

Karabo Mareka, 28, from Alexandra, Johannesburg, Gauteng is a flight attendant with United Airlines and currently lives in Virginia in the United States.

She says she entered the Miss SA competition this year to be a “beacon of hope for so many young South Africans who, like me, are unable to further their education after high school due to financial constraints.”

She is of the firm belief that beauty pageants – she has never entered one before – provide a platform for advocacy, for inspiring and bringing about change. “Women need empathy, courage and kindness,” she says.

Karabo says that we live in a changing society. As a result, “The Miss South Africa pageant should always be prepared to adapt to the forever changing environment by being inclusive and representing the diversity of South Africa.”

Karabo’s parents Sebina and Prince divorced when she was in high school and she grew up with an older half-sister Zaza, and a younger sister Thato. Their mother was a stay-at-home mom until she started a transport business ferrying children to and back from school. Her father runs his own carpentry business. “Growing up and seeing their hard work and determination has shaped the person I am today,” she says.

By representing her township Alexandra on a global scale, Karabo says she shows young people every day that no matter where you come from, you can access opportunities by thinking creatively.

“Since moving to the US I have used my online platform to encourage and inspire hundreds of young South Africans to seek global opportunities and create a life of their own. I have been an ambassador for an au pair program for years, guiding and mentoring young women online and helping them to confidently pursue their dreams.

“Being from the township, I want to inspire young people’s creative thinking which in turn leads to unconventional opportunities and jobs. They don’t have to follow the traditional path to succeed.”

She says she loves South Africa’s people best of all. As someone who travels often, meeting people from all walks of life, nothing beats the kindness, diversity and resilience of South Africans. South Africa is so much more than a place, it’s a heartbeat.

Karabo defines success as the freedom to live authentically and have a positive impact on other people.

Unemployment, she says is the most pressing problem for young people, many of whom are ready to work. “There are not enough work opportunities,” she says.

It is why her message to girls and young women is this: “The world needs your strength, courage and voice. Always believe in yourself. When you step into your power, you can shape not just your future but the future of South Africa.”

She says that as a flight attendant, she interacts with people from all walks of life every day. "Being from South Africa, I would use the Miss South Africa platform to continuously do what I do at work, showing that we can learn from each other while respecting each other's traditions and differences."

Karabo's dream is to launch a youth cultural exchange program for young South Africans who are interested in global opportunities. This initiative would connect young people from diverse backgrounds, providing mentorship to seek unconventional paths building careers.

"We need to remind South Africans that our greatest strength lies in our unique diversity. We are stronger when we work together and that can help us overcome any challenges."

Fact File: Karabo

1. Has a huge sense of humour.
2. Is terrified of going to the doctor without her mother.
3. Live for an adrenaline rush.
4. Enjoys turbulence on a plane
5. Was deeply disappointed at not being able to finish her university studies but pleased to have found another path for herself.
6. Likes that she is loyal to people she really cares about.
7. Would allow herself more time rather than always thinking about the next big thing.
8. Names as her role models actress Nomzamo Mbatha, a global icon who uses her platform to create real change in communities, and Michelle Obama (who she served on a flight) who inspires with her dedication to education empowerment.
9. She would lunch with Taylor Swift, admired for her creativity and constant reinvention of herself.
10. In her spare time, she tries new recipes and watches her favourite TV shows.

SHORT-FIRE QUESTIONS

1. Reading: Atomic Habits by James Clear and The Hlomu Series by Dudu Basani-Dube.
2. Listening to: Anything Taylor Swift.
3. Favourite TV shows: The Summer I turned Pretty, Love Island, The Bachelor.
4. Favourite meal: tinned fish and rice.
5. Guilty pleasure: Mint chocolate chip ice cream.
6. Idea of perfect happiness: Being content with who I am, not worrying about what is next.
7. Greatest fear: Needles and injections.
8. Greatest extravagance: Traveling and clothing.
9. Happiest time: My first Taylor Swift concert in 2023.
10. Talent most wanted: Singing.
11. Most treasured possession: My freedom.
12. Most valued quality in friends: Trust and loyalty.
- 13. Motto: You will never know unless you try. What do you have to lose?**

Facebook: Karabo Mareka
Instagram: Karabo Mareka
TikTok: Mareka Karabo
Other: YouTube – Karabo Mareka

