

Of clouds and a silver lining

Life at home under the Movement Control Order has its moments, writes **Intan Maizura Ahmad Kamal**

“WHAT am I gonna cook tomorrow. And the next day?” “Where am I going to get my coffee?” “I can’t go for my netball training?” “What? MCO has been extended?”

Yes, the wailings and angst that accompanied the announcement on TV that the MCO or Movement Control Order had been extended because we, Malaysians, have been terribly *degil* were most palpable. And yes, they came from me.

But as the days have gone by, life has actually settled down to a pleasant equilibrium. I’m starting to enjoy the calm and the chance to spend more time with the family. And I love hearing the sounds of birds chirping gaily in the garden as opposed to the roar of the traffic.

Yes, I do miss my sports, my friends and my regular coffee “hauntings” but slowing life down has been therapeutic.

I’ve lost count of how many *Rocky* re-runs I’ve bawled over; or how many games of Monopoly I’ve played; or how many trips to the fridge I’ve made.

Bottom line, I’m learning to appreciate every little thing that I took for granted before.

Suffice it to say, the clouds will eventually lift. In the meantime, let’s create sunshine and happiness, and find the silver lining — firmly ensconced in the place we call home.

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Ida is starting to relish her domestic goddess status as the days go by.



KEEP THE FAITH

Dr Ida Baizura Bahar, 46. Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Serdang. Mother of 2.

“The first few days of MCO were of anxiety and confusion. My children were anxious about missing their classes and friends. They missed the routine of donning their uniforms, the school runs and eating out. The second week was better as their school started online classes from 9am to 1.30pm with a timetable posted so the routine returned.

Personally, I was confused as to my own definition of working from home as I never brought office work home! My employer, UPM, has been really supportive, with an exclusive COVID-19 Telegram group just for staff, sharing legitimate news and *modus operandi* for teaching and learning.

Before, we used the dining table for our main meals. Now the dining area has become the hub of “classes”. With two breaks in-between three subjects, I’ve now become the *chef de mission* and it’s the first thing on my mind when I wake up in the morning: what to eat.

So now, I’m not only the single parent of my children and a work-from-home mum but also their domestic goddess, something I never used to do 24/7. I’ve set up

my own workplace — at the kitchen since I’m always there anyway!

The adjustments were a bit haywire at first as my children were restless just looking at me and at each other. So I decided that they should go out to the backyard at 10.30am and exercise to get the morning sun. In order to start that, I had to bring out my magic wand — the ever-reliable *rotan!*

The MCO has made me miss my own me-time and having meals with my close work friends around Serdang but I’m lucky to have my youngest sister marooned with me as she visited me on MCO-eve and cannot go home yet.

I also miss my face-to-face interactions with my students. Most of all, I miss popping over to my parents’ house in Klang, enjoying my mum’s cooking and my dad’s advice just sitting around the dining table with the rest of our family members.

The *makan-makan* is something we definitely miss. A blessing I’ve never taken for granted and will never take for granted. The most important lesson since this all started is: faith. It keeps me calm and keeps me carrying on, to never succumb to the despair of #stayathome. To succumb to despair is to feed on spiritual death. And that’s what we just don’t want.”



Melissa definitely has her hands full keeping the kids entertained.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Melissa Mohan, 37, marketing consultant, married with two kids.

“To be honest, this MCO period has given us a different perspective of life. We can’t help but think we’re extremely fortunate to have a comfortable home with food on the table. There’s fear and paranoia especially among our senior family members and being thankful helps calm the situation. My 6-year-old is enjoying life without having to wake up for school and she doesn’t miss it — but I do!

Our daily routine at home has, suffice it to say, changed somewhat. Particularly the way we grocery-shop. It has become a very stressful chore; making sure you have a list and that you’re covered from head to toe. You also have to be *kiasu* to go to the market at 5am before everyone else! Prior to the MCO, our routine was pretty hectic but now we’re staying at home so it’s calmer. And we eat at

the table together every day.

We’re very blessed and fortunate that we haven’t had to make major adjustments. The only challenge is keeping the kids entertained. My husband and I take turns; if I have to work, he watches the kids and vice versa. I’m very grateful we both can take on our roles automatically in managing work, household and kids.

On weekdays, in the morning after breakfast, my elder daughter Jaeda would do her homework, followed by piano and then we’d watch a classic show like *Matilda*, bake, play board games, do jigsaws etc depending on what mood she’s in.

She’s also done a pancake-making video and there are plans to start a band! We’ve been making the most of our balcony since we’re not allowed to walk around the apartment compound. We also have a small pool for the kids to splash around.

