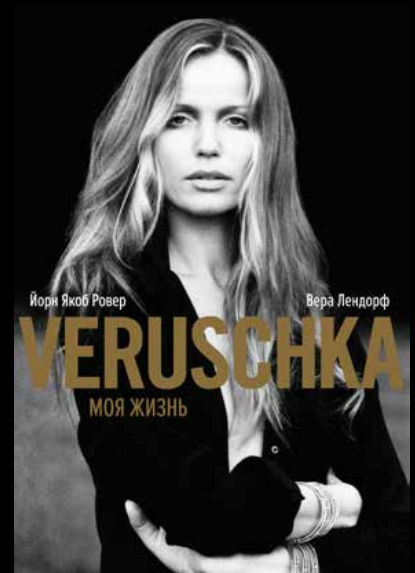


MDUKATSHANI

50 Years of Beading

1969 -2019



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Cover images:

Top left: Mdukatshani beads modelled for *World on a String, A Companion for Bead Lovers* by Diana Friedburg and Joel Lipton

Top right: Verushka – our first celebrity customer.

Bottom left: Ngenzeni Mvelase – a veteran Mdukatshani beader by Paul Weinberg

Bottom right: Beaded bowl and balls made for *World on a String A Companion for Bead Lovers* by Diana Friedburg and Joel Lipton

The Common Denominator



Government lorries – GG trucks. Forced removals affected the lives of crafters at Maria Ratschitz Mission, Limehill, Weenen, Msinga, Waayhoek, Mbulwana and Nhlawe.

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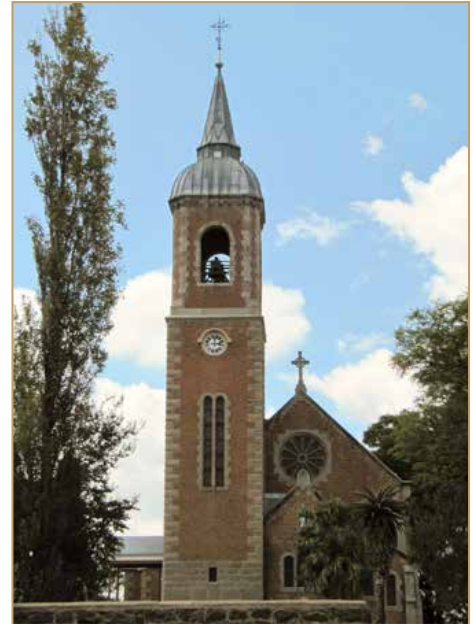
Mdukatshani Craft and Welfare Trust No. IT757/2010/PMB

Maria Ratschitz Catholic Mission

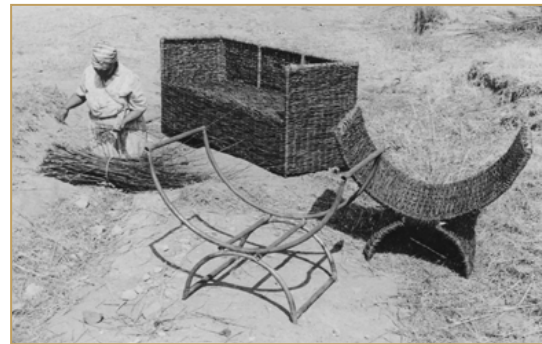
The First Crafts

The Mdukatshani Bead Project was never planned. It happened almost accidentally, a small part of an ecumenical organisation called Church Agricultural Projects (CAP) which was then based on Maria Ratschitz Catholic Mission near Wasbank, KwaZulu-Natal. CAP was founded in 1965 to develop derelict church land to produce food and training for rural African communities, but this changed when the apartheid government announced plans for large-scale forced removals in the district, starting with the African residents on the mission. Only those in full time employment were exempt, so CAP set up a basketwork project using osiers grown on the mission. The project was a week old when the Dundee Bantu Commissioner arrived in October 1967 to do a head count, reluctantly adding the obviously inexperienced weavers to the list of those allowed to stay. The crafts soon expanded to include pottery, wool weaving, and sewing projects which were designed to provide an income not only for mission residents, but for neighbouring communities who were forcibly removed to the Limehill resettlement area in January 1968.

(For a more detailed history of Mdukatshani see Page 51).



Volunteer Carolyn Moulton with the Matiwane sewing group



Nancy Kumalo, our basketwork instructor



Kherorana Dube, one of the potters



Nancy Khumalo



Generosa Hlatshwayo



Generosa Hlatshwayo with handwoven cushions and bags



Kherorana Dube

A MESSAGE FROM OUR TRUSTEES

The celebration of 50 years of beading at Msinga is a story of limitless imagining, of stringing drops of light together through what is bleak and broken, to make it magnificent.

Just as each bead on a thread is uniquely beautiful, it becomes part of a pattern that creates meaning and function. Just as each item of beadwork is a single piece of art, it links people together through ideas and skills, through passion and determination.

In telling this story of the crafters of the Mdukatshani Rural Development Project (formerly Church Agricultural Projects – CAP), Creina Alcock holds up the beads and the cotton, the copper and the gold so that they reflect not only the sun but also the light and shade of the lives they carry.

In the early years, the project had 300 beaders and Mdukatshani beadwork became renowned from New York to Paris to London. Within these pages, a sculptor, a *sangoma* (traditional healer) and a supermodel are among many sharing the stage. The project has connected people across continents and generations. These relationships, their tones and meanings are recorded as intricately as those of the beads.

The project was born out necessity, a response to the apartheid forced removals. It created training and work but just as importantly a refuge from recurrent natural disasters and human conflicts, and from the heartache that follows them. The people of Msinga have suffered through 21 local wars and the project has been taken to the brink by sabotage, flooding, international tragedies, and global recession. Yet it endures and flourishes, and it gives cause for joyful celebration.

We are certain that CAP's Trustees have been equally proud of this legacy. The Trustees have always been selected to include diversity in expertise and experience, from the Chief Headmen, the *Indunankulus* of the Mchunu and Mthembu tribes, the late Petrus Majosi and Bhekuyise Nxongo, to anti-apartheid campaigners Peter Brown, Elliot Mngadi and Reverend Dale White. Although Peter and Elliot were jailed and banned for their work opposing 'blackspot' removals, after their restrictions were lifted they became monthly visitors to the project bringing news of the wider world for discussions with the people of the valley. Today's trustees include Mchunu *Umntwana* (prince) Joseph Mchunu and Bomvu *Indunankulu*, Kusakusa Mbokazi. (The Mthembu tribal representative on our board *Induna* Khonzokwake Mvelase, died recently) Trustees meetings are reflective of the complexity of our country, some driving from Johannesburg and Durban, others hitching rides on bakkies, others walking for miles along aloe lined footpaths to dusty roadside pickup points. The discussions and decisions about the project are entwined with the wisdom of tribal leaders and community elders blending with agriculturalists, political activists and academics. Each point is painstakingly translated between English and Zulu, a skill at which the late Dave Alcock and Natty Duma excelled and which GG Alcock, Rauri Alcock and Gugu Mbatha continue. Opening and closing prayers are offered in the formal Zulu style.

Trustee meetings historically happened under massive *Tamboti* trees, their leaves bright orange in winter, or shady *uMncaka*, Red Ivory trees beside the rushing brown Tugela, trustees perched on rock stools, no boardroom tables here. With the building of the learning centre, also the bead HQ, trustee meetings could take place under a roof, the seats often large wooden boxes full of raw beads.

The Trustees of MRDP are delighted that this wonderful history of the bead project and all who are and have been involved in it can be shared to commemorate the 50th anniversary. It is an invaluable record, beautifully illustrated by the photography of Tessa Katzenellembogen and Rauri Alcock. This book has been translated into Zulu to give the crafters and their families an enduring record of their years as members of the project.

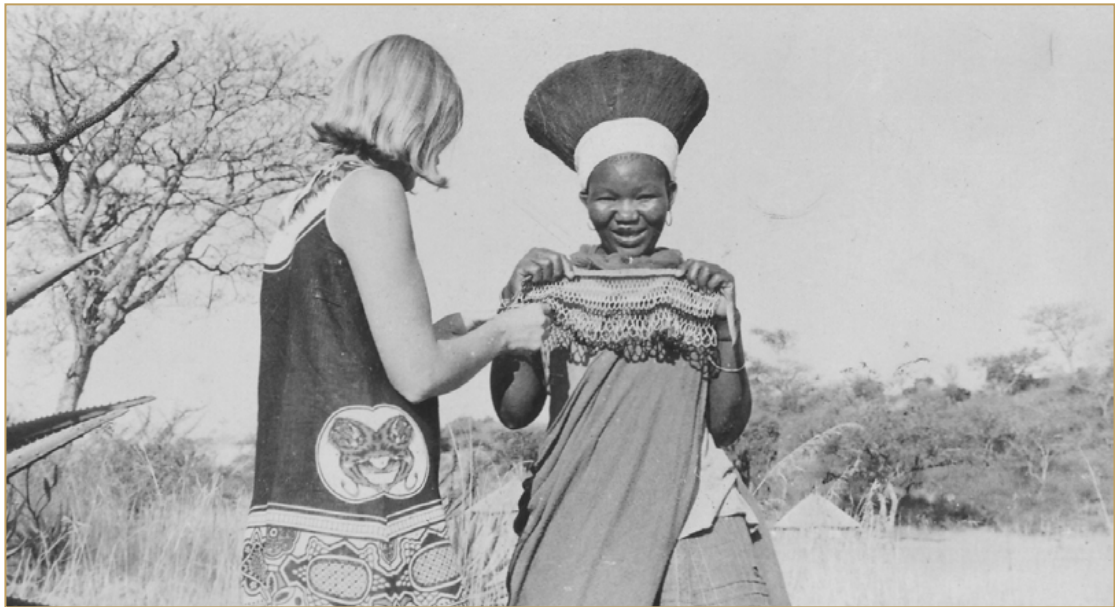


Deborah Ewing, Chair of Mdukatshani Craft and Welfare Trust



"No boardroom tables here"

The Board of Trustees meeting on a kopje on Mdukatshani to discuss the transfer of the farm with Mchunu and Mthembu tribal elders



Sherrell Pitt-Kennedy with one of the first beaders who lived in a tribal area near Limehill. The names of all the early beaders were lost when the project's records were destroyed by fire in July 1981.

THE BEGINNING

Evolving theories around the invention of beads suggest threading something with a hole in the middle was so revolutionary it may have been brought about by a re-wiring of the human brain. Who made the first bead, and why? The innovative leap is a complex problem in evolutionary studies. When the oldest beads in the world – perforated mollusc shells – were discovered in Blombos Cave in the Cape in 2004, the discovery made headlines around the globe. *Ancient Shell Jewellery Hints at Language*, reported *New Scientist*. The mollusc shells were at least 75 000 years old and suggested humans had advanced concepts of symbolism and language much earlier than expected.

Questions of evolution were far from our mind when we reluctantly ordered our first box of beads in 1969. It was a time of upheaval in South Africa, with thousands of Africans being moved from “white” areas to “black” to tidy the apartheid map. Some of the removals were documented. Many were not. The project now known as Mdukatshani has had two separate histories in two different places (See Page 51). Both were areas of large scale forced removals, so the story of the beads will always be entwined with heartache. Yet without the removals, would there have been any crafts at all? They came into being out of the necessity for opposition, a response to need rather than an outlet for creative talent. Yet creativity has always had a value in itself, something of the spirit to transcend reality, to lift the heart above the real world. This was as true for the first women to join the project, as it is true for the women who are still doing crafts today.

When the bead project started in 1969 it was part of a larger craft programme initiated by Church Agricultural Projects (CAP) an ecumenical organisation based on the Maria Ratschitz Catholic Mission near Wasbank, KwaZulu-Natal. CAP was founded in 1965 to develop derelict church land to produce food and training for rural African communities, but it had only been at work a year when its plans were disrupted by the looming threat of government removals. The district – and the mission – were officially white, but the large African communities surrounding the mission were living on black-owned land, or “black spots”. Despite attempts to prevent the removals, in January 1968 government lorries arrived to move an estimated 9000 people to tents on the veld in a Scheduled Bantu Area called Limehill, 30 km away. Long before the removals CAP was involved in legal and practical support, and the crafts were one move among many that would help displaced families in the months ahead. Initially the raw materials for the crafts came from the mission: osiers for cane furniture, local clays for pottery, and Angora goats and merino sheep for wool. Why start on beads?



A crafter doing beads alongside her thatch after her removal to Limehill

There would never have been any beads at all had it not been for a young sculptor, Sherrell Pitt-Kennedy, who joined us as a volunteer early in 1969. She came with her small son Seamus, and using her training in fine arts, soon transformed the pottery and the basketwork projects. Her heart was in beads, however. She was a child of the Swinging Sixties. *One box*, she pleaded. *Just one box*. She'd sell them to her hippy friends. But there were several problems with beads. They were expensive, they were in short supply (because sanctions were having an effect on South Africa wholesalers' shelves were almost empty) and they had become a dying craft, even in African areas. Sherrell was going to get her box of beads, but she would have to walk the hills to find the beaders. She eventually found six women willing to try, one of them a *sangoma* (traditional healer) known as Gogo Nkosi, who would change the course of the beads.

Like all *sangomas* Gogo Nkosi wore white beaded headdress to connect her to her spirits, and after Sherrell had admired the headdress, the old woman made one up as a gift. She refused payment. The wig was a thank you for having work Sherrell wore the wig on her next trip to town and came back with orders for more. Soon the old diviner was working full time threading beads for traditional headdresses. Some of the wigs would be worn by the witches in Welcome Msomi's 1970's stage show, *UmaBatha*, an African adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which would perform in London and New York. But the wigs had a different kind of exposure when we had an order from Veruschka, the 1,9 metre German supermodel whom photographer Richard Avedon called "the most beautiful woman in the world". Veruschka saw one of our wigs on a trip to South Africa and ordered 13 in different colours.

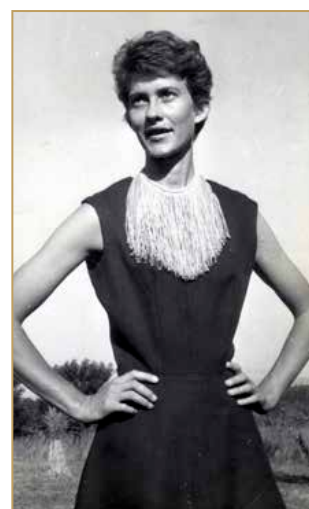
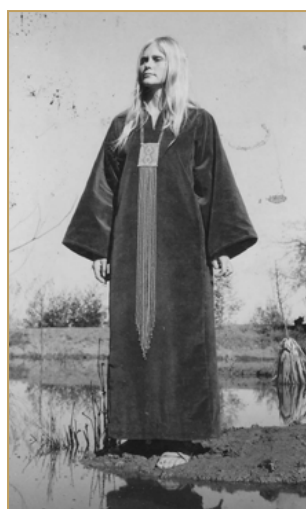
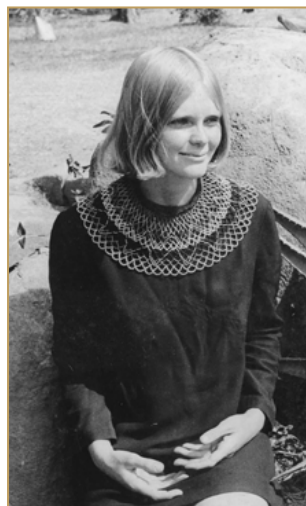
Long before the Veruschka order, however, Sherrell had started having seizures after a fall from a horse and moved to Durban to be close to medical help.* She left a small pile of unsold items, and half a box of beads. The experiment was over. We had used up the beads that were left in the box, and explained the situation to the crafters when Jo Thorpe in Durban arranged a small exhibition in her office at the Institute of Race Relations, and orders started coming in.**

Three years after the project started we had 300 beaders on our books. Half lived in the African areas surrounding the Springvale Anglican Mission near Highflats. Half lived 30 km away in the Limehill area. As we couldn't get permits to enter African areas, we had to function through intermediaries. People like plump Lucy Twala with her bicycle and her willing heart. Every week a truck dropped off beads and instructions at Lucy's home at Limehill. Every week Lucy wobbled off along footpaths to hand out the work. When her bicycle collapsed she said nothing. She walked. We only found out about the bicycle when she started missing deadlines. Even with the bicycle it had been hard to keep up with deadlines, and the work was often wrong. Written instructions were all very well, but nobody could read or write. Lucy asked a neighbour to help her decipher our notes, while the crafters went to local teachers for translation. It was a game of broken telephones.

Despite the difficulties of communication, we felt we were making headway when early in December 1969 the Dundee Bantu Commissioner notified us that in terms of Act 18 of 1936 the homecrafts were illegal. The Act was clear. Any profession, business, trade or "calling" in a Bantu area needed a licence. The crafts paid wages. We were therefore a business. We were trading illegally and had to stop. When we tried to negotiate a truce the Chief Bantu Commissioner pointed out that there was nothing to stop our crafters coming to us. If we turned our crafters into migrants, gave them transport, fed and accommodated them – the enterprise would be quite legal. Lucy would have to start to take a bus.

* Sherrell remained a lifelong friend who frequently visited Mdukatsani. She eventually settled in England where she died after a long battle with cancer in 2009.

** Jo Thorpe's office at the Institute of Race Relations grew into Durban's African Art Centre, and she would become known as "the mother of crafts in Natal" for the help and encouragement she gave to groups like ours.



Some of our earliest designs, modelled by Sherrell and Joey Bowbrick (later Barichiev) who volunteered with us for a year.

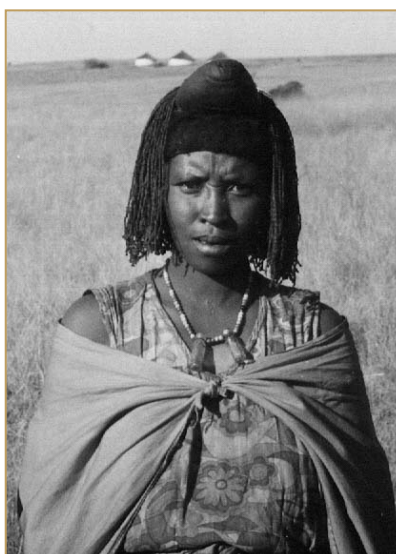


Mmmm. Are you sure? Duchesne Grice, Chairman of our Advisory Committee, at an exhibition with Sherrell (left) and an unknown model. Initially wigs were sold for ten rand each.

