PAP PIONEERS

50 ORDINARY STORIES
FOREWORD
Mr Lee Hsien Loong • 6
Prime Minister
Secretary-General, PAP

MESSAGES
Mr Goh Chok Tong • 8
Emeritus Senior Minister
Senior Adviser, PAP Seniors Group (PAP.SG)
Mdm Halimah Yacob • 10
Speaker of Parliament
Chairperson, PAP Seniors Group (PAP.SG)

Mr Othman Wok • 12
Minister for Social Affairs (1963–1977)

INTRODUCTION
Political Pioneers: Democratic Socialism in Action • 14

50 ORDINARY STORIES

Mr Goh Leong Kiat • 16
Mr Kee Hang Moh • 18
Mr Gan Kee Chwee, Raymond • 21
Mdm Asiah Bt Mesnawan • 22
Mr Chia Nga Teh • 25
Mr Abdul Rashid Hussein • 26
Mdm Hajjah Bibi Mahmood • 29
Mr Choo Hai Boon • 30
Mr Goh Khon Chong • 32
Mr Ang Kim Ling • 35
Mr Ho Chin Nam • 36
Mdm Helen Goh • 39
Mr Lee Bak Lee • 42
Dr Hong Chee Boo, Allan • 45
Mr K. Ramu • 46
Mr Koh Lian Huat • 49
Mr Lau Kim Boo • 50
Mr Law Shun Yong • 53
Mr Cheong Khim Teck • 54
Mr Lec Tong Hai • 57
Mr Leong Lye Marn • 58
Mr Lim Joo Kwan • 61
Mr Leow Peng Kui • 62
Mr Liang Tong Juan, Alan • 65
Mr Lim Hong Lit • 66
Mr Lim Kim Poh • 70
Mr Lim Tat Chee • 73
Mr Lim Teong Hai • 74
Mr Long Foo Choo • 77
Mr Tan Kee Seng, Joseph • 78
Mdm Roberts Clara Beatrice • 81
Mr Poh Yong Meng, Stephen • 82
Mr Puah Suay Arh, Jackson • 85
Mr Rajaratnam Marinimuthu • 86
Mr Ong Ann Peng, David • 89
Mr S. Puhaindran • 90
Mdm Sakinah Bte Jamin • 95
Mr Jerome Joseph Saram • 96
Mr Seah Chin Heng • 99
Mr Seah Kim Swee • 100
Mr Tan Bok Seng • 103
Mr M. Subramaniam • 104
Mr Tan Wah Seng • 107
Mr Tan Wu Cheng • 108
Mr Tang Kan Hoy • 111
Mr Wong Sun Kwong • 112
Mr Zaman Bin Kadir • 115
Mr Teo Chek Meng • 116
Mr Toh Lim Mok • 119
Mr Mohd Seain Bin Madsom • 120

Looking to the next generation of PAP Pioneers
Ms Hamidah Aidillah Mustafa • 122
The Singapore of today is vastly different from the one that our PAP Pioneers lived and worked in a generation ago. As we celebrate Singapore’s 50 years of independence and achievements, we must remember our Party Pioneers who have contributed so much to the progress of our Party and the nation. That is why the PAP Seniors Group (PAP.SG) embarked on this project to gather and document their stories.

This book provides a window into the lives of 50 PAP Pioneers who have served the Party and Singapore for many decades. They represent the many Party Pioneers of their generation who believed in the Party and fought for the well-being of our people. We respect them for their convictions. We salute their tenacity overcoming numerous obstacles, especially in the early years of nation building. We honour their service and dedication year after year, often for decades. Today, many of these pioneers are in their seventies and eighties, and still cheerfully volunteering at the branches!

I am privileged to have worked alongside PAP Pioneers, in my branch and at Party Headquarters. One of the pioneers in the book, Mdm Helen Goh, has been serving at Teck Ghee branch for almost 40 years, longer than I have. Many more Party Pioneers are not named in the book. Their collective efforts built a peaceful and prosperous Singapore that no one imagined possible in 1965.

The stories in the book reflect the spirit of PAP — turning adversity into opportunity, making aspirations into reality, transforming Singapore into an outstanding city state, and opening up a brighter future for all Singaporeans.

I hope that their stories inspire a younger generation of party activists. We face different challenges today. But, we need the same spirit to tackle them, and to serve the people. The torch has now passed to us. We must hold the torch high, and continue to take the Party and Singapore forward, and make Singapore our best home for many more years to come.

Thank you, our pioneers!
There is much to admire in our Ordinary Members. They soldier for the Party, go the extra mile and fight for their conviction. They serve the Party and the country, all without expectation of any personal gain. They do this because they believe in the PAP.

The Pioneer Ordinary Members have grown old. Many have passed away. It is fitting that we recall the stories of 50 of them to pay them a tribute as we celebrate SG50. The 50 Pioneers symbolize the dedication and commitment of many members of their generation. That is why their stories are termed “ordinary” and not “extraordinary”. The common stories belie the courage and sacrifice behind them. It is the hallmark of the PAP members to serve without fanfare.

I cut my political teeth in Joo Chiat. When I was sent to the branch in Lorong K, Telok Kurau to learn, I was struck by the bare premises and the humility of the branch members. The key activists included a retired Chinese school teacher and a local furniture dealer. Both have since passed away.

When I was sent to the newly created Marine Parade constituency to stand for elections in December 1976, people whom I did not know came forward to campaign for me. Some were PAP members as I found out later but many were not. I was overwhelmed by the support of the market stall-holders and cooked food sellers. Several became active branch members, helping in my Meet-the-People Sessions and market visits. S. Puhaindran, a teacher and local resident, was my key man on the ground. He tells his story in the book.

What struck me then was the absence of professionals like doctors, lawyers and accountants, senior corporate executives, rich businessmen and owners of private and landed property in directly helping the Party. Even today, the relatively better off Singaporeans still shy away from ground political work. I hope more of them will step forward because their prosperity and future depend so much on good government and the well-being of other fellow Singaporeans. Those who joined our house-to-house visits, constituency walkabouts and attended to constituents’ problems and appeals, found their contributions fulfilling.

It is such apparently mundane work which helps the PAP to connect with the ordinary people. One can therefore say that PAP Ordinary Members contribute to the stability, progress and prosperity of Singapore. I hope successful Singaporeans will at least read PAP Pioneers: 50 Ordinary Stories to understand the foundation of their own success.

MESSAGE

Mr Goh Chok Tong
Emeritus Senior Minister
Senior Adviser, PAP Seniors Group (PAP.SG)
This book tells the inspiring and heart warming stories of 50 PAP Pioneers who have contributed to the PAP, particularly in the early years of Singapore’s history. Many are still active and serving today, and continue to follow the Party’s progress keenly. The stories that they tell may be ordinary ones but therein lies their strength. Without the work that they do, the Party cannot function well.

Hence, the stories that they share will resonate with all our activists who spend countless hours contributing to the Party. Except for the fact that they joined in the early days of the PAP’s history, their motivations and reasons for standing by the Party are no different from that of many of our activists today. They are all imbued with the same sense of purpose and desire to serve the people and make a better life for everyone.

So, in documenting their stories, we are in fact also recognising all our Party activists, especially our Pioneers who joined the party in its nascent stage, when the Party had not yet achieved much. But as Goh Leong Kiat who joined the Party in 1965 said, “All I knew was that I wanted a fair deal... I saw that if the country did not prosper, the men who were honest, steady workers — men like me — would not have a chance to do well in life”. They believed that the PAP, with its core values of clean government and meritocracy, provided the best chance to improve the lives of ordinary Singaporeans.

PAP Pioneers: 50 Ordinary Stories is also different from many PAP publications in that it tells the PAP story from the perspective of ordinary members and not that of the leaders. It is a ground up collection of the battles fought by our Pioneer Ordinary Members that have never been told and are seldom heard. Whether they support the Party at the weekly MPS or house visits or during election time, they provide the lubricant on the ground for the Party to function well.

We are happy to feature several women activists in the book. We would have loved to feature more women but as Mdm Sakinah Bte Jamin, who joined the Party in 1997, said, “There were not many ladies in the Party in the early days.” So women, like Mdm Roberts Clara Beatrice, who became a member in 1976, and Mdm Helen Goh, who joined in 1978, were the trail blazers. The situation has greatly improved today where there are many more women joining PAP and some are even serving as branch secretaries.

I am glad that the PAP Seniors Group is able to produce PAP Pioneers: 50 Ordinary Stories. Nothing beats hearing the stories straight from the horses’ mouths. We are grateful to our pioneers for their contributions, which have helped build a strong foundation for Singapore today. I hope that their stories will inspire many more young people to join the Party and contribute to our society.

MESSAGE

Mdm Halimah Yacob
Speaker of Parliament
Chairperson, PAP Seniors Group (PAP.SG)
Governing a nation is no mean feat. When Singapore gained independence in 1965 amid social unrest, the Pioneer PAP members were faced with challenges that were unique to our circumstances. In an unexpected turn of events, Singapore had to strike out on its own as a small island state with very limited natural resources, populated by a community of diverse cultures that did not always see eye to eye.

Singaporeans needed better housing, more job opportunities, a more robust economy, improved infrastructure and social harmony, just to list a few. Basically, all the things that would ensure a thriving and peaceful existence.

So we rolled up our sleeves and under the stewardship of the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew, we set about the task of making Singapore great and we have not stopped. And look at how far we have come — from third world to first! Today, Singapore is internationally known as a business and tech hub, a multicultural and metropolitan city that is also safe and clean.

In addition to dependable, clean leadership, our success is only possible thanks to the people of Singapore and PAP banding together to build the nation.

As the Pioneer PAP members, we know only too well that a lot is expected of our community’s leaders. But in the hurly-burly, never lose sight of our core principle: To serve the Singapore people. I hope that future generations of the PAP will always remember that whatever we do, we do it for the benefit and well-being of the community.

MESSAGE

Mr Othman Wok
Minister for Social Affairs (1963–1977)

Photo courtesy of Tribute.sg, an initiative by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay.
There was no inevitability when these pioneers started their journeys. Standing up to corrupt colleagues, risking their lives in political campaigns, trekking for miles into the jungle to recruit like-minded people to join a nascent political party — the People’s Action Party (PAP) was young, but its people were steadfast in their beliefs and commitment to the Party.

This book captures the stories of 50 of these men and women. They joined the Party in its early years, and have stood by it over the decades.

They have seen the Party’s transformation, from a rag-tag, disorganised band of brothers, fighting larger, well-established parties in general elections, to a committed group, fierce in spirit, in physical courage, and combating the pro-Communist factions within the PAP.

Today, the PAP is a large organisation and diverse in its outreach to different segments of society. Its political goals and orientation are no longer about independence or Communism. But its key socialist and progressive ethos remain the same, enshrined in its Constitution:

“To safeguard the freedom, and advance the well-being, of Singaporeans”
“To build a multiracial society, fair, just and tolerant to all”
“To build a dynamic society which is disciplined and self-reliant … and which also has compassion for the aged, the sick and handicapped, and the less fortunate”
“To provide equal opportunities for all Singaporeans”

Its spirit too remains the same — a preference for real action in achieving economic and social goals over empty rhetoric. Expressing political ideas in meaningful work and incomes, social freedoms and duties. Working out practical rules for a fair society.

These pioneers, many of whom joined politics in the 1950s and 1960s, knew little political theory — neither of Communism, nor socialism, nor democracy nor capitalism. For them, politics was written in blood and sweat; for Goh Leong Kiat, 85, equality was the ability to hold his head high and deny the five-cent coffee money that continually crossed his palms. For unionist Kee Hang Moh, 79, fairness was the dream to have a good job, and be paid fair wages. And for Mohd Seain Bin Madsom, 75, it was a deep conviction to do the right thing, to be what he calls “a good man”, to find meaning in working for his fellowmen.

As he said of the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew:

Gajah mati meninggalkan tulang
Harimau mati meninggalkan belang
Manusia mati apa nak bilang
Nama yang baik di sebut tak akan hilang

When an elephant dies, he leaves his bones. When a tiger dies, he leaves his stripes. When a man dies, no words are needed. A good name will never ever fade away.

For Mr Mohd, as for these other pioneers, it is the political life which holds the highest meaning, one that will never fade away.
Everyone was doing it, from the guy who sells you tickets at the railway station to the warehouse supervisor. It cost five cents for clearing you through, 10 cents for recording your delivery properly. I hated it but it was a way to get through. Even if you said: “No, I don’t want anything extra,” a can of coffee would appear on your table.

It was a way of life at the Singapore Harbour Board (SHB) where I worked. But I was determined that corruption be stopped. A man should be paid what he is owed for his work, nothing less, nothing more.

I was a clerk. I worked closely with the delivery men and the warehouse supervisors. If you did not give them a little something, they would ignore you, put you at the back of the line, or even record your delivery wrongly so you would get into trouble. It was just simpler to fall in line, and do what everyone else was doing.

At the SHB my pay was $84 a month. My father had worked there too and his pay was $26. Neither of us had any great inheritance. We did not have a business mind, we were just good, steady workers.

