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VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

To ensure blind people will receive appropriate training and enjoy quality services regardless of where they live in the country.



The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) provides a vital link between the organisations serving the blind in this country by acting as the national coordinating body. Through NCBM, the organisations for and of the blind have a channel to discuss and formulate national policies and plans and to pioneer new programmes for the benefit of the blind and vision-impaired.

It cost The National Council for the Blind, Malaysia RM 30,000.00 a year to produce both print and Braille.

Your financial support will, therefore, go a long way in helping to bring about new developments and progress for the blind. All contributions are deeply appreciated.

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1. NCBM's Job Pioneering Scheme:

This scheme was launched in 2012 whereby NCBM collaborates with prospective employers in providing employment opportunities for the blind. The blind person will work for a period of three to six months and be paid a monthly allowance of RM1,200 by NCBM. At the end of the period, it is hoped that the employer will be convinced of the blind person's capabilities and give him permanent employment.

Please contact the NCBM secretariat for the application form.

Tel. 03-22762973.

2. Equipment Loan Fund for the Blind:

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3. Research Grant:

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1. Articles, suggestions and Jokes for the Magazine:

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in the NCBM Outreach

Please note that it would be helpful to the editor if such contributions could be submitted on a thumb drive or similar mode, or in Braille. If the article is in Braille, it should be on single-sided pages in order to facilitate editing.

You should include your full name (as in the identity card) with your address, telephone number and bank account number so that the money can be bank into your account.

For details concerning payments, please see the last page.

Thank you for your assistance and support.



Moses Choo Siew Cheong
Wong Kwee Heong
Inungkiran Mongijal
Chin Yew Cheng



by Amanda Kong Hwei Zhen

Editor's note: The article, "Amanda Kong Hwei Zhen - blind Achiever in Education", appeared in NCBM Outreach of January - March, 2015. Amanda was overjoyed when she received news of her astounding success as the top student among more than four million students all over the world for the Cambridge A-Levels Examination 2012-13. In recognition of her fantastic achievement, she was given the Outstanding Learner's Award 2013 by the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, YB Datuk Dr Mary Yap, at the Subang Holiday Villa in Kuala Lumpur.

Now here is Amanda to tell us of her law school experience.

Opportunity does not come knocking at one's door all the time. Hence, when it does, one should seize it and make the most out of it to achieve his or her life goals or ambitions. As a visually impaired person, I was overwhelmed when I was given the opportunity to pursue my dreams to become a lawyer. Looking back, I am happy to say that I have made the most out of this golden opportunity as I am the proud owner of a First Class Honours Bachelor of Laws (LLB)

In this article, I will give readers a glimpse into my journey in pursuing a law degree, focusing on my law school experience throughout the four years of my law degree. I will illustrate how it is like to study law as a visually impaired person, what challenges I faced, and how I overcame them. I will also highlight my experience of studying for one year abroad at a UK university, where I completed the final year of my year degree.

Why did I choose law as a field to venture in?

The works of celebrated authors such as Agatha Christie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, John Grisham, Elizabeth George and Sue Grafton never failed to intrigue me. From a young age, I enjoyed reading crime fiction by these authors and many more, fascinated by the intricate plot of the stories as I progressed, alongside discovering the ways in which the law works to

protect society from crime, woven delicately by the said authors into their masterpieces, giving them more flavour and making them more exciting and captivating. This hobby unknowingly formed the foundation of my career choice. At the age of fifteen, my fascination with the world of crime and the way the law works in this field prompted me to pursue a career in law. Indeed, I did hope to become a criminal law barrister in the future.

However, there came a time when I had another goal in mind. I noticed that the rights of people with disabilities are not well protected in Malaysia. In my opinion, the reasons for this are manifold.

One reason has to do with the complete abandonment of disabled children or adults by their families in order to hide the fact of existence of such persons for fear of shame. As a result, help never reached these unfortunate souls.

Moreover, even people with disabilities who mix around in the community at large are able to enjoy only minimum rights. This is because there are only a limited number of people within the community who are brave enough to stand up and fight for their own rights. Perhaps it is their disability that makes them look down upon themselves, thus making them more vulnerable, thwarting their dreams and crippling their desire to live a better life in a community where their rights are secure and adequately protected.

Furthermore, some of these people come from families who have limited resources, thereby making it impossible for them to pursue their dreams. At the same time, the limited funds set aside by the Government in their budget each year for this category of people and the limited facilities provided as physical and technical support further act as a hindrance for these people to achieve their life goals or to realise their ambitions.

I believe that pursuing a career in law will enable me to act as an advocate for people with disabilities. I will be able to stand up for them and fight for their rights. I am willing to reach out to the community of which I am a part. I want to change the perception of society towards people like me, showing them that being disabled need not hinder one from being successful in life and that it does not mean one can never contribute to society because one is viewed as being useless.-

The College Years

Applying for a place to pursue a law degree was not an easy task. A few private institutions rejected my application. Most of the persons in charge with whom I spoke thought in the same way - "How on earth could a person with visual impairment study law, which is such a challenging field to set foot in?"

Fortunately, fate was in my favour when one of the private institutions, the Brickfields Asia College (BAC) in Kuala Lumpur accepted my application. I learned that two other visually impaired persons and one other disabled person were also accepted to pursue a law degree in the college.

Indeed, I was overwhelmed with joy and my heart leapt at the open-mindedness of BAC in accepting me as a student. Initially, I enrolled for the Cambridge A-Levels at BAC and I joined the intake in April 2012. This course lasted for approximately one and a half years. BAC provided fantastic support, especially in terms of materials in softcopies as well as computers with special software such as JAWS which facilitated my studies throughout the course. BAC also provided examination support in terms of a reader, papers in Braille, a separate room, and extra time to complete the test.

I was over the moon when unexpectedly I was awarded the Outstanding Cambridge Learners' Award for obtaining the top marks in the world for law. My aspirations were thus boosted and I felt certain that I had made the right choice in travelling down this path. This small milestone really inspired me to strive further to achieve my ambitions in life.

I, therefore, chose to continue my studies in BAC and I enrolled for their law degree programme in September 2013. Deciding to broaden my horizons and to gain a new perspective of the real world, I chose the UK Transfer Degree, which is a 2 plus 1 programme. The first two years of my degree would be at BAC and then I would get the chance to spend the last year of my law degree abroad in one of the selected UK universities, among the leading partners of BAC.

Without a doubt, the same excellent support was provided by BAC during the first two years of my degree. Aside from providing the afore-mentioned support, BAC also attempted to improve their services by seeking advice from NCBM to make their programme friendlier to people with visual impairment. They also out-sourced the job of embossing internal examination papers to NCBM. I am truly grateful for the help and support from NCBM and its staff. I really appreciate the efforts of NCBM in aiding people with visual impairment to be integrated into society.

Nonetheless, there is always a flipside to everything as life is not so simple and straightforward. One inherent problem is the difficulty in obtaining textbooks in softcopy due to licensing issues. In fact, obtaining permission from the publishers for a licence of the softcopy of the books took lots of persuasion. Fortunately, BAC managed to obtain a few selected titles in the syllabus and I could consider that as a blessing to me. Nonetheless, the softcopies were provided in PDF files, which were not very blind-friendly. It took some time for me to convert them into word or text files (which were more accessible and easier for me to navigate through although the files were quite large, i.e. approximately 1,000 pages per book).

Thus, two years passed by in the blink of an eye. Before I knew it, my two years at BAC were drawing to a close and I had to make the necessary preparations to embark on a new and exciting journey. I chose to pursue the final year of my degree at the University of Liverpool, one of the top-ranking and leading universities in this field, particularly in the aspects of research and development. This was because the university assured me that it was very disabled-friendly and that they would try their best to accommodate my needs. The university even went so far as to draw up a support plan for me, listing down my needs and how they would endeavour to provide them in order to aid me in settling into life there far away from home. The support promised by the university included mobility assistance, study assistance, examination support and disabled-friendly accommodation.

One Year Abroad - an Unforgettable Experience

The first few weeks in the UK were really hard to cope with. It took me some time to adapt to my new surroundings and to get my bearings right. The campus was rather large and sprawled out throughout the heart of the city. The law school was located in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, which was spread out over a few buildings.

The walking distance between each building was approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Besides, the terrain was not flat, which made it difficult for me to navigate my way to some of my classes. In addition, I had to get used to eating Western food, which I found to be rather bland and they were served in large portions. Also, the changing weather in the UK, which was unpredictable, was very difficult for me to cope with at first. Imagine waking up to a warm sunny morning with a blue sky and then shivering from cold blasts of wind with cloudy and rainy skies a few hours later.

Furthermore, most of my friends had chosen a different UK university. Hence, I was all alone in this new adventure, which made me feel rather awkward and a little sad. However, I realised that one had to cope with change and that one should not waste valuable time fretting over petty problems. I knew that eventually I would be able to cope and blend in with the life at the university. This I did and I was able to begin enjoying myself. I was fully aware that this would be the experience of a lifetime and I had to make the most out of it.

