

NCBM OUTREACH



Issue No. 122

January – March 2026

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
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VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT OF NCBM

To ensure that 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.

SUPPORT OUR CAUSE

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

It costs NCBM RM30,000 a year to produce the magazine in print and in 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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**All donations are tax exempted.*

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

NEWS FROM WORLD BLIND UNION (WBU)

Launching More Braille: More Empowerment

On World Braille Day, January 4, the WBU in partnership with the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), officially launched the Global Braille Literacy Campaign, More Braille: More Empowerment, a global initiative reaffirming braille as a cornerstone of education, independence, and inclusion.

Launched through a virtual event marking the birthday of Louis Braille, the campaign brought together advocates, educators, and leaders from around the world to highlight both the enduring power of braille and the urgent need to address persistent gaps in access to braille instruction and materials. Speakers shared personal reflections, practical insights, and calls to action, emphasizing that braille literacy remains essential for equal participation in education, employment, and civic life.

The Global Braille Literacy Campaign will continue throughout the next two years, featuring expert dialogues, storytelling, and advocacy efforts aimed at strengthening policy commitments and investment in braille. By building on the momentum of World Braille Day, the campaign calls on governments, educators, and communities worldwide to ensure that braille remains accessible to all who need it.

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

KENYATAAN MEDIA PROGRAM 'UNSEEN MIND QUEST: WHERE THINKING TRANSCENDS SIGHT' 2026

Kuala Lumpur, 5 Januari 2026 – Perpustakaan Kuala Lumpur (PKL), Jabatan Pembangunan Komuniti dan Kesejahteraan Bandar, Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) dengan kerjasama rakan strategik Goolee Sdn. Bhd. telah menganjurkan Program 'Unseen Mind Quest: Where Thinking Transcends Sight' sempena Sambutan Hari Braille Sedunia yang disambut pada 4 Januari setiap tahun.

Program yang berlangsung pada 5 Januari 2026 bermula 9.00 pagi hingga 4.30 petang bertempat di Perpustakaan Kuala Lumpur telah dirasmikan YBrs. Encik Ismadi bin Sakirin, Pengarah Eksekutif (Pembangunan Sosioekonomi) DBKL. Program ini turut mendapat sokongan dan penglibatan rakan strategik lain termasuk Majlis Kebangsaan Bagi Orang Buta, Malaysia, Malaysian Mensa Society (MENSA Malaysia), Persatuan Anak Kami serta Persatuan Orang Buta Malaysia Cawangan Johor.

Penganjuran program ini bertujuan meningkatkan kesedaran masyarakat terhadap kepentingan literasi maklumat khususnya peranan tulisan Braille malah memperkenalkan Goolee Boardgames versi Braille sebagai medium pembelajaran, menggalakkan interaksi sosial serta mengukuh kerjasama strategik antara semua pihak yang terlibat.

Antara pengisian utama program ialah pengenalan Goolee Boardgames versi Braille, yang berfungsi sebagai medium pembangunan kemahiran kognitif, pemikiran strategik dan interaksi sosial dalam suasana pembelajaran inklusif. Pendekatan ini membuktikan bahawa pembelajaran boleh dilaksanakan secara kreatif dan menyeronokkan tanpa bergantung kepada penglihatan semata-mata.

DBKL melalui PKL komited untuk terus memperkukuh peranan perpustakaan sebagai pusat ilmu, literasi dan pembangunan komuniti bagi semua lapisan masyarakat, termasuk golongan OKU. Program seperti ini menjadi platform untuk menggalakkan penglibatan aktif komuniti,

memperkukuh kerjasama antara agensi kerajaan, sektor swasta dan pertubuhan bukan kerajaan (NGO), serta menyemai kefahaman dan empati masyarakat terhadap kepelbagaian keupayaan.

Melalui penganjuran 'Unseen Mind Quest', PKL berharap agar lebih banyak inisiatif kolaboratif dapat dilaksanakan pada masa hadapan bagi menyokong pembangunan sosial komuniti OKU secara menyeluruh serta menggalakkan budaya pembelajaran sepanjang hayat dalam kalangan warga kota.



Dif-dif terhormat memegang kertas yang mempunyai tulisan braille



Peserta semasa Pertandingan Goolee diadakan



Pemenang Pertandingan Mind Challenge

NEWS FROM MALAYSIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND (MAB)

Thirteen Job Placements for Year 2025:

In 2025, a total of thirteen (13) visually impaired individuals were employed in diverse roles, including positions as masseurs (5), seasonal specialists in sales (2) and one each for these respective position; Customer Service Executive, English instructor in the Gurney Training Centre, Store Assistant, Shop Assistant, waiter and Restaurant Assistant.

The Revolutionary and Inclusive Digital Entrepreneurial Workshop:

This workshop was held on 6th December 2025 and it was organised by the Strategy and Job Placement Unit of MAB under the helmsmanship of Dr. Lim Tien Hong, who is blind.

Seventeen blind entrepreneurs took part in the workshop.

The objectives were:

1. To teach the blind entrepreneurs how to use AI for their marketing activities.
2. To learn how to use the business data to make business decisions.
3. To help recognise the importance of branding for effective business.
4. To develop business communication skills.

There were three trainers for the workshop.

For Dr. Nurul Ashykin Abdul Aziz, her module was Entrepreneurial Strategy and Development for Small Entrepreneurs.

For Dr. Ahmad Taufik Nursal, his topic was Business Analysis for Small Enterprises.

For Dr. Khairunnisa Abdul Aziz, her module was Business Management.

Entrepreneurial Agricultural Development:

MAB representatives took part in the Entrepreneurial Agricultural Development Programme from 3rd to 10th January 2026. This involved taking a trip to Thailand to learn about inclusive agriculture for the disabled in Thailand.

Dr. Lim Tien Hong, Manager of Job Placement and Enterprise Development Dept. of MAB, was involved in taking the trip to Thailand in order to learn about inclusive agriculture for the disabled in Thailand. In this programme, Dr. Lim visited the Bangkok School for the Blind, the Thailand Association for the Blind, the Asia-Pacific Disability Development Centre in Bangkok, the University of Thailand and various other interesting places.

Through these visits, Dr. Lim learned about the history of blind advocacy activities in Thailand. He also saw how the blind were trained in producing bakery products at their vocational training centre. He also saw how the blind were trained in blending chocolate and coffee in a machine. Finally, Dr. Lim saw how the blind were able to sell their products to visitors far and near.

YB Datuk Ahmad Fahmi bin Mohamed Fadzil, Minister of Communications, had Dialogue with the Blind:

The dialogue was held in the MAB hall on 29th January 2026 (Thursday) from 4 pm to 5.30 pm. About 150 persons (including the blind) were in attendance.

The focus of the dialogue was on the opportunities and challenges facing the blind, especially in the creative and music industry.

YB Datuk Ahmad Fahmi bin Mohamed Fadzil highlighted Government policies that are aimed at bringing benefits to the disabled.

He encouraged the blind to voice out their struggles and their opportunities for housing, job opportunities and how they are facing their daily challenges.

Reactivating the MAB Massage Club:

On 12th December 2025, the MAB Massage Club successfully organised their first club meeting. At the meeting, the Chairman, Yeoh Gim Aik, encouraged blind persons to become members of the club.

Yeoh said that the club will provide training in massage and it will organise gatherings for the blind masseurs through which they can talk about their challenges in massage and how to bring about solutions for and among the blind masseurs.

Yeoh said that the main purpose of the club would be to provide support and training for blind masseurs.

A JOURNEY OF A HUNDRED YEARS - WALK BY FAITH AND NOT BY SIGHT

By Wong Yoon Loong and Alfa Nur Aini

Sometimes, when I hear people say progress feels slow, I understand. I feel it too. Barriers remain – access is uneven. Inclusion still asks us to explain ourselves again and again. Living as a blind person has never been simple, and even today, it asks for patience.

But age teaches you this. Progress rarely feels like progress when you are inside it. You only see it clearly when you turn around and look back.

