

NCBM OUTREACH



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President

Jasmine Khoo

Editor

Godfrey Ooi Goat See

B.A. (Hons.), Dip. Ed.

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**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND,
MALAYSIA**

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista, No 150, Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad,

Brickfields, 50470 Kuala Lumpur

(Locked bag 11009, 50990 Kuala Lumpur)

Tel : 603-2028 1999

Fax : 603-2276 1653

Email: info@ncbm.org.my

Contact person - Administrative Assistant

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Tel : 603 - 5632 1302 / 1307 Fax : 603 - 5632 4190 / 8011 2773 Email : sylogprint@gmail.com

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.

SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

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.

Donations should be made in the name of :

**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA OR MAJLIS
KEBANGSAAN BAGI ORANG BUTA, MALAYSIA**

MAYBANK ACCOUNT NUMBER : 5145 9813 0410

Postal address :-

Unit 13-8, Menara Sentral Vista,
150, Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad,
Brickfields,
50470 Kuala Lumpur.

(Locked bag 11009, 50990 Kuala Lumpur)

Tel. +603-2028 1999

Fax: +603-2276 1653

Email: info@ncbm.org.my

** NCBM has not appointed any agent to collect cash on our behalf.*

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author/contributor and do not necessarily represent the views of NCBM.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NCBM's Support Schemes for The Blind

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. 603-2028 1999.

2. **Equipment Loan Fund for the Blind:**

NCBM would like to see significant improvement in job opportunities for the blind in Malaysia. Therefore, blind persons in employment who face the difficulty in obtaining adaptive equipment to help them in their work can get in touch with NCBM for such assistance.

For more details, please call the NCBM secretariat at 603-2028 1999.

3. **Research Grant:**

Anybody, blind or sighted, interested in carrying out research on employment for the blind or on blindness prevention can make application to NCBM for a research grant. The amount to be provided can range from RM3,000 to RM5,000.

Please contact NCBM at 603-2028 1999

4. **Be My Eyes**

Be My Eyes is an app that connects blind and visually impaired with sighted volunteers from around the world via live video call. You may download through Google play and may choose the choice of our language. Bahasa Melayu is also available.

The blind or visually impaired person can need help with anything from knowing the expiry date on the milk , to making sure that their clothes match.

Note* We encourage blind and visually impaired users to be patient, when making a request, because we rely on real people to help you. Most calls are answered within 60 seconds.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

ARTICLES FOR THE MAGAZINE

Readers are reminded that their contribution of articles, suggestions, poems and jokes are most welcome for inclusion in 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 banked into your account.

For details concerning payments, please see the last page.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Wong Yoon Loong

Wong Kwee Heong

Chin Yew Cheng

MESSAGE FROM NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA (NCBM)

The Future of Massage for the Blind in Malaysia

Massage for the blind in Malaysia was initiated by the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) in the 1970's. MAB first identified a suitable blind person, Mr. Chow Hock Seng from Penang, for training as a massage instructor. Through the generosity and sponsorship of the Lions' Club of Taiwan, he was sent to Taiwan to undergo the massage training course. On returning to Malaysia, Hock Seng was appointed as the first massage instructor in the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in the mid-1970's.

Massage was thus introduced to the blind in Malaysia during the decade of the 1970's and many of the blind have taken up massage as a profession. This was most timely as the blind were facing the lack of employment opportunities and many of them had turned to the idea of selling tidbits from door to door in order to earn a living. The stiff competition was greatly eased as many of the blind took up massage as the preferred option, especially with the opening up of massage enterprises by blind entrepreneurs. Many of the massage enterprises by the blind were established in Brickfields and they are still thriving till today but for how much longer, who can tell?

Subsequently, the blind massage entrepreneurs were interested in enhancing the skills of their blind masseurs. Thus, they took the initiative to invite instructors from China and Thailand to impart knowledge and skills to the blind on Chinese and Thai massage. This also led to the introduction of traditional Malay massage and even Swedish massage.

Eventually, when the Malaysian Government took on the serious move to look at traditional medicine as complementary medicine and to have the traditional practitioners registered, the blindness community was faced with the challenging question of "where do the blind masseurs belong?"

In the early years, our first massage efforts were more inclined towards providing massage for leisure and relaxation. However, in response to the Government's move to recognise traditional medicine as complementary medicine, the blindness community is also making the shift from leisure massage to therapeutic and cultural massage. We are in a quandary, nonetheless, concerning the name of the kind of massage that is being practised by the blind in Malaysia, as it has a mixture of elements from other countries like China, Thailand and Sweden as well as our local Malay tradition.

Meanwhile, NCBM has demonstrated its far-sightedness by registering as a member of the Federation of Complementary & Natural Medical Associations, Malaysia (FCNMAM) in order to represent the interests of the blindness community. However, NCBM cannot go it alone. The blindness community needs to seriously consider creating an identity in order to promote Malaysian blind massage and get it recognised as a unique category by the Ministry of Health.

Currently, while several organisations of blind masseurs have been set up, none of them can really claim to be the national representative of the blind. If NCBM were to withdraw from FCNMAM, there is no guarantee that any other organisations could get in to the Federation in its place. It is hoped, therefore, that the blind masseurs together with their supporters in the blindness community can come up with a credible alternative and solution.

DR. WONG HUEY SIEW – EXEMPLARY MODEL OF THE BLIND IN EMPLOYMENT

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See



Wong Huey Siew lost his mother when he was only nine years old and he was in Standard Three. At such a tender age, Wong was already keenly aware of his father's struggle to make ends meet by tapping rubber and planting vegetables. Indeed, Wong had an experience of the difficulties and hardship being faced by his father as he had to help out in the fields after school hours.

Matters became worse for Wong when he was in standard five and he lost total vision. Wong spent the next three years desperately searching for a cure. Eventually, on the advice of the eye doctor and with persuasion from friends and relatives, Wong's father finally decided that his son should return to school. Thus, at the age of eleven, Wong gained admission to the Princess Elizabeth School for the blind in Johor Bahru.

This was actually a primary school being run by the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). Wong found the teachers there to be most inspiring and encouraging so that he thoroughly enjoyed his school lessons. Gradually, it dawned upon him that if one had good educational qualifications, one would probably be able to find a reasonably good job and he would be able to help lift his family out of poverty.

Thus, Wong studied hard and he did well at school. He was then able to go on to university and he obtained his B.A. degree in Anthropology and Sociology with a minor in psychology. Subsequently, he studied for his Master's in Psychology and then read for his PhD in Special Education, thereby being conferred the title of Dr. Wong Huey Siew.

In actual fact, Dr. Wong had managed to gain work experience before entering tertiary education. Immediately after sitting for his STPM examination in 1989, he had gone job-hunting and he found a job as a clerical worker in a company where he worked for nine months.

After graduating from university, he sought assistance from the MAB Job Placement Unit in looking for employment. Unfortunately at the time, he was informed by MAB that there was no job vacancy at all for him. Nevertheless, Dr. Wong did not allow this disappointment to discourage him or to impede his search for another job opening.

