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Proud of his Merdeka badges

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Retired teacher treasures commemorative items he collected over the years

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KULIM: Retired teacher S. Oliver Chandran recalled his mother's delicious lunch she specially cooked to celebrate the country's independence on Aug 31, 1957.

Prior to the meal, Oliver's father, D.B. Santhosham trooped the children outside the house where the family shouted "Merdeka!" seven times while the father proudly raised the Federation of Malaya flag up a bamboo pole.

"We decorated our house with paper bunnings, Chinese lanterns and crepe paper. There was a festive air that day, but father reminded us the day was not just for happiness, but also an important occasion to mark freedom.

"Father also told us to cherish that freedom, that his children must love their country and bring positive contribution to enrich it," said Oliver.

Later that day, Santhosham took the family to the Butterworth Recreation Club field to watch a parade of floats.

Oliver, 64, even remembered all the siblings wearing Merdeka commemorative badges that day. They received the badges from school a few days before the country achieved independence.

The teachers at St Mark's secondary school in Butterworth had distributed the chrome aluminium badges in the sizes of 20 sen and 50 sen coins.

Oliver, 64, also has two plastic Merdeka badges with the words "Independent Federation of Malaya 1957" and a luminous key chain bearing the date 31 Aug 1957.

Other items in his collection are a "Merdeka



Malaysiaku Gemilang

Malaysia" plastic badge and a "Merdeka Declaration Memorial Malacca" button badge.

There is the first-day cover complete with 10 sen stamp issued on that special day as well. Over the years, he bought commemorative silver coins and pewter medals issued during the country's 20th, 25th and 30th National Day celebrations.

Another prized possession is the book *Leaders of Malaya and Who's Who (1957-58)*, in which his father Santhosham, the MIC chairman for Butterworth and Penang region, and his uncle Rev Canon D.D. Chelliah were mentioned.

"I also have a Selamat Merdeka 1957 scrapbook, which I filled with newspaper clippings and photos of the historic event taken from the *Straits Echo* newspaper," he said.

The mementoes are not merely keepsake. During his teaching years, Oliver would bring his "treasures" to school and display the items to get the students interested in the history of Independence.

Even now, he would accept invites to show off his Merdeka collection.



Sentimental keepsakes: Oliver and his daughter Angeline, 26, looking at his collection of Merdeka badges, silver coins, pewter medals and key chains at their home in Kulim.

"The keepsakes have sentimental value to me. But more importantly, they should serve as an attraction to get our young people interested in the whole spirit of Merdeka.

"The road to Independence was really fascinating. We achieved freedom without any bloodshed. There was a fine set of selfless lead-

ers who loved the country unconditionally.

"Fifty years later, such patriotism is still relevant, if not more important, because we are facing so many global challenges. The young appreciate the sacrifices of previous leaders because the freedom we enjoy is the fruit of past struggles," he said.