



Near tragedy leads to Aaron Pang's “transformative purpose”



Health is wealth. It's one of Aaron Pang's favorite mantras. The reason becomes obvious when you hear his story. It was an ordinary evening. As Aaron and his wife sat on their couch in Hong Kong watching television, they heard a scream. They rushed into the room where their infant son slept to discover him struggling to breathe. "There were bubbles falling out of his mouth as he tried to catch his breath," Aaron recalls. "I didn't know what was happening, so I took him in my arms and tried patting his back."

As his son's limbs became weak, Aaron saw a look in his child's eyes that he'll never forget. "It was disappointment. Like, why aren't you saving me? Why don't you do something? I felt so guilty." He describes it as the longest five minutes of his life as they waited for an ambulance to arrive.

Doctors never discovered the reason for the episode. Today, three years later, Aaron often finds himself putting a finger under his sleeping son's nose to ensure he's still breathing. "I'll always remember that terrifying night," says Aaron, who's now a Microsoft architect. "It caused me to start asking myself how I could become a better father. How could I become a better person to positively influence the world?" But it wasn't just that life and death experience that moulded Aaron. He had another, much earlier, brush with an unexpected health scare that came to define who he is today. He was 19 years old, studying in Australia, cramming for finals at a friend's home. "I went into the bathroom at around 3 in the morning and realized something was wrong," he says.

"I couldn't move half my face." He was diagnosed with Bell's palsy, a facial paralysis that affected Aaron's ability to blink, smile, and sleep. "But at age 19, I didn't think much about it," he says. "There wasn't any clinical evidence that it was linked to anything. It was basically a viral infection that I could expect to go away in about three months." Bell's palsy gave Aaron a renewed appreciation for the little things in life, such as smiling and speaking clearly. But as the years went by, what he learned from the experience faded away. "I ignored the fact that life is a marathon, not a sprint," he says, admitting that he didn't look after himself, taking pride in pulling all-nighters. Fast forward 13 years. "I was attending a friend's party in Thailand when I called my wife to tell her I thought I had Bell's palsy again. She asked me to immediately catch the next flight home."





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Aaron Pang



When she saw him, she began to cry. "It made me realize health isn't just your health. It also affects the well-being of those who love you." He says that the second battle with Bell's palsy was one of the things that hit him hardest in life. "It reminded me that I need to be healthy, both physically and mentally, so I can be around to do all the things I want in life," he says. "Like a lot of people, I thought you didn't have to react to something—do something differently—until it happened twice in your life. But sometimes life doesn't give us a second chance. So don't wait for that moment before you do something differently." Health is just one component of what Aaron calls his "transformative purpose"—how he strives to learn from life's lessons to be a "better me" each day. Tune in to the *Powered by the People* podcast to learn more about Aaron's inspirational journey of discovery.

