



The Gateway

Hong Kong Lasallian Family Bulletin

March 2013

Forty Fifth Issue

Welcome

Gateway 45 comes to you with spring bursting forth all-round. Here in Hong Kong, the weather is cool to mild, with occasional light mist.



Our issue date happens to coincide with a most unusual vacancy of the papal chair in Rome. Pope Benedict's resignation, in order to live out the rest of his earthly life in solitude and prayer, has set an interesting and perhaps challenging example for us all...and certainly for those living the hectic pace of life that is Hong Kong. "Slow down, you're going too fast."

Our Brother of the Month, Vincent Ong, lived a rather quiet, reclusive life. Most thought he was born in or around Malacca, Malaysia, until he was engaged in conversation by Brother Vincent Corkery about his early life when it transpired that he hailed all the way from the banks of the Yellow River. In many respects, his is a fascinating story.

Oriental Flavour also touches on a rather quiet man, so quiet that his tomb in Happy Valley remained unmarked for 100 years. We are happy to bring to light the story of Yeung Kui Wan, a former teacher of St. Joseph's College.

This is the holy season of Lent in the Catholic Church. May He who suffered and died for us give us abundance of peace and joy as we try to follow his ways.



Brother of the Month

Brother Vincent Ong 1908 - 1999



Brother Vincent

My deepest memories go back to a little farming village on the banks of the Hwang Ho in the waning years of Manchu rule, to a close-knit family into which I was born in 1908.

I still have warm feelings as I recall my father and mother, a big brother and most of all, my small sister. Also the hustle of life, horses and a favourite donkey. And the panic when fierce bandits approached and all rushed for refuge to a large fortified enclosure.

For centuries my people had struggled with periodic flooding when the Hwang Ho overflowed its banks. In 1912 the worst of remembered floods left widespread devastation and famine, and carved a new channel to the seas several miles further south.

With our farm utterly destroyed and our possessions swept away, the family joined the crowds of starving refugees making their way along the railway tracks east and south, often through bandit-infested countryside, begging food as they went.

My little sister and I, too weak to walk, were carried by my father and big brother in baskets attached to a long pole. We traveled in this way for countless miles, sometimes staying with relatives and friends along the way, till we reached the ancient port city of Amoy.



A friendly old man operating a river boat with his wife agreed to take care of me, while my parents and other family members went in search of work.

A year later my father returned to see if all was well with me. The terrible demands of survival were such that sadly it was the last I was to see or hear of him or my family.

Four years later, a Hokkien family at Amoy were leaving for Malaya. They had taken a liking to me and took me along as a member of the family, even sharing the family name. I was now eight.

We settled near the Muar River, where Mr. Ong, my new father, went into partnership to run a very profitable rubber estate. Success was really due to his efficient management and spirit of enterprise. Later the partnership broke up, the estate was sold, the family moved to Malacca, while my father invested in a new rubber estate at Asahan, near Jasin in Johor. Here he was even more successful, right up to the 1925 slump, when he decided to sell.

In Malacca our family settled in Chan Koon Cheng Road, adjoining Bandar Hilir, just to the back of St Francis' Institution. I was nine. My mother, who ruled the home with a firm hand, decided I should go to school. The first suggestion, St Francis' Institution, was rejected. To her Chinese mind it was a Catholic Institution with Portuguese affiliation: 'Portugal small country, China big country!'

She opted instead for the Anglo-Chinese School - she found the name more reassuring ACS was housed in a rickety old building. After a few months the floor cracked and classes were transferred to the church which had to be partitioned for the purpose.

Anglo-Chinese School



Each day I went to school with my younger brother and returned home for lunch. Probably a bit spoilt, I was often late for the afternoon session and received regular scolding from the Indian headmaster.

One day he went berserk, grabbed a broom handle and began laying about him. He entered my class and hit me with great violence. The class teacher rushed to protect me and later tried to mollify me, admitting that the headmaster had no right to hit me like that, explaining that he had just failed his teacher-training examination.

But all to no avail. I ran home vowing never to return. It was my second year at ACS and I was in standard one [equivalent to standard 3 today]; and also it was October with just some weeks to go before the promotion examination for admission to standard two.