“I sent about 1,000 applications or about forty letters a week but I received only ten responses,” said Dr. Wong. “Then one day when I received a letter to attend an interview, I was filled with excitement as well as fear. Still, I went alone by bus and made enquiries from passers-by as I walked from the bus-stop to the college.”

Thus, in 1995, Dr. Wong was the first blind person to be employed as a student counsellor at the Institute of Technology Pertama in Cheras. The Management of the college was very impressed with his performance. Indeed, the three-year working experience at the college helped to build his confidence. So that he was able to move on to another job as lecturer at another private college known as the Institute of Human Development. Subsequently, he was able to get a job as part-time lecturer with the Raffles Education Group and then with the Han Xing Journalism Academy for a period of three years from 2003 to 2005. Then he spent another two years from 2005 to 2007 as a part-time trainer in Hurray Edu-Care.

According to Dr. Wong Huey Siew, “Braille is a very important educational tool for the blind. Without braille, I could not have gained functional literacy during my school years. I remember very well how braille was of such great advantage to me when I was in tertiary education. While my room-mate was snoring soundly at night, I could read up my braille documents and materials in the dark of the night without disturbing him because I did not have to switch on the lights.”

After completing his PhD studies, Dr. Wong was keen to make a contribution in the work for the blind and so he applied for the Principal's post at the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). However, he was greatly disappointed when they decided not to take him for the job. In the same year of his disappointment, which was 2007, he managed to secure the position of Executive Director at the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled (MCD) where he worked for a very brief period of just one and a half months.

One day, he happened to follow the MAB Job Placement Officer on his visit to a visually impaired client working at the Open University of Malaysia (OUM). Unexpectedly, he had the opportunity of meeting up with the top management of the university and they decided to give him a job as lecturer. He was thrilled and he grabbed the opportunity without a moment's hesitation and he has never looked back since.

Dr. Wong was appointed as the programme coordinator in charge of the Bachelor of Psychology Course. He is responsible for preparing assignment questions and examination papers, reviewing reading materials and course modules, and liaising with subject matter experts from other private higher learning institutions.

He also engages with the students via online forums and through personal interaction, and he is involved in many meetings on faculty administration and module development.

In carrying out his work, Dr. Wong has to rely almost 100% on the computer for communication with friends and colleagues while the internet is now his main source knowledge, information and references.

In 2012, Dr. Wong was appointed as the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences. While this is not a long-term position, Dr. Wong is very happy and proud to know that the university authorities had, in fact, recognised his abilities and capabilities even though he is blind and they have thus bestowed the honour upon him.

In 2017, he has been appointed as Senior Lecturer and Programme Director.

One day in 2003 while on flight to Taiwan to attend a Buddhist camp and workshop, Dr. Wong came in to contact with the girl of his dreams, Kok Lai Kuen. Not only was she very pleasant but she was also of such great help to him. She was very happy assisting him with proof-reading, graphics creation and in adding colour to his PowerPoint presentations for greater visually effect at training workshops, seminars and conferences.

Dr. Wong expressed with great joy, “truly, our relationship blossomed and I’m a very lucky man. We got married and Kok Lai Kuen is my pillar of strength. I really appreciate her!”

Despite his busy schedule, Dr. Wong has been able to find time to make his contribution in the work for the blind and for other disabled persons in the community at large. He is currently serving as the Chairman of the Employment, Economic and Empowerment Committee of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM). He is also a member of the Majlis OKU Kebangsaan (2013-2016), a statutory body established under the Disability Act of Malaysia.

Here is some parting advice from Dr. Wong, “Opportunity doesn’t come easily to you; you must look for the opportunity. When opportunity comes, it comes only once. So make sure you grab it!”

That is exactly what Dr. Wong Huey Siew has done. He has indeed gained achievement and success and he is an exemplary model of the blind in employment.

THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL BRAILLE READING AND WRITING CONTEST 2018, THAILAND

*By Chin Yew Cheng
Administrator, National Council for the Blind, Malaysia*

The 5th International Braille Reading and Writing Contest was held on 20 January 2018 in the Ratchasuda College in Thailand. It was a collaborative effort between the Thailand Association of the Blind and the Ratchasuda College of Mahidol University.

The event began with the opening ceremony of the 23rd National Braille Reading and Writing Contest of Thailand. With some free time allotted for the afternoon of 19 January, the host recommended all to go for a boat ride and to a nearby floating market. During the boat ride, there was a fish-feeding activity along the river-bank adjacent to a temple where bread could be purchased at only 20 Baht. These fish are not for consumption as they are considered to be in a sacred area. Eventually, all came back in time for the closing ceremony of the Thai National Braille Reading and Writing Contest. This was followed by the welcome dinner in the evening.

On 20 January (Saturday), everyone met at the hotel lobby and proceeded to the Ratchasuda College. After registration, the participants were served chicken porridge with 'Yau Char Kue' (Chinese Crumblers), a warm soya-bean drink, coffee and tea for breakfast.

After the welcome remarks and report by Dr. Issavara Srirungruang, the Secretary-General and the opening address by Dr. Monthian Buntan, President of the Thai Braille Promotion and Development Fund. While Dr. Wiraman Niyomphol went through the Contest guidelines. The contest proceeded simultaneously for the two age groups (below and above 25 years old) in two separate rooms, Room 255 and Room 258, at 9.15 a.m. The contest was over by 9.45 a.m. for both categories and this was followed by teabreak.

While waiting for the results, Dr. Monthian held a discussion and sharing session on “Braille Development and Unmet Needs in ASEAN Countries” which involved all the participants from Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam. All the representatives gave their opinions concerning the difficulties faced as teachers. It was finally agreed that they could learn from the strengths of each country, thereby minimising their weaknesses.

At 11.30 a.m., the results were announced as follows:

1. Braille Reading:

1.1. Below 25 Years Category:

First prize--Mr. Werut Bulbon, Thailand; (score 94.25%)

Second prize--Mr. April Mathew Abella, Philippines: (score 88.7%)

Third prize--Ms. Hannah Angelica Dumlao, Philippines.(score 85%)

1.2. 25 Years and Above Category:

First prize--Ms. Chan Sau Yin/Lilian, Malaysia; (score 98.75%)

Second prize--Ms. Wong Swee Foon, Malaysia; (score 96%)

Third prize--Mr. Hong Vu Minh Le, Vietnam. (score 92%)

2. Braille Writing:

2.1. Below 25 Years Category:

Winner- Ms. Hannah Angelica Dumlao, Philippines. (score 100%)

2.2. 25 Years and Above Category:

Winners--Ms. Thitikan Sunthonwirunrot, Thailand (score 100%) and Mr. Ronald ManGuiat, Philippines.(score 100%)

A certificate and cash prizes were presented to all the winners followed by a photo session.

During the closing ceremony, Dr. Wiraman Niyomphol was very pleased to announce that a benchmark had been set by the Malaysians for braille reading.

The host then invited all for lunch at an authentic and exotic restaurant. During lunch, The Thai Braille Marathon Reading Competition was started at the Ratchasuda College. This competition can run for 30 to 40 hours before a winner can be selected.

