

**Singapore HeritageFest 2009**  
**“Arte (factually) Speaking” Story-Writing Competition**  
**Merit Award (Lower Secondary Category)**



Contest ID: 124  
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Nationality: Singaporean  
School: Nanyang Girls' High School

Artefact: Satay Stall  
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

Grandma Khatijah's Satay Stall

Sham tugged at Grandma Khatijah's floral sleeve and said, "Hurry, I want to buy the batik cloth from that stall." Sham and her grandmother were at the night market two weeks before Hari Raya. The night air was warm and thick with moisture. The occasional mosquito made a nuisance of itself. However, no one seemed bothered as they were enjoying the festive atmosphere.

After purchasing the colourful *batik*, they headed to the food section. The aroma of freshly prepared *satay* wafted through the air. Grandma stopped in her tracks and said, "Let's buy some. Do you want extra peanut sauce and *ketupat*?" "Yes!" Sham replied excitedly. She could not wait to sink her teeth into the juicy meat skewered on thin sticks. She watched with rapt attention as the stallholder prepared the sticks of *satay* and cut the compressed rice cakes. He then added the crunchy onions and sliced cucumbers.

As the pair ate the delicious meat dipped in tangy peanut sauce, Grandma said, "You know, Grandpa used to ply the streets selling these to make a living. He had a portable stall with compartments to hold the *satay*, *ketupat*, onions and cucumber. And of course, the yummy *satay* sauce. The stall could be packed and slung over his shoulder on a *kander* or carrying pole." Sham looked up, cocked her head to one side and asked, "Really?" "Yes," Grandma continued, "and when he passed away, I took over the business. It was hard work selling the *satay* and when it rained, business was so dismal."

Sham and Grandma sat down on the cool stone seats at the void deck. A light breeze provided brief respite from the heat. Grandma shared with Sham the hardship she had to go through to raise four children single-handedly after Grandpa had died. She told Sham that she had to work every day, even when she was ill. The family needed the money for food and utilities. When the portable stall broke, she had to haul it a great distance to get it repaired. It was her livelihood and she had no choice. She had so many mouths to feed.

"At first, I was not licensed as an itinerant hawker and always had to look out for the police. Once, I was almost caught but managed to make a quick getaway," Grandma recalled. "Eventually, I got a proper licence. I practised hard and made the most delectable *satay*. After several years, I managed to secure a stall space at the Satay Club along the esplanade. With regular customers and no rest days, I saved enough money for your mother to complete

secondary school." "And mummy is a clerk today, thanks to you," Sham said. Grandma nodded and mumbled, "I wish that Grandpa could see your mum and aunts today. He would be so proud." Sham noticed that Grandma's eyes were a little wet, and the moisture glistened in the yellow light.

Grandmother and granddaughter strolled home together, a coarse gnarled hand gripping the smooth hand of youth. The silence between them was one of understanding. Sham realised how lucky she was to live in a four-room flat, to have working parents and the opportunity to study. The moon seemed extra round and bright that night, illuminating the black night sky. She would work hard and be passionate in learning. She too could shine brightly, even when things were dark.

(566 words)