

*Living Our Lives Fully,
we continue*

TAKE IT FROM ME

A SPORTS MISHAP KILLED HER FIRST-BORN, BUT ANGELINE, MOTHER OF THE LATE TRIATHLETE THADDEUS CHEONG, BELIEVES THAT LIFE – AND THE RACE – MUST GO ON.

When teen triathlete Thaddeus Cheong collapsed right in front of his mother, Angeline, after crossing the finish line at the South-east Asia (SEA) Games triathlon selection trials, the 46-year-old IT professional literally watched her elder son take his last breaths. But despite her grief, she remains steadfast about supporting her younger son in the pursuit of his dream to follow in his elder brother's footsteps – to represent Singapore as a national triathlete at the Youth Olympics in 2010.

On Dealing With Loss
Any mother will tell you that her life is one of hope, dreams, and fulfillment for her children. When my son, Thaddeus, passed away a year ago, our world crumbled. It was even harder for me as I witnessed the last few minutes of his life. A few seconds before he collapsed, he had just crossed the finish line of the SEA Games triathlon selection trial, and even clocked a personal best of 2hr 9mins. I was so proud of him.

After his death, George, my husband, and I spent many nights crying and searching for the answers to why our son was taken away from us so suddenly. But Thaddeus' absence really hit home during Christmas last year and Chinese New Year this year, and I will be spending my first Mother's Day without him this month. Sometimes, I'd imagine that he's gone abroad for his studies or a long holiday, and I'll wake up one day to find him safe and sound at home. Time heals all wounds, but the sorrow never really ever goes away, especially when we ponder about the possibility of what could have been. Still, we try our best to move on.

As cliched as it sounds, we have come to accept the fact that things will never be the same again, and that he has gone to a better place. All we can do now is to cherish the fond

memories of him and know that his life has inspired those around him.

On Learning From Your Children
Thaddeus lived the 17 years of his life to the fullest. He always had an intense enthusiasm for "living strong" – a motto that he had adopted from cyclist and testicular cancer survivor Lance Armstrong. Even though he had to juggle schoolwork with a hectic training schedule, he never once complained about being tired. The most important lesson Thaddeus has left us with is that we have to live each day like it may be our last. He taught us that if there's something we want to do – be it a dream or a goal that we want to pursue – we should go ahead and do it with conviction. Because you'd never know what's going to happen tomorrow.

Even after his death, his friends told us that he had been a source of inspiration and a role model to them. They said that he would give Mathematics tuition to weaker classmates and friends, and encouraged his triathlon and cross-country teammates to keep training hard and do their best.

On Nurturing Passion
My son's death sent shock waves through our local sporting community. Some parents even approached George and me for advice on whether they should prevent their children from competing in endurance racing. My son may have passed away before the prime of his life because of his love for the sport, but I do not regret supporting him in his pursuit of his dreams.

As parents, I believe that if we help nurture our children's potential and be great supporters of their passions, we'll have no regrets no matter what happens. Moreover, if you are going to prevent them from doing things that they want and curtail their development, it will not be interesting for them and that would make your children unhappy.

As for Thaddeus, he naturally excelled in sports from a tender age, and started training as a competitive swimmer at seven. At 13, he was invited to join the Triathlon Association of Singapore's Iron Kids programme in 2003. Not once did we tell him what to do. We provided him with guidance and, talked to him about the difficulties and challenges that may lie ahead, but we left him to make the decisions on his own, even the tough ones.

On Being Careful And Living Life

His younger brother, 14-year-old Thomas, also an aspiring triathlete, is training hard under the Iron Kids programme to qualify to represent Singapore at the Youth Olympic Games in 2010. Yes, I am worried. I've taken Thomas for a full-body checkup and I always remind him not to push himself too hard if he doesn't feel well – his health is now the top priority. But I'm not going to tell Thomas to not do this and that, as that would stifle him. And I believe that he should be given the same opportunities as Thaddeus to pursue his dreams. What I must do now is stand by Thomas and encourage him to do his best, lead his own life and excel in his own way. I'm praying that it's the right decision and I'll leave the rest in God's hands.

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Running the Full Distance: *Thaddeus Cheong*, a book by Thaddeus' aunt, Belinda Wee, and inspired by the teenage triathlete, is now out in stores. All proceeds from the sale of the book will go to a church-building fund for the indigenous people in Sarawak.



"I BELIEVE THAT THOMAS SHOULD BE GIVEN THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES AS THADDEUS TO PURSUE HIS DREAMS."



Angeline Cheong, mother of the late Thaddeus Cheong (with younger son Thomas).

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