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Day 0, South African lock down 26/3/2020

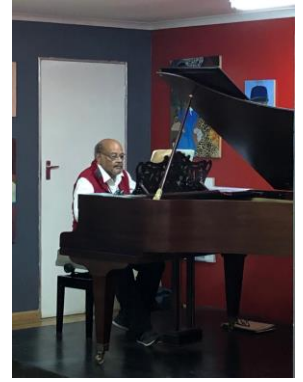
Dear family and friends

The first 2020 Sihlalo newsletter is a long time coming. It has been on the tip of my fingers to write for some weeks, but every time I start, some new drama emerges. Apologies for those who think I have been ignoring you. Since I arrived in Cape Town on 4th Feb 2020, the world has become a very different place. This is indeed a weird global time. And living in Africa is always very, very different! I still pinch myself to think of what I am doing here, and how different my life is to my life in Adelaide! During February and March, the country endured load shedding, from Stage 1 (losing power for 2 hours once a day (randomly allocated timing to different areas of the country)) escalating rapidly to losing power 3 times a day for 2.5 hours each time, random allocation again! That caused mayhem on the roads, as with the power outages go the traffic lights. So my capacity to be assertive on the roads has escalated because otherwise I would still be sitting at the intersection waiting to turn right. I had to remember (and practice) the 4 way stop rule! Load shedding is just an inconvenience, and people here just get on with it and work around it. As long as you have your laptop and phone charged, and you don't get stuck in a lift, life is manageable. The boys in the workshop have learnt to use the electrical equipment when the power is on, and hand finish toys when it isn't. And you know the power will kick back in some time! But when the power goes down at 6am, I do miss my cup of tea! If only someone would invent a battery-powered kettle.... Some clever person has written an app for the phone rudely called Eskom se push (Eskom being the power provider) which gives up to the minute information on what time and in what areas the power will go out. When I have asked people what the name means they look evasive, all I know is it isn't complementary to Eskom!

We had just got over that drama, then the corona virus hit! Cyril Ramaphosa has made a very brave call to lock 98% South Africans in for 21 days to stop the spread of corona. Starting in 2 hours' time. Thanks to all of you who have enquired lately about my whereabouts, and my health, sanity and safety. I am fine, very safe and largely isolated from the general mayhem in the country (and the world) in a gated community, with some money in the bank and even some in my purse. Unlike many, many others. I also have enough food for the next 21 days, and the local shops are open for limited periods if I need fresh food. No prepared food is being sold for the next three weeks (including bread), and no alcohol....so you should have seen the queues in the shops yesterday and today, with no one showing any concern for corona virus spread. However as of tomorrow morning I have to have a pass to get out of my accommodation complex to get food, and I can only be gone for 30 minutes or I will be fined. So, today was for planning ahead. Actually I don't know why I bought petrol today, as I can only use the car to drive to the closest shop, which is less than 5 minutes walk away! I guess I was thinking ahead to the next possible shortage?



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This is the view off my balcony tonight. I guess if you are going to be locked down for 3 weeks, this is an OK place to reflect on life! I have got my yoga mat washed and dried, and there are 6 flights of stairs for me to run up and down in case the complex managers decide to stop me walking in the gardens. This is Table Mountain at its finest

I couldn't believe the chaos on the streets when I was driving back from the workshop today. The workshop is in an area where there are lots of locals and lots of 'popup' street markets. The queues of dancing African ladies in colourful dress, many with babies on their backs, snaking out across the street outside the fish market on one corner, and the meat market on the next corner, was fabulous, but very scary in what it meant (didn't mean) for disease prevention! Cars with their hazard lights on were parked 2-3 deep on the road with no regard for through traffic, people were wandering all over the road, it was chaotic! Corona virus could have been exchanged with equanimity! The real worry here is if it gets into the informal settlements (townships) where people are already living with chronic diseases. Ten years ago people died of complications from HIV, or TB. Now whilst they live with these infectious conditions as managed chronic diseases, they won't survive the onslaught of corona. Moreover the level of poverty is such that even without living with a chronic disease, so many people have so little resistance to disease and so little knowledge on how to combat it. The information I have got from Australia on symptoms, and prevention, has been really helpful for the workshop crew. Thanks Mary!!!! But with this country-wide shut down, and millions going without pay for the next 3 weeks (and many who won't go back to work after that because there will be no work), and no social welfare system, the economic viability of the country is in serious jeopardy.

