

# The People

The Housing Authority provides countless Hong Kong people with the blessing of a home. Over the years, many of them, born at the grassroots level and spending their early years in public housing estates, assiduously worked their way up to become the celebrities and senior government officials that they are today. For example, well-known performing artist Andy Lau considered Lam Tin Estate, in which he grew up, dear to him, so much so that, despite his fame, he wrote an inscription for the redeveloped estate. Public housing estates represent the collective memory of generations of Hong Kong people, each of whom has his or her own story to tell. This Commemorative Book records interviews with 10 individuals from various sectors, including the Secretary for Housing, the father of public housing and Home Ownership Scheme, former Chairmen of the Housing Authority, a famous sportsman and a cartoon artist. They recount their childhood memories, share their experiences in housing and construction, or look ahead to future development and challenges.



# An extraordinary mission Building Houses and also Homes

HO Wing-yin, Winnie, JP Secretary for Housing / Chairman of the Housing Authority

“Housing for Millions” probably best sums up the work of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) over the past 50 years. At present, we have more than 190 public housing estates, which provide residence for more than 800,000 families and over two million people of Hong Kong. Behind these figures are the daily life of one family after another and also the nurturing of one generation after another, which has a direct bearing on the development of the Hong Kong society.

The aggregate volume of public housing affirms the extraordinary nature of the HA’s mission. Over the past five decades, we have worked hard to provide low-income families with affordable rental housing, and at the same time, gradually built up the housing ladder. At present, apart from public rental housing, there are subsidised housing such as the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme, Home Ownership Scheme, Private Subsidised Sale Flat Pilot Scheme and Starter Homes Pilot Scheme. Other schemes such as the Tenants Purchase Scheme and White Form Secondary Market Scheme have been rolled out to show the grassroots population the direction and opportunities of social mobility. Many families, after managing a stable life in public housing, have proceeded to ascend along the home ownership ladder and cultivated outstanding talents in various trades and industries who have given back to the society. These stories kept appearing during the past 50 years and are still unfolding nowadays.

Our extraordinary mission is also manifested in the continuous upgrading and advance of our construction and management technologies: from the off-site prefabrication technology adopted in the 1980s, to the current Modular Integrated Construction (MiC); from manual drawing to electronic drawing, and then to the current Building Information Modeling (BIM) as well as intelligent



management of construction sites and the Project Information Management and Analytics Platform (HA-PIMAP) developed by our colleagues at the Housing Department; and from reliance on manual labour in the past, to become a pioneer user of new technologies nowadays. Over the past 50 years, propelled by the development of public housing, the construction and housing management industries in Hong Kong have continuously advanced, and the HA will continue to play a significant role in the development and application of technology in the future. I deeply feel that, given the advantages of enjoying strong support of the Motherland and being closely connected to the world, Hong Kong will, through the completion of a large number of housing projects in future, become an important platform for showcasing to the international community the

strength of the Motherland and the achievements of Hong Kong’s professionalism.

Looking ahead, we must step up our efforts and make new attempts, not only to increase the quantity, speed, efficiency and quality of our hardware, but also to care for our residents and strive to enhance their sense of well-being. Although our housing estates are modestly designed, they will feel extra warmth and comfort when they go home every day.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the past Chairmen and members of the HA for leading the entire team through all challenges and laying stepwise the solid foundation on which we face today.

In the next 50 years, we at the HA will continue to work hard to “build homes” for more Hong Kong people.





# Father of public housing and Home Ownership Scheme From Teaching to Housing

Dr LIAO Poon-huai, Donald, CBE, JP Former Secretary for Housing, former Chairman of the Housing Authority

In the 1960s, Mr Alec Michael John Wright, Director of Public Works, was committed to improving the living environment in resettlement areas. He laid down the "Wright principle" which re-defined "having a shelter" by emphasizing that each unit must have its own kitchen and toilet so that the grassroots residents could live with dignity. Back then, when I left my teaching post at The University of Hong Kong (HKU) and joined the government, it was Mr Wright who interviewed me. I remember that initially I was only willing to sign a short-term contract, thinking that if I could not realise my ambitions, I would go back to teaching at HKU or start my own architect firm. Fortunately, I made the right choice and soon switched to a long-term contract under which I served all the way until retirement.

