

An ocean to inherit

Datuk Simon Foong tells **Aneeta Sundararaj** that failing to instil in the next generation a sense of duty towards conserving the oceans is being irresponsible

“THAT’S my son. He’s from generation Y.” That’s one of the first things Datuk Simon Foong, 58, managing director and CEO of Aquaria KLCC, says of 26-year-old Daryl.

But as their stories unfold, it soon becomes crystal clear that, other

than Daryl’s laid-back demeanour, father and son are really no different, which makes their relationship deeply endearing and sweet.

STRICT BUT FAIR

While the photographer’s busy working with Daryl, the dynamic Simon begins narrating his story: “My father was a very strict man but he was fair. I didn’t really have a relationship with him as such. He worked all the time. When I had a motorbike accident, with burn marks and all, the last person I wanted to tell was my father. He would scold me for falling down. I am the middle child, the black sheep of the family. I was sent off to boarding school in Northern Ireland at 15.

“But that was the opportunity for me to open up and talk to people. I began to understand myself. My father always expected me to do better than I did. I rebelled at first. Then, when I was away, I worked towards being somebody he could be proud of. With my son, we’re friends. He can tell me anything.”

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Unaware of what his father had said, Daryl tells us his story. He is an executive in a different company because “there were so many expectations”.

“Everyone said ‘Life for you is set’. I wanted to prove that I was something more than just my father’s son. I think this helps to build a sense of self-worth.”

Glancing at his father, Daryl adds: “I’ve always been independent. I used to just do things without telling my parents. When I fell down, I would dust the sand from my knees and clean the wound myself. I would tell my parents last. Then they would scold me because I didn’t tell them first.”

MONEY NOT ALL

Later, on a more serious note, both men tell of their deep respect for the late Dame Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop. “When we started The Body Shop,” explains Simon, “she taught me to think more of others, that money was not everything. I liked her style of management.”

Nodding, Daryl adds: “I admired how she never lost that touch with



Father and son enjoy a light moment

the grassroots. She dressed casually and you wouldn’t even think she was the sharp businesswoman she was. With everything, she would ask, ‘How will this help the environment?’ or ‘How will this help the community’. I liked that very much.”

“With The Body Shop,” says Simon, “I was involved in conservation efforts of everything above the sea. When we sold The Body Shop, I wanted to continue with conservation work. So when the opportunity to invest in Aquaria KLCC came up, I thought it was time to look downwards—at conserving what’s beneath sea level. So, now, I’ve contributed to conservation from the very bottom of the sea to the sky.”

UTMOST DUTY

Simon looks at the elder of his two sons and a quote from Confucius comes to mind: The father who does not teach his son his duties is equally guilty as the son who neglects them.

“While everyone sent their children away to study early, I kept mine as close as I could,” he says. “I’m waiting for him to join my business. I want to explain to him, ‘Look, this is why we’re doing this. We need to look after the ocean’. I want to explain

how important the work is.”

But Daryl’s “education” started early. For example, Simon took his family on a holiday to Rantau Abang when his son was still a boy. “I wanted to show them the turtles hatching. We had to wake up at 2 am.”

WELL DONE

Simon continues his story: “I want people to understand that the ocean gives out 70 per cent of oxygen. Fish are an important food source. The ocean and marine life are important for the tourism industry. I want other fathers to educate their children, in the same way I’ve tried with mine, about the importance of the sea. I want them to tell their children that if we overfish, then all marine life will disappear.”

When all’s said and done, the basis for Simon’s confidence and exuberance becomes visible when his face softens and he says: “I’ve had many people praise me about what I’m doing. None of it compares to what my father said to me once, ‘Look I realise that you’ve worked hard and attained success. I’m proud of you.’”

He admits he has yet to repeat his father’s words to Daryl but one feels it won’t be long before he does.



Datuk Simon Foong and son Daryl share a close bond

WATER HERITAGE

Here are some basic guidelines about the ocean that Datuk Simon Foong insists every father has a responsibility to teach his child:

Explain to your child that the water from a river or stream will flow into an ocean. So, when he throws rubbish into the rivers and streams, these will eventually end up polluting the ocean.

When you take your child to the beach and the local municipal council has not provided bins, don’t leave your plastic bags of rubbish on the beach. These will flow out to the sea and if turtles eat them, they’ll die. Take your plastic bags with you and throw them in proper bins.

Get involved in conservation activities. For example, Reef Check aims to prevent the practice of “fish

bombing’ where explosives are used to stun or kill fish to make it easier for people to collect them. These efforts will also give you an opportunity to bond with your child when you do things together like diving.

Teach your child to appreciate nature properly. For instance, when snorkelling, don’t stand on corals because the corals will break.

On May 26, Aquaria KLCC paid tribute to World Ocean Day with the theme, Blue Ocean, Green Action, which explores the preservation and health of the ocean by focusing on its bio-diversity.

With this in mind, Aquaria KLCC will reconnect with its conservation efforts, namely Save The Turtles and Save Our Fins. Details at www.aquariaklcc.com