

Kyron and Noëlle working on the computers

Onno and Ali studying hard

Yousif decides green works best



TEACHING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

Mary Broekhuijsen is Dutch and is currently the Outpost Focal Point for Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. In this article she explains how her community pulled together to help their children through a tough time.

MARY BROEKHUIJSEN

As the world hesitantly counts cases of H1N1 flu, we fly back to Bahrain after our summer break. We're all excited about having our family complete again, as our 16 year old son has decided to join us and to finish his International Baccalaureate in Bahrain.

Upon our return, the local newspaper headlines welcome us with 'four people die in five days, mostly due to other underlying medical conditions'. H1N1 is never mentioned but 'swine flu' makes the papers.

All schools are ordered to monitor students' temperatures for the first week or so. Quarantine facilities in public hospitals are introduced and

schools have installed hand sanitizers in every room. September 7th and the schools were planning to open, but it is delayed... announced by a text message on my phone. The five lost days are scheduled into the New Year calendar and we all hope we can put this behind us. Then Monday September 13th, school starts delayed again, immediately followed by the Eid Holiday.

What most parents feared, happened: The Eid holiday, when many people travel in and out of Bahrain triggered another closure for schools. None of my children protested; obviously they don't mind a longer vacation, but most parents needed a few days to catch their breath after this sudden shock.

'School's Out!' shouts the headline the next morning, remarkable really, as school hasn't even properly started! Suddenly, we are faced with some tough decisions. It was totally unclear to most parents how long, or perhaps how short, the closure will be. Rumours on the Island multiply faster than the virus. Mandatory vaccinations (in October) and closures until January were our worst fear.

To avoid an educational gap, six impacted families in our compound (with children at different schools and in ages ranging from 6 years until 16), unite to discuss how we can limit the damage and assist our children. Most schools have published work packages on the Internet providing the children with approximately six hours of work every school day. A tremendous job for child and parent, especially the ones with work commitments. We asked ourselves how we could help our children and how can we help each other?

We developed a timetable for the six-hour days from 9am until 3:30pm (children go home for lunch). Participating parents agree to supervise and assist the children according to a schedule. One father has a math, science, and history-degree, and he offers to take a few hours off from work. My husband signs up for 'duty' on the first day of his weekend.

As a (recently) qualified swimming instructor, I offered three times a week Physical Education (PE) sessions for all the compound children and awarded them with an achievement certificate to show their PE teacher at school that they've accomplished their PE sessions despite the closure.

The compound owner supports our idea and offers the recreation room. He brings a big rug, chairs, tables and a water cooler and the facilities are cleaned. My husband wires an

Internet cable from our house across the street to a wireless router and a spare computer is connected. During a weekend we bring in paper, a printer, pencils, sharpeners, white boards, dictionaries, pillows and a relaxing chair to read books. Our Compound Study Centre is ready!

It's 9am Sunday morning, first day of our experiment. From our kitchen window I see twelve children in our compound walking to the 'Compound Study Centre'. They carry their work and laptops and we bring in our coffee and some refreshments. We're all excited and anxious to see if our little project will work out the way we hoped. The children choose their work place and settle themselves. The structured environment away from distractions at home was beneficial. They work in a concentrated manner and help each other with work and projects.

One parent walks in around 11am, expecting chaos complete with running and yelling. She enters the room and is blown away by the atmosphere in the room; all the children are working in silence...

Two weeks later, schools open again, almost a month delayed. First the 10-13 year groups return, followed in stages by the younger groups. After two weeks our little compound school is dismantled. The school bus drives his round in the early hours to pick up our children. Things are back to normal although our children now have 8 hour school days to catch up for the lost days.

The recreation room is empty. The smell of coffee, math and science is gone. What's left is a permanent admiration for the real schoolteachers. In addition, we all felt a strong sense of pride after turning those paralyzing feelings of powerlessness into something so positive and energizing.

Thienny with one of her stunning pieces



MARIET DINGEMANS

Malaysian artist Thienny Lee and her husband Charng-Jing Chee moved to London a year ago. They have two daughters aged four and six years old. Outpost London visited Thienny Lee at her house in Hampstead, North London, to talk about her career as an 'artist on the move'. This article was first published in the Outpost London newsletter.

