

THE  
GOOD  
FATHER



& OTHER STORIES



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FATHER**



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## **THE GOOD FATHER**

Designed and produced by Tuber Productions Pte Ltd

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### **ABOUT TUBER PRODUCTIONS**

Tuber Productions is an offshoot of its parent company, Potato Productions. It is an award-winning creative agency specialising in content production, as well as campaign strategy and implementation. With its roots in publishing the fashion magazine CATALOG, it has grown to provide a range of creative services, from helping clients articulate their corporate identity, to revamping corporate and government publications and collaterals with editorial and design consultancy. [www.tuberproductions.com](http://www.tuberproductions.com)

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**All stories need to be told**

The Good Father  
& other stories

# FOREWORD

**“He who opens a school door closes a prison”**

- Victor Hugo

In 1956 the Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) was formed to provide a shelter for homeless offenders after their release from prison, in an effort to keep them off the streets and away from undesirable company. Fifty-five years on, the Association remains at its original location but has completely revamped its programmes and services to better meet the needs of its present day clients.

A case in point is the Education Support Programme (ESP) which was set up to serve ex-offenders who aspire to upgrade themselves but lack the necessary support and resources to do so. Very often, these people are unaware of the additional learning opportunities available. This problem is further compounded by a lack of family support, positive role models and the required finances to further their education. Yet given that the average inmate has a lower secondary education and not very much work experience, upgrading is more a necessity than an option for many of them.

Initiated in 2010, the Essay Writing Competition is part of the Association’s approach to ex-offender education and upgrading. Its main objective is to serve as a platform for outreach and awareness to the student-inmates in the Prison School, and through their first-person compositions, the wider public. Through these creative essays it is hoped that family members and the community can gain some insight into the “soul” of these inmates and provide the support and acceptance vital for their rehabilitation.

The competition has two categories – Open and Amateur with the latter for those with GCE “N” Levels or lower. Prizes are awarded to the best

essays in each category; with the prize money given to the student's family. This small gesture allows the students to give back to their loved ones hopefully promoting bonding and, in some cases, facilitating reconciliation.

The competition enjoys the strong support of the Prison Service via the Prison Education Branch. The generous support of the Lee Foundation and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports has made the publication of this collection of essays possible.

Offenders face an uphill struggle to make good and be accepted back into society. It is hoped that the publication of these essays will help demonstrate that they share the same anxieties and aspirations, joys and sorrows just like everyone else...

Jeffrey ES Beh  
Chairman  
Singapore After-Care Association

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## A GIFT FROM MY FATHER

It seemed just like yesterday when my son was born one year ago from this date. Although I was not present at his screaming introduction into this world, the day still will be forever etched in my mind. Any proud father would say the same. Slipping out of my reverie, as I looked into his cherubic face and big round eyes and pudgy hands, I realised how selfish I had been in the past.

Separated by steel bars and high concrete walls, I am left as a mere spectator to his growth and infant years. You only get to see your child growing up once – unless I expand the number of my brood which for now is out of the question. I will never be able to experience the joy that comes with being a father. His gibberish seemed to confirm this as if saying, “You better change and be a good father or else I’ll punch you with these tiny fists,” as I looked at him from behind these iron grilles.

Back at the cell as I lay awake thinking of my family, I try to recollect images of my own father. However, there was none I could recall. My parents separated when I was just an infant like my son. My maternal grandparents took care of me and I had grown to love them as if they were my own parents. Still, it is just not the same as having your own parents. Besides taking after and inheriting his surname, I had no recollections or memories of my father. My mother never came about to talk about him or mention him as I grew into my adolescent years and I never did once ask about him either. Nevertheless, that does not mean that I did not think of him.

No physical form of gift can  
be greater than or compared  
to being there for your son.  
A father's support, guidance,  
protection can never be found  
or replaced.



In school, I felt inferior and envious of the other children who had both

parents around. I went to the playground by myself, I learnt to ride the bicycle by myself. These scars attest to it. Needless to say, I felt inadequate and was the cause of mother's separation. I grew up rebellious and as I grew in strength my actions became bolder and more aggressive. That is how I ended up in here.

Pondering deeper into this, I'm suddenly aware of the ramifications and consequences of my actions. I want to be able to witness the growth of my son. I want to be there for him, to guide him when he is unsure and scared. Together, I want to spend time with him flying kites on a windy day or kicking a ball in an open field. I want to build his confidence and give him support as he learns to ride his bicycle on his own. I want to be the person he looks up to and ask questions when in doubt. I want to be a hero in his eyes.

It hits me square in the face when I realise what I am missing and the implications of my actions today. I do not want my son growing up without a father as I had when I was a child myself.

No physical form of gift can be greater than or compared to being there for your son. A father's support, guidance, protection can never be found or replaced.

In a twisted fate of irony, a gift from my father was the realisation on the importance of being there for your family. And I shall be there for my son.



## SACRIFICE

I stood hunched against the cold, sharp wind. The collar of my leather jacket was turned up against the winter chill and both my hands were jammed tightly into its pockets. Bending down, I reached out with my hand and let my trembling fingers trail slowly over the smooth, cool surface of the marble headstone under which was interred the remains of a hero. A man who had displayed the highest order of love and made the ultimate sacrifice. As I looked into the soft, brown eyes – so similar to mine – of the man staring out from the photograph on the headstone, I was overwhelmed with a plethora of emotions. A mixture of sadness, guilt and respect for the man. A solitary tear squeezed itself out of the corner of my eye, rolled down my stiffened cheek and hung for a quivering moment at the edge of my jaw before falling down and losing itself among the blades of grass.

The sound of his rich and resonant voice, the roughness of his strong, calloused hands as they gently picked me up and swung me around and the ticklish feel of his prickly moustache which never failed to make me squirm and scream with delight whenever he nuzzled his face into my neck. These and other memories reverberated through my mind, giving me goose bumps as I relived my childhood. The sweet, pungent aroma of burnt tobacco, the heavy scent of Old Spice cologne and the mouth-watering aroma of steaks roasting and spitting on the barbecue were smells I associated with my father. When I was much younger, we would have our weekly barbeques in our little backyard. My father, who could serve up a mean steak, would be the assigned chef of the day, taking over the domestic helm from my mother. We were typical, happy suburban family.

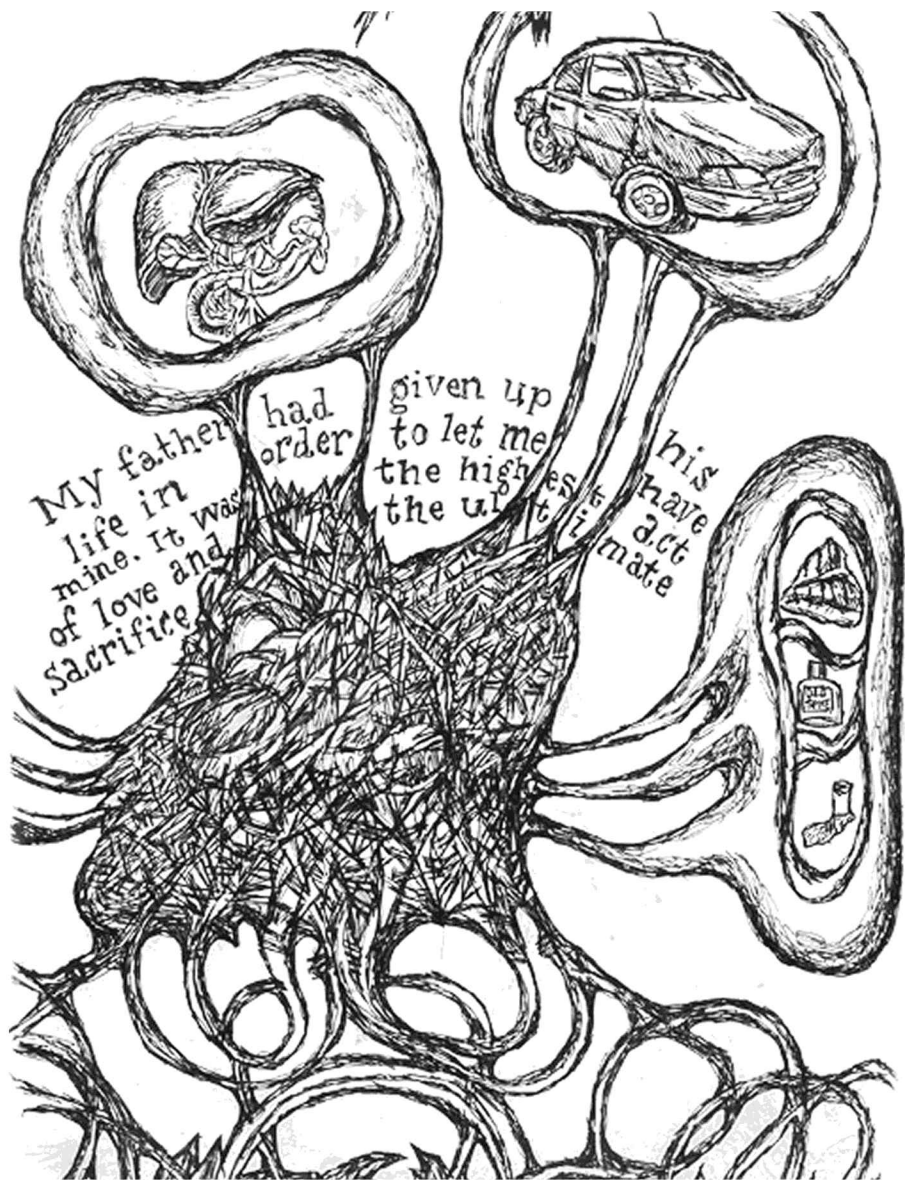
It was a week after my 10th birthday when my mother and baby sister were killed by a drunk driver in a freak accident. My father and I rushed

to the city morgue after receiving the fateful call from our local sheriff's office. Holding hands, we stumbled through the sanitised tiled hallway leading to the identification room. When we reached it, my father disappeared through its doors while I waited outside. I would never forget the haunted look and pained expression on his face when he reappeared through those same doors. He looked beaten and seemed to have aged a few decades in the mere space of a few minutes. He hugged me tightly and it was then that I realised the full gravity of the situation. We were left with only each other.

My father stayed faithful to the memory of my mother and never remarried. Having lost his wife and other child, he channelled all his love and energy towards me, the only other member of our prematurely shattered family. My father assumed both parental roles in the monumental task of bringing a child up in a single-parent family. He had to get up before dawn to do the laundry and household chores and also had to prepare all our meals. He would send me to and from school before rushing off to work. Our weekly barbeque went on as usual, albeit was a somewhat somber tone, as both my mother and baby sister were no longer around. All in all, my father did his utmost best to provide a wholesome and conducive home environment for me all throughout my junior high and high school years.

However, my father insisted that he accompanied me wherever I went and that even included me going to the mall with my friends. I was embarrassed and resented this unreasonable demand of his and took it as an infringement on my privacy. We had many arguments over this issue. In retrospect though, I realised that my father's over-protectiveness was not meant to inhibit me but rather, it stemmed from the urge of wanting to protect me from anything untoward. My father had taken the deaths of my mother and baby sister badly and had never fully recovered from it. He was tormented by the guilt he felt for not being there to prevent the accident from happening. He was not going to take any chances with my safety.





My father had  
life in mine. It was  
of love and sacrifice

given up  
to let me  
the highest  
the ultimate

his  
have  
dict  
mate



The day I graduated from high school was the day my father handed me the keys to my very own automobile. It was a dark green Ford. I could imagine what a struggle it must have been for my father to overcome his personal demons and fears to buy me a car for my graduation gift. If there was any trepidation on his part, he kept it well concealed. Instead, he shared in my elation and excitement and we went for a spin in my new car. We celebrated that night with a bottle of wine. The following summer, I went to college to read law. I had always wanted to be a lawyer and represent the people. I had lofty ideas and my father supported my aspirations in every way. Things were indeed going very well for us, particularly for me.

However, things started spiraling downwards was the fall of my sophomore year. During a routine medical examination, a tumor was detected in my liver. A biopsy was done and it was found to be malignant. The prognosis was bad, very bad. I had only three months to live. The alternative was a liver transplant. Where would I find a suitable donor in such a short time? I was shocked and terrified. This could not be happening to me. I had yet to celebrate my 22nd birthday.

When I broke the news to my father, he was devastated and took it harshly upon himself for not taking better care for me. We hugged and comforted each other with tears in our eyes. The next day, my father and I went to the hospital to undergo the pre-requisite tests to determine where my father would be a suitable donor for me. The results, after days of fretful waiting, declared my father a perfect match! Due to the urgency of the circumstances, a transplant operation was hurriedly scheduled. The days leading up to operation were passed as a stupor and the nights, in restless sleep.

On the day of the operation, I remembered vividly my father's wide grin as he flashed me the thumbs-up sign as he was being wheeled past me in his gurney on his way to the operating theater. I smiled back and returned an okay sign. We were not overly worried about the procedure. Although



it was a fairly complicated one and not without its risks, it was not an uncommon one, I mouthed a silent prayer for the both of us as I was wheeled into the operating theater.

I swam lethargically through murky waters, reaching out with every stroke towards the light at the surface of the water. As I broke through the water surface, a sudden brilliance blinded me and caused me to blink erratically. As my vision slowly cleared, I found myself in a brightly lit hospital ward. I slowly looked around and saw nurses rushing around in an orderly rush. There were tubes sticking out of me and machines were beeping all around me. There was a dull throbbing pain in the right side of my torso. A nurse noticed me, smiled and motioned to an elderly doctor nearby. He came over, smiled and said to me, “Good to have you back, son. Your operation was a success. You’ll be good as new in no time at all.”

I nodded. “My... my... father...” I croaked, finding it difficult to speak with the tube in my mouth.

“Um...” he hesitated. “There were some complications. Your dad, he didn’t quite make it. We tried our best... I’m very sorry.”

