

## *The Betty Letters*

*My Dear Grandchild,*

*At the funeral of Mr Szeto Wah () in Tsimshatsui, Kowloon, on Saturday, January 29, 2011, I could not help but take note of one of the funeral home's workers, a middle-aged, Chinese man, who was chewing gum in a manner that was unmistakable to all those who watched as the coffin was offloaded from the hearse and placed on a trolley, which was, then, wheeled into St Andrew's Church, which is the oldest Protestant Church in Kowloon. Under normal circumstances, I could care less about a person, chewing gum, but, on this occasion, it was a funeral, a funeral of a man who, for many years, had fought for the right of Hongkong people to enjoy democratic freedoms. Whether or not one agreed with Mr Szeto Wah and his many and varied ideas about the future political development of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, during his lifetime, is immaterial, but one cannot help but admire his perspicacity and strength of purpose, and, of course, the fact that that which he was trying to achieve was for other people, not for himself. Mr Szeto Wah was a former teacher who turned his almost entire professional attention to Hongkong politics. As a member of the Hongkong Legislative Council, he was a fighter right up until the end of his life when cancer claimed yet another victim. I recall that that lout, Legislative Councillor Leung Kwok Hung (), also known as the Long-Haired Lout, accused Mr Szeto Wah of having been affected by cancer of the brain instead of just of the cancer, eating away at the internal organs of his body. I wonder whether or not the Long-Haired Lout regrets, today, having made those discourteous and phlegmatic statements in the Legislative Council Chamber when Mr Szeto Wah was alive. For myself, I cannot say anything of a derogatory nature of this former Legislative Councillor because it is said that one should say nothing of the dead lest it be good. The dead cannot defend themselves, you see, so it is best that one says nothing of the dead lest it is good.*

*To my way of thinking, for a worker, employed by a funeral parlour to help to carry out the duty of removing a corpse, lying in a coffin, from a hearse to a trolley so that it may be wheeled in dignity into a Church in order that the assembly of mourners may pay their final respects to the departed, it is an honourable duty of love and care, and the worker should act accordingly: Solemn and with the utmost dignity to the departed. But for that worker to chew gum while bearing part of the weight of somebody who had transitioned from this life to the dust from whence he had come, it was, to my way of thinking, appalling. Where is the respect that one owes to the dead? For every man who passes from this life, he leaves his mark upon all others with whom he comes in contact; and, that mark is indelible. Respect for the dead, especially of a person, such as the former Legislative Councillor, Mr Szeto Wah, is a requirement for all of us because, inter alia, it separates man from all other forms of life on this earth of ours. A worker of a funeral parlour, chewing gum, while caring for a corpse, is not a sign of respect in my book of good manners, but of despicability, approaching the worst kind of action for, inter alia, it is indicative of a complete and utter lack of respect for the body under his charge.*

*I recall that, when I attended the funeral of Frederick IX of Denmark in 1972, one of the pallbearers was Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, the consort of Elizabeth II of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The weather was bitterly cold and we, all, had to travel by train from Copenhagen to Roskilde, a distance of about 30*

*miles. The funeral procession was led by 6 pallbearers, one of which was Prince Philip, representing United Kingdom. As the coffin entered the Cathedral at Roskilde, I noted that Prince Philip's nose was running, the mucus, flowing continuously and dripping off his chin, but he did nothing about this inconvenience, concentrating instead on his sacred duty as one of the pallbearers of the departed monarch, beloved by the people of Denmark. As the coffin entered the cathedral, there was absolute silence as the mourners paid homage to the man who, throughout World War II, was held as a prisoner within his own castle, his jailers, being the German invaders of Denmark.*

*Say nothing of the dead lest it be good. Though the living are well cognisant that, one day, they, too, will die, the dead sleep, knowing naught but nothingness. They have no baubles to accompany them in their final resting place and, for the living, all that is left is the reward of the memory of those who have transitioned. The sins of man may be reprehensible, but man is still to be loved. For love is the most-cherished of all attributes of those life forms, known as homo sapiens. In death, love, hate, lust and covetousness and all of the other valued attributes of man, during his lifetime, dissolve into nothingness. The sun has set for the last time when a man's heart stops beating and his body starts to decay into the sod from whence it came. That same body, however, deserves respect in death as it did in life.*

*Talk to you, next week.*

*Chief Lady*

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