



Nelson Mandela was named president of South Africa following the first democratic election held in 1993, in which the African National Congress won the vote. Metal sculptures, such as the one seen above, line the walkway up to the top of the hill, simulating the long lines of citizens awaiting their chance to vote; until the election of 1994, the black South African population was denied the right to vote, even though they made up almost 70% of the population.



Boulders Beach, outside of Cape Town, Western Cape, lies on the narrow Cape Peninsula where the warm waters of the Indian Ocean meet the cool south Atlantic. This area is home to African penguins, seals, migrating Southern Right Whales, and Great White Sharks.



The House of Resurrection is a home for children born HIV positive. Many of the children have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS related illnesses. Though the age limit for living at the house is 21, the oldest child is only 14. The children live with a mama (mama is the appropriate title for a woman older than yourself) while at the house. Each mama has 6 children to care for, and usually only leaves the children to visit her own family for a few days out of each year.



After a flood in the Missionvale township destroyed numerous homes and claimed several lives, locals still show their love for their country as they contemplate how to rebuild. Hundreds of citizens came to Missionvale for Madiba day to aid in the recovery. Madiba Day is a national holiday celebrating the birth of Nelson Mandela (Madiba is Mandela's Xhosa name of honor) by completing 67 minutes of community service—one minute for each year Madiba dedicated to his nation.

The decision to travel abroad was an easy one; I needed to complete an independent research project for my Master of Applied Sciences in Geospatial Information Technology. Since everything is *somewhere*, there are unlimited applications for GIS<sup>i</sup> in today's world. As a student worker for the DSU GIT Center, I had seen countless applications for GIS used. Armed with this knowledge, as well as my classroom experiences, I set my sights on a study abroad program through Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa. There, I could combine my GIS knowledge with real-world issues and, hopefully, contribute to something much larger than myself.

I have never known a university to show as much encouragement and assistance as DSU. Each time I thought I had hit a bump in the road, someone at Delta State was stepping in to help. I have known many students who have studied abroad, and each one has expressed to me the headache that accompanies preparing to leave. Between the staff, professors, and administration at Delta State, I felt fully prepared and confident when the time came to embark on my adventure.

The first-hand experiences I had in South Africa were life-changing. Everywhere I turned I was presented with opportunities to use what I learned at DSU to improve something, update something, or change something. I spent every waking moment going and doing. I traveled, spoke to locals, researched, and constantly tried to absorb every aspect of what I was experiencing. Everyone I spoke with was more than happy to help me with my research in any way possible (Southern Hospitality must be a universal human behavior, because the people of South Africa were just as warm and welcoming as any good ole' southern family I've ever met). Strangers would give me their input regarding anything I asked—what South Africa needed to improve on, how they felt about their government, the USA, and the world, or something as simple as where to eat. The experience was not sugar-coated or sheltered; I was able to spend a month experiencing the *real* South Africa.

Since my return to the Delta, everything has been a bit different. The Delta didn't change, so the change must have been in me. I have a new-found appreciation for the work I did at the GIT Center after seeing the applications in action and watching the differences those applications make in the lives of South Africans. I appreciate the small size of Delta State and its intimate atmosphere; there is no other university I know that would have gone above and beyond to make this experience possible for me. In the end, what I have gained from the MAS GIS program at DSU and the opportunities it has afforded me cannot be defined with words—it can only be reflected by strength of character.

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<sup>i</sup> Geospatial Information Systems--a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present all types of geographical data