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LEADER

PROFILING 2021 MANDELA WASHINGTON FELLOWS

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE!

DINNING WITH TOMORROW

"The future depends on what we do in the present." This drives my productivity, having in mind that my tomorrow is shaped by my actions and inactions of today.

A SEAT IN FRONT!

Actress, television presenter, producer & entrepreneur Phebean Swill gives us a front row seat into her life and everything that makes her tick!

PHEBEAN SWILL

Not for commercial distribution



WELCOME

Please read this before take-off!!

The 2021 Cohort of the Mandela Washington Fellowship is virtual due to covid-19. This means that networking this year has to be unconventional. **The Leader** digital magazine is a tool that has been created to aid this unconventional networking process. Each issue will profile one of the **2021 MW Fellows** by highlighting their work & interests. This creates new avenues to network & collaborate between fellows. It is also an exciting way to keep in tune with each other. This magazine is **not** an official product of The Mandela Washington Fellowship nor its partners. The views & ideas expressed herein belong to the respective individuals. As such they cannot be attributed to the fellowship. We encourage you to contact the profiled fellow to learn more about his/her work. For more information on the Mandela Washington Fellowship, please contact the fellowship directly on: www.mandelawashingtonfellowship.org

We hope you enjoy this one. Tatenda,
Siyabonga!

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SIERRA LEONE

1. PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF.

I am a television presenter, producer and news anchor at the Africa Young Voices (AYV) Media Empire. I have been a broadcaster since 2009 at 17 when I started my career at Eagle Africa Radio. I now also work as an actress, a mistress of ceremonies, entrepreneur and public speaker.

2. This is amazing! So how did it all start?

When I enrolled at the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology in 2016 through a scholarship opportunity given to Women in the Media Sierra Leone by the Ministry of Education, I got to learn about development communication and entrepreneurship. This changed my life. I became a social entrepreneur in 2017 and registered a production company I co-founded with my late dad. Today, I am not only helping to address some of my country's problems, but also changing my financial status for the better.

4. I am curious to know more about the Phebe Swill Foundation. Can you share a bit about that?

The PHEBE SWILL FOUNDATION was established in 2016 as a mentorship, training and guidance platform for women, girls and young people. My team and I help to positively shape the lives of young people. Over the years I have been engaging youths on career talk sessions, motivational and inspirational talk sessions, carving pathway guides to success through school tours, public lectures and social media. I visit commercial sex workers and encourage them to leave the streets and do something better with their lives. I train those willing to start over on a lean page to become entrepreneurs and business people and I also help them with a capital to start through the profit I generate from my TV show – The Phebe Swill Platform. I serve as a mentor and a big sister to many. For those who watch The Phebe Swill Platform frequently, you'll notice that mostly there are young people in the live audience. It's deliberate. I give them an opportunity to meet with prominent people in society and practice public speaking by allowing them to join the interview and ask questions. Some have also benefited financially in either tuition fees or to make their dream projects come through. Few have been able to secure jobs through my direct or indirect employment opportunities.

6. If you weren't famous, what would your life look like now? What is your vision for the next five years?

If I wasn't famous I would probably be a housewife somewhere running a restaurant and making more and more babies. I love cooking. It gives me pleasure. In the next five years, if the rapture would have taken place I envisage myself in Heaven. If not, I would be the biggest film producer in Sierra Leone, exporting Sierra Leonean excellence on film. I would've empowered many residents with the right knowledge to be better and successful citizens through my company. I would've also transformed over one thousand commercial sex workers to business women.

3. You are running so many projects concurrently. How do you manage?

I am a woman that wears many hats. This hasn't been easy in any way. Multitasking between my life as a television presenter, an entrepreneur, an actress, mistress of ceremonies, a friend/relative and most importantly, a tool in God's vineyard has been challenging. Sometimes more than one hat needs my attention. To the glory of God, I fulfil all my responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Although I have never been able to make enough time for God, I do the best I can and count on His mercy to intervene.

5. Now, Phebean, you're a star. Can you share more about your acting career? Do you ever get used to the fandom, awards & the glitz?

Since my debut in the movie industry in 2017 when we did "Ties", I have done about fifteen movies. Some are yet to be released. With three awards and five nominations.

I have shared camera and worked with several film makers in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cameroon and Liberia. The likes of Frank Rajah Arase, Majid Michael, Kang Quintus, Zainab Sheriff, Sam Obiogo, Director Spartar, Princess Jnap Sesay, Winstona Taylor, Kanon Film Studios, Ramadan K.D. Barry, Collins Archie-Pearce, Alimatu Frahkhani Sesay etc. The bigger picture and aspiration is to be a highly sought after actress across the continent and globe by solid film makers. As for the glitz, I can't really say I am used to it. In fact, it can be a distraction. Especially now that many people are doing things for the eye seeing of the camera. They want to be seen and heard so they can receive awards and money. That shouldn't be the focus. Our goal should be making an impact in other people's lives and the country. And this should be done to glorify God who is the mighty rewarder of good deeds.

What are some of your greatest achievements?

