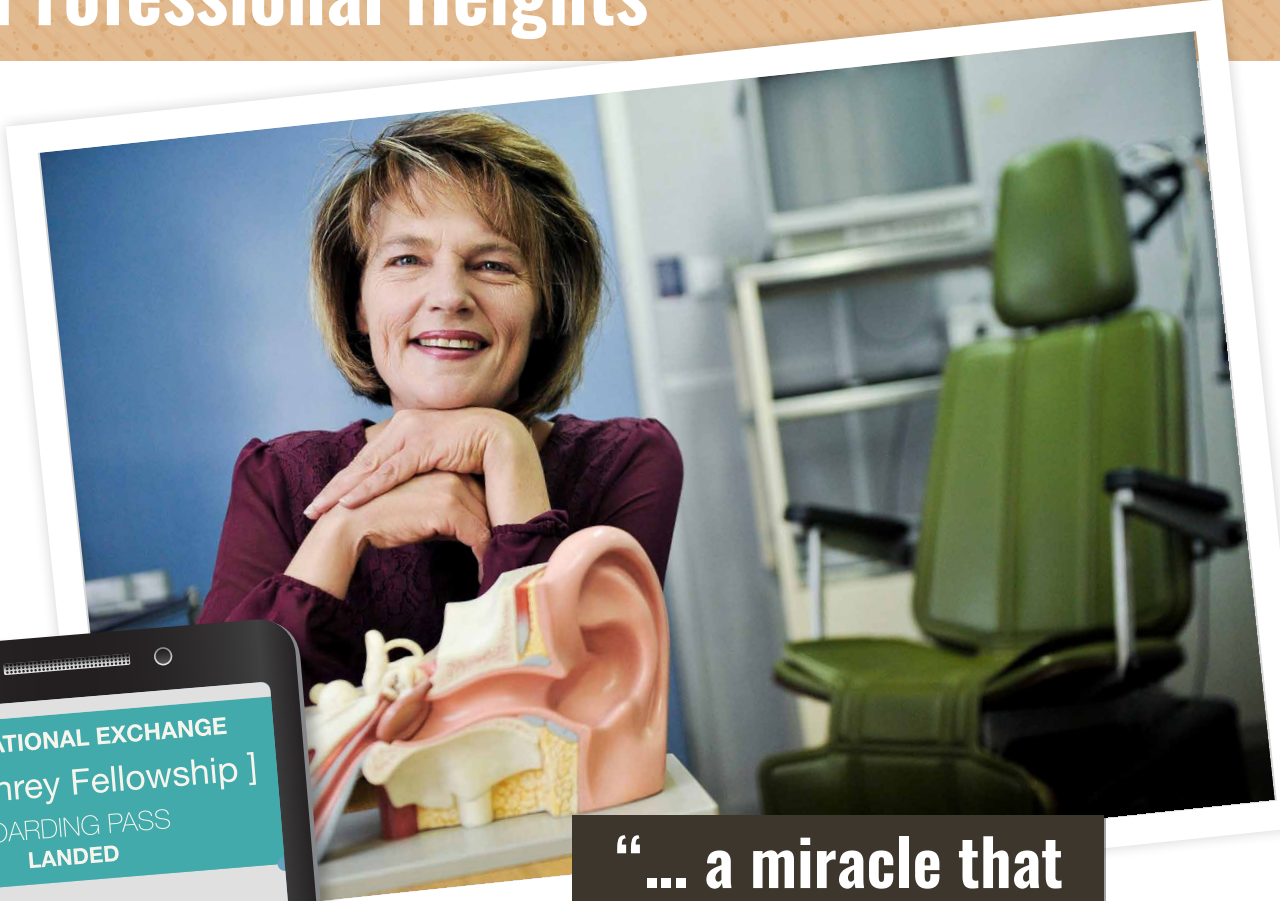


Magteld Smith — Propelled to New Professional Heights

By Sophia Bennett



“... a miracle that

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Minneapolis winters can be so frigid, even the locals think twice before wandering out. But snow and sub-zero temperatures did nothing to deter Dr. Magteld Smith from making the most of her Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship while placed at the University of Minnesota. Nearly every day she bundled up against weather unlike anything she'd experienced in her native South Africa and trekked to the school's libraries to study.



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This level of commitment typifies both Magteld's year in the Humphrey Fellowship program and her mission to serve individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing around the world. A self-described medical-social researcher on deafness and hearing loss, she helps medical professionals in South Africa understand both the physiological and emotional impacts of deafness and advises policymakers on how they can better serve people with disabilities. These are issues she understands well, having been born with profound deafness in both ears. What little hearing she had disappeared after a childhood bout with meningitis.

Magteld was already well-established in her field when she was accepted for the fellowship. Although her position at the University of the Free State's Department of Otorhinolaryngology (a medical specialty of the ear, nose, and throat) gave her access to numerous resources, she knew research in the United States would allow her to advance further. She applied for the Humphrey Fellowship because “I was attracted to the opportunity to further develop the professional skills, expertise and perspectives I would need as a global leader in my field.”

The Humphrey Fellowship, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, is extremely competitive. Magteld was one of two South African applicants chosen in her year from an extremely competitive pool of nominees from more than 90 countries. Advisors placed her at the University of Minnesota so she could further her education and professional development as part of the university's Interdisciplinary Graduate Group in Disability Studies.

Magteld had traveled internationally, so she wasn't worried about living in the United States. Her bigger concern was whether she'd truly be able to communicate with her peers and professors. Upon her arrival she was immediately introduced to the Disability Resource Center at the University of Minnesota, which put her concerns to rest. The

Center included a captioning unit which provides real-time captioning (speech-to-text) services. To say they were useful would be an understatement. “It was the first time in my life I knew what was being said in the classroom, workshops, seminars, meetings, and events. For me, it was a miracle that goes beyond words.”

During her year-long Humphrey Fellowship, Magteld took a partial load of classes so she had time to attend conferences, network with her American peers, engage in professional development activities, and sequester herself in the library to read journals and reports. At the end of her fellowship she attended a four-day Humphrey Program Year-End Retreat in Washington, D.C. There, she received a certificate signed by former United States President Barack Obama, reunited with other Humphrey Fellows and made new professional contacts.

Magteld's career has reached a higher level since completing the Fellowship. Her research has been published in various peer-reviewed scientific journals, and she's received numerous awards, including the Golden Key International Honour Chapter Award and an award naming her one of the top three Humphrey Fellows among her class of 400.

She also received several offers to present her research at international conferences. Her lectures on “Understanding and Living with a Cochlear Implant: A Psychotherapeutic Approach” and “South African Sign Language: Progress and Challenges” give medical professionals an expert's view—and a disabled person's view—on how to support people with disabilities. In this way, Magteld is reaching even more people around the globe.

The sky's the limit for Magteld's career and personal mission now. Let's hope those skies will be warmer in her future travels.