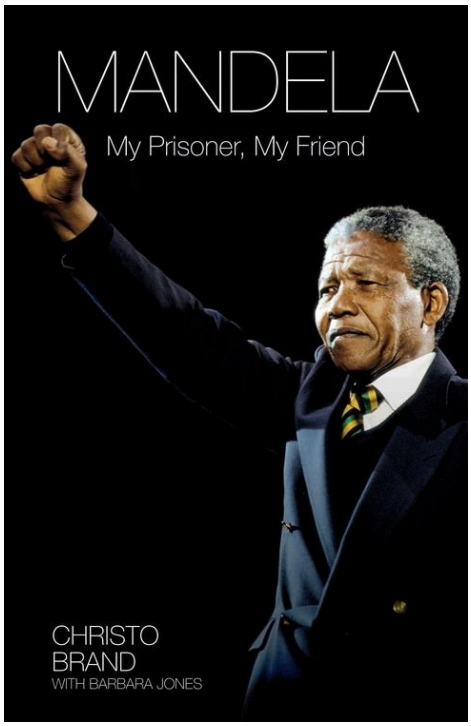

MANDELA
My Prisoner, My Friend
CHRISTO
BRAND
WITH BARBARA JONES

MANDELA

My Prisoner, My Friend

CHRISTO BRAND
WITH BARBARA JONES

JB
JOHN BLAKE

‘On behalf of our family, we’re deeply humbled to stand where men of such courage faced down injustice and refused to yield. The world is grateful for the heroes of Robben Island, who remind us that no shackles or cells can match the strength of the human spirit.’

US President Barack Obama’s message in the visitors’ book on Robben Island, 30 June 2013.

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Most of all I am grateful to my dear mentor and ex-prisoner Ahmed Kathrada, who has written the foreword. This has taken us both back to painful times but these are now thankfully overtaken by our special bond of friendship today.

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FOREWORD

Ahmed Kathrada was, alongside Nelson Mandela, sentenced to life in prison in 1964 at the Rivonia Trial. He was imprisoned for 25 years and since his release he has served as a Parliamentary Counsellor to Nelson Mandela and as the chairperson of the Robben Island Museum Council. In 2004 he was voted 46th in SABC3's 100 Greatest South Africans.

My lasting impression of Christo Brand is that he's a very good human being. He's not a politician; he's just a very caring man who took chances for other people, which could have brought him trouble.

While his book naturally focuses on his relationship with Madiba while he was a prisoner, I too experienced the humanity of Christo while I was in prison. I did not really encounter him on Robben Island where I began serving my life sentence, with Madiba, from 13 June 1964. It was only after I was transferred to the mainland, to Pollsmoor Prison in October 1982, that I really had a lot of dealings with Christo.

We all realised that this was a good man, someone who could help us, but we were warned by Madiba not to take advantage of young warders and get them into trouble. He was asking us not to use Christo for political things, like sending political messages and so forth, and so he didn't do that for us. But he did many other things.

One of my lasting memories of Christo's difference to the brutish warders we had been used to before was at the time I was allowed to start having legal visits from Advocate Dullah Omar. We had been trying to see each other for quite some time and I got my chance when, after I had finished my two Honours Degrees through the University of South Africa, the prison authorities would not let me register for a Master's Degree. So I said I was going to take the matter to court and asked to see Dullah.

On one of his first visits, Dullah brought samoosas – two packets – one for the warders and, once the warders accepted theirs, he asked if I could have the other packet. Christo obliged. At this time, Dullah's wife, Farida, was running a fruit and vegetable stall at Salt River Market in Cape Town, so we then arranged for Christo to go to her and collect fruit from her for us – she also gave him fruit and vegetables for his own family. Next, Dullah started arriving for legal visits with his lawyer's bag packed full of food; not a legal book in sight. Christo knew it and he let it go.

Even better than that was the extra visits he allowed me to have. Christo arranged visits from people I was not ordinarily allowed to see, such as Professor Fatima Meer, other political activists and extra family members. I will never forget the day when a niece of mine was married in Cape Town and Christo organised for virtually the entire wedding party to visit me, illegally, in prison. He set up a special visiting place upstairs and I saw them all, kids and adults. With the kids, it was one or two minutes I was allowed to see each of them. They filed into the room and brought with them laughter and light, a rare and glorious sight for a prisoner. I got to spend a little more time with the adults, again one by one.

He also took me to see political activists who were detained at Pollsmoor Prison, which was in a way more dangerous for him than it was for me. It was the 1980s and the time of the State of Emergency, when thousands of anti-apartheid activists were detained throughout the country. Many of the Western Cape and even some Eastern Cape activists were detained at Pollsmoor. Their own families did not know where they were or how they were faring, but Christo let me see them. One day, he took me to see Trevor Manuel who was not allowed any visitors at all. Trevor, who later became Finance Minister under Madiba and other presidents, had already been in solitary confinement for two years when Christo took me to his prison cell.

It was a big thing for Trevor to have me there speaking with him. In prison, we had been hidden from the world for two decades. Only old photos of us, much younger, were available and even then it was a criminal offence to possess them. One can imagine the impact of our visit to him during which I passed on greetings from Madiba and Walter Sisulu, among others; it really boosted his spirits. Christo also let me give him an inspiring poem at one stage. On another occasion, he took me to see Matthew Goniwe, an Eastern Cape activist who was killed by the security police after his release.

Isolated as we were in prison, we were very ignorant about AIDS, and Christo once told us seven ANC guerrillas who were HIV positive had been captured and brought from Angola. One day, when we were outside, they rushed to us and embraced us. We worried afterwards that we might have caught it from being hugged by them. Later, after we had been locked in

our cells for the night, we happened to see Christo, walking with these fellows with his arm around them, up and down the courtyard. That image with Christo and the HIV positive prisoners, along with that of Princess Di when we saw her on television with an HIV positive child, broke our suspicions about HIV, especially when I saw how comfortable he was with these chaps.

Because of the difficulty of communications with the other activists in prison, we used to stand under their cells and talk, so that they would be able to hear what we were talking about. It was our way of passing on information to them. In another small show of humanity, Christo was aware of what we were doing and he didn't do anything to stop us. When we were eventually transferred to a Johannesburg prison in October 1989, just days before our release, I had two televisions. I left one with Christo for these prisoners and he gave it to them. The other, he kept in his garage for me and gave it to me when I came back to Cape Town as a Member of Parliament, five years later.

One of the most important things Christo did for us was one day in 1986, some months after Madiba had been isolated from us, so that we had no idea of what was happening with him. Christo came to me and said, 'I've got something to tell you, but you'll go and tell Sisulu and them.'

I said, 'Well, don't tell me.'

But of course he told me anyway. He said, 'Last night we took Madiba to the house of the Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee.' And that was enough information for us, to let us know what was happening. We worked out that Madiba must have started discussions with the enemy. It was not long thereafter that Madiba was allowed to see us at Pollsmoor and informed each of us that the talks had started, at his instigation, to get the government to eventually talk to the ANC. Christo would also tell us whenever he took Madiba somewhere for a drive – often it was the only news we had of Madiba, and it was so important to us.

On weekends when Sergeant James Gregory, another warder, was not on duty, Christo would call me to show me letters that Gregory had refused to pass on to me. They had them for years, along with a whole bundle of *Indicator* newspapers – a weekly anti-apartheid newspaper started by Ameen Akhalwaya who had them sent every week. Christo would give them to me in bulk when he could.

And then, of course, his wife started baking Christmas cakes for me. Every Christmas she used to bake me a cake and Christo would bring it to me, a tradition that continues to this day.

It makes a tremendous difference to the life of a prisoner having someone like Christo as a warder. We first had warders who were brutes, like criminals themselves really – of course, they never touched us – but when the younger ones arrived things changed because they were not indoctrinated against us. Christo, though, stood out for his kindness and humanity – even from the younger chaps.

Our relationship continued after our release and, when he resigned from his job, I helped to arrange for him to fill a position at the Constitutional Assembly offices. Later, when he was ready for another job, I found him one at the Robben Island Museum.

He is the hardest worker, ready to help with anything, always willing to do overtime, which many of the other staff won't do. He ran our shop at the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island, at a profit. And not only was he making a profit, but also, as a public relations man, there was nobody better, because he likes to talk. For instance, once a woman stopped there on her way to the island to buy a bottle of water, and Christo, being Christo, hears her accent: 'Are you American?'

'Yes.'

Without any further information, he asks, 'Do you know a man called Bob Vassen?' (He is my friend who then taught at Michigan State University.)

She replied, 'Yes I do, we taught together.'

My book, *A Simple Freedom*, had just been launched and Christo had a big box – not yet to sell but of course he doesn't ask me – and so he says, 'Would you like to buy this book?'

'I'd love to buy it.'

'Would you like his signature?'

So I met this woman, and she turned out to be Professor Marcie Williams, and from that bottle of water developed a strong friendship with her which endures to this day. In fact, I received a doctorate from the University of Massachusetts, through that bottle of water.

I sincerely hope that Christo's book *Mandela – My Prisoner, My Friend* will receive the respect and attention it deserves because it's a valuable addition to the writings about imprisonment during the apartheid era, and it is written by a fine man. It is also unique in that it is the most honest account I have read by a warder relating their interaction with Nelson Mandela, and for that alone it deserves credit. I wish Christo all the success in the world.

Ahmed Kathrada
October 2013

PROLOGUE

Nelson Mandela spent his boyhood in the green and golden hills of South Africa's Eastern Cape. There he ran wild with his friends in the village of Qunu. He has told of the happiest years of his life – shooting birds out of the sky with a catapult, gathering fruit from the trees, catching fish with a bent hook and drinking warm milk straight from the cow.

Just like me, he sometimes looked after flocks of sheep and would go home to his family's little house after playing till dusk, to eat supper and listen to his mother's stories around the fireside.

As a young boy, he had no immediate knowledge of apartheid. In his small, safe world there was no obvious menace. His childhood was secure in the rural Xhosa community where he belonged.

I also knew nothing of the cruel racial boundaries in our country as I grew up. My father was a farm foreman in a fertile part of the Western Cape. All my young life I played with black and mixed-race children who lived on the farm with us in Stanford, many miles from the city.

Looking back, Mandela and I both enjoyed childhoods full of innocence and charm, although many years apart. We were both brought up in the Christian tradition, our lives ruled by strict but loving parents who taught us right from wrong. All that mattered was home and family, with rewards for good behaviour and punishment for bad.

He and I, in contrasting worlds, came to know in our different ways the full cruelty of the apartheid laws, and those worlds collided only many years later when we both found ourselves on Robben Island, the bleak maximum security prison where he was serving life and I was his warder.

I was 19 years old when I came face to face with Nelson Mandela. He was 60. Until that day I had never heard of him, or his African National Congress, or the deeply held reasons that meant that he and his comrades were prepared to die for their cause.

I found a man who was courteous and humble, yet at the same time the powerful leader of many of the political prisoners serving time on Robben Island. If he was outside where they could see him, they would set up a chant – 'Amandla! Power to the People.' They would sing and shout and make the power fist salute. He could not acknowledge them, those were the rules. He had to walk by, and would often only be able to acknowledge them by giving just the slightest nod in their direction.

He was their charismatic leader, their reason for being on the island, yet most of them never even met him once. Those were also the rules.

Mandela, both a dignified prisoner and at the same time a great leader of men, set my young mind racing. I saw his respect for my job and his understanding that I had to make him keep to a harsh regime if we were both to survive. I saw him scrubbing floors, emptying his toilet bucket, cleaning the exercise yard – sometimes on his knees – and, along with a few fellow prisoners, tending a little garden where he grew chillies and vegetables to give variety to the terrible prison food.

He addressed me, a mere boy, as Mr Brand. I called him Mandela. Together, across our different worlds, over time, we somehow came to be friends who were able to show each other kindness and consideration.

After 18 long and difficult years on Robben Island, Mandela was transferred to Pollsmoor Prison on the mainland in a government attempt to break down the ANC's High Command. I was there with him and his comrades.

Later, he moved again, to Victor Verster Prison, where he was given private quarters as he continued the tentative talks he had recently begun with government leaders during his time in isolation at Pollsmoor. He was emerging as the key figure in negotiations to end South Africa's darkest days. Over several tortuous years, the reconciliation process slowly picked up speed. Again, I was with him throughout that time.

On the day of his release, it was decided he should walk free out of the prison gates with his wife Winnie beside him and no warders in sight. So I watched that extraordinary moment on TV at my home, with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. Unbelievably, I told myself, our journey together was over.

But Mandela called me a few weeks later. He wanted to catch up with me again. I have been in his life ever since, there at most of the important moments and honoured to still be considered part of his extended family today.

He wrote of his 'long walk to freedom', and I walked some of that road with him, an incredible journey that defines my life today, as well as his.

In truth, my life began so much later than his. A white Afrikaans boy born into the very culture that created Mandela the revolutionary, I’d had no idea it was going to lead me to him.

CHAPTER ONE

I grew up on a small farm just outside Stanford, a quaint village set in a mountain valley, two hours' drive from Cape Town, the big city. A river meandered through it and the Atlantic Ocean was nearby. Our farm was called Goedvertrouw, which means 'good trust' in Dutch. We had our own little school on a nearby farm and that's where I was sent at five years old.

Come rain or shine, every morning I had to walk five miles to the nearest bus stop. But often one of the farmworkers, an African man we called Chocolate, would walk with me to the bus stop or sit me on the front of his bicycle and give me a lift if his bike was in good repair. We never knew Chocolate's real name. He was just always there. He had no relatives and his whole life was spent working on the farm or helping my mother in the house.

Our family was always hard up with little money and no luxuries. But we had a rich home life: we may not have had a lot but what we had was good. There were roast potatoes with butternut, marrow and pumpkin with breadcrumb stuffing and fresh peas. I hardly knew the taste of meat but it didn't matter.

After supper, we would take the candles outside to the stoep – we had no electricity – and my father would take out his violin and Chocolate his guitar and the music and merriment would ring out into the dark night.

The days started early and sometimes went on until midnight, especially when the winter rains caused havoc with the crops or the fences. I would sometimes go out in the dark with my father and Chocolate, holding the torch for them, while they fixed fences in the driving rain. In the Boland area of the Western Cape, there would be icy cold winters where the washing froze on the line and your hands went numb and blue. By contrast, the summers were stiflingly hot and you could hardly breathe.

My upbringing was that of a typical Christian Afrikaner. I had been baptised into the Dutch Reformed Church and we went to services every Sunday, with a nap in the afternoon. During daylight hours in the school holidays and at weekends, I would be out all day roaming the farm with my friends, the children of the African and mixed-race workers.

During school hours, however, my fellow students were exclusively white. Although I can honestly say I hardly noticed the division at the time, in term-time, our tiny two-classroom school was for the white children of farmers and their managers and foremen. The coloured and African children went to a different school at the bottom of the hill.

Before and after school, though, all of us would meet at the bus stop together and often light a fire right there on the dusty ground if it was cold and we had long to wait for the bus. But we never talked about why there was segregation at our schools. We were small kids – innocents, I suppose – and it was just a fact of life.

The only time I played with white children at home was when my mother's sisters and their families visited us from Cape Town at weekends. My cousin and I would go out early in the morning and Chocolate would accompany us while we hunted rabbits and pigeons.

Then, one day, Chocolate completely disappeared. To this day I do not know what happened but he was probably arrested for being somewhere without a pass. The pass laws for blacks and coloured people were notorious. They were contemptuously known as 'dompas', the stupid pass, and they ruled the lives of non-whites.

My father tried to find out what happened to Chocolate but nothing came of it. We just accepted it as part of an African's life in those days. Men like him would have come from a large, poor family, living in a shack with no water or electricity or sanitation. He may have lost his parents to malnutrition or tuberculosis, and gone wandering to look for work. He had no belongings and no education, and his birth would not even have been registered so he had no ID papers. He would have considered himself fortunate to find any sort of work or home, having been taken in by my parents.

Chocolate would be classified as an unskilled labourer despite his ability to fix everything on the farm and to teach a child like me how to fish and hunt, and mend fencing and tend animals. He would have no employment record and would have fallen through the system like so many Africans who had no value to the apartheid state.

He was obliged to carry a 'dompas' with him wherever he went and would be required to produce it for random police stop-and-search squads to prove that he was allowed to be wherever they had encountered him. But Chocolate had no 'dompas': officially he didn't even exist.

If he was stopped by police outside of our farm, especially at night-time, he would find himself in a police cell where his life was literally of no interest to them. Many hundreds of

thousands of black South Africans ‘disappeared’ during those years. It was not practical, and not safe, to make too many enquiries. Poor Chocolate was just another casualty of apartheid. We missed him but we were living in a police state and had limited rights ourselves. My father would have asked at our local police station, but would not have been surprised at their lack of interest. To them he would have been just another itinerant African with no real name.

The apartheid system in South Africa was one of the most cruel examples of legitimised racism anywhere in the world. Inspired by the notion of white supremacy brought to South Africa by its first ‘conquerors’, the Dutch, who were then closely followed by the British, the Afrikaans-speaking National Party set up these laws of segregation when it came to power in 1948.

For decades, black South Africans had been slaves, or servants, or low-paid workers serving the white interlopers’ best interests. They had already been disenfranchised by the time the apartheid laws were introduced, and the Native Land Act of 1913, brought in by the British, had deprived them of land ownership. Now they were put at the mercy of further crippling restrictions, with dozens of separate Acts of Parliament being passed to rule their lives and ensure their wretchedness.

As well as the much-hated pass laws, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 introduced the notorious ‘whites-only’ official notices that went up in every public place, including airports and even cemeteries. Black people were forbidden to use the same beaches, buses, park benches, hospitals, schools or public toilets as white people. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Act prevented the formation of sexual relationships between different races. And, perhaps cruellest of all, the Bantu Education Act meant that black people were schooled only as preparation for a lifetime as labourers, thus ensuring white dominance for future generations. As Hendrik Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs and the architect of apartheid, once said: ‘There is no place for the Bantu [black person] in the European [white] community above the level of certain forms of labour… What is the use of teaching a Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice?’

Non-whites could not live in a city unless they were employed there and were ordered to carry passes everywhere they went. Millions were forcibly removed from their homes under the Group Areas Act which designated specific, poor, areas for blacks and coloured people.

This inequality did not go unprotested, of course, but the state’s response was predictably brutal. By 1960, uprisings against the pass laws reached their peak when police opened fire on demonstrators in the township of Sharpeville, shooting dead 69 black people – many in the back – in what became known as the Sharpeville Massacre. As a result, the government declared the first State of Emergency in South Africa, during which time all civil liberties were suspended and the police could detain suspects at will without any appeal to the courts. All public meetings containing three or more people were banned.

A decade later, in 1970, the situation became still worse for the black population when the Bantu Homeland Citizen Act was passed. This law was designed to strip black South Africans’ citizenship from them, forcing them to become citizens of ten so-called ‘homelands’ – areas of unproductive, unwanted land many miles from the white-dominated cities. This resulted in more than three million people being forcibly resettled.

I know now that the outside world was raging against these terrible strictures, but as a boy growing up in the Western Cape countryside in a non-politicised family I had no knowledge of it whatsoever. Chocolate was a constant presence in my daily life and I knew many other African and mixed-race men who were the heads of their families and whose homes I was always welcome to enter, just as they were welcome to enter ours. I realise now how rare that was and I value it.

It would have been impossible for city residents to have any one-to-one knowledge of a man like Chocolate, or for their children to be playing with black children. It was only possible for me because my parents lived in a house tied to their work on the farm, the same as the black and coloured workers.

I had no awareness of any of this at the time, of course. I simply remember the many childhood friendships I made without any hint of racial tension on either side. When my grandfather bought me a bicycle, for example, the African children would steady it for me and run after me to help me learn how to pedal it and make sure I didn’t fall. We shared a lot of things, playing near the river and catching fish. Sometimes we would wrestle and have play fights, after which we would all swim naked in the river and be friends again.

One day, a young coloured boy came to live with us and my parents gave him his own room in the attic. His name was Pikky. Somehow he got left behind on the farm when some seasonal fruit-pickers left, so my mother brought him up.

Pikky used to help my mother in the kitchen and also worked on the land. When I came home from school, I would plant onions or potatoes with him. He was with my family until he

was about 15 and then, just like Chocolate, he disappeared and we never saw him again. It was very painful for me because he had been like the brother I never had. We'd shared so much together.

Despite my grief for this loss, I did not ask questions and my parents did not speak of it. Nothing was ever explained to me about the circumstances of people like Chocolate or Pikky. But they had been treated like family when they were with us, and it is only now when I think back that I see how unusual that was.

In fact, looking back, my parents were exceptionally kind to all the people around us, whether they were black, white or coloured. On Fridays, payday, my father would take all the workers to the town 20 miles away to do their shopping. On the way, he would give lifts to workers walking from other farms until our pick-up truck was packed full.

Despite his generosity, my father could be very strict and I learned the hard way that he would not tolerate me disrespecting older people, of any colour. One day, he heard me shouting at an elderly black worker on the farm when we were trying to get the cows into a kraal. I was using bad language and my father was furious. He took a sjambok – a whip – to me and all the time he was telling me that older people deserved our respect. The colour of their skin was no matter: it could not come off and anyway they were all human beings just like us.

Our farmworkers reciprocated my parents' respect and were kind and caring towards me. One of my earliest memories is of wandering off at the age of about three, and getting lost while playing in a canal. I was always out playing somewhere or at the river, fishing with the other children. All our workers turned out to help my parents find me.

However, these settled times did not last. In 1972, when I was just 12, all those nights out in the cold and rain took their toll on my father and he developed pneumonia. He was really sick and couldn't work in the fields. The farm owner, a white man, decided to evict us. So, at one stroke, we lost both our home and our livelihood. We were experiencing the mercilessness that millions of black people also suffered.

We were forced to move to the city and we were stuck there for a whole year, living in a room in the backyard of my uncle's small family home in Parow Valley, a white middle-class suburb of Cape Town. My father, mother and I lived in one cramped room. I slept on a mattress on the floor and I yearned for the green, open spaces of the veld, and the farm fields.

Once my father recovered, he started working on the railways, and a year later we moved to Epping Garden Village, another suburb of Cape Town, which is now called Ruyterwaght. It had been designated for white railway workers. We owned our own house for the first time and today I have inherited it and extended it and live there with my own family.

It was a different sort of life in Ruyterwaght. My father was at home every night now instead of mending fences or rounding up sheep on the farm. But I was missing my friends and all our playtime on the farm. I had no one to go fishing with and I had no black friends any more. I was at an all-white school and I was noticing that public toilets in the city and on the railway station were marked differently for whites and blacks. I still didn't fully understand apartheid but I was starting to see small differences that I'd not perceived before.

I was soon completing my schooling in the city and gained quite a reputation as the fastest sprinter in my year. I took up target-shooting too. But our family's financial deprivation continued, and I decided to try to make some pocket money for myself in my spare time.

By the age of 15, I was working at the weekends with a builder who paid me about 8 rand a day – about the equivalent of £5 – to help build his house. I mixed cement, carried loads of bricks and helped him install electricity, working long hours, from six in the morning till six at night. During the week, after finishing my homework, I went door-to-door selling pots and pans and mixing bowls. One of our neighbours worked at a stainless steel factory and he offered me 25 per cent of all the sales I could make on the products he would give me. I took samples around to show people, along with a catalogue with prices, and they could see that the factory prices were cheaper than those in the shops.

I did quite well and soon I could afford to buy a second-hand Suzuki 50cc motorbike to make it easier for me to do deliveries. I was still only 16 then. By 17, I had bought an old Ford Cortina, which needed its engine overhauled and gearbox replaced.

My social life revolved around going to braais – barbecues – where we cooked meat and fish caught locally. I was becoming a fully-fledged Afrikaner boy immersed in the white community around me.

In 1976, when I was 16, there was a national scare among the white population about the possibility of a violent black uprising. During two terrible days in the Soweto township, in the heart of Johannesburg, police had shot dead more than 100 black students who had been protesting at the country's racist education system. Many children died and the violence had escalated around the township.

Everyone was worried the uprising would spread. All of us older students were called out to guard our school at night because the teachers believed black people were going to burn it down. We took turns to patrol the school yard alongside the principal and teachers, who had firearms with them at the ready. Despite our state of paranoia, the feared mob didn't arrive.

After school, I had to face conscription, national service. From 1967, all white South African males between the ages of 17 and 65 years old had to become members of the South African Defence Force (SADF) or the South African Police (SAP). At first, conscription lasted only nine months, but, by 1977, due to increased fighting in Namibia and Angola, it had increased to two years. Afterwards, you would have to attend a camp up on the borders for a month each year for eight years.

I had friends who had died in military camps on the borders of South Africa, and I had been to their funerals. I didn't want to die like them, and I didn't want to join the police force with its reputation for brutality.

Two of my cousins were sent to a military prison in Phalaborwa because they refused to take up arms and do their national service. I was very close to both boys; we were very good friends. Their mother, my aunt, described to me how they were being treated, telling me how they were being forced to do hard labour for five years, and given the same status as common criminals.

I decided my best option was to train as a prison warder. If you served for at least 13 years, you could not be called up to the police or military or be forced to attend the annual border camps. It was looked on as a low-class job with a low salary, but I listened to recruiting officers who came to our school and I reckoned it was the answer for me. I signed up as soon as I could and soon found myself in a prison at Kroonstad, a large town south of Johannesburg in the Orange Free State.

With me was a friend from my schooldays who was only there because of an amazing set of circumstances. He had desperately wanted to be in the prison service but he knew he would probably fail the medical. Somehow, I had managed to persuade the sergeant in charge of recruitment that he should give my friend a chance. We were sworn in together for the start of training but the medical check-up was looming and I was worried.

In those strange, lawless days, the prison service actually conspired with me to get him in. The doctor, who was coming from Worcester some way away, was unavailable for some reason on the morning of the medical. His name was Dr Brand, and because I shared the same surname I was told I would have to impersonate him to get the process going.

Today, I both laugh and shudder when I think of it. All I can say is that a whole lot of trainees who would never have qualified after their medicals managed to go on to enjoy long careers in the prison service. My old school chum was not the worst of it: I 'passed' one guy who was completely deaf in one ear. There was another whose eyelids were partially paralysed so he couldn't keep his eyes open for ten seconds at a time.

Despite our lack of fitness for service, our training at Kroonstad was extremely tough, consisting of three months of doing drills, target-shooting with the army, undertaking strenuous physical exercises and studying criminal law. We were paid R70 a month and received a very unpleasant taste of life around hardened criminals.

We were on permanent alert, with inspection drills carried out at a few moments' notice. The alarm would sound at any time of night or day and we trainees would have to be dressed and ready for inspection within five minutes. We could be pulled up and charged for the slightest offence: an overall in which the seams were not perfectly straight, a spot on the floor or a bed not made with perfectly straight edges. To fool the system, we would sleep on a mat on the cement floor so the bed would never have to be made. We never wore shoes in our room because it took more than two hours to polish the floors. Our days would start at 5 a.m. with a two-hour exercise drill, whatever the weather, whether it was freezing cold or boiling hot. Even dripping with sweat, we would sit on the cold cement floors rather than flop on the bed and risk making it untidy.

On winter mornings, the water would freeze in the taps and we had to break blocks of ice with our bare hands, before assembling a complex handgun or rifle with our fingers still numb and sore.

It was torture and we were always hungry. When we were assigned to clean up the officers' mess after a function, we would grab all the leftover bread and take it back to our room to devour it. Perhaps it was designed to give us an insight into the way prisoners felt when ordinary liberties were taken away from them.

Sometimes, we were called at night to search the prison, looking for knives, drugs and other illegal objects. Often, there were fights to the death between gang members. There would be blood in the cells and we had to shoot teargas inside before we went in, taking dogs with us.

One day, a prisoner in solitary confinement, a murderer, called out to a trainee warder with me to ask the time. The warder showed him the time on his watch. The next moment, the prisoner grabbed his wrist through the bars and pulled off the watch. By the time we got the keys out to open the cell, he had put it in his mouth and swallowed it in one go. There was no doctor on duty that night to have his stomach pumped so we made a report and that was the end of it.

I saw some desperate things at that time. Prisoners would cut their own tendons with a razor blade to make themselves unable to work. Others injected themselves with Brasso, which led to gangrene and eventually amputation of their legs.

Once, there was a fight between two groups of gangsters. We always tried to separate them but one warder made a mistake and the gangs – some thirty men in all – had met up in the passageway. I was there, along with just two other warders, with no dog-handlers to help us. We blew our whistles and ran in with batons, to avoid a bloodbath.

They attacked us by using metal prison mugs with their socks pushed through the handles to make it easier to beat us. They had taken shower taps and hidden them inside their socks too. After an intense struggle, we managed to push the smallest group into an empty cell and defuse the situation.

But that wasn't the worst of it. Sometimes, a gang leader would force one of his underlings to attack a warder with a razor blade. He had to draw blood to prove himself. The prisoners would target the youngest warders; they could see we were wearing trainee uniforms.

At the end of training, I had chosen to apply to be posted to Robben Island because my family home was in Cape Town and that was the nearest prison. I knew it was a remote and hostile place, buffeted by the wind and sea, and feared and reviled by all who had been there, but I believed that life could not be any worse than at Kroonstad. I was wrong.

As soon as I applied for the post, all of my family and friends were checked out by Special Branch. I had had to fill in my friends' names and addresses, and they were all visited on more than one occasion and quizzed about their political background or membership of any organisations. I hadn't even been able to warn my family or friends about getting visits from Special Branch as I hadn't been told myself. Some of my friends thought the police must be investigating me for a serious crime. Anyhow, they found no interest in politics in my life, so I was accepted.

My ignorance of history had made me an ideal candidate, and, when I heard that I was going to be guarding the most dangerous criminals in South Africa's history, I believed it. The prisoners I would be looking after there, I was told, should have received the death sentence but managed to evade it and that's why they were on Robben Island, the most isolated place possible.

Later, once I had met Mandela and the other political prisoners, the police began asking my friends if I talked about him or his comrades. I came to realise that I was also being followed and monitored by the security police when I was home on leave in Cape Town.

On my first trip to the island, we had a nightmare boat ride from Cape Town in bad weather. The ferry rolled and dipped so fiercely that I spent the whole time vomiting. My first impression of the island was that it was a grim and isolated place where the sea crashed savagely against the rocks. When I arrived on a typical Cape winter's day with gale force winds and driving rain, it seemed so bleak that I found myself marvelling at those first Dutchmen who chose to come ashore in the 17th century.

We must have looked like lambs to the slaughter to the older warders watching us disembark. One of our first jobs was to serve wine to the sergeants in the big hall. Then they forced us to drink the brackish water from the island's borehole, laced with cheap wine. Once we were drunk, they piled us into a pick-up truck and drove us to the back of the island. There were six of us in the vehicle. They switched off the engine and told us to get out. From there, we had to push-start the engine, then we heard them start it up and drive off, with the old-timers shouting and swearing at us out of the windows.

It was dark and raining, with no street lighting. Back at our quarters, they were waiting for us again. They made us run around in circles, a hundred laps each to show how fit we were. They were so drunk. Some of us fell into the bushes and hid there together. We didn't even care if there were poisonous snakes or rats. We were cold, wet and exhausted. They came looking for us again but we crept back inside and spent the night on the floor underneath our beds, and they gave up.

It was the old warders' idea of a cruel joke, an initiation into the ways of Robben Island.

The next day, the head of the prison welcomed us and introduced himself. He told us we would be working with the biggest murderers and rapists in the country. They were worse than the criminals we had previously met, and were so evil that they were in for life. In fact, the men I would be charged with looking after would be neither rapists nor murderers,

though they were seen as a bigger threat to the nation than either.

On our first morning, we new recruits were divided up and placed with senior warders. Then I was told I was going to work in B Section. This was where seven of the eight men known as the Rivonia Trialists were held. I would be working with some of the most notorious prisoners in South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO

The terrorism trial in which Nelson Mandela and seven others were sentenced to life imprisonment took place at Rivonia, a suburb of Johannesburg. That had been the location of their main hideout, Liliesleaf Farm, where several were arrested. Mandela was already in solitary confinement in Pretoria Prison at the time, serving five years for leaving the country without a passport and inciting workers to strike. At Rivonia, in June 1964, he was found guilty of sabotage and sent with six of the other convicted men to Robben Island. The only white man found guilty, Denis Goldberg, was sent to Pretoria Central Prison, which had a whites-only security wing for political prisoners.

Before his prison term in Pretoria, Mandela, posing as a gardener at the farm, had been leading an armed campaign to sabotage the apartheid government's worst efforts to marginalise, dispossess and oppress black people. Radicalised while still at university, where he was threatened with expulsion for standing up for student representation, Mandela had recognised the effectiveness of mass action when he witnessed township marches against the pass laws and raised rents.

By now, Mandela was committed to the African National Congress (ANC), a political party founded in 1912, dedicated to bringing all Africans together as one people to fight for their land and freedom. Since the 1950s, the ANC had been organising a defiance campaign of civil mass resistance in order to put pressure on the government to end apartheid. In the immediate aftermath of the Sharpeville Massacre, Mandela proposed setting up a military wing of the ANC to further continue the struggle. In the face of apartheid's brutality, he declared: 'The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain two choices – submit or fight.'

In 1961, therefore, Mandela was selected as first Commander-in-Chief of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe – Spear of the Nation – and set about a campaign of sabotage. Tracked by police and intelligence operatives, he went underground to elude capture.

Liliesleaf Farm was his team's secret headquarters, where they worked under cover of darkness. But the ever-vigilant security police had noted their movements and were following them. On the afternoon of 11 July 1963, armed police arrived in a laundry van and drove through the farm gates. They rounded up everyone on the premises and trapped others one by one as they arrived. It was a government coup hailed loudly as a huge success on national radio that night. The key members of the armed wing of the ANC had been stopped in their tracks as they plotted the overthrow of the apartheid government. Detailed plans and quantities of armaments had been gathered up as evidence. There was no doubt of their guilt.

Realising this, and knowing the consequences, Mandela and his comrades could only hope to use the trial as a public platform for their cause. As he walked up the steps to the dock, Mandela turned to the crowd and raised his clenched fist. 'Amandla!' he shouted, and the response from his supporters was deafening.

Mandela refused to be cross-examined and instead gave a four-hour speech from the dock to explain who he was and why he and his comrades had felt compelled to turn to violence to defeat the apartheid government. He admitted that the ANC's military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe had carried out acts of sabotage on government installations but he maintained they had always tried to avoid casualties. Mandela also said that he hoped to live by his ideal of a free nation for all South Africans, but that if necessary he was prepared to die for it. His lawyers had advised against that declaration, believing he was almost inviting execution.

The renowned author Alan Paton, who wrote *Cry, the Beloved Country*, also came forward to give a speech in mitigation. He begged for clemency, telling the judge that he believed sparing Mandela and his fellow accused would be the only way for South Africa to have a future.

In truth, the defendants had no hope, and fully expected to receive the death sentence for the prosecution's long list of offences, which included conspiring to overthrow the government, obtaining funds for revolution from abroad, ordering munitions, recruiting for guerrilla warfare, inciting foreign military units to invade and sabotage of government installations. All the trialists had agreed to face the hangman if they were sentenced to death, rather than appeal.

Thus, when life sentences were handed out in the packed, hushed courtroom, one of Mandela's comrades – Denis Goldberg – shouted out, 'Life! Life is wonderful!'

Mandela and his fellow ANC leaders were transferred to Robben Island, where they were always referred to as the 'Rivonians'. Mandela was to spend the next 27 years in prison, 18 of

which would be spent on the island.

During my prison service training, I had been familiar with the sort of criminals who ran in gangs and had facial scars and tattoos. When I was sent to B Section on Robben Island where Nelson Mandela and the others were kept, I was puzzled by their appearance and quiet manners.

I asked the sergeant in charge: 'What are these criminals here for?'

He told me they were not common criminals, but that they were terrorists who were trying to overthrow our country.

He told me they would not steal anything from us. You could leave your money or food on a table in the section with the door open and they would never take it. They were only hungry for news, he said. They were not getting newspapers or any information about what was going on in the outside world.

He reassured me they were not hardened criminals, ready to murder, rape or harm. But nonetheless they were determined to blow up our lives, to eliminate white people and take over the government.

I duly worked up a hatred towards these men. I decided to just do my job, locking up the prisoners and having minimum contact with them.

But when I came into the section I saw prisoners, old guys, standing up to greet us. I had never heard of Mandela at that time. I looked at all these men and saw no tattoos, no marks of the notorious 26s or 28s prison gangs. I went through to the cells and I asked a sergeant if he was afraid of them.

He said: 'No, man, they won't harm you. They're relaxed, they're here for life.'

He told me about the Rivonia trial but it meant nothing to me. As far as I was concerned, they were just terrorists sitting in prison. I wasn't really aware of their political beliefs.

However, I came to see how disciplined they were with their studies, with cleaning and polishing their surroundings, not like in a criminal prison where everything is dirty. Everything here was in place; it was clean and the cells smelled fresh.

I was also surprised when the first of the Rivonians, Andrew Mlangeni, greeted me in Afrikaans. I was surprised at both the greeting and his use of our language. Nonetheless, we were strictly forbidden to fraternise so for a long time I only experienced these polite greetings and clipped discussions about their letters and visits. There was no conversation.

Then, one day, I had to escort Mandela to the visitors' centre, about 300 metres away. It was the first time I had seen him on his own. He was a quiet, dignified man with an imposing bearing, tall, slim and fit from his daily exercise regime and immaculate in his prison uniform.

I was very surprised that he didn't try to talk any politics with me or ask me about the outside world. All he wanted to know was where I came from, whether my parents were still alive, and to ask if I had any brothers and sisters.

He would say, 'Oh, that's good,' when I told him about my upbringing. He was happy to hear that I had a close family. I told him I had grown up on a farm and didn't know much about the city, but that we had moved to the city and my father was working on the railways.

This was the first time we had talked. On B Section, no conversation was allowed with the prisoners. It was only possible while he was walking slightly ahead of me and no one could overhear us in the open air.

We carried on talking as we walked. He asked me what sports I took part in, so I told him about my jogging and that I enjoyed playing badminton. He was smiling and nodding, saying exercise is good for your health and morale. He then asked me if I was studying. I replied that I was studying criminal procedures for the prison service to get myself a promotion.

His manner was fatherly, concerned. He told me to please say hello to my parents when I next saw them. He also asked me about girlfriends, to which I replied that, yes, I had a few. He seemed to disapprove of this, saying I must take my time and choose the right one for me. On the way back to B Section after the visit, Mandela thanked me for our nice conversation and hoped we could talk together again one day when we were alone.

This first exchange was a revelation to me. All my ideas about Mandela up till then revolved around the uprisings, the bombings and burnings going on in South Africa, and the attempts to overthrow the government. And here he was talking about my family and other down-to-earth personal matters. He seemed genuinely concerned – a new experience for me, this concern for me as a person, not just a warder. It was impossible not to be drawn to him, this powerful leader of men facing a lifetime of hard labour and isolation, seemingly without bitterness or anger.

I was one of four guards who had daily contact with Mandela. We would try to keep him busy. All the time he was on Robben Island, I tried to treat him like the other prisoners but when I was alone with him he drew me in. I found myself listening to him and respecting him more and more for his views. Gradually, I became very involved with him. There were little

ways in which I could bend the rules to make his life easier but I had to be careful. I knew that everything that happened on the island was being watched and reported.

I had learned not to tell my family anything about my job. Once, I was home for the first weekend off after three months and my uncle visited. He asked me if I had seen a man called Nelson Mandela. I told him he was just one of the prisoners there, and that I couldn't talk about any details. My uncle said he was asking because he was wondering if Mandela was long dead. In South Africa, no one had heard anything about him after he was given a life sentence in 1964. The authorities had done a thorough job in making him disappear. The last thing they wanted was for his revolutionary ideas to take hold among the black majority.

Similarly, if we were at a function on the island with outsiders, people would ask us about Mandela and we would say nothing. One night, a warder who had been drinking was talking about Mandela. The next day, he was removed. He was transferred away from the Rivonians for four years. That was difficult for us, actually, because we needed him. He was the only one who could speak Xhosa.

The language issue was in fact part of the reason I had been chosen for the job. I was one of a group of young warders who had been sent to the island because we had a good educational standard and we could speak English – which the prisoners could understand – as well as Afrikaans. There were 21 of us, a larger-than-usual contingent because it had recently been decided to change the criteria for warders. Before our time, new recruits were selected for Robben Island for their physical size; they were needed to break the prisoners and intimidate them, scare them. But they could not communicate well because they only spoke Afrikaans, and often the prisoners could not understand instructions.

However, despite the fact we had been brought in for our communication skills, any white person suspected of becoming too close to black or coloured people was automatically under suspicion.

One day, three of us – warders Smuts, Terreblanche and I – were called into the prison office to be questioned by some government representatives. We were nervous about it, suspecting trouble.

The commanding officer of the prison wanted to know how we felt about working with Mandela. Smuts was called in first and asked what he thought of him. He told me afterwards that he had said: 'Mandela is a politician. He is a man of politics, fighting for his people.'

The government representatives were very upset about this, and they all jumped up and told him he would no longer work on B Section. They practically chased him out of the office. Smuts told me all this while Terreblanche was in there for his interrogation, so when my turn came I was ready for that question.

Sure enough, when I went into the office, the conversation soon turned to what I thought of Mandela. I just shrugged casually and said: 'Oh, I think Mandela should have been hanged that time. He just gives us all a hard time and puts in unnecessary complaints. I don't think he should even have been brought here.'

They liked that. They said I should carry on the good work. I shouldn't fight with the prisoners, but just do my work according to the rules. You had to have no political motivation if you wanted to work in B Section.

My reward for such perfect answers to their questions was to be moved into the Censor's Office, where ironically I was to learn more about Mandela and his so-called highly dangerous comrades and to discover their humanity. Rather than uncovering their terrible secrets, I was simply learning to feel even more drawn to them. The government had overlooked the effects of isolation on a small group of men such as ours, with warders and prisoners similarly unable to escape. Ironically, it meant that our relationships with the prisoners became more important to us.

It was the small, human connections between us that created the first bond. I used to watch Mandela working in his little garden where he had planted onions, tomatoes, spinach and aubergines. The water from the island's borehole was very sour so he used to put out buckets to catch rainwater for the garden. It was the way he tended his plants and took refuge in his garden that first drew me to him. He told me that he also came from a farm community. I found myself talking to him about how to protect his plants from insects and from the terrible south-easter winds that plagued Cape Town and the island. I brought him some netting and together we worked out how to keep the most tender plants away from the worst of the weather.

How could you not be drawn to a man with great dignity and humility who would willingly take instructions from a teenage boy to get down on his knees and clean up pigeon droppings from the passage behind his cell?

'Mr Brand,' he said to me, 'the manure will be very good for my garden. I'm glad to be doing this.'

Another time, he was in a legal consultation with a young Indian lawyer, Priscilla Jana. I was sitting outside the room acting as a sentry. Regulations meant that prisoners should be able to consult their lawyers without a warder overhearing them, but of course the rooms were all bugged anyway.

This time, I looked in the small viewing window to check all was well and I saw Miss Jana had gone round to Mandela's side of the table. I went in to tell her that was not allowed and I saw she was handing him some chocolates. I had to take them off her and she was very angry, furious and shouting at me. I told her I would keep the chocolates and hand them to her in the office as she left the prison.

Mandela told her to calm down. He said: 'This man is only doing his job. He knows what he is doing. I can go without chocolates.'

He was protecting me, he understood how things worked. Maybe he knew perfectly well that I would keep some of the chocolates and give them to him later without the lawyer knowing. It was better for no one to know that rules were being broken.

If I lost my job, Mandela would lose an ally within the prison. And by then we had a small history of secrets between us, sealing our understanding of each other – just little things I had done, little relaxations of the rules, that had made his life more comfortable.

Then there was an incident where I took a risk so great, and achieved something so dear to him, that it formed a bond between us for life.

