

VIBRANCE

There is no end to the number of people – some very well-known – who have some sort of connection with Queenstown.

It was there that radio DJ Brian Richmond found the love of his life, Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Associate Professor Koo Tsai Kee rubbed shoulders with gangsters, and one of Singapore's best known bands was born.

Their memories and that of a whole host of others – ranging from a hawker to national waterpolo players – are presented in a new 172-page book, "10 Stories: Queenstown Through the Years".

The book, published by the National Heritage Board, with the Central Singapore Community Development Council and Queenstown Citizens' Consultative Committee, was launched by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew in November.

The book was published to mark the 55th anniversary last year of Singapore's oldest housing estate.

It was written by Calvin Low, a freelance journalist trained in architecture, who was himself a resident of the estate.



DJ Brian Richmond with wife Susanne, in the 1960s. Their love story began in Queenstown.

In his message in the book, Tanjong Pagar GRC MP Baey Yam Keng says: "As Singapore's first satellite town, Queenstown has a special place in our history books."

Indeed, Queenstown can lay claim to many firsts:

The first branch of the National Library in 1970, and first Housing and Development Board homes in 1960.

Its pioneering status aside, the town holds a special place in the hearts of its sons and daughters. In the book, many remember Queenstown as a friendly neighbourhood.

Joo Chiat MP Chan Soo Sen, who moved to Margaret Drive at age six, says folks did not close their doors and kids ran all over the place.

Associate Professor Koo, who moved to Princess Estate when he was five, recalls how children looked forward to the return of the pineapple drink seller in the evenings, as he would give away his leftover drinks free.

The Queenstown of their childhood was also comparatively modern: It had Tah Chung, a three-storey shopping complex, which was the height of sophistication as far as neighbourhood shopping was concerned.

Many milestones were celebrated there: A birthday meant a trip to Mont d'or cake shop on the ground floor, and wedding dinners were held at the Golden Crown restaurant on the top floor.

One of those dinners was Brian Richmond's. His was a love story made in Queenstown.

It was at a sarabat stall in the estate that he first saw his wife to be, Susanne, then a River Valley High schoolgirl. Richmond was accompanying a friend who liked her, but she ended up becoming attracted to him instead.



The blocks of flats, representing a new lifestyle in the estate, with the old makeshift stalls at Queen's Crescent. This was the first built in Singapore's public housing efforts.

It was not just love which some found in Queenstown, there was menace too.

As was the case in other towns, gangs were a fact of life in the estate. Associate Professor Koo found out a neighbour he hung out with, was in a gang. Others remembered lorries filled with gangsters with parangs.

On Nov 26, 1972, a notorious gangster put Queenstown in the headlines: Singapore's most wanted man, Lim Ban Seng, was shot dead by cops during an ambush at a *pasar malam* there. The infamous armed robber was felled by three bullets in a shootout.

Queenstown provided the backdrop to another dark story, closer to present day.

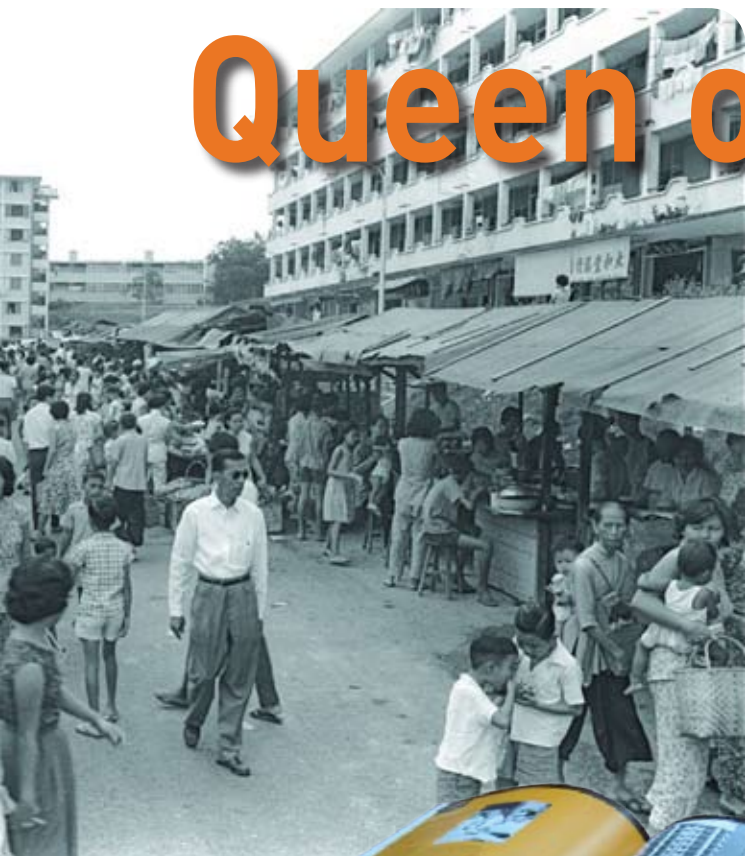
In the 2004 Singapore movie "Perth", veteran actor Lim Kay Tong plays a former sailor left behind by the rapid changes in society. He wanders around the Tanglin Halt area in Queenstown,



First 14-storey and then 16-storey public housing blocks: Forfar House (center), has been demolished. It once was the tallest housing block in Singapore at 14 storeys. But the 16-storey blocks at Commonwealth Close still remain.

Queen of towns

By L Ho



In the 1960s, contrast starkly the flats were among



Friendships, like that shared by these women, were built in Queenstown. Behind them is the Church of the Blessed Sacrament (along Queensway).



The book costs \$30 and is available at bookshops.

with the faded neighbourhood a symbol of the good, old days which Lim's character longs to return to.

Queenstown was also the place where one of Singapore's best-loved regional exports was created – The Quests, a band wildly popular in the region in the 1960s.

Two of its founding members, Jap Chong and Raymond Leong, first came up with the idea of forming a band while studying at Queenstown Secondary Technical School.

The name of the group was inspired by the name of their school magazine, Q-U-E-S-T.

Now, this queen of housing estates is being remade. The old has been giving way to the new. And it is in the news again as Dawson estate in Margaret Drive has been earmarked for a new generation of public housing complete with sky gardens.

Ahead: More good years, and good memories.



Jap Cheong (left) and Raymond Leong (centre), who came up with idea of forming the Quests in Queestown, with Lim Wei Guan, at the 2001 launch of a book on the band.