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FATHER'S DAY SPECIAL

CITY CHAIN PRESENTS SOME
'QUALITY TIME WITH DAD'

ANDREW GARFIELD

SWINGS INTO THE BIG TIME AS THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN



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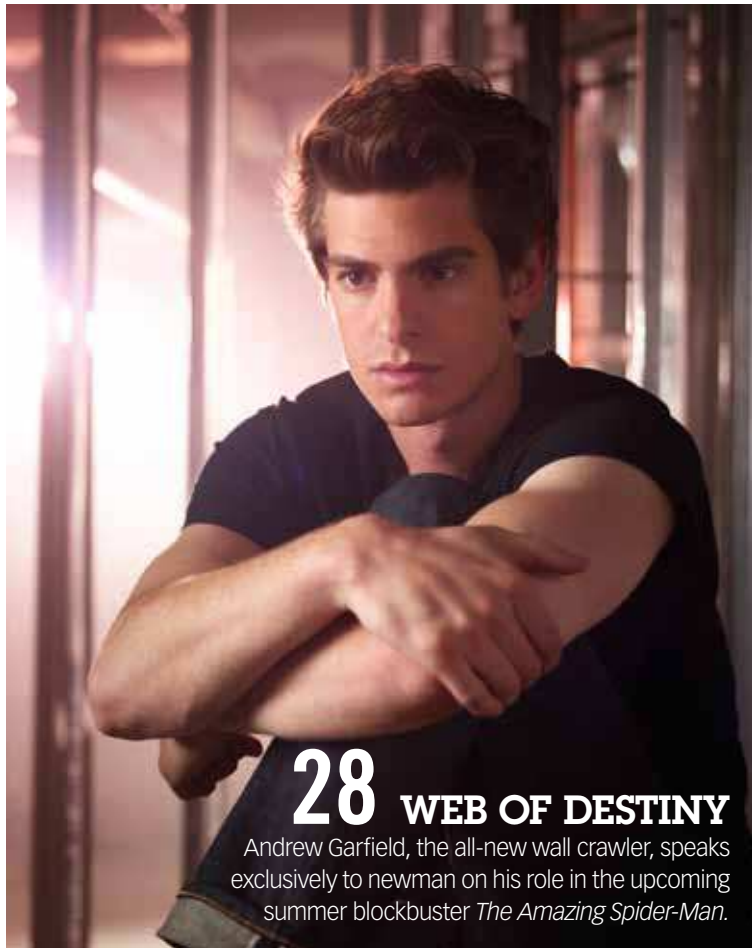
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Art 'Marionette' by Fauzul Yusri (2010)

A POCKETFUL OF POESY

Artist, writer, jewellery designer, and founder of Helping Angels. For this Jane of all trades, life does indeed begin at 30.

By Celeste Goh; Photography by Bibo Aswan / Bibo Aswan Photography; Styling by Kenny Rosmi; Make-up by Annie Gho / Artists At Work; Hair by Vincent Ting / MIKO Hair Gallere; Location Special thanks to Moroso showroom / Starhill Gallery, KL

It sure is a cruel dog-eat-dog world we are living in. When everything in life is practically a rat race for the rich to get richer, leaving the poor to get poorer, with the middle class fighting amongst themselves to bridge the widening gap. One does wonder if basic human nature is compromised in this material and power-driven world. Is there still a kind soul out there who cares enough to be selfless? Does it still matter to be kind and caring, when mankind is clambering onto one another to get to the top first?

For multi-talented Poesy Liang, the answer for both the abovementioned questions is a hearty "yes".

So much so that she recently went bald at the 64th Cannes Film Festival during the finale of the Bald Empathy Movement tour across Europe last year. One of the bigger projects by Helping Angels, a charity Facebook group she founded, Bald Empathy Movement was conceived to lend empathetic support for those who suffer from loss of dignity due

to premature hair loss because of chronic illnesses like cancer.

The tour started in August 2010 and ended in June last year, and it involved many people from all the countries they went to, including eight photographers, who travelled with Poesy across 10 countries in Europe.

"I attended several film parties, days before the shave, but the 'glamour' of it didn't really interest me. Knowing that I was going through a huge transformation the next day, all I wanted to do was to cherish those last moments, as if it was the last day of my life on Earth," Poesy recalls. "It was an interesting revelation because I meditated a lot about death prior to the shave. I would much rather spend my time with my own thoughts."

According to her, the atmosphere that following morning was very serene, much like at a wedding or a funeral, where people were quiet and respectfully anticipating the good deed to be done. Inside, Poesy was a bundle of contradicting emotions.

