

DIKAKAPA
EVERYDAY
HEROES





DIKAKAPA EVERYDAY HEROES

AFRICAN
JOURNEYS TO
SUCCESS



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The support that we have received during our fundraising efforts has been overwhelming, and we would like to thank the University of Cape Town, Faculty of Health Sciences Postgraduate Student Council, Inqaba Biotech Pty (Ltd), David Harris, SMD Technical, DJ Countercurrent, and the IIDDM staff, friends, and colleagues. Also, we are truly grateful to PrimeMedia (LeadSA) and Bush Radio FM for giving us the platform to promote our initiative. From the branding side of things, thank you to Valerie Lambrechts for designing our logo, and to Ross Anderson for designing our publicity flyers.

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Last but not least, to all the learners we have interacted with, thank you for the opportunity you gave us by listening attentively to what we had to say during our sessions. The positive feedback that we have received from you continues to fuel and inspire us. You are the inspiration behind this project!

Sincerely,

The Dikakapa Everyday Heroes Founding Members

Preface

By Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Dear Friends

Although Africa has celebrated more than 50 years of independence from colonialism, African children are yet to be liberated from the yoke of educational oppression. This is one of the things I have spoken out about to many local and international organisations in a way that has at times been perceived to be confrontational. My conscience simply does not allow me to keep quiet about such matters. I truly believe we all have a role to play in making a change in our society so that future generations can prosper. Education is one of the most fundamental tools that can be used to start initiating social change. There is an old African proverb that says 'it takes a village to raise a child.' We as the older generation have played our part in bringing about social change and improving the lives of our people. We now pass on the torch to the younger generation to carry the mandate of our people and ensure that they bring about change. I have had the great opportunity to interact with many young people who have shown immense passion and commitment for justice and peace. Their passion and enthusiasm makes me truly believe that this world is in safe hands. Young people should start working together and empowering each other in order to close the gaps that exist in our society. Education has the power to do this. It is my belief that initiatives such as Dikakapa Everyday Heroes can make great strides in achieving this.

This publication contains the stories of a unique group of African people, young and old, who reflect on their experiences in their journey to success through education. Many of these successes have been accomplished despite difficult circumstances. I hope and pray that these stories make you realise that all things in life are possible through education, regardless of your previous or current challenges. It is the hunger within and the thirst for knowledge that will get you to where you want to go in life, and allow you to

experience things that you never could have imagined. These individuals have become positive role models in their society and field of work. In many societies ravaged by alcohol and drug abuse, crime and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, the need for positive role models in our communities is urgently required. The people whose journeys to success are described in this book are a great example to follow.

Storytelling has long been an integral part of our African culture, and stories enable us to learn from the wisdom of the elders while unleashing our imagination. Embedded within these stories is a great deal of knowledge about how to navigate through life's challenges. These stories and those of our great heroes of the past can help us understand where we come from and where we are going. They need to be told so that we can start creating a new generation of role models not only in South Africa, but in the African continent at large. It is through sharing our knowledge and life experiences that we can start uplifting each other to greater heights and achieve a society that is free of poverty and full of opportunities for everyone.

I hope you enjoy reading these stories and that you learn a great deal from them. I also hope these stories will inspire you to become an avid reader and a consumer of the vast knowledge that is held within books so that we can have a new generation of literate young people. Hopefully one day you will tell your story to your peers or the generation after you so that they can be inspired and learn from it!

God bless you.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu

Introduction

This book, *Dikakapa Everyday Heroes: African journeys to success*, is the proud initiative of a social intervention project called Dikakapa: Everyday Heroes. This initiative aims to inspire and motivate the youth of South Africa, particularly those who are still at school, to use education as a tool to achieve their dreams and contribute positively to society.

The book consists of 25 short stories written by inspirational Africans from all walks of life who have achieved considerable success within their chosen careers. The authors share their stories about their journeys to success, the obstacles they encountered along the way, how they overcame these challenges and, finally, their hopes and dreams for South Africa and the African continent at large. Despite the differences in their gender, ethnicity, countries of origin and fields of study, these authors share the message that education can help to shape your life and the lives of those around you.

The pursuit of education has come at great personal cost for these individuals. Some had to leave their families and travel long distances to receive an education, carrying nothing but their hopes and beliefs that their dreams would one day be realised. Many have come from very difficult family backgrounds, where there was little or no money to pay for their education, and from communities in which there were very few positive role models and high levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, gang violence and HIV/AIDS. What is very evident is that these circumstances did not deter them from reaching their dreams, but they have had to work extremely hard to ensure that they got the necessary grades to get into tertiary institutions.

Hard work and perseverance have resulted in many rewards in their lives. These rewards have included graduating from university with undergraduate and, sometimes, postgraduate degrees. Some have been offered opportunities to study abroad, as were Collet Dandara who studied in Sweden and Siyabulela

Xuza who had the opportunity to further his studies in the United States of America. Continued persistence and hard work resulted in Moreira Chonguica winning multiple music awards, performing at major international jazz festivals and collaborating with international jazz musicians. Some of these individuals have become pioneers in their fields of study, such as Heather Wilmot who is now one of the leading aviation lawyers in the country.

One of the most profound success stories is by award-winning musician, Siphon 'Hotstix' Mabuse, who matriculated at the age of 60! He has had an incredibly successful music career, both locally and abroad, yet he still saw the importance of getting his Matric. His inspirational story teaches us that it is never too late to get an education.

Although these individuals have already achieved much success in their lives, they will go on to achieve more because the pursuit of knowledge and success is a lifelong journey. The important thing is that their education has laid a strong foundation which will enable them to continue to be successful in the future.

We hope these stories will serve as a tremendous source of inspiration and motivation and will generally spark your interest in education. Furthermore, we hope these stories will teach you about the importance of hard work, discipline, honesty and perseverance as a means to achieve your dreams, and that they will ignite your interest in reading more inspirational books in the future.

Enjoy!

The Dikakapa Everyday Heroes Family

Siyabulela Xuza

From dreaming of rockets to the stars

My story started when I was a young boy with big dreams, growing up in eMthatha, and these dreams have led me to Harvard University and MIT. If there is one simple message I would like you to take away from my story it is that as entrepreneurs, innovators and change agents we all face challenges in life, but what defines us, what separates us from the rest, is what we do when we are faced with these challenges; it's how we overcome them that makes us truly great when we succeed. My life is a story of challenges, a story of not having been born into a background of privilege or opportunity. My story is of a simple boy who had a dream and against all odds fought to make it happen.

I'm from eMthatha but I spent my early years in eKasi Lami, a township in North Crest. Looking back, eKasi Lami defined the man that I am today. It taught me principles like humility, kindness and innovation, which I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

Have you ever seen an invention and wondered how the inventor came up with the idea? Well, I will never forget the day in 1994 when I saw an aeroplane for the first time and it was dropping election pamphlets. As a simple boy I desperately wanted to know what made that aeroplane fly like that. This started my interest in aeroplanes and aeronautics. Growing up in eKasi I had limited resources. This was before we had Internet and there were no libraries or fancy laboratories where I could learn about these things. But I had a burning desire, so little by little I started reading about flight and how aeroplanes worked and, as my interest grew, I went on to learn about rockets and aeronautics.

I experimented with the little things that I had around me. When I got to primary school I said to myself, now that I've seen and read, I want to get my hands on this stuff! I felt there was no way that I could ever afford one of

FROM
DREAMING
OF ROCKETS
TO THE STARS



those big aeroplanes or to go into space, but what I could do was to mix up rocket fuel secretly in my Mom's kitchen. I really wanted to put Africa on the map for innovation because every time I read about inventions they never came from this continent, they always came from somewhere else. So I decided to take matters into my hands.

At first I did not know what I was doing. I was just a mischievous boy with a crazy idea of working with rocket fuels. My Mom came home early one day when I was having a great time mixing these chemicals and I almost blew up her kitchen! I was shouted at and beaten and I felt despondent. At this point I could easily have said let me give up on this rocket idea and find another project so as not to add to my Mom's burdens as a single parent.

But I never stopped. Instead I made a deal with my Mom to work outside in a garage.

After a few months I came up with a fuel that seemed to be working, and so I decided I might as well build a rocket. I read up about rockets, found all the chemicals and put together a very simple rocket. When I tested it there was a huge explosion. It was a failure, but this didn't stop me. Instead, failure drove me to new heights. I went back to redesign the system and try again. I kept failing and failing and I became the laughing stock of the village. People told me I was crazy and asked me why. I thought that I could make rocket fuel or rockets. They said I had to be in America to do this, but that never stopped my drive. I sometimes phoned people for advice, and they thought I was a terrorist because of the chemicals I wanted to get for rocket fuel.

By the time I got to high school, rockets were a serious passion of mine. This was no longer just a hobby, something I did behind my Mom's back, but a serious research project. My idea was to get Africa to launch its own satel-

lites and get into space. The little bit I could do was to try and come up with a fuelling system that could make this happen. So I began to read ahead – many years ahead to understand the materials. But the drive and desire is what really fuelled me.

In Grade 10 I had an opportunity to enter the national science exposition to represent my school and share my project with the country. It did not go as well as I had hoped. I didn't even get a medal – I think I came fourth or fifth. This was deeply disappointing because I felt that I had a really great project which worked, and failure was difficult to accept.

By Grade 11 I had found a working fuel. I started building rockets and they began to work. They would fly only a few metres at first, then 100 m and soon I was breaking altitude records and the speed of sound. So I went back to the science expo that year, not expecting much, but it was the beginning of what really has been a crazy ride. I entered with an improved project based on a cheaper and safer fuel and I won first prize. I also won an award to go to Sweden to the Nobel Prize ceremonies and meet the King and Queen of Sweden and all the Nobel laureates. Nothing made me prouder than representing South Africa on a global stage to share African innovation and a schoolboy's idea that had finally worked. Sweden was an amazing experience.

I had also won another award to represent South Africa at the Intel Science and Engineering fair in the USA. It was a privilege for me to go. I did not expect much, but that week was a life-changing experience. The judges asked me questions I had never heard before but somehow I managed to come back with answers. They tried to break me down. They asked me who I thought I was because they already knew about this technology. By the fifth day I was still standing. I was given first prize for my project! Standing on the podium I looked out at the world, at the best scientists out there, and I said, you know what, anything is possible. We, as South Africans, can stand on equal ground with all the great countries because we have it in us as innovators.

I came back from the fair and wrote my Matric. I had applied to US universities and I got many acceptance letters. One of these came from Harvard

University. So in 2008 I went off to Harvard, which was a totally different experience for me. I was exposed to new ideas and it really opened my eyes. My interest changed from rocket fuels to exploring how we can fuel cities, our economies and our homes. My new passion is energy. I'm now doing a post-graduate programme through Harvard and MIT. My research is looking at capturing the sun's energy and finding new ways of storing it through fuel cells so that it becomes personalised and frees people from the grid of dirty coal plants to provide our energy needs, in the same way that cell phones have freed us from fixed lines.

Another thing happened as a result of my winning the Intel fair. NASA named a minor planet after me in recognition of my achievement. This minor planet near Jupiter is now called SiyaXuza!

What strikes me about my achievement and brings me down to Earth, in a literal sense, is that not so long ago I was a little boy from eMthatha who had nothing but a dream. I would look up at the stars and dream of reaching them. I had no idea that one day I would be able to point to the sky and say that one of those stars was named in my honour.

Thobela Bixa

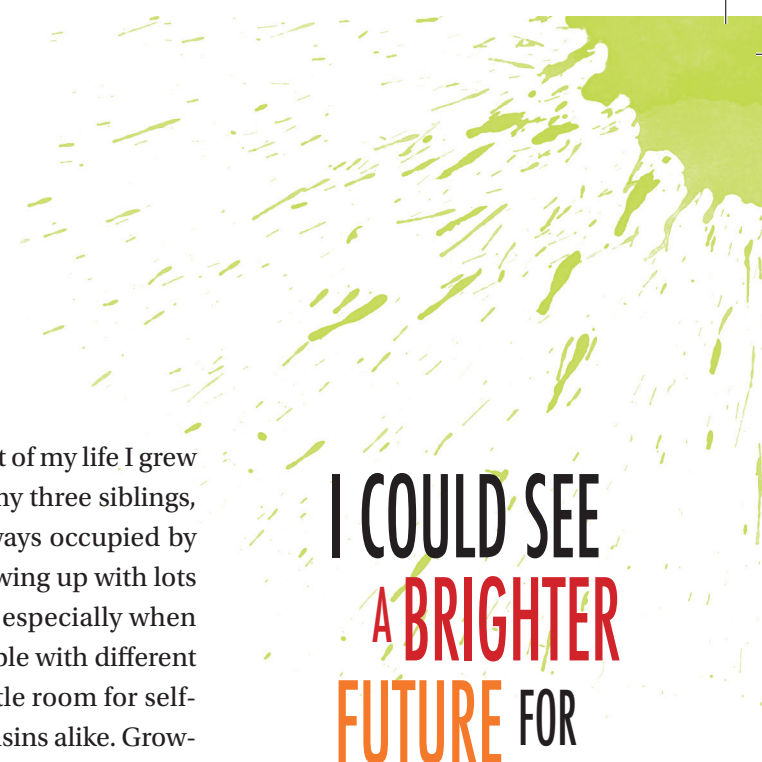
Chickens' feet can go very far

Background

I'm originally from eCofimvaba in the Eastern Cape but most of my life I grew up in Khayelitsha. We are a family of six – my parents and my three siblings, and me the second youngest child. Our household was always occupied by many more people, the others being cousins or uncles. Growing up with lots of people in a small, two-bedroom house was a challenge, especially when it came to studying. However, it enabled me to relate to people with different temperaments – a skill I often use today. There was also little room for selfishness, since I had to share and care for my siblings and cousins alike. Growing up in such a big family taught me too that although you cannot always change your situation, you can accept it and find ways of making it work best for you.

For most of my childhood my father was the only one who had a job. He worked as a cleaner. My mother sold snacks in schools to complement his income. Although we struggled to put food on the table and never got most of the things we wanted as kids, we never went to bed hungry. We lived from one day to the next. The amazing thing was that in our household everyone was involved and responsible for bringing food to the table. For example, we used to help my Mom prepare and sell snacks at school. My sister sold sweets and biscuits in her class and my older brother and I and one of our cousins used to go from street to street after school selling chickens' feet. We sold those feet like our lives depended upon it and, in many ways, they did!

But I knew I didn't want to sell chickens' feet for the rest of my life. I did not want to just get by and live from day to day. I therefore sought education with every fibre in my being. I wanted to break the chain of poverty that had prevailed in my family for generations and I wanted to make sure that my



I COULD SEE
A BRIGHTER
FUTURE FOR
OUR TOWNSHIPS

descendants never had to struggle like I did. They will, however, be able to look back and say that that it all began with chickens' feet!

Although neither of my parents got beyond Grade 8, they always emphasised the importance of education and how it would liberate us. I got the support I needed at home, which many people don't get. This support and my family's struggles became the reasons for me to strive hard for success. I had a reason to wake up at 5 am to help my mother prepare for her 'work' and get my younger brother ready for school. I had an incentive to carry on when every part of me was weary and willing to give up. I learned a crucial lesson at an early age: without an incentive our visions and dreams are mere hallucinations. Without motivation we shy away from life itself and settle for mediocrity.

IkamvaYouth

With the mentality of a fighter and my aspirations to be educated, I joined a free tutoring programme provided by an organisation called IkamvaYouth (IY) at a library close to home. In many ways, joining IY in 2004 as a Grade 11 learner was a defining moment in my life. I joined because I needed to improve my marks so I could access tertiary education. However, I got more than just tutoring – I got to be mentored academically and in life in general. IY was a welcoming and safe space in which to share our emotional burdens, and embrace group and independent learning. Above all, IY was a family away from home. Having people who believed in my capabilities more than I did myself was phenomenal. At IY I met people from all walks of life. As diverse as we were as learners, IY made us realise that we had a common vision – to change our situations at home and hence our communities and the country at large. Working together on our school problems made me realise that we were the very solution to our broken societies. With such people working together I could see a brighter future for our townships and hope for the country as a whole. I got to experience the concept of ubuntu for the first time.

Having enjoyed IY's environment as a learner, I wanted to be more involved

in such a transformative organisation. As a result, after being accepted at the University of Cape Town (UCT), I went back to IY as a volunteer tutor. At first I merely wanted to give back and show my gratitude to those who had helped me get into UCT. However, over time I realised the need for me to be more involved. It wasn't just about giving back but more about investing in the lives of kids of similar background to mine. Also, the more I involved myself with IY kids the more I benefited from them – they gave me as much as I gave them. Their struggles, fears and bitterness became my inspiration. In looking at life through their eyes I realised why I needed to strive harder in my own academic journey to break down the stereotypes about 'kasi-kids' and tear down strongholds of 'self-pity and can't-do' mentalities that rage in townships and rural areas alike. Thanks to these kids and their engagement with me, I now aspire to be an Organic Chemistry professor so that I can interact and inspire people, but especially the youth from disadvantaged areas, through teaching.

More than 90 per cent of IY learners will be the first generation of graduates in their families. These people, in turn, can bring about change in their communities and break down the negative perceptions people have of the townships.

My academic journey

Those who know me well will tell you, 'He's not a smart kid but he sure does work harder than most people.' Hard work became part of me to the extent that I never feared to go the extra mile, even when there were no immediate fruits. Realising that labouring was as important, if not more important, than the fruits expected, and that some fruits take longer to reap than others, was a crucial epiphany in my life. I began to focus more on the process (self-education)



of getting there, than the destination itself. This philosophy has made me more resilient, especially when things don't go the way I planned.

University was very different from high school and there was a huge gap in my subject knowledge. Despite this, the work ethics I had laid in high school were a good foundation and I applied myself in all I did. During my undergraduate degree I managed to be on the UCT Dean's Merit list twice, and in my final year I received the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF), which took me to do research at Williams College in the USA in June 2009. For Honours (2010), I was awarded the prestigious Harry Crossley Scholarship and was chosen to be one of 20 young South Africans to receive training in Chemistry at GlaxoSmithKline in the UK. Also, during my Honours year I was nominated to be one of the IkamvaYouth board members. For my Master's programme, I received the prestigious David and Elaine Potter Scholarship and the Chemistry Department Equity Development Programme award. In addition, I was awarded the Telluride Miller-Sidgwick Fellowship, which took me to do research at the University of Michigan in the USA for seven months. Also, during my Master's, I was named one of the most influential young South Africans in the 2012 issue of the Mail and Guardian Top 200.

University has been a place of self-discovery as much as it has been about discovering science. I discovered how I would like to contribute to society and the world of science and, above all, that where you come from does not determine where you can go. We all start at different places but what we become depends on us more than our starting point, but some starting points require more hard work than others.

One of the many things for which I am grateful is the fact that I grew up in a Christian home, where church was emphasised. Throughout the challenges I've faced and the many good things that have happened to me, I cannot but be thankful for God's hand in my life. Hard work is a crucial part of my life but if I attributed all success to hard work, I wouldn't be telling the whole story. The power of combining prayer and hard work is a philosophy by which I always live.

Moreira Chonguica

My journey so far

My story begins on 13 February 1977 on the dusty streets of Maputo where I gave my first yell! My late father was a scientist and my Mum an accountant, who stopped working to bring up three boys in difficult circumstances, especially after my Dad was sent to Cuba for a long period of time. My Mum still lives in the apartment where I grew up 35 years ago.

My childhood was happy and relatively uneventful. I am the eldest of three boys. My brother Beto is just two years younger than me but Eben, the youngest, is the *laat lammetjie* and 12 years younger than Beto.

