

Touch of Grace™

MCI (P) 120/02/2017

ISSUE 01 | JUN 2017

Of Schedule and Gratitude



**Mdm Lee's selfless love
and commitment for her
husband Mr Foo**

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Meet Mdm Chew, full-time
multitasker and caregiver
for her brother.

A Devoted Husband

**Mr Lee's endearing
and unwavering love
for his wife Mdm Sze.**

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Caregiver Issue

Preface

Welcome to Touch of Grace – our inaugural issue

We are unveiling a new look of the previous newsletter, especially for St Luke's ElderCare subscribers, who had previously received *Happenings*.

Touch of Grace, which we feel is an appropriate name that reflects the nature of our work, will continue to bring you the latest news from St Luke's ElderCare, as well as opportunities for your support.

In this issue, we shine the spotlight on caregivers of our seniors at St Luke's ElderCare, to recognise them for their courage, resilience and love for their kin. They were recently nominated for the 2017 Model Caregiver Awards organised by AWWA

We hope you like what you read and we look forward to continue our journey with you, to care for our seniors.

The team at St Luke's ElderCare

A Devoted Husband

Caring for a loved one who has dementia can be challenging. Indeed, it hasn't been easy for Mr Lee Sze Luan, 82 years old, who has been and continues to be a devoted husband and an indelible source of comfort and strength to his wife, Mdm Sze Fong Buoy, who is a year younger.

The pair's story began in 1954 in China. Mr Lee, who worked for a freight company in Singapore, arrived in China on a job assignment, and, as fate would have it, he met his future wife, Mdm Sze there.

Today, as he cares for his wife at St Luke's ElderCare Whampoa Centre, he allows for her own personal space and autonomy. He is unwaveringly ready to step in to affirm and offer emotional support when she is feeling down.

Being a constant carer for someone with dementia carries its stress but Mr Lee reminds himself not to

worry or dwell on the past. There were times when Mdm Sze confused him when she recounted stories that did not happen. At the same time, there were also moments of gladness when his wife does recite accurate account of past events. And when emotions got the better of her, he would always be there, dotingly doling out positive affirmations to soothe and to comfort her.

Mr Lee is able to financially support Mdm Sze, due in part, to his foresight in saving for his retirement during his 30 years working at the freight company. He retired early at age 54 and has been living a frugal lifestyle to support and provide for his wife's healthcare.

A loving and doting husband in all measures, Mr Lee is an admirable role model, shining light and giving hope to other caregivers who are walking similar journeys.



Mdm Sze and Mr Lee

A Daughter's Piety

Being a sole provider, Mdm Helen Soh, 57 years old, works hard at her own business to provide financially for her 89 year old mother, Mdm Ng Moy Eng, and herself. Her diligence extends to using public transportation instead of taxi services to accompany her mother to St. Luke's ElderCare Hougang Centre daily, even if it means waking up as early as 5 a.m.



Mdm Ng (right)
and Mdm Soh (left)

The pair's daily routine begins when Mdm Ng wakes up. Without fail, Mdm Soh gives her mother a warm hug, expressing her love and concern for her as a daughter. After laying out the day's clothes for her mother, Mdm Soh will pack and organise her mother's handbag to make sure that the additional items to bring along to the centre are in place.



It is important to Helen that they visit daily so that Mdm Ng can enjoy the programmes and activities that the centre provides.

At home, Mdm Soh strives to give her mother a sense of purpose and meaningful engagement on a daily basis. Using day-to-day household chores such as washing plates and cups, and operating the washing machine, she carefully breaks these tasks down into manageable steps for her mother to

follow. During the weekends, for a change in routine, Mdm Soh brings her mother out for food and outings.

Whenever her mother experiences bouts of negative mood, Helen would divert her attention by telling jokes and sharing about current affairs to cheer her up. And when her mother complains of body aches, Helen would soothe by soaking her mother's legs in a basin of warm water and giving her a massage.

As a primary caregiver, Mdm Soh did not stop only at providing financial and physical support to her mother. Instead, she actively and perseveringly sought ways to provide psychosocial support to her mother. Embracing this holistic approach, Helen has shown ways in caring and meeting the needs of her mother that inspire others in their journey of caring for their loved ones.

Her Name Means *Faith*

Sacrifice.

A woman travels alone from the Philippines, leaving her husband and three sons behind to work in a completely foreign country. She only gets to see her family once every two years and spend two weeks with them. That is the personal sacrifice that Novelero Sante Fe, 39 years old, made when she came to Singapore to take care of wheelchair-bound Mdm Koo Kew Yin, 80 years old, who attends the day care programme at St Luke's ElderCare Tampines Centre.

Initiative.

