frontline: the long walk of nelson mandela: interviews: neville alexander

INTERVIEW WITH Neville alexander on public broadcasting service of the United States, in a series of interviews about mandela

Begin at the beginning. You were there on Robben Island, arriving shortly after Mandela did. Could you describe your first vivid impression of him?
The very first time we met was in what was called the isolation section. They were standing in a group, coming out of their cells in the morning and we had been taken out separately. The groups were deliberately kept apart. We were not allowed to talk to them, first of all. But we were immediately impressed by the fact that they were very vocal amongst themselves as a group.
When we eventually did meet some days later, we were able to talk to each other. It was a very warm welcome and real sense of camaraderie from their side, particularly from Mandela's side himself. We were very much more reserved, particularly I, because of the particular indoctrination we had undergone as against the leadership of the ANC at the time ... Not hostile at all, of course, but quite reserved. I was impressed mainly by the warmth and the genuine interest, which was a feature that, subsequently I discovered, is very much part of the man and something which I also must admit now, I learned from him ... to give your full attention to your interlocutor, and really take notice of what people are saying, listen to them carefully. In his case, there was a spontaneous, charismatic exuding of warmth. That's probably the most important, most vivid memory I have of our first meeting.
You say you were reserved at first ... he must have set about a reasonably successful process of wooing you. Can you remember any exchange that you might have had as time unfolded which drew you closer to him?
Two things. The first one was more a kind of fatherly almost admonition, I suppose. We were young. I was only 26 when I went to the island. We were really a hard line sort ... we just thought, "Look, bugger these chaps, we are going to give them hell, etc." Without thinking that they could give us hell, you see. Then Nelson made the point to us one day saying, "Look, you chaps shouldn't have any illusions about how long you are going to be here. In all probability you are going to sit out the entire period." Because we had been blithely talking about a two-year stay and then we will be liberated and all the rest of it. Those are the illusions of youth, and also of revolutionaries, generally. So that set me thinking and set us thinking, because his point in telling us that, was that you might as well, instead of kicking against the pricks ... let's spend

some time strategizing. Let's see how we can transform the situation on the island. That really set me thinking, that instead of being reactive all the time, we could begin to be proactive. We could begin to create a new paradigm ... within which to restructure our existence on the island. That was one of the really important moments where he won me over. I don't think it was a question of wooing incidentally. It was just a pure, human almost fatherly touch that he had, and which he has.

The second thing, which was really memorable ... as I recall it now, was a discussion we had in the quarry about guerrilla warfare. Now, for me that was always the lifeblood of everything, was my understanding of people's politics. We had been led to believe that the ANC leadership was, if not collaborationist in the racist sense of racial collaboration, at the very least compromisist. Ready to compromise. Ready, if not to sell out, then to find some sort of middle way, etc. Of course, we were the much vaunted radicals, revolutionaries and what not. And the movement I came from, which was a minority movement at that time ... was extremely prejudiced against the ANC leadership. So I was ready to believe the worst. Despite the fact that we were all together on the island. I was, as I say, indoctrinated. And today, I quite readily acknowledge that. We had this discussion about the ANC conception of guerrilla warfare and ours. We had been reading up Mao Tse Tsung, Ché Guevera, Tito and various other people ... and had come to believe that what the Vietnamese later on called protracted war or people's war, was a way to go. That even if it took 30 years, that was a kind of time span and strategy strategic visionaries should have. Obviously, the purpose was to overthrow the apartheid state. And when Mandela said to us, [was] that they [ANC] don't believe ... that we can overthrow the apartheid state. They believe that we've got to compel the apartheid ideologues and strategists to come to the negotiation table ... He recalled the fact that [Ben Bella], the Algerian leader at the time, had told him when he had been in Algeria, that they should not try to overthrow the apartheid state, because they would not be able to do so. That it would be strategically wasteful of lives, time, energy, etc. ...
He knew we had been very strongly influenced by the Algerian movement, that he quoted [Ben Bella] as a way of persuading us to a different point of view. I'm sure I was right in my assessment at the time. But that also made clear to me the real differences between us politically speaking. In later years, and particularly after I came from prison, I did come to understand that in terms of the strategic vision that they had, they were being very consistent, very principled, and, in fact, very successful.
Let's talk strategy within the little world that was Robben Island

