

An English Woman In South Africa ...

SYNOPSIS of Three Working Trips to South Africa, in 2005,
by Carole Spiers, (UK Professional Speaker, Author and Broadcaster),
together with (Writer and Photographer), Michael Halpern.



Carole Spiers



Anthea Roussouw

Carole Spiers and Anthea Rossouw, one an English woman from London and the other, a white South African born and raised in Cape Town. Both are now highly successful and experienced career women – but career women with a difference! Their focus of their energies now predominately in the voluntary sector – helping the disadvantaged in society, those at the bottom who have no money but who are desperate to learn new skills in order to make something of themselves .

Carole is the MD of an International Stress Management & Employee Wellbeing consultancy and an entrepreneur in her own right who, nevertheless, worked for twenty years for the crisis agency, the Samaritans in London, assisting those whose lives appeared to themselves to be valueless, many so depressed that they considered suicide. She visited prisons and detention centres in the UK, helped with trauma victims overseas and campaigned against injustice. Carole, a vice-president of ISMA^{UK}, the International Stress Management Association, a professional speaker and author, has a lifetime of experience in counselling those in need of emotional support and her life has interesting parallels with her associate, Anthea Rossouw.

Anthea, after many years as an executive on the South African Tourist Board, now uses her expertise for the Dreamcatcher Foundation of South Africa – an organisation that has in the past few years won many awards, both at home and abroad, for its work in helping disadvantaged people help themselves. Dreamcatcher is recognised, by the S A

government, as a pathfinder, a beacon organisation that has shown the way ahead for many South Africans to become self employed and self-sufficient. She is, almost single-handedly, raising the profile of the needs of those in the townships who are desperate to improve their lot – and she is, slowly but very surely, succeeding. Already, Dreamcatcher has branches in Canada, Holland and soon in the UK, dedicated volunteers who work together to raise funds to help realise Anthea's dream of an equitable society where those who have no assets and, up to now, no opportunity to gain any, are given the chance to improve their lives and the lives of their families.

Anthea and Carole are both very determined women! Women, who are not easily dissuaded, discouraged or deflected from their goals. Their goals are to improve lives – in this instance, South African lives. They go where others fear to tread, but Nelson Mandela's history and courage is a constant spur and a shining example that with determination and persistence, obstacles can be overcome and out of adversity can emerge the green shoots of success, a respect for human rights and equal opportunities for all people.

Both these women have an indomitable belief in the essential truth that what matters is not what you have but what you give and that it is not what you have learned so much as what you have taught. They realise that every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice empowers or encourages others to emulate such examples. Living a life that matters, is one of choice and for Anthea and Carole, their choice is plain. They choose to empower others.

Carole's Story

Our initial journey, flying out on a SAA jet from a rain-swept, Heathrow London airport was made on New Year's Day, 2005, to Cape Town and subsequently onwards, east, along the famed Garden Route. This was followed-up by a return trip for two weeks at Easter and then by a further two weeks in August. Our fourth and final visit, this year, is scheduled for December, when we plan to stay for a month, to include also Christmas and New Year.

Our initial aim was to go outside the usual tourist trail, hotels and game parks to meet with the indigenous people of the region i.e. the ordinary working African man and woman and, in particular, those who were running – or wanted to run - small business enterprises. Currently, it is still a fairly novel idea for overseas visitors to move away from the established tourist itinerary and a little unusual for professionals from abroad to give time to local business on a voluntary basis.

In fact, the region where we established our interest, crystallised as the Western Cape, with our base being the small, seaside town of Mossel Bay (east of Cape Town and a third of the way along the Garden Route) – home to a major gas distribution facility and with the second largest employer being a manufacturing plant of the Swiss company, Nestle, that produces dried milk powder for the local market.

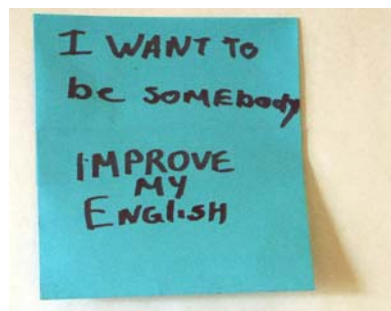


The focus of our first trip was to endeavour to become familiar with the geography and a little of the history of the Cape and the surrounding districts and to learn something of the economy and the relationship and interaction between the three different communities: the blacks, whites and the Cape coloured.

