

End Notes

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Driven by Devotion

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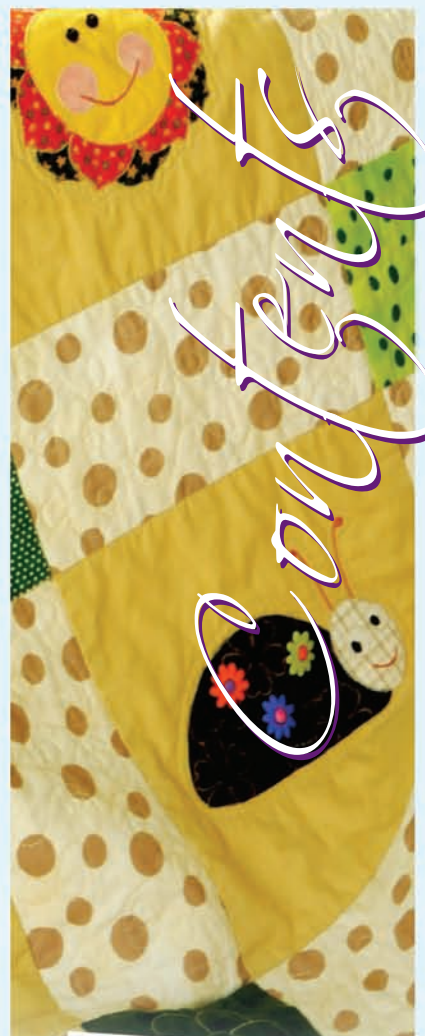


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A solo photography exhibition entitled 'APA' by Puah Chin Kok



<http://alo.usm.my/v2/mag.asp>



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Guest Contributors



Professor Tan Sri Dzulkipli Abdul Razak is the Vice-Chancellor of USM and a columnist in the New Sunday Times.



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For those who are interested to contribute articles to The Leader, please refer to <http://alo.usm.my/> for a writer's guidelines.

Cover artwork by Alec Chin. Photograph by Puah Chin Kok.

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Photograph by Rusli Jamaluddin

From the Chief Editor

What drives people to go beyond their normal routines?

At work and play some people stretch themselves beyond the routines of their job specifications or the safety of comfort zones. Thus, we have pro-active and innovative people at work and creative ones elsewhere. The extra miles they go are usually not consciously done out of a desire to excel but simply for the joy of pursuing particular outcomes.

In this issue, our theme 'Driven by Devotion' attempts to capture a sample of these people and the activities others indulge in to go beyond the comfort zone. One may call some of these extra-curricula activities hobbies and the extra diligent workers as workaholics... the terms do not really matter. Whatever the term is, both the people and the activities are interesting subjects.

The Leader samples some of these stories. Of course, as samples they are not perfect. There may be better examples that showcase these passionate acts of devotion and we welcome readers' contributions for consideration in future issues.

We thank those who have submitted articles for publication. Most of them are in line with our policies and objectives and are therefore suitable for publication. However, we regret that *The Leader* carries only non-fiction articles that is of interest to the USM community and its alumni. Only such articles will be considered for inclusion in our magazine.

For further guidance on contributions please read *The Leader* and visit its website.



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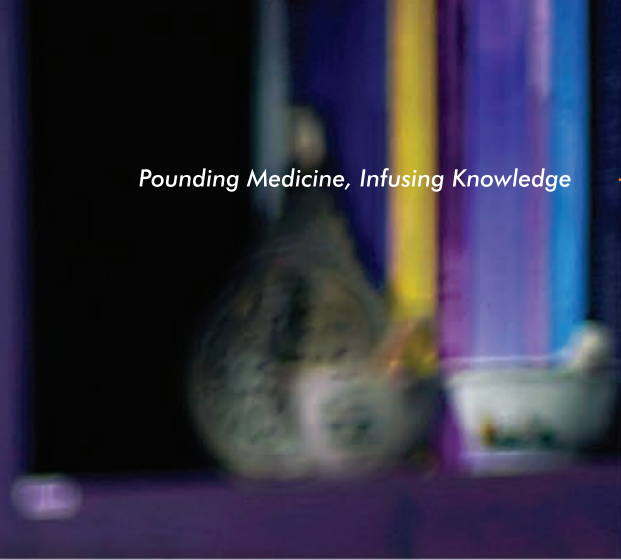
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Pounding Medicine *Infusing Knowledge*

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak
B. Pharm. '76

Photographs by
Mohamed Talhah Idrus

Pounding Medicine, Infusing Knowledge



The collection is presently harmonised with books in the office



It was part of my passion as a pharmacist to assure that traditional tools in the art of medicine-making since time immemorial are preserved as part of the rich heritage of pharmacy. This is also part of scientific history which I love to read about.

I started by collecting photos and illustrations of the mortars and pestles. During the pre-internet days, hard-copy photographs and paintings were the only resources available and searching for them was difficult.

Over time, the photo-amassing progressed to actual collecting. Acquiring the real stuff proved to be time consuming, not to mention quite an expensive activity, even when it was not a hobby yet.

I started with stamp-collecting because each stamp design marked a time in history; there is always a story behind the stamps. But the collection got lost as we moved homes several times. To make matters worse, the houses were burgled a few times, although I am not sure if the collection was worth stealing! However, I was quite fond of some of the rare stamps!

Generally, I collect odds and ends to commemorate occasions rather than acquiring them as a hobby.



Latest acquisition from Quito, Equador is the only one in the collection made from marble

These days, searching for mortars and pestles has become part of my travel 'shopping' agenda. If I have more time and also good lead then I will make an effort to hunt for them. This could land me in antique outlets, flea markets, curio shops or just a departmental store in any city centre. Some are readily available as souvenirs.

'Shipping' them has become a perennial problem, especially from abroad. Since most of them are made of metal, stone, thick wood and other hardy materials they are heavy. Odd shapes and sizes can make packing difficult. In addition some can be quite fragile due to their age or the materials they are made of.

So one has to be quite creative in carrying them home; and there are many stories to tell about this.

One instance is when I bought the mortar and pestle in a Damascus souk near the Ummayyad Mosque for quite a hefty prize. Apart from not wanting to lose it, I was also unwilling to pay for excess baggage (I usually travel economy), it is made of solid metal. So I decided to carry it in with me as hand baggage.

It soon became an object of curiosity at security checkpoints. At every point I was stopped and asked to explain why I was carrying this odd object which was of great concern since it could be construed as a 'weapon'. However, this time-consuming process created yet another problem when the officers became curious about the object.

This led to long queues. Interesting questions were raised. In the case of another incident, the security officers called their colleagues, including the immediate bosses, to listen to my story! Jokes were cracked. They must have thought that I was a nut to carry such a heavy load on board!

When this happened, which was often, those in line behind me got impatient. Some 'kind' curses were overheard!

The pair from Damascus is the one I like most because of the Arabesque carvings on it and its age. Although I have no way of verifying it, I was told it is about 100 years old and had produced unique concoctions.



They come in various shapes and designs but the one from Syria (preceeding page) is Dzul kifli's favourite.





Different designs from Japan

Another favourite is from a Papua New Guinea tribe which I acquired when I was a consultant there for the World Health Organisation. It is made of wood and rather small. Sadly, the mortar is lost while moving house.

The others are unique in their own way, almost like objects of art. Usually, I collect those with interesting shapes and designs that reflect the diversity of the cultures from where they originate; some came from as far as Santo Domingo, Harare and Lima.

After learning about this craze, some of my friends have added to my collection with their 'donations'.

Although the hobby will continue it gets tougher to diversify the expanding collection since the item is either produced as a commercialised contemporary art form or treasured as very antique objects. Either way, they have become very expensive!

Sorting and displaying the collection is not much of a problem, for if one likes and treasure something,

one will find a way to accommodate them. For me, I treasure the memories attached to each of them. Since in most cases I travelled on invitation to speak at conferences, the mortar and pestle sets were in many ways reflective of the gatherings I had attended.

Aptly, each mortar and pestle symbolise a kind of mixing and blending of knowledge to make for a more effective and wholesome learning experience, just like one would do in making medicines.

Eventually, I will donate the collection for public viewing. Hopefully it could be housed in a location where future generations can appreciate and benefit from technologies of the past.

Perhaps, retirement would be the best time for me to reflect on my collection, recall all I have learnt and try to apply it wherever I can. The collection is more for personal satisfaction than as showpieces. It is a reminder that all things have their places in history. 📖



Ahmad with a Field-ling

Jonathan Chen
B. Comm. '05

Photographs courtesy of
Ahmad Daud and Pusat
Teknologi Pengajaran
dan Multimedia



One of Universiti Sains Malaysia's trademark features is its massive green field stretching from the Batu Uban gate right up to the Minden gate. On any given day, the field is a sight for sore eyes, the green possessing some sort of calming and peaceful effect upon the viewer.

The person who left behind a legacy of that pristine field is none other than Ahmad Daud, USM's first sports officer. Upon being tasked to develop USM's sports programme in 1977, one of the first things he set out to do was manage the Universiti's football field.

Catching up with Ahmad at his home in Balik Pulau, he together with Salasih, his wife of 51 years, recounted the good old days from the moment he joined USM until he officially retired in 1989.

"I simply loved our field. The British had left the it in perfect condition and I felt responsible to maintain it that way," said Ahmad, who turns 76 this year.





Trying out the new exercise machines installed at the USM gymnasium in 1983

Ahmad With A Field-ling

Still Remembered



At the USM padang (field) in 1982 during an intervarsity games



USM sports representatives with Ahmad (foreground in white jacket) arriving at the Halim Perdanakusuma Airport, East Jakarta, for an intervarsity games in the 80s

Anyone who wanted to reserve the field had to first go through Ahmad. However, a booking of the field did not mean one could use it automatically. On rainy days, Ahmad would begin by inspecting the field on whether the wet conditions could potentially damage the grass.

“I was very firm, and once I had made up my mind that the field was unsuitable for play, no one could tell me otherwise. I wouldn’t even allow VC Hamdan to overrule me since when it comes to the padang, it was my business,” he said.

“Because of that, I wasn’t very popular, but it didn’t matter as I really cared for the field,” he added.

Still Remembered

Ahmad With A Field-ling

"I was very firm, and once I had made up my mind that the field was unsuitable for play, no one could tell me otherwise. I wouldn't even allow VC Hamdan to overrule me since when it comes to the *padang*, it was my business."

- Ahmad Daud



Representing USM at the interspersity sports in 1982



Ahmad with Salasih after receiving his Pulau Pinang state award Pingat Jasa Kebaktian (PJK) from the Governor, the late Tun Dr Haji Awang Hassan, in the 80s



Ahmad (left) and recipients of the Anugerah Sukan USM (1980s)

At this point, Salasih added, "Every day at 7am, he would go down to the field and scrutinise the place. Sometimes, he would be the one pulling out touch-me-not plants by hand. Only when satisfied with the condition of the place would he come back to have his bath and breakfast. You know, he would take care of the field better than his own bed."

Ahmad was a keen badminton player in his 20s but switched to tennis in his 30s. Soon after, he was captivated by the game, playing almost every day until a heart surgery forced him to slow down in 1999.

Among Ahmad's contributions to USM's sports development was spearheading the construction of the University's swimming pool. Work on the pool began in 1978 and by the time it was completed, USM became the first public university to have an Olympic-size pool designed to accommodate water polo games.



Ahmad and Salasih, 2011

"Working in USM was really great because there was nothing much to be worried about and I enjoyed my time there," he reminisced.

"Now, I still take things easy after retirement. I'm free to do what I want to do, with occasional interference with the 'home minister'," he said pointing to his wife. 🇲🇾

@ Anjung Budi

Gastronomic Variety

Chico's Coffee Bar opened for business on 7 March and operates from Monday to Friday, 8.30 am until 5.00 pm. The manager, Mohd Shahrudin Hamzah, has wide working experience in hotels overseas. The bar welcomes the campus community to savour its blend of coffee, tea, smoothies, sandwiches, pasta and cakes ... all at reasonable prices.



Patchee Bakery

Touted as one of the oldest bakeries in Pulau Pinang, Patchee Bakery Sdn Bhd, started operating at Anjung Budi on 1 March, offering a range of Benggali bread, cakes, buns and other bakery products, including kaya (egg-coconut custard).



Bumble Dee

Bumble Dee has spread its wings to Anjung Budi when it started operating on 1 April, serving delights such as homemade beef burgers, chicken chop, fish 'n' chip, soup-of-the-day and a variety of breakfast sets.



Additional Facilities

The management of Anjung Budi recently added another 13 sets of tables and chairs to cater for the increasing patronage. Now the cafeteria's total capacity has been increased to 180.



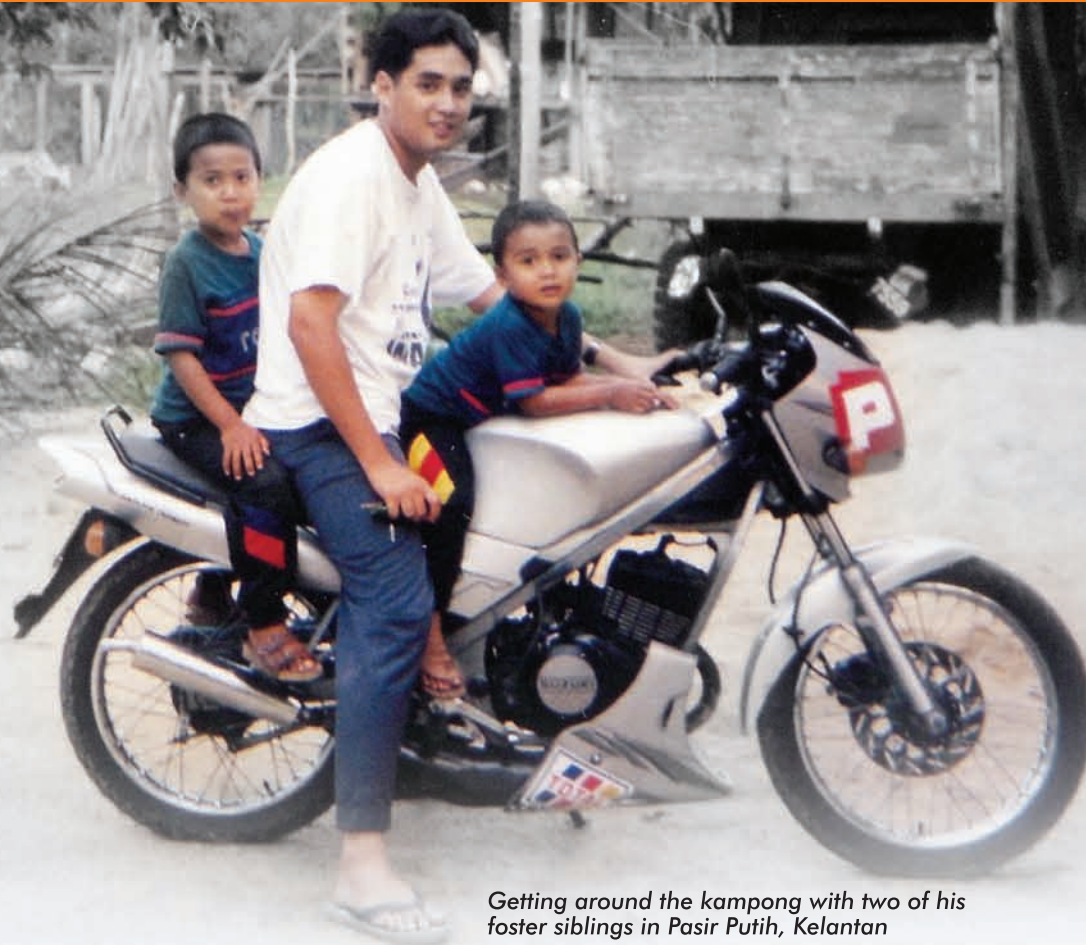
Double Promotions

A food fest and tour promotion was held on 6 April. On sale were *som tam* (Thai salad) and sticky rice with mango, as well as Middle Eastern cuisines. Profits from the sales of Thai food were donated to the Japanese tsunami fund. Asari Murni Sdn Bhd promoted traveling packages for the *umrah* (lesser pilgrimage) as well as packages to Indonesia, Thailand and Australia.

