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LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

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person alive.”**

— *Boston
Sunday Globe*

The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela

NELSON MANDELA

LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

The Autobiography of

**NELSON
MANDELA**



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International Acclaim for
LONG WALK TO FREEDOM



“A compelling book . . . both a brilliant description of a diabolical system and a testament to the power of the spirit to transcend it. . . . One of the most remarkable lives of the twentieth century.”

— *Washington Post Book World*



“ ‘Irresistible’ describes *Long Walk to Freedom*, which must be one of the few political autobiographies that’s also a page-turner.”

— *Los Angeles Times Book Review*



“A truly wonderful autobiography, sharp, literate, unpretentious, and . . . as emotionally involving as it is informative.”

— *Chicago Tribune*



“The Nelson Mandela who emerges from *Long Walk to Freedom* . . . is considerably more human than the icon of legend.”

— *New York Times Book Review*

“Words like ‘generosity,’ ‘fortitude,’ and ‘patience’ ring through this moving account of Mandela’s life and struggle. . . . All hail to the man who could wait so long, and who knew what would be worth waiting for.
Viva, Mandela, Viva!”

— *Globe and Mail*



“An engrossing tapestry of recent South African history that grips the reader from the first pages. . . . Riveting and sometimes painfully honest.”
— *San Francisco Chronicle*



“One of the most extraordinary political tales of the 20th century, and well worth the investment for anyone truly interested in the genesis of greatness.”
— *Financial Times* (London)



“A deeply touching chronicle of one of the remarkable lives of the twentieth century.”
— *Christian Science Monitor*



“The work of a man who has led by action and example — a man who is one of the few genuine heroes we have.”
— *Kirkus*



“Mandela writes with rare and moving candor.”
— *The Economist*



“[It] movingly records the extraordinary life of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. . . . These pages come to dramatic life.”
— *London Sunday Times*

“A true gem. A wonderful journey worth taking.”
— *Portland Oregonian*



“This book should be on your ‘must-read’ list . . . in a world hungry for heroes and role models, there is one to be found here.”
— *Edmonton Journal*



“To read of Nelson Mandela’s fascinating journey . . . is to be reminded of the indomitable human spirit. Yet the reminder is delivered with such grace and subtlety that it intensifies its meaning.”

— *San Diego Union-Tribune*



“*Long Walk to Freedom* is one of those rare books that become not only a touchstone but a condition of our humanity.”

—*New York Sunday Newsday*



“A manual for human beings. . . . Should be read by every person alive.”

— *Boston Globe*



“This fluid memoir matches Mandela’s stately grace with wise reflection on his life and the freedom struggle that defined it.”

— *Publishers Weekly*



“A serious account of a life and a cause . . . wonderful insight into the man who is his country’s combined Washington, Lincoln, and Gandhi.”

— *Montreal Gazette*

“A gripping insider’s view. . . . Riveting and sometimes painfully honest.”

— *San Francisco Chronicle*



“The memoir is as rich, compelling, thoughtful, and informative as any written or likely to be written by a contemporary politician on the world stage.”

— *Book Page*



“An epic tale . . . as riveting as that glorious day in 1990 when Mandela walked sedately out of jail to liberty and leadership.”

— *Cleveland Plain Dealer*

I dedicate this book to my six children, Madiba and Makaziwe (my first daughter), who are now deceased, and to Makgatho, Makaziwe, Zenani, and Zindzi, whose support and love I treasure; to my twenty-one grandchildren and three great-grandchildren who give me great pleasure; and to all my comrades, friends, and fellow South Africans whom I serve and whose courage, determination, and patriotism remain my source of inspiration.

Acknowledgments

As readers will discover, this book has a long history. I began writing it clandestinely in 1974 during my imprisonment on Robben Island. Without the tireless labor of my old comrades Walter Sisulu and Ahmed Kathrada for reviving my memories, it is doubtful the manuscript would have been completed. The copy of the manuscript which I kept with me was discovered by the authorities and confiscated. However, in addition to their unique calligraphic skills, my co-prisoners Mac Maharaj and Isu Chiba had ensured that the original manuscript safely reached its destination. I resumed work on it after my release from prison in 1990.

Since my release, my schedule has been crowded with numerous duties and responsibilities, which have left me little free time for writing. Fortunately, I have had the assistance of dedicated colleagues, friends, and professionals who have helped me complete my work at last, and to whom I would like to express my appreciation.

