Creative Nonfiction: True Stories of People involved in Fifty Years of Conservation of the Orang-utan in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study explores the fourth genre, creative nonfiction, as the means to retell the stories of lived experiences. The aim of the study was to gather stories of ordinary people working to conserve orang-utans in Sarawak through in-depth interviews based on narrative inquiry principles, and then to re-tell the stories by crafting a creative nonfiction artefact composed of different subgenres such as Shorts, Portraits, Literary Journalism, hybrid nonfiction pieces and stories partially or wholly told in the participants' own voices in a subgenre that the narrative inquirer-writer identified and named the Crafted Interview.

Nineteen individuals were identified and interviewed, using semi-structured interview questions that allowed for digressions, follow-up questions and gentle probing with empathy and understanding by the researcher. Not just a detached observer, the researcher was a participant involved in orang-utan conversation, with a background in journalism and conservation, close to the research participants and their work. She became the interviewer as research instrument and a collaborator in the interviews, gathering stories – the lived experiences of participants through in-depth interviews.

The product of the study, the creative nonfiction artefact, tells stories in various nonfiction subgenres spanning fifty years of orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. Through this montage of stories, the narrative inquirer-writer re-tells the storied lives of men and women who have worked in orang-utan conservation in different capacities. These were "ordinary" people, not privileged Western primatologists, but the individuals on the ground, doing their daily work as forest guards and keepers, wildlife biologists and researchers, eco-tour operator and fundraiser for wildlife rehabilitation each contributing to the long-term survival of the iconic primate in its wild habitats or to the orphaned orang-utans that had been confiscated from poachers or illegal exotic pet owners.

These stories reflect not just work to save the endangered species, but also the larger issue of species extinction. It is acknowledged that though important, this study has focused only on a small population of orang-utans found in Sarawak; there are other populations in Borneo and Sumatra threatened by human avarice and ignorance. The human species' lack of humanity is evident in the lives of the orphaned orang-utans and the semi-wild animals that cling to a tenuous life in a tiny patch of forest in the middle of human settlements. This leads us to the

final level of meaning and understanding; that the human species may be forcing itself into extinction. We exist in a large ecosystem; our fate inextricably linked to that of our cousin, the red ape. While it teeters on the brink of extinction, we realise that we could soon follow suit.

Despite the naysayers who believe that reading as a pleasurable pastime will soon disappear, the future of the creative nonfiction seems promising; it will thrive in both traditional and new forms as writers and readers alike continue to “hunger for the real.” The future of the orang-utan is not so clear-cut. What is evident is that species conservation is a real need around the world. More creative projects beckon, appealing to us to research and write imaginatively, telling true stories, to support other endangered species and to share the stories of men and women toiling to save them on this uneven battlefield. This is a baton we can and should take up; the spark has been lit and this is a flame that needs to keep burning.

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

Recognised today by many as the fourth genre[1] with equal status as drama, poetry and fiction, creative nonfiction is variously referred to as the literature of fact,[2] literary journalism or narrative nonfiction[3]. Each name is in its own way accurate, explanatory, and inclusive, but questions still arise among academics, writers and readers alike when the term "creative nonfiction" is mentioned. Gerard voices what many find strange about the term; that it is defined by ***not what it is***, but by ***what it is not***. "It's *not* fiction. But then again, it is *not* poetry, or technical writing or libretto. It's like defining classical music as *nonjazz*."[4] As Lounsberry, an early proponent of creative nonfiction writing says, the genre has an unfortunately "negative sounding name," but "one with untold possibilities when practiced by writers of literary distinction."[5] These untold possibilities are intriguing and alluring to a writer who has encountered interesting true stories in real life. Gathering these stories and transforming or crafting them into a form of "literature of reality" is an irresistible creative challenge.

1.1 Background to the Study

The term creative nonfiction has been called an oxymoron, with sceptics questioning how writers can be creative about facts[6] and others feeling insulted by the implication that journalists aren't creative or artful.[7] In fact, the use of the word "creative" does not refer to

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[1] Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg, introduction to *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction,* 6th ed., ed. Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012), xxiv.

[2] Donna Lee Brien, "Being Honest about Lying: Defining the Limits of Auto/biographical writing," *TEXT* 6, no. 1 (April 2002): 1, http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/

[3] Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and Insights from the Teachers of the Associated Writing Programs,* ed. Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard (Ohio: Story Press, 2001), 1; Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, preface to *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Neiman Foundation at Harvard University*, ed. Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (Boston: Penguin Group, 2007), xv.

[4] Philip Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1996), 3.

[5] Barbara Lounsberry, preface to *Writing Creative Nonfiction: The Literature of Reality*, ed. Gay Talese and Barbara Lounsberry (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), vii.

[6] Lee Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 9.

[7] Lee Gutkind, "Becoming the Godfather of Creative Nonfiction," in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and Insights from the Teachers of the Associated Writing Programs,* ed. Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard (Ohio: Story Press, 2001), 170.

the author's imagination creating or making up ideas or fictitious incidents. Instead, it refers to the art and craft of the written word.[8] As defined by Forché and Gerard, creative nonfiction is "fact-based writing that remains compelling, undiminished by the passage of time, that has at heart an interest in enduring human values: foremost a fidelity to accuracy, to truthfulness."[9] According to Perl and Shwartz, creative nonfiction is "the new term for an old tradition of setting the objective and subjective work together to describe the real world. The aim is to make readers experience that world, using the 'I' as a guide."[10] Only recognised as a legitimate name for the genre in 1983 with a National Endowment for the Arts creative writing fellowship in its name,[11] there are still arguments about its "worthiness" alongside the established literariness of drama, poetry and fiction. Nevertheless, since the 1980s, there has been a marked increase of interest in the genre, both among the reading public and the publishing houses.[12]

Creative nonfiction tells us stories about real life; the literature of reality[13], it is artful writing about real lives lived. As Perl and Schwartz state, nothing is invented in creative nonfiction.[14] Indeed, what makes creative nonfiction compelling and sets it apart from other forms of nonfiction writing is the authorial position; the key element being the meaning that is interpreted and transmitted through the writer's voice.[15] Revealing truths in ways that are normally reserved for fiction writing, creative nonfiction inspires and moves us with new understanding of lives lived near us or on the opposite side of the world. However, in this still evolving genre, arguments persist over its name and definition, and accusations of narcissism or "navel-gazing" are still directed at creative nonfiction writers.[16] Though disputes exist about the truthfulness of the stories or essays blurred by literary devices used in fiction,

[8] Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make this Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction – from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between*, (Boston: De Capo Press, 2012), 6.
[9] Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," 1.
[10] Sondra Perl and Mimi Schwartz, *Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning, 2014), 5.
[11] Gutkind, *You Can't Make this Stuff Up*, 7.
[12] Gutkind, *You Can't Make this Stuff Up*, 9.
[13] Lee Gutkind, *The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997) 21.
[14] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 5.
[15] Bronwyn T. Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," in *A Companion to Creative Writing*, ed. Graeme Harper (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 25.
[16] William Bradley, "The Ethical Exhibitionist's Agenda: Honesty and Fairness in Creative Nonfiction," *College English* 70, no. 2 (November 2007): 203.

creative nonfiction is now the fastest-growing genre among writers and in publishing.[17] According to Forché and Gerard, not only publishing houses, but also trade magazines and literary journals seek fact-based writing and true-life experiences.[18] It appears that readers are enthralled with writing that describes real life experiences.

What is it that draws readers to creative nonfiction? Williams tells us that creative nonfiction "allows us into the minds and hearts of others, to gain a richer understanding of the human condition."[19] This, essentially, is the genre's main appeal. Morley believes readers are attracted by "the twinned attractions of accuracy and art."[20] Accuracy refers to the truth as it is found in the real world while art refers to the creative crafting of the story, essay or book. Williams describes the consciousness as the author's presence or the authorial voice, stating that this is "the core" of creative nonfiction; what the author offers the reader – "let me tell you the story of what I saw and what it means to me."[21] We are intrigued by others' interpretations and experiences of real life events and the stories they tell us about their past and what they have lived through.

Creative nonfiction offers truths about the real world we live in and around us. Our desire to know about the world and our attraction to storytelling have made creative nonfiction a booming genre.[22] Williford describes how after the September 11, 2001 attacks, American readers seemed to want to read "the truth," encouraging publishing houses to embrace nonfiction writing instead of either popular or literary novels.[23] This is supported by the growth of nonfiction enrolments in MFA and PhD programmes worldwide.[24] Although there is still a feeling that nonfiction writing is of a lower status than fiction and poetry[25], the growth is evidence of a positive reaction from both readers, writers, students and academics.

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[17] Gutkind, *You Can't Make this Stuff Up*, 9; Lex Williford, foreword to *The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Lex Williford and Michael Martone (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), xii.

[18] Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," 2.

[19] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 37.

[20] David Morley, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 179.

[21] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 25.

[22] Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," 2.

[23] Lex Williford, foreword to *The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Lex Williford and Michael Martone (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), xi.

[24] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 9; Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg, preface to *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, 6th ed., ed. Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012), xvi; Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," 1-2.

[25] Phillip Lopate, *To Show and To Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction* (New York: Free Press, 2013), 4-5.

1.2 Creative Nonfiction in Context

Why does creative nonfiction matter? Who cares about the stories of lives lived? What do we hope to achieve by telling these stories? Why won't plain nonfiction do? Since our ancestors were cave dwellers, we have felt a need to tell our stories, to explain what we have done and why it matters in our lives, and perhaps why it should matter in others' lives. Perl and Schwartz say "creative nonfiction is a new name for an old impulse: to write about the *real* world with grace, power, and personal commitment."[26] Singer and Walker explain their understanding in this way: "From the beginning, the project of literature has always been an attempt to 're-present' reality through language, to capture the essential truth of our experience of life in words."[27] Root offers the most positive definition of this elusive and controversial term, defining what it is and not what it's not. It is firstly, "the written expression of, reflection upon, and/or interpretation of observed, perceived, or recollected experience" and secondly, "a genre of literature made up of such writing, which includes such subgenres as the personal essay, the memoir, narrative reportage, and expressive critical writing and whose borders with other reality-based genres and forms (such as journalism, criticism, history, etc.) are fluid and malleable."[28]

Today, there are many online journals calling for creative nonfiction submissions; four respected online journals that focus entirely on this genre are *Brevity: a journal of concise literary nonfiction, Creative Nonfiction, Fourth Genre: explorations in nonfiction,* and *River Teeth: a journal of nonfiction narrative*.[29] Each of these journals started out in the 1990s and though the founding editors were not at all confident that the journals would survive more than a few issues, nearly twenty years later, they continue to grow. In addition, there are online websites such as *New Writing: An International Journal of Creative Writing, TEXT, the English Subject Centre Archive* and *Creative Writing: Teaching, Theory and Practice* where teachers and writers can contribute articles, fiction, creative nonfiction, interviews and

[26] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, xiii.
[27] Margot Singer and Nicole Walker, *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 6.
[28] Robert Root, *The Nonfictionist's Guide: On Reading and Writing Creative Nonfiction* (Lanham: Littlefield Publishers, 2008) 3-4.
[29] Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg, "Preface," in *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction, 6th ed.*, eds. Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg (New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012), xv.

other forms of writing discussing issues in the theory and practice of creative writing and the teaching of creative writing in academia and in workshops.[30]

Creative nonfiction has been called by Lopez "the literature of hope" as its flexible form has opened new avenues for writers coming from all walks of life, including scientists, economists, teachers and travellers.[31] We learn through creative nonfiction how seemingly ordinary lives are truly extraordinary. These lives are lived in different ways and in different parts of the world, and through the writers' creative art and skills, and their individual perspectives, we learn what those lives mean. Creative nonfiction has been called the "literature of reality." The writer tells the story from various points of view. It could be the reality of an interview subject, life as perceived by the people observed by the writer, but always, with the writer's interpretation and understanding of the actions and behaviours of the subjects.

How do we know whether the author is weaving fictions into a "true" story or whether she is bending the truth? The answer is that we can't always know. Every writer will choose which parts of a story to tell and which to leave out. As Williams declares: "The moment any story is told, truth, as an unbiased, objective quality disappears."[32] Williams goes on to say that a writer must be as clear and truthful as possible.[33] Wrexler supports this premise, explaining that the nonfiction writer has a responsibility to herself and her reader, that although we may agree that the truth is subjective, it does not mean that we can publish lies.[34] Believing that the writer is telling a true tale, and that she is being honest, the reader is willing to read and to trust what the writer chooses to tell. We are drawn to learn from other people's stories, to empathise and to learn their truths, and perhaps to learn a bit more about ourselves in the reading.

[30] Stephanie M. Vanderslice, *Rethinking Creative Writing in Higher Education: Programs and Practices that Work* (Cambs: The Professional and Higher Partnership Ltd., 2011), 95.
[31] Morley, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*, 191.
[32] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 36.
[33] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 36.
[34] Laura Wrexler, "Implementing Postmodernism in Creative Nonfiction," in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and Insights from the Teachers of the Associated Writing Programs,* ed. Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard (Ohio: Story Press, 2001), 30.

Gerard describes how he hopes to find "a way of capturing a greater truth, a figurative way of thinking about the world."[35] He asks us to notice how writers' "best work always depends on an absolutely accurate sense of the real world – not in some vague, generic way, but in all its astonishing particulars."[36] To Gerard, reflective writers "pay attention to what is going on around them and are curious about nearly everything."[37] Meanwhile, Lamott writes, "To be a good writer, you not only have to write a great deal but you have to care …. a writer always tries, I think, to be a part of the solution, to understand a little about life and to pass this on."[38]

1.3 True Stories of Ordinary Lives

The aim of my research is to uncover the true stories in the lives of the "ordinary" individuals who work to conserve orang-utans in Sarawak. Then, once found, through narrative inquiry and in-depth interviews, I crafted these truths into creative nonfiction pieces that describe the circumstances, the actions, the results of their work into mini life histories, portraits, personal oral histories told in the participants' voices – Crafted Interviews, flash nonfiction pieces known as "Shorts" and hybrid forms that come together in a creative nonfiction artefact that is a montage depicting life experiences and stories in a fifty-year history about the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak.

The most elusive and solitary of the great apes, orang-utans have been portrayed in various ways; in the American box office successes *Every Which Way but Loose* and *Any Which Way You Can* as a sidekick of film star Clint Eastwood and appearing in illustrated children's books. In academia, scientific books and peer-reviewed journal articles have been written about the orang-utan. These include Barbara Harrisson's 1961 article 'Orang-utan - Chances of Survival?' in the Sarawak Museum, *Orang-utan Behavior, Ecology and Conservation* by Junaidi Payne and J. Cede Prudente, 2008; and *Wild Man from Borneo: A Cultural History of the Orang-utan* by Robert Cribb, Helen Gilbert and Helen Tiffin, 2014.

Birute Galdikas, the most famous and celebrated orang-utan conservationist and expert, the third of Richard Leakey's "angels" or "trimates" after Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey, has written the contentious part-scientific treatise-part-memoir, *Reflections of Eden*, while

[35] Philip Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 172.
[36] Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 15.
[37] Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 15.
[38] Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 107.

biographies about the controversial Galdikas and her work have also been published. These include a critical biography *A Dark Place in the Jungle: Following Leakey's Last Angel into Borneo* by Linda Spalding and the more sympathetic award-winning *Among the Orang-utans: The Birute Galdikas Story* by Evelyn Gallardo.

The ordinary Malaysians and expatriate conservationists and volunteers working to conserve orang-utans and their natural habitats, through science and conservation education in Sarawak's forests, longhouses and in urban and rural areas have not been given a chance to speak. The day-to-day lives of these individuals in a somewhat "unglamourous" history of the conservation of the orang-utan in Sarawak has not been written. What is their contribution and what are their stories?

1.4 Aims of the Study

The aims of this research are

- to gather stories from ordinary people working to conserve orang-utans through in-depth interviews based on narrative inquiry principles,
- to re-tell the stories using literary devices of fiction to craft a creative nonfiction artefact that invokes conservation action.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This creative nonfiction artefact tells the fifty-year history of the conservation of the orang-utan in Sarawak through a collection of stories of men and women who have worked in different fields, each contributing to the long-term survival of the iconic primate in its wild habitats. While early researchers might have been Westerners coming from afar, most of the stories are of ordinary Malaysians doing their work in the Sarawak Forest Department, Iban longhouses, and conservation non-governmental organisations.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Conservation is not just the work of one person. Real conservation is achieved over a sustained period through the efforts of many; the ordinary forest guard, the administrator in the National Parks and Wildlife Office, the education team of an conservation organisation, the wildlife researcher and her field assistants.

For the first time, the voices of these people are heard in a collection of creative nonfiction pieces about their work braided through time over a fifty-year period in Sarawak. Each subject interviewee contributes a story or several stories that are connected to the whole, larger story, that tells us of the conservation of the endangered species in the land of the hornbills. Creative nonfiction is the means to tell the stories of seemingly ordinary people working in their everyday jobs to ensure the orang-utan survives in the wild. Their true stories are told in a variety of forms or subgenres through this flexible and still-evolving fourth genre.

1.7 Research Methodology

Narrative Inquiry is storytelling methodology[39]; Kim tells us that "through the narrative actions of storytelling, we try to understand human experiences, which in turn helps us to better understand what it means to be human."[40] Typically used by sociologists and educators, this method has been growing and evolving as researchers continue to explore its possibilities. Connelly and Clandinin explain "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience."[41] In this way, I have collected the stories of seemingly ordinary people who are in fact, accidentally extraordinary conservationists, and tell them through the written word: creative nonfiction subgenres that can best re-tell the honestly told stories for generations to come. As Laurel Richardson says in her ground-breaking book *Fields of Play*, "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it."[42]

To go back into the past to learn the details of how the conservation of orang-utans has been conducted through the years, I must be a researcher, a narrative inquirer, an interviewer, and a writer-storyteller. Narrative inquiry is the perfect research method to help me achieve my aim to learn and re-tell the stories of the individuals working in the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak. Clandinin and Connelly's explanation of narrative was powerful in its simplicity: "People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify

[39] Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2016), 118.
[40] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry,* 118.
[41] D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry," *Educational Researcher 2*.
[42] Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 87.

them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities."[43] In this way, as Frank asserts, "events and lives are affirmed as being worth telling and thus worth living. Being narrated implies value and attributes reality."[44]

Preparing a detailed interview guide for each interview participant as advised by Susan E. Chase[45], the narrative researcher who emphasizes the importance of being an active listener and inquirer, adapting to the responses given, accepting digressions and gently, empathetically returning to the topic or relevant themes, I am a collaborator as Clandinin and Connelly explained in their description of narrative inquiry: "It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus."[46] Thus, I become the interviewer as research instrument, gathering stories – the lived experiences of my participants through in-depth interviews.

The thick descriptions and detailed stories are transcribed and then crafted into different forms of creative nonfiction that pieced together, form a montage of stories telling the fifty-year history of orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. This is not a conventional history of conservation nor of any topic. Though based on fact, this creative nonfiction artefact includes subgenres ranging from portraits, ecocriticism and stories told in the interview participants' own voices – Crafted Interviews – to Shorts and hybrid forms such as the Hermit Crab Essay. Thus "bending genre" as Singer and Walker call it[47], creative nonfiction skews conventional forms, embraces hybrid pieces, and explores new and raw ways to craft and re-tell the "stories lived and told"[48]. These are the truths remembered by men and women who have spent their working hours in different ways, to help orang-utans survive in the 20th century and in the early 21st century, looking ahead to a future that they hope can only be better.

[43] D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), xxvi.
[44] Arthur W. Frank, "Why Study People's Stories? The Dialogical Ethics of Narrative Analysis" in *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-20.
[45] Susan E. Chase, "Learning to Listen: Narrative Principles in a Qualitative Research Methods Course" in *Up Close and Personal: The Teaching and Learning of Narrative Research,* ed. Ruth Josselson, Amia Lieblich and Dan P. McAdams (American Psychological Association, 2002), 83.
[46] Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*, 20.
[47] Singer and Walker, *Bending Genre*, 4-6.
[48] Clandinin and Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry*, 20.

1.8 Overview of the Study

The thesis comprises six chapters divided into three sections. The first section begins with Chapter One, the introduction to the project. Chapter Two follows with the Literature Review of creative nonfiction. This includes its origins in the 16th century well before the term was coined, through New Journalism to current day issues and debates about its definition, what forms of writing it includes, and the boundaries or limits that exist or should exist, and ultimately, the line between fact and fiction, truth and reality. From here, I progress to Chapter Three, where the research method used in this study is discussed and analysed. The chosen research method is narrative inquiry: stories lived and told. In this chapter, I explain how my background and experience as a journalist, interviewer, editor, fiction and nonfiction writer, and as a conservationist and volunteer, place me in a unique position as a narrative inquirer to identify and gain the trust of ordinary people involved in orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. Along with the interview guides that I design, I am the research instrument, actively listening and participating in the interview, eliciting the stories being re-lived in the telling.

Section I is completed with the last part of Chapter Three in which the data (stories) collection is described. This includes an explanation of the interview questions designed, that is, the formation of the instruments of data collection. As suggested by Chase[49], these interview sets are carefully constructed, beginning with broad questions to encourage the interview participants to provide detailed information not just about their work, but also about themselves – their personal histories and lived experiences. The necessarily semi-structured interview sets are deliberately prepared to be adapted depending on what the interviewees say in response to the prepared questions. Here, the frame of this collection of creative nonfiction pieces concludes the chapter.

Section II contains the entire body of creative work emerging from the data collection, that is the interviews. This creative nonfiction artefact spans fifty years of conservation of the orang-utan in Sarawak. Here, in Chapter Four, parts of the raw data have been crafted into different creative nonfiction forms through the use of literary techniques familiar to fiction writing. They range from “Shorts” and Literary Journalism to Crafted Interviews - pieces told in the voices of the participants themselves, and hybrid forms. A crucial aspect of these stories is

[49] Chase, “Learning to Listen,” 83.

that their content is the truth as the interview subjects view it.[50] Thus, this collection of stories within the thesis re-tells the tales of nineteen individuals who have contributed to or still are contributing to the conservation of the orang-utan in Sarawak over the past fifty years. From each different perspective, this collection of stories can be seen as a whole history describing the larger story of conservation efforts that have saved the endangered species so far, and hopefully, will continue to enable its survival in the wild habitats in Sarawak.

Section III comprises the chapters on Reflections, Conclusions and Recommendations. In Chapter Five, I reflect on the process of crafting the creative nonfiction pieces. This includes reflection on the selection choices: which stories to tell and which subgenres to craft them in. The "bending" of the fourth genre necessitates a discussion on the different creative nonfiction forms used to tell the stories. I reflect on the choices made to write Shorts, Portraits, Memoirs and hybrid forms including the Crafted Interview, a new subgenre I developed out of my creative process.

The thesis concludes with Chapter Six. Here, my research and understanding of narrative inquiry as research method and creative nonfiction as process and product come together in the Conclusions and Recommendations of this project. The interview questions, the responses by those individuals working to conserve the orang-utan in Sarawak, and the crafting of creative nonfiction forms to re-tell the stories told in those interviews reveal how the conservation of the endangered species really is a story; a great story that is shaped by the lives and actions of many apparently ordinary people. But it is much more than just the story of the conservation of one species; it is a multi-layered message.

1.9 Summary

In this work, creative nonfiction, the fourth genre is the means to research, through narrative inquiry, to craft and re-tell stories told of lives and experiences lived. Although imagination and creativity are used to craft creative nonfiction pieces, the work is a truthful account of real lives lived and experienced. Through a combination of observation and interview, and using narrative inquiry to design detailed interview sets, the stories are unveiled. In the process of the interview, the narrative inquirer is the research instrument, in as much as the interview questions are. The author's voice, humble, observant, interesting, guides the reader

[50] Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 71.

through the stories of real people. This is not a voice of judgement but one of empathy. The next chapter provides greater detail on this still-evolving genre that opens opportunities to writers and readers to learn and understand real lives working to save the iconic red ape in Sarawak.

Chapter 2

2.0 Review of Literature on Creative Nonfiction

This chapter comprises three sections: *A Chronological Study of Creation Nonfiction; the Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction;* and *Researching the Stories for Creative Nonfiction*. Here, I explore the history of the fourth genre and how it has expanded to include a variety of subgenres ranging from Personal and Segmented essays to Shorts and essays on the natural world and environment. Pushing and crossing boundaries, creative nonfiction is a genre home to many forms of expression, and through these different forms, the true stories of men and women living ordinary lives working to conserve the orang-utan in Sarawak can be re-created and re-told.

The first section, *A Chronological Study of Creation Nonfiction*, includes a study of the beginnings of the genre, how it acquired its name, ground-breaking works such as "true life novels," "nonfiction novels," and "history as a novel, novel as history", the flourishing of the genre, controversies that assailed both the genre and the writers who embraced the continuously "bending" form, and its future in an increasingly digital world. In the second section, *the Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction*, key issues in the creative aspect of writing nonfiction are examined. These issues include an exploration of authorial presence and the subjective "I" of the narrator that are crucial to creative nonfiction, followed by a study of truth and honesty, as well as the flexibility of the genre's embrace of varied structures and subject matter, and lastly, the process or composition of creative nonfiction. The final section of this chapter, *Researching the Stories for Creative Nonfiction*, delves on literature that discusses methods used to learn the stories, whether for the personal essay, memoir writing, literary journalism, nature writing, or other subgenres. These include the different methods embraced by creative nonfiction writers: immersion, observation, storytelling and interviews. In this part, the researcher-writer's role in eliciting, guiding and questioning the stories in the field as well as in the selection and shaping of the tales when composing the creative nonfiction from this information (data) is explored as a prelude to the next chapter on methodology and research method.

2.1 A Chronological Study of Creative Nonfiction

From as long ago as when our ancestors began to draw in caves and use language to articulate their thoughts until today's world of satellite television, blogging on the Internet, and 280-character tales on Twitter, people have told stories to one another. Moore describes our story-telling aptitude as having always been part of human life, providing a means for people to connect with each other through daily interactions and through time. Moore proposes that "every culture, every period in human history, includes some form of shared narrative."[51]

Although people have been writing nonfiction through the ages, the naming of this genre as creative nonfiction is relatively new.[52] The name "creative nonfiction", according to Perl and Shwartz, is simply "a new name for an old impulse: to write about the *real* world with grace, power, and personal commitment."[53] Other names that have been given to this fast-growing genre are the literature of reality, the literature of fact, narrative nonfiction, artful nonfiction, literary nonfiction, New Journalism, literary journalism, among others, but none is as inclusive as creative nonfiction.[54] This inclusivity is explained by Roorbach who describes creative nonfiction as a generic label or an umbrella term that embraces numerous forms of writing that share two key elements: humanity and an aspiration to art.[55] To Perl and Schwartz, creative nonfiction is "a new term for an old tradition of letting the objective and subjective work together to describe the real world. The aim is to make readers experience that world."[56] As Morely puts it, "writers of creative nonfiction try to close that distance between reader and writer while also dealing in the factual."[57] As to the official naming of the genre, this took place in 1983, when the National Endowment for the Arts convened a meeting to decide on what to call the genre for a category of prizes awarded to nonfiction writing.[58]

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[51] Dinty W. Moore, *The Truth of the Matter: Art and Craft in Creative Nonfiction* (New York: Pearson Education, 2007), 3.
[52] Bill Roorbach, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: The Art of Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.
[53] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, xiii.
[54] Roorbach, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, 3; Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," 1.
[55] Roorbach, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, 3.
[56] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 5.
[57] Morely, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*, 178.
[58] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 7.

As I have observed researchers in the field, conservationists at work in longhouses, wildlife centres and schools, immersed myself in orang-utan conservation, and interviewed men and women working in different aspects of orang-utan conservation, I have come to see many kinds and versions of reality and truth. Each individual has his or her version of a story; some may actually lie or colour the facts, while others simply have their own interpretation of events. Writing and reading creative nonfiction is a matter of trust. The writer may receive different versions of a story from different people; she then crafts the story as truthfully as possible, not disguising the truth, but presenting differing viewpoints or perhaps unearthing the truth. The reader trusts the writer to retell the story truthfully. This is the unspoken contract between the writer and the reader. So, the fourth genre is therefore, the literature of reality; essays and stories of real life crafted using the literary devices of fiction such as character, plot, setting, conflict to recreate the stories and bring them to life on the written page. The stories of these lives matter and the reader discovers many truths from the artfully written forms.

Nonetheless, arguments continue about this genre's name and what it really means. In their introduction to the *TEXT Special Issue 18: Nonfiction Now*, Carlin and Rendle-Short describe nonfiction "as a literary/artistic category, one that is built upon negation," quoting Australian author Helen Garner, "Nonfiction – whichever way you look at it – is a word in the negative; 'that thing without a name of its own.'"[59] Lopate remarks on this same oddity, stating it is a genre "defined by what it is not, like the Uncola, the Anti-Christ, or antimatter."[60] From a different perspective, Bly claims that 'Nobody knows what creative nonfiction is, and therefore it can be nearly anything."[61] In her opinion, Bly says that all that is needed is for writers to be truthful, telling things in a personal voice, revealing their life circumstances through anecdote or narrative and revealing meanings attached to those circumstances, rather than arguing a point; that "creative nonfiction is basically about the author's wisdom."[62] Forché and Gerard define creative nonfiction as "fact-based writing that remains compelling, undiminished by the passage of time, that has at heart an interest in enduring human values:

[59] David Carlin and Francesca Rendle-Short, "Nonfiction now: a (non)introduction," in "Nonfiction Now," ed. David Carlin and Francesca Rendle-Short, special issue, *TEXT* 18 (October 2013): 5, http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue18/Carlin&RendleShort.pdf

[60] Lopate, *To Show and To Tell*, 3.

[61] Carol Bly, *Beyond the Writer's Workshop: New Ways to Write Creative Nonfiction*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2001), xvii.

[62] Bly, *Beyond the Writer's Workshop*, xvii.

foremost a fidelity to accuracy, to truthfulness."[63] But what are these facts but choices of the writer to be included in the work? And do these choices alter the reality portrayed?

Walker asks: "What is creative nonfiction writing but the shaping and reshaping of self against fact?"[64] She explains how creative nonfiction is unlike other kinds of writing: "The job of the creative nonfiction writer is to say, Here I am world, and here is the world, and out of this oxymoronic writing, we are here to make each other." Whether it is an umbrella term embracing all manner of nonfiction writing, or a term that escapes definition, creative nonfiction is recognised as a genre that is attracting readers, writers, English departments, online journals, and publishing firms today.[65] The arguments about its definition, the different forms of writing that fall within its domain, and the terminology associated with it persist to this day.

2.1.1 The Roots of Creative Nonfiction

In his anthology *The Art of the Personal Essay*, Phillip Lopate begins with a section that he calls "Forerunners" in which he includes the writings of Seneca, Plutarch, Sei Shonagon, Kenko and Ou-Yang Hsiu. These writers from the classical era provide a background from which Lopate moves to Michel de Montaigne whom he calls "the great innovator and patron saint of personal essayists" who believed that "every man has within himself the entire human condition."[66] Montaigne, recognised as the originator and master of the personal essay[67] named this form of writing by taking the word from the French "essai" meaning to try or to test something. He wrote his first collection of essays between 1572 and 1574[68] and we learn from Lopate that Montaigne believed that "in spite of the range of human diversity, there is a basic unity to human experience" and because of this, "writing about oneself…will strike a chord of grateful recognition in readers everywhere."[69] As Lopate summarises,

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[63] Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction: An Adventure in Lyric, Fact, and Story," 1.

[64] Nicole Walker, "The Braided Essay as Social Justice Action: Between the Lines" in *Creative Nonfiction*, no. 64, Adaptation, https://www.creativenonfiction.org/online-reading/braided-essay-social-justice-action.

[65] Lex Williford, foreword to *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: Work from 1970 to Present*, ed. Lex Williford and Michael Martone (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), xi-xii; Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg, introduction, xxiv.

[66] Phillip Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), xxiii.

[67] Scott Russell Sanders, *Secrets of the Universe: Essays on Family, Community, Spirit, and Place*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 194

[68] Bret Lott, "Toward a Definition of Creative Nonfiction," in *The Truth of the Matter*, ed. Dinty W. Moore (New York: Pearson Education, 2007), 280-281.

[69] Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay*, 44.

"Montaigne's insistence that we ought first to look at our own personal experience – the book of life – and try to learn from it has been a powerful model for the world ever since."[70] Root and Steinberg agree, describing Montaigne's essays as "intimate and personal" with the writer actively cultivating "self-exploration and self-discovery."[71] Madden credits Montaigne, whom he calls the Father of the form with leading essayists with the "charge of revising understanding, re-seeing the familiar, re-thinking the taken-for-granted."[72]

Fiction writers such as George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway continued Montaigne's tradition in the personal essay, and expanded them into nonfiction books such as Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* and Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*,[73] According to Sanders, these noteworthy novelists along with other renown contemporaries Virginia Woolf and James Baldwin used the personal essay to explore the world and to express their perceptions and understandings of its meaning.[74] Kerrane and Yogoda concur, describing such illustrious fiction writers as Charles Dickens, George Orwell and James Boswell as the "novelist-reporters" who joined the ranks of early creative nonfiction writers as what are now termed as literary journalists. Their narrative presence or "outsized and unabashed subjectivity" distinguished them from the traditional "objective" reporters.[75]

2.1.2 Ground-breaking Creative Nonfiction

In the 1960s, the New Journalism movement pushed the boundaries between fact and fiction. The new breed of journalists, most famously Gay Talese and Tom Wolfe in the early years, wrote articles that no longer conformed to traditional journalistic rules for magazines such as *Esquire* and *The New Yorker*; most importantly, the "objective" voice of the impartial journalist was replaced by the clear presence of an authorial voice who, borrowing elements from fiction writing, also dared to "interpret and evaluate those events from an obvious point

[70] Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay*, 45.
[71] Root, Jr and Steinberg, preface, xvii.
[72] Patrick Madden, "Writing the Brief Contrary Essay" in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction: Advice and Essential Exercises from Respected Writers, Editors, and Teachers*, ed. Dinty W. Moore (Brookline: Rose Metal Press, 2012), 158.
[73] Lee Gutkind, "Private and Public: The Range and Scope of Creative Nonfiction," in *Keep it Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Lee Gutkind and Hattie Fletcher (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 13; Scott Russell Sanders, introduction to *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: Work from 1970 to Present*, ed. Lex Williford and Michael Martone (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), xvii.
[74] Sanders, introduction, xvii.
[75] Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 16-17.

of view."[76] In what is considered a landmark collection of literary journalism, *Fame and Obscurity*, Gay Talese described the genre thus: "Though often reading like fiction, it is not fiction. It is, or should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage, although it seeks a larger truth than is possible through a mere compilation of verifiable facts, the use of direct quotation and the adherence to the rigid organizational style of the older form."[77] This "larger truth" is the elusive element that creative nonfiction writers seek as they interpret and craft the factual stories they tell.

The term New Journalism was made famous by Tom Wolfe in a book of the same name published in 1973.[78] A few writers even dared to produce hybrid versions of longer works of fiction.[79] Lauded for his painstaking research stretching over six years, including multiple interviews with the convicted murderers of the Herbert Clutter family awaiting execution, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* published in 1963, remains one of the most famous examples of New Journalism.[80] Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for what he called a "nonfiction novel," Capote said this about his seminal work, "It seemed to me that journalism, reportage, could be forced to yield a serious new art form: the 'nonfiction novel,' as I thought of it."[81] In 1968, Norman Mailer published *Armies of the Night*, his account of the March on the Pentagon, a demonstration against the Vietnam War, that won him the Pulitzer Prize for General non-fiction. This, he called "History as a Novel, The Novel as History". Eleven years later, Mailer won the Pulitzer Prize again, this time for *The Executioner's Song*, which he referred to as a "true life novel" that described people and events related to the trial and execution of murderer Gary Gilmore. Mailer has been called an innovator of creative nonfiction whose work being a "hybrid of fact and fiction" focuses on *real life* (reality) rather than *plot life* (fiction).[82]

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[76] Tom Barone, "Creative Nonfiction and Social Research," in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, ed. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008), 107.

[77] Lee Gutkind, "The Creative Nonfiction Police?" in *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Lee Gutkind (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), xxvii.

[78] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 5.

[79] Barone, "Creative Nonfiction and Social Research," 106-107.

[80] Gutkind, "The Creative Nonfiction Police?" xxvii.

[81] George Plimpton, "The Story Behind the Nonfiction Novel," *New York Times*, January 16, 1966, Books, http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/12/28/home/capote-interview.html.

[82] Tracy Kidder, "Making the Truth Believable" in *The Truth of the Matter: Art and Craft in Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Dinty W. Moore (New York: Pearson Education, 2007), 278.

2.1.3 The Flourishing of the Fourth Genre

According to Gutkind, creative nonfiction is the fastest-growing genre and is in fact, "the most popular genre in the literary and publishing communities."[83] Citing an example of medical schools teaching their students creative nonfiction, Gutkind goes on to discuss how it is possible now to obtain a PhD in Creative Nonfiction[84] while Lopate discusses how student enrolment in nonfiction writing courses has increased over the years.[85] Root, Jr and Steinberg also remark on the growth of creative nonfiction, noting the increasing numbers of anthologies and collections of various forms of creative nonfiction such as personal essays, nature and travel writing and literary journalism as well as the publication of creative nonfiction pieces in literary magazines and "a proliferation of creative nonfiction courses and programs around the country and abroad".[86] Indeed, while the University of Iowa's famed Iowa's Writers Workshop has gained the reputation of being the most prestigious fiction writing course in the US, the university has been simultaneously growing a Master's Nonfiction Writing Program. In Britain, the University of East Anglia, home to the country's earliest creative writing postgraduate course, also offers a Master's in Biography and Creative Non-fiction, stating in its website, "Literary non-fiction is currently undergoing rapid change and reformation. Instead of the old 'cradle to grave' narratives of well-known literary or political figures, our best writers are now experimenting with new forms and subjects."[87] In 2008, new nonfiction courses were considered the "hottest writing course" in Britain.[88]

2.1.4 Creative Nonfiction Controversies

Despite, or perhaps, because of its popularity, the fourth genre is sometimes deemed as less worthy than the traditional literary genres of drama, poetry and fiction. Critics believe that if the author is being creative, then the nonfiction element is compromised. This is especially the case when a scandal occurs and a memoir like James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* is

[83] Gutkind, *You Can't Make this Stuff Up*, 9.
[84] Lee Gutkind, interview by Rachel Worrall, *The Review Review*, December 10, 2010, accessed 19 April 2018, http://www.thereviewreview.net/interviews/what-creative-nonfiction.
[85] Lopate, *To Show and To Tell*, 4.
[86] Root, Jr and Steinberg, preface, xvi.
[87] "MA Biography and Creative Non-Fiction," University of East Anglia, accessed May 7, 2018, https://www2.uea.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/taught-degree/detail/ma-biography-and-creative-non-fiction?_ga=2.170624672.1205041057.1525656330-698738405.1525656330.
[88] Nick Jackson, "The Hottest Writing Degrees are in Specialist Non-Fiction" *Independent Online*, July 9, 2008, Indy, https://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/postgraduate-study/the-hottest-new-writing-degrees-are-in-specialist-non-fiction-863533.html.

found to be less than truthful, and the author is shown to have embellished "facts".[89] Exposed by the Smoking Gun investigative website, Frey was found to have exaggerated his incarceration in prison (he spent half a day in jail as opposed to the three months he described in his book); he did not have to suffer a root canal without anaesthetic; and his description of how a friend committed suicide was fabricated.[90] Before the Smoking Gun's detailed description of every "untruth" in his book, James Frey had been feted even by Oprah Winfrey, and earned millions. His fall from grace and that of other writers who were discovered to have concocted their "memoirs" have been punishing.[91]

Others who were discovered to have fabricated their work include Stephen Glass who went to great lengths to create elaborate websites to provide "evidence" to support his brilliant articles written for and published by *New Republic, The New York Times* and *the Rolling Stone*[92]; Clifford Irving who claimed to have gained access to Howard Hughes and earned huge advances from publishers for himself, and supposedly for Hughes himself[93]; and even the respected playwright Lillian Hellman, who has been accused of appropriating someone else's life story for a chapter in her memoir *Pentimento* - this chapter was turned into a film "Julia" starring Jane Fonda and Vanessa Redgrave.[94]

2.1.5 The Fourth Genre: The Malaysian Experience

Malaysian nonfiction writing in English plays an important role in the media and political and social commentaries. Writers such as Adibah Amin (writing as Sri Delima), Dina Zaman, Karim Raslan and Rehman Rashid have written nonfiction work as journalists, educators and commentators. Writer, poet, photographer and Bernice Chauly has written poetry, fiction and a memoir, *Growing up with Ghosts*, one of the sub-genres of creative nonfiction. These

[89] Lee Gutkind, "Private and Public" in *Keep it Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Lee Gutkind and Hattie Fletcher (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), 12-13; Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 36.

[90] The Smoking Gun reporter, "A Million Little Lies: Exposing James Frey's Fiction Addiction", *Smoking Gun*, (January 4, 2006), under "Documents," http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/million-little-lies (accessed: April 6, 2018).

[91] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 14-15.

[92] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 15.

[93] Mick Brown, "You Couldn't Make It Up" *Telegraph*, July 28, 2007, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3666824/You-couldnt-make-it-up.html.

[94] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 16; Edwin McDowell, "Publishing: New Memoir Stirs 'Julia' Controversy" *New York Times*, April 29, 1983, Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1983/04/29/books/publishing-new-memoir-stirs-julia-controversy.html.

writers are recognised for their engaging and uniquely personal prose; indeed, their authorial voice is what draws the reader's attention and interest.

Recognition beyond our borders for Malaysian authors writing memoirs and personal essays in English has also emerged. Wan Hua Chapouthier nee Goh Wan Hua, whose articles have been published locally in *Her World, The Straits Times* and *The Star*, has also written collections of stories of her experiences as a Malaysian living in France: *Shock Waves from Abroad* and *Stories from the Heart: An Insight of Real Life Experiences in Malaysia and France*. These collections, that could be considered memoirs and personal essays, have helped to bring the citizens of both countries closer, enabling them to learn more about each other's cultures through her erudite prose.

More recently, Malaysian-born Norwegian writer, Long Litt Woon's memoir *The Way through the Woods: On Mushrooms and Mourning* has been long listed for this year's Warwick Prize for Women in Translation. While Malaysian travel writing and blogs in English are aplenty, the former would be considered a form of journalism and the latter, digital journal writing; neither are subgenres of creative nonfiction. It appears that Malaysian authors writing in English have embraced the memoir and personal essay, but not so other subgenres of creative nonfiction. Thus, my exploration of creative nonfiction in a uniquely Malaysian setting, involving diverse characters working to save an iconic endangered species in a variety of plots, forms and voices could herald a start of our embrace of the many different subgenres of the fourth genre.

2.2 The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction

How do we explain writing artfully, crafting creative nonfiction? There are many helpful books that teach and advise us how to choose topics, decide on a structure or frame for our story, how to create scenes for our real life characters. Prize-winning editors and writers teach us how to craft, edit and revise our sentences, yet there is the illusive something that cannot be explained; that magic when the ideas come together and the writing flows. To reach that moment, a great deal of preparation needs to take place. Like the artist and the composer, first, there must be hours of practice before the inspired painting, music composition or writing takes over.

It is helpful to learn what writers make of this genre that they have embraced. Morely says "Time makes stories of us all; history rewrites us. Creative writing explores the narrative of humanity moving through time, and creative nonfiction makes those realities readable."[95] The paradox is explained by Burroway who writes that "there will always be a conflict between 'creative' and 'nonfiction.' In that paradox lies the richness of the form. The question is, at what point does *creative* embellish itself into *fiction*? On the other hand, at what point does *truth* squat on the pages as inert and unedifying *data*?"[96] Through creative nonfiction, writers tell their stories about factual and emotional truths in the world around us. Their stories come in many different forms, but all with the allure that attracts the reader seeking to learn what it means to be human. As Sanders says, "I choose to write about my experience not because it is mine, but because it seems to me a door through which others might pass."[97]

2.2.1 Authorial Presence and Subjectivity

Unlike the journalist who is trained to be invisible, relays facts and crafts a story in an objective tone with no partiality or emotion, in creative nonfiction, Williams says, there is an authorial presence, without which, "creative nonfiction becomes narrative without a point…" It is that subjective "I" who guides the reader, described by Williams as "an important element and allure of the form."[98] Bly concurs, emphasising that the most essential part of creation is to be truthful, and to tell this truth in a personal voice.[99] As Roorbach says, "All creative nonfiction, to be called creative nonfiction, must have a discernible and subjective self at its centre: the writer."[100]

Silverman writes "The 'I' in creative nonfiction is a literary device used to enhance and explore complicated truths. Just as we are complex people in life, we must be equally complex personas on the page. One way to accomplish this exploration of self is through the use of voice…."[101] This is not the voice of the first person narrator that is used in fiction.

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[95] Morely, *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*, 177.
[96] Janet Burroway, "The True Disclaimer" in *Write Now! Nonfiction: Memoir, Journalism, and Creative Nonfiction Exercises from Today's Best Writers and Teachers*, ed. Sherry Ellis (New York: Penguin, 2009), 293.
[97] Sanders, *Secrets of the Universe*, 198.
[98] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 34.
[99] Bly, *Beyond the Writers' Workshop,* xvii.
[100] Roorbach, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, 4.
[101] Sue William Silverman, "Writing through Innocence and Experience: Voices in Flash Nonfiction" in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction: Advice and Essential Exercises from Respected Writers, Editors, and Teachers*, ed. Dinty W. Moore (Brookline: Rose Metal Press, 2012) 70.

Gornick explains the complexity of the authorial presence in creative nonfiction: "I soon discovered that if I wanted to speak truthfully in this memoir – that is, without cynicism or sentiment – I had to find a tone of voice normally not mine…. What I didn't see, and for a long while, was that this point of view could only emerge from a narrator who was me and at the same time not me."[102] Faery ponders this same issue; the delicate balance of being present in the work, and to somehow connect with the reader in a personal, but unobtrusive way. Faery explains how she views the creative nonfiction writer's job: "The writer sees, questions, reads, searches, observes, converses, wonders, and above all thinks…. The nonfiction writer is a conveyor, a medium, a lens."[103]

Perl and Schwartz offer this statement that at first seems perplexing: "We all have many voices."[104] Does this mean that the creative nonfiction writer invents many voices and may pick any of them as he chooses? There is no such schizophrenia in the subjective "I". The many voices come from the many selves we have been through our lives. Just as how Thrity Umrigar answers her own question "In whose voice would I tell the story of my childhood?"[105] with the decision to write in the voice of the child she had been, Mimi Schwartz chooses to start her essay in the voice of her 13-year-old self, full of bratty teenage angst, before allowing her adult voice to take over, the subjective "I' of her adult self, reflecting on her younger teenage self.[106]

Lopate addresses these points in his chapter "Turning Yourself into a Character" while Gerard discusses the question of how much a writer should put of himself into a story in his chapter "Putting Yourself on the Line". Lopate and Gerard remind us that it is important for the writer of creative nonfiction to remember that the question is not only whose voice will be telling the true story; the question is how far she will go and at what cost. Gerard says, "As a

[102] Vivian Gornick, "A Narrator Leaps Past Journalism" in *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, 6th ed., ed. Robert L. Root Jr. and Michael Steinberg (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012), 262.

[103] Rebecca Blevins Faery, "Creativity and Authority," in *Now Write! Nonfiction: Memoir, Journalism, and Creative Nonfiction Exercises from Today's Best Writers and Teachers*, ed. Sherry Ellis (New York: Penguin, 2009), 95; Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2014), 235.

[104] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 58.

[105] Thrity Umrigar, "Whose Voice is Telling the Story?" in *Now Write! Nonfiction: Memoir, Journalism, and Creative Nonfiction Exercises from Today's Best Writers and Teachers*, ed. Sherry Ellis (New York: Penguin, 2009), 243; William Zinsser, *Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past*, (De Capo Press: Cambridge, 2004), 25-27.

[106] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 58-59.

writer of conscience, you have to decide what is nonnegotiable. And telling your story to the world may come at a cost. Only you can decide whether to pay it."[107]

Like Gornick, I have many voices. This is not subterfuge; it is reality. My authorial voice varies depending on the story that I want to tell and the message I hope the reader will receive. For pieces such as "As long as the Red Ape lives" and "If I were the Orang-utan", my voice is the sad and remorseful persona who speaks for the orang-utans, sentient beings, but powerless in the grip of humankind's greed and ignorance. I am speaking truthfully when I take the voice of despair and anguish in "This is not an Orang-utan" and yet use the journalist's voice posing hard facts and numbers to describe the plight of wildlife traded as exotic pets or unvalidated medicinal purposes in "I Love you 3,000 but only 80 live". The Hermit Crab Essay permits good humour and vivid description in the part memoir of "How to Convert a Hunter" while admiration and hope at the commitment of orang-utan conservationists are expressed in "I Love to Hear the Nature Speak" and "Ambushed by an Orang-utan." This leads us naturally to the next important element of creative nonfiction: truth and honesty.

2.2.2 Truth and Honesty

According to Burroway, the touchstone of creative nonfiction truth is the "absence of the intent to deceive."[108] The author's honesty is crucial to the authenticity of the work. In the controversies discussed earlier, it was discovered that the writers clearly intended to deceive everyone from their publishers to their readers. The power of creative nonfiction is that the stories told are true and that the reader believes that nothing has been fabricated, embellished or invented. Once deception is uncovered, the author is discredited and the story loses its power. The writer is trying to fulfil the reader's longing for the "real" and thus, fabrication is not an option. So-called artistic license is not permitted in creative nonfiction as the invisible contract between the writer and the reader is that accuracy, truth and reality are presented in the story that unfolds.

This leads to the question of invention and creativity. Books on writing creative nonfiction have been named *Inventing the Truth* (William Zinsser), *The Art of Truth* (Bill Roorbach), *The Business of Memory: The Art of Remembering in an Age of Forgetting* (Charles Baxter),

[107] Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction,*153.
[108] Faery, "Creativity and Authority," 95; Burroway, "The True Disclaimer," 293.

The Art of Creative Research (Philip Gerard). Each of these clever titles gives us pause. Reflecting on the oxymoronic juxtaposition of these words, we come to the argument that David Shields offers, that is, that every work of nonfiction is actually a work of fiction, that "the moment you start to arrange the world in words, you alter its nature."[109] Shields argues that "you adulterate the truth as you write."[110] Yet, earlier in his book *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, Shields writes that "art is a lie that enables us to recognise the truth."[111] These contradictory statements add to the confusion of readers and writers alike. Gerald Callahan, a scientist and a creative nonfiction writer whose work "Chimera" is often found in anthologies and taught in nonfiction courses agrees that our choices to include or omit, and choices of words or metaphors - all "change everything."[112] There being no fixed or absolute truth, Callahan says simply "facts get muddled in creative nonfiction."[113] In his view, Callahan perceives these not as the failings of creative nonfiction, rather, that they add to the writer's craft, for creative nonfiction is all about real human experience. This includes how we recall, revise and relive our experiences.

Perl and Schwartz discuss the author's intent, and how it helps to grasp and portray the "messy, real world we live in." [114] To them, honest intent prevents the writer from altering facts to improve a storyline and prevents the writer from lying and using facts to blur the truth. Such honest intent helps the writer tell a true story, even though she may use her imagination to provide details that are forgotten or partially recalled. The goal is to describe the emotional truth of the story rather than the factual truth. The writers explain in this way: "We tell our stories, from our memories, based on living our ordinary lives; and readers accept subjectivity, and some memory glitches, as long as our intent is truthful."[115]

Thus, again we return to the question the creative nonfiction writer must ask: how much embellishment is acceptable, how "creative" she can be? Stuckey-French discusses what he calls "a recurring problem" in writing creative nonfiction: the problem of truthfulness, of how imagination is used to fill in the gaps in our memories. Every time the creative nonfiction

[109] David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 65.
[110] Shields, *Reality Hunger*, 66.
[111] Shields, *Reality Hunger*, 32.
[112] Gerald N. Callahan, "Chimera" in *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Lee Gutkind (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005), 381.
[113] Callahan, "Chimera," 381.
[114] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 150.
[115] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 152.

writer starts to write anew, she must herself ask these questions. Stuckey-French calls it "a hard tightrope to walk: we have to call on our imagination to supplement our memory, but when have we gone too far and turned our essay into story?"[116] Prentiss argues that the contract between the writer and the reader is not that the writer is describing the literal truth, but should be an understanding that the reader is reading "the writer's world as interpreted through the senses and re-envisioned through the imaginative nature of memory."[117] If we combine this undertaking of the creative nonfiction writer seeking to discover the larger truth while relaying the realities of lives lived accurately, believably and truthfully, with no intent to deceive, we arrive at an understanding of the task of the fourth genrist. Such is the task I set for myself as a creative nonfiction writer crafting stories of conservationists working to save orang-utans; not removing the science nor creating a fantasy, but setting the scene, describing the characters in action, using their own dialogue as they tread the storyline of their own lives, weaving these plots among others, creating a whole story – the imagery of the many individual trees within the forest and the view of the forest made up of all those trees.

2.2.3 The Nature of Creative Nonfiction

The flexibility and malleability of the genre continue to be explored. When New Journalism burst into the scene in the 1960s and 1970s, readers and writers alike were startled. Since then, examples of authors experimenting with forms proliferate the nonfiction writers' landscape. Robert Root describes a few such experiments in the work of John McPhee (*The Search for Marvin Gardens*, 1972), Wendy Rawlings (*Virtually Romance: A Discourse on Love in the Information Age*, 2002) and Nancy Willard (*The Friendship Tarot*, 2008).[118] In response to the growth of the genre, Gutkind started the first online magazine devoted to creative nonfiction in 1993 "to provide a literary outlet for those journalists who aspired to experiment with fact and narrative."[119]

[116] Ned Stuckey-French, "Starting with Dialogue" in *Now Write! Nonfiction: Memoir, Journalism, and Creative Nonfiction Exercises from Today's Best Writers and Teachers*, ed. Sherry Ellis (New York: Penguin, 2009), 236.

[117] Sean Prentiss, "Eternal Sunshine of the Nonfiction Mind: A New Philosophy for Understanding Truth and Creative Nonfiction" in *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Sean Prentiss and Joe Wilkins (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 114.

[118] Root, *The Nonfictionist's Guide*, 35.

[119] Gutkind, "The Creative Nonfiction Police?" xxviii.

The converging of fiction and nonfiction writing is played out with writers experimenting and embracing new kinds of creative nonfiction. Laurel Richardson's *Fields of Play* (1997), Lauren Slater's *Lying* (2000) and Phillip Lopate's *A Mother Tale* (2017) are examples of exciting, thought-provoking, edgy kinds writing that push the boundaries of creative nonfiction. Using different forms, the writers present facts or realities in structures and styles of writing that invite the reader to ponder the lives presented in ways that challenge our perceptions and understanding of our own lives. In his article "Creative Nonfiction and Social Research" in the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research*, Tom Barone studies the play between the factual and the fictional in social research today. [120] There is not just the writer's choice on what facts to include and what to eliminate, there is his or her interpretation told through the crafting of the work. In the same way, the reader is invited to "adopt a kind of binocular vision…reverberating between the world of the text and her own fund of extra-textual 'realities'."[121] Thus, creative nonfiction brings the writer and the reader, essentially strangers, together to learn about and understand the realities and imagined worlds, the factual and the fictional.

Common subgenres include the personal essay, memoir, literary journalism, personal cultural criticism, flash nonfiction and topical subgenres such as history, nature and travel essays.[122] In my study, the subgenres used would be some forms or combinations of the portrait and literary journalism crafted with what Burroway calls "imaginative writing." Burroway explains making writing vivid in this way: "It's a dynamic process, to which readers actively bring their own memories and experience. Words not only *denote*, or literally refer to their meaning, but *connote,* suggest or imply through layers of connection in our experience and culture."[123] Bending the genre, as Perl and Schwartz call it, takes place; the fourth genre is malleable and open to explorations in style or structure. Indeed, as Root and Steinberg have said, "any of these categories can spill over into any or all of the others, fuse together, blend, dance back and forth across the boundaries."[124] The emerging stories from my research will take different forms, each chosen and shaped to best tell the tales told by the people working to conserve the orang-utans in Sarawak. While these artful forms of nonfiction may seem

[120] Barone, "Creative Nonfiction and Social Research," 106.
[121] Barone, "Creative Nonfiction and Social Research," 113.
[122] Root, Jr. and Steinberg, introduction, xvii; Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 26-31; Minot, *Literary Nonfiction*, 6-10; Forché and Gerard, "Creative Nonfiction," 1.
[123] Burroway, *Imaginative Writing*, 18.
[124] Root, Jr. and Steinberg, introduction, xxiv.

untrustworthy, Margot Singer best explains the blurry borders of the genre when she writes "We love its ability to blend scene, description, meditation, raw fact, speculation, and reportage…. If a piece on nonfiction reads like fiction or poetry, how can you tell it's true? You have to take the truth on faith – not form."[125] First, however, a discussion follows on eleven subgenres that I used to form the Creative Artefact in Chapter 4 to craft the patchwork of tales shared by the foresters, educators and conservationists who worked on orang-utan conservation over fifty years in Sarawak.

