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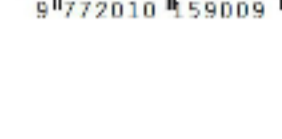
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ACE OF HEARTS

Renowned cardiologist,
Dr Leslie Lam, on matters
of the heart.



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Ace of Hearts

THIS QUARTERLY speaks to one of Asia's most renowned cardiologists, Dato' Dr. Leslie Lam, about his life, love and everything else in between.



IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE a man who has achieved so much to be one so grounded and down to earth. The 67-year-old cardiology consultant at The Cardiac Centre in Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre displays an astounding dedication for both his work and an amazing zest for life.

Dr. Leslie Lam is especially exuberant speaking about his most recent vacation. "I took 12 days off. It was a really good break, the best I've had in years in fact," he says. Considering his profession as a renowned cardiologist, it's understandable when he adds: "It's very difficult for my work to go away for two weeks."

He certainly has a lot of juggle. Apart from his full-time private practice, Dr. Lam serves as an Honorary Consultant in Myanmar and the Seychelles. Shuffling between that, he spends his time as a visiting consultant at Changi General Hospital and the National Heart Centre.

There's no wonder why he is highly sought-after. Impressive credentials aside, he also has a long list of professional achievements under his belt. A pioneer in Singapore, Dr. Lam was the first to perform Percutaneous Transluminal Coronary Angioplasty—a non-invasive procedure in which a balloon is used to open up narrowed or blocked arteries in the heart.

For a number of years, Dr. Lam attended to the royal family of Brunei as a consultant. And it was there that he was awarded the title of Dato', the most honourable order from the Sultan of Brunei. Initially one of seven physicians from Singapore attending to the current Brunei Sultan's father, Dr. Lam went on to take care of the Sultan and his wife years later.

Of his time in Brunei, Dr. Lam has nothing but fond memories of the royal family.

Reminiscing, he says: "The Sultan is the nicest man. Whenever I had to leave [the palace], he would open the door for me. I grew very close to the royal family."

Born under the zodiac sign of Libra, Dr. Lam is extremely extroverted and amicable to all. He enjoys company and gets on well with people he comes into contact with, be they at social functions, on golf courses, or patients who visit his clinic. In fact, he counts several ministers as his golf buddies.

As Governor and Fellow of The Society of Cardiac Angiography and Interventions and an interventional cardiologist himself, Dr. Lam believes that interventional cardiology has become a very significant field of its own.

So how did the man get started in a field he has proven to conquer and love? It all began during his internship where his surgeon-in-charge made a comment about his flair for surgery. Dr. Lam was told that he must take up surgery because "you have

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a pair of hands that can do fantastic work," he said to him, seemingly knowing that one day, the protégé would turn out to be an excellent surgeon.

And sure enough, that was what happened. After training for five years treating congenital heart disease, Dr. Lam continued to focus on adult cardiology. After a stint in paediatric cardiology, he returned to focusing on adult cardiology. He eventually took up a fellowship in Australia specialising in balloon angioplasty, and when he brought the programme back to Singapore, his career took off like a rocket.

In 2005, Dr. Lam was presented an Honorary Fellowship Award by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, University College Dublin, his alma mater, to which he has made various contributions. Dr. Lam also keeps close to his roots. He was on the board of directors for De La Salle School in Singapore, among many other things.

He believes he owes his success to his school and country. "Without them, I don't think I will be where I am today," he says.

The number of accolades he has received over the years is testimony to his professionalism. Yet, Dr. Lam has an equally big heart for charity. He believes in giving back to society.

"I'm a firm believer of that. If there is a need to and if there is a charity that I like, I will certainly give back," he says. "Doing charitable work is more important to me than being a good doctor."

Dr. Lam jokingly defines himself as a modern-day version of swash-buckling cap crusader. In jest, he says: "I like to play a bit of 'Robin Hood'. I tell some of my richer patients that I'll charge them more." This is so that they can offer subsidised or free treatments to his less financially capable patients.

A long-time volunteer for various charitable works, Dr. Lam has been going back since 1991 to Myanmar where he assembled a team of doctors and support staff to conduct eight complex surgeries. He also helped set up a new cardiology hospital unit that cater specifically to monks. Always the man who wants to do more, Dr. Lam confesses about his longing to return to help those in need.

So how does a man with so much to offer find time to relax and to recharge? He spends his days with his wife of 40 years, Dr. Ivy Yap. And he travels abroad with his family about four times a year, plays a game of golf occasionally, and savours wine when he has some quiet time. In short, he keeps busy whether he is in his doctor's attire or when he is off duty. "I live life to the fullest," he says.

Never to sit still, he attributes his active nature to upbringing. During his childhood days, he would go on tree-climbing escapades and nightly fish spearing adventures. While attending college in Dublin, he did everything from scuba diving to mountain climbing—just about every possible activity that an outgoing youngster would love to experience.

These days, he has slowed down his pace somewhat. What excites him more now is a bottle of exquisite wine. His love for wine started all the way back when he was an undergraduate in Dublin. He says: "When we were students, we started to love



wine. But we were so poor, hence the most expensive bottle we could afford cost three pounds and that was a lot of money back then."

A wine connoisseur, Dr. Lam has his own private wine cellar, containing over 3,000 bottles to date.

Nowadays, he spends about \$100,000 each year to add to his wine collection. His most expensive and prized bottle is a bottle of wine dating back to the 1820s. It was recovered by a friend in Dublin who stumbled upon it in a shipwreck while scuba diving. Although the wine is no longer consumable, its origin and historical value is immense.

Dr. Lam's life has not always been a bed of roses. After residing in Dublin for over 20 years, he moved back to Singapore with his wife and two daughters, then aged 11 and four.

"When I first came back, the pay I got from the government service was not enough for the apartment we rented," he says. Initially, he doubted his decision to relocate, since the family had a beautiful house in Dublin and he wondered whether his daughters could adapt to life in Singapore. But soon, things started to change for the better.

Dr. Lam made sure that his daughters were brought up with a humble bringing. He tried to instil in them his philosophy

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in life to keep them grounded and not take the good lives they enjoy for granted. "When my kids were young in Singapore, I made sure they had no branded goods," he says.

His daughters are now married and live overseas. His elder daughter graduated from Princeton University in the US and went on to Harvard University to pursue her Masters degree. She is now living in Australia with her husband, Singapore current ambassador (High Commissioner) to Australia. The younger daughter also graduated from Princeton, and runs a branding agency in New York, where she lives with her husband.

These days, apart from his wife, Dr. Lam's family members mostly live apart but the family makes a point to meet each other often, especially during major holidays, anniversaries and festive occasions. "I still ring my granddaughter every day," Dr. Lam confesses.

All this from a man who can be counted as one of the world's most coveted cardiologists. Even though he has prolific skills to enable him to be where he is now, Dr. Lam fully understands the limitations of modern medicine. He said, "Basically our job as doctors is to heal people, but then we are not gods. There is only a certain amount that we can do. In most occasions, patients recover spontaneously; we just buy some time for them."

Although he believes that there is tremendous room for improvement, Dr. Lam still has high hopes for the future of medicine in Singapore. "Singapore is coming way ahead of everyone else. I hope the next generation of cardiologists will be much better than I will ever be. The reason for this is that, Singapore Government is spending a lot of money in sending our specialists to top centres in the world for training, and providing scholarships, allowances and other perks to groom them," he said.

With such tremendous support the young specialists are getting, it will not be too long before they shine as bright, if not brighter, than their predecessors.

