

The white coffin



Long term use of Styrofoam
increases the risk of getting cancer

“ Styrene is a possible
human carcinogen ”
— WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer



Student Environmental Activism

AT UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

draft manuscript
version 2

editors

ABE WOO & LEE LM



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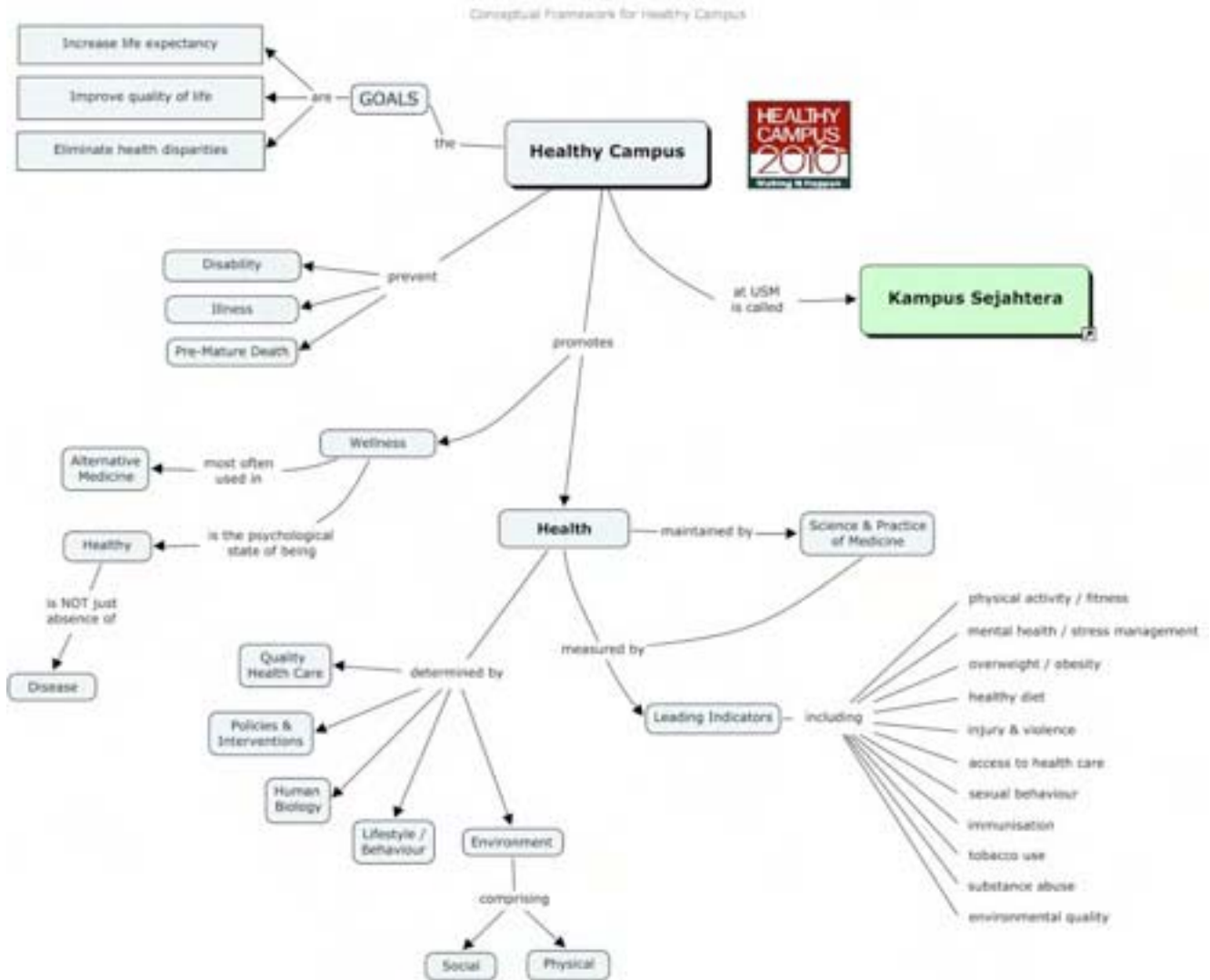
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The Tiffin Carrier
- a culture we must treasure

This is a draft manuscript dated 31st August 2008 (version 2) being prepared for the Healthy Campus Monograph Series. Several contributions are still being edited. More reflections of your personal journeys are welcome.

Photo credits : Many photos have unknown sources and we thank everyone for their contributions. The main photographers are Lik Meng, Abe, Pauline and Mahfuzah.



What is Kampus Sejahtera?

Kampus Sejahtera is a uniquely USM brand conceptualised by the Vice-Chancellor in 2001 to pursue the goals of a Healthy Campus. It embraces issues of health, sustainable campus, peace, harmony and general well-being.

The programmes under *Kampus Sejahtera* are funded by the Vice-Chancellor’s Office and managed by a Coordinator through the Corporate and Sustainable Development Division.



Dzulkifli Abdul Razak
 Professor Tan Sri
 Vice-Chancellor, USM

Reflections as a way of knowing

Learning takes place everywhere, not only in the classrooms. But more crucial than merely acquiring knowledge, learning must lead to changes in our habits and lifestyles for it to have an impact in reducing waste and consumption, the keys to a sustainable future.

Reflection is increasingly used even in University courses as a tool for learning. But reflection is not just thinking back and recalling events. It requires deep thinking and demands a willingness on the learner to accept and acknowledge personal weaknesses and deficiencies and then take that leap to modify our behaviour accordingly. We must also open ourselves up to allow others to influence our thoughts and views. At the very least, we should not reject out of hand, other points of views or positions. We must accept that knowledge is contextual and that there is not only one truth but social, cultural, political and economic backgrounds moulds perspectives and priorities. Put yourselves in the shoes of the authors, try to understand them. Don't dismiss them just because they have a different perspective or point of view.

This monograph provides opportunities for deep thinking on the part of

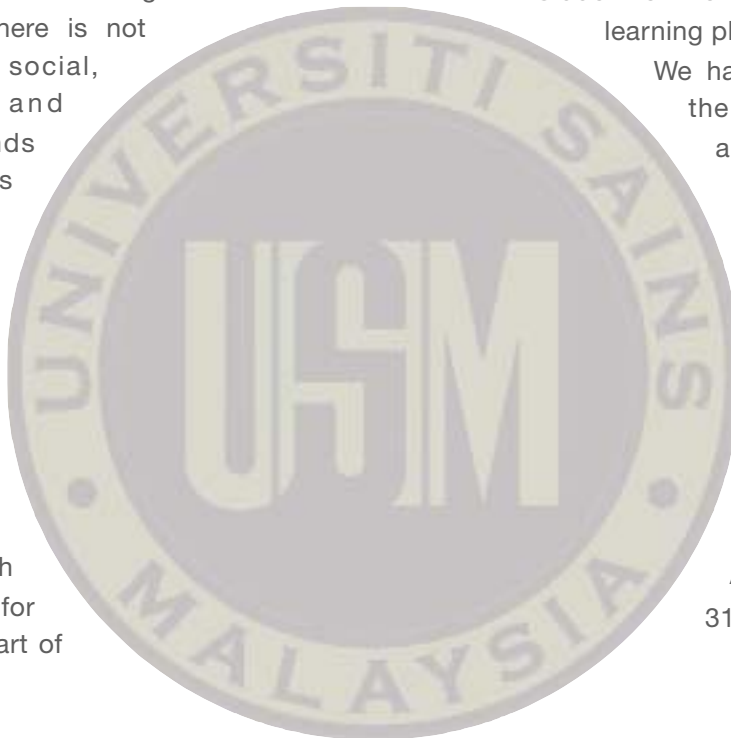
the writers who are all students (except two) who have been involved with *Kampus Sejahtera* pushing the sustainability agenda. It is a record of the process we have gone through to operationalise *Education for Sustainable Development* emphasising the link between learning and a change of habits and lifestyles for a sustainable future.

We also hope that this monograph will become a resource to spur other universities and communities to initiate similar programmes.

We have touched many lives. If you have a story to tell, get in touch with us (abe_woo@hotmail.com or likmeng@gmail.com). We know that there are still many students and staff who remain unconvinced about the agenda but as USM forges ahead to become a sustainability-led university, we see student environmental activism as a crucial learning platform for change.

We have tried very hard to retain the creativity, originality and authenticity of each of the creative works. Ignore the departures from proper English grammar, syntax and structure. Enjoy the exuberance and uniqueness of their personal journeys. Feel the energy that each of them has expressed.

Abe & Lik Meng, *Editors*
31st August 2008



Me and My Journey with Environmental Activism

As remembered by Abe Woo



Abe presenting The White Coffin at the Asian Youth Climate Change Conference, Hong Kong, July 2008

How did I get stuck?

A typical poster with no detailed explanation, a vividly printed cartoon-looking earth picture and a 4 letter word 'EASY' first captured my attention. The best part was that besides the word 'EASY', it said 'coming soon' as though an oscar-winning movie is premiering in USM. Then, curiosity started to emerge. "What is this?" I thought to myself. It looked pretty childish and

furthermore it was printed in colours. More and more questions arise as friends started to discuss or rather taking wild guesses as we try to hit the jackpot. With no written explanation whatsoever, looking for answers from mere guessing was like searching for a pin in a haystack. Alas! Finally we saw another poster carrying the same information with the same printed words 'EASY'.

Then only I realized that 'EASY' stands for East Asian Seas Youth Forum. The first impression was 'WOW'; that is so interesting and cool. I figured out that this would be an interesting forum as I am keen with marine studies. Through the poster, I am able to determine the place, time and date. However, limited information was available. So, I thought it was a forum

and I can just simply chip in to observe or listen.

During the night of the forum, I was shocked to find that only a handful of people were there including some familiar faces from my faculty. “Isn’t this an East Asian forum?” I thought as I assess the surroundings around me. As I walked in, someone welcomed and handed a brochure to me. My confusions were cleared out as I glanced through the brochure and a briefing was given by a speaker. I was actually witnessing the birth of a new club, or should I say, the revival of the long buried environmental club. The ‘international’ forum that I wanted to attend turned out to be a General Meeting to elect committee members for the club. I ended up elected as the Head of Education Department. I did not realize that I started embarking on a colourful and exciting voyage

The Adventure Begins

‘Operation Green Box’. That is the name dubbed for the club’s efforts to encourage the use of personal container to take away food instead of using polystyrene foam. It sounded like a massive military operation to recapture stolen land. I really liked the name of the operation. To some extent, it was a real battle for the environment with strategies such as campaigning, persuading, talking and academic research. To kick-start the project, we held a meeting at the president’s apartment to discuss strategies to eradicate the white box in the campus. Initially, the plan was to promote and encourage students to bring their own container,

without any enforcement or punishment. The game plan is to elect environment ambassadors consisting of cafeteria operators to help us with the campaign and creating awareness besides our efforts to educate them as well. To keep track of the progress throughout the campaign, we proposed to hand out bookmarks to keep count on the number of white boxes reduced.

Halfway through the meeting, I was prompted to voice out my ideas. I figured out that it is pivotal to ensure that all the details are covered thoroughly when we are involved in serious businesses. However, some of the members objected the idea and started defending the initial plans. I voiced out my concerns regarding the issue as I do not want to see it as a failure to create awareness in the society. This is because the level of awareness is so low to the point that people are moved to act by rules and regulation rather than taking personal initiatives to make a difference in the environment. Based on my personal experiences, Malaysians generally do not have self-initiative unless it is enforced as a law. In a nutshell, there needs to be a paradigm-shift in the way Malaysians think and act if a difference is anticipated.

Some of the proposed actions were that additional charges should be imposed in order to deter or discourage students from taking away food. As expected, part of the committee would not agree on that. They still believe that students need to be educated and slowly persuaded to create awareness. I did not have any qualms that awareness was important in order to sustain the campaign. However, I insisted that actions must

be taken such as imposing additional charges to totally eradicate polystyrene foam. Only two seconded my plan and both of them are my close and fellow comrades, Chern Chung and Ke Shin. Later, I was impressed by Ke Shin's suggestion of introducing biodegradable packaging to replace the un-eco-friendly polystyrene foam. She volunteered to look for sources as she knew a stall in Farlim wet market. This stall owner had already started her efforts to save the environment although it incurs a much higher cost. I was disappointed as university students are not living up as intellects of the society. This creates a determination in me to get rid of the white box in our campus.

A note on student activism.

Politics interests me a lot. I love to follow political developments of the world especially in our country. Plans, policies and projects proposed and implemented by the government have always caught my attention, and none of them failed to be commented or criticized. It is interesting to analyze and view all these issues in different perspective. All this enables me to gain a lot of knowledge and I acquired the ability to have critical thinking. Back to the context of the university, I strongly believe that students have the right to speak out for themselves without fear of prosecution. If a university holds the responsibility as a breeding ground of bright minds and if it is not doing so, where can we go? If students are always confined within the box, how are we going to create a critical thinking society? The practice of democracy in the

university is always debatable due to the existence of certain clauses stated in AUKU. I do not deny that AUKU does really bring benefits to higher education institution. In fact, the very existence of universities in Malaysia comes from AUKU. But the downside of AUKU is that it does not encourage student activism, be it in political or non-political cause. In comparison to foreign universities, student activisms are always stealing the limelight due to their maturity of fighting a cause that is global and critical such as the issues of environment, poverty and world peace WITHOUT the influence of sensitive political and racial issues. This is clear because all the causes and issues fought cross the borders of race, religion, field of studies and even political ideologies. I always believe that university students are capable to make a difference be it in the society or to the country. If we could just channel the burning passion towards more critical issues such as global warming and the environment, I believe this issue will no longer able to haunt our children.

The Strategy

We divided our plan into 3 strategies - educate, enforce and examine. The environmental club with collaboration with 2 other student bodies started to educate and to create awareness among the citizen of the university in regards to the various threats of polystyrene. Issues are revolving health, sustainable consumption and environment. All this were pieces of the sustainable development puzzle which was always the attention of the

THE WHITE COFFIN

university. Already known as the 'University in a Garden', USM aims to become a sustainable campus. A booth was set up in the foyer of the busiest lecture halls complex. Armed with pledge cards as our main tool and few streamers, we started to tell, cajole and try to introduce a new culture there. Two weeks were the time frame I sat at the counter. A lot had been convinced, some refused and there were those against us. Eventually we hit the 2000 pledges mark. Phewww... a relief. Now we really can say that we have covered most people being aware of this campaign in the university.

A note from Hong Kong

I got the opportunity to attend Asian Youth Climate Summit in Hong Kong University. A whole solid week talking about the 'saving-the-world' agenda, not as superman but our role as youths. There, I really felt the energy, fire and the real spirit of activism from youths around the region especially the Hong Kong students. They were really committed and clear of their objectives in stopping global warming in particular. Only there I felt where I belong. Back in Malaysia, I always struggle with the systems that bounded students especially on student movements. Nothing much can be done where all the bureaucratic and systems suppresses the sounds of youths. I was amazed by their youth's movement where their sound voice are heard and taken seriously. When are our students going to be like them? I pondered. Got a chance to present my 'white coffin' case there. I presume I capture their attention and interest based on the

loudest applause I gain. I'm very pleased also to hear that one of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology is going to take back the idea to sell it to her university. Perhaps my passionate 5 minute talk really connected to the audience.



