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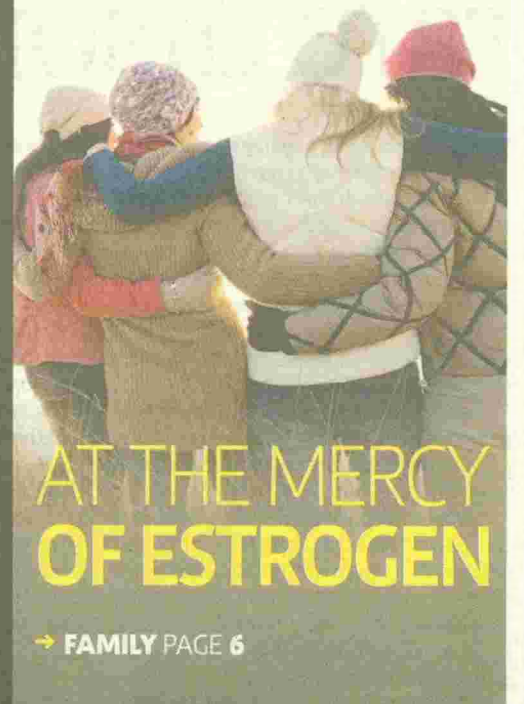
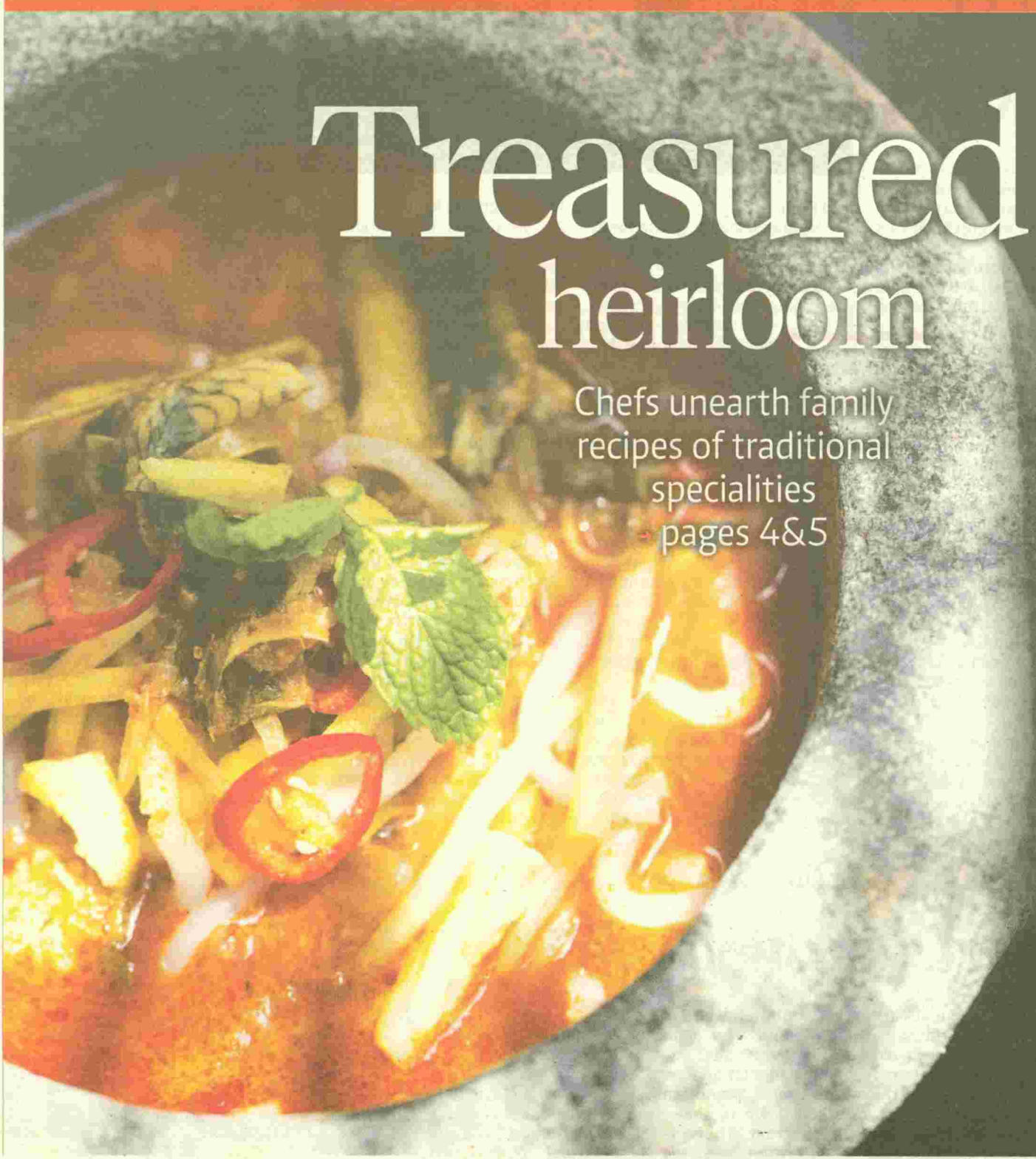
# LIFE & TIMES

