

# A Narrative

## My First-Generation Matric Journey



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### Beginnings in Bophuthatswana

I made my first stab at schooling at the height of Mangope's reign of the Bophuthatswana homeland, in Losasaneng village, the mining district of Taung. At that time Losasaneng village possessed only two schools, namely, Retshegeditse primary and Batlanang junior secondary school. I was a lad of seven summers when I started school at Retshegeditse in 1985, a ripe old age to be at school at that time. The tentacles of Mangope's regime reached every facet of our lives and our schools were not immune to this. Schooling was compulsory in Bophuthatswana and curfews were set for students by the army that patrolled villages after six-o'clock. Loitering was a petty crime punishable by law. First thing you were taught at school was to swear allegiance to the supreme leader, king of kings and the lion of kings President Mangope, those just three titles from a laundry-list of the man's sonorous titles. Black and White with Khaki was de rigueur if not the order of the day in Bophuthatswana schools. So we wore this uniform and had to look prim and proper. With our school steeped in corporal punishment, teachers also groomed nails of ogres to clip our little thighs and lugholes. Winter and summer, we reported at assembly at seven and woe betide anyone who turned up late. Come rain, sunshine or cold snap you had to be on time.

Retshegeditse a four hundred metre square piece of land is located cheek by jowl with Batlanang Junior secondary along the chalky but only main road in the village running through Losasaneng from Vryburg to Kimberley. The rambling blue and white primary, boasted about ten cinderblock classes and four corrugated iron ones. I was in block A in grade one (C), in the class of Mrs. Moipolai. A soft-spoken teacher who brooked no frivolity, Mrs Moipolai drilled in us the three Rs. We battled to hear her sometimes as we were packed like sardines in this class. You could not move your elbow without jostling another kid. There was a serious shortage of facilities and resources, which led to double sessions or platoons, where facilities had to be used twice on the same day. At that period the Bophuthatswana Department of Education supplied minimal stationery and one textbook was meant to be shared by two students. Our parents forked out a school fee of a hundred rand and my maternal grandfather took care of my schooling needs as he did with my other two siblings in the absence of a feckless absentee father. Through my entire maternal family I had a semblance of normality and never went to school with an empty belly or without a lunchbox. At Retshegeditse I started

rubbing shoulders with elite kids who looked preppy, well-fed and more well-adjusted than some of us. Not that their parents could not purchase them a better education elsewhere but because they believed in this school's reputation and the headmaster, the avuncular Alexander Seoposengwe.

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Under Sops' leadership, as our headmaster was fondly known, I became a prominent student excelling in lower grades. The donnish demeanor of the headmaster, sporting a receding hairline endeared him to everyone. He was universally admired in the school and regarded as a community builder in Losasaneng. Being one of the people who pioneered the idea of a community school in the area in the form of Retshegeditse, he would brag to us about how the community built this school from scratch and I was always tickled puce to hear him singing the praises of my uneducated maternal grandfather who also contributed enormously to the project by using his horse-drawn cart to bring construction material such as sand, soil and water. I remember as lower grade kids we were all aching to be taught by our headmaster but at that time his teaching was confined to the privileged standard three's and four's. We only saw him at assembly times at seven in the morning and on Wednesdays for handiwork. He was a witty raconteur who knew how to cajole you into studying. Many of his qualities rubbed off on his teachers and even our wonderful Mrs Moiplai, save, his vocal skills. We realised early on that our class teacher was a consummate warbler who could not teach us music, let alone hold a tune. We loved her for having groomed and nurtured us though, from grade one to standard two, even if most of us were vocally challenged by then.

When I went to my standard three, I was a half-baked product, ready for my head master's hands and other great schoolteachers. Having been used to the idea of sitting on a carpet in groups in lower grades one was now upgraded to desks, albeit not new ones. Ours were rickety and moth-eaten desks that could easily be broken by a baby's tush. Our desks were lined up in rows of six in a class that accommodated sixty or so of us. From standard three in Bophuthatswana,

schooling became a sober business. Instead of being spoon-fed information by a teacher we started learning how to do our schoolwork independently of teachers. Our impressionable minds were now taught the concept of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Seed corns of forming logical and coherent thoughts were now planted. Our little brains were exercised and stretched as our class works passing mark now ranged from 50 to 100, with test reaching 200. Everything intensified and a convincing pass was expected from all. Being in the class of the headmaster I now figured that he was not just a bundle of jokes or barrel of laughs. He had a carrot and stick approach, rewarding good performance and punishing poor. You risked a month-long contusion if you did not do his work. Once I did not do his homework and incurred his wrath. He went thermo-nuclear and gave me an almighty hiding. Discipline was paramount to him. Sops and his staff drummed into us the idea that teachers can only open doors but students should be ready to enter them.

