

Love and Compassion



by Sandra Choo (with paintings by Martin See Tho)

Published by Sandra Choo (2010), 209 pages

This book is the story of Sandra Choo's struggle with Martin See Tho in the aftermath of Martin being diagnosed with Machado-Joseph Disease (MJD), a rare hereditary disease which causes a person to lose control of muscular functions and coordination of the upper and lower extremities of the body. It is a progressive, degenerative disease that causes the person to lose control over his body and will finally lead to death in a matter of years.

Sandra and Martin were already members of the Singapore Soka Association (SSA) when this devastating blow struck. This book tells the terrible

painful struggle that they went through and how their practice of Nichiren Buddhism helped to view this terrible suffering from a different perspective.

When Martin was first diagnosed in 1999, he was not even 30 years old, and had only been married a few years. The next year, their child, Win Win was born. He dare not reveal even to Sandra that he had been given what was equivalent to a death sentence. It wasn't until 2001, when he could not hide his condition anymore, when he was forced to submit to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair at the age of 32, did he muster the courage to tell Sandra and

ask for her help.

Their world collapsed. Sandra could not accept that Martin hid this from her and that she would have an invalid as a husband. Their son Win Win was still so young and she was confronted with the fact that Martin would have a limited role in raising him. From that moment on, their life faced trials and tribulations that included violent quarrels, endless tears and even attempted suicide.

What helped them throughout this ordeal was their faith in Nichiren Buddhism and the support and care provided by SSA members. During that period, Sandra and Martin had

undergone tremendous human revolution to come to terms with Martin's illness and the road that lay ahead. She says, "Buddhism is a philosophy with the aim of empowering people. Its central premise is that each person has the innate capacity to triumph under any circumstance in which they find themselves, to surmount any source of suffering, transforming it into a source of growth and strength. It is a philosophy established on the conviction that within each of our lives and at every moment, there exists an inexhaustible reserve of courage, wisdom, compassion and creative energy."¹

Martin also said in an experience published in the March 2008 issue of *Creative Life*²: "Through the cultivation of the comradeship with seniors and fellow members and the firm mentor-disciple relationship, I regained my fighting spirit. However, I noticed that there was a change in the way I began offering my prayers. My prayers to recover used to be based on self-centred desires, such as wanting to be relieved of the pain and to attain personal happiness with my family. But now, I want to use my life to show actual proofs of victories, thereby repaying my debt of gratitude to the Gohonzon, my mentor, family and

fellow members."

Martin joined the Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD) in 2005 and took to learning doing artwork with a computer. Although he had severe problems controlling his movements, he put his heart and soul into mastering digital art. His hard work and dedication moved many, and he created beautiful artworks, more than 160 pieces in all! He was later recognised as the first signature Digital Artwork Social Enterprise (DASE) artist in 2007. He then held his solo exhibition later that year. He even created an artwork titled *My Life Mentor – Ikeda Sensei*, dedicated to SGI President Ikeda.

Martin's condition could only deteriorate of course, and at the end of 2006, he moved to a nursing home, still only 37. Sandra dedicated her life to supporting him and raising their child Win Win. Martin passed away peacefully on April 13, 2009. His was a life that was truly victorious and full of indomitable dignity.

Through living a life based on faith in the

Gohonzon and staying on the path of mentor and disciple, Sandra and Martin have seemingly insurmountable odds (nobody can surmount death) and created a history of triumph and joy that will inspire people for years to come.

The reviewer would like to express his deepest appreciation to Ashley Chen Lee Mei for her gift of the book (English version).

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1. *Love and Compassion*, p. 46
 2. This experience is also included in the "About Martin" chapter of the book, which comes after the prelude.



Though Martin's ability to swallow was robbed away and was dependent on a feeding tube via his nose, he still persisted with art creation at the nursing home.

Since then Sandra has dedicated her life to spreading Martin's message of living to the fullest and to create value no matter what happened. In her own words:

"After Martin's death, I underwent a series of discussions and legal proceedings to obtain the legal rights to Martin's intellectual property. In December 2009, I set up www.martinseetho.com, the website dedicated to Martin's life and work. I was inspired to write a book about our journey and took two months' leave in March and April 2010 to complete *Love and Compassion*, and to prepare for Martin's tribute art exhibition on May 27, 2010. The exhibition was entitled "HeArt of Love and Compassion", and the book was released on the same day.

In order to enable the book to be sold in public books stores, I resigned my managerial position in a government-affiliated organisation and worked full-time to spread Martin's message of a life for kosen-rufu. I also started writing *Love and Compassion* in Chinese. Writing in Chinese is tougher and took a longer time.

In September 2010, my father was diagnosed with advanced colon cancer that had spread to his lungs. I spent three months taking care of my father in hospital. During that time, in November 2010, Martin's artworks were endorsed and exhibited in One Art Gallery, a renowned gallery where prestigious artworks from world-famous artists are also displayed and sold.

My father passed away on December 30, 2010. After that, I picked

up writing the Chinese version of *Love and Compassion* where I left off.

After writing intensively for a few months, I managed to publish the book and officially launched both the English and Chinese versions of *Love and Compassion* at the Suntec City Convention Hall on May 27 this year.

I look forward to bringing the books to Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the USA and India this year. I would also like to put up an exhibition of Martin's unreleased artworks outside Singapore. I will also embark on my third book project too should approval be granted by the National University of Singapore (NUS). Once it gets the green light, it will be a joint project with NUS."