

The Gateway



Issue 86
August 2020



A graduation ceremony with a difference!
Primary 6 graduates of Chan Sui Ki (La Salle) Primary School will surely remember their 2019-2020 Graduation Ceremony. In 20 years' time, will they recognize one another?!

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Welcome

The new academic year is about to begin. Students resume classes but they will not be physically present. Online learning remains the norm.

Schools without students. Schools without staff. Schools without the sounds of school. It's all rather eerie.

The past academic year has been unlike any other in Hong Kong. Basically, it can be divided into two parts, each significantly affecting school life. The first part was taken up with social unrest, the second with the Covid 19 pandemic.

It will not come as a surprise that we do not have as many 'updates' as usual in Gateway 86. Fortunately, we have found sufficient material from former times and hope readers will find at least some of it interesting.

One of our features is about a former teacher at St. Joseph's College. Mr. Vincent Chan possessed a nobility of character not easily forgotten. There is something of the 'Goodbye Mr. Chips' about him. We thank members of his family for their input and cooperation.

One article concerning the school song of La Salle College is sure to elicit discussion. The author of the song, a song beloved by old boys and current students, has for long been a matter of debate. I don't know if this article will put the debate to bed!

We look forward in hope. Above all, our hope is for the conquering of the pandemic all over the world. May God, in his mercy, sustain us.



Mr. Vincent Anthony Chan – Goodbye Mr. Chips

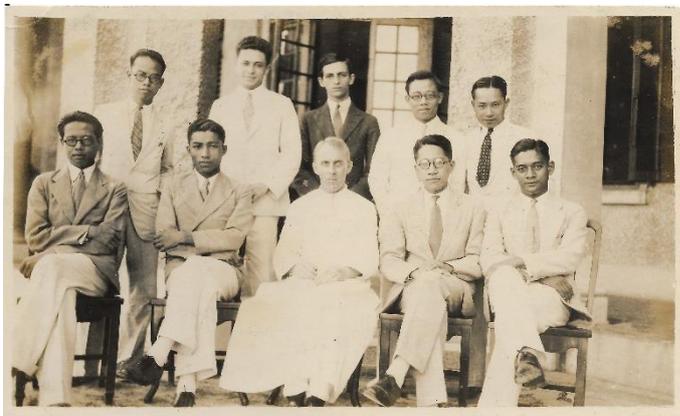
A soft-spoken man who had dedicated his whole life to teaching, Mr. Vincent Chan completed his 46th year in St. Joseph's College in 1973. At the time, his name was almost synonymous with the College. He was one of the most popular and respected teachers in the school.

When asked about his plans after retirement he said: "I'll take a good rest, do a bit of travelling, I think. I've done enough work already."

Vincent was born in Canton, China in 1908. He spent part of his early years in the Philippines and studied in Manila where his father had his business. He migrated to Hong Kong in 1921 where he continued his secondary education at St. Joseph's College. He matriculated in 1927 and was engaged as a teacher by the school that same year.



His zest for knowledge and self-improvement led him to seek and obtain in his spare time a series of diplomas and teaching certificates in a number of technical and commercial disciplines. Equipped with the commerce qualifications, he was also appointed to the school's Commerce Department for a period where he taught shorthand and typing. He was noted amongst peers and students alike for his excellent command of the English language, which was his particularly forte in teaching.



Sitting, 2nd from right. Taken at Ricci Hall, Hong Kong University, 1930

He was the eldest son in a family of thirteen. Such large families were not uncommon at the time. He himself became a dedicated family man and was married to his wife of sixty-seven years, Sylvia. Together they raised, through good and bad times, a family of nine children, four boys and five girls.

One of his sons has this to say. "He was a provider, a role model, and the nucleus of the family. His values and unbending principles, which were so often displayed through his actions and thoughts, were unequivocal. He had strong faith and was a devout Catholic, which was exemplary to his family."

