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Hands on

The dialysis unit at Tufts-NEMC
sets a standard for exemplary care

PLUS: DEGREES OF PAIN ■ THE KNITTING CLUB ■ MY WONDER BOY

VITAL SIGNS

Lion tamer

A few years ago, Tobi Quinto, '09, was in Chinatown celebrating the Chinese New Year when she saw a procession of lions—each about eight feet tall and flamboyantly colored—snaking and shaking their way toward her, accompanied by the booming of a drum and the clash of cymbals and a gong. She was intrigued when the dance drew to a close, the lion heads came off, and she saw that women had been driving the show.

This was something new. Called the Gund Kwok Asian Women's Lion Dance Troupe, the group was formed in 1998 and boasts some two dozen members, ages 16 to 45. As far as anyone can tell, Gund Kwok (whose name means "heroine") is unique in the United States. Traditionally in Chinese culture, only men have been allowed to perform the lion dance, a ritual that is thousands of years old and is enacted at the Chinese New Year, as well as at business openings, weddings and the like, to scare away menacing beasts and bring prosperity, good luck and peace in their stead.

Quinto is a second-generation Chinese-American who grew up in southern California. Her cultural identity, she says, "was not a conscious thing until late college." But after watching the lion troupe in action, Quinto decided to give it a try. She figured it would be a great way to relieve the stress of her job—she was then a legislative aide to Massachusetts State Sen. Cheryl Jacques—while helping to break down gender barriers within Asian society.

During the course of a 10-week training course, Quinto learned to build endurance, agility and grace. Each lion, made of bamboo and papier-mâché, holds two women. If you're up front, "you need to maintain the head so it's facing the audience and not flopping all over," she says. Being in back means that you are bent low, watching the feet of the person in front of you for hints of what's to come. Either way it's physically demanding work.

Quinto performed for a year or so, and retains fond memories of her time inside the lion. She would always feel a flush of pride when the costumes were shed and she heard people say, "Oh, it's all women." But no show satisfies everyone. Quinto's parents, she relates with a laugh, asked her if she couldn't find something more ladylike to do.

