

William Wan

MY BEST WITH HONOUR

Marshall Cavendish Editions

“Most schools and universities fail to teach their students how to succeed in life — they teach much in terms of skills and knowledge, but they fail to teach that to succeed in work and life, you do not need just technical competencies and professional performance, but you need to be trustworthy above all. When you are trustworthy, you honour your word and choose to do the good and the right thing despite the challenges; you display courage and commitment where others give up, and you always deliver on your promises regardless of the cost. And to be trustworthy, one needs honour for honour is the foundation of trust.

Dr William Wan’s account of 12 people whose lives have been transformed by scouting, has in fact produced a book on successful and purposeful living — you cannot miss the message of trust and trustworthiness in relationships. It is a book for everyone, not just scouts, because it is a book of inspiration on what brings goodness and success in life, which scouting helps develop but which all of us can choose to become. It starts with a pledge to ‘do my best’; it ends with me becoming the best I can be. To succeed in life and win with honour. Honour your word and honour others — your parents, your family, your friends, your colleagues and everyone who crosses your path in life. Your honour is your life.”

— Mr Lim Siang Guan, Chairman of Honour (Singapore), and Professor (Practice), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

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William Wan

# For Review Only



## THE SCOUT PROMISE AND LAW

### **The Scout Promise**

On my Honour I promise that I will do my best  
To do my duty to God and the Republic of Singapore  
To help other people and  
To keep the Scout Law.

### **The Scout Law**

A Scout is to be trusted.  
A Scout is loyal.  
A Scout makes friends, establishes and  
maintains harmonious relations.  
A Scout is disciplined and considerate.  
A Scout has courage in all difficulties.

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“Scouting values are kindness values, and Dr William Wan has written an inspiring book to show how these positive values build character that lasts a lifetime. This is a must-read for all who wish to inculcate a sense of moral purpose in the lives of the next generation.”

—Mr Koh Poh Tiong  
Chairman, Singapore Kindness Movement

“*My Best with Honour* is a good text for young people to study and interact with. They will not only be inspired by the way scouting values have informed and moulded the characters of these men and women, they will also be challenged to embrace and practice these values for themselves. As an educator, I strongly believe that education without values is incomplete. I also recommend this book to parents because they play a critical role in shaping the values of their children.”

—Mr Nicholas Tang  
Educator and former Chief Commissioner,  
Singapore Scout Association

“As a scout, I can identify with the stories in this very readable book. I am sure it will resonate with many in the scouting movement. More importantly, I commend this book to parents who desire to develop in their children the qualities of resilience and determination to succeed.”

—Mr Philip Chua  
Chairman, Communications & Relations Committee,  
Singapore Scout Association

“Dr William Wan has written a page-turner that showcases how scouting has contributed to the lives of many people, who are making a difference in our society today. Scouting imparts progressive leadership skills at all levels, and many of the NYAA recipients attributed their achievements to scouting.”

—Mr James Soh, PBM MBE,  
Executive Director,  
National Youth Achievement Award Council

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This book is humbly dedicated to:

My beloved mother, Madam Tan Quee Huay (1903-1991). She singlehandedly raised me and my sister, holding down two jobs to provide for our well-being. She taught me values that were affirmed and reinforced by the scouting ethos.

Ruth, my wife of 48 years. She is my tower of strength and support in the worst of times, and my avid fan, in the best of times. She is a nurturing mother to my three children, Li-Ann, Li-Lynn and Le-Ben, all grown and fulfilled individuals.

My two daughters, Li-Ann and Li-Lynn, who learned from their mother how to be equally faithful and nurturing mothers to my grandchildren, Lucas, Ava and Juli.

All mothers, whose hands rock the cradle and, as far as I am concerned, rule the world by inculcating and providing role-model values as stewards of God's precious gifts of the young lives entrusted to them.

“Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her: ‘Many women do noble things, but you excel them all.’” — Proverbs



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The publication of this book is made possible by a generous grant from the Ministry of Education for the promotion of character education.

The Chief Scout, Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, the President of the Singapore Scout Association (SSA), Mr Tan Tee How, and the Chief Commissioner, Mr Tan Cheng Kiong, for their support in bringing this book to its fruition.

All the interviewees for this book, without whom there would have been no stories for me to tell. These are busy people who took time to be interviewed and provided me with all the material I needed.