I thought to myself: “Why shouldn’t I get a chance at a good life like everyone else? Why must I bribe and connive and put my hand under tables? Why can’t I stand up like a man?”

I did not have much political philosophy in me. All I knew was that I wanted a fair deal. All around me, in Southeast Asia, I saw that if the country did not prosper, the men who were honest, steady workers — men like me — would not have a chance to do well in life.

At the SHB my pay was $84 a month. My father had worked there too and his pay was $26. Neither of us had any great inheritance. We did not have a business mind, we were just good, steady workers.

I thought to myself: “Why shouldn’t I get a chance at a good life like everyone else? Why must I bribe and connive and put my hand under tables? Why can’t I stand up like a man?”

I did not have much political philosophy in me. All I knew was that I wanted a fair deal. All around me, in Southeast Asia, I saw that if the country did not prosper, the men who were honest, steady workers — men like me — would not have a chance to do well in life.

I made just over $1 in four hours of extra shift work. So even 50 cents extra was a lot of money. I could have taken it, but something in me rebelled.

Then I saw what happened when the PAP took power. It was a revolution, and they meant business. If you were corrupt, even if you took a small bribe, you were fired. That’s it. Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew made a strong point, and no one doubted it. But not everyone liked it.

You didn’t make any friends by joining the PAP in 1965, but I signed up. At work, everyone was whispering: “This is a PAP man,” and shying away from me. I was not “one of them.” But I stood up for what I thought was right.

In my ward, I fought the elections with seven MPs. Most people think politics is about winning elections. Yes, that is important, but if you were to ask what I liked most, it is my work in the welfare committee. I was the treasurer who signed the cheques for needy families, for the children who did well in school. Each year, I shook the hands of men like myself, working men, determined to give their children a fair shot.

I wear white on white and I have no regrets. My politics has given me a good life: In my work, I have seen the transformation of the SHB to become the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA). The work culture becoming a professional, open and transparent system. Not just PSA, but all around Singapore.

Around the region, you can see that in countries that cannot get rid of corruption, ordinary men like me will not have a fair chance to grow.

I am a great-grandfather today. My great-grandson is one-year-old. I live in a HDB flat, I have no great riches to leave him, but I hope that he will know what his great-grandfather did. My legacy is what I stood for, what I stood against, and the small part I played in the Singapore that he will grow up in.
It was a time when students did not study and workers did not go to work. Students went on strike for political beliefs. Workers were striking because they wanted a better life. All of us wanted independence. I was in the Middle Road Unions helping Mr Devan Nair, Mr Dominic Puthucheary and Mr Lim Chin Siong.

I was working as a fisherman in a kelong in Changi. We stayed for a whole month on the kelong, even at night. It was hard work, but I’ve worked hard all my life, so I was used to it. But it didn’t seem fair that we didn’t have any rest days. The pay was low, just over $100 a month, but it was low everywhere. There were three of us who lived and worked there. We let down nets and took our luck with the fish that swam in from the sea. We would haul up the fish and put them on ice until the boats came to get our catch.

We wanted to increase our wages and have rest days as we worked the whole month without any rest. Joining the union was our way to take action. After a few months, the negotiations got us the rest days. I worked there for five years and I went out to sea on larger ships to fish.

I joined the PAP after witnessing the great things that they had achieved for the workers. For me, it was about rest days and workers’ welfare. It was not about politics. But this was not to say that I did not feel deeply for the Party and was ready to give my full commitment. When we joined Malaysia, we had our first elections there. I went to Bangsar in Kuala Lumpur. I knew Mr Devan Nair from the unions and I was glad to support him in the election. We lived for a month in a flat above the coffee shop and that was really tough physically because we had to keep putting up the campaign posters. We would put them up in the morning and by the evening, they would be gone.

There was no salary, only living costs and board by the Party. Five or six of us from the Changi Branch went up to Kuala Lumpur to help. One day, we saw the opposition had gathered a big group who surrounded the shop house and shouted, “Come down and fight!”

They were really worked up and it was like a matter of life and death. We called for help. Robin Sim from Party HQ managed to gather a lorry-load of supporters and within minutes they came over. The other side quaked at our show of force and ran off. It was a close shave. We were a group of friends who would do anything for each other. The only regret was that we were the only ward in Malaysia to win.

During one election, I was stationed at Hong Lim. At lunch, the Party gave us a small bottle of soft drink and two slices of plain bread. When we passed the coffee shops, I saw my friends from the People’s Progressive Party eating chicken rice. They laughed at me. “Come and have chicken rice — why are you standing there with two slices of bread?”

I just walked off. I may not have much, but I’ve risked my life for my Party. I will stay strong and firm in my belief that the PAP is the right people’s union. I will not be mocked for a plate of chicken rice.

Mr Kee Hang Moh [79 YEARS OLD]
Ward: Changi-Simei
Joined in 1957

“We wanted rest days and welfare, not high politics.”
I joined the Party when Singapore was under the Lim Yew Hock Government. When the People’s Action Party came into power, there were only a few PAP MPs. What attracted me to join them was their keeping of promises. I had been following Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s rallies. What he intended to do, and what we have today are the results of his intentions.

People would rather go hungry and forgo their lunch to listen to his rallies; there was amazing support from the masses.

I remember the good old days. I owned a lighterage business and we were the people who made the Singapore River dirty. I admit it. Our boats and crew were on the river, and we cooked, ate and lived on the boats, and dirtied the whole place — 365 days a year.

We transported goods from the storehouses to the big ships. I remember, once I was on the barges when the people from the Barisan Sosialis, who were part of the unions, tried to stop us from working. They said we should go on strike. I told them: “No, I am not part of your union, I need to work.”

In those days, unions were very disruptive. I was working on the river until 1997, when they cleared us out. At the time, the trade was also fading. Now it is very nice and clean. The Party has done a good job for the people.

There are more people demanding for an opposition now, and they use very simple language to reel in the people. But the opposition can’t govern Singapore. The young people don’t like to be dictated to, but I think over time they know what is at stake, what the PAP has done and will do. My relatives in Johor Bahru are happy to come here to work. They now know, what we were fighting for — meritocracy, social justice, equality — so many years ago, and what it means now.
I am in the welfare committee of the Party. During the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS), whenever people are facing hardship, I talk to them and give them rations if needed. We always keep some rations in the store and I have been to the homes of those who came to the MPS for help. Some of them were real hardship cases.

One thing I know is that the PAP does not give out money easily. Food — yes, education — yes, and also school fees for their children. But money, it is very hard to get — even $200. If they need it very badly, we will refer them to the CDC (Community Development Council).

But sometimes, people just need to have a chat. They need someone to tell their problems to. They are my neighbours too, and I tell them not to be embarrassed when asking for help. It is better to ask for help than to struggle alone. There is nothing to be embarrassed about. We all go through hard times.

Mdm Asiah Bt Mesnawan [70 YEARS OLD]
Ward: Bukit Panjang
Joined in 1981

“Sometimes, people just need to have a chat. They need someone to tell their problems to.”
Having been a PAP member for over 50 years, I have been part of the journey that has brought Singapore from its humble beginnings to where it is today.

When I graduated in 1960, employment conditions were challenging. Those were turbulent years, with many political parties competing for power. The PAP had just successfully come into power in 1959.

I was inspired by the PAP leadership, by Mr Lee Kuan Yew and his first generation leaders. I believed then that a strong and stable PAP Government could offer us a better future with jobs, housing and better welfare.

We had heard about Mr Lee Kuan Yew’s charisma. As he toured the villages when I was a boy, I would follow him around and listen to his inspiring speeches. I was then living in Kampong Cheng San. My father was an orchid farmer and we had our own orchid plantation. We were subsequently resettled and the Cheng San CC now sits on our old kampong.

I was inspired to be part of the PAP cause, and joined the PAP Jalan Kayu Branch which was located in a kampong shophouse. I had always been very interested in politics and followed local and Malaysian political developments closely. During the battle for merger, I studied Malay so I could understand the debate better.

I have been active since 1977 in Kolam Ayer, working with several MPs, including 13 years with Mr Sidek Saniff. Kolam Ayer is a low-income area, with a mix of HDB flats including one-room flats. We were mainly concerned with social issues such as applications for rental flats, hawker stalls and public assistance. We also built up an educational centre even before the PAP Community Foundation (PCF) started. Mr Sidek was a former teacher so he was keen on building an education centre to better serve the residents and improve educational prospects for the young.

In 1991, I assisted Mr Zulkifli Mohammed in Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS), block visits and social projects. In 1997, Dr Yaacob Ibrahim became the Kolam Ayer MP and I worked with him on various projects including HDB Upgrading, lift upgrading and Home Improvement Programme (HIP).

All in, I have seen eight elections in the span of 50 years as a member, and fought to secure the seat for three PAP candidates: Mr Sidek Saniff, Mr Zulkifli Mohammed and Dr Yaacob Ibrahim. Our knowledge of the ground, and of issues facing residents are invaluable assets that have been built over a long period of time. Activists are integral to the success of the PAP.

The PAP has done much for Singapore. As a country, we have public housing, health care, impressive public amenities, a world-class financial centre and excellent educational facilities. As a family, my three daughters have all benefited from the system and are university graduates. They all have successful careers in finance and education. Today, it is my wish that my five grandchildren will also achieve excellence in their education and career, and endeavour to make it part of our family heritage to contribute to the continued growth of Singapore.

Mr Chia Nga Teh [75 Years Old]

Ward: Kolam Ayer

Joined in 1963

“Activists are integral to the success of the PAP.”
Mr Abdul Rashid Hussein

Ward: Toa Payoh East
Joined in 1983

“Regrets? Not one bit”

My interest in the PAP began some 40 years ago. I was a Union Branch leader, then elected as a General Secretary of the Singapore Industrial and Services Employees Union (SISEU). In 1985, I was elected to the NTUC Central Committee, the decision-making body of our labour movement. I also served in various NTUC committees, NTUC Co-operatives and the National Tripartite bodies including the National Wages Council (NWC) until 1996.

It was during this period that I had the opportunity of working closely with the PAP and NTUC leaders such as the late Mr Ong Teng Cheong, Mr Lim Boon Heng, Mr Goh Chee Wee, Mdm Halimah Yacob, Mdm Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Mr Othman Haron Eusofe, A/P Koo Tsai Kee, Major Abbas Abu Amin, among others. I found them to be committed, sincere, approachable, friendly, good listeners and most of all, people who had no fear of telling “truth to power”. They had the workers’ interest at heart.

The unique tripartite co-operation between union, management and employers has brought about industrial peace and stability leading to a progressive Singapore, unlike in many countries where unions and governments are always at loggerheads.

We have developed from a sleepy fishing village to a cosmopolitan city-state today.

While being active in the union, I joined the PAP in 1983 in the then Kim Keat Constituency, currently the Toa Payoh East Division of Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC. I also served in the RC, CCC, IBCC, town council and various sub-committees.

My grassroots work started under the late Mr Ong Teng Cheong. Under his leadership, I found myself serving both the union members and the residents of Kim Keat. Subsequently as a grassroots leader, I was helping Dr Ho Tai Kim, Dr Ng Eng Hen, Mrs Josephine Teo and Mr Zainuddin Nordin. Regrets? Not one bit. Lots of personal sacrifices but I’ve enjoyed my work both as a union leader and a grassroots leader.
In 1965, I assisted in organising the PAP Women’s Contingent for the National Day Parade. I was the leader of the contingent. It was raining heavily and we were wet through.

I joined the PAP because that was the sort of work I enjoyed. I was always involved in social welfare, in one form or other — first with the Social Welfare Department under the Ministry of Labour and Law and then the People’s Association (PA). At the time, there was a lot to do — taking care of floods and fire, and homeless people.

I started work at a young age while I was still in secondary school. I worked with the British Army as a telephone operator in Changi. Subsequently, I was promoted to a library clerk, before becoming a full-fledged librarian.

I would walk far into the kampongs at Changi, Pasir Ris, Tanah Merah, Ayer Gemuruh, Koh Sek Lim, Jalan Tiga Ratus and Bedok, asking young people to join us. I was good at recruiting young people, maybe they could see that I was enjoying myself. I told them: “Rather than sitting down and doing nothing, come and join me and organise activities.” And they did.

We organised sports activities such as basketball, football, badminton, canoeing and other sea sports. Our picnics were in the thousands and they included the young and old.

Drinks, which we made ourselves, were free-flow. There was bandung, coffee, tea or just water. It was simple food but people kept coming.

Mdm Chan Choy Siong, Member of Parliament and wife of Mr Ong Pang Boon, Minister for Education, was with me at the PA. She wanted me to become an MP.

“I see you are very active,” she told me.

Last but not least, Party members from all branches should be punctual at all meetings and functions and they should play a major role in organising more activities for the young and the old in order to recruit more members.
It was a bus route that got me interested in politics. In the early 1970s, there was a decision to realign bus routes. This would have a big impact on many of us as the bus was the vital link to work and to school.

