

DINNER

TABLES

OF

KL

MSRI

'24

Food is always, always, always important. Certain smells unlock memories, bringing me back to a dinner table where the edges of my recollections begin to blur. Food on the table is more than sustenance—it is identity. It is connection.

My mother is always cooking. There's always pepper burning my eyes. But the table is not just a placeholder for food. It is a medium, a mood, and routine.

She had no recipes written down, no exact measurements, only memory and instinct. I learned by watching, standing at her side as she cooked, she rarely used any measurement besides her fingers. It was not just about feeding us; it was about keeping something intact, about making sure that even in a place that was not hers by birth, she would not have to give up the flavours of her childhood.

Food was where she came from.
She gave me a piece of that world
too. Growing up, I didn't think of it
as an act of resilience. But as I
stepped into other homes, I saw it
everywhere. In the way my
students pressed snacks into my
hands, eager to share their own
familiar tastes. In the conversations
that started over shared meals,
where people who had been forced
to leave everything behind still
found ways to keep their traditions
alive.

RESILIENCE

food brings routine, community, connection. it is a sense of identity, one that is made and carried wherever a person goes. to deny that is to deny not just the body, but history, culture, and belonging food represents.

the way someone prepares a dish, ingredients and spices, speaks to who they are and where they are from. When people leave home, they take their food with them. even when the setting changes, even if substitutions must be made, the act of making and sharing food keeps identity.

a person can be displaced, but as long as they can make and share, home is created where they go.

food is survival, not just in the way it
keeps the body going. it is survival of
culture, of memory, of being surrounded
by unfamiliar languages, different
routines, and a sense of community—
being welcomed.

i started comparing it to life back at
home.

notice the way you wake up, how you eat,
how you carry yourself...

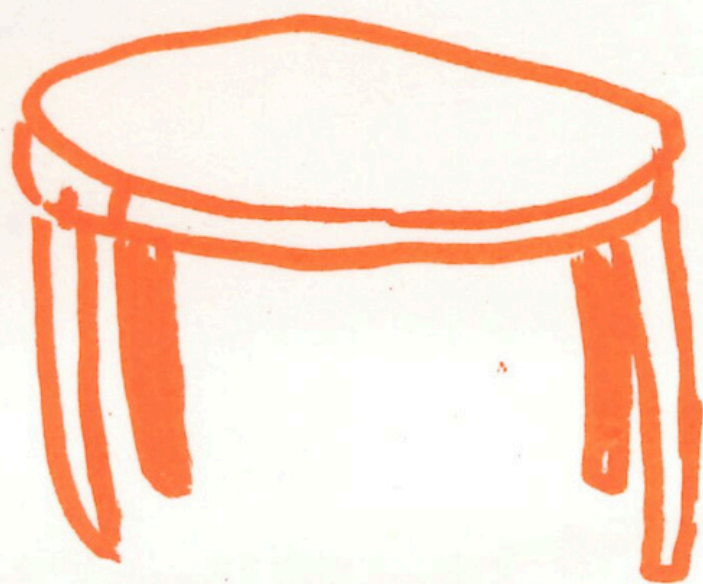
What did I want to carry?

I want to carry the smells, the sounds.

The trust I was given despite feeling
unworthy.

I want to carry their stories.

Life is long and memory
is difficult to hold on
to, but I will hold as
tightly as I can.



O U R

T A B

L E

at our home as interns, we didn't
always eat our meals together, but
we still sat at this table. we engaged
in different activities— eating,
studying, talking, journalling, painting,
writing—

the table reflects our ins and outs.
how busy we were, what we were
cooking, ordering, or celebrating. Our
mood. I tried to capture the shifting
chaos of a short 6 months
throughout the angle of our dinner
table and others.



