

Fathers, The Pillars Of Families



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Father's Day is celebrated on the third Sunday of June, which is on 21 June this year. There are several theories on the origin of Father's Day, with some claiming its origin as far back as 4,000 years ago.

Some scholars opined that the tradition of Father's Day can be traced back to the ruins of Babylon. A young boy called Elemsu carved a Father's Day message on a card made out of clay, wishing his father good health and a long life. There are others that credit it to Sonora Louise Smart Dodd of Washington who felt strongly the need for a Father's Day because of the affection she received from her own father when her mother died during childbirth when she was 16.

This version of the origin of Father's Day is less than 100 years old, but whatever the origin, the celebration of Father's Day has gained popularity over the years. The festival is a secular one and it is celebrated in many parts of the world. Father's Day is celebrated to thank the pillar of the family and to acknowledge the relationship between fathers and their children and to impress upon fathers the full measure of their obligations. But how many of our families celebrate Father's Day as much as Mother's Day? Have we ever once

felt that we are doing our fathers injustice by remembering and honouring one of the parents more than the other? It may be our culture and the way our fathers carry out their roles and responsibilities that results in many of us expressing our love for our mothers more easily.

Our image of an Asian father is usually one who possesses a stern look, keeps a distance from their children, is to be respected and not involved in housework. He is not involved in the children's schoolwork and would leave discussion with the teachers to the child's mother. On the other hand, our impression of a European or American father is one that carries his child on his shoulder and helps his wife with housework. These may be images we receive from television shows and many fathers – both younger and older generations – have changed, but they are to some extent true.

Traditionally, our fathers are the sole breadwinners in the family. Their role in the family in parenting is reduced to a disciplinary master. But as time evolves, mothers are going out to work. Now she has lesser time for her children and the father needs to step in to help out. There is a pressing need for our fathers to be active in parenting. Statistics have shown that fathers who played an active role in parenting would have a positive influence on their children.

Easterners keep the feelings of love to themselves whereas the westerners express their love more openly. We must recognise the value of emotional bonding when we express

our love more willingly. While showing filial piety is necessary, demonstration of affections serve to express our unspoken love and appreciation for our children. The same can be said of the feelings of the children to the parent. I was very surprised that this issue was debated on at a seminar organised by U Family early this year.

The speaker at the talk said that sometimes action speaks louder than words and hugging offers a lot of support and bonding to the family. The speaker urged the parents to hug their children to express love and to increase emotional support. A participant sprung up and spoke strongly that it is not in the culture to hug and express love, though numerous parents spoke in support of the need to hug. I opined that we must start building our bridge to the future and to strengthen the relationship, and it is easier to start the change in our younger children to show and celebrate love.

One of the lessons I learnt about life was from a colleague many years back. He was sharing with us his love for one of his parents. Yet on the parent's deathbed, he could not bring himself to hug even though he dearly loved to. He was not taught that it is acceptable to hug his parents. There was an invisible wall between the parent and his children. He cannot forget the incident and reminded us to be expressive of our loves. He taught us that we must teach our children to hug us and to hug our children.

Fathers, would you like to be your child's hero and leave behind a legacy?

Former STU President Sia Kah Hui Dies

Mr Sia Kah Hui, President of the Singapore Teachers' Union from 1962 to 1963, passed away on 14 June 2009. He was 86.

Mr Sia graduated at Westminster College, a Presbyterian theological college in Cambridge, United Kingdom, where he also obtained a Certificate in Education. Upon his return to Singapore in 1950, he taught at Presbyterian Boys' School, the forerunner of today's Kuo Chuan Presbyterian Schools. He was the school's principal from 1961 to 1963, and came on board the trade union movement as President of STU in 1962; he held this post until 1963 when he served in political office.

During the period when Mr Sia was involved in the teaching profession and trade unionism, Singapore was going through tough times. In 1959, the PAP Government alleged that the previous Lim Yew Hock Administration had run down the reserves and imposed pay cuts to help balance the budget. STU joined other public

sector unions in protesting against the pay cut. According to STU's record, as published in "60 in 06", its 60th anniversary commemorative publication, strong words were used at rallies, and the matter was eventually resolved when, with better financial management, the Government was able to restore the pay cuts.

A notable success that STU achieved during this tumultuous period was a unified education service, accepted by the Government in 1962. The unified education service was based on the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value, that is, all teachers – whatever their qualifications – would have equal opportunities to rise to the highest posts in the teaching profession.

In 1963, Mr Sia, campaigning on a PAP ticket, became a Legislative Assemblyman for Upper Serangoon constituency. Shortly after, he was appointed Parliamentary Secretary (Health) and became a fulltime politician. In 1967, he became Parliamentary Secretary (Labour) and in 1970, he was promoted to Minister of State (Labour), a post he held until 1981.

Mr Sia was concerned that workers should have worklife balance "to avoid ending up as robots" and chided employers who deprived their workers of Central Provident Fund contributions. He was often invited by NTUC and NTUC-affiliated unions to attend their functions, such as the opening of NTUC Games and The Singapore Manual & Mercantile Workers' Union's Variety Concert to raise funds for the Devan Nair Research and Training Endowment Fund. Mr Sia retired as Member of Parliament for Paya Lebar in 1984, at age 61. All in all, Mr Sia was a PAP MP for five terms, a stretch of 21 years.

According to Mr Sia's elder son, Mr Kheng Hong, the senior Mr Sia had suffered multiple strokes and was bedridden for several years. The senior Mr Sia leaves behind his wife, two sons (including Mr Sia Kheng Hong) and a daughter, their spouses, and eight grandchildren. Mr Sia was cremated at Mandai Crematorium on 18 June 2009.