

Qhawekazi Mazaleni, 24, from Gonubie, East London, (she now lives in Sundowner, Randburg) holds a Speech, Language and Hearing Therapy degree from Stellenbosch University and is doing Master of Arts in Speech-Language Pathology through the University of Pretoria with a focus on Autism.

The Top 10 finalist – who is fluent in isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans and now learning Sepedi and isiZulu – entered her first beauty pageant at her Beaconsfield High School in East London, where she was crowned First Princess.

She entered Miss SA 2025 because she is committed to bridging gaps in education and believes winning the crown will allow her to lay the foundation for work that will continue beyond the crown.

Beauty pageants, Qhawekazi believes are extremely helpful for self-development, personal growth and the ability to create change. They also encourage in women a growth mindset that incorporates resilience and tenacity.

She said: "Young women don't always have role models within their own communities to look up to and see themselves reflected; representation gives them permission to dream."

As the last born of three girls, Qhawekazi says she has always felt safe and protected at home. "My mom worked as a clerk at the Department of Education, and my dad works as a manager at Eskom. My mom is Sotho, and my dad is Xhosa and although we grew up predominantly speaking isiXhosa at home, they shaped my cultural and linguistic curiosity."

Making a difference in her community is important and Qhawekazi says her biggest contribution has been through her therapeutic work in "bridging cultural and linguistic gaps in speech therapy and being informed of our political, economic and social worlds."

She's written and published a children's book in isiXhosa that teaches children to read and count saying: "It's been so beautiful watching children interacting and learning from the book." But she would like to see more initiatives that combat SA's rising illiteracy rates. Qhawekazi believes this is possible in that South Africa leads the way regarding changing narratives and cultivating innovation across the world.

As South Africa is a country of many cultures, languages, and traditions she believes that the power of storytelling is a uniting force. "Through my initiative for increasing access to books I hope to find and share stories that celebrate our cultures, languages and traditions and foster a generation with cultural awareness."

The biggest challenge facing young people today is, she says, a lack of hope. "We see the statistics on crime, poverty and unemployment and it makes a lot of young people hesitant to dream."

Qhawekazi believes pageantry is about impact. If she could fulfil one wish she says she would launch workshops for teachers and parents in underserved communities, teaching them how to share resources and finding ways in which they can create their own.

Her message to young girls and young women in South Africa? Dare to dream, know who you are and be relentless in pursuing your purpose.

Fact File: Qhawekazi

1. Ran her first half-marathon last year.
2. She crochets her own clothes.
3. Loves Mpumalanga her favourite province because of the nature.
4. Has a career goal to work on educational policy.
5. Wants to see the Northern Lights one day.
6. Left an unfulfilling job at work to find something that better aligned.
7. Likes that she's an optimist who sees growth opportunities everywhere.
8. Would like to take more risks.
9. Has as her female role models (actress and model) Gale Mabalane for her authenticity in her purpose; and (American actress and singer) Keke Palmer, who fearlessly uses her platform as a voice for societal issues while still being herself.
10. Would lunch with Ms Lauryn Hill to chat about how she balances her passion and purpose with discernment and intent.
11. Likes trying new recipes in the kitchen.

SHORT-FIRE QUESTIONS

1. Reading: The Alchemist (for the 4th time).
2. Listening to: Isitifiketi by Jabulile Majola on repeat.
3. Favourite TV shows: The Office, Modern family, Grey's Anatomy.
4. Favourite meal: Chilli Beef Stew with Steamed bread (amadombolo)
5. Guilty pleasure: Chocolate mug cake after a long day.
6. Idea of perfect happiness: being surprised with food... the way to my heart.
7. Greatest fear: Reaching the end of my life and being filled with regret.
8. Greatest extravagance: My bed. I'd never owned my own bed as I shared with my sisters growing up.
9. Happiest time: Graduating in 2023.
10. Talent most wanted: To swim in open waters – I learnt to swim in 2023, but open waters make me a little nervous.
11. Most treasured possession: My journal from 2019-2022.
12. Most valued quality in friends: Mutual honesty, even when it's difficult.
13. **Motto: It's only embarrassing if you're embarrassed. Don't be afraid to be seen trying.**

Social media tags:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/qhawe.mazaleni.9/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/qhawemazaleni/>

Twitter: <https://x.com/QMazaleni36754>

TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/@qhawemazaleni>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/qhawekazi-mazaleni-643336213/>