WITHOUT HAIR TO SOFTEN HOW I LOOK, I HAD TO INSTEAD SOFTEN MY CHARACTER... IT WAS A RATHER INTERESTING PERIOD OF MY LIFE. I LEARNED TO EMBRACE WHAT IT IS TO BE FEMININE, AT A TIME WHEN I FELT MOST UNFEMININE

"To be honest, I was very exhausted by the time I got to Europe, and the last two months of the tour really tested my patience. I really could not wait to get it over and done with!" she says.

"At that point, I had not been home for many weeks, and knowing that my friends, whether they were in Cannes with me or not, supported me all the way, it really touched me. Also, the fact that my parents and my good friend, The Green Man Matthias Gelber shaved their heads six hours ahead back in KL, it set the stage for me, and I was more than prepared to get rid of my hair."

It was not until Poesy was braiding her hair moments before the shave, when a window of sadness opened up in her. She thought to herself, "that will be the last time for a very long time that I will get to do this."

When the razor began buzzing, a quiet hush fell over the room, and everyone in the room became emotional and ended up crying. Poesy reveals that she had to sit facing away from the crowd, just in case she caught sight of everyone's tears and ended up bawling herself and joining in the hysteria.

Right after the shave, Poesy's executive producer Roy Martens took her out to lunch with some friends. Much to her surprise, her shaven head turned a lot of heads, and photographers on the streets even started following them around town. Novelty or not, the general response to this drastic move of hers have been positive, she says. In fact, having paparazzi stalking her made her feel oddly glamorous, the exact opposite of what she had expected initially.

"When I first wrote this project, I knew that there must be within everybody's resources to draw out a kind of charisma that reaches beyond vanity," she says, when asked about finding herself again, after ridding off what is arguably a woman's most prized assets.

"There were moments when I felt like a boy. Without hair to soften how I look, I had to instead soften my character. Some women can look feminine, but yet possess

a terrifying personality. So, when I got back from Cannes, I stayed low, just to figure out how to get rid of all my bad traits. It was a rather interesting period of my life. I learned to embrace what it is to be feminine, at a time when I felt most unfeminine."

"That being said though, I do like how I looked without hair. That's a pleasant surprise to me," she adds with a laugh.

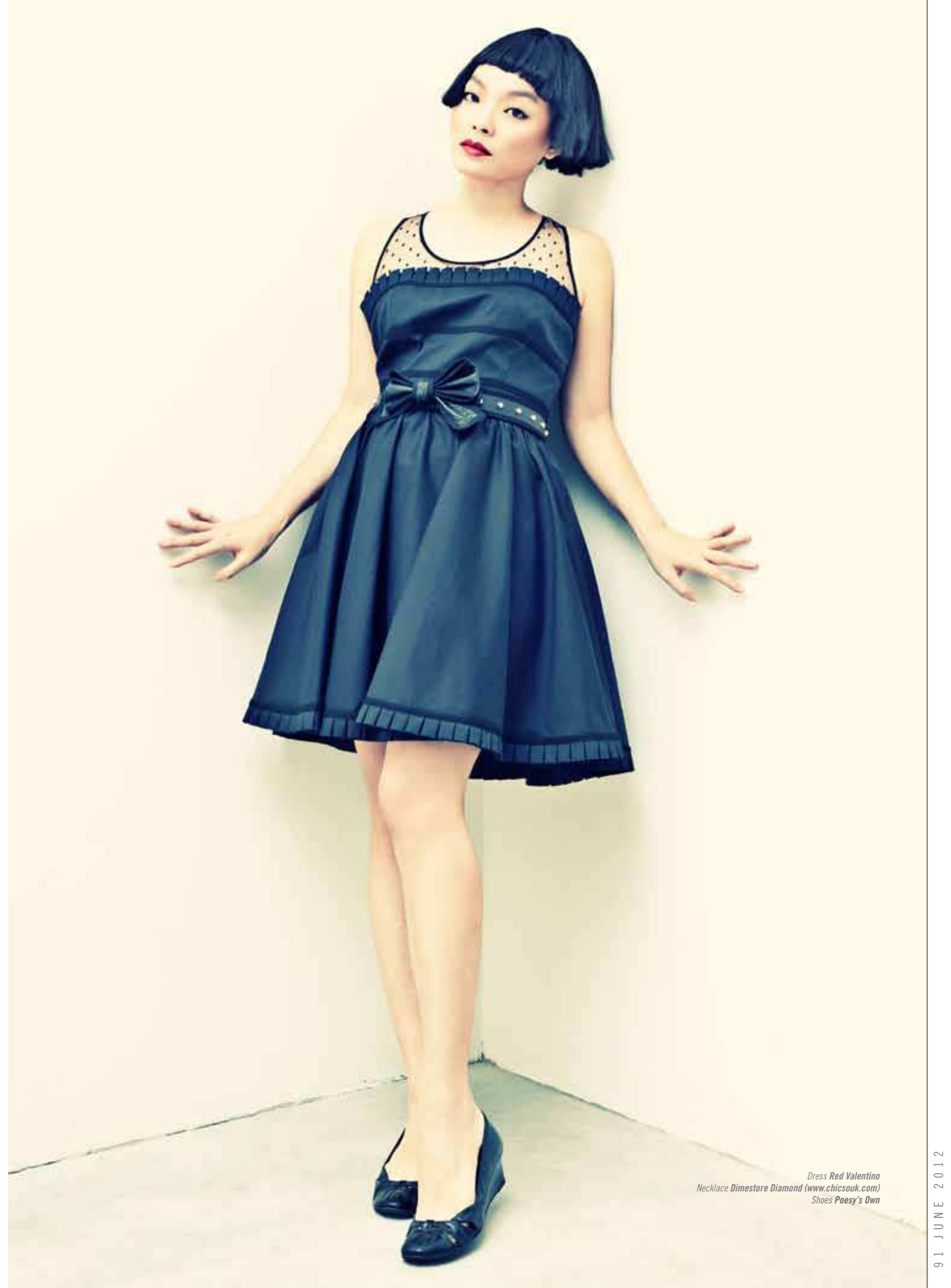
The enigma that is Poesy Liang, started out her career on a more regular path, first in commercials and appearance on local television programmes, before her creative aspirations swept her off her feet and urged her to follow her dream to paint, write and design luxury jewellery for her company, POEZ Jewellers. Eventually, this path led her to become the founder of Helping Angels, a non-profit Facebook group that has managed to carve out a global reach with its random acts of kindness.

