



Dick Yip, a senior citizen, clearly remembers the race riots of 1964.

# Different races, same kampung

**In 1964, violence broke out again in Singapore, this time between the Malays and Chinese. Dick Yip was then a Secondary Four student studying at Victoria School in Kallang. This is his story of how he saved a neighbour from danger on 4 September 1964, a Friday.**

**I**n the middle of my health science examination, parents suddenly came rushing into the school. They walked around the school calling their sons to come out of the classrooms: "Go home! Go home!"

The (exam) papers were not even finished yet but fights between Chinese and Malays had broken out again. The teachers stopped the examination and told us to hand in the

papers and just go home. It was probably like that all around Singapore.

My parents did not come. My father was at work and my mother was busy taking care of my siblings at home.

To stay safe, my friends and I stuck together as we walked to the bus stop outside Horne Road. We waited for a long time but there was no bus in sight. Some of my other friends

walked home but I could not. I was living at Siang Lim Park, near the end of Geylang Road. It was too far to walk home. The teachers who were driving home also did not pass by us.

While waiting for the bus, I saw a group of Chinese people across the road, standing by the five-foot-way. They were checking the vehicles going past. The Chinese were allowed to pass but if you were Malay, they would pull you out and whack you with the **cangkul** and sticks they had with them. I saw them walloping a Malay person with my own eyes.

I was still worrying about what I would do if the bus never came when I saw a cyclist approaching the check point. It was Mat, my neighbour in the kampung. We had grown up playing together and he often came to my house to play mahjong with my parents. He was like part of our family.

When they saw him, the Chinese men pulled him off the bicycle and started shouting, "Shoot ah! Pah! Melayu!" They thought he was a Malay and were about to hit him, but he was actually an Indian Muslim!

I rushed across the road towards them and shouted in Hokkien, "Stop! Stop! I know him,

we're from the same kampung! This is my friend."

I quickly called Mat to take out his **IC** and show them his Indian name. Fortunately, they let him off after seeing it.

I then told Mat to quickly go home and avoid cycling through the Chinese areas. There were a lot of Chinese thugs at Geylang Road, so I told him to cycle along Guillemard Road instead, where there were fewer people. He eventually made it home safely.

As for me, I gave up waiting for the bus and went to my friend's house nearby and called home. My father sent my brother to drive over and pick me up.

It was an unforgettable day for me.

I always think about what would have happened if I hadn't been there that day ... Mat could have died. He was very thankful to me after the incident.

To me, it was nothing about heroism. It so happened that I was there and I knew him. I would have done the same for anybody I knew.

— By DICK YIP as told to JUSTIN ZHUANG  
This article first appeared in *Hate*, a 2010 News for Kids publication.

## DIARY FROM A DIFFERENT TIME

Dick Yip kept a diary as a secondary school student. This is what he wrote in it on 21 July 1964, a day when racial riots broke out in Singapore.

### Tuesday 21 July 1964:

The Prophet Muhammad's birthday, i.e. today, is a public and school holiday. The celebration was a complete flop as it **degenerated** into an ugly communal clash between Malays and Chinese. This was

the first time in the history of Singapore that Malays and Chinese have clashed. It happened while I was watching a TV show "Biggest Show on Earth" (circus). People ran everywhere and columns of smoke rose in the sky. I ran out and cars were overturned and burned. The petrol kiosk was wrecked. Many stalls and coffeeshops were affected.

