SOME KIND OF MIRACLE?

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN IT?

A Brief History of the South Africa Higher Education Fund

SYLVIA EASTMAN SEPTEMBER 9, 2018

WHY, WHEN, AND HOW DID SAHEF COME ABOUT?

How It All Began

Somewhere around the year 2000 or 2001, my pastor, Dick Lawrence, recommended to me a book he had just read, *No Future Without Forgiveness,* by the South African Anglican Archbishop, Desmond Tutu. The book was about the process of "Truth and Reconciliation," the effort to heal the terrible racial divide in South Africa left from the dreadful years of conflict during Apartheid. Tutu had been the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the book was his description of how it had functioned and what it had accomplished.

The racial divide was so great, and the years of its terror on both sides of that divide had left the world believing perhaps South Africa could never be united into one country. Many predicted that the effort would end in a bloodbath that would leave few people or their properties still surviving and the country in a desperate state of civil war for generations to come. But Nelson Mandela, the President and leader of the new nation, came out of 28 years of imprisonment seeking nonviolent resolution rather than retribution. He recognized that the only hope for his nation to succeed and thrive was if there could be a way to get beyond all the horrors of the past decades. He knew there had been atrocities committed on both sides, and that for reconciliation to occur, both sides would have to honestly recognize that. Thus, the incredible idea of having those who had committed crimes against one another come forward and speak the truth and seek forgiveness from one another.

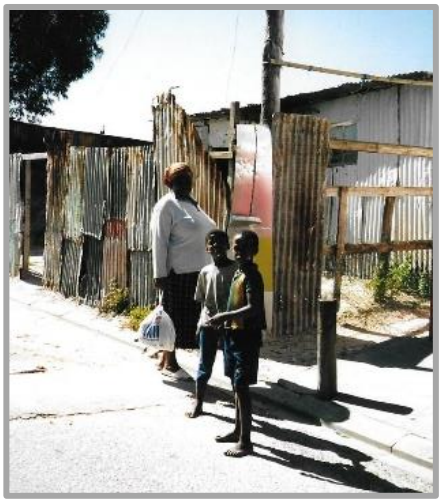
Tutu's book was immensely moving for me. It sounded so miraculous, I could hardly believe it, much though I wanted to. I was enthralled and decided I had to see this miracle for myself. I planned a trip to South Africa to experience this first-hand, and in 2003 spent three glorious weeks traveling about the country and meeting the people. The country has to be one of the most beautiful places on earth!

On that trip, traveling alone, as I almost always do, I saw history, visiting apartheid museums and townships, hearing about the troubles, the brutality, and the conditions people had suffered, and I saw first-hand the poor conditions in which many were still living. I visited Robben Island, where Mandela had been imprisoned, guided by a man who had been a prisoner there himself. I visited other sites where outrageous situations had occurred that condemned people by the color of their skin or their parentage to lives of poverty and pain.

Everywhere I was amazed at the sense of hope kindled by the end of apartheid, and the government of Mandela. But everywhere I also encountered the poverty and lack of education, health, and well-being brought on by decades of discrimination and oppression. Few people had the resources to better their lives on their own.

I have always believed that education is the best hope for raising individuals, families, neighborhoods, and nations from poverty. I believe also that it has the best hope of breaking down misunderstanding of one another that exemplifies racism and the hatred and fear that lead to violence. Although I have dabbled in a number of different professions (seven to be exact), my first and clearly most gifted one was as an educator.

Once I was back at home, it did not take much for me to decide I wanted to return to South Africa as a volunteer to do my part to help this new nation by teaching its youth. In 2004, I began seriously to explore ways to accomplish this goal. I first applied to the Peace Corps, and went so far as to have an interview, but decided against going as a Peace Corps volunteer for several reasons. The Peace Corps does not let its volunteers decide where they will work or even what they will do. They decide where you and your skills will be most needed, and assign you there. Although I did not know, I assumed most volunteers would be fresh out of college, with little or no professional degrees or experience. It was perhaps likely they would be asked to teach. I had had several careers and lots of education, and figured I could well be asked to work using my law degree and my government and civil rights experience to advise new governments in establishing structures, laws, and regulations. This I did not want to do, and I did not believe it would be the best use of my talents, education, and experience. I then applied to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, but found much the same applied there. In both cases I would be required to make a two-year commitment, and I was not sure I could do that, as I was approaching 70 and had had some physical problems that made me worry I might not be able to complete that long an assignment.



Finally, I went online and began to do searches for teaching opportunities in South Africa. Eventually I found a South African organization, which hosted volunteers in a remote village situated near the border between the Eastern and Western Cape. I began to correspond with the heads of the organization and to tell them of my desire to volunteer to teach for a year. I was offered pictures of a beautiful site as location, with nice housing for me and a promise of placement in the local "primary school," what in the US would have been a school before the days of Junior Highs or Middle

Schools and which are now springing up again here (grades 1 through 8). I sent my teaching qualifications and interest, as well as application and registration fees to the organization. Rather than having them pay my transportation, accommodations, meals, insurance, and other expenses, as would have been the case with the Peace Corps or Jesuit Volunteer Corps, those expenses were all up to me to pay for, and of course I was a volunteer not to receive a salary. Nonetheless, I was anxious to go through with this plan.

In hindsight I realize I should have been wary of the arrangement, but at the time I was so eager, and so delighted to find a place and organization willing to take me, I jumped in feet first, with much excitement, making arrangements to go in January of 2005, as the academic year begins there in January, not September.

I always wonder if I am doing something because it's the right thing to do, or just because I want to do it. I can be pretty headstrong at times (or maybe all the time?). Is it a call from God or is it foolish wishing? I spent my summer discussing this all with trusted friends. I received their support for what I wanted to do, but many recognized and cautioned about the possible obstacles and problems to come. I was moving in unexplored territory, and wasn't sure I knew what I was doing. At St. Vincent's summer retreat, I asked a group that consisted of people who were not among my closest friends to help me with discerning. Not everyone understood my desire to take this on, but most believed it was a good idea and meant to be. I was urged to go ahead with the plan.

Knowing there were many supportive and generous people at my church, who urged me on, I decided to hold a birthday celebration in the fall of 2004 for my 68th birthday at my church, and to ask those who attended to give me a donation to help me on my way. This happened with considerable generosity, and I was overwhelmed by people's kindness and willingness to support my endeavor.

Things go awry

I stood throughout the birthday party, and found my right leg growing increasingly painful. At the time I sort of dismissed the pain, thinking it was probably just that I was tired and had stood for too long, but when I had a chance to rest at home, the pain increased rather than decreasing. By the next morning I could not stand, my right knee felt on fire, and I had a raging fever. I had had a total knee replacement about 6 weeks before, and feared something had happened with that. I called my surgeon's office and was told he had no appointments left for that day. I argued that this was an emergency, and was finally advised that I could come and sit in the office, if I wished, and perhaps they could fit me in at some point. I arranged for a friend to take me to the doctor's office, as I could no longer walk or drive. There we waited impatiently for several hours before finally getting to see the doctor. I was in a wheel chair and needed assistance to do anything at all.

Once the surgeon did see me, I was immediately admitted to the hospital and underwent emergency surgery to remove the knee replacement. The cavity was then packed with antibiotics. The next day the cavity was repacked, this time with cement, as

well as more antibiotics. After eleven days in the hospital, I went home with instructions on how to give myself a constant IV with more strong antibiotics, for about six weeks. I had a severe case of staph infection and went for four months with no knee. It took those four months to heal enough to have a new knee replacement, and much longer still to be able to walk again. I had some seven surgeries over a period of eight months, and many medical struggles from the intense treatment of receiving three powerful antibiotics at once. Then I had to learn to walk again!

I lay in bed in the hospital and wept bitter tears over my dashed hopes to go to Africa to teach. I felt responsible for all the money that friends had provided for my support. When I was able, I wrote them and said I would return their money, if they wished, or put it in an escrow account, where it might be possible to use as originally planned, perhaps in a year's time. No one asked for a return, but wished me to soon be well enough to continue with my plans.

Now I had to inform the organization in South Africa that I would not be coming. I had already paid fees to them and assumed they would still have a place for me in the future. I did correspond with them from time to time, but just to let them know my progress, and that I was still interested in coming, if it were possible.

In the fall of 2005, I again made arrangements to go to South Africa to teach, planning to arrive in time for the opening of their new academic year in mid-January, 2006. The sponsoring organization asked me to pay a registration fee, and I noted that I had already done so the year before, and refused further payment. That should have alerted me to potential problems, but I overlooked it. I was by this time admittedly a bit worried about being in a remote place with no access to medical assistance, should I require it, but my eagerness to teach in South Africa overcame my anxiety.

Commissioning

On the last Sunday before I was to leave, my pastor, Richard Lawrence, held a commissioning ceremony at the end of the service, for the parish to send me on my way and bless my work. I don't know who selected the hymns for that week, but they were all appropriate to the occasion, such as "Hear I am, Lord," * and all of them made me cry. I wept through most of the service and the commissioning ceremony. It was a very emotional time for me, and there were many mixed emotions, including much humility and anxiety for the unknown that lay ahead. I still cry whenever I sing that hymn.

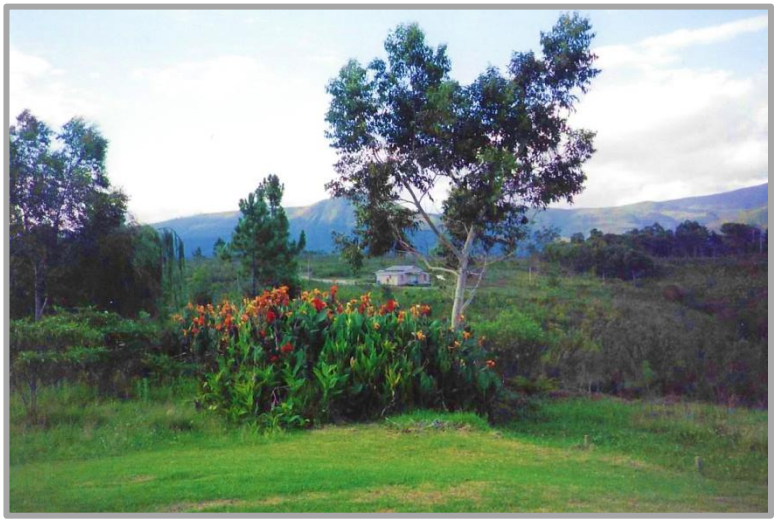
I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in darkness and sin my hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.

I have always seen every work I have done as a kind of mission, whether I was a teacher, a civil rights lawyer, a peace activist, a prisoner rights advocate, a criminal defense attorney, or an environmental activist. Mission has somehow figured into most of my seven different careers.

Finally, on my way

My flight left during a wildly blustery blizzard in January with bitter cold and strong winds whipping the snow. There was a day-long stopover at Heathrow in London before catching a flight to Johannesburg. Arriving in Johannesburg, I was suddenly roasting in mid-summer heat, way overdressed! I was fortunate in finding a travelers' lounge where I could take a shower and change into summer clothing. From Jo-burg I phoned to arrange to be picked up at the airport in George on the Indian Ocean, the nearest airport to the village where I would teach, though still about 100 miles away. My plane was not met, and I waited anxiously at the airport for some time, but finally "Mac" arrived to take me to the headquarters of my sponsoring organization, where I thought I would be living.

As it turned out, the nice living quarters I had been promised the year before were no longer available, as the director had a new girlfriend and they had decided to occupy that cottage themselves. There was no space in the house or at that location. Others stayed in tents on the property, but that did not seem a suitable solution for my needs. Others were young people, college students, who mostly remained only a few days, whereas I was due to be there about 7 months. And although I had once loved to sleep out of doors, I could no longer get down on the ground to sleep, or ever get up again if I did! This meant I would have to find and pay for my own housing.



Once I was able to settle in, I did think I had landed in paradise! The property held gardens rich in masses of colorful tropical blossoms, giant swallowtail butterflies, brightly-colored birds, and stunning views of the surrounding mountains. I was very tired from my trip, but spent leisure time exploring the place. After dinner,

I crashed in bed. I was provided a room in the house for a few days, but told I would need to find another place to live, as new volunteers were coming in and out all the time, and they needed the space. I was grateful to have a bed to sleep in for a few days, and did enjoy my time there, except for food. I am not a strict vegetarian, but do not eat meat or poultry, and that was basically what there was to eat. There were some good fresh vegetables from their garden, but otherwise limited choices as to protein substitutes, such as nuts, cheese, eggs, or yogurt. I did manage, though.

