

The 2013 Abe Bailey Travel Bursary

The death of Tata Mandela will remain a moment etched into our memories, irrevocably part of the 2013 Abe Bailey tour. During our first visit to Parliament's Square in London, his was the only statue erected of a living leader. Upon our return, the colourful tributes rippling from his statue's feet showed the phenomenal global reach of his message of hope and reconciliation.

I felt part of this legacy when I looked at the diversity of the bursars. We each brought our own stories, and had to find gentleness in the way we form this into the narrative of our tour. Abes had opinions that challenged many norms – both in society and in each other.

How do you confront the legacy of colonial exploitation? What should be done to repair South Africa's persistent inequality? Is voting a sufficient contribution to our democratic governance? Can a language policy that teaches students in a language they don't understand be just? How can we make National Health Insurance work in South Africa like the National Health Service works in the United Kingdom? What would Scottish independence mean? Should the ANC be repaired from within or by opposition?

Through this dialogue we were able to nudge each other towards a clearer picture of our wish for South Africa. We had light moments of laughter, gregarious group singing and Scottish dancing, as well as slow moments where a slippery tear reflected the emotions of the theatre. Most significantly, we had time to get to know each other and form bonds that cross universities, racial groups, provinces and gender. Through this, we also had time to get to know ourselves and our country.

The tour opened doors to English and Scottish parliaments, renowned auditoriums like the Royal Albert Hall, tour guides who took us through Edinburgh on foot, universities like the London School, Oxford and Cambridge, theatres where we enjoyed from Shakespeare and War horse to Roal Dahl's Mathilda. At Goodenough college in London and The Burn in the Scottish highlands we lingered, growing used to the new environment. It also opened doors to future possibilities; making an impact on every bursar's dreams.

By slipping out of the cocoon of medical training, I had the opportunity to wander into other fields, and see traces of how it links to my own. It was affirming to feel how I have inconspicuously grown into my career. Through the people we met on the tour, the possibility of persuading an international Masters in Public Health is starting to seem like a possibility. I am hugely excited by the manner in which public health can help to seek systemic solutions for the persistent injustices in our South African health care system.

Through the tour we celebrated the spirit of reconciliation and hope – wishes of both Sir Abe and Tata Mandiba. Through our friendships we will keep this spirit alive and weave it through our own futures and importantly, the future of our country.

Lala ngoxolo, Tata

