

Inspired by Their Father

When the SARS epidemic hit Singapore in 2003, vascular surgeon Dr Alexandre Chao rushed back selflessly from America so that he could rejoin his colleagues at Singapore General Hospital (SGH) to fight the SARS virus. He had been visiting his wife, who was doing her postdoctoral studies in the University of Southern California at that time. Little did he or his wife A/Prof Koh Woon Puay know, that was the last time they would see each other.

Dr Chao spiked a fever on 12 April 2003, and was admitted to an isolation room in SGH on 15 April. The clinical diagnosis made was dengue fever, and Dr Chao later developed symptoms which were consistent with that disease, including rashes over his body.

On the morning of 22 April, he complained of a sudden onset of breathlessness, and was transferred to the intensive care unit. He underwent treatment but eventually passed away that evening, leaving behind his wife and two young daughters, Beatrice and Berenice, who were aged three-and-a-half years and 13 months respectively. A postmortem later confirmed that Dr Chao had died of SARS, which he had possibly caught from a patient who he had been treating.

Today, Beatrice, 14, and Berenice, 11, are studying at Raffles Girls' School and Raffles Girls' Primary School respectively. They share how they are inspired by their father's example of being courageous and compassionate.

SMA: What are some of the lasting values that your father imparted to both of you through his words, deeds and actions?

Beatrice: My father taught me the values of courage and compassion. He showed compassion in everything he did, always serving others and putting

others before himself. This has really inspired me and shown me what good we can do in the world simply by thinking of others and showing compassion.

He also taught me the essence of courage. Courage does not come in the form of performing a big heroic act – rather, it is overcoming our own fears for the greater good. My father was determined to serve others and help in any way he could, even if it meant leaving his family, and eventually, his death. He overcame his own fears and made the courageous decision to put the greater good before himself. This is something that I will always remember and try to act by.

Berenice: Even though I can hardly remember my father when he died, based on the stories that I have heard about him, I feel that his sacrifice in his line of duty of looking after SARS patients has set a good example for me and imparted to me the values of courage and compassion.

SMA: What kind of persons do you think your dad would have wanted both of you to grow up to be?

Beatrice: I think he would have wanted us to grow to be compassionate people who put God and the people around us before ourselves, serving them and helping them in any capacity possible, regardless of self-sacrifice. He would have wanted us to be pioneers and leaders to create a better future for the people around us and Singapore as a whole.

Berenice: I think that he would have wanted us to be compassionate and work hard in what we want to accomplish in order to succeed. I also think he would have wanted us to not only succeed in our careers in the future, but to also serve God and give our families our time when we come home, because God and family were always priorities to him. **SMA**

Dr Chao with his daughters Beatrice (right) and Berenice

Photos: A/Prof Koh Woon Puay

