



The Gateway

Hong Kong Lasallian Family Bulletin

July 2011

Thirty-second Issue

Welcome

June and July, and the thoughts of teachers and students alike turn to summer holidays. Most schools will start the holidays about mid-July. Prior to that, graduation activities of all kinds must be held, exams taken, papers marked, results distributed and school admissions more or less completed. It is a hectic time.



Our Brother of the Month came from a colourful background, led a quiet and meaningful life and seemed to have the secret of long life. Fortunately for us, he was also an amateur photographer and so we are able to bring you some photos of vintage appeal, pre-war little gems. If there is anyone out there willing to write us something or reflect on any of the photos, we will be delighted.

The Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD) Provincialate at La Salle College, Kowloon, is gradually taking shape. Brother Dodo, Visitor, and Brother Thomas, Auxiliary Visitor, are also busy making their pastoral visits to the different sectors. They are our current leaders in the promotion of the Lasallian vision and mission and we thank them for taking on this role.

The editors of 'The Gateway' are going to take a break for the summer. They actually believe they deserve it. They hope to be back with all guns blazing in September.

Happy Holidays!



Brother of the Month

Brother William Muir 1904-2004



We are indebted to Brother Vincent Corkery for tracing, at first hand, the life journey of Brother William: from sun-scorched south India to the plantations of West Malaysia, to schooling in Malacca, to spiritual formation in Penang, to teaching in Hong Kong and finally fifty five years of devoted educational service in various capacities in Singapore.

Brother William's life is best told, as near as possible, in his own words. Here goes.

"The little village of Birisingam Patam was one of thousands dotting the flat landscape of our part of Tamil Nadu in South India. Here I was born in 1904, the eldest of three boys.

The sun-baked Hindu temple not far from home was a focus of village life. Here my father patiently taught a dozen children, using the dusty ground for writing. None could afford an exercise book. My father received his wages in measures of rice and supplies of vegetables.

I was just four, too young to have been his pupil, when my father fell sick and died, leaving mother to provide for our needs. Life became difficult. Mother besides doing all the housework, helped other people in the padi fields to earn enough food for us.

Two years later an uncle came on a visit from Seremban with his wife. They had no children. It was arranged that I should accompany them back to Malaysia. Never again would I see my mother or my two younger brothers.

We reached Malaysia at last and travelled to Sungai Siam Estate, not far from Pedas railway station, some 20 miles south of Seremban. I found myself in the new wonderful world of a large rubber estate, a world of frequent rain and luxuriant growth, a busy world where the day began long before dawn. But the estate was mosquito-infested, and after six months there was an outbreak of malaria fever. All three of us - uncle, aunt and myself were rushed to the small Zinc-roofed hospital on the estate.

One morning the nurse woke me up and took me to my uncle's bedside where his body lay stiff in death: he had died during the night of cerebral malaria. A week later my aunt died as well.

Left alone in the hospital and in the world, I was inconsolable. The story of my predicament went all over the estate and reached the manager, Mr. Alfred William Muir, an engineer by training. He took me to his bungalow and treated me as his own son. He called some servants and in fluent Tamil told them to cut my hair, give me a bath and get me some new clothes. It was now 1913 and I was nine years old.

As December approached Mr. Muir was conscripted into the British Army and had to return to the UK. He took me to Singapore, to Whiteaways, to be fitted out with proper clothes, then to Malacca to place me in the boarding department at St Francis' Institution, a Lasallian school. It was holiday time and the Brothers were away on retreat. I was placed with the Convent until schools reopened.



In January 1914 I joined St Francis' Institution as a boarder. Brother Claude was director, one of the nicest persons I have ever known. Boarding life was exciting. I joined in the games, made many friends, in no time I felt at home speaking English and I made good progress in my studies.

Meanwhile war had broken out in Europe and I felt very upset when news came through that Mr. Muir had been seriously wounded in the thigh in a battle near Basra in Iraq. Unfit for further military service, he was taken home to Scotland where his recovery took many months. During this period he was able to write many letters to me, showing all the concern and affection of a loving father, enquiring about my progress and sending me regular parcels of goodies as well as money for my upkeep and education.

