

Chapouthier, Wan Hua. *Stories from the Heart: An insight of real life experiences in Malaysia and France*. Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 2013. 177 pp.

Stories from the Heart is a collection of 15 short stories exploring the idea of feelings and how they shape experiences. The author, Wan Hua Chapouthier, claims that “nothing and nobody can stop feelings”, and her stories show that even the most passive and quiet person can hold a wealth of emotion within. In these stories she shows glimpses of a world from a bygone era, where she captures the significance of face-to-face interactions and personal relationships which go beyond social media. At the same time, she demonstrates that sometimes emotions run deeper than we can perceive and that feelings leave longer impressions than we may realize. In addition, these stories provide great insight into the importance of sharing experiences and cultivating relationships.

While many of her stories are influenced by her Malaysian roots, they also hold a universal appeal. Traditional themes – love, family, marriage, and death – find themselves at the root of these stories, which makes them relatable to a wide audience. Chapouthier provides glimpses of her childhood, her youth, and her experiences as a student in a foreign land. All of these experiences are heavily shaped by the feelings felt in the moment and the lasting impressions these feelings create. The collection also includes stories about those around her and her revelations regarding the impact which emotions can have on an individual and the strength of them in a particular moment. She captures a variety of moments and situations which exhibit the vast and lasting power of feelings.

Chapouthier also provides wonderful insights on the emotions behind the person, the feelings which sometimes go unseen in our daily relationships. *The Plumber* and *The Cobbler* are two stories which focus on this type of revelation. Death, particularly suicide, acts as the link between these two stories. Chapouthier expands upon the idea that more emotion is often simmering below the surface of daily interactions. Though one man possesses a quiet and reserved nature and the other is overly communicative and chatty, each finds himself in the same situation. Their personal stories reveal a strength of character and discipline behind the façade they show the world.

In many of her stories, like *The Tears and Errors of Aunty Mary*, she pays homage to her Malaysian roots by naturally integrating references to local dishes and customs. She maintains

these links in *Ah Mui's Story*, where she also expands upon the importance of certain figures in the Malaysian community, such as Ah Pek. She explains how his relationships held much importance and yet how he too had his own story to tell beyond his position. These stories, though drawn from personal experiences, become relatable to a wider audience through Chapouthier's storytelling.

The stories of her time as a student show not only the struggle in a foreign land, but reveal the pride in her education and the well-deserved sense of accomplishment. The struggles then are often complemented by feelings of success, again demonstrating the strong effects of feelings and emotions on an individual.

Many of the stories are also touching and intimate revelations. *Songs and a Promise* and *Your Hand, Please* both explore feelings of affection, love, and desire. Young love and sexual awakening make certain moments stand out in *Songs and a Promise*. These feelings are easily remembered with the simple playing of a song.

But in *Sentimental Dilemma* Chapouthier demonstrates that not all stories can be transferred to paper. This story acts as a reminder that human interaction is at the basis of all these stories of feelings and emotions. Chapouthier's reflections and explorations about feelings are insightful. Each story in *Stories from the Heart* is touching and meaningful and provides a wonderful picture of the significance of feelings and the importance of learning from them.

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