2.2.3.1 The Personal Essay

The personal essay is believed to be the oldest form of nonfiction prose; as Moore says, it is a "wonderfully flexible and creative form, as fresh and inventive as the writer wishes it to be."[126] Creative nonfiction writer and teacher, Tiberghien tells us that the personal essay is "both inventive and fulfilling…. The writer shares an experience that resonates for both the writer and the reader."[127] Tiberghien says we can start with the important question: *which experience?* Moore, on the other hand, asks us to focus on our personal point-of-view, on our unique perspective on any topic. Because what Moore calls the "gentle art" is a personal point-of-view that a writer uses to explore a topic, asking questions and not expecting any "right answers", the possibilities are limitless.[128] The personal essay is indeed a means of discovery for the writer and the reader.

2.2.3.2 Memoir

"This is the age of the memoir."[129] It appears that many people have memoirs to tell, and that there are many stories, shocking and unbelievable, crying out for print. To some, it may seem that memoirs seem to be the print version of reality television shows. How many are scripted rather than "real"? How many tell us the truth? Indeed, whose or which truth? Blew writes of her good fortune that her family was filled with storytellers and diarists. Creative nonfiction writers have different ways to reach into their memories to find the stories they will tell. In her chapter on memory and imagination, Hampl likens a memoirist to a travel writer, but one

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[125] Margot Singer, "On Convention" in *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Margot Singer and Nicole Walker (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 141.

[126] Dinty W. Moore, *Crafting the Personal Essay: A Guide for Writing and Publishing Creative Nonfiction*, (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2010), 1.

[127] Susan M. Tiberghien, "Letting the Experience Choose You: The First Step in Writing the Personal Essay" in *Now Write! Nonfiction: Memoir, Journalism, and Creative Nonfiction Exercises from Today's Best Writers and Teachers*, ed Sherry Ellis (New York: Penguin, 2009), 67.

[128] Moore, *Crafting the Personal Essay*, 6.

[129] William Zinsser, introduction to *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998), 3.

who is much like "a pilgrim, seeking, wondering."[130] On remembering and inventing, Hampl explains, "It still comes as a shock to realize that I don't write about what I know: I write in order to find out what I know."[131]

2.2.3.3 The Portrait

The Portrait, also known as the Biographical Sketch, encompasses a wide range of creative nonfiction approaches including profiles or portraits of individuals.[132] Focussing on a particular aspect or characteristic of the individual, the portrait is more personal than the formal biography. Often, the writer will also be more concerned about the literary style used in the work. As Minot explains, if the subject were a stranger to the writer, research and formal interviews would be necessary, and the writer might include information such as that on the circumstances of the meeting, and the surroundings or work environment of the subject, if relevant.[133] Including these details in the telling of the tale enables the writer to provide authenticity as well as set the tone to the piece.

2.2.3.4 Literary Journalism

A definition of journalism would appear to be quite clear cut, involving "fact-gathering" - what reporters would call the work of reporting.[134] However, defining "literary" is more challenging. Contrasting the two forms of journalism, Sims says: "Standard reporting hides the voice of the writer, but literary journalism gives that voice an opportunity to enter the story, sometimes with dramatic irony."[135] Williams describes the difference between traditional journalistic writing and literary journalism, stating "while traditional journalists try their best to be the eyes of a reader, but focus on reporting without any embellishment, the creative nonfiction writer turns at some point to interpretation and reflection."[136] The reader knows that the writer is relating his or her thoughts and feelings about the story; it could even be understood as a shared experience and interpretation. Literary journalism does not focus only on "newsworthy" items or people. Talese, a leader in the field explains he left the New

[130] Patricia Hampl, "Memory and Imagination" in *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction,* 6th ed., ed. Robert L. Root, Jr and Michael Steinberg (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2012), 267.
[131] Hampl, "Memory and Imagination", 267.
[132] Minot, *Literary Nonfiction*, 7.
[133] Minot, *Literary Nonfiction*, 7.
[134] Yagoda, "Preface," 13.
[135] Norman Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," in *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, ed. Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 3.
[136] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 30.

York Times because he believed "the role of the nonfiction writer should be with private people whose lives represent a larger significance."[137] Sims agrees, explaining "Stories about wandering, work, and family – about the things that happen all the time – can reveal the structures and strains of real life. They say more about most citizens' lives than do stories of singular disasters or quirky celebrities."[138]

2.2.3.5 The Hermit Crab Essay

Like the hermit crab in nature, the Hermit Crab Essay named by Miller and Paola is a hybrid nonfiction piece of writing that borrows the shell of a particular form of writing to give it life. A writer may choose to tell her story in the shape of lists, a letter, a recipe or a how-to manual. There are infinite shells to choose from. Why choose to frame an essay in such a strange shell? Miller and Paola urge writers to make artistic choices so the reader is drawn to the personal story. Singer believes the hermit crab essay is "always both an aesthetic artefact and an ironic deconstruction of other, conventional forms" and that "all writing forms an artificial shell."[139] A few intriguing examples from various anthologies and books of the craft of creative nonfiction I had come across are Ruthann Robson's *Notes from a Difficult Case* – seen through "the lenses of two professional epistemologies – the legal and the medical"[140]; Brenda Miller's *Epilogue* to her memoir *An Earlier Life,*[141] crafted in a series of moving letters; Patricia Smith's *An All-Purpose Product,*[142] a cry about race, shame and a mother-daughter relationship shaped in a series of questions and answers in the form of Frequently Asked Questions; and Katelyn Hemmeke's *What You Are*[143] that is composed of numbered paragraphs that tell the story of the author's search for identity growing up American as an adopted Korean child and making her way as a teacher in the country of her birth.

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[137] Gay Talese, "Delving into Private Lives," in *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University,* ed. Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (New York: Plume Books, 2007), 7.

[138] Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," 3.

[139] Margot Singer, "On Scaffolding, Hermit Crabs, and the Real False Document" in *Bending Genre: Essays on Nonfiction,* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 79.

[140] Ruthann Robson, "A Difficult Case" in *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction,* ed. Lee Gutkind, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 226-244.

[141] Brenda Miller, *An Earlier Life*, (Port Townsend: Judith Kitchen's Ovenbird Books, 2016), 155-170.

[142] Patricia Smith, "An All-Purpose Product" in *Short-Form Creative Writing: A Writer's Guide and Anthology,* eds H. K. Hummel and Stephanie Lenox, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 289-291.

[143] Katelyn Hemmeke, "What You Are," in *Short-Form Creative Writing: A Writer's Guide and Anthology*, eds H. K. Hummel and Stephanie Lenox, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 256-257.

2.2.3.6 The Segmented Essay

Allowing for nonlinear ways to describe or illustrate reality, the Segmented Essay provides the writer freedom to express herself and to frame her story or stories. In its simplest form, the Segmented Essay can be organised in chronological order. Writers use space or asterisks to signal a change in time or even theme. Sometimes, subheadings or even Roman numerals are used to indicate the shift. The Segmented Essay is a useful means to explore different viewpoints from varied angles or aspects of a story. However, Perl and Schwartz warn writers to beware of breaking their writing up into segments because they do not really know the purpose of the essay is.[144]

2.2.3.7 The Collage Essay

Sometimes referred to as a mosaic or a multi-genre essay, the Collage Essay is a subgenre that frames multiple stories or scenes to tell a larger, more significant tale. It can also be used to bring together what Perl and Schwartz call the "stuff" of everyday life, juxtaposing different items such as letters, poems and even interior monologues to tell a meaningful story.[145] With all these varied pieces brought together, the story could in fact be multi-layered, with meanings at various levels.

2.2.3.8 Nature and Environmental Writing

Nature writing has long featured in personal essays, before even the term creative nonfiction was coined. Through the ages, writers have been inspired by nature and the physical world.[146] But even before well-known writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau inspired with their ground-breaking writing contemplating nature and the human species' place in the natural world, writers have considered, marvelled and wondered about nature, wildlife and the wild things around us that we have sought to explore and even attempt to tame. In the 20th century, scientists and writers inadvertently initiated the environmental movement by alerting readers to the damage that human actions were wreaking on the natural world. Now, in the 21st century, nature and environmental writing are often intertwined. A good example of this is Erik Reece's piece on his realisation that he

[144] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 53.
[145] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 53.
[146] B. Minh Nguyen and Porter Shreve, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: I & Eye*, (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 207.

could no longer write about the beauty of the nature around him without "also writing about the forces at work to destroy it."[147]

2.2.3.9 Ecocriticism

Rachel Carson started her seminal book, Silent Spring, with a fable of an idyllic American town that is gradually and irrevocably destroyed by human actions.[148] The book, published in 1962, is recognised as the "founding text to modern environmentalism"[149], an early work of ecocriticism that was an emerging branch of literary studies.[150] Ecocriticism continues to grow and drawing scientists, writers and environmentalists together, the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment was established in 1992 and the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* followed on its heels a year later.[151] In her seminal anthology, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, published in 1996, Cheryll Glotfelty warns that "either we change our ways or we face global catastrophe, destroying much beauty and exterminating countless fellow species in our headlong race to apocalypse."[152] Lawrence Buell, a pioneer of ecocriticism, identifies another challenge which he calls the "significance beyond the academy"; eco-critics actually taking part in artistic and creative work alongside activists and artists.[153] Surely, eco-critics must move beyond the page to actually take action to reduce our carbon footprint and live as environmentally-friendly lifestyles as possible in the modern world. Could they speak out among their local communities and then the world stage like 15-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg who protested outside the Swedish parliament in 2018 and who has initiated and galvanized a worldwide protest to move politicians to do something about climate change?

2.2.3.10 The Crafted Interview

Not immersion journalism nor a profile of an individual, but the true story told in the subject's own words, the Crafted Interview is the name I have given to an essay shaped and crafted by the researcher-writer who has interviewed extensively and who selects and

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[147] Erik Reece, "The Act of Writing: Speak and Bear Witness" in *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction,* ed. Sean Prentiss and Joe Wilkins, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 143.

[148] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 3.

[149] Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

[150] Ursula K. Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism", *PMLA*, vol. 121, no. 2 (Mar 2006), p. 504.

[151] Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," 505.

[152] Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," xx.

[153] Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 132.

arranges specific parts of the interview to form a story. Told in the interviewee's own words, the story is yet shaped and crafted by the researcher-writer. Haruki Murakami is the master researcher-writer and master interviewer whose *Underground* is the best example of such Crafted Interviews though he did not name them as such. In his essay included in the English version of the book, Murakami describes the victims' responses to his interview questions as "strictly speaking, just memories."[154] Murakami explains that although "the truth of 'whatever is told' will differ, however slightly, from what actually what happened," it does not mean that the memories – the stories – told are lies. They are, Murakami tells us, "unmistakably the truth, albeit in another form."[155]

So, too, the Crafted Interviews in Chapter 4 tell true stories of the research participants' experiences in their own words, presented through the interviewer-writer's lens. The first stage in creating the story, thus, is the researcher's preparation of the interview questions. This is followed by the second stage which is the actual interview. At this point, the research participant's answers present personal descriptions and explanations of lived experiences. This second stage brings forth the research participant's memories – interpretations of the past and even the present and understanding of the future. The third stage involves the researcher-interviewer's perception of the true stories, and through this view, selects and crafts an interesting, even powerful tale, sometimes using sub-headings or paragraphing and white space to make meaning of the tale to the reader. Indeed, it is the reader who is involved in the final fourth stage, interpreting the Crafted Interview and understanding the story.

It was the interview with Abang Mutalib that sparked the idea of a Crafted Interview. The forest guard who had risen to a leadership role in orang-utan conservation in the Sarawak Forestry Corporation had enjoyed years of interactions with confiscated and semi-wild orang-utans. His enthusiasm was palpable, and his speech powerful. He shared his stories, describing his thoughts and actions in detail, revealing that he had ruminated on these incidents over the years. Abang Mutalib spoke with a staccato cadence, thumping the table for emphasis. There were several stories within his long interview that stood out, but these two simply had to be told: *On Being Chased by Bullet* and *Wrestling with Jerangkung*. I did consider writing them as separate stories but decided that the two together would tell a more powerful story about Abang Mutalib himself. This was a man who, despite having been

[154] Haruki Murakami, "Blind Nightmare: Where are We Japanese Going?" in *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, (London: Vintage Books, 2013), 203.
[155] Murakami, "Blind Nightmare," 204.

chased by an orang-utan, continued to work with these powerful wild creatures in close proximity. His voice needed to be heard and could be, if I were to craft the parts of the interview that told these stories in a meaningful way, shaping them artfully to engage the reader in the same way that I had been captivated during the interview itself. I did not however, realise that this was permissible until I came upon Haruki Murakami's *Underground*. Thus, from these two powerful storytellers, the Crafted Interview was born, and I used the same technique with other stories from interviews that possessed a unique voice, vivid descriptions and detailed memories.

2.2.3.11 Flash Nonfiction

The Short is "a whole world created with just a few strokes."[156] This newest of subgenres has only started to gain interest in the past two decades[157] but it continues to grow in popularity, with writers taking the time to tell their stories "short: succinct, but not slight."[158] Borich explains that flash nonfiction "comes of noticing, and accepting a subject small and precise enough to be contained in such a brief container. We write into this flash of new understanding, then we gather up and get out before the flash fades."[159] Such is the aim of a flash nonfiction writer. According to Cooper, "to write short nonfiction requires an alertness to detail, a quickening of the senses, a focusing of the literary lens, so to speak, until one has magnified some small aspect of what it means to be human."[160]

2.2.4 The Process of Art and Craft or Composing Creative Nonfiction

On composing creative nonfiction, Gutkind reminds us that it is not a scientific process or endeavour.[161] While a writer can be organised and mindful of the techniques of the craft, these are tools of the trade much like the muscle memory of an athlete who has trained so regularly that her body reacts spontaneously to the demands of the sport. So, although descriptions of scenes and characters, dialogue and action may flow naturally after years of

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[156] Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones, "Editors' Introduction" in *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 25.
[157] Kitchen and Jones, "Editor's Introduction," 24.
[158] Judith Kitchen, "Editor's Introduction" in *Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction*, ed. Judith Kitchen, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 12.
[159] Barrie Jean Borich, "Writing into the Flash: On Finding Short Nonfiction's Decisive Moment" in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction*, ed. Dinty W. Moore, (Brookline: Rose Metal Press, 2012), 11.
[160] Bernard Cooper, preface to *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*, ed. Judith Kitchen and Mary Paumier Jones, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 25.
[160] Kitchen and Jones, "Editors' Introduction," 22.
[161] Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction*, 48.

daily practice, the creative nonfiction writer should always write with a spontaneous creative effort.[162] Editing, rewriting, and revision come later.

Pulitzer prize winner Kidder and editor Todd explain that "every story has to be discovered twice, first in the world and then in the author's study."[163] This is where the author shapes the story as she understands it, using the tools and methods to show and tell the story in her chosen voice. On this point, Burroway says creative nonfiction writer can "easily borrow from any form you choose: story, monologue, lesson, list, rondel, collage. The trick is to find the right shape for the idea you have to present."[164] Once the topic or theme has been decided, Gutkind recommends starting with scenes or "slices of reality", what he calls the building blocks of a story. Gutkind explains how writing scenes differentiates the creative nonfiction writer from the conventional journalist or essayist: "The uninspired writer will *tell* the reader about a subject, place, or personality, but the creative nonfiction writer will *show* that subject, place, or personality in action."[165] Right from the start, the creative nonfiction writer must thrust the reader into the midst of action, engaging her while simultaneously revealing what she will learn if she continues to read. The introductory lines may open the story at its chronological beginning or anywhere in the story's timeline depending on the writer's choice of frame or structure. The reflective nature of the creative nonfiction writer's work is that which makes it stand apart. Moore explains it in this way: "Creative nonfiction is a style of *literary* writing, an art form that starts with language and an individual point of view, and then discovers its unique shape through trial and error. To succeed in creative nonfiction, you must be open to new ideas and fresh approaches."[166]

Lopate describes his methods in this way: "The starting point is usually trying to render justice to an actual experience. I have a desire to find the shape underlying the ordinary happenings, through pressing them into artful form."[167] This artful form may change multiple times while the author is writing. Lamott calls this "plot treatment," describing how she revised and reshaped her novel when her "treatment" did not work. Finally, after many drafts and revisions, Lamott found the correct "recipe" her editor had been trying to help her find,

[162] Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction*, 48.
[163] Kidder and Todd, *Good Prose*, 13.
[164] Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2014).
[165] Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction*, 33.
[166] Moore, *The Truth of the Matter*, 4.
[167] Lopate, *To Show and To Tell*, 94.

and her book "moved along like the alphabet, like a vivid and continuous dream."[168] Kramer and Call describe the crafting of the story's structure as putting "words and characters to work systematically" to tell the story.[169] To them, what Gutkind calls framing the story is the writer making the structure "the deliberate and purposeful sequence of the reader's experience."[170]

Gerard views outlines as a useful way to organise material. Whether it is a circle beginning with a certain scene or a straight line of narrative action, Gerard's outline depends on a writer's thinking processes, memory and imagination. As experienced painfully by Lamott, Gerard's outlines can be altered in multiple ways and times. To Gerard, the outline "is only a means to an end, a scaffolding that allows you to reach everything you need to reach. You discard it when the job is finished."[171] However, other writers continue to explore ways to bend the genre further. Williams believes that like a novelist, a creative nonfiction writer has the liberty to condense, expand, re-order events, and generally manipulate space and time. She includes fragmented and nonlinear forms as options of structure.[172] Along with conventional or imaginative structures, the techniques that a creative nonfiction writer then embraces are those of the fiction writer. "Grounded in the writer's personal experience,"[173] the work of a creative nonfiction writer is an exploration of self-discovery and reflection.

2.3 Researching the Stories

In the prologue to what he calls his "field guide to writers," Gerard tells us that "every conversation is a story, and every story is an adventure, and every adventure takes me out of my small life into a larger one, and I love that."[174] Gerard introduces us to the art of creative research, describing the tools of his trade: items for interviewing (notebook, pen, highlighter, digital sound recorder, camera), archival work (manuscripts, letter, other documents, magnifying glass to discern handwriting or details of a photograph), observation (binoculars, measuring tape) and general purpose tools (telescoping walking stick, calculator, maps).[175]

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[168] Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*, 92.
[169] Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation of Harvard University* (New York: Plume, 2007), 98.
[170] Kramer and Call, *Telling True Stories*, 98.
[171] Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 170.
[172] Williams, "Writing Creative Nonfiction," 33.
[173] Root, *The Nonfictionist's Guide*, 25.
[174] Philip Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), viii.
[175] Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research*, 38-39.

Equipped with these items, a creative nonfiction writer is prepared for research. As Root, Jr and Steinberg explain, "creative nonfiction is reliably factual, firmly anchored in real experience, whether the author has lived it or observed or recorded it."[176] Indeed, techniques of research commonly used by creative nonfiction writers include immersion, observation, story-telling, and interviews. These may seem reminiscent of the research tools used by an anthropologist and ethnographer. But though there may be an overlap in the techniques used, the stories crafted by the fourth genrist would be a rather different from the scholarly writings of an anthropologist or ethnographer.

2.3.1 Immersion Reporting

Well known early examples of immersion reporting, a singular type of learning and writing method are Henry David Thoreau (*Walden,* 1854) who immersed himself in nature and solitude at Walden Pond for two years and George Orwell (*Down and Out in Paris and London,* 1933) who explored the lives of the poor in Paris and London by living with them.[177] Lee Gutkind's *Bike Fever* (1973) and *Almost Human: Making Robots Think* (2007) are more recent examples of creative nonfiction born of immersion reporting. Following in the footsteps of the writers who used this method in the New Journalism era, Jack Kerouac (*On the Road,* 1957) and Hunter S. Thompson (*Hell's Angels*, 1967),[178] Gutkind recommends the immersion experience as the best way to learn deeply and intimately about the many facets of a situation or of people's motivations and desires in certain circumstances.[179] Ted Conover, a journalist and writer known for his work resulting from immersion reporting or what he calls "participatory reporting" learned this research method from his undergraduate studies as an anthropology major. He studied participant observation and has spent long months with different subcultures of people (hobos, illegal immigrants, prison correction officers, to name a few) to live and learn what it is to be living their lives. Of Conover's advice about immersion reporting, this I find most illuminating, that "a smart journalist always remembers that even though it's first person, the subject isn't *me*. It's *them*. The reader roots for a humble narrator."[180] Thus, despite the authorial voice of the subjective writer, the focus of the story is always the people depicted in the creative nonfiction work.

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[176] Root, Jr and Steinberg, introduction, xxix.
[177] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 76.
[178] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 73.
[179] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 71.
[180] Conover, "Participatory Reporting," 36.

2.3.2 Observation

To craft creative nonfiction, the researcher-writer must be more than an observer. Observing and discovering, exploring, thinking and writing, the creative nonfiction writer strives to craft a unique story that enlightens or touches the reader, perhaps even profoundly. Moore describes the creative nonfiction writer as more than an observer. While paying close attention to the details of the situation and actions of the people surrounding the topic, the writer observes her own thoughts and reactions, including them in her writing if appropriate. A writer's careful observations will enable her to offer rich details and descriptions, characterization through dialogue and action, a distinctive voice and intimate point of view, and discovery. [181] Giving Thoreau's *Walden* as an example, Moore describes the book as "a blend of personal essay, memoir, and nature writing" demonstrating "the simple power of honest, individual observation."[182] Root, Jr explains what we do in life - we "assemble the associations of memory and experience and struggle to make sense of them. It is an act of discovery."[183] Among the observations, details and descriptions, the writer chooses what to include and what to omit, but is never "locked into limited forms of writing any more than we're locked into limited forms of reading the world."[184] Every artful piece should open the reader to something new about the world and the human condition; it could be something the reader has no knowledge about, it could be a perspective the reader is not aware of.

2.3.3 The Art of Interviewing

Researching, planning, organising questions, posing the questions, responding and following up on questions, engaging, drawing out the participant's thoughts and opinions, helping the participant to recall the past, the interview is a process that can take unexpected turns and reap surprising new knowledge. It can touch the interviewer and the participant, and it is never static or dull unless the interviewer fails to take an active role. There is indeed, an art to interviewing well. While a passive interviewer may mechanically ask questions and note the responses, an active interviewer participates and is alert to the nuances of responses allows the participant to meander. From these divergences, unknown stories are revealed and the

[181] Moore, *The Truth of the Matter*, 11.
[182] Moore, *The Truth of the Matter*, 10.
[183] Root, *The Nonfictionists' Guide*, 82.
[184] Root, *The Nonfictionists' Guide*, 83.

interviewer can also gain rich material in the form of previously unexpressed thoughts and feelings.

Gerard calls this aspect of research as "the warm art of the interview."[185] He describes a good interview not just a tool for journalists and biographers, but as "a lively conversation" through which anyone - the researcher, nonfiction writer or novelist - can learn about information that could not be discovered in any other way.[186] Josselson, with forty years of interview-based research offers this insight on the purpose of the interview as a method of qualitative research: "Our purpose is to understand more extensively or more deeply, other people's experiences of some aspect of their lives. Our focus is on subjectivity."[187] Being an interpersonal process, Josselson perceives the interviewer as the instrument and that "the richness and value of an interview depend on the relational and empathic skills of the interviewer."[188]

2.4 Summary

Creative nonfiction, the fourth genre, flexible, malleable, challenging, appealing to writers and readers alike. The line between creativity and fiction is fine indeed and has resulted in some writers succumbing to the lure of embellishing "truths" to sell more books or to gain more readers. Burroway says "the distance between 'facts' and 'essential truth,' of course, can be troubling," but states that the "touchstone is an absence of the intent to deceive."[189] This is then, the important element: a creative nonfiction writer must have no intent to deceive; she must be honest in the re-telling of tales, and in allowing creativity and imagination to improve the telling of the story, but not the truths told or experienced. Indeed, in creative nonfiction, the writer's very subjectivity and reflection on the topic are what makes the work literary rather than pure journalism, biography or travel writing. The writer's honesty is crucial to the legitimacy of the creative nonfiction work. As Brien explains, "non-fiction draws its power from the truths it tells its readers."[190] How I gathered the data for the

[185] Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research*, 98-129.
[186] Gerard, *The Art of Creative Research*, 98.
[187] Ruthellen Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach*, (New York: The Guilford Press, 2013), viii.
[188] Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, x.
[189] Janet Burroway, *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2014), 235.
[190] Brien, "Non-Fiction Writing Research," 50.

truths depicted in my creative nonfiction pieces follows in the next chapter on research methodology.

Chapter 3

3.0 Research Methodology

With an understanding of the bourgeoning and still-evolving genre of Creative Nonfiction, I now examine narrative research and the procedures undertaken in this research study, followed by a discussion on the interview as a collaborative interactive process. Here also, is an explanation of the design of the research instruments approved by the University's Research Ethics committee and used in this narrative inquiry. The penultimate section in this chapter describes my narrative analysis of the stories gathered; this is the interpretation of the true stories of lived experiences, lived and told by ordinary people whose work entails the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak. The chapter concludes with an examination of my creative choices as inquirer-writer, considering the participants' narratives, on how the creative nonfiction work was framed and how the individual stories were constructed and crafted, braided within the whole creative artefact.

3.1 Narrative Research

"Experience is meaningful and human behavior is generated from and informed by this meaningfulness."[191] Thus, does academic researcher and practicing psychotherapist Donald E. Polkinghorne begin his study, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Polkinghorne continues by explaining that narrative is "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful." We ask ourselves the questions asked through all the ages: "What is my purpose?", "Why am I here?", "What do my actions mean?" To make meaning of our lives is surely a desire each of us has.

Chase explains that "narrative is retrospective meaning making – the shaping or ordering of past experience."[192] Indeed, in terms of narrative research, Josselson states, "Meaning making and interpretation are at the center of narrative research projects," that "the data of interest are people's stories of life experience, rather than their decontextualised opinions, attitudes, or facts about life."[193] To obtain such rich detail about the lives of people, it is necessary to

[191] Donald E. Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 1.
[192] Susan E. Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices" in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, 3rd ed. ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 64.
[193] Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, 3.

devote much time and effort into gaining the confidence of the participants. Empathy and openness to listen closely and actively help the narrative researcher to uncover the detailed tales.[194] To conduct narrative research to understand experiences and lives of the ordinary people working to conserve orang-utans in Sarawak, I followed the steps to narrative research, as stated by Creswell and Poth described below.[195]

1. *Determine if the research problem or question best fits narrative research*. 2. *Select one or more individuals who have stories or life experiences to tell, and spend considerable time with them gathering their stories through multiple types of information*. 3. *Consider how the collection of the data and their recording can take different shapes*. 4. *Embed information about the context of these stories into data collection, analysis, and writing*. 5. *Analyse the participants' stories using the process of reorganizing the stories into some general type of framework called <u>restorying</u>*. 6. *Embed a collaborative approach in the collection and telling of the stories*. 7. *Present the narrative in written form*.

Table 1: Creswell and Poth's Steps to Narrative Research

I matched my own study against the procedures that Creswell and Poth outlined. First, my research problem to discover the detailed experiences of people who have worked and are working towards the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak was identified. As narrative research captures the detailed stories or life experiences of an individual or individuals, this is definitely appropriate for my study.

Secondly, the selection of individuals was made possible through the identification and whereabouts of the forest guards and wildlife officers in the Sarawak Forest Department and Sarawak Forestry Corporation as well as at Semenggoh and Matang Wildlife Centres. Discussions with these individuals provided links to other individuals also involved in the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak. Thus, nineteen individuals were identified, ranging from civil servants (forest guards and officers in the National Parks and Wildlife Office) to wildlife researchers in conservation organisations, spanning five decades of work in Sarawak.

[194] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 2018), 74.
[195] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 71-73.

The third procedure concerns the creation of the narrative. As with other narrative inquirers, Reissman advocates the researcher transcribing the interviews herself. This is to ensure that nuances are captured.[196] Although not everything can be captured in a transcribed interview, the researcher-writer may still be able to translate the emotions, expressions and mode of the interview in the unfolding story that is crafted and written. In line with this premise, I transcribed as many of the interviews as possible including any follow-up interviews if clarifications were needed or more information was required to tell the stories fully.

Fourthly, in my study, embedding context is crucial. Through each step, gathering the stories told about lived experiences, analysing the stories and ultimately, crafting of the stories, context is essential. Without the context of conservation and the aims of the government and the different parties involved, including the context of their individual lives, and in the different times that these individuals lived these experiences, the stories could not be fashioned coherently. Gaining an understanding of their lives and their work, as well as the extent of their relationship with the animals was crucial to the choice of which creative nonfiction subgenre to use in the crafting of their stories.

The fifth step of analysing the participants' stories into a kind of framework, or "restorying" involves the structuring of the whole story. Gutkind calls this "framing," explaining that it is sometimes referred to as "overall narrative" or "story structure"[197] while Gerard, Kidder and Todd refer to this as "structuring."[198] Creswell and Poth describe "restorying" as "the researcher taking an active role to 'restory' the stories into a framework that makes sense." This brings us to the argument that Gutkind describes as recreation versus reconstruction.[199] The important factor is that the author remains true to the stories that the participants have shared. While my framework includes the important literary elements used in fiction, there is never any deviation from the facts presented and the views of the participants. There is no deception on the researcher-writer's part, yet the author presents the stories as what Prentiss calls "our personal mythologies shared with our world."[200]

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[196] Catherine Kohler Reissman, *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 29.
[197] Lee Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 218-229.
[198] Philip Gerard, *Creative Nonfiction*, 155-178; Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd, *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction* (New York: Random House, 2013), 36-46.
[199] Gutkind, *You Can't Make This Stuff Up*, 186-203.
[200] Prentiss, "Eternal Sunshine of the Nonfiction Mind," 114.

The sixth step involves embedding a collaborative approach to the collection and telling of the stories. Clandinin and Connelly describe this as "a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus."[201] Throughout the research, interviewing, writing, revising and crafting, I have sought the collaboration of my study's participants. To be true to their stories, from their descriptions of work, their understanding of larger issues against their personal lives, their views, background and perspectives to their emotions, it was essential that I was open to the many varied responses. The crafting of the stories, incorporating all these aspects of their lives was carried out with empathy, humility and gratitude.

The final step in the narrative research procedures is to present the study in written form. Creswell and Poth include here what they call "a general reporting structure." It is here that I diverge from Creswell and Poth in terms of the product of the study. The output of this research, being a creative nonfiction artefact is naturally different from the traditional social science reports or academic paper. My ultimate aim was to craft a written creative artefact that is readable, engaging, and indeed, publishable. Being thus able to place my work in the realm of narrative research, we move on specifically to Narrative Inquiry and how I place my creative nonfiction work under its wing.

3.2 Narrative Inquiry in this Creative Nonfiction Project

This creative nonfiction research project is about the gathering and re-telling of stories told by the many individuals involved in the conservation of orang-utans over a fifty-year period in Sarawak. The crafted creative nonfiction artefact tells us about these individuals and the world they live in; the stories they tell reveal lives lived that are uniquely theirs to tell. Kim refers to "aesthetic play to encourage us to be open-minded, experimenting with many different, possible ideas out of curiosity."[202] Thus, when attempting to analyse and interpret the research data, I must never predict or assume what is to come forth from interviews or observations. Kim warns narrative inquirers to be careful, that we should not interpret events as we wish them to be.[203] We must set aside preconceived notions, our own prejudices and weaknesses, and strive to be open and ready to learn. It follows, then, that when designing my

[201] D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2000), 20.
[202] Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry: The Crafting and Analysis of Stories as Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2016), 187.
[203] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, 188.

research instruments, I did so with an understanding that the interview process is a collaboration between the inquirer and the interviewee. The inquirer must not lead; instead, she must listen actively and allow the interviewees to tell us the stories that they choose. In fact, Reissman explains that generally, in the human sciences, researchers do not find narratives, rather, they participate in the creation of the narrative.[204] Taking it even further, Richardson asserts that many qualitative researchers perceive the researcher, instead of the survey or interview questions, as the instrument.[205]

An illustration of this can be found in the appendices. Appendix A contains the semi-structured interview questions prepared for the retired forest guard, Banggan Empulu, who took care of the juvenile orang-utans that were to be released back to the wild in the 1970s. Appendix B comprises an excerpt of the interview that Banggan gave, describing how he had been given the instruction to simply release the confiscated orang-utans into the forest without acclimatizing any of them. A comparison of the two shows how the interview was guided to naturally flow into asking the questions that had been prepared. The research participant had been allowed to diverge, and from this, came to reveal details about the hard release of the juvenile orang-utans into the wild. These shocking details formed the basis of the first piece I crafted for the creative artefact, *On Arrival, Please Release*.

A point to add is that the transcript reveals sensitive information regarding the blame that was attributed to the expatriate "Wildlife Officer" who was actually named. I chose not to name the "Wildlife Officer" to avoid potential conflict, even legal action, and also to refrain from inflicting further embarrassment and shame on the retired Wildlife Officer for the foolish command that he had written on a piece of cigarette paper and which resulted in the death of one of the young orang-utans. When I had talked to the Wildlife Officer at a chance meeting in a local food court, he admitted that he had indeed been responsible for that instruction. However, when I conducted a formal interview with him, he denied having anything to do with any release of orang-utans to the wild. In that interview, he did talk of how he subsequently left Sarawak and moved to work in Indonesia. Was he asked to leave Sarawak or had he already been planning to leave on his own volition? Putting this information

[204] Reissman, *Narrative, Methods for the Human Sciences*, 21.
[205] Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018), 818.

together, I pieced the true story as I understood it from the two diverging stories of the retired forest guard who carried out the instructions of his superior and the Wildlife Officer himself.

In narrative inquiry, then, the interview is an active process that involves both researcher and interviewee as participants in a collaborative engagement. While the inquirer must invest much time and effort to prepare questions that will elicit the lived experiences, she must encourage the participant to tell the stories in her own way, and even to elaborate on incidents that may not seem to be relevant. Josselson describes the interview as "a form of evolving constructed interpretation."[206] Elaborating further on the collaborative nature of the interview, Josselson asserts that "although reality is co-constructed, we can reach some understanding of others' experiences of their lives."[207] Narrative inquiry thus allows us to learn these stories by posing the right questions, with empathy, and openness. Chase asserts that all narrative researchers do pay attention to the research relationship between researcher and subject, but that studies based on in-depth interviews transform the interviewer-interviewee relationship to that of narrator and listener.[208] At a later stage, the listener becomes a narrator, a storyteller in her own right, recreating the stories narrated, and in my case, crafting the stories into a variety of creative nonfiction forms. Thus, through narrative inquiry, I, the researcher-inquirer was able to uncover the true stories by engaging with the research participants in a warm, open personal relationship.

Svend Brinkmann offers an excerpt from Haruki Murakami's *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche* to demonstrate that "an interview is not an interaction between disembodied intellects but a joint accomplishment of vulnerable, embodied persons with all sorts of hopes, fears, and interests."[209] Murakami, a novelist and short story writer, is able to achieve the literary aesthetic Eisner and Barone propose as the seventh feature of literary-based narrative inquiry. While the ordinary narrative inquirer may not have such talent as Murakami, the aim is still to craft interviews into stories that describe and reveal participants' reality profoundly. In fact, Murakami's influence is great in the development of a new subgenre that I have named the Crafted Interview.

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[206] Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, 2.
[207] Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry*, 2.
[208] Chase, "Narrative Inquiry," 69.
[209] Svend Brinkmann, "The Interview" in *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2018), 577.

As a narrative researcher, no longer a detached objective observer, I am an observer and participant. I relearned how to interview participants, discarding my past training as a journalist and media officer that required me to take an objective stance and to report only "the facts". Kim supports the personal aspect of the narrative inquiry, asserting that "the more art-like features your narrative work exhibits, the more rich and engaging its character can be."[210]She quotes Eisner who says "if the arts are about anything, they are about emotion, and emotion has to do with the ways in which we feel, and most importantly with compassion. Our capacity to feel compassion is a "way of discovering our humanity."[211] Thus, being a compassionate interviewer, I was able to bring forth from my research participants positive responses, rich with details and descriptions that enabled me, the inquirer-writer, to portray unforgettable true stories of lives lived.

3.3 Narrative Analysis and Conservationists in Sarawak

Understanding the procedures of narrative research, the features of literary-based narrative inquiry, and designing the research instrument - the interview questions (please refer to Appendix A for a sample) and undertaking the interview itself (please refer to Appendix B for a sample transcript) - we examine the analysis of the collected data. As Kim says, narrative inquiry is "a storytelling methodology through which we study narratives and stories of experience."[212] Connelly and Clandinin explain the understanding of narrative inquirers that "humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story…is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful."[213] Barone describes how in the field of education, narrative construction has grown, with researchers experimenting with a variety of literary genres to shape their data.[214] These literary genres include poetry, the novel, novella, short story, autobiography and "self-narrative", and even film and videos and readers theatre. Narrative inquirers use these literary forms as the modes to tell the stories they have learned.

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[210] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry,* 138-139.
[211] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry,* 139.
[212] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry,* 118.
[213] F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, "Narrative Inquiry," *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research,* 3rd ed. (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 477.
[214] Tom Barone, "A Return to the Gold Standard? Questioning the Future of Narrative Construction as Educational Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (June 2007): 456, http://qix.sagepub.com.

Creative nonfiction is the chosen genre I use to tell the true stories of my participants working to conserve orang-utans and their habitats in Sarawak. My role as the narrative inquirer moves on to become the metaphorical midwife that Kim describes,[215] helping the participants to birth their stories. Kim explains that the narrative research genres are the means and not the end; that stories are the means with which the narrative researcher mediates stories so that their meanings are portrayed or expressed in ways that engage the reader.[216] The job of the midwife, thus, is to interpret the stories and to frame them in the montage, drawing the reader's interest, engaging her in an in-depth reading, learning about the lives lived in this work, this piece of literature of reality. Patton asserts that stories are at the centre of narrative analysis and how we interpret them is actually at the heart of narrative analysis.[217] Thus, the crafting of these stories into the montage that is my creative artefact is my interpretation of the stories told by the people who have worked to save orang-utans in Sarawak, from the wildlife researcher in the 1970s to the forest guard working with captive orang-utans at Matang Wildlife Centre today.

3.4 Constructing the Creative Artefact

Denzin and Lincoln offer a description of the qualitative researcher as a "*bricoleur*, as a maker of quilts, or in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages."[218] This description aptly fits my role I take on in this study. Explaining further, Denzin and Lincoln point out that the qualitative researcher may therefore, use many voices and varied textual forms and narratives styles to piece together her complete montage. Such is the collection of creative nonfiction pieces that I have woven together; multiple stories from varied viewpoints, experiences lived in the same wildlife centre but emerging in a different light; treks into forests, studying the landscape and habitats, the wildlife themselves, interacting with communities and the captive and wild animals; all these pieced together with creative threads linking the whole story of multiple tales, as a montage filmmaker would do.

Thus, a narrative study is undertaken from the first question about the storied lives of people working with orang-utan conservation to the design of the research instrument, from interviewing the subjects, transcribing the recorded interviews, "selecting the facts", "telling

[215] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, 119.
[216] Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry*, 151.
[217] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 118.
[218] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research" in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013), 7.

the truth" (with no intent to deceive), crafting the stories, and weaving them into a whole body of work. Finally, the narrative construction of the whole creative artefact will involve this last exercise, what William Zinsser, writer, editor and teacher, calls "the countless successive decisions that go into every act of writing."[219]

3.4.1 The Researcher's Background

This study is the culmination of thirty years of my own growth and experience as a journalist, conservationist, teacher and writer. When I stepped into Kampung Pueh longhouse decades ago with a TV crew, I was taking the first step into the story that has led to this study. Marrying the Melanau forester who accompanied us on that journey, and then working, writing and editing wildlife-related documents and participating in various conservation activities have prepared me for this purpose. Some of the participants in this study were the forest guards I met twenty-five years ago role-playing stories about orang-utan and wildlife taboos to indigenous communities. Their stories deserve to be shared. Like Talese, Gutkind and Conover, I aim to tell the true stories of these ordinary people. These are the people who work on the ground to conserve the orang-utan in Sarawak. Their stories have not been heard.

3.4.2 Framework for Creative Nonfiction in this Study

To discover the real stories of the people who have worked and who are working to save orang-utans in Sarawak, gaining the trust of the storytellers was the first step. Next, the interview sets for the different individuals were designed. These interview sets consisted of semi-structured interview questions that began with broad general questions to put the participant at ease. The nonthreatening background questions were similar to the broad questions described by Chase who conducts a qualitative research methods course with an emphasis on the interviewer's active listening skills.[220] A narrative researcher, Chase instructs her students to design their interview questions around the life story of the participant in the study.[221] This results in what Chase calls an interview guide, the composition of which prepares the interviewer for a wide range of stories that may be told.

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[219] William Zinsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, 6th ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 265.

[220] Susan E. Chase, "Learning to Listen: Narrative Principles in a Qualitative Research Methods Course" in *Up Close and Personal: The Teaching and Learning of Narrative Research,* ed. Ruth Josselson, Amia Lieblich and Dan P. McAdams (American Psychological Association, 2002), 79.

[221] Chase, "Learning to Listen," 83.

On this and the next pages, the framework of my research journey is illustrated. Firstly, Figure 1 on the next page depicts my work experience as a journalist, interviewer, editor, fiction and nonfiction writer. The skills learned and honed over the years through this work combined with my on-going experience as a conservationist, volunteer, and informal media and communications officer along with a network of friends and former colleagues who include the ordinary people at the heart of my research have enabled me to undertake this unique study. As a journalist, I have been an experienced observer and interviewer, and having worked in a conservation organisation, I have been immersed in conservation work with colleagues in the field in urban and wild lands. With this combination of skills, experience and network of friends in the conservation field in Sarawak, I have been able to identify the research gap – the untold stories involving the conservation of the orang-utan in Sarawak – and to carry out the research to gather these stories and finally to re-create and re-tell these stories through various subgenres of creative nonfiction.

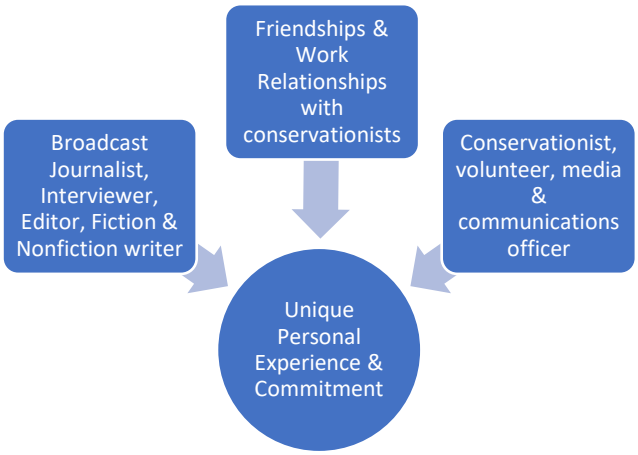

Figure 1: My Unique Personal Experience

Secondly, the research process forms a part of my journey as the in-depth interviews could not have been carried out without my access to the network of ordinary individuals who work variously in the Sarawak Forest Department, Sarawak Forestry Corporation, Matang and Semenggoh Wildlife Centres, conservation organisations and the eco-tourism industry, all of whose work and livelihoods are connected to the conservation of the orang-utan. The research process which uses narrative inquiry as the research method, is shown on the next page in Figure 2.

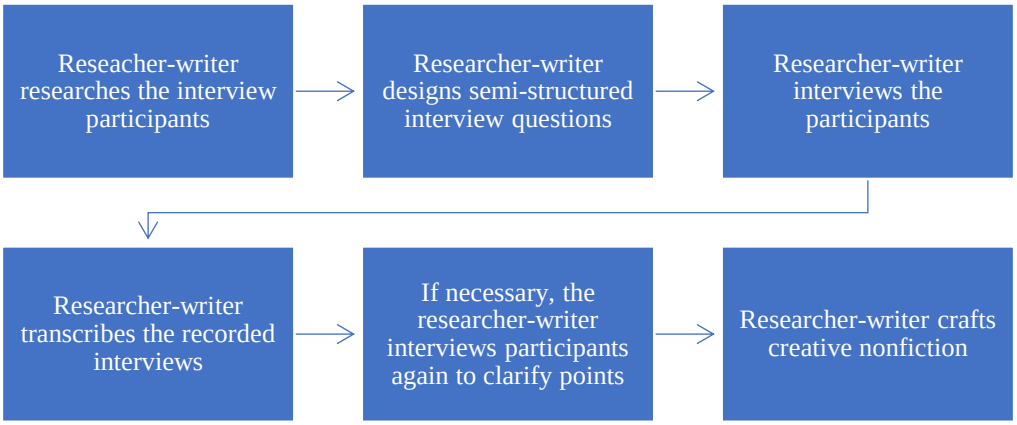

Figure 2: The research process of this study.

Finally, creative nonfiction is the artful product of the re-telling of stories obtained through the research method of narrative inquiry. It is the most appropriate means to re-create and re-tell these personal stories of lived experiences. Using the craft of fiction writing, I bend the fourth genre, appreciating and enjoying the malleability of creative nonfiction. Gifted with unique characters in the forest guards, keepers and researchers as well as orang-utans with individual personalities, I am able to re-tell the stories that span decades or that might capture a moment or a flash of time. Detailed descriptions of the settings, morose or happy expressions, conflicts between humans or humans and orang-utans; all these truths are eked out in the plot or the frame of a chosen subgenre. The literature of reality is all that fiction is, except that it actually happened. It contains that slice of life or that authentic history through the eyes of longhouse folk, wildlife keepers or biologists.

Figure 3: Crafting creative nonfiction; the fourth genre, elastic and still evolving

Creative nonfiction was the form that I chose to relay these stories; the subgenres used depended on the stories told (the data gathered), the actual voice of the participants, and the imagination and creativity that guided my artful writing. Through creative nonfiction pieces, the narrative inquirer-writer tells true stories, but these true stories do not just contain facts and descriptions. These stories contain the emotional truths of the storyteller and the narrator who re-tells the story. Indeed, the re-telling of the lived stories is a collaboration between the interview participant and the inquirer-writer, while the art of creative nonfiction enables the writer to make meaning of lives or experiences lived.

3.5 This Inquirer-Writer

To carry out the study, I obtained research ethics approval from the university's research ethics committee to carry out the semi-structured interviews with the various individuals involved in different aspects of conservation spanning fifty years of work in Sarawak. The nineteen individuals were selected purposefully from different backgrounds in the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak: the civil service, international conservation organisations and the eco-tourism sector. Nine individuals are civil servants working or worked in the Sarawak Forest Department and the Sarawak Forestry Corporation; the state's National Parks and Wildlife Office and wildlife centres fall under their jurisdiction. Two individuals had been involved in orang-utan conservation in the 1970s. A chance meeting in food court had led to one of them, a retired expatriate wildlife officer, while another retired

civil servant was deliberately sought out as he was well-known to have assisted many expatriate volunteers and researchers in the early days of the Sarawak Forest Department. Of the other ten individuals, nine work in three different international conservation organisations while one participant operates an eco-tourist agency that brings travellers to longhouses near to and forests known to be orang-utan habitats. This range of individuals of different age, gender and background with varied knowledge and experience offer many perspectives, views and stories to work with and from which I have written and crafted a unique creative artefact.

The participants of my study are depicted in Figure 4 below. All but two gave permission to use their actual names; they were proud of their work and happy to contribute their stories. If there were sensitive issues touched upon in the interviews, they trusted me to protect their identities. Thus, while it is advisable that pseudonyms be used to avoid unpleasant reactions from other parties in the same field or from those opposing their work, most of the creative work included the names of the actual participants. Certainly, the research ethics approval protects both participants and researcher as it ensures the participants are fully apprised of the study and its purpose, and also allowed the participants to withdraw from the study if they so wished.

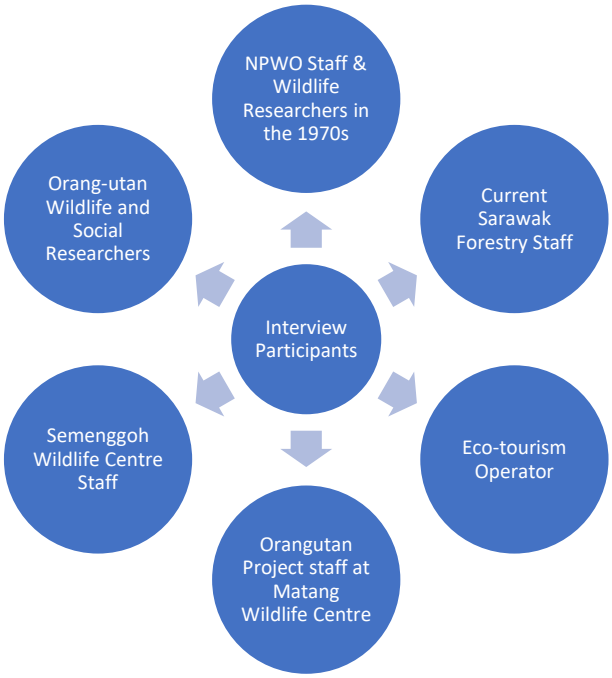

Figure 4: Interview Participants; individuals working to conserve the orang-utan in Sarawak, spanning more than 50 years of conservation.

A conventional book contains chapters; this creative nonfiction work consists of thirty-four pieces that put together form a montage of orang-utan conservation work over time and space. The frame on the next page illustrates the sections of the creative nonfiction artefact that is crafted from the narrative research conducted by the inquirer-creative nonfiction writer, including the subgenre each piece fits into.

Narrative Construction of Creative Nonfiction: The True Stories of People involved in Fifty Years of Orang-Utan Conservation in Sarawak, Malaysia

Story	Story Title	Subgenre
1970s		
1	*The Call of the Orang-utan*	Nature and Environmental Writing
2	*On Arrival, Please Release*	Literary Journalism
3	*Seduku*	Portrait
4	*Three Orang-utans, A Flying Fox and its Mother*	Portrait
1980s		
5	*An Orang-utan Sleeps in my Bedroom*	Portrait
6	*On Being Chased by Bullet and Wrestling with Jerangkung*	Crafted Interview
7	*The Miring Ceremony or Are you Going to Compensate us?*	Memoir
8	*Enggoh's Story: On Isai, the Hunter, Aki Aban and Sustainable Resource Use*	Segmented Essay
1990s		
9	*Cage 14: Bullet's Story /An Orang-utan*	Collage Essay
10	*On Love, Keepers and Confiscated Orang-utans*	Collage Essay
11	*How to Convert a Hunter*	Hermit Crab Essay
12	*As Long as the Red Ape Lives*	Nature and Environmental Writing
13	*Growing up in Nanga Kumpang*	Flash Nonfiction
2000s		
14	*A Tale of Three Orang-utans*	Crafted Interview
15	*Ambushed by an Orang-utan*	Crafted Interview
16	*A Murder Unsolved or The Fourth Suspect*	Hermit Crab Essay
17	*Adoption: Pongo pygmaeus and Homo sapiens*	Flash Nonfiction
2010s		
18	*Fighting in the Tree-tops*	Segmented Essay
19	*I love to hear the Nature Speak*	Segmented Essay
20	*On Counting Nests, Getting Lost at Batang Ai and a White Lie*	Portrait
21	*On Being a Woman in the Field*	Crafted Interview
22	*At SK Nanga Delok, Sarawak*	Memoir
23	*The Joy of Learning and Creating*	Personal Essay
24	*The Orang-utan who Sleepwalks*	Ecocriticism
25	*The Uncanny Red Ape*	Ecocriticism

26	*An Orang-utan living in an Recycled World*	Ecocriticism
27	*What I see is not an Orang-utan*	Memoir
28	*P is for Pongo pygmaeus*	Flash Nonfiction
29	*Teaching English and Conservation*	Personal Essay
2020		
30	*Photographs*	Memoir
31	*An Orang-utan's Reflection*	Flash Nonfiction
32	*Giving the Planet a Chance*	Personal Essay
33	*"Love you 3000" but Fewer than 80 Live*	Ecocriticism
34	*If I were the Orang-utan*	Segmented Essay

Table 2: The Frame of the Creative Nonfiction Artefact

The frame in Table 2 is the result after much evolution over the course of this three-year study. Initially, I could only plan based on my research, but when it came to actually crafting of the work, I hoped, as JK Rowling encourages us, to have the power to imagine better.[222] Details about this creative process are described in Chapter 5 Reflections.

[222] JK Rowling, Convocation Speech, 15 September 2011, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, youtube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHGqp8lz36c.

Chapter 4

4.0 The Creative Artefact

From interviews conducted with nineteen forest guards, wildlife biologists, keepers, eco-tour operators and conservationists, these thirty-four creative nonfiction pieces tell the stories of ordinary men and women involved in orang-utan conservation in Sarawak over fifty years. The personal experiences in the forests, at longhouses, wildlife centres and schools are written in different sub-genres of creative nonfiction, from biographical sketches, personal essays to literary journalism and lyric essays. Together, they tell of the frustrations, wonder, despair and joy in this daunting task of conserving the red ape found in the wild only in Borneo and Sumatra.

Part 1: 1970s

4.1 Story 1: *The Call of the Orang-utan*

Preamble

This creative nonfiction piece of Nature and Environmental writing weaves the stories of two Iban myths with a glimpse of the work of an Iban forest guard in a longhouse community at Nanga Delok, near Batang Ai National Park where the largest population of orang-utans live in Sarawak. The authorial voice is also introduced here; an opening to the montage that makes up this creative artefact.

The Call of the Orang-utan[223]

In the forest, a woman is straining to give birth. She and her husband had been walking to their fruit trees, when she is gripped with birthing pains. It happens suddenly and they are not ready. The husband runs back to the longhouse. But while he is gone, an orang-utan comes down from a tree and carries the woman up to her nest high in the forest canopy. It is cool there in the shelter of the branches and leaves. The orang-utan massages the woman's belly. She soothes her with crushed ginger.

[223] A version of this creative nonfiction work was published in *The Tiger Moth Review*, issue 3 on 13 March 2020.

Below on the forest floor, the woman's husband returns with a parang, but cannot find his wife. It is said that in the old days, the people had to cut open a woman's womb to deliver a child. The mother would die; that is how the story goes. It is not logical. You cannot ask how the longhouse people survived such harsh conditions. If every woman who gave birth had to die, how did communities survive with longhouses that numbered 40 or 50 doors with each door housing a family with many children and close relatives within it?

Nevertheless, the story is that the orang-utan sees the woman in labour in the forest, far from the longhouse. So, the orang-utan takes the woman up to the treetops and calms her. When the husband returns, the orang-utan gestures to him to put away his parang. She takes him up to the nest so that he might learn how to help his wife deliver a child naturally, the orang-utan way. The baby is born and the mother lives. Both are healthy. When they are recovered and ready to move, the orang-utan takes the mother and child down to the forest floor, and then the new father, who is now a midwife who will teach his relatives and friends how to safely deliver a child without endangering the mother's life.

It is believed that the orang-utan saved generations of humans. And for this reason, the longhouse people believe that they should never hunt nor kill an orang-utan.

Others believe a different story. This one was told to me by the Iban forest guard Enggoh anak Glak whose Muslim name is Mohammad Irwan Abdullah. Enggoh's work with the National Parks and Wildlife Office in the early 1990s took him with a conservation education team to longhouse communities near the Batang Ai National Park in Sri Aman Division. These areas are known orang-utan habitats and the conservation education team worked to find out what the longhouse people believed and how they could help them understand why it was important to conserve the protected wildlife; the orang-utan, in particular.

Enggoh was told this story by an old man at the Nanga Delok longhouse.

They said they cannot kill an orang-utan because that is their grandfather. I cannot tell you if this is just a nonsense story, but if you go to this longhouse, this Nanga Delok, they have a story about this one man, I think from this longhouse, quite a long time ago, maybe a hundred years ago.

He was walking in the forest when he met somebody, a stranger. So that man gave him a parang. They exchanged parangs and both of them introduced themselves. Then the stranger said he is an orang-utan. He's human, he said but he is originally an orang-utan. "So now we've become brothers and sisters. I give you this parang, so next time, please tell your people not to kill an orang-utan because we are one family."

Because of that, these longhouse people never want to kill an orang-utan because they think they are their grandfathers. So, when this man is dying, he says, "Don't bury me. Just take me to this mountain and put me there." When he died, his relatives did what he asked. But when they laid him down where he had told them to, suddenly the body gone. Gone, gone, gone, gone … then after a few minutes, they heard the call of an orang-utan. So, they believe that this man died and became an orang-utan. But whether that story is true or not, that is what the old man told me. And the parang that is given to that man by the orang-utan is still kept by the people in this longhouse.… Still, until today.

* * * * *

Have you seen the eyes of an orang-utan? Have you seen how he watches us and follows our movements? I've seen the orang-utan on the feeding platform at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. He reaches to pluck a banana from the bunch or a yellow-orange papaya lying on the platform. He seems gentle and even lazy in his movements, but he is a wild animal, and not a pet. Those eyes are so human, yet not human. Do generations of grandfathers come back in the form of orang-utans?

