

NCBM OUTREACH



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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.



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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.



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 visually impaired.

It costs 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.

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SPEECH BY DATUK ROSALIND CHEW

PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND, MALAYSIA (NCBM) AT THE 38TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF NCBM ON 1 AUGUST 2024 AT THE AC MARRIOT HOTEL KUALA LUMPUR.

Council Members;
Representatives from Ministries;
Executive Director and Staff of NCBM;
Distinguished Guests;
Datuk/Datin
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to the 38th Annual General Meeting of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM). Your presence here today signifies your commitment and passion to serve and empower those who are blind or with visual impairment.

2023 has been a great year with most of our programmes and activities back to pre- pandemic level. NCBM managed to organise a leadership workshop for blind youths, Finalisation Workshop for the Revision of the Mathematics Braille Code to be in line with the Unified English Braille Code and celebration of the World Braille Day with the Sabah State Library. NCBM provided financial support for the celebration of International White Cane Safety Day and World Sight Day in St. Nicholas' Home, Penang, Sarawak Society for the Blind, Sabah Society for the Blind and at the National level with the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). NCBM also provided financial support for several other projects related to the blind.

At the international scene, NCBM continued to work together through the World Blind Union Asia-Pacific, ASEAN Secretariat and other international and regional organisations. NCBM also forged bilateral relationships with organisations of the blind through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the China Blind Association, visit by the National General Assembly of Taiwan Blind Welfare Association and the Thailand Service Co-operative of the Blind Limited (TSCB).

I together with Council Members and Management participated in a few conferences and study visits.

NCBM continues to have meaningful engagements with various Government Ministries especially the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Human Resources, who are represented here today.

Moving forward in 2024 and beyond, NCBM hopes to be able to amplify the voices of those who are blind or with visual impairment in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. NCBM will continue to be a platform for member organisations to propose and discuss issues related to the blind before bringing forward to the relevant Ministries. We might not agree with one another on some issues but the interest of the organisation and the people we serve should take precedence NCBM will represent the interest of the blind in Malaysia in the region and international field.

All these are only made possible through the generous donation of our supporters, committed Government Officials and cooperation of member organisations and most importantly the dedication and hard work of the staff. On behalf of NCBM, I would like to thank all of you for your continued support.

Thank you.



NEWS FROM WORLD BLIND UNION

World Blind Union News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World Blind Union Celebrates the 2024 Paralympics: Advocating for Inclusivity and the Benefits of Sports for People who are Blind or Partially Sighted

August 28, 2024

As the world eagerly anticipates the 2024 Paralympic Games, the World Blind Union (WBU) extends its heartfelt congratulations to all athletes participating in this prestigious event. These athletes exemplify determination, resilience, and the extraordinary human spirit.

The WBU recognizes the positive impact that sports and recreation have on the health and social well-being of blind and partially sighted individuals. Yaw Ofori-Debra, Chair of the WBU Sports and Recreation Committee, emphasizes:

"While we celebrate the achievements of blind and partially sighted athletes, it's crucial to recognize the health and social advantages sports offer them. Regular physical activity through sports helps maintain their health and active lifestyle. Beyond physical benefits, sports also nurture essential life skills, leadership qualities, teamwork, and cognitive health. We advocate for the inclusivity of sports disciplines, urging sports authorities to provide accessible facilities and equipment designed for those who are blind or partially sighted."

Participation in sports can offer anyone who is blind or partially sighted numerous benefits, including improved physical health, enhanced cognitive function, and reduced stress levels. Moreover, engaging in sports fosters essential social skills, leadership qualities, and team spirit, contributing to overall personal development and community integration.

Martine Abel-Williamson, President of the WBU, emphasizes the broader significance of this global event:

"The Paralympic Games are a celebration of human potential and a powerful reminder that disability is not a limitation but a different form of ability. These games provide a global stage where blind and partially sighted athletes can showcase their talents and inspire millions. At the World Blind Union, we are dedicated to fostering an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to participate in sports. We call on all stakeholders to support and promote accessibility in sports, ensuring that everyone, regardless of their visual ability, can experience the joy and benefits of athletic participation."

The WBU calls on sports authorities, organizations, and communities worldwide to take proactive steps toward inclusivity in sports. This includes providing accessible facilities, adaptive equipment, and support systems tailored to the unique needs of blind and partially sighted athletes. Ensuring that sports are inclusive will empower more individuals to participate and excel, breaking down barriers and promoting a more equitable and inclusive society.

As the 2024 Paralympics approach, the WBU stands in solidarity with all athletes, celebrating their achievements and advocating for a more inclusive sporting world.

Be part of the movement August 28th 2024 - September 8th 2024, and let's make the 2024 Paralympics a celebration of inclusivity, resilience, and the incredible potential of every athlete.

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Entrepreneurial Day for the Blind at MAB:

The Malaysian Association for the Blind held an Entrepreneurial Day for the Blind in Kompleks MAB on 20th July 2024 (Sunday). About 400 participants were involved in the event.

There were at least eighteen business ventures by the blind and eleven Government agencies such as MARA, SME Corporation, TEKUN and Bank Muamalat (largest Islamic bank in Malaysia) which opened their booths in Kompleks MAB.

“Most of the blind entrepreneurs managed to finish selling their products by 3 p.m. and some of them recorded more than 200 percent profit,” said Dr. Lim Tien Hong, Manager of Strategy and Job Placement Unit of MAB. “The blind entrepreneurs sold things like durian, food and beverages, handicrafts and various other items. The results show that the Entrepreneurial Day programme was very successful.”

Dr. Lim Tien Hong is totally blind and he was appointed as the Job Placement Officer of MAB on 18th September 2024.

Dr. Lim Tien Hong became blind due to a motor accident at the age of ten. Thus, for his secondary education, he studied at the SMK Haji Zainul Abidin School’s Integrated Programme for the blind from 1997 to 2002, including two years of form six in the same school.

Subsequently, Dr. Lim obtained his B.A. Economics Degree in the University of Malaya in 2008. Then he got his Master’s Degree in Economics in 2012 followed by a PhD. in Development Studies also from University of Malaya. Finally, he gained additional recognition in 2023 from Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang (USM) for his post-doctoral fellowship studies in higher education.

Dr. Lim Tien Hong first went into employment in 2018 working as a Marketeer in Always Marketing Sdn. Bhd. where he helped to prepare reports, monitor business commodities and organise product sales events. He was in this business from 2018 to 2019.

Then in the year 2020, he went into Humanology Sdn. Bhd. selling training products, writing up training packages and organising training seminars for the company's clients.

Finally, it was on September 18, 2024 when Dr. Lim Tien Hong was appointed as the Manager of Strategies and Job Placement at the Malaysian Association where he successfully organised the Entrepreneurial Day programme for the blind at Kompleks MAB.

Visually Impaired Youth Leadership and Exploration Camp:





The Visually Impaired Youth Leadership and Exploration Camp was jointly organised by the Malaysian Association for the Blind and the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia from July 26 to 28 2024. The leadership and exploration camp was held at Kongkoi Jelebu in Negeri Sembilan.

There were thirty (30) blind and visually impaired who took part in the programme as well as ten committee members and volunteers. There were also nine leadership trainers from the UPM Holdings Sdn. Bhd. who helped in carrying out the programme.

The participants had the opportunity to take part in various activities which included survival skills, Water Confidence, a night walk, jungle trekking, and an evening cultural programme.

The participants were also given the opportunity to take up the challenge of hiking through a tunnel, catching ikan keli and crawling through some muddy patches in order to test their physical stamina and mental capabilities.



