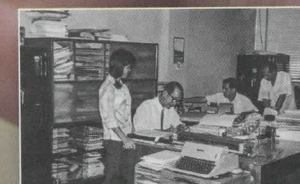


Our Stories, Our Legacy



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SeniorsAloud
Community
Service
Project 2022

A VOICE FOR SENIORS

SENIORSALLOUD is a Senior Community Platform established in May 2008. It began as an online community for older adults and retirees to network and empower themselves through lifelong learning and social connections. Today it has become a vibrant platform for numerous health educational and social activities

VISION

To find fulfilment and joy in retirement, and make the retirement years the best years of our lives.

OBJECTIVES

- To promote an active, healthy lifestyle
- To project a positive image of seniors
- To advocate against ageism in society
- To instil change in ourselves for the better

ACTIVITY GROUPS

SeniorsAloud provides a safe and friendly environment for members to meet up for online and onsite activities. These activities include talks, visits, workshops, trips, celebrations, webinars, book/film discussions, and more. Depending on personal interests, members can choose to join any of the Activity Groups listed below:

- Makan, Minum, Masak (3Ms)
- Travel, Trips, Tours (3Ts)
- Arts, Books & Culture (ABC)
- Home Gardening
- Outdoors
- Jukebox
- Seniors Keep-In-Touch (KIT)

HOW TO JOIN SENIORSALLOUD

Register Free at <https://www.seniorsaloud.com/p/members-registration.html>

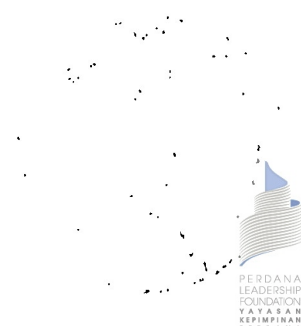
Contact

seniorsaloud@gmail.com

More Info

www.seniorsaloud.com

www.facebook.com/SeniorsAloud





Our Stories, Our Legacy

SeniorsAloud Community
Service Project 2022



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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FOREWORD

By Lily Fu, Founder, SeniorsAloud



The idea came to me as I was sitting at my balcony wistfully looking at the children playing in the garden below. Ah, to be young again! There was a time when we were children too, running around, playing catch with our buddies with nary a care in the world. Then we became rebellious teenagers. We couldn't wait to grow up and be independent adults. Before we knew it, we were caught up in a 9 to 5 job. All too soon, it was marriage, and raising a family. Not much time for anything else in between. The years flew quickly past till one day, we found ourselves at the threshold of retirement. Now as we enter the third stage of life, we pause, look back and realize how fleeting time is. We have accumulated a lifetime of memories. How long will these remain vivid before they fade away with the onset of our twilight years and, for some of us, erased forever from memory by the fog of Alzheimer's?

We can relive past events and experiences by capturing them in photos and videos. The writers among us will store them in print instead of albums. But not everyone has a life that is interesting enough to fill the pages of a memoir or an autobiography. Writing an entire book is daunting for many. But writing essays or articles is less challenging, and more doable.

Thus, the seed was planted to produce a collection of memories and stories that would resonate with those of us who grew up in the 1950s, '60s and '70s in Malaysia. The stories and poems are contributed by seniors gratis, most of whom are SeniorsAloud members. They also contributed photographs from their personal albums.

We share not only a common country of birth but also went through similar childhood and adulthood experiences. This Merdeka generation would immediately connect with the stories in this book. Reading them would bring back sweet memories. These would be conversation triggers when friends gather over a meal or a cup of tea. What cheer and laughter these reminiscences would generate! Going further, think of the smiles the book would bring to the elderly residents in aged

care facilities and retirement homes as they browse the photos and stories. Oh, those carefree days when they were young!

Writing, especially about one's life experiences, is therapeutic, even cathartic. These stories may reach out to someone somewhere. Who knows what effect these shared memories may have on the reader? They may jolt the memory cells of those with Alzheimer's! Who among us baby boomers have not enjoyed slurping ice-balls, played hopscotch or felt the pain of whacks from the rotan? If truth be told, who can still recall the excitement of our first date, and our first awkward kiss? Learning about the birds and the bees, and the day when we held our firstborn?

Regardless of whether we grew up in Penang, Kuantan, Malacca, Kuching or Kota Kinabalu, we share the same childhood games, school curriculum, activities and hobbies. We went to English medium schools, listened to pop songs and had teenage crushes. The majority of us came from similar backgrounds. Our parents were simple, frugal folks who had little or no formal education. But we learned from them early on to be tough, resilient and resourceful. Harsh punishment was meted out for any disobedience through the rotan. That was how we grew up, and when we look at our grandchildren today, we cannot help but compare how different parenting was then and now. We pay tribute to our parents for raising us tough and instilling values that made us what we are today – senior citizens who continue to remain active, contributing to society in meaningful ways.

These are the stories we want to leave behind for our grandchildren so they will remember their grandma and grandpa were once upon a time just like them – young, full of energy and vitality and impatient to grow up. If they could learn from our experiences and pick up some of the values that we still hold dear, then this book would have achieved one important objective.

We may not remember much about the Japanese Occupation or the Colonial Era but we live through it vicariously through the stories that our parents and grandparents shared with us. Passing down stories from generation to generation is a tradition that is as old as time. So will our stories live on in our book *Our Stories, Our Legacy*. Happy reading and happy strolling down Memory Lane!