On a rainy winter's day when the wind was howling around the island, Mandela's beautiful wife Winnie came to visit him. She was a banned person under the Suppression of Terrorism Act and she had been forced to leave Johannesburg and live hundreds of miles from there in a white Afrikaans area called Brandfort in the Orange Free State. For many years, she had been allowed only very limited prison visitation rights – just one thirty-minute visit in his first year on the island – though this had gradually increased over the years. Now, to get to see her husband for thirty short minutes once every three months, she had to receive an invitation from him, apply for a permit to the prison, then go to her local magistrates to have the permit stamped.

Most visitors supported each other in a large group and drove to Cape Town, sometimes overnight, to stay at Cowley House, a charity-funded lodging house set up for the families of prisoners, in the city and from there take the trip to see their loved ones. After the prison visit, they would return to Cape Town on the ferry and stay overnight again at their lodgings, able to share their news and enjoy the friendship of those in a similar situation.

For Winnie, it was different. She lived under a strictly monitored curfew and could only leave her home between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. So she took a flight to Cape Town, alone, to board the ferry to Robben Island, then flew back. Because of her husband's status, there would always be a large number of journalists at the embarkation point to see her leave and return. They were hungry for news of Mandela, despite a total ban on anything being published about him or his fellow Rivonians in South Africa. His sympathisers in England and America got to know much more about his prison years than any of his supporters in his own country.

On the day of Winnie's visit, as the white prison officers and their wives and families went inside the ferry boat – the *Susan Kruger*, named after the wife of the Minister of Prison Services, Jimmy Kruger – the black visitors, as always, had to sit on the top deck, exposed to the wind and rain, or else downstairs in the cold, bleak hold of the ship. Winnie had wrapped herself in a huge blanket against the weather, knowing the 45-minute journey would be hellish.

However, the warm covering also served a dual purpose. Only her handbag had been checked at the embarkation office in Cape Town's waterfront; no one had looked inside the blanket.

When she arrived on Robben Island, I was there to collect her and the other visitors. I accompanied the group on foot, and when we reached the visitors' centre I watched her take off the blanket. I was astonished to see there was a baby hidden inside. It was Zoleka Mandela, the daughter of Zindzi, who was Nelson and Winnie Mandela's child.

Now this was a serious breach of the rules. Political prisoners were not allowed visits from their own children and were even forbidden to set eyes on the children of warders whose families lived with them on the island: a particularly cruel regulation meant they could not see any child under the age of 16 for the whole length of their sentence.

An ANC prisoner, the academic Neville Alexander, has written about hearing a child's voice only once in ten years on Robben Island. He said: 'We all stood dead still and everyone was waiting for the moment when we would actually glimpse that child. And of course it wasn't allowed.'

A fellow prisoner, Patrick Lekota, who later became Minister of Defence, wrote to his daughter about how there was terror that one could die on Robben Island without ever being

able to make contact with one's child.

Mandela told me that when he worked in the limestone quarry there would sometimes be the distant sound of the warders' children playing in nearby bushes. 'We immediately stopped, wanting to enjoy it,' he said. 'But the warders would come at us shouting and make us start shovelling again.'

Now I was faced with this extraordinary situation. Winnie was holding out a baby to me. What on earth was I meant to do?

I told her: 'Mrs Mandela, you must leave the baby with other visitors in the waiting room while you see your husband.'

Winnie, although she was a fighter and was in many ways living out her own wretched sentence under constant harassment from the apartheid police, knew better than to fight prison rules. She might find the visit to her husband was disallowed altogether. So she went into the visitor's booth alone. She and Mandela as usual greeted each other as lovingly as possible by each putting a hand up on the glass panel that separated them.

I sat behind Mandela, listening in to their conversation on the warders' phone. I saw his face as she told him that she had brought their four-month-old granddaughter Zoleka and had somehow managed to get her all the way to the prison. He looked at me, standing behind him, supervising the visit. 'Please, Mr Brand,' he said. 'Is it possible to see the baby? Please let me see this little child.'

I told him it was impossible, that I would lose my job. After a few minutes, a warrant officer came into the passage. Mandela tried again, pleading with both of us. But we told him it was against the rules, that there was no way we could allow it.

He asked again, saying perhaps he could watch as his wife left carrying the child. We said, 'No, impossible.' But by now the warrant officer and I were exchanging looks. It was a flesh-and-blood moment when your heart told you it was only human to find a way around the cruelty.

At the end of the visit, I told Mandela to stay in the visiting booth and I would call his wife back so he could ask her to apply for a Christmas visiting permit. I knew the microphones were off so I went around to Winnie in the waiting room where she had the baby back in her arms. She took R200 in cash out of her handbag – a small fortune and much more than my monthly salary. She said: 'Please, sir, please, Mr Brand, let my husband see the baby for a few seconds.'

I told her: 'Ma'am, I cannot take your money. Please put it away. This is a bad situation for both of us but you have to realise I can't help you, I'm sorry.' She looked downcast, but I went on: 'Ma'am, could I please hold the baby for a moment? I've never held an African child.' It was the only thing I could think of at that second.

I told her she could have a moment with her husband to talk about applying for a permit at Christmas. I ushered her back into the booth on her side and locked her in, then quietly closed the door to the passageway.

The window in front of Mandela was by now also closed so I walked through the passage on his side of the booth and held out the baby to him. He took her and held her and he just said, 'Oh', and I saw tears in his eyes as he kissed the baby. We both stood there in silence and after about 30 seconds he knew he must hand her back to me.

Neither of us said it but we knew this had to be a secret, even from his wife.

When I returned to Winnie with the baby, she begged me again. 'Please, Mr Brand, just let me show him this little child for one moment.'

I refused her sternly and turned away. It was not safe to let her know what I had done. My job was in danger, and Mandela's privileges would have been cancelled if anyone knew about the breach of regulations.

Journalists were waiting for Winnie when she reached Cape Town on the ferry and she told them how cruel we were. She had smuggled their grandchild to him but they wouldn't let her show her husband, even from a distance.

On the way back to the cells, Mandela walked close enough to tell me: 'Thank you, Mr Brand. I know you can lose your job for that. Now it's a secret between us, just you and me.'

Later, I was called into the prison office to explain how a child had been brought to the island. I said we hadn't shown Mandela the baby, and then I had to write a report to our head office in Pretoria to inform them of the incident, and a second report to the security police assuring them that this would not happen again, that no baby would be allowed in next time.

This moment that passed between us, this silent understanding from man to man, meant everything to him. We became allies for life without referring to that day again all the time he was in prison.

CHAPTER THREE

Robben Island is an unmistakable landmark from any point in Cape Town. It can be seen from the glamorous beaches and shopping malls, from the spectacular peaks of the Table Mountain range and at many points along the Atlantic Ocean waterfront. After dark, the single beam from its lighthouse is a blur on the choppy sea, visible for miles around.

It sits in the inhospitable Atlantic Ocean, seven kilometres from the mainland, a wretched monument to the centuries of misery it has seen.

The island, a flat oval about 11 kilometres in diameter, was once a leper colony where unfortunates were sent to die. Later, it was a quarantine station housing sick animals. But its natural God-given purpose must surely have been as a prison. A low-lying, windswept place tantalisingly in sight of land but from where escape was virtually impossible.

In the late 19th century, Mandela's own ancestors, a group of Xhosa chieftains, were imprisoned there by the British after the skirmishes that ensued when the settlers forced 20,000 tribal people out of the Eastern Cape. Their leader, Chief Maqoma, died on Robben Island, and many of his descendants campaigned to have the place renamed after him. On a day of wild weather, you can almost hear their ghosts wailing.

Violent surf constantly pounds its shores, the scene of many shipwrecks. In the late 17th century, a Dutch galleon, the three-masted *Dageraad*, carrying gold coins to Indonesia for the salaries of Dutch East India Company employees, sank there literally without trace, and remains inaccessible to this day. From a hoard of seventeen chests of gold worth tens of millions of pounds, only a few coins have ever washed ashore, with some ducats and silver pieces-of-eight found in rock pools.

Ironically, its isolation makes Robben Island a safe and sheltered haven for more than 100 bird species, among them African penguins and breeding colonies of seabirds like the crowned cormorants, Caspian terns and black-crowned herons that circle the shoreline.

More sinister are the three quarries. Robben Island maximum security prison itself was built from the dark grey-black slate hacked out by its first inmates. A stone quarry on the eastern side of the island is where the first Dutch settlers used their slaves to harvest slate that built Cape Town's castle. A plaque today commemorates their work.

The limestone quarry, which almost cost Nelson Mandela his sight and his general health, lies at the centre of the island. For 13 years, he broke rocks from the sunken cliffs here every day, the white limestone reflecting direct sunlight. The constant south-east wind would whip up choking dust clouds, burning the prisoners' eyes and entering their throats.

The convicts would be accompanied by dog-handlers and armed warders on the 500-metre route-march to the quarry each morning. They would then be forced to break down rocks and mix it with seashells for use in constructing roads across the island.

The prisoners were not allowed sunglasses, so they attempted to fend off the glare with home-made contraptions of netting and bent wire. Mandela's eyesight suffered for the rest of his life, with eye-drops making little impact. A strict rule of his after his release was the banning of flash photography.

By the time I arrived to work at Robben Island, the older men, like Mandela, had successfully campaigned to stop these outdoor work groups after the age of 60, but they recalled them bitterly. Mandela would tell me of the horrendous hard labour of those days in the quarry, and the lesser horror of his later duties hauling kelp – Cape seaweed – from the sea and the beaches, to be processed and exported as fertiliser. In Afrikaans, we called it bambous.

There were some advantages to the beach work, though, he said. Few officers were around and the warders were more relaxed. Sometimes, they would be able to set traps to catch rabbits and guinea fowl. They would make a fire on the spot and eat it. They would also pick limpets off the rocks and sometimes eat them raw.

Other small transgressions could also take place in the more relaxed conditions. One day when they were working with kelp on the northern beach, it was agreed that two prisoners could get into the seawater to catch crayfish while a warder guarded the rest of the work group. They lit a fire and cooked and ate the crayfish, prisoners and warders together. This fraternising would have been greatly frowned upon by the authorities. It was a small, conspiratorial, defiance of the rules.

Another day, the prisoners found a seal on the beach and immediately saw it as a rare source of meat. They killed it with a spade and one of the warders lent them his knife to skin it and clean it out, providing that he could share the meat with them. They lit a fire then and

there on the beach and cooked it. The red meat was tender, Mandela told me. It tasted like lamb in so far as they could recall the taste of any meat. They cooked and ate in a little group alongside their warders, and imagined the barbecues they would enjoy once they were back home again. Each and every one of them believed they would be out of prison one day, with a life to look forward to.

It made me smile sadly to hear them talking of the future. They were all inside forever; they were never going to have a real life again as far as I could see. Political prisoners were allowed no reduction of their sentences for good behaviour and they could not apply for parole. They were in prison for their whole term. Mandela himself was serving life – and he and his comrades, the High Command of the banned ANC, were old already.

I used to tell him: 'Why don't you relax and take things easier? You don't need to waste your money sending postal orders to buy books and university courses, and doing studies for a future career. You're having your life now. This is it. Why not take books from the prison library and enjoy them, instead of driving yourself with all these exams?'

It was true: Mandela was consumed with studying, and used every spare minute to further his knowledge. He believed education was, in his words, 'the future of our country', even telling us that we guards should be studying. The way he saw it, if you have education, if you have degrees, if you have knowledge – even if it's about motor mechanics – for as long as you are alive, they can't take it away from you. He wanted us to have careers, to be thinkers, to lift up our lives for ourselves and our families. He made us think about that, mostly by his own example.

He put pressure on his own people to study and had this great dream that Robben Island could have its own university. Many of the prisoners began to study with the warders without the authorities knowing, and they would exchange books. We worked together well, and I even saw prisoners help warders with their assignments.

Mandela's mantra to his fellow captives was that 'your years in prison will go faster if you enhance yourself with education'. That way, he would say, when they all came out, they would be better educated and would qualify for better work.

The opportunities for education for black people on the outside were very limited, he said. If you studied here in prison, you could keep your mind alert and also avoid trouble. Through his persuasive arguments he converted some of his less-educated comrades into great thinkers armed with degrees. Among the prisoners there were doctors, lecturers and schoolteachers and they all helped each other. It was like an informal university where the men educated each other.

But Mandela was up against a lot of opposition in his determination to study. He needed to organise money for books and assignments to be sent in from university correspondence courses. He would apply to see a lawyer, then pass him a list of names of those who needed funding. Money came in from the church and charitable organisations, the South African Educational Trust and supporters on the outside. The government tried to stop this by stipulating that money could only be sent in by their families.

Mandela himself was determined to learn Afrikaans and take exams in the language. He believed it would give him an edge. He had already received a certificate in 1964 in Afrikaans-Nederlands, but he wanted to take those studies further, and so he enrolled every year to take written exams. Unfortunately, he failed his practical Afrikaans every time. I began to help him by always talking to him in Afrikaans and by reading his 'homework' before it was sent off to a school on the mainland, where mistakes would come back underlined in red. Of course, the teachers had no idea it was Nelson Mandela's handiwork they were marking.

His first essay assignment was to write about a day on the beach. So he wrote about a day on Robben Island where he was working outside, hauling the seaweed plants out of the sea and cleaning them off the rocks on the beach, then hanging it on railings so it could dry before being chopped up, bagged and exported as fertiliser. On this particular day, he had slipped on the sharp rocks and gashed his foot badly.

I had to hand the essay back and tell him to do it again. It was too long. He was only allowed 450–500 words and so I had to tell him he needed to shorten it. We didn't talk about his day on the beach.

After a year of talking to me only in Afrikaans, he finally passed the exam. This was a victory that clearly gave him enormous pleasure.

Before I arrived, Mandela had fought long and hard for the right to study in prison, continually writing to the Minister of Justice until it was agreed that certain subjects were to be allowed. Political science and military history were of course banned, and Mandela was warned that if he persisted in studying law it would be a waste of time for him. There were several attempts to have him struck off as a lawyer when he was in prison, but he fought and won. He and his fellow activist Oliver Tambo – the leader of the ANC since 1967 – had

represented hundreds of black defendants in their time as partners in a Johannesburg law firm, and Mandela dreamed of returning to that work one day.

Tambo was living in Zambia, running the ANC in exile. To many of the Rivonians, he was their only hope, keeping their organisation alive until it was ready to come into power in South Africa. But he and other political prisoners were not allowed to be quoted publicly within the country; their voices could not be heard. Without the oxygen of publicity, the government hoped that the ANC would quietly wither away and die.

Mandela, meanwhile, was obsessively applying to UNISA, the University of South Africa, to take their correspondence courses, and all of the political prisoners in B Section did the same. Sometimes, I would be on the mainland, sitting in the UNISA office for hour after hour waiting to register them. I also had to pick up the study books they all needed from government-approved bookshops in Cape Town.

The right to study was one I knew Mandela valued extremely highly. This had been used against him earlier, before I started working on the island. He had once lost his study privileges for four years, when the original manuscript he had written for his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* had been found hidden in cocoa tins buried in his garden. The punishment was the most severe they could think up.

Now he needed more time to gain his exams, and he appealed to UNISA. Mandela made himself busy every day applying for something, or demanding more blankets, better food or more visits. His policy was to make himself and his comrades noticed, to keep themselves alive and alert.

It struck me that all of these old guys were really serious about advancing themselves, and were never going to give up. Even when they failed exams, they enrolled again and again, or appealed to have them remarked. Occasionally, one of Mandela's subjects would be remarked and he would get through when he had previously failed. He wasn't a natural student and he admitted to me that it became more difficult as he got older.

I was gradually coming to realise what he and his comrades were fighting for, what they had risked their lives for, what they had given up their freedom for. It was impossible not to notice the impact that Mandela had made when I was out in the 'real' world. We were all living in a police state and there was no freedom of speech but occasionally I would see some graffiti in Cape Town before the authorities cleaned it off. Always the same words: 'Free Nelson Mandela', painted on a bridge or a wall. People all over South Africa were thinking of him. People all over the world were thinking of him.

And when we had to take him and his group outside once a week for recreation – when they would spend an hour just kicking a football around on the deserted air strip – we would hear hundreds of other prisoners clamouring for him. 'Amandla! Amandla!' We would hear them shouting and chanting, though they could hardly recognise their leaders from 200 metres away. They would never meet Mandela face-to-face. Yet they became hysterical at the very sight of him in the distance.

Mandela could not really acknowledge them; he would just give a slight nod towards them. Anything more and the men from B Section would not be allowed outside the prison buildings again.

Even in prison, Mandela had a sense of purpose and drive. As much as the prison regulations ruled every minute of his life, he also had his own rules, his own discipline. His day would start early – all part of the hardship – but he worked to turn it to his advantage, using every minute to try to go forward with his life, always fighting for the future, never looking back on his 60-plus years and accepting that it might all be over.

An ear-splitting clanging would start up all over the prison at 5 a.m. We used metal pipes with a chain inside to make the maximum noise, a horrible grinding sound, to wake up all the prisoners in their icy cells.

The cells were as cold as fridges, all year round. They were made of cement and unpainted. Overnight they would freeze. Prisoners slept on the floors with two mats, one hard sisal mat and another softer one. They had three blankets with no extra ones allowed, even in winter. Requests to the prison office for more blankets would be turned down. Occasionally, some of them would persuade a warder to feel sorry for them and one of us would give them an extra blanket on condition it was handed back early the next morning before inspection.

I would see Mandela doing exercises in his cell at 5 a.m., usually for an hour. He would have been cold all night, so he would be doing sit-ups to warm himself up. He was a tall man, and the two mats issued to him were too short. When he lay back, his head would be touching one wall, his feet the opposite wall.

I would see him running on the spot, doing push-ups and sit-ups, everything you could do on your own in the cell. He would wear black or white, or black and red, gym shorts donated by the Red Cross, and a sleeveless running vest.

He was over 60 years old but to me he looked very fit, lean and wiry. He was slender and you could see his muscles. At this time in the morning, he would not have had anything to eat, just a few sips of warm water from the coffee flask he had bought himself through the prison tuck shop, and was allowed to keep in his cell.

At 6 a.m., the bell rang again and prisoners had to get ready for inspection. Like all the others, Mandela had a cleaning pack that he kept in his cell. In the mornings, he would take a piece of old prison blanket out of it and polish the floor until it shone. The floor was cement but prisoners were given liquid polish to rub into it. It had to look like a mirror when it was finished, and be clean enough to eat off. He would also need to fold up his mattress and bedding and put them tidily in a corner. All this would take about an hour, then maybe he would look through his study books while he waited for inspection.

At 7 a.m., the warders reported for day shift. We started with parade in the courtyard. We had to stand to attention, present ourselves for inspection, then stand at ease. We had strict rules about being clean-shaven with short haircuts, the same rules we imposed on the prisoners.

The prisoners were also inspected every morning to see if they were properly dressed and that their uniform was neatly ironed. As they were not allowed access to irons, their only way to achieve that was to sprinkle water on it, rub it hard with a prison mug, and then press it overnight underneath their sleeping mats on the cement floor.

Then it was time to say the daily prayer. It was always the ‘Our Father’. When it came to the line ‘give us this day our daily bread’, I would feel bad for the prisoners who could hear us. The black prisoners never had any bread. It was given only to the mixed-race and Indian prisoners.

Discrimination in South Africa at that time was multilayered. So, although all of these men were being punished for their beliefs, some were being punished more cruelly than others. For example, Mandela and the other black Africans were at first only issued with khaki shorts and sandals, with no shoes or socks. They wore a canvas khaki jacket of which three buttons had to be fastened during inspections. They had protested for several years that they were cold and also humiliated by wearing boys’ clothes, and by the time I arrived on the island they were beginning to be allowed long trousers and socks.

This racial discrimination even extended to food allowances. Black prisoners had 12 ounces of maize-meal porridge with no sugar or salt in it for breakfast, and a mug of black coffee. The coloureds and Indians had 14 ounces of porridge and bread, and coffee.

After the parade, the day-shift warders entered the sections and counted the prisoners with the night shift. The master key was used to open the cells. B Section was about 50 metres inside the one-storey prison building, on the left-hand side. It was accessed by a metal door cut into the solid wall and controlled by a series of locking and unlocking procedures in a sequence to be strictly followed. Each warder carried the key to B Section on a leather strap held in place under the epaulette of his uniform. His single black metal key would open all the cell doors in that section. The night-shift warders held different keys to the day-shift.

Once the prisoners had been counted, the numbers were written on an official record so that they tallied. Some prisoners may have been taken to the hospital section, or some to the harbour with escorts for the ferry trip to the mainland for a Cape Town hospital. We needed to know at all times how many prisoners were physically on the island, so these records were an important security measure to prevent escapes.

At 7.30 a.m., when the cells had been opened, the prisoners could take their toilet buckets to the community toilet to empty them. They washed them out under the showers and put them in the courtyard to dry in the sun. During this cleaning, the prisoners would talk intensely. They knew very well that we didn’t want to be near them during this unpleasant task, and it was a chance to exchange news. In general, though, we had to observe the prisoners closely throughout the morning rituals, even when they were using the community toilets. The stalls were designed so that you could see their heads and their feet.

The prisoners were given a disinfectant like Jeyes Fluid to clean the buckets. They were steel half-drums with a lid on. Once, for several days at a time, Mandela went to a neighbouring cell where fellow prisoner, Eddie Daniels, was quite sick. He took his toilet bucket out for him, cleaned it and dried it in the sun.

All of these actions, without a word being exchanged, were making us realise the extent of the comradeship, the solidarity, between these guys. We had never seen this before.

Prisoners would then use the communal showers. The water was just lukewarm, with no soap provided – though the water was so hard that soap did not work anyway. They used shampoo bought in bulk from the tuck shop, having pooled their money allowance to buy it. They didn’t complain. Years before I came to the island, the conditions were even harsher. There was no warm water and prisoners would be forced to line up naked in the courtyard to

be hosed down with cold water by the warders.

I heard that one time a group of drunken warders got them all out of bed in the middle of the night to stand in the freezing cold while they hosed them down, cackling with cruel laughter while they searched through all of their cells. Some of the more unlucky prisoners were kept in their cells and the guys outside had to listen to them being beaten. Fikile Bam, who later became Judge President of the Land Claims Court, was reduced to tears at the sounds. Govan Mbeki ended up collapsing, and had to be taken to hospital on the mainland. I hope I would never have gone along with that harsh treatment, I hope I would have rather have resigned from the service.

Breakfast was dished up in the courtyard. In winter, the food tables would be undercover. They all queued up with a plate and a mug. One bucket held fresh water and prisoners could take two mugs each. Mandela had taught himself to tolerate the brackish water that came out of the taps from the island's boreholes so he didn't have to take a turn at the bucket. Wherever possible, he was self-reliant, disciplined.

At 8.30 a.m., there would be duties like cleaning the courtyard, the passageways and the recreation hall. Before I came to the island, they would be sent out in working groups at this time, either marched to the quarries accompanied by the dog-handlers, or to the beach where they hauled kelp.

However, by the time I arrived on Robben Island, the hard labour had finished for the older prisoners after years of petitioning, mainly by Mandela. They now worked in the courtyard and indoors, sewing mailbags sent over by the Post Office, repairing prison clothes, and cleaning and polishing the floors.

In my time there, the authorities established a home-made washing machine, a big 44-gallon diesel drum. They put it on a stand at an angle, and somehow poured in the water and washing powder. It was made in the prison workshop. The prisoners didn't like it; it was hard work turning a steel handle for many minutes at a time. But then they came to realise it cleaned their bedding well, especially the blankets.

Mandela would also work in the little garden he had made. It was about fifteen metres long by two-and-a-half metres wide. There was topsoil to which he added pigeon and other bird droppings. Other prisoners gave him droppings from outside their cells. He taught me to look after and respect a living thing, a fruit or a flower, something alive. He would say that he just wanted to feel the soil in his hands. He managed to grow a peach tree, which bore fruit. He even planted carrot seeds and people would bring him tomato seeds they found in their food. He would sometimes manage to get some wild flowers to grow around the edges, but he was mainly interested in growing food.

He would spend half an hour there in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon. I am also a gardener and I watched how things were growing. I encouraged him. He knew the water from the island borehole was sour so he put buckets out to catch rainwater and others would bring him their water from clothes-washing.

For lunch, the prisoners got samp – mealie-meal (corn) – with a meat sauce on top, or something resembling meat. They would have a mug of tea with powdered milk and a little sugar. Again, the blacks would not be given bread. A list of the amounts of food and drink given to prisoners, divided according to their ethnic origin, was posted in the kitchen. Visitors to Robben Island today can still see the originals. At all times, the black prisoners were given less than the others. Their allowance for fish or meat four times a week was five ounces. The others were given six ounces.

Comrades would share with them. Indian prisoners like Mandela's great friend Ahmed Kathrada would divide up his own bread. It was humbling to see this, yet as warders we had no power to change the rules, so all we could do was observe how they dealt with it and be privately impressed.

On someone's birthday, they would all try to make something. One prisoner would provide chillies, and maybe tomatoes and onions from the kitchen. They would make a prison cake by collecting all the leftover bread and adding water to soften it and sugar to sweeten it, and porridge or condensed milk if they had managed to save some. When they got jam, they would spread it in the middle. The porridge became stiff and you could cut it like a cake. Sometimes they could persuade the prisoners working in the kitchen to give them an egg to put in the cake and then bake it in the oven for a short time.

They also made birthday cards. They would use paper from a notebook, and draw and colour it in using leftover paint. Everyone would sign it and write small messages and sing 'Happy Birthday'.

There were other small occasions when the rules were relaxed, for both warders and prisoners alike. Sometimes from the shore you could see huge flocks of gulls catching fish in the sea, with fishing dinghies circling around out there in the distance. Boats were not

allowed to come nearer than one nautical mile to Robben Island, but you could see there was plenty of fish close to the island on days like that.

So, on occasion, we warders would all decide that we fancied an afternoon fishing. The head of prison would call in the section committees representing the prisoners and tell them the warders would like to go fishing that day and it would mean locking the prisoners up at noon. We would give them their lunch and supper at the same time. They always agreed, knowing they could ask for something special in return.

For example, they might want to play a soccer tournament on a Saturday, with teams of prisoners from different sections playing against each other. We would agree on that in return for our day's fishing, and we would also bring back some of our fish to the kitchen for it to be cooked for them. We had a good relationship of give and take.

I came to realise how important these little glimpses of common humanity were to the prisoners. One day, long after I had left the prison service, I met the family and lawyers of a former prisoner on their way to the beach at Robben Island. Wilton Mkwayi, a prominent trade union leader who served many years with Mandela, died in 2004, some 15 years after his release, and had left a request with his family to take his ashes back there.

They told me how he had been the unofficial cook, arranging an extra drum of fresh water to be taken with the work group so he could rustle up wonderful fish stews they all enjoyed, warders and prisoners alike – small, pleasurable moments during a long period of pain. It was a measure of how much those moments of humanity had meant to him during the years of harshness and desperation that he had asked for his ashes to be scattered there.

I know many prisoners have come over on the ferry after their release – maybe to show their families the hardship they suffered. But I don't know any other prisoners who wanted it to be their last resting-place.

CHAPTER FOUR

Life was harsh on Robben Island but gradually I began to cope. In a way, the environment was like the farm I grew up on. Few roads, many trees and unpolluted air, far away from the city. In my free time, I went with my friends among the warders on fishing trips to our favourite spots on the island. If there was a north-west wind blowing, we would choose the stone quarry side; if it was a south-easter, we went to the harbour side.

We caught galjoen and white stompneus or hottentot fish, and sometimes yellow-mouth fish. We cooked them on the braai or, if I had weekend leave, I would take some back to my family.

There was seafood too, crayfish and abalone, both delicacies in their way. Once a month, we organised a dinner-dance in the recreational hall to raise money for the warders' club. It sounds strange now but smart people from big companies, banks or even hospital staff would pay for tickets and arrive in black tie and ball gowns. There would be a live band and a party atmosphere.

Dog-handlers and warders patrolled the whole area so that people could not wander around. But just a kilometre or so away were the prison cells holding what the government insisted were the country's most dangerous men.

If I worked a day shift, I would always find a group of my fellow warders to go jogging with. We would set up quite a pace covering the entire 11 kilometres of the island.

But despite these distractions it was still a prison, and I felt continually isolated. I was supposed to have home leave every other weekend but often that would be cancelled when we were put on standby because of the threat of uprisings.

From the start, I longed for leave, but the rules and regulations followed me all the way home, and time off was very spasmodic. It felt like we young warders were prisoners there, too, just not kept in cells.

After we'd locked up the prisoners at 4 p.m., I'd go to my bedroom and there would be nothing to do. We only got television years later and I wasn't married when I was first on the island so I was alone. We got bored. We tired of seeing each other's faces and some of the warders started drinking. It was not a healthy environment for any of us.

The prisoners, too, suffered from the boredom of the daily routine, though they did their best to vary it and to keep themselves active. Prisoners weren't allowed to sleep during the day; they were locked out of their cells. After lunch, they would play tennis in the courtyard, or squash. We would have proper matches with home-made certificates presented to the winners. They were like the birthday cards they made by hand – just a piece of notepaper or card coloured with whatever bit of leftover paint they could find, with the winner's name printed on it and an ornamental edge drawn around it.

They were all keen to keep fit and they would jog around the courtyard, all of them in or around their sixties, all believing they would get out one day and have another life and so they must stay fit for that.

Some of them were good guitar players. There was one of our political prisoners, James Mange, who played great jazz. He started teaching other prisoners and they sang some songs together in Xhosa. We had a warder called Burger who was a good guitarist too, so he joined in. Mandela would just watch, listening. It was relaxing soft music and actually a strange sight, when I look back, seeing this little makeshift band of musicians enjoying themselves in that grim place.

On rainy days, the prisoners would stay indoors in the recreation hall. There were card games, chess, poker, table-tennis and dominoes. They were not allowed to just sit around and talk. They had to keep themselves busy or one of us would want to know what was going on.

In the hall, there were boxes and boxes of old magazines like the Afrikaans version of *Farmers Weekly*, and *Time* magazine and *Reader's Digest*, censored of course to take out any political content. The prisoners had set up their own library in an empty double cell. They appointed themselves a librarian and there was a warder who would let them in two at a time. They had a card to record what books they were borrowing. A warder would sit there throughout to make sure there was no political plotting.

Books came from the provincial public library in Cape Town. Sometimes, they requested certain books, and these of course would always be checked first to ensure there was no political content or sex scenes. Everything was mercilessly censored.

Supper was about 4 p.m. It was porridge again, same as in the morning. Coloureds and Indians got two slices of bread with their porridge, along with soup for coloureds and Indians,

and a watery African drink for the blacks. It was hot water that was supposed to have powdered maize and yeast in it but was really just a mug of tasteless cloudy-looking water.

After supper, we started counting them in for lock-up time. The night shift started at 4 p.m. Prisoner totals had to tally and be handed in again.

Once a week, a government doctor came over from Cape Town. He would prescribe medication or refer a prisoner to the hospital section of Robben Island. We had a dental surgery in a clinic away from the prison, and a visiting dentist. Every fortnight, there was also a visiting psychiatrist.

By the late eighties, after I had left Robben Island, I heard that several newly arrived prisoners were getting very sick, and the doctor drew blood and discovered they were HIV positive. They were immediately separated from the others and transferred off the island.

Despite the regular visits from medical professionals, there were occasions when prisoners would die in our care. One of my more unpleasant tasks was to take the corpses of prisoners from the island by ferry boat to the government mortuary at Maitland, on the mainland. There I would fingerprint the prisoner and formally release him to his family.

Once, I found a family removing the dead man's prison uniform and dressing him instead in a fine suit. They put a hat and sunglasses on him and somehow got him into the back seat of their old car. They propped him up, did up the seatbelt, and drove off with him to the Eastern Cape for burial in his home village. It was a journey that would take them a whole day. I could not imagine how they managed that, the car already crammed full with family members.

Luckily, Mandela never seemed to get really sick at this time. He would perhaps have cough medicine occasionally but that was all. A medical officer visited the section every morning. He would hand out the tablets for that day, whatever had been prescribed by the doctor.

The prisoners had some limited opportunities to buy things for themselves, too. The prison tuck shop was inside the main building. Prisoners could only receive money from their families. They were never paid for the hard labour tasks like working in the quarry or sewing mailbags.

All the money that came in was registered under the prisoner's name. Once a month, they wrote a list of items they wanted from the tuck shop. Mandela could buy pens, writing pads, sugar, coffee, tinned food, toothpaste, some spices, and cigarettes or biscuits. He bought cigarettes to give to prisoners who had used up their quota and could not buy for themselves, and would swap them for toothpaste. His favourite biscuits were the popular South African Ouma rusks, to dip in tea or coffee. The cash limit for one month was just enough for small items.

He would also buy Blue Pantene hair oil to give his hair a slick look, and Vaseline for use as a body lotion, and for his hands and face. He was a handsome man who cared about his looks, particularly when he had a visitor. He would never go to the visitors' centre in a prison uniform that wasn't perfect.

On Fridays, there were films in the recreation hall. We covered the windows with blankets, standing on each other's shoulders to hook them up. There were no blinds.

We had a projector set up. Prisoners applied for movies through a shop in Cape Town, a precursor of today's video shops. They would send out a list of what they wanted to see, with the different sections taking turns to pay for the movies.

I remember B Section asked for *Roots*, which was a typical sort of choice for them. The Cape Town library also sent free movies, mostly short documentaries, on educational matters like nature, and medical matters and diseases. They were like Discovery Channel documentaries.

On Sundays, there would be church services from different denominations and Mandela always insisted everyone should attend. Sometimes, three different denominations would give services on one day and they would go to all of them. Mandela wanted everyone to respect the fact that a priest had made the effort, but also it was important for them to welcome anyone from the outside world. They enjoyed Holy Communion because it meant they got a sliver of bread and a sip of grape-juice.

Years later, Mandela told me there was a priest who always brought a newspaper in his bag when he came to the island. He would arrive before 9 a.m. and stay the whole day until 4 p.m. He would talk to the prisoners and leave his bag lying around.

During prayers and sermons, the warders would sometimes get bored and hot in the summer sun. That was when their attention might wander and a prisoner could sneak to the priest's bag and take the newspaper.

Once, a prisoner said he would like to take prayers, and told everyone to close their eyes while he spoke. That was another chance for one of them to get to the priest's bag for the paper.

Although breaches like these were fairly harmless, other prisoners made bolder plans. Attempts to escape were rare, but were taken very seriously when they occurred.

The only known and documented escape in the island's history was when the Khoi chieftain Autshumato, sent there in 1658 by Dutch settlers who accused him of stealing cattle and goods, took to a rowing-boat and made it back to the mainland. He had previously worked as a trade interpreter for the settlers and when he landed in Table Bay they gave him his old job back, presumably impressed by his achievement. That was a man you would surely want to meet.

In my time at Robben Island, there was only one unexplained escape and I like to think he made it, but that would make him unique. He was a 'trusty' – someone who was allowed to walk freely around the island. He was in for non-payment of maintenance to his ex-wife.

Two weeks before he was due out on parole, he stole a warder's paddle-ski. Despite the bad weather and rough seas, he disappeared into the raging waves, leaving his prison clothes behind on the rocks. The paddle-ski later washed up on shore.

He had been a life-saver at Cape Point so he was a good swimmer with good knowledge of rough sea conditions. I think and hope that he might have been rescued by a passing fishing trawler. Anyhow, he was never seen again. No warders were punished or demoted for his escape, because he was a 'trusty' and was therefore not being supervised.

Earlier, though, I had seen terrible scenes at Belville Prison, just outside Cape Town, when I was there on a visit. A working party of 12 prisoners were marching out towards their job on the land. One of them attacked a warder with a spade, and they all ran off.

A warder from the guards' observation post started shooting them down. He shot nine of them dead. The others lay flat and survived.

The warder was rewarded with a medal for bravery. I saw those nine bodies, and that one warder who had been up in his observation post within incredibly easy range being lauded as a hero.

On Robben Island, it was virtually impossible to escape. But warders in the Censor's Office, listening in to the cells in B Section reported one night that they heard locks being opened. They suspected a key lost years earlier might be being used to unlock cells.

Over the next few nights, they listened in to some talk about an escape plan. Extra bugging devices were put in the cells and for the next week one of the officers put himself on permanent night shift to monitor the situation. Dog-handlers were instructed to increase their patrols. Prisoners were of course aware of this development and could be heard discussing the extra patrols.

Then a group of warders was sent in with hammers to test all the walls to listen for anything suspicious. Nothing was found. Years later, I discovered that Eddie Daniels was behind that failed escape plan. He was a coloured guy who was a teachers' union leader serving 15 years for terrorist activities. He was released in 1979 and later admitted that he had intended to get Mandela out. He published a book, *There and Back*, in which he showed plans of the prison that he had drawn at the time, and explained his daring idea. Due to the international economic sanctions that many countries had imposed against apartheid, there had been no foreign container ships allowed to dock in Cape Town, so all fresh vegetables, fruit and other small cargoes were regularly flown by helicopter from Cape Town to the container ships out at sea.

No flights could go over Robben Island. But in bad weather the helicopters could fly over for safety reasons. Eddie planned that, on a Friday afternoon, when most prisoners were inside watching a film, and half of the warders were off-duty and on the mainland, Mandela would ask for permission to work in his garden.

Eddie would organise a helicopter carrying a basket as if to take supplies. It would change course suddenly to fly over the island then drop down into B Section and pick up Mandela. By the time prison authorities had scrambled, Mandela would be deposited safely at the American embassy in Cape Town.

It was a good plan on paper but, of course, it would have carried huge risks had it been attempted. In the end, Eddie had informed the ANC in exile in Lusaka, Zambia, of the plan, and they put a stop to the attempt, fearing that it would be too great a risk to Mandela's life.

There were always fears among the prison authorities that he could escape en route to hospital on the mainland. I accompanied him several times when he had annual medical check-ups, like all prisoners of his age. He had regular eye tests and visits to an ear, nose and throat specialist. No one was going to neglect Mandela's regular check-ups. Proapartheid supporters were saying openly that 'the only thing worse than a free Mandela would be a dead Mandela'. Better to take care of his health than have him die a martyr.

When the time came for the journey, he would be put in the back of a white prison van. I sat with him on a side bench, and I and other warders were locked in with him. In advance, all

the roads would be cleared of traffic and people, with police roadblocks around the building where the medical clinic was.

Once inside the building, I would go ahead of Mandela to clear the waiting-room area of books and newspapers, which might have his picture in them, and he would not be allowed to communicate with anybody or even to greet the receptionist. I would be with him inside the clinic while the doctor examined him. On these occasions, I would be armed with a 9mm handgun and other warders were outside carrying machine-guns.

One time, we took him to a clinic where the doctor said he must have chest X-rays immediately. He arranged for Mandela to go to a building opposite, across Adderley Street, the main shopping street in Cape Town. It was full of shoppers and there had been no time to put up roadblocks.

There were four of us, wearing our khaki uniforms, all armed. Mandela walked along next to me in leg-chains that ran from his ankles up the inside of his trousers. They were effective restraints against a prisoner ever trying to make a run for it. I locked the chains at his ankles and he had to hold them up himself at his waist or he wouldn't be able to walk at all. We made our way up the street and I saw a coloured guy rushing towards us. I recognised Dullah Omar, one of the lawyers who came regularly to Robben Island. He had his head down, carrying a briefcase, probably late for court. I pushed Mandela into the nearest shop until Omar had passed.

No one recognised him. Some street vendors handed us free bananas and apples for our prisoner. But nobody realised it was Mandela. He nodded at them and said thank you. It was touching to see these guys who had nothing themselves, reaching out to help a stranger.

Back on the island, of course, financial gifts were only allowed from family members. All money sent in by families was strictly processed on the island, even though it was often tiny amounts. An official note of each prisoner's money was kept with the rest of his belongings in a cloth bag stamped with his prison number and kept in a walk-in safe in the reception office. Mandela's prison number, now world-famous, was 46664. It meant that he was the 466th prisoner to be admitted to the prison in 1964. At the time I was with him on Robben Island, neither of us would have ever believed that one day thousands of T-shirts would be made bearing his number.

Money sent in by family members or their lawyers would be recorded, and kept in a government bank account, with a small cash flow available for prisoners' tuck-shop purchases, stamps for letters and other costs.

Mandela would have to pay to sign up for a correspondence course for his law degree. He took this very seriously. He would identify a study book he needed, then enquire about the price and write postal orders for the payment. It might take two months to arrive. When it did, the study officer would receive it, check if it was relevant or too political, then refer it to the Censor's Office.

When he was first imprisoned, Mandela would have to sit on the cement floor in his cell when he was studying, using a small bench as a table. By the late seventies, he was allowed to have a study table, so he could use the bench to sit on. He was allowed to buy a desk clock to time his studies in preparation for exams.

There were other ways for the prisoners to spend their money too. When the prisoners were allowed to watch a movie, as they were once a week, it had to be jointly paid for by the inmates.

The younger prisoners wanted action movies and the older guys like Mandela usually wanted something more serious, though he was also fond of the Rocky movies because he had been a keen boxer and he liked Sylvester Stallone's character. Sometimes, we would watch religious and musical movies and educational material sent by the South African government libraries.

The films, of course, had to be seen by the warders first. We had to make notes of any racial issues, or violence or politics, or love and sex scenes, or the film would not be cleared for the prisoners to watch. If a whole film was rejected, it would be sent back and their money wasted. I remember requests for Pink Floyd's *The Wall* didn't stand a chance.

If we found inappropriate scenes, we would physically cut the tape then roughly Sellotape the two ends together. The storyline would jump all over the place with unfinished sentences and dialogue that didn't make sense.

But there were no complaints. It was a period when the prisoners could be together, whispering between themselves without being overheard.

And it was often genuinely enjoyable. We would sit there, prisoners and warders together, laughing our heads off at a Laurel and Hardy movie, able to forget where we were for just an hour or so. It was a lifeline for all of us.

On other evenings after lock-up, I would play music for them if I was on night shift. Their

section committee would give a list of music they wanted to hear. Their families had sent in records to the prison, and they had a list of what had been sent in.

B Section would take turns to choose the music, as would the other sections. I was like a DJ. Mandela and B Section's favourite was always jazz by black musicians. I would play the music until 7 p.m., piped through the sound systems into speakers in the cells, followed by the censored news of the day for about 20 minutes. Then they might listen to a previously recorded programme, maybe a soccer or boxing match, or a debate programme – but never politics. They could press a button to interrupt, tell me I was playing the wrong records, or complain they were sick and needed medical attention. There were always complaints if I played Afrikaans music, my favourite. They considered that an insult.

Of course, this was also the period in which they might want to study. Mandela told me he became so used to the music in the background that when he wrote his exams he sometimes had to try to remember music he'd heard to find the answer.

By 9 p.m., everything was shut down, and, even though the lights stayed on in the cells all night, prisoners were not allowed to study after that. They could apply in writing for special permission to study till 11 p.m., but only if they were preparing for exams.

Given the system of wires going into their cells, they must have known that they were also being bugged throughout the day and night. In fact, the recording bugs were fed down into the light fittings in each cell from the ceiling. One day, I found a secret door into the roof space where they were connected. But Mandela and his comrades were mellow – they knew the rules, they knew how the system worked. They just worked around it.

In the late seventies, though, some new inmates joined the prison, and the atmosphere subtly changed. In 1976, South Africa's Soweto student uprising hit the headlines all over the world. Young, aggressive activists, some of them still teenagers, began to arrive on the island. It would take two or more years for their trials to come to court. They would have been on remand, and many of them tortured, before they arrived on Robben Island.

I was sent to the mainland to collect a group of about 30 guys. I had to handcuff them and put on leg-chains. They looked frightened and young. I put them in the hold of the ferry boat so they could not see out. Some of them were very sea-sick.

