

THE NCBM OUTREACH



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President

Dato' S. Kulasegaran

Editor

Godfrey Ooi Goat See
B.A. (Hons.), Dip Ed.

Produced by

THE NATIONAL
COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA

94B Jalan Tun Sambanthan, Brickfields
50470 KUALA LUMPUR

Tel : 03-22724959

Fax : 03-22724960

E-Mail

ncftb@po.jaring.my

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LOOKING BACK AND MOVING AHEAD

*By Datuk S Kulasegaran
President*

National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

Editor's Note: This address was given by Datuk S Kulasegaran at the 25th Annual General Meeting of NCBM held on 9th May 2011. Here is his speech:

Good morning,

As you all know, NCBM is now 25 years old and plans for celebrating the occasion have begun. Here I wish to thank Mr Bill Brohier for having so kindly agreed to assume the heavy responsibility of heading the Organising Committee in March 2011. He has since convened the first meeting in April and has put together some ideas which will be expanded and refined in the coming days. To help ease his worries, the Exco has recommended an initial allocation of RM100,000.00 for the purpose.

In these fast-moving and developing times, NCBM should have made considerable strides during the 25 years of its existence. Indeed, has NCBM progressed satisfactorily as the founders would have wished it to be, or has it been bogged down with issues that should have been resolved years ago? I know the Committee hopes to achieve three objectives: Firstly, to celebrate NCBM's 25 years of existence and to recall some of its cherished moments. Secondly, to assess its past performance and identify the major shortcomings. And, thirdly, to chart its future course and come up with a new Plan of Action, if necessary, to amend the Constitution so that NCBM would remain relevant and vibrant.

As I said in my last address, NCBM belongs to all the five Member Organisations, and it is our duty to make it work, and to work for the sole benefit of the blind. I will not say more as it is the task of the Organising Committee to get everyone's involvement to share in planning a new course for NCBM. But I do know that in conjunction with the celebrations, every committee is making great effort to contribute an item for the grand occasion.

The last two years, I must admit, were difficult and tough for NCBM. Fortunately, it was not in the financial sense for it did not run into the red, but it was in the poor performance of most committees. This disappointing performance led Exco to appoint the former Vice-President, Dato' Mah Hassan, to lead a team to conduct an evaluation on the causes. The teams came up with several recommendations and amongst them were:

That the number of committees be reduced to seven, their scope of work be either widened or scaled down, and their Terms of Reference amended accordingly. I am happy to note that the Chairpersons are taking their work seriously, and I am in no doubt those things will once again move in the right direction. Most of the committees have drawn up or are in the process of finalising their new Terms of Reference and the Action Plans for 2011. Barring any setbacks, we should see some of the following projects being implemented within the next few months.

Besides the Memorandum of Understanding which NCBM signed with Vision Australia last November that resulted in Vision Australia supporting the Blindness-Specific Skills Upgrading Workshop by sending two Orientation and Mobility specialists, and waiving their professional fees, NCBM has signed two more MOU's, one with Universiti Sains Malaysia on 18th March, and the other with Cyber Putra College on 24th March. We should take full advantage of these MOU's to work collaboratively with them to achieve the national objectives of bringing more benefits to the blind through improved services such as:-

1. Holding of more Blindness-Specific Skills Upgrading Workshops, and to extend such training sessions to our friends in WBUAP, especially in the ASEAN region.
2. Structuring a Diploma Course O. & M. for instructors from this region.
3. Setting up the Braille Authority of Malaysia to promote Braille literacy through the E-Kod Braille System, launched by USM, to personnel working in the education of the blind and parents with blind children, and in the standardisation of Braille production.

4. Training of personnel in the work for the Blind.
One of the issues frequently raised is for the training of personnel for the blind but where can we send them to? It is time that we explore with these Institutions of Higher Learning to structure short and long-term courses, such as in the training of Placement Officers, in order to move the pace of development faster. The youngest Member Organisation among us is almost 50 years old and the oldest is 85, and all of them face difficulties in recruiting personnel with the required qualifications.
5. NCBM organised a half-day Audio Description Seminar on 25th February and it was excellently presided over by Mr. Joel Snyder, the President of Audio Description Associates of USA. Audio Description is using appropriate words to describe scenes or performances “to make visual actions or images accessible to people who are blind or have low vision”. NCBM should work with USM to popularise this service for use in museums and tourist places.
6. In addition to setting up a Research Unit, NCBM can and will work with these Institutions of Higher Learning to undertake research on specific subjects in which they have the expertise and the accreditation to make the information acceptable.
7. We have talked quite a bit about promoting ICT skills and making it a level playing field for the blind. I am glad to know that the Committee on Access to Information, Communications and Technology is seriously pursuing this matter from another angle, that of making secondhand or refurbished computers and notebooks available to blind users who have completed a training course. They are holding discussions with relevant bodies to have the fees and the prices for the Operating Systems and the applications reduced.
8. I am also happy to know that the Committee on Sports and Recreation has taken up the challenge, proposed at one of the Exco meetings last year, to popularise chess among the blind students. They have started distributing chess sets and clocks to the five residential schools and have budgeted some funds as allowances for the coaches. Of course, NCBM will continue to promote competitive sports, but it will give equal

attention to recreational activities as these will benefit a larger number of blind people.

