



# DREAMS do Come True

*Ms. Nayana Karunaratne*

*Founder of Salon Nayana*

**N**ayana Karunaratne of Salon Nayana has been instrumental in reforming the concepts of beauty culture amongst Sri Lankans for over 48 years.

Salon Nayana has expanded its branch network in Sri Lanka as well as in India. As she loves teaching she possesses two academies that offer intensive training to aspiring professionals, known as the SN ACADEMY South Asia -for Hair & Beauty education and IMAGE CONSULTANTS – an Academy for Personality Development Training. She is also the founder of the internationally renowned Sri Lanka Association of Hairdressers And Beauticians (SLAHAB). She was recognized as the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2007 and Gold Medal winner for the Business Category - Large, at the annual awards ceremony organized by the Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, with a focus on evaluating the performance of women in business. We got the

*“ I value and cherish the fact that I’m a woman ”*

opportunity to interview her and here are the excerpts from our interview.

**How would you like yourself to be introduced?**

People look at me from an entrepreneur’s point of view, which I suppose is right. To me, I’m pretty ordinary, but there are few points in life that are important to me. I would say I value and cherish the fact that I’m

a woman. I am very proud to be a hairstylist and a teacher and also the fact that I conduct personal development programs. Most of what we teach is very important to me and I never try to teach what I don't know.

Business, I suppose, comes after these values. Yes, I always wanted to do business and there’s a little bit of business sense in me. I want to be successful too. But values come first. If not I would have been definitely richer. I wouldn't sell anything for anything, especially education.

**All your entrepreneurship skills inspire us- were you born with them or did you develop them later?**

I absolutely did not get any formal study or special education on that subject. Yet when I sit back and think, our upbringing was very positive. We had many setbacks in life. My father died when I was seven years old. Even though I did not



feel it at that time, it definitely was a setback for my mother and my family. Yet the family background from both my maternal and paternal side helped me to be who I am today. They were beautiful people from the lower middle class with good values. They inspired and filled me with a lot of hope, passion and ethics. Work wise Janet Balasuriya inspired me in numerous ways as she herself was a success story of a strong hard working woman.

## Looking back at your childhood days, tell us how those days were?

I was a very average student when it came to education at school. I studied at Bishops College, Colombo. But when I was in Grade 7, my mother wanted

me to sit for Scholarships exam just like my sister did and as I passed it I had to move to Visakha Vidyalaya. I think my mother wanted me to sit for the scholarship exam because she had financial issues with having both me and my sister in a private school. She was a widow by then and it must have been hard for her to manage life with four children. I did not like the change then, but today, I see the positives of both schools and am thankful for the experiences.

## When did you realize that you have this potential of becoming a beautician?

The determination had been

there always, even though I didn't realize it. As a child I always played with my grandmother's wigs. By the time I was 14, I knew I wanted to become a hairdresser.

When I was in the O/L class, somewhere in October that year my mother and I met Janet at a wedding and they discussed my interest in hairdressing. Janet was serious, and said after O' levels was a good time to start and said I could join the new batch in January. So I told this exciting news to all my friends and announced that I would be leaving school immediately after writing the exam in December. They gave me a farewell party after the last paper. My mother was

*“ I know it is harder for women to manage your career and household work. But never get disappointed. Enjoy all the work you do. Talking about myself, I always pre plan everything. Even the things I cook. I know very clearly what is going to happen tomorrow. I maintain a diary and I am very organized and I delegate ”*

furious with my decision but I was firm that I couldn't go back to school after accepting farewell gifts. As I come from a family of professors in science, my mother had to make a hard decision to send me to the hairdressing course in January.

We were living in Kelaniya then. It was only after we moved to Colombo that I got the opportunity to learn dancing. I learnt 'Bharatha Natyam' from Mrs. Kamala Jayathilake and performed my Arangethram too. Even for that I had a lot of



determination and I never gave up.

Later, my mother asked me to pick one of the two, hairdressing or dancing, as my career. I was not good in karnatic music that is essential to become a good dancer or a dance teacher. So I decided to pursue hairdressing as my career, which was indeed the correct decision.

### When you were starting did you have an idea about this industry?

No, not on a big scale, but I had focus. When I was young, a very eligible young man from one of the Forces wanted to marry me. It was like a dream come true. He was handsome, had a good family background and everything for a promising married life. But, I had

this fear that a person from the Forces will not be able to allow me open 'A Salon', because of their lifestyle of transfers, official quarters etc. At that time I was working for Janet and all I wanted was to start up my own Salon one day. So my answer was no. I think looking back, it was a good decision. When we are young, we want to grab everything good for ourselves. It was an early learning for me that you cannot have it all, but need to take decision most suitable for you.

