

The Current Times

Connecting Communities – Overstrand

EDITOR'S NOTE

When we launched *The Current Times*, we dove headfirst into the world of print media and journalism, surrounded by a fantastic team – content creators, designers, layout artist, photographers, printers, and of course, our advertisers.

A huge thank you to our advertisers who took that leap of faith with us. They stepped in without knowing exactly what the final product would look like or how you, our readers, would respond.

The feedback we received from our first edition has been overwhelmingly positive, and we cannot thank you enough for the kind words and support. It really means a lot to us and to our advertisers, who deserve recognition for making this all possible. When you see their ads, take a moment to appreciate the thought and effort they put into them. They are the reason you are holding this paper in your hands.

With a little more confidence now, we are excited to bring you more stories about incredible people and topics in this edition. I hope you find something that resonates with you.

We are not just about "feel-good" articles or following a specific theme. I have always been fascinated by words, faraway countries, people and their stories – their struggles, and their triumphs. It is our intention to connect you with narratives from near and far while also highlighting the extraordinary people right in our own backyard.

So, here's to more stories, more connections, and the joy of ink on paper. We would love to hear from you, so feel welcome to write us at editorthecurrenttimes@gmail.com

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Top Car Designer 'Rolls' From Prieska To Germany To Betty's Bay

Marguerite van Wyk

Once a year, Oona Scheepers, an Afrikaans farm girl originally from Prieska in the Northern Cape, and her husband Stef, migrate to Betty's Bay to escape the cold European winter.

Four years ago, Oona resigned at the peak of her career as design department chief at the global Volkswagen Group headquartered in Wolfsburg, Germany. Here she oversaw the interior design of all VW models, worldwide.

The sixty-somethings Oona and Stef, a mechanical engineer, are enchanted with Betty's Bay. "It's where our dream to own a beach house has finally come true."

The sound of waves, birdsong with the morning's first cup of coffee and fresh air, have enticed these global citizens.

Son Sean (44) lives in Königslutter, Germany, where the couple's main interests remain. Their mini pig, Sisi, named after the once-iconic Austrian empress, also stays home. "She lives inside the house and is extremely well-mannered and clean."

It was the Karoo, so familiar and rooted in her core, that gave birth to Oona's artistic soul. She remembers being happy when it rained, adoring bright stars in inky blue skies, tumbleweeds, windmills. Toy wire cars kept her happy as a little girl. Even then she knew she would love to follow an artistic career. It is no surprise then that, when she designed the interior of the Porsche Cayenne, she was inspired by the Kalahari's palette. Oona's design of the Audi TT was influenced by the shades of a Free State thunderstorm.

"I was so privileged to attend a portrait workshop of Elize Bezuidenhout recently, one of South Africa's best artists. Capturing beauty on canvas, along with the smell of oil paint, gives endless satisfaction and inner peace. The magical view and aroma of fynbos, milkwood trees, and ocean air – together they conjure up a unique South African perfume that inspires me."

While pursuing their respective careers – two years in England and forty in Germany – the couple always kept their connections with family and friends in South Africa.

Oona's work had demanded thinking freely, teamwork, motivation and meticulous attention to detail and travel across the globe to Volkswagen Design Studios in Los Angeles, Sao Paulo, Shanghai, Puebla, Changchun and Uitenhage. She was often a guest speaker at international conferences, and a simple Google search results in

many articles written about this iconic designer. She never envisioned becoming a car designer. Long story short: after studying graphic design at the Cape University of Technology, her career path led via

England to Germany. There she worked as a freelance designer in Cologne, then joined Porsche's design department in Weissach. In 2004 she moved to Audi, where she was in charge of design, colour and trim. In 2007 a similar position followed at Volkswagen.

"One of my biggest and most rewarding challenges was the Porsche Carrera GT." Similarly, the Audi TT and Audi R8 V10 evoke emotions. "At Volkswagen, the Golf had to satisfy 18 to 80-year-olds. Both the Golf and Tiguan are considered cornerstone, high-volume, 'bread-and-butter' brands, with emotional value for the company."

She often realised her own contribution would not have been as significant had it not been for great teamwork. "For optimal results, everybody had to be in sync."

Seeing how proud clients looked on receiving the keys to their new cars gave her immense joy. "Satisfaction is the secret to life."

Oona prefers driving a Volkswagen California Beach, a type of "bus". "Good for everyday use, road trips, and transporting Stef's boats." Stef takes part in rubber-dinghy racing, as well as offshore racing, powered by a bigger boat.

They have already lined up boat races for Stef in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Norway, Belgium, and the Lake District in England.

Part of their bucket list is exploring more of South Africa. Backroads, sleepovers in tiny towns in the platteland and chatting to strangers give them joy. "We like to visit

my brother Japie MacLeod and his wife, Louise at the Gariiep Dam on the Orange River. The harvesting of cabbages, trading in town, the wonder of everyday events and the friendliness of the farming community there take me back to my roots."

Her motto: "There is no time to waste. The past is history. Embrace the future."

If you happen to bump into this unassuming artist at Kleinmond's OK MiniMark, know that Oona is renowned in the motor industry as "a prolific designer and a significant South African export – a true master of colour and trim."



Oona inside the Volkswagen Up! Her design philosophy for this model focused on minimalism, durability and a high-quality aesthetic.



Oona's spectacular interior design for the Porsche Carrera GT captures a perfect blend of timeless elegance and functionality.



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From Hermanus To Glasgow: Top Tenor's Remarkable Journey

Marguerite van Wyk

Luvo Maranti, one of South Africa's brightest young tenors, started his journey to international laurels and fame in Hermanus, and the Overberg is still close to his heart. Now based in Glasgow on a two-year contract with Scotland's national opera company, Scottish Opera, since August last year, he misses his sunny homeland when the miserable wetness of Scotland gets to him. And though enchanted by Scotland's history, architecture, and Scottish kindness, it was unforgettably in Hermanus where the road to his "new life" in opera started.

"Performing in Scotland has been a huge boost to my career. Since arriving, I've performed in seventeen locations. It was also magnificent to see the green Scottish Highlands, visit the Isle of Barra and Isle of Arran, and experience my first ferry trip."

He is now in the midst of gruelling rehearsals for the world premiere at the Theatre Royal in Glasgow of composer Dai Fujikura's opera, *The Great Wave*. Based on the life of the great Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai, Luvo sings the role of the grandson.

Chatting via a WhatsApp call, this unassuming dad of five-month-old son Ngcali, and husband of Elizabeth Letsoalo, has been surrounded by music since birth. Nelson, his grandfather, a retired Eastern Cape farmer, is a gifted music sight-reader. "We grew up singing in church with my dad, Maxwell – also a great tenor." A conductor and composer as well, his dad taught Luvo the tonic sol-fa.

From his dad, Luvo received the CD *Pavarotti & Friends* as an eight-year-old. "I connected with Pavarotti's voice on a spiritual level. It was an awakening, and I wanted to sing exactly like him."

But before studying opera, he first obtained a human resources



degree from the University of Fort Hare. To feed his love for music, he joined the university choir.

His opera journey began while doing his HR internship at the abalone producer Abagold in Hermanus, where he was part of the Abagold Choir's performance at the FynArts Festival in 2018. But his soul was still yearning for "something."

"Then my HR manager encouraged me to attend a masterclass with the late George Stevens, acting director of the University of Cape Town's opera school." He had found his niche and home: UCT Opera.

"God has given me the gift of singing. I use it to serve Him."

