

# NCBM OUTREACH



Issue No. 111

April - June 2023

Permit No. PP7594/08/2012(030560)



A quarterly  
publication of NCBM

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*Printed by:*  
**Sylog Print Systems Sdn. Bhd. (166439-T)**  
19 & 20, Block C, Lot 757, Jalan Subang 3, Persiaran Subang, 47610 Subang Jaya, Selangor  
Tel : 603 - 5632 1302 / 1307 Fax : 603 - 5632 4190 / 8011 2773 Email : [sylogprint@gmail.com](mailto:sylogprint@gmail.com)



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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.*



## **EDITORIAL BOARD**

Wong Yoon Loong

Moses Choo Siew Cheong

Chin Yew Cheng

Wong Kwee Heong

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



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 costs the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) RM30,000 a year to produce the magazine in 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:

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**MAYBANK ACCOUNT NUMBER : 5145 9813 0410**

*\*All donations are tax exempted.*

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*\* Note: NCBM has not appointed any agent to collect cash on our behalf.  
Thank you.*



*by Wong Yoon Loong*

Rehabilitation International (RI) hosted a series of events and forums in Beijing, from 19-23 May 2023 in honor of its 100th anniversary.

President and Executive Director of National Council for the Blind, Malaysia were cordially invited by China Disabled Persons' Federation to participate in the celebration.

The opening ceremony on 21 May 2023 (Sunday) started with a Congratulatory message from H.E. Xi Jinping , President of the People's Republic of China, delivered by H.E. State Councilor Shen Yigin and speech by H.E. Shen Yigin.

Followed by congratulatory messages from UN Secretary-General H.E. Antonio Guterres, video speech by H.E. Ms Armida Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, speech by H.E. Luis Gallegos, former Foreign Minister of Ecuador, Dr Timothy Perry Shriver, Chairman of the Special Olympics International Board of Directors, Mr Abdulla Al Humaidan, Secretary General of Zayed Higher Organisation for People of Determination, UAE, Mdm Zhang Haidi, President of Rehabilitation International and Chairperson of China Disabled Persons' Federation.

The Beijing Declaration in Commemoration of the Centenary of Rehabilitation International was released. The declaration urge societies, countries and regions globally to respect human diversity and rights, endorse the equal participation of people with disabilities in world affairs, and advance comprehensive development to create a society characterized by peace, inclusiveness and goodwill.

The centennial celebration featured a high-level opening ceremony, Outstanding Achievement Awards and Centennial Contribution Awards presentation, a strategic capacity-building seminar on 21 May, eight sub-forums/parallel sessions, a themed forum on disability issues in Belt and Road countries, and the Care and Rehabilitation Expo China 2023.

The University of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences has been built to an advanced standard, cultivating top-tier professionals in China.



Parallel sessions held were on:-

- i) Legal Policy and implementation of CRPD. Mr Wong Yoon Loong on behalf of Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR) and National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) delivered a presentation.
- ii) Session on Education which China Blind Association collaborated with Danish Company, Lego on a pilot project to teach the mandarin 'pin yin' language to the Blind using Lego tactile
- iii) Session on rehabilitation
- iv) "Belt and Road" Disability Cooperation Theme Forum
- v) Session on Accessibility
- vi) Session on Employment
- vii) Session on Leisure, Recreation and Physical activities
- viii) Session on Women and Children with Disabilities

In the noon of 22 May at the Belt and Road initiatives Forum several MoU's were signed by representatives from China Disabled Persons' Federation, Disabled People's Organisation, Institutions in China and their partners in Cambodia, Malaysia, France and Kazakhstan.

The MoU's focused on cooperation in areas of rehabilitation, assistive devices and technology and international exchanges in the field of disability.

Datuk Rosalind Chew, President of National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) signed the MoU with Mr Peter Li Qingzhong of China Association of the Blind and also the President of World Blind Union Asia-Pacific (WBUAP).



It was a historic event for National Council for the Blind, Malaysia and NCBM President, expressed her heartfelt thanks for the confidence and commitment to work together to improve lives of the Blind in China and Malaysia. Even though we have the same challenges, we can learn from each other to find the solution in the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.





*by Wong Yoon Loong*

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

A very Good Morning to all of you.

I, on behalf of the 20 representatives from 6 ASEAN countries namely Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam and the host Thailand, I would like to congratulate the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB) for successfully organising the 11<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Community Blind Forum (ACBF) from 23-26 April 2023 at Hansa JB Hotel Hatyai. The commitment of TAB in championing the work for the blind in ASEAN is noteworthy through the organising of the 11 series of ACBF. The Covid-19 did not dampen their spirit as the 10<sup>th</sup> Forum was organised online.

The theme of the 11<sup>th</sup> ACBF “Coalition Building Among The Blind Leaders In ASEAN” is most timely as history has shown that unity among us will bring progress which we can witness from all the 10 countries ratifying the Convention on the Rights Of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD). We should continue our advocacy efforts in ensuring that all ASEAN countries sign and ratify the Marrakesh Treaty and monitor the progress of the midterm review of the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025.

I like to put on record our sincere appreciation to TAB, staff and volunteers for their excellent hospitality. We will not only bring home souvenirs and the delicious food in Hatyai but cherish the wonderful feeling of togetherness amongst us.

If we want to go fast, go alone, but if we want to go far, let’s go together.

Thank you and may you have a successful meeting.

# **MALAYSIA'S 2022 REPORT TO THE 11TH ASEAN COMMUNITY BLIND FORUM (ACBF)**

*by Dr Lim Tien Hong and Maoh Anak Janting*

Recover, Re-initiate and Restart Economic activities for the Marginalise people in Malaysia

2022 was a blessed and joyful year for the marginalised communities in Malaysia compared to 2021. In this year, most economic sectors have returned to normal function even though the Covid-19 pandemic is still ongoing. The Malaysian National Immunisation Programme was successful in reducing the number of Covid-19 cases in 2022. Hence, the household income as well as employment for visual impaired people increased from time to time. However, these indicators were still lower compared to the pre-pandemic era.

Although the Massage and Reflexology shops owned by the visually impaired are opened, the business profits are relatively lower than the years before Covid-19 pandemic. Closing of the country's borders resulted in a decline in international tourist arrivals. This situation caused the loss of customers for the tourism industry. Gladly, the general public in Malaysia has been very generous in supporting the marginalised people during the post-pandemic. Working together with the Welfare Department under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, these organisations reached out to the marginalised community with food rations, cash vouchers, face masks and hand sanitisers.

During the post-pandemic, majority of the Non-Governmental Organisations in Malaysia experienced financial challenges. However, these organisations still try their best to serve the target groups. In the restart stage, Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) organised a leadership training programme for SBM leaders and staff. The training programme was organised in 4 regions in Malaysia. A total of 150 SBM leaders and staff from various states and branches benefited from it. This programme served an important purpose in increasing the motivation among SBM leaders and staff during the post-pandemic period.

In the middle of 2022, SBM held its annual general meeting at Grand Riverview Hotel in Kelantan, Malaysia. Almost 600 participants from various states of Malaysia attended the meeting. The previous year's finance report, activity reports and other reports were presented in the meeting. A new

leadership election was also conducted. With a new leader, SBM is stronger and ready to face any future challenges.

On 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022, SBM joined the Malaysian Confederation for the Disabled (MCD), one of the main cross-disabilities organisations in Malaysia. This organisation consists of 8 mainstream disabled organisations. The participation of SBM will increase the effectiveness of the disabled movement in Malaysia.

On 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023, The Minister of Health, YB. Dr Zaliha Mustafa announced that Malaysia will implement Visual Impairment Friendly Medication Labelling initiative. A total of 250 government clinics throughout the country are involved in the early stage of the implementation. Under this initiative, visually impaired patients will receive Braille label medications issued by government clinics. The information on the labelling include name, medications usage and doses to take per day.

On 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023, the Women and Community Development Department of SBM organised “2023 National Women’s Leadership Training Programme” at WP Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. A total of 30 future women leaders benefitted from the programme. The training was designed to develop leadership skills among visually impaired women in Malaysia. It serves as an important tool to prepare female leaders who will take up the challenge of future leadership and decision-making for the disabled movement in our region.

