young but I could understand if I stayed with my own family I wouldn't have the chance to study. I wanted to be a doctor."

Sobahan Master had her admitted into Class 2 at Kathalia Model Primary School just one week before the second semester exam. Her initial result placed her second in the class. "I was really moved," says Sobahan, touching his heart.

He bought books and stationery and encouraged Mouri, who was able to achieve first place in the final exam that year.

"One day Mouri cooked several kinds of *pitha* sweetbread," remembers Sobahan, "I asked how she learnt to do that and why she made them."

"It's for you," Mouri told him.



Mariam Jerin Mouri on the left, training to be a nurse. PHOTO: ARIF RAHOMAN

She continued to complete all her household chores along with her study, and found it especially difficult during harvest time when mornings were dedicated to collecting and drying paddy, and processing rice.

School was a lonely place for Mouri, who thought to hide her identity as a house help. She wasn't able to meet any of her classmates outside class or visit their homes; and when visitors came to the Sobahans', Mouri tried to stay out of sight. But the Sobahans', including their son and daughter, were always kind, says Mouri; and Sobahan Master continually encouraged her.

In Class 5 Mouri achieved a government scholarship for extraordinary merit, a feat repeated in Class 8. By then she was enrolled in Kathalia Pilot Girls' High School where both the Sobahans taught. Mouri achieved a Golden GPA 5 in the science stream for her Secondary School Certificate.

"I don't understand much about education," says Mouri's mother Sohura Begum, "When I heard of her Golden GPA result I did not know what it meant, but I could understand when it was explained she had the best result in the area. I cried with happiness."

Nonetheless her parents on several occasions tried to persuade Mouri to stay with them and not return to the Sobahans' house, and when she was in Class 9 they thought to marry her off. It took a visit by Sobahan Master and some stern words to convince them otherwise.

"One day my wife absent-mindedly left her gold chain in the house," remembers Sobahan, "and as soon as I arrived home Mouri gave it to me. I really understood how honest and sincere she was."

"He loves her very much," adds Rabeya Sobahan, beaming.

By the time of college, Mouri had the idea to study in Barisal or Dhaka out of concern that in Kathalia her opportunity to pursue science would be limited. But unfortunately due to a lack of finance it wasn't possible. Instead she enrolled in Kathalia College where she found herself a little bored but still attained a GPA 5 in her Higher School Certificate.

Mouri then attended coaching for the university entrance exams but to her great disappointment was unable to secure a place in medicine. She didn't give up, enrolling instead in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College in Barisal, where, still shy among her peers and as determined as ever to pursue her education, she studies today.

"All credit goes to *Kalu*," says Mouri of her achievements, referring to Sobahan Master, "There were even times when he washed clothes so that I could study. In the future I would like to study a higher degree abroad and then give service to my country."

Mouri's family is likewise proud, now managing to raise most of the finances to support her ongoing study in Barisal themselves.

"She is the only family member to have had this opportunity," says her mother Sohura, "It was beyond my imagination she could reach this position." Asked if Mouri should study abroad, Sohura says, "That would be nice."

By way of advice to other employers of young girls doing housework Mouri says, "Give a little chance for their studies and their future. With a chance they may flourish. We are human too."

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