

# Facing Adversity With Faith

NTUC Assistant Secretary-General **Seng Han Thong** chronicles his recovery from a burns attack in the People's Action Party's 'Petir' magazine. The full version can be read in [www.pap.org.sg](http://www.pap.org.sg). Here are excerpts.

I never expected to meet with such a misfortune at a community function where we care for and share with needy families and senior citizens with many grassroots leaders around.

The misfortune happened on a busy Sunday. I had finished handing out bursaries and hongbaos to about 150 needy students and senior citizens and was just settling down to lunch when the attacker approached from behind, poured thinner on me and set me on fire.

One good friend asked me: "Were you brave and upbeat from the beginning?" Indeed, in life, we always encounter challenges, problems and issues which need our immediate response. As for this misfortune, what happened is over. I was set on fire and suffered severe burns on my face, shoulder, arms and chest. There is no use blaming anyone or carping on it as I cannot undo the incident. So, the best and only way is to face it rather than fear it, and overcome it rationally and decisively.

I was more determined to fight on despite the physical pain and sufferings and focus on my recovery when Cabinet Ministers, current and former Members of Parliament, grassroots leaders, union leaders, community leaders, colleagues, friends and relatives came in full



force to give my family and me support and encouragement. Their visits greatly boosted the morale and confidence of my family members during this difficult period. My family members, especially my mother and wife, gained faith each day when they saw how I was able to relate my progress to the visitors.

NTUC Secretary-General Lim Swee Say visited me the day after the incident when he just touched down from an overseas trip. He told my mother that he felt sad as I was suffering from very severe swelling and he could not recognise me. He came back the same day again to console my family. On Lunar New Year Day, SG Lim and Mrs Lim came to wish me well.

Indeed, it was the positive energy from all visitors, including many brothers and sisters from the Labour Movement, who gave me this positive energy to fight on. They are the workers from different sectors, on different shifts, including taxi drivers, who rushed to see me after their duties.

I suffered 14 per cent burns but my second younger sister told my mother: "Brother in fact suffered 28 per cent as the skin grafting would take 14 per cent of his good skin from his thigh and back." She was right that I had to bear with this extra pain and bleeding especially at night. I did not tell my family as they had already suffered too much because of my predicament.

In the first five days of confinement in the Intensive Care Unit, I was intubated and my swollen arms were tied to the bed to prevent me from pulling the tube out of my mouth in case I had nightmares in my sleep. Many tubes were entwined around my body as I was hooked on to many machines. I could not talk nor could I eat, drink, or sleep well. I knew that the skin from my thigh and back had been removed for the grafting and the pain was excruciating.

I am now on the road of recovery, slowly but steadily. I receive physiotherapy and occupational therapy treatments a few times a week as an outpatient. Each time, my mother, my wife and youngest sister accompany me. They know that I still have months of therapy to go through before I will regain most of my capabilities but they are positive. They know that as a burns victim, my lifestyle will not be the same in the next one to two years but they are optimistic.



NTUC Assistant Secretary-General Seng Han Thong (left) receiving physiotherapy treatment from two women.