
Our School's Motto

*Simple in Virtue
Steadfast in Duty*

Date: Nov 25, 2019

Subject line: Class of '72 Main Convent days

Greetings school friends and teachers,

The long-awaited day is here! We are ready to launch the first collection of our school memories in the form of a PDF document, our little "e-book."

The first thing to say is this e-book is for our own private circulation limited to all of you who have participated in the project, thus far. We have collected about fifty narratives, bringing the past when we walked the school corridors, back to life now. A few teachers have shared what it was like to be educators in our times in an all-girls Convent school. You will see for yourselves the rich diversity of all our experiences. Do enjoy the discovery!

Please refrain from circulating to others. It's a preview before we consider the next stage of whether to put it online, perhaps as a blog. We want your comments and suggestions. Should we put this on-line? Can you send us contact information for others from the class of '72 who might like to contribute? Do you have special photos to share? Other thoughts?

We feel privileged to have been able to reach out to so many across different countries and places in Malaysia too. Thank you for sharing and for the support from each and every one of you.

Best wishes to all, please keep in touch!

Prema and How Ming

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***Capturing memories of our days at the Convent,
Saving our stories for posterity***
Class of 1972
Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus, Main Convent, Ipoh

We have collected photos and narratives through interviews and written contributions of memories and experiences from our years in primary and secondary school at the Convent in Ipoh. The collection is from some of our teachers who are now in their 70s, 80s and 90s. Our schoolmates were mostly born in 1955 to 1956, part of the post-independence (1957) generation, representing a rich mix of races, cultures, religions and socio-economic backgrounds.

Photo: Our School and our Badge

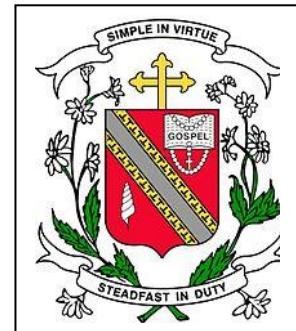


Photo: Class Reunion, Ipoh, 2012



A. Teachers' Narratives:

1. Sister Fidelma, Headmistress and Teacher (from Ireland)
2. Ms. Rosy Yan, Geography teacher (from Ipoh)
3. Mrs. Yaw, Science teacher (from Ipoh)
4. Sister Maureen, Head mistress and Literature teacher (from Penang)
5. Sister Mary Michael, Joyful Vanguard (from Penang)
6. Ms. Mary Ng, Teacher, Girl Guides leader, Counsellor (from UK)
7. Ms. Christine Lee, Chemistry teacher (from Australia)

B. Schoolmates' Narratives:

1. Theresa Leong
2. Kamaliah Noh
3. Agnes Chong
4. Pirunthavany Muthuvelu
5. Yau Sau Wan
6. Rosabelle Ho
7. Nalina Selvamany
8. Meera Mathew
9. Veronica Wong
10. Janice Tham Woon Yee
11. Selvamani Ayadurai
12. Juliana Kathigasu
13. Josephine Choong
14. Ng Kim Lee
15. Lee Lee Lan
16. Chong Hwee Yeow
17. Ng Siew Heng
18. Phoong Huei Min
19. See Toh Choon Wan
20. Yee Oy Lin
21. Wong Wai Kuen
22. Loh Soo Har
23. Salmahanim Abu Hassan
24. Kong Sze Mooi
25. Wong Weng Yee
26. Hah U Lian
27. Mary Fock
28. Khor Soon Wah
29. Chan Yim Chee
30. Ooi Lee Choo
31. Tsai Pao Chien
32. Ng How Ming
33. A. Prema
34. Law Jin Ee
35. Tan Lian Hua
36. Violet Foo
37. Woo Yoke Peng
38. Chow Yin Mooi
39. K. Shanbagavalli
40. Harjeet Kaur
41. Liew Chooi Yatt
42. Anne Kok
43. Khong Siew Lian
44. Sek Sin Yu
45. Lai Siew Meng
46. Catherine Machado

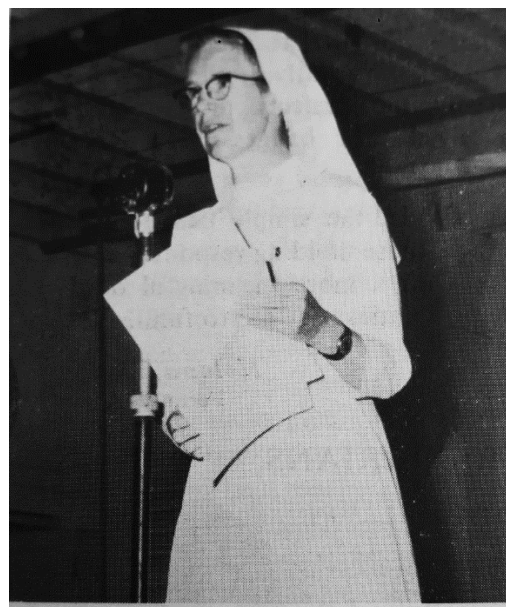
C. About the Convent Schools in Ipoh

D. Not the last word yet! (Contact information)

Photo: Reverend Mother Therese giving a speech, 1972



Photo: Sister Fidelma, our Headmistress



The Narratives – A. Teachers

1. Sister Fidelma's letter to How Ming, 2015

9th April 2015

Dear How Ming, Many thanks for your surprise letter and apologies for not replying sooner. I was actually having some surgery the day it came and it takes a little while to recover.

I do appreciate what you are doing about Ipoh Convent, as well as your tributes. I wish you well in your project, but I find I am quite incapable of doing what you ask. At 88, my faculties are failing and memories quite blurred, though I could never forget my warm impressions of Ipoh, where everyone worked hard (maybe it was too hard for some)

where it was a joy to teach because pupils were so responsive... all those years ago. Anyway it is better that stories of experience should come from your point of view, or from energetic teachers like Mary Ng.

You make a very good point about inter-racial and interfaith harmony in our time. We did have real respect for other peoples' beliefs, traditions, cultures. May it come again!

No, How Ming, I'm sorry to disappoint or sound unwelcoming, but I would not want you to take time and trouble to come to Ireland for nothing (I might not even be around). Please give my love to the other "old girls". No need to reply. Thanks for all. Sr. Fidelma

2. Ms. Rosy Yan, our Geography teacher. Weng Yee, Choon Wan and Prema visited her at her home in Ipoh Garden on September 11, 2019. She is 92 years old and doing well. These are her memories:

I started at the Main Convent in Primary One till Form 5, finished my Cambridge in 1947, stayed on as a teacher and retired from the Convent. I didn't teach in any other school. When I started school, there were no exercise books, we wrote on slates with slate pencils in Standard 1. We carried the slate (black with wooden frame) to school. You rubbed off the slate with a wet cloth; one side of the slate had double lines and you had to write within that space. The other side of the slate had squares marked off for arithmetic. We only used slates for a few years in Primary school. Then we had pens which you had to dip in ink. We had no homework. Sister Magdalene was my first teacher and she stayed at the Convent till I sat for my Cambridge exam; she taught me French.

In those days, there was the Junior Cambridge which was Form 4 and Senior Cambridge which was Form 5 when you sat for the exams that were sent directly from Cambridge. My subjects were Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, English, English Literature, History, Hygiene (later called Health Science), and Second Language. With English literature, I liked that teacher, Sister Brede, she was very sweet and she was later transferred to the Bukit Nenas convent in KL as headmistress. We did Julius Caesar and a book of essays by famous writers, new and old ones. For Second Language, I did French but I wish I had taken Chinese; the little Chinese I learned was during the Japanese time when my father sent me to study with a neighbour who taught at Ave Maria convent. She didn't charge money, we paid her with a cigarette tin of rice because food was so scarce in those times.

The science lab at the Convent probably started in 1948. Before that, any girl who wanted to do science for her Cambridge exams had to go to St Michael's school once or twice a week. I remember that Sister Ernest taught us Algebra and Geometry.

Pre-war days when we were in primary school, Sister Marie Louise was in charge during recess; we went down a slope to where there were stone benches on both sides near the badminton court. All the girls gathered there but she made sure no one could move much because she'd have a cane in her hand. Anyone who ran about playing "catching" would get a caning even though it was our recess time. She was already old and would walk around doddering with her cane. We were only allowed to eat and talk among ourselves but no running around. I wonder if Reverend Mother knew about it. Sister Marie Louise may have died during the war because I don't remember seeing her later on.

After our Form 5, we went for "Normal class" on Saturdays at Anderson School where we had lectures on teaching. We had 3 years of that, and I became a "General Purpose" teacher which means teaching everything except PE (physical education.) Later, we had specialized subjects.

I began teaching Geography, Maths and English. Teaching both Maths and English was difficult; as the teacher, you had to carry home all those exercise books to mark. With 40 books a class, I had all those compositions to mark on the weekends. In 1970, I taught Geography to two Form 3 classes of your Class of '72 batch which had 10 classes.

I also taught History and other subjects because I was a General Purpose teacher. Mother Pauline was very strict as Headmistress; she was strict with both students and the teachers. She kept us on our toes. She would come around each month to review the report cards in each class. They would all be kept in

alphabetical order. There was a column for conduct, we had to mark if the student's behaviour was good, very good, or unsatisfactory and marks for subjects taken during the month. Parents had to sign those report cards.

Once a week in the afternoon, we teachers had to go back for extracurricular activities. I used to supervise badminton and take attendance, but I didn't have to do more than that.

There was little interaction between the four convent schools in Ipoh (Marian, Tarcisian, Ave Maria and Main convent.) At our school, teachers got along nicely, there was no time for rivalry. You were busy as soon as you stepped into the Convent. We were always occupied and only had one free period and you were usually furiously marking books so that you didn't have to take them all home.

We seldom went to the orphanage. It was in a different section and we were barred from going there. There were babies in the pre-war days but no more after that. The orphanage moved out in later years when it was closed, and the orphans moved to Bukit Nenas in the last 3 years.

The students were different over the years. In the early days, they really studied, no playing the fool. Later, you noticed a few in the class were playful and now, what can I say. We had no discipline problems in the early days, then girls got naughtier, more playful. Just before I retired, I was in the afternoon school and taught Form 1. You know, that transition from Standard 6 to Form 1, the students still behaved like small children but after a few months, they were little ladies!

Ms. Yan concluded her narrative with this note: *Information may not be a hundred per cent correct!*

Photo: Golden Reunion (Front row: Ms Thomasz, Mrs. Selvamany, Mis Hew, Mrs Yaw and others)



3. Mrs Yaw (Catharine Chan Choy Yoke), a conversation on Sept 18 2019

Choon Wan and I (Prema) met Mrs. Yaw after the monthly mass held at our school's Chapel. It was the third month after the re-opening of the Chapel which had been closed for quite a while. With the reopening, Father Anthony Liew from the St. Michael's Church had kindly offered to conduct monthly services and today's Mass was especially for students preparing for their final exams. In my eyes, the

priest, a Chinese man, looked quite young but spoke earnestly; he told the students, "It's alright to feel anxious. You do your best. God will do the rest." The chapel is still an impressive space though the walls are in need of a fresh coat of paint and the icons, pews and structures that we held in our memories are long gone! Mrs. Yaw is a devout Catholic and we arranged to talk after the Mass in the Teachers' room next to the lower Canteen area. She was dressed as always in a beautiful cheongsam that she had sewed herself years ago. Now, in her words:

I made my first cheongsam many years ago. I unpicked a cheongsam from the work of The Shanghai tailors and used it as a paper pattern. I sewed many of them until I retired. I stopped after that as I had far too many already. I remember one girl told me, "You wear a new dress every day and it's been a month already!" I put zips at the back, so they are really pseudo-cheongsams; otherwise, openings are in the front in the original style. I made three in that original style, but the openings in front didn't sit well.

I studied and then taught at the Convent. I wasn't married when I started as a teacher. My fiancé was sick at the time and Dr. Moreira was his doctor. He said my fiancé was quite ill and would live for perhaps 3 years. I told him, "I will marry you after 3 years." He got a cold in our 4th year and got very sick and passed away.

When my husband passed away, we had a quick funeral because he had been so ill even though that is not usually the Chinese custom where you wait a day. When I was 80, a group of past students gave me a lunch and they told me about the day of my husband's funeral. The girls said they clapped their hands because they were suddenly told it was going to be a half day. Sister Fidelma made this decision so that the teachers were able to attend the funeral. According to these students, Sister gave them a terrible scolding for clapping because they were being very disrespectful. At that dinner, they told me that they didn't know the reason for the half day – "It was rare for us to get holidays from school back then, so we were happy to get a half day. We didn't know and didn't mean to be disrespectful of your loss."

I got used to living on my own and there was plenty of work in the Convent. I loved it and I felt lost without the work when I retired. I've been retired for 32 years, since 1987.

Sister Pauline became Reverend Mother Pauline. She was a very good principal. She would go around the school every day and if she knew a particular teacher couldn't control her class, she would just walk by to monitor. She would know which teachers were not effective and invariably, they wouldn't be passed and continue as teachers. Only one teacher got called up and was told by Sister, "This profession is not for you." I remember that person became a dental nurse and did well, becoming a matron very quickly. Reverend Mother Pauline was also a very good business lady and built several schools including Ave Maria, Marian, Batu Gajah, Sitiawan convents and the Our Lourdes Church school as I recall. She was the *Building Mother*.

For the longest time, Miss Hew was in charge of the timetable for the teachers. You get about 25-28 class periods a week, and in addition to your core subjects, you'd get things like moral class or something else to make up the total number that you had to teach. The education office later started moving teachers who had given more than 10 years of service at a school. Ms. Hew didn't have a degree and even though she was very much needed at our school, they moved her. She went to Perak Girls School and retired from there after a few years. We missed her as she was a good disciplinarian; she also knew Chinese and taught maths. Ms Hew gave me Science classes to teach every year which I taught

from the beginning. So, my record book was easy to maintain, always just the 1 subject. I was never transferred and if I had been, they would probably have given me *Rojak*.

I have lots of happy memories at the Convent. I remember how the Irish Nuns were very particular. When you said words with the "Th....", you had to really pronounce it well like in *The*.". After the Nuns left because they had to return home to Ireland, there was less emphasis on English pronunciation.

Sister Maureen was Headmistress when I retired; she was the last Sister to serve as headmistress. She was very kind to me. Sister Maureen didn't like late comers and she was strict with other teachers and with the students. Every day I went earlier than everybody else, and someone said, "Are you the sweeper?" Going early allowed me to do things before the others came. I remember one day, I was there early and I stretched my arms out. I felt a hook snap and had to go home and change. I was late and the teacher attendance book had already been given to Sister Maureen. I had to go into her office, and she said, "Go, go, it's OK," because she knew I was always early. She was smiling and sending me off, but another teacher was in there as well and she got a telling off for being late!

I was a student when the Convent started teaching Science. We were the second batch to learn science but there was no Lab. For Lab, students would go to St Michael's and I thought, "Oh dear, I live in Greentown and I have to travel far to do these lab classes." But, the next year, the bathroom area where the Boarders used to bathe was converted into a Lab.

As a student, I would have a few cents as pocket money and it then increased a bit. I always liked the beef luncheon meat fried with onions. There were 8 of us in the family, the first 3 girls would wake up early and the boys would have no time to eat because they would wake up just in time for school so no breakfast for them. I would have time to pack my sandwich for school and I would save my pocket money. Children these days spend so much on KFC and all the expensive fast food that might cost as much as \$20. We didn't have that kind of money back then.

You took 7 subjects for the Senior Cambridge. When I got the result by phone, I was told I got a Second Grade and I wasn't happy, I expected better. But, actually, when I got my certificate, I got Grade 1. They had made a mistake. In those days in the '50s, imagine Cambridge made a mistake! That was unthinkable!

Later as a beginning science teacher, I was asked to help Sister Ernest but as the number of girls increased, there were 2 forms. It was too much for her to do by herself and I became the teacher. When I studied, it was just General Science but now I was a teacher and science had become separate subjects and I felt that if I opened my mouth, "nothing" would come out, meaning I didn't have all the knowledge I needed. So, I thought, "Can I attend Biology and Chemistry classes at Anderson School in the evenings to get up to speed? With extra curriculum duty, I had to do netball. I think if I had asked for permission and time off to learn for all 3 science subjects, Mother Pauline probably would have let me. Anyway, I didn't do Physics.

Pure Chemistry was taught by Mr. Elliot at Anderson School. He wouldn't look at the students and would just write and write on the blackboard. I told him "If you see me munching, don't think I'm being rude. It's because I have no time to eat." Since I was a boarder now as a teacher, they would give me a sandwich everyday with luncheon meat. The luncheon meat in those days was chewy and nice but later

it was all mushy and I never ate them again. When I took the Pure Science exams, I got a grade of Very Good. There was no A1 back then, only VG, Good, Credit or Fail.

As a teacher, I was boarding at the Convent for a while because my parents had to move to work in Telok Intan (*called Telok Anson back then*). I didn't like that place because it rained a lot, so they let me stay in Ipoh and board at the school. I knew every tree in the Convent and when they were cut down. There was a tree with red sap in the main playground and if it stained your dress, it wouldn't come off.

To be certified as a teacher, I was still doing my Normal class during this time while I was also learning to teach science. Because class was late in the day, a trishaw would pick me and take me to Anderson School and I would pay him daily. The Nun looking after the gate would let me in when I got back, and then she would let out the dogs. There were 3 or 4 dogs back then to protect the place.

Several of the boarders were also Ave Maria teachers. They were always sheltered. I loved to do their hair up. Then I could no longer be a boarder. Reverend Mother said she would no longer take locals as boarders. This was the period of the Red Chinese, Chiang Kai Shek, Hong Kong and all that. I remember two who came from China and were allowed to stay at the Convent.

When I was teaching science, we had labs in the new building. Form 1 used to be in the afternoons, and they could use the lab. Forms 3, 4 and 5 also did labs because there were 2 labs. Lab was scheduled as a double period and there was 1 single period in class. I taught mostly Form 2 and 3 Science which was in the morning. One year I went in the afternoon school so I could teach Form 1 and know what they were learning. I also used to help grade the government exam papers from other schools and that would take me away from the Convent. So, I had to work extra to get my books in order before I left on those duties.

Rosy Yan was an excellent senior teacher and supervisor for the afternoon Form 1 group. There was only 1 year we had a male teacher and he was only here for 1 day. He resigned!

4. Sister Maureen, Head Mistress and Teacher (Maureen K.C. Chew, I.J.S. Sisters of the Infant Jesus) in Penang, Sept 24th 2019

Theresa Wong kindly offered to drive Mrs. Yaw, See Toh Choon Wan and me (Prema) to visit two of our former teachers who had been Sisters at the CHJ. Sister Mary Michael (see separate narrative) and Sister Maureen are both retired and living in Penang.

Sister Maureen came to meet us on the ground floor of her apartment building. Her sister Eileen had kindly prepared quite a spread of local kuih. Alas, we had just feasted on terrific Penang Char Kuay Teow, and were looking forward to crabs for dinner, or at least, Theresa was quite definite about the fact that we would be stopping for seafood on the ride back to Ipoh. We chatted with Sister Maureen for almost three hours about her memories from the Convent and also talked about world politics and global finance. We did also have some tea and kuih. This is what Sister Maureen shared with us:

I joined the Convent in 1972 and was there for 20 years. In that first 1st year, Ms. Hew was Acting Headmistress and I served as Senior Assistant as well as Form teacher (*for Form 5G*). Ms. Hew was Acting Head because Sister Fidelma had left for one year's stay in Australia where the Order was starting a new community and a number of Irish nuns were involved.

I was 19 when I joined the sisterhood. All along as a young student, I was fascinated by the work of the Sisters in the Convent. I was at the Light Street Convent in Penang from Primary school to Form 5. We had many sisters and I observed what they were doing. Two sisters in particular influenced my life: one was Sister Marie, a Thai sister who was always in Penang. She was my Form 1 form teacher and that's when I think it started for me to think about becoming a Sister. Students showing interest in the Catholic religion met twice a week in the afternoon with Sister Marie. She stayed back to give us lessons and answer our questions. The bonding started then.

After that, I got to know Sister Ernest, an Irish sister; she guided me up till Form 5. She kept an eye on me and from there, the desire to be like them and do the work that they were doing appealed to me. I was raised a Taoist and was not even a Christian through all this. My parents allowed me to be baptized in Form 5. I did two years of temporary teaching and then joined the Infant Jesus Sisters. You're full of ideals when you're young. I would still join now looking back but perhaps I would have waited till I was a bit older.

My Mother Superior was French and open-minded and she was for pushing the locals to come up. She decided who would go to University. It was not your choice. I was too old to do Form 6 here and was sent to the Main Convent in Singapore which had Form 6; the ruling back then was not so strict even though I was over-age. After that, I came back for Uni here at MU (*Universiti Malaya*.) I thought at most it would be for the bachelor's degree and Diploma in Education and that I would then go to a school to teach. But at the time, MU offered grants for selected students to do their master's degree; the MA was not something that you could pay for and do because they didn't have enough staff at the University and slots were limited. They offered grants and if you got a grant, you could do your MA. I got one and I asked my superiors. They said, "Go ahead!" It was very enjoyable, and all the facilities were given. I got any reference I needed whether it was a book or microfilm from Malaysia, the UK or other place. I just had to ask the Librarian and I would get it. In return for the grant, our research product was kept with the University. I was also paid \$600 per month to tutor Year 1 MU students. The salary for Sisters at schools back then was only \$350. In my 2nd year of the MA, I got \$700 a year so it was also income for the Convent.

With my MA, I was then sent to the Main Convent in Ipoh. That was a joke! That's because as part of my Dip Ed I had been sent to Ipoh to do my practical teaching experience. So, the teachers at the Convent knew how many years of experience I really had! My Superior was Mother Therese, the French nun who was also my Novice Mistress. I was very fortunate to have her in Ipoh during that time. She couldn't herself be Head of a school, but she served as Head of the community. She's in her 90s now and in France. I said, "Mother, I would like more years of experience as a teacher to know the trade before I take on Admin." During my first year as Senior Assistant with Ms. Hew, there was no problem. I was Form teacher and I also taught literature in the first 2 years. Later, I switched to teaching Ethics.

Mother Superior was very reasonable. But in October of my first year, she called me again to her office. I would tremble whenever she called me. She wanted me to take on being Headmistress as Sister Fidelma was away and Ms. Hew had already told Mother that she couldn't continue as Headmistress. Ms. Hew taught Form 5 Maths and that year, she had to begin teaching it in Malay and she felt she needed to be very well prepared. She had no background in Malay. I remember she told us that one day she was at the Immigration Department and the officer asked her age, "*Umur?*" And she replied, "*Empat puluh*

tuhan.” She saw them smiling, realized what she had said and quickly corrected, “Oh....*tahun.*” She said she even had to think carefully on how to say 40 as *empat puluh.*

Anyway, Mother Therese told me that as Headmistress, I would have help from Ms. Hew who was very capable and there were other very good teachers at the Convent, so “You don’t have to worry!” And yes, the teachers were very helpful including Ms Hew, Mrs Selvamany, Mrs Mukundan, Puan Maziah, Mrs Yaw and many others.

The Education department kept pressing Mother about who would be Headmistress. My papers were sent in in December and the approval came back very quickly in January; we didn’t expect it to be so fast. “*Lulus.*” Sister Fidelma did return to the Convent a few months later and she taught for a year, and then she taught at Tarcisian Convent before returning to Ireland.

But still, when I took over as Headmistress, that was when the nightmare began. It was for at least 4 years. It wasn’t because of student problems. Where teachers and students were concerned, that was one of the best schools. We had a core of very good teachers. The nightmare was my own inexperience. You couldn’t learn fast enough and there was so much to learn. I was strict with you all because I was so scared. If the students had only known! Now looking back, your expertise and confidence grows, and you are less strict. The strictness helped you keep things in order. I’d be far more relaxed if I was Head now.

The Convent also was fortunate to have Reverend Mother Pauline who had a degree in architecture before she joined the Order. Among the students and teachers, there was a willingness to work. They had such loyalty and we raised a lot of funds. Each Fun fair raised about \$30,000 and that was what was used to build the schools that Mother Pauline built. The same contractor did each of the schools and he also believed in her. The swimming pool at Ave Maria was her idea too, it was very *avant garde*, a convent having a swimming pool! You need the students and the teachers behind you to do all these things. Mother Pauline was very strict and very fair, and students respected her for those qualities.

I opted to do research after 20 years at the Convent and went to the Catholic Centre in KL from 1999-2000. I wrote a book on history: “The Journey of the Catholic Church in Malaysia, 1511-1996”; I was asked by the Jesuits for this project. I wrote a second book in Penang commissioned by the Bishop of Penang which was published in 2016: “The Catholic Church in the Diocese of Penang.” I have a couple of booklets to give you all including this one on “Nicholas Barre” who was the Founder of the Sisters of the Infant Jesus and this one “Ever seeking, ever serving – The IJ spirit lives on.”

At the end of our teatime together, Sister Maureen asked, “So, what is this for? Would I be able to see this on WhatsApp?” We assured her that she would indeed see the final compilation of narratives.

5. Sister Mary Michael at the Convent of the Infant Jesus, Balik Pulau, Penang on Sept 24th 2019 with Mrs. Yaw, Theresa Wong, See Toh Choon Wan and Prema:

*With the aid of her walker, Sister was outside of the rooms, waiting for us. After the greetings, she insisted that we first go to the Chapel to pray and thank the Lord for our visit. She wanted this record to be a group discussion rather than an interview of her memories. As Sister Maureen later told us, Sister Mary Michael can be serious for only about two minutes before she bursts into her mischievous sense of humour! (*Sister MM has since relocated to the Diocese facility in Cheras, KL.)*

I joined the Main Convent at the end of 1970. I was sent to improve my behaviour because I was misbehaving at every Convent. ("Wait, are you recording all of this!?!..... Main Convent girls will never change!" I continued writing as she spoke.)

I was in KL before I came to the Ipoh Convent. Sister Fidelma said, "Sister Mary Michael, I don't have anyone to supervise the Form 1s." I said I wasn't used to doing supervisory work because I wanted to teach. She said, "Afternoon class, Form 1s. And, in the morning, you'll teach Catechism." I thought, "No escape."

With the Form 1s, there were 9 or 10 classes, they were beautiful, they were great. It was a challenge for me to do supervisory work. I saw the potential in those girls like Caroline Augustine and others. They stood out. Another one who impressed me is the one who was running Indulgence restaurant in Ipoh, Juliana Lip, I think.

Again, Sister Fidelma said, "Take care of the Joyful Vanguarders." And I thought, "You want me to do that, I'll show you." Joyful vanguarders, what did I do? I hammered them! I focused on leadership skills and songs. "Always united, this is our motto." I loved seeing the potential in the girls and drawing it out and making leaders of them. I used to have leadership camps. We had a house in Lumut and every holiday, the sisters would go. There was so much to be done at the Convent that I usually didn't want to go. But that was the place where I would run the Leadership camps and you could see the change overnight especially one girl, Lee Ling, but I don't remember the name quite right."

I was at the Convent for 2 or 3 years and then Rosy Yan took over and I went to the morning session. I taught Form 5 catechism. The girls were listening but I could see their hands doing something which told me their body was there, but their minds were somewhere else. They hadn't finished their homework for other subjects and were catching up. ("The guilty ones always own up," she said, when Theresa Wong in our group quipped, "I was one of them!")

Yesterday, we had a talk by a Sister who at the age of 90 gave a testimony that was so clear and passionate. She said when she was 19, she went on volunteer work to Africa and came into contact with this girl, an orphan about 9 years old and she took care of her. The orphan had been maltreated and underfed; eventually, this girl grew up. This Sister said, "God must have a purpose for my life." And that encounter with that little girl after she returned to Italy, she felt restless and entered the congregation. Again, she was sent back to Africa and helped build an orphanage which reached almost 1000 children.

