

# #ThisIsMyStory

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Faculty of Economic and  
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Fakulteit Ekonomiese en Bestuurswetenskappe  
Lefapha la Disaense tša Ekonomi le Taolo

## Poster exhibition for the University of Pretoria's Anti-Discrimination and Social Justice Week

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[www.up.ac.za/ems](http://www.up.ac.za/ems)

Discrimination and social injustices are hurdles that can make the road to success challenging for many. Staff and students from the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences wish to proudly declare **#ThisIsMyStory** and share inspirational stories of their journey toward overcoming discrimination and social injustice.

Through sharing these stories, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Faculty hopes to encourage those that are discriminated against to remain hopeful that there will be better days ahead.

In addition to this, the exhibition also aims to inspire each of us to look within and rid ourselves of our own discriminatory beliefs and prejudice in the spirit of building a just society.

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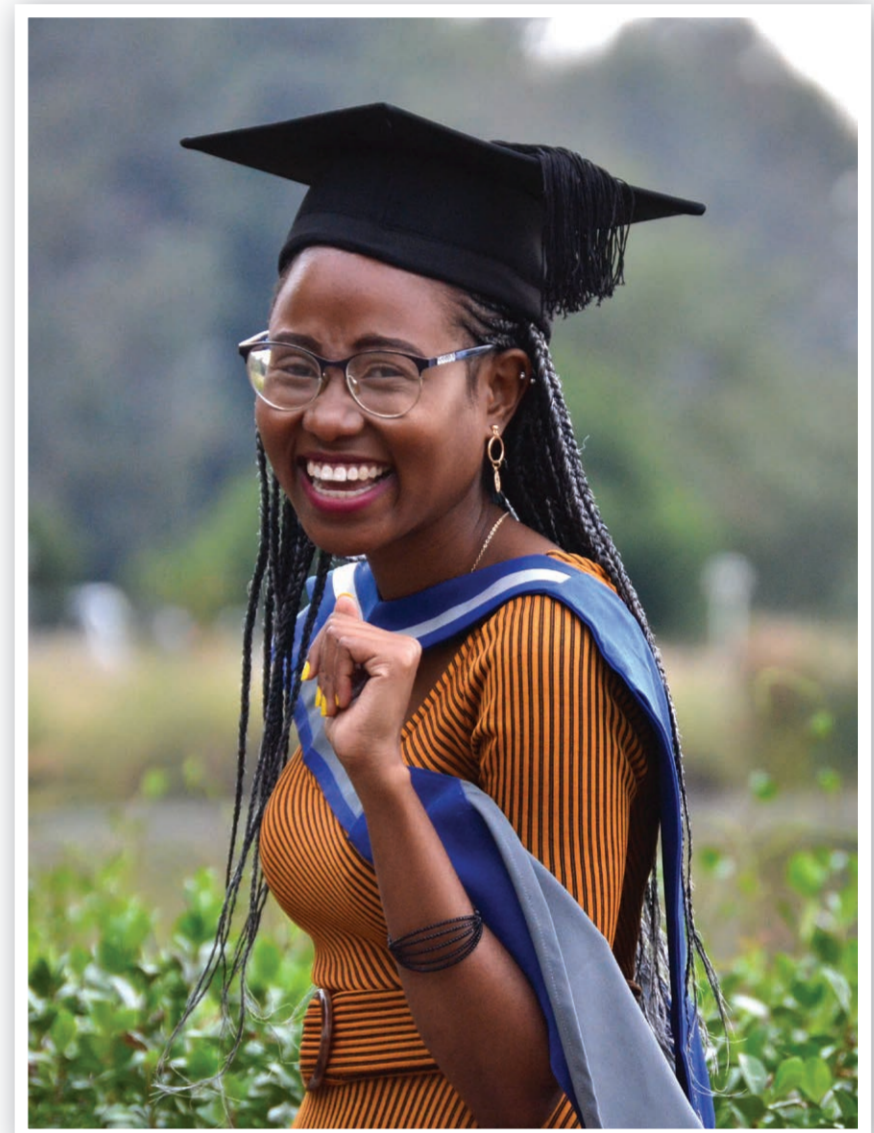
Rome wasn't built in a day. This is how I view my journey towards making impactful contributions to society, which will one day be inclusive and allow equal opportunities for everyone.

