

# A small favour with a biblical twist at lunch

■ Kate Emery

Shortly before physician Peter Friedland was due to relocate from South Africa to Perth, he took his two young sons to have lunch with his most famous patient — Nelson Mandela.

Mr Mandela sat the boys on either side of him and made conversation while Professor Friedland examined the ears that had been troubling the South African leader.

“He turned to my children and he said, ‘What are your names? My name is Nelson Mandela, you may not know me,’ Professor Friedland recalled yesterday, after learning of the death of his former patient and friend.

“My children said, ‘My name is Aaron’, and, ‘My name is Benjamin’, and he said those are names from the Bible.

“And then he said, ‘Boys, I wonder if you wouldn’t mind doing me a favour one day’ and they said, ‘Yes, of course’.

“He said, ‘When you go up to heaven one day, the angels will ask what your names are and you’ll say Aaron and Benjamin and they’ll say those names sound familiar from the bible and they’ll welcome you in.

“But when I go up to heaven, they’re going to ask me what my name is and I’ll say Madiba and they’ll say what kind of name is that?”

“So, boys, please tell them about me and put in a good word for me so they’ll let me in.”

Professor Friedland was Mr Mandela’s ear, nose and throat doctor from 2000 to 2009 — a role that, at times, involved attending his patient while he spoke to then Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon on one phone line and then Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on the other.

Since moving to Perth, Professor Friedland has held roles with the University of WA, the University of Notre Dame, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Joondalup Health Campus and the Ear Science Institute of Australia.

He said news of Mandela’s death had been “very emotional” but he believed it would have come as a relief.

“I think he was very tired and ready to pass on and I think he



Old friend: Professor Peter Friedland, who was Nelson Mandela’s ear, nose and throat physician. Picture: Lincoln Baker

was being kept going for the sake of the nation,” Professor Friedland said.

“I think for many years he was prepared to pass on, he certainly verbalised that to me, but it wasn’t a popular view to give out.”

He said his time with Mandela was the highlight of his career.

“We had a very good, very close bond and relationship and I think the reason our relationship was so close was because I never asked him for any favours,” Professor Friedland said.

“I know people classify him as the great leader or the great politician, etcetera, but I would classify him as the greatest healer of all time, because in a sense it wasn’t just countries and nations and continents, but individuals that he healed and relationships between people and races and cultures and creeds.”

When Professor Friedland and his wife Linda decided to move to Australia for the sake of their children he went to Mandela to break the news.

“It was probably the hardest thing I’ve ever done,” he said.

“He said, ‘Doctor, you need to do whatever you need to do for the safety of your family, but make sure that wherever you go in the world that you make a contribution to the less privileged and wherever you go there will be people like that.’”

The South African Honorary Consulate will be hosting a book of condolence at its West Perth office on Hay Street from Monday at 10am and the public are invited to mark their respects.

## Two-day wait for a career highlight

■ Geof Parry  
Seven News  
senior reporter



It’s difficult to comprehend that a man who spent 27 years in prison could have no bitterness towards the people who kept him there.

But that was the Nelson Mandela I saw and spoke to when I sat down to interview him a few days after his release.

I was in Cape Town when Mandela walked from Victor Verster prison and followed him to his family home in Soweto which was besieged by the world’s press and broadcasters.

Some of the big overseas networks had planned for this day, for years, buying up or taking long-term leases over houses across the road and turning them into outside broadcast studios.

The big players got the first interviews, American, British, Japanese, German.

I had to wait. For two days. Mostly in the rain.

Standing outside his guarded gate, one of Mandela’s security became quite agitated, mistaking me for a South African plain clothes policeman who had given him a bad time.

It was sorted out.

I learnt later that Winnie Mandela had seen me standing there wet and bedraggled trying to convince Mandela’s minders to grant me an interview.

Because of her, I got 10 minutes. The first Australian journalist to be granted an interview.

What was Nelson Mandela like?

Charismatic, certainly, but more.

There was a serenity about him, a peacefulness and a purpose that you don’t see in too many people. I’ve done lots of things in more than 30 years of journalism. Stuff I’ll never forget.

When people ask me what was the highlight, I tell them it’s the 10 minutes I spent with Nelson Mandela.

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