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Founder's Day

2015 192nd Founder's Day

RI celebrated her 192nd Founder's Day on 25 July 2015. The Guest of Honour for the occasion was alumnus Mr Peter Ong (RJC, 1979), Head of Civil Service.

The school mace and colours were brought into the hall, after which the staff procession commenced. Staff, students and alumni alike sang the Founder's Day song, Rafflesians Salute Your Alma Mater. The welcome address was delivered by Year 4 Head Boy Neilsen Chan (4D).



PRI Mr Chan Poh Meng gave a presentation of the Institution Report, an overview of the achievements of Rafflesians over the past year. Apart from the stellar results achieved by students, he shared stories of Rafflesians who have striven to make Singapore a better place, such as the Becoming

Bishan project (<http://www.facebook.com/becomingbishansg50>), which shone a spotlight on the area upon which the school now stands, and which used to house Kampong Peck San Theng. He also commended The Golden Page (<https://www.facebook.com/thegoldenpage>), a project that has improved the living conditions of more than 17 elderly households. Mr Chan thanked donors such as the old boys behind Quantedge, the RI-Hector Chee scholarship and the alumni of the class of 1965, who contributed greatly to helping students from lower-income households. Mr Chan emphasised that we have a duty to maintain the socio-economic diversity of our school, to the best of our ability.

Next was a speech by Guest of Honour Mr Peter Ong, in which he spoke about meritocracy, the information technology revolution and the true meaning of success.

After this, the traditional awards ceremony commenced. Staff and students were given awards from five domains: cognitive, character and leadership, community and citizenship, sports and health, and arts and aesthetics. Some members of the staff also received long-service awards for their dedication to the school.



Chua Xian Wei (16S06E) and Brandon Krygsman (RI, 2014) both received the prestigious Stamford Raffles Award for their outstanding achievement in co-curricular activities, exemplary character and leadership, and contributions to society.

The Founder's Day assembly concluded with the Valedictory Address, delivered by Isaac Leong, President of the 34th Students' Council, and the singing of the Institution Anthem.

Following the Assembly was the inaugural Founder's Day Carnival, a fun-filled affair in which students, staff and alumni took part in various activities held throughout the campus. These include Water Zorb, an Escape Room, a Running Man challenge and games such as Archery Tag. Groups such as the Raffles Symphonic Band, Raffles Street Dance and Raffles Rock also gave electrifying performances in the Amphitheatre.





192nd Founder's Day Principal's Speech

A PATH WITH HEART

Delivered by Mr Chan Poh Meng
Principal, Raffles Institution

25 July 2015

Good morning

Mr Peter Ong, Head of the Civil Service and our Guest-of-Honour,
Mr Choo Chiau Beng, Chairman, RI Board of Governors,
Mrs Poh Mun See, Principal of Raffles Girls' School (Secondary)
Mr Andrew Chua, President of the Old Rafflesians' Association,
Members of the Board of Governors,
Distinguished guests, colleagues, parents, and fellow Rafflesians.

As we celebrate RI's 192nd Founder's Day, it is my pleasure to report that school has continued its tradition of excellence to do very well in the period under review (August 2014 to July 2015).

The Class of 2014 achieved exceptional performances at the GCE 'A'-Levels. 162 students or 12.8% of the cohort had distinctions in all subjects taken, and among them, Ku Jun Xuan, Gabriel Wong and Caleb Chiam scored Distinctions for all 13 units taken.

In Sports, our teams brought home 73 Gold, Silver & Bronze Medals across all 3 divisions in 2014, with the 2015's tally standing at 61 Medals at this point in time. In 2014, our athletes clinched 101 National Colours Awards across 22 sports, and 7 of them also received the Singapore Schools Sports Council Best School Boy & Girl Awards. Two Rafflesian sailors, Loh Jia Yi and Jonathan Yeo, were honoured with the Singapore Schools Sports Council Best Team Award in 2014.

In the Arts, our students staged over 15 events at the 2015 ARTSeason, RI's annual arts festival. Our musical and performing arts CCAs achieved 6 distinctions and 2 certificates of accomplishments at the 2015 Singapore Youth Festival Arts Presentation.

These achievements and many others bear testament to the well-rounded education that the school continues to provide to the students in its charge.

The past year also witnessed the passing of 4 distinguished Rafflesians.