There is a lot of work that has gone into creating the person I currently am – work from my community, my schools, place of worship and society at large. I was born and raised in Acornhoek, a village in Mpumalanga. This is the sort of place that is about three generations behind in terms of social development. Fortunately for me, I had a stable support system and I was able to grab most opportunities that came my way.

It was somewhat a sad experience to be surrounded by the energy of the place, which has stood in the way of most young people. Growing up I tried my best to share, with those around me, information that could help us advance our lives and better our standards of living individually, and for the community at large.

When I got to university, I realised just how exclusive the system is. I was fortunate enough to get a bursary to study. I realised then that people that actually make it out of their “opportunity-starved” communities have it even worse in a university space, financially and socially. The language barriers and the setup of the classrooms make it even more difficult to settle in. From then, my mission has been to help black students get into varsity, to stay in varsity and eventually penetrate the work force that is still starved of black professionals.

*Kganyogo Motsileng*



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I am a Chinese student, studying at the University of Pretoria. All my life, from pre-school until this present day, I have been discriminated against. In high school, I had just entered into a co-educational boarding school when the bullying got bad. It reached a point where I wanted to leave due to all the racial remarks and mockery. There were days where I would just cry myself to sleep.

Thankfully, I had good friends who supported me and stood up for me through the hard times and were not bystanders to those bullies. My parents were very understanding and gave me the option to come home. What I have learnt, is that the moment you learn to ignore what other people have to say, you are living for yourself and not for other people. Not letting other people define you with their words, and being proud of who you are.

How I have overcome this social injustice is to stand up for myself, do not entertain people that are not worth the light of day, and keep my head high. There are people out there that are going to try bring you down, but they will only succeed if you let them. The beauty of university is that you can be whoever you want to be, and you won't get judged. If you are mistreated, you have the option to leave. So making the right choices and sticking to people that build you up as a person is the way to go.

”

*Anonymous*

Be proud of  
who you are

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“Twinkle, twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are. Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky!” As simple and well-known as this tune is, little did I know my life would change because of it.

In August 2009 I was accepted to the Drakensberg Boys Choir School, which has been compared to the Hogwarts of South Africa. I'll explain: at a young age, you're told you have a special talent and are sent to a school in the mountains where you nurture that talent. Every day you practise to show off your magic tricks and ultimately take people on a new great journey. I have been singing properly since the age of 12 and it is a hobby I have carried on enjoying while studying at the University of Pretoria.



In 2017 my musical hobby brought me to the Tuks Camerata, which is an amazing place where people from all backgrounds speak the universal language of music. Camerata has always had a mission to change the world through music by being an instrument of peace. A couple of weeks ago, a very shocking time swept over South Africa as another young woman was raped and murdered, foreign nationals were being attacked and our cities were burning. Camerata decided it was time to send a message out to as many people who would listen to us. We recorded Senzenina (what have we done), posted it on YouTube and social media asking for our voices to be heard. All humans deserve to live peaceful lives, but our brothers and sisters do not. The video reached far and wide and our cry to be heard echoed across the country. We hope real changes comes because of it. Enough is enough.

I firmly believe that if everyone sang in a choir we would all be better people. We would all learn new stories, make new friends, learn a few new languages and have a few chances to tour the world. Music has been involved in my life for a long time now and I hope it continues to be invested in so that everyone's little twinkle, twinkle can make them shine as bright as a star.

