Ex-car guard turns dream into reality

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WHEN 36-year-old Tembi Maloney Tichaawa stood on the graduation stage to receive a doctorate in philosophy, he cut a different image from the car guard, security officer and night porter he had been to pay for his studies.

Cameroon-born Tichaawa arrived in South Africa in 1997 with a big dream.

Tichaawa, now a senior lecturer and researcher at the Walter Sisulu University in the Eastern Cape and the director of the institution’s Centre of Excellence for Tourism Research, said yesterday he was just a lad with a high school education when he arrived in South Africa with a dream to be somebody great.

But Tichaawa found tertiary education was not cheap.

“I started my new life in South Africa as a car guard, watching cars when the owners were in supermarkets for a little change.

“At the back of my mind, I knew my goal was to complete my education,” he said.

Almost eight months after guarding cars in Cape Town, he was offered a job as a security officer at a hotel.

Tichaawa was soon working inside the hotel as a porter. He managed to save enough to enrol for a tourism management diploma at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

After obtaining a degree in tourism and hospitality, Tichaawa enrolled for his master’s in 2008.

By then, his outstanding academic record had reached the attention of the university’s Faculty of Business Dean and Tichaawa was offered a position as a junior lecturer. He completed his master’s cum laude and studied towards a philosophy doctorate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Despite his academic success, Tichaawa has not forgotten his days as a car guard. The married father of a six-year-old daughter and one-year-old son, said while he felt a sense of fulfillment at his graduation ceremony in Durban on Monday, he knew there was more for him to do.