Capturing
the
chaos of
our table





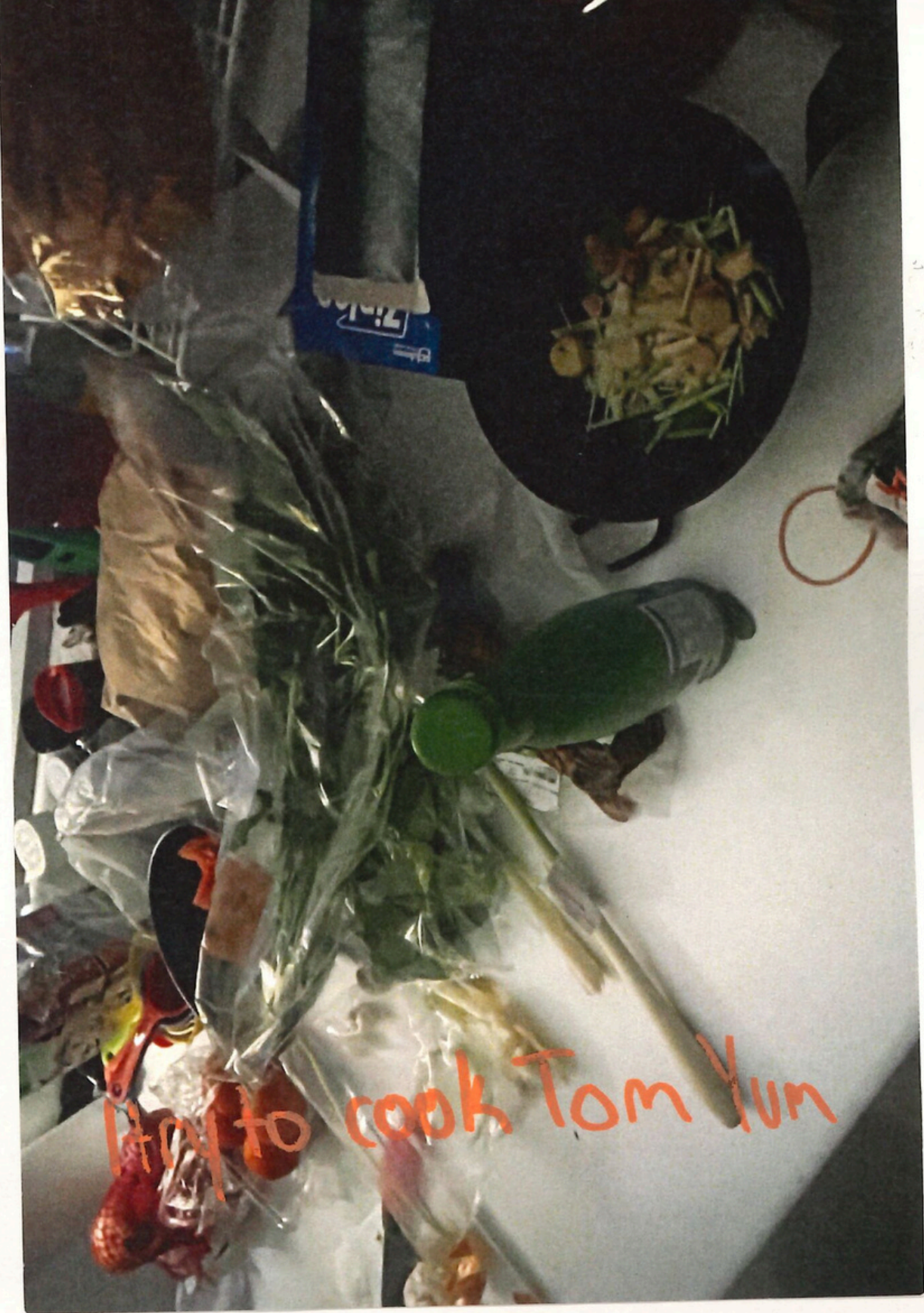
fresh!



Health is wealth

Sous
Chef





the local fruit stall, opening 12-12.

#1 TRUSTED GUY

he has the best deals, i would bring a huge basket to shop. Never saw him take a day off. It felt foreign to be known by him. Although we could not communicate well, in contrast to the limited interactions i have with the neighbours in Canada, he knew my face, he remembered what I liked, he'd get up to greet me with a smile.





