

TALES OF
Sunway
CITY



Sa.Cha

Sunway City Kuala Lumpur never sleeps. All year round, it is animated by the hustle and bustle of activities brought to life by those who live in and shape the City. For the soul of the City lies not in its modern buildings and skyscrapers, but in its lively people and communities. It is they who, through their personal stories, work or creativity, give the beautiful City its everlasting pulse and vibrancy.

Sa.Cha







TALES OF SUNWAY CITY

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Published by Sunway University Press
An imprint of Sunway University Sdn Bhd

No. 5, Jalan Universiti
Bandar Sunway
47500 Selangor Darul Ehsan
Malaysia

press.sunway.edu.my

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ISBN 978-967-5492-27-3

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Tales of Sunway City

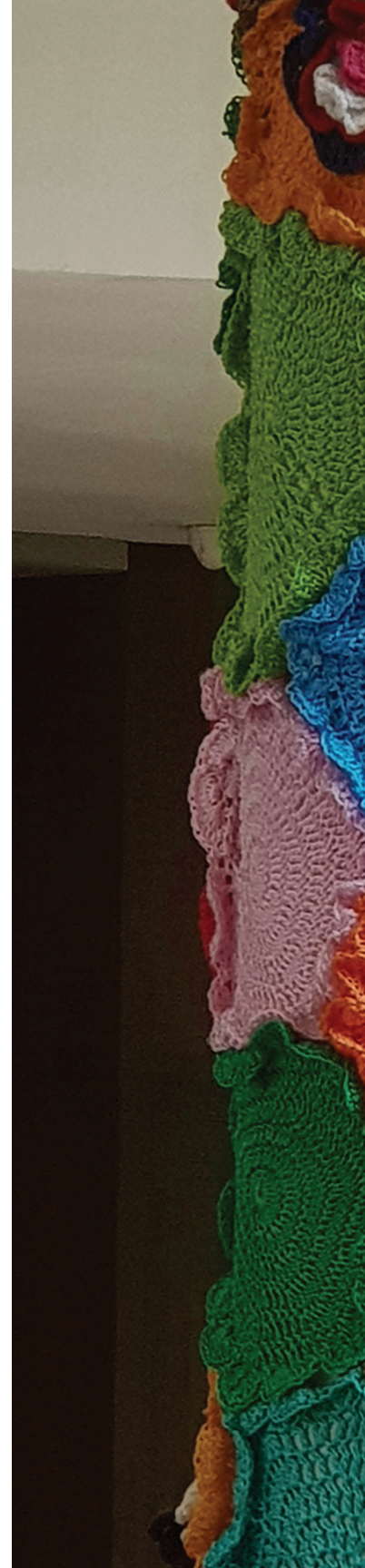
ISBN 978-967-5492-27-3 (hardback)

1. City dwellers--Malaysia--Petaling Jaya (Selangor)--Anecdotes.
2. Bandar Sunway (Selangor, Malaysia)--Anecdotes.
3. Anecdotes.

I. Title.
808.882

Edited by Hani Hazman, Sarah Loh
Designed and typeset by Rachel Goh

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INTRODUCTION

Cities only find their reason for existence in those who live in and shape them with daily activities and emotions. Thus, cities have a soul; that of the people who walk the streets and animate city life from morning to evening, and often even overnight. For a city never sleeps. Never stops. It never dies when it is able to preserve its charm and cultural traditions, its green spaces and wildlife, and when it remains welcoming and human. Far from the lush tropical jungle, Sunway City Kuala Lumpur emerged over 40 years ago from a dream. Born from the dust of a tin mine, the crevices and lunar craters have given way to dense urbanisation and skyscrapers that are evidence of the Klang Valley's rapid modernisation and Sunway Group's economic vitality and leadership. Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Jeffrey Cheah created a city from scratch, allowing his imagination to become not only the hallmark of the city but also his originality. Sunway City has blossomed, embracing modernity and new technologies, becoming a laboratory for entrepreneurship and a hub for training the talents of tomorrow. Beyond the indelible mark left by its generous creator, the soul of Sunway City is not in its buildings; it is in its people and communities. It is they who, through their personal stories, work or creativity, give the beautiful city its vibrancy. It was therefore necessary to recognise those whose lives are marked by Sunway Group or who pass through Sunway City as a student, employee or visitor. This collection of short stories pays tribute to those who have contributed and still contribute, despite the difficulties of COVID-19, to energising the pulse of the amazing smart city and Sunway family.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

A tale of two friends who braved the odds to found Malaysia's leading leisure riding lifestyle and culture store, **Riders Garage & Co.**









THE DAREDEVIL

Born and bred in Subang Jaya, Jeremy Leong has always considered himself a daredevil. Though his mother had forbidden him from riding a motorcycle, he did it anyway with youthful abandon. At the age of 25, riding his 900cc Triumph Scrambler to work and back was a norm and for a while, fortunately, nothing untoward happened on the road—no accidents nor was he pulled over by the police.

Jeremy was well into his corporate career as a Sales & Service Manager at a hotel and later a telecommunications company when he decided to take a detour and pursue his passion for motorcycles full-time. Together with a high school friend, Jeremy took a leap of faith and opened a motorcycle-focused apparel shop, Riders Garage & Co. A unique lifestyle and culture store for motorcycle enthusiasts, the business quickly gained traction by word of mouth.

Today, Riders Garage is the go-to place for riders to get decked out in stylish protective gear and don beloved brands of international biking culture. While most start-ups fail to sustain themselves beyond their fifth year, Riders Garage continues to thrive. To say the success of Riders Garage is attributed to being at the right place and right time—it is after all located in Sunway City Kuala Lumpur's motoring hub where established custom motorcycle builders reside and was opened at a time when the local riding scene was gaining a lot of new, younger members—would only be part of the truth. The Riders Garage success story is simply one of hard work and determination underlined by Jeremy's desire to build more character in his motorcycles, and one of luck when Jeremy's own products saved his life one fateful night.

FREEDOM AND CONTROL

A motorcycle is the personification of freedom. The allure of riding—be it a cruiser, a café racer or a bobber—has been associated with the power of liberty and independence for decades. A rider may feel freedom in the enjoyment of taking roads less travelled or the accomplishment of covering a mass stretch of highway unhindered.

Ironically, the freedom of riding is juxtaposed with a sense of precise control the rider must possess to manoeuvre the machine. While reckless road users are a risky if not uncommon problem on the road, bad road conditions pose a higher risk to riders in particular. With nothing to protect the rider except a helmet, the importance of wearing proper riding apparel such as jackets, boots and gloves is paramount as one small riding miscalculation could result in grievous or even fatal injuries.

Although there are up to 30,000 reported motorcycle road accidents in Malaysia per year, the number of motorcyclists in Malaysia still outnumbers that of car drivers since many consider the motorcycle an economical means of travelling. The popularity of higher CC-engine motorcycles in today's culture furthermore shows that road users with a more adventurous spirit are increasingly turning to leisure riding. The 'cruisers' are probably the most well-known of all the leisure riders. It is not difficult to spot them on the road in any part of the country. Younger riders like Jeremy are part of the motorcade heading away from the city during rush hours and can be seen cruising down *kampung* highways on weekends with other more seasoned riders.

Bigger and more powerful engines, however, require riders to have more skill, control and, of course, better protective gear. A brand-new Harley Davidson might cost as high as a year's mortgage, but an accident could cost a life. In the leisure riding scene, ensuring the good condition of the motorcycle and having reliable protective gear are as important as love for the culture.

THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE DESIGN

Part of the fun of having a motorcycle is customising it. An entire motorcycle can be torn down to its bare essentials of engine and frame, and then be put back together with different parts to become a completely different beast. The process might require ordering parts from overseas and then assembling them, or modifying or creating completely new parts for the motorcycle.

Two years after Jeremy opened Riders Garage, he began working on the side at a custom motorcycle workshop in Sunway City called Beautiful Machines. Beautiful Machines had already been enjoying an excellent reputation for creating show-stopping motorcycles at events such as Art of Speed and KL Bike Week, and gracing the pages of international motorcycle magazines. Jeremy had known the owners of Beautiful Machines from their rides together, and he eventually became involved in managing the operations of the workshop in the capacity of Project Manager.

As Project Manager, Jeremy manages a team of enthusiastic builders from the riding community and participates in all aspects of motorcycle modifications, fabrication and design. Working as a builder requires rigorous attention to detail, and since mistakes can cost time and money, Jeremy is aware that work should not be rushed. It is normal for the Beautiful Machines team to take up to three months to customise a motorcycle, and the team

usually takes on four projects a year. Workmanship and parts can cost an average of RM40,000–RM50,000, although projects that do take a longer time to be completed will cost significantly more.

The motorcycle that Beautiful Machines built for the Yokohama Hot Rod show in 2016 was called ‘Monster’, took six months to come to life, and came with a RM250,000 price tag. ‘Monster’ was the first-ever Malaysian entry in what is considered one of the biggest custom motorcycle shows in Asia Pacific. With a stretched-out frame resembling a classic dragster sitting on a 1,340cc V-twin engine with a Nissan March supercharger, and with computer modelling of the engine barrels for optimum heat dispersion, the motorcycle was a work of art.

Beautiful Machines continues to build unique custom motorcycles that are no stranger to international motor shows. Thus far, they have won more than their shelf’s space of local builder awards and the Fat Boy Pick award at the Bangkok Motor Show in 2016.

Riders Garage and Beautiful Machines naturally flourish together, sharing an organic synergy and market as the look of a motorcycle compliments its rider, and *vice versa*. As far as the custom motorcycle scene goes, motorcycle designs are getting grander and more audacious, with younger riders starting to add a touch of sophistication to the classic, rugged look.







A FULL-TIME RIDER-BUSINESSMAN

Before opening Riders Garage, Jeremy was just a regular corporate man. Jeremy had long thought of leaving the comforts of a steady, white-collar job for his dream of owning his very own motorcycle-related business. Leaving his sales gig to manage his own business, however, meant taking a huge pay-cut and putting in longer hours at work.

As Jeremy resigned from the position, his friend Victor Yap returned from Perth for the holidays. Victor too was an avid rider and, having spent half his life growing up in Malaysia and the other half in Australia, he had the opportunity of experiencing a livelier rider scene down under.

At the time, it was hard for Malaysian riders to find good gear without resembling a MotoGP rider with gaudy patches all over their jackets. Noticing that there were not enough shops selling fashionable, high-quality riding apparel that resonated with leisure riders, Jeremy set out to open his own rider's apparel store. Victor, who worked in banking, became Jeremy's partner and together, they established Riders Garage. The two good friends began taking to the highways and backroads of the country with their Triumph Scramblers. The transformation in Jeremy was indeed noticeable. Instead of having late nights on weekends, he would go to bed early so he would be fresh in the morning to ride to places like Ulu Yam, Janda Baik, Kedah and Johor. His lifestyle was changing and with it came a new sense of clarity.

Riders Garage initially ran its business online on Instagram and Facebook. Not long after, Jeremy and Victor opened a booth at Art of Speed, a local motoring and custom culture event series at Citta Mall. Scores of riders and motoring enthusiasts flocked to Jeremy's booth, as Rider's

Garage was the only local motorcycle lifestyle store they had seen at that point. The event built enough confidence in Jeremy and Victor to open a physical store a few months later.

Having chosen the already bustling automobile hub of Sunway City as its location, Rider's Garage began stocking up merchandise from trusted brands such as Bell, easily considered the world's best helmet brand, and Deus Ex Machina, the legendary surf and motorcycle lifestyle brand. Initially, they sold just a handful of helmets, jackets, gloves and t-shirts. The collection then gradually expanded to include all sorts of protective gear such as eyewear, boots, wallets and even pomade. Currently, the shop carries 14 different brands associated with adventure and leisure riding lifestyle, and acts as a local distributor to smaller shops across Malaysia.

At that point, Riders Garage continued establishing itself in the rider's apparel market. Jeremy, split between working with Beautiful Machines and running Riders Garage, ploughed through without much respite. After all, the leisure riding community was flourishing and soon, the business area began to become an unofficial gathering point for riders nationwide—even Art of Speed set up its office beside them. Together, the community would organise BBQ gatherings and street shows with performances by local bands, and ride across Malaysia with various motorcycle clubs.

The success story of Riders Garage could have easily concluded here, except it would have left out a life-altering incident that occurred one rainy night.

FALLING DOWN, GETTING UP

On a ride to Genting Highlands and flanked by an impenetrable forest, the unexpected happened. Jeremy could hear the sound of his tires skidding against the debris on the side of the old Ulu Yam road seconds before he crashed.

With torrential rain and wind, coupled with the rocky conditions of the road, there was not much he could do except minimise the impact of his fall with instinctive rolling. He tumbled speedily and uncontrollably, seemingly forever. Fortunately, there were no vehicles around him when he fell. The accident left him with a dislocated bone and two fractured ones, and he was rushed to surgery. He was hospitalised for a week and then put in a cast for two months. Though Jeremy eventually recovered from his injuries after six months, a metal plate remains planted in his left leg to this very day.

Jeremy's near-death experience was a sobering wake-up call. Had it not been for the protective gear he was wearing that night, which comprised the brands his business carried, his injuries could have been much graver. The close shave jolted him into realising the dangers of riding, and deciding that he could do more to make a difference, Jeremy began designing his own brand of affordable protective gear to improve the safety of riders.

After the fall, Jeremy was determined to make the most of his life and bring Riders Garage to the next level. More than anything, he was eager to get on a motorcycle again.



WE ARE FAMILY

Behind every successful business owner is a dedicated team. His 10-man staff consists of fellow riders who are as passionate about riding as Jeremy, and it is not difficult to rally them to work. His employees are well trained, and even before his fall, Jeremy would hold regular product and skill training sessions to hone their strengths in various areas from retail and distribution to e-commerce and finance.

A strong believer in life-long learning, Jeremy holds weekly meetings where teammates would share among themselves knowledge they have learnt that can encourage personal and professional growth. The topic of discussion ranges from the nuances of motorcycle-building to the discovery of new apparels and motorcycle technology that would keep them ahead of the market curve.

At Riders Garage, Jeremy cultivates a work culture where each employee is treated like a family member and supported by a solid and empathic leadership. The close bond between Jeremy and his employees is made stronger following Jeremy's close shave with death, and it is not uncommon for all of them to ride together on weekends. Jeremy's warm and affable personality is extended to any customer who walks into Riders Garage, and this should come as no surprise, as riders always feel a natural and deep connection to one another.







RIDE WITH A CAUSE

It was Halloween night in Bangsar Telawi, and bystanders gaped in awe and curiosity at the sight of a clown rolling down the road on a scrambler with other Halloween-costumed riders. The riders then parked their motorcycles and began distributing candies to children who huddled around them in excitement.

It was a carnival-like atmosphere that evening in October, as the riders showed a different side to their usually macho persona. Parents were particularly interested in the specifications of the motorcycles and queried the riders on the modifications. The friendly, approachable riders were happy to relate their passion to the curious pedestrians—that motorcycle building is an art form which requires thoughtful design, and that riders are not, in fact, scary outlaws.

The Riders Garage's Halloween Ride was an event organised by Jeremy to demystify the image of riders which has long been portrayed as the 'bad guys' in pop culture. The general public may be influenced by movies such as *Easy Rider* and television shows such as *Sons of Anarchy* to form a misconception of riders as being heavily tattooed criminals who are invariably clad in black leather. Riders of big motorcycles have thus always been seen as a menace to society, associated with illegal gangs such as the Hell's Angels who are notorious for their debauchery in the 1960's and 1970's.

In reality, most motorcycle clubs these days comprise married, family-oriented riders who are above 40 in age with well-paying jobs, and younger riders who are financially equipped corporate high-flyers. Motorcycle clubs are similar to car clubs in that members come together to socialise and bond over their mutual love for their machines.

SLOW AND STEADY

Apart from an image-rebranding exercise, that evening in Bangsar Telawi gave the riders an opportunity to stress a value that has been at the core of Riders Garage philosophy. They wanted people to know that most riders practise good road etiquette and have no interest in dominating the streets. Riders and drivers have always been at each other's throats on the road. Perhaps the disharmony between the two classes of road users stems from the difference in how both modes of transport work.

Jeremy knows many motorcyclists who have been involved in accidents with cars, and has come to believe that safety on the road is of utmost importance to riders. He took the initiative to forge a collaboration between Riders Garage and Petaling Jaya driving schools to offer road safety classes to riders. Most driving schools teach rudimentary safety techniques to riders, as the majority of their students are not riders who take long road trips on unfamiliar, off-beaten roads. Jeremy saw the opportunity and necessity to close the knowledge gap.

Key safety and control aspects in motorcycle riding were further explored in another unique Riders Garage event called the Turtle Race. As part of their neighbourhood block party, the Turtle Race was a race which rewarded riders who could finish a short stretch of obstacle road the slowest. This race promoted the idea that riders should be in total control of their motorcycles and attracted many participants who rode different types of motorcycles, with the heavier machines being more challenging to manoeuvre. The winner of the Turtle Race would receive a jacket from Riders Garage.



ON A FULL TANK

Riding a motorcycle on an open road evokes an almost indescribable feeling. For those who have gotten the chance to do so, it remains one of life's most fulfilling experiences. Riders who fall in love with the lifestyle of leisure riding tend to continue practising it for as long as they can.

Now in its sixth year, Riders Garage continues to shape the leisure riding community by providing fashionable and quality protective wear, organising public-friendly events and gatherings, and championing road safety awareness campaigns. Barely into his 30's, Jeremy manages to effortlessly juggle these responsibilities while working on new customisation projects with Beautiful Machines. He is a full-time rider-businessman who is not

only living his dream, but is also a part of the driving force behind the spread of riding culture in Malaysia.