Sports Delegates' Visit

The first Asian University Sports Federation (AUSF) and ASEAN University Sports Council (AUSC) meeting was held in Pulau Pinang on 27 March 2011. The delegates then visited USM and were briefed on USM development by Vice-Chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak at Anjung Budi.





Getting around the kampong with two of his foster siblings in Pasir Putih, Kelantan

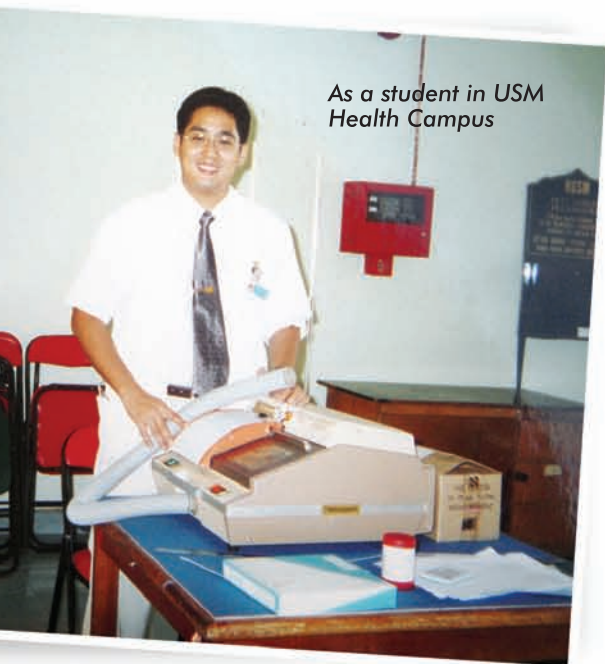
ONCE **SHOCKED** NOW **DOC!**

Luqman Mazlan
M. D. '03

Photographs courtesy of
Luqman Mazlan

The common saying that 'student life is the best time of your life' definitely holds true for me. I began my journey to becoming a doctor in mid 1998, as a medical student in USM's Health Campus, Kubang Kerian, Kelantan. Growing up and spending my entire school years in Pulau Pinang, I would never have imagined that I would have to spend 5 years of my life in the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. In fact, I didn't choose to go there. It was by a twist of fate that, after being accepted to a medical school overseas, the economic crisis of 1997 made it too expensive and recipients of government scholarships for medical sciences were made to study locally instead. Adding to this initial disappointment, the fact that I was used to more urban surroundings didn't help much in reducing my anxiety and skepticism of what I was about to face in Kelantan.

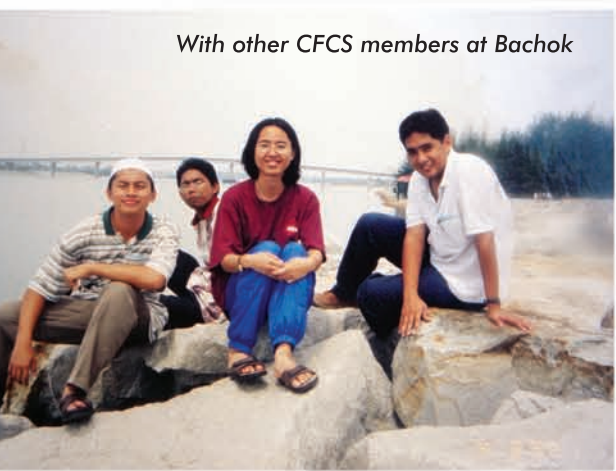
Once Shocked Now Doc!



As a student in USM Health Campus

At the time, most if not all, medical students were housed in *Desasiswa Murni*. With its four blocks (two each for male and female students), juniors and seniors lived, played and studied together. Those were the days before any other faculties and courses were offered and the medical student community was small and close-knit with almost everyone knowing each other by year if not by name.

The days normally started early. The 8 am lectures could stretch till 4 pm. As we progressed through the years, a lot more time was spent in the hospital and it was in Hospital USM that I went through my first experience of being 'on-call'. This meant spending after-working hours on standby in the wards or labour rooms. It was a good opportunity for students to learn and to experience what they all would inevitably face as doctors in the future. We had to deliver babies, assist in surgeries, participate in clinical discussions and follow our lecturers in doing ward rounds. Stress was maximal during the first, third and fifth years when professional exams were held but somehow almost everyone made it through.



With other CFCS members at Bachok

Despite academic pressures, university life was not all about only studying. Sports were a big part of my life as well. Most of my evenings were spent playing tennis with friends and lecturers. It was one of the few opportunities for me to get to know some of my lecturers. Speaking of them, I first learnt to understand the different personalities in the medical fraternity. I shan't go into specifics lest I offend my colleagues by stereotyping them but understanding the differences between individuals who were influenced by the nature and stress of their jobs plus their own eccentricities would help me understand my own bosses better in the future.



Play time in campus

One of the contributing factors that made my student life most memorable, however, was the friendship developed during my time in Kelantan. I had a good mix of friends from all over Malaysia and from different backgrounds and races. This diversity and the fact that most of us were far away from home made us even closer and became better friends. This has resulted in long lasting friendships to this day. I had good times with them not only in campus but off-campus as well. Many weekends and public holidays were spent barbequing, staying by the beach at Pantai Cahaya Bulan or Pantai Irama in Bachok or visiting places as far as to Kuala Terengganu and Kuantan. Closer to campus though was Kota Baru, where we had countless dinners and suppers. The city was much less developed back then. A particularly interesting experience was the time when

Once Shocked Now Doc!

a couple of friends and I went to the old cinema by the Kelantan river and found that we all had to sit on wooden benches and the lights were not turned off during the show! Worse, the technicians mixed up the reels, so we watched the movie in the order of reels 1,3,2,4!!! Although it wasn't very funny at the time, it seems hilarious now. I believe the cinema has since been demolished.

It is a 'must' for me to mention that USM medical students' lives would not be the same if not for the CFCS (Community and Family Case Studies) Programme. Conducted from the third to the final year, the course involves medical and dental students, who are assigned to 'fostered' homes in villages identified by the faculties for several weeks each year. Students were tasked to engage the community in health and educational projects and activities. Besides introducing students to family and community health, it also allows them and the community to interact, experience and learn about one another socially and culturally.

I was placed with an elderly couple in the village of Bukit Tanah in Pasir Putih. The couple's children had all grown up and moved out and they owned a big old kampong house with a huge population of chicken in their backyard. I had chicken to eat everyday for practically all the three meals! Another experience worth mentioning was my first night at the house. I could not sleep because I kept hearing eerie and haunting noises coming from the floor. The next day, much to my relief, it was explained to me that they kept their cow beneath the house. It was such an enriching experience overall and I am thankful to be given an opportunity to meet and to get to know my 'keluarga angkat' and their community. To this day, I still keep in touch with them and make the occasional visits trips back to Kelantan to visit them.

All said and done, student life in Kelantan was one of my cherished memories. The people I met and the experiences I have gained are immeasurably valuable. These have played big roles in making me who I am today. Looking back, I now realise how wrong and unfounded my initial fears of living in Kelantan were. Now, I dare say that the years spent there were the best time of my life. 🇲🇾



Ayah Pa, the author's adopted father and family



First experience in the kampong chicken farm

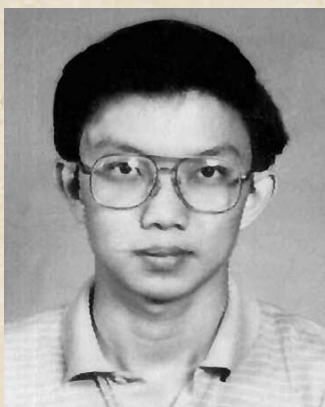


CFCS activities in a local school

Luqman Mazlan can be reached at luqmanmazlan@gamil.com



AZMAN ABDILLAH



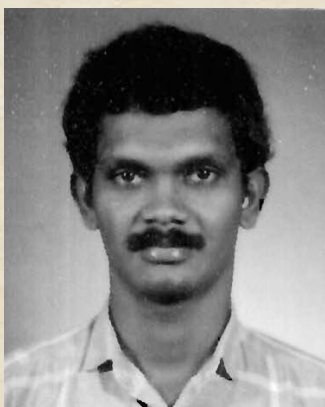
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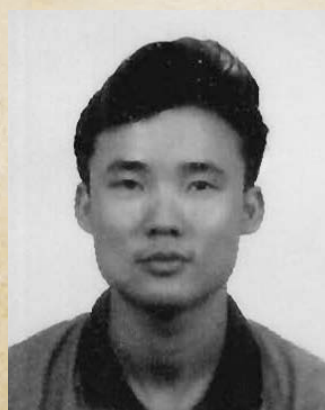
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Out of the Box, Please!

Orasa Awang

Photographs courtesy of Orasa Awang

I spent twenty years, from January 1988, teaching the Thai language at the then Centre for Languages and Translation, USM (the present School of Languages, Literacies and Translation). I was not a Malaysian then and looking back now, I think my rather limited teaching experience prior to coming to Malaysia somehow made me take a lot of things for granted.

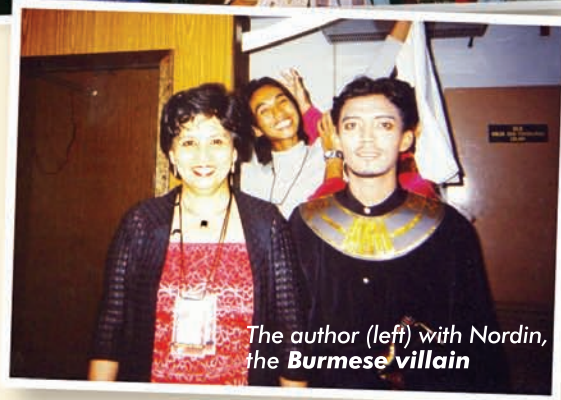
When I first set foot at USM, I did not expect the students to be so passive and timid. I remember once mistakenly teaching a class a wrong chapter. No one, however, made any mention of my mistake until I myself realised, nearly halfway through the teaching period, that the students could not follow the lesson. When asked why no one corrected me, the students just smiled shyly. There were many incidents of this nature during those years which eventually made me decide that something had to be done to transform my students, many of whom were like the proverbial frog under the coconut shell. This was to be my passion and mission right to the end of my teaching career in 2008.

The fact that I taught a foreign language facilitated my mission. To effectively learn a foreign language, one must learn the culture of the language and find opportunities to speak it. I believe that whenever possible, students must be taken away from the relative comfort and safety of their classroom. Luckily for me, Pulau Pinang has a sizeable Thai community. Thus, there were opportunities for the students to actually meet native speakers of Thai and to participate in their festivals and cultural activities.

It warmed my heart to find that the students totally and enthusiastically embraced the idea. I remember teaching the students how to make the *krathong* (adorned banana leaf container) to be floated away to the sea at Gurney Drive, Penang's most popular seafront promenade, during the *Loy Krathong* Festival. Imagine my surprise when I found quite a number of *krathongs* floating at USM's very own Tasik Harapan the next morning. The students were so proud of their work they did not want to run the risk of having their *krathongs* destroyed by the waves at Gurney Drive. When the students were taught to make the Thai *bunga*



A play by USM students during 'A Night to Remember'



The author (left) with Nordin, the Burmese villain

malai, they were so enthralled by the flower garlands that a few male students insisted on being given the 'homework' of making more malai.

I also remember with great fondness the time when the students acted in a Thai play during a cultural project organised by the Centre. The play was about Thai prisoners-of-war and their Burmese captors and it centred on the theme of patriotism, kindness and friendship, even among adversaries. About seventy

“To effectively learn a foreign language, one must learn the culture of the language and find opportunities to speak it.”

- Orasa Awang

students learning Thai took part and I was given a RM100 budget. Despite the paltry amount, I managed to get them appropriately dressed by borrowing, buying (from thrift shops) and simply making do with whatever that is available.

Though initially apprehensive, I was left impressed by how well the students performed. The Thai prisoners were realistically beaten up on stage by the soldiers! Nothing could describe my joy when our play was voted the best show of the night. Special credit must go to Nordin, the Burmese General and the main villain. I purposely selected Nordin, a timid student who was not academically brilliant but one who acted with quiet and unshakable determination, he did not let me down. I learnt later that he had applied himself to the task of memorising the script (in Thai) every night, much to the chagrin of his roommate! He performed exceptionally well and transformed into a much more vocal and confident Nordin after the play. I consider this as one of my personal successes and in retrospect, I thought it was apt that the title of the play was 'A Night to Remember'.

Despite the effort made, the students still had limited opportunity to speak the language. It was then that I decided to embark on another project - conducting annual study tours to Thailand, with the aim of immersing students in the real environment of the language and providing them the opportunity to socialise with Thai university students. This was another of my mission - to take students 'out of the box'. Even if they had to go into 'another box', at least they could see and experience a different box and could learn from the journey.



Rafting along the River Kwai

Out of The Box, Please!

The study tours to Thailand started in 2002. It was mainly for economic reasons that most of these study tours focused on southern Thailand. Initially the trips were intended for Thai language students. It was only later that students learning other foreign languages were also allowed to join in. Students paid their own expenses (never more than RM300) for the five-day trip, inclusive of transport, meals and accommodation.

