the grandma reporter

ISSUE NO. 3: INTIMACY

A companion publication to Not Grey: Intimacy, Ageing & Being, a collaborative performance project commissioned by T:>Works Festival of Women N.O.W.

Singapore,
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“We tend to think of the erotic as an easy, tantalizing sexual arousal. I speak of the erotic as the deepest life force, a force which moves us toward living in a fundamental way.”

– Audre Lorde
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Welcome to this issue of The Grandma Reporter (TGR)—the first birthed in Singapore, and the second on the provocative theme of intimacy. The lens of intimacy is one that people are less inclined to anywhere, not just here. What is intimacy and what does it mean to experience through intimacy? It is a closeness to life, one that, way beyond sex, relates to many dimensions of being and well-being. In a world riddled with fear, caution, distance, and surveillance, what is our relationship to closeness? (A meta question, as relationship itself is about proximity.) To see—and feel—through the ever-present possibility of intimacy is to value slowness, compassion, patient listening, and other gentle ways of being. It is also to swim in depths of feeling, grit, pleasure, vividness, and other wild parts of the soul. This is, to my younger mind, revolutionary, for it brings us closer to that which makes us feel alive. At an older age, having lived much more, what is the nearness that women feel towards life itself? How are they now acquainted with their breaths, bodies, sorrows, yearnings, and joys?

TGR’s plunge into the subject began at the Hollywood Senior Center, Portland, Oregon (USA) with an Intimacy Manifesto, fantasy photoshoot, Senior Women’s Erotica Club, and more. Being Singaporean, I dreamt of collaborating with women from my part of the world. In this issue, 15 senior women living on the equator gathered to discuss the subject, write, collaborate on films and devise performances. In this instance, TGR is the companion publication to Not Grey: Intimacy, Ageing, & Being, an intimate virtual experience commissioned by T>Works’ for the final edition of Festival of Women N.O.W.

At our age, intimacy feels faraway. The people we associate with it have slowly drifted away. Where then do we put our feelings? We place them inside our hearts, not sure how to keep them — yet forgetting is impossible. And when we die, we take them with us.

— Collaborator Koh Lian Hiok, 78

In draconian, orderly Singapore, seniors are infantilized perhaps more so than in other countries. Typically portrayed as caricatures in advertisements of the healthy living or active ageing sort, the complexity of ageing is rarely addressed. Sagely seniors may make good mentors and intuitive figures of authority, but seniors do not all need to be poised, regal, revered pillars of wisdom. And as the nation hyper-modernizes at top speed, many are left behind, finding themselves in urban environments that have all too quickly transformed their childhood and young adult environs. In 2020, elderly suicides reached an 8-year high. I would venture to say that intimacy as an embodied concept is diametrically opposite to what metropolitan Singapore stands for today.

Coming together as women in Singapore talking about intimacy is a potent act of everyday activism. Could we call what emerged an Asian perspective? What each woman has generously offered is unique to the kernel of her being. Intimacy calls for vulnerability. Collaborating with these women was to ask them to allow a stranger (or at best, a new friend) to hold their hearts in my hands, one who was decades younger and who could not truly understand what it meant to age, to ache in that way. Yet they were curious and brave enough to step into the abyss of this inquiry.

In these pages you will meet a beauty pageant judge, plant medicine woman, hiker, and many others. They reflect on the wilderness inside a woman’s soul, romance in later years, self-esteem, waving goodbye with care, lost connection, sex, spirituality, lineage, finding truth, the life force that moves one to dance till one’s last breath, a new lease of life, and more. On these journeys I have been both facilitator and learner. Along the way I have been taught exercises to prevent sagging breasts, been fed, delightfully gifted a $2 dress, and shared intimate conversations that I will remember when I, too, am 80 and sensing the world in the fresh darkness of my old bones.

I am immensely grateful to these women. Their resilience is comforting as I confront my own mortality. Perhaps seeking intimacy is a kind of resilience—whispering to the world: In spite of all your violence and alienation, I will find profound nearness to things. In my sunset, hardly seen, I will be alive. I am alive.

Salty Xi Jie Ng (34 years old)
Editor, The Grandma Reporter
July 2021
I hear the singing of the lives of women.
The clear mystery, the offering, and the pride.

— Muriel Rukeyser

“What does intimacy mean to you?” You might think sex, or some kind of physical closeness or contact. Is there intimacy without sex?

According to Dr. Helene Brenner, a clinical psychologist and author, intimacy is synchrony between two people. But to be truly connected with someone involves at least four types of intimacy – emotional, mental, intellectual and physical. Of the four only one involves touching. Brenner’s formulation of intimacy relates to one-on-one connection with another person. But what about a sense of intimacy beyond human relationships? Could we describe those deeply connected relationships with self, with nature, or with the cosmos as intimacy? What is intimacy as we age when sex is absent?

These questions are seldom asked and discussed. When broached these questions provoked discomfort, and possibly the reason why they are not subjects we deal with daily nor publicly. Intimacy is an important part of one’s life. Because humans are social creatures, we gravitate towards forming connections, that familiar and unique bond developed with another. Our identity and well-being need and thrive on intimacy. How these meaningful connections are formed differ, and especially so as we age.

Hence this project — *Not Grey: Intimacy, Ageing & Being* — commissioned by T:>Works as part of the Festival of Women N.O.W. It is a fitting inclusion to a festival concerned with amplifying the less said and heard, and celebrating multiplicity in the lived experiences of women. It began with a simple premise: invite a group of women, mostly strangers, about 15, preferably 60 years and above, to talk about intimacy in their lives.

The women’s responses deal with the particular. In these particulars, we bear witness to different aspects of intimacy as a basic foundation of achieving personal significance, authentic connection and acceptance. We hear ruminations on sexual pleasures yearned and missing; of embracing loss and found courage; of finding fulfillment in being alone; of the desire and spirit to connect with authentic selves; of claiming self-worth when identities and physical attributes change. Most importantly, of seeking and re-defining how intimacy is formed with another, whatever that ‘other’ may be, in different phases of their lives.

I would like to think that this project is just a beginning. These beautiful 15 women — Ai Keow, Anne, Ajuntha, Dana, Elsie, Evelyn, Faizah, Li Li, Lian Ye, Saudah, Patricia, Pushpa, Shirley, Yvonne, Zubee — are change-makers, having generously shared their experiences on intimacy, publicly. And I end this passage with an open invitation to you, dear readers — share your thoughts on intimacy with us. Let’s continue the conversation.

Noorlinah Mohamed
Festival Director, Festival of Women N.O.W.

Festival of Women N.O.W.
Conceptualised by theatre artist Noorlinah Mohamed in 2019, and presented by T:>Works, Festival of Women N.O.W. celebrates alliances and solidarity between women through engagement, collaboration and dialogue. Presented as an all-digital festival, the N.O.W. 2021 line-up explores different facets of the taboo, fear, intimacy and reclaims them as sources of power and inspiration.

notordinarywork.com
Now is the time for a woman of age to come into her own, that is, to own her courage and wisdom. The problem with any woman bound by the strings of social etiquette is that she loses her authentic persona and soul. A death so subtle, it is not noticed, even by the woman as she traverses from child to womanhood.