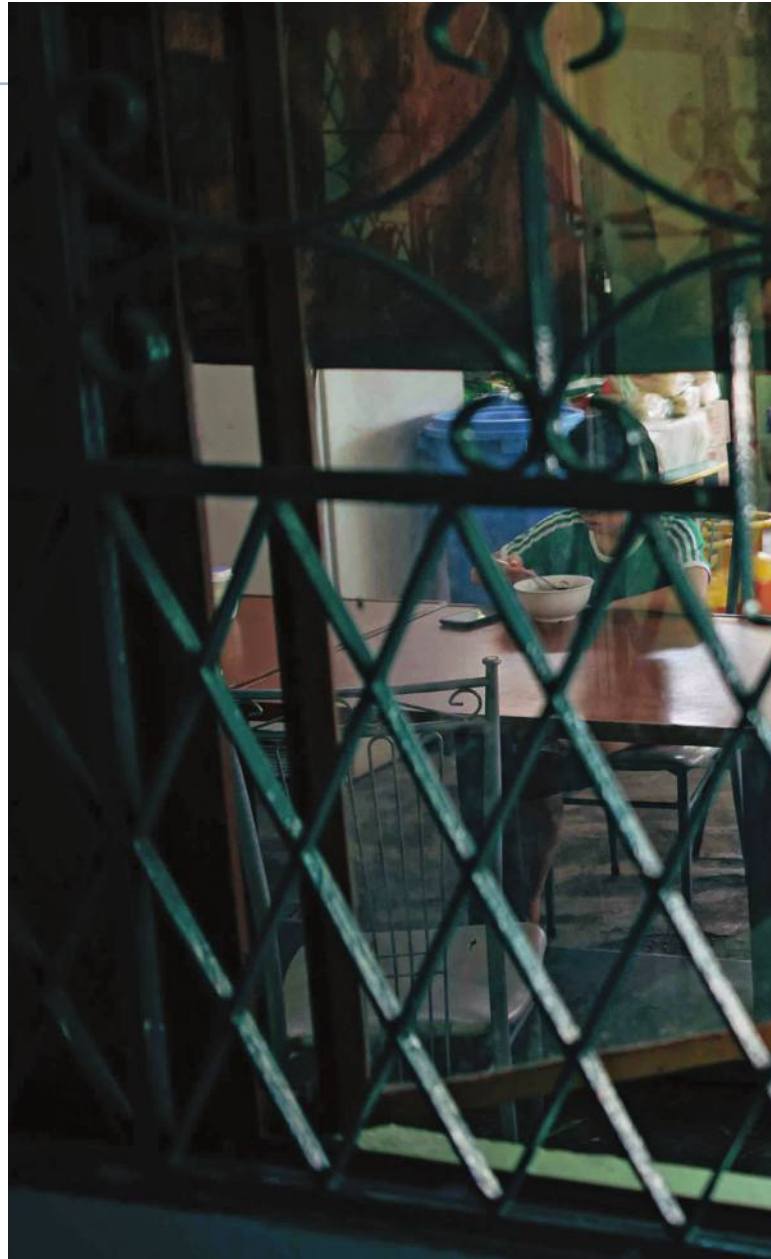
After conquering the distribution market for foreign rider lifestyle apparel in the country, he now plans to release Riders Garage's very own helmet that can place a Malaysian brand on the global biker-wear market. As the most essential protective gear, the helmet requires meticulous, diligent design and each of its material—from the pins to the liners—has to be of the finest quality. There is no denying that the helmet, in addition to its ironclad safety features, has to look amazing.

It will be a long ride to achieving this new dream, but Jeremy believes he can make it.



A HOPE FOR HOME

Joey Ooi details her inspiring journey of self-discovery and personal growth that began the day she was left at an orphanage.







THE DAY MY MOTHER LEFT

I do not remember much of my past. It is as if there is a curtain covering the memories and every time I pull it open, I find yet another one. People say this mental block is due to past trauma. If the mind blocks out painful parts of life, why then do I still remember the day my mother left?

The strongest and earliest memory I have of my childhood is the one where my mother abandoned my sister and me at a shopping mall. I was nine. I did not and still do not understand why she did that. After all these years, a part of me is still bitter about how easily she discarded us. It was as if we meant nothing to her, like we were a mistake.

It was a shopping mall near enough to our house to trek to, yet far enough that we would not know the way back. I remember people moving around and a flashing window display that read, "On Discount". My mother, whose face I cannot recall, was holding my hand and leading the way. She seemed in a hurry. In my other hand, I held my sister's. I was pleading with her to stop crying, that we would be going home soon. My mother brought us to a busy part of the mall. She said she was going somewhere and told us to wait. As she walked away, I do not remember if she hugged us or said goodbye.

We could have been standing for hours; I lost track of time. Finally, someone, an adult, approached us and asked if we were all right. It was Dad.

Dad had never stayed with us. It had always just been my mother, my sister and me. We knew him though because he would visit us, but he always had another family to go back to. As a child, I did not understand how these things worked, how many families a father could have. I assumed a father was shared. Now that our mother had left us, he was our only refuge.

A STEPFAMILY

Understandably, my stepmother resented Dad for bringing us back. His once-happy family of six was now in turmoil, and we were the intruders. I understood then the meaning of “dirty little secret”.

My sister and I spent a lot of time together now that we were living in the same room. While we played with our stepsiblings now and then, we mostly kept to ourselves. I think my stepsiblings knew we were causing their parents to fight. Over the next three years, the relationship with our stepsiblings improved. My sister and I even got a little closer to our stepmother.

We did not have much to do. We usually helped with simple house chores like sweeping and making our beds, played with our stepsiblings, then returned to the bedroom. There were not many books around the house, so my sister and I used our imagination and made up games. In moments of boredom, I reflected on my predicament.

My sister and I could not go to school due to the circumstances of our birth. Dad stumbled upon Yayasan Sunbeams Home, an orphanage that provided education and accommodation for orphaned children. Deciding that Sunbeams was a good place for us to receive some education, Dad met up with the founder, and within days, had us moved to the orphanage.



SEVEN AND SEVEN

Sunbeams was easy to spot with its white façade and large playground. The double storey building was bordered by a concrete fence painted with children's artwork while two other blocks stood on opposing sides of the same street. I remember feeling calm as I entered the main hall, noting the interior's cyan and lime green walls. To the right of the hall were the offices of the pastor and his staff. The home was brimming with activity; children were playing, cycling and running from one block to another. It was a moment I cannot forget.

At Sunbeams, we used permanent fabric markers to write our names on the labels of our clothing. This was to ensure our clothes did not get mixed up when they were tossed into the washing machine. I found the action sadly disquieting. Labels were meant for books or doors.

We were allowed only seven pieces of indoor clothing and seven pieces of outdoor clothing; a pair for each day of the week. Sadly, we were made to leave behind our other belongings as we reluctantly handed them over to Dad.

From living with just each other, my sister and I now had to share a room with eight other orphaned children. It was a big change and we no longer could keep to ourselves. It took us a while, but soon enough, we got used to life at Sunbeams. At the orphanage, we often went on outings to places we would never have visited had we continued to stay with Dad. My sister and I began taking comfort in the presence of other orphans. Talking with them made us feel less lonely. I discovered we all shared some similar experiences.

In the midst of it all, there was always a lingering sadness that enveloped me. I still dreamt of a perfect family with a mother and a father. Now that we were at the orphanage, I knew my mother would never come back.

My life settled into a routine, which I appreciated, as it helped me cope with the constant feeling of despair. I filled my time with reading and



learning. Sunbeams had schedules for everything—there was a time to wake up, sleep, eat and play. Daily, a van would send us to a day care centre after breakfast and have us picked up again for the orphanage at 5 pm. At the day care centre, we learnt to read and write in English. I remember reading the Peter and Jane books. In the evenings, we would play sports.

When we returned, we would shower, eat, and attend Bible study and tuition. I was very passionate about learning, so eager I would cry if deprived of it. Once, while boarding the van to attend tuition, a wood plank I was standing on broke and I fell into a drain. I was injured and there was blood everywhere. I only started crying when I was told I could not attend tuition that night. The disappointment was far greater than the pain from the fall. If it were not for my love of learning, I would not be able to find joy in the world today.





A SUNNY LITTLE PLACE

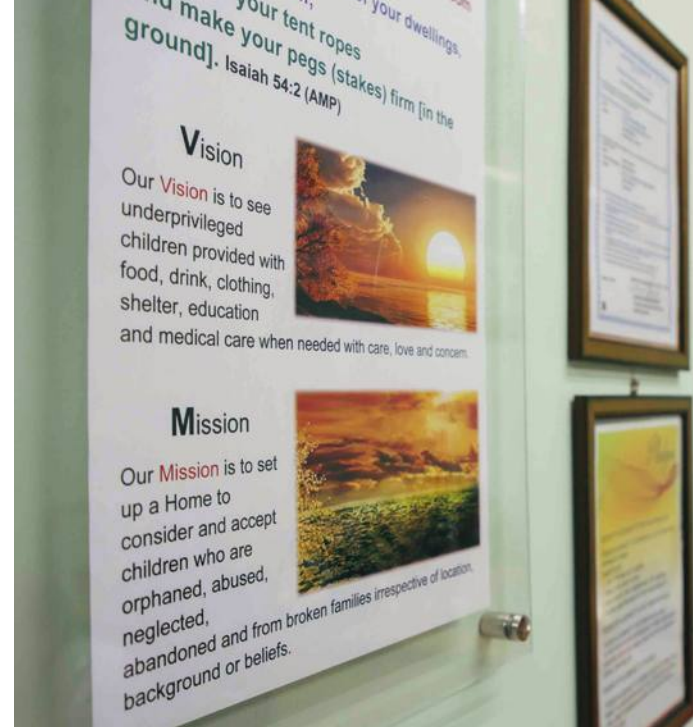
I started formal education at the orphanage around the age of 12. My starting late meant I had to play catch up with regular children who started Standard 1 at the age of seven. Thankfully, I did not find studying hard. We followed the Penn Foster high school curriculum and studied English, Mathematics, History and all other subjects required to obtain a diploma.

The phone at Sunbeams was usually locked but once a month, we were allowed to make calls. I used to call Dad every month but stopped doing so as I grew older. Dad visited us regularly. We hardly talked about the past because I felt he did not want to; it was like the past was a painful memory for him too.

I like animals. This is expected since my Dad breeds dogs and I probably take after him. They make better listeners than humans, and best of all, they do not judge. I have a soft spot for hungry strays so I was often feeding the cats and dogs that loitered the compound. I once caused a commotion when a stray kitten followed me back to the dorm. It was eventually chased out with a broom by staff, but not before I created a ruckus trying to stop them.

Orphans at Sunbeams were separated according to age and gender, so when I became a little older, my sister and I were made to sleep in different blocks. I was saddened by the separation but hid my feelings so that my sister would not feel bad sleeping alone.

Living with many people was not always happy and peaceful. Arguments would arise and cliques would form. I was left out mostly and felt like the world was against me. I was a handful at times and so was made to share a room with a girl much older. Most girls were afraid of Rachel, and so was I, initially. Over time, Rachel and I developed a deep connection and became close friends, godsisters even.



Sunbeams saw to it that our education was beyond the classroom. I attended dance and music lessons, and was provided with the opportunity to observe real-life work situations (e.g. we witnessed a professional film crew at work on a McDonald's advertisement) and learn about different cultures (e.g. an outing to an *Orang Asli* village).

I was seduced into the world of photography after reading a book on a famous wildlife photographer. The orphanage bought me a camera which I kept with me at all times. I learnt about camera depth and focus, even attended photography classes. I began taking portraits of people, focusing on capturing the essence of my subjects and evoking emotions. I soon became the go-to photographer at the orphanage and church events.

I enjoyed studying the Bible and attending church service. Pastor Rachel from the church was a constant source of inspiration and hope. Under her guidance, I slowly learnt to let go of the past.

WHO ARE YOU?

At 17, I completed high school and was ready to enrol in college. I did not have enough funds though, so I worked as an administrator at the home. My duties included handling documents for the orphanage, and among these, I came across many college applications by my peers. One by one, my friends applied and enrolled in college. My yearning to follow suit intensified. Why should my financial situation stop me from pursuing higher education? I realised then I had to shape my own future. Completing primary and secondary school was just the first hurdle. It was time to move forward.

Through my music teacher and Dr Elizabeth Lee of Sunway University, I learned about the Jeffrey Cheah Foundation Community Scholarship. As I leafed through the university's prospectus, the Diploma in Graphic & Multimedia Design course immediately caught my attention. It came with the option of doing an elective in Photography which was of great interest to me. I applied and was accepted.

Of the 12 people who enrolled in the course, only 7 of us graduated. Having come this far, I was raring to go a step further. I proceeded to Sunway's Bachelor's degree in digital film production also on scholarship after completing the two-year diploma course. I travelled back and forth between the college and orphanage, commuting on average two hours daily through the BRT and LRT. I subsequently stayed on campus during the week but returned to the orphanage on weekends.



MY STORY

I was confronted with my past during a documentary filmmaking class. My classmates and I were required to submit a topic for a group project and I was overwhelmed by a deep and curious desire to do a story on Sunbeams. I mustered up the courage to pitch the idea to my friends and to share my story, that I grew up in an orphanage. Up until that moment, I had never told anyone about my life.

My friends were remarkably supportive and did not once make me feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. They wholeheartedly encouraged me to use the idea in our documentary. I realised this was a rare opportunity to show the world my story. Talking about my past had inadvertently also brought to light many questions I had refused to acknowledge all these years.

While recounting my experiences, I was often plagued with doubt and anxiety. What should I reveal in this documentary? How far should I go? Most of the time, I could barely remember anything since I repeatedly made the effort not to think of the past. My team helped a lot by asking questions, and very slowly, through many exchanges, I pieced together events of my life.

When we released our short, barely 10-minute-long documentary, it made such an indelible impact on our audience that our lecturers have not stopped talking about it ever since. Many people say they were moved by the film, that the tragic, yet powerfully uplifting message left an impression. For me, it was an emotional ride having to relive past experiences and re-enact scenes. While the work was demanding, it was also gratifying and very much a journey of growth and discovery.

I cannot wait until my next film project.

HOME IS GETTING BIGGER

It has been a purposeful journey for me—from being abandoned in a mall to enrolling into a prestigious university on scholarship.

Sunbeams now has 135 children under its care. The children here are either abused, neglected or abandoned by their parents. Each child has a story, but at Sunbeams, we are all given a second chance at life. As we are now older, my sister and I have moved out of the orphanage. I sometimes return to help out.

In a few months, I will graduate and embark on another journey. None of this would have been possible without Sunbeams and the dedicated people at the orphanage.

I have submitted the documentary “With Love, Joey” to a few international film festivals. As of now, the documentary has won a Special Jury Award for Best Female Filmmaker at the Independent Talents International Film Festival 2018, received Official Selection at the Roma Cinema DOC 2019 (Italy) and Preliminary Selection at The Chaffey Review Film Festival 2019.

The relationship with my stepfamily is much improved. We travel together and enjoy ourselves, very much like a family. I thank God for his providence and all that has unfolded in my life. I now know that everything happened for a reason.





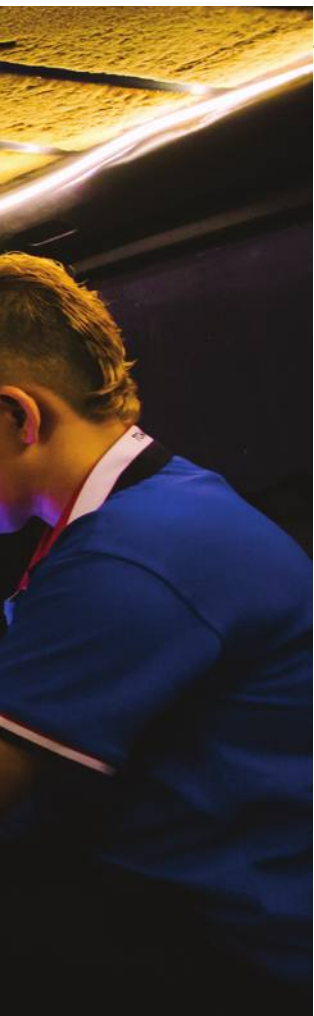
CATS ON A HOT ROOF

Two young entrepreneurs navigate the vicissitudes of the food business after taking the plunge in opening **ATAP Rooftop Café**.









A NATION OF FOOD LOVERS

Malaysians have an innate love for food. Foreigners who visit the country quickly come to learn that the passion for food extends to more than just consuming carefully prepared dishes; rather, it encapsulates the camaraderie of locals who dine together with family or friends.

In Malaysia, social bonding occurs around the clock—over breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner and supper. The F&B industry in the country is thriving and is one of the cornerstones of the economy.

To ask any Malaysian about their favourite dishes and restaurants is to be furnished with a litany of delicious local fare and fine eateries. This description of Malaysians is most evident in the pulsating Klang Valley, where the country's population is at its densest and where the latest gastronomy has grown to include an array of new foreign cuisines and food trends.

The last decade has seen the advent of social media and its permeating influence on how people eat, catalysing a gradual yet certain change in the F&B industry. Klang Valley dwellers, particularly in urban centres such as Petaling Jaya and Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, have become more sophisticated in taste and now prefer 'Instagrammable', albeit

affordable, dining experiences with attractively presented food to match. Businesses that do not adapt to the change will eventually close down.

Traditional eateries have not, however, dwindled; if you take a stroll down a random alley during lunch hours, it is highly likely you will bump into a humble, authentic Malaysian street food stall with customers lining up under the sweltering sun. With consumers now spoiled for choice, it is not easy for food entrepreneurs to find long-lasting success in today's F&B industry. Having reached saturation point, the industry is flooded with audacious millennial-entrepreneurs pursuing their passion and fortune in the Klang Valley food scene. There are now countless eateries occupying shophouses and shop lots, hidden bars or speakeasies, hawker stalls, food trucks, chic cafés, fast-food chains, and bubble tea and coffee dispensaries. Everyone is out for a piece of the pie.

For every success story, 10 eateries close their shutters permanently. It stands to reason that to enter the F&B industry, you require more than just guts and a well-laid plan, especially in this day and age where trends mercilessly come and go.

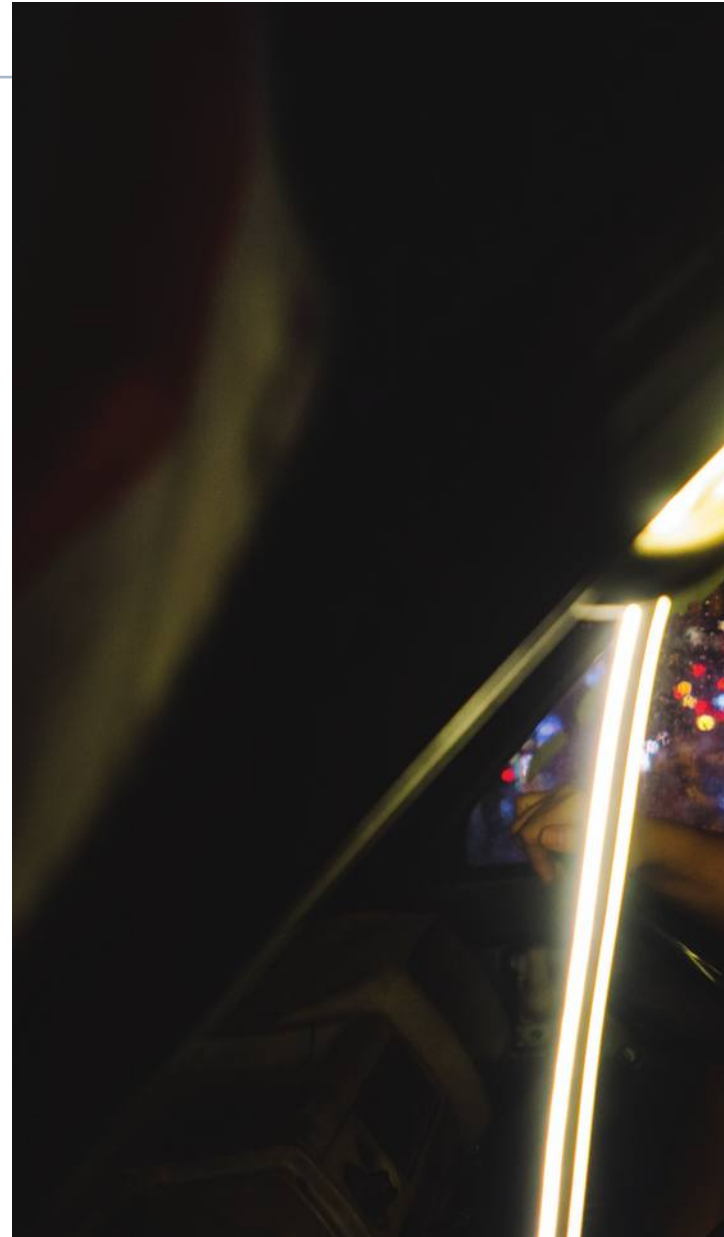
TWO OF A KIND

Muhammad Hatta Yusoff (or Hatta) and Sean Lee first met when they were enrolled in the Diploma in Performing Arts programme at Sunway University in 2012. Little did they know that their lives would be intertwined beyond their shared love for the performing arts.

