

Foreword

I thank my good friend, Tan Guan Heng, for requesting me to write the foreword to his excellent book. I wish to make three points.

First, I wish to praise the author. Tan Guan Heng and I were classmates at Raffles Institution. We had many common friends and common interests. As a result, we became close friends. Our friendship continued during our undergraduate years at the University of Malaya (in Singapore). Although we were in different faculties, we were comrades in the University Socialist Club. We were very seized with the great political issues of the day. We were young and idealistic and we wanted to build a better, a more just and equal world.

Just after completing his degree, Guan Heng suffered a serious setback. As a result of detached retinas, which was hard to cure in the early 1960s, he lost his sight, first, in one eye, and, subsequently, in both eyes. Guan Heng's friends rallied to him, boosted his courage and morale, encouraged him to learn Braille and to find a way to make a living. Due to the help of supporters, including President S. R. Nathan, Guan Heng ran a bookstore, located in the premises of the National Council of Social Services, for several years. Subsequently, he moved it to Plaza Singapura but unfair competition from the big bookstores there eventually forced Guan Heng to close the store.

In recent years, Guan Heng has tried to make a living as a writer. He has published two novels which were well received. He was looking for an idea for a third book when I proposed that he should try writing a book of non-fiction and suggested the topic: 100 Inspiring Rafflesians.

Second, I wish to praise Raffles Institution, Raffles Girls' Secondary School and Raffles Junior College. Few in Singapore would dispute the fact that the Raffles trinity occupy the apex of Singapore's secondary education system. They occupy the top of the mountain not only because of RI's longevity but because all three institutions are based on

merit and have succeeded in recruiting many of the most talented boys and girls of Singapore, especially those from humble families. I have always admired the fact that RI is indifferent to race, colour and social class. What gets you into the school is your ability. Once in the school, you are taught by some of Singapore's best teachers and empowered by the school's heritage, tradition and values. RI, RGS and RJC seek to inculcate in all their students the culture of excellence and the spirit of public service.

Third, RI, RGS and RJC have produced many inspiring Rafflesians, men and women who have distinguished themselves in their careers and in their service to the nation and the world. They include three Heads of State, Yusof Ishak, Benjamin Sheares and Wee Kim Wee; and two Prime Ministers, Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong. In picking only 100 out of thousands of inspiring Rafflesians, Guan Heng was faced with an impossible task. I do not envy him. He has bravely chosen his favourite 100 and I respect his choices.

The book has been carefully researched and written in a clear and interesting style. I congratulate the author and hope that the book will be a bestseller.

Tommy Koh
Chairman
National Heritage Board