

# Author recalls birth of the nation

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➤ Kamarul's Merdeka wish - for the young to preserve unity and the spirit of togetherness

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**EIGHTY-YEAR-OLD** author Kamarul Zaman Ariff fondly recalls the days when people of all races would interact and become firm friends, creating everlasting bonds.

More than that, they struggled hand-in-hand for a common cause - independence from British rule.

That struggle culminated in a landmark event when the clock struck 12 on Aug 30, 1957, ringing in not just a new day but also a new nation.

"I still remember that it was raining the day before Merdeka, so my brother and I, who wanted to witness the birth of our nation, were all wet when we arrived at Stadium Merdeka," he told *theSun*.

"There were already several thousand people at the stadium. All of us saw (Malaya's first prime minister) Tunku Abdul Rahman raise his hand and shout 'Merdeka' seven times as he declared our nation independent," he said.

Kamarul was 17 then, fresh out of high school and was a temporary

teacher, teaching Malay at a Chinese school in Kuala Lumpur.

The Kajang native attributed his fondness for multi-racialism to his upbringing. "I had friends from all races," he recalled.

"I went to Kajang High School where we looked beyond skin colour to become firm friends. My best friend was Andrew Kit. We once went on a cycling trip all the way to Singapore," he said.

Kamarul would later earn a degree in Chinese Studies at Universiti Malaya. He also studied the modernisation of Japan at the same varsity.

"It was amazing. The Japanese were very focused. If it's about car manufacturing, they focus on that only, and they do it very well," he said.

Upon retiring from Pengurusan Danaharta Nasional Bhd where he served as company secretary, Kamarul began to reminisce about his childhood days, and that led to him writing his first fiction, *Long Road to Merdeka*.

It tells the story of Omar and his friend Ananti and it was set during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya. It depicts the struggles they faced until the day independence was declared.

While the book is fiction, the background is semi-biographical. It is based mainly on his own experience growing up in pre- and post-



Kamarul with his book *Long Road to Merdeka*. - SUNPIX

independence Malaysia.

"I do have an Indian woman friend named Ananti who lived in the quarters for estate labourers nearby," he said.

Since then, he has written two more books - *Crisis* and *Travelling in Mandela Land*, a travelogue documenting his adventures in South Africa. "I enjoy writing about places I've been to. I still have several drafts and travelogues but they are my private collection," he said.

During the movement control

order to curb the spread of Covid-19, Kamarul spent the time walking around his home, watering his plants and catching up with friends and neighbours via video calls and WhatsApp.

He now has a simple Merdeka wish - for the young to preserve unity and the spirit of togetherness by interacting with other races.

"I wish the various communities will mix with each other and learn each other's culture so we can realise the true vision of Malaysia," he added.