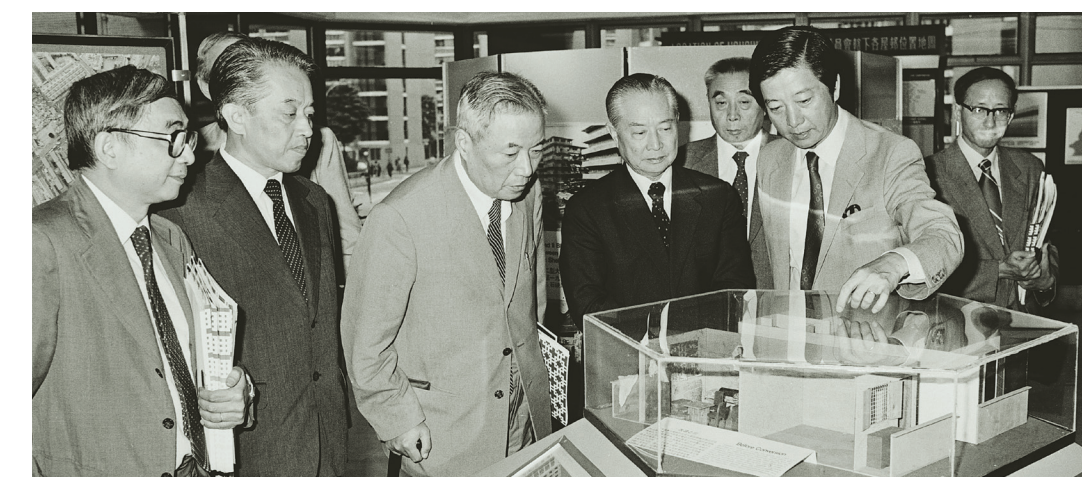
When I first joined the government, I gained considerable experience by taking part in projects such as Wo Lok Estate, Fuk Loi Estate and Ma Tau Wai Estate under the then Housing Authority (屋宇建設委員會 in Chinese). In 1963, I was entrusted with a major task, being fully responsible for developing the mega project of Wah Fu Estate. Manpower was inadequate but rather that in turn allowed me to handle everything by myself. Thanks to my superiors who trusted and empowered to perform my best, the project turned out to be the most memorable experience in my career. In those days, each hectare of land was planned to accommodate 2,000 residents, and with 24 hectares of land, Wah Fu Estate could accommodate almost 50,000 residents, and such a small town must be well supported by ancillary facilities. I still vividly recall how I bargained with China Motor Bus for new routes serving the estate, worked with the engineers of Hongkong Electric to design the power supply lines, and

negotiated with Rediffusion (Hong Kong) on the laying of cables.

Ever since time immemorial, the desire of mankind has been that a farmer should have his own farmland, and a resident should have his own home. The launch of the Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) not only provided public rental housing residents an opportunity to move up the housing ladder, but, through the Green Form and White Form system which is still in use today, also assisted "homeless" residents in buying their own homes. In order

to attract public housing residents to the scheme and vacate their public housing flats to move up the housing ladder, the quality of the HOS flats has to be enhanced.

The achievements of public housing development in Hong Kong over the years are obvious to all. This is the result of the hard work of many people, with the Housing Authority (HA) playing a vital role. It is my great honour to witness the establishment and development of the HA, and I sincerely hope that the HA will continue to excel and reach new heights.