By then, I had wanted to scream in anguish and despair but I felt drained and strangely subdued. It must have been the anesthetic. I allowed my head to fall back onto the soft pillow, closed my eyes tightly and wept silently. My father had given up his life in order to let me have mine. It was the highest act of love and the ultimate sacrifice.



## TRIBUTES TO MY DAD

Years back, I was a typical youth delinquent and all I cared for were my friends and, of course, myself. Life was all about pleasure and I possessed a fatalist attitude. Fate was what I always believed in and I thought I had no control over my own destiny. I would party and spend nights loitering under void decks and the thought of family love had never come across my mind once before. This was partly to do with my broken family and more often than not, I hated them. Most of the time, I had to suffer the irksome attitude of my mum and incessant questions asked. Yelling and screaming in the household became a daily routine and indeed I thought that my mum had gone mad.

The hatred I had for my mum was so intense that I literally walked off from the scene when she threatened to commit suicide because the last thing I want to hear was her irritating voice. My father was definitely different from my mum. He was a righteous man with lots of patience and he was the only person capable of calming my mum down. There were times when he explained to me the reason why my mum became abnormal but I refused to accept the hard and painful truth.

During the 2008 Asia financial crisis, my mum lost a hefty sum of money through investments and also the stock market. After which, she then became depressed and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. It is a mental condition where the patient is not able to differentiate fantasy world and the reality. Due to her mental condition, my dad made a brave decision, which was to quit his job as a marine engineer in order to spend more time with us.

It was a real sacrifice on my dad's side because it had always been his dream to be an engineer and he had been working his entire life in the marine industry. Being a marine engineer, he needed to be away for

projects on the sea and he was not able to spend sufficient time with us therefore he decided to take this step. Initially, it was very tough for him as the opportunity for employment in other sectors was quite slim because of his lack of experience. Furthermore, my mum and I added on to his frustration and he was nearly at his wit's end. During that period, I would always quarrel with them and run away from home. Eventually, I joined gang and I started to be more notorious and rebellious. I began to sell drugs and spent lesser and lesser time in school. Until one day, some police officer arrested me at home and the person who reported me was my own dad.

My world became colourless and dull ever since and I literally gave up on myself. I was sent to prison and the truth of my own father reporting me to the police officers continued to harass me for months. It was indeed unbelievable. I was being thrown into solitary confinement and a one man cell. It was a horrendous experience and I cried miserably.

The presence of God seems unrealistic to me and I kept on wondering why was my life such a tragic one. I could still remember how I yelled and insulted my parents during my initial few months of visits. I could not allow myself to forgive my dad because the sufferings in prison were unbearable to me. The environment was spartan and downright unsuitable for me. Most of the time, prison officers screamed and reprimanded me and it was hurtful and shameful for me. Despite all this suffering, my adamant attitude did not change and I began to sink deeper into depression. I became even more rebellious and unreasonable and even fought for my gang.

After being charged for several cases, I realised that there was no one who cared for me except my dad. The only thing that never changed was his love for me through all the letters he wrote to me. Forgiveness was that he sought and he did not even blame me for my negative attitude towards him. Every few days, he would write to me about his daily endeavours and how much he loved me. He would also update me on my mum's condition and seek for my forgiveness towards my mum. After all these, I wrote to him letters apologising for my past mistakes and my willingness to change for the better. With his encouragement and love, I

took a great step forward and renounced all my affiliation with my secret society gang.



Expressing my patience  
through words is never  
enough; I believe that actions  
speak louder than words to  
show my gratefulness  
to him.

Since then, our relationship improved and we started to communicate more during the visits. It was only through those experiences that he had shared with me that made me realise his uncomplaining love for the people around him and also let me understand what is true love. One of it was the accommodation of my grandma. As the medical facilities are better in Singapore as compared to Malaysia, my dad suggested to my relatives on bringing my granny here for medical treatment for her kidney failure. The shocking news was that none of my relatives were willing to accept my grandmother as she was senile and would ask the same old question time and time again. Being the eldest son in the family, my dad took her in and took care of her.

My dad shared with me how he spent his time rushing back home while working just to calm my mother down and also how he spent his time communicating and cheering my granny up during those painful times when she was undergoing kidney dialysis treatments. Fortunately, the freedom of being a taxi driver allowed him to do so without much worries. Apart from doing these tasks, he still never failed to visit me regularly and showing me tremendous support for my rehabilitation.

Through his experiences with my mentally ill mum and senile granny, I had learnt the true essence of life. He would never ignore my granny even though the questions asked were the same over and over again. Never would he lose his nonchalance even when my mum became unstable during visits and started pulling her hair and screamed. Even if my mum was to lose her self control in public places, he would be the one apologising to any strangers affected. As for me, he had never scolded me and blamed me for any negative past of mine. The power of love was demonstrated clearly to me and I believed he did the right choice back then.

The more mature side of me would never be present without his unconditional love for me. I believe that my life has changed positively thus far and I am looking forward to my release so as to help him. This time round, I would help him in reducing his burden by sharing the load with him rather than helping to add more loads for him. Since I have taken the first step to renounce my gang affiliations, the second step

would be to obtain good grades to prove to him that I am worth loving for. Expressing my patience through words is never enough; I believe that actions speak louder than words to show my gratefulness to him.



## A GIFT FROM MY FATHER

“It’s a gift from my father.” Kenneth beamed proudly, showing off the new watch on his wrist. I looked on enviously, not because of the watch but of his joy of receiving a gift from his father. I have never seen my father before much less received a gift from him. There is not even a picture of him at home. It is as though he has not existed at all. Whenever I asked mother about him, she would burst into tears and cry angrily that he is better off dead.

“He does not deserve us!” she would whisper vehemently.

I would torment myself with questions about father. What does he look like? Did I chase him away with my mischief? Does he not love or care about me at all? Sometimes to console myself, I would imagine he is seeking a hidden treasure in a faraway land and would one day return with untold riches to reunite with us. His absence left a void in my life. It was as if a vital part of me was missing.

So imagine my shock one fateful day, when mother revealed that father was in the hospital. He was dying soon and he wanted to see me.

“It is your decision.” Mother sobbed sadly. “Remember, you don’t owe him anything even if you choose not to go.”

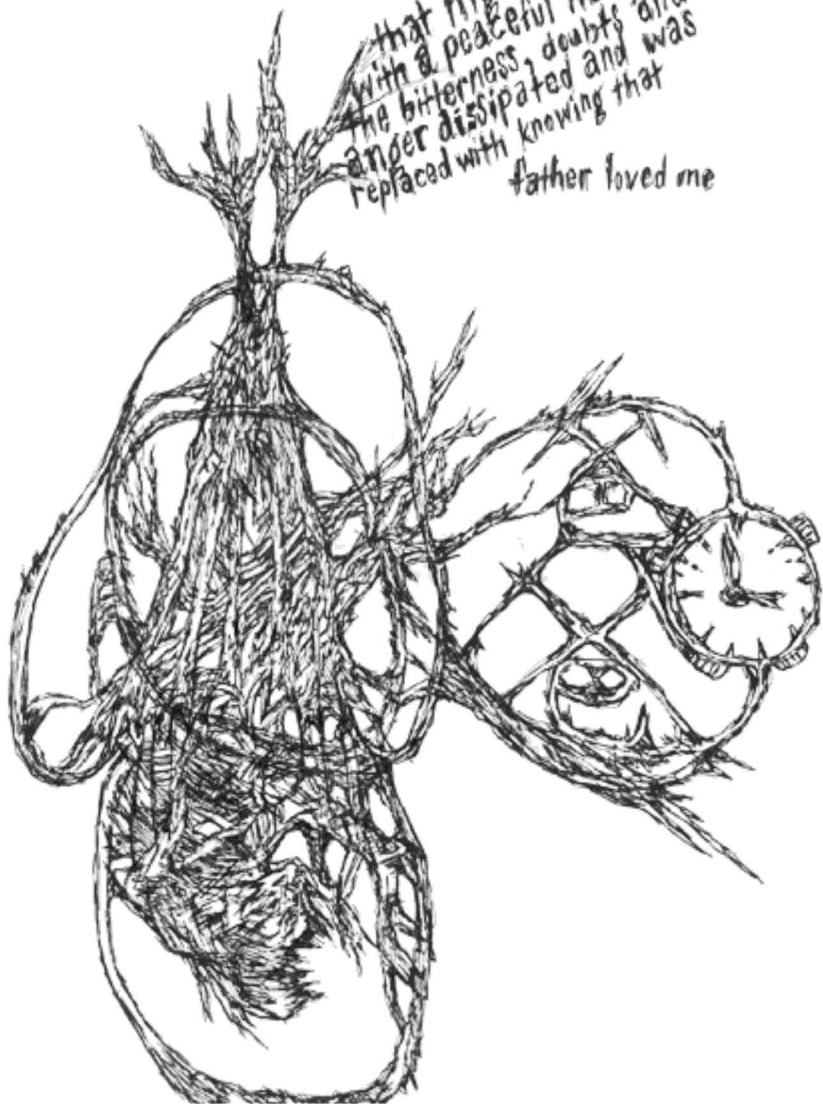
“He chose to forsake us first.” She wept woefully.

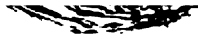
I was overwhelmed by the emotions stirred in me. I could not decide if I wanted to see him. I was torn between the desire to see him and the bitterness within me. After much soul-searching, I decided to honour his last wishes.

at home



that night I went  
with a peaceful heart. All  
the bitterness, doubts and  
anger dissipated and was  
replaced with knowing that  
father loved me





In a cruel twist of fate, father fell into a coma by the time I reached the hospital. With a heavy heart, I entered the room and saw for the first time the man that had given me the gift of life. Although, his wrinkled face was gaunt and contorted with pain, I could still see my resemblance in him.

“It is amazing that he is still alive,” the doctor said, “Most of his vital organs have already ceased functioning.”

“Your father wanted you to have these.” The doctor handed a letter and a small box to me. I read the letter.

*Dear Son,*

*By the time you read this letter, I should be on my way. I know I should not intrude into your life now, but I strongly feel the need to apologise to you. I was a hopeless drug addict going in and out of prison countless times. Shortly after you were born, I decided to leave you and your mother because I know I would bring endless shame, pain and anguish to the both of you. I don't know if I have made the right decision but I am glad you have grown into a fine young man. Son, when you won your first soccer tournament, I was cheering you on the sidelines. When you graduated with top honours, I was outside your school gates with my heart bursting with pride. I am so proud of you! I am not proud of my decision. I chose the easy way out. Please forgive me and accept my gift to you. I love you, son.*

*Your Father*

With tears streaming down, I held my father's calloused hand and pressed my cheek against his.

“I forgive you, pa.” I whispered. “I am neither ashamed nor angry at you. You will always be my father.”

As if hearing my words, father smiled serenely and breathed his last.

That night I went home with a peaceful heart. All the bitterness, doubts and anger dissipated and was replaced with the knowing that father loved me. On my wrist was a watch engraved with my father's name and mine.

It was a gift from my father.



## FATHERLY LOVE

Having to live with my grandparents my whole life, I have never known what it feels like to have a real father. My parents got divorced before I was born. The reason for their separation was because of my father's commitment to his prison life. Going in and out of the prison had become a pleasure for him. The time I spent with him was much lesser than the time I needed to learn how to tie my shoelaces. Even till now he is still being incarcerated.

The fatherly love that I received was from my grandfather. He was the one who disciplined me and provided me with all my needs. I could not ask for more. He was later diagnosed with diabetes and passed away when I was 10 years old. After his death, my life changed. I turned into a juvenile delinquent. At the age of 14, I was caught up by the authority for my minor offences. Fortunately for me, I was given a warning. Since there was no one giving me a proper discipline, my life turned from bad to worse.

At the age of 17, my mother who seldom visited me got remarried to a new husband. I was so unhappy because of the stories I heard about all stepfathers being evil. To show my discontentment, I started taking drugs, involved in gangs and getting into fights. All this ended me being sent to the Reformative Training (RTC) for two years. During my time in RTC, I noticed something about my stepfather. He never once blamed me for all the wrongdoings I had done. Instead, he gave me the support and care of a real father. My eyes were opened up to see how good my stepfather was.



During my time in RTC, I noticed something about my stepfather. He never once blamed me for all the wrongdoings I had done

Upon releasing from RTC, I started to spend quality time with my stepfather. He showed me how to maintain the house, taught me about respect, leadership, self-disciplined and most important of all, how to become a real man. When did we need to stand up and speak out and

when we must sit down and listen. I even started to have dreams and goals because of him.

When everything seemed to turn so perfect, my stepfather was struck by a heart attack. He died instantly at work. It was shocking news. Never did I expect him to leave me so soon. I was so sad that for the first time in my life, I cried. I could clearly remember that the last time we talked was about becoming a good father. I mourned for his death for quite some time before turning to my old ways. I felt like I was being cursed from having a fatherly love. I even got myself an illegitimate child from my wild life. I was sent in and out of prison for three times before I was sentenced to a seven years six months and 10 strokes of the cane for a major offence of trafficking.

While being imprisoned from my long-sentence, I came to realise that I am more and more becoming like my old man. Going in and out of prison, leaving his son out there without the care of a father. So, before things could get any worse, I have decided to once and for all change my pathetic life. I would hate it for my son to follow my footsteps just like how I have followed my father's. I do not want my son to feel what I felt then. I want him to grow up walking tall on the right path and not going through what my father and I went through, living life in prison.

Now, I am being incarcerated in a prison school. I am here to pursue my studies as a stepping stone to achieve my goals. Although both my grandfather and stepfather have passed away, I still hope that this will somehow make them proud and also to thank them for the fatherly love they have given me. To me, even if I did not achieve my goals and dreams, I will still be proud of myself for successfully changing into a better man. From a juvenile delinquent to a more responsible father.

Hopefully this will not only give my son something for him to learn from but also something for my father to reflect on and at the same time opens up his heart to change for the better. For I will wait without tire for that 'fatherly love' I have been longing for from him.



