



Last Outfit for The Last Act

Photo project captures people in what they would like to wear for their funeral

Singapore, 3 September 2011. All of life's a stage and when that final curtain call comes, what would you wear for a memorable last impression?

A wetsuit, mermaid costume, clown attire, Liverpool FC T-shirt and an imperial Chinese robe. These last outfits were chosen by some of the 23 people taking part in a photo project initiated by **The Straits Times**, the leading Singapore daily, in partnership with **Lien Foundation**, a Singapore philanthropic house. Entitled "**The Last Outfit**", the project showcases individuals in the clothes they wish to wear for their own funeral.

Celebrating life's final epic

"Dressing is a way of life and even at death, our clothes can be a statement of who we are", said Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO, Lien Foundation "Each exit outfit is one that best expresses the subject's unique life. Their outfits and candid attitude have given us a fresh and fun perspective on how to deal with death. If there's something like funeral fashion, they are setting a trend by wearing their souls on their sleeves."

The Last Outfit seeks to remove the taboo of death and enthruse people to view life and death differently. As part of the Foundation's *Life Before Death* initiative, the project's unusual approach underlines a serious attempt to spur conversations and thoughts about end-of-life matters.

Behind the scenes

Working behind the lens, the Straits Times photographers captured the passion behind each subject's reflection on his or her own mortality. The eight photographers were: Desmond Lim, Lim Wuiliang, Kevin Lim, Neo Xiaobin, Nuria Ling, Mugilan Rajasegeran, Samuel He and Wang Hui Fen. Chief Photographer Wang Hui Fen said, "We are glad that our subjects were willing to put aside their superstitions and participate in this project. It wasn't easy to convince people to talk about death, much less photograph them in their last outfit. We hope that through this project, the stigma of death will be reduced. People need to understand that talking about death is not going to kill you."

A beautiful curtsey

The final curtain call came early for one of the subjects, 46 year-old cancer patient Madam Foo Piao Lin. All her life, she had always wanted to wear a beautiful cheongsam¹. Now she has her wish fulfilled by the Last Outfit project and at her funeral. Beneath her sweet pose lies the courage to face death squarely. She prepared her family and shared with them her last wishes and hopes. She took part in the project to encourage others not to shy away from end-of-life issues and to make preparations for the inevitable. Madam Foo also wrote to her hospice to thank them for their care and to thank Straits Times photographer Desmond Lim for giving her loved ones "beautiful pictures for sweet memories" of her. On 1 August 2011, she passed away.

Rather than leave it to chance or for others to decide, Mdm Foo took responsibility for her final affairs. "There can be brilliance in the shadows of death. Her family was fortunate to be part of her good-bye plans," observed Mr Lee. "It's so much more valuable and meaningful to have had such conversations when the person is alive."

¹ Chinese dress for ladies

A last hurrah

Other subjects in the project shared Mdm Foo's plucky attitude. They not only donned their last outfits with bravura, they saw it as a fitting way to proclaim a last hurrah to mark their final epic. "These are the most elaborate costumes we have for our performances. When we die, we want to be remembered as performers," said part-time Chinese opera singers, Mr Koh Goh Eng and his wife, Madam Lam Chin Shin.

View the last outfits at www.lastoutfit.org

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About the Lien Foundation and Life Before Death

The Life Before Death initiative is part of the Lien Foundation's mission to advocate better care of the dying. It commissioned the first-ever global Quality of Death index in 2010 and reaches out to the public through the use of social media, art, films and photography.

An international feature documentary film that examines the global crisis of untreated pain will be released in end 2011. It profiles palliative care professionals at the frontline as they seek to improve care for the dying. The film is shot in 11 countries and uncovers the diverse cultural perspectives on pain, death and dying.

www.lienfoundation.org

www.lifebeforedeath.com

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