The closing of the programme was officiated by YB. Puan Noorzunita Begum bt. Mohd. Ibrahim, Chairperson of the Women, Family and Social Welfare of Negeri Sembilan on 28th July 2024.



Others present at the programme were Mr Wong Yoon Loong, NCBM Executive Director and Mr Ros Sazalee bin Selamat, the Chief Operations Officer of UPNM Holdings Sdn. Bhd.

Path to Accessibility:

Advocates are calling on the authorities to ensure that the facilities in public places comply with the Universal Design Standards in order to ensure that everyone can navigate Kuala Lumpur safely.

The former Senator, Datuk Ras Adiba Radzi, is urging the authorities to make the public areas more inclusive and accessible for Persons with Disabilities. The President of OKU Sentral, a non-governmental organisation, said, “The Local Government needs to accelerate efforts to equip facilities and buildings, thereby enabling the disabled folk to have easy access.”

Says Ras Adiba, “We are moving too slowly, not just in Kuala Lumpur, but in other cities, too. We need to adhere to the Malaysian Standards or MS1184. Many people, not just those with disabilities, but also people with knee pain and the elderly do not leave their homes because the public places are simply not accessible.

The MS1184 actually refers to the Universal Design and Accessibility Code of Practice for the Built Environment. The building owners and public facilities

must adhere to this Standard, which is the basic requirement for ensuring seamless access for Persons with Disabilities.

Ras Adiba, who is herself wheelchair-user, recounted how various buildings such as offices, banks and malls, bus-stops, parks, public walkways and toilets are still lacking in many ways despite the implementation of the code.

She said, “Public toilets present a different set of challenges. The toilets look nice but most of the time the door opens inwards, making it impossible to manoeuvre my wheelchair because there is not enough space inside the cubicle. Also, most of the time, the toilet is locked or it is used for storage or even for napping.”

Ras Adiba talked about how her blind friends struggle to move around the city safely. She says, “There are manholes and the drains are not covered and I know of people who have fallen into them.”

MAB’s Chief Executive Officer, Dato’ George Thomas, concurs with Ras Adiba. He added that even the most basic elements of the code are often not followed.

He said, “The blind can only move around in areas where there are tactile guide surface indicator and other surface features which enable the blind to use the footpaths, the stairs and other raised areas to guide the visually impaired pedestrians.”

Both George and Ras Adiba agree that the City Councils as well as the Developers, Architects and building owners must follow the MS1184 guidelines to ensure accessibility for everyone, not just the PWD’s. There must be proper tactile guide surface indicator, breakers and ramps not only for the blind but also for people with crutches and wheelchair-users and even for mothers with prams, thereby ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all. Dato’ George Thomas acknowledged that DBKL has attempted to turn Brickfields into a disabled-friendly township in the year of 2002. However, with massive developments in the area, the implementation of MS1184 has been poor.

Dato' George acknowledged that DBKL has issued summonses to several business operators in Brickfields for obstructing the tactile paths by placing obstacles along the pedestrian walkways.

The DBKL officers have also organised a walkabout, led by a blind person from MAB, who is Abian Jambot, to check on the damaged tiles and obstacles placed along the pedestrian walkways.



Merdeka Day Celebration at St. Nicholas' Home, Penang 28th August 2024 - Inaugural Celebration at Tunku Hall

St. Nicholas' Home, Penang, held a vibrant celebration for Malaysia's Independence Day on the 28th of August 2024 at the Tunku Hall. This event was organized in collaboration with Jabatan Penerangan Timur Laut, Penang, and was graced by Pn. Hasmizah binti Hussain, the Director of Jabatan Penerangan. Assisting in the inauguration was Mr. Teh Kang Ze, representing YB. Woo Sze Zeng, the Ketua Komuniti Madani Gurney and Ms. Carmen Chew, General Manager.

A total of 70 participants attended, including the team from Jabatan Penerangan, trainees, staff, and teachers from St. Nicholas' Home. The event brought together people for a meaningful celebration that fostered community spirit and national pride.

The highlight of the event was a series of engaging games and competitions. These included a talent show, a "Best Patriotically Dressed" costume contest, and other interactive activities. The talent show was especially notable, with three distinct performances in different genres emerging as winners—singing, drama, and a puppet show. All prizes and food were generously sponsored by Jabatan Penerangan Timur Laut.





31st August 2024 - Performance at Gurney Paragon Mall

On the actual Independence Day, 31st August 2024, the Ukulele team from St. Nicholas' Home showcased their talents in the Hari Kemerdekaan celebration held at Gurney Paragon Mall, Penang. The event was officiated by YB Syerleena binti Abdul Rashid and YB Joshua Woo in the morning, and the Ukulele team sang three patriotic songs.

The Ukulele team was accompanied and supported by the General Manager of St. Nicholas' Home, Ms. Carmen, along with Mr. Shawn, the Head of Business Development & Facilities Management Officer. Their performances added a special touch to the celebration, making it a memorable occasion for the attendees at the mall.

These celebrations reflected the spirit of unity, community, and cultural pride that Merdeka Day embodies, while also showcasing the talents and contributions of the visually impaired people.



MALYSIAN CONFEDERATION OF THE DISABLED (MCD) – SOME ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESSES



By Ivan Ho Tuck Choy

Editor's Note: Ivan Ho Tuck Choy has been blind from early childhood and he received his education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Subsequently, he underwent rehabilitation and vocational training at the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur and gained employment as telephone operator at Kumpulan Guthrie where he worked for thirty years.

While working, Ivan Ho furthered his own education by taking up the correspondence from Hadley School for the Blind in the USA.

While training and working, Ivan Ho 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 which subsequently became the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM). He was President of these two organisations for some years.

Later he was actively involved in initiating the establishment of the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) and he was its president from 1981 to 1995. Subsequently, he was appointed as Executive Director of NCBM and he held this post from 1996 to 2013.

Now Ivan Ho gives an account of some of the achievements and successes of MCD:

There were many things that the Executive Committee of MCD wished to do and it wanted to act on them immediately. However, the Exco. was advised by Mr. HRM Storey not to be too ambitious or hasty by reminding them that "It isn't good tactics in warfare for the weaker force to attack along the entire line. Instead, it should concentrate its efforts in the strategic sectors, and move on to other targets when the former ones have been secured".

As already mentioned, MCD decided to prioritise its limited resources on three key areas – access to public facilities, improvement of conditions in the sheltered workshops run by the Government, and public awareness.

MCD also looked into securing of Placement Grants for disabled people taking up wage-earning employment, and for those working in the sheltered workshops to join the Social Security schemes.

Concerning access to public facilities, MCD started drafting a memorandum around 1989. The completed work was printed in 3,000 booklets and sent to the legislators, relevant government departments and corporate bodies. Mr. John Kim (who was then the President of SBM) and Mr. HRM Storey, together with a few others, were instrumental in undertaking the task.

Fortunately, at around that time the Government was also thinking along the same line and progress was thus most encouraging. MCD was invited to send representatives to join a Working Group set up by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to draw up the Code of Practice for Access by Disabled Persons to Public Buildings. This code was given the force of law, first in Kuala Lumpur in 1992, and then to the other states.

The Working Group went on to draft a second document, the Code or Practice on Access to Outside Buildings which covered pavements, crossings, textured surfaces for the blind, and so on. These two Malaysian Standards were referred to as MS1183 and MS1184. Mr. HRM Storey, Mdm. Katherine Chong and Mr. Godfrey Ooi contributed much inputs to the Working Group.