The gardener, Jack, found a venomous snake next day close to the house. It was a very small snake called a "red-lipped herald." One of the volunteers from the UK, Pete, took it to the garden and released it. I remained somewhat wary!

First Visit to the School

I was eager to visit the school and to know what my assignment would be there. When I went to see the principal, Mr. Snyders, I discovered he did not even know I was coming. He told me no one at the school wanted me. I sat in his office and cried, wondering how this could be. How could he not know what I had been through for the past year to get there? How could he not be prepared to receive me and welcome me with open arms and find people eager to take advantage of my services? I was truly devastated and did not know what to do. I sobbed for most of the rest of that day.

Someone back at the house advised me to be patient, telling me that it takes time for these things to work out, for the Africans to get used to the idea, and things would most likely get sorted out. I had difficulty taking this advice, feeling utterly miserable, and I also realized that the organization I had depended on had thus far failed to prepare my way or to see to it that there was indeed a place for me to be useful. From that point on I had to make my own way.

The Village

The village I was planning to be working in was called Kurland Village, not to be confused with the Kurland Polo Grounds, located nearby, which was a very rich, very white

and exclusive playground for those who could afford it and be admitted. Kurland Village, on the other hand, was desperately poor. It had a lumber mill that employed a small portion of the residents of the village, all of whom were "coloreds," I believe. Apparently the mill had once built the village for its employees concrete houses. Some of these may have had electricity and running water, but most had outhouses in back. The lumber mill no longer provided enough work for the town's 1,500 residents.

The village also had a large area of squatter shacks built of scraps of lumber left from the mill. These housed the Xhosa population, who had migrated there from the Eastern Cape. These shacks were made of scraps, probably without nails and all of uneven pieces that did not fit together well, so that there were many chinks, and rain and wind during inclement weather could not be kept out. They were without running water and without even a floor or inside walls. Some did have an electric light bulb hung from the ceiling on a wire coming from outside municipal electric poles, but no other electricity. The floors were just mud, and they generally lacked furniture. In one I was invited to sit on an overturned paint can while the owners all stood around or squatted while talking with me. In another, a creative woman had unfolded and stuck together huge cardboard boxes to create partitions, but most houses were just one wide open space as one big room.

In Africa, most homes in villages like this are shanty towns, built of whatever scrap materials can be scavenged, and do not have kitchens or baths. They cook outside, often on huge oil drums cut in half to hold fuel for roasting meat, and either have an outhouse or many in the shacks may have to go out to the bush to relieve themselves.

Walking around the village during the day, I observed so many idle people, just lying about, with nothing to do. I learned that for those not working at the mill, the nearest work was employment as domestic servants in Plettenburg Bay, about 20 or 25 miles away, but the meager wages they might earn would be eaten up by the cost of transportation there and back. The

residents of the village seemed to lie about and do nothing much but drink all day. I guess they received a small government check that kept them going. Life appeared pretty pointless for most of them. Some raised a few vegetables, and some had a skinny cow or pig that didn't look as if it would produce much food for them.

It was evident throughout my stay that government corruption was rife, whether at the national, province, or municipal level, and it seemed that the needs of most of the people is seldom met. It was tragic to experience after the efforts of Nelson Mandela to establish a new government that invested in the needs and progress of all its people.

Settling in

I was taken to look at a place for rent on a former horse farm located a couple miles from the village. The farm owner, Sue, was of English background, though she was born in Africa, and had all her life lived in various parts of Africa. Her husband, Alan, had renovated a horses' stable at the back of their barn into a two-room cottage, which I did rent from them. The cottage had running water and electricity, but had no heat, which did not seem a problem in hot January. The Webbs seemed to be very kind and pleasant people, and I considered myself lucky. We agreed on the rent terms, and Sue said she would take me to the nearest town, Plettenburg Bay (locally called "Plett"), to shop maybe once a week, if I wished, and also to the library there, which all seemed like a good arrangement.

Note the "kloof" and the mountains in the distance

While there, I had no car, no phone, no computer, and no television. I did not miss some of these things, but in hindsight, I think it was foolish for me not to have had a phone. However, I managed pretty well most

of the time. I found times I could use different computers, and occasionally, if necessary, a phone, and for a couple days at the end of my stay, I did rent a car.

The village and our farm were about 25 miles from the nearest town, in a very rural location. The surrounding area neighboring the Webbs' farm was all farm land, with "bush" below our hill, deep valleys and sort of gulleys or gorges, deep depressions that looked like huge empty bowls in the landscape, called "kloofs." These were geological formations found throughout the area. In the distance along the horizon were the gorgeous Tsitsikamas, a long range of beautiful, mountains, with high, rocky peaks, and dense forests. There were red, orange, and gold-colored exotic flowers growing right near my cottage door.

To me, the most exciting part of the farm's location was that there were no tall buildings or even trees on the hill to obstruct the view, and the sky was visible for 360 degrees. I had never before lived in "big sky" country, and while there, never tired of watching the cloud formations and how their movements constantly changed the face of the mountains in the distance. My greatest pleasure came from the breathtaking view of the stars at night. There was virtually no light pollution at that location, and little air pollution, too. Before going to bed every night, I went out to see the star-spangled sky, and every morning when I got up, I first went out to see the sky. For much of the time I was there, it was still dark in the early morning when I got up, and the stars were still bright. The southern sky is different from our northern sky, so star clusters and constellations and nebulae were mostly all new to me. The planets did appear, of course, and Venus, for a considerable period in the early mornings, was so brilliant and seemed so large, I thought I could reach up and pluck it out of the sky, it seemed so close.

The cottage consisted of one room that was sort of a small kitchen and dining room and living space, and a small bedroom. There was also a "bath"—a toilet, sink, and very low-to-the-floor bath tub that I swear must have been the horses' trough when this was still the stable! I got into it just once, the first night I stayed on the farm. Sue and Alan had gone away for that weekend, and I was alone. I could not get out of the bathtub, as it was very shallow and there were no grab bars or anything else to hold onto to get my feet under me so I could climb out. I suppose it didn't help that I had both knees replaced, and lots of surgery on my right knee and leg, but the main problem seemed to be the shallowness of the "tub," with no hand holds anywhere. I knew I could have called forever and no one

would have heard me or come to my aid. The farm was large, and the nearest farmhouses were a considerable distance away. I finally managed somehow to get out, but never again got in that tub. I used to stand in a plastic pan in the tub and take a sponge bath. I also occasionally was able to take a shower at the organization's headquarters, where they had a shower in the middle of the yard, walled only by wooden stakes in the ground, basically open to the out of doors. I loved that shower, and thought if anyone wanted to look at a 70-year-old woman, they certainly would not like the sight!

There were two sources of running water in my cottage. The water in the bathtub faucet came from the "dam," which was a muddy holding pond down the hill in the bush. The water was piped up from there, though I'm not sure how, as I was not aware there was any pump. Most farms I saw had such a "dam" for holding water. This water from the faucet in the tub contained dirt and small pebbles and even pieces of weeds and sticks. This was used for bathing and washing clothes. In the kitchen sink another faucet provided drinking water. This was rain water that fell on the corrugated tin roof, was collected in gutters there and sent down the drain pipes to a cistern in the yard below, and hence to the sink. This water was used for drinking and cooking. Water is at a premium all over Africa, even when I was there, as it is never certain when the rains will come again. We were fortunate while I was there that we never went without, but no one could ever be certain, especially with climate change already occurring at the time. It was critically necessary to conserve and not waste water, such a precious commodity, essential to all life.

There was a two-burner gas plate in my kitchen, and a tiny fridge that did not hold much or ever get very cold. But I was able to prepare my meals, eating lots of uncooked vegetables and fruits and some cooked fish. Whole grain breads and cereals, cheese, eggs, nuts, and yogurt completed my diet. Tropical fruits were plentiful, and I found myself eating a small pineapple every week. Avocados cost about 25cents a piece, and I loved them and thought it a waste of money not to eat one every single day! That was my lunch I carried daily in my backpack.

The road to the village was a dirt road, with hard round rocks imbedded in it that made walking a bit difficult. When it rained, the dirt turned to mud, of course. It was impossible to avoid the mud, as few roads were paved, even in the village. I had no

transportation, but was happy to walk from the farm to the village and back. Sue said I could not walk, and she was quite adamant about it. I soon came to see what was probably her reason, that no white people ever walked, only black Africans. Only white people had cars. I always walked, though any cars that passed me invariably stopped to offer me a "lift," which I always refused. They finally got used to that, but continued to watch me, to see if I was all right, believing, I suppose, that I might be attacked at any moment!

School

I returned to the school with much trepidation on the first day of the new semester, not knowing what to expect. The principal, Mr. Snyders, told me that he had persuaded his wife, a new 6th grade teacher, to allow me to teach English in her classroom. I then attended a meeting of all the faculty, spoken entirely in Afrikaans, which I did not understand, and at the end Mr. Snyders asked in English who would like to have me work with them. When no one responded, and there was a painful silence, one woman spoke up in English and made a very strange statement: "I would accommodate Miss Eastman, **but** she should realize I speak Cape English and if I sent a child to the store to buy fish and the child came back and said there was no fish, I would send him again to buy sardines." I was astonished at this statement that was delivered with vehemence and obvious discomfort. I said that I did not expect anyone to "accommodate" me, but that I was there to help out in any way I could, and that I hoped to make things easier or better for anyone who needed help.

Now the faculty dispersed to an outdoor courtyard for an assembly with all the students. No one said a word to me. I sort of tagged along, not knowing what was happening next. What came next was a gathering of all the classes of the school and all the teachers, standing out in the sun on hard concrete for about an hour to listen to Mr. Snyders read the Bible and then lecture, all in Afrikaans. I had studied a little Afrikaans and could carry on an elementary conversation, except this region had a dialect I could not understand or reproduce. I did not understand a word, did not know where Mrs. Snyders or her class were, had no idea where the classroom was located, or what I should be doing. I just stood, rather forlornly, and grew to hate the hard concrete and the hot sun.

Then a lovely young woman approached me and said her name was Evangeline and she taught 1st grade. She helped me find an area with a little bit of shade, and told me how to find the classroom where I was to go. She told me I was supposed to follow the woman who had spoken so strangely in the faculty meeting. It was such a simple act of kindness, and I appreciated it very much, as I was feeling quite lost.

The speaker from the faculty meeting turned out to be Mrs. Snyders, the principal's wife, and the 6th grade teacher I was to work with. Mrs. Snyders was obviously not overjoyed about having to have me working with her. In the time since the faculty meeting, I had struggled to make sense of her strange statement. I thought perhaps that she was embarrassed about her English, and that perhaps she expected I would criticize her

speaking. I went to her and said, "I am ashamed that I do not know any of your languages here. You speak very good English and you must never be afraid that I would judge it, as I cannot speak any of yours."


MRS. SNYDERS

She told me she had been at another school teaching 12th grade, but had a conflict with someone that made her very ill, and she resigned. She had never taught 6th grade. So we would be groping our way together!

I was to teach English to Mrs. Snyder's 6th grade class. That was all, but it was a start. Within a short time, I had also persuaded her to let me teach math. Then a week or two later, she talked the other 6th grade teacher into allowing me to teach English and math in *his* classroom (because she didn't want me hanging out in her classroom). This was a big improvement over the horrible first experience with the principal, but it was not enough. I found myself sitting much of the day in the faculty room, with little to do. I decided to go around the school and introduce myself to each of the teachers and to ask if I could help out, perhaps by taking out an individual or group of children who needed special attention and individual instruction to help them over a situation where they were not progressing. Every single teacher said no.

It was not until much later in the year that I recognized what was most likely the problem. The teaching and learning standards were extremely, in fact, shockingly low. It made me quite angry to see how poor was the teaching quality and how little was actually required of the students. I came to surmise that the teachers at the school knew they were ill-prepared and they felt threatened and embarrassed by the thought of an American teacher observing and perhaps judging them. Although both Mrs. Snyders and the other 6th grade teacher, Mr. Ewarts, often remained in the room while I taught their classes, neither was willing to have me in their classrooms when they taught.

The school building was very strange to me, and rather hard to describe. The offices on the first floor, though small, were not that different from what one would expect in any place, I guess. They had linoleum floors. But the classrooms were all of unfinished concrete, located on upper floors, where the building was not enclosed. The rooms were completed with roof, floors, walls, windows, and doors, but each room led directly to the out of doors, to long corridors and stairways open to the elements. All was of unfinished concrete, leaving a very uncomfortable feel. Nothing was finished with wood or paint or linoleum or carpeting, or anything to make it seem warm and comfortable. There was no heat, and the building as a whole was not enclosed. Toilets for the students were in an outbuilding, (which I was fortunate to never experience), and the one for teachers was on

the first floor with the offices, but, at best, a place to be avoided, as the one toilet was nonfunctional much of the time.

