

Winning The Malaysian Video Award - A Firsthand Experience

By Claudine T. Egbert



A close-up of the
Bronze Award

"Project 'Kampung Ulu Batu – The Living Jungle' was the final assignment for my Documentary Production class. When the idea of doing a documentary on indigenous people came about, it initially was just about making a good documentary for the class. Eventually, our lecturer Puan Lina informed the class that she intended on sending our work to the Malaysian Video Awards. As those words eventually sank in, I realised that this was not just 'another' project. This competition was an incentive to produce the best documentary. In fact, it was something I really looked forward to.

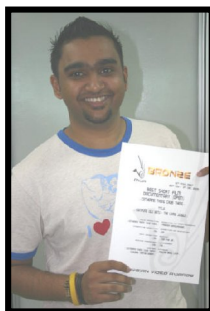
"Before I rattle on about the whole process, a brief description of the documentary should suffice to keep people out of the dark. The documentary is about indigenous people who live in Kampung Ulu Batu, a small village almost hidden in the jungle. Yes, they live in a jungle.

"A pharmaceutical company, GlaxoSmithKline, was helping these people improve their living standards. However, the Jabatan Hal Ehwal Orang Asli (JHEOA) that caters to the needs of the 'orang asli' in Malaysia is said to have done little to help these people. The whole documentary revolved around the involvement of JHEOA and GlaxoSmithKline in the village, comparing how much each party has contributed by assisting the people there.

"There were only four of us for this subject; so we had to work in a group. Catherine Thong was our director as she had come up with the idea to do this documentary. I was ready for a new adventure and, indeed, that's what it was. Going to the village and seeing their living conditions was an eye opener. Yuen Pue Jin, our editor was fascinated that there were so many chickens running about in the village. One might say she had never seen live chickens before. Prakash Gopalkrishnan, our cameraman, was all over the place shooting anything and everything he could. As producer, it was my responsibility to make sure that things run smoothly and as planned or else, as Puan Lina would put it, "your head will be on the chopping board first!"



Here I am admiring the award with Catherine (left)



One of our team members,
Prakash, with the Award

"As certain as every cloud has a silver lining, there were problems that our team had to face. There were times when we had our little squabbles but we managed to patch things up. Some interviews were done in between production and editing. We had to re-shoot some of our footage, which meant going back to the village. During the course of shooting at the village, we made friends along the way with some of the villagers and we even followed the younger ones to school to see how they interacted with the other children.

"Editing the documentary was a painstaking process. We were pressing for time and there were days when we stayed at the editing suite till 8pm. A tiresome process indeed, and it was a test of patience and endurance. The most frustrating moment was translating the interviews from Bahasa Melayu to English. It really took a lot of patience to sit through hours of listening and making attempts to translate into English.

"I don't think anyone really expected to win because the entries sent in each year for the MVA are always of a certain standard. However, when I heard from Catherine that our documentary had been short listed into the finals, it came to me as a surprise and I was really overjoyed. Unfortunately, I was not there when they announced that our video had won the 3rd place in the Short Film: Documentary category. Pue Jin called me and told me the good news and I couldn't help but literally jumped for joy.

"Looking at it now, it was all worth it. The effort, the squabbles and even the running around like headless chickens. No pun intended."