Hopefully, next year there would also be a competition for sighted people to read braille that would indirectly encourage more people to know and learn about Braille.

Finally, NCBM would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Apple Suwannawut, and her team for all the arrangements and coordination during our stay in Thailand.

PRIZE GIVING CEREMONY



Lilian Chan Sau Yin



Wong Swee Foon



BRAILLE WRITING COMPETITION FISH FEEDING ACTIVITY



IDEAL GARDENING PLANTS FOR THE BLIND

By 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 University Malaya and he was a lecturer at the university for about twenty years.

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

Here he is to share on the hobby of gardening for the blind:

Blind people in Malaysia do have the passion to indulge in various hobbies, some of which may be regarded as quite unusual from the viewpoint of sighted people. For example, I know of a blind person, Roslan, who owns expensive fishing gear and he enjoys going deep-sea fishing with his sighted friends.

Another blind friend of mine, Robert Wah, used to enjoy training his parrots to talk and he would allow them to fly freely in his bedroom. He would even place the tamed parrot upon his shoulders and walk about throughout the Brickfields area.

I know of some other blind persons who go for bowling regularly and they say that they have lots of fun from the game. I have also met a young blind man who told me that he would make his way to Kuala Lumpur from Johor Bahru just to play football with other blind friends.

And indeed, I do have some blind friends whose passion it is to gamble and they are really compulsive gamblers. They love to spend many hour playing cards, investing heavily in four-digit numbers, or even gambling at the Genting Casino where they can play with numbers, slotting the machine like the one-arm bandit, taking risk with roulette, or playing black jack.

Furthermore, I know of many blind persons who love and enjoy boozing with alcohol, either singly or in groups.

As for me and some close friends of mine, we love gardening as a hobby. My blind friend, George Wong, has been fortunate to own a single-storey corner house which has extra land on the side. He has planted trees like mango, chiku and custard apple, flowering plants like Jasmine and Chempaka which produce sweet-smelling blossoms, and vegetables like sweet potato, long beans and ladies' fingers.

Another blind friend of mine, Godfrey Ooi, stays in a single-storey terrace house with a very small garden. He tried planting the mango tree, hawaiian papaya and a Christmas tree. Due to lack of space, however, he had to get rid of the Christmas tree, give away the mango tree to his neighbour, and stop planting papaya. Instead, he has a variety of flowering plants in flower pots around his garden, which include the Gardenia, Tear-drop, Thai Jasmine, Eagle's claw, the Creoles and the small hibiscus. He has several of the plants known in Chinese as 'chat ji hiong' or as Orange Blossom in English. Occasionally, they would produce fragrant blossoms in big bunches which would become the haunt of the honey-bees for several days. Recently, he took the risk and planted a custard-apple on a small road-side plot outside his house. The tree seems to be doing quite well and he looks forward to tasting some of the amazingly fragrant and uniquely sweet fruits in a couple of years' time.

Godfrey has also tried to plant three kinds of lime, i.e. the mildly sour lime known as 'shin kam' in Cantonese, the extremely sour and fragrant lime known as 'katchai' in Cantonese, and the spotted lime known as 'thaiko kam' in hokkien, the leaves of which are used as a flavouring spice in many Thai dishes.

However, he gave up on all the lime plants as they would get infested with caterpillars which would eat up all the leaves. Instead, he turned his hand to planting some tiger lilies which produce big beautiful bell-like flowers. But even these can be prevented from growing by the snails eating up the young leaves. Fortunately, he has discovered that the snails can be controlled by spraying some sulphur powder (which can be bought from the chemist) in the flower-pots.

But now, what actually is the most ideal plant for a blind gardener? From my experience, I think it is the banana tree. Indeed, as a blind person, I do really enjoy planting, looking after and harvesting bananas.

I live in an intermediate terrace house. Fortunately, there is some land behind my house which is public land but I am able to make use of it. In fact, I have planted more than twenty types of banana on the land, which include Pisang Tanduk, Awak, Abu, Rastali, Emas Jari and Susu. Pisang Tanduk is a cooking banana and it is the most expensive among all the bananas. It has a unique sweet and sour taste after frying.

Pisang Rastali is eaten raw and it is known to be rich in vitamin B, the ingredient for repairing nerves in our body tissues. However, the type of banana that I value most is Pisang Awak. When eaten raw, the many seeds of Pisang Awak provide roughage for the digestive tract, thereby helping to prevent constipation. After frying, the fruit tastes even more delicious than Pisang Tanduk.

I have chosen banana as my ideal gardening plant because, from planting to harvesting, a blind person can be totally independent. At the start, just dig a one-foot deep hole, put in the baby plant and cover it with soil. Under normal circumstances, you do not even need to water the plant as the banana has the capability of retaining a lot of water. You can easily prune the plant as you only need to cut off the leaves from the stem after they start dropping down. When the plant is reaching maturity, it will produce several baby shoots. You only keep the oldest shoot, the others having to be destroyed by simply piercing their buds with a screw-driver.

In about ten months to a year, the banana flower will appear. The blind person is able to know this by touch or by smell. When the baby fruits appear, the blind person will know it because he can detect the flower bunch with his hands. After a period of sixty days or so, you can begin plucking the fruit one by one for the next thirty days or more. I would keep the fruits in a recycle bag until they ripen. With my innovative harvesting method, I am able to have an abundant supply of fresh and fried banana every day.

When all the fruits have been harvested, I would use a saw to cut off the mother plant and then I would remove its head from the ground with a 'cangkul' (hoe). By now the baby shoot will have reached intermediate size and it will start to produce young fruits within a few months.

Most people are probably not aware of the uncommon uses of a banana plant. Some of these uses are described below:

1. The fibrous inner core of the banana stem can be made into a delicious food. I learned from George Wong, my blind friend, that during the Japanese occupation, the housemother at St. Nicholas' Home for the blind would cook it with coconut milk and chilli and it tasted good.
2. The inner core of the stem can be blended into juice. After adding in brown sugar, it becomes a highly nutritious drink.
3. The centre part of the banana flower is similar to cauliflower and can be cooked with chicken or other meat.
4. The unripe Pisang Tanduk can be sliced, salted and fried into banana chips which are truly delicious.
5. The outer part of the banana stem can be cut into long strips to be dried and turned into very tough strings.

I went round asking a few blind gardeners what would be their ideal plant if that should be restricted to growing only one plant.

George Wong says that the mango tree is nice but the fruits are seasonal. Therefore, he would prefer to grow the Chempaka because it produces the flowers the whole year round so that he can enjoy the fragrant smell at any time.

Godfrey says that he loves the custard apple but he is not sure whether it will grow well because the leaves seem to be getting eaten by insects or snails. If the custard apple is not successful, then he will turn to the chiku tree. The chiku has a lot of leaves and so it will be very shady. Also, it produces a lot of fruits with a unique and lovely sweet taste.

As for Peter, he says his ideal plant is guava as the fruit is rich in vitamin C, richer than in oranges. If you fertilise the guava plant with salt, the fruit will taste very sweet-much better, in fact, than the ones you can buy from the market.

