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# law link

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DEBBIE ONG '89

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

NOELLE SEET '02

THE ALUMNI MAGAZINE OF  
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE  
FACULTY OF LAW



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## DEAN'S DIARY

Universities are, at their best, places where ideas are born. From the most influential research to the spark of creativity kindled in an undergraduate's mind, what unites the many people at NUS Law is a commitment to education and research that makes a difference.

It is my hope that the Amaladass Professorship will encourage more students to consider a career specialising in criminal law—and perhaps play an important role in ensuring access to justice for all Singaporeans.



In the pages that follow you can find out about some of the ways in which NUS Law and our alumni have made a difference, both on our campus and beyond.

Among many highlights this year, the launch of the Amaladass Professorship in Criminal Justice stands out for two reasons. The first is the extraordinary generosity of an anonymous donor who chose to honour the legacy of his friend, the lawyer Mr M. Amaladass, by establishing a chair in his name. The second reason is that the first holder of the chair, Professor Ho Hock Lai '89, used the opportunity to offer a thoughtful and thought-provoking account of the manner in which the right to counsel has developed in Singapore. Chaired by leading criminal defence lawyer Subhas Anandan '70, this event was a timely reminder that the rewards of being a lawyer can be more than financial. It is my hope that the Amaladass Professorship will encourage more students to consider a career specialising in criminal law—and perhaps play an important role in ensuring access to justice for all Singaporeans.



Another way in which NUS Law aspires to make a difference is through the impact of our research. In recent months we launched our Centre for Law & Business and the new Centre for Banking & Finance Law. These and our other centres provide focal points where NUS Law and Singapore have a strategic interest or a comparative advantage. As part of the larger effort to make Singapore a thought leader in law, these centres represent peaks of excellence in legal research that can have a measurable policy impact. They

earned their degrees this year join an extraordinary group that have made their mark in every area of the law—and in a great many other areas.

You may have heard it said that NUS Law doesn't produce enough community lawyers for our society. The stories in this edition of LawLink beg to differ. Malathi Das '92, Debbie Ong '89 and Anand Nalachandran '99, for example, have established practices in Family and Criminal Law.

Over the years, they and others like them have also demonstrated their deep commitment to the community in which they live by championing causes close to their hearts. Malathi Das '92, on our cover, is the President of the Singapore Council for Women's Organisations (SCWO). Noelle Seet '02, also featured in these pages, left litigation practice to pursue her twin passions of photography and animal welfare at ACRES. Anand Nalachandran '99 is a criminal lawyer with a significant pro bono commitment and teaches criminal practice at NUS Law. Stephanie Yuen Thio '93 is a corporate lawyer who volunteers with Dover Park Hospice and SmileAsia. Assoc Prof Debbie Ong '89 has just begun her term as Judicial Commissioner of the High Court.



Dr Beh Swan Gin (Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Law), Assoc Prof Alexander Loke '90, Philip R Wood QC, Minister K Shanmugam '84, Assoc Prof Dora Neo, Dean Simon Chesterman

join our existing Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Law (APCEL), the Centre for International Law, and our Centre for Asian Legal Studies, each bringing together expertise from Singapore and beyond.

But the widest and deepest impact that NUS Law has is through the achievements of our students and our alumni. This year's commencement ceremony saw a degree awarded to our 10,000th graduate. The young men and women who

In the pages that follow you can read about some of these achievements and the other ways in which our alumni remain an active part of NUS Law.

I hope you enjoy this annual print edition of LawLink and look forward to hearing about your own news in the near future.

**SIMON CHESTERMAN**  
Dean, NUS Law



## CRIMINAL LAW EXPERTISE STRENGTHENED BY AMALADASS PROFESSORSHIP

**NUS Law has established the Amaladass Professorship in Criminal Justice, with the aim of strengthening and deepening the faculty's expertise in criminal law. The honour of being appointed the inaugural Amaladass Professor in Criminal Justice went to Prof Ho Hock Lai '89 in April this year, for a term of three years.**

Built upon the Amaladass Fellowship that was first established in 2009 in memory of the late legal practitioner Mr M Amaladass, the anonymous donor has boosted the initiative with an additional gift to NUS Law to convert the Fellowship into an endowed Professorship. Endowed chairs at NUS typically require a minimum S\$2 million gift.

With this Professorship, the donor wishes to honour Mr Amaladass' life and work during his many years in private practice. The donor also hopes that this will promote research in criminal law in Singapore, as well as encourage NUS Law students to consider a career in this field.

Dean Simon Chesterman said: "This gift is an extraordinary gesture to honour a good friend. It is also a timely reminder that the rewards of being a lawyer can be more than financial. The Amaladass Professorship will encourage more students to consider a career specialising in criminal law—and perhaps play an important role in ensuring access to justice for all Singaporeans."

Mr Amaladass was a veteran lawyer specialising in criminal litigation for 28 years. He started his career as a police officer and was a police prosecutor before he retired at the rank of Assistant Superintendent. He studied law in London and was called to the Singapore Bar in 1980. Mr Amaladass passed away in December 2008 at the age of 73 after a heart attack.

