

My Diary



MARY HENG





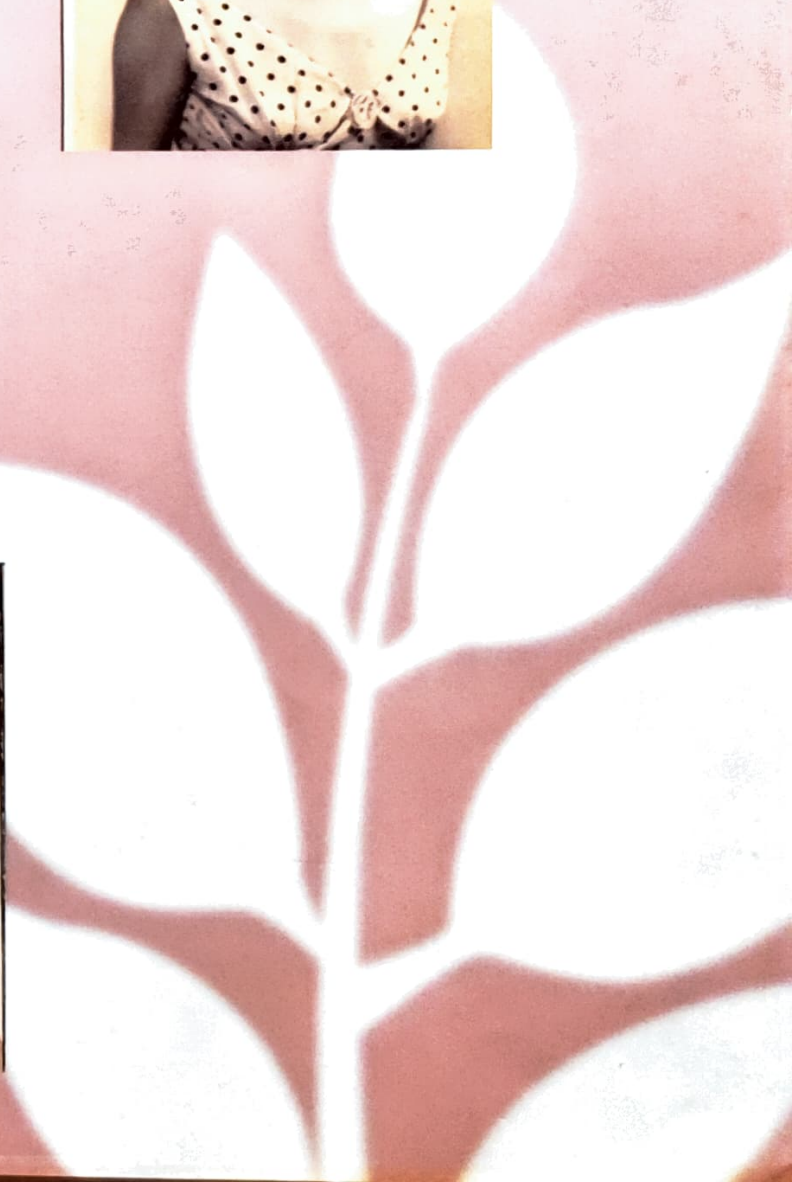
1957



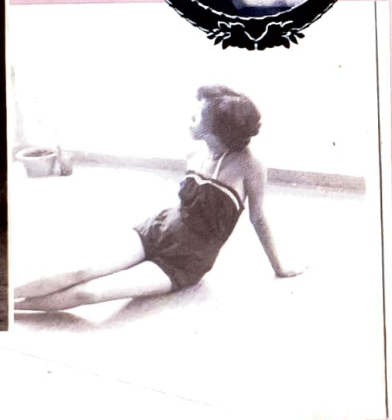
1957



1963



1957

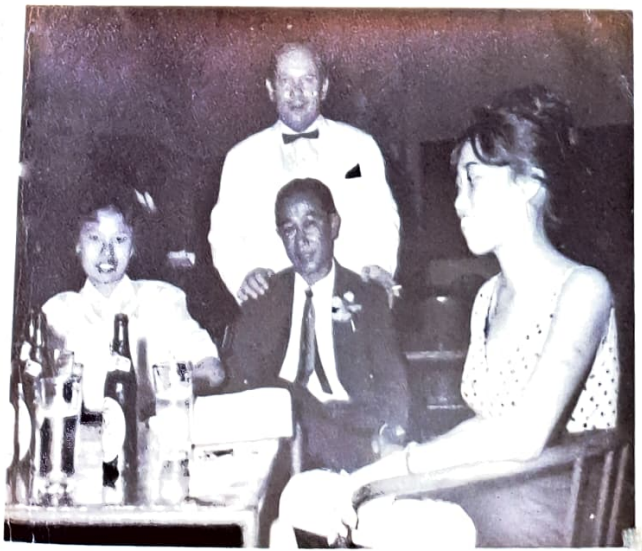


1956





Mission activity meeting @
Catholic Center.





Ward Assistant with the British
Military Hospital 1956



April 1963

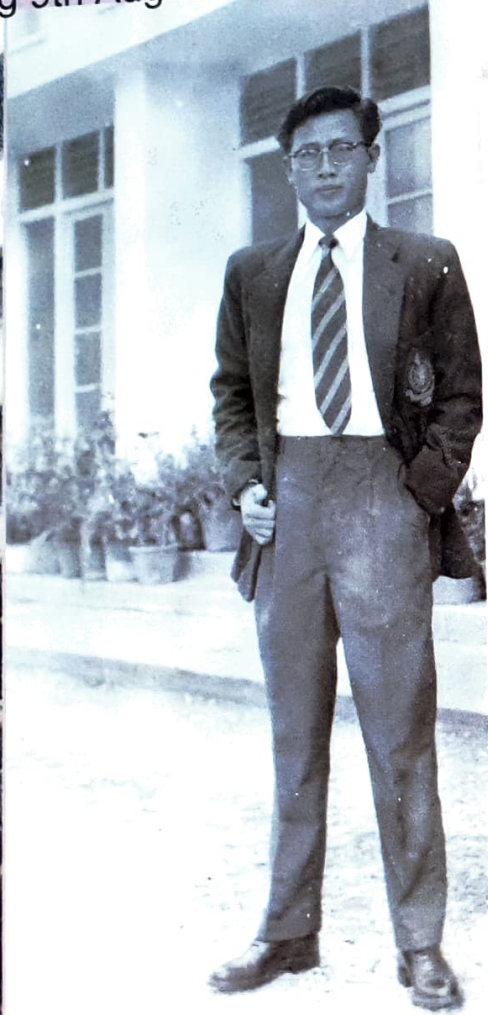


Passing Out Parade.



Graduation in nursing,
Jun 1958

William Leong Chee Kong 9th Aug 1935-18th Aug 1982



William Leong 1st year Old.

Chief Electrical engineer with PUB.



Long Service Awards 1981.



1st Generation from
Guanzhong.

2nd Generation
Family Reunion



3rd Generation



20th Oct 1963, my courtship years.



Married in Dec 31ST 1965.





My Mother in-law!



The 5 brothers



The daughters in-law. 1977





Feb 1973



Feb 1974



DAD'S CLASS REUNION DINNER



Aug 1982.



THEN in 1972



NOW, 40 years on.



Neighbours 1978



Make-up course



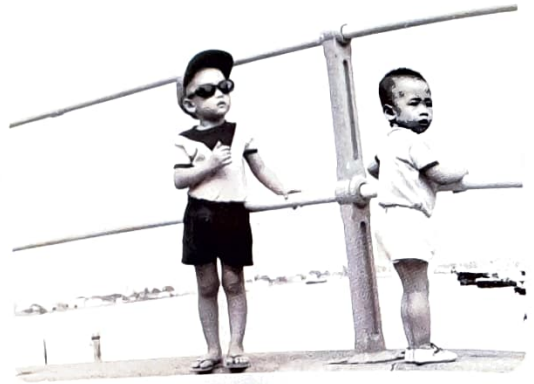
Serving the best coffee at Chinese Swimming Club.



