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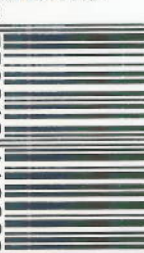
ZHANG TINGJUN

The Chain Reaction Project: Helping the needy,
one gruelling project at time

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THE CHAIN REACTION PROJECT

Channeling passion for adventure and charity into creating social change, four women help the needy, one gruelling project at a time

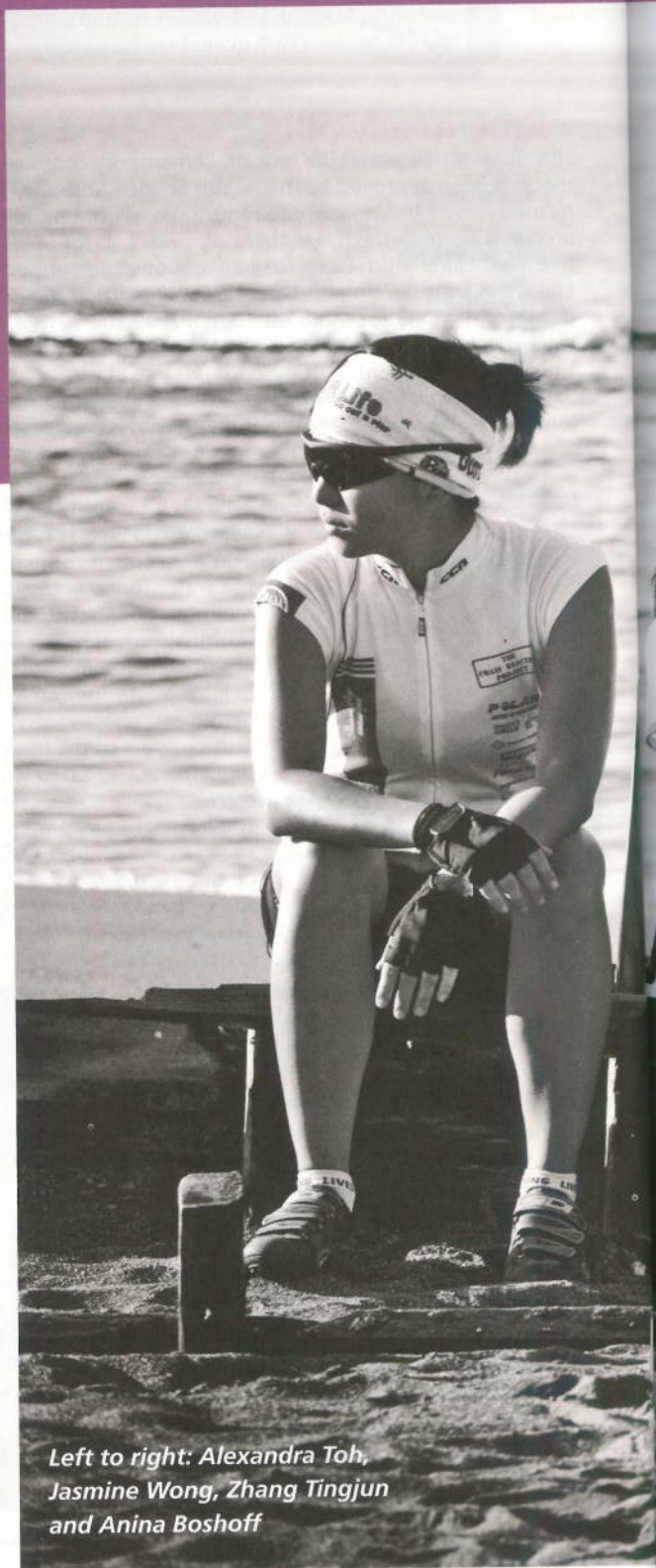
By Maripet L. Poso

Just like some other major turning points in women's lives, the idea of The Chain Reaction Project (TCRP) – a unique, Singapore-based, non-profit organisation committed to helping the less fortunate – started over a few cups of coffee with friends.

