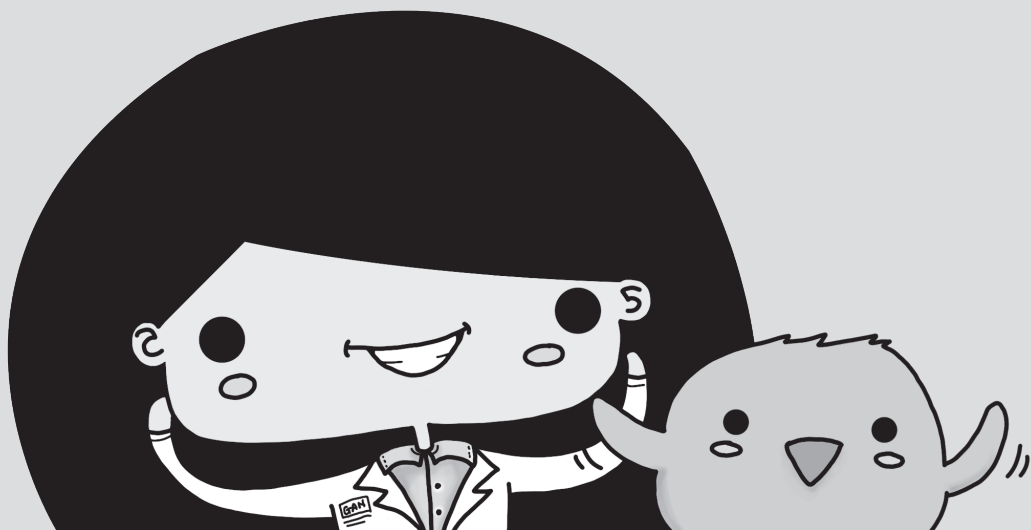


# ***GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE***

***GAN SIEW HUA***

**Kanyin<sup>®</sup>**  
PUBLICATIONS





# Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to my eldest sister, Ms. Gan Siew Pin for critically reading the manuscript. In the beginning, I didn't find it easy to jot down my experiences onto paper till I met the writer and editor Robert Raymer at a writing workshop. He not only urged me to write my stories but also worked with me to make them more effective until finally the book was formed. I am forever thankful of this encounter and the learning experience gained from working closely with him.

Overall, the production of this book has both been a challenge and a delightful experience.

# Preface

One day I had what many refer to as a near-death experience when I nearly drowned. The event itself was frightening and though it happened a long time ago, it was still fresh in my mind. I have never shared it with anyone other than with close family members until the day I finally decided to write about it, hoping that my experience may provide useful insights into death for others. Indeed, I was lucky that fateful day to be gifted a second chance at life and I am eternally grateful for that experience.

This collection contains thirteen narratives which are based on true life incidents written sincerely from my heart. Not all are about dying; most are about living; about the importance of seizing every moment, of overcoming obstacles and of realising the dreams of both ours and others. I now understand

that every single thing that has happened to me has been preparing me for a moment that that has yet to come. For example, wanting to give back to the society when I was still a student, I volunteered to help at the Old Folks Home. However, I never would have thought that in serving others, I would receive much more than I ever gave. Essentially, as we help others, we are lifted up and eventually become a much more wholesome individual.

Overall, my unique life experiences have made me a stronger person and played important roles of shaping me into the person I am today. I hope that by reading this book, others can be touched in many positive ways and gain immense benefit, motivation and inspiration.

# ***CHAPTER 1:***

**Given another chance**

## Given Another Chance

I always thought death would be painful, but it's merely a separation of the soul from the body. At least that was what had happened to me when I nearly drowned.

I was seventeen and waiting for my exams results when I visited Perhentian, a beautiful island off the coastal area of Terengganu, with my extended family. There were ten of us: Dad, Mom, three elder sisters, a brother, a cousin and her husband with their young daughter.

We were nearing the end of our holidays and I was feeling sad to leave such a beautiful paradise as we waited under the coconut trees for the ferry to arrive. The evening was quiet, already drawing late, nearing dusk. The silhouette of the ferry grew clearer as it steadily approached. The soft, gentle breeze was lulling me to sleep as it blew across my pink cheeks and sun-burnt body that was thoroughly baked by seven days of sun. The sea shells I had collected in a

## Given another chance

bottle were at my feet. Stacked nearby on the hot sand were our bags, some quite large.

