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At the age of fifteen, I was sitting on a hospital room's dirt floor in Nanjing, China. I was there as a volunteer for Operation Smile, an organization that repairs cleft lips and cleft palates for children in need. Surrounding me were 80 children, waiting and hoping to receive the free medical care that would transform their lives. One of these children was a three-year-old girl named Mei. I immediately fell in love with her bright eyes and the wide smile. Mei had no idea why she and her mother, exhausted after their 400-mile trek to the hospital, were sitting on this floor with me. Mei's mother was desperate for her daughter to be one of the 25 children selected for surgery.

After hours of waiting, Mei and her mother were turned away. I, who had known this precious girl for less than a day, was crushed. Can you imagine her mother's anguish?

The first night back from Nanjing, I stared blankly out my bedroom window at the well-manicured lawn in the comfort of my safe neighborhood in Virginia. I was overwhelmed by a swirl of emotions. On the one hand, I felt thankful – born with health, opportunity, and choice. On the other, why me? Why was I so lucky? It was a paradox of guilt and gratitude that stays with me to this day.

This experience changed me. There was no instant flash of “what I want to be when I grow up,” but I knew I needed to use my privilege – my blessings of health and opportunity – to help others. Sitting on the floor with Mei led me to many jobs, from a high school math teacher to developing programs for CME professionals to delivering healthcare resources for families living with multiple sclerosis.

My career of working within the community of those most affected by disease drove me to always seek authentic relationships and understand the needs of those we serve, both in work and in life. What began as a volunteer trip ultimately led to BridgeBio, where I have the privilege of impacting the lives of people who are desperately waiting for life-saving treatment.

BridgeBio leads the way in leveraging critical, innovative science and human connection to save lives – understanding that medical breakthroughs and patient advocacy go hand-in-hand. While Mei was wholly beautiful as she was, it is impossible to deny how cleft lip and palate surgery would have provided her a healthier life. At BridgeBio, we offer the same critical opportunities that could have benefited Mei to patients living with a rare disease. We develop treatments and advocate for people who (oftentimes) have nowhere left to turn. We bring hope to people who feel isolated and misunderstood. We work in rare diseases so we never again have to stare out the window and ask, “Why me?” Instead, we dig in. We find solutions. We save lives.

Let's get to work.