Come next year, the Singapore Management University will be moving out of the Bukit Timah campus, right into the heart of the city.

Did you know that the Campus has a long and rich history that spans more than 75 years?

This week's On the Grapevine will travel through time, back to the sixties as former students share their fondest memories of the special Bukit Timah campus.

Hello, I'm Otelli Edwards.

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Raffles College, the University of Malaya and presently, the Singapore Management University are just some of the institutions that have resided on the Bukit Timah campus.

Back in the sixties, the vastness of rainforest trees provided shelter over several low rise colonial school buildings.

Student enrollment was in the hundreds and there were quadrangles and staff houses for them to gather and talk about the day's events.

Even today, the physical landscape hasn't changed a whole lot as most of the colonial buildings are retained, but they've been retrofitted with state of the art facilities as the campus goes wireless.

P N Avadhani, now in his seventies, used to be a student and then later became a lecturer at the campus.

He vividly recalls how 'philosophical' and less 'sanitized' the atmosphere was in the old days atmosphere was far more stimulating. The quadrangles were places where they could gather informally. And the other aspect is that the building structure was a closely knit society, in the sense that they could sit down and talk and interact. I'm nostalgic about the whole campus. Somehow I found in the 60s and 70s, the climate was more philosophical and intellectual, not so career-oriented, and there was great demand for teachers. In arts and science faculty also – a transition from colonial to local situation.

Some of the most nostalgic moments which Dr Avadhani recalled were colourful and even adventurous, especially those times when it poured and flooded the classrooms.

We would have our problems like if it rained heavy and we had to put buckets under the ceiling to collect water. And the other thing was in the late 60s there used to be political rallies which in themselves were quite colorful. Somehow the atmosphere, nostalgia, academic environment and student faculty interaction were there. For example, I remember a political rally, Lee Kuan Yew and all were sitting down and listening to interesting accusations.

Another old timer who echoes a similar sentiment is 77 year old Harry Chan.
Mr Chan was the last to graduate from Raffles College in the late forties and when the college became the University of Malaya, he was the first to graduate to attain an honours degree.

The former permanent secretary with the Foreign Affairs Ministry says he belonged to a unique generation when Singapore and Malaysia were one.

Mr Chan says entering school life after the second world war made students like himself a lot more resilient and focused on their future.

It's a unique institution with a unique generation. It's a breeding ground of two nations and now you see 2 nations - Malaysia and Singapore. Last time, we thought of a single country - Malaya. Our orientation last time was one country. Now it's like two trees with separate trunks but the roots were intertwined. Physically the old quadrangles have been preserved. That's the good part. But as far as student life was concerned, we grew up in a generation that came after the war. Pretty mature, with a sense of what's coming before us - the dawn of nationhood. We were preparing for that. Together, we have this special tolerance and regard to the diversity.

Drawing a comparison between education then and now, Mr Chan says their curriculum was more well-rounded.

We had our own personal development. We had a well-rounded education, and academically we achieved high standards because we followed the Oxford system with a tutorial with small groups. We also had ECA after 4pm and you were expected to be on the sports field for some athletic sports. And there were societies we took interest in like music, drama and singing.

But if there's any similarity between the yester-year students and students of today, it has to be the spirit of pioneering.

SMU's Corporate Communications Director, Sharon Tan explains.

When you speak to Alumni from Raffles College, there's a definite strong sense of daring, camaraderie, pioneering spirit. And uncannily we've also observed that from the SMU students, and its actually this spirit we hope to celebrate and retain as our legacy. I call it a strong sense of the pioneering spirit.

In celebration of Bukit Timah campus's 75th anniversary, SMU will be organising A University Homecoming.

It's a week long open house where the alumni, faculty and students can gather to reminisce and relive memories.

A walking tour, memorabilia exhibition and garden tea party are just some of the activities lined up.

Will the Bukit Timah campus be home to yet another institution after SMU vacates its premises next year?

Only time will tell.

This has been On the Grapevine.

I'm Otelli Edwards for NewsRadio 93.8.