

Looking on the bright side

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The bad good news

It was during the month of July in 2012. Half way through my year in Grade Eleven. Everyone was anxious with high hopes that I would make it to the next grade the following year. As usual I woke at 6 o' clock. But this morning I was dizzy and nauseous. Then suddenly it all went dark. I felt the blood rush through my veins.

'Juliet! Juliet!' The voice was getting louder. I opened my eyes. I was on the floor next to the chest of drawers. I realised I had had fallen, the pain striking hard on my shoulder and head a reminder of the fall. 'What's wrong?' asked my sister who was standing there astonished. 'Are you okay?' She held my hand to help me up. We sat on the bed. I told her how I was feeling and she told me to go to the doctor that very same day.

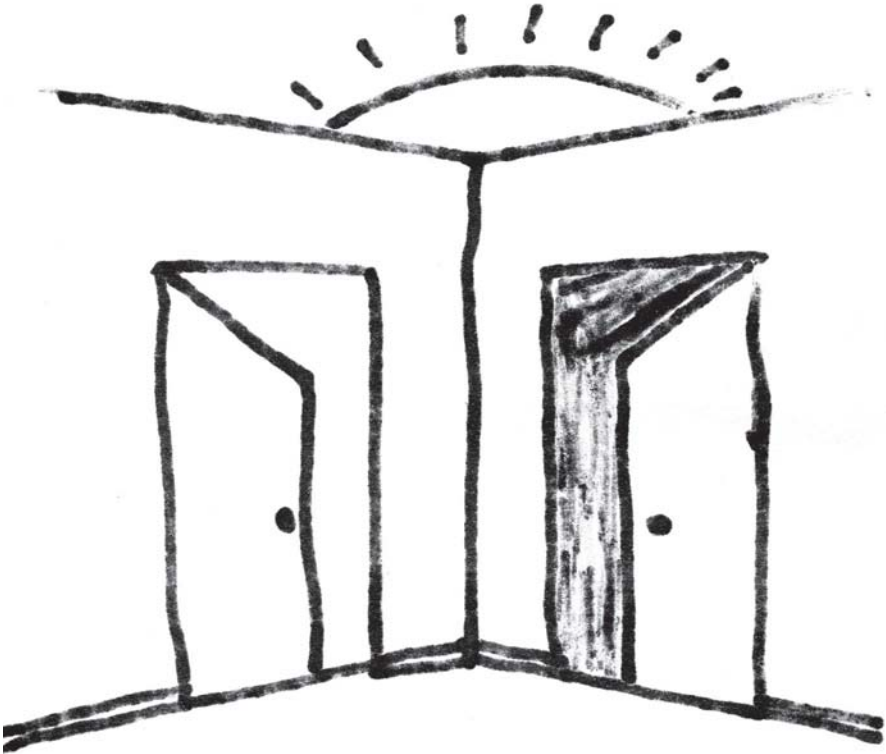
Upon arriving at the doctor's office I could hear the dental drill. It sent shivers down my spine. A light skinned lady with oval glasses told me to wait. After 30 minutes I went into the doctor's room and took a seat. My mind was somewhere else, my eyes roamed around the white walls covered with posters about health and human organs. The doctor had to repeat his question to get my attention: 'How can I assist you?' I answered that I was having pains in my womb for the past weeks and that this morning I felt dizzy and nauseous.

He wrote in a big book and then asked me a question I was not expecting. 'When did you last have your period?' I told him the previous month. He then asked me to climb on the bed and

unbutton my jeans so he could do a scan. He applied gel then he took this little machine that looked like a computer mouse and looked at the small screen. I asked what he found. He said 'Well miss you are fifteen weeks pregnant. Your baby is fully developed. Here is the head' he pointed on the screen. I could not believe it. I just wept. I cried all the way home.

Everyone finds out about the pregnancy

My older sister Nelisiwe was the first to find out that I was pregnant. She is very kind and understanding. She asked what I was planning to do. I told her it was too late for an abortion, I



was already four months pregnant. She said even if I was one week pregnant she would not allow me to abort, I had to take responsibility for my actions. She told my grandmother who was very disappointed in me. It broke my heart. All she was worried about was my education.