Well, tough to highlight. It's like saying count your blessings one by one. I am a Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Program Alumna and now a Mandela Washington Fellow. I've done many things and have reputable institutions both local and international recognize me with either an award or title. I am One of the 50 Most Influential Women Sierra Leone 2019; National Youth Ambassador and One of the 100 Most Influential Young Sierra Leoneans 2018/19; One of the 100 Most Inspiring Sierra Leoneans 2019; 50 Most Influential Young Sierra Leoneans 2017; Best Young Actor 2018; Most Outstanding Female Television Presenter 2019; Best Female TV Personality 2019; Best TV Presenter 2017; Most Outstanding Female Journalist 2016; Media Icon 2015 amongst others. As humbled as I am to be decorated with this much accolades over my twelve years of practice, I can't fully measure my achievements or successes without considering my impact in the lives of other people. Therefore, my most precious achievement is the positive influence I've had in the lives of young Sierra Leoneans and Africans who regard me as a role model and mentor. When I started working in 2009 as just a 17year old girl venturing to boldly live her dreams, I never imagined this magnitude of impact years down the line. I can confidently stand in front of a mirror and say to myself "I am proud of you Phebean!"

7. What triggers you the most? I am secretly hoping you talk about misogyny because I know how strongly you feel about that issue.

My strongest pet peeve is the patriarchy and misogyny that suppresses women in Africa. I hate the way society generally sees and treats women from few generations after slavery till now. From major to minor issues, society seems to be against women. In politics women have their own wing – the women's wing. Not fully encouraged into the strongest circles of the party's inner hierarchy comprising of the decision-making stakeholders. Yet women are expected to take front row during campaign by dancing in the streets.

In most offices, certain promotion is given to men and not women, even when they are competent and qualified. Just because most men feel insulted by working under the leadership of a female boss. In some family's women are given to suitors to seal a lifetime business deal between two families. That's devoid of the woman's opinion, preference and happiness. She's expected to adjust. If a relationship doesn't go well and the couple splits, it's ok for the man. But for the woman she's treated as if it's her fault. Like there's something wrong with her and she can't keep a man. She's considered promiscuous. The new talk is about career women who can stand on their own. Women are expected to have a fulltime job while still taking care of a family (husband and children). Or just a child(ren) with a father that is missing in action and irresponsibly leaving the burden on the woman alone. But how can she? She's only human and not a machine. The patriarchy and misogyny, especially in Africa against women is suffocating! This wasn't so before, and just after slavery. Women were given an equal opportunity in those days. How else do you think women like Ella Kiblo Gulama and Madam Yoko of Sierra Leone; Queen Nanny of the Windward Maroons of Jamaica; Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana; Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria; etc. were able to stamp their signatures in the books of African history? Africa was the safest continent for women's empowerment back then. African women were fully empowered to serve as development partners.

10. On a lighter note, what do you do in your spare time? What does a relaxed day look like for you?

Truth be told I don't have spare time. I am an apt testament of a workaholic. Sometimes when I attend social functions I do so with my laptop by my side to do some work. The Chemists event organisers and frequent guests would have known me for this. But fun time is different from fun time for most people. I don't go clubbing. I hardly attend parties. About 97% of the events I attend are paid for. I go either as the mistress of the ceremony, judge, speaker or moderator. The other 3% are occasions organised by people dear to me so I attend to show support. Well the Chemists is the ONLY event I attend for fun (but with my laptop too, lol!) I enjoy being in bed watching mostly, crime documentaries on Investigation Discovery or CBS Reality and movies on Netflix. I'm a huge Tyler Perry fan too. So I watch most of his movies. If Tyler films a blank wall for six hours and releases it as a movie, I'll watch it, make sense of it and enjoy it. That's how much I love and admire him.

8. What is your take on girl empowerment?

I am of the strong conviction that girls need to be empowered. They need to be equipped with the right knowledge of the world they've found themselves. They should be taught what they deserve; the power of dreams and aspirations; the possibilities of achieving their goals; their abilities and power to change the world. Above all, that they should be their sister's keeper. They should be empowered to a point where negative voices can't distract them. A point where they'll realise that the only thing standing between them and their aspirations and their future are their fears.

But this empowerment must go side by side with the boys. We can't prepare strong and empowered women without empowered men who can stand them and appreciate them.

9. Where does your motivation come from? What influences you the most?

I am motivated by many different things. But mostly hearing other people's stories and my burning desire to try to make life better for other people as best as I can.

My broadcasting mentor is Oprah Winfrey. My film mentor is Tyler Perry. I am also driven by the knowledge that God loves me so much that He created me. He also has a plan and a purpose for sending me here on Earth. And accomplishing that mission is of utmost importance. Of all the many things I am engaged in, my Christianity influences me the most. I am not perfect. But I strive to be better. Day by day I strive to achieve a Christian lifestyle and not a Christian title. I am not oblivious of the fact that this life is all but vanity and there's life after this life. I want to see Jesus Christ and live with Him in Heaven. This is solely what guides my activities under The Phebe Swill Foundation. Which is also why I am not trumpeting our activities on the news and social media. I am not doing any of it for human recognition. I am do them to make God happy about my existence.

Scan code to connect with Phebean Swill



THE LEADER

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