

Honoured, but who remembers?

THE late Queen Elizabeth just got another statue. It was a memorial from the people of Rutland, a small county in the East Midlands of England. It is one of several erected to honour and remember her as the UK's longest reigning monarch.

Statues are of course a popular way to immortalise important people all over the world. Even animals that made a lasting impact on society can get one, like the loyal dog Hachiko – whose statue in Shibuya, Tokyo, is a popular tourist destination.

In America, according to Wikipedia, since Herbert Hoover, presidential libraries have been established for every president in his home state in which documents, artifacts, gifts of state and museum exhibits related to the former president's life and career are preserved.

Another way of preserving the memory of a deserving individual is to name a building or road after the person. That was my brain-wave following the death of Datin Paduka Sister Enda Ryan, the much loved and admired founder and long-time headmistress of SMK Assunta (I knew it as Assunta Secondary Girls School as a student in the 1970s).

I was inspired by the renaming of Jalan Semangat in Petaling Jaya to Jalan Prof Khoo Kay Kim, in honour and recognition of the well-known historian, in July 2019 following his demise earlier that year.

Fellow ex-Assuntarians and the alumni warmly embraced my suggestion to rename Jalan Changgai, where the school is located, after Sister Enda. A petition to Selangor Ruler, Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah, to consider the road renaming proposal was launched on April 24. It has

That's why the contributions and reasons for naming a road after somebody should be kept alive and relevant.

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So aunty, so what?

garnered almost 4,000 signatures so far.

The alumni is hopeful that His Royal Highness will consider the appeal because, as stated in the petition, he had previously recognised Sister Enda's life work as an educator by bestowing her with the Datin Paduka award in 2007.

But road naming and renaming is not a task to be lightly undertaken, because any name change has ramifications.

It's not known what the process is like for Selangor, but a 2017 StarMetro news article detailed how it's done for Kuala Lumpur. It involves many steps and parties.

There are two main committees involved – the Federal Territories Committee on Geographical Names (JNNGWP) for KL, Putrajaya and Labuan chaired by the Federal Territories Ministry secretary-general, and the Federal Territories Kuala Lumpur Technical Committee on Geographical Names (JTNGWPKL) chaired by the mayor.

JTNGWPKL comprises representatives from various departments in KL City Hall (DBKL) and relevant bodies like Pos Malaysia,



Someone to cherish: Sister Enda was a beloved headmistress of SMK Assunta, Petaling Jaya.

the Real Estate and Housing Developers Association Malaysia (Rehda) and the Kuala Lumpur traffic police.

DBKL can receive an application from any party, including the public, which would then be subjected to a vetting and consultation process – which takes about three months – to examine factors like the history, general theme, landmarks and community sensitivity in the area.

Let's suppose Selangor has a similar procedure. A formal application needs to be submitted to Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ), so hopefully one backed by thousands of supporters will make a good case.

Presumably, MBPJ's road naming committee will discuss and consult all relevant parties, and that perhaps would include the residents and businesses on the road because their postal address would be affected. I would assume

MBPJ will factor in the cost of changing the road signboards, which shouldn't be too high.

I don't think there is any issue with the history of the area, considering the school was built early in the township's existence.

But could there be a problem with "community sensitivity" in today's politically-motivated toxic environment, I wonder? Would any quarter be offended by the sight of a road named after a Catholic nun even though she devoted her whole life to educating Malaysian girls of all races and faiths?

Would consideration be given to the fact that she was not an outsider? Sister Enda loved this country so much she took up Malaysian citizenship in 1966.

As an Assunta old girl, as well as a long-time proud Petaling Jaya resident, I fervently hope my vibrant, inclusive city embraces and appreciates truly special individuals who contributed immensely to its community and will do the needful to approve and submit the name change to our Sultan for his consideration.

But you know, even if a road is named after her, unless her remarkable contribution to our society is repeatedly told and shared, over time Jalan Sister Enda Ryan could become a "blind spot" in the sense the public sees the name but have no idea who the person is. That has happened to many roads named after other distinguished people.

For example, how many people are familiar with the personalities behind Jalan Burhanuddin Helmi, Jalan Leong Yew Koh and Jalan

Athinahapan in Taman Tun Dr Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, or Jalan Yong Shook Lin in PJ New Town?

So, while I believe Sister Enda deserves to be honoured and recognised in a public way, it will only be meaningful if the reason behind the road name is not forgotten.

Unfortunately, we cannot depend on our history books to keep alive the stories of Sister Enda, Burhanuddin, Athinahapan, Yong, and others like Dr Ernest Aston Otho Travers – a British colonial government medical officer who was instrumental in the building of a modern leprosarium in Sungai Buloh in 1930 to treat leprosy patients humanely.

That's why I would urge local authorities to try to create plaques wherever possible along roads that will provide brief descriptions of the people the streets were named after.

MBPJ can start the ball rolling with Jalan Sister Enda Ryan – yes, I will remain hopeful – and if they need help to do the write-up for the plaque, the Assunta alumni will gladly help.

I am confident the very active alumni will do all it can to preserve the memory of Sister Enda with activities and events in the years to come.

One thing I really would like the alumni to do is to update her excellently written and designed biography, *Make Me An Instrument*, by Nesamalar Chitravelu. The current version charts her life till 2011. It should complete the life and times of Sister Enda Ryan, making it a full circle of her amazing journey from her birth in Ireland to her passing in Malaysia.

The views expressed here are the writer's own.