Our story began in 1926, in Klabang, Melaka, when St. Nicholas' Home was established by the Medical Mission of the Anglican Church. Back then, blind children were often kept at home, not out of cruelty, but out of fear and uncertainty. Many did not believe that education was meant for them. The home began with a quiet conviction that blind children could learn, and that their lives were worth investing in.

In 1931, the Home moved to Scotland Road, Penang, together with sixteen children. By 1938, with support from Lord Nuffield, land was purchased at Bagan Jermal Road and the buildings adapted, which continue to be used until now. That place became home in a deeper sense. When a place stays, hope learns to stay too.

In 1941, St. Nicholas' Home opened a kindergarten for 28 blind children. For the first time in Malaya, education and rehabilitation were offered together for Persons with visual impairments. Learning was no longer only about being looked after. It became about growing up with confidence and some measure of independence.

The years that followed were shaped by steady effort rather than big announcements. Sekolah Rendah Pendidikan Khas (SRPK) Princess Elizabeth, Johor Bahru was established in 1949. Then in 1951, the Malayan Association for the Blind was formed, founded by Major D. R. Bridges, a blind British army veteran, and mainly led by those without visual impairment, reflecting how early support for blind people was organised through welfare. Classrooms were then added. Training centres opened.

In 1953, vocational training began in Kuala Lumpur. These places were not perfect, but they mattered. They offered skills, routine, and dignity.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, opportunities began to reach further. Agricultural and vocational centres opened in Pahang, Sandakan and Perak. The first Education Act was introduced. Integrated education programmes allowed some blind children to study in selected mainstream schools. Teachers began receiving specialised training. The social club was formed, giving blind people spaces not just to learn, but also to belong.

The 1970s brought quieter breakthroughs. In 1970, blind students entered the University of Malaya for the first time. Boarding secondary education became available. Advocacy organisations expanded beyond state boundaries. In 1978, SRPK Princess Elizabeth became a fully recognised Government school, and the main committee to develop the Bahasa Melayu Braille Code was established. These were careful steps, building foundations rather than chasing speed.

Along the way, many developments strengthened access quietly. Education policies were reviewed. A Braille Publishing and Printing Unit was established within the Ministry of Education. Over time, standards continued to evolve, including revisions to the Bahasa Melayu Braille Code in 2004.

In 2020 the Bahasa Melayu Braille code was revised to align with the adoption of the Unified English Braille (UEB). The Mathematics Braille Code was also formulated to align with UEB in 2025. The codes are now been used in education of the blind. These details may seem small, but for the blind readers, they shape everyday learning.

In 1986, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) was established. For the first time, organisations of and for blind people had a shared platform to coordinate efforts, speak collectively, and engage more firmly with national policy.

Later, the perspective began to change. In 2008, Malaysia signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and ratified it in 2010.

In 2007, the first blind Senator, Professor Datuk Dr. Ismail Md. Salleh, was appointed in the Dewan Negara, marking a step forward in representation. Together with the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008, commitments shifted the conversation from Charity to Rights. Access, Education, Employment and Participation were no longer favours. They became responsibilities.

In recent years, Inclusion has entered daily life in more practical ways. The Zero Reject Policy affirmed that no child should be turned away from school. Universities adopted clearer inclusive guidelines. Braille continues to adapt. In 2022, Malaysia acceded to the Marrakesh Treaty, ensuring that person's who are blind, visually impaired and print disabled can access to reading materials in formats like Braille, audio and large print without copyright restrictions. In 2023, Braille labels on medicines were introduced in selected health facilities, thereby allowing blind people to manage their own health with greater safety and dignity.

A hundred years is a long time. When you live it day by day, progress can feel slow. But when you look back, you see that every school, every policy, every Braille revision, and every organisation was built with care, very often quietly, but never without purpose.

This is not a story of charity. It is a story of persistence, learning, organising and staying relevant with changing times.

As we reflect on a century of effort, NCBM remains part of this continuing journey. By strengthening collaboration, amplifying collective voices, and advocating for meaningful inclusion, it carries forward the work that has been shaped by generations who believed, long before it was widely accepted, that blind people belong fully in society.

So when progress feels slow, remember that you are standing on ground built by those who came before. And that the story continues. This is achieved through your continuous support.

HOW A GUIDE-DOG GOT FOR US SOME SPECIAL TREATMENT

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 (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur and gained employment as telephonist at Kumpulan Guthrie where he worked for thirty years. While working, Ivan was able to further his own education by taking up the correspondence course from Hadley School for the Blind in the USA.

While training and working, 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, Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM).

He was also actively involved in establishment of the National Council for the Blind Malaysia (NCBM) and formation of the Malaysian Confederation of the Disabled.)

It was the year 2006 and I was then the Hon. Secretary General of the World Blind Union-Asia Pacific (WBUAP), which was a chapter of the World Blind Union (WBU), and Mr. Kua Cheng Hock from Singapore was its President. Mr. Kua had a lovely Golden Retriever guide dog, named Kendra, which was trained in the United States and gifted to him. He would take her, the dog, everywhere he went as his "seeing eyes" which well trained guide dogs are supposed to be for their blind owners. Accompanied by my wife, Jill, the three of us were in Beijing to discuss plans with the China Association of the Blind (CAB), the hosting affiliate for the 2007 WBUAP Midterm General Assembly.

We were staying at the Friendship Hotel, a sprawling resort in Beijing which had several hotel buildings, restaurants and facilities spread around the compound. Having agreed with the proposal to hold the Midterm General Assembly in Shenzhen (South China) in the following year and being assured of CAB's commitment that all the details would be meticulously handled by them and the China Disabled People's Federation (CDPF), a government body in charge of all matters relating to the disabled people, we were thus free on the second evening and on our own schedule. Thus, so desiring to enjoy a good local dinner after having successfully concluded our main business, we considered having the meal at a Chinese restaurant within the Friendship Resort compound.

Happily chitchatting among ourselves, with Jill showing the direction to the venue and Cheng Hock holding on to the leash of Kendra, who was confidently leading the way, we approached the restaurant. As soon as we pushed open the door, Kendra – on the leash – was naturally about two or three steps in front of us, stuck her head in first while we were still outside the restaurant, and instantly a waitress practically screamed on top of her voice, “bu yao, bu yao, gou bu ke yi jin lai” (“No, no, dogs are not allowed to enter”). Not wanting to create a scene in a foreign country, we quickly retreated, half laughing but somewhat disappointed with such an unfriendly reception.

Hearing the loud outbursts, a more elderly lady suddenly rushed out, calling to us to come back. On spotting Kendra, she came to apologise profusely for the rude treatment accorded to us. She identified herself as the Manager of the restaurant and she urged us to return to her restaurant.

While we were being shown to a well decorated private room, the Manager was explaining to her employees that Kendra was a special and very intelligent dog, specially trained to assist blind people in moving around public places – avoiding obstacles, crossing streets and leading them to their intended destinations. She personally took down our orders and even recommended special appetising dishes at reasonable prices. By then we were hungry and indeed, the food tasted very delicious. To finish the dinner on a cheerful note, the Manager served us a delicious Chinese dessert gratis. Of course, Kendra got her carrot treat for good behaviour, too.

When we had finished and we were leaving the place, the waitress who had innocently expelled us from the restaurant, again apologised to us for the way she had treated us. We told her we were not angry or hurt as she was merely performing her duty in refusing customers from bringing their dogs into the restaurant. We understood that rules must be obeyed and enforced to prevent troubles, especially for those large dogs who might bark and create a nuisance for other customers.

Thus, all's well that ends well! - We had our stomachs filled to our great satisfaction and at a very affordable price, and Kendra got her treat, but the most rewarding result was that the employees of the restaurant received some education on the functions and responsibilities of properly trained guide dogs for the blind. Hopefully, future blind diners to that restaurant would never have to encounter such a hostile reception.

On the final day of our three-day trip to Beijing, we decided to pay a visit to the China Braille Publishing House at the old city of Wanping (south-west of Beijing), near to the Marco Polo Bridge. We were met and shown round the place by its Director, Ms. Stella Tang. She patiently explained to us about the work of the CBPH which supplied educational Braille materials and library books to all the schools for the blind throughout the country, including those studying in universities. They also publish a monthly magazine containing news of interest to the blind. We were given a copy of the magazine, and not knowing Chinese Braille, it was left on the NCBM office shelf on our return.