### **The lie of the land**

Attending school in this mining district, lying 70 kilometer northwest of Kimberley was no cake walk though. To start with, we realised as immature kids that Bophuthatswana had a barmy pecking order system with Mafikeng at the tippy-top and villages like Losasaneng at very the bottom of the pile. The system permeated every sphere of life from education, health care and water service. You had to have a prominent figure in Mangope's government coming from your place or be in the good books of the wrinkled face leader to get social services and amenities. Losasaneng had no prayer in the former and latter, so was consigned to pariahdom. To the regime, it was a rogue mining village occupied by scoundrels loved only for the revenue they generated Bophuthatswana through the sweat of their brows in dangerous diamond mines that trapped many sometimes. The village had no electricity and potable water. Brackish and fluorine-filled water abounded. My cariogenic teeth can attest to this. We were lucky to have a horse-drawn cart we could use for collection of drinkable water in nearby places like Kameelpit. We woke up at sparrow's cough to put horses in harness so that we could fill gallons and barrels of water before we headed for school. Biomass was a great source of energy and for this we also relied on our horse drawn cart for collection of firewood in far-flung woodlands. Cowpat supplied by puny and emaciated cattle of this area also plugged a vacuum.

To a certain degree, Losasaneng was reaping the whirlwind of its defiance. A compact but populous village with 700 000 or thereabouts, this labour reserve took its temper from Kimberley in the Cape Province (now Northern Cape). The coarse and uncouth miners lived in Bophuthatswana but breathed the ether of central, which, inevitably, gave the place a central character and flavour about it. The place geographically and archeologically located in the Northern Cape was given to Mangope like other obnoxious places as a sop to his ego, our elders would tell us. One other urban legend is that these miners were becoming an excrescence on the mining landscape as they defiled the place with their new shantytown they built on it. For this reason they were decanted on Losasaneng, an amorphous piece of land they turned into something habitable. Some lived in mining compounds and came home on weekends while others commuted daily to the nearby mines. A big chunk of them cycled to and fro, on a daily basis in my salad days. Mining was the lifeblood if not mainstay of this area as the bulk of the population eked a living out of it. Two of my uncles were mineworkers and detested the idea of their nephews working mines as they reminded us that their two older brothers' lives had been claimed by the mines. Most of my peers at that time left school in their teen years to ply their trade at mines. Others older than us went to the army from standard six as you qualified to go for infantry training in that grade in Bophuthatswana. A military base within an 80km radius of our place, in Buxton, the lime area renown mostly for the child fossil discovered by Raymond Dart in 1942, constantly dangled a carrot at young turks and enticed them by the truckloads. As a lad in a hurry, showing some educational potential I was dying to join the army as soon as I reached standard six though I never had the right physique for it. You had to be fit and not be a bag of bones as I was.

### **Making the grade**

Bophuthatswana had two taxing external certificates prior to matric, in standard four and seven, both marked at the Bophuthatswana Education Department centre in Mmabatho. I passed my standard three with top marks to go for my first external examination in standard four. Obtaining the standard four certificate required some level of industry. The bar was raised and one had to apply oneself properly. With my apathy for extra-mural activities I channeled all my energies into my schoolwork and became a diligent student. In standard four I worked hard and conscientiously.

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Considered matured and sentient beings, albeit, impressionable we were now placed in a corrugated iron class. I suppose we were believed to have a strong constitution to even put up with inclement weathers in this metal sheet. It was our last

year at Retshegeditse and we were now expected to carry the banner of the school and live up to its reputation in Zone Seven schools. In the class of Mr Mothibi, a diminutive figure with an amazing gift of the gab and mordant wit we slogged it. He had no truck with underachievers nor substandard performance. Devoid of resources even in this senior class we had to share every facility and use it sparingly. Libraries and laboratories were only words that belonged to the dictionary so we had to make do with what we had. The standard was generally seen as the first gauge of your academic gifts. If you made the grade here, you were considered promising and your progress monitored. I surpassed my expectation in this standard and passed with a good symbol.