Unable to come all the way to the shore, the gigantic ferry had to be moored a distance away in deep waters. A speedboat would have to shuttle us to the ferry. The boat, we were informed, could fit only three passengers and the boat driver, so this caused some confusion as to who should go with whom and which group should go first.

“Quick! Get into the boat! It is getting dark!” my dad shouted. As a police officer, Dad often yelled his orders at us, a bad habit from work. As a result of his intimidation, I grew up to be like mom, timid and meek, not daring to go against his words or ask questions, lest I would be called stupid or shouted at even louder.

My brother, my cousin’s husband and his daughter went first.



## Given Another Chance

After transporting the others safely, the speedboat returned for the next batch. Two of my elder sisters and my cousin climbed aboard.

“Quick! Get into the boat!” my dad shouted at me, his voice reverberating loudly against the silence, breaking my train of thoughts.

I hesitated. The speedboat already contained four people, the maximum load. If I boarded, it would make five. I tried to point this out, but my dad cut me off.

“You are the smallest,” he said. “It makes no difference!”

Seeing my dad’s angry face, I obeyed and sat quietly beside my second sister while my eldest sister sat in front with my cousin. The boat driver was at the back. I comforted myself with the thought that the speedboat would have to make only one more trip after us, instead of two. Again, dusk was fast approaching.

## Given another chance

The speedboat raced us towards the ferry. The skyline was turning orange and red as the sun sank in the horizon. Fresh air continued to blow onto my face, bringing with it a spray of sea water. My hair seemed to have a life of its own, dancing uncontrollably in the wind. I felt free, alive, and very excited, yet also anxious to reach the ferry since I didn't know how to swim.

Several metres away from the ferry, the speedboat made a sudden jerk-like turn in the direction of the ferry. The speedboat jolted, as if in protest and dipped into the water causing the engine to stall. Reality quickly set in as the boat began to sink.

"This is it!" I thought. We not only didn't know how to swim, but also none of us wore life jackets. "This is how we will end our lives."

The water was deep, almost black in colour. What a horrible way to die, I thought. Being a

## Given Another Chance

Buddhist, I recited silently in my heart a prayer that my grandmother had taught me whenever I was afraid, "Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha!"

Everything was happening so fast. My cousin, who was front most, was tossed into the water. My two other sisters followed suit, either tossed or they jumped after my cousin. With three struggling ladies in the water, the boat driver seemed confused as to whom he should save first. Meanwhile, sea water continued to rush into the boat relentlessly as I remained inside to buy myself a few extra minutes.

My cousin kept screaming at the top of her shrill voice that quivered with a strong fear of death. Each scream ended abruptly in a gurgled sound, like an animal in pain; only to start again as soon as it ended. It not only made the chaotic situation worse, but also eerie, too. Her husband was rushing here and there on the ferry, a nervous wreck, not knowing what to do, while his daughter ran after him, also screaming

for her mother.

The boat driver went from one lady to another, pushing and propping each of them up whenever they sank into the water.

From inside the sinking boat, I turned to look towards the island and saw my anxious parents and another sister pacing back and forth, not knowing what to do. Three strong villagers, despite the distance to be covered, jumped into the water and swam towards us. Deep down inside, I knew they could not make it in time to save us.

Water continued to rush into the boat, so I said another silent prayer, "Oh Buddha, if anybody were to die from this incident, please take me....I am the youngest and have no attachments. My cousin desperately did not want to die because her family needed her. My two sisters have bright futures, one eager to get married and the other, to start a new career. Rather than any of them, please take me; I am

## Given Another Chance

not afraid to die.”

After a while, the boat, which was nearly full of water, turned over. The side of the boat hit my head, sending me straight into the sea. Immediately I began to experience what I thought was death. Images, one after the other, ran through my mind. I was forced to see all the bad things I had done, starting from when I was a child. I saw myself stealing playing cards from my brother when he wasn't looking. I saw myself telling my mom I was sick when in actual fact I did not want to go to school. These images appeared in chronological order. There was no way I could escape them.

