

# Female apprentice proves the darkest hour is just before the dawn

By Temana Mabula

**T**he year 1978 brought a storm that almost wrecked the life of a nine-year-old girl in Cala in the Western Cape Province. Pumla Yawa was sexually abused by her uncle after she was forced to move in with him and her grandmother following her parents' divorce. But the fierce Yawa refused to bow to victimisation!

Yawa works at Multi-Franchise Tygervalley in Cape Town, under the Renault dealership, as an apprentice registered with the merSETA. Her big break into the apprenticeship came when Owen Francis, a Regional Training Manager at Imperial Technical Training Academy in Cape Town, negotiated her placement with the management. Although they had scepticism as to whether a female would survive in the world of motor mechanics, they decided to trust Francis's testimonial and offered her employment. To their astonishment, Yawa eliminated the stereotype when she proved herself more proficient than they had anticipated.

"I watched with awe at her enthusiasm on her first day and I knew then that she would blend in easily," says Andre Swart, Dealership Principal at Multi-Franchise Tygervalley. Swart continues to say that "this has definitely broadened my mind with regards to females working in this field and our door remains wide open for many more females of her calibre."

Yawa decided in 2015 after a series of misfortunes in her previous employment that she was going to further her studies. At the age of 37, she registered to study



Pumla Yawa draining oil out of a customers car during a routine service

motor mechanics at Northlink College. "I was struggling to raise my kids after looking for an apprentice opportunity for over a year. So, I decided to better my prospects of finding a job in motor mechanics. I was the oldest in my class and the other learners used to call me 'mom', but I always kept my eyes on the ball so my age never bothered me," explains Yawa.

She finished her N3 level in motor mechanics in 2016 and is looking forward to completing her apprenticeship to qualify as a mechanical technician.

"I told myself that no male would ever gain dominance over me. I worked hard to prove to myself that I can perform any task that a man can perform," she says.

Yawa's journey has been one filled with pain and turbulences. She started work as an apprentice registered under the merSETA in 2005 but failed to qualify due to illness and other challenges.

She explains that she initially wanted to go into this field because she was filled with anger and resentment towards men following her sexual abuse and her parents' divorce, but she soon started doing it out of love and enjoyment.

"I realised after my illness and while I was unemployed that I had not fully dealt with the sexual abuse incident. I wanted to prove a point and this led to multiple confrontations with my male colleagues, because the demon followed me everywhere I went," she explains. She goes on to say that she finds

inspiration in the work done by her co-technician and fellow colleagues, and that her goal is to become a service manager.

Yawa is grateful for the faith Owen Francis showed in her and describes him as “an angel who saved mine and my children’s lives”.

“My children continue to be my biggest motivation for wanting to succeed in life. I want to make them proud so that they can understand why I had to study at such a late stage,” she concludes.



Pumla Yawa with her Co-technician, Lattanzi Jacobs, the man whom she says has been her mentor since she started working at Multi-Franchise Tygervalley in Cape Town



Pumla Yawa with her Renault Dealership colleagues at the Multi-Franchise Tygervalley in Cape Town