Mr Philip Chua, the Chair of Communications and Relations Committee and fellow members, especially Mr Nicholas Tang and Mr Ong Teong Wan, for their constant encouragement and support.

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When Lord Baden-Powell wrote the book *Scouting for Boys* in 1908, he intended it as an instruction handbook for boys, drawing on his boyhood experiences, and his experiences in Africa while he was stationed there as a soldier. The book proved to be a resounding success. Not only did *Scouting for Boys* become a best-seller, it also inspired boys to form themselves into patrols and troops, thus laying the foundation for scouting to become a worldwide movement dedicated to the education of young people. Today, there are over 40 million scouts in 216 jurisdictions all over the world.

Scouting arrived in Singapore in 1910, when scoutmaster Frank Cooper Sands from the United Kingdom started a troop with 30 boys at the YMCA. Subsequently, other troops were formed in schools and the community, and many young people were able to join the movement and to grow up as scouts. I was one of them and scouting became an integral part of my own formative years.

What did I remember about being a scout? First, there were vivid memories of the outdoor activities, such as camping at Jurong Camp, hiking through Punggol, swimming off the Changi coast and orienteering in Bukit Timah, not forgetting the campfires and scout-craft competitions. More than the fun and excitement, I learned many useful practical skills from these activities.

Second, many of my fellow scouts became my good friends and we continue to keep in touch with each other to this day. They are people whom I had worked closely with and we got to understand each other very well.

Third, scouting taught me important values, shaped my character and outlook, and made me what I am today. It instilled in me a strong sense of responsibility and gave me the self-confidence to use my talents to serve the community. I also learned the importance of being prepared for any unexpected developments and events.

Indeed, scouting has enriched the lives of many and contributed much to their physical, mental and spiritual development.

In this book, 12 scouts talk about how their scouting experience has equipped them to develop values, strengths and confidence to take on challenges in their respective lives.

I congratulate the Singapore Scout Association for publishing this book. Young people, both scouts and non-

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scouts, will find the stories interesting. It is also my hope that through this book, they will find inspiration and wisdom to seek out their own purpose and meaning, and help them to live their best life in this fast-changing world.



**DR TONY TAN KENG YAM**  
President of the Republic of Singapore  
and Chief Scout



## FOREWORD

Once a scout, always a scout.

I became a Cub Scout when I was just 11 years old, for no reason other than the fact that I was attracted to the scout uniform. Today, I am still a scout. There are others like me who continue to be actively involved in the scout movement even after we have completed our schooling. We have grown to love scouting and we want to do our part for our young so that they too can benefit from scouting.

However, we are really in the minority: the vast majority of scouts would have left the movement upon finishing school. Yet, they will proclaim that they remain very much scouts at heart. The things they learn in scouting stay with them long after they have outgrown the uniform: things like being a good leader, making sound decisions, taking personal responsibility, serving others, caring about the community and being good citizens. Regardless of what they do in life, scouting has given them the skills and self-confidence they need to be the best they can be, today and for the rest of their lives.



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All these lessons of scouting are learned in the great outdoors, through activities such as hiking, camping, mountain-climbing, canoeing and so on; in small groups called patrols where leadership, teamwork and caring for one another are practised and inculcated; and with an emphasis on age-old values such as faithfulness to God, loyalty to country, integrity and service to mankind.

While the world today is very different from when Lord Baden-Powell founded scouting more than a hundred years ago, the principles and methods of scouting remain relevant to the development of our young today. In fact, in a world of electronic games, social media, online relationships and material pursuits, an outdoor-based, value-centric educational programme will provide the much-needed anchor for our young in a turbulent, fast-changing world.

This book tells the stories of 12 scouts of different ages and from different walks of life. They are stories of how scouting has prepared them for responsible adulthood and good citizenship. They are also stories of how the lessons of scouting have equipped them with the necessary values and important life-skills to confront challenges and pursue their dreams.

The Singapore Scout Association commends this book to all our young people, including those who are not (yet) members of the scout movement. We hope these stories can

inspire them on their journey through life and will contribute to their education and development. We thank the Ministry of Education for its generous funding of this book. We are also grateful to Dr William Wan, a scout and currently Scout Council member, for his painstaking authorship.



**MR TAN TEE HOW**  
President  
Singapore Scout Association

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## INTRODUCTION

How I became a better man.

