

# Early life of nelson mandela history essay



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Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918, into the small tribe of Thembu located at Qunu, near Umtata in the Transkei, South Africa. As the son of Nonqaphi Nosekeni and Henry Mgaleka Mandela, a chief councillor of the Thembu tribe, he was initially named as Rolihlahla Dalibhunga Mandela, but later changed his name to Nelson Mandela to fit into the 'white man's society'. He spent his early childhood in the Transkei, being groomed to become a chief, and after his father's death in 1930 he became the paramount chief's ward to be trained to assume high office.

Nelson Mandela's Struggle for Peace and Equality for All Races "I have cherished the idea of a free society in which all persons live together in harmony and equal opportunities. It is an idea which I hope to live for...but if need be, it is an idea for which I am prepared to die." Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela spoke these famous words and is known for transforming a model of racial division and oppression into an open democracy. Mandela is one of the admired national figures of our age. Nelson says, "I am not a messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances." From Nelson's childhood, as a member of the royal house, being stripped from his dignity in prison, to becoming president of South Africa, his life is an epic of struggle, setback, renewed hope and ultimate triumph. Let us begin this journey of a true leader of peace. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born in Mvezo, which was the capital of Transkei. Mvezo was a tiny village removed from the world and the western civilization influences. Nelson was from a Thembu Royal house and his birth name, Rolihlahla, was given by his father, which means "troublemaker." His English name, Nelson, was given to him by his teacher on the first day of school. Nelson's childhood

was peaceful and he spent his time in the field herding cattle, plowing, and tending sheep. " Transkei is eight hundred miles east of Cape Town, five hundred fifty miles south of Johannesburg, and lies between the Kei River and the Natal border, between the rugged Drakensberg Mountains to the north and the blue waters, of the Indian Ocean to the east." This land was fertile with hills, valleys and flowing streams.

The Thembu people population was 3 1/2 million and a minority of whites. Nelson's father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa, was a chief of Mvezo by the King of Thembu tribe. Due to some misfortunes with the British government, Nelson's father lost a lot of his land, cattle, and the title of chief. Nelson had to move to Qunu to get the support from relatives and friends. He spent most of his childhood at this village. In 1910, Nelson's father took ill and Nelson's welfare were arranged to be raised by the Paramount Chief. The Paramount Chief was pleased to raise Nelson along with his own sons. Nelson was loved by the Paramount Chief just like the other sons. During his childhood, Nelson loved to listen to the tribal courts discuss the regulated traditional African life. This is when Nelson began to develop and respect the law and develop an ambition to become a lawyer. Nelson would also remember the Council Chiefs telling the history of past African ancestors. Nelson later recalled, " our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings and their councilors, and moved freely and confidently up and down the country without let or hindrance. Then the country was ours... we occupied the land, the forests, the rivers; we extracted the mineral wealth beneath the soil and all the riches of this beautiful country. We set up and operated our own government, we controlled our own armies, and we

organized our own trade and commerce.” These stories inspire Nelson to try to restore the rights of his people. Nelson was given opportunity to attend college in 1936 at Fort Hare College, Cape Province. This was a training ground for African leaders. Nelson was very popular and this is where his political education began. One day the Paramount Chief told Nelson that he had to marry. To avoid marriage, Nelson fled to Johannesburg, the largest city in South Africa. Johannesburg was known for gold mining. People from all walks of nationalities came to Johannesburg in the 1880’s. Nelson’s first job was working in the mines. This was the first time he experienced the horrible conditions of blacks living in the white-ruled South Africa. “ The Bantus” – the white term for all black Africans – lived in slum areas, known as townships, on the outskirts of the city. Without electricity or sewage facilities, ramshackle houses were crowded next to one another in filthy surroundings.” In Johannesburg, the blacks had to carry a governmental issued pass. You had a pass to be in certain areas and there were curfews set. The police could stop you and require you to show the pass. You could not work in the city without one. This was a monthly pass that had to be renewed by the employer. If anything were not in order when you were stopped, then you would be sent to jail. Your rights will be revoked or you may be banned to enter the city for a certain length of time. “ Conditions for black Africans had worsened after passage of the Natives Land Act in 1913.... A census two years earlier had shown that there were 4 million blacks in the country, compared with 1. 25 million whites...” Nelson’s world had changed from being brought up in a rural area to seeing inhumanities of apartheid. While in Johannesburg, Nelson became a lawyer to help fight the rights of the conditions for blacks. He also joined the Youth League of the

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African National Congress (ANC) and began to perform nonviolent protests against the laws of South Africa. The ANC's aim was to unite the black African people to fight white domination. One of the followers of the ANC said, " We must think in wider political terms, for we are one people." Apartheid was a system established before Nelson's birth until 1990. It was a law that treated black Africans unfair because it limited their civil rights. They could not vote, eat at certain places, live in certain areas, and have proper jobs. The conditions of living were inhumane. Some of the arrests were made for no reasons. That is why the ANC group was formed to put aside these problems. In 1945, Nelson married Evelyn Mase.

