



# TO SIR WITH L VE

FOR TRANSFORMING BOY SCOUTS TO LEADERS IN SOCIETY

Raffles Institution, Singapore



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# FOREWORD

By ESM Goh Chok Tong

## From Boy Scouts to Leaders in Society

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Scouting was first introduced to Singapore in 1910, and to Raffles Institution in 1922. Soon, RI Scouts will celebrate its centennial, a testimony to Scouting's relevance within the school.

### Value of Uniformed Groups

Scouting teaches us lifelong values, and teases out the leadership potential in us. It is therefore, not surprising that many former Scouts have held or are holding senior positions in the government, private sector and society. Lim Pin, Tommy Koh, Tan Cheng Bock, Chan Chun Sing, and Peter Ong Boon Kwee come to mind. These are people I know personally. There are many other former RI Scouts who are eminent in their professions and the wider society.

From my experience, Scouting helps to lay the foundation for active boys to seek adventures, and grow into strong and reliable men. It builds character and nurtures the young to be independent and resilient. The discipline and kindness of a Scout; the pledge to do one's best, to help others and to make friends and establish harmonious relations - these are the laws of the Scouts.

Singapore needs men and women who are rugged, possess people and leadership skills, and are committed to serve their fellow citizens and their country. For what use are smart people without sound character? Of what use are intelligence and capabilities if they are not used to serve others and the country? Some leadership qualities and instincts are inborn, like courage and charisma. But many other leadership skills can be acquired, nurtured and honed. One should take the opportunity in school to build up these capabilities.



I speak from personal experience. I participated in many school activities, including the Raffles Geographical and Historical Societies, and swimming. But Scouting contributed most to my happy days in school. Being a Scout gave me an opportunity to gain leadership skills as a youth. I joined as a Tenderfoot, soon became a Patrol Leader, a Troop Scribe, and later the Troop Leader of the 2nd Raffles Troop. I treasure fondly my Scouting memories of adventures and misadventures. Participating in and taking on leadership positions in the many co-curricular activities outside the classroom, is the best way to round off your education in school. You make friends. You learn to understand people and the meaning of working together. The mistakes you make as a schoolboy, are relatively cost-free. The mistakes you make in later life as a leader, are more consequential.

### Being Prepared

Scouting taught me to "be prepared", a valuable attribute for my responsibilities later in government. As the Minister for Defence, the Scout motto "Be Prepared" was most relevant, though the SAF uses the term "Operationally Ready". In fact, "Being Prepared" is a mindset that permeates throughout the Singapore Government. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, we were better prepared than many other countries. We had set up the National Centre for Infectious Diseases after SARS. We had the financial reserves and economic resources, to take bold measures to keep the economy going, avoid widespread hardship, and secure vaccines.

I wish the Scout troops in RI, many happy and meaningful Scouting days. The enriching Scouting programmes deserve the school's, the alumni's and the community's full support.

# WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT

WRITER: Inez Tan. Published in the Rafflesian Times, issue 4, February 2015



Falcon Patrol camping at Sarimbun, 1966. Siu Kang Fook is on the left.

Actually, all boys need to belong to a gang,” theorises Mr Siu Kang Fook (RI, 1968), a former 02 Raffles Scout. The patrol is a gang system. You feel the affiliation, you have somebody to look up to, and that somebody becomes your dai gor (big brother), who mentors you. “When my mother asked, “What are you doing in Scouts, all those naughty things?” I told her that I had somebody to look after me.’

Mr Siu has recently assisted in publishing the first edition of a book, *To SIR (Scouting in RI) with Love*, which chronicles the history of Scouting in RI. It was through working with the Raffles Archives & Museum (RAM) that Mr Siu came to discover the many untold stories of the Raffles Scout Groups. He has been working with the museum since May 2013 – one serendipitous day, he had boarded a bus and found him-

self chatting with an old boy of St. Joseph’s Institution, who informed him that Mrs Cheryl Yap (Head/RAM) was trying to get the museum up and running. Mr Siu decided to meet Mrs Yap, who showed him a large album of old photographs.

‘She asked me if I recognized the people in the pictures, and I said, yes, I do. And she said, “Good!” He laughs. As Mr Siu delved deeper into our school’s archives, however, he realized that there was still much he didn’t know about RI and Scouting in Singapore. He uncovered Scout reports in old issues of *The Rafflesian*, as well as a report dating back to 1922, in which K Sabapathy wrote about the founding of the 2nd Singapore Troop and how he had organized the boys. Latter-day publications like *Rafflesian Times* and *RIInspire* also featured stories written by Scout leaders.