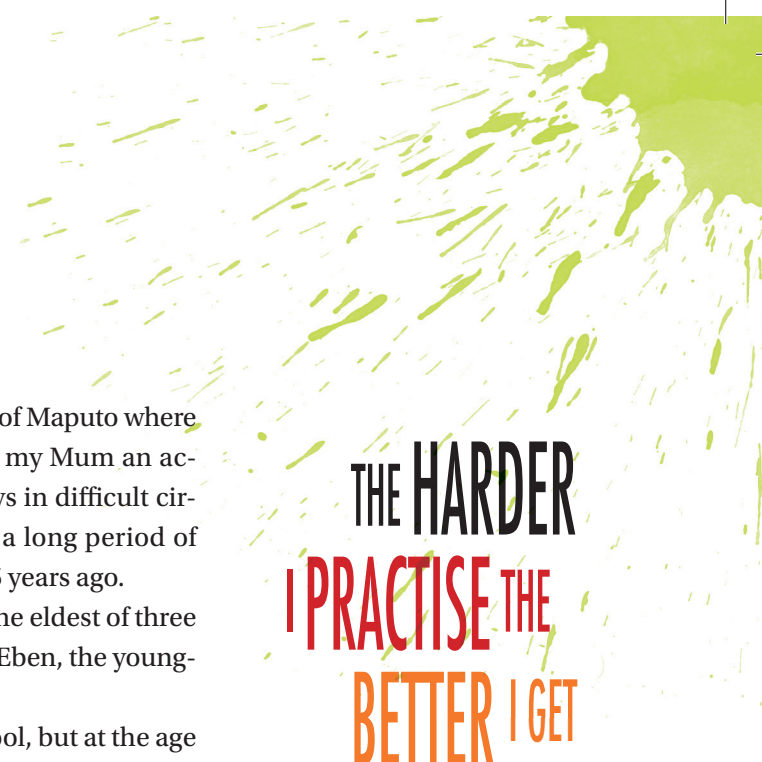
I did what normal little boys do, playing football after school, but at the age of seven I was sent to the Escola Nacional de Musica, the local music school in Maputo. After about a year there, I ran away without telling my parents as I wanted to play with my friends and not be stuck in a stuffy classroom learning the recorder!

I returned when I was in my early teens and began to learn the clarinet, progressing at the age of about 15 to the saxophone.

When I finished high school at Josina Machel in Maputo in 1994, I had to make a decision about what to study. I was interested in becoming an international lawyer, but at this stage I had begun to play the saxophone in some bands and I was enjoying the experience, so I finally came to the decision to study music.

Travelling to Cape Town by bus for the auditions at the music school was relatively scary. Although my family had travelled to South Africa, it was mainly to Johannesburg to visit a family friend who owned the famous Pelican Club in Soweto. Cape Town was a long way from 'Mama's cooking'!

Although I had applied to Berkeley College of Music and the Julliard School in the United States, the University of Cape Town (UCT) was closest and I



THE HARDER
I PRACTISE THE
BETTER I GET

decided that this was a good idea strategically in case I got homesick! There were also a number of Mozambicans at UCT at the time so I knew there would be some people who spoke my language (my English wasn't very good at that stage). I managed to find a place to stay. I had a very understanding and sympathetic landlady who took me under her wing. My class at UCT was stunning, with influences from Mark Fransman, Jimmy Dlodlu, Selaela Seloto, Judith Sephuma, Melanie Scholtz, Amanda Tiffin, Marcus Wyatt and many others who are the backbone of South African jazz today.

Lessons learned so far

I learn every day but the lessons I learned at this early stage were, firstly, that I knew nothing so I needed to keep my mouth shut and my ears open! Secondly, you are only ever as good as your last performance, no matter how many awards you have won and, thirdly, respect everyone you come across, from sound technicians and drivers to the cleaning ladies – we are all human beings.

I also learned a few valuable life lessons from a number of kind people who took the trouble to teach me. Some of these included having insurance on my car, and handling my finances well when I had money so that I had a good track record when I ran into trouble. Taking out medical aid, insuring my instrument, writing a will – life skills that musicians often overlook but which are essential. I have done stupid things that I regret over the past 35 years but I have learned from those mistakes and I don't plan to repeat them.

Challenges that I have faced thus far include frustration at not being able to do stuff without money, but I have realised that where there is a will, there is a way. At times I have been frustrated at not getting the gigs we should have got but I have also realised that these came when the time was right and if I continued to keep up my standard and continued to practise and be disciplined with my craft and my life.

Gary Player has said 'The harder I practise, the luckier I get!' – this is also true for a musician. Playing in South Africa is a huge challenge as there are so

few venues and opportunities, but I came to realise that I needed to take my career into my own hands. I could no longer wait to be invited to play at a festival or a club. If I wanted to play at a particular venue I needed to hassle the promoter until he booked me, or organise my own festival or event! When we failed to get signed up by a major record company we were naturally despondent. However, we then decided to start our own music label and it was the best thing we ever did because now I own my whole supply chain, all my own music, and all of the manufacturing and distribution processes.

Defining moments

A defining moment came when I was in my third year at UCT and all my friends who were studying Economics, Business and Accounting were going off in the June holidays to do internships with a view to their future careers. It struck me then that this course was my future career and I grasped the fact that I had better get my A into G and work out how I was going to make this my living! I started to earmark some great bands to play with and began the slow process of earning some money.

Another defining moment was when my debut album was offloaded from a truck in Burg Street, Cape Town and I saw it for the first time and I realised that a dream had come true. I slept with my CD that night!

Another defining moment was when my father passed away. It put my life into perspective.

My hopes and dreams for the future

My hopes and dreams for the future are connected with my passion for education of the young people of this great continent. If we can only get past the



obsession with all things from the US, and corrupt politicians, we will be unbeatable. We have all the natural resources that we need, we just need to learn how to conserve them. We have all the infrastructure that we require, we just need to learn how to maintain it. We have all the knowledge and know-how we need, we just need to know how to harness it. We have the energy, the passion and the motivation; we must use it wisely and with a conscience.

I spend a lot of time around young people – primary and high school learners, as well as young people out of school. I love their energy and enthusiasm. I learn from them all the time and I share what I can with them. If I can teach them something about life along the way, this is a bonus. Formal education is vital but life education is essential.

We need to do business differently. I am in the business of music. Today, I have three CDs to my name; I have won numerous awards; I own property and cars; I have insurance and medical aid. I am a director of two companies and I get to exercise my talent of playing the saxophone nearly every day of my life and I have a beautiful daughter who keeps me grounded. I am fortunate to live my passion daily. I don't really have a job but a daily dose of fun.

I am truly blessed but I have not by any stretch of the imagination reached my goals.

Hard work, discipline, passion, honesty, big dreams and respect are the mantras for a successful life. These are the values I live by.

Collet Dandara

Anyone can improve their circumstances through hard work

I was born in 1972 in Marondera, a small town in Mashonaland East in Zimbabwe, where my father worked on one of the farms as a farm labourer. However, when I was about a year old, he was released from his work and we relocated to our ancestral land in what was then a place reserved for black Africans. As far as I know, my father never got any other formal jobs except for odd contracts here and there. Our family survived by small-scale farming on a piece of land that we owned.

I am second in a family of eight children and we were the epitome of poverty in our area. We did not give up however. When I was in the equivalent of Grade 4, my older sister and I started working in other people's fields (weeding) to help my parents to support us. As I grew older I took on more responsible duties like looking after other people's cattle during the summer to prevent them from straying into fields. When you are poor, you are always on the receiving end when selling your labour. We were so disenfranchised that whoever gave us a job was able to tell us how much they were prepared to pay and it was non-negotiable. We worked hard and got very little in return, but we persevered. Despite working so hard, even tea and rice were luxuries we enjoyed only on special holidays like Christmas and Easter.

We lived among families of teachers and nurses and had exposure to relatives working in Harare who used to visit their families regularly. If anyone wanted anything done, however menial, their first port of call would be our family. This included jobs like fetching water, repairing thatched roofs and looking after cattle.

Starting school for me was a coincidence. I followed an older child from the village to school. I was not registered initially because I was supposed to attend the following year. However, after weeks of attending school, I was asked to enrol.

**ANYONE CAN
IMPROVE THEIR
CIRCUMSTANCES
THROUGH
HARD WORK**



Thanks to the Zimbabwean government, primary education was subsidised, although the schools still required what was called a 'building fund'. I used to come home from school in Grade 1 and assist my parents with weeding other people's fields to raise the fees for my schooling. I went to school bare-foot until Grade 4 (I look back on this with special memories). I got my first school uniform in Grade 7 when I asked one of the families if they would buy me a uniform instead of giving us money. For this, we (two adults and three kids) had to weed their fields for two full weeks! I must also mention that we could not afford to buy paraffin for the lamp so reading at night was out of the question.

Fortunately, in Zimbabwe, there are some days on which people are traditionally not allowed to work in the fields (for example, Friday and Sundays in some areas). I used these times to study – and study very hard. My parents were ridiculed in community gatherings because of our poverty. When I look back, I am happy that I went through all of this because it made me want to not live like this for the rest of my life. The poverty of our family was my inspiration. Because I had to read before sunset, I started to complete all my homework at school during break and study times. Every moment I got to read I used effectively. After completing primary school, I enrolled for secondary education.

As I grew up I was able to do more demanding jobs that earned the family a little more money. I used to wake up at 3 am to assist some of our neighbours with ploughing their fields before leaving for school at 7 am. This meant that they helped to plough our piece of land in return. I used to take roasted maize to school for lunch. The good thing about eating roasted maize is that it makes you thirsty so you drink lots of water and this keeps you full. I participated in all activities that were required of me but was very dedicated to my school-

work. At secondary school we started to be able to buy a bit of paraffin here and there so that I could read at night.

School fees at secondary school were more demanding and one had to pay by a certain date. At the start of the term the bursar would come and flush out all those who had not paid their fees. I was regularly among them. You were not allowed to return to school without the money. I used this time of absence to help my parents look for work to earn money to pay the fees. However, every day I was not in class I used to ask my classmates for their notes and copy and read them. Surprisingly, I always came out with good marks at the end of each term and was sometimes top of the class. In order for me to write the final secondary examinations, my parents had to borrow money from all the relatives and work harder in the community. Some people advised my father to stop paying examination fees as he could use that money instead to buy himself good clothes, but he refused.

I wrote the secondary school examinations, passed and was accepted to Advanced Level (which would be Grades 12 and 13 here). This involved me moving from home to Harare, approximately 200 km away. However, I needed to first find out where I could stay before accepting this day scholarship. My mother had to prepare home-brewed beer to sell so that we could raise the bus fare for my trip and my initial expenses. One of my relatives agreed to offer me accommodation on terms they would discuss with my father.

I joined the class only in the second term but I did not lose focus. I was a product of a poor family and the only way to change the situation was through education. However, the demands for fees were getting steeper. In the beginning I kept telling the school authorities that I would pay my school fees soon, until they got fed up. When I was about to be sent off, they looked at my marks. They asked about my family history and then asked to see my father. I trekked back home to get him. My Dad agreed to accompany me back to Harare but we had to wait until Mom had brewed and sold some more beer in order to pay for our transport. After the school interviewed my father, I was offered a partial bursary. What a development! But my bursary was conditional on my

getting good marks every term. If I failed, the bursary would stop. I could not allow this to happen!

My father continued to send the other half of the fees. My relative accommodating me did not request payment for food and accommodation. Some of my other relatives and community contacts in the big city would sometimes give me small change to buy 'drinks'. I used to save this and occasionally used it to pay the remaining fees. I passed my A Level (Grade 13) exams with good marks.

In Zimbabwe at that time, if you passed your A Levels with marks that met the requirements for university, you could do your undergraduate degree using a loan that you would pay back only when you started working. I got to university through this scheme. I worked on my first degree and behaved like any other university student, but I never forgot where I came from – a poor family – and this inspired me more. I taught high school for six months and returned to do a Master's degree, which led to a PhD degree. I did some of my work for this in Stockholm, Sweden.

After finishing my PhD, I did further training for a postdoctoral fellowship. After completing this, I got my first job as a lecturer in Genetics at Wits University. I subsequently applied for a post as a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town, the position I currently hold. I supervise students at Honours, Master's, PhD and postdoctoral levels and I usually have 8 or 10 students at any one time. I have travelled extensively, sharing my work in countries such as the USA, Canada, UK, France, Hungary, Egypt, Tanzania, Malawi, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Whenever I am in these far-off places, it does not escape my mind that with hard work, I have turned my circumstances around. And I firmly believe that anyone, like me, can change their circumstances for the better through hard work. I will always celebrate this achievement and my life of inspiration.

David Hatherell

Learning to lead

When I was younger I wanted to have a story to tell. I wanted to live a unique journey and have a range of experiences to share. My wishes were answered in a very unpredictable way. This is my story.

I was born into a loving family with three brothers and a sister, me being the youngest. My parents were both self-employed. My Mom worked from home, thus giving her a chance to look after our family, and my father went to work at his printing factory in Johannesburg every day.

Just before I went to Bryanston High School, my uncle (and godfather) passed away from cancer, and when I was in Grade 8, my aunt (and godmother), Terry-Ann, had the same fate. This stage of my life was significant because my aunt had always said that I should work hard and make something of my life. I never knew that this foundation would guide my life.

My aunt's encouraging words were the last thing she said to me before she passed on. Her words encouraged me to apply for a student job at Husted's Pharmacy, where I worked in the evenings after school. This was because I was not sure if my parents would be able to afford university fees for me in the future.

At a later stage, when I was in Grade 10, my father was diagnosed with prostate cancer. This meant that he had to close down his printing factory to go for surgery. I began to save money from my student job as a safety net, as I realised that my parents would most definitely not be able to pay for high school and university tuition fees. In order to take full advantage of any opportunities or bursaries that might become available, I began to excel academically and in my extra-curricular life. Then an ideal opportunity arose.

In Grade 11 I received a scholarship to attend the Anthony Robbins Global Youth Leadership Summit in San Diego, California, where I met the

I SHOULD
WORK HARD
AND MAKE
SOMETHING
OF MY LIFE



Make a Difference Foundation, who gave me a bursary for my final year of school and for university. After the summit I changed my student job to work at Jukskei Park Pharmasave and continued to put money aside as a safety net. I also took on two extra subjects during my matriculation year and continued with athletics and swimming as I was striving to develop into a well-rounded individual.

I came to Stellenbosch to grow as an individual, be challenged intellectually, make friends and become an active participant in my community. My goal to develop as a leader was noticed and I was selected to attend The Chosen MTN Leading CEO Council, representing the youth of South Africa, where I met many leading South African CEOs.


These CEOs have helped me to develop as an individual and as a young agent for positive change in South Africa.

In my second year of university, I learned many valuable lessons. My father was diagnosed with thyroid and colon cancer. He then had to undergo two operations and undergo radioactive treatment. In that same year my grandmother contracted terminal cancer. At this point I realised that I felt most comfortable when I was helping my community.

I began to lead a community programme which focused on teaching mathematical and literacy skills to a class of Grade 5 learners with the aim to make Maths fun. We also aimed to help these scholars develop their potential so that they would be eligible to apply for scholarships when they reached a suitable age. During my term of leading this programme, we tutored the class every Friday, implemented an individual mentoring programme to help learners every Saturday and developed a partnership with Crossroads Pty Ltd, a transport company.

During my second and third years at university I realised that it was OK to not be OK. I found that friends were there to help me and I realised that a bad test does not define the person you are. I learned to rely on other people and to work effectively in a team and I realised how much I loved community involvement.

This year I have the privilege of studying a Bachelor of Commerce, doing my Honours in Actuarial Science, as a Mandela Rhodes Scholar. I am also beginning a mentoring programme to help give Grade 11 and 12 learners an insight into the leadership world.



I REALISED
THAT NOT EVEN
THE SKY WAS
THE LIMIT FOR ME

Moorosi Leshoele

From academic exclusion to UCT alumnus

There is a saying in Sotho which goes ‘*ho tjetjha ha ramo ha se ho baleha, empa e le ho nka matla*’. Loosely translated it means ‘the retreating of a ram is not to run away, it is to gain more strength’. I use this analogy to describe my experiences at the University of Cape Town (UCT) because I was knocked down by my studies in my first year in 2008 but, like a ram, I redeemed myself and turned tragedy into triumph.

My name is Moorosi Leshoele. I was born in Thokoza, Johannesburg and raised in Lesotho. I am from a proletariat family and the highest academic level my parents reached was Matric. I’m the first person in my immediate family who not only studied at university but obtained a Bachelor’s degree. I did not have any sound career guidance or mentorship while at school. I was, however, self-motivated to reach greater heights. I was the only learner in my school in 2007 to write all my Matric exams (including Mathematics) at higher grade. I was always in the top five in my Matric class and was hailed as one of the shining stars of my school, or at least I thought I was until I came to UCT.

The crux of my story is that the tables were suddenly turned when I got to UCT because I was no longer that top-performing learner. In fact, I battled to make it in the top 50 per cent of my General Extended Programme in Science (GEPS) class. It goes without saying that this poor performance was a hard pill to swallow for someone who used to be in the spotlight for being a diligent high achiever at school. I struggled somewhat to keep up with the standards at UCT, not only academically but also socially and environmentally because I had to adjust to a completely different ‘world’ – the UCT global village. I wanted to study Engineering (Chemical), or at least I thought that’s what I wanted because most of us were made to believe that Engineering and Information Technology (IT) were the only lucrative and prestigious fields of

study for someone of my calibre. As a result I could not understand why I was 'relegated' to do GEPS. I failed my first year of study and was excluded academically. I cannot put into words the heartbreaking pain in that split second when I got that text message saying that I was excluded from UCT. I would never wish this kind of pain and such feelings of shame, disappointment and hopelessness on any student. I tried to conceal this news from my parents but my Mom eventually discovered it. However, she was there with me every step of the way.

I made plans to travel to Cape Town in early January so that I could get appropriate advice and help from the Student Representative Council (SRC) and other stakeholders in this matter. I came to Cape Town with nothing more than the HOPE that this, too, would pass and that there was a brighter light at the end of the dark tunnel I was in. My Mom did not cease praying for me and I had this surprisingly convincing beacon of hope that God was looking over me and working for my good – even in the midst of such adversity. I filed an appeal to the UCT Re-admissions Committee and, with the help of people like Mqondisi Mcqaba (then Science Students' Council Chairperson), Eva Abrahams (Science Faculty student adviser) and Bheki Mchunu (my closest friend), I was given the opportunity to transfer to another faculty – Humanities.

I majored in Political Science and Psychology in the new faculty and I did not have a tough time gaining my momentum, perhaps because my mindset about careers had changed dramatically. I was now studying what I independently and rationally wanted to do all along (Politics), which is aligned with my passion, the humanitarian and social justice side of me.

I was part of the 100 UCT Emerging Student Leadership Programme in 2010 which further helped me get out of my comfort zone and equipped me with critical leadership skills. After this summit, I realised that not even the sky was the limit for me. I became a mentor for first-year students in the Extended Degree Programme in Humanities and this helped me reach out to other students who might have walked down the same route I had walked had it not been for this mentorship initiative. I attended an international summit



in Switzerland in September 2011 called One Young World, where we tackled the world's most potent challenges with world icons, such as Nobel Peace Laureate Desmond Tutu and Prof. Muhammed Yunus. My graduation ceremony in December 2011 was a major highlight of the year. However, it sparked a vivid flashback to 2008 when I first laid my feet on UCT soil.