Like a ticking bomb, the burden of guilt built up over a lifetime will explode or implode. An explosion releases long held frustration and implosion is destruction of the woman.

As I understand, intimacy for those of us women in the Grey of our lives cannot be a desire to reclaim sexuality, intimacy that is limited by the borders of skin. Does a woman aspire to a greater desire? When childbearing years are over—and menopause means just that—a woman does not need a male to fertilize her eggs, and she is free to be stimulated by the world and beyond. This is the dharma of every human being: to expand the mind and seek the truth.

The truth of a woman’s nature is through honest communion with the soul. A soul is the deathless being that steers a woman through many lifetimes. A soul is a woman’s heartbeat at her own birth and that of her offspring, each generation of woman in a collective heartbeat bringing forth life. The vulva is a powerful portal for delivering life. It is a spiritual passage of truth that one soul will go through many times.

The intimacy I yearn for is a deep relationship with my soul. I will go inwards to find my true nature and home, digging deep into the earth to seek the roots of my being.
几年前我生了大病。那时，我想，如果可以度过难关，我就要改变生活，学我一直想学的东西。人一定要追求目标，不然没有时间了。这是我最后的机会。

老了学这些东西很难。我学芭蕾舞，小提琴，古筝，歌唱。拉小提琴时，我拉到痛，满身汗，要暂停才可以恢复。那时我不浪费时间，所以我就开始学古筝。

夕阳无限好，只是近黄昏。但是我要跳到不会跳为止。我要推动自己。我要抓紧最后一道彩虹，永远向前冲，到最后一天，到最后一口气。

My Sunset

I was seriously ill a few years ago. I thought, if I could get through this most difficult ordeal, I would change my life and learn what I have always desired. We must pursue our goals before our time is up. This is my last chance.

It is difficult to learn these things when you are old. I study ballet, violin, and guzheng. When I was playing the violin, I would sweat all over and feel pain from intense practice. I had to pause so as to recover. But I did not want to waste time, so I started to learn the guzheng.

The sunset is infinitely beautiful, only that it’s almost dusk.

I will dance until I no longer can. I will push myself. I will grasp the last rainbow, forever rushing forward till the last day, till my last breath.
Two Worlds

I deeply feel the intimacy of a place, where once a life was led. At 19, I left Singapore for a brief stint as an au pair (nanny) in Germany. Little did I know that I would stay close to 40 years. I got married to a German man and had sons. I started my working life and raised my two boys as a single mum. I was part of a community of families. All seven families went on fantastic holiday trips, camping, fishing, cooking.

All those years in Europe, I felt my Asian roots most strongly when I struggled to let my boys be independent. They left home at 21 and 24, which was late there and early here.

Eventually, I came back to Singapore. After my return, I became legal guardian of my grand-niece Joy when she was just a baby. Joy is like a daughter to me; I’ve always wanted a girl. I’m always happy when she’s around. Sometimes when she goes to school and comes back late, I do miss her. We cuddle in the mornings. We are all that each other have here.

Although I have been back in Singapore for almost 15 years, I have not come anywhere near the life I had there. I don’t really have intimate friends here. My Singaporean school friends and I didn’t journey together through life, so our chats only get to a certain level. I’ve stopped expecting much from them. There’s a void. When I pick up the phone and call my friends in Germany, we can talk very naturally. I love good conversations.

Now I have intimacy with Joy, who loves hugging me. But I realise that it’s not that she wants to hug me, but more than she wants to be hugged by me. I like to hug people, although in Germany many people just give handshakes. Here, it takes a long time for people to warm up. I’m very spontaneous and can easily cuddle someone if I feel the connection.

My sons and Joy are my everything. Having lived in two different worlds, I have built more intimacy with Germany and miss it very much.
I get so excited when someone is coming to my house to eat. I will change the cloth under the TV, change the table cloth, set the table. I even will wake up at 2am to cook. I love to watch my family and friends enjoy my cooking. Because when you eat alone, you cannot enjoy the food with somebody else and then it’s not as nice.

But how intimate can you be with somebody? People will always let you down. Even your children, you are not with them 24/7. There is always a struggle to maintain a relationship as you try not to upset the other. All intimacy fluctuates. One ends up either being insecure or careless.

You can’t rely on that kind of intimacy. Today I read my Libra horoscope in the Tabla newspaper, it said, “Don’t trust anybody completely.” The best and safest relationship which doesn’t cause distress is with God.

God constantly guides me, watches over me, looks after me. God was giving me nourishment when I was in my mother’s belly. When I came out my mother had milk to feed me. Who gave her the milk? Even the ants under the stone receive care from God. When I go for appointments, and I have my walking stick with me, the nurses always ask me, “Are you alone?” I say, “I am not alone, God is with me!”

You want to have the “on” line with God all the time. So you ask for this in the morning. Let the bad thoughts pass, say to God, “God, I want to have close connection with you.” When one has a true friend in God, one has to look no further for intimacy.
I started dating and flirting, which surprised me. So at almost 60 years old, I begin to discover the new side of me. The sensual side. Now I have confidence and self-esteem. Knowing your worth, feeling and looking good, enjoying attention, vanity—these are all part of my new found confidence. I am unashamed of desiring attention. Getting attention from my suitors increases my self-esteem. Makes me feel playful and young. I love taking selfies and frequently change my profile pictures. People tell me, “Oh you look gorgeous! You look younger!” I get hundreds of likes and many compliments. Affirmations like these boost my confidence.

I play these juvenile games. My ever-changing whatsapp profile pics are like clickbait for my suitors. I want them to think about how good I look since we parted ways. But like I said, older women don’t usually get much attention from men. Five years ago, before my makeover, I had been a celibate single parent for more than twenty years. I didn’t think I was date-able. Society frowns on elderly people seeking love and—dare I say it—sex at this age. So, I threw caution to the wind. Heck, you think nobody cares. Nobody is watching. You’re just a little old lady.

The Love Witch

I love the occult. I come from a long line of bomohs—animistic healers who connect with the transcendental world to heal the physical, the mind and soul. I grew up seeing spells being done. Now I’m a modern day witch. Sometimes my rituals and spell-casting come true.

My kids don’t like me dabbling in the occult. Seniors are expected not to create trouble. So you are supposed to be a crowd pleaser, play with your grandchildren, take care of your health, take up cute hobbies like gardening and crochet, find that spiritual path. You are supposed to be invisible. What? Are you kidding me? No way.

But I wasn’t always this confident. Throughout my life, even when I was married, I never deeply explored the sexual, intimate side of myself. I also never spent much time on my looks. And the men I met never made me feel beautiful.

Then I met a woman—a beauty fairy. She took one look at me and said, “How can you be walking around like THIS?” I looked drab then. “Why aren’t you making full use of your feminine mystique? Your sensuality?” She took me on as a personal grooming project. She kept telling me I was beautiful. That’s the first time someone made me feel beautiful. And then you know what happened? I started to transform and believe that I was beautiful!
One day, something else happened to me. I fell in love. With a woman. I had all this time lived life as a heterosexual; how could this be possible? I was hesitant, confused, scared, and I even thought this was inappropriate. But I loved her. We were together for quite some time. Although there was pain and disappointment when the relationship ended after two years, I realised she had opened the floodgates for love and passion to pour in, when they had been shut before. She introduced me to love—being able to love another and allowing myself to be loved. That relationship lasted for two years.

