

GOING ALL OUT

"Some people take a lifetime to find out what they seek in life, but I'm fortunate to have found mine already."

HE STARTED at NTU to study Mechanical Engineering. But his decision to become a joint hall photographer proved to be the turning point that steered him away from engineering and into the glamorous world of photography.

Now George Wong, who graduated in 2003, makes a living as a wedding and lifestyle photographer, but has the time he wants to pursue his personal projects, too.

They come at a cost. On top of wiping his bank account dry, he sold his dream cameras – a Mamiya 7 set and two Leicas – fetching \$7000 to fund his personal projects. His most recent one being an exhibition featuring photographs of the old National Stadium. That alone, cost him almost \$3200.

Despite being out of pocket money, he is a happy man. George, 29, was revelling in the euphoria of his first solo exhibition, which ended last week.



Reminiscing memories of his dream camera, George with his friend's Mamiya set. PHOTO | KONG YEN LIN

Best of all, he is doing what he loves. The self-taught photographer, now works full time snapping for weddings, magazines and events with a Canon 5D SLR camera.

He also had to overcome his

parents' disapproval. They didn't see any prospects for him in photography. "They would nag at me when I come home late at night looking exhausted from work and compare me with our neighbours' children who have regular 9 to 5 jobs," George said. He understands their concern – especially as he works a gruelling seven-day week.

But he is undaunted. "This business belongs to me, that's why I'm trying all that I can to make it work," he said. "With work, I've always believed that it's not so much of whether you can or cannot, it's a matter of how much you want it."

A career in engineering once crossed his mind. George had enjoyed his industrial attachment at Grenidea Technologies and even collaborated with them on his final year project. But when the expected job offer didn't come, he had second thoughts about what he wanted to do with his life.

"I'm sure I could survive as an engineer, but I would be one without passion, merely looking forward to weekends and taking long leaves for holidays," he said.

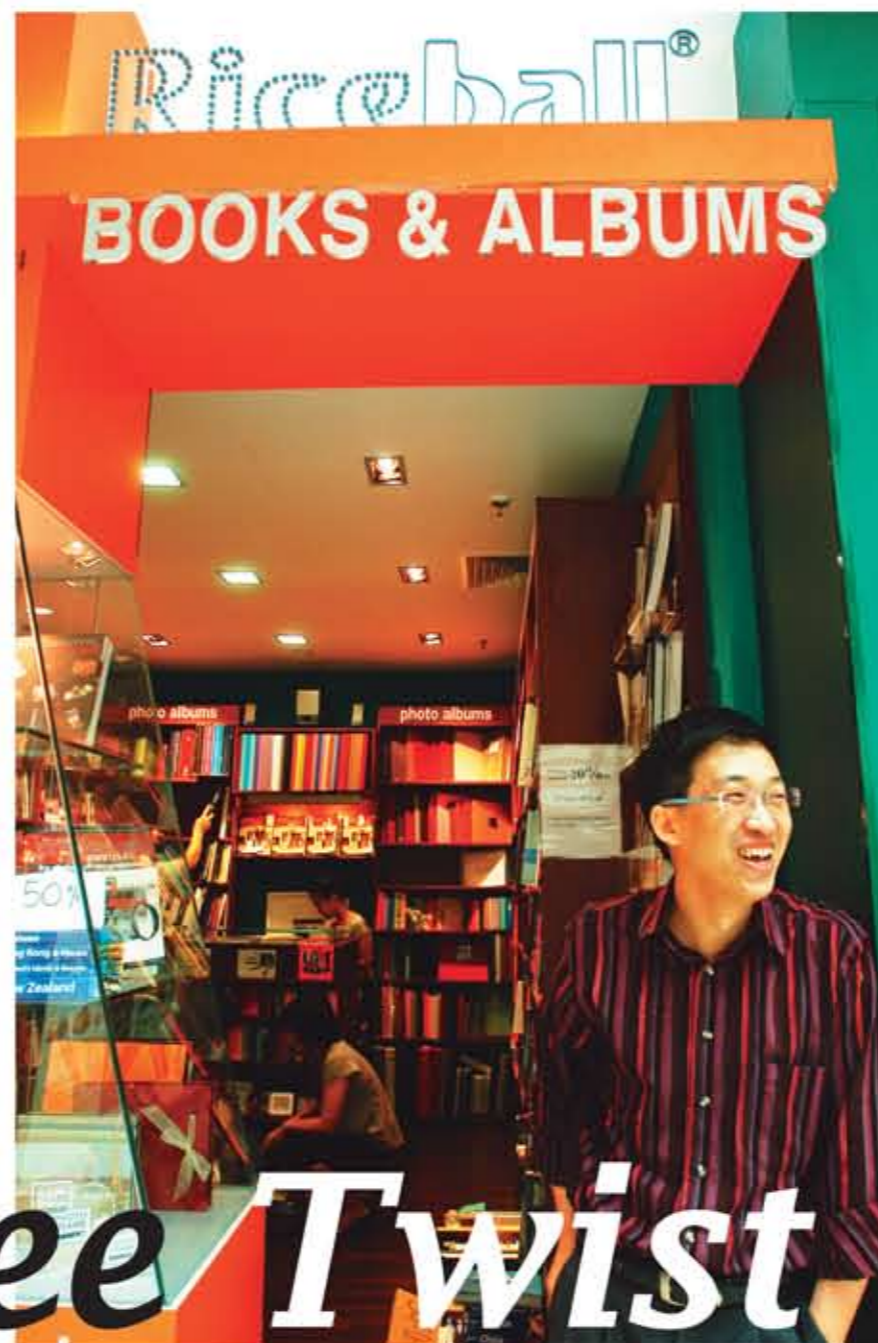
While at school, he had taken the post of a joint Photo Head for Hall 2, which piqued his interest in the art form. While capturing hall life, sports and games, he came to love the way a photograph captures a moment and gives permanence to

