

I-S Magazine

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Animal Activist Louis Ng

By Lisa-Ann Lee

President and founder of ACRES, Louis Ng, wants you to know that pigs can fly and that you can do whatever you set your mind on doing.

I was quite quiet in school but by necessity I became more vocal. I started to realize that there were all these problems but no one was speaking up about them.

I watched a documentary about how people were saving turtles in the wild and I realized that not only was I not part of the solution; I was actually part of the problem. I loved to drink turtle soup at Chomp Chomp. So at 14, I took my first step to make a difference for animals, and gave up turtle soup.

The next turning point came when I watched *Gorillas in the Mist*, which featured the life story of Dian Fossey. I remember saying to my mom, "I want to be just like Dian when I grow up." Of course, she freaked out because Dian was murdered. But from then on, I volunteered at the SPCA and the zoo, and I did my studies in this field.

I always wanted a dog when I was younger but my parents weren't too keen on the idea, so I had a hamster. I always tell them, "Maybe if you had given me a dog, I would have been an engineer or a doctor."

The first registered office for ACRES was my mom's house. After that, we moved to Golden Mile Complex, and then to Opal Crescent and then to Pasir Ris. Before this was Mandai. A donor came forward and told us they had this warehouse space, which they were willing to give us for free. We didn't mind, but halfway through they rented it out to a casket company. So for about a year, we were working beside the coffins, which was quite depressing.

I used to earn \$500 a month. I remember my mom telling me, "If you do this, you're going to die alone." But I've shown her that it's not just me. There are many passionate people who are willing to give up a more materialistic lifestyle.

Singapore's listed among the top 10 countries in the world in terms of illegal wildlife trade, which is shocking because no one ever believes it. We're still trying to verify this but National Geographic listed us as number two in the world. What people don't realize is that it's not just the animals you see; there are hundreds of them that die along the way.

It's not just the quantity of the trade but the variety that scares us. People always ask us, "So what have you found?" We've found everything—star tortoises, iguanas, tarantulas, slow lorises. Same with the tiger investigations. When we first started, we didn't expect to find that many tiger parts. We have such a clean image and everybody knows tigers are endangered, but we found them openly displayed at 52 out of 59 antique and jewelry shops. After all that knowledge, you walk into a shop and you can still find tiger claws and teeth.

We always say that culture is something that cannot be used as an excuse. It is something that is very fluid and changes. If it is going to wipe out a species, then surely culture can change. Slavery was part of our culture in the past. We phased it out because it was wrong. The African-Americans have the same emotions as us, so why not the animals?

Someone told me that if I could set this place up, pigs would fly. So I put a flying pig at my entrance to show that pigs can fly.

Singaporeans are so scared to fail. When I started ACRES, everyone told me, "For sure you will fail. Why would anyone listen to this small boy?" I was 21 or 22 then. Same thing happened when we wanted two hectares of land for the rescue center. Everybody said, "We're so land scarce. What makes you think the government will give you a plot of land for something with no economic value?"

I always say nothing is impossible in Singapore. The problem is, when we hit the first obstacle, we give up.