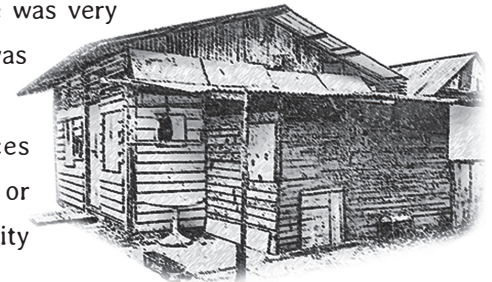
I have just attended the funeral for the son of my former law partner. He was only 18 years old. While I am grateful to be alive, I am now at the age when attending funerals comes with increasing frequency and regularity. Reunions with my circle of friends have become a mournful and cruel version of musical chairs, and death seems to be closing in all around me. The many funeral services I have attended — their formalities, sights and sounds — all seem to mesh together in my memory, while the act of saying goodbye has gotten a bit easier over time. So it was to my surprise that this most recent funeral struck me at my core.

There are people I know who avoid funeral services at all costs, and I believe it is because funerals make us feel uneasy. It brings to light our own mortality. It reminds us that no matter who we are, what successes, fortunes or prestige we have achieved, we all share the same mortal outcome.

Joseph (not his real name) was only a boy. Perhaps the saddest thing about the sudden death of a boy is the loss of a life with unfulfilled potential, like a pruned bud which never had the opportunity to blossom. His passing made me reflect upon my own life and, in particular, my childhood and the subsequent years that moulded me into who I am today. As hindsight is much clearer than foresight, when I look back, I am able to see the road I have travelled with so much more insight and discernment.

Like many, my life has been filled with twists and turns. There are only a few vivid childhood memories which I can recall with the utmost clarity. Being a scout is one of them. I made the decision to become a scout at the age of 10. At the time, I did not realise how important this one decision was, and its full impact on me until many, many years later.

As a baby boomer, I was born shortly after the end of the Second World War, at a time when Singapore was a colony under the British Empire. I grew up in a kampung near Bartley Road. Life was very different then. There was no public housing. Most people lived in places with no running water or sewerage, and electricity



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was limited to certain hours of the day. Needless to say, there was no airconditioning. The kampung where I lived had a shared well, a shared kitchen and a shared toilet. But to call it a toilet is a bit of an overstatement, it was simply a hole and a bucket. This bucket would be manually emptied by the night soil carrier, whose job was to collect buckets full of waste and replace them with empty buckets. Sometimes, when he failed to come on a particular day, people resorted to dumping their waste illegally in the rivers, where waste from hog farming would also be dumped.

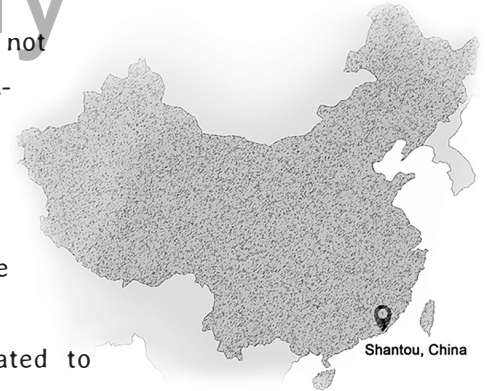
Besides the obvious problems with pollution and sanitation, there was also a lot of social unrest and economic problems during this post-war period. Singapore's annual GDP per capita in 1960 was only US\$428 while the GNP per capita in that same year was US\$3,007. Most people, including my family, were poor. We only ate chicken during Chinese New Year as animal protein was considered a luxury. Our daily meals consisted only of rice and grains.

Life was simple. To entertain myself, I spent a lot of time catching spiders, climbing trees and playing with fish and crabs by the river after the monsoons came and flooded

the streets. Despite not having many modern-day conveniences, I never felt like I was missing anything in my life, except for one thing: a father.

My parents migrated to Singapore from Shantou, near the eastern coast of Guangdong province, with nothing other than the clothes they were wearing. Like many Chinese immigrants who left their homeland in search of a better life, my father's dream was to start his own business. His search for prosperity was fraught with hardship, and when his business failed, he became severely depressed and socially withdrawn. From that point on, he was mostly absent from my life. He abandoned his duties to his family, and left my mother to be the sole provider for me and my four siblings. In order to make ends meet, my mother had to hold down two jobs at a time when it was considered rare for women to work outside the home. As her schedule left her too exhausted to look after me, I was forced to grow up quickly, to assume adult responsibilities and to become self-sufficient at a very young age.