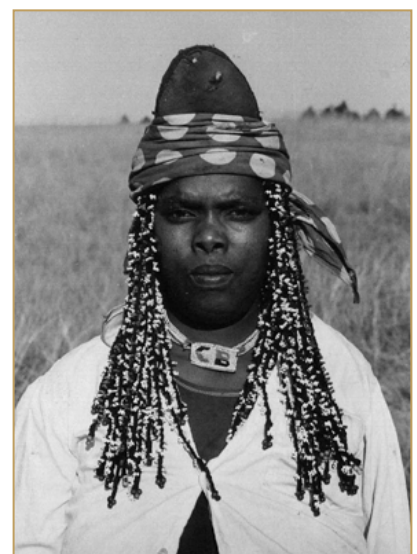


SPRINGVALE

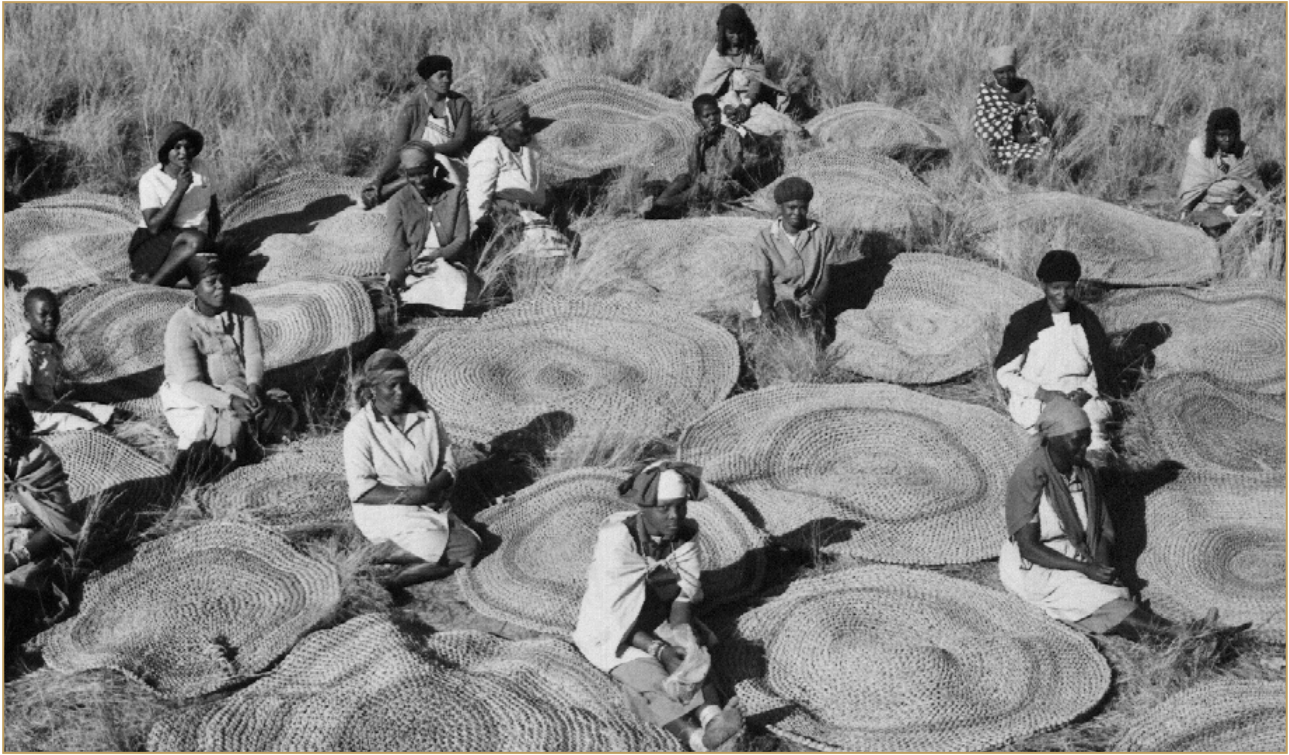
We were already having permit problems at Springvale where the Ixopo Magistrate invoked a little-known law to prevent us entering the Mission without a permit, and when we applied for a permit, it was refused. This meant the end of our agricultural work on the mission, but we couldn't abandon the crafters. We retreated, but not far. The district road was legally "white" and there was space to camp on the verge. For the next five years we operated from the roadside at two sites in white farming country. In summer when the mealies stood high we had a toilet. In winter, when the fields were bare, we walked and walked and walked. So did the crafters, and the real burden fell on them. They had to come long distances to meet us, women with babies on their backs and small children in tow waiting for hours in a queue that seemed endless before going home long after dark. Distance was not the only problem. Working from home affected quality as well as deadlines. We never knew when a finished piece would arrive, or if it would match the order. A woman was easily distracted at home. Beads would get lost, colours mixed, and there was always the problem of thread. It was too thin, too thick, too hard, or too springy which meant knots wouldn't hold when tested. The women had their own solution. They unravelled the plastic thread in green cabbage bags. It looked strong, but it was brittle and snapped – which led to hundreds of reject articles, a bitter experience that cost us money we didn't have, and left the women despairing.



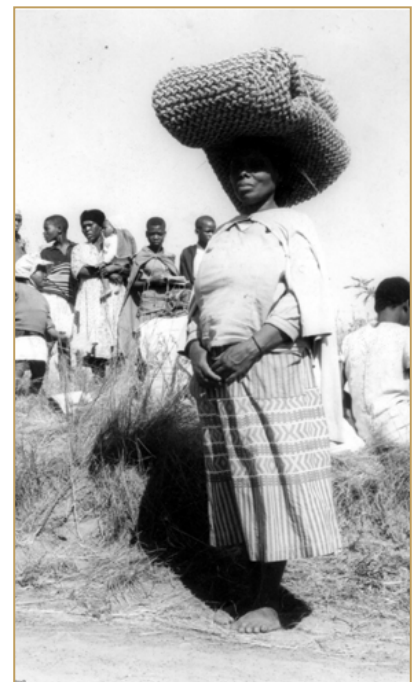
The Springvale women were *amaBhaca*, with ochred hair worn in ringlets, very different from the Msinga women.

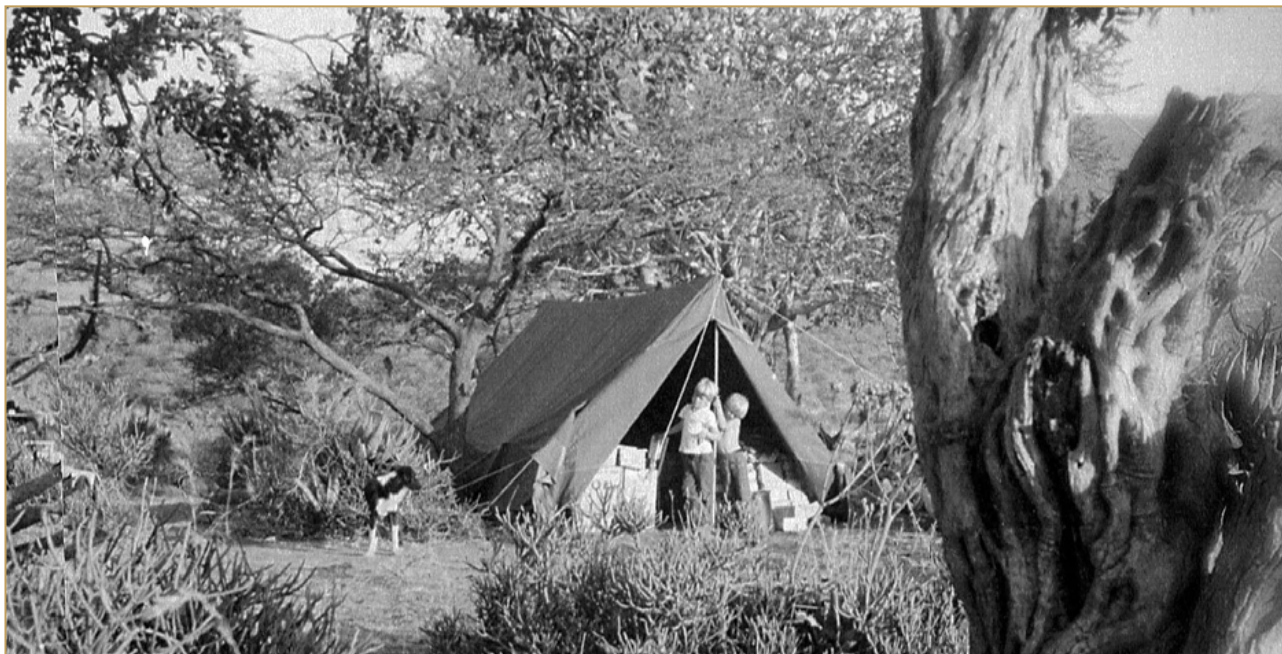


Beaded headdresses were common to all diviners, although this woman's raised "horn" says her tribal group is *amaBhaca*.



There were always slump periods when bead orders were scarce, which is how we came to start on grass mats. Grass was free and readily available, at least in the white farming areas. And that was just the first of the problems. Grass might be free, but it was scarce in tribal areas, and the grass cutting season was short. Tribal law dictated that no grass could be cut from the time the first maize shoots appeared above ground until Good Friday, a law enforced by an eagle-eyed induna who came to our collections to check. Were the mats made of old grass or new? And who had cut the grass under the Landrover? For the women secreted sickles under their skirts to gather small bundles surreptitiously. Cutting grass too soon was said to bring hail, but they were ready to break the rules. We learnt to aid and abet them, choosing a new camp site every month and ordering that a workspace be cleared. It wasn't an order the induna could countermand, and the women went home with armfuls of summer grasses that produce bands of colour in their mats. Storage was another problem. Most of our orders were for very large mats, and the crafters had no storage space at home. Mats stored on rafters were often gnawed by rats, or discoloured by leaks in the thatch. A small defect could make a mat unsaleable despite heart-breaking weeks of hard work. We paid for them anyway, and tried selling them to friends. It was important not to break a woman's spirit.



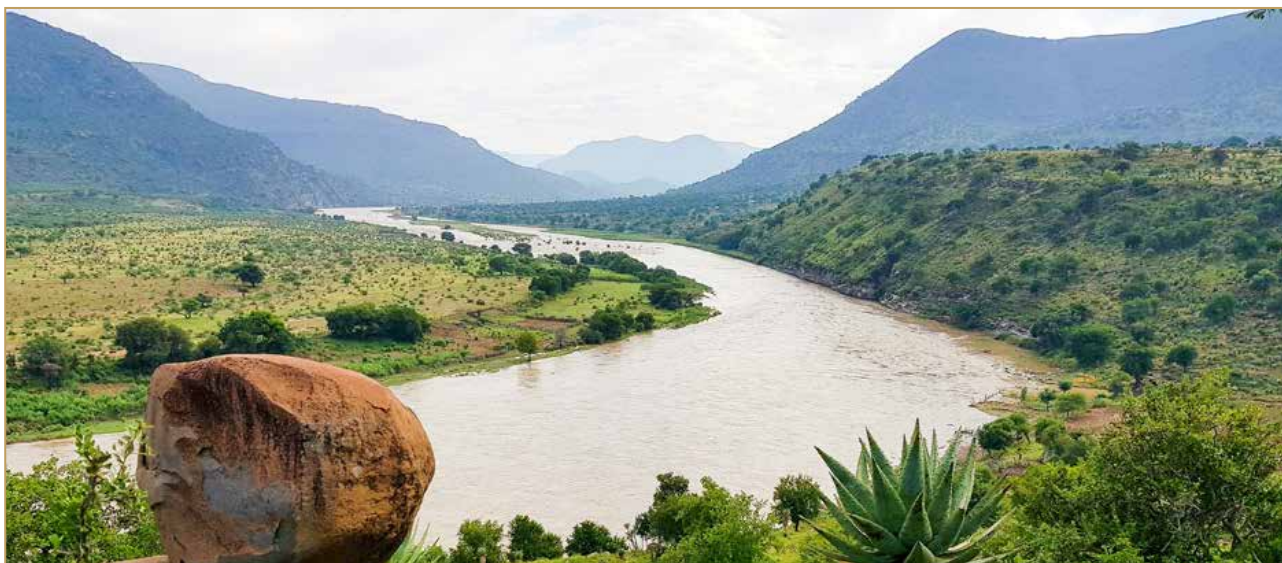


Our campsite at the top of the cliffs above the Thukela river

MDUKATSHANI

But time was running out on us. By 1974 we knew the lease on Maria Ratchitz mission would not be renewed. We had a year to pack up and go. We were facing closure when a new site for the project was discovered on the Weenen-Msinga boundary—three farms known collectively as Mdukatshani. The Chairman's Fund of the Anglo-American Corporation helped to raise the money to buy the land, and by June 1975 we had settled into a life in tents. It would be a year before the first stone and thatch buildings were completed, a year we juggled long distance visits to Springvale, while struggling to keep in touch with Lucy Twala when neither of us had a phone. Eventually the African Arts Centre agreed to take on the grass mat project at Springvale, but nobody wanted the beads. The difficulty was the weighing involved, the hours spent at the scale. Every packet handed out had to be weighed, and weighed again when the finished work came in. A loss of ten grams might seem insignificant but multiplied over the course of the year could leave a big hole in the bank balance.

We camped with the bead boxes covered by a leaky old tarpaulin. We would deal with them later, after the move. They were not important. They could wait. But we had forgotten to take account of our teacher, Bathulise Madondo. Living in a pup tent had done nothing for her temper, and within two months, long before we were ready, she was teaching a bead class under a tree. Bathulise had come to us from Springvale, an unmarried woman who demanded respect and was going to be trained as an organiser. She would never be easy to manage. She was tiny, fierce and temperamental, a tough teacher, sure of her gifts, who tended to terrorise her students. Anything they could do, she could do better. Spinning wool, weaving, or threading beads. Her students were willing to humour her for they could come and go as they liked. The classes were informal and a novelty. An occasional hour of entertainment in a day. Not real work, like digging a field. It would be years before we had a disciplined group of crafters who could be trusted to meet a deadline on time.



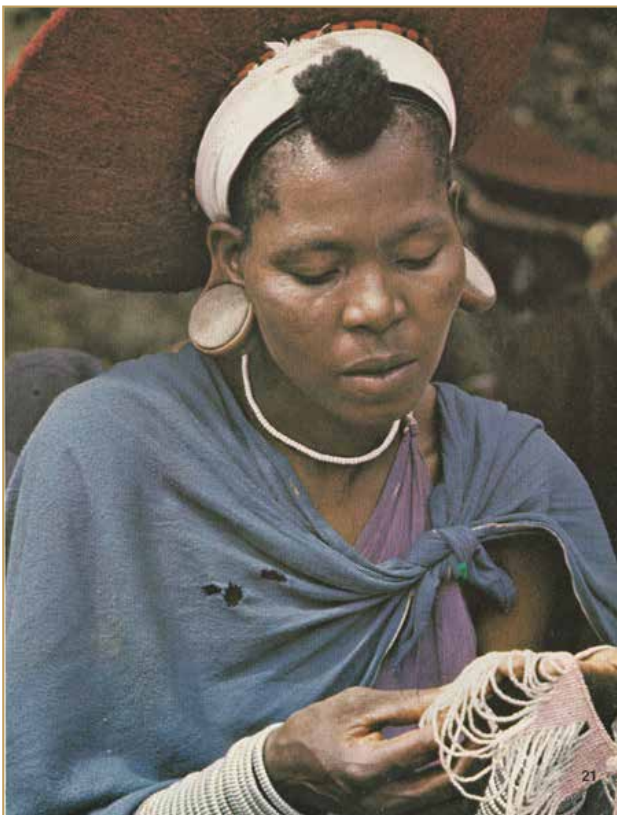
The corner of the farm looking across the Thukela river to the Mthembu tribal area of Msusamphi

We had a lot to learn about the valley we now called home, with its old scars, and its invisible structures, and its guns. The guns were part of the sounds at night, scattering the moonlight, echoing off the cliffs, speaking a language we couldn't understand. Not yet. Literacy would come gradually, learning the calibre, the direction of the shots. But it wasn't information we wanted. We had come for other reasons. We didn't want to get involved. It was background noise, but hard to ignore when it disrupted the details of our lives. It was always there, asserting reality, forcing us to cope with crisis. In time we would learn there were no clear lines of separation. What we came for, and what we were asked to do – they merged into something simpler. A test of the limits of love? The beginning was easier. We put up tents in a beautiful place, overwhelmed by the landscape and people. We were living among the Mthembus and Mchunus, tribal people with a sense of independence that had grown out of poverty and being ignored by the world. They offered us a watchful neutrality. We were living on land they considered their own. Whatever the outward appearance of things, they would set the rules of the engagement.

We were not entirely strangers. “Don't you remember us?” the women asked, pointing to rooftops up in the hills thatched with grass gathered at Maria Ratchitz. We used to open the farm to thatch cutters every autumn, and they had been among the regulars. The grass was free, they had a place to sleep, and there was a daily ration of *amasi* (sour milk). The woman giggled. The grass cutting season had become a holiday. “In fact we didn't go back to cut the grass we went back for the taste of your *amasi*!” The women were beautiful with ochered hair, wooden earplugs, and arms full of heavy silver bangles, their pleated leather skirts flounced when they moved, so climbing up a path could look like dancing.



Bathulise Madonda came from Springvale, a strict and temperamental craft teacher who taught the first beadners at Mdukathshani. Here she looks after a student's child.



Divane Ndimande then ...



and Divane Ndimande today, 40 years later

The first women to join the Mdukathshani bead group were the two wives of Sweliswe Dladla, Divane Ndimande (pictured) and Jaji Khumalo. The family was close, but destitute, and in the 1980s the father, mothers and all 12 children would be treated for TB. Divane spent six months in hospital, her four-year-old daughter, Zephi, was there for four. Both women are still doing beads today.



Phontsi Mvelase was one of our star crafters when she was shot at home in April 1988. Her two small sons, Indoda (10) and Insizwa (3) were with her when she died. Although one of her killers left his hat on a bush, there were no arrests. Her death would leave a shadow on the years.