On 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023, the Showdown Game introduction course was jointly organised by the Sport Development Department of SBM, Malaysian Association for the Blind and Malaysian Blind Sports Association. The course took place at the hall of the Malaysian Association for the Blind and a total of 50 visually impaired people involved in the event. The main purpose of this event is to introduce a new game for the visually impaired community in Malaysia.

Reported by:

Dr. Lim Tien Hong, Chairperson for the Department of Communication, Advocacy and Human Rights, Society of The Blind In Malaysia & Mr Maoh Anak Janting, Chairperson for the Department of Sport Development, Society of The Blind in Malaysia.



*Disediakan oleh: Muhammad Firdaus bin Abu Hassan*

Seminar ini telah diadakan pada 16 Mac 2023 (Khamis) bertempat di Universiti Malaya. Penganjuran seminar ini merupakan program kerjasama antara Bahagian Kaunseling & Pemerkasan OKU, Universiti Malaya dengan kerjasama Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Orang Buta Malaysia (NCBM).

Seminar pada kali ini telah dirasmikan oleh Ybrs. Encik Hirman Awang, Pengarah Bahagian Mahasiswa Holistik, Jabatan Pendidikan Tinggi, Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi.

Penyertaan seminar ini adalah seramai 150 orang peserta yang terdiri daripada wakil pentadbir Unit OKU dan pustakawan serta mahasiswa OKU penglihatan dan tidak upaya cetak daripada beberapa universiti awam dan swasta seperti Universiti Malaya, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia, Universiti teknologi Mara, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia dan wakil-wakil NGO OKU penglihatan di seluruh Malaysia.

Objektif penganjuran seminar ini adalah untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan warga OKU penglihatan dan tidak upaya cetak di peringkat Institusi Pengajian Tinggi (IPT) di Malaysia tentang kepentingan dan kemudahan yang boleh dimanfaatkan melalui penglibatan Malaysia di dalam Perjanjian *Marrakesh Treaty*.

Melalui tinjauan kepada penilaian peserta melalui penganjuran seminar, 100% peserta memberikan maklum balas amat memuaskan dalam aspek pengisian program dan pengurusan seminar.

Maklumat bergambar:







*By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy*

***(Editor's Note:***

***Blind from early childhood, Ivan Ho Tuck Choy had the opportunity to receive his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang and subsequently to undergo rehabilitation and training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, he was able to gain employment as telephone operator at Kumpulan Guthrie, where he worked for thirty years.)***

While working, Ivan furthered his own education by taking up the correspondence education programme from Hadley School for the Blind in USA. While training and working, however, Ivan was actively involved in advocating for inclusion of the blind in the work for the blind and in setting up the blind people's self-help organisation. This led to the setting up of the Selangor Society of the Blind (SSB) which subsequently became the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). He was the President of these two organisations for a number of years.

This led to his involvement in the activities of the Asian Blind Union narrated as follows:

The main sponsors of the Asian Blind Union (ABU) was the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (NABP), helmed by Mr. Arne Johan Husveg who hosted our stay in Norway in 1980. With their generous funding to strengthen the movements of the blind, which included paying all the travel expenses for office-bearers, the Asian Blind Union (ABU) carried out several beneficial projects. These included the setting up of the ABU Secretariat in Colombo, the three-day Youth Leadership Training Seminar in Pattaya, the week-long Perkins Braille Repair Course in Karachi, and so on.

Working with Mr. Husveg, we went to Myanmar to set up the forerunner of the Myanmar National Association of the Blind, assisted in establishing the Association of the Blind of Cambodia, helped to draw up the Constitution and saw the formation of the Brunei Darussalam Association of the Blind, and the holding of the Employment Seminar in that country. As NABP was also working with the Vietnam Blind Association in the building of a vocational training centre, we were in Hanoi on its opening day and we attended a workshop on its future direction.





*Photo of  
Mr Husveg with his Guide dog*

On a trip to Oslo in October 2004 to discuss some major projects to be implemented by the Danish International Development Agency, I learned that Mr. Husveg was terminally ill with a very bloated body. I requested, and arrangements were made for me to visit him in hospital.

When we met, I related to Mr. Husveg the purpose of my visit, touched briefly on the activities of the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific (WBUAP), and updated him on those organisations which he had helped to form. As the visit was confined to fifteen minutes only, I managed to express my deep gratitude to him for all that he had done for me, starting from the study tour in 1980 and through the many adventures of ABU and WBUAP. I then bade him goodbye, saying that the flight home would be a long journey.

Mr. Husveg grasped my hand and said, "Ivan, I made those journeys many times before, but nowadays, my journey is only from this chair to my bed."

I felt so touched and humbled as I left the hospital, but I was extremely glad to have had the privilege of meeting with him for the last time.

Mr. Arne Husveg died on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2004.



*By Majorie Chiew*

It was the year 2013 when Sundralingam, Septuagenarian, found joy, fulfilment and a renewed sense of purpose as he filled his day with voluntary work.

Listening to the news is one thing, but having someone read the news to you is another. You can feel the excitement when Godfrey Ooi, who is blind, hears the news read by a volunteer. There were ‘Oohs and Aahs’ and other exclamations as Godfrey listened attentively to the news that came alive in his office in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur.

Godfrey Ooi, aged 65 at the time, was then the Deputy Executive Director of the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB). He was all ears when K. Sundralingam, 76, retired auditor, was reading the news to him. Sundralingam was reading an article on Li Duan, 33, a Paralympics champion from Ji Lin Province in China. Li Duan lost his eyesight at eighteen when an expired fire extinguisher exploded in front of him. However, that did not dampen his spirits and he, a promising basketball player, went on to take part in competitive sports and won four golds from three Paralympic events. Li Duan got hold of the World Triple Jump Record of 13.71 metres.

Sundralingam engaged in friendly banter with Godfrey Ooi in between reads. When phone calls came in, he waited patiently for Godfrey to attend to them.

Then Sundralingam would say, “Godfrey is a busy, busy man. He is an icon of MAB and he still plays the guitar to entertain others when he has time.” He referred to Godfrey’s guitar standing in a corner of the office.



*Photo of Sundralingam reading to Godfrey Ooi*

For a period of five years or more, Sundralingam had been driving to the MAB in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur for his volunteer reading sessions for the blind. He had been reading particularly to Godfrey Ooi and to Barnabas Lee, who was the Officer-in-Charge of the Low Vision Department of MAB.

Five years before that, Sundralingam learned from George Thomas, who was then the Executive Director of MAB, that he could help read to some of the blind at MAB such as Barnabas Lee.

Godfrey and Barnabas would tease, “Sundralingam is a septuagenarian. He is the oldest MAB volunteer! MAB has about 100 volunteers aged 18 to 76!”

Sundralingam said, “I read news articles that might be of interest to Godfrey and Barnabas, both of whom have their own preferences. Godfrey enjoyed news on current affairs and he loves history and literature. As for Barnabas, he prefers political analysis, business news and book reviews.”

Sundralingam would pick out interesting news items and if Godfrey is interested in one of the items and wants to keep it, then he would type the heading of the newspaper clipping with a Perkins brailler, which is a Braille typewriter, and then he would file it away.

“I would also read Malay articles and official letters to Godfrey,” said Sundralingam.

“It helps in my work to know more things, like what is happening around us and what are the Government policies, especially concerning Blind and other Disabled Persons,” said Godfrey Ooi, who has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in English Literature.

Sundralingam was also instrumental in setting up the Volunteer Development Committee of MAB in 2012. Through this committee, MAB was able to see to the recruitment and development of volunteers for the various programmes of the organisation. Training programmes were organised to help equip the volunteers with the guiding techniques when leading the blind. Consequently, many sighted volunteers could come forward and take part in the Home and Hospital Visits Programme, i.e. providing assistance in leading blind persons on home visitations to new blind clients or visits to the blind in hospital.

Volunteers were also made available to assist the blind by acting as volunteer guides in various excursions, especially the excursions organised by the Elderly Blind Club of MAB. Sundralingam also availed himself as a volunteer guide for some of these trips to different places like Langkawi, Cameron Highlands and Port Dickson.

