him that had the power of death, that is, the devil* (Hebrews 2:14).

That this offer of the deathless and endless life is no empty dream is substantiated by the historic event of Jesus’ resurrection from the grave, having conquered death for you and me on the cross.

To the doubting reader, the risen Christ calls from heaven,

Fear not; I am the first and the last... and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (Revelation 1:17, 18)

Jesus, risen from the dead, holds the key to the future, yours and mine. His offer is life, now and for evermore. In Jesus, death holds no dread, but is become the door to eternal joy and life unending. That is Gospel – Good News.

For seventy years, since I received the call, it has been my supreme joy to pass on the Gospel message to others that the remedy for death is freely available, on offer, to every member of our dying race. And death is never far away.

For why will you die? There’s life for a look! Simply honour God’s Son, look in faith to Him and instantly receive everlasting life. Salvation is by grace, through faith. This Gospel promise is conveyed to you by the best known verse in the Bible:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Whosoever includes you. Believe and live! For why will you die?

Tow Siang Hwa

OCTOBER 2009

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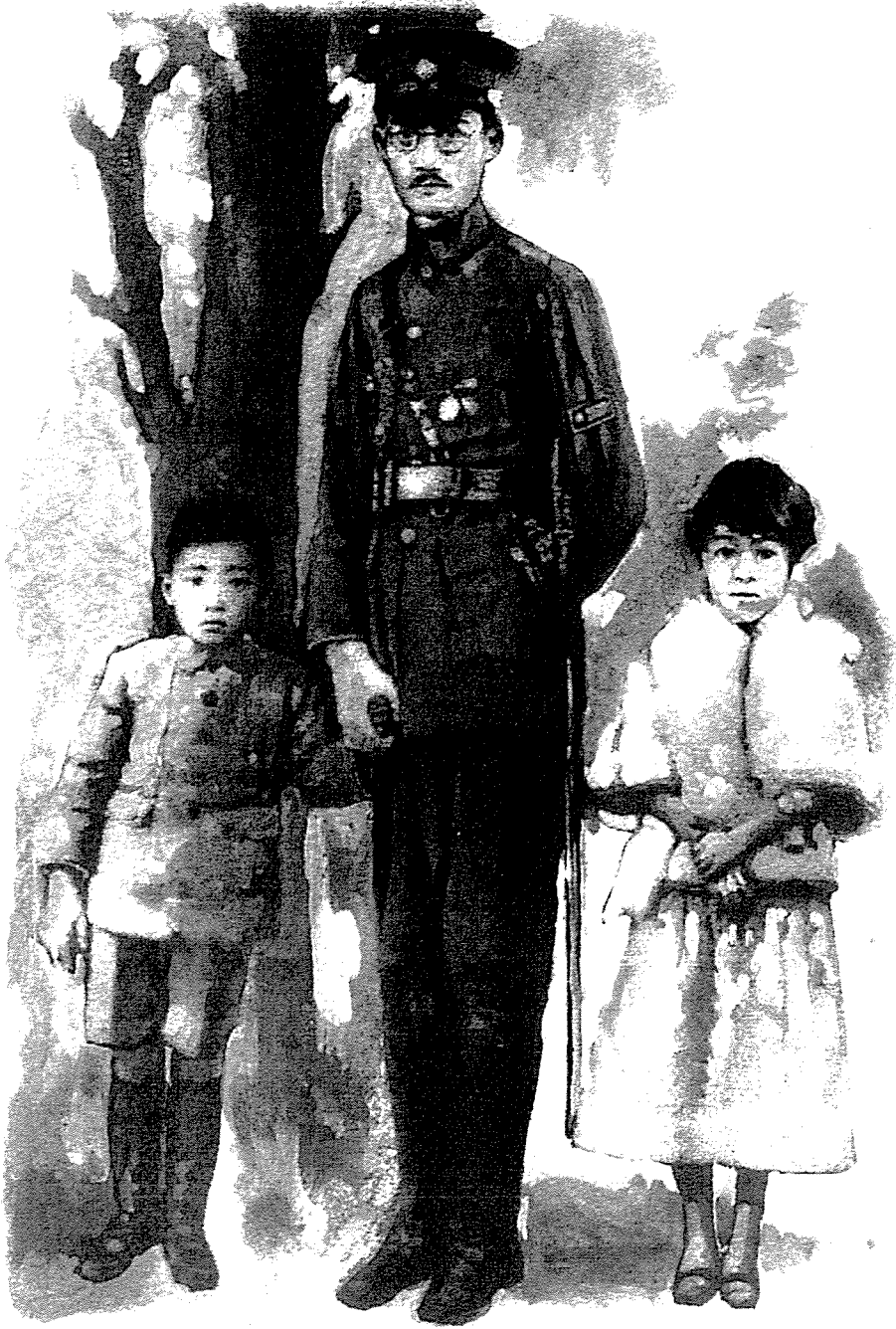
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PART ONE | Childhood



*Father, Medical Superintendent, Whampoa Military Hospital, Canton,
with Big Brother and Big Sister, 1924.*

1 | GOODBYE CHINA | Farewell, land of my birth!

One wintry morning, the twentieth day of December 1925, when the sun had barely risen over Canton, I came on the world stage, fourth child of my parents. As I was being bathed, the midwife noted that I caught hold of the water mug by the handle and would not let go. “His grip is stronger than mine!” Father commented, “This child is destined for unusual exploits.” But Mother pondered the matter in her heart.

Father and Mother called me “Siang Hwa” (祥和) meaning “auspicious and peaceable,” contrary to the political and social climate then prevailing in China, which was anything but auspicious or peaceful.

FATHER –

Father was born in 1887, at a time of great decline of the Qing dynasty. From a young age he showed precocious interest in adult affairs. He was particularly resentful of the Manchu officials who were “fat, lazy and corrupt.” He loathed the sight of Chinese males wearing pigtailed, enforced by the Manchu rulers.



Father, Westernised Oriental Gentleman, pondering the state of China under the Manchus – fat, lazy, corrupt.

Hearing of the insulting notices in Shanghai's public park in the Foreign Concession barring entry to Chinese and dogs, his sense of patriotism was greatly inflamed. When he was twelve, he summarily cut off his pigtail in protest against the humiliating law of the Manchu rulers.

Father was an unusual person, in temperament, aspirations and foresight. His ways were so far removed from the ordinary that he may justly be described as extraordinary.

There is a photograph of him as a WOG – Westernised Oriental Gentleman. In a studio pose, we see Father reclining on a divan, in stylish English outfit, complete with necktie, riding breeches and leather boots, reading a book. Seeing that he spoke no English and had never been to England, one wonders what prompted him, a fourth year medical student aged twenty-one years, to pose for such a photograph in faraway China? Perhaps he just wanted to impress. Whatever the reason, Father was simply extraordinary!

When he was eighteen, he joined the revolutionary Tongmenghui, to support his hero Dr Sun Yat Sen. At 22 years, he undertook a secret mission for Dr

Sun. Father's ambition was to join in the revolution with the Kuomintang and become "somebody someday." Thank God, the "someday" never came.

MOTHER –

Orphaned at the tender age of three, Mother knew only the love of an Elder Sister who brought her up as her own. Mother's faith in God and love for the Saviour flourished from her earliest years: Jesus was her life, her joy, her all.

The ladies of the English Presbyterian Mission in Swatow, taught her the Word of God and songs of faith, in her native dialect, Teochew. They also taught her the fine art of drawn-work. With this, Mother made linen articles such as handkerchiefs, table-cloths, place mats, and napkins.

At twelve, she supported herself by selling her handcrafted articles. God had gifted her with skill to use her hands, and the dignity of work to free herself from being a burden to others. Beyond these few facts, Mother's early life is veiled in mystery.

From Father's after-dinner stories, we learned that theirs was an arranged marriage, the match-making of some wise elders of the Church. Courtship days were strictly social meetings, "getting to know each other." This is how Father described it: "Whenever I got close, she would find some excuse to sit apart. Until our wedding day, she avoided close contact." Today's young people would think, "How strange and old-fashioned!" Maybe, but how God-honouring! Chastity is a great virtue, pleasing to the Lord, but so much lacking in this day of moral decay.

FLIGHT SOUTH –

When Father was Medical Superintendent of the Military Hospital of the Whampoa Military Academy, appointed by General Chiang Kai Shek, he was well aware of the political unrest and in-fighting between the warring Nationalist and Communist factions.

Dr Sun Yat Sen, President of the Republic, was an ailing man, stricken with cancer, barely holding on the reins of power.

Father, by his Kuomintang membership and connections, knew of the uncertainties and perils that China was going through, hardly the sort of envi-

景祺先生
孫文

愛博



Dr Sun Yat Sen, revolutionary father of the Republic of China.

ronment to bring up a young family consisting of Big Sister Siew Ai (授愛), Big Brother Siang Hui (祥輝), Second Brother Siang Yew (祥耀) and me.

Only about two years earlier, Father's political adventurism nearly cost him his life, details of which will be revealed later. Memories of his eleventh hour escape were still fresh in his mind. As he and Mother pondered the family's future and prayed for God's guidance, the prospects of emigration to Nanyang (南洋, South Seas) loomed large in their thinking. In his earlier sojourn in Nanyang, Father had practised medicine for a time in Pontianak, Borneo, and Penang, Malaya. With his earnings he had bought a rubber estate in Senai, Johor.

Rubber price was booming, and a move to Malaya seemed the obvious thing to do. Father was a man of quick decision. Grandfather, a widower, was brought into the family discussions. He concurred: emigration to Malaya was the way out of an uncertain and precarious situation. Grandfather never approved of Father's political ambitions.

The days passed quickly. Father severed links with officialdom and prepared for the family's exodus. He took Big Brother with him to call on General Chiang at his official residence in Eastern Hills. Father duly tendered his resignation from the position of Superintendent of the Military Hospital. Thankfully it was accepted without question.

It was deep winter in 1926 when the family set sail for Nanyang in a P&O

ship for our land of promise. Traveling together were Grandfather and Father's three younger sisters, Mother, my three older siblings, and myself.

Father brought with him a collection of photographs of Chinese Nationalist top brass, including Dr Sun Yat Sen and General Chiang Kai Shek. Both these top men presented Father their portraits with autographs. Dr Sun even presented him with a piece of calligraphy. The question is: how did Father, a young nobody, come into possession of such rare treasures?

Father kept most of the answers to himself. However, he did reveal one mystery. When he was a fourth year medical student, Father undertook a secret mission for his hero, Sun Yat Sen. Mission accomplished, he reported to Dr Sun at his residence. The chief was so pleased that he detained Father for the evening meal. It was a cold winter's night. The First Lady herself cooked dinner. Afterwards, Father asked, and the President consented to write his famous calligraphy 博愛 (Charity to All), autographed to 景祺先生 (Mr Keng Kee). Father could hardly believe his good fortune. This priceless artefact followed us to Nanyang, and was to help the family in an incredible way in the early days of the Japanese Occupation.

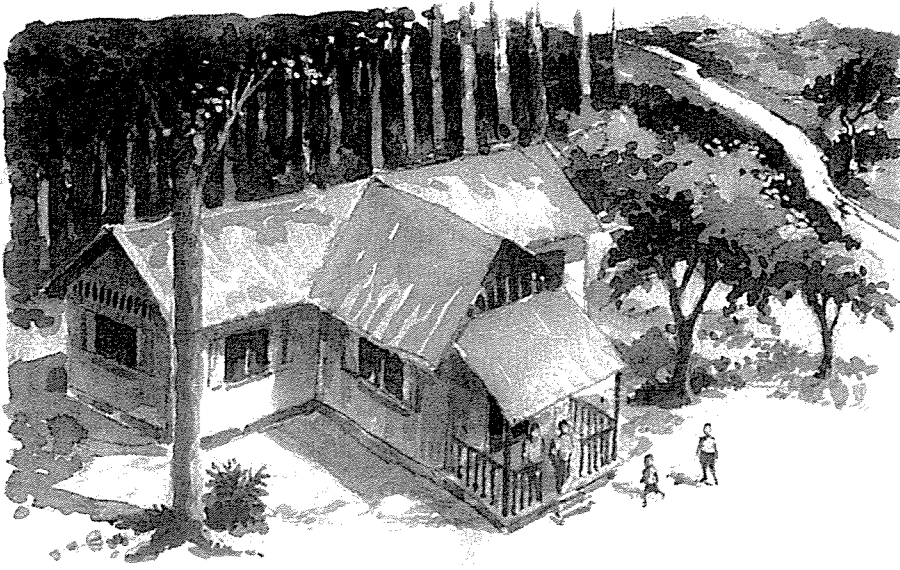
How timely was our southward move, for even as we set sail, China's "Second Revolution" flared up with renewed violence.

The P&O ship took us to Singapore, our port of transit, from whence we made our way to Senai, a rubber-growing village in South Johor, thirty-two miles to the north of Singapore.

Here in Senai was Father's dream resort, conceived when he worked as assistant to a certain Dr Chan in Penang. As proud owner of seventy-three acres of rubber, Father had visions of becoming a prosperous landlord, living off the milk and money oozing from the trees in the estate. The first three years were rosy bright, with a rising rubber market.

But this was not for long. As the saying goes, "Man proposes, God disposes". Dark clouds of economic downturn and global recession were gathering on the horizon. Days of unprecedented gloom were about to descend on planet Earth.

Was our South Seas migration a mistake?



Our home in the woods.



*Peach River Garden
(Tao Jiang Yuan)*

Senai was our heaven on earth. In a clearing in the estate stood a timber and attap country house with many rooms. In this the family quickly settled.

While our leaving China had some semblance of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt for forty years of wilderness wandering, Senai was heaven by comparison. The family house provided comfort and shelter for everyone: no need of a pillar of cloud for shade.

Here I was to spend five of my childhood years with my siblings, three elder ones who were in the group from China, and three younger ones, born in Senai. For water we had a well and a crystal-clear brook flowing through the estate just a stone's throw from the family house. These kept our water tank supplied at all times. Abundant bird life in the trees filled the air with song through the day, sweet reminders of God's lovingkindness and tender mercies, far from the deadly upheaval in China. Here was our paradise.

In poetic mood Father named the estate, Peach River Garden (桃江園).

I say "poetic" because the peaches existed only in Father's mind, and the "river" was little more than a brook. For the years the Lord kept us there, it was

a garden of experience, at times like Eden idyllic, but in the latter days, more like Gethsemane when our faith was sorely tested, as we shall shortly see.

In his euphoria, Father erected a large signboard at the entrance to the estate. "Peach River Garden" proudly announced welcome to all.

Peach River Garden was God's school of learning for the family. There He would teach us the sobering lesson, ... *godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6). True happiness comes not from material abundance but from faith in the Creator and His unfailing promises.

Days of testing lay yet ahead.

SENAI OUR SINAI –

Senai was our refuge in Nanyang as Sinai's plain was a haven for God's people in their exodus from Egypt. Far from China's turmoil of revolution, Father and Mother, and Grandfather, were thankful to God for Senai's quiet and Peach River's seclusion, far from the city's madding crowd.

Here we called upon the name of the Lord, as Moses had led God's covenant people Israel at Sinai. Grandfather set up a family altar for worship each Lord's Day. How fitting is Psalmist David's song for our family gathering:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits... Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:2, 4, 5)

We cannot thank God enough for Senai. It remains an enduring symbol of His salvation, as Mt Sinai was for Israel.

Today, eighty years after, Senai has grown out of all recognition, from a one-street town into a bustling modern city, with an international airport, housing estates, shopping centres, and every modern development, in step with twenty-first century progress.

However, in my mind, the Senai of my dreams remains the sleepy one-street town, Peach River Garden's plank and attap estate house, the rolling stream and rippling water brook. For me the charm of Senai lives on in my mind – distance lends enchantment to the view.

Our family's arrival in Senai could not have been better timed. The year 1926 was boom time for rubber. America's automotive and other industries were on a roll, powering the world's economic recovery and reconstruction after the devastating World War. Led by America, kingpin of finance and industry, the global economy was surging upward and onward into a new era of prosperity. Rubber was in ever-increasing demand.

The world was recovering because of America! Amazing, America had become the world's Number One Nation. Malaya, with her rich resources of rubber and tin, was prospering likewise, thanks to America.

Peach River Garden shared in the boom. Our tappers started on their rounds long before morning light – tapping, tapping, tapping. With every cut of the bark out flowed the latex, the white rubber sap. The milky flow ran into collecting cups. When the shaving round was completed, the tappers started their collecting round, the latex from each cup emptied into a pail. Before noon, the pails of precious latex were brought into the processing house and turned into sheets. The sheets were then dried, smoked and packed into bales for the market.

So we prospered! Father congratulated himself for his foresight and good planning, little suspecting that Senai's market-place was linked to a bigger market half-way around the world, the Stock Exchange of New York, Wall Street, and that Wall Street was subject to the interplay of global market forces of buying and selling.

As long as the market sentiment was healthy, and people were buying and selling, it was business as usual and everybody was happy.

Our first three years in Peach River Garden were blessed ones, like Joseph's first seven years of great plenty in Egypt. In high spirits, Father revived his favourite pastime, fishing. I became his fishing companion, for I was the apple of his eye.

FISHING WITH FATHER –

The story is not so much about fishing as about following. Father loved to fish at night, and I followed him for good company and as his errand boy. He was naturally proud of his three-year-old who walked with him to his favourite perch on the far bank of Peach River, across a wooden bridge spanning the stream.

Those fishing trips took place after dinner. At Father's word, I carried his can



Fishing with father.

of worms, packet of tobacco, box of matches, and mosquito repellent coil. With rod in hand, he would lead on – with me by his side. Across the bridge we took a right turn making for our chosen spot. There Father baited the hook, rolled his cigarette and lit up, and cast the line into the water – a set routine.

On these fishing trips I learned patience and courage, which meant concealing my fear. More often than not, Father would send me home on some errand – to fetch his stomach mixture or his water bottle. I had a suspicion he was testing my daring to walk home alone in the dark. But Mother had prepared me with prayer and the hymn: “God is Always Near Me”. “Siang Hwa,” she said, “there’s no need to be afraid because the Lord walks with you.”

I grew to love that hymn by Philip Bliss which our children still sing at Sunday School:

God Is Always Near Me

God is always near me,
Hearing what I say;
Knowing all my thoughts and deeds,
All my work and play.

God is always near me,
In the darkest night;
He can see me just the same,
As by midday light.

God is always near me,
Though so young and small;
Not a look or word or thought,
But God knows it all.



What fish did Father catch? I cannot recall Father catching any fish but telling of his son's bravery, there was no end!

AN EXCITING EVENT –

One day Father announced: “Rev Quek Keng Hoon of the Presbyterian Church from Singapore is coming with his members for a day retreat. They have never been to a rubber estate, and we have not had such a large group of visitors, some twenty persons.” Then Father turned to me and said, “Siang Hwa, you will learn the Lord's Prayer and recite it during the retreat. It is in three weeks' time and you can easily learn it in one week.”

From then Mother took me under her wing and I recited the Lord's Prayer after her, several times a day. Sure enough, before the week was up, I had mastered the prayer, word perfect. Father made a little mound of earth for me to stand and say my piece. He was ever so proud.

As scheduled, on the appointed day, the group arrived. Excitement filled the air as our home had not had such an event before. The group went through the programme prepared for them which had little interest for me. My sole concern was the Lord's Prayer. When the time came, I mounted the earth podium. All



Reciting the Lord's Prayer.

eyes were on the little boy. When eyes were shut, I recited in flawless Teochew the prayer that our Lord taught us. What a relief!

Eighty years have flown by. The other day I tried reciting the Lord's Prayer in Teochew. To my pleasant surprise, I managed without a hitch. What one learned well as a child remains. The secret is, start early!

PRICELESS TIMES WITH MOTHER –

Mother was the life of the home: every important event revolved around her. In those days there was no pipe-water, no electricity or gas, no modern sanitation, no telephone, and none of today's household appliances.

Mother made up for every lack. She coped with every situation; she had an answer to every need. She managed the household without any home help. Mother was always healthy and well, cheerful and happy. Truly, the joy of the Lord was her strength. Many an afternoon, at sundown, she would gather us children for an hour's sweet fellowship, telling us stories of Jesus. Such memories remain, timeless and priceless.

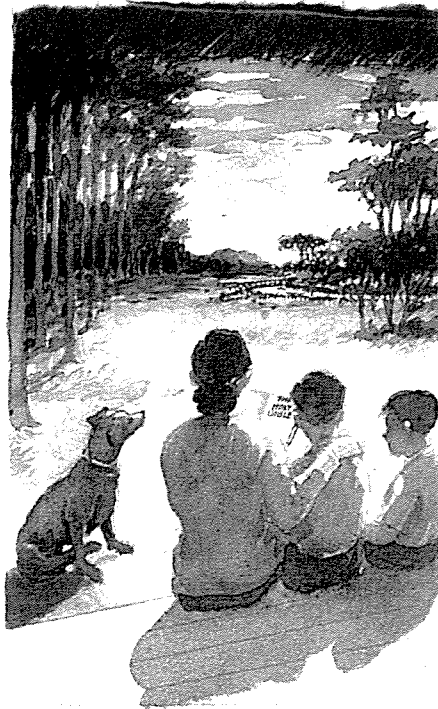
Earth joys are not for long. Through all the changing scenes of life, our God remains faithful, unchanging. He is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. When we need Him, He's always there for us.

With Mother at Eventide

At close of day with God we talk
'Neath twilight's deep'ning shade;
God's Word our light illumes the way –
He's near! Nor be afraid.

Our Good Shepherd leads everyday
Through pathways rough and steep;
For us He died and rose again –
He bought us – we're His sheep.

Keep us in peace, Thou Saviour dear –
Abide with us this night;
Beneath Thy wing we rest secure
Until the morning light.



3 | WALL STREET BUBBLE | It grew – and blew

At the fun fair, happy children scream with ecstasy, blowing soap bubbles, watching them crazily grow and burst. It is so much fun.

An over-heated stock market is like a giant bubble. It crazily grows and, sooner or later, it reaches bursting point. But unlike children blowing bubbles, nobody laughs when the stock market collapses. There are painful repercussions affecting families and whole communities. Like bursting bubbles, fortunes suddenly disappear, and princes become paupers overnight.

Such a scenario was Wall Street in 1929. A bull run in that decade drove the Dow Index to dizzy heights. Paper wealth kept growing! Hopeful investors, bitten by the get-rich-quick bug, swelled the ranks of buyers and speculators. As long as everybody was buying, the bubble kept growing.

The burning question with no easy answer was, “When to sell?” The greed factor kept investors holding on for the top dollar, that elusive “best price”. Remember God’s Word in 1 Timothy 6:10: *The love of money is the root of all evil...* Who was to know that the misery of unemployment and poverty was about to

descend on planet Earth, all because New York's stock market collapsed, because people were money mad? The greed of a few would exact a heavy price on masses of innocent, trusting people.

During the trading week ending 25 October 1929, some people decided that it was time to sell. This sent caution ripples through the New York Stock Exchange. Nevertheless, most people slept over the weekend, lulled by the false security of fat portfolios.

On Monday, 28 October, renewed selling drove the market down, setting off another alarm signal. This time it triggered panic selling on Tuesday, 29 October. Everybody wanted to get out quick. Suddenly, the market collapsed.

Prices plunged, billions of dollars were wiped off the board in trading rooms everywhere. This set off a massive chain reaction: businesses and factories closed; workers were laid off; thousands of banks collapsed. Unemployment hovered like a spectre over the world scene.

This major global economic disaster, code-named "The Great Depression", lasted from 1929 through much of the decade of the 1930s.

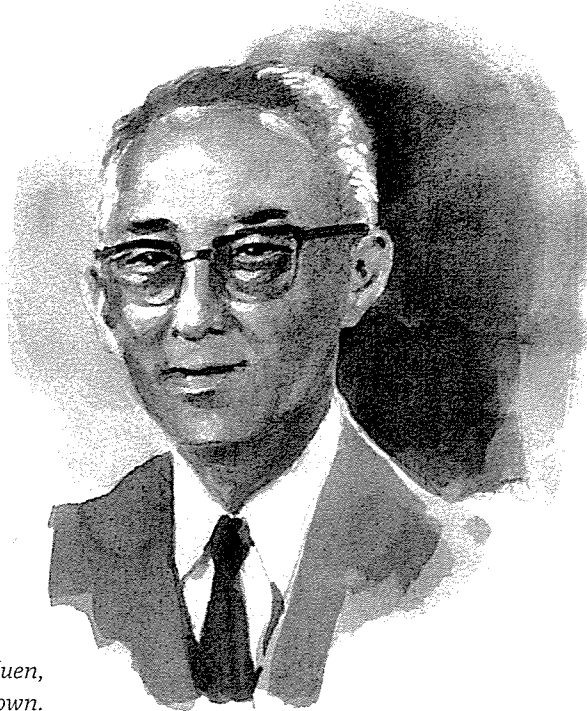
Like a giant tsunami, the Wall Street collapse sent shock waves throughout America and across the globe. Ever since then, Wall Street became the nerve centre of global trade, respected and feared by markets everywhere.

WHEN RUBBER BECAME RUBBISH –

Like most people, Father was taken by surprise. The suddenness and severity of the slump came as a big shock. Instantly, rubber became rubbish. From a high of \$100 a picul (about 60 kg), it fell to just about \$10. In Father's own words: "It couldn't even pay the wages of the workers. Why tap?"

Thank God for the good years and accumulated reserves. We drew on these savings during the hard times. Big Sister, Big Brother, and Second Brother had enrolled in Singapore schools. They lodged with Grandfather who had been called to pastor the Presbyterian Church in Hougang, Upper Serangoon.

Father ordered a tightening of the belt. Observing strict economy, the family pulled through the initial years. Thereafter, Father sought help from friends. In quick time, he found out who his real friends were. It was not a very pleasant experience, for to go a-borrowing is to go a-sorrowing. He never knew that money was so expensive and lending so painful!



*Dr Hu Tsai Kuen,
philanthropist of Chinatown.*

In our hour of need, one friend turned out to be a friend indeed – Dr Hu Tsai Kuen of Nanyang Clinic in Chinatown, a well-known general practitioner and philanthropist, well beloved among the Chinese community. Father had known Dr Hu for many years. On learning of the family’s plight, Dr Hu rendered instant help and refused repayment.

A RED SEA EXPERIENCE –

Those dark days of dire need drove Father and Mother to their knees before God’s throne of grace. They pleaded thus with God: “Lord, You took the Israelites by a strong hand out of Egypt from the Pharaoh’s iron grip. You parted the Red Sea and led two million Israelites across as on dry land. You fed them with manna, the bread from heaven, for forty years. Look down with compassion on us, Your children. You saved us from China, our Egypt, into Senai, our Sinai. Will you leave us to starve in this Great Depression? Is there not bread for us here in Senai?”

By faith we pleaded with God. We learnt new lessons of believing prayer, to pray hardest when it is hardest to pray. By faith, we cast our care upon the Lord, believing that He who called us out of China would surely supply our daily bread in Nanyang.

“Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14)

For He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.
(Ephesians 3:20)

Meanwhile the Great Depression continued to cast its shadow over the world. Oftentimes, we thought of the Israelites gathering their daily manna in the wilderness. Sometimes we wished that Peach River Garden’s ten thousand rubber trees would produce manna instead of rubber!

Those were days of sore testing. We had to learn the hard lesson of patience and trust.

Testing Time is Trusting Time

Gloomy the days when sun was low,
Solemn the silent untapped trees,
Dumb witnesses of human woe;
Father and Mother on their knees
For mercy pleading:
Latex not flowing,
Rubber not selling,
But our God still rules
Over everything.

In the deepest gloom of the depression, we found comfort in the God of all comfort. His promises in the Bible helped us through trying times, ... *for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* (Hebrews 13:5).

Those lessons of believing prayer remain with us. Thank God our sojourn on earth is but a short day. Soon the Maker will call and we’ll be away to our eternal Home, forever free from earth’s fragile bubbles and broken dreams.

Man's Vain Dream

Peach River Garden,
Father's other Eden;
Family's dream resort,
Sadly came to nought.

Great the Depression,
Global the Recession;
Many a millionaire
Jumped, clutching the air.

Millions flown away,
Fortunes gone astray;
Wall Street in retreat,
Bulls by bears were beat.

Hard the lessons learnt:
Fingers – more – were burnt;
Perish man's vain dream,
Nor sail Earth's sad stream.

Heaven is our Home,
Earth no more we roam.
Set your sights on high;
Soon to God we fly.



Wall Street – where fortunes rise and fall.

The year was 1932. The Great Depression, in its fourth year, like a thick fog blanketing the Earth, showed no signs of lifting. Rubber price was still in the doldrums.

Our family of nine hungry mouths had to be fed and the children educated. Will God send manna? Father and Mother continued to pray, remembering our Lord's words, *Men ought always to pray and not to faint* (Luke 18:1).

One day, the thought occurred to Mother. A family friend, Mr Lee Shin Kong, was a Senior Nursing Officer at the General Hospital, Johor Baru. "Let's ask his advice."

Father agreed. Johor Baru was a half-hour's drive to the south by taxi. Together they called on Mr Lee.

Mr Lee was more than willing to help. "Let us approach my Chief, Dr Garkick¹, the CMO (Chief Medical Officer) of Johor State. I have served under him for ten years. Let me ask him for a meeting."

At the interview, Father presented his Diploma of Licenciate in Medicine,



Silent, untapped rubber trees when rubber was rubbish.

Surgery and Midwifery, signed by Dr Alexander Lyall, Head of the English Presbyterian Mission Hospital, Swatow.

The interview was conducted in English, with Mr Lee interpreting. Some routine questions were asked which Father answered: In Swatow he worked for six years in the Mission Hospital where he was trained, then four years in Penang as assistant to a certain Dr Chan, and finally two years as Medical Superintendent of the Military Hospital of the Whampoa Military Academy in Canton.

Dr Garlick took notes, asked a few questions. "We have not issued any licence to graduates from your school. Nevertheless, I shall study your case." Thus ended the interview.

Two weeks later, Dr Garlick's official letter came through Mr Lee. "I'm sorry, no good news, Dr Tow. But we don't give up easily. There is an officer above Dr Garlick. He is Dr Fitzgerald², the Principal Chief Medical Officer, PCMO, in Singapore. We must see him."

An interview was arranged.

SECOND INTERVIEW –

Thank God for Mr Lee. He also was a godly man of faith, a caring person with a kind heart.

On the day of the meeting, Father had a bright idea. "Let me take along the

Governor's testimonial written in 1921. Perhaps the PCMO will consider what the Governor of the Straits Settlements³ wrote?" For whatever it was worth, Father took with him his autograph book, containing the Governor's testimonial, together with his medical diploma.

On that fateful day, Mr Lee accompanied Father to meet the PCMO in Singapore. Dr Fitzgerald, a distinguished-looking elderly gentleman, kindly received the two visitors at his office. Mr Lee presented the case on Father's behalf, together with Father's diploma and the Governor's testimonial.

"Very interesting, Dr Tow, that you have met the Governor. You don't speak English?"

"No sir, not at all."

"Do you know French?"

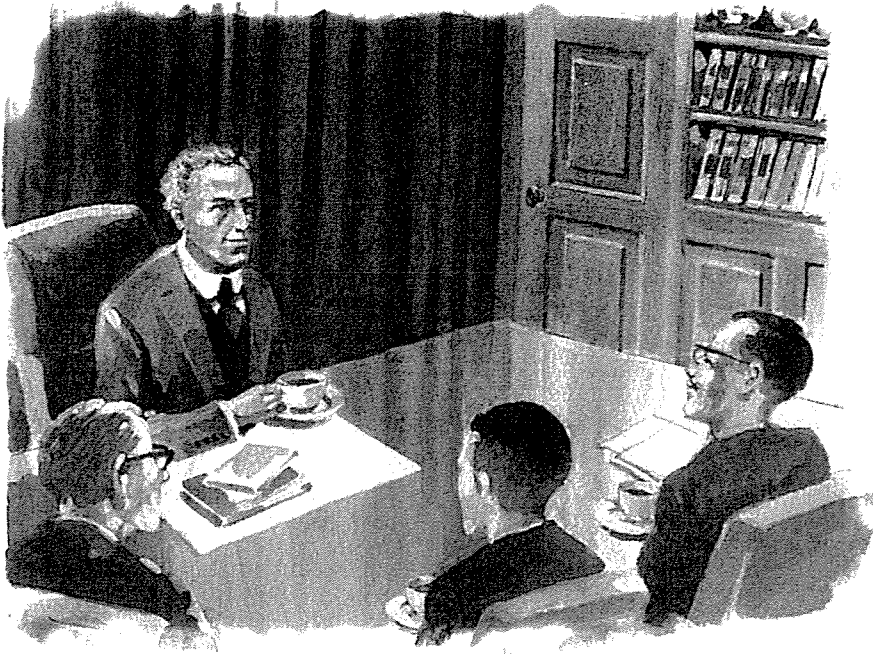
"No French, sir, but some Latin. We learnt to prescribe in Latin."

"Supposing you write me a prescription for a common medication which you use for your patients."

Father gladly complied. With consummate ease, he wrote out his favourite



Dr George Herbert Garlick, Chief Medical Officer, Johor.



I have heard with much interest of the
good work done by Dr. Joo Kang Kee

L. Guillemard

Grove House
Singapore

27 May 1921



Father meeting Straits Settlements Governor, Sir Lawrence Guillemard,
who wrote him the "lifeline" testimonial.

prescription for Dyspepsia. It was a mixture he often took for his own gastric pain. With a steady hand, and in perfect Latin, Father wrote out the complete recipe perfectly.

Dr Fitzgerald read the prescription with obvious interest and approval. Then he turned to the Governor's testimonial.

"You met the Governor in 1921 at Government House. How did you come about to meet him?"

"It was a courtesy call. I was in Singapore to raise funds for our YMCA headquarters building in Swatow. I thought it was courteous to do so."

"You know, Dr Tow, you came just in time. I am due to retire next month. You will hear from Dr Garlick in due course. Good-bye."

All the way back to Johor, Father and Mr Lee talked about the interview and gave thanks to God for making the meeting with Dr Fitzgerald possible, and in the nick of time.

Back in Senai, Mother anxiously awaited Father's return.

"How was the interview?"

"Dr Fitzgerald was friendly and encouraging. But with these *angmo*⁴, you can never tell."

GOD'S LIFELINE –

Two weeks later, came an official letter from Dr Garlick. It was a licence to practise in the State of Johor. Amazing lifeline! The impossible had happened. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?"

Through hunger and want, God was teaching us hard lessons, not soon forgotten. I am reminded of the promise of God in Psalm 37:3 – *Trust in the LORD, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.* We were learning. Persevering prayer pays. Pray hardest when it is hardest to pray.

The licence to practise enabled Father to set up as a general practitioner in Kluang (1932-35) and Batu Pahat (1936-62). His modest income was sufficient to educate the first four children in Singapore, and the last four in Batu Pahat. In 1942, Eldest Sister Siew Ai graduated from the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore and took on a major role in the support of the younger siblings. She was obedient to Father and never married.

When Father retired in 1962, she honoured him by housing him (and Step-mother) in a beautiful apartment by the sea in Singapore. By then he had the satisfaction of having in the family four doctors, two teachers, one pastor-theologian, and one medical photographer.

Is anything too hard for the Lord?

We look back and marvel at God's unfailing answers to prayer. Indeed He who had delivered the family out of China into Nanyang, did not leave us to perish in the Great Depression.

As He had delivered His people in a former time, He will also deliver our family in the end time. As it is recorded: "For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.

(1 Samuel 12:22)

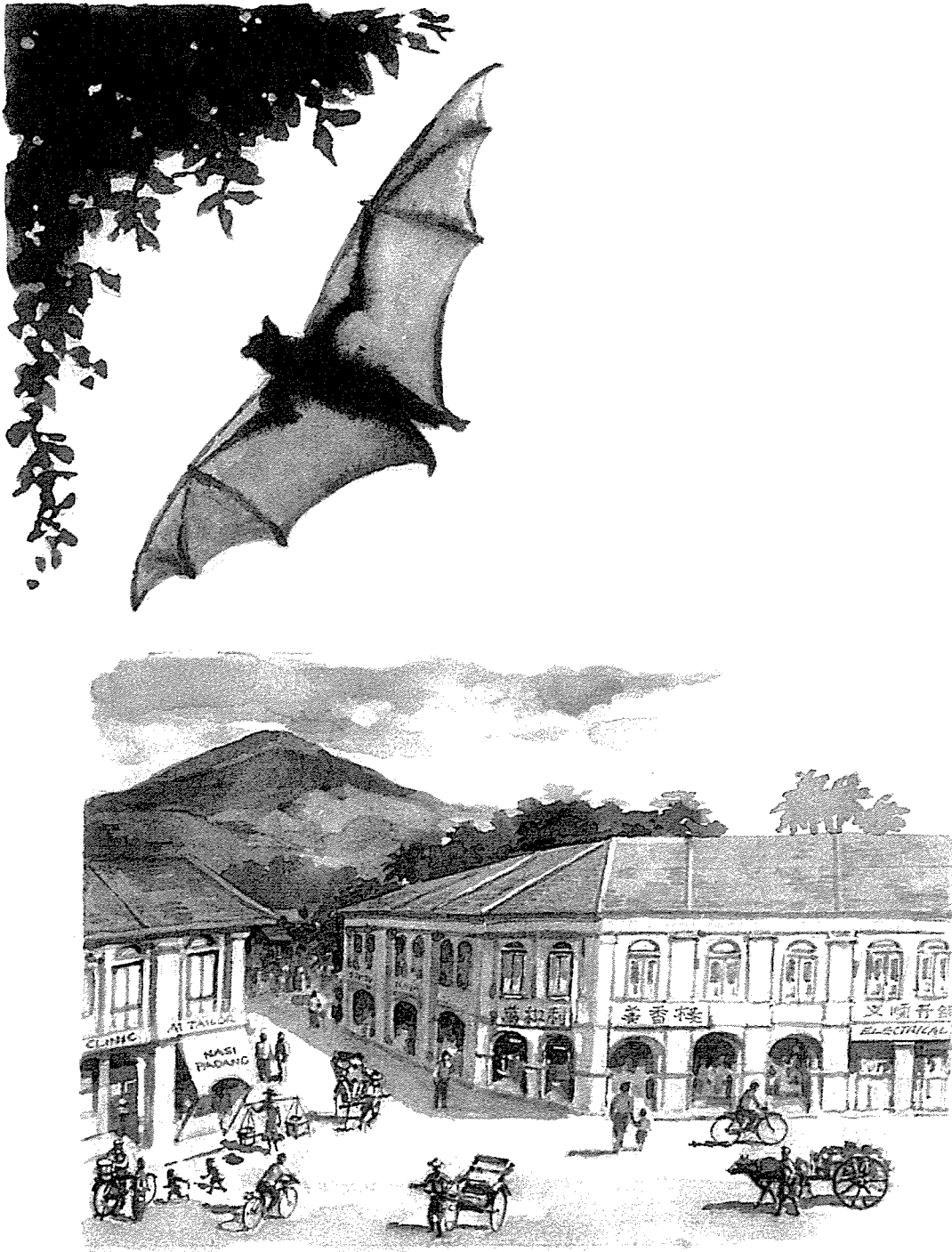
1 Dr George Herbert Garlick was Principal Medical Officer Johor from the 1920s to the 1930s. Garlick Avenue in the Bukit Timah - Holland Road area is named after him.

2 Dr Richard Desmond Fitzgerald was Acting Deputy Director, Medical and Health Services, Straits Settlements, for a short period in 1932. This post was previously known as Principal Chief Medical Officer, PCMO.

3 Sir Laurence Nunns Guillemard was Governor of the Straits Settlements 1920 - 27. Named after him are Guillemard Road, Guillemard Crescent, and Guillemard Lane, in Geylang, Singapore.

4 *Angmo*, "red hair", is the Teochew term for Europeans.

PART TWO | Schooldays



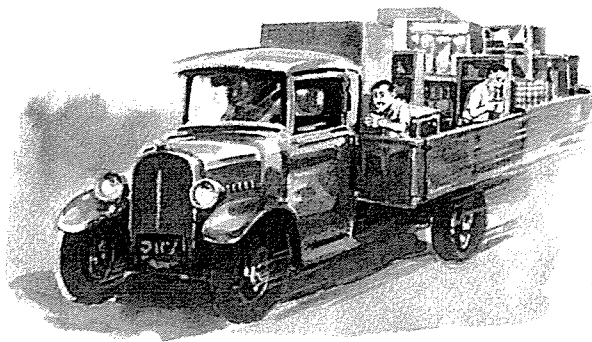
*A keluang or Malayan fruit bat in flight.
Kluang town centre, 1933, with Gunong Lombok in the distance.*

The township of Kluang is named after the Malayan fruit bat which used to infest the forests near fruit plantations. With urbanisation and deforestation, the beasts, deprived of their habitat and source of food, are fast becoming extinct. During our two-year stay in Kluang we did not see any of the fruit bats.

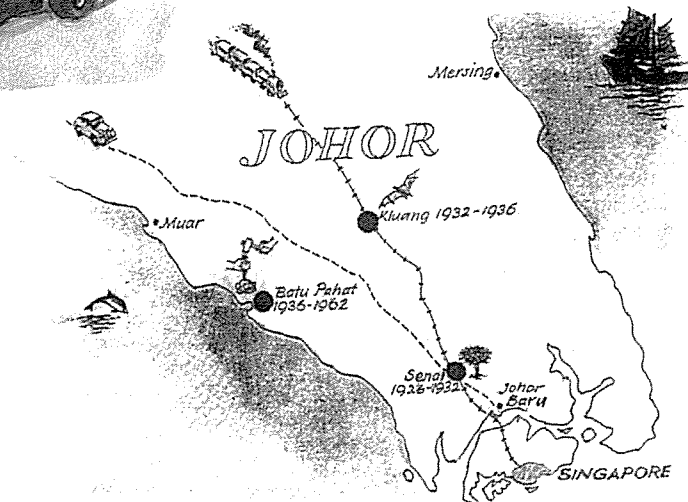
Armed with a licence to practise, Father made an exploratory trip to that railway town some sixty miles to the north of Senai. There he met a friendly businessman, owner of a department store in the town centre. The Hokkien gentleman, Mr Cheong Boon Song, convinced Father that Kluang was a good place to set up his practice as it had a Chinese population of 3,000.

With the help of Mr Cheong, a two-storey shophouse was secured at a monthly rental of thirty dollars on Jalan Station among a row of shophouses alongside the north-south railway. The clinic would occupy the ground floor while the upper floor would be the family quarters.

There were mixed feelings when time came for us to leave Senai. Over the years, we had grown to love Peach River Garden, Great Depression notwithstanding. We had become attached to the family house, the bridge over Peach River,



*Moving to Kluang –
motion sickness all the way.*



and the river itself, not forgetting the bird-song and the smell of smoked rubber.

All these became things of the past when we said our last good-bye as we packed up for Kluang. Father and Mother, and the three younger children occupied a taxi. Second Brother and I were assigned to escort the lorry with the furniture and other household items.

Fired with boyish excitement, we climbed atop the lorry for what we thought would be a two-hour joy ride. It was more than we had expected – no joy ride, only motion sickness all the way! It was an unforgettable ordeal and – never again!

Father named his clinic Nan Sun Dispensary (南山藥房). This became the family's source of support for the next three years. By this medical practice, Father brought in the daily bread, just enough to meet our needs. It was God's manna from heaven to sustain nine hungry mouths. With each successful treatment, Father's practice grew.

