



The real Felicia Mabuza-Suttle is a warm, caring, fiercely honest human being whose success story serves as an inspiration to young and old.

Mention the name Felicia to just about anyone in South Africa who has access to a TV set and they will know who you are talking about. Largely through her TV talk show on SABC One on Monday evenings, Felicia Mabuza-Suttle has come to be known for being unafraid to ask the questions others would rather not ask or be asked. This has resulted in very few people remaining indifferent to her. You either love her, as do many young people in particular, or you find yourself irritated by her direct manner and American brand self confidence. Most people are aware that Felicia has links with America, but few know what these links are. The fact of the matter is that she has a husband and two young adult daughters whom she left behind in America to return to the land of her

By Alan Hosking

If I could do it,  
SO CAN YOU

birth when Nelson Mandela in 1991 appealed to all those who had left to return to help rebuild South Africa.

Felicia is married to Earl Suttle, a psychologist, whom she says is her husband, her friend, her lover, her motivator and her mentor rolled into one. When Felicia spoke to him about returning, she says he had said without hesitation, "Go, your country needs you more than I do at this time."

And so, a relationship that had started over 23 years ago, experienced a dramatic change for the benefit of the people of South Africa. She is the first to acknowledge that it's not an ideal situation and that it's difficult to maintain such a relationship, but points out that the positive side is that when she flies across to spend time with the family it's like a honeymoon. "I cook and I bake and I spoil my husband and two daughters rotten, possibly to compensate for my not being with them all the time."

"When we're apart, we spend frightening amounts of money on trans-Atlantic telephone calls. If I tell Earl about something that is challenging me at a particular time, he's able to help me see the situation from different angles and that gives me a fresh perspective on any problem I face."

Felicia says that the person she is today and the person she was when a young girl are not very different. She explains that she has always been prepared to take risks and laughingly describes herself in her youth as a little girl with stick-thin legs who always dressed to impress. When she had met former head girls

and teachers years after she had left school, she remarks that they claimed to remember her very well and could describe the outfits she used to wear and the way she used to behave.

With her robust and resilient personality which was formed in the dust of everyday life in apartheid South Africa, Felicia has used her show to highlight the plight of people from all walks of life in order to help uplift South Africans where she can. She has also succeeded in inviting role players in appropriate fields to address issues that face our country and its people.

She has played a personal role in acquiring for needy people anything from Christmas gifts and food to cars and houses. Here she displays a remarkable balance of warmth and empathy on the one hand and a really sussed street savvy on the other in the manner in which she provides help. It is clear that this has come about from her having grown up in the real world. Felicia says, for example, that if she has organised a house for a homeless family, she will not approve their taking occupation until the breadwinner of the family has secured a steady job (which she also helps to arrange). She says it is important for a breadwinner to show their commitment to looking after their family and being able to pay for things like the rates and water and electricity.

Like many who have been at the cutting edge of major changes in our country, Felicia seems to be carrying remarkably little "baggage". This has given her a credibility and a platform from which to cross social, economic and racial boundaries which were previously never tampered with. Together with her passion and sincerity, she has certainly been able to achieve in a relatively short time what few have been able to do.


But, the cynics ask, isn't it about seeing a

gap in the market and making good money? While Felicia doesn't deny there should be a financial benefit for one's effort, if it were simply about money, she points out, she would rather have stayed in America earning dollars. And few South Africans who know the rand/dollar exchange rate would dispute that!

One of the significant contributions she makes to the development of young people is her motivational speaking which she does in glittering upmarket venues as well as in rudimentary school halls in townships. She says she challenges the young children she addresses to believe in themselves, to have a dream and to work toward fulfilling that dream because she is living proof of the fact that you can achieve your dream if you believe in it enough and are prepared to do what it takes to get what you want. "I tell

young girls in the townships that if I could do it so can they because I was one of them when I was young."

When Felicia speaks on the issue of the media misrepresenting her, one gets the impression that this is an issue which runs deep. Although she offers no criticism of the media by way of retaliation, it is clear she believes she is getting a raw deal. She assures me she is not afraid of being criticised, but from her comments it is clear that she is saddened by the fact that the criticism is probably the result of a failure to grasp what she is trying to achieve.

Felicia's energy, commitment and compassion, and her strong sense of mission auger well for those in South Africa for whom she is a role model. South Africa needs more "home made" role models, so there is still much work for our Felicia. 



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