

# A TRUE ROLE MODEL

She's graced the world's top magazines, now she's helping girls in her native Congo

BY GERSHWIN WANNEBURG



RIGHT: Noella Coursaris has achieved fame and wealth as an international model but has not forgotten her roots in the Congo, where she was born. Through her foundation she has built a school for girls in the DRC (LEFT), hoping to better their lives.



**H**ERE'S a headline you don't read every day: international model turns philanthropist.

Noella Coursaris is helping girls who may otherwise not stand a chance at survival.

The Congolese model's portfolio is the envy of many international beauties but she's chosen instead to dedicate much of her life to uplifting girls from her native land.

Through her foundation, named for her father, Georges, and the Swahili word for angel – malaika – Noella has built a school for girls in Katanga. This province in the south-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been left in desperate poverty after decades of civil war.

"The initial group of girls we took in were at risk because they were either abandoned or accused of witchcraft. Children accused of witchcraft can be abused by their families," Noella told DRUM via e-mail from her home in London.

Their foundation's aim was to empower young Congolese

women and it started by sponsoring a group of abandoned and orphaned Congolese girls from the Katanga province. The sponsorship included school tuition.

That grew into the Georges Malaika School for Girls, a tuition-free school that took in 104 girls in its first year and 152 in its second, in the village of Kalebuka. The girls receive two meals a day and take part in sports twice a week. They are also taught skills such as brushing their teeth and eating with cutlery.

Noella's work has garnered widespread praise. She's worked with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and has addressed the DRC parliament on women's rights issues. Last year she delivered a statement at the opening of the annual Clinton Global Initiative meeting, attended by former US president Bill Clinton.

Earlier this year she hosted Cinema for Peace in New York, where actor Ben Affleck received an award for his humanitarian work in the DRC. Noella was presented with an award

by entertainment mogul Russell Simmons for her efforts in the DRC.

NOELLA may be living a very comfortable life now, but she certainly understands the importance of education, especially as an escape from poverty. She left the DRC at the age of five after her father died and her mother was unable to provide for her. Relatives in Europe took her in and made sure she received a top education in Belgium and Switzerland.

After completing a degree in business management and making a name for herself as a model, Noella decided to return home and do humanitarian work. In 2007 she started the Georges Malaika Foundation (GMF).

GMF also ropes in NGOs to Katanga to address the myriad needs in the area. Together

with Project CURE, the foundation has secured 10 containers of medical supplies for the region's hospitals. With the help of the Voss Foundation two wells have also been built in the area – one at the school and another in the village.

"This reliable source of clean drinking water prevents the spread of water-borne illnesses and promotes a healthier lifestyle throughout the community," the foundation says. "Removing this serious obstacle makes it much more feasible for the girls to succeed in school and pursue higher education."

IN a place such as Katanga, though, there's always more work to be done. The province has been ranked as the least developed region in the world by the UN and has some of the worst malnutrition and infant mortality rates.

KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES/GALLO IMAGES



ABOVE: The Georges Malaika School for Girls is tuition-free and uses a Belgian-based curriculum. Noella lives in London but makes annual trips to the Congo to visit the school and connect with the girls.

With that in mind, GMF wants to grow the school, funded by Noella and her husband, to accommodate 338 girls. The task is daunting but the goal is enough to keep Noella going.

“Through education the girls will know how to manage themselves and have a job. They’ll be able to have a voice politically, economically and socially,” says Noella, who still visits the DRC at least once a year. “I think it’s very important for people to have education in order to make the country progress.”

It’s no surprise who her hero is. “I admire Nelson Mandela because he was a strong African who overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles in order to achieve rights for his people.

“I believe that every person should strive to live a life full of compassion and help each other in any way possible. One should strive to leave a legacy of positive action and good deeds.” □

## ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The first stone was laid by **Khaliah Ali, daughter of Muhammad Ali.**

\* It’s a green school – construction and maintenance will use natural resources with minimal impact on the environment.

