

Mandela's vast personal archives brought online

March 27 2012



Nelson Mandela, in a 2010 photo from the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Thousands of handwritten documents, photographs and videos of Mandela have been digitised and placed online Tuesday in a massive archive of the life of South Africa's first black president.

Thousands of handwritten documents, photographs and videos of Nelson Mandela have been digitised and placed online Tuesday in a massive archive of the life of South Africa's first black president.

The was created by the Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and [Internet giant](#) Google, which transformed the [documents](#) into a searchable collection that can also be browsed through seven online "exhibits".

It includes everything from his Methodist Church membership cards from 1929 -- the oldest documents in the archive -- to his [handwritten](#)

[notes](#) taken during the talks to end apartheid.

"Everyone, everywhere enjoys access to its contents free of charge," said Verne Harris, of the Centre of Memory, who emphasised the project's independence from its benefactor Google.

"We own the [content](#)," he told a press conference. "We, not Google, determine what content is selected and how it is presented."

[Google](#) gave the Centre of Memory a \$1.25 million (937,000 euros) grant in 2011 to help with the work, and donated its engineering prowess to assemble the collection online through the company's Cultural Institute.

"We believe in the power of digital technologies in bringing the legacy of Madiba to the masses," said Mark Yoshitake, who managed the project, referring to Mandela by his clan name.

"It is content that has never been digitised before, content that has never been accessible before."

Many of the documents are housed at the Centre of [Memory](#), where they have been carefully catalogued and stored, but rarely available to the public.

With the Nelson Mandela Digital Archive, anyone can flip through his desk calendars from his years in the apartheid prison on Robben Island, see rare photos of him as a young man, and find videos of luminaries like Desmond Tutu as well as ordinary South Africans speaking about their experiences with him.

For a man whose public life was intensely political, the documents reveal his personal side.

On a 1980 calendar with a picture of a doe in the woods, Mandela wrote about his then-wife Winnie and their children: "Dream about Zami, Zeni & Zindzi. Zeni is about 2 yrs. Zindzi asks me to kiss her & remarks that I am not warm enough. Zeni also asks me to do so."

The most recent pictures are from last year, including a photo with one of his newest great-grandchildren Qheya II Zanethemba Mandela.

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Citation: Mandela's vast personal archives brought online (2012, March 27) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-03-mandela-vast-personal-archives-brought.html>

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