Father was a doctor of exceptional determination and dedication, one of those never-say-die types. In one of his periodic gastric bleeding bouts, he was confined upstairs to recover from the severe blood loss. Each time, Mother lov-

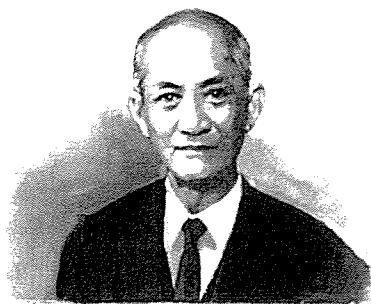
ingly nursed him back to health, with traditional Chinese medications, tender loving care and unceasing prayers. To us children, she gave strict orders: "Pray for your Father, that God would heal him. Without Father you children will be beggars!" During those times, patients still came to the clinic, waiting to be seen. From his sick bed, Father gave instructions:

"Get the patients to wash their feet, bring them up, and I'll see them."

It was Father's "never say die" spirit.

Father Extraordinary

Father never turned his back
Through days gloomy, cheerless, black;
But pressed ever forward, onward,
Head held high, eyes fixed upward,
Confident dark clouds will lift:
God's succour will come, and swift.



Through all the days of trial and testing, Mother supported Father with effectual fervent prayer. The words of the Lord's Prayer were ever so meaningful. *Give us this day our daily bread.* Our God was unfailing and faithful. Day by day He sent new mercies our way.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH –

One early morning, the sun barely up, I heard a woman's mournful wail coming from the back of the house. There was a drizzle in the air but my curiosity gave me no rest until I found out the cause of the sorrow. Venturing into the open, I made straight for the back door.

On opening the door I came face to face with death. A chill ran down my spine as I surveyed a man lying motionless on the cold concrete, face up, obviously dead. Crouching over him was a sobbing woman, presumably his wife, tenderly stroking his expressionless face with both hands, and calling his name between sobs: "Ah Ko, answer me! Come back, where have you gone? Why don't you speak to me!" Those mournful heart-rending words were repeated over and over again. Poor woman.

Stop and Think!

Troubled reader, stop and think –
I'm in etern'ty, you're on the brink!
For Adam's race, 'tis death and strife
E'er since man's Fall – a hopeless life;
In Jesus Christ there's life thro' death!
Believe in Him while you have breath;
Procrastinate? O do not wait.
Another day may be too late!



I watched the raindrops mingle with the woman's tears falling on the dead man's unfeeling face. Suddenly I found myself crying, grieved that death had claimed another victim. Quickly I shut the door and beat a hasty retreat from the falling rain and the heart-rending scene.

Mother saw me as I made my way upstairs, "Siang Hwa, why are you wet?" I told Mother all that happened and questions which arose in my mind. "Where has the man's soul gone to? Why must man die? Do I have to die? Where will I go?"

These questions remained unanswered until Dr John Sung came to Malaya two years later.

MOTHER, A WOMAN OF PRAYER –

One day, I opened her bedroom door, and there was Mother kneeling in prayer, a sight I cherish to this day. It was mid-afternoon, and Mother was closeted at the throne of grace making supplication for family and church. Silently I closed the door and beat a hasty retreat. There and then I learned a precious lesson: not by words but by example, Mother had spoken to my heart. I resolved to be a person of prayer, like Mother.

She was a tower of strength in prayer. In every trial and crisis, she found strength and comfort from God. Like the Psalmist, she would pray,

He only is my rock and my salvation... my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.
(Psalm 62:6,7)

FATHER DID A “JOSEPH ACT” –

Most of us are familiar with Jacob’s favouritism towards his son, Joseph. Jacob made Joseph a coat of many colours, arousing the envy and murderous hatred of his other sons against their brother.

When I was eight, Father did a Joseph act on me. He took me to the best tailor in town and made me a beautiful suit, to my great unease and embarrassment. The only consolation was the suit came with only one colour and none of my brothers raised a protest. At Chinese New Year and festive occasions, Father would take me with him, dressed up in that Joseph suit. On important social outings Father would make me his companion and showpiece, boasting with unconcealed pride, “This is my third son, the smartest of my eight children.”

Imagine my extreme discomfort and embarrassment. No amount of protest could change Father: Nothing moved him, so one just lived with it. After all, he was Father extraordinary!



Apple of Father’s eye.

FATHER'S ASPIRATIONS –

Father had the highest aspirations for each of his children. He lived by the Book and he was careful not to spoil any child by sparing the rod, being an ardent admirer of King Solomon who wrote: *He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes* (Proverbs 13:24). Because he loved me most, I tasted his cane strokes most.

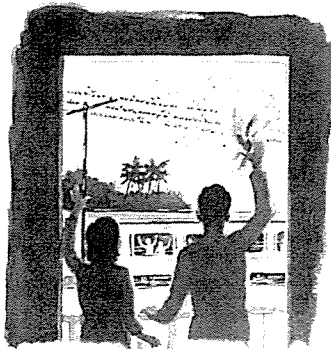
He kept a close eye on our progress in school. Big Sister and Big Brother both scored top marks and first position in class. Father was pleased. Second Brother came second or third. He had been of frail health as a child, so Father spared him. As for me, I came fifth. That was inexcusable, worthy of the cane! Father's caning sessions were common events in our home, and cane marks showed: we wore shorts, unfortunately. So the eight children grew up unspared and unspoil. But the marvel of it all, we grew up filial and grateful.

LEAVING FOR SCHOOL IN SINGAPORE –

For the sake of our education we children left home for Singapore, three times a year. Each parting was a painful event, sealed with prayer and Father's parting instructions. Mother was always there to check that we had everything and to say the comforting last words.

Pain of Parting

Little hands up waving,
Good-bye kisses flying;
Cheery faces smiling,
Hiding pain of parting;
O bravely bear the pain
Until we meet again!



Our good-bye was an act of two parts. Part One was at home when the taxi arrived at the front door – a last hug and a firm clasp of the hand, then on to the station. When the train drew into the station, there was a great rush as we boys got on board to find seats with windows facing east. Singapore was toward the south, and our house was on the east side of the railway line.

Then came Good-bye Part Two – an exciting event. Father and Mother would be at the window waiting to wave to us as the southbound train sped by in front of the house. Ready with handkerchiefs, we would wait anxiously. As the train whizzed along, excitement mounted as we neared our house. As soon as Father and Mother came in sight everybody waved. All too soon, the train carried us away and Father and Mother faded out of sight – until the next vacation.

ACUTE HOMESICKNESS –

Separation from parents for us young children was painful beyond words. There was emotional trauma and acute deprivation in parting, with no prospect of contact for three long months. Second Brother was eight and I was six. While at school the morning's activities occupied our thoughts. After school and lunch, acute homesickness set in.

Our thoughts flew back to Kluang and home, wondering what Father and



No see, no hear, for quarter year – before the days of mobile phones.

Mother might be doing. The yearning for home grew with the imagination.

For our emotional relief, Second Brother and I would steal to the back of the house. Standing by the hedge we held a private and tearful session, comforting one another.

This daily event lasted for the first fortnight. The secret was to keep our minds occupied with homework and other activities. The real relief came only with the vacations when we were home once again, to be close to Father and Mother – until school reopens. So the cycle was repeated.

Childish Tears

D'ye know just what they mean?
That hidden tearful scene –
Childish hearts are aching,
Homesick near to breaking,
Missing Parents' loving tone,
B'fore the days of telephone;
Nor feel nor hear for quarter year,
Through nights and days of absence drear:
So says that mournful scene.

PENMANSHIP –

One vacation in Kluang, Mother bought me an exercise book and started me on writing exercise. At the top of the page she wrote the alphabet, upper and lower case. "Siang Hwa, come and practise your handwriting. For every four pages neatly written, I will give you one cent."

I loved it. As I improved my handwriting, I also collected my one cent coins. Mother did the same with my Chinese handwriting practice.

Forty years later, I walked into our pharmacy to buy some medicine for home use. The pharmacist remarked, "Dr Tow, your prescriptions are always easy to read. You have such good handwriting, unlike most doctors. Where did your handwriting come from?"

"Thank you. Well, there is a little story to it."

Thanks to Mother, pharmacists and others can read my handwriting!

Penmanship without Pain

Dear child, earn as you learn,
 My offer do not spurn;
 One cent for four pages
 Speaks poorly for wages;
 Penmanship without pain,
 Beyond price is your gain;
 Today you may fret;
 One day - no regret!



MY FIRST "HOUSE CALL" –

It happened in 1934 when I was nine. Miss Quek was the daughter of Father's very good friend, Pastor Quek from our home village in China. She was a teacher of English in the local Chinese school in Kluang, recently come from China.

One day, Miss Quek fell ill with sore throat and high fever. Father had seen her earlier. He said to me, "Siang Hwa, I saw Miss Quek yesterday in her apartment. You know the place – you were with me. I want you to visit her, take her temperature, ask if she is better. Before coming home, pray with her."

Father's instructions were simple and explicit. I took a mercury thermometer in its case, walked the ten minute stretch of Jalan Station and found Miss Quek's apartment without difficulty.

"Good morning, Sister Sok Chang. How are you today?"



Miss Quek was better. I took her temperature, returned the instrument to its case, then I prayed for the Lord to heal her quickly. I took my leave.

Mission accomplished I ran home and rendered my report to Father. I had successfully carried out my first house-call!

DR JOHN SUNG –

In the year 1935 there came from the city of Amoy, China, a godly lady called Miss Leona Wu, to be the Principal of the Presbyterian Church Kindergarten. Mother and Miss Wu soon struck up a strong bond of Christian kinship and became fast friends.

The Hokkien-speaking Presbyterian Church had no pastor, so Miss Wu stood in as preacher, and did an excellent job. She taught the Bible with power and clarity. She played the organ expertly and had a beautiful singing voice. She became our spiritual counsellor.

Soon after she arrived, Miss Wu told us about a wonderful preacher called John Sung. He was known as the “Flame for God in the Far East.” She testified, from personal knowledge, how God had raised up John Sung to revive the churches throughout China in the early 1930s. Now he was focussing on the Chinese churches in Nanyang. Wherever Dr Sung preached, many were saved and Christians were revived. Miss Wu’s earnest urgency stirred our souls.

“Dr Sung is coming to Singapore in August 1935. Let the churches pray for God’s blessing to be downpoured. Every family that wants to be blessed – pray and attend the meetings.”

Our whole family attended Dr Sung’s revival meetings at Teluk Ayer Methodist Church in the last two weeks of August. There were three daily sessions, each lasting about two hours.

At every session the church was filled to capacity and overflowing. Hundreds of souls were saved, our family included. I attended forty meetings during the two weeks. The Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ was expounded by Dr John Sung with great convicting power.

For twenty years, Father was hooked on tobacco. Nothing could free him from the habit. But under the sound of the Gospel preached by Dr John Sung, after just one sermon, he came home and turned his entire smoking paraphernalia into a bonfire, marking his emancipation from a vicious and evil habit.

At those meetings, my questions and fears concerning death and the soul, man's destiny, salvation and the eternal state, heaven and hell, were fully answered. I had my salvation assured. My knowledge of fundamental Christian truths learnt from Mother and Father were reinforced by Dr Sung.

The two weeks' spiritual instruction lives on in me, the bedrock foundation of my faith life ever afterwards.

FROM KLUANG TO BATU PAHAT –

One day, four sporty-looking men with hunting gear walked into Father's clinic, speaking Teochew. Father quickly struck up a spirited conversation with the leader, a Mr Frank Tan¹.

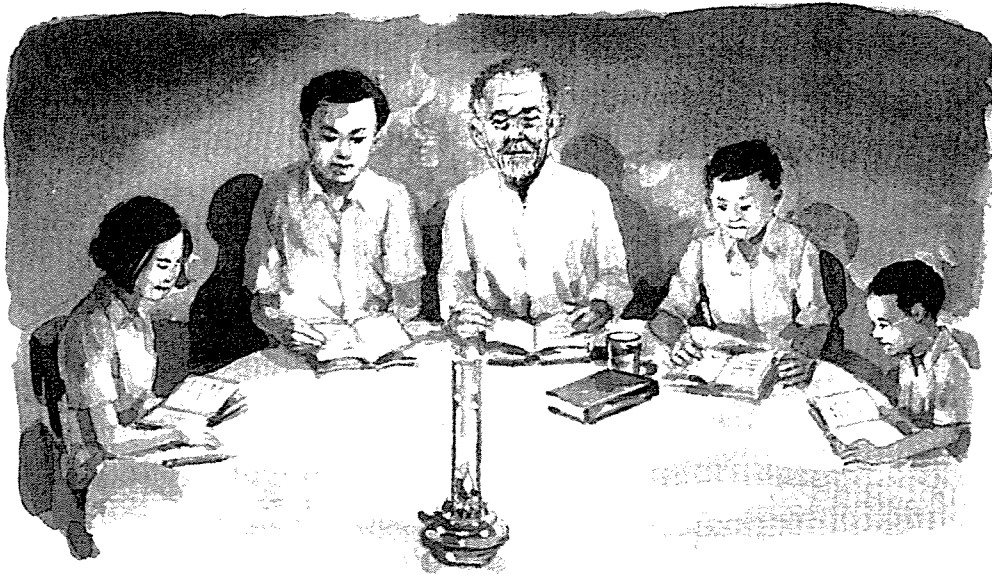
Father was impressed by his frankness and warmth. "Dr Tow, you are wasting your time here. Kluang is too small for you. Batu Pahat is three times as big. There is a large Teochew community, and many rich families. Come, pay us a visit and you will agree with me. I will introduce you to the Teochew towkays."

Frank Tan and his group then left for a fishing and hunting trip in Mersing, two hours' drive to the east. He promised to call again on the return trip, which he did, three days later.

Father followed him to Batu Pahat, thirty-four miles to the west. There Frank Tan gathered the Chinese community leaders to meet him. That one visit convinced Father.

Next year, our family pulled out of Kluang and re-located in Batu Pahat which became our home for more than two decades. Frank Tan's words were more than true: Batu Pahat was not only a bigger and busier township, but it was more beautiful and interesting than Kluang.

¹ Years later, my younger brother, Siang Hong, married Frank Tan's daughter, Lily.



Grandfather ministered to Sunday morning congregation and nurtured us with nightly family worship.

When I was six I was sent to live with Grandfather in Singapore. My five years with this grand old man left its mark on my thinking, my way of life, and my value system. During those years, Grandfather imparted to me, by example and precept, the elements of godly living, just as the Word of God says, *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it* (Proverbs 22:6).

Mother had God-given foresight to send us to schools in Singapore, the centre of learning. She reasoned: “English holds the key to the future, not Chinese, not Malay. The children must go to Singapore to learn English.”

Mother was dead right. English, over the years, has risen to become the pre-eminent global language, the lingua franca.

Thank God for giving our parents the resolve during those difficult depression years to invest in the children’s education. Big Sister enrolled in the Methodist Girls’ School, while we boys went to Anglo-Chinese School. Today these schools rank among Singapore’s best.

While our primary objective for leaving home and parents was for a better

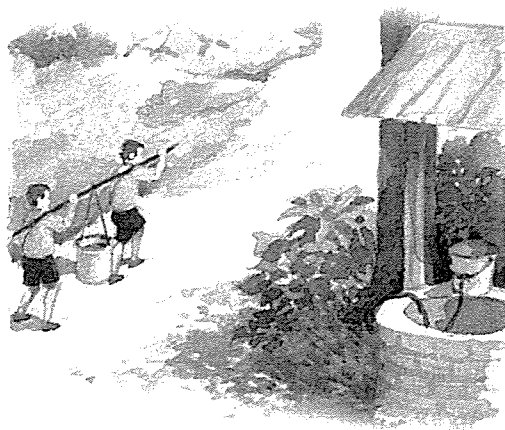
education, we received something far more precious: spiritual lessons from an unusual man of God.

DAYS OF PRE-MODERN LIVING –

Grandfather was pastor of the Chinese Presbyterian Church at 4¾ milestone, Upper Serangoon Road, Hougang. The Church property comprised an attap and plank house on about 30,000 square feet (2,800 square meters) of land, with six durian trees, a clump of banana plants, and a well, our sole source of water, in which lived a solitary catfish.

The attap house was a single storey building with four bedrooms, a centre living room which served as the Sanctuary on the Lord's Day. Here lived Grandfather, his two younger daughters, Second and Third Aunts, Big Sister Siew Ai, and four brothers: Siang Hui (Timothy), Siang Yew, Siang Hwa and Siang Yeow.

There were no modern conveniences: no electricity, no gas, no modern sanitation, no pipe-water. Water had to be fetched from the well some twenty yards (18 meters) down a slope at the far end of the garden. Second Brother and I were assigned this daily task, to keep the jars in the kitchen filled with water. It was quite fun to cast the pail into the well some ten feet (3 meters) deep and pull it up by a pulley suspended from a wooden beam. We always looked for the lone catfish which lived in the well. The trip up the steps to the kitchen was quite a challenge. Grandfather was very encouraging. After all, we were still quite small – eight and six years old. It was good training.



Water service before the days of PUB.

Life was very basic – back to nature – and no cause for regret for “sweet are the uses of adversity.” Here, under the saintly influence of Grandfather, we learned precious lessons of godliness, frugality, self-reliance and discipline.

While Kluang was a mere eighty miles (129 km) from Singapore, we children made the trip home only during school holidays. Father’s modest income did not allow us the luxury of more than three home trips per year. In those days we did not have a telephone, so during the school terms we did not hear our parents’ voices for three long months.

Absence made the heart grow fonder.

When I first set eyes on Grandfather, he was like Abraham to me, a venerable gentleman of threescore years and ten. He never re-married after Grandmother died in 1922. Why? He was sixty and had a good span of years ahead of him. He had his reasons which I surmise from his will, a document containing much godly food for thought. Being wholly given to God, remaining single allowed him undivided devotion to holy service.

Grandfather’s will, written in his own hand on 19 April 1926 in Peach River Garden, Senai, has some precious lessons for us.

To my dear children:

- a) When I was nineteen, the Holy Spirit led me to the salvation grace of Jesus Christ. I gave up my sinful ways, and all my desire for the wealth of this world.
- b) When I was twenty-six, I dedicated myself to preach the Gospel. I retired from my pastorate at fifty-eight. Thereafter I continued faithfully to preach the Gospel wherever I went, from China to Malaya and Singapore.
- c) I received my call from the Lord, and I deeply believe that I must conquer sin and the devil everyday, over and over again. I praise the Lord that He blesses me increasingly all the days of my life.
- d) I have never tried to accumulate great wealth, but only pray that God will give me the wisdom to lead all you children to trust in the Lord so that you may receive the true blessing which is Faith in God.
- e) On earth I have no hope. My hope is beyond earth, that one day we may all meet in heaven and sing the Song of Victory. As for now, keep good faith

with Christ; make good use of what He has entrusted to you by carrying out charitable works.

f) Put on the Armour of God so that you may withstand the wiles of the devil. Be diligent in prayer to receive the protection of God (Eph 6:10-20).

g) Our life in this world is like a day's journey. In one short day the journey is done. If this is so, why then should we crave for many things? Never forget the days of the devastating earthquake followed by the terrible typhoon when hundreds of thousands lost their homes and lives. But our God is always with us.

h) Keep the Commandments. Honour your parents. This is a most beautiful and precious opportunity not to be missed.

MEMORIES OF GRANDFATHER –

Like the soft fragrance of the lily of the valley, sweet memories of Grandfather linger on. If you should ask me to cite an example of a godly man, Grandfather has my vote. Always serene, saintly, and smiling, I have never heard any corrupt communication escape his lips. In my years with him, he never lost his temper on any of us grandchildren, nor on any other person.

In my very first encounter with Grandfather, soon after arrival in the Church House, he said: "Grandson, pray for faith. Pray always, asking the Lord to give you strong faith. *Faith is the key to blessing, for without faith it is impossible to please God* (Hebrews 11:6). With faith everything is possible; you can do great things for God."

How true: without faith we are nothing and can do nothing for God. So I have not ceased to pray for faith.

Grandfather's stories are unforgettable.

"One day there was a great earthquake. It was a terrifying experience. Immediately, I knelt down just where I was, and called to the Lord for mercy. When the shaking had ceased, and all was quiet again, I got up from my knees. The Church House of timber stood firm, praise the Lord.

"I went outside, and to my horror, the concrete houses on either side, had both collapsed. That was in 1918.

"Then in 1922, the great 2 August typhoon struck. Violent winds and mon-

ster waves swept through Swatow, causing widespread destruction and death. In all, over 30,000 lives were lost. Again we cried to God, and our family was spared. The Lord is great.”

May the words of the psalmist exalt the name of our God:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. (Psalm 46:1-3)

Whenever Grandfather spoke with women, he would look at the floor. I wondered, was he shy? I asked him the reason and his answer was plain and simple: “Be careful of the lust of the eyes.” In later years I understood. In the Sermon on the Mount, these words came from our Lord’s own lips: *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart* (Matthew 5:28). Grandfather’s saintliness was not soon forgotten.

Grandfather was fully given to prayer and the Word of God. Oftentimes, his loud praying would rouse us from our sleep in the night watches. On occasions we heard him cry out, “O Lord, receive the soul of Thy unworthy servant!” In the morning we grandchildren would ask him, “Grandfather, were you not well last night?”

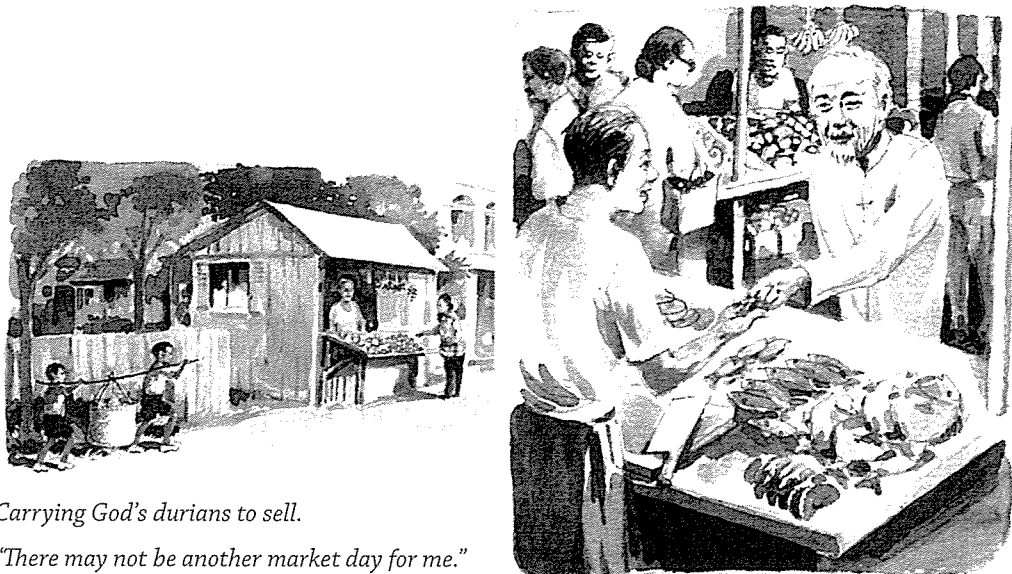
“No, grandchildren, I only long to be with the Lord Jesus. I wish He would call for me soon. This earth is just so worthless, like a cold overnight potato.” Prayer with Grandfather morning and evening was our daily blessing. His rule for us was, “No prayer, no school.”

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, (Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 111:10), then surely prayer before school makes good sense.

One morning, Second Brother and I were running late. Half-way up the steps to the bus stop, Grandfather spotted us from the house. “Grandsons, come back, we have not prayed!” We were late for school, but the lesson was well learnt. We were never late again.

Family Worship at 8 o’clock was our nightly blessing when all the family gathered for Grandfather’s scripture lesson and prayer. He would pray for the grandchildren, seeking God’s blessings on each one.

Grandfather did not socialize, had no diversion or recreation. For him it was



Carrying God's durians to sell.

"There may not be another market day for me."

"All for Jesus, all for Jesus; all my days and all my hours."

The Lord came first in everything. He loved the holy Sabbath Day. To him it was truly ... *a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable*, (Isaiah 58:13) a day in which the world must not intrude: no newspapers, no careless speech, no games or sport. From Grandfather we learnt to honour the Lord on His Day. Was Grandfather unduly strict? I say, no, it was devotion for God. Total devotion.

Grandfather lived as though he were treading the outskirts of heaven, in closest communion with the Lord. One day, coming home from market, he found a ten cent coin in a packet of prawns. Losing no time, he walked back to the market, a mile away, to return the money. The fishmonger was amazed.

"Sir, you could have returned the money on your next marketing day."

"Yes, I could, but you cannot be sure. A man of my age may not have another marketing day."

Grandfather was conscious of keeping straight accounts with man and God.

Whenever our neighbour's hens crossed over and laid their eggs in our garden, Grandfather would promptly return the eggs to the rightful owner. The best durians were carried by Second Brother and me to the market and sold, and the proceeds returned to the Church.

"Render unto God what is God's." Grandfather was a man of godly principle.

"Never be idle, doing nothing! Time is precious: An inch of time is an inch of

gold. Redeem the time; keep busy and useful for God always.”

One day, I was down with one of those seasonal fevers which afflicted us children at least once a school term. I asked Grandfather for a drink. He made a cup of Rowntree cocoa, adding a tablespoonful of soya sauce! “Grandson, this drink is good for you. It is cooling: it will bring down your fever!”

It was effective.

Grandfather was extremely frugal toward himself. His bath towel was the coarse cotton sack which the provision shop discarded after the flour was sold. This saved Grandfather thirty cents, which was good money, then as now.

When he received news of a disastrous flood affecting the Church in Swatow, he sent his entire month's pay of \$30 to help the flood victims.

He was strict on feminine modesty. Sleeves for girls and ladies were a must, at least half length if not full length sleeves for a respectable and God-honouring cover. Sleeveless women were not seen among his congregation. “Christians must avoid all appearance of evil, and not follow the fashion of the world. Girls, be modest!”

Grandfather witnessed for the Lord Jesus at every available opportunity. On Saturday afternoon he would gather the grandsons and together we went tracting in the countryside along Braddell Road (before the road was built). His one consuming passion was to win souls for God's Kingdom.

GRANDFATHER'S FINAL DAYS –

In the days of the Japanese Occupation, Grandfather elected to stay with Father, his eldest son, in Batu Pahat. There he passed his last days peacefully under the care of Mother, assisted by the grandchildren. Gradually his health declined, but, *though his outward man perish, yet the inward man was renewed day by day* (2 Corinthians 4:16). With daily expectancy, Grandfather awaited the heavenly call.

One night, he summoned the family and, with radiant faraway look, he called out excitedly, “Lord Jesus!” This turned out to be a false alarm. A month later he passed away in his sleep, at the age of eighty-three, *absent from the body, present with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:8). What a blessed passing it was.

In a child's life, little first things are most important, infinitely more important than the mass of routine happenings of later years. Adults, especially parents, do well to take note, and despise not the day of small things.

Most of my friends know that I am an old boy of the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) as were all my brothers. But few are aware that my first school was McNair Road School, Towner Road. For some reason, I missed the January intake for ACS and had to wait for the second intake in July 1932. Fortunately, Second Aunt's friend Miss Koh was Principal of McNair Road School, and she kindly took me in. I was a very happy child to know that I was going to school, at last, like my brothers!

With childish excitement, I began to assemble my school things. Second Aunt, my "Second Mother" carefully organized my school uniforms, school bag, pencils, eraser, shoes, handkerchief, a coin purse and a comb. Finally, came the last item, a cork hat!

To introduce this most important item, Second Aunt had prepared, I think, a little speech. "Siang Hwa, this hat is from Grandfather to protect your brain.

The sun in Singapore is very hot. The hat will keep out the sun and protect your brain.” Before I could protest, Second Aunt, with a firm hand placed the hat squarely on my head.

“There you are. Looks great!”

“But, Second Aunt, the hat’s too big. It will fall off!”

“No, there’s a strap. Loop it under your chin, just nice.”

“But other boys don’t wear hats.”

“Oh, don’t compare. Grandfather got it specially for you, to protect your brain, so you will study better.”

Just then Grandfather overheard our conversation. He walked over from his room and joined our discussion. He was gentle, smiling, and firm.

“Grandson, I bought this hat specially for you, to keep out the sun.”

With reluctance I appeared in school with the cork hat over my little head. As I observed, only a few wore a hat like me. Nevertheless, I consoled myself that perhaps the hat would really help my brain function better than those of the other boys.



“But other boys don’t wear hats.”



A nine-seater mosquito bus.

Second Aunt accompanied me daily by mosquito bus, a nine seater – two rows of four seats in the main cabin and one next to the driver. With Second Aunt I felt very comfortable and secure.

One day in the third month, Second Aunt did not appear at the usual time of one-fifteen after dismissal. I watched the clock and became more and more nervous as the minutes ticked by. The school was almost completely deserted except for a few boys.

I had left my hat on the hat rack in the classroom. Two big boys got hold of it and began to throw and kick it around, as though it were a football! I watched in horror, but being much smaller and very timid, I made no protest. I thought to myself, it may be the finish of my hat with the rough handling going on.

Sure enough, the bigger bully suddenly turned on the hat and began to trample on it. What a destructive pair, I thought. Just then, Second Aunt appeared. I was so happy – and relieved – I burst out in tears. The naughty boys made a hasty retreat and disappeared into the back of the school.

Second Aunt took up the hat and we walked down the path along Towner Road to catch our mosquito bus. I was so delighted to see Second Aunt (and to be freed from my protective headgear!). She said that she would make a report to the Principal.

That wasn't my concern. From that day I went hatless to school like the rest, brain or no brain, heat stroke or not. I did not care. All I knew was my spoken English was getting better by the day, even without that hat!

SCHOOL SPORTS DAY –

Sports Day, from memory, was in April. The school was in carnival mood, with colourful buntings and flags everywhere. The Union Jack atop the flagstaff fluttered proudly in the wind. The play-field had been marked out for the various events of the day.

I found myself entered for two team events: Egg and Spoon Race and Passing the Baton Relay. There were four teams: Red, Blue, Yellow, Green. I belonged to the Blues.

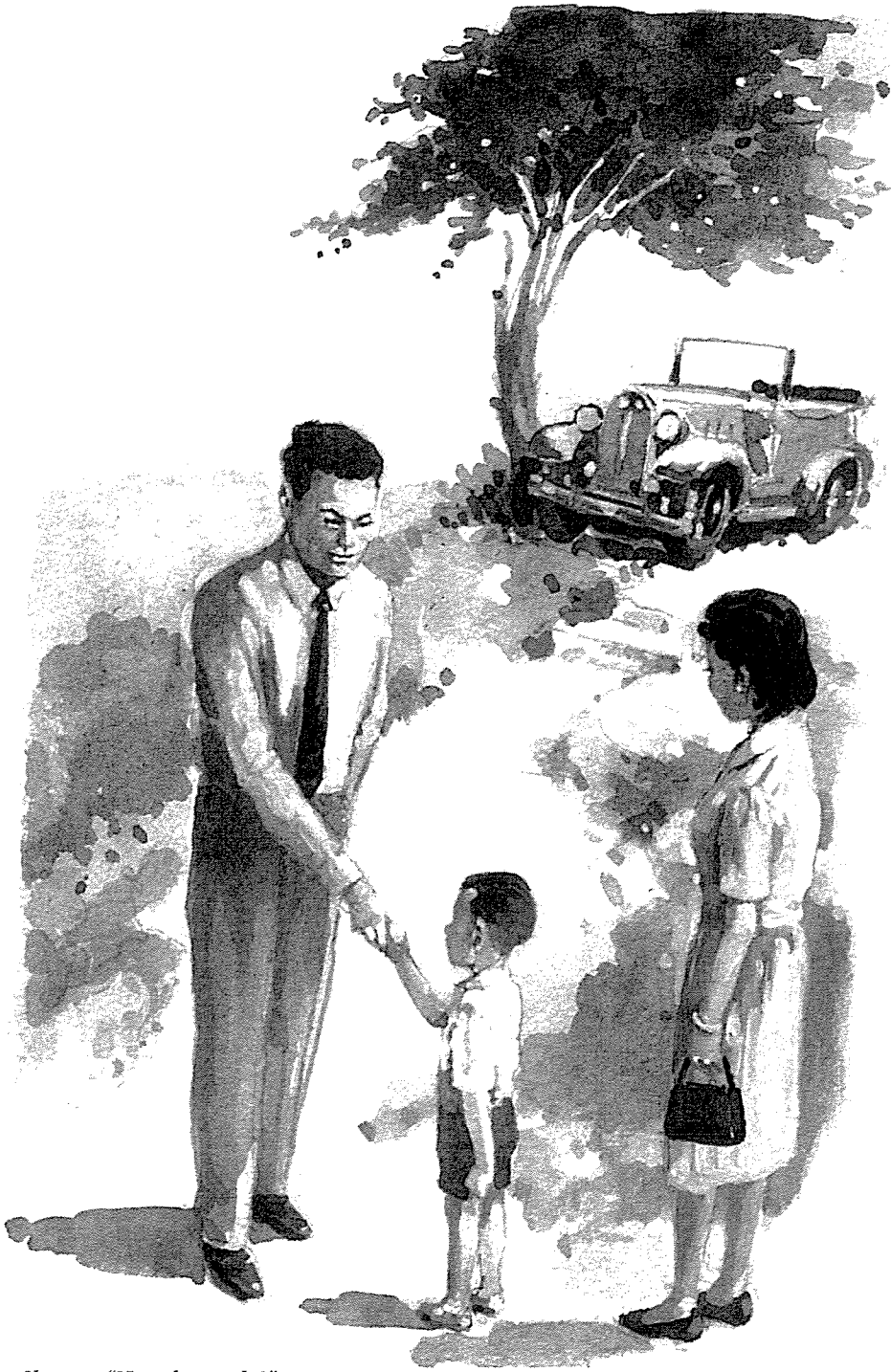
From early morning, guests kept arriving – parents and relatives. Festive music blared from loudspeakers.

Second Aunt was my guardian and guest. My chief concern was to do well for the Blues. Amazingly, the Blues took first prize in both events. Imagine the thrill of winning two prizes for a child of six, recently let out of the isolation of a Senai rubber plantation!

On the way home, Second Aunt carried my prizes: an assortment of English biscuits in a beautiful tin featuring the capitals of the world, and a children's game called Hoop-La. I treasured both these prizes for many months: the tin



Sports Day: egg and spoon race in progress.



*Dr Sheares: "How do you do?"
"I am six years old" was all the English I could remember.*

featuring a dozen capital cities became a valuable educational aid, while the table-top game of skill kept the family entertained through many after-dinner hours.

The best things in life need not cost a lot of money.

THE DAY A VIP CAME CALLING –

One day, there was great news! Small Aunt's doctor friend was coming to visit! The house buzzed with excitement. Who was he?

He was Dr Benjamin Sheares, graduated not many years, and he was young and handsome. Every one was excited except Grandfather! He was unimpressed.

“Who are his parents? What do they do?”

Grandfather was old fashioned.

For some reason, the attention shifted to me. Said Second Aunt, “Siang Hwa, you will get to meet our VIP visitor. He's coming on Saturday afternoon, and you can't speak any English. We must quickly teach you!”

There was no shortage of teachers, everyone anxious to drill me in oral English before Saturday! But what could I learn in five days?

Nevertheless, I learnt some simple conversational English everyday. Excitement mounted by the day. Finally came Saturday! Small Aunt announced, “He is coming at five in the afternoon.”

Sharp at five, an open-hood sports car drew up outside the house. Out stepped Dr Sheares – tall, young, and good-looking!

He walked down the steps from the road to the house. Small Aunt, holding my hand, welcomed the distinguished visitor. He was naturally curious to know who I was. Small Aunt introduced me. I was feeling quite nervous. He shook my hand and said,

“How do you do?”

“I am six years old!”

Dr Sheares smiled. We walked into the house. Grandfather had disappeared into his room.

After a cup of tea and some exchanges of pleasantries, the VIP visitor took his leave and drove off with Small Aunt. Little did I dream that I had met the future President of Singapore and the man whom I would succeed one day as Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Grandfather emerged from his room, looking solemn and unsmiling. In the meantime my older siblings also came out from hiding. “Siang Hwa, how did you do?” they asked.

“I told him my age.”

“Was that what he asked you? What else did he say?”

“Nothing. Next time I’ll do better.”

The “next time” came nineteen years later when he was the Professor and I was his student. In 1951, my medical studies took me to the Kandang Kerbau Hospital. Together with the rest of the Class of 1947, we sat under Singapore’s Father of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

In 1953 I graduated, MBBS, from the University of Malaya, with distinction in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. Big Sister said to me, “Siang Hwa, one day you will succeed Professor Sheares.”

Big Sister was far-sighted. Her prediction came true in 1960 when Professor Sheares left the University for private practice.

In 1971 Professor Sheares was elected to the high office of President of the Republic of Singapore¹, an office which he filled with distinction for eleven years until his death in 1981.

POSTSCRIPT –

In July 1932 I left McNair Road School for Anglo-Chinese School, my school of choice.

In 1935, Small Aunt came under the powerful preaching of Dr John Sung and gave up nursing to become a missionary in China. She returned to Singapore some thirty-five years later.

For me, life in the real world had begun.

¹ In 1972, Small Aunt received an invitation to afternoon tea with President Sheares, meeting him again after thirty-seven years. Big Sister and I were also invited. It was a rare honour to have tea with the President.

8 | ACS FOREVER | Emblem of grand endeavour

In July 1932, I left McNair Road School for Anglo-Chinese School (ACS). The first Friday morning, as I filed into the Chapel Hall with the other boys, my attention was drawn instinctively to the beautiful inscription lining the four walls beneath the high ceiling.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

(Proverbs 3:5,6)

These words of timeless wisdom and truth have blessed countless thousands of pupils who have passed through the portals of ACS. What better way for six and seven year-olds to begin life, instructed early in the ways of God!

To the founding fathers, men like Methodist Bishops Oldham and Thoburn, we owe a debt of gratitude which we can never repay for giving us a school which teaches the everlasting and inerrant Word of God, that priceless Word which builds Christian character.

Today, that Bible emphasis is no more, sadly displaced by a modern and liberal social gospel. The need of the hour is for a clear presentation of the old time Gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone, God's only begotten Son.

As I look back seventy, eighty years, to the days of Coleman Street and Canning Rise, my heart swells with pride that I belong to a grand tradition, the ACS family, which has enriched Singapore society for over a century with the Word of God.

It was from ACS that I received my 3Rs and the grounding for a strong Christian moral character. The inspirational messages at the weekly Chapel Hour, the examples of godly teachers and the Methodist spirit, have all gone to make the ACS experience one priceless gift of life.

From ACS I have gained life-long friends in teachers and classmates, who remain a source of encouragement and inspiration. The teachers who have left a fragrance in the memory are too many to recall individually, but one does not forget Mr Sundram in Standard Two who rewarded honesty with bonus marks, or Mr Lee Choon Eng, Headmaster of Middle School, who bought my younger brother a ten-cent bowl of noodle soup when he fainted from hunger, and Mr Pradhan who bought me a month's supply of Cold Storage fresh milk, a luxury beyond my means, and Mr Lee Choon Ngee (ACS swimming champion) who inspired me to drink a glass of water every morning on rising, now a lifelong habit of seventy years. Such examples of kindly acts would fill many pages if one carefully delves into the dusty memory store of bygone years.

Robert Browning's poem, "Rabbi Ben Ezra" has given us the ACS motto "The Best is Yet to Be." Generations of Old Boys have been blessed by this catchy watchword, to set their sights high and endeavour always to do better.

For interested readers, here is Browning's first stanza:

Grow old along with me!
 The best is yet to be,
 The last of life, for which the first was made:
 Our times are in his hand
 Who saith "A whole I planned,
 Youth shows but half; trust God:
 see all, nor be afraid!"

The alma mater, by this slogan, has challenged generations of students to strive harder, to reach higher and to do better. That spirit is to “Trust God, see all, and not to be afraid.”

All Old Boys like me, who have grown up to love the school song, never fail to be inspired whenever we sing again those stirring lines by poet Henry Martyn Hoisington. Here is the first stanza and chorus:

In days of yore from western shores
 Oldham dauntless hero came
 And planted a beacon of truth and light
 In this Island of the Main.
 Here may it stand from year to year,
 Emblem of grand endeavour.
 God save our land and Heaven bless
 Our ACS for ever!



(Chorus)
 Sing ACS for evermore,
 Our ACS forever
 God save our land and Heaven bless
 Our ACS forever!

How can I ever forget thee, alma mater dear? Distance of years only adds affection to the memory.

Past generations of Old Boys well remember Mr TW Hinch (Principal, 1929 - 1948). He took ACS to heights of excellence. I had the good fortune of four years under his inspirational principalship, and the extra pleasure of visiting him in his home in Ealing, London, after the War.

Mr Hinch brought to ACS his famous Harrow Football Song, “Forty Years On”, which we sang on Founder’s Day each year. Harrow is a famous independent school for boys in the northwest suburbs of London. Its many illustrious old boys include Robert Peel who founded the modern police force, Lord Byron the poet, Jawaharal Nehru the first Prime Minister of India, and eight former British Prime Ministers, best known among whom was Sir Winston Churchill who led his country to victory in World War II.

Here are stanzas one and four plus chorus of the Harrow Football Song.

Forty years on, when afar and asunder
Parted are those who are singing today,
When you look back, and forgetfully wonder
What you were like in your work and your play,
Then, it may be, there will often come o'er you,
Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song
Visions of boyhood shall float them before you,
Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along.

(Chorus)

Follow up! Follow up! Follow up! Follow up! Follow up!
Till the field ring again and again,
With the tramp of the twenty-two men,
Follow up! Follow up!

Forty years on, growing older and older,
Shorter in wind, as in memory long,
Feeble of foot, and rheumatic of shoulder,
What will it help you that once you were strong?
God gives us bases to guard or beleaguer,
Games to play out, whether earnest or fun;
Fights for the fearless, and goals for the eager,
Twenty, and thirty, and forty years on!

I sometimes imagine I might turn the clock back forty, fifty years and re-live my boyhood again! What fun that would be. Then you might wonder, "Which school will you then go to?"

Need you ask?

ACS, of course! ACS forever!

But beyond ACS – *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them* (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

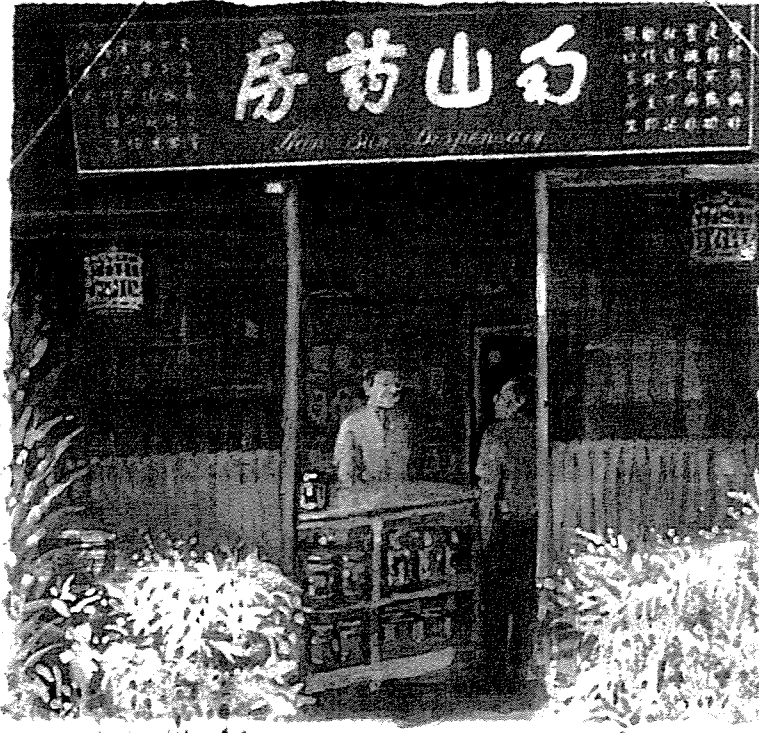
9 | BATU PAHAT | Our family home, 1936-1962

Frank Tan was right: Batu Pahat was three times the size of Kluang and beautiful. A wide river, Sungei Penggarang, formed a natural boundary on its western aspect. A ferry service across the river of about 100 yards (91.4 meters) wide linked up with the road to Muar which was thirty-two miles (51.5 kilometers) to the northwest. The Sungei Penggarang flows west into the Straits of Melaka about seven miles (11.2 kilometers) away.

