

SoulVision[®]

M A G A Z I N E

**Christine Simmons:
Academy Trailblazer**

November 2021

EDITORS NOTE

BK Fulton

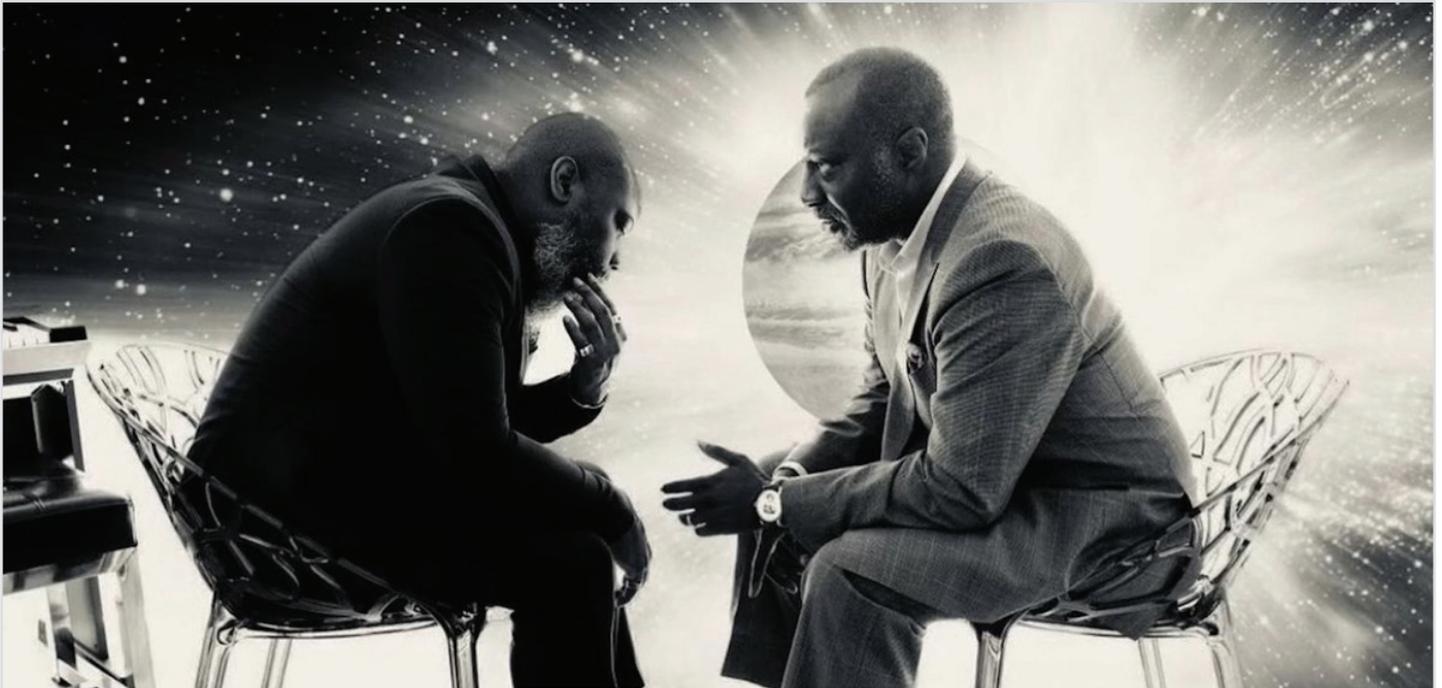


Photo courtesy of BK Fulton

| “We must lift as we climb.”

We must lift as we climb. I’m amazed by the resilience of educators who pour into young lives so that one day we might become the best version of ourselves. It’s really cool when you think about it. We are all an aggregate of our experiences. As we learn more, one of the rights of passage into adulthood requires that we give more. Since teaching is a form of giving, I’m focusing this month’s note on teaching more and not just in the “*each one teach one sense . . .*,” but in the each one teach as many as you can sense. You see, we all can do something to make the world better. It is my core belief that anyone can teach. There is something special about each of us. And it is a supreme gift to give back; to pour into future generations so that this thing called humanity advances. My parents are educators. I started my professional career as an instructor in the Bronx, NY. Today, through our networks, films, and this magazine, we carry forward the tradition of caring and sharing through teaching others.

