

„Africa is my treasure trove“

Marijke D’Herde and her use of the Gefühlsmonster Cards in Africa

Two tragic deaths in her family laid the foundation for her desire to work on improving the living conditions of other people—and thus fulfilling her social commitment.



Marijke D’Herde

For eight years now the Belgian Marijke D’Herde has been demonstrating with her project *Akiiki* (in English: “friend”, “world traveller”, “she who travels far”) that it is possible to find out together on a voluntary and unpaid basis what could be helpful in their situation. At the same time, with this project she teaches tourists an understanding for the living conditions of people in Africa.

Her father had committed suicide when Marijke D’Herde was 13 years old. Four years later, her aunt also chose to end her life. Combined, these two events marked the end of her carefree teenage years. The question that plagued her ever since was: Why did her father and aunt do this? Now she says about her father,

who never really revealed his true self to her during his lifetime, “I think he was a gentle, kind and very vulnerable man, who was searching for himself and was not able to regulate his emotions and find strength within himself to cope with his life. Maybe that was why he worked so hard, to prove his worth and to put distance between himself and his emotions.” That is probably the reason why important themes in her own life include emotions, needs, relationships, self expression, active listening, and authenticity. “That was my school of life.” Even though, it was a hard lesson. In hind sight she is grateful for her experiences.

After studying social work and starting to work with refugees, drug addicts, and sex workers, she decided to take a year off. In search of answers and community she “fled” from Europe to the Central African Republic. The object of her desire was to dare an experiment. She subjected herself to the living conditions of the local population, which meant that she lived in extreme poverty. At age 26 she had neither electricity nor running water at her disposal. This meant not having a refrigerator and cooking food on the open fire. The market was a 45-minute walk away and had to be visited daily due to the lack of storage facilities.

The young woman quickly realized: “When I am in Africa something happens to me. It is a source of creativity and spirituality. I am more in touch with my emotions. I feel more whole. I learn to connect the air (ideas) with the earth (elaboration).”



Now, despite the blows of fate, she is an enthusiastic, energetic and cheerful 48-year-old, who discovered that in the Central African Republic people need to rely on one another to survive. What she became aware of was the long-missed sense of community. Not only did she find this on another continent, but she also found the man with whom she later had three children. She quickly realized that she would not be able to raise them in Africa. The living conditions, medical care, and educational opportunities were not sufficient. So she returned to Belgium with her (now) former husband. The children now reconnect her to her native country. In order to pursue her interests in Africa again, she began to work as a tour guide.

In 2013, a burnout set her back. Ultimately, this led her to giving up her satisfying, but also exhausting, work with refugees and other challenging groups.

Her goal was to no longer help solve problems, but to prevent them from arising in the first place. Since then she has been teaching non-violent communication in Belgium for the Walk Your Talk company. She does so for 100 days per year over an eight-month period. She spends the rest of the year in Uganda.



Her continued work as a tour guide connected her with the African Moses, with whom she set up a program free of cost. This connects the local population with inquiring tourists. Later, she added another program to link her and Uganda’s future. She passes on her knowledge as a trainer for non-violent communication to a group of 15 people, called “Hipos” (which is derived from “high-potentials”, people who stand out in her seminars through special willingness to learn), with whom she works for one year. She makes us aware that in Uganda, the country on which she now focuses, there is a lot of violence, in schools, in families, in companies—virtually everywhere, both physically and psychologically. Her goal is to convey positive feelings and encourage people to live together in a different way.

At the same time she never acts as a “teacher”, but sees herself as someone

who gives suggestions and learns together with the participants what is helpful and how these changes can succeed.



The Gefühlsmonster® Cards¹ play a big and important role in Marijke D’Herde’s work. She got to know them in 2014 in a seminar in Roermond, Netherlands, and she quickly gained knowledge of how to work with this tool.



Marijke D’Herde (left) and Lilli Höch-Corona (right) at a Gefühlsmonster workshop in Roermond

She visited Lilli Höch-Corona in Berlin and told her about her projects. They became friends and every year since, a package with Gefühlsmonster materials has been sent to Belgium. For many years Conex (GFK Berlin) was also involved in her project, sending materials on non-violent

communication. As a thank you, Marijke provides Gefühlsmonster GmbH with reports and photos about her work in Uganda.

Marijke D’Herde never read a manual on how to use the Gefühlsmonster® Cards, she has been working with them intuitively from the beginning. In Uganda there is a great need for such tools. Not having been taught about it in their families, Ugandans don’t show feelings, they get suppressed. It just doesn’t feel safe to them to communicate them to others. Thus, men are expected to always demonstrate strength and not to cry. The cards allow them to access and talk about their feelings. Sharing means healing, because by doing so people feel that they are not alone. Repressed feelings, on the other hand, make people sick and depressed. The cards can reveal and convey what words sometimes fail to do. With the help of the cards Ugandans now even cry together and feel liberated by it.

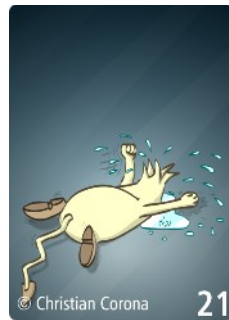


Thanks to regular donations from Gefühlsmonster GmbH, Marijke now has sets of cards that she can pass on. She can provide her „Hipos“ with a set of the cards and a copy of the book *Sometimes*

¹ Gefühlsmonster®- Cards are available here:
gefuehlsmonster-shop.de/gefuehlsmonster-cards

*Feelings are Monsters*² free of charge as teaching materials.

It is a particular strength of the Gefühlsmonster® Cards that they can and should be interpreted in many different ways. For example, a surprising interpretation from Uganda is shown in card #7. It reminds the people in Uganda that they have pain from carrying water or other heavy loads on their heads. The card #21 means that they laugh so much that they can’t stop.



The #5 stands—as it does in Belgium—for relaxation, the #18 for energy and the will to work.



The #19 and #15 are used frequently, they symbolize a feeling of togetherness and love. So in Uganda these four cards represent pleasant feelings, as they do in Belgium.



What motivates the mother of three in her work is her inner drive which she has had from an early age on. Her goal is to convey this desire, to inspire and encourage people. „Things are worth doing if it has meaning to me and I feel that energy“, Marijke D’Herde sums up. „When a person realizes their potential it’s a very good day.“ As it does, for example, when a man like Moses allows his emotions and even cries with the help of the Gefühlsmonster® Cards.



2 Available in bookstores or in the Gefühlsmonster Shop:
gefuehlsmonster-shop.de/books

Marijke’s personal favourite monster is #3. „That’s how I feel when I can be myself, free and strong.“ And that is what keeps bringing her back to her second home, Uganda.



*Martina Günther, freelance contributor for
Gefühlsmonster GmbH*