The things I miss most? Simple things like

outdoor activities, the physical human connection with extended families and friends, and having meals at our usual kopitiam or mamaks. If there’s one thing that this pandemic has made me realise, it’s the fact that Malaysians are generally very generous.

I’m pleasantly dumbfounded by how selfless Malaysians are in helping those in need, whether it’s the medical personnel, homeless or stray animals.”

Melissa and her husband Julian have fallen into a comfortable routine.



FEEDING THE SOUL

Phua Family, 30 Seconds Cafe@Bandar Sri Damansara, Kuala Lumpur.

Richard Phua Teck Chuan, 65. Cafe owner and father, two sons.

"This MCO period has been very inconvenient and a little depressing, not because of being restricted but the fear of contracting the virus when going to places like the market or bank. Furthermore, our business and income have been badly affected.

Not much has changed as far as my daily routine is concerned, except for the fact that we don't get to meet our friends or regular customers like before. These days, I spend most of my time in the cafe clearing my accounts and any backlog in paperwork. And my family and I have our meals at the cafe while working. Another change in routine is that I sleep earlier these days and more!

What do I miss most? Going to the cinema and being able to go out for family outings. And our customers, of course! When I wake up in the morning, the first thing on my mind is thank God that my family and I are still alive and in good health."

Sharon Khor Hooi Keng, 55. Cafe owner, chef and wife.

"I'm just grateful that the MCO period has enabled the whole family to work together. Routine has changed in that I have shorter working hours now and more sleep. But I have MORE work to do now as my kitchen staff are all staying at home during this period. It's all about operating on minimum manpower to keep the business afloat.

The thing I miss most are the gatherings with family and friends and shopping! Whatever it is, there's much to learn from this challenging time. One is that we don't



Matriarch Sharon Phua



30 Seconds family.

know what tomorrow will bring so treasure every moment with your family. I'm just grateful to be alive and healthy, and still be able to work."

Aaron Phua Yi Ren, 26. Head barista and founder of Hands Koffee. Son, single.

"This MCO period has made me very restless. Previously, work was very exciting as it involved a lot of travelling and meeting people. These days, I'm in the cafe every day. Hands Koffee's launching to the mass consumer has been delayed and a new business venture has had to be postponed. Work now has become rather slow and mundane.

All my meetings are done online now and I've just been taking things slow, helping out in the cafe more than before since it's only the family members and one staff working. I try to be home before sundown and chill by watching Netflix.

The things I miss most? Going to the cinema and having hotpot on my off days. And of course, meeting customers. The most important lesson I've learnt since this all started is the importance of hygiene. That and the importance of having a work-life balance. When I wake up in the morning, I'm just

grateful to be alive and still be able to serve coffee to my beloved neighbourhood, Bandar Sri Damansara.

Eric Phua Yi Lik, 30. Drum tutor who also helps out at cafe. Son, single.

"Life has become a pretty fixed routine now. Before MCO, my day would begin with morning exercise, buying supplies for the cafe, teaching drums and having rehearsal sessions with my students. These days, I just help man the cashier counter every day and liaise with customers for deliveries/takeaways.

I've also been spending much more time on the computer than before — setting up online delivery systems for the cafe and uploading content to keep in touch with my drum students.

Actually, I miss my students and colleagues a lot. We were supposed to hold a large combined concert at DPAC in May if not for the virus outbreak.

I've learnt a couple of important lessons through this trying period, namely the importance of social distancing and of having enough emergency funds. What's the first thing on my mind when I wake up in the morning? Err, what day is it today?!"

RECONNECTING WITH NATURE

Zalina Abdul Aziz a.k.a. Ninot Aziz. PR consultant, author. Mother of five.

"Recently I was involved in a five-car accident. I remember everything moved so slowly before the actual impact. This pandemic and its effect on us feel the same. It's a very surreal situation.

On the one hand, I'm at home, working full-time. As a PR consultant, we're even busier than usual and communicate online with our clients and team members. We clock in every day at 9am!

On a personal level, I enjoy being at home, cooking every day and having meals together. My daughters are doing their bit — trash, laundry and cleaning.

Online classes like physics, Add Maths and even dancing classes with ASWARA have become the daily routine.

First thing in the morning, I'll insist the family drink water, eat some fruits and take their vitamins. I also get them to spend 20 minutes out in the sun every day.

Strangely, I don't miss much. Even the girls understand clearly there will be no Tealive, no



Ninot is enjoying the opportunity to spend more time with her family.

outside food [everything's home-cooked] and no friends over. Even mobile phone time is down as drawing, baking and gardening take over. Yes, gardening, including making compost from eggshells and fruits/vegetable waste, raking up leaves, and planting new batches of herbs. Certainly, we're more in sync with nature and ourselves.