When I graduated from UCT in December 2011 I had high hopes and convictions that I was valuable human capital, so I thought I would not struggle to get a 'well-paying' job. Months later, I was still jobless despite the unpaid internships I was doing. I did two internships in Cape Town: one with Primedia Broadcasting, where I trained to be a freelance producer for 567 Cape Talk radio, and another

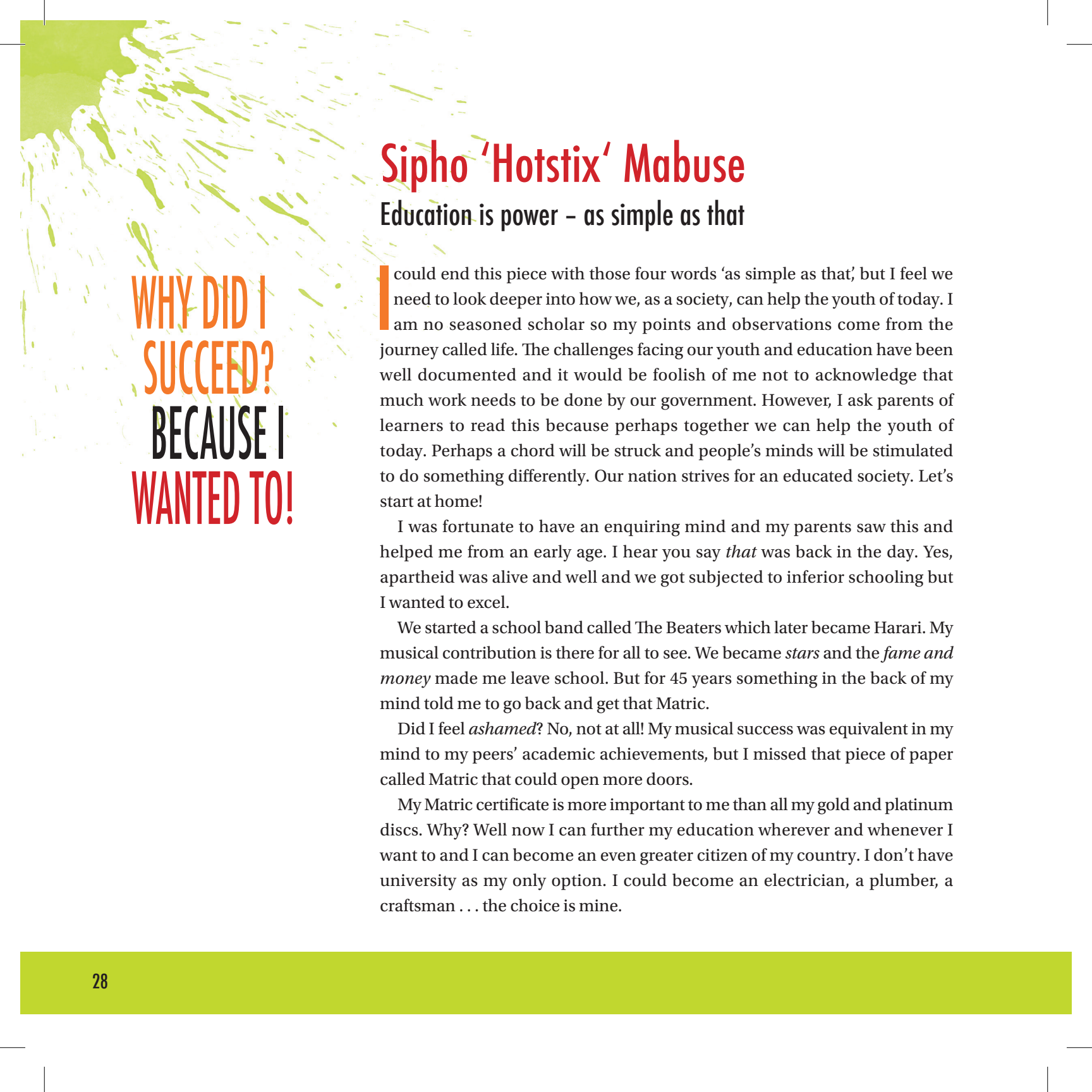
with the South African German Network under the auspices of Cape Mental Health Society.

It dawned on me while I was unemployed that postponing furthering one's studies is like shooting yourself in the foot. It is said that the cost of education is high, but the cost of ignorance is even higher. For this reason I will be embarking on my Master's degree in Public Policy and Management in the Faculty of Social Science next year. I know that we are *all* destined for greatness, even in the midst of our darkest days. The reason I'm relating my personal story is to show you that our forecasts for the future do not always unfold as we initially planned. This does not mean that we should not plan well in advance and work extremely hard because there is a saying, 'Once we stop planning, we are planning to fail', so be relentless in striving to make your dreams a reality.

Do not, even for one second, underestimate the importance of education because as Steve Biko, one of the finest young liberation fighters the world has ever seen, said, "The strongest weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the

mind of the oppressed.' This quote speaks to the heart of the Black Consciousness philosophy that Biko pioneered. In a nutshell, Black Consciousness says that black people should be self-reliant and loving towards one another. You may be thinking, why is this philosophy and quote relevant for me anyway? This is why: education transcends all borders, cultures and races, so if you dedicate yourself to the culture of studying and wholeheartedly do your school-work, you will free yourself and your community from mental and economic bondage.

The simple message for me from my experiences at UCT is that you should always strive to be true to yourself (your abilities and weaknesses). Ask when you don't understand something (remember that it does not cost you to ask) and bear in mind that a problem is only a problem if you view it as such. I have learned to turn tragedy into triumph and to see adversities as blessings in disguise because so-called failures can be stepping-stones to success if we learn from them and never repeat them.



WHY DID I
SUCCEED?
BECAUSE I
WANTED TO!

Sipho 'Hotstix' Mabuse

Education is power – as simple as that

I could end this piece with those four words 'as simple as that', but I feel we need to look deeper into how we, as a society, can help the youth of today. I am no seasoned scholar so my points and observations come from the journey called life. The challenges facing our youth and education have been well documented and it would be foolish of me not to acknowledge that much work needs to be done by our government. However, I ask parents of learners to read this because perhaps together we can help the youth of today. Perhaps a chord will be struck and people's minds will be stimulated to do something differently. Our nation strives for an educated society. Let's start at home!

I was fortunate to have an enquiring mind and my parents saw this and helped me from an early age. I hear you say *that* was back in the day. Yes, apartheid was alive and well and we got subjected to inferior schooling but I wanted to excel.

We started a school band called The Beaters which later became Harari. My musical contribution is there for all to see. We became *stars* and the *fame and money* made me leave school. But for 45 years something in the back of my mind told me to go back and get that Matric.

Did I feel *ashamed*? No, not at all! My musical success was equivalent in my mind to my peers' academic achievements, but I missed that piece of paper called Matric that could open more doors.

My Matric certificate is more important to me than all my gold and platinum discs. Why? Well now I can further my education wherever and whenever I want to and I can become an even greater citizen of my country. I don't have university as my only option. I could become an electrician, a plumber, a craftsman . . . the choice is mine.

We seem to place such a huge emphasis on university, yet our country is crying out for skills in all areas, not only graduates from university. We need people with technical and entrepreneurial skills who can start their own businesses, employ others and help to fill the country's dire skills shortage. And look, for example, at what a qualified plumber who runs a great business can earn!

The schools have a huge role to play but so do parents. Parents need to get involved. They need to get onto school committees and push teachers and principals to be accountable to you and other learners. They need to set concrete, attainable goals. Parents, learners and schools form an educational triangle, each corner having equal responsibility and importance.

Parents need to get their children reading, listening to the news on the radio, watching television news. Parents cannot leave teaching to teachers alone. Parents are indispensable in the success of the learner. Children should be encouraged to read at the first chance available and local libraries are key to this. Have story time round the dinner table. Teach kids to talk and ask questions, even if it is for only 30 minutes each day. At least it's a start! This is what helped me.

Getting a good general knowledge helps an enquiring mind. This does not cost hundreds of thousands of rand. Good general knowledge enables children to debate with their friends and school peers. For example, if you support a football or cricket side, go into the history of the team. Know everything about the team you love. Understanding the history that went before should make you feel proud.

We seem to live in a quick-fix, instant-gratification era of idols. Reality shows on television portray people wanting to own more and more. If you transferred



that amount of energy from wanting more to doing more, you would get more. It is all about balance. Trust me when I say this: nothing comes quickly in life – you need to work hard and keep trying to succeed. I still practise the saxophone for an hour every day to improve my skills.

Remember that no matter how bad or dire your situation is, and as crazy as it seems, someone, somewhere in this beautiful world of ours is going through a similar experience.

Why did I succeed? Because I wanted to! I was driven to achieve, not only musically but academically as well.

Some of my fellow musicians and peers have stopped working but at 60 I am busier than ever before. Why? Because I love learning and I want to find out what is around the next corner. Yes, I have had failures and people have said ‘no’ to me. But you know what? Whenever that happened I got up again and that’s all you have to do.

Life is not a sprint, it is a marathon. And the day that you say you know everything will come back to haunt you forever.

Ziningi Madonsela


It is all up to you . . .

Writing this story feels like I am opening old wounds – wounds that have almost healed. I know that we cannot forget our past – for this is the fabric that makes us who we are. They say that you need to know where you come from to know where you are going, so this is my story.

I am a child born of the soils and dusty roads of a little village called Msahweni on the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal. I was born in 1987 – the second girl in my family – at a time, I am told, of floods, as well as unrest in apartheid South Africa. During my early years my family was nomadic, moving from place to place for employment and educational reasons. I recall being about four years old and living in a one-bedroomed wooden shack in Umlazi, Durban. Some nights, we had to flee into the bushes for refuge because the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkhatha Freedom Party (IFP) were at war. After one of these nights, at dawn, we found our neighbour's house burnt to the ground. They said he was an *impimpi* (an informer). Thankfully our house was left standing. There was no electricity at the time and the wooden exterior of our house was dark, so we suspect that the arsonists did not see it.

When I was six years old, we moved again, and rented a room in a flat that had no electricity, in an area riddled with crime, racism and poverty. My family of six shared this room in a two-bedroomed flat, with prostitutes, who did what they thought was the only means to feed their children. My father worked as a security guard, whilst my mother studied at an FET college and sold food as a vendor in the industrial area down the road. Living here, we were able to begin our primary education at a bi-racial school. I was a budding entrepreneur from an early age and sold sweets in the class line and eventually opened a mini tuck-shop at home when I was in high school.

**YOU ARE THE
ONLY PERSON
WHO CAN DRIVE
YOUR DESTINY**



Five years later, we obtained a plot in a developing township near my birthplace and built our own home. Waking up at 4 am and commuting by taxi, then train and finally a 50-minute walk was a sacrifice we had to make for our education. This is when my ideas and visions for my life started to take shape. For many of my schoolmates, completing Grade 12 then working at the local Pick n Pay or Mr Price was a predetermined destiny. Very often people's dreams are limited by their realities – working at the local Mr Price was the 'normal' thing to do. I was a dreamer, always telling my peers that they should not let their current circumstances define their destiny and hinder their progress. Although university seemed so improbable, I encouraged my friends to apply. Some did and have been successful but many did not. I have always considered myself somewhat different because I had ideas about the kind of future I wanted – one of a better life for my family and community. It was not clearly laid out but I believed there was more to life and that education was going to open many of these doors.

When I was in Grade 10, I decided that I was going to study Biotechnology – a relatively unknown field at the time. I was attracted to it because it was centred on using small organisms to make something useful, and could be applied in a variety of fields. I had intense conversations with my mother who was adamant that I should study for a BCom in Accounting. Like many, she could not fathom why I would want to be a scientist, but supported me nonetheless. I applied to the University of Cape Town and Witswatersrand University with Biotechnology as my first choice, Accounting was my second choice. During my Grade 12 year, due to my school results, I was offered an early conditional acceptance with fully paid tuition and residence accommodation at Wits. My mother was delighted as Wits was much closer to home. Again, I went for my first choice, knowing full well that I was making my life very difficult. I received financial aid to study at UCT and found myself alone in a new city with no place to stay. I had to adjust quickly and be responsible for myself. When I arrived, I lived near Century City with a friend of one of my mother's colleagues. I had a sheltered upbringing and had never been separated from my

family. I also had the typical anxieties of a first-year student but without the protection and assistance one gets from a residence environment. For the first month I had to take two taxis or a taxi and train to make my 8.00 am lectures. Meanwhile, I continued looking for alternative accommodation. I am naturally an introvert, but surprisingly, I made many friends in my first year.

I encountered many obstacles along the way but was able to complete my undergraduate degree within the minimum period. I do not consider myself to be particularly intelligent but I am a hard worker. It took me three years to break into the Dean's Merit List and I graduated with a BSc in Microbiology in 2009. I was the first person in my entire family to obtain a degree.

I had decided that I wanted to further my studies but it was no easy feat convincing my parents when the time came. In many black families you are pressured to start working immediately after your first qualification. My story is no different, but I have gone against the norm. It was important for me to obtain at least a Masters degree before leaving university. A higher qualification does not guarantee success but it does give you a slight advantage when opportunity knocks.

I obtained scholarships from UCT and the National Research Foundation (NRF) and completed my BSc (Honours) in Molecular and Cell Biology on top of my class in 2010. I am currently completing my MSc (Eng) in Chemical Engineering. In December 2010, I was awarded the David and Elaine Potter Fellowship. This Fellowship programme supports excellent South African students who intend to contribute to civil society by leveraging their educational advantage in any discipline. In my application essay, I spoke about my passion for education, sustainable development and science and technology.



I used invaluable insights I had gained in my participation in leadership programmes and the Global Citizenship: Leading for Social Justice course – a pilot, elective, and non-credit bearing course I went on to tutor in 2011. The 10-minute selection interview that followed was the most daunting experience of my life!

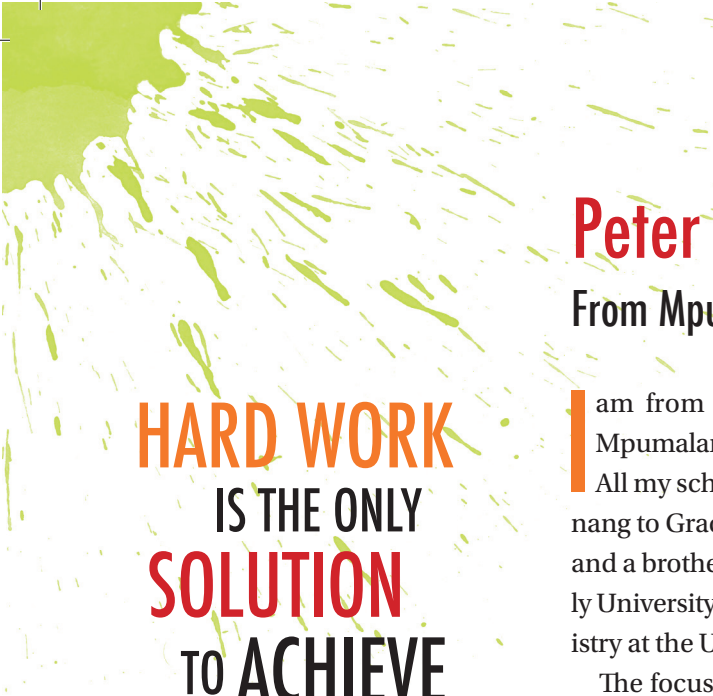
I want to be a role model for young girls, a mentor, and a living proof of the infinite possibilities which exist. I seek to challenge the norms and make a difference – a small ripple can touch many lives. For five years I was involved in the Students' Health and Welfares Centres Organisation (SHAWCO) as part of the Sports Project. I am a sports fanatic and what began as a coaching programme for children from disadvantaged areas around Cape Town, developed into a mission to address social injustices and inequality using sports as a mechanism. A colleague and I from the project are in the process of registering a non-governmental organisation which aims to do exactly this.

It is very difficult to balance academics and extra-mural activities. One has to constantly remind oneself of why they are at university – to graduate. Because of my involvements in many extra-mural activities, my life has always been a juggling act, which I enjoy.

Netball is my love. I played all through school and decided it would be one activity I would continue once I got to university. I began my first two years in the last team, probably because I had attended a disadvantaged school with limited coaching knowledge and resources. This was disheartening but I decided to give it my all. By my third year I had moved up one team and was content. I captained my team and we won the league. I finally made it to the UCT first team in the 2012 season. In addition, I was elected chairperson of the UCT Netball Club, offered a coaching position for Wynberg Girls' High School's first team, appointed manager of a Western Province senior team, selected as a Western Province player and elected into the Students' Sports Union Executive Committee, Sports Council and Student Assembly. I tell my story to budding players so they know that they should not quit. It may take years but hard work does pay off.

The year 2012 was the craziest, but also my best to date. Due to everything I was involved in, a car became a necessity, so I used my savings and bought my first car – a 2012 model. This was after I completed my financial aid loan repayments. I also won the Vice-Chancellor's Best Student Leader in a Sports Club at the UCT Leadership Awards, a Sports Award for Club Administration, and an award from the Engineering and Built Environment Postgraduate Students' Council. Using funding received from the NRF and these awards, I was able to travel to Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam in December. Travelling overseas for the first time was an amazing experience. Who would have thought it possible?

By now you have probably read many inspirational stories and heard numerous words of wisdom. My advice is simple: it all begins with you. You are the only person who can drive your destiny. You may say, I can't afford to study further; I can't do this; I can't do that. But where there is a will, there is a way. You will get knocked down many times, but it is you who has to pick yourself up. No one is going to get you out of bed if you do not want to. I believe that you have the power to pave your own path.



**HARD WORK
IS THE ONLY
SOLUTION
TO ACHIEVE
GREAT THINGS
IN LIFE**

Peter Malatji

From Mpumalanga to a doctorate at UCT

I am from Dr J.S. Moroka municipality in a rural area called Seabe in Mpumalanga. This village is located approximately 100 km north of Pretoria. All my schooling took place in this area, starting from pre-school at Tsholanang to Grades 10 to 12 at Seabe High School. I am the youngest of two sisters and a brother. I did a Master's of Science at the University of Limpopo (formerly University of the North) and I am currently completing a doctorate in Chemistry at the University of Cape Town.

The focus of my story is my final school days from Grades 10 to 12 and on to university. At school, once you passed Grade 9, the education system required that you select the subjects for Grade 10 that were in line with the career you wanted to follow. However, another determining factor was your results in Grade 9. I always wanted to follow a career in Science but didn't know which field of Science specifically. Based on my Grade 9 results, I was accepted to register in what was called a Maths and Science stream – 'the most respected learners at the school'.

In Grade 10 I was a typical adolescent and didn't always choose my friends well. This, together with numerous strikes held by our school teachers, resulted in us spending many days out of school, which didn't make it easy for me in that class. To cut a long story short, in June I failed miserably.

One day the Science teacher (whom I still admire) called me into his office and gave me a lecture. He told me that I had potential but that I would succeed only if I concentrated on my books. That evening I sat down and analysed what he had said. I decided that from that day on I would change and be the good student I was supposed to be. Unfortunately, however, it was too late for me to achieve high enough marks to pass Grade 10 at the end of that year.

I repeated Grade 10, but as a different student altogether. What was important was that I had accepted the mistakes I had made and was given a second chance to prove myself. It was not easy to ignore the fact that my friends were now in Grade 11, but I accepted it and moved on. In Grade 11 I was either in position one or two in the class.

My father worked as a driver for a nut-and-bolt company and my mother was a domestic worker, so our family income was very low. Sometimes I could not attend school tours because of the money issue. One of the most painful times was in Grade 11, when even though I had attended all choir practice, I could not travel with the choir to competitions because we had no money.

Another discouraging factor was the perception among some teachers that if you came from an educated family in which there was a teacher or a doctor, you would succeed, but that school was a waste of time if you came from a 'poor' family. You can imagine the influence this attitude had on the students. For some reason, I was lucky that God gave me the strength to push harder even though there was no recognition for my achievements.

During Grade 12, I worked hard together with friends. We had group discussions and were the first ones to come to school in the morning and the last to leave. We also attended the Saturday school. Luckily we had a fantastic Mathematics teacher and a Science tutor who helped us on Saturdays without payment. We also had fantastic Biology and English teachers, who were our class teachers. They treated us all with respect and allowed innovative thinking. Credit also goes to these teachers, without whom I wouldn't be where I am today.

