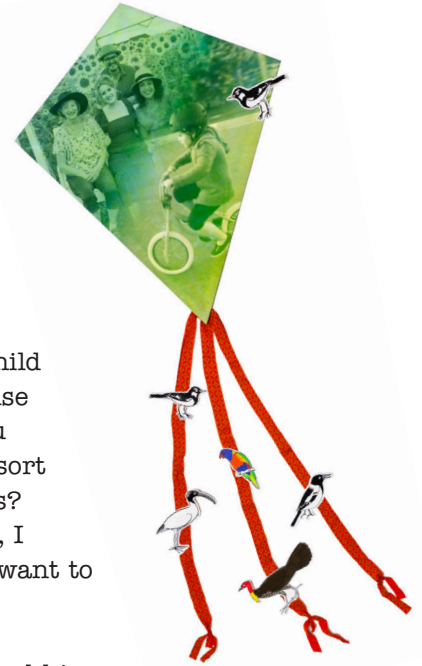


Dear Reader,

I was born in Johannesburg in South Africa and I lived there for most of my time in South Africa. We moved to Cape Town just before we came to Australia as we wanted to get out of Johannesburg. My husband and I were married a few years before we had our daughter, Lize. And I think when we became parents, things changed quite a bit for us. Because then it's not just yourself that you worry about. You try to imagine raising a child somewhere. And there were incidents and things happening around because of how things were in South Africa. You know, a hijacking or someone you know was held at gunpoint or those sorts of things. It's just this ongoing sort of backdrop to your life. And then you think, I need to raise a child in this? And I remember my husband just being like, 'If something happens to me, I can't imagine what life would be like for you guys.' I think it's natural to want to protect your family. So we made the decision to move here.



My mum and dad were divorced and when he remarried in the 90s him and his wife moved to Australia. So we've been here on holidays so we had a concept of what life was like in Australia. I remember after the first time we came for a holiday, we said, 'You know, we can understand why South Africans move to Australia.' There's so many similarities. So I guess when the time came for us to decide to leave the country we thought, 'Okay, let's go at least where we have been before and we know someone.' And we had to leave my mum because the way the visas were we couldn't bring her with us. Which was incredibly difficult to do. We always knew that we would apply for her but nothing is guaranteed. And so we arrived in Australia in 2007, in September.

I remember it was so hot. I remember we were just driving around from suburb to suburb and I was still jet lagged. I think the shock of moving countries and the realisation of what you've done... you're just trying to sort of grasp what's happening around you. And I remember my stepmum was driving us around and you're just trying to picture where you are going to start your life. Because you can live anywhere. But I remember one day she drove into Springfield Lakes and I just saw the big park there with a playground. I immediately thought, this is where we can bring our little toddler. I just had a sense of, I don't know, it just felt okay. We've stayed in this area because we couldn't fathom moving far away again. I think both of us, we just want to actually put down roots.

Now that we're living here, it's very different from when you go on holiday. I will never forget that first morning, waking up in this hot steamy place with magpies screeching outside the window. It's not your birds! They're not South African birds. You know when you're in a strange place when you can actually feel the difference, like it's in the air. The sounds... everything. The strangeness of it is so obvious. You think, 'I'm going to a place that I have been before. I know what it's like.' No you don't, it's very different to live in a place. And I remember that heaviness of the decision you've just made and actually living through it. And I remember waking up and just going, 'Oh my goodness, what have we done?' It wasn't this, 'Yay, excited! I'm going to start a new life!' Actually it dawns on you that, I don't know where I am, I don't even know where the shop is. You have no sense of direction. You have no familiarity. You don't know anyone. It was such a weird, uncomfortable feeling. It was really really uncomfortable. It was very hard.

It definitely took a while before we started feeling settled. You wake up in the morning and I remember just like this sadness in the pit of my stomach. I think it's that loss and the shock of actually uprooting your life. And cutting everything off. And restarting in a new place. And I remember just waking up in the morning with this feeling. And slowly over time, you would wake

up one morning and you won't feel like that. And so slowly, the balance shifted. And one day you realise, 'Oh, I don't feel so sad anymore'. You know, the first time you laugh again, or you feel joy. You make new friends... I think that's what it's like for me. It was a very slow shift. It took some time to adjust, definitely.

Now I feel this is my home. I'm very happy. I don't think I will adjust back to life in South Africa. I feel like I've changed. We've only been back twice. My husband's been back more because he still has to go for work. But I remember the last time we were there was ten years ago and we were really excited. And then when we arrived, the strangeness of being back home hit us. Things change and people change. So you remember people and places the way that it was. You have like a snapshot in your brain and then you go back and you go, 'Oh gosh, it's not like I remember it!' Even my husband was like, 'I feel funny. It's like I'm happy to be here, but I'm not fitting. I don't fit in here anymore.' It's such a weird feeling.

