

An email message to Tom Nolet of Hands for a Bridge regarding 10th Anniversary Celebration

10 years it has been. Yho! I can't believe it was that many years ago when we first hosted a group of exchange students from Seattle or that it was a year later when I got into a plane and went out of the country for the first time in my life. I was a little shaken because it was to be my first time flying but I wasn't at all scared that I would be going into a foreign country because it didn't feel like it. For some reason, it felt like I was going to see family and friends I had not seen in a long time.

That is exactly how it felt even when I was there. I had a great time, I met great people and learnt a great deal. I have always been a believer in accepting diversity, cross-cultural interaction and exploring what makes us alike. What better opportunity could I have gotten, had I not been part of this programme.

I had always been outspoken about social injustices and have always had word or two about South African and the broader African politics but soon after visiting Seattle, I learnt, saw and was suddenly angry for our education system was failing us in terms of opportunity and world awareness, for some reason this was a good thing.

I had newfound confidence because I saw that, regardless of where I had come from, that said nothing about where I was going. Here I was, the average African child born out of wedlock, father never known and mother dead from the number one killer in Africa, AIDS, and raised by an ailing grandmother. I was sitting and debating with kids of accountants, doctors and the likes and they saw me as someone who they could learn from.

They looked at me, not with pity but intrigue. They spoke of the land I had always wished to leave behind as the place they always dreamt to go to and that gave me a different outlook. This is my country, my home and I love it and more than that I could work to change it.

Today I'm doing just that. I went to university and now I work in an organisation that helps others, like who would otherwise not go to tertiary, like myself, go. I am an assistant co-ordinator for a Tertiary Support Programme (TSP). I love my job and I thank you HFB for allowing me see a different world and for helping me look at mine with different eyes.

*Zimkhitha Ndinga,
HFB student in South Africa, 2003*