

THE CONVERSATIONS

256

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 1

OCTOBER 2022

THE **IMPACT** ISSUE

CHEBOI

CNN Hero | Forbes 30 Under 30 | Upcycling Old Computers To Give Young Kenyans Access To Global Opportunities

PERSONAL ESSAY

What Teddy Bears Can Teach Us About Love

MEREZIAN

Disruptors | Creating The Ultimate Tea Experience For Ugandans.

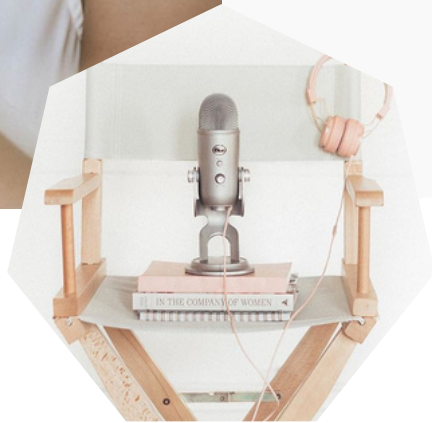
GOODIES THIS WAY

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AISLE XV

Digital Agency

We Grow Brands.

We are a progressive full-service digital agency, growing brands in today's connected world.



STRATEGY

Winning strategies that help brands adapt and thrive in the digital age.



MARKETING

We deliver smarter, high impact, 360 digital marketing that drives awareness, traffic, and transactions.



CONTENT

Captivating copy, video and photography that drives action.

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Hi there

A LITTLE BACKSTORY



When I first created the Conversations 256, it was for selfish reasons. Growing up, I was unable to properly express myself through any other medium except the written word. I was very shy and always sat at the back of the class.

And at the back of that class, I wrote and wrote, for myself mostly, for others sometimes. I wrote stories that I thought they would find interesting. But mostly, I wrote about characters that danced around behind my eyelids even as I slept.

When I started the Conversations 256, it was after struggling with my mental health, a struggle that had left me unable to properly communicate once again. For a while, I was thrust back to my childhood, and I was that young girl again, hiding instead of going to Sunday school because I was afraid of being called upon and asked to share. My struggle had left me hiding, quivering, afraid to even squeak, let alone take up space with my words.

So I created a blog that I was sure only 2 people would read.

On this blog, I shared my thoughts on whatever I was dealing with: self-esteem, self-love, value, belonging, etc. I laid myself bare in those posts, aware that only two of my closest friends were reading.

It was my way of communicating to them, through the written word, what my lips could not. It was my way of apologizing for months of seclusion. Furthermore, it was my way of saying, “this is what I am walking and healing through and maybe if you read this, you will understand...”

I thought 2 people were reading this. I was wrong. It turned out, that a hundred eyes were reading.

With that realization, came the need to adapt to this newfound audience.

Soon, what had started, as a way for me to survive became, “the silent movement of courage.”

And I, a young woman still struggling to find her footing and place in this world, “a voice for the voiceless...”

This platform had made me some sort of hero.

THE CONVERSATIONS 256
PODCAST
RETURNS 30.10.22



Continuation....

Why? Because I had chosen to share topics that my society tended to discard to the sidelines and had turned a platform I created for myself into a megaphone for others, to reach out to anyone who was struggling.

And it worked, for a while.

And then it didn't.

"All writing," Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "comes by the grace of God."

And yet, writing had become a chore. For a while, being the creator of the *Conversations* 256 meant staying up late, editing letters I received, and coaxing one more line from a dull and tired mind. It also meant taking the same editor's eyes that I used on my writing to sharply edit my life, pinpointing out mistakes and vigorously trying to erase any mistakes in a very loud disapproving, disappointed voice.

It started going downhill, fast. More posts. More channels. Wider topics.

"Talk about crotchet hairstyles..."

"Talk about neon-coloured pants...."

"Talk about meat stew types..."

"Also, what colour paint we should use..."

I finally put my pen down.

I realized I was writing for the wrong reasons, in the service of an impossible ideal.

I vowed that when I picked up my pen again, it would be because I had something to say, not because I was trying to prove myself, or impress anyone. I didn't write a word for six months.

During that time, I read.

I also went into a deeper, more intimate communion with God because, for me, that is where it all starts, that is my beginning and end.

I realized that my talent for expressing myself through words was given to me to make me happy, not miserable. If I found a way to use it to impact others, then good, but it shouldn't feel like I was being held at gunpoint to do so.