I lived way out in Jalan Kayu, and most of the bus services went only to the Toa Payoh, Serangoon Gardens and Sembawang Hills Terminals. However, many people living in my kampong had to go to Shenton Way, Chinatown and other parts of the city. I went to the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) and gave my views. “Look, extend the bus services from Serangoon Gardens and Sembawang Hills Terminals to the Jalan Kayu Terminal, it would be good for workers and students.” They accepted my suggestion and we had two bus services, 103 and 163. I was happy to have made a difference, a small difference but it was a daily convenience to many of us.

At the time, I was working as a technician at the Yio Chu Kang radio receiving station which received telecommunication signals from overseas. We didn’t have much by way of facilities in our kampong, so we built our own basketball court. We bought the materials and enlisted the help of neighbours who worked in construction and had the necessary experience. We poured out the cement and built everything ourselves. All that was missing were the lights.

We needed electricity to play at night. This was in the 1970s where electricity was not so common, so I approached the MP. He wrote to the PUB and they pulled some wires and gave us electricity.

By then, I was 26 and I was familiar with the people at the Branch. I regularly brought villagers who were in trouble to see the MP who was then Mr Hwang Soo Jin. He invited me to join the Jalan Kayu Constituency Citizens’ Consultative Committee. After a few years I joined the Party.

I remember in the 1970s, before I joined the CCC and the Party, my kampong friends and I would organise a “one-day tour”. In those days, we would go to Seletar Reservoir, Mount Faber, Haw Par Villa, Botanic Gardens and also organised a picnic at Sentosa. There were between three to 11 buses of people who would join us on these tours.

Among my friends and neighbours, I was the one who always spoke to the MP and the political leaders. Some of my friends were reluctant to do so because they said that they did not know what to say and did not dare to meet with the “government people”, or perhaps they just felt uncomfortable doing so.

But I somehow found the courage to do it. You need someone to be this go-between, to get things done.
In 1967 I was in Chinese High School doing my A levels. The economy was quite challenging and many struggled to get jobs. Then, it was 50-50 for and against the PAP Government. There was a feeling that the Chinese-educated students were disadvantaged compared to the English-educated; many from my school and class went on to attend Nanyang University.

I did not further my studies because my family needed me to work. My father was just a clerk and I had two younger brothers and five younger sisters. So I joined the Teachers’ Training College as a Craft Teacher under the Ministry of Education (MOE). Though I was Chinese-educated I had to teach in English. It was a good opportunity for us to improve our English Language proficiency. I worked hard and continued to advance in my teaching career until 1985.

At that time in the civil service, those without a degree were disadvantaged when it came to salary and promotions. Hence, I studied on my own and received a Diploma, a Bachelor’s and even a Master’s degree. I joined the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) as a Training Officer and later, Seagate, a US Multinational Company (MNC) as a Training Manager and Senior HR Manager. I was promoted to HR Director and posted to China. My "disadvantage" became an advantage. I was part of the team sent to set up Seagate in China. The Chinese-educated ones had a first mover advantage — we were bilingual. We could speak English to the US Head Office and Chinese to those in China.

Since then, the education system has changed. There is no longer a Chinese or English stream — everyone is bilingual. Unlike our time, we were bilingual through a force of circumstances. Our language policy makes sense, even though I had a slower start because I was Chinese-educated. I was able to move up the career ladder with my determination and hard work.

I joined the Party because a group of good friends were helping at the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) with the MacPherson Branch. We used it as an informal gathering place. Also, I had a job while many did not, so I was keen to help them apply for taxi and hawker licences. I was one of the members helping to write the cases. Very few people were educated and even fewer could write in English. It was another opportunity that I forced myself to improve my English.

Looking back, a lot of my Chinese-educated friends remained teachers all their lives. They respect my courage and choice for private sector experience. In fact, any one of them could have chosen to join me. We started from the same point, but we each chose our own roads so we had different endings. Nevertheless, it is the individual’s choice and the key is that one should be happy and appreciative of the system provided by the Government.

You could say that the system disadvantaged me, a Chinese-educated student. But the system also created opportunities for me to take up further studies and to work for different organisations. So, is it the system that determines our destiny, or is it the paths we choose, or could it be a bit of both? The PAP shaped the paths of the country, and that in turn shaped the future of many of us.
I stopped school at 15 and helped my grandfather run a small provision stall.

In 1959, when Mr Lee Kuan Yew was running for election, he came to our shop and asked for help to put up posters. I was 21 at the time and his personal style suited me: straight and anti-corruption.

I can’t write or mobilise people, but I can give my support. After our shop closed down because of competition from the larger supermarkets, I joined the airlines as a technician. I had the confidence to fix any part of it because I spent 36 years fixing aircrafts. I had knowledge of the whole plane. I knew that the aircraft-towing tractors weighed 60 tonnes but changing a tyre, tightening a screw, checking for carcasses of tiny birds in the engines — all these were important. A big plane flies safely only because meticulous support staff looked after the very small details.

“I will contribute even if it is just a small supporting role to ensure that each generation is ahead of the previous one.”

Mr Ang Kim Ling (77 YEARS OLD)

Ward: Bishan
Joined in 1985

That was my role. And I do the same for the Party too. When there are large dinners, I take care of the logistics. I will stay back and stack up the tables. I am not alone as there are many other people with me.

I am proud to be a member of the PAP. Because of the PAP, we have a government, a country that allows the next generation to have a better life. My boy is working in Australia. Both my daughters are married and take care of their kids. I get regular updates about my grandchildren. I know they are going to be more successful than their parents. They will have a better life.

This country is my family! I will contribute even if it is just a small supporting role to ensure that each generation is ahead of the previous one.
I joined the PAP at age 19 as all my buddies were PAP members. They said, this is to take care of our country, so I supported it and I went in. Today, critics can say anything, good or bad, you can’t take away the fact that the PAP did give us a better country.

We were a handful of very hardworking activists. We worked during the night to put up all those banners during elections. We were called “monkeys” because we were so agile. In the Branch, some of them would cook fried bee hoon and red bean soup. We ate together and worked together. It was simple food, but we enjoyed it.

At that time, it was considered shameful to have financial problems and they would not speak to others about it. But we tell them, it’s OK to ask for help. We directed them to the government department which could assist.

Today, it is a different world. Even people who have jobs are in a situation where they have no money. Their children have to attend swimming and tuition classes, they have to keep up with the trends, to be on par with other children so they can be better off in the future.

Politics is also different, it’s not just how good you are, but how... well. At the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS), if you tell someone that their case doesn’t look good, they will shout at you and say: “If minister cannot help me, who can help me?”

If someone keeps on committing parking offences, what can we do? There was a lady who had 20 summonses and I had to write appeal letters. She said: “I am in marketing, and I have to be out late. If I don’t park under my flat, I will have to walk from the carpark far away. If anything happens to me, will you be responsible?” She would make threats like that. Very nasty. I did write the letters for her but I told her it was the last time. You have to have a sense of community, to know that you are living with others who may be making the same demands on space.

Now we have over five million people and already we find it hard to act — what will happen with a bigger population? If you do unpopular things, people will protest. This runs the risk of doing things that favour the people, because they are scared of losing votes.

On the other hand, people have good ideas too. If you listen to them, you’d make them happy and do the right thing. For example, CPF affects the pocket. For the older generation, if we cannot get our money to spend, then what is it for? Give them one third of what they have in the CPF. It is human, all this while, I’ve been struggling. Give me one third; I will go on a short holiday, refurnish my house and do some small business. This is self-supporting too.

Another idea, why not let hawker centres be run by non-profit organisations? In a hawker centre in Jurong, a small stall sells their chicken rice for $2 per packet. Why can’t there be more like them?

Maybe my ideas are not based on hard maths, but you have to understand how I feel, what my life means, and what risks I am willing to take. If we have more people, we have more ideas. This is our country so we want the best for it. This is true now, as it was at the start.
I am Hainanese and I can speak Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese and Malay. I can also understand Hakka but I can’t speak it much. I came from a kampong in Sembawang, where most people could speak dialects. You can say I am multi-dialect speaking. When the new MP, Mr Chandra Das came in, he asked me to translate in English for him during the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS). I agreed to help and also joined some of the grassroots organisations.

One day, a man with a crew cut came to one of our grassroots dinners. He never said who he was, but asked me a lot of questions about what I did. I told him: “Assistant Secretary of the RC,” but didn’t understand why he was so inquisitive. I later found out that he was Mr Lee Hsien Loong, who stood for election as MP of the new Teck Ghee Ward.

Today, I work for the Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre (AMKFSC). I sometimes take a busload of the elderly to the Esplanade to listen to old songs. We all enjoy it very much. I think the elderly are well taken care of. There are many activities catered for them. They can go out and enjoy things at very low costs. The outing is free as the agency absorbs the cost. This is part of honouring our pioneers. There is free lunch, coffee and tea, and you can also play mahjong, rummy-o and bingo. You would not have this in the old days.

I also help out at the MPS. Calls come in at the Branch and the most common question is, “Is the PM coming this Wednesday?”

I will ask them: “Which constituency are you from? Tanjong Pagar? Best to go to your own MP. The PM sees each case from his Division on its own merits, it doesn’t mean the case will be successful.” Many come here anyway.

At times, there are needy cases and the Branch makes sure there are goodie bags ready. There are about 10 items such as rice, sugar, oil, noodles, Milo and biscuits that they can take home immediately. When people are in deep trouble, they do unusual things. For example, there was a parent who had a young child with a high fever. The mother told the other siblings to take the child to school to inform the teacher that the family had no money. She had seven young kids. We brought the child to the hospital.

It can be heart-breaking, but I’ve become more understanding. I’ve been here so many years already, so I’ve learnt how to deal with hardships. Along the way, I’ve made many friends, some of whom are very grateful for the help rendered.
01 Then PM Mr Lee Kuan Yew on a community visit to Choa Chu Kang. Photo courtesy of Mr Seah Chin Heng from Yew Tee Branch.
02 Victory parade for then MP Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam. Photo courtesy of Mr Law Shun Yong (holding microphone) from Sembawang Branch.
03 Decorative gateway for the GE. Photo courtesy of Mr Seah Chin Heng from Yew Tee Branch.
04 Branch members from Teck Ghee in high spirits during the GE. Photo courtesy of Mdm Helen Goh (holding garland).
05 Mdm Hajjah Bibi Mahmood from Whampoa Branch on a lorry as part of the victory parade after the GE.
06 Activists from Teck Ghee Branch on their walkabout during the GE. Photo courtesy of Mdm Helen Goh.
07 MP Mr Khaw Boon Wan presenting a token of appreciation to Mr Law Shun Yong from Sembawang Branch.
08 Press conference for the GE. Photo courtesy of Mr Chia Nga Teh from Kolam Ayer Branch.
09 MP Mr Heng Chee How leads the way at a constituency walkabout. Photo courtesy of Mr Chia Nga Teh from Kolam Ayer Branch.
10 Mr Seah Chin Heng from Yew Tee Branch was part of the ground operations for the GE. He helped to put up posters and distribute other publicity materials.
When Singapore switched to self-government, I was 21 years old and serving as an apprentice in the naval dockyard in Sembawang. I was learning to be a boiler-maker. When the British left the yard, it turned commercial. They assured us that our jobs would still be available. But what about everyone else? It was a big issue for Singapore. For the yard, it was a change of bosses; for Singapore, it was a change of government.

I joined the PAP because I saw what the leadership was doing for Singapore. I thought, these men are very brave, negotiating with the British, fighting against communists. It was a big, big struggle, on all fronts. Everything needed to be done in a hurry, jobs and housing were the main issues.

We were one of the lucky ones and my parents got a three-room flat in Kim Keat Avenue. After having lived in my previous flat, which was basically a cubicle, our new flat “felt like heaven”.

Living in a cubicle is unimaginable to people today. We crammed a family of seven into one cubicle which is a bit smaller than a bedroom in an HDB flat. We had one double bed inside and very little space to move.

Looking at the big picture, we have houses, jobs, and a good standard of living in today’s Singapore. I am very proud of Singapore. We are a small place, but we have made good.
I joined the PAP because it has good and strong leaders with the necessary resolve and integrity that will give our country the best chance of success. I wanted to do my part for nation building so I joined the Party to support these leaders.

I am proud of how much we have achieved as a country. Personally, I think it is important as citizens that we give due respect to the Government and take an active and constructive role in our efforts to build the country.

Over the years, I have given much of my time as a member of the Party. While this may have been a sacrifice for me and my family, I think it has been worthwhile.

What’s different between the old and the new PAP? There was much at stake in the old days but we took the leap of faith and pressed on because we believed in the cause.

Today, I would encourage people to join the Party as my belief in the current leaders still stands. I am glad that my son Ian Hong shares a similar conviction and is currently a Branch Secretary.

For a country’s leaders to formulate the right policies, it is important that they get a sense of the pulse and sentiments of the people. It is just as important for such policies to be communicated and understood on the ground. As members of the Party, we are a critical part of this process.

“There was much at stake in the old days but we took the leap of faith.”

