

Dr. Guardian Angel



Inspired by a true story about living and leaving with dignity.

Life
Books





Hi, my name is Zach and I'm 20 years old. And if you're reading this, it means I most likely lost my battle to cancer.

Lost. I don't know why people say lost. I wouldn't use that word to describe my journey with cancer. The last few months were magical, I gained so much more than I lost.

I learnt to live.

Many people call my story a tragedy.
But I don't think so.

When I was 3 years old, a fortune teller
told my parents that I was a jinx.

And that was the last time I was allowed
to call them mom and dad.



Despite all the drama, I've lived a fruitful life. My Uncle James put a roof over my head, fed me, and taught me how to approach girls.

He didn't always impart the right strategy, but I had a few sweet romances and I made a lot of friends along the way who became like family.

It was all good until it got harder to breathe, literally.





I will never forget the day
I found out about my cancer.

Just like every other 20-something Singaporean boy, it was my time to serve my country. I was really excited. I couldn't wait to make more memories and friends. I was always the first to wake up and get dressed for every activity. But one morning, I woke up with a sharp pain in my chest. It wasn't very painful but it was an annoying lingering sensation, although I didn't think anything of it.

The next thing I knew, there were tubes sticking out of my nose — it was lung cancer, stage 4.



I did not see that coming.

Uncle James converted my room into the most comfortable place in the world. He wanted to make sure that I had everything I needed. So, he got me a Play Station 4 with the latest games and introduced me to something called palliative care.

Uncle James said that palliative care was supposed to help me live. But at that time, I almost thought that it was to help me die.

That's when I met Dr. Jane.

She was about my age, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. She was the sweetest person in the world. She was my palliative care doctor and she made sure that I stayed positive. She made it seem easy because she always wore a smile on her face.



I think she had a soft spot for me. I don't blame her, I'm quite loveable. I told her about my life and I could see that she tried her best to hold back her tears when she listened to my stories. She never said it but I knew that she really cared for me. She was my strength and no matter how tough the day was, Dr. Jane and her team always reminded me that tomorrow was a new day.

They weren't just there to treat me. They were there to support me. There was so much uncertainty in the air but Dr. Jane and her team kept me strong. I was sceptical at first, I didn't realise how much palliative care would help me physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.



And then my cancer started to show. I lost a lot of weight and food stopped tasting good. A cancer specialist told me about a type of drug that might do the trick but said that it might come with drastic side effects.



I told Dr. Jane about it and she asked me if I wanted to try it. And without hesitation, I said, “yes!!!” The next few weeks weren’t easy, but Dr. Jane helped me get through it — the palliative care team helped my pain go away. I don’t think I would have been able to keep my head up if it wasn’t for their constant love and encouragement.



It's been two weeks since I started on the new drug but I've just become more and more breathless. Dr. Jane sat beside me with the cancer specialist and told me that they had both good news and bad news.

Good news, the tumours have disappeared. Bad news, I was the 1% that was affected by the side effects of the drug – my lungs were slowly shutting down.

The first thing that came to my mind was, "Oh dear, how am I going to maintain my high score on Final Fantasy?"





I told Dr. Jane about my biggest regrets. I told her that I regret not being able to take my crush on a date, travel the world, and be a good son and take care of my parents.

Dr. Jane just smiled and said that she'll be back tomorrow.

She came back to my house very early the next day. She brought a pen, paper, and an envelope. She told me that she'll help me send a letter to my parents.

