

This is a heartwarming, candid and frank biography of one of Singapore's most prominent entrepreneurs and multi-hyphenate, Elim Chew.

In this book, Elim shares her lesser known familial histories, pangs of growing up, days of being wild, and the history and subsequent closure of retail icon 77th Street. In addition, she talks about her love for social enterprise, youth mentorships, recent ventures into F&B, logistics and technology, as well as her latest passion, fishing.

Through the book, we get a deeper understanding of who Elim Chew really is. We get to share in and learn from her community leadership, business experiences and unique perspectives on life. She also provides insight into newly independent Singapore in the 1970s as well as an insider's glimpse into pop culture in the rocking 1980s and 1990s. We also get to know more of Elim's hair-raising past, present motivations and future visions.

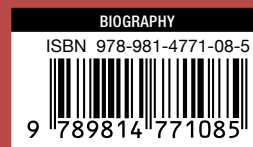
This colourful, visually arresting book is filled with photographs from Elim's multi-faceted career, anecdotes from her life, engaging takeaway lessons, useful entrepreneurial tips and daily inspirations for anyone who wishes to be Driven by Purpose and Destined for Change.

**WHAT A LIFE! WHAT A STORY!
EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ELIM.**

JIM ROGERS, *legendary investor and author*

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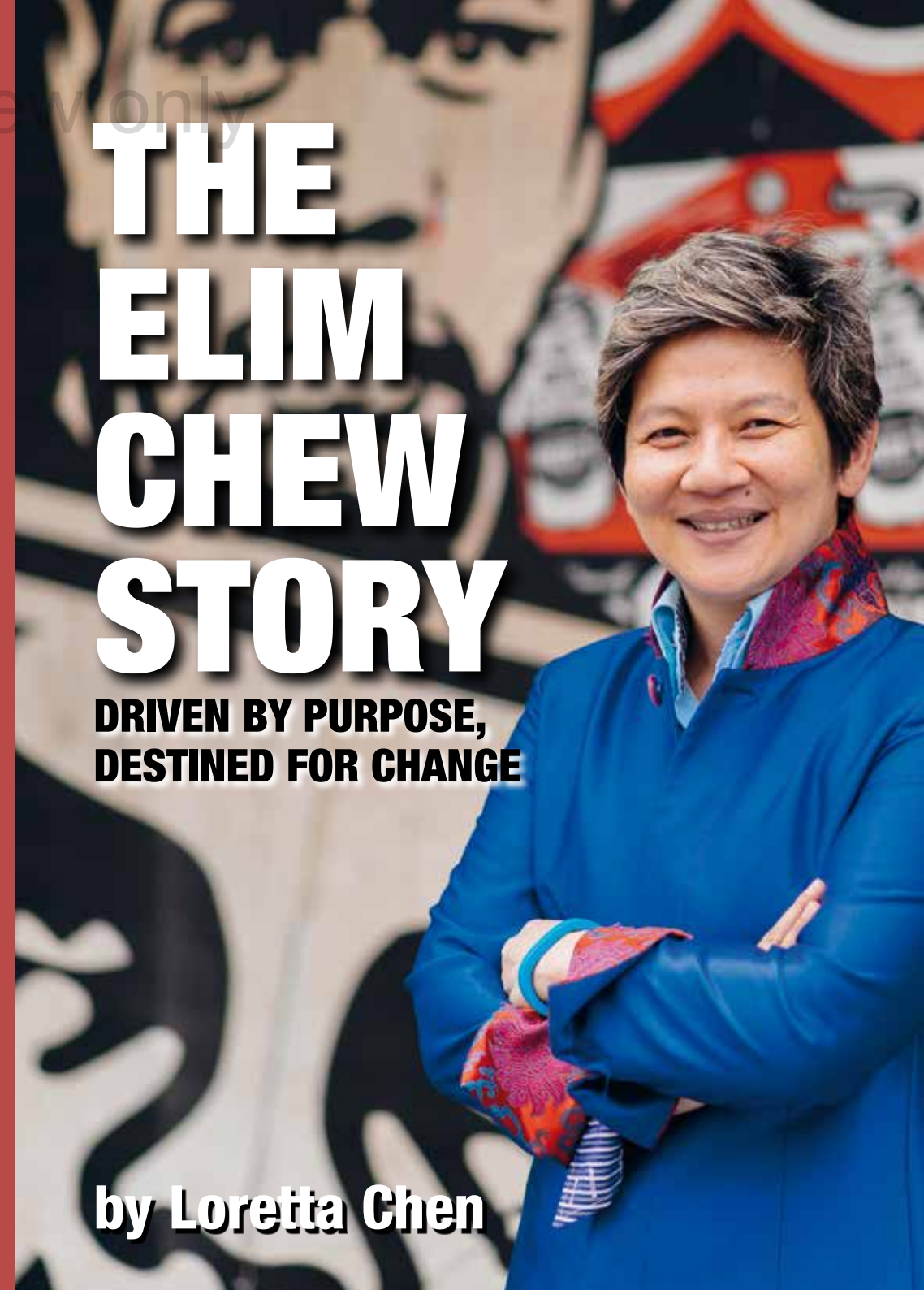
Loretta Chen **THE ELIM CHEW STORY**