NOTE: This book is a SeniorsAloud Community Book Project 2022. It is our Community Service bid to contribute back to society. We intend to raise funds through the book for an aged care home Pusat Rawatan dan Jagaan Tua Al-iklas, Kampung Pulau Meranti, Puchong. More details are on page 163.

MESSAGES



“This book will enable SeniorsAloud to speak out more loudly.

On this day 65 years ago, Malaya achieved Merdeka from British colonial rule. In gerontological term, 65 years is a cutoff in research to categorise a person as being ‘senior’. The chapters in this book encapsulate the experiences of seniors who survived the tumultuous days of the war and relished the halcyon days of the ‘50s and ‘60s in schools and with their families.

In 35 years’ time, Malaya will celebrate the Merdeka centennial and many seniors will celebrate a ripe old age of 100. I hope the Prime Minister will urge young Malaysians to read this book and be amazed by the Merdeka generation who, despite the trials and tribulations of early years still cherished the memories of an era when racial harmony for a common purpose and destiny was never forgotten.”

Dr Kua Ee Heok

*Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, National University of Singapore
Emeritus Consultant, National University Hospital.
Mind Care Clinic, Farrer Park Medical Centre, Singapore.*



“I am encouraged by the enthusiasm the Editorial team has shown in producing this book as a community service project for 2022 to help an aged care home

This collection of personal experiences by different individuals over different eras and various stages in their life journey is invaluable. We all have different stories to tell, and we must learn to celebrate them together. We must learn also to celebrate our differences for together our combined experiences give rise to a richer heritage and legacy to leave behind for future generations.

I extend my most sincere congratulations on the publication of this book.”

Cheah Tuck Wing

*Chairman of the Malaysian Coalition on Ageing (MCOA)
President of the Third Age Media Association*

“2021-2030 is the UN Decade for Healthy Ageing and this coincides with Malaysia’s entry into Ageing Nation status which occurred in 2020 when 7% of our nation’s population became older than 65 years. The authors of this book therefore lead the way for older Malaysians in demonstrating that the key to healthy ageing is continued contribution to society. They are contributing in a way that only they can, by immortalising our country’s history through individual unique perspectives. Well done indeed to SeniorsAloud for this tremendous effort!”



Prof Dr Tan Maw Pin

*President, Malaysian Society of Geriatric Medicine
Hon Gen Secretary, College of Physicians of Malaysia
Principal Investigator, AGELESS research project*

“Congratulations on the publication of *Our Stories, Our Legacy* by SeniorsAloud. SeniorsAloud has come a long way in publishing its first book which is a form of community service project for an aged care home. This commendable initiative deserves more than an applause and appreciation. The stories written would not only be the reminiscence of the writers but also provide a glimpse of social life in the early years of Malaysia. Hopefully, this first attempt would inspire more members to write and share their life stories with the younger generations.



Once again, kudos to SeniorsAloud members for publishing their first book!”

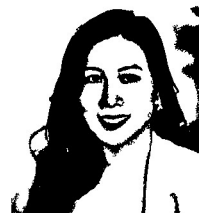
Hamdan Adnan

*President
University of the Third Age
Kuala Lumpur and Selangor*

“This is a timely publication in celebrating and commemorating the lives of seniors. Every story and legacy are well monumented in this edition, I find them very inspiring. Well done to Mdm Lily and the team who contributed to this!”

Dr Jillian Yeoh

Managing Director, IMM Healthcare Sdn Bhd





“Someone wise once said that ‘aging is just another word for living’. While some people look at aging as something to avoid, hide or be afraid of, others look at it as a lifelong blooming – something to be proud and grateful for. Active aging, through writing and other activities that engage the mind, soul and body put focus on how we live and what legacy we leave behind. SeniorsAloud with their first book *Our Stories*, *Our Legacy* is beautifully honouring aging and inviting each one of us, regardless of our age, to live a life that is worthy of a good story.”

Dr. Jasmina Kuka

Co-founder, Jasmina Awards

Promoting active aging through writing

<https://jasminaawards.wixsite.com/2019>



“Many congratulations on the publication of *Our Stories*, *Our Legacy*. It is a wonderful compilation of personal stories that capture memories of the past, something we can treasure and hold dear to our hearts. It is an amazing effort and such a delightful way to showcase unique viewpoints of individual past experiences, that when combined, encapsulates our unique legacy, something we can be truly proud of. I look forward to sharing this with my children and hope they will find delight in the stories whilst giving them a better appreciation of our distinct legacy.”

Jasmin Amirul Ghani

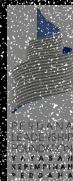
Co-Founder of Amazing Seniors

1. PRE- MERDEKA YEARS



“ You can close your
eyes to reality but not to
memories. ”