I attended Catechism lessons but delayed till I was 15 before asking Brother Justin if I could become a Catholic. My Dad, Mr. Muir, approved. I was baptized in 1919 and chose to be called William, Mr. Muir's middle name. Brother Justin took a personal interest in me and soon after put me in charge of the Sodality of Our Lady, an important post of leadership and responsibility among the Boarders.

In 1919 my Dad accepted the post of engineer and captain on a boat which plied the Pearl River daily between Hong Kong and Canton. His letters were always full of affectionate interest in what I was doing, never making decisions for me, but supporting me in what he saw as God's leading in my life.

By now I had emerged as a leading sportsman in the school. I was champion athlete in 1925 and for three successive years made it to the school soccer team.



When I reached the senior class, Brother Justin asked what I planned to do on leaving school. I told him I was thinking of becoming an electrician. 'Why not a Brother?' he asked. I was greatly honoured by his suggestion, prayed over it for several days and finally approached the saintly Brother Barnitus who was my director at this time, and said simply: 'I want to be like you!' He was most encouraging, advising that nothing would be lost by giving the Brother's life a try. It was in February 1927 that Brother Barnitus put me on the train for the novitiate in Penang.

I loved the Novitiate from the start, the beautiful building, the spacious grounds, the abundance of fruit trees and the waves echoing from the sandy beach nearby. Brother Matthias was my director and spiritual guide, strict but understanding.

My fellow novices came from Malaysia, Singapore, Burma and Sri Lanka. We mingled easily and accepted the silenced and discipline of novitiate life. The training in meditation has stayed with me for life. We were coached to follow the style laid down by De La Salle for the novices of his day. Gradually I was discovering the inner secret of the Brother's vocation. Time was set aside to study the life of La Salle. My enthusiasm for the Brother's life deepened as I saw myself called to walk in his footsteps in simple service to youth. We were taken on beautiful walks, sometimes climbing Penang Hill and staying a night in the cool of the Brothers' retreat house. And, of course, I loved the soccer matches.

On completing my training I joined the staff of St Xavier's Institution in Penang, one of the earliest schools founded by the Brothers in Asia. Here I lived and worked with Brothers of many tastes, and nationalities. I was touched by their welcome, the variety of friendship and fellowship, and I felt confirmed in my vocation by their example of joyful commitment. I was given a primary class to teach and soon learned to enjoy my work.

But I was not allowed to settle into this happy routine because in 1931 I was transferred from St Xavier's to St Joseph's College in Hong Kong. Here living conditions were cramped and difficult. But the revered Brother Aimar, my new Director, was full of concern for my comfort and well-being, even personally seeing me well supplied with warm clothing and lots of blankets when the weather got chilly.



It was a joy to meet Mr. Muir again. I was 9 when we parted in 1913. I was now 26 and a fully-fledged Brother, he a seasoned ship's captain. Our mutual attachment had been expressed in regular letters all the absent years. Now I was able to see him regularly and spend hours in his company.

I enjoyed teaching. In addition I helped with the boarders, ran the bookshop and checked on kitchen supplies. My days were full and I soon learnt to adapt to Hong Kong's special culture, even venturing into speaking Cantonese, just sufficient to get by.

Among the Brothers close to me in those days were Brother John Climacus Toh and Brother Francis Rozario, both renowned for their personal holiness and piety. An early experience was being awakened at midnight by a regular tok-tok sound overhead. It was Brother Francis pacing the corridor, reciting the rosary: this was to become a regular feature of my Hong Kong experience.

In October 1940 I was transferred to St Joseph's Institution in Singapore. With the general sense of foreboding and insecurity on all sides, it was painful parting with my

Dad. I was not to see him again. In April 1941 I received a letter with the tragic news that the Japanese had bombed his boat and machine-gunned the survivors in the water. I suddenly felt alone and lost: I mourned the tragic death of one who had affirmed me with fatherly affection for the most of three decades. Brother Visitor James understood my situation and kindly arranged that I take the next boat to Hong Kong to attend to family matters. The trip was to close a cherished chapter in my personal story.

