

Theatres of History and Memory: Industrial Heritage of 20th Century Singapore

Oral History by Research Team Annotations

Alex Tan

16/3/2018

- **Soft drinks wars.**
- **F&N: Fraser and Neave.** Red Lion by F&N to compete against Amoy Canning's Green Spot (1950-1953).
- **Yeo Hiap Seng** (1920s in China) also copied Amoy Canning to go into the bottling business. They started a factory in Bukit Timah.
- **Phoenix** was founded by Mistri's family. Very popular. They were competitors of Framroz and F&N.
- 1961: New drinks coming into the market. Against 7 Up there was **Bubble Up, bottled by Amoy Canning.**
- **Green Spot** (1950-53). Green Spot from Pasadena, California.
- **Red Lion (F&N)** could not fight against the quality of Californian oranges by Green Spot.
- **Birely:** also orange. They were nice, same category with Framroz and Phoenix. However, they lost out to F&N. They were not gassy and their volume was more than Green Spot.
- **Canada Dry** came in 1970s and closed down by early 1980s. Produced by America to compete with a range of carbonated fruit drinks by F&N: orange, lemon, strawberry and cherry.
- **RC Coke, Kickapoo and Sinalco** bottled by National Aerated Waters. Kickapoo: Joy Juice. You have 3 Colas, cola is the most popular flavour.
- **Soft drinks as popular and modern.**
- Taste is the bottom line reason why some drinks are more popular than other. Fanta > Sunkist > F&N. Consumption continued across generations, from father to son.
- Orange-flavoured drink was popular because in the Chinese culture: orange is a tradition.
- Pepsi and Coke became dominated the market: because of the new generation. During my time, we had a lot of flavours. However, your generation grew up without knowing all these flavours. Everyone drinks it, wears jeans, goes to rock shows, listens to the pop songs, the long hair, the outlandish dressing in 1970s. It is the association with "modernity": the transition from the push cart to food courts, by 1970s, on the account of hygiene and urban renewal, the government cleared all these cottage industries. Lifestyle associated: coke: the beach, because of the hot weather, speed boats and sport events.
- Cottage Industry was present too (Ban San and Long Brothers). They offer the more economical substitute of carbonated drinks, for example: rose syrup.

Angeline Lee

17/7/2017

- Worked in garments factory (name unknown) at Tanglin Halt Industrial Estate at end of 1976 after O level for 3-4 months while saving up for JC (went to ACJC). Factory was next to Great Malaya Textiles, 15 mins walk from her home.

- Found work by word of mouth through friends and relatives in those days – she got the job through a Malaysian who was her aunt’s niece, who worked there.
- Could walk around and chat for a while to break the tedium – ‘quite friendly’ work environment.
- Most lived in HDB flat dormitories near Tanglin. They walked home together for safety especially after OT.

Chong Nam Soy

Chee Chin Seong

10/8/2017

Chong:

- Joined Rollei as a production technician in Dec 1971 and immediately went on training in Germany, which last 7 months till July 1972.
- Rollei was the first MNC in Singapore; vertically integrated in producing an entire product from beginning to end.
- Trained at Rollei HQs at Braunschweig and then in a factory in the Black Forest. The operators (many were Yugoslavs and some were handicapped war veterans) were very disciplined and productive, and obeyed the supervisor fully. Importance was speed, productivity and nimbleness of hands.
- All operators in Singapore were locals, of different races, and mostly school-leavers in the 20s, between a range of 18-30s. He calls them ‘girls’. His work was to ‘go around and check’. He’d train the operators and monitor the speed of the conveyor belt (increasing the speed when they were more familiar with it).
- Singaporean operators ‘can’t compare with the Germans’, but they would pick up fast.

Chee:

- Knew of some supervisors who tried to use army style discipline from NS on the operators.
- ‘Very easy to find a job’ – jobless only for a day and interviewed successfully for supervisor job at General Electric in Kallang, producing resistors and transistors but semi-automated.
- Worked at GE only for 1 year before moving to Tandon, which produced floppy disks. Pay was good and he helped set up production lines. (with Chong) Industry was different but the underlying processes were largely the same, so he could learn and adapt after a few months. Later Tandon brought over by Western Digital in making hard disks.

