

From Rural Roots to Tech Dreams: My Journey of Growth, Education, and Career

Introduction: A Dream Born in the Rural Heart of KwaZulu-Natal

My name is Thembinkosi Dladla, but most people call me Stephan. I am 24 years old, born and raised in the small rural village of eMakhabeleni in KwaMaphumulo, KwaZulu-Natal. Growing up in a rural area meant facing numerous challenges—limited resources, fewer opportunities, and an education system that sometimes lacked the necessary tools to prepare students for the fast-changing world. But despite these challenges, I always believed that my circumstances would not define my future.

The Foundation: Education and the Power of Choice

My academic journey began at Bhekiwe Primary School, where I first learned to read, write, and communicate. These were the building blocks of my education, shaping my curiosity and determination to learn more. In 2014, I moved on to Mashingizela High School, where my perspective on learning expanded. I developed crucial life skills, including communication, time management, and critical thinking. The transition from lower to higher grades was a significant shift, as subjects became more advanced. However, one of the biggest challenges came in Grade 10 when I had to choose a stream. Unsure of what I wanted to become, I decided to take the Science stream, believing it would give me a broad foundation for future opportunities.

Science was not easy, but I pushed through and successfully completed my matric in 2018. This achievement opened another door I was accepted into the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) for a BSc Augmented Program.

Discovering My Passion for Technology

My first year at university was both exciting and overwhelming. The augmented program was like a bridge, preparing me for my main course of study. However, I faced another major decision choosing my specialization. To make an informed choice, I sought guidance from mentors, advisers, and fellow students who had already been through the program.

During this time, a residence tutor introduced me to Computer Science, and my curiosity was sparked. I started researching the field, fascinated by how technology solves complex problems and continuously evolves. I saw the potential of technology in shaping the future, and I wanted to be part of that transformation. That's when my obsession with tech truly began.

The following year, I officially chose to pursue Computer Science and Information Technology. Learning how to think critically, solve problems with technology, and code

was exhilarating. Some modules challenged me significantly, but I embraced the growth mindset understanding that failure was not the end but an opportunity to learn.

At one point, I struggled academically because I was trying to do everything alone. When I failed some modules, I realized the importance of seeking help. I found a personal mentor, attended extra classes, and slowly started improving. My mentor's greatest lesson was to think big and never limit myself. With determination, I completed my degree in 2023 and officially graduated in May 2024.

From Graduate to Professional

After graduation, I returned home, eager but uncertain about the next step. The job application process was a challenge, I applied for countless opportunities, faced multiple rejections, nerve-wracking interviews, and even silence after tests. The emotional toll was real. It was frustrating, discouraging, and often left me questioning my abilities.

But I refused to give up. I kept improving myself, learning new coding skills, and expanding my knowledge. I reminded myself that persistence would eventually open doors.

In November 2024, I received an email about a phone interview with CAPACITI. It was my first-ever phone interview, and I was both excited and scared. I prepared as much as I could, took the interview, and to my relief I passed! Shortly after, I was invited for a formal interview. The fear returned, but I reminded myself of how far I had come. The interview went well, and a few days later, I received the email I had been hoping for, I was accepted.

The Present and the Future

Today, I am a full-stack development intern, continuously learning, growing, and refining my skills in the tech industry. This journey has taught me that growth is a continuous process, and I am still hungry for knowledge. My goal is to become a highly skilled software developer, contributing to innovative solutions and making an impact in the tech world.

Reflecting on my path, I see how every stage from my rural upbringing to my struggles in university and my persistence in job applications has shaped me. My story is proof that no matter where you come from, with determination, resilience, and continuous learning, you can achieve your dreams.