

Dato' Tan Boon Lin

“UM is in My Heart, Education is My Soul”

By: Wan Zul Azzlan bin Wan Jusoh



Dato' Tan Boon Lin

In this edition, the editorial board had the opportunity to track down one of the earliest Alumni of University of Malaya (UM). His determination to participate in the event organized by IAC, Hi-Tea “Thanks for the Memories: Touching Base with Alumni” in May 2012 with his beloved wife (Datin Wong May Lian, also Alumna of UM) gave us the chance to reconnect. A visit was arranged for us to visit him at his residence located in Petaling Jaya on 18 June 2012. His name is Dato' Tan Boon Lin.

He was born on 12 September 1927. His birthplace is Penang but he is now living in Petaling Jaya. He is blessed with three children and seven grandchildren.

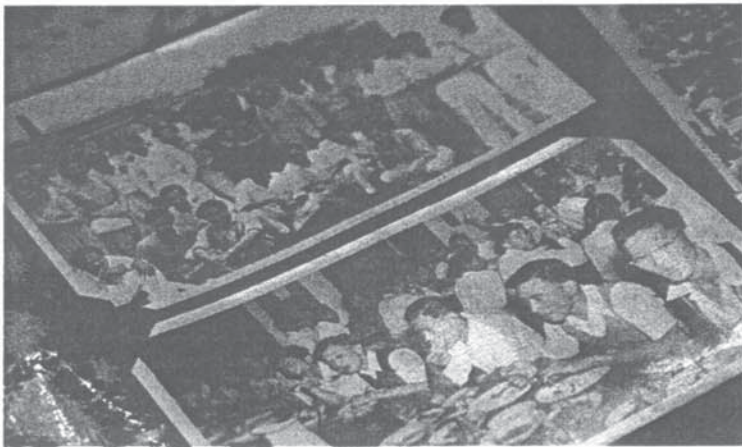
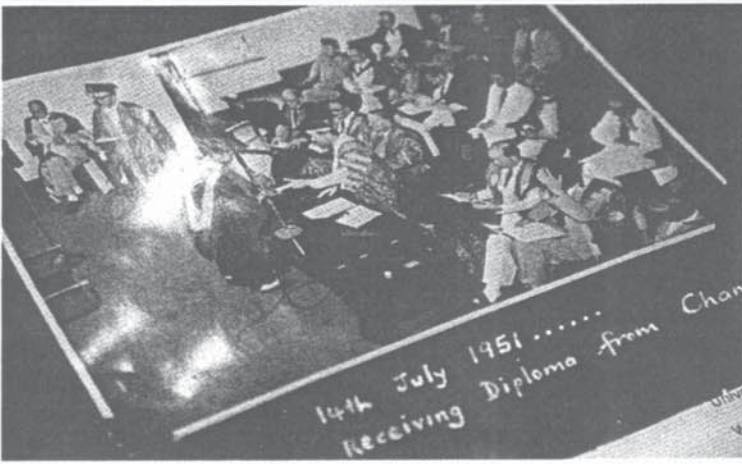
Dato' Tan Boon Lin had his primary education from 1933 to 1938 at the Anglo Chinese School, Nibong Tebal, Penang (Pulau Pinang) where his father was a member of the teaching staff. He comes from a family that places importance on education. In 1939, he continued his secondary education at the Penang Free School. His secondary education was interrupted

by the Japanese occupation of Malaya during the Second World War. He resumed his studies at the Penang Free School in 1945. His efforts in the pursuit of knowledge saw him in 1946, successfully sitting for the 'University of Cambridge Overseas School Certificate' and consequently being awarded Grade 1. He applied for and was offered a 'Malayan Union Scholarship'. It was a source of pride and satisfaction because not all Malaysians had the chance to get it. With the scholarship, he was offered the opportunity to pursue higher education in Arts at Raffles College, Singapore in 1947.

His experience in pursuing higher education at that time began with the long journey from Penang to Singapore. Very soon he found himself on the train heading to Singapore. It was about one day's travelling, starting with Penang to Kuala Lumpur in the day, and at night, from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. The journey was indeed an unforgettable experience for him as it was his first train journey south of the border of the state of Penang. At Raffles College, he studied English, Economics and History. One of his more prominent lecturers during his time was the former Vice Chancellor of University of Malaya, YM Royal Professor Ungku A. Aziz who taught him Economics. At Raffles College he and the other students had to adapt themselves to a new system of learning. Students listened to lectures by lecturers and followed up by referring to reference books in the College Library. The capacity to do follow-up work independently was essential to guarantee academic success at the College. Dato' Tan liked to play table tennis and was involved in the Economics Society.

The University of Malaya was founded in 1949. He was one of a small group of students in the Arts faculty to receive the degree of Bachelor of Arts at the University's first Convocation in the year 1950. The prominent educationist, the late Aminuddin Baki, who after Malaya gained independence was the first professional head of the Ministry of Education, also belonged to this group.

The highlight of his career, in the field of education, was to serve in his former school - the Penang Free School. This he did in October 1951 after he successfully completed his Diploma in Education course at University of Malaya. He served for three years as a Graduate teacher and in October 1954,



Clockwise from right. With VC

With wife: Datin Wong May Lian

Convocation Receiving Diploma

Memories in UM

returned to the University of Malaya for an Honours' course in History. He reported back to the Free School in June 1955 after completing the course. In August he was promoted and transferred to High School, Malacca. In 1959 he was promoted Headmaster of Gajah Berang Secondary School at Malacca and in 1961 he was appointed Headmaster of Sultan Abdul Hamid College, Alor Setar, Kedah.

In August 1963, he was appointed Headmaster of his former school, Penang Free School. During that time, he felt very proud to have the distinction of being the first Malaysian and also the first 'Penangite' to be given the honour to hold the post. It looked like a case of 'home sweet home'. He served as Headmaster there for five years. He was the headmaster when the school celebrated its sesquicentenary (150 years) in 1966 and had its most distinguished Old Boy, Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman as the chief guest of honour. In the year of 1969, he was promoted Director of Education for the state of Pahang. He served there till May 1974, after which he was again transferred to Penang to hold the same post. Like all 'Penangites', he was happy and proud to be able to serve the State of Penang. However, after two years he was promoted Chief Inspector of Schools (Ketua Nazir, Jemaah Nazir Sekolah) Malaysia in the Ministry of Education. In 1981 he was transferred to head the Division of Technical and Vocational Education in the Ministry of Education

and in 1982 he joined a team from the Ministry of Education to The World Bank in Washington, USA to negotiate a loan for the construction of six Polytechnics in Malaysia.

In 1982, at the age of 55 he officially retired from government service. He then was offered the post of Director of Student Affairs at Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman. He accepted the offer mainly because it gave him the opportunity to work once again with students.

After a long and illustrious career for a period of 36 years as an educationist, Dato' Tan is now retired and spending much of his time helping to take care of his wife. He still keeps in touch with current affairs at home and abroad through reading books and periodicals and surfing the net. And he looks forward to being invited to reunions with his old students from the schools where he has served and also to invitations to functions organised by the University of Malaya for its alumni.

This year's Convocation ceremony of the University of Malaya was very significant both for him and his wife as it raised to another level their relationship with their alma mater. He and his wife were present at the University Convocation ceremony on 6 October 2012. It was a unique occasion for they were both present to witness their eldest grandson, Timothy Cheng Tsin Jien, receiving his scroll for the degree of Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) from the Chancellor of the University. Timothy's convocation must have seemed to be, for Dato' Tan Boon Lin, like "Deja vu".