

Beauty against bullies

Once mocked and shunned, pageant queen will help kids stand up to bullies

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Fatty. Giant. Thunder thighs.

These were the nicknames junior college bullies used to taunt Miss Luisa Gan with three years ago.

They not only hurt the 1.74m-tall student, who weighed 68kg then, but ostracised her.

She remembered how she always sat and ate alone in school.

And because she had been treated like an outcast, she vowed to help bullied children once she had the means to do so.

On Sunday night, Miss Gan, now 20, realised her dream when she was crowned Miss Singapore Tourism Queen International at the Miss Singapore Beauty Pageant.

As the contestants had to pick a charity of their choice, she used the pageant as a platform for her cause by opting for the Singapore Children's Society.

The Singapore Institute Of Management business and management undergraduate will be promoting the society's Bully-Free Campaign.

She has committed at least 80 hours of her time to manning the helplines for victims of bullying, and giving talks on the subject in schools.

A spokesman for the pageant said: "The pre-judging segment is very important and it's where we find out how committed these girls are to charity work."

"It's a turn-off when we hear girls naming charities and then not being able to tell us how they want to help."

"For example, if a contestant says she

wants to stop hunger, we ask her how she's going to go about feeding people. If she says she doesn't know, she loses a lot of points even before the finals."

Miss Gan's experience with bullying, and her passion for helping kids in similar situations, touched the judges.

She told The New Paper: "If I could turn back time and go back to JC, I would tell myself to stand up for myself."

"But since that's not possible, I want to educate children and tell them that they should not only stand up to bullies, they should also stand up for others who are bullied."

"I read an article that said that Singapore ranks second in the world when it comes to cyber-bullying. That shows how prevalent the problem is here."

CHOKED BACK TEARS

During the pre-judging segment of the pageant, which constituted 50 per cent of the points awarded, Miss Gan choked back tears as she explained her choice of charitable organisation.

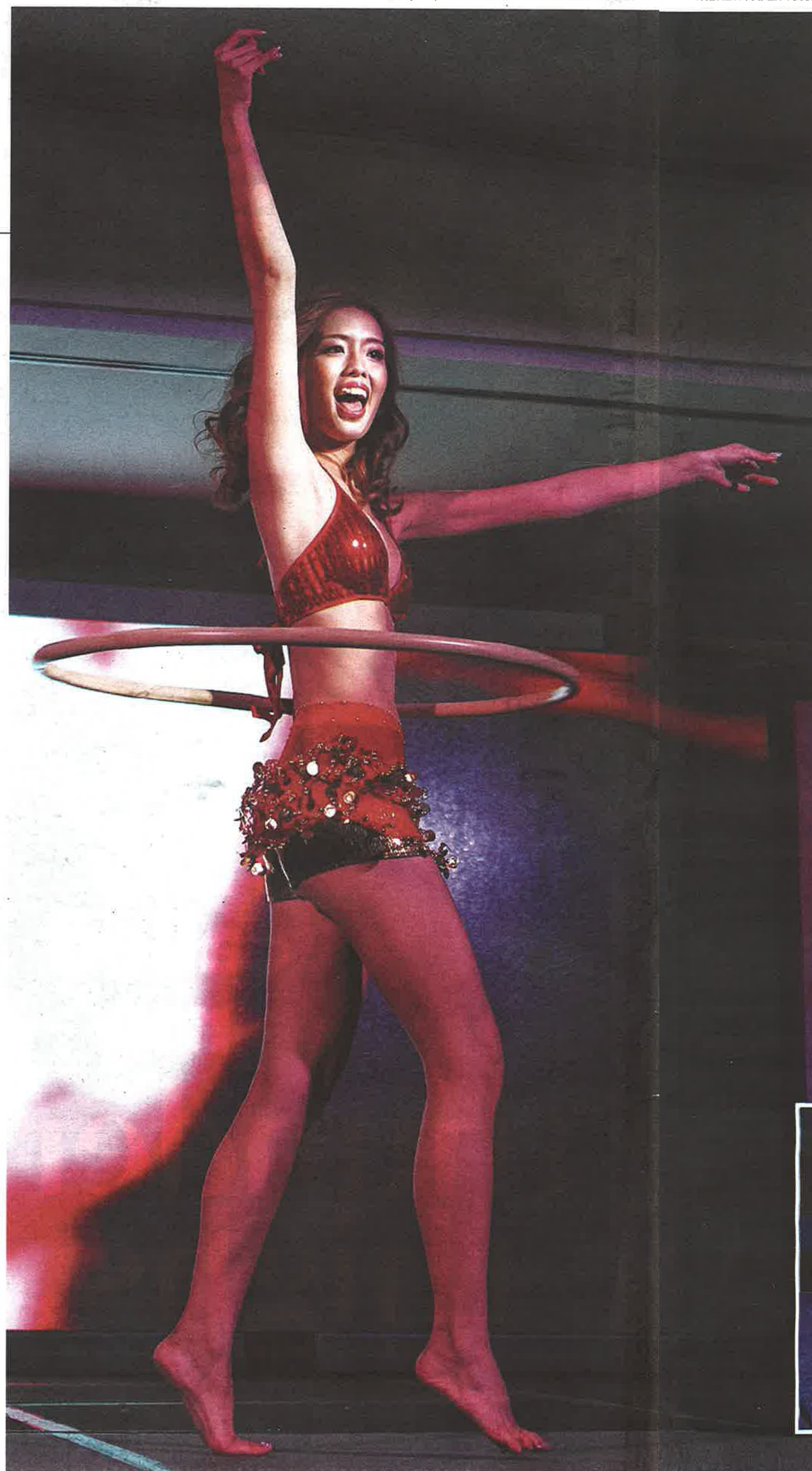
"Being called fatty, giant and thunder thighs – all these names got to me. I didn't want to go to school," she said.