Although my family income was not enough to afford tertiary fees, I studied hard in Grade 12, ignoring the fact that I might not be able to go to university. I applied for as many bursaries as possible, but I received no positive responses. At the end of the year, I obtained full matriculation exemption, even though I wrote Mathematics without a calculator, which I could not afford.

The year after Grade 12, I spent most of the time in church and participating in community organisations to keep myself busy, hopeful that one day I would

be able to attend university. Towards the end of this unintentional gap year, the University of the North (Turfloop campus) invited me to write a selection test for a Science foundation course. This course was for those students who did not pass well in Grade 12 and to prepare those who passed well for university life.

I passed and was accepted to register for the course. Fortunately, the university funded the course and we needed to pay only our living expenses. My father used to send me money and my mother saved some, which she gave me during university holidays. But at times the money was not there and I went to class without a proper meal. However, I had a very good friend and roommate and we used to share food. Because he was from Limpopo, which was closer, he visited home more often than I and would come with enough food for both of us. My life during this year was dominated by studying. Road running was my weapon to relieve the stress. I also spent more time in church, which also assisted me to cope with all the challenges. I obtained four distinctions out of five subjects and was among the top 10 students.

The following year I did not have money for registration for first year. It was by the grace of the Lord that on the last week of registration, my father managed to raise a registration fee of R3 300. The first three months of my first year were very difficult – sleeping on an empty stomach and with no money to buy extra-curricular materials.

Then one day in March, I received a call from the foundation year office. When I got there the secretary presented me with a letter confirming a bursary from Eskom, awarded to the top 10 students in the foundation year. The letter said that the company would pay the tuition fees, as well as additional allowance money. I read it several times and asked what this meant. The secretary confirmed that it was a bursary and told me to supply my banking details as soon as possible. This fuelled my hard-working spirit and my life changed from that day.

I obtained 15 distinctions out of 41 module courses in my Bachelor's degree and two distinctions out of four module courses in my Honours in Science

(Chemistry). In my second year I achieved the Best Student award for two Chemistry modules and a Nelson Mandela merit award bursary. For my BSc Honours degree, I received a National Research Foundation scholarship. I then relocated to the University of Cape Town for my Master of Science and I am currently a doctoral candidate (Chemistry) sponsored by the National Research Foundation and the University of Cape Town Equity Development programme. Since my university life has stabilised, I have participated in many leadership roles and been a mentor and tutor to undergraduate students.

I am currently a mentor, tutor and Science facilitator at my former local high school. There are many challenges facing our government in the quest to uplift the rural people. Though there are some successes, more still needs to be done, especially in the education sector. Education beats poverty and better education will lead to greener pastures. It is also in the hands of the communities to make sure that they take all interventions from the government, private sector and non-profit organisations seriously and participate actively in them. We can beat poverty if all of us become active citizens. Be conscious of those people who sleep on empty stomachs and stop corruption, greed and nepotism. Let us all help one another to raise the spirit of ubuntu.

My life's story is aimed at anyone who is faced with serious challenges and who thinks that they will never succeed in life. It is also dedicated to those people who have succeeded against all odds and are helping others to make it in life. I pray that the Lord will give you strength. Remember, God is there to raise those who are willing to be raised. Hard work is the only solution to achieve great things in life.



I am prepared to share more information with anyone who might see my story as relevant to them and who feels they need advice or encouragement. May the Lord bless each and everyone so that we can ultimately have a prosperous country – one where poverty no longer exists and quality education is accessible to all.

Mushi Matjila

No one should set limits for us but ourselves

I was born in a township near Pretoria called Atteridgeville, also known as Phelindaba or 'Pheli' because of its proximity to South Africa's main nuclear research facility – Pelindaba. I am the youngest of four children born to Nnani Elizabeth and Masebe Andrew Matjila.

One day after a school outing I came home to find a gathering of members of my extended family, some of whom I vaguely remembered, many of whom I didn't know. I had just lost my father after a long battle with cancer. I was five years old. The consequence of his death was that we were raised by a single mother, who was a source of strength, wisdom and inspiration to us all.

I remember running away from primary school one day, only to be returned by my brothers, with great irritation on their part and fierce reluctance on mine, and a caning from my teachers. Over the years my mother instilled in us the value of a good educational foundation. She would always say 'It's the only thing no one can take away from you' and these words still carry me through some tough times today. During the latter part of my primary school years, besides my usual homework, she expected me to give an overview of the local newspapers (*Pretoria News*, *The Citizen* and *The Sowetan*) that she would bring home from work every weekday. Although I detested this exercise at the time, it held me in good stead in the years to come.

My brother was a political activist so I was conscious of the unjust and illegitimate doctrine of apartheid at a young age. I believed that one of the best ways to overcome this system (in tandem with the rebellion and national student uprising that characterised this period) was not only to ensure that I had a good educational foundation, as I had been taught, but also to pursue excellence.

NO ONE
SHOULD SET
LIMITS FOR US
BUT OURSELVES



For my high school education I was required to write an aptitude exam for entry into a multiracial school outside South Africa, in the then Bophuthatswana (now part of North West province). I passed the exam and was accepted at their boarding school. I performed well throughout the grades and matriculated with exemption. In my penultimate year, I participated in a two-week exchange programme with a Cape Town school. As a result of this experience, and having cherished the city, I applied to the University of Cape Town (UCT) and enrolled for a Bachelor of Science, majoring in Microbiology and Biochemistry. At this stage it became clear to me that whatever I was doing was an important stepping-stone to the next milestone and had to be done well.

It was not too long after I had commenced with my studies as a 'fresher' (one unaccustomed to university) that a new friend (in his final year) charitably advised me to drop one of my majors. He said there was no faster route to certain failure than undertaking a double major in science – particularly if you were of a darker complexion. I gave this brotherly advice deep consideration because it came from a senior scholar and friend, who had witnessed all sorts of failures over the years.

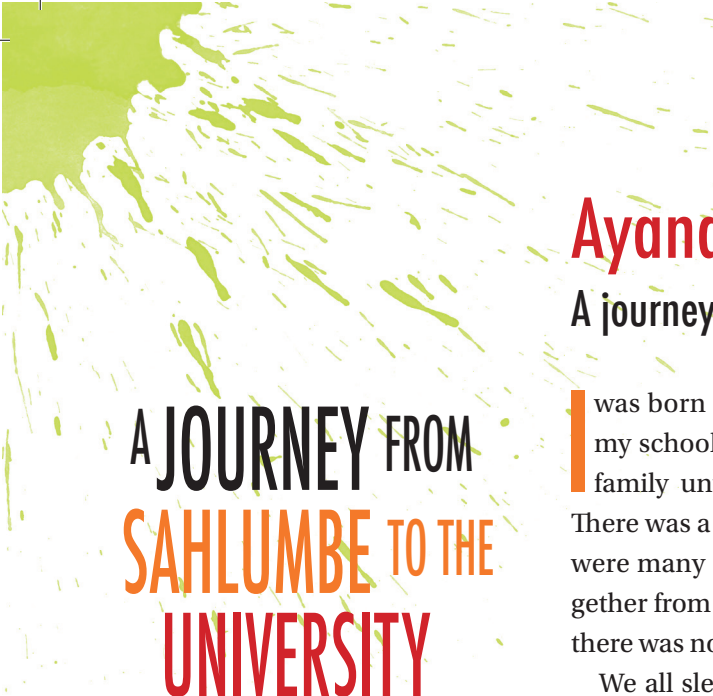
After much deliberation I continued with my two majors. I could not accept that I was being told that I was heading for failure. From this point onwards in my life, those who expected failure from my endeavours unknowingly provided great motivation for me. Nothing motivates me more than being told I will not succeed – and no one else should accept this either. I was also greatly inspired by one of my Microbiology lecturers, who was black (very uncommon in those days), excelled in his field and was a great lecturer. He later became a mentor and played a crucial role at vital decision-making moments in my

academic life. Unsurprisingly he went on to achieve great things, in South Africa and internationally, including being the President of the National Research Foundation (NRF).

After three years at UCT, I graduated joint top of the class in Biochemistry and did extremely well in Microbiology. I was on the Dean's Merit List for each of the three years studying science. At this point I was at a crossroads. I had done well enough to secure funding (from an industrial company) for postgraduate studies in science but, at the same time, I was fascinated by Medicine. The use of scientific knowledge to achieve societal health had a greater appeal to me. My brother also graduated from his Political Science studies in the same year and he was at a similar crossroads – to study further or follow more lucrative options. I still remember the day we sat down and reflected on the next step. We decided to put our best foot forward, spending the next few years pursuing the highest possible studies we were capable of. Not only would this ensure a better future for us but would also be the best way to show our gratitude to a single mother who had sacrificed a lot for us. I went on to study Medicine and he went to study Law.

About a decade later, he is a practising advocate at the Pretoria Bar and I am a senior specialist in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Groote Schuur Hospital and a lecturer at UCT. It doesn't end here though. I have enrolled for doctoral studies at UCT, combining basic science and clinical research in the development and functioning of the placenta, which we know plays a crucial role in determining pregnancy health. This allows me the rare opportunity to relish both the clinical world of medicine and the scientific world of molecular biology, while contributing to women's health through service, teaching and research.

We all have the ability to achieve the highest goals we set for ourselves. With the right initial nurturing, mentorship and dedication, we can be anything we set out to be. No one should be allowed to set limits for us but ourselves. There is no path without obstacles, but with determination, persistence and perseverance these can be overcome. I wish you all the best of luck in your endeavours.



A JOURNEY FROM SAHLUMBE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND

Ayanda Mbele

A journey from Sahlumbe to the University of Zululand

I was born in 1989 and raised in Sahlumbe reserve at Ladysmith. I started my schooling at Fundani Primary School. I lived with my mother and her family until circumstances forced me to relocate to my father's family. There was a war between two tribes that involved my mother's village. There were many children living with my father's family and we all had to eat together from one big bowl. In order to get full you had to be strong and fast as there was no extra food.

We all slept together in one rondavel with our grandmother because of a shortage of accommodation in the homestead. My grandmother was always complaining about her candle. If we tried to study at night she would tell us to put it out as it made the room hot. Therefore it was important to do homework during the day. Although there were challenges at home I did well at school. There was no motivation from my parents or any family member to study hard or dream big. I was self-motivated.

In 2007 I matriculated at Sahlumbe High School. After Matric, life started getting tougher. I had no plans as to what to do. People would tease me by saying demotivating things such as 'Matric or no Matric is the same.' I stayed at home until mid-February 2008. As the month progressed I decided to relocate to Durban with the purpose of looking for job opportunities.

On my first day in Durban I met a woman on the street who identified herself as Mrs Minki Yeni. She seemed interested to know more about me so I introduced myself and told her I was in Durban to look for a job. She enquired if I had Matric and when I said yes, she asked why I wasn't going to university to further my studies. I told her that I had no one to help me but that I was looking for a job to raise money to further my studies. Then she asked for my contact details and told me to bring my Matric results to her the following day.

When I got back to where I stayed, I told my cousin about my conversation with Mrs Yeni. He was not happy about it and told me that all people in Durban were corrupt criminals. He said, 'If Mr Yeni finds you in his room with his wife, he will kill you.' It was hard for me to disregard his advice.

The following day Mrs Yeni phoned and told me to come to her house. When I got there, she asked for my Matric results. She was impressed with my performance and said, 'You cannot stay at home with a super result'. She asked me what I wanted to be and I said a lawyer, but I uttered that word reluctantly because I knew it was impossible for me to study law since I had no one to support me financially.

I was amazed when Mrs Yeni said, 'From today you will be a lawyer,' because I wasn't expecting those words from her. I was under the impression that she was going to assist me to get a job when she had promised to help me. I thought that maybe she wanted to have an intimate relationship with me because I had heard that urban women liked to involve themselves with young men.

Mrs Yeni phoned her friend Mrs Buhle Mashaba and told her my story, and that she wanted me to go to the University of Zululand. Mrs Mashaba said that her sister was at the University of Zululand and could assist me to get registered. She said that she was going to Richards Bay the following day and offered to take me to Empangeni.

I told my cousin that Mrs Yeni wanted me to go to University of Zululand. He was not happy with the offer. He then called to inform my parents who were also unhappy about it. They asked tough questions, such as How could I accept an offer from a stranger, and Why did I trust her? They concluded by saying that I was not to go to Empangeni.

I then phoned Mrs Yeni to mediate in the dispute between my parents and me. She said that I need not heed their instructions and that I had to do what was best for my future. I decided to risk it and accepted her offer despite my parents' objections.

The next day I went to Empangeni with Mrs Mashaba. We arrived at University of Zululand in the evening. She introduced me to her sister, Sphindile



Makhanya, who was already studying there, and then she left for Richards Bay. As Sphindile was living in a women's residence, I couldn't stay with her. She phoned her friend Khethelo Xulu (Mrich) to assist me with accommodation. Mrich was under the impression that Sphindile was my sister. I told him how I got to know her and he did not believe me. Mrich was living in a single room but he agreed to assist me with accommodation, even though he had doubts about my situation. We had to share a single bed. Luckily Mrich grew up in a rural area in a similar situation to mine so he understood me very well. He took care of me like his younger brother. I had to depend on him for everything, including food and toiletries.

During the registration process he was there with me at every step, communicating with Sphindile and Mrs Yeni via phone. He did not attend his lectures until I got registered. He went all out for me. Getting registered was a very frustrating and tedious process, especially as I was a late applicant who had no registration fee, and it took a whole week to sort out.

Mrs Yeni assisted me with the initial registration fee and Khethelo managed to find me accommodation at Manqele's, a family homestead outside the university campus. He introduced me to his younger brother mam'maKhanyile, a member of the Manqele family who was a cleaner at the university. Khethelo discussed with mam'maKhanyile how I would pay the rent, since he knew that it would be very hard for me to raise the money. He asked if I could pay my rent (R150) when I got money, since I did not know exactly when that would be. It was quite difficult to find that amount.

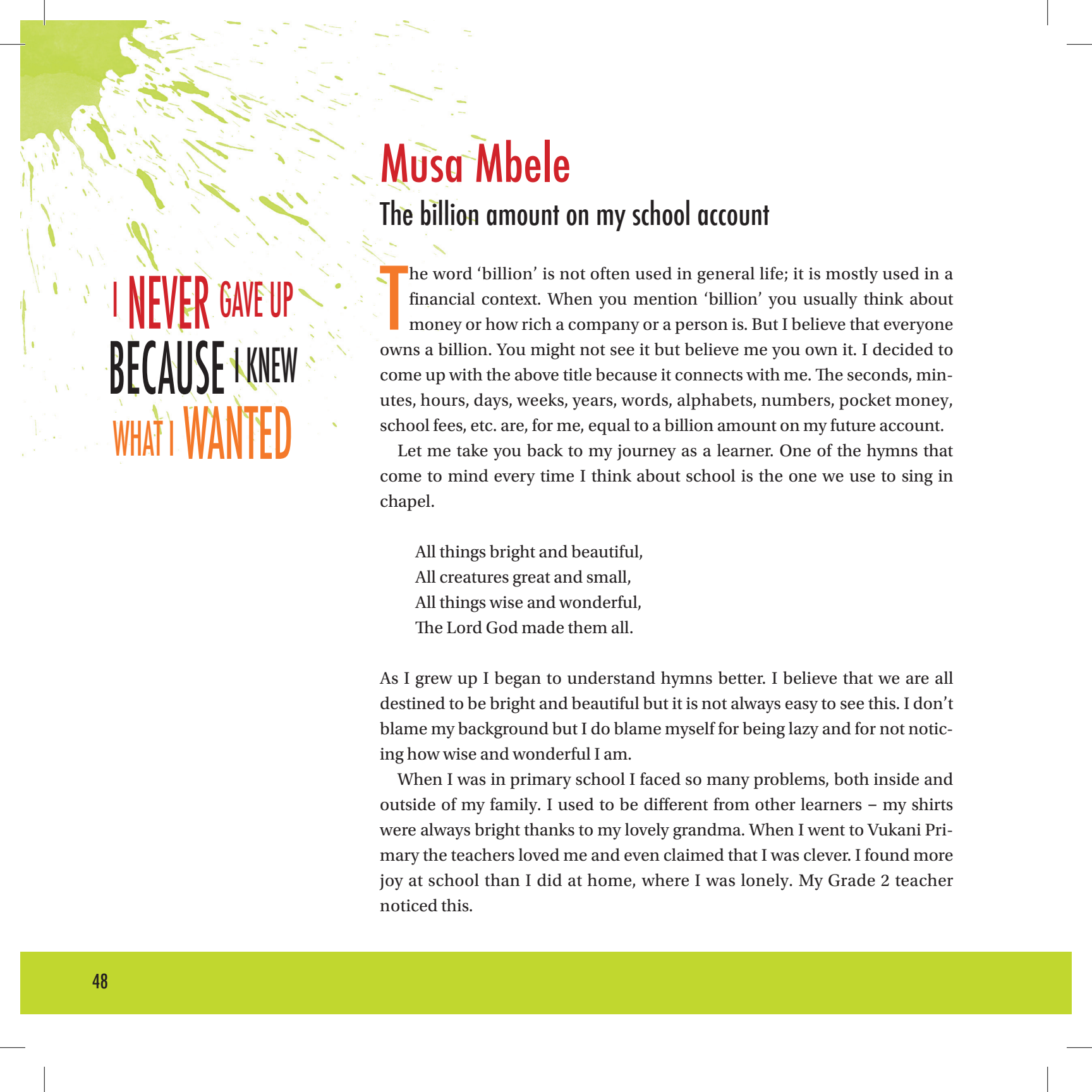
I worked very hard to pass all my subjects because the only means I had to settle my university fees was through the National Student Financial Aid

Scheme (NSFAS), which required students to pass a certain percentage of their subjects. Khethelo was always encouraging me to work as hard as I could to pass my studies so that I could change my situation at home. It was quite challenging to face university life, where most students had fancy clothes, cellphones and many other things, whereas I had only two pairs of trousers and two T-shirts. However, I had to remain positive because there was no need to look at other people as I was studying for myself, with or without materialistic things, and I had to pass my studies to fulfil my dream of becoming a lawyer.

In my second year I got a bursary from the fidelity fund, but this was not enough to settle the university debt so I had to continue using the NSFAS. In 2011 I managed to complete my LLB degree and graduated in May 2012. In February 2012, I started serving my articles at Legal Wise.

I will never ever forget the people who have contributed in my journey to be the person that I am today. I would like to thank Mrs Yeni, Mrs Buhle Mashaba, Ms Sphindile Makhanya, Mr Khethelo (Mrich) Xulu and Thobeka Zakwe for their support.

Today I am a happier young man with dreams that breed bigger dreams. My message to fellow young people is that life after Matric is tough but you have to fight for what you want and never give up, regardless of your circumstances. My motto in life is 'No pain, no gain.'



I NEVER GAVE UP
BECAUSE I KNEW
WHAT I WANTED

Musa Mbele

The billion amount on my school account

The word ‘billion’ is not often used in general life; it is mostly used in a financial context. When you mention ‘billion’ you usually think about money or how rich a company or a person is. But I believe that everyone owns a billion. You might not see it but believe me you own it. I decided to come up with the above title because it connects with me. The seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years, words, alphabets, numbers, pocket money, school fees, etc. are, for me, equal to a billion amount on my future account.

Let me take you back to my journey as a learner. One of the hymns that come to mind every time I think about school is the one we use to sing in chapel.

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

As I grew up I began to understand hymns better. I believe that we are all destined to be bright and beautiful but it is not always easy to see this. I don’t blame my background but I do blame myself for being lazy and for not noticing how wise and wonderful I am.

When I was in primary school I faced so many problems, both inside and outside of my family. I used to be different from other learners – my shirts were always bright thanks to my lovely grandma. When I went to Vukani Primary the teachers loved me and even claimed that I was clever. I found more joy at school than I did at home, where I was lonely. My Grade 2 teacher noticed this.