I asked Enggoh who told me the story of the orang-utan and the parang, and the grandfather who became an orang-utan, "Did you see the parang in the longhouse?" This is Enggoh's reply:

"I never saw that parang, but the people don't want to kill an orang-utan. Maybe if they kill an orang-utan, they will get bad thing, maybe they will get a storm or something like that, rain for so many months, or maybe people died or something like that. So, they don't want to go against their promises."

I think about the story that Enggoh told me. Whether I'm at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre watching the orang-utans feeding or taking a walk at an urban nature reserve, in a classroom with students or having dinner at home with my family, I think it's a good idea to keep our promises.

The people of Nanga Delok have kept theirs.

And today, the orang-utans still live freely in the Batang Ai area. Sometimes, if you're lucky, you can hear an orang-utan call.

4.2 Story 2: *On Arrival, Please Release*

Preamble

Two versions of the release of three young orang-utans that took place in Ulu Sebuyau in the 1970s are told in this piece of literary journalism. The two human participants in this drama tell the different versions of the story with flashbacks informing us of the world they lived in at that time. Some background to the three orang-utans released in Ulu Sebuyau is also provided, and the piece concludes with an imagined viewpoint of the orang-utan who lost her life in this tragic reintroduction of young orang-utans to the wild.

On Arrival, Please Release[224]

"On arrival, please release."

Banggan Empulu reads the words on the cigarette paper that Thulu Ayu hands him. These are his instructions then. After three months in Ulu Sebuyau [1], buying wood, wire and metal, and employing local villagers to help make the three cages, and still others to help create a trail in the forest, the orang-utans arrive by helicopter courtesy of the Royal Malaysian Air Force and these are the instructions … on a piece of cigarette paper! But he is a forest guard [2] only. The instructions are from the Wildlife Officer [3].

The three young orang-utans are carried down from the helicopter on the make-shift helipad behind the primary school SRK Padawan [4]. They had been sedated for the journey and are still groggy in their small cages. The longhouse people have come to help. They are very curious.

Why are the orang-utans coming to our village?

Why are the orang-utans in the helicopter? We cannot fly in the helicopter but the orang-utans can.

They help to carry the orang-utans. Each is in a small cage. One villager, Sambang, can carry a cage by himself, but the others are carried by two people sharing the burden. They are carried to a boat, and after about half an hour on the water, it's time to carry the orang-utans on foot again. They find the trail near Bukit Keladan and set out to the chosen site.

When they reach the site, the animals are still groggy, so they camp overnight. In the morning, Banggan gives them bananas, papayas and sweet potatoes he has bought from the

[224] A version of this piece of literary journalism was published in the 2019 Special Issue: Peripheral Visions of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*.

village. Then he opens the cages. Bullet, Seduku and Banggan – the orang-utan named after him – are released. They disappear into the forest. Over the next three days, the young orang-utans return sporadically to the cages. Though the Wildlife Officer told him simply "on arrival, please release", Banggan leaves fruit by the cages. He knows these young orang-utans have lived in human company since infancy and they have always had plenty of fruit laid out for them. The young orang-utans eat the fruit Banggan leaves by the cages and then amble back to the trees. After the third day, they don't come back. They have found an abundance of fruit in the forest or are lost. There is no way to know.

* * *

Two or three years previously in the early 1970s, an injured orphaned baby orang-utan is brought to Dr Daniel Kok. He's not a vet, but he is the only doctor in town who will treat any of the wild animals that are rescued or confiscated. Dr Kok removes the shotgun pellets from the baby orang-utan's scalp. The infant orang-utan survives and is named Bullet, cared for by the doctor's American wife, Elizabeth, in their house on a hill at Batu Lintang.

In 1975, Semenggoh Wildlife Centre is established. Confiscated animals like hornbills, gibbons and Proboscis monkeys are brought to the wildlife centre to be rehabilitated. When he is a few years old, Bullet joins them. His one-time companion at the Koks' home, Archie, is also transferred from the Wildlife Officer's home to Semenggoh.

A while later, Seduku is brought to Semenggoh. Named after the place of her birth in Sri Aman district, she was bought for RM80. In fact, the forest guard Banggan gives the RM80 to placate the young man who claims the orang-utan as his own. He is furious that Banggan wants to take her from him. The forest guard tells the young man that the orang-utan is weak; she will die if she doesn't get the proper food and treatment. Banggan is well aware that he is not supposed to pay for the animals he confiscates, but the young man is angry. He uses an axe to cut up the post in the *langkau* [5]. "If you take my orang-utan, I will kill you," the young man says. Banggan offers him RM80; it's all he has. Finally, the young man gives up the orang-utan. The forest guard has the authority of the government behind him.

The last of the trio, Banggan, is named for the forest guard who retrieved her from Rumah [6] Bengap Musim, Batang Ai [7]. The longhouse folk had found and kept her. Banggan doesn't know what happened to the mother; only that the protected animal is being kept in the longhouse. The local Forest Department staff had notified the headquarters in

Kuching [8] about the young animal and so Banggan is asked to travel to Batang Ai to bring her back. When he reaches the longhouse, Banggan asks to see the orang-utan. She is in poor condition. The longhouse folk had not known how to care for her, so when Banggan asks them if he can take the orang-utan, they say yes.

"She was female but because I brought her all the way from Batang Ai to Semenggoh, she was named after me. It was the Wildlife Officer who gave her my name," Banggan explains with a laugh. The young orang-utan thrived at Semenggoh. "She was beautiful with very shiny, bushy hair," Banggan tells me.

* * *

The Wildlife Officer has plans. He hopes to set up a habitat management program around the edges of the Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and a rehabilitation centre near Gunung Lesong in Sri Aman division. He thinks about Archie, the young orang-utan who had lived with him for two years "in a cage at the back of the house". There had been nowhere else for young orphaned Archie to stay. Dr Kok's house was a literal menagerie and so the Wildlife Officer had taken Archie in.

Every morning, before he left for work, he would visit Archie in his cage. He would bring him his breakfast and watch the young orang-utan eat some bananas and papayas. Archie would enjoy the rambutans and durians during the fruiting season when they were plentiful and cheap. Then, when Archie was about two, he was taken to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. He was judged to be old enough and ready to be released and taught how to find fruit for himself in the wild forested area. Feeding times were carried out twice a day at Semenggoh, and Archie returned to the feeding areas to eat his fill of the fruit. He learned to use the vines and branches to slowly sway through the trees till he reached the fruit left on the wooden platforms.

Even then, the Wildlife Officer and Archie still have a bond. "We had this trust thing," he tells me. "I'd take his finger and put his knuckle between my teeth and bite and he'd take my finger and bite."

It is with Archie in mind, and all the other orang-utans that have been rescued and trained to thrive in a semi-wild state, that the Wildlife Officer hatches a plan to find them a home in the wild away from the feeding routine at the platforms in Semenggoh Wildlife Centre.

At a British Council [9] function in Kuching, he meets an Air Vice-Marshall in the Malaysian Royal Air Force telling stories about using helicopters to drop off food and supplies at Gunung Mulu National Park. The Wildlife Officer explains his plans to set up a rehabilitation centre at Gunung Lesong in Sri Aman Division and to release orang-utans from Semenggoh on the outskirts of Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary. He tells the Air Vice-Marshall, "I'm looking for help to move orang-utans in cages out into the forest because I have plans for a rehabilitation centre in the swamp forest." Happily, the Air Vice-Marshall is very obliging and helpful.

So, the Wildlife Officer makes arrangements with the Royal Malaysian Air Force and soon helicopters are at his disposal. He is very excited and is on the verge of implementing his planned rehabilitation centre at Gunung Lesong and the release of orang-utans at Lanjak Entimau.

I ask the Wildlife Officer, "so tell me about the orang-utans that were taken out there."

He replies, "No, we didn't get that far."

He says quickly, "I was sabotaged. That's all I can say."

He says nothing about the three young orang-utans flown to Ulu Sebuyau, nor instructions given to a young forest guard on a piece of cigarette paper.

Soon after, the Wildlife Officer is offered a job with a non-governmental organisation in Indonesia, and he leaves Sarawak. He is to return nearly four decades later to live in Kuching through the Malaysia, My Second Home program, and that is when we accidentally meet, and he shares his stories.

* * *

Although the Wildlife Officer has instructed Banggan to simply release the young orang-utans, the forest guard tries to monitor their movements. When they no longer return to the cages to feed on the fruit left for them, Banggan gathers the other forest guards and longhouse folk he had employed to help carry the orang-utans to the site. They start searching for the young orang-utans but are not successful; Ahmad Engan, one of the workers from Semenggoh who had joined the team, gets lost himself and has to spend the night alone in the forest.

Despite their efforts, they cannot track the orang-utans until one day, a few weeks later, they find Banggan lying at the base of a tree. She is dead; terribly thin with no evidence of injuries or attacks. Banggan believes she died of starvation and he realises that the other two cannot survive in the forest either. They redouble their efforts but still cannot find Bullet and Seduku.

About a month after the orang-utans have been released, some local farmers call the Forest Department saying that two orang-utans are wandering in their pepper gardens. Banggan goes to the pepper gardens and leaves fruit to tempt the orang-utans. When the fruit is taken, he knows they are nearby and hungry and they will come again. So, he leaves fruit for them again and one day, he is there when the orang-utans appear. When he emerges to lead them into cages, they come with him quite willingly. They are thin and weak. They do not resist. They follow the forest guard.

Banggan takes them back to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. The release and rehabilitation attempt has failed. Later, he is summoned to explain what had happened, why Banggan, the beautiful female orang-utan with shiny, bushy hair, had died. He must tell the truth and he explains about the simple message on the cigarette paper.

* * *

The retired forest guard takes a sip of jasmine green tea. His eyes are looking somewhere else, his mind far away in the past as I scribble in my notepad.

Banggan was beautiful; she had shiny, bushy hair.

In my mind, I see a young orang-utan with beautiful, shiny bushy hair, snatched from her mother, taken from her home in the forest, caged in the *langkau*, fed rotten vegetables and fruit, maybe even stale bread and leftover rice. Then she's taken to new place far away. She doesn't know she's been rescued, but in this new place, she can see many trees, and she can see other animals trapped in wired enclosures of different sizes. First, she is also kept in a cage. After some time, she is let out and is encouraged to climb up trees and ropes. There are other orang-utans in this forested area, but she doesn't know how to behave with them. How do you speak to strangers when you haven't spoken the language in a long time? She only knows the language and behaviour that humans have taught her. Eventually, she learns how to climb trees and hold onto vines, ropes and branches. She enjoys the figs in the forest and learns to forage. But still, she comes back to the fresh bananas and papayas that are laid out

on the wooden boards and planks twice a day. Many humans come to see her and the other orang-utans feeding. Some are little like she is. But she is growing bigger and stronger.

Then one day, she is given something that makes her sleep for a long while. When she wakes, she is being carried in a little cage along a strange trail. She's still groggy so she sleeps some more. In the morning, she wakes up properly and is more alert now. A familiar man gives her some fruit. The bananas, papayas and sweet potatoes are tasty. Then he opens the cage. The door is wide open. There are trees and ferns, little shoots and leaves on the ground. She sees the wires of the cage on her sides and behind her. She smells the man nearby, holding the door open. In front are the trees. She leans forward on her knuckles and shuffles out slowly. She feels the forest floor beneath her. Then she reaches up and touches the nearest tree. She grasps the tree bark and slowly climbs up. Maybe she is confused, excited, anxious. Maybe she asks herself, is this home? She disappears up the tree. Ulu Sebuyau. Home.

4.3 Story 3: *Seduku*

Preamble

This Collage pieces together the life of the orang-utan Seduku, confiscated in the 1970s, now living semi-wild in Semenggoh Wildlife Centre and the nature reserve it borders. It tells the whole story – as much as we can say it is a whole story - of Seduku, who was introduced in the previous piece, *On Arrival, Please Release*. She was one of the three young orang-utans released in the failed attempt at reintroducing semi-wild "rehabilitated" orang-utans in Ulu Sebuyau. Part Portrait (of the orang-utan herself), part Ecocriticism, the author-narrator asks the reader to consider what it means for a semi-wild orang-utan to give birth to young in a nature reserve, never able to be truly wild and independent in the wide expanse of a natural habitat. It is a question also for humans; what are we doing to protect these sentient beings that are snatched from their mothers and their natural homes? What do we owe this endangered species?

Seduku[225]

The young man raises the *kapak*[226] and strikes the post with it.

"If you take my orang-utan, I will kill you."

He raises the *kapak* again and cuts up the post of the *langkau*[227].

Banggan Empulu says to the young man, "I'll pay for the milk, whatever you gave for the sugar cane. I'll give you eighty ringgit."

The young man rages on with the sharp *kapak* in his hand, but finally, he gives in. He must, for Banggan is a Forest Guard[228], and he has the government behind him. The officers at the Forest Department nearby in Lingga were the ones who had written the report about a baby orang-utan that was being kept in a *langkau*. Banggan had been directed by his

[225] A version of this creative nonfiction piece was published in *Anak Sastra*, issue 36, on 1 August 2019.

[226] The Iban word for axe. The Iban use it when they are hunting or doing chores on their farms.

[227] The Iban term for a shed erected in the middle of farmland away from the longhouse and is used by farmers to take a rest during the day. It is sometimes used as a night stop for hunters

[228] A Forest Guard is an official entry level position in the Sarawak Forest Department. Forest guards are civil servants with promotional opportunities to Forest Ranger and then Forest Officer and Senior Officer levels depending on academic qualifications and completion of Promotion courses (Sarawak Forest Department http://forestry.sarawak.gov.my/modules/web/pages.php?mod=webpage&sub=page&id=780&menu_id=139&sub_id=193).

superiors at Forest Department Headquarters in Kuching to go to the village in Sebuyau to find that baby orang-utan and to bring it back to Kuching.

It is the mid-1970s and Semenggoh Wildlife Centre[229] has recently been established. Several other confiscated orang-utans have been brought here, and along with gibbons and Lesser Adjutant Storks, are housed in cages.

Banggan travels back to Kuching with the baby orang-utan. It is scrawny and weak. The angry young man with the *kapak* had refused to tell him where he had found it nor what had happened to its mother. A young orang-utan depends on its mother for most of its first five years, clinging almost continuously to her for the first year of its life and only weaned by about three and a half. Banggan knows this young orang-utan has lost its mother too soon.

At Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, the young orang-utan is given a name, Seduku. She is named after the small village where she had been found in the coastal town of Sebuyau. It is too soon to let her roam freely with the other orang-utans, so she is caged. What does the young orang-utan make of this new home? Does it remind her of her birthplace in the forest of Sebuyau? Or is the only thing that she remembers the wooden *langkau* where a young man occasionally visits her and feeds her? Is his the only touch she remembers?

The wildlife centre is nestled in a nature reserve where the confiscated animals are gradually released when they are believed to be ready to learn to forage and make nests for themselves in the trees. Seduku is eventually allowed out of her cage and brought to a small clearing in the forest where a rope dangles enticingly from a branch. She ambles around the ground, while the forest guard or keeper watches her, waiting. Sometimes this goes on for days, but eventually, the young orang-utan learns to climb up the rope, up the tree and into the canopy, to perch on branches with her strong feet and hands.

Twice a day, fresh fruit like bananas and papayas are left at the feeding platform[230] where visitors are allowed to gather to catch a glimpse of these great apes. During the fruiting season when the fruits and figs are plentiful, the semi-wild orang-utans roaming in the nature reserve rarely visit the feeding areas. Visitors wait to no avail and go away disappointed, but

[229] Semenggoh Nature Reserve is located 20 km from Kuching, the capital of Sarawak. It is one of 14 nature reserves in Sarawak and was the original site for orang-utan rehabilitation and release. As it has reached its capacity for orang-utans, the rehabilitation of newly confiscated wildlife has been moved to Matang Wildlife Centre.

[230] At the time in the 1970s, there was only one feeding platform, but in 2012-2013, a second feeding platform was constructed to accommodate the growth of the semi-wild colony.

this is the way the gradual rehabilitation of the confiscated wild animals works. They are not caged nor confined in enclosures as animals in zoos are but are free to roam in the nature reserve.

The truth is, though, they are confined nonetheless. The boundaries of the nature reserve are not visible to our eye, but on the outskirts of the reserve are villages and residential areas. Human habitation has pushed and squeezed the wild animals into an area of 653 hectares.[231] During the fruiting season, some orang-utans will venture to the orchards or fruit trees in gardens of the nearby villages. This is a concern, but so far, the villagers have generally tolerated the incursions.

When she is still not fully grown, less than five years, and when she should still be with her mother if she were in the wild, Seduku is selected, along with two other young orang-utans for a rehabilitation and release attempt at Ulu Sebuyau[232]. The Wildlife Officer[233] who decides this is an expatriate who has worked in forestry and wildlife in Nigeria and Hong Kong. He has worked tirelessly to secure alternate transportation for the young orang-utans so they don't have the arduous road and river trip from Semenggoh to Ulu Sebuyau.

Sedated for the journey on a Malaysian Air Force helicopter, Seduku and the two other orang-utans, Bullet and Banggan (named for the same forest guard who rescued her), arrive at Sebuyau. Thulu Ayu accompanies them on this journey as he is the keeper from Semenggoh who is most familiar to the young orang-utans. At the make-shift landing pad behind a primary school, Banggan Empulu waits to meet them. He has been in Ulu Sebuyau for three months preparing for the rehabilitation and release of these young orang-utans. Under instructions from the wildlife officer, he has employed local villagers to assist in building three cages, each strong enough to house an orang-utan and still others, to make a trail to the release site.

When the helicopter lands and Thulu emerges, he hands Banggan a piece of cigarette paper. Banggan unfolds the small chit and reads: "On arrival, please release."

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[231] Happily, today, there are plans to re-connect this area to a larger forest, further south at Bungo Range.

[232] Located in the Sri Aman and Samarahan divisions on the western part of Sarawak, Ulu Sebuyau had not yet been gazetted as a national park in the 1970s. Known as an area populated by orang-utans, it was officially gazetted as a national park in 2010.

[233] The first Conservator of Forests in the Sarawak Forest Department was Mr J. P. Mead in 1919; this was the equivalent of today's Director of Forests. The names and roles of positions have changed over time, and this research participant whom I will refer to as the "Wildlife Officer" held a variety of positions in the department from Assistant Conservator of Forests to National Parks and Wildlife Officer in the late 1970s.

Banggan and the team have been preparing for a soft release; the orang-utans being fed in their cages and slowly being acclimatised to the new surroundings before being allowed out on their own. The instructions on the piece of cigarette paper are flatly the opposite of this plan. But Banggan is just a forest guard; he must obey orders from the Wildlife Officer.

The next morning, the three orang-utans are released from their cages. Despite instructions to simply let them go, Banggan leaves fruit beside the cages. He is fearful the young orang-utans will not be able to cope in the forest on their own. For three days, the orang-utans return and eat the fruit. After the third day, they do not return. Perhaps they have found an abundance of fruit and figs, maybe they have managed to make their own nests and are adapting. It is impossible to tell. So Banggan, the few staff from Semenggoh and some villagers who are eager to help set out to search for the orang-utans. They try to track them, but are unable to find them till one day, a week later, they come across Banggan, the female orang-utan with beautiful shiny, bushy hair. She is lying dead at the foot of a tree, thin and limp.

The forest guard looks at his namesake; the young orang-utan he had been sent out to recover from a longhouse in Batang Ai. The longhouse folk had not known how to care for the orphaned orang-utan and had reported to the Forest Department. Banggan believes she has died from starvation, and the other two orang-utans must be found as soon as possible.

After weeks of searching, the Forest Department receives a call from local farmers reporting of two orang-utans in their pepper garden. Seduku and Bullet are enticed with some fresh fruit, and when Banggan appears to lead them to the cages, they follow him willingly.

So, Seduku is brought back to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. She and Bullet seem to recover from their brief experience of “freedom” at Ulu Sebuyau. The failed reintroduction attempt that took the life of the young orang-utan Banggan shocked many, including the disappointed Wildlife Officer. Soon after, he leaves for a job with a conservation organisation in Indonesia.

As time goes by, visitors are treated to Bullet’s antics imitating his human keepers, pushing wheelbarrows and sweeping the leaves with a rake. The wife of the Forest Department’s Deputy Director brings her children to enjoy the trails and shady trees, and to watch the orang-utans up close. Bullet sidles up to her and leans against her leg and side,

rubbing against her. Seduku is quiet and stays away. She appears calm and thoughtful. But who knows what an orang-utan is thinking?

Seduku's reputation as a gentle, calm and happy orang-utan grows when she bears her first baby. Over the following years, she becomes a poster child for successful rehabilitation techniques and release at the nature reserve. The semi-wild colony of orang-utans is growing, and Seduku has three more babies. Biologists and conservationists argue whether the breeding of semi-wild orang-utans should be encouraged or disallowed. Nonetheless, over the years, more confiscated animals are brought to the Centre and more babies are born. The nature reserve has more than reached its capacity, so newly confiscated orang-utans are taken to an alternate site, Matang Wildlife Centre[234].

In the wild, orang-utans have been known to live up to 35 years; in zoos, the oldest has lived for 59 years. Seduku is considered a success story; now in her 40s, she is still breeding with a succession of live babies thriving. She roams Semenggoh Nature Reserve but returns for the fresh fruit with her young in tow. The visitors love her and she is referred to as a surrogate mother to young ones other than her own biological offspring. We could say that her roots are now firmly entrenched in Semenggoh Nature Reserve. The failed release at Ulu Sebuyau, near where she had been originally found, tells us that her adoption is complete.

What are roots anyway? Are they a sense of belonging to a physical place? Can our roots shift if we are torn away too young, or adapt so thoroughly to a new home? Placing Seduku back where she originated failed miserably, in part, perhaps because science then was not as advanced as it is today. What do we actually know as humans or about animals when it comes to rehabilitation and freedom? What really are our roots and how strongly do they figure in our lives? I remember what a friend once told me. Home is where my loved ones are; it doesn't matter where I am, in Sarawak or in California, so long as I'm with the people I love.

Seduku sways gently amid the branches. Slowly, she lowers herself and her baby to the platform. She picks up a banana and peels it. Her lips pucker as she nibbles the fruit. Her baby clings to her. Seduku ignores the humans watching her. She eats till she's had enough.

[234] Matang Wildlife Centre is located some 40 minutes from Kuching, and its 180 hectares of lowland forest are home to rehabilitated orang-utans and other protected species such as the sun bear, clouded leopard and bearcat. Apart from observing the wildlife, members of the public can also enjoy trekking on four trails of varying distances. Conservation education activities are regularly held at the Centre, with school children and teachers alike being exposed to nature and wildlife in person.

Slowly, she reaches up and grasps the rope. Within moments, she disappears into the canopy. Perhaps she will be back tomorrow.

4.4 Story 4: *Three Orang-utans, a Flying Fox and its Mother*

Preamble

This Portrait of a young conservationist takes us from scenes of his childhood to those in his young adulthood when he is working in the Sarawak Forest Department's National Parks and Wildlife Office, debating on whether to pursue doctoral studies in wildlife biology. His encounters with orang-utans and flying foxes have a profound impact on his decision.

Three Orang-utans, a Flying Fox and its Mother

Kuching, 1972

The long, dark fingers curl around the bars on the cage. In the gloom against the shaded wall, the boy sees an eye gleam from behind matted orange-reddish brown hair. The eye follows him as his mother holds his hand and they walk across the open car park towards the Forest Section Office canteen. He's eight years old; a scrawny, sickly child who often spends more time at his mother's office than at school. The night before, he had slept poorly, coughing and wheezing. Father had propped him up in a chair so he could breathe more easily, and in the morning, his brothers and sister were sent off to school while the boy went with Mother to her office.

He had curled up in a corner of the secretarial pool on a rattan chair with a soft cushion, dozing off now and then, with typewriters clacking away and telephones ringing in the background. Forest administrative clerks came in and out of the office. They typed, answered calls, made appointments, searched for records in heavy grey filing cabinets. In the corner, forest guards exchanged stories about their latest outstation trips while overhead, the air-conditioner rattled noisily. It was 1971 and the upside of being unwell was being able to watch a thermal photocopier in action. The downside was in his feverish state, the air-conditioned room was giving him the chills. Mother wrapped the boy up in a thin cotton blanket and he tried to nap despite the cacophony of voices speaking in multiple languages that sound worse than the vegetable sellers and hawkers at the Sunday market at Gartak Street, a stone's throw from Mother's office. Local Sarawak Malay, Hakka, Hokkien, English, Bidayuh and Iban clashed in the boy's ears. His headache was growing when a man with a bushy moustache popped his head out of his office and asked Mother for some files. After passing him the files, Mother finally said they could go to the canteen for elevenses.

The boy and his mother walk down the white and black tiled stairs to the ground floor and start across the car park to the canteen. They pass the big bosses' cars parked in the shade, and then head for the open car park. A few forest guards are sitting on their

motorcycles, taking a cigarette break. They greet Mother calling her “Madam” or “Kakak” and give the boy a friendly smile. It makes him feel good they respect his mother and feel they can call her “Big Sister”. Then, he has eyes only for the two metal cages against the far wall under the shade. He has never seen those before in the car park. The nearer cage holds the largest bird he has ever seen. It is a tall grey and white bird with long spindly legs and a huge beak. When he asks what it is, one of the forest guards tells him it is a Lesser Adjutant Stork. He wonders about the word “lesser”. Why is it “lesser”? Is there a “greater” Adjutant Stork? Mother has no answers for him. But then he forgets about the tall, stick-legged bird with its long sharp bill and bald head. The other cage holds a young orang-utan. As they get closer, the boy catches a whiff of a strange smell coming from the small and rusty cage. Living in Sarawak, he could not have failed to have seen pictures of this iconic creature. But this is the first time that he has seen one live and close-up. His face is wrinkled and his nose squished in, but oh, his eyes! They are so large and sad, and there are big bags around them. His mouth curves up but he doesn’t think the orang-utan is smiling. He is just looking at the boy with those big, sad eyes. He blinks and his eyes follows the young boy as he and his mother walk up to his cage. Mother won’t let him get too close. “He’s really strong,” Mother pulls the boy back. “Orang-utans are much stronger than we humans are.”

The boy wants to get closer. What do those large fingers feel like? Are those dark finger nails as tough as they look? Is the orange reddish-brown hair coarse and hard or is it smooth and silky like his pet dog’s? Those eyes look like they want to tell the boy something. But Mother pulls him away. “Come on, don’t get close. Orang-utans are dangerous. The forest guards who brought him in told us the story. This one was a family pet, but they can’t take care of it anymore. He’s about two years old now - too strong, too wild. And the family has a baby now. It’s not safe. Orang-utans aren’t meant to be in a house living with people.”

The boy and his mother stop in front of the cage. “What’s going to happen to the orang-utan?” the boy asks, staring at those sad eyes that are looking at him and his mother.

“He’s going to the rehabilitation centre where people can take care of him,” Mother says. “That’s the only place for him now. And that family is going to be warned. We’re not supposed to take wild animals from the forest.”

“What happened to this orang-utan’s real mother?” Mother tugs the boy onwards towards the canteen. “We’re not sure. She’s probably dead. Shot or sold to someone else. Otherwise the hunters could never have taken this young orang-utan.” Mother speaks as if

this is a common occurrence. The boy looks up at her. Maybe it is. Maybe working in the Section Forest Office makes this seem normal. Mother seems to have forgotten about the orang-utan; she is looking at the hawker stalls in the canteen. "*Laksa, kolo mee* or *bubur*?" she asked the boy. What a question! Even if I felt awful, I would never choose porridge! "*Laksa*?" Mother has been teasing; she knows exactly the kind of noodles he likes.

Over a bowl of *Sarawak laksa* at the canteen, the young boy wonders about what Mother has said. The young orang-utan doesn't look dangerous. He looks miserable, all alone and caged up. And he had been living with a family. Does that mean he had been taken from the only family he knew? Or maybe he realises that he had been taken from his wild family and then again from his human family? The boy thinks about how he felt when he, his brothers and sister had to go off to stay with their grandparents and aunt in Miri during the long school holidays. He had felt homesick at first, but he had always known they would come home to their parents after the holidays ended.

As Mother gives the boy a helping of *cucur pisang,* he is still thinking about the orang-utan. He hopes the young animal will still be there after the meal. He thinks he might be able to edge closer to the cage if he is walking back to the Section Forest Office on Mother's left side. "Eat the *cucur pisang*," Mother tells the boy. It is easier not to argue with her. Anyway, he can't taste them since his nose is blocked, so he decides not to make a fuss. As he chews on a banana fritter, he plans how he will get up to walk back on Mother's left side.

On the way back to the secretarial pool, the boy pretends he has to stop to tighten his shoe lace and when he gets up, he casually slips over to walk on Mother's left, closer to the cages. This time, Mother is distracted by the forest guards who are still chatting over their cigarettes. They ask her something about the Director's upcoming visit, so he inches his way closer to the cage. The orang-utan turns his head and looks at the boy. The cage is so small, he can't stand up. He has to stay seated, hunched over, and has to twist a little to look at the boy eye to eye. "Hey, hey," the boy reaches out his hand to touch the orang-utan's fingers curled around the bars of the cage. But before their fingers touch, Mother snatches the boy back. "Stop that!" she shouts. Some of the forest guards laugh but a couple shake their heads at the boy. "He could break your fingers!" Mother scolds and pushes the boy back towards the stairs. He doesn't say anything. It is bad enough that Mother had scolded him in front of the forest guards. He can't forget the look in the orang-utan's eyes, and the way he had

uncurled his fingers from around the bar, as if he was going to reach out to meet the boy's skinny fingers.

Batang Ai National Park, 1992

It is many years later when the grown-up Melvin Gumal sees an orang-utan in the wild for the first time. Through his school years, he has never forgotten that scrunched up figure in the small cage and his plight of being twice separated from a family; first his orang-utan mother in the forest, and then the human family that had raised him in their home until he grew too big and strong. School visits to Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre and later, his work as an Education Officer in the National Parks and Wildlife Office had brought him in close contact with captive orang-utans. He had not been able to discover if any of those strapping young adult orang-utans at the rehabilitation centre was the orphaned orang-utan he had thought had once reached out to him. Maybe he had not survived.

Now, on the trail in the forest near Rumah Jengin, Dr Elizabeth Bennett asks, "How much longer?"

"One stick of cigarette," Griffin, the guide replies. He takes out a thin slip of rolling paper – white with red trimmings - and shakes some tobacco from his pouch. With deft fingers, the young Iban guide rolls his cigarette, lights it, and draws in a deep breath. He grins at us as he squats in the shade.

Melvin shrugs off his backpack and lets it slide to the ground, reaching for his water bottle wrapped in green army style canvas. It had taken six hours on the old single-lane pot-holed road from Kuching to the Batang Ai Dam. Once there, they had taken a single-engine longboat to ride up to the Jengin River. That had taken another two hours as they had to negotiate their way through log-jams. The British researcher Mike Meredith and Melvin have been on this journey many times over the past few years. Mike is studying the orang-utan population in and around Batang Ai National Park and is well known among the longhouse folk. His two field assistants are young men from the longhouse community. Melvin has been doing conservation education work here with his colleagues from the National Parks and Wildlife Office.

On this trip, they are journeying to the longhouses at the Batang Ai National Park with Dr Liz to show her good friend from a Taiwanese university, primatologist Dr Lee Ling Ling, the conservation education work Melvin and his team are doing among the local

communities. Reaching out to the longhouse folk and gaining their trust and cooperation are the only ways to keep the wildlife safe as hunting is a way of life for them and it's their legal right as stated in the state's Native Customary Rights. Conservation education is not a quick fix but is hoped to be a long-term solution to stop the hunting and the temptation of illegal trade in wildlife.

The night before, at the longhouse Rumah Rimong, four forest guards had performed a skit based on a traditional story of how orang-utans had taught humans how to give birth naturally. It had been performed in the local language, Iban, by Iban forest guards, Christopher Kri, Enggoh Glak, Kerchendai Bakir and Uning Paun. Though the forest guards were considered townsfolk, they spoke the same language and were recognised as kin. The enthusiastically-performed 20-minute skit had been well-received by an appreciative audience. These longhouse families were receptive to the message that humans should not harm orang-utans as they had saved their ancestors from perishing in childbirth.

Now the little group has stopped for a short break during a seven-hour trek to Bukit Seligi where orang-utans have been sighted by the longhouse folk. They had left the longhouse at dawn, hoping to make good time while the air was still cool and fresh. When they had started out, they had walked through morning mist. Now, the sun has been shining relentlessly for hours, and even with the shade of the forest canopy, the little group is relieved Griffin stops for a break. The gulp of water soothes Melvin's dry throat, but oddly, Griffin has no need of water, just his handily rolled cigarette. He puffs at his cigarette and appears to be contemplating the light falling through the trees and lianas onto the trail leading further into the forest. Mike, Dr Liz and Melvin have been spending a lot of time in different field locations in Sarawak so they're used to the rough terrain and the tiresome leeches and insects. Unfortunately, straight off the plane from a temperate climate, Dr Lee is having difficulty adjusting to the humidity and relentless heat despite the forest canopy. Despite this, she has kept up with the group; her determination to see a wild orang-utan propels her on. While she has enjoyed observing the interactions between the forest guards and the local people, Dr Lee longs to see an orang-utan in the wild. Melvin does, too. He is working to save orang-utans and their habitats, but he has only ever seen captive and semi-wild orang-utans at rehabilitation centres. This morning, he had set off with his companions, all of them cheerful and optimistic. After all, Mike has been studying the orang-utans in this landscape, and has seen them numerous times.

After enjoying a short break and still holding his unfinished cigarette, Griffin guides the little group on along the narrow trails and through clear pebble streams, but though they see orang-utan nests, they are not able to sight any of the animals. They hear noisy babblers and sometimes, are fortunate enough to spot the shy birds. Once, a tree shrew turns in the path, stares at the little troupe of humans for a moment, and then scampers up into the trees.

Late in the morning, the rustling of leaves overhead alerts the group to a family of monkeys swinging 50 feet above us in the canopy. It's as if they fly through the trees, swinging and catching branches nimbly, more daring and death-defying than any trapeze artist. Their next treat is when Dr Liz spots a large black bird with an outsized beak and casque. The hornbill cries out harshly; it's not a pretty call, but the bird is a rare sight, and Melvin feels lucky to be able to see it. Its size and wingspan cause a "whoosh" as it swoops through the trees and perches on a branch to survey the area. Hornbill feathers are treasured by the local people and are used in traditional dances and to decorate head-dresses. Eight species can be found here in Sarawak, the Land of the Hornbill; their unique size, colours and magnificent bills stand out in the sky and in the forest. Dr Lee enjoys these sightings but is disappointed that she has not been able to see an orang-utan in the wild.

The orang-utan remains elusive even when the group reaches Bukit Seligi. Though they wait patiently, there is none in sight. As the morning stretches to afternoon, Griffin advises the group to turn back. In the forest, dark comes swiftly and it is a long way back to the longhouse. They have no choice and so start trudging down the trail, retracing our steps. Three hours later, they are still making their way through the forest feeling disgruntled and disappointed. Suddenly, Griffin stops, gesturing that everyone should be quiet. Dr Liz immediately looks up and peers through the black Leitz binoculars slung around her neck. Then, even with his naked eye, Melvin can make out on the branches a female orang-utan and her young, about 100 feet away and 30 feet up in the canopy. The infant orang-utan is clutching his mother who is staring down at the group from the tree. It is difficult not to rush forward to get a closer look. Looking at the orang-utans through a pair of binoculars or the camera lens is just not good enough. Even the most hardened and well-schooled of primatologists has to fight the urge to get closer to this magnificent creature. Slowly, they edge closer, but soon realise that the orang-utan mother is getting agitated. With her powerful arms, she breaks off a branch and hurls it in the group's direction. She does this more than once, and then starts bellowing. Dr Liz motions to the rest to move on and away; the mother orang-utan is getting stressed. The group backs up. They shouldn't distress the mother orang-

utan any longer, for her infant's sake and for their own. They would be no match for the orang-utan's great strength and speed, but that's not the only point. There's no telling how her reactions might injure the infant clinging to her.

The return trek to the longhouse is easier now they are energised by what they have seen. Melvin tries to remember the details of the mother and her infant. Seeing them reminds him of that young orang-utan confiscated from a human family that wanted him as pet. He remembers what his Mother had told him; that the young orang-utan's own mother must have been killed or also taken to be sold. He has since learned from his work in the National Parks and Wildlife Office that this means she could have been sold in the illegal wildlife trade as an exotic pet or as a specimen to a private zoo which would result in a lifetime in captivity in conditions that range from restrictive to cruel and inhumane.

Dr Liz has repeatedly urged Melvin to go back to school, encouraging him to pursue doctoral studies in wildlife biology. He has knowledge of forestry and conservation education and development, but he needs to know more. This is not for a lifetime in the ivory tower of academia. Dr Liz is trying to persuade Melvin to study wildlife so that he can use his new skills and knowledge to protect the wildlife here in Sarawak. She and her colleagues in the New York Zoological Society, now known as the Wildlife Conservation Society, like Mike Meredith and the famous Dr George Schaller who studied orang-utans in Borneo in the 1960s and who wrote the seminal book on pandas, "The Last Panda" in 1993, study wildlife to help inform and work to conserve the species and their habitats. The human-animal conflict is very real, but conservation education work is only one part of the solution.

As they continue walking back to Rumah Jengin, the daylight starts fading and Griffin goes up to Mike, the eldest in the group and the person he knows best. He tells Mike he'll head back to the longhouse to get torches. Meantime, the group must walk slowly and carefully and keep to the trail. With that, Griffin moves nimbly and swiftly ahead. Before long, he disappears from sight, and the group keeps going, sometimes slipping and sometimes tripping on the roots and uneven ground. Stumbling in the growing darkness, Melvin thinks about what waits for them at the longhouse: a wash in the cool river, a simple meal with the hospitable longhouse folk, and a night's rest on the *ruai*, verandah. Then he sees in his mind, the orang-utan mother and her infant; her fear and anger as she breaks and flings the branches towards them. He sees the young caged orang-utan at the Section Forest Office carpark and the confiscated animals at the Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre. In his work, he

had once come upon a flying fox that had been shot by poachers. It was dead, but clinging to it was an infant, still alive. It would not be alive for much longer. It was too young and could only cling to and suckle the breast of the dead mother. Those images have stayed with Melvin.

Dr Liz believes that young Malaysians should be given the chance to blossom and grow in wildlife conservation. She has worked in Sarawak for 18 years, writing the first detailed field study of the proboscis monkey and studying the effects of hunting and logging on wildlife. But she believes the time for westerners telling the indigenous people how to protect and conserve their wildlife and habitats needs to go the way of formal colonialism. She doesn't say that but in every way it is implied. Melvin knows she is right. He must take the plunge and follow in the footsteps of the other young Malaysians like Zainuddin Dahaban who spent three weeks each month over a two-year period in a tent near a logging camp studying wildlife. Melvin may not have studied wildlife biology in the classroom, but he has worked with wildlife biologists at their research sites. He has many hours of field experience in the remote areas of Sarawak and has worked with local communities who are crucial to protecting and saving the wildlife. Working on a PhD in wildlife biology will be the next challenge.

The images of the orang-utan mother and her infant near Bukit Seligi, the captive young male snatched away from his mother and abandoned by his human family, and the baby flying fox suckling on its dead mother remain with Melvin. They help him make up his mind to do the research, seek the knowledge that he can use to save the animals that humans threaten. He realises that whether smugglers or poachers, the consumers of wildlife products, the folk who clear the forest for its timber or to grow plantation crops, or simply the ignorant who choose to turn a blind eye to their plight, humans are responsible for the devastation of the natural landscape and wild species. He might not be able to make much of a difference, but he can try.

Part 2: 1980s

4.5 Story 5: *An Orang-utan Sleeps in my Bedroom*

Preamble

Christopher Kri anak Ubang was a forest guard stationed at Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre from 1981 – 1983. These are his stories of living with Bullet, the most famous of orang-utans in Sarawak; it continues the story of the young Bullet we first met in *On Arrival, Please Release*. At the time, Bullet was still a young orang-utan. The interview took place in January 2019 and the stories have been edited for grammar with a few translations included. Different aspects of Chris Kri's interactions with Bullet have been organised to provide a logical flow to the stories, forming a Portrait of the iconic Bullet and a Portrait of the forest guard who cared for him at that time.

An Orang-utan Sleeps in my Bedroom

Bullet sleeps in my bedroom

There were three orang-utans at Semenggoh when I was there in 1981. We had Bullet, we had Pantu, we had Banggan at that time. Bullet was given his name by Dr Kok who had operated on him to take the bullets from his head. If I'm not mistaken, he came from the Sebuyau area. He was about three years old at that time and he was mostly roaming around the Wildlife Centre. At night, we had to put them into the cages otherwise they would go into your bed. That's the problem.

That time, we lived in a small barracks. It had a wooden door that wouldn't close properly, so you know, in those days. So, Bullet would lie down next to my bed. He liked to wrap the sarong around himself and that's how he slept. He slept in my room for about three months.

Every day, I would take him to the forest and hope that he would climb up the trees, hoping that he would go around, [explore], but he wouldn't.

People like Bullet, Pantu and Banggan

People like Pantu, yes, he did climb the tree and people like Banggan, are able to go around, and people like Archie. But Bullet never wanted to go in the trees. He didn't want to be left alone in the forest, so this was a kind of challenge. We didn't know what to do with him. Even though we were very quiet, he would still come back to us. The others would stay in the forest for one or two days and then they would come back, but Bullet never wanted to

be left there. So, in the end, we let him roam around Semenggoh and he just followed us, just like a dog.

He would just sit at the table, grab a spoon, try to use it just like us. Then he would get angry because he couldn't make it work. But Bullet was very special. He wouldn't follow people he didn't like. One of our rangers at the time, Abang Mutalib, Bullet chased him. Abang Mutalib didn't do anything to him, but maybe because he didn't have any emotional ties with him. He didn't like other people. He just liked me, Bujang Halib and Thulu Ayu, one of the veteran animal caretakers.

Trying to rehabilitate Bullet

He was able to sleep till morning. But he didn't lie down properly. He liked to sleep like this with the sarong [covering his head]. He liked to do this. He could lie down. Sleeping, not like other orang-utans. And that was the problem. He didn't try to make a nest. He didn't know how. And I didn't know how to teach him to build a nest.

We didn't have training. Those days, we tried our own way. When I took him to the forest on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, he would climb up on my back and I'd have to carry him like that. We would try to find food in the forest to keep him and let him try to climb the trees and so on. You leave all the bananas and other kind of fruit there. We'd walk back [to the Wildlife Centre]. Five minutes, I give you, and he will be right behind you. So, how?

Eventually, even if you sleep in the forest, he will also sleep next to you. I mean, we really didn't know what to do at that time. Even we asked people who are experts, you know. But that time, we didn't have people or experts. We only had biologists and foresters like Ken [Proud]. People like Ken also came in and couldn't do much. He's a forester and not the expert especially in orang-utans and of course, that time, we didn't understand the actual behaviour of the animal. And Bullet was so different. Orang-utans don't stay close to you most of the time, but he did. He was as if in the wild in Semenggoh not like in a zoo.

Disturbing visitors

He would go right up to the visitors. He would touch them on the neck. He was very funny. If he saw a visitor wearing a skirt, he would go under the skirt to look. So, we would advise the visitors with skirts not to go near him. I thought "Bullet ini, kena jail kamu nanti!" This Bullet, you'll be jailed soon! It's true. I saw him do it a couple of times. But he never hurt the visitors.

I think he got bored because people didn't take him to the forest to walk in the forest. Bullet was very special because he needed attention. That's the problem. Sometimes, we said that he was just like a little kid. He needed our attention. If you didn't give him attention, like a kid, he got angry. Same thing. If you didn't attend to his behaviour, then he'd start messing things, but if you attend to his behaviour, then he wouldn't. But at the end of the day, the rehabilitation process, you cannot do that. You have to distance yourself day to day from the animal. We could not. Because if you start establishing emotional feelings and so on, you can never do the job. You're doing wrong, you see. So, this was very difficult for him. Everybody tried. I tried, Halim tried, everybody tried, but it didn't work.

Bullet and the barbecue

One time, I was very worried, you know. We had this barbecue – Bujang Khalid, Alwi and I. We went to Third Mile and bought some chicken wings and a few bottles for us. At first, we didn't know Bullet was around. First, we saw him up in the tree, not so high, and then at the next moment, he was sitting with a bottle of [Guiness] Stout in his hand. I tried to grab it from him, but he smashed me. He drank the whole bottle, no more. We thought he was going to die and how would we write a report?

Then Thulu, the old man, came and he said, "Jangan ketawa, nanti hari ribut." Don't laugh, the storm will come.

We saw that Bullet tried to stand up, but then he fell. He couldn't walk. But we went to the cage. It was open. Bullet went into the cage and slept inside. The whole night, we took in turns to watch him, to make sure he was breathing.

We were afraid he would die! How could we explain why he died? Bullet woke up and everybody was happy to see him standing as usual. So, next time we had a barbecue, we hid the beer in the room, stored it in a bin so he couldn't see it. Still he would come to see us with the barbecue. He would stand there just like that. He would hug my legs and if I didn't pay him any attention, he would keep disturbing me. He would hit you if you didn't care. Very hard – bup bup!

Bullet and humans

I liked to sit next to him and feed him. I'd pick the fruit up and give it to him. Some people just threw things in the cage, but I didn't. I put things in my hand. I think this is kind of like feeding a dog. If you take care of a dog, and if the dog is friendly, then don't throw things because it will just grab. Probably, that's one of the reasons Bullet liked me – because

I didn't just throw anything. When we fed the orang-utans with milk, I would get a mug and would give it to him. I think he liked that when I did that.

Sometimes, we tried to separate ourselves from him, lock the door. But he would never go away from the door. He would sit there and knock, boom, boom, boom at the door. How to get out? He will stand there. He will walk around and come back. Look at the door.

He would get into everything. If we didn't lock the store, he would open it up and get the saw and cut the chain. Or the parang. He would use it, too. And the hammer. He didn't know how to hold the nail, but he would knock things with the hammer.

Bullet did interact with other orang-utans sometimes but not all day like normal orang-utans. Bullet was more like a human being. When the other orang-utans went up the trees, he would come down. We all said, "dia takut tinggi, itu". He was worried about heights. Bullet was so special.

When an orang-utan is angry

I know when they get angry. When an orang-utan gets angry, you see the hair here? You see it swells up. Be careful. He's not happy. He's angry. But after he chased Abang Mutalib, he looked normal. Abang Mutalib told me to be careful, he was angry. But I walked near Bullet and spoke Iban to him like I normally did, and I told him to go back to the cage. He followed me and he went in. I didn't want to go in with him. If I was locked in with him, then that's it!

I don't know why he didn't like Abang Mutalib, but Bujang Halib, Alwi and Thulu who is very nice to animals – we're very close to him. When you sit on the bed, he would sit next to us. Yeah, he's like that.

Bullet's haircut

This Bidayuh guy, Francis, wanted to trim his hair. It was so long, so Francis wanted to make it look neater. So, he did it. And when Bullet was let out of the cage, he went for Francis. He caught him and bit him on the leg, at the tendon here. I ran from the barracks. I ran down and called him. Bullet just looked at me then I grabbed him on the neck and yelled. He let go that guy, and he didn't actually bite me, but he held my hands with his mouth. I called him and he looked at me and let me go. Then he just walked out, climbed up the tree and sat there. That's all. Francis was probably sent to the hospital because he was bitten pretty bad. It was right here on the tendon.

I wasn't worried because I knew Bullet well and I think he could smell me. I don't know. That was the time that I took a risk to try to release that guy. He's an animal, not a human being. Although you like him, you have to take care of human life. Bullet bit me and he let me go. We didn't chase him. He just walked.

Remembering Bullet

I was at Semenggoh for two years, and then I was transferred to Bako National Park. About four years later, I came back from Bako National Park. I wanted to see if he remembered me. I knew Bullet liked apples so I gave him one and he took it and made this noise "eek eek eek" That kind of noise like us. He remembered me.

I think [he was permanently caged] because he was getting naughtier. He would get into the store and mess things up. And maybe he had a problem with the staff. So, they locked him up.

When I heard he died, I was very, very sad. I heard he had an infection. I went to see his body. It's at Matang now, standing like he used to. I don't know. He was comfortable like that.

The Inquirer-Writer's Perspective

It seems to me that Chris Kri viewed Bullet almost like a human being. He even referred to other orang-utans, Pantu, Banggan and Archie, as people. Was it a mistake or was it a reflection on how he felt about the orang-utans he worked so closely with for the two years he spent at Semenggoh? His stories show us clearly how Bullet had been habituated to humans. He had little time for fellow orang-utans but longed for the attention of his human companions. He wanted to use their tools, to eat, drink and to sleep as they did. Bullet didn't even like being in trees, which is extraordinary since orang-utans are primarily arboreal and live most of their lives in trees.

Chris Kri and his fellow forest guards at Semenggoh did their best to help the orang-utans learn some skills so that they could live in the wild and not be caged. But like he said, at that time, the forest guards weren't trained on how best to rehabilitate the young orang-utans to the wild. Bullet and his fellow orphans had lost the crucial years with their mothers that equip them with the skills to survive independently in the forest and though they received care from the forest guards, they became too habituated to humans to adapt to an independent life in the wild.

Bullet's remains are at Matang Wildlife Centre. Today, he is a taxidermied exhibit at the tiny museum there, a showpiece to visitors of Sarawak's protected endangered species. In fact, he is a lesson to us all about human cruelty and greed, and a lack of concern for the unique wildlife that we share the planet with except as a means to earn money or to keep them as exotic pets till they grow too old and aggressive.

Of course, today, there are live exhibits at Matang and Semenggoh Wildlife Centres in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. The captive orang-utans at Matang are caged because they are too strong and aggressive to be released; they cannot function independently in the forest and would likely disturb human populations, seeking food at the wildlife centre or nearby villages and orchards. If released, they could injure people who got in their way or be killed by farmers and villagers trying to protect their fruit farms or gardens. Those at Semenggoh are semi-wild, living at the nature reserve, but returning to the feeding platforms when the forest fruit trees are not in season and there is less sustenance to be found. These are calmer orang-utans that do not seem to disturb the human visitors or workers at the wildlife centre. They return only for the fruit on the feeding platforms and appear to ignore the many visitors who flock to watch them.

And what of our great ape cousins in the wild forests, mostly in Batang Ai National Park and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Santuary? These protected areas are where the largest populations of orang-utans survive in Sarawak. While those areas remain protected, the orang-utans have a chance. They can continue to roam the rainforests freely and make their own fresh nests every day, sleeping in their own bedrooms in their vast, natural home in the wild.

4.6 Story 6: *On Being Chased by Bullet and Wrestling with Jerangkung*

Preamble

This Crafted Interview comprises the stories of lived experiences of Abang Abdul Mutalib bin Abang Tajudin, a forest guard who worked with orphaned orang-utans at Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre in the 1980s. In some ways, this could be viewed as a Portrait of the man, or a Memoir of his interactions with the semi-wild orang-utans at the Rehabilitation Centre. It is a Crafted Interview because although I selected the stories to form this creative nonfiction work, they are told in Abang Mutalib's own words. Now a Coordinator of Totally Protected Areas in the Sarawak Forestry Corporation, the strength of Abang Mutalib's character, values and beliefs can be clearly perceived through his speech.

On Being Chased by Bullet and Wrestling with Jerangkung

1980 *On Being Chased by Bullet*

I was very new; a city boy from Jalan Haji Muhammad Taib. I had to walk for one hour to reach Semenggoh. It was over thirty years ago, and the area was not developed. I could hear the cicadas, the quietness of the forest, the darkness, no electricity. I could see how hard the life is of people living in the forest. I was blessed, being directed to go to Senenggoh.

It was my first day at Semenggoh and Christopher Kri was playing around with Bullet. I did not know his history, why Bullet was so aggressive. So, I spent one night at Semenggoh and the next afternoon, Christopher Kri wanted to go to the clinic, the Third Mile Clinic, so he left me alone at the office – barracks working area. But Bullet was around. I said to Chris, "I'm very new here, Chris, can you get Bullet inside the cage?" Because I could see – a nine-year-old orang-utan is very big, you know – and I thought Bullet is thinking: "He's different, a stranger to me." Because animals, they know.

Chris, he could control Bullet, because he's used to him, but for me it's just been one day. "Oh," the orang-utan is probably thinking. "He's a predator, and he's after me." So, I asked Chris to lock him in the cage, but Chris said it was okay. Bullet could be controlled. So, Chris left and I was there, a stranger. And Bullet was free. He was underneath the office building and started to bang the water drum.

Bullet banged the water drum, whatever. I stayed in the office up above and then suddenly, Bullet ran up the steps on two legs. The office door was unlocked and so was our sleeping quarters. Bullet ran into the office and started to mess about the books and files. I

was alone; what should I do? He didn't bother with me. I closed the door with him inside, but I didn't lock it because I thought he was so strong, he could break the door down. There was a kitchen behind there, and he banged the kettle. Luckily he didn't do anything to the gas stove.

I opened the door a bit, and he saw me. He started to come towards me so I shut the door and I jumped from the verandah. There were clothes hanging to dry and I broke the wire and got some cuts there. Bullet was up there in the office and I was down outside. What should I do? I waited for a while, then I thought I should save Chris's personal belongings in the sleeping quarters, so I ran up again. I went into the room and shut the door. I hid all the personal belongings under the bed. Bullet was banging on the tables and I knew he was very aggressive. I opened the louvres in the bedroom and I jumped out. It was 15 feet, you know. I was sure if I stayed in the room, Bullet would break the door and I would surely die.

So, I jumped and I ran. It took about one hour to walk out of Semenggoh in those days. I ran for about 20 to 25 minutes, up and down the hill. You know, it was quite interesting; the tame black hornbill followed me right up to the tree nursery then I asked the nursery people to call Chris to come back.

No, Bullet didn't follow me. Just the hornbill. The next day? I helped to prepare his food.

1980 – present *Abang Abdul Mutalib bin Abang Tajudin, "otai"*

What an introduction to his first workplace! Today, Abang Abdul Mutalib bin Abang Tajudin is the Totally Protected Area Coordinator for Kuching Region. He is eager to share his knowledge and experiences as he approaches retirement. I ask him about his most memorable moments and without hesitation, he talks about the orang-utans he has known in the nearly forty years that he has worked in the Sarawak Forest Department and subsequently, in the Sarawak Forestry Corporation.

He also mentions his "golden memories" of the year he spent at the Durrell Conservation Academy on Jersey Island where he trained in animal management. The knowledge he gained there was immediately put to use in the design of enclosures for the confiscated wildlife at what was called then Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre, in particular, for the primates like orang-utans and gibbons that had attacked their keepers. From this training, he suggested that a 'night den' be constructed for each of the primate

enclosures. When cleaning was necessary, the animals would be confined in the 'night den' to ensure the safety of the workers who entered to clean the larger enclosure.

Abang Mutalib's duties in forestry have sent him all over Sarawak. He has been involved in the demarcation of boundaries for national parks and protected areas, field surveys of wildlife like orang-utans and terns, and working at different national parks. Among others, he worked at Bako, Miri and Samunsam, exploring areas in the interior, spending nights in the forest, living simply in the rural areas. He was able to do this because of what he calls his passion and through the years, he has been searching for someone who can carry on he work with the same passion. He has trained many in the different regions, but has identified only a few who have the same passion for wildlife.

When asked what he would say to a young person who would like to work in conservation, Abang Mutalib sighs. He says everything stems from their passion; that they should not be thinking only of their monthly salary. All the long hours in the forest, at the national parks or wildlife centres, on the weekends and being on call for emergencies like lost tourists at Gunung Gading National Park or poachers being caught red-handed at Kubah National Park in the middle of the night; all these you can cope with if you have a passion for the wildlife.

The millennials are so hard to get through to, Abang Mutalib tells me. His wife, who has lived through so many of his job transfers and relocations of the family, settling children in new schools and uprooting them a few years later, calls him one of the "otai-otai" – an old timer and expert in the field. She is not surprised that he cannot find young staff who are keen to go through the rigours of his life in the forest and the remote areas. All their children are in IT or engineering; not one has decided to follow their father's footsteps. They embrace the new world of technology and development, eschewing what is perceived as the undeveloped areas and the traditional ways of life and wildlife associated with them.

The longest serving officer in charge at Semenggoh, Abang Mutalib's fondest and "unforgettable" memories seem to be of the unique orang-utans he worked with and grew to know over the years: Bullet, who chased him when he had just joined the Forest Department and whom he wished to grow to a ripe old age at Semenggoh, Aman who still remembers him when he visits Matang Wildlife Centre ("after 20 years, he still remembers me!"), the semi-wild Seduku who has given birth to four off spring at Semenggoh, and finally Jerangkung, the cranky orang-utan who he thought "knew him and was so used to him".

Abang Mutalib is one of a kind, too, one of the "otai-otai" of whom there are too few today. There are many lessons to learn from him, too many to describe here, but I'll leave you with his story of wrestling with Jerangkung. When he told me the story, it seemed more than the recounting of an exciting incident. It seemed to tell me so much more; the man and his passion, the orang-utan and its unpredictable nature, even those that are semi-wild and appear to be manageable, and just as he did after being chased by Bullet at the start of his career in 1980, the matter-of-fact way the man came back to work after the incident.

