

SOUTH AFRICAN SANDPLAY THERAPY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2026

This newsletter provides information about the South African Sandplay Therapy Society (SASTS) and Sandplay Therapy as developed by Dora Kalff. It aims to facilitate communication between all SASTS members and to provide access to current research, events, and educational opportunities in the field of sandplay therapy. SASTS is a member society of the International Society of Sandplay Therapy (ISST) that encourages the highest quality of sandplay therapy practice from ISST certified sandplay therapists.

Visit our website at www.sasts.co.za

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Jungian Sandplay colleagues and friends,

The year 2025 will be remembered as a year of important happenings for SASTS.

Retha Roux and Braam Beetge were selected to be part of the Organizing Committee for the ISST Congress in The Netherlands where SASTS played a vital role in the success of the Congress. The feedback from the International Societies were very positive and the idea to have an ISST Congress in South Africa in the near future came out very strong.

I am proud of how our Society grew the last year and the positive feedback I got at the ISST Boardmeeting in The Netherlands. It was again a honour for me to represent all of you at the Boardmeeting. We can be proud to belong to such a dynamic International Society.

Before the ISST Board meeting and Congress in The Netherlands, I visited Martin and Sabine Kalff for the last time in the old house in Zollikon Switzerland where Sandplay was born. It was with a heavy and sad heart, but also a blessed one, to say goodbye to the old farm house. The house played a powerful part in the journeys of so many Sandplay Therapists around the world and became symbolic of our relationship with Dora Kalff and ISST. I had the privilege to witness much of the history of Sandplay and the life of Martin there. And many days of special lectures and supervision.

It was a day of deep friendship and many stories. Thank you Martin for helping us to bring Sandplay to South Africa. SASTS wish you and Sabine many happy times in your new house in Zurich.

We also had the honour to welcome International ISST Teachers on zoom who presented outstanding seminars for SASTS. We had Judy Zappacosta from the USA who presented a four-hour seminar on *Loving our Brokenness: The Human Dimension of the Archetype of the Black Madonna*. Ulrich Gundermann from Germany presented *Oscillation along the way-Process in Sandplay* and Dr Audrey Punnett from the USA taught *Navigating Marital Rupture: A Developmental Perspective*.

A successful Symbol Shower day was held where Braam Beetge presented on the symbolism of the Owl in Jungian Sandplay Therapy. Jessica Laubscher shared a powerful symbol study on the



Eland. We were also blessed by a symbol lecture on the Centaur by Elizabeth Vos, Jungian Analyst from SAAJA.

Our Executive Committee is planning to make contact with Psychology departments of Universities in South Africa to promote Jungian Sandplay Therapy and our Society. We also need to educate professionals on the difference between Sandtray PlayTherapy and Jungian Sandplay Therapy ISST. There is still a lot of confusion regarding these two very different treatment modalities. We ask YOU, our SASTS Sandplay community, to help professionals in South Africa regarding the differences.

A new SASTS Executive Committee will be voted for in February 2026. Retha, Sylvia, Judith and I are saying goodbye. We thank you for a wonderful three years together.

Thank you to all our members for your passion, commitment and the wonderful work you do. Thank you for continuing to support SASTS.

I send you all my best,

Braam

Space is the nursemaid of becoming - Plato

Open savannahs and distant horizons paint the backdrop for my early years. I grew up close to the Namibian soil with ample space to play and explore. During the harsh summers, we were shielded from the sun by the fruit trees in our backyard. In the milder winter months we ruled the rockery in the front yard. Hollowing out sandy caves between large rocks and linking them with finger-drawn trails that curved around cacti, we established clusters of villages where the tiny inhabitants of our imagination dwelled.

Family trips often took us through the deceptive “emptiness” of the Namib dessert to Swakopmund, and further north along the Skeleton Coast. We learned early on that dunes could walk. We knew some of them by name and “surfed” down their flanks on pieces of cardboard. We swam in the waters of the icy Benguela current and harvested seafood. We stood in awe of the long limbs of ancient Welwitschias.

Sometimes we drove south to my uncle’s farm near the Kalahari Desert where camel thorn trees and patches of “duwweltjies” (*Tribulus Terrestris*) scattered over the red sand. Good rain seasons (not an annual occurrence in Namibia) brought thunderclouds that soaked the arid earth. We excitedly anticipated veld foods like *tsammas* and *Nabas* that would soon spring from the grateful soil. We marvelled at colourful lichen and the wizardry of resurrection plants that seemed dead, but turned green within hours of rain.

