

The “555” notebooks



used by Mr Wong Niap Leng and his daughter in Ah Leng's canteen at the Sepoy Lines campus

DAYS OF

Theatre Studies

The Medicine Class of 1974-79 at the University of Singapore (now the National University of Singapore) started its five-year run as a disparate mix of undergraduates. We were composed of 92 Singaporeans, 16 Malaysians and 3 Hong Kongers. The Singaporeans came from different walks of life, with three prominent groups from National Junior College, Raffles Institution and Anglo-Chinese School – separate and distinct as they had insufficient time to blend and gel in the six months of national service prior to matriculation. The Malaysians were a more diverse group, with some coming from just across the Causeway and others from as far as Alor Star.

Another division was between hostelites and non-hostelites. The hostelites would meet every day in the canteen for meals, with the rare supper party on the upper floors of King Edward VII (KE VII) Hall. The non-hostelites met in between lectures at Ah Leng's canteen where microcredit was available and noted carefully in “555” note books. Notebooks had little to do with electronic wizardry in those days. Those ledgers full of IOUs were private and safe from any cyber attacks.



Our classmates after a late supper party on one of the upper floors of King Edward VII Hall

Years 1 and 2 were full of academic worries. In Year 4, the class came together to compete for the Dean's Shield by organising a musical called *Beatles Nostalgia*. The musical won the Dean's Shield that year.

In Year 5, the memorable musical *Downtown* was staged. Leow Kee Fong was the big spender. Dressed in a black suit and white tie, he had Vitalis-enriched jet black hair that would have made Antonio Banderas green with envy. He was constantly surrounded by a bevy of girls played by Adiddah Hassan, Pauline Cheong, Chew Sok Leung, Balkis Ali Akbar, Annette Tan and Phay Ken Lin. The girls were dressed in silk cheongsams with slits cut scandalously high. The sight of these girls swooning over



The singers, dancers and musicians of the Year 4 musical, *Beatles Nostalgia*:

Back row, L to R: Anthony Goh (Music Director), Ng Chi Kui,

OUR LIVES

By Dr Tang Kok Foo and Dr Ang Yong Guan



Leow Kee Fong promptly triggered atrial fibrillation in some of our more amorous classmates. Adiddah Hassan sang the eponymous song “Downtown” by Petula Clark with so much feeling that it made us all wish we could “forget all our troubles” in medical school by going downtown where “the neon signs are pretty” and “the lights are much brighter”.

These two musicals won the Dean’s Shield in Year 4 and 5 respectively, and should have led their actors to actual acting roles, if not for medical school’s unforgiving demands.

In Year 3, the Cultural Committee of KE VII Hall organised a Cultural Night at the Victoria Concert Hall. One of the three plays staged that night was *Welcome to Andromeda*. Balaji Sadasivan played the lead role, while Ma Swan Hoo from the Class of 1976-81 was the director. Balaji Sadasivan was smitten and the rest is history.



Wong Hee Kit, Jen Shek Wei, Roy Chan and Chew Khet Kuen
Front row, L to R: Annette Tan, Chew Sok Leung, Balkis Ali Akbar, Pauline Cheong and Phay Ken Lin



Scenes from the Year 5 musical, *Downtown*:

1. Sizzling dance moves
2. Adoration of big spender Leow Kee Fong (centre) by a bevy of beauties, played by (L to R) Phay Ken Lin, Pauline Cheong, Balkis Ali Akbar and Chew Sok Leung
3. The entire cast and crew
4. The ladies out for a good time were (L to R) Annette Tan (partially hidden), Chew Sok Leung, Balkis Ali Akbar, Phay Ken Lin and Adiddah Hassan
5. L to R: Roy Chan, Ooi Boo Chye, Ng Chi Kui, Aris Marzuki (partially hidden), Jen Shek Wei, Wong Hee Kit and Chew Khet Kuen who played GI Joes on R&R, and here they celebrate victory in style with the elegant and suave Leow Kee Fong (centre) just outside the KE VII Hall auditorium

Our classmates setting the rules before the football match... what rules? We made the rules as we played!