The support provided by the university was really fantastic. This was one of the reasons why I was able to cope so well with life abroad. I was given oncampus accommodation and I stayed in a place called Vine Court, which was situated at the heart of the campus.

All my classes were within walking distance (ten to fifteen minutes) from my accommodation. There were supermarkets and convenience stores such as Tesco nearby. This made it easy for me to buy foodstuffs and groceries. The laundrette and mailbox were located in the residence hall so that it was convenient for me to do my laundry and to collect my letters (mostly from the university).

The library was just a block away from my accommodation. In terms of library support, I was provided with a selection of eBooks by the librarian of the law library. The eBooks were downloaded from the publishers' website and I was given a password to access them. I was also provided with a library assistant by the university to assist me in terms of study support and research. For instance, I had assistance in converting all the eBooks into word files.

Actually, I was allowed ten hours of library support each week and I would communicate with my library assistant via email. The assistant was very efficient so that I managed to read all the books recommended by the lecturers in the reading list. I also managed to speed up my research for the courseworks.

For study support, I was provided with a Note Taker, as promised in the support plan. The note-taker is, in fact, a person who would help in taking notes during the lectures. This support is available to all students with disabilities in the UK. The note-taker would take down notes in the format preferred by the student to whom they have been assigned. In my case, I wanted my Note Taker to take electronic notes which I felt would be convenient for both of us. Hence, my note-taker would type up the extra notes given by the lecturers on slides during the lectures and send them to me via email at the end of the lecture. In this way, I was thus able to follow all the lectures easily and I did not miss any important tips or announcements given by the lecturers. I was allowed 30 hours of support for each week.

In addition, the university loaned me some equipment to assist me in my studies - a Dictaphone (Olympus) and a fast scanner (Optic Book) which could scan about five pages in one minute. This certainly helped me a lot in my studies.

All the lecture materials were provided in Braille for me (as I had informed the university that I would prefer the conventional form of notes rather than electronic notes). I was really grateful for this support as I was able to save time having to type up the materials myself using a brailler. However, the materials were produced using UEB Braille, which had been introduced in 2015. It did take me some time to get used to reading it but eventually I got the hang of it.

The university also provided mobility training and support for me. The training was out-sourced to an organisation called Bradbury Fields, which provided assistance for visually impaired persons in Liverpool. One of the managers of the organisation personally conducted my training. The university paid for 20 hours of training for me.

I was taught all the routes to all the campus buildings where my classes were conducted. I was taught the proper way to use a white cane (with rollers) efficiently. I was surprised to learn that there were actually different ways to hold and use the white cane in different situations such as when crossing the road or when walking up and down staircases. My trainer observed that I was able to memorise all the routes and get to my classes unassisted after 15 hours of training.

The training taught me to be more independent and observant. It also helped me to boost my confidence and self-esteem, as I was now able to navigate through uneven terrains, cross busy roads and remember where to make a turn in wide areas.

The UK is indeed a disabled-friendly country and there are certain features built to assist people with visual impairment in their mobility. For example, parts of the road are paved with tactile guides and there are rotating cones on all the traffic-light posts to let one know when it is time to cross the road. As if mobility training was not sufficient, the university also assigned someone to help me get to my classes. This was done by my note-taker, who now played the dual function of note-taking and providing mobility support.

In terms of examination support, I was provided with Braille examination papers and a reader. I was also provided with a laptop installed with JAWS to type my answer scripts. In addition, I was given extra time for the examination.

Overall, Life in the UK is pretty good and very enjoyable. Aside from the trying times during the winter (with temperatures dropping to -4 degrees at night) and the stressful times before the examination, everything else turned out very fine.

I blended in with the other students very well and I made new friends during the class discussions and group presentations. Time just flew by and before I knew it, one year had drawn to a close. Thus, I was officially a law graduate by the end of July 2016.

With the excellent support provided by the university and the superb teaching of the lecturers and tutors, along with my own hard work, I managed to achieve a First Class Honours for my law degree. This is truly a great milestone in my life.

Nonetheless, there is still just one more final hurdle before I become a fully qualified lawyer. I shall be returning to Malaysia to pursue the Certificate in Legal Practice (CLP) in order to obtain my practising licence. So I shall be continuing my studies at BAC in September 2016. The course will last for one year.

Concluding Thoughts

Without a doubt, I must say that the University of Liverpool is a very disabled-friendly institution in the UK, judging from the support they have provided me. Indeed, their willingness to provide for the disabled to ensure that they can live a normal life akin to that of other normal people and able to pursue their life ambitions clearly demonstrates the university's open-mindedness and readiness to assist those in need.

I feel that in Malaysia, it is high time for the educational institutions (whether public or private) to keep an open mind in accepting students with disabilities who desire to pursue their ambitions for academic achievement and success. The public educational institutions and universities, in particular, should strive to make education more accessible to people with disabilities by improving their support programmes to cater for the needs of the disabled. The support plan drafted by the University of Liverpool and the steps they had taken in catering for my needs is surely a good example to be emulated.

Society should not look down on people with disabilities. On the other hand, we, the people with disabilities, should not allow disability to act as a barrier separating us from the rest of the world. We must all strive to make people with disabilities as part of the society.

Finally, here is a shout-out to all people with disabilities: "Do not under estimate your own capabilities. Always believe in yourself and don't let your disability

Hinder you from achieving your life ambitions. I hope that my law school experience will serve to inspire all of you. If I can do it, I'm sure you can do it, too.

"As the saying goes, if you believe you can, you can.

"Remember that perseverance is the key to success and that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel."



by Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Mohd. Yasin bin Abdul Kadir has been working with the Government for about 30 years from 1985 to 2016. He first joined as Assistant Director at the Headquarters of the National Welfare Department under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. He was later appointed as Head of the Disabled Persons' Unit and then the Community Service Unit in the K.L. Welfare Department.

When in Welfare, Yasin worked with the NGO's to set up community-based rehabilitation centres (or PDK's) for the disabled, especially for persons with learning difficulties. He also helped to establish support groups for the families of mentally challenged children.

In 2005 he was deployed to the National Anti-Drugs Agency, Ministry of Home Affairs, where he first headed the Drugs Prevention Unit and was later appointed as commandant of the Drug Rehabilitation Centre in 2006.

In the year 2009 he was redeployed to the Anti-Drugs Agency in Putrajaya and was subsequently appointed as Deputy State Director in Kuala Lumpur. During this period, he was put in charge of Research and Policy Formulation.

However, it was in the Ministry of Home Affairs where he excelled and gained achievement and success. Firstly, he organised anti-drug campaigns in the schools and in the community at large.

He says, "The most memorable campaign that I conducted was at the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB).

As commandant of the Drug Rehabilitation Centre from 2006 to 2008, Yasin demonstrated a deep human understanding for the drug dependents by effective implementation of the therapeutic programme. As a counsellor and friend, he made the dependents aware of the importance of hygiene, cleanliness as well as clean and proper attire.

The food was good but not palatable and so he introduced better cooking techniques. He also allowed the clients to have a say in running the centre. Thus, through persuasion and genuine concern, Yasin managed to win over the clients and they were willing to cooperate ultimately for their own benefit.

Going on to the rehabilitation programme, Yasin introduced many different kinds of courses to equip the clients with a variety of skills. The courses included the handyman programme, plumbing, machine and motor-cycle repairs, electrical repairs, vegetable gardening, floor tiling, covering of drains with slabs, bread-making, massage, reflexology and even music.

"One of the musicians can even play the guitar with his teeth," Yasin said with pride.

"The clients learn and teach each other through the mentee-mentor system. The clients are able to find suitable jobs after they leave the centre."

Indeed, Yasin will never forget the pleasant surprise expressed by the KSU, Tan Sri Aziz, when he saw the centre being so well managed by a person who is blind. The KSU observed that less people were running away from the centre because of the good programmes that had been introduced by Yasin.

Some UMNO representatives were very impressed with the performance of Yasin. They saw that the place was very clean and tidy. The toilets and lighting were working properly and the sewage system was well maintained. They were delighted to see the clients playing football on the inter-centre level. It also pleased them to know that Yasin had set up the detoxification centre and that he had provided a place for the clients to take their urine test.

Thus, Yasin managed to persuade the UMNO visitors to replace the cheap washing-machines with three big and better-quality machines. He was also able to persuade YBhg. Tan Chai Ho, former Bandar Tun Razak Parliamentary representative, to provide three big laundry dryers. This has made it possible for the centre to secure laundry contracts.

Beaming with a broad smile, Yasin said, "Working with the drug dependents has been challenging and yet most satisfying. When I raise issues about the food, the sewage system, and so on, the contractors get angry with me. But when I see the clients are able to make it in life after leaving the centre, I'm so happy to know that my efforts have been worthwhile."

