

By Mr Jason Nguyen Bui Minh Cuong

The swirling solution atop the magnetic stirrer, the seemingly never-ending 0.05 mL droplets of titration, the buzzing sound of the electron microscope, or hours awaiting for simulation of protein chains were all that I anticipated would confine me during my four years pursuing a Bachelor's degree at the NUS Chemistry Department.

That journey took an unexpected turn when I was engaged by the Department to produce a historic booklet. Together with my teammates - Lin, Nathalie, and Shan - we ventured into a challenging endeavor to reminisce the 80 years history of NUS Chemistry, in which we took a risky decision to reflect that 80 years through 80 prominent personalities who have shaped the development of NUS Chemistry in particular, and of Singapore as a whole. That precarious choice turned out to be a fruitful one, as the project opened my eyes to the beauty of chemistry all around us.

Before that, I was not aware of how gratifying, social, and exciting the NUS Chemistry community could be. I was able to meet extraordinary personalities: the humble & inspiring legend Emeritus Prof. Kiang Ai Kim, the friendly educator Prof. Goh Suat Hong, or the charismatic high-achiever Prof. Lawrence Chia. The more people I interviewed, the more evidently I realized that the core competence which drives NUS Chemistry to the current stage would be simply defined in three words: "Excellence in Education". Through that excellence, NUS Chemistry has been able to nurture and cultivate highly competent individuals, who are not only successful in the chemical field, but also unrivalled across many other disciplines: Dr. Chong Yoke Sin in business, Dr. Tan Eng Liang in politics, Ms. Nathasha in IT, Ms. Chen Sin Yee in telecom, or Ms. Lim Chin Chin in forensic. The stories of these 80 personalities have been the source of inspiration for many generations of NUS chemistry graduates to follow, and I am not an exception - who is embarking on his own journey to bring that "Excellence in Education" to his countrymen by opening an education center in Vietnam.

It is my privilege to be an eyewitness to history-in-the-making, a participant-observer in an exhilarating and unfolding publication project, and I truly hope that the high spirit of NUS Chemistry will continue to proliferate in many years to come.

By Ms Koh Lin Lin

The application for an editorial position began with the intent of finding a vacation job. The experience, however, turned out to be more than just that. Over the few months, the team travelled all over the island to interview the various personalities who were to be featured in the anniversary publication. These people were associated with NUSChem at different stages of its growth and had varied stories and experiences to share. In fact, some associates were overseas so we had to make some telephone interviews! Each interview session was unique. Thinking back, I can still remember how some of them treated us with the warmest hospitality, or with views of their personal hobby collections.

Publishing a book is not only about conducting interviews though. There were cycles after cycles of writing and editing of articles, and creating and enhancing of artwork. We even had to figure out what type of paper we wanted to print on, and how it affects the cost of the publication.

Today, 8 years after, some of the personalities whom we've interviewed had passed on. These include some Chemistry giants like Emeritus Prof Tan Ai Kiang, and Dr Lee Kum Tatt. I'm glad to have captured some of their stories in the 80th anniversary publication and that their legacy, the NUSChem department has advanced further in its journey towards excellence.