

Our kids no longer have dreams. Whose fault is that?

JULY 20 — What do you say when your child chooses not to continue studying after SPM?

I wonder why 72.1 per cent of Malaysians have decided further education is not for them, at least according to a survey by the **Malaysian Department of Statistics**.

Is it money? Is there a lack of clear prospects? Is a university education seen as irrelevant?

Perhaps it is because for a long time now a degree does not guarantee you employment, at least not in your field of study.

My friend who teaches at a private university told me a foundation course there costs upwards of RM30,000.

“Where do they get that money from?” Where indeed.

I have never believed that you should necessarily work in the field you studied.

Yet every year some overpaid man in a suit bleats that universities are not producing graduates the country needs.

Like I’ve said before, I do not think universities should be the place to create pliant worker drones.

It might seem like a romantic notion to some but I think universities are places where students get to learn things and at higher levels, contribute to what can be learned.

I do not see why you need a degree for any jobs besides engineering, medicine and the likes. However some employers just do not like to train employees and give the excuse that the money would be wasted if they left.

Well, then, give them every incentive to stay. It really is that simple. If you really want to be nitpicky then make them sign a bond.

They say it takes a village to raise a child; we need a nation to care about, and for, all its children. —
Picture by Yusof Mat Isa

Talking to another friend my age, I said compared to what kids these days had to deal with, our childhoods seemed idyllic in comparison.

He agreed. At least when we were young, we could have fun and revel in unrealistic dreams that involved the year 2020.

What have our kids got left to dream about? So many university graduates find themselves being rideshare drivers or delivering food, essential services for sure but certainly not what they had imagined themselves doing.

For a country that had so many aspirations once upon a time, we seem to be frozen in time while other countries march ahead.

A former prime minister saw no problem with low wages, arguing it would make us attractive to foreign investors.

He was of course a man who did not care if people could barely survive on said wages or if they indebted themselves just to purchase the nation's largest addiction: the car.

Our kids these days seem to have such modest dreams and that is not such a terrible thing — to want the simple things in life like a home and a family to share it with.

Yet we also need the dreamers, the thinkers and yes, even the rabble-rousers.

The only dreams our politicians seem to have is for larger bank accounts... for themselves.

I think often of South Korean June Huh, who briefly dropped out of school to try and be a poet, then somehow wangled his way into university and only realising in his final year that he could be really good at mathematics.

Like many of the youngsters I see on social media, he too was lost and floundered in his classes, often having to repeat them, unsure of what he really wanted to do.

Huh thought he could be a science journalist. Instead science journalists are writing about him for winning one of the most coveted prizes in mathematics, the Field Medal.

I understand what it's like to flounder, unsure of what you're doing because that is a very apt description of my 20s.

Looking back though, as a child, I idolised writer/director Amir Muhammad and thought his column was the coolest thing ever. Now I am writing columns and to be honest, most times, I still think it's pretty cool.

Then when I got a little older, I started reading a local paper's tech pullout and became a fan of the editor who wrote game reviews I loved so much I had clippings of them.

This small-town Sabah girl never imagined she'd be in a film directed by Amir (the first Malaysian film to be shown at Sundance) or that the tech editor would now be a very funny and adored friend on Facebook.

I never imagined either that I'd go to the World Cup in Munich or be in Copenhagen during Hans Christian Andersen's centennial (an event I had read about in passing one day).

Serendipity has been kind to me in unexpected ways but it seems unfair to leave the future of our kids to sheer luck.

If all they can see is a future of despair or of hawking dodgy creams on Facebook, or hoping they'll go viral and catch the eye of a local director, it does seem bleak.

When I was a child, I was told that I could choose what I wanted to be. What I was never told is that you make that choice every day.

Too often we blame kids for being soft or not having enough initiative. We forget that it is our job, and each generation's, to create the paths from which new ones can be born.

They say it takes a village to raise a child; we need a nation to care about, and for, all its children.

Hope and courage are strongest in the young and those are what we need most in these times that have tested so many of us to the brink.

We have relied too long on the wisdom of the not so wise — it is time we embrace, as well, the potential in the hands of the ones who are, quite literally the future of this country.

We have no other choice left to us.

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