

Tommy Koh lauds 'miracle' car crash survivor on graduation

Carmen Sin

National University of Singapore (NUS) student Ting Jun Heng – who suffered a traumatic brain injury in an accident that killed his friend five years ago – has graduated with an honours degree in political science.

In a Facebook post on Tuesday, veteran diplomat Tommy Koh said he hosted lunch for Mr Ting, 27, and congratulated him on his graduation. Professor Koh is former rector of Tembusu College, where all four victims of the car crash studied.

Prof Koh said he also invited to lunch then Master of Tembusu College Gregory Clancey; Associate Professor Lina Lim, who was in charge of Mr Ting's college house; and Dr Margaret Tan, the college's director of programmes.

In his post, Prof Koh recalled how Mr Ting's friend, Ms Kathy Ong Kai Ting, 19, died.

He said: "Five years ago, Jun Heng and three of his friends from Tembusu College were involved in a tragic car accident. One of the students, Kathy, was killed. Jun Heng was badly injured and in a coma. In nothing short of a miracle, he survived and has graduated.

"We will continue to help Jun Heng find a job and heal from his injuries. Congratulations and good luck, Jun Heng."

Mr Ting told ST that the accident had hampered his studies in numerous ways.

"My mother had to accompany me to school because of my mobility challenges," he said, adding that he took more time to complete his assignments due to his reduced typing speed.

His woes were compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, during which classes migrated online. "(I had) difficulty following the instructions on Zoom," he said.

These challenges delayed his graduation, originally slated for 2021, and led to feelings of isolation. "I was a fairly social person before the accident but my late graduation resulted in me losing my circle of friends as support, resulting in loneliness."

He now plans to find work in social services. "I have received a tremendous amount of help over the last five years and I want to give back to the community. I want to tell other brain injury patients: There is still a future if you persevere. You are not alone."

Prof Koh, who founded Art:Dis, a charity for people with disabilities, told ST: "It is still tough for a disabled person to find a good job in Singapore.

"Things are, however, getting better and more employers are willing to hire talented but disabled persons."

On April 19, 2018, Ms Ong, Mr



Professor Tommy Koh hosted lunch for Mr Ting Jun Heng to congratulate him on his graduation, five years after a fatal car crash left Mr Ting with a traumatic brain injury. PHOTO: TOMMY KOH/FACEBOOK

GIVING BACK

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MR TING JUN HENG

Ting and two other friends – Mr Zon Lim Thou Jung and Mr Lim Jin Jie – got into a cab in Commonwealth Avenue West and were headed to Tembusu College in NUS.

Their cab was making a discretionary right turn at the Clementi Road junction when a Nissan crashed into them and sent both cars spinning.

Ms Ong died from multiple injuries. Mr Lim Jin Jie suffered bleeding in the brain and a spinal fracture, while Mr Zon Lim, who was seated in front, suffered a brain injury.

Mr Ting suffered a traumatic brain injury and arrived at the hospital in a vegetative state. After the accident, he had a limp and speech impediment.

The cabbie was sentenced to eight weeks' jail and banned from driving for five years, while the Nissan driver was fined \$5,000 and banned from driving for two years.

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