

Make Time While the Sun Shines

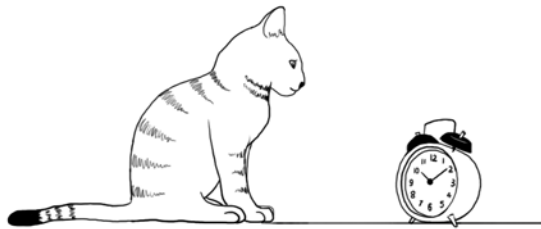
Anecdotes on Respecting Time and Tide
Chan Kah Yein, Ph.D.



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Chan Kah Yein, Ph.D.



This book is a tribute to Earth Hour 2011.

With three bows of deep respect,

kaheyin

26th March 2011

This book is a gift from others to you.

*If you have enjoyed reading it,
please pass it on,*

Let it be your gift to others.

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR

Books

Pawprints on My Heart, 2008
Seven Little Stories about Kindness to Animals

Little Steps, Joyful Steps, 2008
The Humble Beginnings of a Dhamma Speaker

A Kite in the Wind, 2008
Embrace Simplicity, Travel Light in Life

Indy Jones & the 4 Pillars of Kindness, 2009
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See You at Rainbow Bridge, 2010
Saying Goodbye with Love and Serenity

Audio Talks in CDs

How to Practise Right Livelihood and Still be Rich, 2006

Kindness to Animals, 2007

Awakening Kindness, 2007

Creating Heaven in an Imperfect World, 2008

Dewdrops from My Heart, 2009
A Treasury of 28 Talks

Fragrance of the Violet, 2011
A Treasury of 20 Talks



About the Author

Chan Kah Yein holds a Ph.D in Mathematics Education and teaches in a private college.

She is the founder-coordinator of AnimalCare, a charity fund for stray animals. She also gives public talks regularly on ways to lead a simpler and more spiritually-fulfilling life. To date, she has written six books and many of her talks have been produced on audio CDs, all for free distribution.

With a love for all things small and simple, her motto is to embrace simplicity and travel light in life.

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<http://tiny.cc/paws>

Her AnimalCare work is documented in
www.myanimalcare.org

The book is dedicated to my parents, who taught me by example, the virtue of punctuality; my friend, PC Leong, for reminding me that respecting time is a virtue in great need of preservation; and to my schoolteacher, Mrs Wong Yew Choong (who, incidentally, was never late for class!), for helping me edit most of my books, including this one.

*Time, the cradle of hope....
Wisdom walks before it,
Opportunity with it,
And repentance behind it:
He that has made it his friend
Will have little to fear from his enemies,
But he that has made it his enemy
Will have little to hope from his friends.
- Charles Caleb Colton*

CONTENTS

<i>Prologue</i>	1
1 THE SAD DEMISE OF PUNCTUALITY	3
2 REASONS OR EXCUSES?	5
3 A CULTURE SHOCK	8
4 TEACHING BY EXAMPLE	11
5 PUT YOUR PENS DOWN	14
6 JOHNNY COME LATELY	17
7 THE VIP WHO WAS LATE	21
8 EVEN CATS CAN TELL THE TIME	23
9 STAND UP, SPEAK UP AND SHUT UP	25
10 I RESPECT YOUR TIME	27
11 PLEASE START FROM THE END	28
12 THE FOLLY OF MULTITASKING	30
13 THE CHINESE WEDDING DINNER	32
14 OUR FIRST HOUSE-WARMING PARTY	34
15 PATIENCE, BE NEAR ME STILL	36
16 AND THE BULLDOG SMILED	39
17 DO NOT SMASH THE EGG	46
18 TIME HEALS	47
19 NATURE DOES NOT HURRY	49
20 THE GREATEST PHYSICIAN	51
21 TIME WILL REVEAL THE SILVER LINING	55
22 WHEN THE SUN SETS	61
23 NOW IS ALL WE HAVE	64
<i>Epilogue</i>	66

Prologue

Dateline 11th March 2011: A massive earthquake of magnitude 8.9 on the Richter scale had struck Japan causing a devastating tsunami which resulted in destruction so severe it practically paralysed the whole world.

One week later, I was scheduled to give a talk on *karma* at our local temple and it made me reflect again on the reality of the famous saying by Geoffrey Chaucer, the 14th century English poet: *Time and tide wait for no man.*

The forces of Nature strike when it is time to do so and even with the most sophisticated instruments, we humans fail to predict its coming and if we are not trained to prepare ourselves for such calamities, we suffer its consequences.

The Japanese tsunami also made me reflect on our ordinary day-to-day living which seems quite uneventful and relatively safe. It made me think about how we humans sometimes take things for granted. We take life for granted; we forget that we are mortal and when we are reminded that we *can* die the very next day, we sometimes even deny this reality or choose to ignore it. Most importantly, we take TIME for granted and fail to accord it the respect that it rightly deserves. We think we have all the time in the world to do all the things that we want to do, but the truth is, we don't.

In a forwarded email whose authenticity I cannot verify, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was asked what it was about humanity that surprised him most and he was purported to have said: *“Man: Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices his money to recuperate. And then he is so anxious about the future that he doesn't enjoy the present. And as a result he doesn't live in the present or the future. And he lives as if he's never going to die, and then he dies without having really lived.”*

Let's think about the above and reflect on whether we have given TIME the respect that it rightly deserves.

1

THE SAD DEMISE OF PUNCTUALITY

Time goes, you say? Ah no! Alas, Time stays, we go.
- Henry Austin Dobson

Believe it or not, this little book was born out of a casual e-chat with my friend, PC, when I lamented that my students were habitually late for class.

I used to be extremely strict with punctuality, even locking the door after 5 minutes, but these days, I have mellowed and I give a 15-minute grace for them to walk through the door before I mark them absent.

PC retorted that this 15-minute grace is absolutely unacceptable! "How could you tolerate such atrocious lateness", he bellowed.

Whoa, hold your horses, my friend. Hear me out first...

I start my classes on time, right on the hour, not a minute late. There is no compromise on this. Even if there is only one student in a class of 40, I will still start the class right on the dot, and I have. I do not believe in punishing the ones who are punctual.

In the college where I teach, the students get a warning letter after being absent for a certain number of times. Persistent latecomers (with a total of nine absences) will eventually be

barred from taking the final exam and they would have to repeat the entire course. Hence, marking them absent when they are more than 15 minutes late is punishment enough. By doing so, the habitual latecomers *will* be penalised at the end of the day. At the same time, I also give due consideration to cases where the students are genuinely and unintentionally late due to unforeseen circumstances. “Unforeseen circumstances” cannot possibly happen nine times, can they?

I remember a case in the past when I was uncompromising with lateness. Nicole was a very good and conscientious student who had never been late for class. Unfortunately, on the day of the class test, she was late. But because I was so strict with punctuality, she did not dare come into class.

After the test, I stepped out and found Nicole crying at the corridor. She told me that her father had suddenly fallen ill that morning and could not fetch her to college on time. Why didn't you come in, I asked. “I was afraid...you'd be angry”, she said, in between sobs.

That was when I received a very hard knock on my head. It dawned on me that I cannot go overboard no matter how much I wish to inculcate good values in my students. Good intentions have to be carried out with a balance of wisdom and compassion. Practising the Middle Way is wise.

I allowed Nicole to sit for the test that day.

The 15-minute grace stays, but only for the marking of attendance. Classes have and will always start on time.

2

REASONS OR EXCUSES?