In 2009, Zhang Tingjun, Anina Boshoff, Alexandra Toh and Jasmine Wong thought they were only going for an adventure when they signed up for the "Tour de Timor," a five-day 450-km mountain bike race through the rough terrain of East Timor. They never thought that that single decision would lead to a chain reaction, a life-changing one. Ting was a producer at Channel NewsAsia (CNA) when she first heard about the 'Tour de Timor'. Together with the three other women, she signed up for the adventure. And it was over coffee, while the four ladies were discussing the race, that the conversations turned into more serious topics about the country. Suddenly, they were discussing East Timor's plight – the poverty, its turbulent past and current challenges.

"We realised we share not just a mutual passion for adventure but also for people," shared Ting. "It was the decision that we made that day to use the adventure as a platform to raise funds and awareness for a charity in East Timor that saw the birth of The Chain Reaction Project."

Two years into the project, TCRP has already gained popularity not only in Singapore but in the region, fostering a network of over 1,000 people and raising more than US\$100,000 for its adopted charities. During the Tour de Timor in 2009, TCRP has raised more than US\$35,000 for HIAM-Health, a Dili-based malnutrition rehabilitation centre for children. In 2010, the team returned to East Timor to continue their support to HIAM Health, participating in the inaugural Dili 'City of Peace' Marathon. In 2011, Team TCRP took their adventure to new heights. This time in Moshi, a small town at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, to take part in the annual Kili(MAN)jaro Adventure Challenge to raise funds and awareness for Amani Children's Home.



Left to right: Alexandra Toh, Jasmine Wong, Zhang Tingjun and Anina Boshoff



Up close and personal

Beyond their stunning looks and quick wit, what makes these four ladies stand out is their true compassion for people. Ezyhealth & Beauty is privileged to get to know these four "Catalysts for Change" a little better.

Ezyhealth & Beauty: Please introduce yourselves to our readers.

Ting: I'm 29, single, a former journalist/producer with regional broadcaster Channel NewsAsia and an ex-national netball player for Singapore. Currently, I'm a freelance emcee and motivational speaker.

Anina: I am a single 37-year old South African. I am a lawyer by profession and a nomad by choice. The three years I spent in Singapore was one of my longest stops – mainly thanks to TCRP.

“The physical challenge makes us push our boundaries, to be uncomfortable, to dig deeper within ourselves. And in so doing, it helps us to see the mettle we're made of and that we can achieve something greater because we push ourselves. -Jasmine

Jasmine: I'm a sports physiotherapist who in my latest incarnation is gaining new experience as a public servant in the Singapore Government. I have completed races all over the world, and I used some of these races to raise funds for several charities.

Alex: I'm a Filipino at heart and Singaporean by nationality. I was raised in the Philippines and moved to Singapore six years ago to finish my studies in International Business. I am an aspiring photojournalist, freelance-spinning instructor and full-time catalyst for change.

EHB: Wow, you came from different backgrounds. How did you ladies know each other?

Ting: Jas and Anina knew each other through church. Alex was Jas' Spin Instructor at the gym, and I was a friend of Alex's.

Empathy personified

EHB: In the two years that you guys have been doing the TCRP, you must have gone through a

lot. What has been your most memorable project so far?

Alex: I think our first project that took us to East Timor to take part in the inaugural Tour de Timor was the most memorable for all of us. Personally, on so many levels, it was one of the most spontaneous and challenging experiences of my life – from the physical and emotional test, to the steep learning curve of picking a charity to support and fund raising for that particular charity. It was such an eye opening, life-changing, wake up call experience for all of us.

EHB: Has anyone of you ever experienced how it is to suffer in any form that you can sympathise so much with the needy?

Jasmine: I suppose in my case it started with my first visit to Cambodia in 2001. I was backpacking through many of the provinces and really witnessed much poverty. It pained me to see how families could survive on so little when in comparison, I've been accustomed to the affluence and the high standard of living in Singapore. Kids in the villages ran barefoot because they were too poor to own shoes.

When you think about the UN Millenium Development Goals, really, everyone of us can play a part. Why wait for someone else or one of the big organisations to do something? That's one of the reasons why being part of TCRP really resonated with me – we believe in being the change agents, the start of chain reactions, in encouraging more people to do the same and that it's really okay to start small – at least we're starting somewhere.

EHB: Can you share any touching experience from doing TCRP?