# Undaunted by formidable challenges Helping Grassroots Improve Their Housing

Dr Dame WONG Yick-ming, Rosanna, DBE, JP Former Chairman of the Housing Authority

I am deeply honoured to have been a part of the Housing Authority (HA), which has been building up Hong Kong and serving the public for 50 years. Among the many public offices I held, the 7-year Chairmanship of the HA has been my most favourite work and most unforgettable experience. The team I worked with was thoroughly professional, innovative and adventurous. We were like-minded, passionate and people-oriented, and fully committed to formulating housing policies and bringing them to reality.

I still remember my belief when I first joined the HA: the supply of land must be stable in order to ensure steady supply of housing units; the ratio between public and private housing must be clear and the rules for allocating resources must be fair, so that a road map could be laid down for the grassroots to move up the home ownership ladder and gradually improve their living conditions. At the same time the circulation of public housing could also be increased and the market vitalised. Of course, the continuous optimisation of the living environment and the stringent enforcement of quality control can never be overlooked and must also keep up with the times. In addition, I firmly adhered to the strategies of making good use of the private market and maintaining financial stability.

During my term of office, I introduced policies such as the Tenants Purchase Scheme, Mortgage Subsidy Scheme, Interim Housing and Buy or Rent Option; demolished the Kowloon Walled City and rehoused tens of thousands of residents; developed the three major new towns of Tin

Shui Wai, Tseung Kwan O and Tung Chung; implemented ISO certification; and widened and deepened the application of pre-fabricated concrete units. Whether in terms of continuing the work of my predecessor or formulating new policies in response to market changes and public needs, the challenges were all formidable. Thanks to the sincere cooperation and team spirit of my colleagues, the problems were resolved and the work was completed smoothly, and invaluable friendships were struck up. More than 20 years

have flown since then, and our team still maintains close contact. With Mr Wu Moon Hoi, Marco, the walking dictionary of public housing in Hong Kong as the contact person, our team actively participate in regular reunions.

As Confucians said, a person approaching 50 years of age knows his position in the world. With five decades of experience, the HA has matured with a clear idea of its position. I hope that the HA will go from strength to strength and write up a brilliant chapter for the future of Hong Kong.





# Divert and resolve issues A Happy Team Fighting Side by Side

SUEN Ming-yeung, Michael, GBM, GBS, CBE, JP Former Chairman of the Housing Authority

The Housing Authority (HA) is responsible for formulating and implementing public housing policies. I joined the HA upon its establishment in 1973 and became its first Secretary General. My first task was to merge the Resettlement Department and the Housing Division of the Urban Services Department into the Housing Department. Five decades have passed since then, but I still remember vividly what happened at the time.

The two departments, vastly different in background, staff ranking, staff numbers and salary levels, naturally had their own considerations. It was by no means easy to seek a consensus and re-establish a structure which enjoyed the best of both worlds, which was fair and just, and which could withstand the scrutiny of society and the test of time. I firmly believed that we were all serving the grassroots wholeheartedly, and as long as we shared a common goal, we would eventually reach the same destination. I cannot remember clearly how many meetings were held. We voiced our respective views and positions; then we discussed them one by one, looking for common ground while preserving and narrowing our differences, and finally reached a unanimous proposal which was put to the general meeting for a vote and fully implemented after its passage.

After eight busy months in the HA, I was transferred to another department, but unexpectedly my relationship with the HA resumed after 20 years when I rejoined it in 2003 as Chairman. Hong Kong was then facing a host of challenges: the ravage of SARS, the poor economy, the slumping property prices, and fear among Hong Kong people. Grievances and resentment spread across the city, and my colleagues in the HA were under great pressure, making their work even more difficult. To

prevent the gloomy sentiment from affecting the whole team, all negative feelings had to be aired. This was very much like the way in which Yu, a ruler in Xia Dynasty in ancient China addressed the flooding problem: in case of blockage, the only solution was to drain it away. By supporting one another and fighting side by side, we could always find a way out.

