Much sweat and tears over project

BY JUNE CHAN SWEE LIN

S
eeing the colourful cover of the book Working@Home in the October issue of Clove, a magazine published by The Star, was both a relief and a delight to me. It’s finally out, was my foremost thought. Since I agreed to co-write the book with the other writers, the project was among one of the most difficult ones that I had undertaken. Working@Home is the result of a series of conferences organised by the women’s group Mothers for Mothers.

When Mothers for Mothers first made contact with me, I was given to understand that it was a group of mothers concerned about social issues such as the plight of single mothers and disadvantaged women. From the two conferences that I participated as a speaker, I came to perceive the group’s mission as offering support to women, especially single mothers, who needed help to establish financial independence.

And from what I understood, the most natural thing for women in that predicament to do was to work from home either in a business of their own or take on a part-time job. This way they can look after their family and earn an income at the same time.

Interestingly, I noted that at both conferences that I attended, the majority of the participants were women with a job outside the home who were eager to find out about the prospects of working at home.

I also found out that most of the women who helped to put the conferences together were volunteers. I was impressed by their enthusiasm to help those less fortunate than themselves.

Finally, when I was asked to co-write the book, I understood that it would also be a voluntary service.

This went down well with me because, given the fact that I was already busy with a number of jobs and raising two children on my own, only the prospect of being able to help others would give me the incentive to take on another major responsibility.

To say the book project was fraught with problems is an understatement. Among the problems we encountered was the dropping out of key personnel like writers and the original publisher.

Finally, instead of writing the chapter on networking, I was also asked to write on self-esteem at the eleventh hour. Then there was the question of funding. All the writers involved were obliged to find sponsors to finance the project. This was one area that proved to be very difficult in the beginning as there was not much to show to the prospective sponsors save the noblesse of the mission and the enthusiasm of a group of women.

Finally, a couple of sponsors were found which breathed life and hope into the project. Other sponsors also came in at the tail end. The book would not have been successfully published if not for all the women who volunteered their help and also the group of generous sponsors.

Personally, I would like to thank Kong Mun Yee and Sam Wah Yik of Agensi Pelajar Sdn Bhd and Alex Leow of Maxis Taliqnet Services Sdn Bhd who lent me a listening ear and also contributed financial support.

As a co-writer, I have many tales to tell.

In my opinion, one of the most satisfying rewards for writing the chapters was the opportunity to meet many women from Mothers for Mothers who were sincere in their efforts to help less fortunate women and the depth of their commitment.

They offered me a lot of insights into what networking is all about. In fact, they were the inspiration as well as the source for most of the information and tips contained in both the chapters I wrote. Without them and their willingness to share their personal experiences, my chapters would have never been written.

On the other hand, my involvement in the book project unfortunately coincided with one of the most tragic periods in my life.

Three months into writing the chapters, my father suffered a second major stroke. About a month or so later, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. Both of them were in and out of the hospital for the next few months. Half a year later, my father passed away.

During those tiring months, I had wanted to quit writing the book. Emotionally, I was distraught, and physically, I was exhausted. But the members of the book project gave me encouragement and lots of support and especially time to finish my assignment.

On hindsight, I'm glad I did not quit. It's both a relief and a delight to see the book in print.

More importantly, the many friends I found along the way make all the sacrifices worthwhile.

I have some copies of the book for sale at RM35 each. Those interested in purchasing a copy from me can send a crossed cheque for RM39 (inclusive of postage) to Chew Swee Lia, Locked Bag 119, 43509 Subang Jaya, Selangor. My e-mail address is junchan@pc.jaring.my
and timely.

"Women constitute half of our workforce. It would be a shame to lose women who are skilled workers, so working from home offers a good solution. We should look at how best the government can help in this area. At the moment, SOHOs (Small Office Home Office) is at its embryo stage in our country. Women are a creative lot and it is inevitable that women want the best of both worlds. Lucky is the woman who can make this choice," says Shahrizat.

Ramani Gurusamy, secretary general of the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) who was also at the launch, says that women have come a long way and it's time employers change their mindset and look at the possibility of implementing flexi-hours. Everything must start somewhere, and the book spells a positive move for women.

