"The future will determine the significance of my release in relation to the community as a whole." These were the words of Nelson Mandela in an interview with South Africa Today a few weeks after his release from prison. He reminds us that despite his own newly acquired "freedom" and the legalizations of the African National Congress and other anti-apartheid organizations, these incredible events are only the beginning of a process that will hopefully culminate in the creation of a democratic, nonracial South Africa.

A sober reflection on some of the obstacles to progress is needed. The very laws that banned countless dissenters and jailed or detained thousands like Mandela and his comrades are still on the books. The sentiment among white policemen is strongly conservative, in some cases, even neo-Nazi. The white supremacist AWB organization, led by Hitler worshipper Eugene Terre Blanche, promises a fight to the death. The horrific intercultural violence in Natal province between supporters of the United Democratic Front and Inkatha, the Zulu nationalist organization, is not going to stop just because Mandela pleads for peace.

The educational system for the country's blacks is far inferior to that of the whites, suffering from gross underfunding, a scarcity of qualified teachers and more. The poverty and squalor that characterize the lives of the residents, especially the women, of so-called homelands and the black townships will not be easily rectified nor will the heightened expectations of the masses of poor be easily met. These are legacies that will carry over into the postapartheid era. History is in the making, yes, but there is so much that needs to be done.

The Beat is fortunate to have someone "on the ground" in South Africa, Arthur Goldstuck, a young journalist living in Johannesburg, agree to write a piece on his impressions and experiences of the time around the unbannings and Mandela's release. One of the frustrations of being a bimonthly publication is that it is impossible to present timely, up-to-the-minute news stories to our readers. But Arthur's observations hold up well, I think, and present a first-hand view of remarkable events in a remarkable land.

Here, then, is "The 14 Days of Mandela," a period which started for Arthur, as he told me during one of our phone conversations, "like I woke up in a new country."

-TOM CHEYNEY

BY ARTHUR GOLDSTUCK

JOHANNESBURG—For two weeks we South Africans have waited with deep history. At times it's been awesome, often bizarre.

As I write, it is six days since Nelson Mandela walked from prison. Fourteen days since President F.W. de Klerk delivered the speech that changed South Africa. For these 14 days, South Africa has belonged to Mandela. Even before his release, his presence was everywhere. On the T-shirts of the crowds; on the banners of protesters; on the front pages of newspapers; and in the words of the leaders of the left, right and center. Even where he had never walked, we saw his footsteps everywhere.

On Friday morning, Feb. 2, the new South Africa was born. At 11:30 a.m., De Klerk announced the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP).

At the publishing house where I work, the boardroom crowded with people watching the live broadcast. The announcement caused gasps, exclamations of "Jesus Christ," cheers and applause. But mostly, we were stunned.

Nearby as stunned, we were sure, as Dr. Andries Treurnicht, hard-line leader of the right-wing opposition in parliament, the Conservative Party. When the TV cameras focused briefly on his silent fury, it was almost possible to feel sympathy for him. The very heart of his ideology of fear and hate had been ripped out and almost casually tossed aside.

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THE 14 DAYS OF MANDELA

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Speaking to reporters afterwards, he was apoplectic with rage. He blustered and blurted his disbelief, and seemed willing and able to burst a blood vessel for the benefit of the cameras. To the audience in that boardroom, it was a joyous sight. Dancing in the streets was suddenly high on the agenda.

One of my colleagues, a long-time activist, suggested we head for the campus of the University of the Witwatersrand, popularly known as Wits. The largest English-language university in South Africa, it had developed a reputation over the years for its often violent activism against apartheid.

Although the new semester hadn’t started yet, and only academic staff and student movement people would be on campus, we were sure to find celebrations in progress. Unfortunately, we’d missed the bustle by more than an hour. The moment De Klerk had announced the unbanning, halfway through his speech, people had poured out of offices and cafeterias and gone marching into the streets. Already, the casualties were returning.

Breathless students told us of riot police awaiting them on the main route into the city. Apparently, the cops had not yet been notified of the new South Africa. They had waded into the marchers with batons and whips, beating anyone they could reach. We encountered several more student activists on the hunt for the party. Some of them were veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle, with several periods of detention on their credit. Their faces shone with a mixture of joy, disbelief and sheer relief. It was an expression that would become familiar over the next two weeks.

Along the way, we bought an early edition of the afternoon newspaper, the Star. “FW OPENS DOORS TO FREEDOM” it declared. For the next few days, South African history would be written in headlines. “WORLD LAUDS FW.” “BUSH TO REVIEW SANCTIONS.” “ANC SAYS LET'S SWAP PRISONERS.” Within hours of the announcement, the weekly “alternative” newspaper, New Nation, had produced a rush edition bearing the flags of the ANC and the SACP on the cover, above the headline “LONG LIVE THE PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE.” The optimism was tangible.