I have no desire to be your **spokesperson** or **the 'voice of a generation...'** All I want is to figure out a way, no matter how small, to make my time here count. And with this magazine, I hope to highlight others that are doing the same.

This **First Issue** is filled with stories of inspiration, stories of hope that may sound familiar or completely different from your own. Leaf through these pages for a glimpse of yourself or the world around you.

And hang onto hope,
Naks.

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NELLY CHEBOI

Upcycling Old Laptops to Give Rural Kenyans Global Opportunities



“Just like so many Kenyans, I grew up in poverty, the kind that robs you of all hope. We struggled to find food and walked to school barefoot.”

Background Story

“You have to put yourself out there. Show the world your magic. Don’t hide. Show up consistently... In fact, let me ask you, how did you find me? How did you get to know about me?” She asks with a laugh.

“Well... I was scrolling on LinkedIn one time and one of the people that I follow had shared something about you. I didn’t mind it at first, but every time I opened the app, there you were! Every day, someone that I followed was sharing something about you or one of your many accomplishments. My entire LinkedIn feed was singing your praises. Eventually, it became too much to ignore, you were everywhere! I was like, ‘who is this woman, what is she doing and doing so well that everyone has to write or share about her?’



Cheboi laughs in excitement,

“ I started posting consistently about a year ago. I wanted people to know our story, to know our work. I tried the “do your work in silence and people will find you”, but it wasn't working. Furthermore, I know now that it is not enough to do good work; you have to put your work out there so the right support and people can find you. ”

And indeed it is.

The work Cheboi is talking about is TechLit Africa, a non-profit organization whose name is short for Technologically Literate Africa. TechLit Africa leverages the digital economy to lift communities out of poverty.

They do this by refurbishing old computers and teaching computer classes in rural african schools. The goal is to prepare the students enough so when they graduate high school to could world remote for companies around the world

ON HER UPBRINGING

Cheboi is Nelly Cheboi; a 29-year-old CNN Hero and Forbes 30 Under 30 alum that grew up in Mogotio a small town 4 hours North of Kenya's capital Nairobi. Cheboi grew up a statistic; a single mother who had only completed fifth grade, raised her alongside her 3 sisters in abject poverty,

“Just like so many Kenyans, I grew up in poverty, the kind that robs you of all hope. We struggled to find food and walked to school barefoot.”

From an early age, Cheboi's heart broke for the plight her mother was in,

“She is one of the most hard-working women I know, and yet she just couldn't make ends meet. Despite her efforts, I still went to bed hungry.”

Very early on, Cheboi's mind started thinking up ways she could help her struggling mother. She started to observe the world around her versus the world in the textbooks she read.

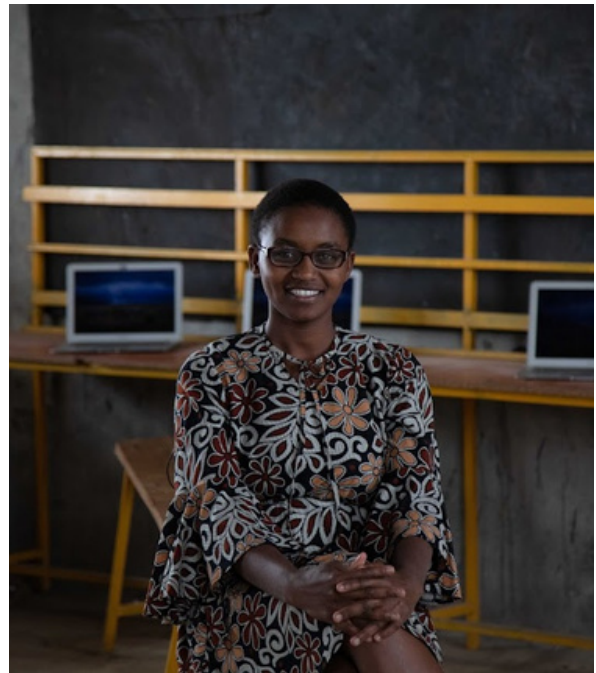
She wondered whether the kids in these textbooks, American kids, struggled with the same things she did, whether they worried about food, school fees and long walks to school...

Despite her wandering mind, there was one thing Cheboi decided to focus on, and that was excelling in her studies. The idea was to perform so well in school that opportunities to help her mother and siblings would come flowing in. and excel she did.

Despite her wandering mind, there was one thing Cheboi decided to focus on, and that was excelling in her studies. The idea was to perform so well in school that opportunities to help her mother and siblings would come flowing in. and excel she did.