The second trip at Easter was to improve and consolidate this knowledge and to embark upon a dialogue with various members of the African community living in the townships on the edge of both Cape Town and Mossel Bay. At this time, we were also introduced to Anthea Rossouw, the CEO of the Dreamcatcher Foundation, which is a national organisation, headquartered in Cape Town but with branches overseas. Its mission is to help and motivate local South African entrepreneurs (and small business start-ups) to succeed by offering training and professional assistance. They also encourage volunteers, from all over the world, to stay and work together with local communities on different projects. We both found an immediate affinity and empathy with Dreamcatcher and its South African born, passion-driven, dynamic, articulate and highly experienced, chief executive.

Our third trip in August was pre-planned, in association with Anthea Rossouw, to hold two, 2-day training workshops on basic marketing skills for small business enterprises and business start-ups. Anthea tirelessly sought and obtained sponsorship for the travel and accommodation for the course applicants to take advantage of this unique opportunity. Carole also received some sponsorship from a UK software company who themselves are working in SA, introducing educational software to schools and computers to business start-ups in the townships.

Motivational Workshop Sessions entitled '*The 8 Step Process to Success: empowering the hidden entrepreneur within*' were held in Khayelitsha township, in Cape Town and taught the principal, basic skills necessary to become an entrepreneur.



The attendees increased their understanding of what it takes to be successful in terms of their commitment, determination, and passion, they:

- developed their self awareness in terms of their weaknesses and strengths and how these can be used to their benefit;
- improved their personal and business communication skills so that they could communicate freely with potential customers;
- spent time developing their image and learning what it is that would help them stand out from the crowd -what would make them different.
- learnt the importance of being professional and ensuring that this image is how they would become known; and finally, learnt to understand that they themselves are also the product they would be selling.



The ten attendees, who came from various locations, (some many miles distant), were enthusiastic and eager to learn the basic skills necessary for marketing their product or service and dealing with customers.

Although all in different occupations and within a wide age range, they all, without exception, were eager and enthusiastic to acquire new skills to improve their small businesses and to learn the basic skills of communication and marketing in order start new enterprises.

One quality stood out with them all – a resilience that enabled them to strive to rise above the difficulties in obtaining finance to fund their ideas and invest in their chosen business ventures.

They believed in themselves and their ability to 'be someone'. This obvious trait made the training, for us, one of satisfaction, knowing that everyone attending the courses were so keen to better themselves.

In all the years of running training courses, I had never seen such commitment; motivation and determination to come from a single group of people.



As for our attendees - they had never attended such a training programme before and they grabbed the opportunity with both hands. Their thirst for learning and knowledge made the atmosphere in the classroom, electric. They wanted to be self sufficient and not dependent on the State and were determined that they would succeed!

What they said:

'The course helped me to stay positive no matter what the situation is or may be'...

'I have learnt how to begin my dreams...'

'Thank you for giving me the tools I need to start building my future...'

'The course made me into the person I thought I could never be...'

'The course opened my mind and brought light to my future...'

'The programme gave me new life...'

It is to be hoped that these workshops will be the first of many and that we will be able to persuade other professionals, particularly from the UK, to spend some time in South Africa imparting their knowledge to the those starting and running small businesses who are in such need of professional advice and who are so keen to receive it.



We also hope to attract sponsorship to fund part of the many activities now being undertaken by the Dreamcatcher Foundation.

Activities that are vital to the growth of the new South Africa – a land and people that have suffered so much in the recent past but which is now so full of promise. But we do need help to achieve our objectives in returning to ordinary, black, South Africans their pride, by helping them to a worthwhile, self-sufficient future.

South Africa is a land potentially rich in minerals and in people, but Thabo Mbeki and his government have a massive job in exploiting their country's natural assets to create jobs and raise living standards, as well as to fighting an AIDS epidemic.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has helped heal the wounds of the recent past and we can now help these courageous people of Southern Africa by sharing our skills with them. Europe has gained from Africa and now we must reciprocate in helping their people build their economy.

There needs to be 'hands across the water' in sharing skills and expertise. We must work together.

As Nelson Mandela said in the moving words of his inauguration speech:

'We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the millions of our people. We enter into a covenant, that we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity. A rainbow nation, at peace with itself and the world'.



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