

In the early days when you knew Mandela, there were some clashes. Mandela was something of a firebrand in those days. Can you describe the sort of clashes you might have had?

Well, ... it wasn't a series of clashes. What had happened, if I may give a bit of background, the ANC Youth League, of which he was one of the leaders, had a more exclusivist approach to things, not racist, but exclusivist in that they believed that the initiative for any anti-government campaigns must be taken by the ANC, not in cooperation with any of the other organizations. That's putting it very simply, because there was some philosophy behind that ... Now in 1950, this is a few years after I had already come to know him, the Transvaal ANC, the Transvaal Indian Congress, and the communist party (just before it was banned) had organized a strike against the banning of two leaders, Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and Sam Khan, who was a communist member of parliament a conference was held which decided to call a strike ... The Youth League opposed that move, and, of course, we worked for it because the Transvaal ANC was one of the organizers of the strike. The Youth League opposed it very strenuously, and Madiba himself was so strong in his belief that he physically pulled down Yusuf Cachalia from a platform, because the Youth League had taken a decision to smash up pro-strike meetings.

It was in the course of that, that I was walking down Commissioner Street, he was walking the other way. We greeted each other very pleasantly, and of course, the discussion went into the strike and we argued about that. It became a bit heated. I was all of 21 years old, very wise at that age, and very conceited. I then challenged him. I said, "Well you are a leader of the African people, I am just a youth, but I challenge you to select your platform, among your own people, wherever. I'll stand and debate against you and I'll win." Well, it became very heated, and we parted and I thought it was all over. Until the strike took place, and the police killed 18 people. As a result of that, there was a joint meeting of the national executives, of the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, and I think the communist party's central committee, which must have been still legal, at the time. I was there as a doorman at that meeting. I wasn't a delegate. I was very young and out of the blue he raised this, at this meeting, as a complaint against me. Now my heroes at that time were his colleagues, law students, Ismail Meer and J.N. Singh ... I depended upon them to stand up for me. Instead, Ismail Meer appealed to Nelson Mandela to forget about this hot-headed youth, and that was it. But that was the only serious clash we had.

Mandela was hostile to communism too, wasn't he?

Yes, he was.

Apparently he would be walking down the street with Sisulu, they'd see a communist coming and Mandela would want to cross over to the other side.

Well, I don't know about that. But he was hostile to communism. At the same time, he was very friendly with these two fellow law students, J.N. Singh and Ismail Meer. Ismail Meer had this flat in Market Street, which I then took over ... they were having discussions all the time about the necessity to work closer together. There were a series of meetings, formal and informal, around that time, and he teases Walter that the Youth League people had gone to a meeting well prepared to promote their line, and at the meeting, as Madiba says, Walter deserted them. He just didn't follow the decision they had taken. So they were very embarrassed, and he says that they went home walking on different sides. They wouldn't even walk home with Walter. They took the same train maybe, but they wouldn't talk to him because he says that Walter deserted them or turned traitor.

But the strike of 1950, the 1st of May strike, which led to this national executive meeting, which in turn led to a decision to call a strike in protest on the 26th of June ... that was a national strike of mourning and protest. That was the beginning of the change in the Youth League's policy of working together. Thereafter, of course, came the defiance campaign, in which he was national volunteer in chief, and his deputy was Maulvi Cachalia, not Yusuf Cachalia ... that was the beginning of their working closer together.

Mandela was made the first MK commander. How did that come about?

Well, [this is] second hand, but what I do know is that in 1961, there was a call for a strike. He was already semi-underground. What had happened is that the ANC had already been banned, and a meeting was called, an all African conference, which was held in Maritzburg. He appeared suddenly there, and called for a national convention. The ultimatum was if the government does not agree to the national convention to draw up a new constitution for South Africa, there'd be a three-day strike. This three-day strike was held, but the newspaper reports were that it was a failure, and the police and the army were brought out in full force like never before to crush that strike. It is then that we made his first public statement, that a chapter has closed in our history, and the first hint of the necessity to go on to an armed struggle. Thereafter, he took the initiative in approaching a few of his colleagues and the national executive of the ANC, to allow them to form an armed wing. It was opposed by many of the leadership, including Chief Luthuli, but surprisingly it was Moses Kotane (the secretary of the communist

party) who opposed it very strongly. But then a meeting was arranged by Walter between Moses Kotane and Madiba, wherein Madiba managed to

persuade Moses, because Moses Kotane's view was that you chaps are running away from the political struggle. There is a lot of room for political struggle and this is an escapist view. So he took the initiative and eventually the ANC national executive and then thereafter, the joint executive of the Indian Congress and the ANC, gave them the go ahead to form MK. But at that time, on the understanding that it is an independent body, but overall under the discipline of the ANC.

