

By Michael Leong, Ng Kee Woei, Lee Hiang Meng, Chew Kok How, Wong Eik Lin and friends

Our Comrade, Our Doctor, Our Friend

IN MEMORY OF DR TOH WAI KEONG (1974 - 2006)



On the laidback Pangkor island more than a decade ago, a nervous bunch of 19-year-olds were attempting to ride a motorcycle for the first time. While most were struggling with balancing and differentiating brake from clutch on the rented Honda Cub, Wai Keong broke away from the pack and rode swiftly into the hilly roads on his own. By the time someone raced up to him, he was already miles away from the rest. It turned out that he was so absorbed in his joyride that he did not even notice he was alone. To us, that was typical of Wai Keong – he learnt fast and lived courageously.

Like a dole of doves released from a cage, the bunch of us scrambled in different ways after junior college. Wai Keong told us that he was aiming for medical school. We were all proud that someone from our clique was going to be a doctor, although we teased him more than we honoured him. Yet being the constant comedian since our student council days, Wai Keong never took himself too seriously and was always big-hearted with friends.

Then again, it was clear how serious he was about experiencing life beyond his profession. He was constantly brimming with

entrepreneurial ideas whenever we met for coffee. And over the years we witnessed how those were not merely talk, but passion turned into action (<http://health.zaobao.com/pages4/specialists120104.html>). There were times though when we wished that we could see, rather than hear, more of him. After a period of missing him at our outings, Wai Keong started to hang out with us again about two years ago. We were glad that he seemed to have finally tamed the workhorse within and found time for coffee. Two weeks before his passing, we spent a quiet afternoon in a cosy café. That was the last round of latte we would have with him.

The SMS shocked every of its recipients on that early Friday morning, 17 November 2006: “Grave news. Weiqiang passed away in his sleep this morning.” Some were lost for words, some cursed in despair, some asked questions frantically, hoping that it was a mistake; none of us could believe that he was no more, just like that. Seeing his family at the wake broke our hearts, yet we have none of those all-too-needed comforting words to offer. Circulated among visitors was a stack of pictures Wai Keong had taken with his wife Tiina, from some of their recent trips. Those inanimate prints offered



Wai Keong with his wife Tiina, from some of their recent trips.

much solace as they reinforce the fond memories of his happy, living days.

Wai Keong's sudden death was among a series of such cases that month, where apparently young, healthy men died in their sleep. Yet that was not the only reason his case was widely publicised in the media. Instead, it was the immense adoration his patients had for him while he was practising at his Sengkang clinic. Alongside pictures of sobbing folks and children, the stories were filled with testimonies of his kindness, sincerity and his willingness to go out of the way to help others. Most of us did not even know that the Chinese newspaper *Lianhe Wanbao* published a reader's letter in Year 2004, commending Wai Keong for rushing to the aid of an injured old lady on the street midway through a busy day at his clinic.

To remember our dear friend and his spirit of giving, we have set up a fund of sorts. After discussions with his family, a decision was made to donate it to a charity for the elderly, as this was a group of people Wai Keong had a special concern for. A sum of \$2,640.59 was collected and donated to the Assisi Home and Hospice in his name in January this year. Though modest, we hope the heartfelt donation from his friends would help make a difference.

A blog (www.18thsc.blogspot.com) was also set up as a platform for his friends and relatives to share their thoughts and fond memories of him, as well as to remember his colourful, selfless and courageous spirit. It is also a way for us to keep in touch and not take our friendship for granted. For his death has jolted us to reassess our lives and move friends up on our list of priorities.

Here's a tribute to Wai Keong – our comrade, doctor and friend. He has gone ahead of the rest again – may he find a beautiful resting place this time. ■

In Hurry!

By Leona Wong

As we walk into that day
 Nothing could seem gay
 Forever silent you will stay
 In that white box you laid
 November 17 was the date
 Leaving behind your lovely flower
 In deep grief and pain she cower
 For the days ahead seems like
 a huge tower
 Yearning to see you once more
 Hoping to hear you speak a little more
 Longing for your hug forevermore

But you went away
 in such a hurry
 Leaving questions with
 no answers we carry
 A faltering flower
 with a burden heavy
 Bewildered, lost and in pain
 No joy could be gain
 Not for now I would say
 If only things went another way
 You were an excellent friend and doctor
 For you are kept in our memories locker
 You were such an amazing
 husband and son
 Accepting what has happened
 weighs a ton

Though we live our lives away
 We think about your loss each day
 But as we walk through in time
 We remember you as one of a kind
 So much of you may slowly fade away
 As we go on with our busy day
 During that of your time,
 Dr Toh Wai Keong
 Your presence here on earth
 was not very long
 But you live on in our memories always
 In which time cannot take away

In Memory of
 Dr Toh Wai Keong