Vincent taught all four sons at St. Joseph's, namely Norbert, Michael, Peter and Cyril. The son takes up the story: "In the case of Norbert, he was schooled privately by dad during the WWII years at home. The hard work during those years had prepared him adequately for secondary school at SJC immediately following the war, and he subsequently gained entrance into the inaugural class of the HKU Faculty of Architecture at the young age of seventeen. Both Peter

and Cyril can recall very clearly the days when dad was not only their mentor at home, but also their subject teacher at school. And, in Cyril's case, dad was also one of his form masters. Obviously, those days of living under dad's watchful eyes both at home and at school could be a little stressful!"

A particular student of Vincent is worth mentioning. His name was Pat Fallon. Pat studied in La Salle College and then St. Joseph's College in the 1930s. While defending Hong Kong during the war he was captured by the Japanese in 1941 which resulted in his spending the next four years confined to a POW camp mostly in Japan. Upon release in 1945, he migrated to England where he lived for the rest his life. He and Vincent had over the years shown special fondness for each other and they managed to keep in contact and paid each other visits until their very end. Pat Fallon was a cheery person who had vivid memory of his years in Hong Kong and Japan. He was someone whose long friendship was greatly cherished by Vincent.



Picture taken in Toronto May 1997, Vincent at the age of 90.

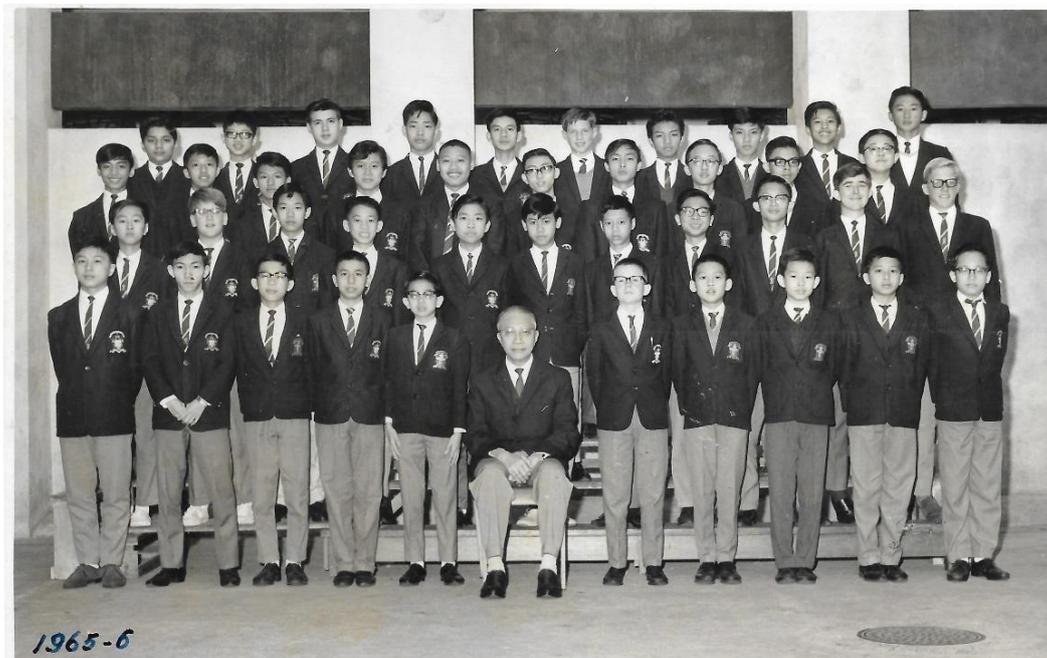


We take up the story again in the words of his son. "Dad lived a simple, full and disciplined life. One of his favourite pastimes at home was reading the newspaper. On weekends, whenever time permitted, he would often be seen clutching onto his South China Morning Post perusing it in great detail from cover to cover. In his later years, he and mom began to engage in more travelling. A pastime, we presume, he had long desired to indulge because

of his interest in geography (a subject which he had also taught at SJC). Travelling also rejuvenated his interest in photography."



