

## Foreword

I remember waking up to the rhythmic clatter of my father hammering away at his typewriter, which was punctuated by dings of the carriage hitting the end of the line and being returned to its original position. Him sitting at his desk with his manual Olympia Typewriter surrounded by a notebook and stacks of papers was a common scene in our house. By the time I was able to read fluently, I had accompanied him often to the printing presses of that era all over Yangon. Sometimes we had to visit the press twice in the same evening, as the crew would lose pages for next day's leader. With no copies left, he would have to rewrite the missing part to fit in the space, all within minutes. It was a profound learning experience and a privilege I would not fully appreciate for decades to come.

My father, U Win Pe, was one of the founding editors of the Working People's Daily (WPD), a Myanmar English language newspaper. He wrote WPD's leaders daily for 7 years single-handedly before sharing that responsibility occasionally and then passing the baton on entirely.

U Win Pe was one of the most prolific authors writing in

English during the early Socialist era of Myanmar, which at that time was among the most developed countries in South East Asia. In addition to the leaders, he contributed regularly to the WPD under different pen names: Win Pe for original poems; Epsilon for the Science and Technology section; Po Yaza for policy matters; and Zagadaungzar for culture and society.

The pen name Zagadaungzar was based on a Myanmar historical figure, who served as an assistant to a clerk in the royal court and later became a minister himself. He was known for his whimsical ways and quick wits. My father chose this name as an indication of the tone and nature of The Bamboo Clapper Essays, which appeared in the WPD 50 years ago as a weekly column. The essays reflected upon the Myanmar culture while giving the reader a rare window into society under the socialists in the mid-to late-1960s.

The essays presented here cover topics ranging from Myanmar culture to cuisine to current events to caricature sketches. Published a decade or more before stringent censorship rules arrived in the country, Zagadaungzar challenged the government and legislature. In *The Case of the Missing Train*, he wrote about the Myanmar railways train schedules while highlighting the lack of clear public communication.

*Great Po Sein* and *U Lun, the Man*, were sketches of national heroes in dance and literature, respectively. The essays illustrated the impact these men had on their chosen art form and the nationalist movement. This was especially true for U Lun's essays. Having witnessed what was to come in the next 50 years, reading these today has a more profound and insightful effect.

*Durian, Mango, and Coconut* are essays that promise you

will never look at these fruits the same way again. *Burmese Food Beliefs*, a column, was a satire about the deep-rooted food anxieties Myanmar people have, many that exist to this day. On the humorous side, *Monk's Tales* is a well-known folklore presented with a slight twist. *File Cleaning Service* pokes at the management consultants, which makes me chuckle as I work for a management consulting firm.

I learned a lot from my father, but I wish I had paid even more attention. *Marking a Book* and *Drafting* had me yearning for more of him and his wisdom. *Self-Discipline* made me realize the kind of father he was. On the surface, these may sound like banal platitudes, but in the day-to-day trenches of grown-up life, banal platitudes can be extremely important. I wish all the fathers have the self-discipline Zagadaungzar not only wrote about, but practiced in his life.

U Win Pe wrote in *Plays* that "The radio needs plays. At the moment they are adapting stories. Why not have original plays?" He followed that up by writing and performing in radio plays in English as *Bamboo Grove Players* on Burma Broadcasting Service (BBS).

What you are holding in your hands is the result of more than four years of effort. The original articles from WPD were pulled from archives and scanned by a team of researchers. Out of 136 we were able to locate and scan, a handful of essays were selected and manually digitized.

This became a passion project for publisher U San Oo, who was committed to bringing this much-needed anthology to the world. After the initial editorial effort, artists U Mote Thone and U Kyaw Phyu San were invited to join this project. New York-based Myanmar artist U Min Kyaw Khine contributed a sketch

of the author.

Due to language adjustments and usage changes over the past 50 years, minor edits have been made to the original text.

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July 24, 2015

U Lun takes his last journey today . . . . The voice and oracle of the Burmese is mute. He leaves us only the written and heard expressions of his thought rarer and more intense than common. For him this play has ended.

(From *U Lun, the Man*)

I owe my program of self-discipline to my son. He climbs up my writing table and pumps ink out of my pan onto my best-prized notebook. Do I go into a rage? No, I carry him lovingly from wherever he has gone to create further havoc and sweetly explain to him why spilling ink over my notebooks is not considered exemplary conduct.

(From *Self-discipline*)

Have you ever seen a big fire balloon swing up from behind the branches of a mango tree? The big, bright bulk, the raging fire in the bottom, the string of winking lanterns in tow. It rises like a big living thing determined to climb the stages of the sky to pay homage to Lord Buddha's relics in Tavatimsa.

(from *Lights*)

There is an abundance of foreign-made toys on the market. But what toy should a parent give his child when he desires to foster a love in the child for things and ways Burmese? . . . The trouble is that so many Burmese toys are now made in an ugly or shoddy way. We want the child to grow up to appreciate articles of beauty and to be habituated to works of high standard. But it is so difficult to get such toys nowadays.

(From *Burmese Toys*)

I have seen some golfers go up to the hole and look into it. I had always thought that they were afraid there would be a frog hidden in it.

(From *Golf*)

*U Po Sein* injected footwork into Burmese dancing. With knee-length velvet trousers and his silk *pasoe* taken between his thighs and tucked behind *U Po Sein* used his feet with good effect to the strong beat of the music.

(From *The Great Po Sein*)