



SG60 Celebrating Stories of Boldness: Past to Possibilities

As part of the SG60 celebrations, we will be commemorating Singapore's nation-building journey — honouring the values that have united us, sustained us through past challenges, and continue to guide us as we build our shared future.

In this exhibition, you will find stories of boldness, resilience and unity. From overcoming adversity to seizing opportunities, these stories reflect the spirit of a people who dared to dream and build a better tomorrow.

May these stories inspire us to chart the path forward, together as one Singapore.



Making Ends Meet

My grandmother's early years were shaped by hardship. Her father passed away when she was just a baby, leaving her mother, an immigrant from China with no formal education, to raise the family alone. To make ends meet, her mother planted crops and vegetables, carrying the surplus on foot over 2 km away to sell at the market. Life was difficult, but she remained resilient throughout.



Wong Liwen (2E), Wong Likang (4I) and their grandparents

Liwen's and Likang's grandmother



Even today, my grandmother continues to inspire us with her wisdom. She reminds us to be resilient and grateful. To her, every setback is simply a setup for a stronger comeback. "Keep learning. Keep going. Never give up," she often says. Her journey is a powerful reminder that with hard work and determination, we can rise above any circumstance and shape a brighter future for ourselves and those around us.



Brave and Resilient Grandmothers

Both my grandmothers are incredibly brave and resilient women.

My paternal grandmother lost her father when she was just two years old, and her family lived in poverty. Rice was considered a luxury, so she often had to make do with tapioca and sweet potatoes. At the age of 15, she left her hometown in Indonesia and came to Singapore illegally in search of work. Despite her young age, she took on multiple jobs at once to support her family back home. Her hard work paid off and she managed to attain her Singapore Citizenship.

Chan Bo Wei's (1E) paternal grandmother



Chan Bo Wei's (1E) maternal grandmother



My maternal grandmother lived through the racial riots in the 1960s. She vividly remembers how her education was disrupted, the strict curfews imposed, and the food shortages her family had to endure. Yet, she remained calm and took everything in her stride, adapting to the circumstances with quiet strength.



Working during the Racial Riots

During the racial riots, my grandmother continued going to work even while many of her friends chose to stay home out of fear. She felt a strong sense of responsibility because she held an important role at the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation to help keep Singaporeans informed with the latest news.



Chai Shao Xi (4C) with his sister and grandmother

One day, while on the way home on the company bus, she saw soldiers on the streets carrying machine guns and witnessed riots happening along the roadside. The bus driver quickly warned everyone on board to hide, as rioters were known to smash windows and force their way into vehicles. It was a frightening experience. On another occasion, it became too dangerous for her to return home, so she had to stay overnight at a friend's house for her safety.

I was amazed by her bravery and sense of duty in such a tense and dangerous time.



Shao Xi's grandmother

Breaking the Poverty Cycle



Christian Lew (3B) and his grandfather

My grandfather grew up in a kampung, and his family was extremely poor. He could not afford to attend school regularly, so he gave tuition just to earn enough money to support his studies.

He seized every opportunity to learn and worked hard to break out of the poverty cycle. When he made it to university, he started preparing for job interviews while others were still finding their footing. Eventually, he landed a job as a Foreign Exchange Trader in a top American bank. With his perseverance, he earned his place as a successful trader.

From my grandfather, I have learned that if we truly want to achieve something, we must be willing to push ourselves and take that leap.



Christian's grandfather

No Electricity and Water

The environment my grandfather grew up in was vastly different from the one I live in today. He lived in a simple attap house without electricity and running water. When night fell, he had to rely on a kerosene lamp to light his home. Water had to be manually collected and stored in a large tank, which was then used for basic needs like flushing the toilet and taking showers. For cooking, he had to chop and gather firewood himself.

Singapore has changed tremendously since then. I feel very fortunate to be living in a modern environment where clean water is available at the turn of a tap. Our toilets are hygienic and convenient, unlike the ones my grandfather described from his youth. I truly appreciate the comforts and advancements we have today, which were not available to him in the past.



Isaac Tan (1H) and his grandfather



Kerosene lamp



Isaac's grandfather

Hiding a Stranger from Rioters

Growing up in a household of seven, life was far from easy for my maternal grandmother. Her family had only one toilet and no shower – bathing was done using buckets and pails.

When she needed schoolbooks, she did not ask for new ones – she searched for hand-me-downs, always making do with what she had. Even in poverty, she stayed determined.



Eva's grandmother



Eva Lim (1G) and her grandmother

During the racial riots in 1964, her family risked their safety to hide an Indian man who was being chased by Chinese rioters. They sheltered him in their home, afraid but firm in their belief that helping others was the right thing to do.

Till this day, my grandmother reminds us to never take things for granted. She wants young people to understand the value of what they have and to treat things like water and food as precious gifts.



On Standby during Konfrontasi

(The Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation)

My grandfather served in the army for 31 years. As a young boy, he was abandoned by his parents and left in the care of his aunt, who was often too busy working to support them. Living in her humble attap house, he learned to fend for himself and cooked his own meals.

Despite financial struggles, he remained determined to study. When he could not pay his school fees, the principal gave him a scolding that left him in tears. Yet, he did not give up. He continued to pursue his education with quiet perseverance.



Eli Lim (3B) and his grandfather



Eli's grandfather

Years later, during Konfrontasi (1963 – 1966), my grandfather showed the boldness he had grown into. As tensions rose, he was put on standby to defend Singapore. Without hesitation, he readied his equipment and stood shoulder to shoulder with other brave young men, prepared to protect the country he loved.