Mr Tan Tiek Kwee, who was Headmaster of RI from 1995 to 1998, passed away in August 2014. Mr Tan is remembered for having restored RI to the top of the pecking order in the annual Straits Times ranking, and ensuring that the school maintained this position.

Then, in February this year, Mr Rudy Mosbergen, the first principal of the former Raffles Junior College, left us. Mr Mosbergen helmed RJC from 1982 to 1987, and established its position as the premier junior college in Singapore.

March saw the passing of Mr Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding Prime Minister. Over the years, Mr Lee graced several key moments of the school's history – RI's 146th Founder's Day Celebrations, the laying of the foundation stone of the Boarding Complex and the opening of the first Raffles Institution Archives & Museum. He was also the first recipient of RI's inaugural Gryphon Award in 2011, which honours RI's most distinguished alumni. Over the past five decades, Mr Lee has rallied and inspired Singaporeans of all ages, with his foresight, leadership and service to the nation.

And then in April we bid farewell to Mr Tan Kim Cheng. A beloved ex-teacher who served RI from 1963 to 1984, Mr Tan was well-known for his stern discipline and unwavering dedication to the school. During his 21 years in RI, Mr Tan restored the glory of Raffles Cadet Corps. After his retirement in 1987, he continued to be a constant figure in the school at Founder's Day celebrations, alumni reunions, and to provide motivation to RI NCC students.

We honour the memory of these Rafflesians who gave selflessly of themselves to both school and country.

SURVEYING THE LAND

In what follows, I would like to take some time to discuss the way forward for RI. We stand at an important juncture of Singaporean history. 50 years into independence, we are no longer an 'improbable country' or an 'unlikely nation'. We have a public service that is widely admired for its incorruptibility, schools, hospitals, a transportation system and a public housing programme that have served us well.

But there are also gaps and fissures that have emerged in the impressive edifice of our country. Our system of meritocracy is working less well than it used to, two generations in – families that have been successful financially have been able to create advantages for their children – the PSLE and other gatekeeping examinations are no longer the level playing field that they once were, thanks to an explosion in the numbers of tuition and enrichment centres. An influx of new immigrants into our country, judged to be important for our country's economic health, has led to feelings of displacement among Singaporeans who have been here longer.

The key question for us is how RI fits into all this.

CLASS AND COMPLACENCY

As a school, we have prided ourselves on being the jewel in MOE's crown. For a long time, we have measured our success by how high our PSLE cut-off and how low our L1R5 were. By how many Olympiads and competitions and tournaments we won. By how well our students do in the A-Levels. By the number of 'top' scholarships and places in the Oxbridge and Ivy League universities they secure. We were comfortably supported by a stratified education system that gave extra funding to the best and brightest.

As a school with its Secondary and JC entry points defined in terms of academic merit, we cruised for many years with an untroubled conscience, serene in the faith that we were teaching the students that deserved to be here. We were a special school with a spiraling host of special programmes for the gifted and talented. One might ask if we have become insular – a school unto ourselves.

But given what we know today about how meritocracy's effectiveness is faltering, can we in good conscience go on with business as usual?

To our alumni who frequently lament how the school is no longer the school they remember, I want to say – like you, as an alumnus, I too ask the same question.

Yet, it is pointless and futile to deny the existence of class in RI. RI has become a middle-class school – that is the current reality. What matters more now is what we do with this reality and this knowledge.

HOPE FOR ALL, NOT JUST FOR SOME

If we can no longer afford the comfortable illusion that RI is truly representative of Singapore, then the more pressing question that must now be asked and answered is: how does RI maintain a breadth and generosity of vision in its students? How do we continue being the hope of a better age for ALL of Singapore, and not just some part, some group, some class of Singaporeans?

Are we able, as a school, to help our students look beyond narrow class-based interests? Our success in this area will affect the health of our country in approximately two to three decades hence.

This was something which the first principal of the reintegrated RI and RJC, Mrs Lim Lai Cheng, frequently noted. I quote 'Given the numbers of doctors, lawyers and public servants that we produce, if as a school, we fail to instil a wider concern and care in our students, it is Singapore at large that suffers.'

The ideals that we have – for RI to be non-elitist, for it to be a beacon of openness and inclusivity – all these are good ideals, but they cannot be accomplished overnight. A long period of conditioning means that we often fail to see elitism even when it is staring at us in the face.