Memories of Rollei Singapore

Kamaruddin:

- Being a German company, football is an important part of the recreation – team from planning department
- Weekly matches against other companies or inter-department matches
- Germans are very serious

Chong:

- As a young school leaver, I wished to grow abroad to study and work.
- Training in Germany – Germans very disciplined very law abiding; adherence to strict regulations and instructions – that is one thing I learned in the 7 months training there
- During training – Germans are very serious and disciplined; they really take pride in their work
- Young men, it was challenging to work in the factory. We had take care of young girls – there many young school leavers at the time
- In Germany, there were not many young girls. They were mostly middle aged and above – The assembly lines are manned by ladies and they were very disciplined in Germany – “work they don’t talk so much, even if they talk they talk softly and they don’t turn their heads”
- Singapore - 16,17,18 [ages] mostly school leavers; energetic and always talk and they stop looking – not easy to handle

Lim:

- Part of the first batch – going to Germany
- Oriented with the production area and service area – every night set a target
- Foreign products for polaroid flashlights – everyday 4000 orders. They’ve got to rush; every night to rush out figures for production.
- Germany – can buy beer – using 20c which size equivalent to 1 mark. Supplier found that it’s [the machine] all from Singapore. They complaint to the HR of Singaporeans being naughty

Q: How did you feel when Rollei closed down and what did you do afterwards in your next job?

Kamaruddin:

- When we heard that it’s in the Court of Liquidation, everyone was shocked. Girls crying; thought they lost job – still managed day to day – later joined inventory control as micro-police (?).
- Not difficult to find new job – with experience it was quite easy – having Rollei on the CV definitely helped

Chong:

- Sad for Rollei but I don’t feel sad – Rollei trained precision engineering personnel and also produce a lot of entrepreneurs.
- After its collapse when the pictures went on auctions, many former employees went back and bought all the machines and set up their own companies.
- There was a plastic moulding company at Kallang Junction – bought most of the standing machines and moulding machines from Rollei and set up their own company with colleagues and proved to be very successful.

Lim:

- Not sad –a lot of jobs outside.

Q: How close were you to the colleagues Germans and British purely work relationship? Or experiences in learning from each other's culture?

Kamaruddin:

- Work-wise they were serious
- During Hari Raya, they would come to the residence to celebrate and eat
- Soccer season or tournament, they would also shout and join in

Chong:

- Learning values – disciplined, punctual, take period – values that Singaporeans should have as well

Chua Hang Seng

3/1/2018

- **Rise and fall of local SMEs.**
- Posted to technical and vocational stream in 1968 after finishing high school (De Xing/Thomson Secondary), to Baharuddin Vocational Institute.
- Graduated in 1970 and became an apprentice at SWC factory at Pasir Panjang, which made furniture. The sifu (some from Shanghai and Wenzhou) were strict – you could not touch their tools and had to follow their instructions. Cf. BVI where they could create designs.
- Later in 1975 they set up a makeshift woodmaking workshop at Adam Road, Bukit Brown.
- Problem of space to dry the wood. The flatted factory however was too small to serve the space needs and he often placed the logs outside the factory.
- Business became difficult in the early 1990s and he even thought to relocating to Burma. This was partly because it was difficult to find skilled workers.
- He changed to teakwood (obtained also from Thailand and Indonesia) and made high end furniture for cruise ships. His designs were sometimes adapted to be more modern, and he used began to use technology to cut up the wood.
- Maybe 2-4 local companies remain. At the peak in the 1970s and 1980s, there were 5-6 rosewood companies. Not much future for the industry. Change is inevitable.

Deng Ya Yin 堯亚银

4/8/2017

- Worked when she was 9 during the Japanese occupation as a weeder at the Botanic Gardens (pulling grass, 'mung chong' in Cantonese). Happy with the earnings and gave them to her mother.
- Worked later (after the war?) in 2 rubber factories: first at 南电(or 殿, Dunlop) and then for over 10 years at 振福, which was bigger (more than 100 staff) and paid better.

- She was very happy to work; preferred to work rather than stay or idle in the kampong. They were obedient workers who followed instructions and were careful to work diligently and not fall behind in the work. Lunch was at 12 noon and they ate quickly in order to return to work.
- **Details of work.**
- Work of sorting out bundles of rubber (pay was \$2 per day) but later in 振福 cutting out the impure parts of the rubber sheets paid better (\$3). Had to pass a test to remove the impure parts and then learn the job. There were different grades of rubber. Paid twice a month. She was enthusiastic to learn other tasks from her senior colleagues.
- Friendly banter between the men and women as they were mostly single. They helped her with her wedding.
- But there were no labour issues at the rubber factories. They were paid punctually. Received big ang pows during Chinese New Year. Also big celebrations in the 7th month at the factory.

