



Vivien and John Lowe enjoying their visit with Ms So.

## A VISIT WITH MS SO

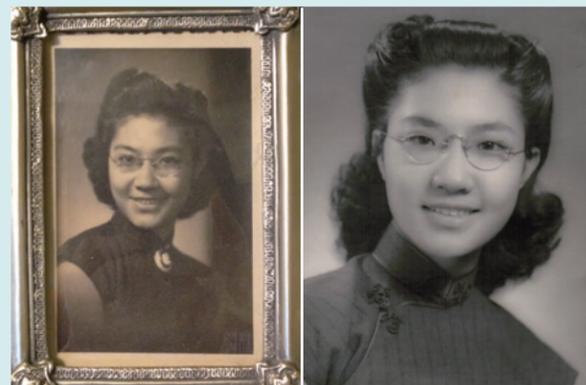
John and Vivien Lowe (1966)

In February 2015, while on vacation on the US West Coast, we paid a visit to Ms So (蘇曼如老師) at her home in Oakland, California, thanks to the thoughtful arrangements made by our classmate Julie Chan (陳亦如) (1966), Ms So's daughter, who also taught at SPCC and married a colleague Mr Edmund Tse (謝汝強老師). They are indeed a family of SPCC teachers!

Ms So was our Mathematics teacher in the 60s, and was known among us for her dry humour besides of course her astute mastery of the subject. As very well put by one of our classmates – Ms So's comments in marking our homework clearly reflected her care and attention for her students.

We had met with Ms So a few years back but had not delved much into the past, and this time we were keen to find out more. Aged 95, Ms So was lively as ever when we visited her and readily provided us with interesting details of herself and her time at SPCC and after. It was pure delight listening to her vivid account of people and events.

Ms So, often taken to be Shanghaiese, is actually Cantonese, but her father had settled in Shanghai with his family and she went to



Photos of Ms So when she was young.

McTyeire Girls' School in Shanghai. McTyeire was an exclusive American school boasting alumnae such as Soong Ching Ling and her sisters! She then attended the University of Hong Kong majoring in Chemistry and Mathematics, but after two years returned to Shanghai due to the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong. She finished her college education at the prestigious St. John's University.



1. Ms So with her daughters Julie (left) and Marie (right).  
2. Ms So at home with her daughter Julie and son-in-law Edmund. All had taught at SPCC.

3. A recent photo of Ms So.  
4. Ms So with Class of 1966 alumni in the Bay Area during John and Vivien's visit.

It was at St. John's University that she befriended Mrs Tao (陶黃淑隱老師), who later also taught at SPCC and was sitting right across from Ms So in the 3/F Teachers' Room. Ms So clearly relished her memories of Mrs Tao who had a heavy Shanghaiese accent. She chuckled when she related to us funny incidents like: Whenever it rained Mrs Tao would cry “生瘡 (門窗) 啦”, and on one fine day she told Ms So that she was planning to go to Shek O “生仔 (山仔)”!

Ms So got married in 1947 and was living in Shanghai, but like many middle class Chinese in that period, moved to Hong Kong with her parents in 1949, to be joined by her husband a year later.

It was quite a coincidence that Ms So became a teacher at SPCC. In 1951 as Ms So vaguely remembered, she took up the job as a temporary teacher at St. Paul's Primary School, to substitute for Ms Wong (黃少珍老師) who was pregnant at the time and needed bed rest. After Ms Wong returned to work, Ms So stayed on to substitute for another teacher who fell ill. Eventually she was invited by then Principal Dr Catherine Woo, who noted Ms So's teaching ability, to join SPCC as a permanent member of staff, and was later transferred to the secondary section. For a while she was teaching English and Translation besides Mathematics!

Dr B. M. Kotewall, who was a few years more senior and knew Ms So when both were studying in the University of Hong Kong, took over as Principal in 1952. Ms So remembered Dr Kotewall as a very assertive educator who commanded a lot of deference from

officials in Hong Kong's Education Department. She was able to set a more vigorous academic curriculum for SPCC which deviated somewhat from the structure specified by the government – for example SPCC had fewer Physical Education but more Mathematics hours! Ms So spoke fondly of Dr Kotewall who was always supportive of her throughout her years at SPCC.

When asked about her view of SPCC students, as we knew ourselves to be far from model pupils, Ms So smiled and perhaps diplomatically declared that, while some students might be a bit naughty, all students in SPCC were courteous and good-natured, and she enjoyed teaching there. And of course, SPCC students performed very well in public examinations.

Ms So retired from SPCC in 1984 and migrated to the US. For years she had engaged in volunteer work with the “Senior Companion Programme” in the San Francisco area, visiting Chinese immigrants who needed assistance. She enjoyed helping people and continued this service until 2010 when she turned 90.

It was such a delight to visit Ms So and find her healthy and spirited. She remains independent, choosing to live by herself in a Senior Apartment although both her daughters and their families are in the US – Julie is in San Francisco and Marie (陳少如) (1973) in North Carolina, and both are visiting her every year. We take this opportunity to wish Ms So the very best in the years to come!