She comments: "The fact is women now have the luxury of making such a choice (of working from home). In Germany, when you have a family, the decision as to who stays home to look after the child is open to both the husband and the wife."

The book was produced using the Internet and coordination at different locations, and is a fine example of how resourceful teleworking can be. What was interesting was the fact that the whole production team came together and met each other for the first time during the official launch of the book held at the Canadian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur recently.

Funding was made available from four major sponsors: the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the Canadian High Commission, the Australian High Commission, Nestle Products Sdn Bhd and Agensi Pekerjaan myHRpal.com Sdn Bhd. Printing was done by Monfort Boys' Town.

The book is in English, and the Malay, Chinese and Tamil versions will be made available soon. Those interested in purchasing the book can call Mothers for Mothers' hotline
couple of hours."

Her SOHO is located upstairs in her double-storey terrace home while the hall downstairs is converted into a playhouse filled with educational kits and toys, construction toys and a small library.

"When you work from home, it's important to teach the children the meaning of compromise. Adrian understands that mummy has to finish her work first before she can watch TV.

"I want them to have their own space, both in the physical and emotional sense, a place to run about while knowing that they have me nearby to listen to them. We can't give them g'deal because they'll probably give you a deal ear! " she remarks wittily.

Book project

According to Working @ home: A Guidebook for working women and homemakers author Chong Sheau Ching, the concept of home-based work dates back to the time when your grandmother and the generation before her baked cakes, cookies and pies or babysat for the neighbours' children to earn some money.

"With the advent of ICT, times have changed, but working from home has long been a formal means of employment. And today, the Internet has certainly provided tremendous opportunities for those looking for a balance between family welfare and working life," says Sheau Ching a columnist with The Star who also conducts corporate training and management courses.

Wireless and borderless, the Internet indeed offers a fantastic yet feasible alternative to the idea of teleworking. Although a relatively new development in Malaysia, the practice of teleworking is rather advance in the West where an array of job opportunities await the homemaker. Home-based activities are increasingly experiencing a departure from its more traditionally cottage industry form with jobs like desktop publishing, digital dictation, data entry, constructing databases and telemarketing to name a few.

At the press launch of the book, Kong Mun Yee, CEO of mhalal.com, a human resources portal for employers and jobseekers looking for online recruitment, shared her thoughts.

"Human resources has undergone a change in mindsets. Previously, women were faced with an ultimatum -- it was either being full time with your kids or work. But in today's world of technological advances, the task of juggling work and homelife has become much easier," she says.

Canadian High Commissioner to Malaysia Jean C. McCloskey explains that in Canada women are included as agents and beneficiaries in its social and developmental programmes.

"In Malaysia, this commitment is exemplified through the

Working@Home — Panduan wanita cipta kerjaya

SEJAK zaman-berzaman wanita telah mula bekerja. Jika dahulu mereka ke bendang menanam padi, menoreh getah, meredah belukar mencari buluh dan akar kayu, kini menjalani kehidupan di zaman alaf baru, bentuk kerja bertukar mengikut tuntutan zaman.

Bezanya kerja-kerja yang dilakukan dahulu tidak mendapat upah. Tetapi tujuannya tetap sama, membantu meringankan beban suami.


Namun setinggi mana pun pendidikan wanita atau melangit manapun kejayaan mereka dalam kerjaya, tetapi jika terpaksa memilih antara anak dan kerjaya, walaupun dengan hati yang berat mereka tetap mengutamakan anak-anak di rumah.

Pilihan antara dua membuat ramai wanita yang berpendidikan tinggi dan berkemahiran menjadi suri rumah sepenuh masa. Apabila anak-anak membesar, mereka mencari sesuatu untuk memenuhi masa yang terluang.

Sesetengah mereka mulai mencari peluang kembali bekerja. Ada pula lantaran terlalu lama terpisah dengan dunia pekerjaan berasa jauh tertinggal untuk bekerja semula lalu mengambil keputusan terus menjadi suri rumah.

Menyedari ramainya wanita berilmu menjadi suri rumah sepenuh masa, dan memahami betapa ruginya jika pengetahuan mereka tidak dimanfaatkan, beberapa wanita telah bergabung idea menghasilkan buku bertajuk Working@Home.

