

## Overcomer

Asthma. What is asthma? To others, it is just another respiratory disease. To my father, it was a roadblock in his life path. The reason behind his breathing difficulties, chest tightness and constant wheezing. But asthma made him a stronger person, a person who could endure hardships, no matter how tough they were.

It all started at the age of seven, when my father was in school. One day, his throat suddenly tightened, and the coughing took over. He had no control over his body at all. Every breath was a painful wheeze, a knife stabbing his lungs. "Asthma." That was what he was diagnosed with. He was clueless about the meaning of the word "es-muh", but he knew it was bad. The dull eyes that once sparkled looked up to meet his parents' but they turned away. He tugged at their hands. "What is going to happen to me?" He whispered to them, features scrunched up in anxiety.

His living conditions back then did not help. At night, my father would sleep on the hard wooden floor of his room. As ice-cold air crept into his scrawny body, he wrapped his thin blanket around him tighter. The cold wood pressed against his lungs, suffocating him even more. He felt as though he was being pressed down by a weight that was sitting on his chest every single night.

As my father's asthma worsened, he was met with more and more difficulties, such as dietary restrictions. Sweets, chips and fizzy drinks tempted him on a daily basis. Every year, my father could only gaze at the Chinese New Year goodies in awe. His

mouth watered as his favourite golden pineapple tarts sat on the table in front of him, waiting to be eaten. Whenever he reached out for a pineapple tart, the only answer he would receive was a simple “no”. Even his puppy-eye-trick did not work. As he watched his relatives consume the scrumptious goodies, he drooped his head and sighed dejectedly. If only he, too, could enjoy those savoury delights.

Sports was another limitation. Since young, my father was engaged in all sorts of physical activities: splashing through the water, playing racket games, running with his friends, and much more. His condition made him unable to carry out these activities any regular child could do, but to be discouraged from swimming was the most disappointing. It was all because of asthma that he was prevented from doing what he enjoyed. He felt like a dejected angel, his wings being robbed from him. His soul longed to fly, but asthma was pulling him down.

Asthma attacks felt like an arrow travelling at eighty metres per second, there was no way to know if it was coming. Every asthma attack felt like a nightmare, a monster waiting to slaughter my father. The faster he breathed, the worse it got. He could not breathe in sufficient oxygen no matter how hard he tried. He was wheezing, gasping, yearning for more air. Breathing was hard, so hard that it seemed like he was drowning in air. Overwhelmed by anxiety, he was unable to calm himself down. He felt as if he was being strangled by someone, as if he was going to die. The torment was unimaginable.

All these difficulties persisted until my father met a special man. At first glance, the man seemed like a normal man - checkered tee, denim jeans, black boots. When my father took a closer look at him, he could see the happiness, hope, positivity that the man radiated. He watched as the man stood on the stage with a wide and confident smile, unafraid of any judgmental eyes. As each word poured out of that man's mouth, my father's eyes started shining too. In the dark tunnel, he saw the light. That man may have just been a cancer survivor giving a speech to the school population, but his words meant the world to my father.

Upon hearing this, my father felt a strange feeling. It was almost as if a screen had been unveiled, and he could now see everything clearly. The way out, the hope, the clear skies. My father thought, "If a person with cancer could be so resilient after facing all of life's adversities, why should I give up? Why am I accepting my condition as it is and not doing anything to improve it?"

Determined to recover from his asthma, my father thought of an idea to reduce dependency on his medication: cutting the dosage of the steroid tablets and consuming it infrequently. This method called "weaning" helped his body to be less reliant on the medication and gradually become stronger.

As time went by, my father grew more confident of himself. He took up the courage to try new activities like life-saving courses which required him to undergo rigorous training. Other than that, he was exposed to many types of activities in National Service, including swimming. All these activities helped my father to push himself and allow his body to be stronger, eventually improving his condition.

Of course, my father still had to be cautious of his diet and activities. Attacks still hit him occasionally, but he took all of these in his stride. He no longer viewed himself as a victim of asthma. Instead, he viewed his condition as a chance for him to push through all odds, a stepping stone to his success.

Ever since I found out about my father's condition, my perception of him changed. He was more than a strong and fit person, more than just a father to me. He was my hero, my glimmer of hope whenever I face a difficulty. It never ceases to amaze me how he managed to pull through all his difficulties and turn into who he is today, a person with such a resilient and optimistic mindset. I am proud to say that my father is an overcomer.

990 words