

Poesy truly a great inspiration

A true-blue KL-ite who has become an international personality is now seeking to mentor the younger generation.



Why Not?
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Gutsy lady: Poesy has emerged from her many life-changing experiences and is the founder of the Helping Angels movement.

HE has been a child TV star, a model, an almost singing artiste and had a couple of multi-millionaire boyfriends to boot but yet Poesy Liang has pushed everything aside to become a mentor and a game changer.

This Imbi girl, who was raised in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, is quite a socialite who counts many rich and famous as her close personal friends. In fact, on the eve of my interview with her, Poesy had Isabella Soliano over to help her clean her house after a leaking roof episode. (Isabella, a popular jazz singer, is the daughter of the late Alfonso Soliano who was a well-known musician and composer in the 1950s and 60s.)

But yet, I had never heard of Poesy until about a week ago although she looked familiar. She was the face of the Levis jeans adverts over 20 years ago when she was just 14 years old. She also hosted RIM Chart Show in 1998 on ntv7.

But for the life of me, I did not know who she was and what she had done. A quick research on the Internet showed that there has been quite a bit written about her and she does have thousands of friends on Facebook.

She has lived a life that would fill several lifetimes but Poesy has had several life-changing moments that act as milestones which have kept her reinventing herself.

Her health issues, immature decisions, rich boyfriends and artistic capabilities have turned this 37-year-old woman from a spoilt brat into a person who is aware of her surroundings and the need to play an active role to help shape the world.

One cannot help but admire Poesy's gumption after hearing of her health problems – tumours grew in her spinal cord and she was left paralysed after two surgeries. She has been having tumour growth since 1992 when she was at the height of her popularity at age 17.

Then within a year she learnt to walk again but “I walk visually because I have no more feelings in my legs.”

But it all came crashing down when in 2003 she needed another surgery for the same problem.

“I had to learn to walk all over again. The second time wasn't any easier but I was determined to do

it,” said Poesy.

Three years later she had to go to Stanford University for a “clean-up surgery” to tackle the rest of her spinal tumours. She was treated by the inventor of Cyberknife surgery, neurosurgeon Dr John R. Adler using that very technology. It cost US\$80,000 (RM253,000) and before she could raise enough money for the treatment, Poesy broke up with her rich boyfriend “because I did not want him to think that I was sticking to him just for the money.”

“I am grateful for the assistance he and his family gave me but I needed to do this on my own.”

Poesy did not come from a rich family but it was one of the pioneers of Jalan Imbi back in the 1960s. She still lives in her family home which she has also turned into her art studio.

On Aug 30, 2007, Poesy set up the Helping Angels movement – an NGO with a loose connection of volunteers held together through a Facebook page – to recruit volunteers to do welfare work.

“There are four exclusive rules in Helping Angels – no involvement in fund-raising or collection of donations, no commercial marketing activities, no political rallying activities and no religious evangelism.

“All activities are funded privately, to offer opportunities for volunteers to use their ability and time to help others,” she said.

The phrase “random act of kindness” is repeatedly used by Poesy during our interview and she defined it as “the donation of time and effort, with less emphasis on material and money charity.”

In five years, Poesy's movement, which now has over 2,200 members, has spread from Malaysia to Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, the US, Europe, Africa and Hong Kong.

At home, Poesy and her fellow volunteers have started Thursday Tutoring – a programme to tutor children at various shelter homes around the Klang Valley.

“Helping Angels travel with me.

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Making the world a better place

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Everywhere I go I try to do a random act of kindness. Like when I was in Senegal, I bought small boxes of colour pencils and pieces of paper and gave it to the kids I met in a poor area.

"One of the mothers asked me why was I doing this crazy thing and I told her that who knows maybe from all the kids who got the colour pencils, one of them may turn out to be a great artist," Poesy said as a way to explain the Helping Angels movement.

Her next project is called the Green Humanity for the Environment.

"We want to show that there cannot be

compassion, kindness and empathy towards humanity without showing compassion, kindness and empathy towards Mother Earth.

