

# Selling Merdeka souvenirs

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## Ong Ho Hin jumped at the chance to sell Independence Day keepsakes

By **CHRISTINA LOW**  
christinalow@thestar.com.my  
Photos by **AZMAN GHANI**  
and courtesy of **ONG HO HIN**

**L**ITTLE did Ong Ho Hin know 50 years ago that the souvenirs to commemorate our nation's independence that he sold outside Stadium Merdeka would someday be valuable.

"At that time, people bought them for their friends and relatives to remember the special day, but not many of us could afford them," said Ong, who remembers that the cheapest item cost about 50 sen then.

He still has a couple of key chains and pins stashed away in his house.

However, among the 70-year-old's most treasured possessions are the photographs of himself and his elder brother beside their souvenir booth.

"It was the day every one had been waiting for and we were all so excited.

"I remember that I woke up really early that day to be at the stadium by 6am," said Ong.

He was glad to be able to help his brother at the booth and witness the historic event from outside the stadium.

It was totally by chance that he was selling the souvenirs, said Ong, who had left Methodist Afternoon School after Form Four to look for a part-time job as he was not interested in continuing his studies.

After short stints in several jobs - first selling cigarettes and then air-conditioners, packing Chinese tea, and working as a laboratory assistant in his former school - he found his niche when he joined the Malay Mail as a librarian on Aug 9, 1957.

"My command of the English language was not as good as my friends', so finding a job was not easy," said Ong, who had his early education in a Chinese school before he went to the Methodist Afternoon School.

He said a friend had approached him and his brother to ask if they were interested in selling souvenirs on Aug 31 and they had agreed immediately.

The 20-year-old then went with his brother Ong Ho Tiong to set up a booth outside Stadium Merdeka.

Ong remembers vividly how the celebration started on the night of Aug 30 when the Union Jack was

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ONG HO HIN

lowered.

"I was on duty that night, tasked with helping the photographer who was snapping photos of the event, to take the roll of film back to our office as quickly as possible so that the photos would be in the newspapers the next day. The printing was done in Singapore at that time," said Ong, who pedalled his heart out as he cycled to the office in Jalan Pudu with the precious film.

However, Ong said age was catching up with him and he hoped to sell his collection to avid collectors.

During the recent interview at Federal Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Ong also submitted two photographs for the 1957 album contest. They were taken at the souvenir booth that he and his brother manned during the Merdeka celebrations.

The 1957 album project is an initiative by *StarMetro* together with partner, Federal Hotel. Five of the most interesting photos and captions will be selected to win prizes.

Each of the winners will get a night's stay at Merdeka Heritage room in the hotel, a copy of *Favourite Dishes of Tunku Cookbook*, dinner for two featuring a selection of Tunku Abdul Rahman's favourite dishes from the cookbook at the Bintang Revolving Restaurant, and a shopping voucher worth RM500 at Plaza Low Yat Technological Lifestyle Shopping Mall.

Members of the public can send in their photos taken in 1957 to [starmerdeka@gmail.com](mailto:starmerdeka@gmail.com) with captions describing the photos.

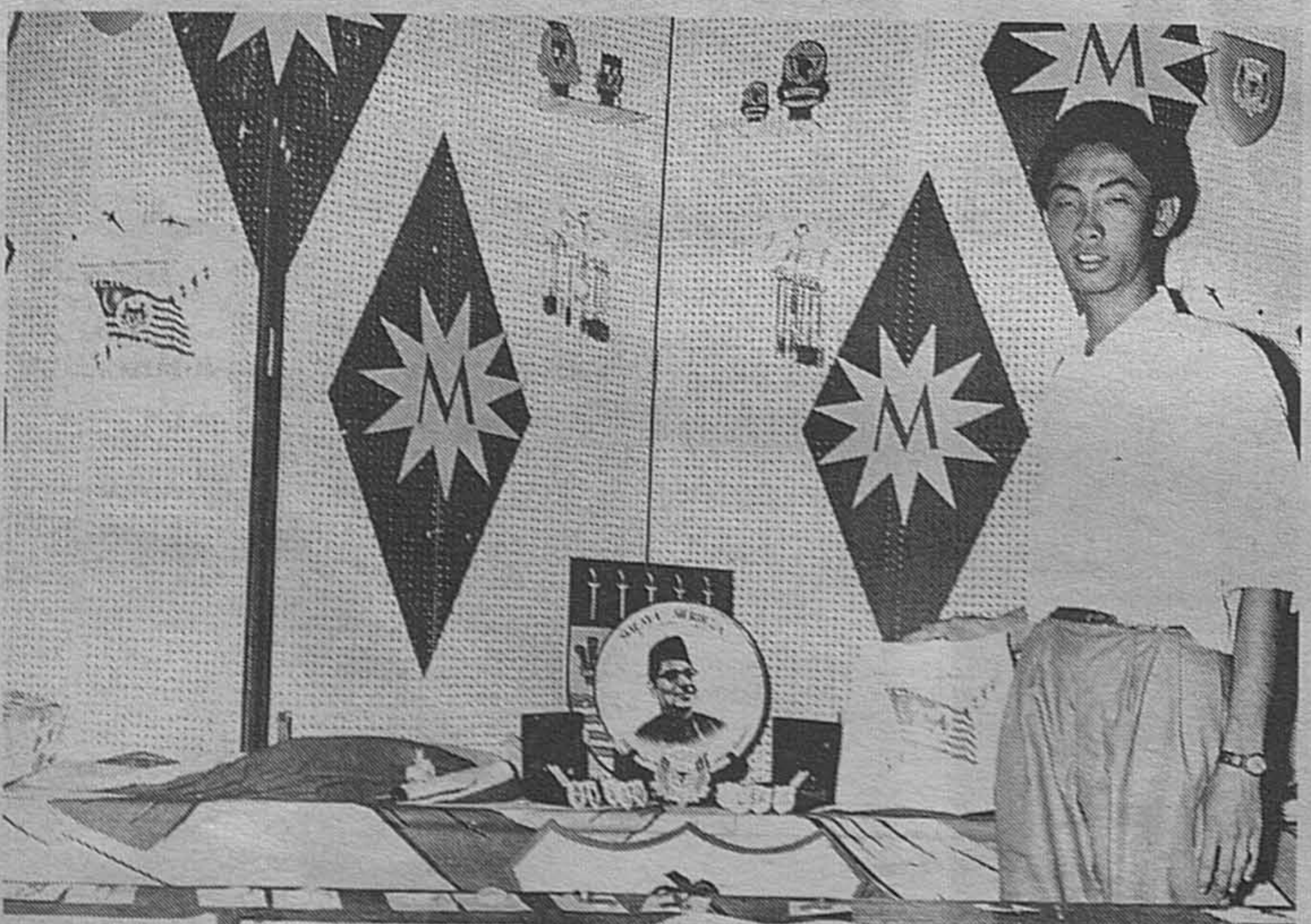
The album can be viewed at the Federal Hotel lobby as well as <http://www.flickr.com/photos/the1957album>.

The contest ends on Aug 24.



Flashback  
**1957**

**Those were the days:** Ong placing his photographs in the album placed at Federal Hotel's lobby recently.



**In the early days:** Ong standing at the souvenir booth where he and his elder brother set up outside Stadium Merdeka on Aug 31, 1957.