Father moved us to Batu Pahat in 1936 and we stayed twenty-six years. There we found a Chinese Presbyterian Church with sixty to seventy members, good schools (Chinese and English), a large thriving Chinese community and, to Father's delight, many fellow Teochews.

With the help of Frank Tan, Father found a two-storey shophouse in a side-street off the main road in town. Here, at number 25, Jalan Ismail, Father established his clinic, bearing the name "Nan Sun Dispensary" as in Kluang. The upper floor housed our living quarters.

There were about a dozen shophouses in Jalan Ismail. Interestingly, four were occupied by Japanese, of which there was a laundry, a brothel, a photographer



Father was a lover of birds and plants and souls of men.

and a barber. Consequently, the street was commonly known as Japan Street. Now being wise on hindsight, these were part of Japan's espionage network in Malaya, laying the groundwork for the future overthrow of the British.

Father's practice improved significantly. The bigger Chinese population was a major factor. Having been revived by Dr John Sung, Father became an active member and Elder of the Chinese Presbyterian Church. He helped the pastor to preach once a month.

MOTHER'S WORK –

Mother led the Women's Fellowship in their Weekly Friday Prayer and Visitation ministry. She sought out the poor and neglected members, the sick and infirm, and those in remote villages and rubber plantations.

By prayer and the consolation of the Word, Mother would comfort and encourage, exhort and revive, singing John Sung choruses which never failed to cheer and uplift flagging spirits.

Despite our own meager resources, Mother considered those in want: *She stretcheth out her hand to the poor* (Proverbs 31:20). In her visitations, she took with her an envelope of dollar notes for the relief of the needy.

At home, Mother was an unfailing source of knowledge, with a ready answer to every question. *She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness* (Proverbs 31:23). Mother's words were filled with *wisdom that is from above... pure, then peaceable, gentle* (James 3:17).

Mother was the life of the home, the centre of love and comfort, of peace and joy. *She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness* (Proverbs 31:23). The last to retire at night and the first to rise in the morning, Mother saw to the wellbeing of every member of the household.

Mother was full of the joy of the Lord. She loved to sing the songs of Heaven. She went about her household chores with a song on her lips, and a song in her heart. Indeed, the joy of the Lord was her strength.

Mother was a model of modesty and godliness. She wore no jewelry, make-up, perfume or any expensive or colourful clothing. She owned no property, had no savings, no bank account. Her treasures were laid up in heaven by faithful giving of tithes and thanks offerings. In all her life she never went on any vacation. She wasted no time in reading fiction, but she read God's Word daily.

BAD NEWS –

While the four younger siblings found schools in Batu Pahat, the older ones continued to study in Singapore, returning home during school holidays. We passed our days under British colonial rule, content with the status quo, striving always to do well in the year-end examination, with the hope of obtaining a good Report Card. So life went on, year in year out, for us students without a care in the world. British rule was benign and we were not complaining.

When I returned home for the December holidays in 1941, I was flushed with excitement at the imminent prospect of being in the Senior Cambridge School Leaving year, just a month away, the grande finale of eleven years of school, preparing for higher education.

Little did we dream that the “invincible” British were about to be toppled by a new power from the Orient. My hopes for 1942, shared by thousands of other prospective school leavers in Malaya and Singapore, were cruelly shattered by

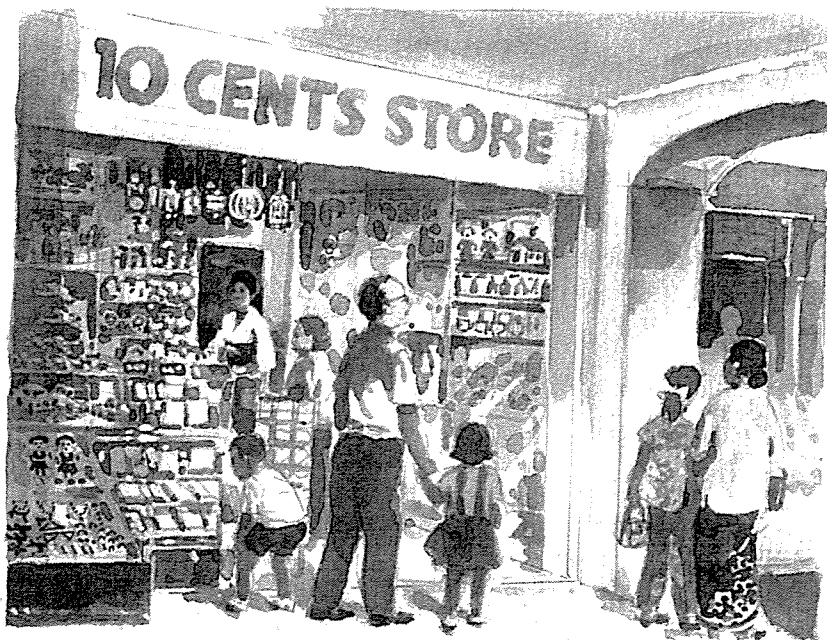
the falling of Japanese bombs on 8 December 1941. Thus began the Pacific War between Japan and the Allies – Great Britain and America.

News of the bombing of Pearl Harbour hit us like a bolt from the blue. It seemed unbelievable that the Japanese had crippled America's Pacific Fleet, and bombed Singapore, the "Impregnable Fortress" of the mighty British Empire!

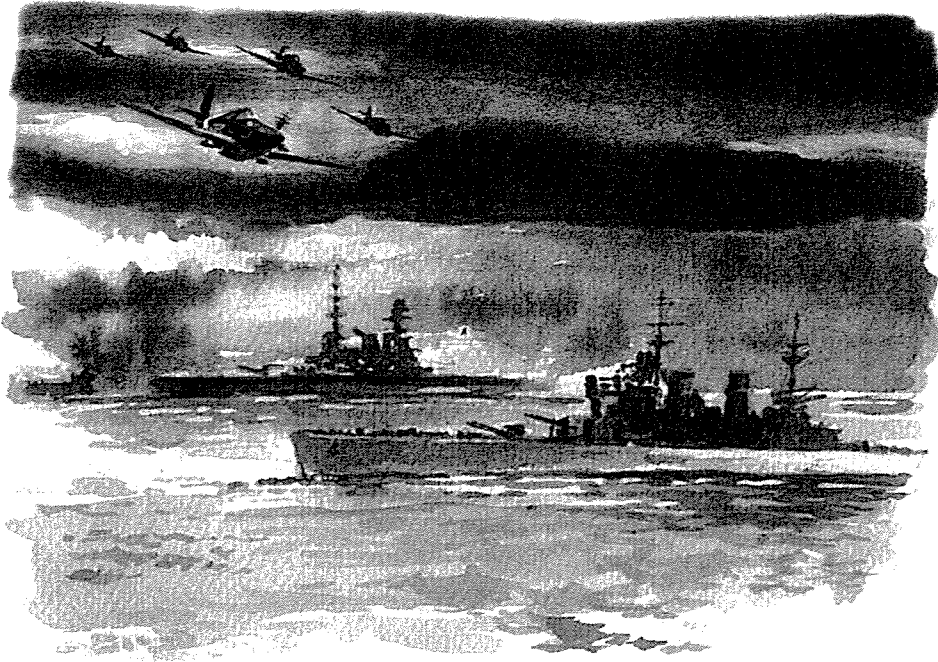
ESPIONAGE NETWORK –

Incredible! We had always regarded the Japanese as a peaceable, hard-working, law-abiding people: shopkeepers, photographers, laundrymen, barbers, doctors, dentists, sailors, estate managers, tradesmen, and operators of Ten Cents Stores selling children's toys and cheap goods.

Suddenly, we woke up to the fact that the Japanese shops in our own street in Batu Pahat had shut down months before the outbreak of hostilities! Obviously there was a secret national war effort in which our innocent-looking Japanese neighbours had played a part. (It was later revealed by British sources that Japan had a highly organised espionage network among their 6,000 nationals resident in Malaya and Singapore.)



"Harmless" Japanese shopkeepers were part of a 6,000-strong espionage network.



British pride was summarily sent to the sea bottom.

FLIGHT TO SINGAPORE –

As soon as war broke out, Father and Mother asked, “Should we stay on in Batu Pahat, or should we evacuate to Singapore?” This burning question demanded a quick answer.

The day after hostilities began, Father took me with him to consult his good friend, a Mr Teo. His advice, “I think I’ll stay put. We have a good country house away from bombs. We’ll be quite safe here.”

Father was not convinced. It was common knowledge that the Japanese had brutally treated the Chinese in China only four years earlier in the Rape of Nanking in which thousands of Chinese had been brutally massacred and many women raped.

Father was also troubled by his former Kuomintang connections. When news came of the sinking of the two British battleships HMS “Prince of Wales” and HMS “Repulse” off Kuantan only two days after the outbreak of war, Father’s mind was made up. Singapore was the place!

By the weekend, the entire family had fled Batu Pahat in two taxis. Father left the house with its contents (including “sensitive material”) in the charge of a close friend, Mr Lim.

A CHANGE OF REGIME –

In Singapore, we crammed into our tiny flat in Tiong Bahru, all told eleven souls. In no time we learnt to obey the air raid siren, and to observe Black Out orders at night. The fear of Japanese bombs raining death from the sky kept us near our air raid shelters underneath the stairs. Each Red Alert signal sent us diving into the shelters, praying on our knees. Our Buddhist neighbours followed us and called on the name of Jesus to save. (Thank God they were converted after the War.)

Our closest call was when bombs fell on the warehouses along Havelock Road by the Singapore River. Powerful shock waves and choking explosive fumes shook us in Seng Poh Road. At the All Clear signal we emerged from our shelter, dazed but unhurt.

The last two weeks of the war kept us indoors and in our shelters most of the day as Japanese shells came screaming overhead thick and fast, exploding with deafening blasts. We escaped unhurt, but our neighbour, a middle-aged man lost a leg on the last day.

It was a welcome relief when the surrender came on 15 February 1942, and the guns fell silent. It was the first day of Chinese New Year.

Suddenly it dawned on us, there was a change of regime: The British had disappeared. Everywhere Japanese troops were in charge. Great fear and uncertainty gripped the city. Life was at a standstill as everybody who had no urgent business remained indoors, nervously waiting to see what would happen next.

Singapore had become part of the Japanese Empire, or to be more exact, a member of the so-called “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”.

We prayed for God’s mercy and awaited developments, for we were displaced persons, Malayan refugees stranded in Singapore.

Batu Pahat seemed so far away, all communications being cut. How did our friends fare during the Japanese advance? How did Nan Sun Dispensary do? These and other questions awaited our return.

British colonial rule was no more. Life would never be as before. What lay ahead, who knows? And I had just turned sixteen. What will the Japanese do to me?

Will they conscript me into the army as cannon fodder?

10 | SUNSET OVER EMPIRE | Britannia rules no more

In school I learnt to speak King's English, read Shakespeare, sang "God Save the King", "Rule Britannia" and celebrated Empire Day. It felt good to belong to the empire over which the sun never sets. No other empire in all history could boast such greatness and durability, until 8 December 1941 sounded its death knell.

Some call it fate, but I think it was God's doing, an event ordered by the Judge of Heaven. It was the Judge who first called the English to rise up to greatness. It was "heaven's command" as that stirring song "Rule Britannia" says:

When Britain first, at heaven's command,
Arose from out the azure main...

That glorious empire had outrun its predestined course, and by the same heaven's command, was about to exit the world stage. *For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.* (Psalm 75:6,7)

The Empire's days were numbered.

BRITISH DEFENCE?

On that fateful day, the impossible became possible: Japanese bombs fell over Singapore, sending shock waves around the world.

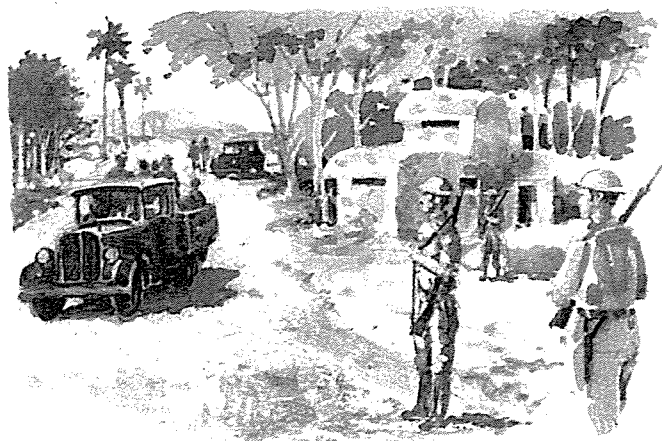
We could not contain the news. What was happening? It was unbelievable but no less true! In the air Japanese Zero fighter aircraft outflew and outgunned the ancient British Buffaloes. What I saw was pathetic, heart-breaking. Where were the Spitfires and Hurricanes which had won the Battle of Britain?

Then I think back on the course of the war in Malaya and Singapore. How was it that the mighty British, masters of a fourth part of planet Earth, could not face up to the Japanese? They had all the time in the world and the best military brains to prepare for the defence of Malaya and Singapore against a known enemy.

But, in action, it was simply no contest. Great Britain and her Allies suffered the worst defeat in British history. How could it be that General Percival and his 130,000 troops, were routed by General Yamashita with 36,000? What happened to the multi-million pound fortresses which the British had built in Singapore and Malaya?

On 5 May 2008, the "New Straits Times" reported that an enormous defence establishment was uncovered in the south-eastern tip of Johor, overlooking the South China Sea. It had been designed to protect Singapore's sea lanes from Japanese landing craft – which never appeared!

I recall, when we fled south from Batu Pahat, we saw British troops manning machine gun nests and pillboxes at strategic points along the main trunk



British pillboxes were monuments of folly.

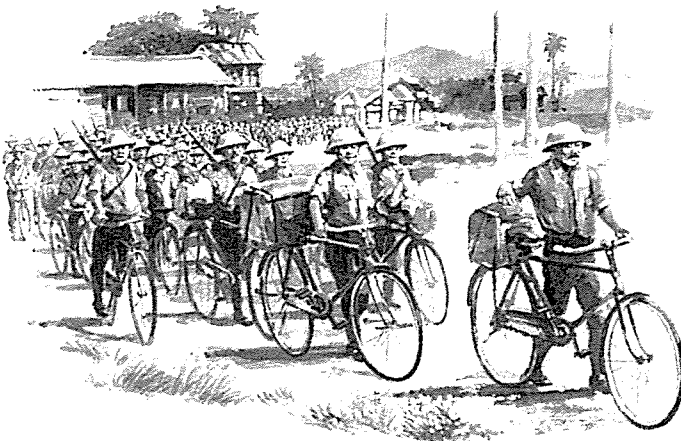
road, expecting the enemy to appear. But they never did. Those enormous 15-inch guns on Pulau Belakang Mati (Sentosa) were armed with Armour Piercing Shells, designed to destroy warships, which did not turn up!

The fixation that enemy forces must come from the sea was a crucial blunder in strategic planning, a fatal blind spot in the British psyche. The Japanese came overland from Kota Baru, sweeping down the Malay Peninsula, outwitting the British. It was brain overwhelming brawn.

JAPANESE ATTACK –

The Japanese people were the most highly educated, industrious and technically advanced in all Asia. Traditionally, they were fiercely loyal to their Emperor whom they revered as a descendent of some heavenly ancestor. In the context of the Pacific War, the Japanese were indoctrinated with the lofty concept of a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” to be built by the Japanese after they had liberated the oppressed peoples of Southeast Asia from their colonial masters. Thus motivated, their spies and under-cover agents operating in Malaya and Singapore had been quietly preparing road maps, charts, photographs, statistics and other sensitive documents, identifying strategic installations – to guide future invasion forces which were similarly persuaded of their mission.

So, according to their well-conceived plan, the Japanese troops came overland on personnel carriers and bicycles, swarming through estate roads and kampong paths, led by the same people who had prepared the road maps! This



“Blitzkrieg Bicycle Troops” led the all-conquering Japanese Army.

was the genius of the all-conquering “Blitzkrieg Bicycle Army” which, by stealth and surprise, overwhelmed the British Allied Forces.

In nine whirlwind weeks, the Japanese conquered all of Malaya, by-passing the fortifications built by the British along the main roads.

SURRENDER –

The sun was fast sinking over the British Empire. Winston Churchill described the defeat as the “worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history.”

By the end of January 1942, the Japanese had gained complete control of Malaya. General Percival and his troops were trapped in Singapore, faced with a most difficult dilemma: to fight on or to surrender. A major consideration was the civilian population, a million lives at stake. The situation was made more critical as the water supply fell into Japanese hands.

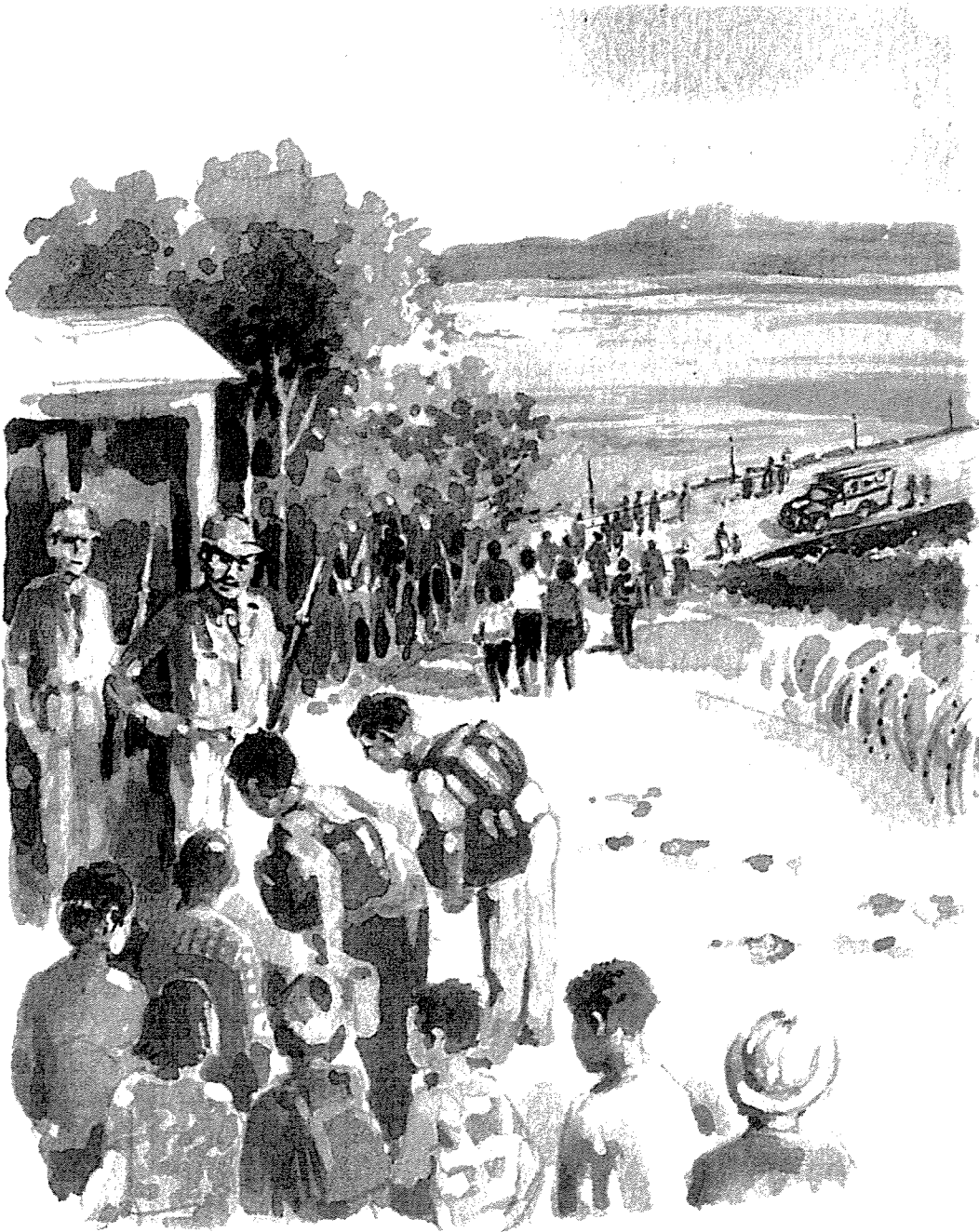
In the midst of the fighting, Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a typical Churchillian message. “The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs ... the honour of the British Empire and of the British Army is at stake. I rely on you to show no mercy or weakness in any form....” It was easier said than done. Why should British Tommies die for British pride in faraway Singapore?

By the morning of 15 February 1942, it was obvious that further resistance would only prolong a lost cause and at the senseless cost of civilian lives. It was a case of Hobson’s choice. General Percival made the decision to surrender: discretion was the better part of British valour. He showed General Yamashita the white flag, thus sparing his troops and the civilian population from further bloodshed. Thankfully, there was no order to fight to the finish, but a sensible consolation for all to usher in the Chinese New Year on a happier note.

Historically, the fall of Singapore marked the beginning of the dismantling of the British Empire. For the people of Malaya and Singapore, it was the dawn of Japan’s dream of a “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”. Thankfully the sphere lasted only three-and-a-half years.

I was one of those who lived through it all and came through unharmed – only older and wiser from the taste of war.

PART THREE | Japanese Years



Refugees from Malaya in reverse exodus, March 1942.

11 | GO HOME! | A Japanese officer came to our aid

15 February 1942, first day of the lunar calendar, was Black New Year in Singapore. The mighty British had meekly capitulated to the all-conquering Japanese Army under General Tomoyuki Yamashita. A new power had arisen over the Far East. Great fear and uncertainty came over the city. Reports of Japanese atrocities, the infamous Rape of Nanking of 1937, and other horror stories had preceded the invaders.

We stayed indoors, just to keep out of harm's way. By much prayer and supplication, the Lord had saved us from the horrors of the so-called "registration" of Chinese males between eighteen and fifty years of age which had resulted in unknown thousands of innocent people being taken away for revenge killings and purging executions on Changi and Punggol beaches and Pulau Belakang Mati (Sentosa).

Shortly afterwards, the Japanese issued an order: All Malayan refugees must go home!

Instead of trying to move the entire family back to Batu Pahat in one operation, Father decided that he and I should return first and get the house cleaned

and ready for the rest to follow at a later date. In any case, the transportation system was practically non-existent.

As we contemplated the return, grave concerns arose. Supposing the Japanese should stumble upon the many photographs and “sensitive” documents in our house, linking Father to the top brass in China, men such as Chiang Kai Shek, the arch-enemy of the Japanese – that would have been fatal for our family. (Those materials had been left behind in Batu Pahat when we evacuated to Singapore in a hurry.)

Father called on Pastor Marcus Chen, a well-known preacher from China, and confided in him our fears. The elderly saint of God, with calm confidence, assured us, “Go in peace. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. Take with you this Psalm 121. Amen.”

The next morning, the family gathered together in prayer to send Father and me off. Big Brother Timothy then drove us to Woodlands and let us off at a respectable distance from the check-point. There we met up with three friends who were also returning to Johor. From then on we made our way on foot.

FORWARD PARTY –

Along the roadside were many burnt-out British military vehicles, silent casualties of the war. At the check-point we bowed to the Japanese sentry who barked some unintelligible words. We had learned to say, “Ohayo gozaimasu” (good morning). The greeting worked.

The causeway crossing was uneventful. Hundreds of others like us walked its length. In Johor Baru we found a lorry bound for Batu Pahat.

Arriving in Batu Pahat, we discovered, to our immense relief, that our friend, Mr Lim Hoon Siang, who had been entrusted with the keys to our house, had taken the initiative and destroyed all of Father’s incriminating photographs and papers. All those materials which had any connection with the Chinese Nationalist Government, especially the pictures taken with General Chiang Kai Shek and other prominent political figures had been consigned to fire. Thank God!

Father breathed a huge sigh of relief, and heartily thanked Mr Lim for what he had done.

Very wisely, however, he had preserved the priceless calligraphy (博愛) writ-

ten for Father by Dr Sun Yat Sen in 1909. Dr Sun was well respected by the Japanese as a peace-loving man and “Father of the Chinese Republic”. During the early days of the Chinese revolution, he had lived a total of ten years in Japan, and was known as “Mr Nakayama” – the Japanese equivalent of his other name, Zhong Shan, 中山.

Our home was in a reasonable state of repair, after being unoccupied for three months. With the help of friends, we cleaned and scrubbed, and got the clinic functioning and the living quarters restored. Then Father began to see patients to get the cash flow going.

With God-given wisdom, Father restored Dr Sun’s calligraphy to its former place on the wall.

OFFICER WITH AN EYE FOR CALLIGRAPHY –

One day, into the clinic walked two Japanese officers, one with a large German Shepherd dog on a leash. Dr Sun’s calligraphy with the name Sun Wen (孫文) instantly caught the eye of the officer with the dog, and he lighted up with a broad smile.

“Som Bong!” he remarked to his companion. (Som Bong being Japanese for Sun Wen.)

“Please sit down. What is your problem?” Father communicated by writing Chinese. The message got through.

“Ear-ache.”

Father examined his ear and gave him a bottle of ear-drops. “Use it morning and night, two drops each time. No charge.”

“Good-bye.”

“Sayonara.” The officer went on his way with his dog.

A week passed by. Father saw a good number of patients daily. Some were old clients who were glad to see him.

Then, surprise! One morning, in walked the same Officer with the German Shepherd.

“How are you today? Is your ear better?”

“No, the same.”

Father examined the ear and gave him more drops.

“Sayonara!”



"Look, Som Bong (Sun Wen)!"

The Japanese loved Dr Sun. I, however, noted the dog – the vital link.

RETURN TRIP –

Shortly afterwards, Father decided that it was time to return to Singapore and fetch the rest of the family. We had been away for over twenty days, without any contact with the family. We called a taxi. By then essential services were returning.

What a tremendous joy and relief it was when we arrived back at our apartment in Seng Poh Road, Tiong Bahru. Mother and the rest of the family received us with unspeakable joy, as though we had come back from the dead!

Together we fell on our knees and gave thanks to God for preserving us through all the days. Psalm 121 had been an immense source of comfort. Father and I called on Pastor Marcus Chen to tell of God's goodness and to thank him. He was pleased and prayed for us.

We began to prepare for the return trip with the family back to Batu Pahat. We held a family conference. There were nine persons: Father, Mother, six siblings and a relative, plus luggage of all sizes and shapes.

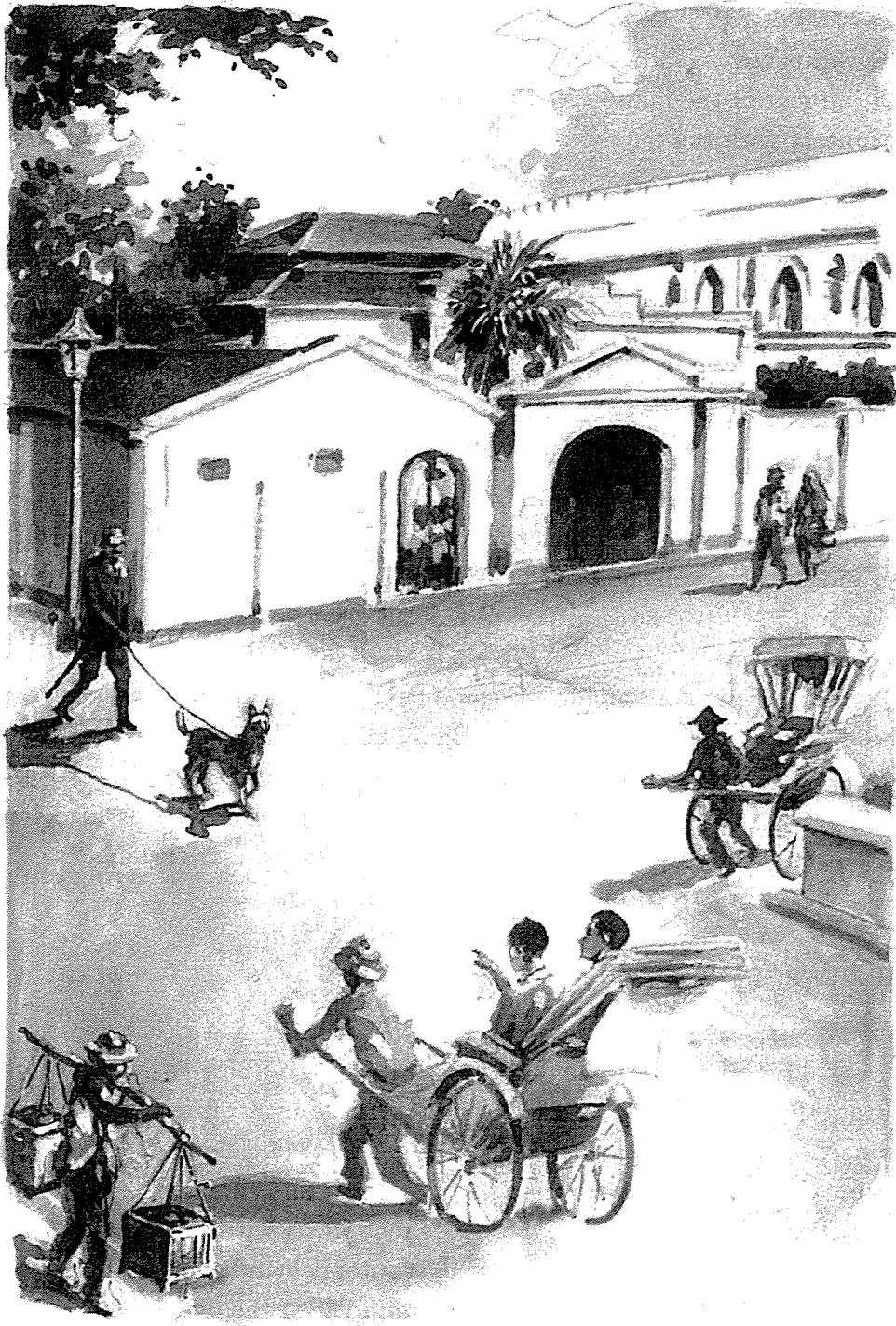
"We will need two large lorries to take all of us and the luggage." This was Father's assessment.

At morning Family Worship, we committed the matter to the Lord in prayer that he would guide us in our quest. Then Father and I set out to look for our transport. In those days man-powered rickshaws were still in common use. We found one in no time. Shortly, our rickshaw man was on Bras Basah Road, heading toward Beach Road where the Malayan lorry terminal was located.

DIVINE APPOINTMENT –

It was late morning and a cool sea breeze was blowing. Our rickshaw man was running along steadily. Suddenly, across the street, on Bras Basah Road, walking from the opposite direction, I spied a Japanese army officer with a German Shepherd! Instantly I recognized the duo – man and dog. For some inexplicable reason, I thought to myself, "Let's speak to him!"

Impulsively, I said to Father, "Stop! See that officer with the dog? Let's speak to him!" Father was puzzled, but agreed. We stopped and paid off the rickshaw man. Then we dashed across the street and ran after the officer who, by then, was some distance away. When we caught up with him, he was puzzled and sur-



"Look! The ear-ache officer and his dog!"

prised. Who are these people? He looked at us. Then a broad smile of recognition spread over his face. We greeted each other like long lost friends!

“Batu Pahat doctor! What is the matter?”

Father took out pen and paper. “Vehicle! Return to Batu Pahat, nine persons.”

The officer pondered a while. Then he beckoned us to follow him. Together we walked back down Bras Basah Road, took the right turn into North Bridge Road, past Capitol Building on Stamford Road corner. Behind Capitol Building in the large car park were a dozen brand new Japanese military trucks belonging to the Army Transport Corp of which our friend was Commanding Officer!

“Tomorrow morning at 9 o’clock two trucks will take you and family back to Batu Pahat!” It was as simple as that.

Amazing kindness! God had sent His angel!

GOD’S PROVISION –

Next morning at 9 o’clock, two brand new covered trucks promptly rolled up in front of 21A Seng Poh Road. We had just finished Family Worship. With much excitement, we loaded our belongings and ourselves onto the vehicles.

On the windscreen of each vehicle was prominently displayed a long white label: “Official Vehicle issued by authority of the Officer Commanding.”



Two army trucks by courtesy of the Officer Commanding!

Before 10 am we were on our way. We thanked God for sending us help from such an unexpected quarter. We sang praises to God all the way to Woodlands and the Singapore-Johor causeway. At every check-point, the white labels worked wonders. They exempted us from having to get down, walk and bow to the sentries. Soldiers on sentry duty took a cursory look at the bundles of household stuff and simply waved us on. We were spared the normal security check a dozen times, all the way from Singapore to Batu Pahat.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? (Genesis 18:14)

Looking back, we see clearly the good hand of God ordering and directing an amazing sequence of events to accomplish His eternal purposes. In His children's lives, nothing happens by chance. Our God is in control at every stage.

In time past, our God parted the sea to open a highway as on dry land for His people; He caused a dumb ass to speak to Balaam, sparing a disobedient prophet's life; He sent ravens to feed Elijah during a time of famine. All this, and much more, God did in time past.

In our time, during the immediate post-war period, God prepared a German Shepherd to be the vital connecting link in a rescue operation for His people in an unusual time of need.

Through it all, we learnt one lesson: nothing is too hard for the Lord. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. And He is mindful of His children's every need.

Only have faith!

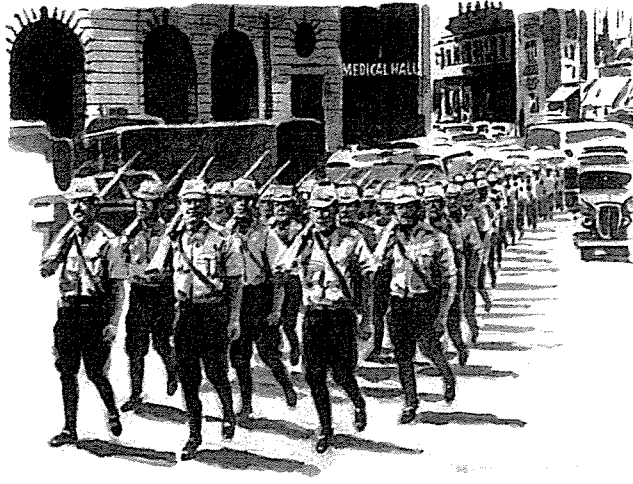
12 | CO-PROSPERITY | Untimely imperialist dream

Prelude to Prosperity

Sirens wailing in the ear
Holding men in mortal fear;
Japanese Zeros roam the sky,
British Buffaloes fear to fly.

Terror raining from the air,
Dear life hanging by a hair;
'Xploding bomb and flying shell,
Sounds of death and smell of hell.

Forget the past because it's past,
Welcome the Sphere, it's built to last;
Banzai, Banzai, Prosperity!
Only look East, everybody!



Triumphant Japanese troops marching down Battery Road.

The Japanese were naturally proud of their stunning military success. In nine whirlwind weeks they had overwhelmed the mighty Allied Forces. The greatest World Empire in history had meekly bowed to the unknown power from the Land of the Rising Sun.

With the vanquished confined in Changi Prison, the victorious Japanese Army marched down Battery Road through Singapore's city centre, announcing the beginning of the Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The Chinese population watched from behind windows and shuttered doors, as the conquerors marched on. Japan's atrocities in Manchuria (1931) and China (1937) had preceded them. People were apprehensive. Would the Japanese do less to Singapore's Chinese population? Our people had sent help to China. That was unforgiveable. The Japanese had a long memory.

Shock waves of fear and grief swept over the population, barely recovered from the trauma of war. What lay ahead, who could tell? Singapore was a small island and the people were holed in, like caged rats, nowhere to run or escape.

We had heard of the Japanese Military Police, the dreaded Kempeitai. Now those men were at our very doorsteps, operating through informers and spies. Their headquarters, located at the YMCA on Stamford Road, became synonymous with terror, torture and death.

The Japanese military were everywhere, guarding vital installations and checkpoints. Communication was minimal as few understood Japanese. But we quickly learnt to bow and say, "Ohayo gozaimasu" in the morning.

LIFE UNDER THE JAPANESE –

The Japanese came with civilian administrators ready to run the country. A former diplomat with the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Mamoru Shinozaki, who spoke fluent English, became the chief civilian administrator. He turned out to be a kind and humane individual. By timely intervention, he saved many from the Kempeitai's torture chambers. This was a bright spot in a black picture.

Singapore was the grand prize of the Pacific War. The new masters marked their conquest by renaming it Syonan (昭南) meaning "Light of the South."

The authorities tried hard to change our aspirations, no more to look west but to look east. Japan and things Japanese were to be the new focus. We kept Tokyo time, which was one hour ahead of Singapore time. This was not a bad thing as it was daylight saving.

Our family suffered little during the Japanese Occupation. While the Japanese soldier is traditionally portrayed as brutal, cruel and unfeeling, those whom our family encountered were kind and caring without exception. We had our normal three meals daily, without luxuries. We planted tapioca to supplement our rice. Essential items were rationed, such as rice, flour, sugar, petroleum.

Not having to leave home for Singapore, I got to know my parents much more intimately. It was during those years that I drew close to Mother and got to know her better – her love and care for family, for Father and for us children. I got to appreciate Mother, how she slaved for the family cheerfully, without a murmur, day in day out, without any vacation.

Mother taught me how to cook, to bake cakes, to keep house, and to make the dollar go further. It was such a joy to be with Mother. At last, I was able to do something useful for the one who had served the family all her life, not forgetting to mention that she was the one who gave birth to me.

English schools were closed. To keep the mind active, I attended Japanese language (Nippon Go – 日本語) school and went through four grades, from the lowest (beginners) to the highest (special). This I found challenging and interesting. It helped me understand Japanese culture.

But deep in my heart I was not convinced that the Co-Prosperity Sphere was going to last. Surely the British will return, once the war in Europe was over.

Feelings apart, our family was united in praying for the British to return – which they did, in time.

In Batu Pahat under Japanese rule, time passed slowly. I made myself useful in Father's clinic, helping Father and Big Sister in their daily routines. I asked myself, "What does the future have for me?" I was seventeen years of age.

Then it happened. One night about 8 o'clock, a middle-aged Chinese man in obvious distress knocked on the door. "Doctor, my daughter is in trouble. She has been in labour the whole afternoon. Please come. I have a taxi waiting."

Big Sister asked for more information. She packed her doctor's kit, putting in a pair of obstetric forceps, a bottle of Dettol disinfectant, cotton swabs, gloves, scissors, surgical sutures, forceps and needles, and masks.

The taxi took us to an attap house in a rubber estate. In the bedroom lay a young woman groaning in pain. Her mother was stroking her face and whispering words of encouragement. Big Sister washed her hands in Dettol, put on gloves and examined the patient. The birth passage was fully dilated and the baby's head was visible, quite swollen from the prolonged labour. She prepared to apply obstetric forceps.



The mother at the head end lit up a cigarette and put it to her daughter's mouth. "Puff it in, suck hard," the elder woman urged. Obediently the poor girl huffed and puffed. Big Sister applied the forceps and exhorted the patient to push. "Keep pushing with all your might!" she said, pulling on the forceps.

Soon Big Sister was exhausted. Suddenly she turned to me and said, "Siang Hwa, come and lend me a hand. Scrub up and put on gloves."

All this while I had stood by, rooted to the spot, awed by things I had never seen before. Now came the greater shock of Big Sister's call! Obediently I scrubbed my hands and put on gloves. She gave me the handles of the forceps and with her guidance I pulled. Amazing! The baby's head moved, bit by bit, slowly but surely. When most of the head and face appeared, Big Sister took over. She removed the blades and manually completed the delivery.

The baby emerged with a lusty cry. Hurray, it's a girl! The patient heaved a sigh of relief that the ordeal was finally over. When told that it was a girl her face fell: The husband wanted a boy! But the mother was quite pleased that she had played a part, administering "nicotine amnesia!" Now she was a happy grandmother. The patient's father appeared and thanked Big Sister for the successful delivery of his first grandchild. But the real heroine was the young mother who had endured the whole birth process without a murmur. She was very brave.

I helped Big Sister clean her instruments and pack her bag. In the taxi, on the way home she said, "When you deliver a baby, you win the gratitude of the family: husband, father, mother. Siang Hwa, seriously, make this your life work."

I pondered in silent contemplation.

14 | STORY TELLING | Father's eleventh hour escape

Hanging inside Father's wardrobe in Batu Pahat was a Cantonese peasant's blue samfu (work-suit) together with an old straw hat. What were they doing there, year after year? We had never seen Father wear them or take them out.

One day, youngest sister Siew Mui's curiosity could no longer be contained. "Papa, there is a blue samfu in your wardrobe. You never wear it. Whose is it?"

"Ah, that's a long story, and an exciting one. I shall tell you tonight, after dinner." We children pricked up our ears with excitement: "Tonight!" That was in 1943, during the Japanese Occupation.

That night after dinner, we gathered for our usual Family Worship. We sang our favourite chorus:

Never fear! He is near;
Look to no man,
Care not what the world may plan;
Only trust in the Lord,
All the way to Beulah Land!

Afterwards, with Mother by his side, Father unveiled the “Mystery of the Blue Samfu.”

“My dear children, the fact that I am here is only by the amazing mercy of God who spared me from certain death in a way that I can only describe as miraculous and supernatural. God intervened by angels!”

Today we don’t hear of angels: angel stories are found only in the Bible. The most famous in the Old Testament are Daniel in the lions’ den and Daniel’s three friends in Nebuchadnezzar’s burning fiery furnace.

For envy, Daniel’s enemies had plotted and schemed. As a result, Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. But the King loved Daniel dearly and he passed the night in sleepless vigil. Next morning he *...went in haste unto the den of lions... (and) he cried with a lamentable voice... O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel... O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me.... (Daniel 6:19-22).*

God sent His angel and shut the lions’ mouths! Angels are ministering spirits of God which perform His bidding. They are there just when needed.

“Now my dear children, God’s angels are sent to help God’s people according to their needs. In the days of the New Testament Church, they were no less active, neither had they lost any of their ancient power.”

TAKEN CAPTIVE AND DOOMED –

Father was thirty-six, with three children, and God had unfinished work of the Kingdom waiting for him. His time to die was not yet!

His story continues: In my youthful enthusiasm I got involved in politics, little suspecting that in those early post-revolution days, politics was a highly dangerous business. For the unwary and those who should fall into the wrong hands, it might cost them their lives, as I was soon to find out. In those days, life was cheap.

One fateful day, I walked into a deadly trap and was taken captive in Guangzhou. The bandits took me to a country hideout. My prison cell was in a barrack-like building. The day was too short as the minutes flew by. In an adjoining room my captors were playing cards, swearing and drinking. A young man stood guard at the door. Execution was scheduled for midnight. Just one bullet

would do the job. Death stared me in the face.

I pondered the prospect of instant death. Never had my mind been so troubled. I was like a bird in a cage, helpless, hopeless, abandoned by man, and marooned in the midst of nowhere.

But God had not forsaken me.

I thought of Mother and the three older children in Hong Kong. I thought of the relatives and brethren of the Church. And, naturally, I thought of God. Never had I prayed so hard, so fervently and earnestly.

On my knees, from my heart, I prayed the prayer of my life. Did not my God promise: *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not* (Jeremiah 33:3)?

From the depths of my soul, I poured out my heart unto the Lord, as I might not live to pray again, for I was a dying man appointed to die at the hour of midnight.

But I took God at His word: His promises are yea, and amen. He is the Almighty, the authority over life and death. If the time is not yet that I should die, then arouse myself I must. God willing – freedom and life, at best. But, at worst, death – no worse than the fate determined by my captors.

