

# Born to be raised in a tough situation

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Naledi was born in the Eastern Cape and raised in the city of gold, Gauteng, Mofoneng, Johannesburg, in a small town of Diepsloot. She brought happiness to her family the day she was born – the 26 September in the year 1993, a year before the emancipation of apartheid. Because she was young to understand or even see what it was like during apartheid she feels lost and keeps asking questions that no one really wants to answer or listen to.

Naledi had a happy childhood and was raised by a single parent, her mother. She attended Riversands Primary School at Mnandi Road and high school at Kwena Molapo Comprehensive farm school at Lanseria. At high school Naledi was very competitive in her school work and in the top three of the best learners in her class. In grade 10 she was again the best learner, with a positive attitude, and up to date with her school work. She rolled with mates who were also driven and wanted to achieve the same goals as hers.

Even though she had a happy childhood Naledi was constantly sick. When she was in grade 2 she had chicken pox and later she was diagnosed with TB. She took her TB treatment and was TB free. When she was ten years old she was diagnosed with pneumonia. From the day she had pneumonia she took her medication until high school. Little did she know it was not just pneumonia, there was more.



In February 2009 she had a doctor's appointment. She woke early that morning, went to the taxi rank and stood in a long queue waiting for the taxi to arrive. The queue kept getting smaller and smaller and finally she got into the taxi going to Joburg. When she got to Joburg she went to another taxi rank and took a taxi to Brixton and Coronation Hospital. At the hospital she submitted her appointment card to the reception guy so that he could look for her file while she left for the waiting room.

This was a very beautiful room with a blue carpet and white walls. There were pictures all over the walls and written on the pictures were the words 'HIV, ARV medications, healthy diet'. The room was well lit and there were many children of her age (16) and some younger. The doctors kept coming in to call the names of the children whose files were on the table. One doctor came in and called 'Naledi Mpholo'.

Naledi followed the doctor into the room. The doctor sat down. Naledi closed the door behind her, pulled up a chair and also sat down. The doctor opened Naledi's file. It looked like she was filling in a form inside the file. Naledi sat quietly, staring at the window behind her, waiting for the doctor to start questioning her about her health. The doctor looked up, greeted Naledi and asked how she was feeling today. As the doctor asked other questions all Naledi could hear was 'you hiv positive and this and that ...' Naledi looked at the doctor and said, 'Hold on ma'm, what are you talking about?' 'Oh so you didn't know you were HIV positive?' Naledi said 'No'.

The doctor could see the shock in Naledi's eyes and she asked who had been helping Naledi to get her medication from the clinic. "My mom" Naledi answered. The doctor asked if Naledi was okay. Because it takes time for her to get angry Naledi said she was fine. Because she felt fine at that moment.

When she closed the doctor's door that's when the emotions kicked in. That HIV part sank in. She felt anger, betrayal, a cloud of emotions over her head. She wanted to explode. She went to the dispensary to collect her medication. Again she sat in a very long queue and this time she was very impatient. She wanted to go home. She did not know who to talk to, what to say. She was confused.

The doctor's referral letter stated how she was infected. 'The patient was born HIV positive' it read, Naledi wanted to hear this from the horse's mouth, from her mother. She wanted her mother to tell her this herself, not the doctor. So she went to her mum to find out what exactly happened and how she got infected with HIV. Her mum is a very strict person and responded that Naledi had got infected in a car accident. Naledi went and did her research and found that there is zero point something percent chance that a person can get the virus in a car accident. She felt betrayed once more.

Naledi lived much of her life in depression after finding out about her status. She took every day as it came and never went back to her mom to ask anything because she had lost trust in anything her mom said to her.

She recalled a visit she had made to the doctor with her mother when she was ten years old and still at primary school. As usual her mom went with her because she was young. Looking back she imagines that on this day her mum must have been pressured by the hospital counsellors to confront the skeletons in her closet, to tell Naledi the truth about what was really going on. So there were Naledi and her mother at the hospital, walking on the grey rough shiny tiles, passing the colourful, beautiful swings nearby, and exiting from just outside the door. As they walked towards the stairs they felt a strong wind from the air conditioner which looked like a fan in a grey lined iron fence. 'Naledi, my girl' said her

mother, 'you know you have been very sick lately and you have been taking medication because you are positive'. Her mother was trying to disclose Naledi's HIV status. But how on earth is a 10 year old supposed to understand what is meant by the word 'positive'? I mean what is that? Mind you Naledi's mother did not say you are HIV positive. She only said you are positive. There are so many ways a person can be positive. So Naledi did not get what her mother was trying to tell her on that day. So when the doctor said she was HIV positive it came to Naledi as a shock and caused her trauma.

HIV positive children always go for counselling when they have doctors' appointments. So while Naledi went for counselling, and they would ask if she knew the real reason why she was taking medication, Naledi always answered confidently 'I am still recovering from pneumonia and so I have to stay on my medication'. She was young but could see the disappointed reaction to her answer on the counsellor's faces, yet she did not read too much into their emotions and she was not curious enough to ask any questions.

During senior primary and high school Naledi was always chosen to attend workshops about health and HIV and this now made sense to her that possibly the universe was talking to her.

Nonetheless she was now depressed, hating her life. She had always attended church and strongly believed in God but at this stage of her life she hated Him, she stopped believing, she stopped going to church. Her life did not really matter anymore. She wanted to die. She stopped enjoying the things she used to enjoy.

She was in a dark place. Her marks at school declined. She started performing really badly. In fact she failed three terms. The third term she studied so much she did not have time for sleep. She had already given up that she would pass matric. She had lost hope but

a part of her wanted that matric certificate in her hand so badly. She wanted to appear in the newspaper.

Come the end of 2011 and it was now 2012. Naledi received a call from her mom saying that her friend bought a newspaper and Naledi's name was in it. Naledi was very excited. That same morning she went to school to fetch her matric statement and it was true! She had succeeded in her matric.

Naledi was depressed for four years after finding out her status. Eventually she continued living her life. She realised she had to get over what had happened, and move on to the next chapter of her life.