1991 ***Wrestling with Jerangkung***

He was used to me, so I called him. 'Jerangkung! Eh! Eh!' He would follow me. So, I was not afraid. He was up on the pole, and there was the electrical wire. Two young orang-utans about three or four years old were killed on the electrical wire. So I called him, and he came down.

But when he came down, he grabbed my leg. He grabbed my leg and with his hands, he held my arms. I tried to touch his head, but I couldn't. He was very strong, six or seven years old then. I was wrestling with Jerangkung. No one knew. So I shouted and Johnwen came, and my wife, she saw from the barracks. But Johnwen couldn't help me because his hand had been bitten by Bullet, you know.

I was wrestling with Jerangkung for five minutes. And he tried to bite me. Luckily, I was wearing jeans. Then they called Dr Manabu and he came and he tranquilized Jerangkung. So that's how. But I was confident with Jerangkung. He was used to me. No one else would have dared, but I saved him from being electrocuted. Because if I didn't call him, he could have died.

The next day when he woke up? He was all right. He was used to me. That's what I mean by animal management. You have to know the relations between the people and the animals. Even though I was confident about Jerangkung and he was used to me, you can never predict.

4.7 Story 7: *The Miring Ceremony or Are You Going to Compensate Us?*

Preamble

This piece demonstrates how creating national parks in Sarawak is much more than just paperwork or the result of political will. Interactions with the local communities who share the landscape with the orang-utans are essential to the creation of these protected areas. Here, we are reintroduced to the young conservationist we first met in *Three Orang-utans, a Flying Fox and its Mother*. While it contributes to the Portrait of this conservationist, this creative nonfiction piece is also a Memoir of a time that contributed greatly to his understanding of how relationships with local communities are crucial to the conservation of wildlife and their natural habitats.

The Miring Ceremony

or

Are You Going to Compensate Us?

"Are you coming to grab our land?"

"Is the government going to log this area?"

"Is the logging going to destroy the fish in the river?"

"Is the logging company going to take over all the farmland?"

"Are you going to compensate us?"

Melvin Gumal is sitting on a *ruai* – the long verandah that spans the length of a longhouse - at one of seven longhouses along the Batang Ai river. He and his team are in the midst of a *randau-ruai* an Iban style chitchat. But this *randau-ruai* is more than an ordinary chat over drinks. It's where people discuss important matters; in this case, it is about the business of the government in this rural community. Melvin's rural conservation education team has just performed a short skit about an orang-utan that taught humans how to give birth naturally, saving women from agonizing deaths, being cut open to bring forth life. In gratitude, the humans promised to never kill orang-utans again; it is a promise that they have passed on to their descendants. This an old Iban folktale and many of the villagers know the story. They are reminded of the promise, a contract between their ancestors and the orang-utans that live in the nearby forests. It is this contract that appears to have kept the orang-utan population thriving in the Batang Ai area.

Though the story is known to the longhouse people, they are not bored. It is always interesting to have visitors to the longhouse, and it is certainly unusual for government officers to perform a drama. It is 1989 and being nearly two hours by longboat on the Ai and

its tributaries from the jetty at Lubok Antu, the nearest town, and six hours on an uneven road from Kuching, the longhouse folk rarely receive visitors. So, any visitors, even government officers whose intentions are suspicious, are appreciated as a welcome disruption to the routine of farming and sporadic hunting in this quiet community in the Seri Aman district.

The team from Kuching is a small unit in the Forest Department's National Parks and Wildlife Office. The forest guards come from different backgrounds and have worked in various towns and offices throughout the state. Their work now in the rural conservation education unit is something new. Their head, Melvin Gumal, is a fresh graduate of Melanau-Chinese heritage and younger than most of his team. Formed only six months ago, some of the forest guards are still trying to get used to his ways and the conservation education work, working to get the conservation message across to the longhouse folk, and demonstrating how conservation benefits them and preserves their way of life.

Now on the *ruai*, the team are enjoying Iban longhouse hospitality. It's a kind of chitchat over coffee which the Iban call *randau ruai*. This is the time when the longhouse people ask the visitors why they're here, and this is when they tell the visitors what's on their mind, raising their concerns. In those days, the late 1980's, the main reason companies wanted access into remote native lands was for the timber; logging was a huge industry. Melvin was ready for those questions, but he had a more delicate mission. Wildlife surveys by earlier researchers had discovered that the primary rainforests in the area around the artificial lake that had been created by the hydroelectric Batang Ai Dam were potentially home to one of the largest known orang-utan populations in wild Sarawak.

How do you convince longhouse people that it's in their best interest to collaborate and possibly share parts of their lands to create a national park? Why should these people who settled in this area back in the 15th century, give up their traditional lands to the government? In what way could it be more beneficial than selling the timber which sits on their land to the logging companies? A lot of the land had already been submerged by the construction of the Batang Ai hydroelectric dam in 1980. What good could come of giving up the remaining land to the government?

For the next four years, Melvin and his team engaged with the Iban communities living in seven longhouses in the Batang Ai vicinity, explaining the benefits of willingly collaborating and sharing parts of their lands to enable the establishment of the Batang Ai National Park. The people would retain their rights to the land, including hunting and they would supplement their income by providing services to the tourists who would visit. This last possibility was demonstrated by flying the headmen of seven longhouses to visit Taman

Negara in Peninsular Malaysia. They were shown how tourists were brought to the national park and how the indigenous people earned good wages as guides, boatmen, field assistants and even cooks. The local communities offered accommodation and meals, and an authentic experience to tourists who wanted to live as the indigenous people did, trekking in the forests, seeing the wildlife in their natural habitat, and eating local produce.

When they returned to Batang Ai, the seven headmen agreed to the formation of the Batang Ai National Park. It was a unique situation. For the first time, seven longhouse communities had come together to create a cohesive group seeking a different way to protect and maintain their way of life. This was when the rural education team started looking at alternative livelihoods for the communities. They were able to organise the communities into a single large cooperative and brought in trainers to help the longhouse folk with English communication, business development, and accounting skills. It was also at around this time when international visitors came to inspect the projects and to visit the sites. Then, unexpectedly, two of the local people in the village, one the headman himself at Wong Tibu and another, in the longhouse opposite to theirs. Both passed within a few weeks of each other. The second passing was a relative of one of the trainees that attended the English communication and business development programme.

The two deaths were sudden, seemingly bad omens that made some of the longhouse folk doubt the wisdom of collaborating and sharing their lands and embarking on a new way of life. In response, the seven headmen agreed that the spirits in the area had to be appeased. Melvin's team wrote a proposal seeking funds to carry out a *miring* ceremony to appease the spirits. The proposal was sent to Datuk James Wong, the Sarawak Minister of the Environment. Without argument, he agreed to give RM5,000 to all these villages for the initiation ceremony at the creation of the protected area.

Melvin and his team made their way to two river systems, Ulu Ai and Lubang Baya rivers, using the RM5,000 to buy several jerry cans of *tuak* and *langkau* as well as several pigs.

At each of the headwaters of the rivers, the pigs had to be slaughtered to appease the spirits in the forest. This had to be done in the traditional warrior's way, using a spear to stab the live pig's jugular vein, letting the blood gush out. As Melvin was the highest-ranking government official, representing the Sarawak government, he was the one to take the warrior's role; this was customary.

The ceremony itself was only five to ten minutes' long, but the preparation took a while. Pandan leaves or a rotan mat was spread out and laid on it, were little plates of

different kinds of food. Village elders prayed or chanted over the food, with a rooster or a jungle fowl held over the food. Only after the chanting was completed, the ceremony of killing the pigs began. This is Melvin's description:

The village headman handed me the spear to stab into the jugular of the pig. Then the villagers said, "Put your foot here." They would hold down the pig's legs. I would put my foot there and I would point the spear at the pig's neck and they'd say, "Push it down here!" and meanwhile, I'd hear the pig go "EEEEEEEK! EEEEEEEK! EEEEEEEK!" and then I would stab it and then they'd say, "Rotate the spear down the front of the neck."

"EEEEEEEK! EEEEEEEK! EEEEEEEK!" The pig would squeal some more and kick some more and blood would be dripping down and then the pig died.

Then they would barbecue the pig and eat it. The skull would be given to the dogs.

The *miring* ceremonies at each of the longhouses evidently appeased the spirits and the longhouse folks, as all agreed to work together for the conservation of Batang Ai National Park. The communities continued to enjoy their privileges according to native customary rights, including hunting within the protected areas, ecotourism began in the area. Adventurous souls seeking a glimpse of the elusive orang-utan in the national park and a taste of longhouse life came to this remote area. The seven longhouse communities cooperated with each other, working on rotation. Each month, a total of seven people from the longhouses would work as contract staff as well as boat men for the park. Beyond these seven, several more would be hired as extra field assistants, boatmen and cooks for research projects at the park. The next month, another group of seven from the longhouses would take those jobs. This way, everyone would have an equal chance to work in the national park. That was the original version of the collaborative relationship. Some changes were made to this rotation system (with the use of contracts) when the Sarawak Forestry Corporation took over in the early 2000s. After some initial teething problems, the longhouse communities are working well now with the staff from the Sarawak Forest Department, eco-tourist agencies and the wildlife researchers who study the elusive orang-utan and the people who live near its habitats.

So, the government didn't come to grab the land or to log the area. The fish continue to flourish in the rivers and the logging companies were not allowed into the protected area. Compensation wasn't needed because the villagers maintained their rights to farm and hunt in the land, but the area was protected from outsiders poaching or buying the land to turn into

plantations. With this arrangement the longhouse communities were provided a subsistence, alternative livelihood in addition to their usual practices of farming and hunting. It is believed that without this, the land would have certainly been converted into plantations or logged for timber and the way of life of the longhouse communities would have irrevocably altered.

It is hard to say what would have happened if the seven longhouse communities had not come together and agreed to work with the government to allow the creation of Batang Ai National Park. And we cannot know what would have happened if the *miring* ceremonies had not been performed at each of the headwaters where those seven longhouses stand. It has been over thirty years now, since those *miring* ceremonies were performed, and despite some hiccups with the changes in National Parks management, the longhouse communities continue to maintain their way of life, while in the forests nearby, the orang-utan populations thrive. Is this the result of political will and legislative policies? Good National Park management and an effective state tourism board and eco-tourist agencies? Or is it simply because a young executive forester used a traditional Iban warrior's spear to pierce the jugular vein of a squealing pig for blood to appease the restless spirits in the forest?

4.8 Story 8: *Enggoh's Story: On Isai, the Hunter, Aki Aban and Sustainable Resource Use*

Preamble

In the 1980s and 90s, Enggoh Glak @ Mohammad Irwan Abdullah was one of the Forest Guards in the National Parks and Wildlife Office working in the Integrated Conservation Development Programme team that took him to longhouses bordering Batang Ai National Park. Interviewed over two long sessions in 2019, Enggoh had many stories to tell; sharing his reflections on his work through the past three decades. This creative nonfiction piece brings together stories about flying foxes and wild boars and an Iban myth told through dramatic skits at longhouses as well as Enggoh's reflections and advice to young people today. Part Memoir entwined with dramatic scenes in a longhouse, this is a Segmented Essay, as the stories and Enggoh's reflections and advice are told in segments that allow the reader to enjoy the individual tales as well as hold them together to portray the bigger picture of Enggoh's lived experiences.

Enggoh's Story: On Isai, the Hunter, Aki Aban and Sustainable Resource Use

Isai, the hunter, walks slowly through the forest. He holds his single-shot shot-gun steady and takes quiet, measured footsteps. His breath is slow and calm as he nears the flying fox roost. Isai raises the shot-gun, takes aim, and shoots. "Bang!" Hundreds of flying foxes startle and flee into the night sky. But one has fallen to the forest floor. A mother with her young still clinging to her and suckling.

It's the weekend and the young working adults are home from the towns, and some of the children are home from boarding school. They shout triumphantly and clap their hands. The elders exclaim or mutter to each other. Children laugh and jump to see the scattering flying foxes and the one left lying on the ground. Then the longhouse quietens and there's just the sound of the generator humming as everyone looks at Apai Watt lying on the verandah floor in his flying fox costume with the baby flying fox toy strapped to his body.

Isai, the hunter, is proud. "I'm going to take this flying fox and its baby home to feed my family!" he says in local Iban. "We're going to have a good meal."

The longhouse people nod and smile. It's a good night's work.

"But my brothers and sisters," says Enggoh, the narrator, stepping up into the light powered by the generator while the hunter and his prey leave centre stage. "What were the flying foxes doing before they went to roost in the trees?"

“Flying around!” a young man quips. His friends chuckle.

“Yes!” Enggoh agrees. “They fly around. But where do they fly?”

There’s a pause while the longhouse people consider the question.

“Among the fruit trees!” someone pipes up.

“We often see them among the fruit trees!” says a teenager.

“They love the durians,” another chimes in.

“I love durians!” a little girl says, and then giggles when everyone turns to look at her.

“Yes,” the narrator says. “We all love durians.” The longhouse people nod and smile. “Including the flying foxes. What happens when the flying foxes fly from durian to durian?”

“They eat our fruits!” says an older man with a stern look on his lined face.

“You can see the fruits on the forest floor,” a young man next to him adds, emboldened by his elder.

“What would happen if there were no more flying foxes?” the narrator asks.

“More durians for us!” someone calls out. “Bang! Bang!” The longhouse people laugh and clap.

“Maybe not,” says the narrator when the longhouse is quiet again. Amid the noise that ensues, the “eh?” “what is this?”, “what does he mean?”, the narrator says, “the flying foxes are helping us to pollinate the fruits. They are the ones who help the durian trees to bear many delicious fruit. They carry the pollen on their wings and bodies and take them far and near. What if there were no more flying foxes left because we hunted them?”

A rumble of mutters runs through the audience.

“What is one meal of a flying fox and its baby to many trees full of delicious durians, papayas and figs?” the narrator asks. Now, the mumbling and chatter escalate.

* * * * *

After the end of the night’s programme, again, there is a shared meal, *tuak* (local rice wine) to go round and sometimes, there is the *ngajat*, the dance to welcome the visitors.

Enggoh loves this time. He learns much from the longhouse folk. He is Iban, but not from this area, and he has not heard all the tales they have to share.

* * * * *

The next night, the Integrated Conservation Development Programme team from the National Parks and Wildlife Office has another drama to perform. This is a greeted with happy anticipation. Living in remote longhouses near the Batang Ai National Park where a large population of orang-utans survives, these communities have few forms of entertainment or distractions from the regular routines of their lives. The longhouses are not easy to access. In the 1990s, it's an eight-hour drive from Kuching and a longboat ride that could be from 40 minutes to hours from the jetty at Lubok Antu in Sri Aman Division depending on which longhouse is being sought. The rare visitors are more than welcome and the longhouse people are happy to host the team from the Forest Department's National Parks and Wildlife Office.

Tonight, Enggoh is the narrator once more for a skit performed by Apai Watt, Uning, Mohidin, Kerchendai, and Christopher Kri. This time, Isai, the hunter, comes across a pregnant wild boar. As it is not a protected species, the indigenous communities are allowed to hunt the boar for their own consumption. A skilful hunter, Isai shoots the wild boar and takes the animal back to the longhouse. It is a good kill; lots of meat that will feed many at the longhouse. But when the wild boar is cut up to be shared among the families, Isai sees six or seven babies in the wild boar's womb.

Enggoh, the narrator, holds up a tin of pork. "This tin of pork costs five ringgit. Is this tin enough to feed the whole longhouse?"

The men and women in the audience shake their heads. The children cry out "No!"

"What about the wild boar that Isai shot and killed?"

Now the answer is the affirmative.

"But, if you keep on hunting and hunting, if today, you kill one mother wild boar with the seven babies in her womb and tomorrow you kill another one with 10 babies, 11 babies, at the end of the day, you're going to lose all these babies. So, at the end of the day, you have to go to the town and buy the tin of pork.

"So, this tin costs five ringgit. We compare it to the bullet. The bullet is about one ringgit; it costs you one ringgit to shoot one wild boar. So, it is one ringgit and it is enough

meat to feed the whole longhouse for a few days. Whereas, you go to the town you buy this one tin of meat. Only one or two people can be full from this tin of meat.

"So, which one do you prefer, the tin or the wild boar?"

The audience responds that they prefer the wild boar. Then, Enggoh continues his story.

"Fifteen years ago, how far did you go in the forest when you were hunting? How far was it before you found the animals, the wild boar, the deer or any animals?"

"10 minutes!"

"15 minutes!"

"Yes, just a 10-minute or 15-minute walk and we already can have a wild boar. But how about now compared to between 15 or 20 years ago?"

"Oh, sometimes we spend the whole day and we never see the wild boar."

Enggoh tells the people: "It's because you have no control. The way you are taking the resources, using the resources - it is not sustainable. Ah. I know because I'm Iban like you. Today you kill one wild boar and you cook the meat. You cannot finish so you throw it away. Isn't it a waste? Why not kill one wild boar when you need it, perhaps once a month, especially if you can *kasam* (salt) it, instead of almost every day?

"Even if you keep on digging and digging, the mountain will become a flat area. The same is with the animals if you keep on shooting, shooting."

One man asks, "How do we know if the wild boar is pregnant? How do we know that the wild boar is a mother wild boar?"

Enggoh replies, "Of course you can see the difference between the female and the male. That is through your experience as hunters. When you shoot the wild boar and find the babies, use your experience, usually for how long is the wild boar pregnant? Okay for example five months. So, from the date you shoot, you make it back the five months. You learn how to know when the wild boar is pregnant. For example, if it's five months, you shoot in December, meaning to say, it's somewhere in June or in July or something like that, the wild boar is pregnant so please do not go hunting. Or, if you want to go hunting, look for the male wild boar."

* * * * *

That night, there is more visiting of different *bilik* (doors – a longhouse has many doors, each leading to the home of a different family. It is a version of a block of terrace houses in the city except that each family is related to the others and all share a common *ruai* or verandah at the longhouse. Every family wants to chat with the visitors. They are a welcome change from the routine of daily life in this area so remote from the towns and their hustle and bustle. The education team enjoys the food and friendship. There is no need to be pushy about the conservation message. The skit and the interaction that followed won't be forgotten so easily.

* * * * *

A third skit that the team performs for the longhouse people is the story about *Aki* Aban, Grandfather Aban. It is based on the Iban myth that Enggoh learned from an old man in Nanga Delok longhouse.

Aki Aban goes for a walk in the forest. There, he meets a man he has never seen before. The man is friendly and after some conversation, offers to exchange *parangs* (long knives or machetes used in the forest to cut a path or to use as a weapon or hunting tool) as a sign of friendship.

"We are brothers, now," the stranger says to *Aki* Aban. "I look human, but I am an orang-utan, so you must never kill an orang-utan because we are brothers and sisters. Tell your people this. Keep this *parang* to remember your promise."

Aki Aban goes home to the longhouse and puts away the *parang* safely, telling his people the story. From that day, no one in the longhouses around the Batang Ai river system hunts the orang-utan.

Then, when he is dying, *Aki* Aban tells his family, "Do not bury me, but place me at a special place on Bukit Seligi." But when they do so, *Aki* Aban's body disappears. A moment later, they hear the call of an orang-utan in the distance. From this, the longhouse people believe the orang-utans are their grandfathers. It is a story that the older generations know, but which the younger generations may not have heard.

* * * * *

"It was very interesting," Enggoh tells me, sitting in his office at Stutong Nature Reserve. Shelves filled with box files and paper files line the walls. Clunky desktop computers sit on the desks and there is plenty of evidence of paperwork and the clutter of busy daily office matters. It is a far cry from the days when Enggoh was young and in the field. In the 1990s, the Integrated Conservation Development Programme team that performed the skits in the longhouses was disbanded. Each team member was posted to a different job in the Forest Department or left to pursue his studies. Enggoh's career involved a range of jobs; among other things, he conducted bird surveys with ornithologists, primate surveys with wildlife biologists and worked at Bako National Park and on an ITTO (International Tropical Timber Organization) project in Nanga Buloh and Batang Ai.

Today, Enggoh is a Conservation Assistant in the Sarawak Forestry Corporation, stationed at Stutong Nature Reserve also known as the Sama Jaya Forest Park, a 37.92-hectare urban green lung in Kuching, the capital of Sarawak. He will retire next year in 2020, after 42 years in service. His accumulated knowledge and experience in the national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and remote longhouse communities is immeasurable, but he is unassuming and humble. When he conducts programme with students, they call him "*Cikgu*" – teacher, but he says, "No, I'm not *Cikgu*." Perhaps he is not on paper and not with any qualifications of higher education, but Enggoh is brimming with knowledge and experience from years in the forests; he is a teacher, indeed.

The conservation education work that Enggoh does now is mostly with students from primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. They visit the urban nature reserve to explore a forest that is located in the middle of the city. It's just 37.92 hectares, a pocket of primary forest in the middle of the city; a green lung that is a relief from the harried life of traffic, work stress and deadlines. Some groups of students visit to practise identifying plants and trees, others just to walk in the forest and enjoy the natural environment for the first time. It is true that in the middle of Borneo, there are city folk who have never been in a rainforest.

I ask Enggoh what advice he would give to young people who would like to pursue a career in wildlife conservation. This is what he says.

"I used to conduct a programme even here with the university students, all the secondary, primary school students. When we talked about wildlife, about animals, I said, 'Maybe one day when you finish your studies, complete your degree or Master's or what not, maybe if you're interested to know about wildlife, maybe you can apply with the Wildlife

Department or the Forest Department or you can work with WCS or WWF because these are the departments that have something to do with protection of wildlife, with the ecosystems. So if you are interested, but you need to go to the forest because the animals are in the forest. They're not in the city, in the town. You must love the forest, you must love the animals. You can be close to the animals.' Some say: "oh takut" – afraid. But I say, 'no it's a very, very interesting thing. I have experienced it already many times.'

"So, if you're in the jungle, you can see so many different things. Even the insects, birds, the animals, they're very interesting. That is my advice to the university students or the colleges or the secondary or primary school students. If you're interested in wildlife, you must learn to be in the forest. One thing is when you're doing the survey you must be very observant. You must look left, right, right, left, and be observant and use your sixth sense to look for the animals.

"'Interesting, Cikgu' the students say. I'm not the Cikgu, I tell them.

"Sometimes I ask the students, why do you choose this course? They tell me I chose another course but I was given this one. But the thing is, once you are there, you have to be interested in your subject, I said. If you're not interested, you're not going to achieve a good result. Even if you want this one but they give you this other one. What to do? You have to accept. If you don't accept, you don't like it, you cannot get 100 per cent of the university course. So you have to accept it - you're in the wildlife department, you have to love the forest, love the animals, and want to be in the forest. Because if you only study from the books, you only get 10 percent. The 90 per cent is in the forest. You have to explore the forest.

"But the thing is, it's not easy to convince the students because most of them are from the town. So, when we talk about the forest, about plants, animals, the leeches they say, 'oh takut, takut'. And I ask, how come you people are not going to the forest? It's interesting for you to see the leeches!"

I ask Enggoh, "After all these years in forestry and conservation, do you see any changes?" This is his reply:

"What I see at Batang Ai, there are a lot of changes in terms of conservation. Meaning to say, because in the first place, the idea is from Dr Melvin, no point for you to conserve the trees, the fish, the animals, at Batang Ai, he said. You must conserve with the people. Because the people are causing the animals to become less and less. Not the animals are causing the people to become less and less. So, you educate the people to work with the

government, with the agencies to conserve the animals and the forest in a different approach, that is, get them to be involved in things that don't cause any damage to the forest or any damage to the animals.

"Now, the people in Batang Ai, when it became a National Park, they moved to the resettlement areas. Of course, they were given a free village, and they can go hunting, do fishing, they can farm in the national park, but the young generation, once they are out of that area, there is no farming anymore. They are in the town already or they moved somewhere else. They moved to Kuching, to KL, Sabah to look for a job. So, the forest here, the animals here, nobody is here to disturb them anymore. The change is there.

"So now, these people are getting less and less. I don't know if there are records, but we can see, there are fewer people, less farming and less hunting. So there are more animals."

That is the irony of modern life. When Batang Ai National Park was established in 1990, the local people retained their native customary rights to continue hunting for their own consumption. But it is the way of the younger generations to go to the towns and cities for education and for jobs. They return to the longhouses only for *Gawai*, the Harvest Festival, or to visit the old folk during their children's school holidays. Eventually, there are only a few old folk left at the longhouses or none at all.

Thirty years ago, Enggoh and his colleagues enacted skits about the wildlife and spoke to the longhouse people about sustainable use of the animals and the myths about the protected species. Today, those skits and the messages are still relevant in lives of the few who remain in the longhouses. But we see that the dwindling numbers of people in those remote areas are in fact, the best protection. For as long as the national parks, wildlife sanctuaries and the protected areas are left alone, the wildlife and their habitats will thrive.

Part 3: 1990s

4.9 Story 9: *Cage 14: Bullet's Story*

Preamble

This Collage brings together a Portrait, Memoir and Ecocriticism to provide the reader another aspect of Bullet, Sarawak's iconic orang-utan. All three subgenres overlap with the memories of a wildlife biologist and foresters who worked at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre where Bullet spent most of his life. Here too, is the voice of the researcher-writer who steps into Cage 14.

Cage 14: Bullet's Story[235]

The Photograph, 1992

Bullet folds his arms across his chest. He is standing upright on his legs like a human staring directly at the camera between the bars of the *belian*[236] cage. His hair is shaggy; his arms orange, face brown with large flanges, body and legs reddish-brown. Bullet is staring right at the person taking the photograph; in an oddly eerie way, it seems as if he is contemplating the humans and their actions rather than the other way around.[237] It's 1992 and the young Executive Forester who takes the unsettling photograph has brought students to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre for conservation education activities. He is mesmerised by the orang-utan's eyes. They are so knowing. Behind the shaggy hair, Bullet is thinking.

Bullet moves in a circle in the cage, his arms still crossed, legs pacing. He walks like a human, upright on two legs. Unlike other orang-utans, he rarely drops down onto his long arms. Those arms are held against his chest as if he were protecting something precious or as if he were deep in thought. The young Executive Forester, Melvin Gumal, wonders what Bullet is thinking as he and the students watch the large orang-utan pace in his cage. There is something so human about the shaggy red ape.

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[235] A version of this work called "Cage 14: The Orangutan" was published in *eTropic: Journal*, Special Issue: Tropical Gothic: Literary and Creative Works, 2019.

[236] *Belian* is what Sarawakians and Sabahans call *Eusideroxylon zwageri*, a hardwood tree belonging to the family Lauraceae found in Borneo, Sumatra and the Philippines. Valued for its properties of being extremely hard and resistant, it is also known as "Borneo ironwood" and is used in the construction industry.

[237] In her work 'Apes and elephants: in search of sensation in the tropical imaginary', Barbara Creed (2013, p.159) describes how in the 19th century, people were drawn to the first modern zoos as they "offered a place of retreat, an opportunity to learn about nature, and the possibility of experiencing the thrill of an encounter with wild and exotic animals which might awaken 'dreams and ancient desires'." Visitors to Semenggoh come expressly to view the semi-wild orang-utans in the flesh, fascinated, perhaps by their humanoid appearance. Captured in this photograph, Bullet appears to be returning the favour, observing the humans in a strangely human-like stance, arms folded across his chest, standing upright on two legs.

The vet, Dr Jane Bennett, says Bullet is angry; his pacing and his folded arms are indicators of frustration and anger. Christopher Kri anak Ubang, who cared for him when he was a young orang-utan at what was then the Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre, says Bullet just feels comfortable standing upright with his arms crossed over his chest. Abang Mutalib bin Abang Tajudin, a Forest Guard who worked at Semenggoh, says the posture shows he is happy. He is, after all, Abang Mutalib reasons, the most famous orang-utan at the wildlife centre.

Visitors to Semenggoh are fascinated by Bullet. They come and stand outside his cage just looking at him; exclaiming, astonished. He is large, dwarfing the other confined and semi-wild orang-utans. His immense size and colourful hair attract children and adults alike. Some foreign visitors are unhappy that he is confined in what seems to be a small cage. His rapid pacing back and forth across the tiny enclosure troubles them. They write letters of complaint and eventually, the authorities order the building of a larger enclosure for him.

In 1990, Abang Mutalib is sent to study conservation and wildlife rehabilitation at Jersey Zoo run by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust.[238] When he returns a year later, he supervises the construction of the larger enclosure for Bullet. It has become impossible for Bullet to be allowed to wander freely at the wildlife centre as other orang-utans are allowed to do. Instead of disappearing into the nature reserve and foraging for fruits in the trees, Bullet prefers to roam the grounds of the wildlife centre. He investigates the barracks, the offices, the tree nursery and human activities.

As a young orang-utan, he would slide up to visitors. He loved to stroke their legs. Bibiana Pek who regularly visited Semenggoh in the early 1980s with her children and husband Abang Haji Kassim bin Abang Morshidi, then the National Parks and Wildlife Officer, remembers how he would come right up to her and stroke her leg. He loved to imitate humans, pushing the wheelbarrow, picking up a hammer. But as he grew older, he became bigger and stronger. He chased and attacked too many people including Abang Mutalib, who worked at the wildlife centre when Bullet was young and was still allowed to roam on the grounds at will. He even bit Johnwen anak Sian, who cared for him every day for years, and Dr Jane Bennett, the vet who treated him with great empathy and humanity.

[238] Dr Jane Bennett helped write the proposal that enabled Abang Mutalib to study at Jersey Zoo where Gerald Durrell, the British naturalist, zookeeper and conservationist, had established a conservation academy to train people from all around the world, equipping them with knowledge and skills to help conserve species in their homelands.

The Orang-utan Ancestor

In the longhouses near Batang Ai National Park in Seri Aman Division, the Iban villagers believe that their ancestors were once orang-utans. There is a *parang*[239] treasured by the people in the Nanga Delok longhouse because it was given to an old man by a stranger he had met in the forest, three or four generations ago. As they exchanged *parangs*, this stranger told the old man, "We are brothers now. I am a human, but I was an orang-utan originally. Never kill an orang-utan." So, the old man went back to the longhouse and told his family and his relatives never to harm orang-utans because they were all brothers and sisters. Years later, when the old man lay dying, he told his people that when he died, they should not bury him, but leave him at a certain place on a hill named Bukit Seligi. This they did, and after they had laid him down in that place, his body disappeared. At that moment, they heard an orang-utan call from afar. The people believe that the old man had died as a human, but then lived again as an orang-utan. To this day, the people of Nanga Delok longhouse will not hunt nor harm orang-utans.

Barbara Creed writes of the merging of human and animal in her 2011 paper *Tropical Malady*.[240] Her analysis finds writers and film makers exploring the line between human and animal and the uncanny possibilities that Darwin's theory of evolution seemed to suggest. In their study of the cultural history of the orang-utan, the so-called wild man of Borneo, Cribb, Gilbert and Tiffin describe how early Western exhibitions used the rare live specimens of orang-utans to "challenge the human-ape boundary".[241] Yet, when he told me this story of the orang-utan ancestor at Nanga Delok, the forest guard Mohammad Irwin Abdullah whose Iban name is Enggoh Glak, was very matter of fact and displayed neither fear nor awe.

When I asked him if he believed the story, Enggoh told me simply that although he had not seen the *parang* that had been given to the old man by the human-orang-utan and which was supposed to still be at the Nanga Delok longhouse, he said that the people there respected the orang-utans in the forest around them. They never hunted or killed them.

[239] A long knife or machete used in the forest as a tool, for example, to cut a pathway or wood to build a fire for cooking, or for protection or hunting.

[240] Barbara Creed, "Tropical Malady: Film and the Question of the Uncanny Human-Animal," *eTropic Journal* 10, (2011): 132, https://journals.jcu.edu.au/etropic/article/view/3414.

[241] Robert Cribb, Helen Gilbert and Helen Tiffin, *Wild Man from Borneo: A Cultural History of the Orangutan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 59.

The people of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who longed to see the exotic and who were thrilled by the possibilities of a hybrid human-orang-utan embraced stories of our cousins. In fact, the humanlike behaviour of walking on two legs and the uncanny resemblance to our species led some to believe that an orang-utan was "something more than an animal, even if it might be something less than a human."[242] Creed's paper exploring human fascination with the animal-human connection and shape-shifting and hybrid humans shows us that the gothic story continues in our imagination, while wildlife centres are home to reality orang-utan shows; to thousands of visitors, a happy, exciting experience, to others, the reality of a sad and diminished life.

Today, some confiscated infant orang-utans raised in human households are grown and semi-wild in Semenggoh Wildlife Centre while others that cannot adapt to life in the forest reserve must remain confined where they cannot trouble humans. Thus, if the Iban myth at Nanga Delok were a true story, some of our brothers and sisters survive in a semi-wild state while others are caged for life; their physical strength, periodic aggression and affinity to humans and life in our built areas render them too dangerous to be allowed to roam freely.

Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, 2018

I'm a city dweller and not a frequent visitor to the forest. Semenggoh Nature Reserve is about 20 kilometres from the city centre of Kuching and is proudly advertised as "the largest Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre in Sarawak". Leaving our car outside the main entrance and guard house, we walk past the Botanical Research Centre, and then up a narrow road that follows a slope up a hill. It's still early in the morning and not yet too humid. We've come in the hope to see the semi-wild orang-utans visiting the feeding platforms for a meal. The fruit will be laid on the platforms at 9:00 a.m. and as it's not the fruiting season, chances are good that some of the semi-wild orang-utans will appear.

We pass the arboretum on our left and the tree nursery on our right. Melvin points out orang-utan nests – some old, some fresh – high in the canopy of tropical trees rising up around us. It's been twenty-six years since he came here as a young Executive Forester with students. Now, Semenggoh Nature Reserve is filled to capacity with semi-wild orang-utans that were confiscated from illegal hunters or villagers' homes. The nests are an indication that the animals have learned or re-learned the daily task of a wild orang-utan. They are breeding,

[242] Cribb, Gilbert and Tiffin, *Wild Man from Borneo*, 30.

too. This is a contentious issue among conservationists; some believe breeding captive wildlife, even if they're semi-wild, is a mistake. At 653 hectares, the nature reserve is too small for the growing population of 22 animals, but the dangers of releasing the orang-utans into other sites where existing colonies reside have resulted in maintaining the semi-wild population at Semenggoh. The two known attempts of releasing orang-utans into the wild in Sarawak resulted in their starvation and death; Barbara Harrisson's release of orang-utans in the 1970s at Bako National Park, and the doomed release of three young animals in the 1980s at Sebuyau.

Semenggoh Wildlife Centre is not ideal, but it's a far cry from the artificial enclosures and cement "trees" found in some zoos. Here at least, the semi-wild orang-utans live in the rainforest, building nests for their rest, foraging among the fruit trees and visiting the feeding platforms when the trees are not fruiting. I wonder, though, what will happen as the population continues to grow. Will the animals forage further afield into the orchards in the nearby village? What will the villagers do?

About ten minutes later, we reach the main visitor's area. A crowd of local and foreign visitors gathers at the viewing station overlooking the main feeding platform. Edwin, one of the alpha males, is slowly picking up a banana, his back turned towards us. Two young adults make their way down the trees, one stretching its limbs in a perfect split to grasp branches as it lowers itself slowly, shifting to hold itself steady with one hand on a rope, the other reaching down cautiously for some fruit. They are surely aware of the crowd gawking at them; the cameras clicking, and the excited chatter of humans. What do they make of us?

When feeding time is over and the crowds have left, Melvin's former colleague, Park Ranger Dominic Helan Eric, lifts the barrier and we make our way along the wooden walkway, past the smaller cages, 1 to 13. Once they housed gibbons and orang-utans, even hornbills.[243] They are all empty and abandoned now. Since 2000, rescued and confiscated wildlife have been taken to Matang Wildlife Centre, allowing Semenggoh to remain the home of the semi-wild population of orang-utans and to serve as a major tourist attraction. Visitors are encouraged to come to Semenggoh and the numbers are remarkable. Dominic tells us there were 20,000 visitors in May 2018 alone.

[243] Sarawak is known as *Bumi Kenyalang,* the Land of the Hornbills; eight species of this majestic bird can be found in the state, with the iconic Rhinoceros Hornbill being both the state and national bird. Revered in local folklore and legend, and coveted for its casque and feathers, the bird is now endangered and deemed Totally Protected under the Wild Life Protection Ordinance (1998).

The wooden walkway is slick from yesterday's rain and the morning dew. Some boards are bowed down and broken through. Scatterings of leaves and moss cover the boards. All around us, between and behind the cages, trees, palms and ferns rise in a tangle of branches and leaves, sheltering us from the heat of the day. Cage 14 is the last enclosure. Beyond it, the forest rises like a thick curtain of brown and green. The air is cool here, and I hear cicadas and the gentle rustle of leaves; sounds I can't hear when surrounded by the humming of the air conditioner at my workplace, or the rush of the cars, lorries and motorbikes on the roads.

I step into Cage 14. The iron bars are covered with creepers and ferns. Branches from the nearby trees shade the cage where now only plants and a sandy floor are enclosed. Further inwards, a smaller cage is connected to the main enclosure. This small cage had been built first as a result of the complaints from foreign visitors who had been appalled by the tiny space that the *belian* cage had afforded Bullet. When Abang Mutalib returned from his training at Jersey Zoo's conservation academy, he was aware that much more was needed.

Under his supervision, a larger cage was built. The two enclosures were connected so that Bullet could be confined to the smaller cage when the larger enclosure was being cleaned and vice versa, keeping workers safe. Abang Mutalib's newly acquired knowledge and training in wildlife management, as well as Bullet's increasingly aggressive behaviours, brought about these changes. It was here that Bullet lived out the remainder of his life; in the two enclosures that formed Cage 14 at the end of a narrow wooden walkway, on the edge of the nature reserve where his semi-wild relatives roamed freely. Standing in Cage 14 now, the dense surrounding forest presses down on me. What must Bullet have thought, to be able to see the forest but never again to feel the earth beneath his feet, never again to touch the bark of the trees, never again to forage among the branches and leaves?

Bullet – free and confined, from childhood to adulthood, 1973 - 1992

The orang-utan is an arboreal ape. In the wild, it spends most of its time in the trees, but Bullet spent most of his life on the ground. Even when allowed to roam at Semenggoh as a young orang-utan, Bullet preferred to remain terrestrial, imitating the humans around him. His keeper, Christopher Kri anak Ubang, says Bullet never seemed to like being in the trees. He loved to be with humans. When he was young, he followed Christopher Kri around Semenggoh, sometimes grasping his leg and hugging it as Christopher Kri went about his duties; other times mimicking his actions, picking up tools and trying to use them. He would go to sleep on the floor next to Christopher Kri's bed; his favourite sleeping position being

flat on his belly. He would put on a sarong and pull it up over his head, then lie on the floor on his stomach.

It is hard to imagine that the young orang-utan living freely at Semenggoh like a beloved child to his keepers Christopher Kri, Thulu Ayu and Bujang Malik, and to the visitors like Bibiana Pek and her children, would eventually live most of his life in a cage. All those who looked after him say he became more aggressive. The trigger, apparently, was when a mischievous Forest Guard cut Bullet's hair and showed him his own reflection in a mirror.[244]

Did Bullet believe he was a human being? Was the sight of his face in the mirror a horrible shock? The young orang-utan had been orphaned as an infant, shot in the head when his mother was killed. With no wildlife vets in Kuching at that time, Bullet had been operated on by Dr Daniel Kok, a medical practitioner in town. Named for the bullet that Dr Kok removed, the young orang-utan was raised by Dr Kok's American wife Elizabeth; he lived with their family for about three years, until Semenggoh was established as an orang-utan rehabilitation centre. Growing too big and strong, Bullet was translocated from the Kok family's residence in Batu Lintang to Semenggoh.

Perhaps this human family life that Bullet had enjoyed was all that he knew about life and family. Did Bullet only remember his human mother and the family ways he learned from living with a human family for three years? Did seeing his own reflection prove to be a gothic nightmare from which he could never wake?

In Cage 14, 2018, Reflections

I look out through the bars of Cage 14. The forest surrounds the cage with only the small gap leading back to the mossy wooden pathway. This is what Bullet would have seen. As a young orang-utan, he had loved being with people. In the cage, he could no longer touch humans nor play among them as he had done. Female orang-utans were brought into the cage in the hope that he might father offspring, but he was not interested in them. Eventually, the females were taken out of the cage and Bullet was left alone. His only interactions were through the bars of the cage. Visitors would trek along the walkway to seek him out in Cage 14, to gawk and gaze at him.

[244] According to Cribb, Gilbert and Tiffin (2014, pp. 235-236), Darwin himself gave a mirror to two captive orang-utans in a zoo. It appeared that their reaction revealed a lack of self-awareness, though they could express emotion. In Bullet's case, some forest guards believe that seeing himself in a mirror made Bullet realise that he was different from the humans he had bonded with, leading to anger and increasingly aggressive tendencies.

Trying to establish a friendly relationship with him, the wildlife vet Dr Jane Bennett would give Bullet's hand a pat before she left every evening. Then one day in 1989, Melvin heard a huge commotion when he was carrying out conservation education activities with a group of students at Semenggoh. Bullet had bitten Dr Bennett's hand and would not let her go. It seemed that he had turned her friendly gesture into an opportunity to express his pent up rage. Finally, the park staff managed to get Bullet to release Dr Bennett, but by then, his powerful bite had severed a ligament in her hand. What had caused Bullet to turn on Dr Bennett? Why had he bitten a human who treated him with kindness and compassion?

Humans created the damaged Bullet. Greed or maybe desperation had led to the killing of Bullet's mother. Saved by Dr Kok, Bullet lived his childhood years with a human family. That life was disrupted when he was taken to Semenggoh where he was initially allowed to roam free during the day. His companions were forest guards and general workers. Could it have been mistreatment or was it the realisation that he was different from humans that had led to Bullet becoming aggressive?

Cage 14 and all those other cages at Semenggoh are abandoned now, but the tale of injured, rescued and confiscated wildlife continues. Bullet's stuffed body stands with his arms folded across his chest in a glass enclosure at Matang Wildlife Centre; the taxidermist had chosen to fix him in his favourite pose for posterity. It is as if he is forced to witness the repetition of the horror stories of rescued and confiscated wildlife that are brought to join the menagerie of damaged caged animals at Matang. Will they ever be rehabilitated and released into the wild? The aim is to do so, but many may not be able to; they were either captured too young to learn how to fend for themselves in the wild or are too damaged from years of captivity or ill treatment. A few might have a chance to be rehabilitated, except that there are no forests for them to be released into. Existing populations of their species in the protected forests or national parks might attack them, while the food and prey in other forests may be scarce or unsuitable for their consumption. It is possible that most will spend the rest of their days in cages visited only by humans who seek Darwin's "backbone shiver" of which Barbara Creed says the human animal yearns "to feel the thrill of fully being alive in the modern world."[245] This thrill is gained at the cost of the mythic human-orang-utan confined in a cage or in a small patch of nature reserve never truly living in a natural state. This is the

[245] Barbara Creed, "Apes and Elephants: In Search of Sensation in the Tropical Imaginary" *eTropic*, 12, no.2 (2013): 168, https://journals.jcu.edu.au/etropic/article/view/3339/3279.

gothic horror story that haunts human civilisations, demonstrating that we are not really that civilised after all. The photograph of Bullet and the abandoned Cage 14 remind me of this.

4.10 Story 10: *On Love, Keepers and Confiscated Orang-utans*

Preamble

This Collage pieces together the observations of the researcher-writer and the lived experiences of the keepers who worked at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, caring for the orphaned orang-utans, helping them to learn what it means to be an orang-utan. How does a human being teach an orang-utan to be an orang-utan? How does an orphaned orang-utan who has grown up learning from humans teach her own child how to be an orang-utan?

On Love, Keepers and Confiscated Orang-utans

The orang-utan moves down the tree at a measured but fluid pace. She finds the toe holds easily and grips the tree trunk with her strong fingers. Hand over hand, she makes her way down, and all the time, her baby clings to her. From the moment she appears among the leaves and branches of the treetops, she moves calmly and never hesitates. The branches sway and leaves rustle. It is cool and quiet under the forest canopy. Small patches of sunlight peek through the green and brown roof above and all around, is the scent of earth and moisture and life. The mother orang-utan reaches a large branch that stretches towards the feeding platform and then ambles slowly across it. What balance! What assuredness! The baby still clinging to her sways in tandem with her movements.

My husband and I are visiting Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, an orang-utan sanctuary and nature reserve some 40 minutes from Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, once known as the Land of the White Rajahs and now known as the Land of the Hornbills. Like many other visitors, 20,000 a month, we are told, we are here to see the semi-wild orang-utans roaming free, not behind bars or in cement enclosures. My husband is a wildlife biologist and he has seen wild orang-utans in the field. I am city-bred and I have only ever seen orang-utans in cages or in documentaries. The visit is for my benefit as I am researching and writing about orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. Over the past year, I have talked to keepers, forest guards, park rangers, wildlife biologists and conservation educationists. They have shared their stories, feelings and understanding about our cousins, the red apes.

This morning, though, watching the mother orang-utan and her baby, I am thinking about the emotion we call love. I watch the gentle but certain movements of the mother orang-utan as she moves among the tree trunks and branches. And the baby orang-utan's expression that seems to be one of complete trust in her mother. Not for one moment does the baby seem at risk or in distress. What natural instincts guide a mother orang-utan that has been raised in a wildlife reserve? In the wild, a young orang-utan could live with her mother

till she is seven years old. Those that were rescued and placed at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre had been snatched from their mothers far too soon. The keeper tells us that this young mother, Analisa is the daughter of Seduku, an orang-utan confiscated in Sebuyau in the 1970s. So, Analisa has learned orang-utan ways from her mother and other confiscated orang-utans, all of them semi-wild. These are orang-utans that have interacted with humans since they were young. How natural are their instincts? How real are their habits, actions and reactions? How real are their lives?

It makes me think about what Charles Darwin wrote in *The Descent of Man*: "Besides love and sympathy, animals exhibit other qualities connected with the social instincts which in us would be called moral." What is an orang-utan's love? What is its expression of sympathy?

The Park Ranger Dominic Helan Eric tells us about an orang-utan mother who carried her dead baby's body with her as it decomposed. The orang-utan mother never let it go, despite the flies and the smell, till the baby seemed to be just skin. Dominic says, "That one we couldn't do anything about. And from that day onwards, I started thinking that this is the orang-utans' love for their babies."

"There is another incident [about nine years ago] I would like to share where there's one orang-utan by the name of Delima. Delima is actually one of the aggressive mothers in Semenggoh. She was rescued from Batang Ai and she gave birth to a baby called Selina. And Delima passed away when Selina was still a baby. It was confirmed that one of the dominant males, Ritchie killed her. We found the carcass, the dead body of Delima. And you know what? Who took care of Selina? This Selina was still a baby, you know. She was looked after by another orang-utan. Her older sister, Endu, looked after her. She even let Selina suck the nipple."

So, this is another instance of orang-utan love; the older daughter of an orang-utan caring for her younger sibling when their mother has been killed. It makes me think about the question I asked earlier, "How real are their lives?" Some people believe that captive bred animals are genetically dead. These are wildlife that cannot truly be released into the wild; they have been raised in captivity and though they roam freely in the small patch of protected forest, they return to seek food left by humans. Their reliance on these feeding stations means that their rehabilitation is incomplete. The small landscape that is their natural habitat is too tiny for too many. So it is with the orang-utans we see at Semenggoh. They have been bred in captivity and though it seems that they have been born wild, in fact, they have not. They are living in a 653-hectare nature reserve surrounded by human populations in villages. In the

wild, orang-utans are usually solitary creatures, but here, according to the list of names posted at the main viewing area of the feeding platform, there are 23 orang-utans roaming in this tiny plot of protected forest.

My husband and I leave Analisa and her baby Anaku to their quiet ruminations. At the main feeding station, the crowd has grown. One of the adult males, Edwin, is sitting on the platform with his back turned to the spectators. A little boy is leaning on the perimeter fencing. I look around for his parents, but there is such a crowd I can't tell who they might be The little boy looks like he might just tumble into the grassy bank, but no one seems to be paying attention. He is peering this way and that, alternately leaning and swinging on the posts.

Christopher Kri Ubang told me about his experience with young orang-utans. They are very like human offspring; curious and marvellous imitators. Chris was posted to Semenggoh in 1981, and here he cared for the young orang-utan named Bullet. So named for the poacher's bullet that was removed from his head by the medical doctor Daniel Kok who loved and treated animals in addition to his human patients, the young orang-utan mimicked the actions of his human care-givers and latched onto them. Chris told me, "In the day time, he will be out, but at night, we put him back into the cage. Because if you don't, he will go into your bed. That's the problem. He's lying down on the floor of the barrack, but what he likes is to get the sarong. You know, the sarong that you wear? He likes to wear that one. He likes to wrap himself around in it. That's what he did."

Chris would take the young orang-utans to the forest, hoping their natural instincts would kick in and they would start to climb the trees. In the wild, orang-utans are mostly arboreal, spending much of their time in the trees, over a hundred feet up above ground. The young confiscated apes have spent most of their lives on the ground with humans and they have to be encouraged to climb the trees and make their daily nests to sleep in. Chris would lead the young orang-utans to the forest. Pantu, Banggan and Archie would climb up and stay in the trees for as long as one or two days, but Bullet would not stay even a little while. "Whenever you go to the forest with him, when you sit under the tree, he would climb up," Chris said. "But as soon as you go, he will go down and run after you."

Bullet would follow the forest guards and mimic their actions at work, in the kitchen, in their living quarters. He would grab a spoon and try to make it work; get angry when the forest guards tried to shoo him out. Chris explained it this way: "If you don't take care of him, he will not be able to take care of himself. If you take care and show that you're really caring for him, then that's the problem. This is something in between that's very difficult.

Bullet is very special. He will not go and follow people he doesn't like. He's very selective. One of our rangers that time, Abang Mutalib, when I was not there, Bullet chased after him and he jumped from the window. He doesn't like him. I don't know why. Abang didn't do anything bad to him, but he just started probably because they didn't have any kind of, probably, emotional ties with him. If you don't have the kind of feelings towards animals…. I think animals can understand that you have your feelings. I don't know. Can understand emotion, I'm not sure. I'm not a scientist on animal behaviour, but I think this is what happened to Bullet at that time because he was very selective. He doesn't actually like other people."

After two years at Semenggoh, Chris had been transferred to Bako National Park and had had to leave the young orang-utans to others' care. Ten years later, he returned to Semenggoh. "I came back to the centre to look at him, to visit him. I just want to see whether he still remember me, but I think he remember. Because, when I come around, he would put his hand out then I give him apple because I know he likes apples. Give him apple and then he making noise: 'eek eek eek', you know? That kind of noise like us."

As I look at Edwin and the young orang-utans that are climbing down the tree towards the feeding platform, I wonder about the feelings of these animals, our cousins. Nearly 97 per cent of their DNA is similar to ours. Humans have wrenched them from their natural homes and torn them from their mother's care. We are trying our best to teach them the skills they need to survive in the wild, but we cannot wholly rehabilitate them. Relocate them to protected forests that support orang-utan populations and they might be killed as interlopers. Release them in forests that are not home to orang-utans and they might starve to death. The only solution appears to be at the wildlife centres. Here they live "freely" as semi-wild nomads who come home to feed when the fruit trees in the forest are bare. It is better than the lot of those who must be caged due to aggression and anger or those who live in cement enclosures in zoos. But how many more newborns can this tiny nature reserve support?

What do I think of the love that exists between the orang-utan and her mother and sister? Or the love of a keeper or forest ranger for the animals in his care? I spoke to Johnwen anak Sian who has been caring for the orang-utans in Semenggoh since he started work there in 1984. He has looked after many of the orang-utans, including Bullet, after he had grown to adulthood and caged, too large and aggressive to be allowed to roam freely at the wildlife centre and nature reserve. Johnwen had been there when Bullet grabbed Dr Jane Bennett's hand when she passed his cage and gave him her usual farewell pat as she was leaving for the

day. He was the keeper who had freed Dr Jane Bennett from Bullet's grasp but was then bitten by the enraged orang-utan.

I asked Johnwen if he had a favourite orang-utan from all those he has cared for. He told me that Tom was his favourite because he had never bitten him once. He was calm and quiet and never disturbed the park staff nor the visitors. But this docile semi-wild orang-utan was taken from Semenggoh to become the star attraction at a wildlife centre in Bintulu and he never returned.

Are the emotional bonds between keeper and confiscated orang-utan that Christopher Kri Ubang spoke about really love? When Johnwen, a man of few words, says he had a favourite orang-utan who was relocated to suit tourism needs and he never saw him again, is he saying that his care for the orang-utan was really love? Maybe these keepers and park rangers would not articulate these ties as love, but I believe they exist as such, at least from the orang-utan's point of view. The young Bullet who longed to sleep in the barracks with his keeper, and who tried to imitate his actions must surely have felt love for his carer, and more than bewilderment and sorrow when the keeper did not return for ten years, and then only for a fleeting visit. What does the orang-utan feel when every time he bonds with someone, those bonds are wrenched apart? First, he loses his natural mother, suffers injuries and ill-treatment, then when he is brought to the wildlife centre and is given a kind of life here, the keepers at the change, and perhaps worst of all, his freedom to roam is taken from him. Many people wonder why Bullet turned on Dr Jane Bennett, the veterinarian who felt compassion and empathy for this huge orang-utan who lived a life confined to a cage, pacing on two legs in circles with his arms folded like a man. Maybe it was just too much, one pat too many, after days and days of receiving a pat and then watching her walk away.

I think of Dominic, Chris and Johnwen, and the many other forest guards and keepers who have cared for orphaned orang-utans in Sarawak. Their lives have been enriched by the care they have given to these orang-utans. They certainly have stories to tell their children and grandchildren. But human lives move on and these confiscated orang-utans live in the wildlife centres either semi-wild and roaming in the limited nature reserve or caged due to aggression and curiosity which led them to disturb the workers or the visitors.

Strangers adopt orang-utans, donating funds to pay for their keep. Confiscated animals are sent to Matang Wildlife Centre where volunteers pay to help feed and care for the confiscated wild animals that have nowhere else to go. Surely those are gestures of love. As for the twenty odd orang-utans at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, they continue to attract about 20,000 visitors a month. Perhaps that's the best we can do for them. They have nowhere else

to go, and though they are still dependent on human intervention, perhaps their purpose is to fulfil that human desire in us to see our cousins, the red apes in person. Somehow, we feel akin to the orang-utan that shares our home, Planet Earth. They are so like and unlike us. Analisa, the mother, Anaku her child. Delima and her daughter Endu who became the surrogate mother to her sister Selina. Bullet whose life had been so torn apart that he wanted so much to live as his human care-takers did. Tom who was relocated never to return to what he knew as his home. Perhaps their purpose is to help make sure that the forests remain protected for their truly wild cousins to stay free. And maybe our purpose is to make sure we have enough love in us to see that their lives are not wasted.

4.11 Story 11: *How to Convert a Hunter or How to turn a Hunter into an Expert Birder and Conservationist*

Preamble

This story falls neatly into the Hermit Crab Essay subgenre, so named by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola in their illuminating book, *Tell it Slant*. Listening to Melvin's tales, the story of the hunter who became a field assistant and an unwitting conservationist fascinated me. Reading Miller and Paola, I realised that I could tell this story of a budding wildlife biologist and his field assistant *slant*.

How to Convert a Hunter

or

How to turn a Hunter into an Expert Birder and Conservationist

It is said that young Iban men like to portray themselves as the strong and brave Iban warriors of old. Or so I am told by Melvin Gumal, a wildlife biologist who has worked in Sarawak for more than thirty years and is the 2014 winner of the Whitley Award on conservation of Ape Habitats. He should know.

"If God had wanted humans to live in peat swamps, He would have given them wings!" These were Dr David Chivers' words when visiting the field site of his PhD student, Melvin Gumal in Sedilu, Sarawak. Both Melvin's supervisors had been determined to visit his field site in Sedilu, some two hours' drive from Kuching city, the capital of Sarawak, but a good many more hours by boat and on foot deep into the peat swamp. This was where large numbers of flying foxes (*Pteropus vampyrus natunae*) were known to roost and for this reason, where Melvin was focusing his PhD studies on flying foxes' roosting behaviour.

Dr Chivers and Dr Elizabeth Bennett, Melvin's field supervisor, agreed it was "the field site from hell." It could have been much more difficult without Melvin's research assistant, Lihon Singga. This "How to" article is really about Melvin and Lihon, their relationship, their work in a remote, barely accessible spot in Sarawak from 1998-2000, and Lihon's "conversion" which has led to his working with WCS field researchers in other peat swamps in Sarawak as well as in orang-utan habitats, and being a much more sustainable hunter. When Melvin told me his stories, I thought they fit beautifully in a series of key points on how we could convert a hunter.