## TRIBUTE TO MY DAD

I always think of my dad. He died when I was 29 years old in what were to me rather dramatic and traumatic circumstances. I had been in legal practice for four years and was right smack in the middle of a High Court trial, assisting a senior lawyer in a capital case. It (the trial I mean) was not going well for the accused. The evidence was overwhelming in favour of the prosecution and the chances of the accused going to the gallows and paying the ultimate price of his crime with his life were almost as certain as the daily dew that emanates briefly with the dawn and then is no more. It was the year in which major currencies in the region were coming under heavy assault as a result of the Asian financial crises. Fortunes were made and lost, livelihoods shattered and lives destroyed. Some chose to jump off buildings. I guess by now you would probably know how old I am. But I have digressed enough...

You see, my dad was a member of that unfortunate generation; born during the Great Depression of the 1930s and having the formative years of his life shaped by poverty, illiteracy and deprivations that were the consequences. Compounded by the experience of the Japanese Occupation in which he saw first hand the brutality of our Japanese conquerors, he learnt early on that only strength was to be respected and any display of emotion was seen as a weakness. I never saw my dad cry, except this once, when he was near the end of his life when he and I embraced for the only time in our lives. I cannot remember why we embraced, only the fact that we did and feeling the heaving sobs emanating from deep within his chest as we did so. That was the only time I saw and felt my dad's tears.

Cold and taciturn to us as children, my sister and I grew up not speaking to my dad very much. After he stopped working as a sailor, he picked up a skill as a machinist in order to support the family. The jobs involved him standing all day long and that proved to be his undoing. My dad had

flat feet and his toes were twisted outward, like flippers on a diver. We were poor then. My mother stayed home to look after us as she herself was uneducated and the only skill she knew was how to sew clothes. My dad's meagre income was supplemented by my mum's earnings, derived from whatever clothes our neighbours gave to her for mending. Hearing my dad drag his feet as he came home every night was an abiding memory of my childhood: the sibilant sounds caused by the shuffling of his slippers, the metallic click of the keys resonating as the door was unlocked and then the silence that came after. Always in silence; I would watch him, momentarily lifting my head from my books and then returning to them as my dad continued into the kitchen for his supper. To me, his existence was one devoid of meaning marked only by the exhaustion that accompanied his daily endeavours.

My dad was very strict when we were growing up. I was not allowed to go to play with my cousins whenever the extended family gathered for reunions. I grew up hating my dad and I shut myself off from him and my family by totally immersing myself into my books and studies.

The deterioration in the relationship between my dad and I continued into my teenage years, National Service and well into early adulthood as I got a place in the university to read law. By this time he had stopped working as a machinist and was driving a taxi. My hatred of him was only slightly ameliorated by my concern over for him. I was afraid that he would get into accidents because that time he had developed Alzheimer's Disease. My sister had stopped schooling so that together with my dad, they would be able to put me through university. It was hard for both my dad and sister.







I cried too. I wept for all those  
wasted years when my dad and I  
didn't talk and what I couldn't tell him  
that I love him in spite of everything  
that had happened

After I graduated, I plunged myself into work so that I could help support the family. My dad and I seldom talked because we frequently quarrelled. His Alzheimer's was getting worse. He frequently argued with my mother and sister. To add flavour to the occasion, he would use words there were calculated to hurt my mother and my sister deeply. His repertoire of vulgarities would have made any sailor proud. I had to play

the role of peacemaker and I hated it. I hated my family. I just wanted out of their lives. I moved out and stayed with my girlfriend, coming back only to visit occasionally and ward my dad in IMH when he became too much for my mom to handle.

Things only started to become better after I recommitted my life to God. My dad also became a Christian. Then he started to soften and it was then I supposed I saw him cry. I cried too. I wept for all those wasted years when my dad and I didn't talk and what I couldn't tell him that I loved him in spite of everything that had happened.

Then he fell in the kitchen one Sunday morning. I remembered the scene as vividly as if it had just happened in front of my mind's eye: the to and fro motion of his legs, his protruding belly swaying as he reached for the washing to dry, the sound of his tibia snapping as he fell We immediately warded him at TTSH. My mom was crying and my sister was distraught. We realised as a family that in spite of everything that had happened; we still loved him and wanted him to be well again. During the day, I attended Court and visited him at night by which time he had lapsed into coma as a result of a viral infection, never to wake again.

My dad died after 11 days in hospital. As I saw his lifeless body lying motionless with his mouth slightly agape, I realised that I had a hole in my heart so huge that only the grief and pain of losing a loved one could fit it. Some things were just so sad, that as an author once put it 'only your soul can do your crying for you'. It was like that for me.

After my dad's funeral, I found out certain things about him. I was dating another girl by then whose mother serendipitously worked in IMH and helped to look after my dad. She told me that from her frequent conversations with him, whenever he was lucid enough to talk, he would tell her constantly how proud he was of me. I also subsequently found out that unknown to me at that time, when he could no longer work as a taxi driver because of his illness, he worked as a washer of glasses in a coffeeshop so that he could save money for me. That was how much my dad loved me and gave his life for me in a lifetime of ceaseless toil and suffering which was only alleviated by his passing.

*Dad, if you can hear me now: please know that I love you very much. I am sorry for being such a smart ass jerk all my life and for not understanding that life was hard for you. Now that I have a five-year old daughter, I realise what it means to be a father. I am sorry I messed up and came inside prison. I promise you that I would do my best to redeem myself so that when we meet again in the life hereafter, you would still be proud of me. Your son.*



## A GOOD FATHER

Whenever there is any mention of the term ‘father’, most people would be able to evoke memories whether joyful, melancholy, or even repulsive ones. Albeit with me, it is somewhat different. This particular word reminds me the absence of paternal love, that I was abandoned by my father.

Never did I imagine that I would one day be writing an essay on ‘A Good Father’, let alone in a competition. How could a person who had never known his father, had never experienced being loved by a father, could only imagine the face of his father by looking into the mirror, and did not even receive any reproach from his father, know anything about a ‘good father’? Other than contributing to the inception of my birth, my father did nothing else, he was not even around.

During my younger years, I would refrain from discussing about my family, afraid that it would lead to unwanted queries about my father. And at times when I had to explain my ignorance on his information, usually it would elicit sympathetic smiles, causing me even more discomfort. The tendency to shy away from such discussions was due to my sense of inferiority. Akin to a disabled person, I felt I was devoid of something that should be naturally available.

After years of self-abasement, finally it dawned on me that I was not completely ignorant. Though I might not have experienced paternal love, I knew how it was like to be deprived of it. I could relate to people with similar predicaments and understood their sorrow, anguish and the turmoil that they were facing. Also, I was more sensitive and observant to relationships between children and their fathers. I became aware that even with fathers around, a ‘bad father’ could lead to serious repercussions.

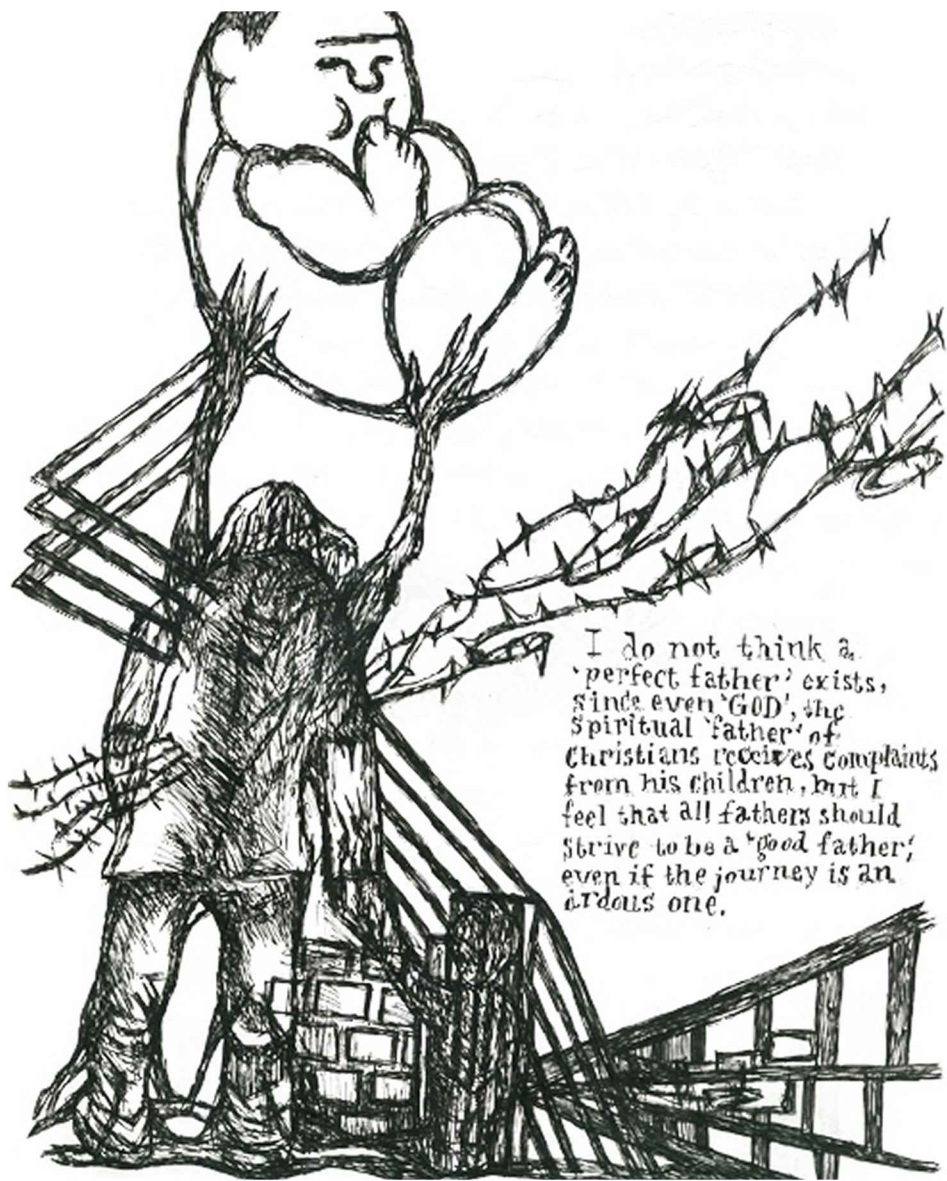
Paternal love has always been underrated compared to maternal love but I realised that they were equally important. Fathers, or rather ‘good fathers’, are essential to their children’s well-being and I find it apt to say that fathers mould the destiny of their children. The results of children whom were deprived of their father’s love are ubiquitous and examples can be best found in the prisons. Most prisoners did not have a good father to emulate, were abandoned, or did not understand their fathers’ love and actions. Hence, leading to indignation and inclination towards crime.

Fathers are usually stereotyped as an authoritarian figure – strict, stern and demanding obedience. Normally they do not listen to their children’s views and interact positively with them, thus resulting in their children being defiant. There are also complaints about fathers who agree to whatever their children demand, even preposterous ones. Hence, turning their children into conceited and spiteful creatures. Abusive fathers, inevitably, inflict great hurt to their children, both emotionally and physically, and most often the resentment stays with these children throughout their lives.

Of course, there are fathers with positive characteristics and it is usually their children who lead a successful and happy life. I do not think that a ‘perfect father’ exists, since even ‘God’, the spiritual ‘father’ of Christians receives complaints from his children, but I feel that all fathers should strive to be a ‘good father’, even if the journey is an arduous one.

A ‘good father’, I believe, should place his family before himself and would work unceasingly for the well-being of his children. He should provide unwavering support and encouragement to his children and listening with empathy to his children’s needs should be a priority. Not only should he discipline his children when the need arises but also patiently explain their faults to them. By keeping in line with moral ethics, he would lead by example and inculcate his children with positive traits. And above all, he should never abandon his children.





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Although my father might not have participated in my upbringing, I cannot deny the fact that he was an integral figure in my life, without him, I would not have had the privileges of enjoying what life had to offer and through his abandonment, I was able to understand the importance of a father's role and responsibilities. And my experiences will serve me well when I become a father.

If I could hope to achieve anything from writing this essay, I hope that this essay would enable fathers and would-be fathers to be aware of their impact on their children's lives. I also hope that this essay would provide them the impetus to be 'A Good Father'.



## IF I WERE A FATHER...

“Ring...” the school bell went off. All of the students immediately packed their belongings and went straight out of the class. I was still packing my books as my group of friends approached me and asked, “Hey Brother! We are going to the café for lunch. Do you want to join us?”

“Okay, sure.” I replied, beaming at my friends.

After I had done packing my books, we immediately made our way to the nearest café which was just five blocks away from our school. As we were walking quietly, I decided to come up with a topic to talk about.

“James?” I called my friend. “Do you love your father a lot?” With that question going through his head, he turned around slowly to look at me. He was obviously puzzled when I suddenly asked him this question, but he managed to reply after a few moments.

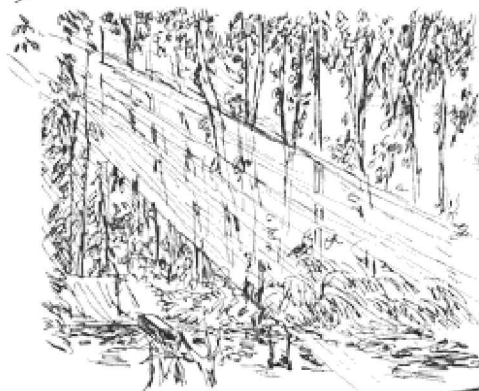
“Huh? Yes, I do love him,” staring at me with full of curiosity. “Why did you even ask me about that?”

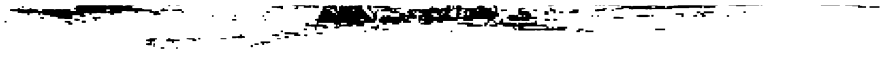
“There’s no real purpose,” I replied casually. “I was just asking.”

