

Today, I'm going to tell you about NELSON MANDELA, who was born in 1918, just before WORLD WAR I ended. He was born in South Africa, and was a member of the royal family of the tribe that he belonged to. But that counted for very little in South Africa when Nelson Mandela was a young man. As we saw when we looked at GANDHI's story, South Africa was a country where white people were in charge and people of colour were treated very badly – even though there were loads more black people in South Africa than there were white. Even the fact that Nelson Mandela was called 'Nelson' showed how much white people were in charge. Nelson Mandela's first name was actually Rolihlahla - but when he was nine, his teacher told him, 'From now on, you will be called Nelson', naming after the famous British sea captain who won the BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR in 1805 (and whose statue is high, high up, on Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square in London). And that was it - from then on he was called Nelson rather than the name he had been given by his family.

As Nelson Mandela grew up, he decided to become lawyer, just like GANDHI had done, and just like Gandhi, he got involved in politics, trying to help improve the lives of his fellow people. In 1943, when he was 25 years old, he joined the AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS (the ANC), a political party that had been created in South Africa in 1912 to try to defend black people from being treated really badly by white people. Unknown to him and the other members of the ANC, things were about to get even worse for black people in South Africa. In 1948, elections were held in South Africa in which only white people could vote - and they voted into power a very nasty party called the NATIONAL PARTY. The National Party immediately introduced legislation that was like the JIM CROW laws that MARTIN LUTHER KING fought against - these were laws that were intended to ensure that white people never had to come into contact with black people, who were relegated to second class status in their own country. The system of laws introduced by the National Party came to be known as APARTHEID (pronounced 'Apart - ite') - which meant 'separateness' in the AFRIKAANS (pronounced 'Afra - khans') language spoken by the white people who lived in South Africa. The ANC, and Nelson Mandela, made it its mission to get rid of apartheid, and ensure that black people were treated just as well as white people in South Africa.



Nelson Mandela soon became a very prominent figure in the campaigns against apartheid, making speeches to huge crowds of people. The South African government took notice, and started arresting Mandela and putting him on trial for all sorts of made-up offences, and banning him from speaking to more than one person at any one time. By 1960, things were getting very tense in South Africa. There was more and more unrest against the South African government, and the South African government didn't hesitate to use brutal measures to put down the unrest, killing 69 demonstrators in the SHARPEVILLE MASSACRE on 21 March 1960. Mandela concluded that the South African government was so wicked and inhumane that the path of NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE that GANDHI had laid down for dealing with evil regimes, and which MARTIN LUTHER KING had followed in the United States, was not going to work in

South Africa to bring apartheid down. Instead Mandela and some others planned to carry out a bombing campaign (pronounced 'kam - pain'), where they would bomb at night (so no one would be killed) military bases, power plants, railways, and telephone lines. Their plans were discovered, and Mandela and his friends were put on trial in 1963. Here is a video playing the tape of Nelson Mandela's first speech in the trial:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5OJ205MdKI>

In June 1964, Mandela and his friends were found guilty, and were sentenced to life imprisonment. Mandela was 46 years old. He would spend 27 years in prison, coming out of prison on 11 February 1990 - at the age of 71. When he went into prison he had been married for six years to his wife WINNIE, and they'd had two children who were only five and four years old when Mandela went into prison. Nelson Mandela saw very little of them when he was in prison.



Think about how bitter you would feel if that happened to you - you were robbed of so much life and for so long by one of the nastiest governments in the world. Think about how much you would want to get revenge on the people who had done that to you. And this is what made Nelson Mandela such a great man, worthy of being talked about in the same breath as Gandhi and Martin Luther King - he overcame ALL those feelings of bitterness and hatred, and all those desires for revenge. He never accepted that his punishment was justified, but he realised that when the day came when apartheid was swept away, and black people living in South Africa were treated just as well as white people, South Africa would only have a future if people focussed on the future rather than dwelling on all the terrible things that had been done in the past. So he was able to put the past behind him. And finally the moment he had been waiting for arrived.

From 1964 onwards, the world had united in condemning the South African government for the way it treated black people, and South Africa was treated like an outcast - so for example, from

1964 South Africa could not compete in the Olympics, and from 1970, no country would play South Africa at cricket. There was also a huge campaign to free Nelson Mandela, with its own song (called 'Free Nelson Mandela', surprisingly enough). The only thing that kept the South African government going was the fear that the United States and the United Kingdom had that South Africa would become a friend of the Soviet Union if Nelson Mandela was in charge. But then in 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the South African government realised that it had no choice but to give up apartheid and allow black people to have a say in how South Africa was ruled. And the first step to giving black people that say was to release Nelson Mandela. After very long talks with the South African government, elections were held in 1994 in which everyone - white and black - could vote. And the result was that the ANC was swept into power, and at the age of 75, Nelson Mandela became the first black President of South Africa.

He spent five years as President, spending every moment of those five years trying to bring the country together, and reconcile black South Africans with white South Africans so that they would all be just South Africans. The biggest symbol of this happened at the 1995 Rugby World Cup. South Africa was no longer prevented from competing in sporting events, and they hosted the Rugby World Cup in South Africa. The South African team, nicknamed the SPRINGBOKS, managed to get to the final, and beat the best rugby team in the world, New Zealand, 15-12. Before 1990, the Springboks were a symbol of apartheid - they were made up exclusively of white players, and showed no interest in having black players play for them. And people found that hard to forget, or forgive. And even in 1995, the Springboks were dominated by white players. But when Nelson Mandela presented the cup to the South African captain, he put on a Springboks shirt and cap as a way of saying to everyone - this is our team now:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2S6YYDbjUu8>

Nelson Mandela retired as President in 1999 and lived out his life as a revered world statesman, full of wisdom and humour, and never showing any sign of resentment at having lost 27 of some of the best years of his life living in this prison cell on ROBBEN ISLAND in South Africa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPM6lhs6EU8>

