

people we admire

BY SANDRA PARMEE

Catherine Constantinides

What is **21** *the* ICONS PROJECT?

21 Icons, now in its third season, is a visual celebration of South African icons – people who have worked to improve the lives of those around them. Inspired by the legacy left by Nelson Mandela, it documents remarkable South Africans through fine-art portraits, short films, behind-the-scenes photography, written narrative and a feature-length documentary. **Watch Catherine's 21 Icons video on YouTube or go to www.21icons.com.**

I grew up believing I would be the president of South Africa. I come from a very humble home where we didn't have lots of things, but we did have a spirit of encouragement and liberal thinking; we were exposed to politics and the media, and we were taught to dream as big as we could. I used to write letters to Mandela, and I finally got to meet him when I was Miss Earth SA.

Multitasking is a way of life for me. I don't know how to do only one thing. I've always been very entrepreneurial and when I was 16 I started my first business – SA Fusion, an events company – that's still running today. I was doing a lot of

Catherine was crowned Miss Earth SA in 2003, and is now the executive director of Miss Earth South Africa, Namibia and Zambia, as well as an international climate and food security activist, and humanitarian. She is also executive director of Lead SA, and was selected to be one of the 21 Icons.

community development and fund-raising, so the business was a natural extension. I wasn't scared of making mistakes, of asking powerful people questions. That gave me confidence.

From childhood, I appreciated and loved the environment, so Miss Earth appealed to me. When I got the opportunity to run the programme here, I wanted to give it more depth and intensity as a leadership programme. I've dedicated the last 12 years to building something that inspires and empowers women to be more actively engaged in society.

There's no greater mistake than deciding to do nothing because you can only do a little. No amount of money equates to giving of yourself.

The Miss Earth programme creates ambassadors and sends them out into communities to educate people on climate change. They make changes at a grassroots level. Our programme in South Africa has become a blueprint for running Miss Earth internationally.

I'm passionate about being a young African. Our continent is full of opportunity – but we need to address the challenges. If we don't, we're never going to move our economy and continent forward. We need to become active citizens. If we all do the small things, we will make changes.

I do a lot of work around food security and empowering young people to consider agriculture as a lucrative opportunity. If we inspire people to become more than subsistence farmers, we can not only feed Africa, we can feed the world – because we have the most arable land on earth.

Two of the hardest challenges I've faced are being young and female. I've stopped telling people my age – if I'm good enough, I'm old enough.

The most important person in my life is Mattheo, my five-year-old son. He's the light and joy of my life. Motherhood is my greatest achievement. There's nothing greater than the responsibility of being a parent. ♣

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