At the Changi Beach



A



Graduated from Murdoch University.



Finally my car licence!

With Godmother - Marta

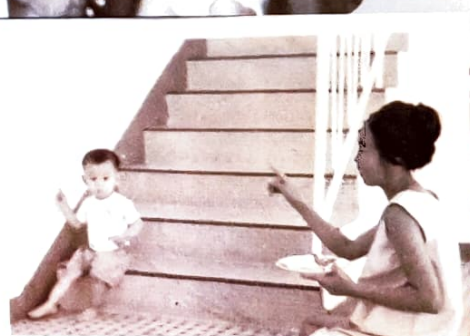
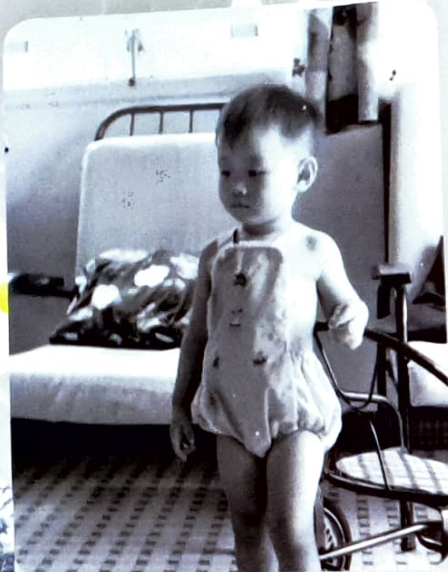
B



Graduated from NUS.

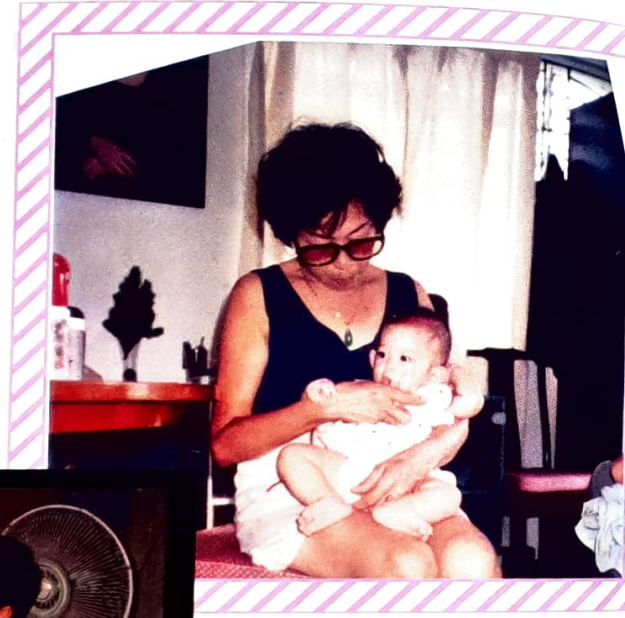


C



2001
D





My 1st Grandchild.



Do we look alike?





My 9 Grandchildren!!
Anymore?!



Vietnam



Korea

Fisherman's Village



StarCruise Virgo



Pulau Ubin, with the village chief.



Hainan, China



Western Australia





Malacca



JAPAN



Phillipines



HONG KONG



Genting Highlands



Sabah



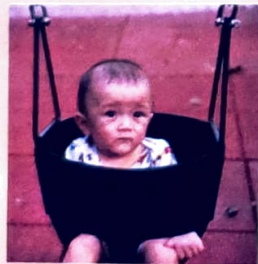
Taiwan











During the Japanese occupation I didn't see any whites, but I did see some Japanese. They had swords and many of the women cut their hair so that they look like a man, as there was a genuine fear that the Japanese might rape the women.