Foo Chee Lee

8/2/2018

- Safety a greater issue in shiprepair than shipbuilding, as workers are changing their work environment.
- Importance of having a safety culture and having employees properly trained. Need for communication from the top down to the supervisor level.
- The culture of work under the British in the 1950s and 1960s was different: workers wore casual clothing, no safety clothing/helmets or standard uniforms. Work at Keppel changed greatly when Swan Hunter (being a shipbuilder) took over.
- He was the classification surveyor of ships at Lloyds during the Spyros incident. A difficult case to determine: there was a basic error of carrying out hot work with gas in the oil tank. But the captain of the ship was pilfering fuel from the cargo for the fuel, saving on fuel. Jurong Shipyard's mistake was failing to check for the fuel.
- Saying: 'if safety is expensive, disaster costs more'.

Gan Lian Sze

Gan Lian Bee

Gan Lian Eng

17/8/2017

- Sze worked in garments factories when she was 15 in ~1970. When Sze was 16 and of legal age, she found work in a larger garments factory called 耀泰 in a 10 storey building at Tanglin Halt (Angeline Lee probably worked there too).
- Bee: They had a basic salary of \$2.50 a day but prices differed according to the different parts of the garment. The collar paid best. Could earn up to \$30-40 a day.
- Work was 6 days a week, 8 to 5 pm. They each had a specific table with an electric sewing machine (Brother). They worked hard – 拼命, did not idle, worked non stop, and

were very thrifty. Gave part of the earnings to their mother which helped to support their brothers in school. They were happy working in the factory.

- Management was largely Hong Kongers. The supervisor was good. Good relations between supervisors and workers. No stress or pressure at work.
- CPF helped them to buy flats. The model workers' award. Helping their colleagues punch the card when they were late.

Goh Hock Wah

Josephine Yau

12/04/2018

Goh Hock Wah

- Jurong then was 'like a swamp'.
- His parents were happy to own a flat which gave them a sense of security.
- He studied in Boon Lay Primary School and then Whitley Secondary School. Later obtained a scholarship from Ordnance Developments (subsidiary of Chartered Industries, now ST Kinetic) and worked there. The company was run by former military officers and also very regimental – no difference between National Service and working in OD.
- Approached (by government) to join the Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Employees' Union in 1992. Union raised labour issues with the Ministry of Manpower which set up a hotline for workers to call. This enabled the Ministry to discipline errant employers and contractors and helped to reduce safety and other incidents.
- Jurong in the 1970s was a 'workers' place' and Boon Lay was known as mini-Johore. There were many Malaysian workers there.

Josephine Yau

- Got to know Goh in Ordnance Developments where she worked as a store clerk and subsequently production planning and then personnel. But she disliked the job (as did Goh's father) as the company made armaments used in war and the company was regimental. She left for the private sector and joined ADM Archer Daniels Midland Cocoa in Jalan Boon Lay which made chocolate. This was a far better and better paying job, originally a Dutch company which was 'slow moving', less structured and more receptive to ideas.
- Jurong has changed for the better and is comparable to the city, but it is important to preserve old traditions such as old games (pond fishing, skipping rope – zero point – playing marbles, five stones). Except for Malaysians, Jurong was a Singaporean place in the past but now there are many foreigners from Myanmar, Bangladesh and China. Bangla Park nearby. Difficult for locals to accept them because they have different cultures and talk loudly.

HB Chan

4/12/2017

- Fairchild contacted him through KBR: had integrated chips factory in TPY at the time. He was interviewed for Fairchild and became GM of Fairchild Toa Payoh.

- He then became MD of National Micronetics, a US electronics company that made magnetic heads for disk drives – so this was his own company and he had to deliver and get returns as soon as possible.
- Then joined Conner in 1987, built 9,700 sq. feet factory in Kallang Basin, which was a rival to Seagate and made disk drives. Most successful period of his career. Made \$100 million in the first year – a record for a new company.
- In general it was very good working with EDB and JTC. Sometimes it was too rigid and he felt they had to do more to help companies come in. Philip Yeo was more open. EDB's challenge of predicting the next wave.
- He would talk to production workers and help them. He told the managers that there are no secrets in the company – they ought to transmit his instruction to the shop floor. CNY reunion – former female workers would tell him how thoughtful he had been, e.g. asking a sick worker to rest for a week before returning to work.

Koh Boon Long

27/03/2018

- Became a PE teacher and was posted to Jalan Lama School in 1968-70. Liked the rural environment.
- The school was a 'good beginning' for a novice teacher like him. Students as 'salt of the earth' from lower-income farming families nearby in Ong Lee Village, mostly graduated from Joo Hwa Public (primary) School nearby.
- Taman Jurong was 'like a wilderness' in the daytime until workers returned to their flats in the evening. He could see the urbanisation and transformation of Jurong. The change was 'a loss somewhat' but inevitable. He liked rural Jurong enough to move back there (current house) in 1982.