1. Let him tell you his stories

The first time Melvin was out in the field with his new field assistant, Lihon Singga, they sat on a log at Sebangan in Samarahan district waiting for the flying foxes to emerge from their

roosts. That was when Lihon told Melvin that he had shot and killed 43 flying foxes. A young Iban farmer-hunter from Sebangan, he had mostly killed them to eat. Lihon evidently had no idea what his actions meant to the young conservationist and PhD student. Melvin says, “He naively told me that he had also shot at a dolphin and had seen other dolphins come to its aid. He was on a boat and shot it for fun. He even told me the dolphin emitted a loud piercing call when it was shot.”

Melvin stayed calm; he was not there to preach, but to make sure that he could live in the peat swamp for two years, gathering data on the flying foxes. This, he did, despite the remote location, hours spent literally in the peat swamp, toe nails falling off because they were constantly wet, surviving on canned food, rice and heavily sweetened coffee - and thanks to his studies and subsequent work in the Forest Department and the Wildlife Conservation Society, Malaysia, the flying fox habitat is now a protected area: Sedilu National Park, gazetted as such in 2010.

2. Let him include 2 kg of sugar in the rations

Two kilograms of sugar for seven days in the field! And rice - stacks of rice! It was a culture shock for both men. Melvin recalls, “The first time I was in a forest for an extended duration, my field assistant didn’t understand that I didn’t like to drink coffee with sugar while I was wondering why they brought 2kg of sugar for the field trip each time.”

Melvin soon realised the reason for the large amounts of sugar and rice. The field assistants needed the sugar and carbohydrates to give them enough fuel and energy for the hard, physical labour in the forest. Meals were basic. Food rations consisted of black bean sardines, tomato sardines, and sometimes, biscuits and luncheon meat. They subsisted on that together with rice or noodles, for two years. It took the COVID-19 pandemic and partial lockdown to force Melvin to eat sardines again.

3. Make the best of his smoking habit

Initially irritated by Lihon’s smoking habits, Melvin soon learned to appreciate the cigarette smoke. Put simply, Melvin says, “The annoying smell of the Indonesian-made kretek or leaf-roll cigarettes can be borne because it helps keep mosquitoes away as you’re trekking through the forest or resting at the campsite.”

Life in the field is broken down into a series of important actions and habits to ensure that basic needs are fulfilled. One of the most important issues to deal with is how to bear the aggravating mosquitoes that cause great discomfort and annoyance at any of the day. Mosquito nets and thick, long socks help at night, but during the day, Melvin learned that cigarette smoke, strong as the Indonesian varieties are, was a great help in keeping the pesky insects at bay.

4. Let him build the camp site

This really is a lesson about humility and acknowledgement of others' essential skills that can never been obtained from studying in the classroom. Higher degrees from renown universities overseas are nothing when faced with the reality of a tropical peat forest. Getting through each day is a challenge, and without an assistant who is equipped with the necessary skills to build a camp site and live in the forest, a researcher could never survive in the forest, much less even begin to gather the data for his or her work.

For Melvin's research work in Sedilu, there were actually two camp sites: the field hut where Lihon and Melvin stayed deep in the peat swamp and second, the field house on stilts built on the side of Sedilu River. Six researchers and assistants could fit in the field house built on rough-cut planks. At both sites, Lihon's expertise was invaluable. In the smaller camp site where only he and Melvin stayed, Lihon was able to build the camp site above the rising and ebbing water line. Because of his skill, they were able to sleep dry in their hammocks after a full day of being water-logged in the peat swamp.

A typical day started with a wake-up call shortly before six. The first task would be to boil water for coffee and have breakfast of instant noodles or rice and biscuits; this was their staple diet. Then they would have to get into their wet and cracking underwear which had been dried by the campfire built to cook dinner. All their clothes smelled burnt, but for those precious moments from waking up at 5:50 a.m. until they stepped into the water, they would be dry for about 30-40 minutes, having breakfast.

Strangely, Melvin and Lihon had no fear of snakes or crocodiles. Although they saw pythons and crocodiles, they were, as Melvin said, "foolishly fearless." He encountered a crocodile whose eye was as large as his thumb and a snake that he almost mistook for a stick in his

way. These were the conditions in the peat swamp that led Dr Chivers to call Melvin's research site as "the field site from hell."

5. Share your observations with him when he asks

These were Melvin's own observations of Lihon. *Over time, he was watching me writing things about animals, about flying foxes and their behaviour and I taught him how to do emergence counts* [Melvin was studying flying fox behaviour and this included taking note of the numbers of animals emerging from their roosts to seek food on a daily basis.] *Because he was very good at observing animals, he was adding information like, "Oh, there's that bird there" and he would open up* The Birds of Borneo *and he would identify the birds from the book.*

So, over time, he started having a little booklet [of his own]and he would write things and he would tell me like, "Oh, I saw this, I saw that", so he stopped being an unsustainable hunter, if you will. Although he would at Gawai I think, even now still, go hunting for a pig to feed the family, but he wasn't as non-sustainable as before. And the odd thing was, when I was watching all these flying foxes and their behaviour, when I came out, I would be about 100 meters away from him because I wanted him away and not disturb me. [But then] he would ask me questions like, "Why are those young juvenile bats, males, they seem to be taunting and trying to mate each other?" This made me realise, "Oh, he saw that too. It wasn't just me recording." It was very interesting that he validated what I saw by his own observations. That's what was interesting.

6. Don't get mad when he plays a prank on you

Even when it means that you struggled to find your way back to the campsite for four hours only to discover that your trusted field guide had been hiding and watching you throughout the whole time!

The flying fox roost actually moves 50-100 meters per day. To observe them, the researcher has to move his camp as well. Melvin got lost because he had asked Lihon to leave him alone. He had wanted to observe the bats without Lihon smoking beside him or disturbing him with chatter so he asked Lihon to return to the camp site on the pretext that it was about to rain and Lihon needed to make sure everything at the camp would be safe. The camp site

was about one hour's walk through the peat swamp so when Lihon left Melvin at about nine in the morning, he gave him some food for lunch.

While he was eating his lunch at about one or two in the afternoon, it started raining heavily and branches started falling all around him. Melvin had practised the Iban way of tracking in the forests by cutting or bending little branches and putting little cut-markers on the trails. Now, these markers were not evident due to the heavy rain and the branches crashing down. At the time, only heavy-duty analog cell phones were available, but few people had them. Certainly not forest guards and field assistants. Melvin's sole analog phone could not be used anyway as Sedilu was so remote that there was no signal available. As there was no way for Melvin to call to find out if Lihon was safe, he decided to start making his way back to the camp site. He could not, in any case, see through the rain to continue observing the bats.

It was shortly before 4 p.m. when he set out. In the downpour, he thought he could see the cuts he had made in the trees and recognise the little twigs that marked his trail, but some time later, he would see the same cuts and twigs, and finally, he had to admit that he had been walking in circles. When he had come upon the same markers for the fourth time, Melvin actually had a terrible thought that Lihon might have been killed by a falling tree and that he would be lost forever!

Desperate to find a way out, he kept walking in circles for nearly three hours, till past 6 p.m. Finally, he found a way out. Somehow, he saw a little twig that was different from the rest and he followed it out. He was walking back to the transact trail when he suddenly heard a noise that made him jump. "Boo!" It was Lihon behind the tree! Melvin had nearly used his parang on him. He asked Lihon how long he had been watching him walking around in circles. The answer was astounding: a few hours! Melvin was so mad he snapped at Lihon, but admitted that "in the end, I also laughed because it was really funny and he wasn't dead, He had just been watching and enjoying himself watching me walking around and around in circles. Iban sense of humour."

7. Trust him

This is Melvin's account of one of the most frightening incidents that occurred during his two years of field work. It involved quick thinking in an emergency, trust, a great deal of determination, and yes, luck!

It was probably in the 18th month of my field work and this time, the bats and the roost had moved 50 to 100 meters and were now closer to the field camp on stilts which had 6 people as compared to the field hut, which is several hours in. So, it was decided that we were going to take a boat from the camp and walk in to track the flying foxes. As usual, I would leave Lihon a hundred meters behind me. Sometimes, he would sleep when I was working, come to me, give me my lunch, and then go back and nap and smoke. This time around, I was tracking the flying foxes and I had a Rambo parang, a very nice Rambo parang, which people said was not as good as a proper parang, but it was a nice Rambo parang. [The blade of the Rambo parang just looked good. It was stiff and did not have the springiness of a regular parang and thus cuts would bounce off the bark.] I would cut little notches in trees to leave myself signs so I wouldn't get lost as I moved towards the roost. About a hundred meters ahead of Lihon, I was standing next to a selunsor tree. Usually when you do a nick on a tree, if the tree is soft, it would drive the sharp end of the parang into the tree and trim the branch. But selunsor stems are really hard [but I didn't know that]. When I put the parang to chop a little nick, it bounced off the stem, the bowl of the tree and went into my knee. And I'm like, "Oh, rubbish. Shit. Crap," and worse. I knew I had done something terribly wrong.

I backtracked and walked towards Lihon and said, "Lihon, wake up, wake up!" He said, "Why are you here?" I said, "I think I have cut myself." He said, "What do you mean you think you have cut yourself?" "The parang hit me on the knee" and he said, "Oh my God." So, he said, "Let me have a look." I was too scared to look. He said, "I have to tear open your long jungle pants." He did and then he said, "I can see your bone." I said, "Oh shit!" But he said, "Never mind, never mind, we have to get you out of here!" I said, "Okay."

"This is what we'll do," he said. He removed his socks which he uses when he sleeps to tie around my big cut to prevent the murky water from getting in. He then bit and chewed his rolled tobacco and stuffed the chewed tobacco leaves into my wound. He wrapped it up tight and he said, "We have another hour to walk out of here. You will be fine, we'll walk slowly." I walked, and for the first 10 minutes, I felt like, hey, I can do this because I had a lot of adrenaline. The last 15 minutes, I was in excruciating pain. Finally, we got to the river and the camp and hut was on the other side. We could see from where we were, about 200 meters away from the hut, the forest guard called Apai Wat was happily cooking and playing Iban music really loud. We were screaming, but he didn't hear us. We screamed then Lihon said, "He can't hear us, the music is really loud. Apai is a bit deaf anyhow." I'm like, "Now

what?" because we had been dropped off at that bank in the morning and Apai was going to pick us up at 6 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. that night.

We knew there were crocodiles in the river, but Lihon looked at me and said, "Do you want to swim?" I said, "I have got a cut" and he said, "Well, you can stay here, or you can swim." So, I'm like, "Okay," and then I said, "Do you see any blood?" But we couldn't see because we had been sloshing around in the swamp. So, he said, "All right, you swim in front and I'll swim at the back." So, we went into the river and swam right to the other side. It took us maybe 10 minutes of swimming to get to the other side. When we got to the other side, Apai said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Why didn't you hear us screaming for help?" and then he said, "Oh, I couldn't hear you." "Your music's too loud," I said. Then, we looked at the longboat - Johnson, the other field assistant, had taken a 15-horsepower boat up to the longhouse. We were stuck with a five-horsepower engine. Lihon said, "We have to take you to the doctor." So, quickly they bundled me for a five-hour boat ride down the river. We puttered down river to the dispensary.

At the dispensary, the government medical assistant looked at me and asked, "What happened?" I said, "Parang." He said, "Oh." Then, he took off the football socks and said, "What is inside here?" I said, "My assistant put tobacco leaves in there to protect it." "Oh my gosh, there's so many!" He took out a whole bunch, then he said, "I need to give you an injection." I said, "Yes, please do." He injected me and he sewed me up.

When I was done with the injection, I suddenly thought, "Oh God, I still have field work to do. What do I do?" Lihon said, "Aren't you going to tell your wife?" I said, "If I tell my wife, she will ask me to come home." So, I said, "Let's do field work at night." So that very night, we started field work at night. I didn't tell my wife for another two or three months and once I had completed field work, I related the parang story to my field supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Bennett and she said, "You are so lucky! A friend of mine had used a parang and cut off the calf of his knee and couldn't walk after that properly/" I replied, "Yes, I was a wee bit lucky." Yeap.

8. Offer him an alternative livelihood

Offer the hunter opportunities to be a field assistant for other conservation projects. It is true that the best way to ensure that the forests remain safe from conversion to plantations or

development is to find the people an alternative livelihood that involves the land and animals the way they are in their natural state. In the same way, if you want people to stop hunting wildlife, you need to offer them an alternative way to put food on the table. Lihon was an Iban hunter who lived off the land as was his right according to the Native Customary Rights. Many Iban men do this in the rural areas. Some believe this is a rite of passage and hunting prowess is a positive manly attribute.

It was a turning point when Lihon realised that his skills in the forest were useful to Parks staff, wildlife researchers and eco-tour agencies, and that people were willing to pay to see the wildlife in the forest that he might have hunted in the past. Suddenly, he saw opportunities that he had never been aware of before.

When I was talking to Joshua Pandong, the Head of the Wildlife Conservation Society's Orang-utan Research Unit, he turned to me and asked, "How do you make conservationists of people?" It was a rhetorical question. Josh knew, as Melvin did, you do it by giving them an alternative livelihood that depends on the survival or even the flourishing of the natural environment and the wildlife that make their homes there. The people in the local communities will stay in the longhouses if they see there's work and they can earn a living remaining there.

It is not just about saving the wildlife and their habitats but also about preserving the traditional way of life in the longhouses. The call of the cities, with their modern buildings, technological advances and facilities, is strong. Governments and even citizens lament the loss of their traditions in the face of development and globalisation, but if there is a good reason for the people to remain in their traditional homes and if they see that others appreciate and even embrace their way of life, they will stay. So, as in the case of Lihon Singga, the trustworthy and quick-thinking Iban hunter with excellent tracking skills as well as an extreme sense of humour, a hunter could become an excellent birder and appreciate the wildlife he observes instead of just killing it for fun or even for the family's next meal.

This then, is how you convert a hunter.

4.12 Story 12: *As Long as the Red Ape Lives* (*Seagi jelu mayas agi idup)*

Preamble

Eco-tourism brings alternative livelihoods to longhouse communities near orang-utan habitats. It gives them an incentive to stay away from hunting (which is permitted as one of their native customary rights) and it gives them a reason to remain in the longhouse and not move to the cities to which many are lured by amenities and jobs that they believe will help them achieve and sustain a coveted modern lifestyle. The authorial voice in this flash piece of Ecocriticism has a light conversational tone, belying the gravity of the fragile entwined lives of the longhouse communities and their orang-utan neighbours.

As Long as the Red Ape Lives

(*Seagi jelu mayas agi idup)*

There is a life where the red ape lives. It is in the rainforest, along the tributaries of the river Ai. Where a skilled boatman earns tourist dollars or a salary from research grants. Or where the best job is guiding visitors to the red ape's favourite fig trees. We can take you to see our cousin of the many names: *maias, mayas*, orang-utan, *Pongo pygmaeus*, but it may take a while. He's rather shy.

You may come into the longhouse kitchen where we blanch the forest ferns and grill or boil fish from the river. Or sit with us after dinner and enjoy *randau ruai*, chatting about the day, the work, the visitors, folklore. We can have some *tuak*, our local rice wine, and sing songs of love lost. Visitors are eager to sample this life. Most are from the west; they are very curious. Others are from the government, the NGOs, the researchers. Some are respectful, some are not. Just like us, humans everywhere. The red apes are the same; some are angry – break branches and throw them at us – others are calm, just cradle their young and peer down at us.

The life of the red ape is a solitary one. Only the females have the company of their young and they range in smaller areas. A male travels alone and over great expanses. He searches for food mostly, resting in nests he makes by bending branches and leaves. That's how some researchers count their numbers. We know this because they ask our help to look for the nests. Class A are green and solid, or Class B, brown and less compact.

We grow vegetables, rear *manuk kampung* chickens, fish and hunt. But we never hunt and never eat the red ape. *Apai* and *Indai*, father and mother, believe that when our ancestors passed on, they would take on the form and life of a *mayas*. The shy red apes live their lives

mostly alone in the forest canopy, but we do hear their call, sometimes in the morning or in the evening. They are like the Iban warriors in love songs, calling for a mate.

Here, bordering the Batang Ai National Park, life in the longhouse continues because of our cousin, the red ape. Some of the young do leave for the cities, but others stay because the rainforests are protected and the orang-utan survives. It is peaceful here and they love the river and all its tributaries; gaining knowledge from their elders about the plants and animals in the waters and in the forest. Visitors come to see the *mayas* in her natural home. No sad captive or semi-wild orang-utans in zoos or wildlife centres for them. A quiet ride on a longboat with stops and treks on trails through this wild area. Leeches and mosquitoes, heat and humidity, they're all part of the adventure. An adventure that goes on as long as the red ape lives.

4.13 Story 13: *Growing up at Nanga Kumpang*

Preamble

This flash nonfiction piece, what is called a "Short," grew from the story that Jenny Ngeian Machau told me about her birth. How much more exciting could it be to start a story with the telling of a child being born on a longboat, hours from the nearest government clinic? The excitement never seems to end because that child grows up to become a conservationist working on an enforcement team, tracking poachers in orang-utan habitats.

Growing up at Nanga Kumpang[246]

Jenny Ngeian Machau grew up on this tiny island. That is, it seemed like an island because everyone travelled by boat. There were no roads and cars; just rivers and boats. In fact, Jenny was born on a longboat on the Batang Lupar River. Her mother had been on her way from Nanga Kumpang longhouse to the clinic at Engkilili but Jenny had arrived earlier than expected. It was lucky that her mother had been accompanied by her parents and her sister who was a nurse. It must have been quite a shock for the boatman, though. For the record, Jenny's birth certificate states that she was born at the Engkilili Healthcare Clinic, but her family knows this is not true.

And it's not entirely untrue that Jenny grew up on a tiny island. She grew up at Nanga Kumpang longhouse and went to boarding schools at Lubok Antu and later, in Miri and Labuan. Lubok Antu and Miri are located in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo while Labuan is a Malaysian federal territory on a tiny island off the west coast of Borneo. Although Borneo is the third largest island in the world, it is relatively underdeveloped. It is the fabled island of white rajahs, oil-rich Sultans, pygmy elephants, hornbills, orang-utans, and sea turtles that return annually to lay their eggs on outlying islands. When Jenny left to further her studies at University Malaysia Terengganu, fellow citizens in Peninsular Malaysia asked if she had paddled a boat across the South China Sea to reach "Malaysian" shores or if she lived in trees like orang-utans. So, maybe we could say that Jenny grew up on a tiny island; tiny in terms of her fellow Malaysians' ignorance of her birthplace.

Jenny's fondest memories about growing up in this "tiny" island are about starting a hiking club in both her primary and secondary schools. Children in remote parts of Malaysia attend boarding schools as their homes are too far in the interior for them to travel to school daily. So, if she couldn't go home, Jenny decided she would start her favourite pastime at

[246] A version of this work was published in *Visual Verse* 2019, volume 7, chapter 1.

school. Since the age of three, Jenny had walked all the way from her longhouse through the forest to visit her grandparents who lived at the neighbouring longhouse Kumpang Langgir. It was a full day's trek through the forest, but Jenny never felt afraid because her mother was with her, leading the way. At school, Jenny started a Hiking Club and organized camping trips to waterfalls near Lubok Antu and Lambir Hills National Park near Miri.

Today, Jenny is on the enforcement team of a conservation organization patrolling the protected forests of Sarawak, destroying traps and reporting on illegal hunters. Growing up on this tiny island, trekking and camping in forests, has given Jenny skills that prepared her well for her conservation work. What spurs her on? The sight of an orang-utan's skull or its body with its hands cut off. Knowing there's a solution for this.

Part 4: 2000s

4.14 Story 14: *A Tale of Three Orang-utans*

Preamble

Rehabilitating orang-utans may appear to be a glamourous job. The reality is very different. Leo Biddle came to Sarawak for what he thought would be a short trip exploring the Bornean rainforest and its wildlife. He has stayed on for close to fifteen years to raise funds and care for the wild animals that have been rescued and confiscated from poachers and illegal wildlife traders. This Crafted Interview tells the stories of three individual orang-utans and how they have survived as semi-wild juveniles. They are Leo's stories as well, his lived experience with the three orang-utans, and the reality of an impossible situation.

A Tale of Three Orang-utans

The orang-utan is not a pet, yet many believe it can be so. Even today, in the 21st century, the desire for the young orang-utan as an exotic pet contributes to the illegal wildlife trade that continues to deplete already shrinking populations of the red ape in the wild. Together with the hunger for lands to convert to plantations or farms and poaching for meat, the illegal wildlife trade is responsible for the tragedies that have resulted in the hundreds, if not thousands of orphaned orang-utans that are either surviving in private zoos and homes or have been confiscated by authorities and are being cared for in rehabilitation or wildlife centres in their native Borneo or Sumatra.

The voracious appetite of the *homo sapiens* for exotics pets rips baby orang-utans from their mothers and it is believed that for every live young orang-utan that is sold to a private owner or zoo, its mother and one or two other orang-utans have been killed in the process, and many die en route to their destination as a living exhibit in some luxury home or as a pet until it outgrows its cute stage and becomes too strong and aggressive to be controlled. The adorable expressions and limpid eyes somehow appeal to humans who believe they can be tamed to live in human environments as living toys. Somehow, thousands of people believe the orang-utan infants and youngsters look cute in human habitation.

Fascination with the red ape continues, no matter Asian nor Western. Since Westerners came upon it on their travels in Borneo in the 1600s, the orang-utan has featured in exhibits, circuses, and shows, it was displayed variously as a pet, a monstrosity, the missing link in the theory of evolution. But it was not so long ago that in Sarawak itself, young orang-utans were dressed in children's clothes and brought out to amuse hotel guests at the edge of the national park where the largest populations of wild orang-utans are found in

Sarawak. Only when the tourists themselves questioned this display of captive young orang-utans in children's dresses was this extraordinary live exhibition brought to a halt. It seems strange to us today that human beings would find it humourous or entertaining that wild animals are trained to mimic human behaviour and to wear human clothes for which they have no need or use. But that was not too long ago and it was not in a different world.

The physical and behavioural similarities that we share, the use of tools and apparent high cognitive abilities of the orang-utan continue to fascinate us. This is the story of three orang-utans, their personalities and their traumas. Their stories are told by Leo Biddle who first came to Sarawak in 2006. Leo had flown to Sarawak as a project consultant to a group that had been running a wildlife rescue centre in Matang. He had intended to stay for six days, but found himself lured by the possibilities he saw, "impressed with the concept of what it could be - a centre that would deal with rescuing and the reintroduction of not just orang-utans, that's so iconic, but any protected species and not even necessarily protected species, any wild animal in Borneo." Leo has stayed on and is a rescue centre worker and manager, nurse, doctor and surgeon, guide, speaker and fundraiser, orang-utan baby-sitter and entrepreneur all in one. Living so closely and observing the rescued orang-utans so intimately, he speaks of individual orang-utans with knowledge, understanding, and great empathy.

David Vann says that "every good story is at least two stories." This story tells the stories of three orang-utans, their observer-memoirist, of Matang Wildlife Centre, of the researcher-writer.

Leo came for six days, promised to stay for six months, and has never left. He does fly to his homeland, Britain and other countries as a speaker, to raise funds for his conservation non-profit organisation, the Orang-utan Project, but his heart and mind have never left the rescued and confiscated wildlife and their temporary home, Matang Wildlife Centre. An entrepreneur whose businesses fund his conservation work, Leo doesn't seem to eat or sleep, yet he appears fit and healthy, whether at Matang, at a workshop or attending a talk by a visiting primatologist. The first time I met him at Matang, a tiny langur was clinging to him. It was an orphaned langur and it clung to Leo as its surrogate mother. That image of Leo told me the essence of the man who works tirelessly to save the wildlife that come his way.

Here's Leo talking about three orang-utans that he has encountered: their individual quirks and personalities evident.

Doris, child-like and inquisitive

The first orang-utan that I started to see the personality, an individual inside was one at Matang Wildlife Centre, one called Doris. She was child-like, I guess, in some ways. Her inquisitiveness about the environment around her reminded me of an ability to understand and frame what was happening in the environment around her made me think of human children.

When I came here [to Matang Wildlife Centre] in 2006, she was about six years old, already a fairly large orang-utan, still juvenile but certainly not a baby at that stage. She was involved, not in a show, but … members of the public would go in and have photographs taken with her at the Matang Wildlife Centre, the rescue centre. The company that operated the Centre then would allow their volunteers and their staff to interact with Doris under a modicum supervision of a more experienced keeper or ranger.

She was in an enclosure with walls but frequently, she would come out of that enclosure. She was still capable of being influenced by the senior keepers and would come out to get photographs with tourists, with visiting schools that came in for educational, sort of awareness day or something like that. She was very much a photo prop animal. She was very heavily habituated to the longer-term food givers that were there. At six years old, [orang-utans] haven't started to develop that more adult independence but they're wild and you don't want to go near them. Typically [their behaviour changes around the time they attain] sexual maturity. It'll stop behaving in a juvenile fashion, doing what it's told and such, behaving more wilfully in [a way] that's true with human teenagers around the world. But, yeah, a bit individual-dependent, unlike the pre-sexual maturity that would generally take the leadership role from the human even though they may already be physically much more powerful than that human that they would still take the lead from.

"The Curse of Orang-utan Rehab"

Well, I remember thinking how sad it was that it was necessary that they were doing it because that's what the public wanted, that's what the tourists wanted. I think the travel agency was doing it to raise money to help assist those animals. Their argument would be, "Well, if we're going to help build her a new enclosure, or build her a new platform or employ new staff to help at the centre, we need to make money first."

The public are willing to pay if they're allowed to get up close and personal with the animals. It's a no-brainer. That's the curse of orang-utan rehab I think. You know, 20 years ago the paying public were just turning up and using these animals as photo props anyways. So, at least they were contributing back to the centre, you know. I remember thinking it was a bit sad and I remember looking at how humanized this animal was and thinking, "Gee, this isn't rehabilitation. The animal's never going back into the wild."

I cannot believe that orang-utans are so different to other animals that I've been around. This seems to be a recipe for disaster, and you know, over the years, I think that initial suspicion is born out that when these animals get big and sexually mature, there's not going to be anymore photo-taking with them. They'll either end up in cages, they'll either end up shot, which has happened in history unfortunately, I think.

An Orang-utan's fascination and curiosity about humans

Well, I tried my damnedest to rehabilitate her, to get her back into a free-living forest-dwelling state. It took some years of work to get her coming off of the ground and going back into the arboreal state or at least a semi-arboreal state. What appeared to be almost impossible was to get rid of her, not so much dependence on humans because she was able to manage for herself as long as food was provided, but her fascination and her curiosity with humans. She would just be drawn to them like a magnet.

We were able to manage that to a degree by putting her in an area very remote where members of the public wouldn't walk past signage gates, "Don't go into this area". [There was] permanent surveillance while she and other orang-utans were undergoing this rehab element. So, we were able to manage that when she was younger but when she crested and started to become sexually mature, she started to not listen to the keepers so much or the rangers at that stage, and not really follow them as much.

She would just go trekking off from our line in the forests. In Doris' case not so much outside of the park, raiding local villages, because certainly a lot of the orang-utans did do that. Doris would go in search of humans wandering around the trail or she could come back to the centre proper or where the captive animals are, the kitchen and the clinic and would seek interactions with largely members of the public and then, as she continued to do that, it

became clear to me that she would start to injure members of the public soon. Doris unfortunately had, I won't say sexually imprinted on humans, but certainly, you know, with the development of sexual maturity comes sexual behaviour and Doris, as it's not uncommon, what with a lot of the great apes, was targeting that inappropriately to humans because she really grown up in a human-dominated environment.

So, fearing serious sexual assault from an orang-utan on a human, and there were a couple of instances where she did bite people, uh, she was put back into captivity. Sadly, I feel for Doris now, she probably can never be rehabilitated back into the wild. If we had had ultimate areas, you know, the much broader expansive forests where there weren't people in them, potentially her rehabilitation then later reintroduction, might have been able to work, but the Kubah National Park and Matang Wildlife Centre weren't the right environment for that. So, she was brought back into captivity after about a year and a half being semi-wild.

Chiam, the smartest orang-utan

I do [have a favourite orang-utan], but you can't tell Doris. One called Chiam. She's just by far the smartest orang-utan that I've worked closely with, you know. So, being exposed to [orang-utans] on a regular basis, [I see] there's a huge individual intelligence variation with orang-utans just as there with human beings, you know. It's hard to see inside their minds but arguably there might be a greater variation between them as individuals than there is between us.

Well, Chiam just happens to be the smartest one that I've met. Sadly, in some ways a lot of it is very humanized behaviour like very heavy tool-use like human tools, a rudimentary understanding of electricity. I'm not saying she understands what's ohms and watts and ampere are, but she understands that electrical devices need to be plugged into a plug and a plug switch needs to be switched on before the device will operate. She learned this through observation; watching humans in their human-dominated environment.

"Mugging" tourists

Chiam now is around 20 to 25 years of age. She could be a bit younger than that as she had been under government care before I came here. She lived semi-wild for about 6 to 7 years, but Chiam was perceived by a lot of my local staff and by the local government agencies as a very aggressive orang-utan. Chiam has put more people in hospitals in Matang Wildlife

Centre than any other orang-utan so, I totally understand why people might perceive her to be that way. I have always been unsuccessful in explaining that actually she's not aggressive; she's curious and slightly human-focused and completely unafraid of humans but actually, soliciting interactions with humans, coming up and making contact with humans, isn't characterised by aggression at all. It was characterised by a desire to, well, I call it mugging, it's not a very nice word for it but it's just the word that I use that these rehab centres, you will get an orang-utan that would start to mug tourists.

So, she would empty the pockets of anyone that was there, particularly people who had bags. She would go through them and a lot of orang-utans will do this because they're looking for food, you know. Orang-utans aren't particularly interested in stealing a bottle of water; they would be, however, very interested in my cup of coffee because throughout their lifetime, in a human-dominated environment, they may have been exposed to caffeine, Coca-Cola or coffee and it does appear that many of them retain a memory for this thing. So, you're far more likely to be attacked in an orang-utan centre if you've got a cup of coffee or a can of coke than you are a bottle of water. If you had a boiled egg, yes, that's food, but certain orang-utans would be far more interested in a packet of cigarettes than they would be in a boiled egg. If you had that versus a smart phone or a digital camera, people might think that the orang-utan is going to want the food, but these animals are very intelligent and have been exposed to humans for a long time. They would have seen a lot of digital cameras and a lot of mobile phones. They will have observed the high regard that humans have with mobile phones and whilst they won't necessarily understand what they do, certainly not necessarily, they will not understand what a smartphone does, they will know that humans prize that possession and might seek to keep it, even not understanding it, you know?

Orang-utans are quick learners. They won't interact with information in exactly the same way that human beings would, but they would retain a fetish value of certain objects. For sure, some orang-utans will just come in for food but ones like Chiam, they're not interested in the banana. They already know that if they want food, we're going to put food on the feeding platform, but they're interested in tourists for other things that they might have. Whether it be jewellery, backpacks, Chiam is always very focused on tools. She would love to steal tools. She would often walk past the kitchen when she came down at night and not touch the food but then break into our tool shed and steal hammers, saws, electrical power tools. On a regular basis, we would find them stuck up trees everywhere. She would even sometimes

try to hammer the plug into the tree, so again, she doesn't fully understand electricity. If there had been a plug socket, she would have used it. If she doesn't find a plug socket, she will try to improvise by hammering it into a tree or hammering into something else.

She bit a number of government workers and a TV crew that they'd taken out with her in rapid succession over a couple of days and then she was sort of recaptured. It's a shame, but I do kind of understand why, I mean, the human-animal conflict is what you get involved with when you do some work over here. It's very hard for humans to tolerate an animal that might be occasionally biting people's fingers off or delivering stitches. So, yeah, she's been back in captivity.

Ganti, who has no love for humans

Ganti is actually a very aggressive orang-utan. If 100 tourists went next to Ganti, 99 of them are going to get bitten. Tourists don't get close to Ganti because she will open her mouth, display her teeth and behave aggressively. So, no one goes in for a selfie with her. No one gets close so she doesn't bite but she has no love for humans either. I wouldn't say she's scared of them; she's just utterly disinterested in humans and dislikes them. So, she keeps to herself and many times with Ganti, I've seen her hide. So, she'll be somewhere, perhaps on the orang-utan observation platform, looking at the captive orang-utans or hiding from the rain. She'll hear a bunch of tourists coming and she'll actually climb onto the roof of the orang-utan observation platform and hide on top so within a meter's distance of, two meter's distance of the tourists, but the tourists won't know she's there. She'll wait until she hears them come off the observation platform, move to an area where she can't be seen and then come back in to take shelter from the rain. So, she is still habituated to humans but she's not seeking out interactions with humans.

On whether Ganti is actually the smartest

It depends how you define intelligence. She hasn't displayed the same tool use, cognitive functions [as Chiam]. Is she behaving more wild? Arguably, although she is still very habituated. She just doesn't want tickles, kisses, cuddles, doesn't want to interact with humans. [She] still makes use of humans; she raids farms on a regular basis all around the park so, she's not behaving fully wild. I would say, as much as a human can get inside the mind of an orang-utan, I've had some years of exposure to them, she's not behaving at the

same level of Chiam, she's behaving in a way that's more desirous to orang-utan reintroduction and rehab, but I don't know if it would be more intelligent.

Not a Suitable Release Site

Nearly all of the orang-utans I put through the rehabilitation process at Matang Wildlife Centre, in fact all but one have been brought back into captivity. That may be safest for them and this is also largely because they've gone through that baby phase, they're now adults. Seems like, "Great! Now what do you want to do with these sub-adult or adult orang-utan since you haven't changed the reality that there's thousands of tourists walking unescorted, unguided, ill-informed, not told of any of the dangers or hazards of being there, and you have communities living in almost a perfect ring around them in the national park?" It's not a suitable release site and it's not even close to a suitable release site. It's not even a suitable site for practising this rehab work.

When describing our fascination and interest in the great apes, tropical ecologist Junaidi Payne states that "their combination of wildness, intelligence and great physical strength induces a peculiar hold on the imagination." Each of these three orang-utans, with her own personality, intelligence and behaviour had learned to live in the human environment and partially in the forest reserve. This semi-wild lifestyle seemed possible while they were young. However, puberty increased the wildness or what is perceived as untamed behaviour of the captive orang-utans and fear of harms to humans and to the orang-utans themselves necessitated the incarceration of Doris and Chiam. Ganti, with her natural aversion to humans and desire to stay away from humans remains free in a semi-wild state.

What can Doris, the once inquisitive and cheeky youngster be thinking? Does Chiam long to explore more items that she enjoyed tipping out of people's handbags or the tools she loved to use along side the forest rangers? Do they remember those days when they were allowed to roam the wildlife centre and nature reserve? What does the captive orang-utan think about in all her wakeful hours when she is perched on a log or substitute tree in an enclosure? What does she see in her mind when she turns her back to the audience that craves to see her face, her expression?

Some might argue that our sorrow and pity are wasted on the aggressive captive orang-utan who has reached sexual maturity and cannot be allowed free. They might say that the animal was doomed the moment a hunter decided to kill her mother and to capture the infant, transforming her into an exotic pet or an exhibit in a private zoo. There are thousands

of captive orang-utans which cannot be released for fear of infecting existing wild orang-utan populations with disease or endangering those populations by increasing the competition for food. Aggression between the existing populations and the interlopers is also a factor, and there are few if any unpopulated areas left which might be suitable habitats for captive orang-utans to be released, especially when hunting for wild orang-utans for protein is still currently practised. Humans have caused this and there are no easy solutions as our rainforests are shrinking as human populations grow and greed knows no bounds.

What then is the solution for our captive cousins? It is an enormous expense to keep captive orang-utan healthy in a relatively large enclosure, not in close proximity to other orphans. They are a solitary creature in the wild yet often they are caged in small enclosures or in larger ones with others. Adopt an orang-utan programs like those at Semenggoh and Matang Wildlife Centres and non-profit organisations like the Orang-utan Project help keep the wildlife and rescue centres afloat. However, realistically speaking, rehabilitation and release are little more than pipe dreams as our cities and human populations expand.

While we do not neglect the orphans we have created, we should also focus on prevention. Significant fines and jail terms should be inflicted on poachers and their paymasters. Enforcement should be given top priority to keep our wildlife – not just orang-utans - safe in their natural habitats. This can be done if governments have the will and the determination to enforce the law. As individual citizens of this earth, we can refuse to buy wild animals either as pets or for consumption or their body parts as medicines or jewellery. Our ancestors may have hunted orang-utans to eat – leaving their bones behind in the Niah Caves - or more recently, may have killed them to collect and display their skulls to show off their hunting prowess, but we don't need to do that. If we save the orang-utans in their natural habitat, each a unique individual like Doris, Chiam and Ganti, we save not just one species, but many less known and less charismatic creatures that live in the same rainforest habitat. Scientists believe that tropical forests harbour a multitude of flora that have yet to be studied but which could have medicinal properties that might cure many ailments. And if we were to look at the big picture, the rainforest provides us humans, and all species, the clean air we need to survive on this planet Earth, our only home.

4.15 Story 15: *Ambushed by an Orang-utan*

Preamble

The quirkiness and intelligence of the wild orang-utan can be seen in this Crafted Interview; lived experiences expressed by Joshua Pandong, the head of the orang-utan unit in a conservation organization. While this could be perceived as a Portrait of Josh or a Segmented Essay, it is through the stories told in his own words that we learn about what it means to be a researcher in the landscape that is the home to a primate that is so much stronger and wilder than we can imagine. The cute and adorable photographs of infant orang-utans and their appealing eyes and sad yet comic expressions belie the true nature of a wild orang-utan that feels threatened in his territory.

Ambushed by an Orang-utan

Joshua Pandong is the head of the orang-utan research team at the Wildlife Conservation Society, Malaysia Program. He has worked for WCS since his graduation from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak in 2005 when he was 22 years old. He recounted his experiences, thoughts and feelings in a frank, open interview that almost felt like a sharing session. A pastor's son, Joshua's beliefs are entwined with his many insights into the orang-utans and the communities that share the landscape with them in Sarawak.

2014 - I call it despair

In the tenth year of working for WCS, I call it despair. Perhaps, discouraged as well. The word that I used at that time when I went through my experience was despair, and I did not know whether I want to keep on doing this for the rest of my life. I went on an eight-month break. I was meant to quit from the job. I had done the hand-over, but Melvin told me to take it as a sabbatical. So, I did that and went on a sabbatical and it turned out to be eight months and for that eight months, that was the time that I realised that hey, actually, things can change even though it's very small change. If we design big change, but it doesn't happen, we feel despair. But focus on the small changes that happen in people's lives, the people that you do touch, the lives that you do touch, perhaps they are the ones who are meant to make that big change.

All you have to do is touch as many lives as you can. So, perhaps they are the ones who [will make the change], because change is not instant. Some changes do occur overnight but most of the time it will take about a generation before you can actually see change happen. But, you have to keep the work going. Another thing is, people fear. There are two

types of mentality when people work. It's either a consumer or a farmer's or gardener's mentality. So, consumers say, "Oh, okay, I have a new handphone but if it starts to be faulty, I go back to the shop and get a replacement or get a new phone." That's how people sometimes view their work. First, this is my dream job. After a while, maybe this is not what I want and they change jobs. But for gardener's mentality, when they plant a tree and see that the tree is dying, they will find ways to find the root cause about why the tree is dying or the plant is dying. Could be they need more fertilizer, they need more water, or they need pesticides and things like that. And then if we invest enough by growing the tree, in the end you will enjoy the fruits and it will be worth your labour.

So, there's two ways of looking at your career. As a consumer, you replace it if you feel that it's unhealthy, or you grow it and make your own grass green. Instead of looking at the grass on the other side of the fence is greener, you water your grass and make it green. We are here to be stewards of God's creation. This is my personal conviction and the work just complements it. So, even if WCS doesn't pay me for the work that I do, I will still do it. So, I think part of the reason why I stayed and why I continue to work is that I believe that change can be, change is possible.

2015-2019 A Story about my Master's

I would like to tell a story about my Master's. It was meant to be a two-year Masters and I prepared a proposal before I enrolled in the university. So, I had in mind already what I wanted to do, which was on orang-utan DNA. Orang-utan DNA in the wild, the study has not been conducted yet. So, it was supposed to be a novel and pioneer work.

So, I tested out the feasibility of collecting faecal sample and hair samples of orang-utan to be used to extract DNA out of that sample. I went and did a pilot test at Semenggoh. Whenever there's fresh faeces, I'll go over. I was attached with Sarawak Biodiversity Centre so it's just next door and then I'll just go over with a cotton swab and put it inside a test tube and bring it back for analysis. Up to a point, the keeper, the animal handler was able to grab fresh, full fresh fur, or hair out of the orang-utan and put it inside the zip lock bag for me to bring it back.

But the issue was - the source was not an issue, we can get enough samples from Semenggoh Wildlife Centre - but the problem was the concentration of DNA was not enough in the outer layer of the faeces and the hair follicle. It wasn't enough, so, every time I did my sequencing and all that, no result turned out that it's an orang-utan. None.

So, what happened was when I actually look up how previous DNA studies were done for orang-utan [and found] the best source of DNA is still blood, but to get blood samples, you have to ask for a different permit from the Forest Department and another thing is it's invasive. So, it's not actually very practical in the wild because you'll be disturbing their natural behaviour…if you're affecting them in their natural environment, you're not actually doing proper science because you're meant to study them without affecting them.

I found that out as I entered and enrolled in the university, I had to put the proposal aside and I didn't pursue my original proposal. So, half year into my masters candidature, I had to change my topic. The next thing I proposed to do was a pilot survey for orang-utans outside the national park, but that is in Sedilu, so this is outside the main habitat and when my colleagues actually went over, they said, "Josh, the area that you're proposing has already turned into an oil palm plantation."

So, again, I had to change, but I don't regret all this journey. I was meant to finish my Masters in two years. This is my fourth year and I'm only completing it this year, probably by September. It's taken me a long time because unexpected things happen, but I would say I don't regret because the final change to my thesis was good…. Using unpublished data of our mass communication surveys from WCS and to use a different statistical or mathematical analysis approach to analyse the population estimate of orang-utans. It turned out very well. I would say it generated interest from people who matter which is those who are doing orang-utan population survey in Sabah, Kalimantan and Sumatra. So, these people are the ones who will actually apply, if they find it useful. They will apply it in their own field sites as well. So, that was beyond what I had in mind. It was initially just as an academic requirement, but it has turned into something that can be used by other researchers. I'm glad that it's contributing to the scientific community. So, I won't regret this journey…. The journey was the learning experience and the Master is just a bonus. So, I'm glad that things worked out well in the end.

I am very relieved now, but I miss the journey and I do feel that I'll miss academic life, even as a student or even writing papers. But perhaps I could use what I've learned and apply it in the context of my own work and not just to confine it to what I did in the university. So, learning is a life-long process and I already have in mind what I want, what I plan to do, perhaps in the next three to five years.

2006 – Ambushed by an Orang-utan

My first visit to Batang Ai was on April 2006. [That was when I had] my first encounter to see an orang-utan. There were two juveniles and because I was fascinated by the sight of wild orang-utans for the first time, I actually spent a lot of time just watching. The people [on the team] were trying to get a better angle to take photos but I decided to just sit there and watch because I was amazed [at what I was seeing]. There were two juveniles, one standing on two feet, while the other went off. Actually, because I was focusing on that one juvenile that stayed, the second juvenile orang-utan actually made one big roundabout u-turn and ambushed me from the back. Then he dropped tree branches on top of me.

Because it was sudden, I wasn't prepared. I couldn't escape in time. So, I had to kneel down and pull the bag on top of my head before the branches hit my head. They were big branches. Orang-utans can break branches as big as my wrists with just one push. Because I heard the cracking and then I saw the tree branch come down and I wasn't in time to escape so I just put the bag on top of my head.

After that I learned to respect orang-utans. That was my first experience [with wild orang-utans] in fact. Perhaps because I was on my own, I was more vulnerable than the rest who were in another separate group who wanted to take a closer picture of the juvenile. So, I said to the orang-utans, "Okay, I respect your space but thank you for showing up. That was my first experience and um, I hope to see, uh, I understand you need your space, so I will leave now." Shortly after that, we all left.

Nest counts and villagers making choices

Nest count. A nest is - we call it proxy or other presentation of orang-utan presence in the area. When you see there's orang-utan nests, it shows that they're using the areas, which is good. Because it's so hard to see them in person, in the flesh, their nest is used as a proxy of their presence. So, we count the number of new nests. New nests because an orang-utan nest would last for about, up to, in our experience, up to 21 days. When we see new orang-utan nest, it shows that they recently used the habitat either for food or as a transit point to the destination that they want to go. Meaning that area is important to conserve.

Most of our work after 2011 were focused on field sites outside national parks. Outside national parks because when we went to the national park, like our visit, the villagers actually mentioned, "Oh, you're interested in orang-utans? I actually saw them at my backyard yesterday. Why don't you have a look at what do we have around here?"

So, between 2011 and 2015, we actually looked at orang-utan reported sightings outside national parks. There are two areas that were gazetted as a wildlife sanctuary, following our work. There's two, perhaps turned into a conservation area because the local villagers did not support the creation of a national park because they perceive that a national park would rob them of their economic opportunity to develop the land.

There is a way to go about this. Instead of saying that only logging or oil palm plantation gives you steady income, ecotourism is also an alternative source of income. So, if you develop a good tour package, you will have consistent flow of tourists to the area, to see orang-utan, to experience their natural environment, the clean water, the clean air, that is actually a tourism package. They have [all these things], but we have to tell them in order for them to believe, because for them, if that place does not generate money, it is not beneficial to the community. So, benefit to the community translates into whether they have money or not.

We don't blame them, because when we did our social survey, a lot of respondents of the survey mentioned that they want the same kind of development happening in their area as it is in the city. They want growth, they want electricity, fair enough, it's a basic necessity. But we mentioned that, alternately, this is what happens if you open up your land for logging and oil palm plantation. You get polluted water, your source of protein, fish and all that will be very much affected. Some villagers do not take our words kindly. They [insist] and say, "we allow logging. I own this land, I will tell the logging company, don't touch this tree, don't touch that tree" and all that, but when the day came to log the area, the logging company did not honour the request of the local people of not cutting the trees. They took all of them.

When the local villagers wanted to look for the logging company manager, he was nowhere to be found and the trees had all been cut off. So, regret and sometimes they need to see that happening and hear all these sad stories for the other villagers to suddenly agree with you, yeah logging is bad, opening up land is bad. Perhaps ecotourism is better. We really hope that it doesn't have to take that kind of extreme incident to happen before people change their mind. As best as we can, we try to inform them, but when it happens, when their eyes are open to see, "Hey, actually yeah, we made the wrong choice."

Some villagers do admit that they made the wrong choice. For us, we don't distinguish between those that make good or wrong choices. If there's orang-utans in the area, we are responsible to inform them about the decisions that they can make. So, we have been going around villages trying to find what are their perceptions, first of all, are they supportive of keeping wildlife or their forests as natural as can be, if yes, then we come in. If

they say that, "No, no, no we want logging and all that," we have to look for those who are supportive of keeping their trees and wildlife and market the ecotourism there so when other villagers hear the success stories, then they will perhaps consider, "Hey, maybe we were wrong, they were right". I'm not sure. It's all about influencing people's decisions.

2019 I am also here on earth not forever

A lot of people feel that conservation work is not a secure profession. They feel that it's a waste of time, um, it doesn't generate a lot of money. But, I have to remind myself every day of the conviction that I am also here on earth not forever. It's just a very short time, what will I do with my life in this short time will leave for the next generation. So, even when I do all my work, I always keep in mind that what I do will be passed on to the next generation, so, what am I doing to train the next generation. The stories, the feeling that you need to pass on; learn something, make it your own and then pass it onto the junior researchers perhaps.

The satisfaction that you get out of seeing people who did not [originally] support you become your strongest supporters, is an experience money can't buy. That satisfaction is like, real, that keeps you going. When you understand that … when you see for yourself that change is possible, I think nothing can stop you from continuing what you do because you, we are making a difference.

Because there were orang-utans

It's nice to have success stories once in a while. We can see people's lives change. I think from that change, I think about 200 villagers who were around that area kept their lands [that were] under threat of being converted for logging work. So, we were there in time to say that we saw orang-utans and this area was important. Logging, oil palm, off-limits. They were quite happy that we were able to deter the big companies from coming in. So, I think orang-utans do play a role, I mean, in that sense where people's homes are still kept alive or in their natural state because there were orang-utans.

4.16 Story 16: *A Murder Unsolved or The Fourth Suspect*

Preamble

Delima's story is a perfect tale for a Hermit Crab Essay. So coined by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola, this particular essay borrows the Murder-Mystery form. It is not to make light of the demise of an orang-utan, one that in a way, became a poster child for the Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, living in a semi-wild state in the nature reserve and giving birth to four healthy offspring over the course of several decades. Though the official response to her death was that Ritchie, the alpha male, killed her, there are other possibilities. For me, this remains an unsolved murder.

A Murder Unsolved

or

The Fourth Suspect

Delima's body was found in Semenggoh Nature Reserve. The Park staff had found her a few days after she had died; the scavengers had been there. The Park Warden Dominic Helan anak Eric tells me that she was one of the most aggressive mothers at the Wildlife Centre. He says that "it was confirmed that one of the dominant males, Ritchie killed her." He did not explain how this was confirmed, but we do know that Delima had a young daughter, Selina who was unharmed in the incident or perhaps was nowhere nearby at the time. There were no human witnesses. In 2018, when he told me about this incident, Dominic said that Selina was about nine years old so Delima's death had taken place in around 2010 or 2011. She had been brought to Semenggoh as a young orang-utan orphan who had been confiscated in the Batang Ai area in Sri Aman Division and grew to be known by some as "Hot Mama".

There are others, though, who believe that it was impossible for Ritchie to have killed her. Certainly, he was one of the dominant males in the semi-wild population at the nature reserve, but why would he or any of the other dominant males want to kill Delima, a fertile mother of three, one of whom was still very young? Males have been observed fighting one another, and even females have been seen chasing, biting or hitting other females briefly, but not males and females. Orang-utan researcher Jenny Ngeian Machau has witnessed such a fight between males near Nanga Jambu longhouse at Batang Ai. Primatologist Elizabeth Bennett has stated that on the rare occasions when male orang-utans meet, it will be an aggressive confrontation, but when males and females meet, it is usually to mate.

Though scientists have noted that some females may not be willing and there are cases of violent copulation, fights between males and females have not been reported except for one documented case in Mawas Reserve in Kalimantan, Indonesia, witnessed by primatologist Anna Marzec of the University of Zurich. Interviewed in 2016 by Live Science a few months after the lethal attack, Marzec described how a female orang-utan enlisted the help of a young adult male to attack an older female. Rescued and protected by another older male, the older female died two weeks later, succumbing to injuries sustained during the 33-minute attack. John Mitani, a primate behavioural ecologist from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor believes this to be an isolated case as many thousands of hours of observation in Borneo and Sumatra have never revealed such aggression from a male upon a female nor a lethal attack by a female upon another female. The very proximity of the orang-utans to one another appears to be a unique, and perhaps, artificially created circumstance at the reserve. Despite the colony of rescued orang-utans at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre also being one that is unnatural in the wild, was Delima's murder the result of the aggressive dominant male Ritchie?

Dominic has this to say about orang-utans and their aggressive tendencies: "Orang-utans from Sebuyau are less aggressive … compared to orang-utans from Batang Ai. You know, Ritchie and Delima are from Batang Ai. These two [are quite similar] in terms of character. To me, Batang Ai ones are more aggressive. You see, Ritchie is aggressive and Delima is aggressive." To Dominic, this explains Delima's violent death at the hands of Ritchie. But even if this were so, what could have sparked Ritchie's aggression? Delima was a female, with a young orang-utan in her care. She was not competing with Ritchie for mating partners, but perhaps it was something simpler, such as competition for available space and food. Since fruit was deposited daily on feeding platforms, the orang-utans did not have to fight for sustenance in the forest reserve. Could it then have been a fight for space?

In 2010, there would have been more than 20 semi-wild orang-utans living in the nature reserve of 653 hectares. In the wild, orang-utans live solitary lives. They roam over large expanses of the rainforest in search of food. Different scientists have calculated the home ranges of orang-utans in various ways and have arrived at different distances. However, ecologist and recognised orang-utan expert, Junaidi Payne has noted in his book *Orang-utans: Behavior, Ecology and Conservation* that research shows that individual Bornean orang-utans may roam from tens to hundreds of acres of forest. Delima and Ritchie were from the Batang Ai area which is contiguous to the Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and the Bentuang-Karimun National Park across the Indonesian border. This is a totally protected

area of almost 10,000 square kilometres (1 million hectares), home to one of the few remaining viable populations of orang-utans on Borneo. The Semenggoh Nature Reserve is a tiny patch of forest compared to that large expanse.

And at that time in 2010, there were perhaps two generations of semi-wild orang-utans breeding in this artificially created population at Semenggoh Nature Reserve. The naturally solitary animal is forced into close proximity with others of its kind in a way that would never occur in the wild. Unlike the other great apes, the gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos, orang-utans prefer a solitary lifestyle. They roam widely in the rainforest, spending up to 70 per cent of their waking hours searching for food to fill their great bulk. Here at the wildlife centre and surrounding nature reserve of only 653 hectares, 40 minutes from Kuching city, the rescued animals are trying to find a way to survive. If Dominic is correct, could the unnatural close proximity of so many orang-utans have sparked Ritchie's anger and violent reaction to an also aggressive Delima? Perhaps this is what happened.

An alternative theory is that Delima was killed by nearby villagers who were frightened by her aggressive behaviour and angry at the raiding of their fruit trees by adult orang-utans emerging from Semenggoh Nature Reserve. When found, Delima's body appeared to have been torn apart by other animals. There was no formal autopsy. Or perhaps, there couldn't be one. After her death, other animals had taken parts of her away and perhaps they had taken away or destroyed evidence of gunshot wounds. Experienced individuals working to rehabilitate captive orang-utans have remarked on the large numbers confined to the small areas of Semenggoh Nature Reserve and Kubah National Park which is adjacent to the Matang Wildlife Centre. Both these areas are surrounded by villages that include fruit trees. Locals have seen, and perhaps encountered, orang-utans in their villages or even ransacking their homes. Semi-wild orang-utans are doing what is natural to orang-utans; they roam in search of food.

The semi-wild orang-utans at Semenggoh have become accustomed to humans providing them with fruit. It seems that they have been habituated to this behavior and evidently believe that any human would be a willing provider of sustenance. Certainly, orang-utans are believed to be the most intelligent of animals and these "rehabilitated" semi-wild animals are roaming free as wild orang-utans do, foraging for food. They are doing what their rescuers had hoped they would do. The park rangers and keepers have taught them to become arboreal as they should be. They have learned to climb up the trees and into the forest canopy. They can now move from tree to tree with confidence despite their bulk and their orphaned infant years on the ground. With scattered nests sighted in the nature reserve, we

see that they have learned how make nests for themselves for resting and sleeping. And, they have learned to recognize edible sustenance and to forage for it. Perhaps they do not fear the humans who inhabit these areas because they believe humans are their food providers.

So, it is possible that the villagers did become irate and fearful of the large primates emerging from the nature reserve and into their gardens and fruit farms. While there are names of many rescued orang-utans and youngsters born to them up on the notice boards or viewing platforms at Semenggoh, only a few are actually seen at the feeding platforms. We are told that those who have not been seen have been successfully rehabilitated into the forest. They no longer appear because they can survive on their own. It is hoped that this is true, but some people suspect a more sinister reason for their nonappearance. Is it possible that so many adult orang-utans could survive in the nature reserve? Or is it likely that they could have left the nature reserve and made it safely across human habited areas to another forest large enough and with food to sustain them? Instead, could it have been that they were recaptured in the villages and sold for meat or as pets? But then, why would a villager enter the nature reserve to kill Delima? Or if she were killed in the village, would the murderer have brought the body back to the nature reserve?

So, there is a third suspect. Perhaps there was someone who worked at the wildlife centre who feared Delima and her aggressive tendencies. It has been noted that some orphaned orang-utans imprint on their human care-givers; they are so habituated to humans that when they become sexually mature, they expect interactions with humans. However, Delima had obviously mated with male orang-utans and had successfully reared two offspring and was raising her third healthy child. So, it is unlikely that she was chasing or hunting a human for such purposes. Let us consider another possibility. Perhaps this act of murder stemmed from a deep-seated grudge borne by Delima. As we have noted, the orang-utan is believed to be the most intelligent of primates. It is remarkably similar to humans, and perhaps, Delima retained a grudge against a park worker who had mistreated her when she was small and helpless. Perhaps there had never even been any mistreatment. We do know that orang-utans do turn on humans, even those who have never hurt them. Perhaps Delima had simply taken a disliking for the worker and had shown aggression or had actually bitten or chased him, and perhaps the worker had grown to fear for his life. Delima was known for her aggression and it could have been that the worker felt he had to do something before he was seriously injured. If this were so, could we blame him?

