

# Life of a teenage lone-ranger

Jesslyn is a piano student at Coronation Music School. A native of Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia and with family in KL, she has spent the last four years in Singapore on her own, living in a hostel while pursuing her secondary education.

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## Starting school in Singapore

**TY:**

Do you remember four years ago when you left home for the first time to start Secondary One in Singapore? How did you and your family adjust to such a major relocation and change in environment?



**Jesslyn:** For me, the change did not hit me as hard. Everything felt like a blur when I first moved. I had seniors who helped me adjust to the new environment in Singapore, but mostly it was quite easy to adapt to living in a hostel. I think my parents were quite worried at first, but as time went by and everything was turning out fine, they seemed more at ease. The most major change for me was probably moving to a new country and living away from my family. But I was just in a rush to settle down and cope with my new school and all, I didn't have much time to get too homesick. Also, I had never experienced secondary school in Malaysia, so I had no problems adjusting at school or academically. Initially I was quite anxious, because I'm not an extrovert. However, after I moved, I found it surprisingly easy to make new friends.

**TY (asking Jesslyn's mum):**

What was your experience sending a child across country borders to school in Singapore? How did you come to this decision, and how did you manage the new situation?

**Jesslyn's mum:**

Sending Jesslyn to Singapore to pursue her secondary education is new to us. There is this fear of the unknown, like what if she falls sick or need parental assistance in her daily undertakings. However, we are grateful for the reassurance and tips from her seniors and their parents.

We talked to Jesslyn and believe she is mature enough to handle the challenges of her new environment. We catch up with her regularly and encourage her to stay positive always. We advised her to talk it out with us and her teacher mentor whenever faced with difficulties.

We hope Jesslyn will benefit from the good education in Singapore and that she will learn to be more independent and resilient to face her future challenges.

Covid-19 shutdowns started in Singapore with the Circuit Breaker a year and nine months ago, and between Dec 2019 and now (Dec 2021), she has not travelled home to be with family for two years. How has it been for this teenage lone-ranger?

Teacher Ten Yeen (TY) finds out.



## *No Way to Practise: Circuit Breaker*

**TY:** In early April 2020, when the Circuit Breaker was announced and everyone started Home-Based Learning (HBL) and Work-From-Home (WFH), your hostel shut all the music and piano practice rooms. And because nobody was authorised to leave the hostel, you suddenly found yourself with nowhere to practise. And you shared your room with a roommate, so there was no space to use a keyboard without disturbing other residents in one way or another. I remember we could not even have piano lessons online.

We were planning for your Grade 8 examination the following year (2021), and you were progressing so well with your playing, that my heart sank when you told me this news.

Were you in touch with your parents at that time? Covid-19 had not yet spread far and wide within Malaysia at that early stage. What were their reactions?

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### **TY:**

When the piano rooms at your hostel re-opened in July 2020, you had not played at all for at least three months. I re-started you slowly and systematically with work on technical exercises. I knew you are good at fixing corrections and coaching points, and getting homework done consistently each week. Even so, my fingers were crossed as we did not know how long it would take a pianist in your situation to get back in shape.

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### **TY:**

I knew back then that we did not have much time to lose. Getting your playing back into shape, then on to a higher level with the more complicated and demanding pieces for grade 8. And finally everything prepared for your exam.

Looking back, I noticed not only have you regained your level of playing from before the Circuit Breaker, you now play more cleanly than ever before. Your hands are more coordinated, and able to handle new and unfamiliar musical patterns more easily. I was very happy and hopeful when I saw this.



**Jesslyn:** I was in touch with my family then, calling them quite regularly. At first I was quite hopeful that my hostel would re-open the music rooms soon, but several weeks went by without any changes. I started to get worried about when I could resume playing again, and even whether I would be able to fully prepare for my Grade 8 exam. I actually got a bit scared. My parents were really concerned too. They kept asking me if the hostel had opened up the music rooms. It was quite frustrating, really, because I had no way to practise. I often wondered about how much my playing was going to deteriorate, and whether it was possible for me to recover and re-gain my previous level of playing.

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### **Jesslyn:**

I was struggling a bit with the technical exercises and often felt like my fingers just would not cooperate. Admittedly, I didn't think that I would be able to get all my pieces down in time. I really tried to recover quickly but at the same time I was still doubtful about being able to finish the Grade 8 exam recordings before my O-levels.

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**Jesslyn:** Things definitely started getting a lot better once going out of campus was allowed and I could attend lessons in person. We did a whole lot of corrections during the face-to-face lessons, after the technical work done during online lessons. After rushing to get my piano-playing back in shape, it was another rush to get the exam pieces learnt.

It was really hard at first, as the pieces were challenging both musically and technically. I also did not have enough time to practice, due to extra lessons at school almost everyday. For most of 2021, I was just stressed out about not being able to finish learning my exam pieces. Now that it's all over and I've done it, I feel more relieved than anything else.

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## Piano Exam, School Exams

**Jesslyn:** The piano exam recording was not easy either. No matter how much or how well I practised, there were always mistakes in the recording. I was so frustrated at that time. Maybe it was due to nerves, admittedly I wasn't the best at handling that. I felt quite disappointed in myself. Also mentally and physically tired, but I had to keep going until this job was done, and it had to be done in a hurry so I could focus thereafter on my O levels. So that day after we finished the piano exam recording, I was extremely relieved and happy. I felt I had accomplished something significant.

It was a few days after my piano exam that I started worrying about the exam results. My parents kept telling me that whatever the results turn out to be, it would be okay and I shouldn't stress myself over it. I was just hoping for at least a Merit, so I would feel I got something back from all the work I had put in for this exam. So when I finally saw my exam results I was over-the-moon thrilled and I couldn't be more thankful.



After Jesslyn finished her piano exam, the final preparation for her school exams started. She had to stay focused, and pace herself to make sure she could continue to do her best for each O levels paper.

It would be several more weeks, till mid-November, before her last exam was done. After which, only one short week to vacate her hostel room, get all belongings organised and packed for storage or travel, complete the Covid-19 tests, and leave Singapore. She is now back home in KL for the year-end holidays.

**Coronation Music School** and our teachers are thankful for the chance to be with a student when they steer through an important crossroads in their lives- and thrilled for them when they step safely and successfully on the other side. A big THANK YOU to Jesslyn and her family for sharing with us their aspirations, struggles and experiences, as they plot the next step in her adventures for the coming year.

For now, we wish everyone a well-deserved rest during the holidays. Stay safe!

Happy holidays and see you next year!