Lai Park On

- c. 1966, conversion of PSA dockyard into a commercial shipyard under Swan Hunter (he was at SVI then). Offered position in the management team to recruit and train local manpower for the shipyard.
- 'sitting by Nelly' (or learning from 'shi fu'), learning from older craftsmen, an informal method. Instead, Swan Hunter formalised this and introduced a system of apprenticeship at Keppel who received practical training at the shipyard.
- He also established an in house Division of Management Services at Keppel (he was th Head), which introduced modern management techniques such as conducting feasibility studies and cost-benefit analysis (prior to purchase of tugboats). Idea of management services advocated by Ang Kong Hua who had studied in Britain and learnt of these ideas.
- Established Semco (Sembawang Salvage Company), a salvage operation under Sembawang Maritime. Semco salvaged burning ships hit by Iraqi missiles in the Persian Gulf in order to save the oil.
- 1973, he was told by Minister for Finance Hon Sui Sen to leave Keppel for Mitsubishi Singapore Heavy Industry, a 50-50 joint venture between Singapore and Mitsubishi. He was chosen because he could speak Japanese and had been trained in Japan.

- He set up the Mitsubishi shipyard (built the dockyard locally with his apprentices) and took over the Jurong Vocational Institute which was converted into a training centre for 600 apprentices for the shipyard.
- Introduced Japanese methods: TQC (Total Quality Control), Quality Circles, which were very popular Japanese ideas in the 1970s. But unable to get support from local supervisors and foremen, who told him in Cantonese: 'Mr Lai, are you stupid? You are asking us on lower pay to implement all these new ideas?' (to follow up).
- The Japanese called him 'baka majimae' ('stupid/foolish and serious') because of his total dedication to work in his early training stint in Japan (Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka).

Lee Soo Ann

25/7/2017

- EDB up to 1965: focussed on local industries but changed to export after.
- IPB founded by David Marshall and the original intention was to have economist Arthur Lewis head the Board. Economic plan by Hugh Savage father of Victor, an officer in the civil service. Thus IPB, the Savage Plan and the UNDP study provided the blueprint for industrialisation and preceded the PAP.
- British military withdrawal. Government response made use of the opportunity of the British withdrawal: led to emergence of commercial shipyards (Sembawang and Keppel), defence industries (DSO, ST at former Tengah base), launch of SAF overseas scholarships (awardees went on to run SAF).
- Conversion of Ayer Rajah base (vacant in 1970) to University of Singapore's Kent Ridge campus (estb 1978), which would comprise engineering (at the old Singapore Polytechnic campus at Prince Edward), medicine (Outram) and Raffles College (BTC).

Lee Soo Ann

15/8/2017

- Check 3 big companies - Philips, Rollei and Matsushita
- Hon Sui Sen chosen to head EDB as he had been Commissioner of Lands.
- 1974 recession due to high CPF contributions to allow HDB home ownership, which affected employers - 25-25. Contributions then reduced to 10:15 and payment for flats extended from 20 to 30 years. 'Singapore's success due to managing the workers'. This enabled workers to buy flats in Jurong and thus saved Jurong Industrial Estate.
- Thus Singapore's economic development 'hotch potch' shifting from MNCs to GLCs to SMEs. No big Singaporean company emerged. Danger of MNCs leaving Singapore..

Lim Buck Tong

04/04/2018

- Family resettled from a farm at current Lorong 8 Toa Payoh in 1966 to resettlement site in Hong Kah Village, Jurong 12th Mile.
- Hong Kah was like 'wild land'. Kampong had a mixed of economic activities, with bean curd and pig farming and fried fritters making.

- Going out of Hong Kah, he would go to the Jalan Lama market at 10th Mile, and further away Beauty World in Bukit Timah 7th Mile for the latest fashions in apparel and 2 open-air cinemas, and later Taman Jurong. Noticed many Malaysian workers in Taman Jurong and began to speak Malaysian lingo, such as 几多钱?
- He liked art and design, and after graduation applied to do applied art Baharuddin Vocational Institute where he received an International Technician Certificate (ITC).
- He set up a company Origin Gifts for trophies and mementos in 1990 following his retrenchment in the 1985 recession. Fast pace in industry and markets due to the advent of online shopping. Business has slowed greatly and he is in a sunset industry.
- Difficulty in applying for tech grants from SPRING Singapore or International Enterprise because of the need to write reports. Gap between generations in terms of online shopping – young clients do not need to see the product physically. Difficult for SMEs to go regional, especially for niche businesses originally catering to the local market.