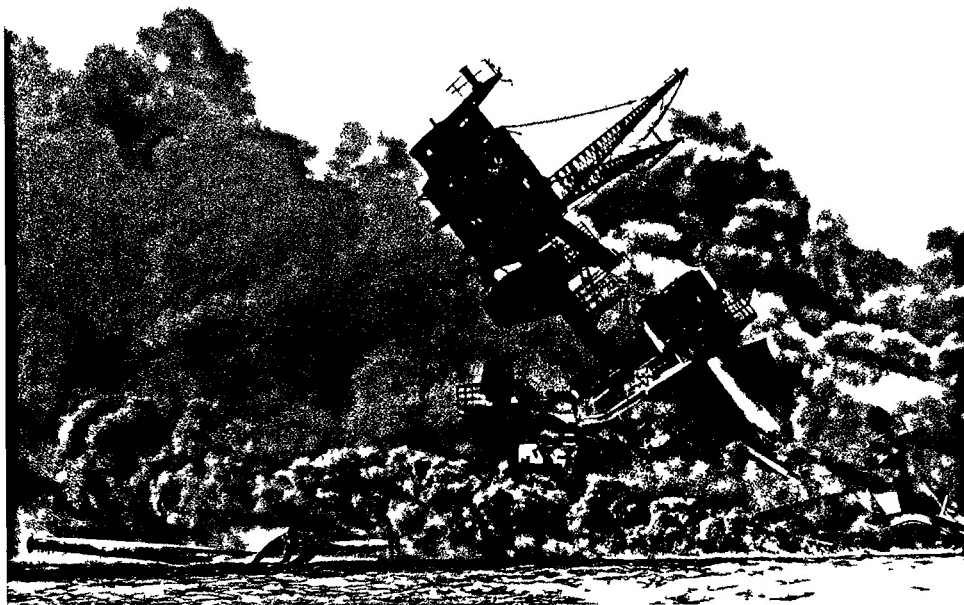
Stanislaw Jerzy Lec



Life during the Japanese Occupation

By Annamah Sabaratnam

The USS Arizona (BB-39) burning after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)



On the morning of Sunday 7 December 1941, the radio announced that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbour, in Hawaii, which held the nucleus of the American fleet, and the pride of the USA.

“The unbelievable has happened!” exclaimed Papa. “Germany in Europe and Japan in the East. Between the two, there is going to be terrible destruction and heavy loss of lives!”

The British, our rulers at that time, installed air raid sirens at several parts of Seremban. Young men were enlisted to become ARP (Air Raid Protection) Wardens, and allocated various sections of the town, to go ‘on duty’ the moment the air-raid siren sounded. We were told that no house-lights should be seen from outside; in other words, ‘a blackout after sunset’.

Everybody hastily wrapped thick black paper around the light bulbs in their houses (fluorescent lights were then non-existent). People were told to dig trenches where they could escape in the event of a bombing, to avoid being hit by shrapnel or other dangerous flying objects. Frantically, those who had some land close to their homes began digging deep trenches. We lived above a hardware store in town, thus were advised to get furniture or concrete roofs in the event of an air raid. Nobody actually knew anything much about war or air raids, so it was simply a case of 'We have to do such and such' or 'We should not do such and such'.

Papa said our home was too close to banks and other important buildings so we moved into the home of relatives in Bukit Tembok, away from the town centre. One Saturday morning, alarmingly loud air-raid siren blared! Everyone froze with fear, then pandemonium broke loose. Much screaming and running this way and that. The ARP wardens blowing whistles, shouted - "Run, run into the trenches! Run among the trees and lie flat on the ground! Hurry! Hurry!"

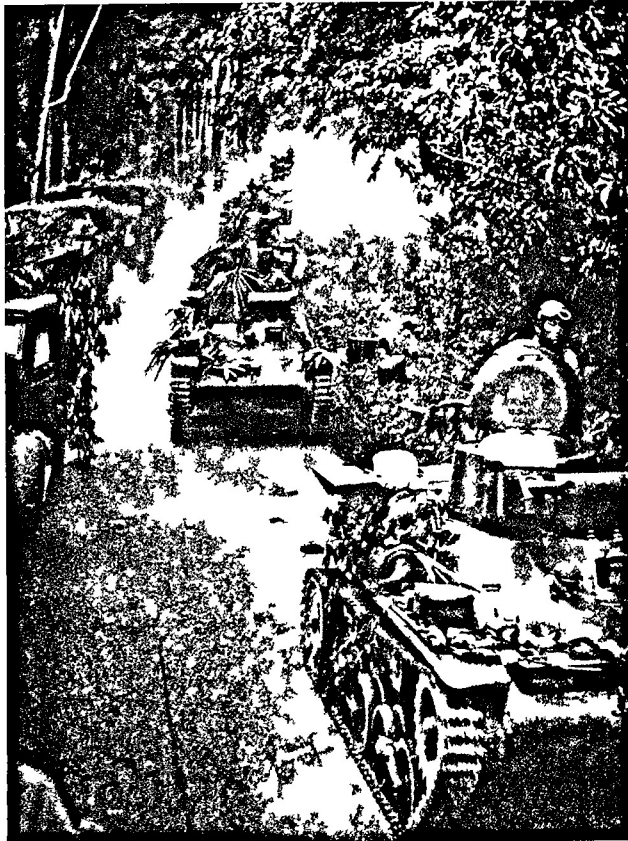
It was an uphill run from the back of the house. The whole place was swarming with people. We ran into the shade of the trees with the wardens screaming, "Down! Down!" We laid flat, two or three persons under each tree, and could already hear the aeroplanes coming. The noise was like nothing I had ever heard and, child that I was, I trembled with fear.

Then, frighteningly close, we heard the planes sweep down, followed by the dull 'thud-thud' of the bombs. All laid prone under the trees, afraid to move, afraid to talk. Silence. Then the 'all clear' siren blared, sharp and loud, 'Waa...' Everybody rose and there was a general exodus out from under the trees. People stood around in a daze wondering where the bombs had fallen, because fall they definitely did. What had been hit? We heard later that, aiming for the huge Shell petroleum storage tanks nearby, the bombs blew up a whole row of labourers' quarters instead, killing several people.