9. And looking ahead to 2012, NCBM will be hosting the 11th WBUAP Massage Seminar. Last year, in Seoul, both Dato' Dr Hsiung and I accepted the offer from the WBUAP Massage Commission to host this Seminar, and Dato' Dr Hsiung was appointed Head of the Organising Committee. He has since gone full steam ahead with preparations to hold it at the Seri Pacific Hotel, KL, where we can expect an attendance of between 300 and 400 participants from across the Region. I hope Member Organisations will give their full support to the event by encouraging their members to attend. To attract local participation, the Organising Committee, I believe, is proposing that the registration fee be brought down to RM200.00 per person as against US\$350.00 for overseas participants. This is not final as the Organising Committee is working hard to finalise details and find sponsors.

10. NCBM, as the national coordinating body for the five affiliate organisations, must and will be the national voice of advocacy on issues concerning the BVI nationally, and it must do this through three avenues, namely:
 - (i) Directly with the government and its agencies;

 - (ii) Through the media; and

 - (iii) Through forums ,seminars and workshops on relevant issues such as employment, education, ICT, the Persons with Disabilities Act, the CRPD, capacity-building and funding, and fund-raising.

In closing, I again seek the cooperation of all Member Organisations and welcome all of you to submit views and proposals as to what you think NCBM should do in the coming years for the national interest of serving the blind. Our contention is not that we have done too much; our concern is that we are not doing enough for the blind. We can and must do more. Let us unite in our resolve to improve the quality of life for BVIs of our country.

Thank you.

DEVELOPMENTS IN NCBM AND WORK FOR THE BLIND, 2010 PART I

*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy
Executive Director*

National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

Editor's Note: This article has been adapted from the Annual Report of NCBM for the year 2010.

1. THE PLAN OF ACTION

The Exco has been giving great attention to the implementation of the Plan which covers three levels of activities. The first level is concerned with working directly with individual Member Organisations by assisting them in their projects on request and within the resources of NCBM. The second level concerns the organising of events nationally to benefit all Member Organisations, or jointly with organisations having dealings with blindness issues that will benefit blind people throughout the country. Thirdly, NCBM works on the international level, particularly with the World Blind Union (WBU) and its off-shores, the WBU-Asia Pacific and the WBUAP-South-East Asia Subregional Committee (SEASRC) and the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA). The purpose of joining these international bodies are for the sharing of experiences and information, and to work with them in improving the quality of services for the blind.

1.1 Working Directly with Member Organisations to Strengthen Their Services

(a) Sabah Society for the Blind (SHSB)

i) Job Placement Unit

Following an evaluation of the Unit in 2009, NCBM continued to give support to this important service in finding jobs for the blind by providing RM40,000.00. This sponsorship will last for another two years on a reducing scale.

ii) *Fund-Raising Efforts*

On their request, NCBM gave SHSB a grant of RM24,000.00 to employ a fund-raiser to strengthen their financial position.

iii) *Donation of Computers*

Four computers and a scanner were given to SHSB to improve the facilities at their Taman Cahaya Training Centre in Sandakan.

iv) *Upgrading the Standard of Massage*

Thanks to the moral support given by Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia, NCBM successfully applied for a Senior Massage Volunteer from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). They sent Mr Saburo Sasada for a ten-month attachment with NCBM. Mr Sasada paid three-day visits to the five Member Organisations of NCBM from July to August to assess their standard of massage instruction. He subsequently conducted a refresher course for the massage instructors and assisted with the training of trainees at the Taman Cahaya Training Centre from 3 – 11 November 2010.

(b) *The Sarawak Society for the Blind (SKSB)*

i) *Blindness Prevention*

NCBM gave a grant of RM15,000 to assist SKSB in their blindness prevention programme in the state. The money was used to subsidise the cost of spectacles for poor children and for meeting some of the allowances of volunteers assisting in the cataract campaigns.

ii) *Job Placement Unit*

Similarly with SHSB, NCBM also continued to support SKSB's Placement Unit with RM40,000.00 for the second year under the three-year sponsorship programme which will end in 2011.

iii) *Mushroom Cultivation*

NCBM had contributed over RM15,000.00 to start the project at the Kuching Centre. The objective of this project is for the training of blind persons from across the state of Sarawak, thereby encouraging them to start their own cultivation at home in order to augment their income.

iv) ICT Resource Centre

With the setting up of this Centre in 2008 to help blind people in the state gain computer skills, NCBM continued to support the programme by paying for the allowances of a part-time trainer. This assistance was ended in December 2010.

(c) Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM)

i) Cyber Centre in SBM Melaka Branch

NCBM had, on 2nd April 2010, installed six refurbished computers donated by StanChart and provided them with six computer tables, switches and Internet connectivity at the new branch premises in Melaka.

ii) White Cane Day

Although the 2010 combined National World Sight Day and the International White Cane Day was celebrated in Kuching, Member Organisations were encouraged to hold such events in their regions to create public awareness on avoidable blindness and on the importance of the white cane to the blind. NCBM approved a contribution of RM2,000.00 to SBM for the purpose.

iii) Entrepreneurship Fund

In response to their request for support of their fund-raising efforts by organising a charity dinner in early 2011, NCBM purchased a table for RM10,000.00. The Fund will be used to help SBM members start their own small-scale businesses.