In 2023, Luvo was one of 34 finalists selected from 800 international entries to participate in Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo's Operalia at Artscape in Cape Town. Operalia is hailed as the "Oscars of the opera world."

For Luvo, hard work is non-negotiable. "A singer is like an athlete. You have to oil the joints. Runners jog. I do daily vocal exercises. It's a taxing profession because you deal with emotions. People pay money and sacrifice time to watch opera," which he describes as like a "live movie performance."

On family life, he says being a dad is the best feeling on earth and a challenge. "Thank goodness for my wonderful wife. Good communication is key. My wife always knows where I am. On long trips, I phone my son every night before he goes to bed and sing him a lullaby."

Luvo wants to share his knowledge, hopefully in masterclasses in South Africa.

His dream role? "Rudolfo, in Puccini's *La Bohème*. It's the peak of a tenor's career."

A 20-Something's Guide To Small Towns

Luchuané Hechter

Your camera is packed, beach bag ready, and you have finally bought that new swimsuit. The small-town breakaway is happening, where the only lights you will see are the stars. As a 20-something, I have looked endlessly for things to do in my little home village and its surrounding areas to beat the boredom and keep young minds busy.

Starting strong, ditch your BookTok list and reconnect with the classics. Second-hand bookstores offer fantastic collections and a wide variety of genres. Once you have your books, pop by the locals' favourite coffee shops where you can indulge in soothing coffee sips, silky-smooth milkshakes, excellent food, and of course, the best atmospheres! After a hearty meal, step into tranquillity and reconnect with nature. Betty's Bay offers plenty of open spaces to find your inner-calm, whether it is next to a colony of penguins, the beach, or a short hike to the Disakloof waterfall in the Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. Park at one of the stops on Clarence Drive Pass to watch the sunset (and maybe some whales), to admire the general splendour of the beautiful biosphere and magic that is found in this little piece of paradise. We hope you enjoy your stay; may your hearts be filled and peace be restored!

For the readers and art lovers:

Between The Lines (Kleinmond)
Oupa se Boekwinkel (2 shops) (Kleinmond)
Harold Porter Book and Gift Shop (Betty's Bay)
Em's Books (Pringle Bay)
Liberty Books (Peregrine Farm Stall - Grabouw)
FoMo Fine Art Gallery (R44 Pringle Bay entrance)
Hermanus First Fridays Artwalk (Hermanus)
Corinne Haas Pottery Gallery (Kleinmond's Harbour Rd)
Local libraries
Judy Mac Gallery (Kleinmond)
Hemingway's Books (Hermanus)

For the food and markets enthusiasts:

Menucha Coffee and Crafts (Pringle Bay)
Carry Me Home Restaurant and Deli (Kleinmond)
Wild Horse (Kleinmond)
Elgin Railway Market (Elgin, Grabouw)
The Book Club (Pringle Bay)
Gossip Corner & Drummond Arms (Rooi Els)
Various weekend markets in Betty's Bay
Hermanus Country Market (Saturdays - Hermanus)
Houw Hoek Farm Stall (Elgin, Grabouw)
Peregrine Farm Stall (Elgin, Grabouw)
Coffee, On Clarence (Betty's Bay)

For the explorer:

Harold Porter National Botanical Garden (Betty's Bay)
Betty's Bay Main Beach (Betty's Bay)
Kleinmond Beach (a blue flag beach)
Stony Point Penguin Colony (Betty's Bay)
Palmiet River (Between Kleinmond & Betty's Bay)
Jean's Hill hiking trail (Kleinmond)
Dappat Se Gat (Clarence Drive - R44)
Caledon K3 Zipline (longest in the world - Caledon)
Platbos Indigenous Forest Trail (You can also plant a tree as part of the reforestation initiative - Grootbos Road, Gansbaai)



Luchuané on a daily walk to the Stony Point penguin colony, Betty's Bay

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More Is Merrier: A Pathway to Prosperity

Marie-Luce Vogel

Discover the quiet magic that happens when choice comes to town. A little friendly rivalry on the high street doesn't just give us better bread or coffee, it sparks innovation, builds community, and turns a sleepy lane into a vibrant hub. From the first whiff of fresh-baked croissants to the surprising partnerships that make us all richer, this is a heartfelt reminder that progress is baked daily, and the real winner is everyone.

"The more the merrier," says an old 14th-century English proverb. It means a bigger crowd makes things more fun, even if there's less to go around. But does it hold true in business? Absolutely, and here's why more competition is often the best thing that can happen to a town.

Picture a quiet street in Rooiels or Stanford with just one bakery or grocer. The bread's okay, the prices are whatever the owner feels like charging, and stale loaves linger because there's no pressure to do better. Now imagine a new coffee shop opens across the road, selling fancy loaves, confectionery, and staying open later. Suddenly the air fills with the smell of fresh baking. The original shop fights back with new pastries, lower prices, and extended hours. The newcomer introduces loyalty programmes and free samples. Everyone wins, especially the customers.

This isn't just small-town daydreaming. Look at smartphones: rivals keep leapfrogging each other with better cameras, faster chips, and sleeker designs. Electric cars are racing ahead on battery life and safety while prices drop. Online giants and smaller platforms battle with same-day delivery and easy returns. Streaming services flood us with original shows and flexible plans. Closer to home, Checkers' Sixty60 pioneered ultra-fast grocery delivery. When Dash and 2U arrived, the competition heated up. Yet Sixty60 still leads because it got the head start and kept innovating.

That same energy shows up on our local streets. When the first little coffee shop opened on the main road, people noticed. Eyebrows were raised, sideways glances exchanged. Then more cars and bicycles appeared. Another café popped up, followed by a deli, an art gallery run by a local who'd returned with fresh ideas. Pavements grew busy. Neighbours lingered over coffee. Young people found jobs and stayed. Older shops spruced up their windows. What began as one new venture became a shared revival, proof that growth doesn't erase a town's character; it helps it breathe.

New businesses bring choices, better service, fairer prices, and jobs that keep talent local. They push established owners to innovate and collaborate. More foot traffic lifts everyone: For the coffee shops, the gift, shops, and for business services. The whole area feels alive, hopeful, connected. Food courts in malls show the same principle, but a favourite example is *Rue des Bouchers* in Brussels with its narrow, cobblestoned sidewalks, lined with restaurants on

both sides, waiters beckoning you in, atmosphere spilling everywhere. Think of the bustling Middle Eastern souk. When similar businesses cluster, they create a destination. Customers come for the variety, stay for the vibe, and everyone benefits.

Sometimes rivals even team up to create co-opetition. A perfect recent example hit the headlines in January 2026: South African Airways and privately owned CemAir struck a domestic codeshare deal. They still compete on service and routes, but by sharing flights they've opened more connections, boosted tourism, and grown the whole market. As Kenneth Blanchard put it: "None of us is as smart as all of us."

Competition and cooperation naturally lead to clustering. In the Overberg we already have brilliant examples. The Grabouw and Elgin area clusters fruit, cider, wine tasting, farm shops, restaurants, and seasonal festivals into one irresistible package. The Whale Coast offers whale watching, shark cage diving, mountain trails, top-notch accommodation, and eateries. Walker Bay and Hemel-en-Aarde draw crowds with wine and scenery. Stanford's riverside heritage and artisan shops pull visitors in, while the Hangklip-Kleinmond-Betty's Bay stretch delivers stunning and unique nature experiences, penguin viewing, sports events, and cosy eateries. These clusters don't split the pie; they make it bigger.