Form Master of Commercial Class, 1935



Form Master of Form 2A, 1965

In an interview for the St. Joseph's College school magazine prior to retirement, Vincent indicated that he had no regrets having spent all his career in teaching. "I love children; nothing can make me happier than to be among a group of boys."

His advice to all was to try our best and leave the rest to God.

Vincent immigrated to Canada in 1974 and made that country his permanent home. He spent much time travelling and visiting his children, and lived in leisure among his expanding family, which spanned three continents.

"There are a couple of notes about dad that are probably quite well acknowledged by people who knew him. First, his command of the English language, both written and spoken, could

indeed make a native English speaker pale. He was sometimes referred to as a ‘walking dictionary.’ Second, and perhaps surprisingly, dad was trendy and vogueish. Anybody who had known him for some time would likely agree that he was quite a fashionable gentleman. His meticulous style was apparent from his custom-made suits to his polished shoes, which was maintained right up to his final days.”



Flanked by Mr. Leo Lee (L) and Mr. To Li Sang (R)

Brother Patrick Tierney, as a new teacher at St. Joseph’s in the 1960’s, remembers Vincent well:

“When I started teaching there were a number of ‘character’ teachers in the school. There was the one who used the cane unsparingly, the one who could go to tea and confidently leave the class an assignment, the one who studied stocks and shares while the students did exercises, the one whose voice could be heard in all four corners of the school and the one whose approach would immediately compel silence. I learned a lot from all of them.

There was one, however, that intrigued me. He was a distinguished looking elderly man and had a philosophical bent of mind. Storms could be raging all round but they would not ruffle him. I never, ever, saw him lose his cool. He was generally popular with the students and sympathized with their peculiarities and sometimes even with their laziness. He seemed to be indestructible.

Year after year, for 46 years, he could be seen heading for class with one or two books in hand. There might be a murmur in his classes but never a hullabaloo. The boys took to him. They knew he would not shout or bawl and that even his scolding would be gentle. In addition, his command of the English language was superb, and students regarded him as a walking dictionary.

I think I tried to model myself somewhat on this gentleman, but my temperament was different, and I certainly did lose my cool a few times, much to my regret. But Vincent had the grace of state.”

One of his students at the time, Michael Tse, recalls: “Vincent Chan was our Religious Studies teacher in Form 2. In that year, our class was a pretty rowdy bunch. I fear we gave our form master a very hard time and he nearly went mental. However, it was a different story when Vincent Chan walked into the classroom. Without saying a word, the class immediately quietened down and behaved nicely until the moment Vincent Chan stepped out of the classroom. He possessed the invisible gravity of a teacher.”

Vincent passed away from pneumonia on Feb 17 1999.

School Song – Mystery Solved!

La Salle College School Song
REV. BROT. AIMAR
REV. BROT. AIMAR

The debate as to who composed the lyrics of the La Salle College school song has occupied the hearts and minds of many over the years.

There were four possible “suspects” and perhaps even more.

The four were Brothers Aimar Sauron, the founder of the College; Cassian Brigant, the second principal; Honorius Dupont, a good teacher of English and Drama; and Edmund John Burke, also a good teacher of English, Music and Singing.

At long last a document has surfaced which seems to indicate, once and for all, that the composer was the last named – Brother Edmund John Burke. The article was written by Brother Michael Curtin, a close friend of Brother Edmund since they were together as young Lasallians in formation in Dover in England.

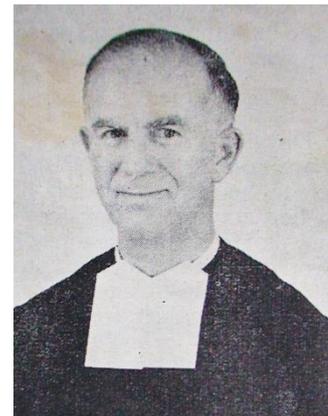
The article is very much in Brother Michael’s style. At the end it makes for sad reading because of the tragic death of Brother Edmund.

