



Ubuntu Art Project- Umunt' ngumunt' ngabantu

Photo Essay: *Ubuntu Learning Journey* by Lauren Rose Caldie
Compiled by Dr. Otrude Nontobeko Moyo



The photographs used in this photo essay are a glimpse at the vast collection of pictures we have amassed during the *Ubuntu Research and Art Project*, in Fort Beaufort and Healdtown Communities in Eastern Cape, since 2011.

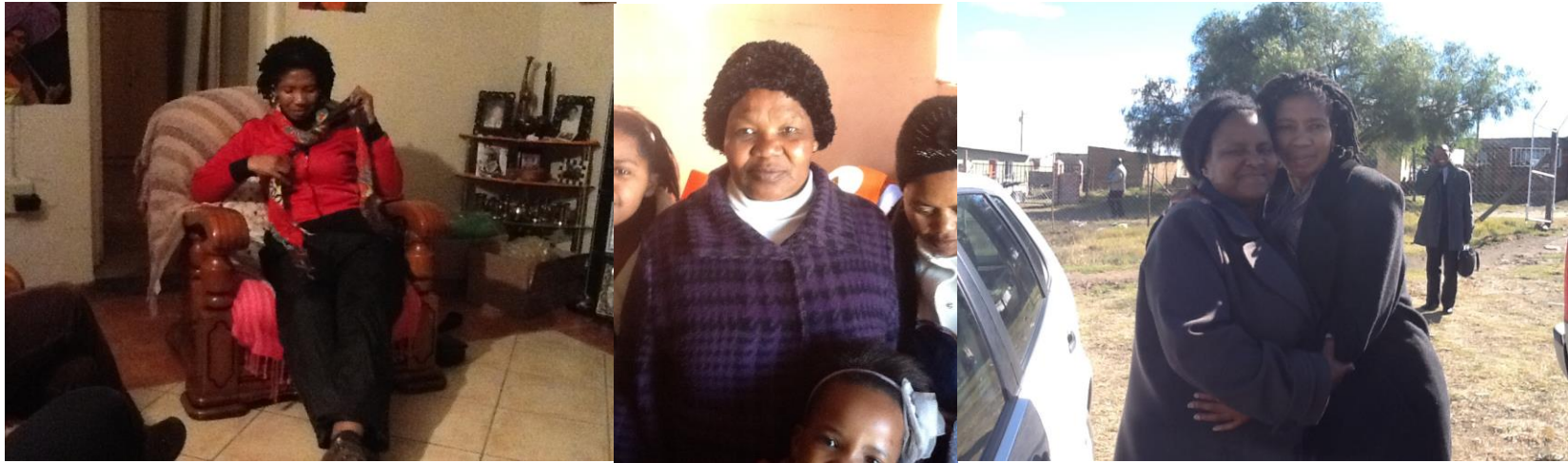
These pictures we hope tell a story of a commitment to learning together about *Ubuntu*. The photo essay is based on a reflective learning journey by one the student researcher's on this project Lauren Rose Caldie.



Dr. Moyo first began this Ubuntu project as a research study to explore perspectives of Ubuntu in private and public lives of people in Eastern Cape. The research project evolved into *Ubuntu Arts* project. Ubuntu Arts is a two-week youth motivational camp founded to support civic dialogue and community building initiatives through *Ubuntu* cultural explorations in Fort Beaufort and Healdtown communities, Eastern Cape South Africa. The initiative uses dialogues in diversity and art based initiatives to facilitate community building among youth. *Ubuntu Arts* has been a partnership between social work students from the US and Healdtown Comprehensive School.



My view of South Africa before I went could be best described as foggy. I had silly misconceptions about the wildlife where lions and elephants roamed the dirt roads in the villages, that there were big purple mountains constantly in the distance and grassland fields surrounding it. This isn't to say that I didn't see elephants (protected in national parks) and that the grassland wasn't vast, but I was missing the point, I was missing what gives South Africa its heart, its people.



Learning about South Africa from our pre-trip preparations I knew there was a lot of diversity within its peoples, but I did not comprehend how much. I pictured the town made up of three peoples: Native South Africans, Europeans, Indians, Coloreds and other people of color. (Wow, that was hard to write, I am so ashamed to admit that.) When I got there I found out that although those were the groups apartheid tried to force upon South Africans, a diverse population can not be neatly split up based upon physical appearances. The South Africa that is starting to be embraced



today is that of a “Rainbow Nation” where everyone does not neatly fit into one category or another. In fact it seemed that most people in South Africa do not fit into these groups as South Africa felt like an amalgam of cultures and trans-racial love (we saw many children who seemed that they could be the result of multiracial couples, but we did not see the actual couples) have been just a few of the factors making the nation more diverse. The sad irony of this was that many groups making up the areas we visited were much



more segregated than I had imagined, even when the marginalized groups were in the majority.

I'd be wrong to say I didn't wonder about the people before going, but I had no idea how big of an impact they would have on me. I had thought that we would travel to place A, B, and C, interview a bunch of people, and go home, but I was very wrong! Interviews took not only time, but also special care to get speakers to know and trust us, which was very



important. I was naïve in that I thought that people there would not want to learn about me as much as I wanted to learn about them. We spent quality time and learned much about each other, and I am very grateful for that.

What I have learned from South Africa is one of the hardest things to explain. I've learned that Ubuntu is a way of living, not just a philosophy or an ideal. Its real, tangible, and will only live on through the practices of it.



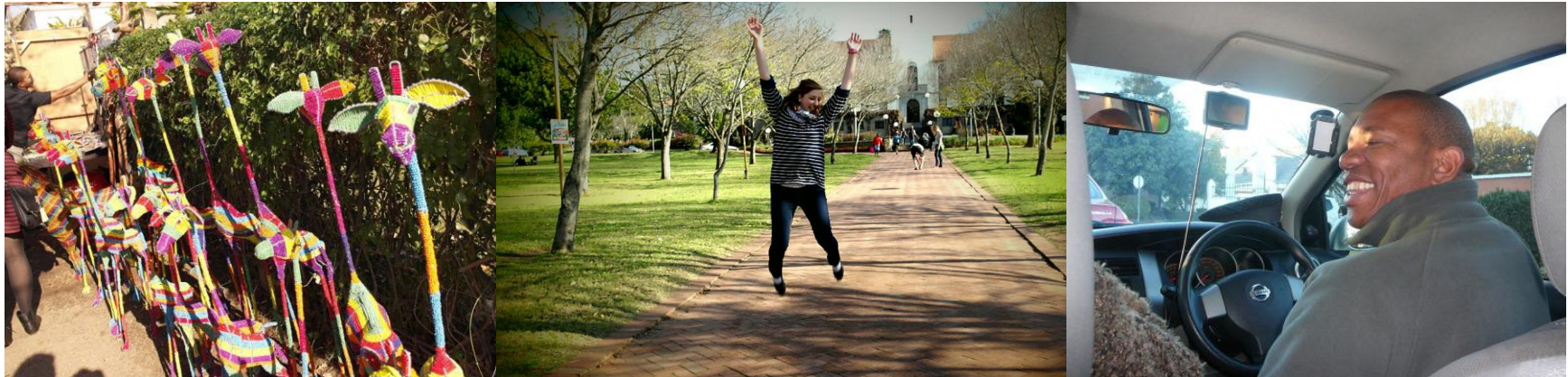
Documents, movies or papers may describe it, but one will not be able to understand it until one has both experienced it and lived it. It is within the human spirit, something that drives our humanity, maybe not quite humanity itself, but the action of living out one's belief in humanity. Ubuntu drives what leads us to care for one another better than ourselves.

We were well cared for in South Africa, welcomed into many homes and cared for as if family. From the first night on, we were treated as long



lost sisters, who had much catching up to do. I do not think that I would have learned as much about Ubuntu and myself had we not been welcomed and able to get true glimpses of day-to-day life.

