

## My improbable encounter with Nelson Mandela

A chance meeting with Nelson Mandela inspired Victoria physician Dr Chris Fraser to pursue a career in HIV medicine. The story of their encounter serves as a fitting tribute to Madiba, and to the way that he touched lives around the globe.

**Chris Fraser, MD**

**N**elson Mandela's eyes are filled with calm and purpose: a benevolent, steady determination that occupies the space between us. His brilliant, endless smile radiates the unmistakable joy of existence—an unquenchable spirit. As his hand squeezes mine, his grip is firm and strong, that of a much younger man with much work still to do.

To my complete amazement I hear him thanking me: "Thank you to all the people of Canada. They have shown great leadership in the struggle against apartheid." This is all impossible; neither of us is supposed to be here—I'm an imposter, and he is a fragile and ill-appearing old man who has been released from imprisonment by the South African apartheid regime.

Our meeting occurred in late 1990. A final-year UBC medical student inspired by the heroism of anti-apartheid activists, I was on an

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Dr Chris Fraser practises inner-city medicine at the Cool Aid Community Health Centre in Victoria, with a focus on people living with HIV and hepatitis C. He is also a volunteer physician for the Canada Africa Community Health Alliance ([www.cacha.ca](http://www.cacha.ca)) at an HIV clinic in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania.

obstetrical elective in a black hospital in Durban. My partner Stephanie took to the pediatric wards caring for black infants, many near death from completely preventable illnesses. Surrounded daily by the overwhelming, horrific health consequences

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and human suffering imposed by the apartheid system, we were educated and mentored by resilient and courageous South African medical colleagues of all ethnic backgrounds. They were enormously excited about the upcoming African National Congress (ANC) convention to be held in Johannesburg. This would be the first legal meeting of the ANC in the country, and they urged me to attend to witness history in the making. They were passionate and categorical: "You must attend."

A long, storm-buffed car journey brought us to a ramshackle conference facility on the outskirts of

Soweto. Excitement, song, dance, and uncertainty pulsed in the air around us. We rushed forward to enter the facility, only to be stopped at the door by imposing security guards, who requested that we present our delegate passes.

"Only elected party delegates are allowed to enter," we were told sternly. All appeals rebuffed, crestfallen at this missed chance of a lifetime, we turned to head back to Durban, hearts heavy with our failure. How could we have known that this failure would change our lives forever?

At that moment a sign improbably beckoned to us: Press Room. Several deep breaths later, sweating, hearts near-exploding, we brazenly and fraudulently presented ourselves as freelance Canadian reporters to the inexperienced volunteer press credential coordinators. Our story was buttressed only by our passports. They scrutinized us briefly, but their uncertainty was overcome by goodwill—we were in!

Dazed, we were quickly photographed for press passes, and soon our trembling hands clutched the treasured laminated cards and we found ourselves in the front row of the convention, sitting shoulder to shoulder

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helped develop several nascent renal units throughout the province, and contributed to more than 30 important papers and many abstracts.

In the 1980s Dr Price was invited to China as a professor and lecturer. He was a founding member of the Canadian Society of Nephrology, chair of the medical board of the Kidney Foundation of Canada, and a member of the Board of Directors of the BC Medical Association for 2 years.

Dr Price had several interests outside medicine: he served as chairman of the board of governors of York House School, director of an education committee at St. George's School, and a director on the board of St. Andrew's Church.

After retiring in 1990 to Salt Spring Island, Dr Price was named professor emeritus of medicine in 1992. He spent his last years in Victoria and Parksville.

Survived by his first wife, Nancy (nee Beattie), and their five children, and second wife, Barbara (nee Bristol), Dr Price will always be remembered by his family as an avid sailor and fisherman, happiest on the water with full sails, tight lines, and a book by his side. He will be remembered by the profession and many grateful patients as a crucial figure in the development of one of British Columbia and Canada's leading renal/medical programs.

Dr Price was a strong supporter of the Kidney Foundation of Canada and the Steelhead Society; donations to either, or to your charity of choice, are welcomed.

—Angus Rae, MB, FRCP  
Vancouver

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### Dr Hans Waldmann 1920–2013

Dr Hans Waldmann was born on 6 December 1920 in Stettin, Germany, and died on 7 October 2013 in Abbotsford, BC. He graduated from Kiel and Hamburg Universities. After the war he worked at an American hospital in Bremerhaven. He was offered positions in many American hospitals, but kept firm in his decision to immigrate to Canada. He left Germany on 22 April 1952 on TSS *Neptunia* and arrived in Halifax after a rough trip across the Atlantic. After 2 years at Saskatoon General Hospital he moved to BC to begin his specialty, radiology. He interned at the Jubilee Hospital in Victoria and Shaughnessy Hospital in Vancouver where he was mentored by Dr Andrew Turnbull, who was the chief of radiology. In June 1958 he moved to Qualicum Beach on Vancouver Island and began a long and happy practice serving Port Alberni, Comox, Cumberland, and Campbell River. He also opened a small office in Parksville that grew to be a large office and a very busy practice.

He married Mary Ann Brabant in 1960 and they raised two daughters and many German shepherd dogs in Qualicum Beach. Hans loved Canada and Qualicum and said many times what a good decision he had made all those years ago.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Ann, and daughters Claire (Gary Conrad) and Carol (Eric Picard), four beloved grandchildren, and relatives back in Germany.

—Mary Ann Waldmann, RN  
Abbotsford

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## special feature

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with the world's media to hear the speeches of Mr Mandela and other ANC leaders. Later, our still-unsteady legs supported us as we turned to see Mr Mandela bearing down on us for that handshake. He flaunted time and age, unleashing the benevolent and compassionate life force improbably stored in his frail-looking frame—a life force perhaps even strengthened through his imprisonment. He moved ahead relentlessly, much as he did in driving his nation's long walk to freedom.

In 2000 I returned to South Africa as an HIV physician—a path inspired by that chance meeting 10 years earlier. The World AIDS Conference in Durban was a turning point in South Africa coming to terms with its AIDS pandemic, and in correcting the misguided policies of Thabo Mbeki, Mr Mandela's successor. As Mr Mandela—Madiba—was introduced at the conclusion of the meeting, a soaring choir of joyous ululation and adulation erupted; voices from all corners of the globe rose in unison, celebrating and thanking him. Another incredible South African, the brilliant physician and antiapartheid activist Hoosen Coovadia, introduced him simply as “the greatest man to ever bestride the earth.”

As we say goodbye to Nelson Mandela and give thanks for his life, let us all ensure that every child, every person on this earth knows his name, and finds hope and inspiration in his accomplishments. **BCMJ**

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### References

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