

**IT'S  
YOUR  
LIFE,  
YOU  
CALL  
THE  
SHOTS!**



**PURSUE YOUR DREAMS -  
SAY IT, MEAN IT, DO IT!**

**Dr Tang Teck Nguong**

**Kanyin**  
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# Introduction

Do you have a dream? What is it? How long have you been carrying this dream within you? Have you been able to realize it?

Or, don't you have a dream at all?

Well, whether you have a dream or not, please allow me to share a little story with you.

One cool, breezy dawn, two brothers, Alex and Adam, decided to go hiking. They packed some necessities in their haversacks and began their journey.

"Isn't it a beautiful day, Adam?" Alex said to his brother. Adam took a deep breath and answered, "Yes, it certainly is!"

They talked and laughed while trekking up the hill. It was a delightful experience and they hardly felt the weight of their haversacks on their backs.

Two hours later, they had reached the peak. The morning sun was warm, and the wind gently stroked their cheeks. They sat on a rock, closed their eyes and enjoyed the beautiful moment.

"Shall we head back?" Alex asked his brother, after hours of contented admiration of nature in all her loveliness.

“Sure. Let’s go home now.” Adam stood up and grabbed his haversack.

Slowly, they trekked down the hill and then drove home. They talked and laughed while walking to the elevator in their apartment block. Then they saw the notice on the wall, and their smiles froze on their faces.

***Dear residents, the elevator is temporarily out of service due to power failure. Please accept our sincere apology for any inconvenience caused.***

***The Management.***

The faces of both men turned pale -- their house was on the 80<sup>th</sup> floor!

“Well, I guess we have no choice but to take the stairs,” Alex said, shrugging his shoulders.

“All right, we’ll just treat it as another trek up a hill, huh?”

Adam replied, trying to make light of the situation.

They took the stairs. When they reached the 20<sup>th</sup> floor, they felt a little tired with the weight of the haversacks pulling down on their backs. Alex suggested, “Why don’t we leave our haversacks here and collect them when the power supply is back up again?”

“That’s a great idea!” Adam put down his haversack too, leaning it against the wall.

The relief they felt after putting down their haversacks was great. They continued their way up the stairs feeling much lighter in mind and body. They even managed to crack jokes as they trudged up. However, the good feeling did not last long. Soon they started to feel the exhaustion creeping in. They did not seem to be nearing the top at all. “40<sup>th</sup> Floor! That’s only half way up!” Adam groaned aloud when they had reached mid-point.

With fatigue and strain setting in, the brothers started to blame one another. “It is all your fault! You are the one who suggested going for a hike!” Alex accused his brother angrily.

“Oh yeah? Then who was it who couldn’t wait to pack his bag?” Adam shot back.

“Who was the first to rush out the door?” Alex responded heatedly.

As they quarreled, they continued their way up and before they realized it they were on the 60<sup>th</sup> floor. By then, both men were simply too tired to argue anymore.

“Let’s just get ourselves home, okay?” Alex said to his brother, gasping for air like an asthmatic patient.

“Fine,” Adam agreed, completely exhausted.

So, they continued walking up in silence. Neither uttered a word.

Finally, they reached their destination -- the 80<sup>th</sup> floor. Home sweet home!

Alex instructed his brother, "Adam, open the door!"

"Me? I don't have the key. Isn't it with you?" Adam answered in astonishment. A thought began to occur to him, and he felt dread spreading within.

"Where is the key? I thought I had it in my pocket," Alex muttered as he began to search in every pocket for the key. Every empty pocket he discovered heightened the sense of doom that seemed to have surrounded them. This cannot possibly be happening, he told himself. He was beginning to think the same as Adam. Then it became impossible to delay the inevitable, and he said in a small voice, "I think I left the key in my haversack."

"What! Are you kidding me?" Adam's eyes were as huge as saucers. He hoped he was dreaming, but he knew Alex was not joking. They had left the key on the 20<sup>th</sup> floor! That was the cold, hard truth.

Does this story sound a little like life to you?