itself. In those early days, the warders, the prison authorities, were pretty rough and Mandela took a more conciliatory position ...
Well, basically, one must remember that Mandela had been there long before us, more than a year, even longer, before we came. He had already been sentenced and imprisoned, and spent most of that time on Robben Island, firstly. Secondly, they had experience of imprisonment in the '50s already, during the defiance campaign and so on. Even though those were very short periods, they were, in that sense, old hands at this business, so that in itself attuned them to a different strategy. We came in, as I said, as young revolutionaries and so on, and his point basically was, and not only his by the way, people like Walter Sisulu spoke to us, their point really was, "Look, you are going to kill yourselves. These people are going to give you spare diet, and punish you until you collapse, and then you won't have gained anything from imprisonment, whereas we can actually gain something from this."
At the time, it looked really strange, because the conditions were so terrible, the physical condition, and the psychological conditions were really bad. Food, clothing, everything. We had some access irregularly to the prison library, which was literally the only thing that made life worth living. At that stage, the first year ... we were too hot-headed initially to understand that, but gradually we came to understand that. And on the surface we became really model prisoners, all of us, particularly in that particular section ... to the point where, eventually, the prohibition on talking to each other was lifted ... and then similarly with things like smoking or sharing of books ... a few years later even on the ban on smoking ... so those kinds of things.
And then work ... I would say for the first 18 months or so, there was absolutely no let up. We were really tortured in ways that, when you think back to it, you almost can't believe that you survived it. Because they, for example, made us fill a wheelbarrow with crushed stone, and it is all done manually, of course, and it was just one hell of a job, and the pace at which you had to do it, no intervals, nothing of that kind were allowed ... and we objected. We went on hunger strike, we did all kinds of things, but they stuck to that for 18 months in my recollection. But eventually through talking to them, through demonstrating our discipline--there were never any overt fights amongst our prisoners or even quarrels of any kind. I think they gained respect. It was basically the sort of leadership which particularly, the ANC leaders, with Mandela in front, that gave that image to the prison warders.
Was Mandela manifestly, transparently, the man in front right from the very beginning?
Not really. I think the trio--Mandela, Sisulu and Mbeki (the old man, Govan)--they were always projected as a trio. But whenever it

came (and this was obviously to do with prestige and stature) to negotiating or talking with the authorities, or with visitors from time to time, he would be the one that was nominated to do so, and the prison authorities generally expected that he would be that one.

From the ANC side there was never any question about it. It was automatic that he would speak. I can't recall a single occasion when he didn't speak on behalf the ANC. Whenever there were occasions to do so, where he didn't speak on all our behalf, one or two exceptions when I was asked to act as spokesperson on education. But in general prison affairs, as it were, he would always speak on our behalf. But there was always a very democratic process. I must stress that point. Nothing happened without proper careful consultation, and there were very few occasions I can recall where consultation was absolutely not possible.
Did you actually witness any instances of Mandela having an exchange with someone in the prison authorities doing what you describe ...
Oh yes.
Give me a sense of the dynamic ...
The point about Nelson, of course, is that he has a tremendous presence, apart from his bearing, his deportment and so on. He's a person who's got real control over his behavior. He is also quite conscious of the kind of seriousness he radiates. And because he's got a legal training and so on, he sizes up other people, particularly those that he has to engage with, often in a hostile sort of way. He sizes them up very carefully and then addresses them in the way that he thinks will make the most impact. One of his favorite tactics is to comment, either on the person's appearance or some tidbit of knowledge, information that he knows about the person. He tends to embroider on that to the point where the person gets a sense that this fellow has studied me quite carefully; therefore, also goes on his guard as it were ...
As I say, I have seen him do that to many prison warders as well as to chief warders, commanding officers and so on. There was one particular person, Kalloman his name was, who came initially and was a real brute ... used foul language, behaved like a real lout. Then on one occasion when we had had enough of this, we decided that Mandela had to give him a dressing down. He went to see him privately, and explained to him, that if this sort of thing continued, there was to be a definite revolt in the prison as a whole and that this could have very serious repercussions politically, etc. Then at some stage (I'm a bit vague now about the chronology) after Mrs. Suzman had visited us, the same fellow became like a lamb. And treated Mandela, in particular ... not just like a gentleman, but really like somebody who was not a prisoner. Whenever they had to communicate with each other you could see there was a

sense of respect and almost an attitude of wanting to be advised as to the best way of doing things and so on ... There was a lot of strategy behind that as well, but it could only be done with somebody like himself ... You could see that a certain measure, level of respect, had been established, which really came from his particular way of dealing with people.