Lina Koh

30 Jun 2017

- 1981, first job when she was 19: joined Bonex Industries at Ayer Rajah Industrial Estate as a line leader, testing the soldering for electronic toys to see if they worked. It was the 2nd toy company in Singapore and ‘very good’.
- Finally, March 1988, joined Sanyo Air-conditioning, at 7 & 9 Jalan Pesawat, and worked there for nearly 20 years. Her most stressful time was end of the year report to Japan.
- Retrenchment in the company in 2005 which affected the Malaysian and other foreign workers. She was on a 2 year contract at GMTI (shipping executive, dealt with Jurong Shipyard etc) and left in 2007. She was OK as she had her own work but sad to leave the good work environment in Sanyo: memories of games, joking, sharing problems, no conflict.
- They lived in the hostels in Yong Kwang Road, Taman Jurong (rented shared room in HDB blocks 63-65, 2-3 room flats, 4 to a room).
- Work was segregated by job (cf. Bonex) and done standing up. No radio in the factory but there was chit chat and a bell for end of the day. She got to know the workers when doing stock take. The assembly line workers she talked to seemed ‘very energetic’ and could still ‘chit chat’ with one another. They got along well with one another and they had ‘everything’ in the company.

Maryati

Hassan Abdullah

27/8/2017

Maryati

- Worked first in Final Control (checking of cameras) and then shutters production line as one of the ‘lead girls’ in charge of about 15 operators.

- Initially she was 'playful' and was transferred to shutters but became more serious possibly after her marriage in 1977. She made some mistakes and was reprimanded, but it was possible to overlook some faults or steps.
- She was selected for Germany training in 1979 but was 4 months pregnant and unable to go (a 'lucky guy' went in her stead).
- Doesn't like production work – stayed because of her friends. Good Chinese friend, Patricia, but have lost contact with them. Production work was very boring.
- Referring to Hassan: operators know production, security guards know people.
- 'Very strict discipline' both at Rollei and Seagate, e.g. for toilet break, lunch. Could chat with colleagues.

Hassan

- Worked as security guard from 1971 to 1982 till it closed. Joined Rollei as it was a popular company with ok pay (\$500-600). Security guard a popular job in the 1970s.
- His job was to check the staff before leaving. He got along well with foremen and other employees.
- Closure of Rollei: he stayed till the end in 1982 to take care of the facilities (5-6 security guards left, all operators had gone). He was not surprised by closure as the company had been making losses for years. Became a delivery driver after retrenchment and then taxi driver after 1985 recession.

Noorsia Bte A Gani

26/05/2018

- Worked at Weng Hing, an electrical company, located on 2 storeys of 115 Commonwealth flatted factory, in 1987. Worked the afternoon shift for about a year before shifting to night shift so she could take care and cook for the children when she finished the shift. She liked working the night shift.
- pay was about \$800 with \$28 transport allowance (she walked to work). She sat on a stool in front of the machine, a worker per machine, to assemble and pack electrical products such as irons, hair dryers, CD players, transistors, CD trays/drives. She enjoyed her work tremendously – could kajiao ('disturb') and joke and chat with her colleagues. Kept in touch with her colleagues until one of them passed away recently.
- It was an easy job which was not stressful or tiring. Fond memories of her employer and his family (Chinese), who paid for her trip to Malaysia, and of the company annual dinner.
- She was sad at leaving and missed her colleagues.

Normah Dobbs

31/5/2017

LKS: '72 then.

Normah: May be around that time.

LKS: You found the job in a newspaper or from a friend?

Norman: From my sister.

Normah: Yes, electronic, a lot of women working there. I think it is a good job too, so, stable too at that time, the job. You work three shifts, they have morning, and they have afternoon and the night shift.

Normah: Yeah. And then they have component to put in each hole, they are like big board and then have this board; you need to put the component, then the soldering.

LKS: Do you remember the name of the company?

Normah: It is American company, significant company.

Normah: No, it is in the middle of...not far from Jalan Afifi...

Normah: Yes, Kallang Basin. Yeah, that's the one. It's around there.

LKS: Can you describe your work area? How was it? You had your own table?

Normah: Yes. Like the table, we have long table...maybe... they divide each person, like the first person do this thing and then the second person, carry on and is taken forward.

