

(10 November 2020) The Star, p.1



Photo: LOW BOON TAT/The Star

By **TERENCE TOH**  
lifestyle@thestar.com.my

HOW do you document a life well-lived? Some people like to record their travel adventures and experiences by writing about them in a diary. Others use photographs or scrapbooks full of mementos.

KC Lee, however, has recorded his life in a completely different way. For three years, he painstakingly sketched out the story of his life, chronicling events from his childhood to his later years.

Many of the cities and off the beaten track places he has ticked off on his travel list have been lovingly captured in pen and ink.

His sketch scroll, with drawings coming to life across over 500 sheets of A3 paper, measures 88m when everything is connected.

This one-man sketching feat was enough for him to get an entry in the

# Long and winding scroll

Artist KC Lee spent three years realising his dream of creating a record-breaking 88m-long sketch journal.

Malaysian Book Of Records for "Longest Sketch Journal For An individual" recently.

Amazingly, Buntong, Perak-born Lee's original plans were even more ambitious.

"I wanted to have it go for 100m. That's a nice round number. But then the pandemic made it very difficult to move around," says Lee, 60, in a recent interview at his (building materials company) office in Sri Kembangan, Selangor.

"There were still a lot of places I

wanted to go and visit, but it was not convenient, so I cut the sketches down to 88m. That's still a good number," he adds.

If you look through Lee's sketches, and you can't help but be taken by the amount of detail involved. Scroll after scroll, his sketches are well defined, with solid skills at lines and colour combinations.

Lee, who is trained in art, also has years of experience in the applied arts industry, has been busy mentoring sketch workshops and instructing local

university students on architecture sketching.

Lee is the founder of the Kuala Lumpur Urban Sketchers, a group which started in 2015. It is a local chapter of the Urban Sketchers, a non-profit group which started in Seattle, the United States in 2006.

Before the pandemic, members of the group met regularly at various locations around Kuala Lumpur to sketch landmarks.

> TURN TO PAGE 3

(10 November 2020) The Star, p.3

> FROM PAGE 1

# Rolling back the years

This year has been a slow one in terms of making trails and sketches through KL's streets because of various movement control orders.

Pandemic restrictions have meant less mobility for sketching groups.

"It has been harder as it is difficult to go to more places because of the pandemic. But I make do by sketching what I can," he mentions.

But Lee's "scroll", or sketch journal, is evidence of an artist who knows KL like the back of his hand. The capital is just a start in this story.

About 950 places are depicted in Lee's journal, from destinations such as Serdang, Old Klang Road, Menglembu (Ipoh, Perak), Melaka and Batu Pahat, to countries like Thailand, Vietnam and Australia.

Lee reveals his sketch time for places – home and abroad – would roughly take him between 30 minutes and two hours.

"I usually look for places with a lot of history or culture. I would take the time to look up the story behind a place when I decide to sketch it. I also would look into the lighting of a place. For example, two rows of shops facing each other ... would it look better in the morning or the evening?" he elaborates.

Research and planning are big part of his work process, but he does give spontaneity a run out once in a while when discovering a surprise spot to sketch.

He travels light to ensure he can move around easily.

"I just have simple tools. Two or three brushes, a box of colours, and an A3 sketchbook. I don't have an easel and can just sit by the roadside or a balcony to sketch," he says.

This three-year project has been a rewarding one for him.

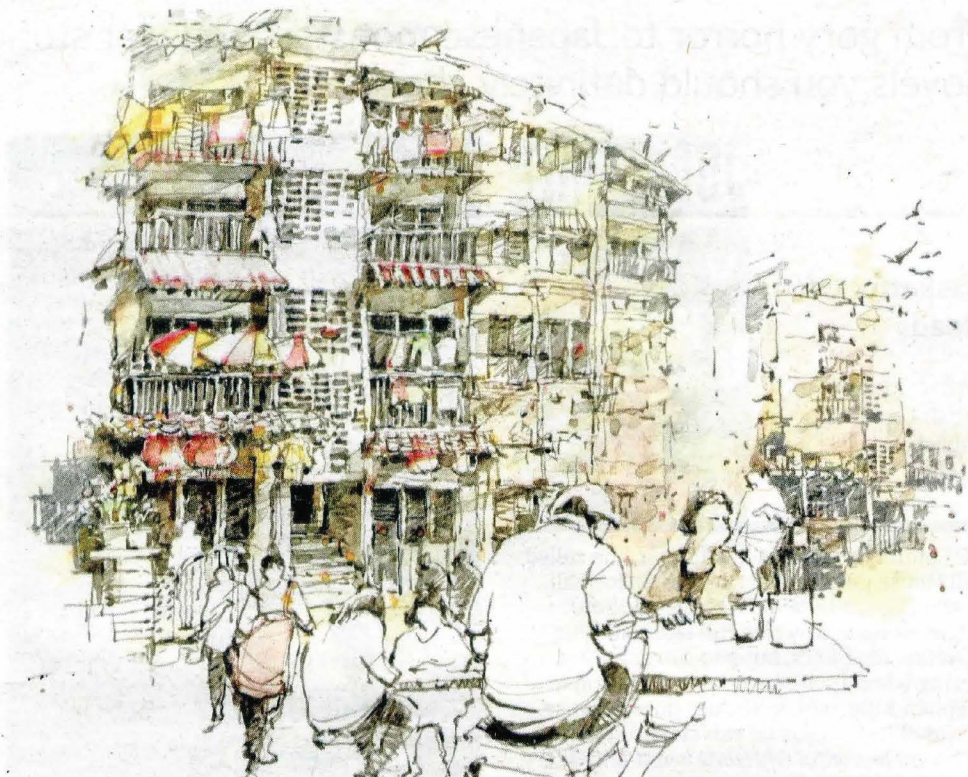
"I have good memories. One of my favourite times was in Chiangmai in 2018. I met a hotel staff member who served the famous singer Teresa Teng. I took a day to listen to his stories of her."

Lee not only sketches the physical details of places visited, he also scribbles down interesting details or stories about them.

"Storytelling is the most important thing for me about sketching," he maintains.

His sketches of Batu Pahat include a page dedicated to the fact that it has over 400 Chinese temples.

"I usually like to capture the significant



KC Lee's sketches from an old neighbourhood in Old Klang Road, Kuala Lumpur. He hopes to exhibit this sketch journal next year. — KC LEE

culture of a place. For example, I went to Serdang, I was very interested in its main street, which had a lot of interesting spots there," says Lee.

"In Bangkok, I was awed by the temples there. In order to understand the morning prayer times of the monks there, I would wake up at 5am to join the monks to pray with them at the temple. I had a very peaceful time, sitting and listening to their chanting."

Lee's favourite part of sketch journal, however, is the tail end.

While the first part focuses more on his travels and architectural sketches, the last 22m focus on his life and his family history.

He plans to compile them into an illustrated book called *The Faith, The Dream*, which he hopes to release this month.

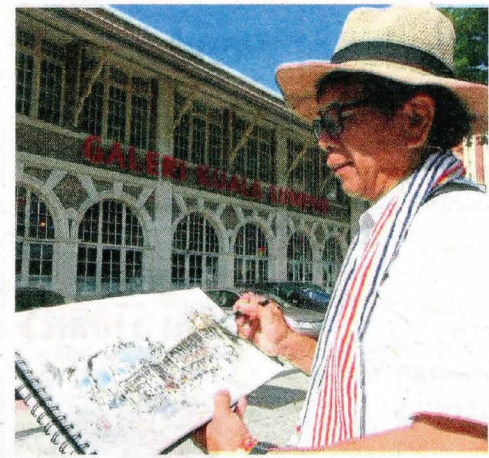
"All places that could be sketched live

were sketched live. For my personal story and history, like parts involving my parents, I referred to photos," he says.

And Lee has had an interesting life indeed as observed in the drawings. Adopted since he was a child of eight days old, Lee never knew his birth family when growing up.

Later in life, his biological brother, a tour guide, happened to meet some people from Lee's hometown when giving a tour.

Lee's brother discovered they knew him,



'I just have simple tools. Two or three brushes, a box of colours, and an A3 sketchbook,' says Lee. — Filepic and this led to a long-awaited reunion.

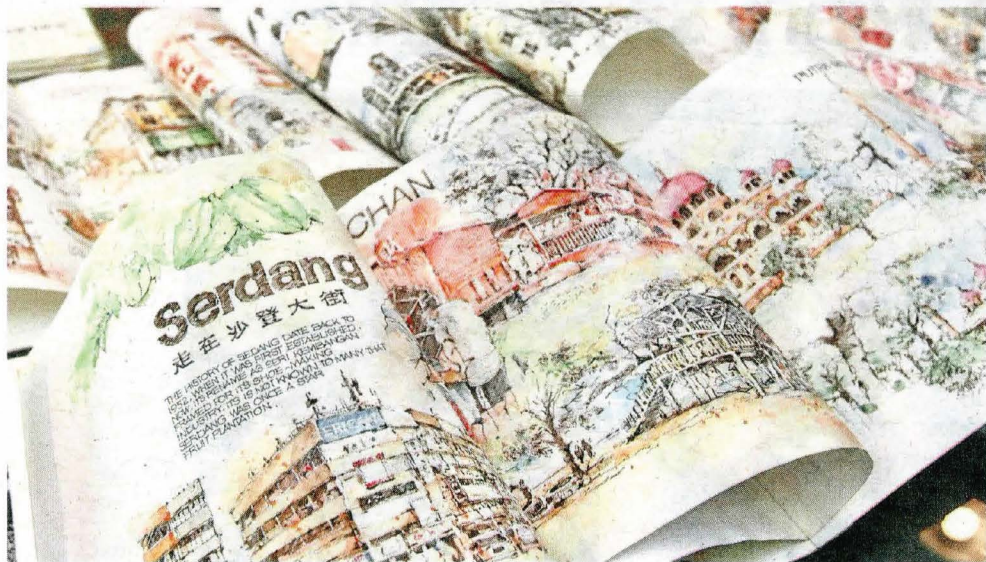
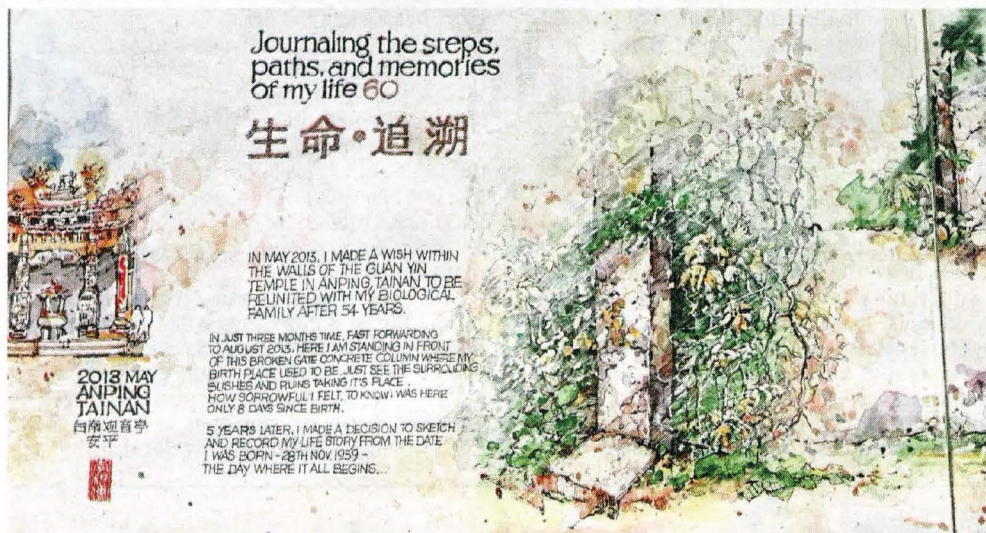
These heartwarming sketches depict the ups and downs of Lee's life, from his struggles in art school right to how he met his wife.

In one of the most interesting pages in the journal, Lee describes how he used to work in a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur. There, he met a man who he would later learn was actually his biological father.

"I hope that people who look at the story of my life, they can pick up something. Maybe examine the drawing skills involved, and the colouring," muses Lee, who mentions Taiwanese sketch artist Professor Pochou Chang as big inspiration.

Does he intend to finish up the remaining work to make it 100m?

"The work is already certified. In my head, however, I would like to add on to it, maybe let it reach 1km, and get another record. I would like to add locations in Europe this time," he concludes.



Lee's writings and memories are a big of this series (above). A close-up of his Serdang town sketch (bottom), featuring detailed buildings and streets. — LOW BOON TAT/ The Star