As the composer of the La Salle College school song, Brother Edmund certainly deserves to be remembered with prayer and affection.

Brother Michael entitles his article, “Brother Edmund as I knew him” and signs off with “A Fellow Doverite.”

“A fresh gap has been violently torn in our ranks by the untimely death of our confrere, Brother Edmund John. Every death brings with it the numbing sense of finality. I need hardly describe with what impact this particular death fell on me; it was the end of so much. Apart from the ties of Brotherhood there had flourished between us, for thirty - six years, a close friendship and affection which no distance or separation was allowed to loosen.

Alec Burke was born at Folkestone of Irish parentage of Dublin origin. His brother John was ordained to the priesthood and is at present Chaplain to our Brothers at St. Joseph's College, Beulah Hill, London. Alec entered the Juniorate of Les Vauxbelets in 1921 and received the Holy Habit on the Feast of the Holy Rosary 1923 at Castlemount, Dover, receiving the name of Edmund John. Having volunteered for the Far East, he left Dover in 1925 to begin his missionary career which brought him to Manila, Hong Kong and Burma.



I first met Brother Edmund in Les Vauxbelets, Guernsey in 1922. Brother Leo Barrington and I had just arrived at the Juniorate and were being led around the dormitory where the Juniors were changing for football. The Recruiter introduced us to a smiling shock-

haired Junior. "This is one of our best boys, Alec Burke." He had a winning personality and his efficiency, good humour and quick perception set him aside as a leader. He was 'chef de groupe' and I recall how tactfully he handled our recreation group in awkward situations. Half the Juniors were from England, half from France; with boys between the ages of 14-16 embarrassing misunderstandings could occur and only a leader with a personality could preserve the 'entente cordiale'.



Brother Michael in 1933

In 1923 I lost sight of Edmund for a year, he had begun his Novitiate in Dover. However, the following year, I was a Novice in Dover, and Edmund was studying in the Scholasticate. I then saw much of Edmund as Novices and Scholastics were intermingled in recreation groups and on the weekly walks. On the eve of his death, we spoke about those old Dover days, recalling old friends, amusing incidents. In the course of conversation he said, "You know, I really think I made a good Novitiate. Brother Damian George was always harping on convictions, I think I did acquire a few which came in good stead at a critical period of my life. Dover was no place for mollycoddling."