In her final primary exams, she emerged as the top girl in her district. She then proceeded to Mary Hill girls' school for her secondary education. Her years at this school were turbulent,

“I struggled with tuition, so I was never in school. Like so many other kids at that time, I was always sent home.”



She spent so little time at school and so much more time at home, but still managed to score A's. After excelling once again despite the hurdles, Cheboi joined a program that helped diligent girls from humble backgrounds to apply to scholarships in the US.

“I got a scholarship to go to an American college. I saw how different life was, and how much more opportunities people had. I became so motivated to bring those opportunities back to Kenya because I didn't want to be like everyone and just leave, you know? I wanted to figure out how I could enrich the environment they were in, so they can have the same opportunities that I saw in America.”

Cheboi fell in love, too, with computer science and software engineering. She fell in love with building products and coding. Her studies introduced her to computers for the very first time and opened her eyes to a multitude of things,

“I realized I did not know about computer science or computers or even what I wanted to be, simply because I had grown up in rural Kenya”



I did not know how to use the Internet, or Google, or any of those things simply because I was raised in rural Kenya. I was the most hardworking person I know but I still did not know these things. Just by growing up in my community, I was already at a great disadvantage. And that was just really sad.”

This realization drove Cheboi to two conclusions; while hard work is very important, so is the environment a child is raised in.

The second conclusion was this, it had involved her leaving Kenya to study at an American college

A TINY SPARK

to get simple knowledge about computers and not all the children back home could even afford to travel to a neighbouring country,

“I was like, this is not right. Kids in rural Kenya need to know these things. They need to know. They don't all have to be software engineers, but they need to know that these things exist.”

That conclusion birthed a tiny spark in Cheboi. But how was she going to be able to do anything about it if she still had to take care of her family back home? Cheboi had to make sure that her mom was okay and living a comfortable life. She had to make sure that her family got out of that unsafe house that they had grown up in, the one that didn't even allow them to invite anyone into it and turn every visitor away because it was just so unsafe to live in and could collapse at any time

“How was she going to be able to pursue this spark while also facing the reality of her family's situation back at home?”



Cheboi got a job washing bathrooms (toilets) on the weekends. As a student, she could only work 20 hours a week. With this salary, she had to pay taxes and cost of living expenses. But with this salary, Cheboi managed to save some money and after a year of working, she was able to buy a quarter of land back in Kenya



with the intention of building her mother a safer house. But it had taken her a whole year just to save up that money.

“I realized if it had taken me a year’s savings just to buy a quarter of land, it would take me forever to build a house. So instead, I decided to borrow money from a friend. And then I flew to Kenya.”

Cheboi bought furniture and then rented a pickup truck and drove all the way home. She moved her family out of the unsafe house with nothing except the clothes they owned, into a small rental, and returned to the United States.

However, it soon became clear that I would not be able to afford the rent, let alone the utility bills that kept piling up. Again, Cheboi found herself stuck between supporting her family and chasing that spark.

“I started looking around, I was like, okay, what else can I do so that I will not be on the hook forever to support my family?”

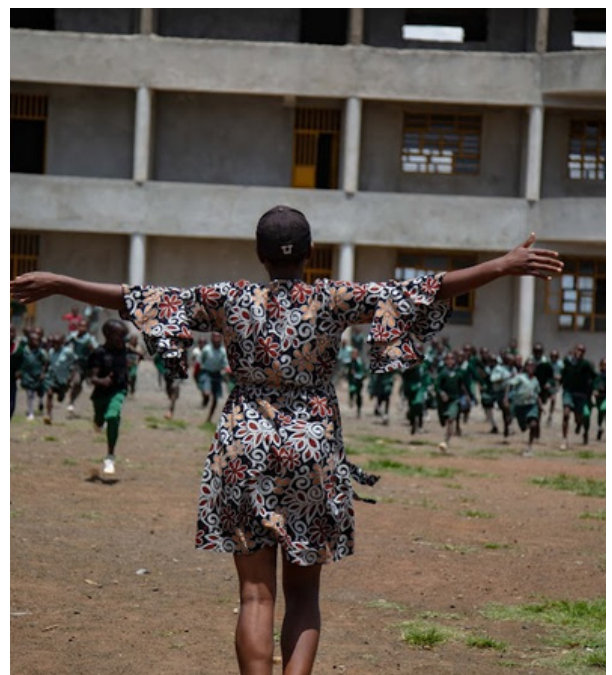
In 2015 during a visit back home, an idea struck!

