



Dr James Khoo receiving the SMA Merit Award 2007 from SMA President Dr Wong Chiang Yin.

DR JAMES KHOO

is a Senior Consultant Neurosurgeon at Tan Tock Seng Hospital and a Senior Visiting Consultant at National University of Singapore. He is also the Vice-Chairman of the Ren Ci Hospital (for the chronic sick) and the Chairman of its Medical Advisory Committee. Outside of work, Dr Khoo is the Chairman of the Conservation Advisory Panel, URA since 2001 and the Honorary Chairman of the Asian Civilisations Museum since 2004. He is also an amateur collector of Southeast Asia Arts and coordinator of the Riau-Singapore People's project (Charity Medical and Social AID) from 1997 till present. His interests include tennis and swimming.

When I was a kid, ...

I wanted to be a scientist to study the Sun and the Stars, that is, astrophysics. But my father, the most influential person in my life, thought that being a doctor was more useful. He was a much beloved general practitioner in Malaysia, especially to the poorer Malays, as he would make visits to the kampongs and be repaid with chickens and eggs.

I have fond memories of ...

Being with my medical school group mates, travelling in Malaysia like climbing Mt Kinabalu or bumming around Tiong Bahru at night eating supper.

The most amusing thing I can remember in medical school was ...

In the old KKMH when I was delivering a baby (fifth year) in a cubicle, and overheard my classmate, who is Hokkien, exhorting his patient, a Cantonese to

“*Tai Hey*” (see a show) instead of “*Tau Hey*” (breath hard). He was roundly cursed but still persevered to become a most popular obstetrician.

I spend my Sunday mornings ...

Playing tennis, doing ward rounds and then having a nice lunch later with my family.

A bad habit I would like to kick is ...

Hoarding all my old books and magazines, which makes my desk and cupboards terribly untidy, like a garden. I think one should prune things regularly.

My greatest extravagance is ...

Collecting bits of Asian collectibles. I enjoy the history and cultures of our surrounding countries and pick up these things to decorate the house but I often lack focus.

The book I am reading now is ...

Infidel by Ayaan Hirai Ali, a reflection of life in Somalia and a personal critique of Islamic culture there.

I enjoy listening to music from ...

Bach and Beethoven and also some opera. I regret not spending enough time to listen more often.

The last DVD movie I watched was ...

Happy Feet, an anime of a Penguins operetta with great music with an environmental theme – very enjoyable.

I would like to think ...

I did something useful for our kids and theirs (being remembered is not really

important as probably only great composers, scientists and artists are remembered beyond 100 years), by helping to set up the museums to foster a greater cross-cultural awareness. The stories telling out history, religions and cultures must be told convincingly with great art to foster this awareness and bonding in our small country and perhaps to the world.

I also helped to set up the National Neuroscience Institute and insisted to Dick Johnson, the first Director of the Institute, that we must have funding for the basic research laboratories and programmes to make the Institute a top one. I hope we will succeed. ■