Alex: One of the most touching experiences I've had was in Africa last year. As we were leaving the home on our last day at Amani Children's Home (our adopted charity for 2011), one of the kids that I had spent some time with grabbed my hand to say goodbye. He asked when I was coming back and told me not to forget him. It was a very sad moment because no kid should have to feel the need to ask that – to expect to be left behind and forgotten. Unfortunately, he is one out of the millions of the forgotten orphans out there.

Of charity and challenges

EHB: How do you choose your beneficiary?

Anina: We always say that the causes to date have chosen us and there is a lot of truth to that, but there is more. We all share an instinctive sense of responsibility towards women and children and from

towards projects that address very basic needs. Our first three big projects focused on basic nutrition and primary care for children. Our next project is about personal freedom, which is less tangible, but is no less important.

Ting: At the end of the day, there are causes all over the world, and TCRP's mission is to expose as many people as possible to a variety of causes to help them decide where they would like to focus their time and energy in the future. I guess you could say our 'cause' is investing in our catalysts and supporting them on their journey to discover their personal giving style.

EHB: What do you hope to achieve with TCRP?

Ting: We hope to inspire catalysts for change and encourage people to find a cause, and have an effect.

EHB: Where do you draw inspiration from for doing TCRP?

Anina: The gratitude that we receive from the people we have been able to assist so far has been an endless source of inspiration. I have never come across bigger dreams than I did at Amani Children's Home in Moshi in Tanzania. It is contagious and it makes me want to do more. It is equally inspiring to see how far people can come with very little help. When I look at what we do and what we have achieved so far from my professional point of view as a Finance lawyer, I have to say that being a catalyst for change has yielded higher returns for me than any investment ever will.

Next stop: Davao, Philippines

EHB: Please tell us a little bit about your next challenge, which will be held in Davao, Philippines.

Ting: 2012 will see TCRP head to the city of Davao, in southern Philippines. Despite being a peaceful and progressive metropolis, Davao has suffered the spillover effect of the unrest in its neighbouring provinces, and tourism continues to suffer. TCRP will be taking part in the 24-hour Mt Apo Boulder Challenge held in Davao del Sur, an initiative to raise the profile of Davao as a safe tourist destination as well as to raise money for Visayan Forum Foundation Inc., which combats human trafficking.

While in Davao, TCRP catalysts will spend time hearing first-hand accounts of trafficking survivors as well as learning more about what is being done to win the fight against human trafficking. In addition, each participant will be required to raise S\$1,000 to support the cause.

EHB: How can our readers support TCRP and your future endeavors?

Anina: We always need financial and logistical support. We also benefit greatly from knowledge-sharing of, and access to networks in, the countries where we do projects. However, given what we have set out to achieve, the most important contribution that people can make is to become involved in the longer term with the charity and/or the cause that we introduce them to.

Ting: Interested volunteers are welcome to join us on our upcoming adventure, or to support us in our efforts by raising funds and awareness for Visayan Forum. More details on TCRP can be found at www.thechainreactionproject.com.

Fit and fab

EHB: All of your adventures are physically challenging, how do you prepare for it?

Jasmine: Perhaps we should clarify that not all our ventures (not adventures) need to be physically challenging, but we've found that the physical challenge lends a necessary dimension to the TCRP experience. The physical challenge makes us push our boundaries, to be uncomfortable, to dig deeper within ourselves. And in so doing, it helps us to see the mettle we're made of and that we can achieve something greater because we push ourselves. That process often facilitates deeper reflection and in many ways, helps us to identify better with the less fortunate in society who struggle even in day to day living.

And to actually answer the question, I think the four of us in TCRP have always been interested in keeping fit, so even if there's no TCRP adventure round the corner, we would still maintain some fitness: running/cycling/spinning regularly. If there's a specific TCRP challenge coming up, we would have a more dedicated training programme drawn up.

EHB: Thank you for being an inspiration to all women out there, and all the best to your future adventures. Last but not least, any fitness tips for our readers?

Alex: Don't take fitness and yourself too seriously and just have fun. Realise that it's a way of life and you have to find a lifestyle you can sustain. Try different sports/activities out and step out of your comfort zone. Be realistic with your goals, try to be consistent and start slow. Organise activities with friends and family – commit to it and make it a weekly event. Do things you enjoy and before you know it – you'll be back in those skinny jeans you've kept all these years. **ehb**