

Michaela Mycroft

"The struggles and challenges someone overcomes are a lot more telling than the awards and things that they receive," - Michaela "Chaeli" Mycroft.



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The acclaimed short-film series *21 Icons* featured the ninth icon of its third season: award-winning "ability activist" and the founder of the Chaeli Campaign, Michaela "Chaeli" Mycroft.

At the age of 16, she won the 2011 International Children's Peace Prize, and the following year, Nobel Peace Laureates' Medal for Activism. She received the awards for her commitment to the rights of children with disabilities in South Africa through her project: the Chaeli Campaign. Earlier this year she became the first female quadriplegic to summit Mount Kilimanjaro after undergoing extensive training to prepare for the ascent.

Mycroft has been selected for *21 Icons* South Africa Season 3 as an individual who exemplifies an inspiration to all South Africans. Having conquered setbacks and adversity, she uses her disability to take a stand against the world's misconceptions about people whose mobility is affected and to highlight their potential using various international platforms to spread her message and create an inclusive society.

She seeks to create a global community that accepts and embraces disabilities and on her selection as an icon she says, "lot of people refer to me as a disability activist, but I don't see myself that way. I focus on the ability. I concentrate on potential and empower people to see their own greatness."

At 11 months, she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, a neural brain condition that restricts movement and which confined her to a wheelchair. The film gives an insightful and inspiring glimpse of her journey and how it all started in 2004, when at just nine-years-old, she teamed up with her sister and three friends to raise R20,000 for her own motorised wheelchair.

Following the success of this small fundraising project, Mycroft realised that more needed to be done to help others in her position and to promote the ability of others. Since then, the non-profit organisation has assisted over 3000 children to receive wheelchairs, hearing aids, food supplements and more.

About the portrait

For the portrait 'XXX' which will appear digitally on the Monday after her short-film is released, Van Wyk describes the visual elements, "The image shows Mycroft in her wheelchair, leaning back and being supported by her ballroom dance partner. Dressed in a gown that she wears when competing in the Wheelchair Ballroom Dancing Championships, she is depicted in a manner that most would not expect from someone in her position. The portrait seeks to embody Mycroft's inclination to shatter perceptions, as well as her assertion that no matter our goals, we will always need to involve others in our journey, and that greatness is seldom achieved alone."

On the future of South Africa, she comments, "Young people are such a powerful force in our country and young people : the people who have changed history. As a collective we need to acknowledge our power and we need to use it effectively but also responsibly."

View the video

About 21 Icons Season 3

The short film-series documents the conversations between Gary Van Wyk as the photographer and filmmaker and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer's creative approach to the portrait.

Behind each portrait lies a carefully planned concept that captures not only the essence of each icon visually, but also in spirit and in terms of their unique legacy.

Season three of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa.

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