### AMALADASS PROFESSORSHIP INAUGURAL LECTURE

Prof Ho '89 kept more than 100 legal practitioners, students and academics engaged in the "Amaladass Professorship in Criminal Justice Launch Lecture" that took place on 17 September 2014. Titled "Recent (Non-) Developments in the Right to Counsel", the lecture was chaired by well-known criminal lawyer Mr Subhas Anandan '70. A tribute to the late Mr Amaladass was given by Mr Chelva Retnam Rajah, SC, and provided an insight into the fond memories and positive impressions that Mr Amaladass left with those who knew him.



During the lecture, Prof Ho shared his thoughts on the right of an arrested person to have access to a lawyer—an issue that has been in contention in recent cases. In supporting his views, he gave his analysis and reflections on the state of the law and made comparisons with the positions taken in other jurisdictions, such as South Korea and Malaysia.

An alumnus of NUS Law, Prof Ho obtained his Master of Laws degree (the Bachelor of Civil Law) from the University of Oxford and his PhD from the University of Cambridge. He joined NUS Law in 1991.

Prof Ho's expertise lies in the areas of criminal evidence and legal theory, including the administration of criminal justice. Some of his works include "A Philosophy of Evidence Law: Justice in the Search for Truth" (Oxford University Press, 2008); "Law, Virtue and Justice" (editor with Amalias Amaya, Hart Publishing, 2013); and articles in various Singapore and international journals. Prof Ho's works have also been cited in the appeal courts of Singapore and other Commonwealth countries, as well as in texts on evidence.

NUS CENTRE FOR BANKING & FINANCE LAW  
MARINA MANDARIN SINGAPORE | FRI 12 SEP 2014

# CENTRE FOR BANKING & FINANCE LAW

## THE NEW THOUGHT LEADER

*Assoc Prof Alexander Loke '90, Dean Simon Chesterman,  
Minister K Shanmugam '84, Assoc Prof Dora Neo*

NUS Law's Centre for Banking & Finance Law (CBFL) is set to become a catalyst for ideas on improving banking and financial systems at the national, regional and global levels. The centre was officially launched by Mr K Shanmugam '84, Minister for Law and Minister for Foreign Affairs, on 12 September 2014, at Marina Mandarin Hotel, Singapore.

The centre brings together local and international bankers, lawyers, regulators and academics to generate scholarship, policy recommendations and exchange of ideas about the vibrancy, robustness, soundness and stability of the banking sector, capital markets and other financial services. CBFL's focus is on important aspects of banking and finance law and regulation, including financial industry reform, new regulations, and private law issues.

The launch event was attended by about 300 local and international bankers, lawyers, regulators and academics. The event also featured the Distinguished Speaker Lecture by Prof Philip R Wood, QC (Hon), a world-renowned expert in comparative and cross-border financial law and an experienced practitioner, on the future of international banking and financial law and lawyers. Prof Wood was joined by a panel of six speakers from the academic, legal and banking sectors, who engaged the audience in a discussion on the topics highlighted in his lecture.

Prof Simon Chesterman, Dean of NUS Law, said, "Bringing together expertise that covers the major economies of the region and most of the globe, the Centre for Banking & Finance Law will enhance Singapore's status as an international financial centre and thought leader in three ways. First, as a convenor, the Centre will engage local and international banks, lawyers, regulators, and academics in a regular exchange of ideas. Secondly, as a thought-leader, the Centre will generate new insights of scholarly value and policy relevance. Thirdly, as a platform, the Centre will ensure that these ideas have an impact in both the classroom and the boardroom."

Assoc Prof Dora Neo, Director of CBFL, said, "Dedicated research and more informed practice will meet at CBFL, for in-depth and intensive dialogue on important issues affecting the financial services industry. Deeper knowledge and greater policy clarity can then be applied in resolving these issues. This will contribute to

advancing Singapore's position as an international financial centre and enhancing trust in banks and financial institutions globally."

### LEADERSHIP TEAM

Assoc Prof Dora Neo, Director of CBFL, is assisted by Assoc Prof Alexander Loke '90, Deputy Director of the Centre, and an executive committee comprising four faculty members of NUS Law. CBFL currently has six Academic Fellows and one Industry Fellow, as well as a team of adjunct researchers.

The Centre's Advisory Panel includes Dr Andrew Khoo, Deputy Managing Director (Corporate Development) of the Monetary Authority of Singapore; leading banking and finance lawyers Mr Ng Wai King '90, Mr Eugene Ooi and Ms Jacqueline Low Mei Lin; and bank counsel, Mr Lam Chee Kin. It also includes two eminent academics, Emeritus Prof Peter Ellinger from NUS Law and Prof Michael Bridge, who holds a dual appointment with NUS Law and the London School of Economics.

### RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES

CBFL Fellows and researchers undertake research on important legal topics, such as moneylending and consumer credit in Singapore; contractual clauses commonly used in the financial services industry such as non-reliance clauses and forfeiture for competition clauses; new forms

of payment such as bitcoin; banking terminology; reform of insurance law in Singapore; and securities regulation in China.



*(Top) Assoc Prof Dora Neo making her speech.  
(Bottom) Prof Philip Wood making a point on value.*

**Bringing together expertise that covers the major economies of the region and most of the globe, the Centre for Banking & Finance Law will enhance Singapore's status as an international financial centre and thought leader.**

PROF SIMON CHESTERMAN, DEAN OF NUS LAW

In addition, CBFL has organised workshops and seminars featuring academics, practitioners and bank counsel from Singapore, as well as guests from countries such as Malaysia, India, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Liechtenstein and Canada. Speakers featured at the events also included experts from the Asian Development Bank and People's Bank of China.

CBFL has also collaborated with organisations such as the Brussels Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), and the Asia Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association (ASIFMA) based in Hong Kong. A wide range of topics were covered at these events, including responses to the global financial crisis; the internationalisation of the renminbi; derivatives regulation; dispute resolution in Islamic finance; mobile payments; and market misconduct affecting securities.



Mr Shaun Langhorne, Partner, Hogan Lovells



Prof Hans Tjjo



Mr Ang Cheng Hock '95, SC, Allen & Gledhill



Dean Simon Chesterman together with the Executive Committee & Advisory Panel for CBFL



Mr Ng Wai King '90, Joint Managing Partner, WongPartnership



Mr Chee Kin Lam, Regional Head for Legal and Compliance, Standard Chartered Bank

In the months ahead, CBFL will be organising two major events—a symposium on banking secrecy from 4 - 5 December, 2014, and a conference on comparative takeover regulation in July 2015.



Mr Ng Heng Fatt '79, General Counsel, Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS)

## LAMP APPRECIATION EVENING

Nearly 200 mentors and mentees from the NUS Law Alumni Mentorship Programme (LAMP) met up on 3 October 2014, for an evening of conversations on shared experiences. The networking session took place at NineThirty by Awfully Chocolate at the Esplanade.

LAMP is a collaboration between the Career Centre@Law and the NUS Law Alumni Office. The programme links first and second year students with alumni mentors who can share first hand experiences, provide insights to the legal profession, give practical guidance, encouragement and support.

This programme better equips students to make well-informed decisions about their professional development.

If you are willing to share your time and experience with our students and would like to be updated on next year's LAMP, please email us at [lawlink@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lawlink@nus.edu.sg)



# CLASS OF 2014 COMMENCEMENT



# CLASS OF 2014 FAREWELL DINNER



# WOMAN WITH A MISSION

MALATHI DAS '92

A natural leader, Malathi Das was elected President of the Singapore Council for Women's Organisations (SCWO) earlier this year. Passionate about the causes she champions, Malathi shares her expectations for the future, her thoughts about legal practice, and her memories of student life at NUS Law.



## What inspired you to pursue a career in law?

I was a very talkative child and remember being told by my late father that I should become a lawyer as I might as well earn a living from talking so much. But I think somewhere along the line, my own interest in story-telling then public-speaking, communication and social issues was slowly paving the way for a career which might either have ended up in journalism or the law.

By the time I got to junior college, I was quite certain law was for me, but was not sure if my grades would get me into the then one law school as I knew my parents could not afford to send me overseas. One of the happiest days in my life was receiving my acceptance from NUS Law. I think it was my father's too. I know he was very proud when I got called to the Bar, and he bought me my first court-bag.

Little did I know then that apart from being a practising lawyer, I was going to have a career in law in the truest sense of the word in terms of opportunities to teach it (at SILE), take on leadership positions locally (Law Society) and internationally (LAWASIA), and do my little bit to shape and influence the law and its practice.

## With your recent appointment as President of SCWO, what are some of your plans for the organisation?

One of the areas which I feel deserves closer attention is with respect to issues concerning ageing women. SCWO, as the national coordinating Council of 56 women's organisations, has the ability to tap on different women's groups in our membership to gather feedback, promote good practices, and propose practical initiatives and influence policy changes. We also have a voice regionally and internationally in organisations such as the ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organisations (ACWO) and at APEC.

This year, SCWO was granted special Consultative status with the United Nations ECOSOC which allows us to participate in discussions at the UN as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). I hope we will be able to use this to good effect to highlight the good initiatives Singapore has undertaken to empower women and girls, and promote gender equality and also speak up in areas in which we are still lagging or lacking.

## As a practising lawyer with a full case load, what compels you to also take on leadership roles in the community?

I have always been interested in community work and everything just evolved naturally from there. I guess you can say I just happened to be at the right (or wrong) place at the right time. But taking on the role is just part of the story. The real challenge is juggling it with everything else. I have been very fortunate to have a supportive family, colleagues and friends in the community who always respond positively to calls for help. It certainly is not something you do or can do alone. I believe in good teamwork and galvanising support from those around me. The work gets easier when you are working with and amongst those who share your vision.