Actually, it was my intention to get NCBM under its "School Adoption Project" to be involved in the teaching of Chinese Braille in schools because at that time the Ministry of Education had announced that mother tongue language classes would be permitted if a certain number of parents demanded for such classes. Unfortunately, due to some unforeseen circumstances, I was unable to pursue the idea.

Later, the management of CBPH invited us to a hot spot dinner that evening. While waiting for the appointed time, they suggested that we take a walk to the Marco Polo Bridge (Lugouqiao) which was a stone's throw from the double-gated city entrance.

In the olden days, the gates would be shut in the evenings and securely guarded. After the outer gates were to be breached, the intruders would still have to go through a space of about ten feet before reaching the inner gate. By then the guards would have been able to summon help to repel the enemies.

The Marco Polo Bridge (Lugouqiao) is 874 feet long and 30 feet wide and it spans the Yongding River, now mostly dry due to dams and water diversion. It is made up of eleven arches built from granite blocks. The bridge is famous for its hundreds of carved stone lions numbering between 85-501 placed along both sides of the bridge's balustrades.

Each carved lion is unique, differing in size, pose, and facial expression. Some lions have tiny cubs hidden under their paws or between them; hence, it is impossible to state the actual number. Most of the lions date back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). Some of the older ones date back even to the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368).

The bridge was originally built in 1189 during the Jin Dynasty and later rebuilt by the Yuan Dynasty. There is a Chinese saying, "The lion on the Bridge cannot be counted clearly because of the hidden cubs and intricate designs." These stone lions were admired by Marco Polo who mentioned them in his 13th-century travel writings.

Despite its age, the bridge is well preserved and structurally impressive for something first built in 1189 A.D.

The Marco Polo Bridge (Lugouqiao) holds deep historical, cultural and symbolic importance:

1. The oldest stone bridge in Beijing, built in 1189 A.D. during the Jin Dynasty. It was rebuilt and preserved through the Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties. It was once the key route over the Yongding River linking Beijing with the southern part of China.
2. Military political significance – the sad and dreadful incident of 7th July 1937 that started the second Sino-Japanese War and marked the start of the Second World War in Asia. It was a national symbol of Chinese resistance against Japanese aggression. On 7th July 1937, Japanese troops which had already occupied Northern China, were conducting military exercises. A soldier went missing and Japan insisted that they be allowed to enter the city to search.

The Chinese refused and a tense stand-off ensued. Shots were subsequently fired (unsure who fired first) and full-scale fighting broke out the next day and this triggered the full invasion of China by Japan and it only ended in 1945 when Japan surrendered with the dropping of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

3. Of cultural and architectural significance, the bridge is famous for its hundreds of unique stone lions, each carved differently.
4. Modern Symbolism:

The Marco Polo Bridge remains as a patriotic landmark. It stands as a symbol of national memory, endurance and unity of the Chinese.

GETTING TO KNOW YAP KIAN JUN AND LOW SAU KE

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

It was in early May 2024 when I first met the two GTC trainees, Yap Kian Jun and Low Sau Ke. They told me that they will be joining us to take part in a talentime for the disabled to be organised by Dato' Siow Wang in Subang Jaya on Saturday, 24th May 2024. That was when I decided to get the story of their life.

Yap Kian Jun (popularly called Ah Chun): He was born in Serdang, Selangor in the year of 2002. His father was working as a contractor involved in fixing mosaic tiles while his mother was a saleswoman with Fraser and Neave (F &N). Ah Chun also has two younger sisters.

For his primary education, Ah Chun was in the SJKC Serdang Baru 2. During his primary school days, Ah Chun enjoyed learning music the most. He loved the singing lessons and he enjoyed learning how to play the recorder.

For his secondary education, Ah Chun was in the national Malay medium school. Hence, he can speak Bahasa Melayu very well.

It was at the age of fifteen when Ah Chun suddenly suffered from headache and fever. He went to see the doctor who told him that he had become visually impaired due to Retinitis Pigmentosa. And so not knowing what to do, Ah Chun decided to stay at home to help his mother in doing the housework like sweeping the floor and mopping the place.

Then when Ah Chun was age 21, he went to see the doctor again. And so it was the doctor who then recommended Ah Chun to be admitted into the Gurney Training Centre.

Thus it was in 2023 when Ah Chun was first admitted into the Kinta Valley Rehabilitation Centre in Ipoh for rehabilitation and mobility training. Then in 2024, Ah Chun gained admission into the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) for vocational training. At the GTC, Ah Chun took up the massage course.

Ah Chun said that he really enjoyed his stay at the GTC. The food was good, he made many friends, he enjoyed learning massage and he loved being involved in the recreational activities like *ping pong*, listening to music and especially learning how to whistle.

He is looking forward to getting a job as masseur after leaving the GTC.

Low Sau Ke:

He was born in Klang on 8th August 1987. His father was working as a draftsman, involved in drawing graphs for buildings. As for his mother, she was being employed in drawing graphs for Bata shoes.

When Low Sau Ke was at age one, he was already having some eye trouble. His parents took him to see the medicine man at the Buddhist temple. According to the medicine man, Low had to drink some purified water in order to improve his sight and, at the same time, it would make him more obedient as well as improve his intelligence.

Then it was in 1993 at age seven when Low Sau Ke entered the Peng Hwa Primary School in Klang. In those days, the students had to pay school fees, and the school fee was RM60 per month.

Later in the year of 1999 when Low was thirteen years old, he went on to the Peng Hwa Secondary School, also in Klang. Unfortunately, Low Sau Ke was not very happy with his studies and so he decided to drop out of school in the same year of 1999 after having studied there for one term only.

Two years later in 2001 when Low was fifteen years of age, he began to experience more eye trouble. This time he went to see a proper medical doctor who told him that he was actually having Glaucoma.

Then it was in 2003 at age seventeen when Low started on his first job with the company, Dynamic Trading, where he sold car accessories. He worked in this company for five years until 2008 when he was age twenty-one.

In 2008, Low decided to change jobs and he became a wireman engaged in fixing wires and cables. He was in this new company for four years until 2012. In this same year, he switched to another company where he was still involved fixing wires and cables.

Five years later in 2017, he changed to a completely different kind of job by getting involved with UB Motor Sdn. Bhd. in selling secondhand cars. He was in this company for seven years till 2023 when his Glaucoma had worsened, and he had to stay at home because of poor vision.

It was in 2023 when he was staying at home that some friends came to visit him and recommended him to go to the Gurney Training Centre for vocational training. The company, UB Motor Sdn. Bhd., kindly gave him some money as a farewell gift. The company also wrote a letter for him to seek welfare assistance from the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM). Unfortunately, all the original documents got lost after they been signed by the Welfare Department.

Fortunately, his friends came to visit him again and they got him to renew his application. This time it was successful and in 2023, he was able to go to the Kinta Valley Rehabilitation Centre for Orientation and Mobility training. Then in 2024 he was admitted to the Gurney Training Centre and took up training in massage and reflexology.

And so when Low Sau Ke leaves GTC at the end of 2024, he will be 37 years of age. In spite of this, he is still very grateful to have been able to undergo vocational training in massage and reflexology and he is very hopeful of getting employment.

A BLIND PERSON'S HOSPITAL EXPERIENCE

By Wong Kwee Heong

(Editor's note: Wong Kwee Heong has been blind from childhood and she received her primary education initially at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. Later, she joined the Integrated Programme at the Batu Road Primary School in Kuala Lumpur; and then she got her secondary education at the Sentul Convent in Kuala Lumpur.

Subsequently, she went to the Gurney Training Centre where she took up the stenography course. This made it possible for her to join the Ministry of Works as stenographer.

Subsequently, on leaving the Ministry of Works, she got employment in braille production at the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM).

Here is her story:)

It was Tuesday, 29th April 2025 and I was at work in the NCBM office. At about 1 pm after lunch, I went back to my place to resume work. Suddenly, without any warning, I just simply fainted and I did not feel anything at all.