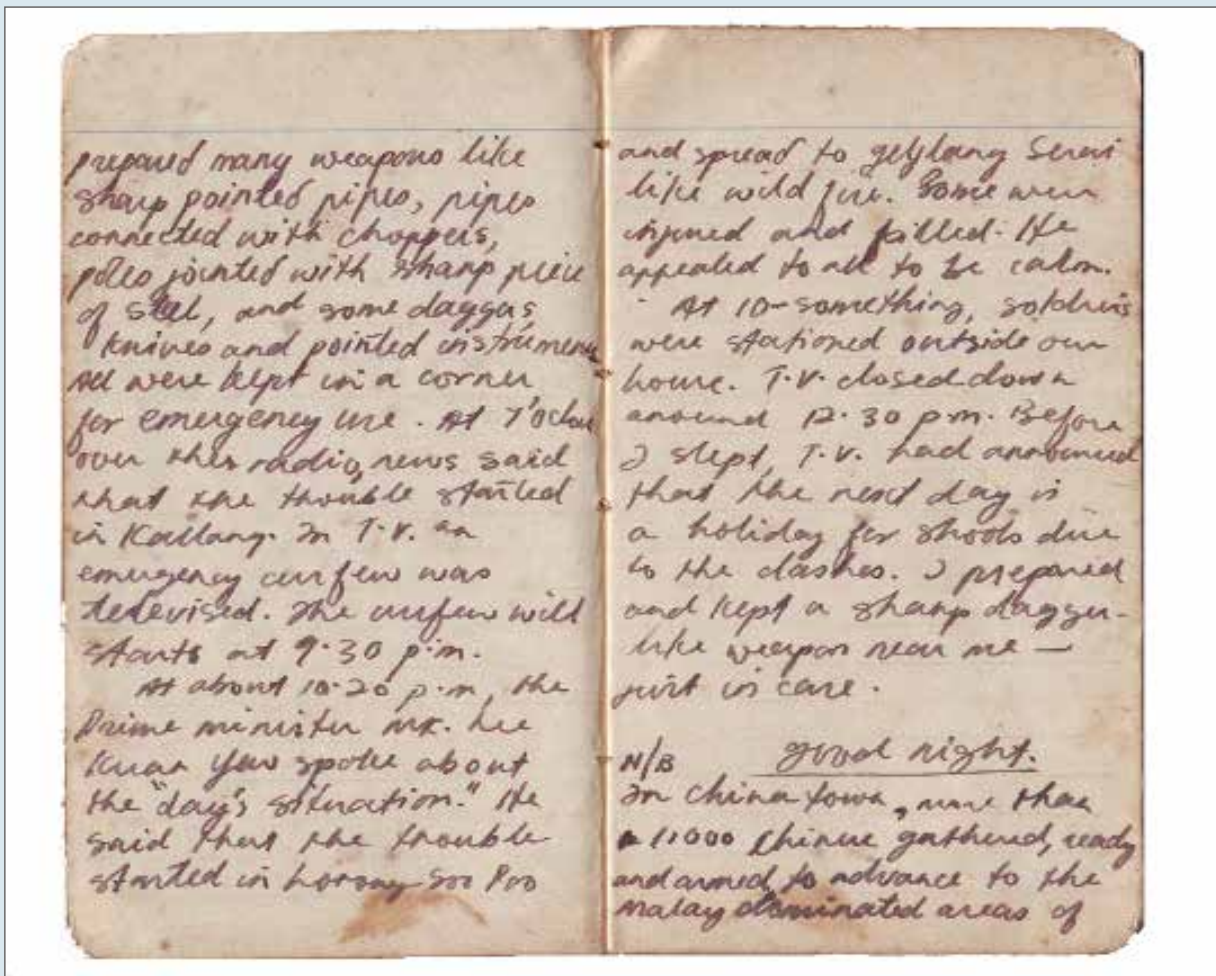
... However, Tian Yee who lives in Siglap managed to phone me. I told him to be prepared for some action ... I told him to use our Judo tactics if possible ...

Police were racing to Geylang Serai and Joo Chiat because of fresh clashes there. Meanwhile in our own home, my father and brother-in-law Ah Meng prepared many weapons like sharp pointed pipes, pipes connected with choppers, poles joined with sharp pieces of steel, and some daggers, knives and pointed instruments. All were kept in a corner for use in an emergency.

At 7 o'clock over the radio, it was reported in the news that trouble had started in Kallang. On TV, an emergency curfew was announced. The curfew will start at 9.30 pm.

At about 10.20 pm, the Prime Minister Mr Lee Kuan Yew spoke about the "day's situation". He said that the trouble started in Lorong Soo Poo and spread to Geylang Serai like wildfire. Some were injured and killed. He appealed to all to be calm.

At 10-something pm, soldiers were stationed outside our home. TV closed down around 12.30 am. Before I slept, it was announced on TV that the next day was a holiday for schools due to the clashes. I prepared and kept a sharp dagger-like weapon near me – just in case.



JUSTIN ZHUANG

His diary is full of memories of ordinary student life, such as studies and school activities. But, on 21 July 1964, Mr Yip's diary suddenly took a very serious turn.

# Counting on neighbours

**E**thnic riots can be scary. Fortunately, there are people like Dick Yip who remember that we all belong to the same human race. During the 1964 race riots, mosques and churches preached tolerance and organised prayers to bring Singaporeans of different faiths together.

Singapore's then head of state, Mr Yusof bin Ishak, encouraged students to unite. "Your racial background is unimportant because that is an accident of birth," he said. Many students and workers helped raise funds for the riot victims.

There was also a mega variety show organised in aid of the riot victims. It featured artistes from various cultures, including Chinese and Filipino singers, Indian and Korean dancers, and acrobats from Australia.

Around the island, the government set up goodwill committees made up of the different races. These multiracial teams protected Malays and also Chinese families living in Malay areas. They also organised get-together sessions and fund-raising dinners to promote goodwill amongst the races.

Nowadays, there are Racial and Religious Harmony Circles to remind Singaporeans to be sensible if trouble ever breaks out. Formerly known as Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circles (IRCCs), they were set up in 2002 after suspected terrorists were arrested in Singapore.

"If any terrorist attack should happen, the community and religious leaders in the IRCCs would already have worked with each other, and built up trust and confidence in each other," said Lee Hsien Loong, who was then the Deputy Prime Minister. IRCCs "would be ready to restrain hotheads from doing foolish things, rebuild confidence and prevent our society from splitting apart".

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## VOCAB BUILDER

**cangkul** (say "chang-kol"; noun) = garden hoe in Malay.

**IC** (say "ai-see"; noun) = short for Identity Card.

**degenerated** (say "di-je-ne-ray-ted": verb) = worsened.

**curfew** (say "ke-few"; noun) = a rule that says everyone must stay home at certain hours of the day.

What happened to Maria Hertogh triggered the 1950 riots that have become associated with her name. In this story, we fast-forwarded to the 1964 riots in Singapore. There are similarities and differences between the two. Both show us clearly that violence is not a good solution to problems. For more insights about the Maria Hertogh saga, read the full series at our website, [www.more.whatsup.sg](http://www.more.whatsup.sg).