



Miss Angel Ng worked 20 hours a week in her first year at NYP before getting financial help. She graduated from the poly last year and is now studying business management at SMU on a bond-free scholarship. PHOTOS: DON HONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

GenerationGrit

# Braving family crisis and emerging stronger

After Miss Angel Ng's father walked out on her family, she worked part-time as a waitress to put herself through polytechnic. Denying herself any leisure time or treats became routine. In this new series, Theresa Tan talks to millennials like Miss Ng, 21, who have had more than their fair share of adversity, but who every day disprove the stereotype of the soft and selfish strawberry generation. This is Miss Ng's story.

My parents became bankrupt when I was very young. My dad is rather entrepreneurial but his businesses failed often. From a young age, I was always told by my parents that they had no money, so I learnt not to ask for things. I was in Secondary 2 when I got my first job during the school holidays, selling shoes to earn \$7 an hour. I made \$200 to \$300 during that short stint and I gave my family a treat by taking them to a meal at a *zi char* eatery. It cost \$50.

That was a big sum of money to me, but my dad said I had to give my family a treat with my earnings. I saved the rest.

I'm the second of four children. I would always work during the school holidays so that I could earn some money.

In my first year at Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), my dad left us. I thought he wouldn't do this to us, but he cut off all ties with my family and me.

I felt anxious and lost and we didn't know what to do. My mum wasn't working then and she became depressed. Later, she found a job as a promoter at supermarkets to pay the household bills.

It was the most difficult time of my life. I thought my dad would always be there for us but I learnt that we cannot depend on others.

I worried about how to pay my school fees, which cost about \$1,300 a year. I was studying hospitality and tourism management.

I told myself that there was no use crying. I started working as a waitress. In my first year at NYP, I worked 20 hours a week and I used my salary to pay my school fees.

I had no time to go out with friends. No time for TV or computer games. My only leisure activity was sleep.

I didn't feel I was missing out on a lot but I felt envious when I saw my friends go on holidays every year. To them, \$2 was nothing, but it was a lot of money for me. Some people think I'm money-minded but they don't understand what I have been through.

But at least I still had a roof over my head. And I was building my own foundation to get ahead in life.

My only indulgence was a \$1.80 cup of bubble tea once a week. Having something good to eat makes

**Putting herself through school**

SCAN TO WATCH

<http://str.sg/angelgrit>

me happy. To keep myself going, I would google motivational quotes like "de-termination wouldn't fail you" and "don't let your problems limit you". Shortly after my dad left, I thought of quitting school to work and help my mum with the household expenses. But I knew that if I didn't have a diploma, I couldn't get a better job. So I finally asked my course man-

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**GENERATION GRIT:** Know of a Singaporean aged 35 or below who has shown grit amid life's adversities? E-mail us at [stnewsdesk@sph.com.sg](mailto:stnewsdesk@sph.com.sg)

ager at NYP for help. I was afraid that I would burn out and not be able to keep up with my studies if I had to work as much as I did.

Just asking opened so many doors. I received bursaries from the Government and NTUC Income OrangeAid. I was also awarded a scholarship from Mainly I Love Kids, a charity. The bursaries and scholarship took a huge weight off my shoulders and covered my school fees and expenses.

In fact, I have not asked my mum for an allowance since I was 17 years old. Now, I can give her some money to help cover the household expenses.

Once I didn't have to work and worry about money so much, I started to volunteer as a tutor to children from poor families under the Chinese Development Assistance Council. I wanted to give back. After all, all the bursaries had helped me.

Last year, I graduated second in my cohort of 167 students.

I also won a bond-free scholarship from ARA Asset Management to study business management at Singapore Management University (SMU). I started on my degree at SMU in August last year and it has been stressful but enriching at the same time.

I'm also working as a part-time private tutor to earn some money to cover my expenses and to contribute to my family. I don't want to have any excuses not to do my best. When I look back, I'm very proud that I braved the storm.

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Some quotes that keep Miss Ng going. "I don't want to have any excuses not to do my best. When I look back, I'm very proud that I braved the storm," she says.