**A really good lawyer is someone who also listens well. This includes listening to not only what someone says but also what he or she does not say, and understanding his or her interests and concerns.**

## Having been in the profession for over 20 years now, what do you think marks a good lawyer?

Of course, a career in law is not just about talking, but is really being able to advance a sound argument coherently and persuasively.

### LISTEN WELL

A really good lawyer is someone who also listens well. This includes listening to not only what someone says but also what he or she does not say, and understanding his or her interests and concerns. It is the same with listening to the judge. I learnt very early on as a mooter not to be afraid of the judge's questions and not to mistake a question as the judge trying to rattle you. A good judge asks questions in order to follow your argument, and sometimes if you are lucky, clue you in on whether or not he or she is with you on a point. A good lawyer knows how best to use these clues. After all these years, I am still learning.

### STAMINA & STRONG WORK ETHIC

There will be days where something or other will get you down. It may be a client or a case or a personal issue that may get you down. That is normal. The important thing is to regroup and get back on track. It helps to be able to sound out ideas with another person. It may be a colleague or another colleague outside the firm depending on the issue.



I find with ethical issues, it is really important to get another take on it and sometimes maybe even more than one take. A good lawyer will develop a good gut feel. When something in the pit of your stomach does not feel right, listen to it, stop and take stock. I think very few lawyers, barring a few black sheep, deliberately set out to do harm. More often than not, someone decides to take a risk or just does not want to listen to that voice inside you that warns you to check the point.

### WILLINGNESS TO LEARN & TEACH

I benefitted from many lessons taught to me by my seniors. Sometimes, it is also about unlearning bad habits, and being open to new lessons, especially as you become more senior. Humility in the profession is a rare commodity, but will take you a long way and must not be mistaken for weakness.

### In your view, what are the major problems / opportunities facing the legal industry, and where do you see the Singapore legal landscape in 10 years' time?

One concern I have for the legal industry is how business-driven it has become and consequently, seeing a slow erosion in values and ethics as a result of the need to pursue the business imperative.

Don't get me wrong. Of course, we cannot all afford to run our practices as a charity, and there is huge responsibility to our families, our employees and their families to ensure everybody is paid and the job is done well. But this cannot be at all costs.

Lawyers have a responsibility to guide their clients on the direction that their case can take and not just slavishly pursue applications or appeals just because they can.

The need to win at all costs can also lead to a lack in civility towards one another and opposing litigants. I get the impression from my seniors that when the profession was smaller, everybody knew everybody and it was a given that people were civil and treated each other with mutual respect.

Decency and courtesy were valued much more in the past and people took pride in their good reputation in the profession. These days, success seems to be measured by how much a person makes rather than the causes he supports and his fearlessness in pursuing a just cause.

Having said that, there are far more opportunities for today's lawyer than ever before. But with such opportunities, also come great responsibility and this includes the responsibility to give back to society, and hopefully not just in making donations but actually do the work where it really counts.



Ten years is not a long time in history, but I see the Singapore legal landscape becoming even more international and becoming a true melting pot of ideas and practices which are not just rooted in the common law.

### Who were your favourite professors at NUS Law? Tell us about them.

Calling favourites is probably unwise but allow me to tell you about some of my professors or teachers who were memorable to me. Professor Michael Hor '84, was my Civics tutor in Year 1 and had an understated manner about him that belied a quick wit and an interest in the law that was both broad and deep.

I remember him taking our entire civics group to watch Anthony Lester QC and Geoffrey Robertson QC argue the seminal Chng Suan Tze appeal in the Court of Appeal. It certainly lent realism to constitutional and administrative law for us.

Speaking of administrative law, one of the crowd favourites and mine was Professor LR Penna. He had a droll way of interspersing his lectures with jokes without betraying any expression which used to keep us in stitches and actively interested in the subject.

Professor Tan Yock Lin was another favourite. He taught me Conflict of Laws which is often viewed as a commercial subject, but really helped me when I came across issues involving conflicting laws in family law.

As for family law, Professor Leong Wai Kum was someone I admired from afar in law school. She was then rumoured to be harder on the girls than the boys, although I personally never experienced that. As I was already then quite interested in family law, I found her deep interest in more than just the law of family law a great inspiration. In her writing, she delved into history and societal context which are particularly important in the development of family law.

She was one of the early academic advocates for changes in family law, such as promoting our signing on to the Hague Convention on International Parental Abduction. I realised now the important role the academics have in promoting developments in the law as much as legislators as they have

**Ten years is not a long time in history, but I see the Singapore legal landscape becoming even more international and becoming a true melting pot of ideas and practices which are not just rooted in the common law.**

the ability to be able to objectively set out the argument for and against a particular point of view, uninfluenced by considerations of popularity.

### What is your favourite memory from your days at NUS Law?

This is probably going to sound a bit nerdy, but I remember enjoying spending a lot of my time in the law library. As the law faculty then probably had one of the lowest number of compulsory hours spent at lectures and tutorials, much of our time was our own in law school.

