

# AS I WAS PASSING



# ADIBAH AMIN



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA



## Praise for Adibah Amin's AS I WAS PASSING

“Adibah Amin writes about real people, people like the *pak cik* down the road, Yin, her teacher-friend, and Mano, the gardener’s little boy. In her inimitable style, she weaves little stories around ordinary folk going through life’s challenges, or as she would put it, their ups and downs. But a common thread binds them all. There is a message, a ‘moral’ if you like, in even the simplest of her tales. That’s what makes her anecdotes so captivating, so enduring.”

**Ng Poh Tip**

*Group Chief Editor*

Star Publications (Malaysia) Bhd

“Elegant, gracious, full of affection for her fellow Malaysians, Adibah’s anecdotes give you not only a sense of nostalgia but also a deeper understanding of the way we were.”

**Lee Su Kim**

author of *Malaysian Flavours*  
and *A Nyonya in Texas*



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA

“Adibah has a rare knack for turning the prosaic into amusing anecdotes that appeal to both young and old. Rereading them almost three decades later, I find them just as charming as ever. Her understanding of human nature has rendered those tales into timeless pieces.”

**Lydia Teh**

author of *Life's Like That*  
and *Honk! If You're Malaysian*

“Adibah’s finely wrought prose, beautiful in its concision, deftly captures the quirks and idiosyncrasies of Malaysians; she makes us laugh at our all-too-human frailties, our vanities, our obsessions, and the oddities of Malaysian culture (or lack thereof).”

**Eric Forbes**

*Editor*



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA

# AS I WAS PASSING



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA

# AS I WAS PASSING

ADIBAH  
AMIN

PUSTAKA PERDANA



1009971

**PUBLISHING**



PERDANA  
LEADERSHIP  
FOUNDATION  
YAYASAN  
KEPIMPINAN  
PERDANA

Published by

**MPH Group Publishing Sdn Bhd**

1st Floor, Bangunan TH, No. 5 Jalan Bersatu 13/4

46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

email: [mphpublishing@mph.com.my](mailto:mphpublishing@mph.com.my)

**mph**

Copyright © 2007 Khalidah Adibah binti Amin

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the copyright holder.

Author photograph courtesy of The Star Publications (Malaysia) Bhd

Cover illustration courtesy of Amir Shah Amiruddin

1st printing ... March 2007

2nd printing ... May 2007

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Adibah Amin, 1936-

As I was passing / Adibah Amin.

ISBN 978-983-3698-06-6

ISBN 983-3698-06-9

1. Malaysians—Anecdotes. 2. Malaysia—Manners and customs  
Anecdotes. 3. Malaysia—Anecdotes. I. Title.  
959.5

Printed by

**MPH Group Printing (M) Sdn Bhd**

27-29-31 Jalan 2/148A

Taman Sungei Besi Industrial Park

57100 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**PRINTING**

959 5  
x 1



## preface

adibah amin

I WROTE THESE SKETCHES of Malaysian life and musings on various topics in the 1970s, soon after joining the hectic world of newspaper journalism.

When the late Tan Sri Lee Siew Yee, editor-in-chief of the *New Straits Times* then, asked me to write a column for the paper, I was excited and terrified at the same time. As you will read later in this book, I had already learnt to hide behind doors and pounce on potential sources of news stories. But a column!

What would I write about, I asked him. “Things Malaysian,” he said, “and anything else under the sun and beyond.” He felt that readers would like food for thought served with a light touch. I was to relax and just write in my own way.

The column was called ‘As I Was Passing.’ Tan Sri Lee allowed me to use a pseudonym, and I felt braver. I don’t really know why I chose Sri Delima (‘the glow of a ruby’); perhaps it was because I had always loved the gentle warmth of that gem.

Anyway, I wrote from the heart and was reassured when readers wrote me letters, sharing their experiences, thoughts and feelings. The *New Straits Times* published

some of these letters, including those that argued with ferocious wit against my views.

In 1976 and 1978, Berita Publishing, the book and magazine publishing arm of the New Straits Times Group, published selections of the 1970s pieces in two volumes. A few years later, I left the *New Straits Times* to freelance. From time to time, there was talk of reprinting them, but then Berita Publishing itself ceased to exist.

A while ago, I was happy to receive a phone call and a letter from MPH Group Publishing. They said they would like to republish my 1970s collections in two volumes. I was deeply touched to learn that Eric C. Forbes, the editor, had enjoyed reading the column as a teenager back in the swinging and groovy 1970s and felt the articles would still be enjoyable and meaningful for contemporary readers.

If you are too young to remember the 1970s, or were born long after, you may be amused by the contrast between lifestyles then and now. Some aspects of my childhood and teens in the prewar and early postwar years will seem even more 'weird' to you. Yet, you may find surprising similarities. My young friends and students who have read their parents' copies of the 1970s collections say it's 'cool' and 'gross' how things like tuition fever, the generation gap, peer group tyranny, youthful 'crushes' and the 'tender tussle' have remained so much the same despite the passage of time.

Again, if you do remember the 1970s and earlier, you may share my nostalgia for 'the way we were,' smile at memories of childhood games and teenage 'dating' styles, and sigh over the passing of the *pantun*, the