

# The Heroine's Journey



## The Heroine's Journey of Noella Coursaris Musunka

Posted by PETERDEKUSTER on JULY 22, 2020



**What is the best thing that I love about my work?** In my work as a philanthropist I love working with people and seeing the students who come to our school at the non-profit organisation I founded, called Malaika. I love seeing them being happy and vibrant. It is amazing to see how they change and develop through their time with us where they receive a holistic primary and secondary curriculum, as well as two meals a day and an annual health check.

We instill leadership skills and vision in them, and they start to believe they could achieve their dreams and want to give back to their community and country in the future. As an international model, I love doing shoots and working with different people from all over the world and having the opportunity to step into different characters. I also love the partnerships it enables me to participate in.



**What is my idea of happiness?** My two children, JJ and Cara, bring me so much happiness and joy. They make me laugh every day, and I learn so much from them. Being healthy also makes me happy.

**What is my greatest fear?** I fear for the future my children will have in our world. There is so much that needs to change and the threat of climate change, conflict, and future pandemics are concerning as I think about them and their future lives. However, I am also hopeful that if we start now to make changes there is a lot for them to look forward to and be optimistic about. I also do fear for our organisation in this current climate where people are losing their jobs and donations are going down.

**What is the trait that I most deplore in myself?** Sometimes I can be impatient.

**Which living persons in my profession do I most admire?** I admire Michelle Obama and her philanthropy work because she is a great advocate for girls education. I also have great admiration for Wanjiri Mathai, the daughter of the environmentalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai. She is leading development of training programs for children and youth that will develop leadership and is a great advocate for Africa and for women.

**What is my greatest extravagance?** My wedding ring.

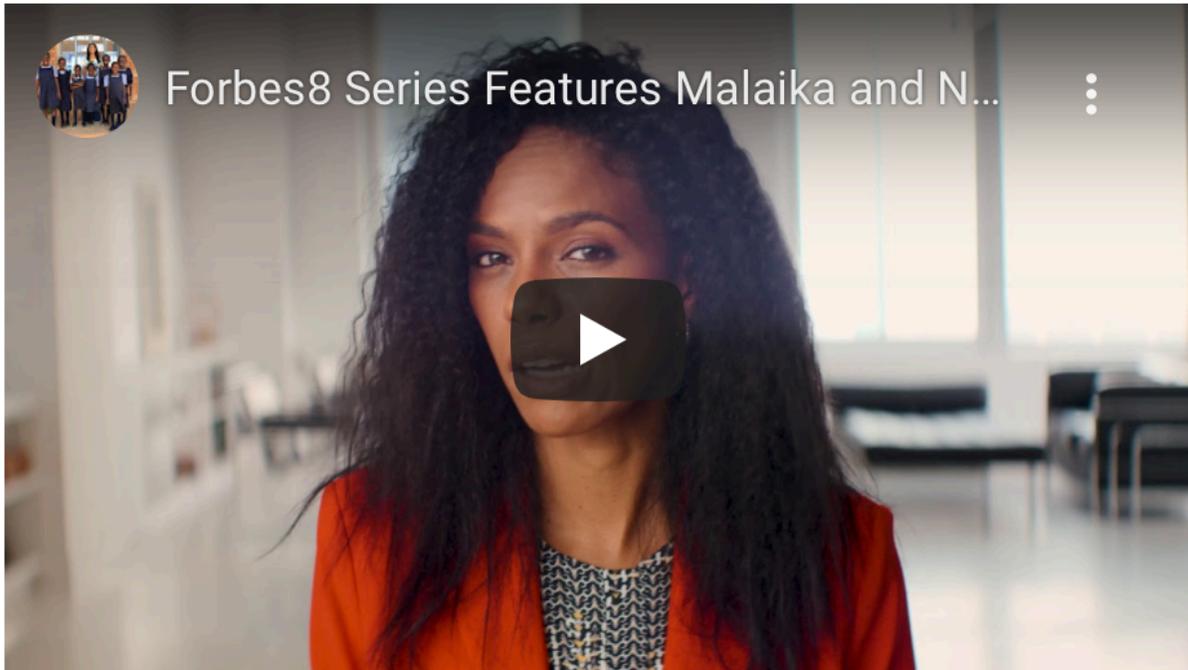
**On what occasion would I lie?** Maybe a little lie about the time so my children will go to bed earlier!

