

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



Contest ID: 192
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Artefact: Satay Stall
Museum: National Museum of Singapore

More than just a Satay Stall

Everyone at school would snigger and make snide remarks every time my Ba came to pick me up, *satay* stall in tow. But I loved him; I loved it, the *satay*. I always wanted to stay at home, follow Ba to the market. Watch him chop the onions, cucumber with lightning speed, never missing a beat, never slicing his finger. I loved watching the succulent meat ooze juices as I fanned the charcoal pit, and the aroma of *ketupat*.

The customers would come at night. Laughing, chatting, and sometimes bringing a bottle of beer or two. They would sit on the tiny stools, bending over their bowls of sauce. And I would sit expectantly, waiting.

Then the stories would come, one after the other. Perhaps an old uncle had seen a *Pontianak* near the Chinese graveyard. Or perhaps my father would tell of a previous customer that had run away before paying. He described the man, as skinny and bony as a kampong chicken and how he had caught and wrestled him. Their faces glistening with perspiration and dust from the heat and smoke of the charcoal pit, the customers would laugh and laugh, chuckling, chortling and guffawing as Ba comically acted out the scene.

Ba called the *satay* stall "the most colourful place in the world", because at least one person from every race would go there almost daily. He would hear the latest gossips and he made new friends all the time.

I hardly made any friends, as people were always gossiping behind my back.

"It's that Malay boy again, that one over there. I can't believe he wants to be a hawker someday. I, however, am going to be a doctor, better than that good-for-nothing *satay* boy."

I went home crying that day. But Ba laughed it off, saying, "I have doctors as my customers all the time! You go and tell that silly boy that!"

I stopped school after Secondary Four. Ba finally agreed to let me take over the *satay* stall when he retired, but I needed practice beforehand. On my first day as a *satay* man, Ba made me carry the stall to the market where he sold the *satay*. It was the heaviest thing I had carried and after just five minutes my back was aching and my shoulders went numb. Next, Ba took

out the basket of cucumber and onions from the cupboard and told me to cut half of them and then skewer the meat onto the sticks. The work was arduous and fatiguing, and I was so tired after the preparations that Ba sent me home. It gave me a newfound respect for my father, and made me wish that all those boys at school could experience this. They would not laugh anymore.

But in 1984, Ba died, leaving me all by myself to run the stall, although Ma helped with the money. The customers were devastated. Yes, they knew Fared was a nice boy, but rather reserved, and they would miss his father's friendly smile and loud laugh.

Selling *satay* is not necessarily the easiest thing to do, but to me it held the most significance and meaning. It symbolised the importance of passion that I had learnt from my Ba, and also represented his love and sacrifice for the family. For without passion and love, how could my newly opened *satay* stall at Geylang Hawker Center have flourished?

If only Ba could see me now.

He would be so proud.

(583 words)