Greetings from the ED

One year after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, any semblance of normalcy remains far from the case in Indonesia, despite the reduced rate of Corona virus infections and deaths around the country. In June of last year the National Covid-19 Task Force classified 58% of the 514 cities and regencies it surveyed as low-risk or Covid-free zones. But now, 10 months later, health protocols and travel restrictions continue to be imposed in high-risk areas such as in densely-populated Java, Bali, and parts of Sumatra. Even so, the government has gradually allowed places of worship and selected business districts to open up, albeit with continued restrictions and limited attendance. And with teachers sharing the same priority status as health workers in the national vaccination program, the government is even considering opening up schools, particularly in “green” or low-risk areas. This announcement has led to heated debate. Some educators, worried about how online learning has lowered student competency levels, support the move to resume face-to-face teaching. Others, however, and many parents as well, are not convinced the schools are properly equipped to ensure the safety and health of the students. The Education and Culture Ministry says it will allow schools to reopen but has left it to local authorities to make the final decision, with the caveat that should any new Covid cases emerge, the school in question will be immediately shut down again.

Ruminations by John H. McGlynn

Jigsaw

I never knew my maternal grandfather, Hubert Schauf. He was out in a field on Lost Hill Farm, when a massive heart attack took his life in 1949, three years before I was born. The only confabulistic memory I have of my paternal grandfather, John A. McGlynn Sr., is based on a photograph of me as an 18-month brat wailing on his lap as he reclined in the oversized leather rocker in the living room at my parent’s home on the last day of June in 1954, the night before he was killed in a fall from the haymow of the barn at Edgewood, the McCarthy homestead where his wife, my grandmother, Mildred had been raised.

I can only imagine how dark that moment and the months that followed must have been for my grandmother. According to my oldest sister, Maureen, who was there at the time, shortly before the accident Grandpa had come into the house for a drink of water and when finding Grandma perched on a rickety footstool, trying to clean a high cupboard, he had lovingly warned her, “Watch yourself, Mate.”—He called her “mate,” from the Irish maitheoir.—“Be careful you don’t fall.”

“Don’t you worry, Pate, I’ll do just that,” she’d replied with a smile. And now, not a half hour later, the man she’d married and lived with for 44 years was gone. The life-partner with whom she’d raised five children and provided foster care for 20 more would no longer be telling her to be careful or chiding her on her ample waistline. As one, the couple had eeked out a living during the Great Depression; together they had lived on tenterhooks during the years of World War II as, one after another, their first three sons entered the war theatre, one
In the midst of this uncertainty, some innovative educators have come up with ways to bridge the gap between the unsatisfactory system of schooling from home and classroom teaching. One such proposed program is called hybrid learning, which combines at-home learning with teachers’ making regular visits and limited classroom work. While waiting for the pandemic to end and for schools to reopen up, this could be a good, if only, temporary solution but such a program would entail increased funding. The pertinent question here is whether local authorities are prepared to go along with this innovative plan.

Funding is a serious problem facing not only schools but other institutions as well that are involved in the promotion of literacy, Lontar included. While we hope that you, our readers, will support greater spending for the improvement of Indonesia’s educational system, we hope that you will also lend your support to the translation and publication of Indonesian literary texts and other books about Indonesian culture.

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of whom, my father, went MIA and was presumed to be dead before, revenant-like, he reappeared.

By this time in 1954 the couple’s first four children – Molly, Tom, John Jr., and Harry – were all married and raising families of their own. Their last son, Joe, just out of the Air Force, was home for the summer to help put up all the hay that would be needed to feed the cattle in the winter months ahead but he would be leaving at summer’s end to begin pre-veterinary school. And now her husband was gone, leaving the weight of Edgewood on her shoulders alone. My father, who had taken over Glynnspring, the McGlynn homestead, from his parents in 1945, lived only a few miles away and was able to call on her almost daily but with him and Anna Marie, having six children to feed and clothe and another one on the way, he could provide no guaranteed long-term support.

A second photograph of me, taken on my birthday in October that year, shows me with my birthday cake, surrounded by my five older sisters and our grandmothers. Alvina, our maternal grandmother, has a broad smile on her face as she watches me about to blow out the two candles on my birthday cake but Mildred, eyes downward, has the sunken, hollowed-out look of a person in despair, one completely unlike the vibrant grandmother I remember from my more sentient years ahead.

Following the death of my grandfather, apparently, a rapid-action plan took place among my uncles and aunt. Because Grandma had never learned to drive, now that Grandpa was gone and with none of their children living at Edgewood, she would be seriously isolated with no easy way to shop for provisions, go to church, or visit the doctor. And then, there was the question of continued farm maintenance. Grandpa was killed in the middle of haying season; last son Joe could help until he began school in the Fall but this was no tenable solution to the fiendish situation Grandma was in.