Well, you wouldn't be wrong to say it did. From the time we are born up to age 20, life tends to be rather carefree, perhaps even uneventful. We do not think much about what lies ahead. We do not really carry any burdens on our shoulders. We play hard, we study hard, we do our school work, and time passes without much incident, somewhere beyond our conscious awareness. We take our

cues from our parents, teachers and the people around us. We learn from them, and role model their actions and behaviour, generally without many questions. Physically too, we have few complaints, as we are young and full of life and energy, and we are, in fact, getting stronger every day.

Towards the later part of the first two decades of our life, however, we gradually start to feel that life is becoming burdensome. Suddenly, there are expectations to fulfill – expectations of parents, teachers and perhaps even some strangers! This is also the time to make some tough decisions on important issues such as university study, career and relationships. We begin to feel all this weighing on our shoulders. This is the time when most of us want to explore life as independent individuals; we want to cast off the weight of those expectations and move in the path of our own choosing.

Then for the next 20 years, we continue to work hard and play hard, trying to get ahead as smoothly as we can. Most of us work very hard and must face a fair amount of struggle in these two decades. It is certainly taxing, both physically and mentally.

So time has flown and all of a sudden, we are in our 40s. We come to the realization that we do not have much youth left to spend, and yet we seem to have many unfulfilled goals festering within us. The road ahead still seems long and ponderous, and we do not quite have the same amount of energy and vigour that we used to. Indeed, the road ahead even seems daunting. We become frustrated

and we begin to look for someone or something to blame, and so we blame everything and everyone who comes across our path! We no longer feel fulfilled and no longer do we seem to enjoy life. Rather, we seem to dread every single step forward.

This blame game continues for the next 20 years, and then, just like that, we find ourselves in our 60s! “Well, the time left is too short. Let me stop focusing on blaming people and situations, and focus instead on living what’s left of my life.” Our inner voice whispers this to us, as we feel desperate in the face of fatigue and weariness. We simply do not have the energy to keep up this futile fight. Then come another 20 years – what seems like an uneventful journey. It is not so much that nothing happens anymore, but that we have resigned ourselves to our life the way it is, and have decided to quietly see out our remaining days. Whatever comes along we will take in our stride.

One day, it is time for us to leave the earth. Lying feebly on the bed, we suddenly recall something, “There is something I didn’t get around to doing!”

Then we realize that we have laid aside the aspirations and dreams of the first two decades of our life! In the face of life’s burdens, we lost sight of our dreams! Carrying those dreams at that time had seemed like lugging a heavy burden. But can we return to that lost time to rescue our dreams and make them come true now? NO way! It is too late. We missed the boat, and we now can only leave the world in despair, having failed to have lived our dream.

If only we had been mindful of this earlier, most of us would say. Indeed, many people are left at the end of their lives with regret for the things they should or should not have done. Yes, all too frequently, they realize too late that they had failed to live out their dreams. If we lived every day in the conscious thought of the outcome of our life, perhaps we would not have to deal with so much regret at the end of our limited lifespan.

All of us are entitled to our unique dreams, no matter how small or unconventional they may be. What is important is for us to know that, and live our dream. We should live every day in such a way as to bring us closer to our dream. We should not wait until it is too late. We are fully responsible for our effort and persistence. There should be no place for the blame game in our life. It is futile to blame anyone or anything else for what we reap in life. We are responsible for our own future, our destination. Nobody owes us anything in life. If we spend our life bitching about everything without taking a moment to consider our own flaws, I can assure you that the outcome will not be pleasant.

We pass through this world only once. It is important that we seize every moment and live life to the max! Who better than we ourselves would know what our dreams are, or should be. If we do not know what our dreams are, we should sit down and work them out. The longer we live without a dream, the more we waste of the precious time given to us. Only after knowing what our dreams are can we live our life in alignment with them, our goals. That is why we should take all the necessary actions to move in the direction of discovering what our dreams are.



