

Good Afternoon Everyone!!

I want to say firstly say that 12 years ago, when I was selected for this very same Mentoring Cayman program, where I got to shadow and learn from Dr Gelia of the Water Authority who so graciously gave up her precious time, I had no idea how fortunate I was. It wasn't until I was selected as a YCLA finalist, and then as this Year's YCLA recipient at 27 that I was given a reason to look back at the past couple of decades of my life to figure out what influenced my own leadership journey, and life choices, so I could in turn have key messages to help influence youth like yourselves, Cayman's next generation of leaders!! It turns out EACH AND EVERY SINGLE one of the major milestones I have reached in my life are largely attributable to the incredible mentors I have been fortunate to have, both formally and informally. Even though it took me decades to realise how instrumental these mentors have been in my life, I am thankful nonetheless that I am getting an opportunity to thank each and every one of them for all they have done for me, for their precious time, and for seeing the potential within me, sometimes when I didn't see it myself.

Today, I wish to take you all on a short journey of a few key mentors that have impacted my life tremendously, illustrating the vast arrays of forms that mentors can come in, and how truly powerful a mentor can be!

### ***Story 1***

I spent a significant part of my childhood with my gran and papa, Sallie and Albert Hislop, while mom and dad were busy working to provide the best for us. My 2 brothers and I would spend countless hours playing hide and seek amongst their bountiful fruit trees in their 2 acre garden or better referred to as our playground, or other times fishing on their boat in the North Sound, Gran and I competing with the boys over who could catch the most fish. What I didn't know then was the strong value system and morals they were instilling in each of us. After papa's father passed away when he was a toddler, he had to assume the position of the man of the house, cutting the wood for the stove, milking the cows and drawing the water from the well for his grandmother, mother and 2 sisters all before heading to school. He left school at 13 to work with Public works on the steams rollers that built Cayman's roads. To me, he was (and still is) the epitome of a hardworking and selfless man, and I love listening to his stories, particularly the ones where he used to sneak his only pair of shoes out of his house so his dear friend Polkadee, who didn't own good shoes, could go out dancing. As soon as he was 18, he left Cayman to work on the ships as an engineer for 11 years, traveling the world and working so he could provide a better living for his family, sometimes barely keeping enough for himself to survive, and instead sending his wages home. Later returning to Cayman, he married my Grandma, together building

themselves a very comfortable life as farmers, and business owners. Although my first job wasn't hard labour like Papa's was, it taught me responsibility, about saving, and about working hard to buy my own things. I was 10 when Papa hired me to stock the shelves at his Savannah Texaco gas station, 12 when I became a cashier! I've never met such an incredible man. I could never count the number of times I saw him pull money out of his own wallet to pay for gas of customers who couldn't afford it, trusting even the most questionable of characters to pay him back, always giving people a chance. I believe much of my own spirit of giving back through community service since I was as young as 11 or 12, and my hardworking nature comes from Gran and Papa, who couldn't have been better mentors to us if they tried. Gran and Papa might not have ever gone to university, but they taught us more about life than a degree could teach us. And while they neither of them may have had the opportunity to pursue studies, they have encouraged each of their 7 grandkids to further theirs, to chase their dreams, often providing the financial means to assist when money was a hindrance to us achieving our dreams. My papa finally retired a couple of months ago, age 78, after waking up each morning at 4am to open, and manage his gas station. Gran is 82, and not in the best of health, but they still make sure to have date night each and every Sunday, coffee together every morning, whether in bed or by the pool, and they just got back from a cruise around Cuba! They still continue to mentor me now, particularly on the values needed to kick start my recent marriage to my wonderful husband. I know all of their time and dedication to mentoring us is paying off, and there is nothing better in this world than being able to make my grandparents, and very first mentors proud.