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THE ELIM CHEW STORY

**DRIVEN BY PURPOSE,
DESTINED FOR CHANGE**

by **Loretta Chen**



“I consider it one of my greatest blessings in life to have met and been mentored by Elim Chew for over ten years.

She is one dear friend who has challenged me to dream bigger and to never give up. I know her integrity, heart for people, innovative and courageous entrepreneurship will leave a legacy of inspiration for not just this young generation but many to come. She truly has been an encouragement

to me and a rock of inspiration over these years and I know that any book, event, production and innovation by her will be a success and an inspiration to us all. Love you, Elim.”

—Nick Vujicic



“I know *Laoban* Elim from PaTH where I was given the opportunity to showcase and sell my products. *Laoban* is a person of action — her positivity and belief in everything she does has inspired me to do the same. She is always full of energy and warmth, encouraging me with words like ‘Well done!’ and ‘You can do it!’ She has taught me that everything is possible with hard work and commitment. I always bear her words in mind, and even though I am born with cerebral palsy, I know I can be a social entrepreneur and changemaker too. Thank you *Laoban* for everything!”

—Mary Low

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Elim with Jim Rogers, his wife, Paige Parker, and their daughters Happy and Bee.

“It started in our early days in Singapore when a friend invited Elim to join us for dinner. I immediately noticed her complicated mind and her strange name, but many Asian names were strange to me then.

She was extremely sweet and interested in us. We explained we loved Singapore and were hoping to get our daughter, Happy, into the Nanyang Kindergarten and Primary School since we had heard Mdm Heng Boey Hong, the very impressive principal speak. Mdm Heng had not been encouraging when we enthusiastically described our jewel, Happy. We knew we would never leave Singapore if we could figure out how to abide diligently by the strict Singapore rules and find a place.

We talked about various things and Elim’s complexity bowled us over. The stories that come out of this understated, delightful lady are simply amazing. We certainly wanted to know more of her!

Soon, we found Elim introducing us to Mdm Heng at the school even though they had never met. The principal was rightly more interested in Elim than in us. She noted she had watched Elim on TV. She introduced us to Nanyang Kindergarten where we got on the waiting list. Baby Bee was then born in Singapore. Eventually, both our girls attended Nanyang Kindergarten and Primary School. Happy is now excited about being a student at Nanyang Girls’ High School so we are delightedly here for good.

Elim continues to be one of our favourite Singaporeans and we see her frequently. We loved her shops even though I was hesitant about letting my girls shop there when they became teenagers! Fortunately Elim is now into other businesses!

We love knowing her; a high school dropout who became a trustee of NUS, a successful entrepreneur, a bedrock of her church, a sweet person in every way. We are lucky we found her while Singapore and the world are lucky to have her.”

—Jim Rogers

“I first met Elim in 2009. She really is different, even though she is a very successful woman, she is never proud and is like an angel to me. She never stopped sharing her knowledge and experience with the youth.

I am born with cerebral palsy with a speech impairment. To many other people, I may speak and look like an alien and they will not have the patience to listen to me. But Elim is always ready to listen, always ready to show me genuine love, support and care, and this gives me hope.



To me, she is not only my friend but also my role model — always so encouraging and inspiring. I am so grateful to God because He sent me an angel like her. Elim is someone who has a heart of gold and a beautiful soul to all those who know her. Words cannot express my gratitude and it is a blessing to know her personally.”