With the fall of Singapore, the Japanese took charge. The Brothers were under a kind of house detention for some days. I felt scared to go out. Life slowly returned to something like normal and we joined the Japanese language classes, now made compulsory for all teachers. Schools reopened and we resumed teaching, under very different and difficult conditions.



Now and then a group of soldiers would come by my class, always with the same routine. Their officer would command a student to "Read!" The listening soldiers would glow with pride and end with a great burst of applause!

After a year thousands of people, including the Brothers, were directed to a jungle clearing Bahau, not far from Seremban, where we managed to survive till the end of the Japanese occupation. We cleared the ground,

planted fruits and vegetables, and reared poultry and goats. Among other things I dug holes to contain all forms of waste as fertiliser for our precious fruits and vegetables.

Months passed, several fell sick, many died, mostly from malaria; medical facilities were poor. I recalled my childhood days in the rubber estate and my uncle and his wife now dead 30 years. The Brothers fell sick also; I alone among them was spared the terrors of malarial fever. Most recovered: I feel the hard work helped strengthen our purpose and keep us alive. Two young Irish Brothers, however, did die of cerebral malaria.

News of the surrender finally filtered through, at first too good to be true, but soon it became official. Our one thought was to return to Singapore to deter looters and

resume charge of our schools. Gradually life returned to normal, schools re-opened.

I was posted to St Anthony's School where I was to work for the next eight years. I loved working with the teachers and students of St Anthony's. Brother Christopher Chen soon took charge as Principal and set a family tone which pervaded the whole school and made for easy co-operation and hard work. My special passion these years was for art and handicrafts and my students brought off several prizes in the annual interschool exhibitions. Evenings and weekends I enjoyed my badminton game with students and teachers. In 1953 Brother Director Ignatius Barry had me appointed Principal of the school. I felt overwhelmed with the responsibility.



The following year I was posted to head De La Salle Primary School in Kampong Bahru, a new school. The teachers were full of youthful enthusiasm and over the next 12 years we forged bonds of friendship which continue to this day. My style was simple. I remember once at assembly

clarifying my role: 'As headmaster, I am here to make you all happy'. It was the way I saw my mission as a Brother to these children. I had committed my life to God to help young people find direction and meaning in life. I was always conscious of this, and it gave me a lively sense of God in what I was doing, and I know He blessed my presence among the students and teachers.

In 1966 I received an apologetic note from the ministry of education, telling me they had bent every rule to allow me continue as headmaster, until there were no more rules to bend! I had to retire! But Brothers don't retire! I went on transfer to St Patrick's School where Brother Joseph Kiely gave me charge of accounts. I also became director of aspirants, guiding a group of young Singaporeans interested in becoming Brothers. I continued my game of badminton. Holiday time, I teamed up with Brother Christopher Chen, my life-long companion and friend, for coach trips up country and even further afield.



In 1972 after a simple cataract operation I stopped breathing. I was still fully conscious and felt the torture when they kept scraping my soles for signs of life. In the general panic Brother Justinian back at St Patrick's told the students I was in great danger: teachers and students alike stopped to pray for me. Their prayers were answered. That very moment at the hospital a different doctor dropped by, checked and saw glucose was lacking. After two injections I coughed and the funeral arrangements they were freely discussing in my hearing had to be postponed!

In 1973 when the boarding department was opened, I helped with the accounts, and have continued to do so now for the most of twenty years, years that have been peaceful and fulfilling. I have even managed to learn the rudiments of using the computer. Time passes more swiftly nowadays as I observe changing patterns in society, in the church and among us Brothers. My work continues but I know the lot marked out for me is moving towards its happy completion.”

As the years began to take their toll and nursing care was required, Brother William was admitted to St Joseph's Home run by the Canossian Sisters. The Brothers visited him regularly and found him cheerful and generally alert. He was happy to be at St Joseph's Home and the workers, nurses and sisters loved him because of his cheerfulness. The Sisters remember him as a man of prayer as he would ask to remain in the chapel longer when asked if they could wheel him out on several occasions. According to them, he spent much of his time in the chapel.