I learned afterwards that, I have fallen off my chair with a loud thud onto the floor and have drawn the attention of one of my colleagues who came and found me lying on the floor. Some of them tried to wake me and it took some minutes for me to regain consciousness and only to realise that I was lying on the floor.

I heard them asking me whether I could get up or stand up and I tried slowly to get back onto my feet, and I managed to stand up. And then, some of them suggested that I should go to the hospital or go home and rest. I, however, decided to follow the latter option. In fact, I was really conscious and I knew what I had to do before leaving the office – I switched off the computers and the embossers – I was still really conscious.

Then I managed to make a Grab booking on my own. A colleague accompanied me to the lobby of Menara Sentral Vista and so I got home safely by the Grabcar. After arriving home, I took a nap and woke up at around 5 pm.

After having woken up, I went to the kitchen to look for something to eat. After the dinner, I cleared the table, washed up the dishes and cleaned up the place. Then I sat down at the kitchen table for a rest. Suddenly, I lost consciousness again and I was not aware of it at all. Fortunately, my sister-in-law, Christina, was doing some work in the hall and, when she heard an unusual sound, she quickly came to the kitchen to have a look and she found that I have passed out, my head resting against the dining table.

Christina tried to wake me and she saw me vomiting out the food. As this was the second time of me going unconscious on the same day, I was advised to go to the hospital immediately to avoid any eventuality during the night. Fortunately, we managed to get my nephew to come after his work to send me to the hospital, accompanied by my brother, Yoon Loong, and NCBM administrator, Ms Chin.

At the Emergency Unit of Hospital Canselor Tuanku Muhriz UKM, the Medical Officer on duty accessed me to determine the necessity of inpatient care by asking the reasons why I had come to the hospital. I tried to explain what had happened during the day but there were some things I could not answer because I was not conscious. He even called up my sister-in-law, Christina, to ask her for some detailed description of what exactly happened.

After the long assessment, the Medical Officer had a discussion with some doctors on duty and decided that I need to be warded and Ms. Chin helped me with the registration. It was already 1.30am . After all the paperwork, I was warded, I was told that tests needed to be carried out within twelve hours of admission to the hospital in order to obtain accurate results of what actually happened.

And so I was sent for all the tests like the blood test, checking of blood pressure, the glucose level test, taking the X-rays, the electrocardiogram (ECG) test, Computed Tomography Scan (CT Scan) – all these tests were being done throughout the night.

Then I had to patiently sit and wait for the results. Initially, I was told that the hospital beds in the wards are full and so I had to wait in the Emergency Ward for one and a half days before a place could be assigned to me in the proper ward. Fortunately, however, I was given a mobile hospital bed to sleep on. I did get all my meals while in the Emergency Ward – I had breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner, all of which came in porcelain cups and plates. I was very happy that they knew I could manage and so they gave me the proper utensils just like other patients.

Early the next morning, when the doctors came on their rounds to visit the patients, some of them began to assess my condition. There was a possibility that I might have suffered a mild stroke as some old blood clots have been detected.

Suddenly, one of the doctors was attracted to the braille watch that I was wearing at that time and he was wondering how I can use it. So, I then demonstrated to him about how individuals who are blind or have low vision use the Braille watch which is a specialized designed timepiece designed to read the time tactually through raised dots and tactile hour markers- hands. They typically feature a hinged crystal cover that opens to reveal a tactile dial with reinforced hands and raised markers (e.g., two dots at 12, 3, 6, and 9). Users feel the position of the hands against these markers to tell the time.

Another doctor, however, disagreed that there was a mild stroke and further CT scan as well as electroencephalogram (EEG) test were conducted. I was then given medication and had to be warded for almost a week for my condition to be further assessed. My stay at the ward allowed me to be able to hear all kinds of beeping sounds from the various machines used by patients there.

Once I got into the proper ward, they must have registered me as an OKU person staying in the ward. Now the food came in paper cups and plastic containers. Probably, they thought that this would be safer for a blind person while I felt that they were being too careful in giving me different treatment.

However, I must say that this also had its good points because there were times when visitors or relatives visited me and brought food from outside in place of the hospital food which was not so appetising for me. In exchange, I could easily give away the hospital food as they were properly packed in the plastic containers which would result in no wastage.

While I was in the hospital, the nurses were very caring and concerned. Initially, they did not allow me to go to the washroom on my own because they were afraid that I might faint or fall down. So, I had to call them by ringing the call bell. They did not even allow me to take bath by myself. I truly needed to wash my hair due to the gel resulting from the EEG test. However, after I had been able to assure them that I would be all right and that I could manage on my own, they then allowed me to bathe and wash my hair on my own and they advised me not to lock the door.

And so I was able to stay in the hospital for a few days and everything went on very well. I could go to the toilet on my own and there were no mishaps occurred. I just had to use the call bell to keep the nurses informed whenever I leave my bed so that they could monitor my movements. And so I must say that everything worked out just fine for me until the day that I was discharged.

One month later, I went back to the hospital for a CT scan and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI). The results of these scans as well as the blood test were good as they did not find anything abnormal. In fact, after six months of taking the blood thinner, I was told by the doctor that I could stop taking the medicine. However, by the end of April 2026, I would be free from taking all medications related to the fainting spell.

On the day of discharge, the nurses were very helpful to me. They helped me with the checking of documents, appointment arrangement and the medication collection. Indeed, the nurses were so caring and helpful during my time in the hospital. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all the staff of the hospital. Keep up the good work!

CAN WE SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

By Loh Kong Ken

(Editor's Note: Loh Kong Ken has been visually impaired from childhood and he was a student at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang. After leaving school, he was able to get employment - first as telephone operator in Multi-Purpose Holdings Bhd., then as Administrative Assistant in Geoprima Sdn. Bhd., and finally as Student Affairs Coordinator in Help University.

Now after retirement, he is actively involved in the work for the blind, especially through the Malaysian Association for the Blind.)

About ten years ago, I remember reading the article, "How Bright Is the Future of the Blind in Malaysia?" in NCBM Outreach of July – September 2015. The article only touched on two issues faced by the blind in 2015, namely employment and the challenges of introducing technological and adaptive equipment for the blind. After a lapse of ten years, it is pertinent for us to visit that article again.

Indeed, jobs for the blind in Malaysia are getting lesser and lesser despite and due to the advancements of science and technology in our daily lives. In the 1950s, blind persons in Malaysia used to work in factory production or as rattan basket weavers. Then starting in the 1960s, more job opportunities were given to the blind such as telephone operators, stenographers and piano tuners. There were also quite a number of blind persons working as teachers, lift attendants, laundry workers and housekeeping in the hotels. Unfortunately, with the advancement of science and technology, these jobs began to dwindle in the 1990s. In fact, it was in the 1980s when the Malaysian Government stopped taking blind and visually impaired persons into the teaching profession.

While all these things were happening, some encouraging and others disappointing, a very significant incident took place. It was around 1980 when Dr. Tsung Wen Siong, Director of the Institute of the Blind of Taiwan, offered a scholarship to train a blind person to be a massage instructor.

One of our blind persons, Chow Hock Seng, was selected to undergo a one-year course in Taiwan. When Chow Hock Seng returned to Malaysia, he was appointed as the first massage instructor at the Gurney Training Centre.

One of the pioneer trainees to take up the course was Mr. Lee Sheng Chow. According to Mr. Lee, it was very difficult to earn a living doing massage initially. The public was sceptical of the blind masseur's skills. Thus, Mr. Lee had to go round selling tidbits in order to augment his income. However, after some time, he realised that what he was doing would not help in promoting massage by the blind. Therefore, he decided to open up his own massage centre.

It was this bold move that helped to open up the door for many subsequent masseurs to start their own massage centres. And so by the end of the 1980s, there were more than twenty massage centres owned by the blind in Brickfields alone.

At the same time, the Malaysian Government, was beginning to phase out the job of stenography due to the advancements in ICT. Then, at the end of the 1990s, the National Council for the Blind, Malaysia (NCBM) succeeded in advocating for the blind to be employed as teachers by the Government. Thus, it was in 1998 when the Government finally agreed to open its doors to the blind for teacher training in the teacher training institutes.

