



**RAYMOND ACKERMAN**  
ACADEMY OF ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

# Junior Mutombo

**CLASS OF JULY 2014**

Story told by  
Junior  
& Carol Williams



## FROM CHILD SOLDIER TO SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR

It's difficult to imagine the reality of the challenges that Junior has faced in his life. Many of us have very little idea of how one's life can be turned upside down by civil war, poverty, violence and above all the right to a carefree childhood; although these are not the first things that come to mind when you meet Junior. He is a tall and engaging man with a bright smile. And he is a born entrepreneur!

Junior was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1988, in a small town called Lubamshi. His parents were involved in a terrible car accident when he was just 9 months old. His mother was in hospital for 2 years and his father left the three children alone. His two older sisters found themselves with their baby brother fending for themselves on the streets. When his mother was discharged from hospital they moved back to their own home and struggled to get enough food for the family to survive. Junior started school at the age of 6, which is also when his father returned to their family home to see if they could make things work again. His older sisters decided to leave home and so it was just Junior and his parents for a time.

His father became an alcoholic and turned violent. Junior remembers a time where he had to run to fetch the police because he thought that his father had beaten his mother to death. His mother ended up in hospital again and when she was discharged decided that it would be best for her to take Junior and to live in another village, closer to her family.

At the age of 12, just after he had finished his primary schooling, the Lord's Resistance Army entered his village. They murdered his family and he was forced to join the army. He served the army as a child soldier against his will. He was in the army for three years. This was a very dark time for Junior and he was forced to do many things that he did not want to do. Everyone wished they could die, but there is always a fear in dying and so there was also some fight in him to live. Junior says that there was always some hope in him that he could become someone in life.

There wasn't a day that passed that he did not think about escaping from the army and miracle of miracles, that opportunity eventually presented itself when a Catholic organization working in the area helped him to escape. They put him in a truck and managed to smuggle him out of

the area without the truck being searched. Junior returned to the city of his birth and stayed in his own. He was desperate to return to school to further his education and so would sell lollipops and frozen water to make money to support himself and study in the afternoons. He would sometimes walk 70kms to his father's family so that they could give him some food.

On these visits to his family he discovered that his parents had survived the war. For many years he had believed that they were killed when the army invaded his village and he was captured. He reached grade 10 in his schooling and then it became too much of a challenge for him to support himself and study at the same time. His dreams of education were put on hold once more and he decided to see if he could find his sister. Through a series of enquiries he found out that she had moved to Tanzania and he decided that he would look for her. On reaching Tanzania he discovered that his sister had moved on to South Africa and thus started his long trek to South Africa.

He got onto various refugee trucks and hitch-hiked or walked all the way to Johannesburg; this took about 3 months. You would think that his search for his sister should have finally come to an end in Joburg, but yet again he discovered that they had moved on...this time to Cape Town. He boarded a bus and arrived in Cape Town. It took him three months of asking around and finally he was reunited with his sister.

By this stage he had very little money left and got a job pushing trolleys in Greenmarket Square where he earned R400/ month. He survived on one loaf of bread a week as he had to spend the rest of his money on accommodation and transport. He would leave home at 5am and return late at night, always believing that somehow things would improve for him. His dreams of getting a good education were still at the back of his mind and one of his sisters agreed to give him R900/month so that he could go back to school. He returned to school at the age of 19 and started grade 10. He would go to school and then work in the evenings to earn money to support himself. He stayed off school on Mondays and Tuesdays so that he could have a small table at the Greenmarket Square. He sold African spoons, salt and pepper holders and curios.

He started hanging out with people who partied and drank a lot and ended up getting a job as a security guard. Once again his studies had to be put on hold as he was unable to attend school and work at the same time. He worked as many odd jobs as he could, but lost all of them when he was arrested for being in possession of weed. The police let him go and he decided to move to Brooklyn and started a course in hospitality. He needed to work to support himself and worked 2 jobs at the same time. He would get home at the 3am and get up at 5am to study.

Eventually he managed to save enough money to study business and this was a dream come true. He started selling handbags and perfume at Greenmarket Square and started making some good money. He bought his first car and met a man who has subsequently played a very important role in his life; Mr Steven Curry. Through a series of events it became clear to Junior that it would be a good idea to start his own business and he realized that he had always dreamt of making cosmetics and perfumes. He started working at a cosmetics company; gaining experience and learning the ins and outs of making cosmetics and perfumes.

He didn't have enough money to start his own business but he had good networks and was able to raise enough money to buy the formulas of ten perfumes. He started his business with R3000 and sold about 4000 bottles of perfume. During this time he also decided to get married and today, has a wife and three children. Steven Curry consistently provided input and support, and when one of Junior's investors ran off with the formulas for the perfumes, Mr Curry decided it was time for Junior to have some real business advice and support. It was this link that brought Junior to the RAA and how he ended up completing the RAA course at the end of 2014.

Junior's story has impacted me on a very deep level and hopefully you will draw some encouragement and inspiration from his story. This is what he had to say in response to some questions I asked him.



*Junior has just come on board the GESS programme where we will be helping him develop his cosmetics and perfume business, Fairytale Fragrance. We are excited to see this business flourish and grow from strength to strength.*

#### **SOME OF THE CHALLENGES I FACED**

**GROWING UP WERE** instability, loneliness, anger and shame. My childhood was not stable at all and I was often lonely. I have experienced a lot of shame with regards to the things that happened while I was a child soldier. I have also experienced lots of anger in my life; anger towards both myself and others.

#### **MY ROLE MODEL IS** Mr Steven Curry.

He is one in a million and I am where I am today because of him. He is a very humble man. He is always willing to help you.

#### **MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF BEING AN**

**ENTREPRENEUR** was at the age of 15. I bought a packet of lollipops and water. I would sell these at the cinemas. My very first experience of selling these lollipops was when a man took 5 lollipops and then didn't want to pay me for them.

#### **MY EXPERIENCE AT RAA taught me that everything is possible as long as you're breathing.**

There is always a new person in you waiting to be born. It is really important to always appreciate what you have. Everything I learnt at RAA was important to me. In terms of the business side of things, I found marketing and HR the most helpful and the personal development part of the programme really helped me a lot. I learnt that everything is about understanding people around you. It's helpful to put yourself in someone else's shoes before you react. **RAA is the heartbeat of my life.** I would NEVER have imagined that I would have the life that I have now- it is a dream come true.

#### **MY PHILOSOPHY IN LIFE IS don't ever give up and don't fight a battle without understanding what it is that you are fighting against.**

#### **MY FUTURE IS BRIGHT!** It's a long walk.

If you want to see your future then you have to look past what you currently see.

#### **MY MESSAGE TO YOUNG, ASPIRING ENTREPRENEUR WOULD BE** that life

is unpredictable. No one knows what will happen. Whatever happens, happens for a reason and takes you towards your destiny. It's your choice what you will become. You must persevere! **Run in the rain because one day you will be driving a car in the rain, instead of getting wet outside.**

When you have a vision that no one else sees, you will be rejected and criticized. That's okay. You're the only one who needs to believe in your vision.