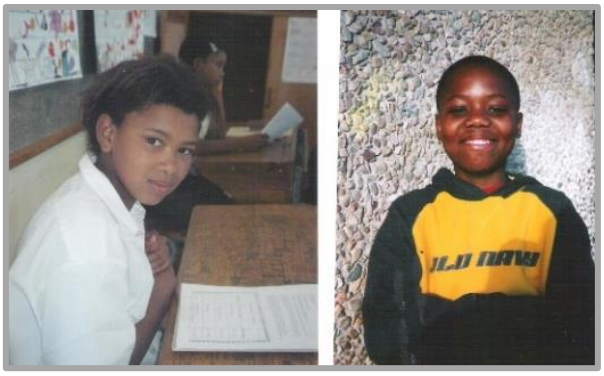
The classrooms had poor lighting. The students sat at what were obviously old, wooden benches with desks attached that were not easy to move, but were crowded together with little space to spare. The desk surfaces were badly scratched and gouged from years of abuse. There was a small teacher's desk, which I never used, but no chair for either Mrs. Snyders or me to sit at any time. There was a blackboard slate on the front wall, and some cardboard decorations above the windows and on the back wall, but there was little that was bright, attractive, or interesting to the room.

The approximately 50 children in the two classes I taught were of two ethnicities. Some were called "coloreds," spoke Afrikaans, and were somewhat lighter skinned, as they had some white ancestors. The others were Xhosas, from the same tribe as Nelson Mandela, and at some point had emigrated to the area from the Eastern Cape. The "coloreds" descended from the original inhabitants of the village, who were most likely employees of the lumber mill. The "coloreds" considered themselves somehow superior to the Xhosas and other tribal groups, such as the Zulus, because under Apartheid they had been a notch higher on the ranking of races. The Xhosas spoke Xhosa, so Afrikaans, the language of instruction at the school, was a second language, and English a third. Nonetheless, most of the Xhosa children worked hard and most of them took school seriously, though it was hard for them in many ways.

You may be wondering how I could teach math (or "maths," as the English call it) without knowing Afrikaans. Frist of all, mathematics is a universal language. Secondly, we had text notebooks for math that explained a lesson in Afrikaans, and I knew the math of the lesson, and could decipher most of the text, as Afrikaans is

kind of a mix between English and German, both of which I knew. I did not find it hard to interpret the text, even though I could not speak it or understand it if spoken.

Some of the children were poorly dressed, sometimes barefoot, and had little to eat during the day, as far as I could tell. Their attention to learning was limited, and some were suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome, which damaged their learning capacity. To me they were loveable, but aren't all children? It seemed to me that the students most eager to learn were the Xhosas, but many of the "coloreds" picked on them, ridiculed and ostracized them, refusing to approve of anything the Xhosa did. I spent much time and effort with little result, trying daily to get all children to see each other as fellow human beings, and to appreciate one another. It seemed that Apartheid and racism had not yet given up. (The large town where we went to shop, Plettenburg Bay, was wealthy and white. On its outskirts were two communities or neighborhoods across a highway from each other. One held "coloreds" and one the black, tribal Africans, mostly Xhosa, but some Somalis and others from other African countries or tribes. These neighborhoods not only never mingled, they never helped one another or shared anything together, except occasional eruptions of violence.)



To my dismay, some children dropped out of school as early as the sixth grade, and even two of the ones I taught just stopped coming to school. I tried to send them messages by other children, or to see them in the village, to talk them into returning, to persuade them how valuable was an education. But they were not convinced, and either returned on a sporadic basis, or not at all. This broke my heart. Some at age 11 had given up on school and learning.

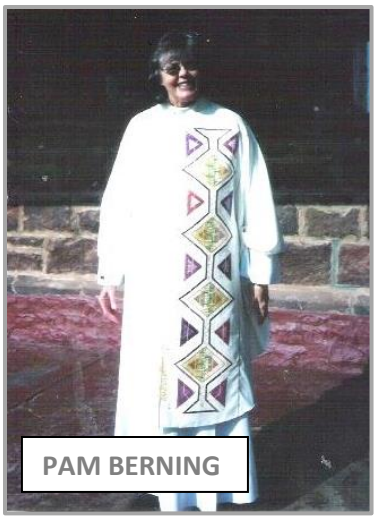
When I saw what the adult life was like for many in the village, I realized these children had no idea life could be any better, and no incentive to invest in an education. To go to high school, they would have to take a bus to Plettenburg Bay, requiring a long round trip, and would have to purchase school uniforms, and some school supplies. I think no child in the village could have dreamed of going to college or of having a profession, though a good third of my students impressed me as being quite capable academically of that kind of future.

Some beautiful examples of my many students

Church and Pam

There was only one actual church building in the village. It was an Anglican (Episcopal) church. I inquired of several people about churches and was told only of this church, and that there were a couple of unlabeled religious gatherings in people's homes. But their meetings or services were all in Afrikaans. For other churches one would have to go to Plettenburg Bay.

It would probably have been possible for me to find a ride with one of the white farm owners to a church in Plettenburg Bay, and in fact several offered to take me, but I preferred to walk to the village, as I wanted to invest myself in the village life and its people. The church was a small, attractive, stone building near the end of the street that led out of town. It indeed looked Anglican. Several people had already suggested I should meet its vicar, the Reverend Pam Berning. I decided to try it out.



I attended this church regularly the entire time I was there, though I did go to churches in Plett a couple of times. The vicar was a fairly young (compared with me), white woman, who was very friendly to me from the outset, eager to get together to discuss the village's needs and to see how we might work together. There were one or two other white parishioners besides myself, and sometimes an old white gentleman played the piano, but most members of the congregation were "coloreds." The service, though a familiar Anglican rite, was conducted mostly in Afrikaans, though Pam's sermon was in English and often the readings were given in both English and Afrikaans. The parishioners sang from hymnals I could usually follow and join in, but they also sang *a capello* in an almost impromptu manner, something not among the scheduled hymns. It was truly so sweet and beautiful, it reminded me often of the Welsh voices, which are also sung in an impromptu manner in their churches, and also *a capello*.

The people generally stared at me with obvious curiosity, were always friendly and kind. Few could communicate with me other than through smiles or hand grasping, but a few did know English. They, too, were always friendly to me, looking out for me on rainy or extremely hot days, worrying that I should have a ride and not have to walk home. Pam sometimes asked John, the school librarian to give me a lift, and I sometimes accepted, if the weather was unbearably hot or a torrential downpour.

The Library at the Kurland Primary School

There was a small room, a closet almost, that had a disorganized quantity of books, many in boxes, and a few in a cupboard, but hardly a sufficient number. No books were catalogued or arranged on the shelves by subject matter or reading level, and I was unclear about whether the children were given an opportunity to borrow books. Without cataloguing, it would be hard to keep track! John, the librarian, was delighted when I volunteered to help with cataloguing, and got the process started.

To increase the number of books available in English, I appealed to my friends at home to send me used paperback books, and to mark them as donations of used books, addressed to me at the school, assuming then there would be no need to pay duty on them. When books began to arrive, I was constantly having to go to the post office to pay fees for the books, and having to argue the case that I should not have to pay such fees. It required letters and in-person appeals at the larger P.O. in Plettenburg Bay, and ultimately, phone calls to the postal headquarters in Cape Town. Sometimes I won the argument that used books donated to a school should not be taxed, but frequently I did not. It was maddening! After several months of appealing to higher and higher authorities, finally writing letters and sending receipts and making phone calls, I gained approval from Capetown, but did not understand that I had to send them all the books I had received before the fees I had paid could be refunded, and no more fees charged. That was the last straw, and it did not happen.

Then it turned out that I could not often help with the cataloguing at the school library, as John was a volunteer and more often than not was not at the school. When he was not there, the library remained locked and I could not do anything about it. Occasionally John came to work in the library on a Saturday or a holiday, and I joined him then, but this was infrequent, and I became so busy with other tasks, the library failed to be much of an opportunity for me to help.

A friend in the US had contributed $500 the year before to the organization in my name, and I had asked at the time what was done with the money, so that I could tell the donor how his money was used to benefit the children I would teach. I was told that the funds had been used to purchase Xhosa books for the school library, yet there was not a single Xhosa book in the jumbled collection. I asked the director of the organization about this, and he said he did not know how the money had been spent, but quite possibly it went for the preschool center. They were unable to give me a satisfactory answer, as their computer had crashed with all their records, and they could not verify how the money had been allotted. I suspected it had gone for beer at their house, as they seemed to party quite regularly!

Over time I grew certain that this organization was something of a fraudulent outfit. The director and manager were probably in their 40's, neither one married or with families, and they lured young American and British college students to come as volunteers for a week or so, charging them exorbitant amounts, I imagine. The idea was presented that the college students could add volunteering in South Africa to their resumes, but very little volunteer work actually went on, as far as I could see. It seemed there were big beer-drinking parties every night, and daytime tourist trips to the Indian Ocean to look for whales, or to the Tsitsikama forest and mountains to do bungee jumping, etc. Very nice, probably, but not as advertised, I believe.

I struggled with what I should do about this. I had more suspicion than fact to go on, and did not feel ready to contact authorities. However, I did express my suspicions and

related my own experiences to local people who were active in the community and responsible for close supervision of the school. They actually gave money to support the school and deserved to know exactly what was going on. This included Sue and Alan and their close neighbors, Anne and Dai.

At later times during my stay, I became aware of two people filing lawsuits against the organization. One was for a physical illness or injury, I believe, but the other was by a young woman I met, who had had a very similar experience to mine. She told me she had made a donation to the organization of $1,000 before coming, which was to be used to provide for the needs of the village, but which she was convinced had fed the organization's managers' beer bellies!

Born in Africa

An organization, called "Born in Africa" was evident throughout the school as providing much for certain youngsters. The organization came from Belgium, and was designed to make up for the Belgian role in Apartheid and the difficult history of Afrikaner race relations over a long period of time. BIA provided school uniforms and nice jackets, book bags and school supplies, and held special classes for the children involved at a Learning Center in the school. I even learned later that they support students going to high school, and even try to help them get into college.

There was much to commend of that effort, but what disturbed me was the selection process for which children would have these privileges. To the best of my knowledge, the chosen children were all "coloreds," and no native black tribal Africans, such as the Xhosa and Zulu, appeared to be included. This probably made sense, at least at some level, since the "coloreds" were most likely the result of racial mixing with the former Belgian colonial powers. But I felt it was very discriminatory, and that many of the children who received these privileges were no more academically worthy of special opportunities than the ones left out.

I guess I also resented having my teaching classes constantly interrupted with students leaving to go to classes at the Learning Center, and seeming to think they were not required to do any work for me or make up the material they lost by being absent from my teaching. It did cause friction. Yet I also recognize that I was only there as a temporary addition, and BIA was a continuous program, and its program goals may have been more important and more lasting than my daily lessons.

Some of the children in the Born in Africa group considered themselves superior, as they were already inclined to do by racial differences, and they sometimes lorded it over their less privileged classmates. The program seemed to be focused on grooming students for university level education, a worthy goal, yet it did seem to me that others who were left out might have benefited even more. In many cases, in my opinion, the chosen ones were not specially qualified, just privileged anyway.

New Friends and Music

One afternoon Sue told me that their neighbors, Anne and Dai, who had just returned from a lengthy trip, had invited Sue and Alan for dinner, and had asked them to bring me. The couple's home was a few farms beyond ours. I liked Anne and Dai immediately, and very much enjoyed the evening. They urged me to come over any time to use their swimming pool. This was a great invitation, as I was used to swimming daily when at home in the US, and felt it was essential to my well-being after so many surgeries. However, the pool turned out to be terribly small, a length of only about three strokes! And it was generally occupied with their grandchildren, with no room to spare! I didn't often take up their offer.

I don't remember why, but Anne at some point asked me if I liked to sing, and I responded that I not only loved singing, but that for many years I had done a great deal of choral singing, with professional orchestras and some of the world's best conductors. She invited me to join a chorus she belonged to that rehearsed once a week in Plettenburg Bay. This chorus was planning to give a concert at Easter, and a renowned conductor would be coming from Johannesburg to direct the concert. I readily agreed to join, as Anne said she would take me to rehearsals.


