

News

'He didn't want to give up'

But former drug addict's determination gives way to helplessness one to two weeks before his death



GOODBYE:

(Left) Mr Mahmood Salleh's body being carried to a van, to be taken to the burial ground.

(Below) He shared his story about a drug-ridden life in a book.

TNP PICTURES:
CHOO CHWEE HUA,
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IT WAS a life of regrets and guilt.

When the cancer from his lungs spread to his brain, the former drug addict was told he had only months to live. To warn others to avoid making his mistakes, he shared the story about his drug-ridden life in a book.

Last Tuesday, Mr Mahmood Salleh, 53, died but only after he had hung on long enough to see the book published.

Mr Mahmood had been a smoker for 40 years and a drug addict for 36 years. It ruined his marriage, and his daughter and former wife became strangers to him.

He was given a shot at redemption when the idea for the book was made. He had just a couple of months to live, so a group of volunteers raced against time to put his story together.

The 36-page photo diary titled *What's Left Of Me - A Former Addict's Pilgrimage To Forgiveness In His Final Days* was published in January.

He told *The New Paper* at the time: "I hope youngsters will read the book and realise how dangerous drugs can be. And for those who are taking drugs, I hope they will realise the danger and give up."

It is a touching tale of how a man who lived a lifetime hooked on drugs finally realises his mistakes and wants to make things right.

Only limited copies were printed due to the high cost of production and the print copies were for his close family members, friends, social workers and volunteers. But there's an online version of the book on HCA Hospice Care's website at www.hca.org.sg

There were initially fears that he might not live long enough to see it published, but he managed to do so and survived almost a year beyond the couple of months he was initially predicted to live.

He was then living with his father, Mr Haji Salleh Mohamad, 77, in a four-room HDB flat at Teck Whye.

But when his sister, Madam Junaidah Salleh, 44, found out that he was back in bad company late last year, she took him to live with her and her family in April.

'He had changed a lot'

Madam Junaidah said: "He changed a lot after he came over to live with me. He stayed clean (from drugs)."

But his condition worsened over time.

During Hari Raya this year, Madam Junaidah managed to take him to visit the homes of three relatives over three days. But he became unconscious on the third day, and she had to call the palliative care nurse from HCA Hospice Care, Ms Amy Lim Sock Hui, 47, who was caring for him.

Madam Junaidah said: "I had to take Amy to my place at about midnight.

"His sugar level was very low. We made very sweet Milo for him and fed him using a spoon, even



though he wasn't responding. Amy then injected him with medicine and he woke up, asking why Amy had come over so early in the morning."

Madam Junaidah was then told that he might not last till his next birthday on Oct 11.

When he could no longer walk, he still insisted on going to the toilet by himself on a wheelchair.

Said Madam Junaidah: "He had very strong will-power. He didn't want to give up."

But one to two weeks before his death, that determination gave way to helplessness. Three days before his death, he kept repeating that he wanted to "go already". By then, he had very bad constipation and once he held onto his bed and cried.

Madam Junaidah said: "I told him, now there's no one who can help you. It is now between you and God. You have to ask God to forgive all your sins and you pray."

He did. But another problem cropped up the night before he died.

She said: "He choked when he drank water. When I saw that, I knew it was time because I looked after my late mother who also died of cancer."

Their mother died on Dec 4, 2011, in the same room in which Mr Mahmood died.

She notified all their siblings, who came over to her flat promptly.

She said: "While I was reading out (holy verses) to him, I saw one shiny little tear forming at the corner of his eye. I dabbed it with a piece of tissue paper.

"Then, I saw him heave a huge breath, he looked at me and then he was gone."

At his funeral last Wednesday, his father broke down when it was time to say his last goodbye.

Mr Mahmood was buried at the Choa Chu Kang Muslim Cemetery.

Although he had managed to reconcile with his 10 siblings, the divorcé never did so with his only child, whom he had not seen since she was about two years old.

His daughter, in her late 20s now, is married with two kids. She and her mother weren't at the funeral.

To Ms Lim, Mr Mahmood will be remembered.

She said: "I'll miss him. But it was good for him - he's struggled for too long."