



# Terran Aw

## BEARYFUN GYM

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*Clad in a blue dri-fit shirt, the slender man animatedly gestured to emphasize his point. Whenever he could not think of a suitable word to use in his sentence, he replaced it with a simpler word and a wide smile. Mr Terran Aw, is an adult dyslexic. Terran, 45, is the founder of BearyFun Gym, a gymnastics school for children that also operates a trampoline park and indoor playground.*

Children born after the 1980s would not recognise the Primary 7 and Primary 8 system, which Mr Aw was a part of. Struggling academically, his teachers commented on his yearly report book that he was not putting in effort and was plain lazy. He was failing so consistently that he had to transfer school, and transfer again to a school that supported Primary 7 and 8 students.

"I didn't know why I was so stupid, I couldn't even speak," he said.

Growing up watching Hong Kong Kungfu movies cemented Terran's dream of being an action star like his idol Jackie Chan. He often went to the beach near his house to practice stunt movies alone, such as jumping, kicking and rolling.

The potential dangers of practicing stunts alone did not occur to Terran, who found joy in being alone



doing what he loved. "I can't study, I can't read, but at least I can do something like my stunt heroes," he thought. A stunt director could be his future career. Terran felt free on the beach, it was a panacea after harsh days at school.

His background was, in his own words, poor. He lived in a house that was small, but comforting and secure for the young Terran. It was so comfortable he would stay there secluded for two weeks without leaving. Aside from escaping to the nearby beach every day to practice stunts, he had a best friend at home - his bear.

After Primary 8, Terran could not qualify for secondary school so he was enrolled into the Vocational and Industrial Training Board (VITB), the predecessor of today's Institute of Technical Education (ITE). There, his first two years consisted of general skills before he went on to specialise in mechanical fittings.

Although the focus was on practical skills, there was still theory aspects and examinations to sit through. Scraping by with his grades, Terran graduated with a practical certificate in Mechanical fittings. After graduating from ITE with a certificate in practical work but not in theory, he was given a year to find a job before going into National Services (NS).

A friend of the family, Uncle Fook, took on Terran as an extra, so he could earn a little money, in the drama programme called Wu Jiao Ji at the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC). In this production he was exposed to many fighting scenes which mesmerised him. He knew he could do many of the moves as he had already began to learn gymnastics. Thus, one day, he decided to ask the action director whether he can give it a try. Soon he was asked to join a newly formed Wushu training class in SBC. After completion of the course, he officially became a trained stuntman.

Even during his NS days, he continued to work as an extra to gain more experiences and fulfilled his passion in doing gymnastics. In one of the dramas, White Snake Lady, he was required to do a continuous front summersault which he had no experience in. With his wit and perseverance, he managed to impress everyone at the scene with his agile moves. He had never felt that confidence in his life ever.

The only problem with this stuntman job was that it was often based on projects, if there was no project, he would not have any income at all. As such, he had to take up extra jobs such working as a KJ in a KTV or took up Chinese opera stuntman role at Getai. Terran needed to find a job with a more stable income stream.

Terran wasn't completely without support. He had a good friend who, in trying to help Terran be comfortable in interviews, brought him along when he went for interviews to show him what to expect. He managed to find a job in the industry, but soon found that he would never have passion for the work.

While looking for a new job, he applied for a coordinator position. "This word 'coordinator', it means there is a lot of paperwork," said Terran. During the interview, Terran impressed the interviewer with his language, who did not realise that Terran did not know how to write. He got the

job. He had to write reports as part of his first job. Noticing that many reports came in a standard format, he devised a template where he could use the same format and simply change the figures for different reports. That made his report-writing process a lot faster.

All was not smooth sailing even though he got the coordinator role. He was not paid market rate, which he accepted because he had shortcomings and he needed a job. His boss noticed that Terran had problems with the quotation and report writing, so they came to a consensus, allowing Terran to go out for meetings to do the talking, while his boss stayed behind to write reports. With his speech impairment, Terran had issues during the meetings as well. He got scolded regularly too, leading him to consider resigning.

A good friend of his persuaded him to continue with his work. "If you leave now, you will never learn," recounted Terran. His friend said that even though report writing was difficult, it was necessary in many jobs. Even if he decided to work as a technician instead of an administrative role, there were also reports to be done.

He stayed on for 5 years, being a part of the company's expansion. Contributing "a couple of good ideas", Terran became a team leader. He was able to delegate the report duties to another colleague and focus solely on bringing in business and building up the company.