My mother understood that my mind was made up and tried to have me admitted to the High School. The headmaster advised me to return to ACS for the promotion examination. To this I would never agree. She tried St Francis' Institution. Brother Director Claude was very kind but gave the same advice.

Faced with this dilemma I just stayed at home. A friend of the family expressed surprise and offered to intervene with Brother Barnitus, the new director at SFI, whom he knew quite well. He succeeded and I resumed my studies. I passed the promotion examination at St Francis' Institution without difficulty.

It was now 1918 and the Spanish influenza was raging everywhere. Each morning the classroom was fumigated and a drop of strong-smelling disinfectant was placed on each boy's handkerchief for extra protection. Death came suddenly, often after just a few hours of fever; people went about in terror of becoming infected. I liked SFI and my lively classmates, always ready for fun as occasion permitted.

My first bicycle was a big experience and together with a friend I loved to weave my way around the slow moving bullock carts jamming the narrow streets. One Sunday we found the school gate open, cycled in and found catechism classes in progress. We asked to join and it was here that I heard the story of Jesus for the first time. For me it was a deeply moving experience.



I liked to take an evening stroll from my house past SFI, to watch the Brothers at evening recreation, walking as a family back and forth along the spacious veranda. What a harmony of races: Chinese, Eurasian, Indian, Burmese, French, Irish, German, and others.

At home by contrast where our extended family now occupied two adjoining houses, I experienced growing tension and conflict, especially with my mother.

The Brothers, despite their long busy day, appeared so serene and joyful. Was it possible for me to become a Brother, I wondered. Deep in my heart I began to sense that this was what I wanted from life. Once on Holy Thursday I managed to peep into their quarters and saw them perform a traditional ceremony of fellowship. I was more than fascinated.

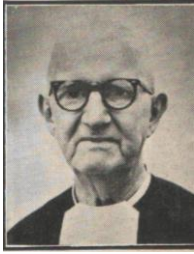
Some evenings as I came strolling by, the school boarders would call out '*Orang panjang datang!*' (tall man coming), teasing me about my height. By now I had grown unusually tall. They liked to see me coming with my usual supply of *kacang putch* (Indian candies) which I shared with them.

With some of them I also shared my dream of becoming a Brother. They told me I would first have to become a Catholic. They advised me to go to the priest for instruction and prepare for baptism. They promised to pray for me. Some spoke to Brother Spare about me and he asked them to tell me to pray, even the simple prayer: 'Jesus, thy kingdom come!' and 'Jesus, I love you!' Later Brother Spare passed a single word question through the boys: 'When?'

I read some books about the Brothers' life and I became more impatient for baptism. Thankfully I was now nearly 21, and the priest no longer insisted on a letter of consent from my parents. I was baptised on the feast of St Joseph 1927. I never forget to thank God for the joy of that day.

I was unable to share my joy with my mother. She was a devout Taoist who fasted on fruits and vegetables the first and fifteenth day of each month. She worshipped daily at the family shrine, and would insist on my presence when I was younger. She would scream now if she heard I had become a Catholic. All went well until one day she realised I had been avoiding meat on Fridays and concluded that I had become a Catholic. I did not deny it. She flew into a violent rage and I had to seek refuge with a friendly family not far away.

This family arranged with Brother Barnitus, Director of St Francis Institution, for me to join the Brothers' Novitiate - but reluctantly, after they had failed to persuade me to join the seminary and become a priest.



Brother Barnitus saw me to the train and assured me all would be taken care of. Sure enough at Kuala Lumpur a gentleman met me, took me for lunch and put me on the train for Butterworth. where once more I was met, taken to the ferry and put in a rickshaw for Pulau Tikus, Penang. Yes, Brother Barnitus was kind to the least detail.

Arriving at the Novitiate, 2 March 1928, I was at once struck by the beauty of the building, the chapel especially: a major extension and decoration project had just been completed. The Director was the kindly Brother Denis, rugged, robust and French, but also thoughtful and caring. Later it was Brother Matthias and for a while Brother Marcian. All were men of God, with a warmth for people.

