

# 'I was really a wreck'

*Major surgery affected Swasthi Trinity's body and brain to the extent that she had to relearn how to read, but she persevered with the help of family and by staying optimistic and is now ready to sit her O-level exams. CHARLENE CHUA reports.*

**W**hen you think of a 10-year-old child, you may imagine a wide-eyed pupil, ready to take on new challenges in life. Swasthi Trinity was no different, except she had a whole different set of challenges from her peers.

"It started when I had a fever for three weeks. My face and chest were swollen and I also experienced extreme fatigue," Trinity, now 17, described.

She was eventually diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, a kind of cancer, in 2013. Then just 10, Trinity started undergoing treatments including chemotherapy.

However, during the process, she experienced a fungal infection in her blood, which created blood clots that entered her brain and ruptured, causing internal cerebral haemorrhage.

This meant that Trinity had to undergo three major brain operations, causing the right side of her body to develop weaknesses. This has affected her mobility and ability to speak fluently.

To remove the blood clots in her brain, the left side of her skull was permanently removed and she now has a titanium custom-made skull.

"I hated being in the hospital for a month and I felt useless. I kept asking why this happened to me," said Trinity.

She admitted that, at the beginning, she felt like giving up most of the time. It was especially tough for her during a phase when she suffered from drop foot, which is when she had difficulties lifting up the front of her foot.

She also had distortion of her hands, where she was unable to grip things with her hands due to decreased strength in the area.

"I was really a wreck. It made me think there is no way out of it even if I had physiotherapy," she said.

Thankfully, Trinity's parents were there for her and helped pull



Trinity felt discouraged during her long hospital stay, but her parents were there for her and helped to motivate her. PHOTO COURTESY OF SWASTHI TRINITY

her out of that mindset.

Trinity's mother's words made a deep imprint in her mind and reignited her motivation to persevere.

During one of her physiotherapy sessions, Trinity's mother had told her firmly: "Trinity, you are going to walk, you are going to talk. You are going to do all the things you desire to do."

Trinity recalled: "I felt very small and weak, but my mother had faith in me. She believed that I would be able to live my life out of this hospital."

## RECOVERING STEP BY STEP

From 2013 to 2014, Trinity was not

able to return to school and instead, continued with her treatments. Nevertheless, she was determined to continue learning at home.

She started by picking up a simple book intended for kindergarten children, but could not make out the letters because of her memory and speech issues.

Even so, she did not give up and, with her family members' help, she managed to improve.

"One day, I took this book and read the first word. It said 'dance'. I didn't know I could read that, you know? To me, it was really a miracle," she said.

At the beginning, Trinity read one page of the book every day.

As she improved, she started reading two pages at one go, and that number gradually continued to increase.

"Now, I'm reading novels. I think that if we really want to overcome challenges, we have to take the first step to achieve what we want," she shared.

In 2015, while continuing her treatment, Trinity also repeated and completed her Primary 4 level at the Children's Cancer Foundation's Place for Academic Learning and Support, a learning centre for children who are medically unfit to attend mainstream schools.

In 2016, Trinity managed to return to a mainstream school.

However, she faced new challenges there. She found it difficult to make new friends because she did not know how to interact with her classmates, who were two years younger than her.

She was also bullied by her classmates in Secondary 1.

"The class had secret chats and said very cruel things about me. Some of them were also jealous because they felt that because I am disabled, the teachers are closer and kinder to me," she said, adding that she has now forgiven them.

She remained optimistic and said that she is grateful that members of the public often come forward to lend her a hand.

After Trinity sits her O-level exams this year, she wants to read more novels and write more poems. She also hopes to play ball games with her younger brother and watch movies with her mother.

Trinity wants to study at a polytechnic after graduation and is considering a diploma in animation and visual effects.

She wants to tell other Singaporeans: "Don't give up."

"I'm not saying this just because of what I went through. Whatever it is, we are all the same. We all have flaws. We need one another's help in times of need, especially during this season."