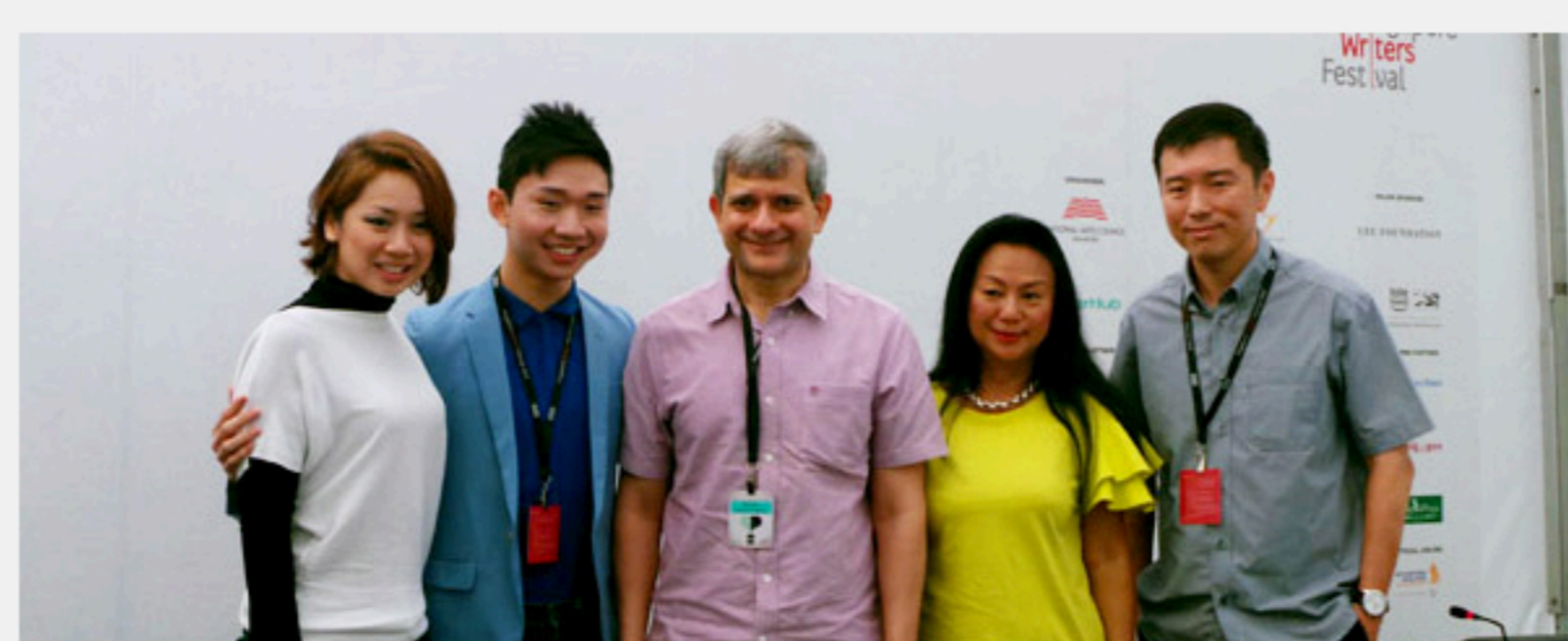


Singapore Writers Festival – YOU Can Write Too!

Even if you don't fancy yourself a writer, you must have had agonizing moments staring at a blank document that's supposed to be your report, speech or essay assignment, let's see how these writers combat that.

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Joyce Tan



Even if you don't fancy yourself a writer, you must have had agonizing moments staring at a blank document that's supposed to be your report, speech or essay assignment. Yes, the dreadful "writer's block" – periods of crippling content stagnation and a nightmarish inability to find the "aha!" moment in crystallizing ideas.

But listening to **Vernetta Lopez**, **Claire Chiang**, **Rodney Ee** and **Jerrold Yam**, 4 published local authors at the **Singapore Writers Festival** on Nov 3 at **Singapore Management University**, sure gets you past all that frustrating barrenness of thoughts and words, and realize that you possess the ability to become a professional writer too.

Jerrold Yam, who believes that inspiration is the "external manifestation of an internal state of mind", goes so far to say, "You don't have to look for it ... it's within yourself."



The author of *Scattered Vertebrae* and *Chasing Curtained Suns*, added, "You've to be ready for the inspiration, not the other way around."

"When you're ready to take in the external sights and sounds, your feelings can (then) be superimposed onto the outside and you will (be able to) write," shared 22-year-old poet.

Claire Chang, 60, author of *My Journey and After* and co-author of *Stepping Out: The Making of Chinese Entrepreneurs*, insists that you simply "should write because you (want) to share", not just because you're a writer.

The book she co-authored may have taken 4 years to complete but it remarkably clinched the National Book Development Council of Singapore (NBDCS) Highly Commended Award and even sparked the inspiration of MediaCorp TV Chinese drama *Stepping Out (出路)* in 1999.



"I think writing is a lonely journey but ... in that lonely journey, you're actually discovering and embracing yourself," Chiang revealed, her face betraying nothing of her age. Many know her as a social activist championing for women's rights and the destitute in society, as well as the well-known executive director of **Banyan Tree Gallery**.

She added, "I kind of feel that anyone who can speak, can write... And then, it's to have the courage to be read."



Local celeb Vernetta Lopez, who penned *Memoirs of a DJ: Life in Progress* last August, advises that you should "forget about the beginning, or the end. Just tell a story, tell your story."

When 1 of the 40-odd audience members asked for a remedy for writer's block, the Gold 90.5 FM DJ spontaneously answered, "You need a break."

"Come out of whatever box you're in, whether it's your own room, your own desk, and just live life for awhile. Allow yourself to be a sponge again. And from there, although it's a very bad metaphor, fungus can grow," quipped the 40-year-old, sending a ripple of chuckle through the crowd.



Rodney Ee, author of *My name is not Konnichiwa*, published in May, shared that his book can be considered his "mid-life crisis project" as the part-time contributor of our local newspaper, *The Straits Times*, has just turned 40.

Having travelled to 44 countries, Ee was inspired to write his travelogue after coming across a "compilation of travel stories from different authors, written with a very humorous slant".

So what unites these disparate authors?

"In all of their (books) ... you get to see a glimpse of them. They are, in a way, the protagonists in their own books," said moderator **Philip Jeyaretnam**. The Senior Counsel has written novels such as *First Loves*, *Raffles Place Ragtime*, *Abraham's Promise* and *Tigers in Paradise*.

Photos courtesy of **Lai Hui Min**

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