

Happy 100th anniversary MCKK

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THESE days, residential schools are no longer the preferred choice for many parents. Life is better now and the comforts of home are preferred to that of a boarding school, anytime.

At home, you can have the types of food you want, and not having to rush for it or being "forced" to eat what you don't like.

You are privy to a television set, and watch your favourite channel, without having to fight over it.

Some even have their own room where they can study in privacy and in peace, and what more, there is an attached bathroom.

And finally, there is always mum and dad to run to when things go a wee bit wrong.

Moreover, many of the day-schools today are at par, if not better, compared with some residential schools.

So boarding schools are left to those who really want the experience of being away from home for some reason, and making it on your own, so to speak.

I had mine in the mid-Sixties, when Malay College was just a year short of 60 years old.

It was almost like going to "exile" at that tender age of 12, to a place not much to shout about — Kuala Kangsar.

Of course, to be offered a place in MCKK then was a personal pride of some sort. It was, after all, known as Eaton of the East, having been modelled after a public school in Britain.

Where else can you play a little known hard-ball game called "fives" in Malaysian schools other than MCKK, a link that takes it back to the Eaton College of UK (www.etonfives.co.uk/about.fives/brief.history.html).

Of course, there were college wags who described Eaton as "MCKK of the West"!

On admission, one is placed in the "preparatory school". Then you get transferred to the "big school", now the icon building of MCKK.

Both are residential colleges which separate the "preppies" from the seniors. It was in the prep school that we are to pick up as much skills as possible that will see to our eventual survival in the years ahead.

And some of these are just what today's mums and dads worry about.

Yes, the common bath (some facilities are not in good working order), the "rush" for food — though queuing up is mandatory — washing your own clothes and drying (at times ironing) them.

(A popular way to "iron" your clothes was to place them under the mattress for a couple of days so that they looked pressed — literally.)

Whatever the hard life or "lack of facilities", nobody died in the process.

Quite the contrary, within a year the preppies are ready to move to the Big School — where everything is repeated but on a larger scale.

The Big School houses Form Two to Form Five students. And as expected, some are by then veterans in how to get a little more comfort from the rest — which is an art of living, if not survival.



CHOW TIME: The food at MCKK may not be as tasty as that prepared by mum, but who's complaining?

Meal time always provides plenty of opportunities to display some of these survival skills. For apart from studying, eating is another preoccupation, given at that stage of growing up.

Take for instance, the "high" table which is a special dining arrangement for the "big shots" (who are usually the duty prefects and duty teachers) where the food is considerably better than those at the "low" tables.

And mind you, those on the high table get to be served, and they have to be fully attired in the college *baju melayu* with *samping* and *songkok*.

Thus, a group of veterans will be always be fully attired when they sense that someone on the high table will not turn up. And the jostling starts to fill the vacancy.

Indeed, some smart veterans make it a point to find out who will not turn up, and get themselves nominated early as the replacement.

This is one lesson on the art of "high" living at the Big School.

Another is the "double ration" — a more common practice of taking someone's else food so that you can have a double helping.

Usually this happens when one is absent, especially on weekends when file food in town is preferred.

A more subtle way is to "flick" the food as one passes by the dining table.

Sometimes making friends with the cook (one fondly named Motalib) helps. Making friends with the locals is another way as every now and then you are invited for a home-cooked meal.

Better still if you can get a foster parent. Otherwise, you will have to "order" some from home — like rendang, dendeng and other delicacies.

The risk is, of course, when a parcel arrives (just any parcel), the whole school will be alerted, and that means whatever that can be shared will have to be shared with friends.

This is the time you have more friends that you need!

But this is what makes residential school life interesting — though going through it can at times be heart-wrenching, for example, seeing the contents of your parcel finishing in no time, when it was intended to last for least a month.

But hey, look at it the other way — you made more friends, even if it is until the food from home lasts, at least.

In the end, what it all means is that we develop rapport all round, among colleagues and teachers as well as the locals. This is certainly an enriching phase of growing up.

Once the rapport is established, it goes a long way even after one has long left the Big School.

While others are identifying themselves as Edwardians, Andersonians, Cliffordians (sworn enemies of MCKK) or whatever, MCKK students are quite content to be called simply *Budak Koleq*.

And that says much of what MCKK means to all of them.

This week, MCKK will be a century old (www.mcoba.org.my).

It was 100 years ago when Sultan Idris of Perak gave 16.2ha of land for the purpose of setting up a college in Kuala Kangsar.

Two years earlier, at the Conference of the Malay Rulers (Durbar) in Kuala Lumpur, the Sultan had voiced w need for the British to prepare the Malays for the sake of a successful future for the Malay States.

Soon after, the "Malay Residential School" was set up and later renamed MCKK.

Initially, "the School of Kings" was restricted to children of royalty and the very privileged, but over the years, it opened its doors to become the "King of Schools".

MCKK has in recent times, however, lapsed into a mediocre school.

The neglect must end when MCKK is declared a national heritage by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong on the occasion of its centennial celebration.

MCKK must live up to its reputation as the "King of Schools" once again, an onus that every *Budak Koleq* owes to his alma mater.

To all the students, past and present, and beloved teachers, Happy 100th Anniversary.

Wherever and whoever they are, *Budak-budak Koleq*, remember *Fiat Sapentia Virtus*. May MCKK soar yet again.

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