MCD also played an active part in approaching the relevant authorities to set aside some low-cost flats, with adapted features, for the disabled. These flats should either be on the ground floor or in buildings with elevators. Of course, there were other bodies which should also get the credit for highlighting the needs of the disabled.

MCD was especially grateful to the Government for being a signatory to the Proclamation on the Second Asia-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993 – 2002).

Another area where MCD was also very much involved was in advocating that public transportation be made accessible, in particular, to the wheelchair-users who faced the greatest obstacle in this respect. MCD did try its best, but it failed in the attempt to get the authorities to make the Light-Rail Transit (LRT Ampang line) to be accommodative to the disabled. They did, however, introduce more accessible features when building the Putra Line (later known as the Kelana Jaya Line). Again, other groups were also involved, such as NCBM, the coordinating body for five major organisations serving the blind in the country, and the Beautiful Gates Foundation. In fact, MCD did team up with some of these organisations on certain occasions to create public awareness on such matters.

In 1990 the Minister of Social Welfare Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCD), appointed a committee to advise her on matters concerning the well-being of the disabled. MCD was well represented on that body. Many of the recommendations put forward, such as the revision of the assistance schemes, were endorsed in the report which was submitted to the Cabinet at the end of 1993. Several of the recommendations had since been implemented.

Since 1994 MCD and other disabled organisations had been requesting the MWFCD to set up a permanent National Coordinating Committee, also being advocated by the United Nations. This body, the National Advisory Committee, was eventually formed and one of the most notable outcomes was the drafting of the Persons with Disabilities Act. Much credit for producing this final draft must go to Encik Mah Hassan bin Haji Omar, then the President of both MCD and SBM, and to the team. En. Mah Hassan was later awarded the State Datoship by the Sultan of Pahang for his active social activities. The document was sent to Parliament in December 2007, and it was unanimously passed on 9th January, 2008 and it became known as the Persons with Disabilities Act of Malaysia 2008. MCD and its affiliates, together with other disabled bodies which had since been formed, were privileged to have been invited by Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, the Minister of MWFCD, to witness the auspicious occasion on the enactment of the Act. In later years, Datuk Seri Shahrizat was conferred the Tan Sri title by the Yang di Pertuan Agung. With this act in place, and backed up by the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action – an Inclusive,

Barrier-Free and Rights-Based Society – national policies concerning Persons With Disabilities would be formulated in order to better uplift the living standards of disabled people in the country.

Perhaps one of the most memorable events in the early history of MCD was the visit in 1993 by Mr. Deng Pufang, the disabled son of Mr. Deng Xiaoping, the Paramount Leader and the Architect of the Modern People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1989. Mr. Deng Pufang was disabled when he was pushed out from the window of a multi-storeyed building during the Proletariat Cultural Revolution that was initiated by Chairman Mao Zedong on 16th May, 1966. This dark chapter in the history of Modern China continued till 1976 and caused the deaths of countless Chinese people.

As the Chairman of the China Disabled People's Federation (CDPF), Mr. Deng Pufang brought along his 50-member Disabled People's Performing Arts Troupe for a two-week tour of some Asian countries to mark the start of the Second Asia-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons declared by UNESCAP. The Magnum Corporation Berhad generously sponsored the visit of this troupe to Malaysia, reported to be close to a million Ringgit. This sponsorship was negotiated by Mdm. Katherine Chong who was then the President of MCD. The troupe gave two spectacular performances at the Putra World Trade Centre, showcasing their musical, vocal and dancing talents. The performance on the first night was attended by the Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mohamad Mahathir, and some of his Cabinet ministers, diplomats and corporate figures. The Exco and some members from the affiliates had the privilege to witness and enjoy this fantastic and joy-filled event.

Mr. Deng Pufang and his delegation later paid a visit to the MCD office at the Tema Corporation shop (the registered address of MCD for that day), and they had a very cordial and useful exchange of views with the Exco members. They touched on the developments taking place in the disability field in their respective countries and across the Asia-Pacific region.

Before departing, they exchanged gifts. Mr. Deng Pufang presented MCD with a cheque of RM250,000, being the entire proceeds from the two public performances staged by his troupe.



By Loh Kong Ken

After completing my primary education in St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang in 1975, I waited at home for the posting to a secondary school from the Ministry of Education. It was at 10 p.m. on 14th January 1976 when I heard the news from my transistor radio that Tun Abdul Razak Hussein had passed away in London. Thus, I was the one who broke the news to my family on Tun Razak's passing.

Finally, the letter came on the first week of February 1976 instructing me to report to St. John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur as soon as possible. I was to stay in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas (SMKPK) in Setapak and commute to St. John's daily.

Although the Chinese New Year holiday was just one week away, my father together with two uncles drove me down to Kuala Lumpur early in the morning of 12th February 1976. Therefore, I missed the Chinese New Year celebration for the first time in my life.

Well, life in SMKPK Setapak was very routine –wake up at 5.30 a.m. to prepare for school, have breakfast, then leave the hostel by 6.30 a.m. to catch the public bus for St. John's.

As St. John's Institution had been designated as an Integrated Programme school, the blind students study together with their sighted peers and they receive some assistance from specially trained teachers known as Resource Teachers in the Resource Room. Thus, after the ending of classes, I would stay back until 4 p.m. to have extra tuition and to copy notes from volunteer tutors and readers every day. These volunteers were actually from the upper forms of St. John's. After 4 p.m. we would take the bus back to the hostel and we would wait for dinner at 6.30 p.m. Then, at 7.30 p.m., all of us would be required to go to our respective classes for prep class and we would be doing our homework or self-study until 9 p.m. lights would be off at 10 p.m.

For my first two years of stay in the SMKPK Setapak, there were no extracurricular activities for the students. And so we had to create activities for ourselves. One popular pastime for us was Clorox Football – we would fill up the hard plastic clorox bottle with some pebbles in order to produce a loud noise when the bottle was being kicked around. Needless to say, there were a lot of injuries among the players. Another game that we played was Table Tennis. In this case, six ball-bearings would be inserted into the pingpong ball in order to produce a noise when we hit the pingpong ball from one end to the other end.

Then in 1978, SMKPK Setapak had a new principal – his name was Cikgu Raja Azidin bin Raja Anur Shah. He had been transferred from the Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind in Johor Bahru. On his first meeting with all the students, he told us that he would be introducing extracurricular activities in the school starting with athletics. He said that attendance was compulsory. As for those students studying in the Integrated Programmes, they would have to make adjustments in their schedule in order to participate in the extracurricular activities.

At the beginning of the second term of school in April 1978, Cikgu Raja Azidin informed us that he would be organising a cross-country run through the rubber estate near the school in the month of June. It was about eight weeks away from the actual event and training would be conducted once a week at 4 p.m. on every Tuesday.

As for me, after missing training for four weeks, I decided to return to SMKPK Setapak after my classes in St. John's Institution. I wanted to familiarise myself with the route for the cross-country run.

Following our afternoon tea at 4 p.m., all the students would assemble in front of the school office to prepare for the walk to the rubber estate next to the school. As there were not enough teachers to supervise us, the partially sighted boys would be appointed to act as the marshals. They would be placed along the route at every turning point to alert the runners.

Upon reaching the entrance gate of the rubber estate, we started running. After several turns, I realised that the route which we took was very quiet.

Only Eugene Hng Heng Kee was with me. He was two years junior to me and he was studying in form one of SMKPK Setapak. He had some vision and he was, therefore, able to move around.

As Eugene was running ahead of me, I shouted at him to stop. When I reached him, I asked, “Where are we?” I added, “Where are the rest of the runners?”

