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Deaf heroes: Deaf South Africans who are making a difference

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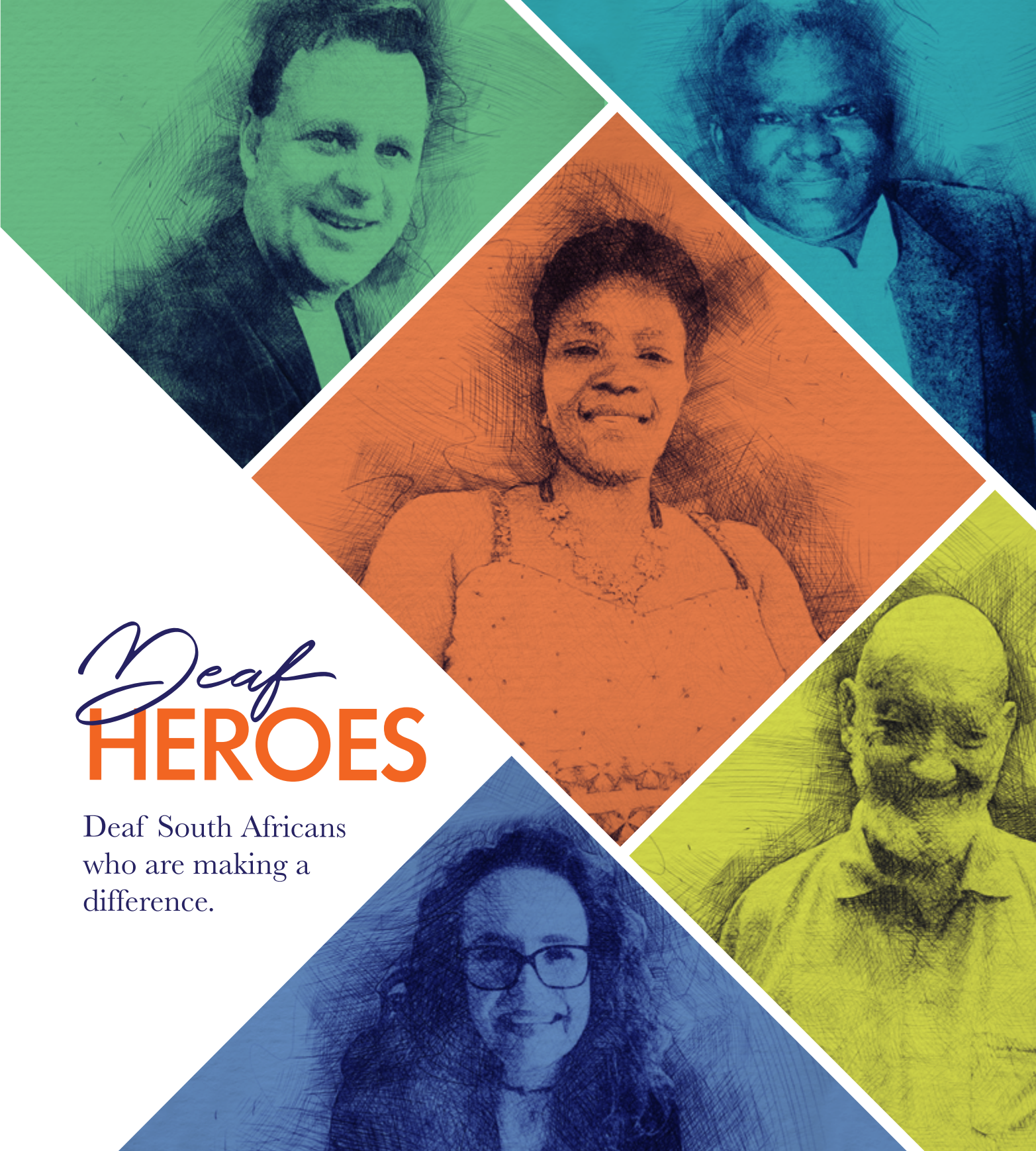

Deaf HEROES

Deaf South Africans who are making a difference.

Deaf Heroes Volume 1
Edited by Robyn Swannack & Claudine Storbeck

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Susan Njeyiyana
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Louis Neethling
Ingrid Parkin
Stephen Venter
Iantha Naicker
Philip Dobson

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Robyn Swannack and Prof. Claudine Storbeck enjoyed creating 'Deaf Heroes' together. They recently discovered that they are almost the same age in 'SA-Deaf-Community-years'. Robyn was born in 1995 & has been proudly Deaf her whole life. She was raised by an amazing Deaf mom with SASL as her first language. Claudine started her journey into and with the Deaf Community in 1992 and has loved working with Deaf people, who have been so patient in mentoring her into SASL and understanding Deaf Culture (which is a journey and not a destination). The two of them had so much fun learning about some of the amazing Deaf Heroes we have in South Africa and they know that this book will inspire many children, both Deaf and hearing.

Robyn & Claudine





Deaf HEROES

Foreword	3
Cyril Axelrod	4
Susan Njeyiyana	6
Tommy Motswai	10
Tadhg Slattery	12
Helen Morgans	14
Lucas Magongwa	17
Nazereen Capiteux-Bhana	20
Louis Neethling	23
Ingrid Parkin	26
Stephen Venter	28
Iantha Naicker	30
Philip Dobson	33



FOREWORD

South Africa has been blessed with many great leaders, both men and women who have gone before us to lead the way and set foundations in place for this wonderful "Rainbow Nation" of ours. Some of these South African pioneers we always celebrate are: The first President of our Democracy, Nelson Mandela, Ghandi & Ruth First (anti-apartheid activists), Gary Player (Sportsman), Miriam Makeba & Hugh Masekela (Musicians) and Dr Christian Barnard (surgeon).

In this publication, "Deaf Heroes, Volume 1", we would like to add to these names and begin to celebrate Deaf South Africans that have made and continue to make a difference in our country. Here are just a few of the reasons we need to tell these stories and celebrate the lives of Deaf Heroes and Role Models.

- Young Deaf children can grow up and see that there are amazing role models they can look up to and be inspired.
- Parents of Deaf children can see a future for their children and know that there is hope for a wonderful life for their child.
- Teachers of the Deaf can use these stories in the English class for comprehension tests etc, making the content applicable to the Deaf-experience.
- Teachers of the Deaf who teach SASL can use this text as an opportunity for Deaf children to create SASL resources or interview Deaf Heroes further.
- The hearing world can see and celebrate the Deaf Heroes of South Africa, because they have been invisible for too long.
- We can create resources and literature (and in this case non-fiction) that have Deaf characters, and finally
- Both hearing and Deaf people can enjoy reading about the struggles and successes of wonderful South Africans … who just happen to be Deaf.

Who is a 'Hero'? We see a Hero as someone who has worked hard, tried new things and who has achieved despite various challenges. It is also important for us to know that these Heroes are willing to 'give back' and support and encourage younger Deaf people on their new journeys. This first volume began with nominations, and as we plan volumes two and three, we welcome you to send us your nominations of Deaf Heroes for these next publications in any field in which they are shining … Academic, Film & Media, Art, Dance, Photography, Sport, Leadership etc.

CYRIL AXELROD

Father Cyril Axelrod
Born in Johannesburg
Living in London, UK

Greatest achievements
Attending a college to study accounting, visiting Gallaudet University for one year, studying to become a priest, traveling all over the world to establish Deaf federations and giving back to the Deaf community.

Family
I am the only child of my family, my mother is from Lithuania and my father is from Poland. They were the most ordinary couple. They had a simple life. When I was born, they did not know I was Deaf. I also couldn't walk until I was three years old. They put me in a hospital to receive physical therapy and then when they discovered I could not speak, they took me to the doctor who revealed I was Deaf. My family's faith is Jewish. I grew up Jewish. I went to Shul, a Jewish church to learn Jewish and practice Hebrew.

> "Help people to understand and to appreciate you!"