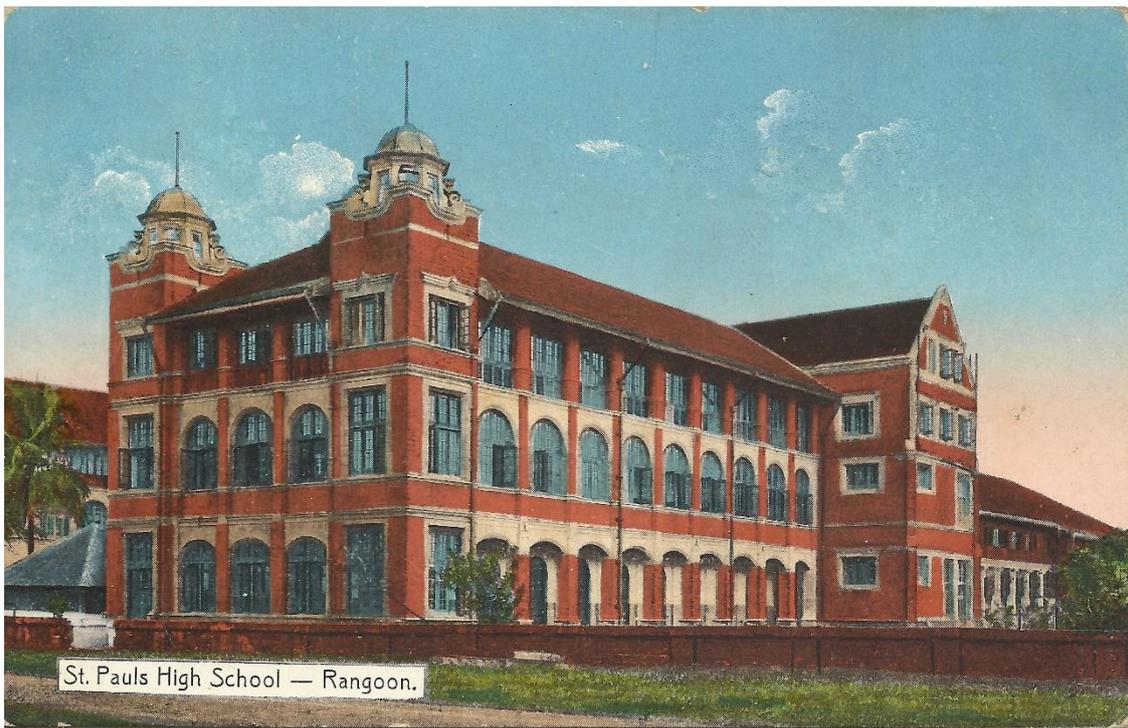
At the end of his Scholasticate year, Brother Edmund volunteered for the Far East but before his departure he taught English to our group for a month. (The week of his death he teasingly introduced me to the Archbishop of Mandalay, as one of his old pupils). All I remember of his English lessons is his reading of poetry; he had a clear resonant speaking voice which he used with great feeling and expression. Leaving England and his Kentish home was not easy; under an exterior which some might have thought flippant or cynical, there beat a heart full of love of God, of his family and of his District. Brother Leo Barrington relates how a few days before he was to leave for his distant mission Brother Leo had been sent into the Salle des Professeur to get some chalk. Under the impression that the room was untenanted, he burst in without knocking. There stood Brother Edmund by the window, looking towards Folkestone in the hills beyond Dover with tears coursing down his cheeks. An incident more eloquent than words indicating the great sacrifice Edmund was making, for he dearly loved his home at Folkestone.

Our paths were not to cross again until 1935. Edmund was transferred from Manila to Kowloon; I, to Manila from Kowloon. We crossed at sea like 'ships in the night'. The mantle of Edmund that descended upon me was rather voluminous. He was running a Debate Club, Oratorical Club; he had started a literary magazine published a quarterly which was confined to literary topics, essays, poems, contributed by the students of La Salle. It was an undertaking out of the usual rut of school magazines and did much to foster and develop creative writers. Rafael Zulueta-da-Costa who won international fame for his prize-winning epic "Strong grows the Molace" dedicated his published work to Brother Edmund with a handsome and grateful tribute, for the guidance and inspiration he had given to the author as a student. Edmund in his short stay in Manila left an ineffaceable impression on his pupils as a teacher of English. He was not a mere transmitter of knowledge, his teaching was the joint enterprise of a group of friendly human beings who liked using their brains. He did much to create a nucleus of young enthusiastic Catholic writers of the Philippines.

Brother Edmund's brief sojourn in La Salle College, Kowloon is still remembered with affection and appreciation by his old students. He made his mark by the force of his convictions,

constant sincerity of thought, unflinching integrity of purpose and high ideal of his vocation and professional duties. Even at this distance in the years, his vigour and good humour are still remembered. Generations of La Salle students will keep his memory green when they sing the School Song which was composed by him.

