

Wong Chen, MP for Kelana Jaya

Constituency e-newsletter: 100 days



Your Member of Parliament Wong Chen, and staffers Timothy Kang and Deborah Augustin

Interview: Wong Chen – Party Technocrat, Lawyer and now a Parliamentarian

By Jane Lazar

Wong Chen, the first time Parliamentarian is treading challenging waters, and making deep imprints in what he solemnly wants to undertake. When I first heard that a person named Wong Chen was PKR's candidate for Kelana Jaya I had no clue to who he was. I met him first in ADUN YB Hannah Yeoh's office one day in June 2013. I was there to meet his wife Yu Leng. The two make a great team, skilled in their respective arenas, with Wong Chen being the politician and Yu Leng as the supportive intellectual wife. I found him down to earth with no airs about him and easy to talk to. He was a freshly elected Parliamentarian and was setting up the service centre in Subang Jaya. He explains that he is the PKR party technocrat working on policies and that he has been a corporate lawyer for 20 odd years. But what do we know of and about him?

The following excerpt of a phone conversation may reveal things we do not know about Wong Chen.

Tell me something about your family background.

My parents come from a simple background, and had only a few years of schooling. My father started working at the age of 11. I was born in Petaling Jaya but moved to Kota Baru when I was about one and the half to two years old. I have an older brother and sister and a younger brother. You could say that we are a close knit family. My father became a successful businessman in his 20s and is still involved in running his businesses. They were keen that we, their children, received a good education. I continued my secondary education in Singapore at the United World College of South East Asia, an international school. Subsequently, I went to the UK to further my studies at University of Warwick. I am married and have two young babies. Older one, a boy, is two years old and my daughter is nine months old. My wife Yu Leng has her own business as a consultant specialising in agribusiness and political economy.

How did you cope going from rural Malaysia to urban Singapore? Did you enjoy your schooling in Singapore?

I was in a boarding school and we did not interact with Singaporeans as the college was exclusively for foreigners. In fact, there were a lot of Malaysians at that school back then. You could say it was a unique environment. I was in Singapore but surrounded by Malaysians. We had students from 60 other countries but the Malaysian contingent was sizeable. I enjoyed my stay there where I studied both English and Malay literature.

What were your favourite subjects then and were you involved in other activities in school?

My favourite subject was fine arts. I did painting, sculpture, and I like oil painting. I was involved in drama and stage production, and wrote scripts. I played sports such as soccer, volley ball, badminton, rugby and basketball. I was good at cross country running. I am a bit strange in that I am a skinny fellow but played competitive sports. I excelled academically too, and was elected chairman of the student body. You could say I was an all-rounder.

Do you still paint and what about other hobbies?

I like to do oil painting and the last time I painted was about two years ago. I love trekking and have climbed Mount Kinabalu twice. I have done the Himalayan range three times, covering Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal. I love being in the mountains. You could say I'm a mountain person and not so much a beach person. Trekking can be meditative. When my son and daughter are older I'll expose them to trekking.

What languages do you speak besides English and Bahasa Malaysia?

I speak Kelatanese Malay. My father is Hakka and mother Cantonese and so I grew up speaking rudimentary Cantonese but am currently learning Mandarin.

Did you work in England after your law studies or did you return to Malaysia immediately?

I did my CLP, and it's a tough exam. I chambered in Kota Baru and practised litigation for a couple of years. Then I came to Kuala Lumpur and practised corporate law. In Kota Baru I did some free legal aid work for the poor.

Even in your early twenties you practised social responsibility. I thought you would be more into making money as you have a strong finance head. There is more to you than a corporate lawyer.

I have my father's DNA, an innate understanding of business and money making and also my mother's DNA to be socially conscious and contribute to society. I have inherited these two values.

What is your favourite food?

My favourite food is curry laksa. Given a chance in any hawker centre, I will try out the curry noodles just to see.

You have a young family. When I called you, you were putting your son to sleep. You seem to be a hands-on dad. How do you balance being a politician and a family man?

Well, I work from both my house and my service centre which is in Subang Jaya SS14/1, one floor above YB Hannah Yeoh. Once a week, my service centre opens for Tuesday night service from 8pm to 10pm to meet my constituents that have day jobs. Six days in a the week I am a politician, officiating events, attending makans, political meetings, embassy events, hold press conferences, etc. Sundays are strictly for my family. I think my constituents will understand my need to spend time with my young family. If I am unhappy because I don't have a healthy family relationship, then I cannot serve my constituents well. I am a devoted father and husband and I want to continue to be so.

Jane is a writer of books on accountancy. She is a volunteer at the Pusat Khidmat Kelana Jaya.

