



## Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

**Report Title:** Inspiration and Adversity in Post-apartheid South Africa      **Name:** Sean Gass

**Other Team Members:**

**Program:** San Francisco Program

**Trip Dates:** 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001      **Location Visited:** South Africa

**Post Fellowship Reporting Template:** PFR Template 02

**Project Summary:** I arrived in Cape Town full of hope and some trepidation. My journey began with a hitch: my primary contact in the country was very sick and could not meet me at the airport, or show me around the first few days in Cape Town. As a result, I had to feel my way around on my own. My primary purpose was to learn as much as I could about what post-apartheid South Africa is like today and make connections with history and literature teachers in the country. South Africa is a place of living history; two blocks from my house was a huge hand-painted sign splayed across a cement wall that read "Free Mandela." I asked some locals about the graffiti and they explained that they were immensely proud of it: it had been painted in the 1980s by a small group of Umkhonto we Sizwe soldiers who had snuck back into the city and it was protected from the apartheid government's censorship by people from the neighborhood and, many claim, some kind of act of God.

In Langa I spent two days working in a classroom, at one point even teaching the class. I got to meet close to a hundred students and interview them about their school experiences. I also got to speak with many teachers and administrators. After my time in Langa I met with Dylan McRay who works with teacher training and the new, post-apartheid curriculum that the state has just published. Through Dylan I had another historical moment when I got to meet Denis Goldberg, an ANC activist, agitator, Umkhonto we Sizwe soldier and close personal friend of Nelson Mandela. He was speaking at a local high school about his experiences during the Rivonia Trial. It was amazing to meet a man who was deeply involved with the movement.

Throughout my two weeks in Cape Town and Johannesburg I continued to learn every day and the history that I had read so much about became more alive to me than it ever had before. I visited areas of forced removals, such as District Six, where people were forced from their homes during the 1960s to make way for a "whites-only" designated area of town. At Robben Island I saw Nelson Mandela's cell and walked around where he and Walter Sisulu used to strategize about the movement. I visited the Bo-Kaap district an area that managed to survive the apartheid relatively intact and it now gives us a window into what a racially harmonious society South Africa could have been and could still be in the future.

It is hard to fit the entire month of my trip into this short narrative. I was so inspired by everything that I saw there, and it gave me such a perspective on the history and complexity of South Africa. When it came time to leave I was loaded down with new information, resources, and narratives I had collected. It was also incredibly sad - I met so many amazing people there, like Siviwe and Zinele. I answered all of my questions, sometimes too well. I became so much more aware of the world I had previously only thought about academically.

**Career Impact:** There is no end to the growth that transpired over the course of this trip; primarily in understanding and interest. My interest in this country, and to a large extent much of Africa, grew exponentially. As I mentioned earlier, I became aware of levels of complexity that had previously not existed to me. I began to think of history in a new way: as changing, developing, happening daily around us. This trip also made me realize how much we have here in the United States and how lucky we are to have this abundance. It helped me develop a perspective on what I do each day and value what is truly important: safety (physical and otherwise), family, food and shelter, stable government; these are things that many people in South Africa have fought for. I will no longer take for granted many of the privileges we have here. I hope to communicate some of that feeling to my students in many ways - I hope to open their eyes to a part of the world that can show them how amazing it is that we are all together and surviving here.

**Classroom/Community Impact:** My fellowship will benefit my school community in a number of ways. First of all, it will instill in our Africa curriculum authentic artifacts, stories and recorded narratives for student engagement. I have already brought a lot of artifacts into the classroom and shared them with students. Perhaps the most meaningful contribution to my classroom will be making connections to students in South Africa through emails and letters. In our planning of this year's curriculum we have used many artifacts I brought back as well as my expertise to create a more meaningful Africa unit. I have drawn largely from my resources and experiences to create a project-based curriculum centered on South Africa. I think the primary benefit for my school community and me has been simply having the stories and experiences I now have to share with my students and fellow staff.

**Open Response:** I have a number of works in progress. I will be presenting my trip and findings to the whole faculty as a part of an in-service day. My presentation will share with teachers the importance of engaging in service learning and how to bring that experience and new knowledge back to the classroom. I am also working with a number of students to create a website for Siviwe (a man I met in South Africa) to collect contributions to help him and others start and run small businesses. Students are very involved in the project and I hope to have a site ready soon. I am also working on editing video footage to create a mini-documentary of my trip. Finally, I am working on how to get students more involved in Africa through a group called Building with Books. As the on-campus sponsor of the program, we raise money to build schools in developing areas of Africa such as Mali, Malawi and Senegal.

**Quote:** In living memory, in living history. We are not condemned to repeat this.

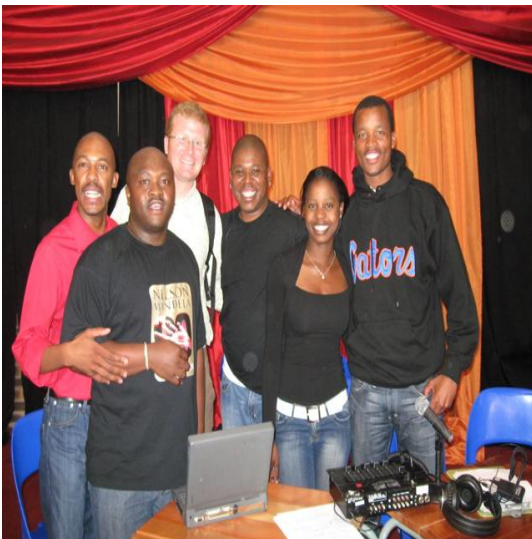
Photos:



Teaching in Langa High School, Cape Town



The Joe Slovo informal settlements outside Cape Town



Nelson Mandela Foundation actors giving a play about HIV/AIDS



A day in Khayelitsha



Saying goodbye in the township



Playing soccer in the Eastern Cape near Willowvale



Learning about traditional Xhosa clan names



Cool shades in the Eastern Cape