One day, as Godfrey was talking about his educational background, he and Sundralingam discovered that they were from the same alma mater, King George V School (KGV) in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan. In 1964 Godfrey was placed in the Integrated Programme of KGV for form one. However, he was there for only two terms of the year. Later, he was transferred to St. Joseph's Institution in Johor Bahru for his third-term study in 1964. As for Sundralingam, Seremban was also his hometown.

Besides MAB, Sundralingam was also a volunteer serving as Hon. Secretary with UsiaMas, another Non-Governmental Organisation, involved in helping the senior citizens. Once a week, Sundra would head to the UsiaMas office in Jalan Ipoh, K.L. to handle the administrative work as well as attend meetings. Where necessary, Sundra would also attend events organised by the NGOs. He was also the Secretary of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam, Bangsar Branch.

In fact, between 1999 and 2005, Sundralingam held various posts at the National Council of Senior Citizens' organisations, Malaysia (NASCOM). He served as Hon. Secretary-General of NASCOM for a number of years before leaving the organisation.

Sundralingam graduated with a B.A. Degree in History and English from University of Malaya in 1959. He then worked as an auditor in the Auditor-General's Office in Kuala Lumpur for thirty years. In 1990 he retired from the Civil Service at age fifty-five and he then worked in a bank from 1990 to 1996.

Sundralingam has two children who have settled down overseas. His son, Dr. S. Sovendran, is a dentist in London while his daughter, S. Yalini, is a Senior Tutor at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand.

After his retirement, Sundra did a fair bit of travelling with his wife, P. Pusapamalan, who was formerly attached to the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) before she passed away from an illness in 1998.

After her death, Sundra decided to get involved in social work in order to keep busy and to do his bit for society. And now in the year 2023, he has reached the great age of eighty-eight and he continues being a volunteer reader for the blind at MAB. He has also served on the Council of MAB for more than ten years. This year in 2023, he was again elected as a Council Member of MAB and he will serve for another three-year term.

Says Sundralingam, a Hindu, "I believe that social service to my fellow human beings is a service to God."



*By Tan Kee Keat*

***(Editor's Note:***

***Tan Kee Keat became visually impaired as an adult and he was introduced to Agape Outreach to the blind by Moses Choo. It was at a service of Agape one Saturday evening when I got to know Tan Kee Keat and I found that he had an interesting story to tell about his life.)***

Here is Tan Kee Keat to tell his story:

### **It Was Like a World Crash for Me**

In 2018 when I was age 61, I felt that the world had crashed all around me. According to the doctor, I only had 15 or 20 percent of vision left. Eventually, by age 63, I had become severely visually impaired and I found it very difficult to adjust to life.

In 1985 when I was age 17, I already suspected that I was having some visual problem and I went to see the optician to change spectacles. The young optician said that it looked like a cataract.

So I immediately went to see an eye specialist and, on diagnosis, he said that I had limited cataract as well as glaucoma in both eyes. He said that my vision in the left eye had half gone and that I would need a laser operation in order to treat the glaucoma and to control the pressure. He also recommended eye drops for both of my eyes.

While the laser operation is very quick and easy to perform and one can go about normal business without recuperation after the operation, the disadvantage is that the eyes cannot touch water for about one month which means that one cannot wash face for that period of time.

So in 1988, I instead decided to undergo a cornea transplant operation for the left eye at the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) performed by corneal specialist, Prof. Donald Tan. After the cornea transplant operation, I could see about 20 percent in the left eye. Unfortunately, in 2009, the cornea failed. Nevertheless, I felt that the cost benefit was negligible – in other words, it was not the money that mattered but the emotional and psychological cost were very high.



In 2014, my right eye, which was the good eye, also started giving trouble. The lens had subluxated (displaced) and I again went to Singapore to get the lens operated on or repositioned in the right eye. I had two episodes of the glaucoma laser procedure, i.e. shooting rays on to the eye. This was to puncture small apertures around the boundary of the eye in order to reduce the pressure. However, this treatment did not last long because as the wounds healed, they started clogging up.

Thus, in 2018 my remaining right eye started giving major problems – between February 2018 and August 2022 I had four major operations. In February 2018, the lens which had earlier been operated upon in 2014, became subluxated again and this time the surgeon decided to do a lens transplant in my right eye.

In July 2018, the new lens became subluxated again and I had to undergo another operation in order to reposition the lens. Then in October 2019, I had the first cornea transplant in the right eye.

Then in July 2021 I had the second cornea transplant in the right eye. The operation was successful in the sense that the transplanted lens remained healthy for one year and two months. Actually, after the diagnosis 37 years ago, the glaucoma had continued to reduce the vision in my right eye. It was as a result of this that I now have very poor vision in the right eye.

Well, in spite of my severe visual impairment, I still remember and treasure those glorious days of enjoying my vision. From 1957 to 2018, I was able to drive a car until I was sixty-one years old. I remember in 2009 how I drove alone in a big car, the Volvo, from Kuala Lumpur to Taiping.

I remember when working, I could not type very well with the computer. But fortunately, I had a very kind boss who hired an assistant to type for me. All other tasks that required good eyesight were delegated to my subordinates. At the time I was the General Manager and Senior Investment Manager in the Southern Investment Bank.

Actually, I started working in 1980 and my first job was as Bank Officer in the Arab-Malaysian Bank. It was then when my eyesight began to deteriorate in 2014.

I have also been suffering from severe Eczema which I contracted at the age of five. I could not find a cure then and it got worse when I was studying in Australia for six years, from 1975 to 1980. The harsh and dry winter weather worsened the Eczema and there was no proper skin care in those days of the 1980s. This was about forty-five years ago when they still had not come up with moisturisers and I had to bathe with hard soap which did not help my

Eczema. But I thank God that moisturisers are available today and this is helping to keep my Eczema under control.

When I finally retired in 2012, I realised that I had been holding desk jobs, i.e. the functions were mainly carried out in the office and they did not require much movement or mobility outside of the office.

In finance management, I managed money and people. I could only read the headlines, and, as General Manager, I left the detailed reading to the subordinates who would then brief me.

My decision-making ability was not affected at all. I could tell which stocks to buy and sell, when to buy and sell, how much to buy and sell, which countries to deal with, and I had to monitor economic and social developments overseas, particularly in the USA.

I have really enjoyed working for thirty-two years. First I joined the investment department as Manager of the Singapore Insurance Company. Later, my boss was transferred to the investment department and I followed him.

Then I studied Civil Engineering in the University of Melbourne, Australia and I obtained the MBA in 1980 after six years of study.

Later in 1983, I met a girl, Rina, at the Pantai Baptist Church in Petaling Jaya in 1983 and she became my wife. Then she had to leave her job when we relocated to Penang for work in 1988. I was in the Merchant Bank dealing with property development which involved finance, planning and sales.

We have three children – two of them are in their thirties and one is in his twenties. The eldest son is in finance management, the second son a finance manager, and the third son is in the health care services. I am so glad that none of them have any visual problems. So far none of them have got married.

Now I am very happy to have been introduced to Agape Outreach to the blind, a Christian group of the blind. Actually, I had planned to meet an acquaintance in person but instead this young man introduced me to Moses Choo, former Executive Director of National Council for the Blind, Malaysia. It is through Moses Choo that I came to know Agape. Now I attend the Agape services every Saturday evening and I find Agape to be very uplifting and encouraging.

Indeed, learning to cope with severe visual impairment is very new to me and meeting these blind people from Agape has shown me how the blind and visually impaired people can persevere, gain strength and receive spiritual sustenance in the journey of life.

Although I do not know each and every one of the members, I can identify with them in sharing the struggle to live a normal and meaningful life.

As the Bible says, “We need company to face our challenges.”



*By Loh Kong Ken*

It has been a number of years since the time when I was asked to write on my experience working with a lady boss who exposed me to Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Frankly speaking, I had been quite reluctant to do so at the time as I felt that the experience that I had undergone was not a good one. Now, however, as I have retired since 1 December 2020, I feel that I am quite ready to reveal the experience that I had gone through. After reading about my experience, perhaps readers will understand my reluctance to do so initially.

Well, after I had been working with Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad (MPHB) for almost twelve years, I was contacted by a friend, Linda Kam Yoke Ying, who asked me whether I would like to work in a husband-and-wife run company called Geoprima Sdn. Bhd. According to Linda Kam, a colleague of hers had asked her to look for a blind person who would be willing to work as a receptionist in her sister's company.