”

*Andrew Van Vuren*

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## Poverty can't take away my dreams

When I was a little girl, I lost my father in a car accident. He was a hard-working man and ensured that I had everything that I needed. My mom was a housewife and she was now a widow that was forced to get a job to take care of the both of us. Money was tight and for most days, we would go to sleep hungry, or I would have to go to school having bathed with cold water.

Towards the end of matric I was stressed because I wanted to attend university, but the funds did not allow. I suppose God heard our prayers and now I have a bursary. I am eating every night, I am passing well and I am juggling a part time job to send my mother money whenever I can. Life is an uphill battle – we haven't made it yet, but one day the struggles will be worth it.

*Anonymous*



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**Yes, I was bullied  
but now I am  
winning!**

The year was 2015. I was on the receiving end of continued bullying from the girls in my school. All my friends didn't talk to me and people called me names. I still don't know where it actually came from. I was depressed, I was suicidal. I cried myself to sleep daily and every morning was an absolute drag. This went on for a year and a half, until I started having a life coach.



I started seeing the bigger picture – I started thinking about what was waiting for me at the end of the rainbow. I reinvested my energy into being a great success and being the best possible version of myself. My matric results came out and I was accepted at the University of Pretoria.

Now I am in a better space mentally, I am winning academically, my social circle is growing and I am a part of the Executive Committee of the Economic and Management and Sciences Faculty House. The future is better. My name is Thato Magano and if there's anything to take from my story it's that there's a better tomorrow around the corner. Keep your head up high and soldier on.

*Thato Magano*



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It was on 1 August 1988 that my life reached a turning point. I was 3 years old when I fell off a moving van and this accident left me with a brachial plexus injury in its most severe form, no use of my right arm and hand. This was the beginning of a new journey for me. I had grown up quite independently and managed to find my own way doing things, like tying my own shoe laces, playing sports like tennis, cutting fruits and vegetables and even changing my children's nappies... all with one hand!

It was in my third year of university that I faced my greatest obstacle. I was super excited to learn how to drive and the day had finally come for my driver's licence test! I headed off to a testing station with much excitement. I was crushed when I was told that disabled people cannot drive.

The sheer narrow mindedness of the officer who declined to proceed with my test was shocking. This is the epitome of social injustice and discrimination. But after fighting for my right to drive, I can proudly say that "I got over it" and today, I have my driver's licence for 13 years.

I firmly believe in the statement 'where there's a will, there's a way,' and I encourage one and all to note that people with disabilities are definitely not 'disabled' but enabled to excel and thrive!

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*Zeenat Paruk*

*My ability is stronger  
than my disability*

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## I heard a new voice

As human beings, we do not have the freedom to show up to life separate from our bodies. When your body does not match society's ideas of how bodies should be, then you become the bearer of people's ideas and assumptions – a weight that I found far heavier to bear than the excess flesh around my bones.

For most of my life, I had assumed it was quite normal that society's voice, as a judge external to myself, both rang much louder than and insisted it was to be trusted above that of my own, even regarding such foundational matters as my humanity and self-worth. I had come to accept this status quo at such a young age that I was quite oblivious that I had become estranged from my own body and negated her voice at every crucial juncture.

Until, one day, another possibility became available. In a moment of grace, I learned that my body held wisdom, and that it, too, had a will and an opinion on how it wanted to show up to life. I discovered that, released from the heaps of social judgments I have stacked upon her, she was actually quite fierce and powerful in the way that she wanted to dance the vital energy of life into expression.

Society will tell you that it's not acceptable for a fat girl to live so unapologetically. I know that voice well, but I no longer bow to its altar.

*Dr Yolande Steenkamp*

Photograph by Keran Elah





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After obtaining my degrees, the adjustment from being a student to a working class individual was not easy. For every opportunity, I had to fight harder and prove myself more than an ordinary South African citizen graduate. My journey was much slower than that of my peers who all got jobs immediately after completing their studies and they looked more successful than me. Within myself, I debated so often to go back to Zimbabwe, my country of origin, regardless of the challenges there.