**What is the thing that I dislike the most in my work?** The painful moments. It is very emotional when you work with people because you are invested in them and their lives and so when they get sick or pass away and face challenges and difficulties such as this global pandemic, it is painful. However, I wouldn't have it any other way because it is important we care deeply about them and don't just provide these programs and facilities in a detached way.

**When and where was I the happiest, in my work?** When working in the Congo at Malaika. I love to be there with the staff and volunteers on the ground and also interacting with the students. We also spend the summer out there as a family with my husband joining me for two weeks and my children for six weeks. I love to invite donors and supporters to visit whilst I am there so they can see the work we are doing and meet our students and staff.

**If I could, what would I change about myself?** To sometimes say no when something doesn't serve my priorities instead of trying to do everything.

**What is my greatest achievement in work?** Founding Malaika in 2007 as it involved a lot of work, difficult conversations, fundraising and generating support.



**Where would I most like to live?** I love where I live now in the UK.

**What is my most treasured possession?** My children!

**What is my most marked characteristic?** My determination to keep going with whatever I believe in.

**What is my most inspirational location in my city?** I love London and New York.

**What is my favorite place to eat and drink, in my city?** I enjoy eating out or going for a drink at all our local pubs.

**What books influenced my life and how?** I enjoy reading with my children, especially when they have books about inspirational people. My daughter has a book about Harriet Tubman, and she decided to 'be' her at school for book day! It is lovely to read with her, because it's engaging and aspirational.

**You Only Die Once. What music would I listen to on my last day?** I enjoy music by singer/songwriter Sade, and classical pieces by Mozart are beautiful.

**Who is my hero or heroine in fiction?** I love the iconic female character in Pulp Fiction, Mia Wallace, played by Uma Thurman.

**Who are my heroes and heroines in real life?** My mother and my husband. They are both incredibly supportive and I couldn't do all that I do without them.

**Which movie would I recommend to see once in a lifetime?** Schindler's List. It is very sad and not an easy watch, but it's incredibly powerful and important for us to watch these kinds of movies.

**What role plays art in my life and work?** Art, culture and music is hugely important in African culture. I have African art in my home and when I go to work in Congo and am often joining with the students to sing and dance. I have a few amazing paintings by African artists in my house.

**What do the words 'You are the storyteller of your own life' mean to me?** You write your own path. I am a positive person, and I think that can make all the difference to how your life plays out.



**Who is my greatest fan, sponsor, partner in crime?** My son as he understands a lot of what I do in my work. My daughter is still a bit too young.

**Which people or companies would I like to work with in 2020?** I don't have any specific companies presently. I love to work for myself and then take any partnership opportunities that feel right as and when they arise.

**Which people in my profession who can make a real difference in my creative career would I love to meet in 2020?** Malala, Michelle Obama, Sade, Jill Scott, Oprah Winfrey, Angelique Kidjo.

**What project, in 2020, am I looking forward to work on?** I am hoping I'll see our school and community center open again in 2020-we were forced to close our doors March 19 due to the pandemic. The next project is to finish building two more classrooms at our school.

**Where can you see me or my work in 2020?** I have been doing lots of virtual interviews and talks, and the best place to find these is on my social media pages. There are also other interviews on YouTube with media outlets such as CNN and the BBC.



**What do the words "Passion Never Retires" mean to me?** To me, it means that you never give up. If you are truly passionate about something you keep going through any setbacks you may face.

**Which creative heroines should Peter invite to tell their story?** Pamela Tulizo, Petra Nemcova, June Sarpong

**How can you contact me?**

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