It has been written about fairly extensively that you and Mandela were politically at loggerheads for quite a long time.

Most of that is, actually, not correct. Let me put it this way. After the first six months or so, when as I indicated we were extremely prejudiced, after that really we had a wonderful relationship and have continued incidentally to have such a relationship. With one or two glitches, so to speak, where again, political attitudes intervened, on both sides I would add. But with the exception of those two or three occasions, we've always had an extremely, not just respectful, but very interesting and exciting relationship. Because we knew we had different attitudes to political issues in South Africa, and we also knew that we could learn a lot from each other. And he makes no bones about it. As young as I was, he found communication with me very interesting and vice versa. There is no question in my mind that Mandela has been one of the most important influences in my life. So I think I should stress that point that while there was some measure of tension, it was never hostile. It was always the fact that we were aware of the fact that we differed on certain issues.

...

The death of Mandela's son, he was very affected by this.

On the occasion of his son's death, obviously by his first wife, was one of the few occasions when I really saw how deeply affected he could become by personal matters. We didn't always associate that with him because he is always in such full control, and even there, emotionally, he controlled his emotions, ... and you could observe his reservedness and his withdrawal almost. That he was deeply affected and he spoke a lot about his relationship with his children, with his wives and so on. And again, something that he didn't normally do, and he called in as it were, a few of us, to talk to us about it. Some of us, like my comrade and friend, who is now Judge Fikile Bam, were very close to him also on a personal level, and of course, they relayed to us just how much he felt about the death of his son, apart from the fact that it was a son, which in Xhosa custom is a big thing, he always had some remorse about the fact that he could never be the kind of father that he wanted to be. To all his children, both his son and his daughters and so on. And all that broke through.

Even at the time when there were rumors in the press about his wife, Winnie, being involved with other men, or another man, he made a

point of calling us in, and talking to us about it, because he felt
that it was politically essential and that that kind of information
should not affect our attitude towards the ANC. Of course, we were
amazed that he should even think it could do so, but he felt very
strongly that on that level, he needed to make it clear that he
himself felt partially to blame for not having paid enough attention
to family matters and to his wife and so on. At that stage, I really
don't know what he thinks now, but certainly at that time, that was
his attitude and he said so very openly to us.
On this business about rumors in the newspapers about Winnie. As I
understand it, the prison authorities deliberately placed some
newspaper cuttings in the cell, which said something about how
Winnie had been named with a co-respondent in a divorce case ...
That's right ... I don't quite remember exactly. It could have been
in '65 or '66. It was early on. It was a deliberate planting of this
particular cutting, Nelson suspected on instructions of Brigadier
Aucamp, who was then in charge of political security in all prisons
in South Africa, more specifically Robben Island. It was straight
forward report on a court case in which she was cited as
corespondent ... he was extremely affected, obviously. I remember
this sort of thing happened to other prisoners also, and one got to
hear of it, but we were so close in that section, next to each other
so to speak, that you couldn't help but feel the tension and the
energy.
I was really surprised when he, as far as I recall, called ... every
one of the prisoners ... and talked to them about this. His attitude
was that politically it was a bad thing. But that he wanted to
appeal to us not to allow this to influence our attitude towards the
ANC and so on. He thought, in the first place, of the political
damage that such an incident might have caused, and we were quite
taken aback. Because we would never even have dreamt of associating
that kind of thing with the political movement for which the person
came, you see. And we said so. We said, "Look, we are fully behind
you. We understand the situation, and if there was anything that we
could do, we would do it." But I always cite that particular case as
an example of the callousness of the prison authorities, and of the
way that they tried to humiliate somebody of the character and the
stature of Mandela.
On that matter, you say that all of your comrades were puzzled by
this response from a man who you had seen as this almost
larger-than-life man, the fact that he should have felt compelled to
bring you in and talk to you about it.
... It's so difficult. I am so fond of him that I really find it
difficult in a way ... to do that sort of analysis, but the one
thing it wasn't the attitude or the reaction of some cuckold. It
wasn't that sort of thing. I want to stress that because he is such