### **Surviving secondary school**

Moving to Batlanang Junior secondary school to be harshly initiated by overgrown bullies who preyed on all rookies was soul-destroying and morale-sapping. They devised hideous and obnoxious methods of ill-treating rookies like making you simulate a cyclist on toilet walls. In another instance, they would make you run errands for them without giving you a red cent to buy items. For this you had to use your pocket money or be subjected to their barbaric treatment if skint. These sadistic curs made me play truant a couple of times as I avoided them. But being a country boy and taught to have a broad back and rhino hide by my uncles, I could not tell my parents as I could have been ridiculed as a puny or pansy. I took it in my stride and soon it was a passing phase.

Batlanang was a different kettle of fish from Retshegeditse with the workload piling up. With punctuality being a rule in all Bophuthatswana schools even at Batlanang we had to report early at seven or endure the treatment of the headmaster and his staff. We had dozens of class works and monthly tests. The headmaster here instilled terror in everyone with his police background. A man of bulky frame and

reddish eyes, Mr Mabotho did not suffer little fools gladly. He derived a perverse kick out of inflicting pain in school kids and I never warmed to his theme like my previous headmaster. I avoided crossing his line but found myself at the receiving end of his harsh treatment a couple of times. With a fairly developed mind, in the class of the lazy Mrs Makukumare I became a presumptuous and pesky kid. Not that I was uncouth but because I could ask teachers many awkward questions. I now had crumpled newspapers and well-thumbed magazines supplied by my uncle in Kimberley, which fired my little mind to argue cogently with my educators. This trait enraged some petty-minded teachers but endeared me to many good teachers. They liked the fact that I challenged them and still did their bidding.

Our parents parted with two hundred rand for our school fee at Batlanang plus we bought extra material for ourselves as the school was also under-resourced. Our class was bursting at the seams, with ninety of us in it, but here luckily every student had a textbook. I also had material previously used by my big sister who did this standard before me. My performance now took a shape for the better and improved rapidly. Notwithstanding some challenges, I passed both standard five and six easily.

### Gifted teachers

Being faced with another rigorous external certificate in standard 7, which was more challenging to say the least, I took it in my stride. External certificates were imperative in Bophuthatswana and treated with the greatest respect. They were a yardstick with which your educational potential was measured. In standard seven we took nine subjects that you had to pass with a good symbol to progress to a higher one. Like many senior standards in Bophuthatswana, our standard seven possessed the best of the bunch when it came to teachers. These were all teachers who could impart like Oracles - minus resources. Our History and Biology teachers, Mrs Gaohose and Mr Lethae, excelled in this area. But collectively, our educators were an embodiment of great teaching itself. They understood the concept of *in loco parentis* and played many parts in our lives. What we lacked

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here in resources we more than made up for in great teaching. In standard seven my strengths crystallised and I showed a strong leaning towards humanities, with History being my pet subject. I also showed some facility for English with an amazing flair for it. The sobriety and gravity with which standard seven was viewed led to the idea of summer schools with various standard seven classes in the zone converging in our area. We had supremely gifted teachers in the entire Zone Seven who pitched in and helped us prepare for this certificate. The exercise was worthwhile, with methods and techniques of approaching the exam. It was a morale-booster and though many of us were still apprehensive we had a modicum of confidence borne out of this effort. Flunk or pass the grade, my sole intention was now to quit school and work for my impecunious mother. Armed with my standard four certificate and standard six I now qualified to join the Buxton military base for training. My only snag at that time was to be considered a promising student with a capacity to even complete a matric. Standard seven exams came and indeed I passed with flying colours, reinforcing my maternal family's belief that I had the grey matter to go the whole hog.