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I went to St Vincent School for the Deaf. It is hard to find a favourite memory because I had so many. It is difficult to choose one. I have many good memories of my friends and teachers. I was happy with many things. I was very open to the community so I accepted everyone and saw a lot of good things.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
When I was at school, each one of their talent reflected well on me. I loved each one of them. They did very well so I appreciate all teachers equally and I get along with each one of them.

How did you decide on your career?
My aims of becoming a priest was not based solely on religion, it was also on community and the notion of 'giving back.' I wanted to show people how good God can be. I saw how so many Deaf people were so negative about having difficulties with the Hearing world, especially their parents, so I wanted to change their negativity into positivity.

Who are your heroes and role models?
I look up to Dr. Robert Simmons because he went to university and he studied science. I was amazed at what he did. He is my role model because he helped me realise that there are no obstacles in life and that I can do anything I want.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
Many people… different characters, different talents and different professions. They all have influenced me to broaden my life and to broaden my mind. I learn from them because everyone have the good gift of life. Some may experience difficult life but there are people around who can influence you. It made me accept myself and when I became blind as well, I still believed there are no obstacles in life.

What is the secret to your success?
Confidence and positivity!

What are your strengths?
Faith. I have faith in myself and of my life. I have the faith to do everything in life.

What is something you want to improve on?
Being a Deafblind sometimes makes my life limiting. Sometimes I am not aware of a few things and end up misunderstanding. Misconception is my weakness.

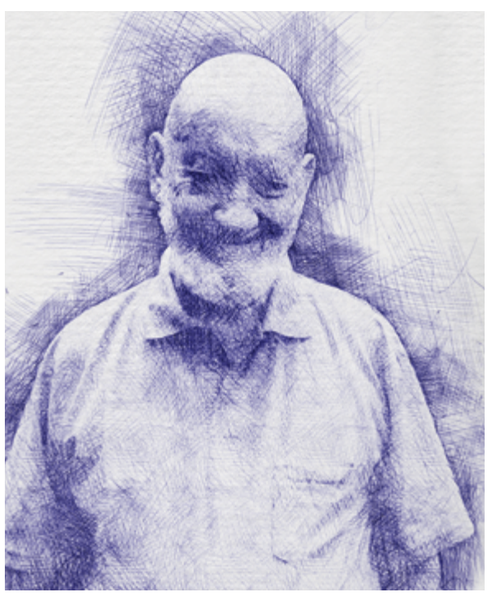
What make you happy?
Anything that comes to me makes me happy. I accept whatever comes in my life. I give back the happiness too.

What is on your bucketlist?
- My dream is to see sign language for all. Hearing people are learning to sign, Deaf with mental health issues are learning to sign, Deafblind are learning to sign. Sign language is not only for Deaf people but for all.
- I want to witness Deaf people to be open with Deafblind people, to Deaf mental health people, to Deaf and disabled people. They need to welcome us in their community.
- I also want to witness Deaf people being involved in politics, to bring the value to the political world and contribute to the country.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
I would tell myself to snap out of thinking negatively and be positive. To overcome any difficulties!

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
My advice to Deaf children is to learn with open mind and heart. If they are experiencing any kind of suffering, please don't feel low. They need to speak up and tell the truth. Honesty is everything. Tell the truth!

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I want them to be open minded like me. To see good in every value. They need to take accountability and to be open. To give back to the community!



SUSAN NJEYIYANA



Susan Njeyiyana
Born in Soweto
Living in Stellenbosch, Western Cape

Greatest achievements
Obtaining a Graphic Design qualification at Damelin and Honours Degree in SASL Linguistics at University at the Witwatersrand. I am a Founding member of Sign Language Education and Development, and Junior Lecturer at Stellenbosch University.

Family
My parents are hearing and never believed in sign language so I always had to communicate orally. We are 4 sisters, the eldest is hearing and the rest of us are Deaf. I'm the last born. All of us were born hearing but at the age of three the last three siblings became Deaf. We suspected that it might be due to a gene that resides in my father's family as the three of us shared the same father. Since we only became Deaf at the age of three, we continued to communicate orally and went to a hearing school. That's why our parents believed we had to communicate orally.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I went to a hearing crèche and when it came time to join the primary school at age 7, I was sent to the Deaf school, Dominican School for the Deaf in Hammanskraal. My sisters were older than me but at that time our parents decided all three of us should go to the same Deaf school. Unfortunately the school could only offer education up to Grade 10, after which I was moved to St Vincent School for the Deaf to complete my matric.

When I was a child, we didn't have technology as we do today, so we played many games with each other on the playground during break time. Some of us had access to TV and after watching our stories, we would come back the next day and tell the rest of the group what happened in the story. They would sit and watch the storyteller with such focus and attention.

Other times, I would ask a friend's brother or sister, who was hearing, to listen to a song that I liked, and write down the lyrics for me. As a group we would then practice the music just like we would play a game. I love music!

Did you have any favourite teachers?
None.

How did you decide on your career?
When I finished school I was unsure of what I wanted to do and I ended up following what other deaf people were doing, which in this case was to study beauty therapy. After I finished my studies, I realised that the work did not suit me as one needed to communicate in detail with clients to establish their needs for their skin. I then decided to study graphic design as this was a passion of mine. During school I had a talent for drawing images and I felt that graphic design would fit in with my passion.

After I finished Graphic Design at Damelin, I looked for work and was invited to participate in the project by DeafSA, *'Show of Hands'*. Various Deaf adults came together to 'tell' their stories and poems and Cara Loening was the coordinator of the project. When we were there for the recording, Bruno Druchen told us more about how sign language poetry worked and he gave us a few examples so we could understand. Some Deaf people did not grasp the idea but others like myself and Helen Morgans decided to further explore the idea and this is where my very first poem, *'June 16th'* was born. It was followed by *'Bear Wash Day'*.

After the project, Cara Loening asked me if I would like to work with them. I agreed and became a founding member of SLED where I worked for 16 years. I developed many poems while working at SLED, some of which I was able to perform at schools during workshops and talk to the teachers (both Deaf and Hearing) about the theme and analysis of the poem. Some themes covered AIDS, in order to bring awareness to the teachers of the risks in the community.

I developed skills in television presenting, telling of stories and character changes in SASL. I could work in different modes of presenting by narrating and then switching to showcasing the various characters. This was a skill that not many Deaf artists were able to achieve but I was happy and proud to do.

I was fortunate to visit London as my first trip abroad. It was followed by a trip to the WFD conference in Canada in 2003. We were a group from SLED, representing our organisation to the conference and to provide support to DeafSA who had put in a bid to bring the next WFD conference to South Africa. Unfortunately we lost the bid at the time. Later, in 2005, through University of Jyväskyla, Finland, I attended a presentation by Deaf academics from Europe who had

done research on signed languages linguistics. This was my very first experience of other Deaf academics who had done research into their own languages. This was the spark that led to my thought of wanting the same for myself, wondering, 'if they could do it, so could I'. I came to realise that since I was teaching hearing people SASL that I was in need of the same knowledge they had of their own language.

> "I'm always willing to learn, reading a lot, and growing my knowledge of the world around me."

After 16 years working at SLED, I decided to venture further as I've obtained my Honours degree in SASL Linguistics from Wits. I was offered a position with Stellenbosch University as a Junior Lecturer, teaching SASL acquisition. At the university I am also involved with the development of LTSM (Learning and Teaching Support Material). I am planning to continue my studies in 2019 and study towards my MA degree. I am working towards my dream of being a full time academic lecturer and professor as well as writing a book on SASL linguistics and literature. I dream of looking at the comparisons of spoken language metaphors and those of SASL metaphors in poetry.

Who are your heroes and role models?
The Deaf artist, Tommy Motswai. He would always visit the school to talk about his art and I loved his work, because it was always so colourful and different.

My classmate, Abram Moyaha, was and still is a very talented artist and his illustrations continue to inspire me to be creative. Anna Rakumakoe.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
Ruth Morgan was a big influence in creating an interest in me to further my studies. Then there was Schuaib Chalkin, a previous board member of SLED, who always encouraged me to reach higher. I worked closely with Kirsty Maclons during my time with SLED, and she taught me to improve English. I was also inspired by Judy Jurgens who came to SLED to work with the staff to improve our capacity to use English.

