

A special collaboration:  
The Birthday Collective x Singapore HeritageFest

## Travel & Tourism Heritage

*Where are you local?*



Edited by  
The Birthday Collective







# THE BIRTHDAY COLLECTIVE

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The Birthday Collective aims to be a “Brain, Heart and Hand Trust” for Singapore as it deals with an increasingly unpredictable and complex external environment, and increasingly acute domestic constraints. Both the external and internal challenges pose risks but also opportunities, if we remain optimistic and creative in our approaches.

As a Trust, the collective focuses on the gifts it can offer to future generations. Unlike usual brain trusts, which tend to be mostly about talk, The Birthday Collective’s focus on the Heart and Hand emphasises that ideas are important but not enough; they need to be acted on to create a sense of national drive and belonging even as individual aspirations are nurtured and lived out.

# FOREWORD

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As the Singapore HeritageFest (SHF) approaches its 19th birthday this year, the festival has been mostly a digital affair, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year, we are excited to bring back more physical programmes which ties in well with our festival themes of *nature* and *travel*, which are, without a doubt, best experienced in-person.

SHF 2022's celebration of Singapore's travel history and natural heritage is fitting as this year marks a number of national milestones: the 75th anniversary of Singapore Airlines, 50th anniversary of Sentosa Development Corporation, 50th birthday of the Merlion statue and 10th anniversary of Gardens by the Bay. As with previous editions, the 19th edition of the festival delves into the stories of everyday Singaporeans, and spotlights lesser-known aspects of heritage such as institutional history, social memories built up over the decades, and our intangible cultural heritage.

Through creative interpretations of our festival themes, many of which were conceptualised together with the community, we hope to bring heritage alive, allowing festival-goers – like you – to uncover our nation's history in refreshing ways. It is also my hope that our programmes can help to seed conversation starters to set people thinking about issues beyond Singapore's

history and heritage – on how looking back on our past, can inform how we can live better in the future.

**David Chew**

Festival Director

Singapore HeritageFest (SHF) 2022

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**EMILY NG: GROWING UP ON THE ROAD**  
**(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2018)**

My journey started when I was two and a half years old when we moved to Canberra in Australia. My little sister was only 6 months old. We mainly stayed in Canberra, but we also went for trips in other parts of Australia. Well, back to when we were in Canberra we went to a spring festival called Floriade that was held in spring every year. There was also a hot air balloon festival. I also joined 2 ballet schools which I enjoyed. One of our trips was to Tasmania. There I saw a Tasmanian devil and ate raw oysters. We also went to Sydney. There was a huge amusement park called Luna Park. Sometime after we moved in, before the other trips we went on a campervan trip to Darwin from Adelaide which went on for 2 weeks. During that 2 week we went to an underground cave church. We also slept in a cave one night. We also saw a crashed "UF O"! After we lived in Australia for 3 and a half years we moved to PNG (Papua New Guinea). Like in Australia we stayed in the capital (Port Moresby) but we did go for trips in other parts of PNG. One of the

places were, Rabaul. In Rabaul we played with the children whose parents ran the dive shop in the resort. One of them took me on a small canoe ride and we all picked up and played with the sea slugs and sea snails. We also walked up a live volcano called

mount Tavuvuvu and had a wild experience swimming with dolphins. We also went to tufi (toofee) there we went snorkeling and saw beautiful coral at the edge of the reef. Back to port moresby every year we celebrate its independence

day in school. We would dress up and perform a dance from our teacher's area. We had many different friends from different places

both nationally and internationally. Some of their names were Lua, Vida and Shiwa - three sisters. Some times I went to Koitaki with my friends and family. Koitaki was a country

club. We also went to a park called nature park there we once saw the rare bird of paradise. Now we just moved to South Korea its summers are very hot and its

winters are very cold. I'm very excited to live here so I can now see the stars and constellations in the northern hemisphere.

