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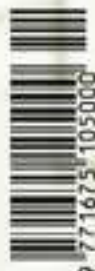
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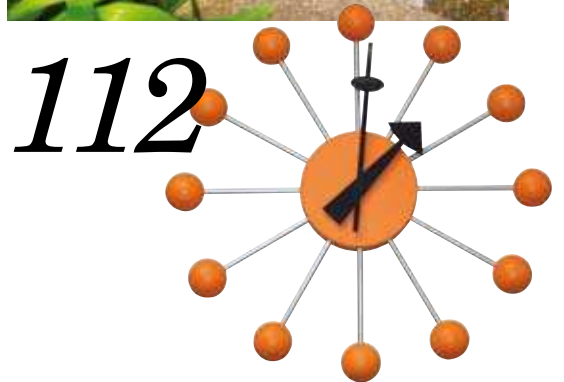
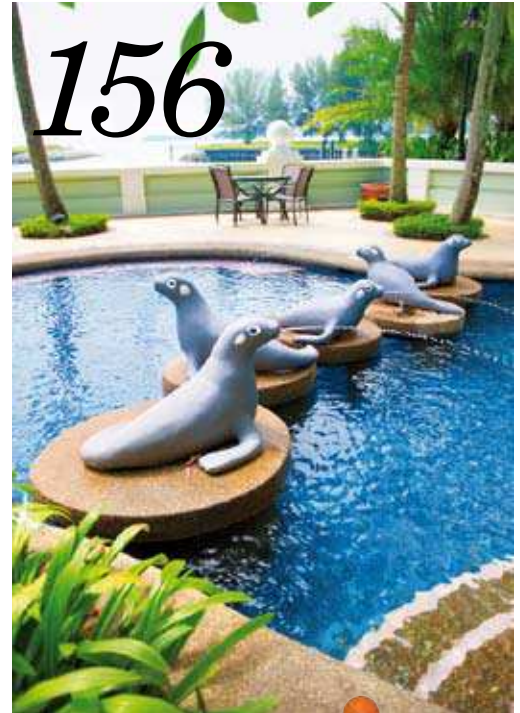
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# Poised for extremes

The beautiful Poesy Liang is on the verge of doing something drastic in the name of The Bald Empathy Movement. ANEESA ALPHONSUS speaks to her about many close shaves.

ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY OF DJENEB A DJAYOM

Standing behind Poesy Liang and looking at her luscious cascading locks in their full glory, and knowing that every strand will be shaved off, can be traumatic. In about six months, Poesy will be going bald at the 64th Cannes Film Festival in May 2011. It's a big deal really. Huge. Especially since she has what is called 'shampoo advertisement hair'; having literally appeared in a television commercial some years ago. Understandably nervous about it, Poesy, however, is unshakeable in her resolve to do so – all in the name of raising awareness for cancer in a project called the Bald Empathy Movement (BEM). Try and convince her all you can about how good she looks with her hair and it'll fall on deaf ears; Poesy remains

stoic to all protests – even that of her long-time hairstylist Albert Nico.

While she was toying with the idea of going bald, Poesy's ex-boss Datuk Yasmin Yusuff (whom she worked for as a talent booker and still affectionately calls 'boss') invited her to participate in the Relay For Life celebrity walk. Theatre personality Sandra Sodhy was appointed to walk with Poesy and ensured that her hands were held the entire time "in case I fell during the walk," she smiles, adding, "it gave me an opportunity to learn about her story of cancer survival as we bonded; it dawned on me that people might want to hear my story too – that maybe it just might help someone."

When invited to join Relay For Life this year, Poesy says, "I felt compelled to reflect on the purpose of it and whether I had gained any enlightenment or brought anything meaningful to others from the event last year. It just so happened that in May this year, I volunteered to help someone with something totally unrelated to my work. It was here that I learnt about hair extensions and wigs and was told that people could actually donate their hair to cancer patients by making them into wigs first since they can be expensive."

This prompted Poesy to think about how a bald patient might feel, and as the idea took root, she decided to attend the walk.

"This year, when I walked Relay For Life, radio personality Angie Ng held my hands. The field had just survived a monsoon storm and it spared no one who got in the way – like cancer would do. To witness the masses who participated in the event evoked my thirst to do something more to help myself and others around me not to take life for granted. That evening made an impact on me that propelled me to crystallize my ideas further on BEM."