THE 2017 BUDGET - BENEFITS FOR THE ROOR AND THE DISABLED

By Ooi Hock Tiam

Editor's note: Ooi Hock Tiam is totally blind and he has been a lecturer at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang since 1991. He lectures on European History and International Relations.

Now here he is to comment on how the 2017 Budget can benefit the poor and the disabled:

The 2017 Budget was tabled in parliament by the Finance Minister and Prime Minister, YB Dato' Seri Najib, on October 21, 2016 (Friday) to the tune of RM260.8 billion. Out of this, RM214.8 billion has been allocated for management, RM46 billion for development and RM2 billion for emergency.

Below are the salient points of the Budget which, in my opinion, will be of major concern to the poor and the disabled.

1. Education:

The provisions are as follows:

- 1.1 RM100 for students with a parental income below RM3,000 monthly will be maintained.
- 1.2 RM250 book vouchers for university students will be provided. These vouchers can be converted into cash so that students can buy other items besides books.
- 1.3 15% discount will be given to students who clear their study loans with the National Educational Loan Fund within a year.
- 1.4 RM340 million has been allocated for teachers to purchase supportive equipment such as computers.

2. Welfare:

The provisions include:

- 2.1 RM424 million will be allocated for senior citizens and for poor children. This takes into consideration the monthly allowance of RM300 to the elderly and RM450 for families with school-children. These two allocations have been around for the past several years.
- 2.2 RM535 million has been allocated for the disabled. This takes into consideration the employment incentive allowance, i.e. Elaun Pekerja Cacat (EPC) of RM350 per month and the monthly allowance of RM300 for those who are bedridden. These allowances have also been around for the past several years without any major increment. In fact, the welfare department has made it even harder for the disabled to apply for the allowance.

3. Housing:

Provisions are:

- 3.1 RM10,000 houses will be built by the National Housing Agency for rental by urban workers who have yet to qualify for the purchase of their own houses.
- 3.2 5,000 houses will be built by the National Housing Agency with a Government subsidy of RM20,000 for each unit. This is to enable the poor to buy houses which are below the market value.
- 3.3 The housing loan for civil servants will be increased from RM200,000 to RM750,000 and from RM120,000 to RM200,000. The objective is to enable Government servants to purchase better-quality houses.

4. Taxation:

The provisions include:

- 4.1 RM1,000 relief for parents who send their children for pre-school education.
- 4.2 RM1,000 relief for parents to purchase baby paraphernalia.
- 4.3 RM2,500 relief for computers, internet, books, papers and magazines.

4.4 Products used by the disabled will be exempted from the 6% Goods and Sales Tax, i.e. GST.

The relief for broadband services and the exemption from GST will be very helpful to most of the blind users, many of whom are dependent on the internet nowadays.

5. Finance:

The main provision in this section is the Bantuan Rakyat Satu Malaysia (BRIM) which has been increased. Those who are currently receiving RM350, RM450 and so on will be given a RM50 increase. Those who are currently receiving RM1,000 will be given RM1,200.

6. Salaries:

All civil servants will be receiving RM500 while all pensioners will be given RM250 as a one-off payment in January 2017. Previously, civil servants were given either a half-month or one-month bonus.

Comments:

It looks like the allocation for the welfare department has been somewhat reduced. Previously, about RM2 billion had been allocated for the Welfare Department. In recent years, it has been difficult for the disabled to apply for the Employment Incentive Allowance (Elaun Pekerja Cacat). The reduction in the allocation for the Welfare Department will make it even more difficult for the Welfare Department to provide financial assistance for the disabled.

Moreover, with the implementation of the Goods and Sales Tax (or GST) together with the reduced allocation to the Welfare Department and with the inflationary trend, it will certainly be more difficult and challenging for the disabled and the poor to cope with everyday living.

It is my earnest hope that there will be greater consideration for the poor and the disabled in the 2018 Budget.

THE STAR REUNITES BLIND DECRURER WITH KINDIE TEACHER

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Aticles from the Star

04th November 2016

GEORGE TOWN: Ooi Hock Tiam was born blind but has gone on to conquer his disability and become a lecturer in European history at a top Malaysian university. But he still remembers his kindergarten teacher who mentored him 48 years ago – and wants to thank her.

Search as he may, Ooi, 54, cannot find Goh Lay Khim, who spent a few months as a kindergarten teacher in St Nicholas Home for the Blind in 1968.

"I was six years old. I only knew Hokkien. All the other teachers were stern and would only use English or Malay so I didn't know what they were saying.

"Goh comforted me, spoke Hokkien and was the first person to teach me English and Braille."

Ooi has been lecturing in history to hundreds of humanities students in Universiti Sains Malaysia since 1990, and not a day goes by without him silently thanking Goh for being patient with him when he was a scared little blind boy.

How he adapts to a sighted world is evident in his office, where he has a private library of Braille and audio books, a computer that reads out students' assignments for him to mark and a scanner with optical character recognition. He is also adept at using iPhone's special functions for the visually impaired.

"She must be almost 70 now. I have spent years searching for her. She is mentioned in the 1968 St Nicholas annual report but there are no more details."

He knew Goh married in 1974 to one Dr Ng, and invited folks from St Nicholas Home to her wedding dinner but he was too young to attend.

"Appealing through The Star is my last resort. I pray she is alive and hope at least her friends and family will read this and get in touch."

Anyone with information on Goh can e-mail Ooi at ooihocktiam@gmail. com.

Kindie teacher and ex-blind student reconnect after 48 years

05th November 2016

GEORGE TOWN: When friends told Goh Lay Khim about her former kindergarten student who spent years searching for her, she immediately e-mailed Ooi Hock Tiam who is now a lecturer in European history at a university here.

The 68-year-old said that she was surprised and almost moved to tears when she read the article in The Star about Ooi's search for her; the friends had sent her screenshots of the heartwarming story.

She said that he was just six years old when she taught him and he was born blind.

"For him to still remember me so vividly, so clearly ... it's wonderful.

"I'm very honoured," she said yesterday.

Goh said she was really happy to learn that Ooi was doing so well, adding that he obviously has great determination to succeed in life.

She has spoken with him and said their chat was "just wonderful". They intend to meet up soon.

"I will go to Penang with my children to meet him next Friday," said Goh who lives in Kuala Lumpur.

Ooi, 54, said he phoned Goh after reading her e-mail yesterday.

"She was almost crying over the phone, she was so touched."

"I'm very happy because I tried so many ways to find her, including social media platforms and going to the St Nicholas Home for the Blind, but to no avail."

Finally, the university lecturer, made an appeal through The Star.

According to him, he wanted to find her because "she's the first teacher in my life".

"Her motherly guidance helped make me what I am today. She was patient and sweet."

Teary-eyed reunion for student and teacher

12nd November 2016



GEORGE TOWN: Hugs, noisy chatter and laughter were the order of the day when lecturer Ooi Hock Tiam met up with his kindergarten teacher Goh Lay Khim after 48 years.

Goh, 68, taught Ooi, 54, for a few months at St Nicholas Home for the Blind in 1968. He was born blind.

"You still look almost the same! Your features are still there on a closer look. But I have aged!" she said.

When told that Ooi has a Master's in European History and is currently teaching at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Goh became teary-eyed.

"Congratulations! I am so proud of you. Glad to know that you are doing well," she said, before giving Ooi a pat on the back.

She was also elated when she found out that Ooi is now happily married to Wong Kit Yeng, who was not present at the reunion yesterday.

After embracing each other, Goh also introduced Ooi to her husband Dr Ng Chee Thong, 75, son Kevin Ng, 41, and daughter-in-law Tivien Gan, 37, during the meeting at Ooi's office in USM.

Ooi had tried many ways to locate Goh, including using social media platforms and going to St Nicholas Home, but to no avail.

He made an appeal through The Star on Nov 3, and his wish was immediately granted the following day when friends told Goh that her former student was looking for her.

She immediately e-mailed Ooi after that.

Goh, who is now staying with her children in Ara Damansara, Petaling Jaya, left St Nicholas Home in 1968 and went on to become a nurse until her retirement.

She said she was quite surprised that Ooi still remembers her.

"I paid special attention to him because he was always quiet and did not participate during lessons in class. "I was a bit worried that he could not cope because he didn't understand Malay and English then.

"He could not communicate freely as he only understood Hokkien," said Goh, who presented Ooi with a chocolate brownie cake during their meeting.

Ooi also bought chocolates and cookies for Goh's granddaughter Krysta Yee, who lives in Singapore.

The 10-year-old girl, who could not make the trip, was fascinated by the story about her grandmother and Ooi, which she read online.

After several minutes at the office in USM, they adjourned to St Nicholas Home in Jalan Bagan Jermal, where both Ooi and Goh reminisced about the past.

They even met Catherine Cheong, who was a senior assistant at the home in 1968.

At the classroom where Ooi had studied in 1968, which had since been turned into a men's dormitory, Goh said: "I still remember the students used to line up here before being led to the dining area. Thank you The Star for bringing us together after so many years."

NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY

The Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) took the opportunity to recognise its hardworking and committed volunteers at the Volunteer Appreciation Day function on August 13, 2016. Tan Sri Datuk Seri Dr. M. Kayveas, President of The People's Progressive Party /Parti Progresif Penduduk Malaysia(myPPP), was the guest of honour at the function.

In her speech, Prof. Dato' Dr. Veera Ramani, the deputy president of MAB, said that the involvement of volunteers in MAB goes back to the very early years when the Association was founded in 1951 as a non-governmental organisation.

At the beginning, members of the general public were invited to become members of the organisation and they had to elect from amongst themselves members to the main committee to run the organisation on a voluntary basis.

Subsequently, while paid manpower was required to manage and run the new services like the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in 1953, the Kinta Valley Workshop in 1956, and the Braille Library in 1959, they had to be complemented by the voluntary manpower in teaching various courses such as cooking, mobility, swimming and music and many readers for the Braille Voluntary Transcribing Service at the library.

With the setting up of the Welfare Unit in 1997 and the clubs in 1998, more volunteers were needed to help in the welfare and social activities for the blind such as home and hospital visits, guiding the blind on excursions and trips, personal reading, counselling, tandem-riding, line-dancing, singing, playing the harmonica, and so on.

She concluded by saying that while voluntary manpower had helped to save MAB from a heavy burden of unaffordable costs, the voluntary service is a great two-way affair - the blind benefit by having their needs met physically. At the same time, the volunteers are also able to benefit by gaining a sense of happiness and love in rendering their services from the heart.

MAB Recognises Its Outstanding Volunteers:

About 100 volunteers were given certificates of appreciation at the Volunteer Appreciation Day function on August 13, 2016. Six organisations were also recognised for providing voluntary services to MAB - they were the Sai Baba Centre of SS3, the Sai Baba Centre of Bangsar, the Standard Chartered Bank, Maybank and the CIMB Foundation.

Citations were read out for the six outstanding volunteers as follows:

1. Mohd. Daud bin Abdul Ghani:

He has rendered voluntary services to MAB for about 20 years. He first got involved with the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) and later with the tandem-riding club. He has indeed been a fervent supporter and ever ready to serve as a volunteer for the outdoor activities organised for the blind.

In 2006 he helped in the tandem-riding expedition to Langkawi in Kedah, in 2007 he helped in the arduous ten-day climb of Gunong Tahan in Pahang, and in December 2015 he again provided assistance and support for the tandem-riding expedition to Taman Negara in Pahang.

Mohd. Daud is truly well loved by the blind because besides riding, climbing mountains, or walking through the jungle with the blind, he shows genuine concern and pays attention to the personal needs of the blind in the course of carrying out the activities. He even spends his own money to ensure that the blind participants do not go hungry.

Thank you, En. Mohd. Daud.

2. Edward Solomon:

He has rendered voluntary services to MAB for about 20 years. He first served in the MAB H.T. Ong Library doing dictation reading for the blind braillists in order to produce Braille books for the library.

He later served in the Outreach Care and Elderly Blind programmes of MAB His readiness and willing assistance given whenever called upon by the blind to help in hospital visits, shopping, educational excursions, exploratory walks and other social activities has truly endeared him in the hearts of the blind as a volunteer and friend.

Thank you, Mr. Edward Solomon.

3. Lee Poh Tee:

She has rendered voluntary services to MAB for about 20 years. She started and continues to serve in the MAB H.T. Ong Library where she is in charge of the Chinese audio-books and she helps with the loan of these books to the blind users of the library.

In addition, she also provides voluntary services in the Elderly Blind Club, particularly in making available transport for many of the outings, excursions and various social functions. She is also actively involved in the line-dancing programme for the blind and she provides transport whenever needed.

Thank you, Mdm. Lee Poh Tee.

4. Selvarani Balaguru:

She has been rendering voluntary services to MAB for about 20 years. She is especially active in the Elderly Blind Club where she has been serving as the Treasurer for many years.

In addition, she has been helping with the organising of various social activities such as the gatherings and excursions. On many occasions, she has helped in successfully soliciting for sponsorships and financial support for the activities of the club.

Thank you, Mdm. Selvarani.

5. Dr. Liu Ban Hong:

He has been rendering voluntary services to MAB for about ten years. He helped to set up the Joyful Choir of the Blind (JCB) and he has devoted much of his precious time in training the choir of blind persons to be of high standard and on par with other choirs in the country.

Dr. Liu has made it possible for the JCB to perform at many prestigious events throughout the country (Including Sabah and Sarawak) and even internationally such as in Singapore. With his support the choir has produced their very own CD of favourite songs and a DVD of their performance, both of which have received enthusiastic response from the general public in terms of sales.

Dr. Liu has truly given the blind the opportunity to hone their skills in choir singing and to enjoy the artistic experience of a lifetime.

Thank you, Dr. Liu Ban Hong.

6. Jenny Chan:

She has rendered voluntary services to MAB for about ten years. She has dedicated much of her time and energy in training the blind to perform all kinds of dances such as the Waltz, the Cha Cha, the Twist and Raven the very difficult Gangnam style dance from South Korea. To encourage the blind in developing their dancing skills, she has found opportunities for them to perform at various social events and functions and to socialise with other line-dancing enthusiasts.

It is the common assumption that blind people cannot learn dancing because they cannot see. However, Jenny Chan has proved that with training, the blind can indeed learn to dance. She has certainly provided the blind with the opportunity of a lifetime to participate in and enjoy the artistic experience of dancing.

Thank you, Mdm. Jenny Chan.

A Day in the Dark Night World Sight Day Concert In Aid of NCBM:

About 1,000 people were in attendance at the Day in the Dark Night World Sight day Concert held at the Megastar Arena, Jalan Kuchai Lama, Kuala Lumpur on Saturday, October 8, 2016. The ticket prices ranged from RM108 to RM588.

Performing at the concert were the stars from Taiwan - Hsiao Huang Chi (blind) and the two blind sisters, Chang Yu Hsia and Chang Yu Ling as well as the blind singer from Singapore, Kelvin Tan.

There were also three sighted singers from Malaysia and they were Candy Cheah Wan Ting, Athena Beh and Jovi Cheng.

Our very own blind singers, Lim Ah Pen and Foong Poh Leng, also took part in the concert.

The event was organised by NCBM in collaboration with Creative Event Sdn. Bhd. and Auto World Marketing Sdn. Bhd.

The Suara Warna Concert In Aid Of MAB and the Malaysian Blind Sports Association (MBSA):

The Suara Warna Concert was held at the P.J. Civic Centre on Friday, October 21, 2016.

MBSA President, (Dr) S. Radha Krishnan, said that efforts had been made to highlight the talents of the visually challenged community in the country. Thus, the formation of a musical band, Suara Warna, was indeed a dream come true.

"The blind are talented in singing and playing music. We want to show their skills to the public and at the same time they can earn some money from their performance."

MBSA Fund-Raising Chairman, Dr. N. R. Nambiar, said, "The event will also coincide with the 94th birthday of Tan Sri Dr. L. Krishnan, who is the patron of MBSA.

In the future, MBSA plans to have a training centre for blind persons interested in singing and making music.

In The Star, Majorie Chiew said that the members of the Suara Warna band were "making meaningful music". She went on to highlight some of the members.

Raman:

When hell broke loose in the pub due to the rowdy crowds, blind musician, Ragu Raman, would be whisked to safety.

"Bouncers would lift me up and carry me out the backdoor," says a bemused Raman, 56, whose real name is Raman Nagapan.

"I didn't feel like a Maharaja ... I feared for my life!" adds Raman, who has been in the music industry for 33 years.

Sometimes he fled without his keyboard. Raman worked as a telephonist 8 years before he was retrenched. In 1988 he sang and performed in the pubs around Kuala Lumpur for a year. He left the risky pubs scene as he felt unnerved when fights broke out and patrons used helmets to thrash each other up.

In 1989 Raman headed to Singapore where he performed at the Indian Association of Singapore and the Ceylon Sports Club. After 8 years, he returned to Malaysia.

Born blind, he had a passion for music and within a few months, he learned to play and master the keyboard and the harmonium. He taught 50 students to play the harmonium which is a dying skill, according to Raman. Nowadays he still makes some house calls to teach students how to play the instrument.

Raman has a flair for composing Indian classical music. "My late wife, a teacher, used to read Tamil poetry and create song lyrics for me," said Raman. "She passed away from chronic respiratory failure 15 years ago."

"Sometimes I have to travel 50 kilometres to ask for help to read Tamil lyrics. That way I can write them out in Braille and then compose songs," says Raman, who lives in Desa Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

A versatile singer, Raman can sing in six languages (Tamil, Hindi, Malayalam, Telegu, Malay and English) and has received praise and awards in the music industry locally and abroad.