Accordingly, in this issue of SoulVision Magazine, we highlight the brilliance and wisdom of Academy COO Christine Simmons, learn how to succeed in our second act with Benita Adams, and witness the power of learning from multi-hyphenate Tanya Boucicaut. We also learn about the craftsmanship behind Karen Cooper’s smoking wands, get a BBQ-ready recipe from Brenda L. Thomas and take a look at her cookbook *Sayin’ A Taste*. Finally, we share the inspirational story behind entrepreneur and model Kathare Mundit’s African Benefit Society nonprofit and celebrate the legacy of Hattie McDaniel.

| “As we learn more, one of the rights of passage into adulthood requires that we give more.”

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CELEBRITY

Christine Simmons: Academy Trailblazer



Christine Simmons with her son Christian. Photos by April Johnston.

| “You don’t have to work within the system.”

In Rancho Cucamonga, a suburban city in San Bernardino County, California, Christine Simmons’s mother raised her and her three sisters as a single mother. Her mother was independent, strong, and had all the love in the world to give her girls. “I watched her make the impossible possible without the help, raising us while working three or four jobs at a time,” Christine says. “She did that for us and still does to this day. Even in retirement, she is the strength of our family. Because of her, we evolved into the women that we are today.” As chief operating officer of the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences, Christine Simmons is helping to evolve the structure of a nearly 100-year-old institution.

Christine Simmons: Academy Trailblazer (continued)



Christine is a big proponent for using your network of relationships for the greater good. She uses the term “social capital” to explain this critical social skill. When Christine had just graduated from UCLA, where she was pre-med, she met Los Angeles Lakers legend Earvin “Magic” Johnson. She asked Johnson about the health clinics he was beginning to open. They talked and found they had similar opinions about athletes and their transitions for making a living off the court. Christine and Johnson kept in touch and he became her mentor. “I checked in to see if he and his family were doing well over the years,” she says. When she was the supplier diversity & sustainability manager at Disney World, Christine helped Mr. Johnson gain the opportunity to compete for a contract for his foodservice and facilities maintenance company, SodexoMagic. “I came to the relationship with something to offer,” she says. “Even for someone as well regarded as Magic Johnson, it’s important to have something to offer.” He hired her to be vice president of strategic alliances for his company and eventually, executive vice president of Magic Johnson Enterprises. Social capital doesn’t necessarily mean networking with famous people. You can also call on your

friends from college. “It is so important to nurture relationships with your peers who you are coming up with,” she says. “You keep nurturing these networks and social capital, so you can advance and be successful together. I think that is key, and this is how business has been for quite some time.”

“What people should or shouldn’t do in their careers is being challenged, and it is a beautiful thing to watch.”

Christine appreciates the direction popular culture is headed in. Mainstream culture has defined who can create, who can get funding, and who can get exposure. “We are now reconciling with our past, whether it be in film or society,” she says. “We are now breaking down the systemic infrastructure that has put people in these hierarchical positions that weren’t always necessarily merited.” The culture of work has changed as well. Employees are now venturing out on their own or moving from company to company for better opportunities. However, people looked at Christine funny when she moved from company to company, specifically after working in high-level positions. “People wondered why I didn’t just stay and collect a pension,” she says. “What people should or shouldn’t do in their careers is being challenged, and it is a beautiful thing to watch.”

After #OscarsSoWhite in 2015, the Academy created the A2020 initiative. The initiative addresses the criticism of the Academy’s lack of diversity in its nominations and voting process. The goal was to double the number of women and people of color in the Academy’s membership. Christine says they have met their goals and, in many ways, exceeded them. After the murder of George Floyd, Christine says the Academy doubled down on diversity and inclusion. To further its progress, the Academy created Aperture 2025 that details new standards for the film industry. “We chose the word aperture because

Christine Simmons: Academy Trailblazer (continued)

we want to broaden the lens through which excellence is recognized,” she says. Aperture 2025 includes several internal strategies for the Academy that address inclusion issues. The Academy has made unconscious bias training mandatory for its board of governors, branch executive committee members, and staff. They are looking at their investment portfolio. They are looking at HR and marketing and red carpet press. “All of these are tangential things that we as an organization can do,” Christine says. “And that is on top of the talent, diversity, and development programs we have that are nurturing the next generation of filmmakers.” The Academy has also made it a priority to target these groups in their Academy Gold programs, “a global talent development and inclusion initiative.”



Aperture 2025’s most significant change is the new inclusion standards for Best Picture. The measures won’t go into full effect until around 2024. The inclusion standards center around four categories: in front of the camera, behind the camera, internship/training/work opportu-

nities, and marketing/publicity/distribution. Hollywood studios must make sure they include underrepresented racial/ethnic and identity groups in these categories. “We still need to do a lot of work in the Latinx community, the LGBTQ community, and the Indigenous/Native populations as well,” Christine says. “These are all areas we have to shine a light on. There are so many beautiful and brilliant artists in these groups who deserve to be celebrated. We can do this and continue to lift our Asian and black brothers and sisters, women, and those with disabilities in the arts.” The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures opened in late September of this year. In 2022, *Regeneration: Black Cinema 1898-1971* will explore African Americans’ history and their roles in cinema. “If you want to research the history of black cinema, you can do so in our library and our archives,” Christine says.

“If we can expose young men and women from all different backgrounds to all things that are possible, then you don’t have those limits that society teaches them.”

Advising those who would like to be in the industry, Christine recalls the advice of a colleague who suggested staying until the end of a film and watching the credits. Why? Because the end credits represent a giant listing of all of the jobs in the industry. “Some folks may want to be a studio exec, and that’s great, but some folks may love technology or coding,” she says. “Maybe they like dressing sets and location scouting. There are so many phenomenal opportunities for careers in film.” She also recommends internships. The Academy has its Gold Rising Program. This program includes internships with the Academy and production and media companies like Jordan Peele’s MonkeyPaw Productions and Warner Media. Christine recommends networking and getting on

Christine Simmons: Academy Trailblazer (continued)

set for those who would like a career change. “You may have to take a step back and be ok with that if you feel that is where your passion is,” she says. Christine recommends that creatives just go for it, even if it is outside the traditional career path for filmmakers. “Tyler Perry did it,” she says. “Ava DuVernay did it. Tons of folks are just starting out on their own. And that is beautiful too. You don’t have to work within the system.” She also suggests using iPhones to capture content. “Technology has helped democratize that a bit for us. Just do it and don’t ask for permission,” she says. When it is all said and done, Christine is excited about the Academy’s work. She wants people to know that they don’t have to be in Los Angeles to be part of the industry. “There are so many opportunities to meet our amazing members who are excited to welcome each new class of Academy members and create amazing movie magic together,” she says.

While Christine has garnered many accolades and earned prestigious positions in the entertainment industry, motherhood takes the top spot. Her son, Christian, sees his mom as a leader. Accordingly, women in power have become second nature to him. She recalls when Christian was three and attended his first Sparks game when she was president and chief operating officer of the Los Angeles Sparks. The Sparks were his favorite team. “The guys who would ask him his favorite basketball team, when he would say the Sparks, they would say no, your favorite basketball team,” she says. “I would have to pause and look at Christian and say, ‘They mean men’s basketball, my love.’ He would then reply with ‘Oh, the Lakers.’” Christine believes that exposure to women in traditionally male spaces can suspend some ingrained biases from childhood. “If we can expose young men and women from all different backgrounds to all things that are possible, then you don’t have those limits that society teaches them,” she says. Christine believes she is making a significant contribution to society by mentoring young people and teaching her son progressive values at home. “I love mentoring and empowering those who are coming after me; hopefully, they will outshine me and arrive sooner and bigger and faster than I did,” she says. “I see myself building future leaders of tomorrow; ultimately, that is what we are put on the planet to do.”

Christine speaking at the RPAA’s Women Take the Stage in May 2021. Courtesy of RPAA. Click [here](#) to view video.

To learn more about Christine Simmons, you can follow her on [Instagram](#). To learn more about the Academy of Motion Pictures, visit their website and follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).



Tanya Boucicaut Embraces the Power of Teaching



Photos by Trevon Brown

| “Learn and absorb.”

Tanya Boucicaut is constantly learning and creating. She is an assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). She graduated from William and Mary with a BA in English, earned her M.Div. from the School of Theology at Virginia Union University, and got her MFA in Theatre Pedagogy with a concentration in Dramatic Literature and Dramaturgy from VCU. She currently is a Writing and Rhetoric Ph.D. student at George Mason University. Tanya is an artist and minister, a playwright, and CEO and founder of the faith-based nonprofit Perfect Love Community Youth Theatre, which she is in the process of restarting. “My craft is multidimensional and rooted in my imagination, love for learning, and the desire for others and myself to see our lives depicted in narratives,” she says. “I am constantly taking film and production classes and workshops as well as completing self-study to perfect my craft.”

Tanya Boucicaut Embraces the Power of Teaching (continued)



Tanya's most recent success story is the TED-Ed Lesson *Can love and independence coexist?* The lesson, written by Tanya, explores Zora Neale Hurston's classic novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She details the theme of love and freedom and draws comparisons between Zora Neale Hurston and Janie Crawford, the novel's protagonist. Zora Neale Hurston based the character on her own life experiences. The video currently has almost 200,000 views on YouTube. Now, Tanya is looking at other ways to create content. She is recording a podcast and an educational series for college students.

TED-Ed Lesson – Can love and independence coexist?
Click [here](#) to view video.

This past summer, Tanya was selected for the Television Academy Foundation Internship program, which was remote this year. It is one of the most prestigious internship programs in the industry. If you know the Emmys, then you know the Television Academy Foundation. She found it refreshing not to be in a position of authority. "Being a professor and returning to be an intern was such a breath of fresh air," she says. "I was in a position to simply learn and absorb as much information as I could about children's programming and television development." Tanya currently is working on a podcast and educational series for college students.

BUSINESS

What's A Second Act Anyway?



Photo by Will Hawkins

| “This is your encore.”

By Benita Adams

If the pandemic has taught us one thing, plans can change quickly and suddenly, whether or not we want them to – Nothing is guaranteed. But, many of us have also learned to pivot when life throws us a curveball and embrace our Plan B. Change can be by choice or chance. It can be both scary and exciting. But, it’s how we embrace this time in our lives that makes all the difference in how our Second Act will play out, especially in midlife. Baby Boomers, born between 1946 – 1964, live longer because of advances in technology, which has helped improve our health. The average 65-year-old today can expect to live to 84.6, nearly three years longer than a person who was 65 in 1980. Today’s boomers are healthier than their parents’ generation and have the longest life expectancy in history.

What's A Second Act Anyway? (continued)

With these “supersized” lives, where we’re given perhaps an extra thirty years, boomers have more opportunities to discover their purpose and passion and even consider having encore careers. It causes us to ask: What’s next? Who am I now? Where am I going? and How do I get there? A second act is your encore and chance to keep your mind engaged and gain new experiences. We have a sense of purpose by staying engaged and productive. It increases our happiness and well-being. But, how do we figure out what our second act will be? Most people can figure out what they want next by looking at a few important steps to help them get started and transition into their second act journey. I call these steps the R.E.S.E.T. plan.

Through Reinvention, Education, Self-Discovery, Engagement and Transformation you can begin the process of changing your life:

Reinvention

Change is all about deciding what you want and don’t want and finding out what makes you fulfilled and happy. Consider things like creating a dream board, letting go of regrets, starting or ending relationships, setting new goals, doing something that scares you, and speaking positive affirmations every day.

Education

Is there a skill or trade you want to learn? Try taking a class or get a certification in a particular field, learn to voice what you want, connect to a cause or organization bigger than yourself, and learn to listen to yourself. Trust your life’s experience.

Self-Discovery

Because most people wear “so many hats” or have a variety of roles they play, it can be challenging to know our authentic selves. But, making peace with who you are is a big must. Start to write your thoughts in a journal, ask a trusted friend to give you some feedback, or go to a therapist or spiritual leader to share your experiences.

Engagement

So many times, we use our time and energy for other people. In engagement, begin to make and keep promises to yourself. Make room for yourself physically and emotionally and learn to tell other people No instead of Yes. (I know that’s a hard one for many people)

Transformation

Realize that change takes time. Most things we want to change take time. If you’ve heard of The Serenity Prayer it says, “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change – The courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” Your transformation will come in its time, and when we make changes in ourselves and our lives people will notice.

The R.E.S.E.T. plan can work for you as you journey and transition into your new phase of life with its possibilities and challenges. Let’s make the rest of our lives the best of our lives. Let’s reinvent ourselves because “It’s Our Time.”

To learn more about Benita Adams, visit her [website](#) and follow her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

BOOKS

Brenda L. Thomas: Cooking for the Family



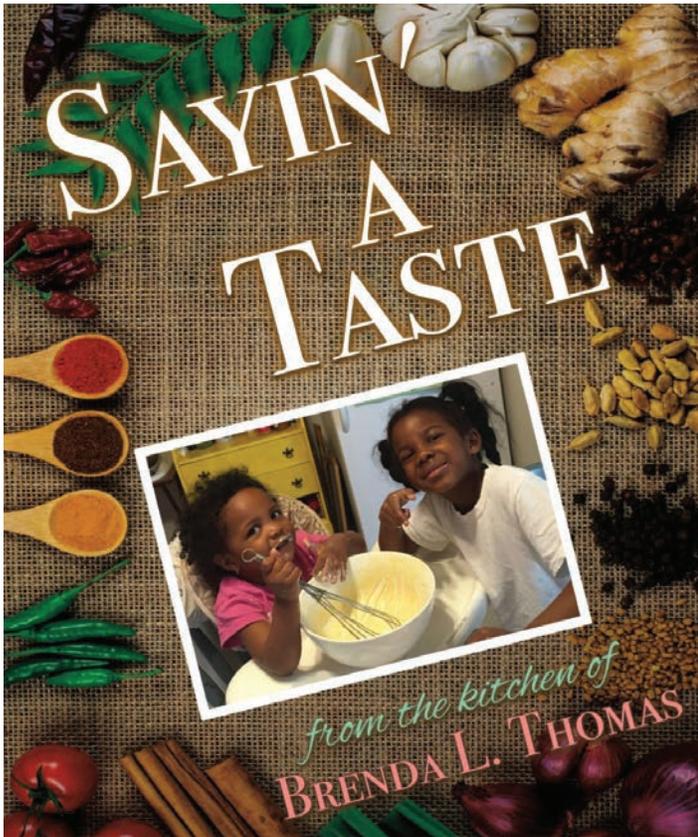
Photo courtesy of Brenda L. Thomas

| “Cook with those you love.”

Author Brenda L. Thomas has written nine steamy novels and has become a bit of a celebrity in her hometown of Philadelphia, PA. But after her late nephew, Michael Thomas, insisted that she create a cookbook, Brenda knew she had a new challenge. He came to her with the idea back in 2015 and Brenda initially turned him down. She mostly wrote erotic novels, but Michael believed in her capabilities and insisted that she write a cookbook. He died in 2016 after a tragic work accident. Brenda says she had no choice but to fulfill his wish.

