

Ode to the HKU Medic Class of Sixty-four

(A memoir fifty years late)

By SC Pang

Dedicated and with respect to

All my inspiring classmates

Do you still remember?

It all began in September

And the year nineteen fifty-nine.

Anyone could see our faces shine,

Reflecting a smile we proudly wore

To form the medic class of sixty-four.

In the dissection hall we acquainted one another;

Around nameless cadavers we grouped together.

Sitting on stools to take up the task,

We could not help whispering to ask:

“Which is the one with the highest score

To head the medic class of sixty-four?”

Has anyone forgotten the remarkable teacher

Who turned Organic Chemistry into a torture?

She rubbed off as quickly as she could write;
We had no chance to get the formulas right.
Alas, the subject stood guard the lone door
Between us and the medic class of sixty-four.

The first hundred days passed, as did Organic Chemistry;
The focus moved to Anatomy, Physiology and Biochemistry.
Sentiments ran wild when the viva results were out.
The top dogs were always the same, we had no doubt;
The rest reluctantly waited for our turns to stack the floor.
Those were the hectic days in the medic class of sixty-four.

The preclinical curriculum was a cramming game;
Any dyspepsia or amnesia would taint your name.
The First MB was rapidly approaching;
There was no time for self reproaching.
Sleepless nights we struggled hard to take in more
Lest we missed out in the medic class of sixty-four.

The journey to achieve our ambition was tedious;
Hurdle after hurdle we persevered to be studious.
Pharmacology, Pathology and Disease Prevention
Following the heels of the First MB examination,
Heralded our next path forward to the core
That finalised the medic class of sixty-four.

The clinical course was exciting with lots to cover;
Time was regularly short with so much to discover.
There was a “mind” guy in the High Street Clinic;
His manner was comedic and his tutorial pure tonic.
He talked on Koro from mystical Chinese folklore,
And brought giggles in the medic class of sixty-four.

There was this easy going “skin” man;
He was usually late for the clinics he ran.
He touched and probed many florid lesions
But never washed his hands in the sessions.
We enjoyed a few laughs but did not care to implore;
We were busy tending to the medic class of sixty-four.

We can never forget the one hundred metre mad dash,
To avoid the quick-tempered Professor’s verbal bash.
It took place every Thursday precisely at ten a.m.;
The race was explosive and definitely not a sham.
It was no fun and the whole body could feel the sore;
’Twas the way of life in the medic class of sixty-four!

We served clerkships to acquire clinical skills
But ended up mostly swallowing humble pills.
Did university lecturers of the day like to be sadistic
Or, simply confuse being humorous with sarcastic?
Stern or concerned, they were a breed we loved to adore;

They sharpened our wits in the medic class of sixty-four.

Clerkships had ranks of junior and senior divisions;
Specialties and subspecialties got their provisions:
Surgery, Internal Medicine, Gynaecology, Obstetrics,
Radiology, Orthopaedics, Oncology and Paediatrics;
You name it; it was a spectacle of institutions galore,
Meant to mould us into the medic class of sixty-four.

The Obstetrics clerkship came in the fourth and final years;
The four-week resident experience was all joy without tears.
The friendly Unit Interns gave us no strife
And we had good support from the midwife.
We would have cried out and requested an encore
But for the schedule of the medic class of sixty-four.

At last the grand final was here;
The moment of truth was near.
We kept our nerves and held our breath;
The battle was a matter of life and death!
We must succeed and be greeted with the roar;
Our destiny lay in the medic class of sixty-four!

The Second MB was over but the wait an anticlimax;
We all deserved a full bottle and a long holiday to relax.
Instead, most rushed around seeking their internship;

Others were getting set for a repeat of the hardship.
They needed six months of patience to let them soar
And rejoin the party in the medic class of sixty-four.

A year of enforced hospital duty was the last obstacle;
We were titled Houseman but more likely an article.
We worked twenty-four seven with little break or rest;
Our dignity was non-issue and we could not protest.
We survived the ordeal but could barely restore
The high spirit of the medic class of sixty-four.

Thirty years on we celebrated the pearl anniversary;
Not all could attend and a few only by their obituary.
This was distressing and we felt the pain,
But it hardened our resolve to meet again.
Our bodies had weakened, our health not as before;
It's sad to see a shrinking medic class of sixty-four.

The ruby celebration was a great hit;
The wish to meet oftener was explicit.
We had been through tough times as a team;
We helped each other to realise a noble dream.
Now that we have reached l'anniversarie d'or,
Let's shout: Viva the medic class of sixty-four!

One's memory is limited and mine small;
Many names and events I cannot recall.
You are welcome to add, amend or delete
To make this narrative true and complete.
You've got the picture, I need say no more;
What a marvellous medic class of sixty-four!