



RAYMOND ACKERMAN
ACADEMY OF ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

Gcobisa Maqanda

CLASS OF JANUARY 2013

Story told by
Gcobisa Maqanda
& Carol Williams



This story is dedicated to the memory of my beautiful heroine, Gladys Maqanda. She raised me with unconditional love and passed away 08/10/2014. Even though you are gone, your memories will live on.

Often you will hear Gcobisa before you actually see her. This exuberant and energetic lady lights up any space that she walks in to and has a way of making people feel like they have known her for years even though it has only been a few minutes. This mother of two beautiful young children is currently working as the Solution Space Manager at the Graduate School of Business. This job entails organising events, working with various entrepreneurs using the shared office space, managing students and lecturers of the GSB who use the space and also looking after various visitors.

This vivacious RAA graduate grew up in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. An only child, Gcobisa was raised by her grandparents as her mother had to go off and work and then tragically passed away in a car accident when Gcobisa was 10 years old. It was challenging to go through adolescence without her mother and she really felt the generation gap between herself and her grandparents grow in this time, often feeling like there was no one to talk to. However her grandparents created a stable home environment and provided support and a home full of love and this was something that made things easier to deal with through those tough years. Gcobisa's face lights up as she speaks about her granny and grandfather and she says that she doesn't feel that she really faced challenges growing up from the point of view that she didn't grow up poverty stricken.

"I went to a multiracial school and I had a wonderful relationship with my granny who raised me. My granny taught me to be grateful for the little bit that we had instead of focusing on all the things we didn't have. We tend to use this word 'poverty' a lot and we define ourselves by it- this doesn't help. We always measure our lives with what we see other people have and this needs to change. I don't apologise for who I am and because I made it against all odds people listen to what I have to say".

Gcobisa laughs as she says *"there is only one thing expected of you if you are a young girl growing up in Grahamstown...and that is that you will become pregnant in your teens and become addicted to drugs and alcohol"*. How devastating for our country that this is the only expectation placed on these young people. From a young age Gcobisa decided that she was going to prove the naysayers wrong and wisely comments on the fact that young people often don't see their potential because they focus on the negative things in their lives. She could quite easily have gone down the same path as many of her friends but she chose not to.

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER I used to be a tomboy, you could always find me playing with the boys. I was dirty all day and never worried about wearing dresses. My granny taught me that I needed to be my own best friend and put God first. This is something that I have done throughout my life and it has this advice has had such a positive impact on my life.

GROWING UP MY ROLE MODEL WAS Oprah...until one day I realised that a role model doesn't have to be a celebrity or someone famous. When I became a student at RAA I found my new role model in life- Elli Yiannakaris, the director of the academy. Elli looks beyond a person's situation and she sees you for who you are. Her professionalism is so inspiring and I aspire to be just like her, not only as a business woman but in life generally. She gave me a chance when no one else would. Her passion is contagious and God has placed her on earth to look after people like me.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR was when I applied to study at the RAA. To be honest I had no idea what entrepreneurship was when I applied for the course but I was so hungry for an opportunity. I had many failures in my education behind me, I had tried to complete tertiary studies and for various reason had not been successful. I was so worried that this would be yet another failure on my list but I rose above that and graduated from the RAA in June 2013. It was such a proud moment in my life! The doubt and fear is something that all of us have and if you allow it to play with you it will take over!

MY EXPERIENCE AT RAA WAS life changing. The highlight of the course was the personal development side. I thought I knew myself but I soon realised that I knew nothing. The minute I came to RAA I started to know myself, understand my feelings, strengths, thoughts, the people around me and how to build on my relationships. It wasn't easy. I realised that in this world you can't do everything alone; you need people, even if they disappoint you (and they will). You need to be willing to take the risk of being hurt because there is also so much good that comes from being in relationship with people. Be aware of what your expectations of people are and accept them for who they are.

I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF presenting my business idea to Mr. Ackerman as one of the top 8 business ideas in my class. My idea was an audio book, but one that is different to all the others. I called my business amaBali, which means "stories". Stories are such an important part of our lives and in my own life I realised that as a working mom I didn't always have time to tell stories to my children. I also realised that the African stories that were part of my childhood are not part of my children's childhood and I decided that my business idea would fix that! amaBali children's audiobooks are books that have the technology to record the parents' or child's voice reading stories together...African stories. Parents and children spend time together when they record the stories and the child can listen back to those stories and hear the parents' voice even when the parent is not physically there. I am hoping to develop this business idea in the future.

In January this year Elli contacted me and asked me if I would like to do a 3 month internship at the Solution Space. I jumped at the opportunity to work in such a dynamic space with some wonderful people. This internship gives me the privilege to develop myself and also do develop my 'intrapreneurial' skills. An 'intrapreneur' is someone who works for someone else but has the mind of an entrepreneur and looks at ways of innovating and applying entrepreneurial thinking within their job. I learn many new things every day and this is an amazing opportunity for me to develop myself, to build networks and to be mentored. This is a life changing experience and I could be managing this space one day! Why not? We often restrict ourselves from dreaming big dreams because we're scared of what people think and we're scared of potential failure...but what is failure in the face of trying and being open to possibilities?

MY VIEW ON WOMAN IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP is that generally men have always been in bigger and better positions and often woman have been oppressed. I am seeing huge progress though in woman holding leadership positions and we are seeing that woman have just as much potential and skill as men! This is very encouraging to me.

MY PHILOSOPHY IN LIFE is that you always need to remain true to yourself and always be content with what you do have.

MY MESSAGE TO OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE would be to stop making excuses, get up and do something; stop lying around and making excuses about being poverty stricken. Look at what you do have, for example you have an able body...use it for good!

"If only I could let you see inside my head... you would see that my future is BIG, BRIGHT and there is a lot of room for development and I am always open to new opportunities."

