

# Miss Universe Netherlands 2019

# LOST IN TRASH



## Who am I?

I am Sharon Pieksma from the Dutch city Rotterdam, right now I'm Miss Netherlands 2019, but when I was 13 years old, I already started working as a model. Lucky for me, modeling quickly became a success, especially after competing in Holland's Next Top Model when I was 16. I started to travel all around the world, doing photoshoots and campaigns everywhere. And so I lived in different countries and cities and learned a lot about different cultures and people. A huge part of that was hearing different kinds of music and music became a huge passion of mine. I now travel the world as a DJ and I'm learning to produce my own music.

But my first love, is nature. I love to be surrounded by nature. Because of my work I've seen the most beautiful places all around the globe, from forests to many beautiful beaches and even mountains I climbed. But I saw one problem becoming bigger and bigger. Plastic!

I always had the urge to do something back for our planet. Like every time I went for a swim on a gorgeous location, I collected all the plastic from the water and the beach. But I wanted to do something big. More people needed to hear the impact of plastic.

### **Why did I compete in The Miss Netherlands competition?**

The Miss Netherlands competition was always in the back of my head, ever since my half-sister was Miss Netherlands herself in 2007. She always took me with her to events and premieres so I got a taste of that world when I was young. She even gave me a sash one day to let me feel how it was to be a Miss! That was so exciting, I think from that moment on, somewhere deep down I wanted to become Miss Netherlands.

Last year, I was booked to do a fashion show and the catwalk coach was the same coach training us, as from the Miss Netherlands competition. She came up to me and told me all about the journey of becoming Miss Netherlands and the endless possibilities that become available as soon as you win.

So, then it hit me: What if I become Miss Netherlands and use this beautiful platform to create more awareness about plastic and inspire people to join this positive movement.

### **What is my main focus as Miss Netherlands?**

As Miss Netherlands I looked deeper into the problems and the solutions of plastic. I'm happy that I'm able to work and connect with different organizations like WWF (World Wide Fund of Nature) and Oceanic Global to do (beach) clean ups all around the world. I really want to make a difference and motivate other people to make a difference. Small steps can have a huge impact! That's why I'm working on lots of different projects like starting my own bottle line. It's so important to bring your own water bottle with you. Reducing plastic is the goal!

Besides that, I connected with some big -also plastic free- DJ's in the music industry to host a plastic free event where the money we raised was sent to an organization that cleans up the ocean. I have so many more ideas to raise awareness, money for good causes and to host plastic cleanups. I feel that I'm already making a difference, people around me tell me they're living more conscious and are even cleaning up plastic out of the environment by themselves.

### **What are my future goals?**

One of my next adventures is competing in Miss Universe. A platform, that if I would win -which is the main focus of course- could help me achieve some of my biggest dreams. A plastic reduced or plastic free world. One of the things I would do, is to start up my own organization to help the planet and environment. Because today not only animals on land or in the sea are struggling with all this plastic, also we humans do. We're eating, living and breathing plastic. We need to work together and make this change fast to stop plastic pollution!

### **Did you know this about plastic?**

Plastic pollution is simply any piece of plastic in a place that it should not be. A majority of plastic pollution ends up in the ocean, but this is not the only place plastic pollution can be found. That said, almost 2/3rds of our plastic ends up in the ocean which equates to about 8 million pieces of plastic a year.

### **Why is plastic so bad?**

As we all know, plastic is a strong and durable material. The reason why we produce so much of it because it is a cheap and durable solution. The problem is when plastic is improperly thrown away it takes a long time to break down naturally.

Most plastics will last 450 years in most environments and they don't really ever disappear completely. Instead, they break apart into smaller and smaller pieces until microscopic. Those microscopic pieces never fully disintegrate and ultimately end up in the sand, the ocean, and wildlife's bellies.

### **Plastic Facts**

- Over 8.3 billion tons of plastic has been made since its mass production began in the 1950's. Only 9% of this plastic has been recycled, the other 91% sits in landfill, floats in our oceans or has been burned.
- The current recycling of plastic bottles generally results in the 'down-cycling' of the material into a product that cannot easily be recycled again. To support the circular economy, we need new products that are made from 100% recycled old products.
- Cigarette butts continue to be the number one item found at clean-ups worldwide! These butts contain plastic and chemicals which takes a minimum of 15 years (!) to disintegrate and hugely harms nature.
- Plastic bags get rarely recycled. So always bring your own shopping bag! So leave one in your car or near your front door.
- We use more than 500 million plastic straws each day. Because of how small straws are they are hard to recycle and very rarely make it to the recycling centers.
- Each day, about 8 million pieces of plastic pollution end up in our oceans.
- 100,000 marine mammals and turtles and 1 million seabirds are killed by plastic pollution annually.

- The average person eats 70,000 microplastics each year.
- Just one plastic teabag can release billions of tiny plastic particles into tea. Steeping a single, empty plastic teabag at 95-degree Celsius releases around 11.6 billion microplastics and 3.1 billion plastic nanoparticles into the water
- Plastic has the ability to absorb chemicals that have been linked to endocrine disruption and even some cancers. By using plastic in for example, teabags but also by polluting our waters, we are polluting a source of our food and ultimately, polluting ourselves.

### **What can you do?**

Reduce your plastic intake! We can look for alternative packaging for disposable items. These small changes may not seem like much, but if you replaced your daily plastic lunch fork with silverware from home, in one year, that plastic adds up. Reducing our use of unnecessary plastic will reduce pollution in the ocean and the microplastics in the air we breathe. More tips:

- Refuse plastic bottles and plastic straws and seek reusable alternatives. Don't buy bottled water, instead purchase a quality reusable drink bottle or boxed water and source healthy drinking water from the tap or bulk sources. Every single-use bottle and plastic straw you refuse is a positive move for the planet!
- Always bring your own shopping bag to prevent getting a single use plastic bag! Leave one in your car or near your front door, so you're always able to get it.
- Give up gum. Gum is made of a synthetic rubber, aka plastic.
- Buy boxes instead of bottles. Often, products like laundry detergent come in cardboard which is more easily recycled than plastic.
- Avoid buying frozen foods because their packaging is mostly plastic. Even those that appear to be cardboard are coated in a thin layer of plastic. Plus, you'll be eating fewer processed foods!
- Don't use plasticware at home and be sure to request restaurants do not pack them in your take-out box.
- Use a razor with replaceable blades instead of a disposable razor.

Thanks for hearing me out!

*Sharon Pieksma – Miss Netherlands 2019*