Only then did Eugene realise that we were lost. He tried to look around in search of the actual route. However, everywhere he turned, he only saw rubber trees.

I told him, “Don’t panic.” And I added, “Just listen to me and do what I tell you. We will get out of here somehow.”

Then I told Eugene that I had read an article from the Reader’s Digest about someone who got lost in the jungle and the steps that he took to get out of it. The first step was not to panic.

Next, we had to take stock of ourselves. Both of us were dressed in shorts, t-shirts and sports shoes. But we did not have any money nor watch nor food and water and not even our white cane. So I told Eugene to look for two sticks that were long enough to be our cane. After searching for some time, he found a stick and passed it to me. Then he continued searching but he could not find a suitable one. As a result, he grabbed a tree branch to be his white cane.

Then I told him to look for a stream so that he could follow it. After searching for a while, Eugene found a flowing stream. But now we were in a dilemma – should we go upstream or downstream? As we had been walking forward, so I told Eugene to go upstream.

We could hear all sorts of sounds around us – the sound of water flowing downstream, the birds were chirping on top of the trees, the mosquitoes were humming around us, and the leaves were rustling blown by the wind while the dried branches and rubber seeds were falling down everywhere.

I guessed we must have been walking for about forty-five minutes. Then we hit a snag – in front of us there were thick bushes. The stream we had been following was lost as it was hidden by the bushes – and thickets – so should we reverse our track and go downstream or should we skirt around the bushes? I decided that we should skirt around the bushes.

And so we turned right and walked along the bushes. Unfortunately, the stream was getting further and further from us. Moreover, we were unable to skirt around the bushes to follow the stream again. Thus, we had no choice but to continue walking. We felt very tired and thirsty.

After walking for about half an hour, I heard a faint noise far away. I told Eugene to stop and listen but he could not hear anything. Eugene said, “Nothing.”

I said, “Listen carefully.”

From far away I could hear the faint motor-bike engine passing by. Then Eugene heard it, too. I told him to follow the sound of the traffic. The sound of vehicles passing by grew louder and louder.

We must have been walking for another fifteen minutes when we found the clearing. It led us to a narrow exit. At the exit, there was a ditch in front of us. We could not tell what was inside the ditch or how deep it was. I threw my cane into the ditch and I heard the sound of dried leaves. It was about five feet deep.

The only obstacle between us and freedom was the ditch. Eugene jumped into it first. Then I dropped in beside him. The ditch was filled with dried leaves and it was about four feet wide. We took turns to climb over to the other side.

Once we were up by the roadside, we tried to stop someone to ask where we were. Unfortunately, no one stopped. The vehicles just zoomed past us. After about five minutes, I told Eugene to start walking by following the flow of the traffic without a cane.

We must have been walking about ten minutes when we reached a settlement. We could hear some men talking in Bahasa Mealyu. So we approached the

men and asked where we were and what time it was. One man replied, “Ulu Klang dekat Zoo Negara. Sekarang dah masuk Maghrib.”

I thought to myself, “Oh, my God! We are about seven kilometres away from SMKPK Setapak and we have been lost for more than three hours!” Then I asked, “Dekat mana ada bus stop, Encik? Jauh tak dari sini?”

We thanked the men and headed for the bus stop. Although we were very exhausted and thirsty, it never crossed our mind to ask for a drink.

We only waited for a few minutes for the Len Seng bus to arrive. When it came, the driver and the conductor were familiar with me. So the pair of them were most jovial and friendly with the blind.

The conductor asked me, “How come you are in Ulu Klang?” We told him what had happened to us. They were very surprised that no one had been searching for us.

The driver dropped us at the junction going into SMKPK Setapak. We thanked them and we started walking towards the school.

When we reached the front gate of the school, the first person that we met was Kwek Chu Lan. She asked us, “Where have you been?”

We told her what happened. She then told us that no one was aware that we were missing. She added that the cook had kept our dinner and told us to go to the dining-hall immediately for our dinner. It was after 8 p.m. already. Although this incident had happened more than forty-five years ago, it has remained fresh in my memory. I cannot imagine what would have happened to the both of us if we had not been able to find our way out. The school authority had failed to make a head count before and after the run. Hence, no one was aware that two boys were missing!



By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

One day I was with a group of friends at the Elderly Blind Centre in MAB and George Wong was there. Suddenly, somebody popped out a question to George Wong.

“Hey George, you are not married?”

At once George Wong replied, “No, I’m not married. Nobody wants me but I’m happy. I’m living a fantastic life.”

This impressed me greatly and I got very curious and so I decided to ask George if I could have his story, the story of his life. George Wong was very happy and he immediately complied with my request.

George Wong said, “I’m now age eighty-seven and by April 23rd 2024, I will be eighty-eight. I think I’m the oldest of all the blind in Brickfields.”

Actually, George Wong is staying all alone in a house in Semenyih. He said that he first moved in there to stay, he experienced all the ignorance and misperceptions of the general public about the blind. Before the public there had seen a blind person like George Wong moving about and doing things on his own, they did not believe that a blind person could stay alone and live independently. For example, whenever people saw George Wong walking along the street, perhaps on the way to the shops to buy vegetables, they would comment, “Why walk here and there, for what purpose?” These people could be Chinese, Malay or Indian, but they would all say the same thing.

“People think that because you are blind, you can’t talk, you don’t know anything, you can’t go out to buy things, you can’t live independently,” George Wong commented.

George said that when some people saw that he had a garden, they assumed that he would not know how to do gardening and so they tried to make use of the garden for themselves.

George Wong remembers that one day, which was January 3rd 2004, he was having a rest for the first hour after lunch, which was between 12 noon and 1 p.m. He had just reached home after his lunch in one of the shops outside and he found the place to be surprisingly quiet. It was between 12 noon and 1 p.m. and he could not hear any sound, not even the chirping or singing of birds, except for the only noise that he heard from the neighbouring oil palm factory, which was also very smelly.

So he decided to measure how much land there was in his porch, i.e. the land on the lefthand and righthand side of the porch. He was wearing only short pants without a shirt or he was bare-bodied.

To his surprise, he suddenly heard a lady asking him, “What are you doing? You cannot see. Do you own this house?”

At first she spoke to him quite roughly in Cantonese. Then as she got to know him, she began to speak with him more respectfully in English. She told him that she was Mrs. Yoon and that she and Mr. Yoon were very nearby neighbours to him. Since then, they have been very kind to him until today. Sometimes when Mr. Yoon sees him walking along the street, he would offer George a lift home.

Three times George Wong came face to face with danger while living alone in this house. The first time, it happened like this –he was walking along the street when an English-educated Indian lady by the name of Saras saw him and she offered to give him a lift home. When they reached his house, Saras saw the long grass in his garden and advised him to get somebody to cut the grass.

After about one week had passed, Saras saw George Wong again and once more she gave him a lift home. She saw that the grass had not been cut and so she went out to get someone, who was a Pakistani Muslim, to cut the grass. Saras wanted to pay the man RM20 but the man said that it was RM80. As Saras said that she could only pay RM20, George Wong offered to pay the balance of RM60.

Suddenly, the man called out in Tamil, “Pampu! pampu!” Fortunately, George understood that “pampu” meant “snake” and so he brought out a stick and the man was able to kill the snake.

The second danger involved a monitor lizard which was about three feet long. The lizard had managed to climb over the fence into his garden but it did not know how to get out again after four days. This was the year 2017 when George Wong had come into contact with Tzu Chi Foundation, which sent out volunteers to do charity work. Two of the volunteers were Ah Kiong and his wife and they would make monthly visits to George Wong to give him some assistance such as taking him shopping.