Our current students should not bear the full brunt of accusations of elitism – we as alumni, parents, staff must ask ourselves – what example have we given them, in the expectations that we impose on them, in the system that we run, in the way that we treat other people? If we must have blame for the current state of the school, we must each accept our share of it.

The process begins now: the externally-imposed financial austerity which our school is undergoing is both a challenge and an opportunity. As Rafflesians, are we able to practice an austerity of the spirit, and use that to nurture and revive a long-dormant creativity? Do we dare to ask ourselves – what can

we do with limited resources to make this a better school not just for ourselves but for the country?

Some 40 years ago, when I was a student at RI, my Principal Mr Philip Liau characterised the challenge this way:

Many would say that if you're at the top, there's no way to go but down. We say that there are always other summits, beckoning to the more intrepid in spirit and the highest in ambition and intelligence.

His description is highly resonant. We must supply the hope, not because the future looks bright, but because we have faith in the ability of the school to weather difficult times.

THE PATH FORWARD

In support of these goals, I want to lay out certain vectors to guide the school in the years ahead – briefly, I would describe these as Duty, Purpose and Gratitude, but allow me to delve deeper into each of these vectors.

A Duty to Diversity

In saying that our school has a duty to diversity, I mean this in two senses. First and foremost, we have a duty to maintain the socio-economic diversity of our school, to the best of our ability. To this end, I want to acknowledge the efforts and generosity of our donors, in particular the Quantedge Foundation, with whose help the school has streamlined its scholarships and expanded its outreach efforts to students from lower-income families.

Also of special mention are the old boys behind the RI-Hector Chee scholarship, in particular Tan Yong Soon, Wong Kai Yeng and Koh How Eng, who raised more than \$165,000 to set up this scholarship to honour their beloved Maths teacher. What distinguishes this scholarship is that it is awarded not just to Rafflesians, but to promising mathematics students in the S7 Cluster schools, from the different academic streams.

I also want to thank the Old Boys and Girls of the Pre-U2 Class of 1963/1965, who generously donated \$100,000 to the Raffles Scholarship Series, to mark their 50th year of graduation from the school.

But there is also the broader sense of 'diversity' as a range of different things. When groups and individuals are different from one another and have little contact, there is the chance for misunderstanding to arise and mistrust to fester. I put it to you that this is our wider duty to Singapore in 2015 and beyond – to serve as a social glue between parts of the community that have little or no contact with each other. Between Singaporeans new and old. Between Singaporeans and the community of foreign workers and expatriates. Between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots. I would like to invite the school to channel its service efforts into these pressing areas. The old proverb 'a stitch in time saves nine' comes to mind – if we can help to close these gaps sooner rather than later, then let us do so.

In this respect, I want to particularly commend the group of Raffles Archives & Museum (RAM) students, alumni and teachers involved in the 'Becoming Bishan' initiative. Part of a wider project undertaken with other schools in the S7 cluster, 'Becoming Bishan (<http://www.facebook.com/becomingbishansg50>)' has unearthed the heritage of this area, which used to house Kampong Peck San Theng, as well as the Peck San Theng cemetery – and what a fascinating history it is! With the help of former residents and battlefield archaeologist Jon Cooper, they have vividly reconstructed a sense of life in Bishan in the last century, and also discovered that part of the WWII defence of Singapore took place in this area. By helping the school and the current residents of this area understand the history of the place which we now occupy, common ground has been established and built.

RI teachers too, are moving in this direction. wRItFormula (<http://ixorastudios.com/games/write-formula/>), is an ICT initiative undertaken by Mr Zachary Kang, a Year 1-4 Chemistry teacher, in partnership with teachers from Ang Mo Kio Secondary, Ngee Ann Secondary and Peicai Secondary. Together, they obtained funding from National Research Fund. The result is a fun and engaging mobile app that teaches students how to write Chemistry formulas, and is currently available on both iTunes and Google Play Store. Collaborations such as these keep our staff in close contact with their colleagues from other schools and allow us to share our know-how with one another.

Thus, let us consider not just the question of who we can serve, but who we can serve alongside, who we can serve together with. If we can undertake such meaningful projects with peers from other schools, then I think the project is doubly meaningful, as it also helps us to move out of our insularity.

Awakened Purpose

One of the great concerns that I have is that our students – and perhaps even teachers – see community service as one more checkbox to be ticked in a string of accomplishments, or as a chore – something boring and mundane, that must be done because the system says so.

