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21 ICONS Season Three (A Future Of A Nation) Features Ezlyn Barends

By The Vent | December 3, 2015 | in Local News, News | 0 Comments



Ezlyn Barends – "Courage helped me to step into my potential. I think everybody has the potential to be great, but it takes courage to actually heed to the call."

On 13 December 2015 on SABC 3 at 19h27, the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS will feature the 15th icon of its third season: 31-year-old, Ezlyn Barends, an impact entrepreneur and founder of the South African chapter of DreamGirls International. The episode will repeat the next day at 17h57 on the same channel.

Driven by a passion to introduce underprivileged youth to opportunities, the 21 ICONS short-film will showcase how Barends' Father established the Dad Fund (in honour of **Daniel Arthur Douman (DAD)** who was an outstanding community leader and mentor to him which inspired Ezlyn to follow in his footsteps on the principle of giving back and helping others. Through the Dad Fund she created DreamGirls, a sisterhood of young female professionals, entrepreneurs and leaders who actively mentor and guide teenage girls in underprivileged communities to be successful in their pursuit of higher education, and life in general.

21 ICONS traces South Africa's history over the course of its three seasons, moving from the fight for freedom to the country's growth during democracy, and concluding with a vision of the future. This season has been envisaged as a tribute to the country's future, shedding the spotlight on young South African icons.

For this reason, young South African talent Gary van Wyk (34) has stepped up as principal photographer for the third season. Adrian Steirn, who conceived the project, continues his involvement as one of the photographers capturing the behind-the-scenes images.

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Barends has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III for empowering young girls to attend university and obtain higher education and increase the amount of high school diplomas and tertiary qualifications acquired by under-represented schoolgirls as a means to contribute meaningfully to society.

On her selection as an icon she comments, "Success for me is not a destination. It's a process. Knowing who you are, where you are going, and progressively moving towards it, that is success."

Hailing from Kuils River, Cape Town, Barends is an optimistic change leader and impact entrepreneur who is going to great lengths to assist and support marginalised youth by unlocking their potential and access to educational initiatives.

In a conversation with Van Wyk she reflects, "In South Africa, I realised that girls faced a wider set of problems and there was a need for a holistic programme that not only focused on the academics but also supported them in a different way." Business etiquette isn't taught so we also impart other everyday business skills to develop all round individuals to provide a holistic individual for the workplace.

"Investing in girls is important. Educated women are more likely to ensure that their children go to school. Educated women are more likely to raise healthy families. There's a link between educated girls and a country's economic prosperity," she adds.

After working in the advertising, events and publicity arenas, at the age of 25, she did not feel fulfilled and questioned her life purpose. In July 2010, she decided to follow her calling to have a positive impact on society by assisting with youth education and entrepreneurship. She established DreamGirls, a self-outcome based, capacity building enrichment programme for girls and young women.

During a portrait sitting she says, "When you are educated you are free. If we really want to take this country places – because we have all of the components to be exceptionally great – we need to educate our young people and set them on a new trajectory."

Her dream has always been to provide programmes that serve as a vehicle to educate and empower the youth, who are South Africa's greatest assets; "For me, education is freedom. It's when you are educated that your opportunities in life just become so much greater."

Her dream has always been to mentor teen girls and transfer skills and knowledge to enable them to become successful in their pursuit of higher education and their future and build their self-confidence and self-belief.

Her mission in life is to assist young people in pursuing their dreams; whether it be in, educating themselves, building a brilliant career path, starting a business or leading great lives in general. "It's important to pass down your knowledge to those who maybe don't have the same experience. If I have walked a certain path in life, I want to be able to pull others with me."

Barends, who holds an MBA from Henley Business School (UK), a certificate in Impact Investing from Oxford University and a Bachelor in Business Administration from the IMM Graduate School of Marketing, believes education is the pillar of society, and the means by which the cycle of poverty can be broken and society transformed.

She comments, "With education, you can uplift the standard of your life, of your family's life, and that of your entire community. As a result, you're actually growing the country."

For the portrait 'Higher Self' which will appear digitally on the Monday after her short-film is released, Van Wyk describes the visual elements, "Seated at a wooden school-desk below a blown-up, projected image of herself, Barends is photographed looking past the camera lens, seemingly imagining her future success. Representing the enormous possibilities that can come about through education, the portrait embodies Barends' work to uplift and assist young women in their pursuit of higher education."

She concludes by saying, "I see opportunity in the youth of South Africa. Because of the spaces that I work in, I'm surrounded by visionaries, change makers and the leaders of tomorrow, and I really do believe that we are going to bring a new energy to this country. We are a nation of activists, we don't take anything lying down. We are friendly, we work together and we believe in the spirit of community."

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