At the Asian Youth Climate Change Conference, Hong Kong

Nevertheless, standing at international ground, hearing positive responses from youths around the world assured me that this programme is of international quality and able to excite people.

The issue of global warming and climate change is the main focus of the summit. Yes, indeed that most people have at least heard of that 2 terms. Me, who reads biology surely knew and have more knowledge regarding climate change. But, although I am aware and conscious about the causes and effects of global warming, I didn't felt the seriousness and the urgency of the problem. After attending this summit, my entire view of life and principle changed. We NEED to do something and FAST! There is not much time for us to revert this situation before everything is lost and human will face extinction and total annihilation.

I met an activist from Canada, David Noble. One phrase that is simple and struck me is "Change the default!" Then i asked myself, what? Yes, change our default of taking escalators and lifts where necessary. Quite true. This society has become so lazy that we even need a flat escalator to walk in a hallway especially in the MTR station in Hong Kong and many airports. What is wrong with our society? Changing default that he mentioned is just one small part of changes that we must ponder of. There are more silly things that we human invent and create that causes more Green House Gas to be at the atmosphere just for the sake of convenience. Think about it..

One Last Stand @ Sg2 Gate

An idea of picket in the university certainly is a taboo. We did it anyway. Felt good about it. This is the very first time I had ever really 'protested' against something, carrying banners, posters and shouting slogans on the street! People and passer-bys may think that few of us are crazy. But honking cars in and out of the gate, showing of thumb-ups demonstrates the acceptance and support. Heard that Dr Lee, my mentor, get himself some trouble and made a stir at HEP(students affair department) by supporting us. But all of us when through it, victoriously! I urge youths and students to stand up and be more out-spoken on critical issues like climate change. Don't sit in lectures only and do nothing! We can make changes! You'll be surprise how much we can impact the policy makers. Now I understand why people move to the street and gather. It was so much fun and energy building within the small group of us.

Environmental Convo

Anyone will be astonished to see the amount of waste and consumption every year when our convocation is held. Thousands bouquets of flowers, teddy bears, souvenirs and plastic packaging were everywhere. The irony of being more educated is that we will live a much unsustainable and consume more resources that are not vital. Lifting up standard of living does not mean that we sacrifice luxury. But justified purchasing and no wastage to resources were the right way to go. There was no point for a

graduate to have more than one bouquet of flower to take a picture. In fact to my opinion it looks awkward! Please refuse I urge! At the convocation, once again we campaigned. Had the honour to present it to our Chancellor, HRH Raja of Perlis. Then again, I wasn't sure why it must be me again to present it. Sometimes I felt that I might steal the limelight and glory of all the teams' effort. But there was none who step out and wanted to present it. I will grab any opportunity to train myself in my presentation skills, so it becomes naturally that I will go and do it. I now and then get the cold shoulder from the some senior club members. I'm not sure why and what made it. Perhaps the view that I'm trying to steal all the credits out of this campaign. But I'm clear with my objectives and will not let these hamper my efforts. I'm also rest assured that I have a few of my great supporters and friends that really understands.

How far we reached?

White coffin had travelled all around the country and probably the world. I myself taken this campaign to Yokohama National University students from Japan, students from Korea, Asian Youth Climate Summit covering 22 countries, seen in numerous blogs, all the public universities back home and countless individual that we impacted. Not to forget the teams effort of spreading it to other parties and individual. Indeed we didn't expect at first this campaign would spread so fast and furious. Now we proved

it only needs a group of passionate people to excite the whole community including international groups. Changes can be done if we persevere and passionate about it. Do not let worries and system bound our voices. Play along with the system and bureaucratic and you will be shock that sometimes these barriers can be bent.

The end? Neh ... is a beginning for great heights

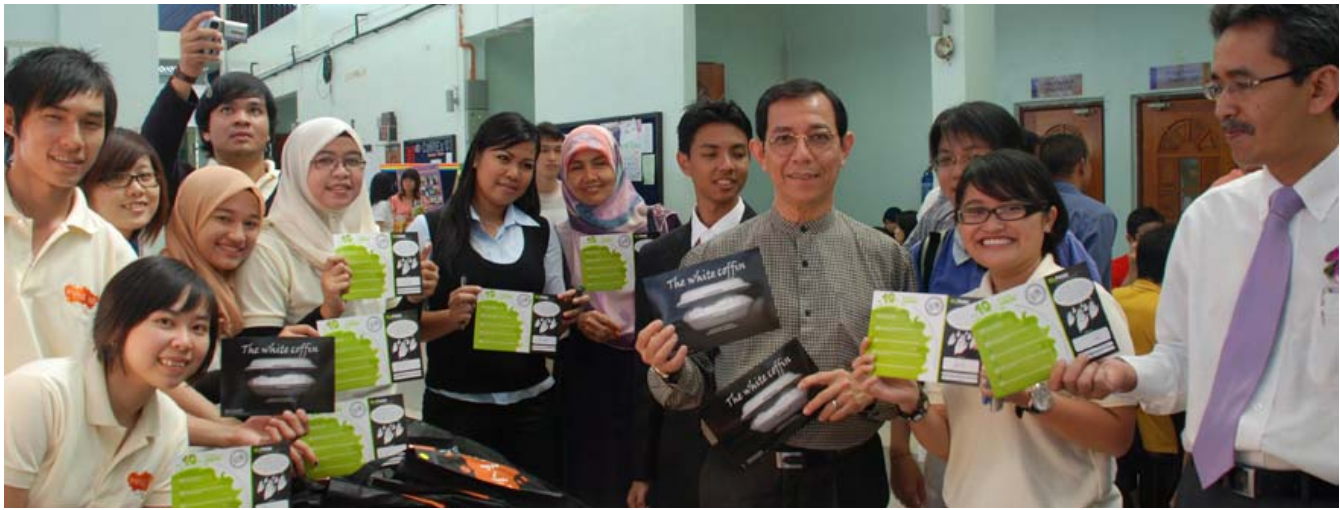
Is that all? Have been babbling about white coffin for the past 4 pages. What's next? White coffin should be a launching pad for more environmental programmes and activist to speak out. Remember that the whole idea of White Coffin isn't just about garbage and unbiodegradable packaging. Nor about just about global warming and climate change. It is about igniting the fire and spirit of youths to fight for what they believe and what they want for the future. Nothing is going to change if we just sit and don't react.

Now, we are moving towards targeting plastic bags. This is an even more challenging to us. Though it is hard and difficult, we must press on. It has to start somewhere and by someone. I'm glad we a still have a core group that are keen and interested to push this agenda. There is no-telling how we are going to fare this time. No matter what the outcome is, I should say we are successful in lighting fires. Seeing more groups of students turning up to volunteer and doing more environmental activities just thrills me.

About the Author:

Abe is in his final year of studies at the School of Biological Sciences, USM.

Recollections *by Lee Lik Meng*



USM Vice-Chancellor (grey shirt) campaigning with students

When did it all begin? How did it get started? Who started it?

Since 1st January 2008, USM has done what many have so far failed to do. Of course there is a university in Sabah which started it before us but I am told that the follow-through needs a lot more work. I had a couple (yes, a real couple, a husband and wife team) of professors from a university in Colorado who visited me in USM in April 2008, saw the poster on the

wall and said that their university is proud to be a green campus but they have not been able to do what we had achieved. And they took some materials to go back to talk to their own people to start their own revolution. I even received an email from a campus activist (well, that's my label for her) who said that their group at a university in Illinois have been trying to take steps to rid their campus of The White Coffin but

progress had been slow. She wanted to know how to speed it up. I told her that the key ingredients are : student activism; top management support; and canteen operators need to be made to feel that they are part of the university agenda rather having policies stuffed down their throats. And I told her not to get distracted by too many targets – focus. Don't try to get rid all plastics at once, for instance (but I

am told a couple of local universities are going to do that on the 1st of July 2008). We also provided a biodegradable alternative as a short-term solution knowing that going cold turkey will most likely invite strong reactions from the canteen operators (fearful of drastic lost of business as customers turn to other sources of food) and dissent from customers who are ingrained with a “convenience culture”.

We have had a lot of press coverage and that interest has been sustained though somewhat subdued now. Members in the community have demanded that the Ministry of Health impose a nation-wide ban but the Ministry seems to have its hands tied saying that there is no conclusive scientific evidence for them to act. What is perplexing is that after declining to impose a ban they advised consumers not use it for hot and oily food because “it will promote the migration of styrene”. I am sure for the average reader the question which popped up in their minds was “if there is no problem with styrene why worry about migration”?

To be honest, when we started this initiative, we really were not absolutely sure if it was the right thing to do or how to do it. There was one professor who said that we should just forget about all that talk about rubbish (as in garbage) and just tell the consumers that that beautiful pure white container is going to give you all cancer one day. And everyone will just stop using that stuff. If only it was that simple. Just look at how many people still smoke even though the link to cancer is established fact (isn't

it?). But health and garbage were just two of my concerns when I pondered how to succeed in this campaign. We had written letters to the canteen operators before and had meetings with them sometime back telling them not to use The White Coffin on campus. Yes, you guessed it. Nothing happened. Business as usual. In fact, when I had my first meeting with the canteen operators when we started this campaign, one of them actually said “we had a meeting like this about six months ago but nothing happened”. Without saying it, he was expressing scepticism – “how is it going to be different this time?” You get the sense that, yes, we all want to get rid of this stuff (and many sincerely do) but don't depend on us to “just do it on our own”. To put it another way, “if we fall, we fall together” and of course if we succeed we want to share the glory.

I also had another concern. The plastic lobby. Their influence reaches the highest levels of government. A few years ago, one local government in Penang managed to get the Chief Minister to launch a campaign to get rid of plastic carry bags in the municipality. Bring your own tiffin carriers was the message. After a few weeks of publicity, everything went quiet. The campaign was abandoned, apparently on the instructions from very high up in the government. Factories will close, jobs will be lost, the economy will suffer – you know the drill. In fact, my concern was more

sinister. Someone actually asked me whether I “was not afraid”. Of what, you asked? Of being beaten up by thugs sent by the taiko’s (a local term meaning “big brother”). I know, its very disparaging and disrespectful of the many honest businessmen around. I actually enquired about the possibility of a backlash from these vested interests but I was assured by a person in the industry that these cancer-causing white coffins are just small potatoes and a sideline to the factory owners. In fact, the factory bosses avoid these pretty little things like the plague, so to speak. Of course in public the Malaysian Plastic Forum (a grouping of plastic factory owners) have not only denied that polystyrene containers are bad for your health but even claimed certification from various authorities around the World. They nevertheless acknowledge the garbage problem. Their solution? Let’s educate the consumers not to throw rubbish indiscriminately. Of course, I totally agree on this last point but that’s not really the whole point about our White Coffin Campaign.

Wow, you must be thinking – “*when is this long-winded guy going to get around to telling us about how it got started, who started it, when did it get started?*” I got asked those questions a lot in the beginning. So this is my take on it. If you hear or read otherwise from someone else, don’t get all worked up trying to figure out “who’s telling the truth” – ‘cause everyone is! Everyone of us was involved in some way and we may

not see every single detail or event. Just enjoy the stories and the journeys. They are all personal testimonials, not academic papers based on objective-scientific evidence-based research for you to dissect and critique.

So, which beginning do you want to read? From my perspective, the first beginning was at the August 2005 Convocation when I, with digital camera in hand, walked the site around DTSP (the Convocation Hall) where for the the last ten years or so a sort of festival (*pesta*) is held, I guess to keep the thousands of grandparents, parents, relatives and friends of the graduates occupied while waiting for the graduates and their freshly minted scrolls to pour out of the hall. I inserted the pictures into a slide presentation (alright, a Powerpoint) and called it an environmental audit of the festivities. What I found was mountains of garbage, filthy open drains, lots of flowers and gifts, lots of plastic and lots of pollution from the bumper-to-bumper traffic. So far, you are not seeing the connection to The White Coffin. So, here it is. At the *Pesta* grounds I encountered a group of students distributing small pieces of paper to the visitors. I usually ignore people who try to give me flyers but the students looked a little agitated and seems to be watching their backs so I was curious. I approached them and got hold of one of the pieces of paper and asked what they were trying to do. I discovered that they were trying to lobby the

visitors not to eat at the stalls selling food in polystyrene containers. I asked them for their reasoning and they pointed to sources claiming a link between the polystyrene container and cancer. Naturally I was interested to know who they were, what bodies they represented and why they were taking on such an initiative. The next thing I knew they started running away from me. I was quite stunned. Then I realised they must have been carrying out an “illegal” activity – as far as the UUCA is concerned. The what? It’s the Universities and University Colleges Act which was introduced way back in the 1970s to clamp down on university student political activism. Unfortunately, at that time in 2005 USM was going through a bad period with media spotlights trained on several cases in which students had been hauled up for taking part in political activities. The students must have thought I was a Student Affairs officer (undercover no doubt) snooping around. I must admit I was ignorant then and asked them (before they ran away), “what’s the alternative”? They pointed to a stall run by a USM student body which was using an eco-friendly food packaging. So, that was my first encounter with EcoPak. Business was



Students picketing at Sg. Dua Gate

roaring and the students hardly had time to talk to me so I took some pictures and gave them my namecard and asked them to get me some samples. Weeks went by and I had given up hope but then one day a student knocked on my office door with profuse apologies and gave me some samples of the packaging. These I dutifully passed to the higher authorities. I had already emailed my environmental audit report to a few selected individuals on campus. And then I waited for the the wheels to start turning. That was the first beginning.

Birth of The White Coffin

Now, turn your clock forward about one and half years to the second quarter of 2007. By then I was several months into my new job at *Kampus Sejahtera*, and pondering where I should put my energy into. I had decided from the start that I would not spread myself thin trying to do many things at the same time. After much reading and more pondering, I knew it would be

something to do with making the campus sustainable. But how? Well, sometimes things just start to fall in

place at the right time. First, I was asked to attend a briefing by a group of USM students from the Tzu Chi Collegiate Youths who wanted to carry out some activities to tackle global warming. This is a little sticky as far as the UUCA is concerned because only registered student bodies can carry out activities on campus but the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) wanted to loosen some of those shackles so he sent the students to work with me under *Kampus Sejahtera*. In fact, I was openly queried at a meeting whether I should be working with these unregistered bodies. Fortunately for me, the Vice-Chancellor told me to “just work with all students”. I even discovered that there is an “underground movement” of student groups who can’t seem to fit (or perhaps refuse to fit themselves) into the established student clubs or associations but have been doing welfare and community work for years – unrecognised and not officially appreciated. There is a huge amount of energy waiting to be tapped.

