

# Harmony amidst Diversity

My primary one teacher had said, on Racial Harmony Day, that harmony was important and crucial to a small and diverse country like Singapore. She said that racial harmony was one of Singapore's greatest achievements.

At that time, I was tempted to laugh. I wanted to point out that everyone was Chinese, what was the big deal? In a SAP school, the environment was almost all-Chinese. I had some Indian neighbours, but they were adults, so my exposure to other races were limited. What *was* the need for harmony?

As I grew up, year after year, I began to feel like I understood the need for racial harmony better. I had read news and remarks about racism and had been slightly disturbed and outraged by it. But what I thought was understanding, was only head knowledge. I did not have opportunities to apply it to real life, and had not seen, with my own eyes, for myself.

My cousin lived on the other side of our island. Almost every week we would go to his house for a visit to our grandparents, and we would play soccer together, under the HDB flat, at the void deck.

I remember the day. Bare-footed and perspiring, I ran after the soccer ball, panting as I watched my cousin dribble the ball towards the goal.

He scored.

"Hey, can we play too?" two boys asked. "We're quite good," they added.

"Sure," my cousin replied.

Dribbling the ball expertly, the boys kicked and scored, running continuously, as if their energy had no limit.

I stood in the void deck and watched as the boys played. I was not at their level. They were much too fast, much too strong.

I smiled as I watched them. They wove in and out, faster than I could ever run. I could see the smile on their faces, too. They were having fun.

It was only after the match and the boys gone home, did I realise that one boy was Malay, while the other was Indian. Isn't it funny, I thought to myself, that we are so different, and yet I didn't notice the differences?

Perhaps differences didn't matter, I realised, if, we did not notice them. If we did not care about them. And therefore, we could be harmonious.

So perhaps I understood after all. Perhaps my teacher was right, perhaps racial harmony was important in the end.

And perhaps, just perhaps, we could have harmony, amidst our diversity.