She could build a school!

On that quarter of land that she’d bought! Cheboi’s sister was an excellent teacher, so maybe she could build a school, a private school that would create jobs not only for her sisters but also provide Cheboi with the opportunity to work with the school kids and implement that spark.

Maybe she could start an organization that would work with the kids at the school and slowly try to eradicate technological illiteracy from her community? Maybe she could call it, ‘TechLit Africa?’

So Cheboi began to cultivate the idea, she worked really hard and saved every extra penny. Soon, the small piece of land contained a small building with four tiny classrooms. That small building was then marketed as a daycare for young children. And that’s how it started. Cheboi’s family could now support themselves.



"And that's why I started thinking about sustainable solutions to poverty. I can give you some money today. But you're going to be hungry tomorrow. However, if I can enable you to earn money every day, then I'm good..."

THE GROWTH OF AN IDEA

Cheboi never forgot that spark, even as she built the school, the thought kept running through her mind. What if she could introduce the kids at the school, who were like 100 at the time, to digital literacy? Well, first, she would need laptops! Cheboi embarked on a laptop-finding mission. She asked her friends for their old laptops and was able to collect 6 laptops, which she took back home to Kenya.

Initially, the plan was to work with the kids at the school, but the program was soon opened up to kids from other schools around the community.

“At one point Cheboi and her friends were serving over 1200 kids, which is like about 300 kids a day. We had only 16 laptops, so the kids would take turns, 20 minutes each.”



But Cheboi started noticing something peculiar, most of the kids they were working with were boys because girls were busy with chores at home or taking care of siblings.

This made Cheboi pause and think;

How did she make sure that girls were not left out of the program? What if she partnered with already established local schools with a population of female students, if they took their services to those schools, then maybe the girls already attending class would be able to join the program?

And they did.

The organization, TechLit Africa, currently works in 10 schools and with over 4000 students.

WHAT IS TECHLIT AFRICA?

In the beginning, all Cheboi wanted to do was make sure kids in rural Kenya, especially within her community, knew how to use a computer. But as a paid software engineer, Cheboi realized that maybe her organization could do more for the children.

The children begin by learning to touch-type and then coding, the children are also taught animation and how to communicate and represent themselves online. In order to do that, Cheboi and her team built an offline application that the children use to search and chat with each other.

Cheboi's organization maintains online and on-site ownership of the computers, providing tech support, software updates, and troubleshooting. TechLit Africa installs new customer operating systems geared towards children, and schools are asked to pay a small fee for the services, which include TechLit educators on-site from 8 am-4 pm.



What started as a small building with four classrooms, has become a community project, **“There’s a woman that came up to me and told me that she was really so embarrassed. She said, “.. I never got the chance to go to school. I don't even know how old I am. I don’t even know how to read and write. But I want to learn something...”**

Cheboi started thinking of how to accommodate more segments of the communities, not just the kids, into the program. How could the program accommodate the stay-at-home mothers in abusive relationships, or how could it accommodate people who had never gone to school?

“We have people who own a specific skill coming in and are just inspiring the kids with music production, video production, coding, personal branding. They can go from doing a remote class with NASA on education to music production with our artists.”



“I started thinking about including things like adults’ literacy and vocational training. In order to do that, I would need to expand the school.”

The skeleton of the school’s expansion is already up. The ground floor will have the children’s school. The first floor will have the organization’s headquarters. The other floors will have programs like adult literacy and vocational training. TechLit Africa has already partnered with Darling, the hair company, to provide hairstyling skills to over 25 women and provide them with salon experience.

This incredible journey, however, hasn’t been without its own challenges.

Take taxes for example that are levied on importing computers into the country. Cheboi might have started by importing 16 laptops, but her operation now imports a hundred computers into her rural community, which is expensive.

“At one point, I was bringing 44 computers, and I paid more for the luggage than I did for the air ticket. ”

TechLit Africa now works with freight and shipping companies to transport donated computers, so it's more cost-efficient. The donated hardware is wiped, refurbished, and distributed to partner schools in rural Kenya, where students aged 4 to 12 receive daily classes and frequent opportunities to learn from professionals and gain skills that will help improve their education and prepare them for future jobs. Cheboi is more determined than ever to eradicate digital illiteracy.

