

ANNIE LENNOX



Annie Lennox with Lynette Saltzman, Editor of Benefits Magazine and a trustee of the Dis-Chem Foundation.

ON HER RECENT VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA TO PROMOTE AWARENESS OF HIV/AIDS AND TO RAISE FUNDS FOR HER SING CAMPAIGN, THE DIS-CHEM FOUNDATION DONATED R500 000 TO HELP HIV/AIDS ORGANISATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY. ANNIE GAVE *BENEFITS MAGAZINE* AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Why did you choose HIV/AIDS in Africa as your passion?

I was invited to take part in the launch of Nelson Mandela's 46664 HIV/AIDS campaign in November 2003. The day after the concert, all the artists were invited to join with him on a visit to Robben Island where he addressed an assemblage of international press, standing in front of his former prison cell. It was a very powerful moment, especially when Mandela personally explained how the pandemic was affecting women and children, describing the situation as a "genocide". My history goes back a few decades. I supported the ANC as a younger person, and took part in the Free Nelson Mandela concert in Wembley Stadium London in 87, when he was still incarcerated. I have always been inspired by Madiba, and the struggle of freedom fighters and activists for human rights and justice. It struck me as being tragically ironic that even after the war against apartheid has been won, millions of South Africans have subsequently lost their lives as a result of HIV/AIDS.

I am a mother, and I believe in the human right of women and children to have healthcare. It's not rocket science.

How do people respond to your passion?

I've witnessed people become very tearful and emotional in reaction to the film pieces we show in the SING Campaign, but more importantly, they then start to ask the question of how they can personally get on board and make a contribution. The South African Health Minister attended the SING presentation, and was so moved that he immediately arranged to go on a field trip with TAC leaders to see the situation for himself.

I was also thrilled with the donation from The Dis-Chem Foundation of R500 000 towards our campaign. I'm aiming to inspire everyone to become more aware, engaged and proactive when it comes to human rights, or any of the issues and challenges we face in the world today, and I think that what's been achieved so far has been very effective.

What is it about South Africa you love?

It's a beautiful country, and incredibly diverse on all levels, and I think that South Africans from all walks of life should be very proud of the transformation that was achieved with regard to apartheid, and I'm sure that everyone is. There's a lot of goodwill for SA all around the world. The country has been a beacon of hope over despair, but it's still early days, and there's a long road to go towards a more balanced and sustainable society.

What was the turning point in your life that made you stand up and say I have to do something?

I think that the experience of visiting health clinics, hospitals, orphanages, townships and people's homes, in order to witness the effects of the pandemic was incredibly important. Until you actually see what chronic poverty combined with chronic illness looks like up close, it still remains somewhat abstract. It's a huge awakening to realise that millions of people are caught in this situation. It makes you value

all the things that you may have taken for granted all your life. I realise that I've been incredibly fortunate to have been given decent education, medical treatment, regular meals etc.

How do you stay healthy?

Well, of course your diet has a lot to do with health. I'm not a health freak, but I don't eat a lot of junk food! I used to exercise more than I do, but I'm trying to get back on track!

When you are on SING campaign, you give it your all, so how do you keep yourself together?

Yes that's true... I do "give my all", and it's quite challenging. The one thing I need to try to do is to balance my work/rest time. As long as I don't become exhausted, then I can handle a lot. So I rest as much as I can in between all the action!

Do you exercise?

I used to exercise regularly three times a week, but after my spinal operation last year, I lost some of my physical confidence and felt drained. I'm slowly getting back on the horse. Pilates is excellent for core strength, so I've been taking classes again.

Favourite food?

I love all kinds of things... sometimes it's heavy filling comfort food like mashed potatoes, and sometimes it's light stuff like tomato, mozzarella and avocado with olive oil. I guess my taste is pretty simple. If the food is fresh and of good quality, and presented with loving care then you can't go too far wrong. I love muesli with blueberries and rice milk, or salted porridge with honey, cinnamon and toasted almonds in the mornings,

Favourite colour?

Again... I love the entire colour range, but I have a tendency to be drawn towards the blues!

How do you keep your skin so beautiful?

That's a very nice compliment... thank you! I actually don't have any special kind of regime. As long as I have a decent moisturising cream of some sort that I slap on in the morning and night, and that's just about all there is to it!

You mentioned that you occasionally have suffered from depression, how do you deal with it?

I doubt that there's anyone who hasn't. It's not easy, but I do think that regular exercise is very helpful to shake up the serotonin levels. Also sometimes it's just something simple, like knowing that you're tired and need to take some time out to speak to a friend, or light a candle and lie down.

Do you wear fragrance?

Yes I do... I love French perfume... especially the Dyptique range. It's mood enhancing!

How was your trip to South Africa?

It was great... busy... inspiring... focused... varied... and very successful. I had several important meetings, met lots of people, gave a lot of interviews, and presented the SING event. Stayed in two major cities, and met with two Health Ministers, visited two incredible HIV/AIDS projects, and filmed the whole thing so I can share the experience and spread the message! **B**



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