



A Happy Coffin before you die

Nursing home residents and designers celebrate the art of dying

Singapore, 28 September 2010 - There are some Happy Coffins from Singapore challenging the taboo of death. Today, designer coffins deck a nursing home where three residents fulfill their pre-departure wishes of how their final resting places should be.

Without any sign of foreboding, Elsie Chua said, "I am not afraid to talk about my eventual departure. It is very meaningful to be able to shape the design of my coffin and see it before I die." She added with a smile, "I want to have a matching kebaya¹ to go along."

The art of dying

Elsie's wish was granted through an initiative between the **Lien Foundation**, a Singapore philanthropic house and **St Joseph's Home and Hospice**. The **Happy Coffins** project overturns the stigma of death and transforms the coffin from a symbol of fear, dread and grief into a positive and life-affirming expression of art. Besides Elsie, two other residents, Kitty Fogh and Magdalene Khoo, from the home also received their own customized coffins created by members of FARM, a Singapore arts creative society. In addition, a multi-disciplinary artist was commissioned to render his interpretation of life and death.

¹ A kebaya is a traditional Straits Chinese garment for women.

The Happy Coffins initiative is part of the Foundation's **Life Before Death campaign** that seeks to get people thinking and talking about death and dying, and to highlight the urgent need for better care for the dying.

Life-giving circle of hope

"The name 'Happy Coffins' may be like an oxymoron. But its very antithesis captures what we seek to do," said Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO, Lien Foundation "We are turning the coffin from a supreme negative symbol of death into a creative canvas for reflection and inspiration, and the positive celebration of life."

Instead of gloom and doom, Sister Geraldine, Administrator, St Joseph's Home and Hospice said, "This project, though seemingly about death and dying, is really life-giving. It has created a non-threatening platform for our residents to share their lives and talk about their pre-departure wishes and hopes."

Mr Lee added, "By subverting the conventional notion of death, we hope to liberate mindsets and spark die-logues or conversations about end-of-life matters that do not need to be full of woe, but are filled with joy, laughter and good memories."

Happy Coffins around the world

Death is no respecter of age, race or creed. To spur greater awareness about life before death, the Lien Foundation invited artists from the global creative community of Eyeka, to create the best Happy Coffins – whether for themselves, a loved one, or a inspiring person. A record 733 entries were received from 37 countries for this international coffin design competition. More than 75% of the participants produced designs for their own coffins.

Mr Lee enthuses, "We have designer clothes and chocolates, so why not designer coffins that better reflect our unique lives, personalities and

dreams. The individual life story behind each personalized coffin will be a poignant talking point at funerals.”

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About the Lien Foundation

www.lienfoundation.org

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It invests in innovative solutions, convenes strategic partnerships and catalyses action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation drives institutional capacity building to address crucial community needs, and empowers individuals to reach their full potential. It seeks to enhance educational opportunities for the disadvantaged, excellence in eldercare and environmental sustainability in water and sanitation.

About Life Before Death

www.lifebeforedeath.com

The Life Before Death initiative is part of the Lien Foundation’s mission to advocate and create greater awareness of the pressing need for better care of the dying. The Foundation first conceived and spearheaded the Life Before Death initiative in 2006 to create greater public awareness about end-of-life issues in Singapore. The second phase in 2008/9 sought to de-stigmatise death and dying by spurring ‘die-logues’ amongst the public.

Today, the initiative reaches out to a wider global audience online through the use of social media, art, films and photography, enthusing them to view death and life differently.

In July 2010, the Lien Foundation commissioned the first-ever global Quality of Death index. Conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the index ranked 40 countries on their provision of end-of-life care.

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