

# ONE *Step*



HEATHER  
MACDONALD

# AT A *time*

By: Leslie Ogle Photography By: Chelsea Bren

**MOST WILL AGREE** that being a parent is the most challenging, yet gratifying, job there is. Parents strive to make sure their children are safe, healthy, and happy. Perhaps no one knows this better than Heather Macdonald, co-owner and operator of Stepping Stones Academy.

“My passion for children and education is just a part of me,” Heather said. “It has always been my mission, motivation, and inspiration to change a child’s life. I love to watch them grow and develop cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically within a stimulating environment.”

Heather grew up in Johannesburg, South Africa, and attended a private girls’ school there. Later she attended teachers training college and obtained her undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in early childhood education. She owned and operated two preschools in South Africa before coming to America in 1996.

“My best friend from childhood had already moved to Arizona,” Heather said. “She was very instrumental in my life, so I followed suit and moved to Tucson. When I arrived in America, I settled with my girlfriend and her husband. They were the only people I knew, so it was quite an adjustment.”

While in Tucson, Heather was a substitute teacher and tutor, and also taught a kindergarten class until finally opening her own preschool. “It was most exciting,” she said. “The academy touched many children in the community; however, I decided to sell the preschool and make another move.”

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Heather moved to Virginia and managed to find a business partner who was going to build a school. “The land was purchased,” she said, “but when we needed to raise a 70 percent building loan, we were denied because the economy had already spiraled down. So, with two children still in college, I had to look far and wide for an existing preschool that I could purchase and run. The school in Mooresville was up for sale ... I was delighted!”



Heather struggled as a single mom and business owner but relied on her children, her friends, and perseverance to get her through. In fact, her favorite quote, and one she often drew strength from is from Julie Andrews, who said, “Perseverance is failing 19 times and succeeding the 20th.”

“Becoming a single mom at the age of 30, having lost my husband in a car accident, has been the most challenging obstacle for me. But we all meet very special people on our journey here on earth, and I have been blessed to have such friends who have mentored and guided me through very difficult experiences. With that and perseverance, you can tackle any obstacle.”

Having learned a lot in her 28-year profession, Heather advises not to sweat the small stuff. “I personally believe that any obstacle can be overcome by hard work and dedication, and I am grateful to my father for teaching me this. I have always run my business with this premise in mind. And, there is actually only one reality at the end of each day, and that is spiritualism ... it has been my saving grace. Without this, I know I would never have made it. It is as important as the air that I breathe.”