

In Conversation

Exchanging views & trading opinions

WITH Elaine Lau



PHOTO BY SHANE WATSON FOR THE DAILY NEWS

The art of giving

What defines a real gift? Has the ritual of giving lost its meaning in the flash and cash of the 21st century? We ask Nigel Skelody, owner of bakery and event designing outfit Just Heavenly and Jasmine Kamal, assistant public relations manager of Louis Vuitton Malaysia, both of whom are in the business of helping customers deliver dreams and pleasure to their loved ones.

Shopping malls are decked with colourful bangles and glitter and the streets with festive lights and wreaths. Ah yes, the year-end holiday season is upon us once again and you know what that means – it's a time for merry-making and of course to indulge in the age-old ritual of gift giving.

But what really is the essence of giving? We live in an age where lavish gifts are pretty much de rigueur, leading one to believe that the thought behind the gift is sometimes lost. Is this really the case? As we put together our annual gift guide, which comes with this issue of *The Edge*, we reflect on the nature of gift giving and what it looks like today with Nigel Skelody, co-owner of Just Heavenly and A Slice of Heaven and Jasmine Kamal, assistant public relations manager of Louis Vuitton Malaysia.

Elaine Lau: There's a saying, "It's more blessed to give than to receive." What are your thoughts?

Nigel Skelody: I feel in life there's a certain circularity in how we give and receive. As

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I think part of the enjoyment, the gratitude of receiving, comes from the giving. So at the end of the day, without giving there's no receiving, and without receiving there's no giving. From the point of view of our company, Just Heavenly and its offshoot retail branch A Slice of Heaven, it was built into the DNA

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called the Jardine Foundation, which gives out scholarships annually. And that really made an impact, that idea of giving.

And so when we got together, all of us decided that Just Heavenly had to be built around that. Every so often we have events... the last one was the opening of A Slice of Heaven in Pavilion KL, we tied up with WAO [Women's Aid Organisation of Malaysia] and The Pixel Project to give back to the community that actually supports us the most – women. They were doing projects that raised awareness of ending violence against women, and so we raised money for them.

For Christmas, we're tying up with Rumiati Nur Salim to raise funds for shelter homes. RM1 from five favours will be given to Nur Salim for the month of December. So really for us giving is in our DNA. I think the saying, it is more blessed to give than to receive, sometimes skewers too much to giving, whereas there's also the receiving part. Both have to go hand in hand.

Jasmine Kamal: I think there's no greater gift, even to yourself, than if you give wholeheartedly and generously. Just to add to what Nigel said, I think the best part about giving is giving in the moment, unexpectedly. It can be a little thing – like a smile.

Nigel: It's an everyday thing – you appreciate people, give little compliments. It goes not just a long way but also builds people.

Nigel talked about his family being a great influence in his attitude towards giving. What about you, Jasmine?

Jasmine: Everything learnt, learnt from my mum and dad. My mum was a very selfless

lady, she sacrificed a lot for the family. That in itself was already, for act of giving, what she could do provide for her children. And of course my dad was always there to get me, the education, the experience and the opportunity. I grew up in a very supportive and strong household so I think for me to give is second nature. I love to give and I love to get that smile or thanks you from others.

Can you tell me of a particular gift you gave that elicited a huge response?

Nigel: You know, it's never intentional. Our business was pretty much built on the back of our passion for food and cakes. When you put your passion out there, when you feel blessed, when you work on that imperative of appreciating what you have but work hard to make sure everything is in place for your company, all of a sudden people start coming up to you and saying, "You've inspired me so much". And it's really word.

Jasmine: I think that's the greatest gift you can give anyone – sharing your passion with people and inspiring them, making them want to do better.

How do you define the value of a gift?

Nigel: Sort of clichéd, but as long as it's given with a sincere heart – most of the time, let's face it, my friends want for nothing really, so these people become a challenge – what do you give? Most of the time I'd either make something or give something that I know has sentimental value to them. It doesn't necessarily have to be expensive as long as it's given with a sincere heart. I think that's the most important thing.

Jasmine: As you get older, as he said, you've got to be very discerning. It could be like a moment or where they are in life, what you feel like they need. Like the element of surprise in giving gifts. You've got to pay attention to the smallest of details of what they want.

Tell me about a gift you've received that is dear to your heart and why.

Jasmine: I was born in Egypt, and my mum got me this little gold thermographic in my name. It's really not much but just the sentimental value of it.

Nigel: It's something from mum as well – a ring. She had a ring with five diamonds... She broke it up and gave three to my female cousins and pendants. She gave Allan and me each a ring she had made for us. That was really touching. It sort of became our official ring from the family.

What about an intangible gift?

Jasmine: I think in general, when someone is there to listen to you and support you. **Nigel:** A lot centres on my personal life actually. One was when dad asked Allan and me to move back in because the house was too empty. The other one was when Allan said, "Look at some point we're going to have to move back in and keep an eye on your parents because they're getting older." This was before dad actually asked us to move back in. So just knowing that family is there, the greatest gift, and that encompasses, as he said, support, togetherness, a shoulder to cry on, a hug, a smile.

Nigel: A boy shared is a boy doubled a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved.

What do you wish for going into the last month of the year?

Nigel: Health and happiness. In that order.

Jasmine: I want more sleep [laughs]. Joy and laughter – that's what I want and that's also what I want to give out.

