

by Jemimah Ujang



Jemimah Ujang and Malaysian Care staff made durian their breakfast of champions

Embracing Thorns

on the Malaysian Care Journey



On a good morning, some staff could gather at least three wheelbarrows of durians, while others collected durians on their motorcycles



Fresh durian in the shade with a cool breeze. The hard work in Ladang Care has its compensations

This year's Team Sempaq included a girl barely five feet tall. It was my privilege to help provide the *sempaq* (durian in the Semai language) that many supporters of Malaysian Care enjoy. I am Jemimah and I was an intern in Ladang Care for two months to complete my undergraduate requirements in social work.

The journey of Malaysian Care and *sempaq* started with Ladang being surrounded by a durian orchard. This is where I came into the picture with a pair of gloves, a wheelbarrow and a pair of weak arms that grew strong after the few weeks of collecting durians. These durians not only became my daily morning routine but also my breakfast.

Some may wonder what an undergraduate student is doing collecting durians. Well, to be honest, I did not see it coming. But I have been exposed to some things by being in Ladang Care, specifically looking into the rural ministry with the Orang Asli community. It is an interesting ministry that reminds me that the struggles of the Orang Asli are real, be it facing education difficulties or land rights issues. At the same time, I saw how one village can differ from another in terms of their perspective on various issues.

Now back to the *sempaq* story: I followed one of the Ladang staff around the orchard collecting durians. On a good morning, we could collect at least three wheelbarrows of durians, while others collected durians on their motorcycles. Durians are collected again in the afternoon, which busts the myth that durians only fall at night. For your information, one wheelbarrow of durians is probably three times heavier than the 10-kg sack of rice I help my mother carry every few months.

After the durians are collected, all the dirt has to be brushed off. One of the many things I have come to learn during my time in Ladang was that there is nothing that looks clean that was not cleaned by someone or something. It reminds me of how Jesus has cleansed us with His blood. Being an intern, besides understanding more about the Orang Asli, I got to learn about values which I believe I will hold onto for the rest of my life.

One of these was a quote by Desmond Tutu, the South African theologian, that I heard in one of the daily staff devotions: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality." A lot of times, we tend to take a soft stance on certain issues because we are afraid of getting backlashes and so on. This quote cries out to me, saying that you

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are also a perpetrator if you stay silent and do not do anything for those who are oppressed, discriminated against and segregated.

Coming back again to the *sempaq* story: After the cleaning, the *sempaq* is ready to be opened and enjoyed. *Tempoyak*, which is a durian paste, is also sold for another level of enjoyment. But of course, besides Team Sempaq comprising those of us who collected, brushed and opened the durians for our visitors and supporters, the durians did go through some quality control as I have said—my breakfast. This is specifically where I feel privileged, that I could taste good durians. Together with the other members of Team Sempaq, trees were identified to know which ones produce fruits that taste best.

As Team Sempaq signs off for the season, we would like to convey our deepest appreciation to those who have journeyed with and supported Malaysian Care through the love gifts you have contributed. May God continue to bless all of us and forever be our uniting factor (besides durian, for the majority). ■



Jemimah's time in Ladang Care included reading stories to the Orang Asli children

■ Jemimah Ujang has now graduated and hopes for a career in social work.