Tan Dawn Wei

WHEN Professor Michael Furnston joined the Singapore Management University in July this year, he was not expecting to be appointed dean of its new law school. But going by his resume, you would think it was the only logical thing to do. Counted among one of the most distinguished contracts and commercial law scholars in the world, the former Oxford professor and law dean at the University of Bristol has been teaching for 50 years.

Some of his friends in Singapore, now mostly lawyers, were former students whom he taught 20 to 30 years ago. But the 74-year-old’s legacy extends beyond the walls of those ivory towers and law firms around the world: He is a father of 10 and grandfather of five.

None of his family members are here — his wife, Ashley, takes care of their youngest, a 24-year-old son who’s autistic, at home in Bridgewater, west of London — but they come for occasional visits.

While he lives near enough to the campus — at Cavenagh Road — to walk to work, a shuttle bus in the morning is “hard to resist”.

The self-professed “compulsive cricket watcher” mostly wants to go home — to England — for the cricket.

“The season coincides with vacation at SMU so that won’t be a problem,” said the affable professor.

Q How do you feel about football? Do you care for David Beckham at all?
A I was brought up in Wales, where rugby is the national game. The present state of Welsh rugby causes me deep depression. England’s performance in the World Rugby Cup was better than could possibly have been imagined.

Q Former American president Dwight D. Eisenhower once said of the British: “If you think they are soft, ask yourself how they came to get the English language spoken in every country on Earth.” What would the world be like now if the English language had not become the global lingua franca?
A Je ne comprends pas.

Q What do you think is the best legacy the British left behind in England?
A A first class legal system is a start, though I may be biased.

Q The English drink more tea per capita than any other country in the world. What is the secret to enjoying a good cuppa?
A My mum made a disgusting cup of tea, which put me off English tea for life. I drink tea only in Chinese and Japanese restaurants.

Q Apparently, the British also buy more lottery tickets than anyone else in the world — about 75 per cent of adults in Britain play the lottery at least once a week. What is the fascination with getting rich quick?
A I have never bought a lottery ticket. You get much better odds at the races.