## **JACOB AGUSTIN: THE ROADS WE TAKE (BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2018)**

One fine day, my parents decided to go to Singapore to work. My father went first. After months of waiting, my dad came back to take my mother and I finally to Singapore. We packed our things and went to the bus terminal. We then took a bus that will bring us to Manila. It was a ten-hour trip. We finally reached Manila and took a car to the airport. We entered the airport, were given our tickets and went to the waiting area for the plane.

Finally, we were able to board the plane. The plane started moving and soon, we were flying. My father whispered to me, "We are going to Singapore, Jacob." After a one hour and thirty minute trip, we finally reached Changi Airport and I was amazed at how the airport looked. It was so different from Philippines. I was on cloud nine.

As I grew older, my parents decided that I should study here. So I did. When I reached primary one, my parents enrolled me for Taekwondo and it was fun. I went for competitions and board breaking workshops. One of my Taekwondo classmates called me "Brown Face Boy" when he forgot what my name was.

After my gained my junior black belt when I was in primary food and took a break from Taekwondo to focus on playing basketball. I took part in basketball matches with my team. We almost made it to the second round but lost the game.

I like that Singapore is a harmonious place and consider Singapore my home.



**OSCAR SWINDELL: WHERE I COME FROM, WHERE I AM  
GOING TO  
(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2018)**

I grew up in Singapore but I am what people call an expat child. My dad was born in England but spent the first eight years of his life in America, then moving to New Zealand for a brief period before moving to Singapore when his parents relocated here. My mom is from across the causeway, Malaysia. She moved to Singapore when she was 21.

I attend an international school and mostly, to me, we are all the same. I feel no different to my friends. I feel that I am similar to other kids my age that live in Singapore. In my opinion we are all the same but we have many unique ways to showing ourselves.

I am lucky to be an expat child because I have different cultures and I can explore: Singapore, New Zealander and Malaysian. Maybe if I retire I can live in New Zealand or I need to save money and find a good job or I can stay in Malaysia or if I am doing business I will live here in Singapore.

But sometimes I feel like I don't know what country I am really from, maybe I will figure it out when I am older. The roads we take will lead us to our destination but whether that is where we actually want to end up only time will tell.

**LARA MANCHHARAM: THE ROADS IN INDIA AND  
SINGAPORE MAKE ME WHO I AM  
(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2018)**



Hi! I am Lara and I am from Singapore and India. Singapore is such a lucky country. The roads are so so smooth, sometimes a bit bumpy. While she saw shop houses, malls, banks, people walking, building. The people are very nice in Singapore. All the buildings, malls, shophouses, banks – they are all NEW and very pretty and clean. Mostly it is very sunny! Lara feels very fortunate and safe. Fortunate because Singapore is so clean and not dirty. Safe, because there is lots of good people.

Lara also comes from India. It is different from Singapore. India's roads have some trash and poor people. The road is bumpy and smelly. It is also very nice because India has very old history. One place that is very old is the Taj Mahal.

The roads in India and Singapore make me who I am. Singapore takes me to India and India takes me to Singapore. No matter what your path is, just be yourself no matter where you are from, no matter what you think, no matter who you are, no matter what we believe in.

I am happy my path led me to Singapore.

## **LUKE MARKUS THESEIRA: GRANDNAN'S MINCED MEAT (BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2018)**

I love eating minced meat with rice, Grandnan knew.

My Grandnan (a.k.a. Great Grandmother) lived in Perth. Whenever I visited her, she would cook minced meat for me. Minced meat originated from her. Three generations had eaten it as their staple food, so I've heard from Daddy.

Grandnan became ill after a fall. She did not get any better. I heard everyone saying she may leave anytime. I heard but I did not know what it meant. I was shocked when mummy told me that Grandnan passed away, died. She left when she was 95 years old.

We attended her funeral held in Perth. It was my first and I didn't know what to expect. I did not see Grandnan. I only saw a white coffin. Mummy told me Grandnan was inside. I saw everyone crying at Grandnan's coffin left in a hearse, my eyes were wet too, but I am not sure why. Mummy said we will see Grandnan no more. I understood as I will never taste Grandnan's minced meat again. Hers tasted the best. But I knew I would want to say hello to Grandnan at her grave where she lies beside my Grandpapa (a.k.a. Great Grandfather) whom I've never met, whenever I visit Perth.

