

YWAM' First Training in Africa bridges the gap

By Tim Heathcote

Quote: "If we could just trace the things God says and then later does, we'd be so amazed!"

OR: "During the apartheid era, they could not have imagined being drawn together in their missionary calling."

Mozambique in 1974 was a war zone. A bitter war for independence from Portugal was coming to an end. It was a crazy place for a young, single Afrikaans woman like Rika Grey to go. But having just completed the life-changing lectures of a School of Evangelism (SOE) in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), she went there on outreach with seven men.

"On the SOE back then we didn't pay to go on outreach," Rika explained. "There was no set budget; we went and we had to survive! While we were there we felt God speak to us about a town called Marromeu. We had a team together and were ready to go and plant the first YWAM base in Mozambique. Then the war peaked and women were being evacuated from the country. One morning I was forced to leave; that afternoon the men were arrested. Nothing happened about Marromeu; life moved on and visions changed. For years I wondered why, as God had spoken to us so clearly. Then in 1999, 25 years later, I heard that a team were going to Marromeu to start a base, I was so excited. If we could just trace the things God says and then later does, we'd be so amazed!"

After its founding in 1960, YWAM entered a period of rapid growth in the 1970s, when it began to actively train missionaries. In 1969 YWAM began its first training course, the School of Evangelism. In 1970 the second 14-month SOE was held in Lausanne, Switzerland. There were 30 students, including several who pioneered work in Africa – like Rudi Lack and Joe Portale. Rudi Lack wrote "We were not spiritual giants, just a bunch of normal Bible school students, with all the usual hang-ups and fears. We did, however, have one thing that marked us out: we meant business with God."

Short-term outreaches from these SOEs worked in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Ethiopia and South Africa. Rudi Lack was part of these outreaches. In 1972 he met a Methodist minister in Rhodesia, who suggested that YWAM run a school there. He offered a retreat centre as the ideal location.

In that same year, 1972, YWAM held a major outreach at the Munich Olympic Games. After the outreach YWAM, which then had just 100 staff worldwide, met at the Hurlach Castle for a conference. Rudi commented that: "The Games Outreach had been a watershed experience and each of us had been stirred with renewed passion by the exciting, action-filled days we had just experienced... Loren reminded us of YWAM's vision for waves of young people to spread across the world. He challenged everyone about the need to multiply. 'We've seen one mighty wave with these Games, but we can't afford to rest on our laurels. One wave is retreating, but we must be prepared for the next even greater thrust forward.'"

Loren encouraged the YWAM staff to multiply SOEs. Rudi Lack returned to Rhodesia understanding that, "In thinking of operating a school in Rhodesia, I was not heading up a side tributary. If I went ahead, I would be flowing with the main stream of where the rest of YWAM was heading."

The first African SOE was run in Rest Haven, Rhodesia, in January 1973. It had 30 students, ranging in age from 18 to 30. The majority were from white, middle-class South African and Rhodesian homes. Three teams went on outreaches to Malawi, Zambia, and South Africa, with a pioneering excursion into

the Congo. In the following year, 1974, YWAM ran the first multi-racial SOE in Africa, based at a YWCA centre in Rhodesia, one of the few places where black and white Africans could live side by side.

Two students on this SOE, coming from very different backgrounds, were Salu Daka and Rika Grey. Salu, a 20 year-old Ndebele man, came from a small mining village near Bulawayo, Rhodesia, and was the first black African man on a YWAM school. Rudi Lack, his leader, saw him as, “a rough diamond who, with some cutting and polishing, had the potential to be effective for God.” Rika, a 19 year-old Afrikaans woman, grew up in South Africa and had just finished a nursing diploma. During the apartheid era, neither would have imagined being drawn together in their missionary calling. It’s hard to see how that would have happened outside of YWAM.

There were 54 students in all, with just two staff. Rika commented how different this SOE was from many DTSEs today: “Most people came saying, ‘I’m called to missions permanently.’ Many had short-term experience already, and most stayed in missions for at least the next decade.” For Rika the highlight of her SOE was learning to hear God’s voice. “Our generation back then spent less time thinking implications. We didn’t make long-term plans. We learned to hear God, and we acted on it.”

For Salu the SOE was a time of reconciliation and healing. Rudi recognised that to Salu, “white people symbolized oppression, something to be despised. Whites were exploiters. It was only now in the multiracial soil of the school that his true feelings on racial issues began to surface... He was speaking for perhaps the majority of his fellow black Africans... The change was gradual, but it happened. During the next few months, the school cemented together and genuine friendships between black and white students were established.”

Salu and Rika travelled together on their outreach to Mozambique. Whilst there, Salu and the other YWAM men were arrested. The others were quickly released, but Salu spent the next 18 months in a Mozambican prison. He was never officially charged with a crime but endured terrible suffering and witnessed brutality, executions and suicides. He faced continual pressure to renounce his faith and embrace Marxist propaganda.

YWAM work continued. Two more SOEs ran, and in 1977 a young Namibian, Kobus van Niekerk, was on an SOE in Halfway House, South Africa. Rika explained that one day during a time of prayer, Kobus had an impression of the word ‘salu’. “He didn’t know anything about Salu, or even that the word was a name. When the staff explained that Salu was a Rhodesian in prison in Mozambique, the group had an intense time of prayer.” Amazingly that next week, in January 1977, Salu was finally released from prison. The following week Iain Muir, the school leader, introduced Salu Daka to Kobus’s SOE. As Rika recognises now: “We learnt in a simple way to hear God. If we can give this to our students now it is the best thing – to be able to hear God and know His will for our lives!”

Kobus and Rika later married and pioneered YWAM work in Namibia and amongst the Zulus in South Africa. Kobus is now the YWAM Africa Director, and Rika is the longest-serving YWAMer in the continent. Rudi Lack is based in Switzerland and recently ran a leadership seminar in Mali. Salu Daka was given a British passport and travelled with YWAM to the UK and Switzerland. He married and returned to help pioneer YWAM’s work in Cameroon, where he died in the 1980s.

With thanks to Rudi Lack: all his quotes are taken from *Breakthrough: Taking the Gospel across forbidden borders*, by Rudi Lack.