While students were eager to join the trip, "no money" was an often-heard complaint from them. Their determination, however, got the better of them. I was pleased to learn that many students did extra work to earn extra money to go on the trips. For many, it was the first time they earned their own money. It was not easy, though, when a few could not pay for the cost of the whole trip prior to the departure date. An arrangement had to be made with the airline to allow them to "fly first, pay later". After all, what is passion without compassion? Luckily, the airline could be convinced then!

It was quite surprising to see the marked improvement in the students' command of the Thai language after they roomed together with Thai university students for just a few days. Many students even taught me the southern dialect which they had picked up from their Thai friends. Changes in attitude, outlook and behaviour were noticeable among many students from every group - the timid ones became braver, the shy ones morphed into confident individuals, the quiet ones became more outspoken and the loners became more sociable.



First study tour to central Thailand in 2002

Arranging for these trips, however, were mentally and physically draining. There were times when I believed I had thought of everything, only to realise way too late (for instance, when we were in the innermost part of a small Thai village) that I did not arrange transport for myself. The students were quite happy to go around on motorcycles and bicycles but because I knew how to ride neither, I had to ride pillion with whoever was available, man or woman. Luckily, I came back in one piece!

Another fond memory that made the effort worthwhile was during one of the trips when my room was invaded by more than twenty students, who slowly trickled in because they needed help to understand a Thai

programme on TV. Before long, they were asking me to tell them stories. For a moment, it felt very much like the time when I was surrounded by my own children who listened intently to me as I regaled them with all sorts of stories, except that these were much BIGGER kids who were not content with the stories I told and who eventually had to be chased out so I could get some shut-eye!

I have left the classroom since my retirement in 2008 but I have not entirely lost my students. Many still do keep in touch. Among them, very few were 'A' students when they were at USM but nothing gives me greater pride than seeing that they are able to think out of the box and are now living life to the fullest. 🇹🇹

She was special. Humility and kindness, these were her strongest traits. Others addressed her as *makcik*, it seems that is how she liked people to call her, but to me, she was always Kak Fadzilah.

They say PhD is a lonely journey. For me personally, it was not only lonesome but also gave some deep insights into the intricacies of human behaviour. That was what drew me close to Kak Fadzilah of Bakti as she was always there for me... all ears.

At times when things got so tough, I would go to Bakti not for the food or beverages but just to talk and spend time with her. She never failed to make me feel better having let it all out.

Now, she is gone forever but her memories will remain with many of us as I cherish every moment, I had with her.

Jasjit Kaur
PhD 2009

Chief Editor's note: Kak Fadzilah operated the drinks stall at Desasiswa Fajar-Bakti cafeteria for over 20 years and sadly passed away last December.

Patches of different fabrics are stitched together to produce this quilt

The Itch to Stitch

Haslina Haroon

To say that Dr. Anisah Lee Abdullah is passionate about patchworking would be an understatement. Taking into account the amount of time that she has spent attending classes and workshops on patchworking and also the amount of money that has gone into buying the relevant books, magazines, fabric and tools, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this is indeed a passion that borders on obsession.

Artwork by Alec Chin

It started when her grandaunt presented her with a patchwork skirt when she was nine.

“At that time I knew it was one of a kind and unique. I loved it so much I would wear it every other day.”

Since Anisah has always been interested in art and needlework she easily added patch working to her list of creative talents.

“It gives me great satisfaction to create something with my own hands. Of course, it gives me greater satisfaction seeing my own children use the patchwork quilts that I made for them,” she emphasised.

Although many people use the term patchworking and quilting interchangeably, Anisah explained that they actually refer to different processes.

“Patchworking involves putting together small pieces of fabric to form a larger design. This then is normally used to make the top part of a quilt which is basically made up of three layers, known as ‘a quilt sandwich.’ The middle layer is called batting or wadding whereas the third is the backing fabric. These three layers are then stitched together.”

The Itch to Stitch

“So quilting actually refers to the method of joining all the three layers together using normal sewing stitches on the top of the quilt. It serves the purpose of not only joining the three layers but also adding a decorative element to the patchwork,” Anisah enthused.

“The patchwork piece itself is made up of blocks, which have their own unique names, such as, Dresden Plate, Ohio Star, Card Trick, Log Cabin, Irish Chain, Weathervane, Drunkard's Path, Pinwheel, Flying Geese and Bear's Paw.”

According to Anisah, patchwork can be based on only one block which is then repeated. It can also be based on several different blocks, referred to as a sampler quilt. Regardless of whether a person uses one block or several different blocks in constructing the patchwork piece, all the blocks must be of the same size to ensure that they join up nicely.



Quilted bed covers: show quilt (above), drag quilt (bottom)



Raw fabrics for the making of a quilt



Imagination is the limit to designing the quilts



Explaining the complexities of patchwork, Anisah said, “One of the main challenges in producing a quilted patchwork is putting together the fabric pieces. In the process of cutting the fabric, the old carpenter’s adage ‘measure twice, cut once’ applies. Mistakes in cutting a fabric even a quarter of an inch too small can be rather costly. Another nightmare is trying to produce several quilt blocks of the same size using stretchable material.”

From Anisah’s perspective, all the stages of making a quilted patchwork are equally interesting: from choosing the fabric, matching the colours, selecting the design of the quilt, cutting the fabric into small pieces, joining the pieces, constructing the ‘quilt sandwich’ to joining the three layers.

“Washing the end product is also exciting, although people might find this rather hard to believe. Nothing beats the joy many quilters get from seeing a crinkly quilt billowing in the wind,” Anisah said with a grin.

The Itch to Stitch

Although busy with the work of an academic, Anisah tries as much as possible to squeeze in a little quilting each day. She admitted that even when there were papers to write, the urge to stitch can sometimes get the better of her.

“Nothing motivates me more than seeing the beautiful quilts other people are making. That’s definitely a sure-fire way of getting you to work on your own quilt. It makes you want to dash to your sewing machine and get stitching right away so that you too can produce your own masterpiece.”

Making a quilt requires painstaking attention to details right from the very beginning. It is the details that make the difference between a good quilt and a great quilt. Anisah, however, is not one who is easily hampered by such intricacies. Although patchworking and quilting can be a painfully slow process mainly because of the need to get every single detail right, Anisah is also quick to applaud the benefits of patchworking and quilting.



The quilts are fashioned for different age groups



"I think it's true that once the quilting bug bites you, the itch to stitch is almost impossible to ignore."

- Anisah


This quilt started off as a bundle of these fabrics (above)



From left: Dresden Plate block; Card Trick block; Sawtooth block

“Quilting is an immediate stress-buster. There is something therapeutic about sitting down in one quiet corner of the house at the end of a hectic day and trying to create something with your own hands,” Anisah said. “Quilting also teaches one about patience and perseverance, and the effort seems worthwhile when one finally gets the end product. The joy is multiplied many times over when the quilt is enjoyed and treasured by loved ones.”

She hopes to be able to make heirloom quilts that can be passed down to the next generation besides those that mark special occasions in the family such as births, birthdays and weddings.

“I think it’s true that once the quilting bug bites you, the itch to stitch is almost impossible to ignore,” Anisah admitted. 



TRAILER

Alumni Sasaran

Program Alumni Sasaran will be held in the Main Campus on 8- 10 July. The event is organised by the School of Arts as a reunion of the pioneer group of students majoring in Performing Arts/Theatre and Drama during the 1970s and to rekindle memories of Pangung Sasaran, the place that played centre stage to their major.

Come Together

Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA) will be holding a *Come Together* dinner concert on 24 September at Hotel Equatorial in Pulau Pinang to launch the *Yayasan Alumni USM*. Tabula Rasa, USM's first rock band, will be headlining the event in conjunction with their 40th anniversary. For details, kindly contact the secretariat at alo@usm.my or 04-6534792/4798

Amman, Jordan

USM Jordanian Alumni Association (UJAA) will be launched in Amman, Jordan in October. In conjunction with this occasion, Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA) will conduct a tour of Jordan from 6-13 October 2011 for the benefit of interested alumni and friends. Please refer to page 58 for details of tour itinerary.

Balikampus 2011

All alumni and associates are invited to participate in *Balikampus 2011* scheduled for 2-3 December in Kampus Kesihatan, Kelantan. This is the first time the event will be held outside the main campus. Kindly contact Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni at alo@usm.my or 04-6534792/4791 for more details.

FORGOTTEN AND ABANDONED TWINNS

Artwork by Rusli Jamaluddin



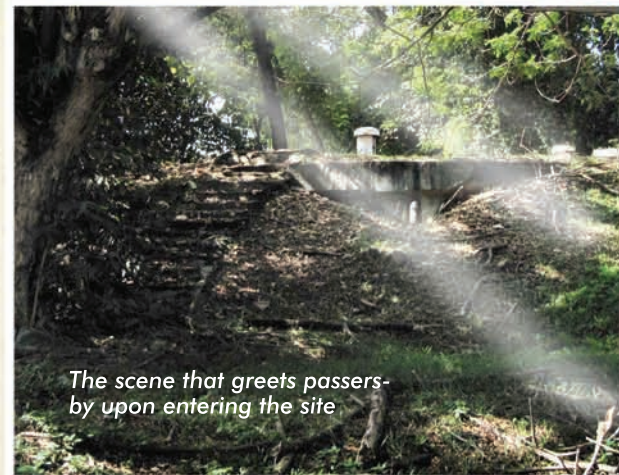
Text and photographs by
Rusli Jamaluddin



Minden Barracks was once home to a network of wartime defenses. Although the World Wars have ended more than 60 years ago, the vestiges of the ‘war zone’ still dominate the landscape posing a stark contrast with the modern campus structures. Some of these vital installations, such as the old underground water tanks, remain indiscreetly visible in relatively elusive spots and are cleverly camouflaged.

The axiom ‘built to last’ fits the description of the enormous twin tanks because they survived till today and are certainly a boon to Minden campus which inherited them together with other war relics. Both tanks have retained their structural integrity and remain in operation since their construction in 1937.

Collectively known as A13 tanks, these underground water storage tanks are virtually hidden under the canopy of trees on a knoll demarcated by barbed wire fences. A tour of Google map will indicate their elusive location on a plot reference of 5° 21’24.98”N and 100°18’34.24”E.



The scene that greets passers-by upon entering the site



Ventilation turrets on one of the tanks

The tanks were located to prevent any intruder from finding them and indeed they remained hidden from the enemy aircraft during World War II. Despite their cavernous interior (if you have the opportunity to peek inside) there are few clues to hint at their size when you look at them at ground level.

There is something endearingly unusual about where it is located. At first glance, the isolated site evokes a sense of sadness and depression associated with a graveyard. Nevertheless, the structures appear formidable. However, the feelings about them are only as bad as the minds that created them. Unlike other defence structures built across Minden, the twin tanks resemble concrete bomb-shelters without peep holes or gun slots.

Formidable Twins

"These old water works," said an ex-serviceman of the Minden Royal Engineers, "were built by means of blast-resistant construction, a method also used for other war bunkers in Minden. The concrete and the pipework were made by the same parent company in Derbyshire, UK that manufactured war products."

"The half-metre thick concrete walls are strong enough to shrug off light artillery fire and aerial attack," explained Corporal Abu Hanifah Abbas.

He added that it was unlawful to enter the facility, "In the old days, the army patrols the grounds regularly. The soldiers of the British army were ordered to shoot any intruder on sight."

Records show the construction was carried out by The Corps of Royal Engineers of the British Army, headed by Chief Engineer Colonel RW Stewart. The twin tanks became a crucial installation in supplying 363,687 litres of fresh water daily to the army camp. The tanks had to be nearby and needed a shorter connection to the Guillemard Reservoir's water supply line that ran along the old Jalan Batu Uban (now Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah). The reservoir was built in 1929.

Today, passers-by cannot miss the point of its warning signage. The notice at the entrance to the tanks, though weatherworn, is inscribed in four languages to ensure that, other than illiterates, no one else would venture into the area. The stern warning reads:

- "NO ADMITTANCE"
- "DILARANG MASUK" (Malay in Jawi script)
- "XIAN REN MIEN JING" (Mandarin characters)
- "ULEY MULAI YATEY" (Tamil)



A partial view of one of the 3.7-metre deep tanks

Murugayah controlling the water level





Three of the six pest-proof ventilation turrets atop the tanks



It is understandable why intruders had to be shot because of the vulnerability of the twin tanks to any saboteur who may poison the water or destroy the crucial water supply to Minden's military encampment.

Murugayah, the facility inspector, invited me to join him during his regular inspection of the location recently. Upon arriving at one of the tanks, he said, "Come, put your ear to the wall and listen."

I did as he instructed and he continued in a hushed tone, "Listen to what's going on behind the walls. It's the tanks' 'heartbeat'."

Indeed, there was no clangour but just a constant gushing sound. It was the sound of the tanks' 'life force' that kept them alive for eight decades, perpetually working even after the army had left. In fact, the twin tanks have increased their supply capacity to approximately 910,000 litres a day to the present Minden Zones A, B and C. 🇲🇾

Rusli Jamaluddin is currently a lecturer at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, USM. He can be reached at rj_hbpusm@yahoo.com



The centrifugal pump to regulate the water flow



*Hamima Dona Mustafa
B.A. '73*

*Photographs courtesy of
Koh Kar Meow*

*The smile belied the reluctance
to accept retirement*

Time to say goodbye

Her 80-year-old mother slept peacefully in the next bed whereas KKM, short for Koh Kar Meow, tossed and turned. It was Tuesday night and KKM's turn to be with her mother.



KKM in 1991

When meeting me the following morning KKM said, "As my retirement day draws near I could not sleep. I grew white hair almost overnight." She lifted her hair above the forehead to show me some white strands.

"I just can't believe it. I'll be leaving USM soon. I kept asking, why doesn't the Prime Minister extend the retirement age to 60?"

KKM's 'love affair' with Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) began when she became a temporary typist at the Bursary on 25 July 1973, at the age of 20. Excited with the job offer she reported for duty the very next day she received the letter. In March 1974 she became a permanent typist. As is the practice, the typist would include his or her initials at the end of each document for speedy identification. Little did KKM anticipate that the initials would be her 'trademark' for the next 38 years.

Time to Say Goodbye

In the earlier days KKM used to wake up at 5.30 am. While her mother and four brothers were still asleep KKM would be cooking some rice and frying an egg to take to work. At 6 am she stepped out from her house in Kampung Kovil to catch a bus at the nearest town of Bukit Mertajam that would take her to the ferry terminal. She would then board the ferry to cross the Northern Channel.