The youngest of three brothers, Hatta has harboured an interest in the performing arts since he was six. Citing Hong Kong actor Jackie Chan as his idol, Hatta remembers being particularly interested in mixing the performing arts with physical acrobatics just like Jackie Chan. This dream later evolved into an interest in parkour.

Sean's interest in the performing arts also started early. He had been doing theatre at church from a young age and was actively performing. Following secondary school graduation, he sought a reputable diploma programme that would not cost a fortune and even vacillated between becoming a pilot or pursuing his passion for the arts. He chose the latter, obviously, and came to Sunway University.

As classmates, Hatta and Sean fully immersed themselves in the programme, working hard to learn the ins and outs of theatre and video production. It was not until the start of Hatta's final year project that the idea of starting a business dawned upon him. He first ventured into business selling foldable bicycles and tempered glass for smartphones, the experience which got him interested in becoming a better salesperson. Undeniably, the performing arts helped enhance his negotiation skills which made selling easier.





Sean meanwhile had begun taking baby steps in becoming a performer. He created content and started putting them up on his YouTube channel. At that time, business was the furthest thing from his mind following a brief and unsuccessful earlier attempt to design and sell shirts. In hindsight, Sean realised he had always been in 'business', as he remembers the days in his youth where he would be constantly buying and reselling Pokémon packs.

While many millennial-entrepreneurs may dream of opening cafés, Hatta only had a parkour gym in mind. When he turned 19 after completing his studies, he took a leap of faith and started a gym after a whole year of preparation. His interest in opening a gym stemmed from his growing love for extreme sports, and having observed the lack of appropriate spaces for enthusiasts, he saw and seized the opportunity to open one. With Syafik Aiman, one of Malaysia's most well-known names in parkour, Hatta founded the Art of Extreme Movement (AXM) for people who are passionate about extreme physical art forms such as dancing, parkour and martial arts.

Hatta's gym was initially on the ground floor of a commercial shophouse unit in Sunway City. The cost of rent could not be covered by only the membership fee, which was the gym's sole source of income. He refused to charge a high entrance fee to keep up with the business expenses as he wanted parkour to be accessible to as many people as possible. To Hatta, parkour was a labour of love and an art form that he wished to further spread and build a community around.

While Hatta was busy with his business, Sean was out looking for acting jobs. The idea of having a business together did not cross their minds. On occasions when both boys hung out, they would briefly joke about starting a business together





though it was not really something that they seriously considered.

Hatta learnt of the financial realities of running a business when he felt the pinch of the high rent of having an outlet on the ground floor. He had to quickly find a solution and started scouting for cheaper options. He found a decent top floor unit at Sunway Mentari, which included access to a vacant rooftop area via an elevator.

Without hesitation, Hatta moved his gym from its former premises to this new top floor unit. Rent was much cheaper. Not wanting to let the rooftop area go to waste, Hatta decided to convince his friend Sean (who had by then been toying with the idea of opening a café) to start a rooftop café with him.

“Come check this place out!” Hatta extolled. “It’s a low-risk business!”

Sean’s humble motivation to start a café was based on his personal desire to make the “best glass of Milo” in the city. He also knew he could leverage his social media influence to draw customers. After all, he had already by then carved a career as an actor and social media heartthrob with a sizeable Instagram following. Considering the low rent, low risk and low start-up cost, Sean took up the opportunity and ATAP Rooftop Cafe was born.

While Hatta and Sean initially felt that the new venture had brought them back to their carefree, university days, they soon came to realise that it was a different world altogether. Instead of being tested occasionally, each day was now a challenge for the business to financially survive and not fade into oblivion.







HOW DO WE GET THIS UP THERE?

Hatta and Sean knew nothing about setting up a café. With the ATAP opening date looming, they had to improvise.

To save on the start-up costs, the boys initially decorated ATAP with furniture made by Hatta, who was skilful in carpentry and had, before opening the café, made several pieces of furniture by recycling old furniture or reusing items like abandoned shopping carts. Due to rain and volatile weather conditions atop the building, however, his 'do-it-yourself' tables and chairs soon had to be replaced in favour of more durable furniture.

The menu was not ready until the day before ATAP's grand opening. Having had endless debates on which direction the café should take cuisine-wise, the duo finally settled on a mix of snacks that would be enjoyed by university and college students and users of Hatta's gym.

Unbeknownst to the young entrepreneurs, they had found a niche. Not many restaurateurs would consider creating a menu consisting mainly of snacks such as nachos, curly fries, and local favourites *pisang goreng* and *keropok lekor* cheese (Sean's signature dish). For ATAP's young crowd, the menu offers familiar comfort food.

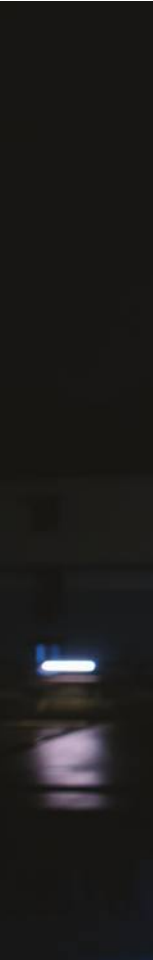
The star attraction of the ATAP menu is the Halal Snack Pack (HSP), inspired by Hatta's university days in Melbourne, Australia. The first of its kind in Malaysia, the HSP is a cult favourite among Asian students studying in Australia. Each pack comes with crinkle-cut fries with halal-certified doner kebab meat (beef, lamb or chicken) drizzled with a special sauce. A staple takeaway dish of kebab shops in Australia, the dish is gaining popularity in Malaysia as word spreads around the community of returning graduates.

Instead of specialising in one particular cuisine, ATAP manages to offer a wide range of favourites. Many of their customers return to the café to get their weekly fix of the deep-fried crispy chicken burger or a beef-ball variant of HSP, while other patrons go to ATAP to satisfy their midnight cravings for *keropok lekor*, which is usually sold by other sellers during the day.

From the start, Hatta and Sean recognised the importance of social media in promoting their café. By marketing ATAP on Facebook and Instagram, they were able to amass a crowd of curious young diners. The family-friendly yet romantic café offers many opportunities for an enviable snapshot, from well-presented food and creative mocktails such as soda-based Strawberry Lagoon or Blue Lemon Lagoon to a sunset backdrop over Sunway City. The most social media-worthy sight, however, has to be ATAP's centrepiece—a van, with its engine removed, that has been ingeniously converted into a special seating area.

Hatta and Sean discovered an abandoned van outside of a scrap metal factory and bought it at a bargain price. They got to work cleaning the van's interior. They hired a crane and hoisted the van up to the rooftop.

The van, which has now become ATAP's trademark, is a head-turner for passengers on the adjacent BRT elevated bus line. On busy nights, the van is invariably occupied by patrons who, while enjoying the delicious food and drink, will be posing for photos within and outside of the van.





MEETING POINT

There was never any deliberate thought or plan to integrate ATAP with the gym and parkour community. It just happened. With its high ceiling, the gym space was perfect. One could go high up on the trampoline in abandon for training, while curious café patrons would be able to see and hopefully become curious about parkour.

With the parkour community being small and close-knitted, the gym and ATAP have seen a fair share of parkour practitioners going through their doors, including those from Germany, Korea, Japan, Singapore and the United States. More often than not, these international guests would lend a hand at the gym and the café. It is a part of parkour culture to host travelling practitioners—if you have the means to—and give them a place to practise, making knowledge sharing easier and strengthening the bond of the community.

The employees at the gym and the café are almost interchangeable, as Hatta and Sean take to hiring those who they find to be a good fit with their entrepreneurial philosophy. Some of their employees include a Syrian refugee and a Pakistan national who sang during the job interview.

After getting to know the Syrian refugee who also frequented the gym, Hatta and Sean learnt that he was a top parkour practitioner in his own country. Hatta immediately hired him to teach classes at the gym, and after six months, made him Deputy Manager of the gym.

The Pakistan national meanwhile happened to be an artist whose work experience ran the gamut from nursing to security. At the end of his job interview at ATAP, he requested to sing Hatta a song. Caught by surprise but amused, Hatta listened to his song and immediately hired him.







Hatta converted the office into their living quarters. It was a dream bachelor's pad, with four bunk beds, two sofas and a television. Except for Sean, the entire team lived there. They got along really well. Adding to the ambience of the living quarters at night were the passing lights of the electric BRT buses which the curtained windows were levelled and parallel to, emanating a sense of living in a mystical, secret hideout far from a high-density urban jungle.

The number of gym staff grew in proportion with the local community of parkour enthusiasts. With so many people seeking work, Hatta decided to start a side business at a dance studio in Bandar Puteri Puchong. Called Bar-B-Cube, the barbecue shop within a dance studio is manned by a chef who also lives in the living quarters of the gym. Hatta and the chef planned the concept of the shop in one week and executed all renovation work in the following week.

Hatta is hands-on with business operations, while Sean is more comfortable in an advisory role. The contrast in their business personalities makes for a great business partnership. The dynamic duo's synergy came from their seemingly divergent interests, goals and strengths—they are Sunway City's own John Lennon and Paul McCartney, its Mick Jagger and Keith Richards.

Sean is aware that he can leverage his acting base to bring in more customers, and he has been working hard at strategising and creating content to boost his social media presence. The logic is simple—the more notable he is as an influencer, the more customers he will attract.

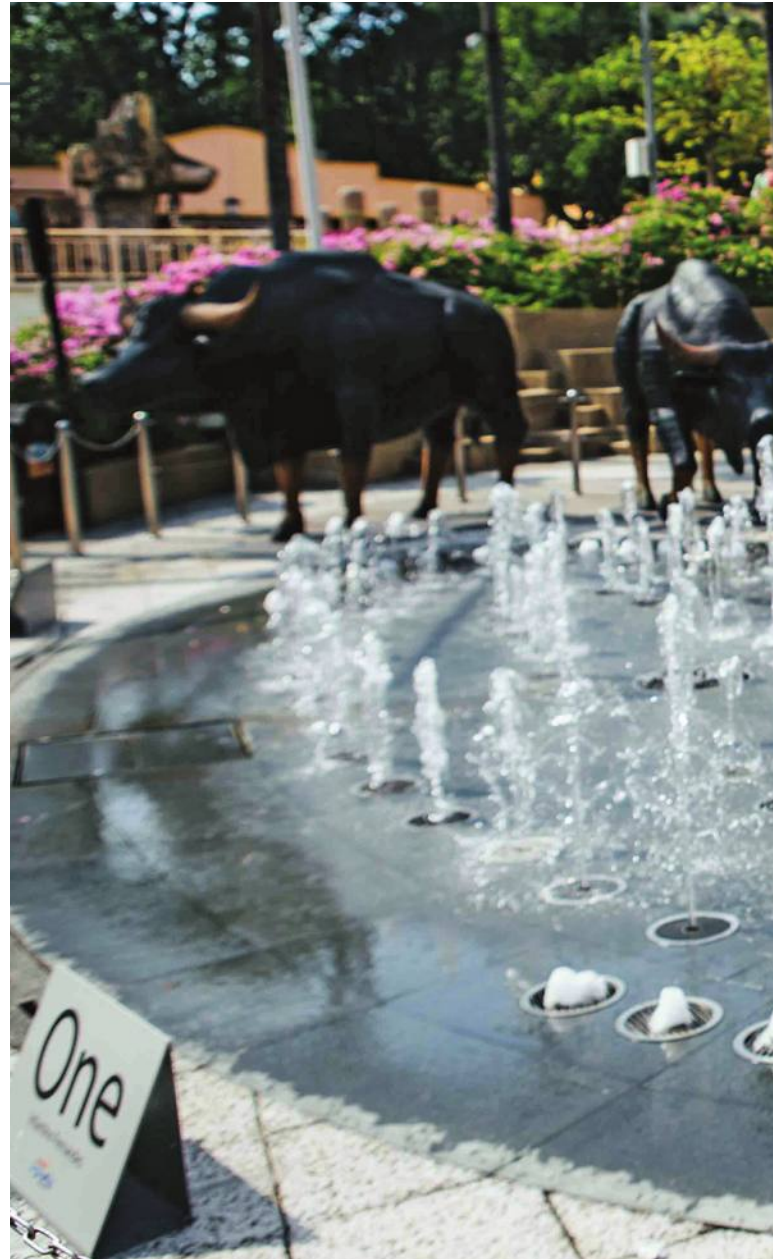
With his dreamy Korean heartthrob looks and easy personable charm, he has landed significant acting roles in local Malay-language drama series such as *Keluarga Pontimau*, *Coffee Prince* and *Sepasang Awan Putih*. His crossover appeal to the Malay-speaking crowd is a wonderful reminder of Malaysia's multicultural social landscape.

Sean has always intended to merge his passion for the entertainment industry with entrepreneurial endeavours. Financial stability is important to him, and he believes he will have the freedom to choose interesting acting projects when there is money to support him. As for Hatta, he has already convinced Sean to join him and another business partner in opening a rooftop bar called Angkasa Bar & Restaurant in SS2 Petaling Jaya. Angkasa offers a more upscale dining experience but uses a similar rooftop concept as ATAP. He echoes Sean's sentiments about the importance of financial stability, but finds his motive for success is no longer dictated by money. Happiness is his end goal and he now loves giving business strategy advice to help his peers in the industry.

Both Hatta and Sean have shaped an impressive journey towards fulfilling their dream, but their appetite for challenges is not yet satisfied. For such young and successful entrepreneurs, they have good heads on their shoulders and have come to understand the vicissitudes of their industry of choice. "Don't make mistakes you can't afford. If the problem is money, then it's not a real problem—a real problem is something you can't solve with money and we love to deal with that," Hatta concludes.

ONE MAN'S TRASH

Unconventional sculptor **Infantino Fernandes** reminisces about finding success as a 'Garbage Artist' and an environmentalist.





THE VALUE OF JUNK

Our junk tells a lot about our lives. From common disposable objects to pieces with sentimental value, junk that eventually ends up in landfills and incinerators—if not up-cycled or recycled—often reflects the obsessions of modern society. Despite the immateriality of junk, a small community of people, loosely branded as junk artists, find value in everyday discarded items, seeing trash as not what they are, but what they potentially could be.

At its simplest definition, ‘junk art’ means art created from everyday trash. From Robert Rauschenberg to Damien Hirst, many artists have used everyday trash including glass, cans, plastics, CDs, PET bottles, organic waste, clothes and construction materials in their works. Junk art, to a large extent, is also a form of environmental activism. The choice of junk often acts as an expression of the artist’s message, like using plastic bottles to create sculptures of marine life to highlight the plight of our oceans. Artists effectively (and ironically) use trash to reflect how our quick-to-consume and quick-to-dispose habits hurt the environment. Sometimes junk art is a metaphor for the artist’s own life, for example, some artists use cheap and free materials to symbolise their struggles in pursuing an art career.

In Sunway Group, resident artist Infantino Fernandes found junk art to be much more than a poor man’s canvas. Not formally trained in the arts, his foray into creating beautiful masterpieces with junk started many years ago out of the simple youthful will to create.





FOR THE LOVE OF NATURE

India's equivalent of New York, Bombay—or now Mumbai—is the city that never sleeps. Home to the country's famous Bollywood film industry, the gap between the poor and the wealthy is wide; living conditions can range from sleeping in makeshift tents along treacherous alleys to owning extravagant houses in posh neighbourhoods. In between, we have the growing middle class of which Fernandes came from.

Growing up in bustling, crowded Bombay during the global economic boom of the 1980s, Fernandes had a typical middle-class city-boy upbringing. The son of a mechanical engineer, he spent his childhood going to school, playing sports and in his spare time, climbing trees. On Sundays, he and his family went to church. His life in the dusty city would be intermittently disrupted by brief visits to his ancestral home in Goa.

Famous for its beaches and tropical weather, Goa is where young Fernandes unknowingly connected with nature. He uses the beauty of nature to depict calmness in his works as an artist. While Fernandes may have grown up surrounded by concrete and steel, nature remains the source from which he draws his inspiration.

CREATIVITY IS ALL YOU NEED

Fernandes took to art at a young age. Not being particularly interested in painting, he focused instead on sculpting using styrofoam and clay. It was in Grade 8 when his interest in art deepened. He requested for paint and paper from his father to take part in a Christmas greeting card-making competition. Having worked late the night before, the request slipped his father's mind and Fernandes found himself having to make do with materials he could find at home. He went ahead with the competition, using old newspapers, glue and whatever else he could find. Much to his surprise, he bagged the first prize.

It was at that moment he realised he did not need expensive tools to create art. He felt he had found a way to beat the system, that all he needed to do was harness the creativity within. He soon got involved in creating decorations for Easter and Christmas, mainly with styrofoam and paper, at his local church. He found that ideas came naturally to him and he did not have to think much about them.

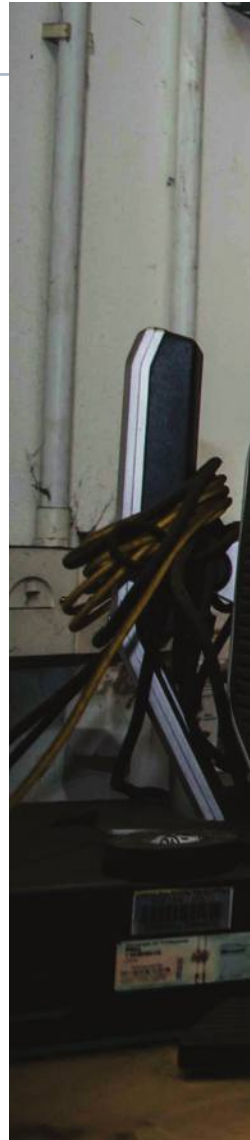
After high school, he enrolled in a course to pursue engineering, a respectable career for the typical middle-class boy that he was. After two years in the three-year course, he decided it was not for him.

His parents and well-meaning professors from the college would come over and speak with him.

Everyone gave the same advice—finish the course and *then* do what he wanted. He was adamant about not wasting an additional year to study and his worried parents resorted to sending him for psychiatric evaluation. The doctor concluded he was either “in love or under the influence of drugs”.