As time went by, a series of small strokes left him unable to respond much to anyone and retention of toxic urine necessitated hospitalization for a time. His hands and feet were swollen. The hospital did what they could before transferring him back to the Home. The Sisters especially took the trouble to continue talking loudly into his ear in spite of the little response they received. They continued to take him into the chapel for Mass. His condition declined gradually, almost imperceptibly before he eventually

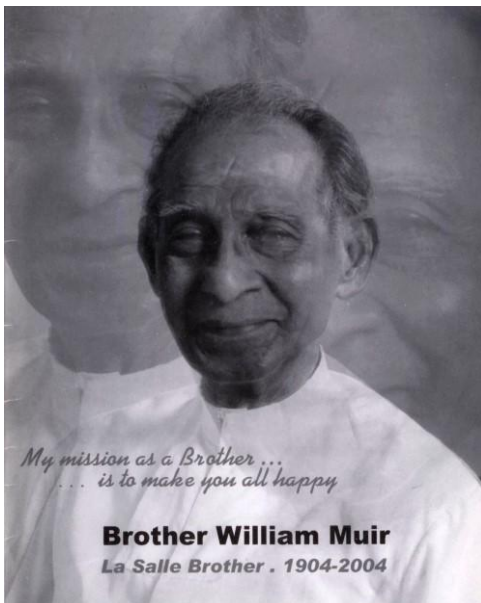
slipped away on the night of the 25th July 2004.



The wake was held at St Patrick's School chapel from Monday to Wednesday with nightly Masses at 8 pm followed by the Funeral Mass on Thursday 29 July at 9 am presided by Mgr Eugene Vaz, the Vicar General. Bro Michael Jacques kindly delivered the

eulogy. The students of St Patrick's School lined both sides of the road from the chapel to the gate of St Patrick's Road and a class of students stood on either side of St Patrick's Road outside the gate waving at the funeral cortege. It was a great send off as the school band played the school anthem near the main gate, while a student blew the trumpet, the Last Post, at the chapel.

There were many tributes. One former boarder recalled: "He had a loving heart and he loved Jesus very much and was a very dedicated Christian Brother. I remember when I ran out of money, I would go to him and he would give me a helping hand and usually give me what I needed as well as a piece of good advice on money management."



A Brother who lived with William for 7 years from 1951 to 1957 said: "I shall always remember him for his genuine simplicity, his admirable humility and his never failing good humour. He never seemed to complain and had that little winsome smile across his face even at the worst of times."

Another Brother remembered how he "often joked with him saying that his other half of the famous "black and white" pair, Brother Christopher, was calling him and he would reply, 'That fellow is having so much fun that he has forgotten to look for my number.'"

At the funeral eulogy, Brother Michael Jacques put it well: "To me he was a divine gift and a grace. To me and to many others to know him was to love him for his abiding gentleness, kindness and generosity, humility and loyalty. His company was a joy and an inspiration, an encouragement to be Christ-like as he himself was. In all my years with him, I never heard him utter a single unkind word. St James says "He who does not offend with his tongue, the same is a perfect man."

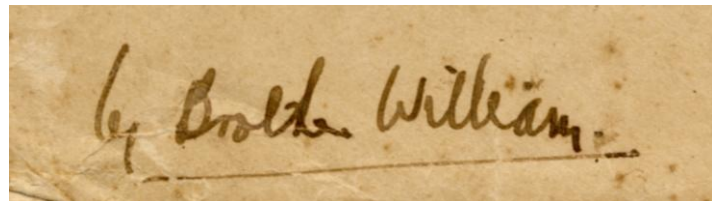
The last words can fittingly be left to William himself. They give us a glimpse of what made him tick, a beautiful glimpse into the inner core of his being.

"As I go for my regular 2-hour evening walk and watch the busy world go by, I find myself pondering a loving God, a God who became very real to me through the diverse people who nurtured, guided and companioned me though every chapter of a story which began so very long ago among the humble villages of South India.

I cherish above all his gift of vocation to be a simple Brother of La Salle, to help young people, as I myself have been helped, and guide them to discover this God of gentle surprises.