(d) St. Nicholas Home for the Visually Impaired (SNH)

i) Digitalising the Talking-books

SNH has over 1,000 books recorded on cassette-tape and they are being transferred onto the DAISY format. They have engaged a part-time assistant to undertake the project and NCBM had contributed RM8,000.00 towards helping with the allowances.

ii) *White Cane Day Celebration*

Similarly with SBM and SHSB, a sum of RM2,000.00 was contributed by NCBM for the purpose. This awareness-creating event took place on 16th October with a walk from Upper Penang Road to the Penang Time Square.

iii) *Equipping the Gymnasium*

SNH had spent an initial sum of RM10,000.00 in order to put up a gym for its residents and for blind people in the state. Subsequently, on request, NCBM contributed RM20,000.00 for the purchase of exercise equipment for the facility.

(e) *Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB)*

i) *Massage Training*

Similar with other Member Organisations, Mr Sasada conducted a week's instruction for the batch of massage trainees who had completed their training programme at the GTC. Subsequently, he conducted a refresher course for the instructors from 29th November to 18th December 2010.

ii) *K.L. World Vision Conference*

MAB hosted the World Vision Conference in Kuala Lumpur from 20th – 24th February 2011. On request, NCBM donated RM32,000.00 in support of MAB. In return, MAB agreed to waive the registration fees for five participants and to make available an exhibition booth for Member Organisations to showcase their activities.

CELEBRATIONS AT ST. NICHOLAS HOME

By Nicholas Lam Yew Khay

My first Christmas at St. Nicholas Home, Penang in 1959 was a great experience for me. I had never been to so many parties, received so many presents and given such an abundance of sweets in my life. The British Army was still around at the time in the Minden Barracks and I remember well their Christmas party to which we were invited. We had lots to eat and each of us received a big bag of goodies; in my bag, I found a big jeep for my present. I kept that jeep for a long time and I was quite unaware of its disappearance later on. 1960 was my second and last time enjoying that kind of Christmas party.

In those days, there was a farm-yard in the compound of St. Nicholas. There were a number of chickens, some turkeys and a goose. The senior boys would take the left-over food from the kitchen to feed the farm-birds. I especially remember the turkeys which would go “gobble-gobble” whenever they heard a loud noise. And so the boys would enjoy slapping their slippers on the floor as this would cause the turkeys to “gobble-gobble” non-stop. In fact, we felt a little sad when we realised that the turkeys would soon be no longer with us because they would be slaughtered for the Christmas lunch.

On the normal days, we had five meals a day. Breakfast would consist of bread and coffee; however, the housemother would first come round to feed us with a spoonful of palm oil or cod liver oil. Ooh, I really hated that stuff! – so I would pretend to go and wash my mouth and I would spit out that stuff into the sink.

Later on, breakfast would include a bowl of porridge which consisted of bulgar wheat boiled with sugar. I did not like the taste at all but we had to endure it for a long time because bags and bags of it were being donated to the Home by the American navy.

For lunch and dinner, we had to eat ox tail, ox tripe, ox tongue and even lamb’s brain. Like the palm oil, cod liver oil and porridge, they were supposed to be good for us. Most of us felt very uneasy eating the lamb’s brain. However, I always looked forward to Monday lunch when we had minced meat. That was also the day when we practised using chopsticks.

Indeed, festival days like Christmas, the Agong's birthday or Merdeka Day were very special for us. It was only on those days when we would be able to have a special meal of mee goreng, chicken curry and boiled or fried eggs.

On the Queen's birthday in June 1960, our breakfast was very special because each of us had a fried turkey egg. As we began to eat, one of the blind girls in the next table exclaimed in Cantonese, "These eggs must have been laid by the Queen!"

When there were no celebrations, our time was still fully occupied. Apart from going to school, we had our regular activities to keep us busy. The Christian missionaries, who ran the Home at the time, took care to nurture our spiritual growth. Thus, we attended morning and evening services every weekday, we had choir practices on Saturdays and Sundays, and we had the Communion Service on Sunday morning and Even Song on Sunday evening.

Once a month, the housemother, Miss Poh Suan, would bring some of the children (including myself) to Teluk Pahang on Penang Island in order to spread the good news to the Chinese living in the kampong areas. We children would sit underneath the coconut tree and Miss Poh Suan would do her preaching in Hokkien. We would then sing some Christian songs in Mandarin.

We also had communion service once a week on Wednesdays at the chapel in St. Nicholas. I was given the opportunity to be the altar boy for more than one year. I served under Padre Dumper for a while and then under Padre Pitfield when he took over from Padre Dumper. I had to get up earlier than all the other children, go to the chapel, prepare the wine and wafers, and light the candles. As the altar boy, I had to wear a special robe. After all the preparations, I would wait for the padre to come and lead the chapel service.

On Saturday mornings, every child was assigned to a particular building in the Home to help wash or polish the floor – this could be the common room, the hall, the library or one of the classrooms. After this one-hour chore from 9.00 to 10.00 a.m., we would be rewarded with shopping time at the tuckshop which was run by the school clerk. One day the clerk got married to an Australian and left St. Nicholas – the shop was then taken over by one of the housemothers.

Each junior child would be given ten cents for shopping while each of the seniors received twenty cents. Many of the children looked forward to this time when they could enjoy shopping for sweets, lollipops, biscuits and toiletries.

As for me, my favourite time was in the afternoon when I could spend many happy hours in the carpentry room. Initially, we children were left alone to do whatever we liked. Then, one day, a flight lieutenant sergeant from the RAAF, Mr Johnson and his wife, paid a visit to the Home. They decided to serve as volunteers and, from then on, I had a great time learning how to use all the various kinds of wood from Mr Johnson.