Then things changed. For Grade 3 I went to Kholwani Primary School. I fell behind with my schoolwork and the teachers started calling me a slow learner. My mother also supported this but deep down I knew I was not a slow learner. In every class there were between 30 and 45 students, ranging in age from 8 to 12 years. But age was not the issue as we were all trying our best. The problem was that when we got back from the Christmas holiday, we found that all the windows of the school had been broken, all the doors had been taken and the desks had been axed. There was graffiti painted on the blackboards. In winter we froze and in summer we all fainted. We sat in groups but the teachers were not worried about us cheating because they kept the clever guys in one group and the stupid ones in another.

The one thing I will never forget about primary school is the cane. If you got something wrong you were caned either on your back or your hands. They didn't stop hitting until you cried and pleaded. I was even caned for forgetting a word when reciting a long poem. We lived in tears and pain but I never complained because I was brought up like that. Instead I adapted; I was clever!

Being clever was the only way out. While the class was getting whipped, I would be sent to the shops to buy fish and chips. During class time I would be called out to go and get water or a cold drink for another teacher. I was their pet. I was used, but I was surviving. And I did survive.

In Grade 4 year I started to open my eyes and plan my future. I wanted to be a singer, so I had to pass Grade 4 so that I could attend the higher primary school in the neighbouring area, Ekuphumeleleni Primary School, where my young uncle was a student. They had a choir at the school.

I made it. However, I soon realised that I couldn't sing, and I decided that I wanted to be a TV presenter instead. Writing English was not my strength, so I asked a girl in my class to write a letter for me to the SABC kids' show, YOTV, but I never got a response. I used to attend church a lot and even wanted to become a priest or someone big in the church. I joined poetry groups. As children we have big dreams; we are so ambitious. What I really respect about myself is that I never gave up trying to achieve my dreams.



When the time came to go to high school I didn't want to go to a technical school. I chose Pace Secondary School, which used to be a private school. I was really craving something that would challenge me but Pace was very boring and the level of teaching was not good. I wanted to change the way people viewed me. I wanted to go to a better school where I would be taught academic subjects, where education would be a lifelong experience. As Oprah Winfrey says: 'If one is educated in a beautiful school having beautiful teachers, one is able to release the beauty that is within.'

I decided that St Stithians College was the place for me. The fees there are very high – everything is high. I didn't have the bucks, my family didn't own any companies and I didn't have an uncle who

was a 'director' somewhere.

But I am Musa. I never gave up because I knew what I wanted. I even promised myself that if I didn't make it to Saints I would make sure that my children did. I wrote letters to organisations and businesses and they sent me some damned nice rejection letters! Some even gave me books, thinking I would forget about Saints.

Randy Pauch once said:

'The brick walls are there for a reason. They are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something, because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people.'


I met Ms Naledi Pandor during the 16 June celebrations and I shared my dream of getting the best education with her. That's when the dream became

a reality. Together with the Gauteng Department of Education she sent letters of recommendation to the St Stithians College Executive to provide me with a full scholarship, I was invited to the school to meet the Headmaster, and from that afternoon the deal was sealed.

I started at St Stithians when I was in Grade 11. It was more challenging than I thought it would be, but I managed to adapt. The first time I wore that blazer I was so grateful. Wearing that 'One and All' blazer connected me to a wider, more global community. At Saints it was not only about me achieving my dream; it was about making a collective dream come true. As I always say, I am not learning for my personal benefits only but for Africa and its future. Many people had helped me to attend Saints and I believed that the best gift I could give them was to pass Matric, which I did. Now I am preparing myself for another challenge: I want to be part of the change that I wish to see and I want to make sure that one day I hold a PhD in Economics.

In conclusion, I have learned one important thing in life: God speaks to those who understand Him better. My relationship with Him allows me to wake up every day and dream. When I pray I ask God to give me 50 per cent ownership of my life because I believe that working closely with Him helps me develop who I am.

I am grateful to the Mandela Rhodes Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund for supporting me. Without them I probably wouldn't be where I am today. I am also grateful to all my former teachers and to my family and the supportive community. Thanks to Mr Knowles and the St Stithians Executive for blessing me with the scholarship. Mama Zindzi Mandela, Aunt Liyanda, Mum Tshepo Motsepe and the Ramaphosa's family, thank you all for checking on my school progress at Saints and for the continuing support. My academic blazer is my special tool that will help me to be part of the change I want to see. Thank you all.



I WAS MADE
FOR MORE AND
EVERYTHING
IS POSSIBLE

Zizipho Mbulawa

You were made for more

I'm from a small village called Cwecweni at Engcobo in the Eastern Cape. I come from a family of five children – two sons and three daughters, I being the eldest girl. From Grades 1 to 7 I went to Ngangenyathi Senior Primary School. Because Grades 8 and 9 were not available there, I had to move to Cwecweni Junior Secondary School, which was two kilometres away. As the eldest girl I had duties after school. Every day I had to wash the dishes, fetch water from the river, wash my school uniform, prepare the supper and do my homework. I managed to pass Grade 9 in 1998, despite these conditions.

My parents then decided to send me to Ntshonkotha Senior Secondary School, a boarding school in Lady Frere, where I passed Grade 12 in 2001. In 2002 I was accepted at the University of Fort Hare to study a Bachelor of Science. There were many challenges at Fort Hare. To mention one, I had communication problems. As you know, students and lecturers speak different languages at university and I had a problem with English. I found it really difficult to express myself in oral presentation and when writing essays. But I tried very hard to improve my English by reading novels and scientific articles. I also decided to use an English Bible instead of a Xhosa Bible. By God's grace I completed my degree within three years in 2004. I have to say that it was challenging but I had to concentrate on my studies and forget about everything else.

I then applied to study at the University of Cape Town (UCT). To tell you the truth, I was taking a chance because I thought that I wouldn't qualify. However, I was accepted for a Bachelor of Science Medicine Honours in Infectious Disease and Immunology in 2006. It was not an easy journey at all because I found there was a problematic gap between my educational background at Fort Hare and that of the students who had studied at UCT. This meant that I

had to go the extra mile in all my courses to get myself to their level. Again, by God's grace, I managed to graduate at the end of 2006.

In 2007 I was accepted to do a Master's in Medical Virology at UCT. At the end of that year, I attended an International Papillomavirus Conference in Beijing, China. That was my first international conference and my first time overseas. It was a great experience, getting to see and listen to experts on the human papillomavirus (HPV). Since then I've attended several of these international conferences because my interests are the human papillomavirus and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). During the second year of my Master's I visited Professor Ulf Gyllenstein's laboratory at Uppsala University in Sweden for two months. During that period I learned new techniques and analysed some of the specimens I had taken with me. My Master's project was very successful so my supervisors and I decided that I should upgrade to a PhD at the beginning of 2009. That year I visited Professor Michael Pawlita's laboratory in Heidelberg, Germany. It was a wonderful experience to work in a laboratory in Europe. In December 2011 I was awarded my PhD.

In 2009 the South African Department of Science and Technology awarded me a Fellowship for a Women Scientist in a field in which the participation of women is low. The award was advertised all over South Africa and only three of us were selected. This was a great award for me and gave me more motivation. This made me realise that I was made for more and that everything is possible.

It is common for students in Grades 11 and 12 to think that their parents will not be able to send them to university or college and I think that this affects their grades. But let me tell you, not only parents can send you to university –



you can send yourself by passing well in Grade 12. There are many bursaries available to those who performed well academically. So stand up, study and pass well!

Apply to the university of your choice early when you are in Grade 12. Every university or college in South Africa is part of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which can provide you with what you need. They will pay all your fees and then you repay them when you start working. Most of us were assisted by the NSFAS. So it is possible to go to university or college even if you are from a poor family.

When you get to a tertiary institution there is no matron or lecturer to look after you. You have to control your life and this can be very challenging for a young person. However, it is possible to manage your life well by concentrating on first things first. You have to keep reminding yourself that you are at university to get a degree or diploma and that the only way to do this is to read, do your assignments and pass. And remember, it is important to pass well (I mean 65 per cent and above) because when you apply for bursaries and scholarships to further your studies, they look at your passing marks and they select only the best students.

Nontlantla Mdletshe

Creating life-changing solutions that last a lifetime

I am a young, black woman from the small town of Matatiele located in the foothills of the Drakensberg in the Eastern Cape, the firstborn of six children. We were all raised by my grandmother who received a government pension for most of our youth. She sent me to school and university – up until the completion of my Bachelor's degree. She unfortunately passed away during my Honours degree.

During my high school days I was intrigued by the thought of becoming a chemical engineer. Then one day I heard that to be admitted for the course, I needed to have done Mathematics and Science at higher grade. So I flushed that dream away. (I found out only later at university that this was not entirely true.) I then followed my love for Science and wanted to pursue a career either in Microbiology or Biochemistry. I applied to all the institutions in KwaZulu-Natal (via the central applications office) and received provisional acceptance from the Durban University of Technology and the University of Zululand.

At the same time I had been applying for bursaries. I lacked guidance in this, and I sent many of my applications to Accounting and Law firms who, of course, rejected them. This was because they didn't sponsor students in the fields in which I was interested, but I translated the rejection letters to mean that I was 'not good enough.' I believe that I might have had a different response if I had had the relevant information to make informed decisions as to where to apply. It got to a point where I lost all hope because if there was one thing I knew, it was that I would not be able to afford to pay my own tuition fees. This left me quite stressed and it affected my work; I started to lose interest because I did not see the point of studying. I wrote my exams in this state of mind but I passed with merit.

BE WHOEVER
YOU ALWAYS
DREAMED OF
BECOMING

Nonetheless, in January I went to the University of Zululand to take the entrance exam. The trip there used up most of the money we had at home. I had not made arrangements for accommodation because I took it for granted that the university would accommodate us. An announcement was then made that in order to receive accommodation, you needed to be registered. This news came before I wrote the entrance exam. The registration fee at the time was about R5 000 and I knew that there was no way my grandmother could raise that amount of money. So without speaking to anyone and asking for advice, I decided then and there that this was not going to work and I called home and told them I was coming back. At this point I made the decision that I would not study because it was just too expensive.

A friend of mine had applied to the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and met some people who advised that I could apply. I did and I got accepted to do Biotechnology (BTY), which was perfect because it gave me the opportunity to do both Microbiology and Biochemistry. I left home with a bus ticket from my friend's mother. On the way I received a call to inform me that I had been accepted to do Biodiversity and Conservation Biology (BCB), this was because BTY was full. I was told that the modules were the same for both courses and that I could change to the one I was interested in later in the year. I was accepted, yes, but my financial position had still not changed, so this was a bitter-sweet moment for me.

Upon my arrival at UWC, a meeting had been arranged with the manager of student residence, for me to convince him why I deserved to be accommodated before being registered and with my late application. After explaining my situation, I was given accommodation but, more importantly, I left that office with an assurance that my registration fee would be paid. The residence manager said to me, 'Your hard work and marks can work for you here.' At this point I was so amazed at the power of God at work in my life.

I later registered and started classes. I also applied for financial aid, which I received. At home my grandmother could afford to send me R300 a month for groceries and whatever else I needed. A month later I received an e-mail

instructing me to come and see someone at the finance office. There I found out that I had been awarded a merit rebate, which meant that a certain amount of money had been subtracted from my fees due to my marks from Grade 12. It is then that I fully understood what the residence manager had told me. I was able to sustain my marks throughout my undergraduate degree and received assistance with registration every year.

My background has taught me that against all odds, with hard work and dedication and assistance from individuals pointing one in the right direction, you can achieve your goals and be whoever you always dreamed of becoming. It has also taught me to live my life selflessly and to help others whenever possible. In my years as an undergraduate student, I was part of the peer-mentoring and tutoring programme. This was a platform intended to tutor first-year students and assist them with the transition from high school to university life.

I am now registered at University of Cape Town (UCT) for a Master of Science in Medicine (MSc Med) majoring in Molecular Haematology (the study of the physiology of the blood) where I am doing a research project on cancer and HIV. It is a two-year programme and, at the end of it, I plan to register for a PhD. I hope to then use the knowledge and skills I will have accumulated to work for the Department of Health. I would like to be employed at any of South Africa's research hubs (such as the Medical Research Council or the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research) as these bodies are mandated by government to solve problems faced by South Africans and I feel I could play a valuable part in finding solutions.

After my experience in South Africa, I will be in a position to apply for a post at the United Nations and to have a positive impact on the the African continent.



Thomas Dekker said: 'This world, after all our science and sciences, is still a miracle; wonderful, inscrutable, and magical and more to whosoever will think of it.' This statement encompasses much of how I view and marvel at the world. This certainly does not imply that I believe that there cannot be improvements and innovations in many aspects that are not currently functioning at an optimal level. Moreover, I am a person who is eager to tap into the unknown; I have a desire to find what we don't know as yet. This originates in the realisation that we, as a planet, need new solutions for our existing problems and a set of precautions for the future. I believe we are smart enough to do this – implementation is what we lack in most cases. My drive is to empower myself enough to change something that can impact someone's life forever. If I had a motto it would read: *Creating life-changing solutions that last a lifetime.*

Ntseuoa Motsieloa

Destined for bigger things

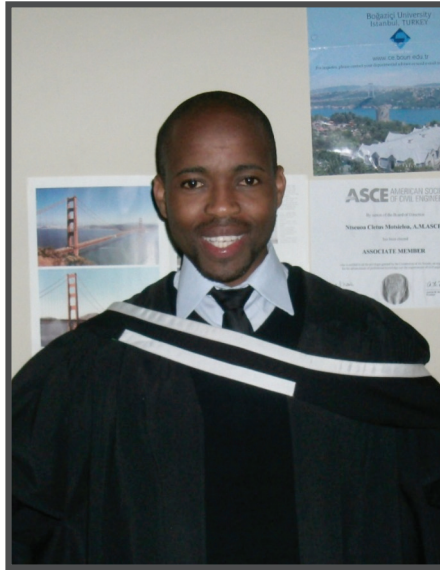
I was born in 1984 in the rural Maseru District in Lesotho. I went to primary school at St Benedict's Primary school at Ha Khanyetsi and in the afternoons my brothers and I looked after my father's cattle, as he was a mine-worker in the Goldfields mines in the Free State. I enjoyed looking after my father's livestock and when I look back I feel proud to have experienced that life. I acknowledge that these were formative years in which I developed my core personality and competitive character. After school we played games such as stick fighting and horse racing and we initiated bullfights, but the latter was an act of naughtiness and the elders in the community did not approve of this. My parents loved education and dreamt of sending us to better schools, so after primary school I went to St Joseph's High School in the town of Maseru.

I loved choral music and in my first year there I joined the Christian Life Community (CLC) and was elected chairperson in my last two years of high school. I was also a prefect for school property management. These activities developed my leadership skills and in 2002 I graduated top of my class with a first class pass.

What inspired me to study civil engineering?

My love for civil engineering, specifically structural engineering (the design and construction of bridges, dams, skyscrapers, etc.) was inspired through reading insatiably at the United Nation Information Centre in Maseru during my high school years. One day I came across an article about an astronomer, Dr Thebe Medupi, and reading about his journey to success, despite poverty, inspired me. I, too, wanted to go to the University of Cape Town (UCT) like he had, but I wanted to study Civil Engineering. However, in Lesotho, a

PASSION
HELPS YOU
THROUGH
ADVERSITY



school-leaving certificate was O Level so UCT would not accept me. This was only the beginning of the journey though.

My university career

I got a Lesotho government scholarship to study a Bachelor's degree in Physics and Computer Science at the National University of Lesotho, as no tertiary institution offered a degree in Civil Engineering at the time. At the end of my first year I came top of my class and applied to study Civil Engineering at UCT and was admitted in 2005.

My undergraduate years at UCT were challenging and I added a year to my degree. However, I became a better person, both personally and professionally, and developed resilience and perseverance.

I became an academic tutor in a senior residence in 2008 and 2009 for first-year Engineering Mathematics and second-year Waste Water Treatment, one of the majors for a Civil Engineering degree. To be a tutor in a particular subject you had to obtain at least 65 per cent for that course to ensure understanding. I graduated in 2009 having produced the second-best thesis in Cement and Concrete Materials and was awarded a first.

In 2010 I got a scholarship from the Concrete and Cement Institute in collaboration with the Department of Civil Engineering, CoMSIRU at University of Cape Town, to study for a Master's degree in Concrete Materials and Structural Engineering. My research topic was 'Acid resistance of sewer-pipe concrete', which combined experimental work and 'live sewer' research. This topic is relevant globally because the drainage infrastructure (sewer pipes) deteriorates as a result of biogenic acid attack. The structural failure of these pipes results in the closure of roads while they are being repaired, which causes havoc with traffic and this may cost more than the repair itself. Since

sewers are underground structures, the leakages may also mix with ground-water and this can affect the ecosystem in a given environment. Underground leaks may go unnoticed for years and subsequent sinkholes pose extreme risks to property and the public at large. This research played a vital role in producing acid-resistant concrete for use in sewer pipes to enhance their service life and safety. In 2011 I entered a concrete cube competition organised by the Concrete Society of South Africa and my team won first prize.

In June 2012 I graduated with a Master's in Civil Engineering and was employed as a structural engineer at Element Consulting Engineers, a multi-disciplinary consultancy firm with its head office in Cape Town.

The role of a structural engineer in society

A structural engineer is the person who designs a civil structure (such as a building, a road, a power station or a mine shaft), specifies the construction materials, and analyses the loads or actions (for example, forces, temperature, pressure, water or wind) that will be applied to that structure. Finally a structural engineer inspects the structure to ensure that it is sound and safe for use. There are many opportunities for a structural engineer in design, rehabilitation and research, depending on the interests and expertise of the engineer.

My short-term and long-term goals

My short-term goal is to register as a professional engineer and complete an MBA, both within the next two to five years. My long-term goal is to be an independent consultant in structural engineering services and forensics. Most importantly, I want financial freedom in the long-term so that I can give back to the community by sponsoring talented young minds and inspiring wealth creation through knowledge and wisdom.

However, as a young engineer with an entrepreneurial spirit just starting to build a career, I am motivated by the following wise words from an anonymous author: 'If I had three days to chop down a tree, I would spend two days

sharpening my axe.' In other words, my current focus is learning and acquiring experience, *not* earning. Earning is compounded if the first two are done well.

My advice to young people in school

First and utmost my advice is that you listen to the inner you and find out what you really love to do. Passion helps you through adversity and is the only antidote for failure; even when things are really bad, you can still survive. Secondly, set yourself a goal and make sure that you take baby steps to achieve that goal. Find a mentor to help you address your challenges and share their insights on how to achieve your dream goal.

Bear in mind that in order to be a structural engineer you need to do well in Physical Science (Physics and Chemistry), Mathematics and English in high school and then apply to study Civil Engineering at a university or university of technology.

Roy Morrison

Attitude and persistence are keys to success

The man who thinks he can and the man who thinks he can't are both right. Which one are you?

(Henry Ford)

I like to think that I am one of those men who *can*. At the time of writing, I am experiencing one of the most challenging phases of my life as I start my own company, called Rise Africa Rise. My vision is to contribute to African prosperity by providing entrepreneurial solutions to socio-economic challenges.

According to the statistics, 9 out of 10 businesses fail within the first two years and every day I understand why. The challenges are daunting and the sacrifices required are great.

Whenever I hit a roadblock, and believe me there are many, I find myself asking whether it would not be easier to just throw in the towel. The temptations to do so are great because success as an entrepreneur is far from guaranteed, and the challenges seem to be never ending. Fear of failure becomes a frequent companion. However, I have come to realise that these are times when you have to dig deep within yourself to not only find the strength to carry on but also to remind yourself why you are doing what you are doing. In my case it is because I want to live my dreams and leave a legacy for future generations.