George told them about the lizard and said that he was worried that the lizard might attack him.

Ah Kiong's wife joked, "The lizard wants to make friends with you!" George suggested that they get something to kill the lizard. Ah Kiong and his wife said that they could not kill the lizard, not even mosquitoes. "Then what are we to do?" George asked. "The thing is three feet long."

The wife said that she could not see anything. Then Ah Kiong said that he could see the lizard under the sweet potato leaves in the garden. Ah Kiong used a stick to disturb the lizard, pushed it into a bucket and covered the top of the bucket. As the lizard was trying to bite its way out, Ah Kiong carried the bucket out to the side of the road and let it out. The lizard had been in the garden for one week.

The third danger had to do with some wasps. It was November 15, 2021 when Godfrey Ooi and K.K. Goh (two blind persons) and Sim Chew (a volunteer) made a home visit to George Wong.

George Wong told them that he had been bitten by a centipede on the night before they came to visit him. Then Sim Chew said that he could see wasps flying in and out of the windows. He said that there must be a nest of the wasps somewhere inside the house.

Then George began to realise that he was facing quite a different danger from centipedes. While centipedes would move singly on the floor, the wasps could fly into the house in a swarm and he would very easily get stung by them.

Then Godfrey said that he had an experience before with the wasps. It was at night and he got stung by a wasp which was on the floor. He was told that

the wasps cannot see at night and that is why they do not fly in the dark and they remain resting on the floor.

George said that it was at night when he had been stung by two of the wasps, one on his toe and another on his finger. However, George said that now he knew what to do – if he could locate their nest, he could destroy them with boiling water. And indeed, Sim Chew discovered that there was a nest underneath the telephone shelf beside George's bed. And so George destroyed the nest with boiling water and used the remains as fertiliser for his garden.

Then George began to reminisce on the past life of his childhood and adult years. When he was very young, his parents had taken him to the hospital to see Dr. Wilson. Later, when he came back to the hospital and they were told that George could not get back his sight, they left him in the hands of the doctor.

Fortunately, Dr. Wilson happened to know about St. Nicholas' School in Penang and she personally sent George to the school when he was four years of age in 1940. Five years later in 1945, which was after the war, Dr. Wilson again went to the school to see George Wong. It was there where Mary Poon, a blind teacher, got George Wong to demonstrate his braille reading skills. Dr. Wilson was so happy that she gave George Wong five dollars, which was a lot of money in those days.

During the war from 1941 to 1945, the Japanese were said to be very wicked people and they were only interested in girls and sex and they would even murder the girls. Actually, this was not true as it was only the military who behaved so badly and they did want to take everything away from St. Nicholas' Home. Fortunately, the Japanese put St. Nicholas' Home under the charge of the Penang Government.

Thus, George said that while there were rumours about the Japanese being wicked, St. Nicholas' only knew of all the good things done by the Japanese. For example, they gave a cow to St. Nicholas' Home to be shared with another orphanage home. So with the cow, they could get two bottles of fresh milk every morning to be shared among the little ones like George Wong.

The Japanese also gave a goat to St. Nicholas' Home and this goat gave birth to several kids and they were all housed in the two bathrooms outside the main house of St. Nicholas' Home. One of the bathrooms was called the Goat Bathroom. The goats were slaughtered and this provided meat for the inmates, which was really special because at this time, they could only have meat twice a week. Most of the time they only got fish and bean-curd.

In fact, when Singapore fell to the Japanese in 1941, they celebrated their victory by sending plenty of bee hoon to St. Nicholas' Home. This was really special because at that time, you could get bee hoon only once a year.

Then the Japanese did carry out plans for the development and implementation of programmes in St. Nicholas' Home. Firstly, they got someone, Miss Saw Choo, to be in charge of the home and they called her Ah Thow (or the Superintendent).

At least two of the inmates became teachers – one of them was a blind man, Mr. Ma Kho and the other was a blind lady, Mary Poon. Mr. Ma taught the bigger children while Mary Poon taught the little ones.

In order to learn massage, all the girls in the home had to massage that teacher, Mr. Ma Kho. Each of the other adults in the home were put in charge of a programme. Swee Cheng did the cooking, Eunice and Rhoda were put in charge of the medicines and dressings, Henry had to climb the coconut tree to pluck the coconuts, Stephen and Francis had to carry the firewood from the lorry to the concrete platform for chopping while Edward Tan had to produce food from the garden.

Francis was also given another job to do – he had to play the organ to accompany the singing in the chapel. However, he could not use the organ in the chapel as well as the three classrooms and the garage at the end of the block because they were being used to store countless bags of sugar and salt. And so they would hold their prayer services in the upstairs verandah of the main house and Francis would play the organ there. The organ was actually a small keyboard instrument with only two octaves called the tacitone.

George Wong had the feeling that the appointments were actually made by Miss Saw Choo and she was being advised by Mary Poon. Indeed, George

Wong had the feeling that Miss Saw Choo. was learning a lot from the quiet advice of Mary Poon while some people like Mr. Ma Kho were rather suspicious of Mary Poon.

Before the war, there was a priest called Padre Scott who liked going to St. Nicholas' Home to visit and mix with the children in the home. He became a very close friend of the children.

When the war started, Padre Scott stayed back in St. Nicholas' Home and he stayed in the boys' dormitory. He had to hide himself part of the time and he was in the home for two to three years. However, one night, which was just after midnight, the Japanese came and took him away and he was taken to a prison in Singapore. There must have been some spies who had informed the Japanese where Padre Scott was hiding.

After the war, Padre Scott came back to St. Nicholas' Home and he started the gardening programme in the home. Every Saturday he would come from Butterworth to carry out the gardening activities.

Padre Scott did not get married but he adopted a number of boys as his sons. And so when he retired, he stayed with one of his adopted sons in Sarawak. It was in the year of 2000 when Padre Scott passed away.

Actually, during the war, there were three teachers at St. Nicholas' Home, the first being Miss Rose Bennett. Then Mary Poon became a teacher followed by Mr. Ma Kho as the latest addition. The three teachers taught all the subjects, including the Japanese language.

One day Mr. Ma Kho went to the toilet and he heard some noise. Immediately, he blamed George Wong for making that noise and he was adamant that it was George Wong despite all the protestations and denials from George Wong. Thus, from that time onwards, George Wong refused to learn anything from Mr. Ma Kho. On the other hand, Mr. Ma Kho also did not want to teach George Wong anything. And so George Wong would just sit there and he would not concentrate on learning. As a result, George Wong was left alone and he did not learn very much in school.

Later, George Wong went to the Gurney Training Centre in Kuala Lumpur for a short stint after which he was sent to the Kinta Valley Workshop in

Ipoh, Perak where he learned basketry. He was at the Kinta Valley Workshop for about two years from 1959 to 1960. Subsequently, he left the Kinta Valley Workshop because he had a disagreement with the Manager, Mr. Cheah. He went back to the GTC which was then under Fred Wong as the Principal and George stayed there for about three to four months.

It was at this time when George Wong wrote to Krishnan, a former student of the Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind in Johor Bahru, seeking accommodation. Krishnan kindly agreed to accept George Wong and so George went on to Gurun in Kedah where Krishnan was staying with his family who were working as rubber tappers on a rubber estate owned by an Englishman. There George Wong was provided with food while he tried to earn his keep by selling baskets. Unfortunately, it was not a successful venture for George Wong.