‘I know more about the 02 Scouts, so as I looked into 01 Scouts’ history, I discovered a lot more stories! They organized hikes with RGS girls, we also organized hikes with RGS girls! The girls get to choose whom they wanted to hike with, so sometimes we had to get SCGS girls or Crescent Girls! But for our

campfire nights, the RGS girls will come for both lah.

‘So I was thinking: Since there are so many stories, why not compile them and make a book? Meanwhile, Roney Tan (current Chairman of the Singapore Scout Guild, RI Chapter) also wanted to make a coffee table book, but I thought we should just make it small scale. I started in July/August 2013. Whenever I found an article written by a Scout leader about camping, or why he has become a Scout – which could be in the ‘30s or ‘40s – I would put it into the book, because the article would be reflective of that era.

I also went to the National Archives and found some RI Scouts photos. All of us (old boys) also contributed through oral interviews or Facebook, and we compiled all these interesting stories about our experiences. I also counter checked with the book written by Kevin Tan Yew Lee (RI, 1979), *Scouting in Singapore: 1910-2000*.’

Of course, Mr Siu has a multitude of fond memories of his own. He was the only secondary one in his Patrol (each Scout Troop comprises

four Patrols with eight boys each), and all the older Scouts treated him like a younger brother, checking his schoolwork, introducing him to second-hand textbook sellers, passing him past-year exam questions, and explaining what the phrase ‘two legs good, four legs bad’ in *Animal Farm* meant.

‘Our Scout den was the British ex-principal’s garage, and it was a place where we really congregated; a place we always went to besides our classrooms,’ Mr Siu says wishfully. ‘When I went to the Scout den I could meet my seniors and juniors, and we all had something to talk about.

‘Through this gang system, we went hiking. An adventure! But through hiking we also learnt to use a compass, read maps, camp in MacRitchie, and cook. We learnt first aid, swimming, how to repair a punctured tyre. We also learnt to be naughty, that’s the paradox. But we learnt it from school prefects and future President’s Scholars. When we went camping, my seniors would bring out copies of *Lady Chatterley’s Lovers*, *Playboy* magazine, and *James Bond: Goldfinger*. Then they’d tell me “Whoa, you must read this book!” and I replied that *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was very cheem (hard to understand). When night came, I was very tired but my seniors said, “We’re going night hiking!” So we went on a night hike and peeked at couples in MacRitchie.’

Besides nostalgia-inspiring tales, *To SIR With Love* also captures the RI Scouts’ spirit of ambition. One prime example is the 01 Raffles Scout Group’s climb of Gunung Tahan in 1971, where they broke the time record previously held by the Malaysian Army. ‘It’s not just a matter of badges, or becoming a Queen’s Scout, but also about the kind of challenges our boys went through,’ explains Mr Siu.

However, the 01 Raffles Scout Group’s second attempt to climb Gunung Tahan was marred by tragedy; one of the Scout died on the return journey, when the group was only 400m away from the base camp. His fellow Scouts were very distraught; when they returned to school following that incident, Principal Philip Liao personally counseled them. Although this story was not included in the first edition of the book, Mr Siu intends to include it in the 2nd edition which will also boast an improved content and layout.

‘It’s quite interesting, these teenagers’ growing-up stories,’ muses Mr Siu. ‘But if you ask any counselor, they’ll tell you that teenagers are going through really rough patch of life. And during this phase, it’s very dangerous if their parents are unable to give them proper guidance. But thank God we were in Scouts, and in RI!

My mother was thankful that although we lived in Chinatown, which



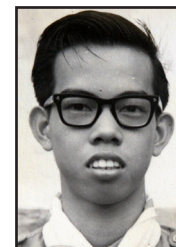
32nd Raffles Patrol combined hike with RGS Girl Guides.  
BELOW: Denis Tan on a suspension rope bridge over the Stamford Canal.

was full of gangsters fighting, all her children were able to grow up quite well. Scouting was what made the difference. ‘As younger boys look through this book, they will realize what their fathers have gone through. Scouts from other schools can read it and realize that they too, have similar stories about camping at Tanah Merah and Ayer Gemuroh.



‘Through our recollections, you can see that we have really benefitted from Scouting, and now that we have gained, we look back and realize that we really love Scouting in RI.

We say that “Once a Scout, always a Scout.” But what does it mean? We continue to help other people at all times. On our scarves we tie a knot, and this knot reminds us to do one good deed every day. Fifty years on, I still hold dear all these things.’



Siu Kang Fook (in 1967 and 2020)