Days passed and my pregnancy started showing. One night we were in the dining room, watching television as a family – me, grandmother, Nelisiwe, my little sister Luyanda and my sister's daughter Ntando. My grandmother asked 'How are you going to cope at school with this big belly'. In my head I said it is better if I stopped school and continued the following year, but my heart was not happy with this. I could not answer my grandmother. She then said 'My dear daughter, unfortunately I cannot allow you to stay at home and miss school. You will have to pull yourself together and finish this year. I knew in my heart that she only wanted the best for me and I had to make it up to her. The doctor had said my baby would be born in December so that meant I would have to write the exams while still pregnant.

Growing through pregnancy

I sat alone in my bedroom looking at the purple walls with their posters, at my bed taking up two corners, my chest of drawers occupying a third corner, and I thought very hard. The room was no longer mine alone. I would have to share it with my new baby. I would have to do everything in a way that would accommodate the two of us. It was no longer about me only. I had to think for two and every decision I made would affect my child. Being pregnant at the age of seventeen did not mean I had to let go of my life goals. My pregnancy was a wake-up call. If I did not plan ahead I would not reach my goals. I had to restructure my goals.

The final year exam came. It was November. I was eight months pregnant. My body weight was 164 Kg. My stomach was so big, one

would have thought I had swallowed a water melon! My school uniform did not fit me. I had to buy a new shirt. My feet were always swollen and I was always craving something cold or sweet.

Though going to school with a big belly was extremely hard, I pushed myself. In class my chair was near the wall on the right side, so whenever I felt tired I just leaned against the wall and slept. My study time at home was dawn. I would run out of sleep, so I would take my books and study.

I managed to write all my papers and I waited for the report cards. The reports were issued on the 5 December. I went to school to fetch mine. When I entered school I was really frightened. I saw all kinds of facial expressions. I passed—screams, laughter, and tears. I went to my teacher’s office and knocked. He opened the door and just smiled. I could see that I had done something good, but I was still worried. He stood there holding a stack of papers. He pulled out one paper, smiled more broadly and said ‘congratulations you have made it to grade 12!’ I felt really happy. When I got home and showed them my report card they were happy. I could see the disappointment fading away from my grandmother’s eyes bit by bit.

Giving birth

The scariest part of pregnancy was giving birth. My water broke on the 26 December. I felt water gushing as if from a fire hydrant. A huge gush went all over the floor as I was walking to the kitchen. It was just after 8pm. My grandmother called the transport. She then called Sakhile the father of my baby to tell him I was about to give birth.

When we arrived at the hospital I was scared. I dragged my feet along the shiny floors all the way down the dimly lit corridors to the maternity admission ward. The lady at the front desk assured

me it would be okay and I should not be scared. We were directed through two more corridors. I could hear unpleasant sounds from behind the door– sounds of many different kinds of screams. I felt confused.

The moment we walked in I could not believe it. Really it felt like I was hallucinating, but it was real. I stared at women being tortured by their labour pains, screaming, shouting, crying, doing all kinds of crazy things. Being the youngest in that ward I did not know how to react. It was a traumatising experience. The fact that I had to spend the night there killed me inside. My phone rang every now and then–Sakhile was with me every step of the way. He wanted to know everything. He encouraged me and gave me strength to push through.

I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. Her dad named her Aphile and I named her Ntokozo because even though she came at the wrong time she brought joy into my life and she groomed me.

The following year I went back to school to complete my matric. My grandmother had no problem with babysitting so that I could study and achieve my goals. I am very grateful for that, because every day when I look at Ntokozo I see all my life achievements. She encourages me to fulfil my life goals because all I do affects not only my future, but hers also.

Today I am happy and proud to say I have made it and I am still going forward. I passed my matric. One day, while we were still studying for the matric exams, the principal of my school asked me what inspires me to want to pass. I told him it was Ntokozo. He was confused then, but when the matric results came out I reminded him that I fell pregnant while still at school, so I cannot live with that disappointment all my life. I have to change it and make it better than before. He gave me a big hug and said ‘I am proud of you’.

Those words inspired me, and with my matric certificate enabled me to further my studies. Next year I will be studying law at the University of Johannesburg.

Being pregnant taught me to take responsibility and see things from a different perspective. I love my daughter and I am happy and glad that she came into my life and changed me to be a better person. I intend to make her an even better person than she made me. All praise to Ntokozo!