Dating at this age is different. Sex requires more understanding and adjustment. I tried dating apps, but I feel embarrassed. Are there men out there? What will they think of me? My conflict with dating is this: if I’m dating men who are 60, I wonder why they haven’t gotten their lives together. I judge them, and I’m afraid of them judging me! Recently, I had an intense connection with a 60-year-old man in another country, but we couldn’t meet because the pandemic had closed borders. I think we would die first before we ever get a chance to meet. I pray that we will have at least one chance to meet.

So where did I get all this confidence at almost 60 years old? Casting a spell is just being confident of the outcome. Like when someone believes in you and helps you believe in yourself. So magic is just belief. Can we use magic to change how we feel about aging?

It might seem like I’m trying to push ageing away. In reality, I’m embracing it. I’m just a different type of elder— I date, I do childish things, I like dessert, I embarrass my children, I travel during COVID, I went back to school. I still think I can accomplish so much with the time I have left.

Don’t get me wrong— there is still room in my life for all the things that people are telling me those in my age-group should do, but there is still space for romantic love too. Even if it renders me soft and fragile, makes me forget the risks of being hurt. I welcome love and hold it gingerly in my hands, whenever it is presented to me, in whatever form it comes. I have hope, and always will.
Ruminations


As I sit here typing, I think that many people would agree that these examples typify moments of intimacy between two people. But I am writing about a different kind of intimacy, beyond the obvious connotations of sex and sexuality, or even that of close friends. In this instance, I am exploring my feelings of intimacy with my country.

But it is not an easy process. I imagine that someone my age should experience some level of intimacy with the country they grew up in. But why do I find it so hard?

The feelings that I had as a child and young person are no longer the same. That sense of anticipation, the eagerness of growing up and being part of all that Singapore promised. Is this just a normal part of growing old? That this is it. Tomorrow is here.

But I don’t recognize what I see before me. My country has changed beyond recognition. Buildings have been razed. Whole streets have also disappeared. Beyond the loss of national landmarks, I mourn the personal ones.

The old haunts around my alma mater are no longer the same. The hustle of Hock Lam Street hawkers who cooked their own fare—the street has made way for progress. The elegant Eu Court just across from the old school, replaced by an eye-sore. The bookshops and bridal boutiques along Bras Basah Road, and shophouses selling furniture along Victoria Street. Only the old convent remains, polished and sparkling like a jewel. Even the chapel has been deconsecrated.

Whole villages have vanished. I recall visiting a relative who lived on Pulau Brani. That was the smaller but livelier of two islands, having hosted a community of villagers. But today, we flock to Pulau Blakang Mati, also known as Sentosa, transformed by name and function. The Brani village consisted of simple wooden huts over the water. The toilet, just a cutout in the floor, always amused us children, and reminded us to always swim upstream!
Growing up, we recited the pledge by heart, and sang the national anthem in our national language. But the sense of being one with the land is slipping away. I try to recapture the old intimacy but it is a struggle, and I think memory plays a role. We depend on our memory to connect with our past, memories that are surfaced by people and places, and the familiar feelings that these memories evoke. With the loss of places, of friends and family who have passed, and increasingly, of memory itself, my relationship with my country has also changed.

So how do I recapture the intimacy that I felt with my country? Who do I connect with to rediscover our shared identity? Neighbours have moved closer, from across the fence to right next door. Yet, despite sharing walls, we don’t know their names. How then do I share my most intimate feelings about my homeland? Will they understand? And what language shall I use? What language shall I use to communicate with my own past if our national language is no longer taught in school? Singlish has evolved from a language which used words borrowed predominantly from Malay, to one which I do not now understand, with many new Chinese words which did not exist when I was growing up. Lah has been replaced by Meh.

What kind of intimacy do I seek with my country? It is more than nostalgia; it is the feeling of connection, with the place and with its people. Like relationships with childhood friends. With trust. Intimacy with my oldest friends allows an inlet into our secret harbor of fears and desires. With knowing. Of being able to finish each other’s sentences but without every conversation revolving around real estate. Our hopes of triumphing despite our challenges. We understood implicitly the dangers before our country. And as with knowing old friends so intimately, we placed our trust in each other because quite frankly, we had no other options.

Our shared dreams from childhood spoke of happiness, prosperity and progress for our nation but did not spell out the 5Cs for the individual; they allowed us to envision a life where we were proud of our diversity and equality. We dreamt of nurturing the next generation by teaching, and of saving lives, or of composing the next great orchestral work, no matter how unlikely it would turn out to be. Today, I hear of our young choosing their careers chiefly through the attendant income. Our newspapers contain articles exhorting us to grow our wealth, and sing high praises of the rich. That noise is deafening.

I don’t disagree with parents guiding their young to carve out a life and a career in which they would not be wanting financially. But today, our young seem to be caught up in a manic race, with unhealthy comparisons constantly made. I have fond memories of catching grasshoppers in the garden or watching my brother fly kites with glass-coated strings. I loved retreating inside for quiet and a book. It seemed a carefree world then that allowed me the time and space to nurture these feelings with my country. Feelings of intimacy that I cannot recapture.
Twirl

I love twirling.
I am drawn into a spiral that spins me into space.
No ground beneath me.
Nothing to hold on to.
There is no light and yet it is not dark.
I fill the expanse of space.
I twirl and whirl and spin.
Spinning is like tossing away all the things on the outside.
All rubbish is spun away.
Who people think I am.
Who I think I should be.
How I should be so that, you, will love me.
I understand now what it means to be close to myself.
I’ve always tried to please people.

I spun things around myself so that people could not see how afraid I was, that I would not live up to expectations.
I propped myself up with my degrees, my travels, people’s admiration of my knowledge and articulation.
Even how I helped people in need.
I’m trying to be open and receive things that come to me, instead of reaching out and grasping.
I’m trying to feel safe without having a plan.
I’m trying to feel safe trusting myself.
I will meet you at that place where we have spun away all our defences.
For the first time, I will know myself and I will know you.
We will meet and not be afraid.
I want to drop everything and have nothing and know who is left standing.
I want to get to the truth of me.
你喜欢拥抱吗？如果我来拥抱你，你会接受吗？

懂得拥抱就是从丈夫给我的榜样。恋爱时期，见面时，他伸出双手抱抱我。他很少说，“我爱你”，“我想你”（福建话）这些爱意情语。他抱着我那一刻，我感觉被关心，被爱护。结婚后我们生活很苦。有时他生意不好，放工回家，闷闷不乐，忧虑重重，没话说。我就静静地靠近他，抱一抱他。这是肢体的安慰，不需语言的安慰。