And so at the beginning of the 21st century, many of the blind found employment as teachers. This can be said to be quite a creditable achievement on the part of NCBM, considering the fact that the community at large had always been very sceptical regarding the capabilities of the blind as teachers.

As a matter of fact, a very small number of blind persons had actually been accepted as teachers by the Government during the 1960s and 1970s. In the middle of the 70s, however, the doors were closed to the blind and none were allowed to be admitted either for the diploma education programme in university or for the teacher training course in college. Fortunately, NCBM succeeded in bringing about a change in policy at the end of the 1990s.

Unfortunately, whenever a new job opening was cracked open by the organisations serving the blind, another existing job opportunity was found to be obsolete.

The organisations seemed to be unable to overcome this vicious cycle.

At the beginning of the 21st century, more and more companies were phasing out the telephone operator's post. Whenever a blind telephone operator retired or resigned, the said company no longer felt the need to replace the post with another blind person. This is because technology has taken over the need for a human telephone operator.

Another obstacle faced by the blind community was the unwillingness of the private sector to take in blind employees into its industries. Perhaps this could be due to the lack of awareness or misconception of the owners concerning the employment of blind persons. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the organisations serving the blind had placed many blind persons in employment. Nevertheless, these organisations now ought to be more aggressive in carrying out road-shows and/or approach the corporations directly for jobs rather than just waiting for the corporations to ask for blind candidates.

Indeed, good rapport or connections with the private sector is very important in opening up job opportunities for the blind. For example, I got my first job at Multi-Purpose Holdings Berhad through a blind friend who had a brother working as a human resource manager there. My second job at Geoprima Sdn. Bhd. Was through the recommendation by another blind friend. Then when I was forced to resign from Geoprima, it was my wife, Cheah Kam Lin, who got me my third job at Help University. She, in turn, got her job through the recommendation of Mr. Lee Sheng Chow, who was a very close friend of the owner of Help University.

When I retired in December 2020, I wrote a thank-you email to Datin Low Kam Yoke and asked her to employ another blind person to take over my place since the assistive equipment was still there. Unfortunately, the nation was put in lockdown at the time due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Help management was cutting down on staff in order to reduce the operational costs. Since then, the vacant position has not been filled until now.

The third reason why the employer is so reluctant to employ a blind person is because of the poor performance by blind employees. Quite often we would hear that so-and-so is always late for work, or he did not turn up for work, or he took medical leave again, or chit-chatting on the phone for hours, or just sleeping during working hours.

For this, I believe that the blind person is at fault which has cost the blind community many more jobs. Although these cases were actually few in between, one rotten apple is enough to damage the whole cart.

Another factor is the failure of the Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (JPA) in carrying out the Policy of One Percent Jobs for the Disabled in the public sector. This has cost the disabled thousands of jobs. Currently, there are about 1.5 million civil servants in the public sector. With the 1 percent quota in practice, fifteen thousand jobs would have been given to the disabled. In fact, in India three percent of jobs in the public sector have been allocated for the disabled and the Dalit community.

The fifth factor is the failure to master the English language among the blind community, being the reason why so many blind graduates have failed to find employment in the private sector. However, towards the end of May 2025, the blind community's Whatsapp info groups were bombarded with the announcement that MAB was looking for interested candidates to join the revived piano tuning course. At this juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate MAB for signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Persatuan Hearts Symphony. Through the MOU, a collaboration has been set up to train and produce blind piano tuners for the music industry.

Another positive move that has been taken by MAB is in employing a blind graduate as the Placement and Training Manager, Dr. Lim Tien Hong. Under the helmsmanship of Dr. Lim Tien Hong, many encouraging steps have been taken to produce entrepreneurs for self-employment rather than relying solely on open employment. For example, through the efforts of Dr. Lim, MAB has already organised two "Entrepreneur Day" programmes whereby blind individuals are encouraged to produce and sell their own products.

MOU(s) have been signed with the Federal Agricultural Marketing Agency, the Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) Indeed, UPSI has agreed to provide training to blind individuals interested in becoming entrepreneurs while FAMA has agreed to provide places for the blind at its Pasar Tani locations to market their products. As for UPM, they have demonstrated their willingness to train the blind in the techniques of hydroponic farming.

These measures taken by MAB deserve our support. I must say that more needs to be done by the organisations serving the blind in order to create more job opportunities for the blind. For instance, I remember the late Lee Ah Kow who used to work as a stenographer at the Kuala Lumpur High Court. I stand to be corrected but my question is, “Couldn’t we explore the possibility once again of placing blind persons in the courts like before and even at Parliament to produce the Hansard for filing?”

I have read about many blind persons working as Medical Transcriptionists in the Philippines. What is the nature of work, I am not sure. Nevertheless, if the blind in Philippines can do the job, I am sure that blind Malaysians could also perform in the job in Malaysia.

In the past, MAB used to train blind persons in agriculture at the Taman Harapan Centre in Temerloh, Pahang. Personally, I feel that it is time for the organisations serving the blind to revisit this sector once more. Courses could be introduced such as vegetable farming, mushroom farming, fish breeding, chicken rearing and even carpentry. All these products can fetch good prices in the open market.

Of course, the blind persons themselves must play their part. They must be willing to face the challenges posed in these courses. No amount of courses introduced by the organisations serving the blind can create job opportunities for the blind if the blind themselves are not willing to change and adapt themselves.

In conclusion, I must say that there may be a ray of hope at the end of the tunnel for the blind in Malaysia. However, I still see a bleak future for our would-be blind school-leavers in finding jobs!

A POINT TO PONDER: I JUST CAN'T HELP LAUGHING ALL THE WAY

By Wong Kow

Here is an assumption – my wife is a few years younger than I am and she appears to be even more youthful than her age. Often when she goes out with me for a luncheon or for a dinner function, someone would say to her:

“Ha ha! It’s good of you to bring your father for some good food as well as socialising with people.”

And when she brings me to the hospital for a regular checkup and after the consultation is over, the nurse would look for my wife and say to her, “Girl, please come, your father is ready to go home.”

On one occasion when my wife had gone travelling abroad, my daughter accompanied me to see a doctor. While waiting for the doctor, my daughter busied herself practising for the sign language service at the coming mass on Sunday. As she practised her sign-language interpretation in the waiting room, I overheard the people behind me whispering, “Oh dear, what a pity! The father is blind and the daughter is deaf!”

A Toddler with a Far-Sighted Vision:

When my wife and I were staying in Taipei, Taiwan, we would accompany our four-year old granddaughter to the kindergarten. Along the way, there was a shop selling delicious fried red bean biscuits. The business was so good that customers often had to queue up patiently for at least twenty minutes in order to get the “just out of the oven” red bean biscuits.

Amazingly, my four-year old granddaughter seemed to understand the economic law of supply and demand. When the supply is limited, more people would be willing to wait even longer for the product. So after watching for some time, our little toddler would remark, “When I am old enough, I will open up this kind of shop and make tons of money to buy a bigger house and a more comfortable car.”

What's Happened to All the Malaysian Men?

When we were in Taiwan, my wife brought me to see one of our neighbours there. At the house of the neighbour, who was Mrs. Chen, she very kindly guided me to a comfortable seat. She then gave me a cup of hot tea. Then she called upon her five-year-old daughter to greet me.

Mrs. Chen said, "Son, this is my Malaysian friend, Uncle Wong."

Realising that I was blind, the young boy paused for a moment and then he asked his mother, "Mum, are all Malaysian men blind like the *apek* here?"

TAKING RISKS WITH THE WHITE CANE – A LIFELONG LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Godfrey Ooi Goat See

Truly, I must say that the white cane is one of the instruments that enabled us, the blind and visually impaired, to live a normal and fulfilling life. With the white cane, we are able to commute from place to place in order to carry out our daily chores or work duties. With the white cane, I believe we are able to travel all over the world in order to experience all its wonders, both great and small.