So I found my my little niche - mining the elixir of youths. And so we talked and I sent the students to do some ground work, to read more in order to open up their perspectives. Nothing happened for

a few months and then another group of students was sent to me. This group had wanted to set up a new society after a few of their leaders had attended a convention in Japan which required that the participants return to their home country to put their new found knowledge into action. The DVC instead asked them to reactivate their defunct Environmental Club (i.e. *Kelab Alam Sekitar*, KAS). Amazingly, the leaders from the two groups had got together and came up with a proposal to carry out The White Coffin campaign. When they first told me the title I held my breadth and refrained from saying “What crazy idea is this? Why so morbid?”. They explained that one of the students (Kai Zheng) had seen it in Taiwan and wanted to replicate it in USM. I listened for a few moments and then said “Yes, let’s do it” (or something equally low keyed). I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. Perhaps I was attracted to the catchy title. Maybe I was desperate to take on a pet



Students campaigning at Engineering campus

project to start showing results. Did I anticipate the huge amount of publicity in the media and expressions of support from the public? Actually, I was more concerned whether the project would be still-born given the Asian taboo with death. So I went around showing the posters to various races, I showed them to students, I showed them at meetings, and I showed it to the Vice-Chancellor. I asked more than 300 students from the Community Welfare Co-curriculum Programme (or RKM) in a lecture hall whether the poster made them “afraid” and they nodded their head. “Are you still going to use polystyrene containers”, I asked. No, they shook their heads. Great, that’s the reaction we wanted. And from this Programme we found a third collaborator, headed by the popular *Kak Asiah*.

And so The White Coffin was born. Yes, it is not an original idea from USM but we brought in our innovations too. The campaign poster includes original photography and artwork by the students. When it was first shown at a meeting, there was a concern whether we would be sued by the manufacturers for using a picture of the polystyrene container in the poster. In fact, we did receive a lawyer’s letter (preceded by an irate phone call from Kuala Lumpur) from the copyright holder of the brandname Styrofoam, all the way from USA, asking us politely not to use their brandname in our campaign and denying that the company manufactures these White Coffins. Using the

name Styrofoam on our poster was actually a strategic decision made by Mervin (the student who did the artwork in Photoshop) and me since we thought that the public would be more familiar with this name. Do a Google. The media in the USA is still using the name Styrofoam to refer to polystyrene foam containers.



DVC Omar chairing the meeting where The White Coffin poster was first presented

Putting it into motion - Turning the Wheels

It took awhile for us to get organised. Should we print lots of banners and hang them all over campus? Should we do all three campuses at once? How should we carry out the campaign? Do we just put up an exhibition and hope people show up? How do we get the students to buy in? When should we implement the new policy? What alternative should be provided? As I said, we had tried before but nothing happened. In fact, during the Convocation of August 2007,

a letter was issued to all the stall operators telling them not to use polystyrene containers. I got the students to monitor the stalls and the reports coming back wasn't good. The use of polystyrene was still rampant at the *Pesta Konvo* that year. Apparently the letter was received after the stall operators had bought their stock of containers. And so they claimed but OK, we gave them the benefit of the doubt.

We spent the whole of the 1st Semester laying the ground work. We didn't want to print flyers and brochures even though there were many suggestions to do so because everyone just throws them away, probably without even reading them. One of our innovations was to produce a pledge card with The White Coffin on one side and a pledge for a sustainable world on the other with 10 tips on how to go green. We made it attractive and of high quality so that people will pin it up in their room. We also told pledgers to keep the card for 30 years – by then they can, hopefully, be proud that they

contributed to solving global warming. Another innovation was to take photographs of the people with the signed pledge card which we used for promotional purposes. We received many stories that signing the pledge did change habits and behaviours for a better tomorrow. This idea for the pledge card came from several sources for campus sustainability assessment which among others asks whether students take a pledge for sustainability. We also refused to print the huge plastic banners initially but instead opted for paper-based A-4 sized posters of The White Coffin focussed on drawing attention and stimulating curiosity. It was much later that we printed A-3 and A-2 sized informational posters.

We had set the first day of the 2nd Semester as the effective date for implementing the ban on polystyrene on the Main Campus. Two weeks before the date, I put up notices on the Healthy Campus website and initiated a poll. I also mass-emailed all users on campus informing them



Canteen operators are our environmental heroes

of ban. An official letter had also been circulated to all the canteen operators in the Main Campus. The students would start their campaign on the first day of the 2nd semester. So I waited for it to happen. And then as the day approached, I realise it was not going to just happen. I gave instructions to convene a meeting of all the canteen operators, but will they come? Afterall I have no authority or jurisdiction over canteens. As an after thought, I said “invite the student leaders and the campus tabloid and other senior officers as well including the hostel wardens”.

It was the second day of the semester and we had to slot the meeting between meals (i.e. at 3 pm) because the canteen operators have businesses to run. To my surprise it was fullhouse, eventually, as the meeting progressed. I informed the canteen operators of the new policy. There was much anxiety and uneasiness but cautious support. Many understood the risk of using polystyrene for food packaging. Then one guy shot his hand up and said they had such a meeting 6 months ago but nothing happened. So what’s different now? I was stumped. I had to think on my feet. First, I said the student

leaders were driving the campaign even as we spoke. They will mobilise the student population. This was to reassure them that they won’t get a lot of complaints from the students leaders, at least. I pointed out that the Director of the Health Centre was there at the meeting with many senior officers to show our commitment. I made a big deal about how this campaign can only succeed with the cooperation of every party,

especially the canteen operators. At a second meeting, I even read out an email from the Vice-Chancellor saying he hoped that the canteen operators would become our environmental heros and not be seen as the target of the ban. At the end of the first meeting, I asked if any of the operators were totally against the move to ban

polystyrene? No one raise their hands. I asked them if we could proceed? A few nods but mostly silent and non-committal. In the final analysis, its all about not making a loss. OK, its about making a profit when you do business. I reassured them that if anyone of them lost money because the customers have taken their business

Eat at the canteen



Biodegradable packaging

THE WHITE COFFIN

elsewhere, then the campaign would be considered a failure. But even as I said those brave words, I had to push the nagging thought of failure to the back of my mind.

One outstanding issue remained. Without the convenience of The White Coffin, what can the canteen operators use? Meanwhile, the meeting agreed that the implementation date would be set at 1st January 2008. So in fact we delayed the effective date of implementation.

Making it happen

I think this is where we made an intellectual leap from blind obsession with trying to get rid of the polystyrene container or to replace it with an alternative to reducing waste and consumption as small steps towards sustainability. I did not want to get involved with looking for an alternative packaging knowing full well that tongues will wag. In fact, I did hear from the grapevine that one operator had implied that my pockets had expanded (“poket kembang” was the specific remark but she later retracted her statement so we cut her some slack). The Vice-Chancellor even sent me a note to enquire if I was following university procedure when dealing with the packaging supplier. I replied that I was merely facilitating the meeting between the canteen operator and the manufacturer. I was determined to keep USM out of the dealings.

After the campaign more students and staff bring their own reusable containers



When I told him about the expanding pocket remark, he said “there, I told you so”. Yes, sir, thank you for watching my back, I said.

We were not out to replace one-for-one the polystyrene containers with an alternative disposal packaging because ultimately the packaging will end up as trash in the landfill, eco-friendly or not. So we formulated a policy which encouraged students and staff to eat at the canteen, using reusable plates and forks and spoons of course. If customers wanted to buy back, they were encouraged to bring their own reusable containers. If they insist on using a disposable container, we will only allow the eco-friendly biodegradable container made from oil palm waste (brandname EcoPak).

The the customer would have to pay for the cost of the container not only because the cost is about 3 or 4 times higher than the polystyrene containers. We wanted to drive home the message that every action taken by the consumer has an associated cost. Because consumers don't have to pay for the cheap polystyrene they don't give a second thought to excessive use of limited resources. We wanted consumers to think

twice about what happens after they had eaten their food.

The cost of the eco-friendly packaging was a concern. I set up a meeting between the manufacturer and the canteen operators so that they could deal directly with each other. The canteen operators demanded a lower price. The representative of the manufacturer could not agree but promised to consult with the management and bring back an attractive



proposal.

When I got the proposal, I said “no way”. The manufacturer wanted USM to buy by the truck-loads and could only promise the special price for one or two months. I had thought that the company would jump at the golden opportunity to work with a university but it seems the bottomline mattered more. I was at my wits end. This is not looking good. The whole thing could just collapse. It was the end of the year and over the weekend I was at a workshop in a city hotel organised by the Student Department. While

at the workshop, I received an SMS from a student asking for permission to discuss with the local agent for the EcoPak in Penang. I said “go ahead”. I only had one other thing to settle. Pricing. I consulted DVC Omar who was hosting the workshop and he agreed that we would allow the canteen operators to charge 20 sens for each disposable container. At the workshop, the Manager of Student Housing asked “So, Dr. Lee, 1st Januari, tak jadi ke?” (“so, it’s not going to happen on 1st January?”). I replied something to the effect of “I am working on it”. And that was 30th December 2007, Sunday. That evening, at home, I called up the student who had SMS me (Ke Shin) and asked her to bring the local agent to see me in my office the next day, 31st December 2007. I only had two concerns. Can they supply the canteen operators by the next day (1st January 2008). Yes, they said. And at what price, I asked? They said 17 sens, as long as stocks last. So I said go ahead and sent the husband and wife team with my staff to take orders from the canteen operators that very instant. Actually, I had a third concern. Will the manufacturer cut off their supply now that I have decided to bypass the manufacturer and deal with the agent instead. I was reassured that they were buddies. So I breathed a sigh of relief.

There was now a flicker at the end of the tunnel.

2008! A brand new year

While the rest of us celebrated the new year, the agents were busy getting the supplies to the operators. I received SMS updates from my staff saying “everything OK”. One or two operators made a fuss about the intrusion



into their business operations. Others supported it wholeheartedly. One even put up a demonstration of the dangers of using polystyrene by dissolving it in “minyak angin” (traditional oilment).

On the morning of the 2nd of January, I walked the canteens with Pauline. Many had stopped using polystyrene. Others begged for more time to dispose of existing stock. By 12 noon, I was in the VC’s office and reported the progress. I had to convince him that many operators had switched. He challenged me, saying “how do you know?”

I said "I have just walked all the canteens. I have seen it with my own eyes". And then he caught on and said he wanted to do the same. I said, when? He said, "this evening". I said "Hold on for a few days. Give them some time to switch. You should go when they have succeeded so that you can praise them, not shame them". He wanted to know what's stopping them so I said they still had old stock. "Go buy them up", said Dato' Dzul (as he was then). Wow, I said, that's what I had discussed with Pauline but did not have the guts to do.

And so I sent a couple of officers (Zol and Rahman) from the Corporate and Sustainable Development Division to buy up all the polystyrene

containers at the canteens. I could tell the VC was excited. He called for "Che Mat" (Mohamad) the PRO to set up a Press Launching and I stood there and felt everything flashing by. I thought it was moving too fast, too soon to announce it to the World. I felt like I was losing control. But on hindsight I think it was a masterstroke. The Press Launch and walkabout at the canteens on the 7th January 2008 by the

Vice-Chancellor followed by a big entourage of students and officers made a big impact both on campus and the media. The canteen operators and students were made the heros during the launch. From where I stand, it sent a message that this is not just the agenda of one or two persons "trying to make life difficult" but it is a university agenda supported by the top management and the campus community. Whether the "saving the World" message got through at that point in time, I am not so sure. One thing I am sure about is that when the VC spoke to the Press, it was to announce

that we had succeeded in getting rid of polystyrene from the campus. It was not to announce that we were trying to rid the campus of The White Coffin.



Media frenzy

I don't know what attracted the Press. It's not a new issue. Maybe it was a "slow day" for the Press. But the interest was sustained for several weeks with journalists from various newspapers (Chinese, Malay, English) calling to do special features. I even

got phone interviews from the Chinese Press all the way from KL. A student from biology who was a BRAT reporter (King Wey) did a spread for a university pullout of a national tabloid (but got into a slight jam when interviewing some university officers who demanded to see written permission from the University to do the interviews). So, was it the fact the a reputed University had the guts to put its neck on the line? Was it because we offered an eco-friendly alternative? Was it because of the attractive and imaginative use of The White Coffin concept and posters and pledge cards? Was it because we had already claimed success when it was announced? Was it the solid support from students and canteen operators? Or perhaps it was just because the most senior and respected Vice-Chancellor of a local Universtiy made it his agenda to green the campus? Who knows. Probably a little of everything.

Some reporters were a little sceptical. They asked me almost point blank whether I practice what we preach. Whether I believed in it. So life has been a little more challenging for me. I need to walk the talk. At the talk I gave to 2,700 new students at DTSP on 30th June 2008, I asked how many of them will refuse food offered to them in a polystyrene container. The first round of hands was dismal. Even after much cajoling, only about a quarter in the audience put up their hands. I should be happy with that. That's what this

Canteen operator at Health Campus using biodegradable packaging



initiative is all about. If everyone of us rejects polystyrene and refuse to take that thin plastic bag everytime you buy something, we don't need laws to ban these products. It took us a long, long time before we (my wife and I) finally bought our first tiffin carrier. My two elder children used to take the tiffin to school in the morning and when they come home in the afternoon, they will buy back lunch in the tiffin. My eldest daughter told me that things are "a little difficult" for her now that she has banned her friends from catching a ride in her car if they have bought food in polystyrene containers. I used to buy beef and other meat from the hypermarket but I have stopped doing that because they all come packed in polystyrene containers. I was recently at the Penang Governor's Birthday Awards Ceremony and was pleased that they provided drinking water from those huge dispensers. The problem was they only provided polystyrene

cups. My wife and I had to go thirsty the whole morning. I am told that even the local authority in Penang distributes food in polystyrene packages during its events – and they complain about the public throwing rubbish indiscriminately! I was asked to give away certificates a few days ago. Of course they didn't use polystyrene packaging. They used paper cups and they gave out water in plastic bottles. During my short speech, I pointed out to them the basket where the paper cups had been discarded. In it was also leftover rice and food. And plastic bottles. So that's what I do. I put on a thick face and tell people nicely that they can do better. But some people, including friends and colleagues think I am a little overboard. I should "close one eye" once in awhile, cut them some slack. But that is the problem. Everyone knows the policy. Some just don't want to take the extra effort to make it work. I know, I do forget to bring my shopping bag for instance. But I am proud to say that we have finally bought a marketing basket (good sturdy plastic) so that we can reduce the number of plastic bags when we go marketing at the wet market during the weekends. And when I buy potted plants from my favourite nursery guy at the market, he is especially pleased. He says "you're the best". All because I tell him not to put the pots in plastic bags. Yes, plastic bags are not only a rubbish problem. With the petroleum prices shooting through the roof,

the cost of plastic bags have also gone up. That means more cost for doing business.

So, enough about me. That's to tell you that I have not mastered the art of responsible lifestyle. But I am working hard on it. I eat only a little portion of rice with three vegetables (no meat) most lunches when at USM – a small effort to combat global warming. I do composting in my tiny garden. I would like to take a bus to work but the service is bad. I try to walk whenever I can in campus instead of zipping around in my old faithful which is more than 13 years old. I still fly 'cos if everyone stops flying, the world will stop spinning - globalisation will stop. But I stay longer for each trip and have given up trips which are too close to another. So, I am trying, I am trying. We all need to try harder.