*I will miss you Grandnan. I will miss your minced meat too.*

*Love, Luke*

**ZOYA MENON GUPTA: SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY IN  
INDIA  
(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2019)**

I am 12 years old and I have been living in Singapore for the past 10 years. Before moving to Singapore, I lived in Dubai and that was where I was born. My parents have been living out of India for the past 15 years.

Over the years I have shifted schools, from preschool to junior school, to now in middle school. I have made lots of friends over the years, Singaporean and friends from overseas. Most of my Singaporean friends were introduced to me at my badminton camps and my badminton training. I absolutely enjoy talking and spending time with them and having lots of fun as in a lot of ways we are different yet similar. I have been on service trips from school and I have made friends from all over the world there as well.

My roots are in India and my grandparents and close family continue to live there. I go back very often as India and Singapore are quite close to each other. I spend most of my holidays at my grandparent's home. These are usually long trips where I spend my entire summer or winter breaks. I get dropped off by my parents and get to spend all my time with my family back in India. It is usually the most fun time of the year for me. Going to my grandparent's home means spending time with them, meeting my cousin, playing football in the garden, playing badminton on the road, eating yummy food, watching TV till late night and just having fun.

My paternal grandparents live in the North of India. Their house has a big, beautiful garden and my favourite past time activity when I am there is to play hide and seek around their huge house and play badminton in their garden. I spend a lot of my summer here in my grandparents' home. Both my grandparents' home are two hours away by flight. At my maternal grandparent's home, we have our family spots like our favourite restaurants, going out to buy our favourite milkshakes, catching up with old friends and more.

For me, both Singapore and India equally feel like home. As much as I enjoy being here and being around my friends, school, badminton camps, etc. I look forward to visiting my grandparents every holiday and having loads of fun.

**FRANCHESCA MINETTE N. ORDONEZ: MY MOTHER, YOUR  
HELPER  
(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2019)**

The first time I took an aeroplane was when I came to visit my mother. I was 12 years old. I was so scared but was also happy. When we got in the air, I was amazed to see the different views. It was exciting to see the many lights as I landed in Singapore. I had last seen my mother two years before.

You see, she works in Singapore as a maid. Some times you call them, foreign domestic helpers. I had a good time in Singapore. I got to meet the family my mother works for and hang out with them. I got to check out all the famous Singapore attractions. Singapore is very different from my home in Philippines; Singapore is clean, safe and actually cooler than back home.

After four years, I got to come back to Singapore. This is my second trip overseas. I am 16 now and I got to discover even more of Singapore. I love chicken rice! It's so yummy! I really like The Gardens By The Bay, The Merlion and Universal Studio. I also visited other places I missed out on the last time like The Jewel and the three zoos. I am amazed at this country. I did not expect to be able to come back. I met many new friends, they are kind and it makes me happy to know them. Most of all, I am glad to be able to visit my mother.

Her employers invited me to come as a treat for graduating and having done well in school. Everyday, my mother has chores to do and I try and help her out. The family has a toddler and I like

to babysit him. He's cute. Sometimes, I swim in the pool and watch TV – There are so many cool channels here!

It is difficult to be far away from my mother. When I am back home, and she is in Singapore, I am sad. It is hard to have my mother be so far away from me, for so long. But I understand that this cannot be helped. It is especially hard when I see that my friends get to see their mothers everyday; it makes me miss her very much. Luckily, I get to video call her almost everyday.

She is a single mother and I really appreciate what she does for me. She is fighting for me even though it's hard. This coming school year, I must study very hard to do well. I hope to run my own business next time and do well enough that I can help my mother. I want to repay her for all the sufferings that she has to go through. I will give her a good life and hopefully, she won't have to work so far away from me next time.

