

Inspired Oshiwambo Greeting Cards



Nangula Shejavali



Seth Caskey



Isaac Esseku

• Martha Mukaiwa

There are people who continue to inspire long after they are gone. Their words may linger after stirring speeches, their wisdom may remain upon reading the briefest of excerpts or they may simply have the fated five minutes to spare to galvanise a whole life.

In the winter of 2009, Nangula Shejavali met the late Neshani Andreas. Shejavali was mulling over the idea of creating greeting cards in Oshiwambo and upon seeing Andreas at a Sister Namibia celebration at Studio 77, she thought she might discuss it with the author of 'The Purple Violet of Oshaantu'.

"At the time Neshani Andreas was one of only a few Namibian female authors of fiction and, in truth, it was no more than a five minute conversation but she told me that what I wanted to do was important, that our languages need to be represented and she advised me to go beyond Namibia and do the same for the whole continent," says Shejavali.

Still at school but unable to shake the idea, Shejavali spent the next two years finishing a degree in International Affairs and African Studies in Pennsylvania and as the years wore on she became even more enraptured with African languages and proverbs.

"In 2011, I came back for the holidays and I wanted to get hold of Neshani but I found out she had passed away of lung cancer earlier that year," says Shejavali. "We never spoke again after that brief conversation in 2009 but, when I heard, I felt strangely devastated. It really struck me as I greatly admired her and saw her as a potential mentor.

In the end, I thought it wouldn't do her justice and it would dishonour her memory if I just let the idea for my indigenous greeting cards go. So I didn't. They are here and they are produced by Neshani Press."

With a haste that belies the cards perfectly packaged, professional and modern look, Neshani Press began production just six months ago.

Drawing on the talents of American designer, Seth Caskey, who is responsible for the cards inventive use of Odelela and traditional African motifs as well as Ghanaian Isaac Esseku who is in charge of expanding African operations through his business acumen, Shejavali has put together a creative international team in the business of celebrating African languages during, well, celebrations.

"I'm really passionate about representing African culture in a beautiful, modern and meaningful way. I've walked into stores many times and only found cards in English or Afrikaans and this, and the fact that my Oshiwambo is not very good, have made me want to help make African

languages resonate with young people."

Though the cards are certainly modern, they manage to be just as culturally rich as they are contemporary. This is achieved through the inclusion of idiosyncratic Namibian proverbs, colour schemes, patterns and plant life.

Perhaps bewilderingly to an only English speaker, one card features a frog with the phrase "Otwa taamba omukwati gwomafuma" on the front. This saying translates to say "We welcome the frog catcher," which refers to the traditional role of boys who catch the creatures whenever they appear. In this way the birth of a baby boy is welcomed while celebrating his traditional role in the community.

A similar gender-based sentiment can be found in a card that reads "Otwa taamba omutsi gwilkwila" which translates to say "We welcome the one who pounds the flour for bread." This is the celebration of an imminent baby girl who traditionally is tasked with doing the very thing.

Cards for weddings and funerals are also a part of the 20 designs currently ready for purchase and Oshiwambo speakers will be delighted to receive cards that incorporate the red stripes a groom wears to his wedding while the phrase, "Wild dogs are following each other in line," may call to mind mortality and reunion when mourning a loved one.

Cards with phrases like "Tate Kalunga ne mu tungile eumbo leni" which in English says "May God the Father build your home," speak of Shejavali's Christian influence and also pays homage to her upbringing.

"My father is a pastor so there is a religious influence in some of the cards," says Shejavali.

"When we were getting the designs together, I went to my parents a lot for the language and they helped me with the proverbs and made sure the translations were correct. I also think this works as many Namibians identify themselves as Christian and may want more religious cards for an occasion."

Though Neshani Press is currently focused on Oshiwambo, Shejavali does hope to include other local languages but admits that the Namibian market is small and the move will have to make business sense.

While the company begins research into other local languages they are also honouring Neshani Andreas' vision of reaching the rest of Africa and plan to roll out cards in Yoruba, Swahili, Zulu and Twi in July.

No doubt a noble endeavour that hopes to embrace and enthuse locals about their country's heritage, the legend and the language of Neshani Press not only honours its namesake but proves that a kind word can go a long way whether printed in a greeting card or spoken at a celebration.

