

August 2004

CHOICES

For Life!

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What idol

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Face2Face with Gurmit Singh



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Don't play play!

Live your life

By Loretta TAN • Photography Eric CHIA

Phua Chu Kang – a name synonymous with loud yellow boots, loud Ah-Beng clothing and an even louder attitude.

And who can forget That Mole and his trademark pun "Don't play play" (or "don't play play").

In fact, Phua Chu Kang or PCK, your friendly neighbourhood Ah-Beng contractor is so popular not just in Singapore, JB (and some say Batam), he was our very own ambassador to the Amazing Race folks when they came to our tiny island!

Phua Chu Kang is indeed more Uniquely Singapore than the swankiest of STB ads (Singapore Tourism Board).

But what about the man behind the larger-than-life PCK?

Indeed, this being CHOICES' first issue, the Editor and I wanted something with a "SLAM! BOOM! BANG!" But not just that, we wanted something, someone that represented or bore the semblance of being Numero Uno, ONE, satu, First.

SomeONE who was different, who dared to venture out of the box and into the hearts of our Singaporeans, young and old. SomeONE who had dared to make the choice to depart from the norm and live out personal dreams, aspirations and beliefs.

Someone whom we could all see a bit of ourselves in and look up to.

Naturally, one would turn to Gurmit. It would be his frankness, candour and wit a writer could always rely on. Our inaugural issue of CHOICES pays homage to Gurmit Singh - the man himself. We find out just what makes him tick, his first brush with the media, his woes, his ability to cope with the media blitz, the backlash, the difficult choices he has had to make and the lessons in life he has to share with our readers.

Lesson 1 Don't Fear Losing - Give All You've Got

Like many celebrities, Gurmit's rise to stardom was purely incidental. Remember the Sing Singapore campaign? Well, Gurmit was one of those performers doing shows in Primary and Secondary schools in line with the campaign.

The next thing he knew, he was asked to audition for a 'Live on 5' feature. In good old Gurmit self-deprecation, he thought, "Yeah, right...as if I'd any hope of getting through this audition..."

But true to his tenacious spirit, he still gave it all that he had. "What the heck. Let's give it a shot." Guess what? Bingo.

Two weeks later, Gurmit received a call informing of his short-listing, went for screen test. And there my dear readers, a host was born.

In fact, even when the going got tough and a huge backlash erupted against the Singlish-spouting contractor that denigrated all the nouveau riche attitudes of middle class Singapore, Gurmit the man remained unfazed and coped like a true Singaporean – went shopping and "ate like there was no tomorrow".

The most cynical of us would think "Cop Out!" but honestly, there is so much strength needed to just be able to keep one's cool and remain positive in such dire circumstances.



Lesson 2 Dare To take The Plunge

From Beng in Boots to the first-ever Singapore Idol's first host, Gurmit never fails to take up a challenge and exudes confidence in all that he takes on.

"Singapore Idol is going to be a damn good show!" he exclaims. Whilst cynics again would lament at the seemingly lack of talent in Singapore, Gurmit exhorts otherwise.

"I am very pleased with the standards of the singers, and being it's first host is something I'll be honoured with in the history books. No one can take that away from me."

Taking the plunge does not come easy.

Gurmit too is often at crossroads. Like many of

us, Gurmit faced the daunting decision of the security of completing an education and the excitement of taking on uncharted waters as a full time artiste. Back in the old days of Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC), people still frowned upon the notion of an "artiste". Many conservatives then viewed the job of an artiste as a frivolous and mindless vocation with no real skill or brain required.

Gurmit was then a student at Informatics studying Computer Programming when he was offered full time-contract with SBC. He had to make the choice of pursuing a degree in Computer Programming or making a career out of entertainment.

One can only imagine the sleepless nights. Yet, the choice seemed clearly simple. To follow one's heart and leave all the rest to God.

"I don't make difficult choices, those difficult ones I pray about and leave them to God. The only choice I make, and I make it time and time again, is to leave it to God's will."

It helped too that Gurmit had a wonderful girlfriend then who advised him to pursue his dreams.

He followed the advice and even married the adviser!



"It was not a display... it was not about bravery... I am so much in the public eye that I never get my own space and time unless I am at home. I am always expected to "perform". I had to tell Singapore the news so that she would understand and forgive me if I seemed distant and uninterested to "perform"..."

Lesson 3 Love Thy Ah-Beng Brothers...

Playing Ah-Beng is no feat for this talented artiste. Having grown up with Ah Bongs all his life, playing one was no sweat and is in fact, as aptly put by Gurmit, "easier than playing an Eskimo learning to make ice cubes in a desert". Very cheem (Hokkien for profound).

Indeed it is this ability to connect with people

from all walks of life that has endeared him to the hearts of Singaporeans. Yet, contrary to perception, Gurmit is very much your "guai zai" (Cantonese for good boy) and is an introvert at heart.

Nothing pleases him better than staying in the comfort of his home. Despite still being overwhelmed by all the fanfare and celebrity treatment he gets, Gurmit

never fails to think beyond himself and tries to connect with all the fans and supporters who love him. He takes pride in offering a warm smile, a handshake, a nod and greeting wherever he goes and is "constantly saying hello or goodbye to someone the minute he steps out of his house!"

Lesson 4 And finally... Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve

Whilst technology changes faster than we can say "Pentium M", attitudes don't.

In an Asian culture that values stoicism, grieving can be unusually draining. Having had to recently mourn the sudden and tragic deaths of my two best friends, I cried when Gurmit grieved the passing of his father in last year's Star Awards.

Where others came in fancy dress and coiffured hair, Gurmit was simply clad in his father's long sleeved shirt. In his thank-you speech, Gurmit gave a moving eulogy to his father and our tiny island wept with him. The Queen of Caldecott was seen dabbing her tears. Fann Wong's dewy skin was dewier than ever..

And Gurmit the man we always laugh with was suddenly a broken man. No wise cracks. No punch lines. Just a grieving son.

It is such moments of honesty in a world of "Reality TV" that we are truly touched.

"It was not a display.. it was not about bravery.. I am so much in the public eye that I never get my own space and time unless I am at home. I am always expected to "perform". I had to tell Singapore the news so that she would understand and forgive me if I seemed distant and uninterested to "perform". Also, in that way, I could grieve within and without my home, something I couldn't do when my mum passed away..."

Indeed, it is in moments of crisis that we see that mark of a person's character. We pause to think, to feel, to be appreciative.

And so to you Gurmit, Thank you for the lessons in life. 

