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Local learners meet Madiba



Mr Nelson Mandela and MP Mzinwa Mahlangu (Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces) join members of the Global White Lion Protection Trust and Seeds of Light together with Daphne Mhaule, Axon Khosa, Phileas Mpapele, Jennifer Nukeri and the performers of the White Lion play from several Acornhoek schools, together with the co-sponsors of the event.
Story by Wendy Strauss

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ACORNHOEK, 2 AUGUST 2007 - A group of enthusiastic learners, educators, and the principal from Funjwa Primary School, as well as a number of learners from Ndabeni Higher Primary, Shobiyane High School, and Lumukisa Higher Primary in Acornhoek, traveled to Johannesburg to meet with Mr Nelson Mandela on July 26.

The learners performed their eco-educational play about South Africa's unique White Lions for Madiba, drawing a link between the White Lions' 'struggle for freedom in the wild' and Mr Mandela's own 'long walk to freedom'. The White Lion play is the result of a collaborative eco-educational programme facilitated jointly by the educators of Funjwa Primary school, the Global White Lion Protection Trust (WLT), P.S. Records, and Seeds of Light (SOL) an American based non-profit organisation.

The WLT, a non-profit conservation organisation situated in the Greater Timbavati, partners schools in the region to create awareness and support for the conservation importance of the White Lions. The White Lion play showcases a fusion of poetry, song and dance developed by the learners from the various schools in celebration of the return of the White Lions to their endemic habitat in the Greater Timbavati region.

The WLT coordinated the trip with the support of the Nelson Mandela Foundation and also sourced funding for the transportation and accommodation of the learners in Johannesburg. SOL has worked hand in hand with the WLT in the development of the performance and assisted with the learners' costumes and backdrops.

Says Daphne Mhaule, Funjwa Primary

School Principal: "The visit to Mr Mandela represented a historic moment for the learners, their parents, fellow Funjwa learners and the entire Acornhoek community. We have been preparing for the meeting with Madiba for many months, with much hard work and dedication from the learners. We thank Mr Mandela, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Global White Lion Protection Trust for affording us this extraordinary opportunity."

The learners departed Acornhoek at 7am on the morning of the 25th of July, the day prior to their momentous 'Madiba visit'. Hoedspruit based Eastgate Safaris and Transfers provided a 22-seater bus for the trip while Nsele Safari Lodge, also based in the region, provided additional transportation and fuel. In Johannesburg, the Rosebank Scouting Organisation provided their scout hall, complete with mattresses and heaters. They also catered a hearty supper and breakfast to prepare the learners for their big day. An additional surprise awaited the learners upon their arrival in Johannesburg, when Sandton based United International Pictures SA (UIPSA) entertained them with a complimentary screening of the film *Evan Almighty*.

Daphne adds: "We were touched by the generosity of everyone involved in making this trip a reality for Funjwa Primary School. Every part of the journey will live on in our hearts." She concludes: "Our play was a gift to Madiba and also to the White Lions of the Timbavati. We will continue to teach our learners through these types of eco-educational programmes about the importance of our country's rich natural heritage and history as well as the urgency of White Lion conservation in our region."



Above: Justice Sambo of Acornhoek, played the part of Nelson Mandela to perfection, with pride, love, and confidence, highlighting the qualities we all know so well in our beloved leader - Madiba.