

They were all yellow: My Bersih 3.0 story
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For you I'll bleed myself dry - Yellow by Coldplay

iWITNESS Morning of 428. That was the song that was stuck in my head as I got ready to attend Bersih 3.0 rally. I put on my yellow T-shirt and sang, "Oh yeah, they were all yellow".

I wasn't there last year. When I read my friends' accounts of Bersih 2.0 and watched the video footage, I cried. I had my reasons not to be there and it was not because I didn't agree with the cause.

So as I watched my friends and fellow countrymen get treated like pariah dogs running away from dog catchers, I died a little inside.

There was one voice in particular, from the numerous videos posted, that still haunts me till today. A young woman crying out to the police, "Is this what you stand for? That you would hurt your own people?"

Her voice was used in one of the Bersih 3.0 'trailers'. And the anguish in her voice echoed many of our sentiments.

I, on the other hand wanted to shout back (into the monitor, nonetheless) "That is not true!" Because if it is, my whole childhood would have been a lie. Let me explain.

My daddy served in the police force since he was 18, since the British colonial times. I grew up with the police around me.

But none closer than the men and women of the Federal Reserve Unit (FRU). The riot police as people call them. You see, my daddy was heading one of the FRU units the last few years before his retirement.

During Chinese New Year, FRU families will cook for us and help my family host 'open house'. FRU trucks will be parked in front of our house, dropping off policemen and women of all races. We were probably the only Chinese family that served ayam rendang and roti jala during this season. I understood the concept of 'muhibah' and of 1Malaysia way before Najib Abdul Razak made it into an enterprise.

Grew up trusting they will protect me

At times when my daddy couldn't pick me up from school, one of these FRU men will come by and make sure I got home safely.

I grew up trusting that they will protect me. And they would do anything to make sure no one harmed me.

So understand this. On 428, when tear gas was fired, and I had to run away from the FRU - the same people whom I trusted my life with. It broke my heart.

I'm sure by now you would have read all you could have on what went down that Saturday.

You would have memorised the sequence of events blow by blow. And I will bear testament to all you have read and witnessed.

NONEInitially, the atmosphere was fiesta like. I haven't felt such excitement from a crowd since the World Cup Finals day in Paris back in 1998.

However, when things changed for the worse as I was running away from the non-stop tear gas ambush

from Masjid Jamek to Pasar Seni, I kept my eyes peeled for anything that would resemble the country I love. And here is what I witnessed.

People of all ages, races and gender, turned to us and asked if we needed salt or water. We came ill-prepared because we actually believed it wouldn't turn ugly this year. All we had was a hand towel.

No one pushed, shoved or turned violent. No one looted, robbed or stole (I think even the common snatch thieves decided to put down their interest for the day for a bigger cause).

We were all trying to disperse, but couldn't because train services were stopped and tear gas was coming from all directions.

But in the midst of it all, the beef noodle stall was still open for business and people stopped to eat. How Malaysian is that?

Standing by the sidewalks eating bowls of noodles while the rest of us were trying to find a way out of the 'war zone'.

As we walked towards Petaling Street, we came across DaiMaCai and Sports Toto shops that were still open. It's Saturday. So, life goes on, yellow shirt or not.

I saw a few Chinese uncles telling one another to stop running, for they had to go buy their numbers.

NONEDespite the mood of the situation, I couldn't help but laugh.

I wanted to take a photo of them, but the tear gas was being blown at our direction, so I had to keep moving.

We were walking towards the famous air mata kuching stall on Petaling Street.

My husband wanted a cup of that magic potion, so we went. There were tourists milling about the place, I think not really sure what was happening.

As we were approaching the stall, another group of protesters ran past us and shouted at us to go because more tear gas was coming.

Immediately I could feel my eyes tearing again. I quickly covered my nose and mouth, and we ran into a back alley. By now, I was just fed up.

We came out at the other side of the alley, emerged at the other end of Petaling Street. "Do you still want the mata kuching or not?" I asked my husband. "Should we?!"

He was hesitant to walk back into the same place where everyone was running out from. I said yes, took the towel and covered my face, and walked right back into Petaling Street.

Refused to be terrorised in own country

As we went 'against traffic', I had only one thing in mind. No, it's not that the air mata kuching was that awesome I had to risk getting arrested for.

It is that I refuse to be terrorised in my own country by my own people. It's a free country.

I will walk to the stall and get myself a drink, thank you very much. Eyes stinging and throat burning, I drank the mata kuching.

Ok, trying to head to the tau fu fah stall next was a bit of a challenge. So we walked on towards Pasar

Seni, trying to get on the LRT train.

I was finally able to Facebook, and quickly posted some of my thoughts and pictures.

bersih 3 rally 030512 03As we were going up, people told us that the trains had also been stopped at this station.

I was surprised though, not because the train stopped, but how calm everyone was about it.

I have seen worse reaction on a normal day from people during unexpected train breakdowns when heading back from work.

I got home safe and sound, back to reality.

The next thought was, I needed to face the wrath of my daddy. When I was 'debriefed' by him and my family on Sunday about what went on, dad explained certain actions that were taken.

For instance, trains had to stop because high voltage tracks and moving trains would have caused serious injuries to people who would jump on tracks trying to flee the scene.

People were denied legal representation, and this was within the Police Act to do so for the first 24 hours.

The debate went on for a bit and my mummy finally asked the mother of all questions, "So what did you all achieve that day?"

I tried to answer, but under my daddy's watchful eyes, meaningful words failed me.

So I turned on YouTube and showed my parents the "Same Day Edit" video that most of my friends were sharing on social media. Stunned silence came after.

Where I could not find my voice, 80,000 other Malaysians help me speak up.

I am your typical Malaysian. A fourth generation Chinese born and raised in Malaysia. I am a mother of two young energetic children.

I am your middle class average Jane Doe. I am a professional working nine to five. I studied here, married here, worked here and have never lived abroad.

I did not go out on 428 because I have a terrible life. I did not go out because I am not loyal to my country or her rulers.

I did not go out because I am a dumb wit bought by the opposition to cause trouble. I went because I love my country. I went because I am Malaysian. And thank you all who stood next to me that day to help me reaffirm that.