Throughout our lunch, I was very quiet. As I was thinking about my father. I tried to picture him in my mind at how he would have looked like if he was still alive. My father was a drug addict. He died of overdosed when I was just three years old. Since then, I only had a mother to love me and take care of me. As I was busy thinking of my father, two hours had already passed without me realising it and we were all getting ready to go our separate ways. As I was just about to leave, James came up to me.









“What’s wrong with you? You don’t look so good,” James asked, feeling concerned.

“I’m alright, I was just thinking about my father,” I replied, looking up to him and gave a weak smile. “Don’t worry about me.”

As I was walking on my way back home, something caught my eyes. I saw a father of two kicking and slapping a child that is most probably his son, while a baby in the pram wailed loudly. It was impossible to miss. I continued to stare at the sad incident and begin to lose in my thoughts. I imagined myself as a father. If I were a father, I swore to myself that I would never abuse my children. Even though they did something wrong, I would never hit them and if a situation went from bad to worse, I would only scold them to remind them not to repeat their wrongdoings. I would focus all of my attention and affection just for my children and wife. As I would never want them to share the same fate as me.

The well-being of my children is my greatest responsibility and as a father, I must be a very good role model. I must look clean, smart and confident. I must teach them about respect. I imagined myself spending memorable moments with my children at the beach, theme parks and even zoo. I believe that if I am a good father, my children would grow up to be a successful person and they are my greatest investment. As they would take care of me in my old days and shower me with affection.

“Hey! What are you staring at?” Suddenly the man that I was staring at shouted at me. It immediately made me come back to reality after being lost in my thoughts for a moment.

“Oh? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it!” I apologised. As I do not want any trouble, I walked away as fast as I could, feeling ashamed and once again I thought to myself, “If I were a father.”



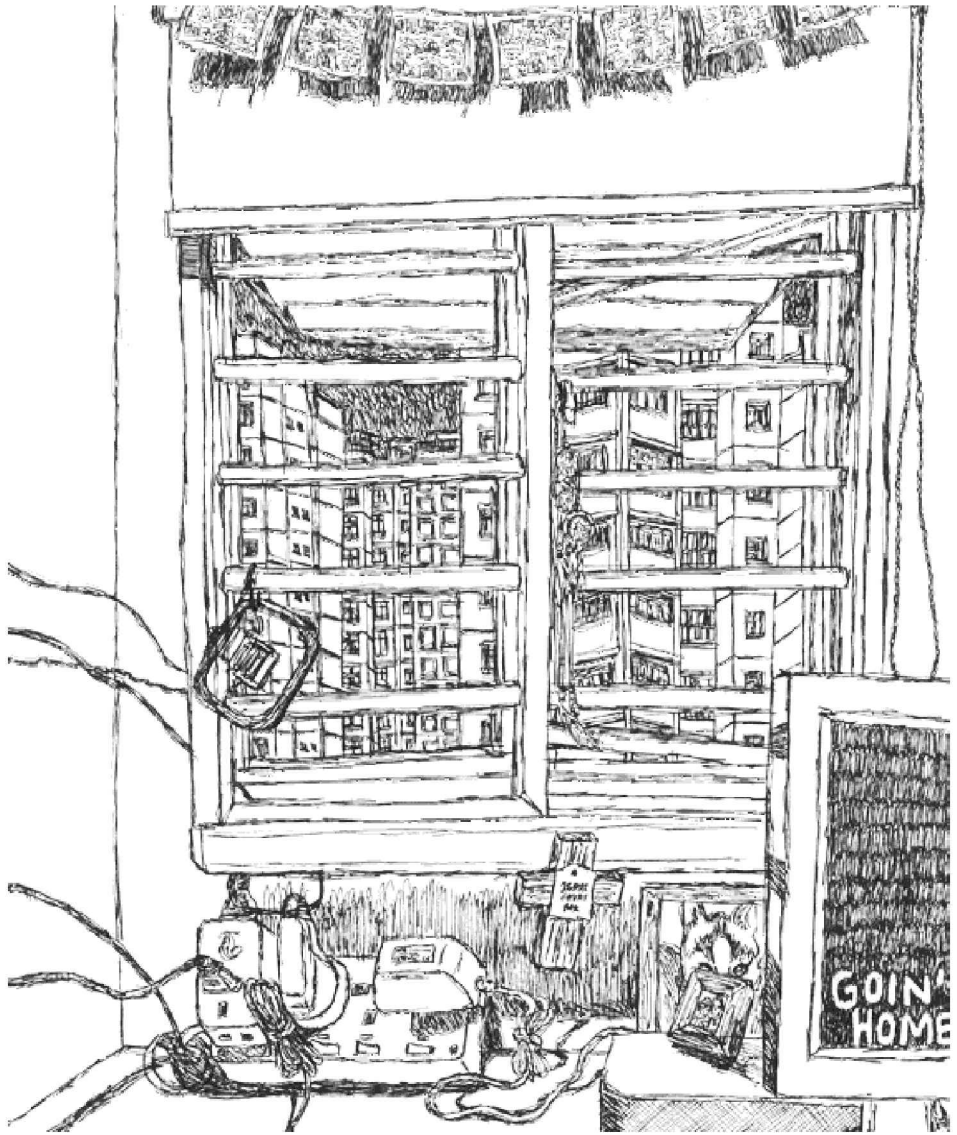
## A GOOD FATHER

When dad was 12, he tore a ligament halfway through a 400m sprint at the school's sports meet but completed the remaining 200m anyway, limping at first before crawling on all fours to the finishing line. A matter of principle, said the young boy to astonished spectators.

To me however, dad was dad and all I remembered of the early years was of soaking lazily by the pool in our enormous house at 6th Ave after school. By the time lessons with Mrs White, my private tutor, ended, dad'd be home for our evening stroll around the estate, our two Labradors in tow. Mum'd be back just before dinner and we'd tuck heartily into Aunt Marie's mouth-watering dishes. It was said that Aunt Marie used to be on the kitchen detail of the late President, Mr Wee Kim Wee. What I truly relished at these dinners was the undivided attention paid me by my parents who'd discuss the day's work with me, treating me as an adult and an equal.

The weekends were awesome. Beginning with a Sunday morning mass followed by the day at the Singapore Island Country Club where dad and mum played golf with associates while I, a 10-year old, attempted to drive the buggy around the course, amid protests by mum and the club's staff.

Then there were the endless garden parties at the back of our house where important looking guests tucked into the buffet spread, picked up another cocktail from the bar and mingled with one another. I loved watching mum at these parties as she played the capable and elegant hostess – drifting gracefully from guest to guest, exchanging pleasantries, paying compliments or chuckling at a private joke, her wit and charm, captivating many. A deputy director of a public relations firm at 35, coupled with a degree in mass communications and a previous stint aboard SQ, mum was not without credentials.



“IQ + EQ + VQ (visual quotient), a lethal combo”, to quote one guest.

“Only a man like my father could capture the heart of my mother,” said another.

The founder of a stock trading firm with a seven-digit figure annual turnover, dad was an upcoming heavyweight and I watched with swelling pride as industry players, in the hope of catching a whiff in the direction a particular stock was expected to take, deferred to him.

The next few years went by just as fabulously though dad looked a little disturbed by company matters, and mum was missing dinners for work. School, weekends at the club and garden parties however, continued uninterrupted along with the evening strolls with dad. It was on one such stroll that we decided to break routine and take a different route to the nearby park. As we crossed the street, a flashy white Jaguar pulled up some distance away. An effeminate figure alighted from the passenger’s side, crossed over to the driver’s, threw her arms around him and planted a long lingering kiss on his lips. I felt dad stiffen and hastily attempted to steer me away from the scene but not before I’d caught mum’s delighted laughter as the driver playfully groped her.

Mum came clean about the affair with her boss a month later as dad pondered the best approach to the situation. In under 10 minutes, she had gathered her belongings and left. But not before reassuring dad she’d not be contesting me or the house. Nor could she, she added apologetically, so anything about the upcoming bankruptcy proceedings against dad. A result of the 1997 financial crisis where stocks dived and suicide rates climbed.

We moved into our first HDB flat, a 2-roomer in 1998, just when I’d made sec 1 to SJI. Nevertheless, dad ensured that my social, emotional and academic development were not compromised. Dad gave up the sole room to me and even decorated it earnestly – lining the freshly painted blue walls with my favourite posters. A 6ft tank was installed where a majestic Arowana circled tirelessly, its golden scales glittering in splendor.

I was enrolled into the youth wing of our church where I participated in activities ranging from hiking expeditions to volunteerism at the orphanage, it was here that I discovered many children my age who lacked the most basic needs, things I took for granted. Dad personally tutored me in my studies and at the dinner table, regaled me with stories of Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Terry Fox – people who'd withstood great tribulations and emerged victorious. Dad's simple principle to achieving goals is to consistently think and act positively towards it, never giving up.

It occurred to me only much later that dad was in a way reinforcing his own resolve to overcome the great odds fate had dealt him. True to his belief, dad was promoted from a mere security supervisor of a local security firm to operations manager, and when he successfully negotiated a multi-million dollar government contract, was made director in the business development arm of the company.

After 10 years of repaying the debts incurred during the crisis of '97, dad was officially discharged from bankruptcy and we celebrated the glorious day at a renowned seafood restaurant in East Coast Park.

Three days later, that is today, I feel proud to be able to stand before all of you to deliver this amazing eulogy on the extraordinary life of my father. I ask that you do not grieve over his unexpected and tragic demise. Nor to rage against the drunk driver who had run him over as we were leaving the restaurant at East Coast that night after having celebrated his discharge from bankruptcy.

As we gather at his funeral today, let us instead celebrate his life and victories over the impossible odds dealt him. A lesser man would not have sufficed. Thank you.

*In memory of C. L. Fernandez,  
Father of C. Jr. Fernandez,  
My esteemed friend and confidante,  
Both of whom had I, the honour of knowing  
And the honour of preparing the original eulogy.*





## MY FATHER

During my childhood, I was not on good terms with my father. We seldom had a father and son conversation and he was not always there for me when I needed him. He was always busy with his work and he would return home every night with his breath reeking of alcohol.

My parents frequently had heated arguments over money matters. They even had fights when things turned ugly. I, being terrified of the situation would hide under the covers of my bed, wishing all these would end soon but it just kept happening and happening again. Every time after the fights ended, I would find my mother crying and my heart really hurt to see her this way.

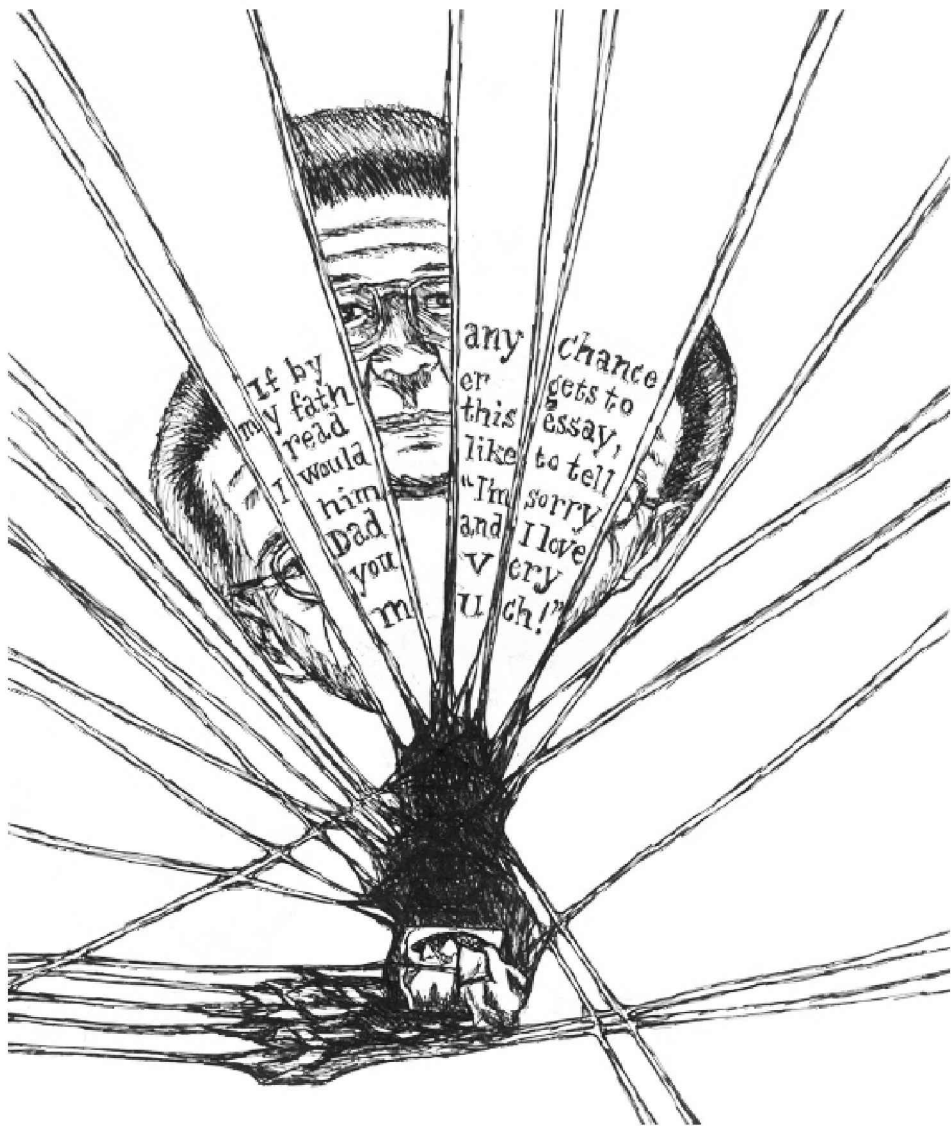
It was during these moments that I felt the bond between my father and I was diminishing.

