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MR PREMNATH SUPARAMANIAM on his turning point after his business and marriage collapsed, and he suffered a heart attack

BACK ON TRACK

One met with professional and personal failure, and the other was young and aimless, but the two recipients of SIM's resilience award have found their footing



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Resilience has become a buzzword in recent times with trade wars, market volatility and artificial intelligence disruptions adding to global uncertainty.

Since 2023, Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) has given out the SIM Chairman's Award for Resilience to students who have overcome deep adversity while excelling in their studies and careers. There have been 10 recipients so far, including two announced this year.

SIM chairman Euleen Goh, who personally funds each cash award of \$3,000, says the accolade "challenges conventional views of success". Highlighting traits like perseverance and determination "broadens the narrative of achievement, while fostering a more empathetic and inclusive society", she adds.

She hopes this will help "level the playing field for individuals from backgrounds that face greater odds".

The two awardees for 2024, who received their awards on May 8, 2025, returned to higher education at SIM following multiple setbacks. Here are their stories.

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HOW TO PUSH PAST A 'WHY ME?' MINDSET

Before the age of 40, Mr Premnath Suparamaniam had hit rock bottom and gone through a series of personal, professional and financial failures.

His business had collapsed, incurring debts that led to the repossession of his HDB flat.

His first marriage broke down. Then he had a heart attack at age 33.

Now 43 and remarried with a one-year-old son, Mr Premnath has sprung back from adversity stronger than before.

He is now an account manager at BlackSky, a company that specialises in geospatial intelligence and satellite imaging and analytics.

The mechanical engineering graduate from Nanyang Technological University attends night and weekend classes for his MBA (Master of Business Administration) in a part-time, two-year post-graduate programme offered by the University of Birmingham, in collaboration with SIM.

He is about six months from completion.

Mr Premnath's wife, a 43-year-old bank customer service officer whom he married in 2019, encouraged him to apply for the SIM Chairman's Award for Resilience. "She said, 'You have gone

through so much of life's challenges, this would be a place for you to tell your story.'"

He adds: "I want to remind other people who are my age – who may be in challenging situations – that there will be a second chance, and you have to maximise it when you get there.

"Do not get depressed; keep moving."

His struggles started when his father, a lift technician, was diagnosed with stomach cancer in 2011 and died of the disease months later in 2012, at age 59.

Mr Premnath was then a 30-year-old bachelor who was working as a representative in a firm that focuses on satellite imaging, also his current line of work.

After his father's death, he became the sole breadwinner of his family, comprising his homemaker mother and a brother and sister.

The burden of caring for his family weighed on him as he went from supporting his father in chemotherapy to paying the household's bills before his younger siblings launched their careers.

In 2014, he started an events management business with \$10,000 in capital. He had enjoyed participating in trade shows in his previous job at the satellite-imaging firm and wanted to strike out on his own.

Mr Premnath, who was married

by then, found that entrepreneurship was tougher than he thought. "I had my strengths, but I still needed to sharpen my skills in areas like financial management, networking and sales pitches," he says.

His business folded a year later in 2015, incurring a "heavy debt".

"I couldn't make my mortgage payments and I still had to pay bills."

Although he eventually paid off his debts, his marital home, a five-room HDB flat in Sengkang, was repossessed in 2018.

Also in 2015, Mr Premnath was having lunch one day when he felt the sensation of "poking needles" and a constriction around his neck.

His then wife rushed him to hospital where he found out he was having a heart attack, which landed him in hospital for a week.

"I felt cheated," he recalls. "I was taking care of myself, going to the gym and running. I was young and already going through so many personal challenges. I thought, 'Why me? Why me?'"

Amid strain, his marriage of less than three years broke down. His divorce was finalised in 2017.

"That was my lowest point. I was confused and lonely. I felt quite lost.

"I then thought, 'What are my gaps? What should I do to readjust

to get back to that point where I felt I was progressing in life?'" he recounts.

He began to rebuild his life, starting with his health.

He reduced his food portions, cut out rice at dinner time and took up brisk walking, losing 10kg in the process.

He cycled through a few jobs – including as an insurance agent, a distribution manager at a telecommunications firm and a research project officer at a local university – before returning to his original industry in 2022.

"Along the way, I gained negotiation skills and learnt to deal with customers more effectively," says Mr Premnath, who hopes that getting an MBA will give his career a boost.

"At each point of progress, I felt I was regaining a milestone, regaining what I had lost – marriage, stable finances, moving back to the satellite imaging industry."

