

Monday July 15 – Journal by Bob Wood

It is appropriate that today it is my turn to journal. Before this journey I was dead to the Apartheid Movement, to South Africa. Deaf, dumb, and blind...and I have Soweto. It's not as if I am remotely knowledgeable three and a half weeks in. I still don't know much...but I am awakening...ever so slowly. And today I have Soweto.

Weeks ago back at the Victor Verster Prison outside of Capetown where Mandela was released in 1990, Tim talked about that day when Mandela walked down the road that laid before us. Tim was so inspired to be on that same path. To see his excitement, to go back to those live feeds from 23 years ago, for him the events of that moment were vivid; I had no memories to draw from. None. In 1990 I was coaching football and teaching freshman something in Muskegon, Michigan, all of it in a mindless vacuum. I barely knew who Nelson Mandela was, and I certainly did not waste time with news of another African prisoner's walk down a dusty road to freedom. So how on earth would I know anything about Soweto. And today I have Soweto.

This country is complicated. It's the only word that I find that relentlessly seems to fit. I've seen poverty; Mali is much poorer. I've backpacked in the midst of Middle East political chaos. And Cuba? Come on. But this place; one moment you are passing suburbs that feel like you're rounding the bend to Cincinnati, the next you cut through the skyline of Joburg or Durban or Cape Town as if you were on the Dan Ryan flying by Chicago. New cars. Clean cars. Fast cars. First world infrastructure. How could this be Africa? And then you see the razor wire, you hit the townships and you taste the open sewage, corrugated tin roofs, and poverty. Oceans; two, the Drakensburg, lions, elephants, and zebra. So diverse. So troubled, but so absolutely beautiful. Colored, Black, Afrikaner, and Indians; Japanese are white, but the Chinese are colored. It's all so complicated.

I've spent a large majority of my time here in the moment. I've listened to many South Africans...educated and not, tell me their story. I am learning about today. Soweto is an icon of the past. It anchored a revolt in 1976. It was then that a supremely confident white government overreached, and was finally forced to circle the wagons. English to Afrikaans in all public schools. And Soweto exploded. The little Pietersen boy was the first to die, the first of many in Soweto and around the nation; by battles end the days for apartheid were numbered. Soweto – marked the start of the end to South African Apartheid. And until a few weeks before we left the states I didn't know it existed.

Soweto was not our sole stop for the day. We were packed. The Apartheid museum, reputed to be one of the world's best, as well as Mandela's home was on the agenda. We were to pick up Mandy Mankanzana, Rich and K's Soweto connection for the past six trips. She would take us to dinner at Wandies, which she reprimanded smartly for no spoons, and then escort us around town...the memorial for Hector Pietersen, down Viliaki Street to the Mandela home. And onto Klipton. Klipton?

The Apartheid Museum is vast. It covers a lot of ground, both in information and in size. The size however isn't mere material; it's also about physical space – lots of it inside and outside of the museum. The exterior grounds, which are incorporated into the experience, and the cathedral ceilings inside the building usher you effectively through. I never felt overwhelmed by the array of the material, even though I didn't get halfway through it all. The audio and visual

productions are simple enough to move you way past a point of introduction, but at the same time so thorough, given a day or two to roam, you could learn the movement from square one, and do so at a level that would be substantial. And your experience starts at the very beginning. At the ticket gate we were provided one of two receipts that were titled either “white” or “non-white”, which sent us through one of two turn style checkpoint gates, reminiscent of Occupied Palestine, and into a separated aisle that led to the museum gate. For the sixty or so feet that we walked amongst white, black, and colored four-foot identification card replicas that lined each side between us. To know the relevancy of those cards, the influence of the pass laws, to have Geraldine fill in the gaps, it provided a powerful introduction. Back outside into the air, up and over the Joberg skyline – you walk past creative mirrored full-sized cutouts of specific individuals who later reappear in the museum, their stories, tied to the past through relatives involved in the Apartheid Movement.

The museum itself covers considerable historical ground; like I said I didn’t get past the 1980’s. However, what I did see resonated. Prime Minister Vorster’s speeches and National Party election videos needed only National Socialist subtitles to fit cheerfully with Nazi apartheid propaganda of an earlier time. Giant posters of Ernest Cole’s stark photographs from “House of Bondage” silently scream vulgarity. The sound of video on multiple televisions, on a continual loop, play loud enough to draw you in, and stick with you as you continue on to the next sight. Still, they never interfere with a new sound, the next movie. Consequently you are continually reminded of previous discoveries. Use of height and space, depth, light, audio, visual and darkness is effective.