Anyway, a couple of months ago, two old students came to visit me, one of whom was living in Japan. I like to have a name to a face. One of the two said, "Sister, she's married to a Japanese." And I said, "Shame on you, you know what the Japanese did during WW2. How do you like living in Japan?" She said, "They have a lot of rules and regulations, it is hard to adapt to living there and such a breather to come back to visit Malaysia." And she said "Sister, you know you punished me in school. You made me stand on a chair." I told her if I had done that I would have been hauled up in court. "Thank God you didn't fall down, otherwise I would have been called up by Reverend Mother."

She looked at our faces after relating that memory and said, "Well, I thought this story to all of you would sound more dramatic than it seems to have.....Oh well."

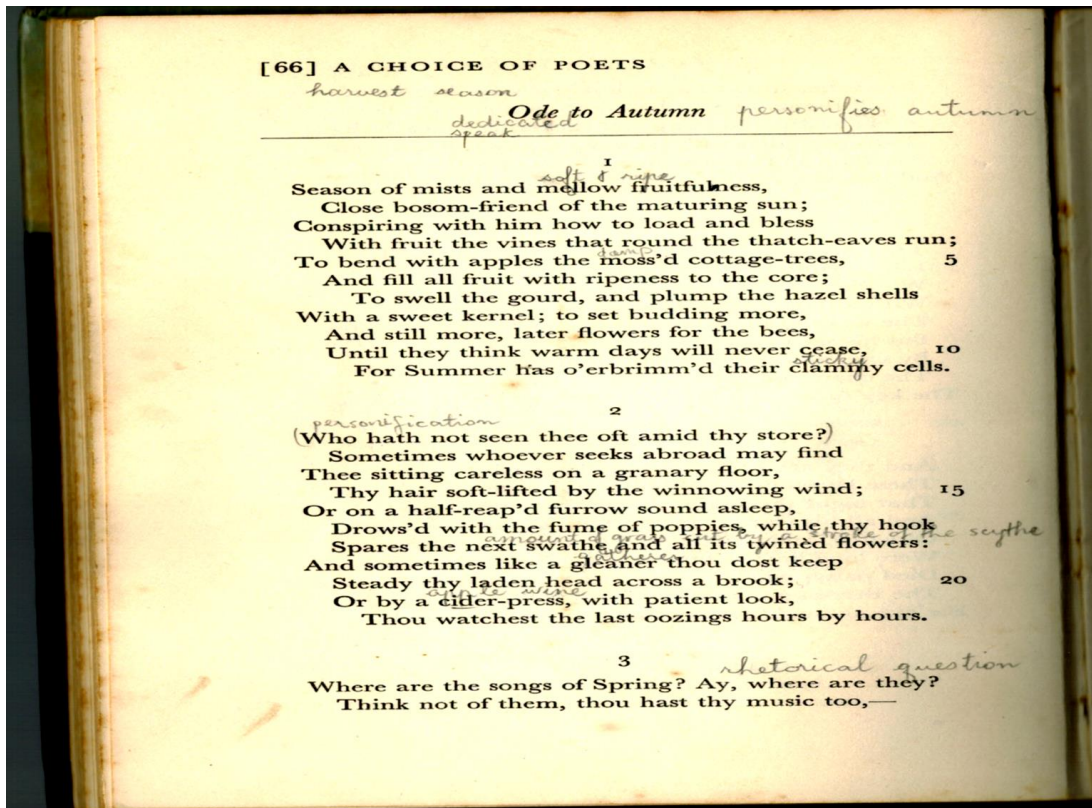
Sister Rachel was my catechism teacher and she put the fear of God in me. She was later transferred to the Batu Gajah convent which Sister Pauline had built. (Mrs. Yaw added, "Most of the Cambridge

students who passed were sent to teach there.”) Sister Ignatius used to also go to the Batu Gajah Convent, a driver would take her and after Ignatius, it was Sister Winifred who went there. We also remember Reverend Mother Therese; she spoke with a French accent.

We had singing lessons. Mrs. Tan used to play the piano when you all were there. Terenzinha Gonsalvez was there and the girls had to prance on the stage, and it was beautiful. I remember wanting to teach the girls the school song. With the usual tune, I tried to get some to do the Alto part but it didn’t quite work.

The swimming pool was at Ave Maria and we had all the Fun Fairs there with games and stalls. Later we did walkathons as fund raisers. (“All the SMI boys would come so of course it was a lot of fun, some were brothers of our girls and some were friends who also liked to see Convent girls,” said Mrs Yaw.) Sister Mary Michael continued, “But parents didn’t approve of mixing. There would be a lot of notes being exchanged. Study notes, yeah right! Read between the lines on that one! Parents were very conservative back then.”

From our Literature class poetry book “A Choice of Poets”, John Keats’ Ode “To Autumn”



6. Ms Mary Ng from England, “Memories Are Made of Bliss,” Nov 2019

I remember vividly the two years that I spent as a boarder at the Light Street Convent, Penang, even though I was only about 8+ or 9 years old. My sister and I were sent to Penang for a better education than was thought available then in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, where we were born. My parents were not rich, but they felt that the expense of boarding school and flights to and from Penang three times a year

were a good investment for their daughters. Six times a year, I always sat in the plane, hunched up clutching the sick bag on take-off and on landing.

I learnt at the age of 8+ how to write a letter home. I never forgot my first attempt. I had to show it to Madame Vincent who called me up later and said, "Mary, I know that you are a very lovely little girl, and Daddy and Mummy know that you are their lovely girl. However, you cannot sign off with "Your lovely daughter" It should be "Your loving daughter. Remember that!" Then she gave me a little hug. That was my first introduction to the correct use of adjectives. I was taught that whatever I wrote on a note/ letter, or notices I put up on the board should be neat and written in blue ink. Writing "thank you" letters was important. Many years later, I made my son write "thank you" letters after his birthday, Chinese New Year and Christmas. For a little boy, it was a chore.

I met Sister Fidelma when I was in Penang; she was just so young herself having just come from Ireland. She was on the teaching staff but took turns to supervise us during homework periods and playtime. I learnt how to mend my socks, make my bed, and fold my clothes and put them neatly in the cupboard as there was cupboard inspection every Saturday. Madame Françoise who was French, was like a mother to us as she looked after us most of the time. I learnt how to hold my fork and spoon properly, how to eat with "your mouth closed" and "Don't talk with your mouth full" and "Don't drink your coffee/tea with your eyes roving all over the place, keep your eyes on your cup." Every child was told that. I was very happy in school and in the boarding department. The nuns have influenced me in the way I do things.

I left Penang Light Street Convent to start Std 6 in Ipoh Convent. I think I must have been in Form 1 when Sister Fidelma joined the staff as Principal. She remembered the little girl called Mary. Sister Fidelma is a very shy person but has a great sense of humour. She now lives in Ireland and we keep in touch.

My schooldays in The Convent were very happy days. I had many friends and many good teachers. Miss Hew had the greatest influence in the way I looked at Mathematics. I was good in my other subjects, but you wouldn't say that I was brilliant in Maths. I worked hard at it. As usual, during holidays we had Mathematical problems to solve. I remember a time when after the holidays, Miss Hew returned our books. I turned the pages of my exercise book quickly because I wanted to see how I had done; I had worked so very hard during the holidays and a warm glow spread over my face as I read her remarks, "Well done, Mary - a very good attempt!" She called me to her desk and asked me if I had had any help at all. I hadn't. She was really very pleased with me. That was enough for me. I floated on air that day! She was very happy when I got credit for Maths in my finals. Strangely enough many years later in England, when I taught Maths, besides other subjects in a Primary School in Year 5, the children thought I was a very good Maths teacher! I made Mathematics fun. I thought of different ways to make the children understand so I made up funny little songs for them to remember the steps to multiply and divide fractions. I had a rhyme called the Decimal Dance to do division and multiplication of decimals by 10, 100, 1000 and many others. The children loved it and found Maths easier.

Miss Hew would have been proud of me if she had seen the children's exercise books - all neat and tidy, all working shown and everything set out in a systematic way - step by step. She appeared stern as she was the discipline mistress, but she was truly very kind and not as stern as she wanted you to think. She remained a great and wonderful friend to me and my family. She stayed with us for a few days when she and her sister came to London and loved my son who was then three. He impressed them with his

knowledge of dinosaurs. Mrs. Selvamany also came to visit us for the day one year and helped to feed him when he was six months old.

During my school days, it was school policy that we had to speak English all the time in school. This did not bother me much as I could not speak Cantonese. I am Hokkien. My best friend was the Head Prefect, I was the Assistant Head Prefect and the prefects had to enforce this rule. Lines were given – “I must not speak Cantonese in school” fifty times. In those days, the prefects were obeyed!

At the back of the school, street hawkers set up their stalls and did a roaring business there after school. The ice kacang man, the rojak man, etc. teased me as “The Chinese girl who could not speak Chinese!” I didn’t mind the teasing. I think they were rather fond of me as they always gave me a dollop more of whatever I bought!

We used to have men teachers who came in after school to teach us Malay. My “chegu,” a big tall man knew I was born in Kelantan; he never called me by my name. Instead he would come into class and after the usual greetings, he would look at me and say, “Apa khabar, Kelantan?” I would then say in my Kelantan Malay accent, “Khabar baik, chegu.” And, the whole class would laugh, and I would laugh too. I suppose he looked to me to break the ice.

When I completed college, I was sent to a big Malay secondary co-educational school outside Telok Anson. Rev. Mother Pauline had asked for me to go back to The Convent, but she was advised by the Education Department to let me go to Telok Anson (called Telok Intan today) for the first year and then they would bring me back to the Convent and I would not be transferred anywhere else after that. And I wasn’t.

I remained at the Convent until I left in April 1976. I think of Rev. Mother Pauline with great affection. She was very strict but very kind.

To this day, I do not know where I got my energy from. I did a lot of activities with the girls. I ran the Convent 7th Coy Girl guides, took them on lots of excursions, camps and hikes. It helped if the teacher who ran the company had been a guide herself. I had been a guide in the 2nd Coy Girl Guides, a company that accepted girls from any school. Then I went on to The Rangers, a company for older girls. I trained teachers at Girl Guide training sessions to become Guiders and became the District Commissioner for Girl Guides. The Convent produced eight Queen’s Guides, the only school that had such a big number in the whole of Malaysia. It is not, and was not, easy to become a Queen’s Guide. I was so proud of these girls. The Guides have always occupied a special place in my heart.

Sister Fidelma was very concerned that I was giving up so much time for the Guides, and for the girls in general that she called me one day into her office for a little chat. She told me that it was great that I was so involved with the welfare of the girls, but I must make time for my social life too. AND this advice came from a nun. Very sound advice too.

The Benefit Society started by the staff to help girls with free textbooks and examination fees was much needed. We thought of different ways of raising funds. One of these was the Food Sale. Each class took turns to make different foods - cakes, rojak, meehoon, and the very popular coconut candy. We could not have done these sales without the mothers who supported us wholeheartedly. I was in charge of buying books and those girls who needed help with books came to see me and got them on loan for years. I even stocked second-hand uniforms. I gave up my free periods to talk privately to Form V girls

who had asked for help with their exam fees. We wanted to help all who had applied, and it was extremely difficult as so many needed help. In the end, we decided that everyone should be given some money towards the examination fees. Nobody was left out even those who applied late.

We organised Talent Time competitions initially for internal entertainment. Later we opened the competition to St Michael's as well as Sam Tet and held the Finals at the Ipoh Town Hall. There was no shortage of offers of help from boy bands. This was an opportunity for BOYS TO COME INTO THE CONVENT AND THEY GRABBED IT. I told the band that we could not afford to pay them much, but they said, "That's o.k. Miss Ng. We want the practice." The boys came in every afternoon for two weeks to rehearse with the competitors. I used to sit at the back and marvelled at how patient they were particularly with competitors who were out of tune. I had groups of boys cycling all the way to my house, afraid that they were too late with their applications. They went home very happy. I remember having to tell the band not to play too loudly, so the leader turned to the other boys, and said, "Cool it, boys" Occasionally I had them telling me that certain songs had to be loud to be effective. I would smile and say, "I get it, but not too loud." and once in a while, I had to say, "Cool it boys!" They roared with laughter as here was one cool teacher! Did we give the boys some money? How could I not do so? The band had worked so hard. Saying goodbye to us was hard. They had become so protective of the competitors and I think I became rather fond of them.

A fashion show was also held in the Ipoh Town Hall. One of my classmates had trained as a designer and she had just opened a shop in Ipoh, so I approached her. She did all the clothes for the "models" to wear. The teachers helped to pick our girls to model the clothes. It was a great success. We had Dance Festivals in the Hall and each form had to do a dance or two. The upper school did "Sicilian Tarantala" and an Israeli dance "Hava Nageela" all with colourful skirts and can-can petticoats. Oh, they were so beautiful. Scottish dances were very popular! Somebody reminded me that we had also performed the "Scillian Tarantala" on the Town Hall padang to celebrate Merdeka and we won third prize. We did a dance display to celebrate Mother Therese's feast day. I coached the girls to do the "Highland Fling" and the Chinese "Ribbon Dance" I went for special lessons at the Chinese Association to learn it. The girls came back to school on Saturday mornings for lessons. It is a very beautiful dance, using yards of red ribbon to create different patterns. During a rehearsal one of the girls accidentally hit me in the face with the baton. On Monday, everybody was so concerned and wanted to know how I had got a black eye. With a straight face, I said I had a fight.

Mrs. Chan and I did a deal; she did the swimming and other physical exercises and I did the dancing. So if you did Form IV and Form V in the Convent, I would have taught you dancing. If I taught you English and Literature, then I had been your form Teacher. I enjoyed teaching those subjects, particularly Literature. I have always loved books. I remember I did "The Mill on the Floss" with a class. It was a sad story and I always made sure I read the sad parts again and again and cried at home. I did not want to break down in front of the class. The day came for me to read the saddest part of the story. I read the part with so much emotion that my voice shook. I was glad it did as it added to the drama as the story unfolded. The class was very, very quiet as we reached the climax. There was foreboding of a tragedy; the girls were getting misty-eyed. When I reached the end, I closed my textbook quietly, put it down on the table and slowly left the room leaving the girls crying and blowing their noses. It was so emotional. Ah, I was a good actress! Many years later, one of the girls told me that I had influenced her to take up journalism. I taught Macbeth, Julius Caesar and beautiful poems like "The Highwayman", "The Ancient Mariner", "The Daffodils" and so many poems. I think the Convent chose the right books for Literature. You and I

were well educated in every subject. The education we had was fantastic.

One girl also reminded me that in the early years of my years at the Convent, I had taught her Geography as she never forgot New Zealand. I also taught Civics which was rather a difficult subject to teach as we had a very dull book, so I had to use my own initiative to use topics relevant for a Civics lesson. I was very firm that we should stand still for the National Anthem. I spoke about being considerate, kind and thoughtful of others. bullying and litter. I talked about the importance of keeping abreast of world news. I was very keen on world affairs and I read my Time magazine from page to page and the newspapers. I encouraged girls interested to write to the different embassies to ask for portraits of the Prime Ministers of the World. One girl did and she received photos. I have always wondered if she took up Politics at University. Another girl, who does a lot of charity work in Ipoh now said that my civics lessons inspired her to take up charity work. I am always very touched when girls tell me that I had influenced them in one way or another.

I cannot forget the one and only Parents' Day we had during school hours, after recess to allow parents to come in and talk to the class teachers. We sat behind desks arranged around the hall. Miss Hew was very impressed with my class as we were the only class that had so many mothers turning up. I had forty children and all mothers bar a few, turned up. I don't know what my girls told their mothers, but they came. I wrote Cantonese words phonetically on slips of paper, names of different subjects in Cantonese to help me along. Each Chinese girl helped me to translate and somehow it worked. I was the last teacher in the hall. It was such a fantastic opportunity to meet the mothers and I really felt so good and so rewarded for having met them. I was very proud of my girls for persuading their mothers to come and meet me.

Sister Fidelma made me the School Counsellor in charge of the educational, vocational and emotional needs of the girls. I invited many speakers to give career talks. The Ministry of Education was then encouraging schools to start Counselling Services. Sister Fidelma arranged my timetable so that girls could see me during the day. I also set aside Wednesday afternoon for counselling. I had a boy who asked to see me immediately after school and we talked in the front parlour. I have always felt very privileged that the girls trusted me to talk to me about their private problems. Just before I left the Convent, my church sent me on a training course to be a Samaritan.

I have always encouraged my class in Malaysia and in England to do anything and everything to a high standard and my classes won every time whether in selling tickets for the Fair or producing the best sketch or the best speaker. I would spend hours making sure that their speeches were delivered well, their sketches had been practised. The school paid for my class to spend a weekend in Cameron Highlands as reward for selling the most tickets for the fair. It was a wonderful experience for all but especially for girls who had never been to Cameron Highlands

The thirteen years four months I taught in the Convent were incredibly rewarding and memorable years for me. I loved teaching and I loved the fantastic girls who passed through the doors of our beloved Convent.

I will always remember the day I said "Farewell" to my beloved school. Towards the end of the school day, Miss Hew took to the public system to say goodbye to me but she could hardly speak because it was so very emotional. She broke down, the whole school broke down., I broke down. Mothers told my mum in the market the next day that the Convent had been flooded with tears. I had not said anything

to her. Even the Malay men teachers said to me in a sad voice, “Kesian, Miss Ng” and shook my hand. They thought I was going to be a nun!!

Today when girls I had taught ask to see me when they visit London, I always try to see them because I am touched that they still remember me with affection. I see the girls have remained kind, considerate, affectionate and thoughtful and are such good ambassadors for Malaysia and I think, ah, the Convent has taught them well. Nobody can quite believe how much the girls are so attached to their school - the convent and to their old teachers. I always feel like a much-loved mother taken to lunch!

You might be interested to know that in England, I became a relief teacher for some time in an independent school that ENID BLYTON had been a teacher. There is a room dedicated to her memory in the school. The other school I taught as a fulltime teacher was like one of the buildings you see in Harry Potter films. Many years ago, it had belonged to ANNE BOLEYN’s aunt who has been seen walking in the garden at night. We are very sure that KING HENRY VIII must have visited ANNE BOLEYN there.

I don’t think of my advancing age as I am still energetic, enthusiastic and active and long may I be until the end of my days It has been my privilege to have taught all of you and thank goodness, I am blessed with good memory because I remember many girls with much affection.

7. Ms. Christine Lee from Sydney, Australia, Nov 18 2019

Dear Prema and How Ming,

Thank you for contacting me and inviting me to take part in your project. Like most of you, I attended kindergarten in the Convent right up to Form 5 when I sat for my Senior Cambridge. Who were my favourite teachers? Well, the teachers who come to my mind are Miss Rosie Yan, Mrs Yaw, Mrs Mukundan, Mrs Saravanan, Miss Hew and Mrs May Wong. They were proficient in their fields and encouraged us to learn their subjects in their individual ways.

After my graduation, I applied to teach in Ipoh Convent and was fortunate to be accepted. It was a bit daunting to be working with my former teachers as colleagues, but they were very accepting and helpful. My memories of Ipoh Convent as a student and later, as a teacher, were very positive. I remembered you all were smart, hardworking, well behaved, conscientious and a pleasure to teach.

Recently, reminiscing with a few old school friends, we observed how the old school had a big impact on our lives. We are what we are today because of all the support, training and education fostered on us and we are indeed grateful for it.

Ipoh Convent is special to us and I hope it will be too for future generations.

Congratulations to you Prema and How Ming for undertaking this monumental task of bringing back happy and beautiful memories of our treasured CHIJ, Ipoh.

It is most gratifying to know that many of you have done very well for yourselves and living meaningful lives.

Photo: Form 5A 1972



Photo: Form 5B 1972



Photo: Form 4C 1971



Photo: Form 4D with Mrs. Mukundan, 1971



Photo: Form 5E 1972



Photo: Form 5F 1972



Photo: Form 5G 1972



B. SCHOOLMATES' NARRATIVES

1. Theresa Leong-Evans at Los Spuntino café, Queensway, and at Theresa's house, London, in 2015; updated June 2019 in conversation with How Ming.

Theresa pointed to the class photo of Form IVB in the 1971 *Veritas* school yearbook, "that's me next to Yin Mooi". *We both peered at the photo and could just about make out the faces.*

I remember the catechism classes taught by the nuns and Sister Fidelma. We had to do homework. I had an exercise book. I remember it vividly because it was colourful with all the drawings and colourings. I wished I had kept it. When we studied the Christian teachings, say the topic is the Sacred Heart, the homework is to write about it and draw. If it was about a miracle or of Jesus crucified on the cross, we had to imagine and draw it. I liked that because I enjoyed drawing and doing the colouring.

Q: D'you remember much about Sister Fidelma?

Not very much except that she was always had this – stern look. She never laughed. She never smiled very much but she was nice. She was very fair. We used to attend St Michael's church for mass and go for confession. *(This provoked much laughter from the rest of us, commenting "What was there to confess at that age!")*

Theresa went on to say, "you say, *Bless me Father for I have sinned*, then you say, *yesterday I told a lie or I argued with my mum...*" and then the priest will say, "Oh ok that's fine, not much problem, go and say sorry to your mum, say your prayers... say your Hail Marys, say Our Father..."

There was one quite young and handsome priest at St Michael's church. We used to wonder "who is that handsome priest?", since we had nothing to do!

Q: Any bad experiences at school?

I remember I fell down the stone steps. It was such a rush after class with so many girls dashing down to the ground floor from the classrooms on the first floor and I hurt my leg. I had to call my father to fetch me and he came to pick me up on his bicycle. We went to see the doctor's clinic and I needed some stitches to my ankle.

Other than that, nothing bad about being in school. I enjoyed school and have good memories of it. No problems with the teachers except with my aunt. She was doing a teacher training stint and she was teaching in my class. She would pick on me to answer questions and I was worried she would tell tales to my relatives and my family about how I was behaving in school etc.

There is another Theresa Leong though hers is spelt without the “h”. We were in the same class. When the teacher called out our name, both of us would stand up! In the end the teacher would call me by my full name so we both knew who she meant.

I wasn't keen on sports though it was compulsory to attend in the afternoon after school. So, I would cycle back to school with some of my friends and hide near the stairs so that we wouldn't be seen and chitchat.

I enjoyed Domestic Science lessons and we get to take home what we cooked. Cornflour mould is the one that sticks in my mind. It had cocoa, so easy to make and it tasted so chocolaty, a taste that was so different and new to me at the time.

The teacher I liked – Valerie Ho. She was my Form teacher. She taught History. I liked History and Geography though I didn't get good grades for them. I passed Bahasa, just a Pass.

There was a teacher who taught us singing. I was in the school choir. We took part in the inter-school choir competition and we came second. Our rival was the MGS choir and they came first.

We formed a band called the “Gypsy Rovers” when we were in Form IV. The others in the band were Linda Loh, Jeanie Lau and Khoo Pek Chin. Linda and I played the guitar. We entered the school Talentime competition and sang “Venus”. We had to make up our own dance steps and sing at the same time. We spent a lot of time rehearsing. We didn't win though it was great fun. It was open to other schools and Pauline Thong from our school won a prize for her piano playing. The band “Purple Hearts” were playing for the event.

I enjoyed very much, the days when we had Film Days and we had to pay 20 cents and we used to watch black and white films. There were some lovely films they used to show, and we always looked forward to that – and also to miss lessons!

I was living in town and I used to walk to school with some friends who lived in town. We used to carry our school baskets. It was made of rattan and so heavy with all our textbooks and exercise books. It had our lunch, an umbrella, a plastic raincoat all neatly folded. It made the hands rough and red at times. It took us about 15 minutes. We would walk along the five-foot way/verandah of the shops to avoid the sun and the rain. We enjoyed the walk to school, chatting and looking at the Sam Tet boys who were walking to their school across from us.

To socialise outside school, my friends and I would meet up in town. Our hangout place was the “Cold Storage” for the ice cream floats.

Q: Did the school give you a good enough education to equip you for life or d'you think it could have done better?

I think we learnt a lot when very young. Also, it helps you in your future in whatever decisions you make. I think sometimes it stems back to where you started off. So, I think it's given me a good base or

steppingstone to get on with life. Although I don't have a lot of memories about it – but everything I remember has been good.

Photo: First Aid Society, 1971



2. Kamaliah Noh, June 7 2019 from Putrajaya, KL

How we were raised as children very much influences who we are today and how we live our lives. School was where we spent the most time and made the most connections in terms of friends. Besides my family values, how I have lived was moulded by the education that I received.

I started Standard 1 at the Raja Perempuan School (RPS) which was a fairly conservative school. Malays sent their girls to the RPS. In Standard 2, the system started streaming students who did well, for the express class. Then, my father was transferred to Taiping and the only school with the express class was the Convent; my parents wanted me to continue in the express class. Looking back to the '60s, as a Malay, being sent to a Convent school was a rarity. It shows how modern my parents outlook was back then. The Convent was a missionary school, a very Christian school and for Muslim parents to send their daughter there, that was a big decision

I completed Form 1 at the Main Convent Taiping and then my father was transferred back to Ipoh, and I did Form 2 at the Main Convent. I joined late, after the school year had begun, and was put in Form 2E as I remember. My friends were a playful group of girls. I must have been what you call a nerd or geek back then as I found them to be very different from the girls in the G class, which I joined in Form Three. Academic streaming started in Form 1 and I was used to serious girls in the academically top class who had a certain demeanour that I was used to. I found my classmates in the E class to have different outlooks, talked about boyfriends and I remember some to be fashion icons of that time. I remember they talked about how to buy skin-coloured bras which wouldn't show through our white shirts. My mother had always bought plain white bras for me!

In Form 3G, the room was full of girls who were very competitive and there was pressure to do well. We were ranked by class standing and that competitive spirit was nurtured. All these years later, I feel that it rubbed off in my work ethic and connected to my adulthood and professional life. That's why now, teaching the young, I find it odd that they're so laid back! It's a generational gap. We were raised differently. Certainly, in the medical line that I'm in, that internally driven, striving for excellence is a must if you want to succeed professionally.

I brought up my children the way I grew up. When they were in Primary school, the family had a strong influence and in adolescence, they were also influenced by their peers. For example, my eldest daughter

was doing medicine at Universiti Malaya, and I said, “How come you don’t want to be in the very top of your class?” and she replied, “Aah, passing is enough.” But some of our values have rubbed off on our children and my own kids who are in medicine have taken their own paths in getting their specialty training, whether studying on their own for the external Membership exams or taking the direct route of going through the structured Master’s programme, which may take longer.

The Convent education was not only about the content and the curriculum, although I must admit we were taught a lot of things, it was a very broad education. We were very good in general knowledge. For example, we did history in lower secondary and you can’t appreciate the need for all this global history when you’re young. Now, you find you can recall those things and you’re a good conversationalist from all that learning. I can still recall studying in Form 2, the Bacsono-Hoabinhian period, the theory of how humans migrated out of Yunan in southern China and then down through Vietnam, Thailand and to the peninsula of Malaya. That theory is now disproven but it’s a tribute to our history teacher that I remember so much. She was a soft-spoken lady, you really had to listen to hear her and yet she managed to impress these details into our young minds.

From upper secondary at the Convent and being in the science stream, I feel it really prepared us for our professional education. The system also allowed us to mix subjects like taking literature even though we were in the science stream and our English language was excellent compared to the other schools at the time. It put us at an advantage.

I was also impressed that the Convent education taught us to read a lot. Every class had its own little library, a cupboard with books. We had to read a book a week and write a book report. It helped us to distil facts and write précis, a writing skill which is so lacking among today’s students. Our writing skills helped us in our university life and professional life. Also, our presentation skills were good because despite power-point and all that, our schooling gave us the confidence to be able to stand in front of a group and focus on the important points, distil all the information into a single bullet and talk about it.