With the support and encouragement of family and friends, I applied for the relevant documentation that allowed me to work in South Africa (SA). I faced many rejections before I was granted the papers.

During the search for opportunities, I met South Africans who saw a fellow African and human being fighting for survival, had potential to succeed and make a difference in SA given the opportunity. They saw beyond my race, gender and nationality. These people proved to me that Ubuntu still exists in SA. To me, they are among the unsung heroes and heroines of SA. Through this journey of fighting for social justice, I learnt that we all have different journeys and paces in life.

Be patient with your own journey. Everyone is fighting for survival and success such that a neighbour is seen as a threat. Another person's success does not take away from your success. There is enough room for everyone in the same space to be successful regardless of demographic factors.

*Nyasha Dhlembeu*

”

*“To my dear brother and sister that struggles with Ubuntu I say: there are so many stars in the sky, yet they all shine - none of the stars need to disappear for another to shine”*

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My story is of hope to all marginalized academics who want to be promoted in their careers to the next level. There is no easy way of doing it at the University of Pretoria. The criteria are stringent and the standards for promotion are high, in line with the standing of the University.

Being promoted to an Associate Professor level makes me feel that I deserve the position – I am definitely not a window-dresser as I had to go through several rounds of assessment both by internal and external reviewers before I was promoted. I had to make a huge effort for my promotion after my PhD and it took me several years to prepare for my promotion.



The road was steep and the mountain was difficult to climb. Nevertheless, five years after completing my PhD I was promoted to an Associate Professor position. I was the second woman of colour to be promoted to such a position in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. I decided to apply for a promotion because I believed in myself even when others felt that I was being too ambitious too quickly. I believe in the adage: it is better to have tried and to have failed than to never have tried at all. I tried, and was successful at my first attempt.

Part of succeeding in one's career is never giving up, having the courage to take on challenges where others fear to tread even when the majority feel you are not ready and accepting change to allow oneself to grow. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved without faith, hope, grit and mettle. My upward career mobility has not ended – to be continued....

*Nasima Carrim*

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Since the beginning of time, there have always been roles and expectations for certain genders. At first it was because of physical differences – men are physically stronger than women, so they were viewed as more superior. Later on however, the superiority of men in a society just became the way things were.

This became evident a few weeks ago during the uproar created by the femicide and sexual assaults in South Africa. I accompanied a friend of mine, who had finally gathered enough strength to open up about how she had been violated, to the nearest police station. On arrival, we were told that it was my friend's fault that she had been violated because she keeps male friends, so she was destined to get assaulted.

In my journey towards achieving social justice for my friend, and all other females who have encountered several experiences, I am advocating for all males to be held responsible for their actions, and not making it the women's responsibility to avoid getting violated, but the men's responsibility to stop violating.



*Anonymous*



**Rape is  
never the  
victim's  
fault**

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Hello, my name is Lungelo Motsamai, the Eastern Cape born taxation lecturer. Growing up in the province where the Matric pass rate is always the lowest in comparison to other provinces, I never thought I would make it this far, both academically and professionally.

I remember studying towards getting university entrance in my Matric year (2008), simply because I thought getting a degree would give me a competitive edge when applying for job opportunities. The dream was never to become a Chartered Accountant but just to get an Accounting degree and start contributing towards the livelihood of my loved ones.



The road to acquiring this degree became harder when I lost my pillar of strength and solution to my problems (my father) in July 2010. I remember 15 September 2010 (exactly a month after what would have been my father's birthday, 15 August) so clearly because I was surrounded by two of my friends, crying by the entrance of the university's administration building. This day would have marked the end of my studies, had my friends not persuaded me to continue. It was difficult. I failed two modules, which resulted in me taking an extra semester to complete my first degree. I am grateful for these friends because I would have never gone back to complete my studies, had they let me de-register.

