



Postcard



From: **Leora, California, USA**

Volunteered in:
Melkhoutfontein, Stilbaai, 6674, South Africa

When: **2023**

My experience this semester in South Africa gave me the opportunity to gain knowledge, go on adventures, experience challenge, and create connections and memories to last a lifetime!

I began my journey in Johannesburg, with Tefo and Lucas, who were fantastic guides! Over the next couple days, I would learn about the history of South Africa and the apartheid history, by firstly visiting the town of Soweto, Nelson Mandela's House, and the 1976 Uprisings Museum/Memorial. Visiting the Cradle of Humankind – a paleoanthropological site and museum of humanity, was one of my favorite stops, emphasizing how we are all one species. It was especially beautiful to see this before going to The Apartheid Museum, as well as Constitutional Hill.

I chose to work with the non-profit Dreamcatcher, because I was interested in community development work and passionate in learning more about indigenous cultures. This semester I spent my time interning at Kwikstertjie (or Kwikkies). This was a disability center for adults, and I helped assist them in making crafts, which they sometimes sell. This was a really interesting experience and I loved the community I made there. I also learned about occupational therapy! One of my favorite activities we did was create a kindness rock garden. In the afternoons, I would volunteer at the Dreamcatcher Future Kids after school program, passing out lunch, and tutoring in reading, English literacy, and sometimes math. A couple times after school, Anthea, the founder of Dreamcatcher, pioneered amazing field trips with them, which I really enjoyed partaking in. For example, an animal safari, a Dennis Warner concert on the beach, and a trip to an indigenous museum, tracing the history of the children's ancestors. Those field trips were unforgettable and so special. Once or twice a week, I would also volunteer at Dreamcatcher's Back to Front Yard Farming project (BTFYF), where I helped build garden boxes, plant seeds, and eat lots and lots of two-minute noodles! The noodles are very iconic. Karel and Lorraine, as well as the whole BTFYF team, always made me smile and laughs filled our days. Although it sounds like a full week, the days would go by slow, allowing me to enjoy and practice being in the moment. I also learned to be more flexible and patient (go with the flow), with unpredictability or changes.

I got to experience living with two homestay families throughout my trip and both truly felt like family! I enjoyed cooking and eating the delicious meals with them, their cute pets, card games, and excursions, whether it be a walk to the corner store, a wedding, church service, or a mini road trip. The community of Melkhoutfontein, is so friendly and welcoming! I've surprisingly learned a lot of Afrikaans. I loved walking in the neighborhood, whether with my homestay family or by myself, and practically everyone you pass says hello like you've met before even if you haven't.

Dreamcatcher allowed me to go on special trips/volunteer placements as well throughout my stay. One of which was a trip to Montagu, where we volunteered at a Girls at Risk program in a township. This was an incredible experience! Not only did I help them in reading and literacy, but they taught me some Xhosa as well. I was so intrigued by the well-known clicking consonants in the language. I appreciated the group of girls I worked with, we had lots of fun, and it was bittersweet saying good bye. Another venture I got to experience, was volunteering at Wild Rescue NPC, a wildlife sanctuary and nature reserve for 10 days. There, I fed and cared for 28 injured and orphaned tortoises, conserved biodiversity, and grew my fynbos knowledge. My main project was alien invasive species removal of the acacia cyclops which I also used for a PSU report. Gill, Brenda, and Richard were awesome and mentored me! I can't forget meeting and spending time with Mackenzie, another Carpe Diem student and Dreamcatcher intern alum, who recommended Wild Rescue to me, and became a lifelong friend!

When I looked up what kwikstertjie meant, the meaning was powerful. First of all, it is a wagtail bird, found throughout South Africa and is symbolic of the country and its people. The bird symbolizes rebirth, resilience, and perseverance in the face of adversity. Whether at Kwikkies or other projects I worked with, the people I encountered's, strength, hope, and kindness despite the hardships they have gone through inspired me. With only a week left in Melkhoutfontein, I will embrace all it has to offer. After, I will do something I haven't done in my life so far, which is travel independently. I am excited to take on Cape Town solo for a week! And like a kwikstertjie, I will continue on, optimistic for the future ahead.

Leora x – see can see all the images from my blog [here](#)