Muhamad Azwan:

National Paralympic athlete, Muhamad Azwan Muhamad Shakri, 31, of Jalan Loke Yew, Kuala Lumpur, loves to sing and the name of his band is Redeem. He is a masseur but he also busks for a living.

"We busk near Sogo, Kuala Lumpur mostly on week-ends. In the past, busking was not permitted but three years ago City Hall gave us an annual permit for busking," says the father of two girls aged 4 and 9. His wife, Kairul

Anisa, who is also visually impaired, sings with his band. They perform Rock Music, Dandut and Balada.

Mazwan dreams big. "Some day if I have the chance, I hope to go busking in Los Angeles".

Lim Ah Pen:

Aged 52, Lim Ah Pen of Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur started singing 18 years ago. He sings Cantonese and Mandarin songs and he is a fan of the Hong Kong singer-actor, Andy Lau. His repertoire includes songs by Harlem Yu, the late Teresa Teng, Sam Hui and Beyond.

"Singing makes me cheerful and chases away the blues," muses Lim.

Manoghayathiri:

M. Manoghayathiri, 30, also loves singing. She loves Tamil songs and she is a huge fan of K.S. Chitra, Indian playback singer and Anuradha Sriram, Indian Carnatic and playback singer.

"I used to sing at Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) functions and prior to that in school and university," says the assistant Welfare officer of MAB.

Also performing at the concert was Godfrey Ooi, former Deputy Executive Director of MAB, singing and strumming his guitar. After retirement in 2013, he has been busking with friends and sharing his music with people.

"Music is my passion. My guitar is like my second wife," quips Ooi.

REMEMBERING LEE AH KOW, FIRST PRESIDENT OF SBM

by Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Editor's note: Lee Ah Kow passed away on September 3, 2016 at the age of 77. It was Lee Ah Kow who had helped in the founding of the first organisation of the blind in Malaysia in 1964, then known as the Selangor Society of the Blind (SSB). Subsequently, the organisation was expanded in the 1970's and became known as the Society of the Blind in West Malaysia (SBWM). Eventually, it spread its wings to Sabah and Sarawak and became known as the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) in the 1980's.

Here is his story:

Mr. Lee Ah Kow was born on 3 June, 1939 in Penang. While studying in Form 6 at St. Xavier's Institution, he developed vision problems which eventually left him totally blind.

Lee Ah Kow was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in 1961 where he took up Braille and stenography classes under the tutelage of Edward Tan, himself a vision-impaired instructor, and typing lessons under Cik Zabidah. To achieve the required speed in taking down dictation and to be able to reproduce the texts on the typewriter in order to be a qualified stenographer, Lee Ah Kow attended regular evening classes with sighted people at the Goon Institute in downtown Kuala Lumpur.

After completing the course in 1973 with a convincing pass, he applied to several Companies and Departments for employment. The Attorney General's Chambers took him in as a stenographer. Lee Ah Kow worked there until his retirement in 1994 at the age of 55.

Lee Ah Kow was married to Susan Yew, herself a stenographer who worked in the Federal Administration and she was the first Secretary of the Selangor Society of the Blind from 1964 till the early 1970's. They had a son, Abel Lee Cheng Ean.

Why the Selangor Society of the Blind was Formed:

When the first batch of office-bearers and administrators in the Malayan Association for the Blind (MAB) made way for new faces in the early 1960's, Major D. R. Bridges, the founder and administrator of MAB and Mrs. Teele, the General Secretary, were replaced by Mr. Navaretnam and Mrs. H.L. Lee respectively. They became very powerful figures in MAB but they had very little empathy for the blind. They were convinced that whatever they did was for the good of the blind, to the extent that they began practising the "Rule the Blind" policy.

For example, if MAB found a job and offered it to a blind person irrespective of how low the pay was, the person was expected to accept it. If he or she turned it down, no more job opportunity would be given to that person. H.L. Lee even went as far as to dictate that Braille watches (which were being sold at a subsidised price by MAB) only be sold to the blind who were working in the offices.

At that time, MAB was operating a very successful sheltered workshop at the Kinta Valley in Ipoh where the BVI male workers were producing baskets of various descriptions, chain-fencing and wooden furniture, which were in good demand. At the height of its success between 1962 and 1965, nearly 50 BVI workers were in employment. They even made contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF).

It was said that the success of the Kinta Valley Workshop had been chiefly attributed to the efforts of Mr. Cheah, the sighted Manager who, apart from receiving a salary, was allowed to get commissions on the contracts that he brought in.

Unfortunately, the new management at the MAB headquarters (which included Navaretnam and H.L. Lee) were not in favour of the policy on commissions and they had it resinded. Thus, having lost the financial motivation, Cheah's interest in the venture also faded and so the contracts began to dwindle drastically.

Fortunately, in the early 1960's, factories and assembly plants were springing up in Petaling Jaya and Shah Alam and cheap labour was in great demand. With declining sales and the prospect of the Kinta Valley Workshop having to close down, the MAB Management turned their attention on finding factory work for the BVI's regardless of the low pay.

One of the workers at the workshop, Peter Wong Siang Han (who was married to Agnes Lim with two children) was found employment in one of these factories. As the pay offered to him by that factory was insufficient to sustain his family, he declined to accept the job as he wanted something that was better-paying. Because he dared to turn down the job offer thereby going against MAB's order, Peter was expelled from the workshop and further assistance was denied to him.

Fortunately for him, Mary Poon and Elizabeth Hoe who were working as Braillists in the Braille Publishing Unit at Jalan Batu (now Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman) that had been started by the Welfare Department under Major D.R. Bridges, helped Peter and his family to ride over the tough times until he found suitable employment with the help of a church-goer. The Braille Publishing Unit later came under the control of MAB but the three braillists (which included David Kathan Pillai) remained on the Government pay-roll.

In the face of such humiliating treatment and unfair policies, and in need of a platform to voice their views on matters affecting the welfare of the blind and to improve their standing in society, a group of blind persons got together to discuss the formation of an organisation of the blind. A Pro-tem Committee comprising seven persons was thus formed, and being the best educated BVI person at the time, Lee Ah Kow was chosen to be its chairman. They then drew up the constitution and preparations were made for the inauguration of the new organisation.

When news reached H.L. Lee concerning the intent of the BVI's, she was very furious and she railed against the group for their ingratitude to MAB which had taken care of blind people's needs from cradle to grave. She maintained that an organisation of the blind would only benefit a certain group of people but her real fear was that the public might switch their support to the blind movement instead of MAB. Thus, she sent an envoy to persuade the group to drop the idea of forming their own organisation. When that failed, H.L. Lee went as far as to send an assistant to the Registrar of Societies to block the registration.

Nevertheless, despite the intense opposition and unfriendly acts against those who publicly supported the formation, the inaugural meeting of SSB took place on 1 March, 1964 and it was attended by 23 members. In order to allay the fears of MAB, the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) was chosen as the venue and Tuan Haji Mustapha Albakri, the Chairman of MAB, was invited to officiate at the inauguration.

In his speech, Tuan Haji Albakri appeared neither to be against nor to be supportive of SSB. Nonetheless, he did say that "Any organisation that is not under the wings of MAB would not exist for long". He said that was one of his misgivings.

Lee Ah Kow was elected as the first president of SSB and he promptly took steps to have the organisation registered. Thankfully, the application for registration was approved without much difficulties. The registered address of SSB was

8C Jalan Thambapillai, Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, which was the residence of three blind ladies, Anne Toh, Margaret Yeo and Susan Yew. In fact, their residence was used for most of the functions of SSB until they moved away to Petaling Jaya and Sungai Way in the early 1970's.

However, opposition from H.L. Lee still continued. In fact, she went out of her way to make life miserable for the three braillists who were serving on the Management Committee of SSB. Fortunately, things began to change slowly and for the better when Justice H.T. Ong, the Federal Judge, took over the chairmanship of MAB from Albakri. Justice H.T. Ong saw the positive side of things and he was said to have advised H.L. Lee and her team to leave SSB alone as long as it did not do any unlawful things. In fact, he considered the formation of SSB to be complementing the efforts of MAB to help the BVI's, which was in accordance with one of the objectives of the Constitution of SSB. Justice Ong even attended several anniversary dinners of SSB and he made donations to the organisation.

Soon after SSB was formed in 1964, Lee Ah Kow was invited to attend the inaugural meetings of the International Federation of the Blind in New York and in Phoenix, Arizona in the U.S.A., and SSB became a Chartered Member. Besides organising social events and excursions, SSB also conducted English and Chinese classes and held some viewpoint gatherings in order to get feedback from members for the purposes of leadership training.

Did SSB Achieve Its Goals?

Regretfully, before SSB could gain public recognition and respect, controversies and dissatisfaction had crept in. Around 1968, some members felt that the membership of SSB was too restrictive and that it was time for the organisation to be expanded to other parts of the country in order to attract more members. However, Lee Ah Kow did not subscribe to the idea of expanding SSB as he felt that there was the lack of quality leaders.

