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Young Potchefstroomer says hard work kept her going

Marianke Saayman

A young Potchefstroom woman showed that no matter what your background or circumstances, you can be successful if you stay positive.

Helen Mtekwe (26) grew up without parents. Her mother fell pregnant when she was still a teenager, but the relationship between her mother and father soon crumbled and her father left.

Helen's mother moved back to her parents' home in Potchefstroom. At the time, Helen's grandfather was working at Bert's Bricks.

'My mom hid the pregnancy throughout the entire time, nobody knew she was pregnant with me.' Nobody was prepared for Helen's birth. She did not even have diapers when she was born.

Helen grew up and lived at Bert's Bricks. Her mother didn't live with them because she had to finish high school. She was raised by her grandparents until her mother finished matric and also started working at Bert's Bricks.

'My mom fell ill all of a sudden. We don't really know what was wrong, but after six months she passed away. I was nine years old,' Helen said.

In the same year, Helen's grandparents lost their other grown children. After this, Helen, her half-sister and her cousins were all placed in the care of their grandparents.

'It was a very difficult time for the family. What hit me the most was the fact that I would never see my mother again alive so I used school as a way to escape. I loved school and the teachers there were incredible,' she said.

Helen studied hard and in Grade 7 she was elected head girl of Bert's Bricks Primary

School. Her schoolwork and her faith kept her going and earned her a bursary to attend the Potchefstroom High School for Girls, where she boarded. In addition to the bursary, she received help from a woman who decided that Helen's potential is much too great to go to waste.

Helen worked diligently at school and finished her matric year at the age of 17 with exemplary marks. This allowed her to get a NSFAS bursary to study at the North West University's Potchefstroom campus, where she first obtained her B.Com Financial Accounting degree and later her B.Com Chartered Accounting degree.

Helen wants others to learn from her story and to realise that nothing good in life comes easy. Her school years serve as a harsh reminder of this fact.

'With parents days at school, all the other children had their moms and dads there, but I always only had my grandma and grandpa. I used to ask myself why my dad ran away, if it was my fault, but growing up I started to realise that it is not my fault. God wanted me and that is why I am here. That is all that mattered.'

Through it all Helen felt grateful to be alive, knowing that her mother could have chosen to abort her, but God had another plan for her.

'I told myself that despite the fact that I wasn't planned, I am going to try and be a blessing in this world.'

'To other children going through a hard time I want to say that it is not your fault that things have happened to you. Some things are just beyond your control, and it is okay. It's not your fault, so don't ever blame yourself. Things can only get better. Stay positive and know that tomorrow is going to be a better day.'

Helen Mtekwe is proof that everything worth living for comes with hard work. Photo: Marianke Saayman