I remember those days in the 1950s and 60s when we, blind and visually impaired children, were having our primary education at St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang and it was considered that the time was still too early for us to learn how to use the white cane for orientation and mobility. However, we, as the young children were allowed to walk and run and play all over the compound and to wander throughout the premises without using a cane. We could venture out into the open fields and get to the fence where we could pluck some berries like the passion fruit. I remember how I would run so fast across a small field from the driveway to my classroom when I was at the upper primary school level.

And we ran all kinds of races in the open field without the use of a white cane – we ran the flat race, we did the obstacle race, we took part in the game of rounders, and we even played football, all of which we depended only on sound and on our sense of direction.

Indeed, it was such great fun for us being able to walk and run and wander all over the place in St. Nicholas' Home without the use of a white cane. Unfortunately, however, without the white cane, we were bound to meet with a lot of accidents. Quite often we would crash into the wall of the passageway or we would crash headlong into one another. Even while taking part in some sports events like the flat race or some game such as Rounders, we would occasionally crash into each other.

One day, the school Principal, Mr. W. G. Brohier, told us that we would be given mobility lessons with the white cane when we reached the age of twelve. And indeed, I remember the day came in the year of 1962 when I was supposed to be twelve years of age.

I remember on that day, we were each given a white cane and then we were told to make our way to the bus stop and wait for the bus to Pulau Tikus.

After spending some time in Pulau Tikus, we took another bus back to St. Nicholas' Home. When we got down from the bus, we thought that we were in front of the main gate and so we walked straight in and we fell into a ditch. Fortunately, the ditch was not very deep and so we did not hurt ourselves too badly.

Later, we were told that actually the ditch was supposed to be for the foundations of a new building project that was coming up near to St. Nicholas' Home.

And now going on to the year of 1969, which was the year when I sat for my Senior Cambridge or Form Five examination, it was decided that I should get admitted to the Gurney Training Centre (GTC) in Kuala Lumpur in order to take up the Rehabilitation, Evaluation and Adjustment Programme. This would either prepare me for vocational training or provide some waiting time to receive my Form Five or Senior Cambridge Exam results.

When the results came, I was filled with great joy and thanksgiving to God for the good news – I had obtained Grade One with six Distinctions, one Credit and one Pass. Thus, this had made it possible for me to decide whether I wanted to stay on at the Gurney Training Centre or whether I wanted to go on to Form Six. With great joy and excitement, I chose the latter.

Fortunately for me, the GTC kindly agreed to let me stay on at the centre while I attended the Form Six classes at St. John's Institution in Kuala Lumpur. This was the time when someone came up with the good news that a new bridge had been put up across the Klang River so that blind persons like me could easily cross over from the bus stop to the Gurney Training Centre. They said that when I came back from St. John's, I could just get down from the bus and go to the bridge behind the bus stop.

And so on my first trip back by bus to the GTC, I got down slowly from the bus and I slowly felt my way behind the bus stop. As I was slowly feeling my way, a very kind-sounding lady suddenly grabbed my arm and she said, "Hey, do you want to die?"

Feeling some fear and in great surprise, I asked, “What happened? Why?”

The lady took my arm which was holding the white cane and she got me to tap the ground with the cane. She said, “Just a few steps more, you will fall into the river.”

This gave me such a shock! “Oh, I was told the bridge is behind the bus stop,” I said.

Fortunately, with the help of this kind Samaritan, I was then able to reverse my steps around the bus stop and make my way to the bridge and cross over to the other side and make my way to the Gurney Training Centre.

After completing form Six, I went on to University of Malaya and obtained a Bachelor’s Degree. With this qualification, St. Nicholas was able to take me on as their Appeals Officer and I was working there from 1975 to 1977. My job was to help raise funds for St. Nicholas.

I was very fortunate to be given a bedroom at the home for which I had to pay only a small rental fee every month. At the time, Mr. W. G. Brohier still was the Executive Director at St. Nicholas’ Home.

I remember that it was at this time when I used to receive many visitors during the week-ends. Some of them were my blind friends like John Kim, Paul Keong and Peter Chin while some of the others were sighted friends from the Star Publications Office like Jeanne Wong, Anne Wong and Tan Cheng Choo.

They would all happily cram into my room and we would sing the lovely old pop songs with the guitar. The songs were from our favourite singers like Cliff Richard, Elvis Presley, Connie Frances, Linda Scott and the Beatles. Sometimes, for a change, we would go to the house of Jeanne Wong and Anne Wong and we would have our singing sessions there.

Then one day, somebody in our group made a suggestion that we all go to Kuala Lumpur for a visit. Everybody seemed to be excited about the idea and it was thus agreed that we should go sometime in August 1976.

Someone, I cannot remember who, then bought the train tickets for the night train. And so it was on one August evening in 1976 when all of us boarded the night train to Kuala Lumpur. We had to split ourselves into two groups in order to occupy two of the coaches, which were just next door to each other.

We chitchatted for a while, we had some supper and then we all went off to sleep.

I remember that I slept quite well for the night. However, I woke up quite early in the morning – I think it was about 5-am or so. I decided to get up and walk to the next coach to see one of my friends. I thought that it would be quite an easy walk and so I did not use my white cane.

I walked very slowly, one step at a time. Suddenly, I heard the train guard shouting, “*Mahu matikah?*” I did not realise that the guard was shouting at me and so I walked on very slowly.

Then I heard the guard shouting for the second time, “*Mahu matikah?*” Still I did not realise that the guard was shouting at me and so I continued walking on quite slowly.

Then I heard the guard shouting for the third time, this time very loudly and in one long breath. “*Mahu matikah?*” he shouted. Suddenly, I became aware that the guard was actually shouting at me to stop walking. So this time I really stopped walking and the guard came over to where I was standing.

The guard said, “A few more steps and you will fall off the train!”

This gave me such a great shock! The guard took my hand and showed me that I was in front of an open space. There was supposed to be a door but the door was not closed and there was a gap between the two coaches.

Indeed, it was such a great shock for me but I really thanked God for having kept me safe.

And now going on to the years of 1977 to 1978 when I was back in University of Malaya to take up the Diploma of Education course. This time I was staying in the Seventh Residential College and I really enjoyed all the courses, especially those courses on psychology and on the techniques of teaching. Doing the practical teaching was the most challenging but I really found it to be a most interesting and enriching experience.

Now while I was staying in the university campus, I would sometimes pay a visit to the Gurney Training Centre in Brickfields in order to socialise with the blind trainees there at the Centre.

I remember someone telling me that travelling by bus to the GTC and back to the university was very easy. And so on one Saturday morning, it was my first time taking the campus bus to the main road where I changed into another bus which took me directly to Brickfields and I could then walk to the GTC. Indeed, travelling to Brickfields from the University seemed to be quite easy enough! However, the real test came when I was going back to the University in the evening.

And so indeed when evening came, I decided to take the bus from Brickfields and I was dropped off somewhere along Jalan Universiti. As I did not realise that this main road was very wide and as the road was quiet, I decided to walk across the main road to the other side. Suddenly, I heard many cars and motorcycles zooming past me. Immediately, I stopped in my tracks – I was in the middle of the main road and I was filled with fear that I might be knocked down. However, I stood firmly still and I held my white cane as the traffic zoomed past and honked loudly.

Then suddenly I heard the loud honking of a horn in front of me and a familiar voice shouting, “Hey Godfrey, why are you in the middle of the road?”

It was one of my old teachers, Cikgu Zahara! I was so grateful for her coming to my rescue and taking me back to the University.

Actually, I was very fortunate to have learnt about this mobility technique from a course on Orientation and Mobility that had been organised by the Society of the Blind in Malaysia (SBM) some months before I entered University of Malaya for my diploma course. I am truly grateful to SBM for having organised that course.

I remember very well what the course instructor, Mr. Liew Yoon Loy, told us. He said, “If you suddenly find yourself caught in the middle of moving traffic, just stand still and don’t move and you must raise your cane. Then the cars and motorbikes will know how to avoid you even though they are moving fast.”

GUNUNG TAHAN - A FADING DREAM

By Siti Huraizah Jalani

Conquering the peak of Gunung Tahan has been my dream since high school. This interest grew when I read the novel by Ishak Haji Muhammad entitled “Putera Gunung Tahan” – “The Prince of Gunung Tahan”. This novel was included in the Malay Language Literature Component subject, commonly known as KOMSAS.