Fast-forward to now: first degree was completed, I worked a bit but I yearned for more. Prof Alta Koekemoer from the University of the Free State made Taxation seem so cool and worth pursuing as an area of specialisation. Needless to say, I went back for more and enrolled for an honours degree in Taxation but that was not enough too. I wanted to teach this thing now and I knew a Master's degree would be my entry into the field as an academic. I enrolled for a Master's degree in Taxation at the University of Pretoria and guess what, I made it into the field as a lecturer and the journey definitely does not end here, it continues...

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*Lungelo Motsamai*

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Nelson Mandela once said that education is the key to success. Coming from a low-income family meant that access to the best education was not a privilege we could afford. Thus, making my road to success a difficult journey.

Even so, I was determined to be successful, so I worked hard to ensure academic success which led to me being awarded the Allan Grey Scholarship. This made my journey to success easier as I had the best educational opportunities available. I am currently doing my second year in university, the first in my family to attend university.

For me social justice means all people being included in society, and all people being able to claim their rights to healthcare, shelter and education regardless of how poor or rich they are. Therefore, I believe that empowering people like myself enables them to claim their rights and to lift themselves and communities out of poverty.

”

*Anonymous*

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

(Nelson Mandela)

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It was back in April 2015 and time to apply for university. What did I want to study? What did I want to do with my life? For me, the answer was simple; I wanted to be a physiotherapist.

With an average of over 82%, I thought I was guaranteed acceptance at the University of Pretoria. My dreams came crashing down a few months later when I not only got rejected but also discovered that some of my friends that are a different race to me and had a lower average than me got accepted.

Henry Ward Beecher once said,

*“One’s best success comes after their greatest disappointments”.*

I took this quote literally and, instead of drowning in sorrow, I proceeded with my second choice – BCom (Marketing Management). I used the disappointment of physiotherapy as a springboard to ensuring that I made a success out of my BCom degree. I decided that physiotherapy was not meant to be and that marketing was what I was supposed to be doing.

After the first year, I got inducted into the Golden Key International Honour Society; in second year I got awarded a bursary for being one of the top students; and in third year I was the top student overall. I am currently completing my honours in marketing and hope to study for my master’s next year.

So, although I was intimately exposed to social injustice, I did not label myself as a victim. I learnt that I needed to improvise, adapt and overcome challenges.

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*Tuscany Kitch*



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“You only made the team because they needed black players.”

“You only got signed because of your skin colour.”

“Can you even do anything without using the race card?”

These were some of the words said by my schoolmates throughout my high school and university life. Words that would ring in my ears constantly and not allow me to believe in my own ability and potential.

I was the type of person who rarely took offence to words as I lived by the motto, “sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never harm me”, but after I was constantly racially abused and made to feel so small, the words began to feel like they were able to break my bones.

These words took me to my darkest place and really made me not enjoy life anymore. I thought I was worthless and not able to do anything, until I began to speak out and tell my story to others. I will always be grateful for the support that I received from my friends and family, who helped me out of that dark place and made me see that those words will never be able to harm me if I don't allow them to harm me.

I am proud to say that today I am studying a degree that I love and will one day be graduating as a CA(SA). I have come to terms with the fact that hurtful words will always be around, but it's how you let those words affect you, that will determine whether they will harm you.

**I AM BECAUSE I WAS!**

*Anonymous*



*“I'm thankful for my struggle because without it I wouldn't have stumbled across my strength”*

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## How I overcame anxiety through yoga

In my youth, and well into my initial years of employment in the corporate environment, I always had a fear of the unknown which made me anxious about the future. I would try to deliver my best and give my best effort, but there was always a cloud of anxiety, which made me feel nervous and lead me to question my abilities all the time. This changed for me in 2014, when I attended an *Art of Living* happiness course. The *Art of Living* is one of the largest volunteer based organisations in the world which teaches people how to manage the emotions of the mind by using simple and effective breathing techniques.