I understand that several years before, Walter Sisulu went to China

...

Ja, what had happened is that in 1953, our secretary of the South African Youth Festival committee arranged for Walter Sisulu and Duma Nokwe to be invited to a festival as guests of honor. The festival was being held in Bucharest, Rumania, and this was a very secret thing, because we had to smuggle them out of the country.

That is when I approached Madiba and put it to him that we have now got the funds, and we've got this invitation, but we cannot take everybody into confidence. He then undertook to take full responsibility for it. He said go ahead. That is when he told Walter that in your trip you must to go China and speak about the armed struggle. Which Walter did, and the Chinese immediately turned it down. They said, "Look, it needs a lot of preparation, political and otherwise," and they dissuaded Walter ... so that, in fact you are right, was the very first hint that we should switch over to an armed struggle.

Were you aware that those conversations were going on between Mandela and Walter Sisulu, at the time?

I doubt it very much. I could have been, but I doubt it.

He was simultaneously preaching peace and political stuff and it's like almost he had a secret agenda.

Well, let's put it this way. I was very much his junior in age and in politics. He wouldn't be discussing very serious things with me at that time. So I doubt it very much if this particular thing was discussed. It's possible that I was present at many things, just by accident, a thing would be held at my flat for instance, which was a venue for many things.

You came somewhat closer to him as time went on, and there was a famous Black Pimpernel episode when he was on the run.

Yes.

Tell me about the beard.

Yes. Now I am saying that to put it in perspective, he is not a saint, and while he's got overwhelmingly positive characteristics, he is also not without some weaknesses. One of which is vanity. Now

the question of the beard. I was involved with a few of my colleagues, including Wolfie, in a little committee which was given the task of looking after him when he was underground. Looking after him meant organizing venues for him to have meetings, other venues for him to meet with his family, venues for him to have meetings with the media, all this we had to do. But our view was at that time, of course, he was already well known. His photographs had appeared and this beard was very well known. We had suggested that he should shave off that beard. He refused. He just refused ... I mean, he was also one of the best dressed persons. His tailor was the tailor for Oppenheimer ... he used to have his suits cut there. But he was prepared to give up that for even overalls and so forth, but the beard, he would not cut. And that beard went with him to Algeria. If you see that photograph ... in the training camp in Algeria, he's got the beard. He came back with the beard. He was arrested with Cecil Williams. So that beard only went in prison. If I may enlarge a bit on the vanity thing. We were in prison together at Pollsmoor. In 1982, five of us were suddenly transferred to Pollsmoor prison. Five of the Rivonia people, two were left behind. For the first time in all these years, we were staying together in one cell - on Robben Island, we were in separate cells. And you see one another's habits and here we found out how attached he was to this brand of hair oil called Pantene. It's no longer manufactured. In fact, it was already stopped in those years. But he is a very determined person and he wanted Pantene. He went right up to the highest authorities. He wanted his Pantene, and he wouldn't believe the prison authorities when they said this is no longer being manufactured. He even raised it with Mrs. Suzman on her visit. Eventually the prison authorities instructed Warder Brandt to go from pharmacy to pharmacy and find that Pantene. This poor chap went and got hold of whatever that pharmacy had. So that was another example of vanity, if I may call it.

On the episode of the beard. It's amazing that this man was apparently prepared to risk the whole thing because of his beard. Would that be an exaggeration?

I think that he was very confident that the security arrangements around him were very good, which they were. I mean, I know that when he was temporarily staying at Rivonia, to go to him we changed cars twice, sometimes three times to see that if there's any police following us. We'd put them off. So he was very confident about the security arrangements around him.

I think it is Govan Mbeki who talks about Nelson's antics in those days, how he was rather rash at times when he was underground, took some extraordinary risks.