Although this novel is a piece of satirical writing against the British government, it was the beauty of Gunung Tahan and the comforting breeze of the mountain that captivated my heart and urged me to make my way there. However, I heard whispers in my heart that told me that my dream of conquering the peak of Gunung Tahan will remain an unattainable dream given that I am a visually impaired person.

As each year goes by, I am busy racing against time and the hustle of my student days gradually led me to leave behind my dream of reaching the peak of Gunung Tahan. With each passing day, that dream faded more and more away. As I was growing up, increasingly I learned to accept the reality that my eyesight condition would not allow my dream to come true.

However, I continued to climb the steps of the ivory tower in order to achieve my dreams in academics for a brighter future. From the bottom to the top, I climbed tirelessly. Finally, I successfully earned a degree from the university.

After graduation, I was busy going here and there looking for a job. Armed with the meagre amount of money given by my parents, I stayed at the house of a friend as I hunted for a stable and good job. At that time, I could not go cherry picking – I had to accept any job that came my way.

And so while waiting for a better job, I took up employment as a telemarketeer at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur. However, I was not someone who was skilled in marketing and my pay was based on commissions, which was paid according to the number of people who came to listen to the Sales Unit presentations and the number of people who signed up for the hotel membership.

Unfortunately, due to my weaknesses in telemarketing, the salary I received was only around RM100 per month. In fact, I was one of those people who often got called up to meet the Manager because of my failure in meeting the weekly targets. My heart was deep in sadness and my mind kept racing about to find another job for my survival.

Then it was on a beautiful Saturday morning when, as usual, I woke up early to go to work. My housemates, who usually woke up late on weekends, had started showering and getting ready. They were outpacing me who was supposed to be going for work. I was puzzled.

“Why did you all wake up early?” I asked one of my friends.

We are going for training,” she replied while getting ready.

“Training for what? Where?” I asked curiously.

“We’re going to hike the Batu Cave steps. It’s training for us to climb Gunung Tahan,” replied my friend. Her name was Mahsuri.

Gunung Tahan? I was surprised and my heart went racing. It felt like an old faded dream coming back and shining bright again.

“Oh, can blind people climb mountains, Mahsuri?” I asked curiously.

“Of course they can. That’s why we want to go for this training,” Mahsuri replied casually.

“Eh, can I join?” I asked hopefully.

“No,” Mahsuri answered briefly.

“Oh, come on. Why can’t I?” I thought that perhaps Mahsuri was just joking.

“Registration has closed. You are too late,” Mahsuri replied.

My dream, which had started to shine again, dimmed and went dark. “Oh, I didn’t know. If I knew, of course I would have registered.” I sighed heavily and I continued to get ready to go to the office.

However, before stepping out of the house, I had the chance to remind Mahsuri. “Later you can ask MAB if it’s okay for someone else to join in.” I conveyed my message with great hope.

“Sure, I’ll ask Mr. Fairuz later,” Mahsuri said.

Mr. Fairuz was one of the officers in MAB and he was the Head of the Secretariat for the Gunung Tahan climbing project.

Throughout the day, my thoughts kept drifting to Gunung Tahan. I had the feeling of sadness and emptiness all mixed up as one. I was hoping for good news to be brought back by my house-mate. The clock struck exactly 6 PM and I hurried home to get news from Mahsuri.

“So, have you asked Mr. Fairuz?” I asked Mahsuri upon arriving home.

“Mr. Fairuz said that the registration has closed,” Mahsuri replied. “He isn’t taking anyone anymore.”

I let out a heavy sigh. I thought that my dream of being on top of Gunung Tahan had to be buried forever.

MY BLIND AND BEAUTIFUL LIFE

By Daud M. Amin

My family tree was made up of the three ethnicities found in Malaysia. My father was born in the district of Patani, Thailand. His family then settled in Kelantan long before the war and they started business in the rubber trade, paddy cultivation and the making of red roof tiles, which was in huge demand from the local elites.

As for my mother's ascendants, they migrated from Hainan, China in the late 1880s with the main purpose of mining for tin and gold. Thus, my mother and her two sisters were born here while her four brothers were born in China. Subsequently, the family landed in Trengganu and they made it as their permanent home.

As they were Muslims, the local community accepted them quite readily. Thus, they soon set up business in groceries and tailoring, specialising in the sewing of embroideries, which was a trend in those days of the rich. My parents then got married in 1928 and they were blessed with three boys and three girls.

My life began in 1947 and I was the youngest of six children born to the family. We lived in a quite comfortable bungalow which was surrounded by many fruit trees. My father owned a lorry, a car and the Norton motorcycle that roared like thunder when started.

Unfortunately, my parents got divorced when I was just eight months old. Thus, I had to go and live with my mother's brother who was also engaged in agro business. Life for my mother was then quite tough because, apart from taking care of me, she also had to tap rubber trees even though she did not have any experience at all.

As kids, we had a wonderful time, venturing around without much supervision. Being a toddler, I followed my cousins while they went to catch fish in the paddy plots and I just stayed far away as I was afraid of the leeches.

When the paddy harvest was over, the fields would get drier and they were then suitable for the locusts to breed as they hibernated amongst the rotten stalks. Armed with oil lamps or with torchlights, the men would go in small groups to collect the locusts that were tasty and crispy when fried or toasted on a charcoal fire.

The women were kept busy as well with activities before the arrival of the next planting season. They would collect the *mengkuang* leaves and weave them into beautiful floor mats. They would also organise a *gotong royong* whereby the paddy would be placed in a wooden bowl to be pounded, which is the process of separating the husks from the grain to produce edible rice.

My life took a new turn when my aunt, the elder sister of my mother, came from another town to visit us. I learned later on that my mother had agreed to let me be adopted by her sister after my aunt's own daughter had died a few years earlier. From then on, I had two mothers and two fathers.

After staying for a few days, it was time for my adopted mother to depart. My biological mother gave me a long hug, rubbed my head and kissed my cheeks. I did not realise then that this was meant to be a "Goodbye".

The village where my adopted mother lived was called Kusial Bharu, which was well connected with the railway line to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, the roads in all directions, and the river. In fact, it served as a business hub for the hinterland villages.

There were two rubber estates owned by the British concerns. It was here where people came to do their shopping and to interact with friends at the coffee shops and restaurants. In fact, my adopted mother was operating a coffee outlet and a sundry shop.

Indeed, the new place and its caring community had transformed my life significantly. There were many children of my age that I could play with. My adopted mother showered me with love and she bought me a tricycle and many toys. One day she brought home a beautiful kitten whom we named as Batik, reflecting its colour. We became inseparable "brothers" as he was always looking forward to finishing my leftover milk.

One day, I was left playing with other kids under the supervision of some adults. After some time, nobody suspected that I was missing. Actually, the loud noises made by the ducks in the pens had caught my attention and I got into their midst to see what they were doing.

When my adopted mother returned, she found me missing and she called out but there was no answer. So the neighbours joined her in a massive manhunt and they eventually realised that I was among the ducks in the pen.

My adopted mother grabbed me home and she gave me a good bath. She then took me to the marketplace to find Pak Din, the owner of the duck pen. My adopted mother enquired about the cost of the ducks and he was astonished at the question. So she narrated the incident to him and the man broke out in laughter.

For the convenience of my father who worked at odd times and for long hours at different locations, we rented two small houses – one of which was on the hillside overlooking the railway station. Here we truly lived among nature, with the bushes around us being full of greens and the flora and fauna being untouched. The sight of quails, peacocks, sparrows and more creatures fascinated me. Of course, my Batik was very happy chasing the butterflies!

One day I accompanied my adopted mother to do her laundry by the stream not far from the house. I could not believe my eyes when I saw a group of fry – they were swimming by the thousands, unstoppable, coming from the mountain above.

Our second house was situated on the other side of the river. The population here was larger and so we were less lonely. Every morning there would be a herd of wild buffaloes or *Seledang* passing by our window, and later they would return to their habitat.