And so, my friends, may I wish you all happy gardening!

MY LIFE STORY

By Lee Hui Ling

As told to Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong

I was born in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and I am the eldest among three siblings, i.e. I myself and two younger brothers. My father was a taxi-driver while my mother was a full-time housewife and part-time baby-sitter.

I had a very loving mother and she was very serious about our education. I remember how she would collect old comic books and sell them to the bookshop, thereby raising some money so that she could send us to tuition classes.

One day when I was in Form Three, I became aware that I had the tendency to become very sleepy and I had to sleep for long hours in the afternoon and right into the night. I felt that I was changing from an active person to an inactive one. I used to be fond of playing outdoors but now I was inclined to stay at home.

My mother would often comment that she could write the Chinese characters much better than I could in spite of the fact that she only had primary school education. I began to realise that my vision was, in fact, gradually deteriorating. When I swept the floor with a broom, my mother would comment that parts of the floor had not been swept. In order to stop her from worrying, I would lie to her that I was keeping those parts for cleaning afterwards.

Later, however, my mother began to be aware that something was actually wrong with my eyesight. She, therefore, asked my cousin sister to take me to an optician for a check-up. In the optical shop, I tried out all the glasses but nothing seemed to help. The optician thus advised that I should go to the hospital for an x-ray.

At the hospital, the x-ray photograph revealed that my poor vision was being caused by a tumour in the brain. He said that he would have to send me to the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital for brain surgery. At the KL Hospital, I had a very young and caring Indian doctor attending to me. He told me that

although my tumour was not cancerous, I still needed to undergo surgery. However, I had to wait for two months as many of the other patients were experiencing severe pain from their cancer and their cases were more urgent.

Eventually, I had the surgery done and when I woke up from the induced sleep, it suddenly dawned upon me that it was Mother's Day. I told my mother that I was so sorry that I could not buy her flowers for the day. She replied that she already had had the biggest present ever because the surgery had been successfully carried out.

I continued to stay on in the ward for another three months before being discharged. During the five-month period when I was being warded, my mother was given free accommodation in one of the flats nearby (which belonged to the Sabah State Government and were reserved for Sabahans).

After the surgery, my vision remained as poor as before. Back in Sabah, the social welfare officer encouraged me to continue my education. He told me that there were many blind persons who, with education, were able to be successful as teachers, lawyers and various other professions. I did not return to school, however, as I still felt rather weak and not physically fit. Instead, I just attended some English tuition classes.

Eventually, at the age of 21, I met a blind church friend who was working as a telephone operator in Kota Kinabalu. He was Herbert Koh and he took the initiative to call up the Principal of the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur to ask about the possibility of admitting me to the centre. Fortunately, the principal was very positive and I gained admission immediately.

At the GTC, I learned braille and massage. There I met many young persons who were blind like me. Four of us stayed in a room in the hostel, and in fact, accommodation and food were provided free of charge. However, I had some problems with the food as I had been advised not to take certain kinds of food after my surgery. Other than that, it was smooth sailing for me and after one and a half years of training, I obtained my certificate and I became a qualified masseur.

Like many of the blind, I stayed on in Brickfields after my training at the GTC. One day I met another blind person in Brickfields and I noticed that he had the strange habit of placing his white cane on top of his head. When I asked him why he did so, he explained that the blind people in Brickfields were busybodies and the news spread very fast through their gossip. He, therefore, wanted his white cane to symbolise a radio antenna which would be able to catch the various broadcasts.

Unfortunately, I began to suffer from some allergy on my fingers due to the oil that I used for massaging my clients. As a result, I could not really work as a masseur every day. Thus, I would sometimes team up with an elderly blind lady to go selling tissue-paper illegally in Singapore. I found the earnings to be very good but I had to stop eventually after being confronted by the police on several occasions.

Then, just about one year ago, our Government in Malaysia built some low-cost flats in Lembah Subang. These flats had three bedrooms and two bathrooms and they were sold at RM 75,000. However, the blind and other disabled persons could purchase these flats at a subsidised rate of only RM 35,000 and so many of my friends as well as I myself made application for these flats and we were successful.

I was allocated a unit of the flats on the ninth floor. I experienced such great joy on receiving the key to my flat. It was very convenient living in these flats as the LRT train station was very nearby.

One day I met the blind man, Dr. Gordon Tan Tok Shiong, who was known to be very interested in observing how the blind in Brickfields lived and worked. He told me that he had joined a team of blind persons who went busking in order to earn some income. I told him that I enjoyed singing and that I had been singing since young.

Sometime later, Dr. Gordon contacted me and asked if I would be interested in attending a training workshop for street performers organised by the Kuala Lumpur City Hall (or DBKL) in December 2016. I replied in the positive and after the three-day workshop, I was awarded the busking licence.

Subsequently, I joined the group of blind buskers organised by Dr. Gordon. They call themselves the Happy Buskers. And so now I do go busking with my friends on quite a regular basis both as a hobby and as a part-time job.

On one occasion when we were singing, I saw (with my low vision) that a mother was carrying a baby and she was standing beside us. The baby started swinging his head and the mother followed him and she ultimately broke into a dance!

Because of my sensitive fingers, I am unable to go massaging full-time. Therefore, I have found busking to be a good and viable alternative. In order to enhance my musical ability, I have also joined the Joyful Choir of the Blind (or JCB) which has been set up by the Elderly Blind Club (EBC) of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB).

I hope to be able to save enough money in order to buy a house in Sabah. Currently, my parents and siblings are living in rented accommodation in Kota Kinabalu.

By the way, what is my opinion on busking? Although I am very happy to have been given the opportunity to sing with a busking group, I am doing this as a last resort as I am unable to find any other means of earning a livelihood.

I am also really grateful that the DBKL has now recognised busking as a profession rather than as begging and they have, therefore, decided to provide some kind of recognition card to the blind buskers. However, as DBKL has emphasised, there should be quality in our music. I find that having musical accompaniment does help us in maintaining some quality. I think the minimum standard should be to sing with a minus one recording and even DBKL has said as much.

MAB WELFARE AND VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

1. Establishment of the Malaysian Association for the Blind:

When the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) was established in 1951, its two main objectives were:

- 1.1 to provide services for the blind throughout the country;
- 1.2 to carry out blindness prevention.

In keeping with the first main objective, efforts were thus made to set up various programmes in order to provide for the needs of the blind, particularly in education, vocational training and employment.

2. Voluntarism:

In the beginning, however, welfare and volunteer development were only regarded as minor aspects of the main work of the association, i.e. to provide services for the blind. For instance, the welfare work initially only involved orientation and mobility training for blind persons going into employment as well as some home and hospital visits.

Voluntarism, of course, has been an important part of MAB right from its inception when persons of good standing and repute from the general public were first invited to become members of the association. They then had to elect from amongst themselves members to the MAB Council, which would be responsible for policy formulation and management of the organisation in a voluntary capacity.

