

## A gero-counsellor's experience: Helping Mdm M to grow

As a professional caregiver, it is always both a humbling and delightful experience working with the elderly and their extended family members. I enter into each working relationship in awe and trepidation. Why? You may ask.

I am in awe of the tenacity of the elderly to have lived so long and their relentless battle to survive, some even from World War II! Some of us in the current generation have meltdowns from queuing and not getting our favorite Hello Kitty. Too cold! Too hot! Too long a wait! Not enough! When we are denied of the things we love or we are put into a situation which we don't like, we justify away, getting into a hissy rage, distracting ourselves from our original intent of creating a happy life for ourselves and others. How would we think about ourselves when we are old?

I recall fondly Mdm. M who came to me all battered from the vicissitudes of life. She is a survivor of World War II. 'I've never held a pen!' she literally blew me away in her loud booming Hokkien. In a quiet sadness she shared, she was the sort only to hold brooms. Her retirement, stroke and accompanying disappointment with her children's nonchalance ... broke her.



Mdm. M is petite and well-groomed with beautifully drawn eyebrows with a slight kink in an all too white foundation. Throughout her life she held jobs washing and cleaning up after people. She is a GI Joe in a neat little Asian package. Her feisty spirit endured the physical hardships she had to bear working and bringing up children as a single parent, alongside the emotional toil of shame of a freewheeling husband. She did it to the best of her ability and responsibility as a mother.



Trepidation hints to you a bit of my own nervousness: 'What if I cannot be of any assistance to her given the complexity of her predicament?' However, she was also joy manifested. This was enough to continue the journey together.

Intimidations and sarcasms belted out fast and furious, she was a guru at them. She threw shade at me and my colleagues. That was how she protected herself, the only way she knew how to survive. We persevered through many sessions of choked up and pent up emotions. Self-blame, doubt, betrayal, guilt, anger and rage eventually transmuted and transformed released into the eternity of time.

Forgiveness, patience, humor, acceptance, wit, kindness, love and much more, she rekindled and authentically connected with all these precious qualities within her. Mdm. M was amazed that there was another way of thinking and perceiving about the past. She could not change the past but she could change the way she felt and thought about it, thereby releasing the shackles of unfairness and bondage of injustice. She reclaimed her



power by getting in touch with her vulnerabilities (this was also the same source where her love flowed).

The counselling sessions brought greater stability and clarity for Mdm. M. She began to see possibilities for herself and for those around her. Taking one step at a time, she began to communicate her needs in a way that could resonate better with her family members and those around her. It touched my heart to see her opening up and thriving, as if she was reborn. Ha! Now I can go in peace.



A couple of years have since passed. Recently, she was reported somewhere in Chinatown, having a nice cuppa with her friends, no doubt in her booming Hokkien no less.

Here in Tsao Foundation, we say, Longevity is Opportunity!

Gladys So

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