

YOU'RE NEVER ALONE

EVEN WHEN YOU THINK YOU ARE

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I'm sharing with everyone my own personal experience during these very trying and uncertain times with the covid situation and how even in the most trying of times, when I thought I could not bear it any longer, suddenly new paths opened up in front of me to navigate through the darkness. It made me realise that I'm not alone, God is always with me and when it's hard to bear, he's carrying me, lifting me up.

My epic covid experience started when I decided to visit my husband, Chung Guan, who has been posted to Kuala Lumpur for work for three years. Due to the uncertainties surrounding the covid situation, I decided not to bring my children with me, so I made the trip up to KL two days before the March holidays started for schools here. Some have asked me why did I even make the trip there with all this uncertainty and the danger of the virus lurking around. My answer is pure and simple, care and love. I simply wanted to be able to spend some time with my loved ones, in this case my husband, who is all alone in KL, so even if it's for a few days, it's better than nothing.

I took the bus up to KL and the plan was for Chung Guan to drive back with me after spending a few days in KL. However, all these plans went out the window on Monday night, 16 March when the PM of Malaysia announced a lockdown on 17 March.

PANIC AROSE AS I TRIED TO MAKE SENSE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON WITH THE SUDDEN CLOSURE OF THE COUNTRY. WOULD I STILL BE ABLE TO GO HOME? I NEED TO GO BACK TO WORK THE FOLLOWING WEEK, CAN MY HUSBAND STILL GO BACK WITH ME?

Very soon we found out Chung Guan could not go back and I had no means of transport to go back. I scrambled to buy a bus ticket to find that tickets were sold out for 17 March because everyone was trying to leave. Flights for 17 March were non-existent and anyone returning by air would be subjected to a stay home notice also. I managed to buy a bus ticket that was supposedly meant to end at Harbourfront in Singapore on 18 March as I found out that foreigners were allowed to leave Malaysia anytime so I did not have to rush home by 17 March. However, with changes happening each day on both sides of the causeway, I never know when a new policy would come, so the best was to leave KL as soon as possible. 18 March being the earliest. However, in the afternoon another hurdle was thrown in my face when the bus company called to say Malaysian buses cannot go into Singapore after the lockdown



WHAT? NO BUS?

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so the journey will end at JB and I'll have to find my way home from there. At that point, I thought, ok, I have no choice but to take a SBS/SMRT bus from JB and go across the causeway right? Inconvenient but at least it gets me back to Singapore, Wrong. Just when I thought all was settled, on 17 March, in the late afternoon, the Malaysian police announced that anyone needing to travel inter-state needed a permit from the police. A permit? What permit? Panic set in. What if I couldn't get a permit and couldn't get on the bus tomorrow to go home? What if the bus couldn't operate if it didn't have a permit? Do I even need a permit? All these questions but no answers. My anxiety was at an all time high. Just to go home was suddenly such a difficult matter. So my husband and I found a police station, explained my situation, they weren't sure if we needed a permit but gave me one anyway and all that was settled it was 11pm at night I thought. We left the station only to find ourselves standing in the midst of pouring rain with no umbrella. Needless to say, my patience and sanity was tested to an all time high. Deciding to stop at a shelter instead of running all the way back to the car which was 200m away, it was then Chung Guan told me the police retracted the policy on the permit until further notice probably due to massive queues that had been forming all night at police stations across Malaysia since the announcement was made. The urge to cry and scream was real, the frustration and anger was so real.

The following day, about 30 minutes into the bus ride which left KL at 10.30am, my friend from Singapore sent me a text with information released from the bus services in Singapore, there will be no bus services ploughing the causeway this period due to Malaysia's lockdown. What? No bus? The realisation dawned on me that the only way I was going back was to use my two legs and walk across the causeway alone. That was when the fear