What is the secret to your success?
I'm always willing to learn, reading a lot, and growing my knowledge of the world around me. Having the right attitude and influencing people around me in a positive way. Encouraging others to reach their own breakthrough like I did. Having the love and support of an amazing husband and beautiful children, that always remind where I'm from and how far I've come. I've sacrificed so much in order to give to Deaf community for our future.

What are your strengths?
Being a SASL poet, a fierce love for my family, independent, a leader and always curious.

What is something you want to improve on?
Written language, specifically, English and Sesotho.

What makes you happy?
Experiencing new things, new environments and meeting new people. I love living in the Western Cape where life runs at a different pace and my work at the university which brings change to the lives of Deaf children.

What is on your bucketlist?
- I want to experience an Opera in Italy.
- I want to learn the traditional dancing of Ireland, like the Riverdance.
- I want to perform my poetry to the sound of music.
- I want to learn to play the piano.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
To go and read more. Go to the library and lead other kids in the class to join you. Start a reading club and after reading the books, tell classmates the story that you've read. Perform the stories you read, such as *'Romeo and Juliet'*, know who Shakespeare is. Bible stories are important, but there's a whole other world out there, just read about it. It's good that you are not too interested in boys at this age, they can wait. Your education is more important.

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
I would tell them that education is very important, because it has the ability to change your life. It will open doors to better work opportunities sity, better work opportunities and a better standard of living. There is no such thing as "I can't because I'm Deaf." It's unacceptable. Through education, everything is possible. During your teenage years, many changes occur, but remember, you're in charge of your own future. Take control of your life and be responsible for your own choices. Education is the key to everything in life.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I hope they will also become role models to Deaf newcomers. That they will guide others to follow the right path in life, giving everyone the love and respect that they deserve. Challenges will make them stronger. Hard work will pay so never stop learning and never waste their unique talent.

Tommy Motswai
Born in Soweto
Living in Pretoria, Gauteng

Greatest achievements
Being recognised as an international award-winning artist.

Family
I am married to Evelyn Motswai and I have three children named Joyce, Thabo and Aubrey.

Which school did you go and share a favourite memory with us?
I went to Kutlwanong School for the Deaf in Rustenburg when I was 10 years old. I moved there from North West.

When I arrived at the school with my parents, I was scared of the many Deaf people who approached me. I was scared, because I did not know them. After my parents left, I didn't know what to do because I did not know how to sign. I cried for a long time. I found a friend, and he comforted me whenever I felt homesick. He kept showing me artwork around school and I wanted to copy some of them because they were unbelievably beautiful. My friend kept signing to me even though I did not know how to sign, but I eventually learned. He would describe the people in the portraits and I finally understood what he was trying to say. This was my favourite memory because he introduced me to the beautiful world of art and sign language.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
I loved all my teachers. I do not have a favourite one… They all encouraged me to succeed in life!

How did you decide on your career?
I was very fond of drawing. Like I mentioned earlier, a friend introduced me to art and from that very moment I was obsessed. When all the other classmates were busy playing in the garden I would sit in the corner and draw. This is how I discovered my passion for art.

I wanted a career in art so I enrolled in art classes at FUBA (Federation Union of Black Artists) and the Johannesburg Art Foundation. I also spent some time at the University of Bophuthatswana to explore my passion.

Who are your heroes and role models?
Many Black artists in South Africa. I cannot choose one, they all inspire me. They all are determined to show what they can do, especially during the apartheid era. I evolved as an artist during the apartheid, so having them as my role models helped me to continue my passion.

> "I fought hard to be in the art world."

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
The Goodman Gallery helped me so much to achieve more with my art. I was a new artist in 1980, I fought for my right to display my art. The Goodman Gallery eventually recognised and selected a few of my works. They encouraged people to come and look at my exhibition, and many people purchased my artwork. I was speechless because I was a young artist and about to become very successful.

Natalie from Knight Galleries also helped me to exhibit and sell more of my works. The Goodman Gallery and Knight Galleries inspired me to persue my dream as an artist. I traveled internationally to showcase my work. I was the first Deaf black artist to receive awards in South Africa. I am forever indebted to The Goodman and Knight Galleries.

What is the secret to your success?
I fought so hard to be in the art world. I never gave up. Fighting for my work is the secret to my success.

What are your strengths?
I am a very strong person. I am confident. I was born a South African man, I am a good role model for many young Deaf artists.

What is something you want to improve on?
I do not accept weaknesses to take over my life, I must fight on and put on the effort to fight more. I refuse to be shy, I need to be more confident. I love to think positively and to think about the future. I am very creative too, so I do not see any weaknesses in me.

What make you happy?
I am so happy to have my wife Evelyn on my side. Evelyn has helped me so much by doing household chores and encouraging me to go further in my life. My wife and I talk about everything. She is the greatest critic to my work, she makes me a better artist. She has been so incredibly supportive. I am so grateful to have her.

What is on your bucketlist?
- I would like to learn how to fundraise so I can travel the world and attend the WFD Conference in Paris in July, 2019 to show them my work as a Deaf South African.
- I want to meet more Deaf people from other countries and learn about their talents.
- I want to start a project to encourage Deaf children to become artists.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
I would tell my 12 year old self that the art I was creating back then were amazing. They were good enough to show to people. I would drop my jaw to see the art I created when I was 12 years old. I would tell my 12 year old to be more confident to show the work!

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
I believe all children should be afforded an opportunity to express themselves through the arts.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I have a very important message for young Deaf children who aspire to become artists: You need to achieve matric and go to university to study art. Study culture too. Education is very important and it will lead you to a better path. Studying will give you better skills and it will make your art unique and special. You can win awards, you can sell your artwork for a lot of money and you can become famous!



TOMMY MOTSWAI

TADHG SLATTERY



Tadhg Slattery
Born in Durban
Living in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Greatest achievements
My greatest achievements are swimming at six paraymplics, receiving South African colours and going to my first paralympic game when I was 20 years old, in Barcelona, 1992. I won six Paralympic medals: 2 of them gold, three silver and one bronze. The greatest achievement of all would be winning gold and breaking the world record in my class at my first paralympic game at Barcelona.

Family
My whole family is Hearing. I have three hearing brothers. We communicate by speaking & lip-reading.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I went to Fulton School for the Deaf when I was 2 and half years old. I moved to St Vincent School for the Deaf when I was 6 years old. I matriculated in 1989.

My favourite memory is definitely when I moved to St Vincent and Louis Neethling took time to teach me South African Sign Language. I picked up SASL in two weeks! He taught me in Grade 1. My other favourite memory is when I won a trophy for being an improved swimmer at the Inter-House Gala at 9 years old.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
I was too naughty and a rebel child so I never liked any teachers at school. I was a very strong-willed child and fought back with teachers. Oops, Shhhhhh!

How did you decide on your career?
After matriculating, I was not sure what to do. The school and my family encouraged me to study and train in IT field. I decided to study advanced IT at a company for five years. I also studied Computer Science for further 2 years. I moved to England for 10 months where I worked at a well-known company as an IT technician. When I returned, I decided to focus on swimming training full time. Swimming has always been my passion so I devoted to it all the time. After retiring from swimming, I became a swimming coach. I have my own swimming school for disabled children. It is going very well!

Who are your heroes and role models?
My heroes are Louise Benjamin and Louis Neethling. Louise Benjamin is also disabled and a great sportswoman. I looked up to her when I was little and wanted to be a good swimmer like her. Louis Neethling always believed in me and never looked at me as a disabled person. He always encouraged me to exceed in sports and never left me out of anything. He made me play tennis, running, squash, soccer, and swimming.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
Of course, my parents and three brothers. They are the best. When I was little, I was so frustrated to see my two brothers who were doing so well at sports and got lots of medals. I decided to train hard and when I was 12 years old, I finally qualified for the Southern Transvaal team. I went to South African Disability Games. I won 5 medals there and broke first South Africa record or under 14. If it wasn't for my family, I wouldn't have trained hard and achieved all this at a young age.
My wife Judy also greatly influenced my life. She has never given up on me and encourages me to go further.