Hordes of people panicked and left for various homes of friends or relatives in rural areas. The generosity of people was touching. They opened their doors to people desperately fleeing from their urban homes. Sometimes,



Papa Sabaratnam



Japanese tanks during the Battle of Kampar, 1941. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

as many as five families crowded into a house meant for only a single family. A relative offered us shelter at his home in a rubber estate about 15 miles away.

The news was chilling! The war in the East was really accelerating at an unbelievable rate. Singapore was under heavy attack and there were rumours that the Japanese were likely to land in the northeast of Malaya. The British had long ago left and were on the run, going south to Singapore. They blew up bridges along the route to slow down the advancing enemy only to have them cut down coconut trees to make temporary bridges. Many of these British were cornered and ended up as prisoners of war at Changi prison in Singapore, where they underwent unimaginable suffering.

Occasionally there was the drone of aeroplanes, and we shuddered at the distant sounds of bombs. There being no news at our retreat, nobody knew exactly what was happening. We saw American B29 super-bombers flying in formation but where to? Later we heard that these planes were bombarding the railways and machine-gunning the aerodrome.

On my father's advice, our host hid his car in a ravine deep in the rubber estate and covered it with branches, grass, etc.

One morning someone shouted, "The Japanese are coming!"

The bicycle troops swept in, with swords and guns, stopping at houses along the way, confiscating barbed wire, wire netting, plywood, machetes and chicken. Then, to our relief, they rode off and three adolescent girls, hidden, lest they too were taken, came out of hiding!

After three weeks, Papa and a group of men walked 15 miles to Seremban. At sunset they came plodding up the road, exhausted and glum. All homes

and business premises had been thoroughly pillaged! My father's hardware store and our home upstairs were totally empty. Even the hospital beds and equipment were looted!

In February 1942, we returned home. Rationing of rice and sugar was introduced. Many food items were unattainable and everyone planted cassava, eating tapioca as a staple food. Younger children found it difficult to eat string hoppers (*idiyappam*) and other food made with millet flour. Textile shops were empty so my mother cut her saris to make dresses for her three daughters. The Japanese were very cruel to prisoners putting them through terrible torture, thus robberies were few despite the poverty. In extreme cases, they sliced off the heads of prisoners, sometimes hanging them up in public places, as a warning against crime.

However, we have to remember that all conquerors, from Alexander the Great to Genghis Khan and others, treated their prisoners of war thus!

In August 1945, America devastated Japan with two atomic bombs.

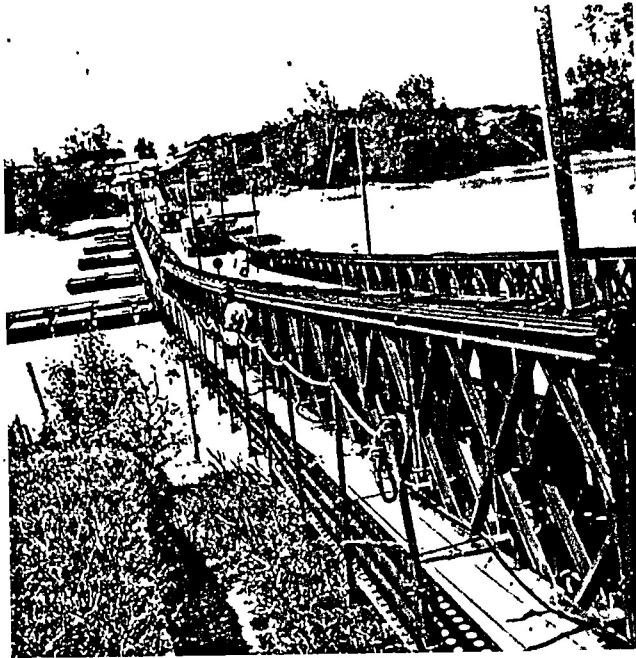
On 15 August 1945 Japan surrendered and the British took back Malaya.

Free after three and a half difficult years, people danced joyously in the streets!

So, that was the Japanese Occupation as I, aged 8, experienced it in Seremban, Negri Sembilan, Malaya. ☑

Nostalgic Bridge Crossings

By Choy Choke Wun



Klang River pontoon Bridge, 1950. (Source: Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies)

The floods of December 2021 in Sri Muda brought back memories of the Klang River and the floating bridge across it in Klang.

My siblings and I grew up in the royal town of Klang in the 1950s where the muddy Klang River runs through the town and the only access linking both parts of the town was via a floating plank

bridge where motorists, cyclists and pedestrians shared its use!

Our home and our school were located in different parts of the town so we had to cross the bridge almost daily!

During our primary school years, we would take the school bus but when we were older and in the secondary school, our parents allowed us to ride on bicycles to school. We had to use our own pocket money saved carefully through the Post Office 10-sen Stamp Savings Scheme. The Post Office cashier queried us when we went to withdraw our money and we had to give our reason that we wanted to use it to buy our very own bicycle. He was very pleased with our efforts to save enough to buy the bicycle.

We were excited with our newfound freedom of riding to school independently and the ability to attend extra-curricular activities on weekends too. Often our mum would have us ride our bicycles to the market to buy vegetables and meat or to run errands for the family. We were living in a kampung-style house on stilts in those days which enabled us to keep all our bicycles under our house.

Each time we cycled across the bridge we were fearful of either losing our balance or our footwear through those gaps in between the planks. The loud rumbling noises caused by the vehicles, especially the lorries and buses going over those planks and so near us always put fear in us that they would knock us down!

As it was a one-way bridge we would usually have to await our turn at each end of the bridge whenever we needed to cross the bridge.