Buku yang merupakan projek sulung Mothers For Mothers merupakan garis panduan untuk wanita bekerja yang mahu berhenti kerja, bercadang bekerja di rumah, untuk suri rumah yang mahu menambah pendapatan keluarga, mencari kepuasan diri serta ibu tenggah atau isteri malang yang mahu memulakan penghidupan baru.


"Sungguhpun tiada galakan daripada kerajaan tetapi kerajaan tidak pernah menghalang suri rumah bekerja dari pada rumah. Seperti kita tahu ramai wanita

Bagaimanapun Katherine tidak menafikan bekerja dari rumah memerlukan pengurusan masa yang bijak dan disiplin diri yang kuat. Ibu kepada dua anak perempuan ini berkata, oleh kerana suri rumah biasanya terpaksa berkejar dengan masa lantaran kerja rumah yang tidak pernah habis, mereka perlu bijak menguruskannya. Dengan kehadiran kemudahan teknologi, ia boleh memendekkan waktu melakukan kerja rumah lantas memberi ruang untuk membuat kerja sampingan.

Projek buku Working@Home ditaja oleh Agensi Pembangunan Antarabangsa Kanada (CIDA), Suruhanjaya Tinggi Australia, Nestle Product Sdn Bhd. dan ajensi pekerjaan myHRpal.Com Sdn Bhd.
Wired mothers do it for themselves

Katherine Yip is a busy well-educated mother, jostling with the demands of two young daughters and a full-time job as a translator.

Living in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, she has found that new technology has opened up new horizons for her.

"In our society, women may have difficulty to move around because they don't have a car or they have to stay home to take care of a bedridden family member," Katharine told BBC News Online.

"We may be home most of the time, but the physical boundary is no longer there once we go online," she said. "That is why a group of mothers could publish a book in four languages by just communicating online."

The book, Working@home, was published last year as a guidebook for working mothers, offering advice of how to run a business from the home.

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well.

"Gone are the days when women who stay home are called housewives and are looked down on because society thought we had little to contribute to society," she says.

"Housewives like me are at home killing the Nimda virus, cursing the Code Red II virus for attacking our websites, crawling on the floor fixing the computer wires and behaving as cyber-professionals while our kids are doing homework behind us or the curry chicken is being slow cooked over the stove."

**Costly barriers**

But the high cost of computers and an internet connection in countries like Malaysia means the dream of working from home is often beyond the reach of many women.

"Besides, original software is very expensive. The Windows operating system and the small office package I bought this year cost more than the computer itself," says Sheau Ching.

"Until the prices of all software and hardware come down, using information technology to work from home will remain a dream for many."

*Audrey Fong*

One of those who can afford it, like Audrey Fong, another of the authors of Working@home, works from home for an internet real estate portal.

Living in Malaysia with her husband and two young children, she has found that technology has freed up precious time to spend at home with the family. But she warns that other mothers against trying to do too much.

"The supermum myth is exactly that, a myth," she says.

"Make technology work for you to
MOTHERS FOR MOTHERS

Mothers for Mothers is a network of multi racial mothers set up in 1998 to give mothers, especially single, disabled and disadvantaged mothers as much information and encouragement as possible about balancing work and motherhood from home. We currently have 25 women in the core team and about 3600 members. We are also in the midst of redeveloping our website “mom4mom.com” into a new portal, ‘myhome4work.net’. This is a grassroots project done by the grassroots for the grassroots.

Mothers for Mothers have been very active in organizing seminars and conferences throughout these years, involving speakers who have experienced working from home under various circumstances and in many forms. During these conferences, we have advocated choices, problem solving and economic self-reliance.

By encouraging women to work from home and to be more vocal about our situations, we want to show society that homemakers possess skills and talents that can contribute to the economy and the household. Hopefully, the message will spread to make full time parenthood a noble venture and eventually more mothers and fathers will consider it as an option for nurturing their families.

In this day and age, we know that the knowledge of Information Technology (IT) is most important if one wants to work effectively and productively from home. IT skills are essential to produce and market goods and services. Through small, concrete steps, if we can help one woman to stand up economically, we are helping her children and the rest of her family.

It is with this objective that Mothers for Mothers has come up with a new project called Salaam Wanita.