*Time wastes our bodies and our wits, but we waste time,
so we are quits. - Author Unknown*

I have learnt, through these years, that in a class of 40 students, unintentional lateness can happen. There is, as always, the infamous unpredictable Klang Valley traffic pile-up, the unreliable bus schedules, an occasional breakdown of the LRT, an accident on the road, etc. Some of these are, of course, “valid” reasons since they do happen and are unpredictable.

However, here are some reasons (more like excuses) which I find rather difficult to accept:

1. Traffic jam (for the umpteenth time)
2. No parking (for the umpteenth time)
3. The alarm clock did not ring (for the umpteenth time)
4. (the list goes on...)

To the above, I say:

1. Get up earlier, rent a room nearer to college, transfer to a college nearer your house.
2. Get up earlier, car pool, take public transport (but “the bus was late” will be the subsequent excuse).
3. Set up multiple alarm clocks.
4. Stop giving excuses!

I used to have a student from way back when who had to take two buses to college every morning and he was never late for class. Not even once. Now, what does that boil down to?

Attitude and discipline.

Is that all?

No, there is one more very important attribute...

RESPECT.

Persistent latecomers obviously have no respect for time. They live in a delusional world where they mistakenly expect time and tide to wait for them. When a tsunami strikes, will it wait for you, I ask my habitually-late students. They smirk at me and are silent.

I know they think a tsunami will not happen in Malaysia, but the tectonic plates are moving, my friends, and one day, it might just happen here and when it does, would you have the correct attitude and discipline to survive it when you have not trained yourself to respect time and tide throughout your entire life?

More importantly, would we have the sense of urgency and the mental strength to do what is right – to help ourselves and others, in a calm and efficient manner? The whole world would do well to learn from the Japanese as we marvel and bow our heads in deep respect at how well they worked together to cope with the devastation caused by the earthquake and the tsunami.

We cannot help but attribute their strength to discipline and

respect, two values that the Japanese hold dear to their hearts.

Time and tide wait for no man. We have to respect this.

So, I will continue showing my students the importance of respecting time. They need to learn, and as their teacher, it is my duty to inculcate this value in them.

I *will* start my classes on time, and I *will* give them the 15-minute grace to make their presence in case of unforeseen circumstances that lead to unintentional lateness, but if they do it habitually, they *will* be barred from the final exam.

The Middle Way is the wisest. But the Middle Way does not mean simply letting go and taking the easy way out. Far from that, the Middle Way is often described in the simile of tuning a lute (or any stringed musical instrument). Do not tune it too tightly or loosely, but tune it to perfection, then play...!

Have you seen how the Japanese prepare for and carry out their intricate tea ceremonies? That's the Middle Way in practice!

3

A CULTURE SHOCK

*Time = Life: therefore, waste your time and waste your life, or
master your time and master your life. – Alan Lakein*

I used to be extremely intolerant of tardiness, having come from a family background where punctuality reigns supreme. I remember my father would always be at least one hour early for any appointment and even now, at the ripe old age of 78 and with the occasional forgetfulness kicking in, he is *still* one hour early for any appointment.

He would be all dressed, with his socks and shoes on, waiting for us to fetch him. Yes, one hour before the appointed time, he would call us on the phone and tell us to come get him as he was ready. My mother is also never late for any appointment, and she is also 78 years old. Hence, I was brought up to respect time and am constantly reminded to do so.

Having come from such a background, you can imagine *my* culture shock when I first started teaching in college and found my students consistently, persistently and habitually late for class.

As a student, I have never been late for class all my life, I tell them. They stare at me in total disbelief. Are you for real, they ask. It was then that I learnt that punctuality is no longer a virtue taught or practised in school nowadays.

Apparently, according to my students, it is normal for teachers to be late. It is also normal for teachers not to teach on the first day of school. Whenever I start teaching on the first day of class, my students again stare at me in disbelief. It's the first day and the first lesson, why on earth are you teaching, they ask.

Times have changed, I know. But should we just accept this fact and let good values deteriorate? I don't think so. Good values need to be upheld and preserved for the sake of upholding humanity, and this needs to be done, not by force or criticism, but with wisdom and compassion.

I can now understand why my college gives the students *nine* times to be absent before they are barred from taking the final exam. We need to acknowledge the fact that some of our students need time to learn. They come from a background where punctuality has never been the norm. To force them to immediately embrace a new set of values is sometimes too much to ask for. We have to give them time. But not too much, though; just enough.

A case in point is Freddy, one of my students. Freddy was a transfer student from another college. He had enrolled two weeks late for the semester and had come to class one hour late on his first day. I explained to him that my classes start on time and Freddy said okay. But he continued being late...for weeks. If I had been extremely strict, he would have been locked out of the class every single time. Freddy was at least 45 minutes late for class every day.

When asked, Freddy would say the bus was late...every time. After hopelessly failing in two tests, Freddy has now finally

“woken up” and he is early for class. Apparently, the bus is no longer late now.

Freddy has learnt.

These students just need time to wake up from their delusional slumber. If I had been too hard on Freddy without giving him TIME to learn, he might have given up totally and might have ended up on the streets now.

So while we try our best to teach our students good values, we cannot force it on them *a la militaire*. As much as we want them to respect time, we must also respect the fact that they need time to learn. It's a two-way process. It's a compromise.

That's the Middle Way.

4

TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

It's not that "today is the first day of my life," but that now is all there is of my life. – Hugh Prather

It was the great physicist Albert Einstein who was reputed to have said this: *Example isn't the best way to teach. It is the **only** way to teach.*

Besides teaching my students punctuality and respect for time by embracing these values in what I do, I have also never taken medical leave all my life whenever a semester is in session.

The reason is simply this – I respect my students and I respect time. I respect the fact that many of them come all the way for class and I do not want them to find a notice on the door that says the class has been postponed because I failed to turn up. With students coming from different programmes and different time-tables, it is also very difficult to find a slot for a replacement class where everyone can attend. So, once the time is gone, how can you get it back? The syllabus has to be covered, the students have to be given ample time to learn.

It is not just about replacing the lessons that have been missed and cramping them into another lesson. It is about replacing time. Can time be replaced?

So, even with a fever or a bad sore throat, I come to class. I have taught an entire lesson in sign language and by writing the instructions on the whiteboard. It was a good diversion for the students too. For the first time, they did not have to listen to me!

But here's my point: It is about respecting time and being responsible for one's duties. Is our younger generation lacking in this?

I have students who conveniently and habitually fall "sick" whenever I give a test. They produce a medical certificate the next day and we have to set a make-up test for them because we respect the doctor's medical certificate. Even with the prior warning that the make-up is always much, much harder than the actual test, they still do this. Why? So that they would have the benefit of looking at the actual test first? So that they would have more time to revise?

Ample time has been given to prepare for the test. Why should this "but I don't have enough time to study!!" syndrome even happen if one plans one's work properly and manages one's time well? Again, it boils down to respecting time, doesn't it? Everyone has 24 hours a day. It is a matter of how well we manage it and this requires training and education.

My mother recalls candidly that when I was in primary school, the moment I came back from school, I would sit down at my desk, still in my school uniform and start working on my homework. I would announce to the whole household that I have "so much homework!!" and that I'm going to take all day to finish it so don't anyone disturb me, please. But within

minutes, it would all be done. That's when I'd go take a bath and enjoy the rest of the day.

I love this quote by H. Jackson Brown: *Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson and Albert Einstein.*

It is all about time management, getting one's priorities right and just doing what must be done.

