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IT IS a classic story of rags to success, and no one tells it better than the man who worked hard to become a towering figure in the legal arena.

Steven Perian, who successfully became the first Malaysian Queen's Counsel (QC then, which is now known as King's Counsel, KC) in England to be called to the Malaysian Bar and practise in both countries, was in Kuala Lumpur to make business appearances and attend conferences.

StarMetro caught up with him to talk about his outstanding career path that is nothing short of inspirational.

Born and raised in Brickfields to a father who was a Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) labourer and a housewife mother, Steven became the second Malaysian to be appointed QC in England and Wales.

He was the first QC to be called to the Malaysian Bar and first English QC to have a practising certificate to appear before the Malaysian courts.

Steven is also the first in his generation to enter university. Both his parents and his siblings have passed on.

"It was a case of building myself from nothing. My father who didn't earn much had nine mouths to feed.

"I realised I needed to do something in my life," he reminisced.

Before he had the opportunity to study law in England, Steven worked odd jobs to earn money.

He pulled cables in Port Klang, and worked as an air conditioner repairman, photographer and

From humble beginnings to legal first in Malaysia

King's Counsel recounts struggles he had to overcome to make parents proud



Steven believes the universe has a way of showing us our route in life.
— AINA AMIRAH/The Star

buyer and seller at the old Malaysian Stock Exchange.

"I remember working in Petaling Jaya, going around on my motorcycle as an office boy.

"One of my teachers saw me. When she looked at me, somehow I felt the disappointment in her eyes that said I could be

much more than this.

"From then on, things changed and I wanted to do something for myself and make my parents proud," he said.

Eventually, he decided to study law. His first ticket out to study and travel abroad to England in 1983 was by no

means a lonely feat.

"I had good people helping me and who also encouraged me.

"These friends stood by me as guarantors for a study loan to do my University of London external degree at Holborn Law Tutors."

Steven, who said he had mild autism and dyslexia, said he believed the universe had a way of showing us our route in life.

"It shows you what can happen if you put your mind to it."

While studying in England, he spent most of his time in the library or working part-time during summer holidays.

By the end of his third year, he managed to save up to fully pay for his tuition fees.

After graduating and receiving his post-degree professional qualification, he was offered to do his pupillage at one of the top company law chambers in the United Kingdom.

From 1989 to 1995, he worked as an employed lawyer with the Crown Prosecution Service.

In 1995, he left to become a self-employed barrister.

"I love the law, and the passion and ability to change things;

right the wrong."

After decades of hard work under his legal belt, Steven decided to apply for Queen's Counsel in 2010 – unsuccessfully then and again in 2012.

"There is a steep learning curve and a lot of soul searching for this; you think you are God's gift but then you are told you are not."

He waited until 2015 to make his third attempt, at which time he said he was doing high-profile cases.

The good news finally came for the interview call.

"At the interview stage, I had a Court of Appeal judge and two others and the interview was only 25 minutes.

"I thought I had failed because usually these interviews last 45 minutes."

Months passed and the email he had been waiting for finally came from the QC Selection Board in 2016.

"When I read 'You've been appointed' I started screaming excitedly to my wife. It was near Christmas. I could finally fulfil my parents' wishes to see me successful," he said.

There are 1,958 self-employed KCs in England of which 194 are of minority ethnic background.

Steven is now one of the leading KCs in London recognised by Legal 500 UK.