SALAAM WANITA

Under the Salaam Wanita Project, 200 disadvantaged women will be trained this year in basic IT skills, i.e. word processing, Internet and net surfing of our website to prepare them for teleworking or basic e-commerce. These disadvantaged women include single mothers, chronically ill women, abused women, single income earners and women who are in a vulnerable position like those taking care of small children, elderly or sick spouses. After some initial training, the coordinator for this project will have the task of securing home-based work and free-lance work for these women or connect them to agencies with this kind of work.

Computer training will also benefit those mothers who already own home businesses such as baking, sewing or handicraft. By learning how to use the Internet, these women have the opportunity to reach a wider market. Often these mothers cannot afford to put out an advertisement in the newspaper; therefore the Internet will give them a cheaper and faster avenue to further promote their products. Our Website can be an effective
medium for them to advertise their products and services. Cash generation for these women can range from enhancing their current home business to editing work, accounting and general typing.

Salaam Wanita’s computer training project for 200 women will run for one year. By March 2003, we would begin to prepare the women to work from home and network then with agencies.

**PARTNERSHIP WITH NGOS**

1. Identifying 200 women. Selection of these women is highly important to ensure the highest rate of success. We are targeting women who know how to operate a computer at the basic level, have high IT interest, and really need cash work. Working from home would be a viable option for them.

2. Computers. Selection would be given priority to those with access to computers and phone. Majority of these women do not have computers. The plans to establish a computer donation scheme to appeal to the public to donate their second hand computers to these women are under consideration.

Training programmes will be held in late November 2002 as well as in December 2002 and January 2003 respectively.

Faithfully,

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Mothers for Mothers
“Working From Home” Conference

NEWS RELEASE
For immediate release

Working From Home – Choice For Today’s Women

Petaling Jaya, November 25, 2000... Working women and homemakers gathered to learn more about the trend of working from home, thanks to Mothers for Mothers, a network of multi-racial mothers of all ages involved in women-connecting-women activities, at the "Working from Home" Conference at the Crystal Crown Hotel here today.

Organised in conjunction with the launch of its book "Working @ home", the conference is a community project which aims at promoting the concept of working from home for women who want quality lifestyle, harmonious relationship with family members, self-improvement and economic freedom.

More than 200 participants comprising working women, homemakers, disadvantaged women, home-based businesswomen and members from various NGOs received useful guidelines on aspects of decision making, financial planning, establishing a home-based business, adjusting home life and home office, and networking. Panel sessions were led by a team of experienced home-based businesswomen of varied background. On hand to exchange their experiences were representatives from abroad - HomeNet (an international network for homebased workers) Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand.

Mothers for Mothers has organised seven successful “Working from Home” conferences held between June 1998 and November 1999 held in the Klang Valley and Penang. The conferences have drawn more than 3,000 participants, comprising working women, homemakers, disadvantaged women and women who run home-based businesses.
on his learning list is ASP and XML. The learning experience has been fun. "The most valuable lesson which I've learnt is how to turn organised information into knowledge. I've also discovered that creating a site is more addictive than surfing. I have to be very careful in managing my time."

Packing more functions and knowledge into the site, Toi aims to get the site working as an 'intelligent agent for surfers' where it may serve in a variety of roles such as a 'librarian, teacher, advisor'. And when Toi has more time on his hands, he will experiment on rigging the site so that it can be synchronised simultaneously to mobile devices such as PDAs and not just to retrieve information but also as a way to update the site.

Not many people share Toi's passion to experiment, create and share. "I think it is more to do with our 'modern lifestyle'. Malaysians just don't have a culture where we encourage learning as a lifelong pursuit. Instead most see learning as a necessary evil for work. I like to see our society cultivating a culture where learning is encouraged and enjoyed, perhaps as a hobby, and not as work!"

