

Pride and Prejudice in the Townships



Carole Spiers

reports on life, work and happiness in the villages and townships of the Western Cape - and some original community experiences for you to consider

My partner and I have been visiting the townships of South Africa's Southern Cape for over three years now, and not only do we visit them - we stay in them as well.

Having read in the UK press about the violence, drug abuse and alcoholism that is allegedly endemic there, we were originally a little wary of what we would find. What we did find, however, was a community spirit that puts the average British neighbourhood to shame! We found a community of people who care about and support one another; a community who have an indomitable spirit of hope and thankfulness at the freedom they now enjoy; and a community who, although very often living in humble surroundings, appreciate what the government is doing to alleviate poverty, create jobs and build basic housing. They realise these things take time and money and it is a slow process, but most of all they realise the value of relationships and family.

They have a name for this indomitable spirit of togetherness - 'Ubuntu'.

Relishing New Freedoms. Nurturing The Community

One of the first people we met during our original visit in 2003 was Rosie Michaels, a middle-aged single mother who is crippled with the effects of diabetes but who works tirelessly and without pay for the good of the children of her community. Sometimes the pain makes her bedridden, but her spirit is strong and she is proud - oh so proud - to be a citizen of an Independent Republic of South Africa, and an active member, still, of the ANC.



Rosie



Loveliness with Carole

Another determined lady goes by the wonderful name of 'Loveliness'. She runs a children's playground for her local community in Mossel Bay. It was set up with sponsorship money from a group of Canadian tourists several years ago, and

is a safe area where children can play and their parents know where they will be. Attached to the playground is a non-alcoholic 'shabeen' - a place where locals and also tourists can drop in and spend a few moments drinking a coffee or ice-cold 'Coke'. It is a focal point in the township and Loveliness looks after the children as if they were her own. An amazing woman whose strength of purpose is as evident as her resolve to build a better future for her family and the community.

Fostering Growth And Development In The Townships

Thembeke Sturman – 'B&B Homestay' – Kwa Nongaba Township, Mossel Bay

We have stayed with Thembeke in the Kwa Nongaba township for the past three years, and over that time we have watched her children grow into young adults. Thembeke makes you feel at home in a way that is so comforting and homely that you feel you are a part of her family immediately - with traditional cooking on the stove and beds beautifully made with fresh linen and plumped-up pillows. Each time we go back we can see that the money Thembeke has earned from us staying with her has been ploughed back into her home. She lives in a two-storey building that anyone would be thrilled to stay in - spotlessly clean and a 'million miles' from the ramshackle dwelling that one might expect from photographs of the old townships before independence. Sensible security is still necessary of course, and we lock up our car at night behind the gates. From the front balcony, we can see amazing views over Mossel Bay and beyond as the sun glints on the water and on the oil terminal at the far side of the bay.

When we saw Thembeke last in December 2005, she was in very good spirits after a Canadian volunteer had stayed with her for four months. She showed us a new promotional leaflet he had created for her. It was a three-fold brochure with good copy and layout, and we took it to the Tourist Bureau for distribution because, as I explained to her, she should promote her 'B&B Homestay' (see below) more widely - and she took this on board. Both she and her husband Basil are now looking at extending their home to give them an additional

self-contained unit to cater for more guests, and they are also now starting to receive visitors from local businesses as well.

Antoinette – Kwa Nongaba

Antoinette is a seamstress and has done really well since our last visit in 2006. Her sewing business has grown and she is now giving part-time employment to two other people. Antoinette works from the kitchen of her tiny home but really needs larger premises, so we spoke about her possibly renting a container at some point if her finances allowed. We also took pictures of some of her products, such as curtains she had made for one of her customers, and a duvet cover. These pictures were printed and we put them into an album to create a promotional product portfolio. This she will now take round to prospective customers to show them the products of which she is so proud.



Cornelius Yellow Eiman – Klapmutz

A gifted wire sculptor from Klapmutz, just outside Cape Town, Cornelius progressed in two years from living with his wife and three children in a shack, to being proud home owners with necessary comforts including lighting and running water. Cornelius and Pasculine his wife now run a quaint wire art studio adjacent to their home. Here, visitors can purchase his art or order directly from him, or learn to produce this 'typically South African art form' whilst they enjoy coffee, tea and mouth-watering local fare proudly served by Pasculine.

Cornelius makes numerous attractive and interesting products out of galvanized wire, carefully worked and beautifully produced. When we saw him in 2006, we created a promotional brochure / catalogue for his wire products, together with a doubled-sided business card. This is now paying huge dividends, and he has increased his sales because of this marketing material.

I was delighted to have secured a computer for his needs in 2005, and it was wonderful to see how

much he had learned on this machine since our previous visit. He is now training his family and other members of the community to use it and is becoming a role model for the community.

We looked at new product ranges and how he could promote his services more fully - greetings cards for special occasions, flower vases, planters with beaded hearts etc. I created a marketing document on his computer and told him to keep a log of his activity and send it to me once a month so that I could assess his progress – which he was happy to do. I also gave him a USB thumb drive, and his part of the deal was to maintain contact by email so that I can supervise him, which he also agreed to.

Belinda – Stillbai

Belinda, a school teacher, was delighted to see us last year. She was in very good spirits, and despite having just had her baby, was very committed to developing her business even further. I spent most of the time working with her on a one-page brochure for which we took new pictures. I delivered the brochure copy to the local printer, and it was ready for collection by the time we left.

Belinda is very keen to improve her 'B&B Homestay' and was asking for advice about this. She is also committed to investing her finances back into her property and business for the benefit of her guests. Her home is lovely and we gave her some input regarding our room, for which she was very grateful (for example, the shower needed to be usable, needed cleaning, and there was paint splattered on the wardrobe and chair). We also suggested some follow-up actions for Belinda, including:

- Creating a satisfaction sheet for her guests so that she would learn from their visits.
- Keeping in close contact with the Tourist Bureau and taking her brochure in regularly to ensure they had sufficient stock.
- She has a good relationship with her local supermarkets, so will take her brochure and put it in their windows.

I have no concerns about Belinda as she is self-motivated and determined to raise her income even more.

She gives recommendations to her guests to go to 'Cookup Kamamma Annie' to eat. Annie shares

her cooking talents of mouth-watering traditional South African cooking, and gives you a meal you will never forget. She has cooked for us on many occasions and I love every mouthful.

I am encouraging this cross-linkage between the two businesses, and suggested that Belinda should also have some of Annie's biscuits on sale at her Homestay for her guests. That way people can sample some of her delights for themselves and will come back for more!

When we saw Belinda last year I suggested that she create a guest book, and this year it was filled with names, addresses and comments from the many people who have stayed with her. This was a real joy to see the huge growth she is experiencing in putting these simple marketing tools into practice.

Welcoming Village Experiences In New South Africa

The township houses may not have all the modern conveniences that we are used to but the new 'Homestay B&B' accommodation (such as Thembeke's and Belinda's) offers high standards that are a delight to experience. All the Homestays have been set up by Anthea Rossouw of the Dreamcatcher Foundation of South Africa - www.dreamcatcher.co.za. This is a highly active, results-driven and outcomes-based organisation, and with the assistance of various donors and volunteers from around the world, dreams have been turned into reality and changed the lives of many.

If you wish to have an experience to treasure, and that will provide an enriching time for you, then you need to meet the real people of South Africa in

their Homestay communities. You might also be lucky enough to experience an authentic Cookup Kammama like Annie's and have the opportunity of eating real, authentic southern African cuisine that has won many awards and has an excellent reputation. Here you will experience a meal to remember, and if you ask your hostess nicely, she will give you the secret to her recipes!



Valuable Lessons For The UK's Un-Neighbourly Neighbourhoods

So what can we learn from the township experience? We can learn how to communicate again. And we can re-learn some of the very basic values in our life... people giving to each other... people knowing each other... people being there and caring for each other....

Street corners filled with families chatting. Front porches with young and old sitting and watching the world go by. Children playing. Old people musing about the past. Schoolchildren on their cell-phones. The corner shops that are open until midnight, ready to provide you with the sugar or tea that you forgot to get. Of course there is crime, and of course there is mugging - just as there is on the streets of our own suburbs where we sit behind closed doors, or increasingly in gated communities.

We can learn something from the townships of South Africa that our parents knew, but which we have discarded. We need to exercise a modicum of care in life, for not to do so would be foolish. But beyond that, we need to have friends and



neighbours – we need that sense of community that is so vital for our health and wellbeing and for the health and wellbeing of our society.

Here in the UK, where we seem to have lost the sense of community; where we rarely speak to our neighbours; where a cry for help can very often go unheeded; where road rage is not unusual; where children are ferried to school in the family car for fear of assault or worse. Here, where many of us live our lives in splendid isolation, with the curtains pulled tightly closed.

We have forgotten the sight of children playing in the street. The neighbourly support. The family friend. We think we have all the answers in our suburban way of life. But so often it is a sterile existence, with the fumes of the cars all around and the cult of materialism pervading every space of our lives, both at home and at work.

If we are looking for vibrancy, support, being there for each other and feeling part of a community, then we have something very important to learn from the township way of life. It is possible, sometimes, to stumble upon magic as if by accident. The Western Cape has that magic – and it's yours to walk into, experience, and bring a little of back home to grow yourself, wherever you may live...

My partner and I return to the townships in December 2007 and I can't wait to see the learning put into practice. To see businesses growing... experience smiles and laughter on the children's faces... share feelings of hope... and feel the growth of relationships. This will be a hard working trip, but not only is it an honour, it is also a privilege to be there and to leave behind the marketing tools and skills that I know will be put into practice.

A humbling experience of great magnitude!

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Carole doesn't just talk success, she lives it! Author of Tolley's 'Managing Stress in the Workplace' and 'Turn Your Passion Into Profit', Carole is the founder of an international stress management group which has won repeat business for over 20 years with leading corporations from Unilever to Walt Disney, and Panasonic to the Bank of England. Carole is President of the London chapter of the Professional Speakers Association and a VP of the International Stress Management Association.

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