I think everybody in our group honed in on what they needed to see...and then lingered. We quietly and occasionally crossed paths, nodded and moved on. Steve found the arrogant crocodile tank, a vehicle that had never before entered my memory, but to him represented the brutality of apartheid. Manny dove into the deep end of the Nelson Mandela exhibit and stayed for a while. I love political poster protest art: the wall to the roof of colorful and creative slogans just outside of the 80’s film, demanded action. And Eric figured out that maybe the reason Tanya and I were getting lost and bumping into one another so often was because they drive on the other side of the road over here. The Museum is absolutely world class. You’d need a couple of days to really take it all in. We got a taste and moved on.

Our day ended in twilight with a short stop at the Regina Mowndi Catholic Church; which served as community hub and ground zero for the initial Soweto attacks in 1976, as well as later supplying a primary public venue for Arch Bishop Tutu’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Between the museum and Church we walked the neighborhood where Hector Pietersen was killed, his lifeless body carried away so futilely by young friends and captured back in the museum by Ernest Cole, stopped by his memorial and Mandela’s home in the process. The trek, although significant at providing a sense of location to the events of 76 took me back instead and over and over again to Selma and Montgomery and Birmingham.

South Africa’s Apartheid struggle is not a foreign version of the American Civil Rights Movement. I’ve been to Alabama with Civil Rights in mind nine times; consequently the American version has been floating just below my surface for this entire trip. But they are very different. If one thing I’ve learned, the Afrikaner version ran to the core of society with

absolutely no thought of compromise ever in mind. The institutionalization of apartheid through the generations washed over all societal and political aspects of life, at the local, provincial, and the national levels. Maybe it's the different way that history worked out these racial conflicts in the two countries, or the fact that with a federal government in tow at least black Americans had some constitutional place to ultimately turn. On paper segregation has always seemed incompatible with our Bill of Rights, with the 14th Amendment; it took Southern blacks to stand up and fight and white Northerners, as well as a complacent federal government to wake up and finally buy into that fight, to ultimately redefine the promises of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" in order to end segregation. In South Africa apartheid seemed more ugly, deeper, wholly institutionalized, and potentially insurmountable.

Regardless, comparisons abound. Regina Muwundi's bullet holes and the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, the bombing at Dr. King's Montgomery residence and the bullet holes in Mandelas living room wall, Beiko and SNCC, bus boycotts, street protests, tear gas and bullets, brutal government police squad efforts to deter often unarmed civilians; the photographs of Emmett Till and Dexter Pietersen; I'm seeing shadows in many places. But I am also painfully aware that history drifts into the past, and that the passion of the confrontation of injustice, the sacrifice of personal life to obtain community liberty can evaporate into apathy and a world of consumerism. I see it more with every visit to Selma. As the old guard passes, young ones lose interest. Shiny stuff and the prizes of globalization seem so much more important. As I've toured through this South Africa struggle, from the beginning, but particularly on July 15, inside of the museum at the Mandela house and memorial, those same thoughts surfaced. You see tourists and school children check the boxes and float through the sites, T-shirt and food stalls have popped up and line Viliaki Street. I keep wondering how much do they care? Do they understand? What will happen when Mandela passes and history fades? That has been a troubling subject for me here and in Selma; until today. I figured it out today.

OK then, what exactly is Soweto? Mandy Mankanzana asked us that right off when she got on the bus. I'll be honest, my first thought, "it seemed a stupid question." We had read the guidebook; the paragraph or two on Soweto. We'd seen townships all along the highway and been to Port Elizabeth. Obviously Soweto was just like Missionvale, a tin shack, crime ridden, dirty and hopeless township that at one time launched a revolution. Duh. Well, it did launch a revolution; that I am learning. But a township? Today? Not exactly. The South West Township as it was officially named in 1961, Soweto was actually created in 1904 as a way for Afrikaners to isolate their cheap black labor force outside of cosmopolitan Johannesburg. Today, as Mandy told us, Soweto is a city in itself of five million residents. It seeps into the outskirts of Jo-berg, so that the two have pretty much merged. It has trees and parks. Paved roads link the various communities. Many of the neighborhoods indeed are tin shack and crime infested and dirty; many others consist of suburban homes linked by suburban roads ringed by suburban corner gas stations. It's a hodgepodge mix of obscene and comfortable, safe and extremely dangerous. However, throughout there is a renewed sense of pride in Soweto; in a sense Mandy represents it. Her past, Soweto's history is linked to a defeat of South African Apartheid, and the nation's future is tied into the hope that places like this can become more than they were, that their future will be so much more productive than the past. Whether or not that happens, Soweto certainly is evolving; it's not so easy anymore to say exactly what that means. It was however, much easier for her to define the portion of it, to which we were headed.