Upon reaching the ferry terminal on Penang Island after a fifteen-minute ride, she joined the other passengers walking down the ramp to catch the yellow bus to Jelutong. From there she had to alight another bus to Batu Uban where the campus is located. Then together with a number of other employees, she walked up Minden Hill to the Bursary. Sometimes, a good Samaritan would give them a ride. By 9 am, KKM would be at her typewriter.

Rainy days were problematic. She would then share a taxi from the Penang Island ferry terminal with some of the other workers in order to reach USM on time.

In 1982, she joined a carpool. A colleague of seven years, Ong Taik Khee, who joined the University earlier than her in 1972, had bought a house in Bukit Mertajam. Besides his sister who worked in the government office complex, in Penang Road, Ong did not have any other passengers from Bukit Mertajam.



Hence, it was KKM's good fortune that he counted her in. When Ong's sister disembarked at her workplace in Penang Road, Ong picked up three more colleagues from there to complete the carpool. KKM's routine changed for the better. She no longer had to start her workday's routine at a very early hour. In 1984, it changed further when Ong asked KKM to be his wife.

Reflecting upon her work, KKM said, "When I took the job I couldn't see the table top. I couldn't see the floor," she said. "My worry was how to locate the files, especially when they were needed."

She gratefully acknowledged the support from friends whom she consulted to discuss ways to sort out the files.





With colleagues at a gathering to bid farewell to an officer in 2008

"I do not like to see things backlogged," she explained. "Foremost in my mind is I have to update the files in order to facilitate people in need of information," KKM explained. "Filing has to be done first thing in the morning and daily so that the files are always updated and upgraded for use at any time."

One can only guess the frustration and the ensuing complications should a file go missing. KKM continued, "One of the most important reasons why we file is to keep documents safe." Hence she recorded electronically the relevant details when files were taken out. Under 'e-record' files that are borrowed need to be returned and this must be acknowledged by the filing clerk. The last borrower is responsible for any missing or unreturned files. Auditing of files has to be done monthly to keep track of the files that one could have missed putting back on the rack.

"*Jangan bagi malu boss.* (Do not embarrass the boss)," she kept reminding herself.

"The boss needs to be updated with the latest info. Files that are not updated or missing may jeopardise the department's performance as a whole," she continued in earnest.

This guiding principle has seen her through the most harried phase of the Bursary when it has to prepare for the various budgets to be included in the yearly Malaysia plans for the Ministry of Finance. Together with some of the other staff members, KKM had to spend long hours, sometimes up to 3 am, working overtime in the office. They even had to rent a room in someone's house nearby, since it was too late to return home.

Two officers whom KKM served with over the years attested to this. Mawan Nooraini Ismail (later to become USM's third Bursar, 1998-2008) and Rohayati Mohd Isa recalled how KKM and her colleague, Salmiah Hamid, strove to complete whatever assignments given to them with much dedication.

"They worked ungrudgingly," Mawan said, to which Rohayati agreed unreservedly.

Moving along with the times the computerised budget was introduced. KKM pointed out that with new attainments such as Research University and APEX University the old system became obsolete.

"We have to create our own system of filing and labelling," she said.


Striking a pose with friend Salmiah Hamid who has been a great help to KKM



Time to Say Goodbye

KKM received a certificate of recognition for services rendered in 1990. Twelve years later, in 2002, KKM received *Anugerah Khidmat Cemerlang* (Excellent Service Award). In 2003 KKM was promoted to the post of a clerk, in charge of about 5,000 academic and administrative personal files.

Anticipating her retirement, she set aside two weeks to tidy her section, get rid of racks and recycle the cartons that come with the salary slips. KKM has scheduled a month to guide and hand over her job to the next person who will now take charge.

"I shall miss my friends," she said. They, in turn, encouraged her to think positively, pointing out that she would be able now to pursue her interest in travelling which had taken a back seat throughout the years. So occupied was she with work that she hardly took leave except for matters pertaining to her two children. Now, her 22-year-old son, is an undergraduate studying Information Technology, whereas her 17 year-old daughter has just completed her fifth form. Perhaps, KKM and her husband who left the University to work in the private sector in 1995, could take up squash again which they used to enjoy in their earlier days as colleagues at the Bursary. 

Dr Hamima Dona Mustafa can be reached at drhamima@yahoo.com





O the ther Architect

*Text and photographs by
Mohamed Talhah Idrus
B. Soc. Sc. '74*

Artwork by Mohamed Talhah Idrus

S

Humans are not the only creative builders. Animals are also ingenious artisans.

Unlike their human counterparts who stretch their creativity despite their fully functional traditional forms, these other architects stick to age old simple, practical models which serve their purposes perfectly.

To refer to these products as nests is quite an oversimplification considering that they are actually complex pieces of creation requiring exact calculations, considerations, planning and skills, all to be possessed by the particular architect.

*The totally protected **Burung Walit** gathering mud and debris for making its nest*

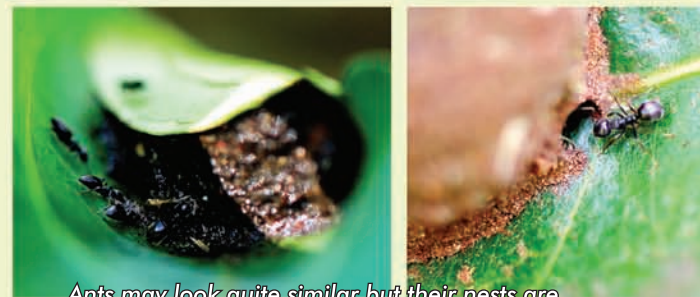
The Other Architects

Consider the wasp's sturdy nest which is the result of the consensus of the whole community to agree to the location, size, building materials, labour, and design of the colony's house. Meticulous teamwork, starting with the search of building materials which consist of dry wood scrapings and saliva result in a perfect design of an incredibly well-shaped closed structure with only a small opening for one member to get in or out at any particular time.

Yet other hornets (which are of the same family as the wasp) build 'open' communal houses, while some ants, on the other hand, produce similar looking abodes like those of the wasp.

There are other examples of animal architecture of fishes, lizards, and mammals which challenge the human taken-for-granted attitude that they are just 'nests' appearing as manifestations of the natural instincts. Some do not even make conspicuous structures but just dig a spot in a corner or simply lay their clumps of eggs in the open. The frog's home, for example, is only realised when their eggs are more conspicuous or the youngs start to frolic in the water.

In fact the architecture of these other residents are not only diverse but also ingeniously crafted. In simple terms...beautiful!



Ants may look quite similar but their nests are distinctively varied from one species to another



Unlike most wasp species this one uses a hole in a rotten tree branch as a nest



Frogs generally do not build nests but lay their eggs in environments where they blend with the surroundings

The **Burung Segan** (Long-Tailed Nightjar) takes chances by 'building' its nest among dried leaves on the ground and guarding it around the clock

The beauty of these artistry is perhaps most prominent in the diversifying designs by the avian architects. These can be generally grouped into four types, a 'cleared' patch among dead leaves as made by the *Burung Segan* (nightjar), an occupied tree hollow as in the case of the *Murai Batu* (White-Rumped Shama), dug out holes of the *Belatuks* (woodpeckers), *Berek-Berek* (Bee-eaters) and *Pekakas* (kingfishers) and the knitted or woven 'conventional' nests.

Most of the other residents build their houses by collecting materials and design and build their houses simultaneously. Looking like simple structures, they conceal the 'calculations' that go into the creation of the usually perfect round shape, the holding capacity for eggs which will hatch into chicks, and the load capabilities when the parents come in and out of the nest. It is quite perplexing as to how they arrive at the decision in terms of the actual size and strength that the final structure should be!

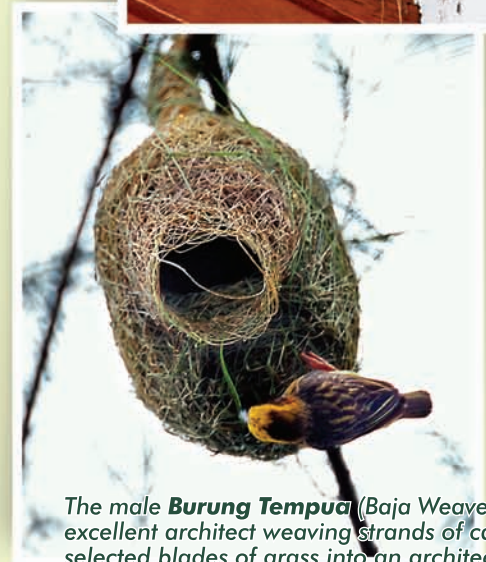
Bat colonies which have lost their natural dark niches adapt with new environments like among crevices of this **Pedang Laksemana** orchids in the School of Housing, Building and Planning



A female **cet-cet** (flowerpecker) in its neat and compact nest built in a **tukas** (fishtail) palm

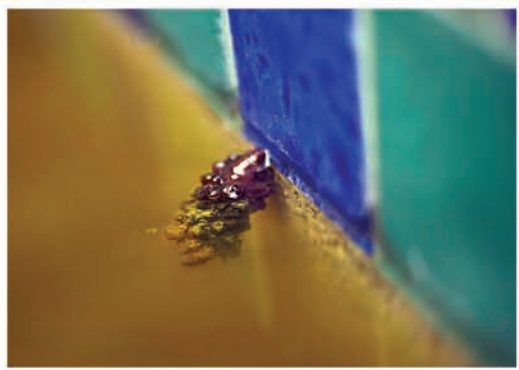
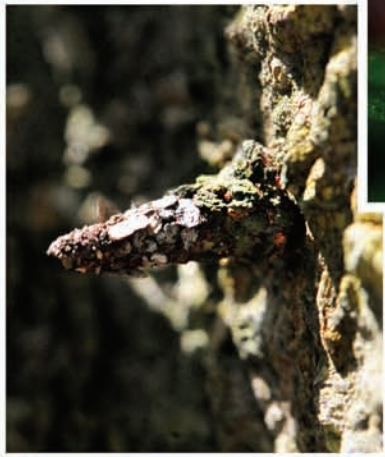


A high niche in the Chancellory is a perfect location for the nest of the **layang-layang** (swallow)



The male **Burung Tempua** (Baja Weaver) is an excellent architect weaving strands of carefully selected blades of grass into an architectural marvel (picture taken in Merbok, Kedah)

Many more of the architecture of the other residents of the Minden campus are designed by unidentified architects



Exact answers are still illusive as to why certain species prefer to build in tree forks, while others on a branch, yet others suspending their nests from seemingly flimsy stalks, and still others between leaves.

Whatever the true explanation may be, these architects produce a myriad of well-designed functional houses that synchronise with the terms 'efficient', 'green' and 'sustainable'. Maybe human architects can learn a lesson or two about sustainability from these unschooled architects. 🏡

Associate Professor Mohamed Talhah Idrus is currently a lecturer at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, USM. He can be reached at tolamaha@yahoo.com

Malaysia's longest
surviving varsity band



Labulia Rasa

is **40** years old

24 September 2011

Artwork by Mohamed Talhah Idrus

COME TOGETHER

at **Hotel Equatorial** Pulau Pinang

'APA' exhibition at a private gallery in Kuala Lumpur, 2009



Artwork by Alec Chin

Love at First Click

Alec Chin
B. Comm. '92

Photographs by Puah Chin Kok
B. Mgmt. '92

It was during photography assignments in the School of The Arts many years back when there was this one bespectacled guy who came to our class very often, trailed us in and out of the darkroom (laboratory for photo processing) humbly enquiring every single step we took to process black and white photographs.

“I heard that he’s from School of Management, so what’s he doing here?” inquired A Rahman, my course mate, now Dean of the School of The Arts, who was busy working on his photography assignment.

Love at First Click



"Yah...I know him, we're from the same *desa* (hostel). Tried to switch course but didn't make it, no worry, he won't be here for long, Fern (Helfand, the lecturer for Photography) held back his application again today," I answered Rahman hesitantly with a sense of guilt.

The guy is none other than Puah Chin Kok, a Management major but had continued to stay true to his first love - photography, even after his graduation in 1992.

"I had no choice at that time. With my JPA (Public Services Department) scholarship, changing course halfway was not an option. I needed the money to study." Puah, now one of the most sought-after commercial photographers in Kuala Lumpur, recounted his early campus life in a sombre tone from the other side of the phone.

"Fern accepted me the following semester. She was one of the lecturers who opened my eyes about photography as an art. (Assoc Prof) Ismail Hashim's and (Dr) Zakaria Ali's lectures were equally inspiring," Puah continued. "On the other hand, the knowledge gained from major courses (management) gave me the insights to proper business management."

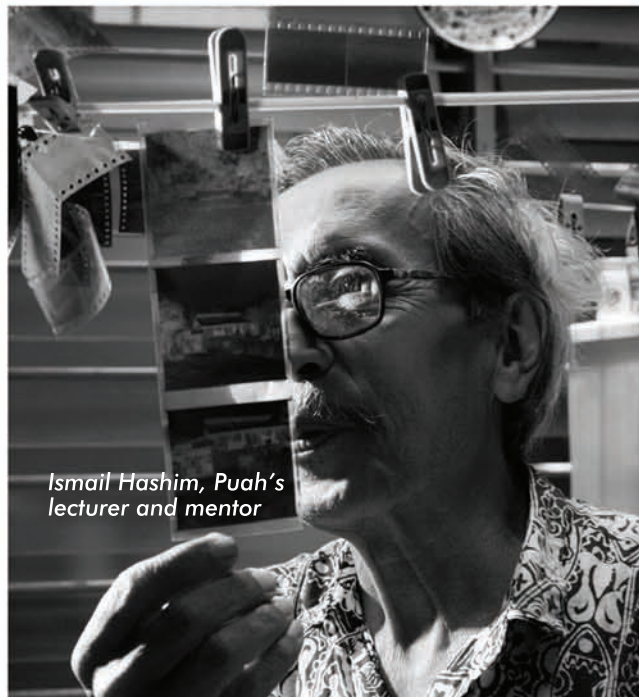
Preparing for his solo exhibition in Kuala Lumpur, 2008



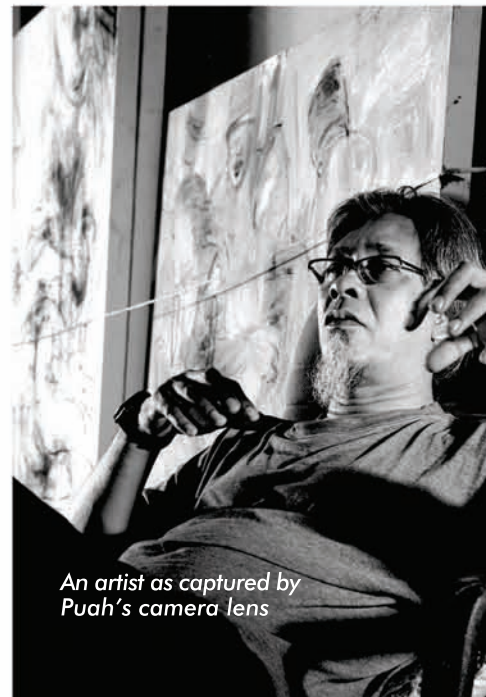
Photographic representation of a client's bronze sculptures



Ismail Hashim, Puah's lecturer and mentor



An artist as captured by Puah's camera lens



Personality

Love at First Click

Currently, Puah is a full-time professional photographer, providing commercial photo-shooting services to his corporate clients located in Kuala Lumpur, and also lately getting heavily involved in fine art photography. The solo exhibition entitled 'APA' in two private galleries in 2008, quickly became talk of the town among art enthusiasts. That was Puah's first taste of exhibiting his masterpieces which were themed around current issues.