As I grew older, I became rebellious and turned a deaf ear to my father's advice. He tried to lead me to the right path but I refused. Instead, I did the opposite of his teachings. Although he showered me with his tender care and love, I remained untouched. All these negative thinking and actions of mine were due to the hurt and sorrows he gave to my mother. Eventually, I was led astray by bad company and sentenced to prison for drug abuse.

My parents visited me every month without fail and every magazine or novel that I requested for, my father would buy for me. Conversations were mostly between my mother and I, my father would sit quietly, contented at seeing me. Then one day, my mother came alone with saddening news that my father had suffered a stroke and was hospitalised. Immediately, I felt a prick on my heart and slowly, tears welled up in my eyes. All of a sudden, realisation struck me that my love for my father had not vanished, it was only anger over childhood



memories had overshadowed my love for him. That night, I stayed awake the whole night, ashamed of myself for not appreciating his love for me all this while.



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much!"

My mother brought my father along on my next visit. The moment he entered the room with a crutch in his hand, a drop of tear trickled down my left cheek. As he walked towards me with difficulties, pain was seen in his eyes with every step he took. Immediately, I felt a heart-wrenching anguish and that night, I sobbed quietly under the blanket till I slept.

After being released from prison, my relationship with my father got better, I would fetch him to the hospital for his therapies and we would chat and gossip along the way. We even shared secrets that my mother did not know. We made up for the times we lost during my childhood. I was glad my father had not forsaken his love for me although it was I who had neglected him. If by any chance, my father gets to read this essay, I would like to tell him, "I'm sorry, Dad and I love you very much!"



## TRIBUTE TO MY DAD

I was overjoyed when I heard there would be an essay writing competition for us this year. At last there is a chance for me to write to my Dad, words that I have kept in my heart and have not said. Words that I did not gather enough courage to tell him in the past.

My dad is an optimistic and humorous man with a heart filled with love, patient and hope for me. He always looks at things on the brighter side and always wants me to be a cheerful person. He always speaks to me in a way like a close friend and is always there for me when I need someone to talk to. As I grew up in a single-parent family, my dad plays the role of a father and a mother. He never fails to tell me how much he loves me and how proud of me he is. I did not really know how much all these words mean and had always taken advantage of everything being done for me until the day I was imprisoned.

I have always loved my dad very much in my heart but he is the person I have hurt most. My dad has always been understanding and supportive towards me. When I did a mistake, he was always ready to correct me and listen to my explanation. I still remember the day that I really broke his heart.

It was Lunar New Year 2008. I told my dad that I would be going home for reunion dinner. Before I went home, I went to meet a friend of mine. "Daddy, wait for me at home. I am going to pass something to my friend then I will come back." I recalled telling my dad on the phone. But I never went home that night because I was caught for drug trafficking. So-called friend had sold me out to cover himself. My dad was waiting the whole night at home during the time when I was brought back for investigation. In the morning of eve, I called home asking for him to attend my court hearing.



Do not be afraid.  
I will stand by your  
side with you through  
your trial.

My dad was at the court before I reached there the next morning. He got me out on bail. When I walked out of the gate, my dad was there waiting anxiously for me. I could not speak as I was in a confused, guilty, betrayed and fearful state. My dad ran up to me and hugged me. He said, "What's done cannot be undone. Learn from your lesson and move on." I was crying so hard that I could not answer a word. Still holding me in his arms, he told me, "Do not be afraid. I will stand by your side with you through your trial." I knew I had brought him great disappointment and pain but my dad never took this time to scold me, instead of scolding me, he had chosen to stand by me to hold me up when I fell. From the black-eye rings under his eyes I knew how much pain he was going through, there were even tears in his eyes. I could never forget the look of my dad that day.

Today, I am given this opportunity to pay tribute to my dad through this essay I want to tell him how his unfailing love have affected me. I want to tell my dad because of his faith in me, I want to be a changed person. I want my dad to know that his effort has not been wasted. Here is what I want to tell him deep inside my heart.

*Dad, I am sorry for all the sleepless nights you spent crying. I do not know how much tears you had shed for me all these years but I know I have caused you so much pain and worries. I want to thank you for being the best friend in my life, you have never criticised me when I do silly things, instead you advised me and shared your opinion with me. Thank you for treating me like an adult. Thank you for the trust you have in me. You always believe that I will come to my senses one day and you always pray patiently for this day. Dad, I want you to know that your optimistic character has a great impact in my life. Now, I always remind myself that everything happens for a purpose and God is in control of all situation. Thank you for all your prayers for me, dad. I am in good hands of God. Thank you for loving me so selflessly and dad, because you have never given up on me. I am never going to give up on myself. You always tell me life is a learning process. Please continue to be my mentor and my best friend as I learn. You are the best daddy to me and you are my pillar of strength. I want to tell you, Daddy I love you.*



## FATHERLY LOVE

“Sir, there’s a phone call from your father,” said the secretary, May.

“Again!” exclaimed John.

“Okay, May, you can connect him to line one,” John relented.

“Is that you, son?” asked John’s father, Mr Smith.

“What’s wrong dad, is there a problem?” asked John.

“No, son, it is just that I wanted to remind you to purchase a new set of stationeries on your way home,” answered Mr Smith.

“For the umpteenth time dad, stop calling me here for petty things. I have to prepare an important proposal for my company;” said John brusquely.

“Sorry, son, but I need those things urgently for my work in peace,” pleaded Mr Smith.

“I heard you the first time dad, and the last time I checked, you’ve already retired, dad. Now let me finish my work in peace,” spluttered John irritably, before hanging up the phone.

Being an emotional man, Mr Smith took offence on John’s curt reply. However, instead of brooding over it, he tended to escape the situation by immersing himself to wiring his prize journal. Although Mr Smith retired recently from journalism, he still does freelance work for a family magazine to occupy his time. John on the other hand, thinks that his father should lay back and lead a sedentary lifestyle in his retirement days.

Such an important man he is, that he shouted  
and hung up on his own father for calling and  
reminding him a simple task. However, blood  
is thicker than water, so my love for him  
will never wane.



"Mr John Smith, I am station inspector, Ryan from Central Division. I'm



afraid I have bad news for you. Your father, Mr Smith has just passed away,” said the Policeman solemnly.

“What! Is this some kind of a joke?” said John angrily.

“I’m sorry sir, the hospital has confirmed that your father died of cardiac arrest. A jogger found him sitting motionless at the park with this on his laps,” replied the officer, handing him a worn leather-bound journal.

Shocked at the sudden departure of his father, John slid to the floor and flipped through the journal unconsciously until his eyes fell upon his father last entries.

*I sat on this lonely bench, away from the city bustle, admiring the scenic view of the nature. Consumed by the thought that nothing’s permanent. This place bore the fondest memories of my life. This is where I seek solace whenever the time in my life hits the lowest point. This is where I first met my late wife, pledged my love and proposed to her. We brought our son to this very spot and watched him take his first step. Unfortunately, my wife was struck with severe acute respiratory syndromes and left me to care for my only son.*

*Feeling devastated and down but I refused to dwell further on sorrow. Instead, I channelled all my focus towards building the route of my son’s future.*

*To recompense his losses, I showered him with all the love and attention I could muster. Never would I raise my voice to either reprimand or reproach him for any wrongdoing. Every night, without fail, I would repeatedly read him his favourite bedtime stories until he fell asleep or even sing him a lullaby. I would try my very best to answer any question asked to quench a child’s curiosity mind.*

*Now here I am again, reflecting on all those kind memories, breathing a sigh of relief knowing that my son has turned up well. He is all grown up and shouldered huge responsibility as an executive in a big firm. Such an important man he is, that he shouted and hung up on his own father for*

*calling and reminding him a simple task. However, blood is thicker than water, so my love for him will never wane...*

Unconsciously, tears started to trickle down John's cheeks. He was filled with sudden remorse for treating his father the way he did. Now it is too late, there is no way for him to repay his father for his fatherly love.





## REFLECTIONS

Prison, a place where all actions are scrutinised and all sense of privacy unapologetically intruded upon, where Big brother is constantly on the watch, roaming from all bends and corners ensuring that all rules are duly followed, is hardly a place for glitz and glamour, the senseless pursuits of my past. Given the intended spartan living conditions, prison is the last place to consider for those seeking a stimulating sensory experience. The stories revolving around this caged world are very much composed in advance, with every routine meticulously scripted and every element of surprise promptly stripped off. Life in prison is a virtual stand still, with probably only the exception of time, which inches forward ever so slowly, ever so excruciatingly.

The irony however, is that this very place where I thought has robbed me of the life I deserved has instead provided me with the potential to live it more enriched and fulfilling. Like all medicine, fashioned to be bitter but concocted with the intention to do the body good, prison has through its rehabilitative efforts helped me identify some important faults I have in my dealing with life. By providing me with barely more than sufficient to maintain life, it has taught me that there is more to life than mere fulfilling of material and physical needs. By constantly making me obey rules and regulations, it has taught me that all I require is the discipline and humility in my approach to life and that it is okay for me to leave my burdensome pride behind. Most importantly, it has helped me come to terms with having to part with a considerable stretch of my life, living and breathing within the confined surroundings of cold metal grilles and dull concrete walls erected in all four directions.

Although my past is on the verge of blurring into the horizon, I can still make out the fading silhouettes. All these years, brick by brick, mortar by mortar, I have built myself a fortress fortified by pride, ego and envy.

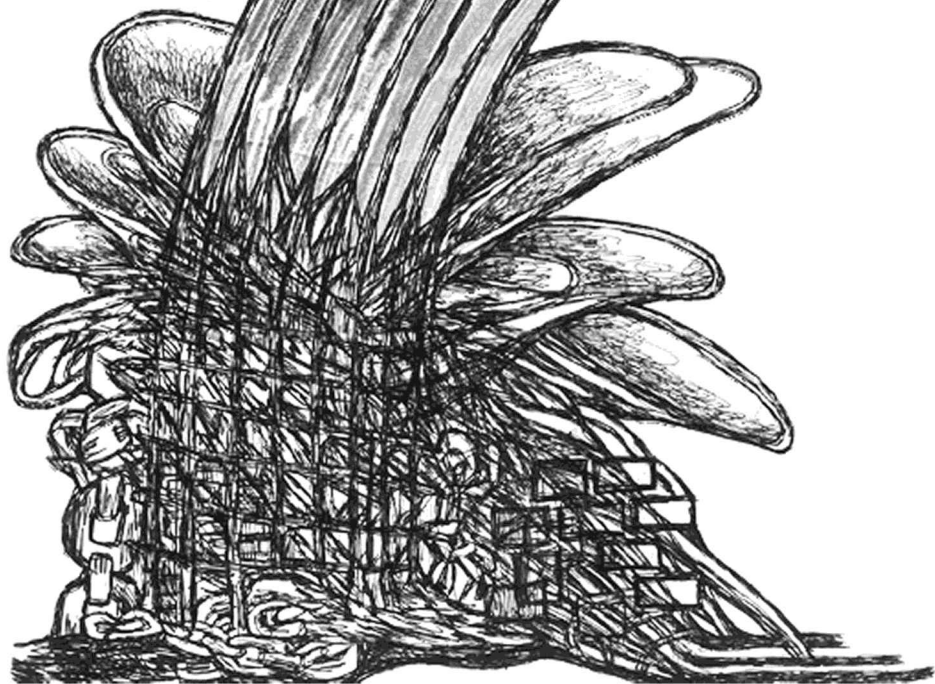
The hard knocks I sustained in life could barely do more than chipping it. But now, the reality sledgehammer of my incarceration has rendered it a shattering blow, sending it crumbling. Life used to resemble flamboyant works of art, created to be highly expressive and intended to impress. To keep up with the pace of modern materialism and the pressure of my own vanity, I began threading on the thin line that demarcates the boundaries of law and eventually to the extent of venturing beyond it. As my principles began to stretch, my conscience gave way. My misguided passion for life had then relegated to outright obsession, reducing me to nothing but a state of negativity, poised for destruction. As society shut its door on me, I could seemingly hear the hinges of the heavy prison gates creaking to life. Satan was hissing triumphantly from his fiery domain.

Mimicking an ostrich, I tried to bury myself in blissful ignorance that something untoward has happened, but to no avail. As much as, with my own undoing, I had victimised others, I was but myself a victim of theft and destruction, suffering from the “steal, kill and destroy” described in the Holy Book. But just when I thought that all was lost and further negotiations with life would be futile, something magical happened within me. In the land of supposed darkness and desolation, desperation met divinity at a receptive crevice of my heart. The two intertwined states conjured an image of serendipity, an awkward marriage between hope and despair, bitter and sweet.

Through my acceptance of a personal relationship with an omnipotent being who possess unlimited creative powers, I have rediscovered a paradise lost, a peaceful and tranquil state of mind free from guilt. I am now able to shrug off the lurking ghosts of my yesterday's err and seek solace in knowing the fact that though being a mere mortal, limited by space and time, and designed to experience the passage of time in a linear fashion, I am able to attribute my plight as a fulfillment of a divine plan, submitting to a higher will that causes all things to gravitate towards their ends.

to realise

In my search to become a better person, I have come  
that tomorrow's joy is very much a result of today's acceptance



In my search to become a better person, I have come to realise that tomorrow's joy is very much a result of today's acceptance. To recognise a fact or to live with a fact is very different from accepting the fact. I can do myself a favour simply by being comfortable with myself with my identity. It is true that having served time, many will not accept my past. Some will throw me with glances of despise, while still others, even with loathe. I should not dedicate too much of my effort trying to sway their perceptions, being confident that time will help do the explaining. After all, when the cheers subside and the stadium empties, the enduring things that are left immutable are ultimately my family, solid friendships and God's dividends for a spirit-led life.

All these years, I have been looking in the wrong directions while searching for a happy and fulfilled life. All the important things in life are actually always within my reach, always within my sight. As my day of reintegration to the society approaches, I am now ready to let my renewed insight blur and blend into my long lost freedom. It is not at all difficult. All I require is to focus near, where I can see, where I can reach.