As I lived in the East and could not afford to live in a hostel, I used to take the first bus out and come in just before the law library opened, and was quite a fixture in the library when I was not at classes. In fact, some of my classmates used to treat me like an information booth to ask if I saw one or other of our schoolmates that day or to pass someone else a message. It was really quite funny. I also had a close group of friends who used to study and socialise together. Interestingly, very few of them are now actually court lawyers, choosing instead to go in-house, become a stay-at-home mum and even enter government service.



Malathi Das with Julia Wan

As law school then was the Kent Ridge Campus, we literally had the run of the whole NUS Campus and would spend time at the Sports Complex playing tennis, walking over to Yusof Ishak House for crepes and beef stroganoff, and catch up with our friends in other faculties. Some days, we would take a break from our studies and pile into someone's car and head out to another part of NUS, Holland Village or Ayer Rajah for a meal. This was why I was a bit half-hearted when approached to support NUS Law's bid to occupy the Bukit Timah Campus some years back.

Unlike many of my seniors, the Bukit Timah Campus did not hold the same place in my heart as law school did for them. But I saw real potential in the Bukit Timah Campus for future cohorts. Plus, I just love its architecture! I envy you for the gorgeous law school campus that you now have compared to the rather industrial and functional one that I had studied in at Kent Ridge. But I still cannot help feeling nostalgic about the good memories of it and the people there. A building is after all just concrete. It is the people in it that make it come alive.

# CONFESSIONS OF AN ADRENALINE JUNKIE

STEFANIE YUEN THIO '93

Stefanie Yuen Thio is the Joint Managing Director of TSMP Law Corporation, and heads its Transactional Practice. She is a leading lawyer in mergers & acquisitions, equity capital markets and corporate transactions. Between her demanding work schedule and her commitment to charity work, she talks to LawLink about what keeps her going at work, the challenges she faces, and the joy she gets from helping others.

**We understand that you played a key role in setting up TSMP back in 1998. What were some of the biggest challenges you faced, and how did you overcome them?**

I only had four years of practice under my belt, when Dr Thio Su Mien '61 asked me to join her in the boutique firm she was going to set up. In hindsight, I realise that I was too green to realise how in over my head I was. I had nobody to guide me on equity capital markets, and mergers & acquisition work, so I had to muddle through myself. I had to learn everything about running a law firm from scratch—from business development, to practice management and office administration. I got pregnant with my son in that first year too and the firm was too young for me to take proper maternity leave, so I was back at the office after a month. I would miss breastfeeding times because of the all-nighters. I guess you can say my career was forged in a crucible of ignorance and painful experience.

**Being hands-on in charity work makes it real, it inspires and galvanises you.**

**What inspires you to pursue your charitable causes? Can you tell us more about the charities you're working with?**

I never thought I would be active in the charitable sector. I'm no bleeding heart and corporate law practice is a jealous mistress. I guess you could say I sort of fell into each charity I got involved with.

#### Dover Park Hospice

My adopted great-aunt had cancer and spent her last days in Dover Park Hospice (DPH). One day, Dr Seet Ai Mee (who is the mom of a classmate of mine) met me and told me about her work at DPH (she was its founder). I told her how grateful I was for the care the hospice had given my great-aunt, and how they helped a woman with a deep-seated fear of death pass her final days in peace. I said to call me if I could help with anything. A few months later she did, with a role on the board she wanted me to fill. "It's time to step up, Young One" she said, quite simply. So I did.

#### Smile Asia

I got involved in "Smile Asia" when I helped to incorporate the company and register it as a charity. The charity organises surgical missions to less privileged countries to provide facial reconstructive surgery. After the legal work was completed, I was asked to stay on the board of directors. I remember volunteering to go on a mission when I first got to hear about the charity. I was gently told "you don't speak the local language, you have no medical skills, you're not a celebrity like Angelina Jolie—frankly you would bring more value by working hard and giving money for missions." But I have found that it's not true—you can make a difference even if all you are doing is filling out a form or walking a patient to a pre-op checkup. Being hands-on in charity work makes it real, it inspires and galvanises you. I have brought my husband and son on missions. Those are the days when our work is the most menial but which make us feel most like giants.



#### Personal Cause

I have more personal causes too. Many years ago, when my son was about a year old, I had a funny impression that there was a family with young children I was to help. I called the church to ask if they were supporting a family with young children. They said no. I went away wondering what that was about, but I couldn't shake the feeling. I called again. This time, a different church worker told me that there was a pair of twin girls, about 5 years old, whose mother had abandoned them and whose father was in jail. They were being looked after by their paternal grandmother who had health issues and could not work. That is how we started helping the twins. We would go to NTUC and buy provisions once a week and go stock their refrigerator, then spend time with the girls. Taking them to McDonald's was a treat. That sort of work is much harder, because of the emotional ties and having to keep a balance in the relationship. I have a profound respect for charity workers who deal with people's emotional needs. I am very proud that the two girls have grown up to be fine young women, who are staunch in their Christian faith.