Dr Hong Chee Boo, Allan

Ward: Radin Mas
Joined in 1971

[74 YEARS OLD]
When Singapore gained independence in 1965, some people thought that Singapore would not make it. But the PAP under the strong leadership of Mr Lee Kuan Yew stood up and faced its challenges. The PAP gradually solved the floods, riots, strikes and the communist threats that the people were facing.

The PAP introduced National Service for the security and stability of Singapore. It built good homes, created jobs, and gave good education to Singaporeans.

The PAP extended a warm friendship to world leaders and brought investments into Singapore. Many campaigns were put in place to make Singapore a better place to live in. The PAP believed in a multiracial society for Singapore and brought the people together to celebrate each other’s festivals, learn their cultures and to live in racial harmony as one people, one nation.
I joined the PAP at a time when old Tampines was facing land acquisition for the development of the Paya Lebar Airport. Our family, together with fellow villagers at Teck Hock Village was to be resettled. I was recruited by a Party supporter to help explain this to the villagers and farmers. At the time, we were not just concerned with acquisition and compensation but also with our new life in HDB flats, schools for our children, finding jobs and so on.

I have never regretted the decision to move out, and convincing my neighbours to do so. Our former villagers now have a better life and their children are all educated.

I joined the Party because I was a bursary holder during my studies at the university. It was natural for me to return to the society that needed my contribution. In fact, a good number of us from my village in Tampines joined the Party.

Attending the Chinese seventh-month dinners (中元) with the MP brings back fond memories. There were nine community centres in old Tampines, extending from Paya Lebar to Kampong Chai Chee. One night, we attended eight dinners in all and it lasted until the wee hours of the morning. We were not tired and were very happy watching the bidding (投標福物) because the proceeds from the auctions were used to top up the bursary fund for needy students.

Over the years, the Party did right in building a corruption-free country and in our public housing policies. But we neglected those older Chinese-educated Singaporeans who could not cope when English was the main medium of communication. This is a great pity.

I am still active in Tampines. It is a great pleasure to work with the young comrades. In the past, we fought for independence, against colonialism, Communism and communalism. We had definite goals.

Today, with modern technology, new media as well as a well-educated but somewhat divided society, people expect something beyond the basics — what we would consider luxuries in the old days. How to satisfy their wants without compromising the welfare of the less privileged? This is our Party’s challenge.
In 1958, I was not happy with the PAP. I was very angry with them. I was at the polytechnic, preparing to enter university but then they abolished the course I was going to take. I remember it was Mr Toh Chin Chye who said the polytechnic was not an academic institution, it should not be conducting that course. So that was it, I was out in the cold. It would be 36 years later before I finally got my degree.

In 1964, I joined the PAP. By then, I could see that they had done a lot for the people. Many people had homes, and with education, there was a chance to make things equal for the rich and the poor.

In a way, they were right about the polytechnics — although I think they were wrong where I was personally concerned, and their policies were not good for me. Perhaps they should have made an exception for the class and allow the course to continue for another year for it to be completed but it was a time when they would not have listened to you. Things were moving too fast — if everyone wanted to be an exception, where would we be?

I took up correspondence courses. Today, I have a law degree and an MBA by distance learning. Hardship makes you struggle harder, that’s all. One has to look beyond, at the big picture.

“One has to look beyond, at the big picture.”
Mr Law Shun Yong, BBM(L) [72 YEARS OLD]

I’ve been at Sembawang for nearly 50 years. Through the years of working the ground with the people, I have seen great transformations over the decades.

A lot of people don’t appreciate this but in the early years, the sheer number of things that had to be done without the help of technology, or other forms of support, was an incredible physical challenge.

In the 1980s, Sembawang was a real kampong where residents had large plots of land which they did not register for an agricultural licence. To many of them, they did not see a need to pay the registration fees and it was too troublesome to have to fill up forms.

As a result, when resettlement came, many residents approached the MP for assistance regarding compensation for their land and produce they owned. The MP then asked me and a few Citizens’ Consultative Committee (CCC) members to visit these residents. We had to confirm and state very clearly who were the farmers and exactly what they owned on their plot of land. It was a very tedious process counting the number of trees and animals as well as helping the residents understand the difficult resettlement and compensation policies. However, we were happy to be able to help these residents in getting their deserved compensations from the government authority.

I was a Chinese-language teacher and school hours then were only half a day. I spent the rest of the day doing community work. To me, it was something that was important and meaningful. I knew then that I was taking part in something larger and I had always wanted to contribute to it.

It was for the same reason that I decided to join the PAP Community Foundation (PCF), to take care of the kindergartens as I believe in providing children with a good start in childhood education. We need to ensure this basic education for all children is well taken care of to ensure better social mobility. During the kampong days, there were no kindergartens and children had to wait till they were old enough to enter a primary school before they had formal schooling. I felt that these children who did not attend two years of kindergarten would be at a great disadvantage. We worked hard to build up a relationship with the parents, allowing them to get to know us, understand what the Party stands for and what PCF does for the children.

Today, I continue to help at Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) with Mr Khaw Boon Wan. On an average, there are about 70 to 80 people per session, sometimes it can be as many as 100. There are many residents who need some form of help and I am reminded of the same sense of urgency as in the early days — so much to do, so little time. The need for more volunteers is great — why not me? I jumped straight into the fray!
I joined the PAP 30 years ago and helped at the Marsiling Branch because I thought it was “give back time” to the community for the opportunities I had enjoyed and benefitted from. Also, the people in the PAP were honest, capable and effective. I didn’t see any other party having these traits or calibre.

The opposition often talked about the good of their own party — nothing about their intentions for Singapore. They wanted to win a seat — but I have not heard them offering any sound policy in the interest of the nation. When the Government gave something — they would ask, why not give more? Anybody can say that!

I grew up in a rural area at Ah Hood Road. I lived in an attap house, shared with four families. Our family occupied one of the rooms. The kitchen, bathroom and toilet were shared with the others. When we were resettled, we moved to a 3-room HDB flat in Toa Payoh. I saw the transformation of a rural village into the modern satellite new town of Toa Payoh.

During the school holidays, I would go with my father to his job site in Jurong Hill. Jurong was still swamps and farm land. Over time, it was transformed and developed into an industrial estate. The Government encouraged and attracted foreign investors to build factories in Singapore. It created employment opportunities for many Singaporeans.

Besides housing and factories, more schools and hospitals were built to provide education for our young and health care programmes to take care of the sick and aged. As we progressed and prospered, the Government shared the nation’s wealth with Singaporeans.

Today, I have my own business and wherever I travelled, I found that Singaporeans were highly respected. It has been a privilege so far and so for every small success in life, I felt I should give back.

Recently, I took on a welfare case, which involved a home visit. The sole breadwinner, a divorcee with custody of his five children, had just died of cancer. One daughter was married and the oldest son was working to support the family as his two youngest siblings were still schooling. Upon the strong recommendation of the MP, Mr Hawazi Daipi, we arranged ComCare assistance for the family.

The interest of the nation is paramount. Look at the Pioneer Generation Package (PGP) and the Bus Concession Card. My dental bill was reduced from $88 to $27 when I used my PGP card, and this was at a private dental clinic. I took the MRT from Queenstown to Woodlands, changing trains at Jurong East Station, and later transferred to a feeder bus service to my office in Woodlands East Industrial Estate. The whole journey cost me only $0.90.

We are fortunate to have an honest, capable and effective government that takes care of its people. Other political parties only talk and never come up with any constructive policies to improve our nation’s economy and take Singapore to the next level of success.

As a Party activist, it is important to put nation before self. If every Singaporean can make small sacrifices in giving part of his or her time and energy in helping and serving fellow Singaporeans, it will make Singapore a better place for us to live and work in, especially for our children.

Mr Cheong Khim Teck [66 YEARS OLD]
Ward: Marsiling
Joined in 1985

“As a Party activist, it is important to put nation before self.”
The boycott of examinations in 1961 is well-known.

At the time, the PAP Government was trying to convert the system used in the Chinese-stream schools (three years + three years) to that used in English-stream schools (four years + two years). This was to ensure one uniform standard for all Singapore schools so that we could all take a common exam after four years of education (rather than six years in Chinese schools and four in English.)

The picketing and lobbying by the leftist students were well-known. They would link their arms in solidarity, and lock the gates with bicycle chains. What is little known is that there was a group of us who were countering the movement.

When the leftists put up posters asking people not to take the exams, we put up ours, asking people to proceed. We put them up at 2 am or 3 am so that we would not be hassled.

I had graduated from Chung Cheng High School by then. I remembered that in 1961, hundreds of students boycotted the Chinese Secondary Four Examination. One of my friends asked me what to do.

I told him: “Exams are not for playing politics. It is about your future.”

My friend took the exams. Many others did as well, escorted by their parents, but I think about one-third of students that year did not.

Too often, the choice was painted as a clash between noble and idealistic versus bread and butter. But to me, passing exams, getting a job, building a safe home — those are ideals worthy of risk and sacrifice as well.
Old men tell stories, but I want to tell you a simple truth: MPs serve their wards for a long time — many for at least 10 years. They know the people, the residents trust them, and when they walk around, people shake their hands. So after retirement, the old MP should come back. The new MP may not know the activists, or the residents as well.

In the Branch, the new MP won’t know for sure — who has been here longest, who is a good worker and so on. The residents too — they see a new face and wonder: what happened to the old guy?

Mr Leong Lye Marn  
[73 Years Old]  
Ward: Tanjong Pagar  
Joined in 1977

“People take time to trust you, to learn that you are their friend.”

This relationship with the ground is built up over the years. If MPs are serious about serving the people, they should keep in touch even after they have stepped down. And the new MP should welcome this — it is an asset to them. People take time to trust you, to learn that you are their friend. You don’t cut off a friend after a GE. Friends come back to visit.

People take time to trust you, to learn that you are their friend.”

This relationship with the ground is built up over the years. If MPs are serious about serving the people, they should keep in touch even after they have stepped down. And the new MP should welcome this — it is an asset to them. People take time to trust you, to learn that you are their friend. You don’t cut off a friend after a GE. Friends come back to visit.
In the 1959 General Election, the PAP contested all 51 constituencies. I was just a student of about 15 years old then and I was very influenced by my friends in the Hainanese kampong who were senior activists. I was asked to help distribute all the manifestos and brochures to my kampong folks who were at “Changi 10 milestone” on which now stands Apollo Gardens and Jalan Tiga Ratus.

As soon as I turned 21 in August 1965, I joined the PAP. I climbed the coconut tree to nail and hang the candidate poster of Mr Goh Chew Chua (Tampines) and also the Party logo posters. When I climbed down, my chest was red and some parts dotted with blood. My singlet was so thin that the rough coconut tree trunk had scraped me through it.

If I were to fall from the tree then, that would have been the end of me because I don’t think we were covered by any insurance. Anyway, we volunteered on our own accord and my parents were not aware of it. Now all the PAP helpers are insured from personal accidents during General Election season.

I have participated in 12 General Elections since 1959 except for the 1972 GE. At the first election, we were all in a fever as we wanted a change of government. We were sick of the old regime’s corruption and the country’s poverty. I could not be a bystander so I helped the PAP.

All these years, the sense that the Party really takes care of the people, that they practise what they preach — never left me.

I remember vividly in 1962 when the then Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, made his constituency walkabouts to our place, our people petitioned him for electricity and power supply to our kampong. A few months later, the men from the Public Works Department (PWD) came bearing poles and wires and we had power supply and light. Before that we used the kerosene pressure lamp. This was something. I thought that people who kept their promises could be trusted to run the country and that was how it influenced me to join the PAP.
My political life started when I was seconded to the NTUC in 1970. The late Mr N. Govindasamy, the MP, roped me in. At the time, I was involved in the Singapore Teachers’ Union. In the 1960s, there was a major industrial relations issue among non-graduate teachers. I was quite unhappy with the different salary scales among non-graduate teachers. We were differentiated according to the training programmes with the old certificate commanding the highest salary. There were many angry speeches and in the end the Ministry of Education integrated the three salary scales.

As a student, I used to attend PAP rallies and its slogan, “A more just and equal society” attracted me deeply. Man could never truly be 100% equal but we wanted a less unequal society. To a young man, the PAP promised overwhelming changes to bring about a better society. Unions in Singapore were an instrument for political independence. After independence, they were galvanised for nation building, a way for us to increase the size of the cake. Not all on the ground understood this shift. Union membership declined. Union leaders agreed with the need to attract investments — but we were seen by some to be weak. It was not until 1969, when the Modernisation Seminar took place, with the formation of co-operatives and a new role, new programmes, that the NTUC became relevant to the aspirations of workers and their families. It was a critical turning point.

I have worked with seven MPs. In the early 1970s, a rally meant going into the kampong on a lorry with speakers and one backdrop. We stayed for 45 minutes at each kampong, covering three in one night. About 100 people would turn up to listen at each stop. The candidate and supporters spoke in Malay, Tamil as well as Chinese dialects like Hokkien and Cantonese. The Party Branch cooked five meals a day for the volunteers who helped run the election campaign; the hawkers in the market donated food to minimise our expenditure. Today the stage for a rally alone costs thousands of dollars!