We all had a birthday
in Kuala Lumpur.

Ridiculous amount of junk food.

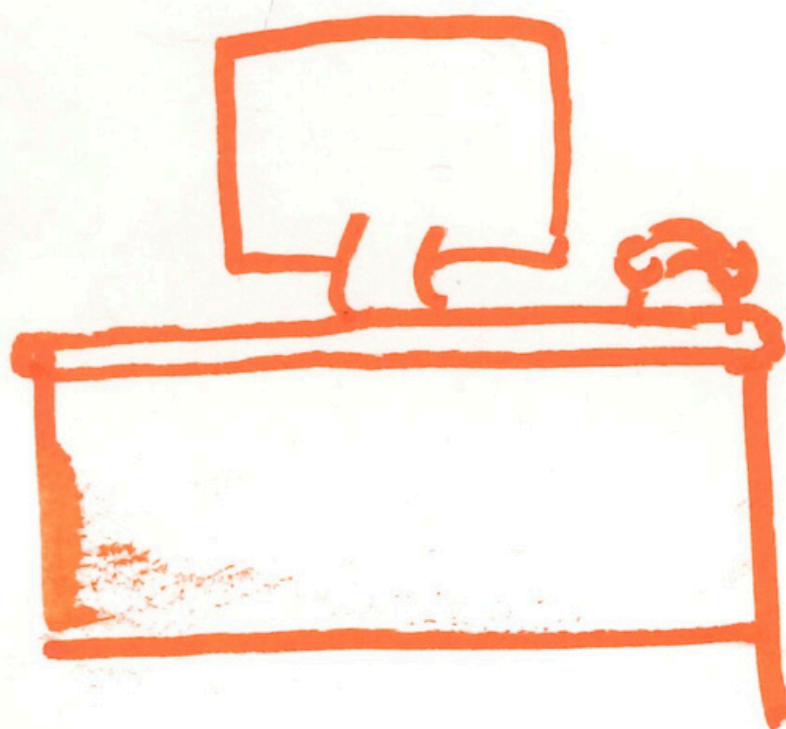
Faeiza's birthday.





Faaiza and I prepared
a lot of recipes together.

Cooking something delicious
is a quick way to break
walls, and even quicker when
someone is godly fast & accurate
at chopping vegetables (Faaiza)



OFFICE
MEALS

I know this is not technically
our office, though we all come
here together. I remember being so
warmly welcomed by Serenade, who was
so bright and brimming with
passion and fire that you come
across only few times in your
lifetime. She was one who inspired
to live full-heartedly, passionately,
and full of love—love for the
work she does and anyone she
invites to see.







Andrea is so full of energy, of fire, passion, empathy, but she does not beat around the bush when something needs doing and she certainly does not mince her words. I've always appreciated genuinity(?) and honesty, and I see it as a higher form of kindness. Except when I got super sick from food poisoning at the office (you know...) and she told everyone very loudly but I got a ride home super embarrassed.

But Andrea and the work she does was amazing. She knows herself, she knows the students, she knew us, she knows her staff.

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her,
put
our
mat
she
she
never
full

She pours her soul into
the program, she lived for it. There
was never a dull day working with
her, and she inspired and pushed us to
put as much energy as her into
our work but I don't think I could
match her reserves.

She was relentless in her care.
She is an amazing woman I could
never stop talking to, she was so
full of life, wisdom, and knowledge.