Prior to that, Puah had teamed up with a prominent art collector to co-produce a 1000-page coffee table book, featuring local fine artists, both young and old. "Encounters with painters and sculptors during the book production prompted me to rethink my passion towards my career. It was sort of a launching pad for my next move into fine art photography." Puah said.

At this juncture, even though I could not see his facial expression, I sensed that Puah was beaming with ultimate pride. Always with some projects up his sleeve, he continues to amaze me, just like he used to in our student days. "The next solo (exhibition) will be at regional level tackling broader issues, which is equally mind-boggling. Given the chance, a sponsor and right timing, I will go for a 'self-exploration' tour (known as 'residency' among the art community) to an exotic place for three to six months. Churn out a series of photo art pieces at the end of the soul-searching trip."

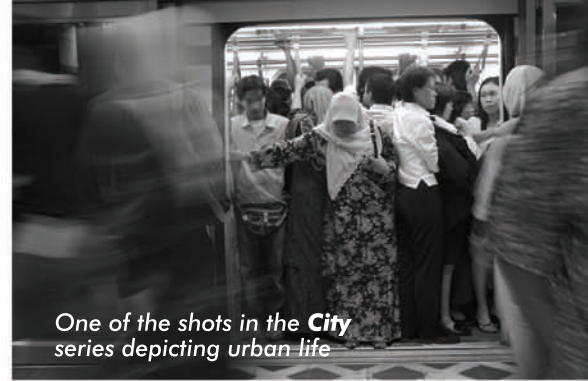
"Listen to your heart, stay true to your dreams and you will be living it to the fullest."

- Puah Chin Kok

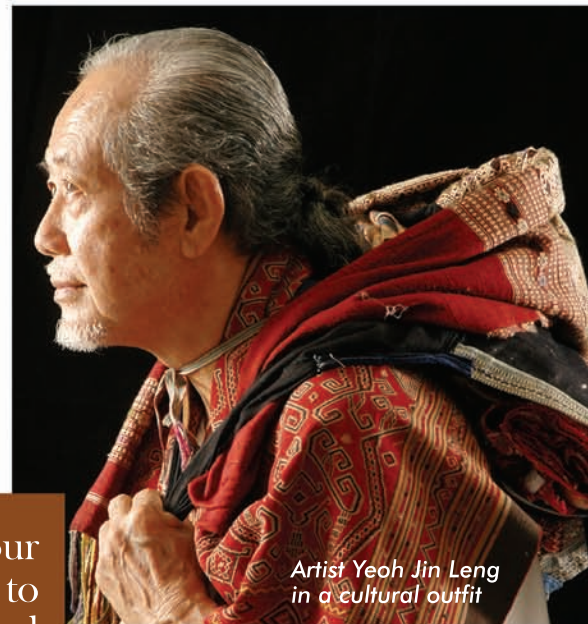
game no # 1996
installation art

On achieving a balance between committing to clients' pressing demands and self-indulgence in fine art photography, Puah responded, "Time waits for no man, grab it when opportunity knocks. I am now in a better position to call the shots, partly due to my close rapport with the clients, and the most important of all, my wife and daughters; they are the pillars of my strength." Puah added just before I concluded our phone interview, "Set your monetary gain a little lower than your mental satisfaction and you will be all right." He continued, "Listen to your heart, stay true to your dreams and you will be living it to the fullest." 

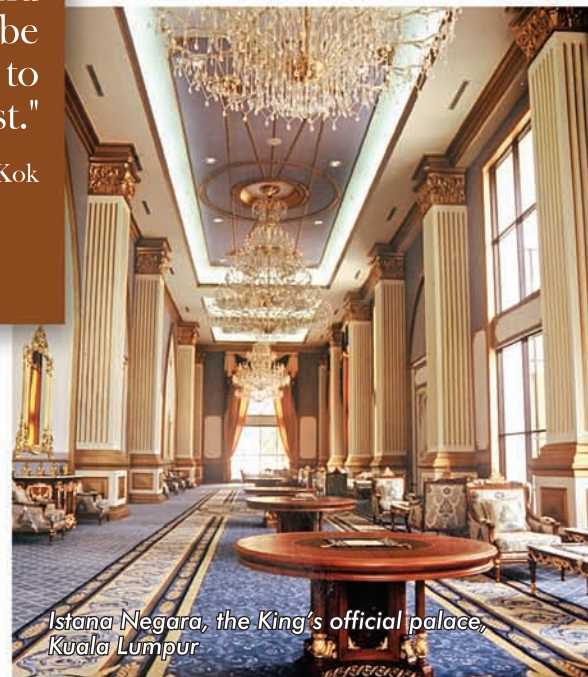
Alec Chin is a designer in Timur Communication. He can be contacted at alec@timurcomm.com



One of the shots in the **City** series depicting urban life



Artist Yeoh Jin Leng in a cultural outfit



Istana Negara, the King's official palace, Kuala Lumpur



Subang, Kuala Lumpur

Engineering Campus



- AD** Administration Building
- CC** Centre for Knowledge, Communication & Technology
- DF** Development Department
- DK** Lecture Theatre Complex
- SF** Sports Complex
- LI** Library
- MA** Main Hall
- MO** Islamic Centre
- ST** Staff And Student Centre / EITD (Engineering Innovation and Technology Development)
- HC** Health Centre
- SCE** School of Chemical Engineering
- SR** School of Materials and Mineral Resources Engineering
- SC** School of Civil Engineering
- SA** School of Aerospace Engineering
- SM** School of Mechanical Engineering
- SE** School of Electrical & Electronic Engineering / CEDEC (Collaborative Electronic Design Excellence Centre)
- AS** School of Languages, Literacies and Translation / REDAC (River Engineering and Urban Drainage Research Centre)
- SH1, SH2, SH3, SH4** Desasiswa Lembaran
- SH5, SH6** Desasiswa Jaya
- SDA** Division of Student Affairs & Development / Cafeteria
- SDP** Occupational Safety and Health Unit / Cafeteria



Aerial views of the campus

Artwork by Alec Chin

Journey of Inspiration



Nawal Shahril
B. Comm. '08

Photographs courtesy of Nawal Shahril

I never expected that my life would change drastically when I started my first year in USM. Before this, the furthest I went was probably from Kelantan to Sungai Golok via sampan, being smuggled in and out by my grandmother for shopping. Curiosity and opportunity-seeking have always been my agenda. I wanted to travel. I wanted to see what's beyond the familiar soil. I wanted to be inspired.

Never have I thought I would travel far and wide beyond Malaysian boundaries. My prayers were answered when the opportunity to travel for 'free' materialised in 2004. I was fortunate to be selected by the Unit Sukan, USM via KRU (Kelab Rekreasi Unisains) to be part of the Great Wall Expedition: Backpackers for Peace. I was ecstatic. My heart skipped with a joyous beat. Finally, I'm a traveller, I thought.

The Great Wall Expedition was aimed to promote peace and to establish USM as the preferred tertiary education institution internationally. With the support of the Student Affairs Development Unit (BHEPP), USM, ten students from various Schools and three USM staffs, backpacked overland through four countries i.e. Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and up to China. The final mission was to reach the Great Wall of China and to raise the USM flag as well as those of all the Malaysian states. This mission would be a testimony to other students that nothing is impossible to achieve.

Like a child in a toy store, I could not wait to feast my eyes on the different sights and could barely wait to experience all the senses and stimulations. Universities, cities, people, environment, colours as the list went on. The inspiring journey has begun.

The conflict along the southern part of Thailand bordering Malaysia, forced us to travel by plane to jump start this expedition. Bangkok (or Krungthep in Thai) was vibrant and very alive, bustling with people who were not stingy with their smiles. I remembered Ajarn Orasa, my Thai language teacher in USM, who once told me that if one would like to be a teacher in Thailand, one has to be prepared to be 'shot' by students! Thailand has taught me a lot in terms of voicing out my opinions and to be dynamic. From the Thai university students I met, especially from Ramkhamhaeng University, Bangkok, I realised that Thai students are very vocal with inquisitive minds and endless curiosities. They are not shy to ask questions or make mistakes. Compared to the university life back in Malaysia, I think students with such qualities are rare species. Here, I hardly ever encountered students who would stand up and challenge their tutors for the battle of wits. How small I felt around these upbeat and dynamic Thais...starting from tantalizing Thailand, I WAS INSPIRED.



Enjoying a local delicacy

Journey of Inspiration

After the hustle and bustle of Krungthep, we moved on to the more laid back Laos. Entering from Nong Khai, north eastern Thailand, we headed straight to the capital, Vientiane. The best part of backpacking was facing the unexpected. Other than our visas and embassy appointments, hotel bookings and other logistic matters weren't done prior to our trip. It was all *ad-hoc*. Whether we had a place to stay for the night or not, it all depended on whether we could find anywhere to accommodate all 13 of us!

Laotian people are more relaxed, warm and gentle. Communication was not difficult as surprisingly, more Laotians speak English than what we had expected. Being one of the Third World countries, income disparities between the rich and the poor here were definitely evident. Watching children playing happily and not going to school really struck me in my heart. What future will these children have? I felt grateful and appreciated more of what I have back home. Looking at them, I know that I must do something in the future to help children all over the world to get their basic rights, to be educated...here in laid back Laos, I WAS INSPIRED.

The transition from Laos to Vietnam was quite interesting. From Hanoi to Da Nang and back to Hanoi again was quite a journey. Being accosted and nearly molested by an unknown local was not something I had in mind. How I wished I paid more attention during my Taekwondo lessons! Grrrr...

The first reaction when we reached Hanoi was WOW! I've never seen so many bicycles and motorcycles on the road before. Vietnamese people definitely know how to handle the craziness on the roads. The art of crossing the road was something I find quite intriguing as I was told that 'once you start to cross the road, don't look back or pause. Just look ahead, cross and the motorists would avoid you rather than having you to avoid them'. The one lesson I learned here was to be focused and to know where I am heading to no matter how crazy things seem to be around me... leaving Vibrant Vietnam, I WAS INSPIRED.

With the Malaysian Ambassador in Hanoi, Vietnam



Quenching thirst at Suvannakhet, Laos



Experiencing a Laotian rural life



Mission accomplished!

Arriving China was surreal. The moment we crossed the Vietnamese border into China, we knew that another adventure awaited us. From Dong Dang in Vietnam we went to Ping Xiang and took a train to Nanning, China. By this time, we were tired, morally down and exhausted. We didn't know whether to be excited anymore. Nevertheless we headed to Beijing full of enthusiasm. The thought of completing this mission boosts our morale. "This is it! Finally we get to complete the mission".

China is beautiful. The majestic Forbidden City with a giant poster of Mao Ze Dung, confirmed our presence in Beijing. I was amazed by how developed China is. When we were on the Great wall, I was sure that USM would be proud of us. The weather was perfect and the flags were raised proudly. Standing on top of one of the World's Seven Wonders, attired in Malaysian traditional costumes, was an unforgettable experience.

After 22 days of non-stop exploring, we had made it. Discipline, determination and perseverance were the key ingredients that pushed us, ensuring our success.

This expedition was a test of endurance both physically and mentally. The spirit of comradeship and the will power of each of us have touched me tremendously...ending our trip in captivating China, I WAS TRULY INSPIRED.

The Great Wall expedition was the stepping stone for me. It opened up the need to go 'out' and see the world. I received my doses of inspiration by meeting new people and exchanging contacts and stories. The travel bug has caught me ever since and I just cannot stop exploring. The more I explore, the thirstier I've become. The thirst of knowledge to seek what is out there has played a vital role in my life, shaping my personality, attitudes and way of thinking. All these have become my strength. "Never give up" has been my mantra ever since.

What else can I say? Travelling has indeed quenched this thirst of mine. **L**

Contemplative Reflection

Mohd Yahya Nordin
B. Soc. Sc. '73

Photographs courtesy of
Mohd Yahya Nordin



The pioneering class of Social Sciences, 1973

It seems like yesterday when I received an SMS message about one of our friends, a graduate of USM, having left this world for permanent residency for the other realm. She was from the graduating class of '73; the first of The School of Comparative Social Sciences (now known as The School of Social Sciences), which also happened to be a part of the university's second intake. Some two or three years ago another friend of ours, also from the Social Sciences class of '73, had also passed away. Al-Fatihah for both of them. The common denominator between them was that they were both from the civil service, in particular the PTD (*Perkhidmatan Tadbir dan Diplomatik*, Administrative and Diplomatic Corps), a major branch, if not, the premier arm of the civil service in this country.

I was also from the PTD. In fact, many of us who graduated from USM had joined the civil service as PTD officers. Shortly after my retirement, I was asked by a friend (he was formerly a Secretary-General at one of the ministries) on what I was going to do then, to which I replied that I may be doing some writing. He then retorted that I would still be subject to the OSA (Official Secrets Act) even in retirement. That strong reminder had dampened my spirit and motivation to write until the tragic SMS news was received. The demise of my two beloved friends had prompted me to pen down some of our experiences in the civil service.

In fact, upon retirement, I received offers to be a full-time lecturer at local universities which I had declined due to, among other things, the OSA and of course, the dreadful eight-to-five. Nevertheless, the urge to document my vast experience with the civil service of well over 32 years and pay tribute to those who have left us by highlighting their contribution to our beloved nation outweigh the risk of breaking any laws. I have decided to write but still within the parameters of the OSA. In any case, is there such a parameter?



Contemplative Reflection

So, why did I choose *The Leader* to place my writings? The obvious reason would be because I am an alumnus of USM from the first batch of the Social Science graduates. Also, I believe it would benefit the many USM graduates who want to join the civil service. Upon graduating from USM, there are many pathways that we can choose to follow and to propel our career forward. The only difference is that in the early years, many of us did not have the privilege of so many choices as compared to what is available these days. As for me, like many graduates during my time, I was bonded by the Government through their Federal Bursary, which like the Federal Scholarship, is a monetary grant but less in terms of amount. It provided me with a yearly scholarship of RM 1,500 to finance my education at USM; sufficient to cover tuition fee, food and lodging. During those days, RM 1,500 was great for a kampong boy whose late father was a jaga (custodian) in the estate earning RM 150 per month and having to support a family with seven children.