The Kampung Spirit

In the past, we lived in simple attap houses surrounded by tall coconut trees. Whenever heavy rain poured, I would wait anxiously, hoping no coconuts would fall and damage our fragile roof. Inside, we placed pails all around the house to catch the dripping rainwater.

My family was poor, and it took my grandmother time to save enough money to finally replace the roof with aluminium sheets.

Our homes were vulnerable – a single spark could set houses ablaze. I still remember the fear when a neighbour's house caught fire, and the kampung rallied together to put it out.



Joshua Ong (2A), Jo-Ann Ong (6F) and their grandmother



Joshua's and Jo-Ann's grandmother

Despite the hardships, there was a strong kampung spirit. We shared laughter, climbed trees, dug for worms, and ate fruits straight from the branches. Life was tough, but it was full of warmth, resilience, and community.



Working His Way Up

My grandfather once shared with me that he grew up in Singapore under very harsh and poor conditions. He lived in a tiny house without a proper toilet or even a real bed to sleep on.



Luke Mah (1F) and his grandfather



Luke's grandfather

After the war, his family had no money, and he had to start working even while he was still in primary school. Though he was very young, Grandfather understood the need to help his family and did not hesitate to do so. He was not afraid of working with strangers or of being tired. His willingness to work hard and face difficulties without complaint showed how brave and determined he was.

I truly admire my grandfather for his strength and courage. Despite all the hardships he went through, he never gave up. His story inspires me to be strong and resilient, no matter what challenges I may face.



Luke's grandfather

Simple Childhood

We mostly stayed at home, and if we were lucky enough to find a book, we would read it. When we had free time, we would head downstairs to play in the sand. We played marbles, caught spiders, or used sticks to build our own toys. We would tie them together to make rollers or anything our imagination could come up with. Life was simple but full of creativity and adventure in its own way.



Elizabeth Toh (5H) and her grandfather



Photo of a Rediffusion box (loudspeakers with a built-in amplifier)

There was no television, but we had something called a Rediffusion box. We would turn it on, listen closely, and even talk about what we heard. It played stories in Cantonese, Hokkien, and Mandarin — and that was how we picked up different languages. We would sit quietly, listening to the storytelling voices coming through that box.



Elizabeth's grandfather



Bare and Basic

Both my grandparents grew up in large families where almost everything had to be shared among many siblings. Their parents worked long hours, often leaving the children to fend for themselves. From a young age, they were expected to be independent.



Claire Tan (2D) and her grandparents

On regular days, meals were simple with just plain porridge accompanied by salted vegetables, or an egg shared among siblings. Clean water was not readily available either. Every day, they had to fetch water from a passing water truck or draw it from a communal well.



Water rationing

Their homes were basic and bare. There were no mattresses – just wooden platforms to sleep on. When the Bukit Ho Swee fire broke out, the threat of losing everything was very real. My grandfather had to climb onto their roofs to soak them with water, trying to stop the flames from spreading to their homes.



Claire's grandmother





Encounter with a Japanese Soldier

One of the most interesting stories my grandmother shared during our conversation was her father's encounter he had during the Japanese Occupation. He had been walking down the road when he came across a Japanese soldier. He happened to be wearing a nice watch which immediately caught the soldier's attention.

The soldier demanded the watch for free. Just as things could have taken a dangerous turn, a senior Japanese officer appeared. In a flash, the soldier shoved the watch back into her father's hands and saluted the officer. Without hesitation, her father took the opportunity to run off with his watch.



Japanese Occupation



Freya Desker (2G), their grandmother and Anya Desker (5I)

She often reminds me that young people today should learn to enjoy the simple pleasures in life and not depend so heavily on virtual entertainment for happiness. Sometimes, all you really need is your family, a good friend, and a little imagination to create moments of true joy.



Their grandmother's school and home in the past

The Lucky Ones



My grandfather grew up in a time when life was tough and opportunities were limited. His father had only studied up to Primary 6, and his mother stopped school after Primary 2. Education was not something every child could take for granted.

Isaac Lee (5D) and his grandfather

Fortunately, my grandfather was one of the lucky few in his generation who got to start his education from kindergarten. His perseverance reminds me that the comfort we enjoy now was built on the sacrifices of those who came before us. I am inspired by his strength and resilience, and I hope to honour his legacy by working hard and making the most of the opportunities I have been given.



Isaac's grandfather

Against All Odds

Education was considered a privilege. Schooling was entirely self-managed – there was no tuition, no parental guidance, just pure grit and discipline.

Despite all odds, she made it to Pre-University 2 in Raffles Girls' Secondary School. However, she had to give up her studies to pursue nursing, so she could help support her family.



Daniel's grandmother's schoolmates

Years later, when Grandfather lost his managerial position in 1998, it was Grandmother who stepped up. She launched a medical supply business, designed hospital-use products, and provided home nursing services while holding a full-time nursing job at Thomson Medical Centre.

My grandmother's resilience and survival instinct deeply inspire me. No matter how tough life gets, I will remember her strength.



Daniel Ng (3F) and his grandmother



Daniel's grandmother's family

Best Recruit during National Service



Many of my grandfather's peers told him that National Service (NS) would be extremely tough. Despite the challenges, he faced them with a positive mindset and a strong sense of discipline. His resilience and attitude even inspired his peers to follow his example which earned him the Best Recruit award.

Augustus Yap (3D) and his grandparents

His story taught me a valuable lesson: if you dislike something, you are more likely to struggle with it. However, if you embrace it with a positive attitude, you will find yourself doing better. That is why it is important to choose to like what we do, even if it is difficult at first. When I enter National Service, I want to give my best, just like my grandfather, and grow into a man who is ready and proud to serve our nation.



Augustus' grandfather's Company