a dignified person. There was never anything like that. He took the blame immediately and he felt that it was through his neglect that his wife may have been tempted ... to do what she was alleged to have done ... So that was his angle, and then the immediate thing was, how do we do damage control? We don't want people now to adopt an attitude towards the organization, because leading members like his wife were behaving in this particular manner, etc. So I think he really saw it more as a way ... on the part of the authorities and of the enemy, to be quite frank ... a way of undermining the liberation movement, and that's why he felt he had to talk to the political leadership, or those who he considered to be important or influential about this kind of thing. This is my considered view ...

There was at least one instance when a group of journalists, sanctioned by the state, came to Robben Island. Do you remember that?

... There was the occasion when a South African woman, Ada Parker, came to the island as a journalist. This may have been in '66 or '67, thereabouts, but early on. She came to the island, was allowed to look at our cells and sort of exchange one or two words with prisoners, but more important was that it was a rainy day, quite cool day ... they put short little rubber raincoats on all of us, as we were marching to the quarry. We all wondered, "Now why are we getting these things?" At that stage she hadn't arrived yet ... When we came back earlier than usual, to the prison from the quarry, lo and behold, there was Ada Parker. And Verster [in charge of prison security], in the most obsequious and really disgusting manner, said to her, "You notice the raincoats that they've got on, this is the way we treat our prisoners," etc. That's really absolutely ... ludicrous manner and we then sensed that there was something wrong. I remember Kathrada trying to say, "Look this is the first time we've had these things," ... and being sort of shoo-shooed, keep quiet type of thing. Prisoners just had to listen. You weren't allowed to talk and all that. And then she disappeared, and lo and behold the raincoats disappeared. In other words, they took them away from us the moment she turned her back on the island. They took them away, and we never saw them again. Now, that I cannot forgive. It was the most humiliating experience of all on the island.

Did you or Mandela or anyone else remonstrate with the authorities about this in due course?

Of course we did in various reports from time to time. Whenever people came, we quoted that as an example of the kind of stupidity, and also the lack of respect and violation of human rights that we were subjected to on the island. We quoted that in a major report to Mrs. Suzman, which she never received of course. I checked with her afterwards when I came out, she never got the report. We were told that she would get it.

What did Mandela read on the island?
Without sounding too scholarly, let me say that in my view, Mandela is a very narrowly-educated person. In the sense that he reads very deeply but not very widely. He is a very focused person. It is quite possible that in subsequent years, he broadened his interests to include things like literature, poetry and so on. But from what I know, for the most of the period I was there, his reading was confined largely to political and legal matter, and historical. He is very fond of, like myself actually, biography. But I always found that beyond that, when it came to issues of science or even technology, philosophy, literature--he wasn't terribly well informed ... He was always very interested, but I don't think he was well informed. What he was interested about and what affected me greatly, was his knowledge of oral tradition. Particularly the Nguni tradition. And he has a quite a sound knowledge of the colonial and even some of the pre-colonial history in terms of oral tradition, which as I say affected me quite a lot. I started doing reading myself on those subjects while I was on the island. For the first time, let me add.
So he broadened you.
Oh, very much so, ja.
Can you remember more specifically what sort of titles of books that he read to illustrate the point you just made.
Not really. I wish I could remember the names. I recall a biography of Napoleon III, which he enjoyed very much. It was an English translation of a French biographer, but I can't remember the details now. And both of us, and this is really because we shared a lot of this literature, enjoyed Alexander Worth's History of France 1919-1958. It was one of the most fascinating books I have ever read in my life actually. The thing I remember him most for from that point of view, is the fact that he got the International Journal of Law, and that was something which he shared amongst us. It was also a way of us getting usually one-year- or two-year-old news about what was going on in places like Vietnam, China, Cuba and so on. He made a really thorough study of those particular journals ...
You mentioned about having to find out about places like Vietnam two years after the fact. Are there any things that you discovered that you can recall rather after the fact that were quite striking ...
The most striking thing in that regard was a complete misinformation that was conveyed to us by a friend of mine actually, who is now dead ... he managed to convey to us that the Americans had dropped an atomic bomb on Vietnam. This was such shocking information that we tried to find out whether it was true and I repeatedly communicated with him, and asked him, "Are you really sure of your facts?" ... I recall that we had a moment of silence in the quad for the people who clearly must have died in the thousands in Vietnam.

