

LIFE&TIMES FAMILY

A father's gift

Tea guru David De Candia has co-authored a book and the proceeds will go to a cause close to his heart, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

EVERY tea has a story, says David De Candia, 53, a tea master who has co-authored a children's storybook, *Master Davey And The Magic Tea House: Legend Of The Blue Tiger*.

It was recently launched together with a limited edition rare blend of tea called Blue Tiger Tea by Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

Blue Tiger Tea is a unique blend of lemon myrtle, malva flower and tea blossoms with a tinge of raspberry flavouring and the storybook highlights the magical journey of Hopper, a young boy who goes on an adventure to save this tea. Helping him in his quest by his friend, Camellia.

Proceeds from both the sale of the book and tea will be channelled to the Malaysian Systemic Lupus Erythematosus Association (PSLEM). It promotes lupus research, awareness and education as well as to serve the needs of the people with lupus and their families.

"I wanted to write a book, an actual physical book," says De Candia, Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf resident tea buyer-cum-master tea blender. "I've been in the industry for 17 years and I wanted to write a book which children and parents can experience together and share as a family. Children must be shown how to read a book."

In fact, he has taken the idea of reading a book out loud to a child one generation further. Ecstatic at the arrival of his first grandchild, Michael, (weeks old at the time of this interview), he says: "I read the book to him and he didn't complain."

Humour aside, this devoted family man who globetrots in search of the finest and best quality teas from around the world, has a very personal reason for wanting to support PSLEM. His daughter, Glorianna, suffers from lupus.

He says: "It was not easy. Here was a girl who was very active, the

star athlete in school. Suddenly, she became ill."

De Candia and his wife knew something was wrong when Glorianna was too tired to visit her grandmother. "I couldn't even carry her as it hurt all over. Our lives changed forever. But we were fortunate. Our doctors diagnosed her quickly. The diagnosis was made in November and by December, she was receiving proper treatment," he says.

Dr Benjamin Cheah Tien Eang, 40, consultant physician, rheumatologist and president of PSLEM, explains that SLE is an auto-immune disease. "It is systemic, which means that it involves every part of the body. While the physical parts, like skin pigmentation or loss of hair are easy to see, it's the damage to the internal organs that are more complicated. Ninety per cent of people who suffer from lupus are women and no two lupus patients are identical. Worse, it affects women between 20 and 40."

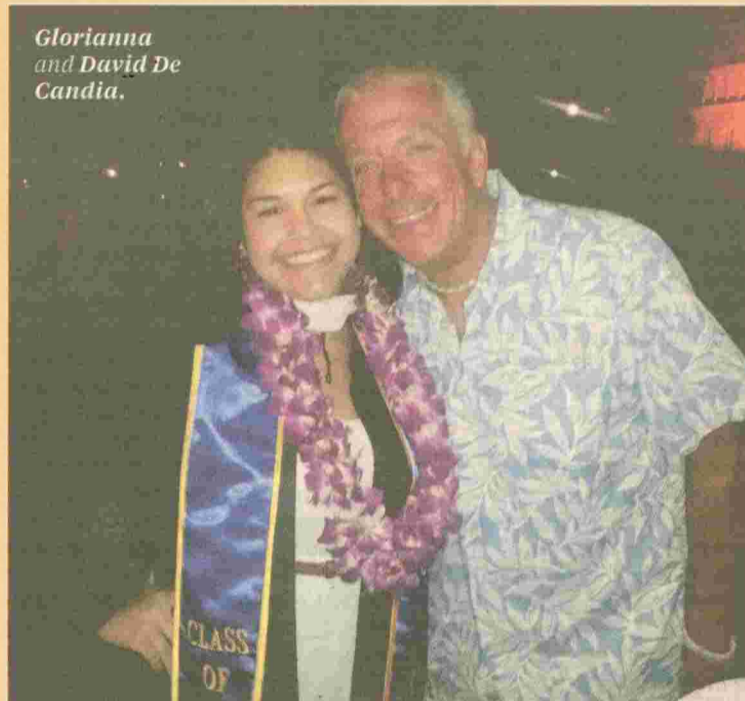
The diagnosis for Glorianna was made when she was 7.

"We are very fortunate," says De Candia. "Our doctors give us a lot of relief. We need an outlet too, and it's good when a doctor says, 'I'm there for you guys'. Glorianna can send him a text or an email and he'll be able to help."

Shaking his head, he says: "Still, not a day goes by that we don't worry. We never know what will happen. All we can do is stay positive and strong."

"When a child has a life threatening disease, it puts you in the moment. You live every minute of the day."

A particularly difficult moment was when Glorianna became an eligible candidate under the 'Make A Wish Foundation'. The non-profit organisation, founded in the US, arranges experiences for children with life-threatening medical conditions. He says: "On



Glorianna and David De Candia.

the one hand, it brought joy. On the other hand, it was a 'stamp' that this could be the end. No parent wants to know that."

What, precisely, was Glorianna's wish? To meet Derek Jeter, an American baseball star from the New York Yankees.

"And you know what?" says De Candia, clearly still excited at the memory of his

daughter meeting this man. "She even made a plaque for him. We were allowed to follow her and I was very excited. She met every single Yankee on

Master Davey And The Magic Tea House

By Susan Chodakewitz and David De Candia

Illustrated by Kent Yoshimura (RM39.00)

Publisher: Booksicals

Available at The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf outlets

Details at:

<http://www.lupusmalaysia.org>

that trip and spent 10 hours with them. When she came out, she was glowing. That's when it hit me that this was all about her. We are there to support her."

Today, Glorianna is a young woman of 22. For the third time during the interview, De Candia repeats: "She just got her Masters in Latin American Studies from UCLA, you know.

And she graduated cum laude. I may brag about her but you know, when I am tired and I become lazy, I just have to look at her. She's an amazing person. She gets up with swollen joints and just gets on with it. She never folds and chooses not to give in to her disease."



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David De Candia