\* There are currently seven classrooms. The final phase includes classrooms for a secondary school plus additional facilities.

\* Uniforms, books and two meals per day are provided free of charge.

\* The curriculum is based on the Belgian model and there is full government support for the curriculum.

\* The teachers receive competitive salaries.

\* For maximum benefit, there is a limit of 26 kids per class.

## WHAT MAKES NOELLA TICK?

\* **MARRIAGE** I’ve been married for a few years. My husband is James Masters and we have a son, James Masters Jr.

\* **FASHION SENSE** Half of my wardrobe is African. I love all designers – each one has an individual style.

\* **LOVE, BEAUTY OR WEALTH?** I would choose love as love is a kind of intelligence and beauty isn’t!

\* **IF I HADN’T BECOME A MODEL . . .** I would have been a doctor, or in public relations.

\* **WEAKNESS** I love food – sweets and apple tart.

\* **AGE** I don’t mention my age – top secret! (Laughs)

# ALL COMPETITION WINNERS!

**W**E have loads of exciting competitions and great prizes every week! If you want to be one of the lucky winners, grab the latest issue of DRUM and start entering. Who knows, we might be calling you next!

For any competition-related queries, contact Nikiwe on 021-406-3454 or e-mail nikiwe.skele@media24.com.



**KELVINATOR FRIDGE WINNER**  
Owen Malau from Johannesburg was the lucky winner of a Kelvinator fridge in our Christmas competition.

When DRUM called Owen, he was delighted. “I’m so happy. I can’t believe I’ve won such a fantastic prize,” he said. Owen is a regular DRUM reader and loves the magazine. And this was not the first time he’s won. “Thank you DRUM, this is the perfect way to start my year,” said Owen.

## CHRISTMAS WINNERS

**OCEAN BASKET**  
V Maqanda, Goodwood; L Makgake; D Letele; N Nyazi, Khayelitsha; P Mulibana; M Moloi, Deneysville; A Mataka, Sunninghill; D Mocheuk, Kempton Park; R Morais, Mthatha; N Mthwana, Gugulethu; N Dlamini, Madadeni; P Landu, Port Elizabeth.

**KELVINATOR FRIDGE**  
O Malau, Johannesburg.

**RAZOR**  
K Tsosane, Bloemfontein; X Khayise, Khayelitsha.

**OLYMPUS CAMERA**  
N Mbatha, Nongoma; P Virginia, Cato Ridge.

**GLODINA HAMPER**  
L Mantshongo, Kokstad; M Tau, Rocklands; P Mosito, Sandton; J Mafoko, Carltonville; B Ngcobo, Kwa-Ndengezi; C Moremi, Tembisa.

**YARDLEY HAMPER**  
T Qangule, Samora Machel; W Thushini, Margate; B Moisa, Ladysmith; M Rabothata, Pretoria; K Ntomsana, Aliwal North; M Babedi, Letlhabile; D Dasheka, Bloemfontein; Z Hlongwa, Durban; N Ndlovu, Esikhawini; R Sibi-ya, Congella; V Mkona, Zwelitsha; K Ngodela; N Mpati, King William’s Town; M Thekiso, Potchefstroom; Z Bomoyi, Pietermaritzburg; M Mogapi, Letlhabile; S Maseko, Boksburg.

**SKIL HAMPER**

P Kekana, Pretoria.  
**BLADEZ JET 125cc PLUS ADULT HELMET**  
L Mahali, Umtata.

## FIND FATHER CHRISTMAS COMPETITION WINNERS

**OCEAN BASKET**  
N Modise, Meadowlands; H Chikonzo, Alberton; J Masingi, Saulsville; M Borias, Brackenhurst.  
**OLYMPUS AND SANDISK**  
M Nxumalo, Tembisa.