During the Japanese occupation, there were no new shoes available and the clothes we wore had to be repaired over and over. People were pale and malnutrition was widespread. I was sick and weak most of the time. There was once my feet were so swollen that I could not walk. I sat on the road and cried. Finally my aunt came and carried me home and was later transferred to Tan Tock Seng Hospital.

In 1945, the Japanese surrendered to the British. The 4 long and hard years were finally over. After the surrender, my aunt could not afford to keep me and sold me to a Chinese family, named Lim. They lived in Selegie Road in a shop house, near the Tiger Balm Building. Mr Lim sold clothing downstairs and his family lived upstairs. As for my aunt who sold me to Mr Lim, I never saw her again.

Living with Mr Lim was the beginning of another enduring hardship for me. I was only 12 years old and was forced to work 7 days a week with no day off for almost 3 years. If I made a mistake or I did something that Mr Lim didn't like, he would hit me with a big stick until I was black and blue on my back. He also hit me on the back of my head until the skin broke and bled. Those scars are still with me today. Although the Lim's family witnessed these beatings, they didn't raise a hand to help me. All these beatings always took place upstairs in the shop, away from the public eyes. Sometimes after beating, Mr Lim will put coffee powder on the wounds to stop the bleeding.

It was one of the market days that I had the chance to escape. One of the ladies selling vegetables realized my state and advised me to approach Social Welfare Department for help. That is exactly what I did. As a result, I never returned to the Lim Family and never saw them again.

My Story

I think I was born in China. It is because of the war that I am not sure of when or where I was born.

When the airplanes attacked Singapore that day in 1942, my family was living in Kim Keat Road. Along with myself and my parents, there were two sisters and a brother. My father, Heng Weng Chua was a shop keeper but because I was so young, I do not remember my mother's name. I just called her 'ama'. Our family lived in Jalan Besar and my dad's shop was located on Kim Keat Road. Since I was the oldest, I had to help with my little siblings, brothers Kim Soon and Kim Chui, my sisters Kim Nan. I only remember my name as Ah Moi.

The Japanese attack came very sudden. The war planes attacked during our evening meal. My family was visiting my aunt who lived in an attap house in Toa Payoh. We had all been sitting around in a circle having dinner and all of a sudden, everything exploded. The explosion killed everyone outright. I survived physically unhurt and ran along with my aunt. We just keep running and hiding, hiding in the toilet and running into the forest and the rubber plantations. I think was about 7 years old when the attack took place.

When the attack ended and the British surrendered, my aunt and I went back to Kim Keat Road where I lived with her and my 2 cousins in another attap house. I never again went back where my family lived. Later my aunt returned to my dad's shop but she told me that other people had taken over it All my papers were lost so that I had no documents or photos of my family and I was without reminders of my past life.

After the attack I lived with my aunt and worked taking care of ducks and farm animals. Life was hard and we didn't have much food, only tapioca and sometimes few grains of rice. Often we had to stand in long lines to get food.

After spending a period of time at the Social Services, the staff got me a job as a live-in maid with an Indian family, named Singh. I ended up working for them for 5 years. The Singh Family had 4 children and they taught me to cook Indian food including Chapati. I was generally well treated. They set up a special cot for me in their kitchen as my room. For 3 years I never had a day off nor weekend or holidays. Everyday I was up at 7am and retired at 10pm. My job was to take care of the children, clean and cook. I was paid \$50 a month but at least I had a place to stay with food and most importantly, I was not physically abused. Still, I was always afraid that Mr Lim would find me, but thankfully this never happened.

One day in the market I met an Indian man that I always saw there. He told me of a job available at the medical center in Tanglin. I applied and was offered the job. So I moved away from the Singh Family and rented a room on my own. This was a great event for me as it meant freedom and independence for the first time in my life. I was about 20 years old.

My new job was cleaning the clinic facilities during the weekdays but I had the weekends and holidays off. What a blessing for me!



The clinic was run by British doctors and staff. I liked it so much that I worked for over 10 years until I was transferred to the British Military Hospital. I worked as a ward assistant.

