

It has always been said that one can judge a community by how it pulls together at times of peril. History tells, over and over again, how during natural disasters, threats of war, times of sickness or disease, communities and even nations have either pulled together and helped their fellow man, or turned against one another, and fended only for themselves. History shows that it is those communities and people who stand together, who find strength in numbers, that survive the challenges that life throws at them best.

The Thunderchild story starts in 1918 in the face of great adversity: the Great Flu Pandemic was sweeping the globe and made landfall in South Africa in September of that year, quickly spreading across the country and claiming nearly 140 000 lives in two years. Towns were left ravaged by illness, with entire families being wiped out, and many children left orphaned or destitute. The small farming community of Robertson, which by the early 1900s only had about 3500 inhabitants, founded the Robertson Herberg Children's Home in an effort to provide shelter for the many children who now had nowhere else to go.

Up until this day, the Herberg Children's Home has continued to care for the children of the Robertson and surrounding communities without fail. Many of the children living there today are not orphans, but come from broken homes or from families unable to provide adequate care for their special needs. As a Non-Profit Organization, the Herberg Children's Home cares for 122 boys and girls across all ages with funds from donations, sponsors and the state.

Being a farming community, the Herberg owned had a 5 hectare apricot orchard next door to the Home, the fruit of which was sold to provide an additional income. In the early 2000's, stone fruit prices were falling due to a flooded market, and bottled wine sales had never been healthier, much in thanks to the opening of the international market post-1994. In 2003, after several years of contemplation and worrying about the viability and future of the apricot orchard, the Robertson townsfolk once again came together as a community and made the decision to uproot the trees. It was decided to plant vines instead, with the goal to eventually make a wine from the grapes they would bear.

What followed was a monumental exercise of generosity, selflessness and compassion by the Robertson region. Everything used to establish the vineyard was donated - from the machinery used to prepare the soil, the fertilizers, the actual vines themselves, to the labour and expertise needed to plant the vines and manage the land. After years of carefully tending the vines, the first wine from the Herberg's vineyard was finally made in 2008. Made by the team at Springfield Estate, who offered their cellar and services free of charge, the resulting red blend of Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon was made using only natural yeast and uncrushed, unpressed grapes, resulting in a beautifully complex wine with notes of cassis and red fruits, complemented by velvety tannins.

Many people wonder why the name Thunderchild was chosen for the wine, once it was ready to share with the world. Storms are beautiful things - they hold so much energy, so much potential. A storm can bring destruction and devastation, yet it can bring new life and new beginnings as well, if experienced from a safe place. The lives of the children of the Herberg Children's home have been characterized by dark, heavy clouds on the horizon - the threat of loss and hardship ever present. In a storm, one takes shelter in safe houses - buildings with solid foundations, secure roofs and watertight windows. The Thunderchild project aims to provide this same sense of security and safety for the children living in the home - a place of comfort in a life often darkened by clouds of thunder. This is how inspiration for the name "Thunderchild" came about, a name that encapsulates the often fragile balance between hope and destruction for these children.

Since the launch of the maiden vintage in 2008, and with the vintages that followed - 2009, 2014 and 2015 - the Thunderchild project has grown from strength to strength. Managed and guided by the Wingerdprojek Trust, 100% of the profits and proceeds from the sale of the Thunderchild wine goes to the Herberg Children's Home in the form of an educational trust. Only hard costs are recovered, such as vineyard supplies, labour and packaging costs - marketing and sales efforts are done by the community pro bono. Audited by Price Waterhouse Coopers, the Trust manages the allocation of the funding in ways that will be meaningful and most beneficial to the futures of the children. One of the smallest decisions with the largest impact, was the resolution to ensure that every child leaves the Children's Home with a drivers license - something not taken into account by the government funding. With many of the children finding employment and apprenticeships in trade related industries after finishing school, being able to drive is an indispensable asset. The Thunderchild project has also employed a full time tutor at the Home, to help any

children with their studies and homework, as well as provided extra maths classes for all learners. By 2017, the project had sent 5 children to tertiary education of their choice across the country, paying for not only university or college fees, but for books, meals and pocket money as well. While BADISA and the SA government provide for the basic needs of these children, an admirable and large contribution, the Thunderchild project tries to go that extra mile for these children - something everyone would do for their own kids. For those that excel at a non school or government funded sport, funding is provided to participate in competitions - for example, funding for overseas sports tours such as a rugby tour to England and Scotland, and a dancing competition in Croatia.

The response to the project has been phenomenal, with Thunderchild winning listings on the wine lists of Michelin-starred chefs abroad, such as Gordon Ramsay, based purely on the quality of the wine. Locally, it has been championed by luxury retailer Woolworths, and supported by many high end wine stores, restaurants and bars.

It is not every day that you can support a charity project, and get a fantastic bottle of wine in return - an added bonus, in a way. Every child has the potential inside of them to change the world, and the Thunderchild Project tries to unlock that potential for the children of the Robertson Children's Home.