EVANGELINE

I was pleasantly surprised when we went a night or two later to a church in Plett where we attended the rehearsal. I discovered the quality of music was up to my standards, and that I had sung most of the works planned for the concert. Other chorus members were delighted to have me, as I knew the music well, and in most cases was able to help other singers learn difficult passages. The surprise of the evening, adding to my joy over the experience, was that Evangeline was one of the singers. At last we got to be friends, for there was little opportunity to even see each other at school.

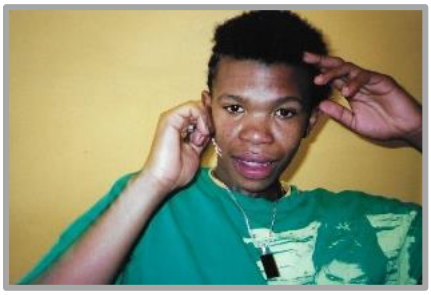
Anne continued to take me to rehearsals over the next several months, and I truly enjoyed the entire experience. I made friends, and always loved singing. When it came to be close to concert time, rehearsals intensified, of course, and were then directed by the renowned conductor from Johannesburg. Sue came to one of our concerts and was very complimentary.

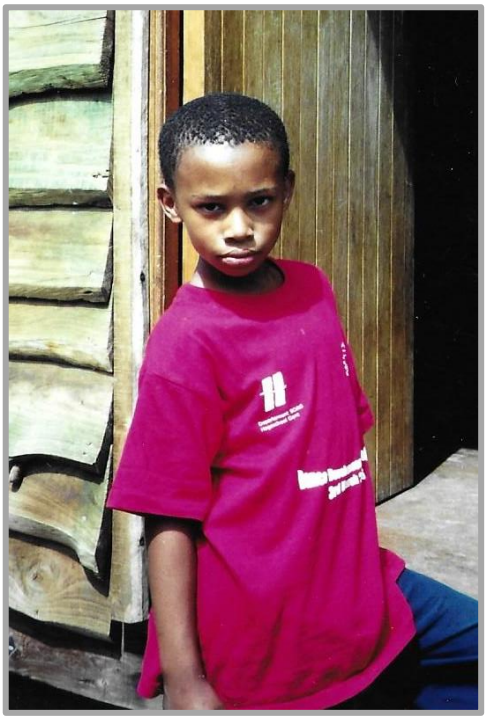
Classical music was so important to my well-being (I have often said I need it as much as I need oxygen), that I brought a portable CD player with me from the US, as well as about a dozen CDs of several classical works that were special favorites I thought would keep me on an even keel throughout my stay. However, I had only just bought the player and had never owned one before. It quit within just one day of usage. I thought it must be a simple matter that could be repaired in Plett the next time we went there, but such a thing was not possible in Plett. There were no electronic shops that would repair such an

item. After a couple months Sue's daughter, Joanna, took the player for me to Knysna, where she also could find no repair shop, but instead purchased a new player for me at some kind of super box store, I believe. That one lasted longer, but also quit after a while. There was a radio with the player, and it continued to work, but the only time classical music was broadcast was in the middle of the night! At the times when I was able to play my CDs, I grew rather tired of them because it was too small a selection, and each was played and replayed too many times. I was quite starved for classical music! I'm sure it might have been better, had I been living in one of the larger cities, but I was not.

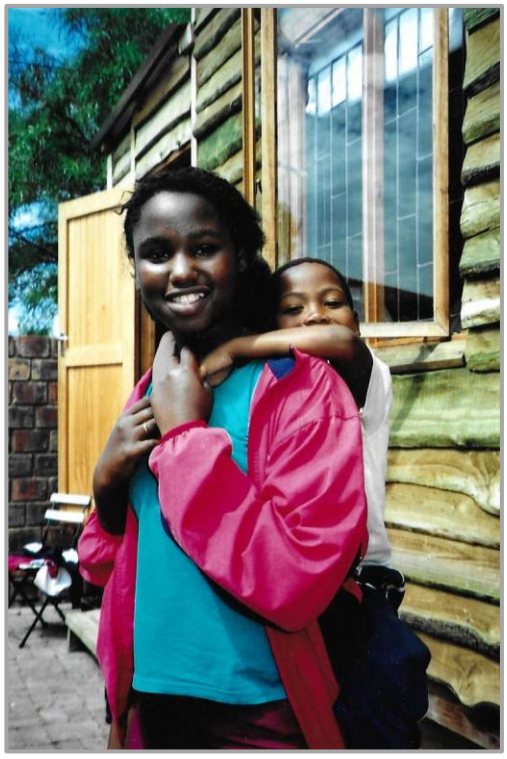
Grace House

I was still only occupied with teaching in the mornings, including time preparing lessons and correcting papers, etc. Once I had tried unsuccessfully all possible avenues at the school to find more work to keep me being useful, I decided to move out into the village to volunteer. I heard that a home for abused and neglected children, called Grace House, could always use volunteers to help, so I walked there one day after my work at the school was done. The director of Grace House was truly delighted to have me, and asked if I could teach English and math to the children there. This I did, but the children mostly had to be worked with one-on-one, rather than as a group or class, which made my limited time unable to accomplish much progress with any of them. The children ranged in ages from about seven to seventeen or eighteen, and all had great needs and limited abilities. All were in considerable need of attention, and I did more mentoring, counseling, and care-taking than academic teaching. Many had emotional and learning difficulties, and also had fetal alcohol and/or drug syndromes and some brain damage. I loved the children and most of them grew to love me, too. I went to Grace House several days a week for several hours at a time, though I was unsure of having contributed much to the children's vast needs during the time I was there. It seemed the routine was different every day, and I had to adapt to the situation at hand. It was quite difficult to build on any lesson I taught one day, as the next I'd be working with a different youngster, or group and different circumstances.





Community Center and Adult English



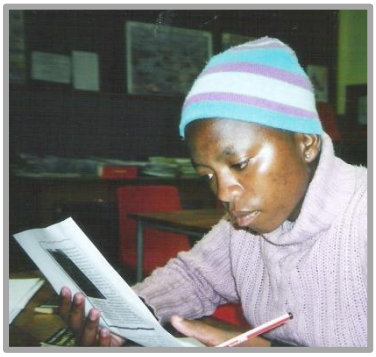
The first day, when I went to meet Mr. Snyders, the principal of the school, on the way there I met Pumla, who was in charge of the Community Center. She expressed an interest in having me teach adults English at evening classes. I of course expressed an interest, and went to see her one day to try to set it all up. We made an arrangement that involved using a classroom in the school for two hours an evening, three nights a week. Pumla agreed to recruit interested adults to attend the classes, and I said I required transportation to and from the village at night. I did not mind walking daytimes to and from the school or to Grace house and home, but I felt for the evening classes, with limited time and energy, and also darkness for the return trip, I needed someone to drive me. Pumla agreed to arrange for that, too.

The classes began with much excitement and enthusiasm on my part. I planned to do some practical work with the adults while working on their English skills, focused on employment. As long as they were working on learning new vocabulary, I wanted to give them a practical use for it. I tried to get them to make a plan for work they would like to do, either working for someone else or as an entrepreneur. I provided a lot of suggestions and some materials with ideas for them. I did lessons on writing resumes and on job applications and interviews.

But things quickly fell apart. Sometimes my ride didn't show up. This happened the first two nights in a row, when the class was supposed to be starting. I was furious and somewhat frantic over thinking no one would keep coming if I never showed up! But at first, most did come back. However, there were many times the adult students did not show up for class, either, or sometimes new people came and others dropped out. There was little consistency, and it was hard to make much progress. Continuing with my original idea of giving them practical learning at the same time I was teaching English, I tried to get them to select a possible future job, then to write a resume and/or at least a

letter explaining what their experience or skills were. I tried to get them to talk with one another in pairs as if they were just looking for or applying for a job, and suggested interview techniques. But no one would talk, or they finally broke into Afrikaans as a fallback. Sometimes they simply failed to understand what I was asking of them.

It seemed the work was too hard for anyone to be interested and involved. There was just not enough time to give the needed individual instruction and assistance, and, as with the children, learning interest and ability were somewhat limited. Many lessons had to be scrapped or repeated, but there was little sense of success for me or anyone else. I tried hard to help students and to accommodate their different needs, but it was frustrating and painful for the most part. The class dwindled to two or three, or only newcomers some nights. After some time, when I was about to give the whole idea up, three teenage girls came and asked if they could join the class. The girls were in school at the high school in Plettenburg Bay and had some basic knowledge of English. Of course I invested my energies and creativity in trying to help them, and ultimately felt more success and appreciation for what I was doing. The girls stayed with me and were dedicated learners until I left for home.



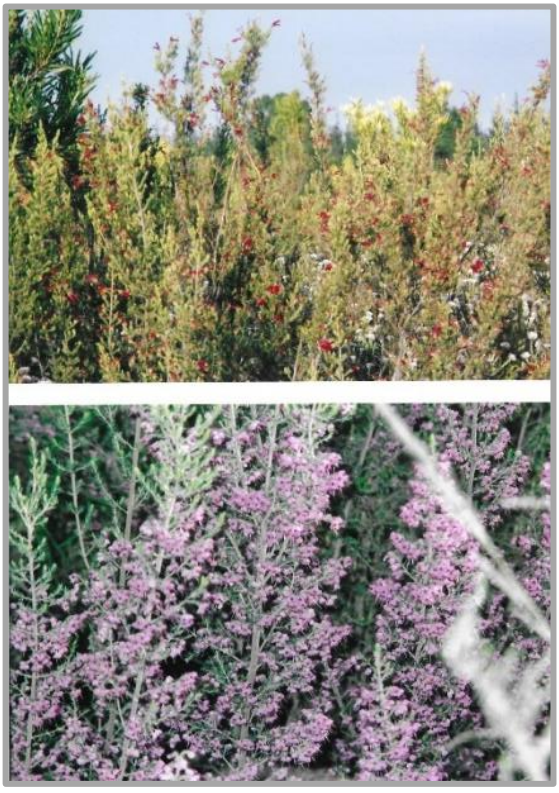
Transportation was always a problem. The driver felt he was not sufficiently compensated, assuming I was a rich American and could afford to pay him more or tip him. He grew very difficult. The arrangement at the school also didn't always work. We would arrive some nights and the school or our classroom would be locked, and we could not find anyone to unlock the space needed. It was all very frustrating and something of a struggle, but the three teens stayed with me, and I did not give up.

Climate

The weather at first was more often than not, extremely hot by midday. I had no trouble walking to the village in the early morning, but by the time I left school and walked to Grace House, or headed for home, it was scorching. I am pretty sensitive to heat, and suffered sometimes, wondering if I would make it. John did take me home in his Land Rover once in a while when it was very hot, and sometimes Sue would also, as she taught some art classes at the school occasionally. By noon or early afternoon, I was always willing to accept a lift.

Once on an extremely hot day, I asked John for a ride, but he did not have the Land Rover with him, but rather had come on a motor cycle. I had a big floppy sun hat, and was wearing a tight skirt, but I really needed the ride, even though I looked rather ridiculous. I took the ride gladly, seated on the back of the motorcycle. Anyone who saw us, and especially the school kids, thought this was the best entertainment they had ever experienced. John insisted on getting a picture, and the vice-principal, Benjamin Louw, complied with his request, so it was preserved for eternity!

Many Americans seemed to think that all of Africa was extremely hot. The region near the equator is of course perpetually hot, but Africa is a big continent, and much of it undergoes seasonal changes, just as we do. South Africa is at the southern tip of the continent, and closer to the south pole than to the equator. In the time I was living there, the weather changed from very hot to quite cold. By the time I left, the temperatures were below freezing some mornings. This was a hard time for the children and for me. There was no heat in the school, or in my cottage.



My cottage was situated on a hill, with few trees or buildings anywhere near to protect from the winds that swept fiercely at times. The rain similarly came hard and strong at times, often in combination with the wind. My door was still a stable door, and it was divided in two, with a good bit of space between the top and bottom halves, and all around the door frame. It showed daylight all around, but that meant also wind and cold were not kept out. The wind whipped about and even came up through the drains. I ended up using wash cloths and rags to stuff into the drains and around the door to try to reduce the amount of cold air coming in. Toward the end of my stay, ton brought me a small electric heater, which was good for taking the chill off at first, but the cold grew so intense that the

heater did little after a time. Then there was a perpetual problem of no electricity. The power went out almost every day, especially in cold weather, and was often out for hours at a time. The electric heater could not be used without power, and then it ultimately died!

In school, both teachers and pupils sat wearing woolen hats, mittens, and whatever winter jackets and coats they possessed. There were no space heaters there. Some of the children just didn't come to school, because coming and going and being there all involved too much discomfort. As far as I knew, they had no heat in their homes, either, and at school there were no hot meals for them, or any meals, for that matter.