**What would be your advice to aspiring lawyers, especially those who wish to venture into the realms of transactional practice?**

Do it only if you love it, because there are easier ways to make money. I do this job because I love the challenge—of solving problems, or dealing with the messiness of people, or juggling deadlines and complex transactions. If I did not, I would go and learn to cook or run a book shop. Life is too short to be stuck in a dead-end job that does not excite you.

**What were some of your best memories at NUS Law?**

I did not enjoy law school much—mostly because I was a lousy student. I got shushed by Hri Kumar '91 (the MP) for speaking in the library. I did not enjoy life in a residential hall, probably because I do not like falling into line. I am, however, very grateful for the friends I made in my four years there.

**Who was your favourite law professor and why?**

Good grief, it has been more than 20 years since Law School! I'm not sure I can remember enough about my misspent youth to make a fair assessment.

# THE RIGHT TO DEFEND

ANAND NALACHANDRAN '99

A partner with Braddell Brothers and an Adjunct Associate Professor at NUS Law, Anand Nalachandran is known for his contributions to pro bono initiatives and his expertise in Criminal Law. With a strong belief in providing help where possible, Anand shares with us what inspires him in his work, his expectations of the future and his memories of NUS Law.

You have actively contributed to the Legal Assistance Scheme for Capital Offences (LASCO) and the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) in acting for impecunious accused persons as well as other pro bono initiatives for the benefit of the community. Can you share with us what inspires you in your work?

In practice, a lawyer will encounter people from all walks of life and all stations in society. Some are influential, some are vulnerable—and it has been said that the measure of a society is how it treats its weakest members. I believe in the role of defence counsel as stakeholders in the administration of criminal justice and I think every accused person—regardless of means—should have the opportunity to exercise the constitutional right to counsel.

I believe in the function of defence counsel to ensure that a person is only convicted and sentenced after due process and based on credible evidence. I believe that when someone is in dire need of assistance and you have the ability to provide that assistance just by giving your time, then it may be incumbent upon you to extend a helping hand. I believe the exercise of charity enriches the person who gives and the person who receives—and the gratitude of a client can be as important as the payment of a client. With these beliefs, I try to balance a sustainable proportion of pro bono work in practice.

## I believe in the function of defence counsel to ensure that a person is only convicted and sentenced after due process and based on credible evidence.

What advice would you give someone looking to follow in your footsteps?

First of all, I would hope that every lawyer finds their own path. There will be a variety of options in practice and I recommend that a lawyer pursue an area of practice which provides satisfaction and fulfilment—and if someone has a passion for criminal litigation practice, then I suggest training and working with seasoned defence counsel to gain experience and exposure.

If a lawyer receives this opportunity, there is no substitute for conscientious diligence—and the investment of time and commitment towards developing skills and abilities can only yield dividends in the ensuing years. In addition to pro bono cases, I commend volunteering with the professional community to integrate with the industry and reciprocating the guidance of your teachers with the next generation of lawyers.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue an area of practice that has provided tangible and intangible benefits—but inevitably, there will be frustrations and disappointments, and you can only reflect on mistakes to avoid repeating them.

A person gives the best effort then hopes for the best outcome—after all, there always remains an element of providence and serendipity in life.

In your view, what are the major problems/opportunities facing the legal industry, and where do you see the Singapore legal landscape in 10 years?

In recent years, there have been several developments in the practice of criminal law—including the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code providing for pre-trial discovery and community sentences, the amendments to the mandatory death penalty provisions for certain homicide and drug offences as well as the Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System (ICMS) in the State Courts.

In addition, there will be a third law school that will focus on community law—including criminal law—and direct funding by the State towards legal aid in criminal cases.

From the perspective of a criminal litigation practice, I think we can look forward to growth in the number of specialised criminal defence counsel and an enhancement of the capacity to provide assistance to impecunious accused persons as well as a robust arena for the administration of criminal justice. That aside, I think the legal profession will establish Singapore as a venue for international dispute resolution.

What are some of your best memories of your days at NUS Law? How has your time at NUS shaped your career?

When I was at NUS, the Faculty of Law was located at the Kent Ridge campus - quite unlike the Bukit Timah Campus—and was the only law school in Singapore. I have fond memories of those years—and in particular, the bonds of friendship forged then. I was quite involved with Law Club student activities and there were many opportunities to interact with my seniors, peers and juniors—which made going to law school more enjoyable. Many friendships continued beyond school into practice and even though many peers have left practice, many friends remain professional colleagues.

The collegiate environment at NUS encouraged an involvement with the Law Society and other professional associations - which I have found enriching. The faculty has evolved since then - and I was glad to accept the adjunct position at NUS for the chance to reciprocate.

If you could change one thing about your law school days, what would it be?