There had already been many cases in which workers had been grabbed, flung and knocked out while others had had their hands or arms bitten. Johnwen anak Sian had been

bitten several times by different orang-utans he had looked after; the scars on his hands are evident and one of his fingers is no longer mobile and functional. Abang Abdul Mutalib bin Abang Tajudin had been chased by Bullet and attacked by Jerangkung whom he thought he had a friendly relationship with, and Dr Jane Bennett, the respected vet and primatologist had been bitten by Bullet and her hand had been so injured that she could not use it properly till an operation many years later restored most of its functions. So perhaps it was a frightened worker who had somehow been targeted by Delima who decided to take the ultimate action, before it was too late. If so, it was his good fortune that the animals in the forest had unwittingly helped him by providing the cover he needed. Their scavenging on Delima's body took away all the evidence of foul play by a human. By the time her body had been found, there was no evidence of a crime and Ritchie was the perfect scapegoat. It was said that Ritchie had torn Delima's arm off. No bullet was found.

But like any good crime story, there must be an unexpected suspect. So, upon reflection, we see that there is a fourth suspect in this case. The *homo sapiens*, a species that is remarkable in its intelligence, creation and innovation of tools that it uses to change and shape the natural environment to its liking. Indeed, we have a voracious appetite for other living creatures and for the habitats they naturally live in. Can we blame whoever pulled the trigger of a shotgun (human) or bit and beat Delima to death (Ritchie) when we are the ones who created this situation in the first place? Delima did not belong at Semenggoh Nature Reserve though it is possible that it was the only home she knew. While she had indeed been "rehabilitated" to the extent that she could roam the forest and successfully raise three offspring, she was still a stranger in a strange land. Did she infuriate Ritchie? Or a villager? Or was there someone else who was fearful of the large aggressive orang-utan? We do not know, but what we do know is that she shouldn't have been placed in that tiny patch of forest among other aggressive orang-utans and surrounded by *homo sapiens* with their own crops and homes to defend. Sadly, this was the only place where she could be left to live out her life and it was, after all, a place where she was indeed, to a certain extent, free.

There are those who believe they know the story of Delima's death. They do believe that Ritchie was responsible and that no mystery remains. Others speculate a cover-up to avoid discussion of human-animal conflicts at one of the most popular tourist spots in Kuching. In one month, 20,000 tourists visit Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. That is an enormous figure and accounts for many tourist dollars and the livelihoods of many people. But what do those figures mean in the face of an endangered species? Or when we consider

the individual orang-utans that are snatched from their murdered mothers and thrust into an unfriendly human world?

We consider this story. The confiscated orphan orang-utan survives her mother's murder in Batang Ai. She survives a captive life among humans before being confiscated by forestry officers and brought to a new home in Semenggoh Wildlife Centre where she is given the name Delima. Slowly, she is taught to leave the ground and to climb trees and eventually, to make her way through the forest canopy. She learns to make nests for herself and to forage for edible fruits, seeds and insects. Even so, she has learned to heed the calls of humans who tell her when food is ready for her on a feeding platform where scores of visitors wait to watch her make her way through the trees to grasp the bananas or papayas, or sometimes, durians. Perhaps Delima sometimes ventures outside the nature reserve and feeds heartily from the fruit trees in neighbouring villages. Perhaps she encounters angry orang-utans in the forest. Or perhaps she encounters angry humans in the nature reserve and outside it. One day, she goes too far.

When she is no more, we consider Selina, the third of Delima's offspring. Her older siblings, Anwar and Endu are already mature enough and independent when their mother Delima is killed. The youngest, Selina, is still a needy youngster. Fortunately, Delima's older daughter Endu adopts the youngster, becoming her surrogate mother. Saved by her older sister, Selina herself is today the mother of a baby called Sigat who appears to be thriving. It seems that Selina had been able to learn how to be a good mother from her elder sister Endu. And Endu evidently had been able to learn these motherly skills from her own mother, Delima, the orphaned red ape who learned what it meant to be an orang-utan from park keepers and forest guards at the wildlife centre and nature reserve, and who did her best to survive in the artificial world she had been raised in. It is Selina's turn now. The number of the orang-utans on the notice boards at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre is up to 30 now. If there really are that many surviving in the 683-hectare nature reserve, what are Selina's and Sigat's chances? If another murder were to take place, perhaps there are the same four suspects to consider.

4.17 Story 17: Adoption: *Pongo pygmaeus and Homo sapiens*

Preamble

Mentioned briefly in *A Murder Unsolved*, the story of Endu, the orang-utan who adopted her little sister when her mother met an untimely death is one of love. That an orang-utan, a "wild animal" could adopt a needy juvenile was astounding to me, an untutored observer of nature and wildlife. I placed this work in the subgenre of Nature and Environmental writing precisely because it is so astounding. Juxtaposing the orang-utan's actions with those of the human being, our cousins clearly come out on top; more loving, more caring, more *humane*.

Adoption: *Pongo pygmaeus and Homo sapiens*[247]

"During these six years, I've counted about four babies born naturally and one dead." After more than three decades working in various capacities within the Sarawak Forest Department, Dominic Helan Eric is now working as a Park Warden at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, about 40 minutes' drive from Kuching, Sarawak's capital city. He recalls how one of the keepers managed to snatch the dead baby from its mother. She would have carried it around despite the rot and the flies, till she was just cradling skin and hair. The keepers and wardens knew this because it had happened before. Then, there's the story about Salina. Dominic describes how her mother Delima was killed when Salina was still young. Salina's older sister Endu looked after her – even breastfed her. There was no milk; young Salina suckled for comfort. The keepers fed her soft bananas and today, Salina survives, living semi-wild at Semenggoh with her sister-surrogate mother.

At Semenggoh Nature Reserve, orang-utan mothers have been observed stretching their arms and legs like impossibly flexible yogis to grasp branches far apart so their young can climb across their brown-red-haired bodies. They teach them what they know; where and what to forage for food and how to turn pokey branches and prickly leaves into comfortable nests. Orang-utan Project founder Leo Biddle has witnessed Chiam, a moody semi-wild female orang-utan teaching the newly rescued young ones how to make nests in the forest at Matang Wildlife Centre. Chiam would "babysit" the youngsters, so that instead of Leo, a clumsy, weak human teaching them how to make a messy nest, Chiam would spend half an hour with a little one, bending and shaping the branches and leaves into a comfortable nest as only an orang-utan would be able to, with her strength and dexterity.

[247] A version of this creative nonfiction work was published in *Particle Magazine* 2019, issue 13.

Although Chiam would never fully adopt the rescued youngsters, Leo watched her devoting some time to teach them skills in the trees that the human keepers could not. It is true that she could neither tolerate them for long nor allow them to nest with her, but Chiam was the closest thing to a natural mother these orphans had. Leo believes rehabilitation can only work with as little influence as possible from us humans, no matter how well-meaning we are. The reality is that a semi-attentive orang-utan would make a better surrogate mother than any well-intentioned human keeper could.

Scientists say that in the wild, orang-utans are mostly solitary apes, with the strongest bonds forming between mothers and their offspring. Here at Semenggoh Nature Reserve, a patch of Sarawakian rainforest of only 653 hectares, an unnatural semi-wild colony of rescued orphaned orang-utans and their offspring survives. And it is here that the wardens and keepers are able to observe orang-utans caring for the orphans that are thrust into their midst. Yet our newspapers tell us that newborn human babies are found dead or left for dead in toilet bowls or rubbish bins. Dominic says simply: *humans dump their babies in drains, but orang-utans look after orphans*. We see that they do, even though they themselves have lost their mothers and grown up under the influence of their biped cousins, mimicking their alien behaviour for good or for bad.

In 2018, there were 1,075 cases of baby dumping reported in Malaysia. Paradoxically, semi-wild female orang-utans at Semenggoh and Matang Wildlife Centres care for the abused orphans that are rescued from poachers feeding the illegal pet trade that continues to thrive around the world. And oddly enough, we, ourselves, can become these abused orphans' adoptive parents quite easily. Today, Semenggoh Wildlife Centre offers orang-utans for adoption. Indeed, many *Homo sapiens* pay 200 ringgit a year to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre to adopt an orang-utan, *Pongo pygmaeus*. It seems that seeing our semi-wild red ape cousins in the forest, free from the confines of cages and cement enclosures, is not enough for many visitors. They would like to contribute to the orphaned orang-utans' rehabilitation and to ensure good conservation work is done to keep wild orang-utans safe in their natural habitats.

It is with these thoughts swirling in my mind that I watch the young female orang-utan and her infant clutching her tightly as she slowly makes her way down the tree to the second feeding platform located deeper into the nature reserve bordering Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. And I ask myself if it would be better to be born an orang-utan or a human being in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo today in the 21st century.

Part 5: 2010s

4.18 Story 18: *Fighting in the Treetops*

Preamble

Jenny Machau's story about observing wild orang-utans fighting in the treetops of Ulu Sungai Menyang fascinated me as I had read about William Temple Hornaday's 1879 taxidermy exhibit that depicted exactly what she had seen more than a century later. Written in the form of a Segmented Essay, this piece is also a Portrait of Jenny, with parts told in her own words, making this a hybrid of Segmented Essay, Portrait and Crafted Interview. It could also be called Part II, a continuation of Jenny's story that started in the flash nonfiction piece, *Growing up at Nanga Kumpang*, but it seemed apt to name it after Hornaday's taxidermy exhibit.

Fighting in the Treetops

William Temple Hornaday's taxidermy exhibit, *A Fight in the Treetops*, completed in 1879 is believed to have been the first of its kind featuring the orang-utan in its natural habitat. Before that, orang-utans had been depicted as freaks or brutes, even monsters or dressed up in pretty children's clothes to entertain the western audiences at zoos or circuses. One enterprising individual even presented orang-utans as the "missing link" in the theory of evolution.

Hornaday spent two years in Malaya and Sarawak (1878-1879), and amongst other things, observed, sketched and hunted orang-utans. The first director of the New York Zoological Park, now the Bronx Zoo, Hornaday reportedly killed 43 orang-utans to supply specimens to American natural history museums. Even Alfred Russel Wallace who discovered the theory of evolution independently of Charles Darwin and who described the faunal divide now known as the Wallace Line, killed 17 orang-utans during his exploration of the Malay Archipelago from 1854 to 1862. That was the science in the 19th century.

Humans continue to be fascinated by the orang-utan. Thousands of people from all over the world come to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre every month to see orang-utans roaming freely in the forest reserve. In May 2018 alone, more than 20,000 tourists visited Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. This doesn't include the number who visited Matang Wildlife Centre on the edge of Kubah National Park, which also houses confiscated orang-utans or those who travelled to Batang Ai National Park and stayed at lodges or longhouses, exploring the natural habitats of the largest orang-utan populations in Sarawak. These visitors who seek

live orang-utans in the wild or semi-wild bring in a huge income to the State and to the local people who provide them guides, homestays, meals, and transportation.

But it is precisely the appeal of the orang-utan, its wide-eyed young with comical and endearing behaviour that leads to ruthless hunting to supply the demand of the illegal pet trade. As young orang-utans live under the protection of their mothers until they are five or six years old, the mothers are often killed by hunters who seek live young orang-utans to supply as exotic pets or private zoos. The young orang-utans are smuggled out of the country, beaten, drugged or confined in such conditions that it is estimated that for every animal that survives, six to ten others have died along the way.

Along with deforestation for the timber industry and conversion of forests for agricultural purposes, illegal hunting continues to put orang-utan populations at risk. Jenny Ngeian Machau works in the enforcement unit of the WCS Orang-utan team. This involves relentless patrolling of protected areas where orang-utans are known to inhabit, but Jenny is used to long treks and camping in the field. These were her favourite activities throughout her school days. From Nanga Kumpang Longhouse located between the towns of Lubok Antu and Engkilili, where her father is now the Tuai Rumah, Jenny was born on a long boat that was ferrying her mother to the nearest Health Clinic. Jenny was educated at a series of boarding schools, culminating in a Bachelor's degree in Biodiversity Management and Conservation at the University Malaysia Terengganu. Since joining the enforcement team in 2016, Jenny has participated in training workshops in Thailand and Indonesia. She speaks of her work with a stoic calm. Who would have thought that someone involved with poachers and illegal wildlife traders, armed surveillance teams, police and army personnel would have such a calm demeanour and matter-of-fact way even when describing rituals involving animal bones and traps that kill any animal that crosses its path?

On Surveillance

The first illegal hunters' camp was really close to the international border, so, we saw a lot of signs of encroachment by the foreign hunters. They don't do selective hunting. They just go for anything that brings them money. We saw their products littered at the camp: cigarettes, rice packets, instant mee packets.

I've never seen a dead orang-utan that's been hunted and killed but I saw one in photographs from the Sarawak Forestry Corporation staff. It was in Ulu Engkari, I think. It was an alpha male. I think it was killed for its palms because the meat or something from the palm has

medicinal value for them. That's one of the reasons. But the Indonesian poachers, they do take the heads for collection. They keep the skulls of orang-utans. I know that they took the skull and it has value to them. I never heard any case of them eating the meat. The head is for, like, they collect the skulls.

Actually, we found quite a few skulls in this foreigner's camp. Before I joined the enforcement team, I didn't really see the problems and threats to orang-utans. Once I joined the enforcement, I thought primates were safe in our areas and I thought the hunters just targeted birds, like ruai, hornbills, but then I saw all these skulls and realised that orang-utans were actually being targeted. And now I've seen there are traps everywhere. It can be stressful seeing the traps that they set. The traps are not selective, they kill everything.

There are a lot of traps, but the one that we saw all the time is a type of drift cane, so that any animal that went along its usual trail would be forced to follow a path to a certain place. So, they can either be dead or still alive when they are retrieved. Of course, the animal is more valuable to them if it's alive.

If we encounter any trap, we just destroy it. Destroy everything.

On encountering a poacher's camp

We were supposed to make camp a place to store called Nanga Kaup. Isaac's team was supposed to go up and along the ridge and then go down but on the way, they found an Indonesian camp. It was a very weird camp. They had animal bones which they hung around the camp. I think it was kind of like, their ritual. These hunters were definitely Dayak, it was something for 'miring' (a ceremony performed to honour or appease the spirits and gods of the natural world). They have a lot of these around the camp. It's very spooky.

And then they have…. I don't believe in like, ghosts or anything but when they were camping at this camp, one of them kind of had nightmares at night. So, like, he was shouting something. He didn't know he was shouting, but the rest of the group heard it. There were a lot of those kinds of stories during the time.

On encountering illegal hunters in the forest

On the way back, Isaac's team was on the way down the ridge and that's when they met the Indonesians. There were seven of them in Isaac's team, but first, they saw 15 people come out of the forest. And then another 15. So there were just seven of them surrounded by 30 people; 30 Indonesians. I didn't know it at the time. Only one of the team had made it to our camp and that's when I was really, really scared. The guy who got to the camp, he said, "Oh, they were just behind me. They will be here anytime soon." Then it's already night and still no one was arriving. I was really really scared, then I called Isaac using the satellite phone but it wasn't on. There's no ring. I couldn't sleep that night because I didn't know where they were.

All the locals on the team and also the SFC maintenance worker, they know the area so I took comfort in that. Maybe it was raining so they decided to camp somewhere else. I thought. They had been separated into three groups. The first guy was the only one who managed to make it to our camp, and the other two groups couldn't be very far off. These two groups, maybe they didn't know where we had camped.

I found out later, the Indonesians asked Isaac's team what they were doing in the jungle and how they got into this area. From their conversation, we found out that this group was very familiar with the area. They even told Isaac's group, "Oh, if you want to go to that place," they mentioned our campsite, "you want to go there, you should take this way, this way." Yeah, they knew the area well. Isaac's team were outnumbered, so they were very polite, and finally they let them go.

It wasn't very far from our camp but when the Indonesians let them go, they couldn't walk anymore. It was raining and so the four of them in Isaac's team were too tired to even set up camp. They just lay there on the ground. And because we had divided the rations between us, the one who carried the gas stove was in the second team. And because it was rainy, they couldn't build a fire.

The next day our group went with rice and all that to look for them. Luckily, there was rice. They met halfway during lunch time. The guys were very hungry.

I don't really talk much about my work with my parents, but sometimes with certain recent encounters with illegal loggers, I'll [say], "Oh, I helped catch some illegal loggers recently."

They were like, "Were you getting into fight with the 'taukeh' (boss)? That's very dangerous."

Hunting is the real problem

Most people think that illegal logging is our problem, still. It is our problem, but I think at least for these two years with the enforcement team, I think hunting is the real problem at least for our side inside the protected areas. If you want to get involved with orang-utan research, I think this is the time we should focus on, how to say, mitigating the trends, or something like that. Because from what I see, this is personal experience, the longhouse people usually hunt for living and they only take what is enough because they don't have a fridge and all that. They usually take enough for them to consume, but once the roads were built, outsiders started to come. Some of these outsiders are either middlemen or they are hunters themselves. So, these are the ones that come to hunt and sell for wildlife trading. I think the longhouse people started to take these opportunities and started to sell to these people.

I think the solution may be to provide utilities and livelihood and better education because this is very sad. Most of these people who live around this area are part of the Iban community, but their level of environmental awareness and wildlife is very low, you see. Those who are actively engaging in these kind environmental activities are mostly Chinese from the urban areas and they don't even depend on the forest and wildlife like the Iban community. I rarely see Iban communities actively engaging in protecting their forest. It's very sad to see that actually, because we do depend on the forest. I don't know why the rest of us are not doing anything. Some of my classmates back then, they're so into hunting. They think it's like a cultural thing that they should continue it.

People who live in the longhouses, most of them have a shotgun. Their parents bought them one. Most, like, my longhouse, they are mostly harmless. We sell stuff in the markets, so, we have our own income. What I worry about is how my parents were very strict about my education when I was little, but not all parents are like that. Some just, if their kids don't want to go to school, they just let them and they don't care much about education. But I think that one of the things that got me into this kind of job is mainly education. I think it's something that the longhouse people should be more aware of. Some of them know this but not many. I guess, for the people in the interior, they stop schooling at Primary 6. Most of

them, I would say. They just don't care because there are still a lot of animals in the jungle which they can hunt and eat or sell.

They do rear chickens and pigs or they did, but now among the boys, hunting is a cultural thing and it's kind of like, a man thing. So, sometimes they compete with each other, like, "Oh, I got this wildlife." And they boast how long they had to travel to get the animal. I heard the story even among the field workers that we hired. I say to them, you know you shouldn't do this: why would you kill five pigs when you can't even finish one pig and you can't sell it because it's illegal to sell it? You can't sell it in the market and five pigs is way more than enough for one whole longhouse. Why would you do something like that?

They say, "Saya jala." What kind of answer is that? They just do it because they can and I think they enjoy it. That's really hard to change. That's the kind of mindset they have, that the forest will always provide for them. I told them when I joined the Johor and Pahang team, we saw lots of wildlife signs everywhere and it was not fruiting season. Even though the area was just a small forest, we saw a lot of animal signs. I asked, why don't we have it here because we have the largest forest? They just, I think, they don't want to accept [what they're doing is wrong].

If I do continue my studies, I would pick something like enforcement or education, something for public awareness. Something that's more to the solution. When I joined the orang-utan team, it's like my own community, my own place at Lubuk Antu. It's sad to see that people have this kind of [hunting] mindset.

Watching a fight in the treetops at Ulu Sungai Menyang

On Jenny's first trip to the field in 2014 on the orang-utan research team, she had her first sighting of orang-utans in the forest. Remarkably, Jenny's description seems to mirror the taxidermized depiction by Hornaday in 1879. It is the description of wild orang-utans in the primary rainforest near a longhouse where Iban folk still live.

My longest encounter with orang-utans was for more than one hour. It took place at Ulu Sungai Menyang, Ulu Belok. We were doing a survey not far from Nanga Jambu longhouse. First, we saw two orang-utans. We thought they were fighting for territory because it was

fruiting season and because of this huge tree nearby – locals call it ubah, it's one of the orang-utans' favourite fruit.

The orang-utans were shouting at each other. They kept breaking the branches and throwing them. They didn't care that we were down there. So, the undergrowth became clear because they kept breaking the branches. At the end of the fight, one of the orang-utans went away down the river, still shouting. I thought it sounded frustrated. Then, a third orang-utan came out from somewhere near the ubah tree and followed the winner. Then, they left.

All this took more than one hour. We just watched them but made sure to stay clear of the branches they were throwing. They're just very strong. The thing was both males were not alpha males. But they were fighting in the treetops for more than one hour.

It's been more than a century since Hornaday observed orang-utans in Sarawak. Yet, these wild orang-utans that Jenny watched avidly in 2014 behaved the same way that the orang-utans did in Hornaday's time. Despite all the changes in the state, in the government, the urbanisation in the towns and cities, through modernisation, there seems to be no change in the expanse of the primary rainforest and its inhabitants. Jenny described this time she spent in the rainforest simply.

It was my first field trip. We heard orang-utan calls every morning when we were on our way to our plot and also every evening on our way back to the camp. There were a lot of orang-utans there. I hope there still are.

So do we.

4.19 Story 19: *I Love to Hear the Nature Speak*

Preamble

This work of Literary Journalism takes us through the life of a young Kayan conservationist who grew up in a longhouse in the Belaga where primary rainforest and indigenous farmlands the size of Singapore were flooded in the construction of the controversial Bakun Dam. Also part portrait, part memoir and part segmented essay, we learn about Mujan Anyie's life with her parents in the Belaga, at boarding schools and as a researcher on the Orang-utan team of a conservation organisation then a member of the enforcement team tracking poachers in the orang-utan landscape. Mujan Anyie's lived experiences are fascinating, but what strikes us is her honesty. It is her voice that resonates.

I Love to Hear the Nature Speak[248]

Eight years old in the Forest, 2001

Mujan Anyie is eight years old and it's the school holidays so she is home at her family's longhouse, Uma Lesong Ubong Lidet Batang. The longhouse is in Belaga, near Sungai Asap, in the interior of Sarawak where longhouse dwellers displaced by the construction of the Bakun Dam were moved in 1998. The resettlement scheme involved submerging primary tropical rainforest, traditional homes and farmlands of about 10.000 Kayan and Kenyah people in an area the size of Singapore.

The eldest of three sisters, Mujan Anyie is preparing to take lunch to her parents in the forest. Her aunt gives her the lunch wrapped in a banana leaf. It's plain rice with salted fish; a simple meal, but it will be tasty to eat in the forest. Her parents will be tired after working on their small plots of vegetable crops – okra and brinjal. They love the salted fish as the taste is strong and it will revive them to work more in the afternoon.

Mujan Anyie steps across the *ruai* (verandah) from her family's *bilik* (room) and then down from the longhouse steps and into the forest. She knows the way as she has walked it many times with her parents and her relatives. This time, she is walking alone, but she is not afraid. The path to the small plots of farmed land is easy to follow. She loves the peace in the forest. It's not actually quiet because the insects are noisy, the birds are chirping, and the twigs and leaves crackle under her feet, but it is peaceful. As much as she loves her friends and playing in the longhouse and going to school, it is calming to be in the forest. All that

[248] A version of this creative nonfiction work was published in *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* on 22 May 2020.

busyness and noisiness of life in the longhouse community and at boarding school can be put away in a different space. She can be still here, and peaceful.

Under the forest cover, it is cool as she walks towards her parents' vegetable farm. Mujan Anyie has eaten already but she will sit for a while with her parents in the forest while they rest, eat and drink. Years later when she starts work as a wildlife researcher for an international conservation organisation that has projects focusing on endangered species in different parts of Malaysia, Mujan Anyie will adapt fairly easily to the work in the field. Her job will take her into remote parts of Sarawak where she will search for signs of orang-utans and their nests, but at the turn of the new century, she is just a little Kayan girl with one year of formal schooling behind her, carrying a simple lunch wrapped in a banana leaf that she will give to her farmer parents. She has no idea of the enormity of the events that have led to the changes in the lives of her family and community; the relocation of thousands of people, the loss of traditional homes and lands, the logging of virgin tropical forest and submergence of wildlife and their habitats for the sake of electricity supply whose necessity continues to be debated.

Today, she is just a little girl, as comfortable in the forest as a child can be, having been born and raised in a longhouse nearly 14 hours' drive from Kuching, the capital city, and 100 km from the nearest coastal town, Bintulu.

At a field-site in Bungo Range National Park, 2017

Mujan Anyie wakes up early every morning. She bathes and eats breakfast early so that she is ready to start trekking by 8 a.m. At Bungo Range National Park, she must trek upwards; it's not an easy trek as the elevation is so high she must take many stops to rest. And searching for signs of orang-utans and their nests, she must turn back by the time it's 3 pm, so she'll make it back to camp before it gets dark.

It has been two years since Mujan Anyie joined the Wildlife Conservation Society; three years since she graduated from Universiti Malaysia Sabah. She has spent most of her life in boarding schools and hostels. Her parents' longhouse is so far in the interior that the nearest school is a boarding school, SK Bakun. Mujan Anyie started living in boarding schools from the age of 7 and even now, she lives and works in Kuching while her parents still live in a house they built on an island in the middle of the lake formed in the creation of the Bakun Dam. They meet once a year at the longhouse in the Sungai Asap resettlement area; she has not seen her parents' own house that they built in the lake created by Bakun Dam since 2012.

In the field, Mujan Anyie has been assigned to conduct surveys in areas that were once believed to have been orang-utan habitats. The Bidayuh villagers at the Bungo Range National Park and the Iban longhouse folk at Sabal Forest Reserve said they had seen orang-utans about five years ago, but Mujan Anyie and her field assistants have not seen any nests in the whole of 2018.

I ask Mujan Anyie if she feels discouraged. She tells me:

I don't see anything, a real orang-utan in the wild. You know it gets so frustrating that you didn't see but you are doing the research about orang-utan. But how to keep going and give myself motivation to keep moving? Well…uhhh…no one else will do this conservation thing.

This is the reason why I don't see any orang-utan: Why? Because, there are many, I mean oil palm plantations. So many people hunting and someone needs to do something, and go into the wild, and work. Maybe one day I will see a live orang-utan in the wild.

An orang-utan folktale

Mujan Anyie tells this folktale about an orang-utan.

My aunt told me stories about the orang-utan. She spoke to me in Kayan, about the 'belavan ayak' in her grandparents' stories. They were scared of it because it was so big and it's like a human figure.

I asked, "Did we ever have orang-utans in our area?"

My aunt said yes, it was before the Bakun Dam, before we went for the resettlement. But my parents said it had a big nose, so maybe it was a proboscis monkey. The villagers killed it and ate it but my parents didn't. They had never seen that kind of animal before so they didn't want to eat it.

So, there is a folktale about five siblings who went to the jungle. They were hunting for food when they were attacked by this orang-utan, this 'belavan ayak'. The 'belavan ayak' is actually the spirit of the orang-utan that has died. She said, a live orang-utan was called 'lakin kuyang'. So, the 'belavan ayak' was roaming around the forest scaring the people who go hunting. This is where the story of the five siblings came out. The youngest one was the one who killed the 'belavan ayak' using blow pipe.

I asked Mujan Anyie how it could have been killed if the 'belavan ayak' was a spirit. So how did the youngest one kill the spirit with a blow pipe? Wasn't it already dead?

There's no answer to that question. Just that the youngest brother shot the belavan ayak from a tree. After a few shots with the blow pipe, the 'belavan ayak' fell. The youngest brother climbed down from the tree and rolled the body of 'belavan ayak' to the river. That's my aunty's story, but this is my father's story: The 'belavan ayak' is a spirit. Ghost. My father admitted that there is a folklore about the 'belavan ayak' in our community. But he said that it has no relationship to any animal's spirit such as the orang-utan. It is just the hungry ghost in the forest. The orang-utan is called 'lakin kuyang'.

Working at the Sebuyau, Sedilu and Lesong landscape 2018 - 2019

It's a whole year after she starts working on the orang-utan field research project that Mujan Anyie finally sights her first orang-utan nest. At first, she is puzzled. She asks herself, why are the branches in this area bent? Gradually, she realises that she is looking at a fresh nest that an orang-utan has made and rested in.

She takes photographs and makes notes on the fresh nest. Finally! It feels so good! She feels so motivated now and is eager to see more.

At a field-site in Ulu Sebuyau National Park, 2019

We are focussing on the Sedilu, Sebuyao and Lesong landscape. We're more systematic this time. Using Joshua's mapping instead of just following the field assistant. It's a swampy area, and we get wet all the time. My toe nails fell off. I don't like it. Plus, you will be so itchy. We were there when it was heavy rain for a few days. We only managed to do the survey for two days. The road was not accessible. You cannot predict when is the right time to go. It's a challenge, but luckily, we didn't have to camp out; we stayed with the villagers. We taught the assistants from the community to help us patrol the area. Taught them how to use the GPS and we covered five points in the Sedilu National Park, Ulu Sebuyau and Gunung Lesong extension. They were so interested and they were fast learners. They ranged from 30- 60 years old and they can use GPS 64c Garmin very well.

It was so tiring, it was so hot and there was no clean water for us. I wanted to bathe in the river but couldn't because of the crocodiles.

Mujan Anyie's best experience on the job so far is when she joined the Enforcement team at Ulu Engkari. It wasn't the job, but her experience at the river Ulu Empyai river and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary. The river was so refreshing. Since then, she has loved

working at Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary. It is a river with rapids, she tells me, so there are no crocodiles.

Standing up for nature, 2019

I ask Mujan Anyie, why this job?

She replies simply: *Someone has to stand up for the nature.*

Mujan Anyie tells me that the best part of her job is when she's in the field. Despite all the years studying and living in boarding schools in the city areas, working and living in Kuching, the capital city, she feels happiest in the forested areas. She's still that same little girl who walked boldly into the forest alone to take lunch to her parents. Today, when she wakes up in the forest, she steps out of the Sarawak Forestry barracks or one of the Iban or Kayan longhouses. The early morning air is cool and the forest greets her with a fresh, leafy, earthy smell. This is the best time to be awake.

In the wild, I have time to do reflection and devotion. I feel free. That is why I love being in the wild, being in the jungle compared to being in the city. The city is always so noisy and busy.

And the job, I ask the young Kayan woman. Why is being in the field the best part?

This is Mujan Anyie's answer:

I love to hear the nature speak even if I don't know the meaning.

4.20 Story 20: *On Counting Nests, Getting Lost and a White Lie*

Preamble

A researcher seeks the truth. She counts nests – the only way to estimate orang-utan populations – she sometimes gets lost in forests as night falls and when a mobile phone is useless because there's no signal. These are aspects of being a researcher on the Orang-utan team for a conservation organisation in remote landscapes in Sarawak. In this Portrait, it is the white lie that fascinates; that helps us understand what "sells" – what will save those remote landscapes for the orang-utan.

On Counting Nests, Getting Lost and a White Lie

The wildlife researcher leads a lonely life. There are field assistants and longhouse folk who will host the researcher, but there is a kind of solitude being out there in the forest or on the river, in the field, plotting transects and looking for signs of wildlife. And there is a kind of stoic aspect to their character, at least it seems that way. How else could they spend so many hours, focussing on certain details and minute aspects in the forest? Mary Buloh Balang has been a wildlife researcher for nearly six years and nothing seems to faze her as we sit and talk about her work and what it means to her.

A senior researcher with the Wildlife Conservation Society, Mary obtained a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science Management from the University Malaysia Sarawak in 2014. After graduating, she conducted research for her professors, doing small mammal and bird sampling as well as work on Environmental Impact Assessments. A year later, she found herself selected to undergo a field test with the Wildlife Conservation Society's orang-utan team. Having made it through an "intense" interview with the senior management team, and after a language and background check, she was now climbing Mount Santubong bearing a backpack filled with five kilo rice bags with two other candidates and the WCS team consisting of Sylvia, Daniel and Wegess. They had started at around nine in the morning, and it was nearly six in the evening when they finally made it to the foothills. One of the other candidates had not made it to the top, but Mary's experience as a research assistant had helped her to cope with the physical effort and a simple meal eaten purely as fuel to energise them all for the rest of the climb.

When she was offered the job on the orang-utan research team at WCS, Mary's parents were pleased because her research assistant job had been contractual work. Her parents' stoic nature is evident in what Mary said was their response: "Good, you've got a job. So, work well." Perhaps it is this down-to-earth response that helps Mary when she's in

the field. Having grown up in Kuching with only sporadic visits to her maternal grandfather's village, Kampung Simpok in Padawan, her work in the remote forests in and around Batang Ai National Park and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary is something new and the skills she has acquired have been learned only in the past few years. She is a city girl who has learned to be comfortable in remote areas, some four to five hours' drive from Kuching, and nearly an hour's boat ride from the jetty of the nearest town, deep in the forests in and around protected orang-utan habitats.

Her stoic nature can be gleaned from her telling of a time when she and her team got lost at Batang Ai.

At Batang Ai, we got lost on the night of the full moon, the lunar eclipse in 2015. It was at night and it was my birthday. We had finished our transect around 4 p.m. and if we had gone the right way, we would have come out of the forest at the pick-up point around 5 p.m. But the senior field assistant said we should go this way, and the other three who were younger thought it was the other way, but they followed the more senior one.

We had no line so we couldn't phone. There was our team member, Fraser Dugat, waiting at the boat, wondering, why are they taking so long to come down since they already know the area? He was worried and so he actually came out upstream near the dam, opposite the school. He came out to the paddy field opposite the school about 15 minutes' ride on the boat.

One of our field assistants, Patrick Saging, swam to the school and got some help from the school. He had relative with a boat, so they came to rescue us and gave us some dinner to eat. Meanwhile, the assistant who had been waiting for us had already formed a search party to look for us.

I asked Mary about the man Patrick Saging, who had swum across the river to get help. Wasn't he worried about the crocodiles? Mary answered simply: "He just took the risk because he didn't want to be in the forest when it got too dark."

The three-year project is nearly at an end. Mary and her colleagues have been conducting a population count of orang-utans in a range of national parks: Bungo Range, Kelingkang, Sabal, Sebuyao, Sedilu and Gunung Lesong. The team scours the landscape, measuring transects to ensure there's no overlapping or missing of areas. Orang-utans are solitary and quiet creatures, rarely sighted in their natural habitat. The most common method of calculating populations is by counting nests. Orang-utans are known to make fresh nests once or even twice a day, so it is difficult to be precise about the number of orang-utans making those nests.

Searching for orang-utan nests in the forest doesn't seem very exciting but Mary has had the good fortune to have seen two adolescent orang-utans from a longboat on the river. It was about two years ago, when the team was conducting training in using GPS technology to help pinpoint the areas that need to be surveyed. She and her colleague Jenny were on a longboat near Kasai Lodge just setting out early in the morning when the boatman slowed down, gesturing to the trees near the riverbank. They watched the two young orang-utans hanging from the branches. There wasn't any fruit on the tree and the young orang-utans didn't seem aggressive. Were they playing? It was hard to tell and when the second longboat came round the bend, the orang-utans left. They are a reclusive species, even with their own kind, so Mary counts herself lucky to have been able to watch the two adolescent orang-utans in the trees not too far away.

I ask Mary if she was taught any stories about orang-utans when she was young, but she says she only knows orang-utan myths and folklore through the longhouse folk she has met since joining WCS's orang-utan research team. Her parents have always lived and worked in the city since she and her two sisters and four brothers were born. Mary's father is Iban and her mother is Bidayuh and the family speaks Bidayuh at home. While she has visited her Bidayuh grandfather's house in Kampung Simpok, Padawan, Mary has never visited her Iban relatives at her paternal grandfather's longhouse in Betong. She has never been there because her grandfather came to the city as a young man to find work and never returned to the longhouse after meeting his city-born wife-to-be. Now, two generations later, his granddaughter Mary's work takes her to many Iban longhouses and some Bidayuh villages in the orang-utan landscape. Why does she persist in this physically demanding, sometimes lonely job?

I like working outdoors; there's more freedom and less stress. I can see something unique, fascinating things in nature like waterfalls. Seeing animals like the orang-utans, gibbons, hornbills, large spotted ground squirrels. Seeing that the historical landscape habitat of the orang-utan is still there – I think it's good to see and tell people, create awareness. Locally, people don't, but internationally, people are fascinated by the orang-utan.

Mary has visited many longhouses since she started working at WCS but she remembers best, the Mengkak Longhouse at the mouth of the Engkari river at Batang Ai. Her visits to her grandfather's village did not prepare her for the lavish decorations and ornaments on display. Today, with many young people leaving the longhouses for the lure of jobs and urban lifestyles in the cities, the Mengkak Longhouse community thrives from tourists who

come from all over the world in the hope to catch a glimpse of an orang-utan in the wild. The longhouse offers the tourists boatmen to navigate longboats on the river, guides in the forests as well as Iban food and culture at the longhouse itself. Some might ask if this is a real depiction of an Iban longhouse. Mary does not see such decorations or ornaments at other Iban longhouses she's visited in her work. But if this is the only way that the traditional ways will survive, and if this is the only thing that keeps the villagers from selling their lands to companies that will turn the native land into plantations, then this white lie is worth the telling.

4.21 Story 21: *On Being a Woman in the Field*

Preamble

Selena Nala tells her own stories through the Crafted Interview. While this piece is a Portrait of a woman in the field, because Selena Nala tells of her lived experiences in her own words, I place it in the Crafted Interview category. Listening to Selena Nala during the interview and then when transcribing her words, I knew it would be best if she were to tell her stories in her own voice. Her kindness, eagerness to learn and her genuine humility shone through. Her personality was just right. She is a woman in the field.

On Being a Woman in the Field

Selena Nala's office is nestled amid trees and shrubs. It's an old house that used to be government quarters for Forestry staff. The main house faces an expanse of grass surrounded by a thick hedge. Behind it, the kitchen leads to what used to be the servants' quarters. All around, there are shrubs and trees. Some hang over the open garage roofs. Early in the morning, you can hear birds chirping, sometimes, a shy ** might appear. Some of Selena Nala's colleagues have actually "seen" the previous occupants of the old house. One was a white man in khaki shorts and long socks staring intently at the white board where peoples' comings and goings were listed. Others were young white children who were playing on the grounds.

I have visited this office numerous times, but I have never had the ability to see such apparitions or beings from other times. Despite this, I appreciate the history of this old house. It seems a fitting place to house a non-profit conservation organisation.

Selena Nala is an Iban conservationist working on the Orang-utan Social Research Team of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Malaysia. Part of her job involves working with people in longhouse communities and villages located near protected areas that are known orang-utan habitats in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. Her profile fits perfectly in my own research and fortunately, she agreed to be interviewed about her work. This is what she had to say about being a woman travelling to remote parts of Sarawak and talking to strangers.

Villagers' reactions

It's not a problem with the communities that we're women in the field. Sometimes they ask why there are no men for these kinds of projects because we have to interview them during the night and carry many things. I think almost every village that we go to, they'd ask us 'where are the men?'

I would say most of the men have manly jobs. We have men but maybe they lack interest in the areas of conservation. The villagers accept us. Though sometimes the younger adult men are very shy and some of them don't want to answer some of the questions. They're not very truthful. We know because they don't want to make eye contact and secondly, their voices are very soft and we have to sit near. When we sit nearer to them, they feel that we've entered their personal space. They feel really, I don't want to say timid, but shy because we're strangers.

If we had male partners with us, we'd rather be the ones to jot down the notes because they would be more comfortable with the males. If I were male, I would feel the same.

Receiving longhouse hospitality

Very awkward! Even in my own longhouse, it's not that I don't socialize, it's such that I tend to not socialize that much because I see them once a year or two. I'm a socially awkward person actually. Even people who say I'm friendly, I actually disagree. I think it comes out naturally. At first it was really awkward because you're living in a stranger's house.

Sometimes they give us a bilik (room) and other times we sleep in the living room. At first, I felt awkward but after a few hours, because of the warm welcome, I felt like I was living in my own house. They saw us as their own children. Many of the younger generation go off to town and don't stick with agriculture sites.

It's an interesting experience; a good experience actually, except for the time we were asked where the men were.

Figures of Inspiration

I am kind of new to the conservation area [though two years into the job at the time of the interview]; I find myself being inspired by the stories [of other women who are passionate about conservation]. They really do care about the conservation efforts made. Sometimes people just say that they really care about wildlife, but they don't know which channel they can refer to. For me, for the ones who can really go through it are Wivina, Joshua and my other colleagues. By looking at them I feel really inspired and I want to do the same. I'm really inspired by looking at them.

When Dr Elizabeth Bennett [Vice President for Species Conservation, Wildlife Conservation Society] came [to Kuching], I was really inspired by how great she is because she is a woman also who's going to foreign countries where she knows nobody but doesn't give up. It amazes me when people really pursue their passions. She said that in terms of conservation, if you love a particular kind of animal, like for her it would be the proboscis monkey; that can be why you would want to conserve them. She inspires me as a woman who follows her passion.

On Myths and Beliefs

If I had been raised in a kampung (village), maybe I would know more as opposed to being a city girl. Even though I am Iban, I wasn't raised in a longhouse, so I don't really know what the roots and sources are.

Most of them [the longhouse folk] regard [hunting and eating] orang-utans as a taboo because it's related to their culture that way. They cannot eat orang-utans because it has been passed down through generations that some of their ancestors become orang-utans. They also know that orang-utans helped them in the past for things like how to deliver their children, but I can say that most of the stories believe that orang-utans are their ancestors. Yeah, especially the old folks. The younger generation are already in-depth into Christianity. I don't know if it is applicable to me or not. If I'm not working in WCS, I wouldn't know about this.

I don't know. I'm in a dilemma if this is really the truth. We have this taboo as well with crocodiles and monkeys. Most of the Ibans know this because we live near the river. For us, crocodiles are the type to want an eye for an eye. If we eat their meat and they didn't kill us, they will kill our generation. That's what we believe. And my Mum would tell me if we eat monkeys, we'll become insane. I think she meant it would cause us to become mentally unstable or something.

For me, I'm in a dilemma because I'm a Christian. My Mum taught us from a young age so I believe in it a bit. We don't know, it's their culture and maybe it's true. In my opinion, if we believe it, it will become true.

On the future of orang-utans

I think it depends. They [longhouse communities] know the orang-utans are protected but we need educational plans for them to renew their sense of appreciation for wildlife. Sometimes they [the longhouse folk] would think that because they are protected species they would be punished [if they hunt for them]. In an emotional sense, it differs between villages. I think because some haven't seen an orang-utan, they don't have emotional attachments to it. For animal lovers and because of the old folks who have experienced it, they [may feel the need to] take care of it. I don't know, maybe good educational cues and being exposed to orang-utans [may help]. For me, I think most of them think in terms of tourism because it can generate income for the village.

A 21st century woman in Sarawak

Selena Nala is a 21st century woman working in conservation in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. She's a city-bred Iban woman travelling to remote parts of Sarawak, learning the stories, myths and culture of the longhouse communities and villagers who live lives removed from the so-called progress and development of a "modern" Malaysia, but who are seeking to find their way as their children move to the cities. Their livelihood is inextricably linked to the fortunes of the orang-utan, the only great ape outside of Africa, and an iconic symbol for the state and the country.

As Selena Nala says:

I feel really sad because like us humans they need to live in the wild. It's sad to see them in that area [caged] because for me, even being confined in a room cause many things to go through my head. I think I feel I can empathize with them. I feel they are very connected to us in a way. I realize they are like us. What I mean is that when they have a child, the child will be with them for years, almost like us whereby when some of us reach a certain age, like for us, it would be 18 years old, we would branch out and decide for our lives. I think I look at orang-utans in a human-like form if that makes sense.

For some of the younger generations, including myself – before I joined WCS, I didn't know what an orang-utan looks like, actually. I knew them by name but not their behaviour or what their face is like. For me it's a shame if the younger generation doesn't know about orang-utans and I think to myself "what if these orang-utans go extinct if we don't take care of them?" For some animals, we may know them by name, but we have never experienced seeing them.

Sometimes I do [feel like giving up] because we are very tired emotionally. Sometimes I try to give up but when I see the villages who really accept us, even when they treat us as their own, I'm very grateful. In a way, we find our passion in this and want to do our best because we love it. Instead of seeing it as work, we see it as something we enjoy the process of doing it. When I feel like giving up, I will remember why I started doing this. I will remember the time when I could have gone for another career but [then, I remember] why I chose this.

4.22 Story 22: *At SK Nanga Delok, Sarawak*

Preamble

The wide expanse of calm water, the rainforest for as far as the eye can see and amid this, a boarding school for children aged 7 to 12 years nestles on a hilly area above the water line. Captured in a Memoir, this was a wonderful experience that gave me a glimpse of a very special world in a remote area where young children grow up in a tiny isolated community with shy orang-utan neighbours and where at least one aspect of modern life has found a place, too.

At SK Nanga Delok, Sarawak

Part 1: Up up, SK Nanga Delok, up!

"Up up, SK Nanga Delok, up!" Clambering up the steep steps from the jetty and over a windy pathway, we reach the administrative office to be greeted by the school's cheerful motto pasted outside the wooden door. Our small team is made of conservationists from the Wildlife Conservation Society Malaysia Program, a local artist and myself, a writer and lecturer of English. It's taken five hours on the road from Kuching to Lubok Antu and forty minutes with the sun beating down on us on a long boat navigating the lake created by the Batang Ai Dam and the River Ai's tributaries that feed it. We've arrived at Sekolah Kebangsaan Nanga Delok, a government boarding school where 41 children ranging from seven to twelve years come from homes scattered around the national park.

It's 2017 and we are deep in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo at the fringes of two contiguous protected areas, Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and Batang Ai National Park, where the state's largest known population of orang-utans lives untroubled by human activity. Encouraging messages about knowledge, virtue and wisdom are painted in English and Malay on the wooden walls of the school buildings constructed on slopes overlooking the river. Their water dispenser is a simple two-litre plastic capped bottle on a wooden shelf and three green plastic cups hanging from hooks outside different classrooms. A simple message in Malay with a picture of a smiling teacher in a baju kurung, the national dress, says: "*Sila basuh cawan selepas minum, Terima kasih*." *Please wash the cup after drinking. Thank you.* A hibiscus, the national flower is painted on the wall right by the water dispenser with the 14-pointed yellow star against the blue as well as the red and white stripes of the Malaysian flag within its petals.

The children are curious and excited to see us: conservation through art and English after-school activities! They are wondering what these could be. But the most stunning

message comes to me when I see the t-shirts these young boys and girls are wearing in the middle of a Bornean tropical rainforest. The names on their backs are bold - foreign and yet familiar: *Hazard, Torres, Messi, De Bruyne, Messi*.

Part 2: The Dining Hall at SK Nanga Delok

In the dining hall, there are many colourful pictures and messages in Malay and English on the walls. "Welcome to Dawan Sri Nadala" in beautiful calligraphy is posted prominently on the green wall above the open counter that separates the kitchen from the dining area. It's Tuesday, we're told in Malay and English. Iban is the mother tongue of most of the children and teachers. The children from the homes near Batang Ai are learning the national language, Malay, and English at school. Happy smiling cartoon children urge the pupils to wash their hands before eating. Prayers are posted up on laminated paper framed with attractive borders and cartoon tiger cubs perched above the lettering.

The children stand and recite the prayers, giving thanks for the sustenance before every meal. When they have eaten, they stand and say an after-meal prayer of thanks as well. Indeed, there is much sustenance at boarding school; so many meals! Breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, supper are served on the wooden tables covered with red and yellow flower patterned cloths protected by plastic for easy cleaning. Red and white checked cloths skirt the tables, matching the blue and white curtains that shade the glass louvres windows.

It is no wonder that many parents are happy that their children attend school, even if it means they have to be away from home at such a young age. At SK Nanga Delok, the government supplies the children with books, pencils and erasers, mattresses and pillows, and meals. Especially meals; six times a day: *milky tea, bread, crackers, eggs, chicken or fish, rice, vegetables, fruit, Milo*.

Part 3: Talking about Orang-utans

The art and English activities take place after the children's regular school lessons. So, they are out of their dark blue and white school uniforms and in shorts or light track suit pants and t-shirts. Their hair is damp from baths and they are eager to find out what we're all up to. The artist Angelina is teaching the older Primary 4-6 children to cut out shapes to make collages of orang-utans and forests in one half of the dining hall.

In the other half, with the Primary 1-3 children, I have a plush orang-utan on my lap. I give it to the child on my right and it is passed on from one child to another. We are sitting in

a circle, telling a story together about Lucy, the orang-utan. Each child continues the story with one sentence in English. This is how the story goes: Lucy is lost, but a big kind orang-utan helps her find her way back to her mother. Of course, they have a nice meal of fresh fruits together on the way. A little boy named Rio Ferdinand is the one I remember the best. How could I not remember him?

Then it's my turn with the older children. The story they tell is darker. It is about a "saviour" who takes the orang-utan to a new home in a zoo. The orang-utan escapes, taking his son with him, but is brought back to the zoo. One day, a scientist comes to the zoo and takes the orang-utan and his son back to the forest where they eat durians and rambutans. Students come to the forest and take photographs. They go back to the city telling people that the orang-utans are happier in the forest because it is their natural home. We see that some of the children really think that the animals belong in zoos. Our orang-utan research team explains that wildlife belong in the wild, in their natural habitats. We hope they understand that animals don't belong in zoos.

At that point, the children ask to be excused because they must bring their foam mattresses in. It's going to rain and their mattresses are airing in the sun. When they come back, we write Cinquain poetry about wildlife. Their English is minimal, but they are happy, excited to learn new things and to talk to us. We talk about orang-utans with the help of the Iban-speaking conservationists. The children know about orang-utans. One 12-year-old saw an orang-utan when he was five. He was with his father who told him he must never kill orang-utans because they are protected animals. Another spoke about a traditional story she knew about orang-utans becoming humans. Some of the children have seen orang-utans near their homes at Mawang, Nanga Jambu, Sumpa and in the hills at Palak Taong. What, we ask, is the orang-utan's favourite food? The children shout happily: *Durians!*

Part 4: Orang-utan Stories and the Children of Nanga Delok

There is a group photograph of our team with the 41 children and their teachers at SK Nanga Delok. It was taken shortly after we had arrived and had signed the Visitor's Book at the school's office. The children and teachers were proud to have us visiting their school in this remote part of the state and we were honoured to be welcomed as guests. It was a happy moment for all of us.

It's been two years since the photograph was taken. The children in the two oldest classes, Primary 5 and 6, would have moved on to one of the boarding schools for secondary schools nearby at Lubok Antu or Engkilili. The tiny ones would be moving up the scale, now

considered seniors to the new pupils. I wonder about the children and their stories and collages of the orang-utans, their Cinquain poems and their shirts honouring their favourite European football players.

A Park Warden at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre much further away near the capital city, Dominic Helan Eric, tells me that his colleagues at the Forest Office at Lubok Antu have reported that the number of orang-utans at the Batang Ai National Park has grown. This is good news. I hope that the stories the children have heard about orang-utan ancestors and lessons they have learned from their parents about protecting the red great ape will continue to be passed down to the future generations. And I hope that they will remember our stories about the orang-utan belonging in the tropical rainforest and not in the enclosures of a zoo.

We know that the young people are leaving the rural towns, lured by jobs and the modern lifestyle in the cities. It is a natural consequence of development and progress. In a way, this will be good for the wildlife because there will be fewer people competing for the land and the food that can be found among the flora and fauna in the forests. But I wonder, like others before me, what is also lost when the young people no longer return to their villages and longhouses. We ask ourselves, is it worth the gain of modern life, technology and progress? But it's not a question we can answer, we who are city folk, the so-called educated and modern ones. For we live in urban areas and have access to that progress and development, so it's not for us to say what's best for those who live in the villages and longhouses far from modern amenities and the hubs of technology.

European football superstars may have reached Nanga Delok, but I really can't say what that means to the children and their lives. Our brief visit and the stories of conservation and the orang-utan may have much less of an impact than the Argentinian football star who plays for a Spanish football club and whose legend has penetrated the Bornean rainforest. Perhaps the best we can hope for is that the national parks stay protected and untouched by human needs and avarice. And we can hope that the children of Nanga Delok live happy useful lives wherever they eventually settle, whether it's near or far from their birthplace where the orang-utans still live freely in the wild.

4.23 Story 23: *The Joy of Learning and Creating*

Preamble

This Personal Essay starts off with the same words that the Memoir, *At SK Nanga Delok, Sarawak*, does, but it continues in a very different way. The flexibility of the fourth genre is apparent here; the authorial voice differs vastly though the messages about learning and creating share some similarities.

The Joy of Learning and Creating[249]

"Up! Up! SK. Ng. Delok Up!"

The Nanga Delok primary school motto is etched on a plaque and posted up on the wall of the school's office along with the school's mission and vision. While the mission and vision are in Malay, the motto is in English. It reminds me of the exuberant children's book *Great Day for Up* by Dr Seuss. That celebration of the joy of life is echoed at this boarding school for children aged 7 to 12 located in Ulu Batang Ai, on the periphery of the national park where one of Sarawak's largest populations of orang-utans live.

Local artist Angelina Bong and I are visiting to share creative writing and art, to learn the children's stories about orang-utans and to help them tell their stories through story-telling and writing poetry in English and creating collages. We are joining the team from the Wildlife Conservation Society that works with longhouse communities in the area near the Batang Ai National Park, where some of the villagers work as boatmen and guides to conservationists and tourists alike. Our journey has taken four hours on the road from Kuching to Lubok Antu, and then 40 minutes on a long boat from the Sarawak Energy jetty to the Batang Ai National Park's quarters near the school.

In this remote area where forty of the forty-one children who attend the school are boarders, the students are excited to meet us and to have extra activities after their classes, even into the night. To start the story-telling with the Primary 1-3 children, I hold up the orang-utan puppet. It's a large brown and orange plush toy and the children are eager to offer adjectives to describe it; nouns for its body parts, the forest where it lives, and food it eats; and verbs to tell us what it's doing. Then we start to tell the orang-utan's story. We take in turns in a circle and one by one, each child adds a sentence to the story. It's a story about Lucy the orang-utan who wakes up in her nest to find her mother gone, and with the help of another orang-utan, goes in search for her mother. They search the forest but can't find

[249] A version of this personal essay appeared in *The Borneo Post* on 13 March 2019.

Lucy's mother so they return to her nest, and find her mother there. She had left to look for their favourite food – durians!

I'm enchanted by the simple story of a child and mother's love, a helpful stranger and the love for the king of fruits, durians! But even more so am I enchanted by the children's eagerness to learn new words, how to connect them, and create a story. How do I motivate and encourage the students in my Foundation classes to embrace that joy of learning – *Up! Up! SK Nanga Delok Up!* – and to create and write stories that resonate? Many of the students who join us after having crossed the bridge known as the SPM exams are exhausted and jaded. They want to scoot through Foundation and get into the undergraduate program of their choice. Satisfied with the core units that they believe will take them where they want to go, many of the students suffer through our academics and communications units and the curious unit called "Innovation and Change."

Parents at Open Day or students in the first class often ask, "What is Innovation and Change?" In this unit, students learn about innovators and innovations, new and traditional organisations, and the rapid changes of the real world in the 20th and 21st century. We read about innovation behemoths like Steve Jobs and Soichiro Honda and little known but impactful innovators like Jodie Wu of Greenlight Planet and Tom Szaky of TerraCycle. The students themselves form teams, brainstorm and innovate a product that they present to the class and write a report complete with primary and secondary sources, fully referenced. They are equipped with the skills and tools to research, present and write a report, but more than that, they learn that they can innovate and must change in positive ways to stay relevant no matter what course they'll be studying or career they'll be embracing after graduation.

It's a challenge and a joy for me to meet new students every semester, entering our Foundation programs, each with his or her own history and baggage. It may not be a 4-hour drive and 40-minute longboat ride on the Batang Ai lake, but they have their own winding paths to navigate. They come from all over the state and country, and from overseas, including Bangladesh, Myanmar and Tanzania. Some are brimming with confidence, exuberant and eager while others are tired, fearful, lost. I'm happy and privileged to help guide them on their way, and I hope to share with them the joy of learning and creating. They may not be living near a national park nor directly affected by endangered species in the borders of their homes, but they are the future of their country. They don't need to be budding artists or writers. This is not about the arts. Creativity and innovation, critical thinking and communication; these are skills they will need no matter what career path they

choose. We hope to help them to learn the new words and how to connect them, to create and make their own stories along the way.

4.24 Story 24: *The Orang-utan who Sleepwalks*

Preamble

I sought a dream-like voice in this work of Ecocriticism. Unlike the hard science of many works of Ecocriticism, I saw in my mind the half-alive orang-utans that I had seen on television, on YouTube and in zoos and wildlife centres in different parts of the world. I wanted to capture a voice in a semi-fantastic world because the captive wildlife surely do live in a strange and alien world. Even if they cannot recognise this alien nature and cannot express their confusion, they must feel like strangers in this harsh terrestrial, barren land they cannot escape.

The Orang-utan who Sleepwalks

The orang-utan who sleepwalks in my dreams is real. I know this because I've seen him before. The first time was when I visited the Matang Wildlife Centre on a conservation education field trip with a team of conservationists, English teachers and their teaching assistants. Matang Wildlife Centre is situated in Kubah National Park, about 30 km from Kuching city and it is home to confiscated wildlife, including the orange-brown haired arboreal great ape, our cousin, the protected and endangered orang-utan.

At Matang Wildlife Centre, the first orang-utan I saw wasn't asleep, but his movements were so slow and almost imperceptible that he might have been sleepwalking, *sleep-shuffling*, that is. He was edging his way along a plank in his cage. Orang-utans aren't normally so near the ground, so maybe he was angry, or sulking, or depressed. Well, wouldn't you be depressed if you were in a cage about 10 meters by 10 meters when normally, you'd be high up in the trees foraging for fruits in an expansive rainforest on the third largest island in the world?

