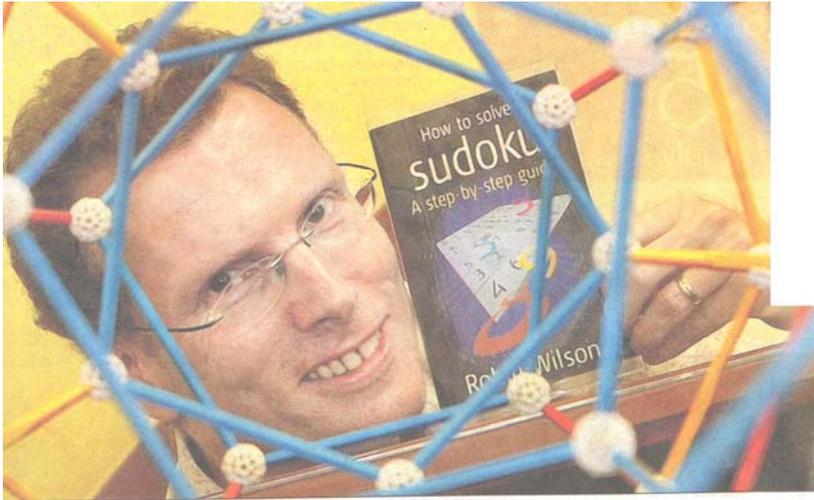


Article 1



Norwegian maths professor Helmer Aslaksen, 47, is an avid runner. He chats to **Elaine Young** about keeping fit, and Sudoku.

The Straits Times

Mind Your Body - Health Help

Of brains and brawn

848 words

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English

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Norwegian maths professor Helmer Aslaksen, 47, is an avid runner. He chats to Elaine Young about keeping fit, and Sudoku.

Your website is full of professional and personal interests, so how do you balance work life and home life?

I am interested in a lot of things and I see links between hobbies and my work. And I have a lot of freedom in my work anyway.

You completed a marathon in just over 21/2 hours; so would you label yourself a fitness fanatic?

Exercise is an important part of my life. It saves you from medical ailments, though you do get sports injuries! And it gives you self-confidence. Wherever I travel, I will always find a bunch of weirdos who like to run around in circles. When I came to Singapore in 1989, I started teaching at the National University of Singapore and started running with a local running club.

Do you still run?

I have a baby jogger so I go for a two-hour run on Sundays. My son Edvard loves it because all the other babies are just strolling along and he is whizzing past. He is the fastest baby in Singapore!

You also do salsa, but is it for fitness, fun or a mathematical reason?

A lot of me getting into salsa had to do with self-confidence. I used to be a bit shy about dancing, started doing salsa and got hooked. There is a lot of applied geometry in salsa, and the music and rhythm is mathematical.

Last month you were chief judge in the Brand's Sudoku Challenge Singapore. How big a fan are you?

A rubik's cube is a brilliant puzzle but it is a little bit too complicated. Sudoku is just the right difficulty level. The beauty of Sudoku is that you have different levels. 'Easy' can be solved by primary schoolkids and semi-senile 90-year-olds. And more difficult levels are a challenge for mathematicians. It exposes everyone to the joy of problem-solving.

And you don't immediately define yourself as a social outcast if you say you do Sudoku!

And would you say it helps with your mental agility?

To be honest, I don't do so much these days but I am interested in giving lectures about it because it is a great way of introducing people to problem-solving and logic.

You have to think mathematically and develop your own techniques for solving it. You need to be neat, organised and systematic.

Aside from all your mental and physical activities, you are a licensed massage therapist. How did that come about?

Because I've had a lot of sports injuries, and had good massage over the years. I was amazed by massage therapists and what they could do, and was interested in learning more. I attended a massage school in California. It is also interesting from an emotional point of view - being a good massage therapist is about making people feel comfortable and safe. I don't do much now.

Does your colour blindness ever present a challenge?

I don't know what it is like not to be colour blind, so I am curious about what the world looks like. I think it's worse to be colour blind now than it was 20 years ago. For example, I'll come across some crazy web page designed by someone who thinks red text on a green background is the way to express themselves. I do not see anything. In all my browsers, I have to turn off colour backgrounds.

One time I did have a problem. I did a modelling class and we had to do our own make-up - I totally couldn't do it. Oh, and if I go shopping for clothes, I never go alone.

Any vices, food or otherwise

Probably none that you can print! I have an addiction-prone personality so I can't do computer games because I know I'd be hooked.

Any health problems?

I found a good osteopath to help with my sports injuries, so I'm running quite well at the moment.

The kitchen is often a no-man land, but not so in your home, right?

I do a lot of baking. Baking is the exact science of cooking. In professional baking books, they don't talk recipes, they talk formulas. I have learnt a lot of physics and chemistry in trying to improve my baking.

My wife Karen, a primary school teacher at Nan Hua Primary School, is pregnant. She is due to give birth this month to Anna - so she has cravings. One week it is chocolate eclairs, another week it could be cinnamon buns.

I bake every Saturday and cook dinner every Sunday. I want my little boy to grow up knowing how to cook because being able to cook is a real babe magnet. He is one year and four months, so he is still a bit challenged.

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