He has also picked up many lessons on grit.

He says: "I learnt not only to embrace change, but also to anticipate it. I try to be more aware of my surroundings so that I can stay relevant and competitive.

"Everybody goes through bad periods, it's how you respond to it that makes a difference.

"When I started moving, life seemed to give me a direction."

Mr Premnath Suparamaniam is now an account manager at a company that specialises in geospatial intelligence and pursuing a part-time master's in business administration offered by the University of Birmingham, in collaboration with SIM.
ST PHOTOS: TARYN NG

GAMING INSTEAD OF SCHOOLING

Mr Jeremiah Ling's life took an abrupt twist in upper secondary school when he started skipping school for a day or two, then up to a month at a go.

He was a "bright kid" who sailed through Jiemin Primary School, before entering the Express stream in Orchid Park Secondary School.

"I developed the habit of truancy and lacked motivation and discipline. I didn't finish my homework and so I didn't want to face my teachers," he recalls. "It all snowballed. Because I didn't attend lessons, I didn't know what was going on, which meant, all the more, that I didn't want to go to class."

He was "always the guy with the empty file, which had no homework or worksheets".

He estimates that he was present in school for less than 70 per cent of his Secondary 3 and 4 years, and even skipped classes once for a whole month. Concerned counselors, teachers and even a vice-principal paid visits to his home, where he lived with his mother, to no avail.

During his periods of truancy, he stayed at home playing computer games all day, skipping meals bar the occasional cup of instant noodles, until his mother came home from work at night with "dabao" (takeaway dinner).

Mr Ling, now 26 and a software engineer, reflects: "My mother didn't really have a choice. She

couldn't carry me to school or force me to go. She could only keep asking me why I was not going to school, and ask me to go.

"My mum was definitely disappointed and scared for my future. My friends just accepted that I was like that, that Jeremiah was not in school.

"Looking back, I would say it was a lack of awareness. I didn't think about the future, neither did I have any direction. I would say I didn't like myself. My self-esteem was low, I guess."

His school almost did not let him take his O levels, he says. "I didn't study anything, I gave up. I got into a Higher Nitec course, but I couldn't get into polytechnic. I wanted to get into poly because Express students normally at least make it to poly (after O levels)," he recounts. He failed three out of six O level subjects.

He enrolled in a Higher Nitec course in Information Technology at ITE College Central. "It felt the most familiar to me because I played computer games," he says.

After ITE, he did a diploma at Nanyang Polytechnic in game development and technology.

He still did not like studying or going to school, although he managed to adhere to the minimum attendance requirements.

National service was his wake-up call.

Mr Ling says: "My biggest motivation was NS. In my unit, everyone was going to a local university or had career prospects elsewhere."



Mr Jeremiah Ling balances full-time work as a software engineer and studying part-time for a bachelor's degree in information technology offered by the University of Wollongong, in partnership with SIM.

He was surrounded by people who were driven and knew what they wanted to do.

"I felt that I was behind. I tried to figure out what I would like to do, to catch up with my peers, because I was two years older than them, having gone to ITE before poly," he recalls.

He decided on programming because he had already done that at polytechnic.

During his downtime in NS and

on weekends, he attended online courses and coding tutorials and designed websites as a personal project. He cut down on social gatherings and quit gaming.

He says: "Pushing through during army wasn't easy, but I knew it was the only window I had to improve my skills and catch up on what I had missed in school. I got my life back on track."

After NS, in 2023, he got into the Fusion programme, which was set

up by the Infocomm Media Development Authority and NCS, an information technology company.

Under this scheme, Mr Ling, now a software engineer at NCS, will soon complete his part-time Bachelor of Information Technology degree, offered by the University of Wollongong in partnership with SIM.

He achieved an average grade of 81.16 out of 100, a far cry from his previous academic results.

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MR JEREMIAH LING, who did not take his studies seriously. He got a wake-up call when he realised his national service mates were driven and knew what they wanted to do

Mr Ling says that securing a job allowed his mother the opportunity to retire from the freight forwarding sector after 30 years. The 61-year-old is semi-retired and does freelance work in the healthcare industry.

He says: "I did this so that she can retire from her stressful career.

"Looking back, I would say to younger people that everyone matures eventually. If I were to give my younger self advice, I would say: Do not be ashamed of taking a different path."

He was shocked when he applied for, and won, SIM's resilience award.

He says: "It's a form of recognition of my efforts, even if I don't deserve it. I haven't gotten any awards before. I'm not used to winning things."