They wore scented corms around their necks with the patina of antique leather but apart from diviners in touch with their calling, it was rare to see anyone in beads. Beads were too expensive for adornment. A handful cost as much as ten kilograms of mealie meal, so they were bought out of necessity to honour the spirits, and strung up as amulets to ward off harm and disease.

When a group of pretty young *makotis* (young married women) enrolled as our first crafters they had never handled needle and thread. Their clothes were not sewn. They were knotted or tied. A needle was a foreign object. They were going to struggle with the difficulties of threading fine needles, and stitching was demanding and slow. Some made it, many fell away. But those who stayed had an affinity for beads that would carry them through periods of hardship and war. For there were going to be 21 conflicts on our boundaries in the years ahead, Mthembu fighting Mthembu, Mchunu fighting Mchunu, impis hiding in the bush on the farm making Mdukatsani part of a war zone. The beads continued, however, offering the woman a kind of refuge, a place to meet and pray and talk before following their separate paths into the hills to feed the men in the impis.

Orders were often interrupted or stalled as men were killed in the fighting. Husbands, uncles, nephews – everyone had somebody on the other side, and the Bead Day allowed an exchange of messages, an openness impossible anywhere else. When the trouble was over new widows in black joined the queue. The beads were going to help with rebuilding, picking up the pieces, just going on. Going on was sometimes all we could do, holding together, sharing the heartache, but sustained on enduring bonds of friendship and trust.



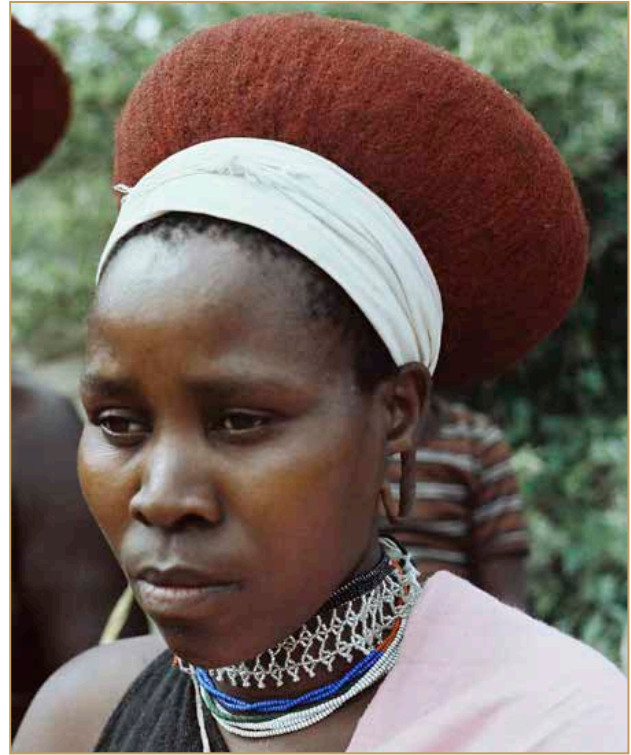
Jabulile Ndlovu was living at Msusamphi when fighting broke out in the village early in 1987. In March, her home was one of the many burnt to the ground by a raiding impi. The war would last four years and leave the village gutted. Few of the crafters who had to rebuild their homes ever returned to beads.



Qhubekile Ndlela was ill for years before she died of TB leaving a young family of three boys. Sitting with her here is Khalisile Mvelase one of the few women who failed to learn beads but is now in charge of the Mdukatsani cleaning and maintenance team.



Ntombizini Skakane has always been a free spirit, direct, joyful, ready to break the rules. This changed when her husband Mtwelanga Mdlolo died of throat cancer in 1995, and her courage faltered when her son Muthobeleni, was burnt to death in a hostel in Johannesburg in 2003. Today she is unable to walk, but still doing beads, sitting on the floor, legs stretched out in front of her, her wonderful giggle lighting up the room with gaiety.



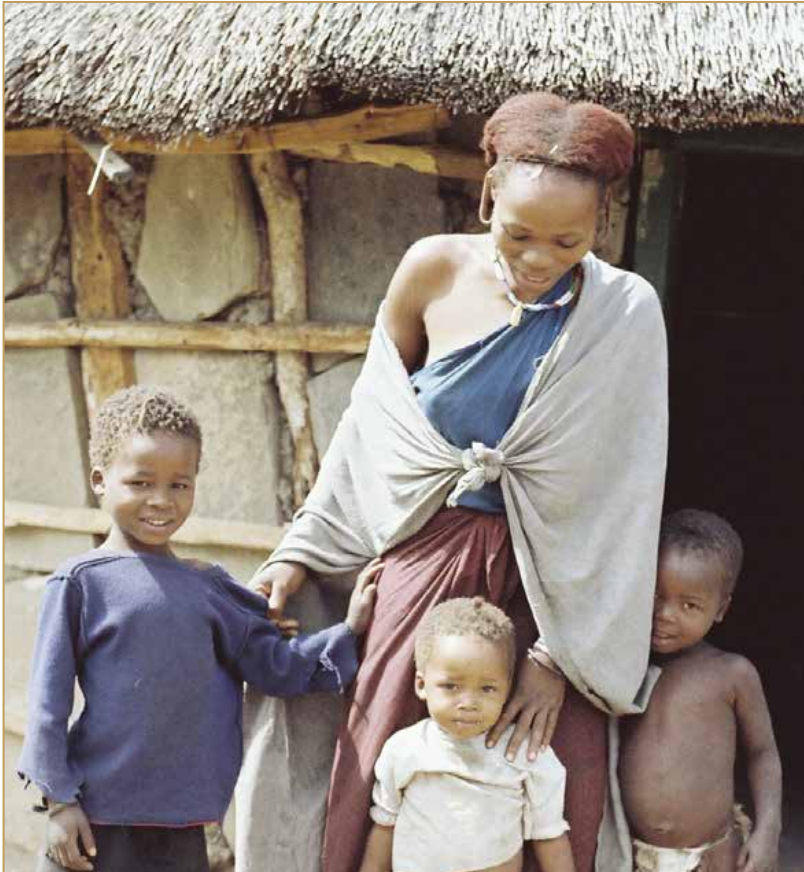
Thandekile Magubane was the craft group's intellectual, always in the forefront of discussions, ready to speak her mind. She tried to reduce the world to order, passionate, intense, and willing to interfere against injustice or hurt. She was 54 when she was killed by lightning in 2003. Her husband, Mpmbe Mvelase never recovered from her death, and died a year later. Their daughters Gosi and Zwakushiwo, are two of our star headworkers today.



Ngenzeni Mvelase was at home with her husband, Mthanana Dladla, when he was shot sitting outside at a fire in 1992. He had called a meeting to help a neighbour settle a quarrel with his son, and would linger in hospital for six weeks before he died. News of his death had not yet reached home when acting on instinct they could not explain, Ngenzeni and her co wife Maskakane decided to remove their *isicholos*, an act of widowhood. Their heads would be shaved after the funeral and they never wore their *isicholos* again.



Ntoza Ndimande (right) was sweeping her yard when she heard her husband, Hlangiseni, had been killed in an ambush at a roadblock coming home for Easter in April 1994. He had always been concerned for his wife's frailty and was considering giving up his job due to increased violence in the city when he died. Ntoza struggled on in failing health, leaving two daughters when she died after a long illness in 2005. Here she wears one of the pieces she made for Yves St. Laurent. Working with her is Qwengukile Madondo, who lost her husband Khuzeni Zwane, to malaria in 1989. She is now a pensioner and retired from beading.



Left: Qhubekile Dladla with her small sons, Mkhulunyelwa, Skhundla and Mphikeleli.

Below: Qabukani Dladla grew up watching her mother doing beads, before becoming a fine beader herself. A serious little girl, and now a serious young woman, she lost her husband and two babies to AIDS before ARV treatment returned her to health.

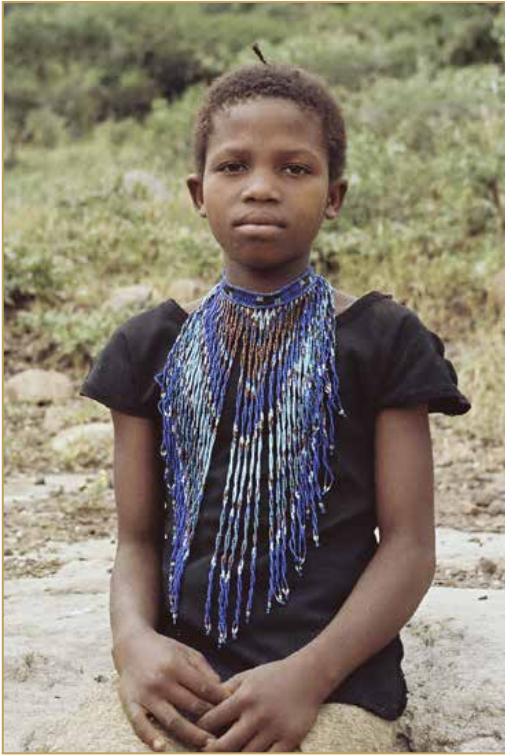


THE CHILDREN

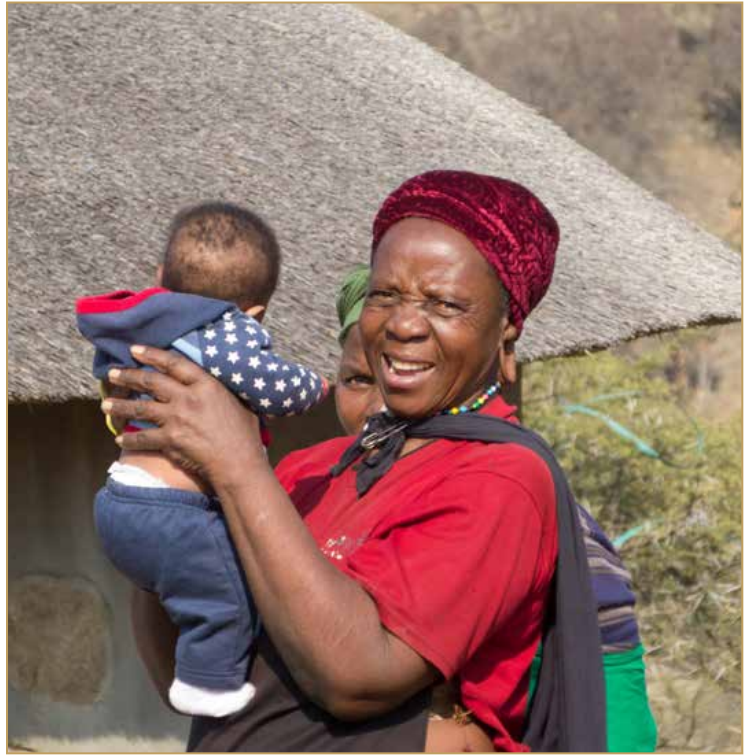
The project was designed to help women with children work from home, something that would never be easy, as the needs of the home came first. There were no schools when we arrived – we started the first – so the children drew their lessons from the world around them, creating playgrounds under the trees while sharpening their skills of observation. They would grow up poor, but responsible, with an early knowledge of death. “Even when I was small I know people was die,” said one. They learnt to craft their happiness the way their mothers crafted beads, picking up moments spilt in the dust and sorting them into colour. Beads were a kind of magic. The children sat alongside their mothers as they stitched, helping, hindering, full of curiosity. It was slow work, adding one bead to another. They watched intrigued. Here and now cease to matter when you’re waiting for a pattern to emerge.



A roadside gathering of mothers and children waiting to hand over finished work, the children modelling some of the beads for fun.



Msofho Dladla was asleep when his parents were shot dead at night in October 1980. The baby Khokho, was still suckling her dead mothers' breast when the police arrived next morning and gently detached her. The seven children of the family would be cared for by the elder sister.



Children are always a joy. Phangiwe MaKhambilemfe Dladla with her grandchild, Celimphilo.



Phontshi Mvelase with her twins, Sonto and Mumula, watched over by their little sister Maseni (the twins were 5 when she was killed).



Khombisile Mvelase learns to weave a copper egg while her small son Vela lies in her lap. In 1985 she lost her first born son Bhekimbheko when he was shot and killed with his grandmother, Phikabesha Dladla, while they were asleep at night. The boy was not yet two.



These are the only surviving photographs of the Yves St. Laurent collection that used our beads. The original captions read: (Left) Superbly matched to the double-layer beaded necklace and earrings is the specifically designed St. Laurent hat. (Right) The beaded designs from Natal complement a red and fuschia ball gown with bejewelled butterfly hat.

A HAUTE COUTURE COLLECTION IN PARIS

The Great Drought of the eighties was just setting in when we had an order from Yves Saint Laurent in Paris. Although St. Laurent is almost unknown to young people today, he is considered one of the foremost fashion designers of the twentieth century, and in July 1982 he was probably the most famous couturier in the world, known for his “exquisite French elegance”. His order came through Jasna Bufacci, a South African art promoter, who had sent her sister to the YSL studio in Paris carrying a box of our beads. We had expected her to be turned away. Instead we got a large order for a selection of fringes, plaits, love girdles, scarves and earrings, some in our standard designs, some more elaborate.

The deadline was almost impossible, so early every morning the women came to Mdukatshani to work under supervision. They brought their children with them, and huge pots of food saw everyone was fed all day. It was a rush, but high-spirited, with gossip and laughter, and endless rounds of hot, sweet tea. The difficult part of the order was going to be the earrings, theatrical pieces designed for the catwalk, to be ripped off as fast as the models changed outfits. The beading was easy. There were bunched earrings, showers, and hoops shaped on fabric coils. The women giggled when they tried them on, earlobes sagging under the weight. Split ears were designed for earplugs, not earrings, and there was nowhere to attach a clasp. The clasps were going to be the nightmare. Paris had sent clip-on bases and a slow-drying glue. A very slow-drying glue. It should have been a simple operation. Apply glue. Attach beads. Wait. But long before the glue

would take hold, the heavy beads were sliding off their bases. We pushed them back. They drifted loose again.

Eventually the CAP Project Director, Neil Alcock, did night duty, waking up at two-hour intervals to push the beads back into position. Our methods were messy, and it showed. We sent the earrings off with an apology. We knew YSL would never accept them, but we wanted to show we had tried.

The Yves St. Laurent Winter Collection was going to get widespread publicity. Our beadwork would be used in promotions for the fashion house, while special pieces would be featured in French, British and American issues of *Vogue*. Only the crafters would be disappointed. “Why are they wearing such horrible dresses?” they asked when the photographs from Paris arrived. “And why are they wearing those funny hats?” They didn’t think much of the stony-faced models in their ballgowns.

Not long afterwards the women started work on a second order from Yves St. Laurent, this time for his Summer Ready-to-Wear Collection. There were some new items, as well as changes and adjustments, but with a generous lead time the women could work from home. As for those reject earrings: Yves St. Laurent used every pair, despite their obvious imperfections. It was impact that counted not detail, and one pasty set would attract the attention of the best-dressed woman in the world. (See next page).

(Photographs of the Yves St. Laurent collection, and our copies of Vogue, were lost in the 1987 flood at Mdukatshani).



"But look at those earrings – a sumptuous shower of turquoise" worn by the best-dressed woman in the world.

CELEBRITIES

None of the celebrities who have worn our beads ever knew anything about the project. And none of the women who crafted the beads had ever heard of the celebrities. Paloma Picasso, Aretha Franklin, Elton John, Princess Michael of Kent ... Who were they? Did it matter? All that mattered to the women was steady work, not occasional pieces on famous necks far from the world of the valley.

None of the women had ever been beyond Tugela Ferry when a group made their first trip to town in 1981. They saw many marvels on the city streets, but their most lasting impression was the number of cars. Where had all the cars come from? The journey itself would be interminable with frequent stops on the side of the road for the women to take turns being sick. Unaccustomed as they were to any kind of travel they were car sick all the way there – and back. They still laugh, remembering. Those were the old days, once upon a time, before taxis made everyone a traveller.

Those were also the days of really big orders that catered to the wealthy on cruise ships. When sanctions stopped cruise ships docking at our ports, galleries closed, or struggled to survive, with an immediate effect on orders. Although sanctions were aimed at the collapse of apartheid, the crafters were collateral damage. In 1986 one of our customers re-opened her shop in London, and it was here that celebrities discovered our beads, and we started doing orders for Harrods. When the London shop too, eventually closed, it was due to recession, not sanctions. Craft sales are dependent on good times, and if our history were plotted as lines on a graph it would follow the wider economy. We have endured repeat recessions over 50 years, but we are still here holding on. Our Jubilee celebrates the courage of the crafters, their laughter in hard times, their willingness to try, and the ongoing faith that carries them along in the simple acts of every day.



Bongile Mavundla a statuesque model for a love girdle, a favourite article for wealthy Americans who spent lavishly on gifts when cruise ships docked in Cape Town or Durban. Her daughter Qwaqaza stands with her.



The first taxis on Msinga roads were dilapidated vehicles retrieved from scrapheaps with broken windows patched with tape. Although taxis have become smarter with time, one thing that has not changed is the use of passenger space on the roof. Sometimes the passengers have to share space with the load, like this wedding kist. Sometimes they choose to sit on the roof, or hang from the back doors, testing the joys of transport.

THE FIRST TEN YEARS AT MDUKATSHANI

Change came imperceptibly, although we hardly took note at the time. There were too many conflicts in too many directions, some affecting the men in the cities, others much closer to home. Early in 1984 a special riot unit was based in the district, and in June the Minister of Police, Louis le Grange, flew in on a helicopter inspection of

the valley. He was accompanied by the Judge President of Natal, Mr. Justice Milne, the Attorney General, Mike Imber, and other high-ranking government officials. Had the riot unit made a difference? “We are proud that we have gone through two long weekends without a fight,” said the commanding officer, Captain “Wessie”

van der Westhuizen, showing off a collection of confiscated weapons that included automatic rifles, a hand held rocket launcher, and a sub-machine gun. He was honest about the prospects of peace. If the unit were withdrawn, the fighting would resume in a month, he said. And he was right. The fights would splutter on for years.



