An inspiration to others

By S.VINOTHAA

NASSER Said from Oman thrives on challenges. And it came as no surprise when he left his wife and two children in Muscat to attend college in Malaysia.

The 31-year-old hotel and catering student at the Sunway College in Bandar Sunway has no regrets. In fact, he's enjoying every minute here.

He was the head of the catering and hostel department in the Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat when he decided to pack it in and return to college.

Consider this too — Nasser already holds a sociology degree.

"I wanted to study the workings of the hospitality industry, food recipes and the catering business," said the Omani in an interview during a break in lessons at Sunway College.

So, why is a sociology degree holder enrolled in a college in a faraway land to secure a higher diploma in hospitality management?

"My job required me to supervise the cafeteria cooks and waiters and make catering orders. "I found that there were so many different grades in ingredients which could make a difference in the costing. "Although I had some help from the cooks, I knew I had to study the whole system and what actually goes into every dish."

"That's why it's very important for me to know the recipes and the ingredients," he explained.

During his eight years of service at the university, which is named after the Sultan of Oman, Nasser was put in charge of 1,200 students.

"Counselling was also part of my job. I help students with their problems. It could be anything, relationships, studies or peer pressure," he added.

Back to being a student now, his Sunway College mates have him to turn to when they need any advice.

Nasser is never short of inspiring words for his college peers. He is regarded as a "mentor" by some students.

"It's quite an experience returning to college. The students here are at least 10 years younger than me," he added.

Nasser seems uncertain in garnishing a dish.

The outcome, however, is wonderfully "divine".

The restaurant, located in the college campus itself, is a venue for students to carry out the practical aspects of their courses. Few know that it is also open to the public on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (noon to 2.30pm).

In the years that he has been here, Nasser confesses to falling in love with Malaysia.

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"His parents came to the college looking for me, to thank me for the help I had given their son," he revealed proudly.

The good-natured Nasser said he preferred to maintain a "low profile" these days.

"I am a student now and want to be a part of the college. In this college, I am a student, not a staffer."

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Amidst the clutter of pots and pans in the restaurant kitchen, Nasser was first struck with Malaysia's beauty during a two-week visit to Penang in 1996.

"It was then that I decided to study in Malaysia. I was attracted by the diverse cultures and the variety of cuisines found in your country," he added.

Nasser, who hails from a little town called Sur in the east of Oman, is being sponsored by the university.

Despite his busy study schedules, Nasser has plans to organise a photo exhibition featuring the lifestyles and sights of his country soon.
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