

Ex-delinquent gets into NUS med school after being top scorer at Singapore Poly

Report by **FOO JIE YING**
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When her parents paid her little attention during her teenage years, she decided to “find love outside”.

After hanging out with the wrong crowd, Miss Amanda Chia started drinking and smoking, slipped into the Normal (Academic) stream in Secondary 2, and was in and out of police stations.

Today, that same defiant student will receive the Toh Chin Chye Gold Medal – an accolade that comes with graduating at the top of her cohort in the nutrition, health and wellness course at Singapore Polytechnic (SP).

She will go on to read medicine at the National University of Singapore later this year – the 17th SP student to study medicine or dentistry at a local university.

Speaking with *The New Paper*, Miss Chia, now 20, shared her transformation journey from being a rebellious teenager to who she is today.

It all started with a rare flesh-eating disease that her younger brother contracted when she was six. The family almost lost him to that disease.

“Because of this incident, my mum focused a lot of attention on my brother. She didn’t pay much attention to me and my elder sister. As teenagers, we felt a bit neglected,” she said.

“If you don’t find love at home, you find love outside.”

BAD COMPANY

That was how Miss Chia, then 13, started mixing with “bad company”. Cigarettes and alcohol interested her more than books.

“I really didn’t want to study. If I could skip class, I would. My attendance was really bad,” she said.

Her grades slipped and in Sec 2, Miss Chia was moved from the Express to the Normal (Academic) stream.

She conceded that she was also “in and out of the police station a few times”.

“The most serious one was for rioting. A group of us beat up another girl,” she said.

It was at the peak of her defiance that she saw her mother’s love.

That night, at the police station, her mother and a few church leaders waited patiently for her as she recorded her statement.

“My mum had to lead a tour group to Israel that day but she was at the police station until 3am. She didn’t get to sleep and had to fly off.



SUPPORT: Ms Amanda Chia with her parents, Mr Chia Lye Liang and Madam Rosalind Lim.
TNP PHOTO: CHOO CHWEE HUA



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— Miss Amanda Chia

Nobody would guess she was a rebel

“That’s when it touched my heart, and I realised that she loves me too,” Miss Chia said.

After that incident, she decided to mend her ways. This included getting her studies back on track and quitting smoking.

She would approach her teachers after school instead of going for tuition so her parents wouldn’t have extra expenditure.

She successfully quit smoking even though it came at the expense of her weight. Fighting nicotine cravings with chocolate bars caused her to balloon in three months.

Hurtful nicknames like ‘pui ter’ (Hokkien for fat pig) haunted her.

It took her two years of tchoukball training sessions – a co-curricular activity she joined in Sec 3 and 4 – before

she got herself back to a healthy weight range again.

During this period, Miss Chia started to develop a keen interest in eating and living healthily.

That was why she chose to pursue her current course at SP even though her perfect O-level score of six points meant that she could qualify for any junior college.

In the course of completing her diploma, Miss Chia did classes like immunology and anatomy and had the opportunity to do community service, where she helped the elderly take their blood pressure, height and weight.

“I realised then that I wanted to help them in more than just their diet, but also to help them heal in general,” she said.

That prompted her to apply for a place in NUS’ medical school.

The acceptance letter from NUS came as a surprise.

“I have heard of straight A students getting rejected, what more a polytechnic student?” she said.

Her mother, Madam Rosalind Lim, 49 said she is not too worried that Amanda would not be able to cope in NUS as she knows her daughter is someone who “really knows what she wants”.

The travel agent said her daughter’s growth and transformation through her teenage years has been “mind-blowing”.

“She has matured a lot and she has really put in a lot of effort.”

“Nobody would think she has turned from such a rebellious child to who she is now. She has done so well.”