Consequently, several members decided to remain inactive while one or two of them even resigned, one of whom was David Kathan Pillai, the Vice President. Therefore, it can be said that between 1969 and 1971, SSB was at its low ebb. Then in mid-1971, a group of members voted Ivan Ho into the Presidency with the express aim of expanding the organisation into other parts of the country and to introduce some services that could benefit the members.

Prior to the introduction of the Integrated Education Programme pioneered by St. Nicholas' School in 1961 and adopted by the Ministry of Education soon after, blind people had no opportunity to acquire academic qualifications beyond Standard six. As such, it was really not easy to run an advocacy organisation which was the hope and aspiration of Lee Ah Kow.

Indeed, there were no qualified leaders at the time in order to bring the organisation to the next level. Thus, with a feeling of disappointment at not being able to achieve his dream, and being suspicious of colleagues around him trying to undermine his efforts, Lee Ah Kow resigned from SSB soon after 1971 elections and he withdrew completely from the blindness scene.

In spite of what had happened, nonetheless, Lee Ah Kow will be remembered for having been the motivating force as he spearheaded the formation of the first organisation of the blind in Malaysia. His efforts had truly helped to raise a new sense of hope among the blind for a brighter future in which their aspirations could be fulfilled.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION FOR THE BLIND

Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong

Editor's note: Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong has been vision-impaired from a young age and he is one of the education achievers among the blind. He obtained his PhD. In Economics from Universiti Malaya and was a lecturer in Economics at the university for about 20 years.

Since retirement, he loves to spend his time observing how the blind in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur live and work. In fact, he has produced a number of articles on his observations for NCBM Outreach.

This time, however, he is sharing his views on the financial inclusion of the blind. Here it is:

According to a popular Chinese idiom, "Money isn't everything; but without money, you have nothing".

Indeed, from the economic point of view, money does perform an important service. After all, money is an important medium of exchange which greatly facilitates trade. Without it, today's modern economy will certainly come to an immediate standstill.

Besides being a medium of exchange, money can also be used to buy "near money", i.e. financial assets which can yield additional benefits and which can be quickly converted into money again. Examples of "near money" are the fixed deposits in a bank which yield interest, unit trusts and shares which yield dividends, endowment policies which yield financial protection, and bonds which yield periodic returns.

Furthermore, money can be converted into financial services which allow one to use future income that has not yet been earned or realised. For instance, you could take a bank loan to purchase a house, or use your credit card to purchase goods in a departmental store, or take a student loan to further your studies, and so on.

In Malaysia, the money issued by Bank Negara is quite easily recognisable by the blind. This is because the paper currency does come in different sizes and so do the coins although the sizes of both paper money and coins have been somewhat reduced in recent years. Besides their size, the new RM1 and RM5 notes are quite easily distinguishable as they are made of polymer. As for the higher denomination notes of RM10, RM20 and RM50, they are still made of cotton paper. In fact, the higher the denomination, the bigger will be their size so that the blind can quite easily identify them by comparing their widths or lengths.

Recently, Bank Negara issued a small currency measuring card for circulation to the blind Free of Charge. The purpose of the measuring card is to help the blind in identifying the denomination of notes, especially during transaction with a shop-keeper, hawker or restaurant owner. We are grateful to Bank Negara for its effort in bringing about the financial inclusion of the blind which practically already exists with the differentiation in size of the currency notes and coins.

However, the talking automated teller machine is another matter to be considered; the ATM machines in Malaysia do not have the "talking" facility. Despite this, the banks are allowed to issue their blind customers with the ATM card which they still find to be rather useful. With the assistance of family members or trusted friends, they can still make use of the ATM card to withdraw their money from the machine. Some of the vision-impaired persons who are totally blind can even manage the ATM machine on their own by memorising the steps involved.

Currently, the most blind-friendly service provided by the bank is the phone-banking service. Just by using the telephone, the blind are able to find out details of their savings and fixed deposits as well as their unit trust and credit card accounts. They can also transfer funds between accounts and they can make bill payments through the phone.

The next most friendly banking service for the blind is internet banking. Nowadays, many of the educated blind in Malaysia do own a computer and even a smartphone equipped with talking software. With the computer, the blind are able to access the internet banking services without much difficulty

and, in fact, many more banking services are now available on the internet such as transferring funds from one's own account into someone else's account, making online purchases, etc.

Nonetheless, it is not all plain sailing concerning financial inclusion for the blind in Malaysia. With regards to credit cards, for instance, there seems to be some discrimination against the blind when they make application for the card at the counter. Some bank managers just simply assume that the blind are not capable of using the ATM card and that it is, therefore, too risky to let them hold the card themselves. They do not understand that the blind have the capability of managing the card by themselves and that they are able to get the assistance of sighted persons to help them in using the ATM machine.

Ironically, if a blind person applies for the ATM card online, he is very likely to receive the card through the post. This is probably because the bank does not realise that the internet applicant is a blind person. Again, they probably think that the blind are not capable of using the internet.

However, a very clear case of discrimination perpetually faced by the blind is in the purchasing of medical or life insurance policies. The blind are required to make higher premium payments for such insurance policies because of the assumption that they are much more liable to accidents than sighted people.

Even with regards to the currency notes, which used to be much more clearly differentiated in size in the old days, Bank Negara was thinking of issuing all currency notes of the same size during the 1980's. Fortunately, Mr. John Kim, who was the President of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) at the time, got wind of the news and he immediately contacted the bank authorities to let them know of the concerns facing the blind if they should implement the idea of the one-sized currency note. Consequently, Bank Negara called for a meeting with SBM and they eventually agreed to retain the idea of differentiating the sizes of the notes although they would be reduced in scale.

Then in the 1990's, however, Bank Negara was again in the process of issuing new currency notes as well as coins. This time they did not forget the blind - representatives from the Society of the Blind in Malaysia, Malaysian

Association for the Blind, and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia were called for a meeting. Concern was expressed by the representatives with regards to the RM20 note - the blind would have difficulty in identifying the RM20 note in view of the very small difference in size in comparison with the other notes.

According to Bank Negara, however, they had received positive response from the general public in favour of producing the RM20 note and they would, therefore, like to go ahead with the idea of issuing the note. As a concession, nonetheless, they would be willing to see what could be done to make it easier for the blind to use the RM20 note. Hence, after some deliberation, it was agreed that it could still be helpful to the blind if at least the width of the RM20 note and RM50 note could be differentiated. Thus, with the RM20 note now in circulation along with the other currency notes, it does pose a problem for blind users - they would prefer to get rid of their RM20 notes as soon as possible or they would even avoid them altogether if they could.

As for the new coins, Bank Negara also agreed to retain the idea of differentiating their sizes while reducing their measurements in scale. There would also be other signs of differentiation around the edge of the coins. For example, there would be some grooves around the edge of the 50 sen coin. However, with the old coins still to be in circulation for several years more until they are finally completely withdrawn, the blind do face some difficulties in identifying the coins. For instance, the new 50-sen coin feels almost like the old 20 sen coin because their sizes are almost the same. However, the new 50 sen can ultimately be identified by the blind person if he feels carefully around the edge of the coin.

Indeed, the efforts of SBM and the other organisations serving the blind as well as the willingness of the banking authorities to address our concerns are deeply appreciated. As a result of their efforts, the blind in Malaysia are very fortunate today to be able to continue using different-sized notes and coins. This really facilitates their dealings in their daily business transactions.

And yet another problem facing the blind person in Malaysia is when he wants to purchase and to possess his own car. Regulatory requirements need to be complied with in order for someone to be issued with a driving licence before he can obtain a car loan or purchase a car insurance policy. Because of this, there is no way for a blind person to have his own car.

And what about the idea of a cashless society? Apparently, the western countries are moving fast towards such a society in which payments are only made electronically either by card or through the internet. I cannot imagine how this will facilitate business dealings at the personal level in the shops, the restaurants and the Pasar Malam. For blind persons, they will face great difficulty in earning a living from busking and tissue-selling. In fact, a completely cashless society does not seem to be really practical at all.

As has been said by Bill Clinton, former president of the U.S.A., "People must have many choices to be happy". In this context, the implementation of the cashless society would bring about the exclusion of the blind as they will no longer have the choice to use the good old user-friendly cash and they would certainly be unhappy.

Personally, therefore, I am not in favour of the cashless society as I feel that it will definitely bring about the financial exclusion of the blind. Moreover, I truly love the touch of paper or even polymer money in the palm of my hands as well as the lovely sound of the coins jingling in my pocket!

by Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Editor's note: This paper was presented at the National Leadership Seminar organised by the Society of the Blind in Malaysia in 2015.

1. Who or What is a Global Leader?

To my mind, a global leader is someone who is able to represent his country effectively to the outside world. In the case of the blind, this is someone who can represent the blindness community in his country and he may be a blind or sighted person.

