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Episode 46- Creating Beauty from your Dreams with Shakiira Rahaman

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Mindy Henderson: Welcome to the Quest podcast, proudly presented by the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the Quest family of content. I'm your host, Mindy Henderson. Together we are here to bring thoughtful conversation to the neuromuscular disease community and beyond, about issues affecting those with neuromuscular disease and other disabilities, and those who love them. We are here for you to educate and inform, to demystify, to inspire, and to entertain. We are here shining a light on all that makes you, you, whether you are one of us, love someone who is or are on another journey altogether. Thanks for joining. Now let's get started.

Kira Cosmetics was founded by Shakiira Rahaman as 37-year-old Florida woman with muscular dystrophy. After an extended hospital stay in 2019, she went home and was inspired by a YouTube entrepreneur video. As a former makeup sales rep, she set out to create her first makeup line. Perfect for makeup lovers who loved the art of makeup, Kira Cosmetics is cruelty-free, recyclable, and has packaging that I personally love, and becomes decor. Shakiira, I am so excited you're with me today. I am a makeup girl, and so I've been really looking forward to this conversation.

Shakiira Rahaman: Yes, me too. Thank you for having me.

Mindy Henderson: Absolutely. So, let's just jump right in. Would you tell us a little bit of the background? I gave a little bit of an overview in the intro, but do you want to

give us some background on how you came up with the idea to start a cosmetics line, and how you developed this company?

Shakiira Rahaman: Back in 2019, I got really sick with pneumonia. I had it three times in one month, and I had to be intubated. I did end up with a trach and on a ventilator, and I spent four months in the hospital. After I came out, I knew I didn't want to just sit around and feel sorry for myself. So, I was watching a YouTube video one day and I just got the idea to start my own company. At first it was lashes, and I did that for a year in 2020, and I decided to start a cosmetic line after that.

Mindy Henderson: That's incredible. And I love the attitude. I think that we're a little bit like-minded. I had some circumstances a few years ago where I had the option to either feel really sorry for myself, and become bitter and angry, or I actually decided to write a book instead. So, slightly different paths. I don't have a makeup line, which is super cool. But yeah, I love the way that it sounds like you look at the world. So, why makeup and why lashes?

Shakiira Rahaman: I have always been a girly girl. I love makeup. I love playing with makeup and trying different techniques, and I just decided to start one day. I'm like, you know what? Since I love makeup so much, I'm going to create my own line.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah, that's awesome. So, the thing is, I have thought about what I might do if I were going to start another business, and like I said, makeup, skincare, bath and body products, all of that stuff are things that I love, but I would have absolutely zero idea how to get started on any of it. There's so much chemistry involved and ingredients, and I know that you've chosen to make your line cruelty-free, which I love, which is probably an additional layer of complexity. So, I would love to know a little bit more about the creation process. How does one even begin to start to create a lipstick or a lip gloss, for example? How did you figure all of that out?

Shakiira Rahaman: So, a lot of research. That was the beginning. And then, of course, you have to find a manufacturer, somebody to handle the amount of products that you need. And yeah, I mean, you just communicate back and forth with a manufacturer. You tell them what you want and they produce it.

Mindy Henderson: Okay. So, that's incredible. So, I know you said a lot of research. It sounds like you probably did a lot of reading and may have spent a bunch of time on Google, which is my best friend any time I'm trying to figure things out, or YouTube, which we've already mentioned.

Shakiira Rahaman: I'll Google anything.

Mindy Henderson: Yes, absolutely. And so was it a question of... Did you have to come up with the formulas or did your manufacturer help you with those things? What's first, the chicken or the egg?

Shakiira Rahaman: So, yeah, I had no idea about what goes into it, so I just let my manufacturer handle that. They have formulas, and it's a lot of testing as well, so they'll send you samples back and forth.

Mindy Henderson: That's really cool. That would be so much fun. So, they send you things to try and you get to give them your feedback and tell them what you like, what you don't like, and then they tweak it?