She started working on the cookbook in November 2017. The book, titled *Sayin' A Taste*, will be out this month. “It was a long journey because I was a novelist and had no idea what I was doing when it came to writing a cookbook,” she says. It was a challenge for sure. What’s more, Brenda was making all of the recipes from scratch. She had to figure out the ingredients. In other instances, she experimented and had to trust where the tastes were taking her.

Brenda L. Thomas: Cooking for the Family (continued)



Sayin' A Taste (Phillywriter LLC)

She hopes that many will purchase the cookbook and she wants them to provide feedback on the recipes. “I tell people on the last page of the book to please email me about how these recipes worked for them.” As Brenda began to create her cookbook, she found the process similar to writing a novel. “I allowed the ingredients to act as my characters and the directions, my plot,” she says. “The elements culminated in a titillating dance on my taste buds and an orgasmic climax deep in my belly, making it a sublime gastronomic journey to be experienced either alone or with those you love. I chose those I love.”

Reflecting on Michael’s wish, Brenda believes he would be proud of what she has accomplished. “I vowed at his homegoing that I would write this cookbook. Every time I felt like giving up, it was Michael’s voice in my head that kept me going.”

To learn more about Brenda Thomas, visit her [website](#) and follow her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

BUSINESS

Karen Cooper: The Cannabis Industry's Newest Influencer



Photo by Sidney Lilly

| “Stay motivated and passionate about everything you do.”

Karen Cooper is a creative/artist and part-time caregiver from Newport News, Virginia. Growing up a stylish kid, Karen would put on her late Grandma Daisy’s jewelry and lipstick. “This helped me with my business today,” she says. “I also grew up coloring, painting, and drawing.” She is the founder of the Healing Touch Companion (HTC), a brand and social media page dedicated to caregivers. The brand has also branched out into the cannabis business. HTC Clips, their latest product, are beautifully handcrafted smoking wands. Her son, a nail artist, inspired Karen to create the smoking wands after noticing that smokers would burn their nails and leave them discolored after getting them done. Karen’s custom clips solve this problem.

Karen spends a fair portion of her time learning new wire wrapping techniques for her clips. She creates 30 or more pieces in each working session. From wiring, beading, and sealing, it takes Karen about 10-15 minutes to create each product. “Sometimes it’s hard to determine how many I’ve done as I lose track of time and get lost in my work,” she says. Her art allows her to focus on herself, especially after Grandma Daisy passed away due to COVID-19. Grandma Daisy helped the Healing Touch Companion’s 100s of thousands of followers take care of their loved ones diagnosed with Alzheimer’s and dementia. She also inspired Karen to start living life. “I stay motivated and passionate about everything I do because Grandma Daisy would always say, ‘Let go and let God...,’” she remembers. “I also enjoy coming up with creative ideas to make something new.”

Karen Cooper: The Cannabis Industry's Newest Influencer (continued)



Oval Green Agate Gemstones



Copper and Light Blue Agate Gemstones



Pink/Barbie Glass Beads

Karen wants to connect with cannabis influencers like Sydni Smiley, Positive Smash, Rachael, Michele Ross, and Wiz Khalifa. “HTC Clips is just getting started,” she says. “I’ll be doing several giveaways on Instagram this year, so keep your eyes peeled. In addition, plan on seeing us at local events that advocate for marijuana use.”

To learn more about Karen Cooper and HTC, visit their [website](#) and follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

CHEF'S CORNER

Brenda L. Thomas



Photos courtesy of Brenda L. Thomas



“This recipe can be cooked in the oven, fried in a pan with sautéed onions, or be put on the grill. Perfect to take to a BBQ.”

