

Inspirational Sparks

Hallmarks of Success



A Portfolio of Achievements

By Mohammad Shamil



I had never ever passed any History or Economics examinations in Outram Institute (OI) (currently known as Millennia Institute (MI)). Adding to this was the embarrassment for being the only Malay student whom had to sit for the Mother Tongue (MT) national examinations three times so that the final attempt could possibly get me into the university provided I did well for my 'A' levels.

That fateful day in 2004 was unforgettable. I came back to the Institute at Bartley Road (our former residence) for my result slip. Mrs. Joy Tan passed me my results and I couldn't believe my eyes! I got a 'B' grade for History! It was a shock and I even asked Mrs. Joy Tan if this was for real. She commented that with my grades now, I could try applying to the local universities. I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Mrs. Joy Tan for helping me in the subject.

It was not as smooth-sailing as thought. Alas in my worst imagination, my application to the local universities in 2005 was rejected. I was puzzled and pretty depressed then. I wondered if I could ever get my education in the varsity after all. I really wanted to get into the university. Later, I found out from my friend who achieved the same grades as me for her 'A' level subjects but attained a slightly higher grade in one of the 'AO' level subject got in. So, literally, I missed my university education by a grade! It really hurt my esteem as my dream to tertiary education was so close and yet so far then.

I was still serving National Service (NS) at that moment and was a NSF Section Commander (SC) at Changi Fire Station. In view of my failed application to university, I was contemplating if I should just sign on. My emotions upsurge was distracted by the 2005/06 Tsunami catastrophe in Aceh, where the natural disaster killed hundreds of thousands of people.

I felt a sense of righteousness in me and I decided to volunteer my service. Though the authorities wanted rescuers and professional helpers to go for the missions, my application was rejected by my Division Commander as they wanted regular personnel. However, I wanted to go badly. After much consideration, I asked my Station Commander to help me. With much effort going through a limbo of rejections and official approvals, I was finally selected for an overseas 1-week mission to Aceh. It was a crazy week back then seeing dead bodies on an unimaginable scale.

A few months after the tsunamis, I was appointed and nominated for a few national awards, unexpectedly. Being the only NSF rescuer on the team, I was given the 'Overseas Excellence Medal' and a 'National Day Home Team Award' in the same year. It was a great feeling. It was then I remembered Mrs. Joy Tan kind words, "You can enter the University." So, the recent accolades gave me a new boost of confidence to apply again. I was eager to make it happen despite all odds.

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For this round of application to the university, I saw a new section called 'Discretionary Admissions' in the form, where a potential candidate could combine their grades with other merits and awards. So I decided to have a go - I combined my 'A' level results with these recent awards and medals which I had achieved during my NSF days as a fireman. Shortly after, I was granted an interview with the professors and I gave it my best shot, armed with a portfolio of achievements prepared by my best friend.

The great wait was over in a matter of weeks. And Viola! Here I am, in National University of Singapore (NUS)! I have opted for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) in NUS. At present, I have an excellent time learning now and everything just fell in place nicely. Without the encouragement of Mrs. Joy Tan and my teachers in OI, I guessed my dream will never come true.



A current member of MI Alumni Association 2007/2008, Mohammad Shamil graduated from the former Outram Institute (OI) Class of 2001. Shamil is currently doing his Bachelor's degree in Sociology and History, National University of Singapore (NUS). We wish Shamil all the best in his future endeavours.

*Shamil is the only guy wearing black in this photo