A TASTE OF HOW THE OTHER SIDE WORKS
INTERNSHIPS IN FOREIGN LAW FIRMS

SHANGHAI, CHINA
Kicking off their Shanghai experience before their semester on exchange at the East China University of Politics of Law, Chang Peiqi Rebecca ’06, Lai Yu Lin Felicia ’06 and Chen Shiyun Su-Anne ’06 intern at Grandall Legal Group’s office in Shanghai. Rebecca shares their experiences.

Our internship experience in Shanghai was totally different from any internship we had done before. It was exciting and meaningful to be able to contribute our English abilities to assist the lawyers and the firm in translating their contracts (some of them big ones for companies like Virgin and Avis). It was interesting to realise how this ability which we take so much for granted in Singapore is so coveted and important in China. All in all, it was a precious and valuable opportunity to have experienced working life in the bustling city of Shanghai - where so many Singaporeans are flocking to nowadays!

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA
Jonathan Oon ’06 and Ho Ching Ying Victoria Anne ’07 on their internship at Dibbs Abbott Stillman in Brisbane

Interning at Dibbs Abbots Stillman was an extremely beneficial experience. While generally similar to working in a local big firm, there are some little differences which cannot be adequately described in words. The working culture for one is quite different from our local culture - the operating hours of the firm are truly 8am to 5pm! Victoria was part of the Commercial Litigation team, while Jonathan was assigned to do Corporate Advisory work. Interns are known as Research Clerks while junior associates are Articled Clerks and we were each provided with our own offices (complete with door!). As part of the internship, Victoria saw Administrative Law in action, and researched into Aviation Law policies. Jonathan had a very hands-on experience - he drafted corporate documents, contracts regarding franchises and client letters, incorporated companies and handled a file regarding a nuisance case. The lawyers expected us to be able to work independently on any legal issues given and were very approachable when we needed guidance. The chance to work in a foreign law firm was enriching and rewarding. Not only were we able to experience a different legal culture and acquaint ourselves with Australian law, we also experienced the wonderful, laid back atmosphere of Australia. We visited Singaporean friends on exchange at the University of Queensland, shopped in Gold Coast and found an excellent “Makan House”! We doubt there will ever be another opportunity to combine work and play so well in future!

HAMBURG, GERMANY
Adrian Chan ’06 reports on his internship with Luther Menold Rechtsanwaltsgesellschaft mbH in Hamburg.

In the Summer of 2005, I worked as a Rechts Referendar (Legal Trainee) for 2 months with a German law firm called Luther Menold (now known as Luther) in Hamburg. This was my second time in Hamburg after living there for 4 months as an exchange student. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience to see the Civilian Legal System in practice. During my stints there, I attended German Court Hearings, worked at the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) hearings and did legal research. In particular, the Labor Court Hearings were a real eye opener as they did not seem adversarial but instead resembled the mediation sessions conducted by the Singapore District Court. Interacting with the German Trainees was particularly memorable and that interaction extended past the office to leisure activities as well. My German friends invited me to numerous lunches, parties and gave me a ticket to attend a televised German talk-show as part of the live studio audience. My weekends were spent traveling to different parts of Germany such as Munich and Leipzig. All in all, a most enriching experience.

The Faculty aims to send more of our students on internship overseas. In 2006, our students will have other opportunities, including an internship at Clyde & Co., Hong Kong. If your company would like to offer internships to NUS Law students, please email daphneloke@nus.edu.sg
When one door closes another opens

High Commissioner to South Africa, MPH Rubin ‘66 shares his thoughts on his move from the Supreme Court bench to Pretoria and reminisces on his career.
BECOMING HIGH COMMISSIONER OF SOUTH AFRICA AFTER OVER A DECADE AS A JUDGE IS A SIGNIFICANT MOVE. WHAT ARE THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN YOUR FORMER POSITION AND YOUR NEW ONE?

