AN OWN ROUTE PUBLICATION

MY OWN ROUTE

Real Stories. Hard Lessons. New Beginnings.



YOLANDI PIETERSE

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An Own Route publication

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To My Children

CHAPTER 1

Nobody Gave Me a Roadmap



I belong to the generation that knows how to use a paper road map.

A real one: unfold it across the passenger seat, find your route, then spend the next ten minutes trying to fold it back.

Before Google Maps, Waze and a friendly voice telling us to turn left in 200 metres, we had to work out the directions ourselves.

You pulled over, spread out the map, found the town you wanted and tried to figure out how on earth to get there.

And heaven help you if you took a wrong turn while travelling alone.

Eventually, technology came along to save us from all that.

Or so we thought.

I remember one particular trip when I had to drive to a spa in Ermelo, South Africa, for work.

By then, paper maps had given way to the wonderful invention called a Garmin GPS.

Enter your destination, follow the instructions and arrive exactly where you need to be. That was the promise.

Simple, right?

Well, apparently not if you're me.

Despite having a Garmin, I managed to get completely lost in Ermelo.

Now, Ermelo isn't exactly New York City. But when you don't know where you are, it might as well be.

I did what any sensible woman would do.

I phoned Riaan.

There was just one small problem.

Riaan had never been to Ermelo.

Not once.

He didn’t know the town or the roads. He wasn’t studying a map on a computer.

Yet he managed to guide me to where I needed to go.

How?

What I like to call Man Logic.

He asked me to read out the street names.

From those names alone, he worked out where I was and talked me through the route.

I still don't quite understand how he did it.

There I was, sitting in Ermelo with a GPS, completely lost.

And there was Riaan, who had never set foot in the town, navigating by street names and whatever mysterious system he apparently had in his head.

Go figure!

The story still makes me laugh. It also feels strangely familiar.

So much of my life has unfolded like that drive through Ermelo.

I have spent years trying to work out where I'm going.

Sometimes I have had a plan.

Sometimes I have had all the tools I thought I needed.

Sometimes I have been absolutely convinced that I knew what I was doing.

And sometimes, with all those plans and tools, I've still ended up lost.

Not necessarily on a road in Ermelo.

But in my career.

In business.

In motherhood.

And occasionally, in life itself.

What I've learned is that being lost doesn't always mean you're going in the wrong direction.

Sometimes it means the route needs to change.

The Life I Thought I Was Building

If you had told the younger version of me that I would be starting a new business at 45, while raising three children, running another business and trying to figure out how to build a more financially secure future, I probably would have had a few questions.

For starters, what happened to the career I worked so hard to build?

I have never been someone who was afraid of working.

I started in the beauty industry, spent five years working on cruise ships, managed spas and fitness facilities, moved into business software, became a consultant, earned an international project management qualification and completed my BCom degree in Entrepreneurship.

I eventually became Head of a Project Management Office for an international software business.

I had worked my way into a senior position.

I was earning a good salary.

I had qualifications, experience and a career that I had spent years developing.

Surely that was the roadmap?

Study hard. Work hard. Build your career. Earn a good salary. Provide for your family.

That was how it was supposed to work.

Except life doesn't always follow the plan.

I have been retrenched three times.

Three!

You would think that after the first two, I might have received some kind of loyalty card.

Congratulations! You've unlocked your third unexpected career change!

Unfortunately, there are no rewards points for retrenchment.

The third one happened in June 2025.

At the time, I was earning approximately R70,000 per month.

Then suddenly, that salary was gone.

The debit orders didn't disappear with it.

Neither did the car payments, household expenses, school costs or the everyday responsibilities of raising a family of five.

I had qualifications.

I had experience.

I had a degree.

And yet, finding another job proved far more difficult than I expected.

That was a difficult reality to accept.

For years, I had believed that working hard, gaining experience and continuing to learn would help me build a secure future.

I still believe those things matter.

But I no longer believe that a good job automatically guarantees security.

That was a lesson I hadn't planned on learning.

Sometimes the Detour Becomes the Road

Fortunately, I had already started a small business.

In April 2024, while still employed, I launched YMP Branded Gifting.

It started with a birthday gift for one of my son's friends.

Then came Mother's Day gifts, Father's Day gifts and other small orders.

I enjoyed creating things.

I enjoyed personalising gifts and finding ways to make ordinary products feel special.

At first, it was a hobby and a side hustle.