Being a recent convert I was detained in the postulancy programme for several months. Finally I was clothed in the black robe and white rabbat of a La Salle Brother on Christmas Eve 1928 and so began the novitiate year of spiritual formation and discipleship, learning to live the Brother's life.



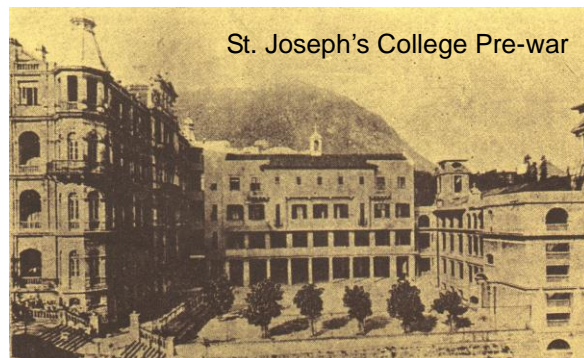
Novitiate in Penang

My gastric trouble became acute just as I completed my initial formation and Brother Visitor James posted me to St Xavier's Institution, Penang, to do some light work until my health improved. The stress of novitiate life quickly faded at the prospect of joining community as a fully-fledged Brother.

At SXI I helped Brother Philip Thompson with the boarders and Brother Peter with the kitchen department. It was a joy working with them. My responsibilities were many and complex, including going up Penang Hill with Brother Alphonse to prepare for the Brothers' weekly recuperation and recreation.

It was partly on doctor's advice that I was sent to Hong Kong in October 1932 to join the teaching staff at the newly completed La Salle College in Kowloon. All admired its distinctive architecture, standing out in its elegance in a still rather ragged but rapidly developing Kowloon. I was assigned to teach a lower class which suited me at the time. I liked the pupils and they responded readily and were easy to teach. I felt fulfilled.

After a few years I wanted the challenge of teaching higher classes and was transferred to St Joseph's College on Hong Kong island.



St. Joseph's College Pre-war

That very evening, eve of the new school term, people were hurrying on all sides because a typhoon was coming. At midnight the cannon boomed again and again: the typhoon had arrived. I

jumped up, fastened doors and shutters and got back to bed with a big pillow over my head to reduce the terrible noise.

Instantly a large brick came loose overhead and fell on the pillow: my escape was truly miraculous. Instinctively I rushed from the room, and joined the other Brothers already in the street below, just in time to see the whole wall collapse out on to the road. Damage was extensive.

Calm eventually returned, damage was repaired and life resumed its normal routine. I liked my work, but my gastric problem gave me little peace and I was hospitalised many times, on average twice each year.

War clouds were darkening the skies and in October 1940 I was posted to St Joseph's Institution, Singapore. Here the new Brothers' wing was just completed, destined to be my home for the next half century and more.

That year my mother died in Malacca. My father had preceded her many years before.



Rumours of war now became more insistent. But we Brothers mostly ignored them, happy with our work, happy too to believe that fortress Singapore could not fall, that all Japanese planes were made of plywood, as the papers kept reassuring us.

We woke up to the truth when the first bombs dropped and we rushed at once to cover the flat roof of the Brothers' wing with sandbags. Some Brothers trained as ARP wardens. I helped to check on food supplies. The final terrible days before the fall of Singapore were not a time for heroism, but to keep your head down and survive.

And that, thank God, we all did at Joseph's, including the many refugees and casualty cases sheltering or being nursed in our classrooms and compound. During this long ordeal I felt God was indeed protecting us and I found deepest comfort in the companionship of my Brothers of many nationalities and the simple loyalty to one another. They had remained behind at whatever cost, when so many had sought security by running away. Some spent the next four years in Changi Prison while two were to die of cerebral malaria in Bahau jungle,

Some kind of normal life gradually resumed under Japanese rule. A year passed and we were all required to join a big exodus to the jungle clearing at Bahau, not far from Seremban. We loaded up some provisions and a supply of parangs, changkols, axes, etc. The axes were later to prove much too small for the giant trees we were to encounter. I grabbed a book from the school library entitled: *Vegetable Gardening in Malaya*, by Milsun and Grist, published in 1941 by the department of Agriculture in Kuala

Lumpur. It was to prove invaluable at Bahau, and still rests on my desk to this day.