If so, why do nothing?

So, I prayed: *Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: Salvation belongeth unto the LORD... Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me* (Psalms 3:7,8; 71:2).

A STRANGE PROMPTING –

I poured out my heart unto the Lord, and He heard my cry. As I got up from my praying, I heard a voice, as though someone was speaking into my ear: “Go, drink water!”

Strange. What is the meaning?

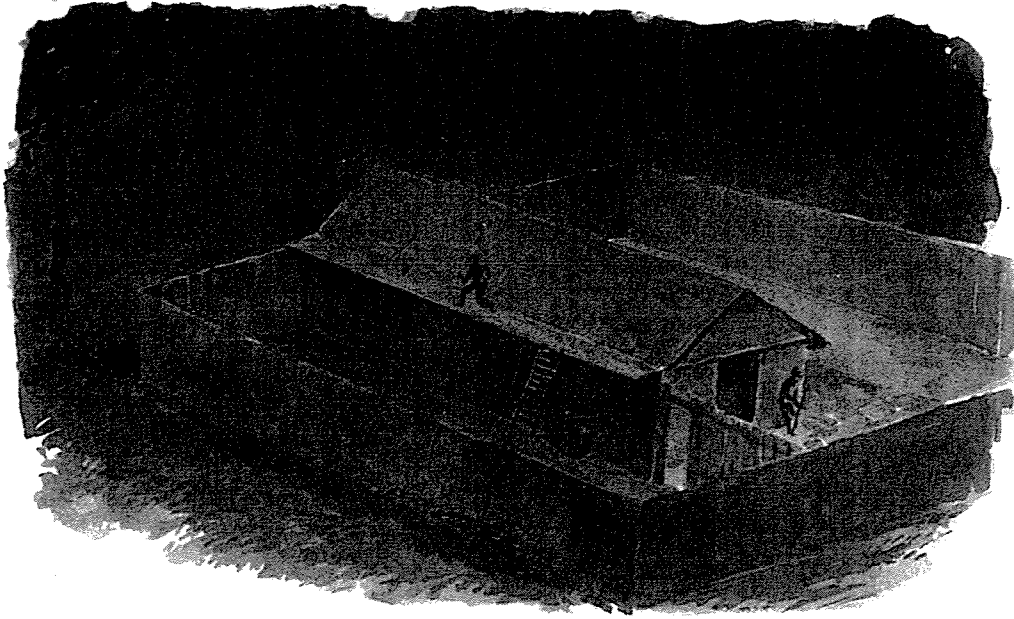
“Go drink water!” The same voice, the same words came a second time, clear as a bell. Two are a confirmation: the Lord was speaking.

Lord, help! I walked to the door. The young sentry looked at me.

“What do you want?”

“I’m thirsty. Any water?”

The sentry pointed to the back of the house and said, “There’s a jar of water



*Run for dear life! Why wait to be shot?
Father's miraculous escape from execution.*

in the back yard, help yourself to your last drink.”

With measured steps I walked to the back. The yard was deserted. I got my bowl of water. As I drank I surveyed the scene. The fence was too high to climb, the exit door was chained.

The roof! I saw a step-ladder. This is it, now or never! In two strides I was up the ladder, on the roof! Angel hands must have buoyed me on. As light-footed as I could I ran the length of the building and, in one great leap, I landed on the ground below, in a little lane behind my prison house.

REFUGE –

Now I ran for dear life! I ran like the wind along a country lane, through some woodland, as fast as my legs could carry me. On and on I ran until I spotted an isolated farmhouse with chickens scratching around, dogs barking, and an old woman sitting at the door.

I ran straight up to her. “Old lady, save me! Bandits are coming to kill me!”

Amazing! Without hesitation the woman took me inside, showed me the loft and hid me under a heap of hay. “Keep quiet; lie still. You’ll be all right!”

The moments flew by, my heart pounding away. I kept quiet as a mouse. Soon there was a commotion: loud excited voices and running feet amidst the cackling of chickens and barking of dogs.

“Woman, we’re looking for a man. Did he come this way?”

“What man? You rowdy people, you have frightened my fowls. Go away!”

The voices subsided. The footsteps took another direction and soon all was quiet. After what seemed an age, the woman of the house came in. “Come down now. The men have gone. What are you doing in this part of the world?”

I told her my story; “I am a revolutionary, a follower of Dr Sun Yat Sen. My pursuers are bandits. They are out to kill me. Will you help? I must get back to Hong Kong!”

The woman listened attentively. Did she believe my words? I wondered. All the time I prayed a silent prayer: God of my fathers, save me from violent men!

“Wait here!” She walked out of the house and disappeared down the lane. After a long time, perhaps half-an-hour, she returned.

“You must wait till it is night.” She then went out and went about doing her farm work.

SAMFU AND STRAW HAT -

Soon after nightfall, two men appeared at the door as if they were out of nowhere. Said the leader, "I will take you to the Hong Kong ferry terminal. Follow three paces behind me. You must not be seen walking by my side. Watch my heels: they are marked with white paint. You will be able to spot them in the dark. I will walk very fast. Can you follow? You must walk between us!"

Having been a footballer, I assured my guide: "I'll be right behind you."

"Here's a samfu. You must not wear your city clothes. Quickly change, and here's a farmer's straw hat. You will look like one of us."

A meal washed down with hot tea was the send-off by my woman saviour.

"Goodbye, Ma'am. How can I thank you?"

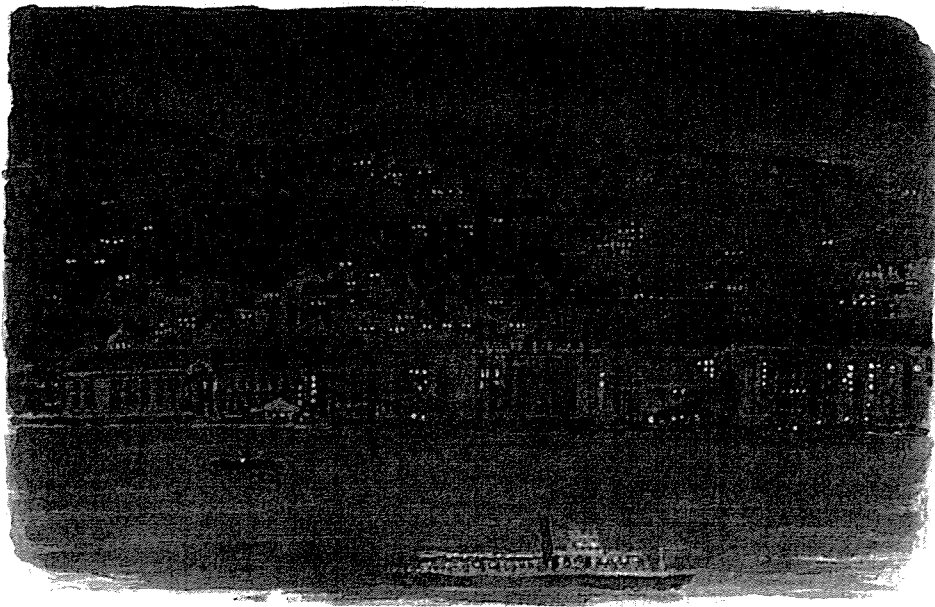
Then we started off, one guide three steps in front, and the other three steps behind at a brisk clip. As we walked we passed other travellers on the road. At the city gate we went through two sentry check points. My farmer's garb with straw hat made for a smooth passage. The sentries did not take a second look.

Nevertheless my heart was madly pounding inside me. It almost stopped when the sentry posts appeared, but we went through without a hitch.

The lead man knew the roads like the palm of his hand, weaving in and out of the busy city traffic, through main streets and sidelanes. We just kept walking, never speaking a word. It must have taken close to three hours when we finally arrived at Guangzhou harbour's Hong Kong ferry terminal.



Escape in the night.



Hong Kong harbour by night.

“Your fare is paid; here’s the ticket. This boat will take you to Hong Kong. Goodbye and good luck!”

My guides faded into the night, leaving me alone with God and a hundred other passengers. Ahead – Hong Kong, and a new lease of life.

As the ferry boat pulled away, heading eastward, I heaved a sigh of relief and whispered a prayer to the Almighty for sparing me from certain death: “Thank you, Lord, for so great a salvation!”

Thus ended Father’s enthralling story.

MOTHER’S VIGIL IN HONG KONG –

After Father’s capture, Mother received a message: “Your husband is in our custody. Tonight he will be shot!”

Mother was stunned. How can this be? “Surely God will hear my prayer. He will never forsake me! My husband has done no wrong: he is innocent. Lord most merciful, please save him.”

On her knees she poured out her tears before the Lord. “Look at these three children, Lord! Siew Ai, Siang Hui, Siang Yew. Surely you, Lord, can save their Father from bloody men.”

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16)

Mother prayed without ceasing. All the while that she was on her knees, Father was on the run, fleeing from his captors, running to the farmhouse prepared by God to be a refuge from his pursuers.

Imagine the emotional release the next morning when Father's knock came at the door: "I'm home! Thank God!" What a tearful reunion there was when he walked into the house – a free man, reunited with wife and children. On the knees, the family poured out their ardent prayer of thanks:

*I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.
But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer.
Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry:
I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.
(Psalms 34:4, 66:19, 106:44, 118:21)*

God had prepared three total strangers to perfect His rescue operation beyond all human comprehension. Dare I say, "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent angels to save Father out of the hands of his captors?"

Angels or humans – what does it matter? We only know that our God *is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...* (Ephesians 3:20).

Through all this, Father taught us one great lesson: "Never to say die," but to trust in the Lord. He is a very present help in trouble.

Thus ended our extraordinary Family Worship and a story which we children have not forgotten. The lesson is clear. Our God is a promise-keeping God.

*... for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.
(Hebrews 13:5,6)*

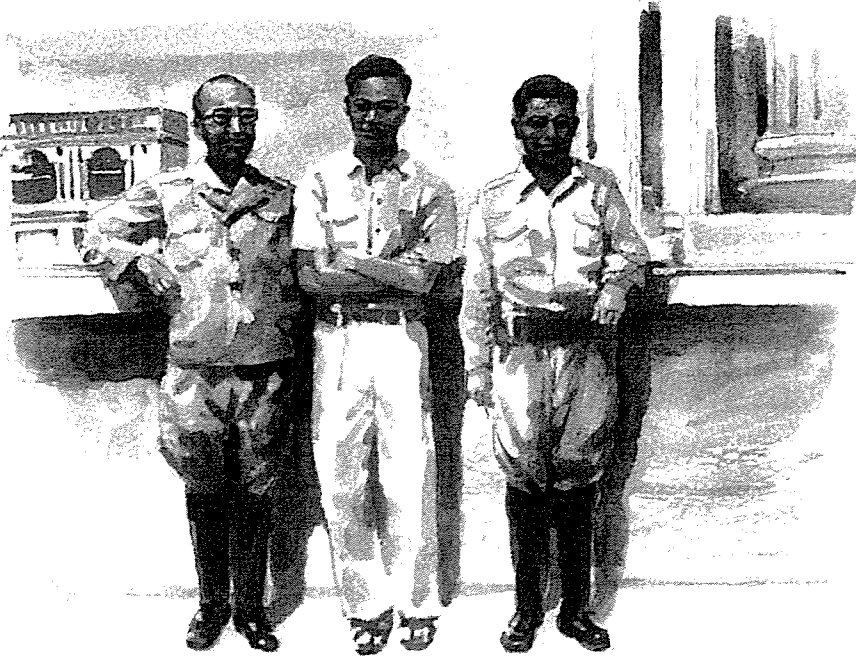
In the final months of the Japanese Occupation, underground sources kept up a steady supply of bad news for the Co-Prosperity Sphere. Setbacks on every front painted a black picture for the Japanese – worried masters of East Asia.

Our money suffered a drastic change. The old British “tiger currency” had been replaced with Japanese “banana notes.” These were issued on demand without assets backing, leading to runaway inflation. Toward the end of the Occupation, the banana notes were not worth the paper on which they were printed.

Father and Mother had heard of the Japanese Army Auxiliary. In 1943, I was in my 18th year, eligible for recruitment. What must we do? My parents had a bright idea. Big Brother, Timothy, was a Trainee Legal Officer attached to the Supreme Court in Singapore. Perhaps he could find me a job there.

“Yes,” was his prompt reply. “My Chief, Judge Sakamoto, says there is a need for a Junior Clerk in our office.”

On application I was accepted. What a relief! I left home and Batu Pahat to take up the post of Junior Clerk at the Supreme Court in High Street, safe



With Mr Shibuya (left) and Mr Hattori (right).

from Japanese Army recruitment. My Japanese bosses were kind to me. They helped me settle into my job. The Chief Clerk, Mr Shibuya, spoke no English, so we communicated in Japanese. My language studies had taken me to Middle Grade. My second boss, Mr Hattori, spoke fair English (equivalent perhaps to my Nippon Go) and we became quite chummy as I advanced in my language studies. By 1945, I had passed Special Grade and, on occasion, I was called upon to interpret in court.

CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE?

Did the Japanese entertain hopes that their “Co-Prosperity Sphere” would survive in the long term? Those who saw the big picture of America’s unstoppable advance in the Pacific, and Japan’s setbacks, especially in their ill-fated campaign in Burma and India, would have harboured serious doubts about Japan’s future. However, for the Japanese bureaucrats and administrators, it was business as usual.

They pressed on with their normal day-to-day routines, recruiting and training Legal Officers and others for the Civil Service. Promising young people were

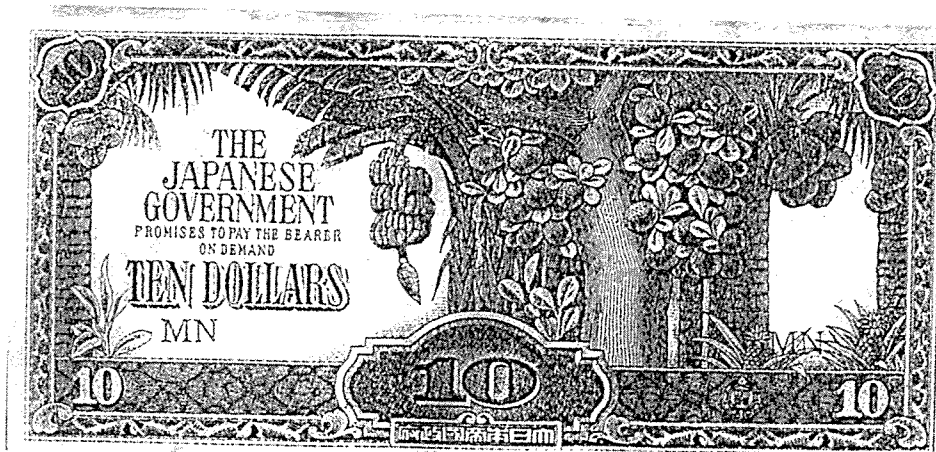
sent to Japan for higher education. The Medical College was revived and re-located in Malacca. These were serious long-term projects, reflecting Japanese confidence in the future. The Japanese were ambitious in the pursuit of their grand plan.

However, they made the fatal mistake of taking on the world's rising Number One Super Power. By the summer of 1945, America's atom bomb was ready. President Truman gave the order and the first bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. In an instant, some 100,000 Japanese were reduced to ashes. This was a historic event in the annals of war: the era of nuclear warfare had begun.

Three days later, on 9 August 1945, a second bomb hit Nagasaki with equal destructive force. The Japanese people were the first victims of this awesome new weapon. The instantaneous destruction of two major cities shook the nation. The Emperor, putting aside his "heaven-born status", capitulated. Thus ended the Pacific War started by Japan on 7 December 1941.

In Singapore, Japan's formal surrender took place on 12 September 1945, bringing to a close a dark chapter in Singapore's history. Japan's dream of a Co-Prosperity Sphere fizzled into the mist of history.

To the Asian people, particularly to us in Singapore, the events of the Japanese Occupation had kindled a new sense of nationalism and self-determination. If the great powers of Great Britain, Holland and France had been unable to protect millions of their subjects in the colonies from the lone aggressor, should they continue to rule over them?



Japanese "banana notes" became worthless after the war.

In September 1945, the British returned to Singapore, but things were never the same again. A spirit of independence had entered into our thinking. The days of colonialism were numbered. The sun was fast setting over the greatest World Empire in history.

Needless to say, with the Japanese surrender, I returned home to Batu Pahat. There I passed the rest of 1945, awaiting the re-opening of my beloved Anglo-Chinese School. What will it be like for me after four years of intellectual stagnation?

But that was not a big worry. All of us were only too impatient for the British to return and things to normalize. My chief concern was to redeem the lost years.

The return of power and administration to the British would take time. Batu Pahat became a political no man's land. The Japanese simply disappeared from sight. Everybody was expecting the British to return, but the question was when? There was a period of uncertainty and unease of about three weeks – ten days on either side of 1 September 1945. During this waiting interval some unusual things happened.

SAVING BOON LIANG –

One day, while we were having our morning Family Worship, a certain friend of the family, a young man in his late twenties, hurriedly came a-visiting. He was obviously in trouble, nervous and apprehensive of something.

“Dr Tow and Mrs Tow, may I have a private word with you?”

“By all means. What is troubling you, Boon Liang?” said Father.

“They are looking for me – those 3-star people.”

These were the members of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, the MPAJA of the Malayan Communist Party.

Boon Liang was a somewhat mysterious character, having dealt in Japanese patent medicines on the black market and a secret listener to Voice of America broadcasts on the short-wave radio. Now the 3-star people were on his trail.

Mother took him upstairs and hid him under the bed in our guest room. This was a risky thing to do. What if the MPAJA should discover Boon Leong? We felt very nervous.

We resumed our Family Meeting: Father, Mother and six children. Shortly

afterwards, two teenage soldiers with guns arrived at the front door, asking to search the house for a man. Mother took them on a tour of the house, downstairs and upstairs. They searched everywhere, and finding nobody, they left. Amazingly, they did not look under the beds.

What a relief! Boon Liang stayed the rest of the day, and slipped out by the back door when all was dark and the coast was clear. We never saw him again.

THE FATE OF TRAITORS –

The next day, the sound of aircraft overhead was heard. Everybody ran excitedly onto the streets. Leaflets were dropping from the air. They contained a brief announcement in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. It said: The Japanese have surrendered, the British are due back very soon. All people are to keep calm and observe law and order – British Military Administration.

Two days later, about mid-morning, there was an unusual commotion outside Father's clinic. In the street was a group of youths in military uniform of the MPAJA, about twenty strong, marching in orderly formation, carrying weapons on their shoulders. Marching with them in their midst was a miserable looking middle-aged Chinese man, dressed in black with hands bound together at the



Three-star army marching with their prisoner.

wrists. A large cloth banner, suspended by two bamboo poles, displayed the man's crime. It read "Traitor Rebel."

A crowd of fifty to sixty men and youths walked along with the MPAJA contingent as they made their way through Batu Pahat in what was presumably a pre-execution parade.

It was later reported that the condemned man was taken to a cemetery three miles out of town and shot. Such was the fate of traitors who had collaborated with the Japanese.

Summary executions and revenge killings were not uncommon during the few weeks after the Japanese surrender and before the British return.

About the middle of September 1945, to our great relief, the British finally returned and the British Military Administration (BMA) restored law and order over the country, after an absence of almost four long years. Thank God for answering our prayers.

It felt like old times, but with a difference. The British rulers had lost their aura of colour superiority and invincibility. As for me I was glad to return to ACS to prepare for my Senior Cambridge School Leaving Certificate.

Co-prosperity, like a bad dream, was soon out of sight, out of mind.

Life must go on.



Mother incomparable.

After four years' study of Nippon Go, it was relief beyond words to see Nippon go – for good. The days flew by as I prepared to leave home in Batu Pahat and return to ACS, Singapore. My personal belongings were few. In anticipation of the daily trip from home in Tiong Bahru to ACS in Cairnhill, I bought an old Raleigh bicycle.

I was the only one leaving for Singapore. Big Sister remained at home to take charge of Father's clinic. Big Brother, married in 1940, was already living in Singapore. Second Brother had left for University in Hong Kong that same year. The rest of the siblings would be attending school in Batu Pahat.

I continued my daily duties, keeping house and clinic in order. Finally came the last day at home, 31 December 1945. It was my last night with Mother.

We talked into the night. I told Mother of my needs in the New Year: school fees, books and sundry items, and pocket money. Mother opened her drawer and counted out the dollars and cents.

“Mother, you have not much left for the house!”

“Do not worry, son. God will provide.”

But that was how the family lived, from one day to another, looking to our Father in Heaven to answer our prayer: *Give us this day our daily bread.* (Matthew 6:11)

I looked at Mother. She seemed a little solemn. I suppose she was missing Second Brother. Only two weeks earlier we had received his airletter from Calcutta, India. It was like a bolt from the blue. We had lost all contact with him during the Japanese years. Now in his first letter after nearly four years we read that he had fled Hong Kong with a group of other medical students for Chungking, China. There he joined China National Aviation Corporation as a radio operator on board their cargo planes, flying between Chungking and Calcutta, transporting essential supplies for the Nationalist Government.

We could hardly believe our eyes! He was arriving in Singapore at the end of March 1946!

Father and Mother were happy and relieved beyond words at the wonderful news. We talked into the night. We prayed, *The Lord bless thee and keep thee.* (Numbers 6: 24)

Finally, past midnight, I said, "Mother, I will work hard, do my best. I will make a place of rest for you. You have toiled all your life for us. We can never repay you. Sleep well, Mother. See you in the morning. Good night."

MY LAST GLIMPSE OF MOTHER –

New Year's Day 1946. After breakfast we gathered for Family Worship. All the family gathered together: Father, Mother, Big Sister and the five of us younger siblings. Little did we dream that this was a family farewell meeting not for me only, but for Mother as well.

At 9 o'clock sharp the taxi showed up outside Father's Nan Sun Dispensary. Time to depart! All the good-byes were said, without tears.

Father and Mother saw me to the taxi. My bundle of personal effects went into the boot. My old Raleigh bicycle was secured to the back of the taxi. A last clasp of Mother's hand and, "Goodbye Mother. Goodbye Father." It was a painful parting.

As the taxi drew away, I looked at Mother standing with hand raised outside the dispensary, silent and forlorn. One wave of the hand and farewell! Little did I guess, it was a last goodbye.

CALLED HOME BY GOD –

Nine weeks later I returned to an empty house, emptied of the happy welcome of the one who had brought me into the world: a house emptied of her cheerful voice. Mother lay cold and lifeless.

Mother dearest, gone to be with God! Her last sickness was a fatal fever. By her own testimony, “A large mosquito bit me.” Could it have been dengue haemorrhagic fever or malaria? What does it matter? Mother was gone!

There were two doctors in the house, Father and Sister. When the fever showed no signs of abating, they called in the Government Hospital Medical Superintendent, Dr Eapen, a good friend from Kluang days. Three doctors made little difference. The fever raged on.

On the morning of the fifth day, Mother calmly said to Father, “I am going to heaven. Get ready my Sunday clothes. Inform the Church ladies.” It was a stunning announcement.

The ladies from the Church came weeping. Gathered by Mother’s bedside, they prayed and sang the songs of heaven. Mother bade her farewell to each one, as well as to Father and the children.

“Be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, till He comes.” At nightfall, Mother’s strength steadily ebbed away. At about eleven o’clock, she spoke her last words, “I hear music.” With a smile she passed into the presence of her Saviour.

UNUSUAL HAPPENINGS IN SINGAPORE –

While all this was happening in Batu Pahat, unbeknown to us in Singapore, Big Brother and I had an unusual experience. We were reading into the night when suddenly our light went out with a “pop.” How odd, I thought. But light bulbs have a limited life. I looked at my watch. It was 11 pm.

Maybe it’s time to call it a night. My bed was a mattress on the floor. I lit a mosquito repellent coil, prayed, and lay down to sleep. It had been a long and tiring day. In no time I was dead to the world.

About 2 am, Big Brother and I were aroused from sleep by choking pungent smoke. Jumping up from my mattress, I switched on the light and, to my horror, the mosquito coil had fallen onto one corner of the mattress, which was alight and smouldering. In quick time, I beat out the fire and all was peace again. What an unusual experience.

I pondered over the two happenings: the blown bulb and the smouldering mattress. What could it mean?

When all the excitement was over, Brother and I went back to sleep.

Next morning, about seven, I was awakened by a loud knocking on the front door. Bang! bang! bang!

“Who is that,” I called out.

“This is a telephone message. Are you Tow Siang Hwa? Your Mother in Batu Pahat passed away last night! Your Father wants you all to return today!”

What a shock! Shock upon shock: blown bulb, burning mattress, departed Mother!

All of us, including many relatives, hurried back for the funeral. It was a tearful event. The Christian cemetery was on a hillside three miles out of town. Father chose a plot half way up the hill. There Mother was laid to rest. Father and seven of us children, a crowd of relatives, Church friends and others paid our last respects. It was a moving, tearful service, a heart-rending farewell for us children. The void in the heart and the intense pain of recall were beyond description, only appreciated by the one who feels.

For months, Father was completely shattered, tossing like a ship without a rudder in troubled waters.

Mother revered Father all her life. In her letters she addressed him, “Most respected Mr Keng Kee,” like Abraham’s wife Sarah *who called Abraham lord ...* (1 Peter 3:6).

Mother’s submission to Father was absolute: she knew no other way. Her love and devotion to children was total. Behind these virtues was her faith in God and her Saviour Jesus Christ. It was such steadfast faith which sustained her through the turbulent days in China when Father’s dabbling in revolutionary politics nearly cost him his life. Mother’s effectual fervent prayers prevailed with God.

By faith, Mother and Father forsook their homeland for Nanyang. It was faith which enabled Mother to hold the family together through the Great Depression in Senai, and faith which persevered until Father’s licence to practise medicine was granted in 1932. Before then, her faith was sorely tested. Through many dark days, when food was scarce and no help was in sight (and there were hungry mouths to feed), Mother would pour out her sorrows to God. “Lord, You have saved us out of China, our Egypt. Will You leave us to starve and perish in

Senai?” She never doubted that God’s help would come. God honoured her faith. Solomon’s description of a virtuous woman is a portrait of Mother:

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life... She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy... Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.
(Proverbs 31:10-28)

Mother had clear priorities: God, husband, children. Father had absolute trust in her through all their thirty-one years of married life. Mother stood by Father through thick and thin, “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health,” till death took her. Apart from home and Church, Mother had no outside interests. She visited no places of entertainment, cultivated no friends apart from God’s people and those she was trying to win for the Lord.

Everybody wept after Mother was gone. But only the filial child is moved to tears for Mother while she is alive. The fact is too many sons and daughters treat their Mother as some sort of unpaid amah.

To the filial son and filial daughter, I say, “Appreciate Mother while she is available.” Are you a filial child?

MEMORY OF MOTHER –

One day in 1943, I said to Mother, “Mother, let’s get a house. I will work and support you. You have laboured hard for the family, borne all our burdens upon yourself, without a day of rest. You have never taken a vacation, not even a day off. Mother, I will make you a place of rest, a holiday.” It was thinking aloud, baring my heart to Mother. That was during the Japanese Occupation.

Mother smiled, “Yes, son, wait till you grow up, one day.”

I was eighteen. That one day was not to be. Her rest came sooner than we thought and from another quarter. God’s rest is perfect.

How can anyone repay Mother? Our Lord says:

Who is my mother?... whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my... mother. (Matt 12:48, 50)

After Mother's departing, this divine law became my lifelong guide: to do something for the elderly ladies and widows of the Church of Jesus Christ. Loving them is loving the Lord.

A CLEAR MESSAGE –

In the first days of unspeakable grief, I asked the Lord many questions but received no answer, until one day God's Word spoke a clear message. It was our Lord's Prayer: *Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory...* (John 17:24).

It then became clear. God in love, had called Mother to rest in the glory of His presence. This is God's will for the one I love. In this I am comforted.

Why should I wish for Mother to suffer on earth?

Ode to Mother

Mother laboured till Kingdom come,
A life well spent for God and home;
Days not for rest, nights long with toil,
And burning of the midnight oil.

Her days were rich with grace fulfilled,
Without fanfare as God had willed;
She went unsung the way she came,
Her children eight they sing her fame.

When task complete and labour done,
God took her Home: "Your rest is won."
How fast did Mother heed the call,
To be with God, her all-in-all!

PART FOUR | Medical School

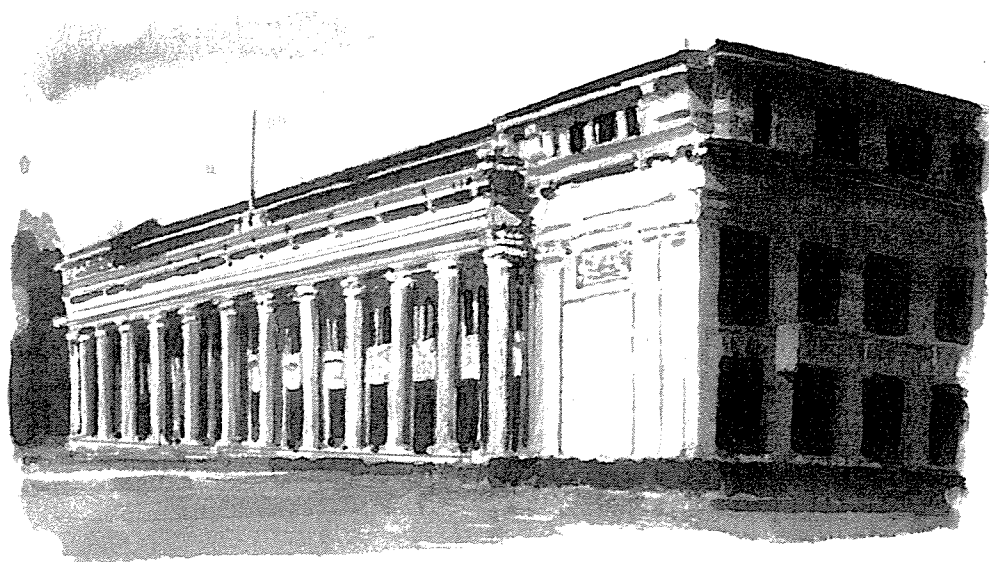


Never before, never after.

I spent 1946 back at ACS, completed the Senior Cambridge Certificate course of study and qualified to apply to the King Edward VII College of Medicine. Aspiring candidates had to take an aptitude test and attend an interview before a panel of three professors. The question posed to me was, “Young man, what made you apply to do medicine?”

My answer was simple. “For three years I assisted my sister, a General Practitioner in Batu Pahat. In 1942, I helped her deliver a baby with forceps. She said that I should do medicine.” The professors were suitably impressed.

In October 1947, I walked through the portals of the imposing College of Medicine, one of seventy-five students, to begin a six-year marathon course of study, with many memorable experiences along the way. I was following in the footsteps of Big Sister who, by then, had moved to Singapore and started her own midwifery practice in the heart of Chinatown.



King Edward VII College of Medicine

RAGGED INTO THE COLLEGE RUGBY FIFTEEN –

Never in my wildest dreams would I have chosen to play that “ruffians’ game” called rugby. College ragging changed my opinion.

“Hey you, freshie, meet me at 4 pm sharp at the sports field! By the way, what’s your name?” At 4 pm punctually I reported at the appointed place. This initiated me into the thrills of rugby which I enjoyed for two seasons! I played second row forward position. My job was simply to run for my life, push like crazy, do or die just follow the ball!

I was amazed by the physiological response of the body. In the first month I was completely exhausted within minutes. The lungs felt like bursting, the legs felt like lead. But astonishingly, by the second half of the season, the build-up of physical stamina enabled the body to finish the full ninety minutes like a breeze. In my two years of the ball game, I virtually never came in contact with the ball! All I did was run, push, and fall, but no ball!

Ours was not to reason why, ours was to run and fly!

In those days, Singapore was a British Colony. Playing against the Commonwealth and British Armed Forces was like sending lambs to the slaughter! The overwhelming advantage of our opponents’ size, weight, and speed showed in the scorelines, which often read like those of cricket! We were literally demolished by the storming Army, Air Force and Navy commando types who simply

flattened everything in their path!

Of the matches played, two stand out above the rest. The first: the Medicos were playing against the Dentals on the Outram School ground. In one mad rush for the ball, I crashed into the opposing scrum half, and his upper incisors sank into the bridge of my nose. Instantly blood gushed out, spilling onto my face and jersey. I became an instant hero, like a wounded soldier returning from heavy battle!

The second memorable event was the Annual Inter-College Rugby Match, pitching the Medicos against the Arts and Science team from Raffles College. (This was before the formation of the University of Malaya in 1950). Great was the rivalry, the excitement, and the publicity. The match was played on the Padang opposite City Hall, right in the heart of the City.

In a hard-fought campaign between two sides equally matched in physical size and speed, the result correctly reflected the balance of brawn power. The Medicos won 3-0 and became proud owners of the Kay-Moat Cup for 1949. To my great delight, the road to learning, though not royal, was simply wonderful – more exciting than I had expected!

PROVOKED TO RUN –

I had never won in any track event in all my life. The fourth medical year was a relatively easy year without the demands of a major examination, so I thought I might have a go at the University's Annual Athletic Meet.

Three years earlier I had run the 100-yards event (before the days of metrication) and came in nowhere. The winner was a loud-mouthed show-off, out to impress the lady students. I was provoked.

When the fourth year came I had to make an early decision. Could I afford to divert time from swotting at books to sweating it out on the running tracks? It was a hard proposition with no ready answer. In my heart I thought, perhaps. I prayed to the Lord. Should I or should I not? What if I should come last again?

I remembered the extraordinary exploits of Samson, whenever, ...*the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him* he rent apart a young lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:6); slew thirty men single-handedly (Judges 14:19), and killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:16).

Samson was given phenomenal physical power for these and other amazing

exploits because the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him.

So I prayed to the Lord for the Spirit's help, if indeed He would help me.

I drew up my plan of training spread over six months. At that time I lived in Tiong Bahru. The King Edward Seventh College of Medicine's running field was a 10-minute walk away, very convenient for my purpose. I remembered the saying, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

So I planned. I read books on athletics. I dreamt of great runners such as Jesse Owen who won four gold medals in the sprint events at the 1936 Berlin Olympics. He was my hero.

I read how great athletes trained and dieted, how they warmed up before a race, and how they ran to win.

But reading was one thing, training was another. Reading in an armchair is pleasant; training on the track is painful. A large part of the game is mind over matter. The mind has to direct the body: how to breathe, how to use the arms to speed the legs and propel the body forward, and how to strengthen every part. But most important of all, there must be the will to win. There must be a strong enough provocation.

I read that the 100 yards race was to be run in one breath! At first it sounded



"I never knew you could run!"

somewhat unbelievable, not breathing while running! But in actual fact, the holding of the breath is only for ten or eleven seconds! But it enables the runner to maintain his sprinting posture without moving the rib cage and interrupting the rhythm of body and limbs. I diligently trained myself to run the 100 yards without breathing at all, and I had no difficulty.

Every morning from six to seven o'clock I trained. Gradually the distance was increased, and the effort was made more demanding. The objective was to build stamina and increase speed. I bought a stop-watch and timed myself. I had in mind to run the three short distance races: 100 yards, 220 yards, 440 yards. These were the distances of track events before conversion to the metric system.

In those days, it was all DIY, that is, Do It Yourself. There were no coaches, no gymnasiums, no sports medicine, no sports doctors or anything. Nobody used starting blocks, and we ran on grass. The only thing not lacking was grit and guts.

I dieted to keep the weight down to the desired level, and consumed large quantities of glucose and honey before a race. I simply applied what others did before scientific advances and refinements arrived. It must sound rather primitive to the 21st century athlete!

Nevertheless, in that one outing, I won the first prize in the 100 yards individual event, the 220 yards relay; the 440 yards individual event and the 440 yards relay. But strangely, the 220 yards individual sprint eluded me, and I had to be contented with the second place.

To this day I can hardly believe that those things happened in 1951. I do not know how, but I know it was a fact. The reigning champion, my "provocator", at the finishing line of the 100 yards dash gasped, "Siang Hwa, I never knew you could run!"

"Neither did I!" said I.

Someone asked me: "Tell me your secret."

Simply this:

Anyone with legs can run,
 But winning is the stuff
 Born of training, painful and not fun!
 And provocation – strong enough.

COURTED AND JILTED –

Experience says, “Better be courted and jilted than never courted at all.” The pain and disappointment must be akin to that of divorce. When it happened, I thought the world had collapsed around me.

After four years of “going steady”, she wrote: “It’s all over. Let’s call it off. No hard feelings.” It was a parting of the faiths: she was Seventh Day Adventist, I was Bible Presbyterian.

For days I walked in a daze, until Second Brother said to me, “Siang Hwa, don’t be silly. God will send someone better!” He was so right. What does God’s Word say?

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.
(Psalm 37:4)

Then I recalled Father’s Chinese proverb, “Only fear no white jade. Why sorrow no good maid?” (只怕無白玉；何愁無佳人?) meaning to say, the accomplished young man need never fear for want of a good wife. Much encouraged, I took heart and resolved to prove the point.

Hard work is the best remedy for disappointment. Daniel and his friends, exiled to Babylon, did not give in to their sorrows, but purposed in their heart to remain faithful to their God and to give a good account of themselves in the midst of an idolatrous people.

God honoured the youngsters’ faith, and ... *gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom...* so that in the final test, they proved ten times better than any of their Babylonian counterparts (Daniel 1:8, 17, 20).

Setting my heart and mind on the First Professional Examination, I gave myself wholly to the task. The reward was more than I had hoped: top of the Class with distinctions in Physics and Chemistry, with a scholarship thrown in.

Shakespeare was so right: “Sweet are the uses of adversity.”

In the midst of our medical studies, a group of Christian believers felt the need of Christian fellowship. Led by the Spirit, four in the class met and prayed together: this was the beginning of the Varsity Christian Fellowship. A faithful and regular member of the group was Miss Tan Cheng Im (陳清音). With her a close friendship developed.

In 1950, Big Brother Timothy was called by our Teochew Mother Church to

start an English-speaking ministry. The Life Church English Service was inaugurated on 20 October 1950.

I was minded to invite Cheng Im to the service. But I was a little hesitant: she was Methodist. Will she attend a Presbyterian service? I thought of Rebekah and how she readily followed Abraham's servant to become Isaac's wife (Genesis 24), someone she had not met. Plucking up courage, I broached the invitation, and, to my great delight, Cheng Im accepted without hesitation. Thus our Christian partnership grew.

Ever since then Cheng Im has followed the Lord without reserve. Our medical studies and common faith brought us steadily closer, leading to holy wedlock in 1954. It was as simple as that, when the Lord was in it.

THE LAST LAP –

Our wedding was not to be until we had made the last hurdle of the final medical examinations. Considering that shortly the group of learners would be let loose on the population at large, how important it was that lessons taught be correctly and safely put to practice.

“Remember, we are dealing with precious lives!” the Professor had said.

The scope of the curriculum is vast and demanding, and the time available to complete all the revision limited. The method and approach to the entire discipline would play a vital role in determining the outcome of the examination.

Believing that, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom* (Psalm 111:10), I worked out a system of study which I have found helpful. It is time-saving and effort-effective, at least in my experience.

For what it is worth, I offer it to anyone interested:

Ten Commandments for Successful Students

1. Purpose in your heart to glorify God in your studies.

He promises: ... *them that honour me I will honour* (1 Samuel 2:30).

2. Pray always: before, during, and after study:

... *in every thing by prayer and supplication...* (Philippians 4:6). Remember wisdom comes from God.

3. Be concise and precise. Summarise your summary.

Writing makes an exact man. Knowledge not summarised is not fully grasped.

4. Utilize the pre-dawn hour for maximum profit. The mind is freshest after a good sleep. Trying to study when the body and brain are fatigued is a waste of effort.

5. Knowledge shared is knowledge assured. Never be selfish. There are no secrets in learning. *The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him* (Psalm 25:14).

6. Study always with an objective and attain it. To study without an objective is a waste of time.

7. Know something of everything, and everything of some things. This is the key to excellence. No one can know everything of everything, not even the professor!

8. Redeem the time: Make every minute count. Buy back precious minutes: cut out unprofitable activities.

9. Exercise daily to keep fit. "Mens sana in corpore sano" – A sound mind in a sound body. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

10. Keep God's day holy. Honour the Lord. He did His work in six days, and so should we. Be God-like: He rested on the seventh day. You too.

God is a bonus-giving God. The results in the Final Examination exceeded my wildest hopes: Top of the Class with distinctions in Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, four Medals and the Queen's Scholarship.

Purpose in your heart to glorify God, and He will send bonuses unexpected.

In my second year at King Edward VII College of Medicine, the student grapevine was abuzz with hot news: one of our local men had obtained the coveted MRCOG (Membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of London). He was Doctor Benjamin Henry Sheares. We students had heard of his fame as a teacher and looked up to him as a hero at a time of awakening aspirations of independence and nationhood.

So the talk went around: how good it was to have a local man, a graduate of our own College fill the Chair – one day.

Sure enough, in 1951, Doctor Benjamin Sheares was formally appointed to the Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

This was a milestone event in Malayanisation, before the political process passed the power of Government from Great Britain to Singapore. I write with a particular sense of pride, having lived through those years of political transition. It is hard for today's generation, having grown up in independent Singapore, to fully appreciate the feeling of pride over one of our own entering the preserve of



*"You have to work hard; hard work never kills.
It's what people do after work that kills!"*

British Civil Service, jealously guarded for all the years of colonial rule.

Professor Benjamin Sheares was a symbol of independence and nationhood. He occupied the Chair with distinction as an outstanding academician and practitioner. He pioneered the operation of creating a vagina in women born without this birth passage. This brilliantly conceived procedure came to be known as the “Sheares Operation.”

Our medical class of 1947 came under the tutelage of Professor Sheares in the fourth year of studies. We hero-worshipped the Professor who always appeared in class in an immaculate white suit, looking ever so distinguished. His command of language was a cut above the rest of our teachers. His lectures were excellently prepared, spiced with humour and witticism. To backward students, the Professor would exhort with a hint of sarcasm: “Young men, you need to work harder. We are born lazy. We all love to lie on Changi beach under the coconut trees and enjoy life. But there is no substitute for hard work. Hard work never kills. It’s what people do after work that kills!”

THE PROFESSOR’S ADVICE –

When I first joined the University Department as a Trainee Medical Officer in 1955, the Professor called me to his office. With fatherly concern he said to me: “Siang Hwa, what is your aim in life? To make money or to teach? If it is money you want, I will send you to Japan to learn how to beautify the ladies: creating double eyelids and dimples, and removing eye-bags. You will make good money, like Khoo Boo Chye. I sent him to Japan.”

My reply was simple. “No Sir. I want to be a teacher.”

During my time in the department, I had the privilege of assisting Professor Sheares in the operating theatre. His superior technical skill was a joy to observe. He was gentle and careful in every procedure, meticulous and precise in his handling of tissues. As a surgeon he was second to none.

In his clinical practice, he was friendly and warm, a first rate diagnostician. In the days before ultrasound techniques, he had “seeing fingers,” able to detect lesions which others had missed. His fame travelled far and wide, attracting Malayan royalty, besides a great following from among Singapore’s women.

Professor Sheares imparted to me one most valuable lesson. He said to me, “My life policy, especially to staff and younger colleagues, is always to help, nev-

er to harm; always do something good if you can.”

These words of profound wisdom remain with me. He was a man of his word, and spoke from his heart.

TRIBUTES –

In 1960, Professor Sheares left for private practice. Eleven years later, he was elected Head of State to be Singapore’s second President.

While it was surely a rare honour to the medical profession for one of their number to be called to the nation’s highest public office, it is also a fact that Professor Benjamin Sheares, with his peerless record as a foremost academician and citizen, did honours to the office of the Presidency.