I talked with the men as we walked to the prison. One guy, Vusumzi Mgongo, could speak Afrikaans. He said to me: 'Where are you taking us? Are you taking us to our leaders?' I told him no, you are going to reception and then you'll be in observation for a month. After that, we'll get reports from security police and we'll give you work that suits your experience. Some of them had been cooks or builders, and we could find appropriate work for them. Security police would also interrogate them to find out who their leaders were, so that we could split them up. I did not tell him that.

They ended up in C Section, next to Mandela. They would whisper from cell to cell at night, trying to tell him about the Soweto uprising.

This blood-soaked period of shame in our country resulted in the death of more than 600 people, most of them youths who staged a peaceful mass protest against schools teaching them in the Afrikaans language. The world watched in horror as television footage showed running battles in the streets of Soweto where police brutally beat the protestors and shot many in the back. An emotive black-and-white photograph showed a youth carrying the dead body of his fellow student, 13-year-old Hector Pieterson, one of many innocent young victims. Mandela had first heard about the uprising a year or so after it had occurred from prisoner Eric Molobi, but now he was hearing about it for the first time from those who were there.

Men from both sections tried to put messages in the dirty dishes for the prisoners in the kitchen to smuggle through. They were desperate for real information, for numbers and names, and knowledge that the ANC had not been crushed.

Another tactic for passing messages was to slit a tennis ball with tiny cuts and insert notes with news that the ANC was still active, still strong in the country. The new inmates would give their names so that the organisation could identify them and their allegiances.

The new prisoners were hostile towards all the prison officers. They stabbed a warder with a knife, and they were charged and put into isolation. They were harder people than Mandela.

Mandela sent back messages saying they should not use violence. The warders were just doing their job. They didn't want attacks; it wouldn't help their situation. All energy must go into furthering the anti-apartheid cause.

But the tensions kept bubbling up. In 1981, when I had been on the island for three years, the whole prison, except for B Section, went on hunger strike. The prisoners were demanding better mattresses, longer hours out of their locked cells, more blankets and visits, and better food and more fresh water.

The prison authorities had promised to take up their demands, but after a week nothing had happened. So the prisoners handed in a letter saying they were going on hunger strike.

B Section knew nothing about this. After six weeks, Mandela got to hear about it. He asked for permission from the head of prison to meet a delegation from the committee members of each section. He wanted to persuade them to stop. Mandela felt strongly that hunger strikes could be counter-productive, although he declared that when he felt there was no other redress he would bow to the majority and not only join in but lead the protest himself.

On this occasion, he met with the disgruntled prisoners and they described their demands to him. Mandela told them: 'We are prisoners, we should look after our health and not put ourselves in extra danger. We don't want to die here for the sake of a few petty things.'

The prisoners listened to Mandela and some other leaders and stopped the hunger strike. They had made their point and after a while they got sponge mattresses and other conditions improved. Mandela was proving he was always the leader, always the diplomat.

Another time, there were complaints about some rotten fish. The head of prison offered to eat it in front of them and, although they still refused to eat it themselves, they calmed down and agreed to go into their cells without making trouble.

In truth, the prisoners had every right to feel angry about their conditions, although they had in fact improved in recent years. In the early seventies, before my time, there had been incidents where a prisoner was told to dig a hole to bury himself in, as a punishment for some wrong-doing. He was buried up to his neck, and when he pleaded for water the warders urinated on him. Later, by the time I was there, this sort of sadistic behaviour had been stamped out – but not out of kindness. The government just didn't want to encourage martyr status for the political prisoners. They had also clamped down on torture techniques, and the truth was that there was no new information to get out of Mandela and his comrades anyway. They had been on the island for years.

But there was torture of a more subtle kind – the censoring of letters and newspapers, and radio reports. The control of visits, the keeping away of their families. Stopping all contact with the outside world. Damping down the power of people like Mandela. Making him disappear from the public's mind.

I was to learn all about the censor methods when I was transferred to the Censor's Office.

CHAPTER FIVE

My own personal prison – the single warders' quarters – was 20 minutes' walk away from Mandela and his friends in B Section. In winter, I was hunched up against gale-force winds and slanting rain as I made my way down the rough track after work. In summer, I sweated in the searing heat.

The quarters were in a one-storey block, which was originally used as the female lepers' infirmary until 1931. As well as lepers, it also housed the mentally and chronically ill. Hardly changed since then, it was built of the same dark slate as the prison and was hellishly unwelcoming.

I remembered a family friend telling us how her aunt was sent to Robben Island with leprosy and was gone forever. There was no communication, no visits. In those days, a doctor seeing the mildest case of skin rash would diagnose leprosy and banish the patient to the island in fear of the disease spreading on the mainland.

The lepers' cemetery on Robben Island is a desolate place. I once searched through it looking for the grave of our friend's aunt. I couldn't find it. The names have nearly all disappeared through erosion.

The single warders were allocated one room between two of us, with an old cracked washbasin in one corner. We were provided with the same scratchy blankets as the prisoners had in their cells. Theirs were army-issue grey, ours were dark blue. The difference was that we could ask for more if we needed them.

The floors were covered with cheap plastic tiles glued on to cement, so it was always cold. We had a heater but sleep was difficult anyway because right outside was the island's power station where diesel engines pumped noisily day and night.

My room-mate was much older than me, an unsociable type who was interested only in his time off fishing. He kept his rod and bait-pail next to his bed, and there was always crayfish and abalone in our fridge. Consequently, our room always smelled of old fish. I never complained; I had to respect his seniority.

All of us got bored with the dismal pace of life on the island. Some, like me, were still teenagers who wanted to go to parties and see girlfriends. Yet there we were – not able to see any females at all except the married warders' wives, and not even able to read in our rooms because the light was so poor.

There was no television in our quarters either so we would go to the recreation hall after dinner, where we could all watch the news together. South Africa only got television in 1976 and it was state-controlled, so we could view a censored version of the news and very little else.

You could use a public phone box to call your family or girlfriends, but the phones were bugged. One day, a warder we disliked was promoted to sergeant and he called home boasting to his parents that soon he would be a warrant officer. We overheard it all, of course, and mimicked him to his face later, sneering gleefully at his embarrassment.

Inevitably, there were practical jokes. There was often a live crayfish or a seabird put into someone's room, and you would wake up in alarm to find a shellfish clattering around the tiled floor or a bird screeching and flapping in your face, trying to get out.

Like Mandela and his comrades, I teamed up with my fellow sufferers and we devised ways to get through the tedium. After work every evening, a group of us went jogging right round the island, all 11 kilometres. Others would play rugby. Then we all showered and went to the warders' mess for dinner, and on to the clubhouse for drinks. Liquor was very cheap, and there was nothing else to do, so many warders would spend all evening in there getting drunk.

With all news of the outside world censored, and our phone conversations monitored, we felt our lives were almost as restricted as the prisoners. But of course our suffering was nothing compared to theirs. We could leave the prison service, or catch the ferry over to the mainland on our days off. We had a freedom they might never experience again in their lives.

Soon after I started work on Robben Island, I was told I'd be filling in for someone on night shift in the Censor's Office. I had to start at 4 p.m. and wouldn't finish until 7 the next morning. We were on alert all night in case of emergencies, such as an attempted break-out or a medical crisis. We had a medically trained warder on call at all times. In addition, the dog-handlers patrolled through every section of the prison on a three-hourly basis and were constantly in touch with us through the internal phone system.

At night, there were also killer dogs running on chains all the time. They were in between

the double steel-mesh fences standing three metres apart that surrounded the entire prison. The dogs were mostly Rottweilers, really vicious. Dog-owners in Cape Town whose animals were out of control would send them to us. Then they were systematically provoked to make them even madder. They could not be handled; they had to be controlled at the end of long metal poles.

The Censor's Office was considered the heart of the prison, set right in the centre of the main building, on the second floor, with a view over the whole of B Section. But there was no heart in that place. Instead, it was this department that meted out some of the worst cruelty to prisoners, namely the holding back or destruction of their letters, their all-important link to loved ones, and the ruthless censoring of daily news to make them believe their stand against apartheid was for nothing, the sacrifice of their freedom pointless. Instead of the real news, all the prisoners would get to hear about was the boring, uncontroversial stuff such as the deaths of prominent people, government appointments or road traffic accidents, or examples of the government's military successfully taking out ANC strongholds. Any show of solidarity from the outside world would be hidden from them, or destroyed.

There were more personal cruelties, too. Mandela had had his 60th birthday the year before I came to the island. When I started work in the Censor's Office, I asked what was in the boxes and boxes piled up there, with still more arriving every week. I was told that tens of thousands of birthday cards had arrived for him, mostly from abroad. Anti-apartheid activists in England alone had co-ordinated the posting of 10,000 individual cards. Others came from the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, and there were many from America. Some universities, like Michigan State, had organised batches of birthday cards, all posted individually. The stamps were pretty and colourful so some of us warders cut them off and took them home.

Each card was removed from its envelope, read carefully and then neatly clipped back on to the outside of the envelope. They were sorted according to the country they came from.

Any letters or cards not given to prisoners for any reason were supposed to be put with their property and stored until their release. But it was too much trouble to keep Mandela's birthday cards. They were taken out and burned on the fire in our boiler-room. Years later, I wanted to tell him about them, as I felt bad for him. But he told me: 'Mr Brand, I already know all about that.' Some prisoners who had been at the dumping site on the island had found charred scraps and given them to him.

He had been given only six cards on his birthday – from Winnie, from their daughters Zindzi and Zenani, from Mandela's daughter Makaziwe from his first marriage, from his son Magkatho and from his lawyer.

I was considered efficient in the Censor's Office so I was asked to stay on there. The office was lined with shelves and filing cabinets holding many years' worth of papers and documents. There were no computers; everything was done by hand. On one wall there were post-box alcoves where all incoming post was stored until Saturday mornings, when it would be handed out. Everything was read and re-read and heavily censored.

Outgoing letters would be handed back to prisoners to rewrite if the contents had flouted the regulations. Everything had to be signed for. We kept a handwritten register of all letters they received, and all rejected letters would be stored alongside the rewritten version.

When letters arrived for the B Section guys through the post office on the mainland, they had already been examined by censors in the police Special Branch office at the embarkation point for Robben Island, and those of particular interest would have been sent on to the National Intelligence agents in their Cape Town office. They would send the letters on in a locked briefcase with a note on each one saying if the prisoner could receive them or not.

Any political content, or reference to fellow revolutionaries, or to the anti-apartheid struggle, would be completely struck out with black indelible ink.

Then we censored it again, checking for any mention of another prisoner or reference to the man's family on the outside. Whole passages would be cut out with a razor blade and the shredded remains, a pitiful thing, would be handed in its envelope to the prisoner at a Saturday-morning session in the courtyard.

It was awkward and strange to be reading a man's love letters to his wife, as I did with Mandela's letters to Winnie. I felt I was breaking into his privacy, especially because by this point I had met my future wife, Estelle, and I was busy sending love letters myself that were full of longing for my fiancée.

Of all his correspondence with Winnie, one letter stands out and is reprinted in Mandela's book *Conversations with Myself*. In it, he pours out his intense feelings for her at a time when she had been ill in bed and had not replied to recent letters from him. He wrote:

> The crop of miseries we have harvested from the heartbreaking frustrations of the last fifteen months are not likely to fade away easily from the mind. I feel as if I have been

soaked in gall, every part of me, my flesh, bloodstream, bone and soul, so bitter I am to be completely powerless to help you in the rough and fierce ordeals you are going through.

What a world of difference to your failing health and to your spirit, darling, to my own anxiety and the strain that I cannot shake off, if only we could meet, if I could be on your side and squeeze you, or if I could but catch a glimpse of your outline through the thick wire netting that would inevitably separate us.

Physical suffering is nothing compared to the trampling down of those tender bonds of affection that form the basis of the institution of marriage and the family, that unite man and wife. This is a frightful moment in our life … To a freedom fighter hope is what a lifebelt is to a swimmer – a guarantee that one will keep afloat and free from danger. I know, darling, that if riches were to be counted in terms of the tons of hope and sheer courage that nestle in your breast (this idea I got from you) you would certainly be a millionaire. Remember this always.

Mandela signs his letter: 'Tons and tons of love and a million kisses. Devotedly, Dalibunga [his initiation name]'.

In another, published in Fatima Meer's biography *Higher than Hope*, Mandela writes:

My dearest Winnie,

I have been fairly successful in putting on a mask behind which I have pined for the family, alone, never rushing for the post when it comes until somebody calls out my name. I also never linger after visits although sometimes the urge to do so becomes quite terrible. I am struggling to suppress my emotions as I write this letter.

I have received only one letter since you were detained, that one dated August 22. I do not know anything about family affairs, such as payment of rent, telephone bills, care of children and their expenses, whether you will get a job when released. As long as I don't hear from you I will remain worried and dry like a desert.

I recall the Karoo I crossed on several occasions. I saw the desert again in Botswana on my way to and from Africa – endless pits of sand and not a drop of water. I have not had a letter from you. I feel dry like a desert.

Letters from you and the family are like the arrival of summer rains and spring that liven my life and make it enjoyable.

Whenever I write to you I feel that inside physical warmth, that makes me forget all my problems. I become full of love.

Outgoing letters were not to be longer than 500 words. Mandela would often have letters returned because they were too long. He would also have letters to the Commissioner of Prisons, for example, handed back to him because they contained issues of race. This was a way of trying to limit his endless complaints and requests to the authorities.

Sometimes his love letters would be rejected by the security police on the grounds that they might be coded. He was baring his heart and soul to the wife he longed to see and hold, knowing he might never be with her again, and these letters were being discarded out of nothing but spite.

Worse, I once overheard a warder in B Section's courtyard saying to Mandela: 'There's no point in you waiting for letters from your wife. We all know she has a new boyfriend: she's sleeping with one of the Special Branch guys.'

Mandela, without a trace of anger, told him: 'Sir, I am inside here, powerless. She is a flesh-and-blood human being living in the outside world. I can't be jealous about what she is doing, or tell her what she can and cannot do.' He simply refused to show his inner anguish.

Of course, it was not just Mandela's letters that were censored – I had to look at all the correspondence to and from the other political prisoners too. One time, this caused a mystery when I noticed that a man who I knew to be illiterate had managed to put together a very articulate romantic letter to his girlfriend.

Other warders were reading identical passages from other prisoners, some of them quite sophisticated. We began to hold them back and compare them. Then we discovered an article in the *Reader's Digest*, one of the few magazines they were allowed to see, about how to write love letters. The prisoners had all been copying it.

Once, a letter to Mandela arrived from Winnie containing a photograph of their children. One child was showing a peace sign, holding his fingers in a V for Victory. We had to keep that photograph back and he was never allowed to see it while he was on the island. All rejected letters, cards or photographs were supposed to be put with his property and given to him on release. But he was selected for especially harsh treatment. There was correspondence he never saw.

If his quota was full, he would not be allowed to see any more letters. Once a year, he could apply in writing to see all the letters that had been held back. He could read them, in the Censor's Office, but then they were put back with his property.

Mandela learned he could spend one extra rand to register his outgoing letters and then check with the post office to see if they had been delivered. By doing this, he knew what was going on, and he was able to stay one step ahead, as he always wanted to.

Like the other prisoners, Mandela was only allowed to receive correspondence from immediate family members or his lawyers. Others were automatically considered a security risk. Prisoners were supposed to give contact details of all their family members, friends and associates, and that information was stored in our files. Ninety per cent of them only gave their immediate family members' details, not friends or comrades. They knew the security police would start harassing them if they reported their names.

However, since post would only be passed on to a prisoner if it came from a known source, that was a further restriction on their links to the outside world. If a prisoner had not registered his brother's name, for example, then if a letter came from him the prisoner would not receive it. It would be added to his property bundle and only given to him on release.

We had a few warders who could speak Xhosa, Sotho or Zulu, and would censor letters in those languages. They also censored visits. Mandela took all his visits in English because we didn't have many Xhosa speakers and, if there was nobody available, then that could have delayed or even cancelled visits, which he couldn't bear to contemplate.

All this was harsh, but a great improvement on the restrictions when Mandela had first come to the island. Then, he and his comrades were allowed to write and receive one letter every six months. By 1975, he was allowed three letters a month, so thirty-six a year in total. By the time I was working there, in the late seventies, the yearly quota remained the same, but there was a maximum of four letters per month. Sometimes he needed to write to his lawyer and that letter would have to be included in the quota.

In addition, Mandela was allowed to receive a total of 12 birthday or Christmas cards each year, of no more than 12 to 15 words each. Anything longer was classified as a letter. All correspondence would be stamped and signed by a warder like myself to show its status, approval or rejection.

On one occasion, Ahmed Kathrada, Mandela's great friend and fellow Rivonian, had a letter held back due to its political content. He knew it had arrived and applied in writing to see it. That was the system. However, a warder in the Censor's Office had decided to burn it. When Kathrada complained, again in writing, he was told it was lost. It was a long, slow frustrating process, and, at the end of it, nothing but denials.

Frequently, we realised that security branch officers were throwing away outgoing letters, as prisoners complained of no feedback or requests for visits from relatives they had invited. That was all part of the casual cruelty, encouraged by an obsessively paranoid government.

Even more important than letters from their loved ones were their visits.

In 1964, his first year on the island, Mandela had been allowed only one visit – from his beloved Winnie – and he could receive two letters. In 1965, he received two visits, in July and December. Gradually, the number of visits permitted improved slightly, year on year, and they continued to be his lifeline, at the core of his ability to survive and stay sane.

By the time I started work on Robben Island, he was allowed one thirty-minute visit every three months by one person alone. Later, that improved to one visit per month, and by the 1980s he was allowed more regular visits, two per month of forty minutes each by two people at a time. He and several of his comrades had earned privileges by their good behaviour, which meant no fights or attempts to smuggle material out, no trouble of any kind and a cell always clean and ready for inspections.

By the time I was guarding him, he had reached A Group, gaining top privileges such as the authorisation for more visits and more letters, and permission to buy more groceries at the tuck shop.

On a Friday or a Saturday, we would tell prisoners if they were going to get a visit. Mandela would prepare himself, and by 9 a.m. he would be shaved and neatly dressed, and impatiently waiting for the visitor's arrival.

We warders would joke about them having an outing that day. They were excited and happy. But sometimes the ferry wouldn't come because the sea was too rough. Visitors would be turned back home and forced to wait for the next calm day.

It was hard on Winnie because for each visit she had her ban lifted for only one day, and she would then have to reapply in writing for another date. If the sea stayed rough for two days and the ferry was cancelled, the visit would also be cancelled, and lost.

Mandela would therefore be anxious from dawn to see that the weather was clement. Only once he knew that the ferry was running and Winnie was on her way would he be calm.

Before a visit, I would escort him down the track to the visitors' centre and, if he saw a flower, a white Namaqualand daisy, he would pluck it carefully and later lay it on the shelf on his side of the viewing glass where Winnie could see it. He loved her deeply and romantically, and, even though we were two big men marching in uniform down a prison track together, with dog-handlers on either side of us, I never found it amusing or foolish to see him pick a tiny flower. It was a part of him, all man and all feeling.

Armed warders would be watching us from the observation posts as we walked along. Everyone was on high alert during visitors' days. Mandela would walk slightly ahead of me and we could talk without being overheard during that 100-metre stretch.

He would always carry a notebook and pencil with him. Every minute of a visit was vital to him and he wanted to note it all down and re-read it later. He would also take a notebook for Winnie so that she could write down instructions about contacting lawyers or their daughters' schools.

Just before the ferry arrived, I would lock Mandela in a cell. Then I would walk over to fetch all the visitors and walk them up to the visitors' centre. They would then be locked into the waiting room.

Often they were pale and sea-sick and needing a toilet. I felt so sorry for them and gave them a few extra minutes to recover in the waiting room but some of them would really struggle to get through the visit, especially knowing they had to face a rough ride back on the ferry again.

A female lawyer who came to visit Mandela one day refused to go back on the ferry because it had made her so ill and frightened on the way over. They had to send a military helicopter for her in the end, just to get her off the island.

There was always a huge swell in the channel between Robben Island and the mainland. These days, the ferry will be cancelled at the first sign of a choppy sea for the sake of the tourists. But back then it brought essentials like food and fresh water and, most importantly for the paranoid government, sheaves of documents tracking the prisoners' every thought and action.

Winnie sometimes looked uncomfortable after the crossing but she was tough, and she would not miss a minute of a visit for anything in the world.

I would bring Mandela into a booth, with empty booths on either side so that no prisoner could see another man's visitors. Then I would stand behind him throughout. He and Winnie would both put their hands on the soundproof glass, no bigger than a piece of A4 paper, then pick up the phone to talk.

I was on a phone linked to theirs, so there was no privacy for them at all. They weren't allowed to mention other prisoners or people on the outside unless it was close family. I would turn off the microphones immediately if I heard any transgressions and I would have to warn Mandela that the visit would be terminated.

Winnie would talk about money problems and would often say that she was worried about their daughters running out of control. She and Mandela were like any concerned parents. He was worried sick about the dangers of the outside world. Zenani was at boarding school in Swaziland, Makaziwe was in America, and Zindzi was in all sorts of danger living with her mother in Brandfort, because everyone knew she was the daughter of Mandela, the terrorist.

Just before I joined Robben Island, in 1977, Winnie had been banished to Brandfort, a remote Afrikaner-dominated town in the Free State, where she was given a house with no running water or electricity, or even floors and ceilings. Hardly anyone in the town spoke Xhosa, Winnie's mother tongue.

Winnie told Mandela she and Zindzi were constantly harassed by security police. Even visitors bringing them food or money were being arrested. She was unhappy and alone. She wanted Mandela to help her by talking to his lawyer. He felt helpless, trapped on Robben Island and unable to care for his family.

Every second of those visits was important and I found it hard to have to tell them there was only five minutes left. Sometimes Mandela would immediately ask for a further 30 minutes, knowing he could have no visit the next month.

Some warders, out of nothing but cruelty, advanced their watches to deliberately cut short visits. They would shout: 'Five minutes left!' and the devastated prisoner and his visitor would have no means of complaint.

Sometimes, Winnie would come with happy news for her husband, for example a new baby born into the family, but mostly their visits were serious and disturbing and Mandela would leave with a heavy heart. I found myself full of stress and sympathy on his behalf. This family of his was in chaos, all over the place, and he could do nothing.

On our walk back to B Section he would say it had been good to see Winnie. She wanted to cheer him up but somehow there were always more problems. However, he would always talk

about how he was going to deal with these problems; he never let them push him under. Back in B Section, he would go into the courtyard and immediately be surrounded by his friends and comrades and talk over every detail with them.

By 1980, prisoners like Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada and Walter Sisulu had enough good behaviour privileges to be graded as 'A' class prisoners, as has been previously mentioned. This also meant that they could now receive newspapers. Mandela ordered and paid for the Afrikaans papers *Die Burger* and *Rapport*. Sisulu would get the *Cape Times* and the *South African Sunday Times*.

Other prisoners were not allowed newspapers; they were not even allowed to touch them, let alone read them. So Mandela and the two others would sit in the courtyard reading out loud, very loud, so that everyone could hear.

The newspapers were heavily censored. Any reports of police raids would be cut out with scissors and sometimes the whole newspaper would be in shreds. There would be more advertisements than news stories. Then they would ask us what we had cut out and of course we couldn't say. Often it was me who had censored them. The head of the Censor's Office made the decisions, and I worked with the scissors.

Nothing about the ANC or fellow revolutionary groups was allowed through, and nothing about bomb blasts or mass actions by the people. We sometimes let an article go through to show the police were defeating the ANC effectively.

We didn't have to cut out any pictures or stories about Mandela. It was already prohibited by law for newspapers to publish anything like that. He was being deliberately erased from the public's mind and memory.

Sometimes, the head of the Censor's Office would leave something provocative in for them to read. For example, at one time a group of twenty-six political prisoners were released from Robben Island and twenty-one of them were killed in a police raid in Lesotho less than two weeks later. That news report was left in to demoralise them and make them believe the ANC had weakened.

All visits from lawyers were supposed to be confidential and there was a great show of respect for that by putting a room aside in the visitors' centre. A warder would be posted outside, out of hearing. But of course these rooms were all bugged and all conversations taped and sent off to the security police daily in the locked briefcases.

The prisoners all knew this and would find a way around it. Mandela would keep scraps of paper torn from a cement bag in his pocket, then start a sentence in conversation with his lawyer while just writing down crucial information, like the initials of someone he was referring to – for example, O.T. meant Oliver Tambo, the ANC leader – or a message he wanted passing on. He would slide the paper across to the lawyer to show him, then quickly put it in his mouth and swallow it before a suspicious warder rushed in to take it from him.

Over the years, lawyers could sometimes smuggle some food in as these were contact visits with no glass panels between them and the prisoner. Dullah Omar used to bring in samoosas made by his wife and was smart enough to offer them to the warders too. Ismail Ayob, another of Mandela's lawyers at the time, brought in fruit. Mandela told me excitedly how he had had his first banana for 15 years.

Mandela's legal consultations were mostly attempts to help Winnie or fellow comrades. She needed money and she needed help to survive her banning period. It was a difficult and dark time for the couple.

CHAPTER SIX

The Rivonians and their comrades had been sent to Robben Island to be crushed. They were to be physically and mentally broken as thoroughly as the limestone they were forced to hack in the quarry for 13 back-breaking years. The Africans like Mandela were literally semi-starved by being given meagre rations, less than other inmates, because they were regarded as the lowest creatures in the land. And all the prisoners were observed, monitored and bugged during every activity, no matter how personal, every conversation no matter how trivial.

Yet, when I arrived on the island and met the Rivonians, 14 years into their incarceration, I did not see broken men. Instead, I saw a group of close friends who supported each other through every hardship, every illness and every setback. They were bound together not just by their circumstances but by their beliefs. They were the strongest men I had ever met.

Yes, I and the other warders watched them naked in the showers and in the toilets. We would order them to get on their knees to clean and polish floors and passageways. We would even cut their letters and cards to shreds when we censored them and we would take part in the government's plan to make them literally disappear from the world. The relentlessly harsh way of life was intended to strip these men of their dignity and reduce them to little more than insect status. The intention was to see them crawl pitifully back and forth between their cells and the yard until they eventually sickened and died.

But what the government in all its paranoia had failed to realise was that the ANC leadership in prison – Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Raymond Mhlaba, Andrew Mlangeni, Govan Mbeki, Elias Motsoaledi and Ahmed Kathrada – was impossible to break. Mbeki was the intellectual of the political group, and was a committed Communist. He and Mandela clashed badly at this time over ideology, and at one point didn't speak for nearly two years. Despite that, by keeping them together, the authorities had inadvertently strengthened the bonds between them.

Their hopes and beliefs were unshakeable. Here they were, mostly men in their sixties, who never doubted for a second that their cause was right and that they would eventually see a day when good would triumph over evil, and that they would be an important part of it.

Mandela had been the undisputed leader from the very start. He was assertive without ever dominating or belittling the others. He had a natural gift for leadership, using it with charm and good humour so that warders like myself were drawn in without even realising it.

Of course, there were many warders who brutally maintained the superiority of their status over the Rivonians, and revelled in intentional sadism. They would cut short food rations, harass prisoners while they ate, tear up and throw away their letters and goad them at every opportunity. They would tell a prisoner his wife was being unfaithful or that his visitors had failed to turn up, when they had in fact been stranded on the mainland because the ferry failed to run.

In the limestone quarry, prisoners would be ordered to half-fill the wheelbarrows. The next day, they would be ordered to work faster and fill them three-quarters full, and on the following day ordered to work faster still. There was no earthly point in this; it was institutional bullying at its most ruthless.

Each prisoner carried an identity card with him at all times on pain of loss of privileges. On it was written his name and prison number, his place of birth, his crime, his sentence, his religion and his ethnic origin. It also contained his fingerprints. Mandela's religion was Methodist and he was labelled Bantu – the generic and derogatory term for black Africans within the apartheid system. I saw the insult 'kaffir' written on some prisoners' identity cards.

I had early on decided to go a different route to this. Having been brought up in a kind environment with no racial overtones, I had a natural respect for my elders. I also saw a rare warmth between these men and a total lack of bitterness at their hopeless situation. I saw no reason to make their lives more miserable.

The fellowship between them was almost enviable. The Rivonians had the respect of all other prisoners and I got to know them well. I like to think they feel the same way about me, having shown them what compassion I could get away with for all those years, while still locking them up in cells and dishing up the terrible prison food. Maybe they were sorry for me in my own 'imprisonment' on the island. They certainly had the capacity for that.

When the Nelson Mandela Foundation published its book *A Prisoner in the Garden* in 2005, I was incredibly proud to see a chapter about myself in which they described the relationship between Mandela, me and my family as 'one of extraordinary richness'.

In his own life story, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela wrote lengthily about Robben Island – the dark years. He stated that the most important person in any prisoner's life was not the Minister of Justice, not the Commissioner of Prisons, not even the head of prison, but the warder in one's section. The officers and higher authorities would work according to the rulebook because they rarely came into direct contact with the prisoners, whereas the warders would often show more humanity.

He wrote: 'If you are cold and want an extra blanket, you might petition the Minister of Justice, but you will get no response. If you go to the Commissioner of Prisons he will say, "Sorry, it is against regulations." The head of the prison will say, "If I give you an extra blanket I must give one to everyone."

'But if you approach the warder in your corridor and you are on good terms with him he will simply go to the stockroom and fetch a blanket.'

He said he always tried to be decent to the warders in B Section, as hostility was self-defeating. 'There was no point in having a permanent enemy among the warders,' he wrote. 'It was ANC policy to try to educate all people, even our enemies; we believed that all men, even prison service warders, were capable of change and we did our utmost to try to sway them… In general we treated the warders as they treated us. If a man was considerate we were considerate in return. Not all of our warders were ogres. We noticed right from the start that there were some among them who believed in fairness… Yet being friendly with warders was not an easy proposition for they generally found the idea of being courteous to a black man abhorrent.'

He wrote about one particular warder who guarded them at the quarry, forbidding them to talk to each other. Mandela described him as hostile and crude. But, as the Rivonians and other prisoners made attempts to befriend him, the warder became less wary and even began to ask questions about the ANC.

Like many of us, he would have been brainwashed by the government's propaganda during his training and would believe they were all terrorists and Communists who wanted to drive the white man into the sea. But, as the prisoners explained to him their non-racialism, their desire for equal rights and plans for the redistribution of wealth, he scratched his head and said: 'It makes more bloody sense than the Nats [the governing National Party].' They had made a friend, if not exactly a convert.

The ANC's leaders in prison were in fact great characters. Walter Sisulu, six years older than Mandela and also a Thembu, was undoubtedly his mentor. Sisulu had been a brilliant political networker, founding the ANC Youth League with Mandela and Oliver Tambo in 1944 and soon becoming its leading light.

He believed from the start in a more aggressive campaign against the prevailing government and was jailed seven times between 1953 and 1963. He was caught by police during the raid on Liliesleaf Farm in 1964 and served 27 years in prison.

I found him amiable and easy-going, the senior trusted comrade to whom Mandela would turn in times of crisis. Mandela has written of how, after he received news of his younger son Thembekile's death in a road accident, he lay on his mat on the floor of his cell and could not talk. Walter came in and was shown the telegram. He knelt at his bedside and held Mandela's hand. Mandela said there was nothing one man could say to another at such a time.

Years later, in Pollsmoor Prison, I was working with Mandela in his garden and he looked across to Sisulu digging in some plants. He said: 'You know, if it was not for that old man I wouldn't have joined up, and I wouldn't be in this prison now. It's all his fault.' They laughed and Sisulu carried on singing like he always did. He would be singing when washing his clothes and going about other prison tasks, and when he talked about one day being released he would say, 'I'll go singing.'

Sisulu became deputy president of the ANC in 1991. He died in 2003 and has a national botanic garden and a university named after him, among many other honours.

Mandela said in a eulogy that Sisulu's absence 'has carved a void. A part of me is gone'. He recalled how they had both decided to face the death sentence at the Rivonia trial, rather than to protest their innocence. 'I know he planned to meet the hangman with a song on his lips,' he said.

Raymond Mhlaba, another Rivonian, was a larger-than-life character. He was always friendly to me, with his loud speaking voice and his uncontrollable laughter, which rang through the whole of B Section and sometimes even annoyed others who were trying to study.

He was the noisiest guy in the prison. It was a great joy when he became the first Robben Island prisoner in South Africa to get permission to marry. By this time – 1986 – we were all in Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town. Mhlaba's common-law wife, Dideka, a nurse, could not receive her pension without a marriage certificate. After many years of written applications, Mhlaba was told the ceremony could go ahead.

I was on guard outside the Commander's office where Mandela and Sisulu were witnesses, wearing smart black suits hired by Mhlaba's lawyer. It was the first time I had seen them out of uniform. They looked rather handsome, with carnations in their buttonholes brought by the lawyer's wife. The bride wore a white dress and carried flowers, and there were snacks and sparkling grape-juice in an adjoining room after the short ceremony.

Mhlaba was a very nervous guy, and obviously extra nervous that day. He could never take exams, he was too jittery. Getting married was a big step for him. He was able to kiss and hug his wife that day for the first time for twenty-two years, but the honeymoon had to wait a further six.

I felt for him as I watched him say goodbye to his bride, and then I escorted them all back to the cells, taking the rest of the snacks for the other prisoners.

Rivonian Andrew Mlangeni liked to talk to me about fishing, a pleasure denied to him, although it was a major pastime for off-duty warders. He would ask about my catch and often I kept fish back for him when barbecuing with warder friends, sending it into his cell with that night's dog-handler.

He asked for cough medicine every day when supplies came round from the doctor. He used to joke that it was his alcohol; he was pretty well addicted to it.

I never forgot that Mlangeni was my first introduction to B Section. When I arrived, he greeted me in Afrikaans, my own language. I came to realise that because he was fluent it had been agreed among the prisoners that he should ask for the cell nearest to the warders' office so that he could overhear our conversations.

He had been brought up in Soweto in a poor family. He became a bus driver and joined strikes, joining the ANC Youth League at an early stage and volunteering for military training outside South Africa once the armed struggle started. It was Mlangeni who told the judge at the Rivonia trial that all the apartheid government had achieved was to put leaders in jail and break up families.

He was the champion table-tennis player in B Section, and he and I enjoyed many games. We remained friends long after Robben Island and up to this day.

Elias Motsoaledi was a born fighter; it seems inevitable that he would end up at the Rivonia trial. At 17, he was arrested for refusing to produce his pass book and sentenced to work on road-building in Pretoria. He was a working-class hero who led the fight for better wages and conditions for factory workers and helped to establish the South African Congress of Trade Unions.

Motsoaledi was a proud member of the South African Communist Party and had clashed many times in the past with ANC Youth League hotheads like Mandela and Sisulu. By the time they were on Robben Island, they realised they had a great deal in common, and worked together.

I remember him mostly for his fierce antipathy towards cigarette smokers. He would call for medical treatment if anyone lit up near him, so, of course, the others would joke that they were going to their cells for a smoke and he would immediately get sick and call for help.

But he was also kind and down-to-earth. He liked to help Mandela in his garden and it became a community activity, something they could do that actually showed results. He was a Sotho speaker and a family man who lived for his wife's visits and letters.

Motsoaledi died on the day of Mandela's inauguration as president on 9 May 1994. Mandela talked fondly of him during a speech at his funeral.

Govan Mbeki, although he came to be a giant politician – he played a major part in negotiations to reconcile black and white South Africans, and his son Thabo succeeded Mandela as president in 1999 – was the quiet man in B Section.

I remember him playing Monopoly endlessly in the recreation hall and wanting to make his own rules. He gave the impression of being very serious, although he had a quiet sense of humour underneath. Generally, he didn't speak to the warders very much, although he opened up to me a lot on the day I had to escort him to see Mandela in isolation at Pollsmoor years later.

But Ahmed Kathrada – Kathy as everyone calls him – was probably my closest friend and remains so until this day.

He was the only Indian on trial at Rivonia, and refused an offer to go free in exchange for giving evidence against the others. He had been an activist since the age of 12 when he joined the Young Communist League of South Africa, handing out leaflets and doing volunteer work.

He always spoke to me in Afrikaans, which I appreciated. He was a kind, gentle person, an intellectual with a huge appetite for studying. He gained his Bachelor's degrees in History, Criminology and Bibliography on Robben Island, as well as Honours in History and African Politics. He would have gone on to gain his Masters if the authorities had allowed it. Today he holds four honorary university doctorates.

Kathy was always very close to Mandela. He was elected to Parliament in South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and Mandela appointed him to the political advisory post of Parliamentary Counsellor.

He has found an extraordinary way of dealing with his memories of the Robben Island days. He was elected chairman of the Robben Island Council in 1994, in which post he remained until his term expired in 2006, and he still travels to the island regularly to bring visitors on private tours, often taking the ferry over and advising on the management of the island as an important cultural centre. Kathy was at President Obama's side when he visited B Section on Mandela's 95th birthday and stood for several minutes in Mandela's cell, looking silently through the bars. Kathy has witnessed many such emotional pilgrimages. He understands them but also strongly believes in the positive elements of his long imprisonment.

Of all my B Section prisoners, Kathy has maintained the most positive philosophy about his days on Robben Island. As he remarked in a speech in 1993:

> Someone has written about two prisoners looking out of their cell window – one saw bars while the other saw stars.
>
> The real picture of prison life is one of great warmth, fellowship, friendship, humour and laughter, of strong convictions, of a generosity of spirit, of companionship, solidarity and care.
>
> It is a picture of continuous learning, of getting to know and live with your fellow beings – but more importantly where one comes to know one's self, one's weakness, inadequacy and potential.
>
> By reducing prison life to cold impersonal statistics one is blotting out the deep multi-dimensional experience, feelings and interests of a vibrant community.
>
> We would want Robben Island not to be a monument to our hardship and suffering but a triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil.

Old friends like Kathy, Mandela, Mbeki and Sisulu shared many memories of life before Robben Island. I would overhear them reminiscing and smiling about some old times. Mandela himself has written of their gallows humour at one of the worst periods of their lives, while they were waiting to be sentenced by the Rivonia trial judge.

In *Long Walk to Freedom* he recalls how he, Kathy and Mbeki were being guarded by a bad-tempered red-faced police officer called Lieutenant Swanepoel. One day, while Swanepoel watched them from the door of the holding cell, Mbeki wrote a note in a secretive way. He handed the note to Mandela who read it, then, nodding seriously, passed it to Kathy.

As Kathy took out matches to burn the note, Swanepoel burst in and grabbed the piece of paper from his hand. He left the room to read his prize.

A few moments later, he snarled at them: 'I'll get you for this!'

Mbeki had written in capital letters: 'ISN'T SWANEPOEL A FINE-LOOKING CHAP?'

Aside from the Rivonians, the leaders, there were other unforgettable prisoners. Japhta Masemola was the longest-serving political prisoner on the island, locked up there for 28 years. He was one of the key members of the military wing of the PAC, the Pan-Africanist Congress, a break-away organisation from the ANC.

He was a man who could fix anything and everything. He could make or build things out of cardboard, pieces of driftwood, paper torn from cement bags, anything. He made furniture, bookshelves, even suitcases, for his friends. He mended other prisoners' clocks so they could time their studies in preparation for exams. He even made a sombrero hat with a wide rim for Mandela to protect him from the sun. It was made out of cardboard, coloured in with white paint. Mandela wouldn't go anywhere without it – he wore it in the limestone quarry and when he was gardening. It was among a handful of items that left prison with him when he was released years later.

Once, Masemola made a special trap to catch mice. It was so effective that he actually wanted to patent it. But someone stole the design. He went on hunger strike to protest, certain that one of the warders had taken it, but it never reappeared.

When Mandela was in Pollsmoor, he liked to take his study books and sit outside alone on the stone ledge. In cold weather, he would wrap a blanket around himself, and he asked me one day if he could have one of Masemola's famous pins to secure it. I got two blanket pins from Masemola and Mandela used it to keep his blankets together around his shoulders. I found these pins in his cell after his release and took them home where my wife used them for our new baby.

But Masemola wasn't an easy prisoner. He was difficult and short-tempered. He tried to break the speaker in his cell one day when he didn't like the music. He was so argumentative he would get into a physical fight with his own comrades.

He had been orphaned at an early age and brought up by his sister. He did his teacher's

training and radicalised some of his pupils. As a result, some of them were later incarcerated with him on Robben Island.

Two days before Masemola was released from prison, in October 1989, Mandela asked to see him. Masemola was flown from Johannesburg's Leeukop Prison to Victor Verster Prison where Mandela was by then living alone. Nothing has ever been disclosed about their conversation at that meeting.

On release, Masemola plunged himself immediately into active politics again, and was rapturously received by supporters who filled a football stadium to listen to him. The apartheid police continued to follow him and monitor him.

On 17 April 1990, when he was travelling without a bodyguard, a truck collided with his car and killed him. The truck disappeared from the scene and has never been traced. The PAC introduced its annual Heroes' Day to honour and remember 'our great son of Africa'.

There were other notable PAC members imprisoned in B Section, including their president, Zephania Mothopeng. He was a sad sight to see in prison – an old, overweight man with health problems that caused him to walk slowly and with difficulty. I used to escort him to visits and he stopped constantly, racked with chest pains.

He was a popular man, whose wisdom Mandela seemed to respect. They agreed that it was easier to negotiate and debate with each other as members of different organisations in prison, in contrast to their clashes in the outside world.

He had been president of the Transvaal Teachers' Association, and was first imprisoned in 1960 for campaigning against the pass laws. He served three prison sentences for his activism and was released in 1989, before dying a year later.

Another PAC supporter, Nontente Kamteni was a special guy. He was just 22 when he was sent to the island for 20 years for sabotage. He had been shot in the hand by police when he tried to stop them arresting people in Queenstown, Cape Town, during a riot.

Kamteni was irrepressible. He was our tea-boy, all eyes and ears and friendly to everyone, staying in the communal cells and earning himself easy access to the reception office and the study office, bringing tea to the warders. He totally endeared himself and was able to knock on doors and just walk in. He was trusted with the warders' money to buy tea, coffee and biscuits, and was meticulously careful with it.

Of course, we all suspected he was collecting information for his comrades in B Section but he was so personable that we all liked him. If he showed reluctance when I wanted some tea, I would offer to show him his letters early, on a Wednesday instead of a Saturday, as long as he just read them quickly in the office and left them there.

Once a year, we had a barbecue for all the warders. Kamteni was the only prisoner we invited. We shared the food with him and almost forgot he wasn't one of us. He would sidle up to us warders and chat in our language, even calling fellow prisoners kaffirs and making a show that he was against them. I certainly didn't fall for that, I don't know about the others. Nevertheless, we liked him a lot. He was always cheerful and smiling, and after all he was just a young guy locked up on the island for the best years of his life.

Ben Ramotse was a tragic case in the end. He had been an ANC activist who went on a sabotage operation on the very day that the armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe, was launched. He was with a comrade when the bomb they were carrying, intended to blow up the Bantu administration office in Soweto, detonated prematurely. His comrade was killed and Ramotse was injured.

Ramotse was smuggled out of the country for military training but was captured and sentenced to 15 years on Robben Island. He was entrusted as a cleaner in B Section and because he was so easy-going he was put in with the Swapo (South West Africa People's Organisation) guys from Namibia in another section, the only Xhosa to be accepted there.

Ramotse was released in 1985, but, as a former political prisoner and convicted terrorist, he couldn't find work anywhere. He wrote to Mandela asking if the ANC could give him funds to buy a taxi. Mandela sent messages out to Winnie and his lawyers, but the funds never came through.

A year after his release, Ramotse's wife wrote to Mandela to say that he had been desperate, unable to support his family, and had hanged himself. She found him in the garage at their home.

She was bitter about it, and of course I read the letter before it reached Mandela and I was also shocked and upset. When I gave the letter to Mandela, he went very quiet. He had tried his best to help, but things weren't always possible.

There were tragedies, crises and unwanted news of all kinds that arrived in the prisoners' letters. It was hard to pass them on when you knew the men were already struggling just to get through their day.