There seems to me a better approach that we can take if we see community service as a vital way for us to grow socially, emotionally and spiritually. These aspects often take a backseat because our system has for so long emphasised the intellectual dimension to the exclusion of these other areas. Seen this way, our outreach to the community is not something imposed, but something natural – a way of expanding our heart and of widening our circle of insight and compassion to gradually include the whole of life.

This is how Albert Einstein describes it:

A human being is a part of the whole called by us 'the universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

As a school, can we evolve in this way? With our extensive alumni network and the quality of our students, RI is well-positioned to begin this outreach. This, for me, is the higher summit that Principal Philip Liau spoke of. To go beyond acting out of a sense of duty, to acting upon the lived conviction of an awakened sense of purpose. To do what is right, rather than what is easy.

We recognise this sense of purpose when we see it in student initiatives like The Golden Page. Helmed by Amanda Yew, Rachel Koh and Tessa Wong who are now in Year 6, since May 2014. Their project (<https://www.facebook.com/thegoldenpage>) has improved the living conditions of more than 17 elderly households by tapping HDB's EASE (Enhancement for Active Seniors) grant. The girls and their team have installed elderly friendly equipment such as ramps and handle-bars and also improved the homes in other ways, including fumigation, painting and cleaning.

While Amanda, Rachel and Tessa could have stopped there, their sense of purpose took them further, to advocating for government grants for seniors. What the girls realised in speaking to elderly Singaporeans was that the elderly were daunted by the (online) application forms and thus refrained from applying. The girls and their team linked these seniors up with volunteers, who then assisted them in applying for the relevant grants.

Truly this is the difference that is made when we act out of a sense of purpose, over and beyond mere duty. The Golden Page team feels that it has grown in the process, particularly in their capacity to embrace the elderly as they are, across generational and cultural boundaries. Rachel, one of the students involved, puts it this way:

Every senior is different, but common traits we always see shining from the seniors is their optimism and their resilience. Even when faced with the toughest situations, both physical and emotional, they always pull through.

These values are what The Golden Page's more than 150 student volunteers are slowly learning.

Mindful Gratitude

This brings me to the final vector of gratitude. To cite Jack Kornfield, when our circle of care is expanded, when we recognise the blood of our own family in everything that lives, our heart is filled with gratitude, love and compassion. We receive physical and spiritual sustenance from the world around us; this is like breathing in. Then, because each of us is born with certain gifts, part of our happiness is to use these to give back – to our community, family, friends, as well as to the earth. This is like breathing out. As we grow in interconnectedness, the integrity and responsibility of a citizen – whether that of Singapore or of the world – naturally grows in us.

I am well aware of how hectic our lives are as a school community. We are caught up in a ceaseless cycle of classes, competitions, common tests, concerts and CCA practices. Is there time for us to become aware? Are we able to make that time, to prioritise it, if we know that this awareness, this growing in gratitude is what gives everything else meaning? That is the question that we must answer both individually and collectively as a school.

SUMMING UP

And so we move from duty, to purpose, to joyful gratitude. When our minds and hearts are awakened, they spontaneously illuminate our way in the world. The light around someone who consistently acts with compassion is visible to those around them. Viktor Frankl, the well-known psychologist, has described this phenomenon:

Those of us who lived through the concentration camps can remember very clearly the men and women who walked through the huts comforting those in need and giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they are a testimony to the possibilities of the human spirit.

Each of us has this spirit in us – sometimes hidden, sometimes more available. This Founder's Day, I invite you to become the hope of a better age for everyone around you. If we all do this as Rafflesians, then our motto will move beyond being mere school propaganda, to a lived reality.

Auspicium Melioris Aevi.

192nd Founder's Day Council President Speech

This speech was given by Isaac Leong, outgoing President of the Students' Council, during the 2015 Founders' Day Ceremony.



(https://pressraffles.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/20026096051_062cd8f1b1_k.jpg)

Photographs – they capture moments that are gone forever, impossible to reproduce. We each keep a collection of them – whether in traditional print or on Instagram. Likewise, I keep a small box of old photographs, notes, cards and other paraphernalia, opening and adding to it at every significant milestone in my life. I recently opened that box in preparation for this speech – after all, as my penultimate speech in this school, I hoped to be able to represent and do justice to the 6 years of joy and sorrow, anticipation and regret, and comedy and tragedy that we have experienced in RI.

