

PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

When Mrs Alice John entered RGS back in 1939 as a student, that marked the start of her association with the school. It was a connection that was cast in stone when after graduating and completing her teachers' training, Miss Cecily Hinchliffe, then-principal of RGS, requested for Mrs John to be posted over as a full-time teacher. So for the next (close to) 40 years, Mrs John dedicated her life to enriching and touching the lives of many students and fellow colleagues in her capacity as Mathematics, English, Geography, Malay, Art & Craft (and even Latin!) teacher, before being appointed Senior Assistant (equivalent to the role of a Deputy Principal nowadays), a role she served until her retirement in 1991.

Mrs John may be counting her lucky stars for having been able to fulfil her passion for teaching at her alma mater, but really, we count our blessings to have had Mrs John be a major part of RGS and even after leaving the school for so many years, continue to make time to attend school events. Fresh from attending the last Evergreen Lunch to be held at our Anderson Road campus, we catch up with the ever-gentle and amiable Mrs John to find out more about her RGS experience over the years.

The Road to RGS

"I was initially studying in another school which only had two levels – primary one and two. After I completed two years of education there, my father asked the principal which school I should go next. The principal suggested a 'very good girls' school' called RGS and encouraged us to apply for the school. When we went down to speak with Miss Richardson, then the principal for RGS, she said that while my grades were good enough, she couldn't take me in because I had attended a private school previously (at that time, RGS could only take in students who were not starting from primary one, from government schools). She advised that the best option I had was to get a certificate from a government school and then re-apply to RGS. So with that, I applied for enrolment into a government school (Serangoon School) where I studied for the next 1.5 years (it was supposed to be a two-year study but I got a double promotion), and upon graduation and receiving my certificate, I reapplied to RGS and entered as a primary three student."

A Shaky Start

"Miss Cecily Hinchliffe was the one who observed my lesson during my final teaching practice. After that lesson, she told me that she could tell I really love teaching, and that was when I became certain of my calling. When it was time to opt for the schools I wanted to teach at full-time, I did not include RGS because all my teachers were there! I mean in those days, we were more nervous being around people we look up to and were not so outspoken. So when I found out that Miss Hinchliffe went to MOE to request for my posting to RGS, I was quite fearful (laughs). For the next three months, I practically stayed in the classroom; I did not dare to go anywhere else in the school, especially the teachers' room. But I slowly adjusted because I felt that if I knew what I was doing, and am aware of my love for teaching, it should be enough for me to get over any fear."



Mrs Alice John studied at RGS between 1939 and 1948 before returning as a teacher in 1952, where she stayed until her retirement in 1991.



Mrs John catching up with former students during the last Evergreen Lunch to be held at RGS' Anderson Road campus.

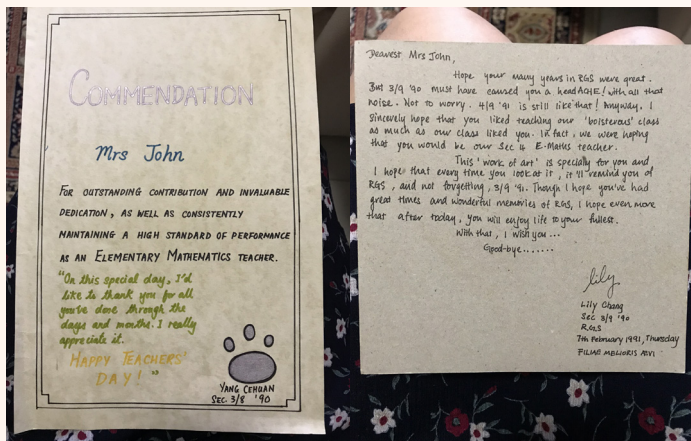
A Teacher's Calling

"I'm the eldest of four sisters. Therefore, since I was young, I have been teaching them and helping them with their schoolwork. I also used to give tuition to one or two neighbours' children. Somehow, when I taught other people, they seem to be able to understand what I was saying. That was when I knew I was good at teaching. When I teach, I also get that sense of satisfaction being able to help other people and being able to establish a rapport with them. Perhaps it's also because my mother was a teacher back in India, so there's that influence and connection there."

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Wearing Many Hats

“Back in those days, there was a shortage of teachers. As such, some classes were left with no teachers at all. So what we had to do was to stand in for classes whenever there was a need. Stand-in teachers were not expected to teach; they just wanted someone to be around to look after the students. However, I was the kind of teacher who cannot just step into a class, sit down and not do anything, you know? I mean what’s the use of a teacher who doesn’t teach? Therefore, whenever there were classes that needed stand-in teachers, I would try to pick the classes with subjects that I could really teach – English, Mathematics, Geography, Latin, Malay etc.”



Treasured memories - Mrs John’s collection of heart-felt letters and cards from students over the years bear testimony to the many lives she has touched.

RGS’ Longest-Serving Senior Assistant

“In 1965, I was appointed a Senior Assistant. These days, it’s much like a post of a Deputy Principal. Initially, I was a little afraid to take on the duties of a Senior Assistant, but I thought, never mind, I should just give it a go because I was not afraid of hard work. On top of teaching (I had a reduced teaching load), I had to be in-charge of things around the office, such as communication of notices from the Principal to the teachers or any other people, collection of school fees and general administration matters. Of course, I also had a lot of help from colleagues like Mrs Pearly Seah, Mrs Ummu Choo and also the office boy, Mr Ho Wah Sim.

Motivating Factors

“With everything that I had to do, I would do it with the best of my ability. When I succeeded, it made me feel good, and that was one of the motivating factors that helped me along the way. Also, when I was still in the Teachers’ Training College, I won a book as a prize for something, and the principal wrote in that book to me “Given in the hope that though she may be less than perfect, she may be more than an ordinary teacher”. Those words have always been at the back of my mind, inspiring and motivating me to always do my best.”

Hopes for Our Students

“I hope they not only continue to do well, but also remember that as equal human beings, they must strive to help other people and give back to the community using their talents and abilities. Having a good character is the most important thing for a person.”



Students and colleagues wishing Mrs John a happy retirement during a farewell assembly planned in her honour.