

10/9/2003

Hello to all,

After the beauty of the botanical gardens, we spent a couple of days learning about the ugliness, beauty and potential of mankind, as it has played itself out in recent South African history.

We started with a tour of the District Six museum. The museum is all that is left of a neighborhood that was razed by the South African Apartheid government. District Six had been a diverse neighborhood, where blacks, Asians, Indians, and people of mixed race the government categorized as colored, all lived together in relative harmony, much to the chagrin of the a government that had declared that social harmony was only possible through different races "living apart," the literal translation of Apartheid.

Since the fifties, the South African government had a policy of separating the non-white races into various "homelands," which in most cases were merely ghettos arbitrarily carved out of the areas around the cities. District Six's number came up a few decades ago. The residents were dispersed and all the buildings were demolished.

The museum has a giant map of District Six on the floor that former residents have marked with the locations of families' homes, stores and neighborhood features. It's all that remains of a vibrant neighborhood, friendships and families. The museum was a sobering introduction to the rigid brutality of the reality of Apartheid.

Next we took a tour of several of the townships that ring the vibrant, modern metropolitan city of Cape Town. These are shantytowns that house over three million people and spread for miles and miles across the plains outside the city. Our guide, Gladstone, was a resident of Longo, one of the townships that we visited. He provided frank insights into the realities of life there, the challenges that face the black residents and their hopes for the future.

As part of the Apartheid government's strategy to retain power for the minority white population, they provided preferential treatment for the non-black citizens of the country. Colored, Indian and Asian people got better homes, better jobs, better schools and a better life. The black African residents were relegated to townships with little to no public services, the worst jobs and little to no opportunity to advance their lives.

On our township tour, we first visited a tenant building, which had been built to house 16 men. Once the access laws were relaxed and family members were allowed into the townships, it housed 16 families. People who could not get into a tenant building built shacks. The tenant buildings and shacks share public faucets for water and all have outdoor toilets.

The townships today are home for millions of people. Many of the shacks now have electricity. Ownership of the shacks and the land they are built on is now possible.

Shopping as we know it and the modern supermarkets are still located miles away, close to the colored townships. Groceries and meat in the black townships are primarily sold in open air markets.

Although billions of dollars in aid have flowed into South Africa targeted at the townships, the most visible signs of advancement are those programs and initiatives generated by the residents themselves. We visited a local environmental center, which provides recycling services, gardening instruction, compost distribution, and an outlet for locally produced arts and crafts. We also visited a successful Bed and Breakfast in the heart of a township. It is owned by Vicky, who gave up her pursuit of a four year degree in electrical engineering after two years due to financial difficulties. She now runs her B&B, which caters to non-black tourists, and is usually completely booked during the non-Winter months.

The township experience was very powerful. The things that stick with me are the power and resilience of the human spirit exemplified by the lives and communities the residents have built, and the incredible happiness and friendliness of the people we met there.

We referred a friend of ours to the township tour company and he visited the same places we had seen the following day. When we saw him at dinner that night, he was moved to tears while relating what he felt during his tour. This reaction was from one of the biggest, toughest riders on our trip, and typical of our experience and that of everyone we talked to who had shared it.

The following day, we visited Robben Island, to see where the Apartheid government had held the political prisoners of that era.

The tours of the prison are conducted by former prisoners, and our guide had spent most of the 80's in the very prison cells and exercise yards he was leading us through. I couldn't imagine the feelings he and his peers must have as day after day, they walk through the very doors that denied them freedom during the prime years of their lives.

It was a strange and powerful feeling to view the jail cell where Nelson Mandela spent so much of his life. To say it was a moving experience would be an understatement.

I marveled at the resilience of the prisoners and their ability to withstand punishments and brutalities. I admired their ingenuity in methods of communicating and educating each other. I was awed to learn that they had spent decades transforming their existence from one of prison survival to that of democratic government incubator.

I viewed clandestine discussion documents on political doctrine and governmental structure that Mandela and the other prisoners had spent years debating. "It took some time because each person wanted to fully voice their opinion," was the modest note attached.

These men had chosen to spend their decades behind bars not sharpening their claws for revenge, but sharpening their logic and their arguments for the democratic, open and pluralistic society they wished to create.

When the locks turned and the doors finally swung open, these men marched out not to burn down the government and society of their oppressors, but to lead the building of a new, truly democratic, truly equal government and society.

It was and remains an inspiring example of what is possible when people focus on reconciliation rather than polarization, when they focus on the future rather than the past, and when they focus on building a new and better society rather than seeking revenge for real and perceived slights.

As I walked out of the prison and back to the ferry, I saw a group of young school children starting their tour. The image I witnessed is my favorite of that chapter of our African experience: the flag of a new South African nation snapping in the breeze and a group of young black children preparing to tour the prison that for so long imprisoned the dreams of those who eventually laid the foundations for their future.

Following are some photos from our tours.