All the cyclists would be the first group to charge across the bridge as soon as the guard gave the green signal after the last on-coming traffic had passed by. As our legs were shorter, we usually had to stand beside our bicycles whilst waiting whereas the taller ones, especially the guys, were able to sit on their bicycles. Often, we had to struggle to get onto our bicycles whilst the rest would rush pass us. We also needed the steadiness and momentum to cross the bridge without wobbling, taking care to avoid knocking onto anyone.

It was a daily challenge, too, as the crossing had to depend on the level of the bridge when crossing it. If the tide was high, the bridge would be level and it would be plain sailing going across. However, if the tide was low, the bridge would dip very low! We could gauge the position of the bridge by watching anxiously at the oncoming traffic rumbling up the bridge. Although we dreaded the low tide, we always enjoyed the nice ride down with the wind blowing against our faces and hair, at least up to the centre of the bridge where we were 'tortured' with either having to puff real hard to stay on our bike and inch our way slowly up to the other end of the bridge on the bike's lowest gear or we just had to get down from it and struggled to push our bicycles up the bridge! Those low tides did give us courage and helped build our stamina and strong leg muscles!

Occasionally we would catch sight of a slipper or shoe on the bridge and knew that something must have happened to someone for their slipper or shoe to be left behind!

We also heard the tragic news that our house-helper's sister committed suicide by jumping off her bicycle from the bridge. We heard that their family arranged for an after-death wedding ceremony between the families of their late sister and a guy who had earlier passed on! That's a tale for another time.

Others had fallen into the river by accident and drowned. Very sad.

Occasionally, if there were something bobbling in the waters, we would gather along the sides of the bridge to see if we could spot a crocodile or two in the muddy river.

Unfortunately, there was no concrete embankment for walkways along both sides of the river like those found in many other towns. The edges on both sides were overgrown with mangrove swamps and undergrowth, and the muddiness of the river didn't encourage any river activities except for the occasional boat rowing along the river.

It was amazing to realise in those days how trusting our parents were to allow us, in our young teenage years, to cross the bridge on our own each day!

We endured the floating bridge crossing with our bikes for several years of our school life until the town finally got a concrete double-decker bridge. It was a relief where we did not have to push our bicycles anymore. Thereafter, it was sheer joy to cycle on the solid bridge with ease and in speed and not having vehicles pass us by. Pedestrians had their separate lanes on both sides of the bridge so we didn't have to avoid them. However, we had to endure heavy rumbling overhead as all the heavy vehicles used the upper deck of the bridge. Today, that distinct double-decker bridge has been replaced by multi flyovers spanning across the Klang River.

Many of us who lived in towns with rivers would also share our nostalgic memories of those floating bridges of the bygone era.

Today, when we drive through some rural areas where they may still have similar bridges, albeit more solid and not floating anymore, it is still with some trepidations that we drive oh so slowly over this type of bridges making sure that our vehicle wheels stay on those planks!

Those rumbling noises across those planks still evoke nostalgic memories of yesteryears! ☑

Reflections from the Colonial Era

By Sakunthala Sundram

The Tamil proverb which says, “Where there is sugar, the ants would gather” is very appropriate with the history of the then Malaya. The Malay Sultanate of Malacca is often referred to as a glorious empire of administrative, economic and cultural aspects. Malacca’s wealth and prosperity attracted European interest and it was taken over by the Portuguese, the Dutch and finally the British in the year 1795. The Europeans came as traders to Malacca, a suitable and favourable port located between India and China to trade in spices, Chinese silk, porcelain and other essential commodities. They later, slowly and steadily, became the masters and ruled this rich, resourceful and beautiful country for more than four centuries.

During World War Two, in December 1941, the Japanese Empire invaded Malaya and ruled for about three years and eight months with terror and horror. After that, the British came back and ruled Malaya until our land achieved its freedom on 31 August 1957. With the return of the British, Malaya quickly prospered with the export of rubber and tin. Basic infrastructures like roads, bridges, schools, hospitals and government offices sprung up like mushrooms all over the country.

During this era, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), which was very much against colonial rule, took up arms to overthrow the British government. The much-disgruntled sub-elements with their guerrilla style fighting was a real threat to the peace and harmony of the country. The communists unleashed a massive killing spree, destroyed infrastructures and hunted down the British masters. The murder of three European planters in Sungai Siput, Perak, in June 1948 resulted in the British government introducing a State of Emergency to combat the insurgents.



(left) State of Emergency declared to combat insurgents. (right) A new village in those days. (Source: Wikimedia Commons)



At that time, my family was living in Raub. Schools had re-opened in 1946 and everyone went about their daily lives with much freedom, something precious which they had lost during the Japanese Occupation. Suddenly, my father was transferred to Temerloh. Mother was shocked about the transfer as Temerloh was noted for communist terrorism.

I was about 10 years old and was studying in Mahmud School. Even though I was happy to go to a new place, I was also sad to leave my dear friends Zanariah and Zaleha who taught me how to read basic Malay and also other friends of my age group.

Anyway, we left Raub with a heavy heart to our new destination. The government quarters which we occupied was a single plank house with kind Malay neighbours on both sides. Behind the rows of government quarters, there was a big swampy land with two or three buffalos half-burying themselves comfortably in the mud. Beyond the swampy area was a thick luscious jungle. The idyllic landscape was a sight to behold.