I was among the three children who were identified as having talent and we were recommended to the school principal, Mr William Brohier, for further training at the technical institute.

Unfortunately, after spending two weekends at the institute for assessment of our abilities, the instructor gave us the sad news that we could not be admitted into the institute. We were told that the machines and tools there were not suitable for our use because they were not modified and there was no protection for blind users. Regrettably, therefore, we had to stop going to the institute.

Nevertheless, I must say that the skills I acquired have served me well for the rest of my life. I have been able to help myself and even assist other people as a handyman. Today, in particular, the skills have been very useful to me as audio technician at the MAB library where I am able to help in repairing the DAISY equipment.

Indeed, learning and working at St. Nicholas Home has taught me that celebrations are not only for the festive seasons; with the knowledge and skills we have learnt, life can be and is a celebration every day.

POSTBAG LETTER FROM DANIS IN CANADA

Dear Sir,

I am a Canadian and I would like to find blind pen friends in your country. I am interested in cultural exchanges and I have no problems with politics, race, nationality or religion.

My profile:

I am a Canadian, male, single, no children, I live in Montreal, I work in an electronic enterprise, I like travelling, pen friends, books and music.

You can contact me by email or postmail in Grade One Braille.

My address:

Danis Bui,
2679-A St. Charles,
Montreal, Quebec H3K1E7
Canada.

Email: dinoBuh@hotmail.com

Thank you for your attention

Sincerely Yours,

Danis Bui

VISIT TO MOUNT KINABALU

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

It was a Wednesday on 16th March 2011 – at long last I had the opportunity for one of my dreams to come true – I had heard so much about Mount Kinabalu and had hoped that one day I would be able to set foot upon its soil. Our daughter, Freida, had just resigned from Air Asia but not before she got me and my wife, Belinda, free air tickets to Kota Kinabalu in Sabah. So we just had to pay about RM900.00 each for the tourist package from Gem Travel and Tours which made arrangements with Wildlife Expedition for our trip and hospitality in Sabah.

We were met at the Kota Kinabalu airport by the tourist guide, Thomas. For lunch, he gave us the choice of a Chinese restaurant or Sri Melaka – of course, we opted for the latter because we loved Nyonya food and it did not come our way every day; we had no regrets as we tasted sumptuous asam prawns, sweet and sour fish with delicious curry brinjals and ladies' fingers.

Then we made our journey for about three hours through long and winding roads to Mount Kinabalu. On our arrival at around 5.00 p.m., it was raining and, ooh, it was shivering cold! But our hearts were warmed by the quiet and friendly greeting of a Kadazan lady who took us to our chalet. The little house was made of wood and brick with one bedroom and attached bathroom downstairs and another bedroom upstairs. However, the cold and hot water taps at the wash-basin were not connected; thus we had to wash up either with the freezing cold water or with snatches from the hot-water tap before it became unbearably hot. Fortunately, the bathing taps were connected so that we had our only bath in two days at around noon of the second day.

Dinner at 7.00 p.m. was at the restaurant of the mountain lodge where we were staying. We had about twenty Britons and two Australians for company while we were the only two Asians – in fact, the only two tourists from Malaysia. The British group had come from Sandakan (a journey of about four hours) where they had spent about a week river cruising and island

hopping to visit or watch the wildlife there (including the turtles on Turtle Island).

The next morning, we were met by another tourist guide, Dennis. He said there were many jungle trails but he had chosen one of the easier tracks for us to walk through. As we trekked and climbed, the interesting sounds for me and the fascinating sights for my wife made us oblivious of the cold.

There were many kinds of figs which provided an abundant supply of food for the animals and birds. When we came to one spot, I could hear various kinds of bird calls. Suddenly, some loud high tones caught my attention and I asked the guide if he knew the name of that bird.

“It’s a tupai or squirrel,” he replied.

“Amazing,” I thought to myself. It really sounded like a bird to me.

The guide told us that there were more than a thousand species of orchids in these jungles. Two-thirds of the orchids in Sabah are found here and some of them cannot be found elsewhere in the world. For example, he pointed out to us the smallest orchid flower in the world – as big as half a grain of rice – and it can only be found here. Only one flower was in bloom and we, especially my wife, were so lucky to be able to see it.

Then he showed us several tiny flowers of another orchid. If one were to look carefully, he explained, one would be able to see the shape of a sexy Kadazan lady gazing at you. Indeed, the flower caught the imagination of my wife and she saw a girl with two big breasts and outstretched arms ready to wrap you in her embrace. Wow! To all my men friends, if you have eyes to behold, you should not miss this charming sight from fanciful nature!

Unfortunately, the flower was only the size of a red bean, too tiny for me to make anything out of it by touch. Nonetheless, I did experience the sheer joy of being able just simply to touch the many different types of trees, plants, leaves, buds and flowers, including the rodendrons and the madinella blossoms.

Then we walked through the Botanical Garden and made our way to the exhibition gallery upstairs. But before that, we entered the lecture theatre on the ground floor and saw a very interesting video-film about the history of Mount Kinabalu which stood at about 13,500 above sea-level. It is a young non-volcanic mountain in geological terms and it has four main kinds of vegetation – the lowland, tropical, temperate and alpine regions.

