

## **A Place In The Sun For All Malaysians**

**By Anwar Fazal\***

*“A place in the sun for all Malaysians” was the theme of Anwar Fazal’s address as Representative of the Old Frees’ Association at our Annual Speech Day on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1978.*

*A most appropriate theme, dwelling on very relevant present day issues and delivered with much aplomb. His ideas and message were well interspersed with amusing anecdotes of his days in the Penang Free School, making his address an altogether delightful yet thought provoking experience.*

When I was invited to this occasion I wondered how one gets selected to represent the Old Frees. Could it be because I was too young to be old and too old to be young and therefore I could perhaps bridge the generation gap? Could it be because I was so loyal to the school that I even married an Old Free? Or could it be they could not get anybody else and I happened to live just down the road in Green Lane!

Whatever the reason, each year one Old Free has to come, speak about the good old days, about where they used to hide and do the things you are not supposed to do, about the wonderful mamak mee in the canteen, the legendary teachers like the one who could mark our homework without even reading it and those who used to leave their painful marks on the Ministry of Education designated parts of your anatomy!

For me it is a special pleasure to be here because several of my teachers are present here and still actively associated with the school. Y.B. Dato' Capt. Haji Mohd. Nor, now Chairman of the Board of Governors of the School, used to make sure that my socks were whiter than white and my shoes blacker than black. There was no better disciplinarian with such an overwhelming commitment to his vocation and who, behind all his sternness, is a warm hearted person who really cared for his students, his school and his country. I can never thank you enough. Then there is Mr. Goon Fatt Chee, the Headmaster. He was my form master in that most critical year, Form V. He also taught me Mathematics and taught me well. (He taught me that one plus one equals to two, until you get married!) There were a whole host of other teachers, some here, some around and some gone.

To each of them who made this school one of the greatest in the country and in the region and whose students have earned for themselves, for their professions and for their country the highest honours we, the Old Frees, say "Thank You".

I am especially proud to be associated with the school because it gave me some of the best all round education that was possible in this country, because it produced young people who had that strength of character, that intellectual toughness and even muscles that made unique citizens - a rare breed that have produced a King, a Prime Minister, A Chief Minister and Captains in all walks of life.

We had the distinction to belong to a community, to a tradition, a sense of fellowship that cuts across ethnic and religious difference and that was an embodiment of all the best - a happy, harmonious, progressive community. That was the rationale behind the pioneering Free School movement and essence of being a "Free". All of you have that same opportunity. You can help to build and shape our young nation or you can fall back into the kind of inertia "tidakapa attitude", shallowness and chauvinism that can lead this country down the drain.

The special character of our nation, our diversity, imposes special responsibilities on our citizens which means that both our hearts and our minds must be rooted in the spirit of the Rukun Negara, which forms the basis, the soul, of our country. There is no other way. In our School's today, unfortunately, bigger classes, changes of staff, merciless examinations, new curricula, new textbooks, no text books, new media of instruction and forgetting the essence of the school - all these have taken their toll, creating a whole new gamut of new problems of identity, inefficiency, anonymity, indiscipline, selfishness. Among the most serious problems appear to be:

- Firstly, the hordes of new illiterates competent in neither language nor skills who are hoisted on to the market place of jobs;
- Secondly, the chauvinistic elements of every colour that divide this nation by exploiting various elements of well meaning but sometimes inefficient and inequitable education policies and practices; and
- Thirdly, a system of inequity and injustice where mediocrity is rewarded too easily based on reasons other than economic circumstances or merit.

We can overcome these problems. We must overcome these problems.

You are the new Malaysians. Neither chauvinism or fanaticism should have a place in our society. The new Malaysia that has been forged so carefully by our fathers has a place in the sun for everybody.

Let us together give our energies, our talents, our hearts and minds to some more important issues of society that affect every Malaysian irrespective of our various origins:

- The degradation of our environment, the death of our forests and rivers;
- The cash register ethics and the corruption that dominates some sectors;
- The destruction of life on our roads, at our workplaces and through poisons in food and in our environment;
- The issues of poverty of the farmer, the fisherman, in our cities and in our estates.

It is not enough that we try to teach our young people the three Rs. There is the fourth 'R' - Real life- that all of you must know. These facts of life have little to do with sex. You must understand the changes going on in our country, you must prepare yourselves to be active and responsible citizens who will take an intelligent interest in the affairs and concerns of the day. We cannot have zombies as citizens. We must prepare ourselves so that we can recognize and act against those forces of darkness and totalitarianism of all colours that lurk in our society and who are ever ready to pursue their selfish ends. We like to hope that the teaching of civics can help this process but sad to say, this is a subject too often neglected, taught poorly and carelessly. We hope it can become a 'live' and meaningful force so we can inculcate a real sense of civic responsibility - not the kind that queues in school but not at the bus stop, keeps the school clean but litters the rest of the world. There must be less duplicity in our society.

I am confident we can meet the challenges ahead. I have visited some twenty countries and I believe that there are few countries that can give more opportunities and a better quality of life than Malaysia. There is nothing in our problems which cannot be solved if the new Malaysians of all races whose hearts and minds are in the right place work together to play a constructive and positive role in the preservation of goodwill and harmony, the beauty and the strength of our lovely land. Whether the spirit of the Free School will mean as much as it used to will depend on how many of you constructively take up these challenges and join the front ranks of the new Malaysia.

Thank you.

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\* Dato' (Dr.) Anwar Fazal studied at the Penang Free School(PFS) from 1958-1960. He is a recipient of the Right Livelihood Award ,popularly know as the "Alternative Nobel Prize". He is currently Director of the Right Livelihood College based at the Universiti Sains Malaysia. ( For more information see [www.anwarfazal.net](http://www.anwarfazal.net) and [www.usm.my/rlc](http://www.usm.my/rlc) This article appeared in the PFS Magazine of 1979.