—Oh Siew May

“I met Elim when I was a freshman in university. She invited me to contribute my story for an inspirational book for youths after finding out that I was a school dropout and youth delinquent for almost 10 years before getting back to fulltime education, graduating as Valedictorian of my polytechnic and getting on the Dean’s List in NUS. Elim saw the impact of how a story like mine, and similar others, would have on thousands of youths struggling for identity and acceptance through our education system.

**The Elim Chew Story:
Driven By Purpose, Destined for Change**

Elim is, beyond a doubt, an inspiration and role model to many including me. She always comes across as genuine and humble even though she has accomplished so much in society and in business. She socializes with everyone and is highly respected. Elim has an indefatigable belief in making a difference to the communities around her regardless of the obstacles before her. And while many individuals write cheques for a good cause, Elim rolls up her sleeves and leans in to effect direct change at the frontlines of social good.

Today, even as a busy corporate professional and a father of two, I am made cognizant that we should all fan the flames of that little changemaker in us whenever I read about Elim's continuous waves of social initiatives. Keep it up Elim!"

—Alvin Pang

"I met Elim as a young man just released from reformatory training and was figuring out how to get my life back on track. I was formally introduced to her at a school event and she was kind enough to keep in touch with me. I remember Elim always makes the time and effort to allow me to feel that I was on the right track and that I was so much more than I thought I was.

She made me believe I could do anything. We worked on a book together and that really impacted me. It really gave me the confidence that I could be something positive in society. Elim has given me something on the inside that has brought me further ahead in life and this something will be with me for the rest of my life's journey. Elim gave me 'belief'."

—Jonathan Tang



Elim with Alvin Pang and Jonathan Tang at the launch of *Breaking Free*, the second book in the *My Voice* series in VivoCity, 2006.

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THE ELIM CHEW STORY



**DRIVEN BY PURPOSE,
DESTINED FOR CHANGE**

by Dr Loretta Chen

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DEDICATION

To all who are Driven by Purpose and Destined for Change, keep up the good fight, especially on a day it doesn't seem worthwhile.

To my husband, Lee, for humouring, standing by and loving me.

To my family as always, especially Dad & Mom, for I am nothing without your devotion, belief and love.

—Loretta Chen



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Writing a book on Elim Chew, founder of 77th Street, prolific social entrepreneur and woman about town is not easy. Not simply because at the point of writing, I am still hobbling from a surfing injury in faraway Honolulu, nor is it that the subject in question is too tough or cocky to handle, but that this woman, and I mean it with all due respect and affection, just cannot sit still.

Her two all-white Afghan Hounds, Tang Tang and Wa Wa, and her Yorkshire Terrier, Happy, are requiring her attention one minute,



Elim with her dogs, Tang Tang, Wa Wa, and Happy.



the next demands her seeing to a barrage of work-related texts and mails coming in fast and furious on her massively cracked iPhone 5 screen (I have more to say about that in a minute), and in a split second, her multimedia team from White Square have arrived at her house for a discussion and video shoot.

You see, Elim has cleverly, let me re-phrase, ingeniously turned our personal interview into an excuse to get her mother on camera. I had suggested that I wanted to hear from Mom and Elim saw this as a great opportunity to have her Mom recorded on camera so that her interviews and testimonies can be made into a short film and be potentially aired on her new online media channel, Elim Chew TV that is scheduled for launch in late 2016. This book interview thus became a wonderful chance for Elim to archive all of Mom's spiritual encounters and testimonies as a way to share, promote and proselytize God's immense reach, wisdom and power. You see how she capitalizes



Elim filming on set. She is very at ease in front of the camera and recently launched her eponymous Elim Chew TV.

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on the one occasion i.e. my book interview, to multi-task and create opportunities for her other enterprises?

But I digress. Though the digression is important. It is crucial to highlight that I am a non-Christian who believes in a higher order, am intensely spiritual with a keen appreciation for Buddhist philosophy as a way of life. But I have also been raised to be very respectful of all religions and attended a Catholic convent all my primary and secondary school days before joining a Methodist junior college. This segue is important to delineate a few crucial points:

That this book is not to proselytize though there will be numerous references to Christianity as Elim is a staunch Christian, a faithful believer and a spiritual leader. The numerous Christian testimonies and encounters here are not meant to suggest my inclination to promote any religion but more to illustrate Elim's strong conviction, humility (cross reference badly cracked iPhone anecdote above), faith and support from the Christian community as well as to demonstrate her ability to suture her strong Christian faith with her hard-nosed entrepreneur ways, creative streak, as well as her keen instincts for public relations, pop culture, trending issues, the media and "the next in-thing".