Now, back to the media interest. Of course we didn't carry out the campaign just to put USM in the news. But the media was kind to us. Even the alternative media (the blogs especially) had good things to say about our effort. Concerned members of the public wrote to the newspapers congratulating USM and to express support. One demanded that the Ministry of Health should follow our lead and ban the use of polystyrene containers for the whole country. The Ministry responded that all the evidence from studies so far have only been done on lab rats (i.e. not on humans!) and nothing is conclusive as far as the link to cancer is concerned. So, they can't ban The White

Coffin. But it did not stop them from warning consumers not to use it for hot and oily food because of possible migration of styrene into the body. Polystyrene is big business and the plastic lobby in Malaysia wasn't too happy with the overwhelming expression of support from the public and even WWF Malaysia so they wrote to the papers saying not only that polystyrene is safe but it has even been certified by the authorities including the US FDA and Malaysian SIRIM. They however admitted the trash problem but put the blame squarely on the consumers. Their solution - teach the public how to handle rubbish. Hey, wait a minute. Our policy says eat at the canteen or bring own reusable container. That's our top priority. Don't generate rubbish, that's the big idea.

I would say almost everyone who had anything to say only had praise. The Vice-Chancellor even received emails from concerned citizens all the way from down south in Johor Bahru expressing support. And Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) up north as well as the International Islamic University Malaysia (UIA) from the Klang Valley came to visit. Both have implemented policies to ban polystyrene on their campus (UUM in early July while UIA will start on 1st August 2008). One of them even sent a thank you note for sharing the knowledge and the experience. So, yes, without the media we probably would not have had a wildly successful initiative.

Lighting Fires - Student Environmental Activism

Only a few days ago (middle of July 2008), Abe, one of the student leaders, took the case to the Asian Youth Climate Change conference in Hong Kong and I believe he managed to "light a few fires" there. Are we merely "filling the bucket" or "lighting fires", one of the speakers asked at the GUNI Conference in Barcelona in March 2008, quoting the poet Yeats. I could very much relate to what he was saying.

Interjection : 22 July 2008, 11:20 am

- Am sitting here at Dataran Bintang next to Dewan Budaya enjoying the basking by a band of USM students and staff while waiting for my lunch-time meeting with the students at 12 noon. It has been slow getting started this semester. Everyone is busy, I am told. Music getting too loud for my health, so I am going to move further away. It is now nine pages of text for this rambling reflection. I need to stop real soon. Otherwise I will lose the reader. Been working on this essay for more than two weeks.

Lighting fires is what we are trying to do with the students. In fact, I have been pushing the term "student activism" at campus meetings, getting it accepted, making it fashionable, differentiating it from political activism. That was my presentation of The White Coffin in Barcelona. That's how

I see how *Kampus Sejahtera* can push the sustainability agenda. We need to create a ground swell. Make it infectious. We start from within the USM campuses, spread it to other campuses and then take it to the community.

The success of The White Coffin have spurred the imagination of other students. A group of students led by Kah Hing from industrial technology came to talk to me about doing some stage performance to drive home the green message. As usual, they went back and didn't get back to me for several weeks. The next thing I knew, we were talking about a small concert to be held at the RESTU hostel to publicise the monthly recycling activities being carried out by a group of students working with *Kampus Sejahtera*. They wanted to invite the VC to officiate. When the VC responded to my email, the project had become the Mini-Environmental Convo to be held in conjunction with the mini-convocation in March 2008 graced by the Chancellor, the HRH Raja of Perlis. Through this activity I learnt that many students are actively working with outside communities on their own initiatives. I also found out about a group of talented students (The Wanderers) who had composed and performed songs with environmental themes.

It is really hard for the students to be involved with extra curricular activities and I salute the small group of my diehard "fans"

who have to adjust their lives around meetings, lectures, campaigns ...

Interjection : 22 July 2008, 1:36 pm

– Just finished my meeting with the students on how to proceed with our "Say No to Plastic Bags" initiative. It was a full house and I am sure our reputation preceeded us. I was pleased that a few first year students showed up. We talked about strategy. We clarified policies and positions. But that's a story to be told another day.

We have travelled to the other two campuses to carry out The White Coffin campaign, with the bus trip taking more than 8 hours to Kota Baru, each way. We have visited a secondary school in Parit Buntar to carry on the message. And soon we will take our message to the State of Perlis under the auspices of the Raja. We made a last ditch effort to convert some of the yet to be converted students who continued to buy food in polystyrene containers from outside, especially the shops just outside the Sungei Dua Gate, by holding a picket which got a few Students Affairs officers a little agitated. After the event a of couple students (Irene and Yvone) came to chat with me and I discovered that there's a lot energy and willingness to participate in environmental activities. One of them said she was so excited by the picket she circled the area three times but didn't know whether she could just jump in and join the fun. She later volunteered for a recycling pick-up organised



Every new student in USM received a Tupperware container on 30th June 2008 Page 27

by *Kampus Sejahtera* and was amazed that recycling is not just bringing in empty plastic bottles on recycling day. She learned about sorting recyclable items as she followed the lorry to pick them up throughout the campus.

The fire has spread and is now out of my control, which is the way I love it. The Student Representative Council (MPP) led by President Shykri for instance wrote a letter to all the new students for the 2008 intake informing the students and their parents about USM's no polystyrene policy. When I first heard of this, I was truly impressed. It says that the agenda has permeated into the student body. And then I got a visit from Azhar, the Deputy, telling me that he had brought up the the proposal to buy each of the new



Effective 1st August 2008, various types of plastic bags and plastic wares will be discouraged or banned in the three USM campuses.

students a Tupperware container with his Auntie (Sharifah) who works in the USM Alumni Office. It seems that the Student Department did not have the funds but the student leaders pursued it through other channels and even though it took quite awhile, the perseverance paid off when the Alumni Office not only bought the containers but got an even better deal from Tupperware.

We will come full circle this August when the *Pesta Konvo* will aim for zero plastic. No polystyrene, no plastic flowers, no plastic bags and no plastic straws. Rama and his Convex Team are out to carry the environmental convo to the next level.

Interjection : 22 July 2008, 3:50 pm

– Just spent about half an hour chatting with Amirul from MPP who apologised for not attending the meeting earlier because of back-to-back lectures. We chatted about their plan to shut-down the campus for one day in September. Well, not shutdown but they wanted to stop the cars at the gates and then transport the staff to their offices using buses. I thought that would be a logistic nightmare so we discussed various alternative solutions. Then there was also the problem of staff having to fetch their children to or from school during the lunch break. We explored a few ideas and I gave some advice. For instance, I said they should focus on getting staff to take

public transport for that one day as a response to global warming rather than trying to make the campus car-free even for a day or having the buses circulating around campus spewing out more greenhouse gases. Wow, I think this could work if the students put their hearts into it. I think we have indeed lit a spark and it's spreading like wildfire.

This is I think an appropriate point to stop writing, for the moment. I apologise if I did not mention your names. Many people contributed to this effort but I only remember a few names. I have not mention others like Chun Cherg, Chee Siang, Min Fey, Leila, and so many more. Come bug me a little bit more so that I remember you.

Postscript

24th July 2008 3:57 PM – Just dropped off my daughter for her piano practical Fifth Grade Exam so I have about one hour to kill before I pick her up again. Am sitting in a *Kopitiam*, a local version of Starbucks but very much cheaper, with free WiFi of course though a tad slow.

Had a very fruitful morning with two ladies from Tupperware together with some students and staff earlier this morning to talk about how Tupperware can help us with our various environmental campaigns and educational programmes, especially our current effort to reduce plastics on

campus. Don't you think it a little weird? A company selling plasticwares helping us to get rid of plastics. Actually, its very cool. Of course Tupperware gets to fulfill its CSR. After much brainstorming we agreed to come up with a scheme to reward and recognise the canteen operators for being environmentally-friendly. And Ke Shin cautiously ask for *TupperChef* which are high quality pots and pans as one of the prizes and amazingly they agreed. We talked about special sales on campus too but it was not about pushing products. We will also think about having green design

competitions for labels which will be put on their products, using their products for creative works, bringing experts to talk about plastics and more. And I discovered that the “tumbler” I have been taking to work for the last few years is actually a kitchenware for holding sauces and oils. No wonder the darn thing is not water-tight. But my wife tells me she has known it all along. It's just her creative solution to my “drinking problem” – the need for large volumes of liquird, even while driving.



The Chancellor of USM, HRH Raja of Perlis (second from left) at the mini-environmental convocation exhibition, March 2008

About the Author:

Lik Meng holds a Ph.D. in Urban Design and Planning. He is an Associate Professor at the School of Housing, Building and Planning and since March 2007 has been the Coordinator of Healthy Campus, USM.

Who Am I? *asks Ong Ke Shin*

I am white, light and loved by many.

Accidentally created, mistakenly produced and awfully surviving.

I was created due to consumerism and commercialization and I exist because of greed and even more greed.

I am in all shapes, sizes, forms and names. I am popular and I am everywhere. In another few years, I will cross over from dumpsite and conquer not only every homes, restaurants, food outlets, drains, mountains; I will also cover masses of land and sea.

I live beyond the lifespan of man, turtle and all living beings. Even when all the buildings and bridges in the world collapsed, I will stand

tall. Be it rain or shine, I shall not lose my identity.

I do not fear water, rain and sunlight. I do not fear of height and would not hesitate to leap from the tallest buildings.

I am fearless of man or animals. If they chew or eat me, I will choke them to death. Just like what happened to the turtles. They eat me because I look like jellyfish.

This is how powerful I am.

I was made up of Benzene, styrene and ethylene, which might cause your cell to multiply crazily for no reason. And this unchecked growth can spread through the body, affecting other cell and organ.

Still in the dark of who I am?

I am the ever-powerful polystyrene.

However, my days are numbered.

I am now distance by many, refused, dislike and unpopular with so many.

This is so, when a group of 'environment-lover' in the USM decides to tell everybody about me, they revealed so much about me, my origin and my future that I could hide no more.

I was branded as eco-NOT-friendly, Cancer-Induced-Packaging and I looked like a 'coffin', a "white coffin".

They pledge, they exercise and they campaign heavily. They refuse my entry to the cafeteria and the

campus. They replace me with reusable food containers, biodegradable food containers and they even choose to avoid take away meals.

I fight on, I slipped into the campus through the food outlets in the vicinity, I introduce myself to other campuses and schools and my smiles and my pure white outlook never cease to charm the food operators. Despite my efforts, and to my surprise, this group of environment-lovers rages their efforts even more, they picket and persist. Media coverage and heavy campaigning has caused my friends and me to loose ground, minutes by minutes, day by day.

I was still fearless until I realize that the campaign has spread like wildfire, campus after campuses, universities after universities, school after schools are following suit.

Before long, where can I be? How do I survive? Is there anyone who will welcome me and praise my existence?

I wonder and I terrified. Tremble with fear, loneliness embedded us, counting the days of our presence in Malaysia.

Asking myself if I am harmful? Why was I created? And question remained.....

Who am I?



Ke Shin (second from right) educating the canteen operators about the biodegradable packaging on the 31st December 2007. On the right is the local agent for the packaging who sells it not merely for the money but for the environment.

About the Author:

Ke Shin is in her final year of studies at the School of Biological Sciences, USM. She is the current President of the Environmental Club (KAS).

The White Coffin Story Book *by Mahfuzah Othman*

I have never been aware of any implications to the environment that I had done in my daily life. Everything changes when my friend, Mervin Low Ze Han and I was selected to attend the East Asian Seas Youth Forum 2006 in Haikou City, Hainan Province, PR China on 10 December 2006 until 15 December 2006 organized by Partnership in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA). We came back to the Malaysia with ambition and hope to spread and share our experiences and knowledge with others. With that inspiration, Kelab Alam Sekitar (KAS) USM was revived and one of the main projects in this club was to encourage students and campus community to bring their own food container. We called it '**Container Campaign**'.

The objective of this project was to reduce the

usage of polystyrene food container and also to reduce garbage that was increasing day after day. This project was presented first to Assoc. Prof. Omar Osman, Deputy Vice Chancellor Student Affairs and Student Development. With full support from him, he endorsed the campaign and referred us to Assoc. Prof. Dr Lee Lik Meng, Coordinator of Healthy Campus for further discussion

The White Coffin campaign officially started on 18 December 2007 until 4 January 2008 by opening a counter at the lecture halls foyer, Main Campus, USM. The function of the counter is to tell, educate and create awareness about the dangers, importance, why and how to avoid the usage of polystyrene food container. Three guidelines have been given to all campus community in the mission to

ban polystyrene food container which is:

- 1) eat in café and finish your meal
- 2) bring your own container and
- 3) buy biodegradable food container with extra charge RM0.20.

On 7 January 2008, The Healthy Café had been launched by Y.Bhg. Prof Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak in Main Campus, USM Pulau Pinang and starting from 1 January 2008, there will be no more polystyrene in all cafés around the main campus. The campaign was continued at Engineering Campus, USM Nibong Tebal on 13 February 2008 and Health Campus, USM Kubang Kerian, Kelantan on 16 until 17 February 2008.

Since I was involved in this campaign, a lot of changes occurred in my personal life. The way I think, act and my habit. I also got an opportunity to make

presentation about environmental issues to student and people. And yet keep learning how to enhance my soft skill and improve from my mistakes. I enjoyed the time with people's curiosity, questions and arguments. And because of that, I have to be prepared myself with knowledge. Reading books and discussing with friends and lecturers also implementing what I had learned from environmental courses to the real situation. That was not easy as written in the book and I still remember words from one environmental officer of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on his lecture, when we manage environment, we actually managing human.

There are some of my friends now called me **'Queen of Polystyrene'** and even say sorry to me when they use polystyrene or plastic bag. How such a big impact I'm(1). I have to aware with what I have done in my daily life. I will use my own food container and reusable bag when I go to *Pasar Malam* (night market) and to my astonishment, my friends also did same things.

The big challenges for this campaign in during occasion and also outside people. We can not avoid people to bring in the polystyrene inside campus. When I walked around in campus, I will try as much as I can to educate and remind people about this. I will ask all the café operators about their problems and complaints. When I got information from my friend about people using

polystyrene in campus, I will find out and politely ask for reasons and if possible, ask them to change to using biodegradable food container. From my experience, even though in or outside of the campus, people can actually accept your request and respect your principle. I believe that as long as you believe you are in the right path, you have to keep it and walk it. It's normal to have an argument but as long as the thing is right, whoever can not deny it. Education, knowledge, and creating awareness can never stop and this journey of saving the environment will be never ending as long as our mother nature still exist because we will inherit this earth to our children just like we inherited from our ancestors.

(1) writer meant that she was surprise and curious on how she can impact people



Mahfuzah, lady in green, campaigning at the Lecture Hall Complex on 18th December 2007.

About the Author:

Mahfuzah is completing her studies at the School of Biological Sciences, USM. She was a Vice-President of the Environemtnal Club.

White Coffin *by Heng King Wey*



When I first came across the small booth outside my lecture hall that was campaigning the White Coffin project, I was amazed at the enthusiasm of the students of USM especially members of the Nature Society(1). It is not everyday that you see busy students dedicating so much time and effort promoting the ban on the usage of polystyrene food containers. There they were campaigning to anyone that had the time to listen, when they could have taken some time to chill out at the nearest mamak stall(2) or hide away in the cool air-conditioned library.

