One of the many rules imposed on students in the early 1970s was the "Long Hair Rule". Those keeping long hair as part of the hippy culture were frowned upon because of its association with drugs. This rule resulted in the "Yeong Tow Foo Scissors" incident as remembered by Dennis Chua. Those with similar memories are welcome to share with us please!

Cheng Huang Leng
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Yeong Tow Foo Scissors

I like to share this story of the Yeong Tow Foo scissors. The team spirit and bonding among our Singapore Polytechnic marine engineering graduates is amazingly powerful and apparent when we studied together. It has remained so even until now. It comes from a sense of unity when we were studying and coping with many kinds of pressures in the campus.

Looking Cool - I will remember my first ever poly lecture that you (Cheng Huang Leng) conducted for our marine group of 120 students in 1978. There were promises of a great future in the marine industry, which some of us has remained to date. But I always remember the good behaviour that you expect out of us from day one.

While the rest of poly students could keep long hair and wear flip flops, the marine boys were an exception. Compelled to be very compliant, we all had to look cool with short hair, and strictly with proper footwear. That was quite hard for many of us in the rock and roll days of the 70s. We were warned to avoid being barred from taking our final exams, unless we can meet your "long hair compliant length". You took some of us with long hair by surprise one exam morning. I remember it was the last exam paper. Many long haired classmates were 'selected' by you to exit the exam. It meant instant doom for some if they fail that paper. But marine guys can be quite resourceful. Showing great teamwork, and sharing information among the senior marine boys quickly, we found some new skills using a borrowed pair of scissors from the canteen's 'Yeong Tow Foo' vendor. And for free.

The problem was swiftly snipped away, the senior boys were there to manage and help. All was well because nobody got injured. Everyone came back from the canteen to finish the exam paper, each with a ridiculous hairstyle. But the outcome was good. I wish we had thought of keeping the Yeong Tow Foo scissors for good luck. Many trendy hairstyles of our present day could have been inspired by that pair of Yeong Tow Foo scissors.

We make it up by keeping long hair when we all went to sea for our first time!
I hope it is not too late to tell this story of the Yeong Tow Foo scissors.

Dennis Chua graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1982. He worked for Chevron till his retirement in 2014. See photograph below for an example of the fad in hairstyle among students in the 1970s.



Lenz Lim (who graduated in 1984) was able to let his hair grow because he was at sea! Here he is cutting a steel plate with a blow torch probably to fabricate some part needed to repair a broken piece of machinery on his ship. There was another student, Paul Soh (who graduated 10 years earlier) let his hair reach his waist. Just think of what would happen to him if he were to work on the lathe and forgot to keep his hair out of the way!