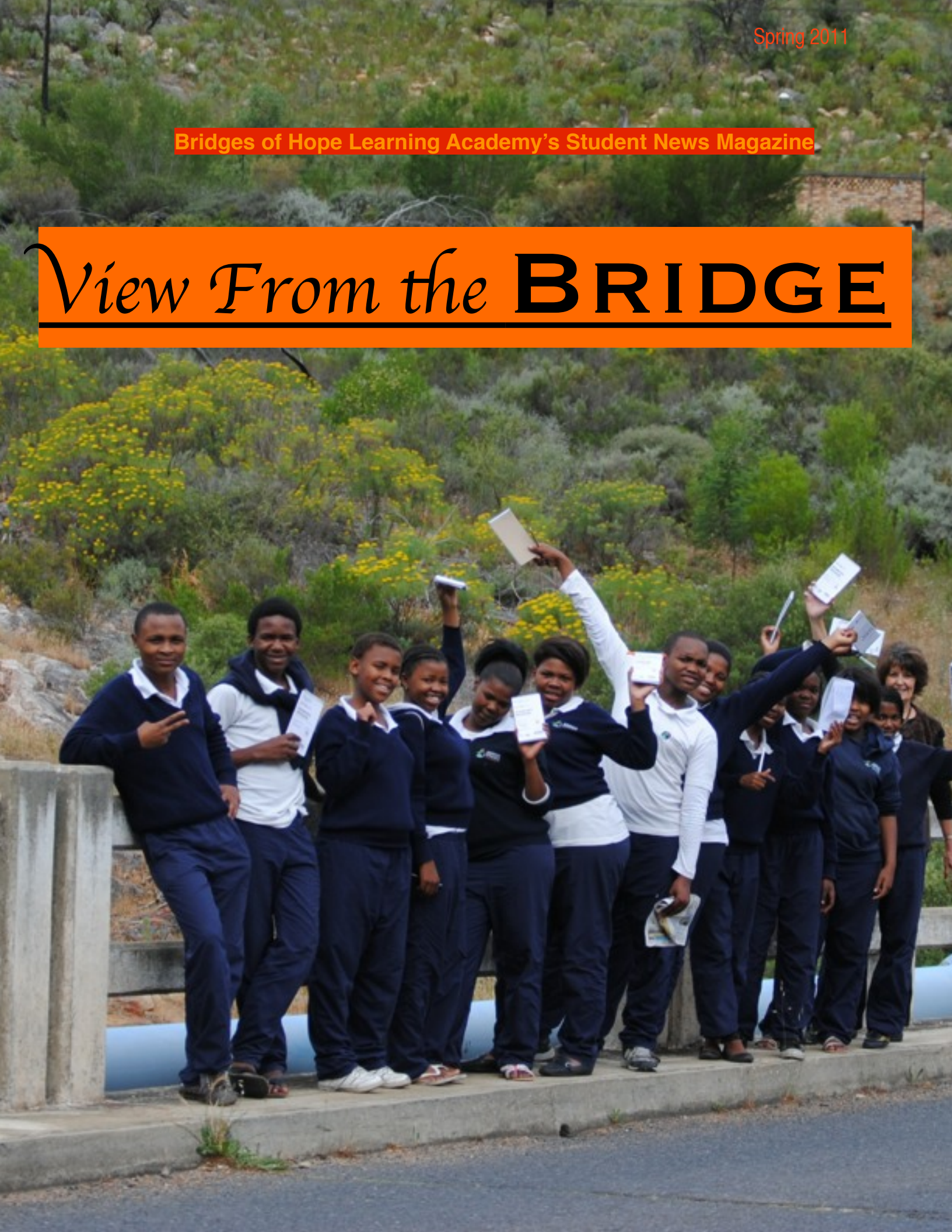


Bridges of Hope Learning Academy's Student News Magazine

View From the **BRIDGE**



Impressions of South Africa on a Vacation With a Purpose

Copyright © 2011 Deborah Paul. All Rights Reserved

When the possibility came up of visiting my niece Rebecca, a teacher at Bridges of Hope Learning Academy in Franschhoek, my thoughts were, “Gee, I think it would be nice to run a newspaper.”

That famous “Citizen Kane” quote would be the exclamation point at the end of what turned out to be an inspiring “vacation with a purpose.” I was invited to put my journalism experience to work in a place where 40 AIDs orphans are pulling themselves up and out of ignorance and poverty one positive experience at a time.

Pastor Dennis Wadley and his wife Susan -- two folks from Santa Barbara, California had the amazing vision to start the boarding school in 2002. The fruits of their labor are evident as former students graduate, attend college, then later come back as volunteers.

Twelve students signed up for my newspaper class. Together, we came up with the name, *View From the Bridge* and immediately voted in Editor-in-chief Nelisiwe Ntshebe who did a great job of keeping the kids moving forward with their interviews, photos and deadlines.

Prior to our trip, I made contact with *The Tatler* Publisher Siegfried Schäfer who generously arranged his time to visit the students and share journalistic insights. Schäfer was interesting in that he puts out a 20-page-plus, monthly community paper with only his laptop and a cell phone. We also took a field trip to the *Paarl Post*, the newspaper of record in the area where photo journalist Lise Beyers gave the kids a royal tour of the offices.

We had some computer setbacks, but still came up with a product in three weeks that brought tears to my eyes. When you think English is the second and third language of the these kids, I was so proud of them, I could just pop.

But my first impressions of this far-away nation was: “Hey, don’t feel sorry for South Africa!”

The grandeur of the mountains and verdant vineyards produced stunning vistas at every turn in the road. I admit, I was surprised to find this exotic land totally modern, splendidly clean, and the food absolutely sublime. To my dismay, the only wild animals on the loose were road-side baboons. No elephants?

Still, nothing showed me South Africa’s polarity greater than when were were seated under sun-filtered trees, sipping excellent wine at one of Franschhoek’s lovely vineyards when the owners flew in on a canary-yellow helicopter to have lunch. Contrasted to that picture of affluence and success, were the shoeless, hungry-looking township children we visited.

Jesus said, “The poor will always be with us,” but it’s still torturous to witness such disparity between the wealthy and multitudinous poor no matter what country.

Along with my traveling companions -- who all had Bridges of Hope projects of their own -- we met people from the many rainbow hues of South Africa. And, during our sightseeing forays everyone was polite and kind to us -- even when we failed to form the curious Xhosa word clicks or turned into the wrong highway lanes.

Perhaps the next time I see my indefatigable 12 reporters, they will be finished with college or running their own local newspapers. I just wish (sniff) South Africa wasn't so far away.

Author's Background Info:

My experience in journalism stems back to the 70's when I wrote feature stories for the Beach People's Easy Reader about quirky South Bay beach residents. In 1996 I earned my BA in Journalism from Cal State University Dominguez Hills and managed to land a job as a reporter for the South Bay Weekly, a community supplement which came inside the Los Angeles Times. The Chicago Tribune bought Times Mirror in 2000 and eventually closed out all the community supplements. Subsequently, I taught two journalism classes and was advisor to the CSUDH campus newspaper for a few years, then took a job with Orange Coast Magazine, which I currently hold title to as the online Charitable Events Editor.

My motto is: "Journalism doesn't have to be cut throat. To me, reporting on the goodness and kindness of others is just as important as uncovering the unspeakable."