## REFLECTIONS

Dear SACA,

Thank you for organising this essay writing competition as it has given me the opportunity to reflect and express my thoughts and feelings on a subject that is very close to my heart: my incarceration. I hope you don't mind that I am writing my essay to you in the form of a letter as it would best allow me to write what I truly feel in my heart. Besides, this would allow me to "saca" up to you and hopefully ingratiate myself to you in the hope of landing the top prize! Haha!

Jokes aside, I have been through a lot in life: a potentially debilitating illness, the death of my father and am now currently separated from my wife and daughter. But prison has stopped it all; I am a neophyte when it comes to prison.

As I sit here in the classroom of C-Wing, KBC, enjoying the cool clean crisp air and listening to the happy chirping of the birds outside whilst luxuriating in the lush greenery of the garden, my mind brings me back to the first six months of my incarceration in the former Queenstown Remand Prison. Nothing prepared me for the experience of the sights and sounds of "QRP" as we remandees would affectionately call her. I had been to QRP before my imprisonment but only as a visiting lawyer, taking instructions from my clients. I knew then that prison was a tough place and so I did my best to help my clients. Every time my clients were sentenced in Court and as they disappeared behind the door of the holding cell to be sent to prison, I would say a prayer for them and my heart would ache for them. I knew intellectually that the loss of freedom would be tough but nothing prepared me emotionally for how pervasive and traumatic it would be to be in prison.

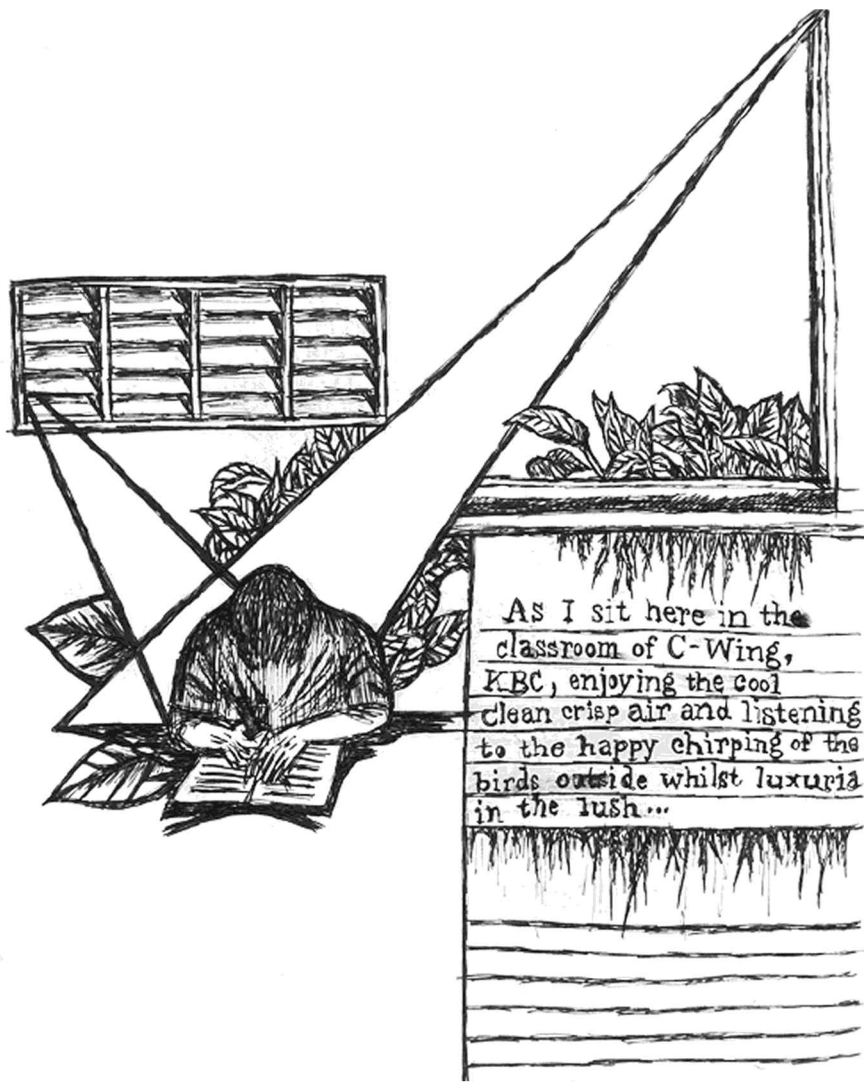
QRP was really a work of art in the genre of perpetual horror fiction. It



was anything but fiction. The constant rhythmic slamming of the iron doors by prison wardens, the high wall and the barbed wire plus the shockingly decrepit condition of the cell itself vandalised by the artistic impressions of generations of passing prisoners and the claustrophobic sensations induced by being confined with three other prisoners all quickly combined together to send me into the abyss if hell.

My feelings of despair were only compounded by my thoughts of anguish. I railed against myself for the rank stupidity of my crimes, at how in one fell swoop I had descended from the heights of being a professional lawyer to the depths of being an inmate in prison. I was crushed by thoughts of having let my loved ones down, devastated that I had somehow let them and the entire legal profession down. I can still remember the fateful day of 17th February 2009 when I said goodbye to my mother and sister, watching the desperate tears of sadness that were in their eyes as I bid them farewell and report to the CAD to be produced in Court the next day in Court to be charged. The cold air-conditioning at the police lock-up; with its windowless grilles and over-crowded with strange people from all walks of life wearing strange clothes and stranger tattoos were scenes and flashbacks that kept haunting me in the darkness of QRP. Worst of all, as a practising Christian, I felt I had let God down and disgraced Him and my fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Tears were part of my daily staple then.

As I yanked myself back from memory lane to my present bodily experience here in KBC, I am happy to report to you that my tears of despair have been replaced by tears of hope and a stubborn joy. The regime here is tough but God has shown Himself to be very real and close to me. Firstly, he alleviated the pain of QRP by sending me the love and embraces of my loved ones through their visits. The kind understanding shown by prisoners and the experience of working in KBC also helped. I had the opportunity to work with talented and decent people here who are so humble and like me in many ways. We were all bound by a common humanity; my journey thus became easier. I had the chance to experience the joy of building beautiful relationships through Bible studies, being in the yard chatting and laughing with my friends.



What kept me going through all the dark nights of soul was the love of

God that is in my heart. I had experienced the hubris and highs of being a professional lawyer. But it is the valley experience of being in prison that is breaking me and remaking me into the kind of person that God wants me to be. My mom and my sister, my church friends and their love and prayers are the oxygen of the human spirit that keeps me going. I have no doubt that the dark nights of my soul would one day break into the dawn of my redemption.

As I continue to wait on God in KBC and serve Him here, I would pray for your continuing support of ex-offenders like me. It is only with your help and the help of an understanding public that we can take that step back into society on firm foundation.

I have to go now for my visit. Thank you for caring and for reading my essay. God bless you.

Yours sincerely, Leong Wai Nam



## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

I am not a good writer nor good at telling stories. I may have told a few stories to my nephews but none can be compared to the story that I am about to share here. It is a story about the unconditional love of my grandmother. This is a story that comes right from the bottom of my heart. It may not sound interesting to you but it will definitely be something unforgettable for me.

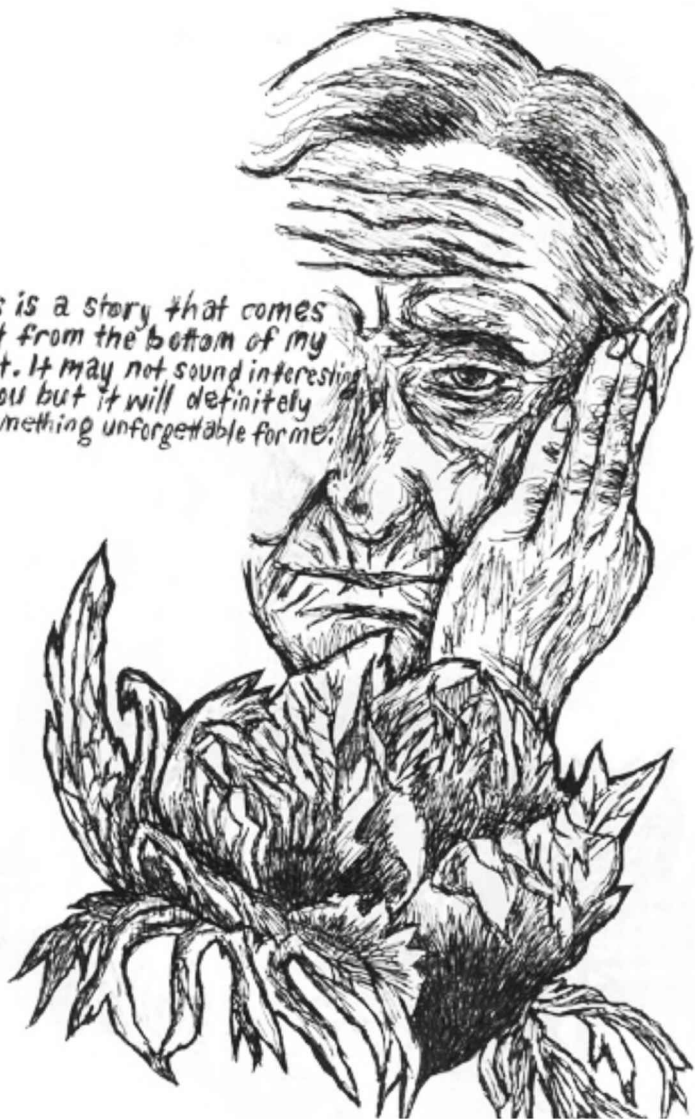
My parents got divorced when my mother was pregnant. Neither of them ever cared about what was going to happen to the baby when he was born. My dad was always going in and out of prison because of drug charges while my mother spent most of her time enjoying her social life. And in the end, when I was born, my grandmother was the one who took care of me.

I knew that deep in my grandmother's heart, she believed that I would not turn out to be like any of my parents. That was why she took me into her care and never did she complain.

When I was 16 years old, I committed my first major crime of rioting and was sent to the Reformative Training Centre for two years. I knew back then that I had disappointed her so much that she would give up on me. But to my surprise, she actually treated me better when I was released.

At first I changed, but slowly things got worse and I began to start my negative attitudes again. I got a girl pregnant and at the same time was charged for selling contraband cigarettes. I was then sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment. Even that did not stop her from loving me the way she always did. She never once failed to visit me for that whole stretch of 18 months. She also took care of my only child all the while that I was incarcerated. I really envy her strength to not lose the hopes she had put on me.

*This is a story that comes  
right from the bottom of my  
heart. It may not sound interesting  
to you but it will definitely  
be something unforgettable for me.*





Now being in the prison for the third time has made me realised something. Time is short, and we cannot let it go to waste. I am serving a seven years and six months sentence for trafficking. It is really an eye opener for me this time because after just serving one year of my ongoing sentence, two of my close relatives have actually passed away. It is really sad for me to see my loved ones come and go just like that. I keep praying to God to give me another chance for redemption. A chance to show my grandmother that she is not wrong for putting high hopes on me, a chance to make her the happiest person on earth before God take her back home to heaven, the only place she belongs.

Lastly, for my son, I will try my best to give him the unconditional love that I received from my beloved grandmother. That is a promise that I will never dare to break.



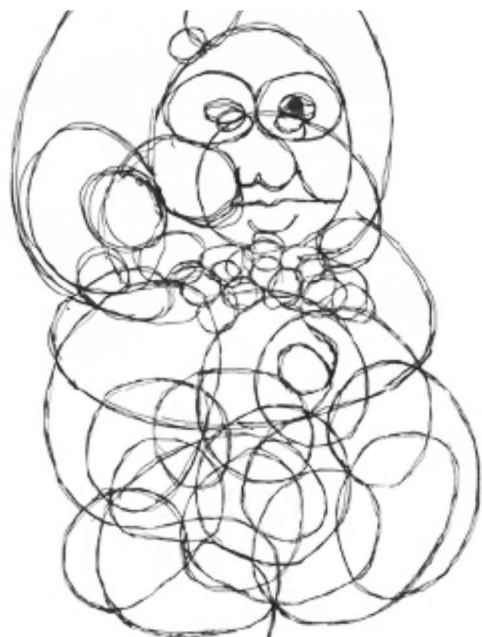
## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

This is the true story of how my mum sailed through the storms in life and managed to raise me and my sisters. My mum ran away from home at the tender age of 18. She ran away because she always got tortured by her abusive uncle whenever my grandparents were not at home. She did not have the courage to tell my grandparents about it and decided to run away instead. Thereafter, she got married to a hypocrite who is my dad. I have never seen him before, but my mum told me that he was a hopeless drug addict. He was sentenced to life imprisonment when I was only 3 months old.

My mum was left all alone and suffered to raise me and my three other sisters. We lived in a rented flat in Boon Lay. It was a non-spacious one. The five of us clammed up in the puny flat for seven years without my grandparent's knowledge. We were also isolated from all other relatives.

My mum was burdened by financial problems. She could not even afford milk powder and other basic necessities. She was also unable to get help from relatives. She worked all her available time away in a 7-11 store and was barely able to support the four of us. At times, she even had to go around asking for money from our neighbours, just to fill our stomachs. She had to juggle between work and her four young children on her own every single day. Such a demanding routine drained away all her energy but she did everything without the slightest complaint. She fell ill often too, but rather than spending money to address her own medical needs, she used them to buy us toys instead. This is how much my mum loved us.





People only treasure  
the thing when  
they have lost it





Throughout our childhood, my mum deprived herself of sufficient rest, day and night, for the benefit of her children. She even starved herself every now and then just so that there would be enough food for us. My mum literally was a woman who willingly sacrificed her very own life for the survival and welfare of her children. Some people say that all mothers love their children. I must, however, say that not all mothers are capable of doing what my mum has done for us.

Neither myself nor my sisters had the privilege of attending early childhood classes. But being aware of the importance of education, my mum set aside a sum of money via extreme frugality and perseverance. She once held four different jobs simultaneously.