To administer the organisation and run the programmes, it was therefore, necessary to recruit paid manpower. From the outset, however, volunteers were also needed to help in many aspects of the work carried out by the association. For example, in the early days of the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur for vocational training and the Kinta Valley Workshop in Ipoh, Perak for sheltered employment, there were already volunteers teaching the blind how to cook, play musical instruments and sing in a choir or taking them out on educational and leisure trips.

Later, many more volunteers were roped in to help in the MAB library with the lending of braille books, doing dictation reading for the brailleists to transcribe textbooks into braille for the use of blind schoolchildren, and the sale of braille and adaptive equipment to the blind at concessionary rates. This ultimately led to the setting up of the Voluntary Braille Transcribing Service (VBTS) at the library. The volunteers were also sent to the University of Malaya to assist the blind undergraduates in the reading of print textbooks and other educational materials.

3. Setting up of the committees and programmes:

It was in 1994 when the Welfare Committee was first established. This was followed by the setting up of the Welfare Unit in 1997 in order to give more emphasis on the location and referral of blind persons to relevant agencies and organisations for education, training, employment and financial assistance.

In fact, it was in 1997 when MAB held its first seminar on meeting the needs of the elderly blind. This led to the setting up of the Social Activity Centre for the Adult Blind in 1997 at the premises of the Rattan Centre at Jalan Berhala in Brickfields. Subsequently, this was replaced by the Elderly Blind Centre which was set up in Kompleks MAB in 1998. In the same year, all the welfare services were categorised under the MAB Welfare Unit with a welfare officer to be in charge. Eventually, a number of clubs were set up to meet the needs of various special interest groups, including the elderly blind club, tandem club, recreational club, youth club, blind women's club and the cyber club.

In 2001 a number of educational assistance schemes were introduced in order to recognise and support the endeavours of the blind in education. They included the Education Achievers Awards, the Education and Scholarship Loan Scheme, the Capacity-Building Scheme and the Research Assistance Scheme. In 2017 the achievers awards were extended to the outstanding blind musicians, entrepreneurs and sportsmen besides the education achievers.

In 2004 the Outreach Care Programme was set up in order to give more emphasis on meeting other welfare needs of the blind. This involved recruiting volunteers to help in meeting the needs of the blind through home and hospital visit, accompanying the blind to hospital, assisting the blind in banking and shopping, providing personal reading assistance, and carrying out errands and chores (especially for the deaf-blind, the home-bound and the elderly).

Thus, MAB saw the establishment of a number of committees relating to welfare and volunteer development (which were the Welfare Committee in 1994, Outreach Care Committee in 2004, and the Volunteer Development Committee in 2012) as well as the introduction of the clubs since 2001 and setting up of the Welfare Bureau in 2015.

4. Development of the Welfare Programme:

Thus, the Welfare Programme gradually took shape with the introduction of various services and activities over the years. Eventually, the programme was streamlined to include the following:

4.1 Location, referral and counselling;

4.2 Home and hospital visits;

4.3 Orientation and mobility training for the blind in their home environment and for those entering employment;

4.4 Financial relief for hospitalisation and medical treatment and for disasters such as fire and flood.

4.5 Organising volunteer assistance for the blind like reading and shopping;

4.6 Organising fitness and wellness activities such as educational talks, tandem-riding and line-dancing;

4.7 Servicing the clubs and supporting the club activities.

5. Volunteer development programme:

The volunteer development programme also gradually took shape over the years and it has been streamlined to include the following:

5.1 The central volunteer registration and referral record:

This system is being maintained in order to facilitate the contacting and recruiting of volunteers to help in the various activities and programmes of MAB.

5.2 Appreciation of volunteers:

To show appreciation to our volunteers as well as the corporate supporters, an appreciation ceremony is organised periodically. Both the volunteers and corporations are given certificates in colours of gold, silver and bronze (and perhaps even diamond, purple and crystal) with the wording “Caring Volunteer/Supporter/Corporation”.

5.3 Volunteer Training:

The volunteer training programme was introduced recently and it includes the following elements:

- 5.3.1 introduction to the welfare and Volunteer Development Scheme;
- 5.3.2 how to interact with the blind and visually impaired;
- 5.3.3 guiding and orientation techniques (or sighted guide techniques) to help the blind in mobility and travel;
- 5.3.4 some games and exercises to demonstrate communication of the blind through braille, touch and voice or sound;
- 5.3.5 Practical volunteering through an outdoor activity such as an excursion, playing a game, or some sporting activity.

6. Conclusion:

From the above, it can be seen how the welfare and volunteer services and the committees had been introduced or developed independently of each other initially. Ultimately, however, the committees and the services have been merged together to become the Welfare and Volunteer Development Scheme.

NEWS FROM THE ORGANISATIONS SERVING THE BLIND

Developing Our Own Unique Malaysian Massage:

A massage training workshop for trainers, testers and masseurs among the blind was held at the MAB hall from 21-27 January 2018 (Sunday to Saturday) as a collaborative project of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM), and the Malaysian Association for Wellness and Spa (MAWSPA).

While two main objectives of the workshop were to upgrade and standardise the massage practice and skills, an even more important objective was to introduce a massage that is uniquely Malaysian, which is based on Malaysian culture and traditions.

For example, they want to create an ambience by using things that give the Malaysian feel such as Kain Batik for the bed-sheet, local aromas like serai, water soaked with Malaysian flowers for washing of feet, and Malaysian traditional melodies for in-house music. The idea ultimately is to bring about the formalisation of the standard operating procedures for all massage centres being operated by the blind in this county

Certificates were issued by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the Ministry of Tourism, University Malaya and MAWSPA, thereby providing recognition for all those who had undergone the raining. The workshop was sponsored by NCBM and there were 22 participants altogether who came from MAB, St. Nicholas' Home in Penang, Sabah Society for the Blind and the Sarawak Society for the Blind.

As a further gesture of support, MAWSPA opened up its membership to all blind massage professionals and practitioners, thereby providing them with a platform to facilitate licensing and certification in Malaysian massage.

“Back to School with MAB 2018”

It was an exciting moment for about fifty blind students from three schools in the Klang Valley as they gathered in the Dewan Dato’ Ismail Salleh in Kompleks MAB, Brickfields on Tuesday, 9 January 2018. The schools were Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Cacat Penglihatan Jalan Batu (KL), Sekolah Kebangsaan Klang, and Sekolah Kebangsaan Sungai Kantan, Kajang.

Present at the opening ceremony was Mr. K. Sundralingam, Chairman of the Welfare and Volunteer Development, Committee of MAB, to welcome and thank all the guests and visitors to the function. To witness the ceremony by Dato’ S. Kulasegaran, Deputy President of MAB. Seeing the happy smiles on the faces of the blind children, Dato’ S. Kulasegaran said that this second year of holding the event will not be the end.

Dato’ Shaiful Nizam bin Abdullah, Chairman of the Pertubuhan Kebajikan MCIO was deeply touched as he distributed the school bags and saw the faces of the blind children light up with smiles. He promised that the event will continue in the following years to come.

The blind children also received boxes of delicious fried chicken from Texas Chicken and they joined in to sing “Rasa Sayang” and “Burung Kakak Tua” with Godfrey Ooi on the guitar at the end of the programme.