The fact that amazed scientists, was how did the temperate and alpine vegetation get to be on this mountain which is in the equatorial belt. They found the answer when they discovered that there had been several other higher mountains in the geological past; as they were eroded downwards, Mount Kinabalu rose up in time so that the temperate and alpine vegetation were able to find refuge here; consequently, these fossil vegetation are even older than Mount Kinabalu itself. In fact, this mountain is still rising by several centimetres each year.

At the gallery, we discovered that the first man to climb Mount Kinabalu was the British resident of Malaya, Sir Hugh Low, in the year of 1851. He together with a team of explorers and porters took more than one month to accomplish the task; realising the importance of this discovery, he was the one who had alerted the international community to this amazing and majestic mountain.

According to the guide, now you would need about two to three days to climb to the top of the mountain and down again. However, it would take about ten days to walk from the side of Mount Kinabalu to Kota Belud, the land of the Bajau horsemen, on the other side. The route traverses through very tough and difficult terrain and few people have attempted it – anyway, permission must be obtained from the authorities in order to take on the risky and challenging adventure!

We also saw a time capsule at the exhibition. It was a sealed box which contained artifacts from the climb undertaken by some government ministers and which was launched by the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, in the 1990's. This time capsule cannot be opened until the year 2050.

The Kinabalu Park was officially opened in 1964, one year after Malaysia came into existence in 1963. Scientists and researchers from all over the world come here to study the flora and fauna of this region. An appeal has been made for Mount Kinabalu to be declared by the U.N. as a world heritage site.

Our guide, Dennis, is a mountain man and he first climbed Mount Kinabalu at the age of thirteen. As part of his job, he has to lead mountaineers up and down the mountain at least once a week. This means that he has been up and down the mountain more than one thousand times in his lifetime – fantastic!

Well, I did not attempt to climb the mountain; at my age of nearly 63 and being prone to backache and chest sprain, I shall probably never be able to make it. Indeed, others in their 60's and even 70's have done it and I do certainly admire their guts and determination.

As for me, I am content that I have visited the mountain; at least I have made some footprints in the place, felt the chilly cold winds, breathed the crisp fresh air, and had the privilege of touching and smelling the wondrous beauties of nature in Mount Kinabalu.

I am thankful for all that!

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: NEW PRODUCTS FOR THE BLIND

*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong
Assistant Director
National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*



VICTOR READER RANGE OF PRODUCTS

HumanWare has just introduced a new version of their Victor Reader range of products. They are especially suitable for those who are interested in listening to audio files, DAISY books and MP3 music. There is also a version that comes with a text speech engine for reading text files.

The Victor Reader Stratus continues the legacy of HumanWare's 13-year history in developing simple and easy-to-use audio book players. It comes in a new look enclosure that is smaller and whiter on the outside and yet smarter and better sounding on the inside. Unlike the previous generation of the product, the Stratus plays multimedia books and music from CD's, sound cards and USB flash drives.

All Stratus models feature large, tactile, high-contrast keys, a built-in speaker, and headphone jack, with self-voicing controls, thereby making it a very user-friendly audio book player.

To cater for the wide range of preferences among the blind, HumanWare has come up with a choice of four different styles of accessing information as follows:

1. A simple four-arrow keypad for easy navigation through novels, magazines or newspapers.
2. The Stratus12 model with its telephone-style number pad for navigation to specific pages in highly structured publications such as reference and textbooks (which may be preferred by students and professionals).
3. The most simple operation possible was by attaching the optional keypad cover to hide all but the most essential keys, thereby simulating the traditional cassette player.
4. The Stratus M and H models not only play CD's but they also support additional media sources, including USB flash memory and an SD card. With the Stratus M's built-in text to speech capability, it is possible even to play computer text documents saved to these external media.

The features are as follows:

- Variable speed
- Increase playback speed to read more quickly
- Integrated handle and rechargeable battery
- Sleep timer
- A great way to enjoy reading before bed
- Digital sound quality
- Enjoy great sound quality for books and music
- Information key
- Announces book info (title, total/elapsed/remaining time, total pages/headings)
- Where am I key
- Always know where you are in a book (page, chapter, headings, etc)
- Key describer
- Announces the functions of each key

Specifications:

- Plays DAISY, audio and MP3 CD's
- Dimensions: 22 X 21.6 X 4.8 cm (8.7 X 8.5 X 1.9 in.)
- Weight: 0.95 kg (2.1 pounds) with battery
- DAISY formats supported: 2.0 and 2.0.2
- ANSI/NISO Z39.86 2002/2005 (DAISY 3)
- Rechargeable Li-Plymer battery
- Recharging time: 4 hours
- Operating time: 10 hours for continuous play of DAISY MP3 books
- Coding algorithms: AAC, AMR-WB Plus, FLAC, MP3, OGG Vorbis, Speex, WAV
- Text-to-speech: Acapela (Stratus M, H, I) to play txt, html, and xml files
- Power jack: 2.5 mm (interior)/5.5 mm (exterior)
- Headphone jack: 3.5 mm
- Firmware upgrade via CD or SD/USB (Stratus M, H, I)

Interested parties can get in touch with the Malaysian Association for the Blind for ordering procedures or you may want to log onto <http://www.humanware.com/en-asia/home> to see the whole range of products by HumanWare.

THE BRAILLE BOX V4

This machine delivers high volume production on copy paper. It embosses 800 double-sided pages per hour and it has a very stable sheet feeding device with built-in noise reduction.

