

# Growing up in Kampong Glam

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Inspired by her mother's desire for a written history of the family, amateur historian Hidayah Amin laboured for four years to record the stories surrounding her childhood home in Kampong Glam.

But to her sorrow, the woman behind the tale never got to read it. The 37-year-old media producer recalled: "I completed the

manuscript on June 18, 2008. I will never forget that date because that evening, my mum passed away."

Her mother, who was in her 60s, died from a heart attack.

Dedicated to her mother, the book, *Gedung Kuning: Memories Of A Malay Childhood*, was launched earlier this month with support from the National Heritage Board's Heritage Industry Incentive Programme.

Full of family anecdotes that detail intriguing customs from Malay wedding rituals to white magic, the book is titled after the yellow mansion (gedung kuning in Malay) at 73 Sultan Gate where four generations of the author's family lived.

The building was home to Malay royalty in the 1800s and bought in 1912 by Hidayah's great-grandfather. Acquired by the Government in 1999 under the Land Acquisi-

tion Act, it now houses a restaurant, *Tepak Sireh*, which showcases photographs and a short history of the author's family.

She said her family is often mistaken as being related to the Malay royals because of the house's proximity to the Istana Kampong Glam palace, now the Malay Heritage Centre.

Mistakes like that prompted her mother to say: "If you don't write our history, others will write our history for us."

In 2004, she began documenting what she and older relatives remembered, using history texts, newspaper clippings and academic theses to corroborate facts.

"The challenge is, Malay history is mostly oral history and what is written is all in Malay. Maybe because I am English-educated, to read a history text in Malay was very difficult," she said.

Nevertheless, she began piecing together a narrative that impressed members of the Singapore Heritage Society, a charitable group dedicated to bringing Singaporeans in closer touch with their roots.

The president of the society, Dr Kevin Tan, 48, put in numerous hours helping her turn the story into a book.

To him, the book is important for various reasons: It is a rare written account of the Malay community in Singapore, and it is in English and thus accessible to the wider community.

He said: "We should encourage amateur historians like Hidayah to tell their stories. Only by actively engaging with our past will we understand our present and plot our future."

The author agreed, "It is so important for you to know your roots. I hope people, when they read the book, will appreciate the importance of preserving their own family stories and be inspired to write their own histories."

**Gedung Kuning: Memories Of A Malay Childhood** costs \$26.64 and is available in bookstores.



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**"I completed the manuscript on June 18, 2008. I will never forget that date because that evening, my mum passed away."**

HIDAYAH AMIN (above), who wrote *Gedung Kuning: Memories Of A Malay Childhood* to fulfil her mother's wish for an account of their family's history

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