The problem I’m seeing now is that students are used to being spoon fed, lacking in discipline and creativity. When we were studying abroad, we could appreciate that the western education nurtured creativity in their students while our Convent education instilled discipline.

I remember one day clearly when we were in Form 4. We were in English class with Sister Maureen and she would pick out a few good compositions and ask the writer to read her essay at the front of the class. It was special to be selected for this and it incentivised us to write well. That day, one of my friends, Loh Soo Har, was asked to read her work. I don’t remember the exact topic but she had written about values. She made us think about why people think differently as times change. She read aloud that “It’s not that society changes but it’s the values that change with the times.” It struck me that she was such a mature thinker for a 16-year old. At the time, there was no internet and what you read was from books or from listening to the TV but even then, we had limited TV channels. So, it was exceptional to hear my classmate’s profound thoughts about values and how an essay writing exercise could elicit this.

In Form 1, when the rest of you went for the Scripture classes, I went for my Islamic religious class. That’s when I got to meet and socialize with the other Malay girls at the school. In class, I had always felt like the minority with only 2-3 other Malay girls in the class. Although, I think it was the same for the Indian girls as well. That’s when I learned to be accepting of the diversity of our country. In school we didn’t feel it so much about being from different races. Life was simpler in school where all of us had the

same goals of getting through exams and it didn't matter even though we were competitive. It didn't matter being #1 or 3 or 10 in the class ranking.

These days, there's frustration about affirmative action for the Malays and that it takes something away from others. On a personal level, we get along fine as when we were in school with no taboos but as you grow older, you think beyond the individual and more collectively, example by your race, and this is where it gets more complicated and uncomfortable. Among our friends who emigrated to the US or Australia, they seem to suggest that those places have more just societies as I gather from the emails. But really, inequity and inequality are everywhere even within the same race; I think it's now more about socioeconomic issues.

We were in Form 2 during the May 1969 race riots and I remember it very clearly. I was getting ready to go to school when my uncle from the kampong suddenly appeared and said, "Come, come, you don't go to school today. We're going back to the kampong." My family was renting a house in Camay Park, Jalan Pasir Putih, at that time and our neighbours were mostly Chinese, including our classmates. School was closed and we were away at the kampong for 1 or 2 weeks. I heard there was violence in some places and people died. Despite the 1969 incident, what I have learnt is that it did not affect us that much. We were 12 and 13 then and we went back to the same routine of school and the relations between us in class was not any different. Although the ethnic tensions were a reality, at the individual level, we were not affected.

I was selected by the teachers to be a Prefect and at assembly, one of the things we had to do was measure skirt lengths, how many inches above the knee. It was the mini skirt era and Prema, (interviewer), I remember YOUR skirt being short! I guess being a prefect put me in a dilemma, I didn't like having to do that as a Prefect and doing this to my friends, I was very uncomfortable. What I did like about being a Prefect was that we were among the first to be chosen to go for any Inter-School events, which I enjoyed.

With the Girl Guides, I remember the Cameron Highlands trip which I really enjoyed. I remember more of my Brownie days in primary school – there was the jamboree and campfires and singing with girls from other schools like PoKareKareAna, that Maori song. When I went to New Zealand, I wanted to go to Rotorua. There I saw the Maoris performing that song and I could recall my young days when I sang that song.

Its ironical, isn't it? We have this perception that the Convent is such a cloistered environment and yet our Convent education gave us a broad outlook on life and prepared us well for our professional life on the global stage.

Photo: Hockey team with Form 4s and our seniors in Form 5, 1971



3. Agnes Chong (Agnes Edwards) at Madison Gardens, London, June 3 2019; interviewed by How Ming

Violet Foo organised a lunch get-together with some classmates, the 'old girls', to meet Agnes Chong who was visiting London. Violet introduced us and Agnes said "How Ming, I remember you." Agnes, a software engineer is living in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. She was in town for her aunt's 90th birthday celebration. Violet, was her classmate and friend since Convent days. Agnes said: "I came to the UK to study A Levels and we were at boarding school together. Then I went to University at Bradford and later went to the States." I (How Ming) explained about the CHIJ project of capturing our schooldays stories and she sportingly agreed to be interviewed for it. It had to be done now in-between socializing and eating as Agnes was flying back to Atlanta the next day.

Agnes attended the Main Convent for her primary and secondary schooling. What memories did she have of her schooldays? I could see that Agnes was working hard to recall her schooldays over 47 years ago. I brought out a photocopy of "Veritas", our 1971 yearbook to show her to jog her memory cells.

Primary school memories... I will always remember Mrs Foo. She was my teacher though I can't remember what year it was. She slapped me so hard on the face that when I got home, my face was still red with her fingermarks. And when my Mum saw it, she said what happened to your face? You must've been talking in class! I was scolded by my mother. I don't really remember why she slapped me, I think I was passing messages in class.

Mrs Foo was very fierce. She had this big hairstyle – not a beehive and she had eyebrows that were darkly drawn and it made her look really fierce. *We found a photo of the primary school teachers in the yearbook and found Mrs Foo seated in the first row next to Sister Winifred. Violet said she didn't look fierce at all in the photo, she's almost smiling! Agnes agreed and said her hairdo didn't look that big too, though she could have changed since the yearbook was done in 1971 and its at least 5-6 years after our primary school days.*

Secondary school memories? Did she play netball since she's tall? No, I never liked sports. I took part in whatever we had to do. I liked science and the science lab.

"I'm in Form IV G, with Catherine Machado" said Agnes pointing at the class photo in Veritas. She was fourth in the backrow. I can't remember the name of the class teacher. "Oh its Miss Au!" on finding out the name in the secondary schoolteacher's photo. I remember Sister Fidelma who taught poetry. I liked poetry. We had to memorise the poems. "A choice of Poets" was our poetry book and I still have it. I liked "Ode to Autumn" by John Keats. I used to recite it from memory. How about now?

*Seasons of mist and mellow fruitfulness
Close bosom friends of the maturing sun...*

That's all I can remember. *Theresa Leong reminded Agnes of the catechism classes they attended and how she liked to do the colouring in of the pictures in the class. Yes, Agnes said, "There were also Bible lessons that we had to memorise. I played the piano and I liked the singing lessons at school. I remember Mrs Tan who used to teach us singing and taught us all the songs from the "Sound of Music". I took part in the Aladdin school production by Mrs Clelland and Miss Thomaz. I was the snake charmer. It was memorable. No, I don't remember the beach picnic trip for the cast after the pantomime was over. I do remember going to Cameron Highlands for a school trip.*

The school experience indirectly led me to my career of a software engineer from my interest in science subjects.

Photo: School outing



4. Pirunthavany Muthuvelu, June 7 2019

I remember my first day at the kindergarten at the Main Convent. I was terrified, so I just smiled at everybody. Funnily enough, I remember the Sisters telling the other girls, “Look at her, she’s not crying, she’s smiling”. That’s one of my first memories of the Nuns.

I remember Mother Superior telling us “You shouldn’t do anything that you also wouldn’t do when your mother is not around.” I remember she used to come to our classes once in a while and give us talks about being good young ladies. She was slightly chubby, and I think, French. She had a lovely motherly way of talking and I always listened carefully to everything she said and practised it in real life.

In Form 2, I was a very quiet person. My class teacher, I can’t recollect her name, called me up and said “You are too sensitive. Learn to be less sensitive.” I think she must have observed my expression about something she had said. I remember it triggered something in me and that the very next day, I became the class clown. I just opened up and started talking and making the other girls laugh. I became a chatter box, it was all just impromptu. Something burst out in me.

I also remember Sister Maureen; we were changing after PE class one day, and she came in for our next class, and heard me talking and laughing, and she said, ‘It’s a very difficult talent to be able to make others laugh.’ Praise was so rare that you remember these things.

Until Form 3, I was always sitting with the less tall girls in the front of the class, like with Hung Sow Mei who used to be crazy over Cliff Richard. I shot up when we got to Form 4. We were always lined up by height for the class seating arrangement and now I was seated at the back with Rosabelle Ho and Nurul Azhar and others and we all became good friends.

The teachers often asked me to act in some of the dramas. We learned to produce a lot of stage events. I remember the play when the girls were singing “Oh Danny Boy” and I had the part where I was holding flowers, crying over his grave and wearing a white bonnet with lace that had been sewn by my mother (she was very talented at needlework.) I also played the role of Prof. Higgins in “My Fair Lady” during

our literature lessons on Pygmalion. For our farewell party in Form 5, I was the marionette for the show. In the main hall, all the Form 5 students were seated in a big circle and I walked around acting like a puppet. That was fun!

I remember that we learned knitting and if you dropped stitches, you had to unpick the whole thing and start all over again. My mother being as great as she was with sewing, was able to pick up the pearl stitches so that I didn't have to re-do the whole thing again. My classmate, Ang May Choo -- she has died since, and sadly, my other good friend, Lau Mi Leng, has also died -- but anyway, my mother would help her too. I was not interested in knitting though. Back then, I was only interested in reading story books.

With May 13, 1969, I remember sitting in the hall of my house, and had half an eye on the TV and my science book on my lap because there was going to be a test the next day. "High Chaparral" was about to start. Then the announcement came on that there was a curfew; everything was closed. With no exams and no school, I tossed my books aside and watched TV the rest of the night. It was funny (as we used the word back then to mean strange and sad and all that) that I didn't think about what was happening. We were 13 at the time and I read the newspaper every day, but I don't remember that we got much details about what was happening or understood about the racial violence.

Those were such happy days in school. My mother never let me cycle; she said, "Girls don't cycle." Then one day, she saw the daughter of one of our family friends cycling. She took me to Taman D.R. and I slowly learned to bicycle there like many of the rest of us. There was a bike track with traffic stops and I learned the rules. I only started cycling to school when I was in Form 4 after my family shifted to Greentown.

I remember Ms. Christine Lee, our Form 4 class teacher who also taught us Chemistry; she was a quiet and pleasant person. At one of our Parent/Teacher meetings, she told my father "You might want to consider transferring her to the Arts stream" because I had failed my Additional Maths test. My father immediately called his former Maths teacher, Mr. Ung Khek Chow, who then gave me tuition. I remember Juliana Chan was also in my tuition class. I did very well in Maths after that. Excellent teachers make excellent students.

The English we learned was incomparable to other Malaysians talking English. When I went to the UK for further studies, the professor told his secretary "Her English is excellent!" I was so proud to be a Convent school girl, that's when it really hit me.

Photo: Miss Thomasz and cast, 1968 stage performance of "Aladdin"



5. Yau Sau Wan (Elaine Myers) now in Australia; from January and August 2019:

Our school seemed to be one huge cavernous building to the eyes of a “kindy tot”. Plus, the Nuns in their habits were a strange sight to behold. Kindergarten was great. Then, a vast parting, moving from CHIJ to Marian Convent till 1968. Back at CHIJ for Form 1, I had Miss Thomas as form teacher. We lived in respectful fear of her; just one icy glare from her and we were reduced to jelly. One incident is imprinted in my memory. We were asked the grammar structure for “I am running.” I remember that we all stood up, one by one, and came out with “....adjective...verb....noun....pronoun....conjunction,” covering the whole gauntlet. By now, almost 3/4 of our class were on their feet with no correct answer. Picture this, one exasperated teacher and one quaking class. Boy, were we glad when someone came out with “Simple sentence!” Ha, now you know what it was like. We had great fun when she took us to Pangkor; I remember we sang “Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do” on the bus ride home but replacing the name with “Cynthia, Cynthia.” She blew us a kiss at the end of it.

We had to walk to Ave Maria Convent school for our swimming lessons. We didn’t notice the heat or any discomfort because we were too busy chattering away. I remember Puteh was so excited with her 1st swimming lesson, she jumped straight into the pool and the next minute, she was shouting “Help , Help!” We were terrible. We thought it was so funny and started laughing instead of panicking or helping her. Our teacher, Mrs. Chan I think it was, coolly extended a long pole to Puteh. Mrs. Chan also had this crazy idea of slapping our bums as a check against false pretences if any of us said we had the monthlies and couldn’t swim. Some people loved swimming and some didn’t.

I also remember the times we had to go to Seenivasagam Park in the evenings for our athletics. How did we manage not to be eaten alive by all the creatures in the grass when we flopped our bodies down? There was a big buzz in the air in 1968 when Mrs. Ng’s hubby and friends won the Thomas Cup for badminton. Sister Oliver with her one green eye and one blue eye fascinated me no end. One time, I was reading a comic book hidden in my Bible Scripture book in class, I think it was in Form 3. She just walked over to me, took out my comic, lifted my desk lid, deposited it and coolly carried on with her lesson. That was worse than any telling off because I lived in fear the whole day awaiting repercussions. None came.

I also remember another Mrs. Ng, our Filipino music teacher with her long, long black hair when she let it loose, teaching us country music. I disliked them intensely because of course we wanted pop songs. Now, I really appreciate these folk and country songs especially living in the “gwai lo” culture and being able to join in pub and party singalongs. My late Irish mother-in-law was so amazed I knew all her folk songs. Another benefit was how we used to have to do a lot of cross-legged sitting for lessons in the big hall. That is not to be sniffed at because heaps of people are unable to sit cross-legged for even a few minutes. Lol.

1969...I remember waking up to news of a curfew. Instead of fearing the ramifications, I felt great relief because I forgot to buy my ingredient as contribution to that day’s cookery lesson in domestic science class.

Another memory was a Barbara Jeremiah who won a talent contest for singing “Raindrops keep falling on my head,” the Bobbie Gentry song that was popular in 1970. I think that was the same year we had a Fashion show amongst the classes. One entry sticks out in my mind; it was a dress strung together with colourful rubber bands. That was so innovative and I hope that person fulfilled her artistic streak. I’m

still surprised none of us had food poisoning from all the food ventures we did every year on Fun Fair Day to raise money for the school. Or perhaps we had ironclad stomachs.

I remember we had a visiting good looking “gwai lo” priest one year in the chapel and attendance overflowed to the corridors.

Now, my memories fast track to Form 4. Quite a few of our friends were made Prefects who answered to the Big Boss, Ms Hew. I remember in Form 4 C frantically trying to quickly hide our comics and romance novels after a tip off from a spy amongst the prefects. I’ve never seen such unspoken and coordinated action when we quickly lifted off the teacher’s platform in one go and chucked all this censored stuff underneath. Then we were smug as canaries when the Prefects carried out the search with our Form teacher, Miss Leong, sitting right on top of all the material. Another time, the poor Prefects had to go around during Recess time, to make sure we were conversing in English and not jabbering in our local lingo.

The dance lessons from Miss NG were fun and a hoot. I think we lost a bit of the plot when we were tried to catch and perhaps inflict a little pain on each other, with the Filipino bamboo dance. We were young and crazy, those were the days.....

Photo: Multicultural stage performance, 1972



6. Rosabelle Ho, now R. Chan in the US

I think my student life was rather mundane. Well, we were in a Convent, a straight-laced sort of place, so what can one expect – lol! I wasn’t that active in any school extracurricular activities. However, I was selected for a couple of performances on stage, especially those which involved dancing, mainly due to my ballet background.

7. Nalina Selvamany who continues to practice medicine in Pittsburgh, USA

The first thing I remember is Kindergarten, and our teacher, Mrs. Thomas. The rooms had been re-designed with small steps for little kids to be able to climb up independently. The toilets were also specially designed and built low to the floor. It’s amazing that they had these ideas in those days back in

1961. My mother took me to my first day of Kindergarten and I remember going up those little stairs and how the room overlooked the courtyard.

As we got further along in Standard 1 onwards, I remember the canteen and all the different food and noodles. We played during recess in the big yard that was cemented, there was no grass. I think most of us had packed lunches; my Aunt packed it for my sister and me. We loved sitting under the tree eating our lunches.

I remember the plays. The first one was *Little Lord Fauntleroy* that was written by Frances Hodgson Burnett. There was an English lady at school who did the auditions, was she Mrs. Singleton? It must have been when we were about 9 and it was a big production, the first one for the Convent. I got the part of the little boy, Cedric Fauntleroy, and my costume included high white stockings and black shoes with a buckle. The part of the mother was played by a girl who was in Form 5, I think her name was Sumam Menon. We had a lot of rehearsals. My mother would go over the lines with me. I remember that my grandparents came for the play as my father was away in England.

The other play that I remember was Aladdin, and I had the part of a maid and I think Gina Lee was also in that. And we had talent shows. I think one year, I sang the Sound of Silence or Blowing in the Wind, and in one other show, I dressed up as a Japanese girl with a Kimono and sang "O teh teh"; it wasn't Sukiyaki. I remember lots of different performances by different girls in the plays and Talent shows.

Photo: *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, the play produced after 3 months of intensive preparation, June 1965, with Sumam Menon as "Dearest" and Nalina Selvamany as "Little Lord Fauntleroy"



With the big exams for the Form 3 LCE and Form 5 SPM, we were all seated in the big hall for the trials and the actual exams; those were stressful. In other years, our regular exams were in the classroom but the big ones were in the hall and we had proctors walking around. Some exams were also in the Labs and we also had practical portions for the science exams.

When our results came out with Standard 3 onwards, I remember they would call out our position based on our exam marks and that's how we knew which class we would be in, whether A or B class for the following year. I would sit there waiting anxiously for my name to be called.

I remember how we used to buy our textbooks and wrap them up in brown paper. We learned how to cut up the paper and do the cover properly. We would also get our exercise books and our pen/pencil boxes with our divider and compass but I don't remember our school bags because we didn't have backpacks in those days.

And our uniforms! The Convent starched blue pinafores that had to be ironed well with the badge sewn on the top left. Later, around Form 1 or 2, we changed to the turquoise blue uniforms that was done nationwide. The younger students started wearing navy blue dresses.

I remember the school office with a long walkway heading out front with the Standard 1 classes one side. There was another corridor that led down to the Chapel and I was fond of going there. To the right of the chapel, there was the big Hall with the stage. You could walk past that through another short hallway that led down a passage to steps that went to the back of the school. I remember we sometimes had assembly in the open area next to that passageway.

My mother was a teacher there and sometimes it was hard when I thought I had done something wrong and didn't want the teachers to tell my mother. My mother was good, she never interfered with my student life, but I always knew that the teachers knew who I was. I felt I was held to a different, higher standard. There was a bit of that pressure. When the school bell rang at the end of the day, I remember everyone else going home and I would wait for my mother to finish her work. We would get home late. I spent a lot of time waiting at the front porch and doing my homework. There'd be a nun who sat there. The convent quarters itself was upstairs where all the Nuns lived.

Later when I had afternoon school, I remember spending more time at the back of the school which is where we were picked up. There was another Nun at that gate and she used to sweep a lot. The ice kacang man and all the other hawkers were around and sand would get on the cemented area so the Nun would constantly sweep to keep it clean. Sometimes she gave me a chance to sweep and I just loved that! I can't remember her name, she was tall and skinny.

My mother would often come back for COGA meetings and the Orphans Christmas party. The COGA would buy presents and I would help to wrap them up. There were clothes and other practical gifts, and Father Christmas, I think it was Desmond Tate from Anderson school, would come and give them out.

With our teachers, of course, Ms. Hew Sook Heng, Cynthia Thomasz, Mary Ng, Puan Noriah and others. I remember Mrs. Mukundan and Mrs. Saravanan not because they taught me but because of family connections. Sister Maureen taught us too and Sister Fidelma taught the higher grades but didn't teach us.

I also remember when royalty came to visit Ipoh, we had to line the road. I think buses took us to some place close to the airport and there was no shade. We would sit for hours in the sun, and the ice cream man would come on his bicycle. Then, when the motorcade came, we jumped up and waved the Malaysian flag.

Sports Day, hmm, I don't remember much. I wasn't big on P.E. and wearing those bloomers. Doing those cartwheels and all was not fun. Choir was fun and so too the dances that Ms. Mary Ng taught us.

I really think we had a great education, very dedicated teachers, and I have very good memories of caring teachers and so much emphasis on English, spelling, grammar, literature and on work ethic and

emphasis on honesty and integrity which all really shaped me into the person I am. I have carried those values throughout my life. The Convent education was incredible. The dedication of the Nuns who gave up so much to be there in Ipoh was a blessing for all of us.

Photo: Form 5B End of Year Social gathering



8. Meera Mathew (now Meera Williams), USA - SNIPPETS FROM LONG AGO

Marian Convent, my elementary school, consisted of a long building with classrooms one behind the other and a long open corridor on either side. When it rained, we got wet walking along the corridor during recess. When we came back to class, Mrs. Paul, my Std. 1 teacher, would make us take off our pinafores so they could dry (can you see this happening today?). I always loved when this happened because I was the only girl who could show off a cancan (that's what they called it then) under my pinafore.

As memory serves, there were bathroom stalls at one end of the building and a tuck shop at the other. We were told that there was a "hantu" locked up in one of the bathrooms and if we were to peek under the door, we would be killed or turned to stone, I don't remember which exactly. I only remember walking past the door with my eyes sternly looking ahead in fear of arousing whatever was locked behind that door.

Recess was fun – we would run out to play Kings Camp, a game involving a bean bag. We got quite good at it and had spirited arguments as to who should be on which team.

In the younger standards, I remember coming to school in a taxi. We were piled into the back seat where four of us had to sit on a wooden ledge that was set on the back seat while four other little girls sat on the seat itself. There was always much ruckus about someone's foot digging into someone else's back. Needless to say, as we got bigger, this didn't work anymore. I can't even imagine the number of safety violations that would be slapped on that driver now!

Moving to CHIJ in 1968 after Std 6 was intimidating but since all my friends were moving with me, it was not so bad. We met so many more girls, had new teachers, and saw many nuns. I think it was during my time at CHIJ that the edict came down allowing nuns to lift their hemlines and wear their headpiece back to show hair. That created a stir among us to know the nuns actually had hair!

There was so much more diversity among the students at CHIJ – there were at least 5 other Indians in my class where at Marian I think I was the only one!

Learning to cook in Home Science class was one of the highlights of secondary school. I still have my Home Science books 1, 2 and 3! Along with cooking we also had mandatory swimming classes which were not my favourite then. Given my anxiety and lack of enthusiasm, I was the last one to “float.”

I don't have a whole lot of memories of CHIJ other than that it was very big, had so many students and was in the city. My best memories are of the friends I made there.

It was with great sadness that I left in 1969 at the end of Form 2 when my father decided to relocate to the US. I left my best friends but am happy to note I still keep in touch with some via email, WhatsApp and Facebook.

Photo: Kindergarten Days (Courtesy of Wong Weng Yee)



9. Veronica Wong Saunders, now in the UK - Sept 10 2019 by Skype from Singapore

When I look at the education that we received at the Convent, essentially a large state school, and compare it with the current schooling system in the UK, I'm convinced that we got the best education money could buy.

Back then in the '60s and '70s, the Convent education bore many of the 'hallmarks' of the English public (i.e., private fee-paying) school system, notably a comprehensive curriculum, examinations, emphasis on the 3Rs, daily homework and enforcing strict rules and discipline. At our Convent, what added to our education was that the nuns and teachers were not only committed to the academic focus on exams and results to drive pupil-streaming (which are not always popular, even today, with many in the UK system), but also enforcing extracurricular activities, where we had to join at least 1 club or society (e.g., debating, hockey, table tennis, etc.). The latter are essential I believe in helping us to become more rounded people.

I loved school! I was always interested in learning and enjoyed being with my friends and having the structure in my daily routine. I hated the school holidays as I would miss my class-mates and lessons. I have fond memories of my experiences. What's amazing is that we have kept in touch over the years, thanks to Weng Yee. It also says something about how we might have developed socially. I can't pin my finger on exactly what it was but something about our education made us and for the year of '72, we have had some very impressive achievements amongst our schoolmates. I would not have accomplished what I have in my career without the Convent foundation. I've been on the receiving end of students joining University in the UK and I'm gobsmacked at their lack of preparation, even from students who claim to have 4 straight As. There was MAGIC in what we received! Yes, it was harsh and you either got on with a teacher or you didn't, which invariably affects our experience. No names mentioned but in any system, even in the corporate world, there are good guys and bad guys and some who wake up on the wrong side of the bed 365 days a year and are mean.

I remember Josephine Choong and I used to call ourselves the "Twinnies" because we were about the same size when we were lined up by height. I also remember we had the concerts and fund raising events. Those were the activities that build character.

My hate, it was domestic science. I had to unpick needlework so many times. Cookery for me was very stressful and I was always the last person to bring out my work. This is one subject that I DID NOT excel in. We had lessons up to Form 3....the number of times I had my ears pulled by Ms Ng (I think. She wore glasses; a different Ms Ng from our dance teacher) for a disastrous fish dish!!

But, these and many practical skills are important in later life. I remember being asked to provide maternity cover for the teacher of Form 2G (allegedly less-academically strong class), after completion of my A-levels and waiting to go to university in the UK. That year the Math syllabus changed and the Convent experimented with binary math. I wondered "How am I going to get the subject across to these students? How do you make this accessible to students who aren't interested in math?" It was tough! Back then, in that 2G class, I could tell many of the pupils who struggled with math, science, or geography or history, shone in other subjects or activities such art, home science, PE, inspired by their teachers who'd instilled in them a sense of purpose and pride in excelling in these areas. Yes, we had a well-rounded Convent education!

The teacher who really inspired me was Ms. Hew who was very strict and a disciplinarian. She terrified me but the way she brought Math into the classroom was wonderful. When we were in Form 4 and 5, she started to nurture the girls who were good in Math like Kok Pik Lai and Ng Mei Ling and Loh Soo Har and Lee Kiat Choo. She set up an A team and a B team for the interschool competition. I was in the second group, the real geniuses were in the A team and if anyone was ill on the day of the competition, we could be picked to step in.

I loved all the academic work with the science and chemistry and geography and history and, yes, especially Math. I also loved literature. If my memory serves me right, Sister Fidelma taught me literature in Form 4, and Sister Maureen in Form 5. She wasn't exactly everybody's favourite, but she really pushed us hard and we learned so much. As an academic, I have to do research and publish (or perish!). I believe if I hadn't had a strong foundation in the formative years at school, I would have struggled. We learned English grammar (believe me that's not always the case in England, although schools are now teaching grammar again) and we did a lot of writing. I consider the Convent education an important part of my life. If I had to go back to Kindergarten, no, I wouldn't want that, but if I had to

go back to Form 1, yes. Primary school was a bit dodgy because we lived in fear of the teachers and that shouldn't have been the case.

I am grateful to those teachers who were passionate about their subjects, instilling in the Convent girls fine values and encouraging us to make the best of our education. What we received was a valuable experience, that's very hard to find, even in the better schools of today.

Photo: Preparing for a Food Fair



10. Janice Tham Woon Yee, June 25 2019 interview in Battersea, London

Looking through our 1971 Veritas yearbook – here I am in the class photo of Form IVE, next to the Form teacher. I was the class monitor when I was in Form IV.

In Form V, I was in the same class as Gina. She copied my Maths homework. The answers were correct but the workings were wrong! We were found out and were scolded. We were sitting together in class and we talked a lot so the teacher separated us.

In Form V, I was a prefect. Sometimes we were allocated to look after a class if the teachers were in meetings. In time, I got to know a lot of the girls, knew their names and we became friends. Even then, I was sociable and enjoyed making lots of friends.

I was staying in Pinji Park and used to hang out with Ooi Lee Choo. We used to take the same taxi to school. Ong Tit Suen, Lai Kheng and Kong Sze Mooi, they lived round the corner. Sometimes in the evenings, we would walk over to see them since we were all in the same neighbourhood.

Lee Choo and I were Joyful Vanguarders and we'd cycle together to school for the JV activities.

Did I enjoy sports? I liked playing netball. I hated swimming. In swimming lessons, we were supposed to swim across the pool. When the teacher wasn't looking, I'd run across the pool instead.

In Primary school, I was at Marian Convent.

