

Overcoming Adversity—Personal Stories of Triumph: From Sick Kids to Bodybuilders and Life Coaches. Dr. Seamus Phan

Whenever my younger brother, CJ, and I step up a stage to give a motivational speech to people on holistic health and fitness, no one in the audience could believe that in our childhood, both of us suffered various medical and physical challenges, and were determined by fellow students and teachers alike to be incapable of any serious sporting activity. Today, both of us can stand proudly on stage and inspire others to improve their health and fitness, including many of our peers who were sportspeople in their youth. Most people would at least believe I am a competitive gymnast, or bodybuilder, while my brother is obvious as a competitive champion bodybuilder.

Our early years of medical challenges

I was very prematurely born, so much so that the presiding surgeon, the director of the hospital at that time, told my grandparents and parents that they might have to expect the worst, that I may not make it. Eventually, I survived, but not without a host of medical challenges that I had to grapple with, including serious myopia (almost clinically blind), structural left lumbar scoliosis (curved spine), multiple allergies, and asthma, that left me very skinny and weak in my youth. My brother was a little better, but suffered Thalessemia minor (deformed red blood cells).

We were told by physicians, parents and friends alike, that both of us should resign to our fate as “bookworms”, destined to walk the corridors of laboratories or universities as scholars or researchers. No one would believe we could handle serious sports, or become strong and fit.

Conquering challenges

But something inside both of us, perhaps the rebellious streak, prodded us to disregard the negative voices, and we decided to pursue sports we enjoyed. My brother became a gymnast, rugby player, and then bodybuilder. I became a 100-meter track athlete, Karate student, yoga practitioner, and then bodybuilder. My brother proved time and again, his mettle when

he turned runner-up at the Musclemenia World Championships in the USA, competing against the toughest of competition in the USA and the world, as well as previously winning a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games and other events. Both our paths converged in bodybuilding because we discovered that resistance training provided many benefits quite unlike other cardiovascular activity, and was generally safe for anyone, including those seeking rehabilitative and curative effects. In fact, because of yoga, meditation and resistance training, I not only became much stronger, but managed to keep my bad scoliosis in check and no longer had to forego outdoor trips or teaching whole-day classes.

Sharing our knowledge

Somewhere along our own personal journeys of discovering how best to conquer our own medical and physical challenges, many friends, relatives and colleagues kept asking us how best to improve their own health and fitness. In 2002, we both decided that perhaps we should take a quantum leap forward and co-write a book chronicling our own journeys to health and fitness, and teach the public how best to take the same path as well. That effort became the bestselling “This Body This Life” (ISBN 9810456468, www.ThisBodyThisLife.com). Somehow, because of the book, both of us began our journey to offer our services as lifestyle coaches, since many would rather enjoy personalized coaching rather than just read and follow the advice in our book. Many of our readers turned to us for our advice, and I created the new venture TechPharma Labs (www.asiafitnesscoach.com), which now offers not only personalized coaching (including house calls), but also offer email and phone coaching for out-of-town clients.

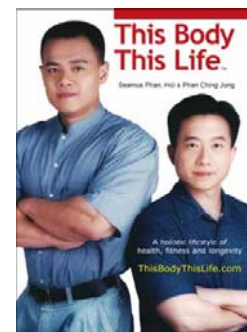
For us, it was never about the money, but our own passion to solve our own physical and medical challenges. And we enjoy the same journey so much more now simply because there are many who believe in us, and are inspired that if we can do it, so can they.

Dr Seamus Phan can be contacted through his web-site - <http://seamusphan.com>.



Dr. Seamus Phan

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Faculty News and Updates

Dr. Penny Billman (CAPHS) - recently published a white paper for Northern Illinois University titled "Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining". The paper focuses on effective strategies and recommendations for implementing the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act. (Billman, P.S. 2004. *Mission Possible: Achieving and Maintaining Academic Improvement*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University, NIU Outreach).

Dr. LaWanna Blount (CEAL) - has just been unanimously re-elected as Chair for the Akamai University Academic Council for 2005. The Academic Council is a body representing faculty leadership from all academic centers and special program areas. The 2005 term represents Dr. Blount's second term of office. As Chair of the Academic Council, she will also hold a dedicated seat on the University's Board of Directors for 2005. We offer our congratulations and thanks to Dr. Blount for her continued leadership and dedicated service to the University.

Dr. Michael Cohen (CEES)- recently celebrated his 75th birthday in a most unexpected and joyous way. Several of Dr. Cohen's students greeted him with a surprise party at the home of one of his students. Participants in Dr. Cohen's Ecopsychology program gathered from all over and peppered him with Haikus. Dr. Cohen describes the event as "overwhelming" and "staggering".

Dr. Cohen also recently had an article titled "Increasing Self-Esteem: Folk Songs and Our Insane World" published by the North American Folk Alliance and the International Community for Ecopsychology. The article can be accessed at <http://www.sugaronthefloor.com/folksanity.html>.

For additional information on Dr. Cohen's programs in Ecopsychology, visit <http://www.ecopsych.com> or e-mail nature@interisland.net. Information on select nature-connected program grants and scholarships is also available at www.ecopsych.com.

Prof. Andrew Flaxman (CSHD) - The University would like to notify the community

that Prof. Flaxman has been ill for much of the month of January. He is presently recovering at home and should be back to a regular schedule later in February. The entire community sends best wishes to Prof. Flaxman for a speedy and full recovery.

Dr. Austin Mardon (CEES) - In early February Dr. Mardon will be presented an honorary professorship at Penza State Pedagogical University by the Russian Ambassador in Ottawa for his work in Geography and Astronomy.

Dr. Mardon was also recently appointed as an honorary lifetime member of the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta (the society's highest award).

Dr. Anthony Payne (CEAL)- will be working on two books along with noted stem-cell and stroke researcher Dr. David Steenblock. One book will focus on Stem Cell Therapies outside of the United States and the second book will focus on how to make the most of the stem cells that each of us retain in our systems. If any member of the Akamai Community would like to receive e-mail notification pertaining to publication and release of these up-coming books, please send an e-mail to Dr. Payne at: braintherapeutics@lycos.com.

Dr. Seamus Phan (CBED)- has recently authored a personal memoir titled *Private Window 1984: Confessions of a Depressed Soldier*. The book highlights Dr. Phan's experiences and reflections as an 18 year old soldier serving in the Singapore Army. Additional details on this book are available at <http://window1984.com>.

Dr. Keith Seddon (CSHD) - is Co-Moderator of the International Stoic Forum, an online community devoted to discussions of Stoic thought and practice, which may be found at the Yahoo! Groups site: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stoics/join>. Further information may be found at: <http://members.aol.com/cyberstoic/forum.html> or <http://www.binternet.com/~k.h.s/stoic-foundation.htm>