TechLit Africa plans to build a hundred labs next year so that, hopefully, they can serve 40,000 children. But the 4000 kids they have spread out over 10 labs at the moment, well guess what? Those kids learn on MacBooks! When asked what her favorite moments have been on this journey she has been on, Cheboi is quick to give a response,

“Touch-typing is very important to me. I learned to touch-type three years ago because, despite my education, I could not even get a job because I could not type. It took me six months to learn how to type. I really struggled with that. I was 25 years old when I was learning how to type (I'm now 28 years). But to see kids that are typing at seven years old and teaching other kids, kids who are older than them, how to type is humbling. I have a really nice video of a kid that is seven years old teaching her mom how to type. I mean, that’s amazing, right?”



ON FUTURE PLANS

Her greatest achievement so far is being able to turn that small spark that she felt years ago, surrounded by immense hurdles and responsibility, into a reality as TechLit Africa and not just teaching the children how to type but providing them with the skills that open a world of possibility for them,

“It’s one thing to give someone money. It’s another thing to empower them to earn money every day. And so I see this as a way to empower these kids to grow up and be able to earn money and make an impact in their communities.”

And you bet her family is proud! Her entire community is proud of the work Cheboi has done and is continuing to do. At 29, she is already creating ripples of impact.

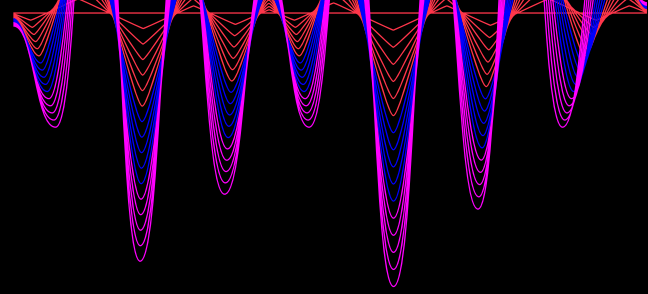
Her future prospects include slowly expanding TechLit Africa into Kenya’s neighbouring countries, like Uganda and Tanzania.

The best words of advice she could give to any young dreamer out there?

“Just start, that’s all. Just start. You’ll never have everything figured out and if you just start, you’re good. I think it’s easy to look at where you’re going and where you want to be and look where you are at and get discouraged. But if you just start, and keep putting one foot in front of the other, things fall into place...”

You can follow Cheboi on Instagram, LinkedIn at **@NellyCheboi**





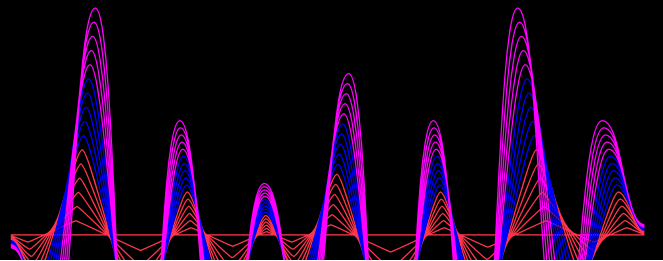
HOUR

GLASS

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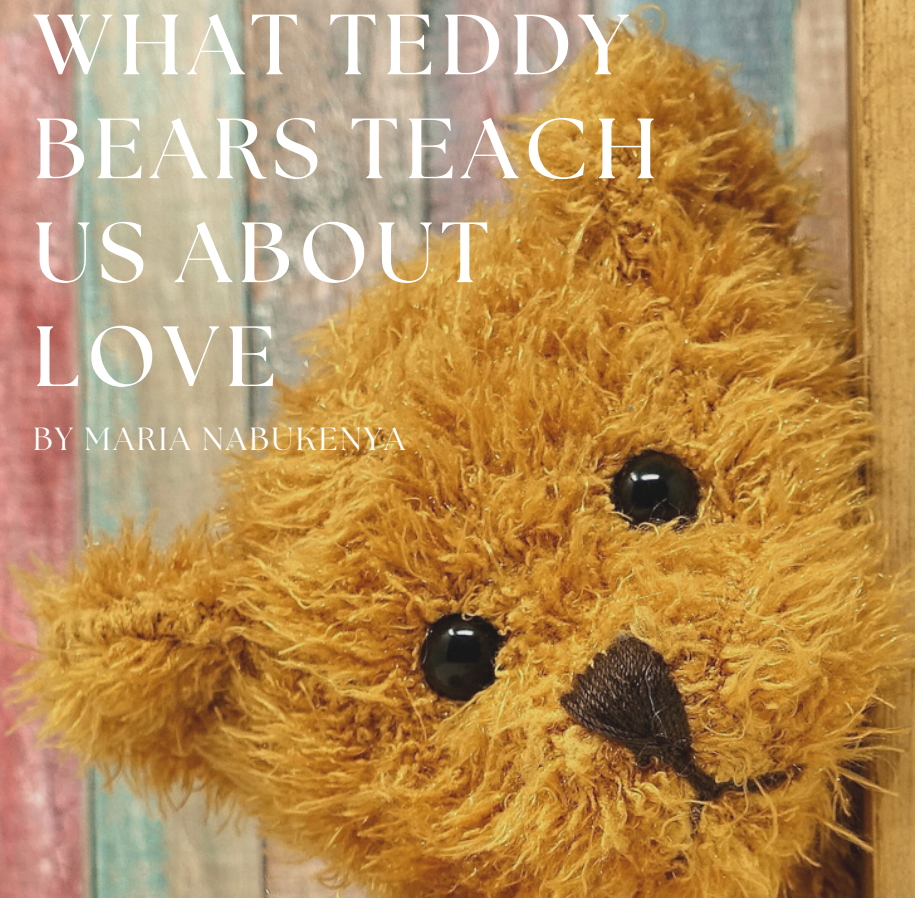