Mom4Mom.com
(www.mom4mom.com)

Chong Sheau Ching initiated the idea of a cyber-community of home makers in 1999. She had a powerful vision: to empower full-time housewives to achieve economic freedom and to promote the idea of working from home to working women, who were also homemakers. It was also a subject which was close to her heart. In late 1998, she described the social stigma which she faced after quitting her demanding career in an article entitled, "A job only mothers can do". It was published in a local daily. She was formerly a policy planner in the World Health Organisation (WHO) and decided in favour of freelance writing which allowed her to work from the comfort of home. The flexi-hours were important because it allowed her the much needed time in raising up her daughter. Chong received a lot of feedback from readers. "Sifting through the emails, I realised that many mothers think motherhood involves only two choices: staying home for the children or leaving them in the hands of caretakers. The third option — working from home — is rarely considered as many women do not even know how to get started," said Chong.

With four years as a home entrepreneur, she is able to share her experiences and insights with other women who are trying to juggle their time between work and family commitments. "I was
Some three decades ago, my family and I lived in a village where a woman who worked at home occupied the house next to ours. Day and night, she would be busy over her sewing machine stitching together men's pants. For each completed pair of long pants, she earned 50 sen and short pants 30 sen.

Today, with more women opting to work from home, the profile of the homemaking woman has changed. Generally, there are three categories of homemakers — the manual, the clerical, and the professional. Helped by information technology, the image of homemakers is also becoming more attractive, even glamorous.

Today's homemaker chooses to work this way mainly because of the traditional expectation of them to be the primary childminder. Others do it for freedom and flexibility.

Despite all the lobbying by feminists, men generally still feel that they are not doing "real work" unless they have a job outside of home. Hence, women are often saddled with the dual role of working at a job and looking after the home.

A simplistic situation would be to give women a job where they can work at home. This way, you kill two birds with one stone, but the reality is, in most cases, it is the women who get hit by the stone.

Working from home is not without its inherent problems. For some women, the disadvantages may even outweigh the advantages. Among the disadvantages are the reduction of income, loss of promotion, the unpredictability of work and isolation.

Job-related losses might be insignificant if a woman believes that being at home with the children is more important. But many women are not prepared for the lack of support from their spouse, relatives and business associates.

This might eventually prove to be the greatest problem faced by women working from home. An unsupportive husband not only fails to give his wife the emotional assurance that she needs but also introduces a new set of problems of a magnitude.

Some women recount tales of husbands who turn angry when they fail to see a house that is spick and span and a hot meal waiting on the table for them when they come home in the evening.

One woman says: "My husband accuses me of lazing around. He asked me what I had been doing the whole day!"

Of course, what this husband did not realise is that work is often unpredictable for the woman working at home.

One homemaker who does clerical work says: "Work is unpredictable. When the office gives me a lot of work, I find myself neglecting my home and children. I even lose my temper and shout at the children." An understanding husband would be able to defuse this situation before it turns into an ugly domestic scene.

Besides supportive spouses, children and other members of the family can also lend a hand. The children can make their own drinks, help with the dishes and general cleaning whereas the grandparents can help babysit.

Other than family members, the woman's employer also needs to be more sympathetic to the peculiar circumstances surround people working from home.

The hidden costs of working from home are unpredictability of income, low earnings, isolation and long hours. The woman's employer can show support by making the contract more attractive.

One employer who uses part-time workers says the offer drawn up by his company depends on how much the particular worker is valued.

If the homemaker has the qualification and experience and the firm values highly, the terms of the contract will be more attractive.

He says: "When we adjudge that the homemaker is only taking her stint at home as temporary, we will give her a good offer to keep her happy until she can rejoin the firm full-time. We value her experience and we know it is hard to train another person to take her place."

But he admits that generally employers tend to see the contribution of home-based workers as "casual" work. They have doubts that the woman can tend to her children and at the same time produce work that is comparable to her counterparts working in the office.

Hence, if home-based women workers want to be taken seriously, they will have to win over the support of their families and the confidence of the business community. At the same time, they should form the collective voice to strengthen their bargaining power.

Thus, issues like minimum pay, medical benefits, insurance coverage and promotion opportunities can be addressed.

Working from home is not a new phenomenon but contemporary women have given it a new image and information technology has redefined it.

It is important that modern women keep a finger on the pulse of changing trends. Perhaps new technology can give women contemplating home employment a better deal.

The coming Mother for Mothers conference titled Building Networks of Support will focus on gathering support from family members.

There is also a section on getting one's household to co-operate financially.

