

IN MY OWN WORDS

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STILL I RISE, I RISE UP

My name is Carol Masingi, I am a 23-year old young female MasterCard Scholar at the University of Cape Town pursuing a master's degree in Development studies. Unlike most people who were born in rural areas, I was born and raised in an urban area – a township called Kagiso on the outskirts of Johannesburg. People who are born and live in urban areas are always thought to be well-off than those from rural areas. Sadly, this is not always the case. In fact townships are as impoverished as rural areas are, the only difference is that their impoverishment reflects and is masked by the tarred roads and the tall glass skyscrapers that overwhelm cities. Townships are the epitome of hopelessness, of failed dreams and of people who have lost the desire to fight the architecture of inequality. Naturally, the scale is tipped unequally and unfairly. Most of the youth are facing unemployment, and those who are employed are trapped in working class jobs that do nothing but reproduce the same poverty conditions for the next generation



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I was very fortunate that I started school as early as the age of 5 and by the time I was 17, I was already doing my first year at the prestigious University of Cape Town(UCT). I was schooled in a resource-deprived primary and high school. We were never taught how to use a computer, let alone how to speak English, nor given any form of educational support. So, from an early age I learnt how to be resourceful. I was and still very fortunate to be raised by both parents. My mother raised a strong afro feminist with her domestic worker salary, while my dad also raised me working as a forklift driver in a board and timber company in Johannesburg.

I was the first one in my family to have stepped in the doors of a university through means of a NSFAS loan. Because of the poor educational background that I had in my high school, I went from being one of the top learners in my school to coming close to failing the first semester of my first year at university.

The gap between high school and university is huge, and it was exacerbated by the steep learning pace that one is forced to adjust to at UCT. The pressure of being the gateway towards a better life for your working-class family and the fear of losing my NSFAS loan due to my underperformance allowed depression to fester. This is the reality that many students from impoverished townships go through every year. Growing up in a working-class household was an important life shaping experience for me because it taught me how it is to grow up without privilege. The racial and class dynamics of the society that we live in do not make growing up in a township any easy. As a black township child, the standards are set very high than the average middle-class child. You grow up fighting for good quality education, fighting to go to university, fighting to stay and finish university without being financially or academically excluded. I am very fortunate that I got awarded the opportunity to be a MasterCard Scholar at UCT, an opportunity that a lot of young African yearn for. Today, I am able to reflect and be happy about all the struggles that I went through to be the young leader that I am today, because I will be able to pull up other young people from my township and challenge the architecture of inequality that exists in our country.