## **Story 2**

I was only about 11 when I first heard a past United World College recipient come to St. Ignatius to speak about their experience. I became enamoured with the idea of going to UWC, often spending hours researching the various countries in which the schools were in, teleporting myself there in my daydreams to imagine what it would be like. When it came time to apply at age 15, some of my friends decided they had the same dream as me. Knowing they were only awarding one scholarship, I began to wonder if it was really right for me, whether some of my friends might be better suited, and plus, it would be hard to accept the rejection if I wasn't selected! After expressing the doubt I was having to my mother, another mentor of mine, she told me I would spend life wondering "what if" if I didn't at least give it a shot! And so 8 months later, there I was sitting on 3 flights traveling thousands of miles across the world to Swaziland in Southern Africa, Mom and Dad right by my side, as I settled into a completely different environment, night and day to Cayman – water that made me really sick, frequent thunder storms and power cuts, internet that didn't really work, and so much poverty.. Among many of my closest and dearest friends who I made there was a young man called Tsiu

Moorosi. Tsiu was from a village called Hlotse in Lesotho. He was born into a poor family who lived without running water, an outhouse for a restroom, and a “bedroom”, but more like living room he shared with his many siblings. Early in Tsiu’s life, he encountered mentors, particularly his father, who was an incredibly smart man. His early academic success, largely because of his mentors who invested time in him, afforded him the same scholarship as me. When I arrived, it didn’t take me longer than a day to realise I was no longer in the top of my class, I wasn’t even in the top half. In fact, I was struggling academically to keep up with the demands of the IB program, particularly in Chemistry and Math. Seeing potential in me, Tsiu began mentoring me, until I was up to speed with my classmates, and was in a very great position after two years there to apply to world class universities like the University of Edinburgh, where I decided to attend. Tsiu, like many of my other UWC friends also went on to achieve incredible things. His perfect SAT subject scores won him a full ride scholarship to Harvard, where he did biochemical engineering, building incubators for premature babies, and later returning to his home country to work for the Bill Clinton Foundation.

### **Story 3**

I completed my Masters at Imperial College London in International Health Management, after which I had no idea what I was going to do with my life. After several rounds of interviews, I was offered an internship with the World Health Organization headquarters. The only thing was that it was unpaid, and in Geneva, a very expensive city to live in. While I was the happiest girl alive, my family who had been subsidizing my cost of living overseas beyond what my scholarships provided, for the past 10 years, were NOT impressed, and were urging me to find a paying job so I could become financially independent. While on a short trip to Cayman, I was contacted by Cayman 27 who wanted to do a follow up segment of my journey, and I managed to include at the end of the video that I had gotten my dream internship with the WHO, but was seeking finances to allow me to do it. Around the same time, a man called David Lickrish contacted my friend Jen at Cayman Free Press to place an ad in the paper, and as they got chatting, she asked if he’d ever heard of me, as my background was well suited to the pharmaceutical company he was CEO of. Within an hour, David and I connected on the phone, and within 24 hours, I was at their office to learn more about the ground-breaking compounds they were developing. I never mentioned that I was seeking funds for my internship as that was a bit awkward only just meeting the man for the first time, but I believe after Facebook stalking me (although David denies this), he found the Cayman 27 video that a friend had posted to my page, and reached out to me to say Ironshore wanted to fund my internship – woo hoo. Eight months after keeping in touch with David, I was offered a job by the same David Lickrish, and moved back home to Cayman to work for Ironshore Pharmaceuticals, largely thanks to my friend Jen who introduced us. It’s been 20 months of exponential

learning, personal and professional growth, mentoring from David and my direct boss Bev and my other colleagues with over 20 years' experience in the industry, but also a special introduction to a lady called Fiona. Fiona was an investor in Ironshore, and had recently sold her successful Canadian Health Care consulting company to relocate to Cayman for her husband's job. She was an extremely intelligent lady, so passionate about health care like I was, and so much rich experience to share with me about life and health care projects she had worked on. David encouraged me to take time out of my work day to meet with Fiona, to speak to her, to learn from her. A year after her serving as my mentor, we decided to start a health care consulting venture together, which is now a new and growing company under the name Healthy Futures Ltd. Fiona is still my mentor, and it would have been so more difficult to begin a company without her guidance, particularly as I'm still working full-time with Ironshore and have quite a few other commitments! And speaking of commitments, I can't tell you how many hours Fiona spent with me helping me through the rather daunting YCLA process, interview and TV prep, and helping me to improve the way I presented myself to the public. She's been an incredible mentor to me!