His dedication was such that the Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, nominated him for the post through three terms, until death intervened in 1981.

To me, a fellow Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, and his successor to the Chair, I should like to pay tribute to my former teacher and chief, and record that the highest institution of our common speciality, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of London, conferred on him its Honorary Fellowship in 1976.

The name of this man is perpetuated by two landmarks, namely, the stately Sheares Bridge which spans Singapore’s waterfront, and Sheares Hall. In this Hall of Residence in the National University of Singapore, stands a bronze bust bearing the inscription.

Benjamin Henry Sheares

President, Republic of Singapore

Chancellor, National University of Singapore

1971 - 1981

As a man and a citizen, he had these qualities
which, present in men of outstanding ability,
make them even greater – humility, a courteous disposition,
a sense of public duty and that unfailing kindness of heart.

19 | EXILE IN IRELAND | A hard sentence

In 1938, when I gave my word that I would serve God for life, I did not doubt that He would surely lead me in the path of His choosing. God's way is the best way, for He knows the end from the beginning – and He wants only the best for us who put our trust in Him.

A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

I prayed: "Have Thine own way Lord, have Thine own way..."

I firmly believe that it was His hand that led me to Medical School in 1947, and that the same hand had led me to the Kandang Kerbau Hospital (KKH), the "Birthquake Hospital" made famous by the Guinness Book of Records for its record number of deliveries.

However, pondering my prospects of becoming a trainee in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, the outlook was not very encouraging. Two obstacles stood in the way. First, the KKH was not accredited by the Royal College in London for

the training of postgraduates for the Membership Examination. Second, if and when KKH was accredited, the priority of training would go to those senior colleagues before me. My turn would come, but when? I was sixth in order of seniority among the Medical Officers.

In my impatience, I was attracted to General Practice. That would give me instant availability of more time and resources for the Gospel work, I thought. I even interviewed a retiring practitioner to buy his practice.

However, my wife, Cheng Im, had a better idea: “Why don’t we ask Dr Seah Cheng Siang for his advice?” Thank God, my better half was also the wiser half!

We called on our good friend and teacher that very night. Dr Seah was Tutor in Internal Medicine at the General Hospital, a highly respected teacher and senior colleague. We told him our story. “A certain Dr Samy is about to retire. His practice is for sale. That seems better than marking time in KKH.”

Dr Seah deliberated a while. His answer was swift and decisive. “Siang Hwa, you have the Queen’s Scholarship. I see no problem at all. Write in. Ask the authorities to let you go on your Queen’s Scholarship to train in the United Kingdom. You do not need to wait for KKH to be accredited.”

Amazing! Why did I not think of it? Instantly my dilemma was resolved.

However, there was the problem of finding an approved training post in the United Kingdom. My wife and I committed the matter to God in prayer: “Lord, if it is your will, lead me to a place of training so that there will not be a shadow of doubt.” I boldly set a deadline of six months for an answer from the Lord.

AN OVERHEARD OPPORTUNITY –

One day, shortly afterwards, as I passed by the Doctors’ Tea Room, I heard the Senior Lecturer Dr Wilson Roddie ask my colleague Dr Chan if he would like to train in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Interesting! I pricked up my ears.

Later the same day I called on Dr Roddie.

“Dr Roddie, did Dr Chan accept the training vacancy?”

“No, he said his interest is in General Surgery.”

“If he is not interested, may I have it?”

“By all means.”

Thanks to Dr Roddie, in four weeks, long before my six months’ dateline, a



Dr Wilson Roddie (left) and Dr Seah Cheng Siang helped shape my career.

letter came, offering me a House Officer appointment at the Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast, the training hospital of Queen's University.

Uplifted and thrilled beyond words, I began to make all needful preparations to take up the two-year posting.

In my excitement, little did I appreciate the pain of separation and homesickness awaiting me, and that for twenty-six long months I would not see a single member of my family – absence from wife and children, separated by 8,000 miles. Ahead loomed a most trying period of my life, but it seemed a small price to pay for the opening promised.

GOODBYE, FAMILY!

Cheng Im was brave beyond words. She had counted the cost and steeled herself to pay the heavy price of remaining behind in Singapore to cope with a full-time Medical Officer's appointment and two kids: Christine, just past her first birthday, and Stephen, due to be born in six months.

My BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) flight was scheduled to leave at eleven in the morning of 26 June 1956.

At six o'clock, I fed Christine a bottle of milk and sealed our parting with a kiss, which was to last twenty-six months before I would see her again. It was a heart-rending experience.

Baby Christine

What did Baby Christine say
To her Dad at break of day?
“Thanks Papa for milk and bread,
Thanks for watching o'er my head.”

“Sweet child, sleep a little longer,
Till your Dad has flown on yonder.
Till your limbs have grown li'le stronger –
Absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

FATHER'S EXTRAORDINARY SENDOFF –

Father Extraordinary, true to his name, arrived at Paya Lebar Airport with a busload of well-wishers gathered from among friends and relatives from as far as Batu Pahat, 100 miles away! It was like sending off some great war hero! How amazing and embarrassing!

Father took over a quiet corner of the airport concourse, marshalled the people together, made a speech of appreciation and committed me in prayer to God. To Cheng Im, I said: “Darling, God will take care of you. I'll write weekly.”



26 June 1956, the farewell party Father assembled for me at Paya Lebar Airport.

Finally, after a group photograph and a round of handshakes, I boarded the BOAC Argonaut aircraft, and strapped myself in my window seat to begin the first day of a 791-day self-imposed exile, to a far country called Ireland.

“TEKKA FEELING” IN COLOMBO –

During our stop-over in Colombo that afternoon, we were taken on a city tour. At one neighbourhood, the sights, sounds and smells mentally transported me back to Singapore’s Little India or Tekka in Serangoon Road. Amazingly, I was momentarily overwhelmed by an acute wave of homesickness. I felt I was back in Singapore.

“Let me off! I’m going home!” Those words formed in my mind but fortunately did not escape my lips. Painful sanity kept me on board as the coach tour continued. How I wished I had never left home!

NUTTS CORNER NEARLY DROVE ME NUTS –

On the third day after leaving Singapore, I touched down at Belfast’s Nutts Corner Airport at 8 o’clock at night. The freezing arctic wind-chill served notice: Take care, the North Pole is not far away! The night was dark, cold, and bleak. The place was strange, the people spoke an unfamiliar kind of English, so unlike the English of Singapore which I was accustomed to. At times I thought the Irish girls were speaking Tamil!

I boarded the commuter bus for Belfast. It was ten o’clock when I stepped through the portals of the Royal Maternity Hospital – acutely cold, lonely, hungry and homesick. My one burning desire was to go home! “Let me fly home to my wife and children. Just take me back to Singapore – now!” Oh, the cold... and it was summer. Why did I ever leave home, and warm Singapore?

CHECKING INTO MY NEW HOME –

Royal Maternity Hospital, Grosvenor Road, Belfast, was to be my earthly abode. I lugged my suitcase through the front door. Nobody seemed to know of my arrival. It was painful.

“Had I come to the wrong place? Let me take the next flight home!” In the cold and loneliness, my mind was playing tricks.

After what seemed an age and phone calls by the staff, the Night Sister appeared and warmly welcomed me. What a relief! I had not come to the wrong place after all. Remembering that this was to be my home for the next two years, I thought I had better start by liking it.

Sister McCulloch gave me supper in the Night Nurses’ Tea Room. Supper over, she showed me to my living quarters in the Female Students’ Wing! It was a sparsely furnished bare concrete box-like affair, with a bed, wardrobe, a chair, and writing desk with table-light – sufficient for my basic needs.

But there was no heating of any kind. It was an ice box. The remedy for this, I soon discovered, was to run on the spot and generate internal heat, not forgetting to be warmly clothed.

To prepare for the night’s rest, I took out my King James Bible, turned to Psalm 23, and read it with prayer. I prayed for my family at home. I was in Belfast for a noble cause. Surely my Shepherd would see me through this first of 791 nights!

STILL NO PLACE LIKE HOME –

Belfast is now but a memory half-a-century distant, a bitter-sweet experience. Bitter, for the pain of separation from home and family; sweet for the Irish hospitality and warmth. Many Irish faces and places have found a permanent repository in my memory store, to be recalled with gratitude.

Thinking of home, I remember the poem by John Howard Payne:

Home, Sweet Home

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
 Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home;
 A charm from the sky seems to hallow us there,
 Which, seek through the world, is ne’er met with elsewhere.
 Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
 There’s no place like home,
 Oh, there’s no place like home!

And where, may I ask, is home? Home for me was 8,000 miles away in sunny Singapore, where wife and daughter were already fast asleep in bed, and in the morning will be missing me.

But there is a better Home where my Lord is, in the place that He has gone ahead to prepare, in His Father's House, a mansion of unspeakable beauty, comfort and peace, and joys unending, a Home prepared for prepared people.

In that Home, parting and pain will be no more. But coming down to earth, my Belfast mission was just beginning. Will I be able to survive the two-year ordeal?

BE THANKFUL -

During my two years in Belfast, why did I not fly home for a visit? Simply, it was a matter of cost. A round trip in those days would have cost four times my month's pay.

The pain of separation taught priceless lessons of patient endurance, lessons not learnt otherwise; that the remedy for acute homesickness is godly busyness with believing prayer.

In those days, I often reminded myself that God had sent me to the equivalent of Oxford and Cambridge. Queen's University, Belfast, founded by Queen Victoria in 1845, had international standing second to none.

Therefore, I told myself, stop complaining, be thankful and rejoice.



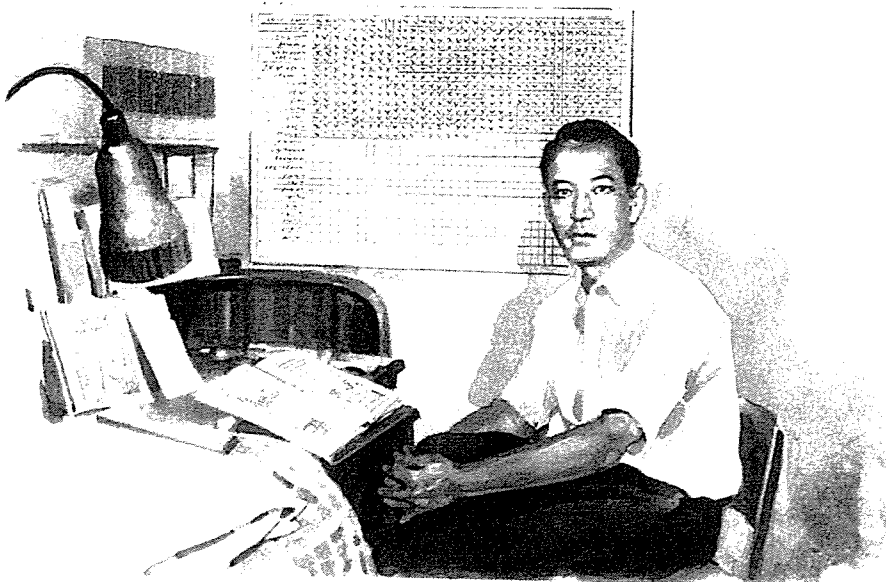
'Exile' in Belfast Queen's University, Royal Maternity Hospital, 1956-1958, my "Homesick Home".

Before Dr Roddie secured for me my Queen's University attachment in 1956, I knew little of Belfast's fame as a postgraduate training centre. The common first choice for Singaporeans was Oxford or Cambridge. Friends seemed a little disappointed when I said that I was going to Belfast.

In terms of prestige, Belfast was the Irish counterpart of Cambridge and Oxford. Queen's University, founded by Queen Victoria in 1845, had a long and illustrious tradition of academic excellence built up over the years by teachers and researchers of international repute. I considered myself fortunate to have been accepted by Queen's. I was also delighted when I learnt that Northern Ireland was predominantly Presbyterian which was also my denomination.

SETTLING INTO A LONG HAUL PROGRAMME –

July 1956 marked the beginning of my three-year programme of preparation for the Membership of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists



Remedy for homesickness: every cross on the chart meant one day nearer home.

(MRCOG) Examination in London. I drew up a plan of study which would equip me for the final exams in January 1959. For a trial run, I purposed to sit for the Diploma of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Examination (DRCOG – a lesser programme restricted to Obstetrics), in January 1958.

But the MRCOG was always kept in focus as the primary purpose of my leaving home and family, to be equipped to teach and to assume the clinical responsibilities in the University Department of the KKH. This was no mean undertaking, but like Daniel exiled in Babylon who purposed in his heart to live a godly life of faith, worthy of God whom he served, I resolved to do likewise.

In the final assessment before the King, Daniel came top (Daniel 1:20); because God was with him. God's Word gave me much needed strength for my task. Just as the Apostle Paul had said, *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me* (Philippians 4:13), so I looked to the Lord to supply me daily energy and mental strength to overcome homesickness and the trials of the new environment.

In the privacy of my room I held converse with God in Quiet Time devotions, in daily reading of the Bible, drawing from His rich and inexhaustible resources. A verse of Holy Scripture which gave me greatest comfort was: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* (Matthew 28:20), first introduced to me by

Grandfather who termed it, “the most precious verse in the Bible.” That was in 1932. I have never forgotten it. It has since proved an ever-ready source of encouragement and comfort.

As I contemplated the long separation from wife and family, another verse of Scripture came to mind: *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom* (Psalm 90:12). Thereupon I took a large piece of paper and drew eight hundred little squares. Then I literally “numbered the days” by crossing out a square for each passing day.

So, by wisdom’s patient endurance, I numbered the days of my “Irish Exile” confident that every passing day, no matter how dreary, would surely bring me one day nearer journey’s end and reunion with my beloved – and home! Soon the pain of parting will be dissolved in the joy of meeting!

WALKING WITH GOD –

One of the memory verses which I learnt years ago in Life Church Sunday School was: *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves* (James 1:22). The message was powerful: to know God’s will is important, but to obey it is more important!

Daily I examined myself, asking the Lord to search my heart and to lead me in the way everlasting, to walk with God in Belfast as in Singapore.

I thank God for putting me in fellowship with the Irish Evangelical Church. Each Lord’s Day, I sat under the sound of the Gospel ministered by the Rev James Grier. He was a great preacher of God’s Word.

“Remember the Lord’s Day to keep it holy.” Without fail, each Lord’s Day would find me in the company of God’s people at Botanic Avenue.

A HAPPY DISCOVERY –

One day, as I had arrived early in Church, I took up the hymnal and began to turn its pages, perchance I might come across the children’s hymn, “God is Always Near Me” by Philip Bliss. Ever since Mother’s departure ten years earlier, I had searched a dozen hymnals in vain for the English version of the hymn she had taught me in Chinese since my infant days.

That Lord's Day in 1956, sitting in the Irish Evangelical Church in Belfast, as I turned the pages, the long-lost hymn, as it were, leapt out of the hymnal! I could hardly believe my eyes. My ten-year search was finally rewarded! Today it is included in our Revival Hymns and Choruses as one of the best loved children's hymns, thanks to the Irish Evangelical Church.

TRAINING TO SPEAK IN PUBLIC –

Not long after my arrival, I was assigned by Professor CHG Macafee, a Vice-President of the Royal College in London, to present a paper at the quarterly Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society meeting. The thought of addressing a gathering of mainly Caucasians made me very nervous. Conscious of my shortcomings in the area of public speaking, I immediately bought a Grundig tape recorder costing £55, the equivalent of half-a-month's wages – a lot of money – but if it could help me in my presentation, it was a small price to pay.

I wrote out the entire text of my speech and read it into the tape recorder. The first play-back was a shattering experience.

“Is that me?” I listened in utter horror and disbelief. My speech was uneven, hesitant, with accentuation in the wrong places. It was a truly revealing and sobering experience.

Thank God, the audition was held behind closed doors, in the privacy of my room. I noted every fault with a red pen and made the necessary corrections, followed by a second recording and audition. The process was repeated again and again until I was fully satisfied with the final result.

Belfast was teaching me new things I had not dreamt of! Back in Singapore I continued to use my Grundig tape-recorder with great profit, in particular, in preparing my sermons.

STUNNING NEWS OF KKH –

In January 1957, a letter came from Dr Roddie informing me that KK Hospital had failed to gain Royal College accreditation. Two senior College Fellows, Mr GF Gibberd and Professor AM Claye, had inspected the hospital, looking into the method of training.

The verdict, however, was not altogether unexpected. The sheer volume of patients, the overwhelming work load, and the shortage of qualified staff, had reduced KKH to a “baby factory,” hardly a training centre for MROG candidates.

Dr Roddie’s message was clear. Professor Sheares needed help. His assistants, my seniors, had left for training positions in the United Kingdom: Dr Seah in London, Dr Goon in Aberdeen, Dr Lean in Manchester. Two others were leaving for private practice.

It was a sobering message.

NEW EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES –

As I pondered Dr Roddie’s letter, new realities and implications dawned on me. The likelihood of my returning before the others, still training in the UK, meant that extra responsibilities would fall on me. As Jesus had said, *For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...* (Luke 12:48).

I saw my chief, Professor Macafee. His advice was candid and helpful. “To get KKH recognised, simply do as we are doing here at the Royal Maternity Hospital in Belfast: Proper patient work-up, adequate records and trainee supervision.



My mentor, Professor CHG Macafee, advised me how to get KK Hospital accredited.

You need more qualified staff to cope with both service and training.”

I saw clearly the new expectations and responsibilities awaiting me at home. How much more urgently and seriously must I conduct my studies and equip myself for the challenging task ahead. Once again I cast myself upon the Lord and the promises of His Word: *I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me* (Philippians 4:13). The Lord must help, but I must play my part.

No more must we send our trainees away for three years!

DRCOG TRIAL RUN –

In 1957, I travelled to London for the DRCOG. With the background experience of KKH, the examination did not prove to be unduly difficult.

Later, back in Belfast, I received written confirmation from the College that I had been successful in the DRCOG Examination. One day, Professor Macafee whispered to me: “I was told by the President of the College that you came top in the Diploma Examination. Well done!”

I offered a silent prayer of grateful thanks.

BELFAST IN LIGHTER VEIN –

The first morning at breakfast in the Staff Dining Room, a fellow intern House Officer, Norman Crawford, shot this question at me: “What’s your name?”

“My name is Siang Hwa, surname Tow.”

“Siang Hwa – too difficult to remember. Let’s call you Wally!” That’s it, from July 1956, I acquired an Irish name.

Later, when I registered for the MRCOG examination, I added Walter to my name. It sounded better than Wally. But in international circles I became known as Wally Tow, thanks to Norman Crawford of Belfast.

My first Saturday’s lunch was a real shocker. I had never tasted salad in all my life. Already acutely homesick and suffering from the cold of the unseasonable Irish summer, I was presented with a tableful of raw vegetables and cold meat. It was more than I could stomach!

How I longed for a hot meal, like in Singapore. I asked Mary, the maid, for a frying pan. As I was frying the salad, I walked my new-found friend Norman.

On seeing what I was doing, he stopped dead in his tracks and gasped in horror, "Wally, what on earth are you doing, murdering the salad!"

"I'm just making the rabbit food edible!"

That, incidentally, was my first and last attempt at "Irish Fried Salad." Before long, by the process of adaptation I was converted and happily relished rabbit food like the rest!

In those days, there was not one Chinese restaurant in all of Belfast. I managed to find tins of Lee Curry in some small provision shop in the city. I made friends with the cooks in the hospital kitchen, and they agreed to let me cook beef curry on Saturday for dinner.

This was a welcome change from Irish stew. In time, my fame was noised abroad and I received regular invitations to the homes of Consultants to cook beef curry. My favourite Visiting Consultant, Mr Ian McClure, after one curry dinner fervently announced, "Wally, now I feel like a flame thrower!"

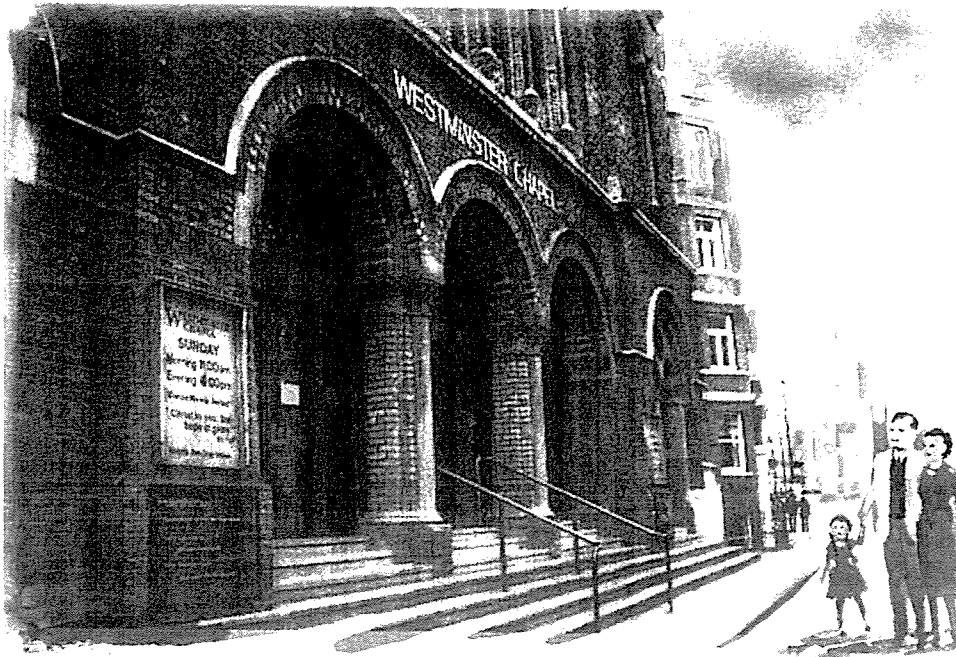
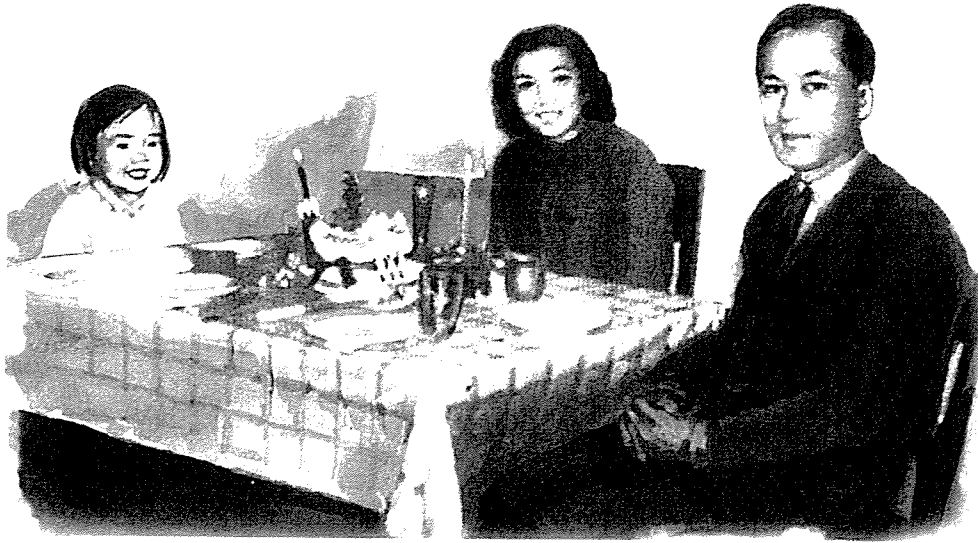
GOOD-BYE, BELFAST –

"Tempus fugit!" Before I realised it, the 800 squares on my time chart were almost entirely crossed out! I had come to the end of my two years in Belfast. I had made many fast friends especially among the hospital fraternity. To aspiring young doctors seeking to specialise, I heartily recommend Queen's University, Belfast. Borrowing the words of Shakespeare from "As You Like It", one may happily say, "Come hither, come hither, come hither. Here shall you find no enemy, but winter and rough weather."

Speaking from experience, Irish charm and warmth more than make up for the rough wintry weather!

Time came to say goodbye! London and the long-awaited reunion with wife and daughter beckoned with welcome urgency.

Who would guess that in 1966, ten years after my first arrival at Nutts Corner Airport, I would return to Belfast as Visiting Professor and guest of Professor Jack Pinkerton, for a "triumphal return" to see the newly built Royal Maternity Hospital and renew old friendships?



*Family reunion in London, Christmas 1958.
Sunday morning at Westminster Chapel, Buckingham Palace Gate.*

In 1956, as I made preparations for the two-year attachment at The Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast, it turned out that between the Belfast internship and the MRCOG examination, there was a nine-month interval in London.

The exciting prospect of living in the capital of the world raised questions: “Where shall we stay? What shall we do? How shall we cope?” A dozen anxious thoughts made Cheng Im and me think. We were quite apprehensive.

At such times, the reality of faith calmed our fears. God’s Word came to mind: *Cast all your care upon him; for he careth for you* (1 Peter 5:7).

Cheng Im was working in the Maternal and Child Health Department of the Singapore City Council. The Officer-in-charge, Dr Cameron, said to her, “Apply to the Goodenough College in London. They provide accommodation for Commonwealth postgraduates.” We wrote in accordingly.

The long-awaited family reunion came on 20 August 1958 at London Airport. The painful experience of twenty-six months’ separation was finally over. Patience was rewarded by happy reunion when Cheng Im and Christine emerged

from the airport's Customs and Immigration, in flesh and blood! That day, that moment, was worth waiting for.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Thank God for keeping us safe through all those intervening months although the long separation exacted its price. To Christine, I had become a stranger. On seeing me, she hid herself behind Mummy, stealing quick glances at the stranger called "Papa". I felt rejected. It took time and patient effort for me to get close to her, and for her to accept me again.

Meantime, God had prepared us a refuge in the heart of London.

WILLIAM GOODENOUGH HOUSE –

Our application lodged in 1956 secured us a place in this privileged residence.

William Goodenough House in Mecklenburgh Square was conceived and developed as a postgraduate facility, financed by a Thanksgiving Fund raised by certain large-hearted persons in London, under the leadership of Sir William Goodenough, the Lord Mayor of London. The object was to thank the people of the British Commonwealth and the United States for the help they rendered to Great Britain during the difficult days of World War II.

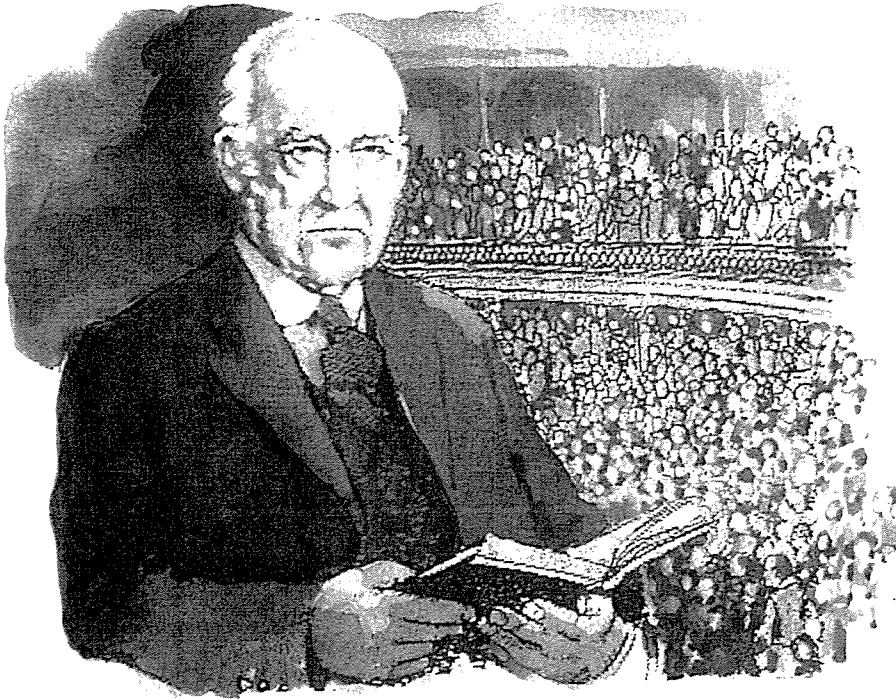
The residences provided by the Goodenough College were specifically for postgraduate students and graduates who had come to London for study, research and professional conferences.

Thank God, in answer to prayer, we were allotted a 2-bedroom apartment, complete with living-dining room, kitchen, bath-toilet, fully equipped with telephone, bed linen, crockery and cutlery – all for six guineas (£6 6s) a week! This was a fraction of the prevailing market rate.

Mecklenburgh Square was a delightful square, with a 2-acre garden, a quiet and relaxing atmosphere, a welcome oasis in a concrete desert. Located in WC1 district, it was within easy walking distance of numerous train stations and bus routes. In this beautiful environment, we spent nine memorable months.

The Goodenough College ran a nursery school for the children of residents. Christine, recently turned three, was enrolled in the school. In no time she was speaking English like the English kids!

William Goodenough House was just perfect for our purpose. From Mecklen-



Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones

burgh Square I drove to three hospitals for my course in Obstetrics and Gynaecology: Hammersmith, Chelsea, Queen Charlotte. Cheng Im walked to nearby Great Ormond Street for a course in Child Health at the Children's Hospital.

Food shops and markets were within convenient walking distance.

LIFE IN LONDON –

Having heard of the fame of Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones of Westminster Chapel, we counted ourselves blessed to be in London, and within a 15-minute drive of the chapel on Buckingham Palace Road.

For nine blessed months we attended the chapel every Sunday morning and sat under the preaching of the Doctor as he opened the treasures of God's Word in the Book of Romans.

Our stay in William Goodenough House brought us in contact with doctors from the Commonwealth. One postgraduate from Australia, Dr Roy Syred from the Royal Hospital for Women, Paddington, Sydney, lived in London House

across the Square (London House was part of Goodenough College, reserved for men.) As we were doing the same MRCOG Course, it was good company to have him ride with me in my Hillman Minx. The friendship continued from London to Australia. Five years after we completed our examination, I was his guest at the Australian Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Surfers Paradise.

Weekends were reserved for catching up on house-keeping, laundry, car-wash, and, very important – exploring London. Not to miss the golden opportunity, we wrote out a list of priorities of which we managed to accomplish the following: visits to Windsor Castle, Tower of London, Covent Garden (to see Swan Lake), Regent's Park, St Paul's Cathedral, Charles Dickens' House, Madame Tussaud's waxworks and the Planetarium.

TIME TO GO HOME!

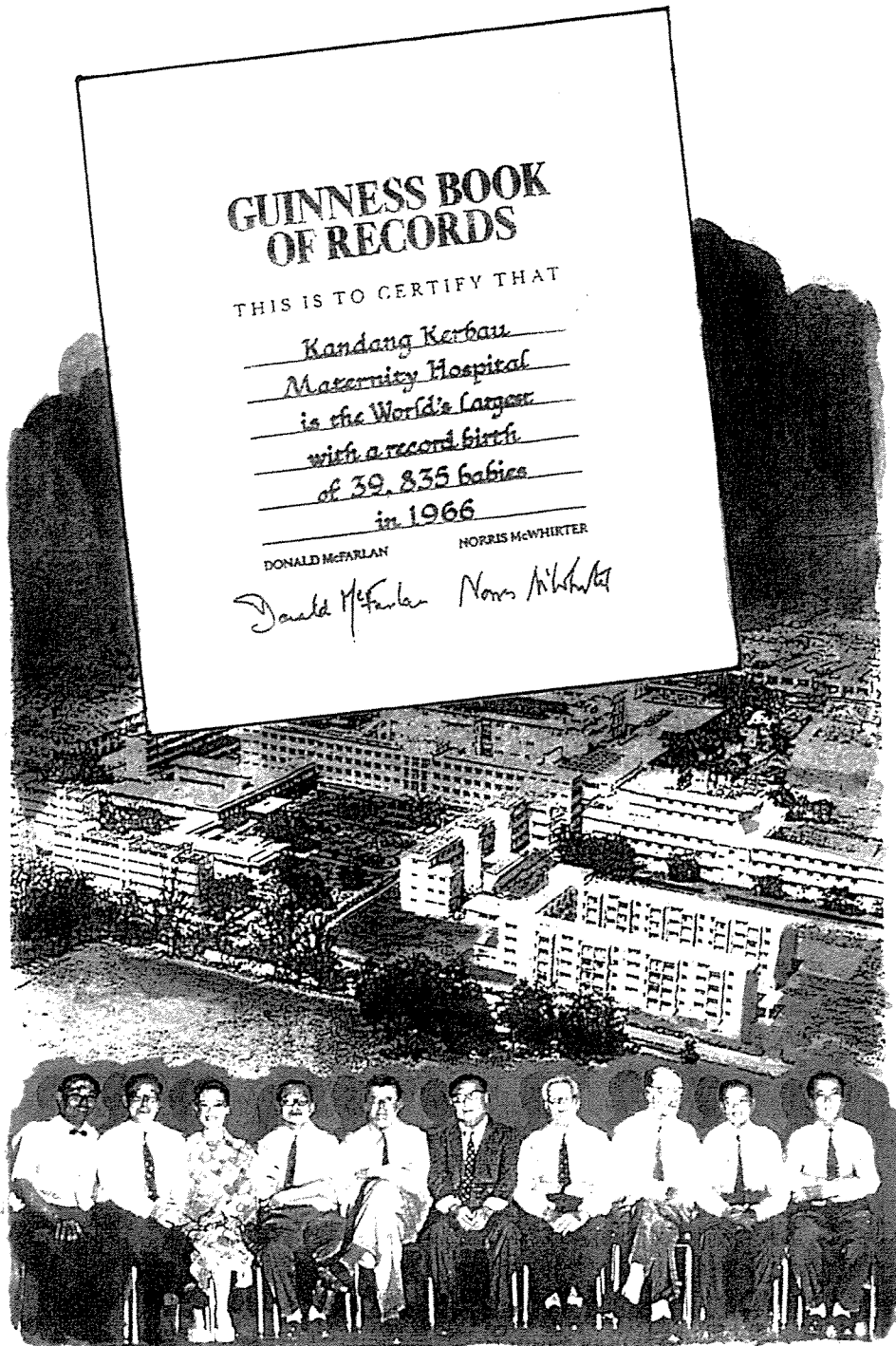
Farewell, London, fair city of my dreams!

March 1959 – was it the 26th? (That would make it thirty-three months to the day I left home in 1956). Time came for us to say goodbye. With the MRCOG diploma safely stowed away in my suitcase, it was mission accomplished! Awaiting my return were my loved ones, the Church folks, friends and – last, but not least, the “Birthquake Hospital.”

Much work remained to be done! I saw it as a debt I owed to the department, hospital and Singapore. These had made it possible for me to spend nearly three fruitful years in Great Britain.

Repaying my debt was a privilege.

PART FIVE | Birthquake Aftermath



Left to right: Dr TH Lean, Dr SM Goon, Dr Y Salmon, Dr Lee Yong Kiat (Med Superintendent), Dr Alan Browne (RCOG Inspector), Dr Ng See Yook (DMS Singapore), Professor Macafee (RCOG Inspector), Dr John McKelvey (China Medical Board), Dr Ho Guan Lim (Dept DMS, Singapore), Dr Tow Siang Hwa.

The morning after touchdown at Paya Lebar Airport, I reported to my Chief, Professor Benjamin Sheares. He said: “Well done! As you probably know, five of the old staff have left – three for training in the United Kingdom, two for private practice – and Dr Roddie returns to Belfast next month. You will need strong shoulders, Siang Hwa!”

Professor Sheares discussed with me the reorganisation of KKH for Royal College accreditation. He assigned me my Teaching Duties and the Clinical Supervision of the Medical Staff in the day-to-day running of the Hospital. This meant the care of the hundred-odd students during their group postings at KKH, and the overall supervision of about a dozen Medical Officers and House Officers (interns) charged with the care of half the Hospital’s patient intake of about one hundred labouring women per day. (By comparison, the Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast, had five.)

I called on the Medical Superintendent, Dr Kapur, and he arranged a joint meeting with the Head of the Government Unit, Dr TK Chong. I acquainted them with the task in hand. KKH was like an old lady needing rejuvenation!

COMBINED GOVERNMENT-UNIVERSITY EFFORT –

Our prime objective was Royal College accreditation. This was perceived as absolutely crucial to the future development of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Singapore. The sending of candidates for training in the UK was a stifling bottleneck and an intolerable manpower loss to our Medical Services. Additionally, it was a heavy expense item, having to support medical personnel in a distant land for three years (as had been done in my case).

This costly and painful social dislocation needed urgent remedial action, something entirely within our reach.

I recalled my visit to the Hammersmith Hospital, to see my former Supervisor, Dr Seah Cheng Siew. I found him watching over a woman in labour, tuning a syntocinon drip, doing a Houseman's job! He should have got his MRCOG years ago, if only KKH had been accredited.

I outlined to the meeting what had been advised by Professor Macafee of Queen's University who was also a Vice-President of the Royal College in London. Simply, it was to update the recording system and to implement the prescribed programme of trainee supervision.

The following measures were immediately activated:

A New Recording System

The outdated record sheets which had been in use for unknown years were replaced by a set which I had brought back from the Royal Maternity Hospital, Belfast. This was the crucial first step to efficient records which the Royal College Officers did not see in 1956. (When the Royal College Inspectors, Professor Macafee and Dr Alan Browne, saw them in 1963, they were satisfied.)

Living-in Facilities for Trainees

One of the Royal College requirements was that trainees had to live in while on duty. Rooms for this purpose were made available from existing students' quarters. This brought to an end the social dislocation and the expense of sending our trainees thousands of miles away from home.

Outpatient Appointments System

One of the observations of the Royal College Inspectors was the congested state of the Outpatient Clinics. For some obscure reason there was no appoint-

ments system, an elementary first step in any clinic. An appointments system was introduced, with immediate relief of the congestion and chaos.

Publication of a Houseman's Handbook

While in London, I had attended the University College Hospital of London University in Gower Street, headed by Professor WCW Nixon. From him I received a copy of *Houseman's Handbook* which he had written.

Adapting to our KKH situation, I wrote and published in September 1959 our version of Houseman's Handbook, with a Foreword by Professor Sheares.

It is my pleasure to commend this guide to Medical and House Officers of the Kandang Kerbau Hospital.

An issue such as this has been long overdue... This guide should serve as a useful reference for the doctor who is not acquainted with routine KK Hospital procedures or of his role and duties in the hospital set-up.

There is, of course, no hard and fast rule-of-thumb in the management of a patient, as individualization is the essence of good treatment. However, the rules relative of this section of the guide have been set out to take into consideration maximum safety for the patient and at the same time ensure that the fledgling obstetrician receives the benefit of first-hand instruction and/or demonstration by a senior member of the staff in a given obstetric abnormality... it is hoped that this first edition may be an inspiration to further study of the problems of KK Hospital.

This was a life saver for brand new graduates groping their way at the beginning of their six-month posting. It also meant the sparing of labouring women from preventable accidents and life-endangering mistakes.

All newly arrived interns were required to make thorough study of the handbook which was a guide to the common practical procedures and treatments required for women in labour. It contained the many do's and don'ts to avoid serious errors in a busy labour ward where supervision tended to be diluted.

Mandatory Twice-a-day Labour Ward Round

As the old saying goes, "Prevention is better than cure." As labour is a fast changing process, we implemented a minimum twice-a-day Labour Ward Round for the safety of all labouring women in the high-turnover situation in KKH.

More Efficient Patient Intake System

The patient intake rotated between the Government and University Units on a one-day-each basis, each unit admitting patients for 24 hours, in turn. By mutual consent of the two Consultants (Dr TK Chong and myself) and the Medical Superintendent, Dr Kapur, it was changed to a week-each system, so that each Consultant would be responsible for all new intakes for a 7-day period.

This proved to be less confusing and less disruptive than the one-day-each system. But it demanded a greater dedication and sacrifice on the part of the staff involved, in particular, the Consultants.

On Campus Residence

As I surveyed the scene, it occurred to me that it would be of significant advantage to the service if I could find accommodation within the hospital grounds. The Medical Superintendent, Dr Kapur, readily opened to me a dis-used nurses' residence.

For the next two years, I simply walked across the car park to work, and provided an emergency consultancy service, available on call 24-hours daily round-the-clock, whenever the need arose, even when the University Unit was not on call. I was kept busy, but the benefits to the hospital were immediate and incalculable. In the process, I gained experience of unspeakable worth.

Night Classes for Students

To make up for inadequacies in student instruction due to the service demands of the day, I held night classes at KKH, especially when Final Examination approached. These extra classes proved immensely popular not only to students in residence but also to those not in residence.

PROFESSOR MCKELVEY, CHINA MEDICAL BOARD, USA –

In July 1962, Professor John McKelvey arrived from the University of Minnesota, sent by the China Medical Board for fifteen months. He assumed the Headship of the Department, but his presence and experience benefited both University and Government Departments and the Hospital as a whole.

Professor McKelvey came with a background of rich experience at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, and at the Peking Union Medical College in China,

so he was no stranger to Chinese culture and customs. He quickly endeared himself to my family, especially my children, as well as to the Department and Hospital staff.

Much credit must go to the China Medical Board, an offshoot of the Rockefeller Foundation of New York, for sending the eminent Professor. His presence brought together the staff of both University and Government Departments, socially and professionally, which was of far-reaching and enduring benefit to the KKH community and to Singapore.

Professor McKelvey was a true professional. His one interest in life was OB-GYN. To him it was work, hobby and relaxation. He came to work each morning with a box of sandwiches. He invited me to join him for lunch. For an hour we ranged over anything and everything concerning the Department and Hospital. He spoke of his four years in Peking, working among the Chinese in the 1930s, and how he picked up some Mandarin.

In no time, the lunch fraternity grew and practically the entire University Staff could not resist the infectious fellowship. We discussed cases, complications, pathology of interesting specimens, and patients.

One day I asked him, "Sir, what do you do in the evenings?"

"OB-GYN."

"What do you do for recreation?"

"OB-GYN."

His was a life totally devoted to the specialty.



Professor John McKelvey made KK Hospital famous throughout America.

Professor McKelvey initiated a monthly Clinico-pathological Conference. Each Hospital Unit would take its turn to present cases of interest encountered in the month preceding. Pathologists sat together with gynaecologists to review cases and exchange knowledge. Sometimes we reviewed outstanding articles and publications like a Journal Club.

As a result, the hospital developed a new spirit of inter-departmental consultation. Professor McKelvey infused a high standard of professionalism and pride in work. He did it quietly and without fanfare, simply by example and force of personality.

ROYAL COLLEGE GRANTS ACCREDITATION –

With Professor McKelvey in charge of the University Department, application was made jointly for both the University and Government Units to be granted Royal College recognition of the Hospital's MRCOG training programme.

In September 1963, two eminent Professors from Ireland, my former Chief from Queen's University, Belfast, Professor Macafee, and Dr Alan Browne from Dublin, visited the KK Hospital on behalf of the Royal College in London. They approved full recognition to the University training posts, and partial recognition to the Government training posts (with full recognition to follow as the training conditions achieved the full recommended standard).

This was a major step forward. The reorganisation initiated by the hospital authorities in 1959 had borne fruit. The bottleneck holding up the supply of specialists in Obstetrics and Gynaecology was finally lifted. Singapore would soon have her own homegrown specialist obstetricians and gynaecologists! A grand dinner was held in the Hospital grounds to celebrate the Royal College accreditation of KK Hospital.

Whereas in 1959 there were six OB-GYN specialists in Singapore, today (2009) there are some 300! Credit goes to the consultants of both Government and University Units of KKH for their part in the supervision and training of their younger colleagues and aspiring specialists.

In 1963, Professor John McKelvey returned to America after completing his term as Visiting Professor, fully satisfied with his contribution to the hospital.

In the process he gained the affection and gratitude of the Hospital community, but lost thirty pounds in weight!