Then I realized that “I” or my soul rather (or my mind, energy or consciousness; whatever one may choose to call it), was hovering from about four metres above the commotion in the water. I was actually looking down at my own body struggling in the water. The energy of my being had suddenly left

my body as if someone had switched off the electricity...I realized at that moment that death was not painful at all. Death was merely the energy leaving the physical body, a very natural process. I also realized that the body and the soul were two separate entities. So "I", which was only my soul, was looking at the body that once belonged to me. It seemed and felt surreal to be looking down at myself. The confusion of seeing my own body turned into sadness when I realized that I was at the brink of leaving the world, leaving my family and my friends.

When the bad images had ended, the good ones started to appear, again in chronological order. I wondered how all of the images could fit in, passing through my mind so fast, in just a split second it seemed to me. I then realized that the images were energy too, created by me when I was alive, but now leaving my body. I saw as a child, when my mom and I were walking on the pavement, we saw a

## Given Another Chance

beggar. Mom quickly shoved some coins into my hands and said, "Hua, run over to him and give him these." I saw myself as a little girl, eagerly following my mom's instruction and handing him the money. Witnessing his face breaking into a toothless grin as he held the coins, I realized that my mom had taught me about kindness.

I saw so many other images of good things that I had done and felt tears of happiness. When the good images stopped appearing, there was a profound feeling of knowing that the good things I had done were much greater compared to the bad ones. I could not explain how, but I had this insight or knowledge that everyone would be safe and no one was going to die. Again, I do not know how, but the feeling was there, strong, real, giving me so much confidence and happiness; so much bliss and joy compared to anything I ever experienced on earth!

## Given another chance

My soul, to my surprise and delight, rejoined my body. Again, this was a unique experience. It felt like my brain had slipped and I was trying to hold my brain to prevent it from falling down only to realize my hands were with my body, below, in the water. However, due to the profound knowledge that I just secured, I was very calm as my soul rejoined the body, which allowed my body to float up to the surface. As I remained floating, I began to laugh uncontrollably... from all the happiness I suppose. To others, I seemed to be acting crazy or even delirious, but I had been given a second chance, another chance of life! The feeling of joy was so intense. Perhaps, in some ways, it was like experiencing heaven on earth itself. I didn't want this feeling to stop. Ever.

Meanwhile, the people on the ferry had tied ropes to some floats and threw them to us. Salt water splashed onto our faces as the floats hit the water. My cousin got the first float, followed by my sisters. One



## Given Another Chance

by one they pulled themselves above the water surface and hung desperately onto the floats.

Finally, I got the last float and was pulled up the ferry. My whole body was physically shaking from the experience; I could hardly stand up on the ferry. My two sisters hugged me and we cried together. After some time, we started laughing when we noticed that one of my sisters was still clutching her slippers so tightly as if her whole life depended on them.

The three villagers who had swum to us finally reached the ferry and offered their assistance. We thanked them profusely for their courage.

Later, Dad, Mom and another sister came to the ferry, on a slow paddle boat, an extra boat from the ferry. Dad was unusually quiet, perhaps due to the guilt for having shouted at me, forcing us to overload the speedboat, knowing that three of his daughters and a cousin could have drowned. Deep

## Given another chance

down, we knew he was glad that everyone was safe, that we had survived such a terrible ordeal.

The incident changed my outlook of life. I became more grateful for the slightest thing. After all, I had died briefly and lived again. I got another chance. Nothing trivial or petty could ever make me feel sad or upset. Death, I now know for certain, is not painful as I had previously feared. The experience also reminded me that I should be careful of all I do in life because my actions will appear once again before me one by one, the bad and the good.

I also know that one day my soul will be separated from my body again, but this time for good. After that I will have to wait, like the rest of us, to see what is in store. For now, I am just happy to be alive...

My sisters and I also learned how to swim... just in case.

