

THE ASSOCIATION OF MIT RETIREES



MEMOIR COLLECTION

May 2012, #3

ABOUT THE MEMOIR CLASS

*The Association of MIT Retirees introduced a memoir writing workshop for members last February. This class of dedicated writers is led by **Nita Regnier**, Association advisory committee member and former instructor in MIT's Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies in the Writing Center. The writers have produced fine work which they wish to share. This year, the Association is featuring work by each class member. While the stories represent a wide range of experiences and generations, some reminiscences may resonate with you and perhaps inspire a flashback or two.*

New members are welcome to join the memoir class! Please contact the Association at 617-253-7910 or retirees.assoc@mit.edu for information.

*Our third featured work is short stories by **Elsa Tian**. Elsa was an administrative assistant in the Audit Division for 34 years. When Nita asked what interested her about writing a memoir, Elsa responded, "I am now the oldest in my family, after my parents passed away. When I heard that the MIT Retirees Association was holding a memoir writing class, I thought it over and instead of writing these stories in my diary, it would be better to write a memoir for my brother's grandchildren. We have a family tree, but stories might be more interesting for them to read and to see the photos.*

My first writing, it is just a simple piece. The class supported me and told me to send in my work. Hope it will help other retirees to join the memoir writing class. There are a lot of members who are also immigrants and want to write a memoir, but may need encouragement to join this class."

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

In 1986 my husband, Jan, and I joined the host family program for graduate students. We hosted couples from Japan, Singapore, and many other countries over the years. All of these couples are now like part of our family. Besides these students, we had young couples from MIT, who also became good friends. Some stayed in this country, but most returned to Europe and Asia. We stay in touch and make sure to visit with them on our vacations to their countries.

This was how I became active with the Wives Group of MIT in 1986, which is now called Spouses & Partners at MIT. Our first student's wife asked me to join the Japanese lunch table where we would practice Japanese and English. I met another young Japanese woman in 1997 at this Wednesday meeting, and there I began to help the cooking group.

I still greatly enjoy the activities of Spouses & Partners. I participate in their outings and cooking group, and lead origami workshops. The first outing I organized was a trip to Wilson Farms in Lexington. Everyone enjoyed this short trip so much. I like to share these nice places in the area that I've discovered. Other activities included walking trips followed by a pleasant picnic in the park, Rockport, and a day excursion to the Wildlife Refuge in Bedford, where they saw butterflies, ducks, frogs or turtles. Young newcomers from other countries were delighted, and their husbands appreciated time to study. When these young women returned to their country after their husbands finished school, they brought with them fun memories of their stay in Boston.

After retirement, I joined the MIT Retirees Association, and I have been on the advisory committee since 2003. I organize day trips, tours and luncheons and teach Japanese paper folding for our members — many of the same activities I arranged with the younger groups!

FAMILY VISITS

In 1975, when my parents came to Boston to see my brother, Alwin, who had just entered Bentley College, they stayed with us for a whole year. It was great to have them. There was always a lot of food; for Mom enjoyed cooking, and supper was always ready when we came home from work. They bought many different treats, and they liked to try all kinds of sweets and salty snacks. Jan and I had a good time trying all the different things, too. To buy special items just for us seemed too much, but sharing them with my parents and brother made us all happy.

Mom and Dad liked to take the bus to Boston and explore the city. They walked to the bus station from our house, a good 15-minute walk up the hill to the corner of Cambridge and Bedford Streets, where the bus stopped for



Boston or Alewife. They were 68 years old, healthy, with a lot of energy. Mom was smart; she always brought her knitting in her bag because she didn't like to waste time.

When we met them in Boston at the end of the day they had long since finished shopping around and enjoying people in Quincy Market, and we found them sitting in a nice spot where Mom could do her knitting. Those were the days when Granny squares were popular. She made 150 little crochet squares and sewed all the pieces into a sweater. She was the only person who added a small knitted square under the sleeve pattern in order to make more room for the arm. "Clever Mom — you are always thinking!" Mom and Dad were always on time at our meeting place. We went home together by car. It was too early for them to ride with us in the morning because Jan had to be at work at 8:30 am in the Government Center area in those days.