Scouting gave me an escape. It liberated me, and allowed me opportunities to do all the things that kids are supposed



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to do: play, explore, socialise, learn and create. Scouting gave me permission to be curious, to be silly and sometimes to be rough. Through scouting, I learned skills like how to identify poisonous plants, what to do when confronted by a predator and how to properly dress a wound. Moreover, it also gave me a sense of belonging and purpose, and a home away from home. Beyond the lessons in leadership, good citizenry, teamwork and civic mindedness, the one other priceless thing that it gave me that I did not consider until much later in life, is that it taught me how to be a man.

I cannot tell you just how much growing up with an absentee father affected me, because I do not even understand the full extent. What I can say is that I had a gaping hole inside of me. When you take a look at crime statistics, you will find that over 90% of all violent crimes are committed by men. When you visit the prisons, as I have, you will realise that the vast majority of prisoners have a history of strained relationships with their fathers. A boy without a father has no road map on what it means to be a man. Instead, he has



to figure out on his own how to be masculine, how to handle emotions and setbacks, and how to navigate the world as an adult. On top of that, he has to confront the reality that his own father, someone whom he once thought of as a superhero, as all kids



initially do, did not take the time to invest in him.

Although I did not realise it at the time, I blamed myself. I thought maybe I was not worthy of his love and attention, or maybe I contributed in some way to his withdrawal. My lack of identity and need for affirmation became a big part of my early childhood narrative, and shaped my perspective on how I saw the world, and it was bleak.

However, joining the scouts changed this. It gave me an outlet for my angst, a freedom to explore the wild — both outside in nature as well as inside of me — and scout masters became my first mentors in life. These dedicated individuals invested in me, guided me, believed in me and taught me by being living examples of what it meant to be honourable and to do my best.

Scouting was also my first introduction to the belief in a Higher Being. Each time I recited the Scout Promise, I made a vow to God and to my country. Like many things we do out of habit, it often starts out as perfunctory, just going through the motions without any real consideration. The first time I recited the Scout Promise, I did not quite appreciate the concept of God. Even after some time had



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passed, I still was not fully ready to accept God into my life. I was immature, headstrong, stubborn and impatient. I had to first be tamed and disciplined; I had to learn how to trust, not only in God and in others He put before me, but also in myself. I had to be exposed to a bigger world beyond my immediate surroundings, and be sensitised to global issues and the challenges and suffering of those less fortunate. I had to learn that by caring for, nurturing and empowering others, I could heal the wound caused by a non-existent paternal relationship and, ultimately, I could forgive my father for his absence. This was the breakthrough that scouting gave me.

In many ways, my years as a scout set me up for my path in life. It gave me the confidence to pursue law and be the first in my family to obtain a university degree, the humility to serve those who are less privileged, the insight to know that happiness does not come from materialism, and the discipline to exercise my body and my mind in a daily practice which I still continue to do today.

Some might say that I have lived a successful life and have achieved quite a bit since my scouting days. I have been a church pastor, a scholar, a lawyer, a professor, an author and I am currently leading the Singapore Kindness Movement. I have been married for



48 years and am a grandfather to three grandchildren, all of whom are currently pursuing university degrees. My definition of success, however, comes directly from the Scout Promise. I consider myself successful if I have made a difference in people's lives, and have truly left the world a better place than I found it.

As I observe my children, and now my grandchildren, growing up, I have come to realise that times have indeed changed. The problems youths face today are drastically different from those of my generation. Especially in this region of the world, there is a heavy emphasis on academic achievement at the expense of everything else. The stress and pressure that children face today have reached levels never seen before, and the suicide rate among schoolchildren are at its highest over the last 15 years. Parents have also become far more protective of their children, despite an overall improvement in safety since my childhood days. Children nowadays rarely engage in unsupervised outdoor play where they, through roaming freely and roughhousing, can learn to forge friendships, set their own rules and norms, and work together in the spirit of camaraderie. It is no wonder that children of this generation have become far more competitive than collaborative, and I believe this trend contributes to the loneliness and isolation many of them feel when they reach adulthood.