A way to earn some extra money, particularly towards the children's extracurricular activities.

I wasn't building a business that could immediately replace my corporate salary.

I was doing something I loved, earning a little extra and seeing where it might lead.

When I lost my job, everything changed.

That little side business suddenly had a much bigger responsibility.

It needed to help support our family.

And I quickly discovered that enjoying what you do and building a financially sustainable business are two very different things.

I could create beautiful products.

I could manage projects.

I understood systems, processes, budgets and business operations.

But finding customers, building relationships, securing corporate orders and competing with established businesses required a different set of skills.

Skills I was still developing.

And, to be fair, skills I am still developing today.

I am not going to tell you that everything magically fell into place.

It didn't.

Building YMP has been challenging.

There are businesses in the corporate gifting industry that have been around for more than 25 years.

They have established relationships, recognised names and loyal customers.

I was trying to make my way into that market while dealing with the financial pressure of no longer having a regular salary.

Some days I felt confident.

Other days, I wondered how I was going to make it all work.

But one thing I knew was that I didn't want to give up on something I genuinely enjoyed.

And I haven't.

The Road That Led Me to People

One of the most important things I have learned throughout my career is that opportunities often come through people.

Not necessarily the people you expect.

And not always in the way you imagine.

When I was younger, my uncle helped me find my first job in a beauty salon in Malelane.

Years later, a professional contact helped open the door to an opportunity to establish a spa in Mozambique.

After my second retrenchment, a mother I knew through school helped connect me to an opportunity in business software.

That connection eventually led me into Sage consulting and a completely different career path.

When we wanted to move our family from Johannesburg to Cape Town, another professional connection helped make that possible.

And when I started YMP, I joined BNI, a business networking organisation.

Every Wednesday morning, I attended networking meetings, met other business owners and started building relationships.

Those relationships helped me grow YMP and introduced me to opportunities I might never have found on my own.

Looking back, I can see a pattern.

My career wasn't one straight road.

It was a series of turns, connections, opportunities and decisions.

Some I planned.

Others arrived unexpectedly.

And quite a few required me to figure things out as I went along.

Which brings me back to Ermelo.

Sometimes you can have the best navigation system in the world and still need another person to help you find your way.

That doesn't mean you're incapable.

It means you don't have to know everything yourself.

And that, I believe, is one of the most valuable lessons in business.

Motherhood Doesn't Come with a Garmin Either

If there is one area of life where I could really have used a detailed instruction manual, it would be motherhood.

When our first daughter, Keira, was born, I was terrified of getting things wrong.

I had read the books.

I wanted to do everything properly.

I breastfed her every three hours, following the guidance I had been given.

We lived in a double-storey house at the time, with our bedrooms upstairs.

One evening, Riaan offered to take Keira downstairs so I could get some rest.

He settled into his La-Z-Boy recliner with our daughter.

Wonderful husband.

Wonderful father.

Wonderful opportunity for a tired mother to sleep.

Until I woke up hearing Keira crying.

I went downstairs to investigate.

And there they were.

Our daughter was lying on Riaan's chest, crying her little heart out.

And her father?

Fast asleep.

Completely oblivious.

So much for the parenting manual!

Today we have three children: Keira, Leandri and Zanru.

And if motherhood has taught me anything, it is that you can read every book available and still find yourself facing situations nobody prepared you for.

Every child is different.

Every stage brings new challenges.

Just when you think you've figured one thing out, they grow up and introduce you to something entirely new.

And then come the teenage attitudes!

But motherhood has also taught me that I don't need to have every answer.

Riaan and I make decisions together.

We try to communicate openly with our children.

We encourage them to think for themselves, take responsibility and find ways to create opportunities.

I want them to understand that there is more than one way to build a future.

And perhaps that is partly because of everything I have experienced myself.

Starting Again at 46

On 16 October 2026, just a few weeks before my 46th birthday, I started another new venture.

Own Route.

Not because YMP had failed.

Not because I had suddenly discovered a magical formula for making money.

And certainly not because I had everything figured out.

I started because I wanted to explore another way of building income and creating opportunities.

I wanted to learn more about digital marketing, digital products, online business and the technology available to entrepreneurs today.

I also wanted to discover how I could use those skills to support the businesses I was already building.

Was I nervous?

There was certainly a lot to learn.

Technology changes quickly, and building an online business involves far more than simply putting up a website and hoping people will buy something.

But I had started over before.

I had changed careers.

I had learned new systems.

