Ripples for Good

Liani and Maria are cycling for change

Many people realise the challenges South Africa is facing with regards to its water, but not many people will stand up and do something about it. Maria Botha and Liani Broodryk are two of those rare people. These modern-day water disciples have hit the rivers and roads, preaching for change in our water ways, one town at a time. Petro Kotzé got them to stand still long enough to report on their activities.

"What is needed along with fresh water is fresh thinking." When Nobel Peace Prize winner and 7th Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan uttered these word, he could have been speaking of two women right at the southern tip of Africa.

Indeed, Maria Botha and Liani Broodryk, along with their two dogs, Dante and Katryn, have devoted themselves to motivating others to value water and share the knowledge that something can be done about water pollution. The tight team of four is just as inspirational as their campaign, *Ripples for Good*. Travelling by any means possible, they are spreading their words of wisdom through southern Africa. They've almost drowned, been without water for days and survived a serious road accident, but their spirits have not been dampened. "People's inherent goodness" make up for it, they say. As Maria puts it, "it puts a smile on your dial."

After touring South Africa, their mission will take them to Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola, where they will have a closer look at transboundary water resources. But this is just a continuation of a journey that started a while back.

WITH OR WITHOUT A PADDLE

The Ripples team reached the tipping point six years ago, quit their jobs and packed their bags to "do something that matters". Maria was 24 years old and Liani 32 when they first cycled from St Lucia to Cape Town. "Our country is amazing", they say. "We haven't met one person along our way that has made us feel like we are in danger," Maria adds. Dante and Katryn are also great travel buddies. "We know that if they are uncomfortable, we should move camp."

After Cape Town they continued to Upington, got a lift with farmers to Springbok and decided to canoe down the Orange River. "We had never done anything like that before," explains Liani. "We didn't even know that we needed a guide". Admittedly, they might have gotten into hotter water than expected. One near drowning and a lost canoe later, it was time to move on again.

Next, they cycled from Springbok to Potchefstroom. A year passed and the girls took a break to gather their

strengths. They always supported causes close to their hearts during their trips and before long, people asked them when their next adventure would be.

explains Liani. "Basic water is free." Their campaign's slogan aptly states that "it starts with you". "If you have to wait for the government to solve your problems, you're waiting for better

"At the end of the day we all have an idealistic picture in our heads of what we want out of life. The majority of people are really good at heart, have a dream and are on their way somewhere."

Soon, Dante and Katryn were loaded up for an expedition from Rustenburg to the Drakensberg Mountains, where they wanted to walk from Witsieshoek to the Sani Pass. Somewhat unprepared for what lay ahead, they eventually reached their destination a month later.

"We've also tackled the Transkei", says Maria, "and we got stuck in floods at Kei River Mouth", adds Liani. Between botched donkey-car trips through the Karoo and planned Swaziland adventures, they eventually travelled to Parys in the Free State, where the friendly locals helped them by sponsoring their next escapade. They decided to canoe down the mighty Vaal River to Douglas. "It was a huge awakening." The women relate how they had to battle through raw sewage and near solid stretches of hyacinth in the river. Sometimes, they had no choice but to get out and carry the canoe for kilometres. "The Vaal is used for so many things, like growing our food and as a source for drinking," they exclaim. "If this continues, what will happen to our children?"

"We realised something was happening to the country's water, and we decided it would be our mission to fight it." Maria, Liani, Dante and Katryn took an eight-month break to regroup and research water issues and role players in the industry. *Ripples for Good* was born.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

"People have a basic right to clean water. They shouldn't have to go out and buy the bottled version",

days," she says. It's no use pointing the finger at somebody else for the solution if you are not also making an effort to change your own habits.

Maria and Liani believe that the more they tell their story, the more they empower people with the knowledge that they can change their own environments. "As soon as our message touches one person, and they start changing their ways, the ripple effect starts." They can now be an example to others, like a family member, a community and eventually, on a global scale.

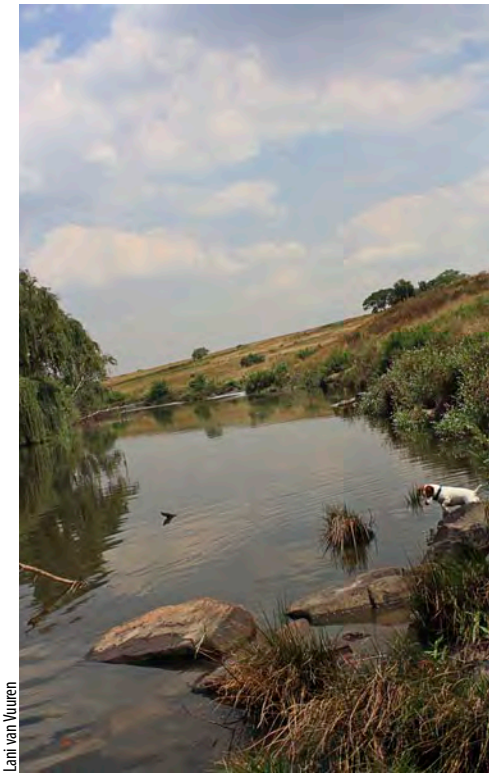
They believe that creating fear around pollution is not the answer, but rather the provision of solutions and knowledge. "You want people to wake up and get involved in a combined, positive effort." At least, they say, they've noticed a "huge" difference in people's perspectives over the past six years. "You can find a *boer omie* that has just finished his *dop* somewhere in a small town, and then he'd suddenly start telling you all these amazing things about pollution and water conservation."

The ripples have also circled out to bigger organisations. Currently travelling on motorcycles sponsored by Yamaha, Ripples for Good are able to visit more communities quicker. Dante and Katryn get Royal Canin food couriered to them wherever they are and Garmin ensures that the girls know in what direction they're aiming most of the time. Companies like Avroy Shlain also organise audiences where possible along their way. Even the CSIR has expressed its support for the quartet.

Top right: *Dante takes a closer look at the Olifants River outside Witbank in Mpumalanga.*

Middle right: *Liani and Katryn share a moment on the road.*

Bottom right: *The mighty Vaal River – an impressive sight in spite of the problems that the team encountered on their way.*



Lani van Vuuren

Ripples for Good

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Another day at the 'office' for Maria, Dante and Katryn.

Maria explains that their main purpose is not only to educate, but to facilitate. They identify positive role-players in communities and link them with people and organisations that can offer continued support. One of the organisations they have linked up with is the Water Research Commission (WRC). "The WRC is making a huge impact, especially through providing educational material to communities."

"Eventually, the way we all look at our water has to change."

GETTING IN DEEPER

Except for the Queen's Corgi's, Dante and Katryn are probably the only two dogs that have been invited to their country's Parliament, muses Maria. They were invited for a visit by DA parliamentary member in Cape Town, Gareth Morgan.

Indeed, the ripples of the past six years have generated more and more attention. They've been featured in *Beeld* and on Kwêla. Environmental interest television programme 50/50 has interviewed them and plan to follow them as their trip continues. They were also shortlisted for the *Mail & Guardian's* annual supplement in celebration of 200 of the country's brightest under 35's for their contribution to civil society. According to the paper's criteria, "this is the generation that will define and lead the country in the future."

Having just completed a promotional run on their bikes for the

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