a memory. Still, he is thankful for having walked this path, and gained a lot from his engineering degree. "Not only had it conditioned me to be more systematic and cautious, the paper qualifications had also placated my parents," he said.

He is finally making headway in gaining their approval, thanks to high-profile commissions, such as his recent work for California Fitness to shoot portraits of their instructors in their world-famous Group Exercise Programs.

He is also proud of clinching an honourable mention in the Photography category at the prestigious UOB Painting of the Year competition this year.

This milestone also improved his parents' perceptions of his career. "They've hung my winning entry up in the living room – that's a sign that they have capitulated," grinned the amiable lens man.



FORSAKING an iron rice bowl for a bookshop named 'Riceball', Masters of Engineering alumnus Zhong Ling created his own fusion recipe out of a love for photography and reading.

He opened his first photography bookshop, Riceball, after he "saw no light" at the end of the tunnel of his monotonous job as a mechanical product engineer. He knew it was time to make a career shift.

"I just closed one eye and jumped into the water, without knowing whether I could swim," the 34-year-old said. "I wanted to do something meaningful in life."

Rationalising the risk he took, he said, "If I don't try now when I have the time, when will I do so? You're only young once."

It wasn't just a leap of faith, though: he had saved up a few thousand during his five years working as an engineer, and armed with this solid financial backing and his wife's support, Zhong Ling used the Internet as his launch pad. He started off by selling books on photography directly to his circle of contacts which slowly expanded over the years.

Eventually he had enough clients to open his first shop in a corner of The Adelphi in 2004. This June, he opened his second outlet at prime location in Funan Centre.

It's a far cry from the stability offered by his comfy job as an engineer in a multi-national company, and Zhong Ling sacrificed a lot including a \$5k paycheck.

He also had to forgo his love for travelling due to his business and family commitments. The avid photographer used to snap his globetrotting trips.

Nowadays, the lens of his camera captures memories of another love in his life – his two-year-old daughter.



Photographer dad: Zhong Ling with a book of photos he shot for his daughter. PHOTO | KONG YEN LIN

#01-24, Funan IT Mall 100, North Bridge Road, S 179097 #04-17, The Adelphi No. 1 Coleman Street, S 179803

A 180 Degree Twist

There are degrees – and then there are dreams. And choosing the latter has brought four NTU alumni everything they wanted. **Kong Yen Lin** and **Gwendolyn Ng** take a look at their lives

COMMUNICATING HOPE

HE WANTED to live a life without regrets. So Jared Tham gave himself one year to fulfill his dreams. It was then, life took off for him.

