

Unique freshman has led exciting life

by Donna Sammander

For those who have not met new student Cynthia Tan (though you will recognize her by sight), she is Malaysian, a petite and energetic lady with long, black hair that swings about her heart-shaped face. If you are up early enough, you will see her awake and about, doing her morning jog. Or you might even recognize her straining behind one of Granville's three shopping carts, giving someone a ride.

Being at St. Andrews is not Cynthia's first experience as an international student. She has studied in a Christian college in Tasmania, Australia and has also taken language courses at Yunan University, Yunan Province, China. Throughout her varied experience, Cynthia has gathered a lot of know how on how to deal with the problems and anxieties that usually plague students who are new to an area and environment. As a new student, let alone an international one, it is easy to walk about in a haze of unfamiliarity, putting off tasks, such as currency change, that need to be done, just because everything seems so overwhelming. Upon her arrival here, Cynthia headed straight for the shopping center she had glimpsed from her ride into Laurinburg in order to buy some necessities.

When asked how she has learned to cope with the strangeness of living in a new environment, Cynthia answered: "The survival kit I always take along whenever I go overseas is my sense of humor and three important criteria: 1. Flexibility 2. Adaptability 3. Teachability. These words seem profound, but it has helped me in many different situations that I have encountered, even much more in overcoming communication problems and custom differences."

Often times, one finds it so easy to misunderstand foreign gestures and mannerisms and mistake them for abruptness or slowness. An international student has a daunting task of breaking through these misconceptions or stereotypes in order to make friends. About overcoming miscommunication and differences in custom, Cynthia says:

"A sense of humor is my friend. It is important to be able to laugh with people and be open to being corrected. If and when I don't understand, I asked them to either explain or repeat what they mean.

To overcome custom differences, the first lesson is to be an observer of how things are done in another culture and

what are the customs; do not compare one culture to another. Be flexible when things are not done the way you are used to. It is an advantage to learn the language, too, it reaches out to the heart of people."

Cynthia's ability to "reach" out to people in her very warm, personal way is something very striking about her. One could attribute this quality to her interest and major in psychology, except that there is nothing clinical or abstract in her conversation. She speaks very directly of her experiences. She has done part-

time volunteer work with Malaysian Care, a nonprofit organization in Kuala Lumpur, which has centers for the handicapped, for drug rehab, and for male and female orphanages. Cynthia has volunteered internationally with Interserve, an American Relief Agency, for two years among Afghan refugees in Pakistan and India as a hygiene and solar oven instructor in the refugee camps. "To live and work in a foreign land has not been easy, especially in a war torn environment...the rewarding part was when I got to see the wounded get attended

to, the homeless and wounded children get hugs and love, and tents pitched up for those who sought refuge."

Cynthia has been thrown into situations where language barriers do not count as much as recognizing a person's need for support. As a freshman in college, she already has quite a resume of skill and experience. She once described herself as going in the opposite in life: college students usually get a variety of experience after they graduate. She got the experience first, then started college.



Freshman Cynthia Tan brings a wealth of international experiences to St. Andrews.

Column

I'm not a "Wheelie," I'm a person

by Amanda Willoughby

I have wondered ever since I came to St. Andrews, where the term "wheelie" came from. I wonder who thought of it, and if it gets under very many skins besides mine. Granted, there are more offensive terms used to describe people, but, as I see it, there are a few fundamental things wrong with "wheelie."

First, it sounds like a mascot for

the Paralympics. Secondly, it does not allow for distinction among some very unique people. How are we ever supposed to get past stereotypes and misconceptions if the first thing we see, and the first thing we use to describe each other is a wheelchair, or a pair of crutches?

Maybe I am stuck on a word here, but words are important. I have always preferred the use of the word "inconve-

nienced" to the word "handicapped," for example, because an inconvenience is a thing I can get past. I can knock it out. I can step around it.

On my weirder days, I imagine that all we "inconvenienced" people are like Barbie dolls. Some of us just have more parts, and come in great big boxes with other Parts Sold Separately. That metaphor doesn't work for everybody, but if all the Barbie dolls were in chairs,

or had crutches, you'd find some way to tell them apart, wouldn't you? Use your creative power. Think of ways to describe people so that the wheelchair—the crutches, appear last, or not at all. Maybe it's okay to be a man or woman or child who happens to be in a wheelchair, but a wheelie? I don't think so.