The former occupants of the house had planted a number of vegetables like eggplants, okra, *labu putih* (bottle gourd), chillies, pumpkin and *daun sireh* (betel leaf). Every morning, mother would pluck the vegetables, wrap them for distribution to the neighbours and Sri Lankan families who lived down the road. I really appreciated her caring and sharing demeanour which prevailed until she took her last breath.

Temerloh District was as big as the state of Negeri Sembilan. It had a District Office, Post Office, two rows of shops and vernacular schools but it did not have a hospital or an English school. Children attended the English Medium Abu Bakar School which was in Mentakab, about six miles away from Temerloh. Sick patients also had to go to the Mentakab Hospital as Temerloh only had a small clinic.

During daytime, life was normal. People went about doing their chores and children went to school. As night fell, people locked themselves up fearing the communists who would come calling for rations. My parents painstakingly covered the holes in the planks of the house with rags of cloth to prevent light, thus evading the outlaws. At times, we heard gunshots which chilled our bones and we shivered with fear. Mother would cuddle my little brother of two years while we three sisters slept close to father.

The communists were ruthless and harassed villagers for food, money and information. There were many incidents where the insurgents attacked police stations, burned buses, derailed passenger trains and butchered civilians with bestial savagery. The guerrillas were merciless and set about killing anyone who could be a threat to their agenda. The mission of the communists was to kill, weaken and conquer Malaya. The movie Bukit Kepong starring Dato Jins Shamsuddin was a clear depiction of how the guerrillas were a threat to the nation. May I suggest that all young Malaysians watch this movie to understand the sacrifices of our men in defending our motherland. In the year 1951, Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner of Malaya was ambushed and assassinated by the communist guerrillas. These barbaric terror campaigns prompted the British government to reward \$250,000 to anyone who could capture Chin Peng- the leader of the Malayan Communist Party. A curfew was also imposed from 7pm to 6am to curb the movement of the dissidents.

Even though the elders were worried about the communist atrocities which worsened day by day, we children enjoyed our lives very much. Watching the motor boats and *sampans* plying the Pahang River, going to the motor boat jetty, playing traditional games such as 'rounders', 'kaunta kaunti' were all fun and amusing.

Once, we little kids were playing 'rounders' in front of my house when all of a sudden, a tractor driven by a young British soldier stopped. The lone driver came walking towards us. We had never expected such an encounter and were frightened. As we shivered in fear, the soldier calmly came up to us and asked for water. Thinking that he was asking for water for the engine of his tractor, I quickly ran home and fetched a pail of water. The soldier smiled and took a steel mug from his backpack, scooped the water and drank it. After quenching his thirst, he gave me a tin of sardines as a token of his appreciation and we gleefully grinned at him. There was a

British army military base outside of Temerloh town and he must have come from there. Military armoured tanks, trucks and Red Cross vehicles were a common sight. However, the soldiers were very friendly whenever we met them.

We only lived in Temerloh for about a year as father was successfully transferred to the Forest Department in Mentakab. This time, our house was located on a tiny hill near the Mentakab Railway Station. I was excited to see mail trains, bound for the north and south from my house and also on the way to school. When trains were about to pass, road traffic on both sides of the railway crossing would be stopped by the rail guard. Sometimes, when we stopped for the train to pass, we witnessed dead bodies of communist soldiers stacked on the wagons of the goods train. It brought intense fear for I was witnessing gory sights for the first time. I also saw dead policemen, shot by communists, brought to the mosque near the Abu Bakar School for bathing and prayer ceremony. The fear of seeing the dead bodies made many sleepless nights.

Once, my father and I were travelling by bus to Raub, our former hometown. Halfway between Mentakab and Raub, near Bentong, the bus suddenly came to a screeching halt. We were puzzled. The driver told us that there was intense fighting going on between the police and the communists. Two communists got into the bus to check the passengers. My father quickly hid his fifty-dollar note behind the small frame in the bus (those days buses had a frame denoting the number of passengers on board and other details of the bus). After some time, we continued on with the journey and father retrieved his money with the help of my hair clip. We never travelled by bus after that horrendous experience.

The atrocities created by the communists lessened with the introduction of the New Villages under the Briggs Plan. People who were living in the outskirts were moved to these villages which were fenced with barbed wire and guarded by Home Guards. Identity cards were issued to the residents and they were carefully scrutinised by the Home Guards to ensure that no food supply and intelligence reached the rebels. Sir Gerald Templer who was appointed as the British High Commissioner of Malaya in 1952, further enhanced the Briggs Plan and implemented a campaign to win the “hearts and minds” of the Malayan people. Sir Gerald who was also known as the Tiger of Malaya strategised that to win the war against

the communists, garnering the enormous support of the people was more important than injecting thousands of soldiers into the jungles of Malaya.

After a few years of suffering from fear, despair, arson and curfews, we were glad to hear that the Malayan Communist Party had weakened. Our Independence from the British brought much jubilation and hope. Shouts of Merdeka thundered throughout the nation.

Today, we are living in this wonderful country blessed with prosperity and nature's gifts. There are no disasters like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions or tsunamis. God, I pray and thank thee for letting us live in peace, harmony and above all with pride and happiness. May we all safeguard this bounty forever by practising tolerance and respect for each other.

“Humanity should be our race, Love should be our religion.”
(author unknown) ☞

The Hill of Education has no Summit

By Shaari Mohd. Noor

Writer at the start of his education journey in the UK.



The title “The Hill of Education has no Summit” has all along been the beacon light for those with a thirst for education the world over. And Malaysians are no exception especially in terms of acquiring English that emerged as the global language, especially for purposes of commerce and industry as well as diplomacy.