During these years an intermittent stream of correspondence passed between us which abruptly ceased when War crashed into our smooth existence and swept us apart. After the war he returned to England and taught for two years in Kintbury. We were neighbours and saw a good deal of each other for we had many sympathies in common and had been in the same places, Manila, Hong Kong, Burma. He spent two years of study at Cambridge where, at the age of more than forty, he successfully passed his B.A. Honours. Edmund would have preferred to stay in England but at the end of his studies he was appointed Director of St. Albert's High School, Maymyo in Burma. He quipped to me "Rome has spoken, the case is closed." Amidst a thousand difficulties, lack of funds, lack of personnel, he built a handsome concrete structure to house the Brothers and Boarding Department. He set the highest standards and tone and remarkably, within a few years of its existence St. Albert's became outstanding for its results in the public examinations. To him St. Albert's owes a lasting debt which will grow as the school reaps the fruits of his ardent pioneer labours. Six years later, he was Director of St. Paul's, Rangoon, one of the best-known schools in the country. His task was an immense one. There were 2,900 boys in the school and incessant demands for places. But he was determined to maintain high standards.



From youth Edmund had that mould and ideal of manhood which we would all like our pupils to aspire to and if possible attain. His great gifts of character were enriched and developed by his early training and constant self-discipline through life. The Chinese Philosopher Lin Yutang says, somewhere, that the cultured man is not necessarily one who is well read or learned, but one who likes and dislikes the right thing; that is, he has taste. Edmund was a well-read man. Moreover, he had taste, the capacity for thinking things through to the bottom, and independence of judgment and unwillingness to be bulldozed by any form of humbug. He was

the soul of integrity. Utility as the only basis of morality was an ethical doctrine that he never accepted. He may not have been popular with some but he was respected by all who came in contact with him. Whatever task he engaged in was carried out with energy and efficiency but with good humour and consideration for others' feelings. He excelled as a conversationalist; his witty comments, stories, anecdotes enlivened the recreations. Everyone who has spoken to me, or written to me about Edmund, has emphasised three things: his cheerful humour, his vitality, and his integrity.

At the end of March, this year, Brother Edmund remained in Rangoon for a few days to complete the promotions for the scholastic year. He was eager to rejoin his Community up in the Shan Hills. The Kalaw country house had been reopened and he was busy planning improvements for he wanted his community to enjoy a pleasant holiday. I was impressed by the warm reception given to him wherever he went; he seemed to enrich the lives of all who knew him. We returned to Rangoon and on the 10th of April he came to bid me farewell at the airport at 1.30 a.m. The plane was delayed but Edmund, the perfect host, insisted on staying until 4.30a.m. when the plane finally flew off. In the early hours of the morning of the 11th of April Brother Edmund was stabbed to death by a hireling. The overturned furniture, the shambles of the room, bore testimony to the tremendous and heroic fight he made in death. He died as he lived - the Happy Warrior, 'sans peur et sans reproche'. May his gallant soul sleep in peace and may his courage and fortitude be an inspiration to us."

Brother Michael's tribute to Brother Edmund is touching. He had lost a soul-mate.

*Boys of courage, boys of daring,
Full of manliness and will;
Spirit nought for danger caring,
Hearts to conquer every ill.*

*We are sons of La Salle everyone,
And no matter where we go.
High aloft her flag we will hold,
And strive that her fame may grow.*

Wild-Life Encounters



In the late 50s, when Brothers Patrick Tierney and Thomas Lavin were in the Lasallian formation houses at Castletown, Ireland, the Director General was Brother Edward Jordan. They had heard he had been a missionary Brother in the Lasallian pioneering days of Australia but little did they know that he had also written a memoir of his life experiences. Part 1 of this memoir has surfaced but Part 2 has still not surfaced.

Brother Edward writes with clarity and good humour. Here are a few of his anecdotes, concerning adventures with the world of nature. Hunting was a common pastime in those days. We don't know if snakes are a protected species nowadays!

Monsters!

After our first swim there was lunch. The billy hung from a tripod over a blazing fire of wood. It had no lid, but a green sapling rested across the opening, for it seems that this device prevents the water from acquiring a smoky flavour. While resting after dinner, I happened to peer into the thick foliage of the nearest willow tree, and right above my head there was a long, black, fierce-looking monster stretched at full length along a bough.

