

## THE REUNIONS STORY

"Hello, is that you, Shu Hui?" asked the voice over the telephone. It sounded so familiar yet; I could not put a name to the voice. It has been a long time since someone addressed me as Shu Hui, in fact since school days in ACS. "Yes, this is. Who is speaking?" I asked.

"Yoke Heng, remember me?" she continued and our conversation went on.

Since Form 4, Yoke Heng was one of my closest friends in ACS. Both of us were in the school 4x100m-relay team since Form 4. We were also competitors as she ran for Malaya House, I ran for Cambridge House. Yoke Heng in one of the shops at the ground floor of the Templer Flats and she witnessed many groggy scenes, as Templer Flats or 14 storey was the favourite place for many distressed people jumping off ending their lives. I stayed next to Metropole Cinema in Temiang, often witnessing gang clashes between the Limbok and Temiang thugs.

We walked home from school together or she will hitch a ride on the back seat of my bicycle. Sometime Poh Ling and Kooi Mei will join us. Her father, a wantan mee maker/seller; and coffee shop owner did not allow her to cycle. They have a noodle making machine sitting in their tiny living room. We spent many evening savouring wantan mee, under the watchful eyes of her elder sisters who were always listening on our conversation. Before going off to Ampangan for Malay tuition, Yoke Heng spent time at my mother's ice-kacang shop, a favourite haunt of the Chinese School students from Chong Wah, Chan Wah and SPI students. Yoke Heng's bed at a corner near the stairway of the coffee shop and often demons disturbed her at nights. I remember her telling me her decision to become a Christian that evoked the wrath of her entire family How could I have forgotten her?

The last time I saw Yoke Heng was at her wedding many years ago. It was a whirl wind romance as she was swept off her feet by this American air force guy she met while holidaying in Thailand. Next thing, she was getting married and flying off to settle in the States with him.

Summer 1992, Yoke Heng is now back in Malaysia, visiting family with her husband and 5 kids! We met at a seafood restaurant somewhere just off Jalan Lobak. It was sort of a very first reunion dinner. I vaguely remembered Swee Choo, Poh Ling, Loo Thay and maybe one of the Fang Twins at the dinner. There may have been others but memories failed me. Yoke Heng chided us for failing to keep in touch despite the fact that there were so many of us still in Seremban or at least visits during weekends. She had a real go at me that night. "Shu Hui, you are always organising functions at the Chinese Methodist Church, at the Girls Brigade. What happened to your energy? Do you have to wait for someone to return from abroad? Sometimes it can be too late..." Guess it must have been that very evening sub-consciously I was challenged to take on the role of initiating ACS reunions and that we should stop making promises to keep in touch but never actually mean it.

The next reunion meal was at a Restaurant in Blossom Heights, third day of Chinese New Year, January 1993, Yee Sang. This time we had a full table and I remember Eddie Leow, Stephan Tan Eng Beng together with David Madhadevan and his wife joining us. Seeing Balbir without his turban was amaz-singh! It was definitely at this dinner that the idea of organising a proper Class of '71 reunion was mooted. We realised that it was 22 years since

some of us met. An organising committee comprising of Loo Thay, Poh Ling, Koon Koon, Loon Loon, Balbir, Eng Beng and yours truly was formed.

First of May (1993) which sounded like the Bee Gees number seemed a good day, as it was also a public holiday. Allson Klana Hotel seemed to be the obvious happening place in Seremban. It was down to tracking people as the hotel wanted us to commit 40 pax before they will cater to the buffet dinner. It was hard work and an uphill task. Credit to the Fang sisters as they combed the length and breadth of Seremban, Mantin, and Tampin to visit your Seremban homes, speaking to your parents, siblings for a contact number for you. Our enthusiasm were sometimes not well received or unappreciated. Comments like, "What for...meet for what..., how much money, eat in hotel, very expensive, got beer or not, free ah... no need lah." It was trying time as people just refused to commit. Some just said yes to get rid of us or shut us up on the telephone.

I was also tasked to emcee the function and writing the speeches, Loon cut cost by supplying the flowers. We roped in Sze Poh who contributed the balloons for décor and bought a RM800 dress for the evening.