At the risk of being a cliché, I have difficulty finding something I would change then—since that reflects something I would change now. I would like to think that I maintained the appropriate balance at NUS and made the most of law school—and to quote Mr Frank Sinatra: “Regrets, I’ve had a few, but then again, too few to mention.”

# FAMILY MATTERS

DEBBIE ONG '89

Recently appointed as Judicial Commissioner of the High Court, Associate Professor Debbie Ong began her two-year term of office with effect from 17 November 2014. Speaking with LawLink, she shares what it was like being in NUS Law, her hopes in her new role, and her passion for Family Law.

## What inspired you to pursue a career focused on Family Law?

As a young academic, I taught whatever subjects I was assigned to teach. There are many forks along life's roads, and just teaching a different subject might have set me onto a different path. But what happened, happily, was that I taught Family Law because there was a need for a teacher in that course then.

I loved teaching Family Law! It is also extremely rewarding when a student comes up to me at the end of the course to tell me how inspired he or she is to practise family law. I think legal training can sometimes be rather cold and technical, and studying family law can put more warmth and compassion into the lawyer's soul.

Research in family law is also very meaningful and engaging; it is the branch of law where ordinary people (regardless of social background) are most likely to access, for themselves or for their friends or relatives.

Having a wonderful senior colleague, Professor Leong Wai Kum, who took on a mentor's role to guide and inspire me was crucial in my growth as a family law scholar. I also found that working on family law led me to many 'spin-offs' – I volunteered as a Family Court Mediator and took on various roles in community organisations and projects that furthered family justice.

## With your recent appointment as Judicial Commissioner, what are the improvements / changes you hope to make in your new role?

The Family Court has always been very active in its efforts to strengthen the family justice system. Through the years since the Family Court was established, the Judicial Officers have worked with family lawyers in a collaborative way, adopting a multi-disciplinary network, to make things better for families that go through the courts. They have done so much even without the Report and impetus of the recent Committee for Family Justice Review.

The new legislative changes will clothe these initiatives with legislative authority. Other initiatives are also being worked on. One of the most significant developments following the enactment of the new Family Justice Act is the establishment of the High Court Family Division; it signals how important the Family is to the state and society. It recognises that family cases are important to the courts and require specialist expertise. We each pool in our respective strengths to make the whole better, don't we?

I will focus on family law jurisprudence. We need to ensure strong family jurisprudence and legal development because the law is going to teach moral lessons that will guide family members on behaving responsibly, as spouses, ex-spouses and lifelong parents. We will give attention to Family Law reform and work on legislative changes too.

## With your experience in the Family Court and in related areas of Family Law, what would you say is the biggest challenge facing today's families and what would you advise to overcome these issues?

Relationships are complicated and the make-up of every individual is unique. So it is quite difficult to identify one biggest challenge. Still, there is one area I can say is very central to my aspirations and which also poses one of the biggest challenges—how to protect the child's best interests when parents divorce. How do we ensure responsible post divorce parenting?

Marriage breakdowns happen to the best of us, and no one is immune to the traumatic effects of divorce which blinds us to the true needs of the children.

What I have learnt is not to have fixed views about or generalise a problem. We can also learn from various broad-based

sociological studies, which can help us to be good problem solvers in family disputes and less coloured by our own personal experiences. Local sociological research tells us that the dual-income family in Singapore is highly stressed.

Marriage breakdowns can cause very deep trauma and pain in the parties, such that they are not at their best in making decisions during divorce proceedings; their thinking processes and behaviour can understandably be gravely affected by strong emotions. All who work in the family justice system work within such challenging circumstances. We can only do our very best with each case before us.



Debbie Ong (center) with her classmates in the old lecture theatre, 1988

## How do you remember your law school days?

The Class of '89 was such a diverse and interesting class. The Law course was not easy, I had to work hard. But stress never came from classmates—everyone seemed easy-going and very generous in helping each other survive law school. It was a cohesive class which, with humour and big-heartedness, accepted everyone, whatever their idiosyncrasies. Law school also constitutes a key part of my life in that I met my husband, Victor, when playing law school inter-year games.

**Research in family law is also very meaningful and engaging; it is the branch of law where ordinary people (regardless of social background) are most likely to access, for themselves or for their friends or relatives.**

## If you could change one thing about your law school days, what would it be?

Maybe study smarter? I now think I was rather inefficient in my study methods! But as I do not look back to see what I could have changed, this is a tough question. As I have said earlier, there are many forks along life's road and each fork taken can mean a very different path and future.

Who is to know what would have happened if one single thing changed in the past? (I admit to enjoying books and movies with time-travel storylines, which always defied logic). I will accept the good, the bad and the difficult, because I do not want to be anywhere else today.



# WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

NOELLE SEET '02

After a decade as a litigator, Noelle Seet left legal practice to take on the role of Head of Campaigns & Communications at ACRES Animal Concerns Rescue & Education Society. Dedicated to the cause of animal welfare since her early years, she started out volunteering at ACRES as a photographer and rescue officer. LawLink catches up with Noelle to find out about her work and how her experience as a lawyer still plays a role in her life.

