

News

# A life of regret, a legacy of hope

**THE CHAPTERS OF HIS LIFE:** (Right, from left) Ms. Junaidah Salleh, 43, Mr. Mahmood's sister and caregiver, Dr. Jamie Zhou, who is treating Mr. Mahmood, and Ms. Amy Lim Sock Hui, his palliative nurse, watching Mr. Mahmood signing his books.

(Below) Mr. Mahmood Salleh praying at his mother's grave. He does this almost every weekend.



**Former drug addict with terminal lung cancer shakes off regret with book on drug-fuelled life**

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**S**TRICKEN with terminal lung cancer, he didn't want to die in vain. Instead, he wants to leave behind a legacy, a legacy he hopes will encourage young people to stay away from drugs.

Mr. Mahmood Salleh, 53, got his wish on Friday – a book chronicling his drug-ridden life filled with regret.

The 36-page photo diary is titled "What's Left of Me – A Former Addict's Pilgrimage to Forgiveness in his Final Days".

He told The New Paper at his Teck Why home: "I hope that youngsters will read the book and realise how dangerous drugs can be.

"And for those who are taking drugs, I hope they will realise the danger and give up." TNP wrote about Mr. Mahmood last October.

**Prison life, again and again**

In his book, he talks about how he started taking drugs as a teenager and how it landed him in prison a total of nine times.

He also tells how he was diagnosed in 2011 with Stage 4 lung cancer, with cancer cells having spread to his brain.

Still abusing drugs, he easily ignored important follow-up checkups.

When he was again caught and jailed, he told prison officers about the lung cancer.

He was given special early release in August last year because of his medical condition. It was then that the doctor told him he had less than three months to live.

He recounted how regretful he was, especially when his mother died of stomach cancer on Dec 4, 2011.

He said in the book: "Because I spent so much time in prison, I hardly spent any quality time with her."

"When she passed on, I was not even by her side. I wished for many things, but not spending more time with my mum is one of my biggest regrets."

It is a touching tale of how a man who lived a lifetime hooked on drugs finally realising his mistakes and wanting to make it right again.

It was a project of love, started by the palliative care nurse with HCA Hospice Care, Ms. Amy Lim Sock Hui, 46, who is looking after Mr. Mahmood in his last days.

She asked him what his last wish was.

To make things right again, was his reply, and Mr. Mahmood, weighed down by years of regret but buoyed by his journey of redemption, embarked on the book.

Ms. Lim roped in a group of volunteers, including a freelance writer, Ms. Nurulhuda Nas-

**AWISH COME TRUE:**

(Above, right) Mr. Mahmood Salleh reads the book, published to chronicle his drug-ridden life, as an encouragement for youngsters to stay away from drugs.

(Right) Mr. Mahmood Salleh enduring the pain and fatigue from his terminal lung cancer while putting up with questions for his book research.



sir Teng, 26, and a freelance photographer, Mr. Ray Chua, 41, to help.

The Straits Times Press stepped in to help in the editing and designing of the book.

**Months of thought**

For about four months, they met against time to collect as much information as they could about Mr. Mahmood.

They walked him down memory lane to his childhood days and took him back to the place he used to call home.

Many interviews were held in between his resting time, with him soldiering on despite his pain and exhaustion.

Though he still fears the day he dies, he feels good to have finally done something meaningful.

Mr. Mahmood said: "I'm very touched that they (the volunteers) did this for me."

When TNP visited him on Friday, he looked more energetic, a far cry from the breathlessness and lack of appetite that got a



THE PICTURES: BENJAMIN SEETOR, GAVIN YOO

*"I'm very grateful to those who have helped me and took care of me. I'll never forget this until I die."*

– Mr. Mahmood Salleh, who, together with HCA Hospice Care nurse Amy Lim Sock Hui (left), came up with the idea for the book

hold of him last October.

He said: "All of you brought good news to me, so my happiness has returned. Otherwise, I'll always be thinking about my impending death."

"I'm very grateful to those who have helped me and took care of me. I'll never forget this until I die."

A doctor who has been treating Mr. Mahmood for the past three months said his condition seems better.

The palliative doctor-in-training with HCA Hospice Care said: "Although the illness is still there, his spirit is uplifted by the legacy that he is leaving behind."

Due to a lack of funds, there are limited copies reserved for his family members, the health workers who looked after him, friends and the volunteers who helped with the book.

But the message in Mr. Mahmood's book will be spread online.

A soft copy can be found on HCA Hospice Care's website at [www.hca.org.sg](http://www.hca.org.sg)