"Look! What is that monster up there?" We had been accustomed to lizards during the past year, and which we knew to be harmless, but we were not prepared to face this fierce-looking lizard, which was about three feet long. To add to our bewilderment, we noticed, on closer observation, that there were several others in the trees all around us, with their eyes fixed on the picnickers below. There was not the slightest motion among them, which made the Brothers from Sydney all the more uncertain as to what their method of attack was going to be.

But a Brother from Armidale assured us that we were not in the slightest danger, for they were perfectly harmless. Then one of the Brothers fired a rifle shot into the branches and the creatures all sprang or slid into the creek and disappeared. We were told that these creatures were called iguanas and will not attack if left alone. Its bite is dangerous, and the swish of its tail is as bad as a whip. Some of us felt the creeps when we realized that we had just come out of a swimming hole where so many monsters probably had their bath before our arrival.

Snakes Alive!

After a rest, Brother Patrick and I decided to climb the wooded hill and do a bit of shooting; and for this purpose, we brought two shotguns and the dog. We were told to expect hares, rabbits, eagle-hawks, snakes and kangaroos. There were innumerable parrots of the rosella variety, and some kookaburras, but we had no desire to shoot any of these lovely, harmless birds. Besides, the kookaburra, which is also known by the familiar name of "Laughing Jackass" is preserved by law, on account of its usefulness in destroying vermin. Up to the present, neither of us had ever yet seen a snake in the open, and we still had the same dread of them that experienced along the shore of Port Melbourne when we first stepped ashore.

However, by this time, we had learned a few points that are useful to the inexperienced. For



instance, people should avoid walking in deep grass, jumping across a tree log, lest a snake should be basking on the opposite side, walking over twigs, etc. Schoolchildren are taught how to treat snake bites. People going on picnics are advised to have snake bite anti-toxin on their person.

Already we had gone about a mile through the bush, and were now crossing an open space, when the dog began to bark excitedly close by. On looking in

his direction, we beheld a big black snake coiled up, with head about two feet above the ground, and hissing at the dog, which kept a respectable distance away all the time. Few dogs will attack a snake, and those that take the risk are nearly always killed. A cat will, under favourable conditions, attack a moderately sized snake.

Whilst the dog kept it occupied, we held a counsel of war. Then, as a preliminary, we called off the dog, approached with guns to the ready, to within about twenty yards of the reptile, that kept hissing all the time. Brother Patrick was to fire first, and I would fire immediately after. But Brother Patrick faltered, even though he had come from the foot of Croagh Patrick, where Irish snakes were wiped out. Then fearing lest the snake should bolt for the hole, I fired and broke its vertebrae. It then darted off, evidently for the hole, but really in our direction, and halted for a moment as though undecided. Then Brother Patrick fired with deadly effect, and soon we left our victim for the ants to dismantle. Black snakes are very venomous, but will not attack like the tiger snake, unless provoked. This was our first encounter with a snake, but as the years went by, there were many more.

The most nerve-racking incident occurred in 1918 along the Como River, where our community of Surry Hills was out for the day. When it was time to leave for the train, for our homeward journey, one of the Brothers was missing. As the ground was rocky, bushy and dangerous, we feared that he might have met with an accident, and all of us scattered to search for him.

At one point I emerged from the bushes and jumped on to a flat stretch of rock in order to spring to the ground at the farther end. In the act of jumping, a large snake sprang from beneath my feet, and both of us sped down the rock surface to the other end, I jumping frantically, and the snake coiling vigorously, each trying to evade the other. My shouts and high action drew the attention of some Brothers who were close by, but long before they arrived on the scene the snake had disappeared into the scrub, leaving me alone to regain my breath. "What on earth has happened to you?" said one. "You are as pale as death."

