

Big heart, big dreams, strong beliefs

Gilmore Smith goes behind the scenes with TV and radio presenter Zoë Brown and discovers a hardworking, compassionate, dynamic young woman.

At some point or another, every little girl dreams about wearing the Miss South Africa crown when she's grown up. In the run-up to the day when these dreams become a reality, some of these little girls might even explore the world of beauty pageants while growing up by entering an array of beauty competitions. As part of this preparation for 'one day when I'm Miss SA', others conduct serious research about the world of beauty pageants by studying digital recordings of past beauty competitions.

Being a 17-year-old teenager with this dream still very much alive and you then are crowned second princess of Miss SA Teen, the unwritten supposition is that you'll spend the remainder of your teenage years earnestly preparing for your entry into Miss SA as soon as you come of age.

If, however, you've got the looks of a Miss Universe, the voice of a seraph and are confidently grounded in your belief system, you seriously think about your reasons for chasing the dream of a pageant queen. This is exactly what Zoë Brown did.

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When Zoë, popular and much-loved presenter of *SABC3's Expresso Breakfast Show* and *KFM Radio* presenter, started thinking about her reasons for wanting to be part of the beauty queen world, she realised her main reason has always been about the opportunities this specific platform offers to plough back and bring about change in the lives of others. Being honest with herself at the age of 17, she realised that it's more important to always be authentic and true to herself. Possessing the "heart to want to give back", Zoë realised that there are various platforms she could utilise to be true to this calling.

An interest in media is ignited

During her post-matric gap year, Zoë worked as an au pair in America, looking after three small children. On her return home, she enrolled at the University of Stellenbosch where she obtained an Honours Degree in International Relations. Having joined *MFm*, the campus-based community radio station, because "I realised I need something creative", it was only during her final year of studies that the dream of a career in media started taking shape.

While doing a TV presenter course in Cape Town after her studies, Zoë auditioned to be an entrant in a competition, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Zoë, who is very strongly anchored in her faith, says that passing her first audition first time has got nothing to do with luck; it's more to do with timing. "Timing of the universe, the energies at play and the reason for one's journey in this life. There's dumb luck versus luck you've earned because you've worked for it." She believes that the harder you work, the luckier you get. That is also why it's important to her to be recognised and acknowledged for the merit of her work and not only her appearance.

Being a self-confessed pragmatist ("I need to understand in order to apply"), she definitely doesn't shy away from hard work. With an average working day starting between 04–04h30am ("... depending on whether there are any dishes to do before I can leave") and sometimes not ending before 9pm, Zoë still finds the time to devote to a good

cause close to her heart, far away from cameras, the limelight or being noticed.

Volunteering is nothing new for this dynamic young woman. She's been doing it since her Matie days.

She is among others, ambassador for the Children's Hospital Trust (the independent fundraising arm of the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital) as well as the Sunflower Foundation.

Love for children made action

Having a natural affinity with children and being passionate about their plight, it is logical that Zoë became involved with children's charity organisations. She is among others, ambassador for the Children's Hospital Trust (the independent fundraising arm of the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital) as well as the Sunflower Foundation. This deepfelt compassion for the plight of children stems from her own happy, protected and treasured childhood.

Thinking about all her special and sentimental childhood memories, for example, the doll she played with until the age of 13, Zoë talks with passion about the sad fact that South African (also African) children are forced to grow up too quickly due to socio-economic circumstances and the pressures of today's society. She strongly believes that "if we could preserve

it [childhood] as long as possible, we [society] should do everything in our power to do so."

Growing up as the middle child in a close-knit family in Durban, Zoë is unashamedly a 'daddy's girl' who speaks to her father telephonically at least once a day. "He's the one man I unconditionally trust for all kinds of advice. As a businessman, he gets my drive and understands why I do the things I do." She inherited her love for DIY and the outdoors from him having spent a lot of time with him when growing up. The example of her parents, "...they're both wonderful people; the biggest lesson they've taught me, and for which I respect them endlessly, is to never give up", has definitely influenced Zoë's positive outlook on life.

Being her methodical ("there always has to be a plan B") self, this level-headed and focused young woman has definite plans to be a dedicated parent when she's ready, because she believes that women can enjoy the blessings of motherhood and have a successful career at the same time. However, at this stage, Zoë is enjoying her current single status and focusing on reaching her personal career goals.

Her advice to young people faced with the challenging demands of today's society is to always dream big but at the same time ask yourself why that specific thing is your dream. "Do what you're passionate about because that can become your dream!"

*Dress courtesy of Dirty Pink Vintage Boutique in Sea Point
Make-up courtesy of Berniece Frylinck*



FAST FACTS ABOUT ZOË

She's equally comfortable in high heels or takkies

She prefers colourful clothes

As a teenager, she was more of a tomboy and mainly pursued outdoor activities

She enjoys spending her spare time sunbathing while playing sudoku

She prefers ordering in to eating out

Her wardrobe is colour co-ordinated

Her favourite pastime is taking a nap whenever time permits.