One man who never struggled, who refused to struggle, was the incredible Herman Adimba

Toivo Ja Toivo. He was the leader of Swapo, fighting for independence for Namibia.

Ja Toivo had been sentenced to 20 years on Robben Island but believed he was being held illegally in a foreign country. Swapo refused to accept that Namibia was part of South Africa. As a result, he would take nothing from the government. He ate the food, only in order to avoid starvation and death. But otherwise he refused to receive or send any letters, accept visits or study. He had no privileges the whole time he was on the island, and remained in D Group while Mandela and others attained A Group status, so they could study and have more letters and visits, and spend more money at the prison tuck shop. He was the strongest – you could say the most stubborn – man you could ever meet.

During the incident when the warders hosed the prisoners down outside, and beat them in their cells, several prisoners were badly beaten. Ja Toivo was the only prisoner who hit back, knocking a warder to the floor with one blow. He was beaten in return, and was forced to clean up his own blood-spattered cell before being put in isolation as a punishment with no food or exercise. Kathrada has since described that day as 'the worst day in my memory.'

He was trained in guerrilla warfare and would march military-style up and down the courtyard for exercise, clicking his heels as he executed a turn. He would do this for an hour, then stand to attention. His background was in the railway police and he believed in total discipline, but he would not accept it from the South African authorities. He mostly refused to talk to the warders and it was not until years after his release that I realised he was fluent in Afrikaans.

While he was on the island, his 90-year-old mother, who was blind, came over on the ferry. She had insisted on a visit, and he had refused to accept it; he loved his mother but he would not play by the prison rules.

The head of prison was worried that this old lady would return to the mainland and tell the media that she had been cruelly prevented from seeing her son. So he had her brought into his office and seated her in a chair behind the door. I was summoned and told to bring Ja Toivo to the head of prison's office.

I escorted him there and marched him through the door where his mother was half-hidden. The door closed behind him and the head of prison asked him: 'Why don't you want to see your own mother? She is here for you.'

Ja Toivo looked around and saw her. She was in the traditional dress of the Ovambo tribe, their people. He went over to her and knelt down and took her hand. He kissed her and they talked in their language. It was his first and only visitor on Robben Island.

They should have only spent 30 minutes together but the head of prison relented and gave them an hour. The room wasn't bugged, and in any case we didn't know their language.

For me, this was a painful, heartbreaking experience. But when I escorted Ja Toivo back to his cell he was excited, animated, for the first time. He even thanked me.

Yet his stubbornness continued. He was signed off for release in 1984, four years early. By then, he had been transferred to his native Namibia, but he refused to leave the prison. He didn't want any favours from anyone in authority. They had to march him forcibly outside the prison gates and dump him in the road. His Swapo supporters came and picked him up.

When his country won independence in March 1990, he became Minister of Mines and Energy and later, ironically, Minister of Prisons. He was unforgettable, a legend.

In 1998, I was at the ferry embarkation office in Cape Town and I spotted him with Kathrada. Kathy asked him: 'Do you remember this man?' and I got a military handshake and a huge hug that lifted me off the ground.

In fact, Ja Toivo was on his way back to Robben Island to show his wife and family where he had been imprisoned. He had arranged a special visit and wanted them to see his cell in B Section and the limestone quarry where he had worked. It was upsetting for him but he returned several times, in an attempt to give himself some sort of closure, I imagine. I told him that I still worked there, in the gift shop of the visitors' centre that opened there after it closed as a prison in 1997. That place was upsetting for all of us, but also finally a vindication of everything they had done and been through. Ja Toivo was the living proof that the attempts to break him and his comrades had failed. Here he was, a huge exuberant character now feted in his own country.

Long afterwards, I was on holiday in Namibia and I'd brought some books from the visitors' centre at Robben Island that one of his comrades wanted. It was Helao Shityuwete's autobiography, *Never Follow the Wolf*, and he wanted 100 copies that I had in the museum bookshop. Shityuwete had arranged a celebration dinner with all the Swapo veterans of Robben Island, in a restaurant in Windhoek. There were five former prisoners of mine, all greeting me and my wife. Happy to see us, overjoyed and making jokes. I found no bitterness or sadness about them; it was extraordinary.

And Ja Toivo was still in charge. Handed the menu by a waiter, he bellowed: 'I don't want

that, I just want meat, bring us all meat!’

He asked me about Mandela and the others. They had been close, finding a way through the layers of political differences between their organisations.

Later, I was driving along a gravel road in Namibia and the police pulled me over for not wearing a seatbelt. The traffic cop was getting difficult and hostile towards me so I called Ja Toivo. He had a brief chat with the cop and then it was all smiles and we were on our way.

We’ve seen each other since, and it’s always a great pleasure. What a man, what unbelievable times we shared. Definitely not always happy times, but real and lasting friendships came out of it.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Everyone who ever lived on Robben Island – lepers, slaves, prisoners and warders – longed to leave. It was tough and isolated on the island and there was no vestige of family life or comfort. Warders like me had to sign on for a minimum of two years there, but every one of us applied for a transfer as soon as our time was up.

I had applied in 1981 and it took a year before my transfer came through. That suited me in many ways as I was planning to get married on 13 March 1982 in Cape Town.

My fiancée Estelle and I had brought our wedding date forward because both her parents had died and she and her brother could not take over the tenancy of the family house in Epping, as she was only 20 and her brother was even younger. The answer was for me to live with them as head of the household.

We had booked the church ceremony and reception and invited the guests, but at the last minute the priest said he couldn't marry a minor without her legal guardian's permission.

For us this was a crisis. Estelle had no legal guardian. We quickly applied to the nearest court, at Goodwood, for special permission to marry and the judge there was totally sympathetic but said it could take weeks to resolve.

He puzzled over the matter for a while with us then picked up the red phone on the judge's bench and called Pretoria. He took some advice from the Ministry of Justice, then he told us our only way forward was if he formally adopted Estelle. Astonishing as that sounded from a man who had only just met us, he said he could do it that day. He found the forms and the whole thing took just two hours.

By 11 a.m. that morning, we walked out of the court with a signed consent form, both of us still stunned by the judge's kindness and our good fortune. We never forgot him and we were sad one day, years later, to read in the newspapers that he had died.

The wedding went ahead as planned and we had a lovely reception with friends and family. We drove off to a sunshine honeymoon in the coastal resort of Mossel Bay. I was 23 and now had a wife and her younger brother to live with and take care of.

While I'd been on leave, I'd been officially informed of my transfer from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison on the mainland in Tokai, a leafy, mainly white residential area of Cape Town. So, after the whirl of chaos around the wedding and setting up a new home as a married man, I found myself on the familiar ferry boat on my way to Robben Island to collect my belongings.

I was officially off-duty so I had no way to say goodbye to the men in B Section. I packed up my things, my uniform and my fishing rods, in the single warders' quarters, and happily turned my back for the last time on the pervasive fishy smell of my shared room.

I looked back at the bleak prison building as we drove down the rough track to the harbour. As I sat outside waiting for the ferry for the last time, I had the strangest mix of feelings. I was glad to be starting a new life but I realised I was heart-sore to leave behind a group of men who had been almost like family to me. And I hadn't even had a chance to say goodbye.

There were some warders arriving with the ferry so I asked them to be sure to give my greetings to Mandela and the old guys in B Section. I didn't really have the words to send a proper message. What was there to say? That I'm so happy to be leaving this godforsaken place but I'm going to miss you? They wouldn't even pass on a sentimental message like that. So we set off across the water and I got hold of myself and put my mind to what lay ahead – my first night shift at Pollsmoor.

Estelle and I were living in the Cape Town suburb of Goodwood so I was able to easily drive to the prison. It wasn't a prospect I was looking forward to. I knew its reputation. It housed the toughest gangsters in South Africa. The three main prison gangs – comprising about 600 men – were segregated on one floor to stop them recruiting new arrivals. These men were known as the numbers guys – the notorious 26s, the 27s and the 28s, still a huge problem to this day.

They were mostly mixed-race guys from deeply deprived areas around Mitchells Plain where drug-taking, violent crime and unemployment is still rife. Members would have their whole bodies, including their faces, tattooed to show their ranking in the gangs so that even outside prison their status was clear.

Pollsmoor housed more than 3,000 prisoners, a mix of those awaiting trial, hardened re-offenders and murderers serving life, including some in solitary confinement. It all took me back to my nightmare days of training at Kroonstad. The difference I saw on my arrival at Pollsmoor was that there were now coloured warders working with us whites. There was even

a black African warder, although we were all separated for the daily inspection parades.

I dreaded the gangs and felt apprehensive about which section I would be posted to. I hadn't been told which men I'd be looking after. But on the first night that I reported for duty I was taken by surprise.

I was told to draw a firearm because I was going out with a sergeant and ten others on a special mission. We were put in the back of two trucks, with a car escort, and told we'd be collecting prisoners. We had no idea where we were going.

As dusk fell, we drove through the suburbs and on to the motorway. I realised we were going towards Cape Town's waterfront, the shipyard where ferries came in from Robben Island.

Today this is a tourists' mecca, known as the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, a glamorous mix of shopping malls, cinemas, restaurants and wine bars. Back then, it was a cheerless place with ships in dry dock for repairs and the busy comings and goings of a working port.

Clearly, we were picking up prisoners being brought over under cover of darkness. As some of the warders stood in a cordon, on guard in every direction, I was told to help unload stuff from the ferry.

And there they were – Mandela, Mlangeni, Sisulu and Mhlaba – all walking towards me from the shadows, looking worried and mistrustful. They stared at me as they passed and we said nothing.

They were loaded into a truck, while I rode in the vehicle behind them. It took 40 minutes to get back to Pollsmoor. My thoughts were spinning.

As the men were unloaded, they were surrounded by warders and I noticed they weren't wearing handcuffs or legchains. There were so many security measures surrounding them, it just wasn't necessary. It was completely dark by now so the spotlights were on, and dog-handlers stood at the ready. All the warders chosen for this special delivery to Pollsmoor were white. The authorities didn't want coloureds or Africans to see these big guys from the ANC.

Each of them was carrying a cardboard box with his belongings. Now they half-greeted me, just a slight nod of the head and an anxious smile of trepidation.

We took them up to the top floor, the rooftop of the prison. They were marched into one big cell with a side door. There was a huge glass window with bars built into it. They couldn't see out but warders patrolling the corridors could see in.

Inside, there were four beds made up with pillows, sheets and blankets. For the first time for nearly 20 years these men would not be sleeping on a cold concrete floor. In addition, there was no toilet bucket, and instead there was a separate shower and a flushing toilet.

We showed them in and then I went outside, closing the grille. As I went, I said quietly to Mlangeni: 'I've got married now and I've been transferred here. Like you, this is my first night. If you need anything you can knock on the window and I'll be there.'

My shift lasted until midnight, then a second shift took over, led by another warder who knew them. We worked out that this was a secret operation. The terrorists from Robben Island, the lifers, were not to be seen by any other prisoners. There would be no visitors, not even warders from other sections. They were to be kept totally isolated.

A solid steel door and a further grille opened on to the rooftop. That was to be their exercise yard. It was about five metres wide with solid surrounding walls and a view of tree-clad mountains beyond. You could see the famous Elephant's Eye cave, a favourite hiking spot in the Table Mountain range.

As soon as Mandela had a chance, he asked me: 'Why have we been brought here? What is this about?'

I told him that we hadn't been informed, but that we warders had discussed it and thought we had worked it out: 'I think you're going home soon, you are closer to that now,' I said. That is what I truly believed, but I was quite wrong.

Within weeks, we began to realise that the imprisoned leaders of the ANC had been influencing and recruiting the younger guys on Robben Island and the authorities wanted them to completely disappear. They were to be kept in isolation, never seen or heard by others. Their whole world from now on would be on the rooftop of Pollsmoor Prison.

Six months later, Kathrada arrived too. He had taken over Mandela's role as leader back on B Section and had begun encouraging other prisoners to study and to learn about the ANC. He came to join Mandela and the others in their strange new world. This was where the government planned to break the ANC spirit once and for all.

There was a new guy too. Patrick Maqubela, a lawyer in his thirties, turned up one day out of the blue. They hadn't wanted him to serve his sentence in Robben Island because he would be able to advise others about their rights and cause trouble.

Now there were five beds in the communal cell and I could tell the old guys didn't like it. They were suspicious of Maqubela; they'd never heard of him. We were listening in to

Mandela's legal consultations once again and we heard him asking about Maqubela's background. They heard he'd been practising law in Pietermaritzburg and was an activist serving 20 years for terrorism.

Walter Sisulu, in his wisdom, took the guy under his wing, ordering cigarettes for him because he was a lower-grade prisoner and couldn't get them for himself, befriending him and probing for information.

Maqubela registered for studies, wanting to do a higher degree in law. He registered for five subjects and Mandela was soon telling me: 'This young chap, he never studies properly, he'll never get enough work done to pass five subjects. He's spending all his time playing table-tennis.'

But Maqubela passed his exams, and by now he was accepted as one of them. He was bright and Mandela told me he felt sorry that this young man had to put up with living with them, old and grey as they were.

Maqubela himself found it hard to adjust to the prospect of many years inside. He told me: 'Mr Brand, 20 years is too long, I'll never survive it.' He was often down and depressed.

But I told him: 'No, 20 years will fly by if you copy Mandela's ways and fill your day with activity. He and his comrades have already nearly done 20 years and look at them.'

Patrick Maqubela later became a judge in the Western Cape High Court. Sadly he was murdered by his wife in early 2013.

By now, the days really were filled with activity. Once we were inside the section, no one could see us, not even the prison officers. The main steel door could only be opened from the inside so no one could arrive and take us by surprise.

We had table-tennis equipment, and an area marked out as a tennis court, an exercise bike, weights and sports clothing, all donated by the International Red Cross. They also sent an entire set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a brilliant resource for prisoners doing studies. Today I have installed the encyclopaedias at the Robben Island Museum.

I began to actually look forward to my shift. It was hot up on the roof in summer and we were all flying around playing competitive table-tennis and tennis.

I would take off my prison uniform jacket and play table-tennis stripped to the waist. The prisoners wore white singlets. The keys to the section and the cell would be left somewhere nearby, as no one was going to escape. That would have meant running down several flights of stairs into the arms of guards with dogs and handguns. Besides, life was OK up there in the rooftop world I was sharing with a bunch of the country's most notorious terrorists.

Andrew Mlangeni was the king of the table-tennis tournaments but sometimes I could beat him. He liked to give the warders a thrashing but it was all done with good humour. Mlangeni liked to win; he used to goad us and call us beginners.

He and the others became brilliant at spinning the ball. You would watch like a hawk as it came flying towards you then took off in a completely unexpected direction. Mandela was also very good – I liked to partner him when we played doubles. They used to want the pairs to be one prisoner, one warder. We all accommodated each other, and we had a lot of fun.

The tennis pitch itself was narrow, and the floor was made of concrete slabs. The prisoners had applied in writing for court markings and some of the criminal prisoners had been sent up to paint the white lines.

The Red Cross obliged again with tennis racquets, poles and a net. Mandela was an excellent player. Tall, slim and fit, he had long arms and would stand there, relaxed, at his end of the court just blocking the balls I served him. I would be haring around at the other end and he would just stand there, leaning over a little to just bat back the balls. It was maddening really, but great exercise.

If an officer arrived on the outside and had to be allowed in, there was a ready-made excuse for my sweaty appearance. I would just have time to put my jacket back on, do up the required three buttons and get my cap on my head before unlocking the steel door. The sun beat mercilessly down on the white-painted walls and soon the officer would be sweating too.

On the day Mandela finally left Pollsmoor, he didn't want to leave the tennis racquets and the exercise bike behind. He knew they wouldn't go to other prisoners; the authorities would snaffle them up on sight. So he gave them to me and I still have them at home. Extraordinary mementoes of extraordinary times.

But elsewhere in Pollsmoor some horrendously violent incidents were taking place, and occasionally they spilled into our rarefied world. I was standing with Mandela on the rooftop one day when there was a hell of a noise starting up nearby – blood-curdling screams and dogs barking. We could see something like 30 or more prisoners climbing up the grille towards the roof.

Mandela was very alarmed. 'Mr Brand, what's happening here? What's wrong with these men?'

I told him we should leave, and I quickly got him back inside the cell with the others and then reported to the head of prison that the ANC prisoners had witnessed an uprising. The next day, new solid steel doors were erected to block out all views from our section.

There were often small uprisings like these in the main section of the prison, and violence was commonplace. Occasionally, despite the warders' best efforts, one prisoner would be killed by another and in response there would be a 'carry-on': an intervention by armed warders when a murder had taken place among the gangs and no one would own up to it. The corpse would be removed from the cell and twice as many warders as prisoners would crowd in there with dogs and batons. They were solid rubber batons called tonfas. Warders would aim at the prisoners' heads and bodies, trying to break bones.

It was the prison's brutal way of getting real information. The carry-on would be accompanied by much shouting and noise. I hated it but I was familiar with this method of enforcing confession. The idea was to beat the truth out of all of them until the murderer was revealed. Otherwise, the whole cell-full would go to court and probably get life sentences. A typical method of gang murder, which I once witnessed myself, was when one of the new recruits was ordered to kill and mutilate a chosen victim, slicing his chest open with a knife and removing his heart, so that he could eat it in front of the gang.

Another time at Pollsmoor, when I was helping with duties in the section where hardened criminals were kept, I had opened a cell door and found a severed head on the toilet bucket. Seven prisoners had carried out the murder, cutting up the body and flushing the mutilated parts away.

By contrast, my prisoners – the men considered the most dangerous in the world – were reading encyclopaedias, studying for their exams and knocking a table-tennis ball about in the sunshine.

After several months, the political prisoners were told they were being transferred to the other side of the roof because the authorities needed more space for punishment cells for prisoners to be put in solitary confinement.

By now attached to their space and their bearable life, the men were anxious when they heard about this. But they were all put in another big communal cell and the daily routine continued.

Mandela was still studying and taking exams but he was finding it painful to write. He was developing arthritis in his hands and they would become numb, especially during a three-hour exam. The doctor gave him medication and a prescription he could send to UNISA requesting more time for exams. Eventually, the message came back that he was allowed an extra 20 minutes for each hour. I was the invigilator so I made sure Mandela could stay when others had finished. Exam days could be complicated, with coloured prisoners having to write their exams separately from blacks. Trevor Manuel, a coloured man who was a celebrity prisoner as he was a leading member of the United Democratic Front, in Pollsmoor without charge or trial, was also keen to study. I would invigilate his exams in the mornings and Mandela's in the afternoons.

On Sundays, we had visits from a priest. Because Mandela was a Methodist, he had a church ceremony of his own in the visiting room. The Reverend Moore, from Stellenbosch, was a kind man who turned up in a suit to avoid any fuss. He would pick up the Bible and read a passage while they both sat close to each other. He chose special passages that referred to good men who were punished for their beliefs. Then he gave a short sermon and they prayed together, Mandela lowering his head and closing his eyes.

The priest told Mandela news about his church and congregation, some of whom were being detained or were activist leaders in the community. I always had to interject at that point and warn him not to give names. So he sent their greetings to Mandela without naming them.

Reverend Moore told Mandela that the whole church congregation prayed for him regularly. Then he would give him Holy Communion, after unpacking a small white cloth from his bag and setting his things on the table. The communion was a wafer and a sip of grape-juice. Even if I had wanted to join in, it was not allowed. We were not supposed to share food or drink with prisoners, although there had certainly been times I had done so before.

Later, when Mandela was in isolation, the priest continued to visit and I think it helped him. He was grateful for anything that gave him added strength.

Of course, even in these improved circumstances in Pollsmoor, Mandela was still busy writing demands and complaints to the head of prison. He even complained to Winnie. He told her he was not getting his Pantene hair oil any more. That was an important part of his personal preparation each day. He still put it on the shopping order to give me each month but international sanctions meant that supplies had dried up.

Winnie, in fighting mood, complained to liberal politician Helen Suzman – a great supporter

of the Rivonians and for 13 years the only member of South Africa's Parliament unequivocally opposed to apartheid. She took it up in Parliament and I got orders from on high: find some Pantene hair oil for Mandela, wherever you have to go and whatever you have to do to get it. The order came right down from the Minister of Prison Services in Pretoria to the Commissioner of Prisons and down to the head of Pollsmoor. He called me into his office and told me to take a prison car to trawl around the pharmacies. 'Don't come back without it,' he said.

I usually bought 100ml bottles from the local Checkers supermarket but those supplies had long gone. I drove over to the distribution warehouse in Cape Town but they had sold out and did not expect to receive any more. The hair oil came from America and that country was no longer trading with South Africa.

In the end, I went to about twenty pharmacies all over the city and outskirts but I only found six bottles. I bought all of them and Mandela was happy to pay for them. I wondered if it pleased him that we were running all over town for him.

Years later, on his 80th birthday, when he was president of the country, I got together with Kathrada and the other Rivonians to tease him about the hair oil one last time. We made up a gigantic card in the shape of a Pantene bottle and we all signed it. We were all invited to the presidential residence in Pretoria for his birthday, party so we took it with us and set it up on the veranda in front of the grand front entrance. I had three bottles of the hair oil packaged in a white box with a pretty ribbon and presented it to Mandela as a joint birthday present from all of us. Kathrada had hunted down the card and the hair oil from America. We brought Mandela outside and made a ceremony of it in front of the big card. He was very tickled, very happy that we thought of something so personal that went all the way back to his prison memories.

I realised that nothing would ever take away what we had all been through together, and that it must have meant something because there we all were, still good friends and laughing together.

In Pollsmoor, the Pantene hair oil incident made Mandela aware that he had some small control over things. He sent in another written complaint to the head of prison, with a request. He said it was tedious for the prisoners to be looking at cement walls every day, with mountains far away in the background. They wanted some greenery of their own. He wanted to make a garden again.

The authorities would consider his requests and accommodate them if it was no trouble. They wanted the ANC leaders to just wilt and die up there, not to cause problems, so this was an easy way of keeping them quiet. Permission was duly granted and the authorities sent up 15 44-gallon drums cut in half, producing 30 big flower-pots, to be placed on the roof and wedged in with bricks. I worked with some of the criminal prisoners to bring up soil from the Pollsmoor prison gardens, although, of course, they had no idea who was going to be using these makeshift plant-pots. Mandela and Sisulu would patiently mix manure with the soil to start their vegetable plot.

Mandela grew tomatoes, onions and aubergines. He tried to grow mealies – the maize cobs that made pap, the African staple diet – but it wasn't successful as a garden plant. He and I remembered fields of mealies that our parents planted when we were kids and we compared the different methods of making rows, his country memories coming from the Eastern Cape and mine from the farm I grew up on in the Western Cape.

When insects attacked the crops, Mandela asked for a visit from the sergeant warder in charge of Pollsmoor's gardens. He came and sprayed against insects and diseases and warned us not to eat anything from the plot for a few weeks. I drilled some holes and fixed up netting to protect the plants.

Mandela was a good gardener. He would send shiny purple aubergines down to the kitchen to be baked with meat and made into stew. He persuaded the prison gardener to give him spinach bedding plants and they were very successful. After this, he would often send a bunch of spinach down to the kitchen too and they would put it with the meat and aubergines. We had a great feast on those days. The pot of food would arrive and they invited us warders to help ourselves first. They would then take theirs into their cell.

In Pollsmoor, I used to tease Mandela about the way he chewed his chicken bones after a meal, to get the last little bit of taste out of them. There would be nothing left afterwards. I told him: 'You'll never be able to keep a dog because you're eating all the bones.'

The prisoners had tables for eating and studying in the cell, and chairs and a steel cabinet each for their things. They ate together around a big table and there was always a huge pot of tea. I would be invited to help myself to a cup but it was too sweet for me; they loved a lot of sugar in their tea.

Mandela and the others had their own special diets. He ate steamed fish or chicken most

days unless he had organised the spinach and aubergine stew. However, he was being seen regularly by a medical officer and it was decided he should try to lower his cholesterol. The Red Cross was monitoring medical reports, so Pollsmoor was doing it by the book. Despite this, sometimes Mandela would smell other appetising food, like the soya mince given to other prisoners, and ask for that. I had to keep it secret that I was smuggling food that wasn't on his special diet, otherwise the medical team would intervene.

Mandela also made his own cottage cheese. I think it was something from his childhood. He would put fresh milk in the cupboard and wait until it was sour and watery. Then he took the thick pieces off and ate it on bread with Aromat, a salty seasoning. He drank the water and said it was good for his health.

No other section of the prison knew what was being sent up to us, so, after all the years of semi-starvation on Robben Island, there was suddenly too much food. We put the leftovers to one side to give to the criminal prisoners who were delivering and collecting food pots. They could eat it later in the kitchen.

Sometimes Mandela complained. His chicken was grilled instead of steamed, or it was all too salty. I called up the prisoner who cooked the food, the guy who did all the special diets. His name was Louw, a coloured man, who Mandela liked and for whom he would sometimes order cigarettes or tobacco. Louw was a repeat offender who was in for continual break-ins and robberies. He was released one day but he had no family to go to so he broke into a house near the prison so he could come back.

I heard years later that an old warder took pity on him when he was next released, and brought him to live with his family. In return, he did jobs around the house and garden and cooked the food. But his kindly benefactors all died in a tragic drowning accident, and once again Louw was homeless. He carried out more break-ins and went back to prison where he still is today.

When the food pots were empty, one of the prisoners would tell us and we summoned guys from the kitchen to fetch them. One day, I threw away a sandwich left over from the lunch-box my wife made for me. It was wholewheat, something Mandela had never seen before. He ate it and enjoyed it.

I told him what the grains were and he was intrigued. The next day, he wanted wholewheat bread. But the head of prison said he couldn't just order as if it was a restaurant, he would have to apply in writing.

By then, it was part of my job to go shopping for the special prisoners in my care. On Robben Island, they had written lists of things they wanted from the tuck shop, and I would take the money from the float that we kept in the reception office where all withdrawals were meticulously recorded.

Now I was actually doing their shopping. I would take my motorbike and go to the local Checkers supermarket once a month and check the price of everything on their list. This was important as they were still only allowed to spend R25 a month. Then we reviewed their orders together, and I drew out their money and took a prison van back to Checkers in the Blue Route mall to collect the shopping. I had to use different supermarket baskets for each of them so that I could pay for their things separately and come back with the receipts for them to sign.

I bought coffee for Kathrada and Sisulu and they made some for me and offered me Ouma rusks with it. These were biscuits Mandela loved too. He always wanted the muesli rusks. He bought Sensodyne toothpaste and all of them wanted Oral-B toothbrushes.

Now Mandela was asking for five loaves of wholewheat bread each month and neither of us had any idea what that would cost. I found myself walking up and down the supermarket aisle making a note of all the grocery prices.

The next problem was how we should keep the bread fresh, as it had to last Mandela the whole month. So I began taking it home to put in my freezer. Every second day, I would bring him a quarter of a loaf, already sliced. When I went on leave it was a problem, but then he just had to wait for my return.

I also took Mandela's letters out to post on a daily basis. The other warders saw me on my motorbike and sneered. 'You're doing too much running around for these kaffirs,' they said. 'We've got 500 prisoners on our section to count and dish up for and clean up after every day. You've only got six of them and they've got you running off to do their shopping.'

They were quite bitter, jealous of our VIP prisoners. They began asking if they could see them, see what was so special about these old guys in the High Command. But I wouldn't let anyone sneak in. We had a good relationship, a good routine with no big problems going on and no violence. I didn't want to allow anything that might upset that.

There was just once that Mandela had to break up a screaming match between the warrant officer warder Terreblanche and Andrew Mlangeni, but it didn't get physical. They were

standing in the doorway of the cell, shouting and swearing. Mandela came along and took Mlangeni away and I saw them talking quietly in a corner. Mandela apologised to Terreblanche afterwards but he refused to talk to Mlangeni for a long time after that.

I asked Mandela if it was all OK. He said: 'We are politicians, not criminals. We should never argue with the warders. We should debate, not scream and fight. If there is anything wrong, we should sort it out between ourselves, not involve the warders.'

Mlangeni could be argumentative though. He was in charge of table-tennis balls and other equipment. If someone damaged the balls, he wouldn't let them have any more. Mandela had to put his foot down to get some for our next game. Small battles, but Mandela would assert himself and re-establish leadership every time.

When the authorities at last allowed them a radio, Mlangeni decided he would have it for himself. He took it away and pleading from the others was making no difference. Mandela stepped in. 'This is important for all of us,' he said quietly. 'We all need to hear the news and find out what is happening in the country. And we all need each other. Now give me the radio and let's agree to put it somewhere so we can all listen.' Mlangeni handed it over.

It was a small, sulky incident but I think that sort of thing was inevitable in the artificially close community they were living in. Always it was Mandela who defused the situation. He was not going to allow petty behaviour to undo the greater good for which they were working.

We had become an unlikely family up there, isolated from other prisoners and officers. We even watched movies together, which they chose and paid for. I fetched two films a week for them in town – they were no longer being censored so we had a much bigger choice. Mlangeni liked to be in charge of the projector, just as he was in charge of the sports equipment.

But, when it came to it, they knew I was really the one in charge. I liked to go home early on a Friday so I would lock them up before time. Mlangeni and Kathrada called me Mr Lock-Up, grumbling that they had lost half an hour.

Occasionally, there was so much going on – chess games and dominoes or cards, and table-tennis and tennis – that Mandela craved some peace and quiet to get on with his studies. I agreed to lock him in an empty office on his own when he wanted to get away from the others. But one day I left him for a long time and he was angry when I returned. He had needed to urinate and had to use the window. He demanded a bucket of water to clean it up. Later, he apologised to me but it was clear he didn't take humiliation kindly.

Often, he would wrap himself in his cell blanket, fastened with the pin I got him from Robben Island, and sit in a corner of the roof courtyard with his books. He used prison mats to keep his feet warm and sat there even in the wind and cold.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Life was undoubtedly much sweeter for all of us now that we had made a virtual social club out of our rooftop hideaway at Pollsmoor. Mandela and his comrades at last had plentiful food and healthy activities to fill their days. All of them were getting more visits and letters so their outlook was less bleak, and we were isolated from the violence and gang problems that racked the rest of the prison – indeed, our comings and goings remained a total secret to everyone else. For me, guarding them had become such a calm and rewarding ritual that I welcomed every shift.

But there were terrible and ominous storms rumbling all around us in the outside world, where hundreds of thousands of oppressed black people were increasingly defying the apartheid laws.

We had an FM radio, which the ANC leaders could now listen to uncensored. In 1982, a few months after they arrived at Pollsmoor, the prisoners heard, and grieved over, news of a mass killing of 42 of their Umkhonto we Sizwe commandos, along with women and children, in neighbouring Lesotho, and of the bombing of South Africa's Koeberg nuclear power station in retaliation.

That same year, Mandela heard that his house had been raided by police and all the family's books destroyed. A few months later, a massive ANC car bomb at South Africa's military headquarters in Pretoria killed 19 people and injured more than 200. The military wing's acts of sabotage, widely touted as intending to destroy only government installations, were now causing casualties.

By now, my wife and I were living in a staff house at Pollsmoor Prison and we had our first child, a boy we called Riaan. We were increasingly aware of the danger around us so I bought myself a firearm, a .38 Special, to carry at all times when we were away from home. Occasionally, I had to escort the government bus that took children to and from schools in case it came under fire.

I knew our country was burning. I longed to take my family and move back to the platteland, the countryside, to find some safety and peace. It was obvious that South Africa could be heading for civil war.

By 1983, the authorities were targeting the many political organisations affiliated to the United Democratic Front – a coalition of non-racial anti-apartheid organisations, sharing Mandela's dreams, which had been launched that year. Their members were arriving by the hundred at Pollsmoor, and the nearby Victor Verster Prison was also overcrowded. I saw many of my former Robben Island prisoners coming back, having been re-arrested.

One day after my work shift, I was driving across Cape Town to visit my parents. My wife and I had little Riaan with us and we got stuck in heavy traffic near the University of Cape Town. It was terrifying: thousands of students were protesting in the road and were in a pitched battle with the police. While they chanted and threw stones, the police responded with water cannons and rubber bullets. It was clear that now, before undertaking any journey, I had to think about the exact route and the possible dangers.

Sanctions against South Africa meant that we couldn't travel abroad even if we had been able to afford it. No one wanted us. Many African countries that sympathised with the ANC refused visas to South African whites, and our vision of Europe was that it was a part of the world that hated us. We had become pariahs.

I could see where it was all heading. I was thinking that a change must come, that there should be justice and a decent life for everyone of all colours. Mandela was the man to do it, to lead us all to a peaceful solution. It seemed bizarre that I was spending most of my days quietly with him and his comrades, and the rest of my time plunged into terrifying danger and chaos.

Prison warders were of course major targets of black anger. My colleagues whose homes were outside Pollsmoor told me about using blast tape on all the windows of their houses to protect against hand-grenades or bomb attacks.

It was a chaotic time, when everyone – both white and black – was living in a danger zone with no visible way out. By now, the government was sending police and troops into every township where protests and demonstrations were taking place, firing teargas and live bullets. The death toll on all sides was mounting.

Mandela and his fellow prisoners felt powerless. Leaders of a great movement that had justice on its side, supported by international organisations the world over, and they were unable to carry out their life's work – to lead.

I saw them increasingly worried, huddled together to discuss strategies and encouragement they might be able to pass on through briefings with their lawyers, their only channel to the outside. Unlike Robben Island, in Pollsmoor, there were no prisoners arriving and leaving who they could use to smuggle out messages or instructions.

This, we knew by now, was why they had been moved. The apartheid government had successfully cut off the head of the troublesome ANC. Now they were just growing older, totally under the control of the government, impotent.

But other news was also coming through. That same year, 1983, the prestigious University of London made Mandela a life member of its students' union. Local authorities in England were naming streets and parks after him. Glasgow gave him the Freedom of the City. He was given honorary citizenship of Rome, and of Olympia, in Greece. That autumn, the British Labour Party invited him to be the key speaker at its annual party conference, a fantasy of course, but one that held a message: decent-minded people in the West were campaigning for his release. He was far from forgotten.

The ANC had successfully promoted Mandela's name as the hero of its party, the man at the centre of its hope for a fair, non-racial South Africa where all could live in peace. His name was on banners and posters and public buildings in the whole of the free world.

Release Mandela committees were forming everywhere. Protestors had been holding a constant vigil for several years outside the South African embassy in London's Trafalgar Square. Mandela was presented, in his absence, with the Bruno Kreisky award for merit in the field of human rights, in Vienna, Austria. UNESCO awarded him the prestigious Simon Bolivar International Prize, jointly with King Juan Carlos of Spain. And in New York City the square in front of the South African mission was renamed Nelson and Winnie Mandela Plaza.

But the stated purpose of his life, as well as Sisulu, Kathrada, Mhlaba, Mlangeni and Motsoaledi – and of Mbeki and others still on Robben Island – was to take the struggle all the way to victory. Instead, they were there with me, playing table-tennis.

Mandela was nevertheless pressing on with his Afrikaans language studies and I often insisted on speaking to him only in that tongue. In return, he taught me some Xhosa. I would say '*ukutya kusetafileni*' when the food was on the table. And '*ukutya kuyaba*', the food is ready. I announced their daily medication as '*amayaze*', and one of the other sergeants would greet them, like me, with '*molo*'.

We played jokes too. It was partly the boredom, partly an increasing sense that we were all in this together and it was OK to have some gentle fun. For example, when the prisoners were locked up, we warders could look through the one-way window and see if they were using the toilet. We could flush it from the outside, so we thought that was very comical. When they protested, we said, 'No, sorry this is an automatic device, nothing to do with us.'

In the prison office, I was getting parcels addressed to Mandela from all over the world, many containing medicine and pills that people knew he could not get in prison. Some of them had Latin or French names so I asked Ebrahim Rasool, a multi-lingual ANC activist who had been detained without charge, to help me translate them. We found all sorts of unsuitable things – for example, some pills that were the precursors to Viagra, to enhance sexual performance. There was no way I would give that to men locked up and deprived of any contact with women. Of course, some of the warders were happy to relieve me of them.

Ebrahim, now South Africa's ambassador to Washington, has joked with me about it many times since. I still visit his elderly mother in Cape Town and talk about old times. Their family was among thousands devastated by the Group Areas Act, which literally bulldozed homes in the city's District Six to make it a whites-only area.

Ebrahim remembers with pain the day in 1972, when he was 10 years old, and came home from school to find all the family's furniture on the pavement and his father desperately looking for a way to get it to another place because the house was about to be demolished. He wrote recently of how 'my parents' sadness and the loss of community has stayed with me throughout my life'.

In Pollsmoor, visits were still the most important events in the prisoners' lives. There had been none allowed in the first month and that was a cause of huge anxiety. Now the prison had devised a secret route to the visiting booths where we could take them without others seeing them.

The booths had bigger glass panels than on Robben Island so that prisoners and visitors could see each other from head to foot. Two visitors were now allowed, for forty minutes. Winnie was no longer under house arrest and she could get to Pollsmoor more easily.

By 1983, the regulations had softened slightly and prisoners were allowed contact visits, though only with their firstdegree family members, which meant their wives or children or parents. Kathrada had a problem because he had a brother but no other first-degree family. We fixed it so that his friends could apply as first-degree and they too could have contact

visits with him.

We had a tricky time over his nephew Cassiem's wedding. Kathrada's extended family, with its deeply held Indian bonds and its respect and love for him, desperately wanted to make him part of the occasion. But there was no way 60 people could possibly come for a visit. So I fixed it that the bride and bridegroom, resplendent in their wedding clothes, could sit in the visiting room with him and the rest had to walk through quickly, just stopping briefly to greet a delighted Kathrada. The entire wedding party drifted past him like a beautiful fashion show with him as guest of honour.

On another occasion, Kathrada's lawyer, Ramesh Vassen, had his little daughter with him and she would not remain in the car while her father visited Kathy on a legal matter. The warders in charge relented and allowed Priys to come in with her father. Throughout what was supposed to be a legal visit, Kathrada was completely overwhelmed, and he kept talking to the child and even stroking her hair. It was his first real contact with a child for over 20 years.

There was a special treat for Mandela too, once these contact visits were allowed. On 12 May 1984, I was told to escort him down from the roof section for a visit with Winnie but he had to come to a room next to the office, not to the usual visiting booths.

I had no idea what was happening; I just waited with him in there while another warder went to fetch Winnie. He had told her what to expect as he delivered her to the room, but Mandela and I were to be taken by surprise.

Suddenly, Winnie was walking through the door and putting her arms around him. Mandela, usually so correct and controlled, was completely overwhelmed. He hugged and kissed her and was nervous and jittery in a way I had never seen before.

It was his first official contact visit since he had been imprisoned. Once, on Robben Island, a warder had allowed Mandela to kiss her briefly, but other than that this was the first time he was able to hold his wife in his arms for 21 years. They sat down, still holding hands, and they were happy and laughing, not sure how to handle this unexpected situation.

It was extremely emotional. For me it was like watching a couple on their first date. Winnie looked beautiful, all dressed up. Mandela was thrown completely off balance. He had his notebook and pencil as usual but he didn't know what to do with them. He tried to get the conversation under control but he was totally love-lorn, he just wanted to look into her eyes.

I felt like an intruder. I knew I shouldn't be a witness to this love affair happening in front of my eyes. I didn't know where to look or what to do. It felt indecent.

Then I had to let them know there was just five minutes left. Mandela immediately asked for a double visit: 80 minutes. He didn't want to let her go, even if it meant forfeiting a future visit.

Of course, the room was bugged as usual but I don't think the security police benefited from a single mention of any politics that day.

Afterwards, Winnie told the media excitedly that she had at last been able to hug her husband. Journalists were always waiting when she had a visit; they were there when she arrived and there when she came out, hungry for news of Mandela.

Meanwhile, I was escorting him back to the section. His friends looked up and saw his eyes sparkling. They thought perhaps he had brought something special, maybe a pot of jam, which would be a cause for celebration. Instead, he told them his amazing news.

Next time Winnie came, Mandela asked me if he could take her some chocolate. I used to buy him Cadbury's milk chocolate slabs in the supermarket with his money and it would be eked out square by square. I said he could give some to her and that became a little habit of theirs, something to share at last.

But Winnie unfortunately decided she could visit any time she felt like it and there was always a willing media audience tagging along with her, hanging on to her every word and listening to her complaints when it didn't work out. Many times I was called to the front gate by the guard in the security kiosk. Winnie would be there, all dressed up, and wanting a visit.

If it was a weekday, there was no leeway at all, I could not let her in. Visits were only allowed at weekends. She would tell me: 'I've got very important urgent news. I can't come tomorrow, I have to be in Joburg. I need to see him now.'

I would tell her firmly it was impossible and there would be shouting and screaming: 'I want to see my husband!' Then she would go back outside to the media, gesticulating at the prison: 'You see these people are refusing my rights!'

I used to tell her: 'Ma'am, I would love to help you but these are instructions from the top.'

Even if she came at weekends, sometimes Mandela's quota for the month would already be full and there would be no way I could let Winnie in. At that time, Mandela was allowed up to five visits a month but a maximum of thirty for the year. Lawyers had to have special permission to come, although their consultations were not deducted from the quota. They had

to say what their agenda was, whether it was a family matter or perhaps a court order. Their applications were sometimes turned down.

Despite this, all of the prisoners were enjoying slight relaxations of the rules compared to the restrictions on Robben Island. Walter Sisulu wanted to give his visitors tea, so he applied to buy a kettle and some cups, and that was approved. But the noise of the kettle interfered with our bugs so we used to boil the water before his visits. He kept powdered milk, tea and coffee and he would always make an extra cup for the warder monitoring the visit. Sometimes I made the tea while he talked to his visitor.

I was in charge of sending off the tape-recordings to the security police after all visits. They came a couple of times a week and I was meant to hand over all the recordings. But I had my own way of joining in this softening of the rules. I let a friend of Kathrada's visit, the daughter of prominent anti-apartheid activist Fatima Meer. Yasmin Shehnaz Meer was a lawyer – nowadays a judge – married to a white advocate. That visit was very useful to him, and I had booked her in as Kathrada's niece so it all looked straightforward. I never sent off the recordings of their conversations. By then, I was keeping quite a lot of secrets, forming some personal judgements that made perfect sense to me then and still do today.

For example, the head of prison ordered me to be wired up with a recording device so they could put Mandela's strength of mind to the test. I had a tiny microphone attached to a button on my prison jacket with a wire leading inside to a battery in my pocket. I was to try to undermine him by suggesting that Winnie was having affairs with other men. They knew that was his most vulnerable emotion, his love and adoration of his wife.

I was given the question to ask: 'Mandela, how would you feel if you heard that Winnie was seeing someone else while you're in here unable to do anything about it, if she was sleeping with other men?'

I had to somehow let him know I was bugged. Aside from other considerations, I was afraid he would chat about playing table-tennis and we'd both be in trouble. When I approached Mandela, I showed him the microphone and also touched my ear to signal others were listening. I didn't want him to miss the clue and get this wrong. He stayed perfectly calm. 'Mr Brand, I would have to accept that. She is a beautiful woman and she has needs. I love her enough to accept anything she does.'

Afterwards, I decided it was time to share another secret with him. We had an understanding, we trusted each other. And I had been keeping a secret for a considerable time. For four months, I had had three special prisoners on a section of the rooftop screened off from Mandela and the other Rivonians.

These men were considered public enemies. They were activists who had caused so much trouble that they were being 'disappeared'. They had never been charged or tried, or sentenced. They had just been removed from society and were being held at Pollsmoor without their lawyers, their families or their colleagues or political associates knowing whether they were dead or alive.

Their leader was Matthew Goniwe, a teacher in his early thirties, made from the same mould as Mandela. He was educated, intelligent and well mannered, a man of iron will and an unshakeable sense of justice. I liked and admired him.