At the end of our life's journey, we should feel proud of our accomplishments, not regretful that we did not achieve our dreams or that our achievements have been paltry. No achievement is too small to celebrate. Never lie feebly in bed and ponder on something that you have yet to actualize – instead, stand up now and lay hold of your dreams! Can you smell achievement? Can you see triumph? Can you feel success?

## **Little words, from me to you...**

You will find standalone stories everywhere in this book. Most of them are from my life experiences, others are from some of the people I have met along my journey of life. But I would like to think that these stories can become part of your life too, that they can help you move closer to your dream in some way. I am an ordinary person, just like the vast majority of people in this world. Being ordinary does not mean that we have to live an ordinary life. It does not mean that we cannot live a beautiful and brilliant life. How we live our life is going to make all the difference between a life that is as dull as a grey morning, or as vibrant as a rainbow!

There are many people and situations that we encounter every day of our life. Do they touch us in a meaningful way? Do they leave a positive impact on us? Does the encounter yield a good lesson for us? Have we shared that lesson with others? Are we happy with our life now? Indeed, life is full of questions, is it not?

What would you do if you only had 24 hours to live? Fly into a panic and not know what to do? Enjoy one last good meal? Spend the precious hours with your loved ones? Or simply wait for that last moment of breath without doing anything?

Obviously, time waits for no one. It never stops its steady march forward, second after second, minute after minute. It is ticking away even now, as you read these words! Just

like our heart that never stops beating until one day... our story is brought to a sudden end.

We have choice. We may choose to let time pass while we move along aimlessly or we can choose to make every second count. If we were wise we would choose to live life to the max by fully utilizing every second as well as everything life offers us.

Life is the greatest teacher on earth if we have the thirst to learn. The most wonderful thing about it is that the lessons it teaches us stay with us forever and we can take them with us wherever we go. If we can then share them with the people around us, we will propagate wisdom and goodness to others, and help them enrich their lives too.

The purpose of this book is to share with you everything that has inspired me in life in the hope that what I share will inspire you in some way. It would be a great blessing to me if this sharing could add value to your life.

Because every story in this book is a standalone tale, you may start at any page or beginning you choose, knowing that life is full of surprises. No one knows what will come next, isn't that right?

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# **PART I**

**What do you  
want in life?  
Have a dream,  
have a vision!**

## How far would you go for your dream?

### Having a dream is important

I have always believed that everyone should have a dream to begin with. Have you ever boarded a plane that did not know where it was going? Would you want to be in a plane that had no destination? This should be our attitude towards life as well. Do we want to live a life that is without a dream, without a clear destination?

We should know what we want to achieve in life and what we want to get out of it. Having the end goal in mind is very important because it determines where we will most likely end up. If a person does not have a dream to start with, does not know where he or she wants to go in life, then he or she will wander around aimlessly every day.

I have always been clear about my dream and what I want to achieve in life. I come from a small, humble town in Sarawak, Malaysia called Sibul. The people there generally live a very simple lifestyle. There is little luxury or excess to speak of. However, it is big in one thing: the can-do spirit. This spirit is pervasive everywhere in this otherwise quiet and unassuming town. The town is full of people who propel themselves forward by the power of big dreams and the sheer determination to materialise those dreams. They know what they want in life and they go for it wholeheartedly. Resilience is a given. If they fall, they get back on their feet and try again. Giving up is not an option. Being brought up in this environment has influenced my thinking and character quite significantly.

I was born into a simple, average family. Growing up, my life was never filled with luxury but it was filled with a lot of love and the practice of timeless values. My parents instilled in us a set of strong life values. They did not preach. They simply walked the talk. With this solid foundation having been built in us, we were well prepared to face and overcome the many challenges of life. We fully accepted the need for diligence and respect for others. We did not dwell on setbacks nor did we waste time complaining about them. When life dealt us a blow, we chose to face it head on.

As a kid and then a teenager, I wasn't really pro-actively thinking about what I wanted to do in life. At that time, all I knew was to live one day at a time. I woke up every day, had breakfast and then went to school. After school, it was homework and sports. Dinner and TV would follow, and then the day would end.