Norman: Yes, each person. And sometimes, we have like...each row do the same job, that they have like...they have the machine, they put through all the component and then the midsection, like me, and then you just do soldering and then at the same time, you check, make sure that it is the right thing in the board, then they have like....what is it called...a thermometer to check, and then they show you red or green and the red one to show that it is wrong; then you have to change.

Normah: Yes. __7:55__ most of them are women supervisors because a lot of women working there.

LKS: Last time, we were talking; you said sometimes it can be dangerous...

Normah: Yes.

LKS: You can have accidents?

Normah: Yeah.

LKS: How does that happen?

Normah: My department does not have much injury because most of the women come from Malaysia, from Johor.

LKS: Oh...

Normah: And then their English is not very good and then they do some job can get accident, few machine they have get accident because they cannot speak English and they do not know how to do the job, so yeah.

LKS: So, most of them were from Malaysia?

Normah: Yeah. After a few years, a lot from Malaysia, from Johor, yeah... cheap labour.

LKS: More Chinese or Malay?

Normah: I think a mix, but Johor more and a lot Malay, maybe they pick them all from __11:16__ maybe they advertise and then they have a way to pick them and then drop to the factory and then when they finish, the truck dropped them back to Johor, where they picked up.

LKS: There you worked for one year, maybe?

Normah: Maybe two years.

LKS: Two years?

Normah: Yeah. Because __14:47__ get into that factory, electronics, you have to be 16 years old. So, I had to work for two years in the factory, maybe a year and a half, something like

that, for that factory you can work underage, no problems, they employ you, but not electronic. This is American company, so they know the law had to be 16 years old.

LKS: When you are working, could you talk?

Normah: Yeah, we talked at the same time, but not like stopping the job and talking, you know, you have got to work at the same time.

LKS: Multitask...

Normah: Yeah. Like.. "Oh...what do you do?" and then you carry on and do your job, you know.

LKS: So, that's okay.

Normah: Yeah.

LKS: Supervisor will not say, stop.

Normah: No, no... unless you stop working and you talk.

LKS" (laughs)

Normah: Yes, but like no more than "what you do" and you carry on, it is more fun.

LKS: Yeah.

Normah: You can't be so strict like... not talk at all, you know what I mean. Different, if you stop and talk and you do not do your job then you are in trouble, you know.

LKS: Hmm...

LKS: Were there other rules in the factory?

Normah: Not much rules. More or less people know you come to job, you have like... a cut and punch machine, click in and then you go have lunch, you click in/out and when you finish you click out.

LKS: Right. Were there breaks?

Normah: Yeah, they have a break, I think 45 minutes. I'm not sure 45 minutes or half an hour or one hour. They had two breaks, one is 15 minutes morning break and then you have a big lunch.

LKS: Hmm...

Normah: Lunch, I think is 45 minutes, if I am not mistaken...lunch...yeah.

Normah: Yeah. It is cheaper to bring your own lunch. Also, it is not boring, you know. If you go out, you have to wait for another 15 minutes to queue up and take your turn that means you wasted 20 minutes, it is better to bring your own lunch, straightaway you sit there and eat and chit-chat with friends.

Normah: Yeah, they have music. I enjoyed working there.

Normah: Yeah. I think I enjoyed also it is stable too, they pay you all the time, on time, and then you get pay raise too some times.

LKS: So, they treat the workers quite well?

Normah: Yeah, American companies.

LKS: Quite honest too?

Normah: Yeah. A lot of people like to work with the Americans.

Normah: It's a good factory, yeah. At that time, we get pay, not put in the bank, they put money in the envelope.

LKS: Did you make any friends there?

Normah: Oh! A lot of friends. They are all women (laughs)

Normah: Yeah... (laughs) just when you go to, they are more like... the factory, the room is really big, they are all square and then each department, you can see each other when you walk, when you pass, you can see the person and then if you know the person, you start talking, and then you say "Hi" you know, then you start a lot of friends.

Normah: In fact, I have one friend... we work in the same factory, but she is Singaporean, she lives not far away from here. Yes, she is Malay, married, got three kids, and then one day, I go to the shop, I saw this lady, then we started talking, and then we know each other, not like close friends.

Normah: Because you work in the same factory and we both worked in the same factory before, so we know. She came here, got married, got three kids.

