

FROM TAN CHIN TUAN BURSARY RECIPIENT TO PIONEER TO PHILANTHROPIST



He was one of nine children and his parents could not afford to pay for his school books, nor could they provide him with pocket money. So, Mr Lee Kok Wah (Arts and Social Sciences '69) would borrow his classmates' books and his father would laboriously copy the text on a typewriter – by candlelight. If he was lucky, his grandmother would give him a potato to take to school for his lunch and his friends would share their food with him.

Mr Lee's life changed dramatically 50 years ago when a teacher put him forward for a scholarship to pay for his 'A' level studies. The scholarship was provided by banker and philanthropist Tan Sri Dr Tan Chin Tuan, who gave both his money and his time generously to young people in financial need. "I was touched and inspired by his generosity. He taught me the value of hard work. His philosophy was if I give one dollar to someone who does not need it, it is not as impactful as giving to someone who is in desperate need. I told myself that one day I would reciprocate and help low-income families whose children qualify for university," shares Mr Lee, who met Tan Sri Dr Tan on a number of occasions.

The scholarship was followed by a

bursary, also provided by Tan Sri Dr Tan, to pay for his studies in social sciences at the University of Singapore, the predecessor institution of the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Today, Mr Lee is a businessman with over 40 years' experience in the corporate, finance and capital markets and is renowned for his ability to turn around flagging companies, particularly in the marine and shipping sectors. He is one of Singapore's pioneer generations who helped lay the foundations for modern day Singapore's success. "Those were fantastic days, the 60s, 70s and 80s. We were part of the pioneers. We were building up Singapore. We were tiny in Asia and no one knew where Singapore was," he recalls fondly.

Mr Lee has made a gift to NUS to set up the *Mr and Mrs Lee Wai Kin Bursary* at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in memory of his parents. "My father truly believed that education was

the key to our future. He was very enterprising and showed me that from failure you get success. This bursary also serves to remind future generations of the tremendous sacrifices of our parents for a better future," he says.

What is his hope for the recipients of his bursary? "They should use the money wisely and hopefully one day they will help the poorer sections of society. Money should be used wisely. Instead of accumulating money, they should put their dollars where they can do more in terms of being of real benefit to society," says Mr Lee.

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MR LEE KOK WAH (ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCE '69)