Physical Education

In Year 4, our class rep Ang Yong Guan organised a series of football games. The pockmarked football field in front of Ah Leng's canteen was the battleground. It did not take long for all to realise that many of our classmates were born with either two left feet or two right feet. This made the matches extremely unpredictable and humorous. The goalkeeper Lau Chee Chong was so bored he repeatedly left his post and went to play midfield. Dr Mulkit Singh from the Parasitology Department joined in the tussle.



Dr Mulkit Singh (front row, first from right) with the footballers before a treat at Ah Leng's canteen

Moral Education

A defining moment in the collective memory of the class was when the government implemented the compulsory bonding of medical students in Year 5. While most, if not all of us had expected to spend many fruitful years in the Singapore medical service, we did not take kindly to a suddenly announced bond in the final year of our five-year course. Despite the threat of final year examinations just around the corner, we decided to stage our own kind of protest, after long meetings that went past midnight. Passion ran high during these meetings and some ran back and forth between impassioned speeches and dry medical texts.

The few telephone consoles at KE VII Hall were commandeered by the Malaysians who telephoned home to anxious parents waiting for instructions. Some raised the penalty sums within hours while others waited with numbed feelings. We marched to the Ministry of Health (MOH), then at Palmer Road, wearing our overalls, and waited outside the office of Dr Andrew Chew, the Permanent Secretary at MOH, in an orderly file. He had wanted only to see four representatives, but in the end, when he knew of the large number of students waiting outside his office, he relented by allowing all 98 of us to enter the cramped conference room (see photo of the *Sin Chew Jit Poh* newspaper article, far right) where we then had a two-hour meeting.

Nothing substantial came out of the meeting with Dr Andrew Chew. We went on to refuse to sign the bond, which had to be revised twice. Finally, on day 88 of the tussle with MOH, Dr Toh Chin Chye, then the Health Minister, agreed to see two representatives from each level (Year 2 to Year 5). Our class was represented by Balaji Sadasivan and Ang Yong Guan (both of whom entered national politics 22 and 32 years later respectively, but on opposite sides of the divide).

At the end of the meeting, Dr Toh agreed to accept our deed of intention to serve in government hospitals (without liquidated damages of \$81,000) as an alternative to the bond (which carried liquidated damages of \$81,000).



Newspapers from both sides of the Causeway carried articles on the implementation of the bond and its consequences. Clockwise from top left: front page of the *Straits Times*, front page of the *New Nation* (a now defunct Singaporean newspaper), a later front page of the *Straits Times* and an article from the *Star* (a Malaysian tabloid)

Recess



Dr Ang Yong Guan as class rep leading a game during the Chinese New Year celebrations at the old Medical Alumni Association in 1975



Having tea with then Singapore President Benjamin Sheares (first from left) in 1977



A *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (a Singaporean Chinese newspaper which merged with *Nanyang Siang Pau* to form *Lianhe Zaobao* in 1983) article about the 98 medical students meeting with MOH Permanent Secretary Dr Andrew Chew

English Language

In Year 5, our debating team took part in the inter-year debate. The team comprised of Ang Yong Guan, Yeoh Swee Choo, Tang Kok Foo and Balaji Sadasivan. In later years, two of our team went on to use their oratorical skills in the political arena and became household names.



The Year 5 debating team comprising of (L to R) Ang Yong Guan, Yeoh Swee Choo, Tang Kok Foo and Balaji Sadasivan



Celebrating our 30th class reunion in 2009... three decades of friendship and counting!

A Few Good Years

Looking back, these were five very good years. Friendships were made and strengthened inside and outside the classrooms. Some romances bloomed while a few faded away. But the class spirit continues till today. We celebrated our 30th class reunion on 12 December 2009 at the Royal Plaza on Scotts. **SMA**



Currently, Dr Ang Yong Guan (left) is a psychiatrist in private practice, and is also the Chairman of the Action Group for Mental Illness, while Dr Tang Kok Foo (right) is a neurologist in private practice.