



Playing the FAME GAME

GROWING UP WITH AN IDENTITY CRISIS HASN'T CLOUDED THE FUTURE FOR ACTRESS ROSIE MOTENE, WHO HAS HER SIGHTS SET ON CONQUERING BOTH BROADWAY AND HOLLYWOOD. NEITHER HAS IT OBSCURED HER INNER COMPULSION TO HELP OTHERS IN NEED

WRITTEN BY AURELIA DYANTYI

To an outsider, Rosie Motene's confidence could easily be misconstrued as arrogance. She's a woman who knows her worth and who refuses to be trampled on. Her tough-as-nails outer persona has fuelled a belief that she's cold and indifferent, but those who've worked with her describe her as a soft-hearted, loving and protective friend who cares deeply for those close to her, and whose generosity is easily sparked by deserving causes.

When we meet for our interview, I'm immediately aware of the skewed preconceptions I had of her. She's bubbling with infectious energy and laughter. In fact, in a couple of minutes, our encounter feels like a reunion of old friends, as we chat and laugh amicably. Her gestures are effusive and she uses her

well-manicured hands to emphasise every point she makes, while sipping water.

Having starred in South Africa's most successful TV soapie, SABC1's *Generations* in a role which made her a household name – journalist Tsego Motene – she had a part in the block-buster film, *Hotel Rwanda* and acted in John Kani's acclaimed play, *Nothing But the Truth*. Motene has earned her professional kudos and has nothing more to prove.

There's no doubt that she's proud of her achievements thus far – and justifiably so. Yet, despite her dramatic talents, it's immediately clear that her niceness is utterly genuine, emanating from deep within her. ➤

Rosie Motene

So where did this misperception of her as an unapproachable being come from?

"A lot of people perceive me as a snobbish, hoity-toity girl," she says, shrugging. "Unfortunately, people in this industry always try to put you down. But, thankfully, you don't have to take it. Sometimes you want to scream and just throw yourself onto your bed, but you have to try to stay grounded and focused."

The negative public image of Motene also has a lot to do with the bad press she's received since beginning her career. However, negative criticism and being misunderstood are experiences she's long been used to.

The child of a domestic worker, she was brought up by her mother's Jewish employers and was fortunate to have two loving families who protected her. However, outside this comfortable home environment, she had to endure harsh criticism from her peers for her inability to speak her mother tongue, seTswana.

University was probably the most difficult time for her, involving a relationship with a boyfriend who physically assaulted her. Yet, almost a decade later, when Motene spoke publicly about the abuse she'd suffered at his hands, she was dismissed as an attention-seeking woman. Thus insult was added to injury.

Nevertheless, she drew on her family's emotional support to overcome her critics and found healing by working with charitable causes such as People Opposing

Women Abuse (POWA).

Throughout her life, Motene has enjoyed the encouragement of her mothers (her biological one and the woman employer who's always regarded her as her own daughter), as well as her family and friends, who've cheered her when she was down and believed in her. Now, as a successful actress, all that is behind her and she is in a happy space, both privately and professionally.

"I've been incredibly blessed. I have two moms who're patient with me – though I confess I wasn't an easy child – and who are my pillars of strength. I'm also blessed to have fantastic girlfriends, as well as a great group of male friends who all form my support group. If I need to cry, laugh or go dancing, they're at the end of the line any time," she says.

Knowing the hurt of being vulnerable and the importance of such support, Motene has a soft spot for young children and women. When she adopts a cause, she goes all out to make an impact and ensure that she touches lives, far beyond mere fundraising.

She trained as a counsellor for POWA in order to assist abused women, is a Director of Childline and recently began working with Tomorrow Trust, helping girl children orphaned by HIV/Aids grapple with issues of growing up and self-esteem. As part of her philanthropic work, she also acted in Eve Ensler's controversial feminist play, *The Vagina Monologues*, and used that

opportunity for self-growth.

Currently presenting and producing her inserts in M-Net's TV magazine programme *Studio 53*, as well as being an MC and public speaker, Motene has her sights set on appearing in Broadway productions, as well as in Hollywood movies. However, once these dreams are realised, she won't be lost to South Africa: she says she'd never base herself far from the country and people she loves.

Motene's approach to acting is a purely business one and, as such, she's taken the time to understand and promote her own brand. She personally handles her own publicity and is one of the few local celebrities who unflinchingly respects the time of others, always arriving punctually and well-prepared for interviews and engagements.