... I wouldn't agree that he was rash. No, I can't remember him ... you know all sorts of folklore emerges from that period and a lot of

it is just not true. People hear ... I mean Govan, with all due respects, was in Port Elizabeth or Natal at that time, and he may have heard something, you know what happens after a while one starts believing some of the things one's hear. We were most closely involved with his day to day ... when he returned from this African trip, Walter and I had gone to Botswana two weeks beforehand, to prepare for his return amidst very tight security ... Cecil Williams had just acquired a new car, which was not known to the police - so we thought. We thought this would be the best way of bringing him back into the country, which Cecil did.

Now just before his return ... I don't know if there were newspaper articles, but somehow the other documents came, which disturbed people. It was misinterpreted by people in the Congress movement and leadership that he has become an Africanist. So it was in that atmosphere that he returned to the country.... we knew that not only did he want to report immediately to Chief Luthuli, to clear up this rumors that were being spread about him being ... Africanist, [but also] the leaders of the Indian Congress, some of whom were his close friends, he wanted to meet them in Natal and reassure them that policy-wise he hasn't changed. So that was the politics of it and he insisted that he just had to do that immediately. It was causing damage, quite a bit of damage, because at one stage, some PAC people claimed that he had joined the PAC, so he was very disturbed about that type of thing.

In our committee we said ... for him to go to Durban, we needed extra precautions. I said [I would] make arrangements on the way to change motor cars and so forth. But he insisted that he just had to go. So our little committee was overruled by the executive. He went ... they didn't even give us a chance to look for alternate transport. They chose that very Cecil Williams car. My own suspicion is that the Botswana police ... there must have been some working together between the two police, and they must have followed Cecil's car. My own theory is that that's how he got arrested. That, if you can describe it as rash or determined, he just had to report to Chief Luthuli and the leaders of the Indian Congress.

I believe that you were involved in a Free Mandela committee.

I was secretary of the Free Mandela committee. We campaigned quite a bit around that, not that we would have got him released, but we did also try to get him sprung from prison. Now one of the things we did, of course, we smuggled in a false beard and glasses and so forth. The other thing we wanted to do is to bribe the commanding officer of the [Johannesburg] Fort. I remember ... I was instructed to go and get some money (£10 000) to bribe this chap. But by the time we came back, he was transferred suddenly to Pretoria prison. We tried there again through a contact, a major in the police, who we knew had taken criminals out of prison. So in the dead of night

this contact, our go-between went to see him, and once he'd heard it's Mandela, he said, "No, I won't, for any amount of money I won't touch him." Those were some attempts we had made.

The Rivonia Trial. There's that famous speech ... apparently Mandela had written the speech in a particular way, and you studied it and maybe some of you had some doubts ... Can you describe that ...

Well, as the accused, we used to have regular consultations. We liked the speech. George Bizos, he'll tell you the little thing about his little objection. It was one word. But we approved of the speech, because right from the start, with his initiative and his leadership ... right from the first day, he said, "Chaps, this is a political trial." And Bram and them had told us on the first day after we were released from detention, that we must expect the worst.

So Madiba's attitude was this is a political trial. We'd have to fight it politically. If we got the death sentence, the courts at that time were constituted in such a way that they are not going to overturn that. So this speech was consistent with that approach, and our evidence was consistent with that approach. So we approved of the speech. There may have been some amendments here and there ... and I'm told that ... the only alteration George then made, was where he says, "These are ideas for which I have fought to achieve ... these are the ideals for which I am prepared to die." And George added, "if need be" ...

The night before sentencing--do you remember that?

Well, we were all in single cells. But, of course, we were meeting at consultations, and we were meeting in court. My recollection is that, although, against me for instance, there was the flimsiest evidence, the only evidence against me is that I had typed a letter. Of course, I had done much more. But they had no evidence. I was not a member of the high command ... but there was always the danger that once you're in a conspiracy, you're going to get the same sentence. So that the expectation of a death sentence remained almost to the end, till we actually appeared in court. The lawyers had expected at least myself and Raymond Mhlaba and Rusty to be acquitted. Especially myself. But that expectation was there. So that we went to court on the 12th of June 1964, expecting the worst, you see. Then came the life sentence, and it was a collective sigh of relief, of course.

How did Mandela's leadership express itself in that?