Chin Weng Kun emerges as champion in the Elderly Blind Talentime 2017: Ten contestants took part in the Elderly Blind Talentime on 2nd December 2017 in Kompleks MAB emerging as champion for the first prize of RM300 was Chin Weng Kun with his beautiful rendition of the Mandarin song, “Ee Tor Siow Hwa” or “A Little Blossom”.

The second prize of RM200 went to Samuel Khor who played the harmonica and sang the sentimental oldie, “Blue Spanish Eyes” while the third prize of RM100 went to Fong Poh Leng. Consolation prizes of RM20 were given to all the other contestants.

Besides the talentime held at the third gathering of the Elderly Blind Club in 2017, a talk on Natural Products for Healthy Cells was presented by En. Azmat Faiza bin Izham of Cellmax and Abiana Enterprise Worldwide Trading.

Mr. Sim Chew, a faithful supporter, sold popcorn and drinks to raise funds with the club while goody bags with the lucky draw were provided by Sin Tai Hing Oyster Sauce Factory and Yee Lee Trading.

Course on public speaking at the Sabah Region of SBM:

On 18 November 2017, the Sabah Regional committee on Human Capital Development of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) sponsored and organised a course on public speaking. The programme was held at the hall of the Sabah Services Council. Participating in the programme were 21 members and 3 associate members from a number of areas like Tuaran, Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Tawau.

The objectives of the course were as follows:

1. To discover and develop the abilities in public speaking.
2. To provide the opportunity for speaking in front of an audience.

Everyone succeeded in passing the evaluation test and received certificates of participation from the Secretary-General of SBM, Encik Rosham bin Sidek.

Post-Natal Massage Course of the Sabah Region of SBM:

The post-natal massage course was organised by the Sabah Regional Committee on Economic Development of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) from 24-25 February 2018. The programme was held at the SUKOM meeting-room of Kompleks Sukan Sandakan Sabah. Only women were eligible for the course and participating in the programme were nine members and four Associate Members from Tuaran, Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan and Tawau.

The objectives were:

1. To upgrade the skills of the blind masseurs in Sabah.
2. To instill courage and the some of venturing into a new field.

In order to explain the theory of massage, the participants were shown the different body parts as well as the materials needed for massage such as the bengkung (or long cloth wrap which is placed on the stomach), the tungku (or hot stone which is placed on the cloth to rub the stomach to relieve of wind), and some massage oils like ginger, coconut and serai (lemon grass). They were also given a demo of how to use the sauna bath followed by some sessions of practical massage.

Everyone passed the evaluation test and they were given certificates of participations by Puan Syamimi of the Sandakan Community College.

Learning how to produce frozen foods and sardine curry-puffs at the Pahang Branch of SBM:

The programme was organised by the Pahang Branch Committee on Economic Development of the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) on 21 January 2018.

The main objective of the programme was to provide the opportunity for members in the SBM Pahang Branch to make their own curry puff which can be eaten at leisure or they can be frozen. They were shown how different kinds of curry puff could be made by varying the contents or ingredients within the pastry. The ingredients could be curry potato, serunding daging and so on.

About 25 persons took part in the course (including members, associate members and volunteers).

TECHNOLOGY UPDATE: BRAILLE DISPLAYS – THE MORE COMPETITION, THE BETTER FOR THE USERS

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

For the past couple of years, the talk has been about the Orbit Reader, a product on which about ten organisations serving the blind around the world have put in their resources in a collaborative research effort in order to produce this affordable device.

However, on Louis Braille Day of 4 January 2018, another product known as Braille Me has also been launched. To keep up with the competition, it has been proposed that this Asian product, which is from India, be retailed at USD 399. Thus, this 20-cell unit will be a little cheaper than the Orbit Reader. The biggest difference, however, between the Orbit Reader and Braille Me is found in their Router keys.

The specifications for Braille Me are as follows:

1. The Braille Display:
It has 20 six-dot braille cells with cursor routing keys.
2. Keyboard:
It has six perkins-style keys.
3. Ports:
They include the micro USB, SD card slot, and the DC Jack.
4. Interface:
Included are the USB V2.0, Bluetooth smart V4.2, and the SD card up to 32GB.

5. Language:
It supports fifty plus languages with a capacity to hold five languages per device.
6. Supported file formats:
They include the TXT, BRF, BRL.
7. Screen-reader support:
Android, they include the Braille Back 0.95.1, iOS 11, Voiceover, Windows 7, and the NVDA 2017.
8. Battery:
Duration of battery is twelve hours. It takes one hour to be charged with the AC adapter.
9. Electrical parameters:
Charging-19V/1
AC socket-AC 100-240V, 50-60Hz, 1.0
10. Size and weight:
It is 18.8 cm,3.8 cm x 2.9 cm
And weight 580 grams.
11. Certification:
It has CE, FCC, and IC certification.

SAQIB SHEIKH MAKES THE WORLD MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED- VISION FOR ENABLEMENT

by Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Saqib Sheikh of Microsoft has developed the Seeing AI app which promises to make the world more accessible to the blind and visually impaired. In fact, with the Seeing AI app, the visual world has become an audio experience to blind people.

You just need to point the phone's camera at a spot and you will be able to hear a description of exactly what is out there. The app can recognise friends- it can describe the people around you (including their emotions) and it can scan and read texts out loud as they come in to view (including the pages of a book, letters, envelopes and sign-boards).

When paying the cash, the app can help identify currency bills. When looking for something in the pantry or at the store, using the barcode scanner with audio cues will help you find what you want, and with some products you will also be able to get additional details. You can even hear descriptions and images in other apps like twitter by transporting them into Seeing AI.

The 35-year old London-based Microsoft software developer is himself visually impaired, having lost his vision at seven. He was in Kuala Lumpur for the very first time as a panellist at the Future of Work, Workplace and Workforce Conference 2017 organised by Talent Corporation Malaysia Berhad.

Saqib Sheikh said, "We created spectacles in our lab as our first prototype. That's still my vision for the future. However, we wanted to get the software out to as many people as possible around the world. The best way to do that was to create a free app on a mobile phone, which most people already have. So it was essentially the same technology, but more readily available and accessible."

Saqib says the spectacles are more difficult to manufacture and they are costly whereas the app is free of charge. "We wouldn't want to make something useful but it is limited to only a few people. That defeats the purpose," he added.

The app captures mainly images while a video-like feature is used for text-reading and face recognition. In order to train the phone to learn about you, you use it to take a few photos. Then whenever it sees you, it will be able to say your name.

In fact, one of the unique features of the app is a computerised voice that can tell you what exactly you have touched on which part of your smartphone screen.

It is only compatible with Apple iOS for the time being and it is currently available in many countries including Malaysia.

Saqib, who has been with Microsoft since 2006, says that the response to his app from the visually impaired community has been “incredible”. He hears people saying things like “I never realised how much writing there was around me until I held up the app and it just read all the writing. I find that very empowering.”

Another user said, “I couldn’t do the cooking for the house and I had to get help from my husband to find the boxes. Now with the Seeing AI, I can now scan the products and independently move them around.”

