



LET ME TELL YOU
stories of a partnership

20 Years Partnership



Many projects on development cooperation and sustainability outline the big picture, the major design. We want to achieve environmentally conscious behaviour, social responsibility, respectful interaction, resource-saving energy use, preserve biodiversity and improve resource management. The projects of the civil society actors should be based on eye level, equal exchange and common ground. The end result should be future-responsible politics, open administration and justice for all, in short: a better society. These are the noble goals. This is also how we have understood our development cooperation between Aachen and Cape Town in the last 20 years: learning from each other, making sustainability visible in everyday life and showing it with small steps in many projects. Change is possible!

After all these years of our cooperation, we have noticed: the big hit, above all the big success, fails to materialise, many small steps remain invisible and are hardly measurable. Of course, something remains: a planted tree, important diploma theses, yields in gardens, a report on a successful exchange - a few measurable things on the outside. What happens on the inside? What do people who participate in exchanges experience - people who immerse themselves in unknown worlds, get to know other lives and other people? How do they process the impressions of the world-wandering? Do life courses, life plans, attitudes change - and in which way?

In this brochure we want to try to make the changes in the world views of the individuals visible in personal statements, to tell. And only tell. Not to classify, scientifically evaluate, assess, scale or evaluate the effectiveness of measures. Only tell. Narratives can make the personal changes transparent. The spirit of Ubuntu resonates: the awareness that the individual is only part of a greater whole. Even small steps can change people and thus the world!

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Hello . Hallo . Molweni

For 2020 we had planned to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership with a whole lot of events of all kinds. Due to the Covid19 pandemic we had to cancel everything and had to go virtual ways - if possible.

10 years ago, when we celebrated our first partnership-decade, I was asked to give a speech at an official function in Cape Town. It was the opening ceremony of the exhibition "Faces Of A Partnership" with posters of people who shaped the partnership during its first decade. In my speech I raised the question: "What was really important? The number of successful projects? The high number of exchanges? The amount of funding raised?" The answer still counts: "It's us, the people - we made a difference - we learned from each other - we changed each others lives."

As a follow up of the faces-project 10 years ago I came up with the idea of the project "letmetellyou - stories of a partnership". In addition to joint activities and work, official meetings and conversations, there are also seemingly insignificant incidents, spontaneous events or friendships that shape the partnership and make it possible to achieve the partnership goals of "Learning from each other - Acting on an eye to eye level - Sustainable action". In sometimes very personal stories the motivation and enthusiasm of the people involved will come to light.

Uta Göbel-Groß, who together with Ephy Nkunzi had carried out the faces-project, immediately was enthusiastic about it and became my perfect project-partner. Originally we planned the whole project as a virtual one, as a website: www.letmetellyou.de, where we could add stories continuously. Because of the big success of the website we were asked to put the stories in a brochure, complementary to the one the support association of the partnership published in March 2020 about the themes and projects of the partnership.

We selected 20 stories, which - in our opinion - represent the huge variety of encounters and experiences which people, who traveled around the globe within the partnership context, told us. We hope they will motivate and encourage other people who are not yet familiar with the partnership to become involved and sensitise them to development policy themes.

Enjoy the heartfelt, funny, sad, instructive and surprising personal stories!

Norbert Kuntz

My German roots . 2002/2003

This storytelling project has taken me down memory lane, a fond one where I reminisced on my first international flight to Germany in September 2002. At that time, all international flights from South Africa were out of the OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. Today one can travel to many more countries around the globe from Durban, Cape Town and other airports in the country!

Trawling through the time as a student is filled with memories of learning to speak German, experiencing snow for the first time, in awe of the trains system and general organisation of all things, mesmerised by the size of the campus and its facilities compared to mine back home, the wonderful classmates and lecturers at the Fachhochschule Aachen who took me on and made me feel so very welcome with my broken German and of course the many good parties and bar hopping nights.

A memory that vividly comes to mind was after living in Germany for a year, our mentors from the Aachen-Partnership would arrange social events for the exchange programme students and this particular one was an outing to the cinema. The cinema was a very cosy, almost like your own living room at home, only it was a public space, with comfortable chairs, you could take food and drinks inside. It was a lovely little cinema in Aachen. Not only does that memory pop to mind because of this unique setup for a cinema, that I liked back in 2003, but also the fact that my German had improved to the level that I could watch a movie in German at the cinema is what made me, on that day, realise how far I had come.

Living in a foreign country, with a culture very different to mine, a different language spoken was a huge stretch in character, resilience, a maturing of a then 21 year old that has seen me make one brave and courageous choice and decision after another. It also planted a travel bug in me (I travelled to 5 EU countries and most major cities in Germany during my time there) and the keen interest in people who were different from me, spoke a different language, held different beliefs, interests. It has led to an interesting career path and the deep-seated knowledge that the world is my oyster. I can live and work and thrive anywhere that I so choose in this world because we all have a common thread as human beings. Thank you to the partnership for the past 20 years of being a part of this wonderful partnership through the mentors like Norbert Kuntz and Josephine Ebel. You keep me close to my “German roots”.

I have these lovely memories from 2003 when I was “young and free” and I am happy to still possess the same smile of gratitude for the life and the incredible opportunities I have been blessed with. What has also remained constant is the afro, the crown on my head.



Benedicta Durcan (nee Mahlangu),
Chemical Engineer, EMBA Candidate (2020 – 2021)

Since the INWENT exchange program in 2002-2004 and involvement in the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership, I have made lifelong friendships with close friends in Germany, completed undergraduate studies in Chemical Engineering; worked offshore in upstream Oil & Gas Exploration, in Shipping and Logistics Operations and now as an Executive in a Special Economic Zone. I am in the 2nd year running Chairperson of SAWISE (South African Women in Science and Engineering). My husband and I started a Biotechnology company (Afrobodies) in 2016. Travel is still my passion (have traveled to 42 countries & sailed around the globe). Married with a 2-year-old

“Not all who wander are lost”



Family life in Germany . 2011

In 2011 I was fortunate enough to travel to Germany. I was only 17 at the time and had no idea that trip would have an effect on my personal life. What really stood out for me was the life at home. My host families made me feel as though I was part of the family and I never felt homesick. Although everyone was busy with work and school, they still spent time together.

My host family created some special moments for me, they showed me around the town, they took me for my first roller coaster ride and we had a family barbeque. But more memorable for me are the things that seem to be normal in their family life. I remember going for a bike ride around Lago Laprello a beautiful lake with Stephan, my host father and it felt so strange to me because it's something that I never did with my own father. He just never had the time or the patience like Stephan had. I wasn't good at riding a bike and made a lot of little accidents but to him, it was okay and then I started to relax and had fun. Even sitting together - having breakfast or dinner with the whole family and talking - made me realize that this is what I want for my own family someday.



Back at home my own family wasn't that close or spent time together. Today as a mother I still remember those moments and try to implement them at home. I remember how happy I felt and I see how happy my son is when we go for walks together or just sit and talk about his day.

