

news education

He became homeless on day of exam

NTU graduate had to give up dreams of pursuing doctorate but feels fortunate to be able to give back to society

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Ten minutes before one of his toughest sociology examinations, Mr Hariz Husaini received a phone call from his mother.

It was the day that judgment was to be passed on his parents' divorce.

He heard his mother crying over the phone, telling him that she had lost the case, that his father had won custody of his sister, and that he and his mother were homeless as his father was also awarded ownership of the family home.

"I went into the exam hall and I just sat down there for like 15 minutes and I couldn't do anything," Mr Hariz told The New Paper earlier this month.

He said: "After that I told myself that I needed to get this done and I got it done... I did well for that exam and then we moved on from there. The next day, straight away we started packing and moved out."

Mr Hariz didn't go into any details of why the family went through such a painful split.

Without a permanent roof over his head, his third year in university was one of the lowest points for him.

Mother and son had to move

from rental home to rental home five times before finally settling in their current flat this year.

But Mr Hariz, now 25, managed to overcome these difficulties and the sociology graduate will be receiving his degree today at the convocation ceremonies of Nanyang Technological University (NTU), which end tomorrow.

Growing up in a less affluent home meant that Mr Hariz had to be resourceful.

As a child, he picked up household skills like plumbing from his grandfather and father, and as he got older, he learnt how to repair electronic devices and computers from neighbours and the Internet.

"It was out of necessity because when you don't have a lot of money to spare, when anything breaks you cannot replace it. It's either you fix it or you don't have it for a really long time," Mr Hariz said.

Entering his first year of university, his skills proved useful as he had to support himself and his family.

His parents' marital issues came to a head and his mother, Madam Anita Minjut, who runs an employment agency, was left with a debt of \$200,000.



Mr Hariz Husaini with his mother, Madam Anita Minjut. TNP PHOTO: LEE JIA WEN

"At its highest, we had to pay the banks about \$22,000 a month, on top of university fees, personal expenses... things like that," Mr Hariz revealed.

He started earning money using the skills that he had picked up helping around the house.

"I just used it to save some

money here and there, and then I started monetising those skills, started doing it for people for really cheap, like changing toilet bowls for \$50," Mr Hariz said.

In his second year, Mr Hariz began to fall in love with his major and set his sights on becoming a sociology professor.

From doing odd jobs, he

started working part-time for the NTU Sociology department as a quantitative interviewer and later at Duke-NUS's Centre for Ageing Research and Education, even during the school term.

While his financial and domestic situation has now improved, Mr Hariz still had to give up his dreams of pursuing a doctorate, despite being accepted into an overseas programme at the University of Essex.

Instead, he has taken up a position at the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association.

"I've always wanted to find a job that allows me to give back to society," he said.

"It is not glamorous at all, but it doesn't matter because it fulfills my want to actually help in whatever way I can."

Mr Hariz added: "A lot of people have come up to me and told me that I'm very unlucky for the life that I've had but they don't see it the way I see it.

"I feel that I've been extremely lucky."

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