Hlekelaphi Dladla (left) was married to the first taxi owner near Mdukatshani, Khuzeni Zwane. An enterprising pioneer in a new industry, he initially had the roads to himself, running taxis from Msinga to Johannesburg. When he died of malaria in 1989 following a trip to Malawi, beadwork continued to sustain his wives, Hlekelaphi and Qengukile. Here Hlekelaphi sits with Bangisile Sithole putting the finishing touches to an order before handing in the work.



The arrival of taxis made the end of *isicholos* inevitable. Drivers complained they took up too much space in a crowded vehicle and left smears of ochre on the roof. Head scarves became compulsory and were soon being worn every day. Phumelele Mbatha was one of the last women to give up traditional dress.



Times are changing. Although the women still have their hair woven into ochre headdresses and wear pleated leather skirts, they have abandoned their heavy silver bangles, while the scarves wrapped around their *isicholos* say taxis have arrived on the roads. Waiting to hand in their work are a group of Dladla wives, from the left: Gidephi Mpungose, Bangisile Sithole, Bandisile Mtshali, and (behind) Kanyisile Masoka.

The crafters worked when they were not at funerals, a disciplined group which tried to meet deadlines despite the disruptions of violence and grief. Their work was improving to meet an overseas market, and their earnings were giving them a growing self-respect. Some of the changes showed in their dress. They were no longer wearing heavy silver bangles, cast off for comfort, like Victorian petticoats – and a sign of things to

come? Taxis had started to appear on the roads, bringing a new mobility. Mobility was a kind of independence, although most of the vehicles raising clouds of dust were old bakkies with missing windows. Passengers sat on the roof, or clung to the back, testing the joys of transport. But there would be unintended consequences for the women. Drivers complained about their ochre headaddresses their *isicholos*. They took up too much



A bead order for New York is washed and spread out to dry before posting.



When democracy lifted restrictions on movement to the cities, modern young *makotis* like Dumisile Mtshali would give up beads – and tribal dress – to join their husbands in Johannesburg.

room in a crowded vehicle, and left smears of ochre on the roof. In response the women started wearing scarves wrapped around their ochred headaddresses, gauzy accessories that became part of daily dress until comfort won out, *isicholos* became detachable, and the women took to wearing head scarves.

But taxis were not the only change of that period. Schools were another development. In 1981 Bethuel Majola was appointed Msinga's first black magistrate, and he launched a programme to build a school on every hill. He had grown up at Msinga, with all its limitations, and he wanted to ensure education for all. Schooling still cost more than many crafters could afford, but gradually it became the norm, and the women took pride in dictating notes to their children, rough scribbles on the margin of a page which were delivered with their work. It was a change with immediate benefits. We no longer had to rely on verbal messages. We could reply with an exchange of notes.

OUR CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Tessa Katzenellobogen first came to Mdukatshani some time in 1980. It was a short visit to practice her already fluent Zulu – a fluency she would put at the service of the project in countless ways in the years ahead. She was curious about everything, and willing to help, taking on any task that needed doing, whether it was legal work, preparing reports, or trying to market 10 000 grass bangles which the women had woven the year before. The bangles were known as *ubhedazane*, pale gold circlets of finely woven grass that were traditionally made by the herd boys. They wore them fitted tight on their skinny arms, evidence of hours spent in the sun, twisting grass stalks into things of beauty. Could the women try weaving some big enough for adults? Just a few? It was a casual request when orders were scarce, and we were going to be overwhelmed. How could we sell 10 000 grass bangles? We were sitting with a pile-up we could not afford when Tessa arrived to take them on. She loved the pale gold delicacy of the grass and sat with the women to learn the weaves. How many patterns were there? *Ubhedazane*, *indundu*, *insontana*. was that all? She coaxed memories of forgotten weaves out of the crafters. *Jikajika*, *umthamo wempisi*, *umhlavuhlavu*. Gradually she built up a repertoire of 30 different patterns, rejecting sloppy work with lazy knots. Then she took the bangles to town and sold them for us, on the back of every cheque scribbling a note about the customer. Nobel laureate. Artist. Designer. Politician. Scientist. Musician. The cheques should never have been cashed at the bank. They were a collection to frame on a wall.



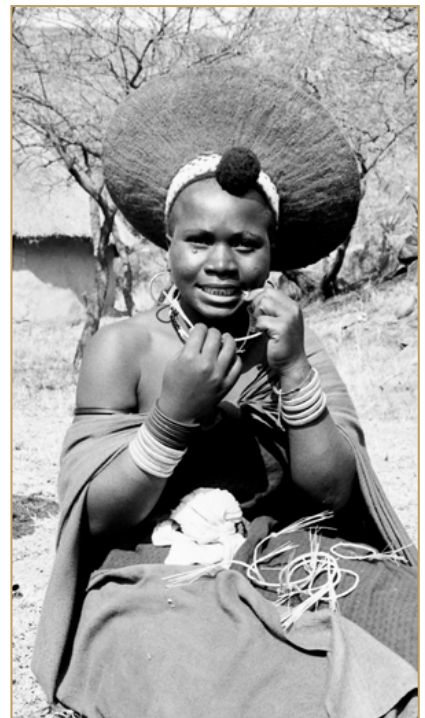
Tessa with her husband, classical pianist Daniel Adni, who lured her away from Africa. They met when he was on a concert tour of South Africa, and now live in London with their son Isaac.



Ntombi Dladla



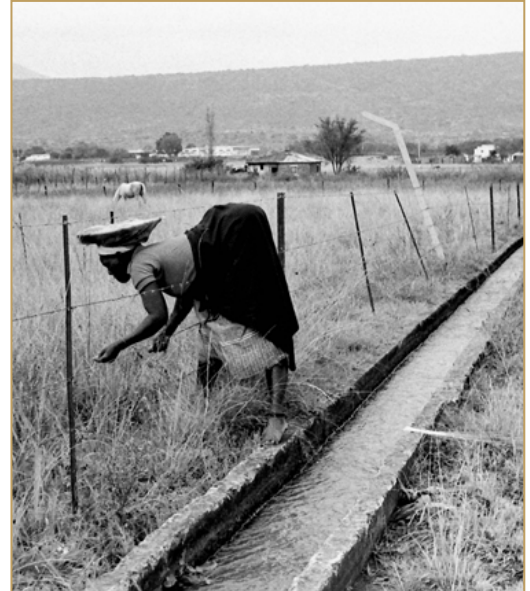
NgakelephiMa Mthethwa



Qheliile Hadebe



Tessa commissioned this photograph to promote the grass bangles. When she started experimenting with fine copper wire she asked the women to try weaving the patterns in metal. *Photo credit: Jimmy Limberis*



In dry years the women travelled far afield for grass as only one species is pliable for bangles.

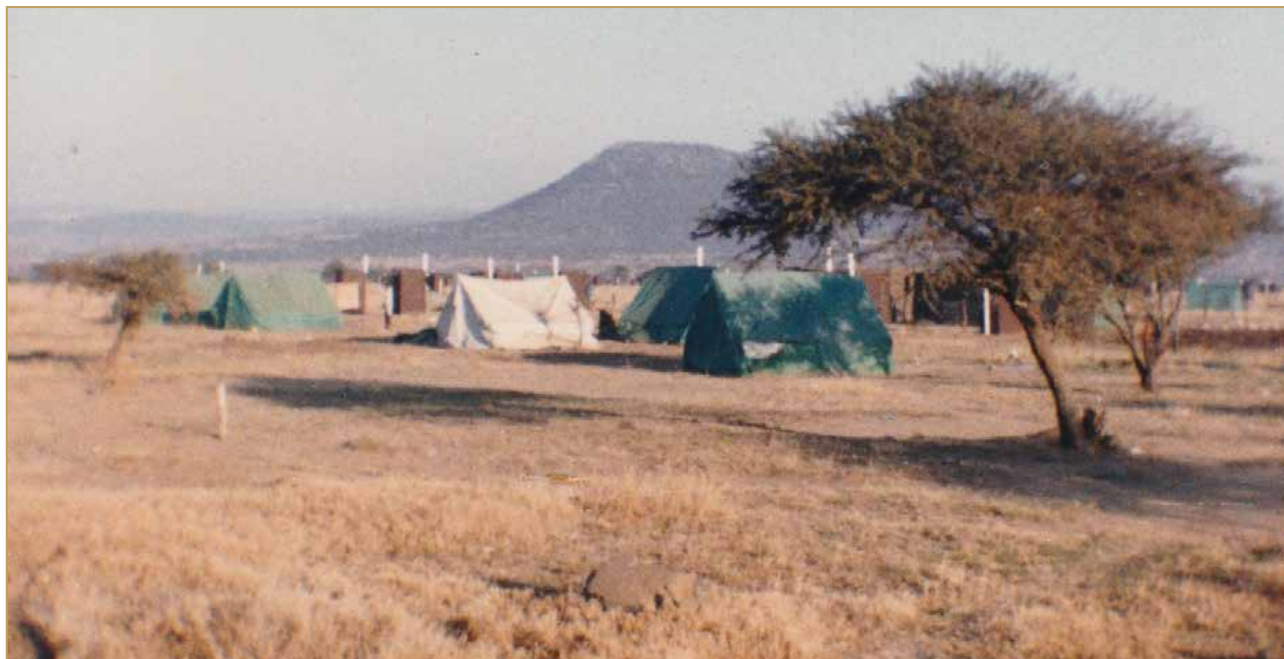


The first experimental metal bangles were made with grass pattern weaves.



Some grass weaves were worn as decorations on ochre headdresses, like these pinned front and back on Mpatha Mbatha's *ischolo*. The child in her arms is Unokwanda Mbatha. In February 1988 Mpatha, was shot at home. Today her daughter, Ngcengaliphi Mbatha, is one of the project's finest needlewomen.

By 1981 Tess was a regular visitor to the farm, easing our burdens, lightening our loads, and noticing what we were missing. That woman who had no milk for her baby? That child with a squint? She took over problems and sorted them out, immersing herself in the lives of the valley, walking the footpaths with a slender grace that belied her ability to walk for hours, untiring. She had a lack of fear which she carried with her, dispelling danger with her wonderful giggle, ignoring that assault rifle propped against a door. She became part of the home life of the beaders, taking portraits of the women and children which are the only record local families have of the beloved faces of the past. Without Tessa's photographs of our early years it would have been difficult to illustrate this report.



Mbulwana – a destitute group of flood survivors who were settled in tents on the outskirts of the Waayhoek resettlement village early in 1988. Tessa was going to train them as crafters, and within three years their work would be displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

WAAYHOEK and MBULWANA

Tessa was with us the day we drove to Waayhoek to set up a garden for Mbulwana. We had a close connection with Waayhoek, a government resettlement village 60 km from the farm. It had been established in 1985 for families forcibly removed from white farming areas, families who had once been our neighbours, and now found themselves living on the open veld in “tins”. There were three rows of tins when government lorries trundled in with the half-crazed community of Mbulwana. They were given tents on the outskirts of the village and left to fend for themselves.

There were 87 families – 287 people – an alien group, most of them Basuthos, who had been squatting in shacks on low ground in Ladysmith when the river came down in the night. Some had drowned, others were in hospital, and all seemed a little unhinged. They had lost all they had and had nowhere to go – a small group of survivors who didn’t count for much against the scale of the wider disaster. For Natal had been devastated by heavy rains which left thousands homeless, towns isolated, roads impassable, and bridges gone. Government and charities were doing what they could, but town halls were filled with people like Mbulwana, whose homes were lying buried in mud.



Tessa used one of Natty Duma’s tin prefabs as storeroom and headquarters for the Mbulwana weavers until she paid to have a building constructed for what came to be known as the Waayhoek Mbenge Co-operative.

When they arrived at Waayhoek they were given tents, mattresses, blankets, cooking pots and food. Six months later they had sold all they could and were begging scraps from the village. Natty Duma and Olga Miya alerted us. The people in tents were starving. Was there anything we could do to help? The first time we drove up in our ten-ton lorry it was loaded with blankets and food. But it was temporary relief and it wouldn’t go far. There was a need for more permanent help. The next time we drove up, Tessa was visiting, and she came along for the ride. This time we carried fencing, poles, picks and spades. There was a lot of waste land in among the toilets and if we fenced it off as a garden ... but Tessa was

already wandering among the tents, noticing the jam tins used as cooking pots, poking and prying, listening and observing, asking questions in her lilting Zulu. A few days later she was back. Would the people of Mbulwana like work? If they were willing to learn she could train them to make *imbenges*, traditional baskets made of telephone wire, woven on enamel bowls. She was already working with a group of night watchmen in Johannesburg, finding outlets for the beautiful work, sourcing wire, extending their range. But there were difficulties. Because Telkom lost millions to cable theft each year, there were legal restrictions on the sale of scrap, and good colours were hard to find.



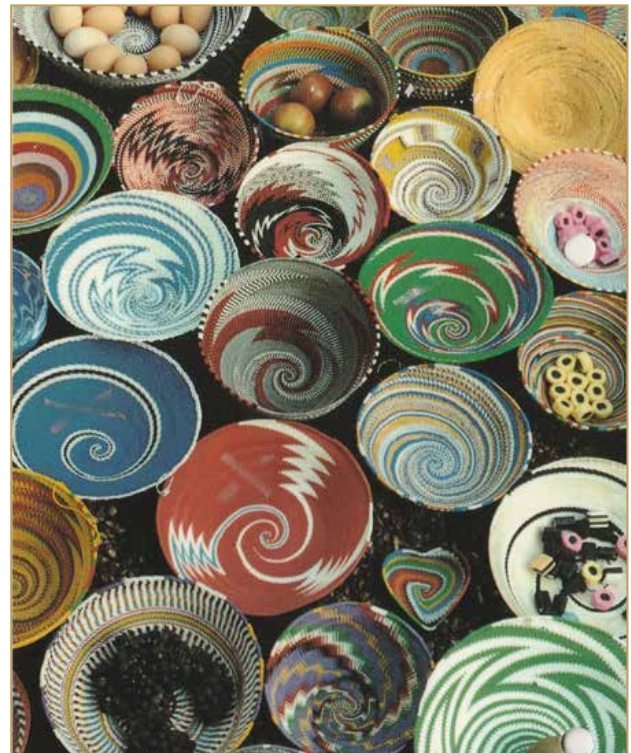
Natty Duma (right) lived at Waayhoek, but worked at Mdukatshani, acting as organiser and go-between on her regular visits to help set up the garden at Mbulwana.



Lucy Mabotha and Ellen Mokoena were the caring leaders of Mbulwana. Hardship had taught them compassion, and they helped to share out the food start the garden and organize the *mbenge* craft project.



Ellen working on a basket outside her tent.



Mbenges

When Tessa visited Mbulwana in July 1988 she was already looking for alternatives to telephone wire and had started experimenting with fine gauge industrial copper wire used for machine windings – an improbable material for craft. She had brought some to the farm to test the beaders. Yes, it was hard on the hands, but she wanted them to try some copper bangles. The same weaves as the grass? She knew the joins would be difficult, but if they left the ends unfinished, she would take the bangles home with her and work something out. The women tried, but they hated the copper. It was hard and unyielding and blistered their hands. Although they made what Tessa asked for, they resisted the change. It was easier to work with needles and thread, and they missed the colour of the beads. It would be nine years before they tried copper bangles again.

We saw less of Tessa as her involvement with Waayhoek grew. Within weeks of her first visit she had a craft group going and the people of Mbulwana were learning to use their hands. She took them on fully aware of the risk. She wasn't going to justify her actions. She worked alone using her own resources. The losses involved she would carry herself. Within three years the work was on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Tessa was adapting the traditional *imbenge* baskets to new materials, new weaves. She worked with Dr. Tony Cunningham, World Plant Officer for Africa, studying the intricacies of baskets collected across the continent, baskets made with bark, grass, leaf, root. What would the baskets look like in copper? She taught herself to weave so she could understand the difficulties and adapt.



Busisiwe Buthelezi joined the Dladla clan in about 1980 when her husband Swayidi brought her to the family home. She immediately joined the bead group, where she became known for the names she gave any new designs. She had no children with Swayidi, a source of pain to them both, but had two sons from a previous relationship, one of whom lost a leg after being injured in a local conflict.



Although by 1995 the women had given up their ochred headdresses they still wore their *isidwabas*, the pleated leather skirts worn like a wedding ring as a symbol of marriage. An *isidwaba* had ritual significance. It couldn't be discarded without a sacrifice to the family spirits, and would be buried with a woman in her grave. Made of cattle hide and goat skin, an *isdwaba* can last for decades.

THE BEADED COPPER EGGS

Although we saw less of Tess, our collaboration intensified. There was a regular to-and-fro between Waayhoek and the farm, and we ferried messages and supplies, while Tess shared ideas and continued to send orders our way. In a period when bead orders were scarce our crafters did a crash course on *mbenge*, learning to weave telephone wire to help Tessa meet a large order on time. It was at her request, too, that we tackled an order for beaded copper eggs from Liberty's of London in 1995. The women faced the prospect with dismay. They had to weave copper on a real egg? They were glum when Ellen Mokoena arrived to teach them. Weaving copper on an egg was an exercise in physics, for the slightest pressure made the eggshell crack. They lost count of the eggs they cradled in their *isidwabas* as they went down to the river to wash. Was anyone watching? They'd never get it right. When Ellen returned home after two months of patient teaching, they were still struggling with a basic shape. Passing men chuckled when they saw the eggs. They looked like *imincedo*, prepuce covers. The women found it hard to share the laughter. It would take them four months to complete the order – with a pile of rejects left behind. The eggs would gradually improve, however, and within a year we couldn't keep up with orders. Soon they would be copied across South Africa – a tribute to Tessa's original idea. Eggs would mark a turning point for the project, a switch to copper wire, with a different kind of beading, which would transform and diversify everything we produced.



Kanyisile Masoka and Ngenzeni Mvelase struggle to master copper wire. Kanyisile's gaiety would be muted by tragedy. In May 1981 her mother was shot, in October 2009 her son Fana.



Although Ellen taught the women to weave copper on jumbo sized eggs, some customers wanted small, some medium, and some large. In 2003 Sean Earle arrived on the farm with ostrich eggs for beading – an order which intimidated the women who had never seen such enormous eggs. The finished work was beautiful, but their anxiety shows on their faces.



