



# QUEEN CODES

**AT THE WOMEN IN COMPUTING CONFERENCE, HELD AT NUST ON 24 MARCH 2018, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DR ANICIA PETERS, SISTER NAMIBIA LEARNED ABOUT QUEEN NAMENE, GRADE 11 LEARNER AT THE HIGHER TECHNICAL SCHOOL IN WINDHOEK. WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A CHAT TO THIS SOFT-SPOKEN YOUNG WOMAN.**

**SN: QUEEN, CAN YOU GIVE US SOME FAMILY BACKGROUND, PLEASE?**

**QN:** I was born and raised in Windhoek. I live with my mother, my twin brother and my little brother. Both of my parents were born and raised in the northern part of Namibia. Along the way, they both went

to great educational institutions. On that account, my mother is a water scientist and my father is a marine engineer.

**SN:** Wonderful.

**SN: CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT AN ORDINARY WEEK LOOKS LIKE IN YOUR LIFE?**

**QN:** I spend most of my time at home or at school. I don't really go out much. I am sort of serious and prefer to do constructive things.

**SN: IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU ARE NOT INTO THE TYPICAL 17-YEAR OLD FOCUS OF BOYS, LOOKING GOOD AND PURSUING ENTERTAINMENT AND "FUN"?**

**QN:** No. I find there are more meaningful things I can spend my time on. I always look forward to attending tech events. I enjoy reading books a lot – especially detective novels, self-improvement books

and books on spiritual matters. I love attending school, because that's where I can learn and get an understanding of why things are the way they are. This is also why I love surfing the internet because it is so easy to expand your knowledge on so many different topics. I am a big YouTube fan.

**SN: CAN YOU MENTION SOMETHING YOU RECENTLY LEARNED ON YOUTUBE?**

**QN:** Yes, I'm now learning about proofs in mathematics.

**SN: DO YOU ALSO PLAY GAMES AND WATCH MOVIES?**

**QN:** Absolutely. I like Xbox; sometimes I play games on my phone; I also like word games and chess and I like to watch Rosewood. It is a series where they solve crimes.

**SN: GOOD TO KNOW. NOW WE CAN MOVE TO THE MAIN MOTIVATION FOR THIS INTERVIEW. HOW DID YOU GET INTO CODING?**

**QN:** My computer studies teacher, Ms Jessica Upani, had to select a couple of learners to teach them how to code in preparation for a computer programming competition which was a month away. I happened to be one of the few who were selected. At first, I had no idea what coding was until I typed in my first line of code which was print "Hello World."

**SN: AND WE UNDERSTAND YOU**



### GUYS NOW HAVE A CLUB OF CODERS?

**QN:** A few tech enthusiasts and I established a programming group for high school pupils in September 2016 called PyNam scholars. It is a subgroup of the PyNam Society that consists of university students. Both our aims are to spread the python knowledge across Namibia.

### SN: WHY THE "PY"?

**QN:** Python is one of the most popular and important programming languages in the world. PyCons are open-source software conferences that happen internationally, bringing together software professionals, hobbyists, scientists, academics and students. The first PyCon conference in Namibia was held in 2015. That's when students, from especially Unam, established the PyNam society. They reached out to schools to teach learners and in 2016 those of us who got hooked, formed our own club – the PyNam scholars.

### SN: SO WHAT ARE THE TOOLS ONE NEEDS TO START CODING?

**QN:** A computer, a thinking cap, a programming language to code in and very basic mathematical skills.  
SN: That simple?

### SN: HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU DEVOTE TO CODING?

**QN:** When I got hooked in Grade 9 I stayed up very late, easily till 1 am because I was learning and coding and just so eager. Grade 10 was too hectic because of the big exams coming up. Now that I'm in Grade 11 I do a lot of organising of workshops and conferences as well as administration for the society and advancing python

teaching amongst other school learners. This means as part of the PyNam Scholars executive committee (for school learners) we meet after school on Thursdays and have general meetings. On Fridays, we meet with the rest of PyNam Scholars members and give them lessons on programming. And then I also do my own coding. But school takes first priority. And while I do other fun stuff too, I spend most of my free time on coding or coding-related activities.

### SN: DO YOU EVER ORGANISE GENDER-SPECIFIC CONFERENCES?

**QN:** Yes, I have co-organised and served as a coach at a workshop called DjangoGirls at PyCon Namibia. DjangoGirls is a workshop that empowers and trains women in building their very first web application using tools such a Python, Django, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and cascading style sheets (CSS). A few weeks after an amazing experience of co-organising and serving as a coach at PyCon Namibia, I organised and ran another DjangoGirls workshop at the Computer Day Conference.

### SN: YOU DON'T SEEM TO WANT TO USE CODING FOR YOUR OWN BENEFIT ONLY. YOU SEEM TO BE OUT TO RECRUIT.

**QN:** I definitely still hope to run more programming workshops in which Namibian youth can do hands-on training. Lastly, along with PyNam Scholars, we want to spread python knowledge to other schools, community centres and orphanages across Namibia.

### SN: QUICKLY BACK TO THE GENDER ISSUE. HOW DO YOU FIND BOYS AND GIRLS VIEW YOU – A GIRL IN A FIELD WHERE THERE ARE PREDOMINANTLY BOYS AND MEN?

**QN:** Guys seem to think what I do is unique. Girls give me the impression what I do is very complicated. I do prefer to talk about tech stuff or other issues that seem productive, which probably adds to girls viewing me as nerdy.

### SN: WHAT HAVE BEEN ADDITIONAL BENEFITS TO

### JOINING THE WORLD OF CODING?

**QN:** Except for having learned to code and constantly expanding my knowledge, I have been getting opportunities to grow other skills too. I'm learning through organising events and conferences and often being a speaker. But equally wonderful, is the remarkable people I get to meet in the tech world. I'm often blown away. One recent example is having met the dean of the Faculty of Computing and Informatics at NUST, Dr Peters. I am so inspired!

### SN: WHAT AND WHO INSPIRES YOU TO PUSH YOURSELF TO DO BETTER WHEN YOU FEEL DOWN OR STUCK WITH A PROBLEM?

**QN:** Whenever I need inspiration and motivation, my computer teacher, Ms Upani, is there for me. She also pushes me out of my comfort zone. She has taught me to write letters for sponsorships and gives me tasks where I simply have to figure things out. I also seriously look up to Dr Peters for having the position she has and leading that department. And when I attend tech conferences I am always meeting other women with cool titles who are simply inspirational for where they are at in life and the work they do.

### SN: HOW DO YOU LEARN AND IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS?

**QN:** When I have bugs in my code that I can't seem to find, I take a break for a few hours or even a day. I've noticed that when I do that I often find the solution to my code. But when I don't, I seek external help. I learn when I teach fellow learners or when I help them with their codes. Attending tech conferences and workshops are other great ways of learning. Reading online software books and watching YouTube videos are also two wonderful, wonderful ways of learning. I am also grateful for StackOverflow, which is a website forum where programmers get to ask and answer questions on programming. Something not to be wasted is ones own mistakes; I learn a great deal from the errors I make in my codes. Lastly, I learn from my friends who are programmers. And to improve my rational thinking I solve riddles, play chess and Sudoku and solve maths problems.

### SN: QUEEN, THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND SHARING YOUR WORLD WITH US.

**QN:** It was my pleasure. ♀