A lot has changed in Singapore, and we have achieved much of what we had set out to do. But what about a more just and equal society? I used to believe that a minimum wage was the fastest way to reduce the gap. But the progressive wage that the NTUC has proposed is, in some ways, better than a minimum wage. It has three tiers and is targeted at certain sectors. It incorporates training and productivity improvements.

Man can never be completely equal. However, we must ensure that society makes things less unequal and more just. This means that the lowest rung must have a living wage. There are workers who worry that major items, such as health care and children’s education, may be beyond them. We must make sure that this is not so.

At the end of a person’s working life, what savings does he have for his own retirement? Old people who have no more income get very upset with the rise in the cost of living. A bowl of noodles increases by 50 cents and they think, “What if I outlive my savings?”

In the past, many had thought that a rising tide lifts all boats, in reality it is not so. We have risen at a different pace and due to globalisation, the lower end has in some ways stagnated. More can and should be done to uplift this group.
Being a volunteer in several grassroots organisations, I came to understand that both the PAP and grassroots organisations work towards the same objective, that is, nation building.

The reason I joined the PAP was to enable me to broaden my volunteer work and to be more effective doing it. I proudly represented the Party as part of the marching contingent at the National Day Parade for several years.

Today, the PAP remains the only credible party.
Mr Lim Hong Lit [ 76 YEARS OLD ]
Ward: Ulu Pandan
Joined in 1984

I was from Malaysia and migrated to Singapore when I was still in school. Singapore was under the Lim Yew Hock Government then. It was a tough time, people hung out of the buses but they were glad just to get a ride, happy that the buses were moving.

I was in the thick of things. I was living at Middle Road where the unions were based — Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Mr Devan Nair, they were all there. I didn’t have much time for politics though. With three kids, I needed two jobs to make ends meet. I was a salesman and also worked the front desk at a hotel. I worked from 8 am till 6 pm, and from evening till 3 in the morning.

I knew the unions because they were fighting for pay increases in the hotel industry. The NTUC people were all PAP people.

Later on, when I came to Leng Kee, the MP Mr Ow Chin Hock asked me to join him. So I became the Residents’ Committee Chairman, and that got me very close to my neighbours. If anything went wrong, I would know about it. They came to me and asked for repairs, mostly of leaking ceilings. And I’ve sent three people to NUH in my car. One had fallen on the slippery road, another was an old woman who was waiting for a taxi with her maid as a vein in her eye had ruptured. So I hurried them into my car and sent them to the hospital.

Then there was an old woman who had fallen on the road and injured her back. One man saw her and started shouting for help. My wife was on the way back from the market and she called me on the phone when she heard him. The ambulance came and took her away. I went to her flat personally and left a note. Her son was in the army and when he came back, he came to my house with a cake to thank me. He still gives me cakes every now and then.

Being able to do that for my friends and neighbours gives me a buzz. It makes me feel proud of being a Singaporean. The next generation, do they feel proud? Through my Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) experience, they can be quite demanding. When someone runs a traffic light, he doesn’t think he is wrong but just feels aggrieved at the summons. He says the Government wants his money — he doesn’t think that it is his fault for beating the red light.

We can feel proud of what we have achieved. The next generation will have to find its own achievements and write its own story.
01 Mr Alan Liang Tong Juan from Tanjong Pagar-Tiong Bahru Branch has fond memories of marching as part of the PAP contingent at the National Day Parade.

02 PAP contingent at the 1995 National Day Parade. Photo courtesy of Mdm Helen Goh from Teck Ghee Branch.

03 Teck Ghee Branch members at a constituency walkabout. Photo courtesy of Mdm Helen Goh.

04 Mdm Hj Bibi Mahmood (holding clipboard) from Whampoa Branch accompanying then PM Mr Goh Chok Tong on a constituency visit.

05 Mr Law Shun Yong takes part in a walkathon organised by the Sembawang Branch.

06 MP Mr Khaw Boon Wan meets the residents of his constituency. Photo courtesy of Mr Law Shun Yong from Sembawang Branch.

07 Mdm Helen Goh from Teck Ghee Branch with fellow members and their families at a Family Day Picnic.

08 Mdm Helen Goh from Teck Ghee Branch attending a Chinese New Year Party held at the Istana in 1988. It was hosted by the Prime Minister.

09 MP Mr Zulkifli Mohammed at a Community Day event organised by PAP Kolam Ayer Branch, 1994. Photo courtesy of Mr Ong Nga Teh.

10 PM Mr Lee Hsien Loong with children in fancy dress at a community event organised by Teck Ghee Branch. Photo courtesy of Mdm Helen Goh.
I could have joined the PAP when I was 18 in 1957, but I waited because it was too messy at the time, and I could not see the picture clearly. I gave the PAP four years to prove itself. I saw that it was a very cohesive, very practical party. We were very poor, and telephones and television needed to be shared. But in that sense, we cared for each other. I saw that sense of caring in the PAP, and I finally joined when I was 22.

I also joined the People’s Defence Force. There was no army then as we were newly independent. We would go for two hours of training, twice a week from 5 pm to 7 pm. I marched in the first two National Day Parades in 1966 and 1967. I also marched for the PAP until the 1990s. I joined the PAP because I was recommended by a friend. I also introduced a lot of friends to the PAP. In the early years, I was an odd-job labourer. I found a job at a plywood factory in Jurong Industrial Park. My pay was only $3.75 for eight hours of work.

I have been a hawker at a vegetable stall and a taxi driver. Today, I still drive part-time. Taxi drivers come and ask me, why did you join the PAP? It is a matter of energy, time and interest. I am in the PAP because I want to know my neighbours, to understand policies. I want to see what this country I defended as a young man has become and where it is going.

I got scolded by friends in the coffee shop who think there are too many foreigners or they want more health care. Young ones ask me, what do you get after so many years in the PAP? Are you famous or rich? I tell them no, but I have happiness.

I’ve led a meaningful life. I remember the times when we built the roads in Neo Tiew area and repaired them. Gotong royong, or community spirit, this was what building a country was about. I remember the people I’ve helped, the friends I have made. The few small roads we built are all gone today. What comes from the people goes back to the people. This is the principle and philosophy of the times. There are new people who need to build their own roads for the years ahead.
I was in Chai Chee from 1968–1975, then in Bedok from 1975 onwards. I’ve been the treasurer in both places, a total of over 30 years. In Chai Chee, we started a consumer club to sell rice and other staples. That was in 1974.

We sold rice only twice a week, one lorry load each time, and there were long queues every Sunday and Tuesday. We sold rice at $1.05 a kg when the shops were selling it at $1.10-$1.20. We sold the rice in 10 kg bags so people could save as much as $2. In the 1970s, 50 cents could buy you a full meal with meat and vegetables, so it was a big deal.

The cash we took in could come up to $10,000 a month. We paid $300 a month to a Cisco guard to come twice a week to deposit the money into a bank. The highest sales record of rice on a Sunday exceeded $20,000 and we had to pay more than $300 that month to the Cisco guards. The longer they waited for us (as we were busy selling rice), the higher the amount they would charge.

I was very strict with the processes. The rice came in large gunny sacks and the karang guni (rag and bone) man would come and buy those off us. Every gunny sack was accounted for and we received a few hundred dollars from just selling the gunny sacks. The money we made from this sale was given to the poor and the victims of fire disasters.
I first met Mr Lee Kuan Yew in 1962. I was helping in my family business, a provision shop in the kampong. When he visited us he spoke in Malay to the residents. Among the three political parties whose representatives came by, his was the most impressive. Soon after that, I joined the PAP as a member.

In the 1968 General Election, we held a vigil at the Branch overnight. The Barisan Sosialis was very strong there. They had burnt community centres and they had also burnt the primary school I was a student in at Tampines so I knew what they were like.

The Branch was in a rented zinc-roofed house and we (seven or eight of us, all young men) took up one-third of the house. We were afraid they would come and destroy our posters. The MP Mr Phua Bah Lee came to visit us at midnight. He told us to sleep because there was work the next day but we sat up the whole night.

The Party was locked in a bitter battle with the opposition Barisan Sosialis. We were afraid but we were careful. When we put up a poster, the Barisan Sosialis would follow us and tear it down immediately. We would confront them and a fierce argument would follow. They would wait until we left and then they would write in paint on the road, scolding the PAP.

In the kampong, whatever you do is transparent and open. We knew the men who engaged in underhanded tactics. No punishment was meted out but these acts gave you the measure of the man. In the end, you had to be able to believe in the man you were voting for.
I was young and useful so my father-in-law asked me to join the Joo Chiat Area Sub-Committee Area 4. Many of the members were small-scale merchants who needed a Secretary urgently. Later I was invited to join the CCC to serve more residents and I did a year later. I was asked to join the PAP Joo Chiat Branch in 1978, and later became Branch Vice-Chairman as well as Treasurer.

My father-in-law ran a coffee shop. It was a meeting place for many people and they would often discuss their problems and issues there. The PAP was, for me, a way to get close to the people, to see their problems and think of how to help. Very often, there were no easy answers. Life is a tangled ball of problems.

I am on the welfare committee and I interview the needy who seek help from sources such as Comcare. Sometimes they are the disabled and the elderly. I once interviewed a former teacher who needed help urgently. I visited her several times to understand her problems. We were very much alike in age, in profession. Just that she had the bad luck to have an illness that required dialysis which ate up all her savings. She was single and waited a long time before asking for help, but in the end she did. And I was glad to help her.

Today, the many issues that we face are the problems of prosperity: parking summons, citizenship appeals, explaining why an application was not approved. The most intense periods are still the elections. This is where we eat and fight together; when we gave freely of our money and energy.

I remember how it was in 1978. I put up banners at the roadside. It was a two-man show then; one man drove the lorry and I stood on the ladder putting up the banners.

My father was a club bartender and I was the seventh child out of 11 children. Life got better when the PAP took over. All of us got jobs easily. Today, both my kids are graduates and have good jobs. I attribute these to the good PAP Government. All my nephews and nieces are also graduates. I see my joining the PAP as a form of national service. I am not an MP but through the PAP, I also serve the people.
I first got involved in the PAP in the 1970s by taking part in their grassroots activities along with my wife and a friend. I found the events interesting and meaningful. I soon became more involved because I wanted to contribute to society. I also wanted to be part of our nation-building efforts and not just benefit from it.

At that time, many of us were new to living in HDB estates. Most of us used to live in kampongs. There were many social, integration and adjustment issues faced by the residents. I realised that I was able to connect well with residents from various ethnic and social backgrounds. This spurred me to help them adjust to more compact and closer living conditions. I made many new friends, some of whom even joined me in the grassroots activities.

Today, I still ask my friends and children to join the Party because it helps them understand Singapore and the idea of governance better. We get to see and understand why changes in policies are necessary, as well as how we need to adapt to the environment and new technologies.

Modern Singapore is very different from when we first started. I still remember the tensions during the racial riots and workplace unrests. I was working as a salesman during those years. Those were difficult times, but I sincerely feel that the efficient and effective way our leaders handled matters helped to move our nation forward. Things could have turned out very differently.

Having lived through those times, I always felt we should never take things for granted. We must continue to build upon what we have. It would be sad to lose all that we have achieved.
I help today, even at age 78, because I was once the one needing help. I got married at 21, divorced at 27. My husband used to beat me regularly after my second son arrived. Sometimes it was because he was drunk. Even in front of my mother, he would hit me.

When I was pregnant with my third child, he kicked me. I was on the ground and he kicked my stomach. An unborn child is very fragile. When my son was born, he was not quite normal. His brain was damaged. It was then that I decided to leave my husband. At the divorce hearing, my old neighbour and my cousin testified. When the judge heard the testimonies, he asked me: “Why did you wait so long?”

Why? He may change. I always thought he would change for the better. Each time a son was born, I thought, he would change for the boys. I was young and could take care of the three kids. Luckily my parents were with me. Physically and financially they helped me.

But when my youngest son was six, I lost my mother and my father within 100 days of each other. I was lost. I worked and trained my boys to go to school by themselves and we had some help from the church, which paid for their school bus. My salary as a secretary didn’t cover the bills, so I went to ask for help. All I knew was a place in Chinatown, where one could get some help — $40 a month. On my way there, I ran into Mr Lee Kuan Yew. I had all three sons with me, and I was carrying the youngest, Patrick, who was going on to three. He took a look at me and asked where I was going. “I am going to get some help,” I said. “I am a single mother with kids.”

“He looked at me and said: “Girl, you must be strong. Be strong as you have your three kids to support.”

That was in the 1960s. What would happen to my kids if things went on like this? It was a place with few jobs. Crime was high and life was tough. Still, I did not forget his words, and I kept working and prayed that the boys would be safe. I took cast-off clothes from my employer; I worked at a factory. I was willing to do anything to raise my boys.

At my darkest time, I met Dr Augustine Tan, the MP of Whampoa, where I was living then. He suggested that I go and see the welfare committee at the PAP. After that, I started getting $150 a month from the PAP — every month, without fail. Faithfully, the money would be waiting for me. It was something I could count on — it was to buy rice, our meals, literally; a lifeline for me and my children.