I only started to think about dreams and goals when I was in secondary school. In secondary school, my schoolmates would share with me what they hoped to do in the future. I did not want to be left out and started to dream my own dreams too!

Initially, my dreams were wild and fantastic: I wanted to be a kung-fu master one day, and the next, a race car driver. After a while, the need to be practical took over; reality had begun to kick in. I was already in upper secondary school and needed to start thinking about university courses that would suit me.



Out of the blue, I started to explore the idea of studying medicine. That was a big dream, something that seemed beyond my reach. Nevertheless, a voice within, although it was a soft one, urged me to consider this option.

On hindsight and further analysis, I realized that my parents might have played a big role in shaping my dream of becoming a doctor. My paternal grandparents and intellectually impaired uncle were living with us when I was growing up. All three had various medical conditions that required close care and attention. My grandfather suffered from hypertension and diabetes and had had a disabling stroke. My grandmother had diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and Parkinson's disease, another disabling medical illness. My uncle required special care.

My parents took up the full responsibility of taking care of all three despite the immense challenge that posed. Not only did they take care of them, they took immaculate care of them. I was really touched by the unconditional love, care and concern that they showered on my grandparents and uncle. It was simply unbelievable. They had to work during the day. At night, they had to take care of my grandparents and uncle as well as my three siblings and me. Guess what? Never once did they complain about the situation. They just took up the challenge and gave of their very best. In addition, my father took the trouble to visit the library to learn from medical books how to take better care of them. At that time doing anything of the kind was unheard of. I was deeply touched by my parents' commitment to their family.

Apart from being impressed by my parents' dedication, I was also beginning to realize the importance of good health and how meaningful it would be to be a medical doctor. As a doctor, I would have the opportunity to help patients on a personal and meaningful basis. Every patient hopes for good medical care, and every care giver tries to give the best care possible to every patient. I told myself how wonderful and satisfying it would be if I could become a doctor and help people in need. And so I began dreaming about being a doctor.

Upon graduation from secondary school, I left my hometown to go overseas to continue my education. My parents decided to send me to Melbourne, Australia. I was very fortunate to be able to go to Australia. It was a very popular place for tertiary education among Malaysians who wanted to send their children overseas to study due to the high quality of its education system. One cool, breezy Monday morning, I embarked on my journey to this great country for the next phase of my life.

The experience exposed me to some amount of emotional upheaval. I had mixed emotions about leaving home to study so far away. I was sad, excited, apprehensive and hopeful all at once. Sad that I was leaving my family behind – it was the first time I had left home to go anywhere so far away and for so long. I cried continually -- see, men do cry! I missed home so much and no words can describe the longing I felt to be with my family.

Being in a completely foreign and unfamiliar environment, I was also very fearful and worried. I was clueless as to

how to live my daily life in this new place. I simply had no idea. I was at a loss about what to do. It was a tough time for me. In the end I had no choice but to find my way around as soon as possible. Call it the need to survive!

The first year was absolutely critical. It was the year that would decide what I was going to do for the larger part of the rest of my life. I went to Australia with the dream of entering medical school. It was an immense, almost impossible task that I had set for myself. Who was I? I was a simple nobody from a small town in a remote area of the island of Borneo. What did I want to do? Enter medical school? Was I kidding myself? It appeared to be something that was completely beyond me and my capability at that time. I did not have a strong foundation in English, which was essential as every subject in university was taught in English. If I wanted to do medicine, I not only had to pass all the subjects, I had to excel in them and be in the top five per cent of students in the whole state or country for that year.

Despite this overwhelming pressure and the immense challenge, I kept my dream alive. In my mind, it was clear to me that medicine was what I wanted to do at the end of the year. There was no other road that I wanted to take. I had burnt all my bridges by applying only for medical courses in different universities. Had I failed to achieve the necessary scores, there was no other course to fall back on to say later that I had been to university. So I worked really hard. I was focused. I made sacrifices. I monitored my progress. I made the necessary adjustments. And then I went for my final examination. Much to my great joy,

I aced all the subjects and came out top of my batch. I was so completely overjoyed that I did not know how to celebrate the great news! My dream had come true!