Reality was indeed harsh for my mum, more so when my grandfather departed. Almost instantaneously, upon his death, all my relatives ganged up to lay the blame on my mum. They and their inherent prejudice towards her had somehow given them all the fallacy needed to condemn her when she was, in fact, not guilty of any of their ruthless accusations. When my mum attended my grandfather's funeral, she was scrutinised with contemptuous looks on my relatives' faces. They stared at her as though my mum was their greatest enemy and have detested her till this day.

During our teens, my sisters and I took up part-time jobs to help to ease the plight. Life was still tough but we endured and battled it together. Just as it got a little better, my mum was diagnosed with diabetes and had a stroke.

This must have been the consequence of my mum's negligence of her health while she was caring for us when we were young. Her condition has deteriorated since.

My mum never misses a single visit and also never fails to cry. She worries about me consciously and subconsciously. I terribly regret being a playful youngster once, and it was only during my current incarceration

that I truly regretted my past wrongdoings. People only treasure the thing when they have lost it. I miss my mum so much now that we are so far apart. Every time she expresses the fear of not being able to be there when I'm released, and starts to tear. I will calm her down, asking her to stay strong and not to worry. I would also promise her to be good and to stay out of trouble in prison and also to do my best in all my subjects. But the most important subject I have learnt, that is her unconditional love.

Some people can wait their entire life time to learn this, but I'm glad I do not. Now I can't wait to be reunited with my mum so that I too, can shower her with my unconditional love.

*I dedicate this heart felt essay to my one and only loving mum, Jayanthi. I love you.*



## IF ONLY...

“If only you had listened to me not to drink the soft drink, we wouldn’t be coming to the hospital now.” My father was sobbing while conveying this message to me. I was having an asthma attack and was sent to the hospital for treatment. I was 10 years old then and came from a poor family, so at that moment I wasn’t quite sure why my father was so upset. Was it because of the hospital bill? Or was it because I didn’t listen to him and drank the soft drink?

Time flew; I got my motorcycle license when I was 17. Told my father about this triumph news, but he did not seem pleased at all. Despite his much effort of dissuading me to own a bike, I somehow managed to buy a second-hand on my own.

A week after riding my beloved bike, I met up with a serious accident. I did not know how long I had been sleeping, but the moment I regained conscious, I found myself lying on the hospital bed with excruciating pain all over my bandaged body. And sitting beside my bed was my father crying ferociously this time while saying, “If only you had listened to me not to ride a bike, you wouldn’t be injured so badly and need to be hospitalised.” ‘Oh my, from the way my father cried and how my body was being bandaged, the hospital bill must be more expensive this time.’ I thought to myself.

Year passed, I am 30, married with a five-year old son. One day while learning how to pedal a bicycle, my five-year old fell and fractured his arm. I quickly rushed him to the hospital for treatment. Seeing his little arm being bandaged pained my heart. Caressing his fragile arm, I told him off gently, “If only you had listened to me not to cycle so fast, you wouldn’t have fallen down and hurt yourself.” Immediately after saying out this sentence, I was startled by my own words. Have I heard this sentence somewhere? Then I recalled, it was from my father.

It was because I am his flesh  
and love, so when I am in pain,  
he is hurt too.



It took me 20 long years to understand why at that point of time in hospital why my father was so upset. Definitely not the hospital bills that matter. It was because I am his flesh and love, so when I am in pain, he is hurt too. But it was too late to realise only till now as my father is no longer around.

“Father, if only I know your well intention earlier; if only I know it was because of love that you reprimanded me; if only I had been more filial to you; if only I had listened to your words; if only you are still around; if only...”



# FREEDOM

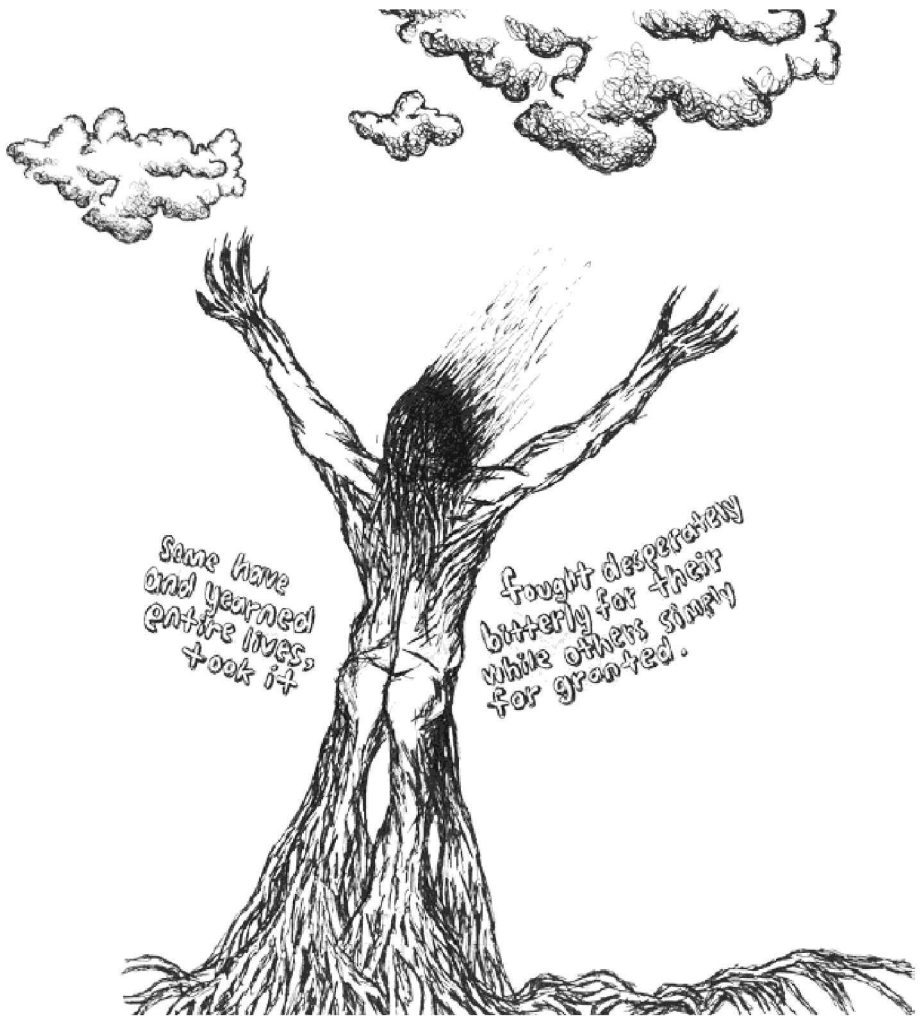
In the past, to embrace the hedonistic pleasures in life without limitations, to possess unlimited wealth and to be free from supervisions and responsibilities were my ideas of freedom. Undeniably, my understanding of freedom was quite infantile, and lately did I realise that freedom is understood in profound ways.

Man desires the freedom to perform what he wants, to fulfill what he is capable of to think, speak and believe without restrictions. However, our desire for freedom are differential and extensive, and no doubt that there would be conflict of interests. For aeons, men had fought for freedom with their sweat and blood. Some had even sacrificed their lives for the freedom of their descents, civilisations and nations.

For generations, people living in developing countries struggle to achieve freedom from poverty. These people are situated in Africa and India. They have insufficient financial means to cover their basic needs – food, health and shelter. Sadly, their entanglement in this vicious cycle is disregarded by their government, on most occasions, because they are statistically significant. For some, their extreme hunger for food has made them disregard the highest orders of humanity – morality and dignity. They scavenge and feast on leftovers, carcasses and even on animals' waste! How terrible! I could not believe that man would go to such an extent after I saw pictures of them. This made me realise that I was not contented with wealth, and even if I did; it was not well spent on food and health, which some people had died without them.

The majority view terrorism as a global threat but little did they know that one of their objectives is to achieve freedom to worship Muslim extremists. Feeling that their faith was under attack, took Quranic verses on self-defence out of context to justify aggression. The European newspapers published an offensive cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad,

which insulted and angered extremists. Radical actions were a response to unjust foreign policies pursued by the Western government. The treacherous Bali bombings and the September 11 attacks, which were their ways of retaliation, had killed thousands of innocent lives. We called it genocide and homicide but they called it jihad. Who is to be blamed? It is difficult to determine the root of the war, but what we know is that the terrorism's undying actions are apparently screams for freedom from fear, discrimination and freedom to worship. From here, I realise that our faiths are actually quite similar. We can be free from this dilemma if we comply with our most basic principle in faith: to be good to every being.



Some have  
and yearned  
entire lives,  
took it

fought desperately  
bitterly for their  
while others simply  
for granted.

Some have fought desperately and yearned bitterly for freedom for their entire lives, while others simply took it for granted. I am one of such.

Four years of my freedom have been taken away. I allowed the law to

deprive me of my needs, control my life and limit my choices. How could this have happened? Why did I allow this to happen when others honour and respect their freedom? I have to admit that it was because of arrogance, greed and self-centeredness.

Education has not managed to liberate me from the shackles and chains of prison, but it liberates me by knowing my rights, knowing the circles of life and understanding the enforcement of the legal system. I envy those who are freely living their lives. They are able to ride comfortably in their car, and enjoy the wind blowing against their hair while listening to their favourite song. They are able to indulge and taste delicious foods, whereas I am only able to drool over them in pictures. I can imagine happy families enjoying themselves at a newly open theme park, whereas my moments with my family are from behind a glass panel.

Sometimes, at night, I pray to God to speed up my time in here so that I can embrace freedom once again. I am willing to buy my way out or even promise in front of an audience that I will never fall back to crime again. I have been here long enough. It is hurtful to see my family endure my incarceration. At times, my mother's and sister's tears made me feel like smashing through those walls and grills so that I could hug and calm them down. However, that is impossible, I feel so hopeless and helpless, What can I do? Regret? Life has no room for regret. I just have to wait another year for my freedom...





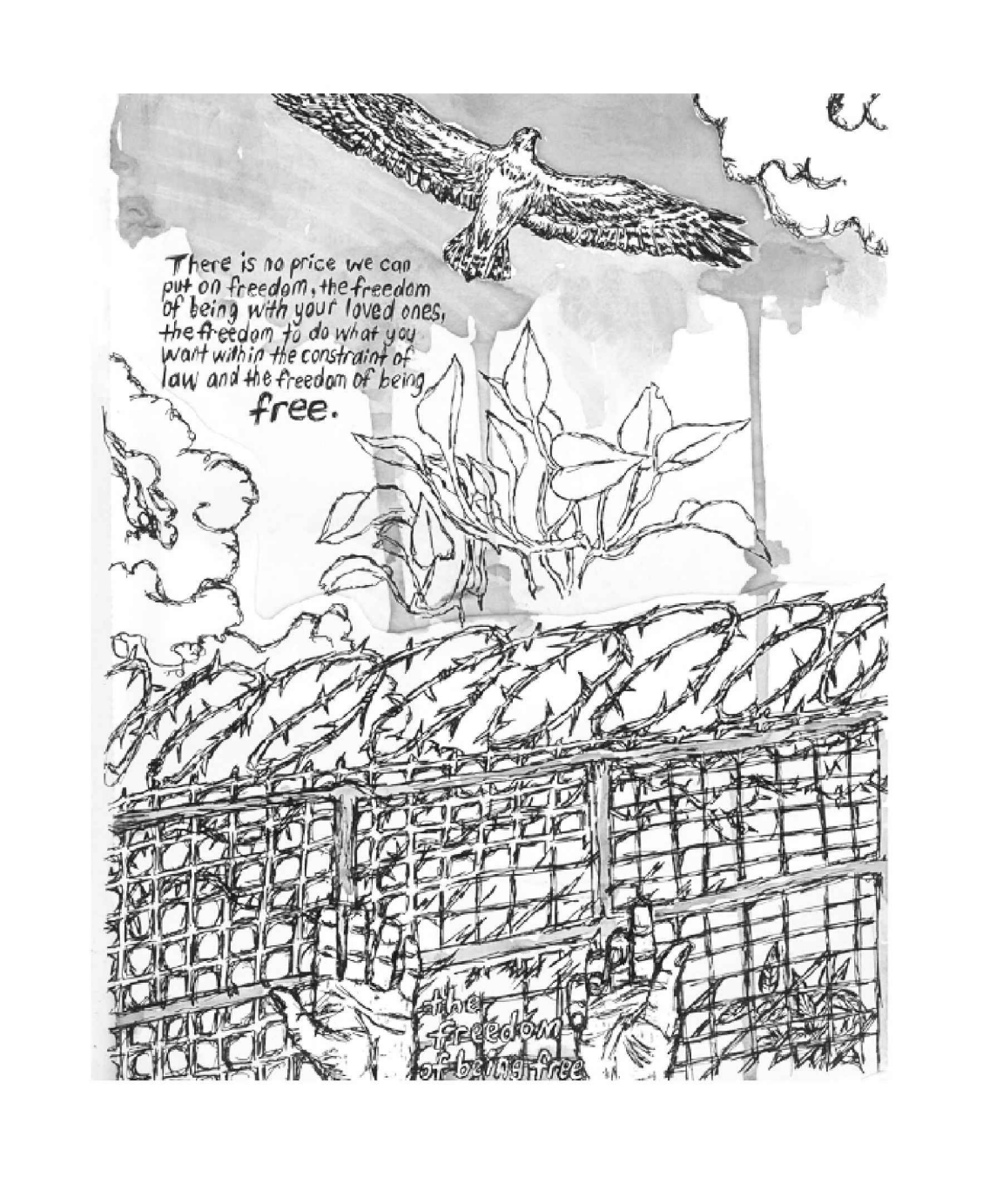
## FREEDOM

“The bail is set at \$100,000.” There I was standing at the dock when the judge made his decision. I looked at the direction of my wife, the look of shock and surprise, as there was no way we could raise that kind of amount. I was escorted out of the court, handcuffed and the next minute, I realised I was in the lock-up. Subsequently, I was sentenced to three years in prison for criminal breach of trust.