I'm happy that her employer invites me and I am determined to do well in senior high school so I can come back to visit again. I am sure, Singapore would have changed and I will have new places to explore. I hope the children in Singapore know how lucky they are to live with their parents.

Many of the helpers that work here leave their families behind to come to Singapore. While I know my mother works with a good family, many Filipino helpers here are not as lucky. Some helpers are treated badly: they don't get off days or get to call home to their families because their employers ban them from using the phone. Some even cheat their salary or give very little food! That makes me sad and angry – please remember that



your helper had to leave her family behind to come take care of yours. I hope you treat your helper well.

## **NEELUFER ZAHRA: ONE GIRL, TWO COUNTRIES (BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2019)**

Hey there, I am Neelufer and I currently live in Malaysia. No, I'm not Malaysian at all even though most of my friends at school assumed I am. However most of them surprised that my sisters and I are still attending school in the East of Singapore.

In December 2017, after I sat for my PSLE, my family and I moved to Johor Bahru due to my mother's business. It was pretty exciting as we move to a condo with a swimming pool and other fun facilities, which we definitely couldn't have afforded in Singapore. In addition to that, the currency difference between the two countries meant that things were definitely cheaper since my parents earn in Singapore dollars.

When the new school year eventually started, I certainly did have a little trouble adapting to the changes at first, but soon got the hang of things. My basic morning routine consists of waking up at around 4:30 and leaving the house at 5:00am so as to get to school on time. That is the fact that everyone is stunned by.

Having lived this lifestyle for 2 years I have definitely become more adaptable to changes because of the drastic change in lifestyle. I also feel that my sisters especially had more responsible as they had to make sure that they have packed everything that they needed for school as there was no way we could possibly get them if anyone forgot something.

Despite the early mornings I still enjoy living in JB because of the very laid back lifestyle at the end of each day.

## **ZOE KWEK KAI-YAN: WHAT CHILDREN NEED (BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2020)**

Every day, the world develops along with us. Every year, it ages with us. We have the choice to fill it up, or break it down and rebuild it into a “better place”, or we can save it. That’s what adults think.

Children, however think differently. To them, the world is an unending swirl of colour and fun, disrupted only by seemingly pointless homework and heavy exam pressure. Adults find it somewhat hard to find the joy in life, while children find joy in almost everything, right from the butterfly flying around outside to the best birthday present ever.

Children live in a fantasy, their imaginations desperately fighting to push against the strong gravitational pull of school, studying, and everyday chores, while adults often stay rooted to the ground, not wishing for more or less, spending a good amount of time going wherever life takes them.

Children open books like they expect the entire fantasy world to jump out at them and play before their eyes, welcoming the adventure and daydream that are most of the time discouraged by adults who prefer they spend that time studying or doing something more productive. That is how the world works. The constant battle raged between child and adult, which can be as fierce and costly as World War II, or as small and unnoticeable as a silent misunderstanding. It remains no matter how many times one apologises.

Now, children are torn away from books and Kindles and forced to spend their lives “planning and working towards the future”. Little do adults know, the more pressure they dump onto their kids’ shoulders, the less likely it will be for them to walk the path towards the future that has been already set for them. Children need time to play. They need time to live. They need time to love. That is what children want. That is what they need. A fantastical world with dragons and castles and magic, constantly filled with excitement and joy and love ♥. THAT is what they need.



## **RAHISH RAUTHER: LIFE FINDS A WAY (BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2020)**

Most of my kindergarten years were spent hidden behind books on wildlife and discussing animal facts with my grandfather. I did enjoy cartoons such as *"Chuggington"* but perhaps not as much as I appreciated watching a documentary featuring a lion stalking its prey in the grasslands of Africa. It was during this time, that I chanced upon the movie *The Lost World – Jurassic Park* and came across an inspiring quote by one of the movie's actors, John Hammond, *"These creatures require our absence to survive, not our help. And if we could only step aside and trust in nature, life will find a way."*

I am not entirely sure why I took to this quote, but coincidentally, it became clear to me this year – 2020. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Singapore government had implemented the Circuit Breaker in April 2020 to reduce interactions in public and private spheres. I did not look forward to the implementation of the Circuit Breaker as it would mean I would have to forgo my fortnightly walks along nature trails around Singapore with my grandfather.