It made me very intrigued to find out why they were so enthusiastic about a campaign which

had a high chance of failure like any other environmental campaigns around. It would be like watching history repeat itself. However, this time around, things were different, way different. These students knew that this was not just some project that they needed to carry out for some grade, they knew, they had a much bigger task, to save planet earth.

I watched how the students who were campaigning answer each and every remark and question with high spirits that were not dampened even when other students whine and give silly excuses like “I don’t think I’m ready to make such a big commitment.”

If one were to think logically, was it really that big of a task to just have your meals at the cafeterias or having to switch off the lights and electrical items when you leave a room? Making simple changes in life for a better future is the least we can do to reduce our impact on the environment.

Not only did the White Coffin campaign involve the co-operation of students in the campus but it also was tedious and meticulous planning to get everyone involved a 100 per cent if it were to happen. The students’ council even had to arrange meetings with canteen operators and suppliers to have a win-win situation that was acceptable by everyone.

They even came up with another alternative which was the “eco-pack” an environmental friendly degradable food container in replacement of the polystyrene ones.

Persistence really does pay off. Universiti Sains Malaysia became the first public university to successfully launch its official ban on the polystyrene food containers on the 1st January 2008. Today, the White Coffin is a success story that is being shared around other public universities across the country.

With this success story of the White Coffin on our belts, our plight for a sustainable world is yet to be over. In fact, this is just the beginning, for a change in mindset towards a better tomorrow.

- (1) Environmental Club.
- (2) A common name of restaurant in Penang run by Indian-Muslims.



An article written by King Wey in The Star newspaper. She's the first young lady on the top row.

About the Author:

King Wey is in her second year at the School of Biological Sciences, USM. She writes for a local tabloid.

My Journey to the White Coffin *by Min Fey*

My journey to white coffin starts with the Kelab Alam Sekitar (EASY club)...

In 1st academic term in my first year, I saw a notice about EASY club at the bus station, stated there is something on that night at School of biological sciences, I thought it is a seminar about environment, then I go with my gang who are a bunch of outdoor activities lover.

Actually we are on our way to confirm our diving trip to Redang Island that time.

Unexpectedly, there is no seminar but it is the 1st Annual General Meeting for EASY club, since we are here and being freshmen is quite free, so we stay still and get to know more about the EASY club which is known as East Asia Seas Youth club.

Accidentally, all of us, newbie, are selected for posts in the newly established club. From there, we start our activities such as recycling programs, new member intake programs, movie weeks, meetings, environmental awareness campaigns collaborate with other societies such as Sahabat Alam Malaysia(SAM) and Tzu Chi(1).

The relationship of EASY and Kelab Alam Sekitar – KAS is registered long time ago in USM but is inactive. Since the objectives of EASY are almost same as KAS, so HEPP wanted us to be registered as KAS and revive KAS to its function in USM.

After few months, there is a recycling training program by Don and Myellin organized

by the Regional Centre of Expertise Penang(2). In the program, we learnt how to differentiate things that are able to recycle and things that are not as well as the ways to recycle. At the end of the day, we have to set a plan to promote awareness of recycling, then, our group targeted kindergarten kids and we have a sketch, as usual, I become the character of animal again (A sea turtle after being a mermaid in another sketch). After that, I hibernated and are not active in KAS as before. But I am still one of them and when there is a need, I will be there. Hence, I missed the part of planning to ban polystyrene during term break, but for the operational

part, I'm in again (not in animal style but in Homo sapiens(3) style).

In the new academic term, we start to educate warga(4) USM with the awareness and reasons of banning polystyrene containers, a lot of practical ideas are brainstormed during their discussion with café operators, students and administrators earlier. The white coffin concept are implemented in this program, pledge cards, students forces, café operators, hard works from administrators of Healthy Campus make the campaign a success! Another key to make this banning successful is to get an alternative to replace polystyrene – EcoPak, container is made from oil palm fibers(5), so it is biodegradable and nontoxic. Compare to 'white coffin'(6), it is more expensive in price, but less footprint impact on earth.

There are reasons for polystyrene to be banned in USM, one main reasons is health concern, styrene is carcinogen (any substances that, when exposed to living tissue, may cause the production of cancer cells). When hot foods are contained in that packaging, the reaction of migration of styrene into food are accelerated. Slowly, the styrene will be accumulated in our body instead of discharged away. Another reason is that it is non-biodegradable plastic; it can stay for more than 1000years! Long lasting properties is good but the problem is they are non-reusable. Normally, we take away the food by using polystyrene and we throw them away after consuming the food inside. Indirectly, we are making a lot of rubbishes that cannot be degraded. Most people know the disadvantages but would not stop using it because of

convenience and selfish mind such as (Aiya(7), one time only mah(7), nevermind la~(7)). That is the poisonous thinking that made this program failed at other places.

Although USM have successfully ban the usage of polystyrene in main campus, we as the student forces of environments still have not finish our tasks. Education on environmental friendly awareness need to be injected into everyone's minds, sound terrifying but true and necessary. This is because there are a lot of students or staffs that bring in the take away food container from outside the campus especially Sungai Dua(8) gate. Hence, before end of the term break, Dr. Lee comes out with an idea of "on last stand" at Sungai Dua gate. A bunch of us stood there with the white coffin posters and showing them that is wrong! We got positive responses from the cars coming in and going out by honking and show us their thumb up. There are small portions of students bringing in the polystyrene containers and get caught by us, we are not there to embarrass them, just to tell them this is not right and think of our future generation(rubbishes overload and human got no space to stay).

Beside that, we have also the white coffin campaign in our environmental friendly convocation together with EARTH HOUR program. I'm in-charge of sponsorship for EARTH HOUR banners. Target is EcoPak company, this offered me a chance to get new experiences in request for sponsorship, although we did face some problem but we managed to get the sponsor at last. This is a win-win situation, we

got sponsor and they got publicity for their company. I got the chance to deal with authorities of the company too. For me, studying in room everyday and not going for some social activities will kill me, although academic is important, we cannot neglect other skills that we have to learn.

There are a lot activities that we can have fun while doing the right thing for the community, learn new experiences in the fight for environment. I appreciate all the good memories I have in my undergraduate life, Thanks to Dr. Lee for his unremitting efforts in trying to help the environment, vice chancellor for his generous supports on our activities.

Everyone, please continue to support and preserve our environment, think before you do, everything we do affect our next generation. Take initiative and do it right.

- (1) Tzu Chi Youth Collegiate is a Non-Governmental Organization doing activities on charity and environment.
- (2) USM is the Regional Centre of Expertise for Education for Sustainable Development designated by United Nations University-Institute of Advance Studies.
- (3) A scientific name for human beings.

- (4) Warga is a Malay word referring to community.
- (5) Ecopak is made of oil palm husks.
- (6) The writer is referring to polystyrene food container.
- (7) 'Aiya', 'mah' and 'la' is a common verbal expression used in Malaysian to show emotions.
- (8) One of the main gates into Universiti Sains Malaysia.



Min Fey (second from right) with friends at the mini-environmental convo, 21st March 2008.

About the Author:

Min Fey is a third year student at the School of Biological Sciences, USM.

Unforgettable *by Winnie Ng*

It was an unforgettable and valuable experience that I shared with Dr Lee and all the supportive crew in White Coffin Campaign and Environmental Convocation. I have this opportunity to take part in this because of our final year project, My Energy Smart Home Campaign which emphasizes on using energy in an efficient way.

Regarding the White Coffin Campaign, at first, the poster attracted me because it shows a coffin white in colour. It brought me to curiosity and to find out more about it even at that time I'm not yet in that campaign. The printed material such as the poster is a creative idea, so I praised those who contributed this idea for the poster.

At that period, we didn't take much time for meeting

and even have many organizations but we still can work together. At first, we do not know each other well but coming to the end, I got to know some good friends there. I earned this extra bonus while organizing this project.

In my opinion, this is really a good campaign which can educate the people about the harmful of using polystyrene. Honestly, I also used to be not very concern about this matter because and having the 'NONE OF MY BUSINESS' attitude. After this, I realized that if everyone has this thinking, what will happen in

our future?
Our next or next-next

generations do not have the peaceful life anymore. I had a lifestyle change. I brought my own container to take away food when I work in Kuala Lumpur but sometimes still cannot avoid polystyrene.

I totally support this meaningful campaign and hope this can extend to the other universities, states and countries. Everyone have the responsibility on this issue. We can think about the convenience of ourselves but do not make inconveniences to others. Love our green world.

About the Author:

Winnie will be graduating with a degree in Mass Communication from USM in August 2008.



Winnie, right, promoting Smart Homes at the mini-environmental convo, 21st March 2008.

My First Encounter *by Amirul*

What was Dr. Lee trying to introduce to the whole USM community actually? Is it something connected to the death that the community would face in the future? These questions came out when I heard about the White Coffin for the first time. Pauline, the steno for the Dr. Lee was calling me and other friends to come to the first time meeting for Dr. Lee to explain everything about what he was trying to do actually. There are also other members such as the Environmental Club, Community Plan Services and Tzu Chi Collegiate Youth Club that attended and willingness to help Dr. Lee succeed with his White Coffin. On that day, I can see clearly what White Coffin was

actually. Maybe it was quite scary to people but this is the best choice to create awareness to the whole USM community.

From my perspective, White Coffin means the effect that polystyrene users will face if they are using it for a long time. In the same time, it can cause death from the chemical substances that exist in the polystyrene if we don't take any action and initiative to avoid from using it. Furthermore, polystyrene also cause half of the trash amount because the polystyrene take about 50 years for biodegrading process. You all can imagine what will we face if there are too many trash that take a long time to biodegrade. We all will live in the trash of the

city. That's why the White Coffin was introduced because it can cause death from the polystyrene (white) effect.

There are good and bad perspectives that we get when we bring the White Coffin to the university community, especially cafeteria owners. If we cannot use the polystyrene, what can we use to bring the food to the room? Actually, Dr. Lee has figured out this problem and also came out with many solutions for the problem. First, we can use Tupperware which are safe from any chemical substances and we can use it for a long time. It can also reduce the amount of trash that will benefit to us. And, if we desperately need to pack

the food but we don't have Tupperware, we can use another solution that we called Ecopack. The advantage of the Ecopack is it can biodegrade and it is safe from any chemical substances because it was made from palm trees.

White Coffin was not actually a bane of polystyrene at all. It has created other awareness that can be to us. For example, we are required to finish our food to avoid waste. We also need to reduce the use of electrical appliances by switching them off when not needed. If we can do one of the awareness, it is already a success to our but it would be great if we can do all of them for the benefit of the future.

Now, we can be proud of the result. Many communities from other university have seen the benefits to us if we can keep the environment sustainable. Even the international community is proud of USM for such awareness campaigns can be carried out globally. Now, what we need is continuously campaign, to collect feedback from time to time and carry out some improvement to make it become more effective in the Malaysia.



Amirul (right) at the Bakti Canteen campaigning to reduce plastics on campus, 29th July 2008

About the Author:

Amirul is a Member of The Student Representative Council, USM.

Scolded by a Hawker *by Pauline Yuiko*

It was the first semester I came to USM. Unexpectedly, I was shocked when the hawker in USM cafe scolded me for not bringing my own food container to pack food. It sounded like this, “Don’t you all know how to learn from Dr Lee’s son? Bring your own container.” Then, she started to tell us story about someone called Dr. Lee, his son and their containers. According to her, Dr. Lee is a person that proposed to the university that we are not encouraged to use polystyrene container in the campus as it is not degradable and not environmental friendly. Then, she continued to ask us, why Dr. Lee doesn’t just keep his principles to his family and not to ask everyone to follow

his son, bringing container to school everyday.

This should be quite a hot topic in our campus lately. Another day when I go to the other cafe to pack food, that hawker told me that I should not be telling anyone that they are still giving the students plastic spoon for our convenience when we pack food from them. I started to feel quite bad to do so, when the others are trying to instill such important knowledge for us.

Furthermore, I don’t want to kill myself yet when I’m supposed to enjoy my food without worries. Then, when it come time where other people need to pack food for me, I had started to remind them to remember to bring container along.

Another incident was when I was going out to pack food for my colleagues at my work place. I actually had forgotten that my colleague ordered a hot packet of coffee. I ended up packing a cold one and went back to the office. When she mentioned that I had packed a wrong one, suddenly she continued with, “Oh yes, I remember. I saw it in the news; USM said packing hot food with plastic bag is harmful, isn’t it?” I just realised that although such a campaign that seems to be troublesome in our campus had created awareness among the public.

This campaign had even influenced my family members. It was when we went out to have dinner and

pack food for my sister. My dad had requested the hawker not to pack the food in polystyrene box, but to serve it on a plate for us first. I was very curious about what he's trying to do at that time. After I asked him about it, my dad told me that USM is having a campaign where we should not be packing hot food in such harmful material. After the food is not that hot, only my dad poured it into a container to bring the food home. Now, I really believe the effort used for the campaign really does work and had brought out a very good impact for the society.

Lucky for our new batch of students too. Hope that they will make good use of the free Tupperware container distributed by the university with the message of encouraging them on the awareness about the White Coffin Campaign.

Coming up next... Our campus is having a campaign on **NO PLASTIC BAG**. This should be another hot issue that we would need to be concern now, since I'd just saw a program on NTV7 just now about it too.

About the Author:

Yuiko is a student at the School of Educational Studies with minor in multimedia at USM.

Environmental Education *by Chin Inn*

Everyone is a part of the environment. The future changes of our environment depend on the actions we are doing now. Although efforts from a person seems like nothing, it is very important to start doing something for our environment as we can save the earth when we are putting our effort together. As a matter of fact, one person can influence lots of people around us. Thus, there is nothing impossible by just starting to contribute as long as you are determined to do so.

I started recycling paper quite a few years ago, but at that time I did not practise the “reduce” concept. Then later I found out that the most important thing is to reduce the production of rubbish. We

should use the resources only when we need or else we will create a lot of rubbish. When I joined the organization of Organ Donation Campaign, we organised a trip to Tzu Chi Haemodialysis Centre. At that time, I realized that Tzu Chi(1) had done wonderful jobs for the society. They use the recyclable items donated by people to get money to help those in need. The amount of money is large and is able to help a lot of people. I was so touched at that moment as I realised that trash is money. It is wonderful if everyone can be involved in recycling, not only to reduce the pollution to our earth but to help others at the same time.

There are a lot of people who are not doing recycling.

They may think that they have no reason and responsibility to do recycling continuously because others are not concerned with this matter. Furthermore, some of them will feel that it is troublesome to collect and classify those “rubbish” in their house. Apart from that, some may think that it is the garbage collectors’ duty to collect the rubbish and there is no solid reason for them to classify the rubbish before dumping it. From this point of view, Malaysians are not so environment-conscious about the importance of practicing recycling.

I would like to thank Ke Shin as she has invited me to join the environment education programme this semester before the

examination. She is such a wonderful girl as she really has the passion to conserve our environment. She is doing a lot of work regarding conservation of our environment. I can learn a lot of things from her. I really want to thank her for giving me this great opportunity to learn and to contribute as well.