"Mom, there must be a reason why you were given a second chance," my ten-year-old

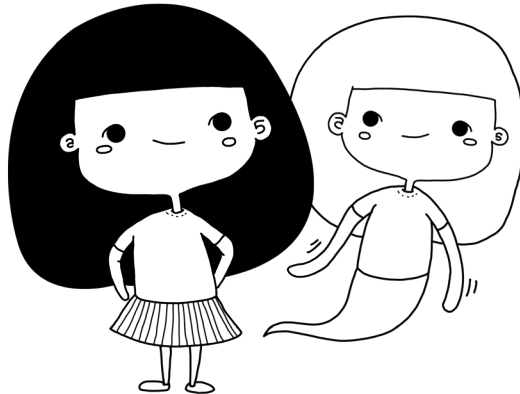
## Given Another Chance

daughter said, when I related the story. "Find the purpose and develop it to the best of your ability."

Wise words from someone so young, but she was right.

Death is not the greatest loss in life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live.

– Norman Cousins



# ***CHAPTER 13:***

**Of life and death  
and other  
childhood concerns**

## Given Another Chance

Every time I go to work, my car would pass by a graveyard which was near to our house. Rows and rows of tombstones stood erect in several straight lines, like a sea of the dead.

“What is that, mummy?” asked Tan Jo Ann, my five-year old daughter, a naturally inquisitive girl while on the way to her school. She is a sweet and gentle child, well-liked by many. Her big brown eyes were very prominent in her round face; giving her a teddy bear like appearance. Her uncle has just passed away recently due to old age. This may have triggered the question.

I hesitated, not sure how much I wanted to tell my daughter, but then I thought it might be a good opportunity to educate her a little about life and death.

“Jo Ann, everyone will die one day, including mummy and you. Maybe at different times...maybe at the same time...depending on the situation,” I said.

Of life and death and other childhood concerns

“Maybe it is due to sickness, maybe it is due to an accident. But everyone will die eventually.”

She probed further, “But, why?”

“Well, simply because we are alive, therefore we will eventually die, just like Uncle recently. His body just stopped working. He will not talk, eat or breathe anymore.”

She said, “And then what happens...?”

“And then the body will be put into the grave,” I said, “Just like those little squares at the graveyard. Notice that they are of different sizes, depending on how big or small the person is”.

“That’s all?” she asked, looking kind of shocked. “Just like that?” She wanted to know more.

“Yes, just like that,” I said. “This is because your body is not needed anymore on this earth. In fact, it will smell if we don’t cover it up, especially in our country because of the intense heat. That is why the body will be kept inside the ground.”

## Given Another Chance

“Will the person ever come back again?” she persisted.

“No, Jo Ann. Unfortunately, when a person is dead, he or she cannot come back anymore. Anything that is alive will die. Including Rolly, your dog. He will also die in the future. Or like a tree. From a small seed, it will grow into a big tree. Then, the leaves turn yellow and drop to the ground. Eventually, the tree will also die and the trunk will fall back to the earth.”

I allowed some time for the information to be processed by her young mind before continuing.

“It is just like your toy, when the battery is finished. Except that this time, we cannot replace the battery anymore because the toy is spoilt,” I explained further.

Seeing that she had not responded, I decided to explain further.

“Yes, everyone will die,” I continued. “Mummy will die. Your daddy and sisters will die too. And so

## Of life and death and other childhood concerns

will you one day, though hopefully only when you are very old and have lived a happy life”.

She looked contemplative as though trying to imagine everyone gone, one by one. I thought that this was a good sign, that she finally understood this complex issue of life and death.

“But I don’t want you to die!” she replied abruptly. “I love you so much! I also don’t want to die either;” she pleaded, her eyes teary.

I offered her my reassuring hand and stroked her hair gently and lovingly to pacify her. If I wasn’t driving, I would have hugged her!

When I assured her that I would love her forever, whatever happens, she looked slightly happier and calmer. Her optimism rose again.

Finally she understood, I thought, relieved... but then she suddenly let out a gasp.

“Oh my god, what am I going to do in case I need to go to the toilet when I am inside the



## Given Another Chance

squares in the soil? Who is going to help me with my business?" she demanded, eyes alert, thinking really hard about this quandary. "Furthermore, there is no water for washing in there!"

