

Dear Team

Dee, a 7 year old closed his eyes for a good 15 seconds or more after blowing out the candles on his birthday cake. Having just returned from surgery where he was fitted with a pace-maker, he needed to take more than one deep breath to honour the ritual. With eyes closed, he made a fervent wish which we guess is something to do with always having his family by his side.

About 2 months ago, Dee had to be admitted into a hospital after a visit to the doctor for noticeable weight loss. The doctor discovered an irregular heartbeat and told the family that the condition was serious and they had to act immediately. Recovering from the surgery was a slow process which had Dee remaining in hospital for more than a month. As his parents had to care for his siblings, they could only visit him briefly daily. It was a difficult routine for the family and the stress took its toll on Dee's mother who suffered a relapse of a chronic mental health condition that resulted in her being hospitalised as well.

When mom did not visit, Dee did not eat well and of course that did not help his recovery. He consoled himself by drawing pictures of his family. Every picture included himself, his parents and his 4 siblings with big smiles on their faces. It was no small blessing that Dee continued to draw strength from his family.

Last Monday, we had the privilege of sharing the joy and gratitude of Dee's father when we learnt that his wife was discharged in the morning. The surprise birthday party in the evening doubled up as a homecoming party for mom too. It was a modest affair with an ice-cream cake and a few balloons at our office porch but not for Dee who had his mother's arms around him as he sat on her lap making his fervent birthday wish.

Every time we share a story, there is a part of us that hopes to end it with "and they lived happily ever after." Perhaps, we can if we accept that life is filled with ups and downs and like Dee, regard the family as a resource rather than a reason for children's problems. Living "happily ever after" is not the absence of problems but the presence of courage, resilience and support to overcome them.

Dee's mother will continue to face many challenges as she endeavours to be a good parent. We need to be mindful that supporting her is enabling her to experience success as a parent rather than simply relieving her of all parenting duties. I am sure Dee will agree.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

*To strengthen the muscles of your heart, the best exercise is lifting someone else's spirit whenever you can." - Dodinsky*