What is the secret to your success?
Never give up your own goal and don't dream too much. Do the action and achieve your goal. Aim at your best life.

What are your strengths?
My empowerment to disabled and deaf swimmers who achieve their goal in the future.

What is something you want to improve on?
I have always told my swimmers to balance their life with studying and playing sports. I would love to have had someone to give me this advice when I was little. I also would like to give more of my time for my wife, Judy.

What makes you happy?
Swimming, coaching, being with my wife, and staying committed to what I do.

What is on your bucketlist?
- Finish off my coaching levels;
- Success with my disability swimming club;
- Travel more: Russia, many little islands, all over United Kingdom and Ireland and many more.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
I would tell my 12-year old self to not be so embarrassed with how I look. I was bullied rather badly at school because of my cerebral palsy. I would also say that it does not matter that I am disabled, I am still going to succeed in life. And to read, write and study more!

> "Roll up your sleeves, climb up the ladder, and achieve your goals."

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
"No Pain, No Gain." Try to have a balanced life between studying and playing sports. Believe in yourself and work harder! Trust your teachers and coaches.

Roll up your sleeves, climb up the ladder, and achieve your goals. Do not let your dreams ruin your life. Do it and don't feel sorry for yourself!

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I traveled all over the world through swimming, and through that I learned a lot from other cultures and languages. Traveling has opened my mind. I want Deaf children to learn that they should exceed in life in order to travel and learn more out there. To pull up their sleeves and start achieving their dreams.

HELEN MORGANS

Helen Guinevere Morgans-Wenhold
Born in Johannesburg
Living in Scotland, UK

Greatest achievements
I am proud that I have three degrees and that I set up a University level South African Sign Language programme. I am also proud of the fact that I have travelled and lived across the world. I think I am most proud of the fact that I grew up as a Deaf person and that despite the fact that I faced many barriers, I learned to let go, to love myself and to love others.



Family
I was born deaf due to rubella. I am the only Deaf person in my family but there is age-related deafness on my mother's side. I am the oldest of three children. My younger sister could sign well as a result of her watching me and learning, however, my younger brother only has basic signing. The other family members are oral, and this was how I communicated.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I attended two schools for the Deaf. I attended St Vincent School for the Deaf from Pre-school to the end of Matric and then during Grade 12 I undertook an America Field Service (AFS) exchange programme in America where I attended the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind for one year.

I was a very inquisitive child and loved to watch the older children sign. I would take in information from them and as a result this helped me to develop my linguistic and social skills. This is my favorite memory, watching the older children signing.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
I did not have any favorite teachers during my school years, however, I did have great respect for my English teacher, JS. I was around 16 years old and he had joined the school. He decided to test my English skills and asked me to write an essay, which he would mark. After reading my work, he approached me and told me in no uncertain terms that I was at least three years behind in my English skills. Although I was shocked by his comments, I realised that I had, over the years of my schooling, missed so much information and this had seriously impacted my understanding of English.

During this time, JS was the one teacher who encouraged me to explore life outside school, especially when I was offered a place for the exchange programme to America. He made me realise that the world is a big place and that I should open my mind to new experiences and broaden my horizons. I will always have huge respect for his input.

How did you decide on your career?
I remember while I was at Idaho School for the Deaf, an older sister of my classmate returned home on holiday from Gallaudet University. She told me about her studies at Gallaudet, the only university for Deaf people, and my decision was made. I attended Gallaudet University and studied accountancy and then spent some time travelling. When I returned home to South Africa I worked at DeafSA as the SASL development officer. I had a lot of Deaf colleagues, and have very fond memories of this time in my life.

> "My strength is my determination. I challenge inequality when I see it."

I then moved on to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and set up the first ever South African Sign Language programme in the Faculty of Humanities. I worked there for eight years, first alone and then more staff who are SASL users were employed.

During my time at DeafSA, I studied part-time for an MA in Linguistics at the University of Stellenbosch. During my teaching at WITS I had a desire to undertake a PhD. I was not ready for the challenge of a PhD and so I decided to undertake a second MA, this one by research focusing on written English as a second or third language. It was a huge challenge, but I felt a great sense of achievement in completing this degree.

I then met my husband, got married, moved to England and had two children who I cared for full time for around six years. We then moved to Scotland with my husband's work and I started a new role in the British Deaf Association (Scotland) as a Hate Crime Officer on a temporary contract. I then took on a new role as Access and Inclusion Engagement Officer working specifically with the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015, engaging with public bodies to promote access for the Scottish Deaf community.

Who are your heroes and role models?
There have been a few influential role models for me during my life: As a school girl, I admired Tanya Hammersmith (neé Schreiber) and Patricia Shores for going abroad and attending university. They became successful career woman in America and Switzerland respectively and were wonderful role models for me.

Dr Robert Simmons was an inspiration. He had a Ph.D. and studied and taught at the University of the Witwatersrand at a time when there were no SASL interpreters, which is astounding. I must mention Father Cyril Axelrod. He worked with Deaf communities both in South Africa and the rest of the world. He spent a significant amount of time in China, and specifically in Macau where he did a lot for and with the Deaf and Deafblind communities there.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
My husband Anton has been the biggest influence in

my life. He is a wonderful man, very patient and easy going. He has helped me to be content with my life and with what I have achieved. He has been such a big influence for me.

What is the secret to your success
Don't compare yourself to others. You can achieve anything you want to in life no matter how big or small it is. Accept and respect yourself.

What are your strengths?
My strength is my determination. When I see inequality, I will challenge this. I believe it is my responsibility to learn, to keep abreast of current affairs and ensure I succeed. When I do succeed I know that I have done this myself and that I have committed to achieving.

What is something you want to improve on?
One area I would like to improve in my life is to be more proactive in achieving my ambitions. I can be a little indecisive and have a tendency to procrastinate. I would like to be more decisive and be more assertive in achieving my goals.

What makes you happy?
Feelings of self satisfaction, of peace, of feeling content inside makes me outwardly happy. Material things, money, status, and titles don't make me happy. Happiness is not something you can buy, it is something you must work at to achieve.

What is on your bucketlist?
- To work in advocacy for the Deaf community;
- To travel around Europe with my husband and my children;
- To be spiritually content.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
I would tell myself to go and get some life coaching in order to try and understand who I was within the community around me. If I think back to my twelve-year-old self, I was so serious and frustrated. I didn't have the capacity to describe what I was feeling. I just felt it and I knew that something wasn't right. As I got older these issues were clearer to me and if I knew back then what I know now my life would have been much easier.

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
My advice to young Deaf people in South Africa is to make sure you get a good education one way or another. There is no point in sitting back and waiting for something to happen. There are barriers you might face out there, but you need to accept responsibility and do something to find your own path to success.

If you really want to succeed you will find how to create your own tools to help you develop. For example, maybe you want to write a formal letter to your manager and not sure of how to set out the letter correctly, so you can use Google to find out what the layout should look like. This is one example of how you can find your own tools to support your learning. There is always a way if you really want it, and that is why I say get a good education one way or another.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example
Back to my time in South Africa, the work I did in establishing the University programme and the success of this as it has developed and grown stronger, I believe other Deaf children can learn from my example.

LUCAS MAGONGWA

Lucas Magongwa
Born in Mokopane
Living in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Greatest Achievements
Graduating with a B Ed Honours and M Ed, becoming a teacher and principal at a Deaf school and becoming a lecturer at Wits.



"There was no turning back despite the many obstacles in my way; I finally qualified as a teacher."

Family
My wife and I are the only Deaf people in both families (hers and mine). We have three hearing children. We communicate with our children in SASL. We communicate with our parents, siblings, and relatives in total communication (any communication means possible) including gestures.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I attended Hlokametse Primary School up to Grade 2, Dominican School for the Deaf up to Grade 6, Tsebentlha Middle School up to Grade 8 and then Bafokeng High School up to Grade 12. Apart from Dominican, all are public ordinary schools. I was the only Deaf learner in these schools.

