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**MADJACK
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This Jack [^] is a KING!

"I know Mad Jack – but who is Jack Chin?" Asked my friend innocently when I told her that I am featuring the savvy restaurateur Jack Chin. It is not an unfamiliar reaction as many recognise this dynamic man as 'Mad Jack'. **ANUPRIYA PODDAR** meets the man whose brand speaks louder than his identity



Jack, I was told, was easy going. He did not believe in frills. But sometimes it is a little difficult to digest the combination of simplicity and success. But that is what Jack is all about - a successful man who made it with the support of his beautiful and loving wife, Siew Khuan and two talented daughters who he dotes on. Family means the world to him. He opened his doors to not just his home but also his beliefs. Here is an excerpt from the conversation I had with Jack Chin over tea.

Behind every successful man there is a woman – your story proves it! Can you tell me a bit about how did you and Siew Khuan meet?

We met at the university in New Zealand. We were course

mates doing Bachelors of Commerce and Administration. She copied my homework and I copied the notes that she took down in class. So I guess somewhere down line, with the exchange of notes, we exchanged our hearts too!

Were you on some scholarship program in the university?

Actually we were very lucky. The year we entered the course, the government abolished the fee and the year we finished, the government implemented the fee. So I can say – it was timing that saved us some money. However we needed to sustain ourselves so

we worked part-time. Siew Khuan worked at a hospital cafeteria. It was there that she picked up her baking skills and later, went on to manage the entire café full time for a year.

I am given to understand that you belong to Malaysia - what brought you to Singapore?

I belong to East Malaysia and Siew Khuan belongs to West Malaysia. We did not want to be partial to one home town so we chose Singapore. Moreover Singapore offered more opportunities.

Can you describe your journey into food from your sales background?

I worked in the sales department of an IT company while Siew Khuan worked in the human resources and administration department for a real estate company for 5 years. Post that Siew Khuan gave birth to our first daughter. But she wanted to continue working. So she became the distributor for a US based e-learning company. However the economic downturn did not allow her to pursue it for too long. So that was our foray into the food business.

You started off with a simple dish out of the kitchen - a pancake. Was there any specific reason behind it?

There was a coffee shop next to our office at Geylang. Each time we would go for a break, we drank *Kopi* or *Teh* but missed a snack to go along with it. I liked to eat something small with my drink. I saw a good traffic of people like me; seized the opportunity and so decided to open a stall. Why

pancake? Well, because I simply love it. And the pancakes Siew Khuan makes – are just out of the world. Call it a selfish motive, but it worked!

What makes your pancakes a bestseller?

We started off with peanut and bean paste fillings. We then added on the coconut filling – all these were Siew Khuan's experimental recipes she developed in consultation with her mother, grandmother, and aunts back in Malaysia. We priced it at 60 cents a piece. Siew Khuan's mother laughed and asked her if she went to New Zealand and studied to end up selling pancakes at 60 cents! Of course, I was doing well. This was just another source of income.

Our pancakes are well liked because they are fresh out the pan, oil-less and so one can eat more without the guilt!

So the king was born with Pancake king! What's behind the name?

Oh! I did start the Pancake (*Ming Chiang Kueh*) business and I always dream big no matter how small the size of the business is. And a king is "big"! I was soon known as *Ming Chiang Da Wang* (Chinese for Pancake king) among my friends.

