

FROM COUNTRY LAD TO PRESIDENT

Compiled by GRIZÉLL AZAR-LUXTON

I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die...

With these words Nelson Mandela ended his statement during the Rivonia trial which culminated in his being convicted of sabotage and being committed to Robben Island for life.

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela accepted the Nobel Peace Prize as an accolade to all people who have worked for peace and stood against racism. It was as much an award to his person as it was to the African National Congress (ANC) and all South Africa's people, he said.

His **Long walk to freedom** is a most compelling autobiographical work filled with thrills, shocks and surprises. Any review of the book is in effect a discussion on Mandela's life.

We have put together a number of reviews on this work by local and international reviewers and some of the comments of the many many readers, young and old, who felt compelled to voice their respect for this international icon.

Reviews and comments...

There are biographies and there are biographies. Frankly this book is just a masterpiece about a compelling person. It is one of the finest biographies I have ever read. It is an excellent book of about 600 pages with lots of details and lots of photos. The writing is clear and fluid, and the book does not bog the reader down.

It has received numerous rave reviews and one understands why when one reads it. An impressive book about a modern freedom fighter.

Dr JE Robinson, Toronto



Recalling the emotions that gripped him as he delivered his first public speech in three decades, he explained: 'I wanted first of all to tell the people that I was not a messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances.'

That spirit and self-image inform the book from start to finish.

The book is not without defects. A scant space of 67 pages is devoted to life after his release from prison, and it is in that section where Mandela's streak of defensive self-righteousness reveals itself most baldly.

With the able assistance of **Time** magazine contributor Richard Stengel, Mandela has produced a memoir worthy of a living legend, a true modern-day hero who achieved a miracle of national reconciliation. At the same time Mandela's

*...a tale of anger and sorrow,
but also a breathtaking story of
love and joy...*

Tyrone August, **Argus**

*...an important contribution to
the literature of the anti-apartheid's
movement - in part
because it provides the most
earthy, warts-and-all portrait of
Nelson Mandela that has ever
been published...*

Joseph Contreras, **Newsweek**

autobiography provides a timely reminder of his quintessential humanity.

Joseph Contreras, *Newsweek*

I have read quite a few autobiographies, but I have yet to read one that is as well written as Nelson Mandela's **Long walk to freedom**. In the book, Nelson Mandela sagaciously writes about his life in Apartheid South Africa, the struggles of the ANC and the emergence of democracy. As a result, he provides the reader with insight that he/she may not receive from other non-fictional works concerning this subject. I highly recommend this book for those that wish to learn more about the struggle for freedom in South Africa, as well as those who wish to learn how he and others worked to end Apartheid.

Carnell, Jersey City

Mandela sluit af deur te sê dat die boek sy 'rusplek langs die pad' is, om terug te kyk na die pad wat afgelê is. 'Maar ek kan net vir 'n oomblik rus, want vryheid bring verantwoordelikheid en ek durf nie aarsel nie, want my lang staptog is nog nie klaar nie.'

Long walk to freedom sal 'n plek kry op boekrakke van mense oor die wêreld wat omgee vir ander mense - en van mense wat wil weet hoe die hart kloep en die brein werk van Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. 'n Merkwaardige man.

Dis 'n tekortkoming van die boek dat

...die boek se grootste waarde is dat dit die verhaal vertel van daardie Suid-Afrika waarvan wit kinders nooit in geskiedenis-boeke gelees het nie en wat verreweg die meeste wit, bruin en swart Suid-Afrikaners nie ken nie...

Freek Swart, *Insig*

...fortunately for readers, not to mention South Africa, the Nelson Mandela who emerges from his memoir is considerably more human than the icon of the legend...

Bill Keller, *The New York Times Book Review*

Afrikaanse vanne en uitdrukkings klaarblyklik nie deur 'n Afrikaanssprekende nagegaan is nie.

So is generaal Jannie Roux se van, *Rue*; die destydse hoof van die Robbeneiland Gevangenis sou by geleentheid aan 'n prisonier gesê het: 'Jou groot pens sal in die tronk *verbruin*' wat seker *verdwyn* moet wees. Daar is ook ander, soos *kaffirboetie* en *toort* waar van 'n flitslig gepraat word.

Die boek bevat humor, kostelike brokkies oor hoe sy mede-gevangenes die draak gesteek het met bewaarders, en natuurlik die hele geskiedenis, uit Mandela se oogpunt beskou, van die onderhandelingsproses tot met die totstandkoming van die nuwe Suid-Afrika.

Freek Swart, *Insig*

At first glance, the autobiography of Nelson Mandela, **Long walk to freedom**, is very intimidating. The book is as thick as the Bible and its bold title made me want to run far away from it and never return. Upon receiving the book, I thought to myself, 'How am I going to read this?' That night, the book sat alone on my kitchen table across from me. I stared menacingly at it. In a rush of adrenaline, I grabbed the book and ripped open the cover. Slowly I began to read. One page, two pages, pretty soon I had read ten whole pages! Surprisingly, the book wasn't frightening at all! It was very interesting and more story-like than I had imagined. The author does a great job of enticing the reader while teaching us about Nelson's life. I got to learn a lot about political South Africa while also getting a glimpse into Nelson's personal life every once in a while. Nelson was not truly a stern political leader, in fact he was quite light-hearted. The book reveals this through a few comical stories and touching moments in Nelson's long life. It successfully ties factual yet personal information into a great story that should be read by anyone who enjoys good, thick books.