Visit neshanipress.com to view some of the cards and complete a survey about the product. The Oshiwambo greeting cards are currently available at Wecke & Voigts on Independence Avenue in Windhoek.



WTF at the Warehouse Theatre

• Martha Mukaiwa

I've never wanted a column photo.

I want one even less after seeing Anesh Morar's WTF-face at the Warehouse Theatre and realising that, should my countenance continue to glare from above, there will be much more slack jawed, bug-eyed incredulity that will surely leave everyone involved thinking I was dropped on my head as an infant.

Though infancy is as good a time as any to begin a story, this one begins at the premiere of Florian Schott's 'Everything Happens for Reason' which was held at the Warehouse Theatre last Thursday.

There will be more on this impressive film soon but, for now, just now that the place was crawling with scores of film enthusiasts, creatives and garden variety luses who probably all know who Kennedy Hamutenya is.

This theory gains further credence given the film's dashing lead actor, Chops Tshoopara, hails from Oranjemund which means every diamond town dweller with N\$40 in their pocket was there yelling about how they knew Tshoopara back in the good old days.

Though these associations dawn on me now, they didn't come to mind when I was standing outside shooting the breeze with Anesh and Hamutenya came by and was greeted by the Penilane star with gusto.

Unfortunately, Hamutenya then focused his attention on me, as a gentleman does, and inquired whether I was the woman from the paper.

Given that my mug stares at readers from my column every Friday, I agreed that I probably was and introduced myself as Martha and asked who we was. It was at this point that Anesh first turned towards me in disbelief and said "This is Kennedy!" as if that would clear matters up right away.

It didn't.

In truth, despite the fact that I am an ex-diamond town dweller, and I have a functioning set of eyeballs with which to read the press, I had no idea what Anesh's exclamation was supposed to mean to me and so I took a chance, noted Hamutenya's film screen worthy looks, smiled with confidence and said:

"Are you an actor?"

At this Anesh's eyebrows proceeded to disappear into his hairline to avoid the shame of the situation and my friend Willem tried to mouth

something to me in a gesture that put way too much faith in my ability to lip read.

Needless to say, Hamutenya was flabbergasted, Anesh stared at me, no doubt inspecting my head for lumps sustained as an infant, and Willem steered me away from a conversation that could only end in the cringing spasms most commonly induced by a sea of WTF-faces.

The WTF-ness of that night was further compounded by an encounter with 99FM's Nunu Namises who took one look at me and blurted out the fact that, having seen my column photo and read my articles, she thought my voice would sound somewhat like a transvestite in the death throes of laryngitis.

Those are my words not hers but I imagine the phrase given the fact that she demonstrated what she thought my voice would sound like with Oscar-worthy commitment. Unfortunately, her impression of what my voice actually sounds like still makes me want to curl into the foetal position at night a whole week later so I shall not dwell on it. (Thanks Nunu. I'll add that to the Loser Complex Jar I keep in the freezer next to a vat of emergency ice-cream.)

All this considered, my conclusion is that column photos are an unnecessary evil.

They make me reveal gaps in my knowledge regarding Diamond Commissioners, which in some universes is a crime against humanity, and worst of all... They make me feel inexplicably bad for not sounding like a transvestite with a phlegm ball building in the bowels of my larynx.

For your own WTF moments at The Warehouse Theatre, head to their daily Boiler Room Happy Hour between 16h00 and 19h00. Food by Antoinette de Chavonnes Vrugt. Selected beers for N\$10 and cocktails for N\$25. And heaps of opportunities for embarrassment.

Tweet me @marth_vader (double underscore between marth and vader) or mail me martha@namibian.com.na

HALLELUJAH PARISH

Easter Galla Dinner Buffet

DATE : 06 APRIL 2013

Venue: XWAMA CULTURAL RESTAURANT AT 18H00

Dress Code: Dress To To Kill (Official)

Cost Of Table: N\$ 250X10 = N\$2500.00

Theme Of The Evening: "Culture In Diversity Amidst Christian Fraternity"

For Bookings Contact:

Mr. Salomom Naukushu @

Cell: 0811247416

Mrs. Sophy Kasheeta

Cell: 0811277924

Mrs. Inge Hiskia Cell: 0817312866

Ms. Johanna A. Henock

Cell: 0811277930

EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON