

## Madiba, man of peace

The optimism is palpable. Two recent visits to South Africa—one including a meeting with President Nelson Mandela—have left me with an incredible sense of optimism about the future of this country that was once the international community's favorite pariah. Interestingly, several major sporting successes have crystallized across the masses of South Africans the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness. Now it is up to those who have so fervently joined together to support the world rugby championship team; the South African cricketers, who emerged from their sport's reputation for mindnumbing draws to thrash England; and the members of the championship African Cup soccer team, to join together in the coming decades to funnel their energy into development of improved health care standards for the majority of the population. I think it will happen.

My most recent visits to South Africa were in August of last year and at the beginning of this year. In previous visits, most black Africans were generally cordial and friendly to my white face even though decades of suppression had left an inevitable legacy of suspicion of whites—a legacy that was sometimes, not surprisingly, visibly hard to hide. However, in January of this year I was greeted on the streets of Johannesburg spontaneously and unabashedly by black strangers with a cheery "good morning" or "hello." A happy, confident smile and eye contact, despite some cultural taboos, had replaced the suspicious, sometimes fearful glance.

Colleagues in practices and universities are working together to build the new South Africa with enthusiasm and dedication. They are well-educated and well-informed and have access to the latest materials, techniques, and equipment. What is lacking in many quarters are adequate resources to put into effect many of the changes that will improve the lot of the average citizen when it comes to dental care. Fellow practitioners, teachers, researchers, and members of dental industry and the international organized

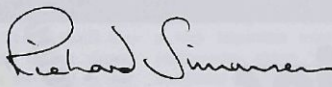
dentistry community must vigorously support the emerging rainbow culture of the new South Africa at every opportunity.

The noxious social experiment called apartheid has failed. Yet, not all is well in South Africa. Years will go by without many feeling the tangible benefits that democracy and the right to vote will eventually yield. But the feeling is in the air. You can't miss it. Soon, this will have to result in improvements of basic and advanced health care standards for all South Africans, particularly for those who have been deprived of so much for so many years.

When the time comes to vote for the human being of the twentieth century, I will think of Mohandas Gandhi, and of Theodore Roosevelt; of Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other great leaders who led their people out of devastating crises. Many others have, of course, contributed to humankind in their own way. But my vote will go unhesitatingly to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela—a man imprisoned for almost 3 decades for his political beliefs, yet a man who emerged from this isolation to lead his country to a peaceful transition to democracy. South Africa could so easily have become another Rwanda, Somalia, Angola, or Mozambique. I believe it did not mainly through the leadership of one man.

Mandela—a gracious, soft-spoken leader. Mandela—a name that will live forever as an example of reconciliation and forgiveness. A man whom we can all admire and hope to emulate in our own small ways. How can I not be forgiving of *anyone* for *anything* when he can forgive what was done to him and his people?

Hail to Madiba, a man of peace.



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