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MediaCorp Press Ltd
Caldecott Broadcast Centre,
Annex Building, Level 1,
Andrew Rd, Singapore 299939
Tel 6236 4888 | Fax 6534 4217
today@mediacorp.com.sg

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MEDIACORP
MediaCorp NewsHub

TV Building, 2nd Floor, Caldecott Broadcast Centre,
Andrew Rd, Singapore 299939
Tel 6251 7671 | Fax 6251 5352
mediacorpnewshub@mediacorp.com.sg

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FOCUS[®]
ON THE FAMILY
BY DR JAMES DOBSON

PRICELESS MEMORIES

I've always thought that kids were funny. I'm reminded, of Ann Ortlund's 11-year-old son, Nels, whom she described in her book, *Disciplines of a Beautiful Woman*. She had taken this rambunctious boy to their paediatrician for a routine physical examination. Before seeing the doctor, however, the nurse attempted to obtain a medical history.

"Tell me, Mrs Ortlund," said the nurse, "how's he sleeping?"

Nels answered on his own behalf, and he said: "I sleep very well."

The nurse wrote that down.

"Mrs Ortlund, how are his bowels?" said the nurse.

The boy responded: "Oh, they're good — A, E, I, O, U."

I encourage you to take the time to record the memorable moments you experience with your children. If you don't have time to take elaborate notes or don't have access to a video camera, keep a diary, record an audio clip, and by all means maintain a photo album.

Having lived to see my children grow up and leave the nest, I can tell you that the effort you invest in preserving their early childhood experiences will pay big dividends as the years unfold and time blurs the memories.

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It's not an elusive goal

Letter from Lim Soon Hock
Chairman of the National Family Council and
Chairman of the Centre for Fathering

I REFER to the letter by Murali Sharma "Family Day should be more often" (May 19). I agree with Murali that eating with the family should not be a one-day event. Families are urged to do so on a regular basis, and many do.

I believe that spending time and eating with our family is achievable, if individuals are committed to making an effort to make it happen. It can be as simple as waking up earlier to have breakfast as a family, or going for a short getaway with your spouse. These are small steps that help to make a big difference.

The Eat with Your Family Day is symbolic and seeks to remind the public and employers on the need for such practices.

It is not meant to prescribe a regular time for employers to let their employees go home to have dinner with their families. It needs to be complemented by wider work-life strategies so that employers can better support employees in their family aspirations.

In acknowledging the need for more sustained reminders and more opportunities for families to bond, the National Family Council will be organising the National Family Celebrations 2010 next month. This is a month-long event which aims to raise awareness of the importance of family, and provide opportunities for families to spend time together and create memorable shared experiences and family rituals. Eat with Your Family Day is one of the key features of the celebrations.

Families can make use of this month-long celebration to participate in activities together with their loved ones, including the Family Day Out this Saturday.

Let's not forget history's lessons

Challenge students to think, in National Education

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

MREUGENEKBTan, in his comment "Remembering our founding fathers" (May 22-23), makes the excellent point that there is a culture of collective historical amnesia amongst Singaporeans. Beyond the memories of our founding fathers — such as the late Dr Goh Keng Swee — Singaporeans in general do not seem to have developed a significant appreciation towards elements of our history.

Many do not see the necessity or impetus to understand these aspects instead of exploring more practical endeavours concerning their daily lives.

On the academic front, much has been done to honour the contributions of outstanding individuals and politicians who have made a tremendous impact on Singapore. Our founding fathers are often honoured by having institutions, foundations and lectures named after them. Yet there is a considerable dearth in terms of understanding our past. Evidently, the outreach of our "National Education" (NE) programme has not educated generations of students on the aforementioned knowledge, and subsequently nurtured an atmosphere of unfortunate apathy and lethargy.

The current pedagogies adopted under NE are rigid, one-dimensional; and the programme itself is often dismissed as propaganda. This explains the general disinterest and disdain many students have for NE. Instead of overloading students

with information and commentaries that harp on Singapore's overwhelming success through the decades, students must be encouraged to explore and evaluate.

Dr Goh was far-sighted in terms of education; but let students discuss and debate whether it was appropriate to introduce a system of streaming in schools. He laid the foundations for the Singapore Armed Forces; however, how has the role of National Service evolved over the years, and has it been any different from what Dr Goh had envisioned?

We must challenge our students to think, and not blindly soak up facts; this is the way to get the general populace informed and engaged gradually with our collective history.

The NE system is flawed in its plain determination to regularly paint rosy pictures of our history, and selectively prescribe episodes to students. This approach is pedantic, and it is yielding no benefits. They should be given the freedom to explore failed policies and evaluate possible remedies.

For a more active historical-political culture, increase accessibility to the relevant people and events beyond the traditional focus on the People's Action Party.

The Western world has its Lincoln, Churchill, de Gaulle; Singapore has its fair share of leaders and visionaries. Not only must we celebrate them; we must do so with a greater openness and appreciation for our country's illustrious history.

Why can't I terminate credit card Giro payments?

Letter from Charis Low

I was shocked to discover recently that upon signing up for payment of recurring bills by credit card Giro, the cardmember cannot terminate the arrangement by giving instructions directly to the bank. The bank only takes instructions from the merchant and not its cardmembers. The only way for a cardmember to stop the arrangement is to cancel the card.

This is different from stopping Giro deductions from bank accounts, where the bank will stop payments to the billing organisation upon receipt of the customer's instructions.

I see no basis for the bank to refuse to accept the customer's direct instruction to stop the arrangement since:

1. The instruction pertains to future bills, and the bank has neither made, nor is under any obligation to make, payment to the merchant for such future bills.

2. The customer has a direct relationship with the bank and there is no reason why the bank should refuse to accept a direct instruction from its customer, but insist on taking instructions from a third party.

3. The Giro forms for payment via credit cards and bank accounts are not any different, with the customer required to only sign and provide details of the account from which payment is to be made in both cases. How then can the customer's authorisation in the case of credit card Giro possibly be construed as being irrevocable?

This practice, which they claim is in line with industry practice, compromises

the rights and interests of customers. Why can't the bank leave the customer to sort out any payment due to the merchant separately?

I think card-issuing banks owe their customers an explanation as to the legal basis of this "industry practice" and how it comes about without it being articulated in the cardmembers' agreement.

I've read the agreement, including the latest version available through the bank's website, which is applicable to my credit cards, and there is no provision that states the cardmember cannot revoke any Giro authorisation by instructing the bank directly.

In the meantime, I would urge everyone to reconsider paying by credit card Giro.