#### **Story 4**

The last story is not about mentors of mine – this time it's about someone that has become my mentee! I met this young lady on the night of the YCLA gala. A group of the Proud of them recipients came up to congratulate me on being the recipient. Of those that came to talk to me, one of the young girls stood out. She said to me "my mom and I have been following all the articles about you in the paper – I want to be like you!" I was pretty taken a back, as I just see myself as super ordinary, and had never had someone say something like that to my face. Completely perplexed, I had to ask her what she meant. She says "I want to do every you've done – I want to go to UWC, I want to go Imperial College London, I want to do all the cool things you've done" I thought this young girl was so brave, and while I wanted to exchange details, we didn't get the chance that night. A few days later, I was asked to be on the Youth Flex Radio Cayman show, where I was so happy and shocked to the same girl I'd met at the gala was a co-host. We exchanged contacts this time, and she asked if I would be willing to be her mentor. It was such an honour to help mentor her through the UWC application process, which I can remember was very daunting! I knew she had what it took, but just like I did when I was 15 doing the same application, she was doubting herself and initially lacked confidence! I can't explain the sheer joy I had to receive a call from her telling me she had gotten not only gotten the scholarship but to her first choice school! And by no means can I remotely take any credit for her achievement, but I am so satisfied that I could stand by her side during the daunting process to give her the advice I wish I had 12 years ago!

As my stories show, mentors have appeared in my life in so many forms – from my grandparents, parents, teachers, to friends, business partner, to my personal favourite mentor and mentee all in one, which is my husband!!! I literally can't say enough about this man, who has selflessly encouraged me to chase every single dream of mine (vice versa) and always provided me with the soundest advice in the past 4 years, even though it meant we lived, worked and studied in different countries until a couple months ago, different time zones, or that our schedules were sometimes so packed we hardly got to speak, as we were both so busy becoming better versions of ourselves.

And so in closing, these stories are what mentorship means to me – people that have believed in me, and used their life experiences to give me inside knowledge, insight, guidance that has help me reach my goals more seamlessly, someone who has positively impacted my career, my passions, my value system. I could never say it's been a smooth road, as I have experienced more obstacles than I have time to share, but mentors have surely helped me to overcome many of them. Equally, I have had a number of mentors that have been able to use their poor life choices and experiences with gangs, violence, drugs and crime, to influence me not to make the same decisions as them, and have had such a memorable impact on me. A mentor need not be a perfect person, need not have 6 degrees, but rather a real life story and experience that people can relate to, and learn and grow from. Call it cliché, but I wouldn't be where I am today without this very crucial guidance I've had from such a young age.

Please take a moment to high-five your mentor and say THANK YOU! For the rest of the program, I fully encourage you all to continue to take as much as you can from this incredible Mentoring Cayman Program the Chamber and Ministry of Community Affairs, Youth and Sports puts on. You are so deeply privileged to have this interaction with these experienced mentors who are leaders in their field – be a sponge and soak up as much as you possibly can from them - keep in touch when the program is over, as you never know what opportunities exist for you down the line, and you may need further guidance beyond the program! To the mentors, I promise you that you are shaping lives, influencing futures way more than you probably realise! There is no better gift to these young leaders than this, and I hope you continue to work in the program in the future. And finally, let's keep the cycle of mentorship going – to the mentees, become a mentor yourselves to someone that is experiencing a tough time, is struggling academically, or needs some guidance or a sound board about their future plans, struggles at home, bullying, unhealthy relationships. You don't need to wait as long as I did to become a mentor, and you each have something very special and unique to offer to someone else. I wish each and every single one of you the very best.