



**health**

THAT  
GOOD  
GUT  
FEELING

P7



**food**

COURT  
CUISINE

P19



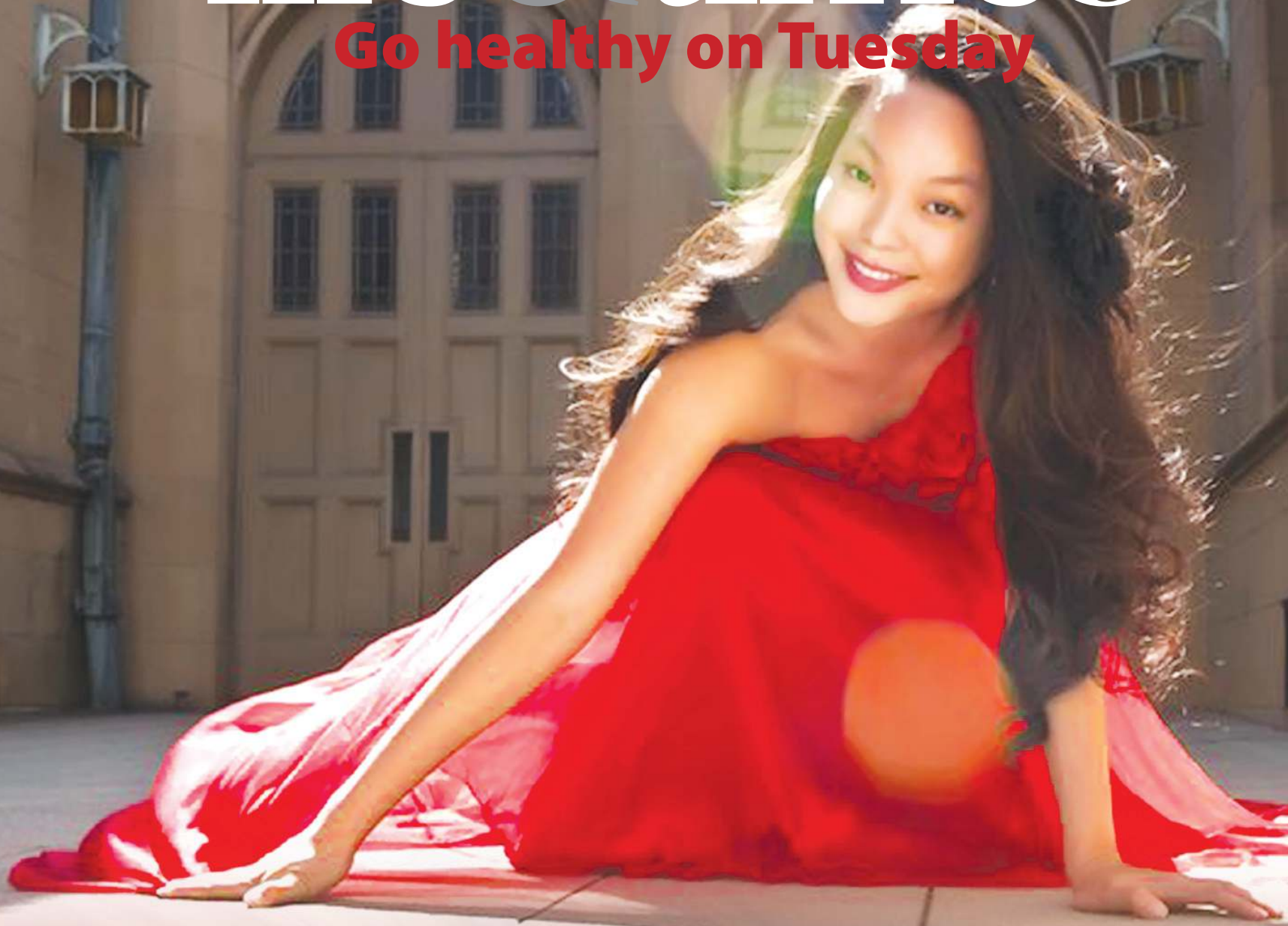
**showbiz**

GRUELLING REGIME FOR  
PARTICIPANTS P23

# life & times

NEW STRAITS TIMES OCTOBER 5, 2010

**Go healthy on Tuesday**



## TAKE IT OFF

Gutsy Poesy Liang starts a movement for cancer

■ PAGES 10 & 15



## health

# Going bald and bold

How many of us would be generous enough to lose our crowning glory for a good cause? Poesy Liang is willing to do just that, and more, writes **SUBHADRA DEVAN**

**P**ERSIS Khambatta, Star Trek. Sinead O'Connor, music. These celebrity artistes went bald. Now, make room for Poesy Liang who will shave her head for cancer patients and wholesome living.

"I am a vain girl, and my hair plays a very big part to my appearance," says Liang, well known as an artist, author, interior architect, design consultant, jewellery designer and motivational speaker. All this just at 35 years old, after three spinal surgeries and still battling paralysis caused by a rare benign tumour that kept recurring in her spinal cord.

Liang, come May next year, will shave off her crowning glory for "a creative welfare effort" — to donate her hair to be made into a wig for cancer patients.

Her initiative, called Bald Empathy Movement (BEM), is one rooted in the social media of Facebook, as is

her first movement called Helping Angels which she started in 2007.

Helping Angels is a movement of compassion to improve the lives and well-being of people around the world. The group has organised and run more than 300 events in many cities — Taiwan, India, Thailand, Bali (Indonesia), Hong Kong — since its inception. "It is driven under four very strict rules — no fundraising, commercial marketing, religious evangelising or political rallies are permitted," says Liang, a Bukit Bintang Girls School alumni.

