



Sheila Purves, project director of the World Health Organization Collaborative Centre for Rehabilitation.

Edmond Tang

### CyberRun for Rehab

Inspired by Purves' running hobby, CyberRun for Rehab is one of the most important fund-raisers for the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation.

Last year, CyberRun raised around HK\$800,000 to support rehabilitation services for some 1 million disabled mainland

children. The donation was also used to fund 20 sports days for these children, in the spirit of the Olympics.

This year's theme is "Family Together". Raised fund will be spent on projects promoting community-based rehabilitation for the disabled, especially the

Sichuan quake victims.

When: 9 am to 13 pm, November 23, 2008 (Sunday)

Where: Cyberport

What: 5km Run, 4km Walk, 1.5km Wheelchair-Accessible Walk

Details: [www.cyberunrun.org](http://www.cyberunrun.org)  
Tel: 2817 6277

# All from scratch

► Sheila Purves is famously known as 'Bei Lao Shi' (Teacher Purves) in the mainland's professional world of physiotherapy. The expat from Canada tells **Joy Lu** about her career and life

When Sheila Purves, project director of World Health Organization Collaborative Centre for Rehabilitation, went to Wuhan, Hubei province, in 1989, she thought she was going to teach community-based rehabilitation.

Community-based rehabilitation had been widely acknowledged as the best approach to meet the needs of the disabled. And it was the core philosophy of the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation, which sent Purves to the mainland for a training program that it jointly organized with the Ministry of Health.

But after explaining the concept to her students, their response was: "Oh, forget it!"

Most mainland hospitals didn't have a rehabilitation department then. All the 50 students in Purves' class are practicing doctors who would return to hospitals and focus on diagnosis and therapy. "First, we must have good rehabilitation departments in hospitals, then we think about community-based services," they said.

"But you can still teach rehabilitation to volunteers," Purves said, not giving up.

Her students laughed: "No, no, you don't understand the mainland. There are no volunteers."

#### 'We both win'

"So one of the first things I learned on the mainland is this: When I teach, I have to think about my audience and make it relevant to their situation," Purves said.

And from there she taught for 19 years. Among her some 20,000 students who are some of China's best rehabilitation specialists today, Purves was respectfully and lovingly known as "Bei Lao Shi" (Teacher Purves).

The doctors who said she should forget about community-based rehabilitation did go back to their hospitals and set up the rehabilitation departments. "They get degrees, write books and become directors of the rehabilitation departments of their hospitals," Purves said.

But they have also become advocates of community-based rehabilitation. "Many of them spent a lot of time every year writing, training, teaching, mentoring and giving talks about community-based rehabilitation," she said.

They have come to realize that hospital treatment would not help a patient if no support is available in the community. "If doctors want what they have done in hospital to be useful and have an impact, there must be community-based services," Purves said.

"So we both won," she said, with a triumphant smile.

The sense of triumph didn't come easily. Despite rapid progress, the mainland's rehabilitation services for the disabled are still wanting in many respects. In Purves' early days in Wuhan, frustration, clashes and misunderstandings were part of life. "We think differently. What I think is important is often the second or third item down their priority list," she said.

The problem is often compounded because of the cultural difference between the East and West. "I don't understand the way they solve problems... For North Americans, we like to go straight out and say it out loud: how can we solve this problem? For Chinese, sometimes it's better not to say it, but slowly, slowly to change," she said.

#### Keep running

Fortunately, there is running.

Purves has been a runner since university. "I came from a very small town in northern Canada. When I went to university in Vancouver, I decided to make good use of my time so I would not just study. I made a lot of friends and had a good time," she said.

Purves joined the university track team. It turned out to be one of the best decisions she has ever made: She traveled, met a lot of people and made friends — including the man she later married.

Running is also how the former history major came into the field of physiotherapy, a profession taking her to many parts of Canada, to Switzerland and then to England.

It was in England that the opportunity to come to Hong Kong emerged. Always interested in Asia, she arrived in 1983 but her first impression of the city was hardly favorable: "I think I can never live here... It is too big. It has so many

people. Life is too fast."

But she stayed, knowing her husband loved the life here. After a few months of adjusting, she realized there were many development opportunities for her and started working for the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation.

She was asked to join the mainland training program in 1988. She agreed and her husband was nothing but supportive: "He really appreciated that I got a lot of satisfaction from my work."

Her husband traveled to Wuhan as much as possible to be with her. But most of time she was alone in the city without an expat community. That's when she started to run on the street everyday at noon.

Reputed to be one of the three furnace cities on the mainland, Wuhan had a three-hour lunch break for people to take naps. At noon, "even people selling things on the street are sleeping on their tables. Nobody bothers you. It's very quiet. There's no car and no pollution."

Running kept her healthy and happy. When she felt frustrated and angry at herself for not being able to cope with things, running was an unfailing mood-booster.

"You see children playing and people doing stuff. Sometimes, people on bicycle would ride beside me and practice English with me. It's quite interesting. By the time you finish the run, you just forget your problems and go back to your work."