Maureen Megan, *Sewickley*

Long walk to freedom is pervaded by the author's personal quality of generosity (even the most brutal prison guard is found, ultimately, to have some redeeming feature).

It contains many genuinely poignant and reflective moments but it cannot, even generously, be described as a visionary work. Occasionally it slips into self-serving polemics (the ANC suddenly has a hand in

the youth uprising of 1976, the PAC break-away was nothing but a personality tiff).

But this is minor. After half a century of National Party rule not a single memorable autobiography by a South African head of government exists. **Long walk to freedom** has broken that intellectual drought.

Brian Pottinger, *Sunday Times*

This is an articulate, moving account of Mandela's life from his 'country childhood' following his birth on 18 July 1918 to his inauguration as president of South Africa on 10 May 1994. Mandela traces the growth of his understanding of the oppression of the blacks of South Africa; his conviction that there was no alternative to armed struggle; his developing belief that all people, black and white, must be free for true freedom; and the effect that his commitment to overthrowing apartheid had on his family, who 'paid a terrible price'. Over a third of Mandela's memoirs tell of his 27 years in prison, an account that could stand alone as a prison narrative. He ends his book with the conclusion that his 'long walk' for freedom has just begun: 'For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.' Highly recommended for all collections.

Maidel Cason, *University of Delaware Library, Newark*

Dis nie aldag dat 'n mens die geleentheid kry om jou land se leier persoonlik te leer ken nie. President Nelson Mandela se outobiografie is nie net 'n eenvoudige, treffende uiteensetting van die ANC se standpunte nie, maar gee ook 'n eerlike, dikwels pynlike blik op die lewe van 'n vryheidsvegter, en die mens agter die eerste swart president van Suid-Afrika.

Die wroeging van 'n man wat moes kies tussen sy familie en sy mense loop soos 'n fyn, pynlike draad deur sy vertelling. Sy kinders, wat hy eers as volwassenes sou leer ken, die egskieding met sy eerste vrou, Evelyn, en die latere vervreemding van sy tweede vrou, Winnie, was die tragiese gevolg van sy strewe na vryheid vir almal.

Erla-Mari Diedericks, *Die Burger*

I was required to read **Long walk to freedom** for a class in school. I had heard from students who were previously required to read the book that it was too long, and very bad. I did not start reading this book with high expectations, which made it a pleasant surprise.

...despite spending a third of his life in prison, the president's autobiography displays great generosity...

Brian Pottinger, *SundayTimes*

Mandela se verhaal is een wat gelees moet word, want dis een van 'n nuwe Suid-Afrika en van hoop. Dis ons almal se verhaal...

Erla-Mari Diederichs, *Die Burger*

The autobiography of Nelson Mandela is written well, and its length is not an issue, especially when taking into account how expansive the story of his life really is. The pacing of the story is actually very well done, years are written away in a few pages without anything seeming to be missed. In my opinion, even if this book had the worst writing of any novel, it would still be worth reading; its story holds so much importance and teaches so much about so many aspects of life, that it would lose nothing.

Long walk to freedom leaves one feeling refreshed; if the racist policies of the government of an entire nation can be taken

down by a group of common citizens, perhaps there is hope for reform in any nation that is going through a period of strife.

Josh Benson, *Sewickley*

Nelson Mandela comes swaddled in myth, and he knows it. To many of his countrymen and to much of the world he is, in fact, the saviour of South Africa.

As Mr Mandela is clearly aware, the problem with such mythology, even when it contains a large measure of truth, is that it invites impossible expectations. It also tends to make for dull reading.

He is a naïve and headstrong youth, a neglectful husband, a distracted father. He misleads his allies and manipulates his followers. He is uncritical of despots who support his liberation struggle. Time after time, he chooses tactics over principles. Mr Mandela is, on the evidence of his amazing life, neither a messiah nor a moralist nor really a revolutionary, but a pragmatist to the core, a shrewd balancer of honour and interests. He is, to use a word unhappily fallen into disrepute, a politician, though one distinguished from lesser practitioners of his calling mainly by his unwavering faith in his ultimate objective, ending white minority rule.

The rich narrative deteriorates in the last 50 pages into a news anthology of the years

after his release in 1990. The township massacres, the negotiations, the Nobel Peace Prize, the agreement on a five-year *Government of national unity*, the election campaign and the elections themselves all whiz by in a blur of platitudes. Perhaps Mr Mandela, the politician, was reluctant to say anything that might offend the former rivals who have become his partners in what is supposed to be a Government by consensus.

Bill Keller, *The New York Times*

Titles on hand

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