NEW SUNDAY TIMES

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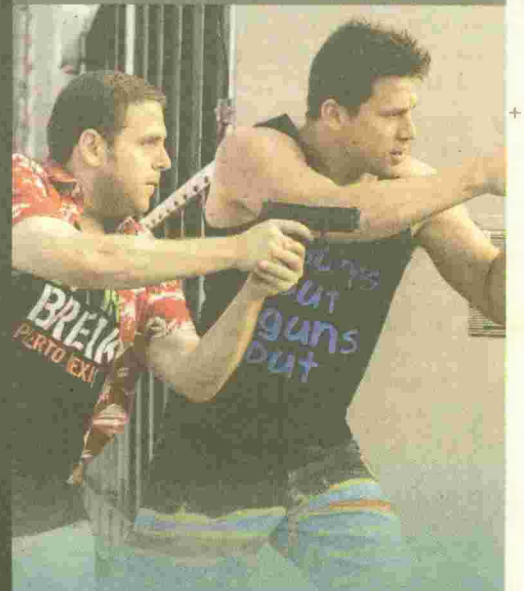
## Treasured heirloom

Chefs unearth family recipes of traditional specialities - pages 4&5



### AT THE MERCY OF ESTROGEN

→ FAMILY PAGE 6



### Jump back in

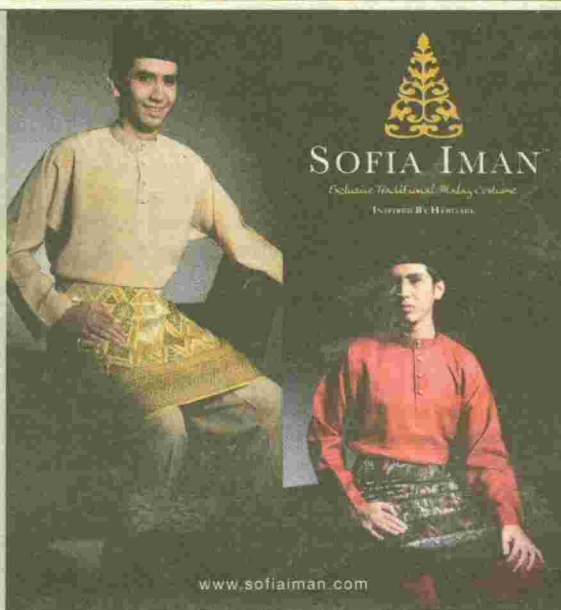
→ SHOWBIZ PAGE 14



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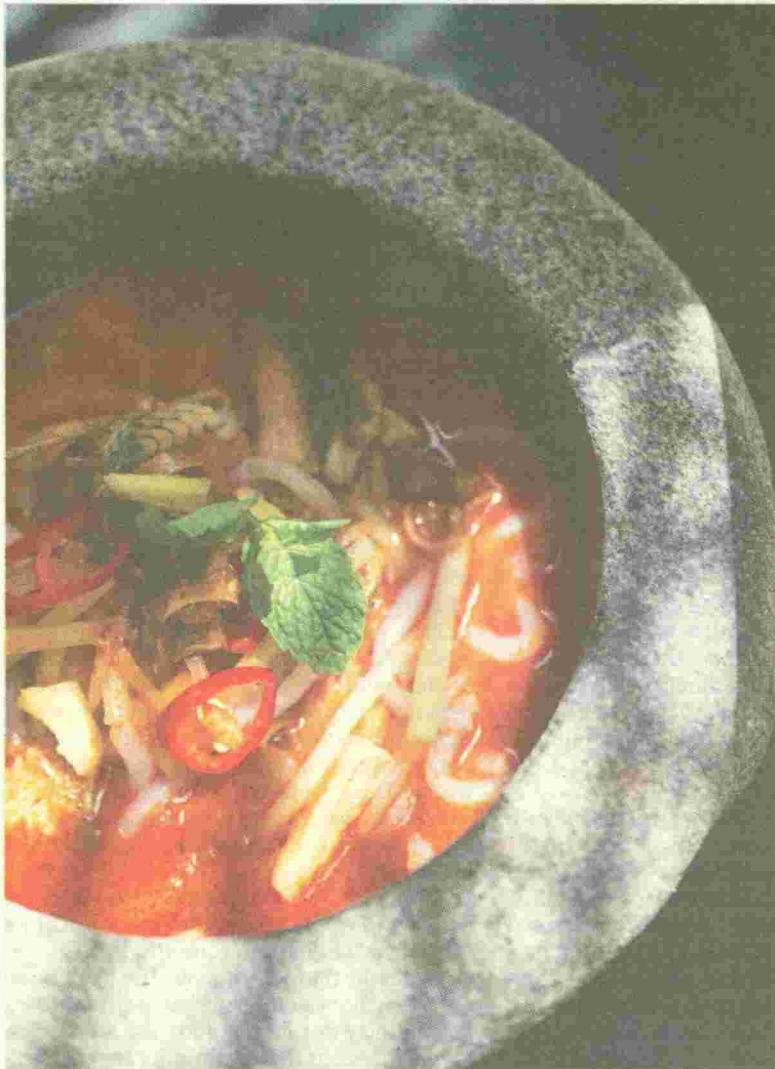
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LIFE & TIMES **FAMILY**



Asam Laksa by Hellen Fong.



Mufton Dum Biryani by Ezekiel Anathan.



Teochew Peach-shaped Dumpling by Hellen Fong.

# Culinary time capsule

Tapping into family memories and recipes, *Lost Recipes Of Malaysia* is a treasure trove of culinary heritage, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**



Hellen Fong and her mother.

“Do you see children holding asam boi popsicles these days?” asks Hellen Fong Yuh Leng of At 19 Culinary Studio. No doubt there is much to our culinary diversity in Malaysia. However, because we’re always in a rush, we tend to focus our attention on the more popular dishes like char kway teow, roti canai and nasi lemak and have almost lost the ability to enjoy those that our forefathers used to enjoy like skewered sengkayang slices, rendang tok and banana-stem paratal.

Before these traditional dishes are lost for good, Hellen, 51, and four other chefs (Mohd Shokri Abdul Ghani, Goo Chui Hoong, Khairial Anwar Ahmad and Ezekiel Anathan) have co-authored a book titled *Lost Recipes Of Malaysia*.

They have tapped into their own

childhoods to come up with 30 family recipes.

According to the authors, local food stretches back more than 600 years. “Malaysia, located in the heart of Southeast Asia, was a trading hub and a favourite stopover along the Spice Route. Malaysian cuisine is influenced by a mix of different cultures and adapted eating preferences of merchants and traders who ply this route. Centuries of trading, colonisation and immigration have left their culinary mark on Malaysian food which has main elements of three great cultures — Malay, Chinese and Indian.”