I've built relationships with people who I can call true friends and can never forget the impact and role they have played in my life. The trip opened many doors for me. I met Mr Backhaus, an English teacher, and Mrs Krewald, the principal at a school in Heinsberg. They, along with 7 other teachers, offered me a private bursary to study Beauty Therapy. Without their help, I wouldn't have been able to study further and follow my passion of being a beautician. But it didn't stop there, my host family and some friends and family helped me start my own business from home. They also came to visit me in Manenberg in 2019. They got to see the projects that we did during the partnership and where I live. I was very happy to introduce them to my family and to show them where I live and the difference in lifestyles. They are also always interested in my son. It feels good to know that I have a family so far across the ocean but still so close to me.



Cleon Botha

I am 27 years old and I live in Manenberg, Cape Town. I joined the partnership in 2009 when I was in grade 9 and participated in the Colourful Bussshelters project with Uta and Norbert. The following year I participated in a project with German learners, where we built a school garden at our school, Phoenix High. That's when I became part of the school exchange program and could travel to Germany in 2011.

I feel that this partnership can open many doors for learners. It will open the eyes of the youth and show them that there is more to life and that there is something better out there.

A South African romance in Germany . 2003

In July 2003 I arrived in Germany for my training in various cities, including Aachen under the auspices of InWent. The name of my programme was called “Local Agenda 21 in Practice: Sustainable Infrastructure Development” focuses on water, sanitation, waste, energy and residential development methodologies for municipalities.

On arrival in Germany, I went to Munich to attend a conference on renewable energy & energy efficiency for industrial use for two days and thereafter proceeded to Saarbrücken where I would spend one month at the Carl Duisberg Centre (CDC), learning professional & technical German language & terminology for the workplace, before going to Aachen and other German cities where I would be placed as part of my training.

It is at the CDC where I met a young lady - Nomfusi - who would later become my life partner, wife and mother of my children. She was on a programme with InWent which focussed on quality management systems and would later be placed at Bayer Industries in Leverkusen for her practical training after completing her course at the CDC.

Our romance started in the classroom where we sat next to each other and sometimes the class was expected to work together in pairs even after hours on projects and do presentations the following day. It was a coincidence that as two South Africans we met in Germany so far away from home. Had we not come to Germany we would never have met because in South Africa I stayed in Cape Town and she stayed in East London which are two cities more than a thousand kilometres apart from each other. It seemed like a divine arrangement that we would be at the right place and the right time in order to meet this way. In class, we worked very well together and enjoyed each other’s company and often took long walks after class to talk and get to know each other better. We discovered that we shared the same interests and values and began to see each other as good candidates for a lifelong partnership when we returned to South Africa. In Saarbrücken we went to Church together, sang in choirs and later in the year went on many excursions.



I am very grateful for the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership, without which I would not have gone to Germany and would never have met my wife. We are married for more than 15 years now and have 2 daughters age 15 years and 13 years. Since our daughters were young they always enjoyed hearing the story of how their parents met and fell in love in Germany. It is the most romantic story they have ever heard and wish the same for themselves when they are old enough.

We enjoyed seeing snow for the first time in December 2003. We look back with great fondness on our time in Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark, and Luxemburg in 2003 and 2004. Germany is the foundation and vision for our marriage and family; that's why we look forward to going back there together soon with our whole family.



Duke Gumede

I was born in 1972 into a music-loving big family of five children where I was inspired by the music of Hugh Masekela to start playing the trumpet in High School. I wished I could study music to become a professional musician and play music every day of my life. But I studied Civil Engineering at the Peninsula Technicon in Cape Town which has also led me to a fulfilling career in community development since the late 1990's in the City of Cape Town municipality.

In 2002 I attended the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg which led me to a conference in Washington (USA) in 2003 then to Germany on an exchange programme for 6 months where I spent one month in Aachen as part of the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership. In Aachen I was very lucky to borrow a trumpet from Josefine's son Felix and we all played every Friday in her orchestra in Kelmis, across the border in Belgium.

I lost contact with the partnership over the years, but got back in touch in 2019 during the Mayor's delegation visit, where I played the trumpet with my band at the closing dinner function.

My journey with the partnership

It all began the end of 2005. We had visitors from Aachen; we had this project, that we were doing in our school on weekends and we were told to be there at 11 in the morning. I was there early because I like to be early and then I was just amazed about these people, who were at the gate at 11 o'clock – right on time! I was so impressed from the beginning of meeting the people from Germany. For me time means honesty; if you can be on time that means you are an honest person; for me, honesty is very important.

We began with the project, where we were painting and I met Uta and Michaela. Somehow, we fell in love – me and Uta – the moment we met. Amazingly only a few months later I was selected to be in a school exchange to Aachen to Inda Gymnasium, which is close to where Uta is staying. So, I was very surprised when I visited Inda and Uta was there to see me. It was just so amazing how connected we are as people.



I remember when we were there I was so happy, because somehow when I was in Primary School I just wanted to travel overseas. I mean I was living and studying in a township, but from the geographic lessons I was just inspired to travel and then this dream of mine came true – I managed to go and be part of the world! Over the years I have lived with so many experiences from the partnership. It has helped me to evolve myself and become better.



During the school exchange, I was also inspired by our teachers and principals. They were leaders and it was the very first time when we found them much more involved, more than just in the classroom, but in doing other activities. For me, it was really amazing because our parents while we were growing up were never close to us doing small things. Somehow, we are living in one room, in one household, but we are all doing separate things. The school exchange allowed us to do things together, so I enjoyed that experience.

At this point in my life, I like to be an inspiration somehow in my life, no matter what I am doing. Even little things, coming from the partnership, inspire my small nieces. When I went to Aachen in 2010 to do the Faces-Project I met more people in the partnership and then I got to know them when we were doing the interviews. I was just amazed to get to know these people personally, for instance Josefine. She was this amazing woman who was able to do everything she wanted to do. She had so many hobbies. I was so inspired by her.



Even now, when I look at the partnership, at all the people in the projects we had: we had kids who were in Primary School, learners who were in High School, students who were in Tertiary Level and adults from various organisations and we had grandparents. It's just so much variety. The partnership on its own is like a household family with all these people.



Ephy Nkunzi

So one day when I was traveling home from school I prayed to have a lady who would be my godmother, who would accept me for who I am and help me to live my dreams. A year later I met a tall lady by the name of Uta. She became a God-sent and helped me become who I am today. Norbert also came into the picture and helped me wherever I needed help. As much as I got my fairy life from the partnership, on the other side of my life, the reality of it has always been a struggle. But I always believe that if I ever need anything: I have a family in Aachen, who is always ready to help me.

Best friends forever . since 2015

During my school exchange in 2015, I stayed for 2 weeks in a small village called Gangelt. I was accommodated by two host families, Cecilia |s family in the first week and Sabrina |s family for the last week. I felt home and welcomed and loved staying with both families.

I met Jenny in 2015 when her sister Sabrina introduced me to her. She had been part of the exchange program with my school in 2011 and her sister Sabrina was my exchange partner now. The evening I arrived at their place we went out for the night to get some drinks with Saskia, another wonderful exchange student. We all connected well like we knew each other for years. We stayed connected and in contact ever since, the friendship lasts for over 5 years already. I always wished to revisit Germany to see all my beautiful and wonderful friends again and to explore more places in Germany.