I joined the PAP when I was in Whampoa, after my divorce. When things got better for me, I started to help at the Meet-the-People Sessions, case-writing and block visits.

I am grateful to the Party, the people who motivated me when I was in that condition. I know what it is for families to go through hardship, I do understand cases when I see them, I know how they feel, what the children are going through.

Today, my youngest son is in his 50s and lives with me. His two brothers care for us. I live in Marine Terrace and when people get into trouble, I have a cup of coffee with them and they talk. They don’t know where to go sometimes.

In the Party, you need people to sit down and talk to people in trouble. I know what tough times are. I tell them, be strong for your family, if not for yourself. And there will come a day when all comes right.

“I know what it’s like. I was once the one needing help.”

Mdm Roberts Clara Beatrice [78 YEARS OLD]
Ward: Marine Parade
Joined in 1976

“...I help today, even at age 78, because I was once the one needing help. I got married at 21, divorced at 27. My husband used to beat me regularly after my second son arrived. Sometimes it was because he was drunk. Even in front of my mother, he would hit me. ...”

[1218.9x666.1]
Mr. Poh Yong Meng, Stephen  
[ 70 Years Old ]

Ward: Kebun Baru  
Joined in 1978

“We are like a top spinning on the edge of a knife. If it stops spinning and falls, we cannot get up.”

Poverty, abject poverty, how many people remember what that was like? A fear that in a drought, the well would be dry and you would have to claw the mud. A time when kids had no kindergartens to attend, they would sit on the concrete pavement with gnawing hunger pangs. Those kids were tough. The Branch looked after them when we were setting up a kindergarten in the 1970s. Straw mats were a luxury to them.

Today, we are different. In a condominium, one of my friends saw some kids kicking a football, and it went into a monsoon drain. He was about to climb in when a little boy said: “No uncle! This is a job for the maid!”

Recently, I was in Indonesia and the Garuda flight was delayed. There was some grumbling behind me. After 30 minutes we were told to wait a little while longer. When the third announcement came that we would have to change to another flight, all hell broke loose. There was a mass condemnation. What a terrible place, there is corruption and haze. Nothing works.

Today, we have this grand notion that we are the best, everyone else is an idiot. It’s not just other countries, this sense is directed towards the Government too.

Take the CPF as an example. The people want to manage their own money. I am a retiree from the banking sector and let me tell you that most people will find it a challenge managing money. If you let them have their CPF to manage, well, that may be the end of their money.

In the past, we had very little, but we were tough. Somewhere in the climb upwards, we have lost our soul and our spirit. We are now a nation of grumblers and complainers. Singapore is like a top spinning on the edge of a knife. If it stops spinning and falls, we cannot get up.

Our politicians need to communicate better — we need to reach out better. We need to stop, think and work together. We are not the best in the world and we can improve by thinking of new ideas. For example, I live in an HDB estate and there are many old people who just sit downstairs and stare blankly at the wall. Why not let them travel for free? Let them meet their friends and keep mobile, keep active. Though $2 is not a lot to someone who is working, but for a retiree, it’s the cost of a plate of rice for lunch.

We are one of the richest countries in the world. Surely we can afford to let senior citizens who are above a certain age, 65 for example, to travel free of charge. That’s what money is for, to make people’s lives better.
The 1960s was a time when the Chinese school student was courted assiduously by the left. I attended Chung Cheng High School, and the leftists never gave up, forever asking me to join their meetings and study groups, to talk and to discuss. Society was in a mess and it was not a good environment for studying. I was more low-key and singularly unimpressed by all the activities. During my school days, the left-leaning groups would visit my home and offered help, homework groups, tuition and meetings. I saw through it as part of their tactics with political motives. These meetings were just an opportunity for them to sow propaganda. This was how they did it in China: the cells systems, indoctrination and we imported it.

To me, this is something that cannot be forced. If I were at a meeting, you may have my time but not my allegiance. There were also “professional students” or spies in my school. I did not know whether they were from the Government or the leftist groups, very likely both!

I joined the PAP because I saw that they had action, it was not just talks and meetings. I liked practical measures, practical outcomes. That’s why I became a volunteer probation officer. I read in the newspapers that they were recruiting and I thought I could make a difference, so I joined.

In the early days, and even today, drugs are a big problem. To work with teenagers, you need a lot of time. It’s like converting to a new religion. And I have to tell their parents not to be too strict all at once — you have to work it through.

Over the past few decades, I have done several cases including one which involved guiding and supervising a probationer and counselling his family as well as conducting time restriction checks on him. I am not sure how many delinquents I can keep out of jail and how many do turn their lives around but this is real life, real work and it suits me.
In the early days we were a small party, financially not very strong, but the results of elections were resounding. There was a strong showing at each election. People trusted the Party to do what was right and gave their support.

I remember in the early days during the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS), there were only three manual typewriters and a few of us to assist the residents. Having to erase typing errors did not deter the writers from completing their job. The rooms were not air-conditioned but there were standing fans. We used to work past midnight. We saw about 20 to 30 residents each week.

The changes at the MPS are clearly evident. We see about 50 or more residents nowadays and everything is computerised. The problems are harder and more complex. Many Singaporeans don’t like too many foreigners in the country. They feel that all the benefits due are taken away from them. We have better infrastructure but the problems have become more complex too.

In the past, we had a fierce opposition. The posters we put up would physically be torn and thrown away. They confronted members physically, and it was a matter of courage to face them and answer their queries.

Today, we don’t have such confrontation. Everything is done amicably but with Facebook and the Internet, there is a bigger challenge because you don’t even know who the opposition is and how to tackle people with negative views.

It is very easy to provide lip service but actually, these people cannot deliver. When they actually participate in grassroots activities, they will find that it is difficult to please everybody, to get the community and activities to progress in tandem.

The good thing is, I see many young Singaporeans coming forward now to help the Party and the country. We see more youngsters helping at the MPS every week. I am sure these young people have their own activities and their own jobs to consider. Still, they volunteer their services. It gives us hope that the youngsters are now more politically-motivated.
I joined the PAP in 1976, right after my National Service. I am happy to have served for 39 years.

My deepest memories are the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) each week. We would receive both reasonable and unreasonable requests from residents — so discernment is key. I learnt to be understanding towards the needs of the residents, patiently noting down each concern, lending a listening ear. Ultimately, I feel that “service with a heart” is paramount in this field. At the Branch, we learn to work in a team, sacrificing our time without asking for anything in return.

How will the PAP be different in future? Technology is constantly changing and people’s needs may not remain the same. Our service towards residents needs to be suited to the season. We need to adapt and keep up.

I believe the PAP will make decisions best-suited for the general well-being of all residents. But there is no one shoe size that fits all, and there is no way to please everybody. On the whole, the PAP is improving in serving the needs of the people. Onward Singapore!

“ There is no one shoe size that fits all, and there is no way to please everybody.”

Mr Ong Ann Peng, David [ 65 YEARS OLD ]
Ward: Tanjong Pagar-Tiong Bahru
Joined in 1976

I joined the PAP in 1976, right after my National Service. I am happy to have served for 39 years.

My deepest memories are the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) each week. We would receive both reasonable and unreasonable requests from residents — so discernment is key. I learnt to be understanding towards the needs of the residents, patiently noting down each concern, lending a listening ear. Ultimately, I feel that “service with a heart” is paramount in this field. At the Branch, we learn to work in a team, sacrificing our time without asking for anything in return.

How will the PAP be different in future? Technology is constantly changing and people’s needs may not remain the same. Our service towards residents needs to be suited to the season. We need to adapt and keep up.

I believe the PAP will make decisions best-suited for the general well-being of all residents. But there is no one shoe size that fits all, and there is no way to please everybody. On the whole, the PAP is improving in serving the needs of the people. Onward Singapore!
Marine Parade became an electoral ward in 1976. When the elections were held in December 1976, a PAP Branch was set up above a coffee shop in Marine Parade Central. The PAP Joo Chiat Branch gave us a helping hand.

The voters in Marine Parade came from many parts of Singapore and thus were generally strangers. It had no CCC or CCMC and thus had no local leadership network. The residents were familiar with the shopkeepers and market stallholders. Activists sought their assistance in the door-to-door election campaign as their known faces made it easier for doors to be opened to introduce to them the PAP candidate, Mr Goh Chok Tong.

Residents at some blocks gathered in the void decks, to provide security during the night. They organised potluck parties and also helped out residents trapped in lifts. Lift breakdowns were both common and frightening experiences. I lived in Block 43 and leadership was provided by the teachers and one or two police officers. There were 12 teachers in my block and we knew each other. I was also fortunate to have five of my ex-students living in the block. This made it easier to work towards a cooperative, conducive and safe environment.

After the elections, Mr Goh in his weekly walkabouts noticed what was going on in Blocks 3, 29 and 43. He was impressed and wanted similar set-ups in the whole constituency. He arranged for a survey to be done, seeking feedback amongst other things on municipal issues and for volunteers to carry out activities. The response was good but there were insufficient people with leadership and organising abilities. He divided Marine Parade into seven precincts. A few of us in the Branch helped to facilitate the seven committees. This allowed both the Branch and the community to have a close working relationship. Despite the advent of Residents’ Committees (RC) in the early 80s the block committees continued until the late 80s. The presence of block reps in the RCs made their presence redundant. They had served the purpose of making residents feel more secure and linked them to the larger community of Marine Parade.

The PAP Branch was at Block 46 Marine Crescent. In March 1977, a kindergarten was set up and I was given the task of working out the details. I looked after the centre until 2013. Many volunteers who assisted at the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) as case writers were not PAP members. They were drawn together for a common objective — to assist fellow residents. We had cemented our friendship over the years.

Over the years I have had political differences with some residents, but we agreed to disagree and respected each other. We knew where we stood during elections. But after the elections, things were back to normal. An opposition supporter was given the same respect and attention as residents who supported us when they sought our assistance during the MPS. I am glad that we have people of integrity and ability to ensure that things are OK for our children and future generations.

“\nWe have people of integrity and ability to ensure that things are OK for our children and future generations.\n”

Mr S. Puhaindran [ 79 YEARS OLD ]

Ward: Marine Parade Joined in 1977

Mr S. Puhaindran [ 79 YEARS OLD ]

Ward: Marine Parade

Joined in 1977

“We have people of integrity and ability to ensure that things are OK for our children and future generations.”

Marine Parade became an electoral ward in 1976. When the elections were held in December 1976, a PAP Branch was set up above a coffee shop in Marine Parade Central. The PAP Joo Chiat Branch gave us a helping hand.

The voters in Marine Parade came from many parts of Singapore and thus were generally strangers. It had no CCC or CCMC and thus had no local leadership network. The residents were familiar with the shopkeepers and market stallholders. Activists sought their assistance in the door-to-door election campaign as their known faces made it easier for doors to be opened to introduce to them the PAP candidate, Mr Goh Chok Tong.

Residents at some blocks gathered in the void decks, to provide security during the night. They organised potluck parties and also helped out residents trapped in lifts. Lift breakdowns were both common and frightening experiences. I lived in Block 43 and leadership was provided by the teachers and one or two police officers. There were 12 teachers in my block and we knew each other. I was also fortunate to have five of my ex-students living in the block. This made it easier to work towards a cooperative, conducive and safe environment.

After the elections, Mr Goh in his weekly walkabouts noticed what was going on in Blocks 3, 29 and 43. He was impressed and wanted similar set-ups in the whole constituency. He arranged for a survey to be done, seeking feedback amongst other things on municipal issues and for volunteers to carry out activities. The response was good but there were insufficient people with leadership and organising abilities. He divided Marine Parade into seven precincts. A few of us in the Branch helped to facilitate the seven committees. This allowed both the Branch and the community to have a close working relationship. Despite the advent of Residents’ Committees (RC) in the early 80s the block committees continued until the late 80s. The presence of block reps in the RCs made their presence redundant. They had served the purpose of making residents feel more secure and linked them to the larger community of Marine Parade.

The PAP Branch was at Block 46 Marine Crescent. In March 1977, a kindergarten was set up and I was given the task of working out the details. I looked after the centre until 2013. Many volunteers who assisted at the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) as case writers were not PAP members. They were drawn together for a common objective — to assist fellow residents. We had cemented our friendship over the years.

Over the years I have had political differences with some residents, but we agreed to disagree and respected each other. We knew where we stood during elections. But after the elections, things were back to normal. An opposition supporter was given the same respect and attention as residents who supported us when they sought our assistance during the MPS. I am glad that we have people of integrity and ability to ensure that things are OK for our children and future generations of Singaporeans.
01 MP Mr EW Barker at a Tanglin Branch Christmas event presenting a token of appreciation to Mr K Ramu.

