

OBITUARY

YUSRA LAILA VISSER (1975 — 2020)



Yusra was a student at Waterford Kamhlaba from 1987 till the end of 1992. She died on May 16, 2020, at the age of 45. Despite her name, which means ‘ease’ or ‘comfort’ in Arabic, her life was far from easy. Even so, she was known, by those who got to know her personally, to be always there to ease the life of others. It is difficult, if not impossible to describe Yusra in a mere couple of hundred words. A more complete tribute to her is available at <http://jvisser-ldi.blogspot.com/2020/07/yusra-laila-visser-1975-2020.html>.

Yusra was a citizen of the world. Though born in the Netherlands, and consequently of Dutch nationality, she never established residence in her native country. Rather, she considered herself an African, thanks to having grown up for the first 18—most formative—years of her life in Southern Africa. But she was flexible and easily felt at home in other cultures. While attending primary school in Maputo, she and her classmates were asked to write an essay about their native country. Yusra wrote it about Bolivia, a country she had once visited and fallen in love with.

Following her years at Waterford, which she highly valued, she went on to study International Relations at the American University in Washington and, later, Instructional Systems Design at the Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. She became a serious scientist; brave enough to ask tough questions for which there was no easy answer yet at the horizon, addressing those questions methodically and in a disciplined fashion, being bold enough to row against the stream of conventional research.

Life means facing challenges and for Yusra there were many. She had a rare disease, Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), which progressively limited her abilities. Dealing with problems, overcoming unavoidable pain and failure, were for her the essential ingredients of life, the things that make us better the more we deal with them effectively. Failure, she felt, was a crucial opportunity for learning. Dealing with the challenges of life in the everyday context makes us resilient. This would be the focus of her next project. However, on 18 May 2020 she was found lifeless in her apartment in Bassano del Grappa in Italy. Her life had come to an end two days earlier. Her legacy remains. To advance research and development in the areas about which Yusra was passionate, a fund is being established in her name. Developments regarding the fund can be followed at www.facebook.com/learndev and via the website of the Learning Development Institute (www.learndev.org).