My friendship with Jenny is so beautiful, when I think about it, it makes me smile. She is my best friend and funny how we got so close and she wasn't my exchange partner, but we grew extensive love and a beautiful friendship. Jenny motivates me, she always makes me smile and always has a caring and warm heart towards me and that is genuine friendship. I am blessed to have a friend like her. We never have dull moments together, we always make time to catch up with each other and make beautiful memories together. Saskia, Jenny and Sabrina revisited Cape Town in 2016 and we met up a few times. I was happy to see them again, it was magical, we had moments full of laughter and joy. We went to Ed Sheeran's concert, it was a dream come true, one of my favourite artists and spending those moments with my wonderful friends was amazing.

Jenny came back to Cape Town again as a student in 2018 and I promised her that I will be coming to visit her soon. I was working in a retail store and tried to save up some money to revisit Germany. Through the Dream Factory Foundation I got the opportunity to apply at SageNet (South Africa German Network) for the Weltwärts Exchange Programme. I kept it a secret and did not inform anyone about the news and what my plans were. I went for an interview with SageNet in Observatory and I had online interviews with the employers that would consider hiring me. Finally, I was chosen and they invited me to work in Germany for one year in a Kindergarten located in Rendsburg, which is in the far North of Germany.

I went through that tough selection process because I wanted the opportunity to go back to Germany. I wanted to impact people's lives and experience a deeper cultural exchange. I wanted to come back as a new person with a new perspective about life and for my next journey and goals. Now I want to expand my horizon and wish to study and become that social worker my community needs.

When I received the good news I immediately contacted Jenny, the moment was so beautiful - we were both so happy and excited that I would actually go to Germany for one year. I arrived in Germany in August 2019. Two months later I met up with Jenny, Sabrina and Saskia and we went to the Oktoberfest - another dream came true, I always had told the girls that I would love to join them and would love to wear a dirndl. It was so nice to experience one of Germany's traditions. Jenny came to visit me in Rendsburg and we had good times together. Our friendship is just so beautiful.

The Aachen-Cape Town Partnership doesn't just connect people from different countries, it has brought love, generosity and friendships. It has brought people together that would want to do more for others.



Genevieve George



I first got involved with the partnership in 2014 through our school-exchange. I have been a peer educator for Life Choices to being a motivational speaker for Dream Factory Foundation. There I also learnt how to code and become an entrepreneur. After my return from Germany I started to work as an assistant teacher at a Primary School in Manenberg, where I can use my skills I have learned at a Kindergarten abroad. There my duties were mainly to speak English to the kids and to experience cultural exchange.

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived, it is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.” - Nelson Mandela

Trapped in a graveyard . 2014

Teresa, my German counterpart during the ASA-Exchange asked me, if I experienced any unexpected or weird things during my stay in Aachen to participate in this storytelling project . So, this is my story:

The first thing that stood out for me during the first days in Germany was, how different the food tastes – the chain franchises. So I would buy a Coke or a Sprite in Germany and it tastes totally different to a Coke or Sprite in South Africa. Mc Donalds also tasted differently, only KFC was generally the same, I think.

And the things people recommend are very different. When you come to South Africa, when you come to Cape Town, people tell you, you must go to Table Mountain to see its natural wonder, and you must go to Mzolis, the biggest braai-place in Gugulethu – we recommend that you go to this place and eat the special food and experience the vibe. When I got to Aachen, people told me: “You got to check out this graveyard! That’s close to where you live.” Coming from South Africa, that was very weird for me, because in South Africa nobody would tell you to go to a graveyard.

One weekend I was alone at home and I went to my favourite restaurant, which was around the corner and got myself a Döner. And I decided on that day with my food in hand, I go and check out this graveyard, because I was walking pass it now. So I walked in and by being South African I am mindful of the time by how much daylight there is – and it was summer, so my time was off. I walked around the graveyard and I took some pictures to show my mates. And when I wanted to walk out, I was locked in!





I was inside this graveyard with these massive walls and suddenly there is this guy there with a white but dirty shirt. I first thought he was a ghost, because this is where our mind goes, when you are in a graveyard. But then he had new sneakers on and I thought, he cannot be a ghost, because which ghost wears new sneakers? And he said: "Okay, I show you a way out." But he was walking deeper into the graveyard. I thought by myself: "No, no, no – that is the opposite way where I want to go!" He said: "No, it's okay, I know the way out, I live here!" The moment he said "I live here", I refused to follow him. I just went into the opposite direction, I bolted and I threw my food over the wall first and then I climbed up and jumped over. The looks people were giving me were like: "What is this guy doing?" And then I just picked up my food and ran home. That was one of the funniest, weirdest experiences I had in Germany.



Grant Bellairs

I was in an ASA-South-North Exchange Programme at Welthaus Aachen and Selfhelp Manenberg in 2014. Our project about youth unemployment was called YouACT and I worked together with Teresa and Anna from Germany and Haroldene from Cape Town. I am now an entrepreneur and a founder of the SA-Alumni Network.

Hlumani means “Grow”. since 2012

My first contact with the partnership was during the school exchange in 2012/13. Currently I am working as a junior architect in Heinsberg (Germany). When I think about the exchange, I see that it changed our lives and our way of thinking. For example, I have become more grateful for the things I have and also for the opportunities I have to shape my life. And I think that is also the reason why I still support the exchange, so that more people from our school – Kreisgymnasium Heinsberg - can make the same great experience we could make.



My connection to South Africa, especially to Cape Town, continued after the school exchange. In 2015 I visited my exchange-friends from Manenberg and stayed with my former classmate Saskia in Khayelitsha. In 2018 I got the opportunity during my architecture studies at the University of Aachen (RWTH) to travel to Cape Town for two projects. We built some self-watering high-beds with pupils from Good Hope Primary School and I also took part in a summer-school-workshop for two weeks together with students from the University of Stuttgart and the University of Cape Town (UCT). That was also where my next project started.



In 2018 and 2019 I planned a community centre in Khayelitsha together with the urban farmers and the community there, who had asked me to help them to plan this community centre during a visit with the students from the summer school. In 2019 I was back in Khayelitsha for four weeks and lived with them in their community. I organised some participatory workshops to figure out what they need there and which kind of rooms should be in the community centre. This project was a big step forward in my life and the community centre should be named “Hlumani”, which is IsiXhosa and means “Grow”. I also grew with this project. That was really fantastic to have this great opportunity, to get more knowledge and to work together with these people. I really enjoyed it and that is also what I want to do in my life now, to work in the field of social architecture. It was this project that guided me to the way I want to live my life now.



Jennifer Krichel

I am an architect and stayed four times in Cape Town in the context of the partnership: 2012 school-exchange, 2015 visit of partners, 2018 highbed-project and summer school and 2019 master project "Hlumani".

For me it is quite important that student exchanges continue to take place, because I know some people whose way of thinking and attitude towards life have been significantly influenced by these experiences - including me. People from Heinsberg and Aachen as well as people from Cape Town benefit for their further life from these impressions and experiences, which can only be made through a stay in the country.