There was a teacher, Mrs Karean. The girls nicknamed her Carrion Crow. She was fierce. I was talking in class with Gina. She threw a chalk at us and made us stand on a bench in the school lab. I will always remember that!

I remember Sister Mary Michael. She didn't teach me, she was with us in the Joyful Vanguard. Although she was very strict, she was fair. She was prim and proper too. I still keep in touch with her. Joyful Vanguard was more about community work and being civic minded, promoting social work and helping each other. You didn't need to be a Christian to be in JV. We did projects. Every year, we would go for a trip for bonding within JV. One trip that stood out was the one we took to Penang. We stayed at Green Lane Convent. It was a dormitory with mattresses on the floor. We didn't mind that. We were happy! We could just chat and play, no need to sleep! Outside on Green Lane, there were hawkers' food stalls. We went there for our breakfast. It was a very good trip!

When I was in Form III, I decided to be a Catholic. The nuns were very good. They did not put any pressure on me. I was taught by Sister Fidelma for the Bible classes to prepare me for it and I was baptised when I was in Form V. My family were not Catholic.

My favourite subject was Maths. Miss Hew, I don't remember her teaching me even though she was a Maths teacher. She was the discipline mistress. One day I was late for school and I remember I had to go to see her to explain why I was late. Luckily it was fine.

A lot of us girls failed Bahasa in our final Form V year. I could have re-taken the Bahasa paper on its own or repeat the MCE. If I only re-took the Bahasa paper and passed it, I would not get the MCE certificate so I decided to repeat MCE. A lot of us girls did that too and we called ourselves "Upper Five"!

I studied on my own for the year and gave tuition too while waiting to re-sit MCE. I had also applied for nursing in UK and been accepted; but I was too young and had to wait a year till I turned 18 before I could go. I used the year to study at home for MCE. When I passed MCE on re-take, I could've stayed on to study at Form VI level instead of going for nursing. But I was rebellious, and I didn't want to spend my father's money to study. I wanted to be independent and go to UK. On hindsight, I should've continued my studies.

Why did I apply for nursing in UK? At the time, my thinking was to look for greener pastures and be independent.

Q: Did school prepare you for nursing?

It didn't. Though school life moulded me to what I am today. Even though we make friends at various stages of our lives, I still value my friends from school days and feel that we bond better. While I was living in UK for 10 years, I kept in touch with good school friends wherever they were; whether in Malaysia or the UK. When Soo Har was living in London, we'd meet up.

Photo: At the back of Form 5A class photo. (Remember how we used to sign autograph books?)



11. Selvamani Ayadurai Olley, now in the UK, August 9th 2019

I used to go to school through the back gate as I lived in Greentown. There would always be a nun sitting at the entrance, I remember two of those nuns very clearly, they were from either Ireland or England. One of the nuns was tall, the other, short, hunched and wore glasses, she was always knitting.

Every morning the bell would ring at 0730 hours, the nuns would then lock the back gate. I don't remember ever being late but other girls told me about coming late and having to walk down the side path, a narrow lane, to get to the front of the school main entrance. This lane was scary, we were young, and at certain times during the day, not many people used this lane except the residents. Po gardens, a florist was at the top of the lane. One school day, my sister, Selvamalar, with a group of girls, all dressed in their convent school uniform, were walking along the lane and this guy flashed in front of them. They reported this to the nuns who advised them to always walk as a group and look out for each other.

I enjoyed all types of sports very much. I played hockey, represented my school, very proud of that. I remember some of the team players, Angela Tan (if I remember right) she may have been the hockey captain. Then there was Miss. Thomas, hockey teacher, Lorilee, Prema, Yogeswari and Shanbagavalli. I have a picture of the hockey team taken in 1971. I am sorry I cannot remember the rest of their names.

We practised and played hockey at Cator Avenue school and mostly at Coronation Park (renamed Seenivasagam Park later on).

I also represented our school in the 100 meters, 200 meters running relay, and remember competing at the Perak Stadium, but sadly did not win.

Sports days was fun, this was in the field in front of the school, together with netball which I tried for a while. I gave it up, guess I was too short!

We also had swimming lessons, I think at Marion Convent school, not sure! I remember being upset because while learning to swim, the swimming teacher, can't remember the teachers name, she scolded me, "Selvamani, are you swimming or dancing? That put me off swimming and then I began giving excuses not to swim, saying I had my periods, forgot my swimming costume etc. Till today I can't swim and am envious of those who do. I have taken some lessons in my late 30s but yet to be able to swim. Now, I do aqua zumba though, it has not put me off swimming pool.

Children's Day was fun, lovely. All our Mums made different cakes, mee hoon, jellies and all sorts of delicious food. We shared the food and had a good time with lots of things to eat all day with no lessons. I remember the party was held in the big hall, down on the left side from where we had assembly every morning.

Miss Thomas was our English teacher, Mrs. Tan too, she always wore the cheong sam. Mrs Tan made us pronounce our words clearly, especially all words ending with d, t etc. Miss Hew was the disciplinary mistress, Mrs Mukundan, English teacher, very strict, Mrs Saravanan, maths teacher, again, I remember her being strict, Mrs Perumal, Burmese teacher, very kind, she invited the whole of my class, all 28 of us to her house for lunch. I enclose a picture of Mrs Perumal with my classmates at her house.

I remember being in Form Five A, A stood for Arts stream. Class photo attached. My classmates, who I can remember, as at the back of the photo were, Lorilee, Leow Mee Lin, Everly Toh, Mary Culas, Ling Siok Hing, Chan Siew Yet, Linda Low, Ho Saw Chan, Saw Bee Ling, Lau Sook Wah, Mary Anne, Chan Yoke Lan,

Loretta Yew, Ang Cheng Peng, Chooi Fan, Cheah Guat Bee, Raja Noormah, Renelin, Angela Tan, Puteh, Filomena and rest I cannot remember.

I also remember that the orphanage was run by nuns who were mostly Chinese or Indian. The orphans would serve the meals at the canteens. The nuns, the Reverend Mother, who were some of our teachers were from England, Ireland and France, When they were retiring or going back on holidays back to the UK, France, there would be a collection so that the school could buy gifts for them i.e. flowers, pen or a book, gifted to them at assembly on behalf of all the students and teachers.

Ballroom dancing was also memorable! We did it in the main hall and learned the fox trot, the twist, Viennese waltz and the tango. One of the teachers played the piano, there was record player too with Miss Thomas teaching.

When I was in Kindergarden, I remember the Convent school didn't allow men into the school during those early days. My father would have to stand outside if he came to pick me when I was sick. In the 70s, men were allowed in with strict permission.

I also remember the Chapel towards the front of the school. I went there just before exams to pray that I did well. We also crossed the road to St Michael Church every Friday for mass.

Even though we were at a Convent school, a catholic school, I remember half an hour was set aside at the start of each day for all students to choose the religious study of their choice. There was Ugama, Chinese, Indian, Catholicism, Catechumen and Moral studies. I have always been proud of that, being taught to respect all religions and we were lucky to be given that choice.

At the end of the year, as we moved on, we would get everyone to sign our autograph book. We would write all sorts of funny rhymes. This was sent to me by my sister, Selvamalar, it goes like this:

"Go to Hong Kong to buy a ping pong, don't marry a husband who looks like King Kong"

Funny what we used to write in those autograph books! I enjoyed my days at The Main Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus, Ipoh. I have fond memories and experiences, all good, happy days.

Group photo with Mrs. Perumal (back row, in glasses and a necklace)



12. Juliana Kathigasu in Kuala Lumpur, her email June 25 2019:

I was at Main Convent for primary and secondary and I thoroughly enjoyed my 10 years there. We had good teachers. The one teacher that had a profound impact on me was Ms Hew. We were all scared of her. She was a strict disciplinarian but had a very kind and soft heart. Also remember Sister Maureen, Mrs Cho and Mrs Hew. It was a very good education and it served me well to tertiary education and my work life.

I hated Art and every time would simply finish the assignment and disappear to the orphanage for the rest of the class. That is one of my fondest memories. Hated Home Science too and never finished the assignments. Enjoyed the friendship with friends in my class and the other classes.

13. Josephine Choong Sept 28 2019 from a chat with Prema over tea at the Caramel Pumpkin Café, Ward Place, Colombo, Sri Lanka

I joined the Convent in Standard 6. My dad worked as a Customs officer in the Preventive Branch. From Penang where he started his career, he was transferred to Johor Bahru, then Taiping and then to Ipoh. That's how I started school at the Convent in Johore Bahru, continued in Klian Pau Convent Taiping, and then to Main Convent, Ipoh in 1967.

I recollect how I used to dread going to school. Firstly, it was in the afternoon session and we had to stay in the canteen for the first two periods while waiting for the morning session to dismiss. Sitting on the floor was not something a twelve-year old enjoyed! However, one thing that enthralled me to this day was that three of the Standard Six teachers wore samfu to work – Mrs Yuen, my class teacher, Mrs Tan and Mrs Yap.

It was tough trying to make new friends as most of the girls, like all Convent girls already had their cliques. I thought the only way to gain 'entry' was to become first in the class to show everyone, including the class teacher that I was good. And I did get first position in the mid-term examination!!!

Eventually, I also had a clique - Agnes Chong, Lim Siew Kee, Ong Yuen Hoong, Kok Pik Lai, and Leong Peak Chui. I recall spending many a happy Saturday afternoon in Agnes' house in Chateau Garden playing (I can't remember what kind of games), having lunch, reading story books and listening to her playing on the piano. After a day of fun and enjoyment, I waited for my brother to take me home on his Vespa. And at that time, you didn't need to wear a crash helmet when pillion-riding!

I also remember going to Novena with Nalina Selvamany. Her father would take us every Saturday and I was so touched because she is a non-Christian. Since I'm Catholic, it seemed a natural thing to pray to Our Lady to help us do well in our MCE. Perhaps, it was because of her being in a Convent and being exposed to morning prayers at the start of the school day. That devotion somewhat was the bond that brought us together. We sat next to each other in class in Form 5G and shared our dreams of the future.

I didn't have a favourite teacher but one teacher who scared the wits out of me by quizzing us on the Add Maths formulae was Ms. Hew. I always made sure I memorised all the formulae the night before, but when she popped me a formula to complete, my mind just went blank! She had such a stern face that scared me so much. When I later became a teacher, I made sure I didn't terrorize my students in that way. Perhaps that was her way of ensuring that we remembered our formulae. My psychology

training over the years tells me that one-size does not fit all – different ways for different folks. Nevertheless, I am grateful to Ms Hew for my good Add Maths grade in my MCE.

Ms Thomasz came across as someone who is very disciplined, and very organized. She made me feel that I had to be prim and proper in class. And she expected much out of us. I remember her flared floral skirts - like a can-can – with a sleeveless blouse. This was one teacher who impacted me in my growing-up years in the Convent.

Miss Lau with her silvered-white hair taught maths in Form One. I recall her insisting that we cover the answer pages in our Maths text book so that we were not tempted to check the answers for the homework questions she gave. That requirement somehow taught me about self-discipline and honesty. Mrs. Yaw was our science teacher and I really admired her cheongsams as well as her good knowledge in science. She taught me the importance of coming to class and being well-prepared to teach. I carried this practice with me throughout my teaching career in school and later in the teacher education institute.

I was also in the debating team in Form 4 and that further developed my self-confidence in public-speaking that was nurtured when I was in primary school. I am not sure how I was spotted back then, but on the Reverend Mother's Feast Day, I would be accorded a private audience with her to deliver a short speech. When you are just 10, 11 and 12, standing in front of a stout Irish nun sitting on a chair can be quite an experience! To this day, I vaguely recollect one speech that started like this: "M" is for the many children under your wings; "O" is for....

Coming back to the school debating experience for the Leong Ah Kow Rotary Shield, I was really very excited to be part of the Main Convent team debating with the all-boys team from Anderson or St Michael's (I don't remember exactly). Winning the Shield was a great achievement for us and our school, indeed. If I remember correctly, Bawani and Nalina constituted the rest of the team. And Mrs Mukundan and Mrs Selvamany helped us prepare our arguments for the debate topic.

Going back further to 1968.... I was the narrator for the Aladdin play. When I was given that part, I was a little disappointed as I wanted to be given a role to act. However, little did I realise that I was actually given a big role to introduce each and every scene to the audience in front of the closed curtain. Was I proud to be in the spotlight throughout all the performance nights. I remember that Billie J. Clelland, the Director, whom I think was introduced to us by Ms. Thomasz and contracted to direct this play. "You are my best genie ever," wrote Mrs Clelland in my programme booklet! I have kept it until this day!

When I was in the lower Forms, I liked the cookery but not the needlework classes. Having to machine in a straight line, making samples for box pleats, French seam, simple seam and what others was challenging! And my grandmother who was quite a seamstress herself did not offer a helping hand as she thought I should learn the hard way!

What I am today I owe to my parents and also to the Convent. We were taught to be honest in everything that we do, to live by our principles, not to back stab people to get ahead – it's also not about "I scratch your back, and you scratch mine." The Convent education has left a significant mark in making me who I am today. I live by the motto: Simple in Virtue, Steadfast in Duty.

Photo: "Gypsy Rovers" for Talent-time show



14. Ng Kim Lee – chat in a teashop, Ipoh Garden 5 Dec 2015 and internet chat, Sept 2019

My family had moved down from Penang to live in Ipoh when I was due to start in Form 1. My mother had put my sister in Methodist Girls School and put me in the Main Convent. In those days, you did not question your parents. Whatever school you were put in, you stayed there.

I found it very strange because my former school in Penang was a government school. I can't describe the initial feeling of strangeness of being inside the Convent school that was a quadrangle building with Gothic arches and high ceilings and an enclosed courtyard within. It was so different from my former school.

At first, I did not know it was a mission school. Then I thought there would be lot of British people because the nuns were from UK and Europe. But I found the schoolgirls were Malaysians, Chinese just like me and also other races like Indians, Malays and Eurasians.

Before that, I had never seen nuns doing things. They were teaching in classrooms and serving food in the canteen. Then, during the school opening and closing times, there was the Sister who looked after the gate to the back entrance of the school leading to the car park. They looked very European and had their heads covered. These were not things you saw in a *normal* school!

Although it was such a big change for me, I was not deterred. I came to respect them more because if you thought of them as a very revered figure, you tended to give them more respect.

Some of the Sisters were strict. Some were very friendly. They'd smile so of course you'd like those who smiled at you. But Sister Fidelma was not that strict. I remember when we were in Form IV, I asked her if our class not be changed for the next year. She asked me why. I said I loved all my classmates and could we not stay together. I said 'please' three times. So next year in Form V, I noticed we (our class) stayed the same and we weren't juggled about.

I found that the orphans had to do a lot of work, washing the bathrooms and cleaning the toilets. I had never seen this before in my former school.

There was this girl who stayed in the orphanage. Though I'm not sure if she was an orphan. She was very dark and the nuns used to give them a box of bread to eat for their lunch and tea every day. I had been in her class before but I can't remember if it was in Form 1. She kept to herself and was very shy. I tried to play or talk to her but she seldom wanted to talk to me, so I just left it at that and played with the other girls. Maybe if I've done a better effort, she'd be better to me but honestly at that age, I didn't know.

In school, they inculcated the Ten Commandments like "Thou shalt not steal". Though I'm a Buddhist, I also knew that you must not do all the bad things. My mother was quite open. The school is a source of learning to do good. I found that we grow up in a certain way to value life.

I joined netball; I couldn't shoot though. I can't remember if I joined any societies or clubs.

My favourite teachers – Mrs Mariam Tan, a short lady. She was the one who played the piano. She was my class teacher in Form 1. She taught catechism and music.

Mrs Selvamany taught Maths. She was a great teacher. She helped to drill Maths into us by repeating and repeating her lessons. I could see that she really helped us girls especially those who were weak in Maths and pulled them up in that subject.

Puan Maziah who taught us Bahasa Malaysia in Form V. She gave us extra BM lessons and gave us extra homework to do and she marked our homework. I remember she was pregnant at the time and I could see that it was strenuous for her. She was such a dedicated teacher. Without Puan Maziah, I wouldn't have passed the BM paper.

There was Mrs Cho the biology teacher and also the history teacher. I can't remember her name, it was "Margaret" something.

I used to hate history. But she was the one who made me look forward to her history lessons. She inculcated a love for history in me. I liked to read books on ancient times. Nowadays, I watch the history channel on TV.

Teachers have a way of teaching. We may not like their method. If we don't pay attention, we cannot blame the teachers.

My happiest years at school were in Form IV and in Form V. I enjoyed the friendship with the girls I made over the years and it got even better in the last two years of school. But after school the bond is still there. Like some of those girls I haven't seen for forty over years but still we're very good friends. I find the bonding gets stronger when we have matured.

Thinking of my time with Convent school, the image of Mary holding the child is one that stayed with me. When I had my son, that was the image I suddenly remembered when I was holding him. The image of Mary protecting little Jesus. So, in a way, it taught me. Maybe I'm overprotective. I love my son a lot. I think that came from Convent. Love, love for your parents as well. Not much of whatever money you earn. It's the love. That's what I got from Convent. The Sisters, they did missionary work without thinking of monetary gain and all that.

I still remember our school badge. To me, it represented a lot of the good values the school instilled in us. The Sisters did a good job in educating us.

Photo: Girl Guides with Ms. Mary Ng



15. Lee Lee Lan, now Lee Lan Davis in Michigan, USA, August and October 2019 chit-chat

I'm working as an occupational health nurse overseeing almost 1000 workers for a private company. I lived in the UK for 3 years before coming to the US and recently I found my Convent Yearbook for 1971. We all looked so little and young in the class pictures. I was in Form 4B and there were about 40 of us in each class, from A to G.

I was a runner and represented the Convent as well as Perak Central Division. Camilla Gomez, one year our junior, was also on the team and we won a lot of events. I remember feeling disappointed that we could take the trophies home for display but after a year we had to give them back. We did also get medals and I still have them in my basement in a box somewhere. I was Yellow House captain and that was always the best House. I was also good in Artwork and every piece always got displayed but I haven't touched a paint brush since I left school. I like to read now especially suspense stories so I may never go back to painting. I remember the Aladdin play and that Wong Swee Fong was the princess.

Being an all girls' School, I remember how we'd get excited when the St Michael's guys would come around to sell tickets for a Fun Fair or something. We would all get a thrill and say, "the Boys are coming!"

Being a Prefect, we had to keep the girls together especially during recess. We had to make sure that people weren't talking during class. At assembly, we sang our school song and Negara ku. Lee Choo would be at the microphone sometimes with another girl leading the group and we would follow along. I also remember Ms. Hew; we had a meeting with her every couple of weeks after school. She had a stern look and intimidated a lot of girls just with her looks.

Leng Hong was one of the Prefects too; her shop-house was down the street from mine. I remember going with Lim Lee Lee and Khoo Soo See to read Prema's Noddy books at her father's store. Lim Lee Lee lived above the hair salon across from Ng Sew Heng's shop-house across from the Cold Storage, and Yeap Geok Aik lived near there too. Like others, I used to walk to school from "Soon Fatt," my father's restaurant which was next to the Telecoms building near the big Central market. He left that business when I started Form 1 and started another restaurant.

I was also a Girl Guide in Company 7 with Liew Chooi Yatt and the Joyful Vanguard with Ooi Lee Choo . One trip, we went to Penang and we camped at Telok Bahang which was pretty undeveloped back then in 1968 or 1969. We slept one night in a big hall at the Light Street Convent which was supposedly haunted. We also went to the Aquarium and did some shopping at the Marks and Spencers in downtown Penang; that's probably because Ms. Ng took us.

Mrs. Angela Loh was at one of our old girls' gathering before she migrated to Australia; I think she was mainly in the Arts stream and taught math. We sure did get a good education and we learned a lot from the Nuns and got a lot of discipline. We had so much love and respect for our Teachers even after we left school.

Photo: Ms. Thomasz (with the bouquet of flowers) at farewell for Mrs. Karean



16. Chong Hwee Yeow in London over weeks of chatting in bursts about schooldays; sometimes in the restaurants and on the tube, 2019

In those days we made friends easily while at school. I went to Main Convent primary school and continued to secondary school at Main Convent. It was in secondary school that I got to know girls who came from Marian Convent primary school like you - How Ming and Yin Mooi. Outside of school, it was not so easy to see school friends since we were living in Buntong. It seemed so far away from school when we were children.

On the way to Buntong, you will pass by a big Indian temple, the Sri Maha Mariamman, just before you cross the bridge over Sungai Parit. Near our (former) house, was a small Japanese cemetery.

There were no schoolmates staying in our area. Although Pao Chien was not living in our area, she was the nearest classmate living in the direction of Buntong.

I used to take the school bus to school with my sister, Hwee Lim. She was also in the same year with me though she is a year younger as she was pushed up through the express class system.

Going home, we took the public bus. My sister and I would walk from school to the bus station at Hugh Low Street (as it used to be called in those days). This was due to the after-school activities which meant that we went home at different times from the school bus home runs.

Most socializing with school friends happened at school, in the school sessions and in the after-school activities. As we got older, we were allowed to take the public bus to go out. The bus service wasn't

great so we tended to see friends who were living in nearby areas. Those who lived in town like Yin Mooi, Yoke Peng had their own circle of school friends who lived in that area. It was the same for the girls who lived in the Greentown area and in the Canning gardens area.

We didn't chat with friends on the phone in those days. We didn't have a phone as it was a luxury in those days. If you needed to make a phone call, you had to go to the shops and pay 5 or 10 cents so it had to be something important. In the primary school days and early secondary school days, my grandfather used to arrange for his workers to pick us up and send us to school.

We had a relative who was a Maths teacher. She gave Hwee Lim and I some helpful tips on Maths and on how to learn the Maths formula. Once I grasped it, the formula 'clicked' and Maths was fine. So I remember I enjoyed Miss Hew's Maths class.

I was in Form 5F and I was taught Biology by Mrs Cho. It was a subject I enjoyed learning too. I did enjoy the dancing and PE classes under Miss Mary Ng. I think everybody enjoyed her classes whatever she taught. I enjoyed learning the Bamboo Dance. It was fun but at the same time a bit worried my feet would be caught by the bamboo sticks if I got the timing wrong. I think we learnt the Ribbon dance too.

English was fine but English Literature was my weak point. I was worrying about the Bahasa subject. I can't remember who the Bahasa teacher was. I did not enjoy the Bahasa classes. That's probably why I failed the exam.

I enjoyed the Art classes, the drawing, painting and learning craft work and screen printing. For Form3, we did a screen-printing project for the LCE exam. The subject was bark design. I think we had to choose two colours to print our own design on a piece of cloth. I think there was a sewing class after school that I signed up for. I cannot remember the name of the teacher. She taught us to draw paper patterns for making blouses.

Games – I joined volleyball and badminton. I wasn't very good in sports. I was in the Science Society. Swimming was compulsory in the lower secondary forms. I didn't enjoy it. I think it was because it was a mixed ability class and there were so many of us. For those of us who couldn't swim, it wasn't of much benefit and I didn't learn to swim from it.

I remember going on a school trip to Penang. I have photos of the trip. I don't know if it was a class trip or one organized by the Science Society. From the photos, there were a lot of us girls! We went to the temple, the beach and to Penang Hill. We stayed at the Convent. I can't recall the sleeping arrangements. We could've been sleeping on desks joined together.

Looking back on my school years, I have fond memories except the Form 5 year was a stressful time for me. I was ill and coughing badly before the exams. I had to see the doctor, take medication and was burning the midnight oil revising for the exams. The coughing affected my chest till this day.

Form 3 and Form 4 were fine, no bad experience. Primary Main Convent – Mrs Foo was scary.

I think school did give me a good grounding for my careers after leaving school. Mrs Cho's Biology lessons helped me when I did nursing in UK. The school Maths gave me the foundation when I did 'A' Level Maths. Then I did a Statistics and Computing degree in the UK. After that, I did a Master's in Medical Statistics. Then my first University offered me a post to lecture at the University and that's where I stayed until I retired.

17. Peggy Ng Siew Heng, Marriott DC USA: by email August 2019

I remember going to school early so that I can play hopscotch with my friends in the courtyard. And I love getting the strawberry jam sandwich from the nuns for breakfast!

I was not a very good student...remembering Mrs. Foo. She used to slap me across the face because I like to talk so much. One time, she even glued a piece of paper over my mouth; and another time, I had to stand on a chair outside the classroom as punishment...the humiliation!



Memories.....

Photo: Form 5F class farewell gathering, Oct 14 1972 at Class Prefect Wan Mee's house



18. See Toh Choon Wan in Ipoh who retired as a phlebotomist from Fatimah Hospital:

I was at the Tarcisian Convent from Std 1-3, the Marian Convent till Std 6, and then came for secondary school to Form 1B at the Main Convent.

While I was in primary school in Tarcisian, I remember going to the hairdresser with my two elder sisters. They took me along on a Sunday to the hairdresser and treated me to a wash and hairstyle. It costed 50 cents in those days for a wash and set. I was in either Standard 2 or 3 and I went to school with that beehive hairstyle on Monday. Everybody, including the teachers, were looking at me and so I washed it off.

I liked to play, meaning in sports! Badminton was my favourite. I also played netball, swimming and was in Athletics, but I didn't do very well. I gave up the other sports for badminton and represented the school and played at the state level with others from different schools who were chosen to play in the interstate competitions. Mrs Ng Boon Bee was my badminton coach. I'm also grateful to her because she helped me understand Art which I failed miserably before that. She taught us about perspective in art and gave me some ideas on how to draw. Surprisingly, I was very good at Biology drawing. When Mrs. Cho started drawing on the board, my drawings came out just as good as hers and I always passed for my diagrams. She made biology interesting out of all the 3 sciences. Mrs Oh was also good with physics. Mrs Loh taught us chemistry.

Needlework was good, domestic science was good, just art was difficult. I was just waiting for the right person to bring out the talent in me like with literature. I didn't like literature much until Sister Fidelma taught us and I think that was in Form 4 with Julius Caesar. She made me understand Shakespeare before that and she helped me push up my English. I didn't act in any plays as I recall but I had the role of the storyteller when I was in primary school. I won't say I was good at studies, but I had smart friends who helped me, so I was always in the top classes.

I didn't pass Malay for my SPM and I couldn't continue here. So, I went to England to do nursing and have a career. I'm happy I made that decision and have no regrets. Nursing was a tough job. Later while I was working at the Hospital in Ipoh, I bumped into Sister Mary Michael. At school, she was with the orphans and when the orphanage was closed, she moved to Penang. She called me the "Vampire" because of my work as a phlebotomist. All the teachers made a good impression on me, I was the quiet one. People who were better than me were my role models.

Photo: Mrs. Ng and the badminton team



19. Rose Phoong Huei Min, Oct 16 2019 - Scattered Thoughts of a Scatter Brain

I studied in CHIJ from Kindergarten right through until Form 5. All in that's a total of twelve years of Convent education. My earliest impression of primary days is the quietness and serenity of the place. The nuns spoke in whispers and were always hushing us up with a finger to their lips. To be seen, not to be heard too loudly. Walk slowly, no running along corridors. That is rule no. 1: Silence is Golden

Rule no. 2: 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'. Remember the ice vendor at the back gate? Some of us in the afternoon session will be sucking on the syrupy ice-balls before lessons. Teachers had to deal with the sticky kids in syrup-stained uniforms sitting through the whole afternoon's lessons, passing on the sweetness to chairs, tables and walls.

Memories of my early school years include tales spun by classmates of haunting in the secluded corners and hallways. We used to sit around in a circle to exchange tall tales of what we saw and experienced. At least we were working our imaginations if not at our homework.

Of course, some teachers were stricter and more memorable than others when it comes to making us toe the line and enforcing discipline. But ah! Some pupils are also more 'lively' so to speak. That's my category!!

