

Growing up with Dr M like regular kids

MalaysiaKini.com

July 11, 2015

By Norman Goh & Zikri Kamarulzaman

INTERVIEW One would imagine that the children of Dr Mahathir Mohamad, the man who had served as prime minister for 22 years, would have had a privileged childhood.

But his eldest, Marina, said she and her siblings had a rather normal upbringing in what used to be the small town of Alor Setar, Kedah.

"People keep thinking I grew up as a prime minister's daughter, which is quite flattering because they think I'm very young, but in fact he didn't become premier until I was an adult.

"I had a pretty normal childhood. He was well known in Alor Setar, our town, because he was the first Malay doctor in the private sector, so he was quite well known.

"But apart from that we really had a normal time, a normal life," she told Malaysiakini in an exclusive interview on Thursday.

Mahathir and wife Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali were wed in 1956, and had Marina the following year. They had three more children, and had adopted three more.

Marina said they were normal parents, describing Mahathir as a joker, and Siti Hasmah as the enforcer in the family.

"He is more the joker, my mum didn't tell jokes that much. My mum was the enforcer you know, she was tasked with making sure we did our homework, and of course you don't like the enforcer."

Strict but liberal

She said Mahathir would only get involved if things were really serious. However this didn't mean that Mahathir did not place emphasis on discipline, and manners.

"One day when I was three years old, our gardener Pak Hashim complained to my dad that I had stuck my tongue out at him, which was considered a really, really bad thing to do.

"I got pinched (on the side) for that, that's something that's not to be tolerated. You can't be rude to anybody especially when they're older, regardless of their station in life. That was really something that was honed in on us," Marina said.

Besides school and manners, Mahathir and Siti Hasmah also emphasised on honesty.

But despite the strict upbringing, Marina said her parents were quite liberal in letting her

and her siblings choose their own paths.

"One thing they never did was they never pressured us to take up medicine, or anything.

"Their idea was, you have to get education right until university, after that if you want to be a singer or whatever, you can. But you have that degree to fall back on," she said.

She said her parents were also confident that they had raised their children well, and developed core values that would be unshaken when they left the nest to study abroad.

Mahathir did not have as much time with the family once he became premier in 1981, but by then the children had mostly grown up.

Still, he made a point for the family to go on holiday together once every year.

Still same old dad

Fast forward to the present, and Mahathir has developed a public persona as a fierce, sarcastic, and strict old man.

Marina however revealed that he is still the affectionate father he was when she was young, who now dotes on 18 grandchildren, especially his 12 granddaughters.

"When I was young we would walk hand in hand [...] and the granddaughters especially, grandsons too, but granddaughters particularly, get the same treatment.

"He has one granddaughter who is very tall and lanky and long haired, and they walk around and they're holding hands. I'm sure people look and think that's a girlfriend, but he just loves that.

"He's a great grandfather, [...] very over indulgent," she added.

Mahathir celebrated his 90th birthday yesterday, surrounded by the family he loves. Siti Hasmah will be celebrating her 89th birthday tomorrow.

Copyright © 1999-2012 Mkini Dotcom Sdn. Bhd

Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/304813>