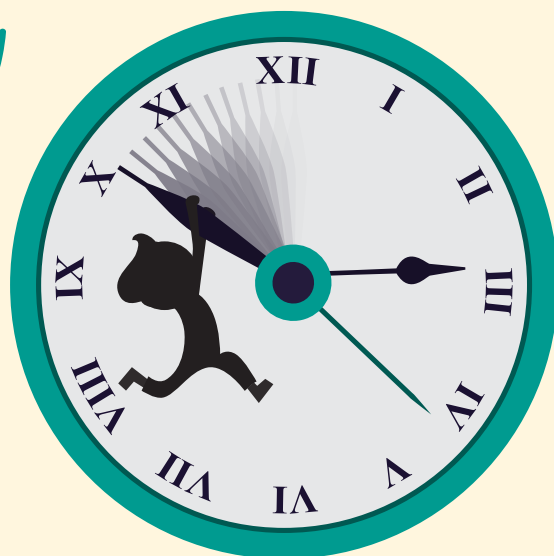


Travelling Back in Time



During our childhood, we form many unforgettable memories that we carry through our lifetime on earth. In this series, we invite four doctors to each share distinctive events that occurred during their formative years which have impacted their lives in one way or another.



Dr Chie Zhi Ying

Dr Chie Zhi Ying enjoys freelance writing and singing. She writes for *Lianhe Zaobao*, *Shin Min Daily News* and *Health No.1*. She can be reached at chiezhiying@gmail.com.



My twin sister and I (on the left) at Chinese Garden, Singapore, when we were three years old

"It's double the giggles, and double the grins, and double the trouble if you're blessed with twins." — Anonymous. My family and I would totally agree with this.

My twin sister and I were delivered through caesarean at Mount Elizabeth Hospital at 36 weeks and a few days of gestation. It ended days of dizzying anticipation and apprehension, but this was to be the start of another tumultuous journey.

At birth, I weighed a mere 1.9 kg and looked as frail as a small kitten. Mum broke down into tears — how she wished she was cuddling a healthy chubby baby! My younger sister fared better, weighing 0.6 kg heavier, and was much healthier than me.

I spent that first month in the incubator with all kinds of tubes imaginable plugged in me and it was not until I could feed on my own that I was discharged. Growing up as a child, my appetite was always poor and Mum had a really tough time coaxing me to eat. My prematurity and poor feeding caused me to fall sick ever so easily. Seeing our family doctor became a "favourite" pastime. I remember myself wailing and shaking my head frantically as Mum tried to feed me

a nasty concoction of medications from our doctor. I was nursing a fever or flu every now and then and those disgusting medications became my "staple". It didn't help that being unwell, I was irritable and my parents had to buy me a new toy each time I saw the doctor.

Those were trying times for my parents, particularly because it was their first time (and the only time) at being new parents. Despite that, they were very dotting, patient and supportive. As I grew up, things got better and my dreaded visits to the doctors reduced. My sister and I enjoyed a carefree childhood where we spent our days watching television and playing at parks, playgrounds and beaches. My twin sister is my best playmate and confidante, and there is nothing we don't share with each other.

Fast forward twenty-something years on, that preemie fraught with ill health is now a young doctor. Whenever I see premature babies in my clinic, my heart goes out to them and their parents, knowing how onerous it is for the parents to bring them up. But at the back of my mind, I find comfort knowing that life has its own plans and it is up to us to live it to the fullest. ♦

In the early 1960s, when I was still in primary school, my parents and I visited my uncle (from my mother's family) during Chinese New Year. His name was Dr Choo Jim Eng ("Jimmy" to his friends, I eventually learnt) and he lived in a small, neat bungalow on the grounds of the Thomson Road Hospital. His house was adjacent to the small traffic circle on top of the hill, which could only be accessed by a small road (Toa Payoh Rise) that began from Thomson Road near Marymount.

I was very impressed because there were only two such bungalows. The first was occupied by the then medical superintendent (do I remember somebody saying "a white man"?), and the second was occupied by my uncle. Each bungalow had a small grass garden in the front, with its own private hedge. Without realising that my uncle was the Head of Surgery at that time, I thought to myself, "How well the government treats its doctors!"

I returned to the hospital for postings as a medical student in the late 1970s, and as a houseman in 1982. My uncle was still there in Surgery, by then with Prof Raj Mohan Nambiar. He had long been joined by another uncle (this one was from

my father's family), Prof Lee Yong Kiat, who was simply called "Prof" and was Head of Medicine, ably assisted by Dr Chua Kit Leng (of "tropical sprue" fame) and Prof Fock Kwong Ming. Funnily enough, I don't remember seeing the bungalows any more by then, though I must have driven past that location every day on my way to work.