Of course, competition can turn cut-throat and stressful. Unhealthy rivalry breeds burnout and bad behaviour. The antidote is a growth mindset and what Stephen Covey called an "abundance mentality," the belief there are enough resources and successes to share. The opposite, a scarcity mindset, sees every new business as a threat: "If you win, I lose." Picture this: Two coffee shops opened metres apart. One owner watches the other's door, convinced every customer was stolen. The second owner waves, sends overflow guests next door, and hosts events. Soon the immediate areas buzz with people. The generous shop thrives because it helps grow the whole market. An abundance mindset creates collaboration, referrals, and resilience. It attracts visitors, talent, and investment. Property values rise. Young people move in and older folk stay. The town becomes a place people choose, not one they leave.

So, here's the call to local business owners: choose collaboration and a growth and abundance approach over destructive rivalry.

Base competition on quality and ideas and growth for all.

Trust there's enough for everyone. Organise events, cross-promote, make the destination irresistible. Good ethics and open communication turn competitors into allies who lift the whole community. As Wayne Dyer said, "Abundance is not something we acquire; it is something we tune into." Why settle for scarcity when so much is already here, waiting for us to notice?



Each year, shops along High Street in Hermanus come together to host a festive Christmas soiree - an evening of shopping, fun, and celebration for the community.



Dr. Marie-Luce Vogel
Entrepreneur, research scientist, author and academic of international trade and competitiveness.

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Economic Outlook: What Every Overstrander Should Know

Cobus Venter



Cobus Venter
Senior Economist at the Bureau for Economic Research and long time fan of all things Betty's Bay. I write in my personal capacity.

It is easy to feel disheartened about our economy. The news is filled with surreal levels of corruption, often baffling political decisions, and all too often, terrible crime. We have become so accustomed to bad news that it feels like our default setting. But are things really that bleak, and what does the near-term future hold?

There is no denying that the lived reality for most South Africans is tough. The vast majority of citizens are objectively poor. About half of those fortunate enough to have jobs earn only minimum wages. The informal sector is thriving, and recent reports suggesting it is much larger than estimated, are likely accurate. Yet most people would still prefer a "formal" job to send their children to decent schools and provide for their families, all while living without the fear of violence.

General investment levels in South Africa remain below pre-Covid figures. Most investment focuses on areas like renewable energy, which do not impact ordinary people in the short term. Property prices have been depressed for many years across the country, with real (inflation-adjusted) declines in most regions. Fortunately, the Western Cape stands apart, but more on that later. Consumers are feeling the pinch from inflation, especially regarding essentials like electricity and food. The government has run out of fiscal space and is forced to extract even more taxes. Additionally, our government appears uncertain about its role in the world, conducting military drills with countries like Iran and Russia, which angers the Americans and their president. These factors have significant implications for the country.

So yes, there are plenty of reasons to be unhappy.

However, could there also be reasons for optimism in 2026? While it is impossible to predict the future with certainty, we can identify trends and important inflection points. My role involves understanding our economic landscape and predicting potential paths forward. We are adept at spotting turning points, and in this regard, there are several reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the upcoming year.

It is fair to say that the primary drivers of our economic performance hinge on political factors. This year features several high-impact events, such as the election of the DA leadership and the local government elections, between begin-November 2026 and end-January 2027. The ANC is preparing for its own election conference in December 2027. The coalition in KZN is incredibly fragile, with parties contesting fiercely. All of this is bound to generate noise and occasional violence.

Last year's general election resulted in a coalition government. While it is messy, it is holding together. We do not expect the chaos of last year's budget to repeat. Most analysts believe the government of national unity will remain intact until closer to the next national elections. Structural reforms have seen steady improvements; the pace may be slow, but it is gaining traction. While we continue to experience load reduction in many areas regularly, we have not faced significant load shedding from ESKOM as the grid gradually improves.


Progress is real.

This is especially true for those of us living in the Western Cape, and even more so in the Overstrand.

Inflation is down and is expected to remain low, with the exception of administered prices like electricity. We are concerned about the impact of foot-and-mouth disease on prices and livelihoods – this is a genuine crisis. Still, our inflation rate is now broadly aligned with that of our trading partners. This has not been the case since the early 1970s, and if sustained, the implications are massive. It suggests that interest rates could decline further, and the rand might continue to strengthen or at least maintain its strength. Our current expectation is that 2026 will see the SARB cut rates by 50-75 basis points, in addition to last year's reductions. This is encouraging news for businesses and homeowners. In time, lower inflation and interest rates will play a crucial role in making the country's debt more manageable. The oil price is behaving nicely and is expected to stay in the mid-\$60s for the foreseeable future, barring major upheaval in regions like Iran. There may be short-term volatility, but the strengthening rand means that the impact on petrol prices remains manageable. Commodity prices are currently high, carrying inherent risks, but the windfall from exports is likely to bolster government revenues this year. The rand is expected to trade below R16.50/\$ throughout the year.

We are not out of the woods by any means. The damage inflicted on the economy, public sentiment, and state institutions during the last years will take considerable time to repair. However, they are no longer deteriorating.

We expect the economy to expand by 1.5% this year, inflation-adjusted, compared to only 0.8% last year. Consumer spending set to increase across all sectors. While GDP growth may be double that of last year, per capita growth remains flat. We need much more than 1.5% – closer to a sustained 3% – to make meaningful inroads into poverty and unemployment. Many initiatives are underway in that direction, and private sector involvement is at its highest in years.




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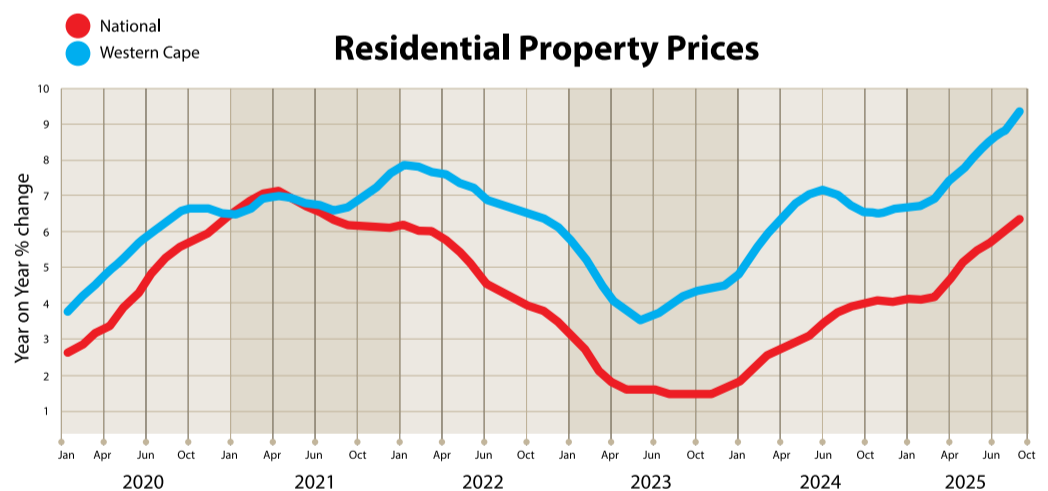


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THE PAM GOLDING WAY



Our surveys indicate more positive sentiments across various sectors, albeit from low baselines. This is finally also true for the residential sector.

The Western Cape has consistently outperformed national averages for several years. "Semigration" from other provinces and increased tourism in the Western Cape have contributed to property prices and volumes in areas like Cape Town and the Overstrand growing significantly faster than national averages. This trend is accelerating further. Reforms to the visa regime and increased traffic through Cape Town airport have also bolstered tourism in the region.