And only a few months later, when somebody got an opportunity at the visitors gate to ask, "How many people had died?" etc., were we told that no, there was no such thing. So that's the other side of the story so to speak, when there is sort of misinformation. But generally speaking, on sort of topical South African things, there wasn't such a big lag because we did manage to get some newspapers. [They] were smuggled to us by both prisoners and even warders, very often deliberate negligence, that type of thing. Then, of course, from time to time we also had visitors who managed to, in a sophisticated way, convey certain things at the visitors gate.
His stubbornness, and his occasional proneness to rage ... can you talk about either or both those? ...
Well, Mandela can be stubborn. I have always experienced that stubbornness more as a kind of arrogance, as an unwillingness to accept something which questions a cherished notion of his. This came out very clearly in a debate ... on one occasion he asked me, "Neville, are you saying that the African people do not constitute a nation?" And I said, "Yes, that's what I'm saying." And he said to me, "Well, in that case I don't think we can continue with this discussion. I don't see the point. For me that is an assumption, an unquestionable assumption." I said to him, "Well, I'm sorry, but that's my position." ... Now, he doesn't actually listen if something questions a cherished notion of his. I am sure of that. At the same time, he will obviously give the impression of listening very, very carefully, but every now and again you realize no, he hasn't listened, because he is still coming up with the same position as before, you see. That is the one side.

I have always experienced this stubbornness of his more as a form of arrogance, as a form of conservatism really. But the rage side. Now, that is quite an interesting point, because Mandela I have seen on only one occasion actually lose his rag as it were. And that was when a warder ... a chap by the name of Huysamen, really lambasted us, had us all assembled there in the quad, gave us a whole long story. I can't recall the details, but it was about abuse of study privileges, this, that and the other, which was completely untrue. They were trying to orchestrate something or the other. Nelson got so fed up with this chap at one point that he actually went to him and said to him, "Look, you don't dare talk to us like that." And went for him. Really gave him hell, you know. "Your day will come, and you will this, that and the other." I was standing next to him, and this chap sort of marched away with his tail between his legs, and there was a terrible awkward silence and real tension, and nobody really knew what was going to happen. So I then asked Mandela afterwards, "What happened there? Why did you do that?" And I'll never forget it, he said to me, "That was very deliberate." And I

must say, I didn't initially believe him. But when I thought about it, he is so deliberate. I thought it is quite possible that he really did orchestrate this thing, you see. But I must say, it was as true to life as you can possibly think. That's the only time I've ever personally seen him lose his rag.

... I have also seen Mandela being very somber and morose, almost as a mode rather than a mood. And for days on end. At that time, I always thought that he must have had a quarrel within the organization or within some committee or other ... I think he took his politics and the political differences so seriously that he couldn't help but show that was something wrong. But again, with Nelson, you never really know because he is such a master of, I would say, dramaturgy, that very mask of moroseness and so on, could be a deliberate way of indicating to all or to those who are relevant to the occasion that look, there is something seriously wrong. Because his usual bonhomie and his sense of humor, laughter etc., is clearly not there. Those of us who were outside the organization, of course, could never really find out what was going on. And in a sense wasn't also interested to know. But those who were in the organization knew that there was something wrong ...

One of the things that most impresses Mandela is that he seems to be so completely genuine all the time in all the various emotions, extraordinary gestures that he pulls off. What you seem to be suggesting is that actually he is a brilliant politician.