I was vice president of sales, dealing in video games for ‘PlayStation’ and ‘Nintendo’, We were the main distributors for Singapore and the Asia market. I had everything going for me, a high post in the company, family, my mum, beautiful wife and two lovely teenage daughters. It’s just that I had gone too deep into my vices, drinking, smoking, women and the worst enemy of all – “GAMBLING”. I was blinded by ignorance, enveloped in delusion and addicted to the enjoyment of sensuous pleasure. To feed my vices, I had pocketed funds from the company, which amounted to \$345,000. A stupid mistake I made which made me lose my freedom.

Life in prison was severe. I felt like an animal behind bars, caged, my will slowly crumbling because of the relentless zeal of my keepers. At times I felt completely broken. My family had to travel two hours for face-to-face visit. It pained my heart greatly looking at their tears. I prayed very very hard for inner strength. I began to have mild attacks of fear being trapped with no way out.

One morning, out of the blue, my number was called. The warden told me to pack my belongings as I would be transferred to another dormitory and I would start labour soon as a librarian. I felt a bit of relief at the thought that there would be some movement and I need not be caged up all the time.



There is no price we can  
put on freedom, the freedom  
of being with your loved ones,  
the freedom to do what you  
want within the constraint of  
law and the freedom of being  
**free.**

There  
is freedom  
in being free.

One day as I was taking my shower, I saw my reflection on the puddle of water and I said to myself, "I have to change for the better." I had requested to see the superintendent to get approval to attend counselling. With the help of the counsellors and my PS (personal supervisor), I had realised the mistake I made. It showed me a new direction and it gave me hope, that if I were to detach myself from greed, lust and desire, I would be able to gain freedom of thought and the freedom of being at peace within myself.

I was called up by a panel of officers for an interview. I was informed that I was selected for a programme "Home Tagging" for six months. I could not believe it. I just fell to my knees; I looked up and thanked the Lord. It was as if my prayers were being answered. I was going to be free again. This was an expensive learning experience for me. I had the freedom to choose to lead the life I wanted but I had taken the wrong path. I believe with the guidance of the counsellors, through prayers and meditation and with the love and support of my family, I can make a difference. There is no price we can put on freedom, the freedom of being with your love ones, the freedom to do what you want within the constraint of law and the freedom of being free.



## LETTING GO

“No food or drinks, no phone calls, no...” the escorting warder cautioned, as I braced myself to enter the Neurosurgery Intensive Care Unit ward.

My senses were immediately overwhelmed by the vision that greeted me. Gone was the affable robust ox I called father, and in his place laid a bloated pudgy husk, something akin to over soaked fish maw. A plethora of tubes stuck out various orifices, and two rods protruded from his skull. An archaic image long buried painfully surged forward. Remember the scene from the “Return of the Jedi”, where Darth Vader revealed his face before dying?

1978. Big budget epic “Star Wars” arrived on the shores of tiny Singapore. Happy family went to the movies. Daddy visited the restroom. Little boy, seven, leaned over innocently and whispered, “Mommy, Mommy, why is Pa kissing our neighbor, Auntie Betty?”

Happy family took a long drive over a short cliff.

Vengeance was swift and brutal. The next day, after Mom left for work, father vented his wrath for the betrayal. My feral scampering bore no fruit, and I couldn’t sit properly for a week. Egoistic even back then, I pretended to be a tiger whilst the other kids laughed, and called me “Little Zebra” behind my back.

Peer acceptance, branded luxuries and exuberant youth came with a price, and the liberty of employment in Dad’s company garnered insidious temptations. The annual stock check exposed my treachery, but turning 18, I avoided chastisement by escaping into the Army, where ironically I was classified a “White Horse”.

“Your father faces certain permanent disability, and is now in critical

danger due to his prolonged coma,” the doctor advised, in a voice laden with compassion.

All colours drained from the room when I heard these words, and I begged God right then for the solace of tears. I guessed his lines were busy because my eyes remained sere. Asinine prisoner in selfish agony. Starving children in Africa. No contest ya?

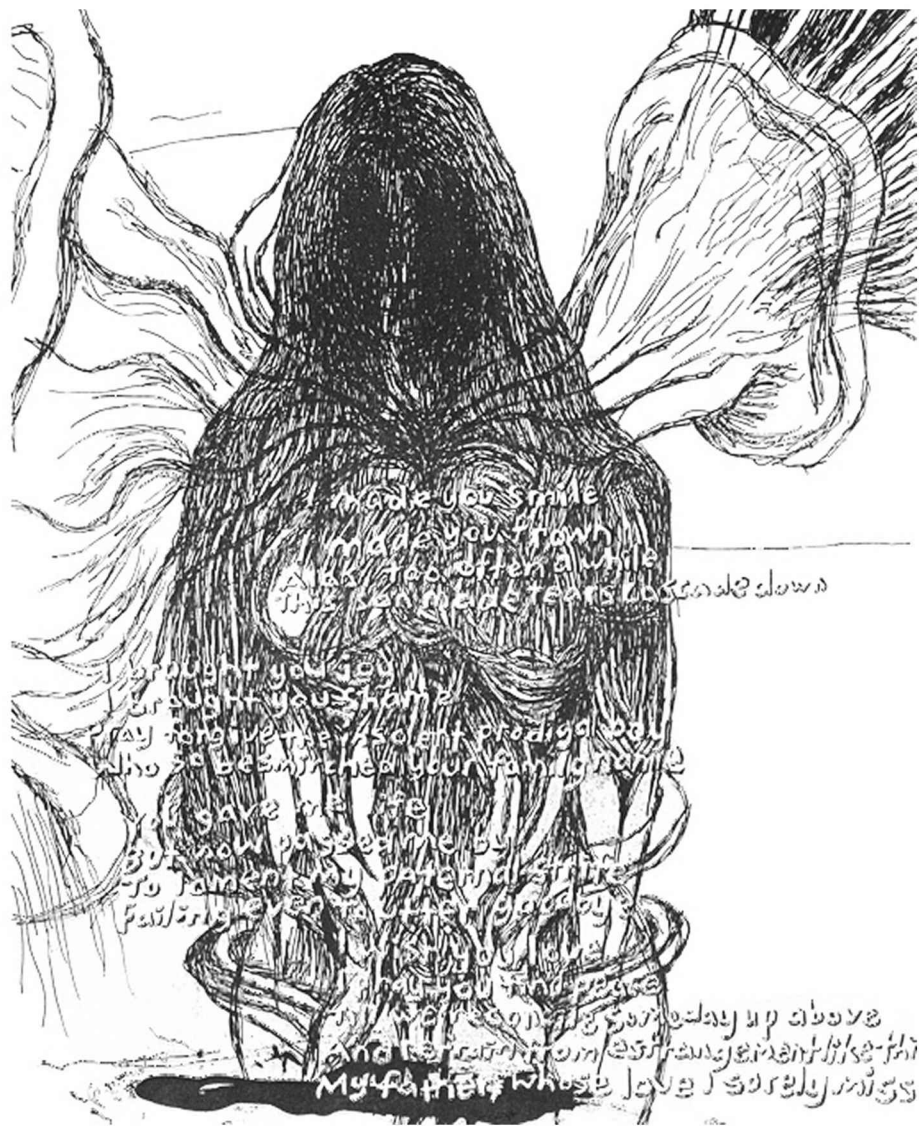
His hand twitched suddenly, and my eyes were drawn to the lighter shade of skin over his wrist. The throne where a gold Rolex used to sit, and just for once made him proud to have his son.

The Greek language has two words for time. “Chronos” the time of minutes till years, and “Kairos”, the time of opportunity, a time of grace.

My Kairos years lasted a decade, all through my 20s. At the zenith I held the title of Chief Trader, representing several international financial institutions. The very first extravagance I succumbed to was a diamond encrusted gold Rolex. The few thousand dollars I cheated from his office never left my mind, and I was dying to redeem myself. Best investment I ever made. A short while later, Dad handed me the keys to a spanking new turbo-charged European sports coupe.

Unbeknownst to Dad however, was my allergy to frugality and deplorable penchant for reckless hedonism. I commanded a stratospheric income, but my credit cards suffered a voracious appetite and were insatiable. My gluttony for pleasure led to drugs next, and the fairy tale descended to hell.

Busted for drug consumption overseas, I was ordered to undergo urine supervision and subsequently lost my Broker’s license. Taking a huge loan from daddy dearest, I ventured into trading under my personal account. Made millions for the banks, this should be a walk in the park, right? Wrong. So devastatingly wrong. So sold my house wrong. So declared bankrupt at 31 wrong.



Made you smile  
made you frown  
Always often a while  
This pen made tears blossom down

I thought you'd stay  
I thought you'd stay  
Pray forgive me, silent prodigal boy  
Who so besmirched your family name  
You gave me life  
But now pass on my  
To lament my patchwork life  
Fairly never to utter goodbye

Why you love  
And you love  
My father, whose love I sorely miss  
And I'm sorry, someday up above  
And I'm sorry, someday up above  
And I'm sorry, someday up above

It's been more than two years since we last met, and to claim we parted amicably would be a blatant prevarication. I wrote to beg for pardon some months back, but received a scorching reply, and shied away to nurse my wounded pride instead of responding.

In the letter, he ranted, "You're my son, but had the audacity to steal from me. I forgave you, but you're so ungrateful and show no concern for the family business. Broke your promises and indulged in drugs yet again. You have hurt me too much and I refuse to be bothered with you anymore."

Those were my father's last words to me.

Darn it! Why did I procrastinate so vehemently! How do I pacify his rancour, now that he can't even hear my plea?

"Last five minutes..." the warder announced, as I knelt down beside my father to offer a prayer. A prayer for the revival of his insouciant mien, his sardonic humour, his chance to hear me cry just how sorry I wretchedly was.

Father passed away a week later.

Last Month.

God heard me this time.

The Italians have a phrase, "Cavoli Riscaldati", meaning to reheat cabbage, an expression signifying the futile attempt to rekindle a failed love affair. That's not so bad, is it?

Try dialing 6 – 3 – 2 – 1 - D – E – A – D.

Remorse and regret are the strongest poison afflicting the soul, and the evanescence of life can make the struggle unbearable. Imagine swimming against the tide with the yoke of twin anchors in tow. That's what I'm going through right now. I'll never be able to explain my

mistakes, or tell him how much I really do love him, or assure him of my determination to eradicate my recalcitrance and restore his honour.

I believe that all men are created equal, but only the density of their past differs. Well, today's choice inevitably becomes tomorrow's past, so I must try to let go. To learn from this and strive to start anew. To "Carpe Diem", seize the day.

An officer suggested tattooing my angst on paper as a healing process. Will it work? Can it help? I honestly don't know, but I'm almost 40 and desperate to reform, so this essay begins my journey.

Till then, I bid thee adieu with this poem for my beloved father.

*I made you smile  
I made you frown.  
Alas, too often a while,  
This son made tears cascade down.*

*I brought you joy  
I brought you shame  
Pray forgive the insolent prodigal boy  
Who so besmirched your family name.*

*You gave me life  
But now passed me by  
To lament my paternal strife  
Failing even to utter goodbye*

*I wish you love  
I pray you find peace  
Till we reconcile someday up above  
And refrain from estrangement like this.  
My father, whose love I sorely miss.*

P.S.: When did you last tell your Dad you love him?



# ABOUT SACA



SACA

The Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) was formed in 1956 and was registered as a charity in 1984. The Association is a voluntary welfare organisation affiliated with the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). SACA is also a member of the Community Action for the Rehabilitation of Ex-offenders (CARE) Network.

SACA is a key agency providing welfare and rehabilitation services for offenders, ex-offenders and their families. The Association recognises that, upon release, the ex-offender client would face problems related to employment, stigmatisation, and acceptance by the family. It also recognises that, during a client's imprisonment, the family may be faced with several emotional and financial problems.

SACA's aim is to help clients and their families cope with problems arising from the offending behaviour and the consequent incarceration. This is done with the belief that such assistance would give them the chance to re-integrate into society successfully thereby reducing the chances of re-offending thus creating a safer society for all.

Contact us – [enquiries@saca.org.sg](mailto:enquiries@saca.org.sg)

Visit us – [www.saca.org.sg](http://www.saca.org.sg)

# ABOUT DADS FOR LIFE



Dads for Life is a national movement to inspire and involve fathers to be good influencers in their children's lives for life. The movement is strongly anchored in research that highlights the distinct benefits of paternal involvement on child development in terms of improved cognitive, socio-emotional, psychological and academic outcomes. Active paternal involvement is also linked to better couple relationships among parents, lower levels of maternal stress, and positive changes in fathers' self-identity, all of which suggest overall benefits for the family.

The movement encourages fathers to A.C.T.:

- Be Aware of the importance of their roles as husbands and fathers.
- Commit to become good fathers and role models to their children.
- Spend Time to acquire Tools and bring Transformation to lives.

Dads for Life is an initiative of the National Family Council, and is supported by the Fathers Action Network (FAN).

# ABOUT THE PATATAS



The Patatas is the social change arm of Potato Productions, and plays a key role in fulfilling the Potato Group's commitment to community improvement, we complement on-the-ground social sector work, helping committed individuals/ organisations to do what they do better. Much as we are currently not-for-profit, we aim to become a social business. The Patatas are 1) enablers who provide funding, design, tech and mobile support; 2) free agents filling the gap in your project to do good or prevent evil 3) connectors who help the social sector to help itself, we are happy to collaborate in worthy causes around the globe.

Our current staple project bridges creatives with NGOs, through unconferences and dinners that promote small but cumulative action. Join the movement at [www.wedesignchange.com](http://www.wedesignchange.com).

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

SACA would like to take this opportunity to thank the following for their support, generosity and faith in bringing fruition to this very meaningful project:

1. Lee Foundation Singapore
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4. The Dads-for-Life Secretariat, MCYS
5. The Patatas
6. The essay writers