

## PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN SETTING THE BAR

Before the official establishment of the RGS Alumnae (RGSA) on 31 January 2015, Ms Leong Choi Fun, President of RGSA and her council members had worked tirelessly on making their case for an alumnae association for their alma mater. A lawyer by profession, Choi Fun has helped numerous clients and friends through difficult periods of their lives in her practice of family law. Amidst her busy schedule (a typical day at work for her can involve attending to cases in the Family Justice Court for hearings or mediations, meeting with clients and attending corporate meetings, drafting of agreements and doing legal research), Choi Fun still devotes a portion of her time to give back to her alma mater in her capacity as RGSA's first President, which she says has been an "honour and privilege". Under her leadership, the RGSA has ticked off milestone after milestone, and the evidence of her success is clear - in a span of less than two years, the association has already managed to raise more than \$70,000 for the school's New Campus Development Fund, reconnect cohorts of RGS girls across decades through numerous RGSA-organised programmes and activities, and establish an RGS Alumnae Award for RGS girls. To date, there are over 200 members registered in the RGSA.

With the year coming to a close, Choi Fun and her team are not resting on their laurels with plans for upcoming fundraisers, and more networking and catching-up opportunities that RGSA members can look forward to in 2017. In time to come, Choi Fun also hopes to see RGSA members being involved in social causes and giving back to society - something that she herself is passionate about. With Choi Fun at the helm, the bar has been set for what the RGSA can achieve, and there is no argument that the association will continue to be a valued part of the big Rafflesian family.

### Success of the RGS Alumnae

*"A huge component of that success definitely lies in the 'dream team' of Executive Council members of the RGSA. Our members have a strong sense of service, are creative and productive, and true to the RGS spirit, results-oriented. The best part is the culture of members stepping up to take over or complete any project or task from another, with no questions asked and no blame assigned. But without the support of the Principal and staff in the Alumnae Relations Office of RGS, the RGSA would not have been able to achieve what it has thus far. The warm and constructive relationship between the Executive Council and RGS staff has no doubt helped us achieve our mutual and joint goals seamlessly. The RGSA looks forward to fostering even closer ties with the school."*

### Recalling Her Days at RGS

*"I had to wake up at 5.30am for school because I had to take three buses just to get there! During recess, I would also share food with classmates who either forgot to bring their food or who did not have pocket money that day. Every Saturday, I would be marching under the hot sun from 8am to 12pm for National Police Cadet Corps, then I would run off for badminton training after a quick lunch. The physical training was demanding, but the fact that RGS was always the champion in the Bukit Timah district and sometimes in the inter-district games during my time made it worthwhile. Vacations were the best! We had sleepovers at friends' homes, played badminton with my teammate's elder brother to improve our skills, and we also walked the whole of Orchard Road to find the outlet selling the t-shirt that we wanted at the cheapest price."*



Choi Fun as Athena, the Goddess of War and Wisdom, during a party.



Choi Fun with her Secondary 3 classmates in RGS. Can you tell which is her?

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### Impact of Her RGS Experience

"...Badminton training was tough, especially after marching under the sun for the preceding four hours. On one occasion, our coach called three of us together, took out \$10 from her wallet and told us to go have a good lunch before reporting for training later that day. What I felt and learnt then has defined my values today, and that is, it is important to be kind. Most of my classmates and I did not come from privileged homes and our wardrobe was limited. I remember my classmate coming to my home to try on what I had when she was invited to a party, while another classmate would stay back after school to teach and explain difficult equations and their applications to us. It is this philosophy of caring and sharing that has made me lifelong friends. Fast forward today, we would also be at the hospital to pick up our single friends from surgery and do grocery shopping for them during their recovery."

### Career Highs & Lows

"The career lows are easy to remember. There was a lot of pressure to resign when I got pregnant and was due to go on my confinement. It was also difficult to take leave for my children's events. When I told my male firm partner that I wanted to take time off to watch my three-year-old son perform in a concert, his response was, "Surely you have more important things to do here?" Well, that actually helped me to decide that I should start my own legal practice as I anticipated that things would only get worse. On the flip side, legal practice provided a good revenue stream, which in turn gave investment opportunities. I am fortunate that my career has made me financially independent. More importantly, my practice of family law allows me to help clients and friends through difficult periods of their lives. It is extremely rewarding to see them walk out of my office or the family court looking more positive and happier at the end of their divorce or custody proceedings."

### Life Lessons She Has Learnt

"It is difficult to change the mindsets of employers towards women and pregnancy. I tell myself that when my staff has to take time off, whether for their children or elderly parents, I should be supportive and understanding. After all, if I was an employee, I would want the same treatment. The proverbial glass ceiling does exist and it is for us to find ways to break it or to seek alternatives. There are many solutions to a problem and what we have to do is to explore the options and choose the one that works best for us. There are also sacrifices that one has to make at different stages of our life. What is important is that the sacrifice is for a worthy and deserving cause. It is important to remain strong, take any setbacks in your stride and focus on the ultimate goal."

### Advice to Aspiring Lawyers

"Apart from knowing the law and how to apply it, it is important to read continually and keep updated on recent and landmark developments. Every lawyer wants to win, but one should never cross the line just for the sake of victory. Never compromise your integrity nor underestimate the importance of trust. While your clients and members of the profession can accept errors of legal judgement, your professional life will never be the same if your reputation is tainted with dishonesty. It is also important to wake up in the morning and look forward to going to work. In choosing the law or any profession, RGS girls should ask themselves if this is the profession they want to be in and why."



Choi Fun with her beautiful family.

### Striking a Balance

"I must admit that it is difficult striking a balance amongst the many roles I've taken on over the years. When I became a mother, my children were my priority and focus, and like most other parents, I postponed my own wants when my three sons were young. Of course, when a break was warranted, I would leave them with the helper and return home more relaxed and energised after a holiday. As they grew older, I recovered the opportunity for time for myself. My husband likes to tell his friends that he lives by three rules:

1. Do not argue with your wife.
2. Do not argue with your wife particularly when she is a lawyer.
3. Obey rule number 1 and 2 and you can retire early, play golf and have lunch with your friends and basically, be free to do as you please anytime you want.

He is joking of course, but really, he appreciates what I need to do at this point of my life and is supportive of my career and RGS Alumnae work."

### Hopes for RGS

"When RGS moves to her new campus in a few years' time, we must not forget that the change in location and building is only a physical and external thing. What is important is that the RGS spirit must remain. For the girls, I hope that like me, they too will make life-long friends from school and learn the values of kindness, sharing and respect. I also hope that the school can continue to instil in the students the ability to acknowledge and accept that sometimes failure is a reality of life and that lessons can be learnt from adversity. Having the strength and tenacity to pick yourself up and soldier on is a valuable life skill that all students need to have. When the current generation has achieved success in their chosen field 20 years down the road, I hope that they will have it in them to want to give back and to serve, whether it is to the school, the community or the country. Only then would RGS have succeeded in truly educating our students and producing daughters of a better age."