

Singapore HeritageFest 2009
“Our Neighbours’ Heroes” Storytelling Competition
1st Prize Winner (Upper Primary Category)



Participant's Details

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Lim Bo Seng

Good afternoon, judges, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls.

Heroes often risk their own lives to save the lives of others. They never allow obstacles to get in their way. Lim Bo Seng of Singapore was a hero who risked his own life for the lives of his fellow citizens during World War II! My story about Lim Bo Seng is told by his wife, Gan Choo Neo, a Straits-born Nonya.

My husband, Lim Bo Seng, was born in 1909 in Fujian, China. He came to Singapore and studied at Raffles Institution at the age of 16. Upon his father's death, he inherited his businesses which included the Hock Ann Biscuits and factories which manufactured bricks.

Ours was a love marriage, unusual in those days when matchmaking was common. I used to go to his house to tutor his sisters. We had seven wonderful children.

In the 1930s, Bo Seng participated in anti-Japanese activities in Singapore. Upon the request of Sir Shenton Thomas, the Governor, he formed the Chinese Liaison Committee to assist in civil defence.

In 1942, Bo Seng and Tan Kah Kee organised more than 10,000 men for the British Government to man essential services and to construct defences around the island.

He escaped to India before Singapore fell to the Japanese. He was joined by the British resistance group, Force 136.

Bo Seng was well aware what risking his life would mean for his family in Singapore. Before he left for India, he told me, “You must not grieve for me, Choo Neo. Take pride in my sacrifice and devote yourself to the upbringing of our children. Tell them what happened to me and direct them along my footsteps. It is very painful for me to put the whole burden on your shoulders, but I'm confident that you are capable of bearing it well.”

Bo Seng's parting words kept me going from day to day. I had to keep the family together during the Japanese Occupation. I sold my jewellery but I vowed never to tell my children what I was going through. I tried to give them a very normal family life.

Bo Seng was a meticulous and successful businessman and also a devoted family man. Why didn't he arrange for the children and I to flee together with him, you may ask? I found out from his diary given to me much later that he had wanted very much for us to be with him. However, as a leader in the resistance movement, he felt that he should not care only about his family.

Soon after Singapore fell to Japan, Bo Seng was captured and tortured by the Japanese military police for not revealing the names of the leaders who worked with him. He passed away in Batu Gajah prison in 1944 at the age of 35, and was buried there. His remains were finally reburied in Singapore and a memorial was erected at the Esplanade Park.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, Major-General Lim Bo Seng was exemplary in all areas of his life. He was an outstanding entrepreneur. He loved his family dearly and was a patriotic and courageous leader.

Major-General Lim Bo Seng is a great hero of the Chinese community but he is my hero too because of his great sacrifice for the people of Singapore, my country and my home.

I would like to dedicate a verse of the Hero song to all the heroes in our stories and to the hero that lies in each of us here:

“And then a hero comes along,
With the strength to carry on,
And you'll finally see the truth
That a hero lies in you.”

Thank you and have a nice day.