I am deeply grateful to Richard Stengel who collaborated with me in the creation of this book, providing invaluable assistance in editing and revising the first parts and in the writing of the latter parts. I recall with fondness our early morning walks in the Transkei and the many hours of interviews at Shell House in Johannesburg and my home in Houghton. A special tribute is owed to Mary Pfaff who assisted Richard in his work. I have also benefited from the advice and support of Fatima Meer, Peter Magubane, Nadine Gordimer, and Ezekiel Mphahlele.

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Part One

A COUNTRY CHILDHOOD

1

APART FROM LIFE, a strong constitution, and an abiding connection to the Thembu royal house, the only thing my father bestowed upon me at birth was a name, Rolihlahla. In Xhosa, Rolihlahla literally means “pulling the branch of a tree,” but its colloquial meaning more accurately would be “troublemaker.” I do not believe that names are destiny or that my father somehow divined my future, but in later years, friends and relatives would ascribe to my birth name the many storms I have both caused and weathered. My more familiar English or Christian name was not given to me until my first day of school. But I am getting ahead of myself.

I was born on the eighteenth of July, 1918, at Mvezo, a tiny village on the banks of the Mbashe River in the district of Umtata, the capital of the Transkei. The year of my birth marked the end of the Great War; the outbreak of an influenza epidemic that killed millions throughout the world; and the visit of a delegation of the African National Congress to the Versailles peace conference to voice the grievances of the African people of South Africa. Mvezo, however, was a place apart, a tiny precinct removed from the world of great events, where life was lived much as it had been for hundreds of years.

The 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. It is a beautiful country of rolling hills, fertile valleys, and a thousand rivers and streams, which keep the landscape green even in winter. The Transkei used to be one of the largest territorial divisions within South Africa, covering an area the size of Switzerland, with a population of about three and a half million Xhosas and a tiny minority of Basothos and whites. It is home to the Thembu people, who are part of the Xhosa nation, of which I am a member.

My father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa, was a chief by both blood and custom. He was confirmed as chief of Mvezo by the king of the Thembu tribe, but under British rule, his selection had to be ratified by the government, which in Mvezo took the form of the local magistrate. As a government-appointed chief, he was eligible for a stipend as well as a portion of the fees the government levied on the community for vaccination of livestock and communal grazing land. Although the role of chief was a venerable and esteemed one, it had, even seventy-five years

ago, become debased by the control of an unsympathetic white government.

The Thembu tribe reaches back for twenty generations to King Zwide. According to tradition, the Thembu people lived in the foothills of the Drakensberg mountains and migrated toward the coast in the sixteenth century, where they were incorporated into the Xhosa nation. The Xhosa are part of the Nguni people who have lived, hunted, and fished in the rich and temperate southeastern region of South Africa, between the great interior plateau to the north and the Indian Ocean to the south, since at least the eleventh century. The Nguni can be divided into a northern group — the Zulu and the Swazi people — and a southern group, which is made up of amaBaca, amaBomyana, amaGcaleka, amaMfengu, amaMpodomis, amaMpondo, abeSotho, and abeThembu, and together they comprise the Xhosa nation.

The Xhosa are a proud and patrilineal people with an expressive and euphonious language and an abiding belief in the importance of laws, education, and courtesy. Xhosa society was a balanced and harmonious social order in which every individual knew his or her place. Each Xhosa belongs to a clan that traces its descent back to a specific forefather. I am a member of the Madiba clan, named after a Thembu chief who ruled in the Transkei in the eighteenth century. I am often addressed as Madiba, my clan name, a term of respect.

Ngubengcuka, one of the greatest monarchs, who united the Thembu tribe, died in 1832. As was the custom, he had wives from the principal royal houses: the Great House, from which the heir is selected, the Right Hand House, and the Ixhiba, a minor house that is referred to by some as the Left Hand House. It was the task of the sons of the Ixhiba or Left Hand House to settle royal disputes. Mthikrakra, the eldest son of the Great House, succeeded Ngubengcuka and amongst his sons were Ngangelizwe and Matanzima. Sabata, who ruled the Thembu from 1954, was the grandson of Ngangelizwe and a senior to Kalzer Daliwonga, better known as K. D. Matanzima, the former chief minister of the Transkei — my nephew, by law and custom — who was a descendant of Matanzima. The eldest son of the Ixhiba house was Simakade, whose younger brother was Mandela, my grandfather.

