



NEWLY-WEDS: Ms Siti Rossaliza and her husband Nazarudin Abd Razak, who is also blind, got married last month.
TNP PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

WOMAN FINDS PURPOSE IN LIFE AFTER GOING BLIND

**NOW A MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, MS SITI ROSSALIZA
DISCOVERED HER GLAUCOMA DUE TO HER HEART
CONDITION**

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Ms Siti Rossaliza had myopia when she was about nine years old and had to change her spectacles once a year.

She thought her increasingly blurred vision was due to worsening eyesight.

From a degree of 200 when she was 10, it increased to 500 when she was 18. It stabilised at 600 from the ages of 19 to 29.

She was unaware she was going blind.

And when she did become blind, she didn't give in to self-pity. She is now a motivational speaker, inspiring hope when there is none.

Ms Liza, 36, is a contact centre agent at Eureka Call Centre Systems.

She is also a facilitator at Glow in the Dark (GITD), a social enterprise started by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) students to help the visually handicapped.

They share their public-speaking experiences with the visually handicapped, training them to be motivational speakers to conduct workshops for corporations and schools.

GITD is representing Singapore at the Enactus World Cup in Johannesburg, South Africa, from Oct 14 to 16. Enterprises from 36 countries have come to share how their innovations have helped others.

Ms Liza, who has been blind for four years, discovered her eyesight problem due to a heart condition.

At 11, she was diagnosed with rheumatic mitral stenosis, a heart valve disorder that restricts the flow of blood through the heart.

Doctors told her she had an 80 per cent chance of survival if she underwent surgery to open up the valve.

Her parents objected as she was still leading a normal life.

But in 2009, Ms Liza was rushed to the Accident and Emergency ward four times with heart palpitations.

Ms Liza said: "I decided to do the surgery because I had already lived for 30 years, so it's okay even if it doesn't end up well."

After the surgery in April 2010, she switched back to spectacles from contacts and her vision worsened again. She thought it was because she was wearing her spectacles from over 10 years ago.

A checkup at the National University Hospital showed her degree had gone up to 800. She was diagnosed with late-stage glaucoma that year.

She did her own research and realised she would go blind one day.

She said doctors could not give her a time frame as to when she would lose her sight completely.

NOT DEPRESSED

But Ms Liza did not get depressed. "I just wanted to know how things worked and what I could do to make things better. What's the point of getting angry with God? Nothing will be solved."

She had to quit her job as a kindergarten teacher.

Slowly, the lights literally went out.

She said: "In 2010, I lost vision in my right eye and my left eye wasn't able to see well. It was very gradual, like dimming a light. At first I could still see bright colours like yellow, but slowly I was only able to see red and very bright blue. Subsequently, I could only make out shapes."

Ms Liza had surgery in Oct 2011 to stabilise the pressure caused by fluid in her left eye.

But in Jan 2011, she developed sore eyes and the pressure on her left eye worsened.

"I told myself: 'Okay, I'm not going to get my vision back'," Ms Liza said.

Losing her eyesight also meant losing her freedom. She could no longer read, go out with friends or shop.

She said: "I was cooped up at home and I had to ask my mum for permission whenever I wanted to go out.

"Even if it was to buy bread from 7-Eleven at the void deck of my flat, she wouldn't let me because she feared that I wouldn't know how to get home."

For two years, Ms Liza was frustrated with her parents because her freedom was restricted by her mother.

"But I never blamed her because I knew that her intentions were good." Ms Liza said.

In Jan 2012, her mother let her go out for the first time in two years - an excursion to Pasir Ris Park organised by the Singapore Association for the Visually Handicapped (SAVH).

"I could finally go out, and wow, I never knew that sunshine felt so good," she said.

By the end of 2013, Ms Liza lost her sight completely.

"But I'm a very positive person. I believe there is a lot to be thankful for. Whatever bad things that happen, there's always a silver lining," she said.

In 2014, Ms Liza met her husband, Mr Nazarudin Abd Razak, 37, a freelance masseuse, on a Pulau Ubin field trip organised by SAVH.

They got married last month.

Mr Nazarudin, who became blind in 2005 after a fever, said: "I'm very happy to know Liza and we share our problems with each other."

Ms Liza added: "I find more purpose in life now more than ever."

"We hope that our unconventional workshops can create a more empathetic society that will become more accepting of the visually handicapped."- Ms Ellyn Ng, 21, sales and marketing director Glow in the Dark, a social enterprise that helps the visually handicapped

WHAT IS GLAUCOMA?

Glaucoma is a disease that damages the optic nerve.

Dr Shamira Perera, 42, an adjunct associate professor at the Singapore National Eye Centre, said it is progressive in nature and patients lose some vision, usually at the periphery, when the optic nerve gets damaged.

He said: "Once it (glaucoma) reaches a certain level where it affects the central vision, the patient may have difficulty seeing in dimly-lit areas and may bump into objects in late stages of the disease."

He said that older people are more susceptible to glaucoma and it is uncommon among those under 30.