记得那些日子探访老人院。一位白发苍苍的老妇女，坐在床边。我走向前，右手轻轻拍她瘦枯肩膀，而她紧紧抱住我，感觉她双手在颤抖，久久不离手。此时泪水沾满我双眼。

我以前在乐领中心当义工时，有一次要见一位整年没有来活动的老朋友，非常兴奋。一见到她，我兴致勃勃伸出双手要抱抱她，她竟然退却，马上说，“不要不要，免行红毛派！”我一怔，脸颊微微发热。我快改口，说：“哇！好久不见，穿的好漂亮哦！”此时我的心掉入谷底。我也领悟到并不是每一个人会接受你给予的抱抱。

朋友之间为什么要抱抱？生活中社交场所，感恩、慰问、慰劳、和久违见面的朋友，新认识的小妹妹和小伙子来个拥抱，把心中的爱，心中的温暖给别人。那要怎么样抱抱？放宽身体距离，两人之间的恐惧感，把对方当作自己亲人。伸出你的双手，互相抱抱！

真可惜现在由于病情的关系，我们不能怎么拥抱。还有，现在时代不同了。以前我们住乡村时，大家很自然地有亲切的感觉。现在的人对事事非常小心。在抱抱之前，如果不问，恐怕会侵犯私人空间。

记得有一次终于拍摄完毕，大家站在一起互相拥抱，互相致谢。只有导演，一位年纪比较大的男人，自己站在一旁，不敢向前来抱我。我看着他，心里充满了感激，便鼓鼓的走到他面前，说，“导演，非常谢谢你。我可以抱抱你吗？”
Hugs

Do you like hugs? If I came forward to hug you, would you accept?

The practice of hugging was taught to me by my husband. When we were still dating, he would extend his arms to hug me whenever we met. Very rarely would he say sweet nothings like, “I love you” or, “I miss you”. Through his hugs, I felt cared for, and loved. After marriage, life was hard. Sometimes when his business did not fare well, he would come home brooding and worried, with nothing to say. I would quietly get close to him, and hug him from behind. This is a kind of physical comfort, a caring that needs no words.

“Ah Gim, it’s you who taught me to give hugs. Thank you.”

Years ago, I used to volunteer at old folks’ homes. On one visit, a white-haired woman sat by her bed. I walked toward her. My right hand gently patted her thin shoulder. She reached out and hugged me tightly. I felt both her arms trembling. She held on, not wanting to let go. At this moment, my eyes sparkled with tears.

Once, when volunteering at the community centre, I was about to see a friend who had not showed up for a year. I was terribly excited. When she came, I had a big smile and reached out my arms to hug her. To my surprise, she waved me away, saying, “No, no! Don’t do that! Don’t imitate the Westerners!” Startled, my face turned red. Quickly changing my tune, I said, “Wow, long time no see! You look nice today!” Inside, my heart sank. I realised not everyone would accept hugs extended to them.

Why should friends hug? As I move through life’s social spheres, I experience gratitude, greetings, reunions with old friends, and getting to know young ladies and lads. Hugs help me express my love and warmth to others. How can we give a hug? Let go of the fear of physical intimacy. Take someone else as your own family, and extend your arms to them!
My Intimate Relationship With Mother Earth

From the age of seven, I tilled a plot of no man’s land with my father, who cleared an area near the quarters we lived in. I looked forward to planting and watering the vegetables we grew. The family enjoyed our bountiful harvests of kangkong, tapioca, bananas and many more. However deep in my mind, I knew the land wasn’t ours, as my father said we’re only borrowing the land and it could be taken any time from us.

As a Geography teacher, my connection to the environment was always very strong; I was always concerned about what was happening to the earth, and plants. But work took me away from my connection with mother earth. Now, my relationship with mother earth is further deepened. Since retirement, I’ve done a lot of things I always wanted to do, such as concocting my own bioenzymes (making use of scrap fruits and vegetables by adding water and molasses, then letting it ferment to become liquid fertilizer). Composting with kitchen and garden waste brings me a lot of joy. Sharing food and beverages with my plants too strengthens my relationship with them. They get regular doses of coffee and tea from me. Sometimes when I give it to them, I see them smiling, straightening up happily, thanking me.

Wrapping the fruits like chikus, papayas and bananas to deter monkeys and squirrels from eating them brings me happiness. Weeding is an emotional moment for me. As I pull the weeds, I apologise to them for having to take them away but explain that they’ve been an obstacle to my plants. I then put them in the compost bin so they can be of use to the soil. When I use my
hongrown vegetables and fruits to cook, they enhance the taste of the dish that I make. I enjoy seeing family members relishing the dishes while talking about the garden I’ve built.

Tending to my plants has also cultivated for me a positive attitude towards life. The belief in tomorrow that gardeners have, nurturing something hoping for a better future, helps me to persevere during difficult times. Gardening also helps me build bonds with the community around me. Sharing a 7kg white gourd—one of my biggest harvests—with neighbours and friends was a highlight. They reciprocate with their own harvests such as brinjals, green vegetables, loofahs etc. This was a memorable experience.

When I am in the garden, I touch the plants, the soil, the ground. I tell my late father that I’m gardening in my own land. I say, “Pak, Odah berkebun di tanah Odah, sendiri.” (Father, I am gardening on my own land.) I feel a sense of gratitude for what I have today. Sometimes this gratitude is overwhelming.

Thank you, mother earth.
Open To Intimacy

Intimacy – what does this word mean to you? Top of mind is . . . Sex. That’s normal. We are conditioned to think of intimacy in that way. I agree. But there is also more to intimacy than just physical. The idea of intimacy in my family is openness. Openness of the soul to receive, accept and make each member of my family feel safe. Safe to try, safe to make mistakes, safe to say whatever that’s on their minds. Even the most inappropriate things. No censorship. So I am going to be open to you all, and share the way my family hang out and get intimate. All true stories. I begin with my husband, the person I am most intimate with.

Me: Hi, dear, you’re back early from work.

Husband: I have some news for you… you want good news or bad news first?

Me (irritated): Haiya! Just tell me! Okay bad news first.

Husband: Our doctor just called to say that our helper is pregnant.

Me: Then what’s the good news?

Husband: I didn’t do it!

“Aiyoh,” said my friends. “I would be so offended if my husband said that to me!” Really? Why? That’s the depth of intimacy we share.

Both my children shared their love woes with me, starting when they were young adults. We were living in the US once, and my son went to college in a different state. He would call me every night to talk about his day and his problems.

Me: Hi boy, are you still contacting Linda?

Son: Ya we talk on the phone a lot.

Me: You know, long distance woes are difficult. You should try dating other girls. What about the Asian girls there?

Son: No, I don’t want to. You know mum, if you’ve been wearing a Rolex watch for two years, would you want to switch to a Seiko watch?

Well, he’s been cherishing that precious Rolex watch for 16 years.

When my daughter moved to Switzerland to study, we started a very close bond which is still strong now even though we have not lived in the same house for thirty years. We trust each other with our most intimate thoughts.

Daughter: Mum, I want to tell you I’m dating someone now.

Mum: Oh tell me about him. How did you meet?

