

Expressions

September saw the culmination of a successful 10-year effort by the Government to clean up the Singapore and Kallang rivers. To mark this occasion, we invited our readers to tell us in a poem, piece of prose, photograph or sketch, what they thought of our waterways. The three poems, I Remember Boat Quay, Life and Death, and Reverie, win \$100 each. The other poems, photograph and sketch will be paid our usual contribution rates.

Reminiscing on the river

I remember Boat Quay

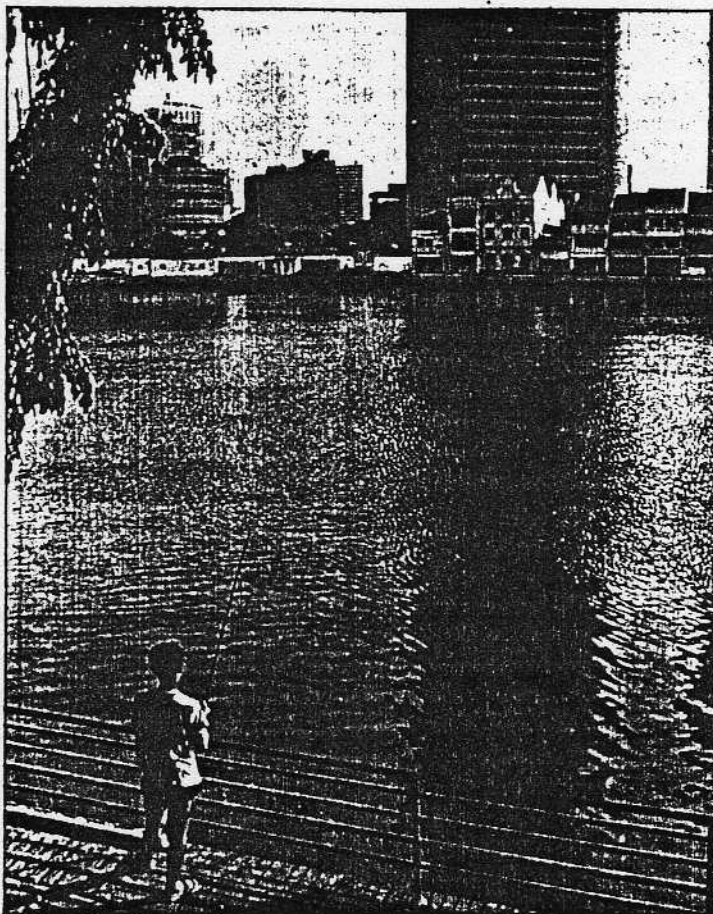
I remember Boat Quay —
Flitting scenes in childhood's treasury
The colourful images of yesteryear
Soon to entirely disappear
Of eyes painted on bows
of quaint cargo-laden *tongkang*
That weaved gingerly through the flotsam
Of debris bobbing in tow.
Yes I remember that distinctive
Acidulous reek
Which hung thickly over the air
And staring at the brackish, murky pool
Did I espy clear water there?

I remember the little shop
Where the *towkay* was grandmother
Running the family salt-trading business
Down by the river
I remember the burnished coolies
Staggering in under salt-filled gunny
sacks
How they strained and heaved and craftily
Piled the goods up in neat, high stacks.
And in the *towkay's* chair I would laze
Observing all for time to pass
Or bored, toy with the abacus
Under late grandfather's framed gaze.

I remember
The squalid, potholed, cobbled streets
Criss-crossed by sundry wheels, tyres,
paws, feet
The noisy trampling of wooden clogs
The meandering cats and barking dogs;
Chewing gum and spittle holding sway
All over the sheltered five-foot ways
Womenfolk parading in pyjamas — no
qualms
Fortune-tellers reading palms;
The butcher on his bicycle, making rounds
Coolies labouring at a godown;
The occasional now-fabled *samsul*
The intimate Hokkien/Teochew
camaraderie.

I remember the old-world charm
That bristled there only recently
I remember the sights and smells
And I remember Boat Quay

REUBEN WONG, 18
Student



CHU LIK REN, 22
Undergraduate

Reverie

Once
Your murky depths
held for me
an awesome fascination
of what lay beneath the flotsam
I imagined
myriad mysteries
a turbulence beneath calm
dregs of a primordial age...
Now
the window to your soul
is opened,
crystal-clear,
a shimmering iridescence
capturing the sunlight with its rainbow facets
and
revealing beneath
a revelry of life.

AGNES SOH,
Civil servant

Life and Death

Murky water
floating carcasses
of fowl,
pigs
and dogs
that's what
I recalled
of the River
that flows
behind my
house
Rainy days
drop by
drop
bring us despair
stirring up
all the
filth
from the
bottomless bed
Windy nights
Oh! how
we hate
carrying
transporting
Foul air
right into
our domain
evoking
creeping creatures
ominous shadows
in my
sleep
Gone
they are
all gone
now
Clean water
flows
Death
once ruled
supreme
replaced
Life flourish
guppies,
plants,
plankton
thought impossible
yesterday
Today
reigning as
master
of this
waterway

TEO CHIN CHYE, 24
Part-time tater