

# New book tells story of late pioneer leader Sim Kee Boon

Transformation of Keppel Corp among former top civil servant's many achievements

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Two years after her grandfather – the late Pioneer Generation leader Sim Kee Boon – died in 2007, Ms Leanne Sim's father suggested they write a book about him.

Ms Sim, the eldest of five granddaughters, agreed to spearhead this "deceptively simple" task. However, she got interrupted by other commitments like career and children.

Work on the biography began in December 2018 when Professor Dave Fernandez, then the new director of the Sim Kee Boon Institute for Financial Economics (SKBI) at Singapore Management University (SMU), suggested a book on Mr Sim.

On Friday, the 240-page biography, *Sim Kee Boon: The Businessman Bureaucrat*, was launched by SKBI and Landmark Books at SMU.

Ms Sim, 38, the co-author, said the book was written to document not only a brief moment in Singapore's history, but also an integral part of her family's history.



Ms Leanne Sim (left), one of Mr Sim Kee Boon's granddaughters, co-wrote his biography with Ms Low Shi Ping. Ms Sim says it documents not just a brief moment in Singapore's history but also an integral part of her family history. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

Quoting a Chinese idiom, the marketing and communications director for a bank said the biography is for her children and their children, "that they may know the source of water they drink, and be grateful".

Born in 1929 in Singapore, Mr Sim joined the civil service in 1953 and rose quickly through the ranks. He was head of the civil service from 1979 to 1984, when he became chairman of Keppel Corp and the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore.

Among many other roles, the avid golfer was founding chairman of

Tanah Merah Country Club. He was also chairman of the Council of Presidential Advisers from 2004 to 2005. Mr Sim, who had five sons with his wife Jeanette and five grandchildren, died of stomach cancer at 78.

One of his many values that stood out for Ms Sim was how he spoke to everyone from cleaners to prime ministers. Gathering different perspectives helped him make the best decisions possible. While he treated everyone equally, he also ensured that the most vulnerable were

cared for even more, Ms Sim said.

Referring to her two children, she told The Straits Times: "I want them to feel empowered to speak truth to power. To treat everyone equally and yet have the empathy and sensitivity to treat the weakest among us with even more care."

Co-author Low Shi Ping, 39, who runs her own consultancy LSP Communications, said a few interviewees shed tears as they spoke about him.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who penned its foreword, hopes

the book will inspire subsequent generations to embody the traits and values that Mr Sim lived by.

Mr Sim participated in merger talks with Malaysia, wooed foreign investments to Singapore after separation in 1965, and helped lay the foundations of the civil service.

He was an outstanding businessman who was instrumental in establishing Intraco, Singapore's trading arm to explore overseas markets, which became profitable within a year of operations. He also transformed Keppel Corp from a struggling shipyard saddled with heavy debts into one of Singapore's leading conglomerates, PM Lee said.

"Kee Boon used to say that a leader should have the clarity of mind to identify and make the strategic decision first. Everything else would then fall into place, including the consequences that had to be dealt with," said PM Lee, adding he found this valuable when dealing with challenging issues.

The book also contains personal stories from over 40 leaders in the public and private sectors.

Education Minister Chan Chun Sing, who was at the launch, said: "The founding generation of civil servants like Mr Sim worked tremendously hard and persevered through daunting challenges to build the foundations of Singapore's success. I hope that through this book, future generations will be inspired to emulate his tenacity and sense of mission to similarly leave behind a better country for future generations."

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• *Sim Kee Boon: The Businessman Bureaucrat* is available at bookshops at \$30 before GST.