**Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

Laying beside my mother, I would gaze into her brown eyes that always brought me both comfort and strength. Her warm smile. Her whispered prayers: “*Terima kasih Tuhan*.” *Thank you, God.* Then came a time when my three younger brothers and I would sleep in her bedroom to keep her company. Her eyes rarely gleamed since my father’s passing.

Semarang, Indonesia. The city where everybody knew everybody. Growing up, I was sensitive to comments from those who viewed our family as incomplete.

I would often be questioned, “Is mom’s business going well, dear? I hope you and your brothers are eating well.”

Although well-intentioned, ten-year-old me nearly teared up at the sight of my brothers watching me in worry.

I paused and took a deep breath, “We’re fine, auntie.”

Perhaps we were seen as frail, but one thing came clear to me at an early age: we are undeniably products conditioned by society, made to think that women, like my mother, are incapable of being breadwinners in the family.

Sometimes, I fell victim to this very mindset, concerned for my mother who had no corporate background in the complex wood industry my father left behind. Yet, I witnessed love and great strength when she left for the office, in hopes of seeking greater opportunities for her four children. She became the reason for my initiative to take on new responsibilities at home.

From washing dishes to lifting heavy tables, I made sure to complete each task with determination. Meanwhile, my brothers were sitting on the carpet, recklessly eating chips.

“Hey!” I snapped. The carpet had flecks of seaweed scattered everywhere—in places I just vacuumed. I was furious. “Clean it up. Look at this mess!”

Lionel stood up, his tiny legs waddled over to my side, “Boys don’t clean, girls do.”

I flashed a menacing stare. Although enraged, I did not retaliate. Instead, I began to negotiate as a way to counter his response, assigning tasks for each of us in exchange for time to watch Netflix—a good trade-off if I say so myself. With every sweat, my brothers lay exhausted on the floor, their cheeks flushed when they realized the energy household tasks demanded.

At school, we were taught that chores were meant for women. At home, we dismissed that role when my brothers and I learned to support one another for every demanding task, regardless of traditional gender roles. My desire to continue this influence lies beyond the walls of our home.

After years of persuading my mother to bring me to the office, it finally paid off. The board room was filled with professional executives wearing their fancy attire; it wasn’t just any room anyone can participate. However, my place in that room was long reserved since my father’s passing. But I refused this luxury; if I wanted to contribute, I had to earn it.

The room bustled with ideas about corporate social responsibility essential to the public and the company. With this in mind, I asked, “Do we have Instagram?”

The whole room shook their heads. Being “new” in an old place never shied me away from engaging in conversations and approaching new ideas with curiosity. Like negotiating with my younger brothers at home, I learned to delegate tasks from design to statistics with peers in the marketing department. Eventually, I was appointed social media manager. Being involved was an honor, but the small influences I made as a woman in business is a privilege I hope to pursue further in the future.

Seeing my mother’s eyes sparkle once again reflected a young girl: someone who has faced adversity, yet persevered beyond the limits of the gender roles set by her community. In the face of difficult situations, she responded with gratitude. Today, I feel more complete than ever, as I look forward to moments when I’d echo her prayer: “*Terima kasih, Tuhan*.”

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