



# Thaddeus

**Thaddeus Cheong**

**24 March 1990 – 24 June 2007**

National triathlete Thaddeus was a dynamic and spirited 17-year-old with an infectious 'can do' attitude who was a great role model to many. His sudden collapse and death after completing the 2007 South East Asia Games triathlon trial in his personal best time was a devastating shock to his family. His aunt Belinda Wee wrote a book about his life, aptly titled *Running the Full Distance*.

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Written by Belinda Wee, Thaddeus's aunt

**T**had was a bright and intelligent baby, the first child of my sister Angeline and her husband George. My parents Sonny and Lucy doted over him, as they did over their three younger grandchildren, Thomas (Thad's brother) and Benedicta and Bennett, my own two. Life was a ball for the four of them, with Konggy (Grandpa Sonny) and Mah Mah (Grandma Lucy) spending almost all their waking hours with them.

Very early on in his life, Thaddeus proved himself to be an athlete to be reckoned with, both in the swimming pool and on the bitumen track. He was selected for local and international competitions when most others his age were barely learning the gruelling ropes of triathlon. He did Singapore proud, not only by winning medals but also by showcasing the kind of sportsmanship that many athletes should aim to emulate.

One would think that it was sufficient blessing to be gifted with an outstanding sporting ability but Thad was also blessed with a good brain. On top of his heavy sporting commitments, he managed to excel in his studies and gained entry into the top scholastic institution in Singapore which is no mean feat.

It would not be far-fetched to imagine that someone with both brain and brawn

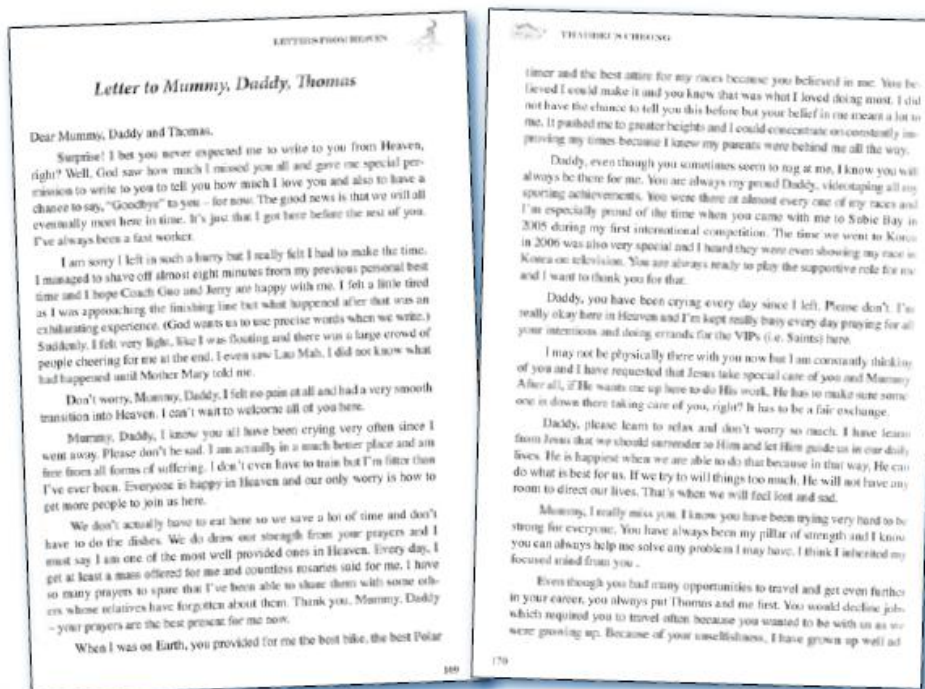
would likely turn out to be both obnoxious and demanding, expecting those around him to eat out of his hands. Not so with Thaddeus Cheong. Unbeknownst to his parents and his family, he was helping other weaker students in their studies, especially mathematics which he was particularly good at and also making time to do other community work to help the less fortunate. He was always polite and courteous to others, especially to the elderly and was particularly loved by his neighbours whom he always made an effort to greet and wave hello to.

He was a keen fisherman and has landed quite a few “big ‘uns” but has never been one to gloat about his success. He was a patient and generous teacher and has enlightened many a novice on the intricacies of the Rubik cube and how to do a good serve on the badminton court.

All this may sound like it was an angel who walked on earth... Perhaps he was. On 24 June 2007, after he had completed the 24th South East Asia Games time trial in his personal best time of 2:09, my dear nephew Thaddeus Cheong collapsed and passed away. He was all of 17 years old.

I was devastated by his passing. He was only a year older than my daughter Benedicta and also happened to be her best friend and protector. His death had turned the proper order of things on its head. Frail and wobbly grandpas and grandmas were sending off the young and healthy grandchild. It was too difficult to fathom, even for a family strong in their Catholic beliefs.

It was particularly cathartic for me to write a book to honour and remember Thaddeus by. I think I aptly named the book for Thad had indeed run the full distance. Alas, he had done it in mere 17 years whereas most of us would probably not have covered as much ground as he did in our own 70.



In "Running the full distance: Thaddeus Cheong", he has written a "Letter from Heaven". I hope you can read it, find some comfort in it and most of all, take the fine advice which this dynamic and spirited young man has given us all.

This last weekend, on 24 Mar 2012, Thad would have turned 22. It's really hard to believe that 5 long years have flown by since our family lost dear Thaddeus and I can assure you that whilst time may dilute some of the sadness, the deep sense of "what could have been" never goes away. I look at my own 17-year-old son Bennett and cannot help but love him more each day as I feel the pain which my dear sister must be feeling with each passing day.

We must all make our way on this earthly journey and everyone has their own crosses to carry. It is not up to us to decide what we would like our crosses to be but I think that if we all looked to each other for support, the journey would be made immensely easier.

It's been nearly 5 years since Thaddeus went to his eternal home. These 5 years have been very long and very hard for George, Thomas and me. I still think of Thaddeus as having gone away for overseas study and that I will meet him again soon.

Over the years, we have continued to keep any articles that appear in the newspapers, magazines, websites, etc. These are kept in scrapbooks; we have now collected a grand total of 3. The articles are getting less, but there are many people who continue to tell us some of the wonderful things Thaddeus has done, even after he is gone. Every year on 24 March, we have a small dinner to celebrate Thad's birthday. Last year, on his would be 21st birthday, we invited a few of his close friends for dinner. Every year, on the Sunday nearest 24 June, which usually coincides with Father's Day, we have a memorial run at his alma mater. We can only think of Thad as being in a better place. He finished his journey faster than all of us. We can only look forward to meeting him someday...when the time is right.