### Academic success

With these results my family was now hell-bent on sending me to a senior school and arranged for me to go to Majeng High School in Kgomotso, a village lying 40 kilometres from Losasaneng. I grudgingly did my standard eight in this area, commuting daily by bus or footing it with my peers when my parents were hard up. Majeng, one of the posh schools in the area benefited enormously resource-wise as it was situated in an area that the president had a soft spot for. A double-storied school, with a terracotta structure, Majeng boasted a decent library and a laboratory. Facilities abounded in this school but our parents paid through their noses for education. My maternal grandfather had to sell a beast to pay for my school fee. We paid a whopping four hundred rand and bought much other material for ourselves. I could not buy all this but was fortunate to have stuff passed down by my big sister who did this grade as well. By now my entire maternal family was four-square behind me supporting me in the best way they could as they felt that I had a first-rate mind to do any grade. At this school I chose six subjects in the humanities with Tswana as a first language. When it came to teachers Majeng also possessed the *crème de la crème*. We had Mrs Mahosh who mastered geography and Mr Mookwa with his encyclopedic knowledge of history.

Other teachers were no slouches either. But my history and geography teachers in this grade made a great impact on me and instilled in me the passion for reading. I envied how effortlessly they could impart and even mimicked them in their absence to the delight of my classmates.

My teachers here spotted my academic chops early in our class works and monthly tests. Under them my performance went an octave higher causing my family to brag to family friends and the community about my abilities. Though passing many things in the class easily, I still had a sense of inadequacy bounded up with my single-parenthood background and my mother's dependence on her family for my upbringing. This aspect always undermined my confidence at school and complicated my relations with my peers, as I could not interact easily with them without doubting myself. I was self-conscious and in my shell most of the time. On the other hand, many of my contemporaries especially those born in wedlock, looked well-adjusted and oozed with bottomless confidence typical of people born to rule. They were

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precocious and well-rounded. They were sussed and slick as they were exposed to fresh magazines and papers their parents could afford to buy them. To cap it all, they never lacked a thing and were always loaded when

it came to pocket money and other endowments. I needed to improve my mother's lot quickly and did not believe matric would be the best means of doing it. My family thought otherwise. To them matric was the best leveller, a solvent of social hierarchy. It was an instrument of social mobility with transformative powers in Bophuthatswana they said. With it the world was your oyster as you qualified to be a clerk or private teacher, thus moving in rarified and exalted circles of the Lethae's, one of the elite family in Losasaneng. I guess they saw matric certificates breaking the shackles of poverty in some ordinary families. I passed standard eight with high marks and graduated under duress to grade 11.

### Change of scenery

It was in this grade that my family suggested a change of schooling scenery from a rural Losasaneng and Kgomotso to Kimberley. Devoid of a matric

child before me, my family staked everything for me to pursue my high school to the last grade. They invested heavily and pinned all their hopes on me. Quickly they plotted with my maternal uncle based in Kimberley that I move in with him for the remainder of my high schooling. In 1994 I relocated to Galeshewe Township in Kimberley to attend school at Dr.E.P. Lekhela senior secondary school. Come hell or high water I had to go all the way to carry the family banner and break the mould.

As a hick from Bophuthatswana, I experienced a major culture shock in the diamond city. Kimberley was a far cry from Losasaneng with many endowments. Where I had been used to horse-drawn carts on chalky gravel roads, Kimberley boasted swanky cars with a ton of tar roads. Where I had been used to candles and kerosene lamps, the diamond city possessed electricity. The city boasted electrical pylons in every nook and cranny. There was an efficient transport system to boot, which was as sharp as a tack. All creature comforts and mod cons were here, ranging from colour television sets to well-functioning radios.

I immersed myself in these two and started keeping my finger on the pulse of things. I could now get fresh news and information on a daily basis which added value to my knowledge and helped in shaping my worldview. The transition

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was not a doddle though as I had to take the rough with the smooth. In Uncle Sam's house, I had to do household chores, which was unheard of for a boy in my grandfather's household. Also at the imposing, double-storied E.P. Lekhela, most of my peers looked very sussed and suave. They looked wise in the ways of the world as they were even versed in courtships and dates. I envied their townie ways and wished their street-cred could rub off on me. Street-cred was valued more highly than any other commodity in this Darwinian city with a hostile environment and ruthless knife-wielding gangs. Kimberley with its rich patois combining Afrikaans and Setswana also rumbled me as a country bumpkin as I could not get the hang of this slang. My opposite numbers here delighted in my naivety and faux pas. They taunted me for these gaffes and I appeared to be a late developer to them, totally unversed in city ways. Soon that damaging tag of ' Plaas Japie' was hung

## FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS<sup>1</sup>

In South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Student Pathways study revealed that of the 2000-2002 cohort of students, from various South African universities, who did not complete their studies, 70% were first-generation.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'first-generation' commonly refers to students whose parents did not go to university and can also apply to scholars whose parents did not complete their high-school education.

