Creating a buzz for speaking her mind

Gayle Goh, 17, Anglo-Chinese Junior College
www.i-phase.blogspot.com

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Her eloquent and heartfelt entries about politics have got Netizens talking about this 17-year-old who sounds wise beyond her years. "Her dad must be writing for her," says a Netizen.

No way, Gayle has a mind of her own and is not afraid to speak up. She made the news two weeks ago when she blogged about what she called "callous" remarks made by Mr Bilahari Kausikan, second permanent secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, during a talk he had given in her school.

Asked about outsourcing, he had said that Singapore had to look overseas because there was a limit to how much retraining it could do for some workers there.

"Look at my generation, more than half of them didn't even complete primary school education. What are we going to do? They are not going to conveniently die off," Gayle wrote in her blog that she was "rubberstamped" by the "callous" remarks. "Honestly, I'm creeped out by the fact that our government is probably populated with people who think just like him."

To her surprise, he wrote back a few days later to clarify his remarks and to apologise to her or anyone else who had been offended by his "strong language". He also told her there was no need to tone down her criticism.

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Jean Loo speaks to Gayle and three other young people who blog on serious topics.

SMU

Blogging with a cause

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In the run-up to the elections, she also discussed the issues brought up at dinner-time with her parents and three siblings.

Of the general election, she says: "I gave it the incentive and inspiration to take another look at our country and see how past and present collide to make our future. How can we not care?"

Since the exchange with Mr Kausikan, her tagboard, where visitors to her blog can leave messages, has been flooded with notes from young and old fans.

"The encouragement provided by Singaporeans who are moved to think because of my articles has been amazing. That's why I keep on writing," she says.

She says some of her friends have cautioned her about speaking out, but she is undeterred.

Her father, businessman Eric Goh, 54, says: "I was concerned that by disagreeing with the People's Action Party in some ways, she was hitting cannon with nails. But as long as she writes with respect and substantiates her writing with facts and figures, I will support her."

She sees herself paving the way for others to speak up.

"In Singapore, there really isn't a culture of expression. I think that's partly due to the signals the Government sends, and also due to our own conservatism," she says.

"It's a perfectly respectable culture, but it may prove to be an obstacle when it comes to political evolution."

Does she ever get scared of offending the Government?

"All the time, all the time," she says. "But fear is everywhere and fear is a constant. We cannot banish fear but we can conquer it."

"And we do that by daring to act despite our fear. How we respond to our uncertainty is integral in defining who we are."

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Comics on school stereotypes raise a laugh...and more

Hee En Hua, 18, Anglo-Chinese JC and Kua Keat Hou, 18, Jurong JC
www.studentsketchpad.blogspot.com
www.studentsnotebook.blogspot.com

THE duo behind the webcomics blog may be stressed out with preparations for the A levels, but there's always time to meet up for a drawing session.

En Hua (otherwise known as En) and Keat Hou (known as Hou) use comics to reflect the Singapore education system and school life in a satirical and light-hearted manner.

A random chat over coffee last July resulted in the birth of the Students' Sketchpad. "I brought along my tablet PC, we chatted about school culture and out came our very first rough sketch," said Hou.

Called The Evil Singapore Chinese Girls' School Girl, the satire on the stereotype of SCGS girls made it to tomorrow.sg and drew a huge traffic of visitors to their then four-day-old blog.

Says En: "Besides the laughter, we want readers to self-reflect and interpret the comics based on their perceived understanding."

The entries incorporate themes of sociology and philosophy and are loosely based on stereotypes of schools.

Hou adds: "Some drawings have more subtle messages, which are a bonus to readers who can 'get' them."

Waxing lyrical about thought-provoking music and politics

Mohamad Zaki, 21, waiting to enrol in Singapore Management University (SMU)
http://znzl3.thelivejournal.com

POLITICAL science and the music of American singer Tori Amos might be a weird combination, but these subjects form the bedrock of Zaki's blog.

Netizens log on to read his blunt and sincere takes on music and politics.

"I take both very seriously," says Zaki, who plans to major in political science in SMU.

His recent entries were on the election rallies he's attended.

In a blog entry pleading for Singaporeans to attend rallies "because work can wait and elections can't", he wrote: "I feel a deep sense of sadness for them, for their unwillingness to get up from the comfort of their seats, for their unwillingness to take a break from work."

"For with rallies comes empowerment, a deep sense of patriotism and a desire to see things get better, improve. No matter which party or platform one supports, the power is in our hands."

He says: "It's important to try and galvanise people to go for rallies because they are real eye-openers. You get to see people from other backgrounds and it makes you feel more attached to the country."

Zaki reads the Economist magazine regularly because he thinks it's very important to have a worldwide perspective on issues.

Music-wise, he compiles a list of the most-played tracks at the end of each month as "a personal record of his music taste and for readers to know what he listens to."

He wrote in a review of jazz singer Rachel Yamagata's song Quiet: "I am still haunted by it...it's nice to know there are still songs out there which you can listen to with the darkness accompanying and the streetlights hushed."

For Zaki, music is a way of coping with life. "I find a personal connection to some songs, especially when they help you find more depth and meaning."