



inspiring

SO WHAT DOES DENTAL SURGEON DR LYNETTE NG DISLIKE MOST ABOUT HER JOB?

"HAVING MY MAKEUP END UP ON THE SURGICAL MASK," SHE DECLARES WRILLY.

AT THIS POINT YOU CAN IMAGINE LYNETTE'S TRUSTED FRIENDS ROLLING THEIR EYES. THEY HAD, IN FACT, FORBIDDEN LYNETTE TO SAY THAT, LEST WANLLA READERS THINK HER A FIRST-CLASS BIMBO. BUT NOT SURPRISINGLY, LYNETTE ISN'T BOTHERED.

It's refreshing to meet a highly accomplished woman who doesn't apologise for being a woman, vulvabilities and all. Sure, this 31-year-old holds a Master's degree in Dental Surgery (Periodontics) and is the dental director of The Dental Clinic, yet she has no qualms about admitting — with a smug-but-like-luxury — that she finds our interview questions "really tough".

The older child of middle-class working parents — her mum is a hotel chef's servant and her dad, a divorce manager at a company that sells toilets — Lynette did not get to where she is by riding on influential family connections or inherited wealth. Nothing was served to her on a silver platter.

Through hard work, she made Dean's List and valedictorian at the National University of Singapore's school of dentistry. It was an honour, she says, to be chosen to give the valedictory speech at the combined graduation ceremony for medicine, dentistry and engineering faculties in 1998.

Not spending an afternoon with girlfriends in a shopping mall with an old school friend, she listens to you attentively, tells you engaging stories, and makes you laugh till you're in stitches. Over lunch, she orders a hearty plate of laksa porcupettes, and tells you that while she's not a study/academia junky, her guilty pleasure is anything potato. French fries, mashed potatoes, chicken pies.

Potatoes run the only thing downer between the animal rights activist, who has those dogs, sits on the executive committee of Ace, a non-profit animal conservation society, when her brother is executive director.

"As an animal activist, they have no voice of their own, but that doesn't mean they don't have actual pain," she says, adding that Ace is currently raising funds to build a wildlife rescue centre, the first dedicated one in Singapore.

Quick-thinking and personable, Lynette exudes an easy charm and confidence. And with her penchant for hair, skirts and pretty makeup, she makes a quiet statement about how the modern Singapore woman can be feminine and beautiful, and yet not compromise on strength of character.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU WANTED TO GO ON A DENTISTY? It was my grand mother's wish to have a doctor in the family, and being the oldest grandchild, I was the one she put the hopes on. I've always been inclined towards the sciences so it was natural for me to do biology science in school.

But at 16, it suddenly dawned on me that I had to make a big decision. What I chose would be what I'd have to do for the rest of my life. So I took the six months after my A-levels to find out what I'd want like as a medical doctor and dentist.

I worked three months as a temporary clinic assistant in a polio hospital, when I found out how awful dealing with death, I ended with the patient and his family when the doctor told him he was dying. After that, they had to ask me to leave the room every time they had to break bad news to patients.

I then did a stint as a temporary dental assistant in a private practice. I wasn't too sure how much I'd like dealing with saliva, but I was immediately captured by dentistry. I guess I've always enjoyed art and craft and doing things with my hands. With dentistry, you really get to work with your hands and sense of aesthetics, to beautify or adjust teeth, and satisfaction and pleasure, and take someone's smile again. That hobby job changed my life. <>

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"IT TAKES A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CONFIDENCE TO SAY: 'OKAY, I HAVE A JOB, I EARN MY KEEP, BUT I'M STILL A GIRL. I LIKE TO BE PAMPERED AND BE TAKEN CARE OF, AND IT'S NOT BECAUSE I'M WEAK.'"

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WITH HER PENCHANT FOR HEELS, SKIRTS AND PRETTY MAKEUP, THIS INTELLIGENT AND ACCOMPLISHED DENTAL SURGEON MAKES A QUIET STATEMENT ABOUT HOW THE MODERN SINGAPORE WOMAN CAN BE FEMININE AND BEAUTIFUL, AND YET NOT COMPROMISE ON STRENGTH OF CHARACTER.

determines, right? But if you can get it done even in a while and maintain it, why wouldn't you? Is it the same for me if I can slow down the process, why not? Why should I choose to let things deteriorate?

Some women would say that if you are confident and self-assured, you won't need to resort to cosmetics, that it's being vain and shallow. I think if you're confident, you do it for yourself, because you want it, and not because someone else says you should.

But if you pursue beauty because you want people to accept or approve of you, then it's a whole different issue altogether. That's why with my patients, I always make it a point to find out what's their motivation behind needing a treatment—that's very important.

DO YOU SEE DENTISTRY GOING MAINSTREAM? Well, there are painless injection techniques out there and laser dentistry, which is touted as being painless. Practitioners say they can do small fillings, surgery and even root a crown with minimal anesthesia. In fact, there are reports that patients who do these painless surgeries didn't even have to take painkillers.

You may get that in Singapore, but it's at a very high price. Do not see patients here who're willing to pay two or three times more for a filling, even if it's painless. But I do see a trend towards painless dentistry and anti-aging treatments.

WHAT'S YOUR IDEA OF A STRONG WOMAN? Well, I don't think you would best take things out of women to be strong, although it seems many modern successful women have that perception. I think it takes a stronger woman to show her vulnerability. It takes a certain amount of confidence to say "Okay, I have a job, I own my house, but I'm not a girl. I like to be pampered and be taken care of, and it's not because I'm weak."

A woman may choose to stay home, cook for her husband and son, and other women may say she's obedient, subservient, like it's a weakness. But I think if she's confident and she believes in what she does, then she's strong! Because she does it simply because she's happy doing it, and that's fine.

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YOU SOUND LIKE SOMEONE WHO SCORES AT CONVENTION.

I like a little recklessness in life... makes life more interesting. But I do not aim to break convention. I can be quite a stickler for rules. And I can really obsess about things—I can mull over a problem, weigh the pros and cons, map out all the consequences... my friends always say, "Stop being so anal!"

When we travel, I will read three or four guidebooks, surf the internet, compile stuff and then, a whole itinerary comes out like there's a schedule, a checklist, laughs at her self. My friends say it's like I wrote out taking an exam! But if I didn't do it, that would stress me out.

ARE YOU A PERFECTIONIST? I used to be more so. I would not pick at everything, but when I was 27 and doing my postgraduate studies, I came down with thyroid. In many ways, thyroid is stress-related, so I had to learn to breathe.

I had to take time off school. I actually missed the exam, so I was delayed one year. After that, I realized that health is more important than perfection. If certain things are not important, let it go. Not everything has to be done now. **YOU LOVE SKINNY AND WAXING/SHAVING. DOESN'T YOU WORRIED ABOUT THE SUN?** (Laughs) Worried, but yeah... what's the point? Sure, you spend the money and you want to maintain perfect skin, but if it means losing out on life, then it doesn't make sense to me. I'd rather just have a few more wrinkles or a bit more redness.

You can't let one aspect of your life being other aspect of your life—you need a balance. So if you know you're wanting to be out in the sun, then you try to put a bit more effort in the maintenance part—just put on more sunscreen.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO LIVE? To live life with gusto! It's not as important to me to be seen as a successful woman, who leads a perfect life. I'd rather be someone who someone who was not afraid to experience life to its fullest, even if it means failure as well as success. After all, life is a journey. Or as those guys in *Crash Course* say.

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