



In loving memory of my beloved son, Zen Dylan Koh

1.1.2000 ~ 1.10.2018

*No longer by my Side. Forever in my Heart. We will meet at Rainbow Bridge
and we will never be apart again.*

You live in Heaven but I will always be your Mummy

My son, Zen Dylan Koh died from suicide due to depression in Melbourne on the 1st Oct 2018, 1 month before his 18th birthday and 2 months before graduating from his foundation studies in Trinity College, Melbourne. Zen was diagnosed with Dyslexia but high IQ weeks before taking his PSLE exams and with the proper support given, he scored very good grades to get into the prestigious ACS(Independent) School. While Zen struggled with his grades in the following years, he would persevere and continued to study hard. His O level results were not as expected but he still did well enough to go the JC route. He enrolled in Serangoon JC as his grades did not qualify for ACJC which was his first choice. It was an adjustment for Zen going from an all boys' school to a co-ed school as well as an independent school to a public school.



He seemed happy for the first few terms and was very sociable and outgoing. But in the 3rd term he became moody and somewhat withdrawn after he broke up with his then girlfriend and was betrayed by a friend. We noticed he started to cut himself and spoke with him. He couldn't explain why he was doing so and just kept very quiet.



As such, we brought him to see a psychiatrist who told us to have him tested for Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD). The result came back positive and he was prescribed Medikinet, commonly known as the study drug. We left it as it was thinking it was all about struggling with school grades and not suspecting

that there were underlying issues. However, Zen told us on several occasions he struggled with anxiety. He could not bring himself to attend lectures in school. The school environment was getting toxic. We only found out after he left us that some toxic students were taunting him about his self-harm scars and called him a cute bar-code. Thinking again that it was due to study stress, and with the limited knowledge we had then, we thought that by sending him to Melbourne for his Foundation Studies without the pressures of the local school system, his struggles would be over.

Again he seemed very happy for the most part of his time in Melbourne. We would visit him very often and he would come home every 3 months during his term breaks.



We Facetimed on a daily basis and did not notice anything amiss as he seemed very well adjusted both academically and socially.



It was only in Term 3 that his friends called me and said that Zen was not in a good place and was increasingly withdrawn. I flew up within 24 hours and

assured Zen that his Mummy and Papa loves him very much and we knew that he was still struggling. I told him that we didn't judge him and we understand that he cannot help himself from feeling this way. I promised that we would get him professional help and that we would be with him every step of the way. He thanked me and even told his friends that he was very happy that his parents were going to get him professional help.



Two weeks after the talk, he came home to Singapore for his term break. It was ill-fated that his previous psychiatrist was retiring and I had to take him to see a different one. This new psychiatrist, a Dr T was not our first choice as all the other highly recommended doctors were not available to see Zen during the short break. After 30 minutes with Dr T, he prescribed Lexapro (Escitalopram), an anti-depressant drug and diagnosed Zen with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and mild depression. Zen's dosage was quadrupled from 2.5mg to 10mg over a 10-day period before he left for Melbourne where he was going to be alone without healthcare support. I did ask Dr T if it was necessary and he said 10mg was "not even the minimum dosage to be effective". We were only told of two side effects, loss of appetite and insomnia. Zen did not have any appetite-loss but ate well. However, his insomnia worsened and to which Dr T prescribed antihistamines to help him sleep. There were no full-disclosure of the adverse side effects by Dr T even though I asked. It was not made known to both Zen and I that this particular drug needs to be monitored closely when given to young adults as it can possibly magnify suicidal tendencies in the first few weeks and months and that it cannot be taken with alcohol. My son even consulted with him if it was okay to take it occasionally with alcohol and he said it was fine with one or two glasses of wine. I later found out online that there are many

evidences to suggest that some antidepressants increase the risk of suicide and suicide ideation in children and adolescents. I also discovered that in the US, the FDA has ordered manufacturers of antidepressants to use a black box warning on the packaging to warn consumers and healthcare providers that antidepressants - like Lexapro - increases the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours in children and adolescents who take them. Zen's prescription was first dispensed in the generic plastic bag that GPs uses and subsequently, in the original box but without any black box warning!

Zen's treatment was poorly managed to say the least, and we paid a very high price. I know now that the dosage of any antidepressants must be monitored carefully and increased gradually under strict supervision.

The only thing that Dr T told us was not to worry and that "loads of kids are on it".

It still breaks my heart each time I remember Zen telling me he was very happy to be prescribed anti-depressants because he said "Mummy! My body lacks serotonin, the happy hormones and now I can be happier!".

So, my son went back to school 10 days later with an increased dosage of Lexapro far away from home. Meanwhile, I had already made plans to fly up again to be with him while making appointments with the school counsellor as well as a local psychiatrist to monitor and support him in Melbourne. Within less than 2 weeks of going back, Zen's condition took a drastic turn. He was acutely sleep deprived and became suicidal especially at night when his serotonin level would dip.

And by the 3rd week, he was making plans to take his own life. His friends called again warning me that his condition had turned very serious. I urged them to watch over him while I caught the next flight out. When I arrived

that evening, we had a cosy dinner together. He was very happy to see me as always. He said he was going to the gym with his friends after dinner. I went back to my hotel which was only five minutes away from his house. We continued to message each other about the appointments for the next day and made plans to take all his friends out for dinner. He was also video-calling his father who was in Singapore. However, at 1:30 in the morning, I was woken up by the fateful call from his house mates informing me that Zen had taken his life. Though we were just 5 minutes' walk away from each other, it was the longest run for me from the hotel to his house. The paramedics were there trying to resuscitate him while I had to watch helplessly. To this day, I still have this painful flashback.



