



# The Person Behind the Project

## ROGER WYNNE-DYKE

*Social Entrepreneur*

### Early Years

The youngest of four children by eight years, Roger's earliest memories are of dozing in a VW Combi as his older siblings were ferried to and from school and extramurals. His mother, a born-and-bred Scot, dreamed of travelling the world. But his South African father would not consider it until he had explored every corner of his homeland. Wynne-Dyke family holidays meant roaming the country: two adults, four children and even two cats, a trusty caravan and the open road.

It didn't take long for Roger's organisational talents to surface. Fuelled by his growing passion for the environment, he set up a successful recycling project at his school at the age of ten. Of academics, Roger says, "I was a good student, but not a natural one – I had to work hard for my results." Sporting excellence, on the other hand, came more easily. If he wasn't practicing at school, he was doing it in his backyard. He would often go from one training session to another in the afternoons with the kind of dedication that only enthusiasm can produce. Brad Bing, private cricket coach and founder of Sporting Chance, spotted his talent and took him under his wing. This close association led to Roger playing for the Western Province's junior cricket team in 1992.

### Coming of Age

Like so many adolescents, Roger then discovered the wonder of music and film and dreamed of becoming a rock star. With characteristic enthusiasm, he practiced playing the guitar for two hours every day and amassing a collection of about 100 movies on video. As his creativity developed, he came up with lyrics and ideas for movie plots. But the event that catapulted him into a future of his own making was, not surprisingly, a voyage.

Soon after finishing school, Roger and his brother set out on a mission to backpack through Zimbabwe and into Namibia. His eighteenth birthday party was a white-water rafting adventure on the Zambezi River. "I didn't actually make it to Namibia," he says. "My money ran out a lot faster than I imagined!" But he was hooked. In nine short months, he saved up enough money to move out of home. Less than a year later, he had bought his plane ticket to London. In March 1999, he landed at Heathrow armed with little more than R1000 and a bucket list of things to do and places to visit.



## Learning to Fly

Roger had grown up seeing far-flung places on screens, and wanted to experience them firsthand. He soon realised how naïve his sheltered upbringing had made him. He also realised that the lifestyle of a globetrotter had its merits and decided that his travels would be his tertiary education. He worked in 22 countries in eight years.

"It was planned chaos, really," he muses. "I wanted to do and see more constantly. But I took it seriously, only having fun on the side. I probably took it more seriously than I should have. I was always planning my next move. But this was 'my university', so I wanted to make it worthwhile." In the process, Roger learnt all he could about business, hospitality, tourism and management. He extended his organisational skills to include everything from accounting and development, to marketing, human resources and operations.

For the first two years, Roger continued to work in the hospitality industry, using it as a springboard to explore Europe. He fulfilled one of his dreams in the process: skiing and snowboarding in the Alps.

From 2001 to 2006, he used his skill as a water sports instructor to explore exotic destinations in Asia, the Middle East, Caribbean and Mediterranean. After working as a sailing instructor at a prestigious hotel in Barbados in 2002, he spent eighteen months sailing 50-foot catamarans for an island yacht charter company. Thereafter, he achieved the highest profits in the history of the Mark Warner resort in Paleros, Greece as the head of its water-ski centre. He set up a new water sports centre at the chain's Abu Soma Hotel in Egypt in the following year. His association with the group then took him to Negombo in Sri Lanka, where he improved The Beach Hotel's water sports centre and raised their profits by 30%.

In 2007, Roger returned to the UK and focussed on the fitness industry. After a brief stint as Project Assistant at Breathing Space, a corporate training and teambuilding organisation, he took a post at the flagship Esporta Gym and Health Club in London. Here he worked his way to a senior management position, which enabled him to initiate and direct the set-up and integration of a new childcare centre for the club.

## Homecoming

A year later, Roger realised something was missing. "I wasn't a London person. And I missed my home – my country and my family. It always annoyed me that I grew up in a beautiful country like South Africa, because it took a lot to impress me as I travelled the world. No place has compared to this beauty yet." The deciding factor, however, was a significant reconnection with an acquaintance on Facebook.

Roger had met Dayne Davey in Knysna a week before he left for the UK in 1999. She'd lunched with her family at the restaurant where Roger was a barman – a fleeting moment that proved to be indelible. Through their online conversations eight years later, they discovered shared interests that had great business potential. Dayne, a zoology graduate, had started a volunteer organisation focussed on conservation. They realised that Roger's knowledge and experience in the fields of hospitality, tourism and operational management could take this project to a new level. And so, Roger returned to his homeland and Edge of Africa was born.

Based in Knysna, Edge of Africa creates opportunities for paying volunteers to visit the Garden Route while making a meaningful and tangible difference in people's lives. The organisation is committed to ethical volunteering and responsible travelling and is involved with a number of sustainable community projects in the area. In three years, Roger and Dayne elevated Edge of Africa from an ambitious start-up to a successful tourism operation. The organisation won the South African Tourism Award in its category in 2010 and was nominated for a World Travel Award for three consecutive years.



One Edge of Africa's many success stories is the annual Knysna Beach Festival. Roger had been dreaming of creating such an event since working at The Beach Hotel in Sri Lanka. Edge of Africa proved the ideal platform from which to make the dream a reality. Roger's vision was to create an event that would not just be another "fun in the sun" festival or beach volleyball tournament. It was to be a meaningful community event, drawing in people from all social groups. It gave underprivileged children who had benefited from Sports Edge (Edge of Africa's sports development projects) an opportunity to compete and to celebrate the year's progress. The vision was also to offer something for everyone, making it a family-focussed affair. Sand sculpting contests, live music and paragliding displays combined with fun sporting events to create a memorable experience for everyone.

### Face to the Future

The Edge of Africa experience has proven invaluable to Roger. It gave him the opportunity to put into practice all he had learnt about business and operational management and honed his skills in sales and marketing. It also forged a network that will allow him to embark on his most ambitious and far-reaching enterprise yet: The Expedition Project. The Knysna Beach Festival, which Roger plans to expand nationally and internationally in the future, will be the launch pad for this new adventure.

Roger launched out from his nurturing home to see the world as a starry-eyed nineteen year-old. His travels taught him many things, but it was in returning to his African homeland that he learnt his identity and vocation. He has done more than see the world – he has observed it. And what he discovered is the vastness of life and the wealth of beauty we pass by unwittingly every day. His future vision is global once more, but in a different way. This time around, his aim is to light a fire that will spread across the world as a force for positive and lasting change.

*Please refer to **Addendum A** for a detailed CV.*

*Please refer to **Addendum B** for the Edge of Africa Social Media Case Study.*

### My Inspiration

"My parents are my main inspiration. My mother taught me warmth, compassion and love and my dad taught me integrity, principles and conscientious work ethic. And to this day, my siblings are the first people I will go to for advice. Sporting Chance's Brad Bing was a huge influence and inspiration to me. He used his passion to good effect by turning it into a career – that was the first time I had seen it in my life. I am still in contact with him today. The next time I saw people actually enjoying their jobs was when I was backpacking through Zimbabwe and went rafting on the Zambezi – the guides loved life! That opened a new door for me. Work could be fun and enjoyable and you could turn your passion into a career. Hence my lifelong mission to explore the world and find my true passion, abilities, interests and direction."

– Roger Wynne-Dyke, 2011