Part of the PTD 'induction course' involved some elements of military training!



After doing community work in Pulau Aman during varsity days



Yahya and his coursemate, Sukor Kasim, in Pulau Langkawi during a break from fieldwork

I recalled, with that assistance from the government, I was able to buy two St Sebastian t-shirts and two pairs of jeans, a Levi's and a Lee Cooper, from a shop at Penang Road. Normally, a student with such meagre financial assistance will have to wear such attire for a few days with the help of Odorono deodorant. That was how we survived without losing sight of getting a degree. Despite the first year's shocking results for the compulsory Quantitative Methods paper, I managed to obtain an Upper Second-class Honours specialising on Rural Studies. For a kampong boy that was a great achievement. Anyway, if I recall correctly, only one of us from the '73 batch had obtained a First-class Honours in Social Sciences.

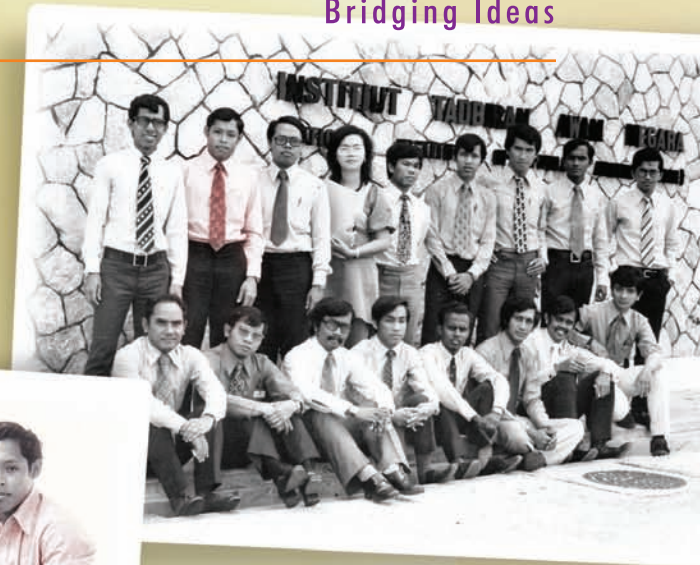
Contemplative Reflection



USM Rural Studies students in Pahang Tenggara



At Gurney Drive, Pulau Pinang, in the early '70s

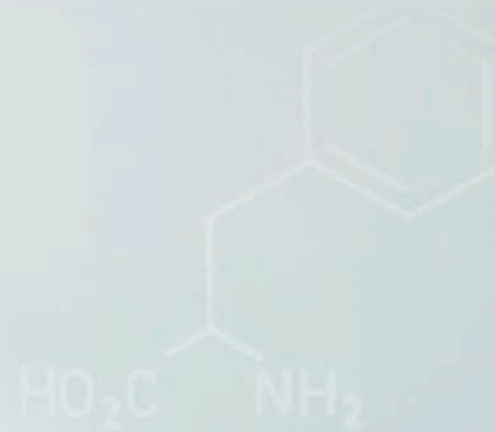


Participating in a training programme for civil servants

Initially, I was offered a lecturer's post by the late Professor Hamzah Sendut, the first Vice-Chancellor of USM. However, as I was still under the Federal Bursary bond, I would only be given a *pegawai sangkut* level (Transitional Officer) immediately upon graduation. It was a temporary post and I would be paid an allowance of RM 500 per month. Nevertheless, I had to forget about joining USM or else I would have to pay back to the Government whatever money that had been given to me through the Federal Bursary. That was the reason why many of us were 'forced' into joining the civil service even though we did not know what it was all about. A few months later, I was offered a permanent post with three years of probation. I had to undergo a civil service examination in order to be placed permanently in the civil service. I managed to pass the examination in two sittings, including a theory paper on land matters although I had no experience at all in that field. Nowadays the system of confirmation in the civil service has changed. Instead of examination, one has to attend and successfully complete a mandatory course before he or she could be confirmed as PTD officers.

Over the years, I came to know that a few of my Social Science friends from '73 and also those from School of Humanities joined the civil service. Talaat Husin (*Datuk Seri*), Sharifah Fatimah (*Dato'*), Raziah Husin, the late Saadah Din, the late Dollah Ismail, Raja Ismail, Huzaimah (*Datin*) and Shamsiah (*Datin*), just to name a few. While some of us are still around, it would be good if we could contribute to *The Leader* to encourage fresh graduates of USM to learn more about the civil service where they can contribute through their Leadership towards building our nation. ▮

Mohd Yahya Nordin can be reached at nmyahya@gmail.com



Liberated **Free** Radicals

Mohamed Talhah Idrus
B. Soc. Sc. '74

"They fight us with fiction and assumptions, whilst we countered them with hard scientific evidence," sums up Tan Sri Prof Emeritus Augustine Ong Soon Hock. He believes that Malaysian scientists should not simply sit back and accept 'discoveries' of scientists from established foreign universities without raising questions.

During our conversation, Augustine, a retired pioneer chemistry lecturer at USM (1971-1987) would not be distracted from his favourite topic of fighting, specifically through research, to promote the superior properties of palm oil. He has successfully proven that palm oil is low in saturated fats.

Augustine Ong was the director general of Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (PORIM) from 1987 to 1989. Now heading his own company which works closely with the Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (PORIM) and the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB), he continues to promote the marketing of palm oil because of its economic efficiency in use of land and resources to produce an equivalent amount of other cooking oils.

When he was a lecturer in USM, he was interested in free radicals which became the subject matter of his first book. Free radicals are unstable and highly reactive atoms or groups of them that can damage cells and are believed to speed up cancer progression, cardiovascular disease, and age-related diseases. For his achievements, he was awarded a fellowship of King's College London this year.

The book was well received by his peers, local and international. Proudly, Augustine approached the Vice-Chancellor then, the late Hamzah Sendut to show off his 'baby'.

After a brief look at the book, Hamzah asked, "Augustine, can't you find something more beneficial to do?"

Reflecting on that comment, Augustine chuckled and admitted that it started him thinking about a 'more beneficial' topic for research. He pondered on subject matters that are directly of economic interest to the country as well as the common man, particularly agricultural subjects.

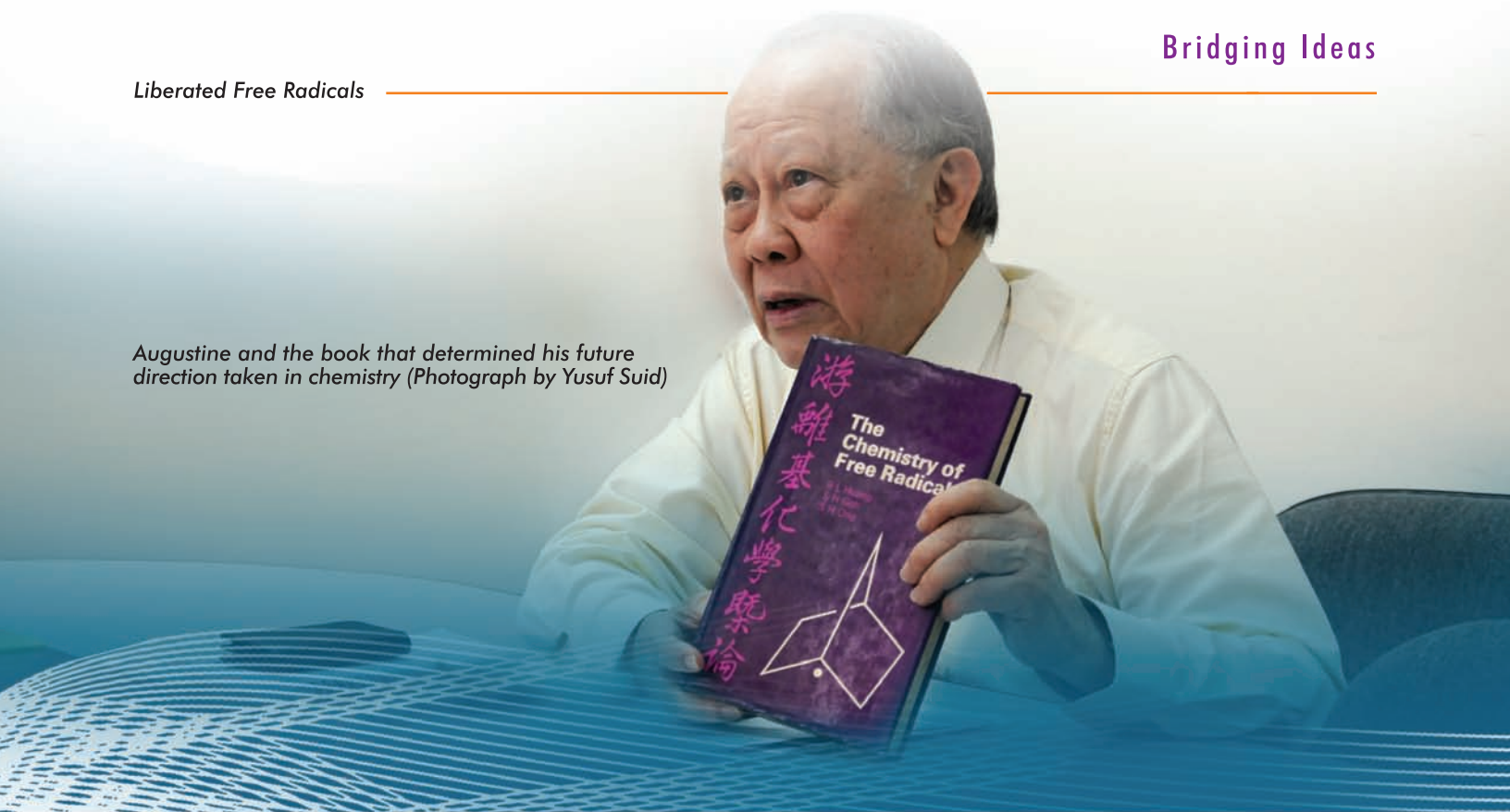
"I thought of rubber but I immediately realised that it was almost overstudied." He considered other crops but those too have been well researched into.

Then it occurred to him that hardly any local scientists have countered claims by foreign researchers on the negative values of palm oil.



During a visit to USM (Photograph courtesy of the School of Chemical Sciences)

Augustine and the book that determined his future direction taken in chemistry (Photograph by Yusuf Suid)



"We tend to accept these findings at face value just because they come from well-known foreign universities. We do not verify their scientific claims."

Working with PORIM, he launched an ongoing research venture to show the superiorities of palm oil as compared to sunflower or soy-bean based oils. His efforts 'fighting' the lobby against palm oil paid off. Confidence in oil palm improved and sales picked up. The 'fighting' however never stops because, as Augustine emphasised, local scientists continue to be 'intimidated' by scientists from world-renowned universities.

"That is why when I was at the School of Chemical Sciences I remodeled the teaching approach so that our students are able to think and not accept 'facts' without questioning. Poor examination results were not because students were not working but because they were not properly guided." He thus instilled in his students the wisdom of a Nobel laureate "it's not what you have learnt but what good questions you have asked."

Augustine believes that his approach succeeded in not only producing students who 'can think' beyond their textbook materials but also make the School an early 'centre of excellence' even before the phrase became vogue.

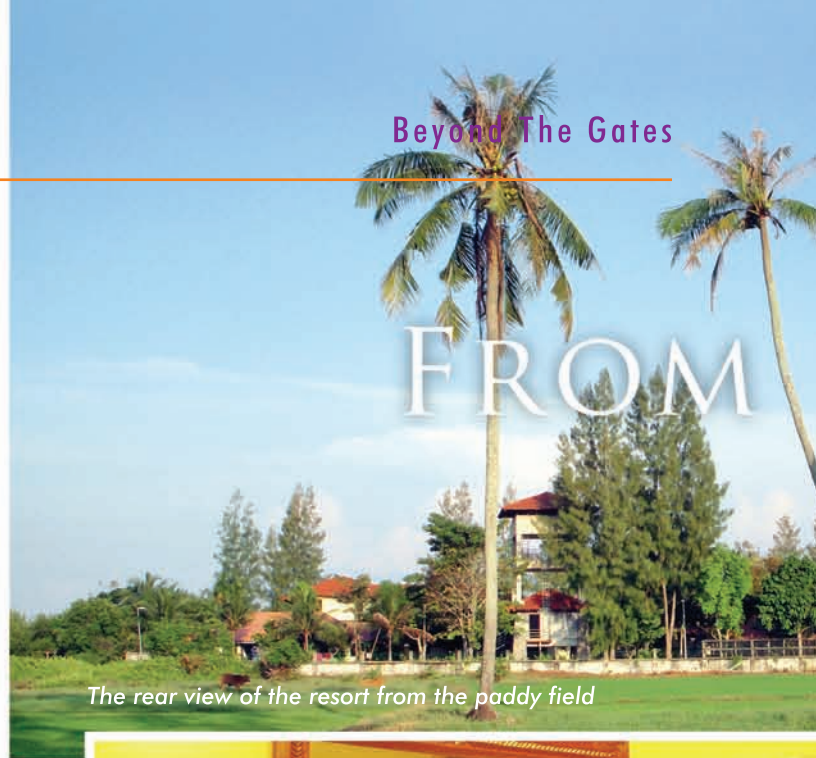
He questions the conventional logic of publishing for one's peers, "You research into palm oil and you publish it in palm oil journals. Who's going to know it" To him information about topics that are of general interest should be disseminated through more popular avenues.

His pioneering students continue to keep in touch with him. In June 2010 he was invited to join them in a morning walk around the Minden campus and other activities that bonded them and their alma mater. Some of the students have become professors and they carry on Augustine's tireless mission to promote local products. Goodbye free-radical. 🇲🇵

Associate Professor Mohamed Talhah Idrus is currently a lecturer at the School of Housing, Building and Planning, USM. He can be reached at tolamhaha@yahoo.com

*I*t is always an honour to be offered to spend the weekend at someone's home. So when the invitation was recently extended to the Editorial Board of *The Leader* to stay at this local style country resort home, it was an opportunity I could not pass up. When I heard that the house was built by the owners themselves, it truly piqued my interest.