The key features of this equipment are as follows:

- High speed production
- Excellent Braille quality
- Paper tray fitting 500 pages
- Very stable single sheet feeder
- Surprisingly low noise
- Newspaper format on A3 folds to four A4
- Large volumes

Currently, Braille Box is probably the best embosser for large volumes of Braille using ordinary copy paper. Its sheet feeder is among the best ever to be used in a Braille printer.

By using the latest electronic platform injection modelling tools and a professional design, it has been possible to combine high performance with a very attractive price for customers. Indeed, Braille Box is Index Braille's masterpiece – a high volume production embosser in keeping with the demands from customers.

Low Noise:

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CREATING A PLACE FOR THE DISABLED

By Sheila Stanley

Editor's Note: This article was taken from "The Star" of 25th October 2010. The writer has some very enlightening thoughts on disability in Malaysia and we would like to share her thoughts with readers.

Here is what she says:

I think recent comments by various parties which exhibit a more progressive train of thought about the disabled in Malaysia is most heartening. Indeed, it shows we have started looking beyond building ramps and disabled toilets and have begun moving into the realm of creating a space for them within Malaysian society so that they, like their able-bodied compatriots, will have the opportunity to contribute to the world around them.

Recent comments by the Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, advocating for the need of special education that would cater for the disabled, and by the Tourism Minister, Dato' Seri Dr Ng Yen Yen, for more research into autism, are highly commendable.

Moreover, in the recent budget, the Women, Family and Community Development Minister had been allocated some RM218 million to provide assistance for about 8,000 people in the country.

There was also the case of Albert Wong who, in 2006, managed to convince a JPA officer that he was worthy of an education scholarship despite his disability. The actions of that officer are very commendable and should be emulated by other civil servants.

I hope this trend of positive ideas and actions will mark the beginning of the creation of an equitable society in which the disabled can live meaningfully and with dignity. There is the matter of the Persons with Disabilities Act (PWDA) 2008, which was passed by parliament in 2007, gazetted in January 2008, and came into force in July 2008. Malaysia has also signed the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in April 2008.

Presumably, the Act was enacted following Malaysia's global stand on providing the disabled with the rights to a dignified life. However, the unfortunate thing about the PWDA is this – it does not provide any remedies to enable those persons to seek redress if they feel discriminated against; neither does it provide any penalties for discrimination. In that regard, it fails to set the platform for society as a whole to take this issue seriously.

Our western compatriots have a completely different approach to persons with a disability. In Europe and the U.S.A., there serious penalties associated with discriminating against the disabled both in terms of employment as well as in the provision of goods and services. The pertinent question is this – how can we possibly bring about a just society for the disabled if we do not put in place punitive measures against those guilty of discriminating against them? This approach takes into account the stick while at the same time providing some carrots for those who meet the needs of the disabled.

“Disability” is not the same thing as “inability”. Many disabled people are gifted in certain areas such as music (Stevie Wonder), intelligence (Steven Hawking), and character (Franklin Roosevelt). Bearing this in mind, companies and corporations should be encouraged to hire more disabled persons. This can best be done by providing incentives in the form of grants or financial aid for business owners to adapt their environment for disabled workers. This approach has been successful in many parts of the world and there is no reason why it cannot work in Malaysia.

In the U.S., for example, there are a variety of tax benefits for businesses which hire the disabled.

In education, we should consider a quota system in providing scholarships for disabled students. Many of them are capable of great achievements but they need the right set of support measures to enable them to shine.

What about detecting a disability, especially a mental or intellectual disability early in the life of a disabled person? The aged, in particular, are vulnerable to diseases like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Indeed, we need to understand that the depth and scope of disability can reach far and wide and, covering in many cases, even mental illness such as schizophrenia.

The average Malaysian has only seen disability in terms of those who are deaf, blind, mentally retarded or in wheelchairs. It will do a world of good if both civil servants and employees of private companies are given training in understanding disability as is being done in the west. In educating the working populace, we will be taking a huge stride in creating awareness among the general public.

It has taken a long time for us in Malaysia to catch up with the idea that the disabled should be given equal opportunities. By virtue of their disability, they do not have the same ease of access as the able-bodied. It is good that this has been realised in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, we should not stop here. We should begin implementing measures and enforcing the laws which have been enacted. Only in this way will the average disabled person in Malaysia be truly able to lead a more fulfilling and rich life.

(Sheila Stanley is a writer and tv producer based in Kuala Lumpur. She was also a diversity trainer. She can be reached on www.sheila-stanley.com)

JONATHAN MOK – THE BLIND TELEPHONIST

By Dr. Tan Tok Shiong



Jonathan Mok was born on 24th April 1950 in the paddy village of Jerang Belanga near Kota Sarang Semut in Kedah. In his childhood days, this village was accessible only by river from the town using a small boat or sampan.

He was the third child among nine siblings. The first two children were normal followed by six children who were blind. The last child was normal and he was a boy. Two of the blind children were girls and they died shortly after being born.

Soon after the birth of Jonathan, his parents consulted a medium in order to get an explanation concerning their misfortune. According to the medium, unclean spirits had entered the place where they were staying. At first, however, his parents did not believe the story and continued living there. After another five blind children were born to them, Jonathan's parents decided to move house. Surprisingly, after making the move, the last child born to them was not blind – he was the youngest child in the family.