If there really were an angel flying too close to the ground, like what country rock singer Willie Nelson sang about in the 1980s, this darling humanitarian would definitely be the angel he was crooning about.

However, Poesy's life is not one that has been handed to her on a silver platter. She was in her teens when her family hit a financial bump in the early 80s. Heart wrenched to see her parents struggling to make ends meet, it prompted her to take up jobs in the media industry to help ease their burden. She was only 14 when she was discovered in a Levi's Strauss television commercial that snowballed eventually to more airtime in advertisements and local television programmes.

However, just when the ball had started rolling for her, Poesy was diagnosed with acute thoracic intradural meningioma, a rare but recurrent case of benign tumours growing within her spinal cord, almost leaving her a paraplegic at the age of 17.

"Perhaps the naivety of being so young helped, because I did not realise the magnitude of my case even when the doctor told me I was not going to walk again. It did not sink in until years later that I could have



Dress Red Valentino
Necklace Dimstore Diamond (www.chicsouk.com)
Shoes Poesy's Own

I DON'T REALLY LIKE SOCIALISING. I HAVE NEVER BEEN FOND OF PARTIES AND EVENTS. EVEN THOUGH I LOVE FASHION, AND I DESIGN JEWELLERY FOR THE LUXURY MARKET, I SEE THIS MORE AS AN INDULGENCE. I DON'T LIKE TO PUT MYSELF IN AN ARENA WHERE I HAVE TO MINGLE WITH STRANGERS, WHERE I HAVE TO EXPOSE MYSELF TO PEOPLE

been paralysed, had we believed in the reality then," Poesy recalls.

"Regardless, my parents were very supportive and detailed in caring for me. Besides getting me to every single physiotherapy session at the hospital, they also devised their own methods to get me to exercise my legs. My mother is also a gifted healer, so I was treated intensively with acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine," she adds, when asked on how much of a toll this unfortunate ordeal had taken on her family back then.

"I believe that parents are always the last to give up, even though they are always the ones who suffer the most pain. They worked the hardest to help me, and they never once cried in front of me, although I am pretty sure they were very tormented inside. They are the reason I had to alleviate my own pain by getting well as quickly as I can."

The angels were definitely smiling down on Poesy, as she recovered miraculously and regained 90% of her strength. Persistent in seeing things on the bright side, she treated her illness like it was merely a broken bone, and was on her feet even before she was fully recovered. Even though she was still limping from the surgery, she kept herself busy by going to the beach, working part time in ex-Miss Malaysia's and radio deejay Yasmin Yusuff's public relations agency and even went ballroom dancing.

Poesy was well into completing her law studies at 28, when life decided to put her through another round of nightmares once again, like an overplayed rerun on television. According to her, she had been worried about a relapse for a while, and suspected that she would find tumours when she went for a CT scan. Unfortunately, her hunch was spot on.

