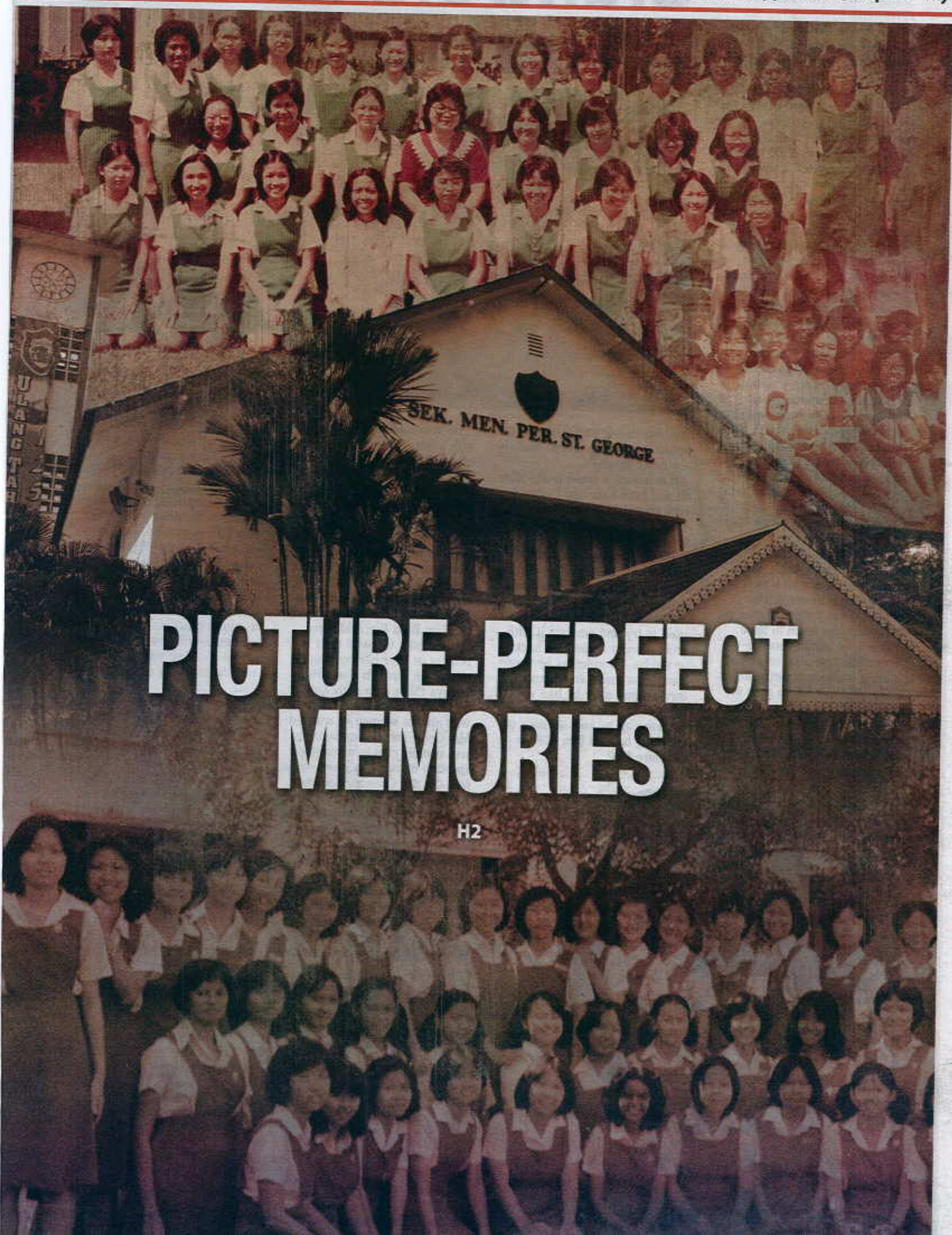


# Learning Curve

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## PICTURE-PERFECT MEMORIES

H2

UNTOLD pride and nostalgia fill my heart whenever I pass by St George's Girls' School (SGGS, now called SM Perempuan St George) on my trips home to Penang. The grand old dame was, and still is, the *crème de la crème* of secondary school education and most importantly, an all girls' domain.

My children (if they happen to be with me) must know by heart the usual excited cry, "There, that's mum's old school, see there's the clock tower!" I can still see in picture perfect memory Ms Pereira's Dalmatians gambolling in the garden at the principal's house next to the school. The green of the shady trees that line the main road; the yellow petals of the angasana trees forming a pretty carpet on the school's long driveway — it is as if time stood cocooned in a warp and I glide in slow motion along that stretch of Jalan Macalister, reliving a precious period of my carefree youth.