Things are looking up for the country as a whole, and our area in particular. As things currently stand, 2026 is poised to be a better year. It may not be a bumper year, but I, as an economist, probably should add an "on the other hand" here.

While it's easy to focus on the negatives to which we have grown accustomed, we do not live in Johannesburg, where water shortages are frequent. The pipes that burst in our town get repaired within hours or days – not months. So perhaps this time, the "other hand" should be pictured holding a cappuccino from *Coffee, on Clarence* while gazing at the ocean.

Let us appreciate being part of this little slice of paradise, take the bad news on the chin, and carry on.

From Sailor To Saviour Michelle Watson's Wildlife Rescue Mission

Marguerite van Wyk

For the past three years, Michelle Watson, a certified wildlife rehabilitator of Pringle Bay hasn't had a day's leave.

"This career chose me, it consumes my life," she admits.



Recently, Michelle happily took in genet babies who lost their mother in wildfires, bottlefeeding them through the night. "Genets are my spirit animal. They are adorable, similar to the civet. Before that, I nursed porcupine and mongoose babies."

Michelle is one of the first South Africans accredited by the International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council (IWRC). Having done extensive courses, she was contacted by Kogelberg Biosphere CEO Corlie Hugo after the 2022 fires in Overstrand.

Corlie says: "A UNESCO biosphere reserve since 1998, the Kogelberg Biosphere was inaugurated in February 2025 as the only facility in the Western Cape to rehabilitate and release indigenous birds, mammals and reptiles into their natural habitat."

Michelle and a team of volunteers work at the Kogelberg Biosphere Wildlife Rescue and Training Centre on the R44, halfway between Betty's Bay and Pringle Bay. Without road signage, it is easily mistaken for the guest house next door.

"Ours is a work in progress. We are pretty busy and have so far saved approximately 370 animals," says Michelle.

Michelle wanted to become a vet. "But my matric marks weren't great. Instead, I went sailing and travelled the world for 20 years."

But somewhere in the Atlantic, she found an exhausted bird on deck. Cradling it in her jacket, she fed and eventually released it. "What a feeling to have saved something."

Returning to Johannesburg, she lived next to a wildlife centre, became a volunteer, and the rest is history.

"In 2019, I founded Wildlife Rescue South Africa and started teaching short wildlife courses based on IRWC standards. There is no facility in South Africa where wildlife rehabilitators can get extensive qualifications, similar to a university degree. My long-term aim is to establish a world-class facility at our rescue centre."

No injured animal is considered too small or insignificant for attention: mice, goslings, snakes, porcupines, genets, tortoises – all merit attention. "We focus on our national bird, the blue crane. What a thrill when the first two chicks were released one year after intake."

Compassion fatigue is a huge challenge for rescue workers. "The job is emotionally draining. We try to ease animals' suffering, but the survival rate of injured wildlife is low. When humans bring them to us, they are usually close to death. We aim to release wildlife into their natural habitats to compensate for declines in species numbers. But often the only option when they arrive here is euthanasia. Children recently threw rocks at a blue crane in Bot River. Her collarbone broke. Afterwards, we went back to teach the children to respect our lovely national bird. This is not the only incident, sadly."

Most injuries are human-related – car accidents, fires, snares, gunshots, and fencing entanglement.

"Cuddles and 'baby talk' are forbidden at the



rescue centre. Animals should retain a healthy fear of humans to integrate into their natural habitat successfully."

Michelle stresses about funding. "Without an anonymous donor's input of R400 000 in our first year, the rescue centre would not have been able to survive. We receive no funds from the government. And often we work without salaries."

The rescue centre urgently needs an ambulance. The community has donated furniture, paint and time to renovate the building. "But running costs are astronomical: medication, animal food, fuel, cleaning products, maintenance, vet bills and educational programmes", says Michelle.

Pragmatism is part of Michelle's mental armour. "You have to make the best decision for the animal." Whenever she feels down, she tries to focus on stories of hope. The peaceful seaside village of Betty's Bay soothes her soul. "I'm not a city girl."

Donate and support this rescue mission:
www.kogelbergbiosphere.org.za

Property expertise rooted in the Overberg



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Anita van Schaik
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Betty's Bay
Jo-Anne Bursey
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Lorraine Henning
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The Inimitable Mrs. Brüning

Marguerite van Wyk

Mrs. Brüning has become a well-known local brand, with little known about the woman behind the business, Leensi Brüning.

You have likely seen her around town – her exotic appearance, her can-do attitude and sense of fun: aqua-blue hair, bright red lips, dramatic eye make-up, green nail polish – matching matcha, her favourite drink.

Her business has taken off after years of dedication and perseverance. Leensi crafts bespoke leather bags using her cherished 1920s hand-sewing machine – one of twelve in her collection. When kykNET featured her stunning creations in a Kwêla episode, the response was overwhelming. Orders for her custom-made bags started pouring in from all over South Africa, and soon her unique pieces found homes in the UK, Europe, and the USA. Today, custom orders are booked months ahead of time.

Each bag tells a story, showcasing intricate designs, from beloved pets to masterpieces like Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night* and Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*. "Creating realistic images on leather is quite the challenge," she shares, adding, "Life is too beautiful for a boring handbag. Scare your adult self with your inner child and try something new!"

Her creative process is as intriguing as the person she is – one single colour can inspire an entire new collection of bags. In the case of Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, she found a piece of cobalt blue leather which reminded her of a tiny piece of the night sky in the original 1889 painting. This version of the artwork is now one of *Mrs. Brüning's* most popular pieces.

Listening to her, being multitasking is given new meaning. She is an animal welfare supporter, she paints, is a mushroom foraging expert, a skilled seamstress, and a qualified hairdresser. Plus, she loves to cook and garden. Her dad, Willie Boshoff, is quite the character; back in their small Free State town of Fauresmith, his medical practice looked more like an art gallery, proudly showcasing Leensi's artwork.

Leensi reminisces about her childhood, saying, "When I was young, people stared at me because of my limp. It

was embarrassing. At least now I give them something to stare at!" Born without a hip socket (*acetabulum*), she has learned to navigate life with resilience and a sense of fun. "I've never known a normal body," she admits, but her motto is simple: "The obstacle is the way." For her, finding creative solutions to problems is what keeps life exciting.

Family is everything to Leensi. She is close to her retired parents, who live nearby in Kleinmond, as well as her husband, Bonsai and their 13-year-old son, William. "He resembles me, always figuring out stuff, dreaming, and creating," she beams. Their home is filled with love, especially for their rescue dogs – two delightful pavement specials. Alice has the personality of Freddie Mercury, dancing through life, while Rex is the gentle giant of the household.

Leensi and Bonsai's love story began 24 years ago at a braai in Bloemfontein. "He calls me a Swiss knife – high quality and versatile," she chuckles. Before moving to Kleinmond nine years ago, they lived in Yorkshire, Britain, where Bonsai was a cage fighter while Leensi was a hairdresser and baker. Her cakes were works of art, shaped like flowers, dogs, and even characters from *The Lord of the Rings*. "The only cake I'll bake again will be for my funeral," she jokes.

Now, Bonsai works as a sound engineer, teaming up for film shoots with local and international productions. Together, they make videos about particular topics and recently snagged a silver award for their short film, *Nature Calls Everyone*, at the International Tourism Festival Africa.