Shakiira Rahaman: Of course.

Mindy Henderson: I love it. That's so fun. I also have to comment, I already did comment, on how great your packaging is, but it's really glamorous, it's pretty. What was your inspiration for that packaging and that... It's a very specific sort of unique style.

Shakiira Rahaman: Yes. I hate boring makeup.

Mindy Henderson: Yes.

Shakiira Rahaman: I mean, I think most people buy makeup because of the packaging.

Mindy Henderson: It's true.

Shakiira Rahaman: So, I knew that I wanted something unique, something that wasn't out there. And between the designers that work with the manufacturers, they came up with the idea.

Mindy Henderson: Wow, you're making this sound very easy. I suspect it was not as easy as all of this, but in true CEO form, you make it sound very simple and straightforward.

Shakiira Rahaman: Yes, it is not.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. So, I mean, like I said, I'm trying to think what words to use to describe your packaging. It's glamorous, like we said, there's almost something regal about it. It's very sort of, I don't know, the word royalty is coming to mind. I think of tiaras and things when I think of your packaging. Is that the vision that you really went into it with or did you have to play with that too a little bit and see where you landed?

Shakiira Rahaman: I knew that I always wanted the brand to be glamorous and luxury.

Mindy Henderson: Yes.

Shakiira Rahaman: So, I think the royalty was just included in it.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. That's really cool. I will say, you just said the word luxury and what I... There's so much that I love about your line and what I saw of it, but it looks beautiful, it's glamorous, it's everything that we've said, and it looks very much

like a luxury brand, but I was not scared away by the prices. I feel like you've managed to still keep it affordable. Would you agree with that? Is that something that you're intentional about?

Shakiira Rahaman: Definitely.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah, that's really great. Has style always just been a part of your life? You mentioned that, I can't remember if you used the words girly girl or a glam girl-

Shakiira Rahaman: Girly girl.

Mindy Henderson: But yeah. Has that role always played a part in your life and how you express yourself?

Shakiira Rahaman: So, growing up, my mom would always dress me in these beautiful dresses when I was much younger, and I think I kind of grew out of it for a while, but as I evolved, I have gotten back into the high standards for myself.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. I love it. And you-

Shakiira Rahaman: And I love dressing up.

Mindy Henderson: Yes, clearly. Well, if you all can... This may be an audio podcast that you're listening to, but we'll have stuff on social media, and I'm looking at Shakiira, and she is dressed to the nines and looks very much like a style or a makeup CEO that you would expect. So, why do you think it's important? I feel like the disability community is having a little bit of a moment, and we're making some progress in some areas in terms of employment, and representation, and entertainment, and things like that, where we've really been a bit behind the eight ball. It's been a collective community that I think has not really been recognized and acknowledged for all of the talents and things in this community, and so, I love what you're doing. I love anytime I see someone from our community who's an entrepreneur and they're creating something. But when we talk about style, why do you think it's important for people with disabilities specifically to really embrace their own style and express themselves in that way?

Shakiira Rahaman: I feel like being a disabled person, we have limitations of certain things that we can't do. We have a lot of limitations. And expressing yourself, whether through makeup or clothes, is very important, because you get to know that person and what they like, and they can express themselves through their clothing or through their makeup.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. It's something that I think just really makes us all unique. And through your style, I personally think that you can say a lot without saying a word.

Shakiira Rahaman: Exactly.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. So, how has living with a disability provided you with skills that have... So often some of the things that are challenges in life can become our greatest advantages. So, are there things that your disability has given you that served you well in starting and managing your own business?

Shakiira Rahaman: So, I would think, yeah, just because my body doesn't function the way that a normal person would function, I do have a strong, educated mind, whereas I can start the business and keep it going, and not everybody has that. So, for me personally, I feel like that works for me.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. I love it. Do you have formal education? Are you self-taught? Talk a little more about that.

Shakiira Rahaman: I do have a degree in health information management, basically medical billing and coding.

