

A Gaiety and Lightness of Heart

By Prof Woo Keng Thye



Prof Woo and Adeline.

I was among the Medical Class of 1969 and two years ago, in 1999, we got together at Tanglin Club to celebrate our 30th Anniversary since graduation. There were about 50 of us there and we noted that each time we got together there seemed to be fewer of us. 1999 was also a special year as it was the end of the Old Millennium.

As was our custom, each of us would stand in front of the group to share our thoughts and experiences. A good number spoke about age creeping up on us. Many of our friends across the Causeway in Malaysia had reached the retirement age of 55 and were enjoying their pensions and leading carefree lives.

When it came to my turn to speak, I read two poems, one entitled "Searching" (see side box) and the other, "Aging". I then told my classmates that as you grow older, there is an additional blessing, that I had discovered a new joy in my life, the arrival of my first grandchild Adeline, who is now 2 years and 9 months old.

We have experienced several kinds of love, love for parents, love for spouses, love for siblings and love for children. But the love for a grandchild is indeed, for many, a new kind of love. This love comes to you when you least expect it, as it is a new found love. It comes at a time when you have fulfilled your goals and obligations in life and approach the twilight of your professional life, when you are established, secure and less

stressed compared to your younger life when you had to carve out a career and raise a family at the same time.

Adeline was born to Bernardine and Bernard in Thomson Medical Centre in December 1998. When Dr Phyllis Liauw, the obstetrician who delivered Adeline saw me carrying her in the hospital room, she laughed at me and said that I was out of practice carrying a baby.

We would see Adeline about once or twice a week. The family would usually have lunch together on Sundays. We would baby-sit Adeline when her parents are busy or have a function to attend. As we watch Adeline grow and develop, her little life becoming intertwined with ours and coloured by the events which shape and chronicle her life and ours, it seems that so many things have happened since Adeline was born. She has today become the centre of attraction, the star in our family life, for my wife, my younger daughter Geraldine, myself, and of course her parents Bernardine and Bernard.

So, here am I, not all that old yet, finding myself being blessed with a new love, a kind of love I have never known for its intensity, a love which is a

great source of joy, which makes one laugh happily with a lightness of heart, feeling young and playful again without any pretence, to see simple things around us in a refreshing and innocent way and yet never seeming to be surprised, to relive again the many lovely "first time in childhood" things that one has long forgotten, like examining a smooth pebble by the beach, seeing a dew drop on a fresh blade of grass, greeting the early morning with Adeline or getting up close to a little kitten under the protective glare of its mother together with Adeline.

I have found a new love which speaks of sweet surrender simply because I do not know how to say no to Adeline. I confess I love too much and I feel very, very happy. This love is a deep longing in the heart which is never satiated no matter how much time I have already spent with my loved one. I feel a tense expectation and a sweet anticipation when I know I am going to see Adeline, hold her, crush her in my arms and feel her warm little form against my chest, the sweet smell of her cheeks and her hair and to call her "Darling Adeline, grandpa's baby". ■

Searching

Listen for the sound of agelessness
 Scattering the dust of eternity
 In a spray of wind;
 Hear the drip drip of water upon rock
 Looking for TAO;
 See the white smoke in unhurried distance
 Pervading moonbeams;
 While water bows in sublimation
 Caressing its own depths;
 In the intimate embrace between earth and sky
 Witness the eruption;
 Dribbled imaginings of last year's seeds
 In the morning's rain.

About the author:

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