While her hip can be frustrating, Leensi has learned to focus on what she can do. "I had to accept that I will never run a marathon, but I swim like a mermaid," she says, enjoying daily free dives in the Kleinmond ocean, sometimes playing with an octopus that joyfully interacts with her walking stick. Remarkably, she has even dived with spotted gully sharks.

Recently, Leensi has taken up tattoo art, teaching herself through YouTube tutorials. "Bonsai offered a quarter of his back as a 'canvas'."

Leensi has been invited to do a solo exhibition at



Hermanus' smallest art gallery, *The Little Wolf Museum*, located at *Mr. Write Tea & Gift Café*. "I am working on miniature art pieces in an animal theme. I will not do small portraits for the next 20 years."

So, what is next for this creative dynamo? "I never want to stop learning." With her zest for life and boundless creativity, Leensi continues to inspire those around her.



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Ladders Of Life: Where Do You Stand On The Happiness Scale?

Kristi Maree (Editor)

A visit to Afghanistan is unlikely to be on anyone's radar in the near future. In contrast, travel to Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, or Iceland ranks high on many bucket lists.

Finland is the happiest country in the world in 2025 – so says The World Happiness Report – for the 8th consecutive year. The same report notes that Afghanistan is the unhappiest country. It also explains that the opposite of happiness is, in fact, despair.

Spoiler alert: in the 2025 report, South Africa ranks 95th out of 147 countries.

The World Happiness Report, commissioned for the United Nations Conference on Happiness in 2012, has become an important annual survey that ranks countries based on citizens' self-reported happiness. First published by The Earth Institute, the report looks at factors influencing well-being and serves as a resource for governments and organisations in policy-making.

Five of the top ten countries are Nordic. This raises questions about a potential correlation between colder climates and happiness. On the flip side, Afghanistan ranks last at 147th, with Afghan women reporting the lowest happiness scores recorded in the report's 14-year history.

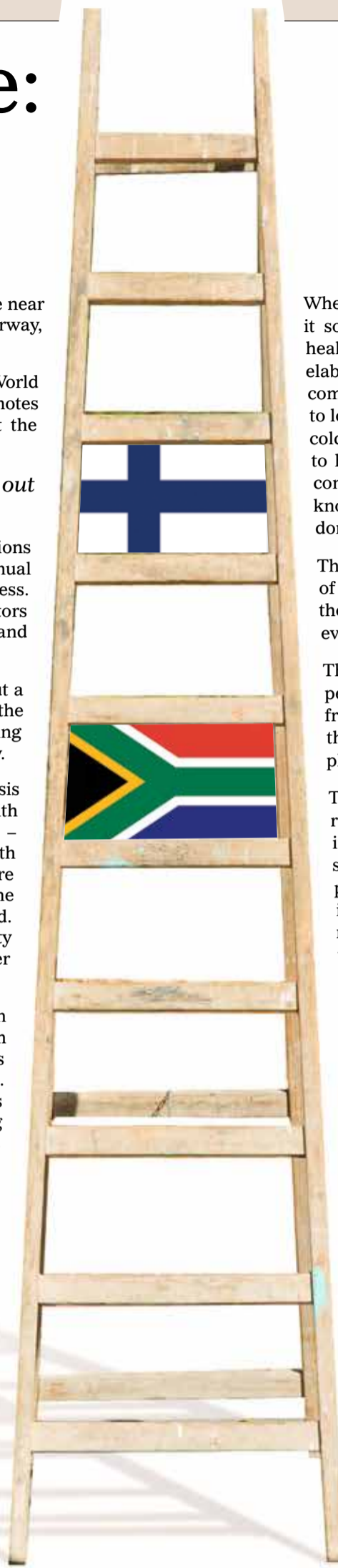
Despair in Afghanistan stems from a profound, multi-layered crisis that has intensified since the Taliban took power in August 2021. With extreme poverty, severe food insecurity, and restrictions on rights – especially for women and girls – many Afghans are grappling with an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. The collapsing healthcare system adds to their struggles, leaving over two-thirds of the population, about 22.9 million people, reliant on humanitarian aid. This despair not only affects mental health but also erodes community bonds, making it incredibly difficult for people to imagine a brighter future.

The happiness rankings use a single life evaluation question known as the Cantril Ladder: "Imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, while the bottom represents the worst. On which step would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?" This question is both democratic and universal, allowing individuals to assess what is most important to them, regardless of cultural or personal background. It avoids direct references to happiness, well-being, or satisfaction, making it easily translatable into multiple languages.

The ratings reflect an average out of 10, with Finland's happiness average at 7.73, while Afghanistan's is only 1.36.

During a recent festive season visit to the Overstrand, two Finnish families shared insights about their status as the happiest country in the world. Jukka Lappalainen said, "We know we're lucky to live in Finland and are aware of the World Happiness Report."

When discussing the reasons for their happiness, their replies came fast. "We trust each other. We trust our government. We feel safe. It's safe for our children to ride their bicycles or walk alone to school from the age of seven," they explained. The effectiveness of the education and healthcare systems, accessible to everyone regardless of income, along with a lack of corruption and the responsible use of high taxes were also mentioned.



Jukka Lappalainen
Anna Savolainen
Talitha Lappalainen
Mats Westerborn
Ninny Olin
Malin Westerborn
Naledi Westerborn
Anton Tenhonen



When asked about worries, Anna Savolainen replied, "I know it sounds weird, but while we do worry about things like health, in our everyday life, we have no major worries." She elaborated on how living in extreme cold creates a sense of community, saying: "When you live in extreme cold, you have to look out for each other. You can't leave someone out in the cold or they may die. It really comes down to being willing to help others." The small populations of Nordic countries contribute to a sense of familiarity among neighbours. "You know your neighbours, and you know a lot of people. You don't feel lonely," Anna said.

The natural beauty of Finland was also listed as a source of happiness, with Jukka adding, "We are the country of a thousand lakes and beautiful forests, and we appreciate it every day."

The families' visit to South Africa was motivated by a personal connection; their two daughters were adopted from Pretoria. They came here to show their daughters their birthplace and to visit the Overstrand, a must-visit place on their list.

The conversation with these Finnish families may trigger reflection on life in South Africa, and particularly on living in the Overstrand. The residents in local communities show genuine care for one another, and municipal and provincial services and infrastructure often surpass those in other regions. The stunning beauty of the ocean, the mountains, the picturesque Clarence Drive, beaches, vineyards, and hiking trails show that the Overstrand and Finland might have more in common than the World Happiness Report suggests.

Happiness is often shaped by our connections with others, the communities we belong to, and the values we hold dear. When people are actively involved in their communities and have strong social ties, they tend to feel happier. It's those friendships and support networks that make a real difference.

Mental health support, access to fun activities, and opportunities for personal growth also play critical roles in how we experience happiness.

Now, picture that ladder again, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The bottom step represents the worst possible life for you, and the top the best possible life – on which step do you feel you stand now? And most importantly, how does your answer compare to South Africa's happiness average of 5.21?

(The World Happiness Report is the world's foremost publication on global wellbeing and how to improve it. The annual report is published by the University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre in partnership with Gallup and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network.)