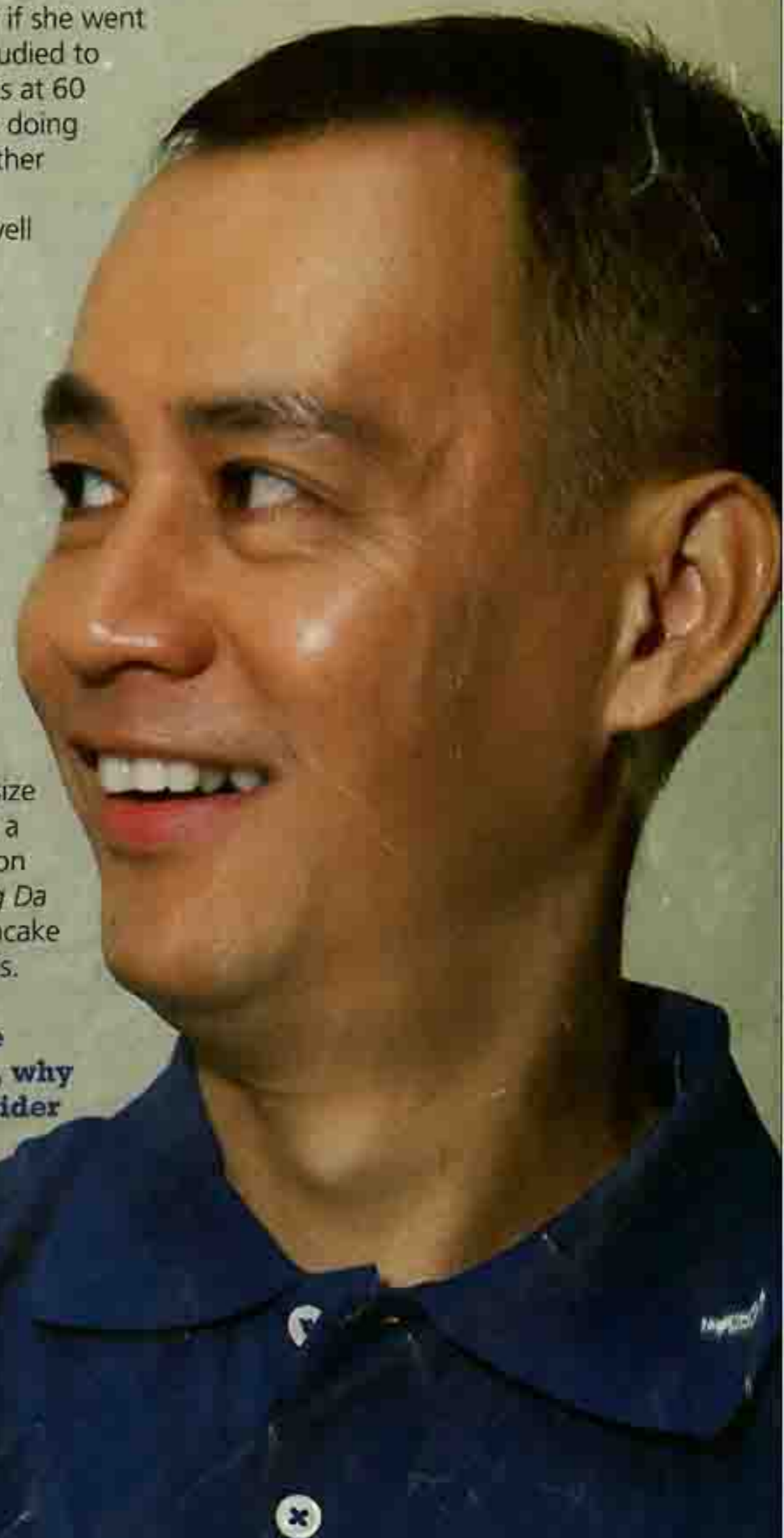
Since we are on the subject of 'names', why did you never consider

using Siew Khuan's name anywhere given the fact that she is a major reason of your success?

Oh yes – we have MAD Jack! She is MAD. Mad is short for Madeline. (Siew Khuan later told me that her name was never Madeline and that Jack normally makes that up. She laughed).

What made you think of Australian food?

We once went on a vacation to Australia and that is where we ate a lot of fish-n-chips. It was so





fresh and crisp, we decided to bring to Singapore, a taste of Australia at an affordable price. Which is why even after four outlets (and more in the pipeline), our focus remains on customer satisfaction and hygiene instead of the frills which unnecessarily add on to the customer's wallet.

So was it difficult for you to enter the market, being a Pancake King?

Actually no. I introduced some of our signature dishes, to 'test the waters', under *PK Express* as we did not want people to get confused with the branding. However they knew it was a part of Pancake King.

Our customers loved this new taste! They wanted more so Siew Khuan came up with more recipes and increased the size of our menu card!!

So why did you want to start it under a new brand - Mad Jack?

Basically, each time we took our kids to eat out to coffee shops and other food courts, they complained about the heat and the hygiene. So that made me think that most children must be thinking the same way and children are big influencers of our

customer base. So we decided to move into Malls under a new brand name - Mad Jack.

So had you already finalised on your menu by then?

No, as a matter of fact we keep adding on. For instance, we never considered having Asian dishes on our menu. But our younger daughter's is very traditional her tastes - she would not touch anything other than rice. We realised that there maybe many children like her and so we introduced a few Asian dishes.

You take people's likes into consideration and give them what they want - I guess that has been one of your greatest success factors?

You see even though I maybe the *Pancake King*, end of day - customer is still the bigger King!! We give them large portions they can enjoy at an affordable price in a friendly ambience. What more would they want - something that light on their pockets and that will not block their arteries!!

Jack not just believes in the motto *Carpe Diem* but sure knows how to live up to it! Guess his other motto should be "live life King-size"! ☺

Coursemate, wife, business partner - we have come a long way, but somewhere along the way, Jack forgot something important. He is yet to propose to me - I am still waiting.

- Siew Khuan