I was glad that I had stuck to my dream. I could have given up in the face of the huge challenges I had faced at the beginning of the year. Had I gone through pre-university without a clear dream, I would probably have chosen the easy way out and opted for an easier course.

Doesn't this sound familiar? A lot of us tend to go with the flow and choose the easy path when things get difficult because we do not know what we want, and had no idea what our goal was when we started out. It is only logical. If we do not know what we want, we are not going to make ourselves face and overcome the challenges that are bound to come our way. Trying to overcome challenges is not easy, and the mission is often painful. However, if we know what we want, and want it badly enough, we will do the necessary to cross every hurdle in our path.



So, before you start anything, set a goal and then go for it! We only live once.



### **It is not easy, but it can be done**

My pre-university year was a huge challenge. I was competing with very bright students from so many other countries – Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia. They seemed much better prepared and better equipped than I was; many of them came from big cities that boasted first-class education systems. In addition, students from Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong had been studying and speaking English from childhood. I came from a non-English speaking background which made my learning curve extremely steep indeed. However, I did not give up. Instead, I was conscientious, and put up a good fight. I made sure that I mastered my work really, really well.

Despite feeling apprehensive and hopeless at first, I made a firm resolution and commitment to myself. I told myself that I wanted to enter medical school and I was going to achieve that no matter what. As you might guess, I was under tremendous stress because I really did not know how to achieve the impossible! I became an ostrich and hid myself from the fear and worry. I persisted in achieving my dream, however, and put in all the necessary hard work and made all the necessary sacrifices. The dream was etched in my mind as if written in stone.

In the early part of the year, I took the initiative to approach the school counsellor to seek advice on how to do well in my studies. She sensed that I was rather anxious and stressed out, and advised me not to be too hard on myself. She suggested that I take it easy and take one step at a time. I appreciated her kindness and understood her rationale for advising me in this way. However, I had a feeling that that approach would not work well for me. Indeed, if I had adopted a more relaxed approach, I would not have got to where I am today. I had to make a choice between the two, 'humane' versus 'tough' approach. I could have conveniently taken the easy way out and relaxed my pace, but after considering all the factors, I chose the 'tough' approach. It was clear to me that I had to put in the hard work and long hours and make some sacrifices to make my dream a reality. The responsibility was mine. Nobody else was going to realize my dream for me.

Over the next few months, I worked closely with my friends, teachers and family members. I checked with

the teachers regularly on my progress in school and on my performance. They were very helpful and gave me all the necessary support and guidance I needed during that extremely challenging time. Their input has left a positive impact on my life.

I learnt from this experience that if you are determined and clear about what you want to achieve in life, you will get the necessary support and resources to achieve your goals. There will always be people who will feel your positive energy and lend you a helping hand. That is the law of nature, I believe. You will be surprised by how wonderful some of your loved ones and friends can be!





### **Success awaits you if you genuinely want it**

From that point onwards, I became very goal-driven and fully believed in living life my way. Isn't this how we order our food or buy our clothes? When you order your food or buy

clothes, do you choose something that you do not like? Do you simply take things offered to you or do you pick something based on what you want or like? When we care about the outcome, we make the decision ourselves. When the outcome does not matter to us, choice is not an issue. Obviously, there will always be people who will not be bothered about some things in life. If that is their approach, there is nothing much that can be done. At the end of the day, it is all really up to the individual.

In life, it is often not just how much effort you want to put in to make a dream come true. It is also about whether or not you are willing to make sacrifices in order to make your dream come true. A lot of people think that if they just put in more effort and time, they will be able to achieve their goal. Unfortunately, life does not work this way. Frequently, apart from the additional effort and time needed, a certain level of making sacrifices is required too. Sometimes you just have to give in order to gain. When people fail to take this into consideration and things do not turn out the way they want them to, they become disillusioned and disappointed. The degree of success we



enjoy is more often than not determined by the extent to which we are willing to make sacrifices, and not just the effort we are willing to invest in the endeavour.