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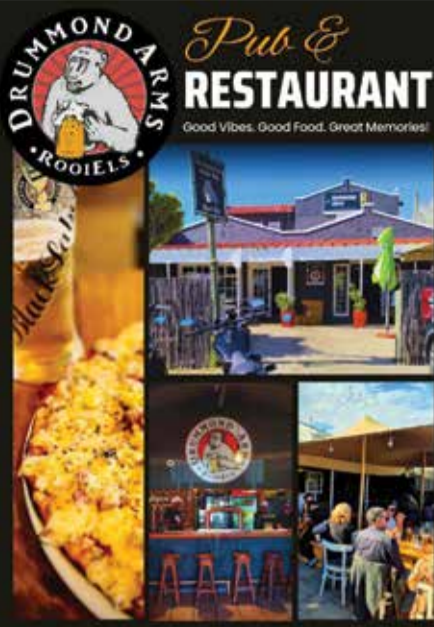
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BOOK BITS

BOOK REVIEWS...

Local Authors

Dieper as Drome

by Marko van der Colf ★★★★★



Dieper as drome is the debut novel by the late actor Marko van der Colff, who, as a local resident of Betty's Bay, brought a unique perspective to his storytelling. Sadly, Marko passed away on December 20, 2025.

The story revolves around Marcus Moore, a half-Irish young man who leaves his struggling childhood home in Scotland after a violent incident. With eyes sparkling with hope, he boards a ship to South Africa, dreaming of the diggings in Kimberley and the lively Gold City.

As Marcus dives into this vibrant world, he meets a mix of legendary fortune seekers, swindlers, and self-made tycoons like Barney Barnato. He also crosses paths with historical figures such as Olive Schreiner, Cecil John Rhodes, and Paul Kruger, which adds depth to his journey. The setting is a fascinating time in South Africa's history, filled with action and drama, all under the looming shadow of the Empire.

At its core, this novel weaves a timeless love story into the fabric of ambition and adventure. It's well-researched and a joy to read, reminiscent of the works of Lerina Erasmus and Wilbur Smith. Marko captures a moment in time when gemstones lay deeper than dreams, inviting readers into a richly detailed landscape where the quest for wealth and love intertwines. It's a compelling read for anyone curious about South Africa's past and the timeless human spirit.

Available: Amazon, Exclusive Books, Coffee, On Clarence (Betty's Bay)

Once upon a Time in the Karoo

by Michael J. Rossi ★★★★★



Once Upon A Time In The Karoo by Michael J. Rossi is a charming and thought-provoking read that dives into the life of Khuda, a fisherman who leaves his ocean home in search of safety and hope. Imagine being uprooted and finding yourself in the vast Karoo desert - 500 kilometers from the sea! Khuda's journey is both humorous and poignant as he encounters a quirky cast of characters, embodying the oddities and superstitions of this new world. Khuda becomes known as The Chicken Man.

Rossi, who lived in Betty's Bay until his death on December 2, 2025, brings a unique perspective to this tale. His ability to blend humor with deeper themes of fear and belonging makes the story resonate on many levels. This is his second novel, following *Internet Dating in the Karoo*, and it showcases his talent for capturing life's unpredictable twists. Overall, it's a delightful story that reminds us of the resilience of the human spirit, no matter where we find ourselves.

Available: Amazon, Exclusive Books, Coffee, On Clarence (Betty's Bay)



Long Story Short COMPETITION

Mr. Write's Café in Hermanus, in collaboration with The Current Times, is excited to invite writers and curious storytellers to take part in a Short Story Competition that celebrates big ideas in small spaces.

Participants are invited to submit an original short story in any genre. The winning entry will be featured in an upcoming edition of The Current Times, giving writers the chance to share their voice with the community and see their work in print.

Ah, but there's a twist! Stories must be written in English and contain no more than 155 words — the same number of words used in this very announcement. It's proof that strong writing isn't about length, but about choosing each word with care. See? A lot was said using only a few words.

Ready to write?

Put pen to paper and send your entry to mrwrite.hermanus@gmail.com by 5 April 2026.

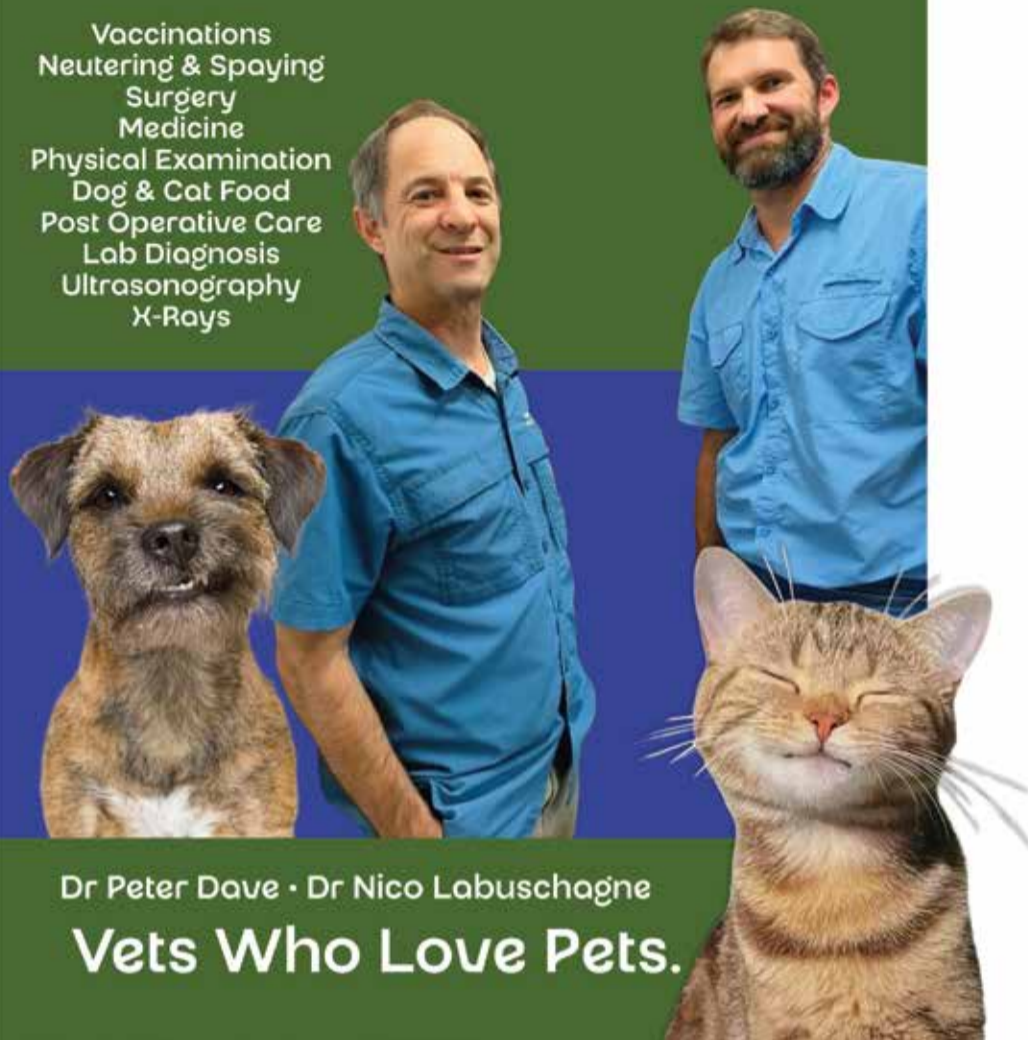


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Clearing Up Some Myths About Menopause

Karen Nebe

Menopause is a major health transition for women, often surrounded by a cloud of myths and misinformation. These misunderstandings can delay care, increase suffering, and leave women feeling alone and unsupported.



Myth 1: Menopause is just about your period stopping and hot flushes.