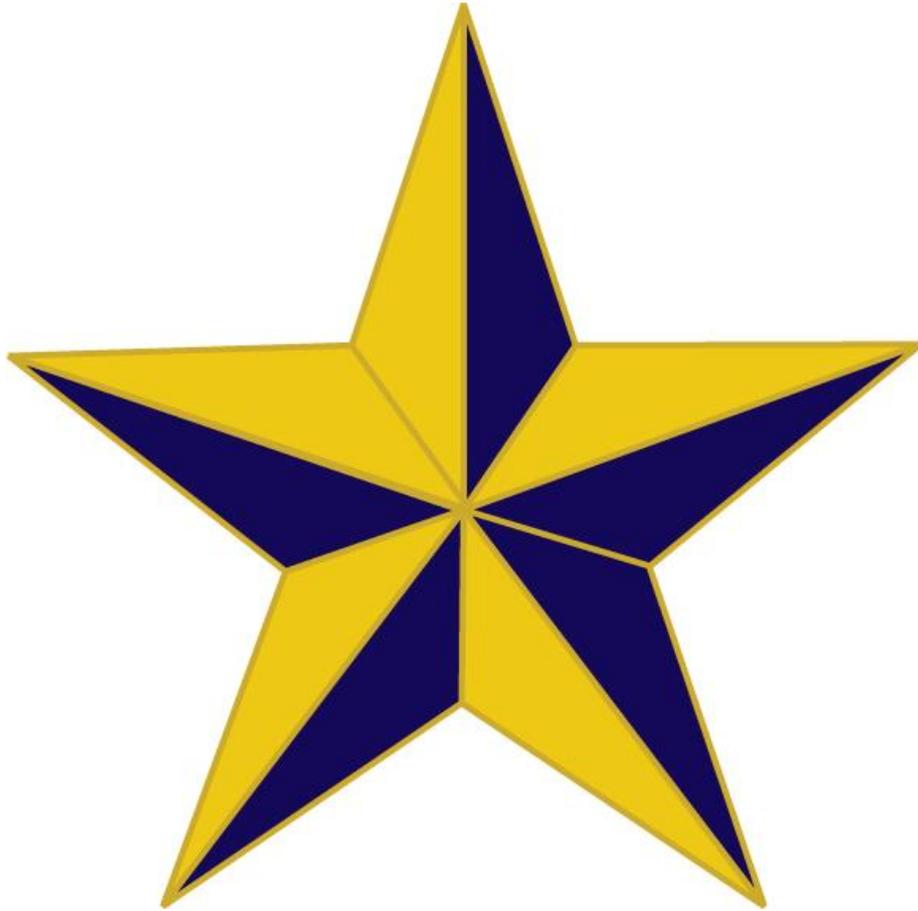
For the coming year, that fright caused my nervous system to be much disturbed. All my nightmares or troubled dreams had to do with snakes, and I would spring out of bed to escape them. During the subsequent 'flu my deliriums were always full of life-and-death encounters with monster snakes.

Hong Kong APLEC Meets

The Lasallian Family in Hong Kong may be unique in that the teachers, who attended the Asia Pacific Lasallian Educators Conferences since they began in 1994, continue to meet. They have been used to meeting face to face twice a year in plenary session, in order to renew their commitment to the Lasallian Mission and to continue their formation journey.

The social unrest earlier in the school year followed by the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted the usual practice. Zoom came to the rescue. On 25th of July 2020, pretty well the full complement of APLEC members participated in a meeting. There was a total of 62, including 6 Brothers. We were also joined by Brother Rey Mejias who gave a presentation on the challenges in the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle. Thank you, Brother Rey. All the participating Brothers contributed; Brother Jude for the opening prayer, Brothers Thomas, Jeffrey and Patrick for sharing, Brother Mikey for the concluding prayer. We were also delighted to welcome the participation of Brother Chris Soosai from afar, from South Sudan! For most of us, it was also the first time to take part in zoom breakout room discussions, thanks to the hosting of Brother Dennis Magbanua. Though unable to meet physically, the APLEC members were happy to see each other again....without masks!





Great Things Are Possible



We are one, and we are many.....