And, I would let Sir John Lubbock have the final word on this: *In truth, people can generally make time for what they choose to do; it is not really the time but the will that is lacking.*

5

PUT YOUR PENS DOWN

A wise person does at once, what a fool does at last. Both do the same thing; only at different times. - Baltasar Gracian

While I can be “lenient” (by PC’s standards) when it comes to giving my students the 15-minute grace for the marking of attendance, I am a total stickler when it comes to abiding by time in tests and examinations.

In fact, my students think I’m an uncompromising hardliner and they are absolutely right...but for good intentions.

Tests and examinations always start on time and they also end on time. Hence, when I say “Time’s up, put your pens down”, I would expect every single student to stop writing and put her pen down. Anyone who disrespects this rule and feverishly tries to scribble in her last-ditch effort at scoring that half mark will be given zero.

A bit harsh, you might say?

I don’t think so. Again, it’s about respecting time and respecting rules. More than that, it is about respecting the students who are obedient and *do* stop when time is up. It is terribly unfair for others to keep scribbling because they are taking extra time, disobeying rules and they might just score a mark or two

because of that last-ditch scribbling. If I allow this, then I am punishing the obedient ones who stop on time. That would be so, so unfair.

So, no. I would not hesitate to give zero to these errant students who have no respect for rules or for time. There is no compromise on this.

One of my former students, Mike, has now progressed on to university. Mike tells me that at his university, there is this elderly lecturer who stands on the stage during examinations. When time is up, he announces it and whoever does not put the pen down will immediately be given zero. Mike says while many other students think this lecturer is a monster, he truly respects the lecturer and he thanks me for having trained him well while in college. Here's one student who appreciates being taught good values, albeit the hard way.

I was once invigilating an external examination and we were being observed by an external invigilator. As we were walking around the hall while the students had just sat down, one student flipped the paper over and started reading the first page. She was severely penalised by the external invigilator because there was no "reading time" allocated for that paper. She argued saying that it was normal to be allowed to read the first page. The external invigilator did not excuse her for her ignorance and blatant disrespect for rules.

It is this meticulous attention to rules and respect for time that we need to inculcate in our students so that they can compete globally. If we allow the lackadaisical *tidak apa* (Malaysian word for "I couldn't care less") attitude to fester in our young, we are doing them a huge disfavouir.

In the final analysis, it all boils down to efficient time management again. I tell my students how I used to train myself to manage my time for an examination while in school. I would put a clock in front of me when I work on the questions and give myself a time restriction to complete every single question.

This way, I practise working within a time frame and under pressure. This calls for strict discipline. No cheating, no peeking at the books. Create an examination atmosphere even at home. By doing so, during the actual examination, it is no longer stressful. I'm already used to working under pressure.

6

JOHNNY COME LATELY

While we are postponing, life speeds by. - Seneca

My friend, Linda, teaches basic mathematics in the engineering course in another college. We often exchange notes.

In one of her previous semesters, the college was abuzz with the news that there would be a new kid in town - a qualified pilot had enrolled in the college and he would be coming to Linda's class.

How interesting, she thought. A pilot shouldn't have any problems handling a basic mathematics course for engineering students. Why, Linda might learn a thing or two from him, too.

But Linda was wrong...oh, so wrong.

To begin with, Johnny the Pilot was always late for class.

Linda thought perhaps Johnny knew all this simple mathematics well enough so he could afford to be late for class.

Again, Linda was oh-so-wrong!

Johnny Come Lately scored zero for the first quiz. And no, it wasn't because he did not put his pen down when time was up.

It was because he got every single question wrong.

So, knowing that my husband and my son are both pilots, Linda asked me if pilots needed to know some basic mathematics. Well, I have seen the stuff my son has to study for the ATPL papers, the highest qualifications for an airline pilot. Gosh, I don't think I can pass those exams in one sitting. The passing mark is 75% and the content is *very* difficult. It definitely has mathematics in it, too.

So Linda sat down with Johnny one day and asked him what his problem was. Apparently, Johnny wasn't interested in taking this course, but since he hadn't been able to get a job offer yet, his father thought it would be good for him to learn something while waiting.

Dad is right, of course, and Dad means well. But if Johnny is really not interested in learning, it might be better for him to get a part-time job, earn some money first instead of coming late for class every day and getting nothing out of this course. He is wasting time and wasting Dad's and Mom's money.

Linda talked to him about this but he chose to stay on and continued coming late for class every day, citing "traffic jam" as the excuse. He failed every test too. He told Linda he would be getting a job offer from an airline soon so he was just marking time.

I am told that there are currently at least 800 jobless pilots in Malaysia.

Sometimes in life, we do not have the privilege of doing what

we like. That's when we have to learn to like what we do, and to do it in a responsible manner.

It is all about respect again. Respecting rules and respecting time, wherever you are, even in situations that you are not happy with. The very fact that you are already there, why don't you just make the best of the situation and give it your best shot?

My son had a friend who graduated at the same time as him in flying school but could not get into the airlines. Although he comes from a very well-to-do family, this friend worked as an apprentice mechanic in a car workshop and he really put in all his efforts to learn the trade. Kudos to him for having the right attitude! He would do well in life, whether as a mechanic or as a pilot because he has the right attitude and he did not waste time.

I drum it into my students that at the end of the day, it isn't about how many strings of "A"s one has on one's resume. It is about one's attitude and the values one has woven into one's life. It shows in how a person carries herself. One of these values which we prize very highly is respect.

My husband sometimes helps out in the interview of pilots at his workplace. He says it isn't always about the skills or the expertise that they display at the simulator. In the final interview, it is all about attitude and values. A pilot's responsibility is a huge one. Attitude is of paramount importance and this includes discipline and respect. How one lives one's life will be revealed in how one carries oneself.

So, back to Johnny the Pilot. Apparently, he told Linda that he has a letter from a certain VIP, and he is confident that he would be able to get into any airline of his choice.

Ahh...the ubiquitous “letter from the VIP”?

Read on...

7

THE VIP WHO WAS LATE

We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history we make today. – Henry Ford

It was Louis XVIII, the king of France, who was reputed to have said that “Punctuality is the politeness of kings”. Way back then in those glorious times, it was deemed “princely” and “gracefully courteous” to be punctual.

And now?

I was invited to attend a certain event and was told that a certain VIP would be present.

The event was due to start at 9am on a Saturday morning.

I arrived at 8.30am and the organisers were busy setting up the projector and laptop for the VIP to deliver his speech.

By 8.50am, most of the audience had arrived and we were all seated in our respective places. I was impressed. Everyone seemed to be early and punctual. Isn't that nice? Who says we go by “Malaysian time”?

However, by 9am, there was no sign of the VIP.

We waited patiently.

They say “patience is a virtue”? True, but not in this case. Respect for time and respect for those who are punctual would have been a greater virtue.

The VIP finally arrived at 10am.

There was no apology at all on his part. While we understand that unforeseen circumstances could have caused him to be late, the least he could have done would be to say, “I’m sorry to have kept you waiting.”

The event started and the VIP delivered his speech. It was already bad enough that he was late, he also went overtime on his speech, carrying on and on, obviously unaware of the time, causing everything else to be delayed.

Due to the VIP’s tardiness, the entire event ended ridiculously late that Saturday morning. The food had become cold, the waiters were sweating profusely, the little children who had all dressed up for their dance routine were tired and listless and the audience was complaining and grumbling all the way home.

And all because the VIP did not respect time.

So much for “leadership by example”.

