

Life can be different

Learning CAPE

**Life can  
be different**

Learning CAPE

Life can be different

Life can be different

Learning Cape Festival 2005

Learning CAPE



Every day a learning experience



I WAS BORN in District 6 and never had any mentor to show me the importance of education. I couldn't wait to get out in the world and wear "long pants", and I lasted just one year in high school before dropping out, along with many of my friends. I became a labourer, but after four years I realised I would never get anywhere without some kind of education.

So I went to night school with the intention of getting my matric, but I never made it that far. I got involved in political activity, and at the age of 28 was arrested and sent to Robben Island as a political prisoner. I spend the next seven years of my life on Robben Island. This is where my real learning started – this was the most significant point in my education.

I was so naïve. I didn't know about politics, the world, other people and it opened my eyes to so many facets of life. I learned to respect other people and their views and met a diversity of people. This may sound strange, since we had no contact with the outside world, but Robben Island was populated by brilliant minds. It held prisoners with high moral and political values and the most fantastic brains. It was impossible to come away from Robben Island without having learned. Robben Island was our university and every day was a learning experience. Many of the guys I was in jail with are running this country now.

I was educated up to Standard 10 on the island, and thereafter during house arrest I attended community art classes.

LIONEL DAVIS



Then I went to the Evangelical Art & Craft Centre in Natal, where I spent two years doing a Diploma in Fine Arts.

I returned to Cape Town where I taught part time for CAP (Community Arts Project) and at another community arts school I taught design and screen printing part time. I also produced anti-apartheid posters.

It is strange how things turn in circles, as I am now one of the curators of a travelling museum exhibition, featuring some of the very posters I had a hand in. This is something very close to my heart. It is part of my heritage and a labour of love for me.

and one of very few black artists in Cape Town. UCT helped me to grow and build upon all the influences that have contributed to my development.

Now I am a Heritage Educator – I talk to learner groups of all levels from primary to university and the educators and facilitators. I tell them about my Robben Island experiences and the value of education, using my own experiences to try and give a love of learning to build a new South Africa.

The legacy I got from Robben Island is one of lifelong learning. I will never stop learning, until the day I close my eyes forever.'

**The legacy I got from Robben Island is one of lifelong learning. I will never stop learning, until the day I close my eyes forever.**

I was always being called upon to sit on panels and people assumed I was more knowledgeable about art than I really was. I wanted to broaden my understanding of art to be able to articulate better and speak with more confidence, so in 1991 I enrolled at UCT to do a degree in Fine Art and a Diploma from the Curriculum Development Project in teaching fine art.

I was 54 years old – much older than all the other students

*Lionel Davis, one of the Learning Cape Festival icons, lives and works on Robben Island as a heritage educator. He is a well-known artist, whose works have been published in several magazines, books and calendars.*