

# Studying spooks

Ghosts in NTU? Fact or fiction, spine-tingling stories help foster campus camaraderie



URBAN LEGENDS  
► Janice Wong

UNIVERSITY campuses are a hot-bed for ghost stories as seniors revel in passing them on to freshmen during orientation.

The students at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), especially those staying in the halls of residence, have heard their fair share.

The rich, chequered history of the university grounds and its proximity to several cemeteries make the tales plausible.

NTU's 200ha of land in Jurong West was inherited from the smaller Nanyang University which was founded in the 1950s.

It was a period of political and civil unrest. Many Chinese community leaders viewed the move by the Government towards bilingual education as bad for Chinese language and culture. Nantah students boycotted classes and clashed with the police.

The site spanning three hills was formerly undeveloped or agricultural land. Its northern perimeter is less than 800m from the tombstones still standing at the Choa Chu Kang cemeteries.

LifeStyle decided to study these urban legends further.

## Nanyang Lake

ONE of the most enduring stories repeated by students interviewed involves Nanyang Lake between two roads — Nanyang Circle and Nanyang Valley.

Final-year engineering student Andrew Lam, 23, a Hall 2 resident, was told this tale by a senior who in turn had heard it from someone else.

A female undergraduate staying at Hall 2 was celebrating her birthday. Her boisterous hall-mates threw her into the lake, not knowing that she could not swim.

They ignored her as she struggled and screamed for help. She drowned and her body was never found. Her spirit haunts the lake — or so the story goes.

The story of a lurking female spirit also popped up in Chinese theatre group Drama Box's play at Jubilee Hall in 1999. Titled I Remember '99, it told of an undergraduate being swept up in a student demonstration in the 1960s while waiting for her boyfriend by

the lake. She was pushed in accidentally and drowned. Her spirit remained to wait for her loved one.

But Drama Box's artistic director Kok Heng Leun, 38, says: "We made it up entirely. We wanted a plot that's melodramatic and reflects Nantah's tumultuous times. The lake was a perfect setting."

A check of English newspaper clippings of Nantah from 1959 to 1980, the year it closed, revealed no student drowning.

Ms Sophia Lim, NTU's corporate communications manager, confirmed that the university has no records of drowning.

Looking at the placid lake today with its tilapia, guppies and terrapins, it is hard to imagine it



PHOTOS: LIM WUI LIANG

LAKE PLACID: Rumour has it that a female undergraduate drowned in Nanyang Lake and her spirit still haunts it.



EERIE FLUSH: The male toilet of Hall 13's Block 62 is supposedly haunted, and so, they say, are some all-male blocks in Hall 2.

being a haunt of anyone more faithfully committed than NTU's student-run Anglers' Club.

Besides, the water is only deep in the centre, where it goes down to 3m. Ms Lim said it is only knee- to waist-deep elsewhere.

## Halls of residence

HALL 2 boasts the only supermarket in an NTU hostel and is also known for being haunted.

One version posted on a website called Sassy Spook Seekers (<http://www.ntu.edu.sg/home2002/s8330747a/sassyspookseekers/main.htm>) created by four NTU undergraduates has it that Hall 2 was once boarded up as a result of a murder.

Another version has it that some blocks at Hall 2 are occupied solely by men instead of a mix of both sexes for "a reason too scary to disclose publicly".

Hall 2 is made up of 11 blocks. Resident Silas Mao, 24, a final-year engineering student, said a hall mate told him that two blocks are occupied solely by men because they are haunted.



GHOST POST: People say they have seen figures running near this disused lamp-post which seems to flicker on and off.



But he has not seen anything unusual and does not believe in the supernatural anyway.

Yet another rumour is that Hall 2's so-called spirit is nothing compared to that in the third-floor male toilet of Hall 13's Block 62.

A former Hall 13 resident who declined to be named recalled an incident in 2000 when he was brushing his teeth there.

He said: "I saw the silhouette of a man's head against the wall. It moved and disappeared. I spat out the toothpaste foam without rinsing and rushed out."

"I'm very sure it is a ghost because my hall mates said they had a similar experience."

But the Hall 13 "ghost" seemed to have faded out in recent times for residents interviewed by LifeStyle said they had never had any strange encounters.

NTU's Ms Lim said Hall 2 was never boarded up. Neither have any rooms in NTU halls been disused during term-time and there were no reported cases of murder or suicide in the halls.

She has not received any feed-

back about sightings in the toilets.

A Hall 2 hostel officer said there are all-male blocks because, among the 652 residents, the ratio of male to female is 3:2.

Dr Brian Yeo, a consultant psychiatrist at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre, said people who are staying away from their usual environment are fond of sharing ghost stories as a form of bonding.

"It fosters camaraderie, a sense that you have survived something together. Those who graduate without being frightened by the apparitions also feel a sense of superiority," he added.

"Sometimes, ghost stories are a way to enhance a hall's folklore, giving it more character and identity. Of course, ghost stories could simply be made up by male students to frighten the women."

## Old lamp-post

THE old disused lamp-post looks out of place standing by itself among dense foliage opposite Hall 12 along Nanyang Crescent.

It is also listed as a "spook

spot" in The Sassy Spook Seekers. The story is either that it lights up on some occasions or there are now-you-see-it-now-you-don't figures running near it.

Mr Charles Goh, 36, co-founder of Singapore Paranormal Investigators which researches the supernatural, has heard the stories.

One midnight in 2003, he went on a reconnaissance mission with a motion detector and an electromagnetic field detector but did not detect anything unusual.

Mr Goh said: "Given that it is an old lamp-post, it's easy for people to let their imagination run wild. There could be a perfectly logical reason for so-called sightings."

"The working street lamps are about 20m away. Their light could have been reflected on the old lamp-post, making it look aglow from far."

Perhaps tracing the origins of the lamp-post could shed some light. We started with the Land Transport Authority (LTA), which said it is not under its charge.

NTU's Ms Lim believes it is part of the old lamp structures on old roads that led to kampung houses and farms. These made way in the early 1980s for the expansion of NTU, then called Nanyang Technological Institute.

She added that the area where the lamp-post stands belongs to the Ministry of Defence (Mindef) and is part of its training grounds.

When contacted, Mindef referred us to the Defence Science and Technology Agency, which in turn pointed us back to the LTA.

The lamp-post is in no-man's land, it seems. But, no matter, for Mr Goh has this piece of advice: "Be happy and energetic. Spirits, with their negative auras, are repulsed by positive energy."

Heard of an urban legend and want us to solve it for you? Send your comments to [stille@sph.com.sg](mailto:stille@sph.com.sg)