So, I know this orang-utan who sleepwalks in my dreams. He has a few fellow orphans at Matang Wildlife Centre. They also seemed to be sleepwalking or just nodding off, hunched up with their backs to us visitors or huddled under sacks in their enclosure under the scorching sun. They were not playing on the old tyres strung up like swings or climbing the bare wooden posts and balancing on the climbing frames that are supposed to pass for great towering trees in a rainforest. Somehow, this was not surprising. In my dreams, the shadows of these human-made structures are sketched lightly in the background of the sleep-walking orang-utan.

We visitors walked around their enclosure in the shaded pathway while the orang-utans endured the brunt of the afternoon sun. This was no easy task when we live on an island

that is located so close to the equator. No wonder they ignored us and stayed quietly on the ground. Perhaps they had lost their impulse to climb and to sway in the air on branches among the leaves. After all, they would have been exposed to the direct afternoon sun instead of enjoying the shady canopy of a dipterocarp forest.

The next time I saw the orang-utan who sleepwalks in my dreams was in the Visitors' Centre. There is a small museum on the ground floor and I saw the orang-utan or rather I saw the effigy of one. The truth is, I thought it was an effigy because I couldn't imagine a real orang-utan standing so tall and straight on its two legs, mouth closed but looking as if he wanted to say something, eyes staring as if to ask a question. I discovered this was a real orang-utan that had been preserved and stuffed by a taxidermist. He is the famous Bullet, orphaned by poachers and named for the bullet that was removed from his scalp by the kindly medical doctor Dr Daniel Kok, who cared for confiscated wildlife when there were no vets in Kuching in the 1970s. Somehow, the taxidermist had decided on this puzzled, questioning expression on the face of the most well-known of orang-utans in Sarawak. His silent question is preserved for us all to endure now.

As I walked in the dimly lit museum, I saw other preserved and stuffed animals in that mausoleum; the unhappy remains of wildlife that have been snatched from their real homes and lives in the oceans or in the forests. They are in this cold, sterile home now, stiff and unmoving, frozen in a position they are supposed to have naturally been in when alive. Surrounded by these effigies, I remember the orang-utan that sleepwalks in my dreams. When the he visits me in my dreams, he is sleepwalking in a seemingly unconscious, yet alive state.

I have not returned to Matang Wildlife Centre since that visit nearly two months ago, but the sleepwalking orang-utan has not left me. I like to take a brisk walk in the urban nature reserve near my home in Stutong Indah where I sometimes see lively macaques leaping from branch to branch, with their young in tow or clutching their mothers. At the back of my mind, I remember the orang-utans in the cages and enclosures, on the sorry planks or with their backs turned to the harsh sunlight and the curious visitors. I recall, too, the effigy of the orang-utan Bullet, captured in a pose of a half-life he lived in captivity.

In the waning light, as I walk home from the nature reserve on a cracked and uneven pavement beside a four-lane road, with cars and motorcycles, vans and four-wheel drives, pick-up trucks and lorries rumbling past me, I know there is nothing I can do for them. The question on Bullet's lips and in his eyes, presented by the taxidermist remains unasked and unanswered.

The orang-utan sleepwalks in my dreams. I know he does not mean to harm me, but I feel uneasy. Perhaps this is so because it is I who have harmed him. His life and the life of his kind are diminishing even as their home, the Bornean rainforest shrinks while we humans pursue what is believed to be a better life.

So, the orang-utan sleepwalks in my dreams. It seems he has found a home at last and is here to stay.

4.25 Story 25: *The Uncanny Red Ape*

Preamble

Talking to wildlife biologists and conservationists working on orang-utan conservation in the wild and in wildlife centres, I grew to understand the complexities that plague this issue. This piece of Ecocriticism gives voice to my concerns and those who shared their stories of lived experiences with orang-utans. While I try to see the glass half full rather than half empty, this time, I felt more despair than hope.

The Uncanny Red Ape

The uncanny red ape does not normally eat bananas. That's a stereotype perpetuated by films, television series, cartoons and caricature mascots. Foraging in the mixed dipterocarp forests of the Borneo and Sumatra, the orang-utan feeds on many other fruits, most notably those of wild fig trees. We could say its favourite fruit are figs, but the orang-utan, or *maias* as the Bidayuh and Iban people call it, also enjoys the succulent sweet mangoes and rambutans as well as durians and wild acorns that are rich in protein and oils. Still, the red ape would not say no to wild bananas. These are, after all, found naturally in Borneo.

Today, at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, combs of large wild bananas are lying on the feeding platform. We're following the progress of Analisa, an orang-utan named after Annelisa Kilbourn, the British vet who worked at Semenggoh off-and-on from 1996-1998. Analisa is coming down the trees with her infant Anaku to a small feeding platform a few minutes' walk from the Visitors' Centre into the forest surrounding Wildlife Centre. She has made her way through the nature reserve quietly, as if careful not to disturb the two-legged primates who gather to stare at her and her offspring. Right now, my husband, Melvin, and I are the only ones at the viewing station. But in the trees behind the platform, the keeper who laid out the bananas is watching Analisa and her infant. Though she looks calm and has not exhibited aggressive behaviour, you never can tell. The orang-utans here at Semenggoh are semi-wild animals. They are used to humans, but they are not tame nor domesticated. They cannot be controlled and while visitors often forget this, the staff can never do. They must always be vigilant.

I call the orang-utan uncanny because when I look at one in person, I see we are so alike. In fact, there seems to be very little that separates the human from the orang-utan. Just 3.6% of our DNA differs. Am I more startled by the great similarities we share than by the differences? When I watch Analisa descend from the trees silently and deceptively slowly, I

see her as a mother cautiously leading her child to food. In the same way, I guided my daughters when they were children. Am I anthropomorphizing? The scientists tell us that orang-utans depend on their mothers for at least five to eight years before they are able to fend for themselves. These five to eight years are crucial instructive years for the young orang-utan. Aren't they crucial for babies of the *homo sapiens*? We've all read the stories of adults who are scarred from neglect or abuse when they were young. How do the invisible scars of their violent past affect the confiscated and now semi-wild orang-utans? We cannot know how much they remember of their mothers or their natural home, nor can we know in what way their instincts guide them in their lives now.

As I watch Analisa and Anaku, a sense of the uncanny fills me. I have observed motionless and inactive orang-utans in cemented enclosures before. The block towers, poor imitations of trees for the captive creatures to climb, were empty. Instead, I saw orang-utans hunched over, backs turned, perhaps thinking of a different world, if they could remember what their natural home should be or maybe imagining something better than this cold unnatural world. Here at Semenggoh, I see recovering orang-utans roaming among the trees and foliage of a dipterocarp forest, and willingly returning to artificially constructed feeding areas where they retrieve fresh fruit. These creatures are semi-wild; no one can call them completely wild for they have been taught to answer the keepers' call, returning to human structures for food. And yet looking into those eyes, even from a distance, I wonder what they are thinking. What do they realise or understand of their situation? Do they know more than we allow ourselves to admit? What feelings do they have?

I tell myself that Analisa and Anaku are living a charmed life in comparison to the sad and inactive orang-utans confined to small lifeless enclosures. After all, Analisa had been confiscated from poachers and brought to the wildlife centre to be rehabilitated. She has progressed to living in a nature reserve, building her own nests to rest in, and foraging for figs and other fruit in the forest, returning to the feeding platforms only when necessary. And now with a youngster in tow, she seems to have grown into an effective mother.

This is all true. But the reality is also that she has become habituated to us, her not so distant cousins. And it is not likely that she would not be able to survive wholly in the wild even if there were a large enough area to release her in. Orang-utans in the wild roam widely, mostly on their own. They are able to survive severe deprivation. When fruits are scarce, orang-utans will eat leaves, twigs and bark. It is believed that they spend about half their day searching for and consuming food. Would Analisa be able to do that? Would she be able to teach her infant how to survive lean times? Or would she search for a feeding platform and

the hairless primates who leave fruit for her in abundance every single day? Would she wind up scavenging in nearby villages or farms, disrupting human activities in her search for sustenance she has learned humans have? And would her search be interpreted as aggressive and frightening behaviour?

Melvin and I leave Analisa and Anaku to eat their fill and move on to observe the alpha male Edwin at the main feeding station. It is a lot noisier here as all the other visitors are crowding to watch the large adult male calmly partaking of the fruit generously heaped on the wooden platform at the edge of the forest. He is huge, with shaggy red hair and a strong wide body. Edwin reaches out with an arm that is longer than his body height and helps himself to a banana. Overhead, we can see two young orang-utans making their way down from the treetops. They stretch their limbs, clutching branches with their feet and hands in enviable splits. How strong, agile and flexible the orang-utan is! This uncanny red ape can tear open a durian or a coconut with her bare hands and is one of a few species of animals in the forest that can rip bark off a dipterocarp tree, using her hands, feet and teeth. The seemingly slow and lazy movements of the alpha male Edwin, with the large flanges or cheek pads on his face, belie his strength and awareness of what is happening around him.

On a post next to the Visitor Centre is a piece of paper with 23 names of orang-utans living semi-wild at the wildlife centre. A zoologist cum self-taught veterinary surgeon tells me that it is impossible that so many orang-utans can live in the patch of forest that is only 653 hectares in size. In the wild, they range in a solitary fashion over a wide range of tropical forests; in Sarawak, the largest populations are found in Batang Ai National Park and the adjacent Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary. Scientists say that one to three orang-utans might be found in a little over 100 hectares especially in places where hunting of these animals is absent, like in some of the remoter sites of Sabah.

Here, in Semenggoh, we are led to believe that the now adult orang-utans that had once been scared orphans rescued from smugglers or poachers are now self-sufficient and living independently in this small nature reserve. They have not been seen recently because they have been successfully rehabilitated and their absence means they are thriving in the nature reserve on their own. Furthermore, it is believed that successful rehabilitation has led to successful births of healthy orang-utans, thus ensuring the conservation of the species.

After all, every so often, there is news that another baby orang-utan is born. We are told that this is a good thing, a positive development in the conservation of this endangered species. On 31st July this year, *The New Straits Times* reported that Minah had given birth to her fourth baby and then on 21st August, the Sarawak Forestry Corporation that runs

Semenggoh Wildlife Centre announced on *Facebook* that first-time mother Endu had given birth to a healthy baby two days earlier. The births of healthy baby orang-utans are believed to be a step in the right direction; that these captive breeding programmes are ensuring the species' survival. However, I have been told of concerns that there might be in-breeding among this community of orang-utans in the small nature reserve. Could there really be so many alpha males – Ritchie, Aman, George and Edwin - co-existing here? And even if they were, could they be reproducing with their mothers, sisters or daughters?

Along with the other visitors at the viewing station, I am snapping photographs and trying to record the movements of the young orang-utans cautiously approaching the bounty of fruit on the platform. Edwin is partially turned away from us. How frustrating for the visitors who come from all over the globe to see our cousins, the orang-utan, *Pongo pygmaeus* who have 96.4% of their gene pool identical to ours! The orang-utans prefer to eat with their backs to the indignant audience. What could that mean? Some strange delicacy of manners? Dominic Helan Eric, the park warden, tells us it could be because they want to keep their eye on the forest from which might emerge a competitor for their bounty. Does Edwin consider the two young orang-utans competitors? Evidently not as they do retrieve some bananas for themselves. Edwin does not react; he simply continues with his ruminations.

Perhaps he knows that there will always be enough fruit to go around. Or maybe he knows the two young orang-utans are not challengers. We don't know what goes on in the nature reserve when the red apes are by themselves. This solitary primate is in a crowded patch of forest surrounded by humans in their structures and with their predictable and unpredictable behaviour. Have they ever ventured out to the other areas cultivated by villagers and rural townsfolk?

I am grateful for the opportunity to see the semi-wild red ape at this wildlife centre; thankful these orang-utans live in conditions so much more natural than those of their cousins in the inescapable cement enclosures. They have a degree of freedom other captive animals don't have. But as I leave, I ask myself again, how much do they know? How much are they aware that they are actually imprisoned in the confines of a wildlife centre, fed routinely to please the 20,000 visitors who come to Semenggoh every month? Do they know they are living an unnatural life? And even if they knew, would they do anything to change their lives if they could? This life is better than a lifetime in a zoo enclosure or in a cage where aggressive orang-utans are held.

Some Asians like me are called bananas because we look like Asians on the outside but are white on the inside, often speaking only English and thinking like Westerners. We

could call these red apes at Semenggoh bananas, too. They appear to be wild orang-utans on the outside, but they are really tamed on the inside, answering to the calls of the *homo sapiens*. Thoreau said that “the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” Are we among those who are living lives of quiet desperation? Have we confined ourselves to our routines and comfort zones as we confine and stereotype our cousin the red ape? Perhaps that is why when I walk away, and then get into our car to drive back to Kuching, I leave with a lingering sense of the uncanny and the knowledge that change is not coming soon.

4.26 Story 26: *An Orang-utan living in a Recycled World*

Preamble

The captive orang-utan hunched over and unmoving is an orang-utan in a recycled world. I see him as a victim of human avarice and thoughtlessness. In this work of Ecocriticism, I am writing about the unnatural world we have placed captive wild animals in. It is full of recycled materials and I will not give it a positive name for it is not an upcycled world that he lives in. In a poor attempt to recreate their natural world, such captive creatures live in and among the discarded objects of the human world.

An Orang-utan living in a Recycled World

An orang-utan who is confined lives in a recycled world. If he is lucky, he drinks fresh water and has fresh local tropical fruit (why do Westerns tourists ask the keepers why they don't feed the orang-utan grapes?) to eat every day, but he is still living in a recycled world. There is nothing new to explore nor to investigate in this home that he did not construct for himself. Every day, he recycles each item in that structure that now constitutes his habitat, his world.

When first transferred to an enclosure, or worst of all, a cage, the orang-utan might dare to move around. A partly arboreal creature, the only Asian great ape is unused to being perpetually near the ground. He is used to tree trunks with lively buoyant limbs and the thick canopy of a mixed dipterocarp forest that is full of branches and leaves with which to make a nest for a nap or a longer rest. As seen in images captured by camera-traps, sometimes the orang-utan does come to the ground to move between trees, especially when the canopy is fragmented. The orang-utan is naturally a nomad, constantly roaming the forest seeking food, and making a fresh nest almost every day, often in different tree away from his previous nest. Now, it seems that he must get used to stiff planks a few feet off the ground and rough earth or cement beneath his feet. He traverses the same meagre space, perches on the planks, sometimes curling up in a corner on the ground to rest.

We imagine that the orang-utan explores the confined area, examines the bars of the cage, walks the short length of the plank, and sleeps on the hard ground, puzzled about the strangeness of it all. How soon does the orang-utan realise that there is nothing new to discover? That there is nothing more than a dreary routine every day? When he wakes up in the morning, does he wonder what is in store? Scientists tell us that a good part of an orang-utan's day is occupied by the search for sustenance. He roves through the tropical rainforest, searching for fruit; eating it ripe or unripe. Here, in his new home, food arrives daily. Fresh

water is provided. Visitors pass by, peering into his cage. If he is lucky, no one is allowed close, and no one throws things at him or tosses him junk food to eat or a cigarette to smoke.

When does the orang-utan understand that he cannot get out of the cage? Does he ever realise that this is now his home and permanent "range" and that he will no longer roam peat swamp or dipterocarp forests? What does the orang-utan feel when he has nothing to climb or grasp high above the ground? Does he know that the hard floor is not his natural nest? As he is a rescued animal, we cannot know how much he had learned from his mother before he had been snatched from her.

Nevertheless, regardless his orphaned state, this clever creature, the orang-utan learns behaviours from his biped cousins, the *homo sapiens*, and begins to stand on his two feet, walking like these hairless primates on two legs instead of on all fours, leaning on his knuckles. An orang-utan has opposable thumbs on his hands and opposable big toes on his feet and this makes him uniquely suited for living in trees. In the rainforest, he grasps trees with both hands and feet, and sways from one branch to another, covering vast ranges of forest. None of the rapid swinging and leaping of monkeys and his other great ape relatives for him; he seems to have a more casual and nonchalant manner. He rarely ventures to the ground, preferring to travel up in the trees, sometimes using his mobile hip joints to hang upside down like a strong and flexible gymnast. In fact, his exceptionally long arms are longer even than his total height, adding to his agility high amid the trees.

However, here in the recycled world, we see that his motor skills appear stunted. Often, he is observed sitting hunched over and motionless with his back to visitors. Sometimes, he can be found beneath a sack or blanket in an enclosure. We can imagine he is hiding from the glare of the tropical sun as he is without the shade of the forest canopy or he is trying to escape the stares of the curious visitors peering through fences or high up at the viewing stands. Perhaps he is depressed. Anyone who is confined as he is would be depressed. Whatever his understanding is, his range is now limited to this small cage or enclosure. Even if he had been kidnapped when an infant and raised by *homo sapiens*, surely he would know that this is an existence alien from his natural state. Something must seem strange.

Pongo pygmaeus lives naturally in Borneo and *Pongo abelli* and *Pongo tapneulensis* in Sumatra, but what we might call their "hometown" is rapidly diminishing. Forest fires and logging to make way for farmland and plantation crops have made the orang-utan's natural world shrink. These activities, along with a thriving illegal wildlife trade (it is the fourth most lucrative illegal trade after drugs, human trafficking, and arms), have jettisoned more and

more of his kind into recycled worlds. The greed, demands and habits of his cousins, we *homo sapiens*, and our modern way of life are responsible for this extreme situation. Scientists estimate there are only about 13,846 *Pongo abelli* and 800 *Pongo tapaneulensis* left in Sumatra and around 104,700 *Pongo pygmaeus* in Borneo. They are endangered species listed as critically endangered on the IUCN (International Union of Conservation of Nature) red list with an acknowledgement of a continued decline in numbers in both geographic regions.

Now, there is a new term now being bandied around. It is "upcycling". Someone clever might say that the orang-utan is living in an upcycled world. It is a world made from recycled materials and turned into something useful such as a home for the confiscated wildlife who have nowhere else to go. Even if they were able to learn how to fend for themselves, there are no forests where they can be released safely without introducing disease to existing orang-utan populations or being attacked as intruders. In this confined upcycled world, they can live long lives and their species will not become extinct. In this way, we convince ourselves that this upcycled world is the best option for the unfortunate creatures.

Here in the upcycled world, the orang-utan is safe from the poachers who killed his mother and safe from poor villagers who might want to have some extra meat for dinner or farmers who torch their farmland because it fertilizes the soil and is so much easier and faster than other methods of land clearing or from plantation owners who seek new land to grow their crops. Thus, we tell ourselves that it is better for the endangered orang-utan to live in this upcycled world where he is safe and where many people, teachers and children can visit him and learn more about his species and other fauna of this unique land.

I know of such an orang-utan. His name is Peter and he lives at Matang Wildlife Centre, Sarawak, Malaysia. He is a solitary creature in a recycled or upcycled world, but some who have read about *Pongo pygmaeus* may say that this is not too bad; that the male orang-utan, particularly, the Bornean species, is naturally solitary in the wild. This is true, but the wild orang-utan travels widely through primary and secondary forests. In Sarawak, the wild orang-utan may make his way through Batang Ai National Park and Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary and perhaps further afield.

A wildlife biologist who worked in Sarawak for many years in the 1970s once shared this story about a wandering *maias* who ventured far from known orang-utan habitats. A Penan guide had seen the creature in Long Lelang and asked Dr Mikaail Kavanagh Abdullah and his assistant David Labang if they could identify a large wild animal that he had never

seen before. His description fit a large adult orang-utan but to confirm, Mike asked if it had made any sound.

This is Mike's description of what happened next.

> "He immediately said that it did and we asked if he could imitate it. Without any hesitation, he broke open his shotgun and blew down the barrel creating a perfect rendition of an adult male *maias* loud call. There has never been any doubt in my mind since then that he had seen an adult male *maias* - an animal that was unknown in that part of the ulu Baram. The nearest known populations of *maias* are a long way to the north and the south. But this does raise the possibility that even such widely separated populations could be genetically connected by wandering individuals. As far as I know, nobody has shed any further light on this, but I would like to know if they have. It's just a little anecdote but it does remind us that there is so much that we don't know, however clever we think we are."

As I study the orang-utan and the human attempts to "save" this species, I think about what Mike Kavanagh said, "…there is so much that we don't know, however clever we think we are." I think about the wild orang-utans who may explore areas we would not consider. And I think about the orang-utan in the recycled world that some would like to call an upcycled world.

The orang-utan shares 96.4% of our genes, of we *homo sapiens*, but he is not a human. Perhaps his understanding is limited. But, surely, he feels pain and fear, and perhaps anger or depression at being confined. Surely, he registers the limitations of his world. We, so-called clever *homo sapiens*, simply do not know.

The reality I see is this: the captive orang-utan like Peter at Matang Wildlife Centre is living in a recycled world. His future does not look bright. There are so many apparent contradictions in the situation we have placed him. He is too old, strong and wild to ever be set free. A wild animal, the captive orang-utan, especially those that have shown aggression towards humans cannot be controlled. And yet, he has been too long in the human world. He has learned too much from human ways and it is not likely he can survive in the wild, even if there were a large enough patch of rainforest for him to roam in, to seek and find fruit, bark and insects to consume, and eventually, to find attractive females of his own kind.

In the wild, orang-utans are believed to live for as long as 30 years, while in captivity, they have been known to live till they're 51 years old. The captive orang-utan's recycled world is a fixed, known and yet unknown alien place where perhaps his body longs to stretch

and reach up to sway from branch to branch, to travel among trees and to savour the wild fruit fresh from a forest tree. Though he may not remember doing such things, perhaps his body tells him something is missing here in this spartan enclosed area.

As I watch Peter through the bars of his cage, hunched over and immobile, ignoring the stares and exclamations of curious *homo sapiens*, I think to myself that while he lives in this repetitive recycled world, perhaps it is well that the captive orang-utan does not know that the future of his kind is uncertain in this fickle, selfish human world.

4.27 Story 27: *What I see is not an Orang-utan*

Preamble

This Memoir sprung from the surprising sight of a recreated head of a Gigantopithecus among bamboo shoots in a museum of natural history at the University of Iowa. It was a delightful surprise to see our cousin so far from home.

What I see is not an Orang-utan

What I see is not an orang-utan. It is a Gigantopithecus. We come upon it suddenly, opening a door at the end of a long corridor. The gigantic head on broad shoulders covered with long, light brown hair gazes from its glass exhibit case with a strangely kindly expression in its eyes. It is framed by bamboo shoots, believed to be its favourite food. We are entranced as we are so far from home yet here in the middle of Iowa where our younger daughter has come to study, we find a replica of an early relative of our state's iconic red ape, *Pongo pygmaeus*. My husband sits on a bench next to the university's natural history museum's exhibit. The Gigantopithecus's head is twice as big Melvin's. I take a photograph. It is August 2018. He will use this later in his work presentations on wildlife and extinct species.

When I read about the Gigantopithecus that we chanced upon, I discover that the villain of Disney's 2016 film version of *The Jungle Book* had truly existed! Disney had not made it up. *Gigantopithecus blacki* had roamed parts of India, China, Vietnam and Indonesia, and is the largest known primate to have lived, reaching 3 metres in height. Its closest living relative is believed to have been the orang-utan. Climate change resulting in habitat alterations from forest to savanna and a diminishing amount of bamboo and fruit are believed to have led to the extinction of the Gigantopithecus some 100,000 years ago. Extinction is unfortunately, all around us. In our life time, the Sumatran rhinoceros has become extinct in the Malaysian wild. The number of the world's most poached animal, the pangolin or scaly anteater is fast declining in our lands with one seizure of scales alone in Singapore amounting to 21,000 dead animals. Reports of pygmy elephants being poisoned or shot in Sabah appear in the news almost weekly. It does not seem that we will have long to wait for more species to become extinct in our country.

I am reading about the great ape that still lives in our country on the island of Borneo which we share with Brunei and Indonesia. Different biologists writing in different times do seem to agree that the orang-utan's numbers have fallen whenever humans have expanded their own range. Habitat loss and hunting, both caused by human activities, are understood to

have led to the shrinking populations of the orang-utan now confined just to parts of Borneo and Sumatra.

It is hard to argue with those who say that humans should come first; that human life is more precious than that of animals, even the most intelligent of primates or the most endangered of species. After all, it is true that there is no Planet B and there is no Noah's Ark we can board to save all these species and ourselves from doom. Yet, I wonder if we truly value human life. It seems not when we consider the fighting and wars within the borders of countries and between nations that are happening in different parts of the world – relentlessly. And daily, we oppress others in the workplace, in our schools, in the markets and in every day life. We seek to improve ourselves so that we can be better or the best! And as we enter the new year and new decade, we make resolutions, pray for blessings, seek prosperity and greater happiness. But at what cost?

It is not an orang-utan that I see. It is the *Gigantopithecus blacki* and it is fading from my view. The gentle, genial look on the strangely familiar face disappears. In its place, perhaps, there are frowns and anger for the world around it is changing. Then, one day, the *Gigantopithecus blacki* is gone. It only returns as a museum exhibit. Other animals take over the changed terrain of what had once been its natural habitat. Perhaps one day it will be the same for the *Pongo pygmaeus* for its home range in rainforests is shrinking and its populations are diminishing due to opportunistic and deliberate hunting, land conversion and the illegal wildlife trade. For the appetite of the *Homo sapiens* is insatiable. We seek trees for timber, more lands for plantations and unnatural environments that depict our so-called successful development. Or we seek the companionship and glamour of exotic pets that few others have and a status that is elevated by the possession of endangered species.

Finally, perhaps one day, we, too, will face the same fate. For we, the *Homo sapiens* continue to try to shape the natural environment to suit our needs and desires without a thought for the consequences. This has not resulted in a happy conclusion for the other living things that share the planet. Perhaps one day, we too, will be unable to adapt to the environment we are changing. And so one day, like the *Gigantopithecus blacki* and *Pongo pygmaeus*, the *Homo sapiens* will no longer be seen, either. This, I believe, may come true.

4.28 Story 28: *P is for Pongo pygmaeus*

Preamble

This flash nonfiction piece provided me the means to express all the anxiety and empathy I felt for Peter, the solitary ape in his tiny enclosure. He is in a shrunken, unimaginable world and he deserves so much more. We put him there.

P is for Pongo pygmaeus

Peter sits on the plank suspended in the cage. He squats with his back turned to us and doesn't move though we are noisy and excitable. If he were a man, he could be a homeless person with his long shaggy orange-brown hair, his face hidden from passers-by. An orang-utan in a cage is the object of curiosity, fear, pity, ridicule, compassion, even horror.

I know his name is Peter because it's proclaimed on the noticeboard next to his cage. I walk the length of the cage from the outside. It takes about twelve steps. Peter doesn't take any steps; he's sitting immobile in the cage. The orang-utan is an arboreal ape and Peter is *Pongo pygmaeus*, the Bornean sub-species.

In the wild, *Pongo pygmaeus* rarely descends to the ground, preferring to move from tree to tree, foraging for fruits. The wild orang-utan moves over a large range, making a new nest every day. Here, at Matang Wildlife Centre, Sarawak, Peter is still, hunched over in a cage, perhaps ignoring visitors because this is nothing new. Being stared at and exclaimed over changes nothing. He is in the cage because he can't be rehabilitated and set free.

What does the captive orang-utan think or feel? Does he remember his mother? In the wild, Peter could have stayed with his mother for up to six years. He would have learned how to climb trees, make nests and choose fruit and plants to eat. Eventually, he would have left his mother to roam in the dipterocarp forest by himself. He might have grown big and strong, developing flanges or cheek pads, attracting female orang-utans.

Peter never got the chance in the wild.

And it seems he doesn't have much of a chance in captivity either.

Pongo pygmaeus: arboreal, grounded, caged.

4.29 Story 29: *Teaching English and Conservation*

Preamble

Written for the readers of *The Borneo Post* at the end of the first decade of the 21st century after a day's interaction with teachers, students and conservationists, this Personal Essay offers hope.

Teaching English and Conservation[250]

We're walking up the forest pathway, making our way through the Semenggoh Nature Reserve to the feeding platform about five minutes from the visitor's centre. A teacher behind me says, "It's as if the trees have grown their roots to create steps for us to climb up." It does seem that way. The earth is packed tightly with a smattering of pebbles and although there are strips of wood to keep the steps firm, there are also thick roots from trees that line both sides of the trail. Leaves of all shapes and sizes have fallen to the ground and these blend in with the dark brown earth.

The teachers are from Johor, Perak, Sabah and Sarawak. The team of conservationists from the Wildlife Conservation Society and I are on a one-day field trip-cum workshop at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre to gather feedback from the teachers who have participated in 4-day workshops on the conservation-English manual *The Next 100: Bridging for a New Beginning*.

Over the past three years, we have conducted workshops with teachers from different parts of the country, including American Fulbright scholars who are English Teaching Assistants and their mentors in government schools as well as teachers from Teach for Malaysia and the Association of Science, Technology and Innovation. These workshops include lessons of various topics like *Global Englishes, Assessment* and *Action Research* which are delved into when studying Swinburne Sarawak's Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. They also include lessons taken from the Next 100 manual, for example using debate to develop speaking and thinking skills in English or using a plush toy as a prompt to a group creative writing activity. One day is spent with the WCS team at Matang Wildlife Centre.

As we walk up the hill, we hear a loud call. It's a human call, but it's not anything a human would say to another. We hear the call once, twice, and then again. It's a long, plaintiff call. We know that the park rangers call twice a day, to encourage the semi-wild

[250] A version of this personal essay was published in *The Borneo Post*, on 18 December 2019.

orang-utans to come to the feeding platforms. Visitors from all over the world come to Semenggoh Wildlife Centre to observe the semi-wild orang-utans. As Park Ranger Dominic Helan Eric says, “Where else in the world can you drive 40 minutes from the city to see orang-utans in the forest free, and not in cages?”

There are many people waiting at the viewing point; school teachers with students on an end-of-the-year outing, local and foreign visitors with friends and young families. While most have their smart phones at the ready, others have professional-looking cameras with long lenses, and there’s a video crew on the feeding platform itself, with the park ranger calling out to the orang-utans. About five minutes later, the park ranger tells us an orang-utan is coming. He points to the forest canopy, telling us to look for the disturbance among the branches and leaves. We’re asked to keep quiet and the crowd hushes.

From our right, an orang-utan emerges. A gasp runs through the crowd as we realise that clinging to her is a young orang-utan. They make their way slowly along the branches, and then to one of the ropes directly above the feeding platform. The mother has shaggy dark red-brown hair while her adolescent is a lighter brown. They move in tandem as if they are trapeze artists with practiced moves, the mother ensuring her offspring’s safety high above the ground. The adolescent moves from its mother to swing on its own, and then back again to its mother as they sway towards the park ranger holding a comb of large bananas.

When they’ve eaten their fill, they slip away into the canopy. There must have been a sign that a large male is in the vicinity because the park ranger calls again. He warns us that the alpha male could take either a route directly to the feeding platform or to the viewing stands where we are. Another park ranger is with us and he’s to direct us away if the alpha male decides to have a closer look at the visitors.

It’s not an alpha male, but a young male without the developed cheek pads that mature alpha males grow and he heads straight to the feeding platform. He swings effortlessly down, hand over hand, two feet clinging, one hand on the branch at the same time, and then still balancing on the rope, reaches to take a banana from the park ranger’s hand. Despite the illusion, we should know that he’s not a tame creature. He’s a wild animal, and though used to taking food from his human cousins, we must acknowledge that he can never be tamed, and there is an unpredictable nature within him.

That evening, the teachers and I gather, along with some students from the Swinburne Sarawak Green Club to watch a video on orang-utans in Batang Ai National Park produced by British university students for their final year project. The head of the Wildlife Conservation Society orang-utan research team, Joshua Pandong who had guided the

university students on their search for the wild orang-utans elaborates on details about the project and about the red ape, the only great ape outside Africa.

We learn that there are fewer than 2,000 orang-utans in Sarawak, and that there are more in Sabah, Kalimantan and Sumatra, but the great ape is an endangered species. Eunice, a Green Club member from Johor asks why orang-utans are endangered, and Joshua explains: opportunistic hunting, the illegal wildlife trade, and the clearing of its habitats for plantations. To compound the situation, the orang-utan is the slowest breeding mammal on earth; a mother gives birth to a baby every 7-8 years.

On 23rd November, we learned that the last Sumatran rhinoceros in Malaysia died. It is now extinct in our country. This has happened in our lifetime. The teachers and I have had the good fortune to witness the Asian great ape in person, semi-wild in the forest, and not behind bars in a cage or zoo. However, the orang-utan is listed as critically endangered and there are many obstacles to overcome to keep its populations safe in the wild. Working with teachers, we try to keep conservation topics alive among their students, the future generation who will live on Earth where we hope wildlife and their natural habitats will thrive and not just cling to a tenuous existence as they do now. We believe this is possible; we can work together, teaching English and conservation to help wild orang-utan populations thrive in Sarawak, and not go the way of the doomed Sumatran rhinoceros.

Part 6: 2020

4.30 Story 30: *Photographs*

Preamble

Spurred by the photograph of the sun bear peeking out of an apartment in the middle of the capital city and its urban sprawl, this Memoir is part Ecocriticism. The news is full of such photographs; a drugged orang-utan packed in a suitcase destined for a foreign land, an orang-utan fighting a bulldozer. There is much to be concerned about, but there is hope, too.

Photographs

Our older daughter Katie sends us a photograph of herself and her flatmate Annie in a kayak on Loch Lomond in the Scottish Highlands. They are treating themselves to a weekend away from the veterinary school and the animal body parts and functions, diseases and treatments. A few months later in January 2019, our younger daughter Emily shares with us a photograph of herself turning a cartwheel on Mandalay Beach in California where she is spending the winter holidays with my cousin Pearl and her husband Robert. It is California that triggers my memory of Hollywood's on fascination with wild animals and their use in films or in their lives; I see in my mind Michael Jackson embracing a chimpanzee and carrying it with him like a child, and Clint Eastwood with an orang-utan in a series of hit movies. Reading up about this, I discover that the animal trainer resorted to beatings and other barbaric "training" methods to force the five captive orang-utans to "perform" as they were needed to in the movies.

TRAFFIC, a non-governmental organization that works on the global trade in wild animals and plants calls this "the conservation crisis of our time," elaborating that the "illegal wildlife trade is devastating wildlife species the world over, as poachers, traffickers and highly-organised criminal syndicates ruthlessly pursue profit at any cost to meet consumer demand." According to the World Wildlife Fund, the illegal wildlife trade is the fourth largest illegal trafficking trade in the world after trafficking in drugs, humans and counterfeiting and is worth US$26 billion. The US Fish and Wildlife Service calls the illegal wildlife trade to be a "multibillion-dollar business" and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime estimates the figures to be between RM28 billion and RM92 billion annually. All agree that this is an unsustainable business. Simply put, this means that the illegal wildlife trade is pushing animals to extinction. The irony is that the more endangered an animal becomes, the more valuable it is to the traffickers. Prices skyrocket, but this is nothing to the enormously wealthy who do anything to seek immortality (even the consumption of endangered wildlife's

body parts for their so-called medicinal properties) and fame for possessing unique creatures as their exotic pets or to be admired in their private menageries or zoos.

On 23rd March 2019, I see a photograph in a news report of a young orang-utan drugged and packed away in a rattan basket in the possession of a Russian man trying to fly out of Bali's Denpasar Airport. The BBC article reports that drugs and syringes were found in the suspect's possession; he reportedly admitted he was going to administer more drugs at the stopover in South Korea to keep the orang-utan unconscious for the rest of the journey. Two live geckos and five lizards were also found among the Russian national's luggage. The young man claimed he had bought the orang-utan from a friend for US$3,000 and could keep it in Russia as a pet. Was he going to keep the geckos and lizards as pets, too? Or was he part of a criminal gang of wildlife traffickers? This is just one smuggler and one juvenile orang-utan. We don't know how many others were killed in the process of getting this youngster to the airport, nor how many others have changed hands and been sold to new owners far from the rainforests of Borneo and Sumatra.

More recently, on 15th January 2020, *The Malay Mail* reported that a Malaysian singer and reality television show participant had been fined RM27,000 by the Sessions Court for "keeping and confining a sun bear cub" in her Desa Pandan apartment. Two photographs accompany the article. The first is of the singer-reality TV star turned criminal in shades. She had claimed that she had thought the sun bear cub was a dog! The second photograph is of the sun bear cub peering out of a window high up in the apartment block. The star's lawyer had pleaded for leniency as he claimed his client's only intention was to rescue the animal and it had been found to be in healthy condition by the Wildlife and National Parks Department. We may never know the truth behind the *Rockanova* star's genuine knowledge (or ignorance) of the animal she acquired and kept as a pet, nor of her intentions, but she is just one of many people who seem to have the desire to possess exotic animals and confine them in human habitation, far from their natural habitats.

The juvenile sun bear is leaning out of the apartment window and peering down at the human taking its photograph. Its beautiful brown nose is a soft triangle amid its black hair framed by the smooth concrete walls of the apartment block, the straight lines of the rectangular window, the tinted glass. The photograph is one of polar opposites. What is the sun bear cub doing in an apartment block in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur, a city that is home to nearly two million people? I can't see the expression on the sun bear cub's face, but it's another charismatic animal that appeals to the human heart. Why do humans think it's all right, even entertaining, to confine wild animals in human spaces?

And what can we do about those animals that have been rescued and confiscated by the authorities? Wildlife and rehabilitation centres like those at Semenggoh which is under the Sarawak Forestry Corporation's operations or the Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre run by the Sabah Wildlife Department take in the orphaned animals. Others are rescued and cared for by non-profit conservation organisations such as Orang-utan Project at Matang, Sarawak and Orang-utan Foundation International that operates several orang-utan rehabilitation centres in Tanjung Puting National Park in Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo. Volunteers from all over the world come to work at these centres. Many others "adopt" the orphaned orang-utans and this helps, too, as caring for them is a costly business. Abang Haji Kassim Abang Morshidi and his wife, Bibiana Pek, who brought their children to Semenggoh in the 1970s and their grandchildren in the late 2010s to observe the semi-wild orang-utans are among the local Sarawakians who have adopted orang-utans.

Abang Haji Kassim was in charge of the National Parks and Wildlife Office from 1974 till 1983 and oversaw the establishment of the Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre, which was later renamed Semenggoh Wildlife Centre. He tells me that originally, he had wanted to discourage the tourists from Semenggoh, to prevent the orphaned orang-utans from too much contact with humans as they were being rehabilitated with the intention to reintroduce and release them into the forest. In fact, he says that Matang Wildlife Centre was established to draw the tourists to view orang-utans away from Semenggoh. However, the tourist agencies kept promoting Semenggoh as this was where the semi-wild orang-utans could be seen while at Matang, the orang-utans were confined to cages or enclosures, often inactive, slumped on the ground or balancing on meagre logs, with their backs turned to the visitors. Despite this, Abang Haji Kassim acknowledges that Semenggoh Wildlife Centre is a success story. Semenggoh draws more than 20,000 visitors a month, after all. These visitors bring in much revenue to the many people working in the different sectors involved in the tourist industry: accommodation, transportation, retail of cultural artefacts and souvenirs and food, amongst others.

The downside is that the orang-utans have become too habituated to humans and it appears highly unlikely that they can survive on their own in the rainforest, even if there were an appropriate expanse of forest not occupied by an existing orang-utan population. Dr Melvin Gumal, co-author of the Sarawak Wildlife Masterplan and the 2014 Whitley Award winner on Conservation in Ape Habitats explains that the two failed attempts to reintroduce "rehabilitated" orang-utans at Bako National Park in the 1960s and at Sebuyau in the 1970s have deterred the authorities from any further attempts at releasing even the semi-wild

animals. This is the problem, Melvin says: “When you release orang-utans that do not have the knowledge of how to survive in the wild, you’re introducing a slow death to them.”

Orang-utan Project founder and chief executive officer, Leo Biddle admits that many non-profit conservation organisations are caught in a terrible dilemma. “I think every orang-utan that dies [is killed] is probably a greater loss than the value of every orang-utan that is reintroduced [to the forest]. I feel it might be cheaper to stop loss of orang-utans than to reintroduce orang-utans … I don’t think people realize what a long process of time and commitment it is, especially if you want to do a thorough rehabilitation and reintroduction process. [There’s] all the post-release monitoring; this is fearfully labour-intensive and fearfully expensive. It costs a huge amount of money to put one orang-utan back into the wild. If those funds could be redirected to stopping orang-utans from being taken out, I think we would be able to be more effective.”

I have taken photographs at both Semenggoh and Matang Wildlife Centres. My photographs at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre in 2018 and 2019 are of semi-wild orang-utans in the trees making their way to the feeding platforms. I have a photograph of Edwin, an enormous adult dominant male with his flanges fully visible as he feeds slowly and deliberately on the fruit left on the feeding platform in full view of scores of visitors. In the trees above, two young orang-utans are stretching their limbs in a weird gymnastic display as they lower themselves smoothly towards the feeding platform. They are aware of Edwin. We are sure that he is aware of them as well.

Another photograph taken at a later visit to Semenggoh shows a mother and juvenile high up in the canopy approaching the small feeding platform deeper in the nature reserve. The youngster climbs across his mother’s body to reach a branch. Later, the park keeper who holds out the wild bananas to the orang-utans tells me the mother is Analisa, the daughter of the rescued Seduku, and the juvenile is her son Anakku. This means Analisa is a first-generation orang-utan born to a semi-wild confiscated mother at a wildlife centre and her son Anakku is a second-generation orang-utan born of a mother who was raised by a rescued mother. I am an amateur photographer who uses my smart phone and not a “real” camera with a long lens to help take close-up photographs. I don’t think my photographs show the sense of deep wonder I felt as I watched the red apes make their through the trees, but when I look at the photographs now, I remember that feeling of wonder and awe.

At Matang Wildlife Centre, I take only a few photographs for the wildlife there are filled with darkness and sorrow. There is Peter, confined in a small cage, hardly moving. His back is pointedly facing the visitors’ line of vision. And there is the stuffed Bullet in a glass

case in the museum, standing upright like the humans he was surrounded by most of his life. Orphaned and shot by hunters as an infant, Bullet is the most famous orang-utan in Sarawak. His name (a bullet was removed from his head by Dr Daniel Kok, a doctor who included rescued wildlife among his patients), huge size and favourite posture of crossing his arms like a human captured people's imagination. When he turned seven, Bullet, like most other adult orang-utans could no longer be trusted not to harm humans and so he was confined to a cage for the rest of his life. The animals in my photographs here are depressed, even filled with a sense of prolonged doom.

What is the future for the semi-wild orang-utans at Semenggoh and their caged cousins at Matang? Can we reduce the numbers hunted and killed or taken from their natural habitats? I hope that the next photographs I take of orang-utans will be happier. Perhaps I will be in Batang Ai National Park, where one of the largest wild orang-utan populations in Sarawak thrives. Maybe I will be lucky enough to see a wild orang-utan in her natural habitat, and maybe I will take her photograph. This is a photograph I will share with my daughters. Perhaps they will keep this photograph and show it to their own children. My grandchildren are not born yet, but maybe one day, I will have grandchildren, and when I show them my photograph, they might ask to see a wild orang-utan in its natural habitat with their own eyes. I hope I will say yes, and that my husband and I will take our grandchildren to the national park where we will all walk the trails in search of our elusive arboreal cousin. If we are lucky enough to see one, I will take a photograph then. It would be a photograph that speaks of hope.

4.31 Story 31: *An Orang-utan's Reflection or What an Orang-utan Sees*

Preamble

The Short seemed to me the perfect form to tell the stories about the individual orang-utans encountered by the different keepers, forest guards and wildlife researchers. Always, I wonder what orang-utans think when they see the world and the living creatures that inhabit it. What do they think when they see us? What do they think when they see their own reflection?

An Orang-utan's Reflection

or

What an Orang-utan Sees

We see our reflection and we understand who we see. What does an orang-utan see when she sees her reflection in a puddle on a forest floor? Scientists tell us that orang-utans, with whom we share 96.4 % of our genes, are aware of a "self" and populations do develop a kind of culture. Orang-utans communicate with each other; twelve kinds of vocalization have been observed. They use tools and exhibit emotions.

Park wardens and forest guards, wildlife biologists and researchers who have observed orang-utans in the wild and at wildlife centres have told me about some of the orang-utans they have studied and cared for.

Archie, who lived in the backyard of an Assistant Conservator of Wildlife in the mid-1970s learned human actions. He mimicked the maid he had watched hand washing clothes in a bucket. Did his actions reflect his desire to be like his human companions? How did he feel when he was taken from Ken Proud's family home and relocated to a wildlife centre?

Perhaps ***Seduku*** saw herself reflected in her captor's eyes as she stepped out of the cage in Ulu Sebuyau. Did she know trust? Maybe she sensed uncertainty for Banggan wasn't convinced a hard release was the right way to reintroduce orphaned orang-utans into the forest.

I wonder what ***Jerangkung*** saw reflected in his eyes when Abang Mutalib called him to come down from the pole near wires that could have electrocuted him. Abang Mutalib believed Jerangkung to be a friend used to him. Yet, Jerangkung came down and started to wrestle with Abang Mutalib. He wouldn't let him go till other forest guards came to distract and pull him away. In the scuffle, Johnwen Sian was bitten. His hands are scarred by the many bites of orang-utans through nearly forty years working at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre.

What did ***Delima*** see before she died? Her reflection in the eyes of Ritchie, the aggressive dominant male believed to have been her killer? A villager angered by Delima raiding his fruit trees? A worker who feared her aggression, afraid for his life?

All those orang-utans are the unfortunate orphans of the cruel illegal wildlife trade. Perhaps we should think about the reflections of wild orang-utans. Bornean orang-utans, *Pongo pygmaeus*, are solitary creatures preferring trees to the ground. When they look down and see their reflections in a puddle or in a river that runs through vast protected areas, are they thinking of food? A drink of water? A mate?

Maybe they are just enjoying a sense of well-being. Though they can't know that they are living in perhaps the safest place in Borneo. It's a large expanse of protected forests, stretching from Batang Ai National Park and the adjoining Lanjak Etimau Wildlife Sanctuary and across the border to Indonesia's Betung-Kerihun National Park in Kalimantan. This is indeed, a wonderful area of dense rainforest, home to many wild orang-utans. For now, here in Sarawak, they are surviving, even thriving in this wild area, this heart of Borneo.

4.32 Story 32: *Giving the Planet a Chance*

Preamble

In this Personal Essay, I took the opportunity to write two haikus to start and end the piece. The essay itself has a stronger authorial voice with a little more lyricism than found in the earlier two personal essays written for *The Borneo Post* readers. Happily, the Editor allowed the haikus to frame the essay; to reinforce its message.

Giving the Planet a Chance[251]

"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

"If one way be better than another, that you may be sure is Nature's way."

Aristotle

Despair

The red ape despairs,
caged, a life among humans.
It yearns to roam, calls.

Recently, Swinburne's campus was abuzz with more than 300 students taking to the debate floor at Borneo's largest English-speaking debating championship organised and hosted by the Swinburne Debaters' Club. Students aged 13 – 18 years from schools all around the country and state, put their minds and voices to motions ranging from education and environment to health, law and sports.

On Day 2 of the tournament, an environmental round sponsored by long-time supporter, Wildlife Conservation Society and new sponsor Asian Arks was held and students debated motions such as *This House regrets the environmental movements' support of child icons such as Greta Thunberg* and *This House, as the Eco-Erectors (a fictitious environmental group) would publicly support the Extinction Rebellion*.

Aside from this, students were encouraged to pen their thoughts on the Malaysian environment; the positive and negative aspects, and their predictions of the future. These thoughts were written on "leaves" that were strung up on WCS's Tree of Life, a tree made from used plastic bottles. Also, for the fifth year running, students were encouraged to fasten

[251] A version of this personal essay was published in *The Borneo Post* on 11 March 2020.

WCS locks for debate and conservation on campus, pledging their commitment to both actions.

The conservation message was further enforced by Kahoot quizzes run by the Swinburne Sarawak Green Club. These focused on two topics: wildfires and rainforest, both pertinent to Malaysia's own environment. On top of this, every student was given in his or her tournament bag, a Paplet – a notebook made from paper used on one side produced by the volunteer Paplet-makers and Green Club members.

Environmentally-friendly behaviours were also promoted through recycle bins placed all around the campus, encouraging students to be mindful of their consumption and waste disposal. Finally, before the Awards Presentation, the audience was shown a WCS video depicting the killing and suffering of wild animals for the sake of the human palate and mistaken belief in the animal parts' medicinal properties. The message was clear and the audience was stunned, breaking the silence with a burst of applause when the video concluded.

So, we ask, what did the students take home with them after the exciting four-day debate tournament? Were the environment and conservation messages retained? In the run-up to the tournament, they would have prepped for the environmental round. They would have read about recent news concerning the wildfires and the species devastated by them, as well as about issues in tropical rainforests. These would have included news involving the iconic orang-utan which finds its home in parts of Sarawak.

In fact, in the past six months there's been news of a baby orang-utan born to a semi-wild mother at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, an Indonesian politician discovered keeping a baby orang-utan as a pet, a Tapanuli orang-utan found wounded and malnourished at a plantation in North Sumatra, and astonishingly, an image of a wild orang-utan reaching out its hand to help a warden out of a snake-infested river in Kalimantan captured by an amateur photographer. It is ironic that a wild animal reaches out to help a human being, while its own species is endangered because of human actions. Indeed, the orang-utan, the only great ape to exist in the wild outside Africa, is deemed Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red list of mammals.

In Sarawak, thanks to the concerted efforts of the State and conservation organisations, reinforced by the support of the late Chief Minister Pehin Sri Tan Sri Datuk Amar Haji Adenan Haji Satem, proclaiming a zero-loss policy on orang-utans in August 2015, *Pongo pygmaeus* lives free in the wild mostly in Batang Ai National Park and the adjoining Lanjak Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary. Sarawak's orang-utan population is steady at

2,000, but vigilance and law enforcement are essential to ensure it continues to thrive. In other parts of Borneo and Sumatra, the iconic red ape is not so fortunate.

So, as the excitement of the debate tournament fades and the debaters face the rigours of their studies and other school activities, what will these 306 students take with them? Certainly, we hope they will have improved their critical thinking and oratory skills, developed new friendships and gained from the experience of emotional highs and lows.

But will they remember the environmental debate? The Tree of Life? Their pledge to commit to healthy debate and conservation? The scenes of wildfires consuming the habitats and the lives of endangered species? The rainforest flourishing as the lungs of the Earth? The image of a shark sinking to the ocean floor still alive, with its fins cut off so humans can consume sharks' fin soup?

Will they give this planet we share with wildlife a chance?

We hope so.

Maias

Among the treetops
Maias roams, teaching her young.
What do we teach ours?

4.33 Story 33: "*Love You 3000," but Fewer than 80 Live*

Preamble

I started writing this essay when what is considered the most powerful film in 2019 was still fresh in many minds. Easily the most moving line in the film, "I love you 3000" was everywhere. I had wanted to write about the vanishing species on our planet, and it seemed that I could link the positive with the negative numbers. But I couldn't seem to finish the essay. I wasn't sure how where to go with all the terrible numbers. Then the pandemic took hold. I was swept up in it like everyone else, and today, even now, we are still in its midst, frightened, uncertain, lost. But with these changes, I found the information and the image with which to finish the essay. This is Ecocriticism. It is grim, but there is a solution. There is hope.

"Love You 3000," but Fewer than 80 Live

The world's most famous magizoologist has a bowtruckle in his breast pocket that can unlock any door, case or chains, a niffler in his other pocket that can track a person's footsteps and discover all manner of jewels and gold, including a blood oath, and a fantastic beast called "Swooping Evil" that can serve as a board to jump on over deathly waters or to help capture Gellert Grindelwald, the most dangerous dark wizard of all time, till Tom Riddle transforms himself into Lord Voldemort.

Sadly, real life zoologists, wildlife biologists and conservationists have only muggle-worthy science and field work to help humans in our quest to take care of and conserve our planet and the species who inhabit it. And unfortunately, the muggle population isn't doing a very good job.

While we were still tearing up at the mention of "Love you 3,000", one of the finest lines in Marvel's *Avengers: Endgame* released in April 2019, Malaysia's last male Sumatran rhinoceros died on 27th May. How many of us cried over Tam's death after years of solitary existence in an unnatural environment and numerous failed attempts at breeding with the two remaining female Sumatran rhinos also in captivity?

We argued over the deleted scene where superheroes bent on one knee at the sacrifice of Tony Stark aka Iron Man who dies to save humankind. Some of us even replayed and shed tears over his noble, moving death. Please don't get me wrong. Entertainment has a place in our lives, and I am a big fan of movies myself; I love to suspend my disbelief and indulge in the lives of fictitious characters and remove myself from the drudgery or horrors of the real world. But we can't run away from the real world forever.

There are quite a few other numbers we should be paying attention to. According to the International Rhino Foundation, there are fewer than 80 Sumatran rhinos in the world today. The Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers reports that fewer than 200 Malayan tigers are left in the wild today while in 2017, the Department of Fisheries recorded only two leatherback turtle nests on Terengganu's beaches in 2017 as compared to 10,000 each year in the 1950s. More than one million pangolins were trafficked from 2000 to 2013, making it one of the world's most trafficked animals. The National Geographic adds that in April 2019, shipments of scales were seized in Singapore, amounting to 72,000 pangolins, while more recently in April 2020, $78 billion worth of pangolin scales were seized in Klang, Malaysia. And this, all for scales made from keratin, the same material that our finger and toe nails are made from, that are supposed to have medicinal value.

In terms of the illegal trade of live wild animals, Global Financial Integrity's transnational crime analyst Channing May, lead author of *Illicit Financial Flows and the Illegal Trade in Great Apes* says that the market for African live apes ranges from US$2.1 million and US$8.8 million each year, and the value of orang-utan trade could be even more than that. Somehow, somewhere, there exist people who enjoy juvenile orang-utans as pets or who would like them in their private zoos to encourage more paying visitors. The plummeting numbers simply make these endangered creatures more desirable.

How do we get people to leave wildlife species alone? The answer comes nearly a year later after I started this essay. It takes a pandemic to do this, one that might have been started by a zoonotic disease. Zoonotic diseases are those that jump the species barrier; examples include ebola, SARS, HIV and the coronavirus. The World Health Organization's International Food Safety Authorities Network tells us that the more we hunt wildlife and enter into new environments, the higher the chances of us being exposed to viruses. Despite this, there are still some who believe that the surest way to keep humans safe is to kill the wild animals as they bear these rare viruses. Nevertheless, while it is still unknown what exactly sparked the spread of COVID-19, many countries are now in a lock-down mode, or as is called in Malaysia, restricted through a Movement Control Order.

With such restricted movements in place, human activities have decreased significantly. Amateur photographers share photographs of the Klang River before and after the Movement Control Order was enforced, showing evidence of cleaner, clearer waters. Conservation organisations, government agencies and local residents have reported improvement in some waterways like the Gombak, Kemuning and Way rivers, while others have actually been found to be clogged with waste such as face masks, disposable gloves and

mini hand sanitizer bottles. *The Star* reported on 24th March that crime was down 48% since the partial lockdown, and this may sound like black humour, but we hope that poachers and wildlife smugglers have also been scared into staying at home. Indeed, some anti-poaching patrolling reports do indicate that poachers and wildlife smugglers seem to be staying at home, perhaps due to the increased numbers of police checkpoints during the partial lockdown.

Jane Goodall says "There is still a window of time. Nature can win if we give her a chance." COVID-19 is opening the window wider, but at a terrible cost. The number of deaths all over the world increases daily. But they are not numbers; they are people, individuals who lived real lives with families, friends and colleagues who are now either suffering from the infection themselves or grieving for their loved ones. These deaths are more than horrifying statistics. When governments decide that they have to allow people out again to earn a living, when children have to go back to school and universities re-open, what will the new normal be? Can we ever go back to the way things were? Even if politicians have the political will and require government departments, corporations, civil societies and nonprofit organisations to find ways to maintain social distancing in the workplace and study areas, what of people's natural tendency to congregate in eateries, pubs, cinemas, sports stadiums and concert halls? And what of that hunger for the exotic? The traffickers of the illegal wildlife trade that is worth $26 billion a year will not give up their lucrative business so easily; not as long as consumers still refuse to give up their taste for the exotic.

I wake up this morning, another day living with the pandemic raging in Kuching, the epicenter of the contagion in Sarawak, and a National Geographic photographer reminds me on Instagram of the orang-utan, an animal that has the perfect social distancing skills we should emulate at this time. According to studies at Gunung Palung National Park, there have been no signs of respiratory diseases or spread of infectious disease among orang-utans. They live most of their lives alone in the trees, and apart from mating, will keep their distance from other solitary orang-utans that they come across, reportedly 17 meters apart. Most humans certainly can't be as solitary as the orang-utan, but it's clear we must try a certain degree of isolation; we don't have a choice right now. While staying at home and maintaining a distance of one to two meters from others may seem peculiar to the social *Homo sapiens*, this is our reality now. This is what it will take; not a magizoologist with his niffler, bowtruckle, swooping evil and thunderbird, nor superheroes who sacrifice themselves to the tune of millions of movie tickets worldwide. If we are to survive the virus we let out of the Pandora's

box of hunting, selling and consuming exotic wild meats, and if we really wish to save endangered species from extinction, we need to stay in isolation. This is our reality now.