I think that is true ... he's a really good actor, and it's the kind of case where art imitates life. And really, genuinely, life imitates art--the other way round. It's really one of those cases where he's a very cerebral person, he thinks things through very carefully, there is no question about that. I have never seen him worsted really in a debate. He thinks things through very carefully, and then the force and the power of his conviction, makes him spontaneous. That's what happens. I have no doubt that that's the psychological mechanism that's at work in somebody like Mandela. Which is why he looks like that and that spontaneity ... the genuineness. He is genuine, but it because it's been thought through very, very carefully. Of course, like every other human being, he has the odd lapse, and then everybody says well, even the god has feet of clay.

Would there be an occasion perhaps, on Robben Island or even later, when what is the clearly this reverence you felt for him was of question ... Was there something, maybe a moment that disappointed you?

Not really, not in the personal sense. Look, I've always been a political rival, not even rival. It's the wrong word, but a critic of Mandela. I believe that he believes in a social system that I don't accept, which I am critical of, and people might think I am

naive, but that's fine. But I have always been very critical of his politics. But since I came to understand the principled nature of his politics, despite his limitations from my point of view, since I have come to understand that, I have really respected him. I have never seriously been disappointed.
There was one occasion where I wondered whether these chaps aren't going a bit too far. That was a prison warder, his name was van der Merwe ... who had been brought in very specifically to torture us in 1971 ... We were getting too big for our shoes, they thought. And beginning to talk back, and do things as we wanted and so on. We sort of began getting the better of this chap over a period of time. Because of our strategizing and we even put somebody on to carry his lunch box for him, and stuff like that. All very deliberate you see. But the point is, this is all influenced by Nelson's approach to things.
This fellow had on one of his fingers ... a swastika tattoo. We speculated what this could be and he told us in the way that warders have, that his father or his grandfather had been a Nazi and he was basically trying to intimidate us and scare us ... none of us really believed this. In fact, what we realized was that he was probably one of those naive white warders, who came in as a young fellow, got embroiled with the gangs. There was a gang called the Big Five, whose insignia was the sort of upside or inverted swastika. It was clear to me that this was where the connection was probably, because many of these warders belong to these gangs ...
When we had to write a report for Mrs. Suzman, the one that she never got ... we had a discussion about what should go into the report. And amongst other things the suggestion was made that we should quote that this chap, this Nazi, was appointed to look after us. And I said, "No, but we can't. We have got no proof that this fellow is a Nazi. He clearly was just being boastful and trying to intimidate us when he said so. I don't think we should say that. We should say that he said so, but it's more likely that he is a member of the Big Five gang." This is the scholar in me, obviously. Saying no, let's try and err on the side of caution. Mandela overrode that and said, "No, no, it's more impactful if we put it that way" ... and [it] went into the report eventually in that way. But I always reserved my position on that. It was the only time where ... I wondered whether expediency and opportunism, in a sense, isn't getting the better of him in that particular case ...
You said that van der Merwe was part of a group of people that had been brought in to--you used the word torture--maybe this was by way of a preamble into telling us the lunch box story ...
Ja. Well, between '67 after the Suzman and the International Red Cross came for the first time, and about end of '70, beginning of '71, for ... four and a half years we had a very easy time when

compared with the previous period. We were allowed to study, we were even allowed to have recreation, tennis, various things like that, games and so on. As a result, we were obviously in a much more relaxed atmosphere. We could do quite a lot of study, seminars, etc. Then suddenly, somewhere in the beginning of '71, they clamped down ... and they changed the whole thing upside down overnight. Virtually started punishing people by taking away their study privileges, and that was a really cruel blow to prisoners always. Started taking us to court, prison court, people got spare diet, etc. It was a very sudden change. Back to the old days as it were. ... They brought in a new set of people, whom we had to start rehabilitating as whole set from scratch. We usually had to rehabilitate these chaps. Anyhow, this van der Merwe was one of those chaps. He was the one who took us out on a daily basis to the lime quarry. After a while, we discussed the whole matter, it was decided that one of our number, a chap by the name of Mops ... would offer to carry the lunch box of this chap to work, gradually begin to undermine him ... It became sort of automatic, Mops would go and fetch it or [van der Merwe] would ... push out his hand and Mops would take the thing and so on ... and [in a] mock servile way, would then carry the lunch box there and back.