Goniwe was kept in a single cell in his own clothes – two tracksuits that he had brought with him – and he was allowed no privileges at all. No money to buy food, no study, no books. He was given a Bible and allowed one visit a week, from a judge whose job was to report on his prison conditions. I was not allowed to speak his name or tell other prisoners or warders that he was there. Goniwe and his two comrades were not allowed to communicate with each other either but they emptied the water from the toilet bowls and spoke to each other through the pipes.

Goniwe had been a brilliant teacher in the Eastern Cape, leading protests about school conditions for black children and fellow teachers. He had a huge following, so the intelligence services picked him up one day from a meeting and spirited him away to the other side of the country, to my rooftop domain.

He was allowed one hour's exercise per day, and he did yoga. He could stand still the whole time in a chosen position. He would pick through the meagre food rations and discard anything stodgy. He was totally disciplined.

I told him confidentially that he was being kept just yards away from his revolutionary leaders, his heroes. One day, I managed to keep the solid security gate between their sections open a fraction so that he could greet Mandela, Sisulu, Mlangeni, Kathrada and Mhlaba. He was like a child running into its parents' arms. They all greeted one another and exchanged a few moments' worth of information.

We made a pact never to mention the incident again. The friendship and co-operation I already enjoyed with my group became even stronger. Kathrada was especially sorry for

Goniwe. He managed to get his lawyer to send a message to Goniwe's family to tell them that he was alive and safe in Pollsmoor.

Some six months after the men had been detained, a decision was made to release them on 10 October 1984 and it was my job to get Goniwe out of Pollsmoor and on to a train at nearby Retreat. Goniwe was worried that he didn't know his way around, and he was anxious as he got into the prison van.

As we drove along, an unmarked police car pulled us over and the prisoners were ordered out. The police, who had seniority over us, said they would escort them to the train. A week or two later, I heard how all three had returned to their political activities in the Eastern Cape and had been intercepted after an evening meeting.

In June 1985, their burned and mutilated corpses were found next to their burning car on a remote country road. I felt so sorry that such a well-educated and well-meaning man, a good man with good intentions, had to die like that.

Soon afterwards, Sisulu went into Woodstock hospital near Cape Town for a prostate operation. He was originally convinced that they anaesthetised him for a check-up but actually they carried out the operation and he had to stay in hospital for a further week.

I took turns with another warder to guard him, and senior warders came in regularly to check us. After 6 p.m. one day, my fellow warder du Toit left me with Sisulu so he could go home quickly. He lived just 15 minutes' drive from there.

He had arranged with the nurses, who were very sympathetic, that he could fetch a portable TV. Of course, they thought it was for us, but we had it in the room with Sisulu and that was the first time any of the Rivonians saw a television, as the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation had not existed in our country before they were incarcerated.

The TV was black and white and the programmes mostly in Afrikaans. Soon Sisulu was sitting up in bed watching the news in English and was tremendously excited about that. On the Saturday, there was a rugby match and we all watched it together. We knew we wouldn't be caught because all the other officers would be watching it elsewhere. When we escorted Sisulu back to Pollsmoor, we told him to keep quiet about it. Those guys were all good at keeping secrets.

Years later, when he was free, I met Sisulu and he hugged me in greeting. His wife was standing by, furious, and pointed out contemptuously that I had been his captor, his oppressor. 'No, you're wrong,' he told her. 'He is our man, he was always our man.'

In our rooftop days, I had started buying their chocolate and biscuits, and sometimes fruitcake for them in the supermarket, and one day I shared a piece of cake with Mandela and found it very dry. At home, my wife had started cooking with a microwave oven for the first time and she had made a really delicious fruitcake. So I offered to bring some into the section.

All of them loved it – it became my wife's famous cake – so I agreed to make a plan so they could buy some regularly. They had to buy it because they had to produce a receipt for everything that came into the prison from outside.

I put a paltry price on it and began bringing in the 2kg cakes, booking them in as 500g because that was the maximum allowed for foodstuffs. All the ANC leaders wanted to buy it and share it. Mandela especially had a very sweet tooth.

I brought my wife's cake in regularly and it took on an important significance between us. Perhaps it represented a sharing of a tiny part of family life. Even after they were all released, Estelle still cooked it for them and I have since heard Kathrada telling friends proudly that he receives two of her fruitcakes every year – one at Christmas and one on his birthday.

Mandela had also experienced health problems while he was in Pollsmoor. In February 1983, about a year after he arrived, I had to escort Mandela to Woodstock hospital because he had a worrying growth on the back of his head, and he had a painful ingrowing toenail. The doctors decided to do both minor operations at the same time. I left my firearm outside and went into the operating theatre, all scrubbed up in a white surgical gown, mask and hat, standing next to the surgeons while they worked.

There was a list of names on a blackboard on the wall. Mandela was down as One Black Special. He really objected to that. He said: 'What is this name? Is it supposed to be me?'

We knew it was but I told him: 'No, man, it isn't you. It's another guy, we don't know who.'

Then he was put under and the doctors set up a screen so neither of them would be distracted. I watched as the skin was pulled away from his skull and the growth cut out expertly. It was put in a bucket and sent away for tests.

Mandela was wheeled out to the recovery room and I was at his side when he came round. By then, I suppose I had been with him for many important moments in his life, and actually, when I think about it, I realise that they were important for both of us.

Back at Pollsmoor, he began to have problems with his prostate gland, noticing blood in his urine and experiencing pain. So I escorted him to Woodstock hospital again in September

1984. This time the name on the list was David Motsamayi, the alias he used when he was working underground, pretending to be the gardener at Liliesleaf Farm.

Mandela, for all his illness, was not having that. He demanded to see the hospital authorities and asked them: 'Who is that? That is not me. I am Nelson Mandela, that is my name.'

They agreed to change the name but of course they didn't. They had no intention of using his real name and alerting everyone in the hospital that they had a world-famous revolutionary in there.

He had further exploratory procedures and was very sleepy and confused when he recovered. Another warder had thought it was funny to exploit his confusion and tell him he had had to be sedated and hidden away because some people had been threatening to kill him, calling him a kaffir.

When Mandela was conscious, he remembered this and was upset. I told him, 'No, you just had a disturbing dream, you're quite safe.' I had to find a urine bottle for him and help him, he was so weak. He was very grateful for small kindnesses like that, and unused to it from a white man I suppose.

It was around this time that he secretly wrote to my wife. He smuggled a letter out with another warder on a folded piece of paper tucked in between the Cadbury's wrapper and the silver foil of the milk chocolate slab. I knew nothing about it until the day Mandela was released.

I still have the letter, a treasured possession. It is written on prison notepaper and reads:

> Madam,
>
> Your husband is a very talented man with a heart of gold. He is always in a good mood and helpful. But he lacks determination, and consequently neglects his own interests and future, as well as those of his wife and children.
>
> On countless occasions I have tried to persuade him to study, but all my attempts have failed completely. I must now request your help. Perhaps you will succeed in getting him to do what other responsible young people across the world do – promote their interests and future.

Estelle didn't tell me about the letter but she began to press me to take up degree courses. I reasoned with her that I already had to study criminal law to ensure promotion in the prison service, and I had a full-time job and a busy family with a baby son, so I had no extra time. In exasperation one day, I told her: 'You're beginning to sound just like Mandela. He never stops nagging me about studying.'

His letter to her is written in flawless Afrikaans. Sworn to secrecy so as to avoid trouble for both Mandela and myself, Estelle had hidden it and waited seven years before she showed me.

Mandela would often offer an act of kindness out of the blue. I once told him about an accident I'd had on my 125cc Suzuki motorbike. I'd been driving through a coloured township to buy spare parts for my car and found the road littered with burned tyres and broken traffic lights after a protest.

A pick-up truck drove straight out of a side-street and into me, knocking me off the bike and into the road where a crowd quickly gathered. It was a bad situation and I only got out of there by insisting the truck driver took me to the nearest police station where I'd be safe. Once there, bizarrely, I saw a former prisoner of mine from Pollsmoor who was there scrubbing the floors, and he helped me take off my helmet and attended to my injuries.

I had cracked ribs, severe bruising and a gash that needed stitches in my foot. Although the truck driver had admitted being at fault, I was now getting demands to pay for damage to his vehicle. I showed his letter to Mandela, hoping his legal mind could help. The bill was R420, a small fortune at that time.

He immediately wrote a stern letter setting out the circumstances, demanding the claim be dropped and insisting I was to be paid compensation. Of course, I had to take the letter home to have it typed. If anyone saw Mandela's handwriting, it would have been serious for both of us. I tore up the original and flushed it down the toilet.

I sent off my typed copy by registered post as he advised, and quickly won the case. Mandela, terrorist and revolutionary, had solved a minor civil case for a non-paying client, his prison warder.

Soon, I was able to carry out some kindness of a different kind for him. In 1985, his prostate problems returned and it was decided he needed another operation. There was a consultation with him about which hospital he should go to. Various private clinics were suggested, primarily because of security concerns, but he insisted he trusted the surgeons at Woodstock. He wanted to return there. He busied himself preparing for another trip from the prison, giving Kathrada strict instructions about watering and weeding the plants in his

garden as he was concerned about their upkeep while he was away.

Once again, I was with him throughout the operation. I was happy to do that job when other warders were not keen. I had been brought up on a farm and had seen plenty of 'operations' – I'd done some myself on frogs to use them as bait for fishing, and I'd helped to slaughter pigs and chickens. I wasn't afraid of seeing blood and actually I was very interested, fascinated even.

But I was also anxious about Mandela. He was nearly 70 and this prostate gland problem seemed to be becoming chronic.

As he was coming round afterwards, I reassured him. 'It's all right, it's all been done and it was very quick. You're going to be fine. You are safe here with me, you can sleep now.' I watched him gratefully sink into a deep sleep.

Earlier in 1985, Mandela had been made another offer of freedom in return for renouncing violence. President P. W. Botha had declared to Parliament that he would free all political prisoners on that condition and claimed: 'It is therefore not the government which stands in the way of Mr Mandela's freedom. It is he himself.' Mandela had written a powerful statement of refusal saying only free men could negotiate, that prisoners could not enter into contracts. He ended: 'I cannot and will not give any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated.'

Winnie was still under house arrest and unable to read her husband's statement to the public. So it fell to their daughter Zindzi, 24 years old, to face a packed football stadium at Orlando, in Soweto, and bravely read out her father's speech. She did it proudly in a loud, clear voice and the response was deafening. Mandela's entire family, and his people, were more definite than ever that they would not cave in to the apartheid government.

The other political prisoners under my care refused too. They had heard that offer before, back in 1967, and refused it then as well.

Botha was furious. He had made this offer on public radio and was now having to bluster about the refusal. I was instructed to get myself wired up with a bugging device again to record Mandela and ask him why he hadn't accepted.

The tiny microphone was hidden under my jacket and other warders were listening in from the office. I approached Mandela, sitting alone in his usual place on a concrete step in the courtyard, sheltering under the roof and reading. Once again, I put my finger silently to my lips and showed him the microphone attached to my shirt. I greeted him and he got it straight away. He answered in a relaxed way, calling me 'Sergeant Brand' and talking about his garden. He said the spinach was doing very well.

I asked if he had any complaints he wanted me to take to the office. Then I said, as instructed: 'Mandela, why don't you agree to the president's offer?'

He told me then that he would never agree to being released unless all of the political prisoners were released. I walked back to the office; I had done my job. That night on television, P. W. Botha said he would never give in to Mandela. The old enemy lines were still drawn.

But Mandela totally understood when Denis Goldberg, the only white trialist at Rivonia, took the offer of release. They had all been given a month to respond to Botha's offer and I had heard that all the political prisoners on Robben Island declined it, save for five of them who had not been involved in the violent struggle.

Goldberg was different. As the only white Rivonian, he had spent 22 miserable years in isolation in Pretoria Prison where he had no comrades with whom to share the suffering.

I talked to Mandela about it while we were tending the vegetable garden together. 'He couldn't be with us, he's had a much harder time,' he said. 'He may have had better rations but to keep someone in solitary will kill him sooner than starving him if he is among his own people. And Denis has no family in South Africa. He needs to go to them.'

The government was coming under increasing pressure to recognise the need for justice and freedom for Mandela, his comrades and his people. Oliver Tambo, leading the ANC in exile from Zambia, sent out a call for the people to 'Render South Africa Ungovernable'. In response, there were mass strikes, stayaways and subsequent police brutality. The sight of uniformed police brandishing batons and felling men, women and children was utterly shocking to fair-minded people all over the world.

By July 1985, the government had declared another State of Emergency. The rand fell drastically as banks and international companies pulled out of South Africa. It had become a business and political outcast, a country with natural riches where no one wanted to invest.

Mandela, meanwhile, was going back to hospital again. There were worries about prostate cancer and, put bluntly, the last thing the government wanted was for him to be an elderly martyr of the revolution who died in their care.

This time, he went to Volks hospital in central Cape Town. A white nurse tending Mandela

told her that her husband had been the medical officer on Robben Island. Mandela remembered him as a good man, he was very fair like that. Unlike the previous occasion, I was not present in the operating theatre but instead I was on guard outside. Security was tighter than ever. Even the cleaners had to have special clearance to be near Mandela.

Winnie was allowed to visit before the operation and I escorted her in. But I wasn't prepared for the next visitor – it was Kobie Coetsee, the Minister of Justice. Mandela maintained his composure, although he must have been astounded. Coetsee behaved as if he was visiting a friend, and Mandela behaved in the same way. Outside the room, I was very aware of the momentous event, however normal it was being made to look. Maybe the government was beginning to come round towards the ANC. Could that be possible?

I heard that Winnie had seen Coetsee when they were on the same plane from Joburg to Cape Town. She had boldly gone up to him – the very same minister who had signed her banning order – and demanded better treatment of her ailing husband locked up in jail. It has been said that she influenced him into visiting Mandela, but no one really knows. Coetsee had surely worked out for himself by then that he had the power to help steer his country away from civil war if he made some conciliatory moves.

Mandela was in hospital for eight days and he certainly had plenty to think about. But, typically, he asked me to buy chocolates for all of the staff and he wrote individual notes of thanks to each nurse. I delivered them on the day he left.

Coetsee's visit wasn't the only surprise for Mandela on this trip. The escort party taking Mandela back to Pollsmoor was joined out of the blue by the prison commander, Brigadier Munro. It was the brigadier who told Mandela that he was going to new quarters. He was given a cell on the ground floor of the prison wing, with three rooms and a separate toilet. He would be there on his own, in total isolation.

I already knew that Mandela wasn't going back to his friends. While he was recovering in hospital, I had been preparing the new cells. We brought his bed down from the rooftop and his steel cabinet containing his clothes, books and sports equipment. I was told that as he was recovering from his operation he needed to be closer to the hospital section, though I sensed the truth wasn't that simple. Inevitably, the National Intelligence guys had sent a team in to put sophisticated bugs everywhere.

On Mandela's return, I saw Brigadier Munro's car arriving with an unmarked police car escort. There were no sirens, nothing. Mandela got out wearing his prison clothes and was brought to the new section. I welcomed him back from hospital and showed him around. He looked and seemed to accept everything, but he was highly suspicious of this move, and, although his new home was spacious, it was also low-lit and smelled of damp.

Two days later, he got his own television. At the same time, his comrades upstairs were told they could also have a television if they paid for it. Mandela's was free, a present from the government.

I was told that a warder would be on permanent day shift, locked in with him. By then, I had been promoted to warrant officer and I was running the office that supervised all the terrorist prisoners and detainees. I would still be seeing Mandela every day, at least twice a day. But I think we both realised our table-tennis days on the rooftop were over.

CHAPTER NINE

For the first time in 21 years, Mandela found himself completely alone.

He missed the companionship of others, he missed his all-important garden and he missed the sunny aspect of the rooftop from where he had been able to at least see the mountains and the sky.

I was still visiting him twice daily and was in overall charge of his life in prison, but the one man who could have made a difference – the warder assigned to spend all day with him, stationed in the passageway between cells – refused to communicate with him at all.

He was a veteran warder who was once in the police force and he spoke only Afrikaans. He ignored all of Mandela's efforts to talk to him in his own language. He turned down invitations to share coffee or tea and he would not even take the newspaper Mandela offered, preferring instead to get his own, the very same newspaper, but untouched by a prisoner. He wanted nothing from any prisoner and would spend his whole shift just observing Mandela and reading from the Bible. Mandela complained to me that the sergeant would not even watch television with him in the cell.

However, this situation did not last long. One day, the warder went for a sinus operation in hospital and developed a blood clot while he was in the recovery ward. His wife was shocked to find him dead there.

Mandela was upset, too. But his replacement warder was something of an old friend – a man who had known him on Robben Island and who would at least pass the time of day with him. They used to chat in Afrikaans.

At this time, I was also thinking I might leave the prison service but I discussed my situation with Mandela and he encouraged me to stay. 'Mr Brand,' he said, 'we don't want to lose good people like you inside. You are good with how you communicate with the people outside; the way you make sure our letters are posted; the way you consult us about our visits.' These were small things I was doing, just treating him with some dignity. But when Mandela said he did not want to lose me, I stayed.

I had permission to take Mandela into a quiet courtyard in the section for some exercise. There was no tennis or table-tennis there but he could walk around for an hour. Other prisoners from the criminal section could see him from their cells on the second floor. They were uneducated people who only knew that this was some sort of VIP getting special treatment and they didn't like it.

They were jealous. Mandela used to wear the sombrero-style hat made out of cardboard by his friend Japhta Masemola, a cherished possession, and the prisoners shouted at him: 'Hey, Amigo!' and pelted him with the dried peach pips left over from their food pots.

They were aggressive. No 'Amandla!' or slogans of political support. They were completely ignorant of Mandela's status or politics. All they knew was that he had been given huge premises of his own and that I was doing his shopping. It was ironic that thousands of these prisoners were the very people whose freedom Mandela lived and breathed for. Now they were attacking him.

Mandela would try to clear up the peach pips in the courtyard, ignoring their shouts. He swiftly worked out that they wanted to engage with him, to get him to plead for special privileges for them and get them tobacco and food.

One day, I entered his cell to talk to him and saw a rope dangling near the window, tied to a parcel. Mandela gestured to me that I should look at it. He had clearly received these unsolicited parcels before and was weary of the messages in them. Inside the parcel, I found pleas from the criminal prisoners offering to smuggle messages out for him when they went to court hearings in return for him buying them tobacco, sugar, jam or Marmite.

'This is from the top section,' he said. 'You need to report this.'

The next day, louvred shutters were fitted to the cell windows upstairs, and Mandela felt sorry they had to do that. Now those prisoners would have no sunshine either.

He knew that Walter Sisulu and his other comrades had also been moved and were now in a section of the female prison, far from him. He seemed calm when I gave him the news, although it meant the end of the rooftop life for them too, and also that his garden had dried up and collapsed, which made him sad. I offered to try to set up a new garden for him but that dark cell didn't really lend itself to growing anything. There was little natural light and an unhealthy, dank atmosphere.

However, Mandela knew something else was going on: all this must be happening for a reason and he seemed to be at the centre of it. He was open to all possibilities as long as he

and the others were not just written off and left to grow old and useless.

He never discussed political possibilities with me. He just seemed totally preoccupied with trying to stay one step ahead of what might be happening in the outside world. Preparing himself perhaps for a golden chance to finally take part in a momentous change in the country, something he had longed for all his life.

In many ways, he was under siege – from the prisoners surrounding him, from Winnie bringing family problems, from apartheid manipulators who were playing mind games with him, and from the National Intelligence guys who bugged and recorded every one of his words and actions.

When he found a little heap of white solder filings on the floor of his cell one day, he looked at me and asked what it was, knowing full well that some extra bugging devices must have been fitted. He was becoming weary.

I always respected his privacy and did not probe. Mandela was deep in thought during those days, and kept all hopes and fears to himself. But he wanted to talk to Sisulu, his mentor and the one man who might be able to help him make sense of all these changes taking place.

Mandela put in a written application to see Sisulu. It took two months to be approved and during that time some enormously significant events came about and had to be dealt with by him alone.

After Mandela had returned from hospital, he had decided to approach the government to initiate talks. Soon, a meeting was set up. One Saturday night, after lock-up time, I was told that I would be taking Mandela out of the prison and driving him to the home of Kobie Coetsee, the Minister of Justice.

We had to leave Pollsmoor by 9 a.m. the next day. I went to the store to find a prison release suit to fit him. These were very functional grey suits, a cheap cut that could at least be smartened up with a white shirt. I hastily chose three, guessing at the size. Two of them turned out to be too short in the arms, but the third was more or less all right.

The warder working with me, Captain Swart, couldn't find a tie so he had to rush to his staff quarters in the prison and fetch one. All he could find was a bright-red tie, which didn't really please Mandela at all. 'So you are forcing me to go to the minister's house dressed like a Communist!' he said, but he was smiling.

We were amazed to see how expertly he knotted his tie. It reminded us that he had practised as a lawyer before his arrest all those years ago and was used to dressing smartly for court appearances.

Swart tidied up his collar for him and we looked at him with approval. He was in a quiet, thoughtful mood. He must have been trying to work out how his meeting was going to go. He hadn't told the rest of the ANC High Command about it, nor sent a message to Oliver Tambo who was leading the ANC in exile in Zambia. Mandela has since written that sometimes a leader has to make lone decisions for the whole flock, just believing in himself and finding strength in his own judgement.

But it was an extraordinary outing for him. It was a beautiful Sunday morning and the sun shone as we bundled him out of the fire escape at the back of the prison and into a car. No one could see us except the guard in the observation post and he had been alerted.

I opened the rear passenger door of the white Ford Cortina, an unmarked government car, and Mandela sat in the middle of the back seat, leaning forward throughout the journey like a small child, to peer at everything between me and Swart seated in the front. Another unmarked police car followed us for the 15-kilometre journey. All the time Mandela was asking where we were and saying how green and lovely it all looked.

We drove him into the Bishopscourt area, past embassy residences and grand government-owned villas with huge gardens. I showed him the house where Bishop Desmond Tutu lived, the tireless activist who rallied the masses against the apartheid government. Mandela was fascinated. 'That's good,' he murmured, as I told him about Tutu.

At the end of the road was a security gate surrounding a government complex where Kobie Coetsee lived. Pik Botha, the country's notoriously hardline Minister for Foreign Affairs, was one of his neighbours. Several police officers were waiting for us, all on high alert and talking into their hand-held radios.

A smartly dressed white man met us at the gate. He signalled for me and Swart to stay in the car and escorted Mandela inside. We waited there from 10 a.m. until about 1 p.m. We were thinking that maybe negotiations for reconciliation had started or that Mandela was being questioned about the recent big uprisings.

It occurred to us that, ironically, Minister Coetsee was actually our overall boss but that we were forbidden to even enter the gates of his residence, while our prisoner was inside with him, having drinks.

One of the household staff brought some cold drinks out for us and told us that Coetsee had

offered Mandela refreshment. Mandela had told him: ‘I’ll have whatever you are having, sir,’ and had been given a large whisky on the rocks. Now we were thinking that Coetsee was trying to loosen him up and probe him for information. But we knew Mandela would never fall for that. It was exciting even to be on the fringes of this very special occasion, the country’s Public Enemy Number One being entertained by the minister in charge of prisons.

Finally, Mandela emerged, looking quite relaxed and very dignified. He didn’t say much but I got the impression that they hadn’t discussed deep politics. It was more of an icebreaker, a getting-to-know-you session.

I was longing to know what was going on but you had to respect Mandela’s privacy when he went quiet. He was giving off this air of intense thoughtfulness and didn’t want it to be interrupted, so we drove him back to the prison mostly in silence.

As soon as we returned him to his cell, he applied again to see Walter Sisulu. He badly needed to talk things over.

He also took the suit off straight away and folded it up nicely, before putting it back in its zip-up cover. I took it back to the office and kept it there for him to use again, along with the red tie. I had a feeling this outing was just the beginning.

In all his prison years, Mandela had done his own washing but now in isolation he had no facilities. We sent one of the criminal prisoners in to collect the shirt. He brought it back the next day, washed and ironed, and Mandela thanked him with some chocolate and cigarettes. After that, he would add items to his monthly shopping order, wanting to show his appreciation for a fellow prisoner doing tasks for him.

That prisoner had a sad story, which goes on to this day. After he was released from Pollsmoor, he set up a small business selling fruit and vegetables door-to-door. But he had a partner who one day attacked and robbed the farmer supplying the vegetables. The partner disappeared and was never seen again, leaving the ex-prisoner to face a murder charge. He was given a long sentence and was moved from prison to prison.

I last heard of him in Worcester jail where he had joined an evangelist church movement and started a band with other prisoners, singing hymns. I tried to help him with a letter supporting his application for parole, and he is due out at the end of 2014. He still has Mandela’s prison clothes and has promised to pass them on to the Nelson Mandela Foundation through me.

Soon after Mandela’s first outing, I was being told to get him prepared for another, this time just a drive around. The commanding officer said I should fetch him straight away and told me that he would be going out in his prison uniform, with no need for the smart suit this time. The CO himself drove his white Mercedes, fetching Mandela again at the fire-escape exit from his cell.

I told Mandela: ‘Sorry, I have no idea where we are going.’

He went to the toilet before agreeing to leave, and wanted to take a notebook with him. We told him he wouldn’t be needing that. During the journey, he sat perched in the middle of the back seat again, anxious not to miss a thing.

We drove a short distance, about 200 metres, out of Pollsmoor and turned into a farm gate. We were in Steenberg, a smart private farm. Today, it is also an exclusive golf course, but at the time they were just growing grapes there. The CO said he could get out and stretch his legs, walk for a while and pick some grapes.

Mandela was very cautious. He said: ‘Surely the farmer will shoot me if he sees me picking his grapes?’

He was told it was OK, that the farmer was a friend of the prison authorities. Anyhow no one appeared from the farm so Mandela walked slowly up the lines, occasionally picking a small bunch of grapes, while we watched.

They were the Cape’s famous hanepoot grapes grown for the table, not for wine-making. There were red and white, and Mandela was choosing to pick the ripest ones. We told him not to eat them until they were washed because they might have chemicals sprayed on them. We had a plastic bag with us so that he could take grapes back to the prison. Mandela was so impressed with the setting. He looked up at the mountains and breathed in the fresh air.

Back at the car, he said thanks, he had really enjoyed a few minutes of freedom. He couldn’t believe the huge number of ripe, healthy-looking grapes and we explained it was a plentiful crop ready to be harvested soon. I opened the rear passenger door for him and we drove back to Pollsmoor.

These outings were so secret and the top raft of government officials were so cautious that Mandela’s millions of supporters in the country were left in ignorance of them. The angry mood of the masses was totally contradicting the overtures being made to Mandela.

The previous year, in August 1985, there had been a huge protest march to Pollsmoor Prison to demand Mandela’s release. Police violence was so intense that 31 protestors were

killed in the resulting running battles. At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission where this was discussed years later, it was reported that ‘nobody was spared from the violence of the police. Children, women and old people were all beaten and those who took part in the march had to run for their lives.’ The violence continued after the protests with the townships in the Western Cape remaining in upheaval until the end of the year. In 1986, when the State of Emergency was extended for the third time, there were so many random arrests and detentions of political activists that the prisons overflowed and disused warehouses were commandeered to take in detainees.

All this while Mandela was picking grapes.

Meanwhile, Mandela finally got permission to see Sisulu and they were to meet for an hour in the visiting booth. It was a contact visit and I was present throughout.

It seemed that Mandela had decided to keep his own counsel about the meeting with Coetsee and the extraordinary outings. He must have wrestled with this over a long period, and maybe sensed that his comrades would not approve.

Of course, I was still seeing Sisulu, Kathrada and the others regularly, and when they saw me without my prison uniform occasionally they wanted to know what was going on. I told them I was taking Mandela out. I did not want to play any of them against each other. It was better to just tell the truth, although not with any detailed information. I simply informed them that Mandela was being allowed to make some private visits.

At Mandela’s meeting with Sisulu, the two men talked about their mutual friends, their health and their recent visits and family news. Sisulu had a lot of news to tell about his own family. His wife and adult children were all closely involved in the struggle and were renowned activists in their own right.

The two prisoners shared coffee and chatted. Sisulu was so happy to see his old friend and Mandela told him for the first time about his prostate operation. They were being bugged and recorded but we didn’t interrupt their conversation to stop him telling Sisulu this because they were both in prison and wouldn’t be taking any inside information away with them.

Sisulu pressed Mandela to complain to his lawyers about being put in isolation. But Mandela must have decided by now that the isolation was giving him a chance to think things through and to strike out in a new direction. He told Sisulu he didn’t want to complain, it would only cause more trouble.

He also carefully sounded out Sisulu about approaching the government to offer talks. Sisulu, ever loyal, said he would support Mandela in whatever he decided to do.

It was strange for me to be supervising two prisoners having a visit. Everything was rather strange at that time. The Rivonians by then were getting all the newspapers every day and Kathrada was marking all the articles that were important for Mandela to see. He hoarded dozens of them until he could get them to Mandela. They were all as hungry for news as ever. I was finding it easy to slip messages between Mandela and Kathrada inside the newspaper cuttings I took back and forth. I thought of it as my small contribution towards peace in our country.

Sisulu and his cellmates asked me all the time about outings or appointments involving Mandela. I could see they were getting suspicious, worried even, that Mandela was making decisions without consultation.

Meanwhile, I got another phone call, this time when I was off-duty at home, telling me to prepare Mandela to leave early the next morning for another visit to Coetsee. I had to collect Mandela’s suit, shirt and tie and get them to him right away. By then I was a warrant officer, so I had the authority to go to the cells after lock-up.

My wife was out at a social function and I was taking care of our small son Riaan, who was just 18 months old. So I took little Riaan with me, toddling along at my side. The warder on night shift let me in and there we were in front of Mandela, who was delighted to see a small child. He wanted to pick him up and talk to him but Riaan was a bit overwhelmed, a bit afraid of this stranger. He clung on to me and wouldn’t go to Mandela.

So Mandela got on his knees to find some sweets in a drawer in his cabinet. Riaan watched him all the time and then hesitantly took the sweets. After that, he was very happy to see Mandela or Sisulu and the guys who kept sweets for him. They had a regular supply of treats these days because by now they could see their own families and young children, and so they would put extra orders on their shopping lists for them.

I drove a prison-issue white Ford Cortina with Captain Swart next to me when we took Mandela to Coetsee for this second visit. He was inside for about an hour and a half. We asked the National Intelligence plain-clothes guys there what was going on but as usual they were tight-lipped and uncommunicative.

Soon after that, the head of prison came to Mandela’s cell and told him he could have a stroll around the part of the prison where pet animals were kept. There were black and white

rabbits, Angoras with long coats, some chickens running around and even a young steenbuck, a small deer. There was also an aviary with birds and a dove-loft. Prisoners ready for release were encouraged to try to rehabilitate in readiness for the outside world and this was part of the process. They could sit in the sun in the pet zoo courtyard, and relax or read a book.

Some prison officers trained homing pigeons and there was a time when prisoners were allowed to take part in that and let the birds free, sending them to their families in the city and watching for them to come back. Then we found pigeons dying on their return. A close inspection showed they had Mandrax pills and tubes of cannabis stuck under their wings. A crafty ruse to bring drugs into jail. We hadn't foreseen that. The homing pigeon idea came to an abrupt end.

Mandela's favourites were the fish pond and the aviary, although he said he didn't like to see live creatures imprisoned like he was.

Despite his improved conditions, he still made regular complaints. He was getting fed up with the way food was served to him in his cells. He didn't want to eat his main meal at lunchtime. He had got into the habit of sleeping for an hour in the early afternoon so he wanted to eat light and save the food for the evening. By then, it would be cold and unappetising.

I bought him some rice from the supermarket and he used to put it in his coffee flask with boiling water from the prison urn and cook it that way. We didn't cook rice in the kitchens, the staple was always porridge made from mealie-meal. I told him that a hot-plate would be a great idea for him. I had to explain to him what that was and how it worked, and how much it would cost.

He decided he wanted one and in June 1988 he applied for it in writing. He was told the regulations forbade it. He applied to a higher authority and was turned down again. Then he wrote to the Commissioner of Prisons at head office in Pretoria, who also refused.

Mandela was exasperated and asked my advice. I told him the head of prison was due back from leave and didn't know anything about the hot-plate requests. He was an obsessive rugby fan and maybe Mandela could feign an interest in the game, get friendly with him and try again for a hot-plate.

The head of prison duly came on a routine visit to Mandela to check on conditions and ask about any complaints. Mandela had done his homework and started talking about the national rugby team, the Springboks, and their most recent match. The two men chatted and Mandela said it was a shame he couldn't watch rugby on his television but it would mean eating cold food. He was advised to send it back to the kitchen to be heated but Mandela said he had tried that and never had the food returned.

He said he had heard there was such a thing as a hot-plate that could heat up food. The head of prison agreed that was the answer, and that Mandela should put in a request immediately to his office.

The hot-plate arrived within days, Mandela signed for it, and that was that. When I told Kathrada and the others about it they wanted hot-plates too and they were delighted when their requests were approved.

There were questions the next time the Commissioner of Prisons arrived and found Mandela warming up milk for a hot drink but I just told him it was all approved and nothing to do with me.

There were some close calls over Kathrada's cooking, too. He had given his lawyer money to bring in some meat illicitly from the butcher, and the Commissioner walked in while he was cooking up a biryani with fresh beef. Nothing was said, though Kathrada said he was numb with anxiety during the visit. He had broken the rules; the lawyer had broken the rules. He feared he might lose privileges, but there were no reprisals. Things were changing for all of the ANC guys.

CHAPTER TEN

As I was now a warrant officer, I had some seniority in the prison. My home was opposite the female section where the remaining ANC men were in their communal cells and I was able to sometimes bring over meat and vegetables and cook up a potjiekos, a real Afrikaans stew cooked slowly in a big cast-iron pot.

We would make a fire with charcoal and I would fix the pot on it, stirring occasionally and enjoying the aroma as I had done all my life. I brought rice with me to cook with boiling water from the prison urn. They enjoyed it very much and we kept a nice helping on one side for me to take to Mandela.

Meanwhile, the unexpected outings continued, and soon he and I were informed about another trip outside the walls of Pollsmoor. Mandela was to stay in prison clothes again, as we were not going far. This time, the commanding officer drove his blue Audi to the back exit for Mandela. We drove around the prison – a huge area with courtyards and gardens, staff quarters and a big dam. We parked up on the sand road and Mandela was told he could take a walk around the dam. Some children, teenagers, were standing at the far end with fishing rods. They had no idea who this man now approaching them was. He greeted them and chatted to them about fishing. The next minute, they were letting him use the rod and showing him how to attach bait.

There were four or five of them, the children of other warders. Mandela spent about half an hour with them while we watched from a distance. When he came back, he said they only caught one fish, too small to eat – the boys were going to feed it to the cat. He didn't say if he told them who he was. He was worried about them being close to the deep water and said it was dangerous. The CO told him not to worry, they were good swimmers. But Mandela insisted there should be an adult with them.

He was very interested to see the large prison vegetable gardens and chatted with the CO who was also quite knowledgeable. They talked about growing potatoes and pumpkins. Mandela was impressed that the Pollsmoor gardens produced enough vegetables to send to other prisons.

Some time later, I got instructions to prepare for a lunch in one of the officers' smart houses for Mandela and an important group of visitors. He was to be the guest of honour at a meeting of the Eminent Persons Group set up by the British Commonwealth and headed by General Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria.

Obasanjo had recently retired as president of Nigeria and had guided the country from military to civilian rule. It had been agreed that he might help to bring the warring sides in South Africa together.

I arranged for some nice food to be cooked in the officers' mess and delivered to the dining room where ten people would be seated. On the morning of the lunch, Mandela looked incredibly smart in a pinstripe suit, which had been delivered the previous day by the head of Pollsmoor. He had organised a tailor to make a bespoke suit that fitted him beautifully, and he was also given a shirt, tie, shoes, socks and underwear. All of the members of the Eminent Persons Group were in business suits. Mandela looked perfectly at home among them. When the head of prison saw him dressed, he told him: 'Mandela, you don't look like a prisoner any more. You look like a prime minister.'

The Commissioner of Prisons was there with Minister Kobie Coetsee and Mandela approached them, openly putting a plea to them to consider further talks between the ANC and the government. However, those two didn't stay long. They refused his invitation to join him for lunch. Extraordinary to think that one of their prisoners was formally inviting them to dine with him in one of their staff houses. Mandela pulled it off perfectly and said he was sorry they were leaving. He had nothing to hide, he told them; they were welcome to join in. By contrast, he had been greeted with enthusiasm and hugs from his fellow black Africans. Of course, the entire house was bugged and I was stationed outside the dining room to observe.

Mandela saw me and insisted I joined them at the table. He sat next to Obasanjo and dominated the conversation throughout, with everyone listening quietly and attentively to everything he said. He explained what the ANC was and what it stood for. He explained why the organisation had felt compelled to answer violence with violence and set up Umkhonto we Sizwe.

As they left, Obasanjo shook my hand and said I would be welcome in Nigeria any time I wanted to visit. That was a very unlikely idea and unfortunately never happened.

The Eminent Persons Group had intended to return and promised to encourage talks

between the ANC and the government. But they retreated after South African troops attacked ANC bases in Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. I guess they felt their mission now had no chance of success.

During the period of these outings, visits and meetings, Winnie was visiting Pollsmoor regularly. I was always in the room with them and I realised that Mandela had clearly decided not to confide in her about the delicate talks, just as he was not confiding in Sisulu and the others.

She complained bitterly about him being put in isolation; she was very upset about it and wanted to take further action and even go to the newspapers. But Mandela told her firmly: 'Darling, if you fight it, everything will get worse. Can't you see they are trying to break me down? We must show the enemy they cannot achieve that. I will deal with it like a man, I will cope.'

All their visits were by now contact visits and he could make her tea and touch her. But there was a lot of turmoil around Winnie. One day, she turned up at the prison gates without an appointment, her arm around a woman friend who was in floods of tears. Mandela was told he would be allowed this unexpected visit from his wife but there would be no contact. They would have to meet in the booths with a glass panel between them.

He was furious, one of the only times I saw him lose his temper. He absolutely refused to accept the visit. He felt he had spent many years slowly gaining privileges and he did not want to go backwards, back behind the impersonal glass panel.

I could do nothing to persuade him and, meantime, Winnie and her friend were making a tremendous fuss. I got him to talk it over with the head of prison, who was exasperated. He said: 'Mandela, just go to the visiting booth and tell your wife yourself that you don't want to see her. We won't take it from your quota of visits. You are the only one who can calm her down.'

Mandela was shouting, angry and upset. But when I took him to the booth he looked through the window and saw the wife of his clan cousin, Sabata Dalindyebo, tribal king of Mandela's people. She was sobbing hysterically. Mandela agreed to the visit, and was soon asking for an extra 40 minutes, a double visit.

It turned out that this was important family business. Dalindyebo, a principled and proud man, had refused to support the idea of the Transkei as a homeland under the racial division of the apartheid government. He had come into conflict with the paramount chief, Kaiser Matanzima, who had him arrested in 1979 for 'injury to the dignity of the president of the Transkei'.

To Mandela's eternal shame and chagrin, Matanzima, his own nephew, and once a man he had looked up to, had collaborated with the government and agreed to the Transkei becoming a homeland, which meant total segregation for black people in that area.

Mandela had refused visits from him, rightly assuming that Matanzima wanted to use the family ties for political advancement. He was on a mission to persuade Mandela to accept release from prison and to go to live in the Transkei.

Dalindyebo himself had called homelands 'pigsties and dummy institutions'. He was forced into exile in Zambia. His wife was coming to tell Mandela that he had died at the age of 57. She had his body brought back to the Transkei where she planned to bury him. But the army was sent to surround her hotel and imprison her there while Matanzima's men took his body from the funeral parlour and buried him in a commoner's grave at the riverside.

In tribal terms, this was a serious injustice that only Mandela, son of a chieftain himself, might be able to put right. He tried to soothe his cousin's widow. He would somehow make contact with clan elders and give Dalindyebo his rightful burial in the chieftains' graveyard.

It took until 1989 for Dalindyebo's body to be exhumed. Then he was reburied as king of the Thembu people under ANC colours.

Mandela, preoccupied as he was with great matters of state and the glimmer of hope that momentous changes were coming, was continually burdened in this way with pressing family matters. Locked up in prison with limited control over affairs outside, he had to use all of his inner strength to work through these problems with a clear head.

One day, I was shocked to see how angry he became when his daily newspaper disappeared. It seemed like a sudden outpouring of all his inner anger and frustration. The warder on night duty had taken it from the grille on his cell window while Mandela was asleep and forgotten to replace it. In the morning, Mandela looked for his newspaper and was really angry that it was missing. He made a huge fuss, demanding to see the night-duty warder. When he confronted him, I thought for a moment that Mandela was going to hit him he was so worked up and upset.

He remained like that, completely out of sorts, for the rest of the day. I tried to talk to him and explain that there was no malice in what had happened. The person who took the

newspaper returned it the next day; it was just a slip-up.

Mandela was very on edge at that time. He had no friends with him with whom he could play sports or talk to in Xhosa, his own language. He had no sense of humour at all at that time and small things were upsetting him. Of course, there were serious matters of great importance on his mind, and his tension just sometimes all spilled out over a small thing.

At heart, he was still a family man, just as I was. He grieved over the problems that Winnie told him about. Their daughter Zindzi was not studying well at university and Winnie herself was constantly watched and harassed by security police. Mandela felt, quite rightly, that she wasn't safe and he felt ashamed, emasculated, that he couldn't help her. She was his wife, he should be able to take care of her. Instead, she had to continually trek back and forth to the prison.

Every time he saw her, he would take a notebook full of instructions for her and when they next had a visit he would check with her that she had carried out his wishes. Often, she had forgotten or had been unable to achieve a meeting with someone, or gain a decision from someone else. Mandela was quite hard on her then, telling her firmly that she must also bring a notebook and write everything down. 'Darling, you are meeting a lot of people and getting distracted and I need you to remember everything we are discussing. Please note it all down and do what I ask.' She was his main instrument to keep his name and his ideals alive in the country.

For his part, he was dealing with many family problems. In April 1987, his daughter-in-law Rennie came to see him. She was divorcing Mandela's younger son Makgatho and wanted to leave the country. She asked Mandela to help settle her son Mandla at boarding school.

Mandela agreed to take control of Mandla's education and arranged it through his lawyers. He was fond of his daughter-in-law and sympathetic about her marriage problems. He took his responsibilities as ultimate head of the family very seriously despite all the restrictions on him.

One night, there was an incident where I imposed another problem on him, simply because I knew he was the right person to deal with it. I had been brought in late at night to supervise the lock-up of newly arrived prisoners. There were crowds of them, all juveniles and new remands. Some of them were teenagers but there was also one very small coloured boy. I judged he was about eight years old.

I went over to him and looked at his ticket. They all had prison tickets in their pockets stating their ID and their offence. This child's offence was murder.

I couldn't put him in with the bigger boys, as he was too small and too vulnerable. So I locked him in a single cell and spent a few minutes trying to find out what he had really done. He came from Manenberg, a dangerous, gangster-ridden slum area of Cape Town.

He told me his family was sandwiched in between rival gangsters' territories. He had been abducted and held at gunpoint. He was told to go to a gang leader's home and shoot him. They gave him a handgun and said if he didn't kill the guy his parents would be shot dead. The child went to the house and shot the gangster in the chest at point-blank range.

Now he was in prison for murder.

I knew about Manenberg and I knew about gangs. This boy, thin and frightened, was almost certainly telling the truth. But how could I get him out of here and into some safe place? Instinctively, I knew Mandela was the right person to turn to. He would have the compassion and perhaps the influence to find a way.

In the morning, I unlocked the boy's cell and told him to walk with me through the prison corridors. He was barefoot, in short trousers and a grubby T-shirt. I brought him to Mandela in his isolation cell and said: 'Show the uncle your ticket.' We talked in Afrikaans, where the term uncle is a sign of respect for an older man.