Oh, tremendous ... I mean right through the trial, right from day one, as I had said earlier, he led us, he guided us ... Right from the beginning of the trial, from the first day that we met, he had said that this is a political trial. We'll have to fight it politically. And that was it right through. Regardless of what's going to happen, because the courts in the country, as constituted, were not going to change the death sentence, so we should be

prepared for that. And that is an attitude he maintained. Of course, we couldn't argue against it because his argument was very powerful. Having fought a political trial, those of us who went into the witness box ... we had to maintain that attitude of a political trial. Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki--they were members of the high command. They took full responsibility for the 200 or what acts of sabotage that we were found guilty of. They took full responsibility for that. Those of us, of course, against some there was no evidence--we took full responsibility politically. But that's how the trial was conducted and that is really under his leadership. On the night before the sentencing, what do you recollect of Mandela's demeanor?

But you see, we were staying in single cells, and besides that he was already a sentenced prisoner, so there was no getting together. We came straight from court, to prison, and we were locked up in our single cells with our thoughts to ourselves, really.

Did he ever talk to you in those meetings that you did have occasionally about the death sentence and preparing for that?

Oh no, he did, right from the start, that we have to prepare for the worst. And we are not going to appeal. We should not appeal if there is a death sentence.

Why did he say you should not appeal against the death sentence?

As the courts were constituted at that time, and throughout the period of nationalist rule really, the atmosphere was such that no court would have upset a death sentence or any sentence, for that matter. In fact, if we had appealed, after having got a life sentence, the possibility was mentioned by the lawyers that it's possible that the appeal court would have said these chaps should have got a death sentence. And if that had happened, cases that came after us, may have got death sentences, you see. But, of course, in our case there was no talk of an appeal.

Mandela was a lawyer. He understood this best. But it is still logical, that if you receive the death sentence, that you would appeal. What was Mandela's political argument for not appealing? His political argument was that this is a political case. Among us were leaders of the movement, that if the leaders of the movement show weakness, in the face of this, what detrimental effect it would have on the followers outside. Leaders are there to lead, and show the courage that is necessary in the face of any consequences. That was his argument, that here were our leaders (there were the four among us were members of the national executive of the ANC), now they dared not show weakness in conducting the trial or deciding on an appeal, you see. Because if after conducting a political trial we suddenly decide that in the face of the severe sentence, we decide to appeal, the followers outside would not take it very well. The supporters outside would not want their leaders killed.

No, they wouldn't, but at the same time they wouldn't want their leaders to show any weakness.

Let's move on to Robben Island. One thing that is intriguing is how it is that Mandela seemed to emerge so naturally as leader. Why not Walter? Why not Govan Mbeki?

They are different personalities. Mandela immediately emerges as a more assertive people. He has a presence which is immediately noticeable in any group that he goes amongst. I have put it down before to his, what you call aristocratic background. He's grown up as a chief, and that's his demeanor. That's one thing. But then over the years, he was already emerging outside as a leader. In those years, any black person, who was either a university student or a professional person, immediately became a leader in the eyes of the people. Because there were so few. And then added to that was this man's personality. So that already in the defiance campaign you found him being the national volunteer-in-chief. In the treason trial, of course, there we were placed in alphabetical order, but he was looked upon by all the accused, when there were a 156 of us, he was looked upon for a lot of guidance and so ... Chief Luthuli was there, Professor Matthews was there. Yet, many of the accused looked upon him for leadership. He was on this committee of the accused people in the treason trial. So that already, years before Rivonia, he was already emerging as a significant leader.

On Robben Island, do you recall a meeting to discuss this?

No, it's not as if we called a meeting to do that. What would have happened is that from time to time when we became aware that there is a visitor, we then decide well, whose going to be our spokesperson. For instance, in 1967 when Helen Suzman was coming, all the prisoners in our section had already decided that Mandela is going to be our spokesman. Now if you know Robben Island, if you know the section where we were staying, he was staying quite in front, as you enter, but the day Helen Suzman came, they moved him right to the back. They were hoping that by the time she reaches him, we would have all talked to her, and wasted a lot of time and then they'd say the time for the ferry has gone. But we already knew that we had chosen him, and we had decided that we just greet Mrs. Suzman, without stopping her to raise any complaints. So she went him, she reached him quickly, and he spoke on our behalf. So there were times when we selected him as our spokesperson. But then he would have visitors who especially, 99% of them, really sought him out. They wanted to speak to him ...