Easily reached from Yan Besar along the coastal road, the property sits on 1.5 acres of what was previously a paddy field, just adjacent to the sea. The Jerai Peak looming in the background and the surrounding paddy fields create an idyllic pastoral setting, reminding me of Balik Pulau in the old days. But the house is no throwback to the past. The vista that appeared after the final turn on the narrow road that leads to the house offered a warm, inviting home of eclectic design. The house incorporates a lot of natural materials like wood and stone, typical of a modern Malaysian house, and this comes as no surprise as the designer/owner, who grew up in these parts of Kedah, knows the elements well and understands how best to incorporate them into his abode.



The rear view of the resort from the paddy field



Zamani Kasim

It was only after a day at the resort, after a morning trip to the nearby Pulau Telor, that I finally caught up with Zamani Kasim (School of Housing, Building and Planning '78), when he and his wife, Esther (School of Humanities '78) treated us to a poolside barbecue of the freshest seafood. 'Enthusiastic' would probably be the best word to describe the owner as he walked me around the grounds, both of us barefooted, with Zamani highlighting several details with the pride and satisfaction that could only come from a person who personally designed and saw to the construction of this place. The quality of materials and professional workmanship brought to mind high-end development projects. It was hard to



From Passion to Pavilion

PASSION TO PAVILION

Chan Suan Choo

Photographs by Alec Chin
and Yong Check Yoon

Songsong Island is 20 minutes
away from the resort

believe some were actually DIY projects. Even what I had initially thought as commercially prefabricated decorative slabs with leaf detailing were actually leaves imprinted on concrete *in situ* by workers under the direction of the master builder himself. Pebbles were meticulously sorted according to size and arranged to make patterns on the floors. Trees, shrubs and palms were planted according to their heights to provide foliage and privacy by hiding the view from passing traffic in front of property. Such are examples of the fine details and careful consideration which had gone into the building of this home-style resort.

The eight semi-detached guestrooms that can comfortably accommodate two to three persons each come complete with air conditioning, *en suite* bathrooms, TV and coffee-making facilities. Beckoning warm waters of the swimming pool is only a mere few paces from most of the rooms. There are also verdant landscaped gardens and pebbled pathways with small footbridges over the brook that runs around the property into an aerated pond (completed with swimming geese) which, when pumped and filtered, also provides the water needed for use at this resort. The main building consists of

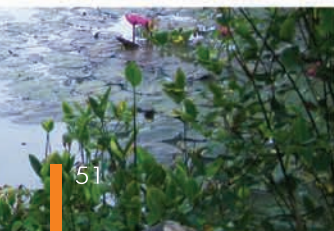
a living room, entertainment room, dining area and a large kitchen. A staircase up to the upper floor leads to a balcony and the private quarters of the owners. With a high vantage point, the balcony offers a commanding view of the Straits of Malacca and the nearby Songsong islands - a sight to behold during sunsets when the bright orange orb seemingly melts into the sea.



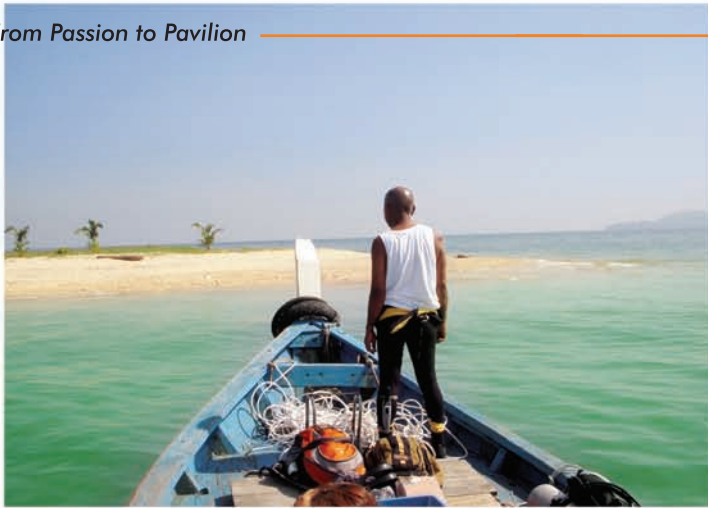
An artificial brook
made to look
natural with hand-
picked pebbles



Car porch supported by
hardwood timber




From Passion to Pavilion



Zamani's favourite weekend pastime, scuba diving

What is also particularly striking in the spacious high-ceilinged living room are the several massive tree trunks that serve as supporting pillars. Such is the common theme of this property, where up to about forty per cent of the construction materials used is either obtained from natural resources or recycled from dismantled old buildings. Pebbles and coarse sands that went into the pebble wash finishes all around the resort came from nearby islands or streams, while frames were built to accommodate the many doors and windows which were once part of an old colonial structure in Seremban that was demolished to make way for a 365-room hotel. Zamani of course has the advantage of having the right contacts to obtain these materials, and this comes largely from his experience in the building industry. Now a CEO of a property development and construction company, he divides his weekdays between KL and Johor, while weekends are often spent here in Yan. And this was how *Zamani's Place* was built, with Zamani overseeing contractors and workers and giving hands-on direction during the weekends for the past 13 years until its recent completion early this year. While Esther humbly claims it is all Zamani's hard work, her no small contribution to this project included the landscaping of the garden and the interior design.

As with its original intention for constructing this property, *Zamani's Place* will soon be opened to receive patrons. With the demand for ecotourism on the rise, a waterfront kampong experience amid paddy fields in the comforts of a resort would be a unique experience which this place can offer. But more evidently, the completion of this home is a testimony to the couple's passion that helped build this warm, welcoming place. 

Chan Suan Choo is currently an editor with The Leader. She can be reached at matlock@streamyx.com



Staircase to the private living quarters from the common lounge



The swimming pool is just a hop-step and jump away from the rooms

YESTERNEWS

Text and Photographs by
Yong Chek Yoon

Universiti Pulau Pinang came into existence in 1969 as the second institute of tertiary studies in the country and the first in the state. In 1971, from the shared premises of the Malayan Teachers' Training College in Glugor, it moved to Minden, the current site, 2 km away. On 22 April the following year, it officially changed its name to Universiti Sains Malaysia.

NOW IT'S UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

ENANG, Sat.—The University of Penang was today officially re-named Universiti Sains Malaysia. Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. Hamzah Sendut, announced the change in Minden Cam-

pus this morning. "I am to confirm the advice I have received from the Government to change the university's name to Universiti Sains Malaysia — USM, for short," he said.

APPOINTMENTS

UNIVERSITI PULAU PINANG

Permohonan2 adalah dipelawa daripada warganegara Malaysia untuk Jawatan2 yang berikut:—

1. PEMBANTU PENTADBIR — PEJABAT PENDAFTAR

Kelayakan: Calon2 hendaklah siswazah Universiti; Pengalaman dalam pekerjaan pentadbiran diutamakan. Mempunyai kelulusan dalam Bahasa Malaysia I atau II pada peringkat Sijil Persekolahan atau memiliki Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysian Certificate of Education. Kebolehan surat menyurat dalam Bahasa Malaysia diperlukan.

Tingkatan Gaji: \$504 x 28 — 812/Sekatan Kekosongan/863 x 28 — 1087 sebulan.

2. (a) PEMBANTU TEKNIK (AWAM)

Kelayakan: (i) Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysian Certificate of Education atau lulus dalam Bahasa Malaysia I atau II peringkat Sijil Persekolahan.

(ii) Diploma Kejuruteraan Awam daripada Maktab Teknik atau kelulusan yang setaraf. Keutamaan akan diberi kepada mereka yang lulus Peperiksaan Jabatan yang kedua dianjurkan oleh pihak Kerajaan dan mempunyai pengalaman dalam bidang Penyeliaan, pemeliharaan, pembinaan, penyelenggaraan, dan

(b) PEMBANTU TEKNIK (KEJURUTERAAN LETRIK)

Kelayakan: (i) Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysian Certificate of Education serta lulus dalam Bahasa Malaysia I atau II peringkat Sijil Persekolahan.

(ii) Mempunyai Diploma dalam bidang Kejuruteraan Elektrik (Electrical Engineering) daripada Maktab Teknik atau yang setaraf dengannya yang diakui. Keutamaan akan diberi kepada calon2 yang mempunyai pengalaman dalam bidang kejuruteraan elektrik.

PEMBANTU TEKNIK (WOKSHOP)

Kelayakan: (i) Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysian Certificate of Education serta lulus dalam Bahasa Malaysia I atau II.

(ii) Mempunyai Diploma pench dalam kejuruteraan mekanik dari sebuah kolej teknik atau politeknik yang diakui atau yang setaraf dengannya serta mempunyai pengalaman bertugas didalam sebuah wokshop.

Tugas2: (i) Mengelola dan mengawasi wokshop jentera; (ii) "General machining, welding, plumbing" bertukang kayu dan lain2; (iii) Menyediakan dan memasang semua alat2 makmal; (iv) Menguji, menyelenggara dan membaiki alat2; (v) Menyelia dan mengawasi semua kakitangan yang bertugas didalam wokshop; (vi) Membantu melatih kakitangan rendah.

Tingkatan Gaji: Bagi Jawatan2 2(a), (b) dan (c) Tempoh Perchubuhan: \$380 x 20 — 420/Sekatan Peperiksaan.

Newspaper advertisements in the 1970s
(Source: <http://newspapers.nl.sg/Digitised/straitstimes1971>)

As USM metamorphosed over the years, newspapers keep track of its transformation in the form of advertisements or news reports. We will play the role of armchair 'archaeologists', digging up years of petrified information found between the pages of newspapers and reconstruct them into fascinating stories.

In August 1971, Universiti Pulau Pinang advertised a vacancy for Library Clerk in a newspaper. The applicant was to possess a Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Malaysian Certificate of Education) with a pass in Bahasa Malaysia and typewriting skills. The basic salary scale was \$140 with an annual increment of \$8 besides receiving other allowances. The employee would be receiving an annual increment of \$15 in the final grade before reaching the maximum salary of \$535. Prior to 1975, the denomination of Malaysian currency was in dollars (\$) and cents (¢) before they were changed to the current *ringgit* and *sen*.

Would you ever consider taking up this job offer today? Fortunately, the above salary scale above was considered lucrative when a laboratory assistant armed with Higher School Certificate (H.S.C. is equivalent to Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia) can only command about \$180 basic salary in the private sector in the mid-70s to perhaps early 80s.

Three months later, a degree holder with appropriate professional qualifications was sought for as an Assistant Bursar (Technical) which, in later years, upgraded to Director of Estates Department. The starting salary was \$715 and an annual increment of \$35. The maximum salary was \$1,300.

USM had formal courses for languages such as Japanese and Thai even in the early years but the School of Educational Studies started Thai language classes from 3 November 1971 for students who just wanted to learn an additional language. It was a six-week course, held on Wednesdays and Thursdays and costing a mere \$6 which could also be a princely sum considering that a plate of noodles then was about 20 cents.

KENYATAAN TAWARAN KERAJAAN MALAYSIA KEMENTERIAN PELAJARAN

Tawaran adalah dipelawa daripada firma-firma yang patang dan luar negeri untuk mengemukakan ter berikut:-

- Tender No. WBSE/78/CH** — Untuk membe menghantar dan memasang alat-kelangka sains bagi Pusat Pengajian Sains Kimia, Unive Sains Malaysia, Minden, Pulau Pinang.
Bayaran Dokumen Tawaran: \$50.00 satu set.
- Tender No. WBSE/79/PS** — Untuk membe menghantar dan memasang alat-kelengkapan si bagi Pusat Pengajian Sains Farmasi, Universiti Si Malaysia, Minden, Pulau Pinang.
Bayaran Document Tawaran: \$50.00 satu set.

Hanya pembekal daripada negeri yang menjadi Bank Antarabangsa untuk Pembinaan dan Pembangu semula atau daripada Switzerland layak membuat tawa

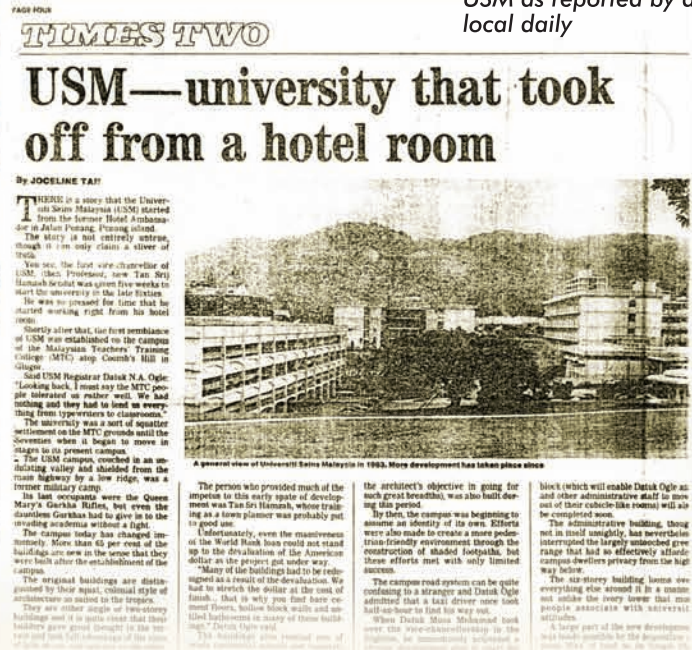
Dokumen tawaran boleh diperolehi di Pejabat B dahari semasa waktu pejabat setelah membayar bayl dokumen tawaran tersebut kepada Bendahari, Unive Sains Malaysia.

The newspaper was the best avenue to call for tenders

During those early years, many students who have completed their upper secondary education just headed for the job market because an H.S.C. enabled them to secure a relatively good paying jobs. Those not satisfied with that might apply into Malaysian public universities. According to an advertisement, they have to purchase application forms costing \$1.00 per set and remit the completed forms in a self-addressed envelope (with a \$1.00 stamp affixed) together with a postal or money order of \$1.00. On-line application was futuristic. The advent of the Age of Internet in Malaysia was a quarter of a century away!

Following the handing over of Minden to USM in February 1971, renovation works started in March. Exactly a year later, an advertisement called for contractors to construct a block of lecture theatres for School of Social Sciences and Humanities. It was part of the expansion programme for the Universiti to increase the intake of students and to upgrade the existing facilities. In 1974, tenders were called to demolish and replace Buildings 51 and 214.

A humble beginnings of USM as reported by a local daily



The construction of a science complex, a library, an auditorium, and a *desasiswa* (students' hostels) were facilitated by a World Bank loan of \$36 million in 1972. As construction and renovation of buildings reached a feverish pitch, in February 1975, tenders for the construction of buildings for the School of Biological Sciences and three *desasiswas* were sought for.

Four years later, the Schools of Chemical Sciences and Pharmaceutical Sciences laboratories received new scientific equipment. It was in early 1980 that USM looked for an x-ray machine, inclusive of television screening monitor, for its *Pusat Kesihatan* (clinic).