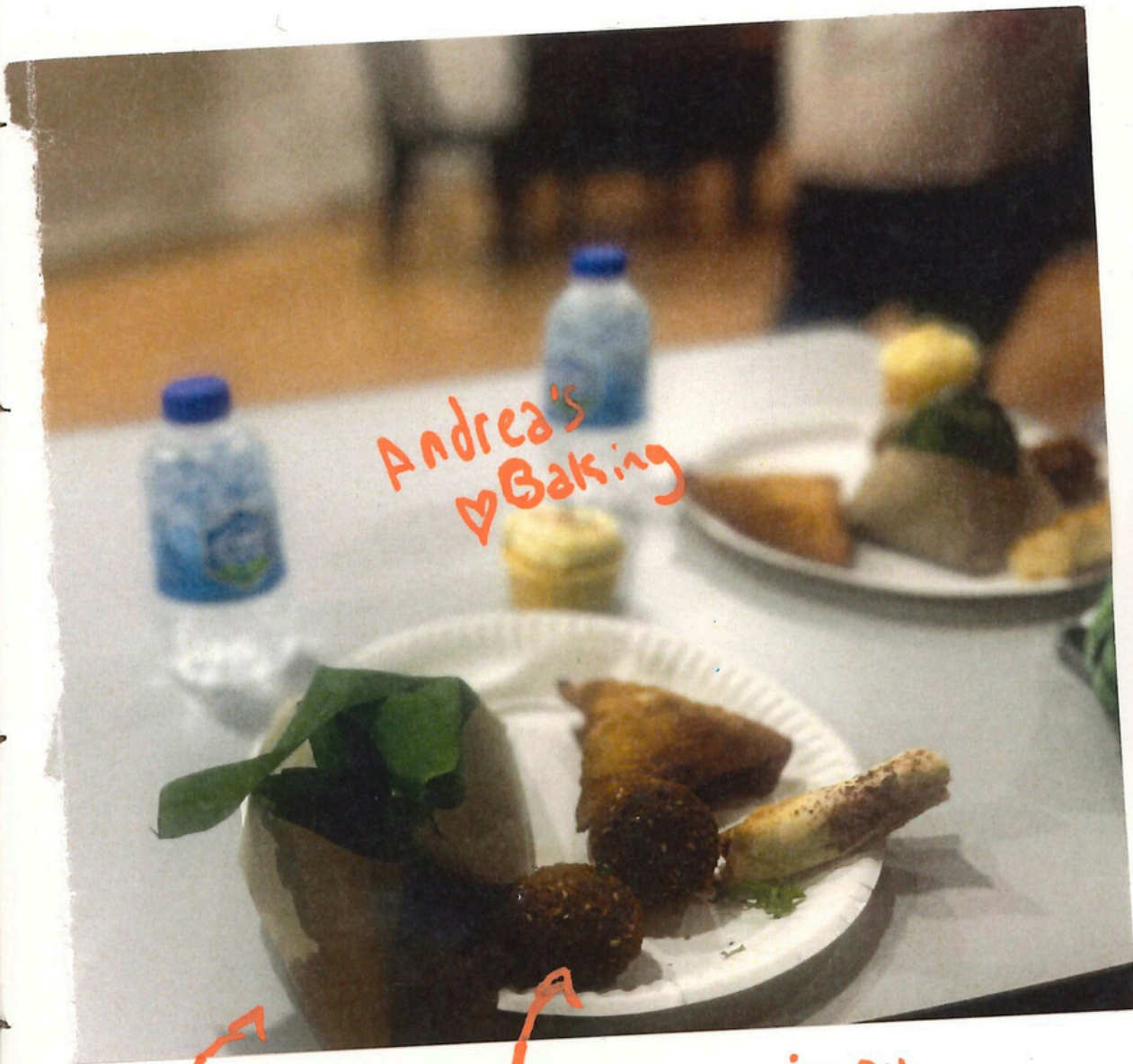


The office never missed a chance to celebrate. Birthdays, going away to a new country, job, or any sort of good news. Andrea was on it with the cakes from Ampang point and the sprinklers that were super scary to light.

Everyone indulged.

Celebrations felt important, more so than here, as every part of everyone's journey, their milestones, were recognized.

our final meal with
staff and teachers was
full of gratitude. We were
full of it. And I hoped to
myself I would be able
to give thanks and craft the
words to touch others genuinely
as they did for us in that
room.



