



The Dramatic Duo

Edmund Chen and Loretta Chen, entertainment veterans – he on-screen and she onstage – tell **SELENA VERA HEY** about their deep sibling bond, despite their 14-year age gap.

Memories Of Growing Up

Edmund: I was a teenager when my parents told Eric (my younger brother by three years) and me about Loretta being on the way. I didn't really think about it till I saw this lovely baby girl in the house. It was very easy to become close to her – she completed our family.

Loretta: I remember our mother telling us how young Edmund came home one day with a red handbag he picked up from somewhere...

Edmund: The roadside, I think!
Loretta: He passed it to our mother and told her: "In case I get a sister." Our mother kept it, cleaned it and later gave it to me.

My Brother, My Idol

Loretta: I was never really star-struck by Edmund's co-stars when I tagged along on his filming sessions when I was 10.

Edmund: (interjects) Because I was her only idol!

Loretta: Well, in a way, I suppose, yes! But my friends and even teachers would peer out of the windows whenever Edmund picked me up from school. All my classmates wanted his autograph.

Edmund: When she was in primary school, Loretta wanted my colleagues' autographs – it was embarrassing as a junior actor asking my seniors for their autographs for my sister.

Loretta: (laughs) That Hello Kitty autograph book became my prized possession – and I was the envy of my schoolmates. But I was definitely star-struck when he later brought Xiang Yun [they married in 1989] home to meet the family.

The Artist In The Family

Loretta: When I was in primary school, I always got an A for art thanks to Edmund who helped me with my homework. He used to draw animals for me – squirrels, birds, anything I wanted. It's a little known fact that he's been drawing and designing merchandise for organisations like the WWF for at least 12 years. And he has just released his fifth children's book, which he wrote and illustrated.

Edmund: I started drawing when I was very young but I didn't take it seriously until Primary 4, when I was invited to a friend's house. He had this huge aquarium and for the next two months, I'd visit his home, study the different coloured fishes and corals, and re-create them on my one precious piece of drawing pad I bought. At the end of the year, when I visited him again, the tank was gone. It struck me then that art crossed all boundaries – the tank was no more, but it lived on in my home, on my wall. I focused more on my art then and began winning prizes. When I started working, art was still seen as something that couldn't support you. I only took it up more seriously after I was more established and after I had children.

Drama In Our Veins

Edmund: No one in our family was in the media business, yet somehow, the three of us ended up there (Eric's in production). I got into it by accident. I didn't even watch Channel 8 at that time, and just went for an audition, encouraged by an acting coach I knew.

Loretta: I was subconsciously influenced by Edmund. Having an actor in the family showed me that

it was possible to survive and thrive in the arts scene.

Edmund: We were so proud of the first professional play (*13 Shaolin*, in 2004) Loretta directed right after returning from Los Angeles.

Loretta: I was very nervous but *13 Shaolin* turned out to be a success and fuelled my passion for directing. I'm quite a competitive person – I try to push and challenge myself – just like in that first major project.

Edmund: As a director, Loretta has a talent for gambling on budding actors with potential; discovering and unleashing that spark is a gift. My dream is for Loretta, Eric and I to collaborate on a project. I'm just looking for the right opportunity to come along.

Family Matters

Loretta: When I was in Los Angeles during the last leg of my PhD eight years ago, my partner at that time committed suicide. It was one of the darkest times of my life. I didn't want my family to worry, so I tried keeping it inside. But while on the phone with them, I broke down and I realised how much I needed to be surrounded by my family. Thinking of mei mei (Edmund's daughter Yi Xin, who is now 10; he has two children) stopped me from taking the same route; I wanted her to have an aunt and did not want her to think that death is ever an option.

Edmund: It was hard on us to have her so far away and alone during

"I've always been inspired by nature"

– Edmund, on his art (below)



that period. Loretta bonds with people in a very deep way and takes her relationships seriously – it's what makes her such a great sister and daughter. In recent years, our father has battled cancer, and our mother underwent surgery for a brain tumour and her eyes, and Loretta has been taking on so much caring for them. Thankfully they are now doing well, and it's all due to her. **SH**

Our Childhood Days



(Left to right) Eric, our mother, Loretta and Edmund.



The famous red bag.



Loretta has always loved dresses.

Relative Values is a column in which a personality and a family member give us insights into their relationship.

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