So the biggest risks to life here are the lack of health literacy among so many people, the coexisting poverty and chronic diseases, and the social inequity underpinning how people will survive (or not) the next 3 weeks. Fear and ignorance has underpinned many of the stupid actions. South Africa hasn't had a toilet paper shortage (in fact there are lots of laughs here about the Australian dramas), but there has been a run on flour, potting soil, vegetable seedlings, oil and alcohol, such that there was none of any when I ventured to the shops earlier. So I can only but imagine how South Africans are planning on spending their time in the next three weeks! Working from home has become the norm, and given how good South Africans are at taking an early minute, and public holidays, I do doubt productivity in the



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next few weeks. I know my own is seriously lacking at the moment.....The good news is that that load shedding isn't predicted, and the internet providers have guaranteed that the internet will be fast and cheap! Now if load shedding happens and the internet goes down, that will be a drama. A local wag put something on FaceBook yesterday 'remember load shedding? Those were the days.....'.



There are so many highlights of my trip to date. I spent the first three weeks as a visiting scholar at the Health Sciences Department at University of Cape Town (encompassing physio, occupational therapy, speech, communication and language, and disability studies). These are located in the old Groote Schuur hospital, on the same floor as the first heart transplant took place. I walked past the old cardiac wards and laboratories every day, and the students still use the very old fashioned wooden, tiered lecture theatres which were in use when Christian Barnard walked the corridors. The hospital is on the foothills of Table Mountain, as part of the University of Cape Town, and the view up the mountain is awe-inspiring, particularly when the clouds are gathering on the top.

The workshop crew and I are in charge of the toy stall every Saturday at the Biscuit Mill, a posh tourist arts and crafts market on the edge of Cape Town. We will be getting quite a few Saturdays off now, which is actually quite nice because toy stall duty is tiring! But it has limited our income! After several weeks of total disorganization, we were into a pretty good routine when everything was shut down by corona. Justin has trained me into using the Yoko reader, and we log all our sales through this. I am even competent in taking card sales now and getting people to sign digitally.....all of which shows you are never too old to learn! We now take our own internet connection with us, 2 chairs, a thermos of coffee and my tuna sandwiches (which are a big hit, nothing else seems to come close to the level of enthusiasm I get for them). With a 7am arrival at the workshop to pack my little Chevvie Spark with boxes of toys, and a quick unpack 5 minutes up the road at the market, we are in time to watch the morning chaos of the market unfold, and can also claim a premier parking spot on the street, so that when the market closes at 3pm we can make a hasty getaway whilst the informal taxis, formal taxis, ubers and stall holders fight for parking spaces. That little Chevvie Spark has made some epic trips around the Salt River roundabout, loaded with rocking horses, log trucks, and people!

We have piloted the Sihlalo Cape Town taxi, inspired by the hair-raising antics of the local informal taxis. The locals love it, and we are presenting it with an opening back door as a corporate gift, as well as a moneybox version and a pencil holder for office desks. Tourists in particular love our penguins with the old-fashioned flappy wheels, and we regularly have to retrieve a penguin being pushed at high speed away from the stall by an over-enthusiastic toddler. Though this usually results in a sale to embarrassed parents, so we sort of encourage it by having them at toddler height! But we know that we have tapped



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into an area of need, that of old fashioned wooden toys that are indestructible. Such a good training opportunity for young woodworkers! If you can make a toy, you can make a table or a chair, or a cupboard!





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We took the taxi to the Cape Craft and Design Institute a couple of weeks ago and got unqualified support for the concept. When things are back on track after corona leaves us, we look forward to being more involved in the arts and craft marketing circle.

I am now officially on duty for Stellenbosch Uni as visiting professor working with the National Department of Health and Quinette Louw's team, on a national data acquisition project on rehabilitation services. All my years of survey design, data item definition and data management haven't been wasted, as trying to even get accurate workforce data is a challenge. I went with the team to East London in the Eastern Cape 3 weeks ago to roll out the first province-wide online app workforce data collection



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approach. We were able to show the (many many) attendees real time data acquisition, and we are collecting (we think) the most accurate data in the country on allied health workforce. Nelson Mandela's family came from this area in the Eastern Cape. It is so beautiful but so poor. The hospital was basic, with a local market outside being the only source of food for patients. No internet, no catering, no chairs, no computer.....