2. Three Important Abilities of a Leader:

The three important abilities are Communication, observation and delivery, I.e. COD in short.

2.1 Ability to Communicate:

Nowadays, there are actually three ways to communicate with one another. They are face to face communication on the personal level, voice communication by using a number of different devices (including the telephone, Skype and What's App), or multi-media communication (which involves using not only the voice but other means as well such as text-messaging and video-conferencing).

Indeed, the youth in this day and age really do love to engage in multi-media communication. Therefore, in order for a blind leader to be effective, he should be able to be adept at using multi-media communication besides the conventional means of communication. Through communication, one is able to get so much knowledge and information; but not only that, one also gets to know what other people are talking about so that one will be able to make a sensible contribution when one is involved in a conversation.

2.2 Ability to Observe:

More important than talking, however, is the ability to observe and learn by just simply listening. When communicating, one must be able to analyse ideas and situations so that he can put together and synthesise new plans and proposals for practical implementation in our country.

2.3 Ability to Deliver:

Indeed, a good and effective leader is one who will not just listen and learn but he will ultimately dedicate himself to delivering of the goods. He does not just simply rest on his laurels and enjoy life after returning from a learning or field study trip. He will make recommendations, set goals and work at achieving the goals for the organisation or community that he represents.

3. Characteristics of a Good Leader:

Now what are the characteristics of a good leader?

3.1 A Motivational and Inspirational Leader:

Firstly, one should know what is the difference between a leader and a manager. Well, the manager is like a commander - he loves to order people about and tell them what to do. As for the leader, he does not just direct and command others but he strives to lead by example. By his acts and his deeds, the leader will be able to motivate and inspire other people to follow him.

A good leader understands that while there are rules and laws to be followed, one does need to exercise flexibility when implementing the rules. It is the common assumption that rules are made in order to control people; as for the good leader, he understands that the rules are there in order to facilitate and make things run smoothly. One need not follow the rules to the letter but in spirit.

A very good example from history is Alexander the Great of Macedonia. He was able to inspire his soldiers because he did not just simply tell his soldiers what to do. When he led his army into battle, he himself went into the thick of the fighting and nearly lost his life several times. But that was how he was able to inspire his soldiers so that they won battle after battle.

Another good example again from history is Mustapha Ataturk. He was sent by the sultan to put down the rebels. However, instead of arresting the rebels, he treated them with kindness and was thus able to inspire and rally them to his cause, i.e. to take over the country of Turkey from the sultan.

3.2 Delegating Responsibilities:

The second characteristic of a good leader is his ability to delegate and share responsibilities with his followers. A good leader understands that no matter how qualified or skillful he is, he will not try to do everything by himself.

For example, the director of a company or the president of an organisation will not succeed in his undertakings if he does not delegate responsibilities to his underlings, i.e. the staff and his followers.

Therefore, there is very good reason why committees are set up. They act as the channels through which the responsibilities are shared out. The chairmen of the committees will, in turn, mete out duties and tasks to its members. In this way, there is a shared effort in achieving the goals of the company or organisation.

3.3 Being Pro-active:

The third characteristic of a good leader is one who is pro-active. Such a leader will look upon problems as challenges and opportunities. He will not allow himself to be overcome by frustration but will instead see how the difficulty can best be solved.

For example, Alexander Graham Bell, who was married to a deaf girl, did not allow his difficulty in communicating with his wife to frustrate him. Instead, he came up with the invention of the telephone so that people could have better communication with one another.

People used to think that going to the moon was an impossibility. However, someone took the opportunity to work on the idea and eventually a man has been able to step on the moon. Now people think it is impossible to go to Mars, but there are others who are dreaming of making this possible. Perhaps some day they may succeed.

Come back to our own home in Malaysia and there was a time when nobody thought that the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) would come into being. There were people who used to think that the blind were incapable of running an organisation. They said that the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) could do everything for the blind. Ultimately, the blind have proved them wrong by setting up their own organisation of the blind initially known as the Selangor Society of the Blind (SSB). Now the organisation has lasted for more than fifty years since its establishment in 1964 and the organisation is run by the blind themselves

3.4 Compassion and Sensitivity:

The fourth characteristic of a good leader is one who has compassion and who is sensitive to the feelings of other people. He tries to bring out the good in other people instead of wanting to ridicule or bring shame to others.

For instance, the Japanese have a very good system whereby if a staff has done something wrong, he will be given a chance to find a way out with dignity and without shame. Instead of declaring in public of the wrong that has been committed by the person, the management of the company will talk to him in private to see how the matter can be resolved. In a Japanese company, they even take care of the needs of the families of personnel and staff.

I suppose that is why SBM also provides benefits for its members. It shows that by being caring, SBM is sensitive to the needs of its members.

In fact, there is the argument that SBM should care not only for members but for all the blind in the country. I am myself of the view that this is true - if SBM shows a caring spirit for all the blind, then more of the blind will be attracted to become members. This will truly strengthen SBM and it can indeed become the biggest organisation serving the blind in Malaysia.

Another example has to do with the execution of criminals. In many countries, such executions have been done away with and the criminals are sentenced to life imprisonment instead. However, in recent times, people have begun to think that life imprisonment is also rather cruel because it condemns the prisoner to a life of perpetual sleeping on the cold, hard floor. The current idea now is to put such prisoners to work or even to let them learn a trade so that they could be more productive rather than just waste their lives away sleeping and doing nothing. Becoming useful again to society will help them regain their sense of dignity and self-worth and hopefully this will ultimately turn them from their bad habit of crime.

3.5 Appreciative and Encouraging:

The fifth characteristic of a good leader is one who is appreciative and encouraging. Such leaders are not quick to blame and they will reward with praise-worthy words and incentives whenever the opportunity arises. Famous men like Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony were successful leaders because of this characteristic in their leadership.

3.6 Selfless and Uncorrupt:

The sixth characteristic of a good leader is that he is not greedy and he is not easily corrupted. He shows respect for other people and he is considerate of the views of others. He does not think that he is indispensable and he is, therefore, willing to prepare others for leadership. He is not afraid that his position as leader will be taken up by others eventually.

A very good example, of course, is Tun Hussein Onn, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia. Tun Hussein Onn was truly "Cekap, Amanah dan Bersih", which was the slogan of his successor, Tun Dr. Mahathir.

3.7 Good Sense of Humour:

This seventh characteristic may not be essential but it can help a leader in establishing friendly and harmonious relations with his followers. It certainly does help in releasing a lot of tension when such a leader is able to look on the bright side of life by projecting the positive spirit and outlook.

For instance, the director of a company had a meeting with his staff, which went on for the whole day and there were still many issues to be settled. He looked out the window and saw that it was getting dark. Then he looked at his staff and saw that they were all looking weary and drained of energy.

He said, "The sun is going to sleep and I'm sure you too want to go home and sleep. So let's all go back and after a good night's rest, we'll have fresh ideas and solutions."

His words eased the tension in the room with some laughter.

4. Conclusion:

Socrates said, "Change is focussing energy not on fighting the old but on building the new".

Charles Chaplain said, "You need power only if you want to do something harmful. Otherwise love is enough to get everything done".

Indeed, a good leader is someone who is daring and bold in taking the initiative. And yet, he is also kind and compassionate in his dealings with other people.

by Moses Choo Siew Cheong, Executive Director, National Council for the Blind, Malaysia

In my last article, I have given you an idea of the Blaze ET as a very small, compact and multi-function device. It is, in fact, a very portable MP3 player with a text-reader, a built-in camera and an OCR function. Being Wifienabled, the Blaze ET also serves as an internet and FM radio receiver.

In order that you may have a better picture of the Blaze ET, let me now give you a physical orientation of this fantastically compact device.

The Blaze ET is small and rectangular, similar in size and shape to a smartphone. It weighs just 4.8 ounces and it measures 2.3 inches wide, 4.59 inches long, and 0.64 inch in thickness. For the purpose of visualisation, just imagine that you have the unit placed in the palm of your hand, or on a desk-top, or on a table in front of you with the keypad facing up and the long rectangular slot on the side of the unit facing left.

The Top Face:

The top face of the unit contains the keypad. At the top centre is a slightly recessed square depression. This is the power on-off button.

To the left and right of the power button are the stereo speakers. Below the power button is a row of 3 buttons. From left to right, they are the info button, the home button and the OCR button.

The info button announces time and date, power, WIFI and bluetooth status. The home button brings up the main "home" menu from anywhere on the unit. The OCR button launches the OCR programme; press it again to capture the image under the camera.

Below the programme buttons is a circular navigation pad containing 5 keys - the left, right, up and down arrows, and a small round button in the centre which is the OK button

Below the navigation pad is another row of 3 buttons - from left to right, these are cancel, menu and review. The cancel button is used to exit a programme, menu or dialogue. The menu button opens the specific menu for the currently running programme. The review button repeats the currently-focussed text, or announces the title of the item currently being played, etc.

