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See the world with your heart, instead of your eyes

Monday Starters - By Soo Ewe Jin

IT'S Monday and you have just reached the 32-storey building where your office is located. And the lifts are not working. Your office is on the 28th floor, so walking up is out of the question. You have a choice – get all flustered up, or hop over to the nearby café for a cup of coffee until the lifts are working again.

Life is invariably about choices. But for some of us, the option is not always there.

Certainly, we do not choose to have cancer, to be born with a disability, or to lose a job because the company went bust.

Today is Monday, so let me share a story to lift up your spirits and drive away your Monday blues.



The cool professor and his student: Azmi Sharom and Albert Wong outside Universiti Malaya's Law Faculty.

Albert Wong is a young adult with an immense passion for life. Readers of *The Star* know Albert. In 1999, they rallied to his cause and raised more than RM500,000 for him to undergo treatment in Tennessee.

I have known him since he was a primary school boy. Born with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, his muscles progressively become weaker as he grows older.

At first, he was able to move around with crutches, but eventually the wheelchair became a permanent fixture. And so we built ramps around the school, and ensured that his class always remained on the ground floor.

Each year, Albert would emerge top of the class, and come the prize-presentation day, the VIP would always have to come down from the stage to give him his awards. And he always got the loudest applause.

Albert aced all the public examinations – UPSR, PMR and SPM. In fact, he was the top disabled SPM student in 2006.

His application for a Public Service Department (PSD) scholarship was originally rejected because the officer thought that it would not be possible for a student in a wheelchair to go overseas to study if the scholarship was granted.

I recall how this officer, after the issue was sorted out, came to Albert's house to personally hand him the letter and was given an instant education on the student's ability, not his disability.

He was very touched and promised that in future, he would ensure that such applicants are not prejudged.

And so Albert went to law school, at a private college, nearby his house. By then, Albert had grown physically and his transport needs had to be customised. Not only was his wheelchair fully motorised, his parents had to invest in a van equipped with a chair lift.

Getting him in and out of the van was an adventure in itself, which is why I find it hard to lose my patience when I am caught in a big jam. I only have to think of Albert.

There is much to share about amazing Albert, and his equally incredible parents and sister, who are his key caregivers.

This year, Albert took another major step in his life journey. He is doing his masters at Universiti Malaya.

Although his application was initially rejected, he persevered. He appealed and he got his place. And the bonus is that he got to study under Azmi Sharom, a cool lecturer who writes the column, *A Brave New World*, in this newspaper.

Albert is pleased that UM is disabled-friendly.

More importantly, he is treated just like any other graduate student.

“Azmi gives his students a lot of leeway. He seems to trust that his students know what they're doing. He also believes that his students are mature enough to complete their tasks,” says Albert.

And that's the way it should be. Whenever I am with Albert, I see his abilities.

One could talk to him for hours. He has an amazing grasp of current issues that is far superior to many people of his age who seem only to be interested in entertainment and making big bucks.

Albert wants to change the world. I believe every law firm in this country, and also the Attorney-General's Chambers, should contact him and offer him a job upon graduation.

Are you still sore over some minor work issues from last week? Are you angry that your boss has misread your intention? You have a choice – to forgive and move on or to let things fester.

In *The Little Prince*, there is a quote, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly, what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

And so today is Monday. Why not start off your week by seeing the world with your heart, instead of your eyes? Your

colleagues and the people you meet will look very different. You will be inspired.

- *Deputy executive editor Soo Ewe Jin is blessed by very ordinary people who, through their words and actions, fill his life with many extraordinary moments.*

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