My secondary school days were spent in a blur. I never seemed to be able to keep up with the reading and homework assignments. Must be my playful nature and don't care less attitude. Loved the last few weeks at the end of every year. That was the after-school examinations period. It was time to indulge in our hobbies: reading, working with handicraft, singing and preparation for end of year concert.

Ms Mary Ng left a lasting impression on me. She was lively, loud and jovial. Loved her folk dancing classes. Unlike these days, almost all of us never had a chance to attend dancing lessons. During those PE lessons we had a chance to twirl and swing to the music. In class, she taught us the importance of reading the newspapers to keep ourselves updated on what's going on in the rest of the world. Loved the way she described world events in graphic detail

On hindsight I am glad that the discipline instilled by the dedicated teachers and sisters moulded me to be the individual I am today. I would think that I am a more focused and disciplined person because of guidance from them.

Photo: Form V Variety Show



20. Yee Oy Lin at the Quizzin Food Court at KL NuSentral, Oct 17 2019, with Ooi Lee Choo, Chan Yim Chee and Prema:

I walked to school from my house on Jalan Laksamana which was on the same row as Monica Chin's; she's sadly passed away. I remember Yoke Har was on Hume Street and Lee Lan was close by too on Cockman Street.

I had Mrs. Mukundan as our form teacher in Form 4D and Form 5D; I learned a lot from her in Maths and English Literature. I wasn't good at sports even though I did play netball and badminton.

Because of my circumstances, I got the SEA (School Educational Aid) money which came from the Wan scholarship which was set up in memory of Ms. Hew's sister who passed away from cancer; she was a teacher in our school too, way before our time. We had to pay school fees and Ms. Thomasz also helped a few of us. I remember from Form 1-5, I only paid half and some didn't have to pay anything.

I was in the Red House like Yim Chee and Prema. Our song started off as "There's a rousing cheer for St. Agnes...."

Lee Sook Fun was my class monitor and she was great. She was funny, humble and friendly. Caroline Yeoh, who was in my class, used to share her homemade sandwiches with me; during our PE classes, she

would sit alone because she would easily get breathless. I enjoyed my schoolmates the most about our schooldays.

21. Wong Wai Kuen, interviewed by How Ming in Battersea, London, June 25 2019

I was in Form IV B in 1971, in the same class as Jin Ee. The class teacher was Valerie Ho. I had very happy school days and I made a lot of friends. I was quite a tomboy.

I was athletic and liked sports and games. I was the assistant defender in the school netball team. In athletics, I think I did shot put. I was also in the hockey team. Miss Thomasz was in charge and she was recruiting as she was short of girls. So, when you joined, you were immediately in the team. I chose hockey because it was a bit different and I enjoyed it. Angela and Catherine Machado were good hockey players. At first, I was looking to join badminton but there were over a hundred people and if you wanted to represent the school, there were too many to choose from.

I came from Marian Convent primary school. Sister Winifred was the one who walked with a limp. She would sing the musical scales do-re-mi...to teach us to sing. In Marian Convent, the punishment was to stand outside the class and pull your ears. And then we'd make funny faces! If your spelling wasn't good, you'd be sent out. My spelling wasn't too bad. They were strict.

I was very active, always the clown! And I was a prefect too. When we did singing, I'd go so close to the microphone that everyone would be laughing. I loved school so much that I was there from 7am to 7pm! One day my father said to me "Are you studying for a doctorate??"

The five of us; Jin Ee, Angela, Esther and Gina; would cycle to school every morning. We were the WEEGALS. We'd cycle from our homes to meet at Angela's house. We'd meet up at Catherine Machado's place too. I was quite close with Yim Chee, Woon Yee and Soo Har too. I'd meet up with school friends at school after school. We formed the WEEGALS and won with our first song, Prayer of St Francis. We had to sing a 'holy' song for a kind of religious concert/inter-school competition. Then, we were invited to sing as guests at STAR college (Sekolah Tengku Abdul Rahman.) It was the All Boys' Malay college and they loved us since we were an All Girls' band of five. I think it was through hockey that we got to know some of them. They used to come to watch us play hockey at Anderson school playing field. The boys were interested in us. We liked them too, but we dared not do anything about it! They came to our school funfair and they entered a singing competition and they either won it or were runner up. They sang the song that went "*No matter what you are, I will always be with you.*" I was flattered when they came to the funfair to see us. We just talked to them at the funfair. Their school was very strict. My father was very strict too.

I enjoyed the dancing classes. I enjoyed doing the Aladdin pantomime. I was the skeleton and had to do a dance. I was dressed in black with a skeleton painted on in luminous paint so it glowed in the dark! I do remember the trip to the seaside after the pantomime for the cast of Aladdin and the teachers who were in it.

What great photos you are showing me of some of us girls on the seaside trip. Was it in Lumut? Great photos! We're all playing and posing in our swimsuits. We looked good tho' a bit skinny. Yes, that's me in that photo showing off my muscles and clowning!

Photo: Clowning at the beach



There were four School Houses; Red, Yellow, Green and Blue House. The girls in each class were divided into the four houses and you were allocated to a house. I think it was from Form III – Form V. The Captain of the House was elected by the girls. We'd design our own House picture and colour in the bricks when we got top marks. We had our song for our own House and competed with the other Houses to win points. There was rivalry and we would jeer at the other Houses!

Lee Lee Lan was in Yellow House and she was very athletic, very good. She was the best runner for our year, for 100 metres, 200 metres etc. They won everything because of her! In Form IV, I was the Assistant Red House Captain. I was the Red House captain in Form V. That year, Red House was third instead of always being last!

I was a prefect in Form IV and in Form V. I think I was chosen because I was noisy. There I was telling the girls to keep quiet when I was the talkative one! I mixed with a wide variety of girls who were in the Arts and Science classes because I was a prefect. Miss Hew was strict. One day, she called Jin Ee and I to her room to tell us off because we did something. I can't remember what it was all about.

I was very talkative in class and was sitting at the back of the class. The teacher pointed to me and made me move "You, come to the front!" My favourite subjects were English and English Literature. Miss Ng taught me and she was very good. She used to talk about poetry and John Keats, William Wordsworth. There was Mrs Valerie Ho who taught history, she was okay. Once she was describing a battle scene and she said "Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!" miming the action.

Reverend Mother Theresa taught me French. She was the one who made the hats smaller and the skirts shorter for the nuns. Suddenly one year, Sister Fidelma appeared with red hair because her head was not so covered up and her skirt was shorter. Reverend Mother Theresa was the one who talked about sex education! A first! Then at one time, there was a Father who came from St Michaels' church to take confession and a lot of girls wanted to go because he was quite good looking.

We did charity activities in school to raise funds. You could take orders, bring in food to sell to the girls, like noodles or cakes, or the food you made in cookery lessons. I enjoyed the cookery lessons.

I passed Bahasa and obtained the MCE certificate. I didn't go on to study Form VI at St Michaels' Institute because I missed the entrance grade by one point. The maximum was a total of 20 points (I

think) from your five best subjects and I had 21. I was at a loss of what to do. They were recruiting for nurses for UK back then. I went to the British Council in KL for an interview and applied for nursing. Since Jin Ee's sister had gone to Chelmsford for nursing with a group of girls, I ended up there too. I met my husband there and we have been married for 40 years. I am still living in Chelmsford, Essex.

22. Loh Soo Har, now in Australia, interviewed by How Ming, Sept 2019

Remember Mrs Karen? Biology lab form 2...she asked whether we breathe thro' our skin? teaching us 'amphibians' that day. I put up my hand (looked round, noticed i was the only 1!!!) and she called me "Frog" and her face was dead serious. She also made me and the rest of the netball team stand in the back field for 'making noise'...thank goodness it was under some shade, or we'd be dropping like flies. She probably thought we could cool ourselves by breathing through our skins...

And we gave her a big bouquet of flowers when she left...got photo but lost it...wonder why? LOL

Miss Hew...terrified of her. taught us Maths in Form 5. counted down questions to my turn question, made sure I knew answer or else knuckle time. Nevertheless, she was a lovely lady, liked her.

Form 1 in Aladdin - moi, Mustapha, brilliant time with one and all, and Mrs Clelland. Later year (?) "Bloaters", I was the lead, wooden as (****). Set in a flat in Camden Town, London. Dunno anything about 'Camden Town' or 'bloater' (till I visited Camden Mart after CHIJ and saw bloater fish!!!) or cockney accent or rhyming slang; then I knew why my lines didn't make sense!. Ironically moi was given the lead cos I talked 'posh'...LOL. 'Play' was entered in a competition at ACS....guess how we did?????

Expanding on Miss Hew's Maths class - we had to answer the questions in a Maths Question book we were using. The girls were called out to answer the questions by the rows they were sitting in class. I counted down the number of girls and worked out that I'd be answering question no.10 if there were nine girls before me. So I made sure I knew the answer to question no.10 when it was my turn.

"Bloaters" was a play that I was chosen to do after Aladdin. I can't remember when it was and how it came about. I just blurted out the lines. I didn't understand what the play was all about. There were only a few players. The rhyming slang and Cockney accent in the play was so foreign to me at the time. It was only when I came to England that I came across Cockney accents. So the whole thing stuck in my mind.

I was in Marian Convent Primary School. I remember Miss Ham, my teacher in Standard 4. She was Burmese. She was so sweet. It was because of her that we can speak so well. And it was also because of Mrs Saw who taught me in Standard 5. Marian schooldays were fabulous.

My favourite subjects were English, English Literature taught by Sister Maureen. I quite liked her. Come to think of it, I liked Maths and Sciences too.

I was a prefect in Forms IV and V. I can't really remember how I was chosen. I enjoyed being a prefect and it helped to boost my confidence. I really loved school and being active in the societies. I was in the Girl Guides. I played netball. I was the assistant shooter who couldn't shoot!

There was all the camaraderie with the girls and the teachers. I felt privileged to be in the top class. I was conscientious in my studies, did the homework and studied for exams. I didn't give the teachers any problems. I had good grades in the exams. Privileged though I felt in the top classes, I found that it was not always the case. Though it was not something I saw in our years at school. After I left school, it

could've been after Form V or Form VI in St Michaels, I became a temporary replacement teacher for one and a half months for a teacher who was on maternity leave. I was in charge of the last Form I class. I adored those girls. They came from the poor, underprivileged and some were from hawker families. I found that some of the teachers did not treat them the way they treated us. The girls told me that they were told by the teachers not to bother to study. I found the lack of equality in the treatment of these girls disappointing and irritating.

On reflection, Convent school education gave me a good grounding for whatever I did after I left school. All the friends we had made at school, we still keep in touch. When I think of the school, the part of the building that I have good memories of is the school hall. We had dancing classes there with Miss Ng. We had school plays and events there.

Photo: How Ming ("Demon") chasing Soo Har ("Mustafa"), Aladdin play



23. Salmahanim Abu Hassan chatting with Prema, The Secret Recipe, KL NuSentral, Oct 17 2019:

After Form 6 at SMI, I went to medical school at UM (Universiti Malaya), did internship in University Hospital KL and joined the Ophthalmology Dept, UM Medical Center. In 1984, I went to the UK for work/specialist training and obtained the FRCSEd (Edinburgh). I returned to UM Medical Center as an Ophthalmologist and was later Head of Department. I left for Private Practice in 1995 to have more time for my family. I fully retired 5 years ago.

I joined the Main Convent in Form Four. I was born in Raub and started school in Temerloh, Pahang. My parents thought it would be best for my education to send me to a school in a bigger town. I stayed with Puan Maziah, my aunt, who was our BM teacher. I was very sheltered and shy. It was tough to be taken out of my comfort zone and be in a new place and school. It was difficult at first to make new friends or to be accepted. I remember some classmates who were very friendly and kind.

I liked English because of the teacher; she made sure you dotted your I's and crossed your T's. I think she was Mrs. Shirley Oh. She exemplified good manners & politeness, which stuck in my mind to this day. I remember acting on stage in a drama for the BM Society and also danced on stage. About the teachers, I remember Ms. Hew was really "garang" though I liked Maths. Sister Maureen was strict but she was very kind. I recall asking Ms Mary Ng for a testimonial and she told me she didn't know what to write about me because "you are such a quiet girl"! Can't help smiling when I remember those "quiet" but 'turbulent' teenage years. I have come a long way since then and certainly being in the Main Convent had taught me a lot and my parents were right to send me to the Convent.

Photo: Group pose outside Main Hall, 1972



24. Kong Sze Mooi met with Choon Wan and Prema on Oct 20, 2019 in Ipoh:

In primary school at Tarcisian, teachers would sometimes ask us to buy noodles from the canteen during recess and I'd be holding the bowl of soup all the way back happily sniffing the soup because we didn't want to spend our own money at the canteen. I don't think I was naughty in school. I was in Tarcisian for primary, and for Form 1, my father wanted me transferred back to Main Convent where I had done my kindergarten. I used to talk with Liew Kam Foong and Lee Kuan Oi when we were lining up, and with Chin Yoke Fong during recess – we used to talk about TV shows. School was fun, knowing all our schoolmates. We've been having more reunions in the last few years which is nice.

I was in Form 4B with Mrs. Ho as our Form teacher and Mrs. Fifi Wong (who has passed away; she lived on Brewster Road near Chan Sam Lock (the photographers' shop) and was my form teacher in Form 5B.

After school, I learned typewriting and shorthand and worked as a clerk with my father with the InchScape Group, a trading firm. They did sales of compressors to miners, brandy and other products. Later I was transferred to Borneo Trading for a few months and then to Borneo Motors and that's how I ended up with the car line with Proton cars when Malaysia launched the new national car.

I liked History taught by Mrs. Perumal; she was a good teacher and it was like story telling. Mrs. Selvamany taught Maths and that's when I started to like it, another good teacher. I remember one classmate told me she used to get 'zero' in Maths and look at that, she later became General Manager of a big company!

Talking about sports, I had my father write a letter saying I had heart problems and had to be exempted from High Jump. Also, Mrs. Chan would ask me, "How come you always have your period when we have swimming periods?" and I would reply, "Because I'm weak and I get them often." With Bible lessons also, my father told them that I was a Buddhist so I had a free class period.

For needlework, we had to do a housecoat and I had to machine the sleeve. Miss Lee would say, "Why are you so stupid, can't you use a machine?" because instead of going forwards with the material, I'd press the pedal and it'd go backwards. She used to whack me on the head and during our recent gatherings, I'd always remind Miss Lee about being hit on the head, and she'd say, "Is it? Did I?"

25. Peggy Wong Weng Yee's memories from Sept 11 at Miss Yan's house and continued on Oct 20 2019 at Prema's house in Ipoh with Choon Wan and Sze Mooi

I was good at needlework in Primary school. Tham Meng Sim would come to my house and I would help her with her needlework; I also helped Gina Lee a bit. In Standard 6, we had to do an apron in preparation for Secondary school; there was no machining, every stitch was done by hand. I still have that apron. During recess, I remember going to the Tuckshop to buy bread with strawberry jam; it was so good. It was sold by an orphan and I remember that she used crutches.

Khong Yit Seong, Sik Leng Hong, Leong Lai Kuen, Ho Lai Kwin and Yeap Geok Aik were classmates in Kindergarten. In Primary school, Pao Chien was asked to sing when we gathered for singing lessons; she had a very good voice.

I used to take a bus to school when I was in Primary school. Mrs. Wah was the headmistress and I used to help her sell Catholic books and magazines to the classes. Since I was in the afternoon school, I would sell to the morning class. I think Veronica Wong would remember the magazine which was something like 30 to 40 cents each; she was Catholic and used to buy them too. We also had these little paper bookmarks that we liked to buy and collect for our books as well as photos of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

After school, we had to help the teachers carry the exercise books to their cars so that they could grade them at home. I remember doing this for Mrs Yuen in Standard 6, she was Lim Siew Kee's aunty.

My father gave me my first fountain pen in Standard 6; it was a Shaeffer pen and he had my name engraved on it. Others had Parker pens. He didn't want to see red marks on my report card. He read Chinese so I had to translate for him, and he would then sign my card.

I remember the Aladdin play which was in Form 1; that was also when we were mixed with Marian girls. The Lord Fauntelroy play was in Primary school. Mother Pauline was in charge when we were in Primary school and Sister Fidelma when we started Secondary.

One day in Form 2 which was during the afternoon session, we were so naughty and making a lot of noise that the teachers made the whole Form stand in the hot sun; it was about 2 pm and it was just for a little while till we all quietened down.

Sister Ernest taught us Scripture class in Form 1; she was tall. Later, Katherine Loke taught me Scripture in Form 3.

In Form 3, we had Art and for our LCE exam, we had to do screen painting on a cloth. One of the motives was the bark of a tree. Hwee Yeow was good at drawing and helped me to draw and I then printed it for the exam.

Sister Mary Noelle taught us French on Saturdays from Form 1-3. I remember that Ann Dourado's brother also took French with us and wanted to sit for the Form 3 exam. Sister was not happy because she wasn't teaching the rest of us up to that standard and so he got extra lessons.

With Ms. Ng teaching, I remember the dance classes with folk dances and dancing with fans.

Our rivalry was with MGS (the Methodist Girls School) but Tarcisian girls considered Main convent girls as their "enemy." We were in Form 4 when Sister Mary Michael came to the convent in 1971. Sister Maureen came when we were in Form 5. I remember one class with Sister Maureen where she would

ask us questions in English Literature and we would stand up to answer. I couldn't answer and kept standing, and she asked another girl to answer. Then she scolded me because I continued to stand but I was waiting for her to tell me to sit down. We were taught to always stand up when called and when answering questions.

In 1972, passing Bahasa Malaysia was compulsory with the MCE. Those who didn't pass BM, got the GCE. Later on, BM was compulsory also in Form 3. A lot of our students with 7As and 8As failed BM and went overseas with the GCE either for nursing, accounting or other courses in UK; several did the A levels in Singapore...that year we lost a lot of good students.

Photo: Fashion Show



Photo: Dance group



26. Hah U Lian by WhatsApp from KL to Prema in Ipoh, Oct 21 2019

I left school after our Form 5 and came to KL to work with a French company. Then, I became personal assistant to the Director. My next job was in medical sales and I did that for 6 years. Then I joined Sime

Darby and became an APPLE software trainer before I went into the building materials industry. I started a trading company and after that, I gave up my business to help my husband in his computer marketing business. Quite a lot of different experiences!

I was born in Ipoh and did kindergarten at the Main Convent, Standard 1-3 at Marian, Std 4 to Form 2 at Sentul Convent KL, and back to Ipoh for Form 3-5 at the Main Convent. I had Miss Yan as form teacher in Form 3J. After that, I was in Form 4A and 5A. In Form 3, I mixed with Diana Lai Siew Meng and Wong Lai Peng. We did homework together, played sports. In Form 4 and 5, I mixed with Wai Heng and Nyet Mien; we talked about TV programs like Big Valley and High Chaparral and we'd fight over which actor was more handsome!

I really remember one incident in Form 3. During assembly one day, Wong Lai Peng was standing behind me and she kicked me, she was playing the fool. So, I turned around and kicked her back. We were caught by Miss Hew. After assembly, she called us to her office and made us kick each other for what seemed like half an hour. We kicked softly of course, and she said, "Kick harder!" By the end, our legs were all bruised. The next time at assembly, we didn't dare play the fool anymore.

I was bad at Chemistry and Physics in Form 3. In Form 4, I was in the Arts and I liked History because I could remember things by heart; at the time, I couldn't do things that weren't in the book. I didn't take Geography, I dropped it. Miss Ng was one of my favourite teachers and I think she taught literature too.

I remember going to Ave Maria for swimming. It's funny that even though I changed schools a lot, the bond is still strongest with the Main Convent girls from Ipoh. I don't have contact with anyone from the KL Sentul Convent.

27. Mary Fock, Oct 21, 2019 - Walking Down Memory Lane

Ipoh is my hometown, and, in those days, I lived near St. Michael's Church on Church Road. I walked to school and always dropped by at the Convent Chapel first thing in the morning before the school assembly starts. I loved visiting this Chapel daily without fail. This practice had helped in my faith formation from young.

I remember my Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Thomas. Why do I remember her? She was my very first Teacher in School. I was very "dum-dum" back then and often looked at the other pupils trying to figure out what the teacher was telling us to do.

There is Mrs. Too who I remembered from my school days as she was my Standard 5 Class teacher and I just happened to see her quite recently though I could not recognize her at first sight until a Church friend told me that she is Mrs Too from our Convent Primary School who is now a convert in the Catholic faith. During my Primary School days, we had the late Rev Mother Pauline as our School Principal, who would walk down the passageways along the classrooms slowly surveying and dropping by without notice to check on our Classes. If I could remember correctly, Sister Fidelma took over after Rev Mother Pauline left. I had hearing problem with Sr Fidelma whenever she spoke, not knowing what she was saying due to her Irish accent and her soft spoken-ness. On one occasion, I gave her a blank stare and that infuriated her much but I still could not hear distinctly her words.

The late Miss Hew, our Disciplinary Mistress, was feared by most students. Her formidable look was enough to freeze anyone to a standstill. If at all possible, I would u-turn off to escape from her when I

spotted her from afar walking in my direction. I remembered witnessing one scene during a School Fun Fair. There were some youngsters (mostly guys) lingering along the sides of the Gallery leading out from the Main Hall, disturbing the girls near the badminton courts. As Miss Hew made her appearance from the Hall and walked slowly down the gallery, an air of silence descended upon these youngsters and they remained hush until she passed them by. Despite the serious look on her face, she had displayed a friendly disposition when outside of school and had commanded much respect from the students. She passed on about 4 years ago. Quite a number of our ex-Convent girls attended her wake.

Miss Cynthia Thomas was my Class Teacher in Form 3. One day, we had PE session and I told her that I had forgotten to bring my shorts. I had really forgotten but she looked hard at me and asked, "Do you forget to eat?" In my fear, I just blurted out, "Sometimes...." I could see she was stunned for a moment, but very graciously let me off.

Mrs Selvamany had been my Form Teacher in Form 4 and Form 5. She taught us Literature and Mathematics. In our Form 5 SPM results, she was so happy to know the whole class passed Mathematics only to find out later, to her great disappointment, that one of us failed the subject.

Photo: BM with Mrs Saravanan "Write 5 words every day in your little 555 book...memorize them!"



Mrs Saravanan taught us Bahasa Malaysia and at every lesson she would give us 5 new words to learn and memorize and test us at the next lesson. We appreciate that this had helped us improved our Malay vocabulary.

What I enjoyed the most about School were the Singing lessons given by Mrs Tan during our Afternoon School and the Folk Dancing lessons taught to us by Ms Mary Ng when we were in Upper Secondary.

The Convent experience was important to me because we had dedicated teachers that brought out the best in us during our formative years in terms of physical, mental and spiritual health.

28. Peggy Khor Soon Wah by WhatsApp chat with Prema, Oct 21 2019:

My father's shop, Yong Huat was one of the top sundry shops on Anderson Road. The shop was close to the General Hospital and there weren't many cars at that time. Visitors going to the GH would stop to buy things before visiting patients at the hospital. Also, many attendants would come to his shop to get their monthly provisions and my father allowed people to buy on credit. I heard that my father struck a lottery sometime way before I was born and that's how he started the shop with my grandfather. I remember that my father was good friends with a businessman on Brewster Road, and it turns out, that was your father! (*Prema's father at Paramount House.*)

I went to school by trishaw from kindergarten until I was older and then I cycled. I was at the Convent and then I went to SMI and was good friends with Eugenia Issacs, Wai Heng and Glynnis Dragon.

I started to work after Form 6 in my brother's friend's shop selling imported long bathtubs. My brother and I had a 7-year gap. Our life was about school and family life. My parents didn't know how to guide my career path and I wish I had studied further rather than going to work. Later, I worked for Hong Kong Shanghai Bank. With computerization and a push on marketing credit cards, I decided to take voluntary separation and stay home to care for my youngest. I have 3 children, my eldest is married and doing MaryKay management and marketing; the second girl is a dental surgeon and the third is a mechanical engineer/IT.

I remember that our school canteen was run by the orphans. I was surprised that there were many of them and always wondered how they passed their time. They spoke a language that we couldn't understand. They used to sell biscuits and cook and sell the curry mee. At the canteen, we would line up to buy the mee and sometimes, the girls would push, and the curry would spill on our pinafores! Some students were given bread spread with jam that was very red, I wonder how they made it so red.

Our teachers were strict, and our parents were also strict. We're moulded along the same lines. I was 19 when I started work in KL and felt green in a big city. But my Mother said, "Don't get yourself into trouble, learn to look after yourself." Our teachers were fierce and strict and those were reminders that helped me to do well.

29. Judy Chan Yim Chee's memories of our Convent days after a Japanese lunch at the Quizzin Food Court, KL NuSentral, together with Ooi Lee Choo, on Oct 17 2019

I finished Form 6 and came to KL to do my secretarial course and will soon be retiring from working as Administration Manager for the technical service provider of the Porsche Carrera Cup Asia races which also support Formula One races in Shanghai, Singapore & previously Sepang.

Every day at school was fun for me, I never treated school as anything horrible except for Maths classes. I was totally hopeless at Maths until Mrs Selvamany, my lifesaver, came to my rescue in Form 5. What a difference a good Maths teacher can do – all it took was 2 lessons with her and my Maths grades went from zero to 85!

In Form 1, the Marian convent girls joined the Main Convent. In the beginning we weren't united yet. In the first 2 months, every day during recess we played the game "Kings Camp" which involved throwing a bean bag. It was a bit of a competition between the Marian Convent girls and the Main Convent girls in the first few months till we gelled. After that, we didn't distinguish Main from Marian. I remember I knew only 4 girls from the Marian Convent (i.e. Ooi Lee Choo, Tham Voon Yee, Chow Yin Mooi and Choo Wan Mee) as they were Joyful Vanguarders with whom I met up in the Main Convent hall for Sunday School during our primary school days.

My form teacher in Form 1A was Ms. Molly Lau - an older lady with white hair and she used to wear "sam foos". She only taught us for one term as she retired after a heart attack. Then we had Ms. Mary Kwan, a temporary teacher. Mrs. Angeline Loh was our English teacher and I remember she was pregnant that year. Glynnis Dragon, Divis Kaur Khaira, Goon Pek Chin, MaryAnne Chan, Gina Lee & Esther Chong were all in my class. We had a concert in Form 1 and each class had to come up with a play with a moral story behind it. The play for our class was written by Eu Yoke Lin, and Gina had the lead role of a spoilt rich boy. I had a small part as a nurse.

Mrs. Marina Tan, a Filipina, was the form teacher of Form 1D. She was our Music Teacher as she could sing and play the piano well and she had a soprano voice.

The pantomime "Aladdin" was staged when we were in Form 1, and the cast was from all the Form 1 classes. As I was artistic and loved to design clothes, I was given the chance to design most of the costumes. Zubaidah Begum played the role of Aladdin. I remember she told me, "I'm an Indian Muslim, but I'm not an Indian". I didn't even know there was a difference then. In those days, we didn't judge people based on race or religion, it didn't matter. Lee Choo played the part of the Genie of the Ring while I was the Genie of the Lamp.

Swimming lessons were fun, as we had to walk to Ave Maria Convent, and getting away from the classroom was a refreshing change once a week.

We had two school trips in Form 1. The first was just for my class Form 1A, to Kuala Kangsar and Taiping, chaperoned by Miss Mary Kwan and Mrs Angeline Loh. I remember we had a tour of the Istana Perak in Kuala Kangsar followed by a picnic at the Taiping Lake Gardens. The second trip was to Pulau Batek and it was mainly for all the girls who were involved in the pantomime "Aladdin" although there were others who joined in. Miss Thomasz & Miss Helen Lim (a temporary teacher and sister of Mrs Theresa Hew) were the teachers who accompanied us.

We had the first Fun Fair at our school in 1968; before that the fairs were always combined with Ave Maria's and always held there. I remember it well because Yin Mooi and I had made these floor mats; we made the individual pieces and then stitched them together and our two mats were the first ones sold at the Fair that day.