Which takes me back to the interview with Mom. It is this ability to quickly, surreptitiously bring disparate elements together that make her the consummate businesswoman, creative maverick and social entrepreneur. She saw our book interview as a chance to get Mom on camera; use the footage of Mom in a short film as a means to engage the ministry, introduce me to her video and multimedia crew — a new business unit she has just invested a stake in, as well as engage the crew on a discussion on the creation of a viral video to promote her new app, FASTFAST, which is an Uber-inspired courier service,

Elim devotes much of her time to a variety of causes from mentoring youths in school, serving on public service committees as well as speaking at international forums and conferences around the world. From top: keynote speaker at Crescent Girls' School in 2016; Elim at the 2011 Women's Entrepreneurship Summit (WES) under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) at San Francisco; member of the Singapore Hawker Centre Panel 2012; panelist at the 2015 Women Entrepreneurship Forum held in Taiwan.



The FASTFAST team: Elim with Adrian Ng and Julian Low.

offering instant courier access and also creating a new, ad-hoc job market. If you are tired reading that, yes. That is exactly how Elim's mind works. FASTFAST.

In short, Elim is an anomaly. Hers is that story of the school dropout turned hairstylist to the stars, turned punk-culture entrepreneur, turned Christian leader, then high-powered businesswoman, social entrepreneur, motivational speaker, community icon (her face is seen even in hawker centres reminding us to "please return your trays") and now hardcore fishing enthusiast. The list goes on.

Which is what makes for a great story and an interesting biography. A vanilla account and a Pollyanna take on life would honestly be just plain yawn and an all-too-tailored, sanitized account would read more as an advertorial, and we in Singapore and pretty much the rest of the world, are no longer inclined towards that sort of a Clorox-ed biography.

Give us Oprah and I will show you our very own Elim Chew. People-centred, respected by all and most certainly — Driven by Purpose and Destined for Change.

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TANJONG PAGAR PLAZA 0208

PART ONE
DAYS OF
BEING WILD

“Everything just unfolds.
I am in my next phase
where everything is coming
together again for where my
new journey will take me...”

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The Chew family in front of Asia Dispensary at Cantonment Road.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS A FOUR-STOREY HOUSE...

Born 15 September 1966, Elim Chew Soo Gim was the youngest child in a family of three children. Her oldest brother Chris and her elder sister Sulim are two successful entrepreneurs in their own right. Sulim runs Kokomama Marketplace while Chris owns I'm KIM Korean BBQ just right next door. But, it is Elim that is perhaps the best known of the trio. She is synonymous with 77th Street, a youth, pop culture retail chain she founded that gained momentum and reigned supreme in the 1980s. In addition, she also made a name for herself as a generous social entrepreneur and champion of many social causes, including the publication of a book entitled *My Voice* in 2004 which featured 77 earnest, real-life experiences of youths from all walks of life.

Indeed, the apple never falls far from the tree and the Chews have always been entrepreneurial. Community service, social enterprise and philanthropy do seem to run in the family.

A little-known fact is that Elim was born to the famous and highly respected owners of Asia Dispensary (亚洲医院) that was situated in the Tanjong Pagar, Cantonment area. In the early days, it was known

to give free treatment to patients who were unable to pay and it also was the only clinic and dispensary with the longest operating hours. Before it was a clinic, the site used to house a popular maternity home.

Unsurprisingly, the home and subsequent clinic was known by the local people and community. The four-storey dispensary later became the tallest building in the area, which interestingly was a stone's throw away from where The Pinnacle¹ now stands. Asia Dispensary belonged to Elim's paternal grandparents, Ah Kong, Chew Chong Kay and Ah Ma, Khor Po Luan.

In fact, in order to understand Elim's passion and drive, we need to step further back into history and pay tribute to Elim's grandmother.

¹ The Pinnacle@Duxton is Singapore's first and tallest HDB-owned condominium. The 2.5-hectare residential complex features the world's two longest sky gardens measuring 500 metres each. The project holds the record for being the world's tallest public buildings.



Ah Kong and Ah Ma
with the Chew clan.
Elim is wearing a
polka dot dress.

