

The Betty Letters

My Dear Grandchild,

I just love this city of mine! While the Government of Hongkong appears to be completely apathetic to the plight of the many, if not most, mentally disabled people of these 416 square miles, it is quite willing to bow to the demands of a very small minority group of people, wanting to maintain what I would describe as a horrible piece of Hongkong's history. I am referring to the dilapidated Wing Lee Street, located in Central Hongkong. Recently, The Urban Renewal Authority proposed excluding Wing Lee Street from its Staunton Street-Wing Lee Street Redevelopment Project in order to address public calls to preserve its special characteristics. In other words, the Hongkong Government of today is a government, at least, partially, ruled by complaint. I suppose you know, My Dear Grandchild, that, on October 18, 2007, The Chief Executive in Council approved the Draft Urban Renewal Authority Staunton Street/Wing Lee Street Development Scheme Plan. The area was zoned as a 'Comprehensive Development Area' with a view to achieving environmental improvement through comprehensive redevelopment, restructuring the street pattern, promoting efficient land use, and providing community facilities as well as public open spaces.

Part of the public open space would be dedicated for the commemoration of Dr Sun Yat Sen (). The Chief Executive, on October 18, 2007, was Mr Donald Tsang Yam Kuen (), also known in some quarters as Donald the Duck, who still wears the mantle of office. I believe that the needs of the people of Hongkong are much more important than the needs of a small segment of would-be, do-gooders who want to try to preserve some of the heritage of the territory. After the renewal of Wing Lee Street, it is quite probable to be very pretty and, most likely, some tourist might enjoy seeing how the territory looked many decades ago.

I wonder, however, whether or not that same tourist, examining the renovated Wing Lee Street, would be just as enthralled at visiting one or more of Hongkong's mental institutions and noting the plight of the disabled that are incarcerated in them. I talked this over with Bo-Bo, my froglike husband, and I explained to him that it appeared that taking care of the handicapped people of Hongkong is much more important than saving a little street which, in its present state, is simply ugly. The Frog looked at me and said: 'People have a right to be heard and, if the Executive determines that the people are correct in their entreaties, then, the Executive must bow to the wishes of the people. That is what I would do if I were the Chief Executive. After all, I would not relish Beijing, coming down on me like a ton of bricks.' With that monologue, The Frog turned his attention back to the television set in order to watch half-nude models, parading on catwalks. 'Hold on, there!' I rebutted The Frog. 'Are you telling me that the vocal entreaties of a very small minority group of people, living in Hongkong, wanting to preserve a crumbling street of houses that should have been removed, decades ago, should carry more weight than the needs of the mentally disabled who are unable to speak or to make representation as to their plight?' The Frog again, obviously getting upset that he could not watch one of the models who was wearing next to nothing above the waist: 'What one does not see, what one does not hear, what one does not smell, does not exist. How can you expect me, or my Chief Executive, to assist the mentally disabled people of Hongkong if we know nothing, or little, about them? Be reasonable, will you?' 'But they do exist!' I exploded in a stentorian voice that was louder than the high-pitched, female squealer, shown on the television set as she received some award. 'Just walk round Hongkong and note the many mentally disabled people, some of them, wearing rags, without having bathed

for weeks. Some of them are fouling public places with their faeces (don't forget, I used to be a nurse). Some of them eat horrible food and are forced, by circumstances, to sleep in the streets, on footpaths, under footbridges and flyovers.' At this point, The Frog interrupted my monologue, stating: 'Maybe, these people enjoy their lives and do not want to live the way that others do. How do you know, Miss Busybody?' 'I do not know,' I quickly retorted, 'and I suggest that neither does Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen. But the point is that the Hongkong Government should know and, if these mentally disabled people are a danger to themselves or to others, it is the duty of the Hongkong Government to take action to assist them for everybody's sake.' I was feeling very strong and full of goodness of heart, knowing that The Frog was losing this argument. So I pressed on: 'You say that you do not know about the plight of the mentally handicapped of Hongkong and, probably, that is the situation with regard to the Chief Executive. But should the Hongkong Government know of this situation and, if it follows that that suggestion is correct, then is it correct to state that the Government should investigate and come to understand the roots of this stain on our society? Then, may I be correct in stating that action should be taken by the Executive, action that is proactive in order to redress the situation?' The Frog was taken aback by my, may I suggest, explosive and erudite argument on the subject of the mentally disabled of Hongkong, and had, just about, forgotten about television and half-nude, luscious lovelies. 'You are correct!' I thought I heard him susurrate. 'OK. Now, who will speak for the mentally disabled? Who will make entreaties to Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen on behalf of these people? Well, Miss Busybody, will you?'

I had won a battle with The Frog, but I was about to lose the war if I said that I would not stand up and be counted. So, I said: 'I am not a politician. You were once a senior politician and you know all of the bigwigs in Beijing. So, you make the entreaties to Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam Kuen.' Then, to my great surprise, The Frog said that he would accept the challenge on behalf of the poor unfortunates of Hongkong. 'By the way,' The Frog explained, 'it will mean that you will have to assist me for at least one year while we prepare a bullet-proof tome for the Executive of Hongkong to consider. I would be willing to devote the time in order to bring your cause to the attention of the Executive. I thank you for this opportunity.'

I was beaten, My Dear Grandchild. What The Frog had done was to manoeuvre me into a corner, making it impossible for me to continue with my lifestyle if I agreed to assist. I could not refuse to assist, of course, but, if I did assist, I would have to readjust my entire lifestyle in order to fit in with The Frog's. Inspiration! 'I shall need a secretary to assist me,' I blurted out, 'and, then, there is the matter of running the house, the servants, shopping for food, etc. And, the matter of keeping us presentable on all occasions is a must, especially when we attend charity functions or when your Beijing people come to town. I shall have to consider a budget for this new expenditure.' The Frog was visibly shaken: 'Why don't you consider all that we need and how much more money it would cost in order to embark on this important project?'

I agreed with The Frog and so I am writing to you, today, to tell you that I shall spend many hours in the next year or so in order to budget for this very worthy cause. Come to think about it, My Dear Grandchild, would you like to take my place to work with The Frog? I am so busy, you know.'

Talk to you, next week.

Chief Lady

While TARGET makes every attempt to ensure accuracy of all data published, TARGET cannot be held responsible for any errors and/or omissions.

*If readers feel that they would like to voice their opinions about that which they have read in **TARGET**, please feel free to e-mail your views to editor@targetnewspapers.com. **TARGET** does not guarantee to publish readers' views, but reserves the right so to do subject to the laws of libel.*