Lost in Holland . 2013

In Germany I discovered that you must leave the South African way of things behind, because it can come and bite you. And that is how I got lost by the mere fact that I never realized, they are doing things differently, especially on time and technology.

There we were, coming from Amsterdam. We had travelled by train. When we came back, in South Africa it would have been dark – I think it was about half past eight – but it was still light at that time. We were in a group with the learners and teachers from Heinsberg. It was a lovely day and they said the train would arrive in a couple of minutes. There is a shop on the platform right behind me and I thought it was a good idea just to pop in. I went just around the corner, the shop was empty and it was less than two minutes – I just took a bubblegum, maybe looked around in the shop a bit – I got back on the platform: empty! I told myself: “I didn’t hear a train”. In South Africa you can hear the train a hundred metres away. I even thought that they must still be there, that it is impossible for them to be gone.



It struck me that my worst nightmare came true – that the train is gone. I walked to a box where there was a man, an official of the railway. I asked him: “Did a train just come and leave?” He said: “Yes!” I told him, that I am from South Africa and I really don’t know what to do now. When is the next train coming and is that train going the same route. But I learned something about myself: I wasn’t scared! I don’t know why not. Yes, it was a challenge for me and my mind was telling me: “How are you going to get back to your group?”

I did not know which station to get off, but there came a train and I got on to it. My mind told me: “They might have realized that I am not with them.” I could not talk to them via cellphone because I did not lock into their network and therefore I didn’t carry it with me. I got on to that train and I thought they might wait at the end of the ride. I just knew that I must get off at Roermond. That’s what I knew and they will come and look for me there – I hoped.

There is a turn in this story where I appreciate something very much. When I got on that train I started to ask “will somebody tell me when I have to get off – when it’s Roermond”. I opened my mouth just to greet a black lady and she said: “You are from Cape Town!” Right there! I asked her: “How do you know?” She told me that she is from Gugulethu and studies in Holland and we talked a lot. The train stopped half an hour later and here came Mr Backhaus, he walked from carriage to carriage. His first words were: “Jeremy, look where you are!” When he realized that I was missing, he got off on the next station, got on to the next train and walked right through the whole train. He was thinking what I might be doing: get on to the next train. That’s how he found me. I felt like a child. But the way they were concerned about me and how they would think on my behalf made me realize how lucky I am.

Only afterwards I thought about that it could have been a disaster, if we missed each other. Where would I sleep? While I was in that situation I kind of enjoyed that I was alone and I had to figure this out! Luckily it had a nice ending and of course everybody at the school in Heinsberg knew that the teacher got lost and the teachers said: “We are supposed to look after the children and not the other way round!”

Jeremy Ontong



I am the current principal of Phoenix Secondary School in Manenberg. I became involved in the partnership through our school exchange program in 2009. As the host school teacher I assisted as well our learners as the German learners in the school garden project at our school.

I became more directly involved through my love for cycling when bikes were sent and donated to our school, which helped me to establish the Phoenix Cycling Club in 2010.

In 2013, myself and four learners had the unbelievable opportunity to visit our partnering school in Heinsberg, Germany, where we renovated one of their school gardens. One of our outings to us to Amsterdam in Holland.



Deleen & Katrin - A friendship which lasts for decades

At the beginning of the Nineties when I was a teen, I stumbled upon some colourful pieces of paper decorated with a multitude of country flags from all corners of the world. They were application forms for international pen-friendships. I got curious: Wouldn't it be interesting to communicate with youth from all over the world and find out what life is for a girl of my age in South Africa? Some letters were exchanged in English, one single contact - with Deleen - lasted until... well after I finished school.

Fast Forward to 2003: Thanks to the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership and in cooperation with my university, I received a scholarship for some months of research for a study in Cape Town. Finally we were able to organize a real meeting with my penfriend in person! And not just once, we met regularly during weekends, when Deleen's husband was able to drive his small family from the suburb into town where I shared a flat with other students. While I was still studying, my friend Deleen had already married her big love, changed her religious beliefs plus her first name and family name, and was already a mother of a little girl. Our life couldn't have been more different at this stage.



Even though we hadn't met in person before, we never felt like strangers. We had shared our heartaches when we were 15 and we knew so many details about each other, that there were more things that connected us than things that could separate us – even though this seemed impossible from the outside.

Our families kept on meeting also after graduation from university, whenever we spent our holidays in Cape Town. A few years ago Deleen`s husband died suddenly and unexpectedly and only left behind his business as an auto-electrician. My brave friend worked hard to provide for her dutiful and intelligent girl and subsequently, she graduated from high school. We were there for them whenever times were especially rough.

We will continue to follow each other`s path through life and we know we can always rely on our friendship.



Katrin Spangenberg

When I was about ten years old, I read Laurens van der Post`s „A Story Like The Wind“. This epic novel which is set in front of the background of the old San myths and the vast landscapes of the Kalahari desert inspired me to read each and everything about Southern Africa I could get my hands on.

After high school, I was finally free to move to South Africa to experience life and people in the new democracy. After a year of voluntary social work in Gauteng in a community for mentally challenged and extended backpacking through Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa I got a new chance to live and work in Cape Town/Khayelitsha during my studies at Aachen University in 2003: a scholarship in cooperation with the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership and the Institute for Landscape Ecology and Planning.

During this time I was lucky to find some very good friends who help me to still keep a strong connection to Cape Town.

For many years I have been living in Munich with my husband and two sons. I am an architect specializing in temporary and exhibition architecture worldwide. In doing this I live my dream of working with and connecting with people from different continents and cultures.



Mural in Khayelitsha . 2005



Together with Uta Göbel-Groß, Thulani Shuku and Dathini Mzayiya, I worked on a mural in Khayelitsha, to be created at Training Centre on Spine Road in Khayelitsha. This training centre is located on a busy road, on the way to two schools, a restaurant is nearby, a good place to present a picture on our partnership and thoughts on the diversity of worlds.

I was quite happy how easily the group, which has known each other for a long time, welcomed me. The swapping technique lets everyone work on all the drafts: one says 'swap' and everyone moves to the next painting... The paintings feature the Aachen Cathedral, the Zülpicher Matrons, people, shacks, abstract patterns and figures. It is a lot of fun and exhausting - because we give everything. There are no language problems: Art is our common language!

The enthusiasm with which I collaborated on the large mural should not obscure the fact that the implementation was extremely difficult. There is the generation conflict: the two South African artists are 20 years younger than we are. And, in addition, there are cultural and gender-specific backgrounds. I want the old, black woman to hold a snake as a staff in her hand because I associate power, strength and transformation with it. For the young men, however, the snake has a dark, magical meaning and signals deviousness - thus it is taboo for the mural.

On the other hand, I am having wonderful experiences working as a team and finding solutions. The really beautiful mural was inaugurated in an official way, radio, newspaper and TV were there and reported. The reactions to our work were consistently positive and I quickly forgot the effort that went into creating this 26-meter-long and 3.2-meter-high wall under incredible time pressure!



Michaela Frank

In the framework of the Local Agenda-21-partnership-projects in 2005/06 I worked one year in Cape Town in various contexts: as an art therapist in an orphans' home, later in a hospice. And I took part in painting a mural in Khayelitsha.