Ask yourself: Do you have a dream? If you do, how far are you willing to go to achieve it? Are you willing to take action? Are you willing to work hard? Are you willing to make sacrifices? Do you have the necessary determination and persistence to reach your destination? How far are you from realising your dream now? Do you think there is a real chance that your dream will materialise within the given time? Only you can answer these questions. Be honest with yourself even though the answers may be painful.

Remember, a dream without any action remains just a dream; only dreams accompanied by real action and sheer persistence will materialise!

So, what are you waiting for? Stand up and chase after your dream.

**Words of wisdom:**

*All our dreams can come true if we  
have the courage to pursue them.*

~ Walt Disney ~

## How badly do you want it?

### Taking the first step

A lot of things are possible in life. The only question is how badly you want something. If you want something so badly that you cannot live without it, trust me, you will do whatever it takes to make it come true. Having said that, taking the first step is never as easy as saying you are going to do it. Many of us face great inertia in going beyond our comfort zone and daily routines to venture into the unknown and unfamiliar. The unknown somehow always has a mysterious feel to it. We never really know what to expect exactly. Sometimes, our mind starts to run wild and comes up with every possible worst-case scenario. This stops a lot of us from taking action. Why do you think that there are many aspiring entrepreneurs who are stuck in their current state and never become real entrepreneurs in the end? Our mind is a very powerful part of us that can take us to all sorts of places. It can carry us to great heights but it can also drop us to abysmal depths. Managing our mind can be an art in itself.

Back in the mid 2000s, I was guilty of neglecting my physical health with the common excuse of having an extremely busy schedule. I was indeed living a super-herctic lifestyle at that time. I worked in the clinic during the day, seeing between fifty to seventy patients from morning to afternoon. Then I would have a quick dinner before rushing off for my MBA class at night. On nights I did not have a class, I would work in a night clinic. Weekends were usually spent on MBA group assignments

and discussions. I could hardly breathe; I thought I was going to die of a heart attack pretty soon. It was not conducive to healthy living.

At the height of my fatigue and stress I made up my mind to take charge of my health. I told myself, "If I do not bother to invest one hour of my time every day in my health, then I seriously should not blame anyone or anything for my poor health in the future. I love my family deeply and I want to be around to be able to take care of them. I need to be in good shape to be able to take care of them." I was fully responsible for my health and the way that I lived my life. I sat down and started to draft an exercise plan. That was the beginning of my lifestyle of regular exercise.

I still remember vividly the first evening I went for a short brisk walk. I asked my brother to join me. My wife reminded me not to jog for more than 100m for fear that I would collapse from a heart attack! I was that unhealthy and unfit then. You would not want to know my body weight at the time! Let's continue to keep it a secret. That first brisk walk was my first step, and I can tell you it was a big step forward. That brisk walk was a lot more significant and important than all the other exercise sessions that followed. As the saying goes, the first step is the hardest, and I totally agree! Taking the first step requires a certain level of vision, commitment and desire to achieve something. The first step forward wins half the battle.

I wanted good health badly at that time. I was willing to put in the effort and time to make it happen. I was willing to sacrifice some things in order to achieve it: time for TV, reading and social outings. A lot of people do not start a regular exercise regime simply because they do not want it badly enough. It is more to a good-to-have for them, not a must-have. When something is not a must-have, do you think it is likely that anyone would make sacrifices for it? Very unlikely!





### **I did it!**

As I embarked on the regular brisk walking and jogging regime, my fitness improved significantly. I was able to jog a few kilometres a time at a comfortable pace. Towards the end of the first year, my mind started to explore the possibility of participating in a race. That was something that I had never thought possible and had never bothered to think about before. All of a sudden, I was tempted to register for the end-of-year Standard Chartered Singapore Marathon. However, as much as my mind was keen on the idea, my physical body was not quite ready for the challenge yet. Still, one Sunday morning, due to a surge of adrenalin I did register online for the race. That was it! I was going to participate in the race. I enrolled in the half marathon, knowing very well that a full marathon would probably shorten my life!