\* \* \* \*

There are many similarities between Australians and South Africans, but we are also so different in the way we do things. I guess as South Africans we can be very polite, almost overly polite sometimes. Also manners are very important to us. Like even with young kids and teenagers. We met new South Africans the other day and the boys came and they shook my hand and I was like, 'That's a South African!' Like with Lieze, she'll have a birthday party and the kids walk in, they don't greet us. Like for us that's an odd thing because in our culture it's very much about being respectful. And I don't mean this in a bad way, but South Africans are very warm. They're very like, 'Come, eat with us.' If you visit us, we go out to the car, we wave.

And something we don't often talk about, but as a nation, South Africa is much more a Christian nation. And even if it doesn't mean that everyone practises that, there's a general understanding and so a lot of respect in that way. And that was something that really hit us when we got here. Like, I've never been made to feel so uncomfortable for being a Christian. Like people would just say things that took me completely off guard. I'm a bit better now but almost at one point I felt like I couldn't share that part of who I am. I don't know, it's quite hurtful and quite confronting when someone would be so disrespectful. Like I remember at a previous house, the property manager sent an electrician to come and fix something. So this tradie, someone I don't know, walked into the house and he saw this scripture thing on the wall and he said, 'Do you believe this shit?' We've never had that before. I didn't realise that that would be a thing. I found that very confronting.

People also have very big misconceptions about South Africa. You know, people will think we're from the bush. 'Do you have cities?' And I've also had, 'Oh, why are you white?' Or like our education is inferior. Like let's say that you've got experience in whatever job, but it must be inferior because it's from South Africa? It's weird.

But living in South Africa, you don't realise how tense you are and how you're living on high alert. It's only after you leave and you're like, 'Oh my goodness. This is how I've been living my life?' I'm much more relaxed about things now but it took a very, very long time, like years. There are certain things that's still ingrained in me, like an instinctive response to noises or someone screaming. It still happens, like I'll have a physical response to certain things. And I guess just that idea of keeping myself safe and keeping valuables safe. I think those responses are always going to be around. For example, I won't drive with my window down. Like the car door is locked, front door is always locked. I don't leave my handbag in the car. And like at work, having my wallet in my bag, I couldn't walk away from my desk leaving my bag with my wallet in there. And it took me a long time to go, 'It's okay. No one at work is going to take your wallet.' It's such a

weird thing right? But it's just so ingrained.

There are things I still don't really talk about now. It's almost, I think, for survival. You just put it in a different place, in your mind. But I guess it's things that happened or certain things that people in your family have gone through. But my studies and my art, I think that was a way for me to process it without actually verbalising it. I guess I researched it so that I could understand the emotional weight of immigrating from where we were from specifically.

I was an artist before we came to Australia and before we had Lieze. South Africa is a very creative country. It was great! And I think you can, in a way, make an easier living of being an artist there. People in general are much more into art. You know, the everyday Aussie's not bothered with art. It's kind of weird. But South Africans in general are very much into creative things. Music. There's always someone making something from something, you know? Even if they have no money, people will even look on the side of the road, they will pick up things that they will start carving. There's such a sense of using creativity, even for survival. Which I think is fantastic.

\* \* \* \*

Now that we've been here for 17 years, looking back... just seeing how, yes, it was the most difficult thing I've ever had to do in my life. I always say, it's like walking into a dark room and you don't know where the light is. Like you don't know what's waiting for you. But having a sense of freedom and having hope for the future, it's amazing. I didn't think that was what was going to come out of it but I think because so much of our thoughts and our decisions were based on the now and surviving, I didn't realise that I wasn't dreaming about the future.

When we got here and later when we became citizens, I realised I could go and study and do things that I didn't have opportunities for over there. You know, suddenly I could dream of things. I think that's why I didn't stop studying, because I just couldn't believe it. I'm like, 'This is amazing!' I'm just so grateful, and I still am grateful. I still have mornings where I drive to work and I'm like, 'Wow! We're here.' Like our life is just looking so different but so much better. And like all the amazing people that are in our life. All the people that I've met through art. And I'm so grateful. So many amazing humans. And that wouldn't have been in our lives so I'm really grateful for that. So yeah, this is my home now. We've grown deep roots here. It's such a melting pot which I absolutely love.

I sometimes do feel like I don't fit in either here or in South Africa. I think there probably will be a part of me that will always know that I'm from somewhere else. I guess your accent is always the giveaway. People will make weird comments out of ignorance, you know, and that's the moment that you're reminded you're different. But I've also realised you can belong to multiple places. So I guess there's a part of me that will always belong to South Africa. It's in our brains, it's in our genetics... I will never not belong there. I remember the last time we were there and I was at the airport and I could hear the South African accent, or you hear Afrikaans, or even the other African languages, you hear that and it's almost soothing on your ear because it sounds like home. But then when you arrive here you're also home. You belong to a few places I think.

## **Annelize**