

“A Tribute to Ooi Giok Ling”

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I knew Dr Ooi Giok Ling when she was Director of Research at the Ministry of Home Affairs between 1995 and 1997. MHA had brought Giok Ling in specially to helm its very first Research Directorate. Being at its infancy stage, the Directorate was beefed up with officers seconded from the Department of Statistics. Giok Ling did a wonderful job for us, laying strong foundations that have evolved till today.

Even though she was with us for only a short 2 years, Giok Ling achieved many significant milestones. They include MHA's very first crime survey on "Safety and Security in Public Housing Estates", done in collaboration with the NUS Geography Dept to get a sense of Singaporeans' perception of crime and how they viewed their personal safety. Giok Ling, with keen prescience, I must say, also initiated a survey on the 'Intent of PRs in Singapore' to examine the reasons why certain nationalities chose Singapore as their second home. This is a topic which has remained relevant; indeed, even more so, in today's context.

As we know, Giok Ling was strong on research. Setting up an 'Information Research Centre', which later expanded into our Library@MHA, the Directorate assembled a collection of research journals and publications from various government agencies, to facilitate research by the staff. Coming from an academic background myself, I appreciated that innovation greatly. This way, policy formulation could be better informed. True to her sensitive and caring nature, staff morale and their development were important to Giok Ling. In this spirit, she initiated the first-ever Ministry HQ-wide Staff Opinion Survey, where officers were asked to rate their work satisfaction. In hindsight, this was groundbreaking as in recent years, with our officers on the ground - for example, those in the Police, Immigration, SCDF - being fully stretched; this issue has become paramount in the minds of the top MHA Management.

But I remember Giok Ling not only for the work she has done for MHA. As a person, she was well-respected and well-liked. I had crossed over from the Back Bench to join MHA as Parliamentary Secretary from the University in 1993. Perhaps because of our common background, we could talk freely on the various issues confronting MHA and Singapore then. I appreciated her views which she gave honestly, passionately but always sincerely. I asked Giok Ling's former staff how it was working with her. Let me quote Sook Bee who found Giok Ling an inspiring leader, "always positive, full of drive and enthusiasm.... (steering) everyone forward to meet the many challenges faced in setting up a new division" In short, her staff in those early days of MHA's fledgling Research Directorate found in Giok Ling a friendly, caring and understanding boss, someone whose guidance and mentorship they had benefited from.

Indeed, Giok Ling has left behind a rich legacy, not only in her professional work, but more importantly, one that created a deep imprint on those she interacted with at a personal level. Giok Ling has touched many lives. We love Giok Ling. May she rest in peace.
