



■ Left: Francois Van Coke

■ Francois's Relate Bracelet



Rocker supports fight against cancer

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Francois Van Coke, the lead singer of Afrikaans rock bands Fokofpolisiekar and Van Coke Kartel, is supporting the Vrede Foundation, a non-profit organisation, in the fight against cancer.

The 35-year-old Bellville rocker teamed up with Relate Bracelets to raise money for Vrede. Relate Bracelets is an NPO that raises funds for various causes through the sale of its bracelets.

The bracelets all have a signature "R" bead on them and are made by elderly people living in townships, and the finishing touches are done by young people. A portion of the proceeds raised by the bracelets goes to the bracelet makers.

The Vrede Foundation was started in 2008 by one of Francois's closest friends, Herman Pretorius, and Herman's brother, Henré.

Vrede raises awareness among young South Africans about cancer as well as funds to help young South Africans who have cancer but don't have medical aid.

"It all goes towards young people with cancer. People send proposals of their situation, and they allocate the funds from there," says Francois.

Vrede started as a way to raise money for Herman's medical bills after he was diagnosed with

cancer. "He and his brother started it to raise money for him because he didn't have medical aid," says Francois.

"They started doing rock shows; I played a couple of them to raise money for his medical bills.

"And then they started to make a little bit of money, and they extended it to other young people with cancer. And when Herman died, Henré just kept on running with it."

In November 2008, Herman was diagnosed with stage-3 testicular cancer, secondary lymph cancer and malignant tertiary lung tumours.

Herman and Francois both grew up in Bellville, and were in the same circles for most of their lives.

"We were in primary school together. We became better friends in high school. We played in a band together when I was in Standard 7 and he was in Standard 8 – that was in 1995."

Grunge in the 1990s heavily influenced Francois's passion for music.

"I got into music through the grunge scene. Nirvana and Pearl Jam were the first bands I listened to.

"The band that we played in together in high school was kind of the same stuff."

Herman was a presenter on AMP, a programme on local Afrikaans channel MK on DStv.

AMP sought to elevate the local South African music scene especially Afrikaans rock.

Francois says he and Herman were like "blood brothers". He remembers when they were in their early teens on holiday and Herman had drunk too much.

"I remember he was in Standard 6 and I was in Standard 5; we were in a place called Uilenkraalsmond. He was very drunk, and I had to buy him a chocolate to help him after he puked. I remember him thanking me for that years later," he says.

"He was someone we all cared about and respected. Someone that everyone wanted to be friends with."

While Herman had been sick, news of his death still came as a shock for Francois.

"I think what was most hectic for me is he went in for an operation, and we thought everything was fine, and that his life was going to be normal again.

"And then, two days later, I phoned to see how he was doing and his dad said he was dying. It wasn't what I expected." Herman died on August 20 2009.

Other musicians who have been involved in raising funds and awareness for Vrede include Arno Carstens, George van der Spuy from Taxi Violence and Albert Frost from Blues Broers.

Last year, an event called Blood Brothers was held in Cape

Town and Johannesburg to help raise funds for Vrede.

Blood Brothers saw ten of South Africa's rock superstars come together and perform in the name of Vrede. Francois was among them, along with Carstens, Van Der Spuy and Isaac Klawansky.

The Francois Van Coke Relate Bracelet costs R50 and the official launch dates are February, 18 at the Fire and Ice Hotel in Cape Town and February, 23 at the Fire and Ice Hotel

in Pretoria.

Francois will be performing for free at both of these events. The bracelet is also available at all of Francois's upcoming shows and on his website at www.francoisvancoke.co.za

For more information or to get involved with the Vrede Foundation, visit www.vredefoundation.co.za

● World Cancer Day is marked on February 4 annually to raise awareness of cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection and treatment.