Anyhow, on one occasion when we had had enough of this fellow, there was some real incident in the quarry ... there was a decision made that Mops would no longer carry this chap's lunch box. So when the chap wanted to give Mops the lunch box, Mops said ... in a very crude way, "No, I don't carry bloody white man's lunch box." And this chap couldn't believe it. He was so taken aback that he literally walked with the lunch box after Mops, behind Mops, and asked him to carry it. Mops just refused point blank. I'll never forget that incident because it showed the extent to which we had managed to not just undermine him, because he became much friendlier obviously ... but also the extent to which they misunderstood whom they were dealing with. The fact that we had very carefully planned the whole thing, and that their whole strategy had boomeranged on them. That whole period was one of a lot of suffering for us, but we also learned a lot from it.

Do you think that through incidents like that--I mean that was a particular bit of psychological manipulation--in a sense, it was all training for the big negotiation you were going to do much later on when he came out of prison?

Not necessarily. I am speculating, of course, but I think Mandela's and in fact the leadership of the ANC's orientation towards that kind of negotiated settlement was always there. It was part of their principle position; therefore, clearly his legal training was vital. This sort of interaction with the enemy, I'm sure contributed to his understanding of particularly the Afrikaner psyche or let's say, the

Afrikaner elite's psyche. It did contribute to that, and to that extent the prison experience was for him, and for them, quite an important prelude.
Talking about the rest of the ANC leadership ... the relationship between Mandela and Sisulu, any anecdotes from prison days which serve to illustrate your views on the relationship.
Ja. I think the relationship was a bit more complex. There is no doubt that there is a definite fraternal relationship. Also, in the traditional Xhosa sense of being brothers, even though not blood brothers. There is that relationship, definitely. But it's also a complementary relationship. Mandela is the negotiator, the one who speaks to the "important people." He is also the man who has very good rapport with the masses, but not like Walter. Walter is really the people's man. Simple, profound, always able to find the formulation that is most accessible to ordinary people. And extremely gentle, the kind of person who really is lovable ... he genuinely likes people and he always will give people benefit of the doubt. I think both of them do that. But he does it in a way that is even more attractive than what it is with Nelson. Also, he is very modest, in a genuine sense ...
Do you have a recollection of how Sisulu responded upon the news of Nelson Mandela's son, or perhaps Nelson Mandela's mother ...
I can't really recall anything of that kind. But I do remember him talking to us in a very gentle way about the relationship between Nelson and Winnie once. And just explaining the point I made earlier that Nelson has a very genuine sense of having neglected his family and so on. That he thought that he was in a sense taking it out too much on himself ...
Not only were they always together, but the one would never move without asking the other's advice or ... it was always that kind of relationship ... on most things. And Walter was always the one ... within our group as a whole, and even more so within the ANC group, to say, "Look, let's take this easy. Let's first think very much more carefully about this. Let's not do anything in a hurry." He is one person I have never seen angry, by the way. I've heard him once sort of use a rather strange swear word, but I've never seen him angry. He's that kind of person. So I think he's the peace maker. I think he's the lubricant. He's the person to whom everybody will come when there is trouble. They will go to him first.
Chess. Mandela played chess. Tell me about how Mandela played chess.
Well, chess and draughts were the two games which were the oldest on the island in a way. Draughts partly because we could play them without a board. Chess, eventually, when we did get a board. It became a favorite game, and he was one of those who knew the game quite well. My personal recollection is that in both draughts and chess Nelson's attitude was that of really attrition. That was his