Sand featured significantly in a repeating dream from this unencumbered time. My young self sits in a underground cavern below a busy excavation area. Sunlight and dust streak in from an opening above, and I wonder how to reach this upper world that remains invisible from where I sit. The persistence of the dreams stirred such a sense of urgency in my young psyche that I pondered the question even in my waking hours. The solution materialized in the unconscious, when the dream girl realized that the sifting sand itself was becoming an elevated floor that slowly edged her towards the world above.



IN THE BEGINNING

Retha remembers...



Looking back now, one may understand the dream series as perhaps reflecting an archetypal blueprint of becoming. But at that time, I was simply relieved that the dreams did not return once the riddle had been solved.

Tertiary education brought me to South Africa. I felt particularly drawn to the depth psychology components of my Master's programme at the University of the Free State. I distinctly remember the empathic insistence of Dr Miemie Fourie, one of our child psychology lecturers, that one should have a green crocodile in one's toy collection to allow for the expression of anger. She may have been the first person tilling the soil for an appreciation of the symbolic value of miniatures in therapy.

More ground work was done by Dr Hannie Schoeman who introduced me to Gestalt sandtray work shortly after I started working for the Department of Health. I found it extremely helpful in my clinic work with rural children at the time.

The demands of trauma work serendipitously steered me to Elana Burger's practice in Paarl for regular supervision. My vague awareness of her sandplay practice was confronted one day when I arrived for my appointment during a time of personal distress. Elana knew me well enough by then to sense my inner state intuitively without me verbalising it. She simply gestured towards the sand trays.

I furiously spaded most of the wet sand out of the tray into a container Elana quickly moved into place. Afterwards, only one tree on a tiny rectangular island remained in the blue bottom. Despite my exhaustion, I experienced immense physical relief and an inexplicable sense of rooted clarity about the challenges I faced. The seeds of Kalfjian Jungian Sandplay Therapy had been sown.

A typical Namibian landscape

A few months later, Elana invited me to join the first intensive training programme that would be presented in Paarl by Deborah Bedford-Strohm. I did not hesitate. The tree logo of the Lemoenkloof Boutique Hotel training venue seemed to welcome my stepping over this threshold for an adventure into the world of sandplay therapy.

The training group met for six week-long blocks, twice annually from 2013 to 2016. Deborah's clarity on Jungian theory and the multi-layered nuances of sandplay therapy competently edged the seed beds for my sprouting knowledge. She was ably assisted by Anke Seitz, an experienced Jungian analyst and teacher, during two of the training blocks. I also met Braam for the first time when he taught a module on traumatology as part of his ISST Teacher certification journey.

I always left the trainings bone tired, but satisfied. The teaching filled an unquenchable thirst in me to know more and I awaited the next block with much anticipation. The vibrant marketplace exchanges with like-minded colleagues, and the silent circumambulation of psyche's mysteries intertwined my root system with this little growing sandplay community inextricably.

My personal process with Deborah connected me in significant ways to my body self and gently addressed shadow aspects. As my inner world expanded, I noticed how outer realities in my life shifted. I did not "believe" that sandplay worked – I knew it for myself.

The symbolic life that had always been alive but remained mostly dormant in undisclosed corners of my psyche, started to flourish. Imagery of the upside-down tree rooting itself in heaven and branching down to earth became a powerful image for me at this time.

The spaciousness and protection that characterized my natural and family environment as a child, unequivocally shaped the topography of my psyche. The free and sheltered space of sandplay therapy that was so vitally important to Dora Kallf, strongly resonated with me.

I knew early on that I would pursue ISST certification. The topic for my first symbol paper on the tree seemed to have chosen itself months before in Elana's office. I rediscovered how much I loved the solitary joys of being a student - reading, contemplating and playing with ideas, and then trying to capture the essence in my own words. It is no wonder that Brainy Smurf turned up regularly in my personal process trays during this time.



A tree that has adapted to the harsh conditions of the Namib Desert

Sandplay became a trusted pillar of my private practice offering. Regular supervision by Braam and Anke provided much-needed fertilization and weeding that supported the organic growth of my understanding, competence and an inner capacity to contain the depth work. I qualified as an ISST Sandplay Therapist in July 2020.

