

GenerationGrit

Wrestler grabs hold of life after troubled past

National wrestler Danielle Lim was just 17 when she plucked up the courage to call the police after her elder brother came home with drugs. Things at home and school were difficult but a remark from a teacher helped turn her life around.

Jolene Ang

He was constantly stealing from his family members, be it a cellphone, a laptop or even hard-earned savings, and then one day he brought drugs home.

That was the last straw for national wrestler Danielle Lim, who finally plucked up the courage to report her elder brother to the police five years ago. Ms Lim, 22, said: "My younger sister, who was 12 then, was at home and I didn't want her to see him taking drugs."

Her brother, who is four years older, was her hero and she looked up to him. Reporting him to the authorities in 2015 was a decision that took courage and conviction.

Growing up, the two older siblings were close. Their father had a fiery temper, inflamed by alcoholism, and was abusive towards his wife and three children.

Ms Lim said her brother always tried his best to shield her from the beatings, and bore the brunt of their father's anger whenever possible. The littlest things triggered their father. Once, when Ms Lim was about eight, she was squabbling with her brother over some jelly they had dropped on the floor.

"Dad told us to lick the jelly off the floor, and go downstairs to the basketball court and stand there as punishment, even though it was raining really heavily," she said.

Such incidents brought the two siblings closer. In those days, when she was in St Anthony's Canossian Primary School, she would skip school to hang out with him.

In 2005, her father left the family. Her mother, a Filipino who is on a long-term social visit pass, worked at places such as Dunkin' Donuts to support herself and the children.

They lived in a four-room flat in Chai Chee and the neighbours helped her family get through the rough patch, Ms Lim said. "What we had wasn't enough, but our neighbours would often cook for us. We are really very grateful to them."

But Ms Lim and her brother were still skipping school.

Later, in St Anthony's Canossian Secondary School, she was consistently bottom of her cohort, though she was an active student athlete who represented the school in sports, including track and field and handball. "I didn't care. I went for my exams without knowing what paper I was sitting. The only reason I even took the exams was that I didn't want to have to spend money on a medical certificate if I was absent."

Life carried on this way until she was 16. "At first, it was all about fun. I had no aims or goals and I didn't know what I wanted in life. Breaking the rules made me feel there was something in my life I could have control over," she said.



Ms Danielle Lim, who has won six medals in wrestling competitions overseas, was once consistently at the bottom of her cohort in secondary school. She managed to turn things around thanks to her teachers' help and is now a student at the Singapore Institute of Technology. She hopes to represent Singapore at the SEA Games and Asian Games, as well as, one day, the Olympic Games. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

Overcoming adversity to excel as an athlete



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DRIVEN AND INDEPENDENT

This girl is very independent. When she wants to do something, she doesn't stop until she gets it done. She always tells me, 'Mum, don't worry, I'll give you a good life some day.' And I tell her, 'Keep going, I'm always behind you, never give up.'



MS CLAIRE BERANI, on her daughter, national wrestler Danielle Lim.

GENERATION GRIT

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She also receives bursaries of over \$6,000 yearly from the Ministry of Education and North West Community Development Council.

On the wrestling front, she is training hard in the hope of representing Singapore at the SEA Games and the Asian Games, as well as, one day, the Olympic Games.

She credits her mother, Ms Claire Berani, 52, for sticking by them.

"Mum could have left home when she wasn't wanted, but she stayed. No matter how naughty we were, she kept on being strong."

That was among the reasons Ms Lim decided to pull up her socks in secondary school. "I didn't want to be another problem for her."

Ms Berani is the family's main breadwinner, and currently draws \$1,400 a month as a helper in a satay kitchen. The family has since moved from Chai Chee to a flat in Yishun, which is fully paid for.

Said Ms Berani: "This girl is very independent. When she wants to do something, she doesn't stop un-

til she gets it done. She always tells me, 'Mum, don't worry, I'll give you a good life some day.'

"And I tell her, 'Keep going, I'm always behind you, never give up.'"

But Ms Lim has not spoken to her brother since she turned him in to the police. They are "in different places and we see the world differently", she said.

She has, however, made up with her father, who mended his ways and returned home in 2016 after a colon cancer scare, and now works as a Grab driver.

Ms Lim said: "He thought he was going to die and he wanted to apologise to us before it happened. There's still a barrier between us, we don't talk much. But I've forgiven him. After all, he's the one who gave me this life."

Her life experiences have taught her to "focus on the things you can control" and that "as long as I don't stop trying, I can succeed".

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