Quek Siow Kai

05/04/2018

- Joined Singapore Polytechnic after his A levels in 1972 because father had just passed away and he needed to start working quickly. Also difficult language wise as there were many changes in education and he was from a Chinese-stream background.
- Job changing was common in the 1970s to get better pay – you were seen to be unsuccessful staying in the same job.
- Joined Gul Engineering which was part of Keppel Shipyard and a shipbuilding outfit, as a technician in the machinery section leading Singaporean and Malaysian workers. He led a team to install and calibrate the machinery, which included imported engines, generators and pumps. It was a 'tough job' but 'good learning experience' managing difficult types of machinery.
- Felt safety depended on management. There were no hard rules in shipbuilding on safety other than obvious rules such as avoiding hot work and painting at the same time. Other hazards included lifting and working at a height were a common part of the job: workers would improvise on the spot.
- Management's main concern, which affected the subcontractors, was completion and delivery of work. There was a Malay safety officer at Gul but he was alone and ignored by the workers and subcontractors.
- The key is to strike a balance between delivery and safety but management was 'rushing to get the job done'. The problem was not subcontractors per se – they were aware of the hazards but also had to complete the project. He thought Spyros as 'a sad case'. The workers went to donate blood and money of their own volition.
- Then joined Tan Cheong Industrial Machinery which was a large company that made construction equipment such as generators, forklifts and heavy trucks. He was the service engineer of a workshop and repair shop. This was also when his boss told him he could not be considered an engineer because he did not have a degree.
- In the mid-1980s, he was already married with two children and decided he had to get a degree to break the glass ceiling. It was a tough decision to go to the University of Huntsville, Alabama, but it was now or never. This was also the time of the recession so he wanted to make use of the opportunity to upgrade himself.

- His view that wafer fab was not successful in Singapore, because unlike Taiwan, Singapore was too small and could not go deeply into the industry. Importance of gaining industrial knowledge and passing on institutional knowledge but in Singapore the tendency was for successful people to be promoted and moved on to new positions.

Show Tian Tin

13/7/2018

- He first worked as a construction worker from 1969 to 1970.
- In 1970 or 1971, he joined Singapore Takada Industries. he was sent to Japan for a six-month training, at where the batch of trainees first participated in a five-week orientation class at the Association of Overseas Technical Scholarship, Kansai Kenshu Center, Osaka. They learned the Japanese language and visited some factories during their stay in Japan.
- Back to Singapore, he was in charge of buying construction materials, arranging workers and other jobs.
- In 1974 or 1975, he joined a US-owned manufacturing company Chemtec Pte Ltd as fitter.
- During his 13-year stay in Singapore, he sent back money to his parents in Muar from time to time.

Supammal Peramal

26/2/2018

- Her neighbour's daughter recommended her to Fairchild and she got the job after getting her Singaporean IC. Worked as a production worker and commended for her good work – received rewards such as a pen, chain. 'Not one unit of her wiring has been rejected'.
- Once interviewed by a Caucasian (check newspapers).
- Her work was in the bonding department, silver threading, line 7, number 1847. She did the night shift for 2 years, then switched to morning shift when Fairchild downsized (1973 recession?).
- She worked at Fairchild for 9 years and 9 months till she asked to be released when there was a round of retrenchment, in order to take care of her children. Also partly because Fairchild was beginning to automate the production and she felt stressed having to punch in the numbers.
- Her attitude towards work was to totally focus on the work and increase her salary – only person to get 2 increments in a year. Her supervisors and colleagues were very nice but she did not socialise with them much. She did 4-5 trays a day while some of her colleagues were chatting. Also went home for lunch and took only short breaks before resuming work. Did not miss her daughters when she was working as grandfather took care of them. Slept only 4 hours a day during the nightshift (3 pm to 7 pm).
- Note: the work was a sort of freedom from home and family, when she had her own space. Her husband initially did not want her to work, because he wanted her to take care of the children and he was the breadwinner, but relented because of her income.

Tan Bock San

12/7/2018

- he left for Singapore to work as a construction worker for five years.
- As an apprentice, he earned S\$5 per day at the construction industry (currency of both countries was about the same). He used to build shophouses in Toa Payoh, a 50-storey building, lighthouse and others. He chose not to work in the factory because the pay is lower and it's more controlled and monitored.
- At that time, it was very easy to get jobs in Singapore. In construction industry, unlike others, the workers worth higher after they have experiences working for different companies and different projects. So, they changed from projects to projects, taking up different jobs. Bock San grew from an apprentice to a 'mid-level worker' (中工), then 'high-level worker'(大工). His pay was about S\$12 / per day when he left Singapore in 1974.
- They perceive the days in Singapore as one of the happiest chapters in their lives – they were young and fearless, they left home to be independent, and they met a lot of good friends.