Came First of May, we were jittery as to who will actually turn up. It was exciting as we were going to see some people for the first time in 22 years. For the committee, we were nervous as we only managed 35 pax so we made Eddie and Stephen bring their wives to make up the number. There were of course those who said "Yes" to us but never showed up. Madhadevan was the guest of honour and it was a teary yet joyous affair as we sang the school song after such a long time with Koon on the keyboard and Loon leading the singing.

Confessions were declared, some openly, some secretly started off by Balbir who was emceeing part of the proceeding with me. Balbir, the bayi-sotong until that night, did not realise that half the boys in school were also in the bookshop in River Road. He thought he was the only candidate! Must have been the some of the confessions going around that Kooi Mei, Foo Chee Seng, Mohan Tarsan had not been back for any reunions. Kean Pow though she and her sister Kean Peng did not join us, gave permission to her husband, Foo Chee Seng to attend. For some strange reason, all of us lost touch with Chee Seng after this reunion. Maybe it is true what they say about Hakka girls; definitely tougher than Hainanese guys. Casey, aren't you glad, otherwise we would be missing your company too.

It was at the Allson reunion that Rahimi made a brief appearance when the dinner was over. We extracted a promise for him to stay in touch but have not heard since. Balbir too has not been regular, since there were no more emcees job for him after this one.

We adjourned for a sleazy karaoke joint in Punca Emas, choice of Eddie and then back to Allson for late, late supper. The bill must have burnt a big hole in Tiew Sing's pockets and he disappeared never came back for subsequent reunions. I suspect it also affected his eyes as he turned up at the recent, "This is our Night", August 2002 reunion looking still looking bleary with his red eyes. He made up for his absence by supplying the liquor. Our recent, dinner with Sing Khow, he could not make it, as he had to contribute to the local economy in Thailand and medical reasons; sowing wild oats as a cure for his red eyes.

Casey also made his appearance with family at the First of May Allson Dinner bringing a couple bottles of wine. He too disappeared at subsequent reunions and surfaced only at the

2001 Reunion. He certainly made up for loss time and churned in contributions and confessions building up the momentum to "This is our Night".

The inexperienced committee made some losses at the First of May Allson Reunion. Some classmates who learnt about our predicament dug into their pockets and contributed. We also managed to cover the loss by charging a higher price when we reprinted the photos. In the end we did make a profit and splashed it over lunch at Regent Restaurant. It was also at this lunch that we wanted to lynch the viscous rumourmonger who was spreading stories about decent gals like Sze Poh, Koon Koon and yours truly. Lucky for him, someone squealed and he did not turn up. We could have added another name to the obituary section.

The next couple of reunions were at Sungei Ujong Club with a helping hand from Sze Poh and thanks to Hoon Peck for allowing us to use his membership at the Club. Kim Fui's pub was also a regular feature for our after dinners event. Kam Onn was always a contributor for prizes, if we ever decide on a lucky draw. I remember once I won the prize of a double mattress. However, I exchanged it for a writing table when I found out the mattress came with Kam Onn with his ang-pow.

Hoon Peck, true to his generous nature, suffered a few losses with some the reunions at the Sungei Ujong Club. Once someone nicked the envelope containing the payments we collected for dinner. Poor Hoon Peck had to pay out of pocket. I have also learnt never to commit numbers to the restaurant, as it can be a disaster. You always end up paying and eating for 5 people who did not show up. Another thing I learnt organising reunions, not only it makes you the most stressful person that evening, it also makes you fat!

Lim Seok Choy did wander into one of the reunions at Sungei Ujong. Lim Boon Chan attended one of the dinners here too. I remember once Chin Teng drove all the way down from KL and missed the dinner because we move the venue to Curry Leaf when we discovered that Thanabalan owned the restaurant. We were disappointed, despite our regular support, we have not been awarded loyal customers discount. No wonder, he expanded his business next door too.