"Even though the first diagnosis was more serious and devastating, the second time round was more difficult to deal with, because at that point, I have already been exposed to the ugly truths, and the mental obstacles were greater to overcome. Everything was weighing down on me, and there was no way of knowing what lay

ahead for me," she says.

"But, at the same time, I made the decision to just deal with it. Since I had the experience of the first miracle, I continued to persevere after my second paralysis, despite my legs losing all sensation and sense of control. It certainly helped to have this kind of life experience earlier, because it helped me handle bigger challenges as I continued living my life."

Three years after her second surgery, Poesy embarked on her third medical procedure to rid herself of the rest of her tumours. Although there has been no diagnosis of tumour movement and regrowth since, the three surgeries have left Poesy with a lifelong paralysis. After her first surgery, Poesy has not been able to feel her legs, and she suffers from diminished or no joint-position-sense (JPS). She has since learned to walk "with her eyes," as she coins it. It is hard for her to find balance even on solid ground, more so in crowded and dark places like clubs with strobe lights. Even simple delights like running, skipping, hopping and jumping, Poesy just has to miss out on these for the rest of her life.

Besides the physical restrictions, her disease has also prompted her to be prepared and plan ahead for her future, in case her disease ever resurfaces again.

"I see them more like realities instead of something to fear and causes me to indulge in self-pity. But to be honest, I am actually more fearful of other unknown diseases. I don't really want to have any more health problems than I already have in my health portfolio!" she says.

"Let's be realistic here. People like me, we have to plan ahead. I have set up a few platforms to fall back on to, which will still allow me to live a full life, should more complications arise. If things do go wrong, I can adjust. If none of the things I was preparing for happens, then it is a great bonus," she adds.

"Hence the reason why I started POEZ Jewellers after my last surgery. Just in case I have to be in a wheelchair for the rest of my life, I can still work and travel internationally.



All clothes Red Valentino
Necklace Dimestore Diamond (www.chicsouk.com)



Dress Platinum Blonde Life (www.chicsouk.com)
 Necklace Dimstore Diamond (www.chicsouk.com)
 Shoes Poesy's own

You know, a job that can engage me creatively as well as on the corporate side of things. Helping Angels is another notable platform as well."

During her long hospitalisation period, Poesy became introspective and spent a lot of time writing. As she moved into her 20s, she kept depression at bay by nurturing her creative skills like writing, painting and making music, to help her reconnect and rediscover herself further.

"I don't really like socialising. I have never been fond of parties and events. Even though I love fashion, and I design jewellery for the luxury market, I see this more as an indulgence. I don't like to put myself in an arena where I have to mingle with strangers, where I have to expose myself to people," Poesy says.

"Don't get me wrong, I do know a lot of fashionistas who are really down to earth, and unlike me, they know how to play the game in the fashion world. Personally, I don't really believe in socialising. I don't mind one-on-one interaction with people who have a common cause we can drive forward together, but ultimately, I prefer to sit at home and work on my writing and art. That's how I relax, with my busy life."

And little did she know back then that it was her passion for brush strokes that would eventually save her at another dire period in her life.

Poesy was at the final leg of the Bald Empathy Movement tour last year, when she found herself down to her last penny in the elegant bosom of Paris. It was at a Parisian sidewalk bench that she embarked on her White Cartoon Sidewalk series, a collection of 40 canvas paintings of quirky animals with their own characteristics, drawn in sparing brush strokes of metallic acrylic paint diluted with Chinese ink. Each canvas fetched her £20, and one in particular of a piggy bank flying next to an Eastern cloud, titled 'International Bank', got her a tidy sum of £200!

Fortunately, her impromptu project paid for her flight ticket to Cannes, and for her trip home... on business class!

"I didn't expect to debut my art career so early on in life, to be honest," Poesy confesses. "I was actually aiming to set

everything in motion by 2016. But as Providence would have it, it kicked off five years ahead of schedule, and I've already been invited by a friend who owns an art gallery in Japan, to showcase more of my artwork in Okinawa next year!"

Besides curating the phenomenon that is the Bald Empathy Movement, Helping Angels is also fuelled by support from cities as far as Cannes and Hamburg, neighbouring ones like Singapore, and of course, Kuala Lumpur.

Inspired strongly by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – top humanitarian driven celebrities in her view – Poesy established Helping Angels on August 30, 2007, a day before Malaysia's 50th year of independence. It is a Facebook group with no intention of becoming a registered organisation that staunchly upholds four exclusive rules: no involvement in fund raising or collection of donations, no commercial marketing activities, no political rallying activities, and no religious evangelism allowed.