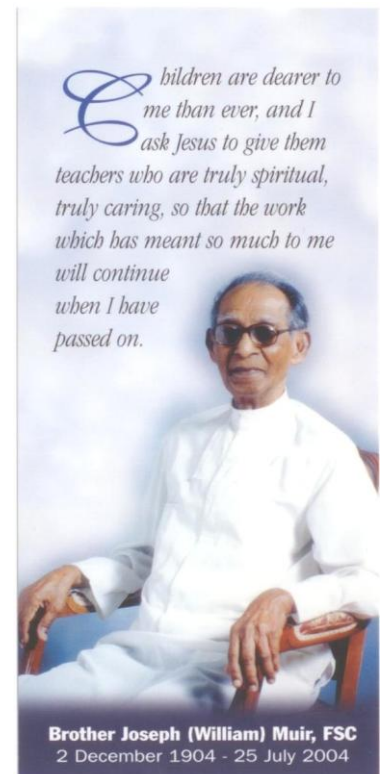
Children are dearer to me than ever, and I ask Jesus to give them teachers who are truly spiritual, truly caring, so that the work which meant so much to me will continue when I have passed on.

With love to all”



Brother William Muir’s Curriculum Vitae

2 December 1904	Born (India)
8 February 1927	Novitiate (Penang)
8 September 1927	Taking Habit (Penang)
8 September 1928	First vows
1928-1930	Temporary Vows
January 1931	Final vows (Hong Kong)
1930 - 1931	St Xavier's Institution (Penang)
1931 - 1940	St. Joseph’s College (Hong Kong)
1940- 1946	St. Joseph’s Institution (Singapore) And War years in Bahau (Malaysia)
1946-1954	St Anthony’s Primary School (Singapore)
1954-1967	De La Salle School (Singapore)
1967-1968	Director of Juniors, St Patrick's Community (Singapore)
1970	Rertired
1970-1998	St Patrick's House, Bursar
1998-2004	St. Joseph’s Home



Family Updates

Asia Pacific Lasallian Educators' Congress

The Hong Kong APLEC members held one of their plenary meetings on the 11th June. The opening prayer focused on the importance of prayer in the life of a teacher. Members were then introduced to the wealth of Lasallian Formation materials which have now been uploaded to our Hong Kong Lasallian Family website. Schools are encouraged to make use of these for staff development days. Bro Jeffrey Chan gave an interesting power-point presentation on the inauguration of the Lasallian East Asia District (LEAD). Finally, members were treated to brief individual school updates.



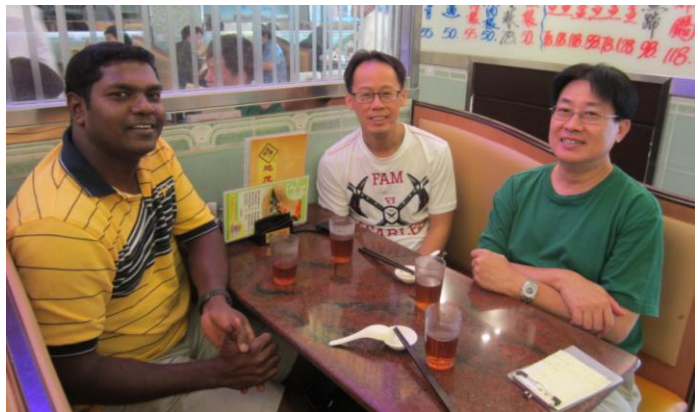
Principals' Conference

On the morning of the 14th June, all our school Principals came together for a meeting and sharing. Topics raised included the new school management structure being imposed by government, updates on Lasallian Formation, the pastoral visit of the Visitor of our Lasallian East Asia District, and the thorny issue of the proposed introduction of a Moral and National Education curriculum. Each Principal gave a synopsis of school highlights of the year which proved interesting and inspiring.



Visit of Brothers Paul and Pinto

Brothers Paul Ho and Pinto paid us a visit in early June and received hospitality in St Joseph's College. Brother Paul is the new Sector Leader for Singapore and also teaches at St Joseph's Institution. Brother Pinto is completing his term as a teacher of Tamil in the same school and will be returning to India



in the near future. Both enjoyed their trip to Hong Kong and they also managed to squeeze in a trip to Macau—not to the casinos they hasten to add.