Thus, George Wong made contact with the Welfare Department in Alor Setar and they decided to send him to the Seremban Welfare Home in 1961 and George Wong stayed at the home for two to three years. One day George Wong was told by the Superintendent of the home that his order was only to help those who cannot work outside independently. As for those who can work, they should not remain in the home.

In view of this, George Wong was thus sent on to Kampong Batu in Rembau, Negeri Sembilan where he was to stay with a Malay man. The house was built on stilts and the Malay man was staying in the front portion of the house. When George Wong came, the Malay man put him in the back portion of the house. However, George Wong did not get along very well with the Malay man and he did not like the kampong way of life. There were no Chinese shops and so George could not get the food that he was used to. If he wanted to listen to the radio, he had to bring the radio outside the house. Moreover, it was usually bedtime by 6 p.m. for the people in the kampong.

And so George Wong decided to move on to an old folks' home in the Segamat New Village in Johor and then to the Pari New Village in another part of Seremban. Here he stayed until 1970 when he then decided to go back to the Kinta Valley Hostel in Ipoh. At that time, in fact, nobody was staying in the hostel and so anyone could just simply go there and stay, no matter whether you were blind or sighted. There the grass was growing long and wild because there was nobody to cut the grass.

Then in the year of 1973, George Wong got the news that there was a blind man, Solomon Hew Keat Kong, who was running a tidbits stall in Pudu Raya, Kuala Lumpur. In fact, Solomon had suggested that George Wong could come back to Kuala Lumpur and share his room and join him in selling tidbits. Unfortunately, both of them did not get along well together and so they finally split up and parted company. George Wong was thus left alone to stay in that room in Kuala Lumpur.

And so this was the time when George Wong started doing sales by himself. He went to many different places to sell tidbits, including Serdang, Rawang, Salak South, Old Klang Road and Bangsar. He sold tidbits like dates, plums, dried fruit, biscuits and sweets and he fixed his own prices for them.

Later on, he got the best money when he followed the van. The van driver was Mr. Lee, who was also the organiser of the sales. Mr. Lee would drive them to various locations and the blind persons would pair off with their sighted guides and go round knocking on doors or selling to passers-by on the streets.

George Wong found out that the best sales were done in Singapore even though they could only sell tissue-packs at the big hawker centres. George Wong said, "If you had the right partner, then you would make more money."

Unfortunately, George Wong could only make his last trip to Singapore in the year of 2010. This was because he was caught selling in one of the food-courts and the police decided to confine him in a police station. He stayed in this station for one night and he had only a bench to sleep on. The greatest problem he faced while in confinement at the police station was the need to urinate. His difficulty in answering nature's call was made worse with the policeman standing close by and not allowing him to close the door, thus making it so difficult for him to ease himself.

Fortunately, the police finally allowed him together with his lady guide, Ah Cheng, to return to the hotel after midnight. The police even sent him and his guide to the bus station. However, before being released, George Wong had to go through many procedures in order to confirm and ensure that he would never go back to Singapore from 2010 onwards.

And so now George Wong is staying all alone in the house that he bought in the year of 2003. He remembers with excitement when he went to collect the house keys on December 31, 2003 with the help of Nor Farah from the Welfare Department of MAB.

After being banned from Singapore, George Wong continued doing sales in Kuala Lumpur for a few more years. After he stopped doing sales, then he spent more time in his garden. He planted vegetables, beans, flowering plants and even some fruit trees like mango, custard apple and bananas. He liked to do most of the gardening at night because it was cool and quiet and he could tolerate all the mosquito bites. He said, "Gardening gives me the chance to get some exercise."

Then in the year 2017 he got involved in the charity work of the Tzu Chi Foundation. One day, some people from Tzu Chi invited George Wong to take part in their project to collect money and useful items for the earthquake victims in Turkey. George Wong immediately responded in the positive.

George Wong says, "As long as I am healthy and I can live independently, I don't want to go to the oldfolks' home. Even though I am living all alone in my own house, I'm still able to do many things that makes life meaningful."

That is why George Wong can say, "Nobody wants me but I'm still happy."

Then he added, "I'm living a fantastic life!"



By Wong Kow

An eighty-year old mother and her middle-aged son, Robert, were spending their leisure time at the Botanical Garden. It was a beautiful Saturday morning as they both sat down under the tree. The son was reading the newspaper while the mother was looking keenly at the things around them. She did not seem to know what the things were and so, like a toddler, the mother began to ask as many questions as she could.

“What’s this? What’s that? What’s swimming down there? What’s singing on the tree above us? What’s flying about near the flowers?”

Apparently, the son was still busy reading the newspaper and at times he was busy playing with the phone. However, when the mother kept asking the above questions repeatedly, the son, Robert, would just simply answer each of the questions with one word, “Grass, cat, fish, bird, and butterfly.”

Knowing that his mother was actually suffering from Alzheimer’s disease, Robert would be very impatient with her. When his mother tried to ask the similar questions the third or fourth time, Robert would often rudely shut her off without even giving her a second look at her face. He would just continue reading the newspaper as though it was much more important than his mother.

A few months later, his mother passed away. When the funeral was over, Robert came back to his mother’s bedroom to clear up the mess. There were not many things in the small bedroom but there was an old diary book lying on the broken bookshelf which attracted Robert’s attention.

He picked up the diary book and tried to flip through some of the pages. Before he could glance through the contents, however, he saw a small envelope dropping down on to the floor. He picked up the envelope and opened it. Inside the envelope, he found a photograph of a baby. “Who’s the baby?” Robert wondered to himself.

As he turned the photo over, he saw a few words clearly written, “Third September, 1985. My lovely son, Robert, is six months old.”

As Robert read through more of the pages in his mother’s diary, some of the following topics specially caught his attention.

Robert is three months old now. He needs my full attention at almost all his waking hours. I carry him, talk and sing to him whenever I can.

At the age of six months, Robert is very curious to know more about his surroundings. He wants me to carry him to the nearby playground every day. He would point at whatever he sees and I would patiently use his “baby language” to explain and satisfy his eagerness to learn.

Besides breast-feeding, I also find suitable food supplements for his growing needs.

At six months old, He is learning to crawl. I put carpets on the floor in order to make it safe enough for his movements. He tries to climb the chair or the bed. I’m most worried that he might fall down and injure himself.

His toys are everywhere and I’m busy collecting them and putting them back into the box so he can conveniently reach out for them again.

With the blessing of having Robert in our family, we have been fully occupied and most happy for the last twelve months. He is learning to walk slowly but steadily. He can speak a few words like pa, ma, dog, cat, bird, etc.

Time flies! Another twelve months have passed. For Robert’s two-year old celebration, I bought for him more interesting picture books and coloured pencils together with drawing exercise books, musical toys, etc.

It’s 1989 now. Robert is four years old. Time to bring him to kindergarten. At the kindergarten, Robert is so happy seeing that there are so many children of the same age to play with. However, he wants me to accompany him the whole day, without letting me leave him at all. This takes the entire week. Fortunately, he settles down quite comfortably the following week. I would

only bring him to the class in the morning and fetch him back home when the class is over.

As Robert reads on, he realises that in his mother's diary, she has covered almost every aspect of his life, from childhood right up until his professional career.

Robert began to realise how much his mother had sacrificed for him. What a great mother he has had! Tears started welling from his eyes. He deeply regretted that he hadnot been able to pay enough attention to his mother's needs.

Robert began to realise that he had been taking things for granted all these years.

How he wished that his mother could be with him again, even for just a few more minutes. Of course, he knew that this precious time will never come back!

Since then, Robert has been saying the above sentence numerous times in his dreams.



