

## PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN

### THE JOY OF LEARNING AND SERVICE

“I wanted to be part of something that brings joy to the school community.”

That was RGS alumna Alyssa Marie Loo Li Ann’s simple reason for getting herself heavily involved in ARTreach, a non-official school-based interest group in RGS. And it was not like she had only few things on her plate. In fact, on top of the usual schoolwork, Alyssa was heavily involved in student groups and special programmes such as Student Congress, Debate & Oratorical Society, F1 in Schools and two Raffles Academy classes. Admirably, despite all that, she has managed to find the time to contribute almost 500 hours of community service over her four years in RGS (students are only required to clock a minimum of 24 hours of service in four years). Alyssa attributes all that to something her CCA senior once said to her on a bus ride, “How did RGS girls seem to cope with having so many commitments? It’s because everyone really loves everything that they do”.

Hence, as impressive as Alyssa’s achievements may look on paper, looking beyond all that, it is really her all-round ability and sincerity of purpose that will serve to inspire those who have the opportunity to be influenced by her intelligence, generosity and humility.

Read on as Alyssa shares more about her fruitful journey in RGS and the inspirational figure in her life.

#### Her RGS Experience

*“My RGS experience was definitely a challenging but immensely fruitful journey. Sometimes I am almost mortified to imagine how I used to be like in Year 1, because I have changed and grown so much since then. It is indeed a uniquely RGS experience to be able to dabble in so many things and still feel supported in everything you do, get so deeply involved with the school community because everyone welcomes you with open arms, and pour your heart out yet still realise that there’s always something more to love. I think my RGS experience has really been defined by this RGS family that is adventurous, supportive and so infectiously driven.”*



Alyssa with the 2017 batch of Congress members when they were in Year 3.



*“It was a mixture of surprise, then confusion, and finally some embarrassment as it sunk in. I remember first attending Founder’s Day when I was in Year 1, and being so in awe of Grace, the Rafflesian Award winner for that year, and the subsequent awardees Fatima and Vanessa! I had never thought myself to be anywhere as accomplished as they are... The embarrassment arose from everything that I realised the award entailed, which included giving a speech in a hall filled with people, being singled out in my batch, and having my face projected on the slide. Of course, those are happy problems! But amidst all this overthinking, I was most excited to tell my parents about it...”* Alyssa on her initial reaction after knowing that she will be receiving the pinnacle Rafflesian Award 2018 at RGS’ 139th Founder’s Day.

#### Important Takeaway from Student Congress

*“Like many from my Congress batch, we started off with lofty ideals and had a fervent desire to make changes, but gradually, we learnt that to be constructive was not to just assertively demand change, but to work with compromise, moderation and accommodation.”*

#### Juggling Different Commitments

*“I think having a good team has been a blessing to times where I had competing commitments. It has afforded me more flexibility in my schedule when it comes to completing tasks as I can depend on my teammates, and vice versa; me putting in the extra work when my teammates are busy. I think it is important for members to be upfront in expectations, commitments and responsibilities in order to nurture such a relationship of trust and task ownership within teams. While I know this has probably been said many times before, it is highly important to know one’s priorities and what one is willing to sacrifice to balance commitments.”*

#### Biggest Inspiration in Her Life

*“My mother is my biggest inspiration. She came from a very humble background of a small town in Malaysia, and had to stop school at secondary school to work and support her family. Yet, regardless of paper qualifications, she is one of the smartest, most creative and ambitious persons I know. As a mother, she has sacrificed so much for my sister and me. With her endless hunger to pick up new crafts, she has taught me that there really is no limit to a genuine love for learning. Her joining Singapore as an immigrant and is now an active member in our resident community has showed me that a sincere heart for service is appreciated by anyone. Through the tough times, she never fails to remind me that a kind heart, a spirit for adventure and a positive outlook are the most important things I must never lose sight of.”*



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Alyssa with her team members of Team Aeronauts after finishing assembling their pit display booth at the F1 in Schools World Finals 2016 in Austin, Texas.

### Myriad Experiences through the RP

*"I enjoyed the fact that I was able to explore and develop skills that were way beyond the classroom. For F1 in Schools, I was the team leader and graphic designer, which meant that I was responsible for our entire team brand – from the logos and merchandise, to all our print publications. The experience gave me valuable experience in what the graphic design industry encompasses, and gave me good practice for it too. I even taught myself how to use two new Adobe software along the way!"*

*Being a member of the Debate & Oratorical Society has been an intellectually rigorous exercise and a test in team morale and spirit. I think it is through debate that I have been enabled to argue for so many perspectives in the world, so much so that sometimes, nothing seems black and white! Debate has certainly enhanced my interest in current affairs, ethics, international policy, philosophy, and such a variety of fields that one does not usually encounter in the secondary school classroom."*



Alyssa with her teammates in debate. Together, they won the grand champion title at the 2016 International Humanitarian Law Debating Championship.

### A Passion for Service to the Community

*"I wanted to help the community because I was frustrated at the sense of helplessness that I felt when I came to know more about the systemic hurdles that those from underprivileged backgrounds have to overcome. It seems unfair, and perhaps even impossible to break out of what is ascribed by the birth lottery. One incident that struck me was during a day-long programme with kids from the Jalan Besar Resident's Community Centre, where I helped run an upcycling workshop teaching kids how to make bags from their old t-shirts. There was a girl who was really difficult to handle at first – she was uncooperative and refused to make eye contact with any of us, flaring up every time we tried to direct her along the activity line-up. However, once we started making the bags, she gradually came out of her shell, and in the end, she appeared so proud of the bag she had made, so much so that her entire disposition took a complete turn, and she even gave me a colourful gel pen that she had from her pencil case. That really touched me because it showed me that volunteering really makes a difference."*



The organising team of Project Elysian, a charity fundraising project that Alyssa led when she was in Year 3 for the Singapore Children's Society.

### In Her Spare Time

*"If I feel a little more creative and mentally energetic, I like to read and write poetry – I keep a little mood board of poetry that I find and love. I am also working on my poetry under a Creative Arts Programme Mentorship attachment. I like going for lectures and talks that pique my interest, and if there are art events happening, I try to volunteer my time there. I like hopping around exhibitions and museums too! But of course, if it's a lazy and tired night at home, you would probably find me bingeing on Netflix and playing New York Times crosswords."*

### Favourite RGS Traditions

*"Two of my favourites have to do with singing! For one, I love singing school songs like 'Dedication' or 'Pass It On'. It is always so amusing and heart-warming to see RGS girls just magically, almost as if possessed by some greater force, string themselves into waving anemones when those songs start to play. It really is an enchanting moment of camaraderie when you sweep your eyes across the amphitheatre or hall. The national day community singing is just as exhilarating, where we jump up and down during the chorus of the songs, and promptly recover by wheezing for breath throughout the verse. Actually, I think we have brought over the tradition to RI – during this year's National Day celebration, I noticed that it would be the RGS girls that start jumping first, and eventually, everyone else started following suit too!"*

### Hopes for RGS

*"I hope that regardless of the upgrade in physical facilities at the new campus, the quintessential RGS spirit of homely warmth, community and love will continue to grow. I also hope that future students and our teachers will benefit from the grand range of new facilities, and use them to make lessons and their school lives even more vibrant!"*