For many years it has been accepted that students whose parents do not have university degrees have had to face a separate number of obstacles not faced by their peers with university educated parents.<sup>3</sup> Extensive research conducted in the United States has shown that such students are disadvantaged in that, among others, they are less likely to persist in completing their degree; more likely to find the transition to university difficult; likely to have less information about the culture of tertiary education and thus, have difficulty in making connections between career goals and educational requirements.<sup>4</sup>

Similar research<sup>5</sup> conducted in South Africa reiterates the tendency for first-generation students to perform relatively poorly when compared to their peers. This research has shown that students with parents who are semi-literate or illiterate are often disadvantaged due to lack of reading matter in the household such as newspapers or books. Reasons for the reduced academic performance associated with first-generation university students has been explained in this research by a general unfamiliarity with the "culture of academe". This leads to the inability of the student to adapt to university culture. As revealed in the research, common characteristics of first-generation students that can lead to their relatively poor performance include: ignorance concerning the use of library facilities; anxiety about language difficulties; apprehension about studying in the absence of classroom-style guidance, and hesitation to set-up appointments with lecturers. They also find the coordination of their studies with other activities, difficult.

around my neck. My country ways bored them stiff. They detested my bookish ways and straitjacket life as well. By virtue of this, I battled to get friends among my city counterparts and wound up with fellow hicks from other provinces and rural areas. I also struggled to adjust, never mind assimilate.

My first year at Kimberley coincided with the advent of a new dispensation. Kimberley was shaking to vibrations of Mandela era and leadership. The zeitgeist gripped everyone and outsiders like myself were not immune to this. Every student was euphoric. They wanted to celebrate first and get an education later. Herein lay the rub: chaos reigned and the student movement (Cosas) usurped authority from teachers and bullied them. They cocked a snook at authority in the belief that they played a key role in emancipating the country. Ill-discipline prevailed and teachers felt impotent in the face of hostility. They taught those with the desire and discipline. E.P. was rudderless. There was a serious whiff of permissiveness and a laissez faire attitude. I wanted to beat a hasty retreat back to my august Bophuthatswana schools but felt it would be

a cop-out. Also, the anarchist in me relished these vibes. They seemed to present a much-longed-for proper excuse to quit school before matric.

### Staying the course

Before long my uncle got wind of this and quickly summoned me to what turned out to be, a heart-to-heart meeting. As it happened, he was concerned about the developments at my school but made it abundantly clear that I had to stick it out. Uncle Sam suggested that I develop the habit of studying independently of teachers. He drummed it into me to keep what he called the good company of disciplined students. I noted all his points and heeded everything he suggested out of reverence. I steeled my nerves for my grade 11, amid distractions and disruptions of Cosas. Soon I struck relations with the disciplined pack, which was comprised mostly of fellow provincials, with a common mission to exploit the resource situation, which we lacked from our respective birthplaces. The school had all the facilities like libraries and laboratories, which we could not use, in the midst of this chaos. But we also had a field day in terms of studying as we did not pay a red

cent to our school fee as payment was suspended in all public schools in Galeshewe, courtesy of the student movement. We swiftly formed study groups and swotted together. We solicited help of teachers and they assisted. Studying in this context was complex and unsafe though, as we were branded goody-two-shoes undermining the Cosas course. We were targeted and harassed but decided to roll with the punches. I worked doubly hard burning the proverbial midnight candle as much as I could.

Obsessed with a matric certificate my family averted its eyes to the school crisis. They instead insisted that I stick it out as they believed that the end was nigh. They had now pinned all their hopes on a matric certificate. To them my pre-matric performance was a good indicator that I would pass a matric. My grade 11 performance and results, notwithstanding the anarchy, confirmed their thoughts. I obtained a B symbol in this grade that made them feel vindicated. I was more than fit for a matric they thought and could bring the certificate that had eluded many before me. Matric was still a genuine article with some intellectual cachet to grease your path to success. It may not have been a be-all and end-all, but it was important as a means to an end. And the end in my family's case was to raise its stock in Losasaneng community. I suppose my family had seen shackles of poverty being broken by matriculants of humble beginnings in the village and hoped for the same...