Reunions dates prior to 1995 were not fixed. It was usually after a drink or teh-tarik session that plans are made. After the 1995 reunion, a few of us got together at Yatha suggestion that the 1996 should be a grand affair. 1996 would have been 25 years since we all left school and should be like a silver jubilee celebration of some kind. So it was down to Yatha, Koon, Loon, Poh Ling and yours truly to plan the event. Getting the guest list and convincing people to attend took the bulk of our time. We wanted a decent turnout for the Silver Jubilee Celebrations.

Experience has taught that choice of dates were crucial. Public holidays, school holidays, festivals were no good as people travel or want to spend time with family. We narrowed it to middle of the year may be a good time. Not good time said the bankers, closing accounts. So in the end we settled for first Saturday in July. Personally I was delighted as the first Saturday was 6 July; my birthday as well. The committee was not aware until a couple of weeks before the event. When the actual day came, we all got so caught up with the activities that we all forgot.

Koon Koon again did a great job; tracking even Victor Chu in Singapore and Soh Kim Foo in Segamat. Most of our phone bills went up the roof. Although I have spoke to Cheah Weng

Kit, Keng Hay a couple of times, I have never been able to convince them to attend any of the reunions. I did the boring stuff like emceeding and writing speeches. Poh Ling went berserk at the refusal by some to pay a hefty RM65 for dinner and a souvenir, a personalised pyramid paper weight with the school badge to take home. Wing Kwong has class. Even though he did not turn up, sent a cheque. Wing Kwong since "This is our Night" Reunion has been promoted to our who's who get together and regular contributor on the mailing list. You have all heard how Small Boy has now turned Bad Boy - Big Time! He is real fun company and now in my league of favourite guys to go out with.

The Silver Jubilee Celebrations, 6 July 1996 was again held at the Allson Klana. This time we had over 70 people who turned up including a few seniors like Kuan Yew Thiam, Jeffery Ong, and Gan Kim Leong. Teachers included David and Mrs Samuel, Mr Peter Lee the then principal of ACS. We were sad to find out that Mrs Samuel was now living alone. The evening was formal for the first part as we remembered and honoured the teachers. It was a tremendous success and we were featured in the New Straits Times with two photos.

During the earlier part of the day, we made a trip to the school and was invited to tea in the teacher's room by the then principal, Peter Lee. Mr Nga's old office was tiny with no canes in sight. Mr Veerapan's old office was half sealed. The fountain or rather Swee Khoon's swimming pool was replaced with plants. I could not remember if the school bell was still hanging. Walking into my old classroom, I could almost see Ms Chin struggling with the blackboard. We passed the fenced up cage-hole housing Form 5B, Mr Nga's favourite class. Come to think of it, if 5B were the favourite class, why was it in that cage-hole. It was heart breaking seeing some of the current conditions in the classrooms and the plaques in the hall falling to bits.

Reunions organised after the Silver Jubilee were tame affairs and never got back to the scale of the Silver Jubilee in '96. Koon, Loon, Poh Ling and Yatha were exhausted and did not recover because they did not turn up at subsequent gatherings. By this time I got Paru and Seng Kee, classmates who left early involved in several of the reunions. They took the lead to organise one of the reunions in Tasik Hotel. I had to contribute to the share of those of you that said yes but did not turn up. I remember seeing the one off appearances of Ee Fook Tong, Yong Yoong Cheong. Swee Khoon made an appearance at this dinner Seremban after been isolated in Norway for 20 over years. We also had dinner with Swee Khoon in KL together with Stephen Cheah, Siew Pheng, Foo Chee Keong, and Shirley Wong at a Thai Restaurant somewhere opposite the PJ Hilton.

Seng Kee organised a few smaller get together in his place. I remember a couple of Chinese New Year meals at his place in Seremban Garden and one when Chin Kit Siew was back. Mah Kok Wah provided us some delicious fried taufoo from his kitchen in Yik Wah Restaurant in Birch Road.