A woman will have the peace of mind to work at her job if she knows that her family is in accord with what she does. It is like winning half the battle already.

The Mother for Mothers conference will be held on Sunday, Oct 10, at Holiday Villa, Subang Jaya. For details, call Sushila (7188794), Hapjiah (7188135) or Karen (7344898).

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Hear me roar, with no regrets

By CHONG SHEAU CHING

THE end of a gruelling two-hour job interview last year, my manager asked me, "What are your biggest achievements in life?" Without thinking twice, I answered, "My weekly Star column and my daughter." He looked at me curiously and asked, "Why?" I explained, "Because they are the loves of my life," I explained. He gazed sharply at me and then said, "Our corporate culture doesn’t tolerate individuals who shine above others. If you want to join us, you have to give up your column," And all our senior staff are single, self-driven men who work long hours and socialise with each other afterwards. You’ll have to work and play like them to achieve the same performance level. This means that you can’t spend much time with your daughter. Are you willing to accept this?"

Without thinking twice, I answered, "Sure, I won’t give up either of them." With that, I walked away from a job that offered a five-figure salary.

When I told a friend what happened, she exclaimed, "Are you crazy? That job would have given you a good, steady income and lots of benefits!"

"Here you are, doing what you like and you don’t own a car or any property? Anyone with your work experience would own at least a Volvo, a luxury condo, a two-bedroom link house, and a bunch of high performing stocks. You’ve got wind in your hair!"

I encountered this friend again recently, after the economic downturn began.

"Look, now everyone is tightening their belts to face this Year of the Tiger," she said.

"The Tiger is going to chew and bite. People who get bitten are those with good, steady incomes. Don’t you regret not taking that job?"

"His question stuck in my mind for a long time. But, no matter how much I turned it around, I can’t see how anything could be more fulfilling and enjoyable than to love what I do and feel that it matters.

My two achievements happen at the same time. Both have demanded lots of hard work and patience, but I have been rewarded many times over for both.

Three years ago I took a break from my career after having my daughter. It was the first time in more than 10 years that I had time on my hands. I felt restless and aimless. When I expressed my dissatisfaction to a close friend, she suggested, "How about spending some time writing up those interesting international stories you used to tell me?"

Strangely, the suggestion sparked off many unforgettable scenes of women and children in my mind, arousing all kinds of emotions. One late night, as my baby sucked sleepily at my breast, my mind wandered back to my past.

The shadow of a street lamp brought forth the image of a paralysed refugee woman separated from her child. Her sorrowful cries made my heart shrink, as if she were still right in front of me. I shook her image out of my head and said to myself, "I have to write about this so one day you’ll know what mommy has seen."

When I sat in front of my computer the next day, I didn’t know what to do. I knew nothing about writing stories. Having been trained in science, every document I had written up to then followed a logical sequence—hypothesis leads to explanation/evidence and to conclusion.

So I bought a book on short-story writing and learned three story structures—pyramid, inverted pyramid and hour glass—before I got confused over "syrinx", "syrinx", "syrinx". The chapter on style used an example paragraph written by Western writers. I had never heard of it, and I passed this encouraging quotation:The best style is your own style.

I sent five stories to June Wong, editor of Section 2 at The Star. When I received a reply, I was shocked at the speed of the response. "Can you hold a column on women’s issues by yourself?"

June smiled and asked, "Can you do it weekly?"

Again, I could only manage another, "I think so."

Since then, I have laboured in front of my computer, sacrificing leisure time to get my stories right. Several times, I almost quit because I couldn’t make sense of my disjointed writing. But June and her staff kept saying on the phone, "Keep going! Don’t worry."

Within months, I was rewarded richly. Several friends overseas read my columns in The Star Online over the internet. They chided me on, an old encouraging e-mail and letters from other readers that told me that I was reaching them with the stories.

Readers, most of them men, have shared private thoughts and personal lives with me. Some of the sharing has been so touching it brought tears to my eyes.

Several readers locally and overseas have become friends. They give me feedback and tremendous support. The issues I raise inspire them and, in turn, they inspire me.

They don’t measure me against material success because they don’t want anything from me except to be friends. I’ve received gifts of books, music and pictures of their families. When I’m down, I e-mail them quick notes. Within hours, they send e-mails and relevant quotes to cheer me up.