Bringing a world of
entertainment and knowledge
to our audiences, wherever they
listen.



WHAT TEDDY BEARS TEACH US ABOUT LOVE

BY MARIA NABUKENYA



One reason why our love for teddy bears tends to be so strong and so rewarding comes down to a contradictory but telling detail: how little we expect of them.

Unlike what we ask of humans, we don't need bears to understand us across all areas, to share every last taste, to express exactly the right opinions, or to have identical views on how to throw a party, decorate a kitchen or spend the holidays. We just want our teddy bears to be there for us, to listen quietly to us, receive us in their arms, and look at us with kindness.

On this slender and limited basis, true love has a chance to grow.

By contrast, we often place an impossibly stiff burden of expectation on the human beings we love. We feel a partner must be right for us in every way, and grow intolerant and impatient at any departures from our hopes.

We want them to approve of our taste in politics, to share our reservations about friends, and to have just the right degree of suspicion of our parents or bosses. If they lapse in any area, we are liable to become furious, accuse them of betrayal and withhold our affections.

We are trying to do too much. By limiting what we expect a relationship to be about, we are often better able to honor the real claims of love.

Guided by a teddy bear type of love, we might realize that a bond between two people can be deep and important precisely because it is not required to play out across all practical details of existence.

By simplifying and clarifying what a relationship is for, we release ourselves from overly complicated conflicts. Then we can focus on our urgent underlying need that cuts across all humanity_ to be sympathized with, seen, and hugged tightly.

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MEREZIAN

Disruptors | Creating The Ultimate Tea Experience For Ugandans.

Merezian Collection

A labor of love by siblings whose vision is to provide the ultimate tea experience.



“Every time someone orders tea from us, this person is making a conscious decision to improve their health

Sonia Bukirwa interviewed by S.N.N

The Roots

01. Can you teach me how they pronounce that name?

Yes! We can.
Pronunciation –
Meh-Rey-Zee-Yan Collection

02. How was this idea born? Why tea?

The idea was born from our mother's love for all things organic. We looked at the various organic products we are growing in our back yard and tea products being the most, we decided to do tea.

03. Why did you decide to name it after your mother?

As siblings, we wanted to honor her. The idea was born because of all the hard work she put into the amazing garden we've been blessed with, and we wanted her legacy to continue through these products.

04. What does your mother say about what you and your siblings have built?

Our mother is constantly in awe, from seeing her name on stickers of the products; the teas and honey, to reading about the business in articles and being invited to speak on podcasts.

“With Merezian Collection, the statement with any of our teas for example, Peppermint tea – You want peppermint, you see it, you smell it and you can drink it!

Merezian Collection_The Ultimate Tea Experience

Launched in December 2021. Labor of love by siblings Sonia Bukirwa, Evita Namukwaya, Phillip Musoke, and Alex Mukwaya.

05. How did your background and culture inspire the concept behind this brand?

Growing up, we were taught the value of organic products most especially their health benefits, which made the message behind the brand very, clear. Our mother emphasizes ethics, integrity, and communication. Culture today has accepted so many products in the market and that has created a lot of anxiety when it comes to one's health because one must take time and read the ingredients, Google the ones that are very long and hard to pronounce, and then buy the product. With Merezian Collection, the statement with any of our teas, for example, Peppermint tea – You want peppermint, you see it, you smell it, and you can drink it!