**CULINARY EVOLUTION**

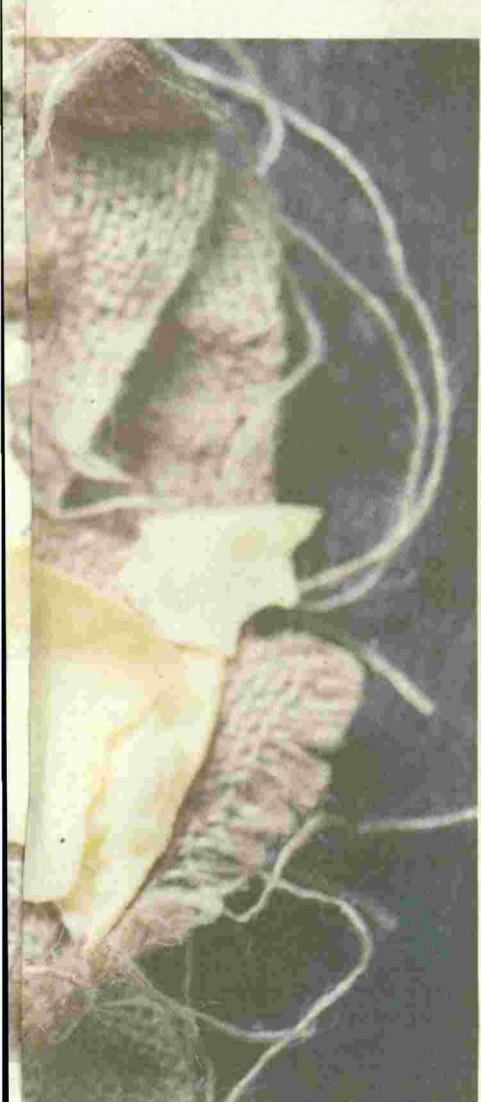
“By ‘lost’, we don’t mean recipes that are no longer available,” says Hellen. “Instead, this cookbook aims to retrace and recreate several vintage

recipes that may have been changed along the way to adapt to modern lifestyle. Some ingredients may have been replaced by more common ingredients which are easier to find or the cooking method has evolved to suit the modern kitchen.”

A perfect example is asam laksa. “When it was cooked the old way, one of the ingredients used was swamp eel,” says the former general manager of a local bank. “This dish came from the north, and as there were paddy fields there, eels were easily found. They used lots of herbs and spices from the garden to camouflage the muddy smell of the eel.”

Today, however, eel is expensive and not easily available, so people use other fish. This, Hellen says, has resulted in recipes being “fusion-ed” in some way.

Another example of this happening



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PICTURE BY MOHD KHAIRUL HELMY

is Mohd Shokri Abdul Ghani's rendang tok.

She says: "Shokri's recipe requires upto six hours to cook and for Ananth's mutton dum biryani, you have to seal the pot with dough and place 200g of burning charcoal on top of the pot to

cook it. Many people today will say 'Aiyah, so leceh to make all this'. But, preparing a dish the old way preserves some of its authenticity."

**FAMILY CONNECTION**

The beauty is that the selected

recipes are from the private collection of each author. "They were passed down from our aunts and grandmothers."

But therein lies the authors' greatest challenge as well.

"Some of these recipes were on bits and pieces of paper in someone's drawer. We had to dig those out. Then, sometimes the instructions don't say one teaspoonful. They will say *satu genggam ini* (one handful of this). How do you measure that? In the old days, they shared their recipes casually instead of writing them down. For this book however, we needed precise measurements such as one teaspoon or however many grams of each ingredient," says Hellen.

For her contribution, the Teochew peach-shaped dumpling, the added challenge was that the person she wanted to learn from, her mother-in-law, was no longer alive. "So, I would make it and then asked my husband to tell me what it tasted like. The first time I made it, he said it tasted nothing like what his mother made. So I kept trying and trying until I got it right," she confides.

Adding, Hellen says: "I grew up in Klang. I was the first grandchild and my father had nine siblings. We had a huge backyard with a mango tree,

rambutan tree and lime tree. We also grew lemongrass and the various herbs and spices used in our daily cooking. We were always cooking—breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"Just before Chinese New Year, we would move the dining table aside and spread mats on the floor to sit on while making kuih kapit. My job was to fold the thin round crepes as soon as they were lifted off the iron mould, into triangles. My mother used to put band aid around my thumb and forefinger to protect them from being burnt."

**Lost Recipes Of Malaysia**

By Hellen Fong, Mohd Shokri, Goo Chui Hoong, Khairil Anwar, Ezekiel Ananthan  
Published by MPH  
Price: RM39

She remembers going to the market with her mother. To this day, Hellen can recite her mother's marketing instructions: "Check the fish gills. Make sure they are red and slimy. Check the prawns legs,

make sure they have not turned black. Make sure the vegetables are fresh. If the seller does not allow you to choose, don't buy from him".

What surprises Hellen most of all is that there are young people who are interested in *Lost Recipes Of Malaysia*. "They may not relate to these the way we do but they have an interest in the stories we're telling in our book. They are genuinely interested in their culinary heritage."

Perhaps our recipes will not be so lost after all.



Rendang Tok by Mohd Shokri.