EARLY SIGNS OF ENTERPRISE

In the early 1960s, Ah Ma used to run a shoe shop, Nan Zhong (or Lam Tiong in Hokkien), in the Tanjong Pagar area. She sold various kinds of shoes and in particular, what were most popular then were the ubiquitous white school shoes. Parents and grandparents would stop by to purchase shoes for their children and grandchildren and would strike up a conversation with Ah Ma.

The idle shop-talk and tete-a-tete is not unusual. What is unusual though, is that Ah Ma was one of the few literate women of that era. She could read, write and speak proficiently and soon started a service helping to read and write letters for the uneducated and illiterate community folk. What started as an ad-hoc favour, soon became a bona fide service. Before long, Ah Ma and her hubby were running a busy cottage industry reading and writing letters to China for the community. Elim elaborates,

“Ah Ma and Ah Kong were like the Gmail of the early days. People would ask her to write and they would post her written letters to their families in China. When the letters got sent back from China, they would then go to her shoe shop and she would read all the letters back to the family members,



Elim was a photogenic baby and here are the photos to prove it.

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who would then have her reply to the letters. Everything takes months.”

Talk about snail mail on a slow boat to China.

But something was stirring in that tiny shoe-shop cum early day Gmail outfit. Little Elim Chew was slowly but surely gaining intrinsic knowledge of entrepreneurship, cultivating the business smarts and engaging in very early stage “investments”.

“So, my entrepreneurial journey started here. Remember the Lam Tiong Shoe Shop? Every weekend if I went to stay with my Ah Ma, I would receive two dollars from her and five dollars from my uncle, or something like that, just for staying over. That’s seven dollars. I also learned that if I rendered service, I’d receive more money, so say if I cleaned the shoes, I’d get another two dollars.

Then, what I would do was head to the next-door shop that sold titbits and *tikam tikam*². I’d take one dollar to *tikam*. The logic of the *tikam* is that it is a “sure-win” venture. So even if you don’t win big, you will still walk away with a packet of cuttlefish and I liked the cuttlefish. So to me, it was always a sure-win. So I guess my sense of enterprise started from there.”

2 *Tikam-tikam* is taken from the Malay language, and the literal meaning is “random pick”. It was a traditional game where one would pick random numbered tickets and have a chance to win prizes. It was a very popular game in the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s and was usually found in old provision stores and stationery shops. Small slips of papers were folded up and pasted onto a large cardboard. A number was written on each piece of paper. The prizes one could win were numbered and displayed above these slips of paper. For 5 cents, you got to pick one of the many pieces of paper. The prize you win would be the one with the number corresponding to that found on your paper. Prizes included anything from marbles, small toys to soft drinks.

But little Elim did not merely squander her hard-earned money on *tikam-tikam*. She had the astute sense to shore up her money for a rainy day even as a young child and got her Ah Por Chim³, or nanny, to safeguard her monies for her:

“My Ah Po Chim was my bank. I would ask Ah Por Chim to keep all my money for me, including my *angpou*⁴ money. She was the caretaker for my monies and I entrusted all my money with her.”



Elim and her Ah Po Chim.

PAPA CHEW, THE ACCIDENTAL HERO

So while Elim’s sense of enterprise was being honed by her frequent trips to Ah Ma and *tikam-tikam*, Ah Kong acquired the premises near the current day Pinnacle and built a four-storey homestead that included a clinic in the hope that his third son would start his own practice there as he was then a medical student. Alas, the dream that Ah Kong had was never realised as his son chose not to practise at Asia Dispensary but opted to run his own clinic elsewhere.

3 Ah Por Chim is a respectful way of addressing an older woman. Elim’s Ah Por Chim had a penchant for coffee sweetened with Blue Cross brand condensed milk or *ang ji gu ni* as it was referred to in Hokkien. Since Elim was a child, she drank *kopi* (coffee sweetened with condensed milk) from the milk bottle till she was six years old. I don’t know if her mom would approve of this so let’s hope she is not in the habit of reading footnotes.

4 The *angpou* or red packets are red envelopes filled with money given to kids by their parents, grandparents and other older relatives as Chinese New Year gifts. They are called *hongbao* in Mandarin, *angpou* in Hokkien and *lai see* in Cantonese. The giving and receiving of *angpou* is a well-observed custom to this day.



Left: Papa Chew or Chew Chin Cheong with a very young Elim.

Right: Elim relaxing at home.

Undeterred, Ah Kong hung on to his dream and eventually it was his fourth son out of nine children, Elim's father, Chew Chin Cheong who took over the reins.

