

NEW DOCUMENTARY TO EXPLORE WHY ELDERLY PERSONS ARE BEING ABANDONED IN MALAYSIA

By Amy Wong



For many of us, recent months spent under the Covid-19 Movement Control Order has provided time to reflect on our relationships with family members and loved ones. For some, it has meant spending more time together, for others months apart, and for some it has been a period of anxiety and loss.

Why Elderly Persons Are Being Abandoned In Malaysia

Written by admin

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But did you know that every year in Malaysia, at least 2000 elderly persons are being abandoned on the streets or left in hospital wards by their own family members?

“They could be our parents or us one day” says Lily Fu (72), a senior citizen herself and one of three winners of this year’s FreedomFilmFest (FFF) film grant. Her film *“Unwanted”* will premiere at FFF following full production later this year.

“I have been interested in doing a documentary about the elderly for the past few years but had no time to pursue it. The Covid-19 stay-home gave me time to work out a proposal for the grant and to devote the rest of the year to focus on the documentary” she says.

Lily is a first time filmmaker but her knowledge and expertise on the issues facing the elderly is extensive and her passion is evident. She holds an MSc in Applied Gerontology (the study of ageing) from the Nanyang Technological University, Singapore and is the founder of [SeniorsAloud](#), an online community for senior-citizens in Malaysia.

“Except for the cases that hit the headlines, scant attention is given to these abandoned elderlies. Abandoned, they have remained marginalized, overlooked and left to fend for themselves” she laments.

Lily says she chose film as a medium because *“everyone is into the visual form now. Most folks have no time to read or listen to talks. Videos and films have immediate impact and wider reach and it also makes for better storytelling.”*

“Unwanted” will follow the lives of abandoned senior-citizens currently seeking refuge at the Tong Sim Senior Citizens Care Centre in Kuala Lumpur. The centre was founded in 1999 by Mr

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Cheong Loy in response to a hospital appeal for the shelter of discharged patients left behind by their family members.

A coffin-maker by trade, Mr Cheong Loy has converted the first floor of his funeral parlor situated next to the Kwong Tong Cemetery in Sungei Besi into a home for abandoned seniors, many of whom are suffering from a plethora of physical and mental health issues.

“Many would consider the location somewhat macabre – next to the Kwong Tong Cemetery, and above a funeral parlor. It is a one-stop final destination for the residents with promise of free burials at the end of their lives” says Lily.

But why are there so many elderly people finding themselves abandoned, like the residents of the Tong Sim Care Centre, you might ask?

Lily points to numerous factors from her experience including social and economic. It ranges from children not being able to financially support their parents and living and working elsewhere, to societal changes such as a decrease in an often guilt-ridden family value, filial piety.

“Some adult children are forced to do so because of circumstances. Some because of poor parent-child relationships. Some elderly seek shelter in welfare homes because they are unable to support themselves. Negative stereotyping of older adults often leads to discrimination against them.”

“In a society where cash is king, destitute elderly have no power, no voice and no rights” Lily aptly coins the situation.

These issues should concern us all, not least because the number of abandoned elderly persons is expected to grow exponentially in the coming years. By the year 2030 Malaysia is estimated to have 5.8 million senior-citizens aged 60 or above, or 15% of the total population, putting it on course to become an ageing nation.

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Currently, Malaysia has no sufficient laws in place to protect abandoned elderly persons. Lily has looked instead to neighboring countries in the region.

Singapore introduced the *Maintenance of Parents Act* in 1995 to provide residents aged 60 or above who are unable to subsist on their own, the right to claim maintenance from their children who are capable of supporting them but are not doing so. Since then, Lily says she has been [advocating](#) for similar legislation to reach Malaysia.

In 2019, former Deputy Prime Minister Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail [announced](#) the need for legislation to protect the elderly due to increasing cases of neglect and abuse. A Bill for senior citizens was expected to be tabled in Parliament in 2021, but recent political changes in the country are likely to delay things further.

"It is ridiculous that after 25 years, there is still no firm decision made whether to introduce such a legislation to protect the elderly. Meanwhile, the number of abandoned elderly is soaring." she says.

Lily says she hopes her film will help speed up the implementation of legislation to protect the elderly in Malaysia, as well as to promote awareness on elderly abandonment nationwide.

More on this insightful documentary at link below.....

<https://freedomfilm.my/news/new-documentary-to-explore-why-elderly-pe>

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Trailer on Meniti Senja at link below...

<https://freedomfilm.my/festival-film/meniti-senja-the-twilight-years-2020/>