"We will be coming up with Random Acts of Kindness towards Mother Earth," said Poesy, who points out that all these projects come from other members of Helping Angels.

Asked about today's youth, Poesy said she enjoyed mentoring them because "the youth of today are leaders of tomorrow and I definitely want to change the world."

There is a real Asian drama series to rival the best Korean soap opera to be gotten from Poesy's life and knowing her, she will probably want a famous actress to play the lead role.

Why not? She is an inspiration.

Observation for the nation

The EC is doing something unprecedented in inviting local NGO observers for the coming general election.

SOME weeks ago the chief executive of Ideas, Wan Saiful Wan Jan, informed me that the Election Commission had invited Ideas to be part of an observer team for the next general election.

I agreed with him that it was a great opportunity to witness the process first-hand and subsequently share our findings with the voting *rakyat*.

At the time of the invitation we were not sure how we came to be selected. Since then, the method of the appointment has come under some criticism – why were we chosen, and no one else?

The appointments could have been much more transparent, and I entirely agree.

Being part of something shady would only sully our name. We want to know we were chosen on merit – a common sentiment in a society where affirmative action and favouritism pervade.

From a neutrality standpoint, our board of directors contains a member of a party on the Barisan side and another on the Pakatan side – and I'll happily use this opportunity to say that rumours stating that I have joined a political party are entirely untrue.

Ideas remains the only independent think tank with a cross-party advisory group, including members from six political parties across both coalitions.

Our board and staff have experience working in many of our national institutions or their progenitors – such as the Westminster parliament.

We have made plain our admiration for Tunku Abdul Rahman and his Merdeka-era colleagues who understood the principles of the rule of law and freedom.

We have consistently argued for the protection and strengthening of all our national institutions and checks and balances – and as a result we have been branded by some conservatives as undermining certain parties and by liberals of promoting absolutism.

But peruse our website and you will see that we have worked and partnered with a large number of organisations from diverse political and ideological persuasions.

In terms of transparency, our downloadable annual report gives details of our accounts, donors and activities to an extent that few organisations do.

Based on our record so far, we were ranked as the 13th best new think tank in the world in a survey of over 6,000 think tanks launched at the United Nations earlier this year.

Nonetheless, we accept that in a political environment laden with scepticism that no amount of openness or commitment to principles will convince everyone.

Because of the nature of our work, it is a



given that we will be accused of being pawns of others.

What many of these equally conservative and liberal brickbats don't appreciate is how much we disagree on things amongst ourselves. Being inspired by common principles does not always mean agreeing on the same policy prescriptions – a concept that our political parties should perhaps adopt instead of being so leader-centric all the time.

It is true that as an institution we have not observed elections before – Ideas was established after the last general election, and everyone must start somewhere – but staff members have done so, as have our potential partners.

We fully admitted problems of capacity right at the outset which is precisely why the observation team will involve experienced observers working with enthusiastic newbies.

We are continuing to discuss details with the EC in good faith in the hope of making a contribution to democratic practices in this country.

I must stress that none of the five NGOs have even accepted the invitation because the terms are still being negotiated.

Sadly none of the critics checked this basic fact with us before throwing accusations. Some have concluded that we are agents of the EC, which is a thoroughly ludicrous assertion given that Wan Saiful inhaled tear gas too during Bersih 3.0.

Still, I trust that the critics will continue to comment as details of the domestic election observer arrangement continue to surface.

This in itself is important for the democratic process and will help to improve the mission. In our continuing talks with the EC we have raised concerns with some of the restrictions like not being able to talk to the press on election matters during the election itself, which is at odds with our intention to share evidence of any malpractice with fellow citizens as soon as possible.

Whatever differences may exist amongst civil society, all of us want to see clean elections.

The EC is doing something unprecedented in inviting NGO observers. Now we must ensure that the real value to the *rakyat* will be achieved in this exercise.

> Tunku 'Abidin Muhriz is president of Ideas.

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