Tan Kian Cheng

21/04/2018

- Then joined Hitachi Zosen in Jurong as a QC/QA technician: inspection of ship before repair. Learnt from classification society people like Lloyd's. 'Tremendous' amount of work: hectic but he enjoyed the work. Japanese work culture: closely knit, but also depended on the individual. Regarded Malaysians as locals – no real difference.
- He joined the Pioneer Industries Employees' Union around 1980 and then the branch of the Shipbuilding and Marine Engineers' Union. His aim was to harmonise the collective bargaining agreement, for younger workers to get equal bonus. He was told by senior unionists that he was naïve but he believed in sincerity.
- Safety: things improved after Spyros. He was very sad at Spyros that so many people were killed – Spyros was 'a shock to the nation'.

Vasanthara Devi

23/2/2018

- Work at Fairchild in Toa Payoh was \$2/shift and she worked the night shift (11 pm to 7 am) for all of 18 years except the final year, and after Fairchild was acquired by National Semiconductor.
- It was very good working in Fairchild, with annual dinner in hotel and Family Day at Sentosa etc. Housewives usually did the night shift. Cousin also worked in Fairchild and had recommended her to work there.
- The night shift could be 'very difficult' if she did not have enough sleep. Mona: 'when mum is sleeping, we cannot disturb her or else we will get caning'. She would comb Mona's hair before she went to bed. Mona would ask her not to go to work. She would see her mother when she left for work and perhaps when she came home in the morning.
- She had good relationships with her colleagues although have lost contact with them. 4-5 of her colleagues would ask her to make chicken curry and thosai on Monday. Colleagues would come over to her house for Deepavali.

William Teo Jui Wah

27 November 2017

- 1967, decided to join Caterpillar Far East as a clerk when he learnt his colleagues joined and it offered higher pay. But he requested transfer to warehouse operations supervisor, which was a life changing experience.
- Offered developmental assignment to US Caterpillar.
- Once he was sent to DC Alabama to solve a management dispute which he did successfully in 4 hours. Led by example and always on the ground.
- He learnt the ropes of warehousing – namely, 3 functions being taking orders, receiving containers and shipping which was the most challenging. Such work was unpopular because the work environment was tough, dusty, humid, and dirty. Lack of Singaporean workers employed in warehouse logistics, partly also some of them were illiterate and could not read.
- Importance of knowing the score in the issue of productivity. Singapore employers did not know how the score (much work had been done in a day unlike in the US). The real problem was not labour costs but much wastage due to mistakes and having to correct mistakes. He believes Singaporean workers are more productive, but circumstances are different locally: orders are en-mass and consolidated, not by piece in order to maximise profit, thus work is more rushed and it becomes harder to attain high productivity. At Caterpillar, productivity was not measured – what was more important was to meet standards and produce quality services (ship in 3 days). Productivity really about maximising space and minimising costs. Problem was some workers lacked experience or understanding of product and made mistakes.
- Fear of losing his job spurred his commitment to work. Worked more than 10 hours a day. Also desire to do better and improve. He was not afraid of speaking up to his bosses. He learnt from Caterpillar, being entrusted with important projects and being given a free hand.

Wong Choo Kee

17/11/2017

- Father later employed as a clerk with Shell at Pulau Bukom, in charge of production of kerosene tins (before the war). Social hierarchy – at the top were the Europeans and the Eurasians also regarded as Europeans; the clerical grades and then workers. ‘Almost like a utopia’, ‘almost a complete city by itself, ‘so much freedom’.
- ‘We could swim like the fish’.
- Part of the work of ‘rolling in Singapore’.

Yee Mei Lin

16/3/2018

- Born 1948. Went with mum to work as long sai (shipyard cleaner) when they moved from SIT flat in Alexandra (Lam Por Lei, a ‘gangster area’) to a shophouse in Duxton Road.

- There was a fat lady, called Big Hen No. 6, who handed out tickets for shipyard cleaners and came to be fond of her, treating her like a goddaughter.
- Most dangerous part was not the cleaning but climbing the ropes onto the ship. Sometimes worked till midnight for OT pay. She was valuable because she was short and could squeeze into the cargo compartment. Often ended up full of 'ba lug u' (local fruit, meaning bruises on her head and all over her body'.
- She did not feel resentful about her work. When young, she also made/sold snacks and tikam tikam. Happy to make 5 cents from \$1. Poverty made her enterprising.
- She did not perform very well in school or obtain a full certificate so she could not be a nurse or teacher. Instead obtained a certificate in hotel catering and various jobs she worked in hotels and restaurants. Also learnt tailoring on the side. 1982, joined NTUC to sell insurance. Eventually bought the current terrace house. Work as a tour guide. Belief in need to do good, in being enterprising, and how when one door closes, another opens.