It was indeed a significant move. To borrow an analogy from the field of transportation, it can be likened to moving from piloting a modern passenger aircraft to that of navigating a state of the art ocean liner. On the bench, a judge will have to deal with human aspects and individual perceptions whereas in diplomacy the issues centre on state interests and national concerns. Also, the process of judging involves, in the main, internal aspects, albeit with an external perspective whereas diplomacy and statecraft revolve around external relationships with internal implications. In judicial decision making the aim is to render justice between two competing claims whereas in diplomacy its exercise involves inter-play between two or more sovereign nations. In the administration of justice, the ultimate aim is justice itself whereas in diplomacy the object, in sum, is goodwill and mutual gain. In the administration of justice, expeditious disposal is vital to its very essence whereas in diplomacy, the norm is patient engagement and step by step build-up.

WHAT DO YOU MISS ABOUT BEING IN THE JUDICIARY?

No doubt, I miss the challenges that court cases presented to me each week during my tenure on the Supreme Court Bench. The law and justice do not operate in vacuo. Dispute resolution and the process of judicial evaluation tend to traverse a complex maze of real life drama - actions and reactions of men and women, their perceptions, foibles, prejudices and predilections. Consequently, decision making necessarily calls for a rigorous mental exercise and balancing. This studied discipline cannot be found elsewhere. While I do miss the intellectual ferment that is unique to judicial decision making, I must hasten to add that the demands of diplomacy are equally fulfilling and their intensity is no less insignificant. I have to say being a diplomat has been thoroughly satisfying.

WHAT WERE YOUR THOUGHTS WHEN YOU FIRST LEARNED OF YOUR NEW POSITION AND HAS YOUR VIEW CHANGED AS YOU SETTLE INTO YOUR NEW ROLE?

I was not unprepared for the challenges the new assignment would most likely present. Diplomacy is something which was not altogether unfamiliar to my family. My wife served as Singapore’s Ambassador in the Benelux, the EU and The Vatican in the late eighties and early nineties. She is currently Singapore’s non-resident Ambassador to the Czech Republic. In any event, from my early days, I kept myself abreast with current affairs and developments in the fields of finance and economics. So, when I received word that I might be posted to Pretoria, I welcomed it. Being High Commissioner is very fulfilling. The terrain is new but not unprepossessing. I find the diplomatic community here extremely vibrant and I am really happy to be here. South Africa is also an exciting place in terms of its demography and culture. It is, as has been described by its leaders, a rainbow nation.

MOVING BACK TO THE LEGAL FIELD, HOW DO YOU THINK PRACTICE HAS CHANGED SINCE YOU WERE A PRACTICING LAWYER, FIRST WITH DAVID MARSHALL AND THEN WITH YOUR CO-PARTNER FORMER JUSTICE AMARJIT SINGH?

The technology that is commonplace today was then in its infancy. Legal research necessarily warranted many hours of back-breaking effort going through volumes of print medium. Practitioners often had to rely on their power of recall to get to the source of learning to develop their arguments. Information technology has since changed the face of law practice substantially. However, in my view, there is one facet of practice that will remain intact, the aspect of application and discernment as well as the individual practitioner’s ability to sift the relevant from the irrelevant. The art of persuasion and the practitioners’ ability to think on his or her feet cannot be replicated by any man-made object. It is apt to quote what the legendary David Marshall remarked to me once. He intoned: “A soul-less computer cannot replicate human endeavours in excellence and compassion.”

MOST FRESH GRADUATES ARE EAGER TO BE CALLED TO THE BAR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO GET CALLED TO THE BAR ONLY IN 1974?

After graduation, I did not think of practising law immediately. So when an opportunity presented itself, I joined the Straits Times where I managed to learn and master some, if not all, of the aspects of editorial and printing management in addition to industrial relations. The experience and insight I gained in my Straits Times days served me well in my later days, both in legal practice as well as on the Supreme Court Bench.

YOU WERE WORKING WITH THE STRAITS TIMES GROUP IN 1966, RIGHT AFTER INDEPENDENCE. HANDLING HUMAN RESOURCE AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, THOSE MUST HAVE BEEN VERY CHALLENGING TIMES?