Mandela, who had been sitting in his chair reading, put his head in his hands.

'This child is innocent,' he said. He thought about it for several minutes, then went to his cabinet and took out some sweets for the boy.

'Mr Brand, please call my lawyer Dullah Omar and tell him to come today to sort this out. This place is not for children. If he stays here, he'll turn into a gangster himself. Nothing good can happen to him here.'

I phoned Omar and he came straight away. The boy was back in his single cell, still crying, but at least I was able to tell him that we were doing something for him. All the warders felt sorry for him. He was a young boy with no gang initiation, no tattoos or police record. I had seen many youngsters in prison, already turning into criminals, but I had never seen one this young. He was just a child from a poor but decent home.

That evening, Omar returned with some social workers to take him to a foster home. He promised Mandela and me that he would personally deal with the murder charge and the court proceedings. Later, he told us the court ruled that the child should not return to

Manenberg. He was to be taken good care of by foster parents and his parents could have regular contact with him until they were able to move to a better area. Every time Omar visited after that, Mandela would start by asking after the child.

Now that it was common knowledge that he was being held at Pollsmoor, Mandela was a cause of great curiosity to everyone in the prison. Other warders wanted a glimpse of him, and the criminal prisoners were clearly jealous. But any new political prisoners admitted to Pollsmoor were totally in awe. They were continuing the struggle in his absence but felt keenly that he was still their leader, their inspiration.

In June 1987, I booked a group of student activists known as the Wynberg Seven into Pollsmoor to serve their year's sentence. They were five men and two girls who were to be kept separate from others to prevent them recruiting. They had been sentenced for public violence during the school protests and boycotts. I had cleared a section especially for them, right next to where Mandela was held, and they often saw him sitting in the courtyard alone reading a book with a guard nearby.

My job was to ensure they had study material so they could complete their exams. I became friendly with one of them, Igshaan Amlay, and I got into the habit of giving Mandela's newspapers to him once the older man had finished with them, which was strictly against the rules. I had to make sure I collected them before the shift changed the next morning. I would also visit Amlay in his cell in the evenings and collect notes he wanted me to drop off at his parents' house in Wynberg. His parents would give me sweets, chocolate, money and messages for me to take back to him.

Amlay's father, who has since died, was the engineer who made the metal burglar bars I have at my home. When Igshaan visits me these days, we often talk about those times at Pollsmoor. Today, he is a successful businessman and social activist, currently bidding to bring the Grand Prix to Cape Town.

One Monday morning, he and the other students were going for medical check-ups and I said I'd try to make sure they had a chance to meet Mandela. It was a very brief encounter but meant everything to those young people. At that time, the world had not set eyes on Mandela for more than 20 years.

I knew it was important for him, too, to have some personal contact with leaders from the outside. He didn't want the world to forget him and what he stood for. He was always gratified to hear that many thousands of people were making sacrifices to continue the ANC fight against apartheid.

When Mandela had check-ups, the appointment always had to be held very discreetly. He would be the last patient to be booked in so there could be no contact with the public. The specialist's clinic on the fifth floor of a modern office block near the foreshore in Cape Town would already be closed when we got there. We had a special arrangement with the doctor for him to stay late to see Mandela.

The doctor would spend an hour and a half with him, checking blood pressure and doing cardiac and breathing tests. I would stay in the examination room with Mandela while the other warders waited outside. There was a view of the harbour from a big picture window, all lit up with the twinkling lights of anchored ships.

One time when we left the clinic, we started towards Pollsmoor along Beach Road, a different direction to the way we had come. We were in a convoy with a police escort. It was about 8 p.m. and quite dark when I drew the minibus into a gravel parking place next to the ocean. The other warders wanted a smoke break. I told Mandela we could get out and walk down to the sea. He looked across to Robben Island and said: 'What is that place out there?' I told him it was his old prison.

He was completely taken aback. 'No, it can't be,' he said. 'It looks like a big ship moored out there, or maybe a small town.' The island was dark at night. The street lights were switched off and there was just the single beam from its lighthouse blinking on and off.

He wouldn't believe me. All you could see of Robben Island was its looming black shape. Mandela was certain the water he could see was a river but I told him to listen to the waves. I then took him across a few rocks strewn with bambous, the huge strands of seaweed he spent years working with, and told him to dip his hand in the water. 'You see it's salty, it's the Atlantic,' I said.

We stood there for about five minutes. Mandela was overawed by the sound and smell of the ocean, and the huge sky. He stood there staring around him and up at the stars. 'I've never been out this late before,' he said.

We both had memories of those terrible times on the island, too awful to even want to share. We walked back to the car in silence. It had been a strange few moments.

South Africa, my country, was by now virtually in flames. After the State of Emergency had been extended in 1986, giving even more powers to the police and army, the situation became

increasingly out of control. Now we had curfews all over again. No non-whites were allowed on the streets without express permission to be there. Thousands were being detained and 'disappeared'. Every township in the country had a contingent of armed troops standing by. Yet, with all this going on, the press was banned from reporting any political unrest.

Oliver Tambo's call to make the country ungovernable was working well. The economy was on the point of collapse and the free world was shocked and outraged at the violent scenes they were watching on TV footage smuggled out of the country.

I knew Mandela was writing regularly to the Commissioner of Prisons and to Minister Coetsee but not receiving replies. Meanwhile, he celebrated his 70th birthday in 1988 with a lunch in the visitors' centre. His dear friends Sisulu, Kathrada, Mhlaba, Mlangeni and Motsoaledi were invited and it was like old times. They laughed and joked and enjoyed the food. Knives and forks were provided for the first time, which amused them, and there was even dessert.

The government had banned all public gatherings to mark Mandela's 70th birthday and arrested dozens of people who tried to defy it. But not everyone would be cowed.

Just before Mandela's 70th birthday, the renowned Marxist Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci had decided to send him an exclusive copy of his epic work *The Last Emperor*. He had somehow heard that Mandela wanted to watch it but that Pollsmoor's projector could only show 16mm films. He got together with the British director Richard Attenborough and the Italian government, and wanted to make a big gesture to go with it. Thus, for Mandela's birthday, he sent a delegation to Pollsmoor with a lawyer to present the reformatted film to him. Of course, they were refused entry and kept outside the gates in full view of a fascinated media.

Dullah Omar, who often acted for Mandela and other political prisoners, was with them and I advised him to take the movie to a shop called Cine Place in the Woodstock suburb, which was where I hired all the prisoners' films from. I could let the manager know about it, and Omar should be there at 10 a.m. to carry out this secret operation. That was the only way *The Last Emperor* was getting to Mandela.

But there was to be no secrecy. I had been taking a trade unionist prisoner, Oscar Mpetha, to his daily physio session at Groote Schuur hospital and planned to take a detour on the way back to Pollsmoor to quietly pick up the movie. By the time I got there, a huge crowd had gathered at the Cine Place and Bertolucci's people wanted to make a big speech. I accepted the movie and promised to give it to Mandela. I had to get the manager to make out an invoice so that I could bring it into Pollsmoor, and we finally got the job done.

In the end, Mandela watched his special copy of *The Last Emperor* on the same day as tens of thousands of his supporters were attending a Free Mandela birthday tribute concert in London's Wembley Stadium. South Africa's own Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela performed on a star billing that included the Dire Straits, George Michael, Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder and the Bee Gees. An estimated one billion people watched it live on TV in over sixty countries and a movie of the events surrounding this concert is to be made shortly.

We were sent a short version of the concert afterwards and I watched it first with the other warders, ready to cut out unsuitable sections. But we left it whole and let Mandela and the others see just how popular they were all over the world. Later, we were sent the complete ten hours of the concert on half a dozen cassettes but we were forbidden to give it to Mandela. Somehow, though, Ahmed Kathrada managed to get hold of it so they could view it.

But all this was a world away from Mandela's day-to-day situation at Pollsmoor. Despite his increasing small freedoms, he was still heavily institutionalised after so many years behind bars.

A few months passed and Mandela wanted to visit his friends over in their new section of the prison, so I got permission to take him in a car. I was told by the head of prison that Mandela must get into the car on his own. I still don't know to this day if that was a cruel joke or an act of kindness, perhaps preparing Mandela for life on the outside.

Of course, he stood at the rear passenger door of the Ford Cortina and was unable to work out how to use the handle. He had never seen a lift-up handle on a car door before. He shook his head and said: 'I've just been in prison for too long.'

After his visit, I got a call on the radio while I was driving him back to his cell. I was instructed to go to my home, a married quarters flat in the prison compound, and wait for an important phone call on the landline. I parked up and left Mandela in the car, both of us slightly concerned. I told my wife she should perhaps go and say hello to him while I was on the phone.

The call was to tell me to take Mandela to Coetsee's house that evening. While I was receiving my instructions, my wife took our son Riaan outside with her and had a short conversation with Mandela through the car window.

After this next visit to Coetsee, Mandela seemed optimistic about a solid proposal coming from the government. There was obviously a huge flurry of activity going on. He didn't know the half of it but he was happy to go along with the mind games. He was nothing if not persistent. I was posting his letters and I could see how regularly he was lobbying government officials.

Mandela was now a cause célèbre supported all over the world, yet he was still not allowed to talk to most of his fellow activists in the same prison. However, I knew how much it meant to the others just to be detained near him and I started to help with a series of 'coincidences' where they could at least shake his hand and have a brief chat.

The trade unionist prisoner Oscar Mpetha was being a terrible nuisance around this time. He had had a leg amputated and needed to go to physio at hospital every day. He actually spent most of his prison sentence under armed guard in a hospital ward. He was supposed to be dressed and ready to go at 8 a.m. but without fail he was always still in bed when I went to fetch him.

I asked Mandela to please influence him, but they were not allowed to meet. So I made a dental appointment for Mandela at the same time as I was taking Mpetha out to hospital. It was early, before the criminal prisoners' cells were unlocked.

I told Oscar he should come out at exactly 8.45 a.m. and he could meet Mandela around the corner. He had been hoping to see Mandela for years, and now his eyes lit up. He would be ready on time, he promised.

In fact, Mpetha was up early, pressing me to set off. He had his artificial leg on and he was dressed. When he saw Mandela, he abandoned his crutches and ran into his arms. Mandela could hardly hold him upright.

I had to fake alarm at the situation, so I was a few feet away shouting: 'Someone come and separate them! This shouldn't be happening.'

On the way to hospital, Mpetha leaned over and squeezed my arm. He was so emotional he could hardly speak his thanks; it meant so much to him. He hadn't seen Mandela since the 1950s. I saw him after his release from prison and he was still talking about it. By then, he had had both legs amputated and was in a wheelchair. He had been a hero himself, a working-class docker who rose through trade union ranks to become president of the ANC in the Cape, and who was only released from prison shortly before Mandela. He lived just long enough to realise his dream of freedom for the black majority, and to see Mandela made president of South Africa. He died at his home in Gugulethu township six months after Mandela's inauguration.

I also arranged for the guys from the Ashley Forbes terrorism trial to meet Mandela, mainly so that he would tell them to calm down and accept prison life. Forbes was 24, the youngest commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe in the Western Cape. He'd trained in guerrilla warfare in Angola and then been picked up for terrorism offences. He was interrogated and tortured by notorious members of the apartheid apparatus – later named and shamed at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – and sent to Pollsmoor to await trial.

He and his fellow defendants were singing protest songs and shouting and refusing to go to their cell. They were treated brutally by the guards in return but never backed down. One night, several of them were discovered cutting through the bars of their communal cell in an escape plan. The warders reported the disruption and we were ordered to intervene with a 'carry-on'. I was the officer in charge but I could not bring myself to take part in the swinging of rubber batons and the beatings. I couldn't stop the intervention but at least I could stand aside.

Forbes was blamed for the incident and given 30 days in solitary, in a single cell in ankle-chains. He was charged with attempting escape and starting an affray, and he counter-charged with a claim of assault against the prison officers. In the end, there was a compromise. Both sides dropped the charges.

He and his fellow defendants deserved to meet Mandela, their hero and their leader. I waited till Mandela was walking in the exercise courtyard and I brought Forbes and some others down, ostensibly to pick up tennis balls they had knocked over the wall, and to take empty food buckets to the kitchen. They shook hands and embraced, and came back inspired by just a few words from the great man. He was happy too to have met these young lions.

Forbes was later sentenced to 15 years on Robben Island but he was released in 1991 when the last political prisoners left the island. The prison became a medium security institution for criminal prisoners for the next five years, until it closed its doors in 1996. Forbes was appointed senior estates manager when the island was declared a World Heritage Site in 1997 and he worked there for 10 years.

Trevor Manuel, a coloured political detainee who later became South Africa's finance minister, also managed to meet Kathrada and Mandela when I fixed up a dental appointment

for him.

Meanwhile, meetings between Coetsee and Mandela and other government officials had resumed and were seemingly increasing in importance. I knew also that he was determined to meet the apartheid government's president, P. W. Botha, so far without success. There seemed to be a deadlock with each side demanding an end to the violence.

I was aware Mandela was mentioning some of this to his comrades to test their judgement about it, and also writing to ANC leader Oliver Tambo in Zambia. But it was his own judgement he was relying on to make decisions, and this was causing tensions. I was regularly seeing Kathrada, Sisulu and the others, and I sensed they were anxious, suspicious even, about talks between Mandela and the government, from which they were excluded. Even one of Mandela's own activist lawyers, Priscilla Jana, whom I am still friendly with today, had suspicions about his secrecy.

This led to mistrust on both sides within Mandela's circle. Kathrada had been sending special food over to Mandela for Eid, the Muslim festival, and some curries and other dishes were stored in the cupboard in his cell for too long. He became sick with food poisoning and refused a visit from Priscilla and a fellow lawyer. They insisted on seeing him so he went to the visit room where they confronted him about 'talking to the enemy'. Mandela rushed from the room and I found him vomiting in the corridor. I helped him back to his cell, while the bugging device in the visiting room recorded Priscilla discussing the possibility that Mandela had run out on them because he didn't want to admit he was secretly 'selling them out' to the National Party.

They returned the next day and Mandela apologised. I saw what he was up against, this man now isolated in both body and soul, mistrusted even by his own comrades but still brave enough to soldier on towards his brilliant version of the truth.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Mandela's health was an increasing worry. A strong, fit man for the whole time I had known him, he now seemed to be growing older and weaker in front of my eyes.

The weight of his many responsibilities was a heavy burden. He had agreed to meet regularly with government representatives but they were playing a hard game with him. Their continual demand was for him to order the end of the ANC's armed struggle. Mandela did not even need to refer to Oliver Tambo or his other comrades to refuse this outright, even though it deadlocked the possibility of further negotiation.

The apartheid government was under siege internationally to release Mandela and abolish its racist regime; it needed to do business with the ANC. But they were putting forward impossible demands. They wanted an end to the ANC's military activities, a renouncement of Communism and an end to the call for black majority rule. Mandela was intransigent on all three issues.

They seemed to believe they could wear him down, these officials with their privileged lives and their freedom, coming in numbers to offer tempting possibilities to a 70-year-old man locked up in isolation and desperate for release.

They underestimated him. Mandela had not suffered 26 years of humiliation and deprivation just to cave in now. I knew he would rather carry the anguish of disappointment to his deathbed than ever sell out the ANC to a half-hearted compromise.

He was allowed to meet several times with his comrades Sisulu and Kathrada and the others, and they were given permission to sit in the big house next to the officer's mess, the same setting where the Eminent Persons Group had met Mandela for lunch. Of course, the rooms were all bugged and they knew it.

Tea and sandwiches were served and it was such a new sensation that, despite the overwhelming subjects of government and nationhood they were discussing and the awesome decisions these great men were considering, Kathrada found time to wonder at the dainty food and the tea poured into china cups with saucers. He told me afterwards what an unexpected treat that was.

The ANC needed to seize the moment while South Africa was in crisis. The apartheid government was clearly in disarray, and the common decency and humanity of the world was supporting their cause. Mandela had emerged as a world figure, a giant of a man who could almost single-handedly lead the way to reconciliation and a bloodless transition to a free and fair life for the benefit of all, black and white.

But I saw his health failing, a dry cough racking his lungs and causing sleepless nights and fever. I brought the medical officer and a government doctor to his bedside. They gave him cough mixture. Of course, there was no improvement and it was clear Mandela's respiratory problems needed further investigation. It was decided to get him to hospital for expert observation and more tests.

On 12 August 1988, I got him to a car outside his cell and we drove to Tygerberg hospital in unmarked vehicles. Three rooms had been cordoned off and warders patrolled the corridors. Presumably, they were there to fend off intruders or the media; they could not have possibly thought Mandela might make a run for it.

Mandela was gasping for breath, and he was wheeled straight to the theatre. Fluid was drained from his lungs, and back in the ward I watched him become thinner and weaker over the next six weeks. He was not eating and he was himself in an anxious state about his health. He told me he had never had 'flu or persistent colds or coughs, and could not understand what was wrong with him.

I was bringing him his newspapers and letters every day and taking my turn with the warders guarding him. Meanwhile, the doctors were doing endless tests. One morning, I was with Mandela in his room. He was sitting up in bed in his green and white striped prison pyjamas, with his study books. A doctor came in and told him he had tuberculosis, a dreadful disease. He said there would be more treatment and it meant a further long period in hospital.

My heart sank, and as I looked at Mandela I saw him keeping himself under control. He thanked the doctor for telling him the truth in such a straightforward way, and said he was prepared to go through any treatment necessary.

Tuberculosis is rife in South Africa and the bacteria flourishes in crowded places like prisons and hostels. It can survive in damp, dusty and dark conditions for a long period, especially if ventilation is poor. With Mandela's immune system at a low ebb from stress and

previous hospital procedures, he was a prime candidate. Nevertheless, the depressing news was a huge blow to both of us.

It was decided that staying in Tygerberg, a state hospital, was too risky in terms of security – there were too many people going in and out. Too many black people was what they really meant: people who might see and actually recognise Mandela and spread the word. The last thing they wanted was for him to be sprung out of hospital and back into the community.

The head of Pollsmoor decided we should send Mandela over to Constantiaberg Medi-Clinic, a private hospital. Towards the end of August, we put him in a wheelchair, still in his pyjamas, and took him to the ground floor in the goods lift. At the back of the hospital, we quickly got him into a car. The one hospital security guard who helped us did so well that he was offered a job at Pollsmoor.

At Constantiaberg, a whole ward had been screened off. There were five warders on each shift and I was ordered to make Mandela at home there. I brought all his things from his cell at Pollsmoor – the steel cabinet, books and clothes all piled into a prison pick-up truck – and set up home for him. He was the first black patient ever to be admitted to this hospital.

Four nurses had been selected to take care of him. They and their family and friends had all been checked out by the security police for their political views. These young women seemed fearful of nursing Mandela at first but he shook hands with each of them on introduction, taking both of their hands in his, and within days they were smuggling in special treats for him and enjoying his good humour and easy manner.

Like me, they had been charmed into breaking the rules for him. They were bringing him cake and chocolate mousse and even pizza for him to try for the first time. This was all strictly against regulations – the warders were supposed to taste and test all the food going in to Mandela.

Minister Coetsee made personal visits to the hospital, keeping up the all-important contact that could, in an ideal world, lead to peace in the country. Mandela was advised by the prison officers that he should buy himself some smart clothes for his talks with government representatives. He had a few thousand rand in his prison account and authorised me to go with the head of prison to choose trousers, shirts, shoes and a jacket. For some reason, the head of prison chose the most expensive men's clothing store in the area, in an exclusive white shopping street in Wynberg suburb. I wondered if Mandela was being given a lesson in how expensive life was on the outside. I never discovered if this was deliberately cold-hearted or a helpful gesture.

I had to hide a smile when I saw Mandela send at least half of it back. A pair of shoes from that shop cost R800, which would be £184 – expensive even by today's standards. The head of prison warned him that was what everyday items cost outside of prison. It wasn't true.

Some of the clothes needed altering so we brought in a warder called Visagie, who worked in Pollsmoor's tailoring department, to do some measuring. He was a coloured guy, which took the hospital staff aback. The head of prison told the nurse to bring food for me and Visagie while he worked, and, although I could see her falter, she didn't refuse. Things were changing and the whites had better get used to it; that's what I saw at that moment.

Mandela made great friends with his nurses. He told me how they wanted to take him to their staff Christmas party downstairs in early December but of course that was impossible. So they brought some turkey and trimmings up to his ward and had their own little celebration with him there. The Christmas crackers had to be opened up, taken apart and put together again by the security-conscious warders, but that went off all right. Mandela, in great spirits, had his party.

Minister Coetsee continued to visit and of course all their conversations were bugged. He was rushing back and forth to carry messages to the other interested parties.

The nurses told me afterwards how Mandela would point all around the ceiling to let them know where the bugs were. He told them once how 'the bees are buzzing, lots of activity in the hive today', getting them to shake their heads and wonder what on earth he was talking about.

Mandela had dug in his heels over the government's demands but he wanted the dialogue to continue too, so a high-stakes game was taking place. Back on the ward in his striped prison pyjamas after these meetings, he made many notes, at the same time taking his medicine and following doctor's orders to regain his health and keep moving forward.

One evening in early December, some three months after Mandela's arrival at the hospital, the head of prison appeared in Mandela's ward and told him he should get ready to leave. Mandela was to dress in his new clothes – slacks, a shirt and a dark-coloured casual jacket – and put his hospital dressing-gown on top.

It was getting dark and I used the confusion of a shift change to get him out. He and I walked down the fire-escape steps together and went outside where I had arranged for the

security alarm to be turned off. Like Mandela, I had no idea where we were going.

I was told to drive at high speed and to follow an unmarked police car. There were five vehicles in our convoy. None of us, police or warders, was wearing a uniform. I was thinking this must be very significant. We were driving away from Pollsmoor and it was all being done under cover of darkness.

I thought maybe Mandela was actually going to be released. A year earlier, Mandela had put it to government representatives that his fellow political prisoners should be released. He was glad and thankful to be told that Govan Mbeki was to be brought over from Robben Island with four others and they would be freed. The four other prisoners were serving life sentences for activism and they had accepted President P. W. Botha's offer of release in return for renouncing violence. Mbeki hadn't, but it was still decided he should be released.

Mandela had had the pleasure of telling Mbeki himself that he was leaving prison. The official reason was his age – he was eight years older than Mandela – and his ability to quell uprisings in the Eastern Cape. The two met in a contact visit in Pollsmoor, then Mbeki was flown out that night and met by lawyers in Port Elizabeth. He was still to play a highly significant role in further negotiations.

But Mandela himself was far from a release date.

Warily, he looked around him as we drove through suburbs and out into the countryside. Eventually, we drove down a dirt track towards farmland and in through the gates of Victor Verster Prison in Paarl, a rural town an hour from the city of Cape Town. Mandela was sitting in the middle of the back seat as usual, peering forward. All the warders at the gate saluted as we drove by.

We parked up by a newly built white-painted wall with observation posts nearby. Behind it was a cream-coloured bungalow with a pretty stoep with three archways. There was a tiled roof, a well-tended garden and a swimming pool.

Beyond the high wall was farmland, where the low-security prisoners worked. There were pigs and chickens and fields of vegetables, so pleasing for Mandela to see after all these years. It was in the middle of nowhere but there was countryside and fresh air, something he had longed for.

He was very cool, very dignified about the whole thing. He just walked from the car into the house, noting the staff quarters outside where his warders would be on 24-hour standby, listening in to the bugs undoubtedly planted everywhere on the premises. The security police were stationed in a large metal container unit with one next to it for National Intelligence. The head of Pollsmoor Prison was moved in to be in overall charge of the set-up, and a cook warder would spend daylight hours with him.

Mandela took it all in, strolling from room to room. He was going to be living alone in a house with a big main bedroom and a big kitchen. 'It's beautiful,' he murmured. 'But why is there a television in the kitchen?'

'It's a microwave,' he was told, and he listened in genuine wonderment while its functions were explained to him. He liked the look of the pool but thought it was dangerous, a place where children could drown. He had always told Winnie they would never have a pool at their home. He was obsessed with safety and freedom for children, animals, everyone.

In the sitting room, someone turned on the television and he saw a news bulletin announcing that he had been moved to Victor Verster. He couldn't believe that they already knew that.

I stood in the big bedroom with him and opened the wardrobe door. He looked inside, amazed. Then I opened another door and there was the en suite bathroom. Amazing, he found everything amazing.

I told him I had to say goodbye but I was coming back. He shook my hand. All he had with him was the portable radio that never left his side, and a small overnight bag. He told me: 'Please drive safely and don't forget to bring my things. My books, my exercise clothes and my photo album.'

He was told he could ring a bell and call anyone at any time of night. There were no prison bars but there were many people around – warders, security police, government spies.

For the first time for many years, he was looking at comfortable furniture in mellow colours, with carpets on the floor and pictures on the walls. I left him in the sitting room, just standing there. He looked tired; after all, he had just left hospital. But he also looked content, as if he might settle in all right.

He told me he wouldn't use the big bedroom. He wanted to move into a smaller one. When I looked back, he was still standing in the sitting room and every light in the house and garden, even on the stoep, was blazing. I heard he left the lights on all night, even in the bedroom. It was all he was used to after 26 years in prison.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Mandela told me the next day that he had taken a walk around the garden and liked everything except the razor wire. There were pretty flower beds, but his gardening days were over. He didn't need to grow vegetables any more; he had his very own chef and the food was good.

He was so taken with the design of the house that he made a rough drawing of it and, years later, he built a replica of it in the village of Qunu where he spent his childhood. His daughter Zindzi rationalised that his affection for the house at Victor Verster was prompted by the fact it was the first place he had lived in for 26 years that was anything like a normal home. The brick-faced bungalow in Qunu with its tiled roof and front stoep beautified by three arches is a home he loved, and he wanted it to be his last resting-place.

Mandela was no swimmer but when it was very hot – sometimes the temperature would climb to 35 degrees – he enjoyed just standing in the cold water in the pool. One of the warder's sons offered to teach him to swim but, although Mandela tried, he had no real enthusiasm for it.

Of course, the warders on night duty also loved to get in the pool. But they were discovered by some officers and forbidden to use it again. That upset Mandela. He told me he had heard them splashing around at night-time and had enjoyed watching through the window, seeing people having fun.

He made good friends with his chef, warder Jack Swart, who has since told of how he reminded Mandela that they had met before, on Robben Island. Swart was the driver who used to take Mandela and the others on outdoor work parties, driving so fast and so hard along the island tracks that Mandela once knocked on his window and told him angrily to stop hurtling over all the bumps and potholes. 'We're not sacks of mealies!' he had protested.

In fact, Swart had been told by Robben Island's senior officers to cause maximum discomfort for the prisoners so he had just been doing his job, much as he appeared to regret it later.

Mandela was slightly unamused to be told this same guy would now be his constant companion, but he lightened the mood by saying, 'Well, I hope you're a better cook than you are a driver.'

They found a way to get on well and soon Mandela was insisting on helping with the washing-up and making the sorghum beer that Swart brewed up so expertly from the wheat grain he brought from his friend's farm, fermented with brown sugar, raisins and yeast. Mandela used to joke with his many visitors that they were only coming to see him because of the beer and the food.

That first day, I returned to Constantiaberg hospital to collect his belongings and I heard how the guards had stayed outside his room all night, not knowing he had gone. When the nurses arrived for their shift, they realised Mandela had been moved and were upset that they hadn't said goodbye. But he had instructed me to buy boxes of assorted chocolates for them and small cards so he could write to them individually. He gave me all the nurses' names and I delivered them. I got the feeling each of those nurses would treasure his words for life.

I also collected the television from his cell and brought it to Victor Verster for him. He said I should give his iron and his coffee flask to the criminal prisoners. And there were cigarettes, chocolates and a note of thanks for Louw, the cook in the prison kitchen.

When I returned, I went through the solid steel side door into Mandela's garden and he was already coming out of the house to greet me, happy to see a familiar face but also pleased to have assessed his new surroundings and found them comfortable. He was wearing a dark-coloured tracksuit, a white T-shirt and trainers. The International Red Cross had been sending money for him and other prisoners to spend on exercise clothing. I never saw him in a prison uniform again.

We brought in about 10 cardboard boxes full of study books, sports equipment, newspaper clippings – all dated and indexed – along with Mandela's desk calendars for every year he had been imprisoned, and his clothing. He asked us to stack them in the sitting room. He wanted to sort things out on his own. He was making himself at home. He had already acquired a bodyboard to help with swimming. I was invited to take the encyclopaedias.

At 11 a.m., Mandela asked Swart to bring us cold drinks. He was by now quite the gentleman of the house, settled into his role. He showed me around the pool area and the garden and was very happy with a big tree at the centre where he could sit in the shade to read.

I had brought letters with me and told him I'd bring them regularly. He sent warm greetings back to the 'old guys' in Pollsmoor and said he hoped to see them soon.

Raymond Mhlaba was particularly angry and upset that Mandela had been taken to another location. He said he and the other Rivonians believed the authorities planned to kill him. They put in daily written demands to see him at Victor Verster. Meanwhile, I heard that Winnie had been his first visitor and they had talked over many family problems. Of course, I could find out everything they talked about because the house was bugged all over.

As I left, my fellow warders showed me the operations room full of tape recorders and switches for various bugs. There was sophisticated sound equipment everywhere, more technology than in Pollsmoor – even the furniture was bugged. The chair legs were hollow and fitted with recording devices operating from batteries. The trees in the garden and all the flower beds were bugged. Mandela could not have gardened there even if he had wanted to. The walls literally had ears, but he was aware of it so it was virtually counter-productive. He wasn't going to openly discuss ANC tactics.

When visits started with Sisulu, Kathrada and the others, he would sometimes walk them to the toilet cubicle, the only place where he couldn't be overheard, for a quick exchange of news and views.

Sisulu wrote to a friend at that time saying that Mandela seemed fit and well, but lonely. He only had the warders to talk to. Mandela's neighbours were the ever-vigilant security police, sweating in their metal container of an office. Next to them were the National Intelligence guys. Close by was a braai area where Mandela could entertain visitors with a meal of cooked beef and sausages. All that area was bugged too.

It took Mandela six months to get approval for a visit from Sisulu. When the day came, I drove him in a government car with no escort. He was in the back, wearing his prison uniform. I was supposed to take a different route from Pollsmoor to Victor Verster Prison each time so as to avoid any media attention and it was a pleasure to be driving through the countryside at Somerset West and Stellenbosch, with a dramatic mountain range behind us.

Sisulu was very excited, noting the farmland and the crops with everything looking green and alive. As we drove past the turn-off to Strand, I pointed out that Eddie Daniels, a popular fellow prisoner on Robben Island, lived there. He was glad to hear that and so interested in everything, wanting to know about the winelands, which he'd never seen before. Like Mandela, he came from the bustling township of Soweto in Johannesburg, the big city. He had seen nothing of the beautiful Western Cape. Even on rare visits to the doctor or the dentist on the mainland, Sisulu and the others had been in the back of prison trucks, unable to see anything around them.

We drove through the gates at Victor Verster and Mandela was at the steel door waiting for him. They hugged and were happy and somehow relieved to see each other. All the old friendship was still there; they still needed each other very much.

Mandela was longing to show Sisulu around the place and he was duly fascinated by the idea of an en suite bathroom: such luxury. Of course, they played with the microwave in the kitchen together, Mandela mightily amused by his new party trick, putting a plastic beaker of water in for 60 seconds and then producing it boiling hot.

They spent about an hour and a half together alone indoors, while Swart organised tea and snacks. Everything they said was listened in to by the swarms of spies stationed outside in their sweltering operations room.

Mandela described how he was seeing a medical officer every day, and a doctor twice a week. They were taking his blood pressure and checking his pills. Someone definitely wanted to make sure he survived. He was still doing sit-ups and press-ups regularly and now had a new exercise bike in one of the spare rooms. I felt he was beginning to look better, back to his usual healthy, handsome and dignified self.

Sisulu was glad that Mandela had recovered fully from his periods in hospital. On the way back to Pollsmoor, he told me: 'It was good to see him in a light mood again, and fit and healthy. He deserves some luxury in his life after all this time.' I got the feeling that Sisulu was going to keep to himself some of the matters he and Mandela had discussed.

On the journey back, we stopped at a little shop and bought some cold drinks. Sisulu asked for a Diet Coke. There were coloured children playing around the car but they didn't take any notice of us in our warders' uniforms and him in prison clothes. We had driven slowly for the whole trip, all of us glad to be out of the daily routine for a few hours, and we got back to Pollsmoor just in time for lock-up.

The commanding officer was waiting for us. He told Sisulu he was being moved into Mandela's old cell, that miserable damp place. Now it was his turn to be alone. Sisulu accepted it calmly but, when I fetched his belongings from the communal cell, Kathrada was terribly upset. 'Sisulu is old, he shouldn't be alone,' he said. 'Who is going to take care of him?

It's my job to look after him. Who is going to do that when he's in isolation?'

Kathrada was kindness itself, and he had been close to the whole Sisulu family even before he was imprisoned. He had become like a son to Sisulu, helping him to the shower and continually checking on his health and diet.

The regime had its reasons for isolating Mandela and Sisulu, the main conduits to Oliver Tambo in exile. It was too late to break them – that was evident – but they could limit their influence on others.

In July 1989, I was told that Sisulu, Mlangeni, Kathrada, Mhlaba and Oscar Mpetha could go to Mandela for a four-hour visit to include lunch. They were allowed to wear their own clothes and to them it was a sure sign that all Mandela's efforts to get them released were surely going in the right direction. For me, I was not so sure. It could just be a security measure so that their journey and their visit could be low-key.

There was tremendous excitement: an outing and a reunion to look forward to. Mpetha was at hospital for physio again so he would be joining the rest of us en route.

I drove the others in a prison minibus with another officer sitting next to me. We left Pollsmoor at 8.30 a.m. and parked up on a grassy patch near the river at Maitland, waiting for Mpetha to join us. When his vehicle arrived, we set off in convoy towards Victor Verster.

Mandela came out of the steel door, impatient to see them. It was very touching to watch them, and for Mpetha it was a moment he had wanted for years. I had sneaked him that brief encounter with Mandela in the corridor at Pollsmoor but now was the first time he was meeting the other Rivonians. Their friendship went back all the way to the 1950s.

Mhlaba was doing his usual big, noisy laugh; they were all in great high spirits. All the old guard of the ANC High Command, two of them now living in isolation but not one of them a broken relic of the revolution, as the government had intended.

In his memoirs, *Conversations With Myself*, Mandela wrote about these comrades, saying: 'I wish I could tell you more about the courageous band of colleagues with whom I suffer humiliation daily and who nevertheless deport themselves with dignity and determination. I wish I could relate their conversations and banter, their readiness to help in any personal problem suffered by their fellow prisoners so that you could judge for yourself the calibre of the men whose lives are being sacrificed on the fiendish altar of colour hatred.'

I walked behind them as they went into the house. They had to be shown every room, and the microwave party trick. They were having a wonderful time.

I left them talking in the sitting room and went outside. Swart was offering to bring drinks and they all had tea. About an hour later, they moved to the dining room and had a proper lunch served to them with place-settings and knives and forks. I had a big smile to myself at their delight. Swart served Mandela some white wine and Mlangeni wanted beer. Kathrada, a Muslim who didn't take alcohol, had a fizzy apple drink. Sisulu asked for the same but didn't realise there was no alcohol in it. So he was very funny afterwards, acting as if he was slightly drunk. The whole thing was just in his head and we teased him about it endlessly.

Kathrada had hidden a book in his bag. It was Mandela's second prison biography, written by his close friend and fellow activist Fatima Meer, called *Higher Than Hope*. Copies had been sent to Pollsmoor in the post and the censors had agreed the prisoners could have it. But still Kathrada could not be sure what restrictions there were on Mandela. He asked Mandela to autograph the book and in fact they all signed it and then wrapped it in brown prison paper and gave it to me for safe-keeping.

Fatima Meer and her husband Ismail had been loyal friends who took many risks to hide Mandela during his underground years when the police were searching for him. They witnessed the development of his relationship with Winnie and supported and cared for her for many years while he was in prison. Fatima and her husband always believed that Mandela would be released one day and lead South Africa. They had watched him through his first, often reckless, years as a revolutionary and they shared his unshakeable faith in the future.

Even while I was with him every day and doubtful that this ageing man could ever walk free and have the energy needed to change the country, he was writing to Ismail Meer about their shared hopes and plans. One of those letters, written from Robben Island, was later published. In it, Mandela reminisced about their early days, arguing their different politics – Ismail was a member of the Communist Party and Mandela was going in another direction then – and he described how: '…a litany of dreams and expectations kept me going throughout those lean years. Some of them have been realised while the fulfilment of others eludes us to this day.

'Nevertheless few people will deny that the harvest has merely been delayed, far from destroyed. It is on there, our rich and well-watered fields, even though the actual task of gathering it has proved far more testing than we ever thought.'

It was astonishing that the authorities had allowed Mandela and his comrades to have the

book. Mandela had agreed that Fatima could write the authorised story of his prison years, as he did not want to display the 'vanity' of writing his own autobiography. He later relented, in the knowledge that his *Long Walk to Freedom* was not a personal vanity at all but a journey he took for all South Africans. The lunch they were all enjoying that day was a celebration of *Higher Than Hope* and a very important reunion to underscore their belief that they could still change the world.

They were drinking wine for the first time in years, a semi-sweet wine that Mandela had started to enjoy. Mlangeni and Mhlaba loosened up and were quite noisy. The next day, Mlangeni complained of a bad headache, though I think even he thought it had been worth it. All of them had been in high spirits on the way back. We delivered Mpetha back to hospital with a police escort, and I took the rest of the party home to Pollsmoor.

A month later, Wilton Mkwayi, their great friend and the self-appointed cook of crayfish and abalone during grim times out working on Robben Island beach, was transferred to Pollsmoor because he needed hospital treatment for a back problem. There was more rejoicing in the communal cell when I brought him to the Rivonians and now he was able to go with them on occasional visits to Mandela.

Mandela had found a way to communicate with Oliver Tambo in Zambia through his lawyers, reporting on progress with his offer of talks and negotiations with the apartheid government. Tambo had advised caution and others in the ANC were completely against any reconciliation. But Mandela was charting his own course, the course he believed would result in less pain, less bloodshed.

Sisulu went on one-to-one visits to Mandela and, as they knew all their conversations were being overheard and recorded, they made conciliatory verbal gestures and talked of their intention to be reasonable with the regime, all strong hints that talks should continue and be speeded up, even if they were only talks about talks.

I heard about several visits from Coetsee, the Minister of Justice, who was actually now bringing bottles of wine with him, and I was at the house once when the Commissioner of Prisons was talking to Mandela.

I could see him becoming more straightforward with his demands. His priority was to get veteran political prisoners released. He refused to negotiate further until that was resolved.

One Saturday morning, an outing was organised for him to drive up the scenic west coast away from the Cape to the tiny fishing resort of Paternoster. Several warders came, with me driving a white Mercedes and a police escort behind us.

We had heard there was a 'red tide' up the coast. This was a fascinating phenomenon when tons of plankton and other algae had over-germinated due to freak weather conditions and an upwelling in the ocean. When this happened, the sea was red and purple, brown and orange. And literally tons of crayfish became stranded on the beach and rocks, having moved to shallow water to get more oxygen.

As the tide went out, the crayfish were left there, suffering from lack of water and a blazing sun. The government arranged helicopters carrying cargo nets to airlift them back into the sea miles up the coast to keep them alive. The fishing industry was vital to that area's economy. However, the local people, many of them subsistence fishermen, came in hordes to collect the valuable crayfish to sell or eat before the helicopter could collect them. It was an exciting event, a spectacle we all wanted to see.

It took us two hours to get there and when we arrived we could see crowds of white people, holidaymakers and vendors selling the crayfish. We found a small restaurant at the beach and decided on a table. I suppose we were an unusual group, four big white guys with a black man, though none of us were wearing prison clothes. Nobody stared. Nobody seemed to notice us as we drank coffee. We walked down the beach and watched people bringing in boats. We drove back through the coloured fishermen's living area where kids were playing around the old whitewashed cottages. We had tinted windows fitted so no one could see in. We drove slowly through the area so Mandela could have a good look. And that was the last time I was with him outside prison until his release.

During this time, he told me he was feeling that some of the warders and their cohorts in the security police and National Intelligence were not sufficiently respectful towards him. He put in a complaint that they were calling him Nelson, and these were men much younger than him, all this occurring at a time when he was at his most assertive, his most dignified, needing to make his status obvious to those in meetings with him.

Orders came in from on high that we must call him Mr Mandela from now on. He had successfully played a game of his own in the face of all the mind games imposed on him.

It was different for me. I would always be 'Mr Brand' to him, or 'Warrant Officer Brand' if I was in uniform. He would shake my hand and greet me warmly, saying: 'How are you today, my friend? How are things at Pollsmoor? I hope your family is well.' For more than 10 years, I

had called him Mandela so I couldn't change that overnight, and he did not mind at all.

It was only when I met him regularly as president that I started calling him Mr Mandela, and then I was upbraided by others for not calling him Mr President. Actually, it didn't matter what we called each other; we had a warm and special relationship, which was nothing to do with names or titles and everything to do with what we had been through together.

For all those years, going back to my first meeting with the Rivonians, I had been thinking that these people didn't belong in there, in those terrible places. The punishment the government had given them was wrong. They were old, polite, friendly and disciplined men. They were high-minded idealists who believed with all their hearts that their suffering was worthwhile.

Their great supporter, the anti-apartheid campaigner Helen Suzman, visited them several times and was impressed with their resilience. She said: 'They were strong and united, and they were organised and they were informed.'

If they were on the outside, they could help to control the violence that was constantly bubbling under the surface of our country, erupting at any time.

When Mandela was first put into isolation, I was thinking and hoping that would be a first step towards freedom for him. He had the power to stop the bloodshed and there was a lot of blood flowing. Maybe black and white and coloured could live in harmony with his guidance. And he could be free. He was a good man – that was clear to me from the start.

I thought about all this a great deal and, even today, I wish I had done more for him and his comrades. The rules were so strict but I tried to make life a little easier. Perhaps, though, I could have been more lenient during visits, and not followed the rules so rigidly when censoring their letters.

I loved my country and I was steeped in the Afrikaans culture, so I had very mixed feelings about how South Africa might turn out. My parents were always definite that there should never have been apartheid, no Hendrik Verwoerd bringing his cruel fascist notions over from Holland and Germany.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up by Mandela after he became president to hear testimony from people who had suffered during the apartheid years, many ordinary white people were genuinely shocked. They had been living in a police state with no knowledge of the oppression that led to black protests or riots or demands. It was impossible for them to have black or coloured friends or associates as that was banned by law, and the news was heavily censored. They didn't know about the torture and deaths. They only knew about terrorist attacks by the ANC.

I knew more. I had been living with a great deal of extra knowledge. I felt ashamed of my government.

I remembered a warder working with me on Robben Island. One day, he had given a lift to a coloured lady in the pouring rain after she had visited a prisoner. He let her sit in the back of his pick-up truck, still exposed to the weather but at least reaching shelter more quickly. It was against the law, the Immorality Act, for him as an unaccompanied man to be in the same vehicle as a coloured woman. He was fined and left the prison service soon afterwards. That small act of human kindness had cost him his career. It could not possibly be right for that to happen.

I thought back to my childhood on the farm when my father would stop his vehicle when he saw people of any colour walking the rough tracks, and offer them a lift. People of all skin tones could be seen on the village streets together. But in the cities where the police were ever watchful, there was total segregation.

I recently met a coloured lady in her eighties who remembered our days on the farm. Her husband worked with my father. She remembered all of my family and our friends with fondness and talked of those happier days when we didn't realise the turmoil in the cities and the suburbs.

She reminded me of a time when my father's truck had a puncture and we were stranded by the roadside. A black African man stopped to help, lending us a spare tyre and saying we could return it the next day. That was in 1974 when such interaction would have been literally impossible away from the farmlands.