Be well,  
Doug

## The District Six Museum

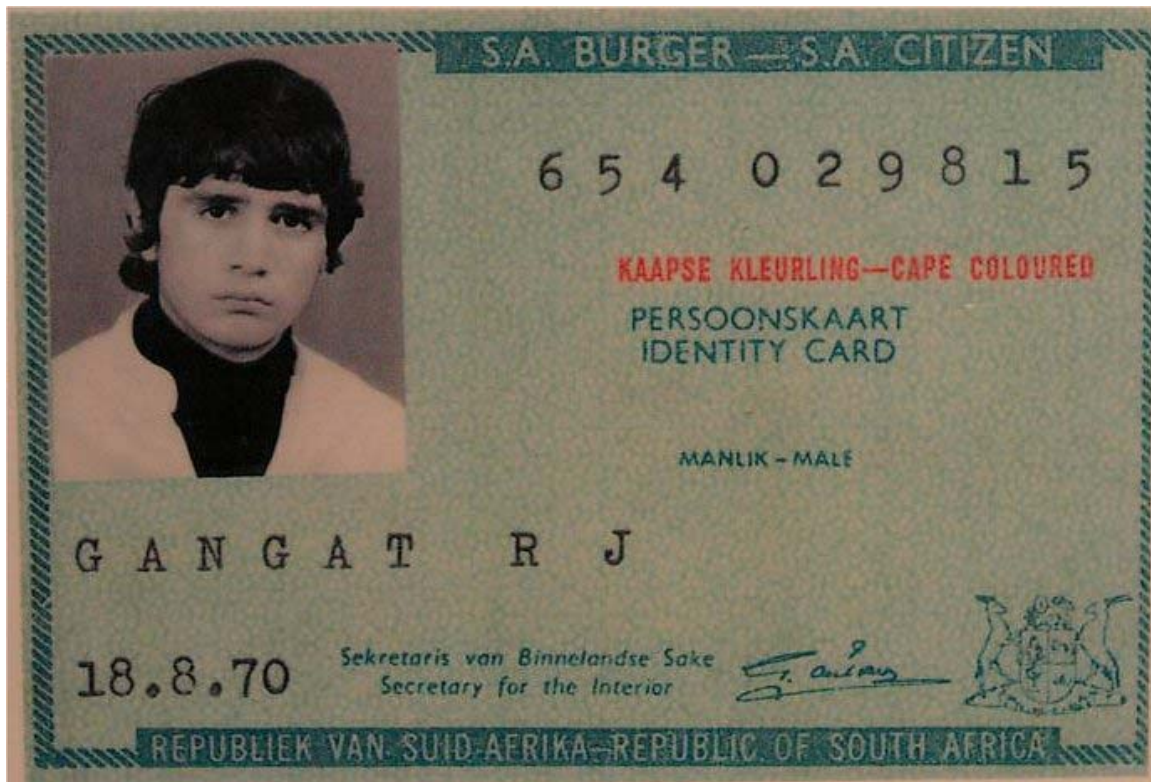


The map of District Six, with notations by former residents.



The Nationalist party was elected into power in 1948 and spent the next 42 years building a nation of Apartheid, or "living apart," in which the races were rigidly segregated in all aspects of life.





A pass such as this one was required to leave the townships. The hated pass laws led to widespread violent and non-violent protests.

## Visiting the Townships



The tenant building we visited. It was built to hold sixteen men, and now houses over twelve families. The man in the blue coat is standing in front of the shack that he and his family live in.



This bedroom is used by three families every night. Anyone who cannot fit into this room sleeps in the common room.





One family's entire collection of cooking utensils and household goods.



One family's entire collection of cups and silverware.



One family's entire collection of toiletries and medications.





The common room, where six families eat and many of them sleep. The entire 2<sup>nd</sup> floor rents for about \$2.50 a month and there are months when it can be a financial struggle for the six families to pool that much money together.



The kitchen, where three families cook every meal.



With few alternatives to fill their time, many young men turn to crime.





Housing millions of people, the townships stretch to the horizon around many metropolitan areas.





Cars are an economic luxury that many in the townships can only dream of.



Small township food shops are a critical necessity, as the large, modern supermarkets are miles away.



The Amy Biehl memorial. Amy was a white American college student killed in the townships. She had just dropped off a friend after classes and was stoned to death by a black Pan Africa Congress mob chanting "one farmer, one bullet," a phrase referring to the conservative white farmers who supported the Apartheid regime.

Both sides of the war committed acts of unspeakable cruelty and brutality. Both sides have used the venue of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to admit their guilt and obtain clemency for their crimes, including the young men who killed Amy.





The unemployment rate in the townships is over 60%. These young adults are part of the “lost generation” who abandoned school as part of the protests against the Apartheid government. The township society today places its hopes on the next generation currently attending school.









The government is now building replacement homes for shack owners. Approximately 20% of existing shacks have been replaced by homes such as these. The residents call them “feet houses” because they are so small your feet almost stick out when you lie down to sleep.



Mail service is possible in some areas now that every shack has been assigned a physical address. This was done to enable all residents to vote in the 1994 elections. Black voters were promised that if they elected the African National Congress to power, each of them would get a home and a car. The vast majority of them are still waiting.



Vicky, owner and operator of Miss Vicky's B&B, inside her Bed and Breakfast.



The strange duality of the townships. It is but a shack, but a shack with a pickup in the garage, electricity and a television.





Two young boys of the townships test their strength. Their battle is similar to the two forces at work in South Africa today, progress vs. impatience. Miss Vicky's B&B in the background represent progress. These boys and their parents are impatient for the promised prosperity to arrive.



These young boys represent the future of the townships, and in many respects, of the nation. If the nation can provide them with an equal opportunity that they can meet with an equal education, anything is possible. Short of that, it is questionable that the society can hold back the longings for economic equality that pervade the townships.

## Robben Island Prison



The gate to hell. The entrance to Robben Island, where all suffered and many died.



One of the cells in B Block, which held Nelson Mandela and his peers.





The lock that kept Mandela and his generation of leaders imprisoned.



Our guide, who spent ten years of his life here as a political prisoner, stands in the doorway to freedom, for himself, for Nelson Mandela, and for their nation.





The flag of their new nation snapping in the breeze, a group of school children prepare to tour the prison that held the dreams of a desegregated South Africa hostage for over 30 years. The irony of these black school children walking the corridors of this once dreaded house of horrors is not lost on the guides, nor is the importance of their education, for on the shoulders of these children lies the fate of the nation so many sacrificed so much to build.