“Dad did it out of compassion. He had a very good heart and liked to help people. He left school at a very young age to help tend to the business while his siblings moved on to university. So, he is like the guy who sacrificed in the early days and took it upon himself to take care of the family.”

Papa Chew did not study medicine, nor did he have a business degree but he gamely took over the premises and decided to run Asia Dispensary by hiring doctors and locums as all the other siblings were studying.

These were perhaps the seeds of enterprise that were keenly sown in the Chew household. Her father knew nothing about medicine but sought to help the community. Elim remembers Papa Chew poring

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through books and having to stay up late into the night, “burning the midnight oil” to research into medicine, and devouring medical journals as a means to better educate himself in the trade. This was also his way of self-mastery to enable him to purchase the medications needed at the dispensary. Those were tough days, but as Elim gamely puts it,

“Running a dispensary and hiring professionals is just like any business with its ups and downs.”

Eventually, through Papa Chew's network of local doctors and locums, his dispensary soon gained a huge following who saw Asia Dispensary as the trusted place for their medical needs.

But the dispensary and Papa Chew went above and beyond the call of duty and became a community centre and councillor-cum-unofficial kampong headman respectively, for the residents. Elim recalls that Papa Chew had to step in as mediator when fights broke



Papa Chew (in black pants) was active in community work; on a walk-about in Tanjong Pagar with Mr Devan Nair (second on right) who later became Singapore's President.



Mama Chew was a staunch Christian and often sent her children to participate in Church dramas and other performances. Can you spot Elim?

out among the residents, usually over petty sums of money or various misunderstandings.

Papa Chew soon became the go-to man for advice, wisdom and good counsel. His name soon spread beyond the immediate community and ex-prison inmates as well as other unemployed men would approach Papa Chew for job recommendations and opportunities. Some expressed their interest in being a hawker, a *kopi-boy*, taxi driver or any other miscellaneous jobs to keep them gainfully employed. Papa Chew would gamely take up all these requests and contact the Member of Parliament (MP) for assistance. So they came in throngs. It is little surprise that Elim would take a huge leaf out of her father's book.

But truth be told, while Papa Chew was a Christian, he was not as devout as Mama Chew was. He was neither a missionary nor was he proselytizing any faith. He did what he did as a self-styled community leader purely from the goodness of his heart and because it was the right thing to do. It was Mama Chew who was the staunch Christian and it was their encounters with her that got them interested in the Christian faith. Many even ended up sending their children to missionary or Christian schools under the encouragement and urging of Mama Chew.

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Over time, word of the Chews' dedication and support for the community spread and the entire Tanjong Pagar area knew of Asia Dispensary as the longest serving clinic, and the Chew clan and the attendant locums became known about town as urban legends of sorts, helping the poor and disenfranchised.

KAMPONG DAYS

So downstairs, the Asia Dispensary was a flurry of activity. But up on the fourth-storey rooftop, the irrepressible Chew children were busy playing catching. In fact, they even had a reputation for climbing other peoples' roofs as they had to retrieve their stray shuttlecocks from their umpteenth rounds of badminton. Those were the idyllic kampong



Elim (centre) with cousins Suyin and Sukee. They spent many happy hours playing in the neighbourhood.

days where Elim would go free-wheeling and cycling about town with Chris and Sulim. And if they should ever get into trouble with the neighbours, which was rare, it was easy for Elim to “get-away”.

“Yes, my relationship (with sister Sulim and brother Chris) has always been good. Every time I did something wrong, all I had to do was push the blame to my brother and sister and they would get into trouble. I’m the getaway one.”

She recalls laughingly with a great pinch of wistful nostalgia.

“We would go to the *longkang*⁵ to catch fish, climb trees, catch spiders then climb yet more trees to get birds’ eggs from the nests... we chased bats and played hide-and-seek in the entire Tanjong Pagar area and would cool off by *makaning*⁶ (eating) colourful ice balls from the street vendors. The area was our sanctuary and playground and we as children, were fearless, felt safe, were favoured and shown much kindness. Even at a young age, we knew that it was due to the fact that we were very loved by the people as our family was much respected in the area...”

She continues, enraptured in those memories:

“Those were very fun childhood days... much more fun than now which is all high-tech handphoned and computers.

5 *Longkang* is the Malay word for drain but it is more accurately, a cesspool or ditch as it is usually filled with stagnant not running water.

