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Same route but different paths

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ONE grew up in a two-room flat, son to a taxi driver and a housewife. The other saw the world at an early age, with a dad who was an academic-turned-businessman.

Different as their lives were and are — one is a colonel in the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), the other a corporate lawyer — both have won the same coveted prize, the Lee Kuan Yew Scholarship Award.

Colonel Perry Lim, 36, and Mr Vincent Leow, 30, were among the 82 applicants this year for the award which, since its inception in 1991, has gone to 24 Singaporeans. Col Lim, a 1991 President's Scholar and SAF overseas scholar, will pursue a Masters in Business Administration at Insead. Mr Leow will do his Master's in Law at Harvard University.

Growing up with two older sisters in a two-room flat in Tanglin Halt before moving up later to a bigger flat in Clementi was what shaped Col Lim's drive to succeed.

That, and lots of hard work. "I did not have any private tuition when I was in school. Basically, if you're in a high-performance environment, you're more motivated to succeed," said the former student of Raffles Institution and Raffles Junior College who, some might say, personifies SPRING Singapore chairman Philip Yeo's description of the "hungry" scholar of humble background.

At school, he not only excelled in his studies, but also represented RI in swimming and rugby. At RJC, he was vice-captain of its rugby team and Sportsman of the Year in 1990.

Since graduating with first class honours in Engineering from Cambridge University, he has served, among other things, as Director of Higher Education at the Ministry of Education. Now deputy assistant chief of General Staff Operations — Current Operations at Mindef, he says: “Serving the nation is my way of giving back to society.”

One side benefit of his full-time 10-month course is that he gets to spend more time with his children, aged between four and nine. His wife is a civil servant.

Mr Leow, meanwhile, will also get to spend time during his 10-month study break with his fiancée — who will be joining him at Harvard as a researcher, after doing her Master’s there last year. “I’m glad for her company. And yes, we plan to get married, maybe next year,” he said.

Mr Leow spent his early years in Nigeria where his father had a university tenure. They came back to Singapore when he was six.

A senior associate with Allen and Gledhill and an adjunct tutor at the National University of Singapore, he was recently involved in the high-profile Horizon Towers en bloc sale tussle. “Practising and teaching law give me many opportunities to give back to society,” he said. Having served as a Deputy Public Prosecutor and in the Attorney General’s Chambers, his legal interests lie in the study of the trial process and how evidence is presented in court.

A volunteer-mentor with the Chinese Development Assistance Council for 10 years, he finds satisfaction in “seeing one student turn good by the time he’s in secondary four”.

Mr Leow also serves on the Board of Directors of Heartware Network.

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