I reminded the team from time to time that they did not have to worry too much as long as they abided by their own duties, gave full play to their strengths and did a good job. If difficulties arose, we would surmount them together. If there were problems, I would take all responsibilities. As the

saying goes, they would take the credit and I would take the blame. Even if there were difficulties, if we took things easy, we would find it easier to come up with solutions. If we constantly harboured fears, we would find every move difficult. Happiness is another source of motivation. I liked to spread positive energy and build a happy team in the HA, so that my colleagues would feel at ease and deliver greater result with less effort.

Over half of a century, the HA has done a lot of commendable work in providing millions of low- and middle-income people with affordable housing. On the occasion of HA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I wish the HA every success in its future work.



# Working hard to make a living A Home of the “Dragon”

LAU Tak-wah, Andy, BBS, MH, JP Showbiz Celebrity

I have only a vague recollection of moving from Tai Po to Diamond Hill when I was very young. I have a clearer memory of moving from Diamond Hill to Lam Tin as I began to make sense of things. A home is a source of warmth. Despite the rather backward living conditions in the squatter area, my whole family joined hands and worked closely to run a shop, earning a living and also generating lots of fond memories. But the squatter area was beset with dangers, especially the fires that broke out every now and then, which constantly put residents in fear. I still remember having to carry my identity card with me all the time, ready to run for my life should something bad happen. When disaster strikes, we can't avoid it: a fire broke out in the 1970s that affected my home. As the old saying goes, fortunes are where misfortunes lie, and it was this very fire that enabled our family to “move up” and be allocated a unit in Block 15 of Lam Tin Estate.

Everything that the old squatter home did not have was available in the new unit with vastly improved living conditions. It took time for me as a kid to get used to an unfamiliar environment. My father continued to work as a firefighter to fight fires and save lives, while my mother bought three electric sewing machines and made gloves at home to help make a living. Our family showed our team spirit again, with my three sisters doing the sewing and me helping with packaging and delivery. Life was busy, but the warmth was always there. The most precious thing was the feeling of security, being free from never-ending fear and the threat of fire.

Lam Tin Estate was actually equipped with comprehensive ancillary facilities, but under the strict family rules, I could only travel back and forth between school and home. I could only join other activities with my eyes and entertained myself by watching the basketball court downstairs from our balcony. There was also Sing Yin Secondary School



which was right next to the bus terminal and of which I have a clear memory because I had to pass by that school on the way to school every day. More and more shops, restaurants and department stores started business in the estate, but I seldom patronised them. I only recall my parents having tea and dim sum at the nearby restaurant every morning, and I garnered that they got to meet many of the former Diamond Hill neighbours, and in this way the neighbourhood gradually built up.

I guess I am always looking for something new! When I was in the matriculation level, I decided to drop my studies and join TVB's artiste training class, and eventually signed a contract and became an artist. As such, I left home early and returned home late every day and sometimes even had to work overnight and sleep during daytime. I had to move out of this beloved home in which I had been living for 7 to 8 years. Forty years have passed in a flash, Lam Tin Estate has been rebuilt, and I have attended the unveiling ceremony. The new estate is

even better than before, and the quality of life of the residents has greatly improved. But what still lingers in my mind is the colourful flying dragon painted on the external wall of Block 15. As a kid, I was curious and fantasised about this totem. Why was it not seen at other blocks? Did it symbolise “a carp leaping over the dragon gate”? As the flying dragon was so close to my flat, should it not be a good omen? Now that I have grown up, the answer does not matter anymore. It is a great pity to learn that the flying dragon was not preserved when the estate was rebuilt. Come to think of it, as the dragon flies back to the heavenly palace, and I have also moved out of the estate anyway, so we each has a home to return to. Isn't that amazing?

It has been half a century since I moved into Lam Tin Estate! HA's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gives me a great opportunity to collate my scattered memories and revisit those salad days of mine. I hope the HA will grow even stronger and better in the years ahead.





