

SINGAPORE

Friends remember late classmate's sense of humour, strength

Social worker recalls primary school pupil smiling even after painful procedures

Adeline Tan
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By the time he was 12, Raphael Lee had gone through six episodes of cancer.

But these adversities, including the loss of his left arm, did not diminish his determination to complete his Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE).

He took the exam while he had cancer and performed well despite only attending half a year of school every year since Primary 2.

Raphael died on Nov 13, 12 days before his results were released.

Many of his friends remember him for his resilience and his positive attitude even when the odds were stacked against him.

One of his classmates from Primary 1 to 4, Daniel Chen Xi, said he was touched and inspired by Raphael's bravery to go through with the amputation of his left arm above the elbow even if it meant the possibility of having a prosthetic arm would be limited.



Raphael's parents, Mr William Lee and Mrs Winnie Lee, with his PSLE results. TNP PHOTO: MARK CHEONG



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He said: "When some of our school teachers took us to Bounce, a trampoline park, he never allowed his lack of mobility or strength to deter him from having fun.

"In fact, he did most of the activities better than my brother and me."

His classmate of six years, Hugo Tang, 12, described Raphael as an enthusiastic and optimistic boy.

"The joy and laughter that he brought to us was outstanding. I still remember the times during recess when a few of us would sit with Raphael and listen to his jokes," he said.

Raphael's social worker at the Children's Cancer Foundation, Ms Kristen Yeo, said he would face each obstacle bravely and take every challenge in his stride.

"He would also always greet us with a smile, even after painful and uncomfortable procedures. I often thought to myself, 'Wow, this boy's resilience and strength is so admirable,'" she said.

Raphael's parents, Mr William Lee, 47, and Mrs Winnie Lee, 45, said their church community and the school had supported them throughout the entire period, such as bringing his school work to him and sending him encouraging messages.

An advance copy of Raphael's PSLE certificate was placed in the coffin with him.

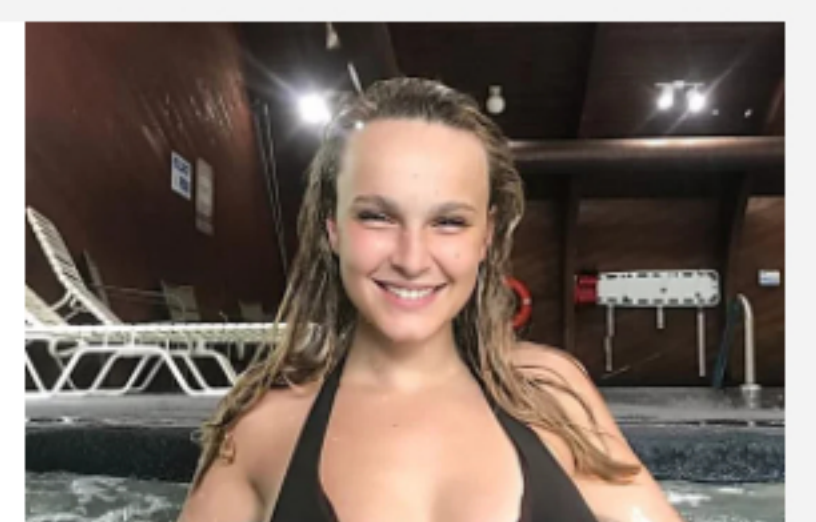
Madam Susan Purnomo, who is in her 50s, who got to know Raphael and his parents through the Church of St Bernadette, said: "Despite missing school for so many months, Raphael never gave up and worked hard for his PSLE exams.

"He passed the exams and won the race even though he could not be there to receive his results personally."

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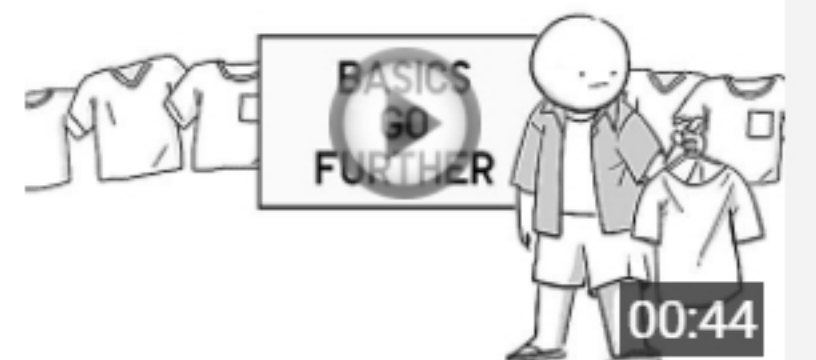
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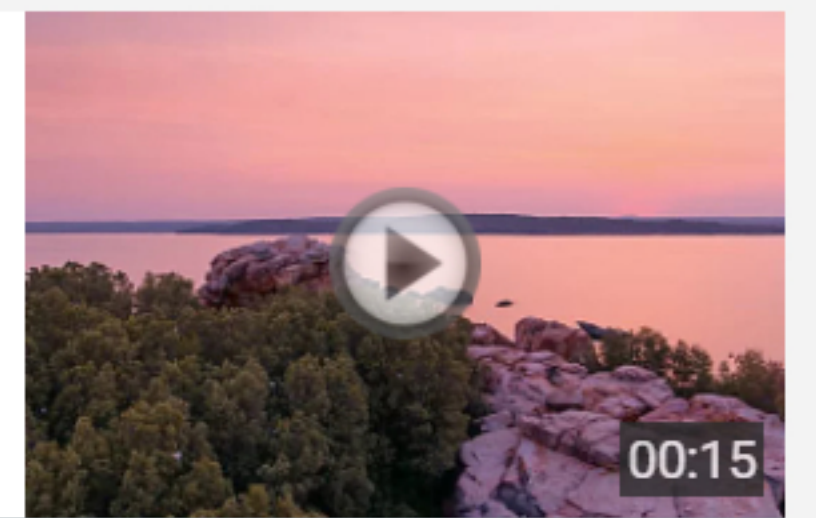
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