

Nelson Mandela and the accomplishments of age 26, 12, 13

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A few years ago when I was strolling in downtown London, England, I encountered a sculpture of Nelson Mandela in a small park across from the Parliament Buildings and Westminster Abbey, not far from a similar sculpture of Winston Churchill.

Much has been written and broadcast about Mandela lately, and I'm sure that Nelson Mandela will continue to have quite an impact on the world long after his death, but I would like to focus on his age for a moment because many seniors reach a certain age, and automatically think that that's that for them, that they are totally obsolete, useless, consigned to the dust heap. Just wrap me up and send me to the funny farm. Not true.

Mandela's shining example should be an inspiration to fellow seniors. In his prime, he was locked up for 27 years. Yes, I know - some of you who have been married for 27 years or more might like to think that you have something in common, but please, you do not come close. What's important to note is that he was set free at the tender age of 75. The South African jaded authorities in control at the time probably thought that at his advanced age, Mr. Mandela was of no real concern or threat to their existence, just as Stephen Harper must have thought that his nominee, senator Mike Duffy, would have no long term deleterious effect on the Conservative party.

Not so. When Mandela got out of prison, immediately, his career took off. He became his country's first black elected president and helped to eradicate the criminal system of apartheid that was reprehensible to most of the rest of the world.

Touring through Europe in my younger days, whenever I encountered a white South African, he or she would become quite restless and evasive when I asked about apartheid, just like our current government disgracefully acts during Question Period when asked about anything.

Mandela put in an extra 20 years beyond 75, and his very presence and humaneness was instrumental in maintaining order as apartheid was gradually dismantled. He, along with another South African rock star, Anglican bishop Desmond Tutu, instituted a Truth and Reconciliation Commission that was as daring and proactive as Gandhi's non-violence initiatives to establish independence for India.



There are many other people with great accomplishments despite their age. Renaissance man Benjamin Franklin is known for many things -- including founding the first public library in the U.S. at age 25, and establishing the first official fire department at 29. But he's also known for a much later achievement: signing the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Franklin didn't put his John Hancock on that historic document until he was 70.