# A haven which has everything Cycling from Lek Yuen to Summit

WONG Kam-po, SBS, MH Well-known Cyclist

When I was young, with my bicycle and determination, I kept pedalling every day until I made my way out beyond Hong Kong and onto the world stage. But to be honest, no matter how far I go, there are times when I miss my home. The photo sessions for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Book of the Housing Authority allowed me to revisit, with a thankful heart, a home which is firmly fixed in my memories – Lek Yuen Estate.

Built in 1975, Lek Yuen Estate was the first public housing estate in Sha Tin. The estate was equipped with excellent ancillary facilities such as kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, a community hall, a public library, a shopping mall and a market. I lived there for more than 20 years and have moved out for more than 20 years. Every time I come back, I notice some changes, but its overall appearance remained the same. Some of the shops have changed, but some are still there. The world is also like that: sometimes we seek changes amid stability, sometimes we persist amid changes. The fountain at the entrance of Lek Yuen Estate is a landmark and the residents naturally want to preserve it. The authorities have responded to their wishes and kept the fountain as it is.

I spent all my school years in Lek Yuen Estate. My academic performance was so-so, but I did very well in all kinds of sports and served on various school teams. There was a cycling track right in front of the estate, and the bicycle rental business was booming. Being an active boy, I gave cycling a try and at once became addicted and “pedalled deeper and deeper”. I began by cycling around Lek Yuen Estate, and then cycled to Tai Wai, Ma

On Shan, and then made my way to the Hong Kong Sports Institute. In the end I became a full-time cyclist and embarked on a career filled with training and tournaments. Competition is like life: you lose the minute you stop, but hope is there as long as you keep working hard. I like this kind of challenge in which no one can claim victory until the very end.

When I was young, I loved to gaze from home at Tao Fong Shan, a place which I felt distant and mysterious; but when I grew up, I realised it was only a 15-minute bicycle ride away. It was a calm and quiet place where I could see my home and

feel safe and relaxed completely. It was a haven for me, and whenever I felt uncertain or confused, I would come up here to enjoy the beautiful scenery, de-stress myself and think about life. The journey to honour and glory was by no means smooth. Besides countless losses, I have even chosen to give up and retired for two years. No road is without bumps and bends. Setbacks are not fearful, and victory comes when we surmount them. It is the curving contour which makes a mountain range beautiful; it is the ups and downs which make life colourful.



# From a poor boy to a master Comic Artist Growing Up Thankfully in a “Theme Park”

KHOO Fuk-lung, James Comic Artist

Those who like to paint and draw are keenly aware of their surroundings and always observant, so that they will never run out of subjects for their creations. This, I believe, is precisely why, despite the passage of time, I still vividly recall the many moments when I spent my childhood in Wah Fu Estate. In recent years, I got to appreciate more: my family lived in poverty without the luxury of entertainment and I was not allowed to go out under the strict family rules, plus I was able to meet all my schooling, leisure and even daily needs within the estate; so it is just natural for me to know Wah Fu Estate inside out, with my early years there etched on my memory.

As my parents had to go out to work, I was able to “steal” time, after school and before they returned home, to explore everything in Wah Fu Estate and its surroundings. What impressed me the most is of course the panoramic sea view, whether the sea sparkled under the clear sky or shimmered in the setting sun, the view was simply breathtaking and mesmerising. We could happily spend half a day catching insects on the nearby hills or just running and playing in the hillside fields (really, there were farmers and farms nearby back then). And there were playgrounds downstairs, which may look a bit crude now but were back then an exciting theme park for me already. If I felt like being adventurous, I would run to Waterfall Bay and feel the power of the non-stop descent of cascades of water.

