

# Ras Adiba Radzi

**Newscaster, performer, athlete, 47, Kuala Lumpur**

**The most anti-establishment** thing that I've ever done is protest against a municipal council in Selangor. One of our [disabled] friends was a bike vendor selling snacks, but he didn't have a licence. The municipal council took away his bike and detained him. When he was in custody, they treated him with such disrespect, just because he was poor and disabled—my friend actually peed his pants because they refused to help him to the loo. So a group of us brought placards and voiced our dissatisfaction at how he was treated.

**No one** wanted to give someone in a wheelchair a newscaster job. It's not glamorous and it's not normal. I waited for six blinking, freaky years. But I'm okay now.

**When I hung out** at the Lake Gardens in the '80s, I met writers from Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the National Writers Association Malaysia [PENAMA]. I started writing poetry and holding readings on the street near the old Central Market. Security would chase us away, but the police were always very nice.

**Growing up** in KL was wonderful. I attended Bukit Bintang Girls' School. Now it's become Pavilion, how sad! They should have at least kept one pillar, for God's sake. That school was over 100 years old. With all due respect to the developer, they should have had a bit of respect. But money tends to cloud people's eyes.

**I was** only 18 when I got a job in TV3, and they thought I was a bit too young to read the news. I mean, who's gonna believe an 18-year-old kid, right? I did a lot of sports, initially. A few months after I turned 19, they got me into the news. I just jumped right into all the jargon and the economics of journalism. It was tough at first!

**Being in a wheelchair** in Malaysia is a challenge. We're still not there yet. I work with people from KAED, the architecture department of the International Islamic University, to raise awareness on the technicalities of accessibility for persons with disabilities. We work with architects, municipal councils and NGOs to make people understand why we need curbs to be so low, why ramps have to be less steep, and why doors have to open outwards. Little things like this matter, but it gets taken for granted.

**If I could choose** to live in another city or country, I would not. I like KL.

**My community**, I call us warriors, because when we're out, we meet all these obstacles—what am I gonna attack first: the ramps, the toilets or people's attitudes?

**When people take my parking**—the disabled spots—I just park behind them. They get angry and ask, "Why'd you park behind my car?" Because you parked in my space. Do you know why I have to park in a disabled spot? Because it's wider and there's place for me to transfer my wheelchair from the passenger seat to the driver's side. I simply can't do that in a normal-sized spot.

**The first person** I interviewed was Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he was still Datuk Seri. I was holding the microphone and shivering—I was 19. He asked, "What's up with you?" I couldn't answer. Then someone said, "She just started, Datuk Seri." "Oh, *budak baru ke?*" [Oh, you're new to the job?] I said yes. I nearly fainted.

**I like to have dessert** on my own because it means I don't have to share it with anyone. The pavlova at Alexis is to die for. *So sedap gila.*

**Another incident** that I cannot forget involved a hit-and-run accident. A gentleman's brain was scattered everywhere. I took my notebook and actually helped scoop it together. It was the least I could do for a dead man.

**Shooting** is a form of release for me. All the frustration just goes out of the barrel, literally. I'm glad you brought this up; no one has asked me that before. When I became disabled, I held a rifle and it felt like a glove. I'd train for about two to three hours until I bled. The irony is that, when I was healthy and whole, I couldn't even hold a rifle properly.

**God** might take away something, but he'll give you something else in return. You just have to find out what that is.

**A fun thing** that I did recently was a poetry and jazz show. I used a standing wheelchair to stand while singing. That was amazing. I hadn't stood upright since 2002. Being able to stand up and look at people from a height while singing was liberating. I felt like a fairy in that standing wheelchair.

**The late Usman Awang**, whom I met in 1987, was my *sifu*, my mentor. His writing isn't difficult to read, but it is very pretty. He was an amazing guy, soft spoken and sentimental.

**If I had four famous people to dinner**, I'd invite Richard Branson, Sting, Annie Lennox and Oprah. I love Oprah. She's a never-give-up person. She's made women all around the world proud by working hard, proving everybody wrong and going against the norm.

**My gang** of brothers and sisters are an amazing lot. If not for them, I don't think I would have picked up the pieces. Some of them sell used newspapers or vegetables. They're champions, my heroes. Borrowing the spirit of my disabled friends got me to where I am now.

**I want to be treated** like normal. I don't want people to pity me. Embrace me like you would anyone else. My legs might not be normal, but I haven't lost my marbles—at least, not a lot of them! The one thing that I can do is push my own wheelchair. So, whenever there's an opportunity for me to push myself—if there aren't many potholes or the curbs aren't so high—I really like to do that. If I need help, I'll ask. 🦿