Linda Kam said that although the company was small, it was financially sound. Moreover, Linda added that Indera Ghandi, a partially sighted Ex-Nicolite or former student from St. Nicholas' School for the blind, was also working in a sister-company called Geopancar Sdn. Bhd.

Equipped with this information, I made contact with Geoprima and I spoke to Mrs. Yap. She asked me a few questions and then she offered me the job on the spot. Thus, my association with MPHB officially ended on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1997, exactly twelve years since I stepped into MPHB for the miraculous interview.

I started work at Geoprima on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1997. Coincidentally, it was also my tenth wedding anniversary.

Officially, the working hours at Geoprima were 9 am to 5 pm for Monday to Friday and from 9 am to 12.30 pm on Saturdays. Little did I know then that the working hours were slowly being extended unofficially from 8 am till after 8 pm on week-days and till after 5 pm on Saturdays.

Furthermore, I also learned that no overtime pay was allowed for office staff. If someone turned up late for work after five minutes, the person would be penalised with a fine starting from RM5. This would be followed by

an increase of another RM5 for a subsequent offence. Needless to say, the turnover of office staff was huge.

Initially, my job description was for a receptionist. However, as time went by, my work load and my working hours kept on increasing. After a while, the earliest that I reached home was 10 pm on week-days and 5 pm on Saturdays. Consequently, I did not have any time at all to socialise with my family or friends. Fortunately, my wife was very understanding and she told me to stay on the job. Moreover, I realised that it would not be easy for a blind person to switch jobs unless you were being offered one.

Initially, my job only involved attending to incoming and outgoing calls. After a week had passed, however, I was asked to obtain quotations for expensive materials such as steel plates and I-beams from the suppliers. My boss would then follow up with negotiations with the supplier to obtain the lowest price and more discounts.

After one month of working in Geoprima, I was instructed to make lunch or dinner appointments for my boss and her family. Once the appointment had been made, I had to call up the family members of my boss to inform them of the appointment.

Later on, I was given instructions to make arrangements for her children's tuition appointments. In this way, I got to know all her family members from her parents and siblings to her children and to even her housekeeper, three maids as well as the eight tutors and coaches.

In the year of 1998, the world went into recession. Many jobs were halted but the company still managed to get some projects here and there. My boss decided to venture into other investments such as properties, paintings, jewellerys and dolls. Thus, I was asked to make appointments with all these brokers in order to view their collections.

It was at this time when my boss decided to expose me to ICT. She instructed me to get more information on ICT for the blind. So I contacted Miss Chok Siew Lee and Alex Lee Guan Hock from the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) for advice.

According to these two persons, I had the option of purchasing a screen reader software known as JAWS (Job Access with Speech). I was told that once the software is installed on to a normal desktop or laptop and activated, it would read all the text displayed on the monitor screen. Hence, the tool was called a screen reader. The price of JAWS was US\$790.

Alternatively, I could opt for a specially designed Braille note-taker for the blind. I was told that the note-taker can also be connected to a normal PC and it would act as a screen-reader. At that time, the note-taker, Aria, had just been introduced and the review was good. The price was around RM6,000.

There were four factors that influenced me to opt for Aria. First of all, Alex Lee was using it and he had found it to be very good. I was, therefore, persuaded by him to go for the Aria.

Secondly, I was new to ICT and I did not know anything about computers and how to operate a computer. Thirdly, I found Aria to be very portable. This meant that I could take it back home to do my work. And then fourthly, if I opted for the JAWS screen-reader, I would have to share a PC with other colleagues.

I, therefore, informed my boss what I had decided upon and she immediately placed an order for the Aria through SBM. The Aria arrived six weeks later and my exposure to ICT began. Regrettably, however, the Aria did not perform as well as described in the brochure. But I dared not inform my boss about this and I kept it to myself.

With the arrival of Aria, my first assignment was to produce an in-house quarterly newsletter and I was to work with the Admin. Supervisor of Geoprima and Geopancar. And so we visited the construction sites and we interviewed the engineers or site supervisors for stories.

As the recession was still on, my boss wanted me to compile worldwide news on the recession and to make it into a booklet for the staff and visitors to read. Her purpose was to frighten the staff into not expecting good bonuses and increments. I must say that in spite of this, nonetheless, we still received our bonus and increments every year.

During the recession, my boss bought a lot of shophouses at a very cheap price. She sold off some of the shophouses when the market recovered. The rest she rented out for other businesses such as restaurants, beauty salons, a bookshop and even a bank. During the downturn, many of these businesses could not keep up with the rental payment. I was tasked to call up the owners to pay up and to arrange for her driver to pick up the cheque. Every week I had to submit a report to her stating which businesses were still owing her rental.

One day my boss informed us that she had decided to open up a Thai restaurant herself. Preparations were thus being made to open the restaurant and all the office staff were required to help in the preparations.



The boss, together with her husband and her Personal Assistant, flew to Bangkok in order to hire five Thai chefs and to bring in some Thai ingredients. With the five chefs having been flown into Malaysia from Thailand, food tasting and photo shoots of the menu were carried out. As for me, I was instructed to accompany the Restaurant Supervisor in bringing the chefs to the market to purchase the ingredients for the food tasting. Every day I was given the petty cash of RM1,500 for the marketing.

When the restaurant opened for business, I was required to go to the restaurant twice daily (at about 10 am and 3.30 pm) to ascertain that everything was in good order even though she had already employed a manager and a supervisor for the restaurant. My duty was to make sure that the supplies arrived on time, remind the boss to buy items that were running out, and to bank in the tips collection and breakages. The service charge and tips would be distributed to the restaurant workers every quarterly. Fortunately, the restaurant was located right behind the office and so I could just walk over there.

Twice a year my boss would bring her family and her assistant overseas for a holiday. Initially, the office would be closed and the staff would be forced to go on leave. As a result, the majority of our annual leave was deducted for this purpose. The reason for doing this was because only her assistant was allowed to hold the office keys. On the other hand, the site engineers were instructed to order the materials they needed in advance as the work had to go on at the site.

After two years of working at Geoprime, my boss informed us that the office will not be closed while she is away. Instead, she wanted me to hold the office keys and she would sign a stack of Purchase Orders (PO) for me to keep. A staff would be appointed to assist me in making the order for materials needed at the sites.

Every evening I was required to prepare a summary of our work and fax it over to the hotel where she was staying. The next day she would then call me up to go through the report that I had submitted. No one was allowed to call her or her husband and interrupt their holiday unless it was an emergency. However, I can remember that I had to call up Mr. Yap twice because something had occurred at one of the sites throughout the seven years of my working at Geoprime. Unfortunately, I can only recall the details of one of the emergencies.

The office was informed that one of the cranes had collapsed at the site and a few of the Indonesian workers had been injured. Fortunately, only one was killed. Most important of all, Mr. Yap and my boss agreed that it was an emergency.

Upon her return from the holiday, my boss would go through All the POs thoroughly. If the price listed on the PO was not to her liking, then she would re-negotiate with the supplier once again for a better discount.

One afternoon in May 2003 while I was away at the restaurant carrying out my chores, my boss came to the office early and she could not find me. She usually came in at 4 pm but this time she came in early and when she could not find me, she got very agitated.

Then when I returned from the restaurant, a colleague informed me that Mrs. Yap was looking for me. Before I could settle down, my phone extension started ringing. My boss was on the phone and she started screaming at me. I tried to reason out with her but she kept on shouting.

She asked, “How come when I call extension XXX, you did not pick up the phone?”

The problem was that I was having two extensions in the office and in two separate rooms. Depending on which room my boss was sitting, I had to be there to make the calls for her.

I explained to her that I was at extension YYY but she was calling my extension at XXX. The moment she heard me mentioning “My extension”, she went berserk and screamed, “What do you mean “My extension”? You do not own any extensions here. All the extensions belong to me.”

She then pulled me out to the reception and repeated what she said in a very angry tone. Nevertheless, I still insisted that I was not wrong in using the phrase, “My extension”. But she was the boss and no matter how hard I tried to explain to her, she would not listen or accept my explanation.

Finally, she said, “You think you’re so smart? You think you’re so good, in your work? If you’re so good, resign and don’t work here.”

