

■ INSPIRATION



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Lorika Beukes, Hloniphile Sithole Mthethwa, Joy Adu, Dr Bongwiwe Mshengu.

UKZN's wonder women in the sciences

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UNIVERSITY of KwaZulu-Natal's wonder women in the sciences agree that passion combined with an inquisitive mind were enough to earn a determined student the highest level of education.

With PhDs, these mothers, wives and daughters from different walks of life said dedication saw them through and their achievements should be an inspiration to younger women.

Dr Hloniphile Sithole Mthethwa, lecturer in the school of mathematics, statistics and computer science, said from an early age she figured that she could solve most maths problems without any struggle.

Sithole Mthethwa from Edendale in Pietermaritzburg, said her family encouraged her to study further and on her journey she discovered that balancing her personal life, work and having to go the extra mile to prove herself as a woman was challenging.

Sithole Mthethwa believes every young person should consider taking maths in their school career regardless of what career path. "There is a stigma of difficulty attached to mathematics and it should not be allowed."

Dr Lorika Beukes, principal microscopy technician at UKZN's microscopy and microanalysis unit said: "I always thought studying was for rich people. I never grew up as a wealthy child and I always knew that when I finished school I would have to start working immediately to help out at home."

"After matriculating, I immediately applied for a position as an in-service training nurse and was accepted. When my uncle heard of this, he immediately persuaded my parents to allow me to further my studies in the science field."

Dr Joy Tuoyo Adu, civil engineering lecturer and expert in water quality modelling and wastewater engineering, said she dreamed of changing the way water is used and preserved for present and future generations.

"In general, whatever water we use becomes wastewater which has to undergo treatment processes before being discharged back into the environment."

Dr Bongwiwe Mshengu, senior tutor in the school of chemistry and physics and at the university's Science Access Programme said: "I chose to be a scientist because I have an inquisitive mind, I enjoy problem solving, I believe in hands-on experiments to prove theoretical concepts, and this was my passion since the age of six."

Mshengu said some of the reasons science is perceived difficult and boring was the inability by students to relate to the existing books or theories.