

# Significant Events

Amanda Yeung

Though I have only lived two decades, my life has been marked by several events that have changed me significantly. It started out with the day I was born, unexpectedly, as a cleft palate baby. I've undergone surgery more than five times together with many hospital appointments that caused me to be unable to focus in school. For years, no one could understand what I said because there was a gap in my mouth that interfered with the sounds I tried to make.

My mother told me that I had about four operations when I was an infant. From what I remember, the anesthesiologists would always let me choose what kind of gas mask to wear: chocolate, vanilla, or strawberry flavor. I was stuck inside a case with open air holes so the doctors could reach me. I even remember a glimpse or possibly a dream of my family in hospital clothes coming to visit me in the recovery room. This memory was probably when I was starting to really comprehend what was going on with me. That was the start of growing up and trying to find ways to shut the jar of tears that I was going to store up.

When I was in the fifth grade, I had another operation. I had to wake up early in the morning, at about 5 a.m. My mother and I went to the hospital and waited for the surgeon whom we called "Dr. Super." Right when he came, I followed him and did not know where he would take me. I had separated from my mother and my heart started to beat fast. In the operating room, after I was put to sleep, a small piece of bone was taken out of my hip and put into my palate to close up the hole in my mouth that had caused me to have speech problems. The doctors kept telling me how brave I was and even though I was afraid at first, I was happy that I could finally talk better and feel more confident in school.

After that surgery, I learned to adapt to the new formation of my palate, but I had an under-bite that required two operations in the summer of 2005. I had to wear a Rigid External Distraction (R.E.D.) device on my face that connected to my jawbone. Since it was hanging on my face, I went through hazy days indoors. For about two months I could not eat meat, vegetables, or any solid food that required me to chew, and I lost about twenty pounds. I ended up looking like a skeleton that could faint any second. This test of life taught me to have patience and endurance while I watched others enjoy the normal things they had. It also taught me to appreciate what I do have in life because worse things could have happened to me.

The doctors I've met in my life have always told me that I would become beautiful. To me, that means nothing. I've grown up learning from the Bible that beauty comes from one's inner self. The outside can be as good as one wishes it to be, but the heart, not the outer disguise, is what makes an elegant swan. As I have

grown to experience pain in a different way from the pain in others' stories, I've learned to find beauty in what may seem a tragic story to me. I've appreciated being me and let life go on and even dare share the experiences I've gone through so others can endure the problems they view as tragic. When I see someone with a disability of some kind, I befriend them because their stories may be heroic—like mine—in facing the difficulties of life.

Nominating faculty: Professor Renata Budny, Restorative Dentistry 1115,  
Department of Restorative Dentistry, School of Professional Studies, New York  
City College of Technology, CUNY.

Cite as: Yeung, A. (2011). Significant events. *City Tech Writer*, 6, 49-50. Online at <https://openlab.citytech.cuny.edu/city-tech-writer-sampler/>