USM history is laid down stratum upon stratum, ever growing, if we were to stack newspapers with the earliest at the bottom of the pile and the current ones at the top. Our armchair 'archaeology' has produced nuggets of information that might be nostalgic to the pioneering students. On the contrary, the information may also befuddle the present generation of students who may wonder where certain buildings were or how USM handled students' applications without the help of computers back then. ▮

Yong Cheek Yoon is currently an editor in Pejabat Pemajuan dan Perhubungan Alumni (PPPA), USM. He can be reached at check_yoon@yahoo.com.



Tian'anmen Square

*Text and photographs by
Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal
B. Sc. '07*

WSM alumni made a difference even in Beijing. It rarely rains in the metropolitan city of 19.6 million inhabitants during this time of the year, according to our tourist guide Lily Wang, but it did when we arrived. There were 20 of us comprising alumni, associate members and staff in this Alumni Liaison Office (ALO) networking trip to Beijing from 20 to 26 April.

"It would be cold and dry during this time of the year but you brought the long awaited rainfall," our tourist guide Lily Wang quipped as it was raining on that day and the temperature plummeted to a numbing 10°C.

It had been a tiring but exciting flight from Pulau Pinang at 7.50 am on 20 April. We spend a two and a half hour transit in Hong Kong, arriving in Beijing at 7.50 pm. We retired to our rooms after dinner as we were too weary although it was relatively bright outside. Beijing was having longer daylight.

We visited Tiananmen Square - the symbolic heart of China - after having breakfast at Taishun Business Hotel. It is the biggest public square in the world, covering 0.44 km² and can accommodate up to a million people at any one time. We crossed the Golden River Bridge to enter the Forbidden City where its inner

Tour guide Lily Wang (right) and her group after an unexpected downpour at Tiananmen Square



sanctum and palace lies. It was from this behemoth palace complex that Chinese emperors ruled their domain for 506 years from the time of its construction in 1406. It has close to 9,000-rooms, courtyards and ceremonial halls where 24 emperors used to live. Forbidden City was indeed a forbidden place where commoners were kept out and palace intrigues kept in.

We then visited a silk centre where they showed us how silk is produced. The popular products sought by tourists are the silk quilt and the poo-poo pillow (a silk pillow filled with silkworm droppings). We end our day by watching an amazing Chinese acrobatic show which is said to be one of the country oldest performing arts and being among the best in the world.



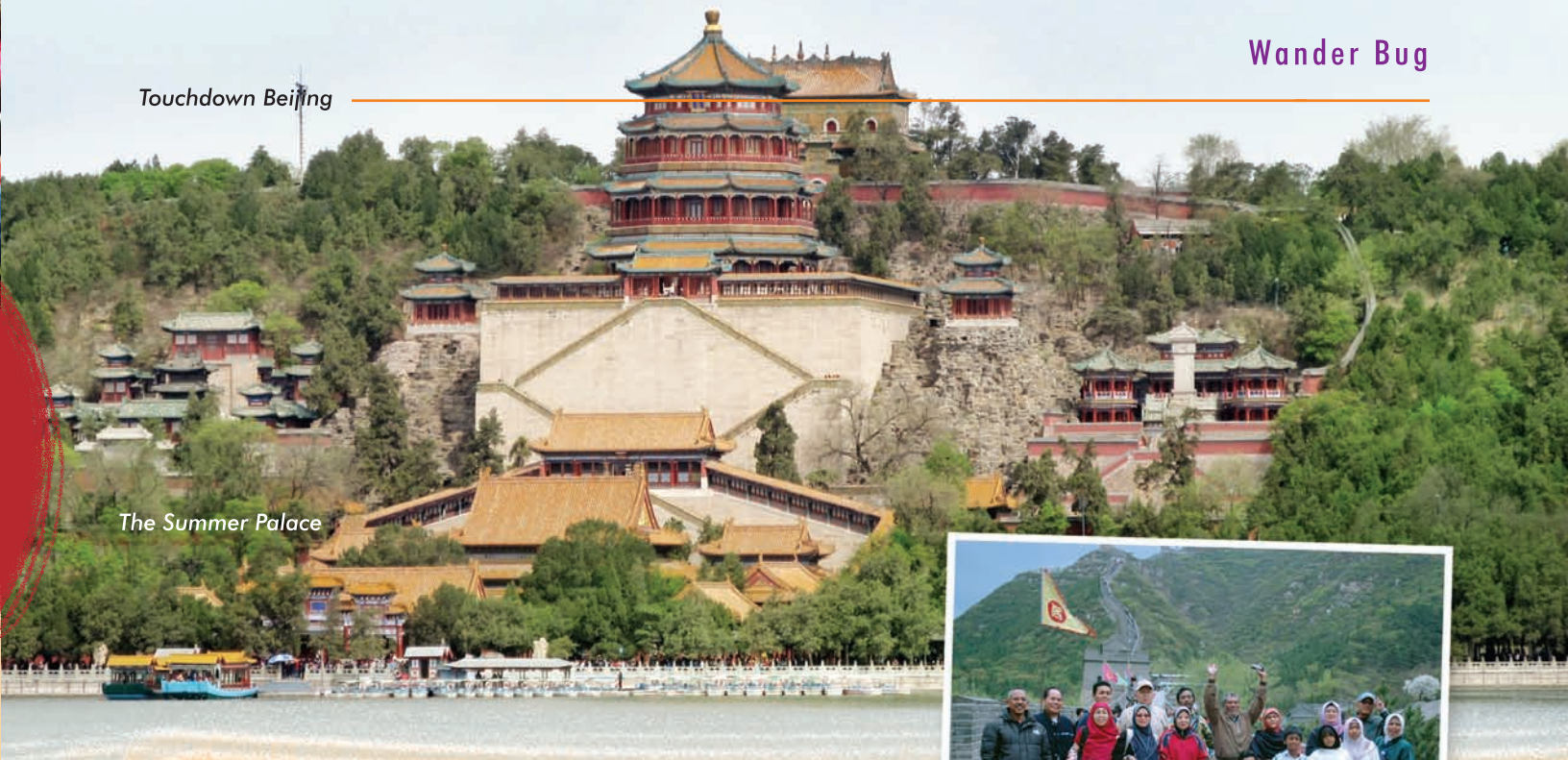
The silkworms' poo-poo



Acrobatic performances as a way of earning a living

Touchdown Beijing

The Summer Palace



A moment together at the Great Wall of China



On the third day, we visited the Beijing Bona Jade Museum. The prices of the ornamental stone items are much too expensive for regular wage earners. However, many of us bought jade pillows as a souvenir it was claimed that it is possible to keep our head cool even in repressively hot weather.

"To maintain good health, the Chinese believe that one has to keep the head cool by sleeping on a jade pillow and feet warm by immersing them in tepid water with a few slices of ginger soaked within," Lily said.

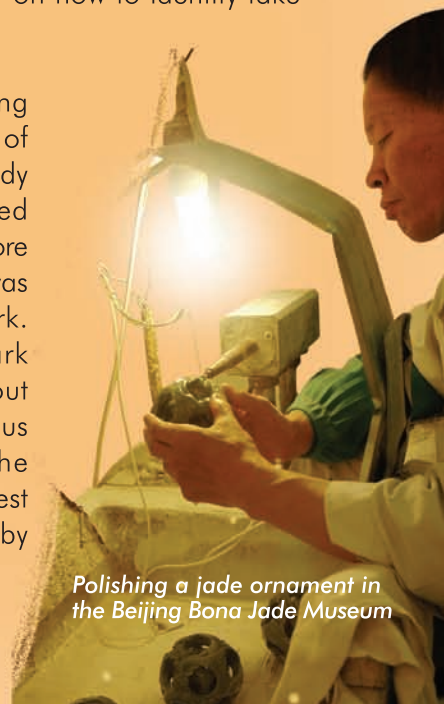
The highlight of the day was visiting the Great Wall. We spent about two hours travelling to the outskirts of the city to reach the Badaling Great Wall. The Badaling section was built during the Ming Dynasty. The Great Wall with a total length of almost 9,000 km is one of the most remarkable feats of mankind, first started by Qin Shi Huang more that 2,000 years ago with sections added on by other dynasties until the late 15th century at a cost of more than a million lives.

You will be able to climb and walk on one of the best preserved sections of the ancient wall, admiring the panoramic mountain scenery. Everybody marvelled by what they saw. Almost half of us manage to climb up until the sixth phase while two of our youngest participants Alif (10 years old) and Atiqah (13 years old) manage to go up until the seventh phase.

Our next stop was the Summer Palace which is dominated by the 60 m high Longevity Hill and the Kunming Lake used by the of Qing emperors. It is amazing that the earth dug up to create Kunming Lake was used to construct the Longevity Hill! We were told that the lake was used to breed oysters for pearls. Subsequent to the visit to the Summer Palace, we visited a pearl shop where the prices of items are very expensive and cannot be bargained. However, we were given a valuable tutorial by the staff on how to identify fake pearls.

Next, we visited the Burning Cream Centre. Here some of us were shocked to see a lady grabbing a piece of heated metal. She winced in pain before a liberal dollop of a cream was applied over the burn mark. Remarkably, the burn mark faded completely after about 20 minutes. While some of us were convinced about the efficacy of the cream, the rest of us were utterly shocked by the demonstration.

Polishing a jade ornament in the Beijing Bona Jade Museum



Touchdown Beijing



Horsing around in front of the Bird's Nest

Before we return to the hotel, we shopped at the Yashow Market where you have to be really good in bargaining because hard selling was the order of the day. The lucky ones are those with good bargaining skills and they end up getting good quality products at a fair price. You will know how well you fare once you compare prices with your friends buying the same product. It was very frustrating but on the brighter side, we gained some invaluable experience.

Bird's Nest and Water Cube stadiums, built for the 2008 Olympic Games, were on our fifth day's itinerary. We went to souvenir and jewellery shops across the stadiums and were lucky to meet a fellow Malaysian managing the jewellery outlet there. He gave us a really good bargain for jade, pearls and jewelleryes.

We prayed at Masjid Madian, located in the Haidian district, after lunch. The 800 year-old mosque is clean and well maintained.

Next was to visit the panda at the Beijing Zoo. We were not so lucky that day because the pandas were too far away and most of them were lazing around.

Later, we watched a kung fu performance which we did not enjoy as much as that of the acrobatic's which we saw earlier. The final itinerary of the day was a visit to the Sunny Gold Street Market, where one's bargaining ability will be amply tested.



With local folks at the Masjid Madian



A panda ignoring the visitors

Finally, we headed to Tianjin on the border of Beijing municipality to visit its ancient market which took almost two hours to reach. The architecture was so beautiful. We went to the Food Street Market for a variety of snacks. Having satisfied our hunger, we returned to the complex where we literally used up our last yuan. Our entire luggage doubled in weight causing us to buy a bag as our last item! Almost all of us bought branded luggage bags costing between 160 and 220 yuan (RM 80 - RM 120).

Despite the grouses and cultural shock, we are happy to have seen Beijing and its dozens of mosques. We did not have problems with halal food as the city has a large Muslim population. It is a trip to be cherished with memorable moments captured on digital cameras combined with the momentos in our luggage. [L](#)

Next destination

Open for booking

Amman, Petra

Jordan

6-13 October 2011



Jegathesan made USM Pro-Chancellor

Tan Sri Dr M Jegathesan, fondly known as the 'flying doctor' for being the fastest runner in Asia during his time, has been proclaimed Pro-Chancellor on 19 March at the University's 43rd convocation ceremony held in its Engineering Campus in Nibong Tebal. Jegathesan replaces Tan Sri Dr Lin See Yan. Jegathesan was the first Malaysian to win an Asian Games gold medal in 1962. He is currently a consultant for a hospital in Kuala Lumpur and is the Olympic Council of Malaysia deputy president.

The 43rd Convocation Ceremony

Kampus Kejuruteraan USM, Nibong Tebal was the venue for the 43rd Convocation Ceremony on 19 March where 562 postgraduates and 261 undergraduates received their scrolls.



A Moment of Honour

Former Deputy Governor of Bank Negara Malaysia and USM Pro-Chancellor (2000-2010), Tan Sri Dr Lin See Yan, was conferred an honorary Doctor of Economics during USM's 43rd Convocation ceremony. At the same ceremony, world-renowned social science researcher, Prof Sohail Tahir Inayatullah, also received an honorary Doctor of Philosophy. Prof Lim Koon Ong, the former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Industry and Community Network) was also conferred Professor Emeritus.

Hall of Fame Awards

The 10th Sanggar Sanjung Awards Night (MASS) 2010 was held on 17 March. Awards were presented under the Distinguished Individual Category, Publication (Journal), Research Product (Commercialisation), Creativity, Quality, International Grant, Patent and Merit Award. There were 284 recipients this year.



USM Minden 69'ers Reunion

A reunion among alumni (from various degree programmes) who were born in 1969 was held on 30 April and presented an opportunity for them to network after a lapse of 18 years since graduating. The event was attended by 50 alumni together with family members and included some sports activities culminating in a dinner at Anjung Budi.

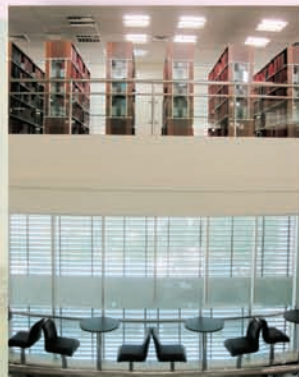


Lake Revitalisation

The completion of the first phase of the CIMB-USM Tasik Harapan Rehabilitation Project on 27 March also marked the start of the second phase to revitalise the lake. The main event of the day was the infusion of the lake with an effective microorganism activated solution.

Developing Orthodontics

USM has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Academy of Dental Sciences Sdn Bhd on 14 April aimed at helping to develop a specialised programme in Orthodontics.



Hamzah Sendut Library Extension

A special referral centre, costing RM13 million, which provides access to 119 databases and electronic books in various fields was opened on 3 March.

Tracking the Graduates

The Graduate Tracer Study 2010 indicated that within four months, 76.6% of USM graduates found employment. It has, therefore, exceeded USM target for 2010 regarding the employability of its graduates. This was announced at the EKSPEN 2011 Career Fair which was held from 4-6 March.



*Texts by Saw Cheang Kee, Sharifah Darweena Syed Ahmad Amir Feisal and Yong Check Yoon.
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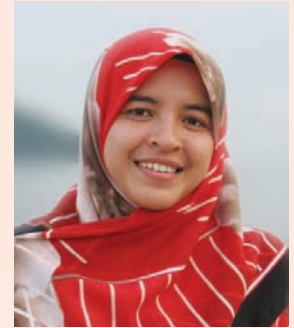
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2-3 December 2011 | Kampus Kesihatan, Kelantan.

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