Friends, schoolmates and teachers — ah, a smile would form on my lips as visions of the thin but handsome Cikgu Aziz lithely holding on to the wooden frames and moving with the blackboards like a trapeze artist as the panels travel up and down come to mind — he never failed to amuse us then too!

I had the good fortune of recounting Cikgu Aziz's antics to his son, Sam, who was my colleague at one of the organisations I was attached to.

Penangites seem to have a knack for sniffing out the immediate "guan xi" or link of sharing a common birthplace since we never fail to grab at every available opportunity to shout out to the world that we are from Penang, the Pearl of the Orient — where the food is

# Grand old dame

CHUAH MEI LIN recounts happy memories of her secondary schooldays at St George's Girls' School, Penang, which celebrates its 126th anniversary this year



The school as it is today

the best tasting and cheapest, the people are the friendliest, and the sea is the greenest.

It is indeed a small world after all and both Sam and I were so very gleeful to discover our super double link — Penang and his father!

Then, there was the tanned and wry Mr Bobby Chan with his sideburns and a rather unusual gait.

Little did he know that we used to try and emulate it with great alacrity behind his back, or did he, I wonder, as he would sometimes make an unexpected turn around after he had walked by as though to check on what we were up to, only to catch us smirking back at him like the Cheshire Cat?

He drove an old sports car with a fair degree of style in the assessment of an impressionable lot of 13-year-olds. We used to desperately want to believe that he had been a secret agent before he took up teaching.

If we were to gather round a table as we intend to this year — when we the Class of 1978 (we finished our Form Five in 1978) turn 50 — there will surely be mention of the ever so motherly Mrs Lim Bian Tee; Additional Mathematics Ooi who used to peer at us over her reading glasses all through class; Ms Malaya Pillay who aptly taught us History; the intense Cikgu Ariff who always seemed so worried; Mrs Goon, the art teacher who was usually clad in a *sam-foo* showing off her fine proportions; Mrs Oh, the Chemistry teacher who used to pronounce "X" as eggs and of course, Mrs Bio Tan.

I plucked up the courage to call out to Mrs Tan at a car park in Kuala Lumpur some years back, knowing full well she would not remember me but just to let her know nevertheless that she was well remembered.

Believe me, she is as beautiful as ever, all peaches and cream

even in her "older" years of age. Her family and she are settled in Kuala Lumpur now.

We certainly remember school to be fun. Education and extra-curricular activities (be it sports or arts and culture) were the twin pillars of success building on the philosophy of SGGS. The school was always involved in one event or competition or another. For me, afternoons were filled with after class events such as music practices, debates as well as Interact club functions.

The year-end school concert was the highlight of every school year.

There was a dusty room at the back of the stage filled with old pieces of backdrop, costumes and props, which we would raid from time to time.

Being short and bearing no resemblance whatsoever, even with the best of imagination, to a tortured but desirable damsel in distress, I was quite content both "behind the scenes" so to say, writing/directing/producing as well as onstage, tackling the meatier (as I would like to think) secondary roles.

Two stood out in my recollection — I was the "gorgon"

of a Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the dreadful ghost of Emperor Nero in a play I wrote, which was staged by the prefects of SGGS for a Penang schools' outing (and which, by the way, we won).

If not for the fact that my dad refused to finance my further education in the performing arts, I dare say I would have quite enjoyed being a *doyenne* of the Malaysian stage today in the good company of Datuk Faridah Merican!

How have we, the precocious bunch of girls who grew up with the school and went on to walk our own individual paths, fared? Are we "marching on without a fear" as envisaged in the school song?

As women, we juggle multiple roles — daughter, wife, mother, worker and dreamer — and I truly salute us all.

I am just immensely grateful that for the 40 or so of us, we had the chance to find one another in the not so short time together and built comradeship that has lasted decades.

Thanks to the advent of Internet, many of us are still in touch even though our journey of life has taken some of us away from Penang and all over the globe.

I believe we have all done splendidly in every role thrust upon us. There is much to catch up on when we meet later this year; so many lost trails to reconstruct and stories to tell!

Thank you SGGS, our beloved alma mater! The character and personality you have built continue to shine on true and strong in each one of us. Happy 126th year and may you enjoy many more, each just as glorious and illustrious!

The writer is executive director of The Association of Banks in Malaysia, the members of which comprise the 23 commercial banks that currently operate in the country. Email her at [meilin@abm.org.my](mailto:meilin@abm.org.my)



Chuah Mei Lin



The Committee of the English Language Society 1977. The writer is next to Bobby Chan (right)



The writer (left) and her "prince" — her classmate, Lena