

## The day Nelson Mandela called my name

I will never forget the day Nelson Mandela called my name.

It was a routine press conference at a hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa, in early 1991. I was the Africa correspondent for the Chicago Tribune at the time, and I had raised my hand to ask a question.

Mandela nodded at me and said simply, "Yes, Howard?"

As journalists, we try never to get starry-eyed about the famous people we cover, ever mindful of our responsibilities as neutral observers of the world — and the inevitable fact that every icon, no matter how towering, eventually turns out to have feet of clay.

But I have to confess it was a particularly electric thrill to discover that, in a sea of international journalists covering South Africa at the time, Mandela actually knew who I was and had been reading my stories.

I've had the privilege during my career of having reported from more than 70 countries — one-third of all the nations on the planet. I've witnessed and chronicled some of the most seminal moments in modern history: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the destruction of New Orleans during

**HOWARD WITT**  
EDITOR'S NOTES



Hurricane Katrina.

But I can say that nothing I've ever witnessed can match the moment when I watched Mandela walk out of Victor Verster Prison in suburban Cape Town on a brilliant sunny afternoon on Feb. 11, 1990.

A few hours later, before a huge crowd in the city center, the very first public words Mandela spoke, after 27 years in prison, were filled with humility and magnanimity.

"I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all," Mandela said. "I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people."

That was the thing about Mandela — he was the real deal. Other politicians have said similar words, feigning modesty to mask their megalomania. But in Mandela's case, it was genuine — people the world over might have regarded him as a saint or a king, but he would never wear that cloak.

Even after his release from prison, as he deftly negotiated the end of the racist apartheid government and steered his



On Feb. 11, 1990, Nelson Mandela and his wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, raise clenched fists as they walk hand-in-hand upon his release from prison in Cape Town, South Africa. AP PHOTO

divided nation toward the first democratic elections in its history, Mandela lived in an ordinary home on a hill in Soweto, one of the notorious, teeming black ghettos outside Johannesburg into which white South Africans corralled the nation's majority residents.

You could drive up to that house as a tourist and stand in front of the gate to pose for a photo. Sometimes Mandela

himself would walk out and greet visitors. I know this because it happened to me one day while I was leading a tour for visiting relatives.

Of course, Mandela did not single-handedly resolve all of South Africa's profound problems. Terrible paroxysms of violence wracked the country in the months and years after his release, and violent crime remains a plague to this day.

South Africa's vast wealth, built on gold and agriculture and modern industry, remains jaggedly and unevenly divided between whites and blacks.

Some young critics in South Africa today deride Mandela for not having been radical enough, for having negotiated a peaceful democratic transition with the white-ruled government that freed him rather than directing, as he easily could have, its violent overthrow and an abrupt redistribution of wealth.