Mindy Henderson: That's a great kind of... What's the word I'm looking for? Bucket of expertise to have. That's something where there will always be jobs in that field I feel like.

Shakiira Rahaman: It's hard though for a disabled person trying to find the job. But that knowledge also helps me, because I deal with a lot of infections. So, with that medical background that I have, it helps me understand better about what's going on with my body.

Mindy Henderson: Oh, that's great. I wouldn't have quite turned it around that way, but it makes complete sense now that you've said it. On that note, I know actually a fair number of entrepreneurs, people who have started their own business and from watching them do it, starting a business is a grind, it's a hustle, and so many-

Shakiira Rahaman: It really is.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. So, many of the people that I know have worked 24/7 for years to get their businesses off the ground. So, how do you balance building this business with still having a personal life and paying attention to your body's need for rest and care?

Shakiira Rahaman: That is very tricky. No, I don't work 24/7. I don't want to push my body to where I do get sick if I'm overdoing it. So, I do what I can every day, and if it grows slowly, then that's what's going to have to happen. But yes, I do also have to pay attention to my body, especially when there are changes, because I don't get... Okay, so the normal body response to an infection is fever, I don't get fevers.

Mindy Henderson: Oh, interesting.

Shakiira Rahaman: So, any changes in my body, I have to get tested.

Mindy Henderson: Really?

Shakiira Rahaman: Yeah.

Mindy Henderson: Oh, wow. That would be hard to learn. I don't want to get too much into your personal business, but are there surefire symptoms and things that you've learned over time to look for? Of course I will say, we never want anyone who's listening to diagnose yourself on Google or online, or by listening to us, but yeah. What have you learned about yourself and to look for?

Shakiira Rahaman: So, if I'm really mucousy, I don't know if this is TMI, I have to pay attention to that. Or if I start feeling extra tired, then I need to go get checked.

Mindy Henderson: Interesting.

Shakiira Rahaman: And the symptoms that I normally do end up with is shortness of breath, and then I have to be hospitalized.

Mindy Henderson: Oh, boy. Okay. Well, we're going to cross our fingers that you stay good and healthy. So, I want you to take care of yourself. What has surprised you the most about being an entrepreneur?

Shakiira Rahaman: I think just learning all the different skills that you need to have a business. I mean, you're everything for your business. You're not just coming up with ideas. You're the photographer, you're the content creator, you are everything. So, just learning how to do different things, and the podcast interviews.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. Well, you've nailed that one. You seem like you've perfected that art, so you can check that box off. Are you a one woman show at this point or do you have help? [inaudible 00:18:08] You are okay. Yeah, it's true. I mean, you have to have business skills, you have to have marketing skills, you have to have creative skills, social media skills. I'm sure that with what you do in creating formulas for different things, you've probably learned about chemistry and ingredients. Yeah, it just kind of never ends.

Shakiira Rahaman: No, you're always learning.

Mindy Henderson: Always learning. The thing that I've learned too is I think successful entrepreneurs are very disciplined, because you don't have anyone looking over your shoulder saying, okay, you have to get these three things done today. You do it or it doesn't get done. And so, have you found that also has your level of, maybe you were always disciplined, but have you found that your discipline has been enhanced?

Shakiira Rahaman: I wouldn't say I'm disciplined yet. There's days where I don't want to do anything.

Mindy Henderson: Yes.

Shakiira Rahaman: But I think I'm getting there.

Mindy Henderson: But that's the beauty of it, is you get to choose. And if your body needs some rest one day or your mind needs a rest one day, you can take Thursday off or whatever the case may be. So, that's great. So, what have your favorite parts of this journey and this creation been for you?

Shakiira Rahaman: Just being a business owner and I just love the different parts of business.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. It's definitely interesting. There's probably not a lot of dull moments. So, what's the biggest lesson?

Shakiira Rahaman: Heck not.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah, for sure. What's the biggest lesson that you've learned along the way?

