

Pathways to Health - Oct 1999

CELEBRITY LIFESTYLE

# A SELF-BUILT WOMAN

*Lebone Woman of the Year, Khanyi Mlambo has gone from a tiny two roomed house in Soweto to becoming a director of Corobrick. Lilian Leistner met the architect of her own dreams.*



Once upon a time, all of three decades ago, there lived a beautiful girl, deep in the heart of Soweto. She was the youngest of thirteen children and her name was Khanyi.

Her mother toiled away in others' homes and took on extra jobs to make ends meet, for her husband was seldom at home, the pleasures of the town having captured his imagination. Khanyi's brothers and sisters gathered their education in the streets of the neighbourhood as money for learning was scarce. In any event they needed to learn the skills of the labouring class in order to contribute to the family coffers.

Khanyi was a gentle, caring and lovable child, but had a stubborn streak. For her it was school at all costs and when chided to iron, cook and wash dishes, she pressed her lips resolutely together and said, "This is not for me. There is a world out there that I need to discover. Mother, you are the most wonderful woman in the world and I will heed your life lessons always, but something is calling me."

Khanyi's mother, in her earthy wisdom, saw that there was something different about this gifted last child of hers and with a mixture of pride and apprehension, she resolved to

do all she could to support her. She encouraged a work ethic in Khanyi and taught her that one should always care about others - that there was always someone in greater need than oneself.

Khanyi read prolifically by candlelight each night, dear as candles were. As she worked and played on the streets of Soweto, she continually looked ahead to what she would do with her life. Her uncle was a car mechanic and this seemed to be one of the highest callings to which one could aspire. As her final examinations loomed, a new concern overwhelmed Khanyi. She needed R12 to

register for her matric, and the family simply did not have the extra money. She hardly slept on the night before the exam started; visions of her future crumbling.

Never one to give up, her mother set out to seek a solution, knocking on neighbourhood doors as she went. All of Soweto knew and loved her, but money was tight. Eventually, just as she was close to giving up, a friend intervened. This friend was just on her way to take money to her own children at their boarding school but generously gave for Khanyi.

Khanyi passed matric and launched into studying civil engineering at WITS University, initially believing that this would be her passport to being a motor mechanic. Adversity struck again when she just could not come up with the fees for her second year. Determined not to be stopped, a great sense of purpose in her life consuming her, Khanyi visited the technician, knowing that one could pay one's own way by studying for six months and working for the next six. She opted for architecture and soon it felt as if she had found her niche as the world of design and structure captured her imagination.

**As she looks you candidly and appraisingly in the eye, you know the business world has met its match.**