Charles R. Swindoll had the following to say about the importance of choosing the right attitude in any situation:

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, the education, the money, than circumstances, than failure, than

ATTITUDE AND
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TO SUCCESS



successes, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company . . . a church . . . a home. The remarkable thing is we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past . . . we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. And so it is with you . . . we are in charge of our Attitudes.

We may not always be able to control what goes on outside of us but the key lesson is that it is our choice how we are going to react to it. It is our choice whether we want to continue to have the belief necessary to make our dreams come true when we are faced with a temporary setback.

I have been fortunate in many ways in that I have been spared many of the challenges some of my peers have had to go through to get where they are today. Nonetheless, looking back on the journey I have taken, from growing up in Switzerland to coming to study at the University of Cape Town (UCT), I believe that what has got me to where I am today are two things: my attitude and persistence.

I studied in the Social Sciences (Anthropology and History) and later entrepreneurship in the Commerce Faculty. I loved what I studied so it came naturally to me and for that I am grateful. Even so, persistence is what got me through university, especially in my postgraduate studies as the workload can be quite overwhelming. The key though is to keep at it regardless and if you cannot take big steps then break them down into small steps as these too will eventually lead you to your goal.

Calvin Coolidge expressed this brilliantly when he said:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan, 'press on' has solved, and always will solve, the problems of the human race.

Persistence is what I am drawing on in establishing Rise Africa Rise. And I have experienced its rewards in getting me to One Young World 2011 in Zürich, Switzerland. One Young World is the premier leadership forum for emerging leaders from around the world, supported by many internationally well-known leaders. In order to participate you have to raise sponsorship of approximately R30 000, and for a student, this is quite a large sum of money, particularly when the economy is not flourishing. Knowing, however, that the key to achieving anything is attitude and persistence, I applied for sponsorship from numerous companies and organisations, here and abroad. I was rejected over 70 times. The more rejections I got, the more it looked like it I was not meant to go to One Young World, especially as time was also starting to run out. But nine months later I secured sponsorship and became a confirmed delegate. Persistence will take you places and it is a skill well worth developing.

If you study the lives of successful men and women – Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Mother Theresa or entrepreneurs such as Richard Branson and Herman Mashaba – you quickly realise that they, too, faced many setbacks on their way to success. What set them apart, however, was their attitude and persistence. Challenges and setbacks are part of life and everybody has to go through their trials. Whatever the circumstances, it is always your choice as to what attitude you are going to adopt in response. Are you going to believe in yourself despite the challenges? Do you have faith in your abilities to take

you where you want to go? Are you willing to make the necessary sacrifices? Are you going to focus on the positives in your life or dwell only on the negatives? When you fall, are you willing to get up again and give it another try? Are you willing to look for the next opportunity just around the corner? Do you look at how you can use your situation to your advantage? These are choices you have to make anew on a daily basis, and you and those around you will be affected by these choices.

It is often said that the greatest limitations we face are those we set ourselves and I believe there is truth in this. Sadly, more often than not, our way of perceiving the world and its many opportunities is more limiting than empowering, and this is why we often think small. It is important to realise that a whole new world, alive with unimagined possibilities, awaits if we dare to venture beyond the confines of our thinking and our comfort zones. This is why I believe education is so important. It allows us to broaden our horizons, deepens our understanding of our world and opens up new opportunities.

As Africa is transforming it is my hope that it will soon be a prosperous continent in which all its citizens will be able to live fulfilling lives and manifest the beauty of their dreams, free from economic, emotional and spiritual poverty. The challenges ahead are great but with the right education, perseverance and a positive attitude, it can be done. These are things within our control, irrespective of our circumstances, therefore it is important to realise that we have more power to shape our own destinies than we might imagine. Let's make use of this power.

Thandiwe Msibi

A letter to my friends

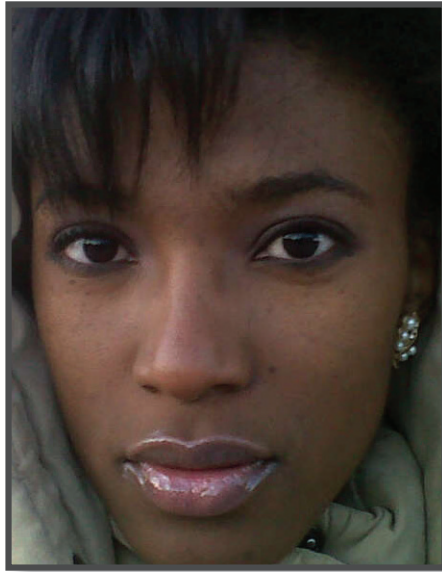
Dear Friends

I was born in 1987 at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto and was raised by my grandmother in Orange Farm in Gauteng. When I look back now, my childhood was happy, and even though it was tough financially I always had food and love. Ever since I can remember my dream has been to become a scientist. I enjoy being in the laboratory and the experiments and investigations excite me. I love doing research because of the adrenalin rush. The thrill of starting with an idea and ending up with a physical representation of it enthralls me.

I started school at Perseverance Primary School (it no longer exists). Growing up in Orange Farm was a challenge because as a girl child nothing much was expected of me, or girls in general. However, my family encouraged us to go to school so that one day we could be the adults we wanted to become and find the employment we desired. My grandmother always reminded us of the hardships she endured in the old regime. I told myself I would pass so that one day I could be the boss.

When I reached Grade Two I was moved to Crown Reef Primary School in Mayfair. My father then left us, which meant my mother had to raise us all on her own. My father's abrupt departure made it harder on us financially. I had to grow up quickly. I baby-sat my brothers when my Mom was at work and did chores after school but I made sure that I kept up with my homework. When I was nine I decided that one day I would go to university. It didn't matter to me that no one in my family had ever been to a university. I did not care about my family circumstances; I worked hard at school to be the best that I could be, even though times were tough. I didn't allow myself to become a victim.

I WORKED HARD
AT SCHOOL TO
BE THE BEST THAT
I COULD BE



To ease my worries I sought refuge in reading and writing. Books kept me sane. Through books I could travel to other worlds. I learned about children in other places who were going through similar circumstances and they gave me hope and kept me positive. Through books I learned that dreams come true. I was lucky to be attending a multiracial and multicultural school. I had access to the library and other resources that other kids in the township did not have. It made me sad and I told myself that one day when I grew up and had money I would do something about this.

I realised that the only way to have a better life for myself and give back to the community was to stay focused on my school books. Fortunately my mother supported my dreams. One day I would

wake up and say that I wanted to be a doctor when I grew up. And the following day I would say that I wanted to be an anthropologist or a psychologist. I studied at Malvern High School and went through school just like any other teenager with many social pressures from my peers, but I somehow managed to succeed because my teachers believed in me. Before high school I had never met a black individual who had studied science at university level and I wanted to see myself there too. My teachers encouraged me so much I really felt special. I can't emphasise how important it is to have someone to believe in you, especially when you are young. My teachers were angels sent from God for me.

I finally achieved my dream of entering into one of the best universities in the land. I enrolled for a Bachelor of Science at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 2006. Throughout my undergraduate years, however, I went through many challenges that made me doubt myself. I wondered if I was on the right path or not. My fear of failure and disappointment

was great. I was confused and started to believe I was not good enough. This fear affected my work. Even though I studied for tests, the fear got to me and often when I wrote an answer, I would rub it out because I did not trust myself. Third year was the hardest and my fear increased.

I came to realise that this fear had been the theme of my life since 2005. I prayed and asked God to speak to me and show me the light. I wanted to know what was blocking me from being the great me that I always wanted to become. Then it came to me, that all along, all these years, it was fear that was keeping me from reaching my full potential. 'You create what you fear' and this is what had happened to me – I feared I was not good enough and therefore I did not do well enough. This realisation made me get up and apply for my Honours despite my worries and troubles. It made me decide to press on towards the goal no matter what happened or who said what. That in order for me to reach my dreams I had to fight my fears. Part of this fight was telling myself that I was in fact good and brilliant enough and that God would have never let me come this far only to leave me hanging.

I also realised that sometimes failure or disappointment are designed to show us just how much we really want something. It all depends on our reactions to the situation in which we find ourselves.

Faith in my prayers was not in vain – my Honours application at the University of Cape Town was accepted. I completed my Honours in 2010, majoring in Physiology, and that year was by far the toughest one I had ever lived through.

I could not continue my studies the following year because I had outstanding university fees, which meant that I had to seek employment to pay these off before I could continue my studies. Looking for work is not easy. I was shocked to learn that even with a university qualification finding employment is not a walk in the park. In a job search you need to have faith and tenacity. You have to have direction and a clear picture of what it is that you want. My mistake was I had not defined for myself what it was I wanted to do, what I wanted from the job and what I could offer to the job. Once I had answered these questions, I went back to my CV and asked myself what was

wrong with it. I went for career counselling and did a mock interview which was extremely helpful because the counsellor went through my CV and pointed out my weaknesses. She also pointed out my shortcomings in terms of how I conducted myself in the interview.

The result was that I got a post as a research assistant at the University of Pretoria. The job taught me a lot about myself as a scientist, as well as a person. With time I learned to be more confident in myself and trust my abilities. I also learned that I was now what I had always aspired to be as a child – a scientist! I learned what it actually means to be a scientist beyond the school-work. It also drove me to think deeply about the role I want to play within my community, as well as my in country. What changes do I want to see? How will I use my education and all that I have learned to uplift those who are younger than me?

I have since left my job to pursue an MSc degree and I hope to obtain my PhD in the next few years. I want to be part of the group of people that increase the knowledge and improve the quality of medicine in South Africa through research. I also still want to give back to my community by getting young children interested in reading and books like I was as a child.

Mine is not a tale of great trials and tribulations but it is a simple summary of an ordinary girl in Gauteng trying to make a life for herself. I hope that when you read this letter, you are inspired to believe even harder in God and the talent that He gave you. Whatever it is, know that you are the best in His eyes; never let your fears cripple you; never allow yourself to become a victim of circumstance and always remember to respect your elders and peers. Remember that God sent everyday people to do His work.

Yours sincerely
Thandiwe Msibi

Patience Mthunzi

You were created to make a change – unleash your potential

I was born in Orlando West, Soweto, in 1976. I was brought up by my Mom (who was a single parent) with the greatest of help from my late grandmother. In fact, my grandmother was more like my Mom. I called her Mama and my real Mom usis Thoko. So when my grandmother passed on, I felt like I had lost my Mom and my world had come to an end.

Orlando West was a typical township. We had no educational toys or well-equipped sports grounds and I played with home-made dolls and cars made from wire. But my grandmother's home was filled with love and wisdom, so I was a very happy child. I was also very energetic and inquisitive and challenged everyone and everything. My grandmother taught my cousins and me many valuable lessons, which sustain us to this day. For example, she used to tell us that we should respect our elders and love ourselves, and that once lost, time can never be replaced.

I attended government schools in Soweto and completed Grade 12 at Reasoma Secondary School in 1994. Upon finishing high school, I enrolled for a degree in Psychology at the University of South Africa. However, in 1996 my attention was attracted by a BSc degree (Biological Sciences). I then did an Honours degree (1999) and a Master's (2002) degree, both in Biochemistry, at the University of Johannesburg (formerly the Rand Afrikaans University). I attended an Afrikaans university by choice. However, because the lectures and course materials were in Afrikaans, I had to put double the effort into my work, as I had to translate my notes into English before I could study. This meant that all my time was consumed by my studies.

I am a persistent person who refuses to believe in defeat. I know that if you put your mind to it nothing is impossible. Most importantly, I learned that if you desire extraordinary achievements, you have to deposit extraordinary

YOU WERE
CREATED TO
MAKE A CHANGE –
UNLEASH YOUR
POTENTIAL



effort! Basically, what you put in is what you get out. You cannot plant potatoes and reap apples!

Life was a serious financial struggle during my undergraduate years (especially the first six months). My Mom worked for Checkers and had to cover my tuition fees and monthly allowance. Fortunately, during the second semester of my first year I received a study loan from the Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (now called the National Student Financial Aid Scheme or NSFAS). At Honours level I started receiving a few bursaries and did vacation work.

From February 2003 to September 2004 I worked as a research assistant at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in their HIV-vaccine unit. I started full-time employment with

the National Laser Centre (NLC) in the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in the Biophotonics laboratories in October 2004. Biophotonics is a fairly new field of medical research using lasers to micro-manipulate biological materials in order to study their intricate processes.

From November 2005 to April 2006 I set up a fully functional cell culture facility at the NLC before commencing my PhD in 2006. In 2010 I completed my PhD in Physics (Biophotonics – Optical Tweezers Area) at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. Both the CSIR and the University of St Andrews covered my PhD fees.

I find my field of study exciting because it takes science projects to an extremely detailed and fascinating level – it takes science into the realm of science fiction. It is also challenging, so it keeps me on my toes. I enjoy this as I am not a complacent individual. I thrive on new discoveries.


What drives and inspires me?

Life drives me. The fact that I can and I am able, inspires me. As far as I'm concerned, not even the sky is the limit – to get to the moon you have to go through the sky! A few years from now I see myself in a fairly senior position. Time will reveal exactly where that is.

My level of curiosity is my inspiration. I'm restless until I know precisely how things around me work. The best thing is that, as a researcher, I actually get paid to find things out. How cool is this?

My advice to young people who are not sure where to start

You are what you think! Be careful not to be negative about yourself – love and respect yourself. Always remember you are unique and there's no one like you. You were created to make a change in life, therefore unleash your potential. Use your talent to help improve life (yours and other people's). Enjoy your youth and schoolwork and participate in sports. Where possible, avoid being a follower and get involved in leading others. Poverty is a curse. Let us work together to break the cycle and eradicate it.



I HAD ALL
THE POTENTIAL TO
BECOME ANYTHING
I WANTED

Azwihangwisi Netshikulwe

My educational journey: a story of hope

I have learned . . . our background and circumstances may have influenced who we are, but we are responsible for who we become.

(Cicero, Rome, 106-43 BC)

Looking back on my early years, I still remember that I wanted to become a medical doctor when I grew up and help people wherever possible. This was a very popular career choice among my classmates because in the rural areas we had little access to information on careers and knew only about doctors, nurses, teachers and policemen.

When I took first position in Grade 1, I was so inspired that I felt I had all the potential to become anything I wanted. I was amazed at how learning came to me so naturally, even at this early age. I mean I started reading when I was in Grade 1 because I wanted to stay on top. Although it was tough growing up in a rural area with no facilities, such as electricity, I was always very involved in my education.

However, I have to admit that my educational journey took a very long time. I am the second youngest of six children and the only one in my family to obtain a university degree. Although it was never my parents' intention not to support my education, it came down to a matter of practicality and availability of resources. My family was not well off. My parents never discouraged me from going to university but were honest enough to tell me they could not afford to pay my tuition fees.

When I passed Matric in 1999, I was not able to go to university for two reasons. Firstly I had applied to the University of Cape Town (UCT) to study Aircraft Mechanical Engineering as my first choice and Chemical Engineering as my second choice, but because I had not passed Mathematics and Science

well enough to meet their requirements my applications were not successful. Secondly, my family's financial situation wouldn't allow me to go there. In addition, information about bursaries and how to apply for them was not available in our schools. But there was some ignorance on my part as well. So I never applied for a bursary when I was doing Matric. Although we had career guidance once a year, it was never enough to show us the way forward academically. In any case, these occasions were an opportunity for us to meet friends from other schools and have fun!

When I realised that I could not go to the university of my dreams, my promising future started crumbling before my eyes. But I never lost hope of going to UCT one day. There were other universities, like the University of Venda, but unfortunately it was under-resourced and many students got excluded during second semester every year for financial reasons, so it made no sense to me to register there.

In July 2001, a friend who was studying at UCT visited me. He had been my competitor at secondary school and we had studied together for exams from an early age. He was concerned about me and asked about my future intentions. I jokingly told him that I was waiting for him to be rich and then I would steal his cars. He gave me a serious look and asked me if I would consider changing my dream of becoming an engineer and reapply for something else at UCT. He said it was possible for him to contact the admission office and change my application to Social Work. He kept his word and I eventually received a letter of acceptance from the Department of Social Development to study Social Work. I cannot explain how it felt but I was really overjoyed!

But my joy was short-lived. I realised that I had no money to travel from Venda in Limpopo Province to Cape Town. I went to my former senior school-teacher and asked her for a gardening job. She said she didn't have one and opted to give me pocket money instead. A week later I took a bus to Johannesburg, where a friend paid for my train ticket to Cape Town. I must admit it was a harsh journey with only R20 in my pocket on a train that took 26 hours to reach Cape Town! I ate only one R5 ice-cream so that I would have some



money for local transport when I got to Cape Town. When I arrived, my friend was in the train station waiting for me. Thus, with the help of friends and a teacher, a rural boy took his first trip to Cape Town.

In 2002 I walked onto the UCT campus as a student. I was scared, confused and lost but I also understood that my educational journey was starting in a place that would give me a chance to succeed. I found the language and cultural barriers both shocking and interesting. I remember seeing two students smooching publicly on campus and I was shocked but realised that I was now in a culturally diverse environment. My English was weak because I had attended a rural school so I felt intimidated in tutorial classes and hardly spoke, but eventually I came out of my shell. My first year was

not too bad but there were some difficulties academically. I remember failing one important course three times. However, this did not deter me from doing well in other courses. At the end of the year I failed two courses but passed the rest, which was enough to start second year.

Like many students I began my academic career getting marks in the 50s for almost all my courses. My journey seemed long and difficult, but there were professors and students who were always there to support me academically and I began to see that there were people who cared for students like me. These individuals have been the backbone of my educational success.


In 2003 I decided to change my curriculum from Social Work to Labour Organisational Psychology and Human Resource Management. I finally graduated in 2005. I was eager to do Honours in Sociology but it was not possible because my average mark was just below the departmental requirements. My supervisor advised me to do a Diploma in African Studies and to take more Sociology courses in order to meet the requirements. In 2006 I graduat-

ed for the second time at UCT with a postgraduate Diploma in African Studies. I then transferred back to Sociology and graduated with an Honours degree in Sociology in 2007. I continued my education at the same institution and received a Master's in Sociology in 2010. I am currently trying to pursue a PhD in Sociology.

When studying Sociology I experienced something new, something that helped to reinforce my academic goals. I have always had a passion for dealing with social issues, and this academic journey gave me a whole new meaning about society and the world. The main reasons why I developed my interest in Sociology is to serve my communities in South Africa given our different backgrounds. I want my community where I grew up to see that a local kid, who passed matric from Dengenya Senior School, attended University of Cape Town, and after completing his studies has returned to make a difference in his community. I want to be an example of persistence and drive.

In the interest of brevity, the bottom line to my educational journey story is for those who feel there is poverty and limit of some sort to achieve what one wants in life – there is not. Perseverance, dedication and the motivation to keep moving forward through education have provided opportunities for both my personal growth and a career that I want to pursue. Poverty was never a limiting factor! I feel that getting an education at UCT has given me the ability to inspire others to say 'If he can do it then I can do it TOO!'

In this educational journey that I took sometimes my feet get tired and sore, but I always run with dignity because what matters to me is not how perilous or painful the journey is, the destination is what matters. Never stop dreaming but always remember that your dreams can only come true when you are awake, working towards them.



LIFE HAS SO
MUCH TO OFFER
IF YOU DO
YOUR PART

Olivia Pale

I had a dream

I was raised by a single mother following her divorce from my father in 1992. This situation led to my mother having to decide whether to continue with her studies or to look for a job to take care of her two children. Considering the two mouths she had to feed, furthering her studies was not an option, and she eventually found a job as a domestic worker. The salaries of domestic workers are very low and job security was often a concern. There were times when my Mom lost her job and so we had to survive with the help of Grandma's grant.