I was able to work as a ward assistant because I had gone to night school. I studied and graduated in Home Nursing in August 1960. I loved the job and stayed for 7 years. There were many activities for the staff such as contests and games in the weekends. I even got an award for finishing the 15 miles walk with the St John's Ambulance Brigade! I worked shift, including night shift. I continued with my education and took up English night classes. This was how I learned to speak better and read and write simple English. I made my European friends and even had a short relationship with Holland!



It was during my working days with the hospital that I met my husband at a party. The occasion was a New Year's Eve Party at the home of one of my Chinese friends, named Jenny. She introduced me to Leong. For a time we ran around with friends in groups attending movies, fishing and parties. Mr Leong's father was a goldsmith and his mother, a housewife. After dating for 2 years, we were married on Dec 31, 1965, in a civil ceremony with my sister and brother in laws as witnesses. Our honeymoon was a week of driving holiday to Kuala Lumpur. This was very exciting for me as it was the first time I ever left Singapore!



After returning to Singapore, Leong started work as an electrical inspector for the Singapore government. At first we rented a flat in the Tanglin Halt area and lived there for about 3 years. I continued to work as a ward assistant until I became pregnant with my first child, Andrew, born on January 3rd 1967.



My husband traveled widely around the island to inspect various electrical installations. In 1968, we had an opportunity to buy our 1st house, No 42, Jalan Limau Manis. My 2nd child was born on April 6th 1968. I continue to work and my routine was to drop the children off at a nanny place, Mdm Wong, on Monday and I will pick them up on Friday evening. I will made the effort to visit them every evening. Even after the boys began school, they continued to stay at the nanny's place.

On October 9th 1970, my 3rd child, Chris, was born. It is about this time that we began the purchase of our 2nd property, an apartment at River Valley, the Dragon View. Now the nanny was caring for all the 3 boys. In 1970, Leong won a scholarship to study in London, but he turned down due to family commitments. These were the times when we worked everyday and all year long with no real holidays.

When I was pregnant with my 4th child, we decided to abort it due to our hectic schedule, but it was unsuccessful. On 11th May 1972, my 4th son was born. All the 4 sons stayed with the nanny. At this time, most of our life was now centered on the family. It is this time that we also purchased our 3rd property, No 36 Jalan Limas.



Leong was doing well at his job with the PUB and had an appointment as chief engineer, and our lives seemed to be going well. After David was born, I gave up my job and became a full time housewife. Apart from doing the house chores, I ferried them to various sports and extracurricular activities. My entire existence centered around the children, with no personal life, hobby nor time for friends. But I was happy!



It was at this time, in 1979, Leong went on his first holiday to Thailand with a friend. Upon his return, he didn't feel well and complained of stomach gastric and ulcers. He visited several doctors but could not diagnose the illness. It was an eventual visit to Laguna Clinic at Laguna Park that Dr. Leau diagnosed cancer of his liver. He was warded at Alexandra Hospital for treatments. Over the 8 months, he lost so much weight that he was reduced to bones.

During these trying times, I did not give up hope and constantly prayed for his recovery. Apart from fatigue, I was also in constant fear of losing him. My hopes were finally dashed on August 18th 350am, when the hospital rang and broke the news of his death. My world just fell apart.



A church funeral was held at St. Joseph's Church at Bras Basah Road. He was cremated and ashed stored at Mount Vernon. At this point, I was more lost than sad. When Leong was alive, he took care of everything and was the sole breadwinner. I was forced to take the full burden of raising 4 children. I took on the only job that I knew - as an odd job cleaner. I remembered Leong's last words to me where to "Be Brave".

I managed since then with mostly difficulty but with success. All 4 of them have completed their national service and graduated from universities in Ausdtralia, Singapore and United States. They have all gone on to have their own successful careers in the various fields. They have also given me 9 beautiful grandchildren.



My goal is now to continue to live in the house of Jalan Limau Manis and have a good rest. I also want to take up new hobbies, travel and contact my lost friends. It has been quite a journey for me from that shop on Kim Keat Road.

Storey by: Samuel Burriss