Below these keys is a standard 12-key telephone-style keypad. The keypad is used to enter text, and to perform specific functions in each programme on the unit.

On the very bottom of the front face are 2 LED's showing power and charging status, and the internal microphone.

The Left and Right Edge:

The left edge of the unit contains 4 items - the voice control button, the volume up and down buttons, and the SD-card slot.

Nearest the top is the voice control button. This button allows you to quickly access speed, volume and pitch settings for the TTS, or audio speed, preamp, etc. during audio playback.

Cycle through the settings with repeated presses of the voice control button and use the volume buttons to adjust the chosen setting.

By default, the volume up and down buttons will control the volume of the content to which you are currently listening. If you are listening to media, they control the media volume. If you are in a menu or list, they will control the volume of the guide voice, etc.

Near the bottom of the left edge is a long, thin, rectangular slot. This is the SD-card slot.

The Right Edge:

The right side of the unit contains 2 controls. Nearest the top of the unit is the record button. Press this button quickly to access previously recorded content. Hold it for 2 seconds to make a new recording.

Below the record button is the keylock switch. Place the keylock switch in the down position to lock the keyboard and in the up position for normal operation.

About half way between the keylock switch and the button of the unit is a very small pin-hole. Inside this hole is located the reset button. Use a pointed object to press this button for more than 2 seconds to reset the Blaze ET.

The Top Edge:

The top edge of the Blaze ET contains only a small hole for looping a carrying strap or lanyard.

At the bottom edge, if you move To the edge nearest to your body, you will discover 3 ports. From left to right, these ports are the headphone jack, the micro USB port, and the stereo microphone jack.

Use the headphone jack to connect the headphones or external speakers to the unit. Use the microphone jack to connect an external microphone or line-in recording source to the unit.

The micro USB port is used to connect the Blaze to a PC for transferring files, to connect a thumbdrive or CD-Rom drive to the unit, or to connect the AC adapter for charging the unit.

The Back Face:

Flip the Blaze over in your hand so that the SD-card slot is now on the right side. The back face or underside of the unit contains two items - in the top centre directly opposite the power button on the front face, is the OCR camera. Below that is a triangular ridged section. If you press down and backward on this section, the majority of the back of the unit slides away to reveal the battery compartment.

If you need further details, a demonstration session can be arranged. Please call the administrative assistant at 03-22762973.

by Wong Kow

Johnny and Jane (not their real names) had been married for fifty years. At their Golden Jubilee celebration, the master of ceremonies asked Jane, "In your fifty years living with Johnny, did you find that Johnny had some weak points and bad habits?"

Jane replied, "Uncountable! They were as many as the stars in the sky."

The M.C. asked, "How many good points then? Did he have any good points?"

Jane replied, "Yes, but he had only one good point."

At this juncture, the M.C. spoke in a surprised tone. "I'm sure that the audience, including me, is very curious to know how you could possibly have got along with Johnny so harmoniously for fifty years if he had plenty of bad habits and weak points!"

Jane responded with a smile and a good sense of humour. "I treasure his good point like sunshine. When there is sunshine, I see no stars in the sky."

In this story, Jane has shared with us her wonderful experience of life in a very effective way. Undoubtedly, she has given us a great lesson in learning how to live a long and happy married life until our golden age.

When two persons join in matrimony, each one would certainly have lots of differences from the other. The differences would be in upbringing, family and educational background, personal habits and hobbies, and so on. Indeed, whenever I appreciate the favours and loving deeds that my wife has done for me, they bring out the sunshine in my life. Whatever differences between us are like the stars in the sky and they disappear in the sunshine so that our happiness in life is not affected at all.

It is essential for us to maintain a positive attitude towards life if we are to go through the journey of life with steady confidence and stride along with sweet pleasure and pride. Of course, I have been a youngster and I know that it is good to be young. However, now that I am a senior citizen, I can say that it is not bad to be old either. Whatever our age, in fact, we should always learn to be wise, graceful and gracious.

A famous writer of many books both in English and Chinese, the late Dr. Lin Yutang said, "There is nothing more beautiful in this world than a healthy wise old man."

Indeed, we should not resent growing old. Unfortunately, many people are denied the privilege of happily growing into old age. It is certainly not miserable at all to be old but it will definitely be miserable if we are not capable of living our old age.

Actually, life is good at any age if we know how to live it. We may not be celebrating birthdays on a daily basis but we have reason to celebrate the lives that we live every day.

So let's just enjoy living and keep singing that lovely golden oldie, "You are my sunshine"!

REFLECTIONS FROM "THE BIG IDEAS OF LEE KUAN YEW".

On Corruption:

In 1961 when the CIA of America tried to bribe an officer in the Special Branch of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew said, "Remember all the time that we are not dealing with an enemy, but with the bloody stupidity of a friend."

On Geo-political Relations:

In 1976 the book of Neville Maxwell, "India's China war", was given to Lee Kuan Yew by Hua Guo Feng, prime minister of China.

Lee handed back the book to Hua and said, "This is your version of the war. There is another version - the Indian version. And in any case, I'm from South-East Asia. It's nothing to do with us."

Mr. Lee's reaction provoked an icy reaction from the Chinese delegation. This could have derailed relations between a great power and a small state like Singapore.

However, in the mid-90's, about six years after Tiananmen, China was in difficult times. Mr. Lee knew that countries which stood with China through those times would be remembered as good friends. He, therefore, advanced a visionary proposal for the development of the Suzhou Industrial Park in the mid-90's, i.e. the offer to transfer some of Singapore's hard-earned software on urban management to a city in China.

Given the inauspicious start with China after Mr. Lee rejected the gift from the premier Hua Guo-Feng in 1976, it is remarkable how much the Chinese leaders came to admire and respect Mr. Lee.

On Dealing With Fate:

Lee Kuan Yew believed that one has to see the world as it is, not as one wants it to be.

He said, "Fate deals with us a certain hand, but it is up to us to make a winning hand out of it."

On A Tough Character:

Peter Ho says, "Lee Kuan Yew's character is tough, even bloody-minded, as the British would put it. When it does not suit to adapt, you can be unreasonable to change the world."

Lee Kuan Yew said, "We can be soft-hearted. But we cannot afford to be soft-headed."

As George Bernard Shaw said, "Reasonable men adapt, unreasonable men change the world."

On Pragmatism:

Lee Kuan Yew and his colleagues, Goh Keng Swee, Hon Swee Sen and Lim Kim San, believed in being pragmatic. They said,

"As the world changes, small countries have to swiftly adjust their policies and positions in a pragmatic and clinical manner. We have to live with the world as it is, not as we wish it should be. We must remain nimble to seize opportunities that come with changing circumstances, or to get out of harm's way".

On Governance:

Lee Kuan Yew said, "Policy is implementation and implementation is policy."

Peter Ho argues that it was this strong will of Lee Kuan Yew that has enabled the Civil Service of Singapore to be effective. Moreover, this was the key that propelled Singapore from a third-world backwater into the first world in less than two generations.

On Political Correctness:

Lee Kuan Yew said, "I am not interested in being politically correct. I am interested in being correct."

On Driving Diplomatic Relations:

Lee Kuan Yew said, "We must seek the maximum number of friends with the maximum capacity to uphold what our friends and ourselves have decided to uphold.

"A small country must seek the maximum number of friends while maintaining its freedom as a sovereign and independent nation. Friendship in international relations is not a function of personal good will or personal affection.

"We must make ourselves relevant so that other countries have an interest in our continued survival and prosperity as a sovereign and independent nation."

Thus, Singapore became known as "The country that has the solutions" - Chan Heng Chee.

On Strength:

Two things that Singapore had learnt from Israel: "How to be strong, and how not to use our strength".

Post-Lee Kuan Yew Era:

Bilahari Kausikan concludes that whatever the dissatisfactions with the present Government may be or however great is the desire for change, Singaporeans hould not lose sight of the old adage: "Domestic politics should stop at the water's edge".

Even the biggest and most powerful countries disregard this adage to their cost and chagrin; for small countries to disregard it would be fatal.

When you show the moon to a child, it sees only your finger.

Wisdom is like a baobab tree; no one individual can embrace it.

Where water is the boss, there the land must obey.

However long the night, the dawn will always break.

Even the lion, who is the king of the forest, protects himself against flies.
When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.
Don't set sail on someone else's star.
If the rhythm of the drum-beats changes, the dance steps must adapt.
We desire to bequeath two things to our children - the first one is roots; the other one is wings.
No matter how beautiful and well crafted a coffin might look, it will not make anyone wish death.

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Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun and Mr Moses Choo Siew Cheong



Readers are invited to write for our publication, "NCBM OUTREACH". For articles published, payments are as follows:-

- 1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) RM80.00
- 2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) RM80.00
- 3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250 500 words) RM40.00 RM80.00
- 4. Interesting articles taken from magazines or documents of limited circulation RM15.00.

(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.)

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