LEAD Meetings

The LEAD leadership has been active recently. First there was the meeting of the District Chapter Preparatory Committee and then, hot on its heels, a District Council Meeting. The Provincialate at La Salle College, Kowloon, was a hive of activity.



District Chapter Preparatory Committee

Back row from left: Brothers Jose Mari , Andre, Augustine, Patrick and Jeffrey

Front row: Brothers Edmundo and Thomas



The District Council

Back row from left: Brothers Anthony (Malaysia), Paul (Singapore), Stephen (Thailand), Ricky (Philippines), Lawrence (Myanmar), Patrick (Hong Kong) and Rodrigo (Japan)

Front row: Brothers Thomas (Auxiliary Visitor), Edmundo (Visitor), Jose (Bursar)

End of Year Activities

As we approach the end of this academic year, our schools are buzzing with graduation ceremonies, religious services, camps and dinners. It is encouraging to see the students praising God and showing their appreciation to teachers and school administrators.



Hong Kong in the 30s from Brother William's Photo Album



St. Joseph's College

This campus on Kennedy Road was first occupied by the Brothers in 1918 with the purchase of Club Germania, seen here on the left. The purchaser and Director was brother Aimar Sauron. The West Block in the centre and North Block on the right have now been declared Heritage Monuments.



The Peak Tram

The tram makes its way up and down at a pretty steep angle. The tall white building in the background was the HK Shanghai Bank Headquarters. The turrets of the North Wing of St. Joseph's College are visible. As far as we know, the spire-like structure is of Union Church.



The Old Supreme Court Building

This was located in Statue Square Central. The statue is of Sir Thomas Jackson, 1st Baronet, 1841-1915, who had been president of the HK Shanghai Bank. The building is currently used to house the Legislative Council of Hong Kong.



The Botanical Gardens

This is one of the oldest zoological and botanical centres in the world. It is located at Mid-levels, on the northern slope of Victoria Peak, on Hong Kong Island and has been open to the public since 1871. The statue to the right is that of King George VI.



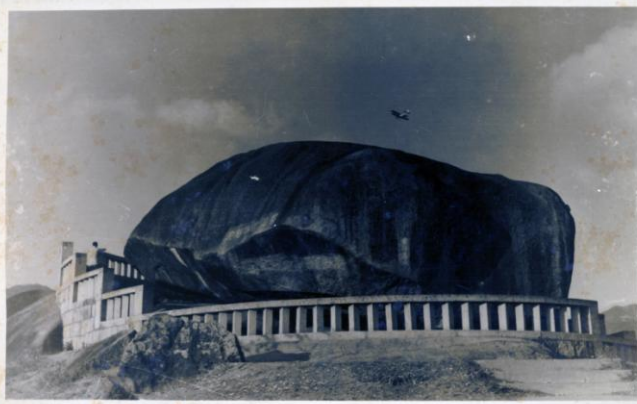
The Old Wan Chai Market

Located along Queen's Road East, the market was very popular with the ordinary people for purchasing meat, fish, fruits and vegetables. During the Japanese occupation, the basement of the Wan Chai Market was used by the Japanese military for the storage of corpses! A new apartment block is now being erected on the site, incorporating the old market façade.



La Salle College

The College was opened in 1932 and occupied a site of apparently splendid isolation. Not a single vehicle is to be seen along Boundary Street. This did not prevent hoardes of students from applying for admission.



Sung Wong Toi

The name Sung Wong Toi literally means Terrace of the Sung kings. It is the memorial of the last two boy emperors of the Southern Song Dynasty, who were said to have temporarily lived in Hong Kong from 1277 to 1279. The Rock used to be located close the old Kai Tak Airport.



Horse Racing

Happy Valley Racecourse was built in 1845 and since then horse racing has become part of the life blood of Hong Kong. Races are held once or twice a week throughout the year with a short break for the summer. We wonder how many punters go away really 'happy'!