Outside the New Nation's city offices, the dancing on the streets began at midday. By 5 p.m., it had spread throughout the city. Traffic came to a standstill. The riot police, presumably unable to read newspaper headlines, waded in with truncheons and teargas yet again. Old habits die hard.

That night, the new, surreal South Africa began to emerge from our tv screens. The state-controlled South African Broadcasting Corp. (SABC), usually nothing more than a propaganda arm of the ruling National Party, gave extensive coverage to the reactions of long-time foes of apartheid. Foes like Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu and World Alliance of Reformed Churches leader Alan Boesak, both of whom had consistently been vilified by tv commentators. Foes like Thabo Mbeki, senior member of the ANC executive committee and the congress' foreign minister. The appearance of Mbeki on our screens was on a par with the arrival of an extraterrestrial being. For so many years he and his comrades had been banned from our media, we expected him to be nothing less than a supernatural creature with horns and a tail.

Over the next week, such broadcasts would become routine, even boring. The names of ANC bigwigs, once given satanic dimensions by government and police spokesmen, would be given faces, and we would be allowed to see them in the guise of rational human beings. More incredibly, it seemed as if the official news broadcasts and commentaries were bending over backwards to portray the ANC as a moderate force for positive change. It was obvious that the SABC was pulling out all the stops to convince the white electorate they had nothing to fear from the ANC.

This was, of course, less out of magnanimity toward the ANC than out of an intense drive to forestall a white backlash against De Klerk. Also, it would soften the impact when De Klerk was ready to announce the release of Mandela. In fact, by the following weekend, the shock of the unbannings had given way to euphoria. The stock market had hit record highs, political prisoners were coming out, exiles were coming back.

Saturday, Feb. 10, we returned to the Wits campus for its annual History Workshop Cultural Day. In the past, this had been a relatively staid, formal event. On this day it was a noisy, crowded celebration of the impending end of apartheid. A book exhibition sold literature of the left and the far left; an exhibit of political posters of the previous decade came alive with the vibrancy of history-in-the-making; poets, writers and musicians performed for free in venues across the campus; and freed political prisoner Ahmed Kathrada (imprisoned with Mandela in 1963) addressed a capacity audience in the university's Great Hall.

Kathrada later repeated his address from the steps outside the hall for the hundreds who hadn't been able to get in. Every time he mentioned the ANC, Mandela or the Struggle, the crowd responded with choruses of “Viva!” When his speech ended, they refused to let him go. They escorted him across campus with a mass toi-toi—a combination dance/jog/march that has become synonymous with anti-apartheid celebrations.

With Kathrada on his way home, we made our way to the headquarters of Capital Radio, a music station formed 10 years ago as a partnership between private enterprise and the government of the “independent” South African-created black state of Transkei. While successive Transkei governments had proved to be deeply corrupt and were overthrown one after the other, Capital retained its credibility as a reliable news source. With the coming to power two years ago of a seemingly enlightened military government, their news broadcasts had become a study in free expression. This was encouraged by the military ruler, General Bantu Holomisa, who had started introducing change to Transkei months before De Klerk began showing his reformist colors.

The alternative anti-apartheid newspaper Weekly Mail had assigned me to write a feature on the new look Capital. I'd already interviewed David O'Sullivan, the news editor and had to collect a tape he had made for me of a no-holds-barred interview with Holomisa. At the station, O'Sullivan was ready with the tape and also with a suggestion that I stick around. He had been alerted that De Klerk had called an international press conference for 5 p.m. It was a minute to five.

We watched the telex machine in anticipation. In the studio, a dj was playing “99 Red Balloons,” a German anti-war pop song. At five past five the telexes came to life with the newsbreak of the decade: “Nelson Mandela is to be released tomorrow.” A reporter ripped the sheet of paper off the telex and dashed for the studio to interrupt the program. Capital Radio thus became the first South African news organ to break the news, and I had my most powerful story hook in years.

We hurried back to the campus, expecting the celebrations to have started all over again, but only a few individuals remained. We bumped into actor Romalha Makhene, star of the hit musical Sophiatown, and told him the news. “I can’t believe this,” he exclaimed. “Suddenly, I feel I am alive!”

This was a reaction that would be common in the days to come. As the news filtered through the city, the celebrations began in earnest. People gathered spontaneously in Johannesburg's“gray areas”—suburb where the authorities turned a blind eye to whites and blacks living illegally side-by-side.

The party began in the central city, where traffic was blocked by small knots of dancing, marching, toi-toying people. Gradually, the knots formed groups, and the groups formed crowds. By midnight, a procession of several thousand people was marching through the streets of the city. The police appeared to have heard at last about the new South Africa. They followed quietly behind the marchers or went ahead to keep traffic off the route.

That night I was sleeping over at a friend's apartment in Berea, a suburb of apartment blocks next door to Hillbrow, which had been

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At 4:16 p.m., the world watched Mandela emerge into the bright South African sunlight and give a clenched-fist salute.