Actually, it's much more than that. Menopause is a neuroendocrine transition, meaning it affects both your brain and hormones. It involves a fundamental rewiring and remodelling of the brain due to decreasing estrogen. This change can lead to a wide range of symptoms affecting the entire body – over 70 documented ones, in fact.

Myth 2: Menopause is always a natural, age-related process.

While menopause is often seen as a natural part of ageing, it can also occur due to medical and other external reasons. Procedures like hysterectomies, the removal of ovaries, chemotherapy, certain medications, and even trauma can trigger it. More women are experiencing early or premature menopause, which can hit suddenly and intensely.

Myth 3: Menopause is just something women “go through”.

Let's be clear: menopause is not temporary. It marks the permanent end of hormone production, including estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone. This means women may spend 30 to 40 years in this hormone-deficient state. This can significantly impact bone health, heart health, brain function, metabolism, and overall quality of life. It's crucial to view menopause as a long-term health

issue rather than a brief moment.

Myth 4: What you're experiencing is “normal” – it's just part of life.

This is a dangerous misconception, often referred to as “gaslighting”. Yes, many women today are living longer – and much of that extended lifespan is spent in poor health. A major driver of this is long-term hormone deficiency. Did you know that 1 in 2 women develop osteoporosis; 2 out of 3 patients with Alzheimer's/dementia are women; heart disease is the biggest cause of death in women? Women need to advocate for themselves and should insist on shared decision-making, better care, and education from their practitioners.

Myth 5: Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is dangerous.

Fear surrounding HRT comes from misinformation and misinterpretation. The truth is, modern, body-identical HRT is considered the gold standard and is safe and effective for most women. Studies show it can protect against osteoporosis, dementia, heart disease, and even reduce the risk of some cancers. In fact, estrogen therapy can lower breast cancer risk by up to 40% if started during perimenopause. It's about making informed choices rather than letting fear influence them.

Myth 6: HRT fixes everything.

While hormone therapy can be a game-changer, it's not a magic bullet. Navigating menopause calls for a whole-person approach. Think about nutrition, exercise, sleep, stress management, emotional well-being, relationships, and finding purpose – all these factors play a huge role. How a woman lives and how she treats herself will greatly shape her experience during this stage of life.

Myth 7: Menopause signals decline and ageing.

Let's flip the script: menopause isn't an ending. With the right knowledge, support, and self-leadership, it can be a powerful chapter filled with clarity, confidence, and renewed agency. When we replace myths with compassionate, correct information, women can face menopause not in silence or fear, but with understanding, support, and choices.



Karen Nebe

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Why We Get Angry When We Are Hungry

Kristi Maree (Editor)

Ever found yourself fuming at the friendly Starbucks barista in Hermanus for misspelling your name on your coffee cup, only to realise you have not eaten anything since breakfast? Welcome to the world of being “hangry.” It is a phenomenon many of us can relate to – where hunger morphs into irritability faster than you can say snack time.

The word “hangry” actually goes way back to 1956 when it showed up in a psychoanalytic journal called “American Imago”, describing how hunger can make people irritable. Even though it really took off in popularity during the 2010s, it didn’t get its official place in the Oxford English Dictionary until 2018.

What is happening in our bodies when we feel this way? Professor Stephen Devereux, at the University of the Western Cape, explains that hunger triggers a cascade of physiological changes. This notion underscores that when our bodies are deprived of nutrients, it can lead to heightened irritability.

When your body runs low on glucose, your brain sets off the alarm and tells your adrenal glands to release stress hormone – specifically, epinephrine and cortisol. These hormones kick in that “fight or flight” response, pushing you to go out and find food, no matter what. This rush can make you feel anxious and on edge, as if your body is gearing up to battle for that next meal. Since we do not actually hunt for food anymore, even the smallest annoyances can feel like a big deal, turning minor frustrations into major threats.

Bonginkosi Ndimba, founder of the Bongs Ndimba Foundation, highlights the cultural understanding of this phenomenon. “There is a Zulu idiom, ‘Indlala

ibanga ulaka,’ which means ‘hunger causes anger. Most of us get a bit agitated when we haven’t eaten or slept well.” This speaks to the universal experience of hangriness, reinforcing the idea that our emotional responses are closely tied to our physical state.

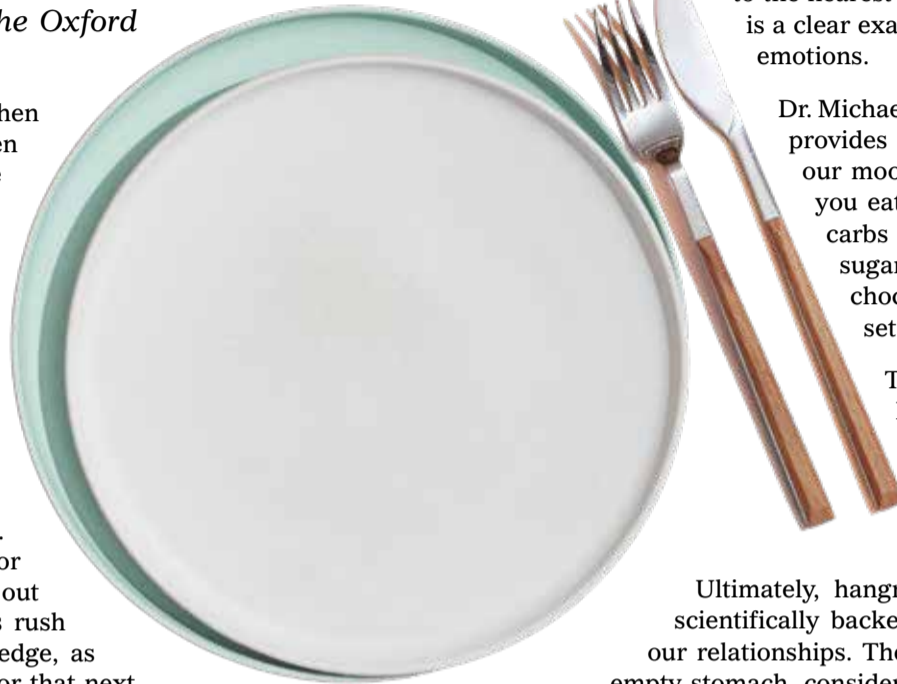
Imagine sitting in a Pringle Bay ratepayers association meeting, and your stomach suddenly rumbles as the discussion shifts to baboon matters. The speaker drones on about the latest sightings, but all you can think about is how you forgot to grab a snack before heading out. The discussion becomes excruciating as your focus shifts from community issues to the nearest food option - “is The Book Club open tonight?” It is a clear example of how hunger can distort our attention and emotions.

Dr. Michael Thompson, a nutritionist based in Johannesburg, provides additional insight on how what we eat impacts our mood. “It is not just about hunger – it is about what you eat,” he explains. “Foods high in sugar and refined carbs can lead to quick spikes and crashes in blood sugar, exacerbating the hangry cycle.” While a slab of chocolate may seem tempting in the afternoon, it could set you up for an emotional rollercoaster later on.

To combat this hangry phenomenon, Professor Devereux recommends regular meals and snacks rich in protein and healthy fats. “Think of it as fuelling your emotional engine.” When blood sugar levels are stable, you are less likely to devolve into frustration over trivial matters.

Ultimately, hangriness is more than just a quirky term; it is a scientifically backed phenomenon that can disrupt our moods and our relationships. The next time you feel the tension rising due to an empty stomach, consider the science behind it. A thoughtful snack might just be the remedy you need to return to your level-headed self. In a world where stress can escalate quickly, recognising the role of hunger when it comes to out emotions, is crucial for maintaining both our peace and our productivity.