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Studies have shown that self-directed play, especially when it takes place outdoors, leads to a reduction in obesity, and in the symptoms of anxiety, depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Research has also shown that children learn self-control and responsibility over their own actions and decisions when they are left on their own, away from parental supervision. Children who regularly engage in such activities grow up to be better at problem solving, are less prone to boredom, are less over-reactive to uncertainty and fear, and can better cope with challenges. There is also clear evidence that a lack of consistent exposure to sunlight in young children leads to myopia or short-sightedness. Today, the prevalence of myopia in Singapore is among the highest in the world.

When children join the scout movement, they not only have ample opportunities to engage in self-directed activities where they can have fun and play with others, but they also become part of a centuries-old tradition that has played an integral role in the development of character, self-confidence, empathy and leadership among youths, while also teaching them practical survival skills, dexterity and how to connect with the natural world. In an age when children have become less comfortable with socialising face-to-face than through electronic devices, it is my fear that children today will exhibit serious social problems later in adulthood as a result

of inhibiting a very natural part of human development. In fact, I already sense a rise in some of these social problems.

My belief that scouting will greatly benefit youths comes mainly from my own personal experience, and I wanted to see if others in Singapore also shared my views, and had similar transformative stories of their own. I wanted to know how scouting benefited them and contributed to their lives, and how the scout movement could evolve to better serve the needs of the next generation.

This book is the result of my quest to seek these answers. It contains stories of 12 scouts of various ages and from different walks of life. It is my hope that in reading these stories, you will not only get a sense of what the scout movement is all about, but you will also recognise the advantages, power and potential of this movement, and how it can fit into your life or the life of someone you love. Ultimately, it is my hope that the story of scouting in Singapore will continue with you and your family.



**DR WILLIAM WAN**  
General Secretary  
Singapore Kindness Movement

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However, the young naturalist soon became restless for he wanted to explore much further afield than his backyard. Looking back, he found that joining the scouts was one of the best decisions he had made. "Scouting is a great way for parents to give their children an opportunity to learn independence and resilience," he said. "It gave me freedom, an escape from the boredom of parental protectionism."

His introduction to scouting came in 1960, when Singapore was still a British colony. He enrolled at St Joseph's Institution, where Brother Joseph had started the Hippo Troop and he was one of the original members. His induction vexed his father, especially when his father had to pay \$28 for Leo's uniform,

which at the time, was equivalent to two and a half days' wages for the average Singaporean household. Furthermore, it was one thing for little Leo to play in the confines of the kampung garden, it was another for him to go out into the open woodlands.

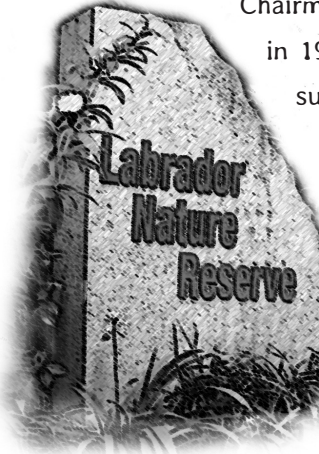


However, his mother, a registered nurse and dispenser in the kampung, encouraged him. She taught him the importance of community, sharing and the kampung spirit, but felt her teaching could only go so far. "From my mother, I learned

through observation, but from the scouts, I learned by doing. I learned how to confront my uncertainties and overcome my fears. I learned how to multiply the little I had and divide among my team members," he said. His years in the scouts reinforced his love of the outdoors.

Not surprisingly, as a university student, he chose to study the natural sciences. His dream was to earn a PhD in Marine Biology and he was the first Singaporean to do so. His love for nature drove him to champion the preservation of Singapore's natural shores. When he became

Chairman of the National Parks Board in 1998, his advocacy resulted in the successful preservation of a ten-hectare stretch of the Labrador Park coast — Singapore's only rocky coast — to be gazetted as a nature reserve. Over the years, he has worn many hats, including Director of the Singapore Science Centre;



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Director and, concurrently, Dean of Science at the National Institute of Education; Professor of Biological Sciences at Nanyang Technological University; and Chairman of the National Parks Board. He also championed the vision of Gardens by the Bay, played an instrumental role in the green development of Semakau Landfill, initiated Singapore's first series of natural history guide books on local flora and fauna, and was a consultant for the mangrove regeneration programme. His efforts in conservation has also won him the National Science & Technology Medal and the President's Award for the Environment.