### Out of all possible industries why did you choose this industry?

The choice was only this and dancing. So it was kind of a clear-cut decision. I consider myself lucky to have known my career path early in life. Most

entrepreneurs realize their calling, only later in life, after experiencing some frustration.

Are there any inspirational characters that inspired you?

Yes there are many and most of them are women. Firstly, my mother, then my paternal grandmother who was a gracious and strong woman and of course Janet who was my guiding light. My Aunt, who is my mothers' elder sister, is also an amazing woman. I have not seen anyone who has faced so many difficulties in life. She is 92 years old now and still smiling. I am always inspired by her. Other than that I should mention entrepreneur Mr. W. K. H. Wegapitiya, Mr. Samantha Kumarasinghe, Mr. Mahesh Amaleen and Mr. Ruwan Edirisinghe who are great personalities.

In my professional life, the late Mr. Jun Encarnacion, the former President of Philippines Hairdressers Association and the current President of the World Federation of Hairdressers Mr. Salvatore Fodera have been great influencers. I believe if you look close and hard, you can see a lot of good things in different people and can get inspired.

### How do you want other women to see you?

"No" and "I can't" are not in my vocabulary. I always do what I think is best and do not allow other people to decide or change my plan of action to suit their time schedules.

My lifestyle is very simple and I am concerned only about the basics. I do not compete with anyone. I compete only with myself. I have a tremendous competition with myself. I am also concerned about myself and

I take care of my health and lifestyle.

### Anything that you desperately want to achieve?

No, because I believe, if you really want something you can achieve it. I strongly believe in dreams. Dreams do come true. What is important is to maintain your mental and physical stamina and then you can work hard to make your dreams come true.

### How do you manage your time, specially being a woman?

I know it is harder for women to manage their career and home. No need to be disappointed or feel guilty. Enjoy all the work you do. Talking about myself, I always plan ahead. From cooking to teaching to office work, I know very clearly today, what I should do tomorrow. I maintain a 'to do' list diary, I am very organized and I delegate. You should not do the things you do not want to do. The quality time you spend is more important than quantity of time.

### How is the support from your family?

My husband is giving me a huge support for everything I do. We have a good understanding. I believe that, without family support you cannot succeed in life.

### What was your first job?

Immediately after completing my course, I worked with a lady named Nalini for a very short time and joined Janet again as her staff. It was 48 years ago. I can still remember, my first salary was Rs. 50 and had earned it before the OL exam results were released.

*Entrepreneurship does not come with qualifications and paper. Don't ever think you can be an entrepreneur just because you have an MBA. Entrepreneurship is a desire in the heart. Entrepreneurs want money so they work hard to earn money*

### Can you tell us more about your business?

I have salons and academies in Sri Lanka and in India. I also have a company named Image Consultants that conduct personal development programmes because I love teaching.

I created the Institute of Hairdressers and Beauticians (IHB), a non-profit making institute to provide internationally recognized hair and beauty education in a range of languages, with internationally accepted certifications. IHB is running extremely well in India.

### Every morning what motivates you to begin your day?

Every day I wake up at around 4.30 am. I go for yoga, take a walk or go to the gym. I cook, do any of my correspondence and writing, as my brain works best in the mornings, and then I go to work. Before I go to bed, the list for tomorrow is prepared. That motivates me to begin my day and there are no surprises, hassles or delays.

### How do you manage your staff?

Human Resource management is the hardest. I have around 100 staff to manage and to deal with the younger generation is challenging. Their attitudes, ideas and commitments are different. I am strict, but very friendly with my staff and my doors are always open for them. We think positive, and pass that message to all youth, helping them to find their calling.

### What is the one last advice that you can give to people who wish to become entrepreneurs?

Most important advice is entrepreneurship, even though education helps, does not come from books and qualifications. You cannot become an entrepreneur just because you have an MBA. Entrepreneurship is a desire in the heart - to do new things- to think out of the box - to earn money - to achieve your dreams.

The mottos I believe in are - strong desire, good planning, hard work, and never succumb to failure, as there will be many to dishearten you. Earn money, but more important is to save money and never waste anything ■

*By Lakruwani Wimalaratne and Harshana Munaisnghe*



# MY DREAM IS TO BE A CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

“ WHEN I WAS SMALL, I WAS DREAMING OF BECOMING A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR WHO RUNS HER OWN BUSINESS. I HOPE I CAN ACHIEVE MY GOAL. NSBM PROVIDES US ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW AS VISIONARY LEADERS ”

