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Former Miss SA's challenging road to graduation

After a seven-year journey at the University of Cape Town (UCT) which includes overcoming Tuberculosis (TB), former Miss South Africa, Tamaryn Green, will finally graduate with her MBChB on Monday, 23 December.

Reflecting on her journey after the diagnosis in the middle of her second year, she remembers having only one thought: don't tell anyone. And for a while she didn't. But as time passed, she realised that keeping mum about contracting TB was a big mistake.

Green realised that she could use her diagnosis to educate young South Africans on the potentially fatal disease and help break the stigma attached to TB, especially among the youth. Through education she could make a difference in the lives of many.

As a medical doctor in waiting, it was her duty. And she managed to do just that.

Her seven years as a medical student in UCT's Faculty of Health Sciences included the full year Green took a leave of absence to concentrate on her Miss SA duties.

And what a ride it's been, one with mostly highs, but as with everything in life, there were a few lows too.

"My journey has been challenging yet fulfilling. I won't trade a second of it," Green said.

Opening up

But opening up about contracting the disease proved to be healing in itself.

In 2018 after she was crowned Miss SA, her role required her to decide on a campaign for her reign. By then, it had been three years since she was diagnosed and cured of TB, and she toyed with the idea of dedicating her reign to her fight against the disease.

She knew that the message she wanted to spread about the effects of TB would be powerful and relevant to fellow South Africans. However, she was unsure of how people would react. After discussing her idea with a Miss SA organiser, and receiving full support, she pitched the idea to the pageant board.

As they say, the rest is history.

The Miss SA platform was also the perfect fit for her #BreakTheStigmaCampaign.

“Wanting to deal with my illness by myself was emotionally and mentally taxing. Opening up about it felt like a weight being lifted off my shoulders,” she said.

Green received an outpouring of support from TB survivors and became a World Health Organisation and National Department of Health ambassador. In September 2018 she addressed the United Nations’ first-ever high-level panel on TB.

“This experience has taught me never to be afraid to open up about challenges or adversity – and to ask for help,” she said.

In the pipeline

The 25-year-old said she is excited to receive her medical degree and to start making a difference in the lives of people who need it most.

And while she admitted that medicine was not her first career choice, she said she is right where she is meant to be.

“I made the decision to study medicine because my father always wanted to be a doctor but couldn’t. The apartheid era brought many challenges that prevented him from pursuing the career,” she said.

“I am blessed that once I started studying medicine, I realised that I really have a love for it. I’d love to make a difference in people’s lives by helping and healing.”

ENDS

Please note that Tamaryn will not be available for interviews after her graduation ceremony on Monday, 23 December 2019.



Tamaryn Green **Credit:** Willem Botha

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