"I'm learning to be a businesswoman and surround myself with people who're successful," she says. "There are lots of women who've made a success of their careers in business and I look up to them. Now I understand how to market my own brand. I read about Thebe Ikalafeng's brand management concept [see *How to Create a Distinct You* on p91 of the May 2008 issue of *DESTINY*] and I'm taking notes. I've registered my brand as a trademark."

A drama graduate from Wits University, Motene's also considering studying for a Master's degree at some stage. But right now she's busy doing a writing course and picking up all the knowledge she can get from those around her.

Her philosophy is that no-one knows everything and that it's essential to keep tapping others' expertise. "I've been learning slowly by asking questions from older friends who're astute businesspeople. It's not as if I'm trying to get a degree in economics, but I want to understand it because the economy affects me. I've realised what a great resource Facebook is and am using it to learn. I also read the *Harvard Business Review* to educate myself on important issues," she says.

And she's gaining as much exposure as she can to other cultures, travelling around this continent and learning more about its peoples. It's an experience she describes as "humbling" and "an eye-opener", and she

GET INVOLVED

If you'd like to support Rosie Motene's charitable causes, here are the contact details:

- POWA – a national organisation offering counselling, support and other resources to abused women. Tel: 011 6424345/6. Email: powa1@wn.apc.org.
- Childline – a national organisation offering 24-hour counselling and assistance to abused children. Email: childlinesa@iafrica.com or visit: www.chidlinesa.org.za.
- The Tomorrow Trust aims to help provide HIV/Aids orphans with the educational and business tools to

create career paths for themselves. The organisation requires not only financial assistance, but also expertise and workshops from corporates, tutors and premises for its Holiday Schools Programme, computers, memory sticks, printers, stationery, mini-vans or buses for transporting the children, textbooks and accommodation for students. If you can help, contact the trust on tel: 011 883 8837 or email: kim@tomorrow.org.za. **D**

wishes more South Africans could become receptive to their fellow Africans.

"I wish we could send everyone to learn more about their neighbours. I learnt tolerance, patience, patriotism and humility from my travels in Africa. No matter how little they have, Africans are accommodating and will go out of their way to make your stay comfortable.

"I'm also blessed to work with a great team of presenters on Studio 53. All of them are great ambassadors for their countries and high achievers."

On a personal level, Motene has rekindled another passion – dancing – and is enjoying every minute of it. She particularly enjoys dancing naked in her apartment, she tells me with a wicked grin. She's also learning to meditate, an activity she recommends as a great stress-buster.

And she's heartened by good developments within her intimate circle, as far as romance goes. Her [informally] adoptive brother, a white Jewish man, has just paid lobola to his black fiancée, and Motene excitedly talks about her future sister-in-law as a welcome addition to her family.

Now aged 33, Motene admits she's broody and hopes to have her own children in two or three years' time. She's been unlucky in love so far, she says – but quickly adds that she's happy, nevertheless, and willing to wait for the right man to come along. Although those close to her continually drop hints about prospective relationships for her, she's not about to compromise just for the sake of having someone in her life. She's learnt important lessons from past involvements, she says.

"I know who I am as a woman, and I know what I want in a man. Before, I was prepared to give a guy a chance, but now I'm in a space where I'm comfortable with who I am and I stand up for my rights. I was in a relationship for a couple of years, but it didn't work out. I've been on dates with phenomenal men, but I realised we didn't have the same energy and accepted that we shouldn't be together."

For the time being, Motene's content with her situation and enjoying her own identity. Life, she remarks, is too short to spend stressing over things she can't control. **D**



THE MOTENE MAP TO SUCCESS

Rosie Motene passes on five crucial lessons she learnt from the showbiz industry

- "My career has been driven by passion and determination and I always steer myself ahead. If I don't get a part I have auditioned for, I pick myself up, work even harder and remind myself that the role wasn't meant for me.
 - I've realised that one never stops learning and that it's important to always be a step ahead.
 - When you have ideas, talk to people, ask questions and take the necessary steps to improve yourself.
 - I'm strategic about who I involve in my plans because there's always someone who tries to claim your work as their own.
 - Having talent is both a right and a privilege, so I cherish and relish it – and have fun!"
- MOTENE'S AMBITIONS**
- "I want to expand my brand locally and internationally - and that includes acknowledgment and exposure through film, theatre and television.
 - I want to travel and live in as many global cities as possible, without losing my base in South Africa.
 - I'm definitely planning to study further, get my Master's degree and improve my skills as a counsellor.
 - I want to write my autobiography.
 - I want to continue doing what I love, laughing uncontrollably and hopefully fall in love again." **D**

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