Back then, various organisations hosted a wide range of activities in the estate. My mother, who was a chef, was the champion of a cooking competition, and I, who had been fond of drawing



since I was a kid, won several prizes in the drawing and art competitions organised by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong. Before then, I used to just hide at home and got down on all fours to draw on the blank spaces in books and newspapers. Finally, I took my works to competitions. The recognition I received greatly boosted my confidence and had quite a positive impact on my future development to be a Comic Artist. So, we should not take these activities in housing estates lightly: a small step today may well lead to a big reward tomorrow.

Now, whenever I have time, I will return to and walk around Wah Fu Estate, and sometimes I will also take my daughter there and share with her my experience, so that she will realise what

we have today cannot be taken for granted. I seldom tell people that my mother and elder brother are also good at drawing. My mother had to give up her talent in order to make a living, and my brother got excellent grades and chose to become a doctor. I had no inclination for studying and ended up being a Comic Artist. We are all grateful for being able to move into Wah Fu Estate back then, which provided a stable platform on which we could pursue our aspirations. Wah Fu Estate will be redeveloped very soon. Of course I do not want to see it go, but then I understand that society must move forward. Comics can be whimsical, but we have to be realistic with our lives. I can only let go of the past and move on with my fond memories.





# Benefitting from public housing policy Giving Back to Community

AU Mo-ching, Katherine Chief Housing Manager

I still fondly remember the joy of moving from a sub-divided unit to Kwai Fong Estate when I was a kid, which allowed me to enjoy the spacious resting areas and playground facilities by simply going downstairs. Thanks to the diligent and conscientious Estate Assistants, the estate was well-managed, clean and tidy. This earned my high esteem and planted a growing aspiration in me to serve the public in future.

By a happy coincidence, a secondary school teacher whom I much respected in my junior years left her teaching post and joined the Housing Department. She was assigned to Kwai Fong Estate, and every time I bumped into her, I felt a particularly strong sense of kinship. Hardworking and friendly, she was well loved and respected by the residents. There is an incident which I most clearly recall: during the redevelopment of Kwai Fong Estate, my family was relocated to a flat in Shek Wai Kok Estate, but it was not directly accessible by lifts and caused inconvenience to my elderly grandfather. Having looked into the matter, the teacher re-allocated us to a flat directly accessible by lifts. My whole family was deeply touched by her people-oriented attitude. Influenced by her, upon graduation I joined the Housing Department as a Housing Officer.

When I was assigned to Yau Oi Estate to perform my first post, I made up my mind to follow my teacher in providing whole-hearted and meticulous service. When I was working in Tsz Ching Estate, I took part in designing the new Herbs Garden, and it generated much interest in housing management organisations which visited and exchanged with us from the Mainland



and overseas. Later, when I took up the post of Assistant Manager in King Lam Estate, the Housing Authority launched the Tenants Purchase Scheme, and I actively took part in the formation of management committee under Owners Corporation by tenant-turned homeowners. At that time, my relationship with the residents became closer and closer and I built a strong friendship with them. I still keep in touch with some of the

committee members.

I have an indissoluble bond with public housing, having grown up there and now working there. I am thankful for this bond, through which I am fortunate enough to have benefitted from Hong Kong's public housing policy and now to become part of its implementation, so that I can give back to the community and serve the public.

# Invited to take part in redeveloping So Uk Estate The Wondrous Journey of an “Indigenous Resident”

LUK Kwong-wai, Patrick Former Assistant Director of the Housing Department

I was born and raised in So Uk Estate and did not move out until after my marriage, so I was an indigenous resident through and through. Amazingly, as fate would have it, I got to “meet” the estate again after many years.

I lived at Azalea House of So Uk Estate. It comprised several buildings lined up along Po On Road. These inter-connected buildings became a playground for me when I was a kid. We left our laughter and footprints at every corner of the building, including the ground floor, staircase entrances and corridors. Back then, the neighbours were close and selflessly helped one another. One of my neighbours, who was studying architecture, voluntarily took time out of his busy schedule to tutor me in my homework. It was this neighbour who steered me to the road towards a career in architecture.