After all, no one wants to turn a simple coffee order into an unnecessary confrontation.



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Dear Alice* ...

helpmepleasealice@gmail.com

* While "Alice" is a real person, this name is used as a pseudonym to protect identities and respect our readers' privacy. If you're facing a challenging situation in your life, feel free to connect with Alice.

Please note: Alice brings wisdom through valuable life experience, however, she is not a licensed mental health professional.

Friends, Family, and Freebies... I own and run a business in Hermanus. My friends and family always want free professional advice or treatment from me. This is my income stream, and it's exhausting. Should I charge them, say no, or suck it up?

A: Ah yes, not just a small town curse, I've lived this one. A lot. I eventually started prioritising paying clients and leaving "quick favours" for last, I would eventually be left alone, or receive a "How much would it cost..." If you run a service-based business, it's okay to be clear: "Sorry, I'm fully booked with paying clients. If a gap opens up, I'll let you know." Family should support you, and that includes being your first paying clients. That's real support of both you and your livelihood. You don't need to whip out a price list at a braai, but you do need a line. A kind one. A calm one. Something like, "I'd love to help, but this is how I pay my bills." Anyone who respects you will understand. Sucking it up breeds resentment, and resentment ruins relationships faster than honest boundaries ever will.

The Park Run Crush... I am a 61-year old divorced man and lives in Pringle Bay. I do the Betty's Bay Park Run on Saturdays where I've noticed a lovely woman of similar age. She seems to be unattached (no rings) but I certainly do not want to make a fool of myself by approaching her to invite her for a coffee or a drink. Also, I look a mess after the Park Run - all sweaty and red in the face - I can't imagine she would be interested. What to do?

A: What I do believe, deeply, is that opening ourselves up and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable might not always get us the exact outcome we have our eye on, but it expands our world in ways we don't expect. It creates movement. It creates connection. It reminds us we're still in it. My advice? Go for it. Red-faced and sweaty. The fact that you're doing a Park Run at 61 already tells me you have far more to offer than you think. Going to a Park Run, says health, discipline, curiosity, and courage. Those things age beautifully. Even if nothing romantic comes of it, you've still shown up as someone willing to try. And I'll say this plainly, I'm far more interested in people who take chances than those who sit safely on the sidelines. So smile. Say hello. Invite her for a coffee. The worst case is a polite no. The best case is a story you didn't see coming. And honestly, even I'm intrigued.

Own or Rent?... We have been renting a beautiful house in Kleinmond for 3 years and we frequently get asked "do you own or rent your house?" When we mention that we rent, we often feel like there's an underlying judgment. We own other income generating industrial properties in a different province but are reluctant to explain our financial decisions. Why do you think so many people feel entitled to ask such personal questions? We didn't

experience this kind of scrutiny when we lived in the city.

A: Small towns run on proximity, not privacy. People know your dog's name before they know your surname, and nosiness travels faster than intention. In places like the Overstrand, owning property is often treated as a shortcut to success and belonging. Renting is misunderstood, seen as temporary or uncertain. I think that's where the discomfort creeps in. Are you really one of us? Can we trust you to stay? Clique-driven communities like proof you've been branded into the town. Permanence is the currency, and a title deed is the easiest receipt to flash. Own a house and suddenly you're "local". Rent, and you're still on probation. But here's the thing. You don't owe anyone your balance sheet, your long-term plan, or a TED Talk on your financial decisions. Renting can be smart, flexible, intentional, and very grown-up. Not everything needs explaining to be valid. A simple "It works perfectly for us," or "We haven't found anything worth buying," is more than enough.

One Bathroom, Three Generations... We live in one of the villages and my 70-year-old mother-in-law is moving in with us in the next few months. We only have one bathroom, and I don't deal well with conflict. What can I do to make sure she feels welcome while still protecting our privacy?

A: The fact that you've opened your home to her already tells me something important, you likely have a good relationship with your mother-in-law. Your worry is valid, of course it is, but starting this chapter already braced for impact can quietly plant seeds of resentment before she's even unpacked a box. To me, it feels like a very natural part of life, and even something that can be welcomed. In many ways, it's a quiet thank you for a lifetime spent raising the person you love. Love lives very comfortably alongside boundaries, especially when everyone knows where they stand. Without knowing personalities, history, or underlying dynamics, it's a hard one to answer neatly. What I do believe is that open conversations matter. Boundaries introduced early, framed as part of an evolving "let's figure this out together," are far kinder than rules dropped later in frustration. The starting point doesn't need to be confrontational, just honest: "Please can we create a space where things can be discussed without anyone feeling offended?" Chances are she's dealing with her own version of this, maybe even more intensely than you are. Giving up independence is hard, ask my mom. Most parents don't want to feel like a burden, and she's likely just as conscious of the shift, while trying not to make it anyone else's problem.

Raising Teenagers in a Small Town... Mother of two teenagers here. I'm not sure if you know how easily accessible drugs are in our area. How do I make sure my children aren't lured into using these substances?

A: We choose to live here for the beauty and the freedom. Our kids can ride their bikes to friends' houses, roam safely, and grow up in what feels like an ideal community. There aren't many places left where that's still possible, and for years we've celebrated it. But we also need to be honest. Drugs

are a thing here. We aren't immune just because we live somewhere beautiful. Small towns aren't exempt; they're just quieter about it. There's a flip side we don't talk about enough. Many kids here are sheltered and a little naïve, and that combination can be dangerous. That innocent bike ride can quickly become a ride to an empty field, where curiosity meets opportunity. Personally, I hope to be the one who introduces the conversation around drugs when my kids are older, in a safe, controlled way. Not to encourage it, but because I know they will encounter it. I've planted seeds over the years and had the conversations, but at some point, we have to let go and trust that our parenting has done its job. I also believe deeply in the village. Kids hit around 13 and our voices fade, but they'll still listen to someone else they respect. An aunt, an uncle, a family friend, another parent. That's where the village matters. We can't protect our children from everything. But we can raise them with honesty, surround them with people who care, and give them enough grounding to make better choices when curiosity inevitably finds them.

The Facebook Shock... We bought a house in Betty's Bay and are planning to retire here. I joined most Facebook Groups for Betty's, Kleinmond and Pringle and have been following the posts, discussions and comments to get to know the area and people better.

I am shocked by the many mean, negative, crass and unhelpful comments. Is this the true character of the communities? We had the dream of moving to a smaller, supportive place where people are friendly and simply good. From where we are, it looks like people do not appreciate what they have, despite living in such a beautiful part of our country.

A: Village Facebook groups are pressure valves. They attract frustration, boredom, loneliness, fear, and people with too much time and too little filter. The good people you're looking for are having a braai, going for a hike, or quietly getting on with their lives, not arguing in comment sections. The real community doesn't live online. It lives in the people who wave when you walk past. The neighbour who grabs your Takealot parcel. The woman who tells you which days the wind is worst. The small, quiet kindnesses that never get likes. There are good people here. Generous people. People with the same hopes, values, and aspirations you have. What you're seeing online is noise, not the whole song. If you're looking for the soul of this place, log off and step outside. Have a coffee. Join something local. Talk to people face to face. The Overstrand is still deeply human, even if its Facebook groups forget that sometimes. Welcome, we're happy to have you. Your dream isn't naïve. It just doesn't live in the comments section.



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