Writing the biography--was there a similar process?

No, there was no wide discussion on that. If I remember correctly, Walter, Madiba and I were walking up and down the courtyard, and his birthday was approaching, his 60th birthday,

I suppose, I'm not too sure any more, I suggested that he should

write his biography. Mac was being released. We said, "Well, we should smuggle it out with Mac." Naturally, because it was a clandestine operation, the only people who were consulted were the leadership ... they were told that this is the plan. Thereafter, nobody had anything to do with it, except Madiba. He'd pass on whatever he wrote to me. I would read it to Walter. If I may just add this, because Madiba's writing is illegible, he is very neat, but not very legible, I had to read it to Walter. I wrote my comments and I also wrote Walter's comments because Walter's writing is worse. Then gave it back to Madiba. He then did the final version whether he accepted our comments or not, but that was left to him. So those are the people who were actively involved. Then we'd pass it on to Mac and Chiba, who were experts in very tiny handwriting. They reduced 500 or 600 pages into about 50 pages. Chiba is the technician ... who constructed what roughly could be described as an album ... they used the rings of a ring file ... and concealed about 25 pages in the one cover and 25 pages in the other cover. Mac then smuggled it out from Robben Island.

Why did you and Walter come up with this idea? ...

I made the suggestion that it's a political statement we were making. We knew the impact politically outside. This was 12 years or so after our sentence that they have not crushed Mandela and the prisoners on Robben Island. It was a political statement. We also thought that the fact of it being published outside was an act of defiance. We also knew that the consequences would be that things will come down very heavily. But it's again a leadership thing ... The leaders have decided this. If the consequences are negative, well, so be it, you see. But essentially, our idea was we were making a political statement. The prisoners have not been defeated, have not been crushed. Their morale is still as high. That was simply stated the motivation.

You had a sense of the impact this would have outside. How?

We were in touch with the outside through one means or the other. Through visits, through letters, smuggled and otherwise. So we had some sense of what was happening outside. There were periods, of course, when we were completely cut off from the outside. But generally, we had a sense of what was happening outside. We knew that after the dark period of the '60s, things have started moving again towards the end of the '60s, beginning of the '70s. We knew that a biography of this nature, an autobiography, written on Robben Island, by Mandela, would have a huge political impact on the movement itself, on the people outside.

Tell me the story about the biography being buried in the yard.

Ja, the idea was that the transcriptions had been taken out by Mac.

The arrangement with Mac Maharaj was that he would send me a signal that this has reached safely abroad. He'd send me an innocuous card,

under some name that we had agreed on ... and that would indicate either that it's failed or it's abroad. Once we hear that it is safely abroad, we would then destroy what we had buried in the garden in plastic containers ... we thought, "Well, who's going to touch the garden?"

What was it that was buried in the garden as compared to what Mac took out?

Mac and Chiba had transcribed everything as finalized by Madiba. Everything. Word for word. They were not editing it any way. As Madiba gave it to them, they transcribed it. We don't know what comments of ours he included or excluded. So the original manuscript of Madiba, in Madiba's handwriting, and my handwriting, and Walter's comments in my handwriting, were buried in the garden. We got the signal from Mac that everything's okay. We felt very secure that nobody's going to touch the garden, until one day they started building this wall. After we were locked up. So the following morning instead of the usual routine, those of us who were in the know, went out to try to retrieve what we could. We managed to take a few of the containers, but we were too late in saving the lot. Those that we retrieved, we destroyed. But the rest were caught. Was there hell to pay from the authorities when they found the

stuff?

The authorities did not react immediately, but I think it was in December of '76, that General Roux, the then assistant deputy commissioner of prisons, came over from Pretoria, called the three of us, that is Madiba, Walter and I, just to inform us that they have decided to cancel our studies as a punishment for this biography that we had written ... that we had abused our study privileges by using ball-point and paper for purposes other than studies, and for that we lost our studies ... they never ever tell you for how long. As far as they are concerned you have lost your studies for good. So end of '76, I got my studies back I think in 1980. So three of us lost our studies as a result.

To what degree did you play ball with the authorities, and to what degree you didn't.

