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## **Unborn child spurs UCT graduate to obtain her Master's despite the odds**

She lost her mother two months before enrolling for a Master of Commerce (MCom) degree, found out she was pregnant during her first block of classes and went into labour an evening before crucial tests during her second block.

But Mildreat Muroyiwa was not deterred. She persisted and will now graduate with her MCom degree in Development Finance on Friday, 12 July.

Muroyiwa, the last of four siblings raised by a single mother in Mpopoma, a high-density township in the city of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, sees the attainment of her master's degree as a pivotal moment in the journey of her life which has been marked by a sheer determination to overcome all odds.

Just before her first block of classes at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) in February 2017, Muroyiwa found out that she was pregnant. Determined to continue, her unborn child became part of the masters' experience. And during her second block of classes in August 2017, the evening before she was meant to write a test, Muroyiwa went into labour and ended up taking her books along for the experience, hoping to still write the next morning.

It was an intense period of learning for Muroyiwa. "I honestly hoped the baby would be born after the block, but as life would have it I went into labour one Saturday evening before two important class tests that would contribute to my overall course mark. I so hoped the pain was fake so much that I carried my notebooks to the delivery ward. My classmates even nicknamed my baby *Baby MCom*," she shared.

During her third and final block of classes Muroyiwa had to travel with her niece from Johannesburg to help look after the child while she was in class and would sometimes go back to her rental apartment to feed the baby and express milk during lunch breaks. She would only return home at 20:00 or 21:00 after school.

Muroyiwa says of her life: "I have always refused to let people dictate what I can and cannot do. While some thought and intimated it was difficult or even impossible to study while pregnant I was determined to pursue my dream."

Raised by her mother - a woman though of limited education and means, desired to see the best in her children and strove to make it a reality - and extended family, after her father walked out when she was still an infant, Muroyiwa is the only one of her family to attain a university education.

It was the lived experience of seeing the drive of her mother and many other such women that inspired Muroyiwa to work within the development sector. She was determined to see the lives of people, particularly women, positively transformed. This was her main reason for enrolling in the MCom in Development Finance at the UCT GSB. However, two months before starting her studies, her mother succumbed to breast cancer. Her pillar of strength and support would, sadly, not see her graduate again.

As she wrote up her dissertation, her little daughter Imani was her constant companion so much so that Muroyiwa has decided to bring her to this graduation. "She must at least be in the class photo!" she said.

For her master's dissertation Muroyiwa chose to study the profitability of savings groups in South Africa. Her topic was inspired by growing up in Zimbabwe and watching her mother, as a single parent, work with her hands and send four children to school from knitting jerseys and participating in savings groups. She was fascinated at the thought of applying academic research and insight into what makes savings groups successful.

She explained: "Such work resonates with my heart and passion to have instruments that uplift the poorest out of poverty and savings groups are a financial inclusion tool that could help communities to do so. I had dreaded statistics all my life but for my dissertation, there was no dodging this bullet. With the support of my supervisors and the Development Finance Head of Research, I am glad and overjoyed that I obtained a distinction. It was worth the nights of data analysis!"

Muroyiwa is looking forward to giving back to society through work in the civic sector by applying all the material she has learnt at the GSB in enabling a better world, particularly for the girl child. She hopes to be a role model to her two daughters and is particularly grateful to her husband for his continual support and willingness to be there for her and "our daughters when I needed to shut myself away from the world to focus on my studies".

"For me the journey continues, I owe it to my daughters, to every girl child and to every woman to help transform the world we live in."

***ENDS***



Mildreat Muroyiwa and baby Imani

**Credit:** Brenton Geach/UCT

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