At the age of two, Jonathan and his younger baby brother, Andrew Mok, were sent to St. Nicholas Home in Penang. This home for the blind was a great contrast from their paddy village. Whenever they wanted to do their toileting in the village, they had to go to the bushes but their mother imposed many restrictions on their movements because of their blindness. At St. Nicholas, the housemothers took care of them and there were modern facilities such as the flush toilets. Thus, when school was closed for the long holidays, they hated very much the idea of having to return home. His younger brother would demomarrate his reluctance and misery by crying and screaming. Back at their parents' house, they felt very homesick for St. Nicholas and longed to be back there. One day Jonathan blurted out to some teachers that he did not wish to go home but they explained to him that he had to because there was no one in the school to look after him during the holidays.

After completing primary schooling at St. Nicholas, Jonathan was sent to a normal school for his secondary education. He was placed in an integrated programme at St Xavier's Institution in Penang. He studied alongside normal sighted students in the class-room and would go to the resource room for special assistance from the resource teachers. Unfortunately, the programme was far from ideal – as they could not take part in the physical education lessons - that was the time when they had to spend their resource periods in the resource room. Frequently, however, the resource teachers would be nowhere to be found. Jonathan was told by other sighted students that the resource teachers were in the canteen or in the staff-room chit-chatting. He believes that it was due to the poor guidance that he failed in his mathematics and had to leave school after form three.

The end of schooling also marked the starting of career building. He applied to be enrolled in the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur. However, after passing the enrollment test, he had to wait for two years before being admitted to the Centre in Brickfields.

While waiting for admission, he had to stay in his village in Kedah and he felt very bored. Fortunately, one of his blind friends, Joseph Soon, invited him to stay at his house in Penang for about a month. This did help him to get rid of some of the boredom.

He was at the GTC for two years and he underwent the telephony course. He found the time at the GTC to be very enjoyable and relaxing. After the training, he was offered a job as a temporary worker in the accounting firm, Peat Marwick Mitchell & Co., in Penang. He worked there for eleven years with a starting salary of RM100.00; by the time he left the company in 1983, he was receiving a salary of RM220.00.

In fact, he had been retrenched by the company because they had automated their switchboard, thereby making the job of the telephonist redundant. However, the company did compensate him with eleven months' salary in consideration of the eleven years' service he had rendered to the firm.

Fortunately, at around the time of his retrenchment, a blind girl had quit her job as telephone operator at the Pantai Medical Centre in Kuala Lumpur. He promptly applied for the post and he was successful in gaining employment in this prestigious private hospital. He was very happy as his new salary had doubled in comparison to the old salary in the former company.

He worked at the hospital for fourteen years until his voluntary resignation in 1996. While working at the Pantai hospital, he had been gradually losing his hearing. It became so serious that on several occasions he had transferred telephone calls to the wrong department and was reprimanded. Realising that the hospital was dealing with human life and no such mistakes could be afforded, he decided to resign. Supposing someone had a heart attack and he had transferred the emergency call to the wrong doctor, he would feel a great responsibility for causing the death of the patient solely because of his mistake. Thus, he has never regretted taking the decision that he did even though the saddest day of his life was when he stopped working at the hospital.

After his resignation, he continued renting a room in Brickfields. He was able to support himself by working as a tidbits seller with a van service. The van operator provided him a guide and they went around to the hawker centres, offices and housing estates to sell their wares.

While working at the Pantai Medical Centre, there was a staff offer and he had bought up one lot of the company shares at RM1.00 per unit. After his

resignation, the price of the share sky-rocketed to RM19.00 and he quickly disposed of the shares. He kept the money in the account of a blind friend, Alex Lee, who helped him with the withdrawals whenever he required it. This money lasted him for a period of three years and when it was finished, he got worried.

However, good luck came to him again. The Personnel Manager of the Pantai Medical Centre, Satanabala, happened to be a close friend of the Director in SOCSO. With her assistance and with help from the Welfare Officer at the Malaysian Association for the Blind, he was able to obtain a letter from a specialist confirming his blindness and deafness and to apply for financial assistance from the Social Security organisation. Just as his savings were running out, he received a letter from SOCSO stating that it would provide him a monthly allowance; this amount was sufficient to cover his rent, food and various other daily expenses.

Jonathan feels that the happiest days in his life were when he was working in Penang and he had many friends both at the workplace and outside. He remembers coming home from work and on stepping out of the bus, there would be neighbours waiting there to take him home. Subsequently, when working in Kuala Lumpur, he could feel that people were rushing all the time and they had no time to be friendly.

He had often imagined that the most exciting day of his life will be his wedding day. Unfortunately, this day had not materialised even though he had gone on dates with two girls.

A POINT TO PONDER: ABACUS FOR EASY CALCULATIONS

By Wong Kow

I read with great interest the article by Godfrey Ooi entitled “SBM’s Role in Promoting Employment Opportunities for the Blind” which appeared in “The NCBM Outreach” of January – March 2011. Among many of the topics touched on by Godfrey, the idea of skills development, particularly using of the abacus for calculations, captured my attention. Indeed, it prompted me in wanting to share my experience in learning the abacus when I was in Chinese primary school. Truly, I found that the abacus could be a great help in dealing with mental calculations and in making mathematics an easy and interesting subject.

I believe quite a number of readers of this magazine, especially the Chinese adult blind, would have had some knowledge on using the abacus. In fact, most of our sighted friends are still using the abacus either at home or in the Chinese medical shops, sundry shops, and so on.

