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SPEECH BY PRESIDENT WEE KIM WEE AT THE ANNUAL DINNER  
OF THE OLD RAFFLESIANS' ASSOCIATION AT THE WESTIN PLAZA  
ON SATURDAY, 5 JULY 1986 AT 7.30 PM

I am happy to be in the company of fellow old Rafflesians tonight. Although my association with Raffles Institution was all too short, it has not diminished the special bonds one develops with the school attended in one's youth.

This year marks the 163rd anniversary of the founding of Raffles Institution in 1823. The Old Rafflesian Association (ORA) established 100 years later. It brings together ex-students not only of Raffles Institution but also Raffles Girls' School and Raffles Junior College, founded in 1879 and 1982 respectively, a unique development.

Speaking of Raffles Girls' School reminds me of the time my classmates and I were robbed of six months by the delayed move of RGS to new premises at Queen Street when we had to "mark time" at Outram School. We were then raring to go to our prestigious new school, if for nothing else but to "show off" that we belonged to the elite school.

To get to Raffles from where I lived at Nelson Road I had to use a tram and then a T-Ford bus, a bathtub-like vehicle that carried only seven passengers. Yet, each bus had to have a conductor, who stood precariously on the steps at the rear. Today, we have 40-seater buses with no conductor.

When we were late for school we had to seek dispensation from the Head Prefect. He was the late Mr Tan Thoon Lip whom some of you from the years of the late 20's will remember. He was a wonderful person, a perfect gentleman. He did not send many of us to detention class. I appeared before Mr Tan once and, as with everyone else, I blamed the bus for my late arrival that morning. With an understanding smile he said, "Please tell the bus not to be late again." With such an understanding Head Prefect, I was determined never to be late again and I wasn't.

The moral of this little episode is that you don't have to be a hard, arrogant and violent taskmaster to discipline a youth. As the saying goes, "you can kill by kindness." For 58 years I have not forgotten the name of my Head Prefect and how kind and understanding Mr Tan Thoon Lip was.

It is the sum-total of such little incidents that occur in one's lifetime that eventually cast the mould of one's character. Most of these occur at school, college and University. This is why they are so crucial to our lives.

Mr Tan Thoon Lip won the Queen's Scholarship award in 1929, the year I left Raffles. On his return from Cambridge he was among the first local men to be appointed to the Straits Settlements Civil Service, the Straits Settlements Legal Service, the Colonial Legal Service, ending up as the first local man to be appointed the Registrar of the Supreme Court. He was, unfortunately, never in robust health and died at the untimely age of 49.

At the risk of spoiling your dinner, I would like to quote from a memorial by the then Solicitor-General, Mr A V Winslow in the Supreme Court in March 1959. I quote:

"Despite his high academic and professional attainments and the high offices to which his character and abilities had raised him, success never turned his head and he was always a shining example of simplicity, steadfastness and sincerity. No one came to him for help, advice or sympathy who went uncomforted away."

I quote again: "To those of us who knew him he was almost like a brother and it is difficult to avoid a feeling of personal loss such as we have rarely experienced before. He worked right here in this very building with many of us both before, during and after the Japanese occupation and his memory, if I may venture to prophesy, will never die."

As long as I am around in this world Mr Winslow will be proven right in his prophecy.

Raffles Institution has produced many great and illustrious men. I admire and respect them all. To me, however, I like to remember the late Mr Tan Thoon Lip as a great and illustrious Rafflesian for his simplicity, sincerity and, above all, his kindness and concern for his fellow men.

The ORA Dinner is a long-established tradition, uninterrupted except during the war years. This annual get-together has kept alive the fire of the Rafflesian spirit. It is an opportunity to indulge in a little pleasant reverie, to recall and relive the happy times we spent together in school.

To have turned out, as you have done, in such a show of pride in your alma mater says something for every Rafflesians' need and desire to preserve those precious

links with the old school and with schoolmates. You look forward to renewing old ties, running into long-lost friends, to recalling old memories, above all to acknowledge a common association with a great tradition and our debt to schools, teachers and principals who have contributed much to our personal development and well-being.

Being an old boy of Raffles Institution I would have had liked to follow closely the events and activities of the school and share the joy and pride of its achievements. But, circumstances were such as to make this difficult. My 34 years as a journalist, when I worked an average of 12 to 14 hours a day, followed by 10 years of absence from Singapore prevented me from doing a few things close to my heart

For those of you who were fortunate to be able to participate in the glories and achievements of your alma mater, I know you must feel proud and happy.

The existence of an old boys' and old girls' association, therefore, helps to engender among its members not only a palpable sense of camaraderie and comradeship whenever you meet under happy auspices such as now, but also an abiding interest in the welfare and continued pre-eminence of the schools and their present torch-bearers.

I am told that the ORA has long been committed to just such an objective. It has continually sought ways to assist the schools in maintaining and enhancing their academic and sporting achievements. In this respect, the Old Rafflesian must each ask himself how he or she can contribute. The schools will find that certain needs in carrying out their educational programmes could well be filled by approaching a specially-qualified member of the

ORA. The individual student with a financial problem, for example, can be assured of timely assistance if there are members who may have been similarly assisted in their time and, therefore, know how important it is to receive an education unburdened by financial worry.

An old students' body represents a wide range of resources on which the school organisation can draw. Old Rafflesians go on to acquire higher qualifications, establishing themselves in government and industry, and carving out distinguished careers in the various professions. They are natural examples for young people just starting out in search of a career. They can make their expertise and skills available to the schools in ways that will make them even better educational institutions.

The Raffles' family of schools has had a significant impact on the history of the nation and there is good reason for all of us to feel a sense of pride in being a part of it. I would like to see it continue to make an even greater contribution in the years ahead. I wish the Schools every success in the future and the Old Rafflesians' Association the very best in its endeavours.

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