I had built businesses.

I had raised children while working and studying.

And I had discovered that being inexperienced at something didn't mean I was incapable of learning it.

I wasn't starting from nothing.

I was starting with everything I had learned along the way.

The experience.

The mistakes.

The relationships.

The qualifications.

The creativity.

The systems thinking.

Even the things that hadn't worked out.

All of it had brought me to this point.

And for the first time, I began thinking about my journey differently.

Perhaps I didn't need to find the perfect roadmap.

Perhaps I needed to create my own.

What I've Learned About Finding Your Way

I wish I could tell you that every unexpected turn in my life led to something wonderful.

That wouldn't be true.

Some experiences were painful.

Some decisions were difficult.

Some opportunities didn't work out.

And there are still days when the financial pressure feels overwhelming.

I haven't reached the destination I'm working towards.

But I have learned a few things about navigating life and business.

First, having a plan is important, but being willing to change it is just as important.

A plan gives you direction. It helps you make decisions and measure progress.

But a plan should not become a prison.

When circumstances change, you may need to adjust your route.

That doesn't automatically mean you've failed.

Second, the skills you learn in one chapter of your life can become valuable in another.

When I was working in the beauty industry, I didn't know that I would eventually work in business software.

When I started using Sage Pastel, I didn't know that it would help lead me into consulting.

When I developed my project management skills, I didn't know how valuable they would become when running my own businesses.

Nothing guarantees that every experience will be useful.

But you may be surprised by how much knowledge you already have.

Third, relationships matter.

Not because every person you meet is a potential customer.

But because people share knowledge, introduce opportunities, offer different perspectives and sometimes help you see something you have missed.

Riaan didn't need to be in Ermelo to help me find my destination.

He simply needed to ask the right questions.

Fourth, you don't need to have everything figured out before you begin.

If I had waited until I knew everything about entrepreneurship, I probably would never have started MomIdeas, YMP or Own Route.

That doesn't mean you should jump into every opportunity without doing your homework.

It means that learning and doing often have to happen together.

And finally, success needs to mean something to you personally.

At this stage of my life, success isn't only about earning more money.

Of course, money matters.

Anyone who has experienced financial stress knows that.

But I also want to sleep peacefully at night.

I want to enjoy a coffee with a friend without worrying about what I should be doing instead.

I want to take Riaan out for breakfast.

I want to travel with our children and create memories together.

I want to be able to buy something as simple as an ice cream in the middle of the month without first calculating whether we can afford it.

I want to build businesses that support our lives, rather than allowing work and financial worry to consume every part of them.

And I want our children to grow up knowing that they have choices.

Those are the things that matter to me.

Finding Your Own Route

Before you move on to the next chapter, I want you to think about your own journey.

Not the one you imagined when you were younger.

The one you are actually living.

Ask yourself:

1. What roadmap have I been following?

Was it one you chose for yourself, or one shaped by family expectations, society, education or the belief that there is only one correct way to succeed?

2. What have my unexpected detours taught me?

Think about a job that ended, a business that didn't work, an opportunity you missed or a decision that changed your direction.

What did you learn that you still carry with you today?

3. Who are the people who help me find my way?

Who can you turn to for honest advice, a different perspective or encouragement?

And just as importantly, whose journey could you help by sharing what you know?

4. What is one step I can take towards the life I want?

Not ten steps.

Not a complete five-year plan.

Just one practical step.

It might be learning a new skill, reaching out to someone, researching a business idea or finally making a decision you've been putting off.

You don't need to see the entire road to take the next turn.

One Last Thought

I still laugh when I think about getting lost in Ermelo.

There I was, driving around with a Garmin, trying to find a spa.

And Riaan, who had never been there, directing me with what I still call his Man Logic.

I don't know whether he would appreciate me using that story as a lesson in entrepreneurship.

But after all these years, I think it fits rather well.

The directions you think you need aren’t always the ones that help.

Sometimes you have to stop, look around, ask questions and try another way.

And sometimes you need to accept that the road ahead won't look anything like the one you originally planned.

At 46, I am still figuring out parts of my journey.

I am still learning.

Still building.

Still making mistakes.

Still trying to create a better future for my family.

I’m no longer waiting for someone to hand me the perfect roadmap.

I'm finding my own route.

And perhaps, as you read this book, you'll discover a little more about yours, too.

My next big detour took me much further than Ermelo: out of South Africa and into a world I had never imagined living in.