Daughter: Hahaha! It’s a funny story. I found a pair of jeans in the dryer of the school laundromat. They looked like they could fit me. So I started wearing them. On the third day that I wore them, a guy came up to me and said, “Hey, those are my jeans.” He had recognised them from a stain on them. I admitted I found them in the dryer. He said I could keep them. We chatted and we’ve been dating since.
That pair of jeans was a good match-maker. My daughter and her husband just celebrated their 22nd wedding anniversary.

Now my grandchildren are also very close to me, even though almost 60 years divide us. They often throw themselves on my bed and share their stories and secrets with me. They are able to share with me their day and thoughts they cannot share with their parents, as grandma will always do her best to help them and give them advice. They call my room their haven.

Nicholas (grandson): Hi granny, we’re here to relax!
Natalie (granddaughter): Hi granny! Ya, love your comfy bed.
Me: Come. Settle yourselves in. Was just reading this article about how people in Germany are not keen to have children. They’d rather keep dogs and cats.
Natalie: Ya me too! No kids for me. I don’t want to go through the pain of giving birth.
Nicholas: Oh I want kids.
Me: Good, Nick. How many? Would you rather have boys or girls?
Nicholas: I think I want two girls.
Me: Oh, that’s nice!
Nicholas: Errh...no, no, I change my mind. Two girls...if they both PMS at the same time, and also with my wife, I will DIE!

Aiyoh! Where did he learn that from, I wonder?

The level of soulful intimacy we have within our family allows us to banter, talk about anything under the sun, laugh at and with each other. Life is so stressful these days, why add more stress? I am blessed I have people who love and trust me to hold them safe in my heart, regardless of what they say.
Some of the most defining moments of my life were the times, decades ago, when weekends would find me escaping from the insufferable noise of Singapore’s bustle, to hike, camp and bird watch in the Malaysian and Indonesian wilderness.

Every chance I got, I would take off from my work in my fancy law firm for weeks on end—much to the disapproval of my lawyer colleagues—to climb some volcano or other in Indonesia’s Ring of Fire. Even my Indonesian aunties, on my rushed visits to them, were bemused— ‘Emangnya ada nenek moyang kamu di gunung?’ they would quiz me. I would simply smile. Of course my ancestors are in the mountains– where else would they be?

My forest forays led me to the lives of the Orang Asli, the indigenous peoples of Malaysia. They were my guides, easily navigating their way through the jungles, often barefoot, and usually with only a parang in hand.

(I later read that, for many indigenous peoples all over the world, the soles of their feet connect them on a deep level, beyond the physical, with the earth. I wondered if perhaps that was the reason why my Orang Asli guides were able to find their way so easily, when to my uninformed eye, there was no visible path.)

Who were these people? I thought to myself. They were brown, like me. Some were short, like me. Some had curly hair, unlike mine. They were also, usually, men. Where were the women? I thought to myself. So at every village stop, I would make a beeline for the kitchens.
There they were, hunched over the hearths, tending to the vegetables cooking in the pot, and keeping an eye out for the little ones, much like women anywhere. I would ask them what they were cooking and how old their kids were. They would ask me “Suami mana?” I told them I don’t have a husband. (I was not married then.) They were surprised. Women married young in their communities. Food and families. So easy to bond with women, even with those we have just met.

Over time, these women taught me many things. What to my ignorant eye was just another green leaf, these women would say, “Yang tu sedap,” as they plucked a leaf, gave it to me and beckoned me to taste its delicious flavour. Or, “Stay away from this one—you will get sick.” They also showed me a plant that—ahem— improves a woman’s ‘performance’. Naturally I stored the information about kacip fatimah for later use!

One thing I already knew was my mother’s own foraging habits back home in Singapore. I used to live near Lower Peirce Reservoir after I got married. Every time my mum came to visit, she would have no hesitation in plucking pucuk ubi (tapioca shoots) from the bushes just off the road, which she would later cook in coconut milk. “Why waste good food?” she would say. Years later, that wild corner of the road would be turned into a concrete car park. Of course it would.

When I was 10, my mum, like all good Indonesian mums, had already set me on the road to regular jamu practice. Strangely, my brother was never included, which as a child, led me to think that this must be a secret only women share. (That is, of course, not the case. Men in Indonesia drink jamu all the time too.) Friday mornings were my mum’s day of choice for us to ingest that bitter concoction, a combination of what, to my ignorant self, was just a bunch of brown roots and leaves made by my grand aunt, Neh Ngah, the medicine woman in the family.

Digging deeper into the lives of the Orang Asli women in the forests of Kelantan, I discovered that one of the women who knew so much about healing herbs had been a midwife. She said a midwife must know plant medicine. “How else will the new mother get strong and breastfeed?” she asked. She also said she no longer delivered babies. She said the younger women were embarrassed. They had no more need for the old ways.

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“Beranak di hospital lagi baik,” these women were told, so they obediently had their babies delivered by doctors. She couldn’t pass on her plant medicine knowledge to the younger women. They were not interested. Her deep sadness and sense of loss was palpable. Sitting with her in that forest far from the world of hospitals, I thought of how ironic it is that in the west having a doula and home births are increasingly becoming a big—and lucrativer—practice.

I cast my mind back to my mum’s own childbirth experience. Even though KK Hospital was already in existence, my mum chose to give birth to all four of us at home, supported by a much sought after midwife back in the day,— in the same house that I still live in today with my own daughters. Every day, I am deeply conscious that the body of the house is literally in my body, and along with it, the energetic imprint of everyone who has ever lived in this house.

You see, my grandfather was a diamond merchant who expanded his trade from South Kalimantan in Borneo, where my people, the Banjar, came from. He made his base in a shophouse in the Kampong Gelam neighbourhood. My dad was born in this house. Naturally, he too, became a diamond merchant. When your father tells you to jump, you don’t ask, Why? You ask, How high?
With the pandemic, my forays into the Malaysian forests and my volcano-climbing days have ground to a halt. Even when I can travel again, I wonder if the women I had known, and from whom I learnt so much, would still be there. I wonder too about women and their ancient beliefs, the wisdom that they hold in their bodies, and what we gain—or lose—when we ask, or fail to ask.

Yesterday I made jamu again—the last time I made it was a year ago. For me, making jamu is not something I ‘do’—I wait for that call. It was only after handing a glass of my freshly made jamu to my daughter Azura this morning (yes, that same glass) that I was inspired to write this piece. I had procrastinated for days, resisting going down the path that I knew I would need to go.

A few years back, on a visit to Jakarta, I chanced upon what is now becoming a rare sight, especially in the bustling cityscape. There, crouching behind an old post box, was an ibu jamu gendong, the itinerant jamu seller, her homemade bottled herbal concoctions neatly packed in a huge basket which she carried behind her back. Hastily making my way to her before she got on her feet again, and in exchange for a few rupiah, I drank that heady mixture of turmeric, ginger, and other magical earthy ingredients. For a few precious minutes we had a chat—me, asking her how long she had been selling jamu, and she, whether I had kids.