One excerpt from my journal describes how I dressed on one occasion, after I had been shopping in town: "When I first arrived, I put all the clothes I had just bought over the clothes I already was wearing, instead of changing them. I wore my knitted cap, gloves, and winter coat, plus 2 pairs of socks, 2 pairs of slacks, and 2 sweaters over a turtle neck, and I was still very cold. I hated to take any of these clothes off in order to go to bed!"

The climate of South Africa, particularly near the southern coast, is to some extent controlled by the two oceans that flow on either side of the continent, the Atlantic coming up from the South Pole, and the Indian, running down from the equator.

The Bush

The African "bush" is undeveloped land, where there are usually animal paths used by humans, and all vegetation is wild, frequently beautiful. There was bush right below the Webbs' property, just down the hill from my cottage. Sue often used the path through the bush, but I seldom did. She thought of it as a "short cut" to get to the road I traveled to and from the village, and, although it did connect with the road, I found it to be more difficult walking for me, and it did not seem to me to make the trip any shorter. But it was beautiful: a fairly dense woods, a winding path past the "dam," (where our muddy washing water came from), and masses of lovely wild flowers of multiple varieties and colors. The "dam" was simply a holding pond that saved water from periodic rains until needed for use.

Critters

There were a couple of unusual animals that invaded my cottage from time to time. One was a frequent visitor: a hairy spider with a body the size of a quarter and a leg span of at least six inches. Over the time I was in South Africa I had several of these settling in and occupying my bedroom. They had very hairy white legs, striped with black stripes an inch or more apart. I had been advised when I first arrived that these spiders were harmless,

but one invariably settled on the ceiling right above where my pillow was on my bed! At first this left me a bit disconcerted for going to sleep at night, but in truth, the spiders barely moved overnight, and never came near me. We learned to live together in peace.

The second strange creature was very difficult to label and describe. When I first saw it, I thought it was a snake, because of its large, long body, but actually the body was not reptilian and was wider than a snake's. The body was black, and appeared very smooth, like an amphibian, kind of like a salamander's skin, and it had many tiny red feet! I found that if I went at it gently with a broom, it would curl its body up into a kind of a coil, then I could scoop it up in a dustpan and remove it from the cottage. But without my ever seeing how it got back in, it would appear later as if I had not removed it! A friend who is a marine biologist, working at Woods Hole in Massachusetts, told me it was related to the centipede/millipede family. This was later confirmed by a local man. I cannot seem to remember the African name, though I have read it at least once. It was something like "sholong."

What was most important about both the centipede creature and the spider, was that they were harmless oddities, and I got used to them.

Sue complained that bush pigs dug up her garden at night when we were all asleep. It made her understandably furious, but I never saw the bush pigs. Later, in other parts of southern Africa, I saw many warthogs and thought them rather nasty creatures to steer clear of.

Sue and Alan had a number of pets—about four dogs, and at least three cats. One of the cats frequently landed on my bed when I was asleep in the middle of the night, leaping through my open window that had no screen. I did not mind, though it startled me awake, but I usually enjoyed the company, very much missing my own cat left behind in Baltimore. After I had been there a while, the other two cats also invaded my cottage from time to time, I guess used to me enough by then they weren't afraid to also jump through the window at night.

At first the dogs had been very noisy barkers, and a bit threatening, before they knew me. I realized they were good watch dogs. But once they knew me, they often visited whenever my door was open, usually hoping for a handout of some sort, and usually getting one. It was company!

Baboons were plentiful in the country, and when I was staying at the organization headquarters, the house where I lived the first few days before moving to the farm, baboons came daily and even several times a day to help themselves to anything left out on the kitchen counters. (The kitchen door was always open.) One of the guys took a rifle and shot at them, not to kill, but just to frighten them away as they scrambled down the hill. Baboons were very aggressive, and I saw one leap up on a man's back once to try to steal a sandwich he was eating. Large groups of baboons were often seen on the highway when we were driving to Plett.

Vervet monkeys inhabited some of the places I visited, and there was supposedly a leopard living near Nature's Valley, where we went quite often, but I never saw it.

I sometimes heard a strange noise in the early mornings I could not place, and asked a couple of people what the noise was. Hard to describe, it sounded to me sort of like a clown slide whistle. The only thing anyone could suggest was that the sound probably came from howler monkeys at the nearby primate preserve.

The primate preserve, called Monkeyland, and an aviary, called Bird Park, were located at the edge of the village. They were big tourist attractions, but no tourists ever came into the village, to my knowledge. One of the women from the UK had tried to form a women's group to introduce craft making, hoping to help the local women start some home industry for selling crafts to tourists. This sounded to me like a very good idea for getting self-employment and income into the village, but it was apparently not very successful. It reminded me of what Eleanor Roosevelt had tried at Valkill Cottage during the depression era, when she promoted cottage industries among women in the US.

A Failed Attempt

I had noticed that the children had nothing to do on Saturdays, and thought perhaps I could provide an activity for them Saturday mornings. No activity was provided in the village. There was no playground even, except one for the nursery child care center for toddlers and infants, although I later discovered there was a soccer field on the edge of town. I was unclear about who was allowed to use the soccer field.

I decided to see if I could attract some of the children to a reading aloud hour that would be possible for maybe the pupils in grades 4 through 6 or 7. I asked Pumla for help and advice. It seemed there was nothing else happening on Saturday mornings, and she said there was a tent we could use, but then said it would be very hot inside. There also was an unused space next to the Community Center office that was the Town Hall, but she would have to clear that with the village supervisor, if we wished to use that space. It would depend on whether the space, which included a large room and a stage, was available and not in use, and it would require that we clean the space before and after use.

Pumla was able to reserve the space for me for the next two Saturdays, so I asked what cleaning supplies I would need to provide and what other requirements there were. I then made flyers about the plan that we distributed to all the classes from 4th to 6th grades. I talked up the Saturday morning gathering to both sixth grades, and I chose one of the paperback books a friend had sent for the library, that I thought would be exciting and entertaining for the intended age group, and not too difficult for them to understand.

Saturday morning arrived, and I went early to the space with a pail and a mop and some kind of cleaning fluid, and began to clean. The place appeared to not be used that frequently, and was obviously not cleaned, either. But I was happy and looking forward to trying out reading to a group of children, talking about what they understood, and then perhaps persuading some of them to act out the story on the stage.

Two children, both from my class, showed up. I asked if they knew if anyone else was coming, but they didn't know. We waited a while, and then I began to read. Another child I did not know then appeared, but did not sit down, but rather began to be quite disruptive, running about on the stage, peeking around the curtain, then getting into things backstage that were not for us to be disturbing. I was totally unsuccessful in getting this child to come sit down with us, and to behave. Soon one or two others I did not know came and began to chase one another about the stage and behind the curtains. It was a very disruptive situation, and made it impossible to continue reading. The two who had come to listen to my reading got up and joined the others, apparently bored with what little entertainment I was providing. I finally said the session was over and we had to clean up and close the place, which was normally locked. I don't remember how I got the group of wild youngsters, who were delighting in chasing one another about, to stop their frolicking and to get out the door so I could lock up. I tried to put things back the way they were when I arrived, and to clean any mess I thought we had created, then finally was able to lock the door and head for home.

I was very discouraged, but had already reserved the space for the following Saturday, so tried once again to interest children from several grades. I wondered if I should try the younger ones, who might have been more willing to be read to, but figured they would not have had enough English instruction to be able to understand the book I would read to them.

The following Saturday, after further attempts at recruiting, I went with much misgiving to try again. This time not a single person showed up. I was pretty disappointed, but had to recognize that I just wasn't offering what the children wanted. They probably did not want to sit still and listen, having too much of that all week in school. They wanted to be up and active, but I was in no shape or capable to do rough games and sports, and I had no equipment for them to use, or instruments for teaching music or dancing. Considering all else I was trying to do, it was probably best for me to just give this up, as it was not a wise use of my time or energy, but a disappointment, nonetheless.

Computers

The only way I had of communicating with people back in the States, and my only real access to news, or even the best way to produce teaching materials, all depended on my being able to use a computer for email, Internet, and word processing. Someone at home had loaned me an old laptop, but it turned out not to be useful, as first I did not have a proper cable for connecting it, and then the disks I had to write on could not be read by anyone's computer that I used for printing purposes.

I asked for permission to be able to use a computer at school, but for a long time there were none that were connected and working. I then asked if I could use one at the organization headquarters, where I had stayed in the beginning. I was told I could use one, if it was not needed and already in use, but I would have to pay for the privilege, for

whatever time I was on the computer. This I did about once a week, but so often had many difficulties. I guess everywhere technology has its frustrating glitches, but there and then they were many and so maddening! Unexpectedly the power would go out, and often everything one had been working on was lost and had to be redone, when and if the power resumed. Sometimes power outages were warned ahead of time, but most often they just happened with no warning, and usually lasted for hours.

My Internet provider in the US was extremely unreliable also. At one point I lost all my email contacts. That day I thought I might lose my mind, too! I struggled to recover about half of them, by going through my sent file, one item at a time, and copying down email addresses. I thought that would take forever, and when it was done, it was still only half the total list I had lost. Then some email messages I thought I had sent, somehow never left the "out" box, and had to be resent. I seldom had time to look at news from the New York Times website, which was probably just as well, as the news was often too disturbing for me to want to know.

Often when I went to the organization headquarters to work, I would not know ahead of time if I would be able to use a computer, and I often had to wait until someone else got off. The wait was partially taken up by my having my occasional shower. There was a wonderful shower in the garden, with a huge shower head the size of a dinner plate, and the garden all around, with a ceiling open to the sky. I loved that shower, and the rest of the time I had only a sponge bath and washed my hair in the kitchen sink.

But I also wasted much time waiting for a free computer, or for a printer, and sometimes arrived when nothing was working.

Eventually, after several months, there were times when I could use a computer at school. Alan also allowed me to use his computer occasionally, but it also had problems. Every piece of technology was at the mercy of the electric grid, which was totally unreliable, and one could work for hours and have the work lost. There also was no printer at Alan's so it was only good for sending email.

The Ocean

The Indian Ocean was close by, though we could not see it from the farm or from the village, and perhaps the children in my school had never seen it, I don't know. A lovely place called Nature's Valley was less than 10 miles away, and I went occasionally, if someone invited me to go by car. Sometimes Sue and a friend of hers would take me for an afternoon outing, or someone at the headquarters of the volunteer organization, or someone at school, would organize a group to go to the beach together. There was a golden sand beach as far as one could see, surrounded by rock outcroppings and interesting land formations. There was reported to be a dangerous undertow, and there was a big surf. Sue and others loved to go to jump in the surf for hours on end, but I was afraid of being knocked down, as the breakers were huge, and I was so small and not very steady on my

feet. I enjoyed walking close to shore or on the beach, or just sitting on the sand and watching the beauty around me.

Plettenburg Bay was right on the Indian Ocean and the ocean was visible from many parts of town, including the church where our chorus rehearsed at night, and other places I visited frequently. John, the librarian, had a house on a high cliff that overlooked the ocean, with a fantastic view. One day I was working at Grace House when he came looking for me to tell me there were dolphins to be seen along the coast, and he invited me to come to his house to see them. I thought they would never still be there by the time we got to the ocean, and he took a long time leaving the village, because he stopped for every boy and girl he met in the village and told them to run home to ask their mothers for permission to come along. The Land Rover was full, and we finally headed for John's house, maybe a 25-minute drive away, near Plett. To my astonishment, not only were there still dolphins visible, but there seemed to be an unending line of them along the coast as far as the eye could see. It was an amazing and thrilling sight!

There were several places with cliffs near the ocean where one could watch for whales that came right up close to the shore. Apparently the ocean was not very far from the farm, either, if one followed the dirt road we were on in the opposite direction from the village. I walked the road several miles more than once, to investigate what the region held beyond our farm. The road had many interesting sights, and wound through quite a lovely dense woods, but there was no actual access to the sea, as after a few miles, all was fenced or walled off and private.

