

While crowd waits, Mandela plays with babies



Vanessa Watson and the "Mandela babies" Simon (left) and Daniel.

Carolyn McGibbon

THERE comes a time once in a lifetime, when history knocks on one's front door, and for mother-of-twins Vanessa Watson of Rondebosch it was last Sunday.

Ms Watson, a researcher at the Urban Problems Unit at the University of Cape Town, said she had decided not to go to the parade in Cape Town to hear Nelson Mandela speak on his release from prison because she had two tiny tots to care for.

"I live in a quiet road below the university and last Sunday evening a friend came to visit and told me that Nelson Mandela was outside.

"I said: 'You must be hallucinating!'

"I went out and there was the whole cavalcade — about five cars, together with traffic police on motor bikes. I believe they were trying to duck the traffic and the crowds and had pulled into our road while they decided what to do.

"I walked up to the cars carrying my one-year-old twins, Daniel and Simon.

"In the first car I recognised Winnie. I gave the salute and she returned it.

"Then I spotted Nelson. He asked me to give him one of the children, as it was a long time since he had played with babies.

"I passed Simon through the window. Luckily, he didn't scream, and Nelson bounced him up and down on his knee. He asked me why I had called him Simon and played with him for a while.

"Then he wanted to hold the other baby, but Daniel was too shy.

"I told him I was delighted to see him and wished him everything of the best. Then he shook hands with my husband and my mother-in-law.

"I would have liked to offer him a cup of tea, but I did not think of it. I was too overwhelmed. It was so very exciting.

"Everybody else in the parade was waiting while Nelson was outside my house playing with my babies!

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."