The Brand

Where are your products sold?

06. Green Bean Café! Our products are currently sold there, but we are majorly an online business. However, there is something special coming soon that we encourage the readers to stay tuned to our Instagram page – @merezian_collection for the announcement.

”
The authenticity with which we tell the story behind every product we sell and the affordability of the products makes our brand stand out

07. What is the purpose behind the brand? Does the business serve a different purpose other than making money?

Other than wanting to make money, our purpose is to spread awareness about organic products through an ultimate tea experience.

Are you profitable yet?

Yes, we are.





The Family Aspect

09.

Does each person have a different role, or do you all share the same responsibilities? How are the positions split?

Yes, each person has a different role. The roles are split according to someone's capability as well as the time someone has in order to get a task done.

10.

In your opinion or experience, what are the unique advantages that family-owned businesses have?

-You never have to worry about someone running off with money and if they do, you know where they live (hahaha).

-By the time you start working with family, you know where everyone's strength is, so you place them in a particular role where they will thrive, and the business will grow.

-There is business continuity because there is always someone in the family that you can train and bring on board.



As siblings, one of us is responsible for the finances and we have clear goals about how the finances made by the business should be saved, used and invested.

What is it like working with family?

11.

It is delightful, however, it has its challenges because these are four individuals with different creative ideas and thought processes. Those are processes and ideas that need to be merged into one. Most times that involves compromise and learning from each other in order to see the business grow and succeed.





What are some of the common mistakes you have seen family businesses make? What tips would you recommend to avoid those errors?

- Lack of roles is a common mistake.

we recommend this being solved through role distribution so that every family member knows what they are supposed to do and is held accountable.

- Mixing personal ties with business.

We recommend avoiding this clear definition of business expectations and how to run day-to-day operations.

- Lack of awareness

Personal issues between siblings can affect the business because there is transference, we recommend being aware of the actions you take while at work and for the business and continuously checking in to make sure they are not stemming from a place of any leftover emotions towards anyone.

We love tea.

Our favourite products from our collection are all the Merezian teas and Merezian Honey.





13.

Lastly, What advice would you give to other CEOs or founders of family businesses to help their employees to thrive?

As a family, there are so many ideas that each sibling has, and there can be a clash when one family member feels like they are not being heard.

Communicate with each other effectively by listening keenly to what each member has to say to help employees thrive.

Being committed to why you started the business helps greatly because it helps you keep track and focus on the business.

14.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

Business Instagram – Merezian Collection
WhatsApp Business – +256771372176

WHEN WE SPEAK

B O O K

LAUNCH

28 DECEMBER
09:00 DOORS OPEN



YOU ARE INVITED

At all times be cautious of what the world expects from you, not what you expect from the world, for you have overcome the world and everything thing in it. By faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word, such that the things that are were brought into existence by the things that are not. So endeavour to create your world.

“

Accept to be found by God.

”

There is a definite identity in the spirit of any man who has seen God. Be the very pattern of the things you believe in and want to create in this life, and be an example by always practising what you preach.

Do everything in Godly love, always looking out for the interests of the majority above your own.

Abstain from any sort of immortality.

You will learn that all lessons are for our learning, but there are those you will wish to have learned the easier way (ha-ha).

Like spending precious time running unsuitable races.

“ You will learn that when you ran a race type you are not suitable for, you are disadvantaged even before you step on the starting line. ”

For example, what would be Usain Bolt's success chances in a marathon or 10,000-meter race, or Mo Fara's success chances at a 100 or 200-meter race? This is exactly what I'm talking about!

If you don't choose the right race, you will delay to taste or even actually you may never get to taste the glory of being a champion, whether it's in business, career, sport or relationship.

