

Remembering my friend Martin

Hello Meena, Martin's family and friends.

First, on behalf of my cohort, let me offer our deep condolences to the family and friends. We have all felt Martin's loss keenly, especially because so many of us could not be at the services for Martin last year.

Martin and I met as teenagers, on our first day at the new concept school, the National Junior College in Singapore in January 1969. He and his friend Bala were among the students who joined us on ASEAN Scholarships. From wearing many different uniforms, we soon forged our very own identity in our new grey uniforms. We were one, and we were everywhere. Martin and Bala were in my English Paper 8 class, and we soon found out what an intellectual giant Martin was when his term paper on Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* contained a bibliography of 40 books and articles. **40!!** Most of us were happy with 10 or 11 references! Martin told me he took himself off to the National Library one weekend, borrowed his books, then locked himself in his room at Kingsmead Hall the next weekend and finished his essay. He ACED the term paper, just like he aced the English Arts stream results when we sat our HSC exams.

But NJC was not only about study. As a Councillor in the inaugural Student Council, our friend and fellow Councillor Vivien Mathot remembers how he felt he should make himself available in case any of his constituents wanted to raise issues to the College's admin. At recess, he didn't join any group of students, instead, he would be in the Councillors' Lounge if students wanted to meet with him. Lunch was a different proposition – food was food, and there he was, in the Canteen, happy to join any group. Vivien says, and I quote, "If Martin offered to serve, he took the duties seriously and put himself out". Martin was committed.

He also suggested or worked with the staff to create many student publications. The editor in him soon kicked in. I worked with him on the College Newsletter, the student magazine *Dawn*, and the inaugural College Yearbook. He was the easiest editor to work with – gentle when discussing changes to my writing, careful when handing out assignments. As a photographer on the yearbook, I would collect my assignments and film at the beginning of the day, then be on my way. Both Martin and the Photograph Editor, Tham Han Chew, left me pretty much to work out how I was going to slot the assignments in between my own academic timetable. No excuses, the academic timetable was non-negotiable. Always encouraging, I cannot remember him criticising my stuff-ups, he just offered encouraging advice. Every time I take out my cameras (and I do that a lot these days), I think of my 'bosses', Han Chew and Martin.

After College, I didn't see Martin all that often. I remember bumping into him at Fullerton Building when I was working with the Post Office, he said he had just returned from Cambridge. Shortly after that, I learnt he had returned to Malaysia. The last time I saw him was at his aunt's funeral in 2012. He was the same Martin I knew from school – quietly putting up with my excitement at seeing him after all these years.

That app for The Star was such a discovery, because it allowed us to keep in touch. It was a case of 'what's Martin saying today' every second Monday. Often, we would have little WhatsApp chats about the subjects of his articles, and in true librarian fashion, I would disseminate the links to the articles to others on the NJC fora I belonged to. I think Martin and I electronically 'spoke' more to each other in those years than we had in all the years after we left school!

When my College classmates arranged a visit to Penang to see him, I was unable to join them. I relished the photos that Peter Kwok sent, and the stories from our English Paper 8 teacher, Mrs Goh, who had been part of the visiting group.

After Martin died, Peter Kwok sent me a video posted by Andrew Han. I don't know Andrew, but the tribute video is excellent. In it, Martin was participating in a discussion about the causes of poverty. He said that the poor don't want charity, they want structural reforms in the systems that perpetuate poverty – fair trade, access to medicines and the global financial systems were the examples he used. Charity is only a short-term solution – it assuages our collective conscience, but it does not provide a long-term solution. Martin hit it on the head when he identified structural reforms as the real solution for alleviating poverty. He never saw that in his lifetime, nor will I in mine. But if the economic structures are changed, however slow or fast this happens, surely that will be part of Martin's legacy.

So goodbye Martin, missing you already.

Mary Anne Jansen (now Schooling),

29 March 2021

Perth, Western Australia.