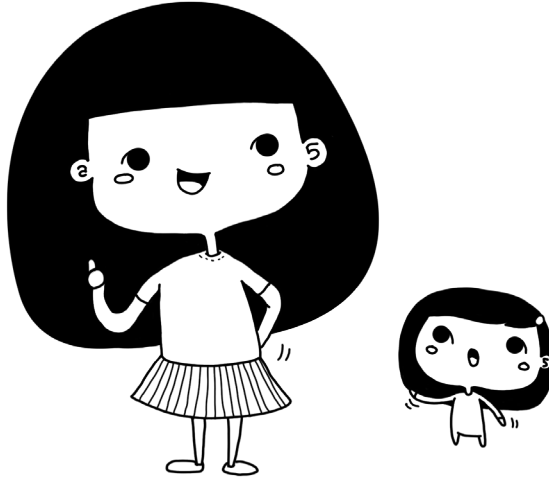
I wanted to chuckle at her first major concern about dying, but I thought the better of it...For the time being I will leave her with that...at least until the next round when this issue will surely arise again....

Then not long after that, that other delicate question will arise, too, the one at the other end of this spectrum of life and death, "Where do babies come from?"

Of life and death and other childhood concerns

Enjoy the little things in life for one day  
you'll look back and realize they were the  
big things.

- Kurt Vonnegut



# ***BONUS CHAPTER:***

Life advices

## Given Another Chance

*After my near drowning experience that I wrote about in "Given Another Chance", I had developed over the years a series of life choices that has benefited me and even led to writing this book, so I would like to include an additional essay that I hope will benefit you as it has benefited me and my family.*

Always have gratitude in life. When you wake up every morning and before you get out of bed, take a moment to reflect. You have been given another chance to life! A gift of a brand new day! What a great gift that is....That is why "now" is called "present", simply because it is a gift. Appreciate the gifts that you have. For example, you have a healthy body and a pair of eyes to appreciate the beauty of the sky at sunrise or the faces of your children, your family and friends. Ask, how can you make life more meaningful? Reflect on three things that you look forward to for that day. Ponder on your purpose in life. Be grateful

## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

for the time you have and savour each joy that comes your way.

Similarly, when your head hits the pillow at night, show gratitude. Ask yourself, “What are the three things you are grateful for today?” You were able to drive your children to school or yourself to work today without getting into an accident or your car didn’t break down unlike others that you see nearly every day. You have a home or a place to live with a roof over your head unlike countless others in the world. You have a spouse or a supportive friend and you may have children or nieces and nephews that you cherish, and siblings, too, not to mention your parents and other relatives.

Be content. A poor person who is content with his life is a rich person, yet a rich person who is never satisfied with what he or she has will always be poor. Only when one has gratitude will one be happy and joyful. Usually, we tend to appreciate things only

## Given Another Chance

when they are gone like our health or our body when we are sick or injured. Even a toothache or a cut on the finger can cause discomfort for a whole day or even longer. Use the pain and aches to serve as a reminder to appreciate your life more. Take good care of your health in all three aspects: emotionally, physically and mentally. There is no use earning a good income when your own health is so poor you are unable to enjoy life.

Remember, life is never constant. Do not let the environment shape your life but instead, you shape the environment. We have only 24 hours a day, yet do we actually realize what goes on during that time? Going through your daily routines of life may, at times, seem boring. At the same time, life can suddenly become dramatic like when you get a phone call from school about your child being injured or when a child steps out between two parked cars and an adult grabs him in the nick of time or the

## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

lump on your breast proves to be benign...each day, there are many things that occur that have a lot to teach us; therefore, our five senses should always be kept on high alert. And be aware of your surroundings whether to enjoy the natural beauty or to be wary of those loitering around and watching you with intent so you can avoid potential disasters like missteps or snatch thieves. In addition, react to disaster with a calm presence. If everyone panics, that's not very helpful. By remaining calm, you can think better. Becoming a "hard" or a "bitter" person due to your suffering or difficult environment is not a sign of strength but a form of weakness.

