



POWER YOUR FUTURE

Botany is her big deal

By Ufrieda Ho

Growing up in the Free State in Thaba Nchu with very little exposure to career guidance, Moleboheng Motsi thought the only career options open to her were to be a teacher or a doctor.

She hoped that her love for science would lead her to a career in medicine. That was not to be, but she soon realised there were still a range of science related careers open to her so she enrolled to do a BSc degree at the University of the North's campus in Qwa Qwa. There she found her new love – the study of plants. "I guess I grew to love botany by the time I finished my undergraduate studies," says Moleboheng. She's currently doing her doctoral studies at the University of Johannesburg. She's finishing her PhD thesis this year in molecular phylogeny. Her research deals with the evolutionary relationship between plant organisms. It sounds very scientific, scary even, but Moleboheng says science and botany is not something that just happens in laboratories, but is at the very core of life. "From plants we get paper, medicine; even the food that we eat."

Let your passion drive you

Moleboheng says that if you want to be an expert in your field you need to stick it out even if it means doing one degree after the other, which is not easy. "There were handicaps along the way, but I kept my faith in God and I always believed in myself. I would also advise people to work and study hard and also to find a good mentor to guide you," she says. Moleboheng has proved herself to be an outstanding scholar, in fact the University of Johannesburg, where she is studying, is also her part time employer. She has also travelled the world, sometimes delivering papers and working with and learning from some of the top scientists in her field.



Moleboheng Motsi

She has studied at the prestigious Jodrell Laboratory in Kew Gardens and Imperial College in the United Kingdom, and travelled to Australia to collect plant species for her research.

And her advice?

"We are living in a time where we have to compete globally and we need many more PhD students. "I would say to people to go for it. There is research funding available, you just have to ask for help when you need it, rather than to sit in the dark because you're too scared to ask." But even hard working PhD students have to take time out sometimes and for Moleboheng this means unwinding with friends, going to church and shopping. She jokes that she may love handbags as much as her precious plants.

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