Mobile phones were extremely costly at the time, but Terran worked hard to save money. He needed to call his friend frequently to check on spelling of words. To save money, he walked from his house in Aljunied to his workplace in Orchard every day, spending almost 2 hours each way.

Around this time, his expenses were rising rapidly. He had just bought a HDB flat, which he needed to pay for. His boss refused to increase his pay, which made Terran severely underpaid. Along with his hardships at work, he decided to resign from his job.

However, fortune shone on Terran as he was approached once again to go back to Television Corporation Service (TCS) he became a stuntman with the project of Condor Heroes. Later, more projects came along such as the movie: 2000 AD starring Aaron Kwok and Sha Shou De Tong Hua starring Andy Lau. Along came one Hollywood

movie project: "Monkey King: The Lost Empire 2001".

However, life is never a bed of roses, after 911 incident, followed by SARs, projects reduced more than expected. Once again, livelihood became an issue. In one of the scene, he fractured his ankle too. With so many obstacles in life, he never gave up as he knew he needed to support the family, his mother.

During the years, working as a stuntman and in his office career, he grasped critical thinking skills, he became very adaptable in different situations and environments, he became very confident and courageous of his ability.

In a twist of destiny; he was approached by an old friend to practice gymnastics once again. He was to assist in coaching children, although without much return in the beginning he agreed because he knew that this type of work has always been his love – gymnastics. He was sent to primary schools to coach children in gymnastics unconditionally. That started his first step in his journey of becoming a gymnastics coach.

With more Principals trusting in his coaching ability, he soon was given many Primary schools to support in training their children in gymnastics.

In 2004, through the "Learn to Play" programme, he ventured into early childhood sector too. He remembered his first experience with young children, he was totally shocked by how adorable all of them are, just like his bear!

He enjoyed the gym lessons with the children. He derived satisfaction as they all grew tremendously under his care. Bingo! When a job consists of all the likings that you have, the ability of yours, and the passion in you, he finally found his mission in life!

It was always his dream to bring BearyFun Gym's child-focused gymnastics programme to as many children as possible, regardless of their abilities. He felt that every child is capable of learning gymnastics and that they can benefit from gymnastics. The birth of BearyFun Gym is where he felt that every child can have an opportunity to grow and enjoy gymnastics in a fun and nurturing environment. Everything that gymnastics and children encompass - strength, discipline, confidence, pure, fun and uniqueness, is what BearyFun Gym stands for!

Terran took courses in early childhood movement, and applied the techniques when he taught children gymnastics. Through his job, he met many parents who have come up to tell him that their



children have dyslexia. They connect immediately, because Terran truly understands them.

Combining his two loves - Gymnastics and Children have made Terran a very happy man today and he sincerely grateful for the support from the parents, principals, friends and my family for believing in him to make his Gym, BearyFun and the Gym's programmes happen!

"I'm living my dream now," he says, "Don't need to do much admin work, but I can play with the children."

Terran's wife had previously studied early childhood education and noticed that he had issues with his reading and spelling. She encouraged him to go for a dyslexia assessment. At the age of 42, Terran was diagnosed with dyslexia. "Initially, I felt very proud, if there really was a problem with me, I wouldn't feel bad," he shared, "but after the diagnosis, I felt bad, like I wasn't a normal person."

Though painful to acknowledge but he accepted his problem. And by accepting his problem, he felt more relieved and grateful that he was able to achieve what he has accomplished despite having dyslexia. Now, he sincerely hopes to convey to more children who are facing issues, not to be in despair. "It really isn't as bad as what you think it is. Through gymnastics, doing the think that I love, I can. I know you can do it too!"

To the young people with dyslexia, he says: "Don't give up, everyone faces difficulties, just try your best. People learn differently, not everyone can learn using traditional methods. Don't be too worried about your future."

Despite his difficult beginnings, Terran understands that the challenges are what made him who he is today. "I wouldn't change my tough childhood for anything in the world."



DAS believes that no child should be left behind because he or she cannot afford the cost of DAS services.

Besides the main literacy programme, DAS also offers support in Mathematics, Chinese, English Exam Skills and Speech and Drama Arts. Increasingly, DAS will provide support for dyslexics who also suffer from other specific learning differences such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyspraxia, dyscalculia and non-verbal learning differences.

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