I feared greatly for my gastric condition. Without proper medicine I would surely be first to die. But the outdoor life, the simple meagre fare and lots of fresh air freed me from all gastric trouble for the whole stay at Bahau!



Old Bahau survivors

My mind often went back thirty years to our little farming community on the banks of the Hwang Ho and I felt at home with the other Brothers planting vegetables and fruit trees, constructing wells and drawing water, caring for goats and poultry.

I was appointed *head* of a garden group which included Brothers Christopher Chen, William Muir and Charles Everard. My book gave us great help.

In addition I made friends with nearby Chinese families from Punggol who were experienced in farming, and obtained seeds, from which we made a kind of hard cake which could be eaten by dipping in coffee. I also planted *kacang parang*, which was edible when young.

Only after the surrender was I able to visit my family in Malacca.

Back in Singapore the Brothers hurried to reopen the school to cater for the crowds of young people now rushing for education. It was a joy to be back in the classroom. Younger pupils became my special concern and I loved to teach the lowest classes. I was particularly thrilled with their youthful creativity in art and craft. In the evenings and weekend I joined them for badminton.

Br Vincent and staff St. Michael's Primary School



Brothers with Brother Director's directives for simplicity.

This was a time of great expansion for the work of the Brothers: student enrolment kept rising and branch schools had to be built. One of my duties was supervision of the Brothers' kitchen department. I looked after the general needs of the house as well, balancing as best I could the wishes of the

Despite my continuing poor health I managed to continue teaching to the statutory limit. On retiring I was able to devote more time to looking after the Brothers' residence, even assisting with the cleaning and attending to maintenance and repairs.

As the years slipped by it was time for St Joseph's to move from its hallowed space at Bras Basah Road to the bright spacious world of Malcolm Road. Leaving Bras Basah Road after more than 40 years, my heart did skip a beat or two. But I was soon to be soothed by the flowers, foliage and early morning chirping of birds at Malcolm Road and memories of far off childhood days.



Today I live a quiet routine, with more time for rest and for prayer, still happy to take a broom and tidy up. I return the cheerful greetings of my Brothers as they go about their busy tasks and I enjoy their witty banter.

And the gastric condition which tormented me all through life was cured very simply only last year, thanks to a fresh diagnosis. What a glorious relief! Thanks be to God.

Most days I move slowly to the beautiful new college chapel nearby, glad to share the daily liturgy with a new generation of Josephians. Afterwards, I delight in their youthful companionship as they escort me back to my room.

I never cease to thank a bountiful God who has cared for me through these many years, quietly guiding the critical choices which led to my walking with him and with the Brothers of La Salle, and experiencing so much fulfillment, joy and warm companionship.

EPILOGUE

Brother Oliver Rogers tells us that he had a stroke in September 1996 which incapacitated him on the left side and, despite physiotherapy, he remained wheel-chair bound and dependent till the end. But he recovered his speech faculty almost completely and his mind remained clear as a bell to the very end.

In November 1996 the Little Sisters of the Poor volunteered to take him into their Home for the Aged. The Sisters took wonderful care of him. During his sojourn at the Sisters of the Poor he had cataract operations on both eyes at the Toa Payoh & New Changi Hospitals respectively. Sr. Mary Lucy was with him in the wee hours when he passed away on 27 August 1999.

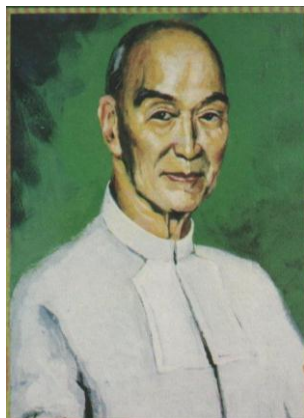
He was the first of our Brothers in Singapore to be cremated and his remains are currently kept in the columbarium behind the chapel at St Patrick's School, Katong.