By Nicholas Lam Yew Khay

(Editor's note: Nicholas Lam Yew Khay has been visually impaired from childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. It was during the time staying at the school when Nicholas Lam learned to appreciate that life is a celebration.)

My first Christmas at St. Nicholas' Home, Penang in 1959 was a great experience for me. I had never been to so many parties, received so many presents and been given such an abundance of sweets in my life. The British Army was still around at the time in the Minden Barracks and I remember very well their Christmas party to which we were invited. We really had lots and lots to eat and each of us was given a big bag of goodies.

In my bag, I found a big jeep for my present. Well, I kept that jeep for a long time and then I was quite unaware how it disappeared later on. In fact, 1960 was my second and last year enjoying that kind of Christmas party.

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

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

Later on, breakfast would include a bowl of porridge which consisted of bulgur wheat boiled with sugar. I did not like the taste at all but we had to

endure it for a long time because bags and bags of it were being donated to the Home by the American Navy.

For lunch and dinner, we had to eat ox tail, ox tripe, ox tongue and even lamb's brain. Just like the palmoil, the codliver oil and the bulgur wheat porridge, all those parts from the ox or the lamb were supposed to be good for us. Many of us felt most uneasy eating the lamb's brain! Fortunately, however, I could always look forward to Monday lunch when we had minced meat. In fact, that was also the day when we all practiced using chopsticks.

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

On the Queen's Birthday in June 1960, our breakfast was very special indeed! – On this day, each of us had a fried turkey's egg!

When there were no celebrations, our time was still fully occupied. Apart from going to school, we also had our regular activities which kept us very busy indeed. The Christian missionaries, who were running the home at the time, took care to nurture our spiritual growth. Thus, we attended morning and evening services every week day, we had choir practices on Saturdays and Sundays, and we had the communion service on Sunday morning and Even Song on Sunday evening.

Once a month, the housemother, Miss Poh Suan, would bring some of the children (including myself) to Teluk Pahang on Penang island in order to spread The Good News to the Chinese community living in the kampong areas there. We children would sit underneath the coconut tree and Miss Poh Suan would do her preaching in Hokkien. Then we would sing some Christian songs in Mandarin.

We also had communion service once a week on Wednesdays at the chapel in St. Nicholas' Home. I was given the opportunity to be the altar boy for more than a year. I served under Padre Dumper for a while and then under Padre Pitfield when he took over from Padre Dumper. I had to get up earlier than all the other children, go to the chapel, prepare the wine and wafers, and

light the candles. As the altar boy, I had to wear a special robe. After all the preparations, I would wait for the padre to come and lead the chapel service.

On Saturday mornings, every child was assigned to a particular building in the home in order to help wash or polish the floor – this could be the common room, the hall, the library or one of the classrooms. After this one-hour chore from 9 to 10 a.m., we would be rewarded with shopping time at the tuckshop which was run by the school-clerk. One day the clerk got married to an Australian and she left St. Nicholas’ – the shop was then taken over by one of the housemothers.

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

As for me, my favourite time was in the afternoon when I could spend many happy hours in the carpentry room. Initially, we children were left alone to do whatever we liked. Then, one day, a Flight Lieutenant-Sergeant from the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Mr. Johnson and his wife, paid a visit to the home. They decided to serve as volunteers and, from then on, I had a great time learning how to use all the different tools and to handle all the various kinds of wood from Mr. Johnson.

Then I was among the three children who were identified as having talent and we were recommended to the school Principal, Mr. William Brohier, for further training at the Technical Institute.

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

Nevertheless, I must say that the skills that I acquired have served me well for the rest of my life. I have been able to help myself and even assist other people as a handyman. In fact, the skills became very useful to me when i was working as the Audio Technician in the St. Nicholas’ Library and later on in

the MAB Library. Being able to help in repairing the DAISY equipment gave me such great satisfaction.

Truly, learning and working at St. Nicholas' Home has taught me that celebrations are not only for the festive seasons. With the knowledge and skills that we have learnt and acquired, life can be and is indeed a celebration each and every day of our lives!



A BLIND MAN'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE PONTIANAK GHOST

By Hng Tek Hing

A couple of years ago, three friends of mine invited me to join them in going to fish for prawns at the Belat River in Kuantan. I hesitated to go at first because I had heard a lot of funny stories about that river. Moreover, being blind, I felt quite nervous going there. However, my friends kept persuading me and so at last I agreed to follow them.

Thus, one morning at about eleven o'clock, we rented a fiber boat in order to go downstream of the river. We arrived at one spot which was quite far from the main river and we started fishing for prawns by lowering our nets down into the river. The water was running quite fast downstream and so we had to anchor our boat on the riverside by tying the boat to a tree beside the river.

Then we lowered down our nets a few times into the river and we managed to catch some big prawns. Suddenly, we were caught unaware as the sky grew dark without warning and the rain started pouring down in great torrents. Therefore, we had no choice but to squeeze ourselves into the narrow shelter of the boat in order to try avoiding the rain water. It took more than two hours before the rain stopped pouring down and, by the time the rain was over, it was already very near to nightfall.

All of a sudden, we realised that our boat was being pushed by a big object strangely going upstream. We did not know what object it was until one of my friends used his torchlight to shine onto the object and he discovered that it was in fact a big tree-trunk that was pushing its way up the river. And so we had no choice but to sway our boat to the opposite side of the river in order to allow the tree-trunk to move.

After about half an hour, we decided to go a little further downstream so that we could see the surroundings. To our amazement, when my friend shone the torchlight on to a tree near the river, he realised that some form of ladies' clothing were seen to be hanging over the branches. He told us, "Something is not right. I think it is the pontianak! We better move away." And so we moved our boat away from the eerie spot.

After our boat had moved a little further down, we began to hear some giggling sounds of a lady coming from up in the tree. Feeling a little nervous, we quickly moved our boat a little further downstream so that we could avoid hearing that strange female laughter. Then, at that same time, we suddenly saw some baby crocodiles jumping about along the riverside. This made us even more fearful as this meant that some big crocodiles could be around in the river.

My friend said, "The night is so cold but I'm starting to sweat!" And so my friend took off his shirt and he put it over a tree branch hanging from the riverside as we stopped there for a while. Then we started going further downstream again and that was when my friend took out another shirt to wear.

After venturing further downstream, we decided to anchor the boat at another spot. Suddenly, we began to hear all sorts of unusual noises like the owls screeching and some unusual bird noises coming from the nearby trees surrounding the river.

Then we were very surprised and curious to see some monkeys sleeping on top of the trees. When my friend shone his torchlight on them, the monkeys looked puzzled as to where the light was coming from. To our amazement, we saw the monkeys sleeping on the branches, which had been pushed down by the monkeys to make a flat and level place for them to sleep on.

Then, quite late in the night, we realised that there was something floating downstream and it looked like a tree trunk. Then my friend suddenly saw that it was actually a big crocodile. We let the crocodile pass by our boat, as we did not want it to get disturbed or it may attack us.

Indeed, the night was very cold and we really had to find thicker clothing to wear in order to keep ourselves warm. The wind was blowing hard upon our backs and we could hear the sound of crickets, grasshoppers and frogs, which made the night very noisy and also very eerie. We could not even take a nap as we were fearful that if we dozed off, anything may come or happen. So instead, we tried to lower our nets into the river to try our luck for the final time. Luck was on our side then because we suddenly felt that something had gone into the nets and it felt like a very big object. When we

pulled up the net, we discovered that we had caught a very big fish – it was ikan toman, wow!