The closest high school I could attend was one of the poorest, with no resources to empower or develop learners. It had a reputation for strikes, students bunking classes and being disrespectful to teachers, and it had one of the highest Matric failure rates in the province. Regardless of this, I grew up having a dream of pursuing my studies in Cape Town – I saw myself as a successful woman.

My friends and my community thought that it was impossible for me to achieve my dream as I came from a poor family and my mom did not have the resources to assist me. At times I would share my dream with my mother, who acted as though she also believed it. She later confessed that she had supported my dream so that I did not get discouraged, but she had not really believed that it would happen.

In 2000 I completed Matric and I surprised the community by achieving a Matric exemption. I was the only female student to get an exemption, together with seven males, out of 200 Matric students. We never had the privilege of career exhibitions or any guidance to help us decide what we want to do after school. So if I was asked what I want to be, I would say that I wanted to be a managing director. But how I was to get there was not clear!

After Matric I did not apply to any college, university or technikon. I believe the Bible when it says in Jeremiah 29:11: 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' It was then that I knew how this scripture applied to me.

It so happened that my cousin had also completed Matric the same year as me and had also not applied anywhere to further his studies. His parents decided that wherever we went to study we should go together as we were both in a similar situation. My primary goal was to study in Cape Town, but since I had to study with my cousin I opted for the Vaal Technikon.

On 16 January 2001, my aunt called to say that I should go with my cousin to look for a place at the Vaal Technikon. I took only two sets of clothes with me, thinking that as soon as I got a place I would come back and collect the rest. When I got to my aunt's home she said that it had been suggested that we apply to the Peninsula Technikon in Cape Town, as there were places available there. She said that her neighbour's son was studying there and that as he was leaving for Cape Town the following day, we should go with him. This came as a shock as I wasn't prepared for this when I left home. I told my aunt that my parents didn't know about the change of plan so my uncle immediately called my Dad and he agreed that I could go. My Mom was told only the following day as she did not have a cellphone at the time. We left for Cape Town by train the following day.

At Peninsula Technikon I heard in the corridors that there was a course called IT so I decided to apply for it. I did not get into IT but, fortunately, I ended up doing a bridging course. This was the best thing that ever happened to me as it gave me six months to see what other courses were available, how they worked and what I could do when I completed them. That's when I fell in love with Internal Auditing. I passed the bridging course with flying colours and was guaranteed a place to study Internal Auditing the following year. My Dad paid half the fees during the first year but was unable to pay them in full so my results were withheld at the end of the year.



My family then suggested that I drop out as there was no money and that I should opt for Nursing as it was cheaper. I told them I was not dropping out and that I was not coming back home. I would continue with my studies and graduate. I didn't know how I would do this but I knew it would happen. Through the technikon I found out that there is a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) that could assist me financially and I pressurised my Dad to find money to pay the outstanding fees for first year so that I could apply to the NSFAS for my second year of study.

I completed the National Diploma in Internal Auditing within the record time, without failing one subject, and then I registered for a Bachelor of Technology (BTech) part time as I was then working. I

also completed this without failing any subject. My Mom was responsible for providing me with a monthly allowance and when she was out of a job my grandmother gave me money. It was just enough to buy groceries for the month. My Mom once told me that at times she worked only two days a week and her salary was only enough for my monthly allowance so that I could eat. She told me that she would walk close to 10 km so that all the money could be deposited in my account – she did not even take R10 to catch a taxi to the bank! When I realised how much she had sacrificed, it made me shed tears, but it also put more pressure on me to push myself and work harder. Failing or repeating a level was not an option.

So now I'm in a position to say with certainty that it does not matter what your circumstances are, your dreams are still achievable. Life is not a fairy-tale – at least not for most people – but life has so much to offer if you do your part and start by having a dream. A dream does not become reality within a

split second; it needs to be worked on and polished. Realising a dream is not an easy thing to do but it's definitely not impossible to achieve.

I realised that God had the main plan even before I knew Him. Today I am a successful woman. My future is bright and I'm enjoying the benefits of working hard and my mother's sacrifices. All the pain, uncertainty, sleepless nights and the community's predictions that I would never make it because I was a domestic worker's child, were destructive obstacles or a way of the devil to paralyse my dreams. I always tell my younger sister that if I could make it to Cape Town under such circumstances, she too can study anywhere – all she needs is a dream.

So I achieved my dream. The question I have for you, the readers of my story, is this: Are you going to achieve yours?



**DARE TO
ACHIEVE BIG
DREAMS**

Tshegofatso Ramatlho

A letter of hope for you

Dear Friend

I believe the most single important thing, beyond discipline and creativity, is daring to dare. (Maya Angelou)

My name is Tshegofatso (Tshego) and I was born in Ga-Rankuwa, where I was raised not only by my mother and grandmother, but by the entire community. I am the second of three children and I am honoured to share my story with you.

Ga-Rankuwa is a township in the north of Pretoria. It is an extremely close and friendly community of people. On average, three generations of people live in a four-room house and the life journey of individuals in families is generally similar. If the grandparents were teachers, their children are likely to be teachers and their grandchildren are likely to follow in a similar career path. If the grandparents were unemployed, their children and grandchildren are likely to have a similar destiny. I grew up on my grandmother's stoep, playing all sorts of games that, looking back now, actually involved envisioning what I would want to be when I grew up. I was the youngest of my friends and I spent most afternoons playing alone as I didn't understand the 'language' the older girls had learned at school. I remember wanting to play 'school' with my friends but would not because I would always get zero for any of the tests that the 'teacher' set for us. I used to cower at the thought of being ridiculed for getting a zero. But I had one friend who taught me to write when it was just the two of us. She told me not to be afraid of playing with the big girls. From that tender age I learned to be daring – a life lesson I carry with me today.

My mother got a job in a different province and moved away and for about three years, I saw her briefly when she came to visit. I started pre-school in 1997 where I was severely bullied for being the thinnest and shortest person.

I became very emotional. I could never fit in and I became socially timid and insecure. But I was blessed because spending time with my best friend at home while she did her homework and copying what she wrote in my own scrap book made me a better learner. Being knowledgeable of anything enhances your confidence. I could speak and write better than any of my bullies because I got zero before any of them knew what it meant. As a result I was declared school ready when I was only five years old.

My mother got another job closer to home and moved back to stay with us. She decided that even though she didn't earn much, she would give my brother and me the opportunity of an excellent education. We went to a private school, which was expensive. My mother struggled to pay the fees. She always told us to be patient because God would make a way. From this experience, I learned at a young age to be patient and to dare to achieve big dreams, dream bigger than any circumstance.

My brother and I excelled in that school and were top of our classes. He was technologically savvy and creative and adored technology and science while I was an athlete and excelled in extracurricular activities. I took part in a traditional African dance team through which I was afforded the opportunity to travel all around Pretoria performing. I am so grateful that my mother remained relentless in empowering us with an excellent education even though the fees were choking her financially. My brother went on to high school, having finished top of his class. He received a scholarship from a car company that paid off all his fees for high school. I stayed on to become a leader and finished top in Grade 7. I went on to attend High School at Loreto Convent School. The years I spent in High School really set a benchmark for who I was to become later in my life. Looking back now, my experiences with faith, friendship and family helped me define the kind of person I wanted to be.

After going through profound changes in my family and other personal aspects in my life, my relationship with the Lord just grew deeper. I learned about forgiveness. I learned that everything that had happened in my life thus far was part of a perfectly orchestrated plan that would unfold as the days went

by. I understood that I had no control or say over where I came from or which family I was born into. However, I also understood that I had a say on where I want to go and what my life is going to be. I was filled with hope – hope for my life and family moving forward. This breakthrough didn't take place in a day or even a year. It took years of getting to know God and getting to know myself in Him, but I was blessed because my guidance teacher who became my mentor in high school would constantly remind me of who I was and that I can do and be anything provided I am prepared to labour for it. This experience taught me that you can never get through life alone. You need someone who will continuously hearten you, someone who will hold you accountable for your dreams and aspirations, and somebody who believes in you just as you do in yourself. I admit that there have been intense life challenges that almost overcame me. I have learned that the people I surrounded myself with were the ones who, at my lowest moments, reaffirmed me. I am forever thankful for those years in high school. I learned about being a servant to others and that to be a great leader I first had to serve my family by becoming a better sister and daughter. I learned that everything is not always about me. I learned that education is probably the most powerful defence against poverty and I couldn't afford to ruin my opportunity at it. Faith in anything, my friend, is costly and painful. I had faith that I would get five distinctions in Matric when my average was only 63 per cent in Grade 11 and I was performing poorly in Mathematics. I had faith that I was going to the University of Cape Town even when I had no clue how my fees were going to be paid. Having faith is having a passion for hard work. It is enduring sleepless nights. It means getting rid of negative influences that do not add value to your life and cultivating those that build you up. It means growing up and making a commitment to be different from your peers. Dare to be different.

Being intolerant of my circumstances created a better future for me. It shaped my thinking. I worked hard in Matric, I applied for bursaries everywhere – I had faith that someone out there would read my story and have faith with me. I remember putting the number 5 up everywhere in my bedroom and on the

fridge. No one in my family knew what it was about – but I did. I told my guidance teacher that I believed I would get five distinctions and she joined me in prayer, always encouraging me and reminding me to persevere. It was a very stressful year with many challenges but I had decided to be faithful to my studies and I was certain it would pay off. On 15 December 2010 I received a letter from First National Bank telling me that they would be honoured to sponsor me to study at UCT. On 6 January 2011, I saw my name in the newspaper with five subject codes next to it. On 1 February 2011, I moved to the most beautiful city in this country and again I was reminded nothing is impossible.

I am now a third year student at UCT studying Business Science majoring in Economics and Law.

I am humbled by the success I have achieved thus far. In my second year, I was awarded for achieving the top marks in Business Accounting in the Commerce Education Development Unit. I also tutor first year Maths and it has been an incredible joy. I have had the opportunity to serve in the Executive Committee of SHAWCO under the Evaluations committee. I currently serve as a small connect group leader in my res and it has been amazing sharing life with the future leaders of this continent. I have always dreamt of travelling overseas and in June 2013, I travelled to China to learn about Chinese culture and language and had the opportunity of touring all of the major cities in China. The trip was partially sponsored and I used my savings to pay for my flight ticket. There are no limits to who you can be. Being in third year makes it easier to say where I want to be in the next five years. I will graduate in the next two years having an Honours Degree in a financial discipline. Thereafter, I plan on obtaining an LLB degree and hopefully qualify as a Corporate Attorney. I am passionate about people, justice and business. I want to help



model the shape that business and law will take 30 years from now, encompassing authentic leadership and policy that benefits society currently and for generations to come. You too can become somebody...

‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’

Jeremiah 29:11

Have Faith
Tshego R

Yajna Ramdass

Design your own destiny

I am a 24-year-old woman who recently graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Pretoria. In addition to my degree, I've been deeply involved in social outreach and youth empowerment projects for many years.

At my high school, Sastri College in Durban, I was the Deputy Head Girl. Growing up with the limitations of a public school, I learned to appreciate and seize each and every opportunity that came my way. Despite its limited facilities, my humble school managed to maintain a high level of education due to the dedication and perseverance of the members of staff.

In the midst of my schooling career, I was fortunate enough to be selected as a Director of Community Services at Durban Youth Council. This is a prestigious organisation which selects a handful of young individuals from each high school in and around Durban. The Council is a highly disciplined forum in which the youth express their views on global affairs, work together at forming resolutions, and are nurtured to develop their abilities as strong leaders. The Council promotes the integration and tolerance of diverse cultures, but its fundamental aim is to serve the community through education, awareness and the implementation of sustainable projects. This opportunity gave me the foundation and skills to create and manage successful projects. With the support of my peers and the constant guidance of the steering committee, I was able to flourish as a young leader in this environment.

From a very young age my curiosity underpinned my desire to study medicine. I find the complexity of the human body and its healing processes fascinating, so choosing a career which embraces my humanity and problem-solving abilities made medicine a natural choice. This vocation is not simple to attain, however, and it required a lot of hard work, sacrifice and dedication.

DESIGN
YOUR DESTINY
AND MAKE A
SUCCESS OF
LIFE

On matriculation, I achieved academic excellence and was able to enrol at medical school at the University of Pretoria.

Hailing from Westville, Durban, it was not easy to leave my close-knit family and friends to pursue my dream of becoming a doctor. I faced many challenges while becoming independent and adapting to a completely new city. But I knew the short-term sacrifices would certainly outweigh the long-term benefits and I was blessed with a solid support system which got me through many trials and tribulations.

During my early university years, I often felt counterproductive. Whereas my high school career had been filled with community-based events and initiatives, the university did not have an official interactive forum focused on community outreach. With a stroke of luck, I met a few medical students who shared similar interests. They had been collecting clothes from the university residences and distributing them among the less fortunate in the area. With my expertise and guidance, we were able to analyse a list of underprivileged homes in our surrounding area. We identified one particular home in dire need of assistance, and took up a short project to provide them with basic necessities, such as food, clothing and healthcare advice. When we arrived at the home – Tshwaraganang Community Outreach in Hammanskraal – I was rendered breathless at the sight. There were 30 children living in three dilapidated RDP houses and a tent, with no proper bathroom facilities, hot water or electricity. Each child had come from a horrific background, from being sold on the street, to being raped, abandoned and abused. Despite their pathetic living conditions, they welcomed us with an abundance of love and affection. Many of the children told us what a dramatic change it was to be living there, and for them, this desolate place was a safe haven.

Later I was given an official tour of the shoddy premises. The primary founder and caregiver of the home, Katherine Sepato, is one the most extraordinary people I have ever met. Disheartened by seeing helpless children suffering within her community, she created this home to make a difference. Her day starts with a 4 am trip to a nearby forest, to chop firewood to prepare a hot meal

for breakfast and heat water to bath the children before they leave for school. Struggling to provide enough food, she often asks the children to request left-over food from local vendors.

I was overwhelmed to witness such selfless traits, which motivated me to play a more active role. Soon after that, I co-founded an official student outreach society called Project Jerseys and Jeans. Over the past few years we have collected and distributed clothes, food, medical supplies, appliances, paint, gas, toiletries, books and stationery to many shelters. We have also provided tutoring programmes and healthcare seminars, and have built bathrooms with hot water, kitchens, and bedrooms, all with electricity. In addition, psychological and social support have been provided in the forms of education, support and counselling by the students of the University of Pretoria.

Having initiated and developed the Project JJ organisation over the years such that it is self-sustainable has been a major highlight in my life. Project JJ has grown over the years, with hundreds of students and staff members being involved, and has helped hundreds of people in many shelters during this time. This student society focuses on long-term and short-term projects, both nationally and internationally. The primary aim is to uplift our community via projects determined by the physical, psychological and social needs of each home.

I'm often in awe at the differences I've helped to make and I find such pleasure in observing how each home has progressed with my assistance. In 2011 I was selected to be one of the Brightest Young Minds of South Africa. This organisation selects 100 youths who have excelled in their careers and have shown exceptional skills in leadership and social initiatives. I was



absolutely captivated at the conference held in Johannesburg, where there were so many optimistic individuals focused on positive change in South Africa.

Soon afterwards, I was privileged to be one of the South African representatives at the One Young World Summit in Zürich, Switzerland. This summit brings together individuals from 170 different countries, who are focused on improving our world, and gives them an opportunity to interact with many of our most influential world leaders, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sir Bob Geldof, the Prince of Norway, and Professors Himanen and Muhammed Yunus. There were many inspiring speeches by these leaders and my fellow peers. Representing South Africa at this world-renowned event has been an honour and a privilege.

The One Young World Summit made me realise that every country has its share of problems, but there are many people who are trying to influence change. It is very difficult for one person to change the world, but united we can make a significant difference. I would like to inspire others so that together we can progress as a nation.

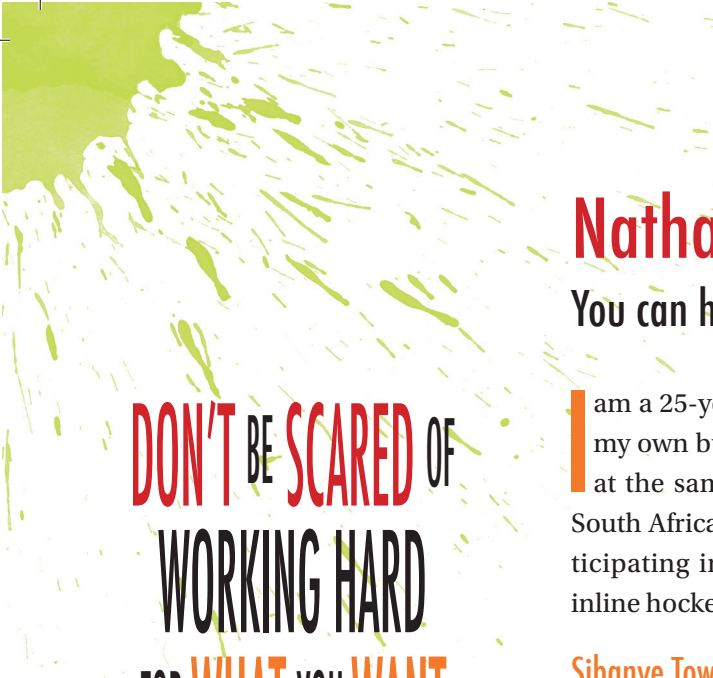
It was a difficult task to juggle studying, responsibilities at the hospital, Project JJ and my social outreach initiatives. But with a great deal of drive and determination and support from family and friends I've managed to balance my responsibilities and endeavours. I am elated to have completed my degree and have returned to practise in my hometown.

At work I am faced with adversity, including sleep deprivation and exhaustion, but I'm there to help the less fortunate. I have worked in the depths of poverty where medical care and facilities are woefully inadequate. Watching sick, motionless children come in for treatment and leave smiling a few days later is an indescribable feeling. I have witnessed the fathomless tragedy of diseases, countless hours of emergencies and life-saving efforts, sadness at the loss of life, and ecstasy at recovery and the birth of new life.

I've come to the realisation that every day you have the potential to make a difference in someone's life. Sometimes it's a small difference, like smiling or

holding someone's hand. At other times it's far more substantial, but both play a significant role in enriching our society.

At the end of the day, you are only as helpless as you want to be. You do not have to be rich or established to improve your surroundings and impact others positively. I believe everything you have ever dreamed of can be accomplished if you are only willing to work hard. It is up to you to design your destiny and make a success of life.



DON'T BE SCARED OF
WORKING HARD
FOR WHAT YOU WANT

Nathan Roberts

You can help save South Africa

I am a 25-year-old social entrepreneur. This means that I start and manage my own businesses for a living. These businesses seek to make a profit but at the same time aim to solve one or more of the problems we have in South Africa. When I am not working on my next business idea, I enjoy participating in unusual sports: downhill skateboarding, breakdancing and inline hockey.

Sibanye Township Restaurant: a white boy running a township restaurant!

I was raised not far from the township of Katlehong, Johannesburg, in the dark days of apartheid. My parents introduced me to cultural diversity from a young age as they helped build a multiracial church in one of Germiston's poor white suburbs. My best friend was William, a young black boy. As a child I grew up with no concept of colour but this changed as I heard, through the young township 'comrades' turned congregants, about the tragedy and horror of the taxi wars and the political conflict that was so destructive leading up to 1994.

I started my first business at the age of 10 and called it Wish-wash Car Wash. We even had business cards and saw this as pretty cutting edge! Being entrepreneurial from young has taught me the 'street smarts' that textbooks could never have done. A few years later and still at school, but now in Hout Bay, Cape Town, I was selling pancakes and apple crumble to neighbours on the street; letting holiday accommodation to tourists; formalising a cellphone repair business; then employing a number of my friends from the local township to distribute an advertising magazine to the 5 000 households in Hout Bay. In 2005 I found myself digging a baptism pool for a local church. Working with me was a young Xhosa boy, Randy McKnight, who was just 16 at the

time. Randy had a ready smile that was disarming to those he met. As we took turns shovelling away the dirt, we talked about everything, from our love for breakdancing to his desire to become a chef. Randy had grown up in very different circumstances from me. After the loss of his sister, his father left home and didn't return. Randy was left with his Mom and two younger sisters to fend for themselves. His childhood was one of abuse, loss and extreme financial struggle, and he was kicked out of school for not being able to afford the uniform.