Novelero Fe Donato, Fe in short, has many responsibilities and cooking is one of them. She takes note that her cooking style is different from that of the locals, and so she wants to adapt it to make her food more palatable for Mdm Koo. From there, each time Mdm Koo dines out with her family, Fe would take mental notes on the foods that Mdm Koo enjoys eating. At home, she will then practise and attempt to reproduce what Mdm Koo enjoys.

Rescue & Trust.

When Fe started working with the family, Mdm Koo was still able to walk and talk. As time passed, Mdm Koo gradually lost her functional skills; she could no longer take care of herself. Fe responded by adapting to Mdm Koo's changing needs. Fe's devoted care earned the family's trust.

Dependence.

During those two weeks when Fe returned home to visit her family, Mdm Koo was temporarily placed into a nursing home because her care needs were more than what her husband could handle alone.

Unbound.

Fe also provides respite to the caregiving duties borne by Mdm Koo's husband who now has more time to be involved in the community work which he enjoys. Fe's involvement also makes it possible for Mdm Koo and her husband to cope as a family.

(L to R), Mdm Koo,
Fe, and Mr How



Of Schedule and Gratitude

This story is one of selflessness, love, and commitment.

Twelve years have gone by since Mr Harry Foo, 79 years old, was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 2004. In these twelve years, his faithful spouse and caregiver, Mdm Janie Lee, 72 years old, has been by his side every step of the way – patient, in waiting, in service – taking care of him and making him comfortable.

Her typical routine starts when she wakes at 6 a.m. in the morning. She begins with oral hygiene – brushing Mr Foo's teeth, cleaning his dentures, and doing a thorough mouth wash. Then she moves on to his eyes, gently cleaning them with cotton swabs and applying eye drops. After that, she supervises their domestic helper during his bath time and serves him breakfast afterwards.

When 9 a.m. rolls by, Mdm Lee takes Mr Foo to St Luke's ElderCare Serangoon Centre for physical maintenance exercises, psychosocial and cognitive activities as well as physiotherapy. She accompanies him back home at 3 p.m.

In the evenings, she supervises their domestic helper in bathing him once again, preparing a soft diet dinner and then assisting him in taking his dinner. After dinner she spends time talking to him and watches television together.

Throughout their 5 decades of marriage, the couple has weathered many bittersweet moments starting from their first dance with each other at a tea party organised by friends. These are memories that Mdm Lee still fondly recalls even as she faces the many struggles in caring for Mr Foo.



During those initial years of the disease when Mr Foo was still able to walk, there were numerous occasions when he fell and struggled to walk as the disease caused him to have episodes of sudden, brief inability to start or continue with movements. On one such occasion, he sustained a head injury and had to be admitted to hospital for neurosurgery. During the period of hospitalization, Mdm Lee unfailingly visited him daily from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. to take care of him.

These days, Mdm Lee wakes up at least three times a night to attend to Mr Foo. And as the disease progresses, Mr Harry's medical condition has deteriorated. Some nights, he gets restless. He does not know what he is doing, but he would walk out the bedroom to the living room. On a few such occasions, he has fallen more than once. Now, whenever Mr Foo is awake, Mdm Lee stays vigilant to watch over him.

Mdm Lee's mind is never far away from her husband. Even as she goes out to run her errands, her mind still thinks of him and wonders if he is doing all right at home. Her selflessness as wife is exemplary.

An expression of deep gratitude from Mr Foo matches the devotion his wife has shown. He apologises for the challenges and the years she has endured for him. Theirs is a love that is deep and unfaltering. Mr Harry counts his wife a blessing.

But to Mdm Lee, the cheerful smile she sees on Mr Harry's face every morning is enough to sustain her through tough times, stating simply that, "he is my husband and the only thing that matters is for him to be happy."



Left - Mdm Lee and Mr Foo

Still Superwoman

Mdm Chew Ah Chew is a part-time customer service officer in a private firm and works four days a week including Saturdays.

Outside of work, she manages the needs of her adopted brother, 80 year-old Mr Chew Leong Huat's daily and monthly household expenses, medical bills as well as accompanies him to all medical and rehabilitation appointments at St Luke's ElderCare Telok Blangah Centre. Additionally, she supports her sister-in-law (wife of Mr Chew's elder brother) who is frail and living with them.

Mdm Chew takes an active approach in her brother's care. She participates in every rehabilitation session, three times a week at the day rehabilitation centre at Telok Blangah, sitting beside him, interpreting to make sure he has properly understood the exercises that were taught. Then, together under the guidance of the therapist, she assists by helping him count the holds and repetitions during strength training exercises.

At home, she monitors his exercises diligently, and then provides regular updates on his progress

and his physical functioning to the therapists on his next appointment.

Sometimes, being a caregiver requires one to wear the hat of a detective. Once, Mr Chew had a fall while Mdm Chew was out buying food. Though she did not witness the fall, she actively assisted in the investigation into its cause. With her contribution, it was discovered Mr Chew was using an unsuitable walking frame. Subsequently, through the Senior Mobility Fund, a suitable walking frame was procured. Mr Chew now moves confidently and safely inside his house.