The Straits Times, in fact, turned out to be my second alma mater - those were my days of further learning. I had wonderful colleagues who were ever willing to share their knowledge and expertise with me. I learned an essential principle - to be frank and forthcoming in my dealing with the trade unions which represented employees of the Straits Group in Singapore and Malaysia then. Although there was a certain degree of tension, as was not uncommon in employer-union relationship in those days, I enjoyed a very sound relationship with the shop stewards of the day and I managed to win the confidence of many of them. I was also singularly fortunate to have worked with the late former President Wee Kim Wee, who was a close colleague, mentor and friend to me. I still cherish the many friendships I made in my days with the Straits Times and am in touch with some of my former colleagues with the Straits Times, including its present editor-in-chief Cheong Yip Seng.

LOOKING BACK ON YOUR CAREER, WHAT DO YOU KNOW NOW THAT YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN WHEN YOU FIRST STEPPED OUT OF LAW SCHOOL?

The process of learning never stops. For me, life is a continuum of learning. What the law school does is to provide the student with a reasonable grounding of substantive and procedural laws. The rest is for the individual to seize and thrive. It is like music. A gift is one thing, but without application, industry, dedication and rigorous practice one cannot excel. In the same vein, the life of law develops only after one leaves law school.

WHAT ARE YOUR BEST AND WORST MEMORIES OF YOUR LAW SCHOOL DAYS?

I have nothing but happy and pleasant memories of my days in the campus, for I enjoyed my university life to the full. The friendships I made then still flourish.
Before long, the Law School will once again be nestled amidst lush greenery at the Bukit Timah campus. The new premises will offer the Faculty close to double the space it currently occupies at the Kent Ridge campus. The historical conservation buildings will be complemented by beautifully landscaped surroundings, enhancing its setting amidst the Singapore Botanic Gardens. State-of-the-art teaching facilities will be developed at 'Block B' - the hub of student activities. Besides numerous modern seminar rooms and classrooms, 'Block B' will boast a new Moot Court; a gymnasium; rooms for student clubs; separate lounges for undergraduate and postgraduate students and a multi-purpose auditorium that can seat over 300 people and may be used to stage performances that are open to the public. In addition to the study spaces in the law library there will also be a large study room available in Block B that can accommodate over 100 students. Besides the food courts run by the National Parks Board, and dining available at the NUSS Guild House at Bukit Timah, Block B will also provide another dining option for alumni, staff and students. The Law School looks forward to inviting you to visit us at our new home – an ideal place to celebrate your (next) class reunion!
“CAN A PERSON GET ATTACHED TO “BRICK AND MORTAR.” YES YOU CAN! ESPECIALLY IF IT IS THE PLACE WHERE YOU STUDIED – SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY. AND SO MANY OF US ARE ATTACHED TO THE LAW FACULTY BUILDINGS IN THE BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS. NEVER MIND THAT THE TUTORIAL ROOMS WERE VERY SMALL; SOME LECTURES WERE IN CREAKY PREWAR BUILDINGS THAT HAD NO AIRCONDITIONING OR THAT THE LIBRARY WAS ALWAYS CROWDED BECAUSE IT HAD TO BE SHARED. THE ATTACHMENT HAS ALWAYS STAYED. IT IS EVEN MORE SATISFYING TO KNOW THAT THE FACULTY WOULD BE RETURNING TO ITS PLACE OF BIRTH. I CAN RELATE TO THE FACULTY MUCH BETTER IN OLD FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS. AS KEATS SAID “A THING OF BEAUTY IS A JOY FOREVER, ITS LOVELINESS INCREASES, IT WILL NEVER PASS INTO NOTHINGNESS.” SAT PAL KHATTAR ’68


