

◆ (From left) Mum Angeline Cheong, dad George Cheong, younger brother Thomas and aunt Belinda Wee.

Picture: CHOO CHWEE HUA



# 9 months on, his things still left untouched

Family of teen triathlete who died last June talks of coping without him, launches book on his achievements

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**H**IS racing bikes are still neatly arranged in their stands in the hall, as if waiting for one more race.

In Thaddeus Cheong's bedroom, his clothes, including his white school uniforms, still hang in the wardrobe.

His pillows and favourite bolster, which he had had since he was 8 years old, lie untouched on the bed.

Except for some minor changes, everything in Thaddeus' room is still laid out as he left it, almost as if he is expected home any time.

But that will never happen as Thaddeus, 17, died last June. He collapsed after crossing the finish line in a South-east Asia Games triathlon selection race, and died of heart failure soon after.

The Cheongs have found it hard to cope with the loss and tears form in their eyes every time they talk about their elder son.

They want him to be remembered and hope a book about his life and

achievements will help others keep his memory alive.

His aunt, Dr Belinda Wee, 44, took two months to write the book, titled *Running The Full Distance: Thaddeus Cheong*.

It is distributed by Singapore Press Holdings and will be launched on 24 Mar, the day he would have turned 18.

The book will be launched first at Raffles Junior College (RJC) and Catholic High School, where he studied.

There will be another launch that evening at St Francis Xavier Church, which he attended with his family.

## FUND FOR SARAWAK CHURCH

The book costs \$14 and proceeds from the sale will go to a fund to build a church for the indigenous people in Sarawak.

At the Cheongs' Jalan Girang home, memories of Thaddeus touch everything.

Part of the ground floor of the semi-detached house has been turned into a memorial corner for him.

Photo montages of him adorn the area, and there is also a picture of him with RJC badges on its frame.

Thaddeus' mother, IT professional Angeline Cheong, 46, said: "When His friends from RJC attended the wake, they arranged their badges around the frame of Thaddeus' photograph."

"The family of one of the triathletes Thaddeus knew also gave us a candle with Thaddeus' photograph printed on it."

She also showed The New Paper two albums in which she kept every newspaper or magazine article about Thaddeus.

Mrs Cheong said: "All the family members carry a card with Thaddeus' photograph on it to remember him. When we go on family vacations, we also carry a picture of Thaddeus with us."

In the house's attic, she showed the shelves which displayed the sporting medals and trophies won by Thaddeus and his brother.

The Cheongs' younger son, Thomas, 13, a Secondary 2 student at SJI International, said: "Thaddeus and I





*All the family members carry a card with Thaddeus' photograph on it to remember him. When we go on family vacations, we also carry a picture of Thaddeus (left) with us.*

— Mrs Angeline Cheong, Thaddeus' mother

used to argue about things like whose turn it was to play the PSP. I really miss those arguments now."

Their father, human resource professional George Cheong, 46, said: "After Thaddeus' death, I saw him once and I shouted his name. He looked so real, as if it was a vision."

Thaddeus' death affected more than just his immediate family.

Mrs Cheong's younger sister, Dr Wee, a general practitioner, said: "Our mother took Thaddeus's death very hard as he was the first grandson and her favourite too."

"His death went against the natural order of things since children are supposed to mourn parents, not the other way round."

It may be some time yet before Thaddeus' family can get over their grief.

**Mrs Cheong said: "On Tuesday, a friend invited my husband and me to a bereavement support group. There, we met people who had been grieving the loss of loved ones for as long as 25 years."**

"George told me that our loss was only nine months ago and we still have a long way to go. One cannot say that there is a particular time to start grieving and a particular time to stop."

"Each of us has to go at his or her own pace."

Meanwhile, Dr Wee hopes her nephew's life and achievements will not be forgotten.

She said: "When soldiers die for their country, they are remembered with medals. In a way, Thaddeus also died for Singapore."

"I hope his life and death will be remembered too."

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