I asked why I don’t see jamu sellers like her these days. She said, “Semua sudah moderen (modern) Bu.” In her eyes I recognised the same sadness, the same sense of loss I had seen before, in another woman, somewhere else. Getting up to pack her now-empty bottles neatly in her basket and expertly tying a sarong to secure it to her body, she said, “Udah habis. Mau pulang. Ingat, minum jamu!” I promised her I would remember my daily dose.

Her back, ramrod straight, and head held high from years of carrying that heavy basket on her back, she gracefully walked away, past groups of young people all engrossed with their phones, taking selfies, completely oblivious to her serene presence.

As she silently disappeared into the crowds and from view, I wondered if I would ever see the sight of an ibu jamu gendong again. I said a quiet prayer of thanks for that brief holy encounter.

The women in my family loved their diamonds. Family heirlooms would have been in full display at the numerous weddings and family gatherings. I was hardly ever there. I was too busy in the rivers and volcanoes, where my ‘other’ ancestors were. I wasn’t too keen on diamonds either. What use were they when I already had a gem-studded night sky in my million star hotel?

Last December my mum passed away. She was 85. Some time ago, my mum gave me that small glass which I used to drink jamu from all those years ago. I had told her that I now make my own jamu and that her granddaughters—my daughters—enjoy it too. My mum often said that when you drink jamu, the good effects are felt for years. She would know. In all of her 85 years she had hardly ever been ill.

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At 61, and for the last twenty-one years raising my daughters as a single mum after a divorce, doing what I can to, in the words of Clarissa Pinkola Estes, “gather my bones”, much of life is still a great mystery to me. Yet, this much I know. In handing that glass of jamu to Azura, I am connecting to all the women I have known in my life, and the millions who came before, many who, like the Orang Asli midwife and the Indonesian ibu jamu gendong, were forced to disappear. I am honouring their ancient wisdom in the art of walking lightly on earth and in weaving the web of life.

All that is left for me to do is to say Thank You. And Breathe.
Confidence

I grew up in a big family—I’m the sixth of nine siblings, and we weren’t of the best means, so we all had to pitch in from a young age. I did factory work as a teenager, all the while dreaming of my true passion—fashion. It was the Eighties, and both hairstyles and my ambitions were getting bigger. So when an opportunity to take up a hairdressing course came up, I seized it. Eventually, I became a successful hairstylist, makeup artist, participated in beauty pageants and served as a judge at such events too. I love transforming my customers. Seeing their boost of confidence and satisfaction is all the motivation I need.

After marrying my childhood sweetheart, I became a housewife and a mother. Despite the whirlwind of having two boisterous young boys, I managed to learn dancing and singing between the cooking, cleaning, and all else. I even conduct workshops on dancing, makeup and catwalking. Every Sunday my husband and I visit my parents with home cooked meals. On the way there and back, we always catch–up on our lives and talk about everything under the sun. I love these intimate moments with my husband. It brings us closer despite our busy schedules. Now that my sons are grown up, I have more time to learn new things off of YouTube, such as Chinese traditional dance. I can practice anywhere, even while waiting for fish to fry! Other than my love for dressing up everyday, I also participate in Cosplay as characters like Queen Hippolyta or Komagata Yumi.

I seek breakthroughs. I want to dress up as characters I’ve never tried before, such as a playful goblin, a snake goddess, or a mythical woman. Fantasy dressup makes me beautiful and lets me play different roles.
When I have a breakthrough, I am able to express myself, which in turn makes me confident and brings me joy. Just like dance, it is intimacy with myself. Practicing 360-degree turns while holding on to billowing fans in both hands makes me feel like a goddess flying in the sky, and hopefully, looks like it too. The flowing movements help soothe my frustration—all these give me much needed release.

When we are young, we possess natural beauty. But this beauty is one that fades, and I know mine is slipping away. As a woman, if I don’t take the chance to dress up now, I might not have the opportunity in my next reincarnation. I would like my weight to stay low. Recently, I’ve aged a lot. Dressing up well helps hide my flaws and gives me confidence. There’s a lot that dressing up can cover, but we must remember that appearances are merely an outward expression of our relationship with society. It is our character that matters.

Although it might be hard to tell, I am an honest, family-oriented woman. Women should seize the chance to play the role of wife and mother. Once married, we must have the strength and patience to cook, clean and nurture our household. This has been our important task for millenia. I believe I have to bear everything, overcome all challenges, and keep my beautiful family going.

When I grow older I will probably retire from all this and live a quiet life, looking back on a life’s worth of accomplishments. No one notices the elderly very much. I would not say very much, because young people are impatient. I would use my elegant body language and a kind smile to communicate with them about their ideas. I would be an even kinder, more jovial lady. I would play other roles—perhaps a wise, refined character such as Guan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy. For now, though, it’s time to dress up and enjoy life!
I had never gone hiking before, and never thought that I could enjoy walking 5 km in our tropical, hot climate. A girlfriend introduced me to my first 4-5 km walk with YMCA and I actually found it enjoyable and relaxing. After that, I joined a regular hiking group, where someone suggested walking with a common purpose: to take on the Camino walk. It starts in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in France, and ends in Santiago de Compostela in Spain. I decided to take up the challenge of this 800km walk and started hiking and training with the group. The Camino experience had begun.

During training walks, I choose to stay in the middle of the pack, not to lead and wear myself out too fast, nor be too slow and hold back the group. Staying in the middle, I walk at my own comfortable pace doing deep breathing exercises as I enjoy the sounds of nature, see interesting plants and animals, and take the time to smell the greens of the forest.

A typical hiking day usually begins at 6.30am when I leave home and take the MRT to the meeting point. Usually 20-30km, the hike might be in Clementi or Dover forest, the Rail or Green Corridor, the reservoirs, on our Park Connector Networks, or a mix of different terrains.

We set out in our groups at 6.30am. I love the morning coolness, crisp clean air and the quietness that has a calming effect on me. No sound of rushing traffic nor carbon emissions. And if we are lucky we may get to capture the morning mist and snap a picturesque Clementi forest for keepsake or to show off to friends.

I love the enchanting changing colors of the sky as daylight breaks, and the touch of wet dewy leaves, so cool I feel it awakens my senses. A forest walk is a treat to my five senses: the smell of the luscious greens and flowers, the touch of tree trunks, hearing the running stream, tasting the fruits of our native plants like buah cheri, seeing our rare native creatures like the Colugo, and so much more.

Deeper into the forest, there are new challenges of navigating slippery, muddy tracks, hidden obstacles, and wild animals. Every step is carefully calculated and thought out, to prevent falling or injuring oneself. All the talking stops and I feel a serene quietness except for the squishing of the grass and my own heartbeat. I feel so close and deep in nature, it's hard to express. And when I walk out into a clearing, I am taken by the awesomeness of nature that I fully understand conservation efforts and feel a sense of duty to protect our natural habitats too.
In between nature hikes, there are long distance endurance walks, such as the coast to coast overnight walk of 35 km, which I have completed that three times. There is also a 100km walk over two days with a rest day in between. I completed 40km on day one and 50km on day two. On day 2, accomplishing 50km was an exhilarating experience, a test of endurance.

