

HEROINE

INDIA BAIRD

This lawyer combines her love for art and education to empower young women.



HER BELIEF IN the ability of girls and women to change the world led India Baird, 47, from Nashville, Tennessee, in the US, to Manenberg, Cape Town, with one goal – to give them the opportunities to do it.

India is a founding member of the ROCK Girl grassroots public art and education campaign. The gender focus is important, argues India, because globally “girls have often been denied the opportunity to succeed.” ROCK Girl aims to raise awareness about violence against women and the need to create safe spaces for girls to live and learn.

A lawyer who still consults to the National Prosecuting Authority and South African government, India was inspired by a group of grade 6 learners from Red River Primary School, in Manenberg. They created a bench strictly for girls, so that they would feel safe. This simple solution sparked a “Safe Spaces” campaign, with more than 20 artists and designers creating benches in public areas around Cape Town, with sister benches in disadvantaged communities.

With the help of the Cecile and Boyd Foundation, ROCK Girl has set up an after-school art room, a secure zone for these girls to become “confident, intelligent, caring agents for social change.”

India hopes to extend the campaign to other areas across South Africa in 2012. While she cites her biggest challenge as “self-doubt,” she

holds firm that women can make the changes they need in the world.

INDIA ON ...

→ **Managing work and life:** “Time with my children and husband, my daily runs up Lion’s Head, travel and being in nature help me feel balanced. My son, Zola, 11, and my daughter, Tallulah, 6, are my inspiration to get up every morning.”

→ **Learning from bad experiences:** “I grew up with strong family and moral values, but encountered shocking racism and sexism at university in Mississippi. This has shaped who I am and what I do.”

→ **Taking a chance:** “My favourite quote is from Mark Twain. It says: ‘Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.’”

→ **The importance of reading:** “It has changed my life, shaped my world views, and taught me about human nature over and over again.”

→ **Helping others:** “We can take back our streets, homes, schools, parks and lives. It is up to each of us to create protected spaces not only for ourselves, but for those around us. If we broaden our own secure circles, we will create a country that does not tolerate violence against women and girls.”

—As told to Jennifer Thorpe

To get involved, visit rockgirls.org