

News

HEARTFELT:
The compilation, which took Mrs Sng Poh Yoke two 'painful' years to put together, was launched last month.

TNP PICTURE:
CHOO CHWEE HUA



Late hubby had something to say

The wife of former top civil servant Sng Boh Khim compiled a collection of his creative writings

REPORT: SYLVIA TOH PAIK CHOO
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SHE went against her husband's wishes. Mrs Sng Poh Yoke has, with much love and not a small measure of tears, put together a collection of her late husband Sng Boh Khim's creative writings.

The Ngee Ann Poly lecturer, 55, said: "I asked him many times, he always said no. He wrote not to make a name but because he had something to say."

That "something to say" includes poems, essays, letters, prose and e-mails, all now published in *Simply This - Simply His, Portraits of Sng Boh Khim* (Ethos Books).

Mr Sng was a top civil servant - private secretary to late president Wee Kim Wee - and died of cancer in 2006, aged 56.

The Pod at National Library was alive with the sound of music and chatter last month, as 100 friends and family, students and colleagues gathered to celebrate the launch of the book.

A band in a corner upped the amp, Jian Wei, 22, the youngest son among the four Sng children, plays bass guitar. "My father introduced me to jazz," he said, "gave me my first CD; Miles Davis, John Coltrane."

The group is called The Broke, and could have been named after this gig, which was gratis, natch.

A band of men, vintage circa 1968, had their noses in their copies. Literally, as after the hair, the eyeglass is next to go.

Schoolmates of Mr Sng, they were on page 55, trying to figure out where each was in the Pre-U class photo. They recalled their lost classmate as "a studious, not exactly sporty, man of few words". But not in his fine writing. He was mentored by Edwin Thumboo and a kakis of Kirpal Singh, both masters of the written word.

The heartfelt compilation took Mrs Sng "Two years, yes, painful".

The writer may have been colour-blind - "D for art, he would paint the chiku green for brown" - but in all other talents, towering, especially his facility with words.

There are poems on a trishaw-rider, the rapist, an aunty's wedding, the Esplanade, Qing Ming day. There are essays on presidents and politics.

There's his first-born's - now a father himself - eulogy to his father. There's an outline for a Chinese opera on the life of Jesus Christ.

Mr Sng said, "He knew how much I loved Chinese opera. One day I hope to produce it, Beijing opera-style."

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Mr Sng's labour of love – completed by wife

JOY FANG

SHE was his "dear PY", his "guardian angel" and his "one and only on Earth".

So it was an "extremely tough" time when Mrs Sng-Fun Poh Yoke lost her husband, Mr Sng Boh Khim – poet, writer, and former principal private secretary to former presidents Devan Nair and Wee Kim Wee – two years ago to lymphoma.

Yesterday, Mrs Sng, 55, launched a compilation of her late husband's work, comprising poetry, short stories, letters and e-mail messages from him professing his love for her.

It took her two years to put together *Simply This, Simply His: Portraits Of Sng Boh Khim* as she found it difficult to cope with being reminded of her loss.

"Every time I took the letters out to read, I would cry and not be able to go on," she said. All 1,000 copies are available for \$20 each at major bookstores.

Mrs Sng told my paper that her husband had been reluctant to put together a compilation of his work during the last few years of his life.

"He told me that he writes because he has something to say, and not to make a name for himself," she said.

He changed his mind later but died before he completed the project.

The publication of the book was therefore "something that I wanted to do for him", Mrs Sng said.



IN MEMORIAM: Mrs Sng-Fun Poh Yoke compiled her husband's writings in a book. (PHOTO: JAME KOH)

The couple met while they were in university, and got married in 1978 after dating for five years. They had four children.

"We never had any major quarrels where we exploded or called each other names. We were not the sort to get very angry," she said.

Mrs Sng hoped the book would be an inspiration to others.

"If someone can learn something from it and be moved, then the act of sharing such intimate things is worth it," she said.

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EXCERPTS

LETTERS

"My dear PY, my love, my one and only on Earth, our love now perfected in love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have lost everything, we have gained the most important thing: our love for one another..."

POETRY

"And I labour in love's abjection,

I have seen him and turned from his glaring,

Love was a trouble that made me stand still:

Love didn't seem like that."

PROSE

"There are stragglers even in the dead of night, in this no man's land of a lover's haunt... The sea has made an untidy retreat, discovering its spoils of worthless junk..."