I think that differed from time to time, and from commanding officer to commanding officer, depending on how they treated us. Let me give you an example of this very general rule. One day, early in the morning, the authorities came to our section and [took a prisoner away]. He doesn't come back. Second one, third one, fourth one. They don't come back. And prisoners are masters at speculation. Absolute masters, you know. There's somebody speculating he's gone home and somebody speculating something else and the other. Towards the evening, Madiba is called, because this went on the whole day. We don't know what is happening at all. Nobody tells us because these chaps don't come back. Madiba is called. We don't know what

happened. Then I'm called. I see these chaps and they introduce themselves, General Roux and other brass, and they said, "Have you got any complaints.?" I said, "I've got plenty of complaints, but I don't want to talk to you." Just for saying that they said, "Okay, isolation." So they don't take me back to the other prisoners. They take me to the prison hospital. I'm put in one office. There I'm told by the warder that Madiba is also in another section of the prison. Because he also refused to talk to them, you see. That was our thing with Roux. Now Madiba, thereafter, wouldn't talk to Roux when Roux came, so there was very bad blood between them, but Madiba being what he is, patched up his differences after a little while. I never did. But Madiba patched up his differences with him, and they were on talking terms again. So it would differ from officer to officer ...

You must have been desperate for political news. What length would you go ...

Any length. Beg, borrow, steal, blackmail, bribe, anything, and we succeeded. But when it came to blackmail, well let me tell you about Mac. Only Mac could do that ... Shall I tell you?

Tell us ...

We were absolutely desperate for news, and being political people, we thought that's our first duty to keep ourselves informed ...

There was a warder working in our section on night duty. He came to me to solve some sort of a competition ... a crossword in Afrikaans. And the idea went through my mind that this is somebody we should exploit. I couldn't do it ... so I sent him to Mac. Mac is a guy who knew no Afrikaans before, but he especially learned Afrikaans in prison ... so Mac did this thing for him. The fellow came to thank him the following week that he won ... one night Mac wrote something on a piece of paper and said, "Look, take this thing to Walter." And this poor old man took it. He was two years or so before retirement. Walter sent it back at Mac's request. Mac then says, "Look, I have now got your fingerprints on this thing. You better play ball otherwise" ... This poor old chap was desperate, you know, two years before retirement. "So what can I do for you?" Mac said, "Newspapers. Bring newspapers" ... she brought the Daily Mail regularly to us. That's just one of many methods how desperate we were there to get news.

Pollsmoor, how did Mandela break the news to you that he was engaged in these secret talks?

What had happened is that first of all, five of us were transferred. Four of them first, and a few months later I was transferred to join them ... we were transferred in 1982, so we stayed together in that one cell till end of '85, when he went for this operation, prostate. Then he didn't come back. They didn't bring him back to us. So our instinct was to protest about this, that he is being punished. In

retrospect, he already had in mind what he was going to do. Because when we said we wanted to protest, he said, "Cool it, chaps. Something good may come from here." So he took this first step without us knowing. Then after having taken the first step, at some stage he then asked the authorities to see us. Because he was completely separated from us at Pollsmoor. They then gave him permission. They wouldn't allow him to see us together. Said you can see them one by one. And that's how he told us what he had done. And we reacted differently, of course.

How did he tell you?

He had just reported to us what he had done. Because, I mean look, negotiations was part of the agenda. All the time. So that wasn't surprising but we reacted differently. Two of our colleagues said we should have started this long ago. Walter was cautious. Walter said, "Look, in principle we can't disagree with this. But the initiative should have come from the other side." And as Madiba himself exposed me one day ... I had completely forgotten about this, but at a meeting he then he reminded me, or reminded the crowd, that when he talked to me, we were on different wave lengths. I had completely opposed this thing.

Thereafter, they allowed us to meet him from time to time, and specially when things became much more serious. When he was transferred to Victor Verster for instance, they did allow him to see us from time to time, and reported to us what had happened. Of course, they had bugged the whole place.

When you went to Victor Verster for the first time, you must have been stunned by what you saw there.

I suppose we were surprised. I mean they gave us lovely food. He could serve us liquor, but none of us drank, so we didn't take advantage of that. Food, of course, we took advantage of. But they had bugged the place. For instance, once we met outside under the trees, and then we heard later on from a friendly warder, that they had had a listening device ... in the tree ... so they were listening in all the time.

The release day, where were you?

