

ON-SCREEN VIOLENCE GIFTED KIDS 'MORE AFFECTED' B17

EDUCATION

From Normal stream to PhD course

Two graduates share their journeys from the Normal stream to studying for PhDs

Muneerah Ab Razak

Mr Ernest Tan, 28, a PhD student, never thought he would get this far.

The former EM3 and Normal (Technical) student did not bother studying much as he had no interest in the subjects he was doing.

But it all changed in his two years at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) as a student in Communications Technology.

He said: "I played a lot of computer games then so I didn't mind learning more about computers."

His interest pushed him to believe that he could continue into polytechnic, where he eventually earned a Diploma in Computer Engineering at Singapore Polytechnic (SP).

With a jump in the learning curve at SP, he was on the verge of failing his modules.

"I think what sustained me through these years was my curiosity in computer engineering."

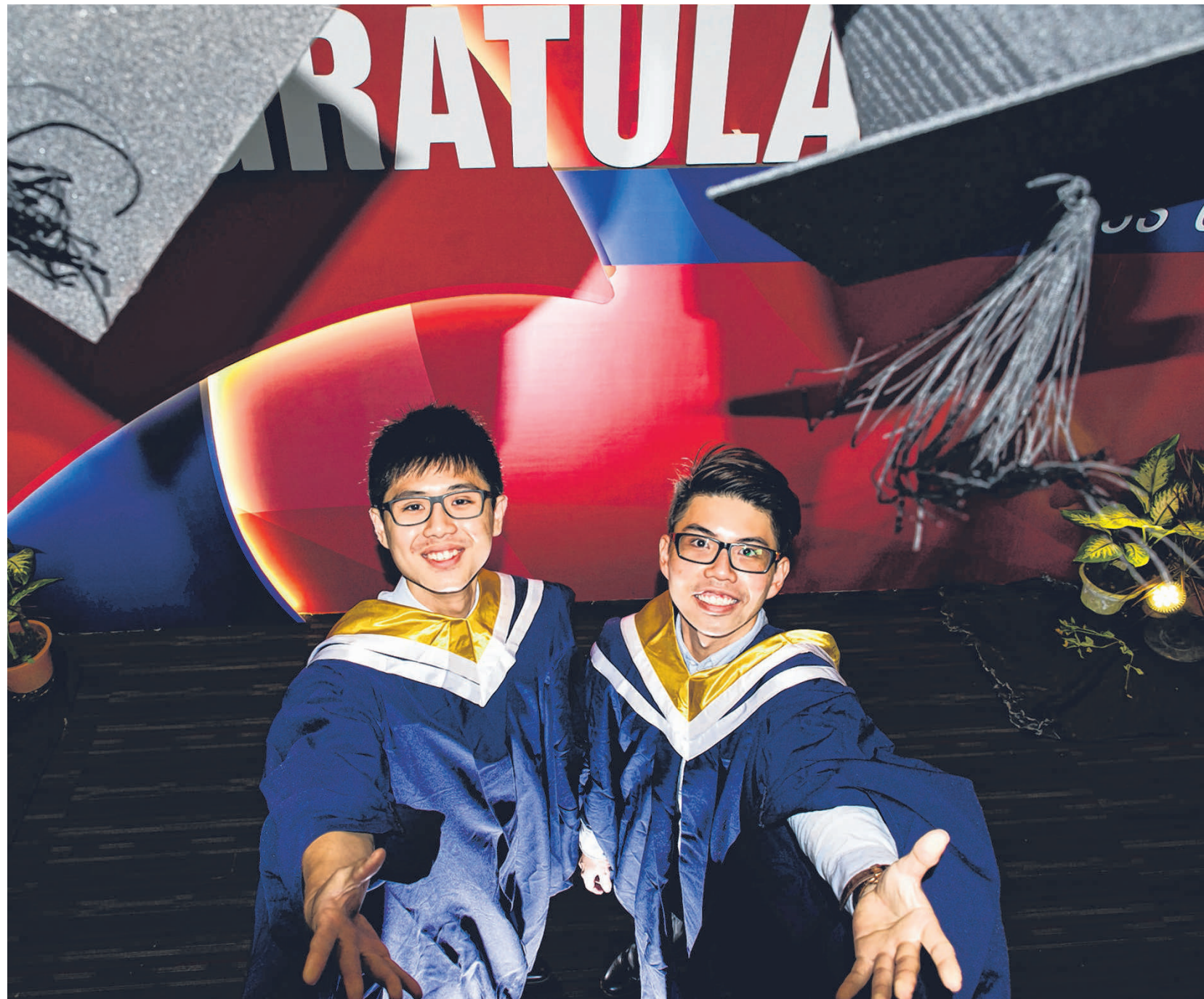
The three years of hard work bore fruit as he was accepted into Nanyang Technological University (NTU) one semester before polytechnic graduation.

