



Mrs Elizabeth Choy

War heroine, politician and teacher

Amongst many things, Elizabeth Choy was a war heroine, politician and teacher. She was born in British North Borneo where she learnt her first language, Kadazan. Later on, she moved to Singapore where she excelled in her studies and became a teacher.

During World War II, Elizabeth and her husband ran a canteen at what is now known as the Institute of Mental Health. There, they risked their lives by secretly carrying food, medicine, money, letters and radios to British prisoners-of-war.

In 1943, the pair was arrested and accused of being British sympathisers. Elizabeth was held prisoner for 193 days where she endured repeated torture and was locked in a small cell crammed with men. The torture she endured included electric shocks and being pumped with water. She would later recount suffering such pain that tears would roll down her face. Nevertheless, she was determined not to break, and never revealed the names of anyone she had assisted.

After the war, the British Red Cross invited Elizabeth to England. Being the only female Singaporean to have been imprisoned for such a long time, she was hailed as a war heroine and awarded the Order of the British Empire. She was also awarded the Bronze Cross, the Girl Guides' highest honour, in recognition of her courage and bravery during the war.

Elizabeth remained in Britain where she studied and taught. When she returned to Singapore in 1949, Elizabeth became active in the political changes leading to the nation's independence. She made history by becoming the first and only female member of the Legislative Council.

After serving a full five-year term as a Legislative Councillor, Elizabeth left politics to return to teaching. She was a respected and well-liked teacher at St. Margaret's and St. Andrew's schools. Elizabeth was instrumental in expanding the Singapore Volunteer Corps in the 1950s. In 1956, she founded the Singapore School for the Blind and became its first principal.

For her dedication to the teaching profession, Elizabeth was awarded the Pingat Bakti Setia (a long-service medal) in 1973 by the Singapore Government. She died in 2006, after being diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer.

The strength that Elizabeth Choy displayed in upholding what is right regardless of the danger she faced serves as a reminder that everyone can do so too. Elizabeth Choy embodied many of St. Margaret's values through the course of her life, amongst which the following - Upholding Integrity, Being Resilient and Showing Care - spoke the strongest through her actions.