I'm thankful for the chance to slow down the pace. Poetry has come back into my life. I worry about my

mother who just had surgery but she's recuperating well. And for the two daughters away from home — one in England, the other in Petaling Jaya — I pray they're doing all they can to stay safe. Thank goodness for technology, which allows us to communicate.

One important lesson I've learnt from all this? Be prepared. But have faith. God will provide for those who help themselves. The government's Prihatin initiatives really help me keep calm."



Anna ensures that she still continues with her fitness routine.

HOME IS A HAVEN

Anna Chew, 46. Chief marketing officer at CARE Concierge. Single and living with elderly mother.

"Home is a safe haven and mum and I are close. We've taken this time to slow down and be happy with less and to enjoy each other's company. Certainly, my daily work routine has changed somewhat but it hasn't been a problem.

My partners and I are in eldercare. The team is tech-savvy so it hasn't been an issue communicating, but surprisingly, people have become more engaged on email and phone calls. We ran an elderly day-care centre in our office which had to close with the MCO. We're currently using WhatsApp to communicate and have designed mental and physical exercise videos for them and the general public to keep everyone engaged and active at home.

Evenings used to be at the gym, but I now have a HIIT exercise routine with a regular evening group on Zoom! Even our religious service has gone online. I've also started doing more video calls for work and with friends and family from all over the world.

Everyone's on home quarantine so



Good use of technology.

we're checking in on each other. Society has certainly become more caring! Weekends are a bit of a sad reminder as I used to bicycle outdoors.

I've set a schedule for work and play and have become fitter. I eat less, have healthier meals and do regular workouts. I've also been engaging a shopper for my groceries. I don't want to risk going out and catching something when there's an elderly person around. I also cook regularly and exchange bulk orders with neighbours.

What do I miss most? My friends! I'd say it's painful to not have been able to comfort

a dear friend at her mum's funeral. Holidays are the other. I was scheduled for a trip overseas which got cancelled, but I'm grateful for the timing as I can't imagine leaving my mother alone here managing herself.

The most important lesson I've learnt through this trying period is the fact that we need so much less than we think we need. And the importance of faith in such a time. Perhaps it's a good time for us to ponder our mortality. The first thing I do when I wake up in the morning is thank God for his care and I say a little prayer for everyone."



The Mahmoud family is spending more time together under the MCO.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Nidal 'King Joker' Mahmoud, 26. Muay Thai trainer and fighter. Lives with family, single.

"To be honest, life has been pretty dull ever since the MCO started but staying at home is something we need to do — so just make the most of it. Before this pandemic started, my daily routine included training in the morning before heading out to conduct personal martial arts training for my clients.

Once back in the house in the evening, I'd have a quick rest before resuming my own training. With the MCO in place, I can't go out to teach so I spend more time around the house training. We have fitted equipment around our home compound so we don't need to go to a gym.

The one thing I'm doing more of now is spending time with the family — my dad, mum and siblings, something I didn't do so much of before. I guess life at home is made more bearable by the presence of technology — there's Internet, I have my games and, of course, Astro! If there's one thing I miss more than anything at the moment is being able to go out to work with my clients and doing my own intense training in the gym.

I pray every day that this will all be over soon. In the meantime, if there's one thing I've learnt, it's that we should never take anything, or anyone, for granted. Didn't we take the coronavirus lightly when it first started? Now it's

taking us over!"

Mohammed 'Jordan Boy' Mahmoud, 24. Muay Thai fighter with ONE Championship. Living with family, single.

"It's not something that's normal for me, as a fighter, to be resting and doing nothing. So despite the MCO, I continue to train as much as I can. And I still make it a point to watch all my previous fights online so I can learn from my mistakes.

Before the MCO started, my daily routine included training in the morning, and then I'd try and spend some time with either my family or friends outside. In the evening, I'd go to the gym and train again. With the MCO in place, I still train but around the home. It's just a matter of making some adjustments to the training routine and venue.

The one good thing to come out of this challenging period is that I get to spend more quality time with my family. And like Nidal, I'm grateful that we have technology to keep us occupied. I spend a lot of time surfing the Internet, watching both local as well as international fights.

What do I miss most? I guess freedom of movement, training at the gym and being able to go for my daily morning runs. When I wake up in the morning, I'm grateful to be able to do that but also topmost on my mind is the question: When am I going to fight again?"



Brothers Nidal (left) and Mohammed Jordan Boy have adjusted their training regime.