100 Inspiring Rafflesians

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Tan Guan Heng

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Foreword

I thank my good friend, Tan Guan Heng, for requesting me to write the foreword to his excellent book. I wish to make three points.

First, I wish to praise the author. Tan Guan Heng and I were classmates at Raffles Institution. We had many common friends and common interests. As a result, we became close friends. Our friendship continued during our undergraduate years at the University of Malaya (in Singapore). Although we were in different faculties, we were comrades in the University Socialist Club. We were very seized with the great political issues of the day. We were young and idealistic and we wanted to build a better, a more just and equal world.

Just after completing his degree, Guan Heng suffered a serious setback. As a result of detached retinas, which was hard to cure in the early 1960s, he lost his sight, first, in one eye, and, subsequently, in both eyes. Guan Heng's friends rallied to him, boosted his courage and morale, encouraged him to learn Braille and to find a way to make a living. Due to the help of supporters, including President S. R. Nathan, Guan Heng ran a bookstore, located in the premises of the National Council of Social Services, for several years. Subsequently, he moved it to Plaza Singapura but unfair competition from the big bookstores there eventually forced Guan Heng to close the store.

In recent years, Guan Heng has tried to make a living as a writer. He has published two novels which were well received. He was looking for an idea for a third book when I proposed that he should try writing a book of non-fiction and suggested the topic: 100 Inspiring Rafflesians.

Second, I wish to praise Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' Secondary School and Raffles Junior College. Few in Singapore would dispute the fact that the Raffles trinity occupy the apex of Singapore's secondary education system. They occupy the top of the mountain not only because of RI's longevity but because all three institutions are based on

merit and have succeeded in recruiting many of the most talented boys and girls of Singapore, especially those from humble families. I have always admired the fact that RI is indifferent to race, colour and social class. What gets you into the school is your ability. Once in the school, you are taught by some of Singapore's best teachers and empowered by the school's heritage, tradition and values. RI, RGS and RJC seek to inculcate in all their students the culture of excellence and the spirit of public service.

Third, RI, RGS and RJC have produced many inspiring Rafflesians, men and women who have distinguished themselves in their careers and in their service to the nation and the world. They include three Heads of State, Yusof Ishak, Benjamin Sheares and Wee Kim Wee; and two Prime Ministers, Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. In picking only 100 out of thousands of inspiring Rafflesians, Guan Heng was faced with an impossible task. I do not envy him. He has bravely chosen his favourite 100 and I respect his choices.

The book has been carefully researched and written in a clear and interesting style. I congratulate the author and hope that the book will be a bestseller.

Tommy Koh
Chairman
National Heritage Board

Preface

The idea of writing *100 Inspiring Rafflesians 1823–2003* was first mooted by my old friend and classmate, Prof Tommy Koh Thong Bee. He urged me to undertake this monumental project.

The book, which spans 180 years, can be used as a resource guide to Singapore's biographical literature. It should also be of interest, not only to Rafflesians, but also to students and researchers of Singapore's social history. The history of the three schools, Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' School and Raffles Junior College, is inextricably intertwined with Singapore's development from a British colony to an independent nation. RI was founded in 1823, only four years after Singapore was founded.

Rafflesians have a proud tradition of public and community service. They have distinguished themselves in the arts and sciences, in the community, and in the areas of defence, diplomacy, education, finance, health, industry, politics and sports. Pioneers in their own right, they have made significant contributions to Singapore's emergence from a Third World entrêpot to a First World nation. The Rafflesian diaspora has also found its niche in the world.

The 100 profiles are arranged in alphabetical order. I had to cast my net far and wide to encapsulate them, because of the magnitude and historical perspective of the book. Some profiles have been included because they are colourful and unconventional. Several Rafflesians, who ought to be featured in the book, declined to be included.

My grateful thanks go to *The Straits Times* and the National Archives for their assistance in my research. I am grateful to the members of the Advisory Panel for their encouragement and support — its Chairman, Prof Tommy Koh Thong Bee, Prof Tan Ser Kiat, Wong Siew Hoong, Bob Koh Chin Nguang, Deborah Tan, Winston Hodge and Cheng Soon Keong. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Chew Boon Keng,

Dolly Sinha Davenport, Stella Kon and Jenny Soh for their meticulous research; and to Dr Rosemary Khoo for her patient and painstaking editing. My interviewees have also given me some rare insights into their own character and personality. They have also regaled me with interesting, and sometimes intimate, anecdotes about themselves and about other Rafflesians.

Writing *100 Inspiring Rafflesians* has been a great learning and enriching experience for me. I am privileged to be given this rare opportunity to write my *magnum opus*, which has taken me three years. It is my modest literary contribution to my *alma mater* and to Singapore's biographical literature.

Tan Guan Heng

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Tan Guan Heng