While in Grade 6 at Dominican School for the Deaf, the principal often asked me to look after the class when the teacher was absent. Instead of just making sure the class was not noisy, I taught them English and Life Skills. Fellow Deaf learners whom I taught were happy because we all communicated in SASL and understood each other. I cherish these unexpected opportunities to teach, even today.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
My favourite teacher was Fr. Axelrod who taught us Religious Education through SASL, the language we all understood fully.

How did you decide on your career?
While I was at Dominican School for the Deaf, I was intrigued by the work of Fr. Cyril Axelrod, a Deaf itinerant priest. He visited the school once a month for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in SASL. Sometimes, he taught Religious Education. I began to help him during church services. I led the congregation in responses and read the scripture before Fr. Axelrod read the Gospel. A desire to become like him slowly grew. I wanted to be a priest like him but he advised that I would require Grade 12 certificate to train as a priest. Since Dominican School did not offer Grade 12 at that time, we decided that I attend a school for hearing people near Dominican school. However, after completing Grade 12, I asked myself: "We had a Deaf priest so why not become a Deaf teacher to give Deaf children more role models?"

When the teaching training colleges rejected me after leaving school, I worked as a clerk at a shoe repair company owned by a Deaf man for a year. I also did most of the secretarial work at Deaf clubs because Deaf people thought I wrote better English. Then after a long process of appeals and testing, I was accepted for my first undergraduate degree at Wits University.

After graduation, I worked and progressed as a teacher, head of department and principal. I have done many short courses such as SASL teaching, counselling, leadership and project management. On my return to Wits as a lecturer, I studied part time and completed B Ed Honours and M Ed in 2008. My first international trip was to the World Federation of the Deaf Congress in Tokyo, Japan in 1991. Since then, I have visited more than ten countries.

Who are your heroes and role models?
My heroes were without doubt Fr. Axelrod (for his service to the Deaf community and the inspiration he gave me to study) and to some extent the late Dr. Robert Simmons (for his academic achievement). Interestingly, Dr. Simmons was introduced to me by Fr. Axelrod. Dr. Simmons taught me how to teach SASL and Fr. Axelrod inspired me to give back by serving the Deaf community.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
Fr. Axelrod was the most influential in my life after my mother. His advice to me that I should go and get a matric certificate opened doors for my further studies. He even provided some financial support in the first two years (Grades 7 & 8) at the hearing school.

What is the secret to your success?
Faith, patience and perseverance took me through.

What are your strengths?
My greatest strength is the ability to persistent in difficult situations and my interpersonal skills.

What is something you want to improve on?
I would like to be a better publisher of the work and research we do at the Centre for Deaf Studies and in the Deaf community.

What makes you happy?
When hearing people begin to believe that Deaf people can achieve as much as they (hearing people) do.

What is on your bucketlist?
- Write a book;
- Train more SASL and Deaf teachers;
- Build a retirement house in Limpopo.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
Be confident in yourself and don't depend on others opinion; you can be a business mogul if you want to!

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
Deaf people, in particular the youth, must believe in themselves as people who can achieve what they want achieve. They must shake off the dependence syndrome that they grew up with. You cannot always get what you want. In the institutions of learning, do your best - do not depend on the teachers for everything. They teach and you learn. If they teach and you do not play your part and learn, you will not make it. You deserve a good quality education from your effort and the effort of your teachers. Take education seriously because your future will depend on it.

Lastly, Deaf youth must go and get to know their hearing communities, participate in sports, debates and cultural practices. Hearing people will learn from you; and you will learn from them, to your advantage and the advantage of the Deaf community.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I am a lecturer and researcher at Wits University responsible for Deaf education and South African Sign Language (SASL). Off university, I am an assistant priest for Deaf parishioners at St Martin de Porres Catholic Church at Orlando West, Soweto. Though, I am an assistant, I work mostly alone due to the shortage of ordained priests. I am a Deaf community leader in South Africa as the former chairperson and current member of Deaf Federation of South Africa. I am also an executive committee member of the African Union of the Deaf. I am a PhD candidate by researching SASL curriculum in schools for the Deaf. It is an honour to be recognised by the society as a respected role model for both Deaf and Hearing people. I have achieved all of these achievements, Deaf children should learn from my example to achieve as much as they can.

NAZEREEN CAPITEUX-BHANA



Nazereen Capiteux-Bhana
Born in Johannesburg
Living in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Greatest achievements
Starting my business, eDeaf, is my greatest achievement!

Family
I have 7 siblings, one sister and five brothers. I am the only Deaf one in my family and communicate orally with them. I was born in Newclare, Randburg. I'm married to my wonderful husband, Rajesh Bhana.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I went to a small Deaf school in Lenasia, but it was overtaken by Hearing people. My family decided to put me in a Deaf school in Cape Town. The other Deaf schools in Gauteng during apartheid were for White people only. I traveled by train for the July and December holidays. Finally, in 1985, a school in Lenasia opened, so I returned to be closer to my family. I wanted to do Grade 12, but during that time it was not possible. I was the Deaf leader in the school, as well as a prefect and the relay interpreter. I learned to read Hearing people's lips and then relay in SASL to other Deaf learners. The social worker at the school asked me to help relay the learners' personal problems. I studied as much as I could in my free time.

How did you decide on your career?
In 1992 I became a teaching assistant at my Deaf school in Lenasia. I wanted to work at the school for a short time, but the principal convinced me to stay longer to be a role model for the Deaf children.

From 1990 to 2007 I served on the National Executive Committee of Deaf Federation South Africa as the Gauteng leader and worked to add value to the Deaf community.

In 1994 I decided to try a new path and got a job as a TV presenter. Honestly, I am not a TV personality - this was a new challenge for me. I worked as a presenter during the evenings and at the school during the days. I got a full-time job offer in 1997 when a new production called *'Signature'* started. I was very happy. I worked as a presenter, then a field presenter, then a script editor, and then a director. During my time with Signature I traveled all over South Africa and world. It was good exposure for me to be involved in the Deaf community. I learnt a lot from working at Signature.

In 2000 Signature closed and Deaf TV (DTv) took over. I worked with DTv for 3 months before realising I could pursue another path to focus on Deaf adults instead of children. It was not my passion to work with children. I became one of the founding members of Sign Language Education and Development (SLED). I was involved in various projects, including the HIV/Aids training. However, this was not my true passion. My heart is to empower Deaf adults to have jobs. All my work experiences helped me grow me into a bigger person and led to me starting my own business.

I met Jesse Kotze, a CODA (Child of Deaf Parent/s). Soon we both realised that we that we had the abilities and experiences to start a company together. I am a people's person and can facilitate connections, develop materials, organize meetings, attend workshops, and do presentations. However, I did not know how to run the finances or manage a business. Fortunately, Jesse is an expert in the field. In 2007, we both started eDeaf-'Employ & Empower Deaf'.

> "Seeing the world through Deaf people's eyes has been the key to our success in empowering them."

eDeaf started small but has now grown to employ staff. We have recruited over 3000 Deaf learners. I am the CEO and Jesse is the Managing Director. I am very proud of how far Jesse and I come. In 2015 I decided to study business management at Razicorp Comprehensive Enterprise Development Programme for 3 years.

Who are your heroes and role models?
Nelson Mandela - his words give me goosebumps. Whenever I do presentations or motivational speeches I always quote him. The second one is Michelle Obama. Her motivation, goals and actions are amazing. I admire the way she dresses, and how she empowers different communities and fights for women's rights. The third is Marlee Matlin. I met her when she visited South Africa many years ago. The first time I saw on her was when she was acting as a lawyer in a television series. She proved that Deaf people can do anything because she is an actress herself!

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
Jesse Kotze. I had doubts about Deaf people owning a businesses. I believed they could oversee projects but I wasn't sure about ownership. Jesse told me, "You can do this". If it wasn't for him, I don't think I would have my business today. He was definitely the most influential person in my life.

What is the secret to your success?
I came from a very poor family. Our house had one bedroom for seven children. One day, when I was 11 years old, I was sitting on the steps in front of the house. My mother was sitting next to me, smoking her cigarette. I told her, "Mom, one day I will have a nice car and nice house." She responded, "Yes, but you are Deaf, I don't know if you can achieve that." I replied, "Mom, one day I will. I will take you with me to travel in my car." Unfortunately, she passed away before I could share my achievements with her.
I believed in myself. I prayed. I achieved. I had a picture in my head of my house, my car, and my husband and I was determined to never give up.

The other secret to my success is to have a five-year-plan. Every 5 years I write down new goals. It works very well for me, both in my personal life and business.

What are your strengths?
My strength is to meet deadlines. When I approach Deaf people to assist with their needs I listen well. I manage to be accountable and support the eDeaf team and as well my families.

What is something you want to improve on?
My English and reading, such as writing a professional letter. I have improved on the budget and financial side of business through my training from Raizcorp. Jesse and I continue to work towards our goals for eDeaf and for our staff and learners. I keep studying and eagerly read about new things.

What makes you happy?
My husband makes me happy and secure in who I am. I love to hear good news from Deaf people who achieve their goals, get a job or anything else positive. I'm always happy and thank to God for answers to my prayers. When everyone else is happy I am happy.

What is on your bucketlist?
The first one I achieved very recently!
- Open an eDeaf office and training centre in Umtata, Eastern Cape.
- Open more eDeaf offices and training centres in Africa. Many students have come here to study from other countries in Africa! I would like to train them in their home countries.
- When I retire, I want to travel around the world to visit poor Deaf communities. I would like to buy books for them, have conversations with them and empower them.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
When I was little, I was always patient and quiet. I did not look for attention, but I made some mistakes. I would tell my 12 year old self to learn from the mistakes, and not give up. I had a hard life but the conflicts helped me to learn and become stronger. Today, I look back and realise my family was right, so I would like to go back and tell my 12 year old self to be patient and learn.

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
To Deaf children in South Africa from grade 1 to grade 12, I would like to give 6 advices:
- Always be prepared.
- Know what you want.
- Please do not ignore any advices or explanations from your elders.
- Please try to achieve matric qualification.
- Please do not chase your dreams with bad attitude and be a know-it-all. Think twice before chasing after something.
- Please do not go on a bad path. That includes unwanted pregnancy, dropping out of school early, and getting involved with drugs.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I want young Deaf children to learn how to achieve their dreams by working hard towards manifesting their visions. I have a beautiful house, car and family because I worked hard. They need to do the same!



LOUIS NEETHLING

"It's important to not be afraid to make mistakes & to learn from your mistakes."

Louis Neethling
Born in Johannesburg
Living in UK

Greatest achievements
I am really proud of setting up my production company, Mutt & Jeff Pictures and of our Deaf strong cast and crew.

Family
I was born into a Deaf family. Both my parents went to St. Vincent's School for the Deaf. I have a Deaf sister, Jenny and a Deaf brother, Andre. Jenny went to a mainstream school and Andre and I went to St.Vincent's School for the Deaf. We all communicate through South African Sign Language.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I went to St Vincent School for the Deaf in Johannesburg from primary age to High school. Before that I went to a hearing nursery school.

My favourite memory from school was when Father Christmas arrived in the school hall and handed out presents to everyone. However, Father Christmas was sad because he didn't have a present for himself. Then one of the teachers brought out an enormous present and we watched him open it only to find another box inside. This carried on, one box after another until inside the last box was a tiny baby's bottle! I remember everyone laughing and laughing at this ridiculous present for Father Christmas!

Did you have any favourite teachers?
My accountancy teacher, Mrs Lindsay. Mrs Lindsay believed in me and stood up for me. Her advice was "You can do it, stop making excuses" and, "If you want to do well at sport or academics you can't just pray about it, you have to put in the effort."

How did you decide on your career?
I entered into the industry as a researcher, and was a Presenter on 'Sign Here', and 'Shakies'. I worked in various roles at Dtv becoming the first Deaf Director in SA and later, Executive Producer.

I studied film making at SABC before moving to the UK where I attended the National Film and Television School and film making workshops at Raindance. I worked at BBC as a director and assistant producer on 'SeeHear' and the first Deaf drama series 'Switch'. I was the first to direct mainstream 'hearing' programmes including BBC's 'Crimewatch'.

I set up my own production company, Mutt & Jeff Pictures in 2007.

I became the first Deaf person to direct the Deaf programme 'Hands On' in Dublin, Ireland. I directed *'L'oeil et la main'* - France5 TV and the first Deaf drama/comedy series in Sweden for SVT. I directed the first ever Deaf/Sign Language Sitcom 'Small World' for UK - BSLBT (British Sign Language Broadcasting Trust).

I have made award-winning British Sign Language films and programmes and have taught film making all over the world. I was involved in a European funded Sign Language and Media project with Wolverhampton University, Klagenfurt University, Orebro University and Turin University. I have just been voted in as a member of BAFTA - the first Deaf member of BAFTA.

Who are your heroes and role models?
Father Cyril was my hero when I was at the school because he fought for Deaf education for all Deaf South Africans.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
My parents for giving me a loving Deaf family home and instilling a pride in my language, SASL. Louise Van Niekerk, Jan Engelen and Wilma Smit who all believed in a young, inquisitive wannabe film maker - for supporting me and allowing me to make mistakes. My neighbour in Dunnottar who sponsored me so I was able to take part in the Deaflympics and have my mind opened from travelling and meeting so many Deaf people from around the world. Rotary International for giving me the opportunity for a student exchange in Canada and to study at the National Film and Television School in UK. The teachers I met at the film school and the many amazing people I have worked with over the years. I am grateful to all of these people and many more.

What is the secret to your success?
It's lots of hard work and a bit of luck - being in the right place at the right time or meeting the right person.

What are your strengths?
I am a problem-solver - if something is not working then I'm not afraid to try out different ways of getting to the end result. I'm not too proud to listen to advice and suggestions from other people. I never stop learning or listening.

What is something you want to improve on?
I would like to try my hand at writing and directing for theatre.

What makes you happy?
My family, swimming, visiting places in South Africa, going to the movies, going on holiday, and seeing Deaf people achieve success.

What is on your bucketlist?
Build my own house, swim across the English Channel and drive Route 66 with a childhood friend.

If you were magic and could go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give to yourself?
Read more books. It's so important to read.

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
Work hard. Respect your fellow man - always treat people how you would like to be treated. Be proud of your language, Sign Language and who you are.
Don't apologise for being deaf - you don't need to be fixed. Dream big!

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I believe in exposing Deaf children to Deaf professionals and the reality of their work. Last year I did a project with a Deaf school about script-writing, directing, lighting, camera-work, acting, prop-making, SFX, make-up, editing and so on. Children experienced the concentration and effort needed by the whole team in film making. They wrote their own script and then acted in and filmed their own film. It wasn't tidied up by any adults - it was their ideas, their film-making, their film. It's important that children do projects by themselves (or in a team) and that they experience a sense of accomplishment that comes from working something out, problem-solving, being creative and learning.

INGRID PARKIN



> “Deaf people can achieve anything they want to.”

Ingrid Parkin
Born in Johannesburg
Living in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Greatest achievements
Winning the Provincial Teaching Awards in 2017 for Excellence in Secondary School Leadership and achieving second place in the National Teaching Awards in 2017 for the same category. Becoming the a Principal at a School for the Deaf! Raising the funds to open a mental health clinic for Deaf learners in Johannesburg.

Family
Youngest of 4 siblings. No one else in my family is deaf. I became deaf at the age of 7 due to meningitis contracted in hospital as the result of a car accident. Communication between us was primarily lipreading.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
Waldorf School before I went deaf and a little while after. I joined St. Vincent School for the Deaf and stayed there until Grade 8.

I don’t have any one particular favourite memory but I really enjoyed my time at boarding school (Fulton) and being with the great friends I made there. We did indeed have a great time during our boarding school years.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
Our Maths teacher, Mr D and English teacher, Mrs I. Not because I was great at Maths but because he just had so much time for everyone and was always willing to talk when needed. Mrs I taught English in the most creative of ways and she would do just about anything to get the message across. She had a great passion for literature and teaching English through literature. I decided to be an English teacher based on this experience.

How did you decide on your career?
When I was in Grade 11 I decided briefly that one day I would like to run my own school but didn’t make much of this at the time. After leaving I went to USA and visited Gallaudet University. I wanted to study microbiology there. However, after a few months, we realized it would be very costly and that I should come back to SA and study here. When I returned to SA, I worked at an insurance company for a year doing administrative work. After this 2-year gap, my fiancé at the time encouraged me to become a teacher so I thought it was a great idea and remembered what I had decided in Grade 11 so went with it and enrolled at Wits. I did initially try to enrol at JCE but was told by the Dean on my entrance interview Deaf people cannot teach. I did have a university entrance in my matric year.

Who are your heroes and role models?
I was fortunate to have a great principal during my time as a pupil at Fulton, Mrs AC. She was truly an inspiring individual and always had great advice. She was passionate about deaf education and just about everything in life. She believed in people and encouraged them in every way she could.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
It would not be one person but a combination of fantastic people I was fortunate to have around me, my father, David, many colleagues and friends.

What is the secret to your success?
I honestly have no idea!

What are your strengths?
I think the ability to motivate and inspire and to provide great resources and tools that our educators need for educating Deaf children.

What is something you want to improve on?
Definitely my time management. The role of principal is vast and a lot needs to be done. I sometimes get caught up spending too much time on one area.

What makes you happy?
Seeing my learners achieve, my educators develop and grow and of course spending time with family and friends.

What is on your bucketlist?
I want to travel more with my family … France, Italy and Greece. I would love to write a book.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
Brace yourself, Ingrid, and be prepared for where life is going to take you – its going to be a bumpy ride!

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
Everyone has their own life journey and set of circumstances – so the same advice may not be the same for everyone. However, what everyone can do is work hard and ask people for help – you will be surprised!

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
Through my example I hope they will know that Deaf people can achieve anything they want to.

STEPHEN VENTER

Stephen Venter
Born in Dundee
Living in Johannesburg, Gauteng

Greatest achievements
My greatest achievements were becoming a TV Presenter & a Chairperson of Deaf Cricket South Africa.

Family
I am married to Susi Weil-Venter and I have two sons, Kevin and Colin. I have a deaf brother, Dionne and two deaf sisters in-laws, Linda and Sue. My parents are still around. I also have one hearing brother, Dennis.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
I attended Fulton school for the Deaf at an early age before matriculating at St. Vincent school for the Deaf.

One of my fondest memories is of my vist to Greater St Lucia Wetland Park when I was the field reporter for Signature. The ranger took us in his 4x4 along the beach, to where the Loggerhead and Leatherback turtles come ashore during the night to lay their eggs. I was able to witness baby turtles hatching and making thir journey towards the ocean. Tempted to pick up one baby turtle and put it in the sea, I was told that they needed to exercise their muscles before they could swim. Later on we found a female turtle digging up the sand and laying her eggs. After nesting, the turtle covered the eggs with sand and returned to the sea. We were told that the eggs incubate for about 65 days before hatching. Their worst enemy is jackals as they would dig up the sand to hunt for the eggs and after eating some, leave the remaining eggs exposed to the heat of the sun. Greater St Lucia Wetland Park has since changed its name to '*iSimangaliso*' Wetland Park meaning 'something wondorous' which is true to what I witnessed there.

> “Deaf work harder to achieve their goals.”



Did you have any favourite teachers?
No, I did not have any favourite teachers but appreciate all the teachers who dedicated their lives to educate Deaf learners and help them to adapt in the real world.

How did you decide on your career?
Not by my own choice but was guided by St Vincent to work in the civil engineering. I've been with the company for 41 years.

Who are your heroes and role models?
My heroes and role models are Deaf people who believed in themselves. Some attended universities; David Black, the first deaf South African to attend Gallaudet University and Dr. Robert Simmons at Wits University. Others who participated in the international sports; Max Ordman in Olympic Rome, Terence Parkins in Olympic Athens and David Lanesman the vice president of Deaf International sports body. Others who hold interesting positions in employment; William Warmington, laboratory analyst for Anglo American, Peter Scholtz, ship building engineer and Tanya Schreiber, insurance broker. Others who have abilities to learn many languages like Father Cyril Axelrod. Most of them were St Vincent pupils, except Terence.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
No one as I have a mind of my own and love to create new things.

What is the secret to your success?
Perseverance, stubbornness, and the ability to keep things together.

What are your strengths?
Not surrendering until I achieve my goal and my faith in God.

What is something you want to improve on?
- Find more funding for the upliftment of Deaf people in employment
- Further studies and participations in the deaf international sports.

What makes you happy?
When I see Deaf people enjoying fulfilled lives.

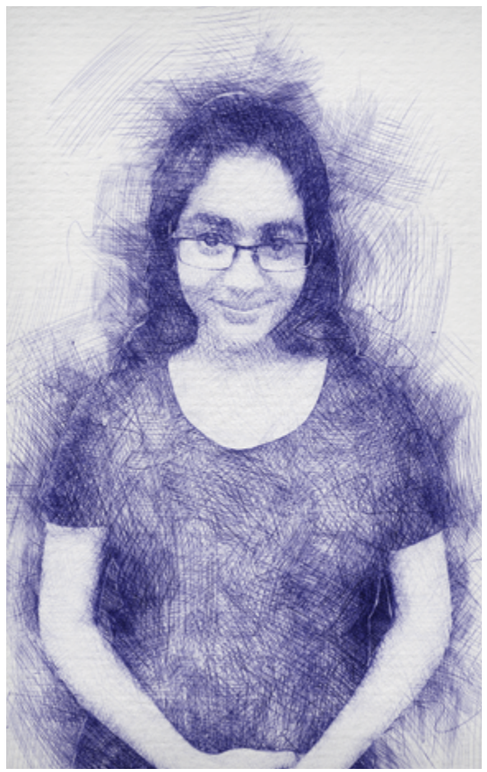
What is on your bucketlist?
- Visiting third world countries with Susi;
- Climbing Machu Picchu;
- White-water rafting down Zambesi river with my sons, Kevin and Colin.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
There is so much to do with so little time! My advice would be to manage your time better to enable yourself to do so much more.

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
Obtain a good education which leads to getting a good job and enables you to provide for your family. Believe you can achieve anything you want to. Be prepared to work harder to reach your goals.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
Don't imitate me, utilise your own God-given abilities. Sacrifice some of your time to assist others who are struggling.

IANTHA NAICKER



Iantha Naicker
Born in Durban
Living in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal

Greatest achievements
My greatest achievement is being successful at my career; being able to make a living from it and having people from around the world see and admire my work. I am also proud that I have developed flexibility in my work. I have worked on various projects from illustrations to help sick and vulnerable children, to textbooks and storybooks. I've created graphics for games and clothing and enjoy being continuously creative in my work.

Family
I grew up with two hearing parents, 3 hearing sisters and a Deaf twin sister. My family learned South African Sign Language so we always communicated well. Having a Deaf twin sister also meant that I never really felt isolated in the family.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
My sister and I attended VN Naik School for the Deaf in KwaZulu-Natal for both our primary and secondary schooling.

My favourite memory from school is finding stray kittens and taking care of them. I am an animal-lover and all the kids at the school would come and find me whenever there were stray cats or dogs on the school grounds.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
My favourite teacher was Mr. Devenderan Gounder, it was as if he was Deaf himself. He could tell you the meaning of any sign and if you and your friends created a few of your own signs to hide from teachers he would eventually figure it out and use it! He was really good at communicating with us, acting out different roles and using facial expressions that made it easy for us to learn. Whenever we needed advice, or to share our opinions or just be ourselves, we could do that with him.

How did you decide on your career?
In high school we didn't have the freedom to choose our own subjects; these decisions were made by the school or teachers. They probably thought they were helping us, that they would choose subjects that would help us be able to get a job once we left school. I wanted to do Architecture and Technology but was told that those subjects were for boys. I was also discouraged from doing Art, but those were the subjects I was really passionate about. I decided that I wanted to study Art in whatever way I could.

