

Devi Sankaree Govender - Women have to take their own place in the sun

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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From growing up in rural KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) to taking on people twice her size - literally - on her television show *Devi*, every week, investigative journalist Devi Sankaree Govender has a reputation for being fearless.



Image supplied. Every week South Africans watch Devi Sankaree Govender take on people twice her size - literally – on her television show *Devi*

Her show has won the petite, but fierce journalist the hearts of South Africans as well as numerous awards such as the National Press Club Awards Journalist of the Year and the Television features, investigative and actuality category award this and the 2022 GQ Woman of the Year.

Her motivation to confront these often very scary and intimidating people she says is simple. “I am passionate about getting answers from people, holding them to account, doing the right thing, and championing the underdog.”

An old gangster

She adds, “We have a country full of scamsters, and I see the work that we do on the show as really important in empowering our viewers into knowing better. That’s what steels me in the face of the people I confront - although some of them can be very intimidating. But I think I am an old gangster at this now!”

But she says don't think she was this confident when she first started doing these interviews. "I remember being quite scared the night before and trying to figure out what would happen and then trying to anticipate every possible thing."

“ I am passionate about getting answers from people, holding them to account, doing the right thing, and championing the underdog. ”

Holding her nerve today she says comes from pure experience. "I am not really 100% worried about safety, as I was some years ago. I do think about it, but we plan very carefully, so with that knocked out of the way I can concentrate on the work that I need to do."

From writer to music DJ to investigative journalist

Govender was all set to be a writer growing up. "As a child I read ferociously - everything from authors such as Enid Blyton and Alfred Hitchcock to books like *Nancy Drew*, *The Hardy Boys*, and *The Three Investigators*.

"For a very long time I want to do that, but then when I was 15 years old, *Carte Blanche* launched on Mnet. The show really resonated with me. That night, after watching the very first episode, as the credits rolled up the TV screen, I told my parents that one day that is what I want to do with my life."

She was very dedicated to her dream and steadfast in taking steps in that direction. She enrolled for a BA in English, Drama and Performance Art at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

"When I was invited to do an honours degree, I decided I needed a freelance job in the industry. I was a bit concerned about finding work after an honours degree in drama and performance arts."

She adds that at this stage she already knew she did not want to pursue an acting career. "I was not going to be an actress; while I don't think I was very good at it, I was alright, but I could see that it was not my calling and journalism was where I wanted to go."

After she sent her CV out, she got a call from Lotus FM in Durban. She went for the audition and got the job.

"I was a normal music DJ... Can you imagine, I was talking about Bollywood movies that I knew absolutely nothing about and sadly I also don't speak any Indian languages."

But in true Devi style, she did not see that as a barrier to entry but an opportunity to try and learn and to get better at it, and in time she ended up doing a talk show and she says that's really where things took off for her.

Her investigative journalism career spans 18 years with *Carte Blanche* and then when her children got older, she took up the opportunity to host her own show, *Devi*.

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Work-life balance

Speaking about her career, but in particular that age-old question how you balanced your work and home life, she says it is easier now as her children are older. “My daughter is 22 and my son 19 so it is a lot easier now.”

However, she is very candid that it was tough before. “It was so tough trying to balance it all to the point where I never really featured on any lists... the lists always had other things and other needs, from the kids to the house and the dog and so on.”

She adds that when she looks back to that time, she really doesn't know how she did it. “I think I should have been a lot smarter at it. I should have asked for more help, but I didn't, I thought it was my responsibility and my role, to take it on and manage it.”

While she says she is getting it right now, that's because her children have left the house. “That's pretty sad because what am I saying then to other women? That you must wait for your kids to leave the house before you get some kind of work-life balance.

“I think what I am saying is that I don't have the answer. Even now I think I am a work in progress. Now I make time for myself, but I wish I had forced myself to do this then already, because I think I would have ended up a lot saner after it all,” she says, with a laugh at the end.



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Karabo Ledwaba 22 Aug 2023



Women's Month

Still speaking about issues that affect women, she says that she has mixed feelings about Women's Month.

"I think women are paid a lot of lip service in this particular month. Yet every single year you will hear the president and ministers talk about how they are going to do things differently, but it is absolute lip service.

"Yet if we look at our GBV stats we have one of the highest rates in the world as well as one of the highest rates of femicide in the world."

“ I think it is important for women to realise that there should be an emphasis on us, and we have to take our own place in the sun. ”

She says that we treat women shockingly in this country. "We kill them. The majority of women murdered in our country are by people they know, not strangers!"

But she says if what Women's Month does is to raise issues, then it is important. "I am not so sure what happens after that, but I think it is important for women to realise that there should be an emphasis on us, and we have to take our own place in the sun. So, if Women's Month shows us that, then it's a pretty good start."

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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