

Biography

The longer more colourful version.

I was born in 1953 (one of seven children) to Scottish parents – in the small town of South Ockendon, Essex (on the outskirts of London) – which is about 40 miles directly east of Buckingham Palace – and that's as close to royalty – that I guess, I'll ever get.

I grew up, in and around London, and was shaped and influenced by the ideas of the sixties.

In 1969 – at the developing age of sixteen – our family (or some of it) immigrated to South Africa.

I was not particularly gifted as a scholar – preferring to play football and watch telly – than put any real effort into studying maths, language, history, science or anything else, of real value, for that matter.

The net effect was – that when I arrived in South Africa – there wasn't much I could do.

I did have a marginal interest in drawing and this created an opportunity for my parents to offload me at the Johannesburg School for Art. I studied there for a while, developing my skill in drawing and a growing interest in sculpture.

Without any recognised qualification – I was extremely fortunate to secure a job in printing and publishing – as a paste-up artist (preparing material for printing).

I found this exceptionally boring but it paid the rent of a flat I had secured in Hillbrow.

My luck changed – when by chance – I was offered a job as an assistant to an art director, at what was then, Johannesburg's and South Africa's most successful advertising agency.

From that point on my career flourished – within a few years, I became a fully fledged art director and by the beginning of 1980, was a partner in my own ad agency.

I won numerous international and local awards, developing brands such as; The Trust Bank, The Yellow Pages, Ford, Fiat, Johnson and Johnson, Sealy Posturpedic and many others.

I was also involved in the launching of a number of local new business and brands including...Kreepy Krauly, 702 Radio and Menlyn Park Shopping Centre.

As a relatively young man, I found the responsibilities of management tiresome and boring.

My creative spirit got the better of my rational mind – and in 1984 I abandoned the directorship – in search of new and exciting challenges. I sold my agency shares and decided to offer myself as a freelancer.

Over the next decade I began to mature – and moved successfully onto the international advertising stage – working for a number of large international agencies based in South Africa.

It was here that I was involved in developing the brands of; Coca-Cola, Sprite, Tab, Black and Decker, Opel and Isuzu, Camel Cigarettes (back when smoking was still cool), L'Oreal cosmetics, Lion Lager, Nissan, BP, Xerox, Plascon Paints and the list goes on. Again my work was acknowledged with international and local awards.

As the eighties came to a close, so did my time with these large multi nationals. Once more uncertainty occupied my headspace – dissatisfied, I looked for another canvas to explore.

The next, and as it turned out final phase, of my advertising career, provided me with further experiences and unique challenges.

I joined a small South African owned company ‘The Agency’. It had, at one point, enjoyed high profile status – but through the loss of significant accounts, had scaled down to a staff of just 20.

This was 1990 – the country was uncertain, as was the business landscape.

The “winds of change” were certainly blowing.

I wasn’t aware of it at the time but the direction of those winds was firmly in The Agency’s favour – because in a fairly short period of time The Agency got lucky!

We started to pick up new business, winning each of the new business pitches we challenged for – we were ‘on a role’ and that role continued right into the hugely significant political changes that were taking place simultaneously.

And as a local ad agency, we positioned ourselves to take full advantage of the situation, by making the affirmative changes required, ahead of our competition.

The result of these actions was the acquisition of some very substantial local accounts like: Eskom, SABC, Telkom, The Post Office, Absa Bank and a host of others.

These were all brands that needed to ‘reposition’ themselves as organisations – in light of the political and social changes 1994 initiated.

In 1997 I initiated an industry training and development programme to help promote and find positions for young black creative talent (specifically recruited from the townships for their unique insights).

The Abekwetha programme was ahead of its time. It enjoyed partial success with the support of the forward thinking agencies but the broader industry, having made gestures of support, failed to deliver.

By 1998 The Agency had grown into a business with over 300 staff and had become South Africa’s largest independent advertising agency.

My creative work had again been acknowledged with many awards and my managerial skills had also been noticed.

I was asked to leave my position as creative director and to take up the role of managing director – such was the growth of the Agency’s business.

The Agency merged with seven other (communication) businesses – and listed on the Stock exchange as Billboard Communications.

What initially appeared to be a bold new move came crashing down – once potential investors lost confidence buying into – “intellectual capital”.

I came to realise (too late) that I had got caught up in a whole lot of investment and disinvestment stuff, that had very little to do with good communication practice and was wholly about making certain individuals wealthy – at the expense of others.

The joy and passion I once derived from advertising had been replaced with devious business deals and corridor politics.

As the millennium drew to a close and the world united in the fear around YK2 – I was put out of my misery and relieved of my duties.

At the close of 1999 – my advertising career over – I was 46 years old.

I spent most of 2000 in depression and despair and reached a whole new level of “lowness” something that I had never experienced before.

Yet, it was out of this dark and lonely place – that my new life was to emerge.

At the beginning of 2001 fortune smiled on me once more, when I was offered a position lecturing Art Direction at the AAA School of Advertising.

Whilst lecturing I experienced a number of epiphany's...

- I came to see that *communication* is absolutely everything – in its absence – there is fear, chaos and certain darkness.
- That *everyone* is creative – ideas are inside everyone – some people just struggle to express them – that I could help people realise them.
- That *I* had something I could give back – and for the first time I found “*purpose*” to my life.

From 2002 I began building a new career and used as many lecturing opportunities as I could to shape and develop my new passion.

This included short engagements with Bond University, Cape Town University Business School, IMM and other institutions looking for lecturers in the field of communications.

The more I lectured, the more I recognised a need to learn more, myself.

I began to read as much as I could on the subjects I was promoting. The more I read the more I began to see differently and the more I needed to share.

The training and lecturing experiences accumulated and in 2004 I was offered a unique challenge – to help redevelop and improve the competitiveness of a large international advertising agency based in Lagos Nigeria.

This project offered me the opportunity to apply so many of the concepts and ideas I had been promoting through my lectures and to see how they would really work in a “real” environment.

It also required that I delve deep into the human component of the organisation – beginning to explore the stuff that made the individuals “tick” and the stuff that brought about disillusionment.

During this nine month adventure I had both success and failure.

For the agency there was success in the acquisition of a large telecommunications account, improved staff effectiveness and an overall strategic repositioning which led to them becoming more industry competitive.

In the many quiet evenings that I had to myself, I also had time to reflect on how my methodology worked.

In 2005, on the completion of the Nigerian project, I enrolled on a consciousness coaching course through Creative Consciousness International (CCI).

The tools and techniques that I learnt on this programme have since benefitted many of the people who have since sought my help.

Today – I am really very fortunate indeed – for now I get to work with so many different people.

In the last year I have helped all sorts of individual wishing to improve their lives through coaching, I have worked with a number of NGO groups seeking to establish improved communications with their constituents and with each other, I have also worked on a corporate platform, helping organisations understand and gear themselves for innovation development.

I have also enjoyed a number of high profile speaking opportunities where I have talked of the tools and mind space required for successful people development.

I really am blessed and am particularly grateful of what life has given me. I looked forward to each day wondering what will be the insight – where is the lesson?