

The Story of Ross

It's early in the morning in Kinshasa. The roads are still wet from the heavy rains from the night before and the pink-red colors of the African dawn reflect in the puddles on the road. Ross is on his way to his latest project. Although it's not much more than a foundation now, in a few months this will be the site of a brand new school, the fifth one he's completed so far. He has the whole picture in his head. The structural drawings, the roof, the colors of the walls. Behind the wheel of his car he whistles a song while carefully maneuvering through the busy rush hour. The cargo that is piled up on top of the trucks rocks dangerously back and forth while mopeds frantically find their own way through the chaos. He passes the colorful vegetable stalls along the road when he spots the first kids in blue and white school uniforms on their way to school. He has felt that same feeling of hope before, the hope of a better future for Congo. Even though there is still so much to do in this country in which years of war have taken their devastating toll. He feels like there is a future for the Congo. He knows what hope looks like, as his own story is one of hope, one of success.

He remembers his first assignment as if it was yesterday. En Classe, a Dutch foundation that strives to improve education in the Congo, had asked him to repaint his old school, which was in desperate need of a fresh coat of paint. He remembers vividly how he was able to cover up the bullet holes with his paint brush and revive the colors of the outside walls. He remembers the smiling faces of the school children once he was finished. This opportunity that was offered to him by En Classe made him think. He decided that he wanted to do more for all those kids who would feel the raindrops falling or the blazing sun beating up on their heads, because of the holes in the roof. So he decided to go back to school and work hard to finish his education. He became an engineer.

That was five years ago.

Nowadays, he doesn't only paint. He builds. Entire school buildings, sanitary facilities, water stations. And he still works for En Classe. His paint shop is buzzing with business and he has more than twenty employees. Every day he feels grateful for the opportunities En Classe gave *him* and he is happy that he can pass those opportunities on to *his* employees. But most of all, he is grateful for everything the foundation does to improve education in The Congo. And his own daughter?? She now is a student at an En Classe School!