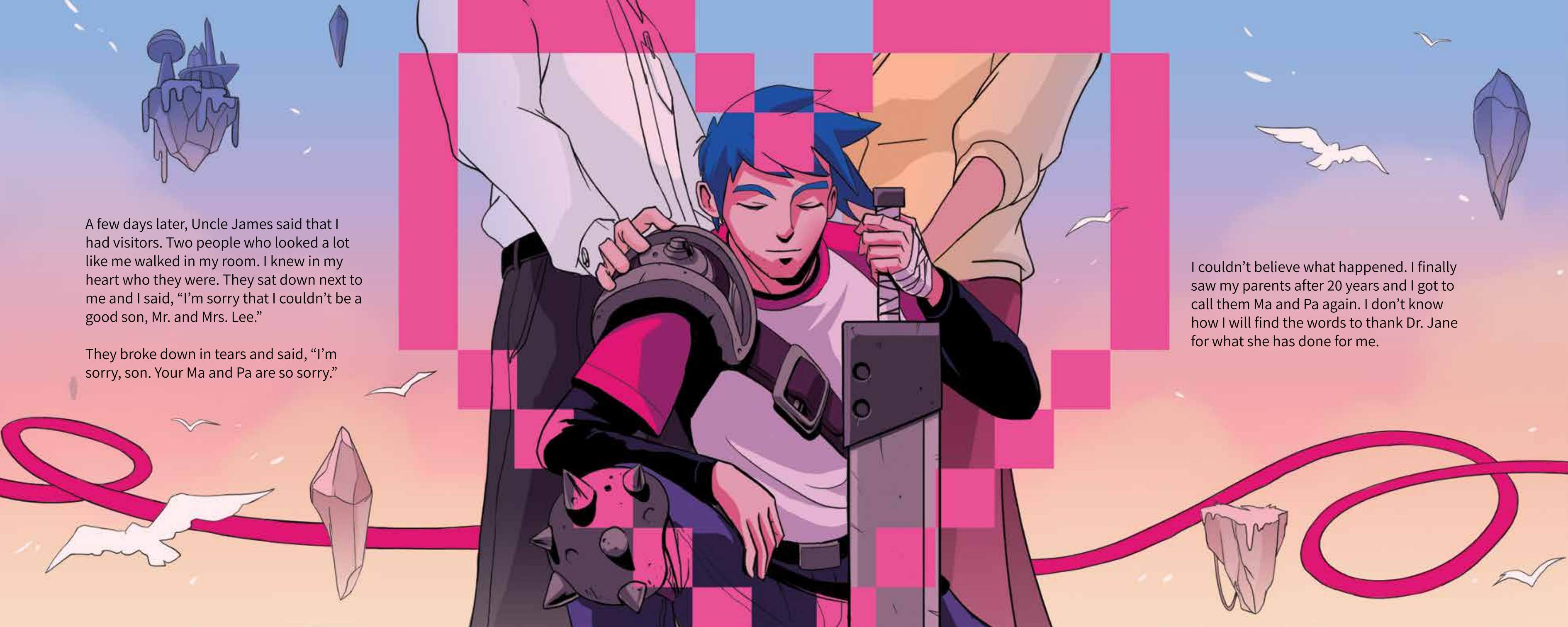
At first, I thought that it was a bad idea, but then, I had nothing to lose. Poor Dr. Jane, she had to help me write pages and pages and pages. I had so much to say but struggled to find the words. Once I was done, she put it in an envelope and said that she'll deliver it to them for me.



A few days later, Uncle James said that I had visitors. Two people who looked a lot like me walked in my room. I knew in my heart who they were. They sat down next to me and I said, "I'm sorry that I couldn't be a good son, Mr. and Mrs. Lee."

They broke down in tears and said, "I'm sorry, son. Your Ma and Pa are so sorry."

I couldn't believe what happened. I finally saw my parents after 20 years and I got to call them Ma and Pa again. I don't know how I will find the words to thank Dr. Jane for what she has done for me.





DR. JANE



Hi, I'm Dr. Jane.

Zach asked me to help him finish this book. Unfortunately, he passed away on 5 June at 3am, six months after his diagnosis.

I will never forget Zach. Even until the end, he made sure that he left us all in smiles. He put everyone else before him and his positivity was so contagious.

He wanted me to tell Uncle James, his family, friends, and the hospice volunteers to, "Try to stay happy. There will be cloudy days, but the sun will still come out. Just like the days I had here with all of you. Thank you for adding life into my last few breaths. I have gained more than I have lost."

Why palliative care?

Just like Dr. Jane and her team, palliative care is provided by a multidisciplinary team consisting of doctors, nurses, social workers, counsellors, and trained volunteers. They bring comfort and support to patients and their family members by caring for them physically, emotionally, psychologically, socially and spiritually.

Patients choose palliative care to focus on their quality of life in the time that they still have. It is not to give up living. Palliative care services are available as home care, day care, inpatient care and consultative services.

If we are to spend our final days with dignity and the least possible pain, we must plan ahead and make our decisions known when we are able to with sound body and mind.



About Singapore Hospice Council

Established in 1995, Singapore Hospice Council (SHC) is a registered charity and an Institution of a Public Character (IPC). We are an umbrella body representing organisations that actively provide hospice and palliative care in Singapore.

SHC is committed to improving the lives of patients with serious life-limiting illnesses and to giving support to the loved ones of these patients.



The e-copy of the book can be downloaded at library.singaporehospice.org.sg

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A stylized illustration of a sunset or sunrise over a body of water. The sky is a gradient of pink and purple, with large, soft white clouds. The water is a deep blue, reflecting the colors of the sky. A pinkish-red shoreline curves along the bottom of the frame. Several grey rocks are scattered in the water and along the shore. Small, glowing yellow circles are floating in the water, resembling fireflies or distant lights. The text 'life Books' is written in a white, handwritten-style font in the center of the image.

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