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Paul !Nomiseb

## Panelbeater

Panelbeaters, often called collision repair technicians repair or replace body parts of vehicles that have been damaged. The demand for panelbeaters continues to grow due to an increase in vehicle ownership rates.

Meet 40-year old Paul Nomiseb, a skilled panelbeater, employed by Thiel's Body Works in the capital, who despite not having any formal qualifications, has overcome many odds in living his passion. This is his story.

### Childhood Dream

Paul !Nomiseb hails from the Kunene region. Born at Outjo, he grew up in the dusty streets of Khorixas where he attended the Brunvels Agricultural School and later the Mureti Secondary School.

Paul's father was a panelbeater too. Spending school holidays and weekends being his helper, it soon became obvious he had a talent and a passion for the occupation. "I learned my early panelbeating skills from him. In fact, he gave me my very first panelbeating assignment when he ran over a warthog and asked me to remove the fender from the pickup and hammer out some of the damage", he recalls.

According to Paul, the dream to follow in his father's footsteps was born that day. "I should say thank you to that warthog, I guess. It got me hooked in pursuing my dream", he shares.

### Technically-Inclined

Circumstances were difficult, though. Paul's parents found the going tough in raising their seven daughters and three sons. And



since Paul was the one that didn't perform too well academically, he had to drop out in Grade 6 to seek employment at the coastal town of Henties Bay, where he landed a job as a gardener.

"I was brought up to work with my hands. My father always said that if you have ten fingers, you can work and don't have to go hungry. Gardening wasn't my dream job, but it generated an income to sustain myself and help my parents and siblings.", Paul notes.

Despite the setback, Paul remained resolute to follow his dream. Luckily for him, one of his gardening clients was the owner of Smith's Garage, a small Henties Bay autobody repair shop, to whom Paul volunteered his services. The owner saw Paul's potential and took him in as an apprentice trainee. His dreams were back on track.

## In-Service Training

Paul grabbed the opportunity to work as an apprentice with both hands. "I was like a kid in a candy store. Working in a fully-fledged workshop with modern equipment and oxy-acetylene cutting equipment technology was world's apart from what I was used to working with my father. I was like a sponge, absorbing everything I was taught.

A commitment to quality workmanship has since seen Paul amassing considerable experience at several employers over the years, at Swakopmund, Outjo and Walvis Bay. He moved to Windhoek in 2008 and is now employed at Thiel's Body Works, located in the capital's Southern Industrial Area. "I've just always had this natural ability to work with metal. It's difficult to explain. It's like I can feel the curves and lines of the bodywork under my hands and touching it tells me whether I've

been able to reshape those lines and curves", he explains. "I realised that since I've never completed school and didn't have any qualifications, the quality of my work and my reputation should be my CV. I'm proud in saying that wherever I've worked, my supervisors were always happy with my work. I have the testimonials to prove it", Paul highlights.

## Lifelong Learner

Paul's infectious enthusiasm for what he does and his dedication to quality workmanship make him an asset to the Thiel's Body Works team, where he is considered the 'go-to-man' for the big jobs. "I love working at Thiel's. We are a good team and the owners appreciate my work. They recently awarded me with a certificate for 'Most Valuable Worker'. I am also a shopsteward for my fellow workers and act as a link between them and the management. Not too shabby for someone with no qualifications", he says.

Clearly hooked by his profession, Paul loves seeing his work evolve; whether that be fixing up a car that has been in an accident, or doing restoration work. "Panelbeating is not one of those anyone-can-do-it jobs. It requires precision and lots of patience. You need to be able to read and understand measurements and specifications; have a good understanding of metals, vehicle body parts and mechanics; and be able to work with hand tools and machines", he explains.

"The learning doesn't really ever end. As an experienced panelbeater, I continue to learn new methods and aspects of the trade", he adds.

## Big Dreams

The demand for panelbeaters continues to grow. With more private vehicles on the road, there has been an increase in crashes, which then require the services of

panelbeaters. Many experienced panelbeaters, especially those who have also mastered spraypainting, choose to go into business for themselves.

Working for a leading collision repair company, Paul is gaining invaluable insight into the running of a professional business. Although committed to his employer, he harbours dreams of opening his own autobody repair shop. He is already making work of this venture, doing repairs on vehicles after hours and over weekends. "Often, people don't seem to take me seriously when I share my dream. Perhaps, they think I don't have the resources and business skills. And although I agree that it will be difficult to do so without any financial backing and support, I am confident that I will make it happen", he shares.

"I want to honour my father's legacy. But, when you follow in your father's footsteps you have to leave a bigger imprint. I now know what it takes to make a success in this industry. It's all about customer service and quality workmanship. And with God on my side, I can do it, and one day open the doors to my own workshop. With him, anything is possible", Paul adds.

## Recognition of Prior Learning

Away from work, Paul remains the same warm and down-to-earth person, who enjoys spending

quality time with his family. As a skilled, but unqualified craftsman, Paul is also eager to enroll for assessment under the Namibia Training Authority's Recognition of Prior Learning programme. Under this programme, skilled artisans with the requisite work experience can enroll for assessment and obtain certification.

"I've learned about the programme and that soon assessment will also be possible in the field of Panelbeating. With the support of my employer, I intend registering for assessment soon. This is a wonderful initiative for so many other artisans who are good and skilled at what they do, but who are denied opportunities because they don't have the papers", he notes.

Paul !Nomiseb. Humble, committed, dedicated, passionate. Although he holds no qualifications in his profession, he is competent and skilled. His story teaches us to never be overwhelmed by our circumstances.

That there will always be obstacles, doubters and setbacks along the way. But that with hard work, perseverance and self-belief, there is no limit to what you can achieve.

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