Shakiira Rahaman: Trusting. Trusting the vendors, the manufacturers, to get things right.

Mindy Henderson: Yes.

Shakiira Rahaman: It's been a challenge.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. Well, and that makes sense too. I don't know what I was expecting you to say, but it wasn't that. And it's such a good point though, because this is your baby and you are reliant on other people with certain expertise, certain equipment, things like that, to get things done the way that you feel good about, and that would be a big kind of leap of faith. And you, I'm sure, do have to put a lot of trust in people.

And you said something a little while ago that made me think, and I think what you said was that you've had to be very open to the process and stay open, and kind of let things come to a little... I mean, obviously you've worked for things, but I think that one of the other things that I've learned in life is that the more open you can stay to what you're doing, what's happening, who is maybe crossing your path, showing up in your life, all of those sorts of things, that's I think a skill that it sounds like you have acquired that I don't think a lot of people let come easily, because it's giving up.... It's not that you're giving up control, but just letting it be and letting things come to you, I think is a hard skill to navigate. Would you agree?

Shakiira Rahaman: I definitely agree.

Mindy Henderson: Yes. Yeah. So, let's talk for just a second. I've just got a couple more questions. I know that we mentioned, or you mentioned, that you started your line with lashes, and I know I saw lashes when I went onto your website. They look

beautiful. What are the rest of the products that you've created already? I feel like I saw lip products. I'll let you talk about what you've got out there so far.

Shakiira Rahaman: So, I have lipsticks, lip gloss, these beautiful blinged brushes. They sparkle so much. I think that's my favorite thing. Setting powders, the bow top, that's actually my bestseller.

Mindy Henderson: Really?

Shakiira Rahaman: Yes. Lashes, eye shadows.

Mindy Henderson: Love it. So, it doesn't sound like there's much that someone can't get on your website. Do you sell just direct so far from your website or do you have other places people can purchase from you?

Shakiira Rahaman: Right now it's mostly my website.

Mindy Henderson: Which is? And we'll put it in the show notes too, but let's tell everyone.

Shakiira Rahaman: Kiracosmetics.com.

Mindy Henderson: Okay. Very simple. Love it. Straightforward, to the point. That's great. So, what advice would you give? We've probably got other people listening who maybe have thought about starting their own business, may have a dream that they're kind of squashing down and resisting. What would you say to others in the neuromuscular community who are interested in starting their own business, whether it's makeup or anything else?

Shakiira Rahaman: Start, just do it. Just start. Any idea or dream that you have, go for it. Try it.

Mindy Henderson: It's so true. And you don't have to do everything all at once, right?

Shakiira Rahaman: No, start small.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. A lot of people, I think, maybe get, and I've been my own worst enemy in this way, but I think people get overwhelmed when they have an idea and they start thinking of all of the things that there might be to do. And you just really have to, like you said, pick one thing and start, that'll lead to the next thing. Yeah, that's great. So, what's next for you?

Shakiira Rahaman: Next?

Mindy Henderson: Yeah.

Shakiira Rahaman: Well, I definitely want to grow bigger, and I also have a dream of starting a foundation for the disabled community who wants to get into business.

Mindy Henderson: That's great. I love that. I think there's a definite need for that, as there is for beautiful cosmetics that look gorgeous in their packages and also make us feel good about ourselves. So, actually, one other question that just came to mind is you mentioned your brushes, which are beautiful. Is there anything in your plans to get into adaptive tools or things of that nature?

Shakiira Rahaman: That is part of my plans. I'm not sure how I will start that yet, but it's definitely in the works.

Mindy Henderson: That's great. Well, I am going to keep my eye on you and watch for all of the amazing things that it sounds like you are going to be doing. Again, thank you so much for joining me today. And yeah, I look forward to seeing what does come next for you. I think it's really exciting.

Shakiira Rahaman: Thank you for having me.

Mindy Henderson: My pleasure. Thank you so much.

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