"Many people are under the impression that they need to be wealthier, better, smarter to give back. I, however, am of the opinion that people who aspire to give back to society only when they have 'made it', should first learn to give their time so that in the future, they will be well-equipped with the wisdom to make a real difference and make every dollar spent count," Poesy explains.

"There are so many ways to give, not just materially. Helping Angels provides just that altruism platform where people can give back to society by offering their time. I wanted to bring all our blessings to the surface, make us aware just how much luckier some of us are and live with that meaningfully. Everybody has a duty to contribute to the world and be responsible humans too."

To achieve this, Helping Angels chooses a more covert, less in-your-face path when it comes to charity work, hitting on quality instead of quantity, for a more solid and foreseeable future for their movement.

"I am a big believer that there is an intrinsic quality about good things being done quietly. I wanted to build a strong

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IT'S VERY FULFILLING, DOING VOLUNTARY WORK. YOU DON'T GET PAID, BUT THERE IS UNSEEN VALUE SURROUNDING EACH AND EVERY PROJECT HELPING ANGELS WORKS ON, AND IT IS THIS THAT MAKES US RICH. THAT'S WHAT I WORK FOR.

track record first, before too much noise comes in to undermine all the effort," she says. "It will take many years to make sure the foundation is ready for the onslaught of attention. Growing organically is the best way to go, develop and learn as we grow. We focus on results, quality, rather than quantity, the little details matters the most."

"Sure, it takes longer on this more clandestine path, but the change will be more sustainable, if not permanent. I want to plant a seed that will grow tall trees, and it takes time to transform a seed into a tree. The lives we touched have to be changed, and through that only will the contributors be truly enriched from their participation. We want the actions to matter."

However, it is not to say that Poesy is against the more controversial and flamboyant movements circulating virtually out there. At the end of the day, she believes everyone is running for their own causes, and some of them are truly urgent with an expiry date to consider. Everyone is making full use of the resources available at hand, via the ways they each know best. At the end of the day, everyone is striving for a better future and a better world.

"I would consider it a success too, when people around the world are sharing the media for the movements as much as they can. It is part of helping out too, and for us, any help is good help," she says. "Reaching the audience is what makes things successful for such efforts, when it becomes a topic that many people care about. After that, it is up to the leaders to implement change and not get caught up in the hype. Many leaders lose focus when the attention gets overwhelming, and a lot of movements get stuck at the hype stage and no one is there to prompt the leaders to start implementing the change they talk about."

"Reading about it, hearing about it, speaking about it... it would just be propaganda. Although propaganda is important in all movements, it will not be successful until we follow through with completing actions," she adds. "Empty promises are the worst tools to gain a following with, because the quality of your followers will be compromised too. What follows afterwards is blame."

Helping Angels has organised notable projects such as the Gratitude Letters Project in Hong Kong, in collaboration with Xuan Yuan Education Fund and City University Hong Kong, to correspond in handwritten letters with underprivileged children from 130 schools in rural China; the Concert Series Projects, in which volunteering musician members performed classical and jazz concerts at an orphanage in Taipei, and in San Francisco for a blind association; and Bangkok Blankets, a collaborative effort with Cambridge Society, sending 700 blankets to the underprivileged folks in northern Thailand, when an unusually cold winter struck in 2008.

In our own backyard, Helping Angels recently launched the Helping Angels Speaker Congress (HASC) during Pay It Forward Day on April 26. It is a forum, consisting of panel speakers like Poesy herself, Matthias Gelber, Jason Kelly of Socks for Japan, and radio presenter Priscilla Patrick, to propagate green humanity through corporate and personal leadership.

"It's very fulfilling, doing voluntary work," Poesy says. "You don't get paid, but there is unseen value surrounding each and every project Helping Angels works on, and it is this value that makes us rich. That's what I work for."

"At the end of the day, I believe that Providence will somehow provide. My life's experience with my illness has definitely helped me make every moment in life count, and I live it with an idea of finality in mind. It's not necessarily a negative thing, but with that attitude, it assists me in all the things I invest myself in," she says, a professed spiritual rather than religious person, who lives by the motto of American writer Max Ehrmann's 1927 prose poem, *Desiderata*.

"When I started Helping Angels, I decided this will be my life's career. Whatever professional career that I worked in before this, they were more of a learning journey for me. My life's work is basically what I'm doing now." **MM**

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www.poezjewellers.com; www.facebook.com/BaldEmpathyMovement; www.facebook.com/poesyart



Dress: Platinum Blonde Life (www.chicsauk.com)