

# Groundhog Day

Dr Tan graduated from the National University of Singapore in 1990. She is married with a daughter and runs her own general practice.



Text by Dr Tan Su-Ming

I don't know if you have ever watched that 1993 movie where Bill Murray played a weatherman who woke up every day to relive the same day over and over again.

Sometimes, I think my patients with Alzheimer's disease do that too, or at least seem to have that experience.

One caregiver related how his father with Alzheimer's would call him frantically every morning to report that his car had been stolen. He had to be reminded that the car

had actually been sold and the money deposited in his bank account.

I thought it was quite funny, but his family members probably don't think so.

Mr H is 90 years old and his Alzheimer's has gotten increasingly worse. He is dodderly but can still walk with a cane and minimum assistance. He lost his wife of nearly 70 years very recently.

"Oh, how is dad? Is he aware that mom is gone?" I asked their son K, who is Mr H's main caregiver now.

K then related how every morning, his father would walk up to his wife's room and peer in, looking for her.

When they tell him that she is gone, his smile fades and he looks like he wants to cry.

After a moment, he forgets and goes happily about his day, till he passes her room again the next morning, and goes through the whole drill once more.

There isn't a happy ending like in the movies. ♦

## Like Seeing For the Very First Time



Text by Dr Tan Su-Ming

A regular patient of mine who is a sweet Malay lady of 70 years came for her usual blood pressure check and mentioned that she had just had her cataracts removed.

"Oh... I didn't know. Has your vision improved?" I asked.

"Oh. Very much! I can see clearly now!"

At this point, she glanced around my consultation room that she has visited countless times before and exclaimed, "Wow! Your office is so nice!" She then looked at me, with her eyes widening in surprise, and exclaimed again, "Oh! This is how you look, doctor! You are so *cantik*\*!"

I was a little taken aback and could only blush sheepishly. I had no idea that all this time, she didn't know what I looked like. All this time she probably had seen my face as a blur and knew me only by my voice and touch.

She was seeing me for the very first time.

She behaved like a person who had been looking through a veil all along. And now, that veil had been lifted.

Everything to her was now fresh, new and exciting. Now there are details instead of a blur.

Wow! ♦

\**Cantik* means pretty in Malay