The more she thought about shaving her head for a cause, the more Poesy

researched such projects that had been done before. She realised that apart from it advocating cancer awareness, she also wanted it to revolve around wholesome living. "It made me see that being bald isn't important, it's just a temporal statement, but to have empathy and develop that side of our spirit can only do us good."

## SURVIVING THE ODDS

The Bald Empathy Movement in aid of cancer patients seems an apt and timely project for Poesy. The first time she was diagnosed with spinal cancer, she was 17 years old and experienced paraplegia for a spell. Her determined parents would see that she received the best possible treatments. Poesy was back on her feet and ready for a television commercial two years later.

However, her condition known as Thoracic Intradural Meningioma, came back with a vengeance 11 years later when Poesy turned 28. Picture a mass of tumours coiled around a spinal cord – that would give you an idea of her condition. Refusing to give in again, Poesy says, "I just decided to stand up and walk. So now, I do so using my visual senses with the inaccurate sensation of my lower limbs. If my feet caught fire, I wouldn't feel a thing." Incidentally, Poesy's mother is also a cancer survivor.

"My mother miraculously got through it at Stage 4. Did she heal herself? There is probably an ounce of truth in her diet and lifestyle choices. She is a gifted traditional Chinese medical doctor who practises acupuncture with a wealth of knowledge in herbs and nutritional studies. It's hard to say if she is just plain fortunate to be rid of her cancers, or that she did everything right. I do believe her work in adjusting her spiritual attitude lent to the miracle, as it did for me too. This has made me want to apply myself and make sure that I do all I can for those who need





assistance in any way. It's about never wasting a day," she shares.

### A COMPASSIONATE CAUSE

It seems Poesy is destined to be the harbinger of help. Volunteering at an animal shelter from her childhood days right through her mid twenties allowed her an insight into what volunteerism encompasses. Later, Poesy was involved with work for underprivileged children, organising charity movie screenings and concerts, among others. After working on random projects for more than 10 years, she started Helping Angels, a Facebook group that is made up of volunteers who do random acts of kindness.

"I wanted to find an avenue where everyone will discover resources to contribute. This is also a great way for

people to realise their own abundance and life's blessings," she explains.

She had absolutely no clue that it would include so many people – at the last count the group has over 2,000 members. Forming Helping Angels has given her more confidence to generate other projects such as BEM.

"I must add however that the project isn't something new. Kudos to all the people who have done it for cancer outreach and awareness all over the world. The toughest part about this project is to build empathy and I will share some of my personal struggles with my hardships with paralysis if that helps."

So, what concerns her most about going bald?

"I'm a vain girl," is her refreshing answer, "and my hair plays a very big part in my appearance, especially when I'm gaining my middle age weight – the

hair helps me to cover it up! Someone once said that if you do a clean shave, the hair that grows back will become wiry and frizzy. I'm not sure if that is true for everybody, but I would not like to exchange my hair for that.

"It has also crossed my mind that I may never do one of those commercials ever again even if my hair is restored to its former glory because by the time I have hair again, I would be past the window of camera glory. Who knows? I might love going bald so much that I might just choose to remain bald. I can't grasp the idea yet, but I have a tendency to frighten myself!"

Having conquered paralysis, the hair shaving, which is set to take place in Cannes next year, seems like a walk in the park for Poesy. "Although I love having hair very much, if this can bring the message forth to change a few outlooks, I think it's a tiny price to pay," she says, tucking a wayward tendril that will soon go to a very good cause. **#FW**

### The Bald Empathy Movement

#### Objectives of the cause:

- To make bald fashionable and cool, as an empathy movement for those suffering from loss of dignity and hair loss due to chronic illnesses such as cancer.
- To advocate wholesome lifestyles. Living well - emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually – by getting a deeper understanding of chronic illnesses such as cancer.
- To raise sensitivity towards survivors and patients suffering from ill health.
- To know that we can give our hair to cancer patients by getting the wigs made and gifting it as a gesture of love and respect. Don't just give away the loose hair - make the wig before giving.
- No hair, no shampoo, less water.

To get involved visit: <http://www.facebook.com/BaldEmpathyMovement> and <http://helpingangels.net>