



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Jerome: he planned his life after death

I'm not too fond of funerals and memorials, not that I believe many people are. But at times, 'you got to do what you got to do'. In fact, that is what I did last Saturday. I was invited to Jerome Frendo's memorial, a year since his passing. It would have been a terrible miss had I decided not to go.

I got to know the family of Jerome as he was a student reading a BA (Hons.) in Social Wellbeing Studies with the Faculty for Social Wellbeing. Through the support he got from Dr Ruth Falzon, the coordinator of the course and all her team, Jerome was able to enjoy the first year of his studies. Unfortunately, he passed away prematurely, way too early. I am sure the family feel that they were taken away from their purpose in life. The life of the Frendo's was expected to be like that of every other family. They were focused on raising their children in the grace of the values they believe in. They were engrossed on accompanying their children to what they would be called for. They were just intent on growing old together. Let's face it, not much to ask for, a simple life.

But swiftly and unexpectedly their whole life was derailed. Kenneth often speaks about this atrocious pain that cannot go away since the departing of Jerome. It is a throbbing stuck to his heart, pressing on every nerve he has. It is an itch that grows, knowing well-enough that he and his wife and other son will never find solace until they meet him again. He knows that Jerome will not turn up in flesh and blood and yet he speaks about a constant presence. Kenneth feels he is with him all the time and Josette on the other hand talks about the signs he keeps giving her.

The love that the Frendo's engendered was staggering. The bonding, the fondness, the warmth, are second to none. After what happened to Jerome, their life overturned and in a way capsized.

I will not delve into the years of pain and anguish Jerome and his family had to go through.

I will not talk about the endless moments of discomfort and anxiety, the arduous treatment and interminable nights, the never-ending decision making that had to be done, the negotiation and debate with the inconsiderate and considerate medics.

I will not burrow in the broken hearts of the parents, sibling, relatives and close friends that had to see their own leave them way too early.

I just cannot conceive what it feels like to have your boyfriend, whom you have just about learnt to love, slip away.

I will not even try to imagine the agony of having to bury one's son, knowing well-enough they will never touch him again, never smell his scent, not ever argue, debate, discuss his future and decisions.

But there is something intrinsically profound in this young man.

He spoke with God and about God with such certainty - his



level of spirituality and holiness was colossal.

To top it up, he had this immeasurable bonding with his soul I haven't seen too often. He knew himself extraordinarily well. He could trace the person he is, something some of us never manage to do during our life course.

Not Jerome.

He had this ability to look at life, and whatever it throws at him, straight in the eyes. Look at his photos and see if you agree with me. His look is intense and penetrating. His eyes seem to dance away to the tune of the Cherub. His eyes were an assortment of gentleness and power.

He was able to read through

his suffering and in all that agony slowly and surely plan out his life after death, yes you got me, 'he planned his life after death!'. He implanted little messages during the time he was ill that his family picked up and keep picking up so graciously - maybe initially not noticing they were doing so. He would write poetry, speak to them and show them what he wanted.

He left a testament that guaranteed he would always be with the people he treasured.

His authentication was based on; the never ending stream of love that filled his heart; the wisdom that he was gifted with; the smile that was as warm as the sun that shone over him; the conviction that God is good and

will not abandon him and finally the passion he had towards his family - a bond that will never slacken. Wow, what a human being.

This young man spoke, but not only about yesteryear, but about how life needs to be after he is gone. That is why his soul glitters. You could see it in the people who attended the memorial last Saturday. It was something 'out of this World'. It was like a big party, not an alienated crowd but serene in the cuddles of this youngster. More smiles and joy than broken hearts. Mind you, I can only imagine what his family were dealing with. The twinkling of excruciating pain I am sure surfaced as people sang to him, talked about Jerome and celebrated his life.

But whilst my mind drifts away, I ask myself; 'why this suffering, why this pain?' Kenneth gave me the answer the last time we met. He assures me that it has nothing to do with God. Pain is pain, borne out of coincidences external of any decision that God would take.

I still cannot take it in.

But what fascinates me is the outlay Kenneth and Josette put into Jerome, in terms of strength of character, uprightness, rectitude and moral fibre. Jerome had so much of it he could share in abundance with others.

The marvel of Jerome is that he has left an indelible legacy in the form of his father Kenneth, mum Josette and his brother Jethro. The family have embarked on a number of projects, one of which is *Smiling with Jerome* which I encourage you to support.

That infectious and transferrable smile of Jerome spills over so many people even after his death. His message was one of affirmation. He was not delusional to the soreness and distress he had to struggle and juggle with day-in-day-out yet had space for altruism in his heart no matter the misfortunes that compressed him.

'Kenneth, Josette and Jethro, we thank you for this young man - he is one of ours as well.'



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