In short, the five children decided that first-son Tom, whose farm, West Branch, he was renting at the time, would take over Edgewood and Grandma would move to Sheafor Acres, home of her daughter and son-in-law, Molly and Jay, where in a miraculously short amount of time they erected a small home for
Author of the Month

Ben Sohib (Jember, East Java, March 22, 1967) is a writer of novels and short stories. Ben attended journalism classes but then spent most of his time as a vocalist in a progressive rock band at the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s. He began to be known by Indonesian readers as a result of his two-part novel *The Da Peci Code* (2006) and *Rosid dan Delia* (Rosid and Delia) (2008), both of which became best-sellers. These both were subsequently adopted for the movie screen under the title, *Tiga Hati, Dua Dunia, dan Satu Cinta* (Three Hearts, Two Worlds, and One Love) and won many important awards in the 2010 Indonesian Film Festival, including Best Film. After these two novels, Ben has mostly been writing short stories. At present, besides writing, he is also an editor at Ufuk Press.

To find out more about Ben Sohib, see his short profile in a video produced by Lontar in YouTube, via the following link: [http://bit.ly/BenSohib](http://bit.ly/BenSohib)

Grandma mere walking distance from their home. A light to illuminate the darkness enveloping Grandma began to glow. The Little House meant that Grandma could be both independent and in close proximity to her dependable daughter and the four Sheafor grandchildren.

Although this tale is close to its end, this is actually the point where the real story begins because it was there in the Little House that my grandmother conveyed to me an important life lesson.

Between 1955, when Grandma moved to the Little House, and her death in 1963, I’d spend one week during the summer and some days during the winter at the Little House. She and I shared a love for jigsaw puzzles and whenever I arrived at the Little House for a stay, a card table would have been set up in her living room with a 500-to-1000-piece puzzle on top of it.

One puzzle I remember putting together with Grandma was the depiction of a sylvan glen with a bright sky and colourful blooms in the upper portion of the puzzle and darkened areas of the secluded glen covering much of the lower third. As these dark areas were the most difficult to piece together, they were usually the last for us to work on. At times I would be in near exasperation as a I tried to match the dark pieces but Grandma would always tell me, “Keep going, Little John; one piece at a time and you will get there.” So, with her encouragement, I would persist and after we had succeeded in finding the proper place for each of the dark puzzle pieces and the puzzle was complete, it was then that the beauty of the puzzle’s upper section was all the more enhanced by the darkness at its base.

Recently, I read *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, an autobiographical work by Rachel Naomi Remen, a physician and specialist in the treatment of depression among cancer victims. In one chapter she revealed that as a child, she and her grandfather had worked on jigsaw puzzles but that she had disliked working on the dark sections of a puzzle until her grandfather explained that without the dark pieces in place, the bright sections would be incomplete. When reading that, I remembered the same implied advice Grandma had conveyed to me.

Being just a boy in the years I was blessed to know her, I was scarcely cognizant of the dark periods in her life, only the empathetic, kindly, and loving person that she was for me but whose strength of character, I now realized, had been forged not by a blissfully carefree existence but by the dark periods she had successfully endured.

*Thanks to Joan Suyenaga for the inspiration.*

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Ben Sohib’s stories, often set in Jakarta and with their panoramic backdrop of urban Muslim life, contain fierce criticism against religious radicalism and serve to admonish people who lightly use religious arguments to justify their actions. The author delivers his criticism in a light-hearted manner, making his stories the stuff of dark humor.

Paperback: 152 pages
Size: 11×18 cm
ISBN: 9786029144833
Language: Trilingual (German, English, Indonesia)
Beyond Home Borders

Our Website is Live

Over the next two and a half months, we hope to raise money to publish much needed translations of Indonesian works into English while raising your spirits with a fantastic line-up of live streamed events that, beginning in May, invites all to travel beyond home borders in a myriad of unconventional and inspiring ways.

Please visit our newly launched beyondhomeborders.org website chock full of information about partnering with the Lontar Foundation to reach our fundraising goals. There, you can also read about the scheduled line-up of events in May with descriptions and bios of our presenters and hosts. Tickets will go on sale in April, but mark your calendars now so you don’t miss anything.

Bagiku, cerita serem adalah perkara bermain-main dengan imajinasi manusia yang sudah kelewat datar dan banal digempur oleh berbagai soal sehari-hari. Ia semacam tamasya literer. Soalnya bukan agar pembaca kembali kepada takhayul atau kepercayaan animisme, tetapi lebih kepada permainan imajinasi yang mengasyikkan. Jika humor bisa membuat kita tertawa, maka horor membuat bulu kuduk kita berdiri dan kita mendapat sensasi yang mengasyikkan.

Bahkan ia juga menulis cerita tentang korban perang, itu tidak menjadi perhatianku kali ini. Yang menarik adalah dia memberi siasat pada realisme yang sudah menjadi jamak dengan cerita-cerita dari dunia gaib. Sebuah dunia yang saat itu belum ditinggalkan oleh khalayak ramai, tetapi tidak menjadi perhatian para pengarang modern kita, karena revolusi dan sekitarnya kelihatan jauh lebih menarik.


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