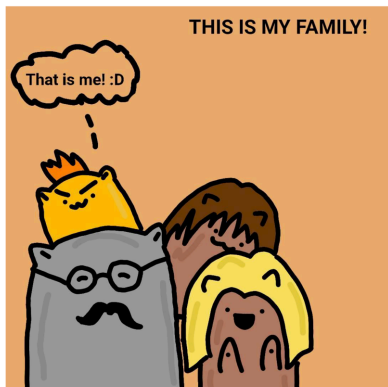
Since June 2017, after my grandparents had gifted me a book by Nick Baker and Kevin Lim titled *Wild Animals of Singapore*, I had made it my mission to spot all the wildlife in Singapore. I embarked on nature trails equipped with a pair of binoculars, my prized *Wild Animals of Singapore* and a pen to check off each animal that I had sighted during the trail. During one of my quests to spot wildlife, I chanced upon an Oriental Whip Snake. When the Circuit Breaker was implemented, I sulked as I

envisioned myself walking around my neighbourhood where sightings of wildlife are quite rare.

Much to my delight, the Circuit Breaker led wildlife to come out of their hiding places and visit the residents of our neighbourhood in Changi. The aeroplanes which once flew through the skies were replaced by egrets which flew in flocks of up to ten. Hornbills made themselves comfortable on the roofs of our neighbour's homes, where they made ear-splitting noises which would wake us up at the crack of dawn. The *Musang*, also known as the Common Palm Civet, made the carpark, its new playground where it left its trademark panda leaf scent. The elusive Sunbeam Snake was also witnessed coiled in an isolated stairway, its scales shimmering in what little light that fell on it. The Asian Toad made surprise appearances and startled pedestrians walking on the sidewalk with its loud cracking.

I discovered that the Circuit Breaker which I initially dreaded, had encouraged numerous positive outcomes. First, I had the opportunity to see wildlife in my own backyard. Second, I was able to appreciate, with a new found clarity, the relevance of the quote I had chanced upon some years ago from *The Lost World – Jurassic Park*, *"These creatures require our absence to survive, not our help. And if we could only step aside and trust in nature, life will find a way."*

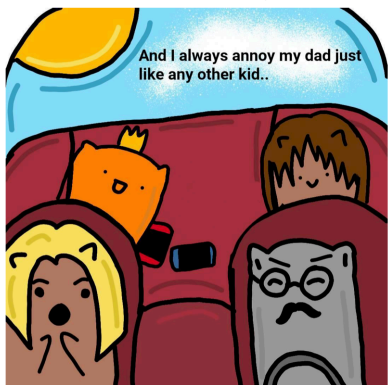
**ULFA IRDINA BINTI MOHD. ZULKARNAEN**  
**(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2021)**



This is my family.



This is our car for our road trips.



We enjoy going on staycations and holidays together!

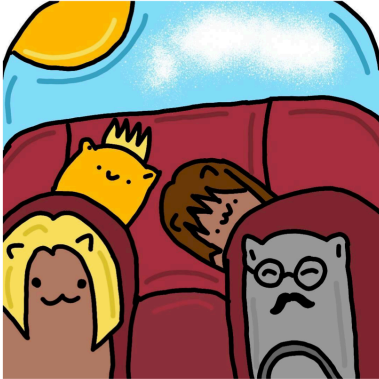


Obsessed!

Which is why I ask him..



But sometimes, just once in a while ...we would get bored



Wait for it...

That is when I would ask him...



ARE WE THERE YET?????

LIM XIN YI

(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2021)



I'm going to imhm  
With a bus to buy food.



**OLIVER TSENG: SAY CHEESE!**  
**(BIRTHDAY BOOK JR 2021)**



Can we go  
on holiday  
now?

-oliver tseng.4





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