02 MP Mr Sidek Saniff with Kolam Ayer Branch activists in 1987. Photo courtesy of Mr Chia Nga Teh.

03 Mr Chia Nga Teh from Kolam Ayer Branch with MP Dr Yaacob Ibrahim.

04 Mr Lau Shun Yong from Sembawang Branch with President Tony Tan Keng Yam at the Istana.

05 Mr Jackson Puah Suay Arh from Tanjong Pagar-Tiong Bahru Branch receiving an award from MP Mr Lim Boon Heng.

06 Mr Lau Kim Boo from Geylang Sersa Branch receiving his long service award from Minister Mr Khaw Boon Wan.

07 Minister Mr Khaw Boon Wan presents a long service award to Mr Seah Chin Heng from Yew Tee Branch.

08 Mr Jerome Joseph Saram from Katong Branch receiving his appointment letter from MP Mr Lim Biow Chuan.

09 Mr Chia Nga Teh (left) from PAP Kolam Ayer Branch with MP Dr Yaacob Ibrahim at a grassroots event.
I started to know about the PAP Government when I was still in secondary school. At that time we studied ethics as one of the subjects. There was no examination for this subject, but I memorised almost everything in it because I was interested. They educated us about the leadership in our country, the names of the Ministers and their portfolios.

From this, I knew which Minister took care of which part of our lives — isn’t it important to know who is taking care of your homes, your savings, and plans for your future?

This feeling of being proud of my country started when I took part in the National Day Parade as a member of the National Police Cadet Corps in 1968.

In the morning, the rain kept pouring and we were drenched but it was nevertheless an excellent opportunity to show how proud we felt about our country. Since then, I have taken part in several NDP parades under the banner of the PAP. I remember, during one of the decentralised NDPs at Jurong Stadium in 1977, I was heavily pregnant with my first child. I could not march but I could not resist watching my friends march. I supported them as a spectator, and that was a mere four days after I delivered my baby.

During the General Elections, I was one of the polling agents — I was proud to be in white on white, observing residents who came to cast their votes.

I remember during one of the elections, I needed to help the Boon Lay Branch for more than a week and my boss did not grant me my annual leave. I told him: “I will do overtime, and work two shifts when the election is over,” and I did what I promised.

During the campaign for the General Elections, I helped to prepare snacks and drinks for party members who went on house visits. There were not many ladies in the Party in the early days. Maybe I was just thick-skinned, but I just joined them since most of them were living in Boon Lay and were like kampong friends to me. I felt very comfortable — we were and still are like brothers and sisters.
I joined the Party because I was impressed with Mr. Goh Chok Tong in the late 1970s when he came to help at the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) in Tanjong Rhu HDB Estate when our MP, Mr. Conceicao, was appointed as Singapore’s ambassador to Russia and had to be away for some time. At the time, Mr. Goh was the MP for Marine Parade. I was not a member of the Party then.

Mr. Goh had no airs about him. He was sincere and friendly. After he had attended to the residents at the MPS, he would come out, sit on one of the small chairs outside and chat with all of us who had come to help. His behaviour was totally unostentatious, even when he was elevated to Minister of State, and that influenced me to join the Party when approached by the Secretary of the Branch.

This is a lesson to remember if we want to recruit more people for the PAP. We should talk to people in a sincere and friendly way when trying to recruit new members. Our actions and behaviour will create a good or bad impression for people to decide whether or not to join your group or party.

“...
In 1962, in Thong Hoe Village Community Centre, I first joined the grassroots. It was along Lim Chu Kang, 18th mile. Mr Lee Kuan Yew was just getting started in the business of government and a whole generation was stirred up. At that time I was 30 and driving a lorry. During the elections, I would drive the lorry or pickup truck for the candidates. This was my service to the Party — for one whole day, I would drive the lorry, go around the different planned routes, changing as the plans changed, from 3 pm to 9 pm. I remember I was driving the lorry for Mr Low Seow Chay and later Mr Yeo Cheow Tong. Later on, they had cassettes so we no longer needed humans to do the shouting, but I was still driving. Morning shift, break for lunch and back again. During the elections, I drove for one week but never felt tired.

"No one heard my voice, very few saw me, but I was the one moving the team around the whole ward."
In 1977, two of my friends planned to raise funds for the poor and needy in Geylang Serai. At that time, I was working in a small professional firm. During the meeting I was introduced to Dr Ho Soon Lye who was a grassroots leader and he had a clinic there. He was a humble and unassuming man. When I was with him at the Haig Road Food Centre, I was surprised by his popularity with the lower-income groups, in particular, stallholders, cleaners and ordinary people patronising the food centre. That kind of respect and spontaneous popularity, no amount of money can buy.

At the time, I was residing in a three-room flat in Stirling Road, and when Ms Chong Hoo Tuan (one of the friends whom I met earlier) who was a senior officer with the People’s Association, learned of my interest in volunteer work, she asked me to volunteer. And that’s how I met Dr Ow Chin Hock, the MP of the area. In the following year I joined the Party.

Whenever you meet people whom you have helped and are now doing well, you feel a sense of achievement and personal contentment that you have helped them. That’s how I started my political work. The key to this work is to stay very connected with the people and to gain their respect.

I must say that the expectations of the voters are very much higher now. It’s not easy to manage a country. I can see the little things from my perspective. People will expect you to solve their day-to-day problems at the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS).

“I want a car-park lot near my home,” they would insist. Of course there are parking lots but it may be further away than where they prefer. But they cannot accept the allocated parking lot. Then there are domestic quarrels. Once, a wife complained that her husband beat her up. We visited her to check on her safety. A week later, the husband turned up at the MPS, drunk, and shouted at us, demanding to know why we were helping his wife. These things happen, I’ve learnt to cope with them. We are here to help and not for any reward or thanks.

I remember a case in the early 1980s. The family was living in a one-room rental flat; the husband was an odd job labourer. His wife was not working and they had three young children. We got them financial support and social welfare. I ensured all three children finished secondary education as well as polytechnic. After that, they moved to a better environment, to a three-room flat. I believe that their standard of living can only be alleviated by educating their children well.

It’s a very ordinary story of hope and possibilities, but it’s the sort of thing that keeps me going.
Mr Tan Bok Seng [1938–2015]

Ward: Radin Mas
Joined in 1974

“...a year, but we were glad for the work.”

I worked for my father who was a hawker selling pork at Redhill Hawker Centre. He gave us one day off a year on Chinese New Year’s Day. I didn’t know what a holiday was, but I was so glad I had work as many of my friends did not even have enough to eat. When things improved we took a day off, although not during public holidays and weekends because those are the best days to stay open. My children and grandchildren have not experienced hardship. They have not seen anything but peace. Many countries can’t even plan for five years as their budgets are running out, their governments are going bankrupt and their civil servants are not paid. We are now planning for the next 50 years. For a small country which started with nothing in our coffers, this is a great achievement. We have been given many opportunities.

For me, the way ahead is simple. For the man in the street, as long as you work, you have a flat, you will have something in life. As long as you work, you will be all right, you will get somewhere. But whatever we choose, we are in this together. This is what the Pioneer Generation Package means to me. It’s about a society taking collective action, remembering the first generation. It’s a very rare gesture in this present moment. Not everyone understood the sacrifices made. Many didn’t know what was to come as the country was caught up in a very messy situation at that time.

I remembered well that our first PM, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, went around the country to meet the older generation and businessmen. He was a practical man. It was also a time when those of us who were members were scolded with crude vulgarities: “The PAP will bring the country to ruin!” that was the cry. For me at the time, it was about who were for the people of the country. That was the line the PAP has taken all these years.

I am a businessman. I trade in rice and wheat flour. I have done this with my five brothers for 40 years. As the country prospered, our confidence in the future has increased. This is important to me. This is what building a life is about. Though our coffers were initially empty, we made the transition to first world status. This is something to feel proud about, something we worked hard for.

Mr Tan passed away peacefully on 4 June 2015, surrounded by his family.
I joined the Party in 1962 because of the charismatic leadership and the people’s wish to be freed from colonial rule. In the 1960s, a group of politicians split from the PAP and formed the Barisan Sosialis led by Dr Lee Siew Choh. During this time, Mr Lee Kuan Yew organised tours to all constituencies to explain about the split and to make people aware that the other groups had a leaning towards Communism. Another small group separated from the PAP under the chairmanship of Mr Ong Eng Guan.

To test the strength of the PAP, a by-election was held at Hong Lim. Mr Lee Khoon Choy won the seat. When Singapore was part of Malaysia, the PAP formed a political party named Democratic Action Party (DAP). They contested in several places in Malaysia and I was sent to Seremban under the leadership of Mr Othman Wok. We lost the election though, only one seat was won by Mr Devan Nair. I remember that election clearly.

Rallies were held at the now defunct National Theatre at Fort Canning to promote a Malaysian Malaysia. Leaders from Malaysia, Sarawak and Singapore spoke during that occasion. But when Singapore separated from Malaysia, I was working in the former Singapore Government Printing Office. Key officers were called back urgently from our homes. I proofread the separation documents in Tamil and English. It was a profound moment in my life.

In the 1960s, the PAP put up a large exhibition at the Victoria Theatre, to give more information about the Party to the people. At that exhibition I was the one who did the translations from English to Tamil.

I’ve taken annual leave from work for the elections since the 1960s. In the early days, after the elections, we congregated at the Shenton Way Counting Centre. I remember at one election, we were told to move out from there under the instruction of Mr Othman Wok. There were parangs and weapons hidden in a corner of the field. Fearing attacks, we moved off hastily.

At the time, the PAP HQ was in Queen Street. I used to go there every month to collect bundles of Party newspapers (Petir) on my shoulder for distribution to Party members. I had less time to spend with my young family as I sat in many committees at that time and had to attend many meetings. Saturdays and Sundays were spent on house visits with the MPs. Time was the biggest sacrifice and seeing smiles on the faces of those I had reached out to was the reward.

I have actively helped in NDP and the PAP HQ for more than 40 years. In my time with the Party, I have worked alongside the following Members of Parliament: Dr Toh Chin Chye, Mr Othman Wok, Mr S. Dhanabalan, Mr Ch'ng Jit Koon, Mr Chellappa Ramasamy, Mr Wee Toon Boon, Mr Conceicao, Mr Rajaratnam, Mr Ho See Beng, Mr N. Govindasamy, Mr S. Govindasamy, Mr Raju, Dr Augustin Tan, Mr Ng Pock Too, Dr Ahmad Mattar, Mr Loh Meng See and Ms Denise Phua. My journey has been a long and faithful one.
In Jalan Eunos, the cars were burning. It was the day of the racial riots and I was teaching in a school nearby. When school ended, some male teachers and I escorted all the students safely back to their homes with police assistance. When I got back to school, curfew had set in. I could not make my way back to Changi so I stayed at the home of a fellow teacher. All the people in my kampong thought I was gone. The next day, I got a lift out from an army truck. When I reached home, the whole kampong was so happy that I survived.

The racial riots were ingrained in me so when I joined the PAP, I was very supportive of the policy of a racial mix in public housing to ensure that there will not be a large group of people of the same race living in one place. We, the older Singaporeans, understand the importance of racial harmony as we lived through it. Some of the younger ones don’t think the same way. They don’t have a sense of traditional values and they forget the old ways. During Chinese New Year, they all go away and no longer do family visitations.

Things change. Part of the magic is lost. When there are problems, people want to migrate. Ironically, my relatives in Malaysia and other foreigners, they all praise Singapore. My relatives say: “Your country is so small, why is your money so big? What do you have? People only. Services only.” They all envy Singapore.

Young Singaporeans are more prone to complain. They fail to realise that we have no natural resources. Hence, Singapore cannot afford to lose its competitive edge. All Singaporeans, young or old, must come forward and contribute collectively to make Singapore a safe and secure place to live in. Together, we can achieve!
I joined the PAP when I was living at Niven Road. I used to go to the PAP Cairnhill Branch in the 1960s and get together with my friends. It was more social than political. Then later, I became active in Marine Parade.

The PAP is part of my life, not because I am politically inclined, but because of a group of my friends. One of them who was older than the rest of us was quite active in the Branch. We had parties and picnics and generally enjoyed ourselves. But we came out in force during the various GE campaigns. We walked with the MPs to canvass for votes, put up posters, just generally made ourselves useful in whatever capacities we could.

Slowly, I became politically mature. I am an extrovert and became quite passionate as I got more involved and was convinced that the PAP is a good political party. Right leadership goes a long way.

Look at other countries with a lot of natural resources but had fallen by the wayside.

I have seen the PAP both as a political party and a governing body. I can see the changes from the 1950s to the 1980s. The systems in place have uplifted the livelihood of the average man. It is not just a few isolated people who became rich. The country as a whole benefitted.

There have been vast improvements. In the early days, there were very few medical clinics. I remember there was one in North Canal Road that was jam-packed every day. Now there are polyclinics all over the island.

When I was a teenager, there were very few good schools. Only people with influence and connections would be admitted into the good ones. My father didn’t have any connections and I was lucky to get into Balestier Primary. Now, we have many good schools compared to the earlier days. I am a textbook publisher so I visit a lot of schools. The facilities and amenities available are amazing.

Transport in the past was all jammed up and buses were completely packed with no air-conditioning. Now our buses are new and air-conditioned.