Foo Chee Keong is one of those with an in built calendar in his system. Every year in June, he will ring me to check where will I be organising the reunion. He has not only faithfully turned up at ALL the reunions but is the self appointed photographer. At each reunion he will be distributing photos he had taken the previous reunion. Such commitment, I have not seen. Chee Hong and Chee Pheng has also been extremely good turning up for most of the do. Chee Hong is now the regular contributor of digital photos you see on the website. Kerk, one of our juniors turns up at a couple of our reunions but I have not seen him for a while. Deverajah has not been seen since recovering from his bypass and makes unbelievable excuses for not

turning up. Gunaselaan will turn up if he is not working on night shift. Eddie Leow, who is trying to lay claim as the creator of my nickname, will turn up if I remember to remind him a couple of days before the event. "Eddie, wrong, I got my nickname since Form 2!" The ladies in Seremban disappeared for a while too but this year thanks to Mei Ling, are now on board and game for 'more fun'.

The first Saturday of July, Class of 71 reunions dates stuck and was so popular that the then revived ASCOSA committee members approached me to see if they could use that date to use for the ACSOSA reunions. I turned them down but suggested that they should use and stick to August annually instead. As a bonus, I offered them the Eddie, Poh Ling and Paru to sit on the committee. Paru and Poh Ling have remained so committed to the ACSOSA that they have not turned up for a number of the Class of 71 reunions. Maybe they have not forgiven me for 'volunteering them'.

Being the surviving Executive CRO - Chief Reunion Organiser, I guess no one will blame me when last year I broke the reunion tradition and first Saturday in July. CRO - Is it really an honour or a curse? Last year, I could not bear having to organise two dinners within 3 weeks. So when Sing Khoo came back in June, I made the executive decision and held the reunion in Petaling Jaya at the Overseas Restaurant. I felt guilty about it but I consoled myself, at least we did not break the tradition of the Class of 71 failing not to meet. Kim Fui said, "If you don't organise the Class Reunion, no one else will. Only you will take the trouble and have the patience.. If.. I .. ah.. want to come, come lah, if not forget about it... go fly kite..".

When I was in London earlier this year, I met with Lai Cheng. She told me that she will be back in August and would love to meet up if I could get a few people interested. It did make a whole lot of sense to me to break the tradition again this year to coincide with Lai Cheng's holidays in August. I knew that the gorgeous looking Chee Kin was also going to be back from Austria as well. I also met with Cecelia and Paul Kit both I have not met in 32 years when I was in Singapore in June this year. I extracted a commitment from them to attend. Yin Chan from Hong Kong heard about it. Casey was resurrected after Brazil won the World Cup, things just moved on and it happened....

"This is our Night" reunion explicit details of which Casey has provided in his earlier write-up.

One thing I learnt about reunions, the one who takes the lead role must also be prepared for many things including paying the extras who did not show up, high phone bills or face the brunt to some tightwads. I have learnt from many years of experience. So this year, I was clever, I left this in the capable hands of Hong Kong trained Yin Chan. There are also insights you never see, traits of character that has remained or people have changed so much that it becomes unbelievable. Read all about it in Casey's upcoming book on "Yellow Skin Think Smart!"

Next year's reunion?? Some one asked. Maybe we should support the ACSOSA Dinner next year and make such an impact they will remember us. Market and publicise our website. Casey has been suggesting that we should all go for a weekend somewhere. The thought of what combination of orgies may take place sounds really tempting but Teng Beng wants to meet up with us at the next reunion, so may not be a bad idea if we all turn up in his Church at Agape in Seremban. After all we have quite a few ACSians attending his church.

2004 should also be exciting when we see the possible return of Michael Lee from Canada, Hock Lye from Melbourne, Lai Cheng from London, Chee Kin from Austria, Yin Chan from Hong Kong. I hope that Thow Boon will be back from China, Swee Khoon from the States, Sing Khow, Kim Tze from London, Chin Khoon from Sydney, we hope to get you all on board. Yew Kim, Victor, Paul, Cecelia, Bernie must return from Singapore. I hope by then we would have tracked missing ones like Ranjit, Rahimi, and Faizul and get more seniors and juniors on board. So if any one of you know their whereabouts or have an idea where they are working, let me know. I am happy to attempt to try and track them down.

I have promised to buy Hock Lye dinner for the wonderful work he had done on the web-site. Any volunteers for the position of CRO for the 2004 reunion, position is open. Applications not needed. Just get on with the job!

*Angie Yen Shu Hui*

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