Fish

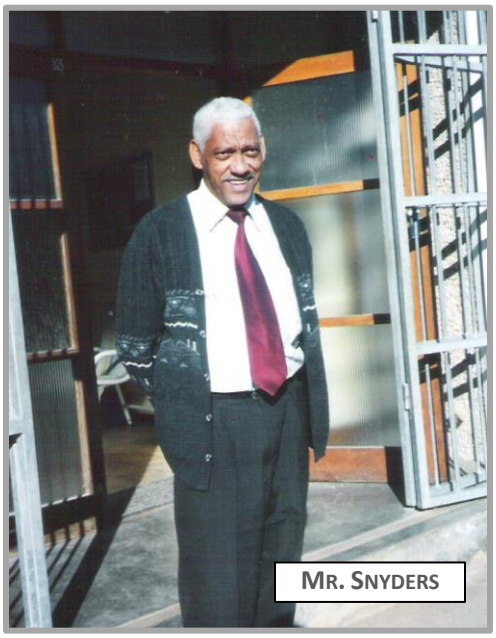
Although I did not eat meat or poultry, I did (and still do) eat fish and sea food. It was surprisingly hard to buy fish unless one went to a select and very expensive fish market at the ocean in Plett. Sue seldom drove there when she took me to town to shop, but once or twice, she did go, and I bought fish to take home and cook. The varieties of fish were different from the ones we are accustomed to in the US, and most seemed to be something I had never tasted or cooked before. I tried Klipspringer and Hake and found I liked them, but most often had to buy frozen at the super markets.

Alan went fishing at Nautre's Valley often, when he had a free afternoon, but almost always came back empty-handed, and complained that there were no fish left in the sea! He believed the commercial fishing industry was responsible for over-fishing, and all the best fish, and all of the best produce, for that matter, were shipped out to Europe and America. He probably was right about that.

But once Alan did bring home a large fish called a Kabeljou (shortened to "Kob"). We then had a brai! A brai was usually a big meat feast, cooked over an outdoor fire, but this one was grilled Kob, and had to be one of the best tastes of fish I have ever had! Alan and Sue invited me and other neighbors and friends, and we certainly did have a feast. Later, when their son, Phillip was visiting, he actually caught two Kob in one day, and we had another brai. It was such a treat! From then on I asked frequently if there were any more Kob in the sea, but no more appeared while I was still there.

The few times I ate out in a restaurant, I invariably ordered and really enjoyed fish. It seemed to be the specialty of the area, as it should be. I once took Sue and Alan to dinner at a good seafood restaurant right by the sea, where we watched whales breaching and fluking very close to the shore, a fairly common sight.

Kobe Snyders


MR. SNYDERS

Gradually, the principal, Mr. Snyders, and I became friends with considerable mutual respect. It did take time, but as we experienced one another more and more, I found him to be a fine gentleman struggling with a very difficult situation, and he grew to trust me and often asked my advice in dealing with some problem. We even reached a first name basis before the end of my stay.

I complained to him about the low standards for teachers and for students. He agreed and understood, but felt he had to work with what he had, and few teachers were comfortable with trying new things. He was attempting to introduce new teaching methods and approaches to them, but it was slow work, and required much patience.

I also became friends with the assistant principal, Benjamin Louw. Benjamin was still working on a graduate degree in education, which kept him very busy when school was out. At the school, he was responsible for teaching math at the 8th grade level, and perhaps some other subjects I don't remember, and for maintaining the academic and other records of the school.

Grades

The students I taught math to received their math grades form Mrs. Snyders and Mr. Ewart. I was not asked to give grades. I looked at Mrs. Snyders' grades and could not understand them. 2/3 of the class received 4's (the highest grade), but few of them achieved close to average, in my estimation. I asked how these grades were arrived at, and learned that every teacher keeps a portfolio of the child's work for the year. The grades are not averaged, but rather the poorest grades are thrown out, and only the best grade is given as the course grade for the year. Each time a new paper, a test or homework assignment is added to the portfolio, if it is a better grade than what is already in the folder, the other grades and papers are thrown out.

I asked Mr. Louw and Mr. Snyders how they could support such a system, which in no way accurately evaluated the students or the accomplishments of the teachers. Instead of defending this system, they told me something even more shocking about the grading system. It seems they have standardized tests for math that are for every school in the Western Cape and come from Cape Town, where the system is administered. Mr. Snyders says the system never takes input from teachers or principals from the schools and is "just a blue light on the computer screen." The standardized math test results for 6th grades in the previous year were appalling: not a single 6th grader was able to achieve a 50% grade, and something like only 17% of them (the 6th graders, that is) could even pass the 3rd grade test.

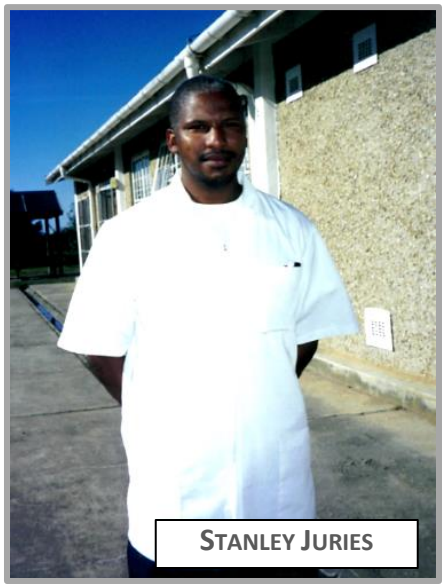
With some pride, I was informed that the grades for literacy were somewhat better, 40% of the students in the school were able to achieve a grade of 50% or higher! I suppose this was literacy in Afrikaans, but nothing to brag about, in my opinion.

Corporal punishment

One day I was shocked and horrified to be present in Mr. Ewart's classroom when the teacher took a thick stick and struck a disruptive student with it. I went directly to the principal and vehemently insisted he must see to it that no teacher used corporal punishment for disciplining a student. Not only was it morally reprehensible, but counterproductive, building resentment in the child and teaching that violence was the way to settle conflicts and disagreements. Mr. Snyders understood, but said that too many staff members were simply trying to discipline their students the same way they had been treated as children, and getting them to change was truly difficult. I was horrified. This is how violence perpetuates violence.

Sue also said she thought the children could only understand physical discipline, and nothing else would work. Sue had done many good things for the people in the village, but I began to see that she actually thought of them as inferior and not teachable. She made many remarks that indicated she had little respect for villagers, whether the "coloreds" or the Xhosas.

A Mishap, and Stanley


STANLEY JURIES

One afternoon, on my way walking through the village to go home, I came upon a huge sanitation Mack truck. It was backing up from the street I was about to cross, (one of the few paved streets in the village), so I started across, then suddenly realized the truck's driver had reversed direction and was bearing down on me at tremendous speed. I am sure the driver, sitting high up in the cab of the truck, never saw me, a very short person in the road in front of him. I really thought I was a goner! There didn't seem to be any chance I could get out of the way of the truck, but I scrambled backwards to the edge of the road, where I fell over backwards to a muddy wooded area. The truck remained on paved road, turned on its way out of the area, and probably never knew what a close escape I had had. A group of people now stood around me where I was lying on the ground, and was somewhat amazed that I was still alive. I could not get up. It was impossible for me to move so that I could get my legs under me. A young black man approached me and attempted to assist me. He finally succeeded in getting me to my feet, but I could not stand or walk with any weight on my feet. The young man introduced himself as Stanley, and said he would help to support me if I thought I could manage to walk to the village clinic, which was very near.

Stanley somehow managed to move me gently, one painful step at a time, to the clinic, which was, fortunately indeed, very near to where I had fallen. I then learned that Stanley was a paramedic at the clinic. It was the beginning of a very good friendship. I frequently met Stanley in the village as we were each headed to our various activities and responsibilities, and I also ran across him occasionally in Plett.

Stanley asked a nurse to come and take care of me. She was very kind, but had limited facilities for addressing my problem, which she suspected was a fracture of some kind. She said I would have to go to Plettenburg Bay to a doctor, and to have x-rays to determine and treat what was wrong. The nurse gave me some aspirin and a liniment for pain. Neither did a whole lot to ease my discomfort or to make me capable of standing unaided.

It was obvious I could not walk home. The nurse first tried to call Sue to ask if she would come and get me, but Sue did not answer. She did not have a cell phone, and was apparently not at home. So the nurse left the clinic and drove me back to the farm and installed me in my cottage, promising to contact Sue, which she must have done quite soon, as Sue came shortly to see me to see what she could do for me.

Sue was really very good to me. She brought me a walking stick she had used when she had a sprained ankle, and, as she was not much taller than I, the stick was perfect for me. It was a broken tree branch, with a crook in it, that served more as a crutch than just a

walking stick or cane. (I don't think I learned, but do believe it had probably been found and fashioned for use by Alan, who was very clever.) The stick served to give me a little safe mobility so I could limp painfully from bed to bathroom and back without assistance. Then Sue brought me supper, and lastly, perhaps best of all, she brought me books from her own library.

Sue called the director of the organization headquarters and insisted he must take me to Plettenburg Bay the next day for a doctor and x-rays. So he made an appointment for me and somehow managed to get me into his truck (there was always a milk crate for me to step on, but this time had to be a bigger task). The doctor could not determine the problem without x-rays, so we then had to go to a place that only did x-rays. When they were completed, we had to return to the doctor's office to get a diagnosis and treatment plan. The x-rays showed I had a cracked pelvis. Apparently there is not much one can do to repair a cracked pelvis, except stay off your feet and wait! I was given more aspirin for pain, but I don't recall any prescriptions.

I was not able to work for the next three weeks, but it was not so bad. In nice weather I was able to sit outside in the sun and read. In bad weather I was able to sit inside and read. I was still in a lot of pain, and I sometimes thought it would never go away, but eventually it did. I was able to get around with the stick fashioned into a crutch, and I truly enjoyed the time reading. Sue supplied me with dozens of good books: South African authors I had never known or read, and books I had not read before by American and British authors I knew well. And she also brought me groceries, so I got by ok. The dogs and cats kept me company, delighted to have someone around during the day.

Sue had notified all the people who depended on my volunteer efforts, so that my responsibilities were temporarily put on hold. During my three-week recuperation, Pam came to visit, and the school children sent me sweet home-made cards and notes, saying they missed me and hoped I'd be well soon.

After three weeks, I returned to the doctor and had more x-rays, which showed good healing underway. I was permitted to return to work, but not for distance walking or standing. Either Alan or one of the neighbors who went past the village mornings, would drive me to the school, or at least to the edge of the village. A chair was found so that I could sit while I taught. Other modifications were made to accommodate my disability until I was further healed, which took at least another three weeks. It seemed more like an eternity!

A Difficult Time

There came a time when I went through a period of discouragement and sadness to the point of depression. I can't say exactly what brought this on, as I believe there were many causes. Chief among them, perhaps, was a sense of loneliness. I had made a number of acquaintances, but no close friends with whom I felt I could talk openly of my feelings. Pam might have served that purpose, but she did not live in Kurland Village; she lived in

Plett, and she had another parish to look after in another small village some distance away, so that she seemed always to have very limited time, and we never had the opportunity to become really intimate friends.

Sue turned rather suddenly from an ally into a severe critic and hostile adversary. This may have been the hardest for me, and I didn't handle it very well. I should have tried to ask and understand exactly what was wrong. For a long time, I was baffled, and also unsure how to treat her, as she seemed to present a mercurial personality that was warm and friendly one moment and exhibited impatience and hostility the next. I felt I had to "handle her with kid gloves," as the saying goes. I probably should have sat down with her and asked what was wrong and whether I had somehow offended and angered her, but I lacked the nerve; it never seemed to be exactly the "right time." Sue had also come to believe I was a useless, stupid American. She was absolutely convinced of this, and no longer had any patience for me. This hurt me a lot right up until the time I left.

Going for some time (somewhat more than the three weeks) without physical exercise, added to my low spirits. I am accustomed to daily exercise, and when I was walking to and from the village every day, I felt good and strong, and it generally kept my spirits up. Then there were the disappointments of the daily failure to teach the children to accept one another, let alone show kindness and love for one another. This was more painful than the feeling of academic failure, though I seldom had a sense of real success teaching at any level, at the school, at Grace House, or in the evening with adults or teens. The failure of the Saturday plans did not help. Perhaps the weather also played a part, as life became more difficult when it grew cold and I had no heat at home or at school.

I think, too, the constant frustrations of trying unsuccessfully much of the time to communicate with friends and family at home, due primarily to computer failures that were a daily problem, also contributed to my feelings of loneliness. There were times when Sue would not take me to Plett for shopping and other errands, and I had few options and did not like the feeling of being dependent, though indeed I was.

At some point, I was also the victim of a theft for which I felt responsible. I had grown accustomed to not thinking of security. I'm never very security-conscious or afraid, so it was easy to assume I was living with no need of protection for me or my belongings. I had for many months lived in the field of the farm on the crest of a hill, where I had never seen a stranger or any reason to be concerned. So I was foolish. One morning when it was still dark outside, but my windows were open and neither shuttered nor curtained, I opened a drawer where I kept my money belt and took out cash to count, to see if I needed to get more when I was in town that day, as I had promised to give some money to the vice-principal, Mr. Louw, to assist with his post-graduate education. When I finished counting, I put everything back where I kept it.