As I grew up, I gradually realised the uniqueness of So Uk Estate, with each building of the composite having its own distinctive features. So Uk Estate was constructed by the hillside, with well-planned building elevations, and so most of the units enjoyed broad views and even sea views. I came to realise that a thoughtful design could indeed benefit the residents. Upon graduating from the university, I joined an architecture firm. In my spare time, I liked going about studying and learning from the architecture of buildings. I found that some of the public housing estates were very innovative in their design and had even won awards from the Hong Kong Institute of Architects. I would very much like to contribute to the development of public housing and so decided to apply for a position in the Housing Department.

At the Housing Department, I met many mentors and friends. We helped and encouraged one another

to develop and utilise our strengths. The experiences I gained have proved invaluable and always useful. The most unforgettable experience for me was the opportunity to take part in the So Uk Estate redevelopment project. I was thrilled to be able to rekindle my ties with the estate. As an “indigenous resident”, I managed to establish a close relationship with the residents and won their trust and support when I explained the redevelopment project and design options. The project was awarded the Planning and

Design Merit Award by the Hong Kong Institute of Planners – the icing on the cake, I suppose!

I have benefitted a lot from working at the Housing Department, and I am deeply honoured to have been a member of this professional team. Although I have retired, I still keep in touch with my former colleagues. On this memorable occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I wish the Housing Authority every success in writing up an even brighter chapter for public housing in Hong Kong.





# Bosom friends, cabinet freezer, stadium An Unforgettable Neighbourhood

LAW Shuk-pui, Rosanna, JP Permanent Secretary for Housing / Director of Housing

I must have lived in a tenement building in Kwun Tong before moving into public housing, but I don't have much recollection of that. When I was about three years old, I moved to Shek Yam Estate, and it is where all my childhood memories come from. I lived in Shek Yam Estate until it was demolished for redevelopment, while my parents moved uphill to On Yam Estate and lived there for 10-odd years.

As a kid, one of the things I most looked forward to every day was being taken by my father to the "stadium" downstairs for a tricycle ride in the evening when he returned from work. The "stadium" actually consisted of a mini football pitch, a basketball court, swings, merry-go-round, slides and so on. These were the main recreational facilities in those days when there were no theme parks. After the tricycle ride, I would go to "Kwan Kee Store" at Block 8 to buy soft drinks and ice-cream, and in the scorching heat it was really "awesome" to immerse our hands in the icy water in the cooling cabinet for soft drinks! Compared to private housing, public housing at that time did provide a lot of space for kids to move around, and the busiest time of the "stadium" was, of course, the Mid-Autumn Festival when lanterns were lit.

During my secondary school years, many of my classmates were neighbours at Shek Yam or Shek Lei, and after all these years a few of them remain my BFFs! Back then, I lived in Block 7, and one of my classmates, who is now the principal of a secondary school, lived in Block 1 across the road. Although we were separated by the "stadium", the road and the car park, we could easily see each other's units and, by seeing if the lights were on, we could each tell whether the other had gone to bed without having to call. This always made me feel warmly cordial – the feeling that people could be so closely linked to each other.

The management of housing estates was rudimentary back then. It has greatly improved

nowadays. The design of the housing estate, the facilities, the security equipment and the manpower arrangement are all much better than when I lived there. Recently, I went to Hung Fuk Estate and Shui Chuen O Estate to visit our young and elderly tenants. They all said that they are living well and that a sense of human touch and neighbourhood is still there though may not be as strong as when I was a child. So I very much hope to work towards re-establishing a good sense

of neighbourhood among the residents so that they will feel a stronger affiliation to their housing estates.

God's plan is amazing. My experience as a public housing tenant for 20-odd years is indeed the best "induction course" for me as Director of Housing. I hope that, with the mentality of "a traveller returning home", I can help more members of the general public reside peacefully and happily in our housing estates.