All these roles required that he exercised leadership by example and persuasion. He is regarded by his students and mentees as a very patient man, extremely optimistic and genuinely empathetic. With a boyish grin, he attributed these positive leadership qualities to his scouting experiences. "I was blessed to have Ng Pock Too and Patrick Lee, two strong and spirited scout leaders with hearts of gold. They taught me not just how to tie knots; they were always patient with me, and instilled in me self-confidence. They were role models with passion and dedication. Through them, I learned to lead by example." Leo also mentioned Brother Justinian, whom he remembered as having helped him earn his wood badge. "He taught me to be humble, resourceful, resilient and

perseverant," he said. That resilience and perseverance paid off as the Labrador Park Nature Reserve took four decades of advocacy, while the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum took six years to materialise.

Leo's former student, Professor Peter Ng, Director at the NUS Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research, was quoted as saying, "His is a world dominated by a very simple philosophy. Just do it if it is right; never mind if it is difficult." Where did that simple philosophy come from? Without any reservation, Leo said that it came from internalising the Scout Oath and Scout Law. "It is a matter of being honourable, and keeping my promise to do my best. It is important to me that I am trusted, and found to be loyal, disciplined, considerate and courageous in all difficulties."

Sitting in the cafeteria across from the museum, I noticed that his badge had no official title, not even as patron or adviser to the Natural History Museum, despite being hailed as its visionary. That, to me, was an illustration of his humility in not taking credit even when it was due.

Leo believes that humility is an important element of sound and moral character. When he was leading the National Institute of Education (NIE), he introduced the Caring Teacher Award. "Leo said let's recognise teachers with character, those who show concern for their students," recounted Leo's



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colleague, Shawn Lum, an NIE Senior Lecturer. “There are already enough awards for success in more conventional, quantifiable aspects of teaching. This award is for a quality so fundamental to being an educator, yet so often and so easily overlooked,” he said. Leo told me that the idea came from scouting. Like scout badges, the award was a form of incentive, recognition and appreciation.

Finally, I lamented to him that technology was keeping youth away from the old fashioned outdoor learning experiences that scouting offers. “Technology should complement and augment outdoor learning — not replace it,” he replied. Reframing my comment optimistically, he said, “Let’s figure out how to use technology to promote and enhance the scouting experience.”

Leo continues to dream and envision the future. He has come a long way from being the awkward solitary boy who played with animals. Today, he is a well-loved and respected leader, who continues to make his mark in the fields of science, education and conservation. “We have to think about investing in the future, in a liveable and sustainable Singapore, improving the quality of our environment and the quality of our lives,” he argues. Thus, his work is never finished.



Professor Leo Tan Wee Hin

- ☆ *Years in scouting: 1958 to present*
- ☆ *Highest attainment: 2nd Class*
- ☆ *Scout troop: 3rd Troop, Hippo, St Joseph’s Institution*
- ☆ *Favourite badge: woodcutter badge*
- ☆ *Favourite scouting experience: exploring graveyards at night*

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drives our youths to contribute to the betterment of their communities, society and nation. Scouting is also engaging because it is winsomely fun and attractive, appealing to the mind and challenging to the body, and scouting is always exciting because it touches and stirs the positive emotions.

It is the international charter of scouting to “Create a Better World” by developing our youths spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially and physically. Scouting seeks to prepare and enable our youths to make a difference in their communities through holistic educational activities that are engaging, exciting and empowering.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr William Wan is a Justice of the Peace and General Secretary of the Singapore Kindness Movement. He lives his life in chapters and in several countries. He was a practising lawyer, a Vice-President of a University College, a Distinguished Visiting Professor of Asian Studies, a Vice-President of a psychometric corporation, a consultant to the Police Department in Canada, and an ordained pastor.

He is also active on the board of non-profit organisations, including the Singapore Scout Association, the National Kidney Foundation and the Public Hygiene Council.

An ambassador for active ageing, he has been recognised for his community work by the Abdeali Tayebali Family Trust, the Solicitor-General of Ontario, Canada, and the Board of Police Commissioners in Ottawa, Canada, among others.

# For Review Only

Dr Wan is a published author and writes regularly for the newspapers. He speaks often at public and corporate functions on “matters of the heart”.

Other Books by Dr Wan include: *Total Evangelism*, *Test the Spirit*, *Pastoral Reflections*, *More Pastoral Reflections*, *5 Amazing Benefits of Being Kind*, and *Towards a Kind and Gracious Society*.