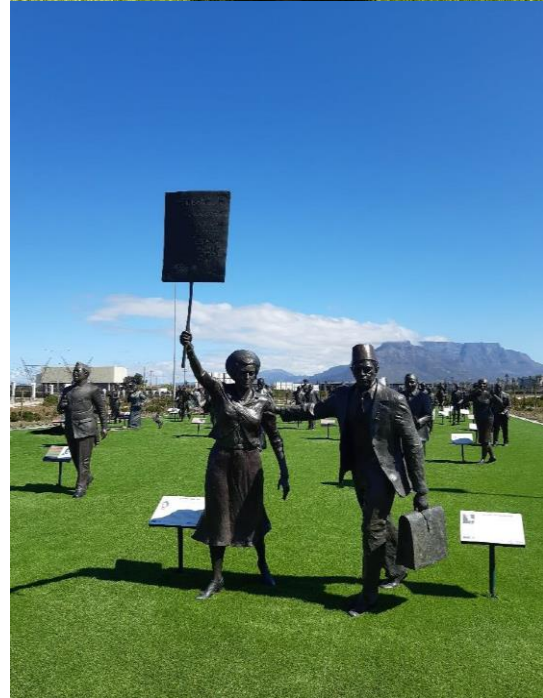
A highlight of this visit has been getting to know Sarah, my next door neighbor, who is the curator of the Long March to Freedom exhibition of 100 lifesize bronze statues commemorating 250 years of South African struggle for equality and freedom. It is awe-inspiring and worth more than one visit. Sadly it has been shut down, along with so many other attractions, because of the corona lockdown, and she sadly had to send her guides home for the next three weeks. This meant dispatching them with only a week's wage in their pockets on buses which could take 14-16 hours to get to their destination. Money is so tight for exhibits such as these. She commissioned a donation box from our workshop, in the shape of a Cape Town taxi. It took us two goes to get it right, but the trainees were extremely proud of themselves when it happened!



Justin and Wilson are putting last minute touches on it. Wilson is quiet and reserved, and a perfect foil for Justin's exuberance. They make a formidable team! Wilson has a beautiful wife Gracious, and two mini-me boys called Prince (aged 5) and Lee (aged 3). I haven't been able to get a word out of them yet, they just stare at me with huge round eyes. Wilson took some of our experimental toys home for them to play with over the lockdown, as he has no internet, no TV and no garden, and the boys have few toys. He said his boys would be really disappointed they couldn't boast to their neighbours about their new toys as they can't go outside!



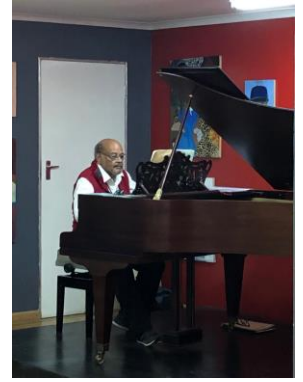
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I christened the piano recital space in Sihlalo on 15th May playing a joint recital with young maestro Qden Blaauw. It was a lovely afternoon and despite the encroaching corona virus, it was well attended. I was disappointed as I could have played better. I am so used to Peter Bok and Nigel doing all the prep work for my Adelaide recitals, where I just turn up and play, that it was a real shock to have to



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organize the piano, help with the cleaning, organize enough chairs and put them out, supervise finishing touches to the space (like getting glass in the window), organize the ticket sales, as well as play some notes in the right order at the right time. And transferring from an electronic keyboard to a proper one at the last minute was challenging! Maybe I am just getting too old for this sort of caper?



Inaugural Sihlalo Promise Salon Recital Program

54 Foundry Rd, Salt River

March 15th 2020, 3pm

Featuring Pianists Qden Blaauw and Karen Grimmei



Adults R150
Pensioners R75
Children < 15 years R50
RSVP Karen@sihlalo.org.za

Supported by Lucas Van Der Walt Pianos

Keep well, and think of me incarcerated in Cape Town for the next 21 days! Much love! Karen