Centenarian publishes 12 books

Children of 105-year-old help him fulfill dream on his birthday

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GEORGE TOWN: A 105-year-old man was given an awesome birthday gift when his two children got all the books he had written published in the United States.

Born in 1910 in Penang, Tan Kheng Yeang has been writing all his life. Except for a novel which he started at the age of 12, Tan never had his writings published.

He self-published the novel Sauce of Life in 1974 when he was 64, which sold a few hundred copies. It was based on his early life in Taiping where he went to school.

"I have loved writing since I was a boy. But I never believed I could have made a decent living from it. So I became an engineer in the Penang City Council from 1945 to 1970 and wrote just for the love of it," said the centenarian whose wife, Ng Kwee Khew, died five years ago at the age of 91.

Over the decades, using school exercise books for taking notes and manual typewriters to pound the manuscripts into existence, Tan produced four novels, two collections of poetry, his memoir in World War II, two books on philosophy, a book of sayings, a linguistic book introducing a language he invented called "Lu" and an accompanying dictionary.

He wrote his last book at the age of 92. It is a philosophical take on humanity titled The Material Structure.

Tan celebrated his birthday yesterday at Pinang Peranakan Mansion here with all his 12 books in print, thanks to his sons - obstetrics and gynaecology professor Dr Tan Seang Lin, 62, who is based in Canada and orthopaedics Assoc Prof Dr Tan Seang Beng, 58, who works in Singapore.

"We always remember our father sitting at the dining table and typing out his thoughts. "He loved to talk about literature and philosophy. Those daily conversations had a lasting impact on us and we know how profound and original his perceptions are," said Seang Lin.

As a tribute to their father, the sons gave every guest at the birthday party a copy of one of Tan's books - the 404-page Intrinsic to Universe which detailed his philosophical theories.

According to online book review website blueinkreview.com, Intrinsic to Universe outlines "a revolution that would permeate every aspect of civilisation and eliminate the ills of war, homelessness, and unemployment".

"This book is our father's masterpiece. We feel that it will someday make him famous," Seang Lin said.

Recalling the past, Tan said he had tried to take up writing as a profession in his youth but found no avenue.

"When we were ruled by the British, they looked down on us. They weren't here to help us. They only wanted cheap rubber and tea. "They couldn't believe a Malayan could write.

So I never had any chance to turn my love into a profession. It's good to see my work in print and I hope you will all enjoy reading them," smiled Tan who has four grandchildren and lives in Free School Road here.