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19 July 2021

Mother-daughter duo graduate in remarkable family milestone



Alison Geduld (centre) and her oldest daughter, Savannah Steyn (right), are celebrating their first graduation as Alison's youngest daughter, Dakota Steyn (left), cheers them on.

Photo: Supplied

This July graduation season at the University of Cape Town (UCT) is a particularly important milestone for Alison Geduld and Savannah Steyn, as mother and daughter celebrate their achievements, cheered on by the youngest Dakota Steyn, a third-year student at the university.

On 12 July, Alison (49) graduated with her first degree, a Postgraduate Diploma in Management Practice, and Savannah (23) followed suit on 15 July with a BA in Theatre & Performance, specialising in Theatre Making.

“Graduation 2021 is a celebration of many things for Savannah and me but above all else, it is the gift of resilience that we want to revel in,” said Alison. Reaching this milestone together was born out of a promise Alison made to her two daughters.

“I told them, ‘I’ll go back to school when you two are enrolled at university’,” she said. After completing high school, Alison enrolled for a diploma in marketing and sales at Cape Technikon (now the Cape Peninsula University of Technology). That was in 1991. But she only managed to complete her first year of studies due to financial difficulties. Instead, she decided to join the workforce to alleviate some of the financial burden shouldered by her parents. “I had two other siblings who were also studying,” she added.

So when 2019 came around, and Alison’s youngest daughter, Dakota, finished her first year at UCT, mum kept her word and submitted her application to the UCT Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB). Initially, Alison didn’t think anything would come of it. But when her offer letter arrived, “shrieks of excitement could be heard houses away”.

In their stride

The return to the UCT GSB was a bittersweet moment for Alison. She joined UCT as a staff member in 2009, as a business coordinator in the Executive Education unit. In 2011 she was promoted to business developer, and the next year, to marketing coordinator. Sadly, five years later, Alison was retrenched.

But all doubts and fears dissipated when Alison stepped into the lecture hall as a UCT student. Fast forward to 2020 and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic: what started as an exciting year soon turned to one filled with anxiety and change – and the experience was no different in the Geduld household.

But this family took it in their stride. Alison took up the challenge of learning online and can now add navigating a virtual classroom to her skill set. And while Savannah’s coursework was largely performance-based and therefore presented a different kind of complexity, she too came out on top – so much so that she was awarded a scholarship from the Mandela Rhodes Foundation (MRF).

Learning bug’s bitten

Lockdown has presented both challenges and opportunities for the Geduld family and one of the silver linings has been time spent together.

“We became a study squad and support team for each other,” said Alison. “We read each other’s work, gave input and chatted about approaches. It was a very collaborative and fulfilling time.”

After their graduation celebrations, the Geduld study squad are back at it: with the learning bug’s teeth still firmly in place, Alison now plans to enrol for an Executive MBA at the UCT GSB. She’ll juggle this with her work as a senior analyst at Accenture South Africa.

As for Savannah, with the support of the MRF scholarship, she is furthering her studies in pursuit of an MA in Applied Theatre.

And Dakota is next in line, as she wraps up the final year of her Bachelor of Social Science.

Story by Carla Bernardo, UCT News

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