All this went through my mind as I watched the extraordinary events going on in front of me at Pollsmoor and Victor Verster, the increasing official visits, the phone calls to and from Zambia, the courtesy with which government representatives were treating Mandela.

A new regular visitor was Niel Barnard, the head of National Intelligence, who was a close adviser to President P. W. Botha. He had in fact been meeting with Mandela secretly since 1988. Mandela had asked many times to meet with Botha but had been refused. Barnard was there as his eyes and ears, reporting back with the help of tapes recording every meeting.

Mandela had written to Botha proposing that they meet to discuss conditions for

negotiations, as the prospect of real negotiations was completely deadlocked. He was determined that an immovable precondition would be the release of his fellow long-term prisoners. In early July 1989, Mandela was taken secretly to the Tuynhuys (the Townhouse – the Cape Town office of the South African presidency) for his first meeting with Botha.

I heard later, with some astonishment, that the head of prison had thought Mandela's tie was done up badly and re-knotted it himself. When they arrived at Botha's office, Niel Barnard was similarly unimpressed by his shoelaces and knelt down to tie them properly. What moments to have captured for history. I just wish I had been there to see for myself.

Over the years, there had been many occasions when I could have taken photographs of Mandela and the rest of the Rivonians. They would have liked it and encouraged it. But there wasn't a photographic processor in the whole country who would risk developing it, and, if they did, we would all have ended up in prison. That was the strength of the fear we lived with. It's a great shame.

I was not involved in the trip to the grand Tuynhuys office; other warders took Mandela. But it is common knowledge now that Botha was staggered by his familiarity with every aspect of the Afrikaner nation and its history. Their meeting was tentative but cordial, though Botha continued to angrily disagree that there was any similarity between black South Africans' fight for their rights and the Afrikaners' battles for recognition in their 1914 uprising.

There would be further meetings, and the ANC in exile in England and Zambia were also having round-table talks with governments that had influence in South Africa. George Bizos, Mandela's lawyer who had represented him at the Rivonia trial, made a trip to Zambia to take detailed information from Mandela to Oliver Tambo.

On Mandela's birthday two weeks later – a day so cold you could see snow on the top of the mountains – he celebrated with almost his whole family, the first time he had ever had his wife and children in one place together for 26 years. He told me how much it hurt to realise what he had been missing.

When his daughter Zindzi later described that day, she said she was trying to work out what the government was hoping to achieve. By now, the government had given permission for certain members of Mandela's family to stay overnight at his house in Victor Verster. Zindzi felt that the family was being encouraged to perhaps move in there with her father, to reduce his martyrdom status, to 'compromise the Mandela legend'. She was almost certainly right.

Neither she nor her mother Winnie ever agreed to spend one night there. Winnie said it was a nice house with a nice garden, but it was still a prison and she would never ever make it her home.

Outside in the rest of the country, the trade union movement had joined up with the former UDF, the United Democratic Front (now known as the MDM, or the Mass Democratic Movement), to forge ahead with a major defiance campaign in sympathy with the ANC. In the prisons, there were hunger strikes and a state of near-anarchy, which forced the government to release about 1,000 political detainees.

In August, P. W. Botha suffered a serious stroke and resigned as State President. In a short while, on 20 September 1989, F. W. de Klerk was sworn in and announced that his government would talk to any group that wanted peace. If it was a signal to Mandela, he quickly recognised it and immediately wrote to de Klerk renewing his offers to talk.

Soon afterwards, I was told I could take Mlangeni, Mhlaba, Sisulu and Kathrada to visit Mandela at Victor Verster again, and once again they could wear their own clothes. A tailor's assistant had been into Pollsmoor to expertly measure them and I made sure he had Oscar Mpetha's measurements too. Fine suits were made for everyone and I took Oscar's to him in hospital. I also found there was a suit for me too, a very nice fit.

The new clothes had already had their first outing and there is a great photograph of all the prisoners together with Mandela – Oscar still in his hospital dressing-gown that day – in the garden at Victor Verster, looking very spruce.

Now, on what turned out to be another special day, the guys were very happy to be climbing into the minibus with me. We decided to make a braai that day for four of us warders from Pollsmoor, two or three of our colleagues at Victor Verster, and the prisoners. Poor Oscar was stuck in hospital again so couldn't join in the fun.

Mlangeni had recently had a terrible setback. His twin sister had died and, despite his written application pleading to go to her funeral, he had been turned down due to 'security reasons'. The police were terrified that the sight of one of the Rivonian heroes in public would trigger crowd hysteria.

We were sorry for Mlangeni for this piece of cruelty. Unsurprisingly, he had taken it very badly. But now there was a party that might cheer him up a little. We had sausages and lamb

chops and beer, with an agreement we could spend five hours there, before leaving at 6 p.m. It was quite relaxing in the sunshine and someone in the prison service took a group photograph of Mandela and his friends sitting under his favourite tree.

It must have been Mandela's idea. It turned out that he knew something we didn't. His friends were going home: he had won that battle for them.

I planned to take the prisoners back to Pollsmoor but I got a message saying we couldn't leave. There were hundreds of people outside the gates. So I took them all over to the officers' mess, leaving Mandela at his house.

Mandela told them then: 'Chaps, this is goodbye,' but they wouldn't believe him. They said that they would believe it when they saw it. I organised some food and drink for them in the mess. They asked if they could have steak and a television was brought in for them to watch. We turned it on just as it was being announced loud and clear that Mhlaba, Mlangeni, Kathrada and Sisulu were being released. They were taken totally by surprise. They were all ecstatic, all incredulous.

The officers found some champagne and the steak was served. Suddenly, it was a celebration and even some of my hardline colleagues looked happy and relieved for these old-timers who had been so suddenly set free. The least problematic and most-liked prisoners in South Africa were going home at last.

Everyone was enjoying the moment. The champagne still flowed, with Kathrada and Sisulu sticking to their apple drink. There were no mobile phones in those days so they couldn't call anyone with their marvellous news.

At about 9 p.m., I drove out through a back route to avoid all the media at the front gates. It was like a party in the minibus on the way to Pollsmoor, with everyone talking at once and so excited. They said they didn't mind staying one more night; they would leave in the morning. They asked me, though, if their cell doors could stay unlocked. Despite everything, I couldn't agree to that, so we locked them up as usual.

But it turned out that the prisoners had to stay a further few days while transport and other arrangements were sorted out for them. Eventually, one evening, I was told to get ready by 5 a.m. to take Mlangeni, Mhlaba, Kathrada, Sisulu, Motsoaledi and Mkwayi to the airport.

Motsoaledi had been brought over from Robben Island two days previously, and Mkwayi had returned from hospital where his back problems had been treated. The two of them had missed out on the release party in the officers' mess but they were still ecstatic to be going home.

First they all had to go to Johannesburg prison for their official release. All their belongings were sent separately. Kathrada secretly gave me a cardboard box he wanted me to keep safe for him at my home, which contained all his prison clothes, his mementoes.

A minibus waited to take them all to the airport. They all wore their new suits and looked great. It was still dark when we left the prison. We drove on to the tarmac at Cape Town airport and they walked up into the plane and right down to the back seats. The other passengers would have had no idea who they were. They looked like businessmen.

It was all done in a big rush, with warders on the steps shouting: 'Come on, come on, get on the plane!'

I didn't have a chance to say a proper goodbye but I shook each of them by the hand and we promised to stay in touch, a promise we all kept and which still means a lot to me.

None of them had slept the previous night. They had been too excited and too busy packing.

When I got back to Pollsmoor, Mhlaba's lawyer turned up to see him, bringing a suit. I said I would take it to him but he could not have an impromptu visit. I was under strict orders not to tell anyone the guys had already gone.

I took the suit and poured myself a coffee and relaxed for 15 minutes. Then I came back and said the trousers were too long but the prison tailor could fix them. Of course, I knew Mhlaba was already in Johannesburg. We sent the suit up there for him but I've no idea if it fitted him.

The next day, 15 October 1989, they were officially released from Johannesburg. The head of prison announced to them that an official fax had come through with instructions. Kathrada was mystified. He had no idea what a fax was and still could not get his head around it after several attempts at explanations. He still jokes with me about it today.

Mhlaba was flown out to Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape where he lived. The others were released at 5 a.m., shown live on television.

Later that morning, I was telephoned from the gates of Pollsmoor Prison. Sisulu's nephew, recently released himself from Robben Island, had come to visit and did not know about the release. 'You can't see him today,' I told him. He was angry and argumentative. He had the day's newspapers with him. I said: 'Well, if you actually read the newspapers, you'd see your

uncle has already left here, he's been set free.'

He was so disappointed to have missed the magic moment of Sisulu's release. He went straight to the airport to catch up with him at the family home in Johannesburg.

Mandela's dearest friends and closest comrades were free and all of them committed to continuing the struggle to defeat apartheid. However, their ANC was still banned by law and they would have to go back underground. It was wonderful for them to be out but there was still work to be done. They would have stayed in prison, or died, rather than abandon the cause that bound them together.

Mandela had achieved one important goal. But he was to remain at Victor Verster alone until all the other goals were met. It took another four months.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Mandela had the great gift of magnanimity. His people were being beaten and arrested and detained without charge. Some of them were little more than children. His own wife and daughters were suffering.

Yet he was able to produce a smile and a warm handshake for the very people who were ordering this. Mandela was not offering forgiveness to P. W. Botha or his successor F. W. de Klerk. He was playing a long game in order to win the biggest prize of all – liberation for black South Africa.

And for all the charming and courteous letters he was sending to de Klerk, asking for further meetings and talks, he was adamant that the real negotiating could only begin once all political organisations had been unbanned and their people released from prison, the State of Emergency ended and all government troops removed from the townships.

Two months after his comrades had been released came the first important step; Mandela was invited to meet de Klerk at the Tuynhuys, in the same office where he had first met Botha. Mandela came away from that meeting feeling for the first time that he was being listened to. He seemed to me to be more hopeful than ever.

When it came to his own release, he had told de Klerk that he would never agree to it until the ANC was unbanned. I felt that only Mandela was capable of that – a man desperate for freedom, with 26 years of imprisonment behind him, telling his captors what conditions they must meet before he consented to walk out of the gates. Mandela was soon writing to Oliver Tambo, telling him there was a new note of hope and that he felt de Klerk was really trying to work with them.

During his long wait for responses in this vital cat-and-mouse game with the government, Mandela was still regularly receiving visitors. Winnie and his daughters came, and in November 1989 I was able to bring someone special to him.

Ashley Forbes, the young ANC commander, was serving his prison sentence on Robben Island where he had taken over Mandela's mantle, recruiting other prisoners into the organisation and teaching them its goals. I was told he had permission to come over to the mainland for a day. I met him at the embarkation point and, as the ferry arrived, I saw he was not wearing handcuffs or leg-chains. Why would he want to escape when he was going to see Mandela, his leader and his hero?

Forbes was happy to see me and greeted me like an old friend. He told me what an honour it was to be going to Victor Verster to see Mandela. After their meeting, I took him back to the ferry. He was in a state of high excitement and he couldn't wait to tell his fellow prisoners on the island that Mandela had promised he would not walk free until they were out.

I was working with a lot of political detainees in Pollsmoor by now, and many of them had been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and were being kept separately. All of them were aware that Mandela was fighting for them and anxious for news from me every time I returned from seeing him at Victor Verster.

Eventually, some six weeks after the president's meeting with Mandela, de Klerk shook the nation by standing up in Parliament on 2 February 1990 and announcing that the ANC, the Pan African Congress, the Communist Party and thirty-one other organisations were no longer banned. He said political prisoners were to be freed and that the death penalty was suspended. The State of Emergency was to be partly lifted. Mandela would be released.

De Klerk had stopped short of ordering his troops out of the townships, and the State of Emergency was still partly operating. But it was a huge step forward.

Mandela was too cautious to be elated and I was hearing that he paced the passageway in his house at night, unable to sleep. He was totally preoccupied with the need to push the government further and to get himself free in order to work openly with his ANC comrades outside prison without the continual eavesdropping.

His bungalow at Victor Verster is today something of a shrine to Mandela. A bronze statue of him stands at the gate of the prison and the house itself has been left as it was when he lived there. The grey carpet in the passageway is worn thin by his night-time pacing.

As with Sisulu and the others, Mandela wasn't allowed to leave prison immediately and we weren't told what date had been set for his release. But he asked to see me on 8 February and I sensed it might be our last meeting in prison; I could always tell when Mandela had momentous news, even if he didn't spell it out. I asked him when he was going home and he said it would be soon. I told him: 'Mandela, when you are free, you must come back to Pollsmoor and visit your people. They talk about you all the time. Don't forget them.'

It was just a joke really. Whoever heard of a long-term prisoner coming back to the place where he suffered? Mandela would surprise me, but I didn't know that then.

Two days after our conversation, Mandela had a further meeting with de Klerk at the Tuynhuys. It was an evening appointment and, as the whole world now knows, de Klerk grandly announced to Mandela that he would be released the next day.

Mandela astonished him by refusing. He wanted a further two weeks at Victor Verster so that his family and the ANC could be prepared.

De Klerk was completely taken aback, angry even. He told Mandela of the plan to fly him to Johannesburg and escort him on to the balcony of the Union Buildings, the seat of government. Clearly, he wanted to use Mandela to win over the masses. It would be a great personal victory for him.

No, Mandela told him, that is not how it is going to happen. 'I want to walk out of the gates of Victor Verster,' he said. 'I want to be able to thank those who looked after me there and I want to greet the people of Cape Town, which has been my home for nearly 30 years. I will make my way back to Johannesburg when I want to, not when the government wants me to. When I am free, I will look after myself.'

Mandela was going to get what he wanted, but he made a compromise to enable de Klerk to save face. He would walk out of the gates of Victor Verster but, bowing to the lesser demand, he agreed to do it the next day.

I felt so proud when I heard about that. Yes! Mandela was the bigger man. At 71, he could still be a great leader. He cared more for his people and his country than he ever cared about himself and his own needs.

He needed to write a speech to deliver to his people. While he worked on that, his belongings were packed up for him. They made a strange sight. After 27 years in prison, he had accumulated 22 assorted boxes, a trunk, 4 baskets, an urn, a footstool, a cardboard hat, 2 large umbrellas, a set of exercise weights, an exercise bicycle, a giant birthday card and a bodyboard that he used for swimming.

There was no doubt in my mind about his most prized possession – the Sombrero hat put together and painted white by Japhta Masemola when they were on Robben Island together.

Now his imminent release had been announced, there was panic and turmoil inside Victor Verster. Mandela himself stayed calm and made telephone calls to Winnie and Sisulu, and then some comrades from the ANC arrived for talks late into the night. He went to bed in the early hours but the prison authorities stayed awake, terrified of the potential disorder and sabotage that might accompany his release. There was inside information that Mandela could be shot as he walked out of the gates, and that it could be done by enemies within. The extraordinary decision was made to disarm the warders on guard that day. Some of the police officers were also disarmed.

I had requested leave. I knew it would be a madhouse. I had already seen swarms of police and crowds of media and the public. There were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets. I didn't want to be part of the chaos and I was scared for Mandela – scared he would be attacked or even trampled in the hysterical rush to greet him.

There was an absolute scrum at the house with people coming and going, and Winnie had to get to Cape Town from Johannesburg, so, of course, she was going to be late. The chef had left boxes of food ready for breakfast, as he'd been told there would be many people arriving early, and now all the food and drinks, every last drop and crumb, was being devoured, while phone calls were made to locate Winnie. All the time there were police helicopters hovering over the house whipping up clouds of dust so that no one could see anything or make themselves heard.

They say Mandela was meanwhile quietly reading over his speech and preparing himself calmly for the moment to come. It was 4 p.m. by the time he finally got to walk out of prison with Winnie.

This day was going to go down in history. I just longed to see him walk out of prison, safe and free. So I stayed at home and watched it all on television. My heart was in my mouth the whole time. Would these overenthusiastic well-wishers run him over by mistake or trample him, wanting to touch him? Would he be able to get safely to the car waiting for him?

Eventually, Mandela walked out, tall and proud, holding Winnie's hand, both of them giving the power salute. They shouted, 'Amandla!' and the crowd went wild.

His car disappeared from the radar at some point as his driver realised they were in danger from crowds pressing themselves against the vehicle and slowing it to a stop. He took a detour right around the city and admitted to Mandela that he was lost as they circled the university area and Rondebosch suburb and finally made their way back towards the city centre.

I watched the television in a state of raw anxiety until I finally saw his car inching towards

the centre of Cape Town and the Grand Parade. The mayor had invited him to walk out on the balcony of City Hall to address the people.

Again I was worried. Would he make a speech in Xhosa that would speak to all his black supporters but exclude others? I knew the Western Cape. In terms of the white population, it was an Afrikaans stronghold.

I watched Mandela looking straight ahead. I had never seen him so strong. He raised his fist in the power salute and the people went mad.

Then he started speaking in English before switching to Afrikaans, greeting them all. Mandela was pulling off one of his greatest moments to perfection. I thought to myself how he could have started in Xhosa and to hell with the others, but that was not his style. He knew exactly what he was doing. After starting in English, he then spoke to the people of the Western Cape in Afrikaans, then in Xhosa, his own language, and finally back in English again.

In my heart I felt so proud. I could hardly speak and there were tears in my eyes. Here was my prisoner, and I knew he was soon to be my leader.

Mandela and Winnie spent that night at the home of their fellow activist, and another great man, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, at his home in Bishopscourt. The next day, I had a phone call from their lawyer Dullah Omar to say that Mandela sent his greetings. He had had a great first night of freedom and he was very tired. He had hardly slept. But he wanted to make sure that I knew I was in his thoughts. He had insisted Omar should call me.

That was so like Mandela. He had the adulation of the whole world in front of him that day. There wasn’t a head of state anywhere who wasn’t making plans to come and see him. Yet I was in his thoughts. It was touching and humbling, and was to be followed by many such moments in the years to come.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It took Mandela twenty-seven years to get out of prison, and just three weeks to come back.

It happened on my day off. I was at home in my staff quarters in Pollsmoor Prison and noticed a convoy of police cars, with their sirens on and blue lights flashing, drive past. I thought it was a government official arriving for talks with the head of prison, a routine matter.

But I heard later that Mandela, a free man, had chosen to come back to see us. He went to the officers' mess – by then, I suppose he could go anywhere he liked – and asked for me. I had been on night shift and was resting at home, although my fellow warders were convinced I was out fishing somewhere and told Mandela they couldn't find me.

It was an extraordinary thing for him to do, and unique in my experience. We have former prisoners who come back to visit their friends or relatives still inside, but I never heard of one wanting to see his captors.

I thought that maybe he was missing us, the warders closest to him. We represented the enemy over all those years but at the same time we had been like his mother and father, feeding him and taking care of him and setting the boundaries, even putting him to bed if you imagine the nightly lock-up as a form of safety and security.

It's not unknown for those held hostage to form a bond with their captors, but Mandela was taking it to an extreme. I liked that idea. I was so sorry I had missed him that day and when I thought about it I realised that I missed all the old ANC guys who had now gone. I was, of course, happy that they were finally free but the fact was that I missed all their faces and our routine; it felt like my family had broken up. I was hoping that Mandela would look after all of the others in the outside world. I knew he would definitely still be their leader, their inspiration. He was the one with influence and power and his release was being celebrated all over the world. I followed all the news closely on television and in the newspapers.

Then I missed a phone call from him. My son Riaan, aged six, answered the phone and apparently chatted to him. Mandela asked to speak to my wife but she was also out of the house at the time. The coloured lady who was looking after Riaan that day was overwhelmed by the idea of speaking to Mandela and wouldn't talk to him. I felt bad that he was trying to make contact and I kept missing him.

He had wanted to ask me about 12 of my political prisoners who had gone on hunger strike, demanding to be released like the Rivonians. Mandela had been negotiating with the government and had achieved an agreement by which ANC and other political prisoners could be freed if they had a home and family to go to, and the prospect of employment and stability.

I was working hard on this, making contact with local employers so that these guys could go out on parole. They would still be under some sort of supervision but at least out of Pollsmoor.

Mandela knew about the hunger strike and the increasing unrest. He next turned up in the administration office at Pollsmoor where I was on duty in my officer's uniform. It was the same room where Raymond Mhlaba had got married on that special day when Mandela and Sisulu put on borrowed suits to be his witnesses and wore buttonholes and toasted him in sparkling grape-juice.

This time, Mandela was in a smart jacket with collar and tie. Everyone wanted to hug him, it was chaotic. He saw me and came over to shake my hand. We had a good look at each other and he asked me about my family. He was very fond of my son Riaan and he wanted to know about our new baby Heinrich who was just two.

I knew some of his bodyguards and we chatted while Mandela addressed the political prisoners for about an hour. He shook hands with each of them and told them they would be released soon and he wanted them to bear with him while he pressed their case with the government. It struck me then that, although he was free, he had no official position in the country, and like all blacks he was still unable even to vote. His only power was his own history and his charisma.

He had an aura of authority, just as he had all those years inside, and he calmed the hothead prisoners. They agreed to end their hunger strike and have confidence that their release was forthcoming. On his way out, Mandela said quietly to me: 'Mr Brand, one of these days your prison will be completely empty.'

He had this way of making provocative comments with a hint of humour so that you could not take offence. It just got you thinking: 'Is he being sarcastic? Is that an attack, or what?' And in many ways I wished that he was right. I wished the prison was completely empty. My

job had taken me back to managing the savage behaviour of the criminal gangs, although at least I was in a position of authority in the office most of the time rather than dealing directly with the murderous guys who were still coming in daily in their hundreds.

A month after Mandela's release, the remaining 343 political prisoners on Robben Island had started a hunger strike, in a fury at being left in jail while their leaders were out and being feted. They were being released in small groups at a time, many sent home or taken to hospital, and the remaining 48 were brought over to Pollsmoor to be rehabilitated. They were the tough guys, still on hunger strike. Mandela came to talk to them. This time he had Chris Hani with him, a young, charismatic people's hero who was leader of the Communist Party and chief of staff of Umkhonto we Sizwe.

Hani had joined the ANC Youth League at the age of 15 to protest at the Bantu education system. He was soon regarded as a young lion able to influence thousands of students, and was targeted by the security services for arrest and detention until he moved to neighbouring Lesotho.

Hani appeared to be in the same mould as Mandela and was widely expected to follow him into a powerful role in a new South Africa. He had returned to be at Mandela's side and promote the party with him. It was for that very reason he was later assassinated in a right-wing political plot in 1993. The pro-apartheid Conservative Party MP Clive Derby-Lewis paid an immigrant Polish agitator to shoot Hani in the head and back outside his home, and both men are still in prison serving life sentences.

When I met him, Hani, then a rising star, had teamed up with Mandela to garner support among black people for continuing peaceful negotiations at a time when many would have preferred to overthrow the government in a violent coup.

When he was murdered, Mandela made an extraordinary speech, calling for unity and calm, while emphasising the need to continue the fight for the democracy Hani had fought for all his life. 'Our whole nation now teeters on the brink of disaster,' he said. '…The cold-blooded murder of Chris Hani has sent shock waves throughout the country and the world. Our grief and anger is tearing us apart.' He recognised that the people's reactions to this murder would be a watershed moment for South Africa – whether we would stand together or descend further into violence and bloodshed.

He had spent many years of his life as part of the complex fight against apartheid and now, in the immediate aftermath of his release, at the age of 71, he needed all his wisdom and strength to bring together the many factions that could uplift or destroy South Africa. He could not be sure of which result, but he was fighting for all he was worth.

He came to Pollsmoor twice with Chris Hani to show his moral and practical support for the prisoners who believed they had been left behind. It would be another year before they were all finally released.

Among them was a big strong guy, Thulani Mabaso, who had served eight years on Robben Island. He was a heavyweight from Umkhonto we Sizwe who had infiltrated South Africa's Defence Force and planted limpet mines in the National Intelligence building in Johannesburg at the height of the 1980s uprisings. After arrest, he was beaten and tortured at the security police's notorious headquarters in John Vorster Square. On the tenth floor – a location that was synonymous with terror during the worst apartheid years – he was hung from a window while his tormentors threatened to drop him and claim suicide. Many detainees died that way.

Mabaso was a natural leader and I came to depend on him to mediate with a troublesome group of the political prisoners who were demanding daily phone calls and extra visits, and refusing to go into their cells. I offered to help them with the calls and visits if we could keep matters calm inside the prison. Between us, Mabaso and I achieved some peace. We became good friends and I was able both to let visitors bring in extra food, and also to personally pass on phone messages.

When he was leaving Pollsmoor, Mabaso asked for my phone number. We weren't allowed to keep up contact with prisoners but I wanted to help him find work and it made sense to stay in touch. Soon afterwards, I had a call from a friend of his inviting me to his home for supper with him and his family, along with his friend Mabaso. My wife and I had a really enjoyable evening and it was good to talk to someone full of hope for the future and with no bitterness about the past.

That was the first time I was ever invited to have dinner with an ex-prisoner. Mabaso was a family man who lived out of town and he was still arranging to get home at the time, so he was staying with his friend in Cape Town for his first night of freedom. He just wanted to share the occasion with me. It felt good. He was so happy to be on his way back to his wife and children.

I didn't see Mabaso for many years after that. But soon after I started work on Robben Island again – no longer as a prison warder but instead running the curio shop now that the

island was a World Heritage Site – I saw him on Jetty 1, our old embarkation point. He had just been interviewed for a job and later it was announced that he had been appointed the manager of conducted tours of the prison. So today we see each other daily, in a different life to the one we shared at Pollsmoor.

When Mabaso has a special tour for VIPs, he asks me to come and talk to them. They love to hear about the old prison days when Mandela was there. Many people arrange their own expensive private visit to Robben Island, arriving by speedboat or helicopter, and they want to talk to us guys who were there, who really know the history of the prison and its famous inmates.

After Mabaso was released from Pollsmoor, I stayed for a further four years. They were tumultuous times and I have very unhappy memories of violence and brutality among the gang members who knew nothing but torturing or butchering each other for money or drugs. There were grudge wars and killings in the sections, and at the same time turmoil in our world outside.

I read of Mandela going on triumphal tours to Zimbabwe, Algeria and to the new Namibia, which was now independent. I imagined him and my former prisoner Ja Toivo, the Swapo leader, relating a host of memories they shared from Robben Island. How I would have liked to be there.

In April 1990, Mandela went on to London, where I saw on television that a crowd of 75,000 went wild to see him at Wembley Stadium, the place where rock stars had played for his 70th birthday while he was still locked up with us.

It was an extraordinary time. Back home, many whites were totally fearful of bloodshed in the country, that there might be a backlash against them by millions of blacks. And government forces were hard at work trying to divide and rule different factions among the black tribes by funding them and providing arms, doing anything they could to derail a peace process that could dismantle apartheid.

Even in Mandela's own party, there was distrust and discord. He was an old man, his domestic life had failed to return to any kind of normality, and he was picking up the reins of an unpredictable guerrilla movement, which was reluctant to give up the armed struggle.

I heard how Mandela turned down an invitation to meet British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who had never been an ally of the ANC. He was desperate to persuade the world to keep up sanctions against de Klerk's government, needing the economic leverage to push negotiations forward. He knew this course of action did not have Thatcher's sympathy.

However, supporters of the anti-apartheid movement in Europe and America gave him a tumultuous welcome on his tour to meet world leaders. Many political analysts and seasoned journalists were writing of their surprise that Mandela was not an egotistical leader who enjoyed the celebrity. He spoke always of himself as part of the ANC, the collective that could bring much-needed peace to South Africa. Although he returned to his home village of Qunu to be greeted as a tribal chieftain, his birthright, he did not want adulation for himself. Instead, he was deeply disturbed at the new level of poverty he was seeing there.

On a return visit to England, he agreed to finally meet with Margaret Thatcher and they had a long meeting in which she, predictably, continued to refuse to impose sanctions and he, equally predictably, made no promises that he would abandon the armed struggle and cosy up to the IFP's Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who she thought was 'a wonderful man'. She was intractable, but also charmed by Mandela. She described him as 'supremely courteous with a genuine nobility of bearing'.

That did not surprise me in any way. He was not the noisy, aggressive or confrontational African leader who many had expected. I knew that he led with courtesy and quietness, and by doing so he disarmed the de Klerks and the Thatchers. In any case, he was head and shoulders above them as a moral leader. I was optimistic that he might keep the world on his side, despite the blood still flowing in our townships.

But it was not going to be easy. The Zulu tribes in the Inkatha Freedom Party had been primed for war against the ANC through government agents wanting to foment trouble to ruin negotiations. At one time, more than 100 people a day were being killed. How could one man, even with the stature of Mandela, bring this overwhelming problem to an end?

I had my own reasons for optimism that the barriers could be overcome. In my life at that time, there was great personal pleasure in the continuation of friendships with Walter Sisulu, Kathrada and the other Rivonians. It was unusual, but I embraced it. I suppose I was the living proof that people from opposing sides could reconcile, pool their thoughts and wishes for their country, and form genuine friendships.

They probably thought I was their first convert, that fresh-faced 19-year-old who had entered the hell of their lives on Robben Island when they were already in their sixties. Through mutual hardships and the need for camaraderie, we had now completed a journey

together.

Ironically, though, I was the last one of us still in prison every day, and the conditions there were terrible, even for a warder. We were experiencing regular uprisings in Pollsmoor due to criminals becoming resentful of the fact that they were not getting released under the amnesty for political inmates. I was locking up 800 new prisoners a night at one stage, with dozens of other warders on night shifts with me. We kept crowds of them shuffled together in the corridors, doling out food in swill buckets for them to eat standing up, while dog-handlers and armed guards searched 150 at a time. It was a conveyor belt of utter misery. It was rough when you just longed to be an ordinary family man, with your wife and two young sons at home wanting you to go biking and fishing with them, but you found yourself unable to put the horror of your last shift behind you.

I'd had several phone calls from Mandela and was glad of them. He was always solicitous, always asking about my family, still with that personal interest in my life, which always took me by surprise. At that time, he was literally the busiest man in the world and everybody wanted a part of him.

On a visit to Tanzania, more than half a million people mobbed him, and Winnie and Mandela lost each other in the confusion and chaos. The standing ovation, the singing and chanting went on for so long that Mandela had to leave the podium without making a speech.

By then, he was losing Winnie in a different, much sadder, way. I had always admired her and thought what great fortune it was that Mandela had a wife like her – so strong and powerful, and beautiful. His marriage to her seemed to mean almost everything to him during his prison years. He told her in letters, which I was at one point reading, how her love literally kept him alive.

But the newspapers were increasingly writing of their lack of a normal family life since his release, and there were strong suggestions of her infidelity, along with various other issues. Her vocal outrage against white oppressors and their brutality against the masses was putting her at centre-stage when Mandela himself was handling delicate negotiations behind closed doors.

In 1982, Winnie had gone on record with a South African journalist to point out that: 'Nelson is 63 now and I am like a young girl, still longing for the experience of married life.' Ten years later, he had finally come home to her, only for them to find that there could be no normal married life. Mandela was constantly touring Africa and Europe to garner support and raise funds, and when they were at home in Soweto there was a constant stream of people at his door and on his phone.

In October 1991, the media was writing of them not even speaking to each other for months, and on 13 April 1992 Mandela looked tired and lonely when he gave a press conference to tell the world that they were separating by mutual agreement. He painfully described how they had been unable to enjoy a normal life but also stated: 'My love for her remains undiminished. I embrace her with all the love and affection I have nursed for her inside and outside prison from the moment I first met her.' They divorced in 1996.

Whenever I saw Mandela or our mutual acquaintances during that period, we all remarked on his isolation and loneliness, a tragedy after the deprivations he had been through for years in prison.

His great friend Kathrada was calling me often and, of course, he wanted his prison mementoes back, the box of clothes he had left with me on the day of his release. We arranged for me to take them to his friend's clothes shop near Pollsmoor as it was convenient for me. But when I got there his friend said Kathy wanted to invite me to his house for dinner and to bring my wife and children.

When I arrived at Kathrada's house soon after, we had a long talk about all the warders, the latest news of Mandela and the goings-on at Pollsmoor. He had a home in Cape Town but his main base was in Johannesburg. Throughout his prison years, he had told me of the flat that was being looked after by his family. He used to say: 'They're keeping everything exactly as it was when I left. I'll be able to walk through the door and find everything just as it was.'

I thought that was very unlikely after 27 years but Kathy was right. His devoted family had cleaned and cared for his home over the years, and when he returned he did indeed walk through the door and find everything just as it was. He had written so much about it over the years that one day a stranger arrived with a VW Beetle, a car he had decided he wanted, and left it parked outside the door. He was a happy man, although he found the car a bit too small and ended up not driving it very often. For a short while, he drove me around Joburg again, although it was now dangerous and hair-raising. We laughed. He was the same Kathy but more relaxed and looking healthier and younger. He was pleased to see me and told me how he was working at the ANC headquarters, Shell House, in Joburg.

We talked about old times in prison and he made jokes about me torturing him, telling his

family I was the chief torturer. He told me about the other Rivonians, all busy with the continuing work of putting pressure on the government, keeping up the momentum and doing their utmost to bring together the warring factions in rival black communities.

I also talked to Sisulu several times by phone during this period and heard that his family was still campaigning for a united South Africa, supporting him in all his efforts to actually make the prison ordeal worthwhile.

If I'm honest, I had expected the Rivonians to forget me over the years, so I was very gratified to realise that they missed me and our time together as much as I missed them.

Meanwhile, I had started taking on some parole duties, working mostly at night-time to go into the townships to check on prisoners out on parole. I had to try to find them work and reassure potential employers that I would be monitoring them, that they would not demand such high wages as other workers, and that they would be living under strict conditions imposed by the prison. I placed several prisoners in jobs and kept up the necessary contact but it was tough to be a white Afrikaner in prison uniform calling at township homes and workplaces after dark.

Everyone knew the gangs' turfs and the need to avoid them. But now I was by necessity plunged into that world. I knew from experience that one false move could literally be fatal. I had once been confronted by three gangsters who demanded the key to my vehicle and I wasn't able to get to my revolver inside. It was a bad situation and my blood still runs cold when I think about it, but I got away safely and saw the same guys in prison a few weeks later on murder charges. That was the reality of my life at that time. There was no release from Pollsmoor for me. I was very weary of it all.

By 1994, South Africa was on the brink of its first democratic elections open to all. It was the most amazing time in our country. Every one of us was nurturing fears of one kind or another. My wife and I found ourselves in a queue of many thousands, snaking all the way round the polling station at Westlake, near Pollsmoor. It took us three hours to vote and it was the first time ever that white, black, coloured and Asian South Africans could literally stand side by side to share a public event. That was incredible in itself, whatever the outcome.

I hoped and prayed that Mandela, the peace-maker, would come into Parliament. There was no way to know if he could be president, I just wanted to see him somewhere in the thick of it while we were all travelling into the unknown. By then he had offered up his whole life for his people's freedom and he was 74. He deserved this.

I suppose it was obvious who I was supporting. My workmates at Pollsmoor had already been calling me a kaffir-boetie (an Afrikaans insult as offensive as the American 'nigger-lover') for a long time. It really didn't matter to me. If the Rivonians could sacrifice the best years, the longest years, of their lives for their cause, how could a few cruel words hurt my feelings?

As we all know, Mandela triumphed in the polls. He was going to be our president.

Within days, unbelievably, he phoned me at Pollsmoor. He knew the prison was burning, with frequent uprisings. The place was like a time-bomb and he felt a responsibility and a need to defuse it. I told him: 'Mandela, everyone here wants to leave just like you did. We can't control them. All the warders are doing is beating them and keeping them in chains, it's hellish.'

He told me he wanted to see me, he wanted to sort out Pollsmoor but it was also time for me to leave there. He said: 'Call Kathy and talk to him about coming to meet me.'

I had been seeing a lot of Kathy and he was busy in Parliament. He was certain to be playing an important role in the new government. He told me there could be an administrative job for me there. The very next day, I was phoned by a woman executive in Parliament to ask me to bring my CV and come to her office. I had no idea what a CV was so I arrived with just my ID. She helped me put together a reasonably impressive list of my working experience. I was to start the next day, but we had both discounted the fact that Parliament was now in recess for three months.

I understood the chaos and the last-minute arrangements, and I was grateful for the job offer and had already given in my notice to the prison service with feelings of great joy and relief. But now I needed to earn a salary for three months. I took a job with a private security firm collecting the takings from businesses in the townships. If I thought prison work was scary, this was something off the scale.

I was travelling to the shebeens, the noisy backstreet bars that were illegally operated during apartheid, selling scarily strong home-brewed beer to blacks. My job was to transport their takings safely away. I also collected from the supermarkets and we transported the cash in sealed containers, which inevitably were often found to contain drugs and were the live currency of the gangs.

I managed to survive, and was even offered promotion. But then Parliament started and I

was happy to take up a job in the Constitutional Assembly. Nothing could be more important than the organisation set up to draft our new, all-inclusive laws, the most liberal in the world. I was employed as an administrative clerk and logistics manager.

The job meant a move away from Pollsmoor for the whole family, finally. I hired a truck and paid six of the trusty prisoners to help me load furniture and move it to my parents' home in Goodwood, a suburb of Cape Town. My mother, now widowed, had been living there alone since 1986 when my father died. She was glad to be joined by us, a lively young family.

The house was quite small so I had to put some furniture in storage until I could afford to build an extension. Our boys went to the local school at Wynberg and were still close to their friends from the Pollsmoor staff quarters. My wife was working nearby in the government's Home Affairs department. I felt it was all working out well.

My sons were four years apart and quite different in personality. They sometimes fought but I noticed the younger one, Heinrich, would copy his brother's haircut and quietly admired him. Kathy liked my boys and remarked that Heinrich's birthday was the same as Einstein's – a good sign, he said.

I was kept busy with the daily paperwork for the drafting of the Constitution. One day, hurrying down the corridor in Parliament, I saw Mandela approaching with his formal retinue. He called out to me and I hurried towards him, pleased to see each other. He introduced all the politicians and civil servants and told them I was the man who did a great act of kindness for him at the worst time of his life. Then he went on to tell them about the time I put his baby granddaughter into his arms. Neither of us had mentioned it since the day it happened more than 10 years earlier.

Years after that, Winnie also found a way to thank me for what I'd done that day. She signed a copy of the book *Hunger for Freedom*, published by the Nelson Mandela Foundation, and she wrote in it: 'My dearest Brand! The wonderful memories we share are priceless! I remember how you refused to accept a gift from me because you were and still are so principled. Thanks for all the wonderful things you did for Madiba in prison. Only God can thank you! You are Amazing.' The gift she was referring to was, of course, the bribe she had offered me that I had refused. She signed it 'Winnie Mandela, 5 July 2008'.

I had another encounter with the Mandela magic when the Constitutional Assembly was nearing its deadline and held a major conference for a week at the coastal resort of Arniston, two hours' drive from Cape Town. I was ensuring all the documentation and support paperwork was in place and was driving to Arniston and back three times a day, delivering both the delegates and their boxes of papers.

At the end of the week, Mandela himself was due to arrive. In presidential style, he was to be helicoptered to a nearby military base and then driven to our conference centre. No one was allowed outside the building and security was tight.

On the appointed day, Mandela walked in, elegant and statesmanlike in his pinstripe suit, every inch the president. There were about 60 people in the room and nearly all of them instinctively rose to their feet. Only a small elitist group of hardline Afrikaners, those who still dreamed of a whites-only Volkstad state, remained seated in an alcove off the main meeting room.

Mandela worked his way expertly around the huge conference table, shaking everyone's hand and remembering their names. Even the experienced politicians were turning to mush under his smile.

But I was looking at the 10 pro-apartheid guys in the alcove. Mandela walked over to them, his body language offering a welcoming gesture. He greeted them in fluent Afrikaans and held out his hand to each of them. They got to their feet as one and I was able to breathe again. These were momentously significant moments. But why did I still feel personally responsible for him? That is the magic of Mandela, that's all I can say.

There was more tension to come for me. Mandela suddenly saw me and abandoned the all-important delegates. 'Oh, Mr Brand, you are here, that's very good. Let me introduce you to all these people.'

He made the introduction as if I was the most important person in the room. He told them all in great detail how I had cared for him on Robben Island, the things we got up to together, the table-tennis tournaments and the way we helped each other through intolerable times. I didn't enjoy all of the attention but there was no stopping him. Mandela was saying I had been his boss, in charge of his whole life. Then he started asking about my family, still keeping the conference waiting. I felt so relieved when he finally let me get back to my desk to continue sorting out the documents.

He sat down and invited feedback about the new Constitution from officials like Cyril Ramaphosa – who is deputy president of the ANC today. He then made an emphatic speech about the importance of our new, liberal, all-encompassing Constitution. It was fascinating to

see this moment of history unfolding in front of me.

Afterwards, I joined the other staff for lunch outside and then all of us were told we must pose for an official photograph. It was funny to see that all the ladies wanted to be with Mandela, they arranged themselves next to him with a great deal of competition for the place closest to him. But he called me over, put his arm around my shoulders and made me stand at his side.

I noticed many of the Constitutional Assembly staff treated me with extra respect after that. They seemed to think that if I was special to Mandela then I must really be somebody. It made me smile actually. His influence was all you needed to get into everyone's best books. For example, one of the directors had never liked me because she had been imprisoned during the anti-apartheid struggle and she knew I had been a warder. But then she dented her car in an accident and I was on hand to help. This, combined with Mandela's personal endorsement, meant that I was suddenly her favourite person, regularly invited to tea in her office.

Similarly, one of the legal directors of the Constitutional Assembly, Hassan Ebrahim, invited me into his office to join him and Cyril Ramaphosa for a whisky, and one Friday night I was driving him home when he insisted we stopped somewhere for supper. I was getting a lot of favours and attention.

I had secretly enjoyed the idea that – until Mandela's big announcement – no one of any importance but the Rivonians and Ramaphosa had known I was a prison warder. Now they all knew.

But there were other reasons my past was useful to my new job. My immediate boss had been against the whole idea of employing me when I turned up on my first day. He was the service officer for Parliament, a former National Party stalwart who didn't trust the ANC. He came round to their way of thinking when he was treated properly with an employment contract and full rights, something he didn't get from the Nats. But even before then I was able to reassure him. I told him I knew all the important guys, the people he was half-afraid of. They'd all been in prison with me.

He was rather old-fashioned and still wanted to do things the old way. When P. W. Botha was in the corridor, for example, everyone had been ordered to disappear, to go into any office, cloakroom, whatever was closest.

That's how he still wanted to run things. But Mandela was the exact opposite. He told everyone he wanted to see them and talk to them. They were not to run away when they saw him, they were to greet him and introduce themselves. He included the cleaners and the gardeners in this – he wanted to meet all of them and find out their names.

I was seeing quite a lot of Mandela at that time. We were constantly bumping into each other in the corridors of Parliament. One day, when the first draft of the Constitution was ready for signing, I was on my way to the executive office with some copies. It was the most important document you could have in your hands and it was my job to deliver it.

But as I passed Mandela's office, where he had once met Botha during a trip from prison, he was standing in the doorway. He called me in, ignoring my protests about the urgent delivery.

He made me sit down and tell him if I was enjoying the job. He kept saying: 'Oh, that's good, that's good.' Finally, he let me go with my precious pile of papers, but not before he autographed one of them for me.

So I was the first person to have the presidential seal on documents that were our country's new laws. How on earth had that happened? Somehow this prisoner, who was now president, and his warder found themselves in the grandest government office in Cape Town, when we both really belonged out in the veld, in the valleys and along the riverbanks.

One day, I heard that the big office that was now Mandela's had been renovated for him and a secret escape hatch had been found behind a cupboard. When you went through the cupboard, there was an escalator leading all the way underground to Cape Town's main railway station. A helicopter landing-pad had been installed on the roof of the building. Or I suppose a train might have been waiting. Botha, rightly paranoid, had needed an exit strategy – just in case.