Our lovestory . since 2012

Hi, I am Mira and I first came to Cape Town in 2012. I was one of the ASA participants in a project organised by the Welthaus in Aachen. During that time my colleague and I stayed at a commune in Ottery and that is where I met Thabo.

Hi, I am Thabo and I first met them when they were moving in. I was just coming back from a night out, having drinks, so I introduced myself and welcomed them to the commune. Only later Mira and I talked and she realised that I was also a student who lived there, because at first, she thought I was the landlord's son welcoming them. We realised that we had a lot in common, we talked a lot about our values and our perspectives in life. That conversations were very inspiring. We realised that we enjoyed each other's company and started to spend more and more time with each other.

For us, it was never about the skin colour, but that of course is the first thing you see from the outside. Some people reacted very positively towards us, some approached us on the street and told us: "you guys are so cute and it's great that you are together". And there were other people, who stared at us and you could see in their facial expression that they were not happy about us being together. But we really tried to not let that get to us and stay positive. But we also really have many positive stories to tell.



Yes, for sure. One story was very cool. We were just chilling at a park. These two guys came over, they are photographers, and they asked us if they can take pictures of us. They explained that it was some sort of competition and they were taking pictures of interracial couples in Cape Town. They just liked how we looked and asked us if we were interested in them taking a photo of us and we were obliged. It was a compliment to us that we could play a part and represent that. That was really cool. Overall, we had more positive than negative experiences.

The new South Africa, where people come together, that's what we kind of want to represent. And the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership made it possible. We met eight years ago, we are married now. We stayed in Aachen for five years – because that is where I was born – and now we are back in Cape Town and are very happy together. Thanks to the partnership for bringing us together.

Mira & Thabo Modise

Mira - born in 1989 in Aachen-Burtscheid, I was privileged to travel the world from an early age. By profession, I'm a Social Scientist and Global Changemaker with a Master in Empowerment Studies from the University of Applied Science in Düsseldorf.

Since October 2019, I serve as a Bread for the World Secondment at Africa Unite, a Human Rights and Youth Empowerment NGO in Cape Town. My vision is to bring young people from diverse backgrounds together to learn from each other and grow stronger as individuals and as a larger human family.

Thabo - born 1983 in Soweto, Johannesburg, I always knew I was bigger than the township I grew up in. My love for art and cartoons inspired me to study 3D Animation at the Animation School in Cape Town.

Since then, I worked in a Game Studio in Muizenberg and a Technology Marketing (TEMA) Company in Aachen. I also had the privilege of working with UTA on a mural project in Dormagen. Currently, I am back in Cape Town, where I develop my first App as a self-taught programmer. My vision is to teach young minds in the township how to use programming to express their creativity so they too can rise above their current circumstances and bring change to their communities.



My green thumb grew in Cape Town . 2010

I had already been in Cape Town for a year in 2007 without knowing the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership, although I had already lived and studied in Aachen at that time. I fortunately got in contact with the partnership, through Uta or Norbert - I don't even remember where and when we met and how that came about. And then I was allowed to join in! I was integrated and felt comfortable there. I also thought: "I can contribute something!" because I had already met certain people and had this special feeling about Cape Town. I also had a great desire to go back to Cape Town. That year 2007 had been great and those three and a half months of our project Healthy Schools in Grassy Park in 2010 were the icing on the cake. It was so enriching, it was so colourful - I met so many different people who all gave me something to take away! I also think I gave them something in return because I just felt like spreading positive energy and laughter.

This hospitable unbiased thinking of many! I will never forget, for example, when I first met Aubrey - RIP - at Fairview Primary in his office: that smile, it was just delightful! I just thought, "Wow, who is that!" With his twinkling eyes and totally open smile, he looked at me as if we already knew each other, yet he only knew Norbert. That's why I'm grateful to this day. Sometimes I watch the video Healthy Schools in Grassy Park with my children. And I always think to myself: "I was able to get to know people there, who I wouldn't have met without the partnership. I also liked this project so much because I think I still live it today.

Often, when I'm working in my garden, I tell my 3 children, back then there was a Mrs. Dollie, and there was the NGO Seed, of which someone told us something about permaculture, and then we built a garden. That's what I do in my greenhouse today. That's just beautiful. I have now started building a school garden this year in one of my schools in France. There I try to teach my learners and show them, we can sow and plant something, we can make the garden more beautiful and learn many things. They are all so excited and enthusiastic as the learners at Perivale Primary in Grassy Park.

I stayed in contact with Mrs. Dollie for a long time. She talked quite a lot about how she works together with the learners. I found it quite interesting how they go to school there. I liked it back then to see the position of the teachers there and how they talked to the kids. It was so much less school-strict than in Germany or in France. It's different, but nevertheless, the respect of the learners towards the teachers is there.



My time in Cape Town can be summarized under the generic term encounters - encounters of the most colourful kind and greenest kind. My green thumb has grown there. To touch the earth - African earth - was very valuable for me. It touched and shaped me.

For example, when we were at the Abalimi-gardens and I was able to experience what the women do there, how they cultivate gardens with few resources and how they enthusiastically showed us what grows there. When we strolled through I thought: "Wait a minute, this is just incredible - gardens are growing everywhere!" That's not really the image you have of a township. Because the township - and we got to experience that - that's usually a lot of dust and a lot of dirt, and that's also a lot of concrete and tin and sand. And to see something is growing, something is sprouting there, that definitely touched me the most.

Basically, I was able to experience that people who for the most part have much less than me are immensely creative in very different ways, have lots of ideas, simply have the desire, have energy - this positive energy to change something, to give, to share. And to share with me! I always felt like I was treated equally. People of course looked at me, a lot and often - that one is white and blond. People, especially kids, would come up to me and say, "Wow, your eyes, your blue eyes!" But everyone accepted me in the most natural way. It's definitely been a good lesson for life for me - then as a student and now as a mother.



Monika Gripon-Galla

Born in Katowice, Poland, my family immigrated to Germany in 1987, when I was four. Aachen became my hometown, where I studied Political Science and Sociology. In 2007/2008 I worked for one year at Cafda (Cape Flats Development Association), an NGO in Cape Town, in order to finish my Master's degree with a case study. What I learned during that year in Cape Town: Home is where love is! In 2010 I was part of the Healthy Schools in Grassy Park project which opened my eyes and intensified my interest in gardening, nature, healthy food and education. Today I live in Cherbourg, France, with my husband, who I met in Cape Town - of course - and my three children. There I work as a German teacher.

Don't you speak to black people? . 2003

Two key experiences came to me during my first trip with the partnership delegation from Aachen to Cape Town in 2003.

Immediately after our arrival on the first day, a get-together at Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens had been organized - with picnic for all of us during a classical concert. The area was full of people and a large stage had been set up in front of the scenery of Table Mountain. The reunion joy and the great atmosphere were really overwhelming. But after some time I realized that among the many visitors there were mostly white people - far in the back, I spotted a little black boy. The bus ticket and the entrance fee are too expensive for most of the non-white people; that was the explanation of our friends. How could that be? Apartheid had actually been over for more than 10 years and I would not have expected that it would take decades before anything noticeable would change the social situation.