I’ve also communicated with former schoolmates and friends I had lost touch with. Through them, I see who I was then and who I am now. An e-mail note came one saying, "Hi, I was your tuition teacher during a year-end school holiday. You were in primary school. I met you several weeks to teach you how to spell ‘uncrouch’.

An aunt, whose speaking to me ever since I was a child was, ‘Ali yok, you’re so fat already,’ now greets me with a smile and ‘Ali yok, your last week story is so interesting. Get any more, ah?’

Last year, a long-time Indonesian friend and his wife were a surprise visit. He had come across my name in an old address book and wondered where I was. He got onto the Internet in Jakarta and searched for my name. Within seconds, he found himself staring at a list of postings with my stories. He read the stories and recognised his old friend in pictures.

Now, I write this column as if I’m talking to friends. I won’t give up the time I allocate for writing any more than I would give up my time with my daughter.

From the first time I saw my daughter’s little feet in an ultrasonic monitor, I have been constantly amazed by her changes. Those two little legs, her repetitions of my own, can now jump three steps without falling. They kick balls, cycle, and splash water in swimming pools.

It was the image of these two feet that kept popping into my mind during my pregnancy in Egypt. I did my very best to protect them from harm — I finally clutched onto hands-helds in Egyptian taxis twice daily while swerving about dangerously on the road along the Mediterranean Sea. I held my hands around my protruding belly to protect it from falling debris and flying stones; I patiently waited at long stops in city and potassium permanganate to make sure there were no worms in my diet, and I prayed hard for her safety in physically risky situations.

These were also the two feet which gave me so many worries since birth. When they kicked in the air, accompanying loud cries, I worried whether or not she was hungry. I bought an ability to sleep through the night — an ability I’d had since my own birth — to worry about her choking, about Sudden Infant Death syndrome, fever, teething, tantrums, stomachaches and hunger pangs.

My education and work experience didn’t prepare me for my motherhood. As the principal caregiver in the first two years of my baby’s life, I had to overcome each new situation and worry with my mother’s instincts. I had to reach into the deepest part of my own being for the potential I never knew I had. As my daughter progressed, I overcame my own fear of incompetence in child-rearing.

Dropping out of my career to spend time with my daughter while keeping my mind active on issues close to my heart through writing is something I never thought I could do. As I wrote each story, I witnessed my daughter grow, change, become a person, and saw the first evidence of her mental achievement.

Now I’ve stopped worrying about my daughter and I enjoy every moment with her. At three, she is half my height, an achievement I attribute to my faith in milk. She has mastered English and Mandarin. She now learns Malay as the Indonesian next door will help her.

Through her, I’ve rediscovered the world of wonders. I now step beside the road to smell flowers, and find fun in watching ants crawl. When I look up at the stars, I don’t just see lights flickering in the distance, I see little eyes playing and wonder if they have the same dreams.

I have never loved another human being this way before. Her every cough and squirm brings me concern. Every wink and every smile brings pride and joy to my heart.

Every night before she falls asleep, she says to me, "We hei ni ni-ah?" I love you very much? My heart fills with a feeling I can’t describe in words.

My two achievements have definitely lifted my self-esteem. They have given me my identity. I’m not a blank face with a works in an office, but that beautiful child’s mother and the person who has lived through the stories she writes. It will take more than the prospect of material gain to make me give up the time I spend with my daughter.

The wind in my head is a cool, refreshing breeze in this Year of the Tiger. The Tiger is roaring to roar as far as sure, but I’m going to roar back in my own way.
The Customer-Centric e-Business Solutions Provider

DC One focuses on providing customer-centric solutions to medium and large-sized businesses looking to expand their horizons in the new economy. Our strength lies in our ability to analyse and customise solutions grounded in sound business, marketing, creative and technical knowledge.

Because of our genesis, we possess an in-depth understanding of the Internet and how the technology works. Because of our passion, we are constantly inventing new ways to assist businesses in building their brands or reinventing their operations to meet the changing needs and expectations of customers.

Our customer-centric solutions allow businesses to create and maintain strong, intimate relationships with prospects and customers alike. We can also help transform the way you communicate with your partners, vendors and employees using the power of the web.