stance. He would take his time with every move, he would consider it very carefully. He would sort of mislead the other person by pointing things, this way, that way, the other and then making the move that wasn't expected and so on. But more than that, when he did make a really good move, then he would really crow and make the other person feel really small. I recall this particularly because of our late comrade, Don Davis, who eventually also joined the ANC incidentally. Don Davis used to think he was a really good draughts player, and Nelson and Andrew Mlangeni were his only two rivals ... He normally beat Nelson, but he tended not to beat Mlangeni. Mlangeni was very good. But the point is that Nelson would ... torture Don, that Don would sometimes just throw the board in the air, with pieces flying all over the place, getting really irritated. But [Mandela] had that way of, as I say, it was a war of attrition, and he tended therefore to be victorious in most cases.
He was excruciatingly slow in getting around to making his moves ...
Ja, it was deliberate you see. This is a point that with Nelson, again, you can't always be 100% sure, but it was largely deliberate because he knew that psychologically he was getting at the other person. By the way, I never played chess or draughts with them, because I just don't know the game well enough.
... There was story early on when I Nelson and the others ... walking to the quarry ...
At the beginning, it was really a war of nerves between the warders, the authorities and ourselves, and it was a question of who was going to set the pattern. We were all terribly aware of this. As I say we were much too naive really to be proactive, strategic about it as a small young group of people. But Nelson and them had thought those things through and he always made the point, "If they say that you must run, insist on walking. If they say you must walk fast, insist on walking slowly." That was the whole point of this exercise, was to insist that we are going to set the term, or we at least going to co-determine, we not going to allow you to sit on our heads. He succeeded and eventually we all understood that strategy. It worked like a charm. We managed to get a lot of things, as I indicated earlier, which we might otherwise never have got.
Give me a particular example of that.
.... Well, let me give you the example of the "touser." Now the touser was a dance, so-called touser dance. A naked strip search and then you would have to expose your buttocks, your mouth, open your mouth, etc., to see whether you hadn't hidden any object and all that sort of thing. Of course, all of us took a strong exception to this, and decided not to do it. When the prison authorities tried to impose that on our group, we supported one another, refused to do it, they then beat me up ... pierced my eardrum and all the rest of it. But when the matter came to court, it was thrown out of court

and ... it put an end to the touser dance. That is a very good example of the kind of thing ... we were setting the pattern. We were saying there are certain violations of our human rights which we are not going to allow. That is an extreme example. In other cases, warders tried to beat up prisoners, especially in the general section, if they didn't want to run or didn't want to walk and so on. But generally speaking, the prisoners won those battles.
...
Give me your reaction to the extraordinary performance at the rugby world cup final, when he came on with the Springbok jersey ...
I think that bordered on the ludicrous ... Mandela putting on the number six, Francois Pienaar's Springbok jersey, really bordered on the ludicrous. It was a moment, dramatically speaking, theatrically, where the whole thing could become farcical, rather than being the dignified play it was supposed to be, and I think that people did read it in both ways. Especially after ... a few months later or a year or two later when they fell out with Louis Luyt and company. Then, of course, in retrospect, that did look extremely unnecessary, extremely farcical. But again, my own comment would be that in terms of his own objectives, his own framework, he was doing the right thing. Mandela was doing the right thing.
... What exactly was he seeking to achieve through that?
Mandela knew and knows that certain symbols, certain traditions, cultural practices, like rugby, like the Springbok, as a symbol, that these things are very important, and his whole purpose, of course, has been to bring together the Afrikaner and the African traditions. And to get them somehow, not in a melting pot way necessarily, but in a salad bowl way. To get them somehow to constitute a single entity. I mean, his whole nation building strategy is based on that. What better coup than to get the "white" Springbok team to be accepted by the black majority as their team. That was his whole point. Similarly, he wanted the white minority to accept the Bafana Bafana as their team, and not as some mainly black team. That was the whole purpose of that and I think he succeeded. For a while. And that "for a while" is important, because there are flaws in that strategy.
For a glorious while it worked.
It worked, ja.
On the 11th February 1990, the day of the release, can you remember where you were that day? ...
Ja. Ironically, on that day I was in Germany, giving, if I recall properly, a very long television interview interpreting what was happening, to the German public ... My feelings were quite ambivalent. I knew that was an historic moment. I knew that given the fall of the Berlin Wall, this was the victory of the moderates in the liberation movement. I knew that. At the same time, it was a

victory for liberation. It was a step on a much longer path in my own personal ideology. So that both the need for this step and the inadequacy of the step, if you wish, were in a very ambivalent way, very present in my own consciousness and that also came through in my interpretation of the event.

... you must have felt a certain personal satisfaction.

Oh yes, certainly. I mean, the fact that after 27 years in prison, as somebody who spent a very long time in prison myself, I knew what that meant for him. I never forget ... one always has this feeling because you know what prison is about. The fact that the best years, or amongst the best years of his life, were spent in prison, you know, suddenly came to your mind. So yes, all that was present.

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