He pursued his dream of volunteering, embarked on overseas expeditions and turned his hand to

freelance writing.

In that same year, the graduate in Communication Studies realised that writing was not his cup of tea: "It is something I can do for a living, but not what I want to do for life," he said.

Instead, Jared took a leap of faith in 2004 and set up a youth society with nine expedition mates, called The Choice Initiative.

And yet, his view of volunteering in the past is poles apart from his perception now. He said he used

to "think of volunteering as a visit to the old folks home". A Youth Expedition Project to Bangalore in India was his wake up call.

The experience presented the fresh graduate with possibilities in volunteering, such as empowering youths to discover more about themselves.

There was no turning back. Now a Senior Executive in the

social service sector, the 29-year-old plans social services for at-risk youth, as well. He also assesses proposals for new services. Beyond his career, his belief in "giving back to society" had also driven him to engage in personal volunteering projects covering social issues such as child rights and Fair Trade.

He has also taken on the role of a conference manager in the Halogen Foundation organising regional events such as 1 Degree Asia. Involving 270 youth leaders across Asia, the five-day event aimed to make leadership education accessible for all youths.

Yet, it was not all a bed of roses. He has not had any formal education in social work, hence the learning curve has been considerably steeper. "Most trained social workers would be able to hit the ground running, but I'm still learning on the job," Jared explained.

Despite the detour, Jared felt that the journey had been worthwhile.

He said, "The path I took and the experiences I had along the way made me who I am." His university education had not only broadened his capacity for critical and conceptual thinking, but had also increased his ability to com-

municate ideas effectively. That's important when he is presenting complex ideas to different kinds of people.

Skills aside, Jared emphasises that "power and speed are useless without direction."



Jared conducting a forum theatre workshop on child rights in Mumbai. PHOTOS | COURTESY

THE 'WRITE' JOB

SHE NEVER wrote off her dream of becoming a journalist even when her grades just fell short of entering journalism school at NTU. Yet dreams do come true as Yang Yang eventually fulfills her childhood ambition.

Yang's journey into the newsroom started when she saw a job ad for a Chinese journalist with Singapore Press Holdings (SPH) during her final year as a marketing student at Nanyang Business School. At first she thought she had the wrong degree for a writing job.

However, the 25-year-old is no stranger to wielding the pen in Chinese as she was a student correspondent with ZaoBao in secondary school and did a minor in Chinese.

And her family, especially her father who is a Chinese language teacher, also played a part in cultivating her flair for writing.

So far, she loves her writing job with Friday Weekly and Thumbs Up, both student's Chinese newspapers. "It has always been my passion to write. And I feel a sense of a satisfaction when I see my articles getting published," the reporter said.

As a reporter for students' newspapers, she covers stories reflecting youths and their culture.

Her first assignment as a full-fledged SPH reporter left the young reporter starstruck.

experience of the press conference with a Taiwanese boyband, she said, "I tried hard to contain my excitement as it was the first that I came into such close contact with celebrities."

One year on, she is no longer the rookie in awe of the celebrities as she realised that "artists are also ordinary people."

Yang has interviewed countless people from all walks of lives, but she still looks forward to the interesting elements she can sieve out from each interview.

Besides waking up everyday to her

dream job, she does not need to jostle with the morning rush hour crowd as she reports to work at only at 10.

Yet, there are sacrifices she has to make. The long hours her job entails and even working on public holidays occasionally means lesser time spent with her family.

Nevertheless, the reporter has no complaints. "Routines are not for me. Though it's a tiring job running around, I get a lot of joy from my job."

Many undergraduates may find themselves in the same predicament as Yang Yang faced back then, disappointed that they did not get into their ideal course. Nonetheless, it's a matter of perspective and she chose to be optimistic.

"Don't be disheartened. You never know when the knowledge you learn will come in useful. Always prepare yourself for opportunities," she advised.



Revelling in the unforgettable