

DR FRANCIS SEOW-CHOEN

is a Colorectal Surgeon who is currently practising at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre. He is also Visiting Professor to the Tianjin Police Hospital, PR China; Visiting Professor to the National Centre for Colorectal Diseases, Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, PR China as well as Visiting Professor to Wenzhou Medical College, PR China.

He was previously the Head and Senior Consultant in the Department of Colorectal Surgery, Singapore General Hospital, Director of the Endoscopy Centre, Director of Surgical Oncology at the National Cancer Centre and Associate Professor at both National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University.

Actively involved in lecturing and demonstrating the finer act of surgery, Prof Seow-Choen had chaired many medical courses, published extensively and had been instrumental in the training of many world renowned colorectal surgeons. He was the Rupert B Turnbull Memorial Lecturer for the Cleveland Clinic, Ohio, USA in 2004 and the Philip Gordon lecturer for the Canadian Colorectal Society in 2005, just to name a few. His international achievements were recognised by Singapore with the conferment of The Excellence for Singapore Award in 2000.

Prof Seow-Choen is also on the Editorial Boards of many prestigious journals. He has published 30 chapters in surgical textbooks and more than 244 original articles in peer reviewed surgical journals. In addition, he has written 32 papers in entomological journals and three books on stick insects.



Dr Seow and a captured stick insect in Pahang.

When I was a child, I wanted to be a ... Zoo-keeper. I used to watch the various wildlife documentaries and thought the greatest thing on earth was to breed endangered animals. Eating wild animals is beastly, shooting wild animals may be manly but only breeding wild animals is sexy.

The most influential person in early life is ... A boy in my neighbourhood. He taught and showed me where to catch fishes in the Kallang River, how to keep and fight spiders and almost everything a budding naturalist needs to know about local nature. We spent a lot of time hunting down all sorts of insects, fishes, reptiles, amphibians along the banks and mangrove areas of the Kallang River.

I wanted to be a doctor because ...

Actually, Medicine was my fourth choice. I put Science first, followed by Chemical Engineering, then Law and lastly Medicine. A month after the closing date for application, I wrote to the Dean after prompting by my eldest sister to say I had changed my mind and wanted to do Medicine. All my friends laughed at me but the Dean must have been amused and I got in! I had originally wanted to do Science followed by Theology and then to do missionary work.

My best medical school memory was ...

The first day in school and being ushered into a room full of cadavers. I realised how guys and girls were worlds apart when all the guys went: "Yucks!" and all the girls jumped into the dissection, scalpel in the right hand and salted sour plum in the other.

The most memorable or touching things I can remember as a practising doctor was ...

Resuscitating a young man who was brought in without a heartbeat at the A & E at Alexandra Hospital as an MO. After half an hour, everyone said to stop as he was obviously dead. I said: "Let's go on for 10 more minutes!" You know what, five minutes later he got up, sat up and asked: "What happened?" I will never forget that! No one and no situation is totally hopeless. Never give up hope on anyone or any situation.

The best thing a colleague/patient ever said to me ...

Just a few days ago, an Indonesian patient told me to speak English as she cannot understand 'Malay', after I spoke to her in Bahasa Indonesian for a few minutes. She said it in a deprecating fashion. I was shocked for a few minutes as I am not too bad an Indonesian speaker. But a few days later, she came to the clinic again and commented that I spoke excellent Bahasa Indonesian. "Are you Indonesian?" she asked. I have learnt never to judge a book by its cover, a person by his appearance, or a situation by its circumstances.

I spend my Sunday mornings ...

Attending church at City Harvest. This church has a congregation of 23,000 members and it is the most exciting place to be on Sunday morning. The preaching is always so amazing and life-changing. Why would anyone want to waste their time on



Teaching surgery to visiting surgeons.



Cuddling a lesser 'panda' in Chengdu.



Feeding with pigeons in Nanjing.

such boring games like golf when you can be totally awe-struck by the power and entertainment at church on a Sunday morning?

I started collecting stick insects because ...

I found out that there were wild stick insects in Singapore that no one knew much about then and because I could not collect bigger animals like tigers or tapirs. Actually, I still want to be a real zoo-keeper and breed all sorts of exotic and local animals. In a few decades, there will not be too

many wild places left. So if we breed these animals, at least they will still be around.

An interesting thing which occurred when I was catching my stick insects was ...

In Hong Kong. I was invited to give some lectures and do surgery there. The night before my lectures, I was catching insects alone at the Peak when I fell and hit my head. I was totally concussed and could not remember where I was and what I was there for, however I kept collecting insects for about two hours before I finally decided that with my fractured rib and my sore head, I had better get back to wherever I was staying and find out where I was. It was a really fruitful night in terms of insects caught but my head was painful and giddy. Finally, I realised that I could not be in Singapore or Malaysia – it was too cold! I must therefore be overseas. If so, I must be staying in a hotel. My IQ, somehow intact, spurred me to look into my pocket where I found my hotel key and realised I was staying at the Excelsior, Hong Kong. My memories literally flooded back thereafter. I walked down the Peak and met a Caucasian lady who took me in, volunteered to clean my wounds and gave me food. I rested there for a while and returned to the hotel after that. The next morning, I went for my lectures and everyone was shocked to see my cuts and wanted me to get checked by a neurologist at least, but I declined!

Collecting stick insects has made me ...

Totally crazy. I would spend the whole day operating and lecturing and the whole night catching insects when overseas. Once in Taiwan on a lecture tour, I finished at about 10 pm. My Entomology friends met me thereafter and we drove three hours into the deep mountain forest where we looked for insects till about 4 am and then drove back to the hotel at 7 am, then I slept for two hours and got back to lecturing at 9 am.

My greatest extravagance is ...

Spending tons of money paying for two Australian lung fishes with CiTies permit. I kept them for many years but alas, due to an electrical short circuit, they died from being electrocuted.

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

Reading in the toilet. This causes piles. However, there is no other way to read. Reading on a table makes me want to read on the bed. Reading on the bed makes me fall asleep. However, I did once fall asleep sitting on the toilet after a very tiring night duty at the hospital.

The book I am currently reading is ...

“成都人”。 This is a book in Chinese about the unique people and way of life in Chengdu, China.

My favourite book is ...

The *Bible*. It has so much to teach us about how to live and always amazes me in the most remarkable way. It is not only able to speak about life but also speaks to me about myself.

The music playing in my car stereo is ...

Chinese music. I love Chinese pop music as they are so much more real than English music. Chinese music is more from the heart and I identify much more with it.

My favourite singer is ...

Rene Liu as she sings such meaningful songs and has a great voice.

The last movie I watched was ...

“大红花”。 It is a mainland China show about a spoilt brat at a kindergarten.

I think everyone should watch ...

“有话好好说”。 It was totally mesmerising. I think that more people should watch Mainland Chinese shows as they are much more fun and yet much more applicable to our lives than Western shows.

My biggest food weakness is ...

Curry chicken. I love curry chicken. Even when I am on my most determined fast or diet, I give in to curry chicken. It is even better than chilli crab and I love my mum's curry chicken most. Some curry chicken are rather forgettable but mummy's is the best!

I would like to be remembered as ...

Someone who loved God, family and friends. ■