Swimming in the shallow and clear crystal water was great fun. We noticed the same fish that I had seen in the stream and they were now voyaging to the exact destination that they knew. While enjoying ourselves, we heard a loud splash not very far from us. We turned our heads and saw a huge monitor lizard – it was longer than an adult man and broader! It quickly disappeared to the bottom of the river. An instinct told us to get out of the water! We scrambled to the bank and picked up our clothes and I grabbed my Batik who was lying under a tree.

We informed our elders and they were surprised that they had not seen such a reptile before although they had been staying here for more than ten years. They finally confirmed that it was actually a man-eater, “the crocodile”. Thus, the Malay proverb, “Don’t assume there’s no crocodile in still waters” is true.

Towards the end of my father’s tour of duty, I suffered a bout of high fever and this affected my eyesight. I saw double visions and I lost my judgment of distance.

For instance, the staircase was about ten feet away and I tried to descend or ascend at five feet only to discover that my eye was playing tricks on me! My Batik was falling sick and soon it died.

My “Mother” took me to the hospital in Kota Bharu and Dr. Frank, an English doctor, was in attendance. After several visits, he gave his expert medical opinion that I would lose my vision gradually, a verdict that was hard to swallow! However, the doctor soothed my “mother’s” anxiety by saying that I still could go to a school for the blind. If my “mother” agreed, he could help to make arrangements. My “mother” accepted and later, two Welfare Officers visited my parents and they signed a letter. Soon the news spread like wildfire among the villagers. Some said that she was cruel to send me away while others supported the decision. My “mother” stated that in no certain terms that she would not like to see me growing up carrying a walking stick begging from door to door, a main profession for the blind at the time.

The day of my departure to Johor Bahru finally arrived. My parents were proud to learn that I was the first child from the kampong to fly in an aeroplane. Many turned up at the Pengkalan Chepa to see me off. They kissed me goodbye but I appeared calm; I did not cry but they did. The air hostess gave plenty of sweets and toys.

On arrival in Kuala Lumpur, Che Ann, the Principal of Princess Elizabeth School for the Blind, received me and I spent the night at her house. The next morning we travelled to Johor Bahru by train. The *amahs* welcomed me and they placed me in the girl’s dorm as I was still under the age of ten. We slept side by side on two long platforms. There were three other boys who were in the same situation as me. In the middle of the night, I cried for missing my mother. The *amah* took me to sleep next to her.

THE STORY OF GEORGE WONG

By Tan Tok Shiong

When George Wong was born, he was already totally blind and he was abandoned by his parents. An English lady doctor later brought him to St. Nicholas' School for the Blind in Penang.

When George was ten years old, the doctor went to Penang to visit George. The teacher in the school then instructed George to read a passage from an English braille textbook. George could read well and the doctor was so impressed that she gave George Wong a five-dollar note, considered to be big for a child in those days of the 1940s.

At that time, secondary school education for the blind was not available. And so when George Wong was seventeen years old, he was sent to the Seremban Old Folks' Home together with other blind boys. There they learned basket-weaving and making of handicrafts. At night, they slept in the dormitories. George Wong did not like the place as the toilets were dirty and he often witnessed the old folks passing away on their beds after some heavy breathing and groaning.

In 1954 when George Wong was eighteen years old, the Gurney Training Centre had just been opened and George was among the first batch of trainees to enter the centre. There he learned how to make laundry baskets to repair bicycles, to sew mattresses and to weave carpets.

After completing the course, George was sent to the Kinta Valley Workshop in Ipoh to work as a basket maker. Then when the workshop was later closed down, George was sent back to Seremban where he stayed in some rented accommodation. Later, he went to stay in a squatter house which he built with his own savings of RM 1,000.

Then in the early 1970s, George moved out from his squatter house in Seremban after having received RM 1,000 as monetary compensation from a Chinese lady. George then rented a room in Brickfields. To earn a living, George went selling tidbits from door to door. He obtained his supply of tidbits from a tidbit wholesaler in Kuala Lumpur.

In the second half of the 1970s and the 1980s, George Wong's life became much better because he no longer had to sell things on his own. There was a very creative entrepreneur named Ah Hua who manufactured his own shampoo and he planned to market them all over the country by making use of the blind. He had four vans, each driven by a driver who would bring several of the blind persons together with their sighted guides to go round various parts of the country selling the shampoo. Each sighted guide would bring along a blind person and they would sell the shampoo from door to door.

This strategy was very successful as many of the householders felt obliged to buy when they saw that blind persons were involved. The guide and the blind person were paid based on commission and lodgings in the hotel were provided. This business model would later be copied by others, but instead of shampoo, they would sell tidbits or tissue paper.

During this period of time, George Wong became very close with one of the fellow blind sellers in the van called Wah Chai. This person became blind due to an operation in the hospital to remove his brain tumour. Wah Chai was fifteen years younger than George at the time but he could tolerate the temperament of George Wong very well. Thus, the two became inseparable friends and they would stay in the same house and they did almost everything together. He left behind his life savings from the sales amounting RM 35,000 to be given to his brother after his death.

And so after Wah Chai had passed away, his brother was very surprised when George Wong brought him to the bank and gave him the money.

Then in the 1990s, George Wong paired up with an elderly sighted lady and they ventured regularly to Singapore to sell tissue paper. Due to the high value of the Singapore dollar and the generosity of Singaporeans, the pair could earn a lot of money from their sales. Unfortunately, after several years of doing their business in Singapore, they got arrested by the police and they were barred from entering the island republic permanently.

With the money saved from the sales, George was able to buy a corner single-storey terrace house in Semenyih, Selangor. Here he spent a lot of his time gardening while he relied on the monthly welfare allowance from the Government and on his life-savings for his living expenditure.

At this time, George would frequently travel from Semenyih to Brickfields to pay his bills in the post office of Brickfields. Otherwise, he would attend various charity functions where the blind would be given food, material things and often some red packets too.

Being alone in the house, George Wong was very eager to join the excursions organised by the Elderly Blind Club of MAB. Moreover, with his slim body and a pair of strong legs, George joined me three times for a very exhaustive 18-kilometre walk from Genting Sempah to the peak of Genting Highlands. He also joined me twice in walking round the Samosir Island of Indonesia, the road being more than one hundred kilometres long. He did all these things when he was already 73 years old.

In 2013 when George was 77 years old, he picked up a new hobby, playing the harmonica. He played the harmonica with a group of blind buskers known as the Happy Buskers headed by the blind guitarist, Godfrey Ooi. George Wong was an excellent harmonica player and busking brought him extra income and a lot of happiness. He often told us that he was a good accordion player but unfortunately this was not a common musical instrument at the time.

Actually, George Wong enjoyed the company of many blind ladies in Brickfields. However, he frequently cited unstable income and the lack of education as reasons for not pursuing a relationship.

In 2015, George Wong was returning to Semenyih by bus from Brickfields. While walking home from the bus stop, he accidentally kicked on a piece of brick and fell. The fall fractured his wrist and he had to put on a cement cast for six months and he was highly immobile. Fortunately, many good-hearted neighbours brought him food every day and they took him to the nearby hospital whenever needed.

In October 2025, a neighbour who brought him food every day found George Wong lying on the floor unconscious, later known to be caused by a stroke. He was in a state of coma and was in the Kajang Hospital for a month before passing away at the age of 89.

EARN SOME EXTRA CASH

Readers are invited to write for our publication, NCBM Outreach. For articles published, payments are as follow:

1. Original articles on the achievements of blind people or of an inspirational nature (about 500 words) – RM80
2. Articles containing ideas and suggestions for the improvement of NCBM or its member-organisations (about 500 words) – RM80
3. Articles on funny or unusual experiences (250/500 words) – RM40/80
4. Articles of an informative nature written in your own words – (about 500 words) – RM80
5. Poems which are personal compositions depicting experiences of a blind person (50/100 words) RM40/RM80
6. Interesting tidbits, jokes or other information taken from magazines or other sources of limited circulation – RM15

(Note:

For all articles, other than news, submitted by anyone, including officials in the organisations serving the blind, payment will be made)

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