On weekends we took Mom and Dad to different places around Massachusetts, and on our extended vacations we enjoyed longer trips. We travelled to Canada, the West Coast, the Grand Canyon, Colorado, Disney World,

New York, Washington DC, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Seattle, Vancouver, Niagara Falls, etc. They enjoyed their stay. After a year they went to Europe with us, and from there, back home to Jakarta, Indonesia.

They returned for my brother's graduation in 1978. Three of my Mom's sisters also came for the graduation. Aunt Tilly came with her husband, and Aunt Nora came from Jakarta (she is a widow now with two sons, both doctors, one in Seattle and the other in Tennessee). Aunt John, the director of the Ann Frank Montessori School in Long Island, NY, came too. Aunt John's real name was Leony, but she was called John by my grandparents. They thought after having eight daughters, that the last one would finally be a son. They were wrong, and named her Leony; but her nickname was always "John." Nobody called her Aunt Leony.

It was so nice to be together. We took them to Long Island and Newport, RI, and we all went to Maryland to see Aunt Nora's son and his family. He was a doctor at Johns Hopkins Hospital at that time.

To go out with family is so much fun. I grew up with all those aunts and to entertain them here felt so good. They had always been kind to me and now Jan and I could bring them to many places they hadn't seen. It was a great time, and Mom and Dad were with us! That made me happy. Jan has known all my family since we were in high school together.



*My parents, Toos and Peter Gandanegara, brother Alwin (front), and husband Jan (back) in 1978.
Photographer: Elsa Tian*

DON'T STOP DREAMING

The things you do and want to do during your life are often amazing. When I was a child, my parents and my Mom's sisters went to our bungalow in the mountains where we went hiking. When we were there a man brought us two horses every day, and my cousin and I went riding. I was only six years old. We were both pretty good and rode the horses well. Only once, when my horse ran away with me was I scared, but I handled it well and I didn't fall off; people stopped it and I was safe. I could have fallen into a deep ravine, though. Dad was so mad at the guy who owned the horse that he never hired him again. Still, he made sure that I went back to riding the next day. Lucky ME! I held on to the horse.



As a three year old, I could swim. I am amazed, when I look back on those years. I remember how they attached a hook to a belt that they put around my body and then hung me like a fish from a pole to do the strokes. When I think of it, they had a weird system of teaching swimming in those days. I had to do the strokes hanging in the air from a pole so the instructor could see if I did the stroke properly. Then they let me swim in the water, which was easier than hanging from that stupid hook and doing the strokes in the air. Was I glad to be in the water that day! I learned to swim like a doggy in the water. Lucky ME! I never had to hang in the air again to do the breast stroke.

I was pretty good at this sport when I was a teenager. I swam in competitions and I joined a swim team. It was hard work; I had to do my homework after school and then go to the swimming pool on my bike. It was a 15-minute ride. The trainer was a Dutchman. As soon as I jumped into the pool he told me to swim 100 meters using only my arms; then 200 meters swimming only with my legs; after this I had to swim 400 meters, arms and legs combined. After that I rested, and then he told me to sprint 50 meters!!! Every day! No wonder I

always slept well. But the hard work paid off and I won first prize. I was NOT the best, but I did win two medals for first place in the 50-meter and the 100-meter breast stroke. Hooray! Lucky ME! I have loved swimming since I was a small child. I do the breast stroke, the crawl and the back stroke.

MIT gave me the opportunity to learn all the water sports. I always had pictures on the walls of my bedroom in Indonesia, pictures of sailboats and the Swiss mountains with a scene of people skiing down a beautiful slope.

In 1968 I joined the sailing pavilion at MIT and learned how to sail. I didn't know you had to pass different tests. To join the sailing pavilion I had to have a certificate from the swimming pool master, showing that I could swim 200 meters without stopping. You had to have earned a helmsman certificate to take a dinghy out in 1968. I joined a class in order to learn the ropes. First we learned all the knots, and I took a test from the sailing master. Then they let me rig the dinghies. That was not easy, especially if the mast was still on the rack. A friend and I had to attach the mast to the boat. Then I rigged the boat and passed the test.