Mr Tan said: "Once I was in uni, I just wanted to see how far I could go. I never thought in a million years that I would go to NTU."

Determined, he maintained good grades in NTU. His final-year project (FYP), determining an algorithm for brain signals when a person recognises another person's picture, was a turning point for Mr Tan.

His FYP supervisor saw the potential in him to go further and linked him up with aerospace firm Airbus for an internship.

As part of the Industrial Postgrad-



NTU graduates Ernest Tan (left) and Nigel Tan were once in the Normal stream. Their hard work since then has paid off and they are now studying for their PhDs and working as research engineers at the same time, Ernest with Airbus and Nigel with the university. PHOTO: NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

FURTHER THAN EXPECTED

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MR ERNEST TAN, 28, a PhD student who was an EM3 and Normal Technical student before moving on to Singapore Polytechnic and Nanyang Technological University.

PERSISTENCE NEEDED

When I feel like giving up, I will now look at what I have been through and continue to work harder. Some things take a lot of time but we need to be persistent and try to achieve.



MR NIGEL TAN, 26, a full-time research engineer in NTU and a part-time PhD student in Material Engineering.

uate Programme introduced by the Economic Development Board in 2011, Mr Tan was able to enrol in NTU's PhD in Computer Engineering course as well as work to gain industry experience.

He is now a research engineer at Airbus, working on improving the use of radio frequencies for aeronautical communications.

"We have to find our interest, put in our best effort and keep trying. After having come so far, it has made me believe that I can still carry on."

He is among the 9,107 students graduating from NTU this year, with more than 6,000 receiving bachelor's degrees and 3,000 getting graduate degrees.

The first of 18 graduation ceremonies was held last Monday at the Nanyang Auditorium, with the last to be held tomorrow.

Also taking the long road to success was Mr Nigel Tan, 26, a full-time research engineer in NTU and a part-time PhD student in Material Engineering.

During the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) preparations, Mr Tan was unable to focus as his family had to downgrade to a two-room rental flat due to his father's business going bankrupt.

The eldest of three children, Mr Tan felt compelled to work but realised that he could not until he was 14.

He did not do well for his PSLE and entered the Normal (Academic) stream. His parents could not find stable jobs and later divorced.

At 14, he became a part-time chef in a fast-food chain while studying to support his mother and two younger sisters financially.

Despite having so much on his

plate, he topped his N-level cohort at Marsiling Secondary School.

He entered SP to pursue a Diploma in Chemical Process but, again, his journey was not a smooth one.

"I was struggling so much with poly that I felt like giving up and working. My mother encouraged me, saying that if I could top the N levels, I could do it again. I just have to continue with the same attitude I had then."

He ended up doing well enough in polytechnic to enter university.

Mr Tan had at first wanted to work immediately after national service. However, after working for a year, he realised that he needed a degree to go far professionally.

Armed with his savings, a bank loan and a Ministry of Education bursary, he entered NTU in 2013 as a student in Material Science and

Engineering.

Assistant Professor Terry Steele of NTU saw his potential and encouraged him to continue on to postgraduate studies.

Mr Tan was initially worried about funding his studies but found out that he could apply to be a Graduate Research Officer as he had attained a first-class honours for his bachelor's degree this year.

This allows him to work full-time and study part-time in NTU.

He is grateful for the support from his family, friends and teachers.

Mr Tan said: "When I feel like giving up, I will now look at what I have been through and continue to work harder. Some things take a lot of time but we need to be persistent and try to achieve."

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