Immediately, I interrupted and told her, “Mrs. Yap, you ask me to resign. Now I tender my resignation with immediate effect. I will submit my resignation letter in writing the next day.”

The boss was stunned. She did not expect that I would react so fast. Actually, I had already tried to resign twice but each time I did so, she told me that my resignation was not accepted and she tore the letter into bits in front of me.

Then she tried to persuade me to withdraw my resignation and she told me not to be hasty. For more than an hour she talked to me but I kept quiet and in the end, I simply said, “I want to resign.”

Then she got a few colleagues to try and persuade me. But I still insisted that I wanted to resign, and this was in spite of the fact that I did not have any job waiting for me and I had three children to feed. One of them was only eight months old.

And so for the next three months, I was isolated from all my colleagues and they were not allowed to talk to me. I was stripped of all my duties and I was placed in a secluded corner with no work to do every day. Once in a while, the boss would call me and she would offer better terms to make me stay. Stubbornly, I clung on to my decision.

Finally, on 30 August 2003 ((which was a Saturday), Mrs. Yap gave me a farewell lunch at her Thai restaurant and we parted amicably. I had worked in Geoprima for six years and five months. Subsequently, for the next one year or so, the boss would call me up and ask me to return to Geoprima with a higher salary and better perks.

Personally, I believe my boss has multiple personalities. When she is in a good mood, she will be very good to you. But if something goes wrong, be it at the site or in the office, then she would become very nasty. Nevertheless, whenever you are required to work late, then she would make sure that you have lunch or dinner with her before letting you go.

Until today, I do feel indebted to her and I do not hold any bitterness against her. She had great trust in me and she believed that I could deliver whatever she expected of me. It was the exposure to ICT that she had given me that enabled me to apply for the post of Assistant Coordinator at Help University.

And so it was on 6 November 2003 (Monday), less than three months after leaving Geoprima, when I reported for work at Help University as the Assistant Coordinator for Student Affairs until I retired on 31 December, 2020.



*by Dr. Tan Tok Shiong*

In Malaysia, Brickfields is a special place for the blind. Indeed, there is no other place in the country which is like Brickfields where there are so many blind people living together. In the streets of Brickfields, it is a common sight to see blind people walking independently, either alone or in small groups of two or three. They can be seen eating at the roadside stalls and in the coffee-shops, paying bills in the post office or buying all kinds of stuff in the morning market.

Why there are so many blind people living in Brickfields? Well, many of them have been trained as masseurs at the Gurney Training Centre in Brickfields while many others have been trained as telephone operators at the training centre. Eventhough many of the blind work out of Brickfields, they still prefer to live here and commute everyday to and from Brickfields.

Many of the Blind masseurs have rented flats on the first floor of the shophouses in order to operate their massage centres. Many more of the blind sell tissue-paper packs at the roadside while quite a number of the blind have taken up busking in the market place, street corners or some other strategic locations in order to earn a living.

Many of the organisations serving the blind are also located in Brickfields, where they offer a wide range of activities and facilities. These organisations include the National Council for the Blind Malaysia (NCBM), Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB), Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM), Agape Outreach for the Blind (AOB), the Chinese Cultural Association of the Blind (CCABM), Yayasan Orang Buta Malaysia, Malaysian Blind Sports Association and Blind Empowerment Society.

Along a number of streets like Jalan Padang Belia, Jalan Thambypillai and Jalan Tun Sambathan, there are about twenty blind massage centres in active operation, the largest of these being the PB Massage Centre.

This centre has thirty massage beds and it employ at least twenty five fulltime blind masseurs.

Then, especially for the safety of the blind users, the authorities have built many overhead bridges and pedestrian crossings equipped with sound signals in Brickfields. Many of the walkways for pedestrians have been laid with special tactiles which greatly assist the blind in their mobility. These tactiles can lead them to their various destinations like the bus stops, train stations, sundry shops, banks, post office, eateries. and food stalls. Because of this ease in mobility, it has enabled many of the blind to work as freelance masseurs as they can easily walk from one massage centre to another to attend to their clients.

As there are many blind people in Brickfields, they are valued customers and given better treatment by the shopkeepers and hawkers than anywhere else in the country from my experience. When a blind turns up in any restaurant, the owner will automatically read aloud to him/her all the food available.

Moreover, when a blind is in a bank or post office, there will be a special counter where assistance will be given. When blind persons are crossing the road or waiting at the bus stop many kind individuals will guide them across the road or tell the bus number/destination.

There is another reason why there are so many blind people in Brickfields. About seventy years ago, Malaya was still ruled by the British and the British advisor Sir Henry Gurney who was later shot dead by the communists of Malaya who allocated three large pieces of land in Brickfields to the Malaysian Association for the Blind (MAB) with the intention that Brickfields will become the 'Village of the Blind.'

MAB then built the Gurney Training Centre at Jalan Tebing, and set up a hostel for the blind and a braille library at Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad. Unfortunately, the vision of a blind village was never achieved and the area gradually has been transformed into a part of the metropolitan centre of Kuala Lumpur. Nevertheless, the pieces of land owned by MAB have become an invaluable asset to the blind, and the sighted community in Brickfields has accepted the blind as part of their community.

Many blind people also got married and raised up their children here. Therefore, it is a common sight to see children holding the hands of their blind fathers or mothers to go to various places. It is worth noting that children of blind parents studying in the nearby Kuen Cheng Independent School are normally exempted from school fees. There are also blind teachers teaching in the national primary and secondary schools here.

Below are the true stories about some extraordinary blind people in Brickfields.

**Ajong Sidim** lived in the Palm Court Condominium and worked as a telephone operator in Sime Darby. He was a very determined person with high ambitions. While working, he also took up part time study in law and later became a legal officer in the company. To keep himself fit and healthy, he did pumping exercise one hundred times daily. One day, while he was walking back to his condominium, a thief tried to snatch the handphone from his pocket. Though totally blind, Ajong Sidim grabbed the thief and pushed him to the ground. After some struggle, the snatch thief ran off on a motorbike empty handed.

**Yusof Abdullah** is a teacher in a national secondary school in Brickfields. He teaches English, History and Music. He is also a weight lifter for his own sporting entertainment. In the gymnasium of the Malaysian Association for the Blind, he could carry up, a record weight of 195 kg in his deadlift. His body weight is 67 kg.

**Godfrey Ooi** is an English graduate from the University of Malaya. He has served in the Malaysian Association for the Blind as an Assistant Executive Director. Currently he is the editor of the Outreach Magazine of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM). He is also a good guitarist, singer and often perform on stage in various events.

**Roslan** is a masseur working in the blind masseur centre at Jalan Padang Belia. He is nicknamed 'The Royal Masseur' because he is often called to the palace to massage the King and the Queen. His passion is to follow friends to go to the open sea to do fishing, he owns an expensive fishing rod.



**Cheah Kam Lin** worked as an administrator in the HELP University. She organises many travel trips for the blind to places in China, Thailand and locally in Malaysia.

**David Gip Eu Jo** is a spiritual leader of the blind Christians in Brickfields. He is also a music composer and a pianist. Currently he is the administrator of the Agape Outreach for the Blind.

**Lee Sheng Chow** is a qualified masseur, entrepreneur, sportsman and a motivational speaker. He is the owner of the PB massage centre, the largest blind massage centre in Malaysia. He has won many medals in international sporting events for the disabled. He is also a motivational speaker for HELP University and has been conferred an honorary Master Degree.

Below are some interesting quotations from the blind in Brickfields.

**Long Boon Huat** is born with retinitis pigmentosa. After completed his Form Three education, he worked as an aircraft mechanic in Malaysia Airlines for 11 years. When his vision deteriorated, he was retrain as a telephone operator. He is married with 2 children. He says, 'in life, money is not everything, but if we don't have money, we have nothing.'

**Lim Ah Pen** became blind when he was working in Japan as an illegal labourer. When he returned to Malaysia, he was trained as a masseur by the Gurney Training Centre. He says, 'when you are sighted, you are running here and there everyday, but when you have become blind, you stay in one place and start to learn skills, such as singing, playing guitar, weight lifting and massage.'

**Sudiarto** is a blind Indonesian who is now residing permanently in Malaysia. He says, 'There is no where else on earth that is like Brickfields.'

