

The Struggle of a Disadvantaged Girl to Be a Dentist

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Lisa Paputungan was hugging her father, Isnan Paputungan (76), when he recounted his life journey. For years, Isnan suffered from prostate disorder that forced him to use a catheter during the past few months. At a glance, they both look like a grandfather and granddaughter. Yes, their age differs by a great number of years. Lisa is the only child of Isnan and the late Tenti Paputungan. Isnan said they had to wait a long time to have Lisa. But when Lisa was 8 years old, her mother passed away. Then, Isnan became sickly. Finally, Lisa had to be raised by her aunt from her mother.

“Since grade four, she was already raised by her aunt,” said Isnan when met at Kotabunan village in Bolaang Mongondow Timur (Boltim) regency in North Sulawesi.

In the uncared home, Isnan said, he became ill after the death of his wife. But it was not enough to pay for the medication just by relying on the copra produce. So, he was forced to sell the farm and eventually brought Lisa to her aunt, Masita, 48, a teacher at a junior high school in the surrounding village.

Lisa’s childhood was spent at her aunt’s home. As an orphan, she had not much choice and she often missed her mother.

Making Achievement at School

Lisa passed her primary and secondary schools. Her aunt, Masita, as a teacher, always reminds her to use her time for studying. Lisa is an obedient child. She even excelled in class and finally able to get admitted at a high school, SMAN 1 Manado. But since the distance between Boltim and Manado is 144 km, finally Lisa stayed with one of her teachers in Manado. For her daily needs and school tuition, fortunately Lisa was able to earn a government scholarship.

Lisa said she kept studying hard because she remembered her aunt's advice that one day she could make her parents happy by achieving her aspirations. "If you have succeeded in the future, it's you that will take care of all," she recounted.

But Lisa often misses her father who is alone at home. She feared if he got worse. Sometimes she regretted for not being there for him. But then she had to shun this thought remembering that there are other members of family nearby that often visited him. "When I remember my father, I feel sad," she said slowly.

Despite this condition, the hardship did not stop her from achieving her dreams. She sticks to the principle, be close to smart people so you will be smart, too. Lisa always stays in the big 10 in class. Later, Lisa applied to get a seat at Dental Education study programme at Universitas Gadjah Mada, and got admitted.

Knowing this, Isnan had a mixed feelings, because it means it would be less often for him to see her due to the long distance. However, "I'm glad, I'd remind her to always be thankful," said Isnan who was slightly trembling whilst holding his walking stick. Lisa hugged him tighter. Her aunt, Masita, was in smiles but wiping her tears, seeing the father and daughter embracing each other on the dirty sofa.

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