The second encounter took place in the administration building in the township of Khayelitsha. In the morning we were on our way to one of the many meetings we had with the City's administration and NGOs to learn about planning and projects to improve the living situation in the townships. As I said, it was early morning and we met three workers with black skin at the entrance of the building. We saw them but did not greet - an unfortunately usual habit in Germany. One of the three approached us, said "Good Morning" in a friendly manner and asked, "Don't you speak to black people?" It hit me like a shock! Could it be that even I am so white-influenced in my perception of values that I had not noticed the three men?

The excuse that we Germans are simply "lazy about greeting" did not apply to me. For me, it is an unconscious form of discriminatory behaviour that is hidden in our white minds until we uncover it. Yes, that's exactly what happened. Awareness has been revealed - for the view of equality, justice and social coexistence of all "colours" of my fellow human beings. These two experiences have accompanied me since 2003 and, together with many other stories and experiences I have had in connection with the partnership, enriched my life.



Nika Stützel

I am an active member of the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership and also a board member of the partnership association (Förderverein). During the past years, I could combine projects from the partnership with my professional work at the Department of Landscape Architecture at the Aachen University. This resulted in study projects, co-operations and excursions around the topics of sustainable and socially equitable urban development in Cape Town.

What is special for me: after 20 years, being part of a North-South network that connects people, inspirations, friendships and ideas for the future across the globe; to see that many small projects can have a great impact on a personal level and have changed my view of the world in a long-lasting way.

Aubrey de Wet: Gone too soon

I met Aubrey for the first time in 2007 when my counterpart Talfryn Harris from the NGO s.e.e.d. took me to Fairview Primary School in Grassy Park. We wanted to sign papers for an exchange project “Bauwagen goes South 2008” that should take place at Fairview. We immediately had a special connection and I felt the positivity and warmth of this man, who always ended a conversation with a big smile. In 2008 I visited our volunteers during their project and from day one I felt like a part of this school – his school. He knew the name of every child (nearly a thousand!) and a lot of them just came to hug him when we passed by – and after a while they also started to hug me. I could feel by myself how much the children loved him.

I invited him to come to Germany the same year and to start partnering with Schule Am Lousberg in Aachen. Because of work related issues, he could only stay in Aachen for eight days, but he filled these days with a lot of joy and love. And the children at Lousberg School took him straight into their hearts – just like the kids at home in Grassy Park. At the end of the week, he had to write some verses into the girls’ poetry albums.



He stayed with me during his time in Aachen and one night I woke up hearing him putting on his clothes and trying to leave my flat in silence. After about an hour he came back. I was still awake because I was a bit worried about the fact that he left the house without telling me. So I asked him: “Why did you leave and what did you do?” And he answered: “I just wanted to walk around town at 2 o’clock at night because you can do that here. It is quiet and calm in the city, you will not get mugged or murdered. We cannot do that in Cape Town. I just wanted to experience that feeling!” It made me think about how fortunate we are in Germany to live in peace and harmony most of the time – no burglar bars or other security measures.

At Lousberg Primary he also saw my every-day-work for the NGO Stadtoasen and the original Bauwagen. He especially liked the balancing beams and outdoor gym. “The kids nowadays are missing sports and movement”, he said. “Something like this I would like to have at my school too!” With these words the project “Healthy Schools in Grassy Park” was born.



Before he left Germany, on the way to the airport, I could fulfil his great wish. He wanted to see the “Father Rhine” – that huge river, where big cargo ships transport all kinds of goods and people on cruise ships make holiday trips. We walked across the bridge in Cologne and took the elevator up the skyscraper named Triangle. I will never forget his astonished look down to the river and to the Cathedral on the other side.

In 2010 my project partner Monika and I had the great pleasure to work with this humble and caring principle of Fairview Primary for two months. He had made it possible that two other schools could participate in the project “Healthy Schools in Grassy Park”. He never considered himself to be too good to do some hard work that needed to be done. I remember him mixing the cement and putting it into the wholes of the tar – and actually showing the caretakers how to do it right.

When I moved to Cape Town in 2013 I had no place to stay for the first two months. He invited me to stay with his family. Everybody made me feel at home and I became an adopted family member. I am so grateful that I could call Aubrey my friend and that his family created a home far away from home for me. I was heartbroken when I heard that he died with Covid19 on the 21st of January 2021 – only two months after he had celebrated his 60th birthday.

Norbert Kuntz

M.Sc. Biology – Author – **Wanderer between two Worlds**. Since 2002 I am an active member of the partnership, project manager of many “green” exchange projects, organizer of several school partnerships, leading through joint art projects together with Uta Göbel-Groß – and since 2013 I live part-time in Cape Town.

Being a Friend – no matter where you come from . 2013

Selfhelp Manenberg, the organisation I worked for, used to do North-South work exchanges. We had very close encounters with a lot of German people and also the people from the partnership were in and out of the organisation. They were like family, they came to do projects in Manenberg and we are still friends with the people who came as volunteers, but also as professionals from the partnership.

I was fortunate in 2013, that our partners from Aachen invited me to come to Germany for 17 days. I appreciate it so much and I am still indebted to them, that they took me out of my misery during a very challenging period at the organisation. I am especially very thankful to Birgitta, who decided that I could come and live with her in Aachen. That was the best place for me to be in Germany. During my visit I met a lot of Birgitta's friends, she took me to a lot of outings and excursions and one evening she took me to supper with her friends.



To my observation – and that is something that is not happening here in South Africa – Birgitta had a group of friends that came from different backgrounds: professionals, some worked in NGOs and there were domestics. What stood out for me was to see how this group of friends did not look down upon each other, but are real friends, who had one collective goal in mind. They were busy saving for a communal, where they wanted to build a block of flats in order for them to live together. And for me that really stood out, because if I look at South Africa, that would have been a disjuncture: if you are not a professional, you will never be seen in professional circles; for example, if you are a domestic you will never be allowed to be in the circles of professionals.

That really struck me as what I would term as friendship – looking beyond your class, looking beyond your status – really being a friend, no matter where you come from. Here in South Africa the class issue is still very dominant alongside the race issue. Coming from Manenberg, that really stood out for me.



Patsy Daniels

I worked for Selfhelp Manenberg which was part of the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership since 2007. But my family was already one of the Local Agenda21 pilot project families in 2001, which materialised through this partnership.

Part of my responsibility was to accompany other community leaders to meetings and liaising with gang leaders and external entities over the years to work towards a safer and peaceful Manenberg. This was from engaging with the City of Cape Town, local networking partners to international partners and funders and representing the community as far afield as Germany.

In 2013 I was sponsored by Welthaus and the Aachen partners on a 17-day trip to Germany. This was after taking on the Acting Director role at Selfhelp Manenberg, which was a very challenging period in the history of the organisation.

What stood out for me of Germany or the Germans were their hospitality and the way they take life so seriously, at the same time! They love to party, but are time management freaks! They were challenged with the African time syndrome!

Change of view direction . 2015

As part of my job as head of the public order and security service of the City of Aachen at that time, I was selected to participate in the international work exchange between the municipalities of Aachen and Cape Town on the topics of a safe and clean city. At the age of 29, I had no idea that this would have a lasting impact on my life and my professional life.