On this course, I was introduced to yoga and this was my 'Aha' moment where I experienced how to manage my mind so that I maintain myself in the present moment, instead of focusing on the unknowns which usually brings up emotions of anxiety. I decided that I want to learn more about yoga and share this practice with people so in 2016 I travelled to India to complete a 200 hour yoga teacher training course. I currently teach Yoga to University of Pretoria staff as part of the employee wellness programme and have also introduced breathing techniques and light stretches to my students.

Yoga is an ancient discipline, designed to bring balance and health to the physical, emotional and mental elements of an individual. Numerous academic literature has shown that yoga is an effective tool to reduce anxiety, and improve overall wellbeing and quality of life. It is a secular practice and is becoming a worldly practice with even some schools and academic institutions offering yoga as a subject. Having experienced the positive effect that it has on my life and on my intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, as well as the ability to remain calm and centred during stressful situations; I do believe that Yoga is a tool for inner transformation that all people of any gender, race, and physique can practice.

*Sharmila Mungal*





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“You have been accepted into the University of Pretoria for a degree in BAdmin (Public Management and International Relations)”, seeing this message brought such excitement and happiness in my life. The struggle of achieving excellent results in matric and making it into university was over. I had made it!

Through Christ who gives me strength, I had finally made it into university! My first days were a mixture of all emotions of happiness, excitement, anxiety, nervousness, shyness and many multiple emotions. Everything was just one crazy, exciting journey filled with sooooooooooooo much work in which I felt like I was dying.

I vividly remember a day when our lecturer for public administration had told us that with module selection, we had to choose either economics and statistics or industrial psychology with English. I had to go to the Faculty Student advisor for help and guidance because I wanted to take economics with industrial psychology.

There was a line and I stood in it. Behind and in front of me there was a white girl. The first girl goes in and is helped effectively. When I go in, to my shock, this white lady was just shouting at me, barely helping me and venting out her frustrations on me. I really don't know what this lady's problem was! I felt somehow discriminated against, hurt and kind of embarrassed.

As a new first year student, who knows nothing about university, I felt super hurt by this lady's behaviour towards me. I left with a pain in my heart, but I let it go and found help somewhere else.

”

*Anonymous*

*“I was not going to let this bad experience bring me down”*

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“

I am Mahlatse Laka, the Sotho, German-speaking girl who can only do math equations in Afrikaans to this day.

Being female, black, overweight, overlooked, undermined and voiceless has been a battle of overcoming societal prejudices, injustices and discrimination. As to what beauty and intellect looks like, I had to always prove that I was neither stupid nor lazy.

I was raised by a courageous single mother, who was the driving force of helping me find my voice. Having commenced at an Afrikaans primary school and matriculated at a German High school, made me realise that I must fight myself to overcome my insecurities.

I decided to no longer dim my light and allow myself to fill up the room, fearlessly and unapologetically. I put on my “oog klappe”\*, unlocked my potential and no longer cared about any negative thoughts or feelings about myself, especially when it came to things I could not change about my gender and race.

Identifying and appreciating what defines me, and my uniqueness became my competitive advantage. I found my voice at the University of Pretoria, putting myself out there and gaining the most confidence.

I became a member of the Golden Key International Honour Society, an Executive Committee (EC) member of a Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences sub-house, an EC Member of the STARS Mentorship programme. Furthermore, I was selected as one of the 2018 GradStar Top 100 students and ended up joining one of the Top 100 South African employers' 2019 graduate programme and enrolling in my Honours at UP.

\*“Oog klappe” means blinkers in Afrikaans.

**Mahlatse Laka**



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I always used to describe discrimination from a perspective of race because growing up that was the main common form of discrimination. Never did I imagine one could be discriminated by relatives.

Well, growing up I used to visit my cousins in Botswana and was always looking forward to spending holidays with them. They grew up there so they could speak Tswana, Botswana's official language. And now that I think of it, they would always speak in Tswana so that I couldn't hear their conversations. I was always left alone to play by myself.