A well-rounded caregiver is one that knows how to take care of herself too. To allow for that, Mdm Chew has become a master scheduler. She sets time aside for herself by making arrangements with Mr Chew's son to assist in her place.

On occasions when her sister-in-law was unwell, Mdm Chew had to stay home and take care of her. Whenever this happened Mdm Chew would call up the centre and make alternate arrangements to make sure Mr Chew wouldn't miss his sessions. Because Mdm Chew has to work in the afternoon, she

adjusts her schedule to come to the centre early in the morning.

To anyone watching, it is undeniable that Mdm Chew is a reliable and very dedicated person. As a carer, she embodies these qualities and has ensured that Mr Chew and his sister-in-law have been properly cared for with organised efficiency. Rain or shine, she wheels Mr Chew to and from all his appointments.

Superb care has the ability to uplift and resonate with ripple effects. Mr Chew's cheerfulness and motivation is due in large part to his superwoman sister by his side cheering him on. While she spurs him to keep up in his therapy, he encourages her to be active and stay healthy.

This positive energy has rubbed off on other seniors at the centre too. Those in contact with him are spurred by his cheerfulness. And other care recipients are inspired to work on maintaining their well-being. They, too, feel motivated to do their exercises.

It is a truly amazing sight to see Mdm Chew balance all of life's responsibilities with such cheerfulness and grace.

And where does Mdm Chew draw her strength and resources from? A gratitude for a lifetime of blessings that she has received as an adoptee to the family since she was 11 months young.

At 69 years old now, Superwoman, we salute you!



Mr Chew (left) and Mdm Chew (right)

Brotherly Bonds

Anthony

Keeping things in order at home is one of the challenges that Anthony Tan, 75 years old, faces in day-to-day living with his youngest brother, Arthur Tan, 74 years old. Oftentimes, Arthur would restlessly fidget about the house; spectacles, dentures and other personal belongings would go missing. In order to lessen Arthur's restlessness, Anthony would bring him down to the coffee shop for tea. The hustle and bustle in the coffee shop – people moving about, talking and eating – provide sensory stimulation for Arthur and lessens his restlessness.

Anthony is a seasoned traveller, often going to faraway places every year. He used to take Arthur to Bangkok in the first two years after his diagnosis. As time passed by it wore on Anthony as the traveling became too difficult. He stopped his travelling – just to be with Arthur at home.

At St Luke's ElderCare Whampoa Centre, Anthony has opportunities to talk to other caregivers who, like him, are handling the responsibility of caring for a loved one. Knowing that others are facing similar challenges as him has made him feel more relaxed and relieved.

Five years have gone by since Anthony started to take care of Arthur. Along the way, many things have changed - Anthony gave up his love for travelling, he learned to be more resourceful when it comes to engaging Arthur, and, at some point, he also learned to manage his own emotions and became a calmer, less irritable person.

Sebastian

When Arthur was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, eldest brother



(L to R), Dr Amy Khor, Senior Minister of State for Health, Mr Anthony Tan, Mr Arthur Tan

Sebastian Tan, 76 years old, set out to learn all about what Arthur was going through. Eager to step in and provide care for his brother, Sebastian read up extensively about dementia. Through his reading, he chanced upon Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA) and became a regular member of the association. He would attend weekly sharing sessions and participate in seminars conducted by the doctors. It was through ADA that he learnt about St Luke's ElderCare (SLEC). From then, he enrolled Arthur into SLEC at Whampoa in 2012.

As brothers, Sebastian and Arthur had a very distant relationship. They weren't close. However, when Sebastian began caring full-time for Arthur, the dynamic of their relationship changed for the better. Now, both brothers are closer, and with the commitment of being a full-time caregiver, Sebastian made some adjustments and gave up his bachelor lifestyle.

In his work as a general secretary in his past career, Sebastian had encountered



and worked with many people from all walks of life. Those experiences empowered him to be empathetic and patient to Arthur's repetitive storytelling. An easy going person in general, Sebastian has never let stress overcome him. Singing church songs and oldies keep him going with a positive outlook on life.

When Sebastian got to know the many care seekers in the centre who are in various stages of dementia, he is appreciative that the progression of dementia in Arthur is gradual.

Arthur

Prior to his diagnosis, Sebastian was Arthur's confidant. Arthur would confide in Sebastian when he faced stressful moments. Anthony, in turn, kept vigil over Arthur's emotional well-being, watching out for mood swings or signs of unhappiness in times of such stress.

Now, both brothers, Sebastian and Anthony, have taken on much responsibility in caring for their brother, complementing each other in different aspects of Arthur's care. They have demonstrated how different members of the family can support each other, forge strong bonds in times of need, and contribute towards caring for one another.

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* denotes coming soon

CAREGIVING



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June 2017

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