

Know me for my Abilities, Not my Disabilities

Celine Lean Yew Lin

Introduction

- My name is Celine Lean Yew Lin
- Currently 20 years old
- Totally blind due to Leukaemia since the age of 4 ½

- Nevertheless, life goes on
- Disability is not a hindrance.

- Started learning braille at Malaysian Association for the Blind when I was six years old
- As most are inexperienced when it comes to disability, it is highly advisable to reach out to these associations.

Primary School Life

- Started primary school at the age of seven, as is the norm
 - parents shouldn't fear that disabled children are too young etc.
- Received primary education from an integrated school (SK Klang).
- Made friends and compete academically with able-bodied friends, especially in upper primary.
- Took part in various co-curricular activities, even up until secondary school and so on.

Primary School Life

- Went on many camping and hiking expeditions; one example is hiking mount Kinabalu at twelve years old.
- Joined the school's musical group and frequently performed.
- Participated in many sports competitions (long jump, shot put, 100 m sprint), up until national levels.
- Achieved 5 (straight) 'A's in UPSR.

Secondary School Life

- Received secondary education from SMPK Setapak (the only secondary school specially for the blind)
 - parents ought to realise there are two options to special education, integration (like my primary education) and separation (like my secondary education), each with its own pros and cons.
- Lived in the hostel throughout secondary school, thus enhancing independence.
- Was made a prefect in Form 1; later became the head prefect in Form 4 & 5.
- Learned to play chess and went for competitions (international level Paralympics when I was in Form 3).
- Continued to participate in track & fields throughout secondary school.
- Participated in various public speakings and debates.
- Achieved 7 (straight) 'A's in PMR.

Secondary School Life

- Went on an international exchange programme to the United States of America for six months in Form 4
 - while on the programme, I attended American high school and experienced many things not available for the blind in Malaysia.
- Due to the exchange programme, missed school for seven months or so, hence struggled to catch up with studies upon return.
- Achieved 10 (straight) 'A's in SPM.

Post SPM life and A Levels

- Directions after SPM for Malaysian with disability is mostly not very clear cut and straight forward; of course, there is always the option of taking STPM and then public university, but even then it is not that simple
 - I chose a different path from the norm.
- Started seeking out opportunities for tertiary education, all the different options etc.
- Unfortunately, many institutions refuse to admit me, giving reasons that they do not have experience with disability etc
 - therefore my options were very, very limited.
- I chose to do A Levels as I wanted to pursue a Law degree in the United Kingdom
 - I did it in Methodist College Kuala Lumpur.

Post SPM and 'A' levels

- Another post-SPM struggle was attaining a scholarship
 - countless applications and tests, but despite everything, I was refused.
- Eventually, after continuous efforts, I received a scholarship from Yayasan Khazanah.
- A Levels was entirely different (neither separation nor integration)
 - I am the first and so far only blind to study in Methodist College Kuala Lumpur.
- Achieved 4 (straight) 'A's in A Levels.
- Received an offer to study Law in the University of Cambridge, where I will be pursuing my degree.

Passions

- Two greatest values from my American experience are volunteerism and self-advocacy.
- Along with my firsthand experience as a person with disability, it has become my passion to work towards peace and justice, to stand for human rights and heighten awareness.
- Actively involved in community service activities by volunteering and so on.
- I, in fact, initiated and organised several community service projects of my own, that aims mainly to raise awareness towards the blind.

Conclusion

- People with disability are no different from the rest of society; i.e. disability is only one of life's challenges that, given the right efforts, can be overcome.
- That being said, society at large ought to be aware of this, beginning from families and education environment.
- Parents are naturally concerned and should definitely be as supportive as possible—supportive does not mean over-protecting and sheltering children with disability, on the contrary, supportive means to look out for them but at the same time to not restrain them from living life to the fullest.

Conclusion

- Society, in general, should work towards embracing inclusive society; in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, it is high time we realise that everyone in society, able-bodied or disabled, has the right of enjoying equal opportunities.