“THE SENIOR LAW GRADUATES FROM BUKIT TIMAH CAMPUS (BTC) FROM 1957, WHEN OUR LAW SCHOOL STARTED, TO THE LATE 1970S, WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO SEE OUR LAW FACULTY GOING BACK TO ITS ROOTS IN BTC IN MID-2006. IT IS A CAMPUS THAT WAS COMPACT AND INTIMATE, AND I REMEMBER MY CAMPUS WITH FOND MEMORIES, HAVING CREATED THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CLOSE FRIENDSHIP AMONGST LAW STUDENTS AND STUDENTS FROM SO MANY OTHER FACULTIES AND ALSO OUR LECTURERS WHO HAVE NOW BECOME OUR FRIENDS IN THE LEGAL FRATERNITY. AND I AM SURE MANY OF US WOULD LOVE TO VISIT BTC IN ALL ITS GLORY. IT IS MY HOPE THAT WE WOULD, AS ALUMNI MEMBERS, GIVE OUR FULL SUPPORT IN WHATSOEVER WAY WE CAN TO OUR LAW FACULTY AND TO NUS.” CHANDRA MOHAN NAIR ’78

“INITIALLY, LIKE MANY OTHER STUDENTS, I HAD MIXED REACTIONS TOWARDS THE MOVE TO BTC, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE KENT RIDGE CAMPUS WAS RECENTLY BEAUTIFULLY RENOVATED. GRADUALLY, AS I LEARNED OF THE PRELIMINARY PLANS FOR THE NEW CAMPUS, MY OPINION CHANGED. I BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE LAW SCHOOL HAD BEEN PRESENTED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO INHABIT A TRULY ICONIC CAMPUS BEFITTING OF ITS REPUTATION. I LOOK FORWARD TO STROLLING AROUND THE HISTORIC AND BEAUTIFUL GROUNDS IN THE NEXT ACADEMIC YEAR.” CHAN KIM WEN ’08
If you do a quick survey of the burgeoning arts scene in Singapore, you may find that considering our size, the Law School can proudly claim a relatively large number of alumni in the arts. In an earlier interview with LawLink (Jul-Dec 2004), champion of the arts, Prof Tommy Koh '61 declared that he believed that those alumni who have distinguished themselves in the arts are “creative in spite of their legal education.” Adrian Tan '91, of The Teeneage Textbook & Workbook fame seems to agree. When asked if he thought legal training was useful to someone working in the arts, Adrian remarked, “[It’s] definitely a hindrance. “Law is the product of logic, fact and practicality. The Arts are the result of fantasy, imagination and speculation. That is why good lawyers are rarely good artists. And if you attempt to combine the two, for example by introducing surrealism elements into your puplications, you will not be assisting your client.” On a slightly more serious note, Sherman Ong '95 (a filmmaker whose latest film 'Meat Vegetables and Dessert' features the preparation of fresh dog meat) thinks legal thinking can be a disadvantage “because it is too logical while the creative process is not a logical animal - humans by nature are not logical but emotional creatures.” Eleanor Wong '85 who has produced award-winning plays and is the Director of the Faculty's Legal Writing Programme, adds “I think true artists really can’t be bothered with what other training” they get. They will take whatever it is (law, architecture, needlework) and somehow find a way to channel it into the primary purpose which drives them - making art. In that sense, legal training cannot truly hinder the artiste - it can’t beat the creativity out of her even if it tried. Nor can legal training truly help the artiste - law provides no inherent stimulant for artistic creativity. Others have a different perspective. Lynn Lee '96 believes that “legal training helps you think logically and be very precise about what you mean and what you want to say. That is important, especially when you’re a documentary film maker.” Lynn has produced an acclaimed documentary feature PASSABE - about Indonesia’s occupation of East Timor, now Timor Leste. Claire Wong '88, Co-Founder and Joint Artistic Director of Checkpoint Theatre thinks that “the basic skills set required in law and acting is similar - the ability to understand, analyze and interpret text: to work out the “intention” behind the words. Both require oral advocacy skills - the actor has to understand his character’s thoughts and advance his character’s interest and intentions in the play. Basically, they both involve good old fashioned story telling.”