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“Smile Pinki” was very emotional for me. I was already aware of these difficult situations happening around the world, but seeing it in a documentary brought me to tears. In fact, these situations are happening everywhere, even in areas close to us. Videos such as “Smile Pinki” really inspire me to one day also make a difference in the community and help with providing access to oral health care.

I was born in America, but my family roots are from Poland. Although I was mainly raised in the states, I would go almost every summer to Poland to stay with my family. My values and beliefs are, without a doubt, influenced by both cultures. Growing up in the states allowed me to be curious. I was able to ask questions about deformities and disabilities, which lead to explanations and becoming more educated about the differences of others. I was brought up to respect and to treat everyone alike no matter what their appearance may be. Ironically enough, I was bullied in school not by my appearance, but because I was the weird Polish girl who couldn’t pronounce her English words. It is not easy when your classmates do not accept you. I can’t imagine what it must feel like to not be accepted by your entire culture. In Poland, the environment was considerably different. My grandparents still live in a very small village where anyone who does not fit the “norm” is looked down on. I remember a boy in a wheelchair that lived two farms over from my grandparents. Although he was handicap, his mind was just as sharp and alert as any other child’s. Not being afraid, I would want to speak to him. However, before I could say anything, I was pulled away and told not to look at him. I was told not to speak to children like that for whatever reason. This is a very old world mentality and I suppose my grandmother was just trying to “save” my reputation or perhaps she thought his disability could be contagious. Later into my teenage years, I had seen him again and found out that he had dropped out of school. I assume he experienced some bullying and I would not have been surprised if his parents felt there was no point in his education, since his disability inhibited him from living a “standard” lifestyle. I am happy to declare that this type mentality and views are progressing and changing for the better with the new generation.

One thing that I could relate to from “Smile Pinki” is superstition. The older generation in Poland still lives with strong superstitious beliefs that stem from lack of education or scientific knowledge. There have been similar situations like the one in the video where the woman was explaining that there was an eclipse during her pregnancy, and as a result, her child was born with a cleft palate. Growing up, there were many times I have heard that a birth defect or an unfortunate incident happened because God had punished them for something they had done prior. When in fact, there is a scientific explanation for the cause and effect.

As part of the American culture, oral health and dentistry has always been important. I would regularly visit my dentist and by the time I was 11, I was already wearing braces in order to enhance my appearance. Observing the dental health of my family in Poland, it was clear that not all of them could afford dental care. Therefore, a trip to the dentist was a last resort. It meant that the condition was serious and usually accompanied by a lot of pain. Most of the time, teeth were pulled out and rarely replaced unless necessary. Money plays a big role when it comes to dental health. Just as in “Smile Pinki,” my family was concerned with cost and transportation. You can’t always make the journey to the dentist when you are responsible for taking care of your land and feeding your livestock. Similar to Pinki’s family, my family would have to arrange a ride to the city and someone had to stay home to take care of the farm. There would also be times where my family would all contribute and send money in order to pay for medical emergencies. Being aware of this at an early age made me appreciate and value the medical and dental services that were and are always available to me.

I believe every person is born as an original individual and that is beautiful enough. Whether they have deformities or not, everyone has feelings and it is extremely important to be sensitive to others’ uniqueness. In my opinion, our bodies are just temporary homes for our soul and deformities do not define a person. Even though we live in a very superficial society, we should embrace the beauty people possess inside of them rather than looking at their exterior. As an aspiring dental hygienist, I would like to not only promote oral health, but to also bring joy and confidence to people’s life. Everyone has the right to have the same opportunities and live a full and happy life. It’s simple: treat others the way you would like to be treated.