It is daunting when the heat of the day wears you down after 25-30km. No more chatting; my mind goes blank and I just go on. Muscle memory on auto mode, my legs keep moving one step after another and I stop checking the distance covered. Not bothered if my friends are in front or behind me, hunger comes and I want to head as fast as possible to the dinner stop, telling myself not to give up. Finally dinner break, and that was the 40km mark. Feeling better after dinner, I assured myself that another 10 km would be easy peasy. With my body battery all charged up, the last 10 km was so much fun, because my mindset was that I would be reaching the finishing point soon, plus the bonus of night walk is cool weather. “Eureka!” I cried when my smart watch recorded passing the 50km mark.

Hiking is more than keeping myself fit. I feel well rejuvenated after a hike and a freedom that I have not experienced after my marriage and the arrival of children. It is a new connection of intimacy with self and nature. As a new set of accomplishments, it’s so rewarding for the mind and soul. I have found a new beginning in life, and I feel stronger, younger and more confident than before.
I do like forethought. I like it that I am anticipated. The sign - the laundry on the line. He launders his sheets on a Tuesday a day before we meet. Nobody knows this about him, but me. Although a curious neighbour might very well notice the routine. Unusual until of late. 400 thread count, white Egyptian cotton percale, one thread up, one thread down, flapping in the morning sun in the middle of the week.

I smile. I always smile from somewhere deep at the sight of this and at the faint scent of washing detergent still hanging in the air. This morning there is the bonus of chlorophyll from the whirring blades of contract gardeners in the neighbourhood. He looks faintly apologetic for their intrusion.

We do not speak. He lets me in. Lets me sit. I watch him go back out, take down/take in the sheets. He does this adroitly, his beautiful arms gathering the gently billowing fabric to him. I hear him flap the sheets. I get up, slowly walk into the room. He stands facing me. The bed is expertly made, the sheets pulled taut, the corners neatly turned. I smile at this. I always smile from somewhere deep at this.

We fall in it. His breath briefly on my face.

And then, there is that business of getting out of one’s clothes.

When it dawned on me for the very first time several decades ago that this requires one to get out of all of one’s clothes, and then, to get back in, after, I was mortified.

The tee-shirt does not slip off on demand. It bunches up at the armpits and gets caught over my head. I feel him on the other side of the shirt, his mouth hovering and then is down the midline between my breasts. I lie back, the sheets so recently sun-kissed, now on my back. He takes his time.
I drift. I drift to a time in the sea off a coast somewhere, where (?) where the water laps the shore and pulls away from between your legs. I lie there summoning the Greek god, Zeus. And suddenly I am in the Guillermo del Toro film, The Shape of Water, where the bathwater overruns, spills from rooms, runs downstairs, seeps from seams of the building. He turns me over and on to my side, sliding between my legs. Hot. Blind. Buttery. I turn over on my back straining, willing him to come inside. He makes short stabbing motions at the opening. What is he thinking?? I bite on my lip, arched my back, open my legs wider, how does one communicate this? I reach for him with my hand, so here’s where the work begins.

I keep the strokes long, languorous. If that’s how he wants to play, we have time. I take him with the rise and ebb of my breath, my tongue on his pulse, my teeth on the thin folds of skin, my heart on his vitals - weight, temperature, curvature, tumescence. And then I bring him home.

I gasp. He gasps. Move. It is the first word I say. Move, please. I turn my face, press an ear into the sheets listen to him moving. In, out, slap, out. The vagina is not a hole in the ground, I think to tell him. And then I lose myself to the squelching in my ear. In my nose, notes of ammonia, bleach and musk and the dewy florals of recently laundered sheets.

Afterwards he tells me it hurts where my tooth is chipped.

Writer’s note: Sex is a lot of work. Sometimes it is pleasurable work. Sometimes it is not. For me, its pleasure quotient depends on, among other things, place, timing, chemistry and intimacy. It is an extreme sport. The first time I read a piece of so-called elderly erotica was Salty’s in The Grandma Reporter. I laughed. Not because it was anywhere near laughable but because the sex in it struck me as so much work. And so correct and polite as to be clinical. So, this piece is my response to the challenge. I have a friend who advises her partner, If you want me to be responsive to you in bed at night, you have to start wooing me in the morning. Whatever is your pleasure, enjoy!
Waving Goodbye

Taking time to say goodbye is a lingering, intimate gift to a someone dear after taking the time to be together. It is like a small, sweet dessert that ends a happy meal, till the next meetup. I often find goodbyes too fast, where people just hightail into their home or destination without waiting for the other to leave the premises...no waving, no inaudible laughing, no bowing, no “I call you” hand gesture to one’s ear. If I’m dropping off my friend, I always wait until they enter their doorway. If I’m being dropped off, I wait until I see the taillights of the car/taxi or the pulling away of the bus or subway where my friend is. I like to walk all my guests to the elevator, say nice things, and wave all the while the elevator doors are closing, until our line of sight is no more but sometimes our laughs can still be heard. It can be a comical scene if both of us practise this, where we’re seen frantically shooing each other to leave first. Waving goodbye is a distanced, intimate dance that leaves both of us smiling, long after we lose sight of each other.
Anne Lee, 74, is a retired teacher who lives with her children and grandchildren. Her hobbies include cooking, mahjong and gardening. She volunteers with the Appropriate Adult Scheme for Young Suspects (AAYS) at the Singapore Children’s Society.

An avid performer, Anne has taken part in black box performances with Theatre for Seniors (The Necessary Stage), in the stage play “From the Belly of the Carp”, a flamenco dance performance for Silver Arts Festival 2019, “Prank It” with Mediacorp, and TV series “She’s a Terrorist and I Love Her”.

Ajuntha Anwari is Medicine Woman Asia, a platform she created 11 years ago to showcase the healing plants of South Asia. A yoga practitioner and advocate for women’s empowerment, she has over 40 years of experience in horticulture, health and wellness. She is well versed in the indigenous healing traditions of Jamu and Ayurveda and is a strong proponent of living foods. Ajuntha has been coaching individuals, teaching at workshops and speaking at corporate events on the power and health benefits of natural remedies and food as medicine.

Choo Ai Keow, 81, has three children and two grandchildren. With performing, she is finally living the dream she had in her youth. In 2005, she performed for the first time, with DramaBox. She has been part of Glowers (2008–now) and The Necessary Stage’s Theatre for Seniors (2008–11).

Ai Keow has performed in many stage plays, films, and advertisements. In 2013 and 2015, she won best actor/actress awards for her roles in short films. She also enjoys tending to her many plants.

Dana Lam is a visual artist and writer, and an Associate Artist with Checkpoint Theatre. She most recently wrote and performed in “Still Life”, a monologue developed with Claire Wong of Checkpoint Theatre that incorporated a year of painting as process. Dana has performed in Jerome Bel’s “Gala” (TheatreWorks, 2016), Joavien Ng’s “Incarnation of the Beast” (TheatreWorks, 2015) and “Dream Country - a Lost Monologue” (Singapore Arts Festival, 2012). Her writing credits include the book, “Days of Being Wild: GE2006 Walking the Line with the Opposition” (Ethos Books, 2006). Her visual art has been shown in the Singapore Art Museum and the Substation Gallery. Her 500-piece installation work, “When Bellies Speak: You are your own work of art” was held at Hong Lim Park on 8 March 2015.