Form 2 was in the afternoon session & we were in the classrooms behind the orphanage. It was the only time Form 2 classes were held in the afternoon. After our year, Form 1 moved to the afternoon session.

Miss Rosy Yan was my form teacher in Form 2C. The "Carrion Crow" was in Form 2 as our science teacher and she was hopeless and lazy. She never allowed us to do any experiment, she did everything at her desk and we could only gather around and watch her carry out all experiments. We were only allowed to do one simple experiment that whole year, and during all that time I remember how she kept reminding us to be careful with the lab equipment, warning us that we would have to pay if we broke anything.

Form 3 was even more interesting; Ms. Thomasz was my form teacher in Form 3A. One day that year, the teachers went on strike for a whole day because Ms. Hew, our disciplinarian, had received a really nasty letter from an anonymous sender. After a serious lecture in the school hall, we were all left alone in our classrooms wondering what was going on. All the prefects were called into a meeting and were told to find out the culprit. Ms. Thomasz came back to our class after recess and made us all stand while she read out parts of the nasty letter to us. I remember she was crying when she asked, "How could anyone be so mean to someone who has done so much for the students and the school?" Funnily, things went back to normal the next day and the matter was never mentioned again. I doubt many girls even remember that episode, and I have often wondered if they ever found out who had written the letter.

Form 3 was the year of the LCE; it was the first exam that we had with objective questions. When we were in Std 5, Std 6 was having its last national exam. So, the LCE (Lower Cambridge Examination) was

our first national exam. We were nervous as the first batch. I remember our 2B pencils had to be carefully chosen & sharpened.

Form 4 was horrible because I wanted to be in the Arts but I was streamed into the Science class; I was in 4F, with Miss Christine Lee as our form teacher. Form 4 F was next to the sick bay, up the stairs above the canteen. In Form 3 we had classes going through to K but in Form 4, our classes ended at G so 3 classes of girls didn't make it through the LCE. Anyway, I survived.

One time during our Form 4 year, Mother Therese called for an assembly at the new hall. She said she had been receiving a lot of letters with questions from many girls. One person had asked anonymously, probably a Catholic girl, whether it was a mortal sin to mxxxxxxx. Honestly, most of us had never heard of that word before and we were all whispering to each other, asking, "What is she talking about?" until one girl said "Hai yah, playing xxxx xxxxxxxx." It seems so funny now because we were so innocent back then.

Mrs. Saravanan taught us Malay in Form 4. She made us read an outdated Malay book about the Japanese occupation in Malaya and every lesson, she would give us 5 Malay words to memorise; we had to write these words in a little notebook that we each had to have. That probably contributed to why many of us failed Malay!

Our music teacher was Mrs. Jesu, I think. She was petite and always wearing a saree. She organized "*An Evening of Delight*" which was a variety show open to outsiders as well. Law Jin Ee (affectionately a.k.a Lan Mah) did a fashion show with flowers and plants & using things that you could easily get. I was busy doing the makeup. I always wanted to be involved in drama but only behind the scenes because I had terrible stage fright!

I switched in Form 5 to the Arts. After the LCE and just based on our performance, we were placed in the Science or Arts streams. Everybody encouraged me to give it a shot but who knows me better than myself. I couldn't cope with the Maths; I kept failing Pure Maths and Physics. When final exams were done, I flunked the science subjects. I wasn't alone, there were other girls who wanted to be in the Arts and vice versa. There were girls in 5E who wanted to do science and those who were in 5F and 5G who wanted to do Arts so we were allowed to switch. I remember telling my Mum, "I am going to fail the MCE if I don't switch." I had to catch up on two years of History as we didn't do History in the science class. We did Geography so that subject was OK for me. Miss Doreen Tan was our Former teacher in Form 5E. She had a great sense of style and fashion and we were always watching out for her new outfits.

Form 5 was fun even though we were stressed about the MCE. At the end of the first term before the holidays, we had a Talent time show. Gina must have sung there.

I also remember our school was involved in the Educational Expo '72 held at Anderson School. Miss Mary Ng prepared us with a Sicilian dance. Seto Choon Wan was my partner, she was the girl and I was the guy. We performed that dance again during Reverend Mother Therese 25th Jubilee that year in the school grounds outside the new hall. There was also a Scottish dance and a Chinese Ribbon dance.

Sister Maureen came when we were in Form 4 and she did have an attitude then. One day, Sister Fidelma was away and we had a lesson with Sister Maureen in English Lit. She was using bombastic words and we were wondering what she was trying to tell us, she didn't know how to connect at our

level. We were looking at each other trying to understand what she wanted us to do. Anyway, I helped Sister Maureen with a lot of things; she liked me because I was artistic. I made posters and decorated the hall whenever there was an occasion. She probably noticed my talent during the Talent time shows. For those shows, we first had the elimination rounds and at the final, there were no classes, and everyone would be sitting in the hall. I had been told to prepare about 20 programs and I did it so that every cover had a picture of a girl, and the program was written inside it. The programs were for the teachers only and for the Assistant Principal (Sister Maureen at the time), and that's how she probably noticed my work.

Miss Mary Ng also noticed my talent and very often I was asked to prepare posters for her career guidance room. I remember with great gratitude how she would go about getting for us information on the numerous careers & professions available. She conducted aptitude tests for those of us who wanted to take them, and even arranged for professionals such as doctors, dentists, nurses & even beauticians to come to the school to give us talks on what it takes to embark on those professions. In an era before internet & Google, those were truly helpful.

At the end of the first term of Form 5, while we could still enjoy ourselves before the big MCE exams, Yoke Lin, Esther, Angela, Soo Har and I jumped in a friend's car to KL with plans to attend the Bee Gees concert at the Stadium Negara. In the end only Yoke Lin and I actually went for the show because we had saved up all our money for it. We had a memorable 1-week holiday in KL and PJ, going often to the A&W Drive-in for lunch because we were staying in Soo Har's aunty's house in Section 14 in PJ.

I remember Miss Doreen Tan telling us that schooldays are the best days of our lives and we should always cherish them. Looking back, I honestly agree with her although at that time we didn't believe her as we could not wait to leave school to go out into the world!

I must have heeded her advice of cherishing my schooldays because I have always very vivid & beautiful memories of them, thanks to the wonderful friends I had made there and to the dedicated teachers who had made a great impact on me.

Photo: Trip to Kuala Kangsar & Taiping, 8th August 1968. At the Istana with our guide, Uncle Osman



30. Ooi Lee Choo's memories during lunch with Yim Chee and Prema at the Quizzin Food Court, KL NuSentral on Oct 17, 2019:

I enjoyed a lot of events like the pantomimes and activities like singing. Gina sang "Sunny" at the performance of "An Evening of Delight" and I remember thinking, "Wow, she has a good voice!" The May Pole and chopsticks dance with PE lessons and folk dancing were all also fun, thanks to Ms. Ng.

I liked the outdoor activities and domestic science classes; we made rock buns except they really came out rock hard and we could throw them like stones. We also made Queen cakes and the Victoria sandwich with jam and cream. I remember that we cut the cake in half and put jam in the middle. *Yim Chee chimed in and said, "No, we made two cakes in low trays and they were separate cakes. We put jam and cream and sandwiched them, and sprinkled castor sugar on the top."*

I remember Form 1 when we played with the bean bag during recess and that Chooi Mei was the "strong Tarzan lady" and could throw far.

We had good teachers in Form 2. Maths was the last class and we'd all be fiddling, quietly packing our bags ready and eagerly waiting for the bell to ring. I remember that we had to do our multiplication tables, backwards and forwards, and we couldn't leave till we were done. That's why all our maths are very good, all mental calculation in the head without calculators or smartphones.

Ms. Thomasz made us articulate all our words in English. I played netball and of course, Carrion Crow was in charge of netball and she didn't do anything. She never had a hair out of place, always prim and proper; it was like her shadow had to follow closely. After school, she made us carry her books to her car.

Ms. Hew didn't like me as head prefect. That year was the first time that the choice of head prefect was made amongst the prefectorial board and not by the teachers. Ms Hew found me lenient and accused me of always smiling and that I wasn't strict enough. It was a good experience being Head Prefect but towards the end of Form 5, I had to be a bit more careful in my behavior and set a good example. That was not so much fun. I knew I was popular, but I had to be strict, like in the morning with attendance. Late comers to school had to be reported and I didn't like doing that. Also, I was innocent even up to Form 5. One day, I was hauled in by Ms. Hew and I wondered, "What did I do wrong this time?" And she told me, "You were seen holding hands with Lam Lai Peng." Lai Peng lived at Waller Court and was a good friend. It never occurred to me in those days that anyone would be concerned about us holding hands. I was disappointed being subjected to that type of scolding.

We had typewriting class in Form 1, and I learned swimming in Ave Maria Convent as part of our PE lessons; we did athletics such as javelin, discus, and high jump at the D.R. Seenivasagam Park. Also, one time, we had the Convent Sports day in Form 5 at the Ipoh Stadium. Everyone marched past the VIP stands behind the Overall Form Captains who held the flag of their respective Houses and singing their house songs (Red, Blue, Green and Yellow.) I was the overall Yellow House captain. Wong Wai Kuen was red house, Loh Soo Har was green and Law Jin Ee was blue as overall house captains. Jin Ee was also assistant head prefect.

There was no polarization in those days, no race or religious concerns even though we all had different beliefs. Those were good times at the Convent! On a more serious note, Convent has given us all a very rounded education and I really thank the School for nurturing and preparing us for the challenges we faced. I think most of us did pretty well in our lives and our careers. A big clap!

Photo: Pesta School Choir, 1982 with Mrs. Subramaniam and Mother Therese



31. Tsai Pao Chien - Chinatown, London, July 15, 2015, followed up in Nov 2019 with How Ming

I was in the Main Convent Primary school. I remember at Primary school, we were so well trained by the teachers. When I was at school, I was serious and studious. Because I was tall and was good at games, I was in the school netball team. Loh Soo Har was also in the netball team. Mrs Loh was the netball teacher. I joined the netball team when I was in Form 3. The other girls in the team were older. They were in Form 4 and in Form 5. I remember Miss Hew said I was the youngest player in the team. I have good memories of playing netball. We also played against other schools. I remember we were beaten by Raja Perempuan. We played well as a team though.

In Form 5, I was the head librarian for the school. Chan Mei Yong was also a librarian. We did a lot of work with Sister Maureen who was in charge of the library. We organized a big librarian conference with Sam Tet School. I think other schools took part too.

Chan Mei Yong is a good photographer. She used to have a camera and was always taking photos in school. She may have a good collection of those days.

I do remember Main Convent ran an orphanage and the nuns looked after girls. Some of the older girls were tasked to look after us at the end of the school day. They had to lock the back gate of the school after we left. Sometimes when my father was late to pick me up from school, they would ask us to go to the front of the school because they wanted to lock up the back gates.

Outside of school, I would see school friends who lived nearby. When I was staying in the Housing Trust, Fong Sau Mun and Soo Har were also staying in the neighbourhood. We used to cycle to see each other at home. I used cycle to see Violet and Hwee Yeow too. They were living near enough for me to visit by bike.

I passed MCE at Form 5 and went to study Form 6 at St Michael's School. After I completed Form 6, I became a computer programmer and recently I retired. I have two girls, both graduated. I really appreciated the grounding in the English Language from the school. When I was at St Michael's school, I found that our standard of spoken English was better. In what way? We were taught not to use slang

when we spoke in English. I remember I was in Miss Thomasz's class though I can't remember which year it was. It could have been in Form 2. I have been joining the reunion gatherings for a long time now. They do big ones every few years. There was a 40-year reunion too. That one was held in Ipoh.

Photo: Form 2A or Form 3A? (Pao Chien, last row, fourth from right; Ms. Thomasz, middle of third row!)



32. Ng How Ming - Memories of school - October 24, 2019, London

I attended Marian Convent Primary school. I have lots of memories because I used to live with my grandparents in a tiny house on the school grounds. My grandfather was the carpenter for the Main Convent and he had use of the house. The main school building was a long rectangular block with the canteen at one end. School assemblies were held in the canteen area. Each classroom had four big doors. We were sat in neat little rows of wooden desks and chairs. I would gaze at the greenery outside instead of listening to the teacher.

One day, a parked car started to move slowly down the slope towards the field of lalang. A teacher ran out of the classroom, got into the car and pulled the handbrake. She went back into the classroom and we continued our lessons. We had a few exciting fire drills. Bell rings – stop work and run to the bushes. The bushes separated the school grounds from the huge Chinese cemetery.

I remember Mrs Paul. She was kind. Later, she became the head teacher of Marian Convent.

The teachers were strict. I just about memorized the times table to avoid the knuckle rapping with a ruler. I did stand on the chair a few times and also outside the classroom, though I can't remember what I did to be punished.

One afternoon school assembly, I was hot and tired and leaned against a pillar. The teacher called me out "HOW, are you standing!" The whole assembly burst out laughing. I was teased for a few days after.

Oh, the joys of recess time! When the bell rang, we'd run to the canteen. We'd be noisily jostling to buy food, tapping the big jars of goodies with our coins wanting to be served.

In the evening after school, I'd have the whole school to roam by myself until it was time for dinner. The only other family living nearby ran the canteen. Sometimes I'd come across a sobbing girl, upset to be the last one left waiting to be picked up. It was scary for her to be alone at Marian. I'd be delighted to have a playmate and we'd play games like seven stones till she was collected.

During recess time, I went into the bush area with Jin Ee to look for snake's eggs. Once my grandmother had to deal with a snake near the house when my grandfather was out. We did find little eggs on the ground and we hit it with stones. I don't know if it was really snake's eggs. We stopped going in as we were scared of coming across a snake.

When I was not staying with my grandparents, I went to school by taxi. The driver put slats on back seats to cram in two rows of children. I was so squashed that I knocked the door handle and fell out of the moving taxi. I was alright though bruised. When my mother found out, she stopped the taxi service and I took the school bus.

Afternoon school sessions were hot and sleepy. A group of us took turns to buy ice drinks from the canteen during lessons. We had to ask permission from the teacher to go to toilet. So we'd pretend to do that but instead dashed off to get the drinks. When it was my turn, I was caught out by the teacher. Nothing happened to me and that was the end of it.

There was a girl called Maria in my year. She dropped out after Standard 6. She told me they couldn't afford it and she would help her grandparents on the farm.

I liked the enclosure of the Main Convent though it was the complete opposite of Marian Convent. The chapel was a peaceful and serene haven though I was not a Catholic. The orphans would go in for confession with the priest from St Michael's church. My grandfather's workshop was at the front of the school, full of wood shavings, wood and hand tools. Nothing electrical. Sometimes I'd go to see him.

I enjoyed Form 1 and Form 2. Making new friends was fun and easy. The school bus runs extended the socialising time with friends until I was dropped off home after school.

I was in the Aladdin pantomime as the "Demon". My wooden fork prop had big spikes and I did poke poor Soo Har (acting as Mustapha) with it accidentally because the stage lights were dimmed and I couldn't really see out of my costume headgear.

The school encouraged us to create our own sketches and do the shows to raise funds. We worked in small groups and 'produced' little sketches or sang songs. It was a happy creative time.

I helped Jin Ee collect frangipani flowers for the school fashion show themed on local flowers and plants. We cycled to the army barracks outside Canning Gardens where the frangipani trees were along the road. Someone locked our bikes and took away the keys while we were engrossed in picking flowers. It worked out in the end and we cycled home with the flowers.

Teachers who were inspirational - Miss Ng, Miss Thomasz.

Miss Ng was my Form 3 teacher. She was firm, fair and fun in what she did and taught. Energizing to students and the most popular teacher. She organized talks on careers to prepare the school leavers. Miss Thomasz was also the hockey coach. She was encouraging, fostering good team spirit, that every one mattered in the game. Having good teammates made it fun. She taught us to look after the hockey sticks to help us to play better. We bought our own sticks, poked little holes in it and soaked it in linseed oil to condition the wood. I did it religiously and my family thought it was so funny. I would cycle to her home and play with her dog.

Mrs Rose Teh and Christine Lee were Forms 2 and 4 teachers. Mrs Rose Teh was cool and Christine Lee was kind. Sister Fidelma looked stern and we knew we had to behave. At the Aladdin play/rehearsal, she put on a turban on top of her nun's headdress!

The East Coast school trip was unforgettable. The teachers who went on the trip included Miss Ng and two Malay teachers. We slept in schools on desks pushed together. We had to bring our own blankets. We went in two school buses. The buses were ancient even then, with number plates AA and AB. When we passed through kampongs and stopped, a curious crowd of boys would gather around the bus, on bicycles or motorbikes. Once some of the girls were exchanging Pantuns with the boys, with help from the Malay teachers. Going over the mountains to the East Coast, the old buses were straining. Some of the girls got out to race the bus up the hill. We went to the market to buy salt fish and sarongs. One night we slept on the beach to wait for the turtles to wade to shore to hatch eggs.

My favourite subjects were English and English Literature and enjoyed the dancing and singing classes. My weakest subjects were Maths and BM.

I joined the First Aid Society. We learnt bandaging and lifting techniques.

I was allowed to cycle to school and to hockey with Angela, Catherine or Wai Kuen who were living in Canning Gardens like me. I could visit friends who lived nearby or take the public bus to town. Otherwise, my mother was strict. No boys, no parties. Though I did go to a few parties without her knowledge!

I remember the school library fondly. It had a good collection of books and the American Life news magazines. It opened a whole new world to me. I was more interested in reading stories than studying textbooks.

Form 5 was all about the MCE exam when government policy made it compulsory to pass Bahasa. It was like a big dark cloud hanging over me and I spent more time fretting than studying. I was one of those who failed Bahasa. That set me on a course to come to UK and after doing A Levels, trained and qualified as a physiotherapist, thanks to Miss Ng's career talks by a physiotherapist. Later, I changed direction, graduated in law and practised law.

Looking back, our school education gave us a good general foundation. It was all so different back then.

Photo: On a school trip



33. A. Prema, Oct 21, 2019, written at my mother's house in Ipoh

My first memories are of kindergarten with Mrs. Thomas, a matronly figure with a kind and tolerant face. It was also the year in which I was in a terrible car accident with my parents. Dr. Menon, the general surgeon, told my mother, "She's got a cracked skull, I'll do the best I can." I went back to school with head bandages and remember being called "Botak!" Whatever the connection, that was also the year in which I actually realized that our brain and thoughts gave us the freedom to imagine anything we wanted – I vividly remember how that first dawned on me when I was standing in the grassy area where we played just beside the kindergarten classrooms.

I then did Standard 1 followed by Standard 3A with other girls who also had a double promotion; Mrs. Foo was our teacher. I don't remember if it was her, but Convent discipline took off. For misbehaving, some girls got whacked on the knuckles with a ruler; pinched on the cheeks and ears pulled and twisted. We were generally obedient kids in our starched dark blue pinafores and white short sleeved shirts; I remember having to iron those pleats when I was older and hating it when the creases didn't look quite right. My performance in primary school yo-yoed. I think I was then in 4B, 5C and 6B.

We wore bloomers for PE. I loved sports or "playing" as we called it. We had races in the front grounds, running with a partner with our two inner legs tied together or with an egg tottering on a spoon, gunny sack hopping, and charging to the finish line. There was something with baby powder that flew up on our faces and uniforms, but I can't remember what game that was. The teachers used white lime to mark off the lanes when we had races. Those were carefree days albeit within a set routine.

In primary school, the colouring box was my prized possession with neatly arranged rows of pencils that we had to sharpen with each use; there was the small box and the larger box with more colour choices. Later, it was our maths instrument box that took priority; I think we had the Staedtler or Oxford brand, with compass, protractor, divider etc. We also had to use fountain pens and fill them from ink bottles.

Studying became more serious when I entered Form 1 as we had to prepare for the LCE. Years later in graduate school, I remembered how our system involved comprehensive final exams, from two to three years of work, with a lot of writing, analytical thinking and synthesis compared to the objective, multichoice questions that were given in small tests after every few weeks of lectures in the US system. Piece of cake that was, in the US! The education at the Convent really was pretty solid; we had dedicated teachers and were given the opportunity to thrive in academics and in extracurricular activities. My sense of naughty largely amounted to calling our Headmistress, Sister Fidelma, as Sister "Fiddlesticks," of course said only behind her back to a few classmates. Some teachers were family friends and I remember doing better in science because of having Mrs. Karean teaching that subject; she was strict and always prim and stylish in her saree with her hair pulled up in a '50s style bun. Mrs. Chan who taught us swimming and Mrs. Ng Boon Bee, wife of a top badminton champ, were some of the famous names in Ipoh.

Over the years from Form 1-5 (including 3H, 4F and 5F), I remember being in the Girl Guides, First Aid and Science Society, being a Librarian, and playing hockey, running, swimming and also loving the javelin, shot put, high jump, long jump and hurdles that we did at the Stadium. I was average on all of these but especially loved hockey. It invariably rained in the afternoons and as soon as it stopped, I would quickly bike over to the Ave Maria field; alas, only the die-hards would show up. Miss Thomasz

was our coach and we sometimes got to play on the soggy fields. She was also my form teacher in Form 1 and was a great role model: pretty and proper with a no-nonsense attitude.

While we learned to dance, sew, knit and cook as well as do typewriting, I regret that we weren't given the option of learning to do some carpentry or fix fuses and such, that the boys got to do at SMI, ACS and Anderson schools. My mother was a good cook and domestic science classes were a nice complement to learning about "kitchen work." I don't remember if Ms. Lee was my domestic science teacher. Recently in September 2018, I was in Ipoh and able to join a reunion lunch for Ms. Mary Ng with Ms. Lee and Mrs. Yaw; I didn't recognize Ms. Lee and thought she was one of our schoolmates! That's how good she looked. She had brought us some good, old fashioned, coconut hard candies, the ones that were dark brown and cylindrical in shape and in different coloured transparent wraps. Sadly, I learned that Ms. Lee passed away a few months later.

I loved that the Convent exposed us to lots of different friends with all types of skin tones, socio-economic backgrounds, religions, cultures and foods. We visited and depended on each other. I especially identified with the girls who lived around my father's shop-house on Brewster Road. Even so, there were definitely cliques and the in-crowd, whom I envied. But the key driver for many of us was to do well in exams and to climb that ladder towards becoming a teacher, doctor, lawyer or engineer, those revered professions back then. In addition to schoolwork, my father ensured that I had after-school tuition classes in Forms 4 and 5 for Malay, Maths and Science and those did make a difference.

Sister Maureen was our headmistress when we completed Form 5. I still have her letter with my School Leaving Certificate. She described me as "quiet and hardworking." I suspect she wrote the same letter for many of us. Finishing at the Convent and moving on to St. Michael's started the next phase. Looking back, I'm grateful for the solid upbringing that we had with hardworking parents and many very dedicated teachers, growing up with clear moral values and an appreciation and tolerance of diversity.

Photo: Penang 1971



34. Law Jin Ee by WhatsApp chat with How Ming on Nov 8, 2019

From How Ming: Looking through the School Yearbook of 1971, you were very active in school. Did variety shows, in the Aladdin pantomime, fashion shows and of course you were in the 5-girls band

WEEGALS (formed with schoolfriends). You were the Blue House Captain, a prefect, in the hockey team, in the English Language Society and on the Editorial Board of the school magazine.

I was in the Girl Guides too, 7th Company. I was the leader for two years running. In Form 5, I was the Assistant Head Prefect.

I did my basic nurse training (in UK) and went on to midwifery and went on to do mental health training. Because of my mental health training, I was asked if they could second me to mental health service for children and adolescents. So from there, I was thinking it was so important for a child to have good self-esteem, inter-personal skills. Because those were the things that were bubbling all through my school life and I think having the confidence to perform on stage and public speaking and all that, it helped me later on when I was involved in planning and delivering training for all the community staff on mental health issues.

Because mental health for kids was not terribly high profile then but it is *now*. There were very few people who were doing mental health for kids in the health service. It was mainly for adults. I was very geared to the mental health of kids because then I was involved with doing preventative work like going in to school and teaching on emotional wellbeing, talking about why they need to talk about emotions. We did loads of things on self esteem. It was not just therapeutic work I was doing. We were also doing lots of preventative work to harness the good mental health of kids. I was dealing with kids from ages 4 – 16 year olds. When I think about it now, maybe that was why the passion was there because I had such good experience of school life.

And of course, I was dealing with young kids, I had to get involved with parents. And I started doing courses in parenting schemes – parenting classes. So I was more and more immersed with problem kids and families. I think having the inter-personal interactions in school helped me with my career because I was able to communicate and I was able to understand or want to understand the emotional well-being of the kids. I think that was the bit that gave me the most job satisfaction when I was dealing with school age kids.

I think as well probably that was the development of my sense of humour that has carried right through to my adult life. It was actually in school – playing the clown and acting silly, you know. So all the skills I learnt I was able to transfer to my adult life and in my career. Because of a very, very happy school experience all the way through.

I don't think there was anything I disliked about school. I wasn't very good in Maths. And because of that, I used to copy from people who were willing to let me copy their Maths homework. Esther would copy what I had copied. There was a mistake in the long workings though the answer was right. The teacher, Mrs Selvamany cottoned on to it. So when she handed back the exercise books to us in class, we had to go up to get it from her – she said – these two, the blind leading the blind! Basically, she had sussed us out because it was happening so often!

So that was the only thing I didn't like about school. Not because of anyone but because of Maths. I just got it into my head that I wasn't any good at it.

The most influential teacher was Miss Mary Ng. From Form 1. I joined the Girl Guides and she saw me through right up to when I left school. She was the one who inspired me to take an interest in English Language and English Literature. She was the guiding light for leadership skills when I joined the girl

guides. That's how I just took on responsibility becoming House Captain, prefect, in all the different activities I was involved in.

Miss Thomas was our hockey coach all through my secondary school and she installed in me the concept of team working, discipline, punctuality and commitment to turn up on all sorts of weather conditions. I soon found out as the penalty was an extra 2 rounds of sprinting around the perimeter of the field sometimes on my own. I applauded Miss Thomas for her time and commitment to keep our spirits up as we were always beaten by our no. 1 enemy MGS! Happy days.

Photo: One of those "Happy, Carefree Days!"



What other things could I think of? Basically to a certain extent I went to school because it wasn't always academically interesting, I was more interested in the social aspects of school life. I didn't want to miss out on what was happening with who and who. My parents used to say, you leave the house before it's light before 7 and you don't return home till about 7:30 pm because of all the after school activities I was involved with. So that was quite a typical school day for me.

And those people that were from school that I was close to, we still remain close because of the positive experience of these relationships and they have carried through into our sixties. That's quite amazing! Like meeting up with you again. Other than the WEEGALS, the five of us, we are still very much in touch. There are also other girls still maintaining that closeness.

Our school music teacher, Mrs Tan entered WEEGALS into a Holy Talente. When we got to the venue which was St John's Ambulance Hall, we felt very intimidated when we were faced with various church choirs, some up to 42 members strong which had various musical instruments to accompany them and there we were with Angela strumming on a guitar and just the 5 of us singing our hearts out to Prayer of St. Frances. At the time little did we know we were in different categories and to our surprise we came second in our category.

The lane between our school and Poh Gardens a florist establishment was a dread to use as there were various reports of sightings of the local flasher. I must admit there was one incident when I was oblivious of the flasher's presence as I was so busy talking as we cycled down this lane.

