

The Story Book: more than just stories

An event place for stories to come alive

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A book lover and an avid story teller, Jeanisha Wan had dreamt of having her own book related business since she was a teenager. Seeing that the storybook industry needs to be revolutionised, she took a leap of faith and established The Story Book.

"I knew I wanted to do something with books. I thought of a book café, a book shop, something related to books. The Story Book is to fulfil a childhood dream of helping people to discover stories from books again," said Wan who has been running a PR company called Wan Two3 Sn Bhd for eight years.

In an exclusive interview with MALASIASME®, she said The Story Book is actually an event space, dedicated to run or host storybook-based events.

"The Story Book lets people experience the stories from books rather than just read it. To clarify, we are not a bookshop or a book club. We are primarily an event space that allows stories to come to life. And it is for both adults and kids," she emphasised.

The Story Book wants to let people experience the stories from books with all their senses - listening, watching, reading, telling, acting etc. It aims to encourage people to look at books differently and see it as a treasure box waiting to be opened.

"We started with the aim to encourage people, mostly the young people, to love stories from books again. And to realise many of the good movies and music they've seen or heard are actually based on stories from books, which people wrote," Wan said.

Wan also hopes to have partners and collaborators to join her in this vision to revolutionise the storybook industry. "I notice most people especially the young people no longer read books. They consume content in a different way now and because they don't read books, they are missing out on the benefits that stories from books can bring - stories that can teach them to be a better person, open their eyes to a whole new world."

Thinking like a true-blue entrepreneur, Wan said, "In order to get these people to fall in love with stories from books once again, we need to change the way stories from

books are delivered to them. Just like how Airbnb and Uber change the way the product was delivered although the product is the same as before."

The Story Book had its soft opening on February 5 this year and had done two events for both children (Beauty and the Beast storytelling) and adults (Reading Romeo and Juliet) that were very well attended. In addition to the events organized, it is also home to various brands such as Bookalicious bookstore, ice cream from The Last Polka and a few other bakery brands.

Wan chose to open The Story Book at Plaza Arkadia due to its proximity to many schools (both government and international ones) as well as many music and dance schools.

"The idea for The Story Book has always been in my head and initially I thought of starting it in Ipoh. Unfortunately, I could not find the right location for it there and by chance I encountered Plaza Arkadia in KL, which I thought was more suitable for the shop. So here I am!" she says with a glint in her eyes.

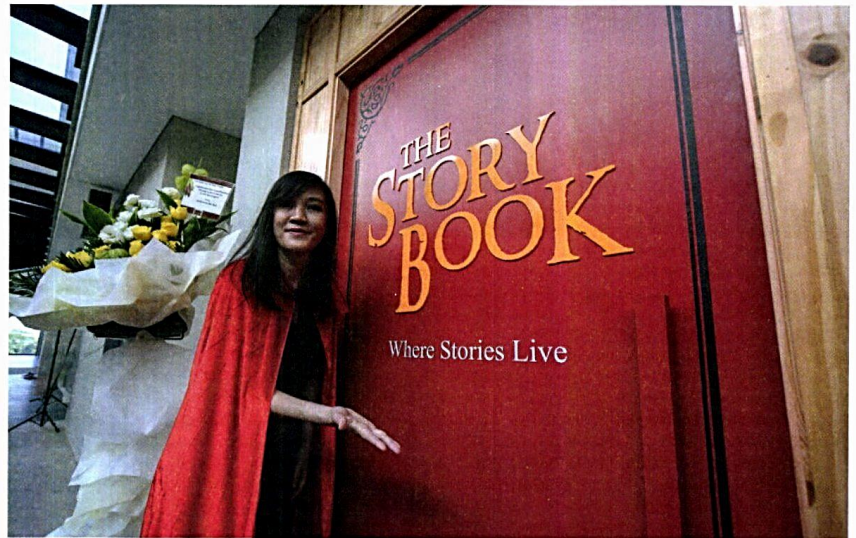
Her initial plans were to open a café bookstore, however after much market research she realised that community in Desa ParkCity area yearns for an event space.

Since its launch, Wan has received enquiries to host activities in the premises. "We don't just do the normal book readings or book club meetings - our activities incorporate dance, acting, arts and crafts too - anything that ties to a stories," she explained.

Able to accommodate up to a 150 people, the space can be rented out for private and corporate events and workshops as well.

Targeting the young and young parents with children, Wan said the market wanted an activity space. With a myriad of events with specific themes planned with partners, Wan said, "This is not a conventional event space. People don't just come here to watch plays or drama, they also participate. At the end of the day it's a platform to express themselves."

"I dare say no one has done what we are doing. We are a black swan if I may say so. People walked into our shop at first expecting the same old 'book café, book shop or a library' and they later realised it's none of that. They were enticed by our door which is in the shape of a book cover, they walk in and say 'Wow, I've never seen anything like this before'," she said with a smile.



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As much as it sounds like 'happily ever after' ending, Wan wasn't spared from the challenges of starting The Story Book.

"The biggest challenge was getting partners and collaborators, notably bookshop partners and bakeries or food suppliers to join us. Since this concept is unusual, most people cannot understand it. It is still an ongoing challenge."

"I hope some big brand bookshops could join me so we can be their activities or events arm and they open a bookshop opposite to cater to the market here as well as

the traffic we are bringing to our place," she said.

Amuch as Plaza Arkadia in Desa ParkCity is a strategic location, the place is still rather new. "With vacant units opposite us - the footfall in the 1st floor of our plaza is still low. Also, unlike malls, each unit has their own individual owner and bigger chain stores with good brands are unwilling to come in as the individual unit owners cannot agree on a flat rental rate should the big branded tenant want to take up a few lots."

"Without a big established chain store brand to the Plaza, some of the shops here who rely on walk-in customers are not getting enough customer traffic versus if they open in a mall," she says wistfully.

However with her PR and Marketing background, Wan leads a group comprising of tenants from the first floor of Plaza Arkadia to conduct joint activities to encourage more traffic to the first floor.

Another challenge is the awareness of the event activities that The Story Book hold. "Albeit the turnout for most of our events we organised have been good, we realised people have a habit of RSVP and then do not show up. Also, people have the perception the word 'story book' means it is for kids.

"We actually cater to both adults and kids as stories are not just for children. We have organised a few adult story events in our place but notice people wasn't aware about it as they normally take place at night," she said.

Touching on entrepreneurship,

Wan said it is definitely not for the fainthearted. "Don't go in to for the sake of making money alone. Some of the key qualities an entrepreneur needs is resourcefulness, stamina and integrity."

"Perhaps some people are born to be entrepreneurs. Just that they may not have realised it yet and circumstances have caused them to take a safer path. But you see the sparkle in their eyes when they question the why and how, the passion that fuels their tireless efforts when they work and that hint of courage that is waiting to be unleashed," she explained.

Determined to be a game changer in the bookshop industry, she said sadly books are seen as a decorative commodity rather than something we want to discover something from. "Sure, there are still booklovers or readers out there but as compared to the larger population, they are a small number. And many parents realised the importance of letting their kids learn about stories and love reading. But apart from just buying books for them to read, they don't know what other ways to encourage them to love stories, and books."

"I like to see our place to be the go-to place when people think about stories from books. I definitely cannot achieve this on my own. I'm not getting any younger," said the 45 year old. "I want to leave a legacy."

Quoting a line from Lord of the Rings, Wan says like Frodo, she needs the support of the fellowship for this journey ahead. **MSME**