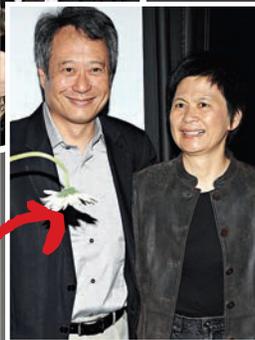


## IN MY OWN WORDS



(from top) Oscar-winning director Ang Lee with Heath Ledger and Michelle Williams; with wife Jane.

“MOVIES ARE ALL THERE IS FOR ME”  
ANG LEE

**My father was the principal of my school.**

That was bad. Everything was focused on academic study – you work hard, you go to college.

**I did OK in school – not good, not bad, just average.** I was shy and artistically inclined, so I was always tuning out.

I suppose I was daydreaming, but you're not meant to; you're meant to focus on your studies. I had a bad attention span, which made me feel guilty.

**I shot part of my new film, *Life of Pi*, in Taiwan, which is where I grew up.** Everybody wanted to help, which was wonderful, but then there was the pressure of not wanting to disappoint anyone. I just hoped my crew behaved, because they were working in front of my friends and family. But I'm proud of my crew; they didn't make a fool out of me.

**I've always loved movies.** When my mother was pregnant with me, the two things she couldn't stop doing were chewing sugarcane and watching movies. And when I was in the baby carrier, my parents would go to the movie theatre with me.

**Movies became an escape, but I never imagined I could be a film-maker.** In my culture, that's something somebody else does. I was the Taiwanese Billy Elliott.

**After I flunked my university entrance exam, I enrolled in an academy of art to bide my time until the next year's intake.** But it thrilled me, so I worked up the courage and told my father I didn't want to go to university. He was devastated. He said, “Drama is a good interest, not a profession. If you feel drama is your thing, get a degree for your future so, when you grow up, you can teach.” But I never grew up.

**Moving to New York to go to film school liberated me.** I hardly spoke English and, at first, it was a culture shock. Finally, I could study film and theatre, but I couldn't act – because of my English – so I did stage directing. That was it – I loved it. To this day, I don't see directing as a job. I feel as if I'm in one long film course. It's crazy that I get paid to do this.

**There was a long break between film school and my first movie.** I was a lost soul and had a lot of doubts. The thing is, I didn't have any alternatives; I'm bad at everything else. Movies are all there is for me. I felt useless and I hated it. Why couldn't I flip hamburgers? Some people don't have that problem, they have a choice. I didn't.

**My wife, Jane, supported me when I had years of nothing.** She worked and did everything else – the cooking, the cleaning, looking after the kids – while I tried to write scripts. I'm surprised she stayed with me.

**She is sense and I'm sensibility.** Jane is a scientist, but I think she's more of a romantic than I am. Scientists are explorers, like film-makers, it's just a different tool. We complement each other. At the core of it, we're both unusual, creative people, and that bound us. We've been married for almost 30 years.

**When I make movies, I feel comfortable.** It's strange; even on the first day on the set of my first movie, *Pushing Hands*, I knew exactly what to do. Onset, I come to life.

**People were surprised I directed *Sense and Sensibility*.** It was like, what would I know about Jane Austen? When people ask me why, I say, “Why not?” Everything is fascinating to me. Different people, different regions, different stories. When you make a movie, you learn something new.

**Heath Ledger was very intense.** He was fiercely intelligent, but he was so wound up. He clenched his fists for the two months we filmed *Brokeback Mountain*. I couldn't tell how much of that was him or the character. For a long time, I wasn't able to watch him onscreen, but recently I sat down and watched him as the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. It was hard for me.

**I was the first Asian to win a Best Director Academy Award [for *Brokeback Mountain*].** It was nerve-racking because I had to give a speech and I didn't want to screw that up. The next day, I was on the front page of *The New York Times* – usually they put the best actors and actresses on there. I was so proud.

TIFFANY BAKKER

*Life of Pi* is in cinemas January 1.

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