

# Out of Africa: Lesley's herbal success story

A chance meeting with an African witch doctor while on holiday in Zimbabwe led to a change of direction for the Holme Valley's Lesley Robinson. Today the former pharmaceutical company executive runs a successful company selling African herbal remedies and a new product - a "miracle" face cream. She talked to HILARIE STELFOX



HERBAL TREAT: Lesley Robinson with her latest idea, a face cream containing extracts of the African potato

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**IN THE language of Zimbabwe kuswera zuro means "the day before yesterday".**

It's a fitting name for a face cream that promises a youthful complexion and one that its innovator Lesley Robinson just couldn't resist.

The cream, which contains extracts of the African potato, is her new baby — only the third product to be sold by the Little Herbal Company that Lesley and her partner Glyn Robinson founded three years ago in the spare room of their Scholes cottage.

There's a true cottage industry, selling largely by mail order, with Lesley available to answer the queries of customers on the other end of the telephone.

Nevertheless it turned over £72,000 last year and with the introduction of Kuswera Zuro, Lesley expects to see business grow.

The African potato has already been used in another of the company's products. Simba (means strength in the Shona language), a herbal supplement that balances the immune system and is taken by people with auto-immune conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome.

In Africa it has been used to treat AIDS patients and is also being tested on people with other serious ailments such as cancer, MS and arthritis.

Closer to home, a doctor in Bolton is currently recommending Simba to ME patients and scientists at St James' Hospital, Leeds, are investigating its immune-boosting properties.

The supplement has been found to

contain natural plant sterols that increase the production of white blood cells and improve the body's response to disease. There has also been an unanticipated side effect of using Simba:

"People reported back to us that, not only were they experiencing improved health, but they had also noticed a beneficial side effect — their skin was showing a marked improvement and other people were noticing," said Lesley.

Working with the Zimbabwean pharmacist who helped to develop Simba, they came up with the idea to create a face cream for topical application of the African potato.

"I have been using it for six weeks now and I have noticed an improvement in skin texture and the fine lines. Everyone who has tried it thinks it's wonderful," said Lesley, who is understandably enthusiastic about her venture into the beauty industry.

The former pharmaceutical executive first discovered the power of traditional African herbal remedies while on holiday in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe in 1999.

A torn ligament in her knee was giving her trouble and their African guide took her to see a witch doctor who prescribed a herbal remedy.

Lesley was so impressed with the

effectiveness of what she had been given that she decided to explore traditional African herbal treatments further.

The first product she began selling was a cream called Themba, which contains kigelia root extract and is used to ease eczema and psoriasis.

Such is the effectiveness of the cream that the couple have sold thousands of jars and The Little Herbal Company now has an agent in New Zealand and a partnership in Florida, USA.

**As well as employing local people in Africa, a percentage of their profits is donated to local schools and clinics**

Kuswera Zuro is really a spin-off product from the more serious therapeutic side of the business but Lesley is convinced that the public is ready for a natural herbal face cream — it also contains vitamin E, jojoba, olive vera and evening primrose oil.

In order to formulate and source the ingredients for their products, Lesley

**WE'VE six pots of Kuswera Zuro face cream (each costing £19.99) to give away in a competition — so the winners can try the product for themselves.**

Just tell us what the name of the product means. Put your answer on a postcard or back of a sealed envelope and send it

## COMPETITION

for: Face cream competition, Features department, Huddersfield Daily Examiner, PO Box A26, Queen Street South, Huddersfield HD1 2TD. Entries can also be dropped in at our pick-up points at the newspapers on the Piazza and Huddersfield bus station.

and Glyn had made many trips to Zimbabwe and, after falling in love with the country, decided that they'd like a base there as well as in the Holme Valley.

In the last year they spent many months in Africa, in their house in Bulawayo and at a lodge 260km away in Hwange, which they have restored and opened to tourists.

By working in Africa the couple say they are helping to support the local community — as well as employing local people a percentage of their profits are donated to local clinics and schools.

Their most recent project was the building of a maternity unit at a rural clinic. Plans for the future include finding land to grow their own kigelia root

and African potatoes. Although Zimbabwe is a troubled country Lesley says they have always found it welcoming and they have experienced no problems with the local people.

She is even keen to build up the tourism side of their business by running herbal holiday workshops at the lodge.

In the meantime she has the launch of Kuswera Zuro to keep her busy.

For further details of Lesley's products check out the company's website [www.littleherbal.co.uk](http://www.littleherbal.co.uk) or phone 01484 685100. All The Little Herbal Company's products are sold at Dodds in Huddersfield and Your Nuts, Denby Dale.

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