8

EVEN CATS CAN TELL THE TIME

This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it. – Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Every morning, I am usually up at 5.30am. If I am not, at exactly 6am, my female cat, Cleo, comes to my bedside and wakes me up. If I still don't get up, she would mew in my face until I do. She does this without fail every time.

As I step out of bed, the whole battalion of my other five cats line the route downstairs. Bunny and Cow are in the bedroom, Indy is on the staircase, Tiger is on the breakfast table and Pole is already on the kitchen slab. They have their respective checkpoints all the way from the bedroom to the kitchen, as though to remind me that it's time to eat and so that I do not detour elsewhere.

Then, we have breakfast (cats first, of course) and later, Bobby the Dog comes downstairs for his meal. At the ripe old age of 15, Bobby needs more sleep these days.

Bobby, as most dogs would be, has been an epitome of faithfulness all his life. For more than a decade, he would patiently wait for me to come home from work every day. He seemed to know the time and if I was ever late, my children told me he would start whining and howling at the window. He still does that now.

So, when I go for any dinners or parties, I would always have a valid reason to go off early. My dog is waiting for me to come home. I have to go.

Having lived with animals practically all my life, I know for a fact that they have this uncanny knack of telling the time, and very accurately too. Isn't it ironical that we humans have watches and clocks and yet we still have trouble telling the time?

At night, Cleo usually accompanies my husband downstairs as he watches the TV. But if he watches till too late at night, Cleo would nudge him to go to bed. Then, she leads the way upstairs. If he still doesn't move, she would mew until he does.

Cleo is a very reliable alarm clock.

That is why I'm never late for work.

9

STAND UP, SPEAK UP AND SHUT UP

*Take time to deliberate, but when the time for action arrives,
stop thinking and go in. – Napoleon Bonaparte.*

Talking about starting on time, I must congratulate two of the Buddhist centres that I go to often to give talks. One is the Ti-Ratana Community Centre in Klang and the other is the Mudita Buddhist Society, also in Klang.

At both of these centres, the talks always start right on the dot. In fact, over at Mudita, 5 minutes before the talk starts, the emcee will announce that the talk is going to start in 5 minutes, so will all the ladies please come out of the kitchen and take their places in the hall?

Then, at precisely the appointed time, the emcee starts the talk. The same goes at the Ti-Ratana Centre. Kudos to the organisers for leading the way in respecting time! This is leadership by example.

My mentor, Uncle Vijaya, is also a stickler for rules when it comes to time. He is usually at least half an hour *early* for every talk. Sometimes, he is an hour early and he says, "We already know how bad the traffic can be in the Klang Valley, so I start off early to ensure I arrive on time." Uncle Vijaya has never been late for any talk, as far as I know.

But Uncle Vijaya also taught me something equally important – never go overtime. He says the Golden Rule of public speaking is to “stand up, speak up and shut up”. I would do well to remember this as I sometimes have a tendency to go overtime in my talks.

Nobody likes a speaker who goes on and on, oblivious to the time.

Enough said about this, now, let's move on...

I RESPECT YOUR TIME

*Dost thou love life, then do not squander time, for that's the stuff
life is made of. - Benjamin Franklin*

In this day and age when there are so many modes of communication, my favourite would be the email, the text message (sms) and the blog. The reason for this preference is that the recipient of the message or news has the option of (a) not reading it, (b) reading it only when she feels like it, (c) responding only if she feels like it, (d) not responding at all.

In this way, I am not imposing on others to read what I write and I don't demand for a response either.

I don't make phonecalls unless it is absolutely unavoidable and I don't visit unless my visit is useful.

People lead very busy lives and they have so much to do.

I respect their time.

Enough said now.

Thank you for reading this.

PLEASE START FROM THE END

It's not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about? – Henry David Thoreau

Have you ever noticed how some people have something important to say, yet it takes them a mighty long time to say it?

Someone gave me this advice a long time ago, and I truly appreciate its wisdom: *If you have something to say, please...start from the end!*

In my animal welfare work, I receive calls from all kinds of people. Sometimes they do not get to the point, and I am waiting for another call to come in, or driving, or cooking or attending to an animal at the vet's. They take their own sweet time to tell me a brief history of their lives, then the animal's life, before proceeding to tell me exactly what help they need from me. Some don't even get to that last part!

My son laughs his head off whenever I receive such calls and he hears me saying, repeatedly, "Okay...and how may I help you?". After a few minutes, I would repeat myself again, "Yes, okay, so how may I help you?"

"Could you just tell me what help you need, please?"

And still, they don't get to the point.

Sigh...I hope I have made my point.

THE FOLLY OF MULTITASKING

*The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.
- Albert Einstein*

Has multitasking become a way of life these days?

“It’s a skill”, my students tell me.

Yes, I know. I see people typing text messages while driving on the road. I see people surfing the computer while talking on the phone. I hear of mothers who forget where they have left their babies because they were too busy talking to a friend at the supermarket.

Multitasking sure is a skill, one which I hope I will never master nor have to learn.

I actually know of someone who left her young daughter at the wet market because she was too busy buying things. She only realised her daughter was missing after she had reached home. Luckily, a stall owner took her daughter in and she was safe and sound.

Multitasking is dangerous – to oneself and to others.

While superhumans in this day and age think they can multitask, can they, really?

I am told that we can actually only do one thing at a time. By living under the delusion that we can multitask, we are merely doing several things in a certain time period, but our attention is flitting from one task to another, and hence, we are not truly focused in any one task at any one time, and hence, not giving each task the attention that it rightfully deserves.

It sure doesn't sound like a wise thing to do, does it?

Give full respect to the task you are doing. Give it all your attention.

Give it all your time.

You owe it that much.

One of my favourite quotes that guides me in my teaching is from Nel Noddings: *I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student - to each student - as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total.*

If we want to truly help someone, then let's go all out to do it and give it our undivided attention and everything we've got.

That time interval may be brief, but it is priceless.

13

THE CHINESE WEDDING DINNER

Time is what we want most, but...what we use worst.
- William Penn

Why do Chinese wedding dinners always never start on time? It can be stated “7.30pm SHARP” on the invitation card, and yet, it never starts on time.

Recently, I attended a Chinese wedding dinner of a pilot.

“Please fasten your seatbelts as we will be taking off soon!”, the emcee announced very happily.

But the wedding dinner did not take off...

It started late, no, it started horribly late. THREE hours late, to be precise.

That evening, it so happened I was sitting next to a Korean, Kim, whose husband had just joined the airlines. She has three young children and had left them in the care of a baby-sitter.

Kim and her husband had arrived early for the dinner and she had told her baby-sitter that she would be back latest by 10pm that night. Imagine her horror when by 9.30pm the wedding dinner which was supposed to have “taken off” at 7.30pm had not even started!

As we sat munching our third plate of peanuts, Kim asked me if all Malaysian wedding dinners started late and I said, very apologetically, “Unfortunately, yes, and I’m so sorry”.

So while we waited for “the flight to take off”, Kim told me all about Korean weddings. In Korea, according to Kim, it is a much, much simpler affair. There would be a simple ceremony and a party after that. But everything started on time, she said.

Simple ceremonies that start on time – now, wouldn’t that be lovely?

Kim and her husband left before the dinner started that evening because their baby-sitter had to go home. So they did not get to taste any of our delicious Malaysian cuisine.

They only took home the dessert that was left on the table.

I won’t be surprised if it left a rather bitter taste in their mouths.