... The BBC deprived me of this opportunity. They had taken me to the Johannesburg Fort. They were doing a Mandela story, and so I couldn't come to Cape Town. I had to spend the morning with them.

So you followed it on television.

Oh yes. Oh yes.

When you watched him come out, can you give us a sense of what your feelings were.

... I can't describe it now. I suppose we were all very emotional about it. I remember I saw it with members of my family and some friends ... we watched it all. I suppose we must have been quite emotional about it, but I can't really recall.

On the question of Mandela being given conditional offers for his release before, when he was in Pollsmoor.

Not at Pollsmoor. I think it started at Robben Island.

A series of temptations ...

Well, the big one that I can remember is when they offered to release him to the Transkei. That's just after the so-called independence and they wanted the Transkei recognized. I think that was the first serious thing. That was at Robben Island. Pollsmoor was the major offer made to all of us, through him, of course. Those are the two I can immediately remember.

On the Transkei question, Matanzima, you hurled the challenge once at Mandela ...Tell us about that.

It could have been around the time when Matanzima wanted to visit Madiba. And we all opposed it. I think at that time that we were discussing something, and I don't know how we arrived at this particular point, but I had then said, "Look, you are the commanding chief of MK. Matanzima is your nephew. If you were given instructions to kill him, would you do that?" And I think momentarily he was taken aback, and I didn't know if it was anger or hurt at my putting such a question to him. I tend to think that it was hurt that I'm really questioning his loyalty. But that's what I recall.

How did he respond to you?

... the only thing I can remember is this expression on him. At that stage, the thought went through my mind that he may have been angry with me, but then I decided no, he's really hurt, and I felt a bit bad at putting such a question to him. Because I was really questioning his loyalty in fact. That's what it amounted to.

Does Mandela get angry? Have you seen him get seriously angry? I have seen him getting angry twice. Cold anger. Once was the prison warder we were not present at the actual scene, but Eddie Daniels and I were in the corridor when he came out, mumbling to himself, obviously very angry. He didn't even notice us. He walked past us. But you could see that he was very, very angry. As he himself has said, that that day could have led to violence. He could have assaulted this chap.

What was it about.

It's some remark that this chap made. I can't remember. I think he discloses it in his book ...

One never sees Mandela the private man.

That's the thing, you know, he's inscrutable. He's the coolest man that I have come across. Unflappable. Incidentally, I did see his anger with de Klerk--all of us watched it on television. But he is unflappable. What had happened, if I recall, when Thembi [Mandela's son] was killed, is that he went to sleep. But that did happen now and then, so I don't think that people thought there was something

unusual. But then Walter went into his cell, and they spoke. He told Walter what had happened, and Walter, of course, conveyed this to us. But he doesn't show this emotion. He feels it deep down inside. He doesn't show it. I mean, his family was harassed more than most of our families. But he didn't show that, and he never allowed those things to cloud or overshadow what he considered his duty towards us, for instance. He was forever being approached for this, that and the other, for advice and so forth. I don't think anybody can say that his reaction was, "Look, I've got this thing to attend to. I'm very busy. I've got this worry or the other." He was always available.

Did they try and get to him via his family to try and break him down?

What I remember, for instance, there was some unflattering newspaper report about Winnie. So what they did is they made a cutting, when we were not allowed newspapers, and they just put it on his desk. So they did do that from time to time.

Do you remember how he responded to that?

Again, he'd just tell us they've done such a thing ... as I said, he's the coolest man I have met, and exasperatingly so, too ... for instance in January of 1985... at Pollsmoor, we were always looking forward to visits, to get news. Even after we were getting newspapers, because we wanted news about the organization. His was the best source, because he had this understanding, especially with Winnie, where she could convey things to him which our visitors couldn't. So when he was called this particular morning, we all looked forward as usual to him coming back and telling us our news. So he came back, greeted us, went to his table and started doing whatever he was doing, either reading newspapers or something. Later on he said, "Well chaps, I was called to the front, because P.W. Botha has offered to release us." That was the statement, you know, Botha had made it in parliament. So he's like that. Exciting news like this, he just told us that in his time. In his stride.

Why did he do it that way?

Well, he must have already decided in his mind what his reaction was going to be, and he already decided what we are going to say. I mean, I don't think it took hours. But he didn't come back excited and say, "Chaps, let's get together. This is the news!"