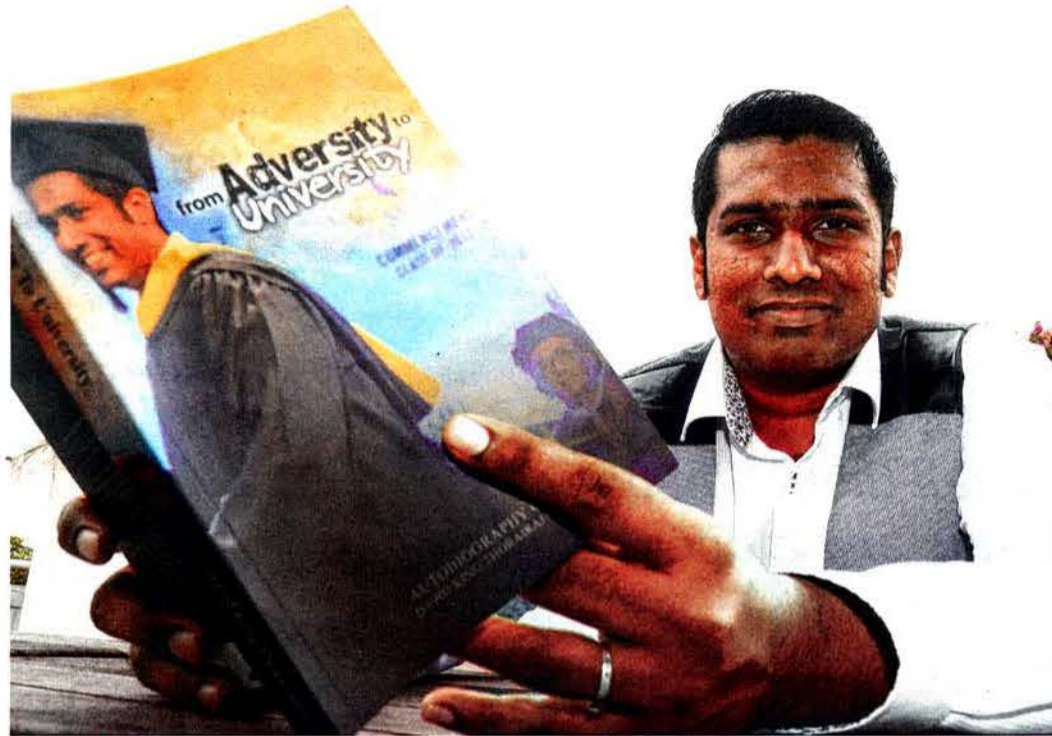


HARDCORE Singapore

As our population swells, the concept of a 'core Singaporean' is becoming murky. In this ongoing series to find the Singaporean Core – a term raised in Parliament during the Population White Paper debate – we speak to people with a pink IC to see how red and white they truly are



WRITER: Motivational speaker and author David King with his book *From Adversity To University*. He's now writing his second book.

TNP PICTURE: NURJANNAH ZULKIFLI

What qualities do you have that make you Singaporean?
 Being ambitious, which we know as "kiasu" in Singapore.

How would you describe Singapore to a stranger?
 I would tell them that it is a prosperous First-World country.

What are the little quirks you see in Singapore every day?
 I think we don't smile enough. We should do it more often without being suspected of having any ulterior motive.

What food do you miss most when you are overseas?
 Chicken rice.

Your favourite Singlish phrase?
 Shiok!

If you feel you are uniquely Singaporean or you think you know someone who is, e-mail tnp@sph.com.sg and share your story with us.

Ex-offender writing book to help youth

REPORT: ANDRE JOSEPH THENG
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MOTIVATIONAL speaker and author David King, 31, has come a long way since his days in prison.

Mr King graduated from university last year and now helps students by giving talks at schools, where he advises them not to make the mistakes he made.

He also wrote his life story in a self-published book titled *From Adversity To University* and is writing his second book, *My Masterplan*, to help young people live their lives successfully.

From 2000 to 2008, he was known by his prison number "64635" after he was jailed because of several fights when he was a gang member.

Changed his life

But he decided to change his life and set a goal to go to university. He took his A-level exams behind bars and got five Bs.

But when he applied to three universities from prison, he did not hear from them.

It was only when a prison counsellor personally approached the universities that Mr King got a chance.

Associate Professor Tan Yoo Guan, Associate Dean of the School of Social Sciences at Singapore Management University, went with three other staff members to the prison to interview Mr King.

Prof Tan told *The New Paper*: "I thought he was a very talented, sincere and intelligent person, so we decided to accept him."

In 2008, just two weeks after he was released, he began his university studies.

Mr King described the difficulties he had adapting to life outside prison.

He said: "I did not even know how to use a computer and had difficulty making

friends. They would ask me, 'What JC are you from?' and I wouldn't know how to answer that question."

Afraid of being judged, he would simply tell them that he was a private candidate.

He graduated last year with a Bachelor of Social Sciences with majors in psychology and human resources. His life has been going well since.

He married a church friend and set up a company called Ministry Of Empowerment, where he gives talks to students, parents and teachers. He has plans to expand overseas.

He was recently nominated for the Junior Chamber of Singapore (JCI Singapore) Ten Outstanding Young Persons of the World award.

JCI Singapore is a leadership training organisation and past winners of the award include Members of Parliament Dr Fatimah Lateef and Dr Vivian Balakrishnan.

Many people who have been touched by Mr King's life story have encouraged him after talks and reading his book.

He said: "They tell me that they want to take charge of their lives, that they want to do what I have done."

While he has been accepted at his talks despite the stigma of being an ex-offender, Mr King hopes that there will be even greater acceptance of ex-offenders in Singapore.

He said: "While I may be accepted at a distance, I'm still not sure what people think of me when I am interacting with them."

Nonetheless, Mr King is grateful that Singapore has given him a chance.

He said: "If I were in another country, I may not have been given the chance to study in jail and enter university."