Andrea's
♥ Baking

→
NASI
LEMAK

→
PALESTINIAN
style Falafel
(my fave)



TEACHER'S
+
STAFF TEAM
BUILDING LUNCH



EVERYDAY @ Break

YEMENI STYLE RESTAURANT W/TWLCCTW



When I spoke to teachers in the school,
I of course was entering their space as a stranger. But
the first teacher I met was excited to meet us as students
because he was one too before fleeing Afghanistan. He had been
marked for helping a secret girls education centre, and
left all his electronics and belongings and fled with his mother and brothers.
He left a scholarship at a university. He was the most passionate
about the school and education — Andree feared he
would lose passion as time went on because we know
refugees in Malaysia remain stuck by process for years.
I hope he does not lose his passions.



+ friends



VISITORS
+
VISITS



MARCUS + LAUREN'S! in Kota Kinabaku

The first time we left KL was to KK. We were BEYOND grateful to see so much greenery again!
+ Being able to other interns and their experience helps put time into perspective. What we had struggled with, our hopes, just the experience of a new environment. Digestion is all the better with others beside you.



Jalan Ampang, Ampang Point

There was a freehouse cafe, this breakfast place to eat at in the morning, the downstairs market where we ran into students, stray cat, and neighbours. There was street stalls and mamaks all along the way and a motor cycle at the end. Everytime I looked up I felt dizzy from the sheer height of the apartments.



OUR FRIEND
TOM
is leaving...



We
enjoy
dessert
together!



After the rice wine festival...

There is Flooding in this Kampung near Penampang

But they saved all the wine! What was supposed to be us cleaning up ended a never ending round of shots of sihat! We could not say no, they even said so. Before 12 we were begging to stop passing one glass between a dozen of us. They had earned it, shoveling and sweeping mud out of homes for days.

Their hospitality went way beyond our expectations, and had me thinking hard on "sharing" after/during a time of crisis...



all
wine
after
floods

MEALS @
STUDENT
HOMES

It felt both endearing, strange, and very privileged to meet people who easily open their houses up to us and share their stories, their journeys, where they hope to go or do and to be trusted with those stories is not a simple gift of life. I don't just mean being vulnerable to share, or resilient enough to make it through. People willing to genuinely open their hearts and trust to almost strangers. Once you invite someone into your home and share food, you are not strangers.



shisha.yup.

arabic
coffee
@
10pm...

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to
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a
Sh
go
for
Sh
I
She
tell
she
When
mix
lad
and
A

▼
Aunty Rahman spoils me with
too much rice, tea, soda, coffee
after I've eaten. Even dessert and
a cop to partake in shisha...

She kisses both my cheeks hello and
goodbye. I bring her hand to my
forehead. We touch each other's hair.
She tries to teach me Arabic, but
I really can't pronounce anything.
She and her one son and two daughters
tell the story of her resilience — and how much
she cares for others.

When I left our tears met, cheek to cheek,
mixing with the salt on my lips.
I admired her, I respected her. She was strong
and courageous and motherly

▼



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W

Zahra and I would gossip in the halls while she still worked at the school. We would scheme exactly what kind of disciplinary action would get unruly students to listen (none). She'd call me over to a corner, or at school celebrations we could joint body guard students from destroying my classroom.

There are misconceptions about cultural barriers when meeting other people the same age.

As you can see, Zahra and her mother intend to stuff us.

I couldn't find the name of the potato dish, but she explained it was like mortal combat to scrape the potatoes that get crispy on the bottom before anyone else.