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### First-generation matriculant

In 1995 I embarked on my matric journey, a year billed to be my last at E.P. Lekhela secondary school. Not to make heavy weather of it, matric was still a scary proposition to me. Always having been my schooling bogey I now had to tackle it head on. I had a dozen misgivings borne out of the fact that I was a first-generation matriculant in the family with no luxury of

foreknowledge or forewarning from my folks. I had no one in the family with experience of this grade to share tips or pointers, never mind material to pass down. On the other hand, my continuing generation classmates had the heads-up about this grade, as they were also equipped with notes and question papers passed down from their predecessors who gave them some edge over us first generations. They had pointers from their folks before them and were clued-up on how to go about approaching this grade. They sounded better equipped and optimistic even to the point of presumptuousness. I felt I was navigating this way without a compass. Where I struggled with jotting down labour intensive notes, my continuing generation classmates relied on previous notes passed down by their predecessors. They could even answer in class questions that baffled me. They spoke of a matric only as a springboard and prematurely speculated about courses to do for their tertiary education. They oozed with self-assurance where I was self-conscious. I envied their chutzpah. At this point, I had struck a good deal with my family that 1995 would be my last year at school with or without a matric certificate. Crisis abated at E.P. Lekhela in my matric year and we had unlimited access to our well-resourced library and laboratory. I knuckled down for my matric and realised that for me to complete this grade I had to ingratiate myself with teachers by doing their bidding. I hit the ground running and did every project they issued us. The effort paid off with some teachers lending me their invaluable material they normally use for their teaching trade. Through my new interpersonal skills I also endeared myself to my continuing generation classmates and borrowed their resourceful material. I wrote copious notes from their material like study guides and textbooks that I did not have, which was like pearls before swine to some. Our first quarter mock test came and I was in pole position further reinforcing my family's position. With my diffidence still getting the better of me, I saw this modest achievement as a fluke. I was still haunted by the idea that I had no brainpower for this grade and saw it as a preserve of elite bright sparks. I warned myself about setting great store by this achievement as I felt that I could easily rest on my laurels. With every project and test I raised my game and upped my ante to the delight of my curious uncle who strongly monitored my progress. I finally adjusted to Kimberley and started hitting my books at Galeshewe community library. Matric soon became bearable but still, I warned myself

against optimism as it could lead to complacency. I passed many half-yearly trials, which gave me the impetus to do more. I busted gut and maintained the momentum till the final examination.

With the arrival of matric final examination levels of anxiety and apprehension shot sky-high. Butterflies did their own thing in my tummy. The atmosphere in the massive hall in which we wrote the examination, with hawk-eyed invigilators keeping tabs on everyone only exacerbated the situation. There was

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no way you could have smuggled in a cheat sheet. We wrote this examination and with every paper I felt the weight of my family's dreams riding on my success. I thought of their vicarious feelings. Whether I failed or passed this grade, it would reflect on them either way. I applied myself and became punctilious. I wrote painstakingly and meticulously remembering that our teachers warned against dangers of sloppiness in the exam. By now, it had registered with me that I was carrying the family banner and had to break the mould. Better still, I had to show successors in my family that matric was a challenge to be surmounted by effort. I saw myself as a torchbearer illuminating the way of my successors. Their future success will depend on how well lit their way was by yours truly. When exams ended I went home to Losasaneng knowing that I gave this certificate the best shot. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief and spent time with my family that celebrated prematurely like I had made the grade already. December holidays became a non-event in my family as they were saving their energy for the results day. Days unfolded and soon the results day rolled around in January. My family woke up with the lark and sent one of my cousins to get a newspaper that carried matric results in Pampierstad, a town just a stone's throw from my place. I could not move an inch that day, as I also needed to know my fate. My cousin came back wearing a broad grin that was a give-away. A scramble for this paper ensued which resulted in it being crumpled. In the midst of this struggle my cousin, who had access to the paper before everyone, announced the news. Finally the paper was opened with many eyes on it. It became evident that I had not only passed matric but also

obtained an exemption or university entrance. I had surpassed everyone's expectations (including my own) and got more than what I bargained for. There was pandemonium in the family and I was royally treated like some warrior who brought home the glory. I had made my family proud and they were all elated bragging to everyone about this achievement as if some jinx had been expunged in the family.

