



By Anne Schwab

My first encounter with Mikki Williams was in October 2004. She was presenting to a local women's group and her unconventional approach to life was fascinating and engaging. In a world where most people are trying to fit in, Mikki was born to stand out. To some, she may have seemed outrageous with her "big hair," flashy clothes and trademark tagline "Slip 'Em a Mikki." If so, she accomplished her objective as one of her mantras is "Be outrageous – it's the only place that isn't crowded!"

Mikki was in full stride, engaging the audience with her stories which evoked peals of laughter – her energy and enthusiasm for life was contagious.

At 29, Mikki Williams was living the American Dream. Pregnant with her second child, living in a posh Connecticut neighborhood with a loving husband, able to stay home and raise the three or four kids they planned to have – Mikki felt she had it all! Then her dream was shattered in rapid fire.

First, she lost the baby she was carrying and became gravely ill. The following month her father in law died suddenly. Three months later, her husband Gabe was killed in a car accident when driving home from his job at IBM.

Suddenly a single mom with no income, Mikki was not prepared for the tumultuous

Mikki Williams:

"Slip 'Em a Mikki"

turn that her life had just taken. This was not the life Mikki had envisioned for herself and her family. Still reeling from three months of tragedy, it was hard to face the world.

As she looked at her two year old son one morning, Mikki told herself she didn't have a choice – she

had a responsibility to her son, Jason. Mikki now knows, though, that "Yes, you do have a choice." She could have just given up but instead, she made a conscious choice to go on and to make a life for herself and her son.

How to make a living, though? For the answer, Mikki looked within. She had danced professionally so it seemed a logical choice to open a dance studio. The Connecticut community in which Mikki lived was a celebrity haven and many of those celebrities quickly found her dance studio. Her students included Wayne Cilento, original cast member of "A Chorus Line" and choreographer of "Wicked," Joanne Woodward, Erica Jong and Patty Hearst.

And because Mikki was considered a "great cook," she also started a catering business "The Happy Cooker." Martha Stewart was one of her students and in her book, "Martha Inc.," the author credited Mikki with starting the home catering business phenomenon.

After selling her dance studio in 1985 to a former student, Mikki started a variety of businesses (nine in all). In 1987, she founded Mikki Williams Unltd. which includes professional speaking and her coaching business. She also chairs two peer advisory boards through Vistage, the world's leading executive organization for companies that want to grow exponentially. Vistage recognized Mikki with the Speaker of the Year and Chair Excellence Awards.

From that frightened, young widow has emerged a witty, smart and engaging persona who is passionate about life and inspiring other women.

When asked what she considered to be an **authentic woman, Mikki responded with "WYSIWYG"** – an acronym for her expression "What You See Is What You Get." She is the same person whatever it is she is doing, she said, and Mikki encourages other women to do the same. "Don't pretend to be real – *be* real! Allow yourself to be vulnerable, think outside the box."

She went on to elaborate that in juggling all our different roles, we women have a tendency to "compartmentalize." "Women choose one role and wear that banner on their forehead," she says. Mikki's advice: *Be a whole person – don't feel you have to put on different hats.*

Many women Mikki has met lack self esteem. To combat self esteem issues, she recommends volunteering – "Good things come back to you, they come back in different forms." She also encourages women to continue to learn, to be inspired by other women and to read voraciously.

When asked if she believes her life would have taken the same path had her husband not died so tragically, she pondered before answering "I don't know whether or not my life would have been different. What I do know is that we should make conscious decisions – don't wait for something to catapult you into those decisions."

She encourages people to create not a "bucket list," but an "experience list." For example, Mikki wants to tango in Argentina, not just "go" to Argentina. She has driven at the Indy 500 and dined in the Israeli desert. Still on her list is having a Mint Julep on Millionaire's Row at the Kentucky Derby. She tells all her audiences to dream big and put it out to the Universe because "people love helping you get what you want."

Despite the tragedies, Mikki feels blessed at the fullness of her life, the people she's met, the opportunities she's had (such as speaking at Nelson Mandela's home and at the White House) and, most importantly, that she is leaving a legacy by inspiring and influencing other people's lives.

Mikki was recently chosen as one of the best speakers by *Meetings and Convention Magazine* July 2010 along with Tony Robbins, Bill Gates, Rudy Giuliani, Colin Powell, Lou Holtz, Zig Ziglar, Mike Ditka, and Jay Leno among others.



Mikki's parting words of advice: *Carpe Diem!* which is Latin for "**Seize the Day!**"

We could not have found a more authentic woman to feature.

Most of Mikki's speaking events are private but on October 20th, Mikki will be doing a free public event for "Compass to Care" at 6:30 p.m. at Flourish Studios on Lincoln Ave in Chicago. Call 312-664-8447 for further info or simply email Samantha@mikkiwilliams.com

Sign up for her Ezine "Hair She Is" and for her blog Mikki Williams' Blah Blah Blog" on her web page.

Information about her Speaker Schools, her "Mikki and Friends" monthly tele-seminars, and her social networks are also available on her website www.mikkiwilliams.com

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