

KEEPING THE SPIRIT ALIVE

Alumni will always remain a pillar of the university community. Mr Peter Lim, one of NUS' pioneer administrators, explains why.

By **Zalina Gazali**

● “To help others and impact their lives positively” has always been the mantra for Mr Peter Lim, one of NUS' founding champions of alumni relations. Fondly remembered by students and peers for his warmth and commitment to service, Mr Lim, 89, brought to NUS a sense of empathy honed during his years as a teacher and pastor. During a visit in early 2012, Mr Lim (who now resides with his family in Edmonton, Canada) shared his story with *AlumNUS*.

What were you doing before you joined NUS, and how did you come to join the university?

I taught at Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) during the 1950s and was also active in the local Methodist community; in fact, I was the founding pastor of two Methodist churches (Fairfield in 1946 and Barker Road in 1956). From 1961 to 1965, I served as the Principal of ACS and pastor of Wesley Church in Seremban, Malaysia.

And then NUS – or rather, the University of Singapore – pulled me in. At the time, I was actively involved in fundraising for the YMCA and other organisations. The

university needed someone with experience in this area, so they said, “Come and join us.” And that was how I got “caught!”

You've taken on many senior administrative roles during your years with NUS. Tell us about some of them.

I joined the university in 1965 as Development Officer. I later worked in Student Affairs, and there was a season when I was in charge of Public Relations. I also served as Deputy Registrar for a period before spending three years in New York recruiting faculty members.

After returning to Singapore and serving as Acting Registrar, I felt that it was important for NUS to have a concerted approach towards alumni engagement, so I started the Alumni Affairs Office in 1989. This was renamed the Alumni Affairs and Development

Office in 1991 and I oversaw its efforts until I retired in 1996.

What were some of the highlights of your time as a senior administrator?

As a Student Liaison Officer in the late 1960s, my focus was very much on helping students. One of the

challenges they faced was the cost of textbooks. That's why we decided to set up the University of Singapore Co-op Bookstore in 1969. We were able to repay our initial S\$20,000 loan within six months and the NUS Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society is still doing its part for students and faculty. I was also involved in the construction of the original Institute of Molecular Cell Biology Building at Kent Ridge. This was completed in 1987, on schedule and within budget.

What were some of the challenges you faced in engaging alumni?

NUS has many predecessor-institutions and all their graduates are considered alumni. I myself am an alumnus of two of these institutions, Raffles College and the University of Malaya. Both had many alumni in Malaysia. So one of our first tasks was the painstaking compilation of alumni records – updating names and addresses, for example. This was a tremendous amount of work!

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Mr Peter Lim, one of NUS' pioneering administrators



Why is it important to reach out to alumni, then and now?

The support and contributions of our alumni – which can come in various forms – ensures that future generations of students can continue to have excellent learning opportunities. I see it as a blessing to have been given the opportunity to shape alumni matters from the very beginning; I'm a true believer in the capacity of our alumni to change peoples' lives.

Tell us about your family and where you live now.

I have a son and daughter, both in their 60s. I also have four grandchildren in their 20s and 30s, and three great-grandchildren aged four to six years. My wife, Flora, passed away in 2010. Since 1978, I've been with my family in Edmonton, Canada, where I serve as Minister Emeritus at the Highlands United Church.

What's your secret to a long and fulfilling life?

I don't like to sit still and do nothing; I need to exercise my mind. So I read a lot and prepare sermons, and am happiest when there's work to be done. I also value the experience of being a friend and mentor, and of making a difference to others. I hope I've been able to do this. ■

A FRIEND AND MORE

Mr David Ho (Arts and Social Sciences '72) recalls his early friendship with Mr Peter Lim.



In the late 1960s, I served a term as the Honorary General Secretary of the Students' Union. We would meet with Peter (who worked in Student Affairs) once a week, after which we'd bring our issues up to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Toh Chin Chye.

My first impression of Peter was that he was very witty; he never came across as stern

or authoritarian. Even so, to us he was "the Establishment". We often gave him a hard time about issues involving bus fares and so on!

But Peter never took this to heart. Instead, he always tried to see things from our angle. He was also very supportive; rather than kill our youthful, fiery idealism, he sought to nurture it into something even more positive.

In my final year of studies, Peter was the first person to recommend me for a job, so that I got an offer even

before graduation. And when I expressed a wish to continue my studies, he was very supportive as well. Simply put, Peter's commitment towards positive change has been instrumental to how I live my life.

Mr David Ho is the Managing Director of Windmill International, a commodities trading and logistics firm. In 2002, Mr Ho established the Peter ST Lim Bursary at NUS in honour of his longtime friend and mentor. Mr Ho was appointed the President of the NUS Society in June 2012.