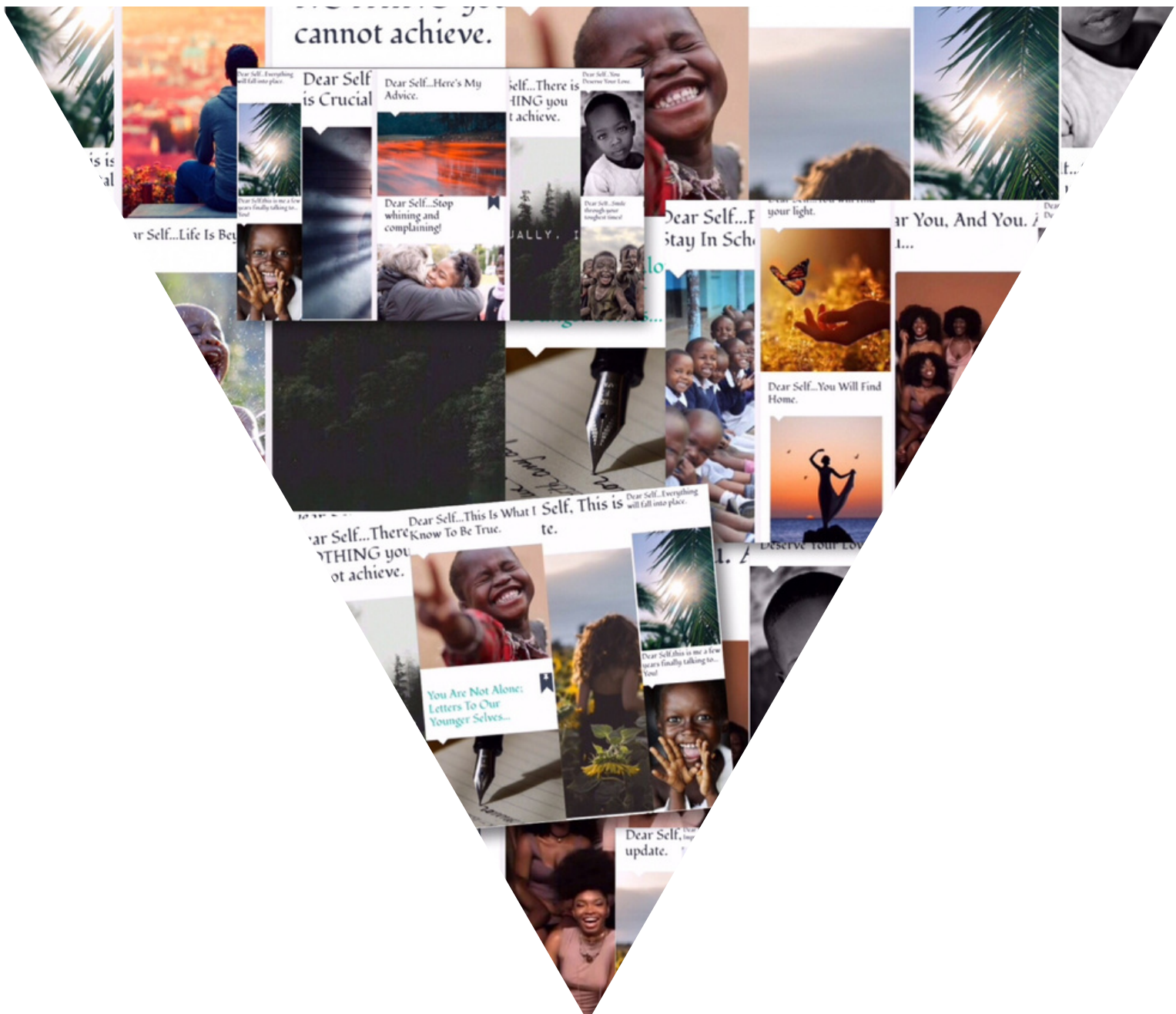
So take time and choose a worthy and suitable race otherwise you'll end up wasting a lot of time with people, jobs, studies, businesses etc. that are neither suitable nor worth it and participate in delaying your own victories.

LETTERS 2 SELF PROJECT

It will take you a long time to bear a vision for your life (ha-ha). Eventually, though, you get it.

May God who is rich in mercy deem you faithful. May His grace always abide in you to always will and to do (every good work)

Yours Truly,
NICHOLAS KIGOZI



YOU CAN FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE LETTERS 2 SELF PROJECT featuring a collection of amazing letters from our extraordinary community filled with moving insights and advice about identity, belonging, hope and healing, and so many other topics at the Conversations 256/Letters 2 Self

THE CONVERSATIONS

256

THE IMPACT ISSUE | ISSUE 01



OCTOBER 2022

www.theconversations256.com

FOR THINKERS
LEADERS
IMPACT MAKERS

BRAVE WORK

To a brave man, good and bad luck are like his left and right hand. He uses both.

TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

Being brave enough to start conversations that matter

WHOLE HEARTS

We have one life. What's most important is that you be awake for it

THE
CONVERSATIONS
256
MAGAZINE

COMING
SOON

ISSUE 1

OCTOBER 2022

THE
BEAUTY
ISSUE

*NOREEN
ASEKENYE*

Exclusive interview with the founder of TELL A STORY
FOUNDATION