Today life is so different. People have high expectations, information flows are so quick with social media. We need to do different things to attract people to the Party. Of course, the younger Singaporeans grew up with all these. The Party’s challenge is to convince the younger ones and relate the past to them. At the same time, it should try to do even better for them.

“‘If we fall by the wayside it is the people who will suffer.’”
In mid-1971, Mr. Seah Mui Kok, the MP for Bukit Ho Swee, where I was living, asked whether I was interested in community service and to be in the Party. I was English-educated, and they needed someone who could write in English. I agreed. My friend who is Chinese-educated helped to write Chinese.

We were two greenhorns who helped at the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS). At the time, Bukit Ho Swee was a very poor constituency comprising mostly one-roomers. Our job was to organise house visits and activities. Those days, people were really very poor. It was common to have at least five or six adults and children crammed into one room. I went with a simple mind, to help and improve their lifestyle. There was no furniture, no beds in some flats. They slept on the floor. Or they put double decks of planks and made their own double-decker beds. The sheer poverty and lack of resources really motivated us to help.

Those “sponsors” for rations were not rich themselves. They were hawkers and small-time businessmen but they were relatively better off. They would donate but we didn’t have much rice, so we would use small cups and ration it out in small plastic bags.

Many people didn’t know how to get to the Branch and we would see them in their homes. They were very grateful for our help. They were always telling us that life was very difficult and they were desperately poor. It was quite disheartening. They were not keen to participate in our activities. They didn’t even have enough to eat, how to participate? So we helped to look for jobs for them.

Our goal was to uplift our living standards. We tried to help them financially although we didn’t have much money ourselves. We gave them rations. We gave them time. But most importantly, we gave them hope.

Those days we were not affluent. Now the new constituency is much better off. But of course, there are still poor people among us now. Now the needy are old, and things are different. We help them clean up, give them money and comfort in their last years of their lives.

Mr Tang Kan Hoy

168 years old
Ward: Bukit Batok
Joined in 1973

“we gave them time. But most importantly, we gave them hope.”
I remember our Branch at Ah Hood Road. The place used to flood regularly because the drainage was not good. The flood water went into the Branch, and into the MP’s office. We had to attend the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS), even though the flood waters were ankle-deep. People had families to feed, problems to be sorted out.

The water would bring in a lot of rubbish, and it got very bad on some days. Floods were not uncommon in those days so we just got on with the job.

The Branch has since moved. It was in an old coffee shop along Rangoon Road, then moved back to Ah Hood Road, and to Balestier Shopping Complex. Now it is in Kent Road. Moulmein itself has seen many changes. It was a kampong, and during the campaigning you had to go through a lot of small roads. Jalan Sinaran is now the site of high-rise condos near Tan Tock Seng Hospital. In the old days, I was chased by dogs during campaigning along those roads.

Over the years, we found that the PAP really stuck to what they promised at the election. I’ve remained with the Branch all these years because of comradeship. Some old guys have gone, others have dropped out. The thing is, you must not expect anything in return. You must be very sincere and be prepared to sacrifice your time.

Today, the MPS is all done mainly by the young members. The youth group has quite a lot of people. I am not sure who or how long they will be staying. If everybody can stay for 40 years, there will be no problem!

Looking back now, 40 years seem like a long time, but I’ve been interested in politics since young. I was curious. At the time, I remember Mr Lee Kuan Yew visited Whampoa. I think it was the School Canteen Association he was visiting. I went there and joined the crowd. At that time I was living around Farrer Park. We were all very independent in those days. So I saw Mr David Marshall, Mr Lim Yew Hock and later Mr Lee Kuan Yew.

Politics was in our blood in those days. During elections, we had to do things ourselves — ride on a lorry at night and decide on a strategic location for the posters. Today, we ask contractors and the thrill of doing things is not really there. Could we ask activists to do it now? Maybe they will say it is too dangerous.
I was a member of UMNO first and I joined because at that time the Malays supported UMNO mostly. Two things made me support the PAP.

At the time, I was in the army and the British wanted to pull out. My family was living in the 10th Milestone area in Nee Soon. I remember that the Prime Minister went to the naval base and spoke to the workers, promised them a roof over their heads, food for the stomach and schools for their children. And jobs, most of all — they were concerned about jobs.

Second, I prayed at a mosque regularly and met a family there with three sick kids. I tried to get help from the MP. By that time, I had moved to Taman Jurong and the MP was Mr Ho Kah Leong. I went to see one of the helpers at the MPS who was my friend. The MP did manage to get some help for the family. So I knew the PAP can help the people, and they can lead the way forward. For that, they have my full support.
Today, there are many people who vote on single issues. But we cannot vote a government in based on one policy. Suppose one policy is bad, it doesn’t mean that the PAP is no good. Overall, it is a fair system. Look at all the policies on jobs, on creating stability.

People are unhappy because they are in a hurry to move ahead. Graduates in their early 30s want to live in a condo. They want to get rich quick. They want to be rich young men, not rich old men. They want to be at a certain position by a certain age or better still, to do things faster by shortening the learning curve.

I am a teacher and many times, I say to the younger ones: “I don’t think you can shorten all learning curves.” Sometimes it just takes time. For example, you need time to gain judgement; and in relating to teenagers you must be sincere and learn how to relate and to do that well, you need experience.

This drive, this competitiveness, the system evolved that way. But I think there is a slight flaw here. Take the “scholars” system we have in the civil service. Scholars are important, they are at the apex, they are mobile. The fear is that if we do not take care of them they will emigrate.

So their career paths are charted. By a certain age, they will be Deputy Director, or Director and so on. But what about the rest of us? How do you measure passion? How do you value years of experience? We must be a team and not just take care of scholars. Today, we can hear the non-scholars tuning out of discussions, saying: “Let the scholars do it!” The resentment is obvious.

There is no easy answer as we do want meritocracy. In my area, education, I have told the scholars who were attached to my school to work in the schools for a reasonable duration — especially the schools at the lower end of the social economic spectrum — before they write the policy paper.

I have two normal technical stream students, both of whom are very good. After ITE they made it to the polytechnic and then both went to the NTU. And then for the students who lack academic ability, we have formal vocational training. So there are many paths and we need to make sure that we value everyone, take care of everyone.
In the 1960s, the Beach Road area was under Kampong Glam, with Mr S. Rajaratnam. My family had a shop selling general merchandise and fishing nets, a business that we still run today in Ubi.

The Barisan Sosialis were very strong in Kampong Glam too, but we had a bad experience with the Communists in China. My father’s assets, padi fields and property, were confiscated and we had to flee to Singapore. This left my parents very bitter.

In the later part of the 1980s, China opened up and I wanted to bring my mother to her village but she refused. It was a very bad experience that she would not forget, but I was too young to remember much of it.

My lasting memory was of the race riots. We were in Arab Street and living on the second storey. I saw the fighting from the window. It was very, very close, and my father and uncles started to prepare some weapons, sharpened heads of gas pipes, in case we were attacked. That was in 1963 and I was 16 years old. Our family is big — three to four families — living in three shop houses, next to each other. Let me tell you, unless you’ve had a weapon in your hand, fighting for your life, you will not know how valuable peace is to us and how much it should be treasured.

After the riots, several well-known grassroots leaders who set up the Citizens’ Consultative Committees tried to mediate between the Malay and Chinese communities, and see how to settle the fights. When we saw this, my family thought: “This is a responsible government. They are not out to pander to racial lines.” That was when we joined the PAP.

Singapore is still a multiracial society, still vulnerable to these kinds of threats. We take it for granted to some extent today, but it is something that could tear us apart, something that could break us.

The key to continued harmony is to ensure that the majority should respect the minority and accord genuine mutual respect. We must also remember that the Chinese are a majority only in Singapore, elsewhere in the region, it is the other races.

So if you look at the foreign policies of Singapore — a lot of effort is making sure there is regional harmony. Today, it is no longer a racial divide where those who are left behind cannot cope with the cost of living. There are deep income and wealth divides as well. These are deep and potentially explosive issues. We must tackle them well.
In 1961, I was a member of the Works Brigade in Sembawang Camp. At the time, work was hard to come by and they provided two square meals a day. When I started, my pay was only $1.50. After a month, I became a team leader and was paid $3! After two months, I became a Malay teacher in the camp, with some allowance. Most of the time, it was hard manual labour. I built the roads around Andrew Road that still exist today.

At the time, I was already a temporary member of the PAP. But they did not collect my subscription, and I did not know how to pay. The Party was not so well organised then. I guess in the early days, there were other pressing matters.

By that time, I had joined the Public Utilities Board as a storeman in the Water Department. I then became a store attendant and I finally retired as a technician in 2002.

I joined the Citizens’ Consultative Committee in 1967 and I officially joined the Party in 1977. I am not active in politics but I know about politics as you have to know what is happening to your country. I am also active in community service: I am a Baweanese, and I was the Secretary General of the Singapore Baweanese Association from 1972 to 1983. I am also in the committee for mosque building in Queenstown, and the Singapore Silat Federation.

But during elections, I am active in the Party. I follow the candidate around on the ground, using the loudhailers on top of the lorries. My friend Tan Kim Hock speaks Mandarin and I speak Malay.

After the 2011 General Election, it is very difficult to judge how the PAP will do in the next General Election. Since then, there have been a lot of changes by the Government. The Government is now very generous. The people will also see what the Party has done.

My family and I, as well as many Singaporeans, feel saddened by the demise of our first Prime Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. As a leader who devoted his life towards Singapore, he is irreplaceable. The Islamic Malay community is indebted to him. Mr. Lee helped us in establishing the Mendaki and the Association of Muslim Professionals. He also initiated the contribution of money through the CPF to enable modern mosques to be built around Singapore.

There is a saying in Malay:

Gajah mati meninggalkan tulang
Harimau mati meninggalkan belang
Manusia mati apa tak kilang
Nama yang baik di sebut tak akan hilang

When an elephant dies, he leaves his bones
When a tiger dies, he leaves his stripes
When a man dies, no words are needed
A good name will never ever fade away

I hope the present leaders will continue the legacy that was left by Mr. Lee and will continue the policies of unity, regardless of race, language or religion.
I am an accidental PAP member who joined at a time when there weren’t as many youths. My interest was piqued after the quiet nights spent during the Meet-the-People Sessions (MPS) writing letters for residents. That was back in 2008 under a Youth Leadership Development Programme.

At that time, I was attached to the Keat Hong constituency with Mr Zaqy Mohamad as Adviser. He introduced my friends and me to the friendly team of volunteers and from then on, I was “hooked”. I like the idea of being an “advocate for good” in the lives of others.

Working so closely with the other party volunteers and listening to the residents made me realise that the Party has the power, responsibility and capability to make a difference to the lives of others and to shape the country.

I have always believed that the PAP is the Party that can best bring this country forward. It has brought stability, peace and security. It has kept Singapore’s flag flying high in the region, the world and above all, it has given its people the chance to pursue their dreams and ambitions. Its challenge however, is to stay relevant.

Today, I think the PAP has lost the art of storytelling and in truly connecting with the voters on the ground. The PAP needs to build a sense of renewed fervour. Many feel that bread and butter issues, the high cost of living, and infrastructural developments have not been adequately addressed.

Maybe the PAP is a victim of its own success. Voter expectations have changed dramatically — people expect their MPs and Ministers to be closer to them, to listen to them and to take prompt action and above all, to sayang them. But then, is this not the heart of politics?

One heart-tugging memory was an MPS case involving a Malay lady who had throat cancer. She was declared a bankrupt, and could not open a bank account even though she had a job. She cried as she related how her husband had mistreated her during their three-year marriage and how she had been made a bankrupt because she agreed to be a guarantor for his loans. I think the chance of helping someone like this matters a lot.

As a Malay-Muslim activist, I am aware of the issues relating to my community. I have family and close friends attending Madrasahs, and they do not have access to the same resources as I did in mainstream schools. There has been an increase in subsidies for students in these schools but only recently, and even today, they do not have the same funding for CCAs.

We need a balance — the Madrasahs have a religious syllabus, but there can also be a broader perspective. If there is more national funding, there would have to be a balance and an alignment with the national perspective.

The threat of political Islam is very real — many people say: “This is Singapore! We don’t have any radicals.” But we must remember that Singapore is surrounded by large countries with large Muslim populations. There are many factors at play.

Singapore is a patchwork of many races, a working model of multiracialism. Many people all over the world say that they are for multiracialism, but they don’t realise that this is very difficult to put into practice. The PAP is the only party that can bring us forward into modernity while preserving the cultural and historical nuances of being one country with many races.

I have given my best for the past seven years. For me, there is no sacrifice, only duty, responsibility and passion — you just need to do what’s right and get the job done the best you can — because you know that others are relying on you.

Ms Hamidah Aidillah Mustafa [30 YEARS OLD]
Ward: Keat Hong
Joined in 2008

“People expect their MP to sayang them — but is this not the heart of politics?”

Looking to the next generation of PAP Pioneers
“There is much to admire in our Ordinary Members. They soldier for the Party, go the extra mile and fight for their conviction. They serve the Party and the country, without expectation of any personal gain. They do this because they believe in the PAP.”

Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong