

27. Denis and the Children of Hout Bay

By Dwyn Griesel

Denis Goldberg: a complex man, with so many different interesting angles. I met him only 4 years ago but he has already helped me realise some of my dreams.

We met when I was just starting the Kronendal Music Academy of Hout Bay (KMA) a mutual friend told me, “Hey, I know this amazing guy in Hout Bay who would love to hear about what you’re doing! He loves children and he is passionate about helping people improve their lives... you should go see him!” I had no idea I was about to embark on a warm and joyful journey with one of South Africa’s most loveable personalities.

KMA is a non-profit music academy established in 2007 and run by a group of passionate people who dedicate their days to bringing to their community what they do best: sharing the gift of music. What makes this project special, however, is that this gift is made possible to everyone, regardless of race or economic standing. It’s no longer a luxury. Hout Bay is an interesting and complicated village, filled with wonderful people from all over the world and all over Africa, but the majority of its residents are very, very poor and live in extremely underprivileged areas. KMA prides itself on focusing on these areas to bring social and racial integration, and personal growth through the joy of music education.

Nowadays we have over 120 pupils participating in music classes of all shapes and sizes. Our 13 teachers teach many different musical styles and 17 different instruments. Through our many annual performances, workshops and weekly tuition, the pupils develop important values, like self-esteem, responsibility and self confidence. KMA facilitates daily opportunities for the young people of South

Africa, our future, to discover their talents, their potential and create friendships where they otherwise would not have the chance.

Without Denis Goldberg, we would not exist. Since 2008 Prof Goldberg has supported our project, not only financially, but in any way he can at any time. His door is always open and he is always listening. He is a treasure trove of advice and creative ideas.

In June 2012, we were very privileged to take a group of 6 young jazz musicians on a 2 week tour to Germany, to participate in 2 music festivals, and school workshops, performances and collaborations. Most of this group had never been on an aeroplane before, let alone outside of South Africa, and this was an experience of a lifetime for them all. They were able to make friendships, learn about other cultures, and experience all that goes along with travelling to new countries, but most importantly, they could be proud of their talents as they were celebrated everywhere they went.

Without Prof. Denis Goldberg, this experience would not have been possible, and he has created memories that will last a lifetime. As he said at the end of our tour, “It’s made me love music much more... you have made me love my country even more, because you are my country.”

Denis Goldbergs life is extremely full and dedicated to the upliftment of human beings, especially in South Africa and we are not the only project Denis fathers and loves, and works incredibly hard to support, year in and year out. But, what always astounds me when I sit down with Denis for a cup of tea and a chat, is how clear it is he is always thinking about us and our various issues we are dealing with; he is always looking for solutions and always processing in his mind how we can improve and grow and thereby honour our mandate of giving and helping the poor, while improving the fabric of South African society as a whole.

A chat with Denis is never a quick 15 minute planning session! Because Denis is a thinker; he is a philosopher; he is passionate about the human spirit, about injustices and about integrity. These themes fill everything he says and thinks about. A quiet and dignified man, he is also capable of a wicked sense of humour and it is pure joy to see him break out in his hearty, almost child like giggle about something funny.

The first day I met Denis, he told me all about his history with our beloved country and I sat with my mouth hanging open in horror and awe. I still to this day am incapable of imagining what he has gone through or what it must have felt like to endure what he has had to, all in the name of his unbreakable principles and beliefs. I will never forget putting an arm around him and hugging him that day, both of us in tears as he recalled the agony in his heart for the suffering his wife and children went through, a pain he still feels to this day, and which I doubt will ever leave him.

And yet, for an 80 year old man full of complex memories, Denis has a delightful way of flirting with women of all ages and can still bring many to blush! I must say, there is something very sexy about you Denis Goldberg, and I do believe it is the immense love for life that you exude wherever you go. Your intuitive understanding of what makes a modern child smile and how to communicate with just about anyone, anywhere at any time, is your link with KMA's daily work, and we can always rely on you to bring the appropriate lightness or seriousness to a moment when it's called for.

Prof Denis Goldberg is an anomaly in my life and has become a father figure, a friend, and a compadré to me. Thank you Denis, for sharing yourself with us all, for your generosity and kindness, your passion, but most of all, your integrity, which I have never seen compromised. You are a true role model and an honour to know.

Love,
Dwyn

Dwyn Griesel studied music and taught music for many years. In 2007 with an inheritance from her father she founded the Kronendal Muisic Academy of Hout Bay. It has grown since then and has received various awards. In 2012 Denis Goldberg initiated a tour by KMA's Jazz Band to Germany playing at music festivals and with schools in 10 cities.



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