However, Randy was no victim. He dreamed of meeting Jamie Oliver and learning to cook so that he might eventually have his own restaurant. To achieve this he cleaned restaurants and learned to bake in the local bakery from 4 am every day. Unfortunately, he was fired because he didn't have enough education to keep up.

Two years later, with the help of additional cooking and literacy lessons from my Mom, donations from two generous people, the help of the Hout Bay community and a great deal of mentoring from business people, Randy and I opened our own small restaurant, Sibanye Township Restaurant. We were only 20 and 21 respectively and it was a very exciting experience.

An incredible couple, Terra and Nosamkelo Ntonjane, believed in what we were doing and allowed us to use their premises free of rental. They so deeply shared our dream of bringing people of different cultures and backgrounds together, that they allowed us to convert their lounge into a kitchen and they moved into one room for a time. They had tried to establish a restaurant themselves but it had closed down a few months before we arrived.

So Sibanye Restaurant was born and, at last, I was again able to experience a place that saw no colour. Sibanye (Xhosa for 'together we are one') is a place where I am not 'white' but just someone who loves good food, where my father's and my grandfather's quest for unity has not been wasted and where commonality is more comforting than difference.

My grandfather's recent passing reminded me of two quotes from another wise man, Tata Madiba:

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.

What is exciting about being a social entrepreneur?

When I was a young boy I wanted to be many things: a chef, an actor, a professional breakdancer and/or a commercial fisherman. And now, as a social entrepreneur I can do all these things: I get to cook, shoot my own promotional advertisements, speak in front of large crowds and teach colleagues how to fish (metaphorically speaking).

I set my own work hours, I'm my own boss, one day writing the rules and the next day breaking them. As a self-employed person, the 'up-side' is massive – if you get it right! I recently took six weeks off to go to the United States to learn the benefits and pitfalls of the way they do business. Each day I am driven by my passion to change the way things are done.

In 2011, I had the privilege of being selected as one of South Africa's 100 Brightest Young Minds and subsequently represented South Africa at One Young World in Zürich, Switzerland. Most recently I have become a fellow of Power of Youth, a group of about 60 young entrepreneurs from more than 16 countries who are working together to try to solve some of the world's greatest problems, with business as their primary weapon.

My 'learning disability' will never hold me back

Growing up I really struggled to read and write. I remember a Grade 1 teacher called me a 'stupid idiot'. I was diagnosed as having attention deficit disorder (ADD) and I hated school. Fortunately, in order to start your own business, you don't have to have any formal education. Having said that, however, someone I look up to greatly once said to me:

Nathan, if you do what you want to and drop out of school now, you might change a few people's lives in the system but if you put in the time and effort to learn 'how the system works,' one day you will change the system itself and that will impact millions of people's lives.

After hearing this advice I chose not to drop out of school but went on to study what I loved and felt was easy to learn – business.

Eight years later, I look back on that advice as some of the best I ever received. Today I stand here with a drawer full of pieces of paper that say I have a very serious 'learning disability'. But in the drawer next to it I have a Bachelor of Commerce degree in General Management, a postgraduate diploma in Entrepreneurship from UCT and a diploma in Entrepreneurial Leadership from a college in the US.

With these degrees I am far more equipped to take on the business world than I would have been with just my 'street smarts'. You can choose whether to let people's labelling of you limit you or not. I prefer to take advice from people who encourage me and I am driven to prove the negative people wrong.

If you were to ask me, 'How do I get to where you are?' what would I say?

I would say that you are asking the wrong question; that you should be exploring what you want to do to change the world and then ask yourself how you can get there. We do not need more followers! However, if I were mentoring you as a young entrepreneur I would give you six tips:

Don't be scared of working hard for what you want. There is merit in working smartly, but there are few things that build sustainable success and character like a hard day's work.



Be a 'rice farmer' – sow and care for your 'fields' with a long-term perspective. Put in the hard work to create the right environment for success within yourself, so that when opportunity knocks, you have the capacity to grab it.

Cherish your friends and family above all else – you don't know when they will be gone. I never had the opportunity to say goodbye to my business partner and friend, Randy, before he died last year because I was too busy trying to build a better future for others. Don't forget those who matter most.

Be friends with failure. Know that failure is seldom a defined moment. When you choose to give up, you have failed. We, at the restaurant, failed many times but Sibanye is by no means a failure. Failing is often an important part of the road to success. Learn to sell and to save; both will prove invaluable tools to help you get back up when you fall.

Become focused on others. I believe *ubuntu* is the only way for South Africans to live. If you are not helping people to realise their goals, you are going to struggle to reach your own.

Let's start a movement today that could impact the whole of South Africa

Step 1

Share a meal with someone you wouldn't normally eat with – perhaps someone of a different race or nationality, different social class or religion. This one action of inviting someone to share a meal will break down something in both of you. Trust me, it's powerful!

Step 2

I have created a Facebook group, Pay One Meal Forward. Please join our group. Change doesn't happen overnight, but as you engage more you will start seeing things differently and you'll notice your world opening up. I look forward to hearing how your actions bring about change in your community.

Step 3

Ask the person you have shared this meal with to 'pay it forward'. If they do

the same and share a meal with someone from a different background, we can start undoing some of the damage caused by our nation's messed-up history.

We as the youth can bring South Africans back together and create a better future for our children than the one the previous generation left for us. Let's start this journey together, today!

Welcome to the Sibanye family.

WELCOME TO THE SIBANYE FAMILY



**EACH OF US
HAS THE POWER
TO CHANGE THE
WORLD**

Olihile M. Sebolai

Each of us has the power to change the world

I believe we are not born by mistake or a mere coincidence. What are the chances of a single male cell, out of the multitudes, fusing with a female cell to create life? There must be greater forces at work here. This encouraging thought suggests that there must be a higher calling in our lives. Despite one's background, each life is of immense value and each of us has the power to change the world for the better. My story is of how my and my parents' dreams of what I could become placed me on a path of commitment to achieving anything and excelling.

My earliest memory of a vocation was that of being a doctor. Something about being able to provide care appealed to my better nature quite early in my life. However, my mother tells a story of me wanting to become a pastor. And even though I am neither today, in some way what I do now combines something of the two.

I was born in 1979 into a middle-class family in Thaba 'Nchu, a small town in the Free State, about an hour's drive from Bloemfontein. My father was a teacher and my mother was a home executive. Most of the jobs in Thaba 'Nchu revolved around the public service, as well as the manufacturing and agricultural industries. Typical of any small town in South Africa, the town lacked recreational facilities and the youth sought stimulation in the wrong things. The chances of going astray in such a place were therefore quite high. However, I believe my success in life began at home. My parents, Molebatsi and Lenphentseng Sebolai, taught us the importance of education, being solid and pursuing an honest living. My parents' trust in God's goodness gave them hope in being able to successfully raise us. They worked hard to ensure that our upbringing was as normal as possible. I am grateful and blessed to have had this background.

I began my academic career at the University of the Free State (UFS) in 1997, majoring in Microbiology and Biochemistry. I travelled every day by bus to a different world that was much more complex than home. My first few months at varsity were quite challenging as I acclimatised to this new environment. I am glad to have made friends with Selemela, Daddy, Lebogang and Tefo, who became my anchor. We motivated one another and reminded ourselves of the dreams and aspirations that had brought us to this point. And together we persevered because we understood that nothing is ever achieved without application and determination.

I left varsity after my Honours degree to find employment in order to assist my family but also to establish myself as an independent person outside of the family unit. I was appointed as a medical technologist by the National Health Laboratory Services (NHLS). My time there gave practical meaning to my tertiary education and allowed me the opportunity to appropriate my experiences and better understand the world of microbes, or 'bugs' as they are commonly known. More importantly, this experience bent the arc of my life's path towards a career in the medical field.

In 2003 I left the NHLS to further my studies and registered for a Master's degree and later a doctorate. My doctoral work focused on the medically important yeast pathogen *Cryptococcus neoformans*, which causes AIDS-defining illnesses. I completed my PhD in 2008, for which I received a meritorious scholarship from the university, which bonded me for service. When I failed to secure an academic appointment, I was offered an administrative position in the university environment. At that time I could not look into the future and connect the dots. I believed the appointment derailed my dream of an academic career. Nonetheless, at some elemental level, something told me this was meant to be. And with hindsight, I believe this period away from research allowed me to refocus and re-energise. After serving my time at the university I was appointed as a lecturer and researcher. In 2010 I joined the Department of Microbial, Biochemical and Food Biotechnology at UFS and a year later I established a research group within the department.



My current work is informed by questions that arose from my doctoral work and is supported by a research grant from the National Research Foundation of South Africa. I have re-established collegial relations with a number of fellow *Cryptococcus neoformans* scholars from around the world. I am also a member of the Vice Chancellor's Prestige Scholars' Programme, which is a programme that aims to develop the next generation professoriate.

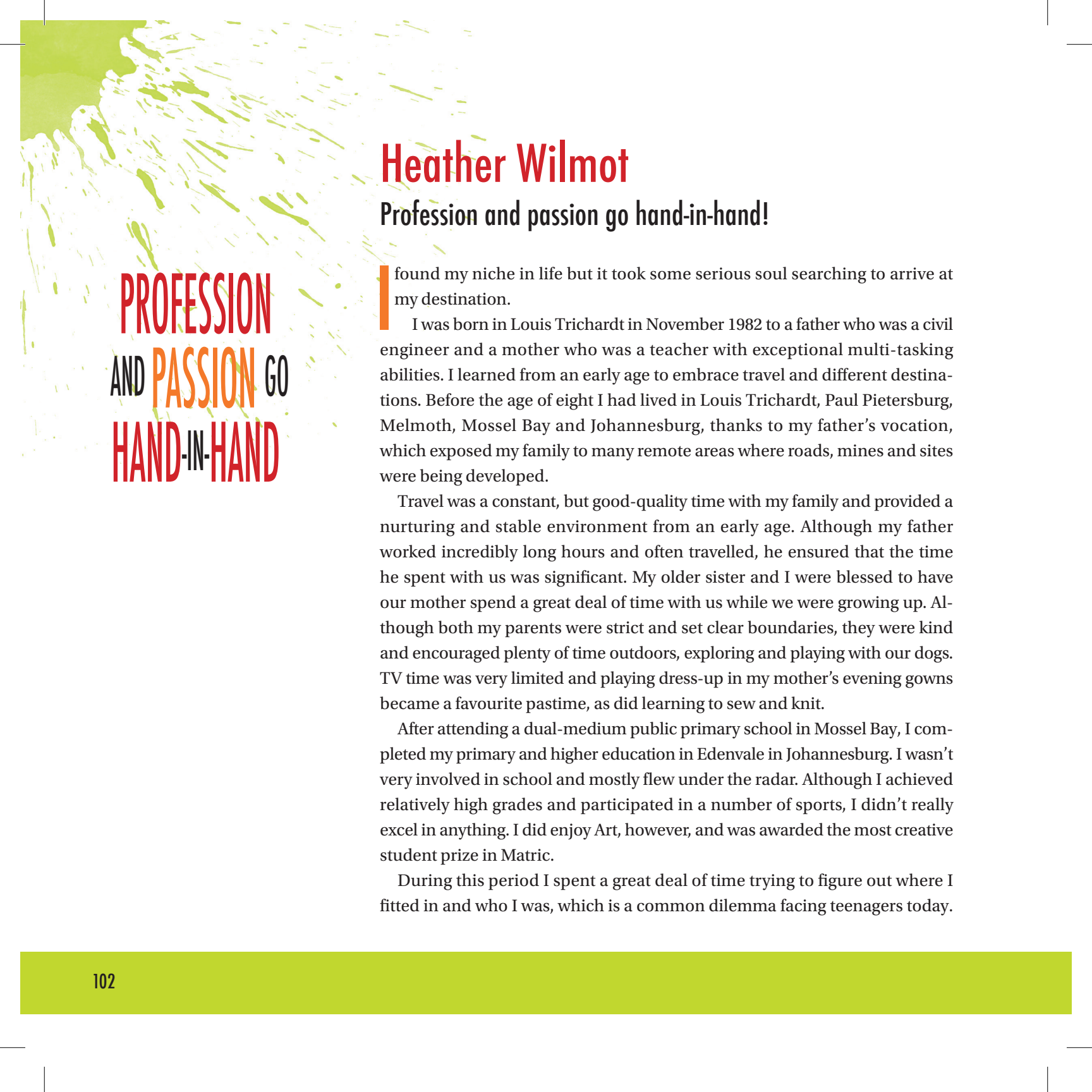
Over the course of my short career I have established a recognisable presence. I have been invited to review research manuscripts, grant applications on behalf of the National Research Foundation of South Africa and research protocols and dissertations. I have received meritorious academic awards

and prizes from the University of the Free State, the Medical Research Council of South Africa and the National Research Foundation, an A.W. Mellon Foundation scholarship, the Andries Brink-Sasol Award, a Chris Small prize, a J.P. van der Walt prize, a S2A3 bronze medal and the Free State Premier's Excellence Award. My work has also been highlighted in media such as Reuters TV, Voice of America, SABC radio and TV, City Press, Leadership in HIV/AIDS, among others. I have been recognised as a young achiever by The CEO Magazine and listed in the Mail & Guardian's Top 200 Young South Africans. I also received a special acknowledgement letter from the Minister of Science and Technology, Ms N. Pandor.

I am generally a positive person and what excites me about my work is the potential it has to reveal insights and strategies to combat infectious diseases. I believe the macro socio-economic benefits of my work for South Africa and the world are self-evident, but I take special pride in the contribution it could make to the wellbeing of people infected by this pathogen.

Perhaps the biggest challenge I have is maintaining a balance between my work commitments and family responsibilities. I have at times asked a lot of my family. I consciously attempt to be accessible and present in every moment I am at home. I think scholarship is, in many respects, a selfish pursuit. Therefore, I am humbled daily by the selflessness and support I nevertheless receive from my family.

My message to the youth is to keep dreaming. A dream knows no limitations and, with application, we can eventually become what we dream.



PROFESSION AND PASSION GO HAND-IN-HAND

Heather Wilmot

Profession and passion go hand-in-hand!

I found my niche in life but it took some serious soul searching to arrive at my destination.

I was born in Louis Trichardt in November 1982 to a father who was a civil engineer and a mother who was a teacher with exceptional multi-tasking abilities. I learned from an early age to embrace travel and different destinations. Before the age of eight I had lived in Louis Trichardt, Paul Pietersburg, Melmoth, Mossel Bay and Johannesburg, thanks to my father's vocation, which exposed my family to many remote areas where roads, mines and sites were being developed.

Travel was a constant, but good-quality time with my family and provided a nurturing and stable environment from an early age. Although my father worked incredibly long hours and often travelled, he ensured that the time he spent with us was significant. My older sister and I were blessed to have our mother spend a great deal of time with us while we were growing up. Although both my parents were strict and set clear boundaries, they were kind and encouraged plenty of time outdoors, exploring and playing with our dogs. TV time was very limited and playing dress-up in my mother's evening gowns became a favourite pastime, as did learning to sew and knit.

After attending a dual-medium public primary school in Mossel Bay, I completed my primary and higher education in Edenvale in Johannesburg. I wasn't very involved in school and mostly flew under the radar. Although I achieved relatively high grades and participated in a number of sports, I didn't really excel in anything. I did enjoy Art, however, and was awarded the most creative student prize in Matric.

During this period I spent a great deal of time trying to figure out where I fitted in and who I was, which is a common dilemma facing teenagers today.

It was only during my time at university that I learned to accept myself for who I am. Throughout my high school career I tried to mimic other people and spent a lot of energy copying their interests and strengths, as opposed to developing my own. It was only at university that I found myself finally doing something that I enjoyed and accepted that I was good at it.

I found it extremely difficult to identify a field that attracted me or identify a career that I wanted to pursue. During Grade 11, my parents took me to a vocational psychologist. At the time, I thought I wanted to study architecture but thanks to good career guidance I realised I had a poor perception of depth, which would not have stood me in good stead. Today I am very grateful to the vocational psychologist who pointed me in the direction of law and steered me away from a field that interested me but for which I did not have the necessary aptitude.

I attended the University of the Witwatersrand where I studied a Bachelor of Law (LLB). Here I fully grew into my own and thoroughly enjoyed my studies. Realising I had something that others didn't and which created an avenue for financial independence was incredibly rewarding. However, I do regret not studying an undergraduate degree prior to the LLB, which I believe would have provided me with a broader base.

I fell into practising aviation law by chance. While completing my articles at Norton Rose South Africa, I spent six months with an attorney who specialised in aviation insurance. The field of aviation is very technical and demanding, and the more I researched, the more I discovered that law provides the perfect vessel for the very analytical way in which I think, while also catering for my creative side in the need to think out of the box and develop innovative solutions for my clients.

I have focused exclusively on aviation law for almost six years now and still learn something new every day. It is a field of law that is innovative, always adapting to the ever-changing aviation market. A good example of this is the exclusive forms of security that have been created to cater for the mobile nature of aircraft. Aviation law has a solid international grounding but can cater



for vastly different local laws. It is incredibly exciting to be involved in the development of aviation law in Africa. It is a unique market with unique challenges and while the legal systems in place in Europe and Asia are informative, the challenging part is moulding those systems to suit our dynamic continent.

On a philosophical level, I firmly believe that a well-designed air-transport network will widen markets, offer a more diversified export base, improve production efficiency, and open up new tourism destinations, which will encourage greater foreign investment into Africa with an opportunity to set in motion a cycle of economic growth. By being aware of the challenges facing the aviation industry and offering appropriate solutions to my

clients, I can contribute to the industry as a whole.

I am extremely proud of the fact that I have contributed largely to Norton Rose South Africa having grown its aviation expertise to a full service offering in a relatively short time.

When I am asked what drives me and where I see myself in a few years from now, I can say confidently that I am constantly fulfilled and challenged on a daily basis, which is not something many people can say. I earn a living doing something I excel at and am passionate about. I do not consider what I do as a job but rather a profession that is very much a part of who I am.

My approach is not only to assist when someone seeks my advice but to assume an active role in educating those in the industry, communicating with various industry bodies and keeping an eye on trends and developments in the global aviation industry. The enormous benefit posed by aviation is not going to realise itself – it requires the full commitment of the industry as a whole.

Growing up, I didn't have a role model as such but was influenced by hard workers such as my father and multi-taskers such as my mother. Professionally, I am fortunate to have had incredible mentors such as Maria Philippides and Pierre Naudé, both directors at my firm. Maria's ability to run and develop a successful practice while being actively involved in the lives of her three boys has created a poised platform for my professional world. Pierre emphasised the importance of balancing self and family with one's profession, which is quite a feat but vitally important.

I have been incredibly inspired by what I have been able to achieve in the short eight years post-university. My advice to young people starting out in the world and feeling overwhelmed by the vast array of career choices out there is to identify your strengths and interests and be open to others helping you to do so. Don't blindly follow others or try to be something or someone you are not. Keep your values in check and ensure that you align these values with what you do on a daily basis. Don't shy away from differentiating yourself and following a different path and be conscious of the need to convert your strengths into a living.

This advice has stood me in good stead and has allowed me to spread my wings and make my mark as a woman in a very challenging male-dominated industry. I was selected as a leading aviation lawyer by *The International Who's Who of Aviation Lawyers 2012*.



DIKAKAPA FOUNDER MEMBERS

(from left to right) Khethelo Xulu, Agano Kiravu, Andile Nofemela, HlUMANI Ndlovu,
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