Fikisile Duma



Bonisiwe Mbatha



Gcinani Duma



Zwakushiwo Mvelase



Ntombizini Mdlolo



Khombisile Mvelase



Loyisiwe Mdlatlose weaving copper wire on a *khamba*, or traditional clay beer pot. Originally trained by Tessa at Waayhoek, she became part of the Mdukatshani group when her family moved to Nhlawe, a land reform farm in Weenen district.



In July 2005 Bonginkosi Thusi died at Nhlawe- the first crafter to die of AIDS. His wife, Zephi Lethuli, was diagnosed HIV positive soon afterwards when we took the entire group to hospital for testing. It was a year when the reality of the disease hit home, with several crafters losing family members. Zephi was put on ARVs, with a grant and food parcels to help the home. She would not survive her husband for long.

NHLAWE

We discovered Nhlawe by accident, a small encampment hidden in the bush about 25 km from Mdukatshani. It was an eerie place, full of ghosts, with thickets of thorn trees growing on the sand, and a small human settlement in a clearing. It looked deserted when we arrived there one autumn morning in 1999. There were shacks, tents, a few red 'tins'. Did anyone live there? Were we being observed? A man strolled out of the shade as we parked. "Hullo Natty," he said, "Where is Tessa?" We had found a group of crafters from Waayhoek.

Nhlawe had originally been home to a 'squatter' community who were forcibly evicted in 1984, and were moved to the village of Waayhoek. They had never expected to return. When the government selected Weenen for the KwaZulu-Natal Land Reform Pilot Project in 1994, Nhlawe was one of the first farms bought up for resettlement and the squatters came back as owners of the land. Almost.

For years Mdukatshani had been closely involved in the land claims programme and understood the difficulties of getting promises put onto paper. The 'beneficiaries' knew the problems too. It took courage to pack up your belongings and move, and not until late 1998 did the Thusi family decide to 'go home'.

They paid the transport themselves, loading the 'tins' onto the lorries like trophies. The metal rooms might be grimy, but they were part of their history, and would be useful while they camped in the bush.

We adopted the group immediately. Could they make copper bowls woven on *khambas* (traditional beer pots)? We had a large order from Karen Muir, an American customer who had bought some at Waayhoek when she was out on a visit to South Africa.

They had sold well and she wanted more, but nobody was willing to make them. The Waayhoek crafters were busy on *mbenge*, which they preferred to *khambas*, which were difficult and slow. Infinitely slow, as we were going to discover, watching the bowls begin to take shape with a single simple spiral of beads. The bowls were beautiful, but expensive. Karen had outlets willing to take them, but when we had finished her order was there any point in making more? Where would we find a market?





A face marked by the struggle of the years, and a gentle faith that never faltered. Elias Mtshengu was the odd-job-man in the village of Waayhoek, and he was struggling to make a living when he heard he had won first prize for a woven copper bowl at the Contemporary Zulu Basketry Exhibition in November 2000. The village cheered. He was a man who had nothing but was always there for anyone in trouble. Once guarding a dead body, waiting for the police, he had been shot at close range in the shoulder. Although the injury made it difficult to lift his arm, it hadn't prevented him working with Tessa, learning to weave copper wire. Winning his prize would give him release to work full-time as a crafter. Coiled 'sungulu' bowls became his specialty, a stitch that defeated the weavers at Mdukatshani despite Mtshengu's attempts to teach them. He had been ill for some time when he started on a bowl using copper and silver in combination. It would be his last. He finished the bowl with an effort of will and, died in hospital early in March 2012. He was 67.

And that might have been the end of the bowls had it not been for Marisa Fick-Jordan (See page 31). Marisa was on a visit to the farm when she caught a glimpse of the *khambas*. She was dazzled. Six months later, in November 2000, she launched the bowls at an exhibition of Contemporary Zulu Basketry* at the *Alliance Française* in Johannesburg. Soon afterwards we were commissioned to make eight large bowls for 'Bowled Over', an exhibition at the Oxo Gallery, London, which was opened by Nelson Mandela as part of a 'Celebrate South Africa Festival'. There have been many exhibitions since, the bowls gradually evolving from beaded to pure metal- another development that happened by chance through a meeting with Julia Meintjes (See page 40). Julia was assembling an art collection for a mining house in Sydney, Australia, when she came across our *khambas* at the 'Beautiful Things' exhibition put together for the World Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002. Within two years she had Mzonzima Dladla attempting a small bowl in 18 carat gold wire. Today our crafters weave gold, silver, copper and brass wire in a collaborative project, known as Threads of Africa. But that is another story.

*Baskets or bowls – the names are interchangeable



In May 2001 the bowls were exhibited at 'Bowled Over' an exhibition at the Oxo Gallery, London, which was opened by Nelson Mandela. The bowls were subsequently bought for permanent display at South Africa House where they were again on exhibit in June 2019.



The invitation to the Contemporary Zulu Basketry Exhibition which launched our copper bowls in November 2000. Every bowl sold and Elias Mtshengu went to Johannesburg to receive first prize.



The Msusanphi crafters wade every week, balancing their beads on their heads. When the Thukela is in flood they use their sons to swim their work across in buckets. The boys let the river take them, bobbing out of sight, kicking for the beach, pushing the buckets ahead of them. An empty bucket on a bank says an order has arrived. The courier has made a safe delivery.

THE RIVER CROSSINGS

For Dora Masoka wading the river is an ordeal. It's partly her glaucoma, the growing struggle with failing sight, although it's not vision that helps you across. It's finding a grip with your feet. She drags her sadness with her, trying to hold steady as the rocks slide away under water. The crossing is never easy. Even in winter, when the water's knee deep, the rocks are treacherous, a slippery tumble that lie in wait, ready to trap the unwary. Dora is too slight to do battle. She was always slender and a little aloof, not given to ready laughter. Now her thinness suggests an illness, and she carries an air of defeat. Yet her work is diligent, and she is always on time with an order. Sometimes she wades alone across the river, sometimes she wades with a group. They have all had loss, and they have shared loss with her. The death of her son Thuthukani, shot when he was twelve. A warning shot. Accidental? He was carried across the river on an old iron bed to the police van waiting at Mdukatshani. And there was the death of her husband, Ntabela, his body found lying in the river one morning, killed with a blow to the head. Others learnt to go on. Dora struggles.

Although the Thukela is the largest river in KwaZulu-Natal, long stretches of its course are lonely. There are few bridges, upriver or down, which makes the wading places important. There is one upriver at Nomoya, a placid drift of water with sand underfoot, which means crossing is easy if you know the hidden contours of the currents. It's the shadows that have frightened the crafters. Once you're in the river there's no visibility. It's the people on the banks who report the crocodiles, random sightings that are hard to confirm unless the crocs take up residence for the summer. They appear and disappear with the seasons. Some big, some small, usually alone, sometimes in pairs. In 2009 there were crocodiles everywhere. Two on the island at Sahlumbe, one near the pump, one below the cliffs, two at the corner of the river, a group where the cattle graze.



Until the Nomoya ferry was sabotaged in 2008, crafters paid a special price of two rand return for a crossing. The boat landed them 5 km from the farm, so they were fetched from the river bank on bead days.



Dorah Masoka



Ncedile Xaba



Zandile Sithole



Thombo Masoka



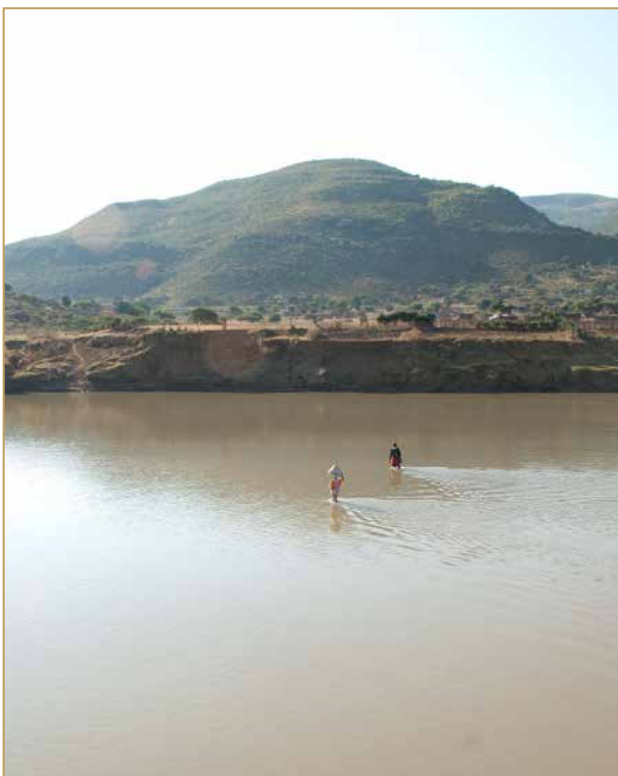
Monica Lamula (58) started working at Mdukatshani as a girl, and was a qualified fencer when she started learning crafts in 1998. Despite failing health, she soon became adept at beaded copper bowls. A widow with a son and a family of stepchildren her home at Nomoya meant years of wading, always with an eye out for crocodiles. Today she uses the bridge.

It was a year without the ferryboat, so people kept wading. Once there were ferryboats all along the river providing a service when the river was high. The Nomoya boat was one of the last, landing our crafters on the bank at Nkwadini, about five kilometres from the farm. But it was always a risky undertaking. In 2005 a woman was drowned when the oarsman lost control in heavy currents, and when the boat was sabotaged in 2008, the owner decided he had had enough. For the next seven years Nomoya would have to wade, keeping an eye out for crocodiles. The drought years helped, exposing large sandbanks and reducing the river to trickle. There was also the distraction of the bridge. It took shape gradually above the sand, a stop-start development with concrete pillars that opened without fanfare in 2016. It's difficult to do justice to its impact on the valley, providing a walkway for children to get to school, and opening up new routes to the towns.

But people still wade at the old crossings, taking short cuts between the banks. This is particularly true for the crafters of Msusanphi, whose village lies a long way from the bridge. It's an hour on foot along their high mountain road. Another hour from the bridge to the farm. The bridge is useful when the river is in flood, but for the rest of the year they tie their skirts above their knees, and wade the crossing at Mdukatshani.



Crocodiles have become a common sight on the Mdukatshani stretch of the river. This one was photographed on Christmas afternoon 2009. It had just emerged from a pool where children had been swimming all morning. In 2019 local men killed a croc a little downriver on the farm.



Crocs appear and disappear with the seasons. This croc was one of a pair that basked on the island at Sahlumbe during the summers of 2009 and 2010. They were in full view of the road and the Sahlumbe wading place nearby.



The Learning Centre was built in 1992 with a grant from the Equal Opportunity Foundation. Because the boys' massive rock was too heavy to be moved up to the building, it came to rest to form the main step at the entrance.

A HOME FOR THE BEADS

The beads had spent 15 years in a rat-infested cellar when they were moved to the Learning Centre in 1996. No more snakes in the boxes! Or not quite as many. When the cellar was built in 1981 it had been intended as a permanent home for the beads, a fireproof storeroom, half underground, that would soon become notorious for its cobras. Nobody entered without a stick, ready for close encounters. It was a place of solitude, invisible to the world, with a single patch of light in the open doorway. The beads were stored in sturdy wooden shipping crates which had once done duty as furniture. They had been used as benches in the waterwheel building before it burnt to the ground. Nobody would ever forget the date. Friday the Thirteenth, July 1981. It looked like an act of sabotage, and although the evidence suggested a group of militant right-wing whites, finding a suspect didn't mitigate the loss as we sifted through the ash of lost documents. Our history had gone, and so had the beads, melted into lumps of coloured rock.

The cellar was built in response to the fire, a hollow in the hill dug out as a refuge and given a roof of cement. It was dark, damp and fireproof – but never designed to hold a flood. There were going to be two, nine years apart, the first in September 1987, when the flood also took the waterwheel, and submerged the house. The staff had just retreated from trying to save the beads when a wave caught the cellar and a cobra swam out, still gripping a rat in its mouth. There were cheers and laughter as it was swept downriver. *Bye bye Mfezi ! Bye bye!* There was less to laugh at with the second flood, which rose in the night in January 1996, and left us with months of drudgery. Both floods were considered a once-in-a-hundred-year events, which was of little comfort to the clean-up teams who had to clear out the mud, wash the beads, and rebuild the walls.



The Learning Centre gardens are spacious, and crafters sit in the winter sun when it is too cold to work inside. Here Fikisile Duma and Monica Lamula wind copper wire off a reel for the bowls they will weave at home.



It had been a bet. The boys said they could do it. Everyone scoffed. It was going to take them two months in 1989, working every afternoon, to move this rock two kilometres down the hill from Koornliver using poles as rollers. The rock would eventually form a massive main step to the building. The boys are, from left to right: Mpikayipeli Sithole, Nkosi Sithole, Zwelithini Mbatha, Nqakide Sithole and Mabuku Dladla. At the time all were refugees from fighting in their home areas and were living at Mdukatshani.

The move to the Learning Centre was meant to be temporary for the building was already in use. Originally funded by the Equal Opportunity Foundation, it was a stone and thatch building that would have been beautiful were it not for the windows high up on the walls. They looked like the fanlights of toilets, only built to let in the air. They made the interior dark and gloomy, although they had been a concession from the men on the project who had resisted having windows at all. There was a war underway across the river at Msusanphi, and with bullets flying windows were dangerous. They wanted a building impregnable to guns.

The Learning Centre was serving many functions when the first bead boxes were moved across. It was a venue for literacy classes, a mobile clinic, a legal advice office, and the many meetings and workshops of Mdukatshani's land reform programme. Initially the beads shared space with the paralegals, an uncomfortable fit as there was no check on pilfering, with a queue of strangers always waiting for attention and an unguarded open door. It was a relief when the advice office moved back to Durban, and we could claim the room as our own. As the war across the river was over at last, we knocked down the walls to let in the light, installed large windows and built termite-proof cement bins for storage.

The Bead Room was beautiful, an airy space with a view across the valley and craft work displayed around the walls. It is hard to describe what a difference this made to the women. For the first time they had a place of their own, and it gave them a formal identity. They still did most of their work at home, but the Learning Centre was theirs on Bead Days. It was a place for sharing work and innovation – like learning how to sit on a bench. The women giggled as they tried it out, hunched and awkward, feeling exposed. Traditionally women sat flat on the floor. Sitting on a bench was a claim to equality, a move into the modern world.

Not much has changed in the long years since – if you discount the spectacles perched on the womens' noses and the mobile phones hanging in the trees. It is almost impossible to get a signal at the Learning Centre. The phones hang on the branches, just in case. If a call came through it would be muffled by the chatter, the sound of laughter, the exchange of news. Inside somebody is boiling a kettle laying the tray for another round of tea. This is catch-up time, uninhibited and carefree, and an informal celebration in gratitude for work.



In election years this room becomes a voting station for the Independent Electoral Commission. For the rest of the time it provides a venue for workshops, meetings and film shows.



Ngakelephi Mkhize would find her calling in wirework, becoming a teacher who demanded quality from her students. Her own work was perfect, and there was nobody to replace her when she died in December 2003.



Finished work

GRADUATION DAY

April 2000

In August 1999 30 young *makotis* gathered at the Learning Centre to start a ten weeks training course in beaded copper eggs. They were a generation who had never been to school, and were nervous. The six teachers standing by were nervous too. They were veterans who had learnt with Ellen, and remembered their skirts full of broken eggs. Would their students do any better? The day started with a prayer to the prophet Isaiah Shembe, and then the women sat in silence as the work was handed out. The first lesson was learning to use pliers to cut the copper into equal lengths. A murmuring rose among the trees as the women picked up their tools. Was something wrong? But were speaking to their family spirits, their *amadlozi* asking them to guide their hands and help them. Here and there a name could be discerned in the muttering. The spirits who were going to be present on the course would include some famous men of honour.

We would never have attempted formal training had it not been for a grant of R80 100 from the Masibambane Trust. Marisa had introduced us to Solveig Piper, the Director, and Mathebe Mkonyane, her deputy, who were easy guests but exacting critics of our arithmetic. After a visit to the farm to check us out, they asked for a change in our proposal. We were asking for too little, not too much, and we were probably selling our eggs at a loss. When the grant arrived, it was subject to two conditions: We would repay the grant with a one Rand tax on every egg sold, and we would accept the Trust's recommendations on pricing.*



The teachers (from the left): Busisiwe Buthelezi, Siphokuhle Mvelase, Khombisile Mvelase, Hlekelaphi Dladla, Bandlele Mtshali and Kanyisile Masoka.



Teachers and students gather for a group photograph at the Learning Centre on graduation day.





In January 1999 Marisa Fick-Jordan was brought to the project by our trustee, Eric Apelgren who thought she could offer advice and support. We put up with her reluctantly. She was an artist and designer working with crafters in the Durban townships, creating something new out of *mbenges*. She had a lot to teach us and we had a lot to learn. Didn't we? What we hadn't expected was the rapport, something she established immediately with the crafters, setting them laughing with her noisy exuberance, her acute understanding and her ready warmth. She was going to be a gift to the project, finding donors for our training, new outlets for our work, and connections to artists overseas. (How else would we have done bowls for Oprah Winfrey?) Although Marisa's project, *Zenzulu*, has steadily won international acclaim, she has stayed in touch, always ready to help when we need her.

The six months would pass in a flash. The students were serious about their work, and loved being part of a group. There was always something happening at the Learning Centre providing a buzz under the trees. Land reform, childrens' rights, voter education. It was slow work, making an egg, and there was lots of time for easy chatter. It was a happy period for everyone. The teachers gradually gained in authority as their pupils were quick and eager to learn. Many showed a natural ability, and there were obviously some real stars in the group, although the teachers were not letting on, not yet. "N-e-a-r-l-y right," they said. "Not bad. Keep trying." But when the students had gone there were peals of laughter as the teachers stood in awe, examining the work.

Graduation took place on a cold autumn day with drizzle. The women arrived early, looking beautiful, and then waited for the guests of honour. What had happened to Solveig, Mathebe and Marisa? There were no mobile phones for making contact, so the women took over the ceremony and danced. With or without the guests of honour, this was a day of celebration. There were still women dancing when the guests arrived at dusk after twice getting lost on the way. They were given a cheer of greeting. The women would only get home long after dark, but they were ready to dance all night.

