



Two recent Rhodes Journalism School (JMS) graduates won section awards at the 2012 Discovery Health Journalism Awards. Although not Health Journ grads, we're very proud of them.

Fatima Simjee (BJourn class of 2009) won the inaugural “loveLife young upcoming Health Journalist of the year” award and Siphosethu Stuurman (BJourn class of 2010) won the Discovery Health “Best radio health journalism” award. They both received a cash prize of R25,000.

Simjee’s won her award for a 24-minute Special Assignment TV documentary which she wrote, filmed and edited on her own. Entitled “Behind her Smile”, the documentary tells the story of 38-year-old single mother, Nozipho Mgoma, prolonged struggle against end-stage breast cancer. Nozipho died shortly before the documentary aired on SABC 3 in September 2011.

Simjee spend 8 months interviewing Nozipho before her death. “She was determined to leave a legacy,” Simjee said. “Although she was often in great pain, she wanted something that could both alert other women to the need to get regular check-ups and mammograms, and also to give her nine-year old daughter, Gugulethu, something to remember her by.”

Nozipho told Simjee: “I am scared. Maybe if I didn’t have child, I wouldn’t be scared. But, because I have a child, I’m scared. No one is going to love my child like I love her. I tell her, “Mummy’s sick and Mummy is going to die. Some day, you will be alone and then you will have to do things for yourself. So that is why I’m teaching you now.”

Simjee decided not to use the usual camera crew of 3 or 4 people to shoot the documentary,

and did all the filming on her own. This helped create a real intimacy between the two women, which shines through the documentary, according to the judges.

Simjee credits both Rhodes Journalism School and her current employer, Health-e, a non-profit health journalism news agency, with her success. “The Journalism School really prepared me well for the world of work. I was able to join Health-e and go immediately into making TV documentaries for broadcast without any further training. Of course I’ve learned a great deal during my time at Health-e, but in my BJourn 4th year, the lecturers really get you to produce work of broadcast quality, so the transition to the ‘real world’ is fairly easy.”

Siphosethu Stuurman won the “Best Radio Health Journalism” Award for a story on a group of elderly Soweto-based women who have arthritis. The women get together most weekdays in an entirely self-organised support group to do stretching exercises, sing songs and help each other cope with their debilitating illness. “They refuse to bow their condition” says Stuurman, “they have an amazing spirit of resilience and I felt I had to capture that in my documentary.”

The documentary was broadcast in both English and isiXhosa on various SABC radio channels late 2011.

Stuurman also credits Rhodes Journalism School for giving him the skills he needed to do good journalism straight after graduating. Born and raised in Peddie and schooled in Port Elizabeth, Stuurman was activity involved in both the Activate and Oppidan student newspapers, as well as Rhodes Music Radio, while doing the–year BJourn degree. He also interned at Health-e, along with Fatima Simjee, but with a focus on print and radio.

“In the 4th year of BJourn, I specialised in radio, and that’s where I really got into it, learning the art form, and working out how to tell a story in sound. The lecturers allowed me to experiment with sound and think about how to give ordinary people a voice,” Stuurman said.

“I wanted to get down to the grassroots, and create platforms for people to express themselves, and I think Rhodes prepared me really well to do that”.

Another recent Rhodes graduate, Hanna Barry, won the award for “Best Analysis and Commentary” for a piece “Healthcare’s new horizon: a prognosis for NHI” that she wrote for RISKSA magazine. Hanna did not do Journalism at Rhodes, but the media-rich environment at Rhodes clearly rubbed off on her.