

Fellow Victorians

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening,

Since we are among friends, I hope that you will forgive me if I do not begin by recognising all the persons who should be recognised.

It is many years since I last attended an Old Victorian's dinner. So it is good to come again and see how many of my generation are here.

A gathering of alumni from a secondary school is rather unusual. If you get to my age, in the seventies, you ask yourself what is so special about the very few years, not exceeding 5 years of your life that you spend in a secondary school or junior college. What kind of person you are today have been more shaped and influenced by your years after secondary school, either in further studies or in your livelihood or in your responsibility as spouse or parent or grandparent. What then is so significant about the few years that we spend in secondary school or in junior college that many of us have this desire to get back together with our friends from youth? I myself was in Victoria School from 1951 to early 1956. When I was doing my O levels in 1954 a group of 12 of us formed a study group. We are all in different professions and two of us have passed away in the last two years. Yet every year we still meet at least once a year with our spouses over dinner. That may be why I have not attended the OVA gatherings as often as I should. We recount the things we did and the people whom we knew those many years ago and sometimes to our embarrassment behave like young kids again. Maybe here is the reason why we have this desire to meet with our old school mates. There are times when we want to forget that we have grown up and want to re-live the care free days of our youth. Of course it seems to be care free looking back at those years from today. At that time we felt as stressed as any student today. Time does lend enchantment to past events. When we get together like this we forget the intervening years and imagine that we are back in those good old days.

So I do want to thank the OVA Organising Committee for organising this event and inviting me as the Guest of Honour. I know that it is not easy to organise an event like this especially for volunteers. It is hard work which reminds us of Nil Sine Labore—nothing without work.

I also appreciate your efforts to mark the occasion tonight with a special tribute to an old comrade of mine, Dr Ong Chit Chung. You have chosen this platform to launch the Ong Chit Chung Scholarship.

I understand there will be a special tribute to Chit Chung. My speech would not be complete without me saying a few words about Chit Chung myself.

Like many Singaporeans, I was shocked and saddened by the sudden passing of Chit Chung last year. He was a colleague of mine in the government, serving as Parliamentary Secretary for Ministry of Homes Affairs and Labour. He was a committed Member of Parliament. During his 20 years in Parliament, he also served as Chairman for the Government Parliamentary Committees for Education, Defence and Foreign Affairs. A noted military historian, he took a special interest in foreign affairs.

As an MP, Chit Chung worked hard to improve the lives of his constituents. He was an effective organiser and brought in many professionals and businessmen to contribute to his town council. He was a family man and gave much to his family and his nation.

For us Victorians, we were fortunate to have had the commitment of Chit Chung who served tirelessly and selflessly for over two decades in the key executive and advisory bodies of Victoria School and Victoria Junior College. He was instrumental in the founding of the Victoria Junior College. Many of you may not know that it was Chit Chung, among others like Wong Hung Kim, who played a key role in finding a location for Victoria School when it was proposed to relocate the school from Kallang Bahru. The site that was identified for the relocation was not very attractive. Chit Chung approached and pressed me to persuade the Ministry of National Development to allocate a better site, nearer to Victoria Junior College. I was fortunate to be able to persuade the Minister to allocate the site at Siglap Link to the new Victoria School. With Chit Chung's passing, Singapore and Victoria School have lost a good son. I hope his fine example would spur and inspire other Victorians, present and past, to come forward to contribute to the further development and welfare of the school.

I am happy to see so many prominent members of the alumni, as well as supporters and well wishers of the Victorian family tonight. I also hear OVA will be embarking on a series of events this year to commemorate the 25th anniversary of VJC. As part of the celebration, you have lined up an exciting string of events. Let me wish you every success to your up and coming events.

Finally, let me thank the OVA Council Members again for your hard work you have put in for the school. To everyone here tonight, principal, teachers, staff, students, old boys and girls, let me just quote from our school song: "Victoria School is something more." Incidentally the teacher who wrote the words, Mr Shamus Frazer and the teacher who composed the music, Mr E.W. Meyer were teachers when I was in Victoria School in the 1950's.

Thank you and have a wonderful evening.