

# Photographing South Africa

*Students from Southern California return from racism conference with stories on film.*

By Ellie Hidalgo

**T**hey saw traditional Zulu dancing, marches against racism, preparations for the sugar cane harvest and met children living with HIV.

Five young photographers from Venice Arts Mecca in Venice returned from the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa with dozens of stories to tell on film.

The students, ages 10-16, photographed and are writing about their experiences meeting people from all over the world and visiting young South Africans in nearby townships in late August. Their journey was partly sponsored by the Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission.

In the coming year, the youth will exhibit their photographs and lead presentations and discussions on racism at schools and community organizations throughout Los Angeles.

On these pages The Tidings is previewing some of their work and the insights they gained.

"My pictures are about emotions and facial expressions. That's what drives me to take pictures of people," said Justin Hill, 16, a parishioner at St. Anslem Church in Los Angeles.

Justin said he was captivated by the Zulu dancers, who danced in the opening ceremonies, prior to a speech by South African President Thabo Mbeki. "The passion in their faces as they were dancing — I could tell they took pride in what they were doing," he said.

Delisa Alejandre, 13, an eighth grader at St. Anne School in Santa Monica, snapped a photo of two men together — one white and one Indian — also during the opening ceremonies of the parallel forum for non-governmental organizations prior to the U.N. conference.

Delisa said she appreciated watching the crowds and seeing individual people learning about each other. "Everybody came together from around the whole entire world, and they were sharing their points of views," she said.

While most participants were able to dialogue

about serious issues like environmental racism, indigenous rights and the criminal justice system, the young photographers also witnessed some of the heated confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis, which threatened to derail the conference.

Mar Vista resident Michael Linarte, 10, experienced such conflicts firsthand. While Michael was interviewing a Palestinian man, the man and an Israeli woman became embroiled in a heated discussion.

"It turned into a big old crowd," said Michael. "They wouldn't let the kids talk." Having to cut the interview short, Michael switched to capturing the scene on film.

The students also visited several nearby town-

ships. Venice resident Eamon Wright, 12, watched Zulu farmers set fire to the underbrush in sugar cane fields before beginning the arduous work of harvesting the cane.

For them, said Eamon, it was a regular work day. "For us, it was really exciting."

Venice High School student Selina Vargas, 16, visited a center providing services for young people whose parents died of AIDS. Most of the young people also are HIV positive or have AIDS.

Selina said she was moved by the young people's spirit in the face of such hardships. "They were all together, just talking and laughing with each other," she said.

Michael also was interested in capturing the games young South Africans play, particularly with tops.

"It was really fun once I got my own," said Michael, who bought ten for his cousins. "We actually play the game now."

Youth in Durban and in Los Angeles have common connections and common problems, noted Justin.

"Every city has its difficulties like they do and we do," he said. "People sometimes forget to look within their own situation or their own country and see the similarities."



**YOUNG PHOTOGRAPHERS** — Participating in the photographic journey are Selina Vargas (front row, from left), Michael Linarte, Delisa Alejandre, Washington, D.C. resident Randy Henderson, and Rae Wright (back row, from left), Giselle Macfarlane, Justin Hill, Eamon Wright, Tom Wright and Washington, D.C. resident Justin Arnwine.

**1 HOMELESS** — Photographer Eamon Wright's younger sister, Rae, 8, traveled with her father Tom Wright, a parent mentor, and took this photograph of an Afrikaaner girl who lives with her mom at a homeless shelter.

**2 ENDING RACISM** — Thousands of community organizers from around the world gathered in Durban, South, Aug. 28 through Sept. 7 for the U.N. World Conference Against Racism and a parallel forum for non-governmental organizations.

**3 CONFLICT** — An Israeli woman and a Palestinian man are embroiled in a heated discussion during the World Conference Against Racism.

**4 HARVEST** — Eamon Wright photographs young Zulu farmers setting fire to the underbrush in sugar cane fields before the harvest begins.

**5 CHILDHOOD** — Selina Vargas photographs young people whose parents died of AIDS in the township of Umfazi Location in Durban, South Africa.

**6 AT PLAY** — Michael Linarte snaps a picture of kids playing with tops in the township of Kwa Mashu Location in Durban, South Africa.

**7 ALLIANCE BUILDING** — Reed Brody (back), advocacy director of Human Rights Watch, New York supports the cause of the Dalits — a group of people considered to be "untouchable" in India. His headband reads: Dalit rights are human rights.

**8 PRIDE** — Justin Hill photographs Zulu dancers performing traditional dances prior to a speech by South African President Thabo Mbeki.