Thanks to the extremely positive initial contact and the gracious support of Gabriele Schütz-Lembach over many years, I have not only learned a lot through the partnership, but have also been able to change my view of many things. I feel a deep sense of gratitude for this, especially towards Gabriele, but also towards many other members of the partnership association.

Let us now turn to my first meeting with my colleague Eddie Scott from Cape Town. In the development cooperation between Aachen and Cape Town, a delegation trip to Cape Town was planned for November 2015. Before that, a visit of some colleagues from the Cape Town Municipality to Aachen took place in June 2015. This was also the first meeting with my exchange partner and now fatherly friend, Eddie, who is the manager responsible for district development of the Improvement Districts at the Cape Town Municipality.

I was keen to meet Eddie before the official start of the work exchange in Aachen, which was scheduled for Monday morning. Without further ado, I organised a meeting in the afternoon of the official start and picked Eddie up at his hotel at Aachen's Marschierter. After a short greeting and a chat about the beautiful weather in Aachen, Eddie got straight to the point and informed me that he was shocked "how dirty" it was in Aachen. He asked me if I had seen that the tree grates were not well maintained, that there was a lot of rubbish on the street and that there was unattractive graffiti on many houses. All that would be unthinkable in the inner city of Cape Town.



"Bang, that hit home!" This extremely nice person travels 9500 km from Cape Town to Aachen and has nothing better to do than to badmouth my beloved hometown. Somehow I had imagined diplomacy differently. After I was speechless for a moment (which happens rather rarely), Eddie immediately had a few good ideas on what I could change and always managed to get me thinking by asking critical questions. At this point, our meeting was about an hour old. I then walked around Aachen with Eddie for about 4 hours, including a short escort by my colleagues from the public order office, and was thus able to give a passable impression of Aachen after all.

What became clear to me even during this first meeting was that Eddie would change my view of my work and the environment in Aachen, and that he had shown me things in this short time that I had never noticed before. I was able to do the same during my return visit to Cape Town. The focus on "learning from each other" was the greatest benefit of working with Eddie Scott.



Ron-Roger Breuer

I am 34 years old, an employee of the Municipality of Aachen since 2003 and currently Head of the Haaren-Verlautenheide District Office. I am active in the partnership since 2015 and a participant in the international work-exchange between the Aachen City Council and Cape Town on municipal development cooperation in the years 2015 - 2021.



How I learned to take the bus in Cape Town . 2002/2003

During my stay in Cape Town – a long time back from November 2002 until April 2003 – taking the bus played a very important role. After my arrival at an anthroposophy community in Plumstead, where I could hire a small room, all my housemates were shocked that I did not want to hire or buy a small car to be mobile and to get to my different workplaces of Abalimi Bezekhaya - the NGO where I was volunteering - in Khayelitsha.

Several reasons kept me away from driving by myself. How should I get used to driving on the “wrong” side of the road? I have a distinct left-right weakness! And how should I, who already drives overly cautious in Germany, ever arrive safely here in this mad traffic of Cape Town? In such a big city there had to be public transport, I thought. My new – only white – house mates had neither idea if it even exists nor how it works. “We never take public transport; that is far too dangerous!” Hmmm???

In the beginning, one of my colleagues from Abalimi who also lived in Plumstead gave me a lift to and back from work. I observed that buses were driving around in the townships on a regular basis and obviously, I also saw a whole lot of people from the townships leaving in the morning to work in the rich areas of the white people. Bit by bit I got into closer contact with the ladies in the township. „Of course, there are busses from Wynberg Station to Khayelitsha.“ And so I rolled up this problem from behind: some ladies and children accompanied me to the bus stop in Khayelitsha and waited with me until the bus arrived.



They instructed the bus driver to take good care of me and to only let me step out of the bus at “Wynberg Station” – the final destination. The next morning the ride in the opposite direction was no challenge for me! I used this bus line for nearly six months and I was always the only white person on the bus. I have been always treated very friendly by all the other passengers. Interestingly it was clear to everybody, who I talked to on the bus that I have to be a European and not a South African – before I even said a word.

My housemates in Plumstead observed that I arrived every day at home alive, safe and intact – they treated this fact as a miracle. Most of them had never ever been to a township - they were too scared. Bit by bit their interest had been aroused to take the plunge. And so I transformed to the uncertified tour guide between Plumstead and Khayelitsha, where all my guests were warmly welcomed in the gardens of Abalimi.

Sabine Schönberg-Ehlen



Born in 1955, I caught myself again and again being jealous of all these young people, who could spend a gap year or at least some months before or after their tertiary education abroad. So I saved time for about six years for a sabbatical, and - first my children had to mature.

My time came in 2002! Some dreams last until the 47th birthday: six months in Cape Town – but not as a white tourist! I wanted to get to know the everyday life of the black people after the end of Apartheid. And I thought that would be most successful by working together. I found two jobs as a volunteer, one at a garden which was founded and supported by Abalimi Bezekhaya and one in a children’s home for kids of HIV/Aids-infected parents.

“To me the Partnership is the continuation of my time in Cape Town, so to say the support of a lot of projects from home. The effort to learn from each other on an eye to eye level is the most fascinating aspect with it.”



It's Huggle-Time . 2011

In 2011 I had made arrangements with Mrs Krewald, the principal from Heinsberg High School (Kreisgymnasium), because the previous year they had visited us. Between the two of us, we decided we visit each other's school every alternate year. The strange thing about Phoenix was, that even though Manenberg is less than five minutes away from the airport and my learners hear these flights coming in and out of Cape Town International, they have never visited the airport. And never they could have imagined themselves flying. So it is very close to them - they see it - it's tangible - but it's not accessible!

Only when the Heinsberg learners visited Cape Town and established our school garden together with our learners in 2010, we hired a taxi for those, who had worked hard in the garden during the two weeks of the exchange and they could wave "goodbye" to the Germans.



After nearly two years of very heavy fundraising and with some sponsors on board - and I am still very grateful for the Heinsberg school's contribution - we left Phoenix Secondary School with a lot of gratitude and with a lot of emotion: myself, Ms Nabuweya May as the teachers and seven learners. Exactly 10 years ago we drove to Cape Town International Airport.

On arriving at the airport, I noticed that the learners were very subdued. The nervousness was creeping in. Eventually, it all exploded once we went through customs! All of a sudden I found it strange that Ms May said: "It's Huggle-Time!" I couldn't quite understand... It dawned on me that the customs officer was telling them: "On your way to your flight you are now leaving the territory of South Africa." None of them have even been as far as Cape Point! For them to get the idea to think that they are leaving South Africa, they actually became very emotional.

And the teacher was exactly in the same case as the learners. She hadn't flown before and hadn't traveled far out of Cape Town. The emotions just erupted and they all held on to me – as if in a scrump. But it was an affirmation that we are now a family! It was an affirmation that we would stick together and see this German trip through. People often ask me about the highlights of our trip and people would think I would suggest that we were in Brussels, where we went to the EU parliament, or the trip to Amsterdam or the 500 stairs up the tower of the Cathedral of Cologne – yes it was all fantastic – all the entertainment that we had, but I think that the departure galvanised the group into the success that we had through the next three weeks.