As a youth, Brother Vincent walked miles through the floodplains of the Hwang Ho, as a Brother, he has walked uprightly behind the plough in the vineyard of the Lord for 70 odd years. Such as he, too, will shine as stars for all eternity.



Postings of Brother Vincent

Penang	Novitiate	1928
St. Xavier's Institution	Teaching	1929-1932
La Salle College, Kowloon, Hong Kong	Teaching	1932-1937
St. Joseph's College, Hong Kong	Teaching	1937-1940
St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore	Teaching	1940-1943
Bahau Jungle Settlement	War Time	1943-1945
St. Joseph's Institution, Singapore	Teaching	1945-1999



Family Updates

Brother Xavier RIP

On the 30th January, 2013, St Joseph's College arranged a Mass to celebrate the life of Brother Xavier, also known as Brother David Jones. Although the Mass was at 7.30am, it attracted a goodly congregation of Brothers, Old Boys and students. The celebrant fused the gospel reading nicely with Brother Xavier's life and the general intercessions called on God's generosity and mercy. At the end of the Mass, the Brothers sang the Salve Regina, after which school Supervisor, Brother



Thomas Favier, delivered a very fine and touching appreciation of Brother Xavier, highlighting a number of his human and spiritual qualities.



Family Fun/Open Day

Something akin to an Open Day is held every year in St Joseph's College and La Salle College. It so happened this year that the event fell on the same day for both schools. The occasion is a joyful one, with plenty of food on offer, and is a favourite for family and old boy visits. It is also an occasion for displaying some of the enormous talent of the students.



Pilgrimage

Eight students and a teacher of Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College went on pilgrimage, during Chinese New Year, to the Trappist Monastery on Lantau Island Hong Kong. They walked to the Monastery in silence, repeating the little prayer, “Come Jesus, be my light”. The walk to the Monastery is on an uphill slope, adorned with the Way of the Cross. After lunch, they joined the priests and brothers in their daily prayers, a rare chance of chanting prayers together in Mandarin. They were then introduced to the history of the Monastery and also to the importance of prayers. The pilgrimage was an eye-opener for all the participants.



CBSSA 2013



Valentine’s Day provided the date and Wanchai Sports Stadium the venue for this year’s Christian Brothers’ Schools Athletic Meet. Everything ran smoothly, including the weather. Brother Thomas Lavin was Guest of Honour. He reminded all the athletes that, besides their own individual families, they belonged to the large Lasallian Family of Hong Kong and the

world. As such, they must start by loving their own schools. He also thanked the school Principals and P.E. teachers who have been supporting this athletic gathering for so many years, since 1974 in fact, when the Association was founded. The occasion suitably rounded off our Chinese New Year celebrations.

Hong Kong Lasallian Volunteers AGM

This was an AGM with a difference. The Hong Kong Lasallian Volunteers movement was established in 2005 but this was the first time that a Constitution was adopted and the First Executive Committee inaugurated. The Committee consists of 7 members and the President is Mr. Peter Leung, a teacher at La Salle College. The meeting was attended by 4 Brothers, perhaps a record in itself in recent times! We wish the Hong Kong Lasallian Volunteers the very best as they strive to live out the Lasallian charism, particularly by helping the poor and needy.



40th Anniversary Dinner



As part of its 40th anniversary celebrations, Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) Primary School held a grand gala dinner on the 23rd February. There were 28 tables and guests were treated to a sumptuous Chinese course of dishes. The dinner was nicely punctuated with student performances, the cutting of a massive anniversary birthday cake, presentation of long-service awards to staff, lucky draws and down-memory-lane

videos. The function was well supported by principals and supervisors of our Lasallian schools in Hong Kong. Here's looking forward to the golden jubilee in 10 years' time.

Athletics' Finals

For the past week or two, schools have been competing for laurels in Athletics a three day event for each division. The leading schools are in Division 1 and, at the end of the day, overall honours are usually shared by either La Salle College or Diocesan Boys' School. This year La Salle was pipped at the post, losing out on the overall by a mere 2 points. Such is sports. There was good news for our sister school, Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) College, who secured promotion from Division 1 to Division 2. Congratulations to all concerned and especially to the athletes who gave it their all.