## What inspired you to be a legal officer for an animal welfare NGO?

When I read law in NUS, my dream was to eventually become an advocate for animal welfare. That voice was later drowned out by the challenges of practice. Then, I found ACRES.

I first volunteered as a Wildlife Rescue Officer and photographer. Although, it was—to me—a small contribution towards the betterment of the lives of animals in Singapore, it brought me immense fulfilment. I wanted to intensify my efforts to effect greater change, and I felt that I could only do so if I committed all my time to it.

The turning point was at the Asia for Animals Conference, where I saw how over 300 animal welfare groups around the world gathered to exchange ideas and experiences on how to protect and conserve wild life. That was when I decided that I could do a lot more.

To me, making the world a better place means making it better for all the creatures that live on our planet.

Quitting practice was a difficult decision to make. I want to look back on my life knowing that I did at least one thing right—I lived my dream to fight for the voiceless.

My dream now is to form a band of lawyers who will use their professional skills to promote animal welfare in Asia, similar to that of the UK Association of Lawyers For Animal Welfare (ALAW).

To me, making the world a better place means making it better for all the creatures that live on our planet.

## How has your experience at NUS Law and in practice helped you in your work?

A campaign, in essence, is to persuade people to believe in and join hands for a cause. At ACRES, we use facts, science, and law to substantiate our arguments. Likewise, arguments in litigation practice are based on facts, expert opinion, and law. The advocacy skills I honed in practice are just as valuable to me today in campaigning.



As in litigation, tenacity and stamina are fundamental in animal welfare campaigns, some of which run for several years. We also have a wildlife crime unit that investigates into offenses against animals and birds—this is where my background in criminal law comes in.

Nothing I learnt in practice has gone to waste. The big difference for me is that the job I do today gives me an immense level of satisfaction as I'm making a difference everyday.

## What is your best memory of law school?

My best memories are of certain modules that I took such as Foundation of Criminal Justice, Administration of Criminal Justice and Human Rights Law. I wrote a thesis on "Battered Women Syndrome", which was under the Human Rights module. I was happiest writing & researching papers like those because those were the topics that resonated with me.

## If you could change one thing about your law school days, what would it be?

If there was a module on International and Local Animal Welfare laws, I would have taken it.



# ALUMNI REUNION IN NEW YORK

BY AMARDEEP SINGH '10

Former undergraduate and graduate students of NUS Law from over the years gathered for a cosy reunion dinner with Dean Simon Chesterman on 19 October 2014 at Café ASEAN in New York City, US.

The reunion dinner saw former students who have, since their NUS Law days, moved into diverse areas of work. The varied experiences of each student provided for rich and meaningful

conversations through the evening over what we missed the most: Asian food.

What was palpable was the sense of fondness with which each of us remembered our days at NUS Law and especially of the friendships forged with fellow students and the faculty professors. Even though all of us may have graduated over different years, it felt as though we have known each other for many years.

As the evening drew to a close, instead of goodbyes, we promised to meet again at the next NUS Law alumni reunion.

Present at the event were:

Koide Akiko (LL.M.) '11, Stella Liu (LL.M.) '11, Karin Loevy (LL.M.) '09, Dharshini Prasad '12, Amardeep Singh '10, Wang Zhengmin '12, Vivian Wong '94, Christina Zantis (LL.M.) '11.

## SHERIDAN FELLOWSHIP

The National University of Singapore Faculty of Law is pleased to invite applications for our second intake of Sheridan Fellows. These full-time positions are intended to serve as a bridge between either undergraduate study or work in the legal profession and a tenure-track academic position with a strong foundation in Singapore law.

A successful candidate will be appointed for two years on a competitive salary. You will teach only half of the standard faculty workload, typically by joining one of the team-taught compulsory subjects. The reduced load will free up considerable time for research, assisted by a faculty mentor who will read and comment on your work as well as advise on publication avenues. Sheridan Fellows will also be expected to take

part in faculty workshops and present at least one paper in the Research Seminar Series.

At the conclusion of the two year period, you may be encouraged to pursue a doctorate (on salary), after which you would return to the Faculty and be assessed for appointment as an Assistant Professor on the tenure-track. Alternatively, provided you achieve satisfactory performance in teaching and research, you may be appointed directly to the position of Assistant Professor on the tenure-track. (Candidates who are interested in pursuing a doctorate immediately should consider the Overseas Graduate Scholarship scheme.)

Applicants should have an outstanding undergraduate degree and, ideally, a strong LL.M. Exceptional applicants without a



Master's degree may also be considered but would be required to complete an LL.M. prior to being appointed to the tenure track.

To apply, submit a letter of interest together with your curriculum vitae, transcripts of your results, and a list of at least three referees. Applications close on **31 December 2014** and should be submitted by email to [lawfsc@nus.edu.sg](mailto:lawfsc@nus.edu.sg). All applications will be treated with the strictest confidence. Candidates who are shortlisted can be expected to attend an interview.



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