To me, it is doing the little things in life that matters most, such as holding the door for someone, offering someone a lift, helping an elderly person with a heavy bag; also listening to others instead of always talking or sharing a meal with your loved ones, friends or an acquaintance. Even smiling to a stranger

## Given Another Chance

or a colleague is a gift since it can touch another's heart. The world is already a tough place as it is. Make it a little better by your simple acts of kindness. The help rendered may seem small or insignificant to the giver but may mean volumes to the receiver and can turn their bad day into something meaningful or uplifting. It also shows you care, another gift. Therefore, look out for possible opportunities to offer your assistance since each day is filled with limitless chances to help others. By doing so, your life will become richer and more meaningful.

Donating money is relatively easy when compared to donating time and service to others. Time is precious, because once it is used up, one cannot get it back, unlike money. Try volunteering yourself in several types of organisations. It is an enriching experience and you will find that when you help others, you lift yourself up even more and come away as a better person. It is also definitely one of



## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

the best ways to remove one's ego! Life is not merely about you. Life is about how many people you can lift up along your passage of life.

Remember, your moods are also contagious. Share positive energy instead of negative. When you walk into a room, you have the opportunity to lift other's spirits, be it your colleagues, friends or family members or to bring those spirits down. The energy we give off will bounce back to us. So, bring only positive energy to others. At times, when you feel sad, try helping others; this can lift your own spirit and theirs too. Remember, no matter how heavy your suffering is...somewhere in this world, there are thousands if not millions in worse situations. Therefore, always be positive. Train your mind to see only the good in things. When you are positive, you will attract all the good to you as well. Alternatively, when you are depressed, find a way to break away from it by going back to nature; replenish your

## Given Another Chance

energy by taking a walk in the jungle or by the beach. Or find another way to relax and meditate. Music often helps to soothe a troubled mind. So does physical exercise like jogging or riding a bike.

Having goals and being focused on them is very important, often more important than having talent and knowledge. Clear, precise goals coupled with a strong determination to succeed can help break major barriers in life. Having both short and long term goals are equally important, but you also need to put some effort into them to get ahead in life. Otherwise, the goals become unrealized dreams since they were never acted upon. Make that list and take that first step towards accomplishing at least one of your goals today.

Find your passion and follow it. Only when one does the things one loves can you excel. For example, I am a lecturer, yet my passion and talent, perhaps, is writing. So, I write many scientific papers. I also

## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

write books, both related and unrelated to my career, to fuel my passion as a writer and to challenge myself to a new level...in addition to my core business of teaching medical students. I realise that as long as I write, I am a happy person. Everyone has a certain talent that they can leverage upon to benefit themselves and the world. So, ask yourself what is your special ability, talent or gift? After you have found it, develop it to the best of your ability to help others in this world.

While pursuing your passion, do not forget to take account of your own personal growth by joining courses that may help to open up your mind and to learn from others. In Malaysia, I conduct scientific writing workshops to both lecturers and postgraduate students. Whenever I speak on writing, I become more “alive”, because writing is my passion and I am speaking on a topic that I love. At the same time, I also attend other scientific writing workshops

## Given Another Chance

conducted by other trainers. Yet, many times I have been asked, "Since you are already an expert in this field, why do you still need to learn?" I think they have missed the point. I have become an expert because I am always open to learning. I become an expert because I am always willing to update my knowledge regularly! Never have the attitude that you are so good at something you don't need to learn anymore. By closing the door to learning you actually stagnate and start to decline. Remember, no matter how good you may think you are, there is always something new that you can learn since others have different experiences than you.

Be humble. In fact, the higher you go up the ladder of success the more humble you should be. Be friendly and make friends with everyone including the cleaners, the gardeners, the cooks, the teachers and the doctors. No one is higher than the other and everyone has an interesting life story to tell. Always

## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

use “love” when dealing with people. When love is applied, one cannot go wrong. One of my staff was always late for work. Instead of reprimanding her, I decided to have a heart to heart talk and she revealed that she has a handicapped child who required special care and worst, her husband had left her to fend for the child all by herself! So, love and understanding is important, allowing one to become more compassionate.

