

# Essay on Some Characters I Have Met

There was one business acquaintance of my father that I remember well. For one thing, he was perpetually drunk. I have never actually seen him in a sober state. My father had to put up with him because he was a good customer, drunk or otherwise. So he would come often to my house to fill himself with beer and liquor, which my father supplied amply.

He would alternately sing and cry whenever the mood seized him. My mother despaired each time he came to our house for he would stay for hours on end. My father told us to be patient because he could not afford to lose such a valuable customer. So all of us suffered in silence.

This drunken valuable customer died about a year ago, much to my mother's relief. We heard that it was cirrhosis of the liver brought about by excessive consumption of alcohol. I was not surprised. Anyone who abused his body so was marked for early death. He was no exception.

Next door to my house used to live a Nyonya from Malacca. She spoke an unintelligible brand of Hokkien and Malay which we often heard coming from her house. She lived alone as her two sons worked in another town.

This woman was incredibly fussy. She would sweep her front porch a few times every day. We lived in terrace houses. The front porch was just a piece of hardened cement a few feet square just about large enough to accommodate a medium-sized car. Anyhow this little piece of concrete seemed to be a real bother to her. Besides sweeping, she would regularly wash it. All the time she performed her self-inflicted chores she would mutter to herself unceasingly. God knows

how she kept inside of her house. I never had the opportunity of finding out.

Her obsession with cleanliness sometimes spilled over to us. At times dirt or some leaves from our potted plants would be blown over to her porch by a breeze. That would set her off into a frenzy of verbal abuse. I could hardly make out anything she was mumbling about, but I knew that she was hurling abuse at us for the teeny bit of leaves that had gone over to her porch. Sometimes our patience was sorely tested, but there was no point saying or doing anything to an old lady who obviously was not in her right mind.

Anyway, this lady had joined her sons in another town. It was another relief to us. No doubt she would be abusing her neighbors there too.

Finally, I remember a good-natured chap who used to come around the neighborhood selling bread. It was always a pleasure to hear his motorcycle coming at about in the evening. He would almost always be singing a song to himself. This chubby-faced jovial bread-seller certainly endeared himself to his customers. He presented quite a sight on his motorcycle. The poor motorcycle had to take his weight as well as a load of bread in the metal container on top of the back seat. The loaves of bread hanging from the side of the container would swing precariously when the motorcycle was in motion.

About a year ago, he was involved in a motor accident that reduced him to selling bread from a stall. It was unfortunate that it should happen to him. Anyway, we still get our bread from his stall which he had set up not too far from our house.

There were other characters who were just as colorful as those just mentioned, but It would take too much space to write about them all. What is said is sufficient for now.