

Mandela's personal chef recalls 'journey with food and uTata'

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HOMELY COOK: Xoliswa Ndoyiya



Although he was arguably the most famous man in the world, former president Nelson Mandela loved simple, traditional "home food".

Invited guests got a taste of some of Madiba's most favourite dishes at the Nelson Mandela University's scholarly centenary exhibition at the South End Museum on Thursday.

The Provoke exhibition – adopted as a legacy project of South Africa's first democratically elected president – was conceptually synchronised with the Mandela colloquium. The three-day "Dalibhunga: This Time? That Mandela?" colloquium sought to explore the different meanings Madiba's name carries.

The colloquium, a collaboration by NMU, the Human Science Research Council and the Nelson Mandela Foundation, offered a scholarly and intellectual critique of Mandela and is part of the university's year-long centenary celebrations programme.

While different facets of Madiba were being dissected, there was one individual who knew Mandela the person. Xoliswa Ndoyiya worked for the former president as a personal chef for 22 years.

"When people find out that I used to be Tata's chef, they always ask me what he was like as a person," said Ndoyiya, who was one of the special guests at the exhibition. "My answer is always the same – he was an ordinary man, just like anybody else and he was always full of jokes. He was down-to-earth and people liked him for who he was." Ndoyiya said Madiba had been quite simple in what he liked to eat.

"Some of his favourite dishes were samp and beans, oxtail stew, umphokoqo [crumbly mealie meal with sour milk] – that's what he loved."

At the exhibition, Ndoyiya supervised the menu, which also included Madiba's other favourites, such as Mandela's pulled sweet chicken on breyani rice, as well as dumplings. "What a long journey I had – with food and uTata," Ndoyiya recalled.

"I met Tata in 1992 and I worked for him for 22 years of my life and, honestly, it never really felt like it was a job or that he was my boss," she laughed.

"He would sometimes just tell me that we were going to have people over for dinner and that I should prepare a home-cooked meal.

"He would just be walking down the street and tell people, 'go to my house and get food'," she said.

In 2010, Ndoyiya released her own cook book, *Ukutya Kwasekhaya: Tastes from Nelson Mandela's Kitchen*. *Ukutya kwasekhaya* means "home food" in isiXhosa.

"I took the name of the book from what he used to say when he invited people over. He would say, 'come let's go and eat ukutya kwasekhaya'," Ndoyiya said.