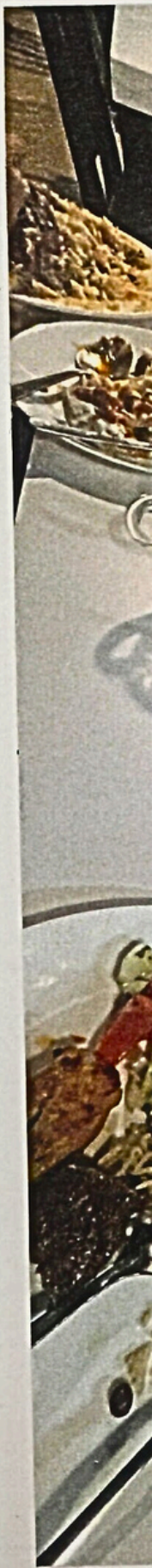
Everyone deserves access to their own food, for moments like these. It is not just a dish but the rituals and attitudes along with it.



Coach Tony called me "Precious"
the first time we met because he
claimed I looked like his daughter
(I do not). He scolded me for not
knowing my regions well in Sierra Leone
and Nigeria, and not speaking Krio well.
Yet in front of his kids, just to compare,
he talked me up to motivate them (haha).
He was my resident KL dad.
but he was like the papa Bear
for everyone. Getting everyone involved
and looking out for the kids.



One of the girls in lower grade tuition very strangely slipped a card to each of us on varying occasions before working up the courage to ask us to her dad's restaurant. It was our first time trying Afghani food. I was blown away when he didn't want us to pay (150RN) we insisted. Well, we had to be creative by saying he could treat us next time so that we could pay our bill.



time

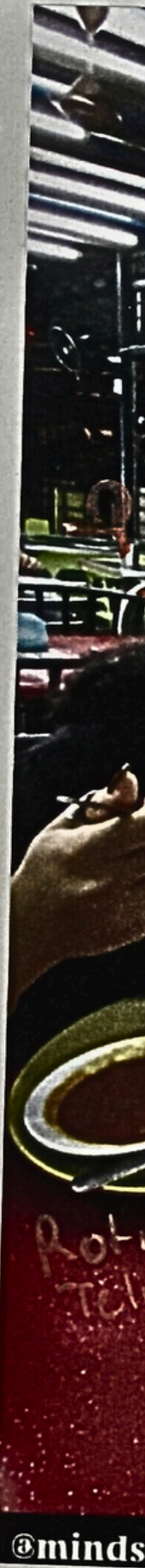
50RN)

me



OUT &
ABOUT
-
LOCAL

This Mamak near KLCC is a frequent spot. It was near the Ampang skatepark and KLCC towers. We'd get breakfast here with Sakina and Melody (co workers) after early morning weekend walks, or I would get late night dinners with my friends Pia, Farah, Diane, Sara, Amin, Abang Nizam, so on.... since it was open late, the only time to hangout at the skate park is early morning or sundown because it's too hot! But I'm grateful to have befriended locals who took me to every spot in the city





Roti
Telur

areakeying





near
China town

Pucks gets a special place. I accidentally ran into so many friends, or made friends, or stumbled here after a long day, a music show, a festival, or a concert. And we as Interns were lucky to find it our first weekend.

We wrote all our goodbye cards here, and I said official goodbyes to my local friends here. This medium was for coming and going and facilitated many conversations, a place to rest, and always had me stopping to observe the art outside and posters inside.

PUCKS ♡



Am pang ♡

ampang
cafe







on food, I'm privileged to
live where I am, and have what I have.
But sad to see how food culture — and sharing
it around a table — feel so sterile
compared to huge parks, courts, and stalls with
inexpensive (for us) food exist and people who don't
have to avoid eye contact and talk to you.
Besides the guy asking me to sell my hair?









I am grateful for my friend

Manami who visited me from Japan.

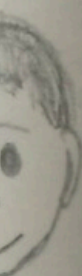
The way she dines is almost ritualistic,

it made me think about my habits when eating. Do I give thanks everytime? Can

I eat one dish without another?

Do I sit and talk or hurry to leave?





with my students, food was always a party. they were insistent on making me eat whatever they had. They welcomed me, definitely tested me, but made me their own.

they were apprehensive when I had cooked them my own dishes. they looked at it, unwilling to touch it.

I then began to eat it with my hands

"teacher, that's also how we eat"
and so we shared.