....the end.....



*By Moses Choo Siew Cheong*

***(Editor's Note:***

***Moses Choo Siew Cheong has been visually impaired from early childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind, Penang.***

***He served as the Executive Director of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) from 2014 to 2020. It was at this time when he focused his attention on technology developments for the blind.***

***Now he tells how the blind depend on technology for their daily life)***

## **Depending on Technology for Our Daily Life**

As someone who has been living as a blind person for almost seventy years, I have been through such times when there was no technology to assist blind people in their daily chores. Later on, technology arrived but it all came at a very high cost.

Presently, there are so many solutions, some of which are costly and yet there are some which are free for anyone to grab. Nevertheless, the most important fact is that we, who are the victims, do need to embrace the technology. Whether it is free or requires payment to be made, I am certain that all the applications are useful in their own way.

In this article, I would like to highlight the “must-have apps” for people who are blind or even those who are about to become blind. This is because blindness does not discriminate. You may be rich or poor, you may be of any religion, you may be from any country or from any corner of the world, when blindness strikes, especially when there isn't any form of cure, then the only thing that you can do is to adapt and move on.

Technical solutions could come in the form of a computer-based solution such as an application developed for tablets and smartphones or it could be built as a piece of hardware. Of course, specially built hardware would be the best but this could also be the most expensive available. While it is true that computers do have better processing power and speed, carrying about a desktop or even a notebook may not be the most practical solution. In view

of this, I am therefore narrowing down to the applications that blind people must have in order to make life easier for them.

As such, learning to use a smartphone is something that all the blind need to do. Fortunately, smartphones now may come in various makes and models but there are only two operating systems. China may have some other alternative operating systems but they are not commonly available in our market. Therefore, with only Android and iOS available and both systems being built with a screen reader, the blind are now able to use almost all the phones that are available in the market.

Some of the smartphones have better accessibility and there may be some other smartphones which have limited accessibility, mainly due to the applications that have been built into the phone. It has been well established that iOS which is being used by all iPhones, does have much better accessibility due to the strict control imposed. It has also been established that iOS is more secure because their Appstore ensures that the apps placed for downloading will meet certain requirements and security standards.

The first and most important app for the blind to acquire is the **Screen Reader**, which is a generic name being referred to. For an Android system, the screen reader is known as TalkBack. If Braille is required, then the BrailleBack also needs to be installed as well. In the case of the iOS, both speech and Braille assistance come in the form of a built-in app known as VoiceOver. Unlike iOS, some Android phones come pre-installed with TalkBack and BrailleBack. In the case of the cheaper Android phones, the buyers will need to download from the Google Play Store. This means that you will need a Google account before you can begin to download. All iOS users will need an iTunes account whereas all Android users will need a Google account in order to be more practical.

Moving on, now let us delve into the other apps that blind persons may need. One of these apps is Siri, which is an easy-to-use vocal assistant. For many blind and visually impaired persons, finding and clicking on the right button may be quite difficult. Therefore, using a voice-control system is easier and helps them to save time. They just need to ask Siri to call a contact or to send a dictated text message and everything is easily done. So this makes things much easier for the blind user!

Google Assistant can also be activated by voice control. In fact, Google Assistant has the same functionality as Siri. Therefore, the user has total control of the smartphone according to his or her needs. This includes sending an email, setting up an alarm, or even managing one's appointments.

Unfortunately, however, we would need to speak in clear English or American. Speaking in our *kampong* slang may result in the phone doing the wrong thing. Also, while Siri is built into all iPhones, Google Assistant will still need to be downloaded from the Google Play Store. Interestingly, Google Assistant can also be used on the iPhone as it is available on the IOS App Store.

Concerning **Google Maps**, it is one of the most popular of the GPS navigation apps. For the blind and visually impaired, being able to anticipate their route is most essential. And this also applies for many other types of profiles in general as Persons With Disabilities more frequently use the GPS on their smartphones than do the rest of the population.

Google Maps enable the users to have access to all the real-time traffic information; this is most ideal when choosing the right means of public transport. The app even provides a new feature called “Accessible Places”. This enable the users to better comprehend their environment, thanks for the information concerning the exact location of a building entrance. Moreover, the app also provides precious assistance for the blind and visually impaired to get around effectively. This app is available on both the Android and the iOS.

Then there is **Moovit**. For those who are used to taking public transport, this app will list public transit navigation, maps, schedules, real-time arrivals and check all the different routes to get to your destination

The app even indicates to the users the names of stops while on the bus, tram or subway. This has proved to be most essential to blind and visually impaired persons when the voice announcements are not activated. While this is available on both the Android and iOS, my personal experience shows that there are some issues with this application when using it in Malaysia. It used to work very well before the Movement Control Order (MCO) lockdown. However, the locations of buses on the road are no longer synchronised. Instead, the arrival of buses are now based on the pre-scheduled time-table rather than on real time.

With regards to **Be My Eyes**, this is an app with which users can ask for assistance from sighted users in order to match their clothes or to know the expiry date of a product. Thanks to an audio-video connection, users can easily get in touch with a sighted volunteer who can see through the camera built into the phone that the blind person is using. In order to use this app effectively, a blind person will need to learn how to point the camera at things that they need the volunteer to see or to read. In Malaysia, there are quite a number of local volunteers who can provide such services in our local languages. In fact, this app is available both on Android and on iOS.

## What about **Seeing AI**?

This is a multi-purpose app that can help to read or describe all types of documents placed under the smartphone camera, including bank notes, product barcodes, and so on.

Seeing AI can even recognise images, colours and faces and it can, therefore, provide detailed information on people's emotions. There are also features that can help to indicate whether the room is bright or dark, thereby enabling the blind person to ensure that the lights are turned on or off. This app is available on iOS as well as on Android.

Finally, there is the **Envision AI**, which used to be a paid app. Now the company has made it free of charge. This free app uses your smartphone's camera to speak out written information, describe surroundings and even tell you who is nearby.

Excelling in all kinds of text and object recognition, Envision can read text in over sixty languages, which could be handwritten notes, text or food packages, or text on the pages of an entire book. This app is also available on iOS as well as on Android.

Well, these are only some of the apps that are available. In actual fact, there are lots more of them but we can in no way cover a complete listing of them all. As new apps are being introduced, it is good if we can keep track of them and make them part of your conversation topics when speaking with friends. At the same time, you could also call upon the different organisations to keep you updated on the information and all things new.



*By Wong Kow*

We often hear of people who we admire seeming to be much more fortunate in life than we are – they live in a glamorous house, with a few luxurious cars, they are holding high positions in society, and so on.

In actual fact, it is of no use at all envying others because everybody's life is different in his or her own way. In the life journey ahead, if he or she knows what are the challenges ahead and he or she works out some suitable method or way to clear up the obstacles, then he or she will be able to find the solution to fulfil his ambition.

Let us look at the story of the two birds – one is living in a cage owned by its master while the other bird is flying freely in the blue sky or wherever it wishes to go. Obviously, the two birds are living different lives and both are facing different challenges in life. The bird in the cage has everything provided for but it has lost its freedom. On the other hand, the bird which flies about freely has to search for food and shelter despite the bad weather.

They both think that “The pasture over the other side is greener”. Thus, they agree to change their positions. However, they both die in just a few weeks after changing positions. Why is this so?

Well, they both cannot adapt to living in the new environment. The one now in the cage cannot forget the freedom of the past, how it could be flying about freely in the blue sky. And so it refuses to eat and drink. As for the one which is now flying about freely, it does not know where to look for food and it cannot find a comfortable shelter, especially when it is caught in the bad weather.

As human beings, of course, I think we would know better how to live our different lives in different situations. In fact, I would say that for those who are now around 70 years of age or below, they have better opportunities nowadays to obtain reasonably comfortable accommodation, some education and sustainable livelihood.

As for those who were born at the time of the second world war, the period when the Japanese were occupying Malaya, they would consider themselves fortunate to be alive. And yet, there are those who were born a few years before the war, they would have had few opportunities to receive formal education and so their lives were not so favourable.



Indeed, one certainly cannot choose to be born at a certain time or at a favourite place. Nevertheless, I believe where there's a will, there's a way.