The opening decade of 1950 saw a surge of needs to study English, what with the emergence of an agitation for independence from the British colonial power. But though there already existed premier schools such as Penang Free School, Malay College Kuala Kangsar, Victoria Institution Kuala Lumpur, Sultan Ismail College Kota Bharu and Johore English College they were staffed by expatriates, mostly the British. Therefore, there was a dire need for our own trained teachers as there were then only two teachers’ colleges, namely Sultan Idris Training College in Tanjung Malim and Malay Women Training College in Malacca.

In order to compensate for this, the British Government was kind enough to provide opportunities for our teachers to be trained in England. Hence the setting-up of Kirkby College near Liverpool and Brinsford Lodge at Wolverhampton. Trainee teachers were sent in batches to these two colleges for a two-year stint there. Although this part of the world was strange to them these trainee teachers adapted to the place fairly well. They were quick to acclimatise themselves and to follow the course successfully.

As a stop-gap measure teachers who specialised in certain subjects were seconded from outside the country especially India. Added to that, the presence of the American Peace Corps did a lot to help.

The UK-trained teachers brought back the knowledge of not only a good command of the English language but also the new mode of teaching other subjects like Geography, History, Mathematics and Science. Living together in closed groups they developed a comradeship that lasted even after they returned to Malaya. Thus, to this day, the Kirkbyites and the Brinsfordians have been enjoying their friendship through their own respective associations even after their retirement.

At the same time the need for higher education at tertiary level was getting more urgent at the beginning of the '50s. Besides the scholarships given by the government for studies at degree level, the private sector also chipped in to enable our students to go overseas. This was necessary as the only institute of higher learning that existed in the country until the end of '60s was University of Malaya. By this time some selected nurses were sent to UK for specialised training as were the promising army cadets enrolled in the Military Academy at Sandhurst.

By far the most prominent funding came from the Colombo Plan which came about with the cooperation of various Commonwealth countries namely Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. From then on, many Malaysians could study especially in the Western countries. Later this facility was extended to serving government officers to acquire post-graduate qualifications. I was one of the beneficiaries who gained entrance to University of Birmingham to specialise in Local Government Administration.

My trip to the United Kingdom in 1970 and the sojourn at University of Birmingham opened my eyes as to the open-arms warm attitude of the British people towards the incoming foreign students at that time. All this while I only heard stories from those returning from the two teacher training colleges, of how some of them were even welcomed at their pupils' homes during their teaching practicals in the United Kingdom. Also, from a few UK graduates who became close to the local British families.

In those days Colombo Plan students were under the supervision of the British Council who took care of us, from picking us up at Heathrow Airport for an overnight stay at a London hotel, to seeing us off at the railway station for our onward journey to Birmingham. My office colleague and I were accommodated at a YMCA Hostel. We arrived there at dusk. In autumn, dinner was served early at the hostel, so dinner service was already completed before our late arrival. But the caring

caretaker reserved our portions thus ensuring we did not go hungry that night.

University of Birmingham at Edgebaston was only about ten minutes' bus ride from the hostel. The sprawling campus that housed all the faculties and residential buildings also provided a chapel for stay-in students to congregate on Sundays. Since there were no mosques then in this city the Pastor kindly allowed the Muslim students to use the chapel for Friday prayers. Despite becoming book-worms as was the norm in British universities, students from various nationalities were given space to mix freely with a getting-to-know-you attitude. As did the academic staff. One of them by the name of R.A.W. Rhodes even hosted us to a sumptuous lunch at his country home.

On days nearing Christmas time the few postgraduates on Colombo Plan (British Technical Assistance like us) in Birmingham were rather in 'demand' by NGOs including Rotary Clubs which hosted lunch or tea meetings. They were interested to know more of our respective countries. We Malaysians were specially targeted as all this while they knew only about Malaya and not 'Malaysia'. The Indian scholars too were subject to their inquisitiveness as the name 'Bangladesh' was new at that time.

For Christmas the university introduced a programme in which a lecturer each 'adopted' one of us scholars for the day. As for me I was the guest of one Mr Bracher who came to pick me up for lunch at his house after his Church service. It was a memorable gathering with his family, and Mr and Mrs Bracher were indeed a pair of perfect hosts.

The climax of British hospitality was New Year Eve when the British Council arranged a gathering of international students for a gala dinner at the Isle of Wight to usher in the New Year. It was held on a former warship-turned-nightclub, moored at the Island's Port. As the clock struck 12 midnight, we joined hands together, singing 'Auld Lang Syne' ...amidst the falling snow outside...and danced away the night. ☑

With friends at
London's Covent
Garden, 1971



The Polished Rock

By Annamah Sabaratnam

“Teacher, I am the rough rock that you polished.”

Let me tell you about my teacher who picked me up and brought me to great heights.

I started my schooling at the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Seremban in 1939. After three years, in December 1941, during the World War II, Japan attacked Malaya and soon we were under Japanese rule. The ‘occupation’ had begun.

From March 1942 to August 1945, we had to learn the Japanese language. At nine years of age, Nippon-go entered my life. The language was taught by Japanese female teachers.

In 1942 I learnt to write the Katakana alphabet, written vertically (top to bottom), like columns, from right to left of the page - a, e, oo, a, o, ka, ki, ku, ke, ko... and so on. It was easy and soon I was reading short stories from my book.

In the following year I learnt the other characters, the Hiragana, which was rather curly.

All the girls picked this up too, quite easily.

