



Wei Quan was part of the Singapore national dragon boat team (lane 2) at the Malaysia International Dragon Boat Festival 2011, held in Putrajaya, Malaysia

The Pursuit of Happyness

By Dr Heng Wei Quan

We all have our secret identities. Peter Parker was a college student by day, and a crime fighting arachnid by night. I know a senior colleague who shocks patients out of ventricular fibrillation by day, and teaches ballet by night. These alter egos allow us to escape from the mundane grind of daily work, and give us a reason to smile when the going gets tough.

Let's face it, being a doctor isn't exactly a bed of roses. Everyday, bleary-eyed, post-call house officers get hounded by nurses to re-site overdue IV cannulas while being reprimanded over the phone for unnecessary blue-letter referrals, and registrars rush to finish their overbooked morning clinics while being called incessantly for, well, unnecessary blue-letter referrals. At the end of the day, we all need something to release our pent

up frustrations. For some, it may be a 160 km/h drive down the East Coast Parkway in a Subaru Impreza WRX STI with Eminem blasting on the stereo, while for others, it may be a cosy kick-your-legs-back session at TWG with fellow colleagues.

I have no money for snazzy rides or exorbitantly priced teas, so I spend my non-working hours on the waters with my paddle. Yup, that's my secret identity. It's nothing special really. I have friends in the medical fraternity who run marathons like a walk in the park, friends who have taken up equestrianism as a hobby, and friends who do trail biking on an almost daily basis. I personally find these friends pretty funky. Whatever it is, gliding through the water takes my mind off work, and the entire experience becomes more meaningful because I am doing this with a group of like-minded enthusiasts.

Balancing work and training will be challenging. I remember watching Bud Greenspan's documentary on the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics. In it, Kirstin Holum, the speed skating prodigy who came in sixth for the lung-blistering 3000 m event at a tender age of 17, said in an interview that she loathed being unable to give 100% in both her studies and sport. That very year, she gave up her sport to concentrate on her arts degree, following which she decided to answer her calling to become a Catholic nun.

A thin line separates passion and obsession. I have wondered if this love affair with my paddle, this singular focus to better myself on water, has made me overlook other important aspects of life. My answer to this has always been an unequivocal "no". I enjoy every single bit of training (yes, endorphins do work magic), and I will continue in this pursuit, even if it means, regrettably, that my work has to take a backseat.

In case you are wondering, I still love my job. The smile from the ah ma for whom you have sutured a scalp laceration, the thumbs up from the uncle for whom you have finally diuresed out of an acute pulmonary oedema, remind me that everything we do is worth their while. Yet, as traditional Chinese wisdom suggests, 鱼与熊掌不能兼得 (literally "you cannot have both fish and bear's paw at the same time", meaning that you cannot have the best of both worlds), so something's gotta give. I am now working towards having a more balanced schedule to wield both my stethoscope and paddle. This will affect my career prospects somewhat, but I have calculated my risks, taken the plunge, and I am not looking back. Yoda couldn't have said it better: "Do, or do not. There is no try."

There will always be high expectations from both work and training, and meeting them all will involve sweat, pain and possibly some disappointment. It is not going to be easy, but I guess this is exactly what makes my pursuit of happy-ness particularly enriching and exciting.

"To put to rout all that is not life, and not, when you have come to die, discover that you had not lived."

– Henry David Thoreau **SMA**



Wei Quan is a medical officer with interests in Emergency Medicine and water sports. He believes in sucking the marrow out of the life, without choking on the bone.



The Singapore team emerged champions for the Malaysia International Challenge Trophy (Open) at the Malaysia International Dragon Boat Festival 2011



Participating in the traditional boat race at the 26th Southeast Asian (SEA) Games, held at Lake Cipule, Indonesia in 2011



Wei Quan (standing, third from left) with his SEA Games teammates