6 *Makaning* is the Singlish present continuous verb compounded from the verb *makan*. *Makan* is a Malay word for “meal” or “eat”.

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Back then, every week we would go swimming at the Yan Kit Swimming Complex⁷. We knew the people. We would go through the back door and swim the entire day. I think other children had to pay per hour or something but we paid like 20 cents... or maybe close to nothing.”

So even before Elim had a conscious vocabulary, she saw, appreciated and had a profound understanding for the social network — that unspoken rule of kindness and reciprocity that was extended to them not just because they were children, but because they were the Chews’ children.

MISSY ELIM, THE MAGICIAN

The clinic was not just all work and no play. In fact, it was fertile ground to hone the wild imagination of the young Elim who would take on the make-believe role as a junior nurse or “Missy” as nurses were known in those days. In addition to playing Missy, Elim would also undertake the role of clinic clown or amateur magician, to entertain the sick who were waiting to see the doctor. Elim recalls impishly,

“While the patients were waiting, I would go to the magic shop nearby to buy all my magic tools to entertain the patients. So, from Primary 4, I was doing a lot of entertaining. While you are sick, I do a magic show and make people laugh. Otherwise it was quite boring, and you

7 Yan Kit Swimming Complex was named after a Canton-born dentist Mr Look Yan Kit who came to Singapore in 1877 and became one of the founders of Kwong Wai Shiu Free Hospital in 1910. When it first opened, it had an all-girls only policy on Tuesdays to cater to women who were too shy to appear in their bathing suits in the presence of men. Clearly, the Chew sisters had no such inhibitions as they went swimming all the time!

are already feeling down while waiting for the doctor. So, I entertained both the patients and the family members who accompanied them. I had a magic drawer where I kept my magic tricks. Some of them I still have till today. Of course, I also got to play Missy. I learned what medicine was for what ailment.... and that cough syrups came in various colours — clear, green, brown and red.”

When Elim got tired of playing nurse or magician, she would head to their old house on Cantonment Road with her two siblings. Rainy days were exceptionally fun as Elim would sit precariously on the window grill to enjoy the cool, soothing rain.

“Every time it rained, I would sit on the grills of the window, but one day, I slipped through and got stuck by the chin. Apparently, it was my brother who pulled me up from that rail. Otherwise, I would have fallen through the third floor. So, I guess I was either saved by God or saved by my big head (laughter). We literally grew up playing in the neighbourhood and had so much fun in the Tanjong Pagar area.”

OUT(SIDE)STANDING HAIR ENCOUNTERS

So while Papa Chew continued to make grassroots his passion at the Asia Dispensary in the Tanjong Pagar area, another Hairspray comedy was brewing at the back of the clinic.

Mama Chew, more formally known as Madam Ooi Kooi Tin, had a cosy hair salon at Cantonment Road behind the Asia Dispensary aptly called DoReMi Hair Salon. Why aptly? Well, unbeknownst to



Mama Chew's albums

many, Mama Chew was a Chinese singer in the 1970s and went by the monicker, Huang Guizhen (黄桂珍). In fact, she had released two albums after taking part and winning second place in the popular Talentime singing competition.

In those days, Mama Chew was neck-to-neck with yet another popular artiste of the time, Lin Zhujun (林竹君)⁸ and was a household name. Despite that, Mama Chew soon left her singing career to care for Elim as she was apparently a “naughty baby”. But as it turns out, it seems it was not only Elim that got up to mischief:

“I don’t know how true it was but Mom said she quit singing to take care of me as I was naughty. That was when she started the salon. Mom enrolled me in the very strict and conservative Fairfield Methodist Girls’ but would send me to school in Primary 1 with doll-like blond and curly hair.”

⁸ You can find an old MYV video of Lin Zhujun or Lena Lim on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMIQhTGCW1M>

For Review on



Elim (front row, fifth from left) in Primary 1 at Fairfield Methodist Girls' School. She was too naughty to be the class monitor but admits to being the teacher's pet.

The teacher would see this curly blond hair on me and ask,

“Are you an *ang mor*⁹ *kia* ? How come got this?”

“I'd *kena*¹⁰ scolding and be sent back home to colour my hair black. So I was afraid every time my mum wanted to perm my hair as I'd get into trouble... But I think that was what made me outstanding — as in outside-standing, way back from Primary 1.

And, I think, in hindsight, that was literally the most fun period of my life.”