Ganny’s Italian Turkey Burgers

Course: Lunch or dinner

Cuisine: Soul-infused Italian

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 25 minutes

Total Time: 45 minutes

Serving Size: 4

Ingredients

- 1 pound of ground turkey
- 2 hot Italian turkey sausages (remove skin)
- Vidalia onions, diced
- 2 small mixed-color bell peppers, diced
- 4 chopped mushrooms
- 1 tsp. of minced garlic
- McCormick’s Hamburger seasoning
- McCormick’s Roasted Garlic & Herb seasoning
- A sprinkle of Italian bread crumbs
- 1 raw egg, beaten
- 3 tbsp of olive oil

Preparation

1. Lightly sauté the onions, peppers, garlic, and mushrooms.
2. Mix the ground turkey and sausage in a bowl, adding seasoning and onion mixture.
3. Mix well and then form into patties.
4. Allow to sit in the refrigerator for 30 minutes to get firm.
5. Warm olive oil in a pan over medium-low heat.
6. Place the burgers in a frying pan two at a time—not to crowd—and cook for at least 8 minutes on each side or cook on the grill for an even better flavor.

Recipe courtesy of the author’s upcoming cookbook, *Sayin’ A Taste*, out November 13, 2021. To learn more about Brenda Thomas, visit her [website](#) and follow her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

COMMUNITY

Kathare Mundit's African Benefit Society: Remedying Society's Ills



Photo by Darryl Cobb Jr.

| “Work towards a sustainable future.”

Each month we highlight a community program that aligns with the values of SoulVision Magazine. We believe engaging with one's community is critical to fostering positive change in the world.

Entrepreneur and model Kathare Mundit was born and raised in Ethiopia of South Sudanese parents. Her family arrived in the U.S. as refugees in 1998. “As a result of this beginning, I see the world through a different lens than most. I have learned to be more compassionate, loving, hard-working, and most importantly, I exude gratitude,” she says. Her life experiences motivated her to begin taking the steps to create the African Benefit Society (ABS), an upcoming nonprofit organization.

Kathare Mundit's African Benefit Society: Remediating Society's Ills (continued)



Photo courtesy of Kathare Mundit

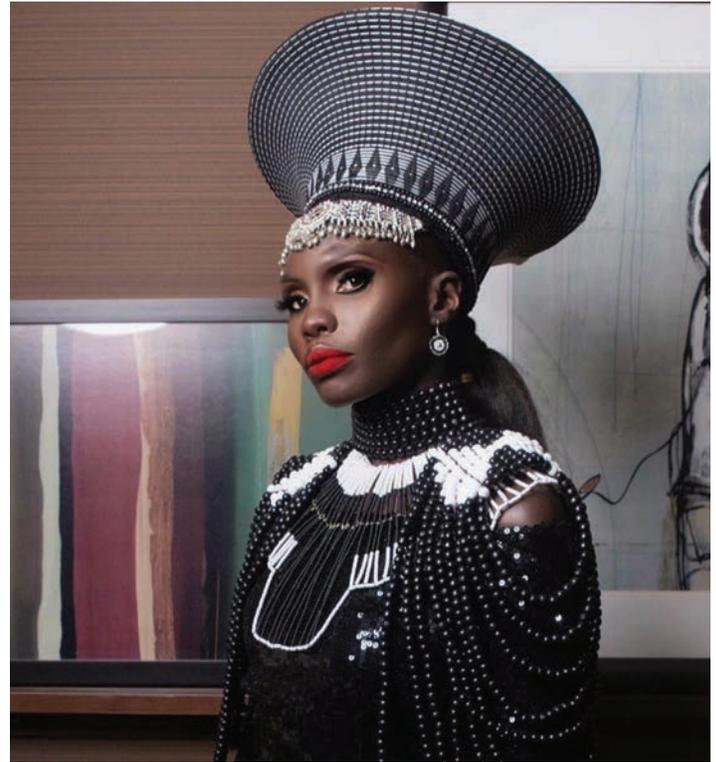


Photo by Tobi Odukoya

She remembers 1990 like it was yesterday. She was seven years old when her family had to walk 30 days to escape the violence and bloodshed of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War. “During this forced march, it was raining much of the time, and we had to cross swollen rivers teeming with hungry crocodiles,” she recalls. “The most terrifying thing I saw as a child was dead bodies everywhere.” Her mother was eight months pregnant with her sister Parman. Reflecting on her family’s journey, Kathare is upset that she couldn’t do more to help her mother.

