

Interview with Janet Tay Hui Ching

Author of *Callus*, a story from *Cries from the Heart – Stories from Around the World*

Where do you live?

I live in the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

Do you make your living through writing or something else?

I am currently a book editor with a local publishing house, having left a career as a litigation lawyer a year ago. I also do freelance book reviews for a local newspaper, and am a contributing editor to the literary pages of a local book magazine called *Quill*.

What inspired *Callus*?

I'd always been fascinated by the fact that my grandfather had married two wives – bigamy in Malaysia was not yet illegal in the 1940s. I was inspired to write about it when I attended my grandmother's birthday party during which, naturally, relatives chatted and talked about my grandmother's life and experiences. *Callus* is a purely fictional account, however, as my grandmother was the second wife of my grandfather and I don't know anything about how the first wife might have felt when my grandfather decided to marry a second wife. I'd always wondered about the emotions of a woman in her position though, and why she would allow it because in this day and age, it's something that's no longer accepted as a matter of course.

How long did it take to write and why did you write it?

I can't recall exactly how long, but I'm sure it didn't take longer than an hour. Then it was just brief editing. I wrote the story to enter it for the 2004 Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) Short Story Competition.

What other published works have you written?

I have published a short story entitled *Transience* in a local arts and culture magazine, *Off The Edge*. Currently I am in the midst of writing a short-story collection.

Were you happy to have your story published by Oxford University Press?

Definitely! It was very exciting for me to note that the publicity generated by the CBA attracted the attention of Oxford University Press. And it was certainly a pleasure to see the story in print (CBA recorded an audio version but there is no printed copy), with a beautiful illustration to accompany it.