

**Nelly Mashile**, 28, from Daveyton, Benoni, Gauteng (she now lives in Eveleigh, Boksburg) is a doctor and a surgeon, having earned her first medical degree in Cuba and, in 2022, and her surgery degree from Wits University. Nelly, who speaks English, Sepedi and Spanish and who unsuccessfully entered Miss South Africa in 2023 says she reapplied because as someone from a “very disadvantaged background, getting an education on a housekeeper’s salary, I carry the responsibility to represent kids from similar backgrounds. My story is a beacon of hope our nation is in need of.”

Nelly believes that beauty pageants impact society, foster social cohesion and inspire transformative growth in women who dare to dream. To drive global impact, women need to be self-aware while possessing leadership skills.

The Miss SA pageant, she says, should be inclusive and representative of society “because of the diversity of our people. This fosters unity and empowers women from all walks of life to reach their full potential”.

Nelly says her life has been shaped by the resilience of three generations of women who raised her: great-grandmother, Mantswane Mashile, who named her ‘Nelly’, meaning the bright one; grandmother, Mpumi Mashile, who believed in the power of education and her mother, Buyisile Mashile, an aspiring social worker.

“These women were domestic workers who inspired kindness and humility in me,” she said.

Giving back to her community is of great importance to Nelly who, over the past 3 years, has pioneered the initiative *Ignite Unite*, which bridges the gap between access and opportunity empowering young people to reach their full potential. She sees poverty as young people’s biggest hurdle saying her own early circumstance has fuelled her passion to empower others to break the cycle.

Proudly South African, she says: “We might come from diverse backgrounds, but we have one uniting value: our spirit of ubuntu, deeply rooted in our culture. Random acts of kindness and grace unite us as humanitarians – I would want my reign to symbolise that.”

To girls and women she says: “We are not the product of our circumstances; the power to redefine ourselves lies within us.”

#### Fact File: Nelly

1. Is a great dancer.
2. Speaks Spanish fluently.
3. Is driven by her own personal experiences.
4. Can eat, when she finds a meal she loves, the same meal for a month.
5. Is disappointed that while studying in Cuba she was so work focused she did not travel.  
As a result she is learning to take time to enjoy things.
6. Sees her compassion and big heart as her greatest assets.
7. Calls her kind, fearless mother her role model.
8. Would choose Nelson Mandela to lunch with, to thank him for changing her life on a personal level – his collaboration with Cuba allowed her to study medicine there.
9. Loves reading, and going to the gym to keep fit.
10. Plays netball.

#### SHORT-FIRE QUESTIONS

1. Reading: The Secret by Rhonda Byrne.
2. Listening to: All things Tyla.
3. Favourite TV shows: The Good Doctor, Black-ish.
4. Favourite meal: Butter chicken curry.
5. Guilty pleasure: Eating mandarin bread dipped in Ultramel custard post work out.
6. Idea of perfect happiness: Not searching for everything to be perfectly happy as this leads to sadness.
7. Greatest fear: Not pursuing dreams because of being afraid.
8. Greatest extravagance: High end fashion.
9. Happiest: "When I heard I'm a Miss South Africa 2025 finalist."
10. Talent most wanted: Being able to sing.
11. Most treasured possession: a photo album filled with childhood memories, gifted by my mother on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.
12. Most valued quality in friends: Kindness, love, and support.
13. **Motto: Dream big; Reality will be bigger.**

Facebook: Nelly Mashile

Instagram: dr\_Incmashile.

TikTok: dr\_nellymashile.