This is the first time only three of us, Ke Shin, Chiew Yan and me are involved in preparing the environmental education programme for certain primary and secondary schools, so we plan the programme according to the requirements of school authorities. The preparation is quite good as we have the guidance and support from Dr. Lee. I admit that I am easily influenced by people. It is still in my mind that during the World Water Day, one of the PEWOG members told us that they are focusing on the environmental education on community and adults instead of children who have no power to do something and will take around 20 years for them to be able to contribute. Also, he told us that if we are carrying out the environmental education in the early childhood, we can try to focus on how to love and appreciate our nature. This is because it is quite complicated for the children to understand if we discuss some serious environmental problems that we are facing now. Actually at that time I had been influenced by his words. Luckily Ke Shin and Chiew Yan are not influenced by him so we continue our plan.

Before we started conducting environmental education in any school, we had represented Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) to go to a kindergarten, Learning Garden, to give a talk

about environment as the kindergarten had successfully launched a recycling campaign and has collected some amount of money to donate to MNS as contribution to the fund to run the projects to care for the environment. I think that the teachers and parents have done a great job as they started recycling. We had educated the children on the love for the nature by reducing, reusing and recycling. I think the students had a wonderful time as much as I do and had learnt something that day. I learnt from my partners as they are really great and put a lot of effort to make the talk more interesting and successful. I am so amazed that they are so energetic and passionate while doing it. Haha...They are my role models and I should learn from them. Since that day, I realised that everyone can do something to save the earth. Just like the children, when they learn about recycling, they will share with their parents the knowledge and some of their parents will start recycling. It is a good habit for everyone to do recycling since young so that he will think and care for the environment all the time.

We had our first environment education in Kong Ming primary school on 23rd May 2008. The recycle bin prepared by Tzu Chi in that school is only for papers. Although there were quite many papers and cardboards in it, we were still able to find many recyclable items in their dustbins. During the talk, we faced some problems such as the students were sometimes distracted and some students sitting at the back were unable to hear our voice. Basically, I think they know quite well about the recyclable items but they still

dump it into the dustbin. This may be due to lack of encouragement from their parents, teachers and peers so that they did not practice the recycling concept well. We are focusing on the ways to love nature and how they can approach it. They had learnt more about those items which can and can't be recycled. We also taught them to practice the "reduce" concept. We tried many ways to attract their attention like puppet show, slides show, interesting video and powerpoint presentation as well. They seemed to enjoy it and learnt something but I still wonder how much they can remember. Teachers' help is needed to keep on reminding them until the practice becomes a part of their daily life.

Thanks to my partners and all people that support us when we are doing the environmental education programme. Last but not least, I would like to share with you all one principle that is "Don't worry that you are just one person, do what you can do. You will be surprised what many one person can achieve when they are all doing the same thing." It is a phrase by Mahatma Gandhi that I am impressed very much when it is used during the PEWOG meeting.

(1) Tzu Chi Youth Collegiate.

About the Author:

Chin Inn is a student at the School of Educational Studies, USM.

My Special Holiday *by Chiew Yean*

When everyone around me is doing the same thing but I'm not, it actually confusing me. During my 2nd year 2nd semester, almost all of my friends are looking for a company or department for their industry training during coming holiday. Some are planning to work with experienced lecturers. But I... did not prepare any resume because I was lazy and another main reason is that I hope to learn more about things other than my majoring subject--- biotechnology. At that time, I'm planning to work with Consumer Association Penang (CAP) because they

are dealing with environmental and social issues that I'm interested in. My decision sometimes makes me confuse because I am scare of being less competitive compared to others when looking for a job in the future. At that time, I met another lazy girl—Ke Shin. She also did not apply for any job but not because of lazy as I said; she is planning to work with NGO such as WWF or MNS related to environmental education. She strengthens my mind as if I'm jobless in the future at least got some body accompany me also =P. Therefore we both go for

what we want. Now, I'm working with her in the field of environmental education. Why? CAP informally rejected me when I called them because they currently don't have any project to run so they no need people. Then Ke Shin suggested to me to run environmental education program ourselves in primary and secondary school. We are so excited with that but what we are worried about is that two of us have no experience at all... therefore, we try to look for some opportunity to learn more from others NGO active in environmental education. Our journey started since then...

When I joined the environmental activities with Water Watch, I learned much from people around me, not only the facilitators or teachers but even the students. Before I joined with the activities, I thought that students from an academically high performance school are better in the sense of learning but I found out that I'm totally wrong. Some of the students came from school which I never heard before. Maybe they are not good in academics and even the way they talked are not polite but at least they showed their involvement during the activities. Those who are really interested they pay attention during the entire activity. I remembered one of the school invited in one of our activities is a famous school in Penang and I was very happy when I knew they came because I came from the school as well. After dealing with the students and teachers, I felt so disappointed. They are not interested with the activity at all and the reason they came is because the school will add 4 marks in their geography exam for their participation. I really don't understand what system is that? In this situation, I know we can't blame anyone because all of us have responsibility towards it. Our society nowadays is mainly concentrated in academic results, therefore schools and students are forced to follow the norm. Most of the students do not really understand the purpose of learning, even the teachers. We conducted water quality tests in the river during the activity and for sure the students have to take off their shoes and go down to the river. Some of the girls are really not

willing to go down and one of them told me that "I wear so beautiful today and you ask me go down?"... This is not the worst case... Some more I felt that it is not their fault as their teachers also didn't show them a good attitude. Their teachers remain seated for the whole activity. Other teachers from another school participated more even though she is pregnant. Is it now a suitable time for us to review our education system? Normally people who have higher society status and more educated are causing more impact to our environment as they concentrate on earning more money. The teachers were making a complaint on our proposal because we didn't state that they have to hike for a 5 minute journey to have a look at our waterfall. If it is the case then she said she won't joined us for this activity. The students are also different from others because last few time students from other school enjoyed very much the beautifulness of our protected natural resource but they are not. I can't imagine if one day all people around the world do no longer love our earth, the place we live, then how will it become? This is the first time I feel shame to tell others I came from that school...

I went to the Pantai Keracut two weeks ago... It is a memorable trip as a lot of unexpected and amusing incidents happened. This trip was requested by a tuition teacher and organised by the Malaysian Nature Society. The teacher is hoping to expose her students in a natural environment as most of them haven't experienced that before. Actually I very much

appreciate her work. It is not an easy work to organise this type of activity. She was persuading the parents after she proposed the idea to them because mostly all of them disagreed with her the first time. Fortunately she was successful. Besides the approval from the parents, her willingness to bear all the responsibility is another hard nut to crack. Thus, her courage should be highlighted. The children were very excited when they arrived; some are really small ~7 years old. At first we are quite worry for the small girl because her backpack is even bigger than half of her size. However, she proved to us that girls are tougher than boys. During the journey she never complaint to us; she can carried her bag on her own for nearly 3 hours hike. During the way back, two boys cried because of tireness and mental stress. I understand their situation because the trip is considered quite tough for those primary

students, more so because most of them are seldom exposed to this type of activity. Parents nowadays are too protective for their children but it does not seem like a good way to educate them. They hope their children can be equipped themselves with many capabilities in order to compete in this fast moving environment but how can they obtain their knowledge through sitting in the classroom and memorising every single word inside the book? This field trip is a good alternative as many of them benefited from it. They learned about the ecosystem, tropical rain forest, water cycle, Meromictic Lake and the most important is let them appreciate on our natural resource and their importance to us. Field trip makes people happy while learning... especially when they are playing with the waves and watching eager catches fish...

About the Author:

Chiew Yean is studying biotechnology at USM.

Green Green Grass *by Elaine Teng*

I still remember the first time when I came to USM. During that time, I was only a form 5 student. I was so happy to see the green grasses. It is all green. and the trees around make the campus more friendly and closer to the nature. Since that time I made the decision to study in USM.

I still remember the day I was waiting for the admission letter from USM, I was nervous and worried that I can't send the reply letter back to the campus in time. When I saw the postmen pass by my house, I was so excited. Finally, the letter came. I was thrilled, and jump with joy as what I have done in my form six was not wasted. I succeeded in becoming part of USM! I

quickly open the envelope and discovered a piece of paper with words; it talks about the usage of polystyrene. I was so surprised with the campaign. I told my parents about USM banning polystyrene. My parents were also happy to know this news. Even my parents are using their own container. My brother was using it too. This news reminded my family that we should start to save the world.

28th June. First day in campus. Three years ago, I am looking at the green field, and now I am a USM student. Thank god for giving me a chance to become a member of USM. I wish to kiss the grass and sleep on the green field. The wonderful

smell in my entire life is only the smell of green grasses. It's a natural thing that made by god.

Here am I, USM, during orientation week; there is a talk about the healthy campus. I am happy to hear that there still are people trying to save the world. I wish to become part of it and I love the tupperware they give us. (I chose the red one). Since that day, I always pray for these people who run this environmental friendly project outside the campus too. I wish all Malaysian will really appreciate god's creation and not take it for granted.

One day, my roommate and I went to buy some groceries at the grocery stall at bakti permai. I am surprise that the healthy campus is

running a "SAY NO TO PLASTIC BAG" project. It is a good project and I think will reduce the usage of plastic bag and can save our earth too. Soon, my friend, who is my senior also invited me to go for a meeting with healthy campus to recommend some ways to run this project. I am very happy to become a part of it to help the campus to become greener. I am really very thankful to this senior who brought me there.

Today, I am going to Tesco Extra with my friend, I told my friend not to use plastic bag because it can harm the earth, if the things we can carry, we carry it. If not then only we are force to take some plastic bags. I was so happy that my friends followed what I said. From this event, healthy campus can really influence a person. According to what the cashier workers at Tesco, USM graduates already reduce the usage of plastic bag at Tesco. It means there are many graduate in USM having a environmental friendly mindset. Healthy campus is changing graduates mind without force very effectively.

The most impressive thing about healthy campus is that they just like the people who

spread the good seed to the social. Green colour represents the nature. Let's shape our campus to be green! The one who can colour the campus is only USM graduate, so let's colour it with green colour.



Elaine with friends making the Earth greener at the Tree-Planting Ceremony to mark the UNESCO World Heritage Listing of George Town, 25th July 2008

About the Author:

Elaine is in first year studying Chemistry at USM.

A brown colour box *by Lye Yi Wen*

The first day I met it, it was during USM Merdeka Senamrobik which was held at the stadium. As for me, it is a box....Yes, I named it a "box", a brown colour box. I don't know what it is made of, I thought it is made of paper.

After some days, I saw the white coffin poster. But I really don't know that it is a poster regarding polystyrene. When I walked closer and have a look, I only realised why it is called "white coffin". It is white, and it really looks like a coffin. But more important is it will make our earth "die" in future if we continue using it for a long time.

Anyway, unless it is not convenient, if not, usually I won't use the polystyrene. I am sure that those who are used to the polystyrene will notice that when we put the

hot dishes in the polystyrene box, when reopen back, it will come out with some drips of water and it will spoil our food freshness. Thus, if I want to buy food, normally I will bring my own Tupperware or having my dishes straight at the particular place.

I can't say that I myself is a very environment friendly person. But, what I always do is just a habit. I seldom use plastic bag, but I won't think that is because it is eco-friendly, just because I like to collect nice paper bag. It may seem strange, but at the same time, I am doing something to benefit the earth.

Just make it as a habit, you can do it. Try to have a food case with you wherever you go, change your Spritzer bottle into a Tupperware or any other bottles which is not harmful to the environment,

do not hesitate to tell the aunties and uncles who sell the food to use the recyclable food container and use less plastic bags. Do it everyday and you may find that this habit can be a part of your daily life. Make USM not only a university in the garden but also the university which is the most environment friendly in Malaysia.



About the Author:

Yi Wen studies social science at USM.

Time to Change *by Pauline Chin*

Before joining The White Coffin Campaign

I heard about a little bit of health hazards of polystyrene but it didn't make much impact for me. Having to work in several restaurants since I was in form three, it was really common for me to see people bring in and out with the polystyrene container. But, two things that I dislike about polystyrene are: space consuming when thrown into the bin and it made the food become soggy and taste bad, unlike if it is wrapped into the plastic or brown paper. (I am not encouraging you to eat in the plastic sheet). These perceptions were before I joined the White Coffin campaign.

Student's time

Back to my student's time, I stayed in the USM hostel for 5 years (3 years degree and my 2 years master). I still remembered I was also one of the culprits to the environment – I liked to bring back food to my room. It was because I didn't like to talk to others when I want to enjoy my food and I really hated when the cats disturbed me when I was eating at the canteen. Though I always take away food, but I had asked myself, actually I have created a lot of waste. I was triggered to think because I was a social science student, I studied waste management and went to the landfill for project. I discovered that the dustbin in desasiswa had a lot of waste

thrown in them. The common waste was disposable container together with plastic carry bag. I had my own container but I didn't use it frequently. I only used it for a few times then I left there because I had no encouragement to use the container.

The White Coffin campaign educates us to eat at the canteen and use our own container to take away food. When I was in primary school, my sister and I always brought food prepared by my mother in a container to school. My mother instilled this habit to us since we were very young. I also believed many of us actually brought container to school when we were in primary school at least for my

generation. Nowadays, everyone uses the disposable containers because it is convenient.

Now as a staff of USM

Before I became a staff in USM, I don't know much about *Kampus Sejahtera* and I even don't know Bahagian Pembangunan Lestari dan Korporat existed in USM. I emailed Dr. Lee to ask for a research job but he hired me as a Research Officer for *Kampus Sejahtera*. I still remembered I was hired to do research but since White Coffin Campaign came in, I became more like an event planner. I have to do everything that my boss assigned to me.

Sometimes, people will call me polystyrene, but that is fine for me. One thing I felt embarrassed was I cannot recognise our Vice-Chancellor. During the launching of the Kafeteria Sejahtera (White Coffin Campaign), we did the campaign with our Vice-Chancellor. The student volunteers who involved in the campaign actually complained about students nowadays were not alert in everything, including our Vice-Chancellor. I only kept silent because I also couldn't recognise the Vice Chancellor at first. I know his name and his signature because I recognise it from my Ko-k certificate. During the campaign, our Vice Chancellor gave much support.

The success of the White Coffin campaign could be seen in several aspects, the students, the staff, the Vice Chancellor and the canteen operator at a very early stage. The campaign wouldn't become successful if it rely only on one party. Every party actually complement with each

other to make this campaign a success. The campaign was first initiated by students, but the campaign is like sand in the ocean, cannot prosper. If they didn't meet with the coordinator of *Kampus Sejahtera*, the campaign would not be brought up because he carefully and strategically planned all this out. If gained no support from the Vice Chancellor, the campaign wouldn't go far. If the canteen operator don't follow and still using the polystyrene, the campaign wouldn't be a success. Don't forget the catalyst, a little "force" and "ban" also make the campaign a success. For me, we are lucky to have the right player of the White Coffin team to make things happen.

In reality, the canteen operators actually play a very important role because they are the one who face the customers everyday and need to explain to their customers about what is happening. They have to face what the students and staff complained about. Some stubborn staff even say rude things and say not to buy food from them. I hardly agreed with this statement, "customers are always right". Customers also need to be educated. I hope the staff and students will be changed through this campaign. As for the canteen operators, they actually are the person behind the scene who has to face all these things.