Whether you are planning to bring your existing business online, or looking to expand your online business initiatives, we are well-equipped to help you realise your plans with effective solutions that deliver results for today and tomorrow.

DC One aims to provide the market with customer-centric, end-to-end, business solutions that fuse strong technology with creativity and penetrating marketing strategies. It is driven by a group of experienced and highly motivated professionals from diverse backgrounds and disciplines.

**Solutions**

- Applications development
- Turnkey projects
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
  - Loyalty programme
  - Permission marketing
- Web site development and management
  - Research, business analysis and planning
  - Strategy formulation and development
  - Web site marketing and management
  - Content development

- Online and offline marketing communications
  - Online advertising - online banner ad, online button ad, email advertising
  - Offline advertising - print, radio & tv campaigns and below-the line promotional materials
  - Others – multimedia presentation

- Infrastructure set up (Hardware & Software)
- e-Commerce and e-Procurement

**Products**

- Web-based e-Business Suite
- e-Customer Relationship Marketing Tools

For more information on our services, kindly contact us at

DC ONE TECHNOLOGIES SDN BHD 468348 H
53B, Jalan SS2/55, 47300 Petaling Jaya
Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Tel 03 7877 2813
03 7877 2592
Fax 03 7877 1906
Special Recipe for an Enriching Life @ Home

Useful Preparation Instructions:

The parent body for ‘E-homemakers’ is “Mothers for Mothers”, a multi-racial network of Malaysian mothers of all ages involved in women-connecting-women activities that emphasise self-reliance and family love. The parent body’s website is “mom4mom.com”, the cyber-entity which will be in full action under the DAG grant from 2002 onwards.

“Mothers for Mothers” was created primarily to build community and family support for women who consider motherhood as a key priority in their lives.

Our long-term vision is to create a network where mothers help and support each other through networking, activities, workshops, creative problem-solving, and sharing of ideas and experiences. The aim is for mothers, working from within or outside the home, to become fulfilled, self-reliant individuals in their own right.

One of our main aims is to elevate the social status of homemakers in relation to the immense contribution they make towards creating strong, well-adjusted families which are the foundation of the nation.

In this spirit of self-reliance, the subject of working from the home or tele-working, is explored widely by this network of enterprising mothers, many of whom are seeking to achieve a productive career at home while fulfilling their role as mothers.

The network aims to provide mothers – full-time working ones, home-based businesswomen, full-time homemakers, single mothers, disabled/disadvantaged mothers – with the necessary awareness, knowledge, skills and connections so as to empower them to deal successfully with the challenges they face in their role as mothers in their respective circumstances and in the process, find happiness and fulfillment.

Vital Ingredients Provided:

“Mothers for Mothers” promotes the values of self-reliance, making choices for oneself, resourcefulness, and mental and emotional strength that mothers of all ages need to practise. “mom4mom.com”, the website, presents many true-life experiences of Malaysian mothers who have successfully gained a more enriching home life by utilising their unique abilities and capabilities and turning their circumstances around to the benefit of themselves and their families.
Report For The Month of March 2003
For
Nestle Products Sdn. Bhd.

Activities for the Month

1. ANNOUNCEMENT ON “GREEN MOMS UNITE!” CONTEST
   - A press statement was circulated to the media on the “Green Moms Unite!” contest and very good coverage was received.

MEDIA COVERAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New Straits Times</td>
<td>February 28, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Nominees wanted for mum contest&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Malay Mail</td>
<td>March 14, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Green moms to be honoured&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>March 14, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Green mums to be feted&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harian Metro</td>
<td>March 18, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Cungkii kreativiti menerusi pertandingan kitar semula&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>March 19, 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Going Green&quot;</td>
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2. GREEN ARTICLE COVERAGE

<table>
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<th>Media</th>
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<tr>
<td>Harian Metro</td>
<td>March 11, 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Surat Khabar Lama Tuah Asiah&quot;</td>
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3. OTHERS

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<th>Media</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The New Straits Times</td>
<td>Feb 24, 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Networking women&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
EVALUATION

- A very productive month for Mothers For Mothers/E-homakers and Nestle in terms of media publicity

- Nestle was mentioned in all leading dailies