Sometimes it takes darkness to spark off the light within.

Take Ministry of Education teaching scholar, Mr Jonathan Yew, 25, who is the perfect embodiment of strength in adversity.

Electricity and water cuts were a common occurrence for his family during his growing years, when they could not afford the bills. His widowed father – the sole breadwinner – was earning less than $1,000 a month doing odd jobs.

Instead of being crippled by his dismal situation, Mr Yew studied in the light of the void deck under his home. Having no water for baths at home did not stop him and his brother – they showered at a nearby swimming pool complex, after getting some exercise and a tan from swimming.

Despite his less than smooth-sailing childhood, his determination to succeed paid off and he won a scholarship to university.

The life sciences major at the NUS Faculty of Science graduated with a second-class (upper) honours degree early last month.

Mr Yew plans to share his experiences with his students when he begins his teaching career.

“I hope to motivate them by saying that if I can do it, they can do it, too. They can emerge victorious if they work hard,” he told The New Paper in an interview last month.

There you have it: resilience, determination, and the will to succeed.

Kind of like the Singapore story.