Klipton is a Soweto village of a three or four thousand people. It is a dirty and dusty, tin shackled, conglomeration of single story one and two room homes piled upon one another. It is a very bleak looking place. Back in the 1950's when a wife lost her husband to AIDS or TB, as often occurred, actually if he died for any reason, custom and law left the woman powerless. If she had an 18-year-old son, he inherited the property. If she didn't have any male children, her husband's brother got it. Often the widow was sent away; sometimes she landed here; and so began this squatters site of corrugated shacks; no electricity, no running water, no sewage disposal, it was not much more than a hopeless place to rest your head; a widow's camp. That was under apartheid; today the visuals aren't much better. And if the sight of these shacks aren't obscene enough, the statistics of those living in them complete the shock; over 50% of the residents have AIDS, rampant alcoholism, 40% of the children have been left orphaned (often by AIDS), recently placed plastic porta johns get emptied once a week by the local government, and any electricity has to be high jacked from the street.

To comprehend Klipton's past and hesitant future, Mandy's presence is required. There are individuals who you come across out on the road, who command the moment. They radiate confidence and demand loyalty, without even asking for it. That's Mandy Makanzana. And to listen and watch her, I think is to begin to see what's going on in Klipton, and to possibly discover the waning spirit of a passionate fight against South African Apartheid. When our tour bus landed on the outer rim of the village, Mandy broke us into four teams and sent us off with three of her young apprentices. Each had lived their entire life in Klipton. Each had matriculated through a 12th grade that dead ended into the reality of insurmountable college costs. Each was articulate, confident, and brutally honest. And all of them had been brought into the fold by Mandy, to tell their story, show people like us their lives, and I think most of all to take up that mantle of self-empowerment that Mandy had offered with the job. And so our four groups of six and seven first world American schoolteachers, plodded off among tin shacks.

I went with Mandy. She took on all questions and unhesitantly answered "yes" when asked if photos were OK. Even with approval, I find it awkward pointing the camera and peering directly into people's pain; still I do it, just not so well. Great photojournalists must be supremely confident human beings. Mandy walked us through a broken gate and tiny dirt yard, under wash drying on the line, towards an open door. To our right at eye level, printed clearly in chalk on the rusted tin, looked to be an English language lesson. We went inside to the dark kitchen. Mata was cooking. She lives in the two-room dwelling and has for fifteen years. She has three kids and HIV. Mandy told us the lesions on her face were as a result of rapidly progressing AIDS. Dust consumes these places despite the linoleum rolled out on the ground to squash the dirt. Our day was cool, but in December and January corrugated metal walls and roof must bloat the summer heat. And winter winds I'm sure turn the dwelling into a freezer. We found out later that in order to curb the winter cold, residents light charcoal fires in the yard. When the coals burn red, they're carried inside to toast the place. The opportunity cost - toxic fumes. Freeze or suffocate; heckuva a choice.

Mata's home was well organized. It was neat; and as clean as can be when dust settles everywhere. The cooking stove, which she heated with paraffin wedged into a corner aside cupboards, shelves, and a cabinet that featured all sorts of family photos; just like at mom and

dad's. A number of medals hung proudly from a knob on the cabinet. They were her ten year olds school awards. In Kosa, Mata asked Mandy if we wanted to see the report card. We did and Mom certainly wanted to show it off. So while we nosed around the kitchen and living room, one in the same, she shuffled through stacks of papers to find the card. It must be so difficult to keep anything organized in such conditions; the report was lost somewhere in the piles. Eventually, after Mandy moved on with the rest of the group to the next hovel, and I had lingered waiting futilely for the report card to be found, Mata's fifteen-year-old daughter, the one with the bad report card, came running in the door...like any fifteen-year-old teenage. Arms and legs flying, she almost ran us over and joined mom in the search. After the entire house had probably been turned over twice, the pair found it, made the proud presentation, and then led me off with report card in hand to the others guys back out in the street.

It's kind of strange to read the same comments on an impoverished Township report card that you'd find back in the States. Midyear percentages were totaled out in English – 71% in home language, 60% in English, 60% in Life Skills, 55% in mathematics, mid seventies in Geography, History, and Science and Technology...the comments even echoed our elementary teachers, "Well done! Keep it up!!" Mom and sis couldn't have been more proud.

