



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE ONE
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Sawubona and greetings from South Africa!

As promised, albeit slightly delayed or as it is called over here "in African time", we are proud to give you Compass Odyssey Newsletter Issue 1. Through this newsletter we hope to offer you a slightly different insight into what is happening in both South Africa and Africa than that which is perhaps offered to you via your television or newspaper back home.

Africa can be many things to many people: harsh or hopeful, challenging or rewarding, frightening or inspirational...the list goes on. We aim to show you snippets of life out here - sometimes with a comparison to life closer to your home - that may even spark your curiosity enough to have you boarding a plane and coming out this way to see Africa for yourself.

Our three Compass Odyssey South Africa tour itineraries are now available on our website - launched last week to coincide with a story in The West Australian weekend travel liftout - and within each newsletter will be the odd story highlighting a sight or experience offered on one of them.

For issue 1 we thought we'd talk about that which all of us are most concerned with:

Money? No.
Health and Happiness? No.
Cricket? Rugby? Football? No.

You may not think about it that often but deep down what concerns us all, is *LIFE*.

How much is a life worth?

It's a question probably only posed when you look at your life insurance premiums on your monthly bank statement. Lately, however, the subject has been popping up in the news, in between Iraq and Climate Change, whereby differing values have been quoted for one's life.

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In Australia last week Woolongong lad Nicael Holt sold his life on e-Bay for A\$7500. The successful bidder purchased his name, phone number, friends and even Christmas dinner with his parents. The anonymous bidder, known only by his e-Bay identity of *ridderstrade*, also owns all of Nicael's worldly possessions including his clothes, CD collection and childhood photos, inherits "some tension with a former ex-girlfriend" and will be given a four-week training course, including surf lessons, on how to be Nicael Holt. To top off the bargain deal, Nicael has also offered two months of after-sales support!

Meanwhile back in South Africa there was two cases regarding the value of a life.

A story came to light of the plight of nine-year old Mozambiquan girl, Rosallio Nyasoro, who was lured to South Africa by a seemingly caring 'auntie' before being sold for a paltry 350 South African rand. No sooner had Rosallio crossed over from Mozambique into South Africa than 'auntie' handed her over to another woman who transported her to a nearby village where she was set to work washing laundry for a large family.

"I was told I was going to a better life" said Rosallio. "There were no friends that I could play with and I had to spend all my time washing clothes."

It was only after a routine check by local social workers that her life of forced labour was finally halted.

A recent report by the United Nations' International Organisation for Migration (IOM) identified southern Africa as fertile ground for highly organised human trafficking, or what many call modern-day slavery. The report claims that Mozambique, Malawi and Lesotho are key source countries for women and children, up to 100 daily, smuggled into South Africa and sold to *mareyanas* (traffickers) who sell them on again as domestic workers, farm labourers or for criminal activities, prostitution and pornography to buyers as far afield as Europe and Asia.

Rosallio is now safe at the Amazing Grace Children's Centre near Johannesburg. Vusi Ndukuya, who works at the centre, says "The increasing volume of human trafficking is being fuelled by poverty and the promise of a better life."

"I never want to go back, I'm happy here now" says Rosallio.

Last Friday the family of a Cape Town man who was found dead almost a week before in the wheel-well of a British Airways aircraft at Los Angeles Airport were advised it would cost R40,000 to bring his body back home. The parents of 17 year old Samuel Benjamin last saw him on 21 January as he headed off to work near Cape Town Airport and it is still unknown as to how he boarded a plane that left Cape Town on the 22 January and made trips to Hong Kong, Singapore, back to Cape Town, and Vancouver before landing in L.A. where the stowaway's frozen body was noticed on a routine inspection by the pilot. Benjamin was identified from documents found on his body and it is not yet known why he tried to stow away.

His unemployed parents, who are at a loss to explain their son's actions, obviously wanted to bring his body back home but were told they must first find the R40,000. Thankfully this week, British Airways extended a hand of goodwill and have decided to transport the body back home for free.

There were no stowaways, only 795 passengers and 400 crew, when the Regent Seven Seas Voyager cruise liner, on her maiden voyage around the world, docked at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town this week.

"The location couldn't be better for us" said one passenger. "Everything is right there in the harbour, there are malls with great shopping and restaurants, and it is really clean and safe. It's one of the best ports I've stayed in". The complete voyage sails for 111 days and calls at 46 ports in 26 countries.

And how much for this once in a lifetime cruise? Anywhere from about US\$90,000 to US\$310,000.

Finally, 'Life' and the quality of how it is lived, is something Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu preaches from the heart. This week, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate received India's highest international honour, the Gandhi Peace Prize at a ceremony in New Delhi. Tutu was the first black archbishop of Cape Town and during the years of apartheid he used the pulpit within the city's St George's Cathedral to deliver many a stinging sermon on the evils of racial discrimination.

Indian Prime Minister Manmoham Singh said "Bishop Tutu is a living Gandhian because there has been no greater example of the practice of Gandhiji's principles than the reconciliation effort in post-apartheid South Africa".

The connection between South Africa and Gandhi goes back to the end of the 19th century. In 1893, the then 23 year old Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi sailed from India to Durban to serve as legal counsel for a family friend. In June of that year, he was asked by his employer to travel to Pretoria to sort out some business matters. The ensuing train journey first took Gandhi to Pietermaritzburg, 80km from Durban. It was there that a European (white) man entered the first-class compartment that Gandhi was seated in and proceeded to complain to the station officials, who ordered that Gandhi exit the van compartment as *coolies* and non-whites were not permitted in first-class. He protested and produced his first-class ticket but was eventually unceremoniously pushed out of the train and along with his luggage, dumped onto the platform. The train steamed away and Gandhi shuffled to the waiting room.

He later wrote in his autobiography "the cold was extremely bitter. My overcoat was in my luggage but I did not dare to ask for it lest I should be insulted again, so I sat and shivered."

It was there and then that Gandhi became acutely aware of racism and of the inequality of life to which people were/are subjected because of their skin colour.

"There was a white man in the room. I was afraid of him. What was my duty? I asked myself. Should I go back to India, or should I go forward, with God as my helper and face whatever was in store for me? I decided to stay and suffer. My active non-violence began from that day."

Gandhi stayed in South Africa for the next 20 years peacefully protesting against the lack of rights afforded to the Indian population within South Africa and eventually pressurising the government into recognising Indian marriages and abolition of a poll tax imposed on them.

In keeping with his mission of lifelong service, however, he organised a South African Indian Ambulance Corps for the British during both the Anglo-Boer War and World War II battles that took place mainly in the region now known as the Battlefields in KwaZulu-Natal.

On April 25, 1997 in a moving ceremony at the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station, then South African President Nelson Mandela posthumously conferred the Freedom of Pietermaritzburg to Mahatma Gandhi, accepted on his behalf by India's High Commissioner to South Africa and Gandhi's grandson, Gopalkrishna Gandhi. President Mandela called the ceremony "righting a century-old wrong". The High Commissioner described his grandfather's experience at the railway station as something like a second birth.

“When Gandhi was evicted from the train, an Indian visiting South Africa fell. But when Gandhi rose, an Indian South African rose.”

The value and quality of life – it should be a birthright regardless of domicile or skin colour.

Visit the Amazing Grace Children’s Centre website at www.seedsoflight.org/amazing.html to see where little Rosallio is now being cared for.

Good LIFE to you all.

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