Someone else said, “A guy who works in a school has mounted a phone above his desk. The phone will tell him when students are walking through the door and who else is coming. It is incredible that everyone in their own lives has their own little story.”

The humble and affable software developer is quick to credit others, insisting that he is building on the work of many scientists who have worked on this for years and that this app was the product of the team of four.

Being visually impaired, Saqib is particularly passionate about accessible and universal design, and he serves as an international consultant for teams, including Windows, Office and Skype.

Saqib says, “We’ve released the first thing. But this is a very long journey and the technology keeps getting better every year. It’s been much better than the year before. It’s very possible that I might soon focus my attention on people with other disabilities as well.”

A POINT TO PONDER: AN UNFORGETTABLE TRAIN JOURNEY

By Wong Kow

I travelled for the first time by train from Ipoh to Nibong Tebal in 1953. That was when our entire family had to move from Ipoh to a village in Sungai Bakap, not too far away from the Nibong Tebal railway station.

It was for me quite an exciting experience sitting in a train for the first time, especially when the train passed through the four tunnels between Kuala Kangsar and Taiping. However, I had the fright of my life when, after using the toilet in the train, I found that the toilet door had got jammed up. I tried all possible ways I could to unjam the lock but I failed to get the door to open. I banged very hard on the toilet door for more than five minutes before the train conductor came to my rescue. In spite of this mishap, nonetheless, I continued to travel by train from Butterworth to Kuala Lumpur in those days as there were not many long-distance buses operating along that route at the time.

Then when I was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur for training in 1964, I would travel by train back to my hometown near Nibong Tebal two to three times a year. In fact, I carried on this routine travel by train even after I had got married and I had children.

In those days, the third-class coaches of the train would be packed with passengers and there was no air-conditioning. It was particularly crowded during the festive and holiday seasons. Worst of all, I found that the seats were not numbered and there were often lots of standing passengers. As I could only afford to travel on third-class, I would, therefore, normally try to avoid the peak seasons to visit my hometown with my wife and young children.

My most unforgettable train journey happened in April, 1973 when I was travelling with my wife and two very young children, aged one and three years old. We boarded the mail train at the Nibong Tebal Railway Station

at 10 a.m. and the train was scheduled to arrive at the Kuala Lumpur main station at around 6 p.m. My brother would wait for us there and help fetch us back to our Kuala Lumpur home.

After a few brief stops, the train reached the Taiping Station at around 11.15 a.m. and the train would usually stop at the Taiping Station for one or two minutes. Sometimes, however, it would stop for ten to fifteen minutes to wait for the north-bound train to pass by as the trains would only meet at the railway stations equipped with double-track railway lines. Thus, should any incident occur along the railway line, the whole railway transportation system could be paralysed.

There was no announcement on the train in those days so that we were always left in the dark concerning whatever happenings in the train or along the railway track. Half an hour had elapsed and the train was still not moving. It was hot and stuffy and our two young children felt very uneasy and impatient. The only thing my wife and I could do was for each of us to carry one of the children, feeding him and getting him to sleep.

Almost two hours had gone by and there was still no news from the railway authority. Many of the passengers lost their patience and started shouting and banging on the seats to show their anger. When the conductor finally came around, it was already 2 p.m. and we were informed that there were land-slides in the tunnel between the Taiping and Kuala Kangsar railway lines. He advised us to leave the train and get ready to board the chartered buses, which would fetch all the passengers to Kuala Kangsar to board the north-bound train to the Kuala Kangsar station. From there, the train will bring us back to Kuala Lumpur.

The distance from the train to the chartered buses was around 200 metres, which was actually not too far for anyone to walk. As for us, however, my wife had to guide me together with our two very young children, and we had to lug along our belongings – it was a truly terrible experience! Fortunately, there were some kind-hearted people who assisted us in getting seated safely in the bus.

At last, we were able to board the train again at the Kuala Kangsar station and when it finally started moving towards our Kuala Lumpur destination, it was already 4.30 p.m. as the train journey was out of its usual schedule, the train had to stop for some extra minutes to allow for the on-coming trains to pass by at almost every railway station. We finally reached the Kuala Lumpur main station at around 12 midnight and it took another one hour for us to get our transport back home in Kuala Lumpur.

I am happy to observe that the Malayan Railway Services in Malaysia has made gradual improvements over the past forty years or so. More trains have been added to the system, all seats are numbered, and the coaches are equipped with air-conditioners. The canteens are more comfortable and there is the P.A system to keep passengers informed of whatever happenings in the train or along the railway lines, the names of up-coming railway stations, and so on.

With the introduction of the LRT, Monorail, commuter train and many other amenities, travelling by train has become much more comfortable and accessible to many people, especially for those living in Kuala Lumpur and the Klang Valley. Nevertheless, delays and breakdowns do still occur every now and then and it is still not uncommon to encounter delays of more than an hour should you travel by the long-distance train.

THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT CAN COME FROM BEING BLIND

By Teow Cheng Poo

Editor's note: the WBUAP Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest was started in 2003 and it has gone on for fifteen years. For the 15th Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest (2017), the Fine Works prize of USD300 was awarded to Teow Cheng Poo, 57-year old female from Malaysia.

Here is the essay:

My life was simple but beautiful. Each morning I awoke with eagerness to the splendid daylight wherein I enjoyed all sorts of outdoor activities in my amazing surroundings.

There was a wide river with clear flowing water that woven through my peaceful town like glossy ribbons. I took part in many expeditions and I galloped across green fields, leapt over large ditches, chased and caught dragonflies, fireflies, spiders and grasshoppers. Indeed, life was most wonderful for me growing up in this small town. Nature was truly beautiful!

Half way through my elementary years, however, this magnificent environment which had given me so much joy suddenly disappeared from me and it was replaced by darkness. I had a high fever caused by Meningitis which robbed me of my vision. My dear mother was ill prepared in caring for a disabled child; who would have expected such a misfortune to come along in a family? She did what she could and she was most concerned for my safety. She insisted that I should stay where I was put as I could no longer see my way around.

Fortunately, I recovered and, being youthful and full of vigour, I naturally wanted to continue living an active life. Thus, as soon as I had recovered my health, I was up and about, going in and out of the house and ignoring my mother's well intended restrictions. In actual fact, I was too young to fully understand my inhibitions, and so I ran, played and skipped along with other children, leaping over ditches and climbing trees as we played hide-and-seek.

Well, my small-town care-free life came to an end when I was enrolled into St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Little did I imagine then that this institution would give me a much brighter future than what I would have had if I were sighted. Initially, I felt lost and miserable staying in a residential school so far away from home. The strict rules and regulations did not make life easier for me.

The blind children here were trained from a young age with daily living skills such as cooking, washing and ironing of our own linens, cleaning our wardrobes and sewing buttons. We had a weekly project to stitch hexagonal pieces of patchwork together to make blankets for use in the sick-bay.

We were also not excluded from sports and recreational activities and we were taught swimming and diving, cycling, walking on stilts, rope-skipping and so on. We were taken for outings to the parks where we would climb up to the tree-top houses. The interest in outdoor activity has remained with me since, and in recent years, I have cycled around Penang Island on a tandem with a sighted pilot, and I even climbed up the entire 2733 feet of Penang Hill.