** The repayment would eventually be waived, and we spent the grant so frugally we had funds for a second course.*





THE STOPS

That's what the women call them – the “stops”. Not the bus stops, nor the taxi stops, but their own stops, the places on the side of the road where they wait for work to be collected. The time is set at *emini*, which means day, daytime, midday, or noon. The first to arrive draws others, and long after the work has been collected, the women sit on, enjoying the chatter. The stop is a place to watch the world passing by, and they're in no hurry to go home.



THE TWIN TOWERS

11 September 2001

News of the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York took a long time to reach Msinga. There was no electricity in the valley. There were few radios, no telephones, no TVs, and you couldn't buy a newspaper at Tugela Ferry.

It was days before newspapers reached the farm, and we could show the photographs to the crafters. They spread the pages out on the ground and studied the pictures in silence. This wasn't a distant event. They were connected to the scenes of conflagration. Just weeks before a consignment of bowls had gone to a shop on the ground floor of the World Trade Centre. They were a new design, in glittery beads, and everyone remembered Sizani's special bowl.

She hadn't always been a crafter. She was a gifted rock builder, who had taught herself beads while she was in jail at Tugela Ferry in September 1980. She had been detained for 90 days under a controversial law that applied only to the district of Msinga. Her crime? She had escorted a stranger out of a war zone after an ambush on the bus. It was customary for women to offer safe conduct on request. She had walked the stranger to the top of the hill, and that was that. Her arrest several weeks later was a shock. She had no information to give the police, and she was refused legal help. For the next three months she would remain in prison while the Legal Resources Centre challenged her case in court. The provisions of the law under which she was detained were vague, giving the police powers of arrest and detention "in connection with certain offences committed in the district of Msinga". When the LRC won their case, Sizani became a part of legal history.

She would always meet hardship head-on, holding steady, ready to hit back if she had to. When she occasionally crumpled, her tears were not for herself. They were a lament for a world she could not control, beyond the reach of her strength. The attacks of 9/11 were very personal, not only for Sizani, but for all the crafters, who understood tragedy and the need to share. When they called a special prayer meeting under the trees, they were sharing their grief with the dead and the dying, and those, like themselves who were left behind.



Sizani Mbatha learnt beadwork in jail while she was a 90 day detainee at Tugela Ferry in September 1980. The beads were delivered with food parcels on our weekly visits, with the permission of the police. One of Sizani's beaded lampshade bowls was in a shop on the ground floor of the World Trade Centre when it collapsed. Initially orders for our lampshade bowls were for glittery beads. This has changed in recent few years with the current demand for ethnic designs in matt beads.



Diana Friedburg had worked in film for 37 years when she set off on a ten year odyssey to 40 countries to film an award-winning series *World on a String*. Originally a South African, her travels included a trip to Mdukatshani to film the beaders at work for the second film in the series, *The Tiny Mighty Bead*.



Mdukatshani Jewellery being modelled for *World on a String – A Companion for Bead Lovers* (Diana Friedburg and Joel Lipton, 2013).

WORLD ON A STRING

Big projects can start in a small way. Early in 2004 we had an unexpected letter from Adel Mabe, the President of the Bead Society of Los Angeles, in the United States. A Bead Society? What was a Bead Society? Adel explained: “We are a non-profit organisation supporting international bead research and the study, discussion and shared knowledge of beads throughout the world”.

The Society was producing a documentary on the story of beads called “World on a String” which would be premiered in Los Angeles and Washington later that year. She had seen our eggs. Could we make something smaller for the premieres? The shape should be a sphere representing the planet, with a hole allowing the bead to be strung.

The day her letter arrived the newspapers were full of the discovery of the oldest beads known so far – 75 000-year- old perforated mollusc shells from Blombos Cave in the Cape. The Society would be interested. Copies of the articles were enclosed with our reply. Then we started the search for moulds for tiny eggs.

Five months later Diana Friedburg arrived to film beaders at work at Mdukatshani. She had the force of a small tornado, hair tousled, smile wide, ready for anything. It was hard to resist her energy.

She was producer, director, researcher, scriptwriter and photographer, setting up scenes, directing the crafters, and doing the filming herself. Although the crafters couldn’t understand her commentary, they could see how she pulled loose elements into place as she worked. She was inspired by beads, any beads, and before the project was over would travel to 40 countries across five continents to produce a remarkable record of the beadwork of the world. Although the Bead Society originally envisaged a single documentary, *World on a String* became a series of five that would go on to win 30 awards.* The Mdukatshani crafters appear in the second in the series, *The Tiny Mighty Bead*, which features seed beads. Our crafters also have a place in the book *World on a String – A Companion for Bead Lovers*, which Diana published in 2013 as a lavish tribute to her passion for beads.

For the crafters the film is a reminder of a time before their knees gave in and they could see what they were doing without spectacles. They watch *The Tiny Mighty Bead* with giggles and disbelief. Stop the film for a moment. Go back and have a look. Weren’t they beautiful once? They haven’t forgotten Diana’s probing camera, and they are still doing orders for small beaded balls.

*DVDs of the series can be ordered from www.worldonastringproject.com



It’s not yet summer, so the women work out in the sun, beading small balls for the launch of the film in Washington and Los Angeles.



Mdukatshani beaded bowls and balls in Diana Friedburg’s collection, photographed for *World on a String – A Companion for Bead Lovers*, Diana Friedburg and Joel Lipton, 2013.

OUR GUYS

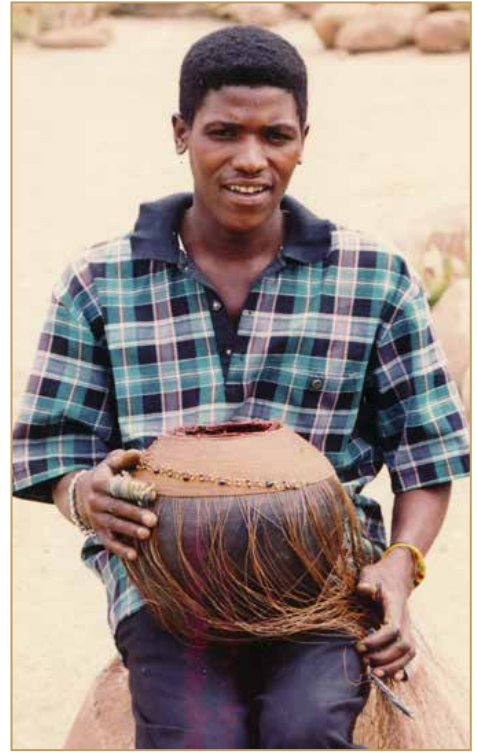
They came at different times for different reasons, and they didn't plan on staying long. It was a bit embarrassing, doing crafts. They needed the work, and some had really good hands – but crafts were for women not for men. It helped that they were working with wire. Traditionally metal was a male material. They liked the copper, with its male qualities, the unyielding strength that calloused their hands. Beads were only there for decoration, an addition to the wire, not part of its complexity, the inner resistance that held a bowl intact. They might have stayed longer had the orders been permanent, but craftwork could never offer certainty, and we let them go with regret.



Mzonzima Dladla was a gifted weaver when he decided to take the path to the city, a rite of passage for local boys.



Mgongo Ngubane's father was shot when he was three. He never intended to work on crafts, but is today one of the project's stars.



Canake Mbatha joined the craft group after his father was killed in an ambush. Today he works as a security guard at a local school.



Zamani Madonsela now has a permanent job as driver for the Mdukatshani Rural Development Trust.



Gidli Mbatha and Jobe Sithole were part of our childrens' craft group. Although Gidli struggled to produce quality work, Jobe had his bowls exhibited in London when he was only 12. Gidli is now in the city, while Jobe is at home after a breakdown.



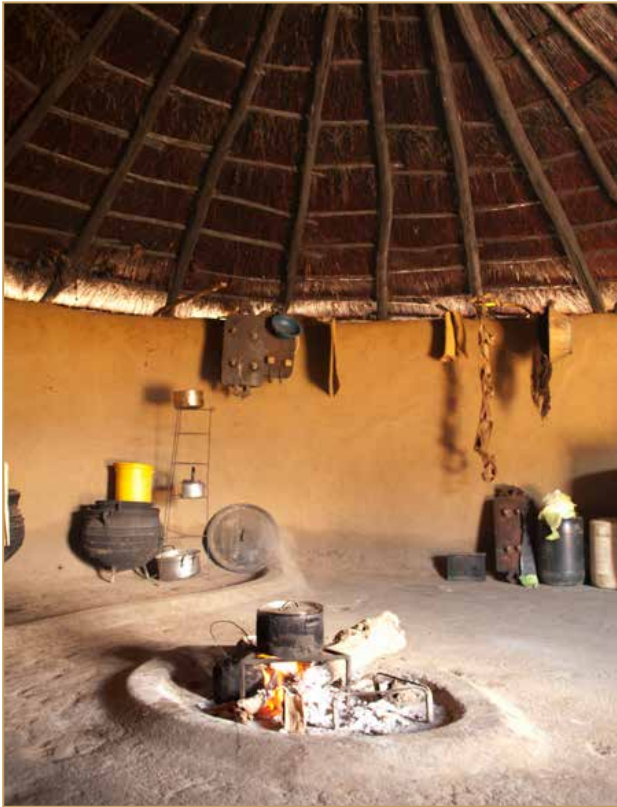
Fiyani Masondo had been a farm labourer all his life when he started crafts. He left the district when orders became scarce.



Originally from Maria Ratschitz, Mlamuli Magasela has retired on Mdukatshani as a pensioner.



Gili Nzimande learnt to fend for himself after his mother was shot when he was small. He eventually attached himself to a grandmother who was chased out of the district for stealing cattle in 2004.



The interior of the home of Khulelaphi Mbatha, a veteran beader and our needlework instructor.

The crafters were prepared for bad news when they gathered at the Learning Centre at the end of February 2008. There had been no orders for the January trade fairs, and if they were sitting without work, the outlook wasn't good. They had come for an update on the year ahead, and listened intently to a simplified account of the looming subprime mortgage crisis in the United States. What was a mortgage? A lifetime debt on a house? They went home sombre. The attacks on the World Trade Centre had affected orders. So had the Iraq War. And the Palestine War? After Zulu radio reported fighting in Palestine two women rushed down the hill in anxiety. Where was Palestine? Would it affect their orders too? When the subprime mortgage crisis pushed the world into recession, it marked a point of no return for the crafts.



The large Dladla homestead was originally built by three brothers. Today it is shared by their widows (all veteran crafters), their *makotis* and grandchildren. Nozi Ntshapa had only one child and finds happiness in the shared company of the combined families.



Horns on the roof say the spirits are at home.

HOME GROUND

2008 -2009

The Subprime Mortgage Crisis

Shops closed, businesses collapsed, exhibitions were cancelled, and Jablonex, the great Czech bead firm, had to shut down furnaces due to lack of demand. The days of big orders were over. There would be a recovery, but it was gradual, and never on the scale before the crash. Orders would be smaller, items cheaper, and seldom did the women have full time work.

But hardship tended to obscure the real developments of the period that were changing life on the hills. In 2002 the mountainous area adjoining Mdukatshani was identified as one of the poorest districts in South Africa, and government launched a "Mashunka Flagship Poverty Relief Project" that included bringing in a road, electricity and water.



Homesteads have become a mix of buildings. Square and round. Cement and mud. Iron and thatch. With the help of her father, Mpembe, Siphokuhle Mvelase started building her home herself, and although she has "flats" with iron roofs, her main room is mud and thatch.



The homestead of Mcineni Dladla and his two wives, Buzukuthini Mtshali and Xinile Mvelase.

Electricity arrived in 2006, water in 2009. Although there wasn't a ceremony for either, there should have been. The water was like a miracle. The women stood at the taps and watched it flow. On and off. On and off. An infinite supply to fill their containers for ever. The taps were communal, and the water would be sporadic, but just for a moment they could believe in the impossible. The days of fetching water from the river were over. They could rest their aching knees.

One routine that didn't change was the annual exodus to the highveld in search of thatch. Every winter a third of our crafters asked time off from beads to cut grass. They would be away two months, camping in the cold, counting their bundles into separate piles. The grass was free but it wasn't cheap. One bundle for the farmer, one for themselves, with the added cost of a hired truck to bring the load home when it was ready. There was comfort in thatch which the old people missed when their RDP houses arrived. The first were completed in July 2012, square grey boxes of iron and cement with windows that let in the cold. Soon they would be part of the landscape, bare little houses, occupied with pride – but not by their intended owners. For they were a promise to the young, not the old. The youth liked the hemmed in modernity, the break with tradition, the cement and the iron. But the old wanted the warmth of a fire on the floor, and like the *amadlozi*, the family spirits, they needed to live under thatch.



First you collect the materials, then you build. Phumelele Mbatha has an exquisite hand for crafts but is not exempt from the toil of tasks at home, like collecting these rocks for a new building with her son Mdidiyeli.



Dhayimani Dladla and his family have rebuilt their home more than once since they were forced off Mdukatshani during the government removals of 1969. Today he is back, sitting in the sun with his wife Kanyisile Masoka, a veteran beader. They have rebuilt on land returned to the Mthembus by the Mdukatshani Rural Development Trust. At rest at last.

CHANGING FASHIONS

Fifty years ago you could walk into a wholesaler like W.G. Brown and find an entire floor given over to beads. Browns had been in the business a long time and knew the colour conventions of each district in KwaZulu-Natal. Springvale women wore orange, yellow, green and black, Msinga women wore peacock colours with a little pink. At Springvale nobody ever pilfered blue beads – a horrible colour. At Msinga yellow and orange were viewed with distaste. We had been at Mdukatshani 35 years before orange started making an appearance in local head scarves – very daring. Soon it was everywhere, a pretty pale pumpkin that was changing conventions in an area where tradition remains strong.

Fashion implies change. On the catwalks of Paris fashion is designed to last a season. At Msinga change is more gradual, although a stranger coming in would immediately notice the hairstyles. Smart, trendy, sophisticated – an obvious sign of the influence of the city on ideas. Ideas of who you are and who you could be, if only... Nothing speaks more to the aspirations of the young than the way they style their hair. Braided, tufted, plaited, combed, stretched, straightened, twisted, beaded, beribboned. Anyone can do it, and everyone does. It's called *isitayela*, or *swenka*. You may live far from the city streets, but your hairstyle says you are fashionable.



Fifty years ago it cost £5 to have your hair put up in an *isicholo*, and “five bob” to have the ochre renewed. This rare photograph shows the work involved in a hairdo. Because the hospital objected to ochre on its pillows, a woman had to comb out her hair before she went to hospital to have a baby. Today a detachable *isicholo* costs R250.



Friends like to dress in similar outfits for special occasions, and the break-away use of orange, a new colour, says these young women are in the frontline of fashion.



Where once beads were only worn as amulets, today ornate beadwork is part of the ceremonies of worship of the Nazareth Baptist Church.



Two young beadworkers, Nonhlanhla Shezi and Ntombizini Mbatha, were among the first to break with tradition to start wearing orange *doeks*, or headscarves.

Yet in the midst of change traditions linger on, like the use of leather petticoats. The older women feel undressed without them. An *isidwaba* is the symbol of the spiritual bond of marriage, and when a woman dies it will be buried in her grave. It's part of forever and forever. Another lasting sign of marriage is the *bhayi*, a full-length cloth knotted at the shoulder. Even the younger women, discarding tradition, are not yet ready to discard their *bhayis*. They wear them to town with their two piece outfits, an incongruous mix of the old and the new that describes the confusion of the modern.

Yet respect for tradition has revived the dying craft of beads – something on display at the annual gatherings of the Shembe. The Shembes are members of the Nazareth Baptist Church, one of the fastest growing churches in South Africa. Built on the teachings of the prophet, Isaiah Shembe, the church believes in a respect for tradition that sees beads as integral to worship. Beads are more than ornaments worn for celebration. They are part of prayer on holy ground, worn in tribute by thousands of the Shembe faithful when they gather on open dancing grounds to pay homage to Isaiah Shembe.



Msinga's traditional colours are peacock blues, greens and purple, usually worn as *bhayis*, or knotted shoulder cloths, which denote a woman is married. *Bhayis* are worn daily – as well as for special occasions.



Friends setting out for a ceremony – all dressed alike. Despite the increasing use of orange, red and yellow, traditional colours still dominate at Msinga.



The rapid growth of the Nazareth Baptist Church has seen a revival of the dying craft of beads. Followers of the prophet, Isaiah Shembe wear headbands and anklets for worship at home, and more elaborate beadwork for their annual gatherings for worship and prayer. Most of the Mdukatshani crafters are members of the church, which has become one of the major faiths in South Africa.



Nothing speaks more to the aspirations of the young than the way they style their hair. Today even toddlers have their hair "styled" while braids are sold at rural spaza shops, along with the bread and cabbages.

OUR HELPERS

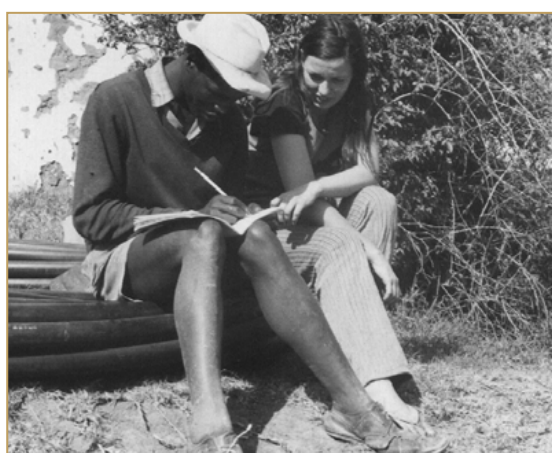
Help seems an inadequate word for the voluntary support which has kept us going over 50 years. It would be impossible to list all the individuals and groups who have helped the project in different ways, providing skills we lacked, arranging sales and exhibitions, raising funds, tracking down supplies and suppliers, collecting materials like plastic bags, printing our reports, doing our accounts, and always being on standby in moments of need. Had the project had salaried staff we would have closed down long ago. Instead, from our first tentative beginnings, we have been dependent on voluntary help. We never went out looking for volunteers. They came to us by chance, from different directions, and they sustained us with friendships that have lasted down the years.

