

Like water, Lilian Abbew is soft enough to offer so much life, but tough enough to penetrate earth and mountains!

Through the wide glasses of a café, I was sitting in, I saw a beautiful silhouette running to meet me. She exhaled as we greeted and said: 'I am sincerely sorry for being late.' Lilian was just as I pictured her in my mind, like water, 'Soft enough to offer so much life but tough enough to penetrate earth and mountains' (Lao Tzu). 'I came to Australia 15 years ago to study and loved it and decided to stay'. With a Social Work's background, Lilian has been working in the aged care sector for over 14 years now. She now working with the Hume City Council as an Assessment Officer for the Age care unit.

Back in Ghana

After completing a degree in graphic designer, Lilian worked as a desktop graphic designer in advertising industry for approximately three years. Her interest changed after migrating to Australia, she transitioned into community development sector but did not leave her love for art behind.

In Australia

'You can never say, you have made it all on your own.'

After completing Certificate III in Aged Care, Lilian worked in the sector for over 10 years. She pressed on to complete a master's degree in social work at Melbourne University and worked in family sector for about six years. Not knowing that she could one day live in another country without my family, Lilian was blessed with a zeal to make life happens. Along the road she also met a lot of people who were kind enough to listen to her story and supported her. Some of these people are still her friends. 'You can never say, you have made it all on your own, I have received some help from good people, to be where I am today.' Her zeal for life led her discovering that she had some hidden skills and believes that everybody has some hidden treasure. 'You never know you have them until you are challenged, and you will be amazed what strength you have to go on,' she said.

The Artist

'I am inspired by the Lively, Colourful and Vibrant West African life!'

At the age of three, her mother use to take her with her to her school where she was taught. Lilian vividly remembered someone asking her to draw something, 'I drew a tap which I can still see in mind today. Everyone was surprised and applauded me.' That was the beginning of Lilian's artistic life's journey. I become known as 'That girl could really draw.' Lilian drew for her friends' assignments. Hers is a combination of digital and fine arts depicting African women as well as making African jewellery. Lilian participated in Whittlesea Council's Arts exhibition in 2012, 2014 and 2015. Her artwork is very colourful and bright! 'I am inspired by the lively, colourful, vibrant west African life, where I am from. 'I love Ghana even before I came to Australia, I travelled there almost every three years.' After being exposed to many diverse cultures in Australia, Lilian become more appreciative of Ghanaian culture, lifestyle, and art. 'I am self-taught Jeweller,' Lilian enjoys experimenting making modern designs made from recycled glasses and fabrics which are made by local traditional Ghanaian artisans. She buys these materials and rebuild them into beautiful, colourful, and exotic Jewellery. This year she participated in 2019 Art exhibition launched by brotherhood of St Laurence in conjunction with Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV) in Epping. Some of her work can be found at 'SistersWork'

in Richmond and South Yarra and 'Space 2b' in St Kilda. 'These are two fantastic social' s enterprises for migrant women doing splendid work!'

Challenges

'Art is as an expression, a tool to communicate and connect with society. I get a lot of satisfaction from my artwork.'

For Lilian, rather than being a money-making machine, art is platform where she expresses herself, connects and communicates her thoughts to society. The difficulties in selling her artwork as an African artist is challenging but she somehow manages to sell her African jewellery. 'It sounds like money focus, but I am doing it as an expression, a tool to communicate and connect with society. I get a lot of satisfaction from my artwork.' Lilian is still trying to find out how she could do her artwork around her main job, how she could make it all work for her.

Woman's role in Art's Work

'Women are vessels to put out messages that society needs.'

Lilian believes that in this stone age women are fortunate and could use their artistic skills to educate the community and build relationships. 'Almost everyone comes from a woman.' I can be biased by saying a woman's voice is likely to be more powerful than a man's voice. Lilian urges women to channel their voices not literally 'vocal' voices but through everything women do in their everyday lives through art, cooking, love, dance, hospitality, and care which appeal to most people. 'Women are vessels to put out messages that society needs.' While aware that some might not want to listen, Lilian is convinced that it is more likely that society will listen to women's authentic voice.

Nurturing her Soul

For self-care, Lilian enjoys doing arts and reviewing others' artwork in her mind. She also enjoys nature, walking and listening to birds singing and wind blowing. 'I think I am attracted to simple things in life.'

Her journey

'Try and give a little bit of what you have, there is a blessing in it.'

The journey has not been easy for Lilian. She acknowledges that there were times when she woke up only to find her pillows all wet from her own tears, tears of love, of missing her family. Although she encountered some challenges, she looks at the bright side and appreciates the sacrifice her parents made to give her a great foundation. Not knowing anyone, trying to make friends and trust people were some of steps that built her into a resilient woman. Lilian advises to find help when face with a situation while acknowledging the difficult part in finding suitable people for you. 'It is not everyone who can support you or guide you.' Women should be able to say 'Yes' and be able to say 'No' when that help is not suitable for them. She urges people to be kind to one another, especially when going through tough time, which can make your journey less rocky. Lilian believes that you can sow the seed of abundance by giving the very thing you seek, 'There is a blessing in it.' 'If you face poverty, though tough, try and give a little bit of what you have. I know it is a challenging thing to do

but I have tested myself and I am telling you it works!' If you are depressed try and do a project or some volunteer work, 'this shifts your focus, and you are not always sad.'

African Aged care facility

'I am yet to meet a Ghanaian interpreter.'

Lilian would like to see African migrants who think about how and where they are going to spend their time in their old age. She thinks that other migrants seem to establish themselves very well. 'They have social groups, infrastructure, and many interpreters. I am yet to meet a Ghanaian interpreter.' For those who want to retire in Africa, it is fine not to think about it, but for those who want to be here, 'we need to advocate for services suitable to our needs in our old age.' Other migrants' presence is felt through a multitude of social services, 'African's presence is missing.'