



Mdm Janet Lim

First local hospital matron and best-selling author

Janet Lim Chiu Mei was a woman who beat the odds through tenacity and grit. Born in Hong Kong in 1923, she grew up in the Chinese province of Guangdong. At the age of 8, her mother remarried after losing her father and brother to illness. Times were hard and as a result, Janet was sold to slavery as a "Mui Tsai", or domestic servant.

Janet was sent to Singapore in the early 1930s where she was resold to a wealthy man, who mistreated her. At this time, Singapore had banned the imports of mui tsais and required the existing ones to be registered. Janet's registration as a mui tsai led to a major turning point in her life. She was placed in the Po Leung Kuk orphanage for girls. In 1934, she was moved to the Church of England Zenana Missionary School (now known as St. Margaret's Secondary School) where she spent the next few years gaining an education.

In the early 1940s, Janet started training as a nurse at St. Andrew's Mission Hospital (SAMH) and attained the necessary qualifications by the end of 1941. It was also at this time that war broke out and the Japanese invaded Singapore. Although Janet tried to flee, the ship she was on was bombed and sunk. Janet managed to jump overboard, and she drifted among corpses for two days before being rescued by fishermen. She was then taken to Sumatra, only to be captured by the Japanese. Tortured for three years, she suffered beatings but managed to escape from sexual imprisonment as a comfort woman.

When the war ended, she went on to help former comfort women at the Social Hygiene Hospital. In 1951, Janet became the first nurse from Singapore to study nursing in Britain just three years after her return to SAMH.

A year later, she was back in Singapore and was eventually appointed the first Asian hospital matron of the nation at SAMH. Upon the urging of her friends and colleagues at SAMH, Janet went on to tell her unusual life story. In 1958, her memoir, *Sold for Silver*, was published by Collins and Sons of London. It was lauded as the first English book by a Singaporean woman, and also notably the first local autobiography.

In 1959, Janet left SAMH and married Errol Strang, an Australian doctor. Together, they moved to Kuala Lumpur, and then Hong Kong, where they finally settled down in 1960. She returned to Singapore in 2014 for the Hall of Fame induction ceremony before passing away peacefully five months later.

Janet's story is one of resilience, a quality we hope is instilled in our students as they grow and learn through their experiences during their time at St. Margaret's Secondary School. The courage that Janet exemplified is a timeless reminder that come what may, it is important to always remain steadfast in one's beliefs.