OUR FIRST HOUSE-WARMING PARTY

Better three hours too soon than a minute too late.
– William Shakespeare

23 years ago, when we first moved into our present house, my husband was still serving in the Royal Malaysian Air Force. At that time, he was attending a course where there were some participants from overseas.

We thought it would be nice to invite his classmates over for our house-warming get-together, so the invitations were sent out.

7.00pm, it said on our card.

One of our guests was George, an air traffic controller from New Zealand.

At exactly 6.55pm, we spotted George and his wife walking towards our house.

At exactly 6.59pm, George rang our doorbell.

The food was ready, of course, but where was everybody?

George was rather embarrassed and thought he had got the

time wrong.

“Er...didn’t you say it was at 7.00pm?”, he asked when I served him the *hors d’oeuvres*.

Yes, George, it was, but Malaysians have some problem with their time management. Even military officers have this problem. Sigh...

It was only at 7.30pm that the rest of the Malaysians started trickling in.

Some even arrived at 8.00pm.

George soon learnt all about “Malaysian time”.

In the next dinner that he was invited to, he was five minutes late!

PATIENCE, BE NEAR ME STILL

The most powerful warriors are patience and time. - Leo Tolstoy

It was William Shakespeare, in Henry V111, Act IV, Scene 2, who wrote: *Patience, be near me still.*

While I have been writing so much about being punctual and respecting time, sometimes embracing patience is also one of the ways to respect time.

I am instantly reminded of the story of the butterfly:

A little boy was watching a caterpillar in his garden and his mother told him one day soon, the caterpillar would transform into a butterfly. Just wait and see, his mother said.

So the boy waited patiently and watched the caterpillar every day.

Soon the caterpillar had latched itself onto the branch of a plant and become a cocoon. The boy was very excited as his mother told him it wouldn't be very long before the butterfly would emerge from the cocoon.

The boy waited and waited, and one day, he saw the butterfly struggling to come out of the cocoon. Out of sympathy and

wanting to help the butterfly, he quickly ran to get a scissors and cut the cocoon so that the butterfly could come out more easily.

The butterfly did come out, but it did not fly. Instead, it merely crawled around on the floor, and it had a swollen body.

The boy didn't know what had happened. He asked his mother.

It was then that he learnt that he shouldn't have "helped" the butterfly. By nature, it needed to help itself and the struggle in coming out of the cocoon enables its body fluids to be spread onto its wings so that it can stretch its wings and fly. It is a natural process.

Now, the fluids would remain forever in its body and the butterfly would never be able to fly for the rest of its life.

Sometimes, we cannot expedite the process of learning even though we mean well.

Sometimes, the struggle is necessary for us to acquire the strength that is needed for each level of growth.

I often tell parents that children must be given ample time to learn. Each child learns at her own individual pace and one must never compare a child with another. When a child learns willingly and with understanding, the learning is effective and solidly grounded.

Very often, I have students who would plead with me to help them pass with a make-up test or to be very lenient in marking

their exam papers. I tell them I cannot do that. It would be unfair to them and to their profession. Repeat the course if you have to, and study harder until you pass it with your own honest efforts. Then, you can stand tall and be proud of your achievement, no matter how long it takes you to do it.

Respect the time needed for change to take place.

There are also many students who don't turn up for class when the semester starts. If the reason is "valid", I will help the student get back on his feet as much as I can. But very often, I get "reasons" like:

1. I went for a family holiday and I just came back.
2. I wanted a longer break.
3. What?? You mean I have to come on the first week?

To these students, I wish I had time to tell them my story...

If you have the time, read on, please...

16

AND THE BULLDOG SMILED

Misty water-coloured memories, light the corners of my mind.
– Alan Bergman

This next story is not specifically about respecting time, but I had wanted to tell this story for a long time, so please allow me this little indulgence.

I grew up in the small town of Kuala Kangsar where life was good and slow-moving. When I finished Form Three, I qualified for the Science Stream but my small school did not have the Science Stream so I had to apply for a transfer to Ipoh, the capital of the state.

Unfortunately, the Education Department decided to take its own sweet time in processing my application, so the approval came two months after school had started.

This resulted in my starting Form Four two months late.

I remember my first day at school. The school was huge and it was an all-girls school. My class had more than 40 students and I almost could not find a seat.

All of a sudden, I had to catch up with two months' work for EIGHT subjects and these were all new subjects. I guess I was

quite okay with Mathematics but the sciences had me totally baffled.

You see, in my small town school, we never had a proper science teacher for the first two years. Instead, we had an English teacher who took us to the lab and let us play with earthworms. That's about as much science I had learnt – that earthworms could be cut into two and they could still survive.

I did not even know the proper way to hold a test-tube, let alone perform tricky manipulations like titrations and handling contraptions called burettes and what have you.

But there I was, having to catch up with two months of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography, Additional Mathematics, and the rest.

I remember going home the first day and crying my heart out. I stared at the books and the books stared back at me. There was zero communication between me and the books.

But it was already March and the mid-year exams were coming in June. That gave me hardly three months to catch up with everything I had missed.

I knew I couldn't afford to waste any time, so, on the second day, I went to the three science teachers and explained my situation to them, so could they please help me out a bit with catching up on whatever I had missed?

Miss Sandra, the Biology teacher, was very kind. She said I could come in the afternoons and she would let me repeat some

of the experiments I had missed. Mr Chan, the Physics teacher was very helpful too.

However, Chemistry was taught by another Mr Chan.

Now, he was nicknamed “Bulldog Chan” and for good reasons too.

First, he never smiled. Second, his face did bear some resemblance to our canine friend (but you must remember that I love dogs, so this is absolutely not an insult). Third, he had a loud booming voice.

Undeterred by his nickname and spurred by my desperation to catch up with lost time, I approached the Bulldog and explained my situation to him and...

“WHAT THE HELL!!” he bellowed. “You come TWO months late and you expect me to teach you everything you’ve missed!!! You must be out of your mind!”, and the Bulldog stormed out of the preparation room in the Chemistry lab.

I went to a corner and cried my little heart out.

Every day after that, I went home and stared at my Chemistry books. Oxidation, reduction, titrations, the Electro-Chemical Series – I struggled to make sense of these alien-sounding words.

I don’t remember ever having worked so hard all my life... Besides Chemistry, I also had to cope with the other seven subjects. I was also away from the comforts of home for the first time in my life. I had to wash my own clothes, make my

own meals, take a bus to school. Tuition was unheard of at that time so I had to rely totally on myself.

It wasn't easy...I was only 16 and had led a life of comfort.

But by June, it was time for the mid-year examinations. With hard work and lots of luck, I came out first in the whole form.

However, while it was possible to score full marks for Mathematics, it was almost impossible to do it for the sciences, especially the Bulldog's Chemistry paper. No matter how well you thought you'd answered a question, there would still be something incomplete in your answer and that remained a big challenge for me. The Bulldog's standards were so high.

As unapproachable as he was, I must confess that I truly looked forward to his Chemistry lessons. He would come into class, right on the dot and he was NEVER late. He would deliver the day's lesson in just a few minutes. The Bulldog was a man of VERY few words, and yet, those words, if you listened intently, were all you needed to understand the entire lesson.

Until today, I am still trying to master his skill at saying precisely what he has to say, making you understand it completely and not having to say anything extra. Believe me, brevity in speech *is* a skill.

If it were a lab lesson, his instructions would be delivered at the beginning of the lesson and his parting words would be, "Make sure you don't blow up the lab."

He never monitored what we did in the lab. He trusted us

completely, and I appreciated that.