But when I returned that night, there was an empty money belt. Someone had been watching outside my window in the early morning and had entered probably as soon as I was gone for the day and helped himself. My door was never locked. There were both

South African Rand and American dollars and travelers' checks, which of course the thief could not convert into money, though he did not know that. Still, I could ill afford to lose the amount of cash I did. And I blamed myself, as did Sue. She asked why I didn't put my money in their safe (once again implying my stupidity), but no one had ever mentioned to me that they had a safe, and certainly never invited me to use it. After that, Alan did keep my passport and return flight ticket in the safe for me.

Sue was sure she knew who the thief was, and he was questioned by police, but he denied it and there was no proof, so they let him go. The police took fingerprints, but not very effectively, it seemed, and got no evidence.

Whatever the cause of my low spirits, and most likely it was a combination of all these things, I grew quite despondent at times, and, when alone, shed quite a few tears of self-pity. This was often alleviated by watching the splendor of the night sky, with its vast array of brilliant stars, which never ceased to amaze and comfort me. I also took to talking to the moon (Does that make me a lunatic?), as it was the one certain thing that was going to Baltimore every 24 hours, where it would shine on my loved ones, with or without me!

As time grew closer for me to end my stay, I was feeling such a failure and not feeling satisfaction that I had really accomplished anything by being there. Mr. Snyders told me I had done a lot and made a difference, and Mrs. Snyders told me she had learned from watching my teaching, and that it had made her a better teacher. Somehow I either didn't believe these compliments or they were not enough. I wanted to feel I had accomplished something for the children and set them on a path to education that could lead to a brighter future than any could then contemplate. I just felt there was so much need, and what I had done had barely scratched the surface of need, had not amounted to a drop in the ocean. I longed to feel I had made some lasting difference.

I grieved most over the fact that some children were quitting school, and others seemed to have very little interest in learning. Looking at the village residents, and how their lives went, I understood that there seemed to be no reason for these children to want an education. None had the prospect of succeeding in high school and going on to college, or being trained in a profession where they could have a good job, and might lift themselves, their families, and the community out of poverty. I wondered what I could do to change that, and how could I possibly have a lasting effect on this community and these children I had learned to love.

Somewhere, somehow the idea came to me, that perhaps a scholarship program could be provided for the youth of the village to make it possible for them to go away to school for an education beyond high school. Seeing some do this might be an incentive for younger ones to stay in school and dream of a future that was not beyond their grasp. If I could go home and raise funds for such a project, perhaps it could have the lasting effect I wanted. Once again, I suppose I behaved rashly, as I fell in love with the idea without much practical thinking through the multiple obstacles.

The Birth of an Idea Takes Shape

First I went to Kobe Snyders, the school's principal, and asked him what he thought of the idea. He liked it, of course. Then I discussed it with Pam, and she simply loved the idea and began right away to expand on it. Now that it seemed a possibility, I went to invite others to participate in a small committee that would first of all advise me on the idea and how or whether it might work, and then to be the ones to oversee the project there. Knowing how easily African projects meant to benefit the people could become frauds, I selected persons I trusted would invest their time and efforts for the people of the village for its benefit, and not for theirs. I invited Evangeline, the first grade teacher and singer, with whom I had become friends early on and who knew the children of the village from the time they started out. Then I invited two people who were close to the residents of the village, who could be involved in recruiting scholarship applicants, Pumla from the Community Center, who knew the Khosa community as well as the "coloreds," and Stanley, from the village clinic, who also knew all the village inhabitants through his work. These three and Pam and Kobe became a committee of five.

Kobe, Evangeline, Stanley, Pumla, and Pam

This group I asked to meet with me to discuss the idea, hoping they would volunteer their part in making it happen. We asked Pam to be the Chair, or president, and to take the responsibility of administering the scholarship program. She was excited with the possibilities she could see for the people of the village, and especially the young ones she hoped to nurture in her church. She readily agreed to take on that role. Kobe Snyders agreed to act as Treasurer. Pumla and Stanley, both of whom worked with community members on a daily basis, were asked to be the people who did the outreach to the community to find students to apply for the scholarships, and to help with screening the applicants. Evangeline agreed to act as Secretary for the project.

The new organization chose the name **Kurland Tertiary Education Fund**. In South Africa (and I guess in other countries also), the term "tertiary" refers to education beyond secondary education. The project in South Africa is called "KTEF," not "SAHEF." Since this might not have been a clearly understood name in the U.S., we changed the name here to South Africa Higher Education Fund, or "SAHEF."

I had come to know from my own experience that much fraud existed in Africa and its dealings with the outside world, but these five people I had come to trust. I believed in them, and they in me. We met to draw up a charter, and Pam, Evangeline, and I went to the bank in Plettenburg Bay where I made an initial deposit to open a new bank account for the purpose of holding funds to be used for scholarships. I agreed to go home and raise the funds needed.

Returning to the United States

Once I had been home a few days, I began to think about what I had promised I would do while I was still in South Africa, and I began to feel pretty awful about it. What was I thinking of? To promise I'd raise funds for a scholarship seemed like the height of foolishness! I had done some dumb things before in my life, but this had to top all of them. I hated raising money, and wasn't any good at it. To be honest, I never had raised individual donations from anyone, I had only written and defended in person grant applications to foundations to raise funds for running some of the non-profit organizations and programs I had directed. That work was hard enough, but I could not imagine going to individuals and asking them to donate money, even to what I hoped would be a worthy cause.

I knew that in order to succeed I would have to obtain a 501(c)(3) tax exemption from the federal government. I had done that once before in 1982, when I started a peace institute to train adults in peace activism, and it had taken much effort and patience, and a total of two years to obtain the IRS exemption. I thought by the time I got a new tax exemption for this project, everyone would have forgotten all about my time in South Africa and would have moved on to other concerns.

A friend at my church, Jerome Bird, had taken from my emails all the "reports" I had periodically sent back from South Africa throughout the time I was there, and had printed them out and provided copies to parishioners who did not have email or were not on my contact list. This meant the church members had been kept informed of my work while I was in South Africa. Jerome had saved all the reports and he gave them to me when I returned. Jerome was eager to see my plan for a scholarship fund succeed, and he suggested two things: 1) he would help me put on a slide program to show the congregation something of the village and school and children and the conditions of poverty, at which time I could narrate and end up by presenting my scholarship fund plans; and 2) he urged me to ask our pastor to take on the scholarship fund as a church project, so as to have the funds donated to the church, thus earning a tax exemption without my having to wait to obtain one. Both ideas were good, and I acted on them. The slide show made people interested, if they hadn't been already, and my pastor eagerly offered to make the project a church-sponsored activity that would indeed take care of the tax exemption.

My church created a separate account for the South Africa Higher Education Fund. Some people assume that the church takes a cut, but that is not true. There is a separate account for my funds, and I keep a record of every cent that is donated. When I am ready to send funds to South Africa, I know exactly how much money is in that account, and, except for keeping a small amount in the account to start the next year's funds, every cent is sent to Africa. In fact, rather than taking anything out for the church, my church donates at least $1,500 a year to the fund from its general budget.

I sent out appeal letters and brochures, and the funds began to pour in! I was amazed, but also could not imagine this would sustain itself for very long. I could not imagine that we could raise enough money to put one student into college, let alone support a student for four or more years and see them actually graduate. Jerome had another suggestion, which was to ask people to pledge for the next five years. A few people did so, but not many. They no doubt wanted to see how this project developed.

This beginning was at the end of 2006. We collected donations throughout 2007, while at the same time, in South Africa, the KTEF committee began to set up its requirements and applications and recruitments for the scholarships. I don't know how many students applied that year for scholarships, but we raised what seemed to me at the time the incredible amount of $16,500! Much of this was one donation from an especially generous donor, who has continued to support the project generously ever since, and has easily accounted for even more than 50% of the funds raised every year. But even the balance that we raised in addition to this incredibly generous gift was still more than I had ever dreamed could happen. I decided to send by electronic transfer $16,000 of that total, and to keep the $500 as a start for the next year's fund raising.

The academic year in South Africa begins in January, and that is when tuition payments are due, so the funds we raise during one year are sent to Africa at the beginning of the next year.

KTEF gave three scholarships that first year! I felt truly humbled, as I hadn't believed it was possible, and I didn't believe I had worked that hard to make it happen. Was it just a fluke? Could it happen again? How long could this go on?

I was the sole operator of this fund-raising project in the United States (When I use the pronoun "we," I guess I'm referring to discussions with my pastor and others, but I made the decisions and my pastor approved). I did try to select a board of directors early on, but that effort fizzled and I gave it up. I had wanted the board to include several African-American members, as I thought it would assure that the project remained focused on serving the African students. I have a number of friends and former associates that I thought I could call on, and asked their recommendations when they declined participation. I have always found this a difficult component of any project I have conducted, and I fully understand the African-Americans who are engaged in such projects and activities are way overstretched and can only do so much.

Occasionally someone has volunteered to help with a mailing or some other need, which has been much appreciated, but for the most part, whatever was done to raise funds, I did it. I decided from the outset that I could not contribute much money to the project, but that I also would not take any money for my time and work, or for the materials and supplies I had to buy and use. This is my donation. Every cent of money donated is sent to support the scholarship program.

To the best of my knowledge, the same is true of the committee in South Africa. They have been donating their time and work, and paying for whatever supplies they need. Thus, all donated funds are going to the scholarships, with one exception. When we electronically wire funds to South Africa, the money goes through several intermediate stages, and each country along the way that transfers the funds takes out their own fees, so the money that arrives in South Africa is not exactly what we send from the US. There are bank fees here, too, but they are paid with church funds, I believe.

The composition of the committee in South Africa has changed over the past twelve years. Kobe Snyders left Kurland after the death of his mother. He moved to Port Elizabeth within the year following my return home. He was replaced as principal of the school by the former vice-principal, my friend Benjamin Louw, who also became a member of the committee in Kobe's place. Stanley Juries also left Kurland, and his position on the committee was replaced by an American teacher working at the Learning Center for Born in Africa, named Michael, whom I also knew during my stay, so the committee is still made up of people familiar to me.

Donors have come largely from my church, but relatives and friends, both local and from several other states have also contributed to making this project a success. There have been donations from people in Massachusetts, New York, Florida, Nevada, and California. One couple that lives on Long Island I have never met. They spent a brief time in Kurland Village a couple years after I was there, and volunteered at Grace House. When they returned home, they did a Google search to see if they could find anything about the village, and somehow this project came to their attention. They called and spoke with my pastor, who gave them my address, and then they inquired of me about the project. I sent them some information that included pictures of the children I had taught, and they recognized children they had seen or known in the village. Since that time they have been loyal donors.

Some donors drop out every year, but new ones learn about the project and take their places, so there is no indication of the project dwindling at present. Rather, it seems to be thriving!

In 2008, we raised just over $16,000 again, but for some reason, we only sent $15,000, and kept back in the account $1,050. I don't remember why, but I believe it was because there was a financial crisis underway, and I began to be afraid that contributions would dwindle, and we would not have sufficient funds to see the scholarship students through their four years or more of professional training. Meanwhile, KTEF kept giving

more scholarships to new students each year. That made me worry, and I did feel an obligation to keep this project going.

In 2009, we only raised $15,470, and sent only $14,000 of it. In 2010, we raised $16,050, and sent $15,000. In 2011, we raised a total of $16,475, and that year a funds transfer of $16,000 was sent to South Africa, something we had not been able to do since the first year. In 2012 we again sent $16,000, and by 2013, it was $17,000! Since then, the totals have been consistent or have grown each year. Subsequent years the amounts sent were: $17,000, then $18,500, $19,500, and $19,500!

The increases in those last couple years were due to a friend of mine deciding to donate $200 a month. She had had to move into senior housing that was no longer conveniently located for her to continue attending the church where she had been a regular member and had been contributing the $200 a month. She decided she wanted to make that amount go to SAHEF instead, as she was no longer attending her church. I later found that she was able to arrange a ride to church and has returned there, but she insisted on continuing her donation to SAHEF.

This year I have had an unexpected new donation that knocked me over! A friend who had not donated, but who knew something about the project, asked me late this spring to set aside time to have lunch with her and her boyfriend, whom I'd met only once. I said I was terribly busy and didn't have much time, as I was doing volunteer teaching pretty much full time. Every couple of weeks she kept urging me to find some time to have lunch with them, as she wanted me to tell her boyfriend about SAHEF. I honestly didn't think anything about it, except perhaps there must be some curiosity on his or her part, or perhaps they were just being polite to show an interest in the project.

