

The Christian Family and Social Movement

**CFSM**  
**Singapore**

**2 Highland Road,**

**#03-12**

**Singapore 549102**

Visit our website: [www.c fsm.org.sg](http://www.c fsm.org.sg)

**March 2008**

## **Journey's End**

During the months of January and February, my wife and I spent many hours beside sick beds, and driving between hospitals visiting and tending to my mother, and her mother.

My mother-in-law was the Family Matriarch. Every one of her 8 children their spouses, and 16 grown grand children (youngest is 14) respected and loved her. Her 8 great grand children are too young. For the last 20 years or so, her wishes (few and far between) were our commands. Her sons and daughters takes her out to Church, to meals, and monthly for her only indulgence – for her hair to be done.

No, she is not in control of the family finances. She never did. In fact, through her life of more than 90 years she had nothing to her name. She earned her position of honour by virtue of the way she led her life - simply, and with single minded devotion to her family. In her later years her grand children would ask her to pray for them during their examinations, etc. When we travel for business, for studies, or on holidays we knew that she prayed for our safety and waited for our return.

Her legs betrayed her first. She had aches in her knees, which we believe developed into excruciating pain. We say "we believe" because she never complained. Medical science could do little for joints so badly worn out. She just asked for pain killers, walked less, and rested more. She refused to use a wheelchair. A granddaughter who is a medical doctor sent her one a few years ago. She just said "no", and firmly returned it.

About half a year ago on account of failing health and mental faculties we took her to Changi Hospital for a series of tests. In the Medical complex, moving between the clinics and the labs she discovered the relief and the freedom of using a wheelchair. Still she refused to let her children "waste money" and buy one for her use. She opted to endure the agony a few steps between places to rest. She would however use one if we were to tell her that it was provided by the establishment, eg. in IKEA Store, where we discovered we could take her to lunch and a spot of sightseeing-shopping.

Being her favourite son-in-law I guessed that I have to be the one to risk her displeasure by purchasing one for her. We took her to the Subordinate Courts to watch one of her grandchildren in session as a District Judge. We put her on the new wheel chair which appeared out of the boot of my car. Later, when we went to the nearby People Park Food Centre for lunch she asked if we were allowed to take the Court's wheelchair to the Food Centre. Only then we told her that it belongs to us.

That was about the last "outing" which she had requested for and thoroughly enjoyed. A few months after that, it was steeply downhill, all the way.

She went into a coma weeks ago, against her doctors' advice her children decided to "tube feed" her. Now another month has passed and she is still in coma.

My mother is in her mid eighties. A month ago she could still walk the 200 meters, accompanied but unassisted, twice a day, to the neighbourhood park for her "exercise". After she lost her hearing some 5 years ago she found hearing aids a hassle, she became much less communicative. About 6 months ago she became incontinent, and her "age-onset dementia" accelerated. She was also diagnosed to have less than 50% of her renal functions intact. Recently she could not even recognise me. Then she had a chest infection which aggravated a heart attack. She was rushed to hospital and spent 10 days recovering. Within 24 hours of being discharged she was back again, in the Emergency Ward, gasping for breath and suffered another heart attack. Having discussed this issue earlier with my siblings, I instructed the doctors that if her heart should stop she should be allowed to go to the "Western Sky".

She recovered, they discharged her from hospital again. We took her home and nurse her, but her quality of life dropped to subsistence levels, sleeping and eating. 8 days later, she was again gasping for breath, turning blue, and was re-admitted into hospital.

The young doctor on duty in the High Dependency Unit show his displeasure when I repeated the family's wish that we do not want intrusive and invasive treatment for her, but asked the hospital only to medicate her, for her own body to fight back the infections if she can, to nurse her and make her comfortable. If her body cannot cope, and if her heart should stop – they are to let her go.

When friends asked me about the two of them I told them the obvious truth - that "it is not likely that they will get better."

It is rather surprising that as Christians, who professed to believe in Heaven, many of us are quite unwilling to let our loved ones go to their rewards. We feel the need to prolong the life of those we love by all and any means. Some would say that we lack the courage, at the right time to say firmly, "no more medical intervention. Let them go to God".

The decision is not easy. Where do we draw the line? When do we say that we want to cure a person, and when do we accept that cure and recovery is not possible and a person should be helped to prepare themselves to meet their maker? Age is one factor for consideration. The older the person the easier it is to make the decision. "Money is not a problem" I have heard someone say with bravado, about the next medical procedure for an aged very sick person, - as if that is the only or main consideration.

If the aged sick are mentally conscious, we have to help them in the painful, heart-breaking task of accepting and prepare for death.

However, if they are in coma, like my MIL, or suffering from advanced dementia and failure of multiple organs - like my mother, then the next of kin must have the courage to make the decisions that are best for the sick person. In a way, this is easy, as the sick is oblivious to the circumstances and do not have to confront her imminent demise.

The decision lies with the living. We have to pray asking God for the wisdom to know what we can do, and what should not do, and, when the time comes, we ask for faith, to let our loved ones go comfortably and peacefully to their reward in heaven. We must accept "Sister Death" as a reality in our lives. It is not a *taboo* subject for family discussions. We also have to teach our children about death in the family.

.....article by .....mark

Praise to you my Lord,

Through those who grant pardon for love of You

And bear sickness and trial.

Blessed are those who endured in peace, By You Most High they will be crowned.

Praise be you my Lord, through Sister Death, From whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin, Blessed are they she finds doing Your will,

No second death can do them harm.

- An extract from

Canticle of the Creatures

By Francis of Assisi