4.34 Story 34: *If I were the Orang-utan*

Preamble

While writing this Segmented Essay, I wondered if it were really a prose poem in disguise. The segments could be considered stanzas and I aimed for a lyrical flow. Through the repetition of the words "If I were the Orang-utan" the researcher-writer that I am asks the reader to imagine the lives of the different orang-utans, real individual, thinking, feeling beings: Peter, Edwin, Analisa, Anaku and the two unnamed wild orang-utans caught in terrifying human-invoked traumas, as well as the one wild orang-utan who reached out to help a human in a gesture of trust and hope. I am happy to end this creative artefact on a note of trust and hope, with a gesture of reaching out to help one another. It is just humbling that the orang-utan is the one who reaches out to help the human.

If I were the Orang-utan

If I were the orang-utan Peter, an adult male with cheek pads enlarged, confiscated and caged at Matang Wildlife Centre, unable to be released as I can't fend for myself even if there were an area of rainforest large enough for me to roam, I might ask

"Where are the trees?"

"Where are the branches and leaves to make my nest?"

"Where are the females?"

"Why am I here?"

"Why can't I leave?"

If I were the orang-utan Edwin, a young adult male born of two confiscated orang-utans at Semenggoh Wildlife Centre and raised semi-wild here, sitting on a feeding platform, I might be thinking

"I turn my back on the humans and their noise and eat this fruit."

"I wish I could eat in peace. Should I break this branch and throw it at the bothersome humans?"

"It's too crowded here. I just want to be alone in the forest and eat in peace, but there are too many orang-utans here."

If I were the orang-utan Analisa, born of a confiscated mother, semi-wild with my own infant moving through the trees at Semenggoh Nature Reserve, I might say

"Come, little one, grasp this branch with me."

“Yes, there’s a human there and he will give us fruit to eat. We have nothing to fear.”

“Don’t worry about the humans over there watching us. They’re far away and they’re weak. They can’t climb trees or break branches to throw at us.”

If I were the orang-utan Anaku, a juvenile who knows no other home than Semenggoh Wildlife Centre and its Nature Reserve, perhaps, I would say this

“I love my mother. She teaches me to climb.”

“She teaches me to make a cosy nest to rest and sleep in.”

“My mother tells me where I can roam and what I can eat.”

“I ask my mother, why don’t we leave the forest and explore the villages we can see from the treetops? Couldn’t we eat the fruit in the gardens? Why is it dangerous? The humans will let us eat from them. They give us fruit to eat here every day.”

If I were the orang-utan bundled in a suitcase in Bali in March 2019, snatched from my forest home and drugged to be smuggled out to beome some human’s exotic pet, I might ask

“Why did you kill my mother?”

“Why did you take me from my home in the forest?”

“Why do humans want to own wild things?”

If I were the orang-utan, in 2013, wild and angry, fighting a bulldozer that is destroying my home in Sungai Putri Forest, Borneo, I have

no words for this.

And yet.

If I were the orang-utan in Kalimantan, Borneo in September 2019, reaching out my hand to a man chest deep in a river, I would say

“Let me help you.”

“Let us help each other.”

Chapter 5

5.0 Reflections

Writing creative nonfiction is a journey of discovery. Whether writing a personal essay, memoir, portrait, lyric, braided or segmented essay or flash nonfiction, the creative nonfiction writer is seeking understanding, some form of *truth*. As Barnes says, "If we believe that we know the answer to the question before we sit down to write, we will learn nothing new about ourselves and, worse, our readers will be denied the opportunity to learn something new about themselves."[252] We know that memory can be faulty and that different people have different memories of the same event. This is because our recall and our understanding differ and necessarily so, since we are individuals, with different backgrounds, knowledge and experiences that shape our beliefs, thoughts and interpretations. As I have journeyed through these doctoral studies, I have come to experience intimately what others before me have written about the researcher-writer, individual memories, writing to discover, and authorial presence in creative nonfiction.

5.1 Introduction

Choices had to be made and leaving out some of the stories was inevitable in the crafting of the pieces that would be used for this creative artefact. As I worked, I also began to understand intimately, what John McPhee meant when he said that "writing is selection…. You select what goes in and you decide what stays out."[253] That was precisely what I needed to do, to choose wisely so that I could craft hybrid essays that would engage readers to keep them reading to the end. Perl and Schwartz write of how writers discover new thoughts while actually writing; creativity emerges in the act.[254] Miller and Paola encourage us to find our slant.[255] Selecting the quotes and the stories from hours of interview transcripts was not easy, but it was exciting. I also learned of the importance of rewriting. Tiberghien quotes Mark Strand, the former American poet laureate who famously said: "I like rewriting and don't

[252] Kim Barnes, "The Art and Absence of Reflection in Personal Nonfiction: What is the Why?" in *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre: An Anthology of Explorations in Creative Nonfiction*, eds. Sean Prentiss and Joe Wilkins (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 133.

[253] John McPhee, "Omission," *New Yorker*, September 7, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/09/14/omission.

[254] Perl and Schwartz, *Writing True*, 5.

[255] Miller and Paola, *Tell it Slant*, 90.

trust anything that comes spontaneously. It's just my way."[256] Through the process of writing and revising these pieces of creative nonfiction, I have come to believe that this is so. What emerged from my story ideas sometimes seemed dull and unimaginative. I could see the interviewees in my mind's eye, but I could not translate that image into words for my reader. Taking a step back and then returning to rewrite the piece with a fresh mind helped.

To illustrate my creative writing process, I have reflected on one or two pieces that fall into each of the eleven subgenres attempted in this work. It is important to point out that some of the creative nonfiction pieces do fall into more than one subgenre, combining two or more subgenres in one. For example, a piece could be both a Portrait and a Segmented Essay or a Memoir, Ecocriticism and Flash Nonfiction. They are, indeed, hybrid pieces and in such instances, I have placed the creative work in the subgenre that I believe it fits most, reflecting the characteristics of that particular form more than those of its sister subgenres.

5.2 Reflections on the Personal Essay

Story 23: *The Joy of Learning and Creating*

Story 29: *Teaching English and Conservation*

Story 32: *Giving the Planet a Chance*

Crafting the voice in creative nonfiction is what Phillip Lopate calls the writer building herself "into a character."[257] Indeed, the voice in the personal essay may not actually be the writer herself and often, is not. Though this may seem a duplicitous practice, one that might even appear to be unethical, it surely is not. The writer seeks to find a voice to ruminate the world that she finds herself in, searching to find truth in a remote corner of world or in the seemingly mundane tasks of an ordinary day. This voice is her own, but how it is crafted to appeal to the reader is crucial. I feared that the reader would find my voice shallow and worse, artificial. Taking a leaf from Lopate and turning myself into a character was far more difficult than creating a fictitious protagonist who stumbled through life with all her ignorance and failings. To me, the Personal Essay would expose all my own inadequacies and follies for the world to see, and I wasn't ready for that.

[256] Tiberghien, *One Year to a Writing Life*,190.

[257] Phillip Lopate, "Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character" in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and Insights from the Teachers of the Associated Writing Programs*, eds Carolyn Forche and Philip Gerard (Cincinnati: Story Press, 2001), 38.

5.2.1 Giving the Planet a Chance

Almost one of the last pieces of writing for the creative artefact, was the Personal Essay, *Giving the Planet a Chance*. It was nearly a year later and I was a braver writer, more willing to experiment and to combine genres. The essay starts with two quotes from Aristotle followed by a haiku of my own. The authorial voice in the essay begins first with descriptions of a large inter-school debating championship that takes place every year in Kuching. The images of secondary school students on the debate floor, taking part in environmentally friendly activities and debating on timely, relevant topics such as Extinction Rebellion and environmental icons like Greta Thunberg. The voice proceeds to state grim, heart-breaking facts about the plight of the Asian ape, questioning if the students remember the environment issues and pledges they made. Yes, there is hope in the words and in the tone, but it is a voice of one who is not afraid to ask pertinent, difficult questions. All three Personal Essays have been published in *The Borneo Post*, the largest English daily in Borneo. The Personal Essay is still a difficult subgenre for me as I feel I don't have the wisdom or knowledge to expound great truths from my observations. I have learned, though, that I can open myself to learn from asking, seeking truths through writing.

5.3 Reflections on Memoir

Story 7: *The Miring Ceremony or Are You Going to Compensate Us?*
Story 22: *At SK Nanga Delok, Sarawak*
Story 27: *What I see is not an Orang-utan*
Story 28: *Photographs*

Annie Dillard strikes a chord when she writes in her much-anthologised essay *To Fashion a Text*, "I wasn't out to deceive people; I just didn't like the idea of writing about myself. I knew I wasn't the subject."[258] In the same way that I struggled to find the voice in a Personal Essay, I struggled when writing the Memoirs from the fragments of life and of understanding during my research. My life, I felt, was not particularly interesting, not nearly important enough to warrant a memoir. But I came to realise that I could not and should not wallow in that same false-modest destructive vein of thought. As described in Section 2.3.3.2, the

[258] Annie Dillard, "To Fashion a Text", in *Inventing the Truth*, ed. William Zinsser, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 145.

Memoir is larger than a fragment of life; the meaning behind the tale has resonance in a larger story. The remembered accounts that I crafted were not just my own, but others' memoirs as well. I was the research instrument, the narrative inquirer retelling the stories of others' lived experiences.

5.3.1 What I see is not an Orang-utan

A visit to the Museum of Natural History at the University of Iowa was the spark that led to this Memoir. It was an unexpected gem in the midst of a wonderful trip we took to Iowa City to see our younger daughter safely settled in for her first semester of university studies. A photograph shows my husband sitting on a bench next to an exhibit of a huge head. He wears a light green shirt and next to him, in a bamboo field, the exhibit of a Gigantopithecus sits, staring out steadily with eyes that do not see. This is a model of a head that scientists put together from fossils and calculations. It's impossible to say how accurate the exhibit is but it was extraordinary for us to find a recognisable cousin of the orang-utan so far from home. *What I see is not an Orang-utan* is about a species that once thrived on this planet, but which now has all but disappeared so that the traces of its existence can only tell us a little about what it looked like and how it lived. Perhaps this is the destination of all living things. One day, too, perhaps, this is the future we humans will face as a species. While I believe this is a Memoir, *What I see is not an Orang-utan* may also fall into the category of Ecocriticism. The stark reality and predictions of the last paragraphs concern the human activity that are destroying wild lands and wild habitats, leading surely, to the demise of endangered species. The bleak scenario that perhaps, one day, the human race will merely be fragments in dust as are the few fossils of the Gigantopithecus places it within the Ecocriticism subgenre. This illustrates clearly how creative nonfiction writings are often hybrids, overlapping two or more subgenres. Rather than distracting or confusing the reader, this malleability allows the stories to flow seamlessly from the personal to the larger world, covering multiple perspectives.

5.4 Reflections on the Portrait

Story 4: *Three Orang-utans, a Flying Fox and its Mother*
Story 5: *An Orang-utan Sleeps in my Bedroom*
Story 19: *I Love to Hear the Nature Speak*
Story 20: *On Counting Nests, Getting Lost at Batang Ai and a White Lie*

Honor Moore tells us that writing biography stems from an infatuation. Like poetry, she says we should bring together "aspects of experience into a diction that reconfigures them in a new and unexpected way for the reader."[259] To construct a Portrait, I understood that I needed to identify the pertinent aspects of the subject, the research participant and his or her world. As Malcolm Gladwell says, "The individual is a means to examine another world – the world in which that person lives."[260] In this way, the Portraits take us into the worlds of the subjects, their culture, thoughts and beliefs as well as their work. This was my hope when I crafted Portraits of these individuals who worked in different aspects of orang-utan conservation in Sarawak.

5.4.1 An Orang-utan Sleeps in My Bedroom

Portraying the young forest guard and the young orang-utan through Chris Kri's own words reveals both the nature of the man and the wild animal under his care. Using his instincts and without any specialised training, the young forest guard did his best to care for the orphaned orang-utan who latched onto him as his surrogate mother. Being so habituated to human ways, it is not surprising that Bullet preferred the forest guards' company to that of his fellow orphaned orang-utans. Imitating the forest guards, Bullet could never learn his way among the trees, neither making himself a nest nor searching for food in the canopy. He was more at home on the ground and among the terrestrial humans. The story is a Portrait of both Bullet and Christopher Kri, but it is also the story of wildlife and the *Homo sapiens*.

5.5 Reflections on Literary Journalism

Story 2: *On Arrival, Please Release*

Story 19: *I Love to Hear the Nature Speak*

"The story you discover is never exactly what you had in mind."[261] I grew to understand the truth of Norma Tilden's words as I began to write the creative nonfiction pieces that make up the creative part of my dissertation. Though "fiercely attached"[262] to the idea of writing the

[259] Honor Moore, "Twelve Years and Counting: Writing Biography," in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and Insights from the Teachers of the Associated Writing Programs,* ed. Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard (Cincinnati: Story Press, 2001), 94.

[260] Malcolm Gladwell, "The Limits of Profiles" in *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Neiman Foundation*, ed. Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, (Plume: New York, 2007), 74.

[261] Norma Tilden, "Nothing Quite Your Own: Reflections on Creative Nonfiction," *Women's Studies* 33, no. 6 (2004), 710.

[262] Tilden, "Nothing Quite Your Own," 709.

little known and unwritten history of the conservation of orang-utans in Sarawak, when I started writing the creative pieces that were to tell this history, the stories that emerged were quite different from what I had planned or expected. It was then that I truly understood what had been said, that writing creative nonfiction is a form of discovery. Researching literary journalism, I discovered that the key to this subgenre was the narrator's voice, that "the defining mark of literary journalism is the personality of the writer, the individual and intimate voice of a whole, candid person…. The genre's power is the strength of this voice."[263] (please refer to Section 2.3.3.4).

5.5.1 On Arrival, Please Release

The story of the failed release of three young orang-utans at Sebuyau was the first I wrote in this collection of creative nonfiction work. A chance meeting at a food court in Kuching with one of the men intimately involved in this incident nearly forty years earlier sparked my interest and search for the truth. It was fortunate that the other person involved, Banggan, the forest guard who had been told to release the juvenile orang-utans still lived in Kuching and was more than willing to tell his stories. Initially, the stories of the two men matched, but when one was officially interviewed with the audio recorder turned on, his story changed. For this reason, the "wildlife researcher" was never named although he did give his signed consent to be named.

Tackling the "truth" of the story when memories or stories diverge is a challenge for the creative nonfiction writer. In this case, I tried to maintain the voice of the writer as objective and non-judgemental. The reader interprets the layers in the stories and is the one to arrive at his or her own conclusion. I believed that this was the only ethical approach I could take. In the same way, ending the story with an imagined view from the juvenile orang-utan Banggan seemed to me the most appropriate way to conclude the piece. We can only imagine what the view of a captive orang-utan is. Scientists would scoff at this attempt. But this creative nonfiction writer can imagine and describe the scene for the reader to try to visualise, so that we can enter that forest, that cage, that moment when she took that step forward, and then disappeared into the trees.

[263] Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," 29.

5.6 Reflections on the Hermit Crab Essay

Story 11*: How to Convert a Hunter*

Story 16: *A Murder Unsolved or The Fourth Suspect*

Like the mollusc it is named after, Miller and Paola describe the Hermit Crab Essay as one that "appropriates existing forms as an outer covering, to protect its soft, vulnerable underbelly."[264] The essay may concern "material that seems born without its own carapace" and the "shells" are born from whichever subgenre or form the author chooses. As mentioned in Section 2.3.3.5, the writer can decide how much of herself to invest in the essay and depending on the form taken, may choose to craft the piece with compliance to the voice of that form or merely as frame with which to structure the work.[265] Singer explains how the hermit crab essay is a "new name for a very old literary device: the false document…both an aesthetic artefact and an ironic commentary on the material of which it's made."[266] With this in mind, I took on a light tone to lend irony to the harsh realities of the villager's life in *How to Convert a Hunter* while the frame of a murder mystery short story was used for *A Murder Unsolved* to introduce the terrible possibilities that could have led to the demise of a semi-wild orang-utan.

5.6.1 How to Convert a Hunter

Explaining conservation to villagers and longhouse dwellers is complicated. The lives of the rural folk are closely linked to the land, forests and animals that inhabit them. Melvin Gumal's research required an assistant who was skilled in finding his way through forests and to help him live in the forest for weeks at a time. Recommended for his skills in the forest Lihon was also notable hunter. However, through the course of all their adventures working together, Lihon learned how to recognize and learn flying fox behaviours, how to take notes and to use the *Birds of Borneo* to name the birds he learned to recognize. But how could I include all these marvelous anecdotes about this eccentric character in an engaging story so that it wouldn't be just a list of one-liners? The Hermit Crab essay was the perfect solution. I realized that crafting the many anecdotes about Melvin and Lihon into a "How to" document would enable me to include all these snippets and show how, gradually, over two years, each fragment contributed to turning the hunter into an expert birder and conservationist. *How to*

[264] Miller and Paola, *Tell it Slant,* 115.
[265] Miller and Paola, *Tell it Slant,* 116.
[266] Singer, "On Scaffolding, Hermit Crabs, and the Real False Document," 79.

Convert a Hunter really is a guide on how to explain, through real action, what conservation can mean to a villager who has grown up learning that hunting is the best way to survive in this harsh world.

5.7 Reflections on the Segmented Essay

Story 4: *Enggoh's story: On Isai, the Hunter, Aki Aban and Sustainable Resource Use*
Story 18: *Fighting in the Treetops*
Story 34: *If I were the Orang-utan*

Early on in my reading, I came upon *The Fourth State of Matter* by Jo Ann Beard. I mention this essay not just because it is so gripping and powerful but because the way it was shaped to carry three stories in one. It is a Segmented Essay, as it must be, to distinguish the three stories: the writer's disintegrating marriage, her dog's painful deterioration, and the mass murder of her friends on the campus where she worked. I have used the Segmented Essay (see Section 2.3.3.6) to allow transitions in time and place in other essays and stories, but they have also fallen under the umbrella of other subgenres such as the Portrait or the Memoir which is where they have been placed. The two essays that most clearly exemplify the characteristics of the Segmented Essay are *Enggoh's Story* and *If I were the Orang-utan*.

5.7.1 If I were the Orang-utan

Over the course of the past three years, I have personally encountered many orang-utans; captive, semi-wild, stuffed in museums. Others have described to me orang-utans they saw in the wild and those they cared for in wildlife centres or rescued from villages. Johnwen Sian told me of juvenile orang-utans clinging to his legs as he walked to the forest to teach them how to climb, Bob Basiuk spoke of his first sight of Bullet, an impressive adult male at a wildlife centre, Jenny Machau spoke of the orang-utans fighting in the treetops and Joshua Pandong spoke of how he had been ambushed by an orang-utan at his field site. When I thought of all these orang-utans, each with its own personality and character, I wanted to describe them somehow, to the reader. I longed to give some expression to my feelings of sorrow mingled with hope. Scientists tell us to never anthropomorphise; a human can never know what an animal thinks, and we should never assume that we could understand or interpret their behaviour. Yet, I wanted to suggest the emotions I felt when I saw those orang-utans in the situations they were trapped in through the actions of humans. So, I started each paragraph or segment with the same refrain: *If I were the orang-utan,* followed by the name

of the animal I was thinking of. There is a spark of hope at the end, but that hope is even more poignant because it is the orang-utan that reaches out a hand to help a human and not the other way around, the way it should be.

5.8 Reflections on the Collage Essay

Story 3: *Seduku*
Story 9: *Cage 14: Bullet's Story*
Story 10: *On Love, Keepers and Confiscated Orang-utans*

"A subject becomes noteworthy, in other words, because the author takes close notice, and then finds a way to transmit his or her fascination with the subject to the curious reader."[267] In this study, the subjects are the men and women who persevere to conserve Sarawak's orang-utans despite the adversity they encounter. Through intense interviews, I gathered tales, anecdotes and views on orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. I realised that these snippets, anecdotes and tales could be crafted and weaved into different, unique Collages (please refer to Section 2.3.3.7).

5.8.1 Cage 14: Bullet's Story

Tiberghien writes how definitions, categories and labels fall short. We strive to write meaningful essays, flash nonfiction, portraits of others, yet some pieces escape simple names. They are hybrids, combinations of two or more subgenres. Or maybe they are fragments that can be integrated into a whole, longer piece.[268] While the story of the iconic orang-utan Bullet could have been categorised as a Portrait, the piece is more a Collage, bringing together many aspects about orang-utans in different forms; memories of interactions, a myth, a visit to the actual site and cage where he lived out his adult life. The Collage brings many aspects together to give us an understanding of that bigger picture. Beyond the story of that single orang-utan, Bullet, is the story of all the orang-utans that have been smuggled out from their natural habitats, all the orang-utans that have been killed along the way, and the plight of those clinging for survival in pockets of forests in Borneo and Sumatra. Would this change the reader's view of orang-utans and wildlife to be more humane? I hoped so.

[267] Moore, *The Truth of the Matter*, 11.
[268] Tiberghien, *One Year to a Writing Life*, 171.

5.9 Reflections on Nature and Environmental Writing

Story 1: *The Call of the Orang-utan*

Story 12: *As Long as the Red Ape Lives*

Story 17: Adoption: *Pongo pygmaeus* and *Homo sapiens*

"We live in a time when animals are defined largely by their absence. Most people encounter animals only at dinner, or as pets – neither of those seem quite 'animals.'"[269] Charles Bergman's opening statement in his flash nonfiction piece "An Animal Looks at Me," was stunning. According to the United Nations, 58% of the world's population live in urban areas; and it is projected that by 2050, 68% of us will be living in urban areas. Even more of us will be detached from the creatures that share this planet with us. What will come of those living beings? And what will become of us if we continue to ignore them? These pieces could be categorised as Ecocriticism (please refer to Section 2.3.3.9), but they are placed here because I feel that this truly is nature now. We have made it so.

5.9.1 The Call of the Orang-utan

Two myths, or variations on the same theme, were common among some of the research participants. The woman who is taught how to give birth naturally by an orang-utan and the grandfather who turns into a *maias* on his deathbed. The borderless forms that creative nonfiction gave me the confidence to write this non-traditional Nature and Environmental essay, *The Call of the Orang-utan*, combining the retelling of myths with Enggoh's stories in his own voice. It was important that the myths would continue to be treasured for generations to come.

5.10 Reflections on Ecocriticism

Story 24: The Orang-utan who Sleepwalks

Story 25: *The Uncanny Red Ape*

Story 26: *An Orang-utan Living in a Recycled World*

Story 33: *"Love you 3,000," but Fewer than 100 Live*

[269] Charles Bergman, "An Animal Looks at Me" in *Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction*, ed. Judith Kitchen (New York: WW Norton & Co., 2005), 208.

Not being a scientist made me wary of writing Ecocriticism. Who was I, not even an amateur naturalist, explorer or birder to write a serious essay about environmental issues? What finally gave me the confidence to give it a try was the realisation that there is no fixed way to write Ecocriticism. I realised that creative nonfiction actually opened doors for writers to explore and to write in as varied ways as possible. This was a genre that had no real boundaries other than "telling the truth" (please refer to Section 2.2.5). Liberated by that understanding, I decided to write my own form of Ecocriticism.

5.10.1 An Orang-utan Living in a Recycled World

The orang-utan I had seen recently on a field trip with a group of teachers and conservationists was motionless. Back turned and silent, it was confined in a small enclosure at Matang Wildlife Centre. I thought that if I, too, were so confined, I would also be still, with my back turned to the ogling visitors. There was not a single natural thing in that enclosure; no plants nor trees, nothing to grasp and climb up. The orang-utan itself could hardly be considered "natural". Years of captivity had made it ill-equipped for living in the wild. I realised then that the orang-utan lived in a recycled world. He was recycling it over and over until he was in a stupor. I decided that I would use that as the frame for the essay on the plight of orang-utans in the wild and in captivity. It was, indeed, Ecocriticism - the story of an orang-utan living in a recycled world.

5.11 Reflections on the Crafted Interview

Story 6: *On Being Chased by Bullet and Wrestling with Jerangkung*
Story 14: *A Tale of Three Orang-utans*
Story 15: *Ambushed by an Orang-utan*
Story 21: *On Being a Woman in the Field*

The Crafted Interview (please refer to Section 2.3.3.10) is a subgenre that I have identified and named. As I worked on crafting the creative nonfiction pieces, I began to realise that some of the men and women I had interviewed had voices that longed to tell their stories on their own. I could hear their real voices speaking to me, and I knew that I wanted to let them tell their own stories. I did not realise that this was acceptable until I read Haruki Murakami's *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*. It was at this time that I reread the transcript of the interview with Abang Mutalib and I realised that Murakami had shown the way to use the storyteller's powerful voice to tell his own story. So, whenever I

found that the storyteller's choice of words told the story better than a re-telling, I would use his or her own voice for the cadence of speech, the vocabulary, the emphasis – the storyteller's own voice was more powerful. Thus, from the hours of interviews, I selected the stories and though I have chosen to let the research participants tell the stories in their own words, I decided how they would be structured. The chronology of events, editing, sub-headings and paragraphing; all these devices that shape the flow of a story were decided by the other storyteller – the researcher-writer.

5.11.1 On Being Chased by Bullet and Wrestling with Jerangkung

During the interview, Abang Abdul Mutalib bin Abang Tajudin, told his story of being grabbed by the orang-utan Jerangkung, thumping the table and stressing different points, repeating "he's used to me." His unique voice made it easy for me to let it speak for itself in a Crafted Interview. As I pieced Abang Mutalib's stories together, I included subheadings to give the story a chronology and structure so that the reader would understand how he had grown over the years. Furia writes how we can create suspense through narrative ordering.[270] In this case, I kept the chronological order, but separated the two stories of Abang Mutalib's encounters with orang-utans, filling in on his work through the years.

5.12 Reflections on Flash Creative Nonfiction

Story 13: *Growing up at Nanga Kumpang*
Story 28: *P is for Pongo pygmaeus*
Story 32: *An Orang-utan's Reflection or What an Orang-utan Sees*

Each flash nonfiction piece was born from what Borich calls the "Decisive Moment" (refer to Section 2.3.3.11). The challenge was to convert that spark or or flash, that "sudden, bright, glint of understanding,"[271] into a story that captures meaning and reaches out to strike a chord in the reader. *Growing up at Nanga Kumpang* was sparked by Jenny's sentence: "I was born on a longboat"; *P is for Pongo pygmaeus* came from the vision of a caged orang-utan who sat, unmoving, on a single plank in a bleak, dead enclosure; *An Orang-utan's Reflection* was

[270] Philip Furia, "As Time Goes By: Creating Biography," in *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Instruction and Insights from the teachers of the Associated Writing Programs,* eds Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard (Cincinnati: Story Press, 2001), 79.
[271] Barrie Jean Borich, "Writing into the Flash: On Finding Short Nonfiction's Decisive Moment" in *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction*, ed. Dinty W. Moore (Brookline: Rose Metal Press, 2012), 11.

born from an image of a person and a puddle – I wondered what an orang-utan sees when she sees herself in a puddle.

5.12.1 Growing up at Nanga Kumpang

This Short (described in Section 2.3.3.11) was inspired by Jenny Machau's nonchalant mention of her birth taking place on a longboat chugging up on the Batang Lupar River from Nanga Kumpang to the nearest government clinic at Engkilili. It was an image that remained with me and that I felt deserved a flash nonfiction story of its own. I had come upon my own "Decisive Moment" but needed to flesh out from there, the story that would offer multiple layers of meaning; rural life in Nanga Kumpang even in the 1980s, the reality of this simple life, with the only schooling available meaning that a child had to live away from her family and her community from the age of seven against the fables associated with Borneo, and what that baby born on a longboat grew up to do – working in enforcement to prevent wildlife poachers and smuggling in the wild lands still surviving on that "tiny island".

5.13 Summary

Reflecting on the creative process and the selection of subgenre, indeed, the defining and naming of a new subgenre, I see my journey as a writer as one that has taken a literal and figurative winding pathway through longhouses, wildlife centres, national parks, nature reserves and urban parks. The long interviews with the research participants that allowed digressions and elicited greater elaboration on different aspects of their work and indeed, their lives, provided rich detail of myths and lived experiences with wild, semi-wild and captive orang-utans. The creative process was an exciting yet purposeful process as the flexibility of the fourth genre provides an exciting range of subgenres from which to choose. Ultimately, through each creative nonfiction piece, the inquirer-writer tells a story in a unique form deliberately chosen to relay a message. Sometimes a hybrid, sometimes a singular subgenre, each creative nonfiction work has a purpose, to engage the readers, to capture their interest and to persuade them to become conservationists; indeed, to convert the hunters as one wildlife biologist inadvertently did.

I have learned firstly, to be true to the storytellers who have shared their stories, ideas, experiences and views on orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. Secondly, I have learned to listen to my own voice; to seek it out and to be brave. I am not a primatologist or even a biologist, but I can tell a story that is true, and I can craft it to touch and inspire and at the

very least, to inform readers. Thirdly, I have learned that the message has many layers and is more than important. This is not just the story of orang-utan conservation in Sarawak; it is the story of imminent species extinction; of human nature and our carelessness, our lack of humanity and lastly, the survival of the *Homo sapiens* – are we creating our own demise as we seek to tame the wild to use it for our unnatural ways of life? The final chapter in this thesis will explain these ideas further.

Chapter 6

6.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Creative nonfiction is an exciting, still evolving and developing genre. It is all of these and more: "true stories, well told", malleable, allowing writers to "invent the truth" in terms of the craft, but remaining true to the facts, and to choose the stories to leave in and those to leave out challenging, pushing us to explore the craft, shaping stories in new ways.

6.1 Summary

Creative nonfiction continues to evolve, with arguments persisting about truth, the essence and accuracy of different people's memory of the same event, and accusations of authors' narcissism and cheapening the tradition of the personal essay or literary journalism, tainting them with the content and tone of a sordid reality television show. It is not surprising that creative nonfiction courts controversy as there are so many versions of the "truth," so many differences in memories recalled, various interpretations of memories, and so many ways that a writer can place her voice. The reflective nonfiction writer can have a voice that is as reliable or unreliable just as a fiction writer's narrator could be, for it is a persona that is created to tell a particular story. Purists will insist that the "creative" element of creative nonfiction must not cross certain borders. However, because those borders in writing themselves keep changing, creative nonfiction will continue to evolve. With the digital age, writing possibilities, perhaps new genres, are emerging, with memoirs appearing on social networking platforms and websites.[272] How will these new forms, new subgenres of creative nonfiction change our reading and writing habits, and even shape our minds?

6.2 Conclusion

While linguists discuss code switching by language users depending on their circumstances and who they are talking to, creative nonfiction writers discuss code switching in terms of the voice they use for each different piece of writing they undertake. Lopate advises us that the creative nonfiction writer "needs to build herself into a character."[273] This does not mean that we are creating a fictional "I" or that we are deceiving the reader into believing we are

[272] Janelle Adsit, 2015, "Giving an Account of Oneself: Teaching identity construction and authorship in creative nonfiction and social media' in *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 105-119.

[273] Lopate, *To Show and To Tell*, 17.

something we are not, but we are surely different when we are passionate or emotional about perceived wrongs from when we are observing and enjoying the memory of a pleasant experience. The voice changes just as the "I" changes. As Moore tells us, "we are in fact made of many selves: our happy self, our sad self, our indignant self, our demanding self, our rascally self and on and on and on."[274] This is the beauty of writing as a character in our work. We are crafting the writing with a persona that suits that particular piece – matching or creating its tempo and voice to shape with empathy and yet passion, a true story of lived experience.

So, if creative writers already "have many voices in their repertoire,"[275] the advent of the digital age and different media forms from blogs and personal websites to social networking websites, now offers writers even more opportunities. A writer can now choose how to present herself both in print and online. Some authors use social media to further their causes and beliefs. An example is Terry Tempest Williams who uses her Twitter account to project her activism that is already evident in her creative nonfiction work.[276] The digital age, thus, opens more avenues for a creative nonfiction writer to present her identity, her writer-self. Indeed, our many selves can be put to good use. The subgenre I have named the Crafted Interview, could be used to allow writers to give voice to the many people who live on the fringes of society. Our world is changing all the time, and now in this time of greatest change when there is a seemingly unstoppable pandemic spreading throughout the world, we must capture as many stories as we can, before they are gone forever, like a 24-hour Instagram story.

6.2.1 The Research and Writing Journey

About four years ago, a nugget of an idea took root in my mind. Around this time, I discovered creative nonfiction. The more I read about the genre, the more I realised that it was the perfect means to tell the stories of the unsung heroes of orang-utan conservation in Sarawak. Like Gutkind and Kidder, I aimed to tell true stories about "ordinary" people going about their daily work. I didn't want to focus on the glamourous foreigners who sought adventures in the fabled land of the White Rajah, but on those who got the work done, day in day out. These were the people and their untold stories that I sought.

[274] Moore, *Crafting the Personal Essay*, 141.
[275] Adsit, "Giving an Account of Oneself," 106.
[276] Adsit, "Giving an Account of Oneself," 110.

6.2.1.1 Gathering the Data

As a narrative inquirer, I prepared myself with background research on orang-utan work in Sarawak, as well as semi-structured interview questions and an open, alert mind ready to follow meandering reminiscences and also to guide the research participants to tell the stories they had retained from their years of lived experience working in orang-utan conservation. The interview gave them an opportunity to revisit their past; stories, snippets, anecdotes emerged. Interviews led to follow-up questions, gentle probing and in some cases, additional interviews. I was indeed the researcher as instrument as well. During the three-year period, I had the opportunity to visit wildlife centres, natural history museums and zoos as well as to work with teachers and students on conservation activities including poetry and storytelling. An observer and participant as well as interviewer, I was able to choose from among these many selves, the voice to use in each creative piece.

6.2.1.2 Creating the Nonfiction Stories

Transforming the raw data of hours of interviews into transcripts and then into creative nonfiction was the highlight of this study. This was the crux of the study: creating from the interviews and observations and my own lived experiences in the longhouse communities and at wildlife centres engaging stories for the lay reader who wants to learn more about the endangered species, alternately known as *maias*, orang-utan, the red ape. Reading the transcripts and selecting the stories to re-tell; finding a chance remark and turning it into flash nonfiction or using it as the spark of a bigger story; these were a few of the fascinating and challenging tasks I carried out.

Many of the pieces overlapped subgenres; they could be considered Portraits or Segmented Essays; Memoirs or Crafted Interviews. A few, like the Hermit Crab Essays, fell distinctly into a single subgenre. These distinctions ultimately do not matter for the appeal of the fourth genre holds both writer and reader in their sway by telling the truth through witnesses and participants their realities of what happened.

6.2.2 Research Outcomes

From interviews with nineteen research participants, thirty-four creative nonfiction pieces were crafted, ten of which have been published. These pieces spanned eleven different subgenres: the Personal Essay, Memoir, Portrait, Literary Journalism, Hermit Crab Essay,

Segmented Essay, Collage Essay, Nature and Environmental Writing, Ecocriticism, Crafted Interview and Flash Nonfiction. Organised in chronological order, these pieces formed the larger picture of the Creative Artefact: fifty years of orang-utan conservation work in Sarawak. Untold stories emerged even as anecdotes and rumours were substantiated. The thirty-four pieces have contributed to our knowledge about a range of work from caring for confiscated orang-utans in wildlife centres and surveillance tracking poachers in the natural habitats of orang-utans to how alternative livelihoods for longhouse communities can save the endangered species. Like a large mural covering space and time, this montage illustrates orang-utan conservation work in Sarawak spanning fifty years, telling the stories of men and women whose lived experiences are intricately bound with the fate of individual orang-utans and their species as a whole.

6.2.2.1 Contribution to the Field

Formerly a journalist for broadcast and print media, I had already learned that each individual has a unique voice. However, I did not realise until I had read many varieties of creative nonfiction and writers' craft essays and books on the fourth genre that the voice of the research participant could be used to such good effect. The research participants in my study told stories in alternately powerful, moving or humourous voices. As a narrative researcher in the footsteps of Kim, Richardson and Reissman, I learned to shape questions and to listen actively, to allow digressions and to bring back the storytellers. While deciding on the stories to retell and the way in which to tell them, I realised that I could use some of those powerful voices directly, selecting sections of their transcripts, editing and crafting them within the pieces I was writing. Then, in the course of my research on conducting interviews, I came across a mention of Haruki Murakami's *Underground*. This book brought together a collection of interviews that Murakami had conducted with victims of the sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway by the Aum Shinrikyo sect. I realised then that I could do the same with some of the interviews I had conducted. The individuals I had interviewed had strong, unique voices of their own and I knew that their original words could be far more powerful than any paraphrasing of them.

Selecting the sections of the transcripts, editing and deciding the order in which to place these powerful stories, the Crafted Interview grew out of my research and my desire to give the research participants a voice; their own voice in a creative nonfiction work. While four pieces have been identified specifically as Crafted Interviews, pockets of others include

sections of Crafted Interviews within the Portraits, Memoirs or the Segmented Essays. The overlapping of subgenres is a common occurrence, and the inclusion of the crafted selections gives the pieces an authenticity that cannot be denied.

6.2.2.2 Publications

During the course of the three years' work, I also researched many online literary journals that feature creative nonfiction. There are themed journals that focus only on nature and environmental writing or on LGBTQ issues, general nonfiction journals and those that focus on flash nonfiction. As I started completing the individual pieces, I began to submit my stories in the hope for publication. Achieving the research aim to bring the stories of orang-utan conservation work to light, a few were successful: *The Joy of Learning and Creating* (Borneo Post, 13 March 2019); *Seduku* (Anak Sastra, August 2019); Adoption: *Pongo pygmaeus* and *Homo sapiens* (Particle Literary Magazine, Autumn 2019)
Growing Up in Nanga Kumpang (Visual Verse, November 2019); *Teaching English and Conservation* (Borneo Post, 18 December 2019); *The Call of the Orang-utan* (Tiger Moth Review, 1 January 2020); *Giving the Planet a Chance* (Borneo Post, 11 March 2020); *I Hear the Nature Speak* (New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing 22 May 2020).

In addition, I took the opportunity to submit my work to participate in conferences and was successful in presenting my research at two, and subsequently publishing the creative nonfiction works in the organisations' journals. My Collage piece, *On Arrival, Please Release* was published in the Australian Association for Writing Program's TEXT Journal's Special Issue: Peripheral Visions in October 2019 while the Portrait, *Cage 14: The Orangutan (Bullet's Story)* was published in the eTropic's Special Issue on Tropical Gothic: Literary and Creative Works also in 2019.

6.2.2.3 The Next Chapter

The story of the orang-utan and the individuals who work in different ways to secure the future of its species continues. As we progress in the 21st century, change is everywhere and yet some things remain the same. The rainforest, the lungs of the Earth, and the creatures that inhabit it continue to be threatened while human beings live lives shaped from the unsustainable taking of the Earth's natural resources. The premise and the actions have not

changed. There are still stories to be told and changes to be made in a positive direction. The fourth genre, too, continues to evolve, to meet new challenges and fill new niches.

6.3 Recommendations

Sanders has written of the essay as "the closest thing we have…to a record of the individual mind at work and play".[277] Now, in the 21st century, Adsit writes that "the digital age has offered us more versions of the essay – more records of the mind at work."[278] It is not merely that the medium of expression has changed. Some colleagues apologise to me when they speak about their work using the latest technology: videos and phone apps to tell their stories. They are apologising because they believe that reading and writing are no longer relevant. That the written page is irrelevant in the digital world of images, videos and sound bites. Today, everyone is fixated on their smart phones and the stories that are told in brief bursts on social media by influencers on YouTube or Instagram or Twitter. Although the myth that the attention span of the majority of human beings has fallen to eight seconds has been debunked[279], what is clear is that most people now prefer a good narrative with visuals. How does the writer cope with this? According to Lopate, creative nonfiction writers are notoriously underwhelming and lack attention anyhow. Nothing has changed.[280]

If Lopate is correct, and we should not expect many readers anyway, there is yet worse to contemplate. Even in 2011, Carol Hoenig in the *Huffington Post* argues that readers now seem to prefer instead "a lot of fast food for the mind" as "people think that reading such commercial dribble keeps them in the know. On one level it does, but it is knowledge that serves no useful purpose. For publishers, it's a moneymaker because we are a fast food society unwilling to take time to digest sustenance."[281] Thinking about this, I wish we could shape our lives as the narrator in Amy Bloom's classic beautiful and moving short story does,

[277] Adsit, "Giving an Account," 106.
[278] Adsit, "Giving an Account," 106.
[279] Simon Maybin, 2017, "Busting the Attention Span Myth," *BBC* 10 March https://www.bbc.com/news/health-38896790.
[280] Lopate, *To Show and to Tell*, 127-131.
[281] Carol Hoenig, "Are Books Becoming Obsolete?", *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/are-books-becoming-obsole_b_61494?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAN4M53fYg_tF6zw1RmLBJ5EYafr-gGQccq1ndXEMW3jW28ryNieHuTrXJUdR5G9Xrg_NWpAqfxGsBAG7LO-JOCVZLgo9w6ynn-pWwUzi6Ml9UgAUnSPlWVsiKjnbj7NNdRrHYTy5bgZyvkjjKb4Da3da0UbPREQ-IGv2hNZZynXk.

after great loss, "I have made the best and happiest ending that I can in this world…I have made it as the world should be and not as I have found it."[282] But that is fiction.

6.3.1 The Multi-layered Message

Fifty years of orang-utan conservation in Sarawak is not merely a telling of true stories of lived experiences of nineteen individuals who worked with orang-utans in various capacities. The stories speak of a larger concern: that of species extinction. The populations of orang-utans in Sarawak are merely one group of a species whose natural habitats are slowly being eroded due to human population growth and an apparent need to cultivate land.

On a third layer, the stories illustrate people's humanity or lack of humanity in terms of our behaviour towards other living creatures. The orang-utans in the wildlife centres, semi-wild or captive in enclosures are a result of human avarice or ignorance. How do we stop these human behaviours? As scientists say, "extinctions breed extinction."[283] And that is the fourth layer of meaning: the survival of the *Homo sapiens* is at stake. Children are taught in school that the ecosystem is intricately interconnected, that one species depends on another. It is our own folly that we are ignoring this basic scientific tenant.

My initial purpose was to tell the stories of unsung heroes in orang-utan conservation. I realise now that while these stories are indeed powerful, they force us to face the reality of a future that is bleak. There is hope, but a lot more work needs to be done, and major changes have to take place before we can take our own species back from the precipice we are leaning over.

6.3.2 The Future of the Fourth Genre and Conservation

The True Stories of People involved in Fifty Years of the Conservation of the Orang-utan in Sarawak, Malaysia is a starting point. There are an infinite number of other true stories to tell; in our backyard or further afield, not just about orang-utans, but about the hornbills whose feathers are used in cultural practices and performances, about the pangolins whose

[282] Amy Bloom, "The Story" in *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, 4th ed., ed. Janet Burroway, (Boston: Pearson, 2014), 279.

[283] Ivana Kottasova, "The Sixth Mass Extinction is happening faster than expected. Scientists say it's our fault," *CNN*, June 1, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/01/world/sixth-mass-extinction-accelerating-intl/index.html.

scales are traded in the tonnes[284]. If we can gain their confidence and those "ordinary" people let us into their world, we could tell their stories. They would be true stories, told as Crafted Interviews in the voices of the interviewed, or in our own different slant, as Miller and Paola would encourage us to write, in our own voice, the voice of that moment. All are possible, in print or online - in the world, while it still exists.

Creative nonfiction takes us to another plane; not better nor worse, but a different plane. The past few years' work of researching, interviewing and writing have stirred to life dormant memories of many individuals. The men and women were happy to share their stories with me; in their work, they had experienced unusual experiences, even extraordinary moments with orang-utans, in the forest and in the cities. But this is much more than an exercise in telling anecdotal stories about the red ape. Yes, it is about the conservation of the orang-utan, and I do hope that by crafting these stories and putting them into print, the writing will reach readers and awaken them to the plight of the orang-utan. The red ape is often romanticised, and some might say that flash nonfiction or memoirs will not help; that stating the bold facts in the media or in conservation organisation reports and UN conferences would be more useful.

On one level, we consider the orang-utan in its natural habitat and we hope that populations will continue to thrive there. But on the next level, we see that the plight of the orang-utan stems from human greed and our desire to control the wilds. Some humans view the primary forests as a direct source for their livelihood while others see the forests as a means to gain great wealth, from timber or from plantations and the wildlife as game for food or for entertainment. When the last orang-utan is gone, what happens next? On the final level, we could interpret the demise of the endangered species as foreshadowing the doom of the human species. As in the piece *What I see is not an Orang-utan*, we can place ourselves in the position of the Gigantopithecus; a creature that once lived on this Earth, roaming different lands, occupying a place in the ecosystem. Today, we can only guess what the Gigantopithecus looked like; tomorrow, the creatures that remain might guess what the *Homo sapiens* looked like.

[284] AFP, "Malaysia makes Massive Seizure of Pangolin Scales," *New Straits Times*, April 1, 2020, https://www.nst.com.my/news/crime-courts/2020/04/580370/malaysia-makes-massive-seizure-pangolin-scales.

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Appendix A Sample of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Questions for Banggan Empulu, Forest Guard, Sarawak Forest Department. Worked and assisted various American, British and Canadian volunteers who studied orang-utans and protected areas in Sarawak from the 1970s till the early 2000s.

Semi-Structured Interview (follow-up questions will be raised depending on the interviewee's answers)

No.	Main Interview Questions	Probes
	Background information Reasons for each question are shown in blue. Questions 1-2 = background information and to put the respondent at ease. These are non-threatening questions.	
1	When (what year) did you start working for the National Parks and Wildlife Office / Forest Department?	a. How old were you then? b. Why did you start working for the NPWO / Forest Department? c. Did you choose to work there or were you assigned there?
2	What was your job at the NPWO / Forest Department?	a. What did your job involve? b. What was the best part about the job? c. Why did you enjoy that the most? d. What did you like the least? e. Why?
	Questions 3-8 = Questions related to the respondent's early work with orang-utans.	
3	When did you start working with / taking care of orang-utans?	a. When did you first see an orang-utan? b. Was it in the jungle or had it been captured? c. Please describe your thoughts when you first saw an orang-utan. d. Please describe the activities that you did with the orang-utans when you were working with them. e. Were you given any training to work with the orang-utans? f. If yes, what kind of training? g. Who gave you the training? h. If no, how did you learn to handle the orang-utans? i. What did you like best about your job with orang-utans? j. What did you like least about your job with orang-utans?
4	Did you work with or take care of any other wild animals in your job?	a. Which animals did you like working with the most, apart from those orang-utans? b. Why?

5	What kind of work did you do in the forests and protected areas?	a. Please describe field work you did in orang-utan areas. b. Who did you work with? c. How did you feel working in the field?
6	Please tell me about your work at Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre.	a. What was it like when you first worked there? b. Please tell me about the animals that were brought there. Which were they and why were they brought to Semenggoh? c. What kind of enclosures were the animals kept in? d. Were any of the animals allowed to roam freely? e. If so, which were they? f. If not, why not? g. Please tell me about a typical day of work at Semenggoh.
7	Please tell me about your interactions with Bullet, the young orang-utan that was rescued.	a. When did you first see Bullet? b. What kind of condition was he in? c. What had happened to him? d. How was Bullet treated? e. How did Dr Kok, a doctor, and not a veterinarian come to treat Bullet? f. How long did Bullet take to recuperate? g. Where was he during this recovery period? h. Why was he moved to Semenggoh Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre? i. Was he kept in a cage or let free to roam in the forested area? j. Why? k. Please describe a typical day for Bullet and the other orang-utans at Semenggoh. l. What do you think happened to make Bullet angry and aggressive?
8	Later, Bullet was caged and never allowed out to roam like other orang-utans. Why did this happen?	a. What do you think caused Bullet to get angry and aggressive? b. Did Bullet ever attack other orang-utans? c. Did Bullet ever attack humans? d. Did you ever see Bullet in an aggressive state? e. What did he do? f. How did you feel when you saw this? g. Can you recall any particular violent incidents that took place at Semenggoh?

	Questions 9-12 = Questions about the respondent's work and interactions with Ken Proud and the release of orang-utans.	
9	When (what year?) did you first meet Ken Proud?	a. Who introduced you? b. Why were you assigned to work with him? c. What were you supposed to do? d. What did you think about the work that you did with Ken Proud? e. What parts of the work did you like? Why? f. What parts of the work didn't you like? Why? g. Please tell me about a typical day working with Ken Proud.
10	Please tell me about the release of the orang-utans.	a. Which orang-utans were to be released? b. Why was it decided that the three orang-utans could be released? c. Who decided they were ready to be released? d. Where were the orang-utans taken to be released? e. Please describe what you saw and did when the animals were released. f. What happened to the animals after that?
11	Did you help to care for the orang-utans after they were returned to Semenggoh?	a. Please describe how the orang-utans looked when they were found. b. How were they caught? c. What kind of condition were they in? d. What do you think would have happened if they weren't captured and returned to Semenggoh?
12	Have there been other orang-utan releases?	a. Have they been successful? b. Do you think that it is possible to release orang-utans into the wild? c. Why or why not?
	Questions 13-15 = Questions about his subsequent work with Dr Mikaail Kavanagh (WWF Malaysia) in Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary, habitat of orang-utans.	
13	Please tell me about your work in Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary.	a. When did this take place? b. Who did you work with? c. Why were you assigned to do this work? d. What kind of work did this involve? e. How long did it take?

		f. Did you enjoy this work? Why or why not?
14	What is the difference between helicopter surveys and land surveys (on foot) of orang-utans?	a. What did you do in a helicopter survey? b. How long was each trip in a helicopter? c. What did you feel, seeing the forest from above rather than in the forest? d. Could you see the orang-utans from the helicopters, or did you just see the nests? e. Please describe what you saw from the helicopter. f. Which do you think is more effective – helicopter or land surveys? Why?
15	Please tell me about the importance of Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary.	a. Do you think that there should be more protected areas created like Lanjak-Entimau in Sarawak? b. Why or why not?
	Questions 16-21 = These questions are asked to ease Banggan into questions about wildlife in wild habitats, opinions about human behaviour and effective ways to help wildlife.	
16	Please tell me about your subsequent work with orang-utans.	a. Please describe your work with orang-utans. b. Was it with animals in the wild or in captivity? c. Did you work with other animals after that? d. Why or why not?
17	How do you feel about orang-utans in general?	a. Why? b. Have you ever seen a live orang-utan in the wild? c. If you have seen a live orang-utan in the wild, please describe what it feels like.
18	In your opinion, what do you think is the most effective way to help wild animals?	a. Please explain why this is so.
19	What advice would you tell people who would like to work with wild animals?	a. If your own children wanted to work with wild animals, what would you say to them?
20	What advice do you have for young people today regarding wildlife?	a. Who do you think cares for wildlife nowadays? b. Please explain.

21	Do you have anything else you would like to share?	a. If so, please do share.
	Thank you.	

Appendix B Excerpt of an Interview Transcript

An excerpt of an interview with Banggan Empulu (BE), retired forest guard, Sarawak Forestry Department at Swinburne University of Technology

Saturday, 1 September 2018

Interview conducted by Christina Yin (CY)

Also present, Dr Melvin Gumal (MG), formerly of Sarawak Forestry Department, and at the time of the interview, Director, Wildlife Conservation Society, Malaysia Program

Note: Information from this section of the interview provided the content for the creative nonfiction work of literary journalism in 4.2 "On Arrival, Please Release" published in TEXT Journal of Writing and Writing Courses, Special Issue Peripheral Visions, October 2019, issue no. 57.

Line	Speaker	Transcript
209	CY (10:48)	Were there any accidents that happened during these trips or….?
210	BE (10:55)	No, actually, except one cases whereby we came back from Ulu Lubong Bayah and then we stopped at – what's the name of the longhouse that I crossed? – before there was no longhouse there – Wong Tibu. We stopped by there and tried to dry our clothes and try to do some cooking. And then some people, George Delima and some other staff were going in the jungle. Then suddenly there is coming water from – flash flood – washing away all our clothes including the cooking pot and what not (laughing). So, we had no choice. At first, we tried to go to the longhouse there – Rumah Bertik there - which is only a few meters further down, but they said never mind, we'll rest here first. So, once everything washed away, we had no choice but to go back to the longhouse and sleep.
211	CY (12:24	And borrow clothes….
212	BE	Yeah. Luckily that was our coming back trip.
213	CY (12:36)	Okay right. That was in the 1970s, right or was it?
214	BE	Yeah. Between 1970-71.
215	CY (12:53)	Then tell me about the time at Semenggoh you were talking about. After you did this field work with all these volunteers. Then were you asked to – How did you start working in Semenggoh?
216	BE (13:07)	Because Semenggoh was actually still a forested area, so most of our animal was kept by museum, like the orang-utan, the gibbon, and what not. So, the department must have been discussing about setting up the area for the orang-utan. So, I think they choose, they happened to choose Semenggoh as the area. So, we were sent over to do, to start the clearing and set up the pondok there, a small pondok there, a very small pondok.
217	CY (13:50)	So, this was around when?

218	BE (13:54)	I can't remember exactly when was it, but it was a I think, early 70s or middle of 70s.
219	CY (14:11)	So, there were no more surveys of orang-utans after that? Or they didn't ask you to go?
220	BE (14:19)	No, because that time I was attached to Kuching already. So I was transferred to Kuching so and then we have uh one staff coming from England, Ken Proud, last time.
221	CY (14:38)	And?
222	BE (14:39)	With Ken Proud…
223	MG (14:40)	He was the NPWO, isn't it?
224	BE (14:45)	Yeah. Before that he was assistant to Abang Haji.
225	MG (14:51)	Because Abang Haji Kassim came back from Edinburgh. He was the first local Malaysian NPWO.
226	BE (14:55)	He was there, and then he got Ken Proud to assist him with wildlife work.
227	CY (15:14)	So, you were based in Kuching now, and then did you have to go daily to Semenggoh or you were stationed there?
228	BE (15:24)	Yes, I was assigned to go to Semenggoh more or less like taking charge of what kind of food they give, whether they bath the animal, whether they give. So, I have to drive all the way to Semenggoh and have to walk 45 minutes to the site.
229	CY (15:45)	So, after you arrive, you have to walk 45 minutes to get to the place where the animals are.
230	BE (15:50)	Yes.
231	CY (15:51)	So, what animals did they have?
232	BE (15:55)	We have only gibbon, and orang-utan and I think that's all. Gibbon and orang-utan and I think civet cat.
233	CY (16:04)	So, were these captured or how?
234	BE (16:10)	Captured. They were captured by the locals, so we confiscate them.
235	CY	Ah.
236	BE (16:14)	One animal I remember, during the trip to Batang Ai with David and Kevin McCormick, I brought back one orang-utan with the name of Temi.
237	MG (16:26)	That's the one that was released in Sebuyau!
238	BE	Yeah, yeah, yeah.
239	MG (16:32)	Oh. Now I get it. I was wondering why it's there.
240	CY (16:39)	Did it survive when it was released?

241	BE (16:42)	No, it *mati*. Because somehow, we brought three. One is Seduku, one is Banggan and the other one is Bullet. So, we sent them by helicopter because it's a failure of Ken Proud also, because you know what, he just write a note to me on a piece of cigarette paper, "Banggan, on arrival, please release". That is his instruction.
242	MG (17:19)	Oh my God.
243	BE (17:21)	So of course, we came back by helicopter. We sent the animal down, put them in the cage. So, I opened up the cage. So, the animal was wandering for themselves in the forest and we tried to locate them for a few days to get them back. Until one of the workers at Semenggoh at that time, Ahmad Engan, he lost in the jungle for one night following the orang-utan.
244	CY (17:56)	Oh my gosh. Luckily, he got out. So, finally?"
245	BE (18:04)	Finally, they were wandering in people's gardens, we managed to catch back, but Banggan died. We found out the body – I think she must have accident, I mean, fallen from the tree.
246	CY (18:25)	What year was that?
247	MG (18:30)	77-78
248	BE (18:34)	Somewhere there, 77, 78. That one there the first time we proposed for the Ulu Sebuyau National Park. We proposed to set up the Sebuyau National Park after that trip. First, Ken Proud used to go to Ulu Sebuyau with me, and also Bukit Lesong.
249	CY (19:00)	You said that was his mistake. What did he actually want to happen?
250	BE (19:10)	No, because actually the orang-utan was supposed to be there. And then we keep on feeding them until such time that they are familiar to the area, and then you slowly release them. But his instruction: Please release on arrival. (laughs) So I have to follow his instruction.
251	MG (19:32)	He was doing what they call a hard release. You shouldn't do a hard release.
252	CY (19:37)	So, what happened when he found out?
253	BE (19:57)	Well, he was blamed by the department. It was his mistake. He really got the blame from the Director, Joseph Yong.