Outside of performance, Dana has worked as a newspaper reporter and volunteered with AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research), serving as its President from 2000-2002 and again, from 2009–2011. She is currently working on a comic form artist book with Checkpoint Theatre.

Elsie Tan struggles with the idea of a biography. She is in a state of wanting to strip off everything that has given her a sense of who she is. Her degrees, her work with children with special needs and teenagers on probation all seem far away and belonging to someone else. Even further away is the journalist who once believed she would change the world with her words.

Elsie considers herself ‘bare naked’ now and ponders when people want to know, “Who are you?”

Evelyn Fernandez, 64, is Catholic Eurasian. At 19, she left Singapore for a brief stint as an au pair (nanny) in Germany. She ended up staying for forty years, during which she married a German man, had two sons and became a single mum after 10 years of marriage. Evelyn then returned to Singapore and became legal guardian to her infant grandniece, who is now 12. Her sons and ward are her everything. Having lived in two different worlds, she has built more intimacy with Germany.

Evelyn’s hobbies are reading, listening to classical music, and going to the theatre especially to watch ballet.
Faizah Jamal served as a Nominated Member of Parliament from 2012 to 2014, and as a veteran nature advocate and environment educator, she focussed on weaving her environmental platform into every national issue, from education to health, from the economy to national development. Faizah considers voting against the government’s contentious Population White Paper in 2013, on environmental grounds, as her most memorable Parliamentary experience. Formerly a corporate lawyer, Faizah is a pioneer in the field of Breathwork, a healing modality for mental and emotional health.

Faizah is one of the first few in Singapore to be a Certified Breathwork Facilitator in 2003. She continues to offer this work today.

Koh Lian Hiok, 78, is a retiree who believes in now living the many dreams she had in her younger days. She spends her time training hard in ballet, violin, guzheng, singing and more. She has been dancing for years with a troupe currently based at Cairnhill CC, and has performed at many events, including the National Arts Council’s Silver Arts Festival, at old folks’ homes.

Lian Hock received the President’s Volunteerism & Philanthropy Award in 2015.

Li Li Chung has been retired from corporate life for ten years and returned to graduate school in London to study art history and contemporary art theory. She is the founder of Exactly Foundation, which commissions photography projects to visualize and dialog Singapore’s social and political issues. She advocates change from within and self-motivation to be curious, be informed and to patiently change oneself and then society.

Li Li loves eating together in small groups, always ensuring that happy food binds and encourages.

Patricia Lim, 60, has been a hairstylist and makeup artist/consultant for over 40 years, working with regional public figures and celebrities. She frequently imparts her skills, starting as a teacher at the famous Princess School in the 80s. She has also been a judge for numerous pageants including Miss International, Little Top Supermodel, and Teen Singapore. In 2015, she was given the Our Lady of Excellence award.

Patricia has two lovely sons and her passions and hobbies include singing, dancing, cooking, and selfies. She also loves Cosplaying with youths, and performs Yumi and Hippolyta with martial arts moves.

Pushpa Melvani was born in Hyderabad and is proud to be Sindhi. She was educated in Delhi, where she received training in handicraft, sewing, and embroidery. After graduating at 19, she married a businessman and moved to Singapore in 1958. She has two children and five grandchildren. Pushpa has had the good fortune of learning from various Masters on how to live a harmonious life. Hosting brings her immense joy. She enjoys creating new dishes for family and friends, as well as gifting them handmade cards and bookmarks made from recycled materials.

Pushpa loves to step out in style, and that’s earned her the title of Sophia Loren of Geylang Bahru.
Salty Xi Jie Ng co-creates semi-fictional paradigms for the real and imagined lives of humans within the poetics of the intimate vernacular. Her practice manifests with humour, care, subversion, discomfort, a celebration of the eccentric, and a commitment to the deeply personal. With a longstanding interest in the gerontological universe, she founded The Grandma Reporter, a collaborative publication on senior women’s culture around the earth. She has made a feature film on busking, co-created the world’s first prison variety show, ran an alternative economy art space in a Singaporean mall, and facilitated the Senior Women’s Erotica Club.

Xi Jie was recently artist-in-residence or artist fellow at the Singapore Art Museum, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park, and Buangkok Square. Her work has been supported by diverse platforms from Singapore Art Week and Elsewhere Museum to King School Museum of Contemporary Art and Singapore International Film Festival. She is currently the editor of Conversations On Everything / Social Forms of Art Journal, a Portland OR publication.

Saudah Marwan, 66, retired four years ago after a fulfilling and meaningful teaching career for 38 years. Though she loved teaching, she had very little time for herself then. With much research and planning, she is determined to have an enjoyable and enriching retirement focusing on herself and the community around her. Currently, Saudah’s priority is keeping herself physically and mentally healthy. She believes with good health she can better enjoy her retirement journey. Gardening works wonders for her as it gives her a connection to nature besides allowing her to transform spaces, waste material and many other things to good use.

Shirley Low worked in financial services in regional and global roles, but is rediscovering a life without deadlines. She is pursuing her interests in art, dance, music and wine and has also returned to writing and editing, having started her career in business journalism. She is a Board Director with the Singapore National Paralympic Council as well as Honorary Treasurer with Animal Concerns Research and Education Society Singapore (ACRES).

Shirley has particular interest in diversity in the workplace and gender equality, and was a mentor in the Financial Women’s Association.

Yvonne Teo was a pre-school educator during her children’s growing up years. She decided on a mid-life career switch to pursue her passion for food and went back to school at Sunrice Global Chef Academy to get her Diploma in Bakery and Pastry Arts. After interning at TWG Tea production kitchen, she worked in F&B in Singapore and later as a pastry chef in Bangkok.

Now retired, Yvonne enjoys hiking, which she picked up in July 2018. She’s completely hooked onto the sport having completed unprecedented hikes of 30-50km. Hiking calms her mind and body while privileging her to the sights and sounds of nature. She has learnt to navigate muddy, slippery dirt, hidden obstacles and wild animals crossing her path. Yvonne hopes to continue this form of exercise as long as she can.

Zubee Ali is a consultant in the NGO sector specialising in social issues faced by women and older persons who have been marginalised through economic or social barriers. As a learning and development professional, she has worked with the leading women’s organisations for the past ten years on community building programmes.

Zubee earned her Master’s degree in Arts and Cultural Management in 2017, and would like to bring the community together more through socially engaged art. Her biggest pride and joy to date is being grandmother to a precocious two year old girl.
THE GRANDMA REPORTER is a collaborative publication about senior women's culture across the Earth. We are a space for intimate exchange about: style, isolation, and adventure; aging bodies, wrinkles, bunions, caregiving, and death; considering the struggles of growing old in a young, technology-focused world; swimming as a magical way to keep fit in spite of on-land mobility challenges; food, genes, and other things passed through generations; lost loves, longings, and sex that evolves with age. Presenting perspectives that are tender, poignant, moving and humorous, we are energetically connecting our contributors, collaborators, and readers in a senior women's culture movement.

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