

The Cape of New Hope

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From the Crisis in Germany to new beginning in Cape Town (by Stefanie Walther)

We all know that twist of fate is unfathomable. Hajo Kowalke can tell one or two things about that. When eight years ago his life came apart at the seams, he didn't know what fate had in store for him.

It was July 2000, when the drama started. First Hajo's mother died, then his employer went bankrupt and he lost his job as sales manager. Shortly after, his long term relationship broke up and as if this wasn't enough, he was diagnosed with bladder cancer. He, who then was 39, had to deal with all this within 6 months - more than many people have to cope with all their life. "That's how quickly life can change. It was a very difficult time." Hajo Kowalke remembers today, "but I am not someone who gives up easily and wallows in self pity." Full of courage to face life, he fights his illness, the authorities and uncertainty for two years.

At the beginning of 2002, a friend talks him into a trip to South Africa. I am still grateful he did, for this trip changed my life", he tells. When he first sets foot on South African ground, sees the steel blue sky and tastes the air his fate is sealed. "It was strange and I can't really explain it, even today. Although I didn't know this foreign country, I had a feeling of having arrived home," he says as his eyes focus into the distance. During the following three weeks, he falls in love with the country and its people - particularly with one. "The incredible beauty and the diversity of the country, the unique atmosphere of Cape Town and the sincerity of the people deeply impressed me and I would have loved to just stay."

Back in wintry Berlin, he keeps wondering: What am I still doing here? Two days later he books another three weeks' trip to Cape Town. During this second trip, his love for Africa deepens. After a visit to the Township his decision is made. He wants to risk a new beginning in Cape Town. "I saw these people who often don't own anything, don't know how to get through the next day and yet they have such a joie de vivre, are content and

full of hope. It gave me a completely new perspective on my life. I realised that there was more than just earning money. I realised that everything was possible."

Hajo Kowalke traveled to Cape Town for a third time and upon his return sold all his belongings, married his South African love and took his chance for a new beginning in Cape Town. "I just knew that I was doing the right thing, although my friends were skeptical in the beginning. What could I lose? I could always return to Germany. Health wise I was doing ok so that nothing could get in the way of my plans."

Hajo arrived in Cape Town on 27. November 2002. After some considerations, he decided to open a guest house. He soon found a suitable house in Milnerton. In September 2003, after being converted and renovated, Hajo's Lodge with four guestrooms opened. But Hajo always looking for new challenges wasn't satisfied with sitting around waiting for guests. He trained as a tour guide first for Cape Town and surrounds, later for all of South Africa and its neighbouring countries. The friendly Berliner and freelance tour guide is in high demand and often on the road while his partner is looking after the guest house. Recently an additional four rooms opened in the newly renovated house on the opposite side of the road. "Life is too short to stand still. That's how I look at it" he explains his alluring love of life. He latest line of business is to organise and arrange travels himself, "so that I can better enjoy what I built for myself here," says the travel fan.

I can truly say, I am happy here. I have found a new life: Traveling, my passion, is my job, I have found the love of my life and I enjoy every day. I can't imagine to return to Germany. South Africa is the best that has ever happened to me!" he concludes and smiles.