At that point, Fernandes could not decide if his passion was truly in the arts. There were prejudices associated with being an artist; it was commonly regarded as not a proper profession. Neither was it seen as sustainable. The career involved sacrifices and much hardship. Fernandes decided to pursue culinary arts instead as he also loved cooking (being very close to his grandmother and mother and having spent a lot of time with them in the kitchen). He enrolled into the Hotel Management course at Bombay University and subsequently became a Trainee Chef at the Leela Kempinski Hotel, one of the top three hotels in Bombay at the time.

About three months later, he found himself eyeing a job advertisement for the newly opened Hilton hotel in Dubai. Eager for new experiences, he applied for the job and was accepted for the position of Commi Chef. Although this was five positions lower than his earlier role, he was keen to make the move. It was in Dubai where he found his true calling.









FROM ICE TO STEEL

While working in the cold section of the kitchen, Fernandes met a Filipino kitchen artist who did ice sculpting for the hotel. Fernandes would complete 12-hour shifts and then do another four to five hours of ice sculpting with the kitchen artist. After two years, the kitchen artist left the hotel and asked if Fernandes was willing to take over his post. Fernandes began to work as both chef and kitchen artist, placing his culinary and ice sculpting creations on the buffet table.

In time, Hilton opened a hotel in Kuwait. Marco, the Executive Sous Chef at that time, came to Dubai to interview Fernandes because his work had caught the eye of the master chef. Marco wanted Fernandes to work solely as an artist for Hilton Kuwait and so, Fernandes transitioned from the kitchen to the hotel's workshop and spent the next four years there as its resident artist.

During the early days at Hilton Kuwait, however, the hotel had no budget to provide him with ice-sculpting tools. Not only that, water was also a rare commodity in Kuwait. To Fernandes, this was like the Christmas greeting card-making competition again, but he was undeterred and determined to create his ice sculptures in time for the hotel's grand opening. He began to make his own ice blocks by buying water and ice cubes and putting them into a large tub in the hotel kitchen's freezer. He acquired a few chisels from a local cobbler and adapted whatever tools he could borrow from the hotel's chefs. His ice sculptures made it for the hotel's grand opening.

Eventually, he tried his hand at a different kind of art. He started diving into the hotel's dumpsters for scrap material he could reuse but as the hotel was fairly new, the trash was mainly broken dials and steel rods of assorted shapes and sizes. While these objects were unusable, he realised that he could give them new life if he moulded them the right way, restoring a semblance of dignity to these seemingly worthless parts.

Initially using just glue, he started making abstract sculptures that attracted the attention of resident artists from other neighbouring hotels. Before long, he got the nickname 'The Garbage Artist' and started receiving daily cartons of breakage and waste from the hotel.



A NEW BEGINNING

It was the best of times and the busiest of times for Fernandes. He began to paint murals and was assigned to paint murals for a month in Hilton Tokyo. He would go on to paint and sculpt for Hilton hotels in Sydney and Colombo. Through it all, however, he often asked himself if he was truly happy with what he was doing.

In his four years with Hilton Kuwait, he tried to resign on three separate occasions claiming that he wanted to try something new. Each time, the hotel's management requested him to retract his resignation and advised him to take a break.

Finally, in 2006, a former General Manager from Hilton Kuwait who had been transferred to Hilton Kuala Lumpur (KL) contacted Fernandes to see if he was interested to work in Malaysia. Having not heard of Malaysia before this, Fernandes' interest was piqued. He leapt at the opportunity and spent the next eight years with Hilton KL.

Never had he felt so at home abroad in Malaysia, with locals welcoming him and showing him kindness. In 2014, however, about the time his contract with Hilton KL ended, the hotel

industry was going through some changes. Budgets became tighter and old players like Hilton were losing ground to newer, chic boutique hotels and a more bespoke accommodation experience such as Airbnb. It has become a luxury for hotels, even five-star ones, to keep a resident artist on their payroll.

Fernandes did not have to worry, however, as his ethereal creations had created a buzz among the KL elite. Activist and actress Datin Seri Tiara Jacquelina bought his only human-themed sculpture *The Anatomy of Hope* for her home while his piece *Autumn*, which was based on a single unique leaf he found in Taman Jaya, was a hit when it went on display in Hilton KL.

One day, he received a call from a former colleague who had joined Sunway Group. He was told that the Group's founder and Chairman, Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Jeffrey Cheah, is a big fan of art and that his work would be appreciated in Sunway. Keen to keep creating art, Fernandes moved into his new workplace expecting to work with Sunway Resorts and Hotels. His employer, however, had bigger plans for him.

THE ARTIST, REBORN

It was a radical move by the Group to have Fernandes create art pieces for its malls and theme park. The type of sculptures that Fernandes creates is usually for confined spaces such as galleries or five-star hotels. At Sunway, his work would be displayed as central pieces in public areas.

Malls and theme parks usually do not have a resident artist. They have creative departments for festive decorations, but to have a sculptor on board is uncommon. Would his sculptures be considered fine art or mere props? Fernandes knew he had to get the aesthetics right for his art to work and to do that, he needed to understand his new employer and the type of audiences his art would cater to. His mission was to take fine art out of private galleries and into public spheres.

Gradually expanding since the 1980's, Sunway City was the ideal location for his art. From the Group's perspective, these pieces would add value to the City and enrich the experience of tourists and residents.

His first few months with the Group were spent setting up his workshop, which was a small room beneath Sunway Pyramid next to the creative department where mall staff worked on festive decorations. In this room filled with polyester and scrap metals, Fernandes welded materials and bent rods.

Ever one to take on the elements, Fernandes' choice material to sculpt soon became steel as he finds satisfaction in giving life to something rigid. Although he no longer has to source for materials through the trash anymore, as they are now ordered directly from a supplier, his background as a 'Garbage Artist' helped him understand the nature of various materials—steel being one of them—to give his art the desired effect.

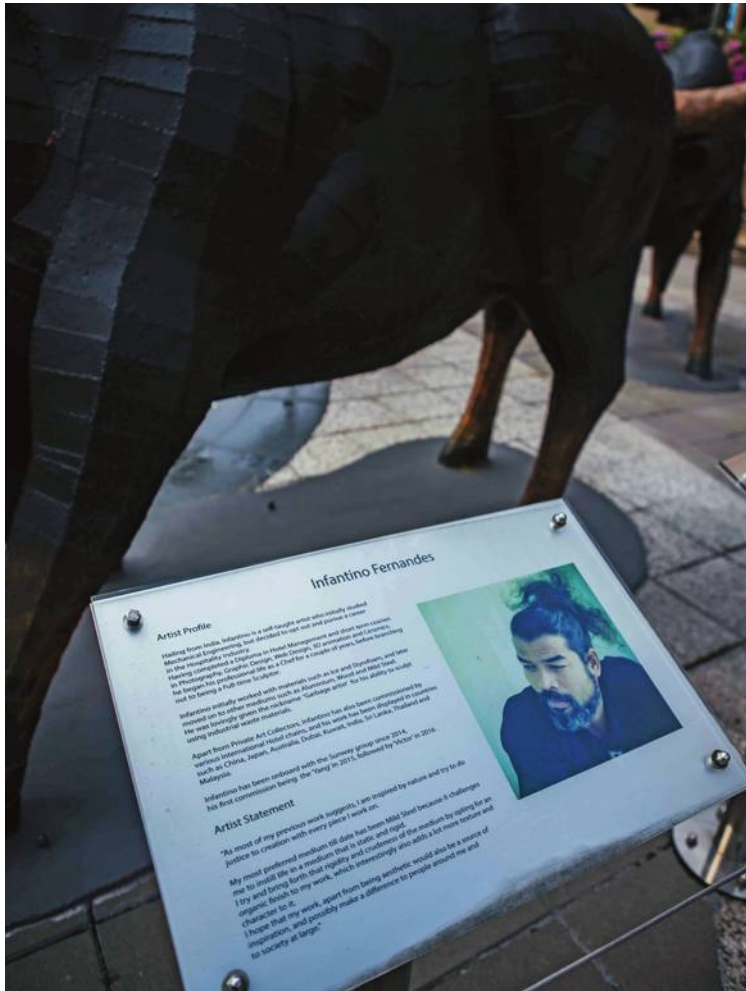


One could easily mistake the dim, dungeon-like atmosphere of his workshop for an industrial factory or construction site but it was here that Fernandes created his three biggest pieces to date. His first piece *Yang*, for the Year of the Goat, was a testament to what he could achieve. Embodying the strength and majestic look of a goat, *Yang* was the biggest piece he had ever done—2.5 metres wide and 3.5 metres tall. After serving at Sunway Pyramid for years, this piece now stands at Sunway Putra Mall, with hope placed upon it to pull in good *feng shui* for the mall.

His second project was a personal piece. Naming it *Victor* after his own middle name, Fernandes created a scarred lion as a tribute to people who were facing challenges. A few of his friends were going through tough times and he thought it apt for *Victor* to serve as a symbol of







the struggles one has to achieve to be ‘King of the Jungle’ and also as a beacon of hope. Many who had seen *Victor* claimed that the piece brought some peace and positivity to their troubled psyche. Many messaged Fernandes privately to thank him. One message stood out: “Victor changed my life. I was battling depression and that piece just made me feel peaceful.”

Fernandes realised his work could touch people’s lives. Why create art for art’s sake when it could do so much more? Fernandes figured that if he could accomplish what he did with *Victor* on a personal level, he could do the same on a community level. Thus, for a record-breaking 22 months, he threw himself into creating *One*.

One is currently displayed outside the entrance of Sunway Lagoon Theme Park. Its stirring and formidable presence at the entrance makes it hard to believe the spot had once, for 25 years, been empty. *One* represents a herd of seven Indian gaurs—six adults and one calf—made out of 7,000 individual parts of steel. Each adult gaur is 3.3 metres long and 1.8 metres tall. Although each gaur has its own unique expression, they come together as a family at the water fountain, symbolising unity.





CLOSE CALLS AND GOD

Fernandes went on a break after completing *One*. In creating the piece, he was struck with tendonitis in the wrist, shoulders and ankles and had ligament tears as a result of welding and grinding metal in an unnatural posture for 12 hours straight each day.

It was not, however, the first time he had physically suffered for his art. He is familiar with cuts, bruises and inhaling nasty fumes. Even with safety gear on and proper ventilation, he is still exposed to toxic fumes and dust. Staring at the welding flame for eight hours causes his eyes to dry up and tire.

While working on *Victor*, he suffered a grade-2 ligament tear in his left wrist from bending too many iron rods with his hands. He was made to wear a cast and completed 80% of *Victor* with just one hand. Although right-handed, he needed his left hand for balancing and for holding parts and tools. Without his doctor's knowledge, he cut open his cast and continued working.

There have been many close calls. Once, while working with an electric saw, Fernandes got distracted and just before his thumb was severed, the power went off. Another time, while working on *One*, a grinding machine fell and missed his head by inches.

After years of creating art, from ice sculptures to murals to large centrepieces made of steel, Fernandes attributes his blessings to God. "Because I am an artist, I believe in a Creator. To have everything I have and to be able to do what I love to do has been nothing short of a miracle," he muses.

He is currently recovering from the 22 months spent on *One* and conceptualising his fourth piece for Sunway.

BALLAD OF A MAT SOM

The personal story of **Azmyl Yusof** an independent musician and the life-affirming lessons he picked up along the way.





***What's stopping us from getting acquainted
In this big city of endless refrain***

Mat Som is the titular character of Malaysian cartoonist Lat's 1990 graphic novel *Mat Som* and represents, to me, the 'everyman' or common person. I eventually wrote and recorded a song titled *Ballad of Mat Som* for my 2012 album *Wilayah* not only as a tribute to the character but also to Lat the artist and the modern condition.

Lat's comics and his simple way of storytelling were a source of inspiration for me growing up. He is a master at evoking a nostalgic feeling for a time and place that I have never lived, particular in the book *Kampung Boy*, a story set in a village Lat grew up in which was far removed from the environs of my own upbringing. I grew up in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, off Jalan Gurney, in my grandparents' bungalow with the whole of my immediate family. There was a river, Sungai Bunus, near our house but it was not the kind of river that Lat portrayed in *Kampung Boy*, nor would you ever want to dive and swim in it. The river was murky as milk tea, and debris and rubbish were the only things you could see floating in it. As a boy, I spent my time happily climbing rambutan trees in the house yard and enjoying the fruits on the branches. Being the first-born, I had a solitary childhood.

My young self was in awe of Lat's depiction of peaceful co-existence of Malaysian society, and the diversity of our cultures and beliefs. As I grew up and started getting my feet wet in the performing arts scene, the one diversity I found lacking was that of ideas relating to creativity. I observed that the performing arts scene in Malaysia (and genuine storytelling) was, and is still, not leveraged enough as a tool for nation-building. Take P. Ramlee for example. He was Malaysia's iconic film and musical





artist, whose multi-layered and multi-faceted *oeuvre* crossed ethnic and cultural boundaries. His works, however, seem to have been diminished by spectacle and crass commercialism which fell short of pushing ahead some genuine form of folk narrative.

The folk genre tickled my fancy early on; it is after all a genre 'from the people, of the people'. The attraction was probably in the genre's inherent musical simplicity, and the focus on imagery and storytelling that was evident in the early works of my favourite American band R.E.M. and local music heroes like Kembara. Music became an even bigger influence on me after my family moved out of Kuala Lumpur and relocated to Bandar Baru Bangi. It began to be not just something that I enjoyed listening to, but also my companion and best friend. I went to a private school in Cheras despite living in Bangi, so the long commute allowed me to entertain myself by humming (in my mind) my favourite songs at the time and imagining alternative lyrics.

***I've come a long way to where I'm
now seated
When will I graduate from the
learner's lane***

I made the decision when I was 18 to pursue a journey in music. Although I was a bigger film buff at the time, I thought a music career was the more practical option, and the mode of working was cheaper and a lot more immediate. After all, this was in 1995, an era long before digital media became a norm and video production affordable.

Before entering college, I had never walked into a music jamming studio nor did I have friends who played musical instruments. Subang Jaya had been just a suburban sprawl in my teenage mind until my parents decided to bring me to one of the private colleges there. My parents are both science professors; my father Dr Yusof Husin is an entomologist (one of his research involved ladybirds and, for a short while, I had my own mini ladybird farm in the unused fireplace in our apartment in San Francisco while he was on sabbatical) while my mother Dr Norani Samad is a microbiologist who specialised in viruses (and no, we never had a virus farm).

Despite their background and specialisation, my parents had never forced me to pursue a career in the sciences. They noticed my creative and artistic inclinations early on and when I was about 10, they registered me for a children's art contest at the Dayabumi building. Sadly, I was disqualified because I decided not to paint my drawing—as required by the contest rules—because I felt the drawing was sufficiently represented in its black pencil sketch. Despite having accompanied me for a couple of hours for a competition that ended in my being disqualified, my parents remained supportive.

Another time when I was a toddler, the television in the living room collapsed on me (I had climbed up the television rack). Miraculously, I came away unscathed, but have always felt, after that experience, that I was destined to be in the general field of media. I wear spectacles not from too much reading or homework but from sneaking out of my room once everyone was asleep to watch films in the dark throughout my teenage years.

Films were a great inspiration to me and I would oftentimes imagine myself as a character in a film whenever I experienced awkward moments as a teenager. Such clumsy, adolescent moments were beautifully portrayed in Lat's *Mat Som* and had influenced me to write *Ballad of Mat Som*.

As a songwriter, my process of writing lyrics is often referred to as stream-of-consciousness writing. I write based on words, images or even ideas that rush to and stick in my mind. My childhood and routine long journeys to school and back equipped me with enough imagery and sentiments to fuel the creative process. The meaning of these imagery and sentiments, or their lack of meaning, is never an immediate concern to me as a songwriter. I am akin to a painter who makes big, bold strokes on a canvas and hopes that some pattern would emerge from which meaning can then arise.

I wrote *Ballad of Mat Som* while I was pursuing my Master's degree in communication in Melbourne, Australia. It was fitting too that my dissertation research topic revolved around the use of popular songs in films. Music and film never left me, even in my academic endeavours. Being





an international student abroad, I had limited funds for leisure. So one of the things I enjoyed for free was watching films on the SBS TV channel which broadcast many foreign non-English films (with subtitles, of course) often categorised as ‘world cinema’.

When people ask, I often reply that I do not have a career in music. Instead, I regard music as a vocation, a calling. This calling is driven by the vicissitudes of being alive and by the maxim, “When life throws you lemons, make lemonade” (although I admit my version is more like, “When life throws you lemons, make lemonade, use the excess juice to wash the dishes, make lemon skin peel and preserve whatever else is left”). In life, we tend to treat setbacks as hurdles to greater goals. But I believe hurdles are exactly the drive to direct your endeavours (be it creative or otherwise) towards interesting new places that you probably would not have thought of in the first place.



***Well, curse these walls that keep
us apart
If I don't live long enough I'll die from
a broken heart***

As a musician, people make a lot of assumptions about who you are and how you are as a person. At the previous university where I worked, I became the token musician among my colleagues. They would often say, “Hey Azmyl, sing us a song!” and I would retort, “Come to my gigs, man. I ain't gonna sing a song here for you”.

Do you ask an accounting lecturer to do your accounts or tax returns in the office? Do you ask a psychology lecturer to psychoanalyse you in the staff pantry?

The cliché of the musician or artist as a carefree, passionate figure is oftentimes romanticised in popular media and literature. The stereotype is sometimes a recurring source of annoyance for me because one, it demarcates the arts as something ‘exotic’ which lacks any practical use in the modern epoch, and two, it draws a clear binary with the sciences.

The imagined demarcation between the arts and sciences is problematic. If you go back in history, many of the greatest thinkers of the time such as Leonardo Da Vinci were both artists and scientists. Art gives us the ability to dream and imagine, while science is the practical application of the dreams in tangible motion. I feel society is now scarce of a soul primarily because of this unending quest for logic, practicality and reason. We draw walls of separation where there should not be any. Even if walls must be erected, those within each separate confine are often not given the chance to understand what lies on the other side.

Words like ‘passion’ and ‘talented’ are arbitrarily heaped on artists as a token of awe and appreciation, yet whatever artists give to society is sometimes never given back. These words further mystify art-making as something that not everyone can pursue, which I find to be heartbreaking. In my mind, everyone can be creative and pursue some form of art-making; the creativity can feed the soul and liberate us from the seemingly endless parade of consumerist solutions that are bandied about in the media as the only way of getting in touch with ourselves.

Once I had completed my pre-university programme, I had the luxury of spending about six months to ‘discover’ myself. I continued jamming and recording demos with my fledging band, which was made up of my college mate and his high school friend. I pursued this form of art-making without giving any thought to my future or any meaningful employment that I would settle for. I was indulging creatively and, with the benefit of hindsight, this period was a crucial ingredient in my creative development. I was dreaming, I was imagining.

As with most middle-class urban Malaysians, the dream of pursuing a musical project like a band will eventually be hampered by the reality of having to pursue tertiary education. Our guitarist flew off to the United Kingdom for an information technology degree and our bassist flew off to the United States for an English degree. Eventually, it was my turn to fly and I had the opportunity to

further my education in Perth, Australia. Slowly but surely, my dream of pursuing a musical journey with a band was thwarted by larger plans. I had found a double-major degree programme that suited my linguistic and creative skills; an undergraduate degree in mass communication with a double major in journalism and film and television at a university just outside of downtown Perth. I was excited and thankful that such a programme existed. The programme was new and my cohort became the guinea pigs.

My parents helped me settle when we arrived, and two of my college mates who also enrolled in the same university became my housemates. At the time, I was still torn between pursuing an impractical dream of being in a band and a pragmatic tertiary education that would set me on a straight and narrow path. I spent three and a half years in Perth, and extended a semester to do extra credit to keep the real world at bay for as long as I could.

There were the usual ups and downs of living and studying abroad but the geographical isolation of Perth continued to haunt and inspire me. I suppose that is why I wrote songs; I had very little distractions and even less to do outside of the university.

As our student visas automatically granted us a part-time working visa, I applied for a variety of part-time jobs in hopes of supplementing my finances but to no avail. The failure to secure a part-time job made me feel like the world was deliberately conspiring against me. Not only had I lost my band, but I was also stranded in a God-forsaken town with no one wanting my labour. Life was throwing me the proverbial lemon in succession. It was during those moments of

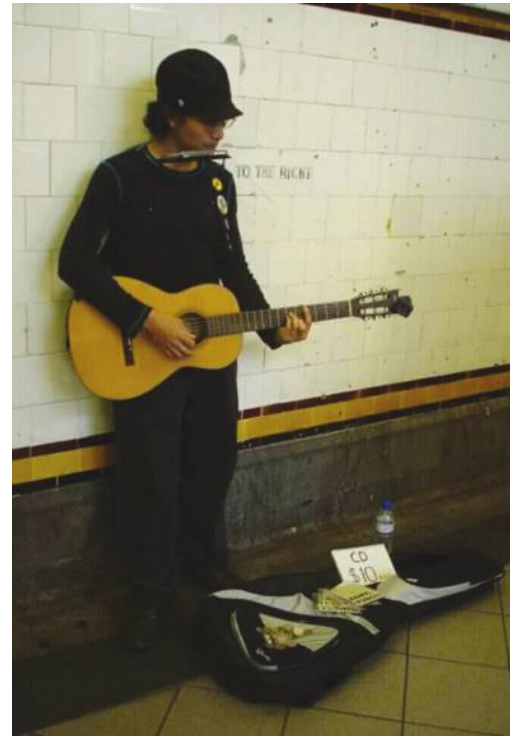
despair that I walked around the city centre and noticed street musicians, or buskers, playing on the sidewalks. Some were good but most were less than impressive. It was during those instances of observing buskers that I thought to myself, “I could do better than them”.

I quickly applied for a permit with the city council. The application process was simple. I needed to just show proof of a mailing address that had my name and pay AU\$1 for a month-long permit that I had to renew once it expired. I did not bring my guitar along during my first attempt at busking in Perth, so I found a music store, checked out its discount bin, and bought an egg-shaped shaker and a small tambourine.

I found myself a spot next to a department store window on a weekend, started a beat with my newly bought instruments and sang songs. I earned about three dollars for less than ten minutes of busking and thought to myself, “Hey, this isn’t that bad!”. I brought my guitar along for my second busking attempt, bought a white fishing hat from an army surplus store as my tipping ‘jar’ and played away. Slowly but surely, my broken heart was being nursed by a *eureka* moment that I could not have planned nor imagined happening. Never in my life had I thought that I could hack it as a street musician but here I was, busking away in Perth, learning the ropes of being a performer and entertainer, while being exposed to the dark and bright sides of life and society.

If it were not for the rejection of all the restaurants, cafés and cinemas I applied to, I would not have been a performing musician in the first place. So again, the lemon that life threw at me bore fruit to a lemon tree from which I continued picking for the next several years.





***The only thing school taught me was
to wait for the bell
Well, you know I've got a thing for
you, you could always tell***

Busking became close to my heart ever since. It not only shaped my musical sensibilities and influenced me as a performer, but also shaped my philosophy about life and society. I met so many interesting characters and got to know other buskers, most of whom were busking for fun or just travellers passing through.

I found the lack of Asians busking perplexing; was it a status thing? I know for a fact that in Malaysia, being a busker was associated with poverty, homelessness or being down-and-out. This perception persisted way into the 2000's when I returned to Malaysia and got to know local buskers who later became my friends and musicians I admire. I recall an instance when a classmate of mine was walking towards me on the city sidewalk when she came out of a shop near where I was busking. She saw me (I know for sure, as we had eye contact) but as I turned my head and looked back again, she was gone. I was going to say, "Hi!" but she had crossed the street and was walking swiftly away. Maybe she thought something bad had happened to me that left me broke and in need of money, so she avoided contact with me for fear that I would ask for a dime.

I still busked later on when I had another opportunity to further my studies in Melbourne, Australia and again, the lack of Asians busking in the city, aside from the Japanese or Koreans, left me perplexed. Not that I was complaining; I was more than happy to be the token Asian musician with a gruff voice earning my way to the bank.

As a busker, I learnt about my environment and spaces. I did not busk with an amplifier as I

could not afford nor be bothered to buy one, so I found spaces that could help amplify my voice as much as possible, like spaces that were walled or covered with a roof. Being a busker allowed me to see the other side of society too. If I was window-shopping downtown as my regular international student self, homeless people would ask me for some spare change; but when I busked, these same homeless people would give me their spare change (which they needed more than I did) as a token of appreciation. My ability to empathise with the downtrodden grew further with this experience and I began to see society in a different light. It was a lesson that no university, Ivy League or world-class education could provide.

This period was also a dark and trying time personally that I now look back on with equal affinity and despair. But more importantly, I would not change a thing if I had to do it all over again. As the Sufi saying goes, "The scar is where the light comes in", and the trying moments of my youth also inspired some of my best songs. My experiences, good and bad, are mine and no internship experience would ever equal my three-odd years of busking in Australia.

Busking has now become very mainstream in Malaysia, but it is not the form that I find an affinity for. The philosophy of busking that speaks to me best is as my musical hero Meor (a local folk singer-songwriter who is also a professional busker) puts it; busking is like a prayer, you are singing to no one in particular but maybe to God.

***And there's always a time and place to
fall in love
But in this world of speed it's all
fallacies***

I do not really consider myself a musician. I do treasure the little unexpected moments onstage, but not the preparation and practice that precede a performance. I find rehearsals a total bore. After all, life is not a rehearsal. You need to live in the moment and time onstage is but a moment. This simple philosophy, as I later learnt after meeting other musicians who studied music, seemed to amuse them. Most musicians I knew liked to talk about their instruments and equipment; the kind of conversation which, again, bored me. I preferred talking about current affairs, thoughts on certain issues and philosophy. Perhaps my topic of conversation that was closest to music would be something about the new songs, albums or musicians I liked, found interesting or was listening to. The music industry was the furthest thing in my mind that I thought I could be a part of, and there were aspects of the industry that I did not find particularly appealing; the gossip, the meaningless press talk, the need to be presentable and always please a crowd. If these were the expectations of someone who wanted to be a musician, I would rather take up accounting.

My discovery of music subcultures changed all that. The discovery was a gradual one as I began to visit a record store called 78 Records during my free time or after I had done busking. The record store allowed patrons to browse music books and magazines, and even listen to CDs at their listening booths even if you did not buy any (such customer-friendly record stores were hard to come by in Malaysia at that time). I delved into the history of modern music, the birth of punk rock in the





70's, the psychedelic and protest music of the 60's counterculture, the birth and rise of rock 'n' roll in the 50's, the heart-tugging country music of the 40's, and the early Delta blues and folk-blues music of the 30's and 20's. I learnt with this paradigm that the trajectory to understanding anything in the present will be evident when you start looking back into the past. With this knowledge, the appreciation for the present will be even more meaningful with the loaded context of history.

I was also getting to learn who I was as a person in the greater scheme of things. The discovery of punk rock was crucial to me, primarily because of the genre's 'do-it-yourself' ethos. I could not understand initially why someone would create music or art so unappealing as punk rock. But as I came to understand the philosophy of the ethos, it became evident to me that punk rock championed a philosophy of self-empowerment and self-discovery. By then, I had slowly metamorphosised myself from Azmyl Yusof, the kid, to Azmyl Yunor, the artist. I had found my own niche outside the mainstream music industry and became an *independent musician*.

Travelling as a touring independent musician is one of the many joys of being a working musician. Travelling gives me time to think, contemplate and philosophise. I tend to tour alone for logistical and financial reasons; it is faster and cheaper. For one, I do not need to wait and plan for anyone else, and all the earnings from a show do not need to be split among band members. Having travelled far and wide, I have become able to debunk one of man's greatest misunderstood notions that being alone equals being lonely. Being alone *does not* mean being lonely, it *does not* mean being anti-social. Being alone allows you to listen to your own thoughts, joys and fears. I believe moments of solitary contemplation are sorely missing from everyone's lives in this busy and super-connected

world. I was lucky to not have grown up with smartphones and internet-enabled distractions that mask themselves as connectors to others. If you are not at peace with yourself, then you will never find peace or contentment in the presence of others.

My personal musical history is not one that you often find in typical musician biographies. I was not a prodigy. I did not write my first song when I was three years old, nor did I hold my first concert when I was five. My family is not a musical one, as no one in my immediate family sings nor plays a musical instrument. But what my family does have is a love for music in general. My dad had a mini record collection that satiated my curiosity, although I never got to hear the records since the vinyl player was always broken. He also played a lot of music in the car tape deck and I really looked forward to going on *balik kampung* trips as he would play compilation cassettes by 60's and 70's *pop yeh yeh* bands and Kenny Rogers. On the way to my dad's hometown in Batu Pahat, Johor, we would also stop by the town of Muar to check out a small music store next to a supermarket to buy new compilation cassettes.

I loved singing as a kid and would sing along to my favourite Malaysian 80's hits. I even sang at some events in my secondary school but I never gave any serious thought to working with music. As a teenager, my ambition was to be a professional tennis player but I daydreamed too much. I did not pick up the guitar until I was 17, although I had been taking formal piano lessons on and off since I was about seven. I played the piano as far as Grade 3 but never really enjoyed playing old European

classical songs by long dead composers. While I admit there were moments of joy when I got the hang of a song, practising for classes was nothing short of agony.

What I love most about songwriting is the mystical aspect to it. Sometimes I would come up with a song that I had never predicted writing, and I would ask myself, "Where did that come from?". *I live* for such moments. Songs either come or they do not; I do not write songs on demand. Just as how certain cultural practices become richer and stronger as a result of social or political oppression, songs too can come easily to me during trying times or desperate moments. I do not champion the stereotypical idea of the 'struggling artist' but based on my own experiences, the struggle is the greatest part of being an artist. I would never force myself to be a full-time musician or recording artist for this very reason. I am not a circus act that you can pull out onstage and perform tricks for a paying audience. I play for me first; the rest is a bonus. If I am an accidental musician (as one journalist described me), then so be it.

Music is a spiritual and practical quest and vocation. If you want to take a musical path, then my advice is this: do not quit your day job. My art hinges on the dialectic and contradictions of modern life, of the struggle of the individual to find a place in a world that increasingly favours collective subservience. I am a *Mat Som*, the everyperson, the layman. I am not a superstar nor am I a rockstar. I am a tax-paying citizen who cherishes the trivialities of living as the average Joe. That is my journey and that is a journey that keeps me *real*.



KEEPING IT WILD

An exploration of the city's hidden gem **Sunway Lagoon Wildlife Park** through the eyes and experiences of the people who work there.





MORE THAN A ZOO

Sunway Lagoon Theme Park opened in 1992 with only the Water Park and the Dry Park, and operated a simple petting zoo from 2002 to 2005. Today, the multiple award-winning theme park that sprawls over 88 acres is made up of six different parks, one of which is the Wildlife Park. Designed by zoo architects and experts from Singapore, the Wildlife Park is home to 448 animals and counting from over 150 species. That simple petting zoo became incorporated in the eight-acre Wildlife Park which officially opened its doors to the public in 2007.

In the early days, admission to the Wildlife Park required a separate ticket and the park received about 100,000 to 200,000 visitors a year. When Sunway Lagoon opted for a single admission ticket to all its parks, the Wildlife Park began receiving 1.3 million visitors a year. The park's wildlife collection is diverse with animals of all sizes and colours including white lions, black panthers, sun bears, marmosets, peacocks, tortoises and porcupines. There is plenty to explore as visitors walk through the park's different sections namely Village, Rimba, Jungle Trail, Tiger Land, Bear Enclosure, Bird Savannah, White Lion Kingdom, Aviary, Tree Top Terrace, New World Monkey and Pet Village.

The park was designed to be a boutique zoo with a carefully curated wildlife collection set within a verdant landscape. Visitors come to the park for all sorts of reasons: some seek the lush greenery to cool off after a fun day under the sun while others are just happy to see animals. The park, however, wants to offer its guests a more enriching experience than just a mere stroll through the zoo. With interactive animal encounters,

wildlife shows and educational tours, visitors leave the park both entertained and enlightened.

On the whole, public opinion on zoos is divided. Some of us question the necessity of zoos and believe that animals should not be held captive. After all, reports of animal abuse or mistreatment in zoos are widespread and some zoos have been found unlicensed or unregulated. On the other hand, many zoos today also act as conservation centres and some even have captive breeding programmes meant to protect endangered species from extinction. Endangered species that have reportedly been saved from extinction because of zoos include the Arabian oryx, the California condor and the golden lion tamarin, to name a few. Most modern zoos have moved away from cages and instead designed enclosures as similar to the animals' natural habitats as possible. Every river, tree and rock at the Wildlife Park, for example, have been factored in when recreating the animals' natural habitats in their enclosures.

Many of us have fond memories of our first visit to the zoo, remembering our first time seeing wild animals that we have only ever seen on television or read about in books. For generations, zoos have given us a chance to see these animals up close. Whether you are for or against zoos, they seem to have become an integral part of society and will seemingly continue to exist. Perhaps the bigger question then relates not to whether zoos are necessary but rather if they are responsibly managed particularly in how the animals are treated or exhibited. As the team at Sunway Lagoon Wildlife Park would tell us, it is no easy feat to manage a zoo, big or small.









TAMING THE WILDLIFE PARK

Magendaran Marimuthu, more casually known as Mag, is Assistant General Manager of Sunway Lagoon Theme Park. He currently oversees the operations of the Wildlife Park which include managing the zoo team that comprises a manager, a veterinarian, presenters, animal trainers and zookeepers. Prior to this role, Mag was Club Manager at Sunway Lagoon Club.

One of Mag's primary tasks is ensuring the park's adherence to the Five Freedoms standard of animal care that was set by the United Kingdom government in 1965 and has since been adopted by many zoos worldwide. According to the Five Freedoms, animals in captivity should have freedom from hunger and thirst; freedom from discomfort; freedom from pain, injury or disease; freedom to express normal behaviour; and freedom from fear and distress. With more than 150 different species of varying diets and habits in his care, Mag has to make sure all his animals are well-fed, healthy and living comfortably.

In 2012, the government of Malaysia gazetted the Wildlife Conservation (Operation of Zoo) Regulations 2012 as a way for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (Jabatan Perlindungan Hidupan Liar dan Taman Negara or PERHILITAN) to regulate zoos in the country and act against errant ones. All zoo operators must observe these new regulations—which include employing a full-time veterinarian, providing vaccination to animals, maintaining a record of the animals, etc.—or risk being fined. The introduction of these new regulations proved to be exciting yet challenging for Mag and his team as they had to make various changes to the park. Some of these changes included the construction of the Tree Top Terrace and other new areas, the expansion of animal enclosures, and the acquisition of new animals.







It is common practice for zoos to trade animals, particularly endangered ones, with one another as moving animals around prevents inbreeding and preserves the species' genetic diversity. The Wildlife Park likewise receives its animals from other zoos and sometimes from a breeder if the animal is a common, non-endangered species. Wildlife trade is governed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), an international treaty that protects endangered flora and fauna. CITES ensures that the trading of endangered species will not threaten the species' population.

Mag oversees the types of animals being brought into the park, ensuring that these trades or acquisitions are in accordance with CITES. For every new animal they wish to bring in, Mag and his team have to consider budget constraints, space availability and if they have the appropriate expertise and facilities required to care for the animal. The main attraction of the park is no doubt its animals so acquiring new animals keeps the park's collection 'fresh'.

In addition to overseeing the structural aspects of the park, Mag also looks after the 'edutainment' aspect. Visitor engagement is important, and Mag has to make sure the park offers plenty of events and activities to keep visitors excited. For example, the park has daily animal shows, interactive 'wild encounters' sessions and educational programmes that not only entertain but also educate visitors on sustainable practices and how to improve wildlife conservation. Busloads of preschoolers and school children routinely pour in for the park's educational programmes.

In 2015, to show visitors just how important they were, the park held a public naming contest for two of its newest and most prized animals—a pair of newborn white lions. The contest was special as the naming of newborn animals in a zoo is usually a right reserved for zookeepers due to their close bond with the animals. The contest generated much fanfare and attracted many visitors to the park, and Zuri and Zola became the winning names of the cubs. Zuri and Zola, obtained from a zoo in South Africa, are indigenous to Africa's Timbavati and southern Kruger Park regions. Regarded as divine by the locals, they are not albinos but have blond to near-white fur due to leucism, a rare colour mutation. The Wildlife Park is the first zoo in the Klang Valley to have a pair of such beauties.

Mag understands that the park's star animals are its big cats. Apart from the white lions, the park is also home to a family of blue-eyed white Bengal tigers—Samson, Asha and their cubs Sam and Elsa—and three black panthers—Shadow, Maran and Ara. While Mag oversees the operations of the Wildlife Park, these cats and other animals are tenderly looked after by the park's team of 13 dedicated and experienced zookeepers.







THE CAT WHISPERER

Two male black panthers—Shadow and Maran—arrived in 2007 and were among the park's earliest residents. The task of introducing the panthers to their new home fell to Saravanan Vanan, or Sara for short. Although an experienced zookeeper, Sara was undeniably a little fearful when he came face to face with the panthers for the first time. While lions are pack animals, panthers are solitary creatures and Sara was afraid Shadow and Maran might not get along well when put together. It took Sara six months, including one month of quarantine period, to train and bond with them. One of the tactics he used was clicker training where he first conditioned the panthers to associate the sound of the click with a reward (mostly food). Sara then used the clicker whenever the panthers displayed a desired behaviour and he rewarded them for the behaviour. By doing this repeatedly, the panthers eventually learned to exhibit the desired behaviour without being prompted.

When Shadow and Maran were finally placed together in one enclosure, Sara was happy at how well they took to one another. Then came a third black panther, this time female. Sara introduced the female panther, Ara, to each male panther one at a time. The trick was to intermittently lead them into each other's cages alone so that they could familiarise themselves with each other's scent. Once Sara was confident that the panthers were familiar with one another, he released Ara into the same enclosure as Shadow and Maran. It has been 13 years and the three panthers are still together at the park.





Sara started working for Sunway Lagoon 15 years ago as a part-time keeper when the park was just a simple petting zoo. Without any prior formal knowledge of animal care, he had to learn on the job. When the petting zoo evolved into the Wildlife Park and more animals were brought in, Sara received proper training from the Singaporean team that assisted with the setting up of the park. He was an eager student and impressed the team with the way he handled horses. Sara also trained at Taiping Zoo and did a zookeeper's course at Malacca Zoo with the Malaysian Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria. Over the years, he has cared for all sorts of animals including birds, monkeys and sun bears, but his expertise is with the big cats.

On a daily basis, Sara prepares food for the animals, checks their health by weighing them, assists the veterinarian with tests, and ensures that all is in order within the enclosures. While a regular work day is from 8 am to 8 pm, Sara often stays back if an animal is sick. Sara 'takes' work home frequently as he constantly worries about the animals beyond official work hours. During his days off, he continues to check in on his animals by calling up colleagues from home. After 15 years as a zookeeper, Sara remains as passionate as ever about his job.

The most challenging part of Sara's job is when an animal is about to give birth and when its mood becomes highly volatile as a result. Due to their close bonds with the animals, zookeepers can instinctively tell when an animal is sick or pregnant even before the zoo's veterinarian identifies the issue. Sara believes that this instinct or gut feeling in zookeepers is developed from their years of experience in handling animals. When an animal is due, Sara will prepare an area for the animal to give birth. Sara has overseen the successful birth

of many animals at the park including four sun bear cubs.

Giving birth, however, is only the beginning. Not all animals display maternal instincts as some abandon their weak or sick offspring while others leave their young to fend for themselves. Frequently, Sara intervenes to help new mothers. If a mother is really bad at the job, Sara separates her from her offspring. Timing of the separation is crucial as done too early or late, the offspring dies. For many newborn animals abandoned by their mothers at the park, Sara steps in to nurse them, the most memorable being some white tiger cubs he bottle-fed. Sara spends at least an hour a day with the newborns to ensure they get used to him and humans, in general.

The Wildlife Park also organises enrichment programmes for its animals so that they lead an active life and will not be easily bored by routine. Such programmes usually involve rearranging the landscape in the enclosure or giving the animals novel things to play with. For example, Sara will place goat droppings in the white tiger's enclosure to arouse its curiosity. The animals' interactions with visitors through the park's wildlife shows also keep the animals active. The park mainly uses birds in their wildlife shows as they require less handling and would already fly around naturally to the bemusement of visitors. All the zookeepers, including Sara, are always on hand to assist with the shows and will never let any harm come to the animals.

For Sara, the animals at the park are like a second family. His face lights up whenever he talks about them like a proud father would when speaking of his children. Sara has come to know his animals very well and feels sad each time an animal is traded to another zoo. He likewise finds comfort in every new birth at the park.

GROWING RESPONSIBLY

Since its inception, Sunway Lagoon Wildlife Park has never stopped growing and improving. Mag noted that the park's upkeep of its landscape and terrain has been continual since day one. Visitors entering the park not only admire its animal collection but also its green landscape. Zoos, in general, provide researchers with opportunities (and a safe environment) to study the behaviour of wild animals up close. The Wildlife Park is no different as it welcomes researchers from various universities to study its animals or students keen to do volunteer or research work at the park.

In recent times, Sunway Lagoon has stepped up its game plan for sustainability by working towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The team at Wildlife Park focuses on SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Some of the initiatives the team has come up with include celebrating World Animal Day to create awareness of wildlife conservation and using groundwater source to clean common walkways and water soil. The park's daily wildlife shows or tours also emphasise the importance of sustainable practices and conservation.

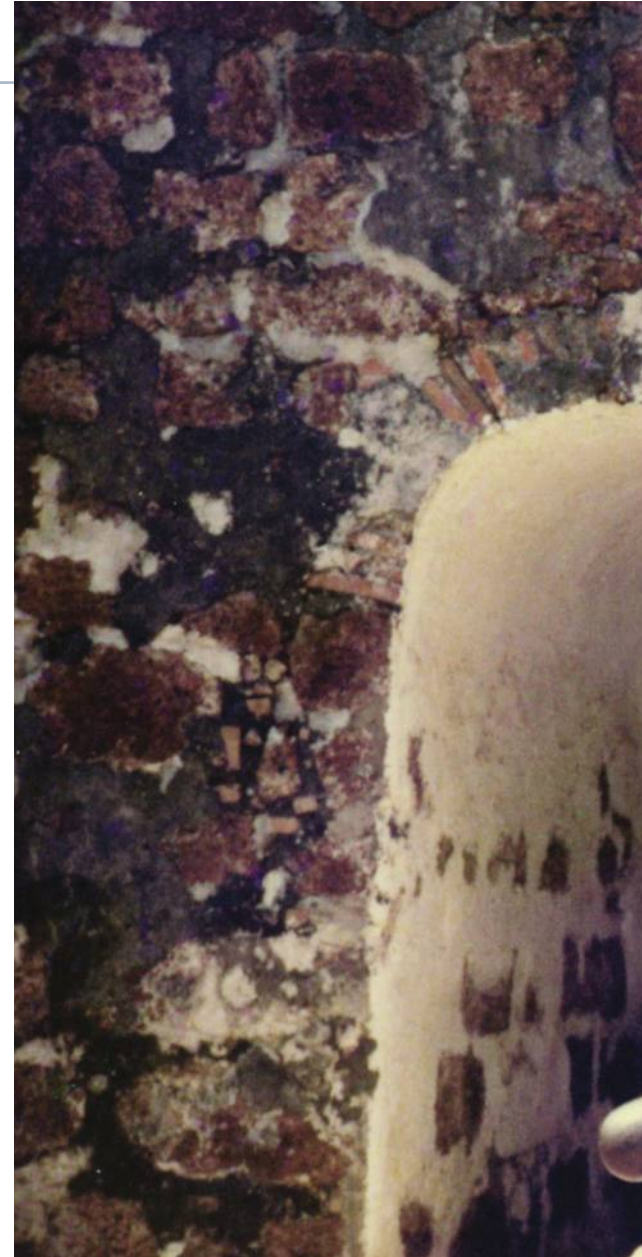
Sunway Lagoon Wildlife Park is a zoo that strives to be more. As much as the animals are the park's stars, so are the park's team of hardworking employees and the park's educational initiatives. In the near future, the park could possibly play a bigger role in wildlife conservation when it expands. For now, it continues to serve as a mini green haven for its furry and feathery residents.





A MATCH MADE IN SUNWAY

A tale of the heart as shared by **Betty Lim** and her modest pursuit of personal happiness amidst the scurry of working life.







LOVE HAPPENS

It was the 1980's, the decade of flashy fashion, greatest hits in music and booming economies. In the midst of all this, a young woman was making her way in the world.

Betty was a stenographer with Sungei Way Quarry & Construction Sdn Bhd, the construction and quarry operations division of Sunway Group now known as Sunway Construction Group Bhd. As a stenographer, Betty carried out administrative duties such as receiving and managing calls. Her main role was to assist her superior with time management and to transcribe information and ideas. The job suited her well as she is meticulous and efficient, always ready with her notepad.

Sunway Construction is now a public-listed, international mega-builder. Back in 1984, however, it had barely 20 office staff and was located on two levels of a typical three-storey retail lot. Betty's office comprised a small tight-knit team, including her boss, who sometimes gathered over casual drinks after work. The nightlife scene in the 80's also meant discos, DJs and dancing. Back then, discos were usually found in hotels so Betty and her colleagues would frequent classic five-star hotels across the city such as Merlin in Subang

Jaya, Shangri-La in Kuala Lumpur and Hilton in Petaling Jaya.

Made up of Quantity Surveyors, Civil Engineers, a few Finance staff and only one Purchaser (who represented a 'department'), Betty's small team was also on cordial terms with the subcontractors who often stopped by for lunch. The bond within Betty's team was so strong that when the Quantity Surveyors burned the midnight oil chasing tender submission deadlines, other colleagues would stay back to motivate them. When all the work was done and tenders secured, they celebrated their hard work over dinner. They were like one big family.

Betty loved her job and had made many friends at Sunway. Only in her 20's, she was young, independent and optimistic. The world was her oyster and she wanted to have fun; love was the last thing on her mind. While she had been on casual dates, she was not looking for anything serious. Yet love usually happens when one least expects it. In Betty's case, unbeknownst to her then, love took the shape of a tall bespectacled man who entered her office one day.

WHEN BETTY MET MATTHEW

The year was 1985 when Matthew Goh started visiting Betty's office. The seating arrangement in Betty's office on the ground floor was like a classroom with three long tables in a row facing forward. From her table, she could see everyone who walked into the office and likewise, everyone could see her.

Matthew worked in the Credit Control department of Sungei Way Equipment Sdn Bhd, another subsidiary of Sunway Group. His company bought and rented equipment for Betty's company which explained Matthew's occasional trips to her office as he had to meet with her Finance Manager. On those trips, he engaged in casual chats with everyone in the office, especially Betty.

There was something about petite Betty that intrigued Matthew. As luck would have it, Matthew had a colleague who was trying to woo a friend of Betty's, a secretary from Group headquarters.

Coincidentally, all four were also fans of local pop-rock band Kenny, Remy & Martin. Revelling in the opportunity, Matthew plucked up his courage and invited Betty out on a double date to catch the band's performance.

While Betty was somewhat surprised to receive Matthew's call considering he was usually quite reserved, she did not read too much into it and took it that the four friends were merely hanging out. At that time, engaging in fun outings with small groups of friends was one form of relaxation from work.

It turned out that beneath the quiet demeanour, Matthew was brimming with charm and wit, and his funny stories sent everyone particularly Betty into fits of laughter. It was fair to say that the double date was a roaring success and the good start led to many more double dates. A little spark had ignited between the two.

Apart from their nights out, Betty and Matthew often found themselves thrown together over company-organised events. Sunway Group, with the aim of building a more cohesive organisation,



B. LIGHT JULY 85

had formed Kelab Sukan Sunway (now known as Kelab Sosial Sunway or KSS) to organise events and activities for staff across the diverse business units. There were dinners, local trips and the annual Sunway Sports Carnival. Betty and Matthew participated in many of these activities together, even emerging as champions once in a Treasure Hunt at Fraser's Hill where they drove around looking for clues.

As much as Betty enjoyed Matthew's company, she did not regard him as a potential love interest then. She for one thought he was too tall standing at 5'11" when she was a mere five-footer. While those fun-filled days at Sunway certainly brought them closer together, the turning point for Betty came at a company dinner when the wife of Betty's boss dished out love advice to the young ladies at the table. Partly in jest, the wife talked at length on how important it was to find the right husband and the sort of traits he should have. It was beginning to dawn on Betty how Matthew ticked off many items on the 'right partner' checklist.

Matthew's art of courting did not include any direct or tacky approaches. He was a man of few words and showed his affections through little gestures like sending flowers and caring for Betty when she was unwell. He was attentive and dependable and Betty, for her part, felt like she could be herself around him. They also had a lot in common—both being of the same faith and sharing similar interests such as travelling. They also appreciated the simple pleasures in life such as enjoying a bowl of *hokkien mee* together after watching a movie.

They hardly discussed the status of their relationship nor did they put a label on it. Yet, they found themselves always preferring to spend time in each other's company than with others. In many ways, their feelings for one another developed and deepened naturally over time and without them even realising it. In the words of Jane Austen, they were in the middle before they knew they had begun.





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MORE THAN A FEELING

Betty and Matthew dated for three years before finally tying the knot in 1988. Being a pragmatic person, Matthew did not surprise Betty with a proposal nor go down on one knee with a ring in hand. He did, however, paint Betty a promising future with him—a life filled with comfort, love, stability and laughter. It was a future of simple pleasures and shared values, and Betty was deeply moved. She was ready to do life together with Matthew.

The couple registered their marriage in March 1988, had a church wedding four months later in July, and then took part in a mass wedding in October of the same year. Mass weddings were a trend in the 80's and a typical mass wedding package at that time included a dinner for 10 close relatives and a honeymoon plan for the newlyweds. The package that Betty and Matthew chose included a honeymoon in Taiwan and Macau. The fact that they got married at three “different” times became a source of amusement to the couple as over the years they could never decide on their anniversary date!

In their second year of marriage, Betty and Matthew were blessed with the birth of their daughter, Vicky. In 1998, after 14 years of working for Sunway Construction Group, Betty left her job to concentrate on raising Vicky. In the following years, she worked as a freelance insurance and financial planner.

After Vicky turned 18, Betty wanted to rejoin the workforce. She had been toying with the idea for some time now that her daughter was









independent enough to care for herself, but was not finding much luck with online job-hunting sites. One day, she met up with a former colleague who was in the midst of migrating to Australia. The colleague proposed the idea of Betty taking over her role as Executive Secretary to the CEO of Education & Healthcare, Sunway Group. Betty went for the interview with the CEO, Dato' Dr Lee Weng Keng, and was offered the job.

It has been over 10 years since Betty joined Sunway again. She settled into her new role fairly quickly and like in the 'good old days', participated in the numerous activities offered by KSS. This time she led the Sports Carnival table tennis ladies' team and won the championship numerous times.

Matthew joined Sunway Computer Services Sdn Bhd after their marriage. In 2012, he moved to Hitachi-Sunway Information Systems Sdn Bhd and in 2013, opted for early retirement. He now spends his time occasionally doing Christian outreach works and catching up on his long-neglected hobbies like reading and playing games. Betty joins in his activities whenever she is available.

ENDLESS LOVE

Betty and Matthew have been married for 32 years now. In 2008, the couple renewed their vows in church after having spent 20 years together. In 2013, on yet another KSS trip, this time to Turkey, Betty and Matthew took the opportunity to celebrate their 25 years of marriage, buying each other a turquoise ring to mark the occasion and as a symbol of their enduring love.

Through the years, it cannot be said that Betty and Matthew's marriage has been untouched by time. While the relationship has had its share of challenges, many of which have in time served to strengthen their bond, the success of their relationship stems from the fact that they both understood right from the start that they were only as strong as they were united, and that a lasting marriage needed lifelong commitment, mutual respect and communication. The heady days of young romantic love have now evolved into a quieter but deeper relationship of understanding and trust.

As the couple becomes a family of three, their priorities and the roles they play in the relationship have changed. The needs of the family take precedence over personal interests. From being

darling Betty and Matt to one another, they now playfully call each other Mi and Pa, a testament to their evolving roles.

For Betty and Matthew, they believe that going on holidays as a family and doing projects, be it family or church-related, together are the essence that keeps their relationship healthy. They also still surprise one another with little gifts and celebrate special occasions together. Knowing that love is a decision and not just a feeling, the soulmates still think of their relationship as a journey of embracing and enjoying each other's company. If a relationship is like a candle and love the flame, then theirs is one that burns slowly and quietly, providing a steady everlasting glow for the years to come.

Sunway has been a big part of Betty's and Matthew's lives, being where they first met, where they grew as individuals and finally as a couple. Betty and Matthew may reminisce about their Sunway days with nostalgia but in the years to come, as Betty continues working in Sunway, new opportunities to create more happy memories will no doubt present themselves to the couple.





WHAT I AM

Musings from half-Swedish **Eric Lau Löfstedt** in his search for identity while growing up in multicultural Malaysia.





EURASIANS IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a heterogeneous society with people of various ethnicities, religions and cultures living together in the tropical country. The dominant ethnic groups in the country are the Malays, Chinese and Indians, and anyone who identifies as otherwise is simply categorised as 'others' or '*dan lain-lain*'. Interethnic marriages, however, are not uncommon and the country has been a cultural mosaic for centuries. The Department of Statistics Malaysia reported that of the 206,253 marriages registered in 2018, 18,509 (or 9% of them) were interethnic marriages. The oversimplified categorisation of ethnicity seemingly glosses over the fact that some Malaysians are of mixed ethnicity, particularly the Eurasians.

The term 'Eurasian' has three dominant definitions. The first is a broad definition of anyone who is of mixed European and Asian lineage, while the second describes indigenous people of Central Asia who are genetically a mix of European and Asian blood. The third definition is an umbrella term specifically used in Malaysia and Singapore to describe the descendants of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonialists who had married Malayan locals. Eurasians have been in Malaysia for centuries, ever since the Portuguese colonised Malacca in the 16th century. They have formed their own distinct communities, customs, food and even language.

Swedish-Chinese Eric Lau Lofstedt is an example of a Eurasian living in Malaysia. A quintessential youthful 20-something, he was brought up in Malaysia and is now pursuing his studies at Sunway University. In this piece, Eric shares his unique story on growing up multi-ethnic in Malaysia.





THE MULTITALENTED WUNDERKIND

If you told Eric years ago that he would one day represent Malaysia in *wushu*, make viral videos on YouTube, shoot and star in commercials, appear in Bollywood films, and open his own café, he would have thought you were pulling his leg.

This accomplished go-getter was born in Luleå, Sweden and spent the first three years of his life there. His father, who has recently passed away, was Swedish while his mother is a Malaysian Chinese hailing from Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. His parents met when Eric's father visited Malaysia on a trip.

When Eric was four, his parents moved to Malaysia partly because they wanted to bring their family business to Asia Pacific. His parents managed Index Braille Technology, a company that sells braille printers invented by Eric's paternal uncle. His father managed product sales while his mother oversaw the company accounts and acted as the company's public relations officer. His family became invested in braille technology ever since his grandmother became blind at the young age of 32.

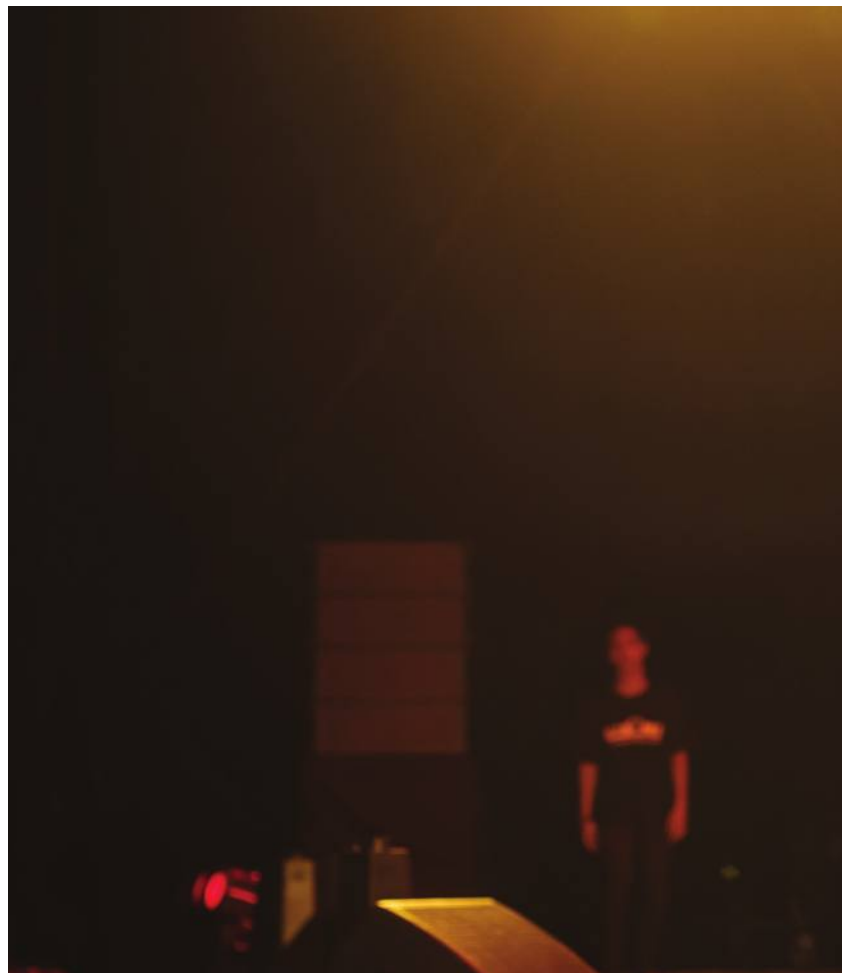
Eric's parents decided to settle down in Malacca as the historic town is in close proximity to Kuala Lumpur yet away from the hustle and bustle of the capital. So Eric and his younger brother grew up as *kampung* boys, away from the city and with paddy fields right outside their home. While Eric did not find adjusting to his new idyllic life particularly difficult, he did have a hard time in school. His parents had enrolled him in a Chinese vernacular primary school even though he only had a rudimentary grasp of the Mandarin language.