Although over the decades there have been many stories that I was in the line of succession to the Thembu throne, the simple genealogy I have just outlined exposes those tales as a myth. Although I was a member of the royal household, I was not among the privileged few who were trained for rule. Instead, as a descendant of the Ixhiba house, I was groomed, like

my father before me, to counsel the rulers of the tribe.

My father was a tall, dark-skinned man with a straight and stately posture, which I like to think I inherited. He had a tuft of white hair just above his forehead, and as a boy, I would take white ash and rub it into my hair in imitation of him. My father had a stern manner and did not spare the rod when disciplining his children. He could be exceedingly stubborn, another trait that may unfortunately have been passed down from father to son.

My father has sometimes been referred to as the prime minister of Thembuland during the reigns of Dalindyebo, the father of Sabata, who ruled in the early 1900s, and that of his son, Jongintaba, who succeeded him. That is a misnomer in that no such title existed, but the role he played was not so different from what the designation implies. As a respected and valued counselor to both kings, he accompanied them on their travels and was usually to be found by their sides during important meetings with government officials. He was an acknowledged custodian of Xhosa history, and it was partially for that reason that he was valued as an adviser. My own interest in history had early roots and was encouraged by my father. Although my father could neither read nor write, he was reputed to be an excellent orator who captivated his audiences by entertaining them as well as teaching them.

In later years, I discovered that my father was not only an adviser to kings but a kingmaker. After the untimely death of Jongilizwe in the 1920s, his son Sabata, the infant of the Great Wife, was too young to ascend to the throne. A dispute arose as to which of Dalindyebo's three most senior sons from other mothers — Jongintaba, Dabulamanzi, and Melithafa — should be selected to succeed him. My father was consulted and recommended Jongintaba on the grounds that he was the best educated. Jongintaba, he argued, would not only be a fine custodian of the crown but an excellent mentor to the young prince. My father, and a few other influential chiefs, had the great respect for education that is often present in those who are uneducated. The recommendation was controversial, for Jongintaba's mother was from a lesser house, but my father's choice was ultimately accepted by both the Thembus and the British government. In time, Jongintaba would return the favor in a way that my father could not then imagine.

All told, my father had four wives, the third of whom, my mother, Nosekeni Fanny, the daughter of Nkedama from the amaMpemvu clan of the Xhosa, belonged to the Right Hand House. Each of these wives — the Great Wife, the Right Hand wife (my mother), the Left Hand wife, and the

wife of the Iqadi or support house — had her own kraal. A kraal was a homestead and usually included a simple fenced-in enclosure for animals, fields for growing crops, and one or more thatched huts. The kraals of my father's wives were separated by many miles and he commuted among them. In these travels, my father sired thirteen children in all, four boys and nine girls. I am the eldest child of the Right Hand House, and the youngest of my father's four sons. I have three sisters, Baliwe, who was the oldest girl, Notancu, and Makhutswana. Although the eldest of my father's sons was Mlahlwa, my father's heir as chief was Daligqili, the son of the Great House, who died in the early 1930s. All of his sons, with the exception of myself, are now deceased, and each was my senior not only in age but in status.



When I was not much more than a newborn child, my father was involved in a dispute that deprived him of his chieftainship at Mvezo and revealed a strain in his character I believe he passed on to his son. I maintain that nurture, rather than nature, is the primary molder of personality, but my father possessed a proud rebelliousness, a stubborn sense of fairness, that I recognize in myself. As a chief — or headman, as it was often known among the whites — my father was compelled to account for his stewardship not only to the Thembu king but to the local magistrate. One day one of my father's subjects lodged a complaint against him involving an ox that had strayed from its owner. The magistrate accordingly sent a message ordering my father to appear before him. When my father received the summons, he sent back the following reply: “*Andizi, ndisaqula*” (I will not come, I am still girding for battle). One did not defy magistrates in those days. Such behavior would be regarded as the height of insolence — and in this case it was.

My father's response bespoke his belief that the magistrate had no legitimate power over him. When it came to tribal matters, he was guided not by the laws of the king of England, but by Thembu custom. This defiance was not a fit of pique, but a matter of principle. He was asserting his traditional prerogative as a chief and was challenging the authority of the magistrate.

When the magistrate received my father's response, he promptly charged him with insubordination. There was no inquiry or investigation; that was reserved for white civil servants. The magistrate simply deposed my father, thus ending the Mandela family chieftainship.