set in. I'm alone, I have never taken this route before, I do not know how to walk from the bus drop off in JB to the JB immigration checkpoint, but God was kind, He sent me a friend who sent me this message which gave me a few hours to mentally prepare myself. In hindsight, for every hurdle I had encountered as far, He opened a path for me when I thought there was no answer to all that I was going through. After a four hour odd journey (faster than normal as there was no traffic or jam on the highway), I reached JB only for it to rain. Sigh. How will I walk across the causeway in the rain? No umbrella, lugging a suitcase, a duffel bag and a shoulder bag. Again, God was good. The rain stopped quite soon before I even reached the JB checkpoint and I met some Singaporeans from my bus and together we found our way to the checkpoint. Again, just when I thought I was alone, I was not alone. He made sure of that. After I cleared the checkpoint, I began my epic walk across the causeway alone. From the JB side, I took my first look at where the Woodlands checkpoint was. My first thought was "I don't think I can walk all the way back with all this luggage." The checkpoint was far away and the walk made me feel so daunted but there was no choice. If I wanted to go back, there was only one solution: walk. As I started on my epic walk, the sun came out and I thanked God for stopping the rain and that the weather wasn't too hot. The walk was surreal. There was no one on the causeway. The people that I walked with disappeared after I cleared the JB checkpoint. So there I was, with the whole causeway to myself. No one in sight. I truly felt like a refugee after an apocalypse. It was unnerving and I was scared. Having no one to talk to amplified my fears. All I saw were empty food containers and wheels broken off from luggage littering the causeway, a testament to the previous night before the lockdown when there was a mad rush, an exodus across the causeway. I grew



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THE LORD
HIMSELF GOES
BEFORE YOU
AND WILL BE
WITH YOU; HE
WILL NEVER
LEAVE YOU
NOR FORSAKE
YOU. DO NOT
BE AFRAID;
DO NOT BE
DISCOURAGED.”

DEUTERONOMY 31:8

tired, dragging my luggage was like dragging a tonne of rocks, amplified by the heat from the sun, the humidity, no shelter to rest, and no water, having finished it ¼ way when I started walking. At that point, I was only halfway through the causeway and I truly wanted to cry. Out of breath, and I'm also asthmatic, thirsty, tired, perspiring profusely, my throat was parched and I really thought I couldn't go on. I had no energy to drag my luggage. The thought of throwing the luggage over the bridge into the sea was tempting. I cried out to God for help. For strength to continue on. To not let it rain because while sunny, it looked like it was going to rain again. It took me about an hour and a half to reach the Woodlands checkpoint. But just to reach the building itself was no easy feat. For having cleared the causeway, I had to walk through a long tunnel, climb two different flights of spiral staircase joined by long corridors, have my temperature taken somewhere and at some point after the second spiral stairs, I had to stop. I could not go on. Parched beyond parched, ready to cry, out of breath and legs won't go on. After what seemed like an eternity, I managed to drag myself to clear customs and immigration in a deathly silent hall. The silence was all around me was intimidating and played on my fears, all the way from the start of my epic walk from JB. When I finally managed to drag myself through endless walkways to reach the taxi stand, I saw the kind face of the taxi driver who came out of the cab to help me with my luggage. I was never so happy to talk to someone else, a Singaporean on top of that. **I WAS HOME. TRULY HOME. IN SINGAPORE. I MADE IT AND SURVIVED THE JOURNEY AND THE EPIC WALK.** All that uncertainty and insurmountable hurdles along the way since Monday night, 16 March. I finally reached home at 6pm to the relief of my family members who had been praying for a safe journey back for me.

In hindsight before I end, what was the clear message that was screaming at me was that I was never alone. From the onset of everything, when hurdles presented themselves, God cleared the path for me time and again and allowed me to move forward. When I thought I couldn't walk further, He gave me the strength and courage to go on. When I thought my mental strength was tested to the limits, He gave me the will and positivity to go on. I was never alone for when I couldn't walk anymore, it was He who carried me through. Why are we facing such tough times today, I believe God will allow us to bear what we can and carry us through. I hope I have given you some inspiration from my own experience.

**WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS COVID SITUATION.
HE IS WITH US. NEVER DOUBT THAT.**

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I am in need of Your strength right now. These have been very challenging times for me. Father God, I trust that You are in control of my life at all times. Calm my heart, God, keep it away from the spirit of fear and anxiety. Surround me with your peace that surpasses all understanding. Grant me Your strength. Help me to persevere and focus on You. And now Lord, I surrender to you my heavy burdens; the challenges in my life. Only you are in control of what will happen and know what is best for me. As You walk with me each day, surround me with Your peace. All these I ask in Your Name, Amen.



Renee with her husband and her children