

This Much I Know

Over two weekends, *August Woman* sat down with 16 extraordinary women to learn the wit and wisdom that can only come with age

AS TOLD TO XU CI'EN + AMELIA CHIA PHOTOS RONALD LEONG MAKEUP + HAIR ANGEL GWEE
USING SHU UEMURA JANICE KOH'S OUTFIT ALLDRESSED UP MARGARET CHAN'S OUTFIT FLY NOW



“As you age, you really have to sit down and think: where am I? You have to plan. And after you plan, you have to move”

Margaret Chan, 62

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF THEATRE/PERFORMANCE STUDIES (PRACTICE), SINGAPORE MANAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

ONE DAY I THOUGHT TO MYSELF: I'm an actress and I work with my body and it's getting old and tired. People are cast by type, so no matter how good an actress you are, you can forget about playing, for example, Juliet in the standard *Romeo & Juliet*. My roles were going to be extremely limited, so I decided to look for a job that would value me even if I was old and doddering. Hence, I thought maybe I could become a professor, which meant I needed a PhD.

IT WAS A LONG JOURNEY, BECAUSE TO GET A PHD, YOU NEED TO GET YOUR MASTERS. To go back to university after 25 years was tough, yet I did well enough in my Masters and won a UK research scholarship. I started my PhD in 1998 and completed it in four years at age 52.

AS YOU AGE, YOU REALLY HAVE TO SIT DOWN AND THINK: WHERE AM I? You have to plan. And after you plan, you have to move. The route that I chose was not the easiest one. I had to fight for it. Being absolutely focused and grounded is essential when planning your future. What got me to where I am was honesty, sheer determination and tremendous discipline. And I'm fortunate to have an employer who gave me the chance despite knowing that I was older, with fewer choices.

I AM GRATEFUL TO HAVE A JOB BECAUSE MY CHILDREN HAVE ALL GROWN UP and the empty nest syndrome can hit really hard. To this day, the pain remains and the only way to not be a busybody mother is to immerse yourself in work.

I REMEMBER READING AN INTERESTING ARTICLE IN THE STRAITS TIMES, which talked about the notion of active ageing as an expectation that society imposes upon you. There are many narratives that society tells you such as "society doesn't owe you a living" and you tend to buy into them. So if you don't make it because you're incapable or disabled you can be made to feel less. It's a very dangerous value judgment. Frankly, I don't know if the little old ladies cleaning toilets feel wonderfully empowered.

I'M RELUCTANT TO BE HELD UP AS A SHINING EXAMPLE OF "ACTIVE AGEING", because people can do whatever they want to do, and I'll do whatever I want to do. If you feel like sitting in a chair all day, read or watch TV, you're active ageing as well.