

'My Upbringing Is What Made Me Who I Am Today'!



Cebisile Ngobese

“My mother is my role model”, said Affectionate Thandeka Mtakwende.

Now a qualified social worker who graduated with a Bachelor in Social Work, she said life was very difficult when she was growing up. “I grew up in absolute poverty. I barely had school uniform and sometimes had to walk to school barefoot as my mother worked as a domestic worker and had to provide for my other three cousins with whom I grew up in an extended family setting in my grandparents household”, said Mtakwende.

During her years in school, she attended a local government supported school called Weseli Primary School. Went on to attend grade four at Inkazimulo Primary School and did her grade five to grade 7 at Botha’s Hill Senior Primary School. She then studied grade 8 at Siyajabula High School, but because she was a clever and intelligent student who had a lot of potential, she said that the daughter of her mothers ' former employer requested that her parents pay for her school fees so that she can attend school at Hillcrest High School and there she re-did grade 8 and studied up until she matriculated.

“During my high school years, I wore second hand school uniform as my mom couldn’t afford to buy me brand new school uniform. My shoes had holes on the soles and I had to put cardboard and plastic which assisted, but when it rained, rain water could get in and get through to my feet.

For lunch, I would carry peanut butter sandwiches for the whole week if not polony, but polony was a luxury”, she said.

“As I was schooling at Hillcrest High School, my mothers’ employer ran out of funds to proceed paying for my studies. Fortunately enough, the Hillcrest Advice Bureau and Bursary Fund Organisation was funding high school students at that time. They paid for my school fees from grade 11 to grade 12. They then continued to pay for my tertiary fees until I graduated in October 2016. I then got to work for the bureau as an interpreter on volunteering basis. That is where I acquired some of my skills and values in working with people and report writing skills. I then enrolled at UNISA through the assistance of the late co-founder of the bureau Mrs Mary Grice. The experience I got at HAB helped me a lot throughout my studies as I was exposed to similar social work environment” she continued.

Regardless of having to go through so much hardship, she managed to study throughout lower levels of schooling, continued to study throughout tertiary level and graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work at the University of South Africa (UNISA). And said that what motivated her the most to yearn for a successful future was her upbringing.

She said, “My motivation was my upbringing. I realised that in life there are some people who need emotional support to enable them to pursue a career. I was motivated by the fact that there were people who did good by me by supporting me. So for me to be able to give back to other people I chose to study towards becoming a social worker, to capacitate other families with ownership, empowerment and enabling skills which could enable them to sustain their livelihoods. Psychosocial support is the most important skill that one can render to families and communities at large as there are many social ills affecting the world of today. So, looking at social ills we face, I felt that one enabled person could assist in minimizing the rate of vulnerability.”

Her advice to youth wishing to pursue careers is that they must not loose focus in following their dreams. Always remember where you come from to be able to focus on where you are going. Don't wait to find employment based on your qualifications as pride cannot take you places as you never know where your luck is.

She concluded by saying, 'Persistence is the secret to success and not fearing to fail, rather keep on trying until you succeed. Not being afraid to face challenges in circumstances and believing in your capabilities. Most importantly, invite God to your plans'.