

# A Simple Twist Of Fate



By  
 Vanessa Teo

## UTES Bursary Grant Raised A Doctor And A Senior Parliamentary Secretary



Timothy Fernandez

She will never forget the words of her father on his deathbed: “Masayu, don’t go to university yet. Work and support your brothers through their education first, and after that, you can do what you want.”

One of her two brothers is Mr Masagos Zulkifli Masagos Mohamad, Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Education, and Home Affairs). And she? – Dr Masayu Zainab.

Dr Masayu remembers how torn she was between fulfilling her father’s last wish and going to medical school. Fortunately, her father’s union, Union of Telecoms Employees of Singapore, continued to give her a bursary grant and she was able to continue her studies. And the rest, like they say, is history.

Coming from a traditional Asian family, it was important for the men to complete their education first so that they could take care of the family. Besides, with the tight economic situation at home, it was not possible for all to pursue an education at the same time. However, the impossible became the possible simply because of two bursary grants that came from UTES – one for Dr Masayu and one for Mr Masagos.

“I wanted to study medicine at National University of Singapore, and school fees and books were expensive. So it was really a blessing that this bursary came through because no one could say there was no opportunity for me to study with this new amount of money,” said Dr Masayu.

Dr Masayu’s father was a technician with Singapore Telecommunications Private Limited. Bringing home an income of about \$1,000, and having five mouths to feed, life was not bad but definitely not easy either. In order to provide a slightly more comfortable life for the family, he drove a taxi during weekends. Her mother brought sewing to do at home. The family lived in a rented 2-room SIT flat until Dr Masayu was 10, and Mr Masagos, 15, when their father bought a 4-room HDB flat, in 1977.

“Even with my parents’ combined income, my father still had to borrow money from his sister when we needed to change our refrigerator, and we didn’t have a colour television until I was 16 years old,” said Mr Masagos.

While other children went out for treats together with their family on their birthdays, Mr Masagos’ and his family would have it the other way round – his father brought food home from the hawker centre for the special occasion. But not once did anyone grumble or complain.

“Whatever we had, we were happy. We never felt we needed more. Even when I was studying at National Junior College, I still brought food from

home everyday. I didn’t feel that I needed to buy food even though my food was cold by the time I ate,” said Mr Masagos.

Mr Masagos was a yearly recipient of the UTES bursary grant from Secondary 1, all the way till he obtained his Masters degree, and this amount of money was sufficient to make life a little better for him. However, this bursary grant became essential the year Mr Masagos’ father passed away in 1985, which was also his first year at university.

Having the sole breadwinner of the family disappear overnight, the bursary became the main source of income that supported the family. Not only was it used for Mr Masagos’ education, it was also needed for paying bills and expenses. Trained to be frugal from young, Mr Masagos was careful with every cent that he spent.

“After my father passed away, there was very little money in my family. In fact, there was not very much left in his Central Provident Fund because most of the money was used to pay for the flat. Besides, my mother was not working, and only supplemented the income by selling kuih-kuih. So, whatever money I received from the UTES bursary aided us through this period of time,” said Mr Masagos.

Dr Masayu’s opportunity to study was also made possible with this fund. When her dying father made the request for her to work first, it made every sense for everyone to say yes to his request. However, deep down inside, Dr Masayu was very keen on studying, and with this surprise gift from UTES, it became clear that she should continue with her studies.

“When my dad passed away, one of his colleagues suggested that I should apply for the UTES bursary grant even though we knew that traditionally, one family was eligible for only one bursary. To our surprise, my application was successful even though there was no way my course could provide a bond to Singtel,” said Dr Masayu.

“UTES provided me the bursary for my full five years of education, and I am really very thankful to all that helped,” she added.

Transport itself was already a big expense on

Dr Masayu’s list. She had to take four buses to school, accounting to about \$37 a month, which her yearly bursary grant of about \$3,000 dollars was sufficient to cover. Without this additional money, life would have been harder for her.

“I packed lunch to school and sometimes I had to skip dinner. In the end, I become a coffee addict because coffee was only 40 cents!” said Dr Masayu.

UTES can proudly lay claim that its bursary grant “raised” two shining members of society.

“This is one of the best ways for unions to show they care for the welfare of their workers. And there is no better investment for the family than to support the long-term future of their children through education,” said Mr Masagos.

Shortly after Mr Masagos was elected Member of Parliament for Tampines GRC in 2006, the Metal Industries Workers’ Union and the Singapore Malay Teachers’ Union invited him to become their advisor. Of course he said yes!

“It went a long way for my father to know that his employer and his union cared for his children. This is the very important part of being a union member, where you realise that you can rely on other institutions and not only on those established ones.”

Masagos Zulkifli Masagos Mohamad  
 Senior Parliamentary Secretary  
 (Education, and Home Affairs)

“When you get the grant, it would be of great use if you do proper financial planning and state your priorities on what the money should be spent on. When you need books, use it on books, spend it on your education and remember not to include your movie or dinner treats in the expenditure list.”

Dr Masayu Zainab, The Neptune Clinic