Inside, I found images of our seniors imparting the Unite cheer during our Year 1 Orientation, of victory at the end of my Year 4 debate season, of my classmates and me horsing around in class back in the time when we didn't share the same classroom with girls. Each of these photographs brought back a stream of memories and emotions that have crept into moments between my waking and sleep on many occasions this year. I'm sure that each of us has a set of mental photographs that will forever remain etched in our memory.

But as important as these photographs are to us, they aren't only personal. If there's anything, what is common amongst our individual photographs is the collective backdrop that is RI. Each photograph is like a story frozen in time and these stories have been inevitably linked with the broader RI narrative. In other words, we had gone through what we had gone through because things were lined a certain way for us – by our teachers, the school, traditions, circumstances or in some cases, just pure luck. Even though coming from RI may sometimes bestow on us certain self-importance, we are, fortunately or not, not as central and important as we think we may be. It is with this humble acknowledgement that I have come to more deeply appreciate how much RI has shaped us.

However, we cannot just reminisce about the past, especially on a day like Founder's Day. It is indeed ironic how history ceases the moment we start living in the past. And it is with this paradox that we must look ahead and ask ourselves how do we keep the flag of Raffles flying high. After all, I hope that the photographs I keep and treasure never become a thing of the past, 10, 20, 50 years from now. I believe there are 3 things each of us can do.

First, we must work hard. RI has been the top school in Singapore for many years, but that does not guarantee us, individually or as a school, any success. The success we celebrate today is the culmination of hard work put in by those who have come before us. This means that for us today, we must not shy away from either excellence or hard work. There are debates raging on about "inclusive" and "equal" education, but that should not deter us from working hard and pushing the boundaries of achievement for this school.

The proudest moments I have had as a Rafflesian are of struggle and sacrifice, even when the stakes are stacked against us. The achievements on the field and on the stage that Mr Chan presented often did not come easily and was the result of long training, restrictive diets and sheer discipline in managing the different expectations of being a student and an athlete or performer at the same time. However, we know that it is not just the gold medals that we celebrate. I remember this once when a Year 1 boy rather innocently asked why we were cheering Raffles so enthusiastically even though we were losing the rugby game badly. It was some time ago, but I think my reply went something like "Ah that's the spirit that never says die. It's the spirit that is best when we are down and losing – and that is what makes it so unique". That indomitable spirit is the essence of Rafflesian tradition and is articulated in our school motto – to improve, excel and always reach for the best.

Second, we must look beyond the A-levels. Let's admit that there is immense pressure for Rafflesians to do well at the A-levels; and certainly, my batchmates and I hope that we can live up to these expectations as well. However, we must broaden our perspectives by continuing to explore and enrich ourselves. Initiatives like the Gap Semester have been effective in exposing and educating us beyond the confines of RI and Singapore. But we cannot just rely on big school programmes for enrichment; it should happen every day in the classroom as well. I remember my Year 1 geography teacher coming into class one day and started forcing us to play with biscuits, jam and milo in order to simulate tectonic movements. In hindsight, it all sounded so childish, but it was important because it piqued our interest in what we thought was a boring subject about things we could neither see nor feel. We were proven wrong. I'm also thankful to have teachers who care more than just the syllabus – exposing us to ideas & concepts that complement or even challenge what we learn in class. As my Humanities tutor Mr Reeves would put it, "life's more complex than that". Perhaps, this autonomy to explore outside the scope of exams is one advantage of the IP system and we must continue to leverage on that. In showing us that life is not black and white, RI has encouraged us to be curious.

Finally, we must contribute back to society what we have taken from it. I say this because RI cannot just be excellent. It must have a soul to ground itself. Community work has been a growing focus in RI, but we can still do more to benefit society as a school. Referring to history once more, Singapore has always been the core of RI. We were founded by Sir Stamford Raffles as a school for the children of native Singaporeans and never for the colonialists' own children. Likewise, we may now be the beneficiaries of an excellent education, but we must never feel entitled to what we have and must continue to benefit society in the work that we do.

Ironically, the future seems to have an ancient heart. As we move forward with time, it is history that grounds us as an institution and memories that offer us some comfort as individuals.

The future will not be handed to us. But with the combined effort of the Rafflesian community at large, we can all ensure that RI will not simply be a school with a great past, but a school that has a great future.

Auspicio Melioris Aevi.

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