

Oh, the treasured memories at the reunions

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Comment

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FORTY years seems a very long time. But, when gathering for a reunion, 40 years seem just like yesterday as experiences and faces neatly fall into place.

It's much like a jigsaw puzzle meant for children. The pictures are vivid and large, the colours fresh and appealing. Most of all, it is fun as everything comes alive. At times, it is like re-living everything all over again, especially when it exudes happiness, in contrast to the predictions of gloom and doom ahead.

I discovered this twice last week when my alma mater celebrated its 40th anniversary. Both occasions were equally grand and captivating as though we were in a time-capsule, flashing from point to point, just quick enough to sample the moments.

The first time-capsule in this case brought us back to the days when Universiti Sains Malaysia, then known as Universiti Pulau Pinang, was newly established in 1969.

Then, it was the only other university in the country and it made history. Being located in a former military barracks with some military activities still taking place then made the experiences even more memorable.

The celebrated evening of "*Sirih Pulang Ke Gagang*" was catalytic in this sense, as the alumni gathered to recall vividly what captured their interest then.

Songs and dances were choreographed to bring out the light moments shared by most, judging by the response from the audience. So, too, the humour and comical rendering of events which livened the occasion considerably.

Favourite haunts like the "durian valley", "VC rock" and "Fu Man Chu canteen" were more than just keywords that had a myriad of meanings and caused bursts of laughter and even tears. It was part of history in the making for many who were there, and now proudly re-lived all over again.

But none was so precious as to relive the moments of tolerance among the various ethnic and religious groups as it were then some 40 years ago.

It was as though the level of tolerance was firmly etched forever in the minds of everyone and was second nature to them. The reunion only served to reinforce the great feelings of the good old days.

The night ended on a high note and a great sense of accomplishment with the expectation that it would be repeated in the years ahead. Maybe the next time would be even better.

The other time-capsule was a journey back into the century-year-old history of the unmistakable Malay College, established in 1905.

The occasion was the 40th anniversary of the class of 68/70, notably those who became part of the college as Form 1 pupils in 1964. Although the alma mater was deep in its own history, it did not distract the class of 68/70 from focusing on their unique experiences like no other.

Many were at a very tender age when they left their homes and loved ones for the first time to board in a school in Kuala Kangsar—not exactly an adolescent's idea of a fun place! So, they thought, then.

But fun we had as privileged members of an esteemed college. And that fun continues to be the magnet that draws not only members of the college together, but teachers as well.

Do not be deceived by the "Malay-ness" of the college because a good number of the teachers were from a diverse cultural background.

In fact, they were among the highlights of the reunion night, with speeches of thanks directed to them for making what we are today; followed by "intimate" personal exchanges from those present.

There were no pretences in the cordiality exhibited as the students and teachers comfortably shared their common memories and experiences.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the long-lasting bonds created during the encounter at the college four decades ago had grown stronger after each reunion. It is ironic that all the punishments meted out during the college days seemed to be the very glue that brought them even closer.

Each time the subject was broached, it would invariably be followed by cheerful laughter.

In short, the 40-year span was no more than a blink of an eye. It went to prove that time is indeed relative, and the quality of encounters mattered in giving it meaning in the passing of time.

This perhaps is the very ingredient that today's education is sorely lacking! And it must be reinstated as soon as possible.

Wishing all readers a Happy New Year as we usher in 2009.

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