Being the only Eurasian at school and not knowing how to converse in Mandarin, he was like a fish out of water. The other kids were friendly enough but none of them spoke English. Sad and shy, the young Eric thought he would have to go through school without a friend. Fortunately for Eric, his best friend from kindergarten, Zen,

ended up at his school too. Zen encouraged him to be brave and not let language be a barrier. So, Eric began to communicate with his peers in a mix of English and Mandarin, and by Year 4, he could speak Mandarin fluently. Zen also ended up being Eric's classmate all the way until they graduated from secondary school together.

For secondary school, Eric wanted to attend a national school. He felt like he had neglected his Western side and wanted to converse freely in English again. He tried applying to a national school, and as priority was given to students who live within the school's vicinity, he even went to the extent of applying with a different home address. However, his application was rejected and he ended up going to Malacca Chinese High School (Sekolah Tinggi Cina Melaka or STCM), another vernacular school. He was dejected but found comfort in the fact that his friends from primary school, including Zen, were also attending STCM.

Much to his surprise, Eric thrived at STCM and ironically, found himself speaking in English often. He was surrounded by new friends who wanted to learn English from him and he made it his personal mission to coach his friends in the language. While many of his peers did well academically, their command of the language was weak. His peers tended to memorise facts and regurgitate them during examinations instead of actually understanding what they had learnt. This also applied to essay writing as his peers would choose to memorise model essay answers instead of coming up with their own words.





Eric was also excelling in sports. An active person by nature, he would grab at any chance to compete in sports and was always ready for gym class (he would have his gym shorts on even before class started). He learnt to play volleyball and handball, but *wushu* was his primary sport. He was seven when he watched a video of a *tae kwon do* student doing a 'backflip 360° to a ninja stance'. With excitement in his eyes, he naively told his mother that he wanted to do *kung fu*. He knew nothing about martial arts and its different forms. So, mother and son visited different martial arts institutes and Eric tried out *karate*, *judo* and *tae kwon do* before settling on *wushu*. He remembers walking into the room and seeing the wushu students doing acrobatics and backflips as well as 'playing' with swords and machetes. It was love at first sight.

At 15, Eric participated in the Malaysian Games (Sukan Malaysia or SUKMA) and bagged a medal for *wushu*. A year later, he took part in the Kuala Lumpur International Wushu Competition and was up against international competitors, including ones from China. Nonetheless, he beat them all and won four gold medals, a feat that remains unrivalled until today. He even flew to the Philippines for a national-level competition.

After finishing secondary school, Eric no longer competes professionally in *wushu* as he found it too stressful. His last SUKMA participation was in 2017 before he stopped to focus on taking the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia), the country's final national examination for fifth formers. He has left a lasting





impact as his win at SUKMA elevated the school's status and many students started flocking to the school for *wushu*. The school now has the most and best *wushu* student-practitioners. Eric was President of the school's Wushu Club for a while and even received the Best Sportsman award upon graduation. He felt proud that he had done something for his hometown and his school.

Eric's *wushu* training has built up his athleticism and flexibility, and he started exploring new forms of extreme sports such as parkour and tricking. He became a part of the Art of Extreme Movement, a group comprising people interested in performing all sorts of extreme physical art forms including *wushu*, parkour, tricking, hip-hop dancing, b-boying, gymnastics, stunts and power moves.

While at the indoor trampoline park Jump Street one day, Eric met a Kazakhstan talent-casting agent named Vadim. The two began showing off their trampoline stunts and Vadim was so impressed with Eric's tricking abilities that he offered him a role in two Bollywood films. In one of the films, Eric got the chance to fight alongside Thakur Anoop Singh, the famous Indian action film star and bodybuilder. They shot for 10 days in Kuala Lumpur and Eric experienced how action scenes in Bollywood were made, with the use of suspension wires for overdramatic flips and falls.

Apart from his athleticism, Eric also has a natural flair for the theatrics. He has been making videos on YouTube since he was young and would perform in plays and give public speeches at school, but university is where he truly shone. He enrolled himself in the Diploma in Performing Arts programme at Sunway University to study the technical and creative aspects of film and acting. On his first day, he made, what he describes as, a 'silly video' of himself overreacting to everything on campus. The video became an instant hit on

YouTube, garnering about 400,000 views, and Eric became known not just to the student community, but also the university staff—the marketing department contacted him the very next day and requested him to make another video for the university. He has since worked with the various arms of Sunway Group, including doing musicals for Sunway Property and producing the official video for Sunway Lagoon Theme Park's *Nights of Fright* event.

It is not just Sunway that knows of Eric's talent both in front of and behind the camera. He has been involved in filming commercials, as creator and/or talent, for various international brands including Spotify, Samsung, HomePro, Epic Fit Meals, Traveloka, and Myprotein Netherlands. He even choreographed and performed a dance captured by motion sensors to create movements for animated characters in a video for Genting Resorts World, and recently put on an acrobatic show for Milo and Mercedes. He felt that the most stressful project to date was choreographing and performing for *The Greatest Showman*, a dance performance by him and his classmates based on the 2017 Hollywood musical of the same name.

Eric has already made a name for himself in the social media community. To date, his video titled *Backflips Around Sunway* has gained over two million views on Facebook and he is also known for his collaborations with local YouTubers and stars including Jin Lim (Jinnyboy), Dan Khoo, Tata (formerly from MGAG), Arwin Kumar, Jenn Chia (SoImJenn) and Dennis Yin.

After appearing in Jinnyboy's *This is Malaysia*, a parody music video of Childish Gambino's song *This is America*, Eric found himself—more specifically his nationality—under scrutiny. A commentator publicly called him out for his mixed ethnicity and questioned if he was Malaysian enough to be in the video. Not one to be easily affected by such remarks, Eric responded with









a tongue-in-cheek video of his own, *I'm More Malaysian than You*, in which he rapped out why he considers his upbringing as typically Malaysian. Both Jinnyboy's and Eric's videos have since gone viral on social media.

Eric recently returned from a month-long trip to Sweden where he laid his father to rest. He found himself reconnecting with his long estranged Swedish family and was happy to discover that he has a half-sister and is now an uncle to her two daughters.

At only 21, Eric has accomplished much more than the average person. He added entrepreneurship to his list of achievements with his recently opened rooftop café, Angkasa Bar & Restaurant, in Petaling Jaya. He is also fluent in four languages: English, Malay, Mandarin and Swedish. An optimistic self-starter, he has never been bothered by how others perceive him and believes that self-realisation is important. Though he does not like the term 'influencer', he does appreciate being considered one. He sees opportunities in challenges and constantly pushes himself, and others, to go beyond, believing that everyone is good at something. The sky is the limit for this confident lad, or in his own words, "every idea is stupid until it works".







LITTLE HANDS

A tribute to the unseen and unsung heroes whose daily grind and hard work oil the wheels of **Sunway Pyramid**.









THE LION STANDS PROUD

Nestled among the rising skyscrapers and bustling new developments in Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, watching over incoming and outgoing traffic from the New Pantai Expressway, Sunway Pyramid proudly sits. With its main entrance guarded by a giant lion statue modelled after the Great Sphinx of Giza, the mall is the City's most recognised landmark.

When Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Jeffrey Cheah, founder and Chairman of Sunway Group, decided to build a shopping and entertainment hub for the township, he wanted something that would make a lasting impression. This inspired the idea for a themed mall.

Construction for Sunway Pyramid started in 1995. After its launch in July 1997 and as the first themed mall in Malaysia, Sunway Pyramid very quickly became the talk of the town. With its ancient Egypt-inspired architecture and aesthetics, from the giant lion statue and magnificent pyramid façade to the decorative hieroglyphics and tulip-designed pillars, the mall was a sight to behold.

Today, the mall remains the heart of Sunway City while new developments are built around it. The mall is connected to three hotels, and linked

to Sunway University via the Canopy Walk, an elevated covered walkway converted from unused monorail tracks. Sunway Lagoon Theme Park is 200 metres away.

Inside, as iconic as the mall itself is the ice rink. Viewable from multiple levels, it is one of the longest-running ice rinks in Malaysia. While the ice rink stays evergreen, other mall tenants have evolved with changing times and trends. Jason Chin, General Manager of Operations of Sunway Malls, notes an increase in F&B tenants, taking up close to 30% of the leased space in the mall. He attributes this increase to the growing trend of dining-out and the rise of the cafe culture among the young.

Chin has been with the Sunway Pyramid team since 2002, starting out as Ice Rink Manager before moving on to general operations. He believes the reason for the mall's continued growth is the cohesiveness of its team, that people from different departments communicate and work closely together. With 3.3 million patrons per month, it takes a whole organisation to operate Sunway Pyramid but as the saying goes, many hands make light work.

SPICK AND SPAN

Norazura Jantan, Housekeeping

People commonly relegate housekeeping to keeping a place clean, with tidiness and cleanliness key priorities for people in the trade. The housekeeping department at Sunway Pyramid takes pride in going beyond cleaning in their day-to-day operations. The team helps to ensure the mall runs effectively, doing everything within their means to create a comfortable experience for shoppers and visitors.

Apart from cleaning, housekeepers at Sunway Pyramid are trained to respond to problems pertaining to mall operations. If there is a problem they can fix, they will and are empowered to do so, for example, attending to burst pipes or water leakage.

Norazura Jantan (or Ida as she is commonly known), a member of the housekeeping team, has been making Sunway Pyramid look good since 2008. She studied and worked in landscaping for a few years, but soon decided that toiling under the hot sun was not for her and opted for a career change.

Yet keeping a mall spick and span is also no easy task. Ida manages 120 cleaners with their own zones and responsibilities and assists her managers in responding to problems. Oftentimes, she is the first to assess an issue and decide on whether the matter needed to be escalated. At times, problems may arise beyond the scope of the Housekeeping department, like faulty sensors in the toilets or clogged floor traps flooding a shop. Such problems will be referred to Maintenance while Housekeeping does what it can to minimise damage. On rare occasions, Ida has to investigate bad odours and determine if the smell is due to rodents, spoiled food or simply faulty air conditioning.









There are various tasks the Housekeeping department performs to ensure the mall is clean every day. The mall's business hours are from 10 am to 10 pm and everything has to be accounted for before the doors open to the public. Every morning, Housekeeping checks the loading bay chambers and dispose of wastes before checking on the restrooms, staircases, car parks, corridors, playgrounds and other common areas.

When the mall closes, the more industrial cleaning happens. Machines are brought out to scrub, wash and polish the mall, including ride-on scrubber dryers for the car parks. Every surface requires a different cleaning instrument. To reach high ceilings and get rid of cobwebs, for example, Ida and her team sometimes use helium balloons. According to Ida, the area at the mall most scrutinised for cleanliness is the restrooms, which had previously been awarded 'Cleanest Toilet (Mall Category)' by the Subang Jaya Municipal Council (Majlis Perbandaran Subang Jaya).

In line with the Group's sustainability efforts, Ida and her team attempt to reduce the resources they use, like paper towels, to minimise impact on the environment. They also use recycled water attained from rainwater harvesting and untreated underground water to clean loading bays.

Apart from housekeeping, Ida feels she has learned a lot from the different departments and tenants in Sunway Pyramid. She appreciates the lengths with which the management goes to train housekeeping staff in other aspects pertaining to the mall. Although she has not pursued the idea, a discount is available to Sunway employees for further studies at Sunway University. As Ida puts it, nothing beats Sunway in terms of career growth.





SAFETY FIRST

Seow Boon Ting, Technical Services

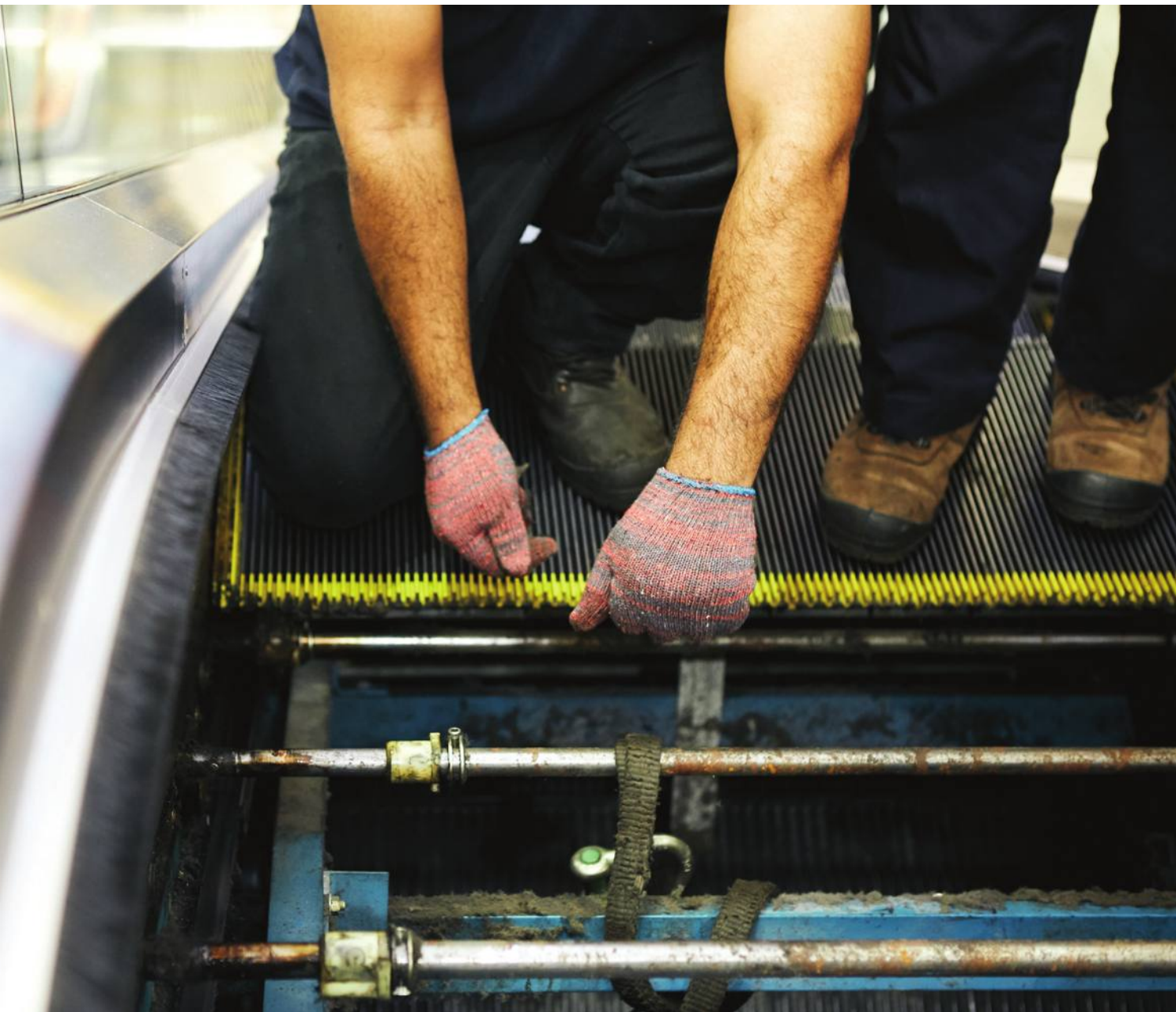
Seow Boon Ting joined Sunway Pyramid in 1998, a year after it opened. In his first month, he met with an accident while riding his motorcycle home from work one night. Although he was still a probationary employee, Sunway Pyramid paid for his medical and hospital bills. He was on paid sick leave and spent the next four months recovering with a metal plate in his leg. Eternally thankful to his employer, Seow has never taken a day of sick leave ever since.

Currently Senior Executive for Technical Services, Seow is responsible for the operations of all electronic doors, lifts and escalators. Doors are checked every six months but lifts and escalators are checked daily. With over 100 lifts and escalators, Seow performs daily checks with his team according to a schedule, servicing four lifts and eight escalators per day. The lifts and escalators also require monthly servicing while their licenses require yearly renewal with the state's Department of Safety for Machines (Jabatan Keselamatan Jentera) under the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (Jabatan Keselamatan dan Kesihatan Pekerjaan).

Maintenance and servicing are done in-house but if a lift gets stuck, Seow calls for assistance from a 24-hour outsourced licensed contractor. With regular checks and servicing in place, breakdowns are uncommon.

Seow oversees the service contractors during the day and when the mall closes, he shuts down the escalators one by one. The last escalator, which descends from the cinema, is turned off around midnight. It is tedious work that requires focus and attention to detail but Seow does it with much enthusiasm and diligence.

A family man and father of two, Seow puts his family above all else. As such, he is grateful for the benevolence of Sunway in providing insurance and medical coverage for staff and their family members. He sleeps well knowing his family is safe and looks forward to each new day at work.





THE ENFORCERS

Ahmad Sukri Hussein, Security

Tan Sri Dato' Seri Dr Jeffrey Cheah envisioned Sunway City to be a safe place where visitors would feel at ease. Numerous CCTVs, both visible and hidden, can be found around the city and Sunway Pyramid was the first shopping mall in Malaysia to install panic buttons in its car parks. In addition to sophisticated surveillance, the mall has a team of security force to keep it safe.

When Ahmad Sukri Hussein (or Shukri) first joined Sunway Pyramid in 1998, the mall's security force comprised regular security officers with no training in handling criminal situations and no authority in making arrests. Today, each member of the security force is an auxiliary police officer trained by the Royal Malaysia Police (Polis Diraja Malaysia). As auxiliary police officers, they can now make arrests and some are even licensed to carry firearms. Part of the larger Sunway Group Security, the security staff must be trained for three months at police barracks around Malaysia before they graduate to become auxiliary police officers. The mall now has about 50 security staff assisted by technology like CCTVs and Segways to help the officers cover more ground.

