



## Life has thrown so much hardship at To Phat 'Tommy' Sec

OPINION DEC 30, 2019 | BY DAN PEARCE | TORONTO.COM

I had a complicated photo assignment at the tail end of 2019. My assignment was to shoot To Phat "Tommy" Sec, a patient at a nursing home.



He has a rare disease, neurofibromatosis type 2 (NF2) that has left him deaf, mute and paralyzed on the right side of his body.

While he is fully cognitive, at the age of 42, he is bedridden in a downtown senior's nursing home far away from his family in Quebec, and isolated and despondent to the point where he has applied to the federal government for the right to die.

There were some logistical issues because Tommy could not communicate orally. However, he could read and type (with one finger) on his computer, and there was a laptop set up beside his bed to communicate directly with him.

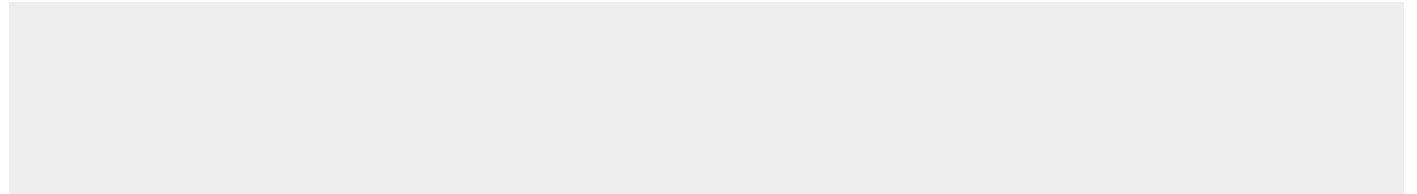


My first thought was how am I going to ask Tommy to do different things so I could get photos for the story. Also, I wanted to make him feel comfortable with me taking his photo.

As I walked into the room I was met by one of his advocates, Paul Nguyen. I knew Nguyen from photographing him for another story a few years ago.

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Nguyen helped me communicate with Tommy to make him feel comfortable with photos.

Nguyen told me Tommy asked him to come early so he could cut his hair and shave his beard, because he wanted to look good for the photos.

I was amazed that even though life had thrown so much hardship at him, Tommy still took pride in his appearance.

I hope he gets his wish to go back home to Quebec to be closer to his family.

*Dan Pearce is a photographer with toronto.com*

**Correction - Dec. 30, 2019:** This article has been edited from a previous version to give the correct spelling of Paul Nguyen.



by [Dan Pearce](#)

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