AN ARTIST ON THE MOVE

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in a small town called Kulim on the North Peninsula of Malaysia. Back then it was a small and charming town with rivers, paddy fields, rubber plantations and forests. I come from a big family and have five sisters and two brothers. Two of my sisters were accountants and somehow it was rather natural that I went into accounting as well. I have always liked

painting and drawing very much, but it never occurred to me to become an artist. In a country like Malaysia where there's no social security system, it's important to make sure you are able to make a living. To study accounting, I moved to Kuala Lumpur and later to Port Dickson to work. I completed my studies abroad, at the University of Hertfordshire, UK.

Where have you moved with Shell and how did your artistic career develop?

My first move with Shell was with my husband in 1995 to Holland where I lived for nearly three years. A Japanese ceramist, Yoko Takata, whom I knew through a pottery course saw some of my paintings and was impressed. She asked me if I wanted to do an exhibition with her. I wasn't so sure at first, but then an English lady came along who wanted to buy one of my paintings. It was the first painting I ever sold! That sale made me decide to have the exhibition. The exhibition was very well received and it has broadened up my life in a way I never thought it would.

After living in Holland for three years we moved back to Port Dickson, where I started working in the Procurement Department of Shell. After that we moved to Kuala Lumpur where I worked in Home & Fashion Merchandising. That was a job much closer to my artistic inclination.

I would sometimes even use my own designs and drawings for the merchandising development. I loved the job and worked very hard. However, moving to Singapore with my husband for Shell again in 2002 allowed me to take a break from my pretty stressful office job. I started to paint again and made a lot of paintings. I had my second exhibition, this time a solo exhibition, which was called 'Greenwaves'.

When our two daughters came along during our posting in Singapore, busy motherhood life made me stop painting again. I did however manage to illustrate some children's books for a Singaporean charity organisation helping women migrant workers, called 'Aidha' which is one of the wings of UNIFEM. When my second daughter started to attend nursery school for a few days a week, I volunteered as a guide in the Singapore Art Museum. That was one of the most wonderful jobs I ever had!



Cows and Elephant Ears



Water Hyacinth and Frogs



Lotus and Butterflies



Plumeria and Bees

After living in Singapore for more than six years we moved to London. I was totally thrilled when my husband told me we were to move. Leaving a country like Singapore wasn't easy, but London is a great place to live. Apart from being a wonderful city with great museums, I like London most for its multi-cultural and international sense. You don't stand out nor do you feel a need to fit in. In a way it's like Malaysia, which also is a very multi-cultural society. It's easy for me to integrate and connect here and I felt part of it almost instantly.

Thanks to coming to London I'm now doing a part-time MA in History of Art and Archaeology at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). I wanted to study contemporary Oriental art at first, but I could not find a suitable course so I decided to give this course a try and I love it now.

Do you still find time to paint?

Due to busy motherhood and doing an MA, I can hardly find time to paint. I might get into it again next year once I have finished my studies. My earlier paintings strongly reflect the rainforest vegetation where I grew up. I try to preserve

the beauty of rainforest in my canvas. Here in a four-season country I am very inspired by the autumn colours, I would like to freeze the colour of autumn on my canvas this time.

I think I am blessed with a pair of eyes, which see beauty in the extraordinary as well as in the mundane. All the countries I have lived in have their instinctive and exclusive charm in their own way; you just have to open up your heart and you will see beautiful things around you.

Do you think your career would have been different if you had not been a Shell spouse?

I probably would not have had the chance to develop myself as an artist and would not have gone back to the university again. To other Shell spouses I would like to say; live for the moment, focus on what you have gained, the opportunities will appear to you if you open up your eyes and your mind.

To see more of Thienny Lee's beautiful paintings have a look at www.thiennylee.com

The books Thienny has illustrated are available online at www.aidha.org

HOW TO BE A GLOBAL GRANDPARENT

REVIEW BY BELINDA DRABBLE

This book is co-authored by a Shell grandparent. It is anecdotal, referring to the experiences that the authors themselves have had and that other grandparents have passed onto them through interviews, a questionnaire and an online survey.

It contains common sense, useful advice, particularly if you are new to being an expat with children, and away from your close family for the first time. Authors Peter Gosling & Anne Huscroft suggest you need not be abroad, as even if you only live a car journey away the advice still applies. My mother enjoyed reading the book, and she's been a global grandmother for twenty years.

A third of the 131 page book is devoted to technology: using the internet, email and exchanging digital photographs and videos.



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wishing you a safe & happy 2010!**