We finally scheduled a day and met for a nice lunch. Most of the time we spent talking about travel experiences, as we all love to travel. Finally, my friend asked me to tell something about SAHEF, so I gave a brief history. We then parted and I pretty much forgot about the whole thing, because my life was very much occupied at the time with my teaching and other responsibilities.

A couple weeks later I received an envelope in the mail that was obviously a greeting card. It was addressed to me at the South Africa Higher Education Fund. I looked at the return label, but did not recognize the name. However, the address was the same building as where my former pastor, Dick Lawrence, lives. (You may remember he recommended Tutu's book that inspired my trip to Africa, and so strongly supported the initiation of the project.) I thought, he must have talked with a neighbor about the project and someone as a result was sending me a check for $25 or $50, which most of the donations are. I opened the envelope and was completely uncomprehending.

There was indeed a check enclosed, but at first I did not know from whom. I kept counting the zeros, and saying to myself, "There are too many zeros here!" Then I read the words underneath, so there was no mistaking the amount: "ten thousand dollars!" Finally, I read the note, which was hard for me to decipher, and at last realized the surprise donor

was my friend's boyfriend, with whom I'd had lunch and to whom I had briefly explained this project, though I didn't even know his last name to recognize it on the return address label. This means this year's amount going to South Africa will be way higher than anything ever dreamed of!

The students who have been awarded our scholarships are varied, both by gender and ethnicity, but females have outnumbered males. I know we have had some, but not many, tribal Africans, Xhosas and Zulu, but not enough to satisfy me. I think there may have been one white student, but the predominant number have been "coloreds."

In the first year of operation, the scholarships awarded in South Africa only provided tuition costs, but we soon recognized that for most students, it was necessary to provide living costs, as well. These young people came from a very poor, remote village, and the universities they attended were all located in the big cities. Some had distant relatives in nearby villages, and could find homes and support from them. But most had to find living quarters for themselves at the universities or in the cities, and pay for their own food and lodging. This was extremely difficult for many, and the limited finances made adjusting to their academic responsibilities very hard. After the first year, I insisted that in most instances we should offer living expenses in addition to tuition and books and fees. It also became evident that mentoring would be helpful to most students, at least for the adjustment of the first year or two.

Well, what has all this accomplished? We have supported thus far 26 students. I have counted higher numbers, because I counted the number of students each year and included most for four or more years of study, and my figures amounted to student years. Some have continued for four, and some for five years, acquiring professional degrees, and some for only a one-year trade certificate. Their fields have been widely varied. Many have taken degrees in education to become teachers. Other professions included: accounting, international relations, law, psychology, and nursing. The one-year students included cosmetology and tourism.

There have now been a number of graduates, including four just this year. A success story happened this past year, when a student who had had to drop out due to poor grades several years ago, reapplied and was awarded another scholarship. Jason Pieterse succeeded this time, and just graduated with an Education Technology degree from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Other graduates this year included Laurissa Savage, who completed her LLB in Law and Leslie Ann Kamphor, who proudly graduated as an accountant. Amardine Pluim, who already had completed work for a Psychology degree, and decided to go for a Bachelor of Education degree, as well, was awarded both degrees this year.

I am so pleased to see the wide variety of pursuits of these students, and to see that every one has thus far succeeded in completing their studies and earning the certificates or degrees for which they worked. Many students completed some of their courses "with distinction." One or two have also gone on to earn additional scholarships from other

organizations for further study. My hope now is that they somehow act as role models for the children still in school, that rather than dropping out by sixth grade, those children can see there is hope for getting a real education and a meaningful career, if they stay with it.

Although there is some variety in the areas of study from the many students we have supported, nearly all of this year's students are working for degrees in education to become teachers, something very much needed indeed!

Students now enrolled for this academic year receiving KTEF scholarships and their areas of concentration, as well as the amounts of tuition and living costs paid for each include:

JASMINE KOOPMAN – Bachelor of Education at University of the Western Cape - 4TH YR
50,000 Rand tuition
SADIE ROMAN - Bachelor of Education at Nelson Mandela University - 3RD YR
30,110 Rand tuition, plus 2,350 Rand accommodations
SULEIMAN KRIGGA - Technical School in Basic Education - 3rd YR
30,000 Rand tuition plus 30,000 Rand accommodations
LUCHE BARNARDO - Financial Management at Nelson Mandela University
17,350 Rand tuition plus 26,000 Rand for accommodations
CHANDRE PLAATJIES – Bachelor of Education Varsity College - 1st YR
29,500 Rand plus 25,000 Rand for accommodations
SIMONE KRUGER - Bachelor of Education University of the Western Cape -1st YR
31,720 Rand plus 26,500 Rand for accommodations

These young people who have received our scholarships and assistance will unquestionably contribute to strengthening the new nation and to promoting in South Africa a better society.

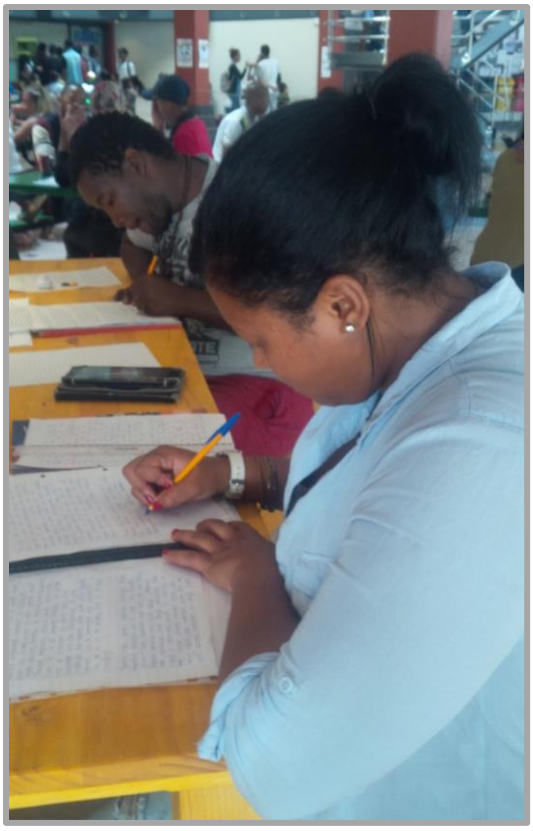
SOME OF OUR WONDERFUL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Laurissa Savage, as she received her law degree in 2018

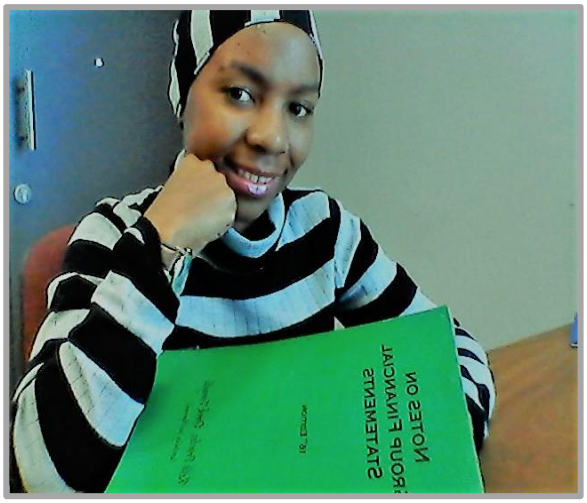
First year student Chandre Plaatjies, who is studying at Varsity College in Port Elizabeth

Bianca Hewitt, a first-year student at Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth, studying to become a teacher

Jason Pieterse, who just
received his degree
in technical education



Sadie Roman, studying to
become a teacher



Leslie Ann Camphor, studying accounting,
has since received her degree
and been hired for her first job
as an accountant

Rochelle Nicole Thais,
as a student teacher practicing at the
same school where Sylvia
taught back in 2006,
the Crags Primary

Genino Davids, studying
Electrical Engineering at
Nelson Mandela University

Current Students
Simone Kruger, Genino Davids, and Sadie Roman

Sylvia Eastman September 9, 2018

KURLAND TERTIARY EDUCATION FUND HISTORY

APRIL 2019

(from Pam Berning, Vicar of the local Anglican Church)

The children of Kurland attend a number of different schools, including Crags Primary, which includes grades 1 through 7, and is located in Kurland Village in The Crags. They may also attend one of several high schools in the region: the Wittedrift Secondary, in Wittedrift, and Plettenberg Bay Secondary, situated in the New Horizon Suburb of Plettenberg Bay, and two or three other schools providing secondary education.

The Crags Primary has 558 children at this moment. Those who go on to secondary school mostly attend the Plett High School, but that is the end of their education. The few who would want to and qualify to continue their education have no funds available for that purpose. The parents are mostly unemployed, and those who are employed do not earn much more than bread line salaries.

Crime, alcohol and drugs are very prevalent in this community, and the children who have no future soon find themselves enveloped in this scenario. The local Anglican Church had a real concern for the youth who wanted to improve themselves, but there were no resources available to them. Rev. Pam Berning put out letters asking for sponsorships, but received no responses.

Rev. Pam Berning, the local priest of the Anglican Church was approached by Sylvia Eastman, an American teacher, who came out to South Africa, and to the Crags Primary School to teach. She, too, saw the need for Tertiary Education for the bright children leaving school. She set up a meeting at the Crags Primary and invited several people to attend: teacher Evangeline Koeber, the headmaster Kobie Snyders, community worker Phumla Bolitina, and health clinic worker Stanley Juries. Together with Pam Berning, they formed the first committee to administer a scholarship fund for the children of Kurland Village. The first committee meeting took place on the 20th of June, 2006, and selected Pam Berning as its Chair. Sylvia promised to go home and raise funds for the scholarship fund, which she has done every year since 2007.

The primary school teachers were asked to encourage students with good grades to consider going to college or university when they leave school. We recruited in all the area high schools, but specified that the scholarships were for students from the Crags, especially those who had attended Crags Primary. We established the standards for acceptance and award of the scholarships, and prepared to select our first recipients in 2008.

After 2008, many scholarship recipients remained receiving support for four or five years until completion of their degrees, but most years we also accepted new students, as our funds increased.

Scholarships Awarded, the Students, and the Degrees They Received

In **2008** we selected three students we awarded scholarships:
Joy Smit, working on Tourism; Sharinda Barnardo, working for a degree in Education;
Daveria Roman, seeking a BA degree in Psychology

In **2010**, Joy completed her Tourism degree, and Shurinda completed her Bachelor of Education. Also in 2010, Simoki was accepted at Stellenbosch University in Political Science, but failed to complete his degree. Stanley Juries was accepted to do a year's Management degree, and Leicester Barnardo was accepted do work on a one-year program of Computer Technology.

In **2011**, two students, Amardine Pluim and Veronique Roman, were accepted for Psychology degrees from Midrand Campus in Port Elizabeth.
Samantha Gwa-Gwa began work on a nursing degree.
Daveria Roman completed her BA in Psychology.

In **2012**, Jessica Barnardo was accepted to work toward a law degree.

In **2013**, Samantha Gwa-Gwa passed her finals for nursing degree requirements.

In **2014**, Jessica Barnardo passed her finals in law and began to do her Articles with a Law Firm in Cape Town. Laurissa Savage was awarded a scholarship to study law.

In **2015**, three new students were awarded scholarships: Rochelle Thys and Jasmine Koopman began working on bachelor degrees in Education; and Leslie Anne Camphor began working toward a Business degree. Amardine Pluim and Veronique Roman completed their degrees in Psychology.

In **2016**, two more students were accepted to work toward Bachelor degrees in Education: Sadie Roman and Bianca Hewitt, both studying at the University of Nelson Mandela Metropolitan, in Port Elizabeth.

In **2017**, Laurissa Savage completed her Law Degree, and is doing her Articles.
Other students continuing with their scholarships and pursuing their degrees: Jasmine Koopman – Education; Leslie Camphor – Business; Sadie Roman - Education.
New scholarships include Suleiman Krigga, for a degree in Business,
and Jason Pieterse, for a Bachelor of Technology Education.

In **2018**, one new student was added: Chandre Plaatjies, working for a degree in Education.

In **2019**, also one new student: Genino Davids is working on a degree in Electrical Engineering.

The scholarship fund is supporting six students at present:
Two are working on Business Management, three on Education Degrees, and one in Electrical Engineering.

This scholarship fund has supported a total of 23 students since its inception, with 6 still having to complete their degrees. One student failed to complete. We are very proud of those who have acquired degrees and now qualify for good-paying jobs. Their lives have improved, and they have contributed their talents to their village and their nation as a whole.