At first, the canteen operator had fear to make changes especially when we wanted to impose charges for the biodegradable container because they were fearful their customers will run away. But, I think this is a good platform for canteen

operators to change, especially their mindset. They can actually save cost in the long term and help to protect the environment at the same time. Don't under-estimate some of the canteen operators, they are more environmental friendly, it is just that they don't know how to make changes.

For me, working in *Kampus Sejahtera*, my every actions count. Dr. Lee is also concern what I am doing. One day he asked me did I take away food in the Red House that still providing plastic sheets? At first I didn't understand but later that I knew. I think I must be very careful in my actions as I work as a *kampus sejahtera* staff. I still remember one night I went to Subaidah at Taman Pekaka and wanted to take away nasi kandar. I couldn't decide whether to take the nasi kandar in container or in brown paper, but I still have the mindset that nasi kandar put into the brown paper is better. But at last, I decided to bring my container to Subaidah. As I walked into Subaidah, guess what? Behind me was Dr. Omar DVC. I was quite surprise. I felt relief to choose the right decision. During the Chinese new year, I went to my aunty's house for lunch. My aunty served the lunch with polystyrene plate. So, I decided not to take the food in polystyrene. But my aunty said nevermind, because I was not at penang and only our relatives gathered here only. No person would discover. But I insisted on taking the plate. While we were eating, I met another lecturer from USM came to my aunty's house. This made me quite surprise again. I

never expected the lecturer will come in like that. I felt relief again for being firm in my action.

The Impact

The White Coffin campaign gains its popularity not only in the national level but international level too. This can be known by people reading Dr. Lee's blog and seek help from him about the implementation of the White Coffin campaign. Many USM student walked into *Kampus Sejahtera* to volunteer their effort. The student volunteers are busy campaigning and educate people. As for me, my place has become an information centre that I need to give students and people who interested in the campaign whatever information I had. Not only the White Coffin Campaign prosper, now *Kampus Sejahtera* also famous for its formula, *Kampus Sejahtera* = sustainable. Whatever things that involved in sustainable development, the students will come here to seek help. In *Kampus Sejahtera*, we also want to make things happen and get things done.

Changes

One day in the middle of April, I walked in the canteen and I saw big changes in the canteen. Students and some staff started to bring their own containers to take away food. I talked to the canteen operator, they told me actually 50% students bring container to take away food. Last time, people just follow people to use the disposable packaging, but now the situation had reversed. As for me, now, I had changed. I will bring my own container to take away food (like

Tzu Chi fellow). This has already become a habit for me. At first, I still put some EcoPak behind my car so that in case (In case!) I forgot to bring my container, I can use EcoPak as substitute to take away food. One day I told Dr. Lee that I put EcoPak behind my car, then he told me about the issues of contamination. Suddenly, I remembered that sometimes at night, the cockroach can come out from my car. On the second day, I had cleared all the Ecopak from my car. Now, I only bring my own container.

During the Apex exhibition, one professor from Engineering Campus asked me why we ban polystyrene in the campus whereas there is no conclusive research to show polystyrene poses health risks to human. I told her we banned the polystyrene also depend on the environmental point of view. Waste wise, we generate a lot of disposal packaging trash in a day. In a sensible manner, we should avoid using any disposable packaging that create waste and cause harm to the environment.

I like the White Coffin Campaign because it stresses on change. The White Coffin campaign needs us to take action and effort to make the campaign a success. Before that, we hardly change because there is no motivation. But now, the whole campus community change together, nobody feels alone or lonely to make the change by himself or herself. I am proud that USM has become the first University to ban the polystyrene and lead the other university to follow suit.

About the Author:

Pauline is a graduate in social science and town planning from USM. She is a staff of *Kampus Sejahtera*.

I never thought that I will become part of the White Coffin campaign. It really coloured my life and made me feel satisfaction at work. I could see the White Coffin campaign actually become a platform to make changes especially to the campus community. I hope that we are not only indulging in the success that we had done through The White Coffin Campaign but to grab this opportunity to make full use of this platform so that we can go farther for a sustainable campus.



Pauline, right, is the organiser and people-oriented person. She knows every canteen operator and student volunteer by name.

Keranda Putih *oleh Noor Asiah Mamat*



More than 300 students in the Community Service Programme (RKM) were there the first group of students to see The White Coffin poster on 20th September 2007

The white coffin

merupakan satu kempen yang amat baik dalam mendidik warga kampus Universiti Sains Malaysia ke arah cara hidup yang sihat. Bahkan kempen ini dilihat sebagai serampang dua mata dalam pelaksanaannya iaitu ianya membawa kebaikan bukan sahaja kepada universiti itu sendiri tetapi pelajar juga mendapat banyak manfaat. Pandangan ini berasaskan kepada penglibatan saya secara langsung dalam program *the white coffin* dari awal hingga sekarang.

Bagi universiti, pengiktirafan *the white coffin* iaitu pengharaman penggunaan polisterina di

USM oleh Dato' Dzulkifli Abd Razak, Naib Canselor telah membuka mata semua pihak sama ada dalam atau luar universiti. Pelbagai respon yang diterima dari pelbagai pihak, ada yang merakamkan jutaan pujian kepada universiti di atas tindakan tersebut tidak kurang juga yang mengkritik. Namun apa pun reaksi yang diterima, USM terus melonjak nama sebagai peneraju utama dalam melahirkan kesedaran tentang pengharaman penggunaan polisterina di dalam universiti. Sehingga sekarang kempen ini semakin mendapat sambutan dari universiti lain di Malaysia yang juga turut berminat

untuk membuat perkara yang sama.

Bagi pelajar yang terlibat secara langsung dalam kempen ini tidak kurang hebatnya. Kami berhempas pulas pada peringkat awal pelaksanaan kempen tanpa menoleh ke belakang. Walaupun pada mulanya kata-kata seperti 'apa orang lain kata', 'ini kerja gila', 'berjaya ke kita mempengaruhi pelajar untuk tidak menggunakan polisterina' dan banyak lagi yang menjadi persoalan antara kami. Namun kesepakatan dan sokongan antara satu sama lain kami teruskan dengan satu nekad iaitu 'tidak salah kita mencuba sesuatu yang baru'.

Satu perkara lagi yang penting ingin saya sentuh di sini ialah kesepakatan dan kesefahaman. Ini yang saya maksudkan pada awalnya yang kempen ini merupakan serampang dua mata. Ada yang tersurat dan tersirat. Kesepakatan antara persatuan seperti Kelab Alam Sekitar, Rancangan Khidmat Masyarakat, Kelab Tzi Chi dan Majlis Persatuan Pelajar amat tinggi. Kami bekerja tanpa mengira perbezaan bangsa Melayu, Cina dan India, kami ibarat satu keluarga. Kesefahaman yang tinggi dan saling bertolak ansur jika ada salah faham menjadi amalan kami. Kempen ini juga mengajar kami menjadi semakin lantang dalam menyuarakan perkara-perkara yang membawa kepada kebaikan. Kami menjadi lebih kreatif dan berinovasi. Contohnya, aktiviti 'piket' di depan pintu masuk Sg. Dua yang pernah diadakan merupakan satu pengalaman yang cukup menyeronokkan. Saya rasa seperti seorang 'aktivitis' yang berjuang untuk mengekalkan kesejahteraan alam yang kita diami.

Kempen ini juga turut memberi kesan kepada cara hidup saya, sejak terlibat dalam kempen the white coffin kesedaran terhadap alam sekitar semakin tinggi seperti mengamalkan kitar semula barang kegunaan harian, mencari maklumat tentang alam sekitar, berkongsi dengan rakan kepentingan menjaga alam sekitar dan sebagainya.

Sebagai rumusan sudah tiba masanya kita sebagai pelajar universiti mengubah paradigma

About the Author:

Asiah (centre in picture on right) was previously the Vice-President of the Community Service Programme (RKM), USM.

dalam pemikiran masing-masing. Ini bukan masanya untuk kita fikir tentang diri sendiri atau mementingkan diri sendiri. Dalam soal menjaga alam sekitar kita tidak boleh pentingkan diri kita sendiri. Kita perlu memikirkan dunia atau alam ini bukan untuk kita nikmati hari ini tetapi juga untuk anak cucu kita pada masa depan. Jika kita masih mengamalkan cara hidup yang biasa kita buat seperti 'tak apa guna polisterin bukan terus dapat kanser', atau membiarkan air paip mengalir walaupun tidak digunakan, 'leceh la guna Tupperware' dan banyak lagi kata-kata yang menyakitkan telinga, maka alamatnya anak cucu kita nanti tidak ada peluang untuk hidup di bumi seperti mana kita nikmati sekarang. Tidak ada juganya kita belajar di universiti, menjawat jawatan tinggi, mempunyai keluarga yang bahagia dan menjadi kaya raya, jika kita tidak berupaya untuk menjadikan bumi yang kita diami hari ini selamat untuk selama-lamanya. Marilah sama-sama kita menjaga kehijauan bumi supaya kita tidak perlu bercerita atau menunjukkan gambar air sungai yang jernih mengalir, gunung menghijau dan burung berkicauan kepada generasi akan datang. Biarlah mereka sendiri menikmati keindahan dan kehijauan bumi ini.



THE WHITE COFFIN

Photo updates of "Say No to Plastic Bags" Campaign as at 30 July 2008



My mother always say *by Chern Chung*

“This bin is for waste paper, this is for plastic items!” My mother already started to implant bits of recycling knowledge in me since I was young. Energy saving is another issue in my family which my mother will always preach whenever we forgot to switch off any electrical devices. Due to this reason somehow my environmental conscious was slowly nurtured in my inner self. But still there were some limitations as before I entered university, all environmental action was done without much understanding. To me, reasons to recycle are to get extra pocket money and the reason to save energy is to save money and to save

myself from my mother’s nagging. Without taking much initiative to understand what it is all about, this was my basic platform about environmental issues.

I was enlightened when I entered USM. Accidentally I was selected as one of the committee members of Kelab Alam Sekitar (1) USM and that was the place where my journey of going green began. KAS was once in dormancy and now revived as a new club. A lot of small scale projects were carried out but the impact and effect was not that encouraging. The purpose of reviving the club was to create environmental awareness among the students. Due to

the lack of man power and support from upper university authority, we could only manage to get half the result with twice the effort.

After a few months of struggling, the efforts we put in eventually met the dawn (“saw the light”) when the “White Coffin” campaign was introduced. After many meetings and discussions, we concluded that the utmost impetus that we need was the support from university authority. We deeply understood that things will not flow smoothly and this campaign will not survive for a long period of time without a strong backbone. With this concern, we went to other student

activist groups which were also active in promoting environmental consciousness and set up a collaboration with them. After we gathered enough man power and had convincing attestation to prove our passion towards this campaign, we managed to get the attention from the coordinator of Healthy Campus. He was impressed by our idea and gave full support our campaign.

Before knowing our campaign had reached the authority level, I personally did not have any faith in this campaign. I treated this campaign as

a sheer normal routine project which every club has to do in order to keep their club alive. I foresaw the failure and did not expect much impact. Dr. Lee proved me wrong when all of us were called up for a meeting about this “White Coffin” campaign. I was surprised enough to

learn that the student are no longer alone and Healthy Campus was going to march forward hand in hand with us. That was really inspiring and a series of campaign promoting activities were planned and carried out. Most of the policy implementation was led by Dr. Lee. He was responsible to deal with canteen operators while the students helped in promoting the campaign.



A booth was set up at the foyer of dewan kuliah(2). Our strategy was to get the students to sign for a pledge whereby they will promise to green the world and of course refuse to use polystyrene. We received great and vigorous responses from most of the students and staff. We were gratified to receive such support and I knew our efforts were going to give some impacts. Undoubtedly there were some ignorant university students who did not even stop to listen but quicken their steps and walked away with skeptical expressions as if words from our

mouth will poison their innocent minds. I also came across a headmistress from a primary school in Penang. She approached me with a kindly smile and inquired about our campaign. I explained to her patiently after her brief introduction about herself. After knowing her identity, I

expected some positive feedbacks and hoped to hear her to say she is going to bring this back to her school. She stopped me in the middle of my explanation and said “You know what young man?! You should not be staying here doing all this promotion to students. What a futile attempt! Instead, you should go and see the manufacturers of polystyrene and explain all

these to them and then ask them to stop producing. With no more supply then everyone would have to stop using it. Don't you think it is a better way to solve this problem? If they keep on producing then we will have the supply. If we use it then this is not our fault, you can't stop us from using it as there is supply." I asked for excuse from her politely and continued to approach other student passing by. I acted cool and pretended to be very calm and ignored her. I did not feel like arguing with her because I was surprised and disappointed to receive such irresponsible comment from a person with such respectable status.

I learned a lot from this incident. I understand that there is something called diversity in this world and I should respect that. Everyone can have their own thinking and they have the right to choose whether to stay ignorant or to be conscious towards some issues. What I can do is to try my best to educate them and hopefully they will be enlightened one day. I also realized another fact which is I would not say many, but some Malaysians will never take self-initiative in environmental issue. Instead, they need law enforcement from the authorities to rule them. Indeed, a very good example is the "White Coffin Campaign" which we have made a success. With the implementation of the policy by university authority banning polystyrene, no one can make any noise and they are only left with one choice which is abide by the policy. Maybe some people will not agree with this idea as it is forcing people to comply and it will not serve the purpose to

educate and convince them by reasoning. Hey! Where are we now? Never forget you are stepping on the "Bolehland"(3). As long as the authorised people say what we are doing is to prove " Malaysia Boleh"(4), you ought to shake your docile tail and follow their back. No questions are to be brought up and 100% of compliance will always win you a good citizen award. No matter how, sometimes it is good to have 'questionless' people to merely support because they will never understand what are you trying to say and it is preferable for them to just comply.

We also faced some challenges from the canteen operators. What their concern was their profit and they worried students will patronise their store less for take away after we imposed the cost of the alternative to polystyrene (i.e. Ecopack) on the students. After much negotiation with the operators and also the Ecopack manufacturer, we finally came out with a reasonable pricing and this subdued the opposition. I could see the changes among the students and staff. Some of them started to use their own container when taking away. This indicated at least some of them willing to change and have an open mind to accept the messages we delivered. After all, we finally came to our last stand out in USM, a demonstration on banning polystyrene at Sungai Dua(5) gate. We approached the passerby and explained to them about the campaign again if they were not aware about it. We accidentally came across some students who brought in polystyrene from out

side. We did not mean to humiliate them but just to give them a mild reminder on the campaign. We took their pictures and had a good conversation with them. I could feel their guilt and that was a good sign. I have faith that they will change in the future, maybe not now but one day.

This campaign is definitely not the end of my being a green crusader. There is still a lot of effort needed in environmental work as the condition of the earth is deteriorating and we the human being are responsible for that. Maybe there is nothing we can do to entirely reverse the effect of what human has done to the earth but we are the one who set it up, now we are responsible to make it stop. Even individual strength can have some effect on the environment too. There is an English proverb “many a little makes a mickle”. That is what I realized and experienced after I joined KAS. Together we are strong, that is why it is so important for us to gather the youth of the nation to get educated about the environment and voice out their thoughts on this issue. We need to get them involved to make them realise that everyone is capable of changing our way of living. It is just the matter of choice; you want it this way or that way ...