When we put the fish into our pail, it could not fit into the bucket because it was too long. And so we had no choice but to wrap it up again in the net in order to prevent it from jumping or escaping into the river again.

So we could not do any more fishing as the net was being used to wrap up the big fish that we had just caught. Anyway, we were also quite tired and we suddenly realised that it was going to be morning already. Thus, we resumed our journey back to our starting point upstream. It took quite a number of hours to go up the river because we did not realise that we had gone so far downstream. At long last, we reached the starting point of the river and then we surrendered the boat to the owner – with great relief!

The owner was very surprised when we told him that we had caught a very big fish. He was more amazed when we told him that we had heard a lot of strange noises along the riverbank.

I told the owner, “I think it must be the pontianak ghost. We heard the pontianak giggling and laughing on the trees.”

The boat-owner confirmed that some of his other customers had also gone through the same kind of experience as we had.

After the trip, I did feel a little bit sick. And so did my three friends – they also felt a bit feverish. This must have been from the effect of hearing or seeing the pontianak ghost.

Actually, those three friends of mine are fishermen who have retired. Now they are merely doing some odd jobs for survival such as catching fish by the riverside just by using fishing rods.

As for me, I must say that it was a really spooky but also a very interesting experience for me.



GETTING TO KNOW SUN WAN TING

By Ooi Hock Tiam

Sun Wan Ting was born in Kuching in the year of 1994. Her father was working as a car mechanic while her mother was the housewife. Sun Wan Ting was born blind due to cancer of the eye.

For her primary education, Sun Wan Ting attended the Special Education Programme for the blind in Kuching, Sarawak. The Principal of her school was Miss Annie Soon, who was also the Representative to NCBM for the Sarawak Society for the Blind.

Sun Wan Ting then went on to the Sekolah Menengah Batu Lintang in Kuching for her secondary education. She did very well for the form three PMR examination and for the Form Five SPM examination. In fact, she obtained five distinctions for the SPM exam.

She continued doing her form six studies in the same school for which she also obtained excellent results.

After completing her form six education, she went to St. Nicholas' Home in Penang in the year of 2015 where she had some computer training by the computer instructor, Mr. Lim Yew Yi. Then, in the middle of the year, she returned to Sarawak to teach computer to the blind there.

In 2016, Sun Wan Ting was accepted for admission to UNIMAS in Sarawak to take up the course in General Linguistics. Again, she did very well in her studies and she obtained a First-Class Degree in the year of 2019.

Upon graduation and while waiting for a proper job, Sun Wan Ting took up basketry under the blind supervisor named Untong Bangan in Sarawak from 2019 to 2020. Then, after the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, she applied for a job as Information Technology Assistant at St. Nicholas' Home. She was accepted for the post of Information Technology Assistant under Lim Yew Yi, who had been her former teacher in I.T. at St. Nicholas' Home. And so now Sun Wan Ting is teaching blind students how to use the screen-reader such as JAWS and NVDA.

Indeed, Sun Wan Ting is a sweet, friendly and very pleasant blind lady and I really love talking with her. Currently, she is still single and she would certainly consider marriage if she can find a suitable match.

Sun Wan Ting is Chinese but she is a Muslim convert. Nevertheless, she has an open mind about religion even though she follows the Islamic faith.



Daniel Amen puts forward ten principles for you to Change Your Brain and Change Your Body. They are as follows:

Your brain is involved in everything you do.

When your brain works right, your body looks and feels better. When your brain is troubled, you have trouble with how you look and feel.

The brain is the most complex organ in the universe – respect it.

Your brain is very soft and it is housed in a really hard skull; protect it.

The brain has only so much reserve. The more reserve you have, the healthier you are. The less reserve, the more vulnerable you are.

Specific parts of your brain are involved in certain behaviours. Trouble in specific parts of your brain tends to cause certain behaviour problems. Therefore, understanding your brain can help you optimise it.

Many things hurt the brain and make it harder for you to get the body you have always wanted. Many things help the brain and make it easier for you to get and keep the body you love.

Brain imaging gives great insight into healing the brain so that you can have a better body.

One prescription does not work for everyone. We are all unique and you need to understand how your own personal brain functions.

You can change your brain and your body.

(Taken from Change Your Brain, Change Your Body by Daniel Amen)



Ras Adiba Radzi, President of OKU Sentral, Malaysia:

Life really does begin at 50 because by then, we have passed the half way mark and we have experienced so much in life. I have learnt that whatever comes, we must always live it up.

So live each day as if it is our last, and live life to the fullest.

Brahma Kumaris:

Listen to your elders' advice not because they are always right but because they have more experiences of being wrong. Therefore, from today onwards, let's give respect to everyone's suggestions, especially from your elders.

Charlie Wardle:

A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking. Her trust is not on the branch but on its wings.

So, like the bird, you must always believe in yourself.

Anatole France:

The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards.

Anonymous:

A man was once observed walking on an ocean beach. As he walked, once in a while he would stop and pick something up and throw it out into the ocean. An observer walked until he was able to talk to the man. He saw, on closer observation, that the man was picking up stranded starfish cast up on to the beach, and throwing them back into the sea.

He asked, "Why do you throw them back in the water? They will be thrown back on shore by the waves and the tides. It just doesn't make any difference."

The man stooped again and threw another starfish back into the water. Then he stood up and said, "It makes a difference to that one."



Benjamin Franklin:

It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation and only one bad one to lose it.

Phyllis Campbell in the book, "Friendship in the Dark":

I have never felt cheated of the rich beauty the world has to give, for as long as I can remember. I have reached out to the world around me, giving and taking all the good things life has to offer.

Helen Keller:

A happy life consists of not in the absence but in the mastery of hardships.

Confucius:

Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall.

Marla Runyan:

Don't listen to negative influences. Believe in yourself and show others what you can do. Only you can find your potential.

Indian Wisdom:

There's nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.

Robert M. Hensel:

There's no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more.

Eleanor Roosevelt:

Always do that which you are most afraid to do.

Anonymous:

Be happy, not because everything is good, but because you can see the good side of everything.

Helen Keller:

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow.



PRINCIPAL OFFICE BEARERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS OF NCBM FOR 2023-2025

President

Datuk Rosalind Emelia Chew Bee Koh

Vice-President

Mr. Irwan Hanis Bin Ismail

Hon Secretary

Mr. Roy Chai Heng Hock

Hon. Treasurer

Mdm. Jasmine Khoo Khin Sheen

Malaysian Association for the Blind/
Persatuan Bagi Orang Buta Malaysia (MAB)
Dr. Ahmad Kamal Ariffin Bin Mohd. Rus

St. Nicholas' Home, Penang (SNH)
Rev. Dr. Stephen Soe Chee Cheng

Sabah Society for the Blind/Pertubuhan Bagi Orang Buta Sabah (ShSB)
Mdm. Vilina Passon John
Mr. Justin Liew Vun Shin

Sarawak Society for the Blind/
Pertubuhan Bagi Orang Buta Sarawak (SkSB)
Dato' Dr. Hsiung Kwo Yeun
Mr. William Chan Yeok Beng

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



REPRESENTATIVES OF NCBM TO OTHER ORGANISATIONS 2023 - 2025

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

World Blind Union / World Blind Union Asia-Pacific (WBU / WBUAP)

Datuk Rosalind Chew

Mr. Wong Yoon Loong

Mr. Mohd Mustaza Bin Mohamad Zin (Effective 4 September 2024)

Dr. Wong Huey Siew

World Blind 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 2023 - 2025

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: All articles submitted and used for the magazine, other than news, payment will be made.)



NOTES