If you ask me about what I remember, I will go on and on about how great it truly was, but that does not mean that I was oblivious to the pain around me. South Africa is a place of contradictions to me, of incredible



beauty and heart, yet not without it's stories of strife that are carried around in the eyes of so many. I wish we could hear more stories, the sweet and the bitter. Even when I could not understand the Xhosa language, I saw the stories as they were being played out in others' eyes.

If I close my eyes, I can see their faces, and hear their voices. The soundtrack of South Africa is bittersweet. The voices like the gentle trill of Auntie, combine with the bouncing rift of the morning doves, the chords of



the church choir, the “hooting” of horns on the streets, the rare snippets of traditional music and the waves crashing on the beach all play on repeat in my mind. When you ask me, “How was South Africa?” I will sigh and take a deep breath, remembering the little things that made it so special. We really did have an amazing time learning so much in such little time. I’m sure everyone there would teach us so much more if we came back.



“Oh, so what were you studying?” The simple answer to that question is Ubuntu, but to explain Ubuntu is like trying to explain love, for South Africans tended to hold it in their heart and have a hard time describing it themselves. It can be described, but it must be experienced as well. The word itself made me want to learn Xhosa in order to grasp a better understanding of where it came from. Reminded that Ubuntu does not necessarily speak English or does it? To experience Ubuntu, one



experiences a togetherness rooted in understanding, care, and concern for everyone, including complete strangers. In these concepts, South Africa is rich.

There was a fullness when we were in the smaller communities within Fort Beaufort that I couldn't describe, a sense that although we were travelers, we were welcome and safe there. As much as some folks (a very small minority) tried to warn us of the dangers, there was nothing to be



frightened about really. Why do the residents build great walls and some pay for high-tech security systems? Some of the places we felt the safest, like at Auntie's small, cinder block house had barbed-wire fences that could easily be penetrated, but they were respected. If you have love and show Ubuntu to your neighbors, why do you need to keep your neighbors out? At the core of Ubuntu is to love humanity, love your neighbor, so why then not



trust your neighbor? Walls only keep you in, keep you from experiencing the world outside.

The walls at the Bed and Breakfast where we stayed felt safe at first, but quickly became eerie. I remember the children would play football (soccer) just down the road from the B&B, in the torn up road and in the dirt around it. I would only catch a glimpse of them on our way out or in from our flat, but I wondered what their community would look like



without walls. If we hadn't any walls around the bed and breakfast, would they have been able to play in the giant green lawn of the B&B's compound or would they still be seen as trespassers in their own land?

The history of South Africa is enough for anyone to understand that there are still visible walls as well as invisible ones there. There is the explanation to the great contradiction, how one can build huge walls, and



still practice Ubuntu. The history should not be seen as the “excuse” of why South Africa is still divided, but it gives us the chance to realize how extremely deep South Africa’s wounds are. Colonialism and apartheid gave South Africa its wounds, and capitalism, free-markets call it whatever you wish - has been conducive to these barriers. It seems that the only way to healing is not through the short-lived Truth and Reconciliation hearings,



but through learning of what Ubuntu means and how it can bring humanity back together.

Apartheid was about as contradictory to Ubuntu as anything could be. The xenophobic lacing of Africans by South Africans is a crime to humanity. While one philosophy taught fear and superiority, another is teaching acceptance and humility. How did Ubuntu survive then, during the forcing

of conformity to take on apartheid or be punished? As born-frees, Generation Mandela now come of age, are their philosophies that of their ancestors who believed in and re-constructed Ubuntu, apartheid, individualism, socialism, capitalism, or combinations?

Ubuntu does not encourage the separation of any peoples; it welcomes them in, as we were welcomed. Ubuntu surpasses the walls and separations between us. Older than the walls of South Africa, it is a remainder of the humanity in all of us, to work harder to be more inclusive societies, and encourages the potentiality to become more humane.