Helping Angels recently completed its first event in San Francisco in the US for the blind "with great success".

Liang, a Malaysian-Taiwanese, was diagnosed as suffering from paraplegia due to acute thoracic intradural meningioma (a tumour of the central nervous system) when she was 17. The tumour was

coiled around her spine and prevented her from walking. Liang recovered to go ballroom dancing, and was back at work in two years.

Her last operation was in 2006 when she underwent a Cyberknife surgery at Stanford University by neurosurgeon Dr John R. Adler Jr, the inventor of the medical technology. (Cyberknife is a sophisticated robotic radiosurgery system.)

So far no signs of tumour movement and regrowth have been detected. Due to major loss of sensation and control, Liang walks using her visual senses without accurate sensation of her lower limbs.

She tells me that she fell in the bathroom early last month during a photo shoot in Bali. "I have to watch where I place my feet because they have no feeling," she says. "Often I might step on sharp objects, hurt myself and not know that I had harmed myself till I notice



A picture of Liang in Bali by Rio Helmi

some bleeding. There were a few times that I walked on fractured toes and functioned as normal, till the injury was discovered much later."

Undeterred, Liang is forging ahead with BEM and has come up with five objectives:

1. To make bald fashionable and cool, as an empathy movement for those suffering from loss of dignity and hair loss due to chronic illnesses such as cancer.
2. To advocate wholesome lifestyles. Living well — emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually. Encourage healthy attitude, diet, exercise, lifestyle and free of destructive or negative habits — by getting a deeper understanding of chronic illnesses such as cancer.
3. To raise sensitivity towards survivors and patients suffering from ill health. Learning

awareness so we don't cause further stress. For instance, don't bring germs or viruses (no matter how minor) to visit someone who is already fighting for their life. Don't take chances with other lives. Appreciate that ignorance can lead us to take many things in life such as health for granted.

4. Know that we can give our hair to cancer patients by getting the wigs made and gifting it as a gesture of love and respect. Don't just give away the loose hair — make the wig before giving. Good wigs are expensive. Here is an opportunity for you to give away something not just great, but good and from your heart. Lighten their financial load.
5. No hair, no shampoo, less water. The last one has Matthias Gelber, well-

known for eco-warrior efforts (greenmanplanet.blogspot.com), on board. And, adds Liang, "will be shaving his head in solidarity on the same day to support my cause".

"I first learnt about hair donation to cancer patients through a make-up artist in Singapore," says Liang. "It was one of those random days when I volunteered to help someone with something unrelated to my work (designer jewellery making). I helped the make-up artist sort out the hair extension pieces when my curiosity struck.

"I learnt about hair extensions and wigs, where the best can be bought and what the differences were. She told me that anybody can donate their hair to cancer patients, by making them into wigs first — that bald patients would really appreciate, as good wigs can be expensive. This made me think about how

**People with 'empty legs' may seem like walking miracles to someone with the fullest use of their faculties, but little do we know that we are consistently surrounded by walking miracles**

a bald patient may feel, perhaps some suffering from loss of dignity."

Among her many pieces of April, is her participation in the annual National Cancer Society of Malaysia's Relay For Life. This is a spirited event for everyone in the community to join in the fight against cancer.

"Being there with them had begun to matter, reminding me how much we have been through as a family unit. My cancer, mother's cancer, all the years of hardships, etc.

"My mother is a miraculous survivor of fourth stage cancer. Did she heal herself? There is probably an ounce of truth in her diet and lifestyle choices. She is a gifted traditional Chinese medical doctor who practises acupuncture with a wealth of knowledge in herbs and nutritional studies. It is hard to say if she is just

plain fortunate to rid off her cancers, or that she did everything right. "However I do believe that her work in adjusting her spiritual attitude lent to the miracle, as it did for me too.

"I believe my mother survived because she has helped heal so many in her path as a doctor, and her motivations were set in the right place."

Although the message seem to be pivoted around cancer awareness, Liang wants this to be also about advocating a wholesome life — to attract people to live fully and shun self-destruction.

"Being bald is not important, it is just a temporal statement — but to have empathy and develop that side of our spirit could only do us good."

Liang observed: "People with 'empty legs' may seem like walking miracles to someone

**Being bald is not important, it is just a temporal statement — but to have empathy and develop that side of our spirit could only do us good**

with the fullest use of their faculties, but little do we know that we are consistently surrounded by walking miracles."

Liang is also working with international visual artists for the before-during-after shots. On board for BEM, says Liang, are photographers Todd Harrison (Los Angeles), Mitch Parnes (mitchparnes.com), Djeneba Aduayom (djeneba-aduayom.com), Rio Helmi (riohelmi.com), and Max Milligan.

BEM has also drawn filmmakers who will make 60-sec shorts for the message objectives to go viral on the Internet. There are already two award-winning directors — Jerome Jourlaït (monkiztribe.com), who plans to submit a documentary for Cannes 2011 and Soma Helmi who will work on emphasising the objectives through her short films.

"Empathy is a very big part of this balding affair and I wanted to bring awareness to wholesome lifestyles and healthy traits, and perhaps reduce tendencies of taking our life for granted which leads to regrets and for some depression."

So, while for many of us our midsummer madness may see us waltzing or holidaying, Liang plans to make her Cannes BEM moment "a party of crazy talented and creative international friends".

Cover picture by DJENEBA ADUAYOM

sdevan@nst.com.my



A photo taken by Rio Helmi in Bali on Sept 17 this year