But if you had questions for the Bulldog, you had better make sure they were intelligent questions worthy of being asked or else you would get a deathly cynical stare and the next thing you hear is an extremely loud booming sound that literally blows you out of the preparation room in the Chemistry lab where the Bulldog resides.

I worked so, so hard for Chemistry, and I got blown out many times from the Bulldog's residence in the Chemistry lab, but I persevered.

By the next year, it was time for the Form Five mid-year examinations. I studied very hard for every subject, especially Chemistry. I knew the Bulldog only needed one day to finish marking our papers. He worked at lightning speed.

The next day, the whole school was abuzz with news that a student had scored 100% for the Bulldog's Chemistry paper. It had never happened before. Who was it?

It was me.

Much as I had been taught not to let success go to my head, I celebrated the moment with a smile on my face. At long last, I had made it.

One year...I took one full year to *earn* 100% from the Bulldog.

While it is all about giving yourself time, it is also about persevering and giving it all you've got *and* making good use

of that time given to you, if something mattered enough to you.

At the end of the year, it was customary at that time to have an “autograph book” and let all your teachers sign it.

No one dared to approach the Bulldog for fear he would smirk at such sentimental gestures and say something cynical.

But I went up to him, asked most politely if he would care to pen a few words in my humble book, and fled the room before he said anything.

The next day, I went to collect my autograph book and with bated breath, I flipped the pages.

There, in the Bulldog’s own handwriting, he had penned these few words:

*Dear Kah Yein,
Students like you are hard to come by.*

And he signed his name. I looked at him, and for a moment there, I thought I saw a faint smile on his face and a twinkle in his eyes.

As I look back after a few years, I realised the good intentions of the Bulldog when he refused to help me catch up with whatever lessons I had missed. I realised his good intentions when he boomed at me for asking “stupid” questions because he knew I should have been able to figure out the answers by myself.

He refused to cut the cocoon I was trapped in. He wanted me to struggle out by myself and struggle I did, and now, this

butterfly has strong wings to fly for the rest of her life.

Many years after that (but this was still during the time when hand-written letters were still in fashion and emails were not), I found a letter addressed to me in my postbox. It was from Ipoh. I recognised the handwriting immediately.

Mr “Bulldog” Chan, my Chemistry teacher, had remembered me. It was not a letter from a teacher to his student, but from a good friend. We corresponded for a few months, and he told me he would be migrating to New Zealand at the end of that year.

I received a letter from New Zealand by the end of that year, and soon, there were no more letters.

There are a few teachers whom I shall always be indebted to all my life and whom I shall remember with very fond memories. They have made me what I am today and for this, I am very, very thankful.

Mr “Bulldog” Chan ranks in the top three.

17

DO NOT SMASH THE EGG

*You get the chicken by hatching it, not by smashing the egg.
– Arnold Glasgow.*

I once had a student, Alex, who took five years to complete a two-and-a-half year diploma course. In the first three years, he fooled around. No matter how often we advised him, he just wasn't ready to learn.

He kept failing the elementary courses and had to repeat each one several times. This went on until he progressed to the third level. It was then that he "woke up" and decided he had had enough of fooling around. He worked incredibly hard that semester and scored an "A" for my subject. After that, there was no stopping Alex. He soared.

The wonderful thing is that Alex now looks back at those five years with no regrets. He knows he needed to fall many times so that he could learn. Today, Alex is a successful engineer in Queensland. He still writes to me.

Nowadays, we hear of "instant maggi mee" courses where students can obtain a diploma or degree in the shortest possible time. I question the wisdom of such courses. Do we think we can challenge time by discounting it from our students' learning process?

The time for learning has to be given due respect.

18

TIME HEALS

Take care of the minutes, and the hours will take care of itself.
– Lord Chesterfield

Time heals...

Does it, really?

From my experience, yes, I believe it does.

But let me share PC's story with you (with his permission, of course).

In his own words:

I am an angioplasty patient and one who should have had a heart attack 5 years ago when my 3 arteries were 90 / 70 / 100% blocked respectively. Surprisingly, the 100% block didn't bring about the MUST heart attack. On the contrary, I was still feeling fine as a fettle. Must be Divine intervoention?? Doc says it was the right artery doing a natural by-pass to help the left artery...probably came about through the hours put in the pool when young & the walking the length of our Plus North-South highway twice in a year. I guess I have used my TIME well to help my body over the years...and I'll be going for that walk again after this.

I have just completed the angioplasty to clear the 100% block last October...now I am a normal person with 3 cleared pipes. I was living with just 2 pipes since the first angioplasty in 2006...but quality of life wasn't compromised at all. Life is still good.

Now you understand why I am so happy for every sunrise...

Yes, I do. We all should be, too.

Time heals...if we give it time to do so.

Next, let me share with you my father's story...

19

NATURE DOES NOT HURRY

...yet everything is accomplished. – Lao Tzu.

Sometime last year, when my father was 77, he slipped and fell. Being of that age where one's bones are already quite brittle, there was a hairline crack on his hip and he had to undergo surgery to have a metal plate screwed on. After the surgery, he had to walk with the aid of a walking frame and was advised to do some simple exercises every day to quicken the healing process.

Well-meaning relatives and friends tried to help. But the "help" rendered was, unfortunately, not very helpful. We would have relatives and friends calling from far and wide, telling my father that he SHOULD exercise, that he SHOULD try to walk and that he SHOULD do all kinds of things so that he would recover as soon as possible.

My father was totally at peace with his surgery; he knew healing would take time. So, why were the other people not at peace with it?

It also did not help when relatives and friends started comparing his case with so-and-so's case where so-and-so got up and could walk after two weeks. None of these "advisers" have had their hip broken before, so I did wonder what made them think they

were qualified to tell my father what he SHOULD do or how fast he SHOULD be healing.

My father was 77 at that time. Every 77-year old person is different and heals at a different rate. To compare his case with another, whether it is another old person or not, is not very helpful.

What my father needed was to be allowed to heal in his own time. I wish people could have just respected this.

Today, it is almost five months since the surgery and my father is much better and more cheerful. He is still walking with the aid of the frame but he is happy with it. On the average, a person takes three months to recover from such a surgery. My father may have taken a longer period, but that's alright. What is important is that he was at peace with his condition throughout the healing process.

Some things just cannot be rushed.

Now, I have yet another story to share with you...

THE GREATEST PHYSICIAN

Time is a physician that heals all grief. - Diphilus

I know of this woman who suffers from clinical depression. She had had it since she was in her thirties. The depressive episodes would come in cycles, averaging at once in every 1-2 years.

When she had her first depressive episode, nobody could really understand what had happened to her and neither could she. Friends told her to “snap out of it”, but tried as she did, she couldn’t do it. Other friends tried to help by taking her out and getting her to participate in social activities, but they did not understand that a depressive person simply does not wish to engage in any social activities at all. She just wants to be alone.

After a few months, the depression disappeared “just like that”. She woke up one morning, and it was gone. She was in a hypomanic phase and could move mountains. Life was good again.

This went on for many “rounds”. With each round, the depressive episodes simply lasted longer and longer. This woman did not wish to take medication as she wasn’t prepared to endure the side effects, so it was her choice to garner all the mental strength she had and tide each depressive episode over.

Unfortunately, well-meaning friends did not really understand the nature of depression and INSISTED that she must heal quickly. “What?? You’re STILL depressed? Why don’t you take some medicine? Why can’t you just snap out of it?”, they asked.