The COVID pandemic swept mighty winds of change through the world and through the copse of saplings in my sandplay patch. It was pruning season. When I shared with Deborah how wind symbolism had been turning up for me, she encouraged me to sort my reflections into a talk for a supportive online learning space she was hosting for South African sandplay therapists at the time. As always, this community kindly embraced the bare branches and green buds I produced, and motivated me to flesh them out some more.

In 2022, an opportunity arose to present on wind symbolism at a virtual congress organized by the Canadian Association of Sandplay Therapy (CAST). Given my uneasy relationship with technology, it was a major feat which I only braved with two faithful Johans by my side. My husband and a dear IT specialist friend sat out of view from the online audience, ready to intervene if disaster struck.

Feedback from the international participants bolstered my confidence. I realized that I trusted my personal experience with sandplay process and the processes that I anchored for clients so implicitly, that I wanted to teach this modality to others. Wise mentors like Judy Zappacosta, Imme Thom and Gwenda Euvrard watched over my ripening.

Simultaneously, many conversations among local ISST-registered therapists and teachers (Braam Beetge, Judith Bredekamp, Sylvia Clutten, Imme Thom, Gwenda Euvrard, Reyhana Seedat and I) centred around forming a South African Sandplay Society.

Imme and I put together the first newsletter for our developing community in July 2022. And so the African man waving a newspaper - who had appeared towards the end of my personal process years before - stepped out of the tray into the outer world.

Dogged determination spiced with much merriment helped the founding members to navigate the minutiae of establishing a society. SASTS' baobab tree finally found its spot in the ISST garden at the 26th ISST congress in Israel in 2023, which I had the privilege of attending online.

Serving on the executive of the newly formed society brought responsibilities to maintain and strengthen what SASTS offered its loyal membership. It also brought opportunities. Towards the end of 2023, I volunteered to join the organizing committee of the 27th ISST congress that would be hosted by the Dutch Sandplay Society (NVST). This triggered a growth spurt that widened my circle in the sandplay community, grew my understanding of the structures and policies of ISST, and honed valuable skills.

I continued working steadily towards meeting the teaching certification. Opportunities to teach and supervise virtually were important formative experiences. Being accepted as an ISST Teaching Member in July 2024 represented a very special growth ring in the trunk of my sandplay development.

Another abundant year followed in 2025. Twelve years after embarking on my formal sandplay training, I was finally able to attend an ISST congress in person. To have my proposal for an experiential workshop accepted as well, seemed like an exceptional windfall.

The theme of the 2025 congress "Changing horizons: Encountering the Other in Sandplay Therapy" resonated with me deeply. I sat down with the other members of the congress committee whom Braam and I had been meeting online for nearly two years. I shook hands with teachers with whom I had only had virtual contact before - Lorraine Freedle, Carlo Ruffino, Betty Jackson, and Dyane Sherwood to mention just a few. I discovered new teachers with fresh ideas and I met so many therapists like myself who simply loved sandplay and remained eager to learn more.

Braam Beetge introducing me to participants of my experiential workshop at the 2025 congress.



Walking the labyrinth at Rustenberg Estate with the first SASTS executive team, in celebration of our Society's inception.

It was an honour to represent SASTS at the congress. We helped to anchor the event behind the scenes. We also brought solid teaching, novel research and playful exploration to the academic programme. Others noticed and admired our community's approachable and positive energy, and our commitment to being worthy custodians of Dora Kalff's legacy through our work.

My sandplay journey has constantly invited me to expand my views. My gradual evolution into a sandplay therapist and teacher seems to amplify the childhood dreams of long ago. I am profoundly thankful for the marvellous panorama of Kalffian Jungian Sandplay Therapy that is now visible all around me. It is a privilege to belong to this empowering community.

It is grace that met me and led me this far. I know that grace will guide me further.

Retha Roux

January 2026



INDABA



27th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

Changing Horizons: Encountering the Other in Sandplay Therapy

Egmond aan Zee | THE NETHERLANDS

August 18-22, 2025



Braam planted the SASTS flag next to those of other ISST member societies at the Board Meeting.



The congress organizing committee: Braam Beetge, Retha Roux, Marianne Molbech, Theresa Foks-Appelman, Jellemieke Hees-Stauthamer and John Paulet.



Congress goodies...



After two years of virtual meetings, the first face-to-face congress organizing committee meeting took place on the evening before the event.



The SASTS delegation: Retha Roux, Judith Bredekamp, Braam Beetge, Reyhana Seedat and Sylvia Clutten.



Early birds! Getting the official registration out of the way, so we can focus on other tasks.