In my two years at the Royal Maternity Hospital of Queen's University, Belfast (1956-58), I had not seen a single case of molar pregnancy, but in the fortnight of my return to Singapore's KK Hospital in 1959, I saw six cases of the disease, one woman dramatically aborting a mole on the floor of the maternity ward as I was doing my round. (Because of the acute shortage of bed-space, patients had to lie on mattresses on the ward floor.)

Instantly, it struck me that here, at our very doorstep, was a gold mine of research material begging to be studied. Molar pregnancy was a fascinating disease attracting worldwide interest because of its malignant potential, which complication was sensitive to chemotherapy.

Here, I recognized, was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not to be missed.

Shortly after, thought was translated into action. With the consent of the Medical Superintendent, Dr Kapur, and my Government counterpart, Dr TK Chong, I formed a Mole Clinic to which all cases of the disease would be channelled. For the next ten years, the Mole Clinic absorbed much of my time and

attention, occupied hundreds of my spare hours and kept me busy working on the fascinating pathological course, response to chemotherapy, and complications of the disease.

When the results of my study were first published, KK Hospital was immediately acknowledged as the world's leading centre for research in the field, housing the largest scientifically conducted prospective study in recent times.

By now, I'm sure, the reader is getting impatient to know what molar pregnancy is all about.

As early as the first century, the Greek "Father of Medicine", Hipocrates, had recognised the disease but mistakenly called it "dropsy of the uterus, due to the drinking of unhealthy water." But the most interesting account comes from Holland. It tells of a certain Countess of Henneberg who gave birth to 365 babies on Good Friday of 1276, "as many babies as there are days in a year." The "children" were baptised, put into two basins, and together were buried in the church cemetery!

This case of molar pregnancy was obviously fantasized by some imaginative medieval story-teller.

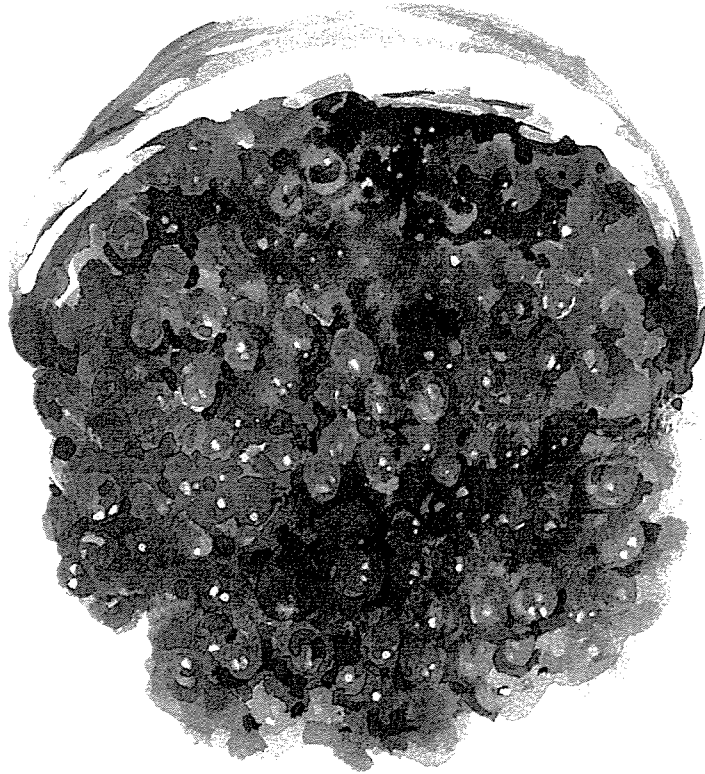
WHAT IS MOLAR PREGNANCY?

I shall describe in simple laymen's terms how a conception may run wild and grow into what looks like a bunch of grapes.

Every pregnancy begins with one cell, the egg cell (ovum), fertilized by a male cell (spermatozoa). The fertilised ovum rapidly divides into a globular mass of cells, which differentiates into (a) an inner cell mass which normally becomes the foetus or baby, and (b) an outer mass of trophoblasts which implants into the uterine lining to form the life supporting organ of the foetus – the placenta.

The trophoblast cells have unique invasive power to penetrate the maternal tissues (decidua), making contact with the maternal blood vessels to form the placenta which, for the duration of the nine-months' gestation, serves as the vital life support organ for the developing foetus, acting as its lungs, liver, kidneys, etc.

In molar pregnancy, for some unknown cause, the inner cell mass fails to form a foetus, while the outer supporting trophoblasts continue to produce nutrients for a non existent foetus. The nutrient fluid being unused, accumulates



Uterus with "grape pregnancy".

and bloats up the villous processes transforming them into grape-like vesicles.

To the woman, all the symptoms of pregnancy continue to be present (even when there is no baby), and often unusually accentuated, e.g. severe morning sickness, swelling and discomfort of breasts, and abdominal enlargement, often much larger than in a normal pregnancy. Sooner or later, the uterus rejects the abnormal conception and the woman aborts the molar material in the form of a bloody mass of grape-like tissues.

In about ten percent of cases, the trophoblastic cells' penetration of the maternal tissues exceeds the normal bounds of placenta formation, and become malignant, invading the maternal tissues and the blood-stream to be transported to distant sites, e.g. vagina, lungs and brain.

For this reason, medical researchers are especially interested and concerned, to detect any malignant behaviour early and to institute treatment. Fortunately, such malignancies are often amenable to chemotherapy.

THE KK HOSPITAL SERIES –

When visiting Professor Dr McKelvey from USA saw the research material, he said, “This is dandy stuff.” That was July 1962. The very next month, Dr McKelvey said, “Siang Hwa, you will pack your bag soon. I am sending you to the top OB-GYN Departments in America to tell them of your work on Molar Pregnancy. It is simply fascinating.”

In a 12-week whirlwind tour from November 1962 to January 1963, I lectured at fourteen OB-GYN Departments at the following universities: Minnesota, Chicago, North-Western, New York, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, George Washington, Salt Lake City, UCLA, UCSF, and Stanford.

Dr Nicholson Eastman, of Johns Hopkins University and doyen of OB-GYN in America, after listening to my reports, elected me to the panel of Editorial Consultants of the prestigious Obstetrical and Gynaecological Survey, America’s foremost journal for OB-GYN.

In 1964, I presented the KK Hospital Study Series of Molar Pregnancy to the Australian Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Surfers Paradise, Queensland, Australia. At the close of the meeting, Professor James Scott, member of the Scientific Committee of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, London, came up to me and said, “Wally, send me your paper. It will be considered for the award of the William Blair Bell Lecture for 1965.”

The William Blair Bell Lectureship is awarded annually by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists for the most significant work in the field of OB-GYN done by recently qualified MRCOGs in that particular year.

I was duly awarded the lectureship. The lecture on “The KK Hospital Study of 200 cases of Molar Pregnancy” was delivered in May 1966.

Over the years, as the study progressed, it became evident that the disease occurred predominately in the lower socioeconomic group of the community. As Singapore has been elevated from the Third World to the First World, Molar Pregnancy has become a rarity. In thirty-six years of private practice (1969 - 2005) I did not see a single case of molar pregnancy. It is obviously a Third World Disease. If the opportunity had been missed, we would remain in our state of ignorance.

It was patently a case of striking while the iron is hot.

My North American lecture tour on “Molar Pregnancy at the KK Birthquake Hospital” (December 1962- February 1963) took me to New York City, for a welcome four-day stop-over with Professor Tommy Koh, Singapore’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

As a first time visitor to New York, I could not have received a more cordial and warm welcome. In between my speaking engagements at New York, Cornell and Columbia universities, I had the pleasure of visiting with the Koh family, a model of Oriental hospitality.

I should perhaps fill in, for the reader’s sake, how I came to know the Kohs. In 1960, in the midst of Singapore’s unprecedented population explosion, the Family Planning Association organised a debate on the motion, “Therapeutic Abortion should be adopted as a method of Population Control.” As Acting Head of the University Department at KK Hospital, I led the team for the Opposition, while Professor Tommy Koh led the team for the Proposition.

At that time, Mrs Tommy Koh (Siew Aing) was a medical student under my

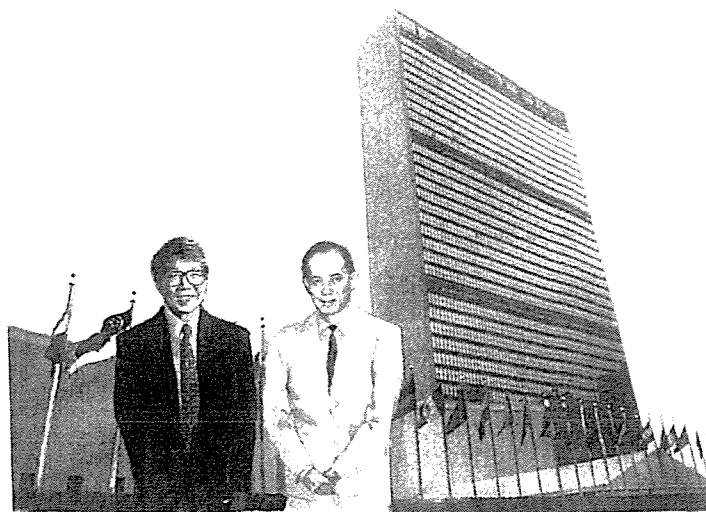
charge. From these beginnings, a warm friendship grew between us. In the debate on Population Control, Professor Tommy Koh was judged the best debator although his team lost the motion. Notwithstanding, Therapeutic Abortion became official policy and caused some regretful consequences. Singapore's population growth suffered a serious decline.

My New York visit turned out to be the high point of the lecture tour, starting with an early morning jog with Professor Koh along the banks of the East River. Later in the day, he took me on a conducted tour of the United Nations Headquarters, to tread the corridors of power, and see the Assembly Hall where world leaders met to deliberate on international issues of peace and war.

A particular Meditation Chamber which caught my attention had on one wall hopeful words, reminiscent of Isaiah 2:4, of a day coming when nations "... shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

To complete my New York interlude, we spent an afternoon viewing the priceless art works at The Metropolitan Art Gallery.

On reflection, some half-a-century after the time, I count myself more than fortunate to have been a family friend of Singapore's best known overseas representative. I have never forgotten the pleasant surprise: when I emerged from the aircraft, there was the Professor waiting to greet me on the aerial bridge. In the words of my late Father, such warmth "caused even the winter snow to melt."



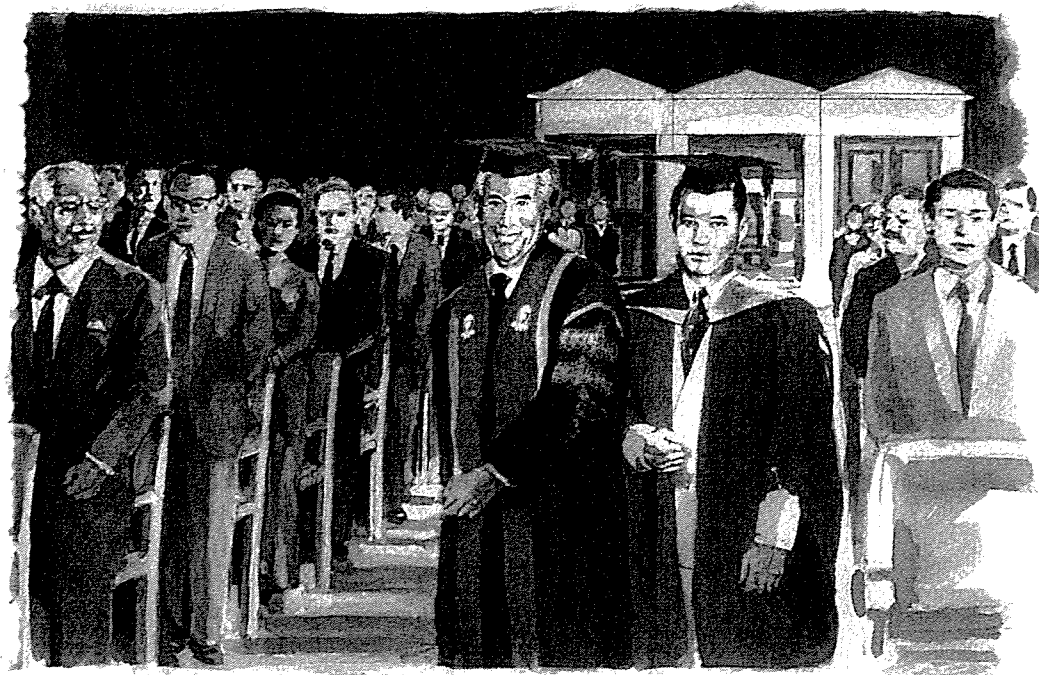
Visit to the United Nations building with Professor Tommy Koh.

Awed by the prospect of appearing at the Royal College in London, before an august assembly of specialists, academicians and international practitioners, I was acutely conscious of my inadequacies – a “Chinaman” addressing a predominantly Caucasian and international audience.

As I thought of my hospital, the world-famed “Birthquake Hospital,” and my Department, and of course, my country – Singapore – no more a Crown Colony of Great Britain, but independent and sovereign, I set my heart to rise to the challenge. It was back to my Grundig tape recorder, the instrument which saved my face in Belfast when I read my first scientific paper at Queen’s University.

I wrote out my presentation, with the relevant statistics, pathological slides, charts and tables. Then I rehearsed – to my Grundig recorder, to my students, to my staff, and to the Singapore O & G Society. In the preparation, no detail was left to chance.

As the day approached for me to travel to London, amazing, surprise of surprises, the President of the College, Sir Hector MacLennan, invited me to stay



Sir Hector: "I will make it easy for you."

in his Presidential Suite at the Royal College in Regents Park. I have yet to figure out the reason for his extraordinary hospitality.

On the day of days, 20 May 1966, at breakfast with his family, the President treated me like a son. He said, "Wally, I shall be your Chairman, to introduce you."

At 10 o'clock, the great door to the College Hall swung open and Sir Hector led me in. The hall was full to capacity, an awe-inspiring sight. I felt as though I had a dozen butterflies inside my stomach. I prayed, "Lord, help!"

As we reached the rostrum, Sir Hector whispered a few last words. "Don't worry, Wally. I know how you feel. I shall make it easy for you!"

What assurance and kindness, and that from the President himself. In his opening remarks, Sir Hector said, "I have learnt from Dr Tow how he is indebted to his teacher Professor Macafee of Queen's University, Belfast. He quoted a Chinese proverb, 'When drinking water, remember the source' (飲水思源). It was at Queen's that Dr Tow received much, which he acknowledges with deep gratitude."

Thus eased by Sir Hector's assuring words, I took my place at the rostrum and delivered my material on Molar Pregnancy. In truth, it was the moment of my life, here expressed in poetry.

William Blair Bell Lecture

From College rostrum I survey
Colleagues come from far away;
For to hear what I would say,
At th'appointed time in May.

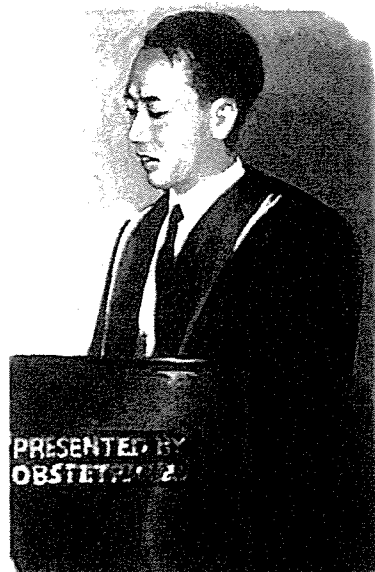
That moment more than made repay
Thousand hours of silent toil;
Unseen burning midnight oil –
And you might say it made my day.

The subsequent publication of my paper in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology lifted the name of KK Hospital to the highest international level.

The impact of the lecture and its appearance in the British Journal of OB-GYN resulted in requests to lecture overseas, and distant consultations on cases of molar pregnancy with malignant complications, something not unexpected.

In all this, one lesson stood out loud and clear: rare opportunities come but rarely. When they do, seize them, work fast and hard.

But it all depends on you!



Day of days – 20 May 1966.

It was like a dream come true when I acceded to the Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University in 1965. When I joined the Department in 1955, the hierarchy told its story: the way to the top was crowded, virtually set and sealed. Any ambition had to bow to reality, and reality spoke a silent solemn message, thus:

1. Professor Benjamin H Sheares
2. Doctor Seah Cheng Siew
3. Doctor Goon Seck Mun
4. Doctor Lean Tye Hin
5. Doctor Wee Joo Seng
6. Doctor Tan Joo Siang
7. Doctor Tow Siang Hwa

In 1953, when I graduated at the top of the class, Big Sister, in a moment's

enthusiasm spoke prophetic words: “Siang Hwa, you will succeed Professor Sheares.” Her words were sweet sounding but silenced by sobering reality.

My senior colleagues were brilliant and top scholars in their own right. Dr Seah’s position was undisputed. The Professor had sent him for a special course of training at the prestigious Johns Hopkins University, and had recently returned with the aura of an “heir apparent.” His place, next to the Professor, was beyond question.

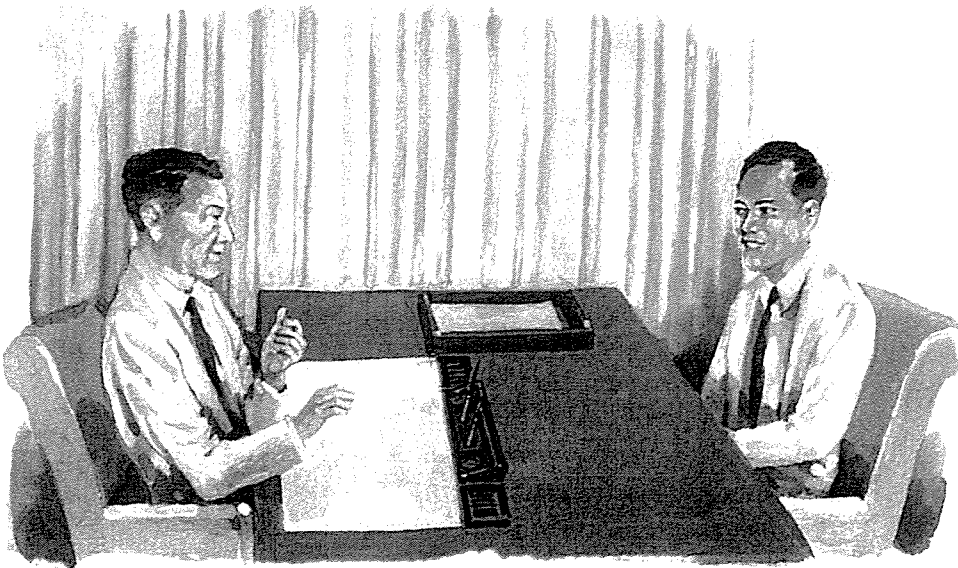
The next two men, Dr Goon and Dr Lean, were equally able. Their excellence as academics and practitioners was undoubted.

In life, events do not always turn out according to plan. In the words of a ACS teacher: “In life be wise: always expect the unexpected.”

In December 1956, while I was undergoing training at the Royal Maternity Hospital in Belfast, Royal College Inspectors from London inspected the KK Hospital for accreditation, at the request of the Hospital authorities.

The result was a “no.” This disastrous failure caused a mass exodus from the Department in early 1957. Five of my senior colleagues abruptly left the Department: Drs Seah, Goon and Lean left for training in the United Kingdom; the next two for private practice.

This left a large void in the hierarchy.



Professor Sheares said, “What is your aim in life: to be a teacher or to make money?”

So, when I had obtained the MRCOG, London, and returned to Singapore in March 1959, I found myself filling the void left by the departure of my five senior colleagues.

I was now Assistant to the Professor.

In 1960, Professor Sheares suddenly left for private practice, leaving me in charge of the Department. It was shock upon shock.

This rise from No. 7 in 1956 to No. 1 in 1960 literally took the wind out of me.

As I reflected on the turn of events and the unprecedented rise to the top, it then became clear as day. The casual Tea Room tattle in 1955 which led to my move to Belfast, and the years of training which followed, had prepared me for the sudden void caused by the Professor's unexpected departure in 1960.

The train of events was no accident, but of God! I believe He used my early return to KK Hospital for good purpose, to activate the Hospital's accreditation exercise and to lift it to international status.

Then and there, I resolved to make the accreditation agenda my top priority, so that future generations of trainees will not have to suffer the three-year separation from family and country that I had experienced.

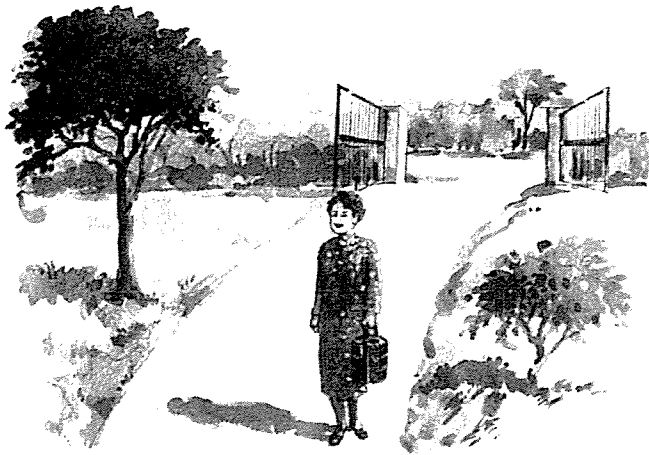
But my ultimate prize looked beyond: it was the Call of God to life-long service.

When I got to the KK Hospital, Mr Kam Shen Koon lay lifeless on the floor by the patient's bed, behind a screen, obviously dead. The most likely cause – heart attack. Mrs Kam sobbed uncontrollably, in a state of shock.

Five days earlier both husband and wife were celebrating the birth of their daughter (after three sons). How happy and thankful they were to God, to have a girl in the family at last! In a moment, their joy was turned to grief – such is life in our sorrow-filled world. Thank God, the Kams were a God-fearing couple. So in Jesus Christ there was comfort in the sure hope of the resurrection and reunion as promised in God's Word:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.
(1 Corinthians 15:22)

After the funeral, I spoke to Mrs Kam. "How are you going to manage without your husband?" He was an accountant, the sole bread-winner. Mrs Kam had



Mrs Kam never forgot to say "Thanks" during Chinese New Year.

been a full-time housewife. They had some savings, not much.

"Mrs Kam, we have two unused rooms in our staff quarters, with a small kitchen, shower and toilet. We invite you to move in with your children. Then you can rent out your terrace house. Another help I can render is a IUD (intra-uterine device) Research Project in my Department which needs a clerk for two years. If you wish, you may start any time. Please think about it."

Gladly she agreed. We did some improvements to the quarters and the Kam family moved in. Their house was rented out for \$1,600 per month.

The next week Mrs Kam started her job; the two older kids continued schooling, while the two young ones were looked after by a maid and caring relatives. The Kam family stayed with us for two years. This tided them over a critical period of need, all due to the husband's untimely death.

One day, Mrs Kam said, "Dr and Mrs Tow, I have found a HDB apartment and we are leaving next month. Thank you for looking after us for two years. We have been very blessed. Our children have grown up with your children and under your watchful care. We have enjoyed the nights of Family Worship. God bless you. We can never thank you enough."

Good-bye! The Kams moved to their own apartment in 1966 but Mrs Kam has never failed to call at Chinese New Year with presents until she was afflicted with Alzheimer's disease.

Today, her four children are professionally qualified, all married; they are believing and practising Christians and successfully established in society.

28 | PHONE AUCTION | God moved in mysterious ways

Number 64 Andrew Road was our family home for thirty-six years and “traveler’s lodge” to missionaries, pastors, Christian groups and workers, university professors, church members in distress, and relatives. It served as a service hostel with school transport provided for a string of nine nieces, and refuge for a family of five for two years.

Some of these guests were unknown to us, but God’s Word says,

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:2)

For two years we lived in KK Hospital quarters. It was during the “birth-quake” era of the 1960s when our hospital delivered over 100 babies daily and there was an acute shortage of qualified men.

So, for two years, I offered my services as Consultant-on-Call, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Towards the end of my two-year on-campus residency, my wife and I toyed with the idea of buying a house – a bold proposition when we did not have that sort of means. However, I had a generous Big Sister who was kind beyond words. I plucked up courage and gently broached her on the matter. She was encouraging. That was October 1961.

Daily we studied “The Straits Times” classified columns. One day, something interesting caught our eye: “No. 64 Andrew Road, bungalow for sale. Deceased estate. Call Mr. Milliken, Hong Kong Bank Trustees.”

Our enthusiasm was aroused. “Might this be our dream house?” We studied the Street Directory: Andrew Road was in Caldecott Hill Estate, off Thomson Road, near McRitchie Reservoir. Excellent locality!

That very afternoon, we took a drive and identified the house, an old colonial style bungalow on a beautiful square piece of flat lawn with few plantings, some fifteen feet (4.5 meters) below road level. To the Chinese mind, it was not good fengshui (geomancy), but this did not bother us.

We liked what we saw. It was love at first sight. We knocked on the front door and a kindly gentleman, Mr Hamilton, welcomed us in. He showed us the rooms: A large living room downstairs, with windows looking into the garden; a dining room adjoining the kitchen, and two large bedrooms upstairs, with ensuite bath-toilets. We loved the charming high-arched ceilings.



Traveler's lodge to unnumbered visitors for 36 years.

Mr Hamilton said he was due to retire and return to Scotland. “The property belongs to the estate of the late Mr NR Mistri, owner of Phoenix Aerated Waters, and related enterprises. He was a philanthropist and gave so much to the medical services that the pediatric block was named Mistri Wing after him. In fact Mr Mistri owned the entire Caldecott Hill on which he had built some thirty bungalows. He named the roads in the Estate after the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott, his wife Olive, and children Joan and John.”

Mr Hamilton’s historical account was fascinating. We fancied the prospect of becoming owner-residents in this prestigious estate! Our imagination was flying high!

“Mr Hamilton, we are most grateful for what you told us today. I am a university lecturer, working at the KK Hospital. We have lived two years in hospital quarters, and thought we might venture into something like this. It’s like a dream.”

“I hope your dream will materialize. Good luck!”

Thus ended our introduction to 64 Andrew Road. We said our goodbye and with a long, last look around, we drove back to our KK Quarters, our heads full of 64 Andrew Road, for we had truly fallen in love with it.

Now I shall tell you the exciting story of our blind auction which began the next Monday. It lasted for six days until Saturday, a test of nerves.

DAY 1: MONDAY, 9 OCTOBER 1961

“Good morning, Mr Milliken. I am Dr Tow, university lecturer, KK Hospital. I read in the classified column of ‘The Straits Times’ about No. 64 Andrew Road. May I know what the asking price is?”

“Dr Tow, it is S\$52,000. The land is 39,700 sq ft, freehold. You have a competitor who made the offer. You have to outbid that. It is an auction.”

My wife and I had a quick consult. We agreed to \$53,000.

“Mr Milliken, what about \$53,000?”

“Very well. You’re in. I will convey the news to the other party. Please call me this time tomorrow.”

So the telephone auction took the form of a nerve-racking six-round bout.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – as the stakes rose, so did the pulse. Each morning’s telephone call brought new tension and excitement.

“Who might our competitor be? Man or woman? Some tycoon? Perhaps a property agent or investor.” It was shadow boxing.

DAY 5: FRIDAY, 13 OCTOBER 1961

“Mr Milliken, good morning. What is the latest?”

“Well, Doctor, your competitor has stamina. We’re looking at \$59,000. You’ve got to better the figure.”

I could almost hear my heartbeat. My wife and I looked at each other. “Up one thousand? Agree? Last price!”

“Mr Milliken, \$60,000, our last price. Win or lose, that’s it. That’s our limit.”

“Right, Dr Tow. Tomorrow is race day. I’ll be at the races. You will hear from me at four. All the best!”

I put down the phone, wondering, “Have we done the right thing? What if the other party should go up another thousand? Then we shall lose that beautiful house for just one thousand!”

Mind games, I have learnt, are tricky and trying. We need to take our mind away from flightful fancies and fears, and trust in our Father in Heaven: He cares for us and He will surely help.

That night at Family Worship we committed the matter into the hands of the Almighty, remembering the verse in 1 Peter 5:7 – *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*

DAY 6: SATURDAY, 14 OCTOBER 1961

The hands of the clock never moved so slowly. We looked and looked again, as though to speed up the time. We kept our ears open as the hour approached. Will that magical 4.00 pm bring good news? We tried to concentrate on other things, but Mr Milliken filled our entire thinking. We walked around, as it were, on tenterhooks.

Finally, sharp on the dot of four, the phone rang. Mr Milliken’s voice came on the line. “Dr Tow, congratulations! The house is yours.” He sounded so upbeat, I thought his horse had won!

“Wow, truly? What an answer to prayer! Mr Milliken, thank you, we can’t believe it!”

Mr Milliken detailed briefly the terms of settlement. "Please call at my office on Monday."

Settlement was in sixty days. Big Sister graciously handed us a cheque for \$40,000. "The moon had fallen from heaven!" The University Housing Loan scheme supplied \$25,000. Our cup runneth over!

We moved into 64 Andrew Road on 25 December 1961, perfectly timed for a Christmas present.

The years passed, mostly flying too fast. To the old house, built in 1938, we did many improvements: we added three rooms, a swimming pool (an expensive folly) – the children swam for five years and we were left to clean it for the next twenty-five! We planted a fancy Chinese garden. Vanity of vanities!

Then the children grew up and, like birds, flew away one by one.

In 1997, we decided it was time to stop being servants to the pool and house. We walked to our next-door neighbour to bid her goodbye. Mrs Kay was a perfect neighbour, a Christian lady about our age, and Secretary to the Anglican Bishop of Singapore.

"Do sit down, I'll get some tea. What a pity you are going to leave us." Mrs Kay then revealed to us the untold bit of our blind auction of 1961.

"You know, Dr Tow, you remember Mr Milliken? The Hong Kong Bank trustee? Well, we had come to that memorable Friday. You had raised your bid to \$60,000. I told Mr Milliken, we would add another thousand.

"Mr Milliken said to me, 'Mrs Kay, let your competitor have the house. He is a young doctor working for the University. You have such a large house on 65,000 sq ft of land. Why not help him? Make it your good deed today!' My heart was touched. I said 'yes' to Mr Milliken."

My wife and I thanked Mrs Kay profusely, from our heart.

Question: Who touched Mr Milliken's heart to touch Mrs Kay's?

But godliness with contentment is great gain... And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. (1 Timothy 6:6,8)

Our God cares and *...is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...* (Ephesians 3:20). He is able even to touch the king's heart.

Truly, God's blessing was beyond all that we asked for.

29 | GOODBYE TO THE CHAIR | A time to go

Said the wise King Solomon:

*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...
a time to come, and a time to go. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

I came on the staff of KK Hospital in 1955. Ten years later, in 1965, I was appointed to the Chair. In 1969 it was “goodbye” – it was time to take up my life-calling.

In 1938, at the age of thirteen, I heard the call of Christ: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me* (Mark 8:34). God’s servant Dr John Sung gave the challenge. Readily I responded, together with a dozen others. The beloved servant of God laid his hands and prayed for us. Thus the call of God was sealed. Thirty years later, the time came for me to leave the University for the “way of the cross.”

As the apostle Paul supported himself by tent-making, so I set up the Tow

Yung Clinic (a partnership of Christian gynaecologists) to support my Gospel work. My Christian partners provided spiritual and moral support.

I AM A DEBTOR –

So says the apostle Paul, and I say the same: I also am a debtor. As a recipient of the free salvation grace of God, I have a bounden duty, nay, a royal privilege to be a labourer together with God, repaying my life debt.

I see this repayment of debt in two dimensions: to society as well as to my Maker. So, before I sent in my letter of resignation to the University authority, I seriously searched my heart and was more than satisfied that my debt to Hospital and University and society had been adequately repaid. Thereafter was my letter of resignation despatched.

When the letter reached the Vice-Chancellor, I received a note to see him. That was November 1968. The meeting was friendly and relaxed. I knew Dr Toh Chin Chye who had been on the Staff of the Department of Physiology some twenty years earlier. His wife had been my patient. We spoke freely and frankly. He wanted to know my reason for leaving.

“Why did you not tell me?”

“I’m sorry, I thought I should not trouble you.”

We spoke for half-an-hour. I told Dr Toh my purpose of leaving was to save souls. This did not greatly impress him. I assured him that the Department was in good shape and in capable hands.

When I succeeded Professor Sheares in 1960, I was the only member in the Department with the MRCOG. The Hospital was not accredited for specialist training. I initiated the plan for reorganisation of the Hospital which I had brought back from Belfast, to be implemented for the whole Hospital, the Government section included.

In 1963, Royal College accreditation was duly granted. My debt to University and Hospital was amply repaid.

I spoke freely with Dr Toh.

“Today, I am comfortable to leave the Department to a team of seven MR-COGs (all loyal, fully qualified, home grown products), trained and groomed in the Department. Dr SS Ratnam has been with me for six years. I am very confident of his capability. He is more qualified than me on paper, with the FRCS,

and is well able to step into my shoes.”

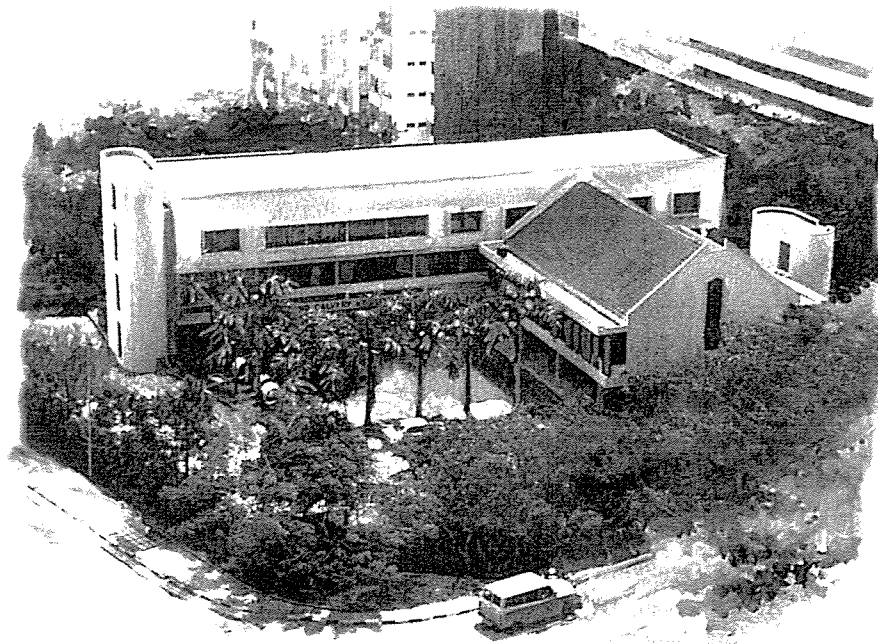
We parted on a happy note. The Vice-Chancellor seemed more assured and relaxed.

Subsequent history has proved me right. Under Dr SS Ratnam and the new team of younger men, the Department built on the old foundation, expanded into new territory, and achieved renown in unexplored areas.

In May 1969 I departed with a light heart. A new life for me had begun.

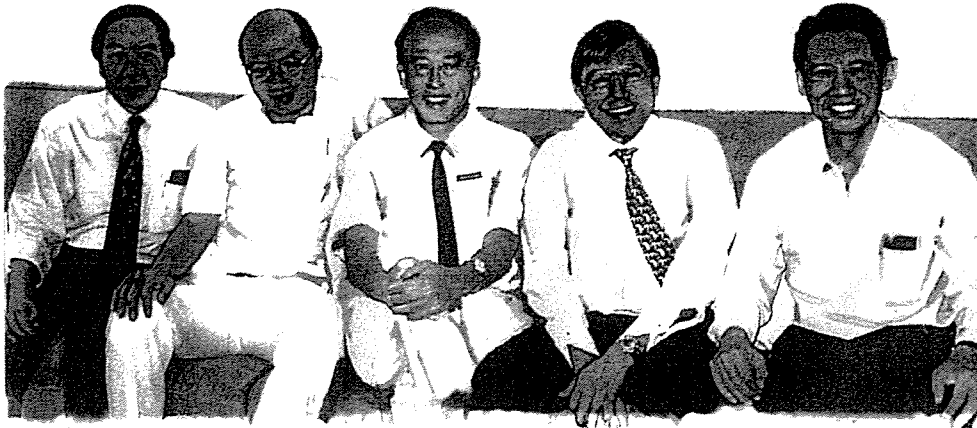
Forty years have flown by. My Gospel efforts have reached out to ten countries and established over twenty churches, with the saving of precious souls for God’s everlasting Kingdom. Have I any regrets leaving the University? What do you think? What value does one place on a soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Others can do what I did, in the Chair, and better. But can they care for souls? It’s a matter of different values.



Four years after leaving the Chair, Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church was completed in Taman Jurong, the first of over twenty churches built.

PART SIX | Partnership & Practice



*Top (from left): Dr Lim Lean Soon, Dr Quek Swee Peng, Dr Tow Siang Hwa,
Dr Lim Teck Chye and Dr Richard Yung.*

*Bottom (seated from left): Margaret Hum, Dr Lim Lean Soon, Dr Richard Yung,
Dr Tow Siang Hwa, Dr Quek Swee Peng, Dr Lim Teck Chye, Catherine Wong.
(Middle row from left): Judy Tan, Pat Chia, Nancy Yeo, Cecilia Wee, Ma Siau Kee,
Chung See Lin, Audrey Chong, Jenny Yong, Dixie Tay, Juan Sow Mei, Amanda Goh.
(Back row from left): Tham Ngan Kuai, Chng Eng Leng, Marie Lee,
Tan Soh Teng, Ong Siew Hoon, Yeo Wyelin, Ng Ngan Oi.*

Forty years ago, dream became reality, and a clinic with soul concern was born. I had thought long through the matter: To simply care for the perishing body and its transient needs, giving not a thought for the deathless soul, the real patient, would surely be folly and vanity of effort.

Today, with fifty years of practice behind me, I am ever more convinced that, in the broad perspective, the net result of doctors' best efforts merely postpones the final demise, perhaps rendering the departure more comfortable.

What Tow Yung Clinic has done is to offer a better way, something beyond medical science which is able to defeat our chief enemy, who wields the power of disease and death. Our greater joy beyond compassionate and quality medical care, is to introduce the Saviour, the Divine Physician: the only Man who took on the Devil, and destroyed him who has the power of death (Hebrews 2:14). That fearsome evil spirit holds all mankind in his grasp, without exception.

Our Saviour is ever victorious. On the cross, He defeated the Devil; from the grave He arose triumphant. To Christians, He has given a mandate to go and proclaim the message of hope to all our condemned race. Jesus says,

Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.
(Revelation 1:17, 18)

We who have been delivered from the Devil's power, should we not tell the rest of the dying race, "Come to Jesus, accept His offer of victory over death, and receive His life more abundant, life which knows no end?"

Only Jesus can meet the need of the soul, the real person within us. Our focus must shift from body to soul. The best of medical science, aided by the latest and most advanced technology can, at best, add some years of life, merely postponing the inevitable.

Tow Yung Clinic opened its doors to the public on 10 May 1969. To date, it has registered over 80,000 patients. I hung up my stethoscope on my eightieth birthday in 2005, after a happy association with partners, staff and patients over thirty-six years.

This clinic was built on two Christian principles:

... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Matthew 22:39)

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. (Luke 6:31)

These verses guided me in every human relationship – toward patients, partners, staff and all. Our Lord's instruction determines how I deal with others, "...as I would that men should do to me." Every treatment and every procedure must be what I would prescribe for myself. This is the acid test of Christian faith and practice.

This principle sets the standard for every transaction. Patients coming from near and far may rest assured of a fair deal based on truth and love. Some patients travel long distances simply to verify a diagnosis made by another doctor. They may not reveal their real purpose, but inside them is a burning question: "Will this doctor tell me the true and accurate diagnosis?" The fact is: not all doctors do. But the Christian doctor must. He must do no other, but ever remain faithful to the Master's teaching.

In all my human relationships, then, I have made Luke 6:31 and Matthew 22:39 my compass, standard, and guide. This applies not only to patients, but to partners and staff alike, in fact, everybody.

CHOICE OF PARTNERS –

For me, God's Word has clear instructions on the choice of partners, not much different from the choice of a spouse: it is "for better for worse... till death us do part..." Amos 3:3 says, *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?* And 2 Corinthians 6:14, *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...* The common faith in the Lord has kept our partnership happily united through forty years.

In the same spirit of being one family in Christ, I have welcomed each of my four partners – Richard Yung, Quek Swee Peng, Lim Teck Chye, Lim Lean Soon – without the usual joining fee or any other monetary consideration. Within the partnership, the guiding spirit is: each for the other, and all for the Lord.

Partners stand in for each other, look after each other's patients on a quid pro quo basis, and protect each other's interests. Overheads are shared in proportion to each one's earnings, fair and square.

Our happy relationship is built on Jesus our Lord. We meet together for prayer every Monday morning to seek His guidance and blessing. This is the key to enduring unity and harmony.

When we started out in the beginning, Dr Yung and I made the best decision, *to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's*, meaning, to pay Income Tax and any other levies required by law. We engaged a Tax Accountant, set up a Cashier's Department to handle all money matters. This arrangement puts all financial transactions into the hands of a team of trustworthy staff, and frees the doctor to do his doctoring with a free and easy mind.

I call this the "Good Sleep Department." The busy partner may leave the clinic after the last patient, without having to count his dollars and cents. He can sleep well at night, knowing that no one is stealing his money, and the Tax Department's due also is in safe hands.

STAFF MATTERS –

Tow Yung Clinic has a staff of between fifteen and twenty of all categories (nursing, secretarial, domestic). We have to contend with a highly competitive and mobile market. Good members of staff are like pearls, hard to find and harder to keep. So, once we have found a good person, we treasure her and look after her interests. Most of our staff stay with us for good. We treat each one as family,

applying Christian principles. Fifteen of our existing staff have been with us for over twenty-five years, seven of these exceeding thirty-five years.

OUR SERIOUS BUSINESS –

At Tow Yung Clinic, we are concerned with eternal realities and the serious issues of life. Let me here repeat a line from my opening paragraph: “To simply care for the perishing body and its transient needs, giving not a thought for the deathless soul, the real patient, would surely be folly and vanity of effort.”

Arising from this, seriously, I asked myself, “How can Tow Yung Clinic contribute to the Gospel effort in a meaningful manner? Our Lord’s words are constantly ringing in my ears ever since I heard them in 1935: *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mark 8:36, 37)

Question. How can a busy Clinic contribute to the Gospel effort?

In our clinic, Gospel tracts and booklets are freely available for interested patients and relatives to help themselves. At times, during a slack period or at the end of a clinic session, there are opportunities for doctor and patient to enter into meaningful dialogue, and for the Gospel to be presented.

But the main contribution of the clinic is to allow me the mobility and finance to advance the Gospel cause. From the beginning, one afternoon each week was reserved for Gospel outreach. Over the years Gospel time progressively superseded clinic time as mission doors and opportunities opened in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Australia, England and Canada. Progressively, I phased out of medical practice into Gospel missions.

Today, in my retirement, I look back with satisfaction on what God has done, giving me a part in the building of two dozen churches in over ten countries. Thank God for Tow Yung Clinic, partners and staff.

I end with a well-known Christian quote:

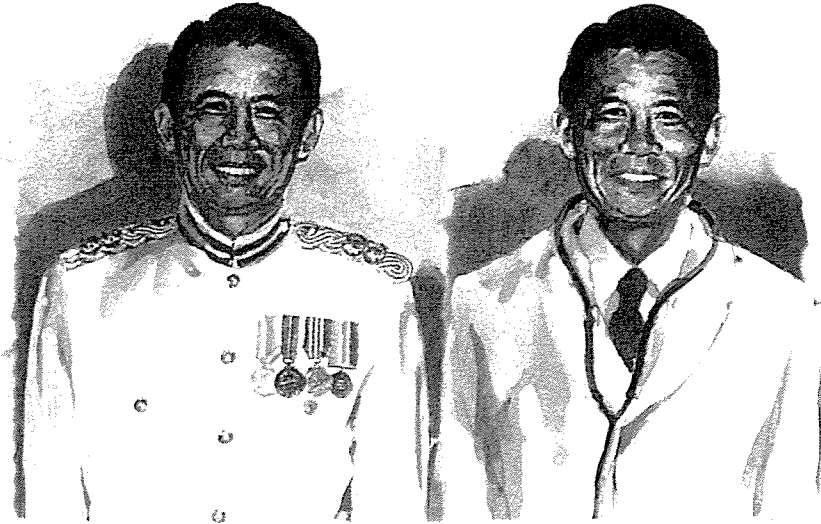
Only one life ’twill soon be past;
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

To the reader, may I ask: Where will you spend eternity? Do you know? Do you care?

Our clinic partnership has lasted these thirty-five years. It must be one of the longest associations of medical specialists in Singapore. Prof Tow has always told us that a partnership is like a marriage, supposed to last a lifetime. A lot of give and take, and we have found, more give than take. If we think first of good for the partner before ourselves, how can we fail? Of course, we sometimes have to keep one eye closed, and occasionally both eyes closed. This spirit has been due mainly to Prof's stewardship and example to us. He has been our teacher, mentor, guide, partner and friend.

Besides all the partners being practising Christians giving us that extra bond, we have wives who get on well together. They only set foot in the clinic for social visits. Many specialist groups have failed because of domestic interference in clinic affairs. We are all grateful for our wives' support on the sidelines.

There is a special reason for me to be grateful to my partners. Each time I took off from the clinic on military duties, they did my work for me without ever grumbling. Jokingly, they told me they were doing National Service by proxy!



Richard Yung – soldier and doctor.

Another common characteristic of our partners is that we all have Type A personalities: Active, forthright, with quick reactions. Just watch us behind the steering wheel! All drive like the devil, including Prof. In the days before Juma'at came along, Prof used to drive me with him to different hospitals, including Jurong. I don't know whether he ever noticed that I always sat forward with my hands hanging tightly to the seat! Never mind about Swee Peng, Teck Chye and Lean Soon – all of us run for our deliveries and there was also Doctor Su. Once I was his passenger. He was driving sitting half forward hanging on to the steering wheel – like a cop chasing robbers. I asked him, "Wow! Do you always drive like this?" How unlike him at the top end of the OT table, where he was always a picture of calm coolness.

THE YOUNGER THREE –

The three younger doctors in our group were our students at KK. I had very little contact with Lean Soon while at KK. But he is the brightest of the lot, being the only Royal College Gold Medalist among us. In Prof's day if the College had instituted the Gold Medal for the top candidate of the year, he would have been a recipient. Prof was a Queen's Scholar.

Coming back to Lean Soon, he has a special gift for ultrasound and laparos-

copy. He tried to teach me these new techniques on quite a few occasions, but my three-dimensional spatial concept was just not good enough to pick these up. I gave up in the end. I guess this is a fear of modern technology among the aged.

Teck Chye – I remember him well as a good student, always with a thirst for knowledge. He never failed to ask questions. I had to be on my toes with him. He reminded me of one instance in a gynae op at KKH of how I reprimanded the students for joking and laughing in front of a patient with her legs up in a lithotomy position. Apparently I asked the boys how they would feel if a whole bunch of female medical students were giggling while handling their hydroceles? He said he had never forgotten this.

Now the tables have turned, they are my teachers. Teck Chye and Lean Soon are like walking medical dictionaries. I often intercom them asking, “What’s the latest (for this or that)? And what’s the dosage?”

Whatever Teck Chye does, he does with passion and enthusiasm. He has very good rapport with his patients – caring and considerate. In the time they have with him at the consulting room, he makes them feel as though they were the only patients he had. He is the busiest among us. I don’t know where he gets his energy from. Sometimes his life can be very stressful. Can you imagine in a late afternoon, with a roomful of waiting patients, and there is a multip at three quarters dilated at Mount Alvernia? Can you not feel the tension he is under?

Apart from the clinic, he has many preaching duties in his church as an Elder. He gets up around five in the morning to prepare his numerous sermons. I really envy his sonorous bass voice. He preaches like a professional evangelist.

Swee Peng, whom I know the longest, was a very intelligent student. When he first came to KK, I was told by one of the department staff, “Be careful with him, he is Prof’s nephew.” Actually they are both Teochews and only family friends. Talking about being Teochew, Prof used to sparkle up with a broad smile upon learning that a patient was also a Teochew. “Le Teochew nang ah?” Then he would switch to his China-style Teochew. But Swee Peng seldom spoke Teochew except to some of his patients. I am really impressed with his labouring efforts in Mandarin and Cantonese. Over the years he has improved in these dialects.

One day at the clinic, Swee Peng and I had a bit of free time. I gave him an IQ test, and he scored 160, like the PM and his father. His mind seems to be working faster than a computer. A very good surgeon, slick and neat, with very

little false moves, he was also very fast. However, he also has a quick temper to go with it, especially in the OT, and some nurses ended up in tears. But he was also quick to send them chocolates the next day. Quick blow-up, and quick calm-down, that's Quek Swee Peng. One of the girls told me that he actually has a good heart and never harboured any ill feelings.

One day, not long after he joined us, he assisted Prof in a hysterectomy. As was his usual self, he was a very active assistant with his hands all over the operating field. Prof looked up and asked him, "Are you trying to teach your grandfather how to suck eggs?" Dr Ma told me this story.

PROFESSOR TOW –

Finally, this list of appreciations has come to Prof – our teacher and mentor all these years. In fact, I would say he has been the heart and soul of our clinic. I first met him in 1962 when I started to attend postgraduate lectures and meetings at KK. I was doing post mortems at SGH at that time, and found myself missing the live patients. One day he phoned me asking whether I was interested to join him at the department. Thus started my lifelong association with him.

Prof is a man of many qualities. Blessed with a strong imposing personality, he has provided us all a fine example by the strength of his convictions and his single-mindedness of purpose. Whatever task he embarks on, he does so with total dedication and passion. He sees things in black and white, and makes very quick decisions. Occasionally he regrets his hastiness, and when I asked him about it, he admitted saying, "What to do? I've done it."

I believe he has inherited this impulsive and quick action trait from his late father. Some years ago, on the first day of Chinese New Year, we paid a visit to my Uncle, Doctor Hu Tsai Kuen, in Paterson Hill. Dr Hu was Cousin Richard's father. In walked old Dr Tow Keng Kee wearing a coat and tie, with his second wife in tow. As soon as he saw Dr Hu, Dr Tow Sr. held up his two hands clasped together in the old Chinese tradition, and greeted him and the others around, saying: "Keong Hi, Keong Hi!" (best wishes!) Then he turned around to his wife behind and said, "Zou!" ("let's go!")

Prof has never lost his temper at anyone, (certainly never in my presence.) If he was displeased, he would simply glare at the person with his "poppy" eyes. And then he would start chewing his Gelucil (antacid) tablets for his ulcer pains.

Teck Chye tells me that, at first, he didn't want to take up Obstetrics & Gynaecology because he was really scared of that look.

Another of Prof's qualities is the fact that he never talks bad about another person, and never gossips. Prof is also a man of many contrasts. Usually very generous to a fault, giving away his personal fortune to his church, ACS, SANA, SSO and other charitable projects, yet he could be tight in other ways, but always very frugal with himself.

During his heyday, Prof's clinic was very busy, and patients had to wait two or three hours before seeing him. One patient told me, "Seeing Dr Tow was 'deng de jiu, kan de kuai!'" (Long wait, quick consult). When a patient comes into his room, even before having a chance to sit down, he would ring ding dong for the nurse. Afterwards some of his patients would come to my room next to his to get advice and instructions, telling me that they didn't have a heart to delay the busy doctor with more questions. I guess we were a team and this was part of the team-work.

He taught me most of what I know and practise. A very good and neat surgeon, he didn't waste any actions and movements. In the early days when he assisted me in doing major operations, he used to count my fumbling moves, calling out "One fum... two fum..." He used to have two operating mornings a week at Mount Alvernia. On one Thursday morning, he had only one single Caesarean Section. He started as usual at 8 am sharp – 8 sharp means "start cutting at 8" – and finished in 20 minutes, skin to skin, timed by himself. Then we were free for the rest of the morning and didn't know what else to do. That was Prof.

Thank you, Prof and all of you, once again for putting up with me all these years, and for all your support through the ups and downs of my life. I shall miss you all.

God bless you.

* This chapter is an excerpt of Dr Richard Yung's retirement speech delivered on 20 June 2004. He passed to glory on 24 July 2007.

Dr Richard Yung joined me at the University Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 1962. Thus began a happy association of 45 years. Richard proved to be an excellent member of my team in the busiest “baby factory” in the world.

He was an active lay leader in the Anglican Cathedral Mandarin Service.

In 1969 he joined me to found the Tow Yung Clinic for women, a partnership which attracted three other Christian Obstetricians and Gynaecologists: Dr Quek Swee Peng, Dr Lim Teck Chye, Dr Lim Lean Soon. Together we made a happy family.

In life one needs a faithful spouse; in work, a loyal partner. When Richard consented, my joy was complete; my cup runneth over. Together we laid down certain Christian principles. Straight as an arrow, Richard never bent. He loved God’s commandment “Thou shalt not steal.” He organized our accounts staff to look after all financial transactions. The doctors did the doctoring and handled no cash. Prevention is the key.

In all our years Richard was light and salt in the clinic. No harsh word escaped his lips. He was considerate and kind: all the staff loved him dearly, not to mention his patients. His untimely retirement due to illness was a great loss to the clinic. But that is life. It is blessed to be missed.

During his clinic years, we learnt something: Dr Yung was a soldier at heart. Medicine was almost a pastime. This is not to say that he treated his medical practice lightly. No, Richard was in a class of his own. Whatever he did, he put in all he had – be it medicine, soldiering, family, Church, friends. Faith in the Lord was the foundation of his life.

Richard loved his country. He gave himself, heart and soul, to the nation's Armed Forces. For twenty-one years, all his available time was devoted to the military, in the jungles of Brunei, the bush of Australia, the rugged terrain of Taiwan, or the disputed Land of Promise.

Richard worked his way up in the Army – from field medical staff command to commander of a combat division. He held a regular colonel's appointment while a part-time volunteer. He won the coveted Command Appointment Plaque and the Meritorious Service Award. He was more professional than the professionals. In his autobiography, published in February 2007, his military activities occupy twenty-four pages. Obstetrics and Gynaecology fill eighteen.

Richard remembered well his Chinese roots. The fruits of his research into



At heart more a soldier than a doctor.

the Yung clan's history and family tree are recorded in his autobiography. By painstaking investigation, he traced his ancestry back almost a thousand years, identifying more than a thousand Yungs scattered over the face of the globe. By his persuasive skills, he gathered them for a grand rally of Yungs at the Yale University in Connecticut in 1998; and the maternal branch – the Kwan Clan, in California in 2003.

During the turbulent years of Japanese invasion and the Civil War, the family had to move from place to place, through many parts of China. They arrived in Singapore in 1949. Richard and his siblings (brother Allen and sister Geraldine) knew little or no English.

Nevertheless, by the grace of God and sheer hard work, they overcame their handicap and caught up with their English. Richard was fluently bilingual, with the advantage of a real life experience which few others had – the experience of the civil war in China. He made the gruelling overland trek from Hong Kong to Chungking, the wartime capital of China. That was endurance.

From his parents, Richard inherited a love for books, a deep sense of history, and the discipline of meticulous record keeping. When it came to writing his memoirs, he had his parents' collection of letters, articles, documents, diary notes, newspaper and other clippings, and literally thousands of photographs to draw from.

Richard was a model father and husband. Together with May, he raised three sons and a happy band of grandchildren. He was a model husband. When May had her two post-surgical intestinal obstructions, he never left her side. It was only their faith in the Lord and unceasing prayer that saw them through.

The greatest test of faith came in 1998 when, one day, Richard was found to have malignancy affecting kidneys and bone. Like a good soldier he took the news calmly. That night, the full impact of the illness set in. Then he and May, in their desperation, turned to the Almighty, praying unceasingly for divine help. The best medical team was assembled to manage the problem. Thereafter, it was unending hospitalizations, chemotherapy, stem cell transplant, interspersed with periods of rest and recovery. Through it all, both Richard and May stood the test with patience and fortitude. Christian friends supported with prayer and visits.

Richard was full of humour and wit. One young lady admired his luxuriant black hair which had re-grown after chemotherapy had taken everything.

“What beautiful hair you have, Dr Yung. Tell me your secret.”

“You like to try?”

“Why not?”

With a wee smile and twinkle in his eye, the doctor replied: “Chemotherapy – try it.”

Doctor Richard Yung, Colonel of the Singapore Armed Forces, soldier of the cross of Jesus Christ, founding partner of Tow Yung Clinic, beloved life-long husband of May, father to Shing Wai, Shing Jit, Shing Gene, brother of Allen and Geraldine, friend to all – was called home to be with the Lord on 24 April 2007.

One day, soon, the Lord will raise Richard to new life, together with others who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Dear Richard, your years with us were good. Farewell for now... till we meet again at Jesus' feet. Amen.

PART SEVEN | Some Reflections



In 1947, seventy-five "freshies" started the 6-year medical marathon.

October 1947 was a landmark date for the seventy-five of us at the King Edward VII College of Medicine, the cream of the crop, a four-year concentration of top scholars gathered from around the region – Singapore, Malaya, Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei – all because of the Japanese Occupation, 1942 - 1945.

From the first day of the six-year medical marathon, the group was thrown into a bonding pot where kinships developed and for a chosen dozen, aided by Cupid's love-darts, the bonding was for life.

With graduation in 1953, the Class of 1947, licensed to cut and stitch, dispersed to where we had come from. Twenty-five years later, the bonding of 1947 was revived with the first class reunion.

A self-styled Supreme Council decreed that the class – or what remained of it – gather to renew old bonds.

The reunion brought together the members, spouses and offsprings, to re-live for three days the thrills of ragging and to swap notes and renew old friendships. Former professors and teachers were not forgotten – those who had moulded us



50th year reunion: 32 of the original 75 were present.

in the “King Edward Cauldron of Medicine” and made us what we are.

The first reunion did its intended work of re-bonding so successfully, many more reunions and gatherings have kept alive the fires of friendship over the years of fast flying time. All this blessing has come to the class because of the genius and determination of a dynamic Supreme Council which comprise Dr James Murugasu (President), Dr George Khoo, Dr Wilmot Rasanagam, from Singapore, and Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, and his wife, Tun Dr Hasmah binte Ali, from Malaysia.

The driving force is James, President of the Supreme Council, who keeps a complete record of each member, contact telephone and email addresses, so that none is allowed to escape.

Whenever a reunion is ordained, James gets active. He seeks out every member, gives each one ample time of grace to make travel plans. He does not take “no” for an answer. By gentle persuasion (and more energetic measures) he gets

colleagues from as far as Australia to respond.

Alas, it is a losing battle: James has to contend with the toll of time and age, of wear and tear, and natural attrition. Naturally, with each reunion, the roll call gets shorter while the list of absent members grows longer.

What do we do during reunions? It is a catch-up on news and each others' latest happenings; visits to must-see places, especially scenic spots and any recent innovations by our illustrious classmate Mahathir. Naturally, we have a time of socialising, food and fun, reminiscing and crying (for some) on the last day, not forgetting the singing of college songs, especially those of the ragging. To sum it all, we have a jolly good time.

We had our 60th reunion in 2007, in Bukit Merah (near Taiping, Perak). Will there be more gatherings? Who can tell?

The Supreme Council is in consultation. The class members are in their eighties. Distant travel is beyond most. Until we receive marching orders from our Supreme Council, I dedicate to the Class of 1947 the poem Auld Lang Syne by Scotland's beloved poet Robert Burns.

Auld Lange Syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
 And never brought to mind?
 Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And days of auld lang syne?
 For auld lang syne, my dear,
 For auld lang syne,
 We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet,
 For auld lang syne.

Fondly known as Dr M, the architect of modern Malaysia is a man of unusual foresight and drive. Mahathir Mohamad had plunged into the academic melting pot of the King Edward VII College of Medicine with us. He not only gained his degrees but also found in fellow student, Siti Hasmah bte Ali, a worthy life partner.

Rising from the ranks, without the advantage of royal lineage, he became Malaysia's fourth and most illustrious Prime Minister.

In twenty-two years, at times turbulent but always progressive, Mahathir Mohamad lifted his nation out of Third World despond to heights of First World aspiration.

In class reunions, despite his elevation to high office, Mahathir remained friendly and warm as ever.

Mahathir*(Written for the 45th-year Class Reunion, 1992)*

From Kedah State down south he came,
 “Chet Det” Mahathir was his name;
 “Tanam Padi” he gained his gown
 From KE VII’s Med School in town.

Back in the north he served his own
 Twenty long years – how time had flown!
 The rich, the poor, he helped them all.
 By day, by night: “I’m at your call.”

Beloved Doc of Alor Star,
 They flocked to him from near and far;
 With Aesculapian skill he brought
 Health and relief to all who sought.

But deep at heart he had a yen
 To raise his fellow countrymen;
 A burning zeal to lift their lot
 From kampung plot to city spot;

From slough of paltry existence
 To heights of urban eminence;
 A value system geared for change
 To mountain top of lofty range.

With heav’n blest vision came his call
 To Bumis, patriots, one and all:
 “Awake! My fellow countrymen,
 Cast off the time-worn regimen

“Shake off the past, fear not, press on!
 The battle’s yours, it must be won!
 Time and progress wait for no man;
 Join me, my friend, I have a plan.

“Together let us build our Land –
A New Malaysia with our hand;
A new venture, a new outlook –
We shall succeed by hook by book*.

“If break we must, then break we shall
With former ways of thinking small;
Sons of the soil the future’s ours
To shape and make with God-giv’n pow’rs.

“Let us advance, let us not fret,
With discipline, with grit and sweat;
Adapt, adopt the skills we need,
Keep pace with change, my words give heed.

“Your newfound vigour, zest and zeal
Shall win successes none can steal;
Look up, look out, look West, look East!
The world’s our field, fear not the least!

“United then let us correct
The faults of years, things imperfect;
A better society let’s build –
For surely this our God has willed.

“A land with happy people filled,
A place for ev’ry r’ligion build,
May racial harm’ny firmly reign
Throughout Malaysia’s pleasant main.

“These hig-tech days let’s modernize:
Industrialize, computerize;
Compete! Update! Be not content;
To lag behind – do not consent!

“Prosperity comes not by dreams;
Hard work, brave toil, must flow like streams.”
With vision fresh Malaysia’s Fourth
Great Leader came and proved his worth.

United Nations makes his day,
From global stage he points the way;
The world sits up, they take a note:
Mahathir's wisdom – worth a quote.

A man of noble principle –
To stand alone quite capable;
And for the sake of worthy cause
He will not shrink, nor even pause.

Swift as the wind decision makes,
And swifter still the action takes;
“No time to waste, the day is late!
Let's move ahead, leave nought to fate!

“A thing that's good let's imitate;
But better still let's innovate;
Progress depends on you, my friend,
By honest means strive to the end.”

Long live the Tun with life's new lease,
May latest aids his health increase;
God bless the land, God bless the man,
With days of peace through life's brief span.

** The Malay Dilemma*



Dr M standing tall before world forum.

Solomon, in this verse from Ecclesiastes 11:1, presses upon the Christian reader to be liberal in good works as often as the opportunity presents. Such benevolent acts will abound to their account in a latter day.

He says, *Cast thy bread upon the waters for thou shalt find it after many days*. This alludes to the sower who goes forth and scatters precious seed apparently going to waste. He may need to wait many days but the harvest will surely appear.

In Gospel work the same principle applies. A good act, a timely word fitly spoken for the Gospel, may not bear fruit for a time, perhaps years, but this should not deter us from sowing the Gospel seed and persevering in every gospel endeavour. God is able to multiply the scattered seed with a bountiful harvest in after years. *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not* (Galatians 6:9).

In one of my house-calls to see Mrs Teo Poh Kong, a post-hysterectomy patient, I noticed three children, two boys and a girl, ranging from six to ten. Here was a Gospel opportunity, I thought. That was in 1969.

“Mrs Teo, do your children attend Sunday School?”

“No, they stay home on Sunday.”

“Would you mind if I come by this Sunday and fetch them to my Church? Your kids will love Sunday School; we have two hundred happy kids.”

Thereafter, on our way to Life BP Church in Gilstead Road, we took a little detour, picked up the Teo children so that they could receive the Gospel.

The years passed and I lost track of the Teo family until I was called to help the New Life BP Church in London in 1996. There, lo and behold, I found Dr Teo Chong Gee, younger son of Mr and Mrs Teo Poh Kong, settled in London with wife Linda and three children, Esmeralda, Elrond and Ellerina.

Dr Teo was one of the two Teo boys who had followed me to Life Church Sunday School in those early years. There he received the Lord as his Saviour. Later, he was elected Deacon of Grace BP Church (an offshoot of Life Church). In 1984 Dr Teo and family migrated to London.

For nine years, Dr Teo served as Elder of our newly formed New Life BP Church, London. There he and his family rendered excellent and faithful service until he moved to the USA in 2005. Then in July 2007, I received a letter from the USA, written by Chong Gee’s sister, Aye Tee.

Our Heavenly Father was most gracious to bring you and Mrs Tow into our lives forty years ago! Thank you for your faithfulness in taking us to church, Sunday after Sunday, exposing us to the Word of God. Your love and concern for us through the years remind us of the apostle Paul’s love for Timothy. Through your care, my parents and brothers have come to receive the Lord and the good news of salvation. You are instrumental in God’s loving hand in pulling us away from the world of darkness and despair into God’s love and hope. My parents have both been baptised.

Aye Tee is married to Daniel Monaco. They have two teenage daughters, Lauren and Kathryn. They attend a fundamental Bible Believing Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. (Galatians 6:9)

As I prepared for private practice, I had visions of employing a chauffeur who would serve also as a personal helper to relieve me of some of the chores of daily life – someone like Robinson Crusoe's Man Friday.

One day, on the recommendation of one of the nurses at our clinic, a young Malay driver presented himself for interview. He was aged twenty, recently completed National Service.

"What's your name," I asked.

"Juma'at" which means "Friday."

How interesting! Just as I had envisioned, a chauffeur-cum-valet sort of person, here was my Man Friday – Juma'at!

"How long have you been driving?"

"Just about two years."

"Do you smoke?"

"A few sticks a day."

"If you want to work for me, you have to keep to three conditions: No smoking, no speeding, no horning."

Agreed. Juma'at appeared to be a serious young man, worth a try.

“By the way how did you come to be called Juma'at?”

“Because I was born on Friday.”

Juma'at commenced work in 1972. He served thirty-three years with Tow Yung Clinic until 2005 when I retired, then he came under my personal employ.

Juma'at's knowledge of Singapore roads is unrivalled and surprises us often-times. That's the difference between a professional and an amateur.

Juma'at has an impeccable record. Rarely sick, he reports for work even when under the weather. Ever ready to lend a hand for household chores, he has assumed responsibilities far exceeding the domain of driving and car care.

Most praiseworthy is firstly, his clean record: Thirty-seven years of accident-free driving. Secondly, his readiness to lend a hand in domestic matters, helping our maid, Nita, with marketing and odds and ends in the kitchen.

Finally, Juma'at's most valuable service to me is providing a mobile office environment with every trip. By his smooth and steady handling of the car, I am able to read, write and edit (within limits) for the duration of the ride, which may be anything from ten to thirty minutes. It has been my practice these forty years to redeem much precious time while being chauffeured around. Always armed with a book, not a minute goes to waste.

Idling time has been converted into productive time, thanks to my Man Friday. This time-saving makes it worthwhile having a chauffeur. Finally, Mr Juma'at serves also as my EPL updater! (He played for Mt Emily Football Club in years gone by.)

He is also my occasional Malay language guru.



Potiphar was Captain of the Guard to Pharaoh. He bought Joseph from the slave market and brought him into his house. The Lord was with Joseph and all that he did prospered. The Lord blessed Potiphar's house because of godly Joseph, a late teenager. Official duties required Potiphar to be out of the house to serve the Pharaoh. This left Madam Potiphar alone with Joseph. The lady began to cast eyes upon the youth. The lust of the eyes inflamed the lust of the flesh, and the lady, burning with desire, began to make advances.

However, with godly determination, the lady's adulterous approaches were repulsed. Joseph's words are worthy of note and imitation for any Christian facing temptation: "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Joseph rejected Madam Potiphar's determined attempts but she kept it up day by day as she burnt in her lust. Finally, she could not contain her lust and she tried to force him. But Joseph stood firm. Then, Madam Potiphar, frustrated in her attempt, accused Joseph of attempted rape. As a result Joseph was thrown into prison. The rest of the real life drama is told in Genesis chapter 39.

BEDSIDE MANNERS –

In the practice of Gynaecology, the sexual element poses an ever-present occupational hazard to the male gynaecologist. One golden rule is, “Never be in a vulnerable situation with a woman patient.” Any examination should only be in the presence of a nurse chaperone.

Now we come to my story. It happened some thirty years ago, in the late 1970s. One day, a stalk of pink rose was delivered to my clinic, addressed to me, from a patient. For ten days, the daily gift was repeated. I did not see the patient or the roses. I told my nurses to take the flowers home.

After the tenth day, the patient presented herself. She complained of lower abdominal pain. Examination, in the presence of a nurse, was inconclusive. I admitted her to Mt Alvernia Hospital for observation.

The next morning I did my usual hospital round. As it happened on that day, no nurse was available, and I was in a hurry. I took a calculated risk and saw her in her room – without a nurse. I was well prepared for any eventuality: Her ten roses had served ample forewarning.

As I entered the room the patient sat up in bed. As I approached her, she suddenly caught hold of my right wrist. She had a wild look in her eyes. Fortunately my arm was stronger than her grasp. With a twist and a jerk, I broke free. Turning around, I walked out of the room to the nurses’ station. The whole encounter was over in a matter of seconds, something of an anti-climax.

The sister-in-charge had returned to her post. I duly discharged the patient and went on my way. The patient did not appear again.

In my half-a-century of practice as a gynaecologist, I have received two suggestive telephone calls and two physical advances. This was the only one with physical contact.

Let every Christian resolve to be a Joseph, to flee from lust and always say “no” to temptation.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

It was my fourth venture with Dr Aw Swee Eng on the waves. “Today you’ll sail solo. We’ll take two Lasers – one each!” I was a little nervous but did not like to say “no”, so bravely I took off.

All went well for the first hour. Somehow I lost sight of my teacher, but that’s not a problem.

About 5 o’clock, dark clouds were massing over Pulau Ubin and the north-eastern approaches of the straits. A stiff wind was blowing and white horses had ominously multiplied. I foolishly thought it was great fun as I skimmed over the water heading north, oblivious of the approaching Sumatra. Then I noticed a dozen other sailboats all heading south towards the clubhouse. Foolishly, I did not appreciate that they were hurrying for shelter from the impending storm and sped onward into trouble.

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread!

Suddenly, all hell broke loose. Lightning and thunder rent open the windows of heaven. The black clouds poured their pent-up store of water in horrendous

torrents. In the upheaval of wind and wave, the boat tossed out of control and capsized, throwing me into the boiling sea like a drowning rat. Visibility was zero while the orchestra of thunder and lightning, wind and wave and pouring rain roared on unabated. Somehow, I managed to cling on to the upturned boat and, after desperate wrestling, I climbed atop the upturned keel. There I perched, clinging on for dear life beneath the blinding rain.

Thank God, the Laser is unsinkable!

For the next fifteen or twenty minutes I was perched atop the bobbing craft, resigned in prayer to the Creator's mercy, expecting any moment a fatal million-volt lightning strike. Never before, and never after, have I prayed so earnestly and urgently.

In the upheaval of nature's elements, certain thoughts raced through my mind. I remembered the Japanese golfer sheltering under a tree who was struck by lightning on the golf course, and the Chinese footballer who suffered a similar fate while training. Just one zap from the sky proved instantly fatal. Surely now was my turn! A score of times I thought I would surely be struck. The next lightning bolt must surely be my last earthly experience. Then, I visualized in my mind the next day's "Straits Times": Gynaecologist killed by lightning in Johor Straits.

I thought of my wife and children, and the Church, the clinic and my partners. Like Jonah, in my affliction, I cried unto the Lord: "Lord, You have cast me into the midst of the boiling sea; all Your billows and waves are passed over me. I am cast out of Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple. Save me, Lord, I will devote my life only to You forever. Amen."

Amazingly, without warning, the rain suddenly stopped, the sky cleared, and all was peace and calm again! Prayer answered!

Then, welcome sight! A boatload of fishermen appeared from out of nowhere and Dr Aw also sailed up from the south. Together they righted my Laser.

I thanked the fishermen and they went on their way. Then Dr Aw and I headed back for the Changi Yacht Club. As for me, I had "graduated."

Back home, Cheng Im calmly listened as I recounted the drama in the Johor Straits. Together we thanked God for so great a salvation, the experience of a lifetime.

Spared from Certain Death

In Johor's placid Straits one day,
I met Sumatra's power-play;
Sudden burst of million volts,
Lightning flashes, thunder bolts;

Pouring rain like dogs and cats,
Soaking man like drowning rats;
Violent flip capsized the boat,
Flailing limbs kept me afloat;

By fluke I got atop the keel,
Dripping wet from head to heel;
A dozen deadly zaps I missed,
Ear-shatt'ring thunder boomed and hissed;

Then and there I made resolve
Ne'er again sail boats involve;
Nor yet again with lightning play,
There might not be another day.



I have driven on the Pan Island Expressway (PIE) times without number, in every sort of traffic condition and in every kind of weather. Not once in thirty years has my motor vehicle given any trouble.

Then one day something most unusual, uncanny, happened in broad daylight and without any provocation, except for what I did just half an hour before.

Let me relate what took place earlier that day.

The Chua family, ardent idol worshippers all their lives, came under the sound of the Gospel. The Lord opened their hearts and the entire family – Mr and Mrs Chua and their two children believed. As they prepared for holy baptism, their idols had to be removed, so Mr Chua called me to help.

“Pastor, please come and remove my household idols and ancestral gods. They have been with us for over twenty years.”

That Sunday after Service, Mr Chua led me to his Housing Development Board tenth-floor apartment. The family gathered together for prayer. I asked the Lord for His protection on the home.

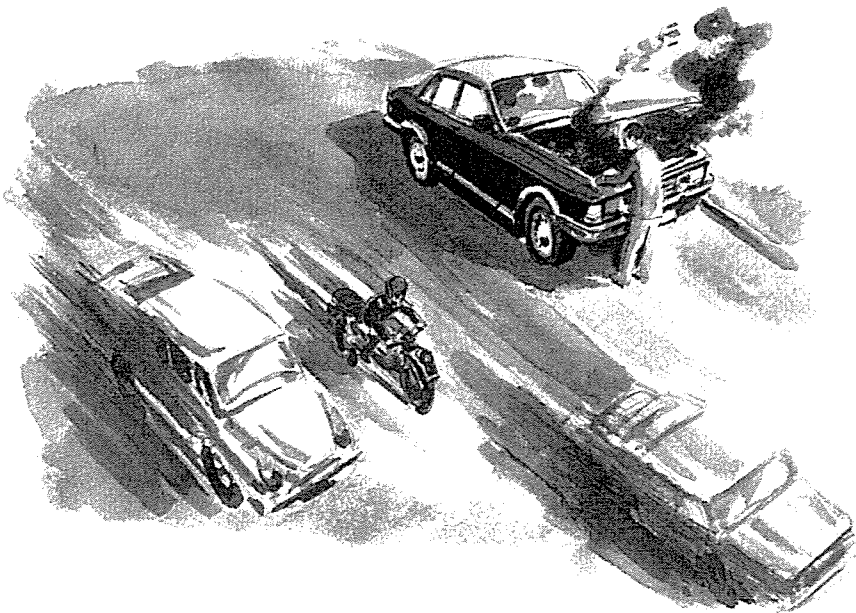
“Almighty God and merciful Father in Heaven, may Thou look down with grace and mercy on these Thy children, whom Thou hast called out of the darkness of idolatry into Thy everlasting Kingdom of light. We rejoice that the Chua family has received Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and renounced their household idols and ancestral gods to worship only the one living and true God. Please defend the family against attacks of the evil one. May the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ protect over this home, to ward off every evil spirit and keep the family in perfect peace. In the name of Jesus Christ our blessed Redeemer I pray, Amen.”

Three dust-covered idols and several ancestral tablets, joss stick holders and paper charms were taken down, together with the altar, and packed into three large plastic bags. The couple helped me load the stuff into the boot of the car, a 4-month-old Ford Granada.

I said goodbye and drove off.

Home was twenty kilometers away. The midday sun was blazing in the sky. Being a Sunday, traffic on the PIE was relatively light. The drive was smooth and uneventful for the first ten minutes. Soon after passing the Bukit Timah flyover, Satan struck.

Suddenly the vehicle began to sputter and jerk. Smoke emerged from under



Half the engine of my four-month-old Ford Granada was destroyed.

the bonnet. The car rapidly lost power, obviously in trouble. Stepping on the accelerator made no difference.

Quickly I drew to the side of the road and the vehicle came to a dead stop. I lifted the bonnet. Smoke was coming from somewhere under the engine. I stood stunned and helpless, wondering to myself what on earth was happening. Then it dawned on me: the idols in the boot! Their master was not pleased. The *prince of the power of the air* (Ephesians 2:2) had struck at my car for taking away his idols.

Next day the vehicle was towed to the Ford Motor workshop. The engineers were baffled. Half the engine was totally burned up – something they had not seen before. A 4-month-old engine had been destroyed under normal usage in normal physical conditions.

Satan is more powerful than you think, and very vicious. In one day he destroyed all the property and ten children of Job, the man ... *that feared God and eschewed evil* (Job 1).

PASTOR PHILIP HENG'S EXPERIENCE –

My fellow worker in the Christian ministry of bygone years, Pastor Philip Heng, had two similar experiences of mysterious brushes with the unseen enemy involving his motor vehicle. One day, after removing the household idols from the home of a new convert, he drove off with the idols in the boot of his car. Let Pastor Heng tell his story:

“As I drove around the circus at Jalan Anak Bukit, and got on to the Pan Island Expressway heading toward Tuas, nearing the Ngee Ann Polytechnic, suddenly there was an explosion and the entire windscreen of the car shattered. I drew to a halt by the roadside. There were no other vehicles ahead of me; nothing was unusual, except for the idols in the back of the car!”

On another occasion, Pastor Heng's car was again attacked by occult forces. “As I got on to the Pan Island Expressway from Toh Tuck Avenue somewhere near the 27 km mark, suddenly there was a loud explosion in the engine compartment. The car rapidly lost power and came to a complete stop by the roadside. Lifting up the bonnet, I saw one of the four spark plugs hanging loose by its cable, dangling in the air, free from the engine block.

“I was completely flabbergasted! How could it be? To remove a spark-plug from the engine block normally necessitates detaching the lead cable, unscrew-

ing it many rounds before it comes free. But here was something altogether unusual, mysterious. When the Automobile Association repairman examined it, he was absolutely dumbfounded. He had never encountered anything like it before. Neither had I!”

PROTECTION AGAINST EVIL –

What protection does a child of God have against Satan’s evil power?

Answer. The child of God is fully assured of God’s care. The Word of God declares: the believing Christian is fully protected by God against Satan’s attacks, for our God is almighty.

God’s Word says:

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. (Isaiah 41:10)

The “fear nots” of God are many and comforting. We may walk with the Lord, knowing full well that we will never be harmed, ... *because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* (1 John 4:4).

Finally, the Lord’s parting words, *lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen* (Matthew 28:20).

Christians, walk close with the Lord, but take heed: keep away from idols; never delve into occult and Satanic things. Why should you get hurt?

PART EIGHT | Family



Cheng Im 清音 Sweet Music

We met at King Edward VII College of Medicine, 1947.

These past fifty-five years have been wonderful God-blessed years for my wife, Cheng Im, and me. God's provision is perfect as we were yoked together to follow the Lord "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health."

Daily *we number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom* (Psalm 90:12), for we have long exceeded the proverbial "threescore years and ten" spoken by Moses. As the Lord wills, we continue our earthly sojourn, grateful for His sustaining grace and supply of strength for each day.

WE LOOK BACK AND COUNT OUR BLESSINGS –

Firstly, we thank God for keeping us in soundness of mind, sparing us from that dreaded senile dementia otherwise known as Alzheimer's Disease.

With the Psalmist I say, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits* (Psalm 103:2).

With the gift of a sound mind, I recount His blessings.

Thank God for sending Cheng Im into my life when we entered the portals of

the King Edward VII College of Medicine in 1947. By His enabling we weathered six trying years of the marathon medical course.

Thank God, He enabled us to labour together for our Saviour, and with other like-minded Christians to lay the foundation of the Varsity Christian Fellowship.

Thank God, Cheng Im made our home a haven to weary travellers, God's servants, pastors and evangelists, university professors, persons in distress, and our many nieces.

Thank God for Cheng Im's faithfulness and whole-hearted service in the Gospel ministry, my happy co-worker in a hundred mission travels to countries in all parts of the globe. In spite of deteriorating health, she continues to serve, for the joy of the Lord is her strength.

Thank God for her longsuffering and willingness in 1956 to remain behind in Singapore to mind the children for the years when I was away in the United Kingdom. Through twenty-six months of separation, she held a full-time job of looking after mothers and sick children, as well as caring for our two kids, and her own ageing parents.

Thank God, in the Gospel industry, Cheng Im is with me wholly given to the grace of giving. To the countless calls of the mission field, for the support of God's servants, the building of God's House, and the relief of needy members, she is ever ready to give liberally and cheerfully – and quietly. *She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy* (Proverbs 31:20).

Thank God, Cheng Im is brave beyond words, much braver than me in many respects. Her attitude is, "If an operation is necessary, let's do it, now!" To date the surgical procedures she has endured number twenty-two, just two short of two dozen! Weaker sex? No way!

Finally, Cheng Im is a person of prayer and the Word. All her spare moments are devoted to Quiet Time with God, which makes her a tower of strength and a source of encouragement to me in time of need.

We live on borrowed time! We number our days and appreciate each other, thanking God one day at a time.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

A prudent wife is from the Lord... Who can find a virtuous woman? ... for her price is far above rubies. (Proverbs 19:4; 31,10)

I end with two poems and “Ten Commandments for a Christian Marriage.”

Our Wedding Prayer

17 July 1954

Saviour, pray walk with us
From this day of days;
Joined in holy wedlock
In Thy lovely ways.

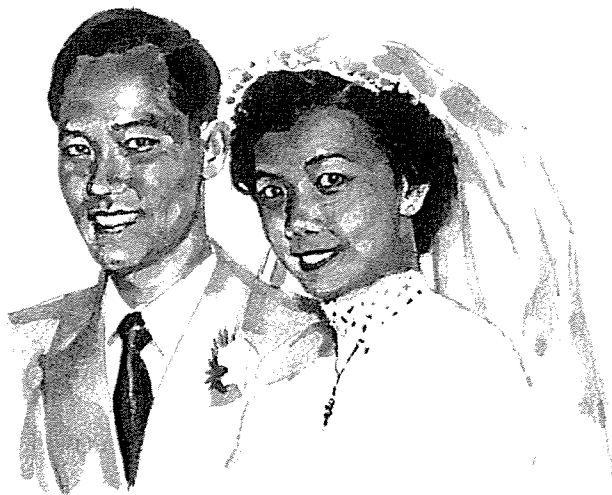
Bind our hearts together
Of the two make one;
Seal the vows now promised,
For new life begun.

On our humble dwelling
May Thy Spirit rest;
Pray make every burden
By Thy presence blest.

Bless our daily duties
With new joys divine;
Bind our different natures,
With Thy love entwine.

Never, Lord, forsake us
Ever be our Friend;
Watching, guiding, guarding,
Till the journey's end.

Adapted (Source unknown)



My Cheng Im

My Love loves best a red red Rose,
That beauteous bloom in June;
Her lovely name means Melody
That's sweetly played in tune.*

To see her is to love her
And love but her for ever;
For God made her and only her
And ne'er made another.*

Faithful, steadfast, caring, true,
Shedding silent tears like dew;
Speaking true and thinking straight,
Thus the Creator made my mate.

Patience, honour, Spirit fire –
Gift of God, nor can I tire;
Firm her faith no foe can stir,
So the Maker gave to her.

Couns'llor, comfort, gentle wife,
Gospel help meet true through life;
Affectionate, warm and giving free,
Th'eternal Father gave her me.

*Adapted from 'Red, Red Rose', Robert Burns

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR A HAPPY CHRISTIAN FAMILY –

1. *Thou shalt not be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever* (2 Corinthians 6:14).
This is the first rule in the choice of a life partner for a blessed union in the Lord.
2. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands... husbands, love your wives.*
This is God's way to a happy home (Ephesians 5:22,23).
3. Renew your "first love" before God often. *We love him, because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

4. Hide no secrets. Husband and wife are one flesh (Gen 2:24). Be open and transparent before God.
5. “For richer for poorer” – what does it matter? More or less, all come from God the Giver. Best to operate one bank account.
6. Read God’s word and pray together, morning and evening. And be ye doers of the Word and not readers only.
7. In dealing with children, be united, firm and fair, always. Children observe more than you think.
8. Abstain from favouritism. It is the root of envy and contention. Remember Jacob?
9. In any disagreement, be ready to say sorry. *Let not the sun go down upon your wrath* (Ephesians 4:26).
10. “Honour Father and Mother” means double blessing to you. Never neglect parents: repay their love while you can!



Each for the other; both for the Lord.



Like Mother – “Given to Charity”, 授愛.

Big Sister was the firstborn of eight siblings. True to her name, she lived her life for the benefit of others – the Church of God and a large family. From young, Father had impressed upon her the responsibility of helping him bear the burden of the family’s support. Big Sister was filial and obedient, so she remained single throughout her life.

She would have been somebody’s wife
Now married to a single life;
But Father’s word to her was law;
She held him in patristic awe.

Big Sister was a model of determination and purpose worthy of emulation. Growing up in conditions of deep poverty, she learnt to trust God and work hard. God had given her a good brain: she came first in class through all her years in the Methodist Girls’ School.

Together with the family, Big Sister was greatly blessed and revived by the preaching of Dr John Sung. In all her life, she freely gave of her substance in support of family and Church.

In 1941, Big Sister graduated from King Edward VII College of Medicine. Then she began to help Father in his medical practice in Batu Pahat, Johor. After five years, she moved to Singapore and set up her own clinic. It was a step of great courage and enterprise. There, in the heart of Chinatown, single-handedly she built a midwifery practice and flourished for forty years as physican to hundreds of families.

When Big Brother Timothy founded Life B-P Church, Big Sister became his most faithful supporter. She contributed liberally to Life Church and Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC), and the many Gospel outreaches branching out from Life Church. When FEBC celebrated its Silver Jubilee in 1987, Big Sister brought \$25,000 to me. (I was then President of FEBC.)

Big Sister's beautiful bungalow at Queen Astrid Park became a regular meeting place for many Christian groups. The Tanglin Bible Class, in particular, met there weekly for three decades.

BIG SISTER SHAPED MY CAREER –

Big Sister played a major role in shaping my professional life and career. Being eight years older, I looked up to her almost as a mother. During the Japanese years in Batu Pahat, I was her constant helper in her medical practice.

In 1942, I accompanied Big Sister on a house call and assisted her in a forceps delivery. I was then in my seventeenth year, marking time, waiting for the Japanese Occupation to end. Sister said to me at that time, "Siang Hwa, make Obstetrics and Gynaecology your career. You will find it most rewarding and satisfying."

Big Sister kept a close eye on my progress. She was pleased when I was admitted to King Edward VII College of Medicine in 1947. Six years later, on learning that I had graduated with distinction in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, she said, "Siang Hwa, you will succeed Professor Sheares one day."

When Big Sister spoke those words, there were three others in the Department below the Professor more eligible than me to the same prize. But her words were prophetic.

BIG SISTER'S LAST DAYS ON EARTH –

In June 1994, Big Sister suffered a severe attack of vertigo. I visited her in her house at Queen Astrid Park. She was living alone in a big house. At 77 years of age, it was not the best thing to do.

With some persuasion, she moved to 64 Andrew Road, the house she had helped me buy in 1961. It was my great delight to welcome Big Sister to stay with us and have all her needs taken care.

Big Sister made me sole executor of her estate. She willed \$500,000 each to Life Church and FEBC.

On her last Sunday, 24 July 1995, Big Sister had attended Life Church in the morning. In the afternoon she found difficulty in speaking and walking. Her speech was slurred and movements impaired.

I called her physician, Dr Gwee Hak Meng, a wonderful and caring Christian endocrinologist.

“Send her to Thomson Medical Centre. I’ll meet you there.”

“That was about 5.30 pm. Dr Gwee examined Big Sister, checked her blood sugar level and found it to be 20 mgm percent (normal 80-120).

“Your Sister has severe hypoglycaemia. She needs a dextrose drip.”

I set up the drip and ran in the dextrose solution. In ten minutes Big Sister was a new person, speaking and moving normally. “Siang Hwa, take me home,” she said.

“Not yet, you should stay the night. I’ll assess your condition tomorrow,” said Dr Gwee.

We found her a night nurse. My wife and I then left for dinner. When we returned at 10.30 pm, the night nurse met us in the Ward Office. “Your sister is very well. She had dinner at 7 p.m. Her temperature, blood pressure, pulse rate are all normal. The dextrose-saline drip is running. She is comfortable.”

We then went in and greeted Big Sister. She was very pleased to see us. “Siang Hwa, I want to go home after breakfast tomorrow.”

“Not so soon, Big Sister. Dr Gwee is coming to see you in the morning.”

“I want to go home. Take me home after lunch.”

We prayed with Big Sister, commending her to the Lord for the night. We said goodnight. It was 11 pm.

All was quiet at home when we retired to bed just before midnight. At 2 am the phone rang. The night nurse said, “Doctor, your sister is not well. Please come.”

When we arrived at the hospital, the House Doctor was administering external cardiac massage. The ECG registered an occasional response.

“Doctor, thank you. I think my sister’s gone. Let her rest, and we too.”

At 78 years, Big Sister had earned her rest. She had fought a good fight, she had finished her course; she had kept the faith. God had called her. Her earthly labour was complete.

We laid her body to rest at the Choa Chu Kang Lawn Cemetery to await the resurrection day, when our Lord will return in power and great glory, to keep the promise spoken at His ascension.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

(1 Thessalonians 4:16,17)

For that glad and glorious event we await with quiet expectation. That will not be long, for the signs indicate, our Lord’s return is near, even at the doors.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

When our parents left China for Nanyang, they brought with them four children and four thousand years of Chinese culture – respect for rank and age. In our family, Father was Commander-in-Chief. Among the siblings, respect for rank was paramount, and rank came with age.

Timothy was Big Brother, eldest among five boys and two girls. Big Sister Siew Ai was eldest of the eight. Through all our years the younger siblings addressed the elder by rank, never by name.

Today, Chinese families, westernised by emigration and assimilation into western society, are fast losing the respect for rank and age. Slowly but surely, tradition gives way to culture. The downslide is greatly accelerated by television and internet.

Big Brother's pre-eminence among the siblings received a boost when we left home in Malaya to live with Grandfather in Singapore. In the absence of Father, Big Brother was Commander-in-Chief with authority over the younger siblings.

In school, Big Brother was always top boy in class. This achievement added prestige to his status. His brilliant school record was crowned by winning the coveted Seow Poh Leng Medal, coming top in ACS in his school-leaving year.

Big Brother was my hero.

During the days of the John Sung Revival, Big Brother was among the first to offer his life for fulltime ministry. He became heavily committed to holy things (Evangelistic Band, Prayer Meeting, Sunday Service, etc). Being five years my senior, he moved with his peers in higher circles.

During the Japanese Occupation, he enrolled in the Legal Officer's Training Course. After the Japanese surrender, he was determined to complete his law studies in England, shelving his dedication vow. God in mercy brought him back by two deaths, of Mother and his younger daughter.

In 1947, Big Brother left for theological studies in Nanking under Dr Chia Yu Ming, then later on to Faith Theological Seminary in America.

In my simple mind, I thought that when Big Brother returned from America, the revival days of Dr John Sung would return, not appreciating that John Sung was God's exceptional gift to China.

During his years at Faith Seminary, we kept up a regular correspondence for spiritual counsel and direction from Big Brother.

The one great thing he did was to inculcate in me the doctrine of Biblical Separation and warn me of the deception of false Christianity masquerading as "Liberalism" and "Modernism." Out of this came the formation of the Varsity Christian Fellowship in the University in Singapore (which in time was swept into the Ecumenical stream).

BIG BROTHER AND THE B-P CHURCH –

When Big Brother finally returned with the Bachelor of Theology from Faith Seminary, our own separatist movement began in Singapore. On 20 October 1950, the Bible-Presbyterian Church and the Twentieth Century Reformation Movement were born.

The young pastor, recently returned from America, was an instant attraction to the youths of Mother Life Church, "Say Mia Tng", (which worshipped in the Teochew dialect). Many of our youths, being brought up in English schools, were unable to cope with their parents' native Teochew. This led to the exodus

of many to the service conducted in English.

Thus the B-P Church was inaugurated, mustard seed fashion, which today has grown into a global Church Movement, like a great tree, ...*so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof* (Matthew 13:32).

Under the mentorship of Big Brother, my spiritual understanding and Christian service grew. Those initial days were memorable first experiences.

To sustain an afternoon service at 4 pm in borrowed premises was a real challenge. So too, to keep up interest and ward off drowsiness in those hot and humid Sunday afternoons without air conditioning.

Nevertheless, by God's grace, the congregation grew. Big Brother was faithful in preaching, visitation, prayer meeting, and family worship. Those family meetings held in homes of members proved to be popular events in the life of the Church. It allowed the members and families to get together and to know one another.

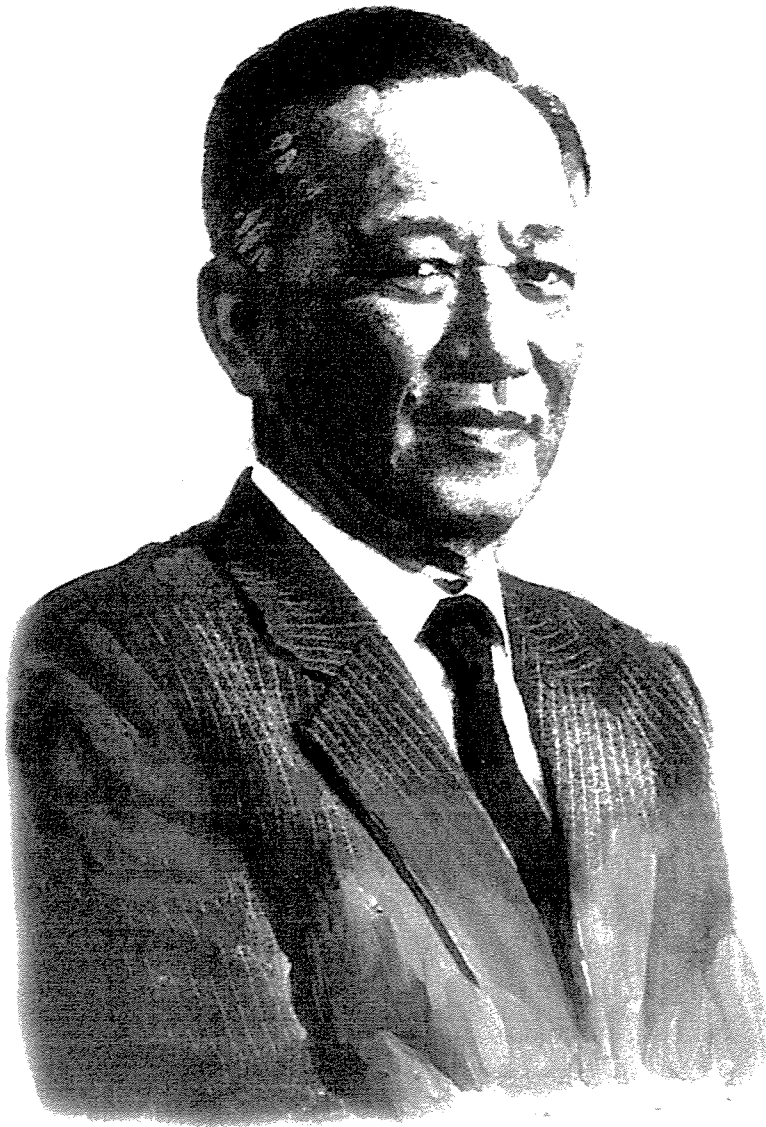
LESSON LEARNT FROM BIG BROTHER -

In 1953, when I graduated from medical school, seven young people came together to start a Youth Fellowship, the first B-P Youth Fellowship of which I became president. The next year, I was elected Superintendent of the Sunday School. Both Youth Fellowship and Sunday School were great instruments for the development of Christian leadership skills under Big Brother's watchful eye. About 1955, I was elected Deacon.

Big Brother assigned me to teach the Basic Bible Knowledge Class. This set me to serious self study of God's Word and the classic works pertaining to the Christian faith such as the Westminster Confession of Faith and Systematic Theology by Louis Berkhoff.

In the Sixties, I was elected to the Eldership and continued to labour together with Big Brother and the Session. Those were years of learning by serving. Thereafter, the Lord opened a new door of Gospel outreach, Calvary B-P Church, Jurong, when I said goodbye to Life Church.

Looking back, I thank God for precious lessons learnt under Big Brother, Pastor and Founder of the Bible-Presbyterian Church Movement in Singapore and Malaysia. True to his calling, he proved to be a faithful witness for the word of God and the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.



*Tomothy Tow (1920-2009), pioneer of B-P Church,
Father of Biblical Separation in Southeast Asia.*

A DEDICATED PASTOR –

Indefatigable in the service of Life Church for over fifty years, he was a Pastor available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, to all who had a legitimate need. For the Lord's people he was ever ready to spend and be spent. In the building of God's House, he played a leading role in its design, construction and funding. He patterned the design after the typical American country church, with a porch lined with seven stately Grecian pillars, topped with a bell-tower and steeple. The structure is now a national heritage building.

From the earliest days, Big Brother was fired with a burning zeal for souls. This sent him and Elder Hsu Chiang Tai on numerous missions to Malaysia's New Villages to evangelise the Chinese who were resettled by General Sir Harold Templer in the war against Communism. I had the joy of accompanying Big Brother on those missions trips, to gain a first-hand experience of practical evangelism.

In those villages, his knowledge of Chinese dialects was put to excellent use. He spoke fluent Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese and Mandarin, to convey the Gospel message to the villagers.

Life Church, true to its name, was full of life, like a fruitful vine bearing much fruit for the Lord. In quick session Life Church brought forth many daughter churches: Sembawang, Zion, Faith, Galilee, Kelapa Sawit, Kulai, etc.

While a student at Faith Theological Seminary, Big Brother first heard the call to Biblical Separation from Dr Carl McIntire. Big Brother testified that his heart was strangely warmed, gripped by the clarion call, to ... *earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3).

While many of those who started out well, apparently striving together with us, have defected or fallen by the wayside, Big Brother remained faithful and steadfast, abounding in the work of the Lord, till his death in his ninth decade.

The motto ...*for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ* (Revelation 1:9) has kept Big Brother faithful and steadfast; *holding forth the word of life* (Philippians 2:16) unmoveable in his stand on the King James Bible, the Bible of the Reformation, the only Bible whose translators suffered the fires of Rome. While many B-Ps have defected from the KJV to embrace the NIV, NKJV, and other corrupt Modern English Versions, Big Brother continued to hold fast, unmoveable to the end.

VISIONARY AND MENTOR –

In money matters, Big Brother taught me to be completely clean and transparent. During my years sitting with him in Life Church Session, it was always a difficult thing to persuade him to accept a pay rise. His chief concern was for God's House. During the purchase of Beulah House at a cost of about \$7 million, his entire salary went toward the building fund; he led by example and the people followed. Inspired by his leadership, in six months, the entire sum was realised.

A man of prophetic vision, he founded Far Eastern Bible College. In his words: "Without a college to train our own workers, the B-P Church will die." Founded in 1962, the FEBC to date has turned out over 600 graduates, workers for God's vineyard in all parts of the world.

Not only does FEBC keep on enlarging its training programme, but it has helped to found Bible Institutes and Colleges in Myanmar, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania and Cambodia.

Amazingly, in his eighty-third year, he left Life Church to found True Life B-P Church. While men may wonder, we are persuaded that the thing is of the Lord for the words of Jude 3 still apply.

Big Brother, my spiritual mentor, continued faithful in the Lord's Service for fifty-eight years, steadfast, unmoveable, fighting the good fight of faith. Amen.

BIG BROTHER CALLED HOME –

Big Brother conducted his last baptismal Service on Easter Sunday, 12 April 2009, and attended his last Lord's Day service on 19 April. The Lord called him home on Monday morning, 20 April 2009.

Who among the readers will follow in the footsteps of Big Brother, faithful and fearless soldier of the cross of Jesus Christ?

Father was a scholar of old Chinese classics with a prodigious repertoire of poems and proverbs which sadly few of us children, being English-educated, could appreciate. In my years with him, especially during the Japanese Occupation, he had me sit with Mother while he recited to us long passages by ancient poets. The rare treat, however, was largely wasted on me, being way above my head.

But he was pleased, and so was I, since he was.

Some may consider it a waste of time, but the sense of rhyme and rhythm, and the poetic idiom – at least some of it – rubbed off on me. I was then in my late teenage years. So I consider myself a happy beneficiary of Father's poetic gifts, not forgetting to mention the uncommon wisdom passed down from those Chinese sages.

Father was extraordinary!

He had the determination to live and did so even though he was past ninety years and was bed-ridden. Three days before the end, he asked to stay with me. I arranged an ambulance and moved him and Stepmother from Big Sister's sea-

front apartment to our home in Andrew Road. He was satisfied.

On the third day, 4 February 1979, God took him in the early morning. Father extraordinary had gone home to his well-earned rest with God.

In the pages following I shall endeavour to repeat some of Father's dictums and proverbs which have been deeply impressed on me.

一寸光陰一寸金

An inch of time, an inch of gold

Each of us has the same supply of priceless time: twenty-four hours each day, 365 days a year – but not all utilize the time to profit. All too often, we carelessly let precious minutes fly by, oblivious of the fact that wasted hours are forever beyond recall. Father, by example and precept, impressed upon us the preciousness of time.

“Buy back the golden hours,” was his constant reminder. How? “Get organised! Plan your use of time carefully. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail!”

一日之計在于朝, 一年之計在于春

Make each day's plan in the morning, each year's in the spring

Father systematically listed out his day's appointments early each morning. That plan was his companion and guide through the day.

Following Father's example, my wife and I still use our year planner to guide us each day all through the year. Our daily appointments are rehearsed over breakfast, listed according to the time, and strictly observed. In this way we do not miss any appointment. Life becomes much more productive and profitable. Try it!

知人知面不知心

You may know a person by his face but you cannot know his heart

How true! Father had learnt by long and sometimes painful experience, how face and heart do not always cohere. Who, but God, can see a person's heart?

God's Word informs us, *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* (Jeremiah 17:9)

Hear good advice from the past: “Take time to get to know a person.” To further press home the point, Father speaks the next proverb.

路遙知馬力,事久見人心

**Long journey proves a horse's strength;
long alliance shows a person's heart**

Father's says: "Go slow; take time to know a person's heart before committing yourself to him. As in the case of a horse, it takes a long journey to prove his strength, so it takes long association, sometimes many years, for a man to reveal his true self."

Remember Judas Iscariot? It took more than three years before he revealed the hidden treachery in his heart. In some cases, it may be longer. To his trusted Brutus, the dying Caesar gasped, "Et tu Brute!" meaning, "You too Brutus!" (I never knew you could do this to me – Brutus plunged his dagger into Caesar's heart.)

柔能勝剛

Gentleness can overcome hardness

This and the next two proverbs are specially helpful in conflicts, to defuse a potentially explosive situation. Trouble shooters and fire fighters take note!

Solomon the Wise said, *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger* (Proverbs 15:1). In any strife, hard words are like fuel to fire. Avoid them! Speak gently and graciously.

大事化小,小事化無

Big conflict – minimize; small conflict – dissolve

The secret in conflict resolution is to use quiet diplomacy to defuse a potentially explosive situation. By gentle words soothe the wounded pride; hard words only add fuel to the fire.

The ancient wisdom of King Solomon is worth repeating: *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger* (Proverbs 15:1).

相恕相赦,事過境遷

Mutually overlook, mutually pardon; matter past, matter forgotten

There is a kindred English proverb which says: "To err is human, to forgive divine." No one is perfect; we all offend and transgress. Therefore, be ready always to forgive, and forget the thing that is past.

By a gentle spirit of mutual forgiveness, a conflict is soon forgotten – out of

sight, out of mind. Never harbour grudges; they eat into the system, and make the spirit bitter.

The Bible says, *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath* (Ephesians 4:26).

飲水思源

When drinking water, remember the source

The key word here is “remember.” We drink water many times a day, but do we remember where it comes from? Did you ever pause and ponder, how much we owe the Giver, for sending rain to fill our reservoirs which supply our homes?

Then think of our parents, friends, and helpers sent by God along life’s way during our years of sojourn on planet Earth. Remember all these, and be grateful. And not only remember, but repay! Be grateful – always.

三人同行必有我師

When three walk together, surely one is my teacher

Some people are just too proud to admit their ignorance and to seek help. They think that they know everything. A motorist thought that he knew the way and would not ask for directions. He took a wrong turn on the highway. It cost him an hour to retrace his route.

Father drilled this proverb into us children. “Be humble; open your mouth. Never under-estimate another person. He may not have a university degree, but he may have just the information you need. Don’t be proud. Ask and it shall be given you!”

利令智昏

Money dulls wisdom

As the year 2008 drew to a close, the globe was reeling under the impact of the most serious financial debacle in history. The worst hit is America, the richest and financially most influential in all the world. What had happened?

Simply because of “Filthy Greed,” said the front cover headline of TIME.

Dulled by the *love of money... the root of all evil* (1 Timothy 6:6), respectable and successful fund managers, investment experts resorted to unlawful methods. They stole and the world suffers. When caught, some spend years in prison, wisdom blurred by greed.

美名勝過大財

A good name is better than great riches

This proverb is rich with meaning. Never fall for the temptation of easy money or filthy lucre. The lure of laundered millions can tarnish a person's reputation, forever beyond redemption.

The Chinese say, "When a tiger dies, he leaves behind a skin; when a man dies, he leaves behind a name." What name will you leave behind?

At death a millionaire parts with his millions. He will be remembered by his reputation. Not a few of the world's tycoons will go down in history as the men who stole and made others poor!

大智若愚

Great wisdom like fool

People thought he was a fool just because he did not open his mouth. But when the real fool speaks, he removes all doubt.

We have all heard: Silence is golden. Unless there is something worth saying, one should keep quiet. Learn a lesson from the owl as described by Edward Everette Hale:

A wise old owl lived in an oak:

The more he saw the less he spoke;

The less he spoke the more he heard:

Why can't we be like that wise old bird?

There is wisdom in silence. It is better than the empty vessel which makes much noise.

It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35), so said the Master Teacher, the Lord Jesus. How can it be?

The Sea of Galilee freely receives the water flowing down from the melting snows of Mt Hermon in the north, and freely discharges that water into the river Jordan which keeps Israel's farmland flanking both banks well watered, lush and green with vegetation. The Sea of Galilee teems with marine life and human activity.

To the south, the river Jordan flows into the Dead Sea which only receives and receives, but never gives. Nothing grows on its shores and its waters support no marine life. It is a scene of barrenness and desolation. Ponder again Jesus' words:

It is more blessed to give ... freely ye have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:8)

The spirit of giving is from God, the Giver of every good gift. He gave us His only begotten Son, the best of all gifts. He sets us the example. Dare we follow?

From childhood, I received from God the gift of philanthropy, meaning “readiness to help others especially with gifts of benevolence.” I thank God for this liberality born of childhood poverty. I recall the days of the Great Depression of the 1930s when Father and Mother and we children endured years of want, with little hope or help in sight.

Yet, God saw us through those difficult days. Today, eighty years after, I look back with wonderment and gratitude, considering how the Lord fed us all the way, and gave us more than we needed.

With gratitude I am committed to *spend and be spent* (2 Corinthians 12:15) for the betterment of those in need, or for some other good cause.

I search my heart, “What should I do with surplus funds?” To have some reserve for a rainy day is wisdom, but to let surplus funds lie idle without a thought of those in need is folly.

In 1969, I left the University to set up private practice and, lo and behold, the Lord opened the windows of heaven just as the Bible says and poured out ... *a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it* (Malachi 3:10).

From then, it has been my pleasure to repay society from which the money had come. Briefly, let me tell my story, perchance it might provoke someone to experience this joy also. You need not be a Rockefeller to be a philanthropist,. But you need to have a heart that feels for others.

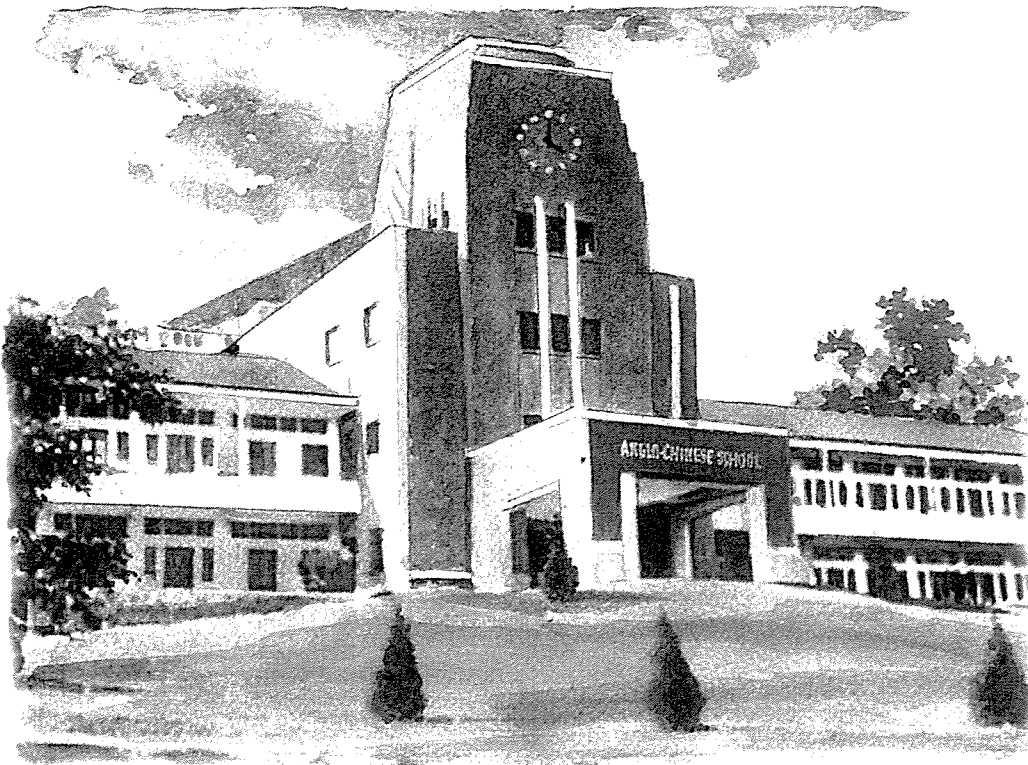
MY ALMA MATER, ACS –

I spent eleven happy years at the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) which equipped me for admission to Medical College. ACS had laid the foundation on which my future career was built.

Some of my happiest and most significant years of life were in ACS. Those learning years under kindly and caring, inspiring teachers, have left a lasting fragrance, cherished in the memory.

In 1976, years after leaving ACS, I was asked to help the alma mater. What better opportunity could there be for me to repay my old school? Holding office of President of the Old Boys Association was good, but surely one could do better. Ideas were tossed around with my OBA Committee.

What about a fund-raising Piano Recital and Charity Dinner? We needed a respected public figure, and some well known celebrity to perform at the



The original ACS clock Tower designed by Ng Keng Siang

piano. Putting our heads together, we identified both: Dr Goh Keng Swee, Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, ACS old boy, an ardent music lover, and Mr Dennis Lee, a top flight concert pianist.

The event brought in about \$100,000 to my old school. To me, it represented a pleasant satisfaction of repaying, in small measure, a debt of gratitude.

SINGAPORE ANTI-NARCOTICS ASSOCIATION –

In the early Seventies, drugs became a serious social problem in Singapore. One day, a teenage addict from a respectable family was brought to see me. My heart went out to him, but what could I do? What if he were my son? This started me thinking: my heart was touched.

“Prevention is better than cure!” The old adage held the key to the problem.

We should aim to get our young people before the deadly poisons get them. What Singapore needed was a preventive and educational body to spread the message to our vulnerable youths, to simply say “no” to drugs.

In 1972, the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) was born, of all places, in a women’s clinic! Tow Yung Clinic had a thousand square feet of unused office space and facilities for the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association to begin operations, rent free.

Staff were recruited, and our own newspaper, “SANA News”, publicised the work of this new-comer among Singapore’s many social service institutions.

As with any worthwhile new enterprise, our members had to work very hard, hand in hand with the Central Narcotics Bureau. We managed to get SANA on its feet, at a cost of \$50,000 (many patients and well-wishers chipping in), until more help and permanent premises were found. After five years, my work was done and handed over to more qualified persons.

SINGAPORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA –

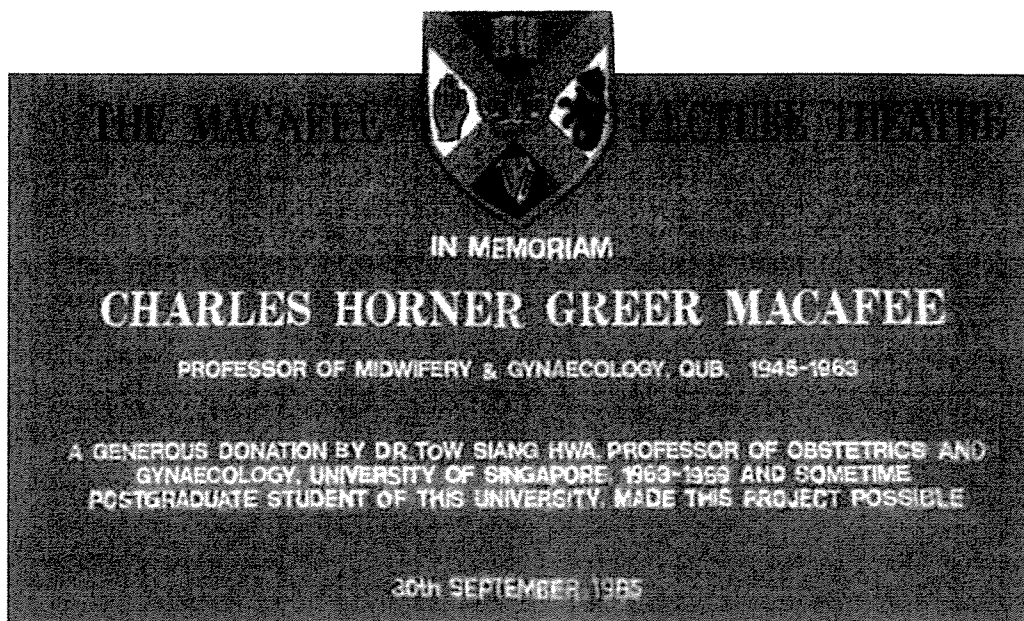
When the Patron of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), Dr Goh Keng Swee, asked me to help raise funds for the group, I needed no persuasion. I was only too glad to do my bit, for I loved classical music.

I studied my register of patients and listed out a number of the corporate chiefs, bankers, heads of MNCs, and big towkays.

Undoubtedly, the task in hand was a challenging one. Fortunately, my Clinic Secretary, Mrs Catherine Wong, was a great help and enthusiastic supporter. She enlisted her husband, Wong Hung Khim, into our fund-raising team. I thought this was a master move as Mr Wong was an influential person. We worked hard for one whole month, writing letters, making phone calls, and personal visits.

Naturally, my own “minister of home affairs” wrote out an acceptable cheque. When the final addition was done, to our pleasant surprise, it amounted to S\$750,000.

Truly, it was more blessed to give than to receive. When I handed the cheque to the Patron of SSO, he was duly impressed, adding the wish that I might do an encore for a good performance! I thought to myself, maybe at a later date, when the cow has recovered from the vigorous milking.



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST –

In quiet musing this morning, my thoughts flew to Belfast's Queen's University, the source of blessings which lifted my academic standing to the highest level in ways beyond anyone's contriving.

The account of my fortuitous early acquisition of the MRCOG ahead of my senior colleagues at the KKH which changed the course of history – and careers – is fully recorded in an earlier chapter.

As it happened, I was the first to return with the MRCOG to KKH, and was instrumental in initiating and obtaining KKH's RCOG accreditation in 1963. Then, by virtue of my work on Hydatidiform Mole, the Hospital and Department gained international recognition. Finally, in the academic race, the ultimate prize, the Chair, literally fell onto my lap.

All these benefits were traced back to one source: the early head start at Queen's University.

In today's reading of my Guide Book, I find my direction.

What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? ... I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. (Psalm 116:12, 14)

For all the benefits sent by God, and received through the wonderful folks at the Queen's University, I resolved to express thanks in an appropriate manner. Indeed, I can never adequately repay the debt of gratitude I owe to the Professor and Department.

In thankful appreciation, I obtained Professor Macafee's consent, and a Lecture Theatre and a Research Fellowship in Obstetrics and Gynaecology was set up in his honour.

NSW UNIVERSITY COAST ASSOCIATION –

In 1958, preparing for the MRCOG Examination, London, Dr Roy Syred and I struck up a lasting friendship.

On completion of our MRCOG examination we each returned to our home countries: Dr Syred to Sydney, Australia, and I to Singapore.

In 1972, I attended the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Coast Medical Association of the Randwick Campus Group of Hospitals, as guest of Dr Syred, the



Dr Roy Syred initiated the Tow Prize.

Association's President. The papers presented at the meeting were thoroughly first class and I was most impressed. However, there was not any acknowledgement of this excellence.

On the way home, I dropped the idea of awarding prizes to outstanding works presented at the Annual Meeting, and made a token donation of \$10,000.

Thus began the Tow Research Awards, an annual feature in the Academic-scientific calendar of the hospitals within the New South Wales University Group.

Various Hospital Foundations have since given enthusiastic support to the Annual Event. Boosted by their donations the Tow Research Fund has grown to its present \$250,000. So far, over 110 prizes have been awarded. With an able and enterprising committee in charge, who knows what new heights will be reached in the future – all because of a timely token gift?

It is truly more blessed to give than to receive.

GOSPEL INDUSTRY –

I have so far not touched on the support of the Gospel industry, which was, in actual fact, my main area of interest. In these forty years (since 1969) of increasing Gospel commitment, over twenty Churches or related institutions have been founded and funded in over ten countries around the world, as God enabled.

My love for the Gospel industry was sent me from Heaven. It is God's gift and my greatest delight which I would not exchange for all of earth's treasures.

Will you ask God to give you this gift also? It will change your life, and you will never be the same again.

PART NINE | Eternal Issues



John Sung, servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

John Sung was a hardship student in America: he worked his way through college and university. God gave him exceptional talents and gifts, so that he excelled in every examination, winning numerous prizes and awards. In six years, 1920-1926, he gained the degrees BSc, MSc and PhD in chemical engineering, winning name and fame in the process. Job offers and honours came knocking at his door. As the saying goes, the world was at his feet.

But God had other plans for him.

In a night of crisis, God challenged him, and John Sung forsook the world to become a servant of the Gospel. Returning to China, he began a lifelong ministry as a humble preacher, holding forth the word of life to his fellow countrymen, declaring with fiery zeal, the Gospel of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord mightily prospered His servant's ministry with phenomenal results. Wherever he preached, men and women, and youths, repented, turning from sin and idols to serve the living God. Such pulpit power had not been seen in China. The most hardened sinners, adulterers, gamblers, opium smokers,

thieves and cheats, crooks and gangsters, repented in tears, publicly confessed their sins and turned in repentance to serve the living God.

The fires of Holy Spirit revival swept through the country. This was in the early Thirties.

FIERY PREACHER COMES SOUTH –

In 1935, John Sung began his Nanyang Gospel ministry. This met with similar success. By God's grace and in His eternal counsels, our entire family came under the sound of the Gospel: Dr John Sung's preaching did a mighty work of grace in Father, Mother, and the eight children.

Dr Sung's preaching was wholly Bible-based: the pure Word of God sounded forth with Holy Spirit's mighty convicting power, penetrating hearts and moving thousands of hearers to repentance.

I attended his revival meetings yearly from 1935 to 1938, two weeks each year during the August school holidays. Dr Sung preached three sessions daily, two hours per session, in Mandarin translated into Hokkien. Everywhere he preached sinners were moved to repentance and new life in Christ.

At the age of ten, I received the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, but the most significant event, my consecration for life-service, came four years later. This fixed my entire life direction.

Dr Sung was preaching his farewell sermon in Muar, Johor. It was the morning session, the day's first meeting, specially to persuade and prepare for life-service. God's Word gripped my heart:

For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest. (Matthew 9:37, 38)

Harvest plenteous... labourers few. The words kept speaking to me.



Leona Wu interpreting for John Sung

URGENT CALL TO SERVICE –

Dr Sung testified of his own salvation and how the Lord called him. He spoke of the joy of leading souls out of Satan's bondage into the freedom of God's love.

Dr Sung challenged us with the Lord's parting words to the disciples:

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

(Matthew 28:18-20)

The final appeal was charged with Holy Spirit power. Think! Every soul is worth more than the whole world.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36, 37)

IRRESISTIBLE CHALLENGE –

Now, to us, the Lord has committed the preaching of the Gospel, for only redeemed sinners can testify to other sinners the joy of sins forgiven and release

from Satan's deadly bondage. On earth our Lord has no feet to go on missions; no tongue to speak the Gospel message. They who have been saved are His hands and feet, his mouth and tongue!

Harvest plenteous ... labourers few.

"Who will go for the Lord? He gave His life to save you from everlasting death. Will you not go and lead other perishing souls to the Saviour? There is joy in serving Jesus! Offer yourself, young man, young woman, on the altar of sacrifice for the Master's use! Who will be a labourer together with God?"

The appeal touched my heart. In that solemn moment I dedicated myself for the Lord's use - my life direction was settled, no turning back.

About a dozen of us who had responded to the Doctor's appeal met in a Prayer Room. On our knees, we prayed the prayer of consecration. Then the Doctor prayed for each of us, and sealed our vows by the laying of hands. That sacred and solemn moment lives on in my memory to this day.

O the joy of being counted among the servants of the most high God! Truly, after these years, the thrill of serving the coming King of Kings and Lord of Lords grows ever stronger, in the sure expectation of His soon return in power and great glory.

BEGINNING TO SERVE -

That morning's consecration in 1938 was a landmark event, forever imprinted in my heart. Now truly I am my Lord's and He is mine! In the years following, the chorus "All for Jesus, All for Jesus" continued to thrill my soul, reminding me of my life direction, while my schooling went on.

How should I serve my Lord? As a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or pastor? Whatever I should be, I trusted that the Lord would surely show me, for He knows the end from the beginning, and He will order my pathway. And He knows best. While at school, receiving my basic education, I told myself that I must do well for Him.

The days flew by. Just when I was about to enter the Senior Cambridge Class of 1942, the Pacific War broke out. My hopes for the future came crashing down. Incredibly, Japan's invaders overwhelmed the mighty British in lightning quick fashion, toppling them from their unassailable pinnacle of power in ten incredible weeks. This put my clock back by four long years.

What will happen to my call to serve? Lest I forget, God sent a reminder on the very last day of the war: a Japanese shell exploded in our neighbour's bunker and he lost a leg! God spoke loud and clear: it could have been me! Then, I might have become a one legged preacher!

But, praise the Lord, He kept all of the family safe, through the Japanese Occupation, until the American atom bomb brought the war to an end, and I returned to school and resumed normal life.

Now allow me to leap over the thirty long years following my "Muar consecration" of 1938.

The year 1968 was the year of decision. It was the fourth year since my appointment as Professor and Head of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of Singapore. After long consideration and hard soul searching, I sent in my letter of resignation from the Chair which was barely warmed. I was forty-three, but the time had come to activate my 30-year vow and answer God's call.

In May of the next year, 1969, I inaugurated the Tow Yung Clinic – the equivalent of the apostle Paul's tent making – to begin the fulfilment of my consecration vow, to take up the cross of service and to declare the life-giving Gospel of God's everlasting Kingdom.

What lay ahead I could not know, but I trusted that the Almighty who had called me had every step of the future mapped out for me. All I had to do was to follow.

The challenge of missions unveiled one step at a time as the Lord opened the way, just as the Lord Jesus had said in Acts 1:8, ... *ye shall be witnesses unto me... in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*

So the Lord opened the way for me into the western sector of Singapore, into Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, Saipan, Australia, England, Canada, Sri Lanka.

As it were, I followed in the footsteps of the Apostle, endeavouring ... *to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest (I) should build upon another man's foundation* (Romans 15:20).

Nearing the end of the road, the reader may be wondering, "What is your final assessment of God's call?" My response is best expressed in words borrowed from the Apostle's letter to the Philippian Church:

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. (Philippians 3:7-8)

The ultimate prize of God's call is *that I may win Christ* (Philippians 3:8). He is the Pearl of Great Price.

CONCLUDING THOUGHT -

As I survey the scene, passing through the "Birthquake Hospital," the Halls of Academia, the years with Tow Yung Clinic, and the last lap forty years' active service for God's Kingdom I realise my time is almost gone.

Was it worth it?

Delivering babies, aiding their "first birth" had its rewards, for this life and for this earth. But Gospel work goes beyond the temporal: its rewards transcend this life and reach beyond earth. The satisfaction of helping men and women attain their "second birth" is joy unspeakable, full of glory that fadeth not away. It is the satisfaction of life everlasting in the Home which God has prepared for the faithful and believing.

And soon will come the everlasting prize from the Lord who commissioned me, and all who love His appearing. From heaven He calls:

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. (Revelation 22:12, 13)

This is all that matters.

Not too long ago – it seems like yesterday – I was young, strong and able. Eternity seemed a distant prospect. Today, I can almost hear eternity knocking on the door! Pressed by the relentless flight of time, the inevitable event draws nearer by the day. Every morning I greet my Sweet Music with a cheery “Good Morning” as we begin another day of our earthly sojourn, by the grace of God.

It could well be the last day for one of us, so we always appreciate one another, and thank God for it.

One of Singapore’s rich men was so carried away by the joy of the family lunch that he called for the delightful gathering to be repeated that same evening. However, before dinner time, the Maker’s summons had come. Eternity for him had begun.

What happened to one can happen to all, for eternity respects none – not the wealthy, healthy, or young.

How will it be with you when time gives way to eternity? Some may believe otherwise, but it will be a conscious experience. At the last breath, as the light of

time switches off, the light of eternity switches on. Suddenly the things hitherto invisible come into view. Then we see the things that really matter, the changeless and weighty things of eternity.

One little step from time, one great leap into eternity! It will be a stupendous step of no return. The soul which finds its new abode intolerable has no way of re-entry into the domain of time. It is a one-way street of no return.

When your turn comes to take that final step, how will it be? Will it be with fear and reluctance, or with joy unspeakable?

KNOWING THE TIME, AWAKE!

The day is far spent, the night is at hand. Awake! It's later than you think. But men and women are caught up with the world's hollow pleasures and seductive lifestyles, swept ever onward by the relentless tide of time. All they care for are the demands of the dying body, with not a thought for the deathless soul.

A young lady, receiving a priceless diamond ring, exclaimed to her young man, "Dearest, thank you for the lovely box! I promise to look after it with utmost care so that no harm or loss will come to it!" Ridiculous, you say. So we all agree. Yet it is a picture of time-bound men and women, young people lavishing everything on their perishing bodies, without a thought for their priceless souls. Before they realise it, the day of judgement will have dawned.

IT COULD WELL BE YOU! WHAT WILL HAPPEN THEN?

Did you realise our coming on to Earth and our departing are completely passive events? We were put here without our consent, and we are taken out likewise. However, that is not the end. The soul – the real you – will face judgment before the Creator Judge.

How do I know? Because God who directs our coming and going says so.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

(Hebrews 9:27)

What then must we do?

As for me, I made my peace with the Judge when I was ten. I received Him as my Saviour and Lord. I went to Him and He took me in and forgave me all of my sins.

Those who go to Jesus will not be disappointed. He says,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
(Matthew 11:28)

...him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. (John 6:37)

Jesus is a loving Saviour. He died for our sins – yours and mine – on the cross, and He rose from the grave for our justification. Take Him now as your Friend and you will not face Him as your Judge. Lovingly, He invites you:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.
(Revelation 3:20)

Receive Jesus today as your Saviour. He is waiting to be your Friend.



Footprints in the sands of time.

Epilogue

Dear reader, you have patiently followed my footprints of eight decades of time and change. The end of the journey is now in sight and, before long, traveling days will be over.

In school we studied Shakespeare's "As You Like It". These lines come to mind: All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances.

Our world is an ever-changing scene determined by the Director.

I used to wonder, "How will it be when I make my exit?" This thought bothered me much (as it must bother you) until the Director said to me:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am. There ye may be also.

(John 14: 1-3)

I have since come to believe in the Father's promise and offer of a place which He has prepared for those who believe.

You ask me, "How can you be sure?"

Simply because the One who promised was also the One – the only One – who died and rose again. And His promise is worthy of my trust – and yours too. Only believe with all your heart!

Before I sign off, may I say a parting word: God grant you faith to believe, that we may meet and enjoy eternity in the Heavenly Mansions.

Only believe.

(An) interesting and inspiring book...
a valuable addition to our growing literature.”

~ Professor Tommy Koh
Chairman, National Heritage Board

Tow Siang Hwa's life is marked by miraculous escapes and events.

Born in China to a young military doctor who risked his life for Sun Yat Sen, Siang Hwa was carried as a baby as his family fled to a rubber estate in Senai, Johor.

At six, he met Dr Benjamin Sheares whom, against all odds, he would one day succeed as Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in the University of Singapore, fulfilling a prophetic remark by Tow's eldest sister.

In 1935, Tow came under the powerful preaching of John Sung, "Flame for God in the Far East", which would later take Tow from medicine to church planting. In the early days of the Japanese Occupation, a piece of calligraphy by Sun Yat Sen, a Japanese officer with an ear-ache and a dog showed God's provision.

Post-war, after graduating from medical school and marriage, Tow was "exiled" to Ireland, then returned to the Birthquake Hospital to play a crucial role in enabling the training of obstetricians and gynaecologists in Singapore. Soon after, his pioneering research on "grape pregnancy" put Singapore on the medical map of the world.

At the height of his medical career, Tow resigned from the Chair of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and went into private practice so that he could devote more and more time to church work.

The path Tow has walked is remarkable and memorable. The footprints he leaves are deep, showing a way for all to follow.

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