A depressive person cannot “just snap out of it”. If only it were that simple. Tell me, *who* in her right frame of mind would want to be depressed? People who have never suffered from depression before would never quite understand how helpless a depressive person feels. The person’s self-esteem is totally gone, she feels useless and worthless and even though she tries very hard to get by each day, in every moment of her waking hours, she is suffering inside.

She needed TIME and she needed friends to understand that just as others have physical ailments, she merely had a mental ailment. There is nothing “wrong” with her. It is just an ailment due to the malfunction of neurotransmitters in the brain. So, can they please just give her the time and space to heal? If she wants to cry, let her cry. If she wants to talk, let her talk. Please don’t ask her to “snap out of it” because she cannot.

It is strange how people can sympathise with those who suffer from cancer, diabetes, heart ailments and other physical diseases. They don’t ask these patients to “snap out of it”, so why do they ask a depressed person to “snap out of it”? It is just another ailment, that’s what it really is.

This woman soon learnt that time was her only medicine. With each depressive episode, if she could ride it out with patience and an inner mental strength, the healing would come, when

the time is right.

For this, she is grateful to time.

Time really heals.

I know this only too well, because that woman...is me.

At the point of writing this book, I have just got out of a 10-month long severe depression. I am currently in what I call a “mountain-moving” phase, and I thought I should do all the good I can until the next depressive episode pulls me down into a pit again. Then, I thought I would ride it out again...in due time.

However, I am fortunate enough to have two caring friends, one of whom is a psychiatrist and another is my spiritual teacher. Both are very concerned about my condition and advised that perhaps the time is ripe for me to seek help instead of trying to battle it myself as I had been doing for almost two decades (seven cycles...and survived!). I am really thankful to them and have heeded their advice. Let’s see if I can prevent another round of depression. If I can, perhaps I’d write another book and share my experience with those who have a similar disorder.

My psychiatrist friend has diagnosed my condition as Bipolar 2 Disorder. Bipolar 2 Disorder is a mental ailment which can be traced to genetic heredity. It causes mood swings in a person, alternating between periods of hypomania (where there is tremendous energy and the person can “move mountains”) and periods of depression where the person has to drag herself out of bed, has no more self-esteem and even has suicidal tendencies.

Well, finally my ailment has a name! And I am definitely not alone. Apparently, 2% - 3% of the U.S. population has bipolar disorder. Recently, Hollywood's Catherine Zeta-Jones also went public with her Bipolar 2 ailment. Vincent Van Gogh was also Bipolar. But don't worry, my ears are intact!

It is about time that we destigmatise mental ailments and talk about them openly as we do physical ailments. Mental or physical, it is just an ailment. A cure may be possible. If not, then perhaps the severity of the ailment can be reduced with proper help and in due time.

Ultimately, time heals.

P.S. I went to see a psychiatrist. Unfortunately, the only thing allopathic medicine can offer is psychotherapy (which would not be very effective in my case since Bipolar 2 is a genetic disorder and not a social problem) and a selection of mood stabilizers, all of which have side-effects, ranging from skin breakout, weight gain to cognitive dulling and other more scary consequences. I have decided I do not want the medication messing with my brain or other parts of my body, so I'll go for herbal remedies instead. Apparently, flower teas are helpful. So are Omega-3 and B-Complex, I was told. But if you have a similar ailment, please get a proper diagnosis. In some cases, medication may be required.

TIME WILL REVEAL THE SILVER LINING

The future belongs to those who live intensely in the present.
- Anonymous

We are often told that there is always a silver lining behind every cloud. But sometimes tragedies happen, and we simply don't see the silver lining. It takes time for it to manifest. This calls for patience, confidence and faith...in TIME.

My son, Jia-Wen, was only 17 years old when he went off to the flying school in Langkawi. It had always been his dream to become a pilot.

One evening, barely two months after starting the course, he called us to tell us he would be taking the motorbike to the *pasar malam* (night market) to buy dinner. The boys rented a few motorbikes and shared them amongst themselves.

After an hour, our phone rang again, and it was a call from Jia-Wen's handphone. My husband took the call, but it wasn't Jia-Wen speaking. It was his friend. In the background, my husband heard the blaring of the ambulance siren.

Jia-Wen had been involved in an accident which had resulted in severe injury to his head. His head was covered in blood and two of his friends were accompanying him in the ambulance,

heading to the only government hospital on the island.

When my husband broke the news to me, I was stunned beyond words. We immediately called the three local airlines but failed to get a flight. It was past 8.15pm and we had just missed the last flight. Even if we had driven to Kedah, there were no more ferries in operation at that time of the night to take us across.

That night, I did not sleep. I held the handphone all night, waiting for news. Jia-Wen's friend kept me informed of what was going on, but even the doctor could not tell me what was wrong with him except that all the injuries were on his face. The hospital did not have many facilities. I was told that a dentist had been called in to stitch up Jia-Wen's face as there was no plastic surgeon in that hospital.

We were so far away and had no access to reach the island that night. I waited for daybreak.

Time...time passes so slowly when you wish it would whizz by.

The next morning, we took the first flight up. As I sat waiting at the departure lounge at the airport, I saw mothers holding their babies. The little faces looked so perfect. Visions of Jia-Wen as a perfect little baby flooded my mind. I cried.

When we reached the hospital, we were told Jia-Wen was at the Imaging Room. We rushed there and he was just being wheeled out.

Jia-Wen's head was bandaged completely. I suppose that was good as it spared me the shock of seeing the severity of his injuries.

We spent the next few days nursing him at the hospital. Jia-Wen's face was so swollen, he could not speak at all. Every movement was painful. I had to feed him liquids with a syringe through his mouth. There were injuries on his body too, but these were very minor. Our only consolation was that the X-Ray did not show any brain injury. However, he had lost five teeth.

Much later, when Jia-Wen was able to talk, we learnt that on the night of the accident, they could not administer any anaesthesia on him as he had to be conscious to stretch out his tongue. There was a split on his tongue and it had to be sutured. The dentist was Saudi Arabian and could not speak any Malay. The nurse was Malay and could not speak any English. Jia-Wen had to act as interpreter between them. The dentist pulled up Jia-Wen's lips and sutured it just to seal up the tear on his face. He was not a plastic surgeon. That was the best he could do.

Jia-Wen also told us that he knew how bad his injuries were on the very night of the accident. It was so bad that he thought we would only be able to recognise him from his clothes.

We brought Jia-Wen back home after four days. For two weeks, I cleaned his wounds daily. He also needed dentures done as a temporary measure as he had an interview coming up. The flying school could not allow him to take long leave as that would involve relegation to the next batch.

Jia-Wen was determined to get well and get back to flying school. He did. And for the next year, he shuttled between Langkawi and Subang Jaya as he needed to get his teeth implants and the plastic surgery done on his face. A very nasty-looking keloid had formed where the suture was, so a skin graft had to be done

twice to repair that part. When the plastic surgeon removed that nasty keloid in the first surgery, Jia-Wen said it looked like a wriggly worm.

Because Jia-Wen was so prone to keloids, he had to come back regularly for steroid injections. The time spent in travelling up and down affected his studies, which was already very tough to begin with.

Throughout Jia-Wen's period of recovery which spanned almost a year, he displayed a mental strength so strong it amazed me. For a boy of 17 who used to (and still does!) stand in front of the mirror making sure his hair and clothes were in proper order, I thought he would be completely devastated by this accident and the severe injuries on his face. I thought I would have to cope with helping him deal with depression or a loss of self-confidence.

I was wrong on both counts, and I am so glad.