Braam and Reyhana ready to meet and greet other delegates in the hotel lobby.

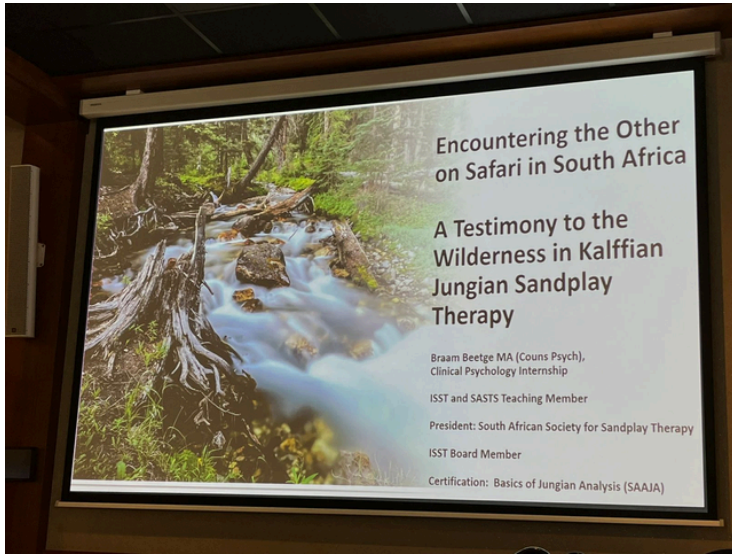


Judith and Anke celebrating Judith's research poster.



We love Egmond AND Sandplay AND Sylvia...

Contributions to the academic programme reflected the versatility of our community:



Keynote Address by Braam Beetge.



Research Poster and Presentation by Judith Bredekamp



Experiential Workshop by Retha Roux

Judith Bredekamp reflects:

Going to an International Sandplay conference is like stepping into an adventure, and even though this was only my second, both experiences have been richly rewarding and a true blessing. When entering the lobby of the venue the huge sign greeting us was; “I ♥ Egmond”. That was welcoming, but at the end of the conference it took on a much deeper meaning. It was good to see familiar faces again and talk to like minded individuals.

Even before leaving Cape Town and then from day 1 I could tell the huge amount of work the international organising group put into making this conference such a success. Part of this international group was our own Retha and Braam. Once again they represented our Sandplay society on the international stage and did it with great aplomb.

They were not only part of the organising committee but also presented their own presentations – Braam as keynote speaker, injecting a touch of Africa into this European conference and Retha nurturing our souls with her SoulCollage® experiential workshop. At this conference I knew what it was like to receive an encore – when participants asked Retha if they could come back later the evening to do more SoulCollage® with her.

Another highlight for me was spending time with Sylvia and getting to know Reyhana better. Reyhana’s life is embedded in such a rich history. It was an honour to hear some of her stories. I also got to present my research – which was a fulfilling experience.

For the next conference – if anyone has the opportunity but is still doubting their attendance – I would truly grab it with both hands. As with any true adventure, this conference stretched, nourished, and rewarded those who chose to step into it.

What you are seeking is seeking you.

Rumi

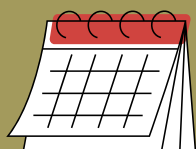
READY TO CONTINUE YOUR SANDPLAY THERAPY JOURNEY?

These colleagues can assist:

Individual Supervision: Braam, Gwenda, Imme or Retha

Group Supervision: Braam

Personal Process: Braam, Gwenda, Imme, Retha, Sylvia, Judith



2026 WEBINAR PROGRAMME

Thursday, 26 March at 19:00

Moitara: Changing Horizons

Presenter: Lucia Azevedo (IBTS/ISST Teaching Member)

Thursday, 28 May at 19:00

Presentation of a Case supervised by Dora Kalff

Presenter: Janet Tatum (STA/ISST Teaching Member)

SAVE THE DATE

**Registration
Open!**

ISST 2026 Intensive Training Week Ephesus Retreat Center – Izmir, Turkey

A week of focused learning and connection in the
ancient city of Ephesus

Intensive Training Weeks in Sandplay

Week One: 2 Nov - 8 Nov 2026

Week Two: 16 Nov - 22 Nov 2026

Questions? Contact us at itw2026turkey@gmail.com

THE SYMBOL SHACK

Mud

Mud characterizes the abundant ecosystems of swamps, marshes, morasses, waterholes and bogs. The water-saturated soil and relative stillness of these areas store chemical elements and proliferate micro-organisms that perform vital biochemical functions essential to all life (Hale, 2020, p. 1).

