

Goodbye, Garfield

(29 October 1943 – 21 February 2005) *by Dr Tan Cheng Bock*

I first got to know Kah Poon well, when we were drafted into the national service. We were among 12 others from my graduating class of 1968. We were army room-mates at SAFTI. I remembered Kah Poon was chubby and at times clumsy. He could never scale the wall on his own during training and always needed our support. However, he never shirked his military training under the Israelis and did well.



It was obviously a mistake to draft us in. We got into trouble with the army authorities and were given the

option to leave after six weeks of training. We left in not-so-pleasant circumstances. For that, we could not get employment in any government ministry, including the Ministry of Health, although we were bonded to serve.

So, we became family practitioners – by accident. Together with Dr Neo Eak Chan and Dr Tan Kok Soo, we formed a loose medical grouping called Association of Medical Practitioners. Till today, the four of us remain strong friends.

Kah Poon was not only our army buddy. He was also a true friend always ready to assist. Up to the end, he never



DR CHAN KAH POON, also known as Garfield to many SMA News readers, passed away at home on 21 February 2005. In this issue, Dr Tan Cheng Bock reminisces fondly about his friend. The SMA News also pays tribute to one of our longest serving Editorial Board Member (since 1987) by reproducing one of Dr Chan's earliest articles from the June 1989 issue.

wanted to trouble anyone, resigned to the fate that he had to go. We supported him till the very end.

Those who do not know him may find him reserved, but he was a fun person to know, always coming up with contrarian views. He wrote well because he read a lot. His articles in the *SMA News* under the pen name of Garfield were tongue-in-cheek essays of what he saw of life as a doctor and a citizen. He had cultivated a strong following of doctors through those interesting, and at times, controversial essays.

He lived a simple and frugal lifestyle. Never showy, he dressed simply and enjoyed driving his old Volkswagon till the poor car gave up on him. He enjoyed nature and the parks, and loved to tend to his small neat garden at home. His love for taking long walks found him at my doorstep one Sunday morning. It was a joy to share breakfast with him that morning. Once a while, he invited old friends for simple home-cooked dinners. I enjoyed the simplicity and

informality of this gathering of old friends.

His patients loved him because of his frankness and honesty, and many of his poor patients will miss his generosity. Very ethical in his approach to medicine, the medical profession and Singapore has lost a very good doctor.

His great love, Elizabeth will miss a good husband and friend; his children, a good father. To the three of us – Eak Chan, Kok Soo and I – we will miss a great army buddy, a great partner in medicine and a very good friend.

Bye, Kah Poon. Rest in peace. ■

About the author:

Dr Tan Cheng Bock (MBBS, 1968) is a family physician and Member of Parliament (Ayer Rajah). Dr Tan is also an SMA Honorary Member.