Loving your child alone is not enough. They must feel the love. Hugs, being there to offer a listening ear and doing things that they enjoy are good ways to illustrate your love for them. Every morning, let them see a smile on your face. Children need a place that they know they will be safe, love and protected. In fact, strive to make your home a haven for your family. Make sure your children know that you are available for them 24 hours – emotionally or physically or as a listening ear – and they will

## Given Another Chance

turn out well. At the same time, do not pamper or spoil them. Actually, parenting provides the opportunity to make us a better person.

Hug and kiss your own family members daily, especially your children. One cannot die of an overdose of love and warmth! Children need to feel that they are loved. Give them the chance to bask in your embrace, at any time. If your children ask for a hug, do not let go until they do. You have no idea how long they need that hug for....Now that one of my children is entering her teen years, I hug her in a different way. Instead of saying, "Do you need a hug?" I say, "I need a big hug!"

In addition to assisting your kids to grow up happy and wholesome, the most important gift you can give is to help them cultivate good reading habits. Reading is the route to success not only in school but also in life. Reading is the key that opens the door to the world's knowledge. Without this key, children

## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

will be left behind. Every day, I will spend a few minutes of time to read to my children no matter how tired I am from work.

Remember, children tend to follow not what you say but what you do! So, live the way you want them to live so you can mould your own children as they observe how you live your daily life (and not just giving them the occasional lip service). Help your children achieve their personal goals by pursuing their own passions. Do not force your own expectations on them. Each child is born with unique potentials and parents exert strong impacts on these qualities. The greatest gifts you can give to your children are to teach them to develop their full potentials and to build their lives around whatever it is that fulfill them. Better still, praise your children when talking to others and let them overhear it. This shows that you are proud of them and it may help boost their confidence.

## Given Another Chance

As parents, we are the light that shines when our children's world seems dark, when the monsters lurking under the bed give them a fright or when they are bullied at school or by their neighbours or even their relatives. We may not know exactly the right words to say when our children are sad or anxious or unhappy, but we can tell stories from our own life to offer them some comfort or even some inspirations. We can hold their hands or give them a hug through the pain and the confusion. After our passing, it is our children who will live on and leave their footprints in this world. Make sure that we let the world inherit people who will make it a better place.

Balance in life is also important. Do not overwork yourself. Many people ask me how do I balance between my career and taking care of four young children? I tell them that when I work, I really work and put my heart into it. But when I play, I really play with my children! Do not mix the different areas



## Bonus Chapter: Life advices

or parts of your life or you will confuse your children and possibly even yourself. We all know people who are not focused at work or spend too much time chatting with others, and get little done; then they have to bring their work home, leaving them with little or no time for their family.

Live your life as though you are going to die at any time. Do not be too attached to your family, friends and materialistic things. The way I see it, we have temporarily been “lent” with many material things, including our children and loved ones while on this earth. They are not ours to keep forever. When you start to think that they are not really yours and you are merely “borrowing” them when you are still alive, you will appreciate them better. Everyone will eventually end up in the same place.

Remember, you cannot take your money or your fame with you after your death. But when you are still alive, you have immense opportunities

## Given Another Chance

to make a difference in the world and in yourself. Use your time wisely. Make everything that you touch meaningful. Happiness is a matter of choice. Accept “what is”, let go of “what was”, have faith in “what will be” and enjoy the present moment. Live, love and laugh!

Bonus Chapter: Life advices

If you have a family that loves you, a few good friends, food on your table and a roof over your head. You are richer than you think.

- [lessonslearnedinlife.com](http://lessonslearnedinlife.com)



# **About The Author**

Gan Siew Hua is a Professor in a Medical School in Universiti Sains Malaysia. She writes regularly and has published several books including children's books and books on proper usage of common medicines for general readers. She loves writing and regularly conducts scientific writing workshops in Malaysia to lecturers and postgraduates. Nevertheless, she feels that her greatest achievement is her four young lovely daughters.

For more information, updated biography, signed copies of books, news about her workshops, and to send queries and comments directly to the author, go to [www.gansiewhua.com](http://www.gansiewhua.com).