

# The Courage Fund: Deeds, Not Words

*"That he which hath no stomach to this fight, let him depart.  
We would not die in that man's company  
That fears his fellowship to die with us.  
He that outlives this day and comes safe home  
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named.  
Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot,  
But he'll remember, with advantages, what feats he did that day...  
From this day to the ending of the world  
But we in it shall be remembered,  
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.  
For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother;  
Be he ne'er so vile, this day shall gentle his condition."*

*- Henry V, Act 4 Scene 3  
William Shakespeare*

**F**acta, non verba. Deeds, not words. Oaths and pledges are merely words till they are tested in the waters of adversity.

In the humdrum of routine, oaths more often than not become debased to mere words uttered as rites of passage through life's milestones, and are left in the corridors of the distant past. Yet in times of immense hardship, these oaths become much more to those courageous enough to recite and live by them. They become clarion calls to action; mission statements for those who find themselves tasked with an impossible mission; and sometimes, even just a daily prayer of hope and determination for those who have set the course of their lives by them.

March 2003 opened a grim chapter in Singapore's fledgling journey of nationhood. In the course of a few short days, the international community was alerted to the emergence of a new and unseen threat whose only name was SARS – an insidious virus that was spreading across the globe, causing severe respiratory distress and often death for its unsuspecting victims. In Singapore, the virus felled both patients and unsuspecting healthcare workers caring for them. Day after day, healthcare workers started coming down with the deadly infection.

As health authorities awakened to the full potency of its threat, measures were swiftly taken to contain the spread of the virus into the community by isolating all afflicted and suspected patients across the island in both the Communicable Diseases Centre and Tan Tock Seng Hospital. Overnight, the die was cast, and the staff of both these centres found themselves faced with the toughest decision in their careers – to stay and care for these SARS patients at great personal risk to themselves and their loved ones, or to choose the easier option – simply walk away.

Nobody walked away. Each healthcare worker stayed to do what he or she had been trained to do. Private fears were faced in the quiet backrooms of the wards and in the embrace of loved ones. Prayers were whispered in the hospital corridors each day by these quiet heroes as they donned their flimsy masks and gowns to serve those who needed them most. They had taken an oath in one form or

another: To put patient above self. And that oath was to be lived out at the frontline.

As one hospital after another announced the findings of new SARS cases, and the fight against SARS extended to involve healthcare workers and the whole community across the island, a groundswell of public emotion erupted. Fear of contracting SARS from healthcare workers led to the public shunning them like lepers. Admiration mingled with sorrow was shared as valiant frontliners succumbed to the scourge in the line of duty. To those taking care of SARS patients, the public expressed their prayers, words of encouragement, and immense gratitude for shouldering a task many would flee from. Yet it just wasn't enough to express what everyone felt.

2 April 2003. The SARS Relief Fund was started to give the public a voice for their feelings where words failed them. Several doctors and nurses worked together under the aegis of the Singapore Medical Association (SMA) and the Singapore Nurses Association (SNA) to launch the fund to help patients and healthcare workers affected by the SARS crisis. Within days, the movement gathered momentum with the input of SPH Mediaworks through fund-raising advertisements; of JWT, who lent their creative talents to design an instantly recognisable logo; and the local radio stations, who helped raise public awareness of the SARS Relief Fund. Within a week of the initial launch, NHG and Singhealth also began a national effort to raise funds under the banner of the newly-formed Courage Fund, in the same spirit of wanting to help those affected by SARS. The SARS Relief Fund was incorporated under the Courage Fund, bringing with it a contribution of over \$800,000 (of which \$230,508.03 was donated through the SMA Trust Fund, as of 30 June 2003) from corporations and the general public.

The Courage Fund has since evolved into a rallying point for all Singaporeans from all walks of life, who have risen boldly to this test of nationhood. Although it can never suffice as a healing balm for those whose loss of loved ones in the call of duty is immeasurable, it has become a voice for the people of Singapore to express their heartfelt emotions, their hopes and their shared pain.

We are proud to have been there at Ground Zero, to honour these quiet heroes amongst our midst who have epitomised for us true courage. It is our hope that the legacy of the Courage Fund will serve as an inspiration for all who come after us, that oaths are mere words till they are married with faith and action.

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