## GLODINA HAMPER

J Maribeng  
**YARDLEY HAMPER**  
M Moyimane, Lephalale; M Khosi, Evaton East; E Lewis, Woodstock; D Nyaundi, Chuenespoort.  
**BOSCH HAMPER**  
M Cupido, Belhar.

## 14 DECEMBER COMPETITION WINNERS

**JAY JAYS SHOPPING VOUCHER WORTH R1 000**  
Xoli, Diepkloof; Thato, Bloemfontein; M Moletsane, Winburg.

**MAXI BATTERIES AND ENERGIZER PRODUCTS**  
Z Dollie, Steenberg; C Wyn-gaardt, Gatesville; J Mokoena, Geduld; Bulelwa, Dobsonville; A Abraham, Hout Bay.

**CORNER BAKERY PICNIC BASKET WITH GOODIES**  
M Dibakwena, Meadowlands.  
**NIKON COOLPIX S30 CAMERA WORTH R1 000**  
K Mgidi, Blue Downs; B Dlamini, Orange Grove.

## 27 DECEMBER COMPETITION WINNERS

**FIRE AND ICE**  
T Letuka, Tembisa; M Mokwena, Lebowakgomo; N Gcobisa, Uitenhage.

**QUAY 5**  
M Harold, Port Elizabeth; E Masabela, Atteridgeville; L Mahonga, Mucklenuck; Thandiwe, Bloemfontein; C Hlongwane, Empangeni; P Ngobeni, Midrand; T Mabele, Standerton.

## 4 JANUARY 2013 COMPETITION WINNERS

**ICB JUNIOR BOOKKEEPING NATIONAL CERTIFICATE**  
E Mgangathi, Mfuleni.  
**SIMPLE, FABULOUS LUNCHBOX IDEAS**  
F Kibinye, Bloemfontein; S Manyapelo, Johannesburg; S Majola, Edenvale; K Nxadi, Peddie; Ann, Durban.

## PICK N PAY BACK TO SCHOOL VOUCHERS

C Lester, Eshowe; S Mpolosi, Kwaivelo; S Rangata, KwaThema; N Nikani, East London; D Makhaye, Ash-down; F Samente, Hillbrow.  
**LEGIT SHOPPING VOUCHER**  
B Maseko, Rietspruit; Othisa, King William’s Town; S Lamola, Sebokeng.

## CLERE HAMPER

D Motshabi, Saulspoort; Jabulile, Pretoria; B Sigeje, Ugie; Shirley, Bethal; G Mashegoana, Midrand.

## 18 JANUARY COMPETITION WINNERS

### ZAHARA TICKETS

N Plam, Mitchell’s Plain; S Makgatho, Wynberg; Z Mphoyiya, Sea Point.

## VALENTINE WINNERS

**AMERICAN SWISS**  
L Mokoena, Leondale, C Sandura, Cape Town; C Sandura, Alexandria; Z Mnisi, Emalaheni; T Kubayi, Imbuzini; P Ndubandubana, Bloemfontein; D Mkhwanazi, Newcastle; M Hlapane, Hoopstad; P Mdlatu, Port Elizabeth; A Dyan, Midrand; M Mangeni, Empangeni; M Ngaxma, East London; L Mahonga, Pretoria; M Marumo, Bloemfontein.

## I LOVE YOU HAMPER

Yandiswa, East London; T Ngoma, Cape Town; B Taboshe, Port Elizabeth; M Frans, Mdantsane; S Mnguni, Bloemfontein; Refilwe, Highlands North; Sibanda, Meadowlands.

## NICA HANDBAG

N Meke, Maitland; S Buthelezi, Klerksdorp.  
**PUZEY SCOOTER**

T Shabangu, Newcastle.

## OLYMPUS CAMERA

C Sikity, Mitchell’s Plain; N Tshabalala, Braamfontein; H Satyele, Durban.

## BELKIN CHEF

Maria Ntuli, Mpumalanga.