Nelson's passion and long hours working for the rights of his people became too overwhelming for Evelyn, so they divorced. Nelson then later married Winnie Madikizela, in 1958. Winnie was born in 1936, in the Pondoland region of the Transkei. She grew up with an educational background and she too learned that her people were not being treated fairly. She said, " There is an anger that wakes up in you when you are a child, and it builds up and determines the political consciousness of the black man." Nelson and Winnie met at a courtroom when Winnie was there visiting with a friend. Nelson began to court Winnie and they fell in love. In December, Nelson was elected deputy to Albert Luthulis, the new president-general of the ANC. The South African government decided to ban both of them and other leaders from moving out of their assigned areas and attend any meetings with more than one person at a time. Mandela had to remain in Johannesburg for 6 months. Several years later, Nelson continued his law practice but because of his leadership of the apartheid, the Transvaal Law Society tried to disbar him.

The Supreme courts, however, ruled in favor of Nelson. Mandela recalled, "In the courts we were treated courteously by many officials, but we were very often discriminated against by some and treated with resentment and hostility by others." In 1955, a Freedom Charter was drawn up which began, "We the people of South Africa declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people." Nelson was banned from attending this meeting but he was able to send letters to inspire the movement. The police conducted investigations and raids were made on homes and offices. Nelson's papers were seized. On December 5, 1956, Nelson was arrested and charged with violation of the Suppression of Communism Act. For 6 years, Nelson was in and out of jail. Nelson used this time to prepare for his defense. This charge was finally put on trial, known as the famous Treason Trial. Nelson married Winnie during this same time; however, this union sparked a political partnership that Nelson needed to withstand the persecutions that he was receiving. There were many nights when Nelson and Winnie woke up to the sounds of the police knocking at the door, raiding their home, personal belongings and being called vulgar names. Not only was Nelson arrested for no reason, Winnie was jailed while she was pregnant. She was released and found not guilty but the government made it very hard for her. The government ordered Winnie's employer to dismiss her. Other terrible things happened about 35 miles away in Sharpeville. A crowd gathered for a peaceful protest and the police began to shoot into the crowd killing 69 people, 180 wounded. The Sharpeville massacre got international attention and the South African government was condemned. The government had to declare a state of

emergency because of the protest demonstrations throughout the country. Leaders of the ANC were arrested and some followers. Meanwhile the Treason trial was about to end. Nelson was acquitted. Nelson was free to go wherever he wanted. The ban was lifted but only for a short time. Nelson took this opportunity to go underground and further the cause of civil rights. Nelson established the National Action Council to organize the stay-at-home protest. The government did not like this so they began the arrests again. Nelson could not be caught. He earned the name of the Black Pumpernickel after the fictional character, Scarlet Pumpernickel. Nelson explained, " I have had to separate myself from my dear wife and children, from my mother and sisters, to live as an outlaw in my own land, I have had to abandon my profession and live in poverty, as many of my people are doing...The struggle is my life. I will continue fighting for freedom until the end of my days." Nelson toured many countries in Africa. He obtained support from nations to boycott South African goods. Nelson was finally captured on August 5, 1962 after evading the police for 17 months. He was imprisoned in the Johannesburg Fort and found guilty on October 22, 1962. He was guilty of inciting workers to strike and leaving the country illegally. There was an international outcry to " Free Mandela." Nelson was transferred to Robben Island, an isolated prison. The hardships that Nelson endured while in prison cannot compare with what his people were experiencing. Winnie was even put in prison for a short period but received inhuman treatment. On Sunday, Feb. 11, 1990, Nelson was free from a 27-year imprisonment. There were a lot of changes such as the ANC could operate legally, national state of emergency lifted, and a new constitution with no domination. After his release, Nelson played a pivotal role as ANC president in negotiating the end

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of apartheid. In 1993, he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with South African President F. W. de Clark and a year later, at age 75, was elected president himself. On Dec. 10, 1996 amid chants of “ Power to the People!”, Mandela signed the country’s new constitution, which includes sweeping human rights and anti-discrimination guarantees. Mandela stepped down as president in June 1999, having groomed Deputy President Thabo Mbeki as his successor for years. He left behind a country still troubled by racial hatred, crushing poverty and staggering violent crime. But he remains the most revered man in the country, credited with a remarkable transition from tyranny to democracy, and a commitment to reconciliation that saved the country from a violent bloodbath.

## **Work Cited**

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