Jia-Wen was able to laugh over the accident *and* his injuries. He would even play with his dentures (before he got the permanent implants) and joke about the "worm" on his face (before the skin graft). The only time he ever indicated any sadness was the time when he said to me, a few days after we brought him home, "Mummy, I wish I had just broken a leg instead of losing my teeth."

During the course of his recovery, as all parents would, I wished I could take away all his injuries and make them mine. But we know this isn't possible. However, Jia-Wen was not looking forward to the future where everything would be perfect again.

He accepted the imperfections on his face, he lived intensely in the present, enjoying his life despite the difficulties and inconveniences brought about by the accident.

Jia-Wen recovered and passed out of flying school on time, together with all his friends. Today, he is flying for a local airline and having a great time doing what he likes.

There is still a noticeable patch (the skin graft) on his face, between his lips and nose. Hopefully, with time, it will blend in with his natural skin. Even if it doesn't, it's alright. He has lost the ability to taste on a certain portion of his tongue, but that's alright too. He even jokes about this as well.

We are thankful that there was no speech impairment and no injury to his brain. All his injuries had been external. Luckily he was wearing a helmet on that fateful day. There was no visor on the helmet but perhaps that was a blessing as the visor might have shattered on impact and caused even more severe injuries.

This entire experience had been quite traumatic for me at the beginning. In quiet moments, I would imagine and feel his pain at the point of the accident, but I knew this was causing me unnecessary heartache. The suffering is over; don't dwell in it. There is no point. Rejoice in the fact that he is well now.

In time, I reflected on the whole thing and it reinforced my belief in the adage that "behind every cloud is a silver lining".

Jia-Wen's mental strength and his ability to rise above such a terrible tragedy assured me that should there be any adversity

in life later on, he would be able to cope. That is the silver lining that shone through this entire episode.

So, look for the silver lining.

If you don't see it now, be patient.

Give it time.

Let it shine.

WHEN THE SUN SETS

The time is always right to do what is right.
– Martin Luther King, Jr.

My daughter, Ming-Yi, has eczema. It developed soon after she entered university and we thought it was probably due to stress. Western doctors could not do anything to alleviate the problem so I finally resorted to consulting Ivan, a herbalist and a friend.

Ivan looked at Ming-Yi's fingernails and pinpointed the problem.

“You don't exercise and you sleep late at night”, Ivan said, matter-of-factly.

He was spot on.

Ivan then prescribed some herbs but emphasised that exercise and sleeping at the right time were of paramount importance to ensure that the eczema would heal.

I interjected and suggested that perhaps it could also be due to genes as I too have eczema on my heels.

To this, Ivan gave me a good lesson and revealed another aspect

of respecting time.

He said, "Yes, it may be due to genes and you may have the heredity, but don't create the conditions for the disease to manifest. You are human and humans are supposed to sleep by 10pm at night."

Yes, sir. I am instantly reminded that Yoga teaches us that humans are supposed to rise two hours before sunrise and sleep two hours after sundown. That's a piece of ancient wisdom which we don't heed nowadays and believe me, we pay a heavy price for that.

So, Ivan said, "Sleep at 10pm. It's non-negotiable."

Yes, sir. We hear you loud and clear.

As I reflect on this now, it's again about respecting time and respecting our biological bodies. We sometimes think we are superhumans and disrespect our own bodies, thinking that we can always make up for the insufficient sleep by taking afternoon naps.

It doesn't work, folks. Our biological bodies have not changed for millennia and they probably won't. We need to sleep at night. That cannot be changed. We are humans; not owls, bats or opossums (which are nocturnal animals).

I also read somewhere that our liver detoxifies between 10pm and 2am. So, it is really important that we ensure we are asleep during these hours.

Sleep two hours after sundown and rise two hours before sunrise.

That's wisdom.

That's respecting time.

NOW IS ALL WE HAVE

If not now, then when? – The Talmud

Ever since Eckhart Tolle published his bestseller, “The Power of Now”, present-moment living has become the talk of the town.

However, many people fail to realise that the teaching of present-moment living has always been found in ancient wisdom. It is not something new.

One of my favourite poems is from “The Sanskrit”:

*Yesterday is but a dream,
Tomorrow is but a vision.
But today, well-lived,
Makes every yesterday a dream of happiness,
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day,
For it is life, the very life of life.*

In “The Power of Now”, Eckhart Tolle talks about people who become victims of time. Those who indulge in guilt, bitterness, regret and resentment are victims of the past while those who are engulfed by worry, stress, anxiety and fear are victims of the future. We shouldn't live as victims of time.

We only have the present moment to do the best we can. If we are not happy with the present moment, then by all means, change it. But if we cannot change it, then let's change our attitude towards it. Harbour no resentment, accept the situation with an open heart and live with it. Or better still, see the silver lining behind the cloud and be grateful for the lessons learnt. Adversities, when viewed in a positive light, make us stronger.

Once time has passed, we can never get it back. So, let's not allow ourselves to be caught up with regretting the past or worrying about the future. It is a futile and wasteful effort.

Right after I finished writing this book, I met a colleague whose wife has read all my books. I told him I'd just written my sixth book and I'll give him a copy when it's published. He exclaimed, "How on earth do you find the time to do this? Gosh, I have no time!"

Everyone has 24 hours in a day. We just have to find the time, and make the time to do what we want to do.

Time is precious.

Now is all we have.

Live now, and live it well.

Epilogue



Practically everyone who knows me knows that I always complete my tasks well before the deadline.

“Why do you have to do things so fast”, I’m often asked.

Well, there are two reasons.

One, I have been brought up since young never to waste time and never to put off till tomorrow what can be done today. Call it a tradition in the family.

Two, I embrace the fact that life is uncertain and death is certain. For a person like me who has a faulty heart valve, unexplained epileptic seizures and is Bipolar 2, this reminder rings true every day of my life.

Knowing and reminding myself that I can die anytime is sometimes a blessing. It makes me do everything that I set my heart out to do and to complete it as much as I can before I go to bed at night.

By doing so, I sleep very peacefully and contentedly. I do not have to look forward to a new day because I have done whatever I want to do on this day itself. So even if I don’t wake up the next day, I know I will go happily because I have made good

use of my days. There is no unfinished business. There are no regrets. Everything is done.

And now, this book is done.

*I expect to pass through this world but once.
Any good therefore that I can do,
Or any kindness or abilities
That I can show to any fellow creature,
Let me do it now.
Let me not defer it or neglect it,
For I shall not pass this way again.
- William Penn*

A Last Word



My friend PC told me in a text message that if ever I write a book on the subject of punctuality, he will sponsor the first printing. I said I would, and I now have a draft. I shall now send this draft to PC for his safekeeping so that in case I do not wake up tomorrow and if PC likes whatever I have written and thinks it's worthy of being printed, he will get it done as promised and distribute it...to all the Chinese wedding dinners, colleges and schools, he said!

Happy Reading, everyone.

And, thank you for your time!

*Whether we wake or we sleep,
Whether we carol or weep,
The Sun with his Planets in chime,
Marketh the going of Time.
- Edward Fitzgerald*

*A man who dares to waste one hour of his time
has not discovered the value of life.
- Charles Darwin*

Keep Your Gold, Give Me Time



In this book, Chan Kah Yein shares her little personal anecdotes on respecting time and tide. In her hallmark simple and light-hearted manner, she looks at how we manage time in our lives and offers hints on how we might be able to do the job a little better!

*The only thing that matters is
the everlasting present.*

- W. Somerset Maugham