Winifred Phillips

Winifred Phillips was a trained occupational therapist when she arrived at Maria Ratschitz from England in 1971. A volunteer with the Quaker Overseas Voluntary Service, her many activities included short courses on beads for the tribal women from Limehill who came to the mission for a week at a time, “sleeping and working on the floor, worried about children at home, excited about being away, chatting all day and night”. The courses were a useful preparation for Springvale where the women started to arrive at 6 a.m. “Women with the most exotic headgear and ringlets, clayed faces, beads and brightly-coloured garments.” Ready to drop, 12 hours later, she could no longer see in the dark. But there were compensations. A hot bath in a tin tub under the stars. Winifred only intended to spend a year in South Africa but her stay became permanent when she married William Bond, a co-volunteer. Today they live in Cape Town where Winifred teaches crafts at the Waldorf Michael Mount School.



Winifred with her husband William Bond.



Linda with Khwengce Mzolo, teaching basic literacy.

Linda Woodley

Linda Woodley was preparing to return to Canada after a working holiday in South Africa, when she came to Maria Ratschitz on a weekend visit in 1972. She would eventually stay three years, offering help and support through a difficult period that made her part of the family forever. A trained occupational therapist she not only worked on the crafts, she also ran literacy classes, with a special interest in how to adapt IQ tests for Africans who had no education. She was a tireless teacher, helping her students struggle with concepts that were alien to them, and guiding them to make sense of letters on a page. Linda was with us when we moved to Mdukatshani, a small Canadian flag flying from her tent. Although she never did succeed in baking brownies on a camp fire, there were always little boys to eat the charred remains of her experiments. It was hard to let her go when she married and returned to Canada, where she resumed her old career, and produced a family of three.

Julia Meintjes

Julia Meintjes first visited Mdukatshani in 2004, a visit that would be the first of many, eventually leading to a collaborative project known as Threads of Africa which has enlarged the horizons of the crafters who work with her. Although Julia started with beaded bowls, she soon moved to designs in multiple metals, such as gold, silver, copper and brass. In 2011 she organised an exhibition, *The Earth is Watching Us*, at the Gold Museum in Cape Town, which gave three weavers their first flight in an aeroplane. Because the metal bowls are sold on an art market, Julia has been able to raise the wages of the weavers, while encouraging increasingly fine work.



Julia sits at a workshop at Mdukatshani, learning a weaving stitch from Bandlele Mtshali.

Roxana Earle

We first met Roxana at the roadside at Springvale in about 1973. She had come with a friend to see what we were doing, a casual visit that would lead into an unexpected involvement with the beads. When we moved to Mdukatsani in 1975, Roxana agreed to look after the Springvale beaders, a task she undertook until the last beader left in 1995. More importantly, in 1988 she agreed to give the project secretary a sabbatical by taking over the financial administration of the beads, as well as all dealings with customers and despatch of orders. (When a customer asked her to pass on comment to the despatch clerk, she replied “I’m the despatch clerk!”) She was a strict administrator with a gift for business, and shifting funds to benefit from interest rates built up a surplus in the bead account which enabled us to pay a bonus to the women, to buy beads in bulk, and invest in a secondhand bakkie. She took on the job for about six months – and handed it over nine years later. How could we ever thank her?



Cynthia McKenzie

Cynthia McKenzie had a small baby in her arms when she arrived in our lives to offer help. She didn’t know what needed doing, she said, but she wanted to be useful, so if we needed anything just give her a call. It was hard to take her seriously. Apart from the baby she had three small children. How would she ever have the time? But it didn’t take long to discover she meant what she said. For the next 30 years she would be “doing anything that needed doing”. Typing, accounts, reports, arranging aid for catastrophes, collecting help for the destitute – and selling beads. Her children would grow up with memories of beadwork spread out across their sitting room floor. Living in town made Cynthia accessible to would-be customers and using her home for both display and sales she increased the work for the women. She loved the beads, but when her children left home her life took a new direction. In September 2000 when she finally “retired” it felt as if a pillar had been removed.

Tish White

There were few NGO’s in the rural areas of South Africa when we first met Dale and Tish (Laetitia) White in 1970. They were a remarkable couple. Dale had grown up in an orphanage, and while still a boy had decided on a life in the church. He had been ordained a priest in the Anglican Church when he met Tish – the only white priest with a Soweto congregation. In 1965 he was appointed director of the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in Roodepoort, an ecumenical organisation training South Africans for a non-racial future. That future seemed a long way away when we travelled to Wilgespruit in August 1970 for a conference of rural church workers from across South Africa and neighbouring countries like Botswana and Lesotho. With government forced removals widespread, the only projects in rural areas were run by isolated church groups, who all expressed a common feeling of great loneliness in their work. This was one of the reasons that led to the launch of SHADE*, a project close to Tish’s heart. SHADE was designed to help rural craft groups by opening up export markets, handling orders, and assisting with production and design. There would be many benefits for Mdukatsani, not least the regular visits from Dale, Tish and Sarah Webster. Eventually Dale became chairman of our Board of Trustees, widening the scope of the project as he guided us to meet the demands of an increasingly professional development community. When he died in 2007 some of his ashes were buried on Mukatsani. *The beginning of the journey*, he would say, *not the end*.

* Self Help Associates for Development Economics



Tish with programme director Griffiths Zabalala.

OUR SUPPLIERS

We have always had a special relationship with our suppliers, part business, part friendship, sharing the ups and downs of the economy, particularly the low points and the fears around an uncertain future. Many of our suppliers have had to close down over the past 50 years. When Greenstein and Rosen went out of beads in 1989, they offered us their entire stock at a special price. Two of their “dead colours” (unsaleable colours) are still in stock, a reminder of the effect of sanctions in the past. Today’s problems are different, and we salute our suppliers for their courage in hard times and thank them for their help.



One Way Electric Motors

Colin and Justin Hemingway have been supplying us with fine gauge copper wire for the past 15 years. Father and son run a business fixing electric motors and the copper we use for jewellery and bowls is actually designed for transformer windings. While gauge is crucial to their work, colour is crucial to ours, and they have gone out of their way to look for reels in the colours we require. Sometimes plum, sometimes orange, sometimes brick. There is nothing predictable about the colour of the stock they order, and when they manage to locate a rare shade of copper, they are as jubilant as we are. One invaluable task they undertake for us is selling our copper scrap. Once we had to leave home at 4 a.m. to wait for hours in the queues at city scrap dealers, regularly shoved out of line because we were not “regulars”. Now we just dump our bags with Colin and Justin who burn the enameled wire to get a better price for us, and organize the sale. Meanwhile the reels that carry the copper have become sought-after stools, and part of the furniture of the valley.

N.D. Patel and Sons

Raman Patel knew nothing about beads when he bought a few packets in 1976. It was a risky purchase for a little shop selling bread and sweets in downtown Durban, and it set him arguing with his brother Ramoo. The brothers were making a precarious living, and he intended to sell the beads below cost? “I wanted customers,” he said. And he got them. Then, as now, the bush telegraph worked, and the shop became a place of enchantment. For how else do you describe the growth of a business spun on the colour of beads? Raman’s knowledge of the bead market grew gradually, and as sales increased, he started thinking about imports. Where did the beads come from? He took to hanging around the docks, making friends with the dockworkers. One day he found a crate stamped with an address and started to buy direct.



Paresh Patel in the family shop



Raman Patel

When Raman died in 2018 he left a small empire built on his love of beads. “Beads were his passion,” says his daughter Jasmita. A clever girl, who grew up helping in the shop, she admits she had no aptitude for the colour codes of beads. 94110. 59115. 38128. Her father chided her. She had a head for figures, and would become an accountant, but she couldn’t hold a bead number in her head? The numbers were part of his vocabulary, a coded vocabulary for every shade of the rainbow. Metallic, silver-lined, lustred, opaque. He sat up at night, poring over colour charts. When he had a new shade he would discuss it on the phone, conversations that were brief, but full of interest. Had we heard that Russia had overtaken America as the world’s largest consumers of beads? The Russians had started beading portraits of icons. A return to religion. The thought pleased him. He was a devout man himself, and he carried his faith into his living, caring for his customers, guiding and helping them, and always fiercely loyal to our interests. When outsiders came in to copy our designs, they would leave empty-handed, with a lecture.

We had been friends for 32 years when he died, a long distance friendship, conducted on the phone, so it’s his voice we miss, like an imprint on the beads, with their bright variety, and the familiar coded numbers that gleamed like the rainbow in his head. He had 173 different colours in stock when he died. 17090. 78102. 67300. We still use the code for orders, but today they are emailed to Paresh Patel who has taken over the family business. The job involves a lot of travelling, but while he’s away his father Ramoo, still helps in the little shop. For more than 50 years N.D. Patel and Sons has been a family business, and the family are ensuring that it carries on.



Some donations are made in kind, like the eggs collected for the beaders by the 1st Dundee Scout Troop in 1999. The boys organised the Egg Drive by posting themselves with trolleys at various supermarkets in the town, an annual Easter activity to help the needy. For Khonjiwe Dladla collecting the eggs meant the treat of a rare trip to town, which included lunch at the Wimpy. Photographed with her are (Back Row): Benjamin Marais, Benjon Petzer, Jonathan Durham, Mark Holliday and Creina Alcock, the Mdukatshani secretary. Sitting on the tailgate are Timothy Marais, Carl Pieterse, and James Marais.

OUR FUNDERS

Some time in 1969 we cleared out the hay loft at Maria Ratschitz to provide a sleeping space for a group of Anglo American executives. It was the only accommodation we had, and we were nervous. Our visitors were accustomed to the comforts of the city. What would they make of the ablution facilities – buckets of hot water delivered to their door in the morning? The visit had been arranged by Paul Henwood, secretary of the recently established Chairmans' Fund of Anglo American and de Beers, which in time would become known as "South Africa's Second Government" funding developments neglected by the apartheid government, including hospitals, schools and technical colleges for blacks. When members of the Fund visited Ratschitz, however, it was still early days. They had come as much for discussion as to take a look at our work, thoughtful men, full of questions, trying to see the road ahead.

The weekend was easier than we expected, and not long afterwards a letter from Paul arrived in the post. It included a tariff card from the Carlton Hotel (then the most expensive hotel in South Africa) and a cheque. He wanted to thank us for the weekend, he wrote, but there had been one problem. Although they had looked everywhere, they couldn't find a tariff sheet with the cost of their accommodation. The Carlton offered equivalent comfort, and they hoped we would accept payment based on the Carlton's tariffs. It was an act of grace we would never forget, and the start of a long friendship with Paul, and an enduring relationship with the Fund. The Fund would help us purchase Mdukatshani, and without its backing there might never have been a project for beads at all.

Although a youth group in Johannesburg gave us R 150 to buy that first box of beads, it was a considerable outlay at a time a bag of mealie meal cost R3,30, the staple for a family

for a month.* Nobody saw any promise in beads. They were "a passing fad" said Interchurch Aid, rejecting our application for help. We were struggling when Chairman's Fund came to the rescue, first with two grants of R 1000 in 1970, and a year later with a further R 3,500 to help us create a revolving fund for the crafts. And that would not be the end of their help over the years, for despite the use of volunteers, the project would seldom break even. Our funders were always better at counting costs than we were. Transport costs, audit fees, bank charges, tax, the telephone. Overheads have to be deducted from sales, which reduce what the women earn. There are also the costs of emergencies, illness, injury, death. The mark-up on beadwork is small. Without the support of funders, could we ever have offered help?

It would be impossible to list everyone who has helped to fund the project over 50 years, but we would like to make a special mention of the following:

- The Chairmans' Fund of Anglo American and de Beers
- The Africa Development Fund
- The Raimondo Charitable Trust
- The Clem and Nancy Ramsden Educational and Charitable Trust
- The Harry Brunskill Educational and Charitable Trust
- The Masibambane Trust
- Phyllis Mittlestead and St. Catherine's Anglican Church, Canada
- Mignon Charrington
- Joan Herring
- Ken and Carol Deane

** In 1969, 1 pound of beads cost R1,00 and 1 pound of mealie meal 6 cents. In 2019, 1 kilogram of beads cost R360 and 1 kilogram of mealie meal R7,00.*

ROLL CALL

Some of the Mdukatshani beaders who are at work today have already been shown on these pages. Here are some of the others.



Jaji Dladla



Ntombizini Mdlo



Kanyisile Masoka



Buyelaphi Ngubane



Hlekelaphi Dladla



Nozi Ntshapa



Phumelele Mbatha



Fikisile Duma



Ntombi Dladla



Bangilise Dladla



Celiwe Dlamini



Phangiwe Dladla



Nyelisile Sithole



Ngenzeleni Dladla



Gwinya Mbhele



Mikahle Mchunu



Celiwe Kumalo



Misi Mvelase



Zwakushiwo Mvelase



Dumazile Dladla



Sithlephi Mtshali



Ngenzeleni Mvelase



Phumelele Njoko



Bandlile Mtshali



Siphokuhle Mvelase



Lindeneni Dladla



Ntombizini Mbatha



Khulelaphi Mbatha



Geinani Duma



Hloniphile Mchunu



Qabukani Dladla



Nomzotho Chonco



Nonhlanhla Shezi



Siphilangangani Dladla

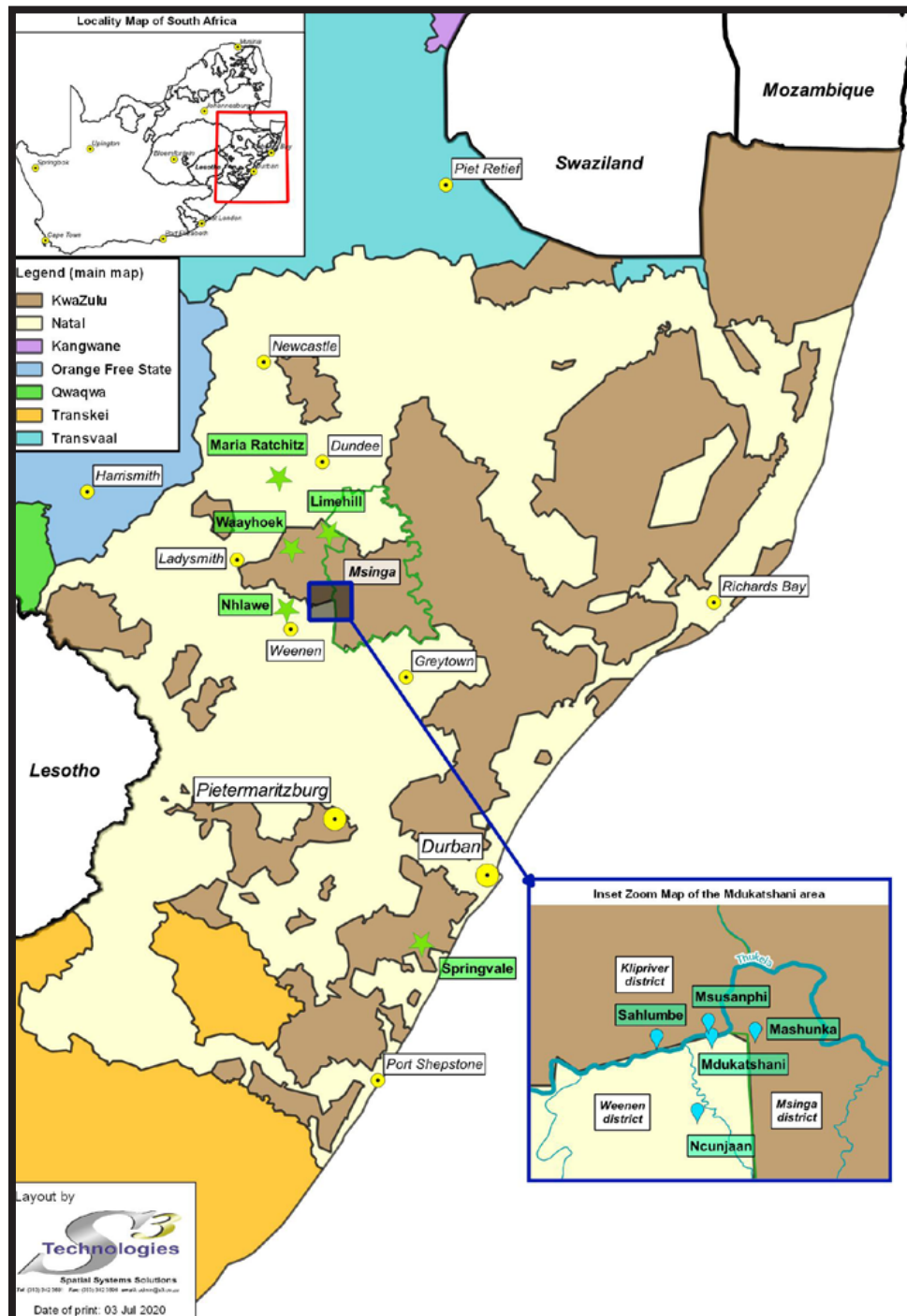


Ncengaliphi Mbatha

WHAT WE MAKE







Map of the project area showing the old South African “homeland” boundaries and craft areas mentioned in the text



A winter view of the bushclad hills of Mdukatshani (right) and the Thukela River, which forms one boundary of the farm. The blue hills in the distance are Big Mashunka and Little Mashunka, while the marijuana gardens on the left bank are part of Msusanphi. The large, bare area in the foreground is inundated every summer.

THE MDUKATSHANI PROJECTS

Who we are

When the bead project started on Maria Ratschitz Catholic Mission in 1969 it was part of an ecumenical organisation called Church Agricultural Projects, or CAP. Founded in 1965 to develop unused mission farms, C.A.P was headed by a Board of Bishops of the Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches, under the chairmanship of Archbishop Denis Hurley. At the time church-owned land in South Africa totalled about a million acres, most of it adjoining crowded African areas, and most of it lying idle, or being leased to white farmers. CAP's objective was to use mission farms to produce food on a malnutrition relief basis for African communities, while providing agricultural training for farm workers, a group which never had a chance of education. Initially CAP worked on Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran farms, as well as the Buthelezi Tribal Area in Zululand.

CAP had only been at work a year when the government announced plans for the large-scale removal of all "black spots" surrounding Maria Ratschitz. The district was officially white, and in terms of apartheid policy, thousands of Africans living on black-owned land would have to be moved to Limehill, a Scheduled Bantu Area 30 km away. With the threat of removals looming, CAP focused its work on opposition to the removals, and when the government lorries arrived in January 1968, it provided legal and practical support to families living in tents on the veld. The crafts were one move among many to help those families. Although the crafts would always be separately funded, they were part of the overall CAP Project, and dependent on many shared services such as transport, telephone and auditors. This has not changed over the years, and without the overlapping support of shared services, there would be no beads today.

In 1975 CAP's lease on the mission came to an end and the project moved to a block of three farms which would be collectively known as Mdukatshani. The land lay on the border of the Weenen and Msinga districts and had a troubled history. In 1944 the Mchunu and Mthembu, the two biggest tribes in Natal, had clashed in a fight over a contested boundary on the farm, and in 1969 the land was "cleared" of 146 African resident families as part of government removals that eventually forced 25 000 people off the farms in Weenen district. When CAP arrived, the land was empty. It would take time to discover we were living on tribal territory, and the families on our boundary fences had prior claim to the farm. Land restitution was going to be a critical part of CAP's work in the years ahead.

There had been many changes in South Africa when Mdukatshani celebrated its coming-of-age in 1996. Democracy had arrived two years before, and with it new policies on land that began with the launch of a Pilot Land Reform Programme for each province. With CAP's backing, Weenen won the bid for Natal, and when Nelson Mandela flew into the village in March 1995 to launch the KwaZulu-Natal Pilot, it was in recognition of the only land claims programme in the country to be led at grass roots level – something CAP's involvement had made possible. After 21 years in a notoriously closed society the project had played a multiplicity of roles at every level of the process of land restitution, providing links between tribal authorities, land-claiming communities, government officials and consultants. Its unique position in the district was further marked by the fact it was the only property-owner in the Pilot to face no land claims, while being elected to the Trusts of the communities that would settle the farms adjoining Mdukatshani.

Today most of Mdukatshani has been ceded to the Mchunu and Mthembu tribal authorities, and families evicted by government in 1969 have rebuilt their homes on the farm, following tribal procedures for settlement.

Once land claims had been largely settled, the project began to move in new directions – under a new name. For one problem the project had not addressed was its variable legal identity. Over 45 years the project had tried to keep pace with government requirements by changing its name from Church Agricultural Projects, to CAPTRUST, to CAPFARM Trust, producing a legal nightmare that was finally resolved in 2011 with the creation of two new trusts, the Mdukatshani Rural Development Trust (MRDT), and the Mdukatshani Craft and Welfare Trust. The same trustees serve on both trusts, which run different programs, but share space, time and services, as always.

In the eyes of the beaders the projects are one. MRDT provides advice on the care of their livestock, their chickens and goats, their forage and gardens.

However, this is just one aspect of a much wider programme that has extended the project across the province. Today MRDT provides agricultural support and help for thousands of emerging farmers struggling to make a living on the land in the rural areas of KwaZulu- Natal. Some live on new land reform farms, others on tribal land, most of it arid country like Msinga, far from water, too dry for crops, but suitable for rearing livestock.

Although about 70% of people living in poverty in South Africa depend on livestock for food security, they are a neglected segment of the population, with neither training nor veterinary support. These are shortcomings MRDT is helping to address with a variety of projects aimed at filling the gaps, while developing the potential of the market. MRDT has a special focus on women, who are increasingly taking ownership of stock, while the project provides training for children who are the primary herders and livestock-keepers in most rural African homes. With technical skills, young people can help to change the economy of rural areas.

Find out more at www.mdukatshani.com



Ncunjane goats set off in the morning for their feeding grounds in the bush. This area was once Mdukatshani's Top Farm, now formally ceded to the Bambanani Machunu Community Property Trust.



Celiwe Kumalo, a Ncunjane crafter, beading at home in the winter sun, close to her family and her chickens.



Phangiwe Dladla, a Mashunka crafter, beading at home as a chicken comes looking for scraps.

THE END Or Another Beginning?

This report was completed during the Covid-19 lockdown with a Bead Room full of stock, and most of our customers facing closure. After 50 years had we come to the end of the beads? It is a difficult time to celebrate with the future unknown and full of uncertainty, but it isn't the first time we have faced a dead end, and the crafters are willing to wait. Even in good years orders have been sporadic, with seasonal shifts between winter and spring. The women have always been ready to diversify, saving in months when orders are plentiful, but prepared for the months when there is no work at all. Today all of the crafters have gardens. Home gardens, communal gardens – and what you might call commercial gardens. More than 92 percent have chickens, and 85 percent have invested in goats, while more than a third of the women are weaving grass mats, *amacansi*, which are sold locally for ritual purposes. None of these ventures can replace the income from beads, but they provide a buffer, a back-up for the home – and an outlet for the women's creativity. If a bead order arrives tomorrow, they will rejoice, drop everything and start at once. Meanwhile they try to transform the world around them, taking control, improving the design. It is still a long way to go before the end.



Sizani Mbatha, a Mashunka crafter, has carefully saved her earnings to accumulate a small goat flock.



All home gardens are small miracles. Celiwe Kumalo digs for water in a dry river bed at Ncunjane, carefully saving all the homestead spillage to water her vegetables.



Nyelisile Sithole, a Ncunjane crafter, checks her goats before letting them out of the kraal in the morning.



Ntombizini Mdlolo is one of the original crafters, now in a wheelchair, but still doing beads. Although she is a specialist in beaded sticks, when orders are scarce, she weaves grass mats on a homemade loom, selling them locally for ritual purposes.



A view of a "commercial garden" irrigated by pump on the banks of the Thukela River near Mdukatshani.

OBITUARIES

We do not have photographs of all the crafters whom we have lost over the years, but here are a few of the beloved faces who enhanced our lives. We miss them all today.



Natty Duma couldn't thread a bead, but for 30 years she held the project together as organiser, confidante, trouble shooter, and comforter. She knew every detail of the crafter's lives, their joys, their anxieties, their despair. Their secrets were her secrets too, and she was always ready to take on their problems, armed as she was with unshakeable faith. Her schoolmates had called her Napoleon Bonaparte, a name that recognized her strength. She spoke her mind, she didn't back down, and she was never scared of controversy. But it's her laughter we miss the most now. She was a tease and a practical joker, and her presence could light up a day. Natty died in hospital in April 2011.



Khombisile Ndlela Mvelase never really mastered copper, but she could create anything with beads, needle and thread. Naturally competent, she became both organiser and teacher, and her early death in March 2019 has left a gap that cannot be filled.



Velephi Chonco and Dingile Ntshaba



Uslaphi Majozi



Busisiwe Buthelezi



Khonjiwe Dladla



Dimalile Mvelase



Keleliwe Majozi



Ngakelephi Mkhize



Phakamile Dladla



Uthimbi Dladla



Tshelunina Masoka



Thunjiwe Duma



Hlekisile Mtshali



Funani Mbatha



Dingile Mshali

AN EXTENDED FAMILY

Because so many documents were lost in fire and flood, the following list of crafters is only a partial record of the men and women, boys and girls, who have been crafters with Mdukatshani over the years. Some have died, some are still working, and for reasons often linked to tragedy, many left. MaSiphika Mchunu stopped doing beads after her husband was beheaded by the son of a drunk neighbour. Basongile Dladla gave up beadwork when her daughter, born without limbs, was offered an opening in a craft group for the disabled. Two women left because they were not prepared to become the property of their brothers-in-law after their husbands died. Girls have left to get married. *Makotis* have left to join their husbands in Johannesburg. But no matter how far they have travelled or how long they have been away, they continue to claim relationship. They will always be members of our extended family, and we are happy to welcome them back.

Right: Kwenzeleni Mvelase has endured more hardship than most. In 1987 her home was hit by lightning twice, one week apart, destroying 3 houses, killing 8 goats, and knocking her unconscious. She still has burn marks, like bullet holes in her legs. Eight months pregnant at the time, the baby she was carrying died within a year. She gave up beads in 1988 when the family moved to Kalandoda, a mountainous area where the home was struck again. In January 1997 Kwenzeleni was returning home from clinic with a newborn baby when her husband, Wadulana Mbatha, was killed in an ambush coming back from a peace meeting. Today the family live in Newcastle, but we see Kwenzeleni regularly when she returns to Mashunka for family events.



Mashunka

Jaji Khumalo
Divane Ndimande
Phakamile Dladla
Kanyisile Masoka
Winnie Mchunu
Bangisile Dladla
Ntombizini Mdlolo
Phumelele Mbatha
Siphokuhle Mvelase
Khulelaphi Mbatha
Gwinya Mbhele
Dumazile Dladla
Nozi Ntshaba
Sizani Mbatha
Phangiwe Dladla
Ngenzeni Mvelase
Bandlile Mtshali
Hlekaphi Dladla
Siphilangangani Dladla
Qabukani Dladla
Lindeni Dladla
Sithelephi Mtshali
Ncengaliphi Mbatha
Gcinani Duma
Fikisile Duma
Nonhlanhla Shezi
Bakhipile Mtshali
Nomzotho Chonco
Ntombizini Mbatha
Bonisiwe Mbatha
Sibantu Mtshali
Ngenzeleni Dladla
Misi Mvelase
Nesheli Mvelase
Danadana Dladla
Zwakabi Ngubane
Mfuniseni Zwane
Nomfundi Ngubane
MaNgubane Ngubane

Nozipho Mbatha
Thokozisi Ngubane
Mlamuli Magasela
Zamani Madonsela
Mzonzima Dladla
Ginsela Mbatha
Jobe Sithole
Canake Mbatha
Gidli Mbatha
Gili Nzimande
Fiyani Masondo
Mgongo Ngubane
Ntombi Dladla
Uslaphi Majosi
Busisiwe Buthelezi
Ngakelephi Mkhize
Khombisile Mvelase
Khonjiwe Dladla
Hlekisile Mtshali
Dumsile Mbatha
Xolisile Mtshali
Buzukuthini Mtshali
Thengani Ndimande
Qondeni Mbatha
Thulile Dladla
Dora Mbatha
Xinile Mvelase
Dumalile Mvelase
Bongile Mavundla
Qwengukile Madonda
Ntoza Ndimande
Gideph Mpungose
Qhelile Hadebe
Dingile Mtshali
Zevile Thusi
Phontshi Mvelase
Thandekile Magubane
Qhubekile Ndlela
Qedani Ndlovu
Mpomane Dladla

Umephi Ndimande
Utimbi Dladla
Khonzeni Ndawonde
Kwenzeleni Mvelase
Khalisile Mvelase
Ntombiyenkosi Thusi

Limehill

Lucy Twala
Gogo Nkosi

Springvale

Bathulise Madonda

Msusanphi and Nomoya

Chazani Mkhize
Tshelunina Masoka
Velephi Chonco
Funani Mbatha
Kheleliwe Majosi
Dombi Dladla
Jabulile Ndlovu
Khombisile Mvelase
Zandile Sithole
Dora Masoka
Ncedile Xaba
Thombo Masoka
Monica Lamula
Funani Mbatha
Thunjiwe Duma
Khangwayini Zungu
Buzile Mbatha

Waayhoek

Elias Mtshengu
Virginia Mvelase
Mbuyi Nsele
Ellen Mokoena

Nhlawe

Thamuza Madondo
Nesta Dladla
Sihle Ndlela
Kwenzakamlaba Thusi
Zephi Luthuli
Bonginkosi Thusi
Loyisiwe Mdlalose
Bonani Thusi
Marriam Mlele

Mathintha and Nqumantaba

Sizakele Mchunu
Nondlolothe Mchunu
Basongile Dladla
MaSiphika Mchunu
Ufishi Sithole
Busisiwe Mchunu
Zwakushiwo Mvelase
Khonzephi Xaba

Ncunjane

Sebetheni Mchunu
Mikahle Mchunu
Nyelisile Sithole
Phumelele Njoko
Buyelaphi Ngubane
Celiwe Khumalo
Celiwe Dlamini
Buyelele Mchunu
Siphongo Mncube
Tshitshi Mchunu
Buselaphi Khumalo
Sizakele Mncube
Bakhethile Sithole

SOME OF OUR CUSTOMERS

Our customers have shared the hardships – and helped us by providing friendship and support, as well as many new ideas and designs. Few have survived the past few years of economic difficulty. Thank you all for trying to find a wider market for our crafts.

piece – Eugenie Drakes
Heartworks – Margaret Woermann
Africa Nova -Nick and Margie Murgatroyd
Delagoa -Graskop, Pretoria and Dullstroom.
D and J Design – Wendy Visser
Local Works -Ina Marie Killian
Gold Restaurant
The Irresistibles -Fiona Armstrong
Zulu Craft – Karen Muir
Queen Bead -Lulu Pillay
Kim Sacks Gallery
 Ricca Turgel
 Barbara Lindop
Melange – Colvin English
 David Arment
 Lisa Goldberg
 Dave and Sue Charles
 Sean Earle
Craft Council -Wendy Goldblatt
AMWA – Lindy and Solly Levy
Muscade, Mauritius
 Lynelle Gradwell
Tatham Art Gallery – Mary Kleinenberg
Carnegie Art Gallery- Judy Jordan
African Art Centre
African Attitude

Art Africa – Linda and Karen
Art on Connection – Sophie Ferrand Hazard
The Bridge Foundation – Susie and Kim
 Dr. Rose Wagner
 Molly McCallum
Bat Shop
Buy Afrika
 Amelia Broderic
Ifaniso (Pty) Ltd – Hlengi Dube
 Wolfgang Schnekenburger
Mai Mai – Fiona Rankin Smith
Abercrombie and Kent
The Kraal Gallery
Cape Gallery
Gold of Africa Museum
 Brigitte Jacobs
The Gallery Shop
African Threads -Valerie Hearder
Baskets of Africa
African Art and Living
Threads of Africa
 and
 Caroyln Jacoby and the **Peace Corps** girls Ryan
 Ruggeiro, Kathleen Newell, and Rachel Anedy.



When Fiona Armstrong started selling our beads on Fifth Avenue, New York in 1980, she opened American markets to the project for the first time. A gifted teacher who won awards for her work teaching immigrant families in New York, Fiona ran the bead business part time as a passion. She was a regular visitor to Mdukatsani, and had become a major outlet for our beads when she died in 2003.



Creina, Natty Duma and crafters in the bead room on a bead day

Editorial: Creina Alcock, Rauri Alcock

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Tessa Adni: Pages 10, 11,12, 13,18, 19, 21, 38

Creina Alcock : Pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12,14,16, 17, 22, 28

Rauri Alcock: Pages 8, 9, 10, 19,23,24, 25,26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,32, 33, 35,36, 37, 38, 39,40,41,44, 45, 46, 47,48, 49,51, 52, 53, 54, 55

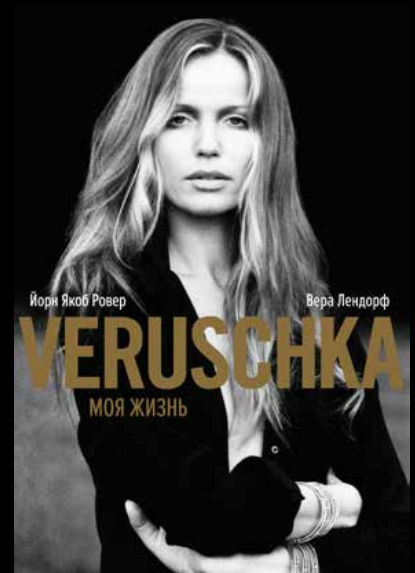
Jimmy Limberis: Page 19 Mark Marais: Page 43



MDUKATSHANI

50 Years of Beading

1969 -2019



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Cover images:

Top left: Mdukatshani beads modelled for *World on a String, A Companion for Bead Lovers* by Diana Friedburg and Joel Lipton

Top right: Verushka – our first celebrity customer.

Bottom left: Ngenzeni Mvelase – a veteran Mdukatshani beader by Paul Weinberg

Bottom right: Beaded bowl and balls made for *World on a String A Companion for Bead Lovers* by Diana Friedburg and Joel Lipton

SOME OF OUR CUSTOMERS

Our customers have shared the hardships – and helped us by providing friendship and support, as well as many new ideas and designs. Few have survived the past few years of economic difficulty. Thank you all for trying to find a wider market for our crafts.

piece – Eugenie Drakes
Heartworks – Margaret Woermann
Africa Nova -Nick and Margie Murgatroyd
Delagoa -Graskop, Pretoria and Dullstroom.
D and J Design – Wendy Visser
Local Works -Ina Marie Killian
Gold Restaurant
The Irresistibles -Fiona Armstrong
Zulu Craft – Karen Muir
Queen Bead -Lulu Pillay
Kim Sacks Gallery
 Ricca Turgel
 Barbara Lindop
Melange – Colvin English
 David Arment
 Lisa Goldberg
 Dave and Sue Charles
 Sean Earle
Craft Council -Wendy Goldblatt
AMWA – Lindy and Solly Levy
Muscade, Mauritius
 Lynelle Gradwell
Tatham Art Gallery – Mary Kleinenberg
Carnegie Art Gallery- Judy Jordan
African Art Centre
African Attitude

Art Africa – Linda and Karen
Art on Connection – Sophie Ferrand Hazard
The Bridge Foundation – Susie and Kim
 Dr. Rose Wagner
 Molly McCallum
Bat Shop
Buy Afrika
 Amelia Broderic
Ifaniso (Pty) Ltd – Hlengi Dube
 Wolfgang Schnekenburger
Mai Mai – Fiona Rankin Smith
Abercrombie and Kent
The Kraal Gallery
Cape Gallery
Gold of Africa Museum
 Brigitte Jacobs
The Gallery Shop
African Threads -Valerie Hearder
Baskets of Africa
African Art and Living
Threads of Africa
 and
 Caroyln Jacoby and the **Peace Corps** girls Ryan
 Ruggeiro, Kathleen Newell, and Rachel Anedy.



When Fiona Armstrong started selling our beads on Fifth Avenue, New York in 1980, she opened American markets to the project for the first time. A gifted teacher who won awards for her work teaching immigrant families in New York, Fiona ran the bead business part time as a passion. She was a regular visitor to Mdukatsani, and had become a major outlet for our beads when she died in 2003.



Creina, Natty Duma and crafters in the bead room on a bead day

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Rauri Alcock: Pages 8, 9, 10, 19,23,24, 25,26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31,32, 33, 35,36, 37, 38, 39,40,41,44, 45, 46, 47,48, 49,51, 52, 53, 54, 55

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