

# For Mandela's 80th, Parties And Talk Of A Wedding

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JOHANNESBURG, July 17 — If you were a man who had grown up in a tiny village in rural South Africa, spent 27 years in jail for your political beliefs and succeeded in changing the course of history, what would you ask for on your 80th birthday? A bride?

Newspapers across this country are betting that that is just what President Nelson Mandela will get on Saturday, when his schedule says that he is spending his 80th birthday at home with his family in Houghton, a suburb north of Johannesburg.

His spokesman has denied any such plans. But in an interview with the Johannesburg paper *The Sowetan*, a playful Mr. Mandela seemed less willing to deny the event.

Mr. Mandela and his Mozambican sweetheart, Graca Machel, 52, made their romance public two years ago and have since been seen all over the world holding hands. But though he has indicated his willingness to marry, she has demurred. Mrs. Machel, the widow of the former President of Mozambique, Samora Machel, has said she wants to keep her independence and her former husband's name as a tribute to him.

In front of a reporter for *The Sowetan*, Mr. Mandela called Mrs. Machel to tell her of the banner headlines about their impending marriage. "Eh, Mama," he said. "There is a front-page story here saying that you are going to have wedding bells on Saturday with this old man."

"But I cannot talk now," he added. He said the reporter would write anything he said, therefore, "I cannot deny or say anything."

Whether or not the couple ties the knot, Mr. Mandela will hardly be lacking in birthday celebrations. Mandela mania has seized the country. Birthday celebrations began on Thursday when the President gave a party at Kruger National Park for more than 1,000 orphans, complete with a 260-pound cake.

On Sunday night he will attend a charity birthday bash with more than 2,000 guests willing to pay up to \$1,200 a seat. Among the stars in attendance will be Michael Jackson and the actor Danny Glover. The event is one of dozens being planned over the

next year to raise money for Mr. Mandela's Millennium Fund, which supports his favorite charities. Two concerts are to take place later in the month.

Newspapers are also falling all over themselves to honor the occasion, running full-page collages of birthday cards drawn by schoolchildren and offering glossy pullout sections recounting Mr. Mandela's life from his boyhood tending sheep in Qunu to his days as the "Black Pimpernel," a guerrilla fighter trying to free South Africa from white supremacist rule. The post office is printing Happy Birthday Madiba (Mr. Mandela's clan name) on almost seven million letters this week.

The government also announced today that it would mark the President's birthday by releasing thousands of prisoners early. The decision, which prompted criticism from other political parties, will see about 9,000 prisoners with less than six months left on their sentences set free next week.

Individual South Africans are turning out to pay tribute to their beloved President in their own ways. Thousands have simply sent Mr. Mandela birthday wishes by electronic mail. But a group of gay men from Cape Town took a different route. They are planning a "Mad about the Man" party. Posters and pamphlets advertising the event depict a beaming Mr. Mandela flanked by naked men covering their genitals.

One newspaper editor wrote about how she was thrown in jail for trying to organize a party for Mr. Mandela's 70th birthday.

The guards at Pollsmoor Prison, where Mr. Mandela spent most of the 1980's, sent their own greetings. They took out an ad in a Cape Town newspaper saying: "If we can stand tall and join hands we could rise above all doubts. Love is the only thing that will keep our country together, because the world has found a friend in you. May your ancestors smile upon you."