Her brother is the main inspiration for ABS. He passed away on September 8, 2021, from alcohol addiction. He was just 44 years old. “Substance abuse is rampant and endemic within the black community, and ABS has a strategy to address this scourge,” she says. “We will offer traditional African therapies for poly-addictive disorders and mental health issues.”

One of ABS’s biggest goals is to bring low-cost electrical energy to villages. “Having reliable, sustainable, and affordable energy is the portal that opens other doors of opportunity,” Kathare says. “Without electricity, we cannot address the critical issues of digital inequality and educational insecurity.” Low-cost electricity will open doors and help to address many issues like access to clean water, better health and hygiene, education, and creating green and sustainable environments. Kathare says she will utilize cutting-edge technology like 3D printing to construct low-cost living/work housing in economic development zones to incubate new businesses. “ABS is ready to hit the ground running with turn-key solutions to solve most energy issues.”

To learn more about Kathare Mundit and ABS, follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

LIVING LEGENDS

Hattie McDaniel



Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Hattie McDaniel was an actress who provoked many opinions from critiques of her roles; however, she was a pioneer for black performers in Hollywood. The date was February 29, 1940, and Hattie McDaniel became the first black person ever to win an Academy Award. She won for her role as *Mammy* in *Gone with the Wind*. Despite winning this award, she was barred from sitting with her costars. She was relegated to the edge of the room, close to the stage but out of sight.

She grew up in Denver, Colorado, the daughter of former slaves and the youngest of 13 children. McDaniel and her sister, Etta, formed the McDaniel Sisters Company, an all-female minstrel show. She created a parodied “Mammy” character. Their black audience looked at these shows as making fun of the racial stereotypes of white minstrel shows. In the 1920s, McDaniel was a blues singer and performed with Florenz Ziegfeld Jr.’s hit musical *Show Boat*, which shut

down after the stock market crashed in 1929. She was left stranded in Milwaukee and got a job as a restroom attendant for a nightclub called Sam Pick’s Suburban Inn. But after Sam Pick’s closed due to the Great Depression, McDaniel was out of a job. She packed up her bags with \$20 in her pocket and headed to Hollywood, joining her acting siblings Etta and Sam McDaniel.

When Hattie McDaniel arrived in Hollywood, she took on the roles that were given to black women at the time: the “Mammy” character. “I can be a maid for \$7 a week, or I can play a maid for \$700,” she once said. In 1937, casting began for *Gone with the Wind*, and Bing Crosby (a friend of Sam McDaniel) suggested to producer David O. Selznick to cast McDaniel. He did. After *Gone with the Wind* was released in 1940, McDaniel walked into Selznick’s office and placed a stack of reviews on his desk. Both black and white critics praised her role in the film. McDaniel had convinced

him to submit her for the best supporting actress category.

Like many black Americans, civil rights were personal. Many affluent members of the black community, including Hattie McDaniel, started to move into the Los Angeles neighborhood Sugar Hill. In 1945, white residents sued to have their black neighbors evicted, saying that restrictive covenants made it illegal for them to be homeowners in Sugar Hill. McDaniel organized her black neighbors and called on the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP to fight the suit in the court. Loren Miller represented the residents and argued that these covenants violated the 14th Amendment and the California State Constitution. Judge Thurmond Clarke agreed. This ruling laid the groundwork for the 1948 Supreme Court case, *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which ended racially restrictive housing covenants nationwide. In 1952, McDaniel died of breast cancer. She was 59 years old. McDaniel made what many thought was impossible possible.

“I feel no great personal pride for my contribution to the world of art. Rather, I feel that the entire fourteen million or more Negroes have all been raised a few notches higher in the estimation of the world.”

– Hattie McDaniel