The following is the life story of my cousin brother, Anthony, and his struggle against all odds to make his dreams come true.

Anthony was born in 1935 in the remote farmhouse of Cameron Highlands. When the Japanese soldiers were occupying Malaya, Anthony was seven years old and he was supposed to be in primary education. However, the schools were not open at the time. It was only after the war when Anthony had the opportunity to attend standard one in the nearby Chinese primary school. But then, as the school was situated at a strategic point for the British colonial government, which together with the Malayan Police was fighting against the Malayan Communist Party, the school was often occupied by the soldiers. Even then it appeared to be peaceful in those days, there were hardly any teachers around. As a result, the school could only be open at irregular intervals.

Fortunately, Anthony was able to complete his primary education by age sixteen. He then eagerly looked forward to go into secondary education but there was no secondary school nearby in those days. Moreover, the family could not afford to send him to a boarding school in another town.

Indeed, Anthony was bitterly disappointed for not being able to continue his secondary education. In the meantime, therefore, he had to learn a trade to prepare himself for the future. Alas! with only primary education, what could he do?

Still living in the Cameron Highlands, he first went to a sundry shop to work as a shop assistant. Two months later, he went to work in the tea plantation of Cameron Highlands. However, he could not seem to find anything suitable to do that would help him in his future endeavours.

So he decided to go to Ipoh where he found work in a rubber plantation. After working there for half a year, someone recommended him to work in a tin mine and he agreed to take on extra shift working hours. He continued to work in this way for five years in order to save money for his future plans in life.

The golden opportunity finally came. In 1957 Anthony's parents and the entire family moved to Penang. Here he discovered that there were a number of secondary schools not too far away from his home. He told his parents

that he wanted to go back to school to resume his studies. He was already twenty-two years old but fortunately at this time there was at least one private school which was willing to accept over-aged students.

Realising that he was in a poor family, Anthony had been wise enough to save his money for his secondary school education. After six years of hard work in the secondary school, he managed to obtain good results, thereby qualifying himself to enter the teachers' training college. Indeed, it had been Anthony's ambition to become a teacher since his childhood years. Thus, with his ambition having been realised, Anthony found that the years of teacher training and the subsequent years of teaching to have gone by very quickly. About fifteen years later, Anthony was promoted to the post of Assistant Headmaster. Then just before his retirement, he became the Headmaster of a big school of more than two thousand students.

What a contrast this was in Anthony's life! For his entire primary school years, he had only been in a school of not more than twenty students. But when he became a headmaster, he was taking charge of a big school of more than two thousand students. Certainly, all this had taken place not merely by chance nor was he really lucky. Rather, it was because he had an ambition and he decided to face the challenges by finding the correct ways to clear all obstacles in order to achieve his life goals.

Recently, I paid a visit to Anthony. Before saying "See you again", he spoke with a broad smile on his face, "I'm very glad that I've worked hard for a good profession. Now I'm a happy old man."

Truly, Anthony is a happy retired headmaster. At age eighty-seven, he is still in excellent health and his aspirations have been fulfilled.



by Hng Tek Hing

**(Editor's Note:**

***Hng Tek Hing has been totally blind from childhood. Fortunately for him, he had the opportunity to receive his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang and subsequently to have his rehabilitation and training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur.***

***He was thus able to get employment as telephone operator, get married and lead a normal and fulfilling life.)***

Here is the seventh story of his life:

**The Pontian Girl**

It was about 27 years ago, around the year of 1995, when I was working in a legal firm, Shearn Delamore, as the telephone operator, and I got a missed call. The girl wanted to speak to somebody and I told her that there was no such person here by that name. However, she insisted that I was the one because I sounded like him. When I insisted that there was no such person, she said that I was bluffing her.

In the end, I told her, "Well, if you think I'm the one, then it's okay, I guess."

Then I asked her, "Anyway, what's your name?"

"I'm Nor Asmara," she said.

"Oh, that's a very lovely name," I said. "Asmara means love, you know? So I believe you are such a lovely girl!"

I heard her laughing and she sounded so happy. So we continued to converse for about another fifteen minutes and then I told her that I had to attend to another call. I said that she could call me again another time.

The next day at about the same time, she really called me again and she persuaded me to pay her a visit. I told her I could not visit her over the next few days as I was quite busy with some personal matters.

"Most probably I can visit you in the following week," I said. She agreed.

Then I asked her where I could stay in Pontian.

“Oh, there are two hotels in Pontian,” she said. “One of them is called Puteri Hotel which is at the back of the bus station.”

That sounded quite okay with me because if the bus were to reach the destination quite late, I could still take a walk to the hotel. So I let her know of the exact day when I wanted to go.

In fact, at the time when I set off on my journey, it was already quite late in the evening – it was past 8 pm. By the time I arrived in Pontian, it was almost 12 midnight. Therefore, it was no surprise for me that the girl had already gone back to her kampong as it was already so late in the night. I, therefore, went to stay in Puteri Hotel as planned earlier.

Next day the Pontian girl came to look for me in Puteri Hotel and she took me round the area of Pontian. We came to a spot underneath a pine tree which was near the sea. However, the sea had been held back by a retention wall in order to curb the flood. We enjoyed ourselves chitchatting and laughing and she really loved eating the *mata kuching* that I had brought along for her.

After that, we managed to visit a few other places in Pontian. I remember especially going to a shaded area where the shopkeeper had put out a few tables and chairs for customers to eat and drink. The food had been prepared in the traditional way of cooking of Pontian, which I found to be very different from the KL style.

“Yum, yum!” I exclaimed. I truly enjoyed the Pontian food very much.

Towards evening, she told me that her brother would be coming back from work and he would be looking for her. Anyway, I asked if she could stay back for a while more and she agreed. And so we went to the nearby shops to look for items that I could bring back to Kuala Lumpur. She showed me many of the nice things and other souvenirs that I could bring back for my friends in KL.

Initially, however, I could not help but notice that the girl was very shy with me and she did not want to hold my hand. At last I said, “You told me to come but you are so shy! Come on, hold my hand, lah!”

She took hold of my hand for a while and then she let go again. So, in the end, I just had to hold on to her shoulder. I think she was not used to leading the blind.

At last the time came for us to go our separate ways. I heard her whispering something to me but I could not hear what she was saying. So I asked her to repeat what she was saying.

Then I could hear what she said. “Can I visit you in KL one of these days? She said in a whispering tone.

“Why not?” I said.

Then she said, “I’m so sorry, here is not so convenient for us to be close together as there are lots of people that I know living around this area. So I’m a bit shy to hold your hand!”

In reply, I said, “Don’t worry, just let me know when you’re really coming to KL and I can take leave from my work to show you around the place.”

She said, “I’ll think about it and let you know later.”

Then I asked her if there was a public toilet that I could go. She said there was one not too far from here. She was kind enough to show me the way and she waited outside while I went in to relieve myself. Then when I came outside to the basin to wash my hands, I was pleasantly surprised when she gave me a tight hug and kissed me.

And then she led me back to the place where we had been originally standing and she left me. As for me, I had to wait there for a few more hours before the bus came to take me back to Kuala Lumpur.

A few days later, the Pontian girl called me again and asked whether she could come to KL to visit some interesting places. I told her that I would need some time to think about it as I had to make a survey of the places that she wanted to visit.



by Julie Lim

*Editor's note: Julie Lim was visually impaired from childhood and she was a student at St. Nicholas School for the Blind in Penang. She passed away on 4th April 2023 while she was in recuperation at the old folks' home in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.*

Fortunately, some months earlier, I managed to get her story about her visual impairment.

Here is her story:

I was born in 1955 at the Maternity Hospital in Penang. I was known to be “a naughty child” as my mother had great difficulty in giving birth to me because of my weight – I was an eight-pound baby in my mother’s womb. Anyway, I was very much loved by all the family members because I was the first grandchild to be born to the family.

I first went to school at the age of five. I attended the kindergarten which was in the compound of the Seremban Convent school. From the singing lessons in the kindergarten, I was able to take up my hobby in singing. In fact, I was only five years of age when I first got my first grammophone and I was able to learn how to sing many songs from the records which I spun on the grammophone. I sang so many of the pop songs which were popular in those days – songs like More Than I Can Say, Ding Dong Song, Papa Loves Mama, and so on. I would sing along with all these songs the whole day long or all night long.