For the next couple of months, I picked up the pace of my training and prepared myself mentally for the very first race in my life. Finally the day came, and I was there bright and early to take my place at the starting line. The race began in a beautiful part of Singapore near Collyer Quay. I started running and was soon enjoying myself. It was really quite cool! I managed to finish within a decent time and found myself still very much alive! I was absolutely thrilled that I had finished the race, or more importantly, had won the challenge. I had done it!

From then onwards, I became addicted to exercise. When I stopped running for a few days in a row, I could feel the withdrawal symptoms, like a drug addict! I felt really fantastic after every run; it was the perfect way to relieve the stress brought on by work.

I didn't stop at that first race. Because I love challenges, I went on to run in a full marathon the following year. That was a significant milestone in my life. In the past, whenever people had mentioned marathons, I would let their words go into one ear and out the other. I had never understood why people put themselves through this kind of torture. I used to think that they were all mad. I no longer think that, of course.

I thought I was satisfied and would stop at the full marathon, but I did not. I was reading The Straits Times one day and came across an advertisement for a mini-triathlon. I could run. I could swim. I could cycle. Put the three together, and it meant I could participate in a triathlon. It sounded logical, but combining all three was

a totally different story. The level of speed, coordination and fitness required was something that I had never attempted before. I felt it was beyond me but somehow I was attracted to the idea. Having the option of a mini category also made it less daunting and more manageable. I asked my wife for her opinion but she killed the idea before it even had a chance to breathe! I had a feeling that I was not the only one who was not ready for the race. I put down the newspaper but picked it up again shortly after. I repeated this a few times during the day. Then, I went to the computer and signed up for it online! I kept the news from my wife until it was closer to the race. As expected, I got a big scolding from her. So you see why taking the first step can be harder than it appears.

I really had no idea what competing in a triathlon would feel like. I did not even know what to wear for the race, nor did I own a bike! I had to go to Carrefour the night before the race to buy a \$100 mountain bike!

On the day of the race, I wore my usual swimming trunks with my running top and shorts and went to the venue. I felt completely out of place among the other participants who were geared up in the coolest tri-suits. I looked more like a bike-repair person. I think I was the only one in swimming trunks, and I know I looked completely ridiculous, but I just went for it. I cast off my pride and rushed for the sea. I swam as fast as I could. That was the very first time that I had swum in the sea! I used up so much of my energy during the swim that I was panting hard as I ran to get my bike for the bike run. I almost died! The ordeal did not stop there. Cycling on a \$100 mountain bike in a triathlon was a real challenge. I was cycling to

the best of my ability but the bike just refused to pick up speed. Everyone raced past me, leaving me behind like the tortoise in that children's story. I kept at it, of course, and finally completed the race. I had started out aiming not to come out last, and to my pleasant surprise, I ended among the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile, meaning that I had ended ahead of forty per cent of the participants.

There you go. Taking the first step was the hardest part of my journey into marathons and triathlons. That initial hurdle has been crossed, and I am now a regular participant in these grueling races. In fact, I went all the way from mini triathlon to Sprint Distance, then Olympic Distance and finally Aviva Ironman Triathlon in 2010! The feeling was just remarkable.

As you can clearly see from this, a lot of things are possible in life. All you need to do is to take one step at a time; however, it must start with a dream or goal. You must want to do something, and do it badly enough before you can make it happen. Why on earth would anyone start running a marathon without having dreamt about it in the first place? Nobody would entertain such an idea considering the amount of training required and the physical





pain that would have to be endured. Once there is a dream, all you need to do is to pace yourself appropriately, give yourself enough training, and you can make it come true.



I was once a person who rarely exercised. I was as idle as one could possibly get. Needless to say, I had a big spare tyre around my waist! However, all this changed the day I decided to take good care of my health. With the help of strong determination, proper planning and sheer persistence, I was able to complete in not only a full marathon but also many triathlons subsequently. The journey will not stop here. There are many more races to conquer!



The 100m brisk walk back in 2006 still seems like a fresh memory to me but I have since moved on to multiple long distance duration races every year!