As a WHO project director for the Asia Pacific region, Purves has many responsibilities. But when there's a need, she still works on the frontline. After the devastating Sichuan earthquake on May 12, she is at the center of the operation helping provide timely rehabilitation to the injured.

For a runner whose best distance is one mile, her career "is really a marathon," Purves said.



Purves visits children injured in the Sichuan earthquake. Courtesy of HKSRC

## Irony ends with the title in *Smart People*

### MOVIE REVIEW

By ELIZABETH KERR

What defines a good family drama? Is it uncomfortable situations that wring a cringe of recognition from audiences? Could it be empathetic characters that inspire shrieks of "I know that guy..." from us? Is it accurately crystallizing the current zeitgeist and filtering that through a domestic lens? All of the above? Whatever the case may be, angsty families have been a cinema staple for years, and the best films among them — Mike Leigh's *Secrets & Lies*, Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums*, John Madden's *Proof* — make the foibles of damaged, abrasive people relatable and draw us into their worlds. That's what *Smart People* wants to do; it just goes about it the wrong way — often by making the characters so unlikable we fall into an apathetic abyss.

Widower Lawrence Wetherhold (Dennis Quaid) is a genius Carnegie Mellon English professor with a knack for alienating his students. He's an intellectual bully whose disdain for his classes, the university, and publishing manifests in all sorts of boorish

behavior that he chalks up to superiority. This is fine with his enabler daughter Vanessa (Ellen Page), also a genius and a proud Republican that is so wrapped up in academia she has no youth and no life. There's also Jimmy (Ashton Holmes), Lawrence's disaffected son, who just wants all of them to leave him out of the domestic proceedings. Into the house comes Chuck (Thomas Haden Church), Lawrence's quasi-drifter adopted brother, there ostensibly to chauffeur Lawrence around after a seizure gets his driver's license revoked. When emergency room doctor Janet Hartigan (Sarah Jessica Parker) — a former student — becomes romantically involved with Lawrence, the dysfunction becomes even more evident. Oh, but then there's a redemption and/or catharsis for everyone and so it's all okay. Maybe Vanessa will become a Democrat.

The title of the film is meant to be ironic, much like the actual little children in Little Children weren't in kindergarten... they were their parents. The brainiacs of *Smart People* are, in fact, too smart for their own health and happiness: They're stupid. Director-writer team Noam Murro and Mark Poirier

don't really do much to add any kind of twist on the genre; neither do they offer up any new insights into the psychological or emotional mechanisms of the supremely bright. The metaphors are simplistic and the relatively happy ending is forced. Chuck appears to be the lone voice of "dumb" reason within the family, and he is the beacon that guides Lawrence et al to more fulfilling lives à la those with an average IQ. But if the comparative emotional stability of the Uneducated Noble That Appreciates Life is never seen in another film ever again it will be too soon. It doesn't help matters that Nuno Bettencourt, formerly of "rock" band Extreme (recall the ghastly "More Than Words"), scored the film, and grating guitar plucking telegraphs every big moment well in advance.

Likeability is by no means a prerequisite for enjoying a film or a character. Empathy is. Characters that do "stupid" things are the foundation of any number of great films — Tilda Swinton's protective mom in *The Deep End*, Josh Brolin's unfortunate hunter in *No Country for Old Men*. The difference with those films is that right or wrong, smart or not, viewers could understand what moved the characters to

act. The people in *Smart People* are just infuriating. There are narrative threads that hint at more compelling sub-plots, but those are never thoroughly investigated. Vanessa's fierce attachment and defense of her father suggest a parent-child dynamic that could have been exploited and Jimmy's determined detachment makes an interesting counterpoint to that. Chuck is clear-eyed enough to rightly dub Vanessa a "monster," while he develops an unspoken bond with the properly socialized Jimmy. Too bad there wasn't more of that story.

Does the cast sell any of it? That depends on your tolerance for pigeonholing. Quaid has experienced a career rebirth by playing this kind of middle-aged curmudgeon (*In Good Company*, *Far From Heaven*) and he pulls it off here with ease. The problem is that Lawrence is so reprehensible — and downright unethical at times — that his tics teeter over into the realm of personality liabilities. Why does he still have a job? Why is the doctor interested in him? Why is his brother talking to him at all? The overrated Page sleepwalks through a rehash of her role in *Juno*, albeit with a conservative slant, and has



Dennis Quaid, Ellen Page, and Sarah Jessica Parker play three of the dumbest people to ever grace screens in *Smart People*

#### Smart People

Academic family drama loses its way with unappealing characters

Directed by Noam Murro, written by Mark Poirier. Starring Dennis Quaid, Sarah Jessica Parker, Ashton Holmes, Ellen Page, and Thomas Haden Church. USA, 94 minutes, IIB.

stamped herself as the go-to girl for the snarky, quip-spewing oh-so post-modern pseudo-feminist. And you know what? It's already a tired act. Parker is simply a toned down Carrie Bradshaw (she just might be wearing Manolo Blahniks), and then there's Church supplying

comic relief in the role he started honing on television in *Wings* and perfected in *Sideways*. Familiarity only works when filmmakers turn conventions on their heads. *Smart People* is just baffling.

*Smart People* opens in Hong Kong today.