In addition to serving as pantries of carbon vital for global climate regulation, wetlands act as large sponges that filtrate and cleanse water. They play a crucial role in groundwater recharge, and curb floods and erosion. As rich breeding habitats, they support biodiversity (especially for birds, fish and amphibians) and supply local communities with essential products (such as food and timber). They also offer many opportunities for play and recreation.

Mud features in origin myths from around the world. In Zulu culture, Unkulunkulu (Old-Old One) is honoured as the first ancestor who emerged from the reeds of a muddy river bed. In Inuit and Northern Native American myths, the creator typically brings mud from the bottom of the chaotic waters up to the surface where it is stretched out as earth. Mud is also used to form people and animals that reflect traces of their maker.

Farmers on the banks of the Nile particularly valued mud as the foundation of fertility, growth and prosperity. They honoured deities such as Khnum, who shaped creatures from clay on his wheel, Meshkent who presided over childbirth, and Heqet, who took the form of a frog or a human female with a frog's head and grasped the *Ankh* (a symbol of life) with both hands.

Regular mud bathing allows animals such as rhino, elephant, warthog, wildebeest, buffalo, and pigs to manage body temperature, to protect their hide from the sun and to ensure their wellbeing. Once the mud dries and becomes itchy, they remove parasites and ticks from their skin by rubbing themselves against rocks, tree trunks and termite mounds.

The Himba tribe of Northern Namibia cover their skin with mud against harmful UV rays. For them and many other groups, mud has ceremonial significance too. It is often used in rites of passage to indicate the status of an individual (initiate, single or married). For the Bambara of Mali, mud cloth (hand-woven fabric dyed by fermenting mud) offers both physical camouflage and spiritual protection for the hunter.

Mud's microbial components qualified it as one of the most common materials for the mummification of the body in ancient Egypt. In the book of John, Jesus restores the sight of a blind man by applying a mix of saliva and soil to his eyes. The medicinal and cosmetic properties of the unique black mud from the Dead Sea in Israel have been popular for thousands of years (Ma'or, Henis, Alon, Orlov, Sørensen & Oren, 2006).

All these aspects underpin mud's symbolic links to creative potential, the generation of new forms, renewal, protection and healing. Contrasting negative connotations are apparent from the words for mud in many languages - slime (mut in Polish), excrement (mutra in Sanskrit and schmutz in German) and filth (modder in Dutch).

Muddy areas are often viewed as unkept, dangerous, unhealthy and stagnant. The seasonal fluctuation of water levels in muddy areas makes them particularly unpredictable and is associated with threat, loss and death.

Mud darkens, swallows, chokes and drowns. It can engulf whatever struggles within it and can transmute life that is dependent on light and air to death that becomes yet more mud. (Todman, 2007. p. 12). It is a disintegration that reflects a regression into the hidden depths of the unconscious where there is no form, no light for direction, no time and no space (Turner, 2005).



Mud may symbolise the *prima materia*, an idea dating back to pre-Socratic philosophy and favoured by medieval alchemy. Without any empirical proof of such a substance in the outer world, the concept represents an archetypal image of a formless tumultuous original essence from which all in the known universe differentiated and manifested (Edinger, 1994, p.10).

Edinger (1994, p. 12) likens the alchemist's challenge of finding the *prima materia* to deciding what to work on in psychotherapy. In sandplay therapy, the components of mud - water and soil - engage the sandplayer with the unconscious in a free and sheltered space.

Muddy sandtrays often mirror the alchemical phase of *nigredo*, a period of intense psychic suffering and distress which Jung (1977, par 721) describes as "a state of dissolution and decomposition that precedes synthesis." Muddy trays may reflect those developmental transitions or temporary passages within a larger process where consciousness experiences itself in the muck between the permanently dissolved and the yet to be, a space of extreme potential and extreme vulnerability, vital, slippery, unpredictable and emergent." (Ronnberg Ed), 2010, p. 120).

The mud in a client's tray may symbolically dispose what no longer serves the psyche, may allow something novel to surface, and may cultivate and expand psychic buoyancy.

It is in the mire that possibility germinates. "For the darkness has its own peculiar intellect and its own logic, which should be taken very seriously" (Jung, 1977, par 345).

By Marit Woudstra
(Based on research for first symbol paper)

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Picture: Judith Bredekamp