

Old habit eggs Ah Poh on

Photo by SAM THAM

THE frail and dark frame hunches over baskets of eggs in a corner near busy Central Market as smoke from her cigarette shrouds her face with every puff she takes. She doesn't mind. The fumes of passing vehicles are far worse anyway.

But then, this is Ah Poh's workplace, and it has been for decades when the area was quiet and clean.

Dressed in a simple *samfu*, the elderly woman squats at her spot with her wares, watching the world go by.

Many passersby see her, but most do not notice the quiet woman. She is, to them, a permanent fixture on a veranda beside a row of bustling shops.

Ah Poh sells kampung eggs, quail eggs, century eggs and salted ones, too. Sometimes she sells eggs rare to city folks, but that are common among villagers.

Her quiet spot is a stark contrast to her surrounding. Everywhere around her are honking traffic, blasting noise from music stores and shoppers haggling for bargains.

Ah Poh doesn't join in the competition. She doesn't have to. Most of her customers are regulars, mainly neighbouring traders.

Here is a routine that was the same decades ago. Ah Poh travels to her spot from Puchong by bus everyday. "I don't know the time I get to my corner, nor the time I go home," she says. "Maybe, I ply my trade from 8am to 2pm." Ah Poh isn't sure. But, what she is sure of is the time she wakes up in the mornings.

Beginning today, City at Work focuses on careers and lifestyles that are unique to Klang Valley residents. Ordinary as they may seem, to the workers they mean much. In our first article, YIP YOKE TENG meets an old egg seller near Central Market.



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"I wake up at 5am every day, take the bus down and sell the eggs," she says. "I leave earlier for home on rainy days when I will sell the eggs off cheaply because they are too heavy to take them back home," she says.

Ah Poh tosses her cigarette butt into a manhole and looks about her. "I have been in this spot for years, before these buildings came up," she says.

"Everyone calls me Ah Poh.

"When I was young, my mother called me Ah Yee because I am the second child in the family."

She smiles as if reminiscing the good old days. It must be because during the old days, Ah Poh ran a small-scale poultry farm that her parents owned.

It was hers to be called her own until the tragic May 13, 1969, incident.

Since then, her family had to buy eggs from other farms and sell them to make ends meet.

Ah Poh's corner may be dirty. But she isn't. Her dark, curly hair is neatly tied up in a bun, held up

by an old-fashioned net and hair clips.

For a person who is pushing 90, her mind seems clear. She speaks softly and is articulate.

Though petite, she carries the baskets of eggs on a bus to her spot. "See, because of that, Ah Poh's hands are thick and rough like a man's," she says, looking down at her dark and wrinkled palms.

Ah Poh has four children and four grandchildren. Her husband died years ago. She raised her children selling eggs.

"Now, they are all working in offices," she says proudly. "They don't want me to work, but I insist that I want to. I am used to it."

Her daughter-in-law helps Ah Poh out sometimes.

As for business, it was better in the old days.

"Now, only a handful of people stop by to buy my eggs, usually out of pity than anything else" she says. "Sometimes, I feel like a beggar."

The shopkeepers on the same veranda are nice to her. They let her have her spot. Some people even help Ah Poh with her luggage onto the bus.

"I have never had any bad experiences nor has anyone complained about me," she says. "I take life easy. I just do whatever I can."



Ah Poh ... 'I take life easy. I just do whatever I can'