

PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN

AMAZING GRACE!

A brand-new section in the Raffles Wave, Portrait of a Rafflesian seeks to highlight the stories of inspiring Rafflesians who epitomise the spirit and strength that we have come to associate with RGS.

To kick-start this section, we caught up with 2014 Rafflesian Award recipient Grace Tern. Inspiring, humble, dedicated and thankful - those are words you will probably associate with Grace if you heard her speech during the school's 135th Founder's Day. Born with profound sensorineural hearing loss in both ears, Grace thought that her life was destined for a world of silence. As it turned out, the fine young woman that Grace has grown into today, is proof that the imperfections of life and the weaknesses of a person can be polished away through acts of love, acceptance, belief and empowerment.



Grace writing calligraphy at various corporate events to raise funds for The Singapore Association for the Deaf.

Receiving the pinnacle Rafflesian Award

"I was absolutely thrilled, though I also felt a sense of disbelief, as there were many others in my batch whom I thought were far more deserving than I was. I am indeed very humbled that the school had deemed me worthy of the award."

Challenges she face on a daily basis

"While I can now hear and speak with the help of bilateral cochlear implants, the 'sensation' of sound that I receive from them falls acutely short of normal hearing. Hence, listening under most circumstances is a physically and mentally demanding task for me. Having a hearing impairment is not just limited to the mere physical obstacle of not being able to hear as well as others can. It's also often the emotional isolation from my friends as well as the alienation from things that are happening around me which is most difficult to cope with."

Moments of despair and frustration

"To be honest, I've been struggling with my impairment for a really long time. To others, hearing is a passive activity, but for me, the daily grind of straining to hear, lip-read and follow conversations and process incomplete information can be really stressful, frustrating and exhausting. I used to struggle with accepting that and constantly asked myself 'what if?'"

Turning point of her life

"I chanced upon the Serenity prayer tattooed on a man's forearm while I was queuing up behind him to board a plane! It was at that moment that I realised that my impairment was a part of me and was unchangeable, that instead of viewing it as an insecurity and hindrance, I should openly accept it and focus on what I am capable of. It was after this incident that I finally felt liberated from the reservations I once had."



Grace with Senior Deputy Principal, Mrs Shirley Tan - *"I owe my success to the unflinching belief, constant encouragement and unwavering support of all my principals and teachers, to whom I am immensely grateful."*

Also a national fencer!

"I was first introduced to fencing when my brother joined the sport and started teaching me a few fencing techniques. Unlike the general misconception that fencing is only about 'poking people', each fencing bout requires not just stamina, but also mental acumen in constantly developing strategies to counter the opponent's attacks or defences. Being in the National Team for the past three years has also taught me how to make sacrifices, though they have been worthwhile, as the sport has taught me resilience and determination to pick myself up from failures, time and again."



Grace is an épée fencer in the RI school team as well as the Singapore National team.

Her dreams and aspirations

"I would like to be a dentist. When I was in Year 3, I was given the opportunity to be part of the school's Work Experience Programme, where I was attached to the School Dental Centre at the Health Promotion Board. The five-day attachment gave me the opportunity to observe first-hand the practice of paediatric dentistry and I realised that a big part of the job is handling young patients and winning their trust. I think it's a job I'd enjoy and probably do well in as I adore children and would love to be around them! Moreover, I'd like to think that I'm good with my hands, because I write Chinese calligraphy and do floral arrangements as well."

Biggest inspiration in life - her parents

"They're the most positive and resilient people I know. My brothers and I have different health issues, but despite all the various setbacks, my parents pressed on and never gave up hope on us even at the darkest moments. I remember that as a child, my mother would repeat everything that was being said on TV to me so I could understand what was going on. To train me to hear, she would sit down with me every night and run through the syllables with me until I could make out even the soft ones such as 'shh'. Thank you Mum and Dad for loving me just the way I am and never measuring me against anyone else. With the both of you, it is never a question of 'why' but 'why not?' I love you Mum and Dad!"