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Young mother defies financial pressures and adversity to graduate at UCT

Bianca Rousseau had to drop out of school and find herself a job to finance her studies. Rousseau always wanted to continue studying after matriculating, but as one of four children being raised by a single mother, there wasn't any money.

It took her longer than she had expected, but in 2010 she finally began studying towards her BCom in marketing management through UNISA. It was hard to work and study, but she passed all the modules with distinction.

Unfortunately, financial pressures again got in the way of her dream, and she could only finish the first semester. Not long afterwards Rousseau got married and had her first child. Then her mother was diagnosed with cancer and she took some time off to care for her. Her mother died when she was seven months pregnant with her second child.

After taking care of her mother's funeral expenses, with R10 000 left over, she could have easily used that money for everyday living expenses. "But I decided to rather invest it in my future. I'd had enough of struggling due to a lack of education and, more than anything, I wanted to be an example to my daughter," she says.

Rousseau signed up for a three-month human resource management online short course, which started when her second daughter was three weeks old.

"Even though I didn't have any background in the subject and I often had to study at 2am while breastfeeding, I got a distinction. This gave me a sense of accomplishment, but it didn't really help my career as recruiters wanted to see more than just a short course."

She later enrolled for the Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice at UCT's Graduate School of Business. "The day I received my acceptance letter, I cried," Rousseau recalls. But her struggles were far from over. She had hoped to get a bursary, but discovered there weren't any for the course. Her classmates were all professionals and postgraduate students. "I felt inadequate with only my matric," she says.

She and her husband decided to refinance their house to fund her course. "It was a scary thing to do but I believed that it would be worthwhile, that it was an investment for the future."

Rousseau found a new job with a non-governmental organisation, which she is excited to start later this year.

"I wish my mom was here to see me, I know how proud she'd be. I feel honoured to dedicate this success to her."

Rousseau will graduate on 22 June 2018. She will also be awarded two class medals for passing her course with merit. For her, it feels like she is being launched into a whole new life.

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