

INTERVIEW



Blessed with a photographic memory

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waiting for the tuans to start”.

There were no tees then and the caddies had to build small clay mounds for the golf balls. “If a mound was too high, the tuans would say, *banyak tinggi* and we would reduce the height.”

They also had to polish the clubs while tuan and mem had their tea. “When done, mem would give us our fee: 10 cents! We could buy *nasi lemak* with one cent, so it was not bad.”

Many years later, he would return to the Sentul course, this time as a member and a doctor. His golfing skill reached its peak there.

“There used to be a yearly championship and I beat the tuans two years in a row. The defending champ the first year was an Australian by the name of Roy Greenwood whose handicap was five to my 15.”

The following year, Majid’s handicap was reduced to eight. He would have got a hatrick and became the permanent cup holder had he not left for the US as the first Malaysian recip-

ient of the Eisenhower Fellowship.

Had the Sentul Golf Club ownership not changed hands and become privatised, his moments of triumph would have been chronicled in its archives.

At this point, he shows me a picture of “The Four Kings and One Knave”. It shows five golfers: Sultan of Perak Raja Azlan Shah, Sultan Abdul Khalim of Kedah (both former Kings), the Sultans of Terengganu and Selangor and “the knave – that’s me!”

He remembers the games of childhood as being of a rustic nature: catching birds and fighting spiders. A favourite derring-do, Majid recollects with a great measure of glee, was throwing stones at hornets’ nests.

“We would arm ourselves with stones and our shields were leafy branches. Once we hit the nest, we would lie absolutely still holding the branches to fool the insects into thinking we were trees. But one day, a friend Islamuddin wriggled his toes and gave his presence away. The insects converged on him with a

vengeance and he ran for his life. Fortunately, he got off lightly!”

Life changed when he entered an English primary school on a scholarship and lived in a hostel in Kampung Baru. His scholarship was RM10 – RM7 for board and RM3 pocket money. His primary education was completed at Maxwell Boys School and Batu Road Boys School.

Then it was on to the prestigious Victoria Institution. Only the top 120 boys from three schools in Kuala Lumpur – Pasar Road School, Maxwell School and Batu Road School – were given a place.

In his first year, he topped his form. Then, he caught a severe bout of typhoid and was hospitalised for three months. “It did something to my memory, I’m sure! It was never quite the same again.” After that, he had to be satisfied with second or even third place in class.

The first day at VI is still vivid. “Of course, there was the usual Monday morning assembly in the hall and then we went to class. I was sitting right at the back. The headmaster, F.L. Shaw, asked: ‘Who is Majid? Are you a Malay?’ (‘Yes, Sir!’). ‘You’re not Javanese?’ (‘No, Sir!’).”

He was singled out for attention by the headmaster because of his outstanding entrance exam results which outshone the record set by one Yap Pow Meng, who was two years his senior. Pow Meng’s brother, Pow Weng, was Majid’s classmate.

Majid’s brilliance also made him a favourite of Shaw whose term of endearment for him was a brief ‘Mej’.

And the reward for being the HM’s favourite? ‘Mej’ was allowed to carry Shaw’s cloaks.

“It was my proud duty and privilege as top boy,” grins Mej.

Pow Weng was the top boy in Senior Cambridge and later became chief architect in the PWD, while Pow Meng became a Queen’s scholar and the first local to qualify as a psychiatrist.

Unfortunately, Pow Meng returned to find there was no post available as he was too qualified, so he moved to Hong Kong where he became chief psychiatrist.

Majid remembers the hospital where he stayed during his battle with typhoid: “It was called the Malay Special Hospital and was meant only for Malays who believed in (and sought the help of) bomohs. The cases that ended up there were so far gone that most died.

The British created these special hospitals in KL, Kuala Kangsar and Negri Sembilan to change their attitude.”

Malay students from the hostel were sent there for deworming every three months. “I was a naughty boy and used to climb the *mata kuching* tree outside the ward.”

In years to come, when he returned as a doctor, he would stop by the same *mata kuching* tree. The Malay hospital was sited where the KL Paediatric Institute is today and Majid was instrumental in incorporating it into the KLGHS.