This has sparked another memory of mine which took place in the first few months of secondary school. I used the back gate to cycle home at the end of the school day. Before setting off home we often purchase snacks and ice balls. On this one incident I had noticed a Trishaw man who was parked by the

railings and he had one leg resting on the top of the railings as he sat on the seat of his Trishaw and in doing so exposed his private parts as he had baggy shorts on. I reported this to the nun who was sitting by the back gate. The following day I was approached by a plain clothes policeman as I came through the back gate to ask me if I could point out the culprit (the trishawman) I was able to do so. I was very impressed that the nun who was on guard duty must have taken note of my previous days report. As I had always thought she looked bored and uninterested as she usually had her knitting or crochet with her and never made eye contact let alone any interaction with us mere pupils. From that day onwards I realised my impression of her was wrong and that she did take heed and took action of my report of the previous day's incident. I made a point of greeting her at the end of the school day and found she was capable of breaking into smiles on the odd occasion and that she did care for our safety and wellbeing. My only regret is that to this day I do not know her name as I didn't have the nerve to ask her and to thank her for keeping an eye on us at the end of every school day for 5 years.

Just thought of another incident. I was part of a dance group to represent an Italian version of the Tarrantalia. I was the female partner to Wai Kuen. Because I had such a short hair cut at the time; I wore a long black wig to look the part with my tambourine in one hand. I was traumatised over this period of time as it was so hot and with an itchy scalp and the fear of losing my wig whilst we made these dance manoeuvres. I'm sure I had nightmares over this.

From looking all that you did at school, you really blossomed in school. Would you say you're an extrovert and one of the noisy and naughty ones at school?

Oh yes, if I could get away with things, I would. Just for the hell of it!

Being given positions of responsibility at school like prefect, did that change you in any way?

On being appointed to Assistant Head Girl, Miss Hew called me to her office for a pep talk (at the time I didn't know what it meant). She told me that I was the people's (i.e. students) choice but not the teachers' choice as I was deemed too unruly by the teachers and so it was time I was a role model to justify my new appointment. A wakeup call for me.

My self-confidence grew more and more as I went into school life. It made me realize the importance of self-confidence when in my career, I was dealing with kids that were self-harming, kids that were physically, emotionally and sexually abused. So I saw the ugly side of that part of kids who had been deprived. But at the same time, I was also very interested in ensuring that those other kids should have good mental health. Because social interaction also helped me with problem solving skills which you need to have for adult life.

Is there anything you recall from your days as editor for the school magazine?

Yeah! We had to be selective as to what should be on print. So that was quite difficult because we were asking people to contribute for various things and then to include all the different clubs and all the different sporting events, everything that was happening. And trying to give everyone equal exposure.

And trying to please different personalities that were in that editorial team. And then having to go back to the teachers for guidance and for what was relevant and what was not.

When you had to choose, you had to be quite blunt and say this article is not good enough, come up with some more! Those were the times when I probably learnt diplomacy and being able to go back to people and say – Sorry, but this isn't good enough. So I was the "bad news person" and that was difficult. I think they gave me that role because I had the confidence to be assertive and not being too aggressive.

The main thing is I developed the confidence to think this is what I should do and consider people's feelings, negotiating and using diplomatic skills and being tactful at a very young age.

Sometimes I would question myself, am I capable, am I a good role model? You're voted in as a school captain, a Girl Guide company leader. Do people really trust me? They would have since they voted me in. The self-reflection and being aware of my strengths and weaknesses started during the last few years of school and carried into my career and life.

Anything about Marian Convent school that stuck out in your mind?

The girls I got to know at Marian Primary school, they definitely carried right through to secondary at Main Convent. Of course, we got to know the girls from Main as well.

Were your parents strict or did you have a lot of freedom?

I think my father was the one who said, "Here are the front door keys. If you want to use them again, prove to me that I should give you the front door keys again." In the beginning I thought I have the front door keys, I can go home anytime I wanted. But because of what he said, I had to be responsible, so I was home by 11.

And I remember as well some of the parents of schoolfriends that I got to know, they would say "If Jin Ee is going, then you can go." They seemed to think that I could take care of my schoolfriend, if we were going to any parties.

My parents had an open door. Everyone came to the house. So, in fact, they became like 'daughters' of my parents as well because they'd seen us right through school. Actually they remained close to my parents as well. And I suppose my parents knew there was a close knit five of us girls, we would take care of each other. Having the friends from school foster this caring and being responsible, to be a good friend and help and we would look out for each other. So because of that socially, I didn't think there was much restriction because my parent were thinking I know these four girls from the time they were little and they know that we are very close and we wouldn't let anything wrong happen to each other. Because of the strong bonds, I didn't think my social life was curtailed in any way.

Photo: Teachers Ms Kuan (Form 1A, replaced Ms Molly Lau who retired) & Mrs. Rose Teh (Form 2)



35. Tan Lian Hua (married name Adams) by Whatsapp chat with How Ming, Nov 12 2019

In Primary school, I was in Marian Convent. The biggest memory I have of Primary school is that I skipped Standard 2. I went from Standard 1 to Standard 3. That's how I joined your year. The teacher told my mother, your daughter is too smart for Standard 2, have to go to Standard 3. *(Laughing heartily)*

My mother had taught me A,B,C before I started school even though my mother only had two years of schooling in Chinese school. Can you believe that!

And it was also my mother who encouraged me to re-sit my LCE exam in Form 3. And she was the one who encouraged me to come to UK. She was the biggest influence in my life.

I failed my Maths in LCE. My mother got me a Mandarin schoolteacher, Mr Chew to teach me. My Maths grade went from F to A! He taught me how to apply the formula in Maths. Once I understood how to apply, I could answer the questions and I always got it right. After that, I really enjoyed Maths at school. I went through the whole Maths book and did all the exercises.

My best years in Main Convent were after I failed LCE and joined the Form 3 year (that I should have been in if I didn't skip a year in Primary school). I used to be very quiet in school before then. I came out of my shell, became more confident when I found I could do Maths. I was the Red House Captain in my class, I was the teacher's pet! Whenever the teacher was not available in class, I took over. That was a very enjoyable experience. Form 4 and Form 5 years were good, and I think Form 5 was my best year. I was in Arts class and Mrs. Mukundan was my Form 5A class teacher.

Maths became my favourite subject. Before then, I liked History. I can't remember the teacher's name, she made it interesting. I find that English taught by Mrs. Mukundan was pretty good. Cookery lessons – I really enjoyed. So whenever we made something at school like sago pudding or fried rice, I'd practise on my family and do it at home.

Also, I was very keen on handicrafts, sewing, needlework, working with raffia, making apron, crochet, knitting. Everything I started at school, I'd never finish. My mother used to say to me, "You are no good, you always start but you never finish!" So when I came over to England when I was 18, I told myself to finish what I started. I made a thick V-necked jumper (much faster to finish it) for myself in the hospital. Then I wanted to show my parents that I could do it, to prove that I could do something to the end. I sent for their measurements. I knitted my mother a *cable* cardigan and also, a diamond patterned one for my father.

I did all the compulsory activities like PE, dancing. Swimming was compulsory. I did learn a little, can float. Otherwise I find swimming challenging as I am scared of the water. I don't remember joining any other sports. I joined the Joyful Vanguard from Forms 3 to 5.

What did I enjoy doing at school? I enjoyed teaching Maths to my friends when I became okay in Maths. What happened was my other friends would ask to borrow my book to copy the Maths homework. I used to say, "no copying, I'll teach you". That's how I think I got the title 'Mother Hen' from my friends. They used to call me that behind my back for a lot of years until I found out from them about ten years ago when I went back to Malaysia.

I remember the school fund raising events like the school funfairs, 'food fairs' within school where each class had to do something. In Form 5, we made 'har mein' (prawn noodles) to sell. Someone made a big pot of soup. I have some photos of the food fund raising events with all the little things that we did to sell.

I got on very well with Mrs. Mukundan. She was very caring, a very nice lady and a good teacher. Whenever I went back to Malaysia, I used to visit her, that was back in the 80's after I had my children. I would try to visit other teachers too, like Miss Thomasz.

There was not really anything I disliked about school even though I was very quiet in the beginning. I enjoyed the cafeteria, sometimes my mother would give us food to bring to school. There was an orphan, I think her name was Mary, I can still picture her. I used to talk to her a lot. I don't know what she did at school. She used to walk around at school. D'you remember whenever we started school for the year, there was a bookshop in school where we used to buy our books? The lady in the shop would give us the books. I think Mary used to work there.

I used to attend the religious studies, I got to learn the Lord's Prayer. And since I've been a Christian for the last 6 years, I'm very glad for what I learnt as I knew it from school.

I ended up having two sets of school friends, year of 1972 and 1973 from re-sitting LCE. So that's how I remember you How Ming. I don't know you but I recognised your face. Same for the other girls in the year of '72. I don't know all of you but I recognize the faces. I still keep in touch with school friends.

Looking back, I find the last year of school the most memorable. I was riding my motorbike to school with my helmet. I loved wearing my visor as it allowed me to see out but no one could see my face except for my two pigtails flying about. Before then, I was cycling to school when in Form 3. When I was 16, started biking, I was happy with the freedom and independence I had.

Subsequently, a year after MCE, I came to UK to do nursing, all thanks to Chooi Yatt. My mother told me to follow Chooi Yatt who was in UK doing nursing.

We had very good teachers. And I am very thankful for all the guidance that I had at the school and for what I am now. Without the 'O' Levels, we wouldn't be able to come to UK.

36. Violet Foo by Whatsapp with How Ming on Nov 12 2019, and 2015 group chat in Dalston

I was in Main Convent Primary school. My earliest memories are of learning cursive writing. I used to write all my 'c' backwards and Mrs Foo would rap me on my knuckles. Painful as it was, it still took me quite sometime to get it the right way round but eventually I did master it.

I can't remember much about Primary school though I do remember playing Jesus in a biblical play about Jesus crossing the river, etc, put on by the Secondary school. Gina and I took turns in playing Jesus. I think we were chosen for the role as we were little and not too heavy to be carried across the stage. I found it fun and amusing which is why I remember this.

It must have been in Secondary school that we started swimming lessons at Ave Maria school. Mrs Chan was the teacher who taught us swimming. I remember one time there was this Japanese swimmer coming to train us for competitive swimming. It was tough. I persevered for a while and then I left.

Then off course there was our Aladdin pantomime. Who can forget that! I was one of the dancing girls and I thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. Mrs Clelland and Miss Thomasz were very supportive and encouraging, the cast were all friends and there was great camaraderie all round. There was also fashion shows and Talentimes during my time at school and I enjoyed participating in all these too. Miss Ng was my Akela in the Girl Guides. I enjoyed my time with the Guides, taking part in the games, the singing and everything, even though I had problems with the more complicated knots! I was in the Girl Guides up to Form 3.

Mrs. Rose Teh was my favourite teacher, that was in Form 2. I believe Catherine and Nalina were also in my class that year and if memory serves me right Cathy was Captain of my House i.e. Green House.

As far as lessons are concerned, I loved poetry and I kept my school poetry book , 'A Choice of Poets' until today. I loved reading and enjoyed English and English Literature at school. I was absolutely dreadful in Art and can only do matchstick figures!

After my LCE, I left Main Convent in the beginning of the Form 4 year. I came over to UK early because my sister was in the UK, also to get my uniform, etc. and generally to get ready for the start of the school term in September.

Yes, school days were wonderful, and I made a lot of good friends. When I left, it was sad to leave all my friends behind but at the same time, at that age, it was exciting too to go abroad. I'm so glad that now, a lot of us have re-connected.

Looking back, we received a very good foundation which has stood us well throughout. I mean I left school at sixteen, I came over and went straight into another school and I had no problems settling down. And that is all due to the education we have received, the good values and independence the teachers have instilled in me.

CHIJ has done a wonderful job with us and we will always be grateful. However, for the new generation, education has got to evolve with the times and move forward, making it relevant for the modern era. May our Alma Mater continue its wonderful work for generations to come.

Photo: Form 4F with Ms. Christine Lee



37. Woo Yoke Peng from Dalston, London on June 6th 2015

D'you remember there used to be first Mass of the month? We'd go to the St Michael's church across the road. And we were not really interested, we were more interested in looking at the boys from St Michael's School.

I remember we had dancing classes with Miss Ng. We did ballroom dancing and the waltz. And we had singing with Mrs Tan.

I liked the talent shows we had in the school. That was very good.

I was a chatterbox in school. Miss Lee, who taught us in sewing class would call out “Yoke Peng!” whenever she caught me chatting. She used to slap me on my arm and tell me off - you must be doing blah blah blah. I remember the needlework we did in class. I made a housecoat.

Who else? There was Mrs Chong who was teaching health education. I remember, you know why? I used to get caught out for chatting. Luckily I liked Health Science. And every time Mrs Chong asked me a question, I was able to answer even though it seemed I wasn't paying attention to her as we were all chatting. And every time she'd say “Yoke Peng!” She'd throw a book at me too.

I loved Chemistry as well too. She was teaching Chemistry and Health Science and I knew all my answers.

I was in Form 5C, a class known for making a lot of noise. As for the teachers – they really surrendered. We were often standing outside our class because we were caught chatting. I would get it because if somebody sitting behind me started talking to me, I had to turn around to respond.

My daughter had the same treatment from school! At Parents' Day, the teachers would tell me about it and I'd just put my head down, thinking to myself, I went through that too...

To me, strangely, it felt like we had a lot of freedom within the Convent school. During school, you sort of practise how to behave. I remember when you go out of school, you have to take off your school badge. You can't be seen going around Ipoh town with your school badge or else they would know which school you came from. I wish I had kept my school badge.

The religious side of Convent school, talking about sin and confession and all that. Oh my God! Guilt! I was carrying a lot of guilt.

I think ultimately religion has good and bad. All the Bible bits that I read are so meaningful. Sometimes it talks to me. And sometimes if I have a rough day or a really trying day, I have this daily scripture that I read - it talks to me and somehow suddenly you feel not so bad after all. And you read it with meaning. It's so hard when you read “to forgive those who trespass against you” and to mean it. To say that every day is nothing but actually to practice it and also to trust the Lord. By trusting the Lord, you have to let go of everything, it's so hard. But when you hit 60, you can let go.

I think we all go through normal years of rebellious behavior. I started mine when I was 18 and that's why I came to England. It's part of formative years. Whatever had gone wrong in my early life or whatever had shaped me to be a better person and all the things I grew up with in Malaysia and all my periods that I have gone through in life has shaped me to be for what I am and I'm quite grateful.

I'm really thankful. Every morning I wake up I'm thankful to be alive. I look at life more philosophically. Sometimes I'm able to tell young people, oh, just chuck it out of the window – you just sleep on it. I wouldn't have been able to do things like that when I was younger.

I must have loved school but I didn't make an effort when I was in my Form 5 because I was too distracted. I think the Convent school has given us a really good ground education. If we hadn't had the

7 O' Levels, I couldn't have come to England. When I hear about people having one O'Level, is that all? We had to do 9 subjects and how did we do it? I often have nightmares thinking about that.

38. Florence Chow Yin Mooi, from a chat with How Ming at Vietnamese Food Café, Liverpool Street, UK

Looking back, I consider my schooling days at CHIJ as the best part of my life. It's the place that helped define me to what I am today, making new friends and developing long term friendships. Until now when I remember the things that happened in my schooldays, I still smile. I enjoyed those days from walking to school with a group of neighbourhood friends, making detours halfway for breakfast at hawker stalls, having fun and laughter along the way. There were always free time meeting up with schoolmates, after sport lessons, eating local food and going to the cinemas.

Those memories of taking part in the school talent contest (not that I made it into the qualifying round) and joining the School Pesta Choir which won second place in the national competition was one of my proudest memories.

Schooldays would not be the same without the occasional ruler rapping on the knuckles for spelling mistakes, reprimanding from the teachers for doing badly at swimming, and making silly mistakes in domestic science practical lessons. Last but not least was playing pranks to get out of science lab lessons. And of course, the exam times and anticipation of exam results!

I miss my schooldays of being mischievous, troublesome, dumb but CAREFREE!

39. K. Shanbagavalli, Nov 16 2019

I started at Main Convent from Standard 1 with Mrs. Pillai. She was the best teacher in the world, strict, yet animated and interesting. She had a loud and clear voice and made English interesting by having stage acting in the class. I was chatty and she picked me once to be the Wolf and I had to jump up on the table. I was an ever-willing participant.

I lived in Greentown near the school. Sometimes I walked to school with Yogeswari and Selvamani, my childhood friends who lived close by. Another good friend who lived nearby was Puteh. She was so much fun at school, such a happy person.

In fact, I could see the school's back door right from my home and see whether it was open or closed; those days when I had a slow start, I'd run fast to get there in time and the Sister would hold the door open for me. I would thank her and run in. One nun who sat at the door had sharp features and was hunched. There was a Nun who used to do a lot of knitting, sitting there morning and afternoon. I think different Nuns took shifts.

When I started school, my father, like other parents, stood there watching for the first few days to make sure I was OK. I remember during the second week of school, when one day, the bell rang after recess for us to line up and go back to class. I mistook and ran straight to class, took my bag, ran out of school, and ran down Po garden lane. I didn't know what I was doing except for thinking the bell rang, school was over, and it was time to go home. There was a guy cutting grass at the side of the lane and we had been warned to be careful. I was so scared, walked quickly past him, came behind the back of the school, and crossed Jalan Abdul Jalil. My Mother saw me from the kitchen window and was shocked to

see me coming home. I told her, "I don't know, the bell rang, and I thought it was time to come home." I went back to school after a few days with a lot of coaxing.

In primary, I remember there was an orphan girl who was like an office assistant, and she used to bring my welfare card which allowed me to get free uniforms and books and a card for recess. We had to line up and get milk and drink it up in front of the Nuns and we'd get bread with marmalade jam which tasted so bitter. Whether we liked it or not, we had to finish drinking the milk and eating the bread. Until today, I don't like cow's milk and marmalade jam! But I am grateful to the school for that nourishment.

A few days ago, I had soup mee with my sister at a restaurant near my house; as I was eating it, I said, "This reminds me of our Convent school soup mee with the taueh!" Back then, it was ten cents a bowl.

I used to wonder each year when during the first day of school, they would ask each student to stand up in class and answer, "What does your father do?" Why was that important, were they going to put us in different categories? Or, maybe they wanted support from the fathers.

Form 1 was a real transition from Standard 6. The Home Science class was interesting, but I didn't like needlework, the teacher was loud and demanding. Cooking was good, we had a nice teacher. Years later, I bought the same brown ceramic mixing bowl that we used for making cakes because I had such good memories.

My Form 2 teacher was slim, tall, and elegant; her daughter was a good ballet dancer. I think it was Mrs. Too. I also remember pretty Mrs. Lian. I used to see them in later years when they came to TNB to pay their bills. I was at the counter at the time and would say "Hello" to them and remind them that I was a Convent girl and they'd say, "How nice of you to say Hello."

We had scripture with a Nun, also tall but with a big nose. Later on, my daughters were surprised to hear that we learned the scriptures and the bible at school.

Art class was fun with Mrs. Ng Boon Bee, I still love to draw and paint.

I started sports with badminton in primary school, but it was hockey all the way from Form 1 because I used to play with my brothers who later became national players. I really wanted to play netball but it was full and so I went for hockey. Miss Thomasz was wonderful. I always had high regard for her as our hockey coach. We trained at Ave Maria Convent's field. I used to walk there, rain or shine. In Form 2, the junior team inter-school competition was at Ipoh Padang and I remember one of the games was against the MGS team. It was an evening game and it was pouring. I was practically in tears and told my mother, "It'll be a walkover if we don't show up." My father kindly took me on his bicycle, holding his umbrella, and we did have our game. But it stopped after halftime because the ground was too soggy.

After Form 5, I wanted to train and play for Perak state. If my memory is correct, Vimala Chelliah who was a national player was coaching the girls' team in Taiping. It was not possible for me to continue with hockey because of having to relocate to Taiping.

Mrs. Saravanan taught Bahasa; she was good but extremely strict and out of fear, you studied hard. We had a little book in which you had to write 5 words a day in Bahasa; the book itself was branded with three 5's on the cover. We had to take the book out every day to write and memorize those 5 words.

We called it our “roti” book because it was like the book we used to keep track of our daily bread purchases from the bread man.

Mrs. Mukundan was my form teacher for Form 4 and 5. Her husband, an accountant, later was my boss when I was working at Perak Hydro. Mrs. Mukundan was very good with English and English Lit and I improved so much.

Mrs. Selvamany was my Maths teacher. I started to love the subject because of her. She was a super teacher and a lovely human being! Her hair style always fascinated me, it was a small bun and I loved the way she carried herself in a saree. She reminded me of the movie star, Saroja Devi. Over time after our schooldays, her guidance and advice have been important to me. For the longest time, it was only these two teachers who called me by my full name as I had pet names and abbreviated names with family and other friends.

Not forgetting the chapel, I loved it. For me it was a comforting place to go and sit especially during recess. I never had any intention to convert even though we went for mass and joined the Joyful Vanguards and went to church and took scripture classes. One time, I almost took Holy Communion until someone said “Wait, you’re not a Catholic, you can’t do this”. I was just curious about what they were giving each person in the mouth!

None of the Nuns forced religion on us. When we are strong in our own beliefs and religion, we have no fear to learn and experience other teachings. What we learn from our home and from our school and from whoever comes into our lives over time, helps to mould our lives in the right path, making us stronger in our own journey. I still have a small bible in the house from schooldays.

Thank you to all my teachers, friends and the Convent school.

40. Harjeet Kaur, by Whatsapp from KL to Prema in Ipoh, Nov 18 2019

I started in 1962 at the Main Convent in Standard 1. In Standard 5B, we had a very sweet teacher, I think it was Ms. Ng. She would close her eyes as we did prayers for the morning school, “In the name of the Father....”, and that really gave us a good start to the day. I remember Mrs. Tan in Standard 6B; when she was angry, she would flick the books and she wasn’t bothered where it landed! I think she taught us Maths and she was a good teacher. Maybe she got angry because she didn’t understand why we didn’t get it. Lee Lee Lan was also in our class.

I don’t have many memories from Forms 1-3. Life got tougher as I wasn’t very science inclined but I was in the Science class; Physics and Chemistry were challenging. I remember Miss Hew taught us Additional Maths and Christine Lee taught us Chemistry.

I was in Form 4G and then 5G with Nalina and Divis Kaur. Gomathi Kuppusamy and I sat next to each other. Our classroom was upstairs towards the end of the floor.

I was not sports’ inclined and did the basic things we had to do like badminton. When I was younger, perhaps in Standard 1 and 2, they had a little play with a few of us and I remember going to school all dolled up. My Mum stitched a pretty white frock for me for that play. I have eight siblings and I remember that they teased me for getting all that attention.

Divis Kaur and I were Punjabi, and we went to the same Gurdwara temple. At the time, I was staying at the quarters in Greentown and the temple was nearby. There was no two ways to it, my parents expected us to attend the service on both Wednesdays and Sundays. I remember how Divis teased me one time. I had 2 special suits to wear for temple. Divis would come mostly on Wednesdays which was the smaller function with fewer people. We would be so confident wearing our suits and she teased me about always wearing the same suit every Wednesday. I said, "It's because you never come on Sundays so you don't see me in my other nicer suit, my Sunday best!".

After the SPM/MCE exam, I didn't pass BM and so I went to the UK to do nursing. I specialized in midwifery. I returned to Malaysia in 1978 and worked at Fatimah Hospital until 1980. When I got married, I moved to KL. I got involved in work and life that I didn't attend any Convent functions and lost contact. My sisters and I had a get-together last year and one of them told me that she had seen her Ipoh alumni. That motivated me to find our classmates. I'm so glad to contribute to this memoir and to reconnect with everyone.

Photo: Form 2 with Mrs. Rose Teh



41. Liew Chooi Yatt, videochat with How Ming, Nov 20, 2019

I was at Marian Primary School and went onto Main Convent Secondary. I'm going to talk about Primary School in comparison with what happened in Secondary School. For example, when we could not answer a question or we didn't do whatever the teacher wanted us, in Marian Convent, the punishment was to go and stand outside the classroom. The teacher thought it was a punishment to make us go outside but in fact, we went out to the tuckshop to buy snacks!

In contrast, in Secondary school, in Miss Hew's Maths class, we were frightened when asked about all the Maths formula. If the answer to the first question was wrong, you had to stand up. If you got the second question wrong, you had to stand on a chair. If you got the third question wrong, you had to stand on the table. Juniors passing by saw this and it can be humiliating!!! It's a harsh and uncalled punishment in my opinion. Whereas I don't think in the Western world, you have this kind of punishment. She was not our teacher though once in a while, she would stand in for our teacher. Whenever I saw her coming into our class, I was so scared and stressed.

The other thing I remember is our class of '72, we were always so talkative and we always get punished. I don't think any other class was punished like us. We had to stand out in the field at 2 pm in the sun, maybe it was for half an hour. It was really harsh as we were in the afternoon class.

Another incident was to do with going for Miss Ng's Dancing class. We used to walk down the corridor to the hall for dancing. Sometimes we could not help talking and making noise in the corridor. She would punish us by sending us back to class and make us walk back to the hall.

I was a Girl Guide for the whole of my secondary schooldays, from Form 1 to Form 5. The activities took place every Saturday at the Girl Guides hut, in the field behind the school. We helped to raise funds to build a new Girl Guides hut by doing odd jobs. A few of us or sometimes in pairs, we would cycle around to peoples' houses especially in the affluent areas to see if there were any odd jobs we could do. They would give us money and sign our book when the jobs were done. The next year round, we would remember which where the houses that would give us odd jobs and which houses would set the dog after us. We'd mark those houses and tell ourselves not to go to this one or that one. Sometimes we cut the grass, sometimes we cleaned up pantry and things like that. So the Girl Guide Hut that you see in Ipoh, we were the ones who helped to build it by raising money. I have fond memories of Girl Guiding time. It was fun. We learnt a lot. That was what shaped us in our adult life. Not to be "scaredy cat!" When I went to England to do nursing and when I went on holiday for the first time, I was brave enough to go on my own.

Another incident I remember. I was doing the Lifesaving swimming test in the swimming pool at Ave Maria School. After the test, I cycled back to Main Convent by taking the short cut through St Michael's church. I was in a hurry to get back to attend Mrs Cho's Biology class. In my haste, I tore a bit of my school blouse when I was putting it on. My hair was wet and I arrived in her class in a disheveled state with a torn blouse. She was very concerned and kept asking me if I was alright. I just sat calmly in my chair, said yes and looking at her puzzled by her concern. Looking back in hindsight, she must have thought something bad happened to me. Back then, in my innocence, I had no idea.

In those days, I was a busybody at school. I would go to the other classes and get to know everybody. My regret is I didn't pay attention to the names of the girls. Now when I count my school friends, there are those that I cannot remember their names. But maybe when I look at their picture I can recall their names.

I enjoyed the friendship, enjoyed each other company and doing things together, having fun. We went camping, we had jamboree. We learnt to cut bamboo, build gadgets, build bridges. All those kind of things. It was us girls who built it, without the help of the Boy Scouts. Basically it's the friendship. It's just like now, we meet up, spending time and have lunch together.

42. Anne Kok from Sydney, Australia, Nov 20 2019:

I was brought up by my Aunt and cousin who still live in Ipoh. Actually, I was there last week for just two days and then went back to KL to Sydney. It was a short trip. I'll be making more trips in the future to see them. I wasn't able to get back for the reunions because our tax year is the end of June and that's usually when the Convent reunion events are organized. Now, I may be able to make it and am looking forward to seeing our schoolmates again. I've kept in touch with a few like Violet Foo in UK, Siew Lian in Australia, Siew Ngoh in Vancouver, Juliana Kathigasau in KL, Joan Li in Melbourne and a little also with Sook Mooi in US/Iowa, and, Chew Eng Lim in NZ. (Skype as well as Whats App is such a wonderful

thing!!!)

From Kindie, I remember there was a group of us together with Mrs. Thomas, and the whole lot continued to Primary school and all the way to Secondary. Later, Gina and a few of us had motorcycles where we rode everywhere in Ipoh town.