- (1) Environmental Club
- (2) Lecture Halls
- (3) ‘Boleh’ is a Malay word meaning able or can.

- (4) A common slogan used by Malaysia for encouragement meaning “Malaysia Can”
- (5) One of USM’s main gate.

About the Author:

Chern Chung is a third year biology student at USM.



Too troublesome! *by Kan Yin Wei*

As time passes, the differences between generations become more apparent to me. I have never really put much thought into this as I have always enjoyed a great, open relationship with my family. Now as more issues are laid out on the table between the younger and older generations, differing opinions start to emerge.

It really upsets me when I fail to convince my mum and older counterparts to stop or even reduce the usage of polystyrene containers for food. It is deemed as too troublesome to carry containers around to pack food in. Either that, or impulsive buying happens all too often. No trade-off between convenience and the environment is willing to

take place. This is also the result of growing affluence. As income becomes more disposable, people are more willing to shell out money to buy convenience instead of taking a backseat to consider leading a more sustainable lifestyle. The same goes with plastic bag usage. I don't get why some people just have to grab as many as they can when they go to hypermarkets or supermarkets – just because they are free. They do not seem to realise the implications of their actions. It is hazardous in the manufacturing and disposal of plastic and it creates more waste on our land. Why can't we just bring our own shopping bags and reuse those for our garbage? Even better, why not compost our

waste? It is going to be too late to reverse the effects of our nonchalant actions if we do not start acting today. At this time, perhaps it is even more appropriate to say that it is too late if had not started yesterday.



About the Author:

Yin Wei is a biology student at USM.

A challenging project *by Mervin Low*

The issue of using styrofoam containers has been there in the USM for many years; it even got worse during such major events such as Convocation or Hari Raya. Coincidentally, after founding Kelab Alam Sekitar (KAS) in July 2007, we managed to get the help of Tzu Chi Group and came up with a project called Coexist with Earth, a Convocation Exhibition to educate or create awareness among students, parents and staff of USM.

The continuation of the projects has led to an Action movement: the White Coffin Campaign. I could not have completed the poster design without the help of Tzu Chi group members who gave us the idea of using styrofoam as the coffin, and Dr. Lee who guided me in creating a clear message in poster design.

It was a challenging project since it involved many

parties and people.

Personally it was hard at first to cope with the workload of a new club as well as my studies. I'm sure those who have been involved in this project would agree, too. Each small step gets us closer to our targets; each small target gets us closer to our vision. That is how we can endure the duration of the project.

Well, we went on to create a structure on how to start this project, how to create a win-win situation for all the parties concerned, and how

to create an impact in the campus. Unfortunately, I was away for a one-year exchange program in Japan after the initiation of the project. The rest of the effort was continued by KAS committee members, with the help of lecturers and students from USM.

I am really glad to see the success of this project and looking forward to working with KAS committee members again in helping USM create an environmentally friendly campus!

About the Author:

Mervin (squatting, centre) is a final year biology student at USM and founder President of KAS.



E + E = EE *by Ong Ke Shin*

Every second year student is worrying about their LI (industrial training). I am wondering which lecturer should I follow. Should I work in the government sector? Or should I join the private sector. Or NGO¹?

LI is a good opportunity to join the organisation that you intent to join when you graduate. In another words, it is the time for you to look for your “future boss”. Of course, being a picky person, I only want to do what I like. Well, as a student majoring in environment, certainly I am interested with job related with environment, but I like education too. How to choose? Ding!!! Why not I just take both? Environment

+ education = environmental education.

At that time, everybody had already sent out application letters, some even sent out hundreds of letters. When we meet each other, the first thing we ask is “have you got your LI?”

When I met Chiew Yen, I told her that I wanted do LI about EE² and she was so excited and wanted to join also.

We know exactly what we want, but we are not sure where to go. I have asked around, including lecturers and NGOs in Penang where can I do my LI. Unfortunately, most of the NGOs are not that active in EE. They only have one or two programmes in two months. So we went to

see Dr Nurul³ and she suggested that we join MNS (Malaysian Nature Society) in KL. I am willing to go anywhere as long as I have the chance to learn, but Yen, being a responsible tuition teacher, is reluctant to leave her student for two months. Then Yen ask me, since nobody is doing that, why don't we start? Ya, why not???

This was how everything started.

I knew I can't do everything on my own, and it is good if I involve as many people as I can. So I started to tell all my friends that what we will do. Everybody is so excited when I tell them about this, but at the end,

only me, Yen, and Chin Inn from the School of Education wanted to do this. Sometimes I felt so sorry for Yen, because her major is biotechnology. I still remember the day when I tell her that I wanted to do this, she was so interested and she straight away cancel her name for doing LI under her lecturer. We don't have any experience on EE, luckily Yen has experience as a teacher as she is giving tuition, and Inn, being a future teacher, I believe she don't have any problem. As for me, I only have experience in teaching handicapped children, not so good with ordinary children, ha ha!

After a few months, those who have applied for LI received confirmation letters from the companies. And we started to get nervous now, whenever she sees me; she will ask "what about us? I felt so lost". We were so excited at first, but I can see her "burning desire" had been put off. I felt so sorry for her, but there is no turning back, because she has cancelled her name for doing LI. I have to do something before she felt disappointed. I am considering whether to use the name of KAS to do the project, but there are too many rules and regulation that I need to follow. Another problem is about money, because we are doing on our own, we don't have any boss to support us. We need money! Then I remember the recyclable items at my hostel, Cahaya Gemilang. That is all money! So I went to see the person in charge and ask him whether he can give me all the garbage. He agrees immediately but I have to collect and sell it within 2 days. So I message Yen, asking for her help.

We work non-stop until 4.30 am in the morning. I tied the entire recyclable item together, put it beside the staircase and ask whoever is going down the stairs to carry them down for me. When they pass by, they will see us with funny looks, some will ask what we are doing and why we are doing this. After they listen to our explanation, they will said "oh, gambateh!⁴". And some say "wah! You guys are doing a great job, how I wish I can join you, but I am too sleepy. Well, good night." The next day, we manage to sell all the recycle items, we earn RM 227. And we save 7 trees. Again I felt so sorry for Yen, she reached home and 5 am, but fall asleep inside her car because she is too tired and she don't have much time to rest as she have Karate class at 10 am.

So we have money to run our project now, but the problem is where to go and what to do? We need to hide behind somebody, who is big, (not in size). So I e-mail Dr Lee⁵ to tell him about this. Luckily, he is willing to help.

Our fist project is at a kindergarten, The Learning Garden. We have prepared some animal pictures for the kids to do some colouring. After distributing the pictures, all the kids started to colour their animal. One small guy refuse to start and keep on asking his teacher what animal is that. The teacher tells him that it is a kind of water bird and he insists that it is a swan. So he came to me, and asks me what that is? I tell him that it is a flamingo, a kind of bird that likes to eat fish. I wanted to tell him it is pink in color, but I keep my words when I remember our education

expert, Chin Inn told me that we should let them color whatever color they like, so that they can bring their creativity into full play. After a few minutes, he came back to me and shows me the flamingo pink in color. “This is not a flamingo”, he said it confidently and loudly. “Why?” I asked. “Because flamingo stand on one leg” and he pose like a flamingo and stand on one leg when he tell me about this. “Oh My God! Me, called a “mahasiswa⁶”, a university student from the School of Biology and majoring in environment. A future “environmentalist or ecologist”, how could I make this kind of stupid mistake? How could I? Should I tell him that flamingo do stand on one leg to save my face? At the end, I tell him I am very sorry for that, he is right. He nodded his head and go back to his place with satisfaction.

When I tell them about polystyrene, one small guy, shouted angrily “when I buy ‘mua chi⁷’, uncle always give me the white container, but he don’t have the brown container.” And he put his hand across in front of his chest. Then I tell to bring his own container when he I wanted to buy ‘mua chi’. I really hope that he can remember what I told him today, bring the message to his Daddy and Mommy, and practice it.

Kong Ming Primary School (Branch No. One)

Our second ‘target’.

Our theme was transform. Why transform? We wanted to tell them that if they were willing to change and transform starting from today, they can transform our earth into a better place. Hence, to attract their attention, we played the

video, ‘Transformer’. After that, we pulled out the garbage bin ‘stolen’ from their classroom. We distributed a green leaf and an orange leaf for them. They were asked to raise the green leaf if they think the items that we showed are recyclables and orange if they can’t be recycled. Most of them got it right. It shows that they already have the basic knowledge on recycling.



Then we had a short puppet show for the standard one to standard three students. They were so excited when they saw Mr. Tiger and Mr. Polar bear. Mr. Tiger and Mr. Polar Bear told them the problem they were facing now, and all

this was related to global warming and how 3R helps. They began losing their concentration after half an hour. However, our future teacher Inn had foreseen this. She had prepare some interesting videos for the children.

As the microphone was not functioning, and there were three classes involved at that time, we had to shout loudly. Everything had to be repeated 3 times as we were unable to get the message across for the first time. After a whole day, we were exhausted but happy.

B & G Daycare and Kindergarten

We repeated what we did at the learning garden, but this time, I cut out 1 of the leg from each flamingo. Then we asked them “Do you know why it stands on one leg?”, “Let’s try to stand like a flamingo!!!”.



All of us stand on one leg, some of them fall. After that session, we explained to them to imagine how difficult a handicap person could stand and walk. The best thing was that we can help them by recycling the aluminum cans!

We are not a perfect “teacher”, but we learnt a lot from this project, and I hope the children learnt something beneficial as well. I am very grateful with Yen and Inn for their time to prepare all the materials needed, to prepare video clips, and come out with many creative ideas. They had done a very good job, but I got nothing to offer them. What I can do was to bake them some cream puffs. Ha! Hope they like it.

Mini-Convo and Flowers

We are having a meeting about the mini convo for this year (in March 2008). It is a bit different as it is a “green convocation”. We discuss about several condition that can be improved during convocation. Then Dr Lee ask “what we can do about the flowers?”. Fuzah and Abe look at me immediately, they knew I was selling flowers last year. I suggest that we rent the flowers, the words just come out from my mouth without thinking. And I was actually joking, but Dr Lee takes it seriously, he suggested to give it a try. OK, so I started planning for that, but I didn’t arrange it properly as I was in Sabah for around one week. I have to continue everything after I came back from Sabah. As it is just a pilot test, so I order both plastic flowers and fresh flowers.

As we can only prepare limited bouquets of flowers, it is very important that we prepare the most popular flower with the limited budget. We have roses, gerbera, sunflower and lily on that day. There is a rehearsal on Friday morning, so we took this opportunity to tell them about our new “service’. I put a big sign “free” at my stall.

Many people were very curious, and come and ask about what is free. Some felt very surprise, some felt very funny, and some wanted to “book” the flower for the convocation tomorrow. Although it is “free” we set up a donation box to further fund our environmental works. Besides, we do not take any deposits when they borrow from us. We just wanted to try out whether they can be trusted.

When I was enjoying my dinner, the florist called me. She asks me how the response was. Can I help her to sell some bouquet of flower during convocation? Or can she put her name card at the stall..... Seems like she do not know what am I doing. I tell her that I couldn't help because it is not my stall, it belongs to Healthy Campus.

On Saturday morning, Pauline and I arrived there earlier so that we can do some promotion. What surprised us was an aunty visited our stall yesterday was already there. She wanted to borrow the red roses for her daughter. She worried that someone else will take them before her so she came earlier.

Dr Lee's wife was there, and she asked who came out with this idea. Dr Lee asked me “is that your idea?”. I took 5 seconds to answer that. Should I admit that it was my idea? If I said yes, I will be in very big trouble, but if I said no, I am a useless coward. Finally, I admitted that it was my idea. However, it is not solely my effort, it was a combined effort.

Many reporters were interested with the flower lending service. They came and asked about it,



and they asked again, was that your idea? This time I didn't think too much, yes, it was my idea! Yes! It was my idea! They asked me to stand beside the stall, took my photo, took my name. I knew I am really in a big trouble now.

When the graduates were about to come out from DTSP, Daya told me a bad news. A bouquet of roses was lost. I am so worried because I just promise the lady I will reserve the flower for her this morning. I search around DTSP, but I couldn't find the flower. However, the "borrower" manages to send back before we got back. And all the flower we borrowed are return. Sometimes, we just have to learn to trust others.

So what do we do with the flowers after convocation? Dr Lee suggests that we gave to somebody without flower. We found one gentleman, hardly. Daya interview them asking why they didn't buy flower. They say they would rather use the money to eat something great.

Finally, everything has finish. Is it? No, I haven't tell you the big problem I am facing. The next day, the florist calls me. She read the newspaper, she understand what I am trying to do now. I saw the newspaper too. The Char Koei Teow uncle keep a copy of the newspaper for me and ask my mother to pass it to me. The reporter explains it very well, complimented with my beautiful photo, and my name on it. And I knew the florist would hate me very much. I am

very sorry, but I have to do this. Sorry to all the florist in Penang! The florist is my ex-boss, my friend's mother, she teaches me many things about flower, about business. She teaches me to wrap flower, sorry aunty! I explain to her that what is the meaning of "green convocation", and what is my purpose of doing this. And she is very concern that whether USM will continue to do this. I think many florists are concern about this also. I felt like a betrayer, should I do this again?

Ya , Why Not?



About the Author:

Ke Shin is a third year biology student at USM and current President of KAS.

Accolades



Above :
The USM Team won Best Community Service Award for The White Coffin project at CUSA 2008.



Left :
Letter of appreciation from the International Islamic University Malaysia for sharing our experiences and resources concerning The White Coffin campaign.

The White Coffin campaign has also attracted the attention of Taiping Hospital in Perak and Standard Chartered in Kuala Lumpur. Abe has also been invited to Japan to propagate the campaign in August 2008.



be part of the SOLUTION to POLLUTION

TAPAU-MANIA

Bring your own container
Because you are part of the solution!

TAPAU-MANIA BOOTH
Venue : DK Foyer
Date : 2nd Sept - 10th Sept 2008

Buy Tupperware products
at special low prices!!

TAPAU-MANIA CONTEST
Collect 'Tapau' Stamps by 18th Sept 2008
by using your own container in USM Cafes
and stand a chance to WIN A TUPPERWARE SET!

CLOSING AND PRIZE GIVING CEREMONY
Venue : Foyer DTSP
Date : 20th Sept 2008 (SAT)
*Officiated by USM Vice-Chancellor



healthycampus.usm.my

The campaign to rid the campus of disposable containers continues with "TapauMania" a brainchild of KAS. "Tapau" is a Chinese word for "takeaway" but is term used by all Malaysians. Poster designed by Mervin.

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31st August 2008

Fact or Fiction

You may dispute some of the "facts" in the stories and we acknowledge that there are various instances in which the authors may have got the facts "wrong". We have however chosen to retain these error of facts as it represents a point in time of the author's continuing journey of learning.