"I don't want anyone else to live through what I did."

Miss Gan told TNP that her weight really hurt her when she tried to get part-time jobs to earn extra pocket money.

After she was done with JC, she went for modelling and acting job interviews during the holidays.

Time and again, she was turned away



SEXY: Miss Luisa Gan doing a hula hoop number at the Miss Singapore Beauty Pageant.

TNP PHOTOS: NICOLE QUEK

because she was told she was overweight.

"They would tell me 'you're flabby, come back when you're skinnier'. That was hurtful," Miss Gan said.

"So I had to lose the weight because I wanted the extra income."

At the pageant's finals, watching Miss Gan work her hula hoop in her dazzling red bikini to Shakira's La La La, one would have never guessed that she had weight issues.

After a year of exercising and dieting, she now weighs 51kg and sports a flat stomach.

Her waist size, which used to be 76cm, is now 61cm.

But with her new figure comes a whole new lifestyle.

"I walk 5km three to four times a week, and run and cycle in the gym," she said.

"Food-wise, I don't eat much carbohydrates any more. I'll have a heavy breakfast, a normal lunch but won't eat anything after 5.30pm."

"If my weight starts to go up, I'll go on a strict diet that includes mostly fruit and vegetables."

Apart from her looks, the judges were impressed with how she handled the question-and-answer segment.

When asked about the one thing that she was not allowed to do but really wanted to and why, she said: "I want to confiscate everyone's electronic gadgets for a day because everyone relies on the Internet too much."

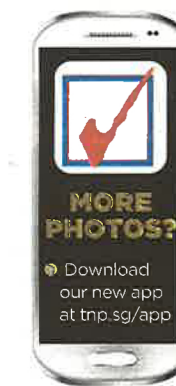
"This is so that they can spend face-to-face quality time with their families and friends, just for a day."

Miss Gan was the biggest winner of the night, also winning four subsidiary awards – Miss Charity Queen, Miss Hodaka Motorworld, Miss Fabulous Aesthetics and Miss Nongsa 2014.

She will represent Singapore in the Miss Tourism Queen International 2014 pageant in China.



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— Miss Luisa Gan on being turned down for modelling and acting jobs



BIKINI BEAUTY: Miss Jasmine Chye, who won the Miss Singapore Global Beauty Queen title, during the swimsuit section.



Miss Siyamala Vasavan (Miss Singapore All Nations)

Miss Tammy Ng (Miss Singapore Chinatown)

Miss Luisa Gan (Miss Singapore Tourism Queen International)

Miss Jasmine Chye (Miss Singapore Global Beauty Queen)

USING PAGEANTS TO BRING AWARENESS TO CAUSES

At the Miss Singapore Beauty Pageant 2014, some of the 17 finalists stood out because of their personal ties to charities.

Four were crowned beauty queens and will represent Singapore in different international pageants.

Apart from Miss Luisa Gan who supports the Singapore Children's Society, these other three winners have also committed at least 80 hours of their time to their causes.

SIYAMALA VASAVAN, 24, FULL-TIME TUTOR

Title: Miss Singapore All Nations 2014. She will represent Singapore in the All Nations 2015 pageant in China

Tutoring has made her passionate about promoting awareness of the Dyslexia Association Of Singapore to help those who struggle with the condition.

Dyslexia is a type of learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading and spelling.

Miss Siyamala said: "I think I won my title because the judges knew how much I wanted to use this platform to bring awareness to my cause."

"I feel this from the bottom of my heart as I'm tutoring two dyslexic students at the moment."

JASMINE CHYE, 23, SALES AND MARKETING EXECUTIVE

Title: Miss Singapore Global Beauty Queen 2014. She will represent

Singapore in the Global Beauty Queen 2014 in South Korea
Subsidiary Award: Miss Charity Ambassador 2014

An avid scuba diver with a love for marine life, she chose to support the Project Aware foundation.

The global organisation is focusing on two issues at present – sharks in peril and marine debris, the latter a project to clean up rubbish in the sea.

Said Miss Chye: "This is something I feel deeply about, having scuba dived the past few years and helping out at turtle rehabilitation. I've come to realise that there's a lot we can do to help conserve marine life."

TAMMY NG, 19, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE PHYSICS UNDERGRADUATE

Title: Miss Singapore Chinatown 2014. She will represent Singapore in Hong Kong TVB's Miss Chinese International 2015

Having lost her best friend to cancer in primary school, Miss Ng knows the emotional struggle of kids with cancer and their carers.

She chose the Children's Cancer Foundation as the "best tribute" to her best friend.

She said: "I watched my friend's parents caring for her and coping with the loss after she died, so I know what people in these circumstances go through."