Oriental Flavour

An Unsung Hero

Yeung Kui Wan 楊衢雲(1861-1901), revolutionary and former teacher of St. Joseph's College

For over one hundred years, a special tombstone has stood anonymously in a quiet corner of the Hong Kong Cemetery in Happy Valley. A corner of the tombstone is cut. In Chinese tradition, this means the person buried there died of an unnatural cause. The tombstone is inscribed with only a serial number, "6348", to protect the identity of the dead person.



Then, in September 2011, 110 years after he was assassinated and in time for the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命, which resulted in the establishment of the Chinese Republic that he fought and died for, the Hong Kong authorities placed a granite plaque next to the tomb, thus identifying the person buried there, and making public the story of Yeung Kui Wan.



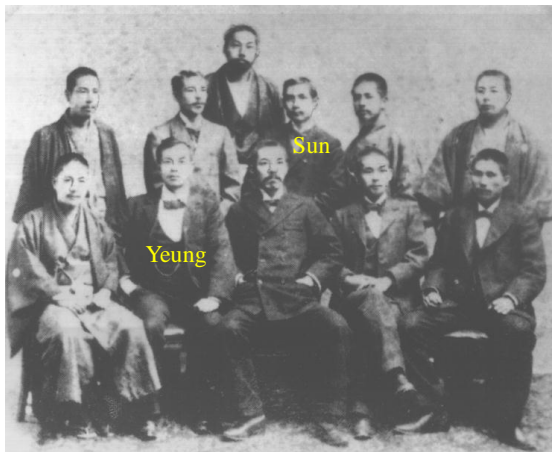
On 10th January 1901, while Yeung was preparing lessons for his tutorial students, an assassin sent by the then Qing government shot him in the head and throat. Yeung was carried to hospital but passed away the next day. Though he had been warned many times that his life was in danger and had fled with Dr. Sun Yat Sen to Japan for a while, Yeung insisted on returning to Hong Kong to earn a living through teaching English. He believed that in so doing, more money could be saved for the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty.

Yeung Kui-wan was a Chinese revolutionary of the late Qing Dynasty. Like many early revolutionaries, Yeung was educated in Hong Kong. He was among the elite young Chinese boys who managed to gain admission to a missionary school. At that time, missionary schools helped to open a window for a group of educated Chinese to learn about Western culture and democracy. Hong Kong provided an environment for the dissidents to get together and form groups that served as catalysts for the transformation of China in later years.

After graduating from St. Paul's College at the age of 20, Yeung started to teach English in St. Joseph's College (probably from 1881 to 1885). He then took up different jobs and became acquainted with young Chinese who shared the same ideals and passion.



In 1890, together with Tse Tsan Tai 謝纘泰 (founder of the South China Morning Post newspaper), Yeung started the **Furen Literary Society** (輔仁文社), which was also known as the **Chinese Patriotic Mutual Improvement Association**, to spread ideas of revolution against the Qing Dynasty. The guiding principles of the society were: "Open up the people's minds" (開通民智) and "Love your country with all your heart" (盡心愛國). The society met in Pak Tsz Lane, Central, Hong Kong, and released books and papers discussing the future of China and advocating the overthrow of the Qing Dynasty government and establishment of a republic in China. The society had 16 members, two of whom were teachers (Yeung Kui Wan and Law Man Yuk 羅文玉) and a student (Lau Yin Bun 劉燕賓) all from St. Joseph's College.



In 1895, the society was merged with the Revive China Society 興中會 founded by Sun Yat Sen. Yeung became the first President of the Hong Kong Chapter of the Revive China Society and was, with Sun Yat-sen, in charge of planning an uprising in Canton in 1895 and in Huizhou 惠州 in 1900. After the failure of the Huizhou uprising, Yeung was warned to leave Hong Kong. But with a family to support, he stayed and made a living by teaching. In 1901, he was murdered by a Qing government hireling in his home at 52 Gage Street.

Through the persistence of a family member and with the help of friends, this tragic story of an unsung hero has been officially recognized in Pak Tsz Lane Park in Sheung Wan, dedicated to the memory of Yeung Kui Wan and the society that he founded.