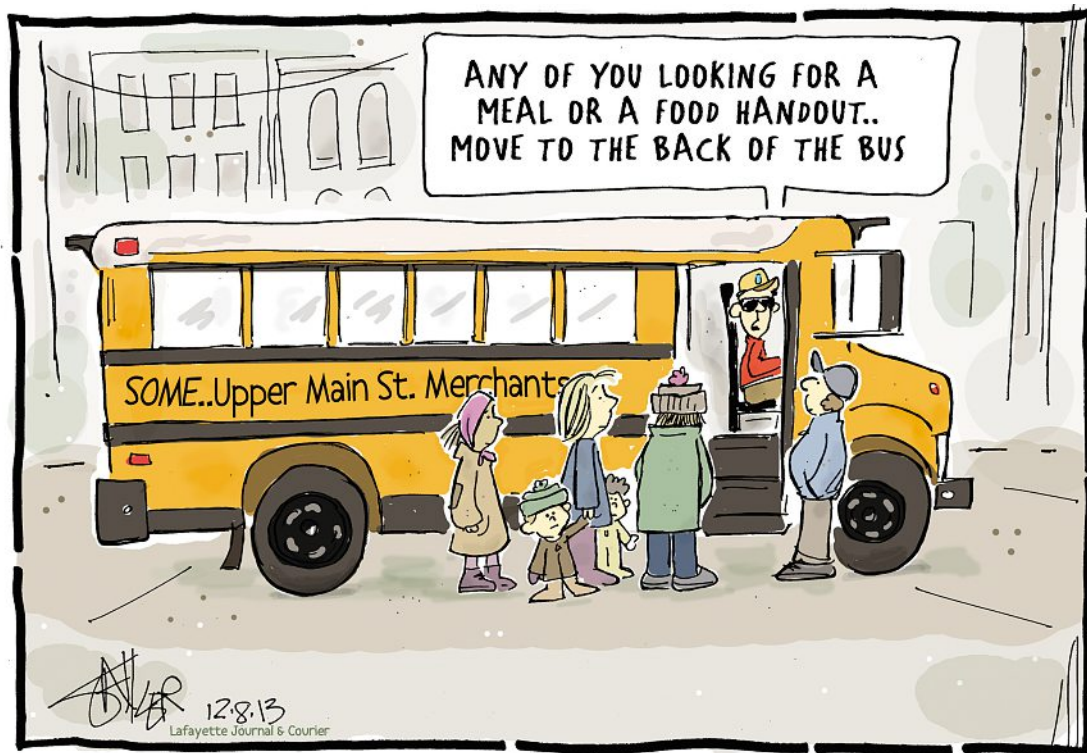
But most of those critics were too young, a generation ago, to understand the miracle that Mandela accomplished in sparing his nation a bloody civil war. There is a reason why the example of forgiveness, forbearance and steely determination Mandela showed ranks him among the most respected statesmen the world has ever known.

Mandela did not, in fact, turn out to have feet of clay.

And that's why, in all the houses I have occupied over the last two decades, his portrait has always hung on the wall.

And it's why Mandela is my youngest son's middle name.

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Dave Sattler/Journal & Courier

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### What \$64 could buy

The average American will spend more than \$700 on holiday gifts and goodies this year, totaling more than \$465 billion, the National Retail Federation estimates. If that money was

spent entirely on U.S.-made products, it would create 4.6 million jobs. Imagine that.

In reality, that won't happen. But what if we took the first step? We can make a difference this holiday season with as little as \$64, according to ABC World News. If each of us spent

just \$64 more on American-made goods during our holiday shopping, the result would be 200,000 new jobs created. With millions of Americans still out of work, surely we can all do our part to help by buying American.

Travis Wilson  
Lafayette

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### GUEST COLUMN

## Thanks for helping TSC after tornado

By Scott Hanback  
For the Journal & Courier

On behalf of the entire Tippecanoe School Corp., I would like to thank the Lafayette community for its tireless work and overwhelming support for our teachers, students and families in the wake of the Nov. 17 tornado.

The storm damaged two of our buildings, Mintonye Elementary School and Southwestern Middle School, disrupting the lives of more than 900 children.

The events of the past few weeks have demonstrated how effectively and compassionately our community pulls together in times of crisis. I watched employees and volunteers stepping up to the challenge of relocating classrooms in a matter of days.

They picked up debris from the playground, brought lunches to workers salvaging equipment and sorted papers for teachers getting settled into their new classrooms. It is heartwarming to see such abundant generosity and willingness to help, and it re-emphasizes my continued appreciation to live, work and raise my family in Tippecanoe County.

We are so grateful for all the different school and church groups, Scouts and other service organizations

who donated school supplies. Generous cash donations allowed us to replace some technology and medical supplies immediately, and teachers have been able to purchase items they need for their classrooms.

First Assembly Community Ministries and Wea Ridge Middle School have welcomed our students and staff with open arms. Our students are comforted by the many messages of hope that decorate the hallways of their temporary classrooms. The posters read, "Thinking of You" and "Stay Strong," helping to keep our Pioneer spirit and Wildcat pride alive.

This journey reinforces important life lessons, reminding us all that we grow stronger by working together through the challenges we face, we overcome obstacles by focusing on the mission at hand and our resolve is only strengthened by adversity.

Thank you for showing our teachers, students and staff how much you care. We would appreciate your continued support as we work to rebuild and repair our schools.

We have much to be thankful for, and it is my sincere hope that all of us can rest and reflect this holiday season.

I look forward to our students returning to their "home" schools in the new year.

Hanback is Tippecanoe School Corp. superintendent.