> "Believe in yourself, follow the path that is meant for you."

After school I attended Centec Technical College where I majored in Art and Graphic Design. I also started taking on requests for illustrations and designs.

I traveled around KZN to get a sense of the different scenery, the different animals and landscapes.

I really flourished during this time; it was the first time I was doing something without my twin sister and I started exploring all the different mediums and techniques of art. I hadn't thought of art as a profession before, I just knew that I enjoyed it and wanted to continue.

Once I started receiving some media attention, getting requests to work on projects, and being paid for it, I realised that this was something I could be successful at as a career.

Who are your heroes and role models?
I don't think I had any heroes or role models. I looked up to some of the teachers who were always kind and always had a smile for us. It was difficult with the resources in the school to dedicate enough attention to each child and make sure they were learning and keeping up with the syllabus. Learners often failed subjects and these teachers would continue working with the learners until they passed, no matter how exhausting it was. They were also patient with the learners; the school was very noisy (I've been told), learners would laugh and shout and move around noisily. It's difficult to control your volume when you're Deaf and can't judge how loud you're being, and this is often an issue when you're in the same environment as hearing people. But the teachers were always patient and understanding with us.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
I don't think there has been one specific person. I am lucky to have a big family. Mostly my twin sister has always been by my side. She's the feisty, strong-willed and tougher one. I think I'm timid, quiet and shy. She's always been there for me as a sort of protector when we were little, and then as we grew older we would

always fight for each other. My parents, especially my mother, has been amazing. They have supported me in every way without putting any pressure for me to be a certain way or walk a certain path. And then having 3 other sisters, each one provided a different type of support whenever I needed it.

What is the secret to your success?
I think the secret to my current success is to believe in yourself, follow the path that is meant for you - don't try to be someone else or do what society or your family think you should be doing; and try to continuously improve yourself - if it's through prayer, or mindfulness or meditation - whatever you choose. Spending time out in nature and reflecting on life helps put things into perspective and helps you decide what you want in life. It keeps you on your path to success.

What are your strengths?
My greatest strengths are my kindness, my ability to see beauty in everything and my perseverance.

What is something you want to improve on?
Both my sister and I are epileptic. We had seizures when we were younger but those have become very rare. I think being Deaf adds a level of vulnerability that also makes me anxious to be out in public. Part of this is also a lack of confidence. I would like to improve my confidence and anxiety levels and be able to chase a few of new experiences.

What makes you happy?
I love watching people and their pets together, that's something that makes me happy. I love spending time with my family, but it also makes me happy to be alone outside in nature with my dogs.

What is on your bucketlist?
- Visit the Forbidden City in China - I love ancient history, especially ancient Chinese art & culture.
- Own a horse if I can get a big enough yard.
- Visit a really good dinosaur museum.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year- old self, what advice would you give yourself?
Get rid of all your fears! Fear destroys so much of your potential. Let go of all your fears and just live life. Be confident enough to follow your own path and make decisions for yourself. And mostly, don't do something you don't want to for someone's approval!

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
I think some of the advice will be the practical things that I wish I had done, and some will be more motivational:
- Choose the subjects you're good at and you enjoy doing.
- Read as much as you can and watch movies with subtitles to improve your English - being profoundly Deaf it is difficult to catch on to the English language.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Be yourself in everything you do and be proud of who you are.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I would like them to be encouraged by of how far I have come in my career. I have been able to let go of negative feelings for people who have bullied me, and managed to get through tough times with prayer and mindfulness.

PHILIP DOBSON



Philip Dobson
Born in South Rand, Johannesburg
Living in Worcester, Western Cape

Greatest achievements
Comrades Marathon 9 times finisher with best time of 8h35 mins.

My fondest memory is of my first Comrades when I started more than an hour after the field due to alarm clock that did not go off to wake up my hearing brother who took me to the start. My time was 9h45 mins. I also finished two 100 mile races without additional time given to complete. Running taught me to hold on and not give up. I felt rewarded for my dedication and hard work when I achieved my goals within the rules. Despite my disability restrictions of limited vision I proved it could be done.

I also represented South Africa at the World Federation Deafblind General Assembly twice and met the queen of Spain at the 2018 assembly.

Family
I am the only Deaf person in the family but have a blind sister as we have genetically transferable eye condition on my mom's side. I became Deaf at age 15 after I had meningitis. My mom used to write notes on paper or her hand palm. I taught siblings the BSL alphabet and that is about how tiresome we communicated as they did not develop other sign language skills. I always felt aside in the family but then that motivated me when I was in school to show them I can do well. I completed my matric with a distinction in accountancy and as such become the only one of the siblings having matric.

Where did you go to school and share a favourite memory with us?
Before I became Deaf at age 15 I attended primary school at Laerskool Voorbrand in the South of Johannesburg. I started High School at Fakkel Hoërskool until I became Deaf and was transferred to Trans Oranje school for the Deaf in Pretoria where I completed matric in 1982. There I started to learn BSL finger spelling. It was not easy in the begining as I could not hear. Neither was I fluent in sign language that at that time was still forbidden in school.

My favourite memory is sleeping on my accountancy books before exams and then achieving a distinction. In this experience lay the foundation of learning Sign Language.

Did you have any favourite teachers?
There were three teachers value equally. Dr Elsabé Smuts-Pauw (Late) who encouraged me to accept my Deafness. Secondly, Mr FE Marx (Late) the accountancy teacher who postponed his retirement with one year in order for me to complete matric with him. He also wanted me to teach accountancy after he left but that did not happen. Thirdly, Mr Chris Groenewald who is now retired but still one of my mentors. He was a language teacher and later acting Headmaster at Jan Kriel school. I still have regular chats with him. He is very tall and had to bend to enter the classroom.

How did you decide on your career?
In my day there fewer options, either you went to do carpentry or welding. I wanted to be a teacher and teach accountancy to Deaf children, but going to university with a standard matric was not possible, and in those days more difficult for Deaf to be admitted. After school I started my career in banking at the Volkskas bank now ABSA. That was my career until I lost sight in my right eye and became Deafblind. I have always wanted to be equal to hearing people but also to help help people with whatever I could. Today doing community development is my passion. One day in the not so far future there will be well developed services and resources for Deafblind persons.

Who are your heroes and role models?
I remember meeting new Deaf friends in school and how excited I was to see how Deaf play rugby and soccer. I told my old hearing buddy's how amazed I was but for them is was strange that Deaf could play rugby and asked me silly questions.

Looking back, who most influenced you and helped you reach your achievements?
My faith in my Creator and my Creator God has and will always have the most influence and inspiration by His word in Philippians 4:13 *"I can do anything through the power of God"*.

What is the secret to your success?
To take responsibility for my future.

What are your strengths?
Adapting to circumstances without blaming others for my fate. My mom said of all her children I stood out with determination and resilience and did things against all odds.

What is one of your areas you would like to improve in?
Family life. I am and have always felt outside that.

What makes you happy?
To see how Deafblind and Deaf people have advanced from our elders and the resources we now have.

What is on your bucketlist?
- Walking the New York City Marathon in less than 9 hours.
- Have a two week holiday in Mauritius.
- Doing another Comrades Marathon and at last receive my Green number 1370.

If you could magically go back to your 12-year-old self, what advice would you give yourself?
Make the best of your future and look ahead.

What advice would you give to Deaf children?
- Work hard;
- Respect all people;
- Respect the resources you have;
- Keep on walking;
- Take responsibility for your future and don't wait for things to happen, let things happen.

What do you hope young Deaf children will learn from your example?
I'm currently doing community development in the Deafblind constituency. I am working to establish a Development center for Deafblind people that will assist with the current lack of such a facility in South Africa and Africa. Despite the challenges I face in running such a structure I stay committed.
I hope I am a role model to people with my open approach and respect to everyone regardless of their race, gender or orientation. I want to contribute towards solving issues instead of creating difficulties for others. My advice is to stay humble and take responsibility to bring positive change and not expect others to do it for you.

> "Help others with openness and respect."