Shukri's daily routine starts with a morning roll call where his superiors brief him on the day's specifics. Security staff switch shifts every week, guarding the mall 24/7. Randomising their shifts as well as sign-in spots and time lowers predictability and makes crime prevention more effective. The scheduling, although requiring discipline to follow, keeps things interesting for the staff as night-time patrols are different from day-time patrols when customers are walking about. To build discipline, the security force performs marching exercises, practises fire drills and attends training on service







and procedures weekly. Some officers even patrol the mall in plain regular clothes to look out for suspicious activities.

With such stringent training, coupled with the mall's safety protocol such as having tenants register and identify themselves with security, the security force of Sunway Pyramid is one to be reckoned with. While the mall had its fair share of break-ins in the early days, only the occasional pickpocket causes trouble these days.

Shukri himself had nabbed thieves at the stores and car parks. Of all his past experiences, Shukri's nerves were tested the most the day a shop caught fire. Like a scene from an action film, he leapt down a floor and landed on a bed of plants

to get to the nearest fire extinguisher. Looking back, Shukri humbly claims his actions were not as brave as they seemed as he had checked for a soft landing before leaping. After all is said and done, one wonders how many employees would actually do the same given the same circumstances. Not many presumably.

Like Seow, Shukri has never taken sick leave. The proud father of three is glad that Sunway provides, among other things, affordable housing for his family. He also enjoys the spirit of *silaturahmi* (kinship) fostered among the staff during festive seasons. After more than 20 years with Sunway, he still loves his job and is proud to be part of this big family.



THE MIRACLE BABY

One evening in September 2015, a group of random Malaysians from all walks of life came together in Sunway Pyramid to deliver Kee Sun Way into the world.

A woman had gone into labour outside the mall's entrance, just a few metres from a restaurant. A group of men—security officers and patrons—formed a human wall by linking their arms together to give her privacy while a customer service personnel and four Sunway students attended to her.

Baby Sun Way was born healthy and one month later, celebrated his full moon at Capriciossa sponsored by Sunway Pyramid. The mall honoured its staff involved in the labour with certificates of commendation while Sunway University awarded the four students with certificates of appreciation. The students also received certificates, free insurance worth RM5,000 and Touch 'n Go cards from the non-governmental organisation, Persatuan Kesejahteraan Rakyat Malaysia (Ker1M).

This news made headlines and the students, one of whom was only 15 years old, were hailed for their bravery. The father of the baby referred to them as 'wonder girls' while a local publication praised the 'teenage midwives'. Farhana Mohd Fadzli, one of the students involved, told *The Star* newspaper she relied on what she learnt from novels and films to safely deliver the baby.

Named after the mall by his parents, Kee Sun Way was duly showered with gifts, vouchers and a lifetime of free parking at the mall. Had his family not decided to drive up from Seremban during the school holidays to visit Sunway Lagoon, all of this might not have happened. As faith would have it, the incident serves as a reminder of what people can achieve by working together in a moment of urgency.



THE LION THRIVES

Sunway Pyramid has been a shopper's haven for the past 23 years since its launch in 1997. While the mall has since undergone two major expansions, the Egyptian-inspired ambience of the place remains very much intact. Plans to further develop Sunway Pyramid are continually in place, from further integrating with Sunway Lagoon to developing the mall into a city within a city where shoppers enjoy a fully-sustainable retail, F&B and entertainment experience. Sunway's efforts to revolutionise its shopping malls is testament to the importance of the shopper's experience in the digital age.

For making our shopping experience and lives more exciting and fulfilling, the toil and daily grind of the unassuming community behind the scenes cannot be emphasised enough. If not for these little hands of housekeeping, maintenance, security and operations working like clockwork to ensure continuity of the mall (and on occasions adding a touch of kindness to an otherwise unfeeling world of consumerism as in the case of baby Sun Way's miraculous birth), Sunway Pyramid would not be what it is today nor would it be able to take on challenges of the future. As in many things that often get overlooked, the absence of this community of unsung heroes is ironically only ever felt when the mall is dirty or unsafe or has escalators that do not work. It is hoped this little exposé will serve as a tribute to these people who collectively make all the difference.

DANCE OF LIFE

Stories of passion and fulfilment through the art of dance as chronicled by **Lydyaty Stephenie** and **Padma Priya Pillai**.





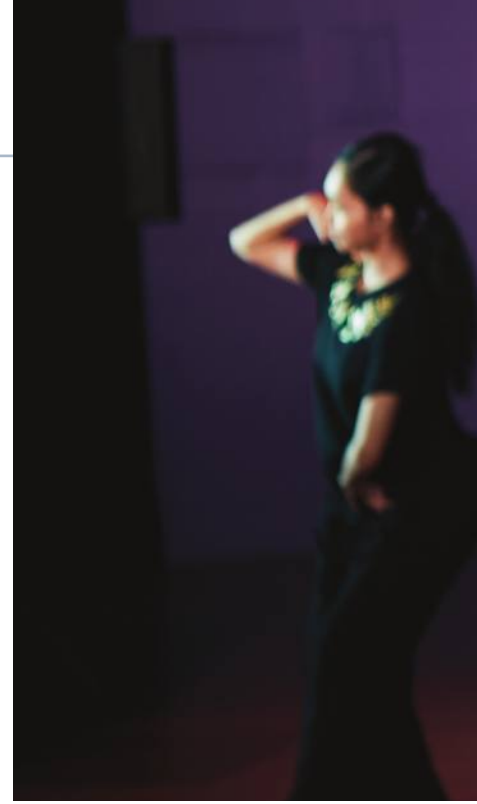
IN-BETWEEN WORLDS

A career in the performing arts is seldom seen as a viable option for many Malaysians. The likelihood of academically strong individuals pursuing a full-time career in music or dance is relatively low, as they may prefer a career in ‘safer’, tried-and-true, traditional fields like engineering, medicine or law.

Parents are often ill at ease at the prospect of their children becoming ‘artists’. Many middle-class parents enrol their children in performing arts classes as a form of utility where music or dance classes complement their children’s physical and mental development to help them in their studies, not the other way around.

Many who pursue careers in the traditional fields indulge in the arts merely as a hobby. The arts, while regarded as the soul of a society, oftentimes remain on the sidelines in favour of careers that offer financial stability and a better social standing. Some do find balance and a spiritual order (outside of religion) in their busy lives to practise the arts. These people who straddle the arts and the corporate world make for interesting stories on the elusive work-life balance that many seek.

This piece explores the lives of two such individuals from different parts of Malaysia—Lydyaty Stephenie from Sarawak and Padma Priya KR Pillai from Kuala Lumpur—who have both found fulfilment through dance and call Sunway their professional home.







EAST SIDE STORY

Lydyaty Stephenie

Lydyaty Stephenie's (or Lydya) relationship with dance started in her primary school years. In her hometown of Kuching, she had been dancing, without any real interest, since kindergarten. Her interest in dance heightened when she was enrolled in the school's cultural club and was exposed to traditional Bornean moves like the Iban, Bidayuh and Kadazan dances. She would perform at school events like Teacher's Day.

Dancing took a back seat in her secondary school days when her father, a clerk at the Accountant General's Department, and her mother, a maternity nurse at the Sarawak General Hospital, urged her to focus on her studies. Her daily routine soon revolved around school and tuition classes, and dancing was relegated to the background.

Upon completing high school, Lydya left home for West Malaysia to pursue a Foundation in Physical Science at University of Malaya (UM). Her arrival at UM marked the return of the performer in her. She seized the opportunity to perform a traditional Bornean dance in a talent programme during orientation week and her long-dormant dancing persona sprang back to life. Impressed with her performance, other student dancers approached and coaxed her into joining the university's traditional Malay dance group. Lydya had only learnt Bornean dances at that time but with an open heart and a new sense of excitement, she began learning Malay traditional dances with the group.

Lydya soon participated in the University of Malaya Art Festival (*Festival Seni UM*) and it became clear to her that dancing was her true passion. Her mind thrummed with thoughts of dancing and nothing else. "My love for it stems



from the traditional songs that accompany and guide the dance movements. The sound and the melody—I can feel them,” she gushes.

Having developed a fine reputation within the university’s dance circle, Lydya found herself heading various student committees and projects on the performing arts. She was by then pursuing a bachelor’s degree in the sciences at UM and began to feel the weight of the demand of her studies. It was during this period that Lydya contemplated pursuing a bachelor’s degree in dance instead. Her concerned parents opposed to the idea and their words of reproach rang clearly in her ears: “Dancing should be a hobby, not a career.”

Lydya relented to her parents’ wishes but as much as she enjoyed the sciences, she could not numb her passion for dancing. Though she dedicated herself to her studies, she continued joining dance competitions without her parents’ knowledge for fear that they would be upset. She only came clean with her parents once she graduated and, much to her relief, they understood.

History repeated itself after Lydya graduated: she stopped dancing again, and this time, it was in favour of building a career in academic research. Her years at UM led her to develop a deep interest in research and she became a Research Assistant at the university, even pursuing a master’s degree in management at the same time. She then worked as a Research Officer at UM’s Faculty of Engineering for five years.

The years away from dancing, however, did little to diminish Lydya’s love for the art or her reputation in the dance competition circuit. A sought-after dancer, her choreographer would submit her name for competitions and her fellow traditional dancer friends would similarly recommend her if productions were in want of dancers. Her return to the scene was triumphant: her UM-based troupe *Gema Nusantara* became the reigning champions of the Traditional Dance category at *Festival Seni UM* from 2015 to 2017 and her main dance troupe *Nyala Dance Theatre*





was runner-up at the *Festival Tari Malaysia* national competition in 2017.

Academia came knocking at her door again in the guise of a PhD offer at UM. Lydya was already active and experienced in research work but had told her research supervisor that she could only accept the offer if she found a full-time job that could fund her studies. As luck would have it, she received a job offer from Sunway University soon after. She accepted both the PhD and job offers, and this time, she did not put the brakes on dancing.

For Lydya, everything has fallen into place. She has come to understand that work-life balance means not limiting herself to fulfilling just one passion. While she goes about her administrative job at Sunway University, she also lends a hand in choreographing dances for some of the university's Diploma in Performing Arts students. Her friends and colleagues at Sunway University are very supportive of her 'other life' as a traditional dancer. "Even my Faculty Dean cheered me on at one of the competitions I was in and told me to keep him updated on my future performances!".

Lydya is currently a member of Nyala Dance Theatre (which specialises in *inang* and *joget* dances) and supports the Sanggar Budaya Sri Pengkalan dance group (which focuses on *zapin* dances and performs mainly at the Istana Budaya) whenever it needs an extra dancer. While many may feel that people who occupy two different worlds do not have their feet completely planted in one place, Lydya's philosophy is to live life as fully as possible: "Most people stick to one thing for the rest of their lives, and that is such an unexciting way to live."



A DANCE ODYSSEY

Padma Priya KR Pillai

In the bustling northern Kuala Lumpur (KL) suburbs of Sentul and Gombak lives Padma Priya KR Pillai (or Padma), who started dancing when she was five years old. Her mother was a dancer, albeit not a very famous one, and watching her mother perform had always fascinated her. With her mother's encouragement, she continued dancing and learned the *bharatanatyam*, an Indian classical dance form, under the tutelage of a dance guru. She focused on learning the *bharatanatyam* dance all through her primary and secondary school years until the passing of her dance teacher.

After graduating, Padma was offered a place at Universiti Putra Malaysia to pursue a bachelor's degree in language and journalism. It was during her time studying at the serene and lush green campus that she began nurturing a budding passion for another Indian dance form, the *odissi*. She had met an *odissi* dance teacher from India, who also happened to be her lecturer's sister, and decided to sign up for her classes.

Having come from a *bharatanatyam* dance background, Padma found the *odissi* a challenge to learn. Unlike the *bharatanatyam*'s stiff and structured movements, the *odissi* is fluid and requires the bending of the head, hips and torso (hence its label as a 'three-bend dance'). Padma was nonetheless determined to learn the art form and invested much time in understanding it. She soon began taking part in various non-competitive performances to hone her dancing skills.

As Padma's newfound interest in the *odissi* started to bloom, so did her aspiration to be a journalist. The late 90's were a time of great change and anticipation in Malaysia and graduates like Padma saw the new millennium as an opportunity to apply their academic knowledge in creating a new future for the nation. Upon graduating and landing a full-time job as a reporter at *The Sun*, the reality of being a reporter hit her. "I struggled with the

hectic lifestyle full of deadlines; not to mention always having to be on my toes to chase the big stories and cover the latest news," she recounts. "I still liked writing but I started to realise that the career I dreamt of as a student did not suit my real personality."

Within a couple of months, she began looking for other jobs and soon took a teaching position at a local college. She taught communications and English, and despite the initial monotony, gradually came to enjoy being in the classroom. Her working hours were more stable and she could devote more time to practising the *odissi*.

"When we practise or perform, our guru tells us to approach the *odissi* spiritually," says Padma. "The *odissi* is more than just a dance. Though the tales behind the dance are of Hindu deities, the spirituality of the dance goes beyond organised religions. My soul feels rejuvenated after each practice or performance, and I enjoy learning the meaning behind every beat of the ragas in the songs, dance position and movement."

A graceful and passionate dancer, Padma gained many dedicated followers including her now husband. He had been an admirer of hers and attended every single one of her performances. He himself is not a dancer but he has been incredibly supportive of her thriving dance career. Dancing had indeed brought Padma and her husband together and their love for the art and each other led them to tie the knot when she was 26.

Professionally, Padma carried on teaching for a few more years before deciding to pursue a master's degree in media and communication. Believing that academia was her calling, she decided to stop dancing and worked hard at her studies. She went back to dancing several years later, after also raising two young daughters, and joined the famed Temple of Fine Arts in Brickfields, KL for her comeback.

Padma's return to dancing has only intensified her passion for the *odissi* as she learns more techniques such as how to stay in control during performances. The one-and-a-half-hour commute



to dance classes does not hamper her enthusiasm for the art, especially now that her two young daughters have joined her for the *odissi* classes. Her daughters possess great potential and for Padma, passing down the dancing bug to her children is comparable to her mother passing down the craft to her. Her proudest moment came in 2016 when she performed with her eldest daughter on the same stage. The experience was magical and highlighted the special artistic bond she shared with her daughter.

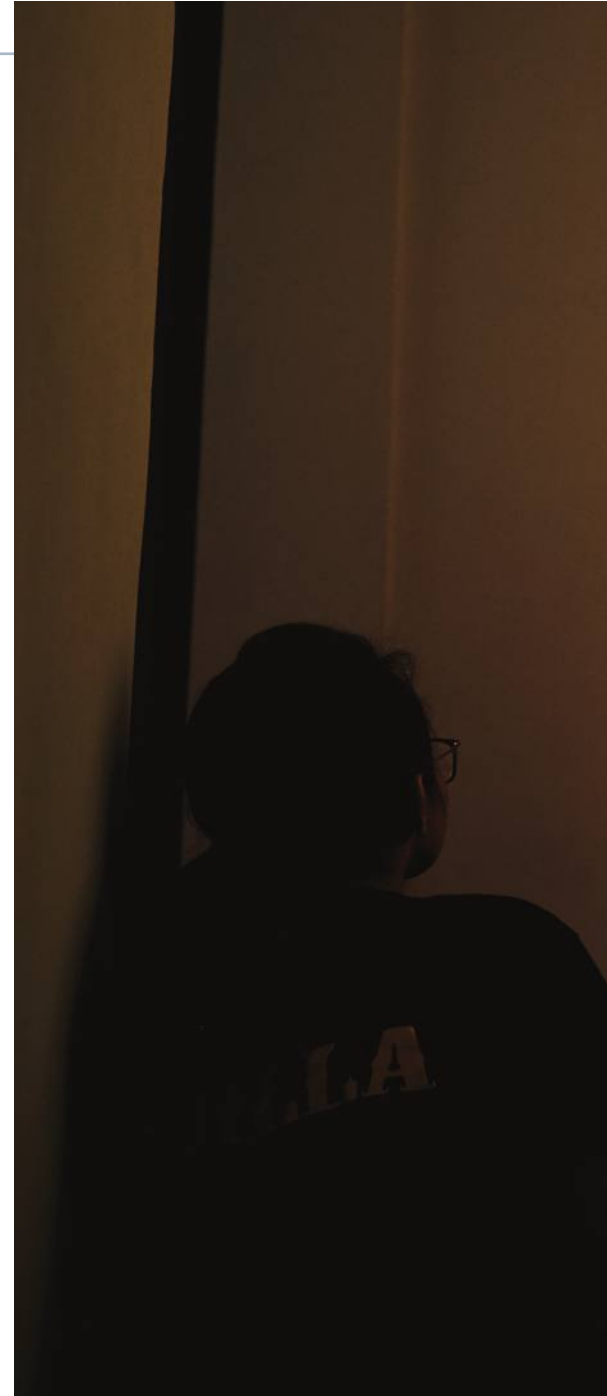
Padma amazes the people around her with her ability to maintain a perfect balance between work and life. On top of her professional and creative pursuits, she is also pursuing a PhD. To Padma, balancing her career, passion and family is akin to a physical and mental exercise that not only keeps her active but also makes her life meaningful. “It keeps me sane and alive,” she declares. She is now a Senior Lecturer at Sunway University’s School of Arts and is content to perform on stage at least three times a year.



HAPPY FEET

The history of the performing arts stretches back to the times of ancient civilisations when the Greeks immortalised tragic plays and the Egyptians performed stories of omnipresent gods. The spirit of artistry is inherent in the souls of human beings, and it is of little surprise that people continue to seek creative fulfilment despite the hustle and bustle of hectic modern life.

The act of balancing the arts and the corporate world is indeed possible and it is, in fact, a coveted pursuit for the sense of personal freedom it represents. As attested by Lydya and Padma, Sunway does not shy away from nourishing the artistic ambitions of its people. After all, the arts can open the minds and hearts of people across all physical boundaries.









ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to acknowledge and thank the following for their contribution to the production of this book:

Stories

Mr Ahmad Sukri Hussein
Ms Betty Lim
Mr Eric Low Löfstedt
Mr Hatta Yang
Mr Infantino Fernandes
Mr Jeremy Leong
Ms Joey Ooi
Ms Lydyaty Stephenie
Mr Magendaran Marimuthu
Mr Matthew Goh
Mr Mohd Azmyl Md Yusof
Ms Norazura Jantan
Ms Padma Priya Pillai
Mr Saravanan Vanan
Mr Sean Lee
Mr Seow Boon Ting
Mr Victor Yap

Sunway Lagoon Wildlife Park

Dr Pakee Raj

Sunway Pyramid

Ms Carmen Lee
Mr Darren Chear

Sunway University Press

Ms Carol Wong
Ms Hani Hazman

Text

Mr Ben Liew
Mr Mohd Azmyl Md Yusof

Photography

Mr Teng Wong

Special Mentions

ATAP Rooftop Café
Riders Garage & Co
Yayasan Sunbeams Home





*A*n intimate portrait of people who have made Sunway City Kuala Lumpur central to their lives, with human stories that symbolise social opportunities, entrepreneurship and positive achievements.

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ISBN 978-967-5492-27-3



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