The abacus is made up of a rectangular frame with a long bar within it in order to separate the beads from upper and lower portions. The frame is filled with beads which may range from eleven to seventeen rows. Each row has seven beads arranged vertically on a rattan or metal stick, two beads being on the upper portion and five beads on the lower portion.

The beads are fixed in a way so that they can be moved up and down swiftly, thereby facilitating split-second movements of the user’s fingers in performing fast calculations. Even in our modern times, you can still hear the rapid “tick-tuck” beating sounds of the abacus as the shopkeepers in the traditional medical or sundry shops perform their calculations.

Each bead on the top portion represents the value of 5 (five) while the beads on the lower portion represent the value of 1 (one). Before using the abacus, you must set it to the value of 0 (zero). This means pushing all the beads on the upper portion to touch the top frame and pushing all the beads on the lower portion to touch the bottom frame.

Let us look at some simple calculations for beginners.

Question 1. $1 + 3$

Method – Simply place your finger at the single unit digits row, push one bead up from the lower portion to touch the dividing bar, and this means the value of 1. To add 3, just push another three beads from the same row to touch the bead which had been pushed up earlier; Thus, you will see the four beads on the same single digits row, which means that the answer is 4.

Question 2. $5 + 4$

Method – At the single digits row, push one bead from the upper row down to touch the dividing bar. Remember that the value of each bead on the upper row is 5. Thus, the value on the abacus at this moment is 5. To add four, just push another four beads on the same row up to touch the dividing bar. Now you will be able to see 5 and 4 on the same digits row, which would indicate that the answer is 9.

Subtractions are done in the same way. With the help of suitably trained instructors and a well modified abacus, I believe the blind will be able to perform even complex calculations, including multiplication and division sums, quite easily.

For beginners, I would like to recommend a simple book entitled “A Guide to the Abacus”. The book is written in simple Chinese and in a poetic style. As students carry out the practical calculations with their fingers, they read out the teaching method in a sing-song tone, thereby embedding the tricks deep into their memories.

I am quite certain that the book could be translated into English or Bahasa Malaysia without much problem. However, since the vocabulary in the guide-book actually indicates numbers or finger movements such as “up” or “down”, I believe that even the non-Chinese or blind students could just simply pick up the Chinese words by heart and learn the abacus without needing any translation.

In actual fact, the abacus had been introduced to the Chinese primary schools in Malaya long before independence. Usually, they begin from Standard Four onwards. Indeed, in the 1980's and 1990's, there had been much talk about introducing the abacus to the national primary schools. Unfortunately, little has been done to follow up on the proposal.

Currently, in Malaysia, there are quite a number of private institutions and tuition centres offering the course on the abacus. We are amazed how some of the young students are able to out-manoeuvre other students who use calculators in solving even complicated arithmetical questions.

We often hear that students from the Chinese primary schools usually perform much better in mathematics and related subjects. However, I do not have any statistics to prove the truth of this statement.

Nevertheless, for a point to ponder perhaps, do you think that arithmetic could be made to be easier and more interesting for the blind if well conducted abacus lessons were introduced?

QUOTATIONS FOR REFLECTION

Don't just add years to your life;
Add life to your years as well.

Elisabeth Foley:

The most beautiful discovery true friends make is that they can grow separately without growing apart.

Harper Lee in “To Kill a Mocking Bird”:

The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience.

Phyllis McGinley in “The Saturday Evening Post”:

Praise is warming, is desirable, but it is an earned thing. It has to be deserved, like a hug from a child.

Garry Emerson Fosdick:

Liberty is always dangerous – but it is the safest thing we have.

David Bly in “Salt Lake City Deseret News”:

Striving for success without hard work is like trying to harvest where you haven't planted.

Rev. Norman Vincent Peale:

Change your thoughts and you change your world.

Robert Brault in “National Enquirer”:

Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realise they were the big things.

Eleanor Powell in “John Kobal's P W Talk”:

What we are is God's gift to us. What we become is our gift to God.

Laurence J. Peter in “Peter's Almanac”:

It is wise to remember that you are one of those who can be fooled some of the time.

Toni Morrison:

The function of freedom is to free somebody else.

Louis L'amour in "The Walking Drum":

Victory is won not in miles but in inches. Win a little now, hold your ground, and later win a little more.

Will Rogers:

Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the time we have rushed through life trying to save.

20,000 quips and quotes edited by Evan Esar:

A real friend never gets in your way, unless you happen to be on your way down.

Robin Cook:

Education is more than a luxury; it is a responsibility that society owes to itself.

Ralph W. Sockman:

The test of courage comes when we are in the minority. The test of tolerance comes when we are in the majority.

Mohandas K. Gandhi:

In matters of conscience, the law of majority has no place.

Elizabeth Drew in "Washington Journal":

Democracy, like any non-coercive relationship, rests on a shared understanding of limits.

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in “The NCBM Outreach”. However, please note that it would be very helpful to the Editor if such contributions could be submitted either on diskette or on single-sided Braille pages to facilitate editing.

Also please note that if the article is accompanied by at least two relevant photographs and if they are accepted for publication, you will be paid an additional RM25.00 fee.

You should include your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money can be sent to you easily.

For details of payment, please see the last page.

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3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 - 500 words) - RM35.00 - RM75.00
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(Note: Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its member-organisations will not qualify for payment unless these submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.)