

Moving closer to her dream

A bond-free scholarship from NTU gives Ms Kareen Thian the flexibility to choose her career path after she graduates

by april chong

SHE may have big dreams but nothing is going to stop Ms Kareen Thian from pursuing her ambition to be the chief financial officer of a large organisation one day.

The 22-year-old is now one step closer to her dream after securing the Nanyang Scholarship from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) and the Lee Kuan Yew Scholarship To Encourage Upgrading (LKY-STEP) Award.

They will come in handy for Ms Thian, who is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Accountancy at NTU's Nanyang Business School.

"My family was most delighted and grateful to know that I have been offered the scholarship and award, as these greatly lighten the financial burden on my family," says Ms Thian, who has three siblings. Her mother works as a factory machine operator while her father is a hawkler.

Her path to tertiary studies had not been an easy one, and this makes her current achievements all the more remarkable.

She did not do well during her junior college days due to bulimia nervosa, an eating disorder. After pulling herself out of the doldrums, she went on to do a diploma in accountancy at Singapore Polytechnic.

However, her health took a hit again when she was diagnosed with lupus, an autoimmune disorder.

"Both bulimia nervosa and lupus have taught me a very important life lesson — that in times of adversity, I could either give up and end up none the better; or choose to live with a positive mindset and let nothing get me down.

"These personal challenges only made me more determined, as I came out a stronger person than before," she says.



PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

Her interest in accountancy was piqued when she was working as an accounts assistant after her junior college days, and was introduced to concepts such as debits and credits.

She then decided to pursue the subject as she felt that there would be many career opportunities if she had an accounting background.

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— Ms Kareen Thian (above)

She also set her mind to continue with a Bachelor of Accountancy course at NTU and was delighted to get the Nanyang Scholarship, and later the LKY-STEP Award, which gave her an additional one-off cash award of \$3,500, to finance her studies.

Both are bond-free, giving her the flexibility to explore different areas of

interest and allowing her to choose from the wide spectrum of careers in the accounting and financial sector after graduation, she says.

Financial support aside, Ms Thian also gets priority in NTU's Global Immersion Programme and has been given many other development opportunities.

These include the Nanyang Scholars Programme, where scholars are given leadership training opportunities and are invited to take on the role of Scholar Ambassadors in representing the university to give publicity talks, receive guests and represent the university at outreach events.

"Such programmes give us the added exposure, build character and also instil confidence in all of us to be positive role models in society," she says.

On facing an interview panel of three last year, she recalls: "On the whole, I felt that the interview process was rather stringent.

"Good grades alone are almost insufficient for one to secure a scholarship, as not many questions were asked about my grades.

"Scholarship providers are now looking for all-rounders — people who not only excel in their studies, but also possess leadership qualities and exemplary conduct."

Her advice for aspiring scholars: "Always strive to give your best in everything that you do. There is no shortcut to success. Working hard and perseverance will pay off in the end.

"Also, believe in yourself and have a never-say-die attitude."

It is also practical to develop good time management skills, which is essential if one aims to be an all-rounder, she adds.

"With so many activities to participate in, one must be able to budget one's time carefully to ensure that there is time allocated for activities, studies and also for family and close friends."