

“The Next Picture”

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Every one of us walks through life with many memories. As we look back, these memories come in the form of images, with different colors or shades of gray. There are the brighter and colourful ones that appeal to us most. There are the dull and gray ones that we shun. I recalled from a show I have seen, that for a person to pass through life and go on with a smile, he needs nice pictures.

We think that our mind is ours to control. This is not always the case. Some pictures, whether good or bad, will remain with us. Those who disagreed have chosen to ignore the bad memories. Yet these unpleasant pictures are important markers in our life, and they will persist. So when my life crumbled suddenly one day, as I lay all alone in an isolation ward at the Tan Tock Seng Hospital, I realised that this is going to be a significant episode in my life, and that I will remember it in vivid pictures in my memory.

Saturday July 12th, I woke up abruptly with my head splitting. I sat for awhile with my head throbbing from the pain. Suddenly a nauseous feeling overcame me and the next thing I knew; my dinner had arisen from my stomach to lay before me like mixed food straight from the blender. I had tried to overcome the illness that had taken control. But every time I tried, I failed. This was not right; I had already see the doctor on Thursday, July 10. On July 11th I had also returned to the same doctor as my fever had not subsided but remained at a burning 40°C. In fact, I was given an injection and had my blood taken for examination. But yet it persisted. Soon, I was referred to Tan Tock Seng Hospital as my fever had persisted.

On Sunday, at 1.30am, the doctor told me that I would have to be admitted for further examination and that I would be in an isolation room because of my high fever.

The gloomy day outside and the condition of the room affected my mood. Anxious and frustrated with an unsure outcome, my mood worsened. I was frightened of getting SARS and the thought of dengue fever was by no means anymore comforting. What was wrong? I’m not an evil person.... why was I made to suffer this? Thoughts like this kept running through my head. I kept praying.... I had never prayed so hard in my life.

My temperature was taken again and again but showed no signs of subsiding. I was given another injection to bring the fever down. I was really worn out by then but I still could not sleep. The one consolation I had was that I no longer felt nauseous. My condition persisted until Monday morning, when my fever slowly subsided. I was also told that my tests confirmed that I was not suffering from SARS or dengue fever but just some kind of virus infection. The good news had eased my tension. I was much relieved. I was removed from my drip. It was a tremendous relief and joy for me when I was offered my 1st cup of hot Milo after a few days without food! I felt very re-assured, as the nurses were all very attentive. Even when I was no longer having a fever, they continued to monitor my temperature. By Tuesday, I was discharged in the afternoon.

We have many vivid pictures in our life journey. This is one of the gray pictures in my life that will stay with me. It has revealed to me that life can be fragile. The picture has also given me a fresh and positive outlook in life. Like many of those who have gone through the agony of suffering from SARS, or are suspected of it, I learned to value my moments in life more, and to care more for my family, friends, colleagues and all around me. I learned to approach life with courage. No matter how bad things can get, I am convinced that it can turn out right in the end. My illness, the isolation and treatment at the hospital, is an excellent awakening of myself. Everyone of us will come across a major event in our life journey. I have learnt to persevere in life, and I urge you, the reader, to have the courage and positive outlook like me. Well, life moves on and I am going to paint the next picture....

“To the questions of your life, you are the only answer. To the problems, you are the only solution.”

- Jo Coudert

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