

Teacher Thinker Rebel Why  
Portraits of Chee Soon Juan  
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ISBN 978-981-09-4624-1

Published by Singapore Democratic Party  
12A Jalan Gelenggang  
Singapore 578192

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Layout and design by Word Image Pte Ltd  
Printed by Ho Printing Singapore

A CIP catalogue for this book is available  
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# TEACHER THINKER REBEL WHY

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PORTRAITS OF CHEE SOON JUAN

EDITED BY  
**JASLYN GO**

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# *Preface:*

## *The Man I Married*

For someone who has done a lot of talking and writing on various socio-political issues, Soon Juan has said very little about himself. I've read countless comments about his character in the more than twenty years of his involvement in opposition politics, many of which were, shall we say, less-than-flattering.

The most distressing part is that for a long time it was close to impossible to tell people that this is not who he is, it is not the man I am married to.

Through all these years, we were like living our lives inside a protective bubble, later joined by our 3 children, to shield ourselves from all the negativity that his political involvement attracted and not let his work drag us down. It worked to a degree because as arduous as things were, we were not unhappy as a family. In fact, we have found contentment in living a simple yet meaningful life.

I met Soon Juan when we were doing our graduate studies at the University of Georgia in the United States. When I was offered a scholarship to do my PhD at Pennsylvania State University in the north, I wanted to think it over. Having just met, we naturally wanted to be closer together but Soon Juan encouraged me to pursue my doctorate. I still remember him saying, "You've got to have dreams in your life."

“You’ve got to have dreams in your life.” It’s the kind of things we write for the composition class in school—a cliché that we seldom actually believe in. It turns out that for Soon Juan, he meant it. And it’s not just the big dreams that he has for Singapore but the little ones that I’ve shared with him as we went through life’s journey together—our children, our home and our lifetime of memories. It’s a journey I’m glad to have taken, experiencing a world of new ideas as well as humanitarian values—and, in the process, become a better person.

It certainly doesn’t mean that things haven’t been without difficulties and challenges. It is peculiar in a society like Singapore to not be able to keep up with material progress. But we believe that imparting to our children life’s values and doing what’s right—including taking a positive attitude and persevering in the face of adversity—is a more important gift than all the things we can buy them. Thankfully, they’ve adjusted well to everything that has gone on.

Through all the trying times, I’ve always felt that the journey itself is as significant as the final destination because it is from the trials and tribulations, and how we respond to them, that we redeem ourselves and our best human qualities. Being from Taiwan, another Asian country with its own authoritarian past, has in some way equipped

“*It is this hope of a better Singapore, a more humane and compassionate Singapore, that drives Soon Juan on. I can only hope that we’ve turned the corner and that Singaporeans, through this book, will come to know the person he really is.*”

me with the ability to empathise with the present Singapore and continue to be hopeful about its future.

I am thankful that those who know Soon Juan have come together to tell Singaporeans something that they have not previously seen or heard about. For that, I am grateful to Joshua Chiang, Jaslyn Go, Leong Yan Hoi, Sam Rainsy, Constance Singam, Paul Tambyah, Tan Lip Hong, Sir Graham Watson, Wong Souk Yee and Wong Wee Nam for their contributions.

A special mention goes to Jaslyn for coordinating the project and seeing through to its fruition. A big thank you to Fong Hoe Fang for his labour of love in the editing, layout and design of the book. Not forgetting Chee Siok Chin, who has undergone no small sacrifice herself in the quest for change in this country, for putting things together. Thanks also to Kenneth Tsang and Peter Low for their sponsorship of this book, Tay Yuanqi for his photography, Surayah Akbar and Yeo Poh Hong for assisting with the production.

And to everyone, both past and present, who has entered our lives and woven into it such a rich tapestry—thank you for being there.

HUANG CHIHMEI