One day when I was in school at the kindergarten, the teacher told me to go out and play in the field. So I went out to the field to play on the swing. The teacher also came out with me and she started pushing me on the swing. Suddenly, my teacher saw a friend and as she communicated with that friend, she forgot that she was pushing me on the swing. All of a sudden, I fell off the swing and, without thinking, I just simply stood up like a kid would do, and the swing came back and banged me on the back of my head. Then everything blanked out!

Fortunately, however, I managed to get home and then I started vomiting. My father saw me and, seeing my condition, he decided to take me to see Dr. Wana at the Seremban Medical Clinic. Then they took me to the Seremban Hospital as by now I was feeling very sick and then I became unconscious.

Subsequently, they told my father that I was suffering from Meningitis, i.e. inflammation of the brain. I was in a coma and I was being fed through a tube in the nose.

The doctor told my father that I needed an operation on the head in order for them to diagnose my condition and find out what was really wrong with me. However, my father objected. He asked whether something else could be done instead of an operation to have me cured. They said nothing else could be done but my father remained stubborn.

Thus, I was in a coma for two and a half years. My father told the doctor that since I could not be cured, he would like to put me in bed for tube-feeding in one of the rooms of the hospital and he would pray for me. The doctor agreed.

And so I rested in the Seremban Hospital for one year. Then my grandparents, who were Buddhists and they prayed to the Buddha, felt that it would be better for me to be transferred to Penang. Thus, I was transferred to the Penang General Hospital where I remained in coma for one and a half years. When I came back to life, I was already seven and a half years old.

As my senses returned, I began to pull off all the nasal feeding-tubes from my nose. The doctor told my father that I was regaining consciousness and when he came to see me, he kept saying in Hokkien, “*Mai, mai, mai!*” meaning No, no, no!”, as he saw me pulling off the feeding-tubes.

At the time, my grandparents were in the Buddhist temple at the Penang Hill railway station, praying for my recovery. When they came to see me at the Penang General Hospital, the doctor told them, “Don’t just chuck her like a vegetable. why, because she is a very intelligent girl. She came back from the coma because of all the songs and the things we did for her in the hospital that brought back her memories today.”

The doctor told them that I had a gramophone and some records. Every day the hospital would play the songs for me in my one-person room. They played songs like Papa Loves Mama, Ding Dong Song, More Than I Can Say, and Limbo Rock.

The doctor, in fact, was Dr. Wong Poh Lam. He was the doctor who would make voluntary visits to St. Nicholas’ School for the Blind in Penang at regular intervals in order to give the blind residents there a simple medical checkup.

Dr. Wong told my father, “Julie is very musical. But one thing, she is gradually becoming blind. This is because both the retinal nerve and optical nerve have collapsed into her skull. This is the cause of her blindness.”



My father asked the doctor why I was in a coma and in paralysis for so long – for two and a half years. The doctor explained that it was because my left brain had been badly injured when I was hit by the swing on the right side of my body.

After being discharged from the hospital, I continued getting physiotherapy treatment for another three months. My right arm and right leg remained under plaster for many months.

After recovery, my parents initially sent me to a school for sighted children – it was the Maran Girls' School in Penang. However, the teachers found out that I could not read the blackboard nor even the textbooks which were in large print.

And so in the end, my parents decided to send me to St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang.



Ten Things Money Can't Buy:

Manners; Morals; Respect; Character; Common sense; Trust; Patience; Class; Integrity; Love.

### **Cardinal Rules for Life:**

1. Make peace with your past so it won't disturb your present.
2. What other people think of you is none of your business.
3. Time heals almost everything; give it time.
4. No one is in charge of your happiness; except you.
5. Don't compare your life with others and don't judge them; you have no idea what their journey is all about.

### **The Six Best Cosmetics in Life:**

Truth for lips;

Sympathy for eyes;

Prayer for voice;

Charity for hands;

Smile for face;

Love for heart.

Use them well and make life beautiful.

Without Love:

Without love, hatred rules.

Without Joy, sadness dominates.

Without Peace, war prevails.

Without Hope despair governs.  
Without Trust, suspicion looms.  
Without God, life is meaningless.  
Therefore, to Love is to provide.

Joy is to share.  
Peace is to maintain.  
Hope is to pursue.  
Trust is to step out.  
God is to believe in.



## SOME QUOTATIONS:

The First Nations People of Canada have this expression:

The longest journey a man will ever take is from his head to his feet, and back again.

### **Publius Syrus:**

Do not despise the bottom rungs in the ascent to greatness.

### **John Locke:**

Where there is no desire, there will be no industry.

Where there is no desire, motivation is flat.

### **Sir Walter Raleigh:**

Desire attained is not desire but as the cinders of the fire.

### **Horace:**

Naked I see the camp of those who desire nothing.

### **Maxwell Anderson:**

You must learn to desire what you would desire.

### **Philip Doddridge:**

Let us live while we live.

**Marcus Aurelius Antoninus**, stoic philosopher and Emperor of Rome:

Your life is what your thoughts make it.

**Henry David Thoreau:**

Goodness is the only investment that never fails.

**Arthur Schopenhauer:**

Politeness is to human nature what want is to wax.

**Samuel Johnson:**

Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless; knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.



*by ENC Anrade and Julian Huxley*

Story on the Importance of Observing Carefully by E.N.C. Anrade, Quain Professor of Physics and Julian Huxley, Professor in University of London:

One of the chief things in science is careful observation. Things that look rather alike may actually be very different when we come to look closely.

There is a story of a professor of medicine who was giving his first lesson to young men who were going to be doctors. He said to them that if they wanted to become good doctors, there were two things most important for them – one was to observe well and carefully while the other was not to be disgusted at unpleasant things.

In front of him was a bowl of dirty dish-water, with an offensive smell. He went on to say that, to test them, he was going to put a finger first in the water and then in his mouth, and that he wanted them all to do after him exactly what he did.

Accordingly, he dipped in a finger, and then put a finger in his mouth. In spite of the unpleasantness of the water, the students came up one by one and put a finger in the water and then in the mouth, bearing the very unpleasant taste as best they could.

At the end of it all the professor said, “I must congratulate you, gentlemen, on all having one of the qualities necessary, but one alone. You do not let horrible things disgust you, but neither, unfortunately, you observe carefully, or you would have noticed that, whereas I put my second finger in the water, it was the third finger that I put in my mouth.”

Let this story serve to remind us of the importance of noticing what really happens, and not what we think is going to happen.

(Taken from the book, *An Introduction to Science*, Book II, *What Is Science – Interesting Things Around Us*)

**Anonymous:**

You need to build three factories and the fourth one will come about automatically.

Build an ice factory in your brain and you will be cool. Build a sugar factory in your stomach and so you will be sweet. Build a love factory in your heart and you will be calm.

And the fourth factory, it will come automatically – it is satisfactory!





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Society of the Blind in Malaysia/  
Pertubuhan Orang Cacat Penglihatan Malaysia (SBM)  
Mr Khairul Azwan Bin Wahab



## **REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS 2021- 2023**

The following persons were also appointed as representatives of NCBM to local/International organisations:

### **World Blind Union (WBU)**

Datuk Rosalind Chew,

Mr Wong Yoon Loong

Tuan Hj Nazari

Dr Wong Huey Siew

### **World Blind Union Asia-Pacific (WBUAP)**

Datuk Rosalind Chew

Mr Wong Yoon Loong

### **World Union Asia Pacific Massage Commission**

Dato' Dr Hsiung Kwo Yeun

Mdm Norimah Hj Ahamad

### **Malaysian Council for Rehabilitation (MCR)**

Secretariat of NCBM

Majlis Kebajikan dan Pembangunan Malaysia (MAKPEM)

Secretariat of NCBM



## **AUDITOR 2021- 2023**

Inpana & Associates,  
Kuala Lumpur



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) - RM 80
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) - RM 80
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250/500 words) - RM 40/80
4. Articles of an informative nature written in your own words - (about 500 words) - RM 80
5. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (About 50/100 words) - RM 40/80
6. Interesting tidbits, jokes or other information taken from magazines or other sources of limited circulation - RM 15

**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.