I am really grateful to have had such a wholesome and active childhood despite my disability. St. Nicholas' has certainly brought light to my world of darkness through education. I am able to read books and stories in different languages in the form of dots known as braille. I can solve mathematical problems through touch by looking at tactile diagrams and I am able to locate places in the world using tactile maps and graphics.

Indeed, education has brought me tremendous joy and success as I diligently strove to obtain good grades in my school performance. Even when I lacked sufficient academic materials, my passion for learning drove me to make significant achievements for which I was frequently awarded.

My academic success helped me earn a scholarship for tertiary education in a prestigious university. This was very momentous for me, being one of the few coming from a small town and being the first in my family to have had such an opportunity. When I was presented the scroll for my Honours Degree at the convocation ceremony, many people were proud of my success and they gave me two rounds of applause.

I started my career as a Social Worker which gave me the golden opportunity to serve those who were less fortunate than me. I had countless positive experiences while serving the poor, needy and disabled. I travelled from village to village with a physically handicapped officer. Together we reached out to vision-impaired people who were home-bound, and we helped them get reconnected with society. We could learn social and other useful skills to improve their quality of life and increase their chances of employment. Meanwhile, I organised tuition classes and taught English and Malay to sighted students and adults. I also offered free tuition to those who were poor. In the process, I discovered my talent for teaching and so I moved on to become a teacher.

I realised that students who were blind require more attention and meticulous teaching, and so I turned my focus to the education of the blind. I have helped to educate many generations of bright young girls who are vision-impaired. Bearing in mind that my students will walk down the same beaten path that I have trodden, I continuously try to improve my teaching and ICT skills in order to arm them with the necessary knowledge and skills to face the challenges of living in a world without sight.

With each fall or failure that I encounter, I gain a better grip of the situation in order to overcome my disability. Consequently, I have become positive towards life which is full of opportunities, and more so with the support and encouragement from the community around me.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE BOOK, “FRANKLY SPEAKING”

By Musa Hitam

In his book, “Frankly Speaking”, Musa Hitam gives some very interesting tips on how to deal with various crises. Here they are:

The 1973 sugar crisis in Malaysia:

In dealing with the 1973 sugar crisis in Malaysia, Musa Hitam, who was the deputy Minister of Trade and Industry, explained that “what should be done first is to admit that the problem exists, then understand the issues, take stock of the situation, look at options and their possible consequences. Only after that should one decide on an appropriate course. Then action should be taken firmly and decisively.

“One of the biggest problems that leaders face in a crisis is to be habitually in a state of denial”.

Distinguishing between a gift and a bribe:

How to make a distinction between a gift as a token of appreciation and a gift as a form of bribery or inducement?

When Musa Hitam was serving in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Japanese in particular were fond of bearing gifts whenever they came on official visits to Malaysia. These could be pearls or products they were particularly proud of as uniquely Japanese, or things that were manufactured by their companies.

With regards to the receiving of such gifts, Musa Hitam explained thus:

“I was vigilant about my response to these overtures. Tun Dr. Ismail’s advice was very simple. Firstly, respect the culture of the society you are dealing with and don’t refuse a gift if it would offend the giver.

“Secondly, learn to differentiate between real gifts and gifts as inducement or rewards, and products samples used for demonstrations or promotions.

“Finally, if you accept an expensive gift, whether you have chosen to keep it or donate it, report it and make it known to your organisation.

“He, (Tun Dr. Ismail, Minister of Trade and Industry), often made the distinction between a gift as a token of appreciation and a gift as a form of bribery or inducement. To him, corruption was the blatant act of offering and receiving a reward in exchange for work performed in the course of duty. It was a conditional act. Those words have always remained with me”.

On the matter of crisis management:

Musa Hitam said that throughout his political career, he had always used the same modus operandi in crisis management. Rule number 1 is to remain calm and never display any weakness or indecisiveness.

Rule number 2: before you try to solve a problem, admit that it exists and try to understand it.

Rule number 3: involves exploring all options fully—there could be several. For each of these options, one must look at the consequences, and only then make an informed choice, having considered these consequences.

Rule number 4: is equally important: you must stand by your decision.

Musa Hitam believes that he had been consistent in applying these basic principles when dealing with the 1974 unrest and demonstrations involving the rubber small-holders in Baling and Sik and the students in Thailand and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Penang.

The unrest over rising prices had been instigated by the banned Communist Party of Malaya (MCP).

Well, for many more interesting insights, why not read the book by Musa Hitam?

HEALTHY LIVING

By Joan A. Friedrich

Joan A. Friedrich recommends five foods to keep you healthy. They are as follows:

1. Bananas:

They contain potassium for counter-balancing action with sodium and they are directly connected to proper fluid balance and overall muscle tone. Potassium shortage leads to weakness, insomnia, and even irregular heart rate.

They are also low in calories and fat.

2. Bran Muffins:

They consist of fibre which help in the prevention of colon cancer and other intestinal diseases. They also help reduce serum cholesterol which is implicated in coronary and circulatory conditions.

3. Broccoli:

It contains vitamins A and C. vitamin A is essential for better eyesight while vitamin C helps to maintain the body's immune function and keeps bones and teeth in good order. Both A and C provide the link to cancer prevention.

4. Chicken:

It is the source of lean protein which helps in proper immune function and hormonal balance, good muscle tone, and even skin resilience. It is easily digested and it has the lowest fat content.

5. Flounder:

This fish contains poly-saturated fat which helps to improve the quality of general health by lowering the blood cholesterol level. It is also a good source of protein.

(Taken from Reader's Digest, November 1985)

SOME QUOTATION

Gautama Buddha:

Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle and yet the life of the candle will not be shortened. Likewise, happiness never decreases by being shared.

Oscar Wilde:

Experience is the hardest kind of teacher. It gives you the test first and the lesson afterwards.

John Paul Sartre:

Every word has consequences; every silence too.

F. Scott Fitzgerald:

For what it's worth, it's never too late to be whoever you want to be.

Unknown:

You cannot change the direction of the wind but you can adjust your sail.

Bono:

To be one, to be united, is a great thing. But to respect the right to be different is maybe even greater.

Dr. Goh Keng Swee of Singapore:

You do good, you will be rewarded. You do wrong, you will be punished.

Hermann Hesse:

Some of us think holding on makes us strong. But sometimes it is letting go.

Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama:

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion.

G. K. Chesterton:

If a thing's worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

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EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

Readers are invited to write for our publication, “NCBM Outreach”. For articles published, Payment are as follows:

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) - RM80
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its Member-Organisations (about 500 words) - RM80
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250/500 words) - RM40/RM80
4. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (about 50/100 words) - RM40/RM80
5. Articles of an informative nature written in your own words (about 500 words) - RM80.

Note: Articles submitted by officials of NCBM or its Member-Organisations will not qualify for payment unless the submissions have nothing to do with their daily office duties.

Also, full payment will be made if the article requires little or no editing.