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Zindzi Mandela was 15 when she first met her father, Nelson.

Zindzi Mandela, the youngest daughter of Nelson and Winnie Mandela, was 15 years old the first time she met her father in prison. Chatting in front of a rapt audience to the journalist - and former BBC South Africa correspondent - Allan Little, at a sold out event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Mandela accepted that the experience had not been a pleasant one.

“My mother had done her utmost to prepare me psychologically for what it would be like to see him in prison,” she explained. “That we would be separated by a partition, that I would only see his face, and there would be a box microphone into which I would speak, and that there would be prison warders on either side of us.

“Despite all of that, it was still quite a shock to walk into the room and see that. I just felt further violated by having to see my father, for the first time, like that. I couldn’t utter a sentence without these guards trying to intimidate me, so for me it was extremely difficult.

“But then my dad had this power of persuasion; he was really charming and was one of the first people who taught me to appreciate the power of the imagination. He said to me: ‘Just imagine you’re sitting on my lap, in front of the fireplace, and I’m reading a story to you, and we’re laughing and joking and you’re asking questions about the story I’m reading to you.’ He had an almost hypnotic effect; the warders and the harshness of that particular experience just faded into the background, and it was just my dad and I eventually.”

As a child growing up, Little asked if she had ever hankered for an ordinary family life? “Of course I did. Children can be very cruel, and sometimes my dad was referred to using a very derogatory term for prisoner. And you’d find among some people there would be more respect for families that had fathers at home.

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“It was very difficult, but we realised early on there was something unique about our circumstances because whenever his name was mentioned there would be a reaction. It would either be a positive one, sympathetic, or hostility or fear; there was always a response that was noticeable to us children.”

Zindizi Mandela is currently the South African ambassador to Denmark. So, approaching the centenary of her father’s birth, why did she choose to write a book, *Grandad Mandela*, specifically aimed at young children?

“I think it is very important to document our stories for future generations,” she said. “There are many young people who know that Nelson Mandela was once president, but not what his story is, and the journey he travelled to get to that point.

“It is very important for the African child to know that, irrespective of where they come from and the challenges put before them, that it is possible to rise to their highest potential,” she said.

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