Whenever I asked to join them in their games, I could see the resentment on their faces before 'smiling' and telling me that I was too young to understand 'grown-up' games. Suddenly it all made sense that because they were financially stable and my family wasn't, it simply meant I was on a lower-class level.

”

*Anonymous*

“There is no room  
for exclusion in  
family... only love”

(Wes Fesler)

# #ThisIsMyStory



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Playing sports was one of my greatest loves but that quickly changed when I was 18 years old.

I was playing for my provincial team in a national championship in Johannesburg. All was fun and games until I was selected to be part of the national team but that's where my love for the game faded.

The year 2017 was one of hopes and dreams, I was an enthusiastic young man doing my last year of high school. We were summoned by the coach for our first practice of the new season as the new under 19 National Team.

When the team arrived at the venue we were confused as there were other players who were not selected through the national championship that practiced with us. We thought that they were just joining us to better their skills, but little did we know.

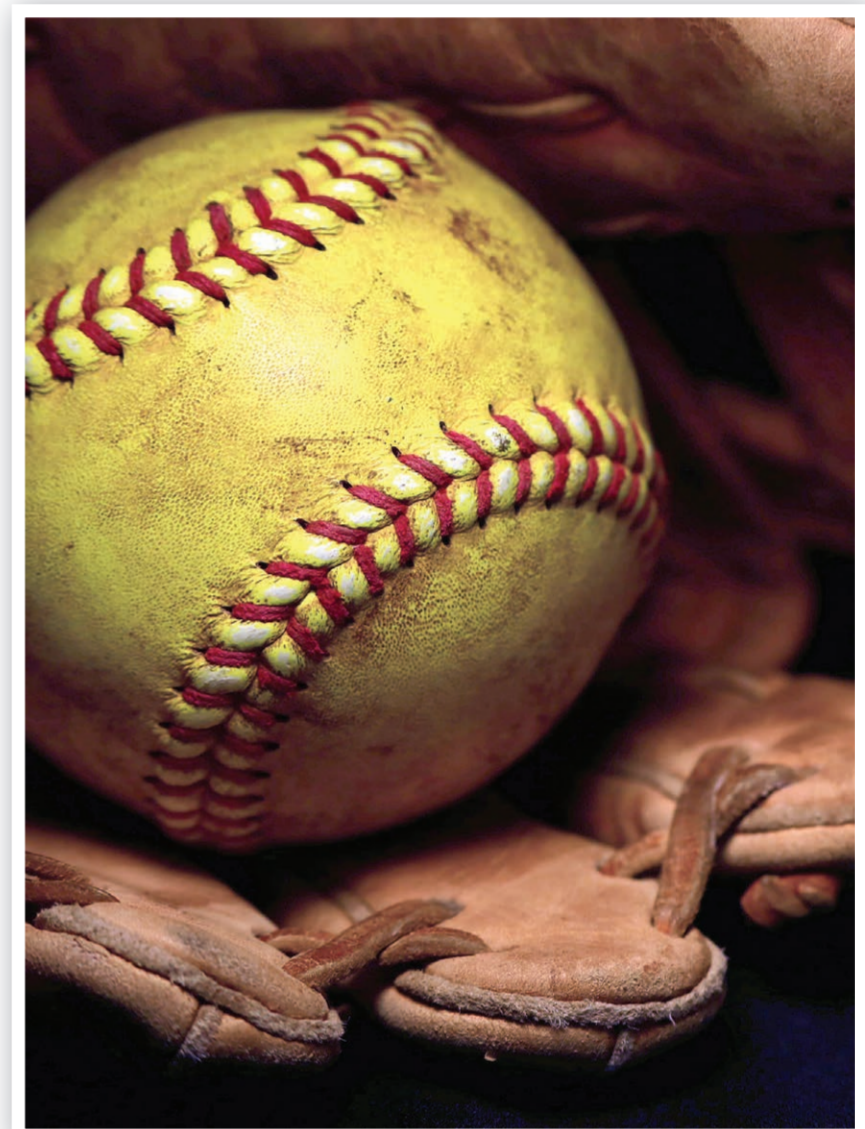
At the end of the practice the coaches (which were selected from the top 3 performing provinces in the previous championship) announced the team. We realised that it was not the original team that was selected in 2016 during the national championship but players that these coaches brought from their provinces and automatically put on the national team.