Some of us were very naughty and some were good but the whole class always banded together no matter what. I remember the teacher who taught us Malay. There was a classroom at the corner next to the Teacher's staffroom and you could only enter in two ways. What we did was lock the gate on one side, so she had to go around to come in from the other side. The whole class got punished for that. To learn Malay, she used to give us words and sentences to remember. We used her name and said "*Sara, Mrs. Sara, mesti bersara cepat.*" She got quite angry with us about that too!

One year, Christine Lee, who taught us Chemistry and Maths, got upset with us too. Coming close to the exam time, we had so much work piling up and when she gave us even more, we yelled at her. She didn't come to teach us till we apologized and begged her to come back. She was quite upset with us that time. She's a very nice teacher. I still keep in touch with her and now, the first thing she asks me is, "Are you as naughty as before? Don't drink too much. Drive carefully" And I reply with a big smile, "That was many years ago"

With Ms Hew, we did Additional Maths. I remember one time she had us walk to the main gate on Brewster Road. To improve our Maths, we watched when cars were passing and we had to add two numbers or minus numbers, each girl going one after the other, at a fast pace. We were so frightened of her. Then we went back to our class to continue our lessons. It's one of the things I remember.

I came to Melbourne to do my University. I worked in KL for a while, and then in '88, I migrated back to Sydney where I got my job. I'm still working, but now with my own business. I studied accounting and as you go up, there's more "bullxxx." Now I run a small recruitment company. I enjoy it and have been working from home for the last year. You can take your laptop wherever you are, and I can work even when I travel.

On the whole, I believe I had a good rounding and education even for a naughty person like me back then. I enjoyed myself except (of course) for the exams. Tell the truth, the friends I made then in CHIJ are still my closest friends. I'm not close & have lost contact with my Uni friends, but the ones from school who I keep in contact with are my best ever friends.

43. Khong Siew Lian, now Honey Bidwell, from town near Perth, Australia, by WhatsApp on Nov 18 2019:

I'm an accountant and do a lot of compliance work and such. I'm not retired yet, I'd like to work for a little longer. I left Malaysia in October 1982. I was working in Ipoh at the Chung Khiaw Bank and met my husband on his working holiday in Ipoh. We dated from April and got married in July. We tried to extend his visa in Malaysia but that didn't work out, so we left. It was hard leaving as I lost my Dad the year before and my Mum missed me but she migrated here in 1985. I visit Malaysia now and again for family events, and weddings and such. I catch up with Soo Har, Yim Chee, Angie Peng Choon, Tit Suen, Hoi Yong and others. I also reconnected with Sook Mooi and kept in touch with Anne Kok; in fact, I talked to her yesterday, it was her birthday; she's over in Sydney. Anne lived down the road and we went for tuition classes together during the Convent days. She came for my wedding too.

Well, I was born in Ipoh in Old Town; we lived in one of the shop houses by the river area. Then my parents moved to Canning Garden when I was about 7, and I started Kindie at the Main Convent and then Primary School at Marian. There were a whole bunch of us little kids, holding hands to walk to class with the Nuns there too. At Marian, it was also good and I keep in contact with many schoolmates like Hah U Lian.

It was exciting then to move to the Main Convent and going into Secondary School. Our uniforms were also different, it was the straight A line and no longer the pleated skirt. The sisters used to measure our skirt lengths from the hem to our knee and we had to make sure they were long enough to not show too leg!

In earlier forms, we had our music teacher who was a Filipino and was also our history teacher. I think it was Mrs. Tan, Mrs. Rosy or Rose Tan. She was strict but great and trained us well and many girls joined the choir. We did a choir competition, but I don't remember where we went. I was the conductor and our teacher was playing the piano.

There was also a Chinese sister, tall and thin with glasses, who used to teach us moral class. That was Sister Mary Michael.

I enjoyed English, and Biology with Mrs. Cho and Physics with Mrs. Loh and Chemistry with Ms. Lee. Sister Maureen was my class teacher in Form 5G. Miss Hew had her office right next to our class and at the change of classes, we'd be talking, and she'd pop in and say "Everyone, keep quiet!" She was strict but really good, teaching us Maths.

Sister Fidelma was always very kind though strict. My memory has faded over the years. I also remember the French sister; it might be Sister Marie Therese. She was cute, with rosy cheeks and I loved her accent. I remember a funny thing one year. I was interested in pen friends and used to write to a friend in France. He wrote in English and I wrote back in English. Being smart, I said I could read a bit of French and he wrote a 2-page letter in French. Well, Sister Marie Therese had to translate it for me. I wrote back to him and said "Sorry, I was trying to be a bit smart. I needed help translating your letter."

44. Cynthia Sek Sin Yu, Nov 23 2019

I remember Mrs. Tan, our music teacher. I really liked singing though I couldn't sing well. We did all the popular songs back then like Elvis Presley's "Blue Hawaii"; Cat Stevens "The Morning has broken" which we also used as a hymn; and the Beatles "Let It Be." Some of those songs were old, from my father's time! Mrs. Tan was a Filipino and I remember she seemed to be pregnant every year; I don't know how many children she had. This was around Form 4 and 5.

Ms. Christine Lee was our Form teacher in Form 4. She was a very gentle person and nice; she taught us Chemistry. The next year, Mrs. Loh taught us Chemistry; till today, I remember that we didn't do well in our trials and she said, "You are all beyond redemption." And, we all passed, and we all did well in our Form 5 exams!

I was in Form 1B with Mrs. Tan, she had very short hair and tanned skin, no glasses. I think she was Eurasian. I think I had Miss Thomasz in Form 2, and Ms. Mary Ng as form teacher in Form 3J. I went for dancing under Ms. Ng. I remember the Sicilian dance and that we went some place to perform, I played the guy's role and my partner was Ho Foo Leng I think. I loved all the dances, the "Dashing White

Sergeant” and the Scottish fling with the *pas de bas*” step. With the ribbon dance, we were crossing back to back and I didn’t see behind me and accidentally hit Tye Lee Sun’s head with the stick! When I was in the UK, we watched dancing competitions and remembered fondly what we had done in school.

In the Girl Guides, we sang “Hurry Home” using Maori words and we sang it as “Poh Kare Kare.” With the Guides, we shouted and sang a lot and went camping. I didn’t get too involved because I also had Badminton training with Mrs. Ng at St. John’s; we were sponsored by the Shell company. We would see the Perak players training on the other side.

The Convent days really shaped me to what I am, my values to be honest and to be a true person. I treasure the friendships I have now with all the girls from way back in school. We learned to support and love each other, even up till today.

45. Diana Lai Siew Meng from Penang, Nov 27 2019:

We were the generation that helped the nation leap-frog to modernization. We also have to look after our parents out of filial piety. We heavily insured ourselves in medical and hospital insurance for our old days. But, in the present days, we get very little help from our kids. We are the generation that is holding both ends while our nation is still bickering over race and religion but not giving back enough to the population that need social support and benefits for the poor and middle class retires. In a way, call it bad timing for when we were born. This was something I shared with our “Ipoh Gals WhatsApp group, Nov 18.”

I was one of those girls who actually dated young, got married when I was 22 and had three boys. In the 90s, I went through a divorce and after that, I married a national from Finland. From then onwards, I was spending a lot of time between Finland and Malaysia. Fast forward to the present. Having retired, we spend about 7 months in Penang, and we are in Finland in the summer months. Life has become mundane but I’m busy with my three grandchildren, a small social circle of friends and a bit of travelling to see the world.

A reflection on the Convent education system from 1962 till 1972. Overall, I cannot say that it was perfect and flawless. It was quite stifling to me. I was underprivileged when young, my parents were poor, and we didn’t have anything to show off at school. I was just an ordinary student, struggling to get an education. The teachers were strict and rigid, and they had control over the students. If you were outstanding and your parents were rich, you could see the difference in their approach. The Sisters who took part in the education tried to instill the Catholic way of life and beliefs into every student; we had civic and moral class, no doubt, but every morning, we had the prayers and we were often encouraged to go to the chapel. Well, what could we say, after all, it was a mission school! It seemed normal back then in the 60s. Now, our society has evolved, the direction of our country has changed, and our national school systems are so different. Recently, I sent my granddaughter to school and I saw the principal standing at the driveway. She was greeting every student who walked through the gate! I was impressed! I was to learn that the school practises a policy of mutual respect. Such a far cry from the convent days! I firmly advocate that religious indoctrination should be taken out of a good education system. Education should teach students to speak up and to think and analyse, not just that the teacher is always right.

That brings to my mind an incident when I felt there was a miscarriage of fairness and justice. As anyone

would recall, there used to be a library in each classroom. One of my classmates had apparently gotten hold of a book from the library and did not plan to return the book. The teacher asked one day, "Whoever has the book, you've got to return it." Next morning as I was walking to the classroom, I saw this girl opening my desk and putting something in. I wondered what she was up to and when I opened my desk there was that very book! I went to the teacher and said, "I found this book in my desk," which was exactly the truth! The teacher did not want to hear my explanation. She punished me and I was shamed, no questions asked. I got bad comments in my report card too and it has scarred me till today. I took an honest approach, but it didn't get me anywhere. I know I have gotten a hard knock and I still remember that nasty incident in my schooldays.

I liked Miss Yan as a teacher; she was soft spoken, and she didn't need a rotan or harsh voice to discipline the students. She tried to understand us and taught us well. I counted myself lucky to have her as my form teacher.

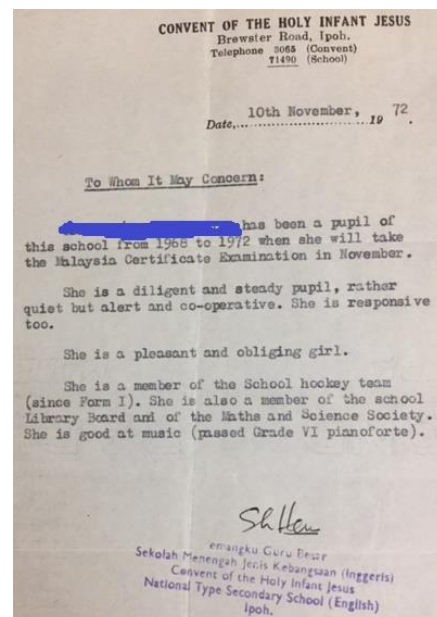
I did not excel in sports, but I do remember our PE bloomers! Chuckles! There was a literary and debating society which I liked a lot too. I enjoyed all the plays and musicals each year! That was fun! That was our entertainment!

The convent education has taught me self-discipline which to me is so important as we grow. When young, discipline was about having your shoes white-washed, your uniform properly ironed, your nails trimmed and cleaned but on hindsight, the good habits formed the foundation of what we are today.

I ended my career when I was about 50. No regrets and at my age now, I don't have billions but that doesn't matter, I have enough. I enjoy my family time and bonding with my grandchildren. The young people rejuvenate me and it's rewarding to see them grow day by day, year by year. Retirement with a bit of travel, a few close friends and a lot of family time is great.

Our Convent school, of course, has a record of producing very outstanding pupils who have carved a niche in their lives and careers and our diaspora is all over the world. Ipoh is where I was born, the Convent is where I was bred, and I am truly blessed.

Photo: Copy of School Leaving Certificate by Ms. Hew



46. Catherine Machado from Australia (June 2020)

I was at Kindergarten at the Main Convent & Mrs Thomas was the teacher. Then I had 6 years at Marian Convent. I remember Mrs Burgoyne (Std 1), Miss Ham (Std 4), Mrs Saw (Std 5) and Mrs Ratnam (Std 6).

1968: Form 1 The Main Convent was sooo big and different after Marian Convent. Then there was the task of adjusting to being at the 'bottom of the heap' in Form 1 after being 'top dog' in Standard 6!!! It was a big complex - there were so many teachers, so many stairs and, horror of horrors, the curry mee was different!!!

I was placed in Form 1B, much to my mother's disgust! So many questions to answer – why wasn't I good enough to be placed in Form 1A??!! What do you expect with a surname like Machado??!! It was also a time of getting to know the 'new girls' – those who had been at the Main Convent in primary school. I clearly remember that Tsai Pao Chien sat next to me at the back of the class – such a studious person. Even the class teacher (Eurasian lady - can't remember her name) commented on her behaviour when she performed a class appraisal. It was pretty brutal – she didn't mince words. I remember Gina Leow and I being singled out as being immature because we laughed a lot and were jovial. The teacher meant well, I'm sure, but I feel she would've benefitted from a workshop promoting positive language!

My most embarrassing memory in Form 1 was failing (0/8!) to identify phrases and clauses in English grammar!!!! To this day, I still can't!

I recall being thrown out of a Domestic Science sewing class because my excuses of forgetfulness were wearing thin! It was woeful making a pair of bloomers on hand operated sewing machines, of which there were only about six for a class of forty! All that lining up for nothing!

But I did enjoy the cooking side of things – my hands were rapped for using a metal spoon to stir a sugar solution on the stove top – “don't you *know* you have to use a wooden spoon??”!! I don't care about these niceties these days! But how I wish I could remember how we made ondeh-ondeh!

Singing classes with Mrs Tan in the hall – small lady, loud voice! She would be thumping away at the piano exhorting us to sing with feeling. What a lady! And I still have my song book and I still sing some of the songs occasionally! She was also the History teacher and I relished learning about ancient civilizations.

The plethora of snack stalls at the back of the Convent where the school buses picked up the students. Ice balls, kacang puteh, rojak to indulge in whilst waiting for the bus!

1969: Form 2 The afternoon session! Our cohort was so big that we were relegated to the afternoon session. Mrs Rose Teh was my class teacher in Form 2B. She was a breath of fresh air and so right for a class of adolescent schoolgirls! She wasn't strict but she had that knack for getting the best from her students.

Friendships had been forged between the 2 groups (Marian and Main Convents) and I remember it as a halcyon year. One teacher that I clearly remember was Mrs Karean – can't remember what she taught (!) but she was tall, stern, poised & elegant in her sarees. She left the school at the end of the year and the class presented her with a gift of perfume which touched her immensely.

The class also presented Mrs Teh with a gift of perfume at the end of the year – I remember her being moved to tears. Both gifts of perfume were beautifully and artistically wrapped and decorated with fresh flowers by Anne Dourado's mother, Jean – a talented floral artist.

1970: Form 3 By some quirk of fate, I had managed to scrape into the 'top' class and Miss Rose Yan was my class teacher. I was in Form 3K which involved another long and pointless explanation to my mother about the K aspect! Miss Yan was soft spoken and a sweetie.

I remember being involved with the Literary & Debating Society – my group was named Chekov (as suggested by Pao Chien). Hockey was my sport of choice – the teams were ably coached by Miss Cynthia Thomasz and our main aim was to defeat the MGS team! I received a salient lesson in tackling from the wrong side when I received a blow from a hockey stick that was raised a tad too high and it connected with my brow bone. I had quite a shiner which I valiantly tried to hide from my mother as she would've pulled me out of the sport. I have wonderful memories of hockey practice, cycling to/from Anderson School grounds with How Ming, Wai Kuen, Siew Yet and Angela.

Crunch year – the all-important LCE! I remember interminable tuition lessons after school to improve my maths and science (not at all my forté) and Bahasa. Mrs Angeline Loh taught Art for a few lessons and I had my first encounter with screen printing. I thoroughly enjoyed it and thought that I had done pretty well – the examiners thought otherwise and gave me a Pass!

1971: Form 4 I had done reasonably well in the LCE – all those tuition classes helped. Terbaik in English II, History and Geography; Kepujian in Maths, Science (thanks to the late Mr Khek Chau), Bahasa and Art. I would've loved to have continued with History and Geography but my mother thought otherwise. I was placed in Form 4G (Science stream) and Diana Au was the class teacher – another small lady with a loud voice! She had studied in Australia and she used to regale us with tales of her experiences there. Mrs Cho taught Biology – we marvelled at her clothes – minis were in and she had great legs. A terrific Biology teacher.

Miss Hew was absolutely scary. I recall her expecting us to know our 16 times table!

Mrs Chan was our uncompromising PE teacher.

My most excruciating memory of Form 4 is of the monthly tests. I really wasn't meant to be in a class of brilliant students!! Kok Pik Lai always duxed the class. And my tuition classes just could not turn a sow's ear into a silk purse!

But I remember Soo Har sitting next to me on one side and Agnes on the other. And Nalina, always wandering around dropping pearls of wisdom! I clearly recall her telling me that the only year in which her dates aligned was when she turned ten on 6.6.66!!! I still remember Nalina's birthday to this day!

Extra-curricular activities continued. A group of friends and I orchestrated a variety show with skits, music and a fashion show highlighting local fruit/flowers. I was invited to be a model in a local designer's fashion show at Sam Tet School. And Mrs Subramaniam organised a group to perform a play in a play competition – it was called 'The Bloaters' and Khong Siew Lian received the award for Best Supporting Actress.

1972: Form 5

Sr Maureen was the class teacher. It was a crunch year for me. My Bahasa was pathetic and no amount of tuition was going to make it improve. I knew that I was going to fail Bahasa. I had applied to migrate to Australia and notification was received in January 1972 that my application was successful. I am

looking at my CHIJ Leaving Certificate as I write – I was admitted on 8.1.1968 and I left on 7 February 1972.

What I do remember is a contingent of classmates and friends, bidding me a tearful farewell at the Ipoh Railway Station. So many happy memories!

I am happy to say that with social media, I have managed to re-connect with some classmates from Ipoh. Agnes Edward (nee Chong) and I keep in touch. Various folk see my posts on Facebook & it's fun to see what others are doing with their lives. Soo Har and I seem to have similar political views! It was great to see familiar and unfamiliar faces at the KL reunion in 2015.

A warm thank you to How Ming and Prema for their vision and fortitude in compiling this wonderful and lasting memoir.

C. About the Convent Schools in Ipoh

1. **Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (Main Convent School) - A Brief History**

<https://db.ipohworld.org/view/id/973>

Location: Brewster Road (Jalan Sultan Idris Shah), Ipoh

The school was founded by Mother St Victoire, supported by Mother St Anatoli, Assistant General to the Priests' Assembly in Paris. The school was opened on 7th January 1907, by Mother St Anatoli, at a small house in the compound of the St Michael's Church, with only eight students. Initially, it had only two teachers, Sister St Anne and Sister St Stanislaus, headed by headmistress Sister St Prudence. Open to both boys and girls, the enrolment of the school increased to 98 students by the end of that year.

The government then contributed \$7,500 towards the construction of the first timber building at Brewster Road, with chapel, school office and Sisters' quarters. Over the years the Sisters have been of various nationalities, Irish, French, Italian, Eurasian and Malaysian. They served as teachers in the school, nurses in the orphanage (later known as Asrama Bintang, Home for the Needy), supervisors of the boarding school and of course, housekeepers, gardeners, cooks and the like, necessary to run the establishment. At one time they all lived in the Convent House, but in 1992, with numbers down to five, they took up residence in Pasir Puteh South.

The finest buildings in the Convent complex are the front block from 1927 (facing Brewster Road), the middle block from 1929 and the back block from 1935. The blocks are all linked together by a maze of corridors and covered galleries framing quadrangles for sports and games. The front block presents a dramatic facade with Neo-Gothic arches and trefoil shaped window openings with timber shutters. A third of this block was originally occupied by a magnificent chapel with high ceilings and columnades, illuminated with five panels of exquisite stained glass, which has since been removed. It was a sanctuary for prayer and meditation, which celebrated its last Catholic Mass in 1991 to mark the retirement of Sister Chew, the last missionary Principal of the school. The chapel complex was regularly used for music and other activities including Friday night prayers by a Christian group. (It was closed for a few years and newly re-opened in 2018/19 with monthly masses, COGA meetings, etc.)

Four students passed the Standard Seven Examination in December 1909; and one candidate for the Junior and two for the Senior Cambridge Examinations in 1915. In response to appeals from parents, in 1910 the Convent erected a Hostel block to which pupils of all denominations were admitted.

In December 1913, with the opening of St Michael's Institution, the boys were moved to SMI and the convent became a 'girls only' establishment.

Mother St Marcellin became the Principal in 1922, and brought the school up to par with other Convent schools in Malaya. The curriculum was aimed at preparing students to become future good wives and mothers and to this end, as well as the normal scholastic subjects, included social skills, involvement in welfare work and excelling at handicrafts and needlework. In 1927 and 1929 two extensions to the school had to be made to cater for the ever-increasing number of pupils and in the 1930's the curriculum started to concentrate more on academic achievement - a sign of the changing status of women in the community.

During the Japanese occupation the building was taken over by the invaders and used first as a Nippon Go Teachers' Training School and later as a *Gakko* (camp). Closed for three years and eight months, the school reopened on 27th September 1945, just 25 days after the Japanese surrendered.

1947 marked two milestones in the school's history: Science was included in the curriculum for the first time, setting up of the laboratories being managed by Sister St Oliver; on 21st May that year the first Old Girls' reunion took place and their Association COGA (Convent Old Girls' Association) was formed.

The 1950's brought many changes: in July 1950 the students were divided into houses ("red, yellow, blue and green") for the first time to encourage participation in competitive sports; on 3 February 1955 the first school magazine "Via" was published; in 1959, the first Board of Governors was set up; at an unknown date the school became known as "The Main Convent, Ipoh" to distinguish it from sister convents that were being established, these being partly funded by functions put on by Main Convent.

In the 60's and 70's changes continued: in 1965 Tarcisian Convent, housed and eventually took over some of the classes as Main Convent could not handle the ever increasing numbers: despite this, afternoon school had to be brought in at the beginning of 1968 due to lack of space; in 1976 Malay replaced English as the medium of instruction and in 1978 the first batch of form three students sat for the SRP examination.

In December 1991 a major change took place when Sister Maureen Chew took optional retirement from the post of Principal, which she had administered since 1973. Her services to the community had been recognised a full ten years earlier when, on 18th September 1981, the Sultan of Perak had awarded her the Pingat Jasa Kebaktian (PJK). She was replaced by Miss Khoo Gim Keat in January 1992. The administration by missionary sisters had ended after 84 years!

2. **Ave Maria Convent School**, <https://db.ipohworld.org/view/id/766>

Location: Jalan Lim Seng Chew, Ipoh

The school was founded in 1938 by Reverend Mother Pauline Legrix (1899-1988) a pioneer educationalist, as the 'Chinese Convent' and its first premises were in the Catholic Centre at Brewster Road, just one block away from the 'Convent of the Infant Jesus' (Main Convent) and offered girls an opportunity to gain a Chinese education.

During the Japanese Occupation the school was closed but in 1945, immediately after the war, Reverend Mother Pauline restarted it as 'Convent Teik Siew' (Convent for the Education of Ethics) which occupied part of the Convent of the Infant Jesus due to lack of suitable classrooms elsewhere. However, by 1948 the number of students had increased to a level where new premises had to be found and the new school, named 'Ave Maria Convent' was born, on the corner of Jalan Chung Thye Phin and Jalan Lim Seng Chew. Initially there were 12 classrooms with pupils from Standard 1 to 6 under the new Principal Sister Thomas Foo.

In 1950, the Primary School was started with 16 students and in 1952 there was another landmark when the first batch of students sat for the Government examination - the Junior Middle Three - in Chinese. Lower Secondary education was established in the school in 1950 with an initial enrolment of 16, who sat for the Junior Middle Three examinations two years later in Chinese. In 1957 the school status was changed from Missionary School to a fully funded Government school.

In the years that followed, Ave Maria Convent underwent several expansions. A swimming pool was built in 1962 from the proceeds of a funfair; in 1963 a 3-storey block was constructed encompassing 10 classrooms, a library, 2 science labs and a canteen. In 1965 the pre-existing building was renovated to include 2 more classrooms and a domestic science room above the canteen. A year later this was expanded with an art room and another domestic science room added. The third phase of the school's expansion was launched in 1975 with the construction of a 2-storey block. A new library and two science laboratories were included in the new block. In 1983 the fourth phase on the school's expansion commenced. The new 3-storey building built housed 11 classrooms, a teachers' lounge, a prayer room, a counselling room, a science lab and 15 toilets. The offices in the school were also upgraded. The last major undertaking came in 1995 in the form of a new school hall, which upon completion was named in honour of Dato' Chin Pek Soo. For further information, please go to the following link:

<http://www.smjk.edu.my/school/index.php?schid=23>

D. NOT THE LAST WORD YET!

We hope you enjoyed this initial collection of *our* school memories. Please contact other schoolmates from the Year of '72 who would like to share their stories and have them contact us. In that way, we can expand the compilation of experiences as a record of our times for future generations and as a tribute to ourselves. A big "Thank you!" to school friends and teachers who took part in the project and for your wholehearted support without which this would not have been possible.

By: Ng How Ming and A. Prema
Our email contact: howmingng@gmail.com; prema1600@gmail.com
Date: November 2019

Photo: A tribute to Rev. Mother Pauline, the "Building Mother"



REVEREND MOTHER PAULINE
OUR SUPERIOR FROM 1945-51. 1957-66

A TRIBUTE

MANY of us cherish the memory of Mother Pauline, who during her terms of office in Ipoh rendered innumerable services to the school. If it had not been for her, our school would not be what it is today. Indeed, it was a regrettable loss to us when she left to take up a new appointment at St. Margaret's Convent in Bukit Mertajam.

During her years here the school progressed tremendously. Marian Convent in Tambun Road and Tarcisian Convent in Silibin were built, improvements were made, wherever possible, to our Brewster Road premises, and new blocks were added to Ave Maria Convent, largely with the aid of funds raised by annual fun fairs which she so energetically organised. Another project which she successfully concluded was the building of the swimming pool at Ave Maria for the use of secondary pupils in all the Ipoh Convents. However, to her disappointment, Reverend Mother Pauline could not, in spite of earnest and persistent efforts, get permission from the Ministry of Education to set up a Sixth Form class in the school.

Although she had many administrative duties and problems, Reverend Mother found time to take a very real interest in her pupils and staff, never failing to show concern for their well-being. Her roots, she used to say, had grown in Ipoh, and yet when called to serve elsewhere she thought only of doing God's will. Today her kindly eyes look down upon us from the life-sized photograph which hangs in the main Convent hall, and we can well imagine the same benevolence in her heart for us, her Ipoh children.

Photo: Message from Sister Fidelma for the Convent's Diamond Jubilee in 1967

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRINCIPAL



THIS is a solemn occasion—a Diamond Jubilee. It means that our school has reached its sixtieth year of life, when it is fitting we should pause and count our blessings, while it is natural to rejoice in the achievements that have been won.

As a diamond has many facets, so has modern education. Each one of them contributes to forming a beautiful whole, and so our aim is to form individuals who will be truly “whole” persons. The past decade has witnessed growth greater than ever before; we trust it is not in numbers alone, but in comprehensive quality as well.

In the following pages you will read how the original Convent has “overflowed” into new schools around Ipoh, which in their turn have flourished and are already filled to capacity. Though these, our “sister Convents”, are necessarily separate from Brewster Road, all are very closely linked in one spirit and purpose.

Our Boards of Governors have served us unobtrusively and well. To their members is due a special word of grateful appreciation.

I avail of this opportunity to greet all our past pupils, very specially those who have left us since our last — our Golden — Jubilee. Wherever you may be, you are remembered with affection, and this historical issue of our Magazine will serve to strengthen the old ties.

I wish to congratulate the present pupils, represented by the Editorial Board, who have so enthusiastically taken up the task of presenting the school record. They could scarcely have succeeded, however, without the aid of competent teachers; and herein lies an example of the unity that inspires.

May our Divine Patron ever guide all associated with our school in the past, the present and the future.

Sister Fidelma

Photo: Reunion with Mrs. Mary Sands (our Ms. Mary Ng) and her husband, Mr. Chris Sands, Ms. Lee (domestic science teacher), Mrs. Yaw and schoolmates, September 2018



**Photo: Reunion with Mrs. Selvamany and Mrs. Yaw, October 2019
(Joo Sim, Weng Yee, Prema, Kamaliah; Photographer: Choon Wan)**