The individuals whom I have mentioned above were obviously gentlemen and experts in the science and art of medicine and surgery. As a houseman, I was surrounded by them and learnt a lot, both by example and by osmosis down a steep concentration gradient. They also served the medical profession well. Dr Choo Jim Eng was president of the SMA for three terms, he and Prof Lee Yong Kiat were both SMA Honorary Members, and Prof Raj Mohan Nambiar and Prof Fock Kwong Ming were Masters of the Academy of Medicine, Singapore. However, early memory is a funny animal. While I was surrounded by great men who are very well respected and well loved by our profession, it is that bungalow on the hospital grounds that I remember first. It is, to me, symbolic of how much society could value doctors in days past. ♦

I remember the first magic show I watched at the Singapore Indoor Stadium: *A night with David Copperfield*. That was just after I had completed my Primary School Leaving Examination. During the show, there were countless effects, with each of them more astounding than the one before. It started off with close up effects such as melting a cigarette through a coin and progressed to large-scale effects with motorcycles appearing and people vanishing and reappearing. Everyone was amazed.

Eventually, it ended off with David Copperfield performing a flying stunt. It was dream-like. I remember watching with wonder and awe, just

like all the other kids around me. It was stunning. He even carried a member of the audience and with seemingly no effort, he lifted his feet and took off. He was flying, and carrying a lady as he did so. It was truly exhilarating!

From then on, I was greatly inspired to pick up magic and hone it as a craft. During my secondary school years, I started learning how to throw cards, manipulate cards and execute sleight of hand. This passion fuelled my inner desire to learn more about magic. I went from performing close-up card tricks to performing on stage as a part-time professional. Now, it has also become a means of giving



Dr Lee Pheng Soon

Dr Lee Pheng Soon is the Chairman of the Professional Indemnity Committee of SMA. Dr Lee has a Fellowship in Pharmaceutical Medicine from the UK Royal Colleges of Physicians and an MBA from Warwick University, UK. He works part-time as a consultant in industry and part-time as a GP.



Dr Sin Yong

Dr Sin Yong (Dr Syros) believes in magic with a message of hope and love. He seeks to use magic to encourage and inspire others around him to develop the same passion in helping the less privileged. Together, he believes we can create a wonderful world using what we have.

back to society as performances are used to raise funds for the needy. These performances are also themed with a message of hope and love to encourage and inspire the audience. Performing magic is not just about the effects, but also about the underlying message that makes the experience magical and worthwhile.

Never would I have imagined that I would someday be the one performing on stage, inspiring the next generation of youths. Now, looking back, each and every one of my experiences has helped to shape the effects I perform for my

audience. It was truly a touch of magic from Copperfield and I hope to pass it on.

A charity magic show was also held last month to raise funds for the National University of Singapore Medical Society - Christine Chong Hui Xian Bursary, which serves to alleviate the financial burdens of needy medical students during their course of study to become a doctor. An act of kindness from you can mean the world to someone in need. More details on how to donate to this cause-worthy fund are available at <http://www.magicofkindness.org>. ♦



Dr Syros creating a snowing experience



Dr Bertha Woon

Dr Bertha Woon is a full-time general and breast surgeon at her own practice, Bertha Woon General and Breast Surgery, at Gleneagles Medical Centre. She is an advocate and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Singapore, an associate mediator at the Singapore Mediation Centre, and one of the four Associates of the Medical Protection Society in Singapore.

I spent most of my childhood in Bandar Seri Begawan with my maternal kin. Every day was filled with fun because I had numerous cousins to play with and many different relatives' houses to visit. My mother also took me to the beach every Friday and Sunday. The beaches in Brunei were different from Singapore's. In my memory, the sand was fine and silvery. There, I collected a wide variety of seashells, along with a collection of beautiful pebbles polished by the waves. We used to build sandcastles and catch baby crabs. There were no ships at all on the horizon and in fact, very few people on the beach.

However, I came back to Singapore during the September school holidays and discovered that Singapore had **Plaza Singapura**, which to me was the greatest thing since sliced bread as Brunei had no shopping malls at that time. Plaza Singapura had

a space where parents paid \$1 an hour to leave their children there while they went shopping. I loved the place because there was a ball pit (like the one in Ikea) to jump in, cartoons playing on a colour television (Brunei only had black and white television, and not many cartoons at all), crayons for colouring and ice slush in orange and grape flavours. In addition, the basement of the mall had a shop where I got my bento box lunches with tempura udon, shaped rice with pink fish floss and black sesame seed garnishing, carrots cut into the shape of flowers, plus *Anpan* bun for dessert. I loved grocery shopping in Yaohan. The best thing in the basement though, was the wide selection of coin-operated rides that were available in airplanes, helicopters, trains and animal models. I really loved the rides.

I told my parents that I will not return to Brunei. My grand plan was to stay in Singapore to play every day. My father had to scramble to apply for a Primary One spot for me while I gave up places in three schools in Brunei. I got enrolled in Raffles Girls' Primary School, where I had to repeat Primary One because I was underage and also because we studied Malay and traditional Chinese in Brunei, whereas Singapore uses simplified Chinese. This one decision changed the entire course of my life. ♦



This is last photo taken before mum went back to Brunei and I stayed behind in SG because I refused to take the plane back. I said if I missed mum, I'd just look at this photo



A photo taken with my cousins in Brunei