I was devastated and disgusted as I worked hard to make it where I was, only to be cheated from my position because of favouritism. The new players were selected based on a practice that was exclusive and not open to every player in the country.

That action made me to question my quality: was I a good player or was I also selected because of some system of unfairness? Nevertheless I continued playing for my school and later played for my provincial team for a second time. I found joy in the sport by playing with my friends and class mates.

*Anonymous*

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Stepping out of my mothers nest has made me realise one thing – the world is a nasty place! There is injustice everywhere and once you are out there into the world you realise that injustice has become a norm.

To this day I've asked myself one question: why is the world so evil? And the only answer I can come up with is: it's a normality of today. I have come to the conclusion that I participate in the injustice of society. Why? Simply because I am an imperfect human being.

One of the most frequent injustices that I (as part of the South African community) have experienced is discrimination. Personally it's the most confusing form of injustice I have come across simply because I cannot seem to understand the personal gain one gets from it. Discrimination is filled with anger, sadness and fear and all the other negative feelings and emotions one experiences when exercising discriminatory actions. From sexism and xenophobia to tribalism and racism. I have never understood gains from these forms of discrimination.

*Once we start realising that these forms of injustices never work for both parties, the victim and the perpetrator, we will start seeing the beauty this world has to offer. We will start appreciating each other for what we are and the beauty of being different and unique, but we will never see this before we appreciate each other for what we are – unique human beings.*

*Goitseone Rethabile Chomane*

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## Women are your equals

I am a woman, a black woman, living in a post-apartheid patriarchal society. Because I am not a man, I am a subordinate whose role is to serve and be submissive towards the man. My best traits are my face and body, not my intellect or talents.

In meetings my opinions and ideas must be kept quiet because if they are raised, I will be labelled as too emotional. As a woman, my role is the nurturer or caretaker never the innovator or the breadwinner.

I remember job shadowing a project manager who is a qualified civil engineer at a big company. She was obviously brilliant and a gorgeous black woman. We were in a meeting and after the meeting I asked her why she didn't give her solutions or raise any issues. She told me that if she did, people would perceive her as emotional rather than rational. I did not understand at first but then I realised it was all because she was a woman. She had to restrict herself in fear of being wrongly labelled. Her femininity was a weakness but what they are unaware of is that this femininity will change the world for the better.

Brigham Young said, "You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation".

As an educated woman I will break the patriarchal norms. I will not be silenced. I will stand up for my fellow sisters until we are equal.

*Nandi Sibiya*



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This is my comeback story rather than a setback to my academic endeavors. I've experienced the coldest form of discrimination and prejudice from my fellow group members. As we all know that in certain modules students are demarcated to groups where assessments are performed for marks contributing towards the semester mark. Our first group assignments were all cooperation, teamwork and a spirit of togetherness. Until on this specific day where things went sideways with my team.

As per the norm, groups split and allocate to each member work that needs to be completed. Thus, my classmate and I were assigned a question to do like anyone else in the group. We invested so much time and relentless efforts to get the assignment right and to deliver to the group. On the day before the due date work was submitted to be compiled with the rest of the assignment. Results were released, however we received a shocker of a lifetime.

We were the only members to have not been allocated a mark since our names were excluded from the final draft. When the rest of the group was approached on the matter, no one dared to comment in this regard. My classmate confronted one of the members who opened up that on the day before the due date, they decided to divide the work amongst themselves and completed it without our consent. In the midst of it all I managed to pass the module very well...

”

*Anonymous*

*“Exclusion is never the way  
forward on our shared paths  
to freedom and justice.”*

Desmond Tutu