Our other three groups had similar experiences. Each of the young people showed their homes, told their stories, took all questions. Michelle and Holly and Katie related an encounter with their 18-year-old tour guide. His situation seemed hopeless, his appearance - a lump on the neck and yellowing eyes could have added to the desperation, but it didn't; he wasn't. He took them to his one room home that housed seven! A big bed touched three of the four walls. The place didn't even have a table. Little ones (nieces and nephews), slept on the floor around the bed. Mom and himself and his sister shared it. The rest of the dwelling sounded like a losing effort at keeping out cold winter rains. Tarps hung from the ceiling, filled up with water and apparently found all sorts of places to leak. Cocoa Cola posters slapped on the tin covered more holes. If anybody had reason to give up it would've been here; it would've been him. No way. Not here. Not now. Holly, who is difficult enough to impress, was, at how ordered the room and yard were. Plastic bags and empty bottles that engulf these townships were absent from his house, from his yard. She asked him "How?" "Why"...and he told her, "You've gotta start somewhere. This is my home. It's my responsibility." He didn't have much, but he took that responsibility to heart and left an impression on all three gals.

It was that kind of spirit in those three young people, and those they introduced us to, that resonated so deeply with me, with many in our group. On paper these people don't have a lot to live for; their future is pretty much set. And it does not look promising. Still, they take on life, the world, and the task at hand with eyes wide open and shirtsleeves rolled up. If we ever believed that we had it tough, or had a right to complain or compare our puny little first world problems with that group in Klipton, it evaporated with the tours. It's from that sense of pride, that role of responsibility, such a sustained and mindful effort in the midst of overwhelming poverty and chaos that serves as inspiration. The fact that one of the gals who toured our group spoke three languages, that she had all the business sense and presence of any of the finest students that I've taught, that further education past grade 12 for her was financially forever out of the question, and that our tips were the sole source of bread for grandma and grandpa and the little ones back in her two room tin shack; and that she didn't complain but took on the challenge

with gusto, that's why I leave places like Klipton energized. I know everybody is affected by these township experiences in a different way. We all come to our own resolution with the encounters. I can only speak for me. As in Missionvale, here in Klipton I'm not leaving sad, the fire that burns inside of these kids inspires me. Mandy's almost revolutionary zeal to push the positive, to empower her tour guides, Mata's pride in her daughter's report card, and the duty of an obviously sick young man, to clean up the dirt floors and yard of a one room tin shack because "its my one room tin shack", that for me outweighs the hopelessness.

Its gotta be inspirational, at least to them, or why go on.

And so it was in Klipton. ...and more. I don't have time to write it all up. As usual this is late and you all were there. You know. You have your own personal interpretations to draw from. That after school program, which opened the doors for kids to study together after a long walk home from a lousy public school; it was marvelous. The fact that so many kids showed up, that they filled the place with an explosive energy, the fact that the teachers, the organizers, they all came from Klipton, and had reached the end of their own educational roads only because there's no money to further it, but the fact that they haven't given up; a loud exciting optimism exploded in that after school program. Through the kids, through the teachers, Mandy and her tour guides, nobody that I met in Klipton was or is going to give in anytime soon. That spirit that eventually liquidated apartheid isn't dead, it has refocused. Life, bread, health care, education, personal responsibility to family and community, people haven't given up; they are still fighting, they are fighting for survival. They are fighting for economic equality and for the future, if not theirs, then at least for their grandkids.

And I don't know if they can win.

I have no idea what the long-term prognosis is for Klipton, Soweto, or even South Africa. I'm not sure if in the end they will make it. The challenges are overwhelming. South Africa is complicated economically, politically, and socially. And that's in the cities, where hope seems at least within reach. In the townships, in Klipton, I don't know. I know that it is necessary if these people are to survive that they engage in the struggle, that they battle. They must remain enthusiastic in the fight. They must take on the poverty, the economic inequality, by all means necessary, that or just give up. And I don't see surrender happening anytime soon.

For Mandy this struggle is essential.

It was on my mind, but it took Kristine to ask the question. Or Tanya or Amie, I don't remember who. Maybe they all asked. Maybe it was because they are black that they brought it up. I don't know if a black American has a different set of values, a historical perspective that shines a different light, that sees these townships, apartheid, from a view different than me and my white eyes. I don't know that answer. I know I was thinking the same question.

Anyhow, one of the three asked Mandy, "How did you get involved? Why did you start bringing people here and educating people about this place? Why do you do it?"

As always Mandy was direct. "I did this job because I wanted a healing platform. I went

through hell in this country, my family went through hell and the TRC was not a platform for me to heal. I needed to heal. And for me to heal I needed a platform like this, so that I can be able to tell my stories and help my friends.”

She stopped. She looked intently at each one of us. “And it really did help me. It really did. It’s not the end. And we need more. You cannot fix a lifetime of injustice in twenty years. But this has helped me enormously to heal.”

And it has helped me to awaken.

I think it has helped us all...