

Bookstores occupy a special place in my heart. To me, a well-stocked bookstore is not just a place to buy books. It is a refuge from the hustle and bustle of daily life, a treasure trove, a granary for the mind.

Many of my most cherished memories involve bookstores. Browsing the bookstores at Bras Basah Complex was my book-besotted father's idea of a weekend well spent, and it was a default family activity for years. He would usually deposit me at the children's section at Popular Bookstore before vanishing in search of new books to buy, trusting me to remain where he left me.

During those long afternoons, I learned that if one was quiet, unobtrusive and treated unsold books with scrupulous care, most bookstores wouldn't mind even if one sat on the floor reading for hours at a stretch. And what marvellous entertainment was to be had from those volumes! It was, of course, during the days when our public libraries were not as up-to-date and comprehensive as they are now. Back then, the best bet for anyone wanting the latest in reading material was to visit a bookstore.

As an older student, I continued to seek out bookstores on my own and with friends after school, saving up pocket money to buy the latest installment of my favourite series, or looking for new authors to try. In the days before mobile smartphones, bookstores made ideal meeting points because waiting was never a chore with books near at hand. The old MPH at Stamford Road and the Times the Bookshop at Centrepoint were among my regular haunts. Other bookstores came and went, all wonderful in their own ways.

Today, brick-and-mortar bookstores face myriad challenges. Readers who stick with physical books are likely to buy them over the internet, while many are consuming books in electronic format. The very concept of publishing is in flux. Like many consumers, I find online bookstores and e-books incredibly convenient. Our public libraries have also become well-resourced, well-equipped knowledge hubs in their own right. But to someone who grew up with bookstores, there are still few things that beat spending a leisurely afternoon in a beautiful bookstore, surrounded by new volumes just waiting to be bought and read.

It is heartening to know that memories of the old bookstores are being collected and presented by those who treasure them. The "rememberBookstores" campaign under the Singapore Memory Project by the National Library Board Singapore and initiated by the Chou Sing Chu Foundation in 2014 is now captured in *Passage of Time*. I hope this initiative will help the younger generation appreciate the role and significance of our bookstores in creating common memories and strengthening the community bond among Singaporeans.

Each bookstore story in this book is unique. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as I did!

Ms Sim Ann

Senior Minister of State,
Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth
& Ministry of Trade and Industry

