



Our Inspiring Alumni - The story of Dr. Tasneem Rupawalla - This is her story...

The young lady burying her mother had tears in her eyes. She was all alone now, orphaned at the cusp of being an adult. The world seemed different to her. No father to spoil her and give in to her every whim. No mother to quietly encourage her and comfort her when she was hurt.

Saying goodbye to her last surviving parent, she made a promise to herself. "It's not over

Tasneem", she whispered. "This is not the end but the beginning and I am going to make something of this life. I am going to live a life that would have made my parents proud. I swear it."

Anyone who says that a diamond is the strongest thing on earth, has not met Tasneem. Dr. Tasneem, to be precise. This young alumna from Arya Vidya Mandir Juhu has shown us what it means to be remarkably strong and dignified in the face of adversity, and how to emerge a winner in the end. This is her story.

Born in Kuwait, an only, eagerly awaited and pampered child, she was abruptly handed a harsh life test in the form of her father's illness. Due to a financial crunch causing his angina attack in 1986, her family was forced to move back to Bombay and Tasneem started school at St. Joseph's, Juhu.

The new AVM at Juhu was to start soon and they lived right across the street. Thinking there was no harm in trying, Tasneem sat for the eligibility test. She passed with flying colours but couldn't secure admission due to financial constraints. Mrs. Pandit (a lady who needs no

introduction to many AVMites) decided it would be an honour to grant admission to such a deserving student.

Tasneem still remembers Mrs. Pandit fondly. "I remember seeing Mrs. Pandit for the first time. Her eyes were warm and compassionate. I was very nervous during our meeting, but seeing her enter the room gracefully in her sari and pearl necklace put me at ease. I felt like I had come home."

AVM helped Tasneem blossom, discover her hidden talent for singing and encouraged it. But life had more in store for her. Her father, who had returned to his job in Kuwait after settling the family in Bombay, had to be evacuated from there owing to the Gulf war crisis, only to be airlifted to God's abode 2 years later. Tasneem was still only 11 years old.

The tragedy stricken young child became a recluse; she would hide circulars from school about outings and invites to parties to avoid increasing expenses. The worsening lack of money prompted her mother to shift her back to the convent school.

Mrs. Priti Sachdev, the principal of AVM Juhu, learned about this from Tasneem's classmate's mother. The AVM culture of magnanimity once again kicked in and the tuition fees were waived off for the bright and deserving student. Perhaps it was this support that encouraged Tasneem to shine. She was always selected to sing at every Balsatang, besides excelling at studies. At every Shloka completion she bagged the first prize. In class 10 she was given the prestigious 'Arya Kumari' trophy. The trophy was the prize but Mrs.Pandit's words that Tasneem 'lived up to her expectations' was the real award.



Mrs.Sachdev personally sponsored Tasneem's 11th and 12th college fees. She wanted Tasneem to pursue music but Tasneem wanted to study medicine. She secured a free seat through the CET for medicine at MGM medical college, Kamothe , Navi Mumbai. In order to save money and be with her mother, she travelled daily from Juhu to fulfil her dream of becoming a doctor, a total travel time of 4 to 5 hours per day. Despite such challenges, Tasneem was the recipient of the "Ratan Tata scholarship" every year!!

Things began to improve in her life and just when she felt that stability was just around the corner, life dealt another cruel blow to Tasneem.

After a long battle with diabetes that had weakened her heart, Tasneem's mother succumbed to her illness, bringing all of Tasneem's worst fears to reality. Tasneem was still very young, living all alone and far from completing her studies, let alone becoming a financially independent adult.

In order to take care of her mother she had taken a sabbatical for a semester from studies. She sat for her exams in October 2003. True to her exceptional character and talent, she passed with first class and followed it up with an internship. Given all her life's experiences, she decided to acknowledge the most important man of her life. Tasneem and Aliasgar, her fiance who had supported her before and after her mother's demise, were married in December 2004. Unsurprisingly, she shone at the wedding too, managing, all by her self, the caterers, decorators, trousseau, while still working at the hospital!

“The day I got my degree was the worst day of my life.....it had no meaning suddenly.” After so many trials and tribulations, Tasneem felt as if there was nothing else left to work for. Life has a way of easing the pain. The birth of her angels Rukaiya and Taha has helped her make peace with life. She believes that they are her parents reborn. Life is good now with a loving husband, two beautiful kids and her work as a paediatrician that brings smiles to the little faces of her patients.

When praised, called courageous, amazing, humble, a privilege to know and to write about, her reply is, “I have no words, all I know is that circumstances mould you the way you are. I don't think I am really amazing or anything. I'm just normal.” Tasneem's story may feel like straight from a novel or movie, but it's real. This gritty, soft spoken, amazing, yet always cheerful girl is for real.

So if you meet someone who says that a diamond is the strongest thing known to man, introduce her or him to Tasneem. Dr.Tasneem, to be precise.