⁹ *Ang Mob* is literally the Hokkien dialect for “red hair”. The term is widely used to describe Caucasians in Singapore and Malaysia. “*Kia*” is Hokkien for child so *ang mob kia* is the offspring of a Caucasian.

¹⁰ *Kena* is derived from a Malay word that means “to encounter or to come into physical contact”, and is only used with objects that have a negative effect or connotation.



Elim took part in the fancy dress competitions and talent shows that were organised as part of the grassroots activities and often emerged as the winner. These events gave her confidence and would serve her well in later years when she emceed fashion shows and gave public motivational talks.



ELIM'S PHOTO ALBUM



A then unknown Nick Vujicic in the 77th Street office.



Chinese New Year *lo hei* celebration with friends from NUS.



Elim was a torch bearer for the Youth Olympic Games held in Singapore in 2010.



Elim receives her Letter of Recognition at the APEC Women and the Economy Summit 2011.



Entrepreneurs Organisation Forum I, Bangkok, 2012.



The 14th APEC Women Leaders Network Meeting, 2009.



Elim with Richard and Veronica, friends who support her endeavors.



Elim with her *makan kakis* or eating buddies!



Elim and her super team from Social Innovation Park!



Elim and fashion designer, David Wang.



Launch of Changi General Hospital Caring Festival, 2015.



TEDx Youth Talk at Hwa Chong Institution with Mediagroup artist Belinda Lee and Delane Lim, Founder of HappyYouth.



Taiwan-Singapore Social Enterprise Development Forum, 2012.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harper's Bazaar describes firebrand Dr Loretta Chen as “a force of nature”, *The Straits Times* labels her “a Rebel with a Twist”, “Wild Thing”, “Crowd Puller” whilst *The Peak* calls her a “critical arts entrepreneur”. She was recently featured alongside Sir Ian McKellen in the special “Meaning of Life” edition in *Esquire*. The multi-hyphenate scholar turned award-winning creative director is a celebrated tour-de-force and is one of Asia’s leading creative and theatre director as well as branding and marketing powerhouse with a sharp academic edge.

She has received numerous creative and humanitarian accolades including Best Director and the Amnesty Freedom of Expression award. Some of her notable theatrical creations include *Victor Victoria* starring jazz icon Laura Fygi, *The Vagina Monologues, 251* — a controversial production based on porn queen Annabel Chong as well as *The F Word* that premiered at the Edinburgh Theatre Festival. She has also helmed campaigns for LVMH-Moët Hennessy, Louis Vuitton, Samsung, BNP Paribas and a host of luxury and international brands.

Chen is also an expert in the field of leadership development, executive coaching, strategic thinking and cross-cultural communication. She has over 15 years of teaching graduate, undergraduate classes and corporate programmes in Directing, Creative & Critical Thinking, Media Communications, Marketing, Public Speaking & Presentation Skills, Performance Theory, Personal Development and



Elim with Loretta.

Leadership, Ethics, Training and Development and was part of the Founding Committee for the Creativity, Innovation and Enterprise Centre in 2002.

Owing to her strong leadership and oratorical abilities, she was hand-picked to be the International Trainer & Consultant to Druk Holdings and Investments (DHI), the government investment arm of the Kingdom of Bhutan and facilitated a roundtable together with the Chairman of Temasek Holdings. Poised with a commanding presence, she works with top CEOs on their public presentations, media appearances and frequently conducts thought leadership, entrepreneurship and creative workshops for illustrious institutions and foreign universities.

She publishes frequently in academic as well as lifestyle journals and recently founded the Centre of Ascending Leadership with the aim of providing leadership training, consultancy, advocacy and fund-raising assistance to needy communities in Bhutan and the Philippines. She also instituted the VMSD Young Talents Scholarship to the top design students of Raffles Design Institute.

She curated and hosted The Art of Lush for Lush 99.5FM and has written a best-seller, *Woman on Top: The Art of Smashing Stereotypes and Breaking All the Rules*. She is currently working on two more motivational books. Chen was nominated as a Nominated Member of Parliament (Arts & Culture), voted one of Asia’s Most Inspiring Women and a tireless advocate for various charities and worthy social causes.

She is Visiting Faculty in University of Southern Maine, University of Hawaii and the federally run East West Center. She has recently relocated to Honolulu to be with her husband and is honored to be part of this amazing journey with her dearest friend, Elim Chew.