

## **Standing on protocols salutations.**

There is a saying that “it takes a village to raise a child”—but in my case, it took much more than a village. It took someone from the other side of the world who believed in me before she even knew me.

My name is **Lubanzi Mgenge**, and I was born in the rural areas of Flagstaff in the Eastern Cape, where opportunities for quality education were very limited. My family later moved to Durban in search of a better life, and that is where I grew up.

Fortunately, my performance in both academics and sport earned me a bursary to study at Simon’s Town School through the Lawhill Maritime Centre. And that is where my life changed.

Coming to Lawhill was both a blessing and a challenge. I came from a school where everything even English was taught in my home language, isiZulu. Suddenly I had to learn isiXhosa as a Home Language, and I found myself in a place where I had to articulate myself in English and so. All these soft skills have shaped me to be this particular person I am today. Indeed, here we shine diamonds.

academics were not only part of my growth. I also found myself in sports I never imagined doing. Athletics, Rugby, rowing and sailing. Rowing taught me grit and earned me a gold medal. Sailing gave me some of the greatest experiences of my life: competing in MSC Week and the prestigious Lipton Cup. We rewrote as the Class of 2025 and to be all qualified skippers. Opportunities like these transformed how I see myself and my future.

To the Class of 2026, Let me share this with you. Stay true to your dreams, your dreams are very valid. There one particular saying in Zulu that says. I will say it Zulu, and I’ll try to translate it. It says, iphupho alifi umnikazi esaphila and merely translates to: A dream does not die while the dreamer is still alive. So, while you’re still alive and kicking your dream is still valid and it will remain alive. Stay true to your vision. Stay true to yourself, stay true to your identity. Ensure that there is alignment in your life, alignment between your vision, relationships and emotions and so on. If your dreamer does not scare you, if your dreams do not give you restless night, they not big enough. Dream even bigger.

There was a conversation between two people, and one friend ask what most important? Is it the Journey or the destination. The other friend answered “it is the company” it does matter difficulties we came across. The memories that stick along is such moment the laughter, smiling with the people that care about you. It was never about the journey or the destination. It the friends and families and the people that we keep for the rest of our lives.

But all of this, everything I have achieved, leads back to one moment.

In 2023, the UNC MBA Class visited Lawhill. And one of the students, **Mrs Leigh Shultz**, made a decision that would rewrite my entire journey. At that time, I was at Lawhill with no sponsor technically studying for free while earning eight distinctions every term. I carried the constant fear of uncertainty.

Then on the 26th of October 2023, an email came through. Mrs Leigh Shultz had chosen to sponsor me.

That single act changed everything.

It lifted the weight from my shoulders. It gave me confidence, stability, and motivation. But more than that, it reminded me that there are people in this world who invest in others simply because they believe in potential. My relationship with Mrs Shultz has since grown into one of the most meaningful connections in my life. Her support has pushed me, encouraged me, and kept me striving for excellence.

Today, as I stand here as a final-year student, I am a product of generosity, opportunity, and belief. My story is proof that one decision, one act of kindness, can change a life forever.