Shafiek Abrahams

In 1983 I started to teach at Phoenix Secondary School as one of the first staff members of the newly opened school. I was appointed as headmaster in 1999 at the age of 40. As a young, energetic and idealistic headmaster, I set myself two goals, to enhance and improve the quality of teaching and to broaden the student's worldview to extend beyond Manenberg. Within three years our results improved so dramatically that the school was presented with the very prestigious "The Most Improved School" award. This led to the school being invited by the Minister of Education to attend the budget speech in parliament.

I encouraged my students to join interfaith organisations at school level to broaden their perspectives, to realise there is a world beyond Manenberg. When we made contact with Kreisgymnasium Heinsberg via Mrs Krewald, I realised that my goal for my students is being reached. It resulted in the first trip to Germany, hosted by Kreisgymnasium Heinsberg, for seven students accompanied by myself and another teacher.

Living sustainability . 2013

My time in Germany was nothing short of awesome. I arrived in Germany in September 2013 and stayed with Gabriela and Michaela. I immediately felt safe and welcomed. I was told before that I would be in for a culture shock but I never realised to what magnitude.

Things in Germany were totally different from what I am used to. I spent my days with different people at the Welthaus and each day was more interesting than the last. I met a lady named Anne whom I spent a few days with at the schools that she works in, amongst other colleagues working in schools. I was so impressed with the time and effort these ladies put in teaching the youth about the environment: learning at an early age about living sustainability. Birgitta, who at the time was the manager of Ecological Centre at Welthaus, explained to me more in detail what the project was about. Their job was it, to work together with the schools and educate people about the environment.

I stayed in Germany for two and a half months and I must say I met with so many people from so many different organizations but it felt like they all had one theme: "Living Sustainability" - whether it was a day in Monschau with Gisela, a visit to "The Tafel" or going to a theatre and watching a show on "Waste" with my hosts. I learned the importance of living within our means and reducing the impact on the earth's natural resources.



In Cape Town, progress is still slow with regards to living gardens, most people believe that you need to have a lot of space to plant fruit and vegetables and therefore do not bother at all. And because they cannot always afford to buy fruit and veg from the shops they resort to unhealthy eating and the cycle continues however change is happening every day slowly but surely, in townships and in schools - thanks to the Aachen-Cape Town Partnership. The partnership changed my way of thinking forever, my outlook on life and my role as a citizen.



Shonelle Williams



In 2013 I was invited to Germany to do a course in project management in living sustainability. We were a group of 7 people representing 6 different countries: South Africa, Mexico, Namibia, Nicaragua, Togo and Germany. During my time in Aachen I met up with different organisations at Welthaus: Greenpeace, Ecology Centre, Friendship-Aachen-Lampaseh (Indonesia) to name a few. I also spent a lot of time with the kids, Elke and Helmut at Spielhaus Kennedypark.

The exchange programme opened a whole new world for me. I started to see things differently and realised that change is happening and everyone has a role to play. I believe by changing one's mindset a lot can be accomplished in making a difference in someone else's life. I've learned so much about sustainability, biodiversity and co-existing.

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no-one thinks of changing himself" - Leo Tolstoy

Potjiekos: Afrikaans dinner . 2009

An invitation for dinner at Juanita's place: «Come round about 5 pm» she said, "we will have a typical African meal". Happy and with an empty stomach Norbert and I are driving to Manenberg. I have some groceries with me – I offered to arrange a big fresh green salad with the traditional meal.

We arrive in time – a wonderful reunion, we've know each other for several years, where we met in Aachen and Cape Town. We see the little house, the garden surrounded by concrete walls, we take a walk around the neighbourhood – houses, shacks, a playground, only a few green spots around, only a few people on the streets. Some of the houses and gardens were flourishing and immensely green. In some of the houses we are introduced and welcomed – these are friends or family of Juanita; she wants us to have an idea of the environment she is living in. – We are very happy to have the chance to meet all the lovely people.



Back in Juanita's house – we begin with the preparations for dinner. I want to know if I should start to do the salad. I brought a lot of things with me – spices, oil and vinegar, herbs, green salad and tomatoes. There are more guests arriving meanwhile, we talk, we swap stories and remembrances, we laugh. – Juanita begins to clean the iron pot that will cook right above the fire, she fills it with onions and meat, it roasts gently, putting water on top, cooking slowly; vegetables are added, more and more. Curiously I see how many layers the pot is taking – and it's cooking and cooking.



About 15 guests are there now – and more and more kids crowd the two little rooms, kids from the guests and from the neighbourhood. They play and they run around laughing – they bring this overwhelming life into the house.

I remember my stomach started roaring at some point – starvation! The wonderful smell of the pot, lots of talks, the swarm of kids – for a long time it is already dark outside. The salad „looks very sad“ in its bowl – no wonder, summery temperatures and 3 hours without cooling, that's quite a sportive challenge for the strongest leaf salad.

Finally the sharing of the meal begins – we as guests are the first to be served. I am not used to that – and I only take little. I share the salad on all the plates; everyone wants to have a little bit of it, to taste the “German salad”.

When the last dipper is given, immediately there is an incredible silence. – I will never forget this image: everyone concentrated on their food, with lots of kids sitting on the ground floor, putting their paper-plates on their legs, using plastic-forks to pick the pieces; cautiously they try the strange salad and then a sudden shine in the eyes. At the end of the meal, all plates are so clean as if there was never any food on them. – The pot is empty, lots of stomachs are filled, big warmth in the room, a comforting being-together.



Uta Göbel-Groß

I am an artist and lecturer for arts. Since 2000 I am busy with creative projects within the partnership Aachen-Cape Town. I worked as lecturer and project-organizer of 15 MURALS with students of partner-schools & local artists in South Africa & Germany.

POTJIEKOS – only this one time I experienced the cooking of this meal – the smells and sounds, the trickle away of time, the slow movements of cooking, the longing for the moment to eat – above all the evening sky and the fading of the colours around – and the kids who, in the moment of eating, enjoy quietly every single bite – it is a pin-sharp image in my memories.

www.letmetellyou.de

You can find all the stories of this brochure on our multi-media-website. There you can hear the storytellers own voices in podcasts and some you can even see in videos, where they talk about their experiences.

And on the website there are more fascinating stories to read, see and listen.

A big "Thank you" to all the storytellers in this brochure and to those ones, who appear on our website so far: Birgit Jakobs, Josef Backhaus, Josefine Ebel, Line Thaler, Luisa Repolato, Stacy-Ann Michaels, Stephan Granger, Teresa Boule, Tiffany Chambers, Venwar Newroly, William Williams and Xola Keswa.

For us as interviewers and listeners this project-year was very inspiring. We enjoyed the memories people shared with us and experienced some very special personal moments, which also sent us back in time. The more stories we were allowed to hear the more we understood the importance of meeting each other in reality compared to all the virtual meetings, which helped us keep in touch during the pandemic.

Uta and Norbert,
December 2021

LET ME TELL YOU
stories of a partnership

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