I was unaware of these events at the time, but I was not unaffected. My

father, who was a wealthy nobleman by the standards of his time, lost both his fortune and his title. He was deprived of most of his herd and land, and the revenue that came with them. Because of our straitened circumstances, my mother moved to Qunu, a slightly larger village north of Mvezo, where she would have the support of friends and relations. We lived in a less grand style in Qunu, but it was in that village near Umtata that I spent the happiest years of my boyhood and whence I trace my earliest memories.

2

THE VILLAGE OF QUNU was situated in a narrow, grassy valley crisscrossed by clear streams, and overlooked by green hills. It consisted of no more than a few hundred people who lived in huts, which were beehive-shaped structures of mud walls, with a wooden pole in the center holding up a peaked, grass roof. The floor was made of crushed ant-heap, the hard dome of excavated earth above an ant colony, and was kept smooth by smearing it regularly with fresh cow dung. The smoke from the hearth escaped through the roof, and the only opening was a low doorway one had to stoop to walk through. The huts were generally grouped together in a residential area that was some distance away from the maize fields. There were no roads, only paths through the grass worn away by barefooted boys and women. The women and children of the village wore blankets dyed in ocher; only the few Christians in the village wore Western-style clothing. Cattle, sheep, goats, and horses grazed together in common pastures. The land around Qunu was mostly treeless except for a cluster of poplars on a hill overlooking the village. The land itself was owned by the state. With very few exceptions, Africans at the time did not enjoy private title to land in South Africa but were tenants paying rent annually to the government. In the area, there were two small primary schools, a general store, and a dipping tank to rid the cattle of ticks and diseases.

Maize (what we called mealies and people in the West call corn), sorghum, beans, and pumpkins formed the largest portion of our diet, not because of any inherent preference for these foods, but because the people could not afford anything richer. The wealthier families in our village supplemented their diets with tea, coffee, and sugar, but for most people in Qunu these were exotic luxuries far beyond their means. The water used for farming, cooking, and washing had to be fetched in buckets from streams and springs. This was women's work, and indeed, Qunu was a village of women and children: most of the men spent the greater part of the year working on remote farms or in the mines along the Reef, the great ridge of gold-bearing rock and shale that forms the southern boundary of Johannesburg. They returned perhaps twice a year, mainly to plow their fields. The hoeing, weeding, and harvesting were left to the women and children. Few if any of the people in the village knew how to read or write, and the concept of education was still a foreign one to many.

My mother presided over three huts at Qunu which, as I remember, were always filled with the babies and children of my relations. In fact, I hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We do not make the same distinctions among relations practiced by whites. We have no half brothers or half sisters. My mother's sister is my mother; my uncle's son is my brother; my brother's child is my son, my daughter.

Of my mother's three huts, one was used for cooking, one for sleeping, and one for storage. In the hut in which we slept, there was no furniture in the Western sense. We slept on mats and sat on the ground. I did not discover pillows until I went to Mqhekezweni. My mother cooked food in a three-legged iron pot over an open fire in the center of the hut or outside. Everything we ate we grew and made ourselves. My mother planted and harvested her own mealies. Mealies were harvested from the field when they were hard and dry. They were stored in sacks or pits dug in the ground. When preparing the mealies, the women used different methods. They could grind the kernels between two stones to make bread, or boil the mealies first, producing *umphothulo* (mealie flour eaten with sour milk) or *umngqusho* (samp, sometimes plain or mixed with beans). Unlike mealies, which were sometimes in short supply, milk from our cows and goats was always plentiful.

From an early age, I spent most of my free time in the veld playing and fighting with the other boys of the village. A boy who remained at home tied to his mother's apron strings was regarded as a sissy. At night, I shared my food and blanket with these same boys. I was no more than five when I became a herd-boy, looking after sheep and calves in the fields. I discovered the almost mystical attachment that the Xhosa have for cattle, not only as a source of food and wealth, but as a blessing from God and a source of happiness. It was in the fields that I learned how to knock birds out of the sky with a slingshot, to gather wild honey and fruits and edible roots, to drink warm, sweet milk straight from the udder of a cow, to swim in the clear, cold streams, and to catch fish with twine and sharpened bits of wire. I learned to stick-fight — essential knowledge to any rural African boy — and became adept at its various techniques, parrying blows, feinting in one direction and striking in another, breaking away from an opponent with quick footwork. From these days I date my love of the veld, of open spaces, the simple beauties of nature, the clean line of the horizon.

As boys, we were mostly left to our own devices. We played with toys we made ourselves. We molded animals and birds out of clay. We made