### The ripple effect

Soon I became a point of reference to my family members and some relatives. Aunts and Uncles encouraged their offspring to take a leaf out of my book and emulate me. I was lauded to the sky in the family and they also, inevitably, took vicarious pride in my achievement as they crowed about having raised some smart aleck. I became a White Hope expected to improve my mother's lot and theirs. I relished my exalted position in the family with everyone coming to me for some schooling advice. I helped with projects of my family members. My success became a catalyst for many of my family member's with everyone benchmarking him or herself against mine. They emulated me and this had an extra-ordinary ripple effect with many surpassing me.

My success did not go unnoticed as it set some tongues wagging in the community. Parents in the neighborhood motivated their kids to ape me. I was asked to be involved in some community school projects designed to empower learners with their education. I joined a great team of other matriculants and educators in their endeavors to motivate learners to take their education seriously. Many heeded our advice and emulated us. Soon matriculants were a dime a dozen in the area, needless, to say it became a target to shoot for in the area. It became a must-have for every student in the community. It became a norm in the Losasaneng and soon lack of ambition in the area became a thing of the past. Mining and Army, popular jobs in the area, were now scorned and frowned upon. Here as well, a long ripple effect, affected every youth in the area and the face of the area changed beyond recognition. I was chuffed by the harvest of seeds I helped sow but I had to earn a crust for my family.

### Unmet expectations

With a university entrance the world was my oyster and I thought I could easily get a job with or without a tertiary qualification. With opportunities few and far between, in the newly named Northwest province I



had to pack my bags like many of my peers for the big city. Alas, when I arrived in 1996, reality struck. Opportunities abounded but matric had lost its cachet in the job market. My humanities could not help my cause like science would. I was not employable, regardless of my exemption. You had to have some post-matric certificate even for a simple job as security or waiting on tables. One could not compete with a matric anymore in the big city and I started realising that decent jobs were a domain of the 'degreed and diplomaed'. I saw many of my contemporaries living it large with tertiary qualifications and this made me envious. Though I only wanted to work for my family initially I realised that it was virtually impossible to achieve this without a post-matric certificate. Grudgingly I changed my tack and intended to pursue simple post-matric certificates with every job opportunity that came my way. Lady luck shone on me some day and odd jobs came my way. With every odd job I did I sent some money back home and also got to save for a post-matric certificate. Finally, I decided to do a national key point in security that improved my chances greatly in the marketplace. I worked for a while in this industry but was not fulfilled.

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With competition very stiff in the city I figured that I needed another proper certificate that could enable me to get a mainstream job. Having done humanities

and possessing a facility for languages I assumed that I was more cut out for artistic pursuits. Performance arts appealed to me more than anything. Perks and trappings of this career looked very enticing as well. I imagined myself as a scriptwriter or radio presenter at some point. One was spoiled for a choice in this career I thought. Without wasting time I enrolled for this certificate on a part-time basis. Within two years I completed the course and was ready to take on the world. To my disappointment, at the completion of the course the industry looked saturated with every college and university churning out artists of different stripes at a fast clip. Possessing the certificate, I still believed that I had a unique selling point that could give me an edge over others and naively quit my security job. I was intent on getting a break in the industry and decided to give it a bash. I took a calculated risk more in a sense of a leap of faith. I got stints here and there but hitherto, ran out of luck to get a proper break like many impecunious artists.

Despite these challenges, I still pride myself on having this certificate as it has shaped my outlook on life and enabled me to develop intellectually. I am now able to help with many school projects back home and also impart with people that I interact with in my life. It may not be financially rewarding, but it is fulfilling and intellectually stimulating. Owing to these life vagaries though, I do not think my career trajectory has developed along lines my family and I expected. For this reason I cannot claim to be on the credit-side of the ledger. I still owe my family and birthplace a huge debt.

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#### NOTES FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

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