DRUM NEWS

WHAT A BRIGHT IDEA

This inspiring entrepreneur's glow-in-the-dark invention has made rural roads safer for both animals and humans

BY **DAKALO NEMASETONI**

FOR motorists in rural areas, it's the stuff nightmares are made of. A dark shape suddenly appears on the road as if out of nowhere and bam! There's animal blood and guts everywhere. And even if you're lucky enough to not be injured yourself, your car would also likely have taken a serious knock.

Memphis Morebudi Kaotsane (35) is one of many South Africans who know the terror of navigating rural roads after dark, especially in areas without streetlights.

He was a passenger in his cousin's car when they crashed into a donkey one night in their hometown of Taung, in the North West Province, in 2011. They were not seriously injured, but the car was a write-off.

Necessity, the old saying goes, is the mother of invention and a need to keep motorists and livestock safe spurred Memphis to figure out a way to do both. Like all great inventions, his idea was amazingly simple: why not spray paint the animals with a reflective, glow-in-the-dark paint?

It took years of tinkering and experimentation, but Memphis eventually came up with Moonshine, a reflective spray paint that's making life on the roads a whole lot safer in the rural parts of his home province – for both humans and animals.

He entered the North West Province's Innovation Competition in 2016 with his idea of a reflective paint for animals and won second place.

"That competition definitely gave me the platform for my dreams to come true, because before it happened, things seemed very bleak," he says.

With the help of the provincial premier's office, the North West development corporation and the North-West University, he decided to develop the product and take it to market.

His prize was R50 000 to create a prototype and an opportunity to work with a Ventersdorp vet and a Potchefstroom-based pharmacist who assisted him with product development.

This year, after working for two years to perfect his paint, his creation earned him a cool R200 000 at the 2019 SAB Foundation Social Innovation and Disability Awards.

He plans to set up his own factory in Taung to manufacture the paint and create jobs.

"I am looking into creating at least three jobs and having a safe storage facility from where we can distribute Moonshine to all nine provinces. I am really looking forward to seeing that happen," he says proudly.

"I want to empower people in the village I am from, I want them to see the endless possibilities," he adds.

THE first person with whom Memphis shared his light bulb moment was Gaobotse Kaotsane, his single mother who had raised him and his brother.

"I told her about the idea the minute it crossed my mind," he recalls.

He was living in Joburg at the time, working as a financial consultant, when he called his mom to share his brainwave.

"I was so excited about it that I was just rambling and she could not understand a word I was saying," he chuckles.

He returned to the family home at the weekend, where he explained his idea in

detail, impressing his mother.

At first, she was the only one who was impressed. Other people said it was silly and some even said it was impossible, he recalls.

It was not easy for him to figure out a way to bring his idea to life as an actual working product.

"Coming from a rural area made this project difficult because we do not have any innovation hubs," says Memphis.

"I sat on this idea for a very long time because I didn't know how to go about making it a reality. We have to deal with a lack of resources and funds even though we have so many great ideas we want to see become a reality," he says.

When he found out about the North West Province Innovation Competition in 2016, he practised his presentation with his mom. "She was the first person I presented to and she gave me ideas on how I could improve it," recalls Memphis.

She was excited for him, but when he said he was quitting his job to focus on Moonshine fulltime, she wasn't so sure it was a good idea.

"She was worried about how long it would take for me to jumpstart the business and how I would make enough money to live, but she still gave me her full support throughout this journey," he says.

He was running a project management business on the side, which helped him survive while the paint was being developed, he says.

Memphis admits he had his own reservations about quitting his job and pinning his future on an idea that had popped into his head, but he did it anyway.

"I was also very hesitant, but in order for me to focus on the invention I had to make that sacrifice. I am really grateful I listened to my intuition."

He has dedicated his invention to his mother.

"She raised two mischievous boys as a single parent but instilled a strong work ethic in me at an early age. I'm always grateful for her support," he told TimesLive.

THE idea of painting wandering animals to make them visible to vehicles at night is not new, says Memphis. "In Finland, the Lapland Reindeer Association once painted the antlers of their reindeer with reflective paint, to avoid them becoming roadkill," he said in an interview with Standard Bank's BizConnect website.

"In Britain and the US, cows and horses in villages are also marked with reflective bands."

Working with compounding pharmacist Dr Johan Marais and veterinary surgeon Dr Oloff Marais at a laboratory in Potchefstroom, Memphis came up with a reflective paint that was non-toxic and safe to apply to animals.

"When I got the go-ahead from Dr Marais that it was safe to use on animals, we tested it on livestock in the village but we found that the paint stayed on the animals for less than a month," he says.

They went back to the lab and continued refining Moonshine until they came up with a version that stays on the animals for up to four months and is visible from up to 100 metres away.

Moonshine was officially launched in July and Memphis already has a partnership with the Road Accident Fund, which has bought 2000 cans of Moonshine at R70 a can. "They sponsor a village of their choice and distribute the product in the community," he says.

Memphis's long-term goal is to own a manufacturing company as his current operation does not have the capacity to mass-produce Moonshine, and his prize money from the SAB Foundation Social Innovation and Disability Awards will help make that a reality. "We are hoping to grow the company, secure some investment and have Moonshine products in stores by July 2020."

His journey has been nothing short of amazing, he says, adding that he feels blessed that his idea has found support.

"I want my story to motivate the people in my hometown and make them see the value of perseverance and taking risks," he says. DM

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