

Get my intercontinental drift?

Businesswoman and TV personality Felicia Mabuza-Suttle chats to **Lihle Z Mtshali**

FELICIA Mabuza-Suttle has a dream — that every young girl can rise up from her circumstances and live her dream, no matter how humble her beginnings. Just like she did.

This is the premise on which Mabuza-Suttle's forthcoming memoir, *Living My Dream*, is based.

The biography, to which Mabuza-Suttle is putting the finishing touches, tells the story of her rise from the dusty streets of apartheid-era Soweto to being a popular TV personality, businesswoman, author and motivational speaker.

"I want to encourage young girls who might be thinking that their dream of success will never come true because of their background that, if they put their mind to it, they will realise their dream," she says.

Living My Dream is Mabuza-Suttle's third book, following on the motivational books *Dare To Dream* and the recently published *Dare To Succeed Against All Odds*.

"I found it a lot easier to write this book because it is about my life, my memories. I remember very well that, if I had allowed it, my own dreams of getting an education, being on television and going to America would have been crushed," says Mabuza-Suttle.

South African TV audiences last saw her on the small screen in 2004 when the last season of her talk-show, *The Felicia Show*, was on air. After this, she moved permanently to Atlanta, Georgia, in the US, to join her husband, Earl Suttle, and to complete her PhD.

"As a young girl growing up in Soweto under the apartheid regime, I yearned for education. I just wanted to have alphabets behind my name," chuckles the well-dressed Mabuza-Suttle, whose youthful and expertly made-up face looks like she's just stepped off a magazine cover. She now has a bachelor of arts degree in journalism, a masters degree in mass communications, and a PhD in communications from Berkley University, Chicago.

The topic of her dissertation for the PhD, "How to change perceptions using media", was the motivation behind her current talk-show, *Conversations with Felicia* on The Africa Channel, which airs in the US, the UK and the Caribbean.

The weekly show, which is not only targeted at Africans living abroad but at the entire population of the countries it airs in, tackles the negative perceptions that the international community has about Africa. Mabuza-Suttle chats to well-known personalities about their visits to Africa to try to break the stereotypes that are portrayed about the continent in foreign media.

She has interviewed people such as Cherie Blair, the wife of former British



DARE TO DREAM: Felicia Mabuza-Suttle at the Regency Park Hyatt hotel, in Johannesburg, which she considers her home away from home. She is visiting South Africa from the US, where she is now based
Picture: DANIEL BORN

prime minister Tony Blair, and actor Danny Glover on being a "Zulu boy".

"The Africa Channel was launched right after Hurricane Katrina, in New Orleans, and I remember there was a big billboard outside our studios showing the devastation caused by Katrina. Everybody thought the picture was taken somewhere in Africa," she says.

"These are the kinds of negative perceptions we try to change: that Africa is just a place of devastation, hunger, disease and wars. We are making a difference, but it will not happen overnight."

Mabuza-Suttle is not a stranger to marketing Africa to the Americans. Between 2005 and 2007, she was president of South African Tourism in New York, where she created enough noise to get Americans excited about visiting South Africa.

"When I was helping SA Tourism boost visits by Americans to our country, I didn't want to use textbook theories, but I used

the passion that I have for this country. I would just approach famous people, even at a polo game, and say, 'You have to visit my country, South Africa; you would love it there,' and they would come," she says.

Using these tactics, Mabuza-Suttle was able to lure popular TV host Matt Lauer to broadcast his show *Where in the world is Matt Lauer*, which is part of NBC's popular *Today Show*, from Table Bay in Cape Town. Comedian Steve Harvey was also one of those who fell prey to Mabuza-Suttle's persuasions and visited KwaZulu-Natal, as was Academy Award-winning actor Forest Whitaker.

Mabuza-Suttle says the work that is being done to change the negative perceptions the world has about us becomes counter-productive when we are constantly comparing ourselves to the US.

"South Africa is the size of Texas," she says. "Why compare ourselves to the US when we should be proud of who we are and

continue doing things the African way? To compare local talk shows to *Oprah* and compare home-brewed magazines like *Destiny* to *O* magazine is just not right.

"Americans are a good model for us on some levels, but we must never forget who we are."

Mabuza-Suttle visits South Africa at least six times a year to take care of her business interests. She is a founder member and non-executive director of Pamodzi Investment Holdings.

The quintessential gracious and vivacious hostess, Mabuza-Suttle is also founding owner of a dine-and-dance restaurant, Back o' the Moon, at Gold Reef City Casino, in Johannesburg. Mabuza-Suttle says she intends opening branches of Back o' the Moon, which is currently hosting a Michael Jackson tribute, in Sandton and New York between 2010 and 2011.

"I make a mean lasagna, but it was too rich for the restaurant," she laughs.

ONLINE VIEWS

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ON www.thetimes.co.za

On the article 'Cape Town woman's body found in car'

WELL done to the victim's friend who saw the Uno and reported it. This is the kind of action the public at large must take in the fight against crime. If we were all to act in this manner, a large dent would be made in the crime statistics. — Zodiac

On the article 'Caster Semenya wins gold'

LOOKING at a post-race video clip of Mokgadi "Caster" Semenya, I think the IAAF has every right to do the gender tests.

The tests will prove if she is a woman or a man. It will be a national embarrassment if she is caught out. — Mrpapari

On The Times Editorial 'Business as usual for company with record of death'

WHEN I was in Europe two years ago, we used a tour bus which had some mechanism (I am sure it is available here) that recorded the time and distance the bus was in operation. If the limit was exceeded for a day,

there were serious consequences.

We even had to postpone one event to the next day because the driver had used up his hours. The venue was literally 10 minutes down the road so he would have been over the limit by 20 minutes. Even that was not acceptable.

So, like most things in South Africa, until there is accountability and consequences, we will still be getting the short end of the stick. — Pickedlast

POLL RESULTS

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Will the taxi strike derail the BRT launch?

Yes 34.83%

No 65.17%

Total votes: 1697

On the article 'Gauteng woman dies of swine flu'

I AM still waiting for the information website and information flyers from the Department of Health providing the public with facts about this matter. It is a crying shame that I must rely on websites from the UK's health department, while my government tells me I should not panic while I hear daily reports about people dying. — Plong

On the article 'Khumalo witness claim investigated'

DOCTOR Khumalo is either in the soup for drunk-driving, or for being a doctor imposter? For all the pain you caused Bucs' supporters with false penalty claims, may the magistrate be kinder to you than the referees were to us. — Asikhulumbe

On the article 'A million unsolved crimes a year'

EFFECTIVELY, there is only about a 5% conviction rate in criminal cases. This is a

disaster. What kind of justice system do we have? No wonder serious crime is so endemic, because the chances of a conviction are minimum. Crime really pays in South Africa. — Bruinou

On the article 'SA Roadlink slated in report'

OF COURSE SA Roadlink will be slated because of its high profile. What about all the other bus and truck accidents that never get reported?

The only problem I have is allowing drivers to work long shifts — fatigue and sleep deprivation are huge contributing factors to road accidents involving passenger and goods vehicles.

Allan Reddy, owner of SA Roadlink, is an astute businessman who saw a gap in the market for cheap, yet luxury transport. He took advantage of it and created many jobs. You, the commuter, vote with your rand as to whose service you use.

There is a lot of envy towards this company. — Bkissoon