In the third year, we started writing the Kanji script which looked like the Chinese characters. This was more difficult and we were plodding through when, suddenly, in August 1945, the war ended and the British were our rulers again!



Teacher Ralda
Lawrence

During the Japanese occupation, the nuns and our other teachers, all female, taught us arithmetic, drawing and needlework, as well as singing of Japanese songs and marching, too.

We also had a gentleman, Mr Arumugam, who started the day for us. The whole school assembled on the indoor field at 8am. He stood atop a low table and instructed us on lining up evenly. Then he raised the Japanese flag, and all of us sang their national song, Kimi Gayo. Following this, he led the whole school in a series of physical exercises called the Radio Taiso, done to a recorded music played in an old-fashioned record player.

At 9am, we were in classrooms for our lessons. The best part of their education system was that, after each lesson period of 50 minutes, we were set free to run around freely along the passageway adjacent to our classrooms, but were warned not make any noise. This was great as it helped us relax before the next lesson.

After 3½ years, going back to school, in August 1945. we children were left floundering. The nuns who ran the school were in a dilemma. The school was overcrowded, as girls who had not attended school during the occupation, filled the classrooms. Desks were put two together, thus accommodating 45 girls in a room meant for 20-30. I was put into standard 5, the present Form 1, with girls of my age 12 as well as overaged girls of 13, 14, 15 and 16. The nun who taught us was very young and could not control the pupils. We were so unruly that the teacher from the next class, Miss Ralda Lawrence would come and shake a warning finger at us!

In December they gave us an English test. Luckily for me, I had a few children's storybooks at home which I had read avidly during the days of the occupation. There were several other students who had kept in touch with the language but, woe be to many who found that they had failed in the test. They were demoted. Some brilliant girls were promoted while several in my group, as well as I, remained in Standard 5 for another year.

At least now we had moving space, as there were only about 30 girls in my class.

Geography was the bane of those days for me. Not understanding how a sketch in my atlas could be a country, I struggled along learning about the lumberjacks of Canada, the sheep herders in Australia, and the Eskimos who lived in ice-houses called igloos.

At the year-end examination, I was graded the 26th out of 30 girls. I slunk home with my report card, ashamed to show it to my Papa for his signature. However, he was very sympathetic and promised me that soon I would improve.

In 1947 I entered standard six and met my redeemer, Miss Ralda Lawrence! She must have seen something in me, as she put me in the front row instead of the third row which was my usual strategic place, with all my 'gang' around me! I was terrified as she had a habit of slapping girls on the face. I kept my eyes glued to her face when she taught her lessons, studied late into the night and did all my homework conscientiously. Any form of physical punishment was, to me, an insult! The nuns made girls stand up on their chairs or stand in the passage and sometimes, exercise books would go flying into the passage. I had thus far escaped all this.

I loved my teacher's method of teaching because she brought in magazines and read out articles relevant to the lessons in our books. She insisted we read one story book each weekend and copy quotations (extracts) into an exercise book, which she inspected regularly. This habit I still continue at the age of 86!

My fear of her bore results for, at the first-term examinations in April, I was marked as the *first* girl in my class! Giving me my report-card, she shook my hand and, with one of her rare smiles, remarked, "I am proud of you. Keep it up!" Joy oh joy, I thought that I was in heaven. The other girls gave me astonished looks and, did I walk home that day? No. I floated on a cloud all the way home!

That was the turning point in my life. I shone like a polished diamond and many of my gang members, too, did better from that time onwards. On viewing our grades when our group graduated from the Senior Cambridge class in 1950, Miss Lawrence was so proud that she took the best of us to a photo studio and sat down to a photo with us!

A teacher can either make you or break you. Years later, in 2003, on hearing me reminding her of what she had done for me, Miss Lawrence beamed with joy. She is no longer in this world today but I still say, "Thank you, Teacher".

"I am what I am now because of you!" ☑



This book is a treasure that documents the different web of life and trajectories of Malays, Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia, culminating in harmonious cohesion, a way for life that is truly Malaysian. The narratives are clear and concise, yet able to bring the readers to the bygone era that allows the reader to immerse and experience the stories.. The writing style makes the stories come alive.

I encourage all Malaysians to read the book to appreciate who we are and the struggles in life many of us went through.

Prof Dato Dr Tengku Aizan Hamid

Former Director, Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing,
Past President, Gerontological Association of Malaysia



This is a book that I cannot stop reading. I am a history buff (pre-Merdeka section is my favourite) and published real-life personal account stories of ordinary Malaysian post-WW2 are rare. The writers beautifully examine and communicate the condition, mood, circumstances, and emotions during this era. Family ties and school day sections aroused a warm feeling that makes my mind wander back to my childhood, grandparents' home, and primary school in Segamat.

I hope this book can be a trigger or a seed for all of us to come forward and share stories. Talk to your parents and elderly relatives, record it down and share it in any form comfortable to you.

Dr Wong Teck Wee

Consultant Cardiologist
Past President of Malaysian Healthy Ageing Society
Founder of www.cardiologistmalaysia.com



This is indeed a huge contribution, the first of its kind, by a group of seniors to leave behind priceless memories for themselves, their families, the community and future generations to come. I feel privileged to be able to read and enjoy the many personal accounts, adventures and memories so vividly described in the book.

I believe every senior ought to get a copy of this book and read these stories at their leisure. I know this generation and the ones to come will treasure these memoirs – their Legacy.

Mrs Jagjeet Singh

Consultant, Trainer, Author, Wellness Coach,
Mentor, Public Speaker

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