Zen fought for three days at The Royal Melbourne Hospital waiting for his father and brother to fly in to bid him goodbye. I spent the three days in a daze just cuddling and lying with him in his hospital bed while he was having non-stop seizures. When the doctor said that there was little hope and that even if Zen pulled through, he would never be the same. He would not go to university! I realized that I cannot be selfish and I had to let him go. I thanked him for having me as his Mummy even if it's only for 17 years 11 months! I went down memory lane telling him how he came into my life and how much joy he has brought me. I had to make the difficult decision to tell him to go find his eternal happiness. I told him I forgave him and also asked for forgiveness! Tears rolled down his eyes and that night he passed. Friends from Melbourne and Singapore got to bid him farewell as well. His childhood friends flew up from Singapore. My husband and I decided to donate his organs while doctors kept his heart beating for as long as it took for the

transplants to complete. Today he lives in six other people in Melbourne. He took his own life but he selflessly gave six back. In death, he continued to be selfless just like he was when he was alive. We read all his messages on his phone and found out that he was such a caring boy who was 'counselling' many of his friends who were also struggling with mental health issues to the point where his own core and mental strength was weakened and exhausted. He wrote "I want to be a Psychologist to help kids with the same struggles". He also said that he was born to be sad and if he could, he would want to take away people's sadness because he couldn't be more sad.



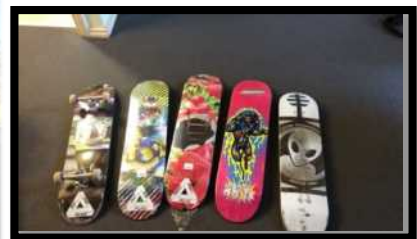
This is my Zen! The ever-caring boy as reaffirmed by many friends who gave their eulogies in Melbourne and the many messages from his friends in Singapore that we received in the days after his funeral. Zen touched so many lives with his love, care and friendship. We brought him up to be both colour-blind (regardless of race) and gender-blind (LGBT inclusive) when it comes to making friends and we are so proud that he grew up so.





He loved animals and being the natural athlete was adept at picking up any sports be it hockey, soccer, roller-blade, golf, snow-skiing, diving and water-skiing as a kid. He was also a very stable scuba diver and loved skate

boarding in Melbourne, which he said makes him very happy. He also worked out at the gym because Mummy told him exercise creates natural endorphins.





He also volunteered in a health camp mission in Nepal, once when he was just ten years old and another at sixteen.



Zen shares a love of fashion and shopping with Mummy and love of whisky and cooking with his Papa.

It was heart-breaking to have read his messages to 2 of his friends during his last moments asking for help. One just said “no and please don’t” and did not check in on him although she was just one door away from his room. The last one did not tell her mum, a close friend of mine who could have called me and knew I was there. I hope to share my story so other young people know that such situations are serious and must be handled with urgency. There is no tomorrow!

I also like to highlight that some mental illnesses may be hereditary. After Zen’s passing, I found out that we have many family members across many generations from both my parents’ sides who struggle with mental illnesses, including my younger brother. It is necessary for the older generation to be more well informed and come to terms with it instead of being in denial. It is only then that we can be more alert and be more informed to get the right support and help.



Mental illness does not discriminate. It does not happen to only those from dysfunctional or toxic family. Zen comes from a loving and intact family where we share lots of beautiful memories from the many family vacations.



Yet depression did not discriminate him. He had a genetic predisposition to depression which was brought on by situational triggers from friendship betrayal and relationship breakups. Mental Illnesses run in my family. There is a deep denial among many Asian families in today's society. No one wants to admit it. No one wants to talk about it because of the stigma and the taboo. They think it can get contagious if you admit it!


I was told that within weeks of Zen's suicide, Trinity College in Melbourne pushed for Mental Health support to be a priority for all international students and this was addressed to the graduating class in 2018 by the Dean to urge those struggling to seek help. Zen would have also graduated in that same class. It is bitter sweet to know Zen is the driving force for changes!

We miss our son deeply. And today, my husband and I light candles in our balcony every night without fail. He is our guardian angel and deserves to be happy. Zen, my dearest sweet heart, go find your peace, happiness and eternal bliss!



Mummy will do what I can to turn my pain to strength through my advocacy work with PleaseStay. Movement to champion for responsible dispensing of anti-depressants by medical professionals to youths as well as dispel myths and stigma of mental illness.

LIMITLESS TZDKFUND ADVOCACY GIVE



THE ZEN DYLAN KOH FUND

This fund supports youths with mental health issues in need of therapy

If you are struggling, you are not alone
Help is available, we're here for you
Choose life

[APPLY HERE](#) [SUPPORT THE FUND](#)

Mummy will also choose to honour my love for you by keeping The Zen Dylan Koh Fund close to my heart and to continue to make a difference for disadvantaged youths who need free counselling for as long as I live. You have already made a difference for 21 kids to date and some have been stopped from completing suicide by the caseworkers. I will forgive the irresponsible psychiatrist! Forgiveness is the first step in the healing process. It is better to focus my financial resources and energy into saving lives instead of taking him to court.



Thank you for the many signs you have sent me from heaven to let me know you are near and not to give up!



Thank you for leading Mummy to Lord Jesus Christ! You know Mummy best. You know I needed a faith that gives me hope and a faith that I can understand from my heart. Without which Mummy would be so lost and despondent. When Mummy's journey is completed, I know you will meet me at the Rainbow Bridge and our loving God will wipe away all my tears and you will say "Welcome home Mummy- thank you for continuing to love me!".

With Love
Your Yummy Mummy Goose
#zenmummyforever