

Well done, Janice

Tat-Ying Wong, MD

In the July 15 issue of CMAJ (1997;157:172-4), Dr. Tat-Ying Wong described his infant daughter's battle with end-stage cardiomyopathy and his family's desperate search for a donor heart. Janice Wong eventually received a heart transplant, but died of respiratory infection about 3 weeks later, on June 17. In this brief article, her father explains why her death was not in vain.

Good-bye Janice. This is so hard to say because you were only here for 15 short months, but we feel that you bonded with us for a lifetime. During the 9 months you were waiting desperately for a new heart, we prepared for the possibility of death. It is ironic that when death finally did come it was unexpected. You had been so ill for so long that we thought you would pull through once more, but God had a different plan.

Although you had a short life, it was full. The measure of any life is not found in its length but in the way it is lived. You lived yours courageously and richly, even though a lifetime of suffering, pain and love was compressed into 15 months. Amidst pain, you persevered. Faced with despair, you never gave up. Battle after battle, you fought on.

First you stayed alive with a heart that was squeezing hardly any blood into your tiny body, and then you fought frequent infections. We tried hard to keep your spirits up while your body wasted away. We watched in agony as your life ebbed away. Faced with desperation and helplessness, we were determined to love you and stand by you to the end. God sustained you and strengthened us as we prayed.

Then the miracle happened. After waiting a record 9 months in the hospital, you received an unmatched heart because of the generosity of a donor family.

The change that followed was remarkable. You recovered after the operation and started breathing on your own. You started eating and putting on some weight. You fought rejection of your new heart and potential infections.

You died just as we prepared to welcome you home. On the day you died you were coughing and irritable, like the old days when you were struggling to stay alive. Then you went into respiratory arrest.

We all came to say good-bye that night, more for our sake than yours. You looked calm and at peace. Although we miss you so much, we are in a way glad that your ordeal is over. Well done, Janice.

Janice, we are so proud of you. From your smile we could tell that you knew you were loved — you attracted people to you with your bright smile. You touched the hearts of those who cared for you very deeply and you radiated a beauty that had been crystallized through suffering. Cuddled on our shoulders, you seemed to soak everything in as we walked the same hospital hallways for the thousandth time.

You also delivered a message about the need for organ donors, potentially saving many lives. We hope Canadians were listening.

Janice, you have taught us so much about love, about life, about faith, about suffering, about hope, about dying, and about death. Because of you, we will never be the same.

Good-bye, Janice. Until we meet again.

Love always, Dad and Mom, June 18, 1997. †



Experience

Expérience

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