Next I learned how to handle the wind. Tacking was easy, but jibing in a 15-mile an hour wind was tricky. I fell into the Charles River when I took my test and I had to take it over, but I did the jibe well that time. I received my helmsman! I could take a dinghy out any time after that. Lucky ME! I could sail! I always wanted to learn sailing. Another dream came true.

If I had not immigrated to the United States, perhaps I would never have had the chance to sail a sailboat. When I was still in Jakarta in the '60s, sailing was only for country club members. There were not many sailboats at that time. But it is different in Indonesia now; you can join a club. Still, not many girls learn this sport in Indonesia. I am lucky to have learned it, especially on the Charles, which is the best place to learn.



Remember the ski pictures from Switzerland on the wall in my bedroom in Jakarta? I learned how to ski at Nashoba Valley. It's the best place to go if you go alone. It's not far, and their teaching is the best. The slopes are good for beginners; they teach you what to expect at the bigger mountains, because the hills are steep. These are just short slopes, with trees on either side, and their teaching method is very good. I learned to go down narrow slopes and to use the J-bar and the T-bar and the chair lift. I took classes on the weekends; then, on workdays, I went skiing by myself for two hours. After that I went straight to work. I was determined to learn how to ski so that I could go to bigger ski areas. After training with good instructors, everybody can ski.

I am always happy when I accomplish my dreams or wishes. I'm lucky that Jan encourages me to pursue these activities. He does not want to ski, because he broke his ankle at MIT on the outdoor skating rink, when MIT had the outdoor rink in the early '60s. It was too bad, because Jan was good at sports. He knew how to roller blade. Skiing was another dream that came true. Lucky ME! I could ski!

I did some skating in the '60s, but I just went around, stopping myself against the walls. I never could stop on skates. With skis it was easy to stop just by turning sideways. I was an ugly skater, but skating was never on my dream list. At least I could skate around, slowly and carefully, since I didn't know how to stop! If I had to I would just make a turn and most of the time I was on my fanny!



This did not stop me from trying other things. I played a lot of badminton when I was in Jakarta, and I took lessons in tennis, and I did skate boarding with my brother and Jan here in the States. Yes, I did all this! I liked golf, but that was not one of the sports on my dream list, though I did love playing on a quiet golf course. I enjoyed the surroundings and beautifully kept greens, but it was expensive, and I had to wait for somebody to invite me to play. Not many friends were golfers.

In 1986, MIT started windsurfing. That was the most challenging sport I learned. Every lunch hour I was on the Charles River on a sailboard. I asked my boss if I could come in early and take a two-hour lunch in order to learn the sport. He let me do it! I was so happy. Windsurfing is difficult. You have to know the tricks and you have to be strong. Two other people from my office also joined the windsurfing class. It was the best sport and #1 on my list of favorites. I learned how to bring myself back to the dock. It sure was easier with a sailboat. Windsurfing uses the same technique, but it is your body, especially your arms, that are working with the sail. I accomplished my goal, and I learned to windsurf. Yay! I was so happy and so tan in those days!

Jan and I bought a sailboard and we went on windsurfing outings. Jan tried a couple of times in very light wind, but it was hard for him to sail back, you had to know the tricks, so I sailed the board back. I was glad I could windsurf. You lose a lot of weight doing this sport which was great.

Don't stop dreaming! Now that I am old, I only do cross country skiing and biking. It's easier than walking a long distance. Although I continue to dream and challenge myself, I never thought I would take a memoir writing class. I enjoy this class very much, and I thank Nita Regnier who gives her time and is a great teacher.

— *Elsa Tian*

The mission of the **Association of MIT Retirees** is to provide opportunities for members to engage with the Institute and to develop programs and events that will be of both interest and fun. We strive to be an active component in the MIT family by keeping our members in touch with each other and with the Institute, and to forge new friendships.

Nancy Alusow is chair of the Association. The organization is supported by Traci Swartz and Chris Ronsicki of the Community Services Office.

Please send suggestions for activities to:

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