Mandela gave orders for it to be sealed up. He hadn't spent most of his life in prison to start hatching escape plans at this stage.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I already had my own personal copy of the new Constitution signed by the president, but the country had yet to formally adopt it. So I was happy to be invited to the Adoption Party in Fernwood, Constantia, at the end of 1996. My wife and I were among a huge crowd, comprising the top tier of the ANC and everyone from the Constitutional Assembly itself.

Mandela gave a speech in which he recalled the bravery behind the Freedom Charter drawn up in 1955 by activists who collected the demands of ordinary people across the country, which was now soundly echoed in the Constitution, which itself would soon be the law of the land. It was very heady stuff and I was proud to be there. But I was brought down to earth when Priscilla Jana, one of his lawyers whom I had encountered previously, suddenly grabbed me and propelled me towards the podium.

'Tata, Tata,' she said, using the affectionate Xhosa word for Papa. 'Look who's here. That prison warder who fought with me in Robben Island.' She remembered the ugly scene when I confiscated the chocolates she had brought for Mandela.

He stepped down from the podium and soon we were all laughing. He had to repeat the story to Trevor Manuel and all the top guys. I protested that Mandela had got his chocolates in the end and we enjoyed the joke. It was a moment of happy reunion. A circle was closing – we had all been around the block over the years in our different ways, and now we were together again, talking like old friends.

For me, the final adoption of the Constitution meant the end of my job in Parliament and, although Cyril Ramaphosa had given me some extra months, I needed work elsewhere. Kathy was helping more than anyone to find me another position, but it was hard to know where to go. There were opportunities in the prison service in Johannesburg or Durban, but that was a bleak prospect.

Kathy's next phone call closed the circle completely. He offered me a job on Robben Island where he was chairman of the Museum Council. The island was a prison no more: it was a place of endless fascination to international tourists, historians, political activists and anyone with an interest in South Africa's turbulent past. I would be back on duty in that place that had haunted me for so much of my life.

I would be stationed at the new exhibition centre on the mainland, on Jetty 1, the old embarkation point that I knew so well. The island had been declared a National Museum and three years later UNESCO gave it World Heritage status. Robben Island was now one of the most important symbols of racial recognition in the world.

As I walked down the familiar path at the harbour's edge, I began to meet some of my ex-prisoners. They were coming for interviews as tour guides. Who better to tell tourists the gritty detail of those long years in prison? It was good to be welcomed warmly by them. I felt more glad than ever that I had been as humane as possible in my treatment of them.

It was October 1997, a full 15 years since I last turned my back on Robben Island. And now we were climbing on to the ferry, the old *Susan Kruger* boat I travelled on so many times with prisoners, on our way for orientation at Robben Island in its new guise.

The island looked green and fresh; I was pleasantly surprised. And there were ex-prisoners of mine everywhere I looked. One of them was training as a tour guide and, although no one had a tenth of my knowledge about the place, I was content to sit there quietly and just take it all in.

We took an old government bus for a trip right round the island, all 11 kilometres where I once jogged every evening out of sheer boredom and desperation. We stopped at the lepers' graveyard and the warders' quarters. We looked at all the old shipwrecks, broken down more than ever through the harsh weather. There was the wreckage of a big yacht that hadn't been there during my sojourn.

I was experiencing very mixed feelings. A sort of excitement and nostalgia, and sadness I couldn't quite define. I certainly didn't want to go back to those days in B Section but there was a familiarity about everything that was playing with my emotions.

When we got off at the main prison, I let everyone go ahead and look at Mandela's cell and the courtyard. I went off on my own to see the old Censor's Office, that monument to snooping and prying where I learned every secret of my prisoners' hearts and souls and often reduced them to shreds.

Everywhere was empty and full of dust. My footsteps echoed and the place seemed full of ghosts. I looked through a window to the courtyard and across the catwalk where you could once spy on the inmates.

I rejoined the group and found there was a reconstruction of Mandela's cell. Everything was quite faithful to the original but of course he wasn't there so it didn't work for me. We went into the exercise yard and we all laughed at some graffiti – a well-drawn caricature of a man holding bags of swag with dollar signs painted on them and the defiant message 'Happy Days Are Here Again'.

I told them all that was new. The place had been vandalised. My prisoners, I said, were never common criminals and robbers. They were victims, with ideals. Look at them today, I said, resisting the urge to preach any further. I couldn't take credit for anything that happened to Mandela and the other Rivonians. All I did for them was to manage to bend the rules a little.

I found Mandela's garden and saw it was completely overgrown with some grape-vines, not pruned or cut, but somehow finding their way through the undergrowth. The trellis and netting was broken. In his time, Mandela had kept everything clean and cared for. After he and his comrades left, the prison housed common criminals for some years, and they had left the whole place dirty and unkempt.

I looked out to sea and thought about my fishing days. I recognised some of the warders' old boats in the backyards of empty staff houses. Some broken-down cars were rusting there too. The old electricity power station that kept me awake every night had been moved nearer to the prison, much too late to rescue my years of sleeplessness. The village shop where warders bought basic goods was there too, but now it was empty. I could have told many tales about all the places we were visiting but I kept quiet.

I was tasked with starting a curio shop on the island with a partner shop on the mainland. We sold T-shirts with Mandela's picture on them and heritage site logos, alongside books like *Long Walk to Freedom, Higher Than Hope* and *Island in Chains*. Business was brisk and I enjoyed it.

Kathy occasionally invited me to go with him to Mandela's house, a property he bought for himself in Bishopscourt. One day, we walked into his lounge to wait for him and I joked about sitting in his chair. Mandela liked a straight-back chair and he would always take that seat, overlooking his guests who were on comfortable sofas in front of him.

Mandela walked in and told me: 'You are my special guest today. You must have my chair, please sit down.'

We did a sort of polite dance around the chair and sofa, while I protested he must take his special place. In the end I sat in his chair. We had a sociable chat and I commented that he was still surrounded by police and guards, some of them even in uniform.

'You're still in prison,' I said. 'You have more security around you than ever before.' He said that was what happened in public life.

He seemed lonely to me. His marriage to Winnie was long over and he had missed his daughters' childhood. I knew he prized family life and I began telling him about my sons. Riaan, the little boy he had met many times in Pollsmoor, was now 16. He was a lovely boy, a really soft-hearted person who could talk to anyone, and we were very proud of him. His younger brother, Heinrich, looked up to him greatly, and even though they were very different characters, he would often try to imitate him, even with his haristyle. Mandela jumped up and found some notepaper. He wanted to send Riaan a message. He wrote it in front of me:

> Dear Riaan, I am told that you are now 16 years old. Congratulations! If you work hard you are likely to rise and become one of the most important leaders of our country. Always remember that.
> Sincerely, Uncle Nelson.

He couldn't find an envelope but it didn't matter. I took it home to Riaan and told him to read it carefully and follow those words. I believed in his future too; he was a bright, active, caring boy.

Riaan was proud to have a letter from his uncle Nelson who also happened to be the president. He wanted to take it to school but, of course, we wouldn't allow it.

Mandela had told me he wanted to see Riaan after his matric exam and talk to him about further studies. When I saw him again, I said Riaan had decided on civil engineering. We weren't sure how to go about this, although I had an insurance policy taken out especially to fund his career. Mandela said he wanted to take care of my son's future. He called his secretary and told her that he wanted to arrange a scholarship course in New York, where he believed Riaan would have the best possibilities. A week later, Mandela called me and said the New York course would not be starting till the end of the year, and I should find him a way to keep busy till then.

Riaan was by now regularly diving for perlemoen (edible sea snails) at our favourite weekend spot in the fishing resort of Gansbaai and really enjoying himself. He was interested

in all aspects of diving and beginning to change his mind about a career. I thought it would be difficult to explain to Mandela and I didn't want to seem ungrateful. I went to see him to explain, leaving Riaan at home. But Mandela said: 'I want to see the boy myself. Can you fetch him here?'

So I sent for Riaan and stood with him at the door to Mandela's reception lounge, waiting to hear we could come in. When he heard we were there, he stood up and hurried out the newly appointed Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, before he had even started his cup of tea. Mandela had a way of just standing up and extending his hand, smiling all the while, to let a visitor know he should go. It wasn't quite the same as me telling him there were five minutes left for his prison visits, but it wasn't far off.

He was so happy to see Riaan. He actually asked me to leave them together, so I sat outside on the stoep while they talked. When I was called back in, Mandela told me: 'You know, Mr Brand, we can't tell children of today what they have to do. We have to respect their wishes. We can't impose our will on them. Your son is very serious about being a commercial diver and I think we should encourage him to do that. I will arrange courses and equipment for him. You can leave it to me.'

There was an opening in Westlake, not far from our home, with a diving company willing to train him. He loved it from the first day and took naturally to the technology of handling construction materials under water.

Later, I found a company looking for divers and Riaan started his first paid employment. They had taken on a big excavating contract on Robben Island, so my son was to go to work with me. His job was to work with a team installing a new harbour wall, which had been built on the mainland and was being floated out to the island. Concrete blocks made by some of the political prisoners – huge solid squares weighing several tons each – had to be lifted by crane and dropped into the sea outside the harbour to protect boats from the rough seas. Riaan was taking part in the dangerous process of guiding the blocks into the sea.

As the concrete blocks were being retrieved, the divers were told to examine them for graffiti carved into them by prisoners. There were some names and dates and prison numbers, although the seawater had eroded a great deal. Some of the blocks dated back to the 1930s and 40s. Riaan's job was to chain them and guide them out of the water. They were to be exhibited as part of the island's prison heritage.

We used to travel on the staff ferry together out to the island. Sometimes he stayed in staff quarters overnight for the week to be constantly on call. Like me, he loved to fish and he took a spear-gun with him for the big species. He caught a small shark once and he and his team hauled it up on the slipway and barbecued it.

Riaan always talked enthusiastically about his workmates and it was good to hear him mentioning black and coloured guys as if those friendships were normal now among young people. All of them knew that he had met and talked to Mandela since childhood. I had put Mandela's birthday letter into Riaan's CV when he first applied for the job.

By now Mandela had remarried. He had known Graca Machel for many years. She was the widow of his fellow revolutionary Samora Machel, president of Mozambique, who died in a plane crash in 1986. She was to bring much-needed love and comfort into his later years.

He was happy again. They married on his 80th birthday when he was well into his retirement but still actively working for the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, his two passions. He wanted every detail of South Africa's troubled past to be documented and catalogued by the Foundation, including the Rivonians' part in it, and he wanted to improve education and career opportunities for the country's children.

When the Nelson Mandela Gateway was built as a grand edifice on the quayside in Cape Town's Waterfront, he was there to declare it open in December 2001. It was to be the embarkation point for tourist ferries to Robben Island and also housed an exhibition and a curio shop. Mandela gave a speech saying how delighted he was to have this monument named after him. That was funny really – after all, who else could they possibly name it after?

Today, his name embellishes landmarks all over the world. A total of 23 schools, universities and institutions are named after him as well as 25 halls, buildings, monuments and housing developments; 13 stadia, squares, plazas, parks and gardens; 91 streets and boulevards; 32 bursaries and scholarships, foundations and lectureships; and 14 statues, sculptures and artworks. He has received around 250 international awards of which the most important to him is the Nobel Peace Prize, which he received in 1993.

At the Gateway that day, there were lovely flowers around the place, beautiful roses and lilies. The next morning, I saw the cleaners preparing to throw away some apricot-coloured roses on long stems and I stopped them. My mother, 89 now, was a superb gardener who might be able to get them to grow. She planted several in our garden and two of them are still thriving, bearing many flowers every year. I don't know their real name but we call them our

Mandela roses.

I was enjoying a useful life imparting my memories of the prisoners and the island to thousands of tourists coming through the museum and shop. Many of them were overwhelmed to find themselves with someone who was close to a man they had admired all their lives.

In 2002, the lawyer Priscilla Jana was organising a big event in Holland where the Queen of the Netherlands wanted to meet Mandela, and she invited me to be part of it. I travelled over with an African children's choir and the Koninklijk Theatre in Amsterdam was absolutely packed when Mandela walked in.

There were speeches and singing and dancing, with Mandela and the Queen and other members of the royal family in the front row. I had been asked to bring my prison uniform and cap, in hindsight a totally inappropriate idea. The event organisers had this notion that I would walk down to Mandela and 'arrest' him and bring him up to the stage. Thank God someone had the sense to cancel that mad plan.

I wore an ordinary suit as I walked out of the wings, and Mandela was astonished to see me. I walked down the steps to him and we hugged; he was very happy. I told him we had to walk together up to the podium and he was so nervous about how he was going to get up the steps that I told him: 'Don't worry. I'll carry you if I have to.' Of course, I knew what was going to happen.

We walked up a couple of steps just fine and then I said, 'Let's stop here for a moment.' The step rose up from underneath him and he found himself centre-stage, slightly surprised but with his dignity intact.

He had to wait for a standing ovation to die down, then he gave a charming speech. Meanwhile, the young singers were clamouring around me to let them meet him somehow. It was easy. I just told him the boys and girls wanted to shake his hand and he instantly obliged, walking right down the line with a smile and a little conversation for each one. It must have been the thrill of their young lives.

Back in Cape Town, people were coming to the Robben Island exhibition at the jetty in their droves and buying hundreds of copies of *Long Walk to Freedom* and other books. They often asked me to autograph them. Ahmed Kathrada was then closely involved with the island and its new status as part of our cultural heritage, instead of a place of dread and fear. He often brought visitors, and people were excited to meet him and have him sign their books. Only recently I got talking to a woman passenger on the ferry boat and when I told her Kathrada was actually there, a few feet away from her, she could hardly believe it. I introduced her to him and he chatted to her, kindly as always.

He brings many VIPs to Robben Island and involves me if I am around. Through him, I met Colonel Gaddafi and also Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian revolutionary. People have commented that these men were not exactly icons of liberation but Mandela himself has said he needed all the support he could muster in the tense days between his release and the country's first election, when civil war or liberation were equally possible. That seems a good explanation to me, although I can't say I enjoyed either of those encounters.

On the other hand, there have been great stars – the American activist Jesse Jackson, singer and civil rights campaigner Harry Belafonte and Gillian Anderson from *The X Files* were taken around by Ahmed Kathrada and myself, and it is gratifying to see that everyone, no matter what their status, is emotionally overwhelmed when they enter Robben Island prison and see for themselves the hardship Mandela and the Rivonians went through.

I was proud of the work my son was doing on Robben Island and went to find him every time I arrived at the harbour. He was in his fourth year working with the big construction company and still enjoying it every day, showing us photographs of what he was doing. I could see for myself the transformation of the quayside. He had a good social life with plenty of friends, and my wife and I were proud when he made a fine speech at his 21st birthday party. He was a real outdoor sportsman and had a great attitude to life and work.

But one night when he was at home on leave with us in Cape Town, he was out late at night and I received the phone call every parent dreads with all their heart.

Riaan had been involved in a car accident and had died on the way to hospital. His girlfriend told me that some thugs – some drunken white guys – had been dicing with them in another car, playing at forcing them off the road. Eventually, they side-swiped Riaan's car, sending it crashing into a lamp-post and a tree. Afterwards, they smashed the windscreen to get in and steal his cell-phone, in case there were photos on it revealing their number plate. They have never been found, never brought to justice.

It was 3 a.m. and I drove to Tygerberg hospital, a place I knew well, and saw my son's body. He looked serene and seemed to be almost smiling. I've had to keep that thought with me over the years as a small means of comfort.

I could not believe my Riaan was dead. That same day, I went to the police yard asking to see the car they had towed away. I wanted to see for myself what had happened. When I got there, they were busy siphoning the petrol out of it, and told me they were making it safe, which of course was rubbish.

The next day, I had to do a formal identification. I was driving to the hospital mortuary with a heavy heart. My wife's brother was with me and we were silent in the car.

When my phone rang, it startled both of us. I pulled over to take the call and heard Mandela's voice. He said: 'I heard about your boy. It is a terrible thing when a parent has to bury his child. I understand how it feels because I lost my own son in the same way. I wish I could give you some strength to bear this.'

Mandela's oldest son Thembekile had died in a car crash in 1969 when he was 24 years old. Mandela was then incarcerated in Robben Island, before I worked there, and had been refused permission to attend the funeral. It remained one of the greatest sorrows of his life. Now he was telling me that I had to believe in something, I had to believe that Riaan was in a better place.

He said: 'I was sent a message about Riaan's accident. Tell me what happened.' I explained to him about the car crash and said I was on the way to formally identify Riaan's body. Mandela was very emotional, very upset. He said: 'I know how you must feel, I have been through this myself. You must take comfort from the knowledge that you did your best for Riaan throughout his life and that he was happy and enjoyed life to the full.

'You saw him growing up, from a tiny baby to a big strong adult. And I saw him too. I know you did everything possible for him. I always saw that he was passionate about his career.

'But you can do nothing now. You must try to make peace with this and know that Riaan has gone to a better place. Your most important task is to stand with your wife and help each other get through this together.'

It was a long call and as we were talking my phone suddenly cut out; the battery had gone. I saw that Mandela had talked to me for 22 minutes.

It helped my wife and I, and our younger son Heinrich, to know that people cared. We asked a retired priest we knew to do the funeral service because he had known Riaan since he was a baby.

The Dutch Reformed Church in Ruyterwacht, near Goodwood, was packed for the funeral. There were family members and Riaan's many friends, and Kathrada with his partner Barbara Hogan. Dullah Omar's widow was there, and many colleagues of mine from Robben Island and the Constitutional Assembly. Mandela had told me that he and Graca would be thinking of us. They were on holiday in Mozambique and there was no time for them to return for the funeral, but they would be with us in spirit.

We had decided to have a cremation and to scatter Riaan's ashes at the harbourside on Robben Island, a place he loved and where he lived life to the full. We went across on the ferry, taking flowers with us to float in the sea, and we had a small ceremony where passages from the Bible were read and we said some prayers. Although it was totally heartbreaking, I felt Riaan was still there with us, and I have felt that ever since.

My wife and I continued to take flowers there every year for five years, but then we made a decision to stop. It was incredibly sad for us every time, and we felt strongly that we wanted to keep our happiest memories of him alive, not get trapped in a state of continual mourning.

It has been hard for my younger son Heinrich, who is now 25. He took his brother's death badly and dealt with it in silence, often on his own in his room. He had just finished his matric and, while trying to deal with the death of his brother, he couldn't decide what to do. He ended up with a casual job at Distell, a company that makes liquor. Later that year, he applied to the Cape Town Technicon to study as an interior designer but, unfortunately, that year they were only accepting applications from people of colour. It was another blow for him.

Fortunately, through some friends, we managed to find him a place in Damilin College and for the next two years he studied there. It was difficult for him to find permanent work. He worked for a guy for two years and even worked in Abu Dhabi – he had to travel there twice to finish a job he was doing. After that he was unfortunately jobless for one year but, eventually, he found a permanent job in Cape Town, where he still is now.

He is a very clever guy, a talented interior designer who works endlessly on 3D drawings and plans on his computer. Like Riaan, he is also sporty and goes scuba-diving. He plays rugby with friends and is taking a martial arts course. He lives with us and my mother at home at present and one of the great joys of our life is his little daughter, Mia, who is now five. Heinrich and Mia's mother never married or stayed together but they share the love of this delightful little girl and we look forward to the weekends when she's with us.

One Sunday, our whole family was in Gansbaai, a couple of hours from Cape Town, when Mandela's granddaughter called to invite us over. Of course, we packed up quickly and drove

over to Bishopscourt. Mandela was so pleased to see Mia but she was very cautious about him and wouldn't go to him. We tried a few times but all we could manage was a photograph of her with him, something she now cherishes. Mandela was also happy to meet Heinrich, whom he didn't meet as an adult until this time; he knew how much it meant to me and my wife to have our son and his child with us as a family.

We spent more than an hour with him. Then he said he wanted to see me alone. By now, I was calling him by his clan name Madiba, like all South Africans who love him. I said: 'Is there a problem, Madiba? What's wrong?'

He spoke to me quite severely. He said: 'I can see you are putting on weight. You need to get one of those exercise balls and use it every morning. And you need to eat more healthily. Discipline yourself and you will get back in shape again.'

Even now, he was pushing me to improve myself. I laughed, but he was totally serious. When I went outside, I saw one of his police guards was very fat. I said to him: 'Mr Mandela wants to see you. You'd better get ready for a lecture about your weight.' He looked terrified.

I often had spontaneous invitations to see Madiba. The last time I saw him was on his birthday. I told him: 'We all want you to reach 100, you just have a few years to go. Don't leave us.'

I had thought for years that he could not go on. I thought maybe he had a couple of years left. He was stiff with arthritis. But then I would see him doing that famous Madiba shuffle and I realised I was wrong.

He asked me once about the Sisulu family. He missed Walter, his dear friend and mentor, so much since he had died in 2003. He said: 'How is Mama Sisulu? Have you seen her?' He meant Walter's wife, who has now also passed away.

Mandela told me: 'It's my turn next, for sure.' But he was probably joking, you could never really tell. At one of his birthday parties he told me the crowds of people there had only come because he was old. 'You know, they want a last look,' he said.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

As I write this, Madiba lies ill at home and it is feared that he may never recover. He has been plagued by the recurring lung infection that dates back to the onset of tuberculosis in Pollsmoor Prison where he was put into isolation in a dark damp cell.

His 95th birthday came and went as he lay, intubated, in an intensive care ward in Pretoria's Medi-Clinic Heart Hospital. The window of his room was opened slightly for a brief time so that he could hear African children singing for him outside the hospital.

His family and close friends visited regularly and I know that Winnie and Mandela's new wife Graca Machel took turns to sit with him, to hold his hand and talk.

His daughter Zindzi kindly invited me to visit too. She told me: 'Come with us, Tata would like to see you.' But I felt that would be intrusive. This was a time for the family to be together as much as possible.

I receive regular news and I know that, at times, Madiba is strong enough to sit up and watch television but mostly he is comfortably asleep. Winnie or Graca wake him up to greet a visitor and he opens his eyes and appears to smile, though a tracheostomy tube means he cannot speak.

I think of him a great deal as I head for Robben Island every working day.

Often I travel on the old *Dias* ferry boat or the *Susan Kruger*, both still in service and used to transport staff there and back. I choose to descend the steep iron stairway into the hold where I can lie full-length on one of the wooden benches and catch some sleep while the boat ploughs through the water for 45 minutes. Most people prefer the cabin with windows looking out to sea, or even the exposed top deck if the weather is good.

For me, the hold is a special place. It's starkly bare and there are no windows but if the sea is rough I find it is the place where I'm least vulnerable to sea-sickness.

Actually, the real reason is that I belong down there. So many, many times I would take those stairs down with Mandela and his comrades for the journey. They would be in leg-chains and we sat in a forlorn row on those hard benches. Today, there are sturdy cushions to provide a little comfort, but in the Rivonians' day there was nothing but the bare wood, the dark steel of the walls and either a medical appointment at one end of the journey or a grim return to Robben Island at the other.

There's no sunlight so it can get very cold. All you can do is listen to the klap-klap-klap of the water as the boat hits the waves. When you lie down, the wood is cold, the steel joints are cold. You are so cold you have to turn over and move your body in an attempt to keep warm.

The staff boat is often crowded with tour guides, maintenance and cleaning staff, security company workers and people like me who run the tourist facilities. I am the shops supervisor, buying in historic books about Mandela, the apartheid struggle and the island itself, as well as curios like posters and T-shirts. I deal with the memorabilia from the prison cells and also run the cafeterias with food and drink for visitors.

Recently, I took Ebrahim Rasool to Robben Island with me, my ex-prisoner and now South Africa's ambassador to Washington. Like me, he wanted to be in the hold, no need for explanation. He even took his family members and children down there on the way back. The sea was rough and he knew from experience the need to minimise that feeling of sea-sickness.

A little-known landmark in the cultural collection that commemorates Mandela's great sacrifice to his country is Jetty 1, where the *Dias* and the *Susan Kruger* are moored. It is tucked away along Victoria Harbour just off the busy thoroughfare where tourists throng. It is a National Heritage Site where the public can walk in free of charge. In its way, Jetty 1 is the saddest monument of all. It has not changed from the time when it was the only gateway to the sea and Robben Island.

It is a brick-built structure where prisoners and visitors once waited for the island ferries. I took Mandela there many times, locking him in a cell on the first floor, then escorting visitors into their separate waiting room. When the ferry arrived, the prisoners would be the last to board, hurried down the iron staircase into the bowels of the boat to sit there in misery.

Today, the ground floor contains memorabilia from those times, handwritten letters from families begging for permission to visit a loved one, and lists of names and dates drawn up by warders like me to denote whether a visit was allowed or not. There is a large painting of the handsome Xhosa chieftains in their tribal dress, banished to the island by colonial settlers in the 19th century and left there to die, disinherited of their land and their livelihood.

Anyone stepping inside the tiny museum would have to be made of stone not to weep at film footage of the last political prisoners coming home from Robben Island in May 1991.

Their faces tell the whole story with broad smiles and unashamed tears, while their bodies sway to the spontaneous singing of celebration that breaks out as the ferry pulls into the jetty. Dozens of people lean dangerously over the ropedoff quayside with outstretched arms, longing for the first embrace from men who are their sons, brothers or husbands. Their joy when the men finally step ashore and walk into their arms is overwhelming.

It is extraordinary how Jetty 1 sits virtually unnoticed at the harbour's edge, just yards away from the bustle of tourist boats taking crowds of sightseers for a trip around the bay or a night-time party cruise. Across the pathway, easily heard from inside Jetty 1, there is music and chattering from the glamorous restaurants and wine bars along the harbourside strip. The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront is Africa's most popular tourist attraction by far, drawing in millions of visitors every month. Yet the museum is hardly sign-posted and rarely filled with people.

At the immediate approach to it is the exact spot where I once stood, mystified, on that secret mission on my first night shift at Pollsmoor. It's the place where I saw the ferry coming in under cover of darkness and realised that Mandela, Mhlaba, Mlangeni and Sisulu were emerging from the shadows, clutching their cardboard boxes of belongings.

There were no shops or restaurants or wine bars then, and no sightseeing cruise boats. It was a dark and soulless shipyard with harsh searchlights directed at us with our machine-guns and guard-dogs.

Of course, the tourists don't travel on the *Dias* or the *Susan Kruger*. We have a new modern ferry to accommodate crowds comfortably and we don't go out to sea if it's bad weather. Tours go to the island several times a day at a round-trip cost of about £20 per person and less for children. They leave from the showy Nelson Mandela Gateway across the water from Jetty 1, next to the Clock Tower.

For me, though, the past never fades. How can it when I feel the boat engine slowing at the approach to Robben Island and go up top to see the harbour wall that my son helped to build? As I step ashore, I sometimes close my eyes briefly and I can see Riaan there, waving and smiling to greet me and getting on with the job he loved.

I walk across the landing-stage and I can still see the prisoners in my mind's eye. I can see them and hear them. The warders are watching sternly as they kick a football around the soccer field for a few minutes of freedom and exercise before lock-up. The pitch is neglected and overgrown now.

The whole island is full of ghosts for me. I am actually one of them, trudging up the track to my dismal quarters that stank of old fish or hurrying Mandela towards the visitors' centre, stopping only to let him pick a daisy for Winnie.

All the single warders' quarters are empty now, and I think it's a shame that visitors can't stay overnight in some sort of residential centre developed from these historic buildings. The island's only residents are ex-prisoners – many of them from the Soweto uprising – who take people around B Section and describe the daily life they once led there. They live in the former married warders' quarters. The guided tour takes a bus trip right around, to include the lepers' graveyard, the little church built for them with no pews – many of them were limbless – and the mosque. At the north end, there is a magnificent view of Table Mountain from the hard shingle on the beach, the spot where Mandela and the others waded into the cold sea to pull out the giant seaweed plants.

The island school stands empty and like the deserted houses it is now inhabited by birds. A desalination plant has been installed nearby, ironically, now that most of the people have gone. In my time, there was just the brackish, virtually undrinkable water from the island's borehole, discoloured and strange tasting.

The overgrown sports field looks sad. But it strikes me that all these facilities could be brought back to life easily. There are conference facilities for workshops and Robben Island could become a vibrant centre of education. Mandela's dream of a Robben Island university could be a reality.

Recently, I had to stay over after working late. I went outside on the stoep in the late-night darkness and saw the twinkling lights of Cape Town city in the distance and the looming shape of Table Mountain. I thought about all those evenings jogging around the limestone road. There were fewer twinkling lights then but Mandela and his friends would have known that real life was just seven kilometres away, so near and yet so far.

Many times I am called in to talk to visitors who want to know about my days with Mandela. They listen teary-eyed and they will often tell me Mandela has been their life-long inspiration. He is their hero, their role model of tolerance and goodness.

Yes, I tell them, but I am the only one among you who can say he was my prisoner and my friend.

It was soon after dawn on Sunday, 15 December 2013 when Christo Brand walked through the ancient fields of Qunu village and past the river where Mandela played as a child, on his way to a sad but fitting ceremony, the last goodbye to the great Nelson Mandela. Security guards noted his damp and muddy shoes and insisted on brushing them clean for him. He continued alone right up to the burial place and looked into Mandela's empty grave.

'I thought to myself how he would now be able to look over the whole of that green valley he loved so much. Madiba had come home, just as he always longed to,' he said.

Christo was greeted warmly by a group of military generals, every one of them an ex-prisoner from Robben Island. Film producer Anant Singh, whose *Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom*, had recently received huge critical acclaim, persuaded Christo to sit nearby, along with actor Idris Elba, who took the lead part.

Mourners started up their beloved freedom songs dedicated to Mandela, and Christo felt proud. Close to tears, he listened to Mandela's grandson Ndaba giving his moving speech. 'I closed my eyes and I could hear the man himself, and see him in his youth', he said. Granddaughter Nandi was also impressive and talked of Mandela's warmth towards his family.

Daughter Zindzi saw Christo, gave him a special smile, and thanked him for being there. The singing stopped and everyone stood. It was the moment for Mandela's coffin to be carried solemnly past the mourners.

'The coffin was close enough for me to touch but I didn't think that would be right,' said Christo. 'And it was enough to know that our lives had touched for so many years. I said a silent goodbye to the best, strongest and most honest human being I have ever known.'







I had a happy childhood growing up on the farm with my mother and father. Where we lived we didn’t worry about race, and I would play with children of all colours.



Nelson Mandela with Oliver Tambo looking every inch the professional lawyers that they were.

© Gallo Images/Getty Images



In 1950 Mandela became President of the ANC Youth League in South Africa, the first step in an incredible career in activism.

© Gamma-Rapho via Getty Images



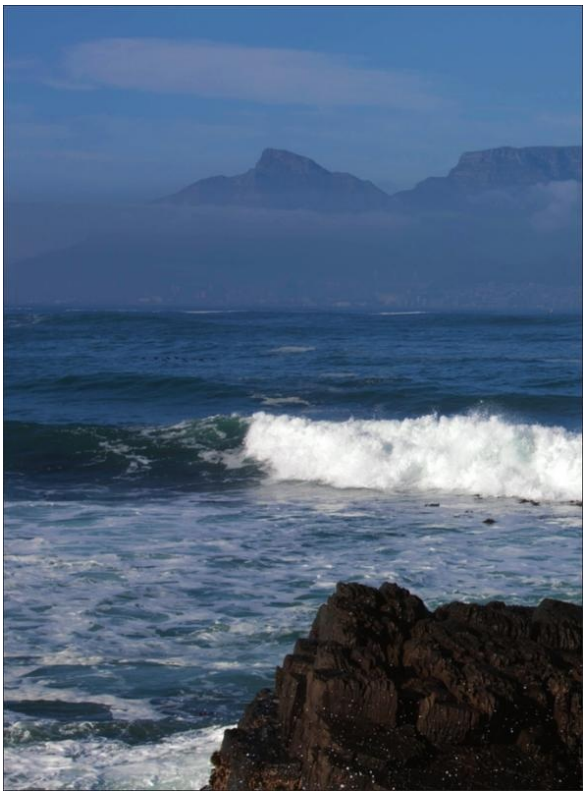
Winnie and Mandela look so happy at their wedding in 1957. They spent most of their married years apart but it was Winnie's love that helped to allow Mandela to survive Robben Island.

© AFP/Getty Images





My own wedding day was also a joyous occasion, and was only made possible by the kindness of the judge who legally adopted Estelle at a hearing immediately before the ceremony. My parents, Cornelia and Floris, were able to share our happiness with us.

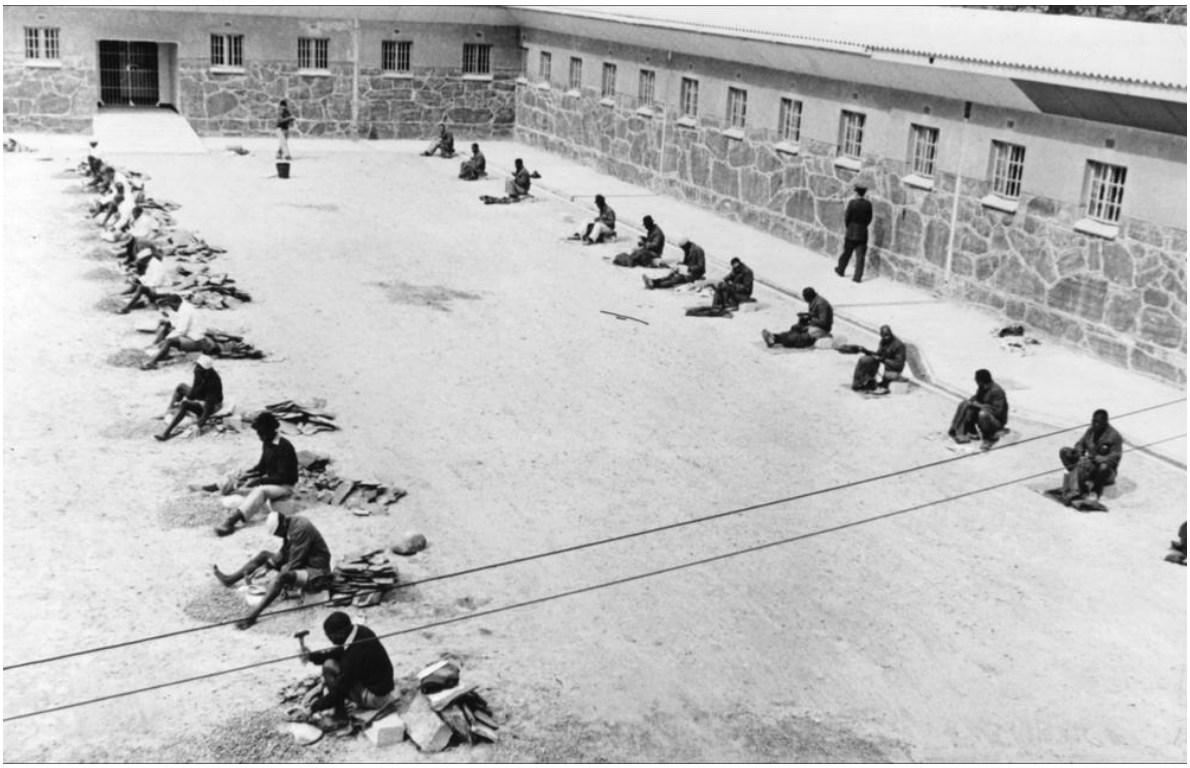


The striking view of Table Mountain from Robben Island. It can be quite beautiful, but for both Mandela and myself it was a reminder that our lives and wives were a long way away.



The Rivonians were imprisoned but never broken. Even as they were driven away from the courthouse after being sentenced to life, they made the power fist salute through the bars of the prison van.

© AFP/Getty Images



A rare picture taken on Robben Island in 1964. The prisoners in front are breaking bigger rocks into smaller rocks, while those behind are sewing mailbags.

© *Getty Images*



At times we were able to have some fun together at the single warders' quarters. In this picture I am visiting my friend Charlie Adams who had been ill in bed. With us is Wayne Hill.



I’m holding my new-born son Riaan while wearing my prison warder’s uniform. I couldn’t be more proud.



Baby Riaan was enjoying his first birthday in this picture we treasure.



I am with my young family. Heinrich is on my left, and Riaan is on the right, both fine young men with good hearts.



Throughout Mandela's imprisonment there were demonstrations demanding his release. As time went on, and apartheid began to falter, these demonstrations became unstoppable.

© *AFP/Getty Images*





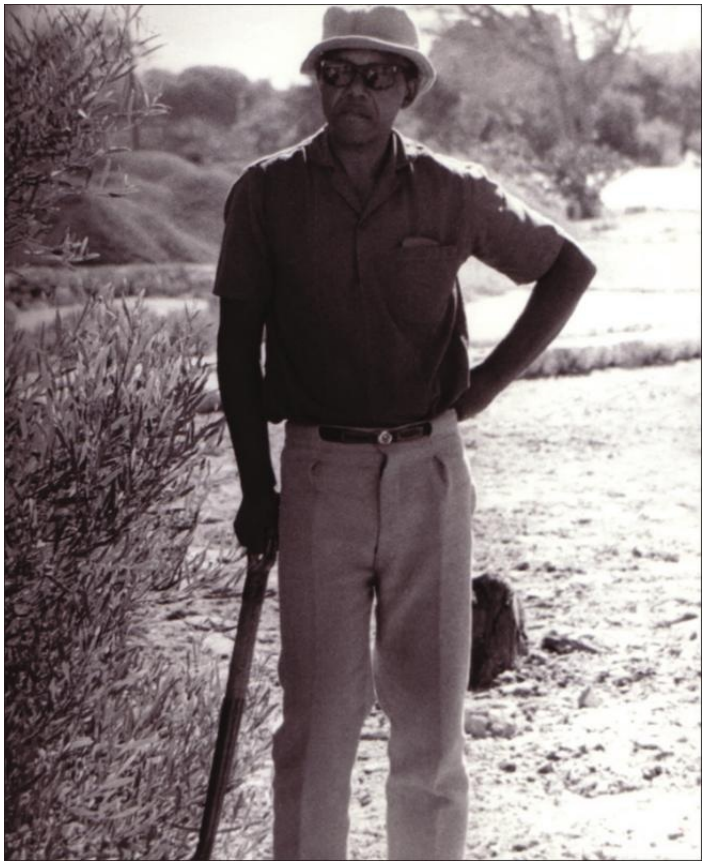
People came out to support Mandela not just in South Africa, but throughout the world, as can be seen from the demonstrations (*below*) in Paris. Wembley also hosted a huge Free Mandela concert in 1988 (*centre*) which showed how the world felt about apartheid.

© PA Photos and Getty Images



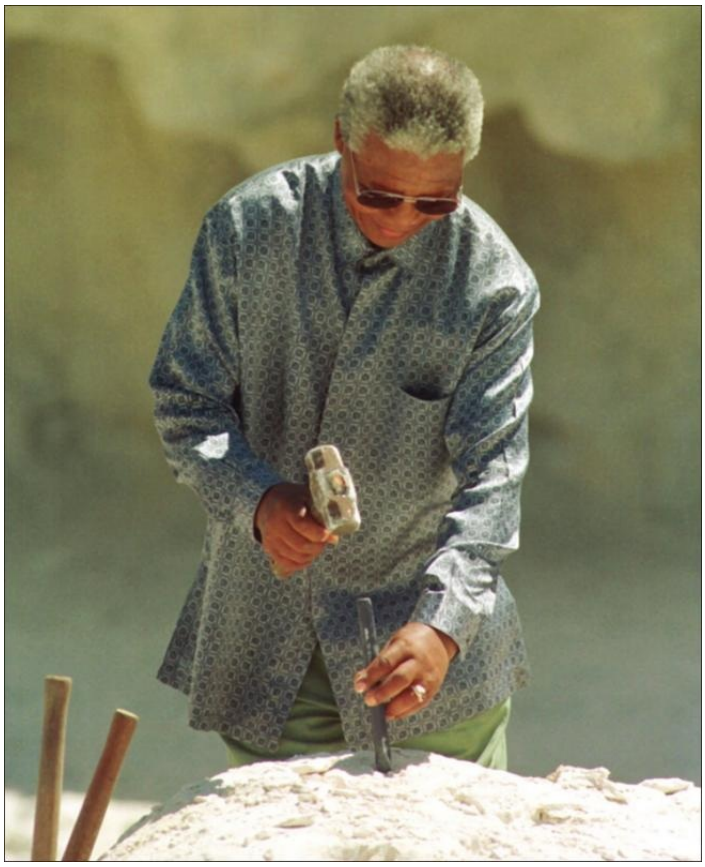
A happy reunion in the garden at Victor Verster Prison. Everyone looks smart in their suits except for Oscar Mpetha who was in his hospital gown. From left to right is Wilton Mkwayi, Andrew Mlangeni, Raymond Mhlaba, Ahmed Kathrada, Oscar Mpetha, Elias Motsoaledi and Walter Sisulu. Nelson Mandela himself stands in front of them.

© *National Archives of South Africa*



Nelson Mandela in a working party cleaning a pathway in the no-man's land area behind the maximum security block on Robben Island.

© *National Archives of South Africa*



Mandela returned to the infamous quarry on Robben Island along with the other political prisoners for a reunion in 1996. Incredibly, he was returning as the President of South Africa, rather than a prisoner.

© *Gallo Images/Getty Images*



He spent many long, hard years in his cell, and it was a special occasion when Mandela came back in 1994.

© Getty Images



The man who some hope to be a successor to Mandela on the world stage – President Obama – was emotional when he visited Mandela's cell.

© AFP/Getty Images



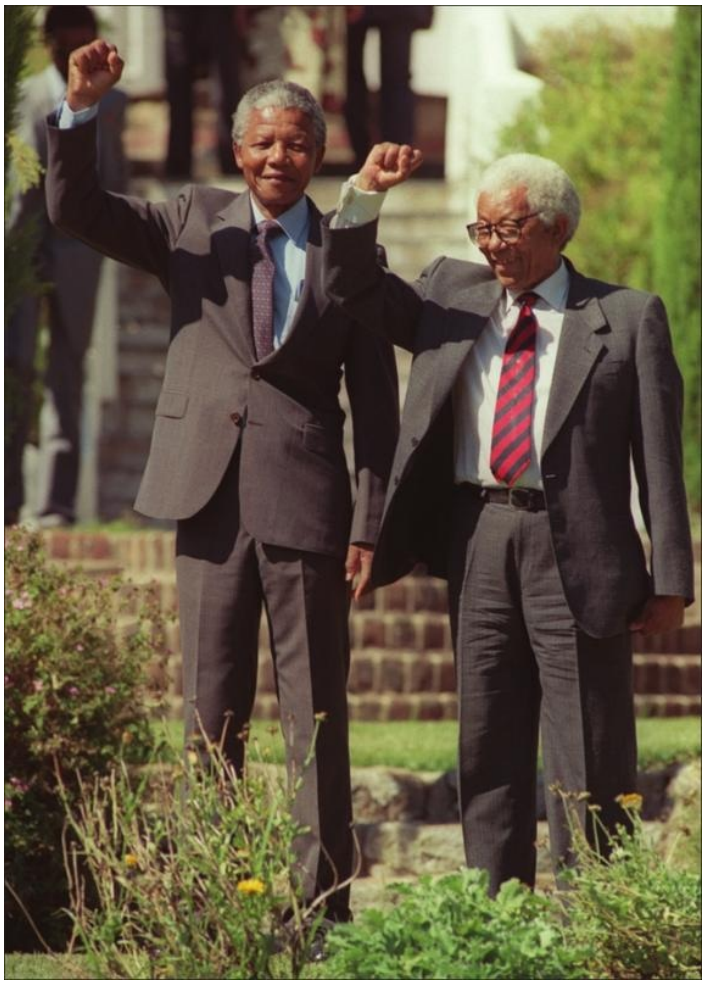
I was very nervous, but overjoyed, watching Mandela’s release from prison. What an amazing man, to be able to arrange his release on his own terms.

© *Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images*



Two days after his release, 100,000 people turned up at Soweto Stadium to celebrate with him. Mandela is on stage with his wife.

© AFP/Getty Images



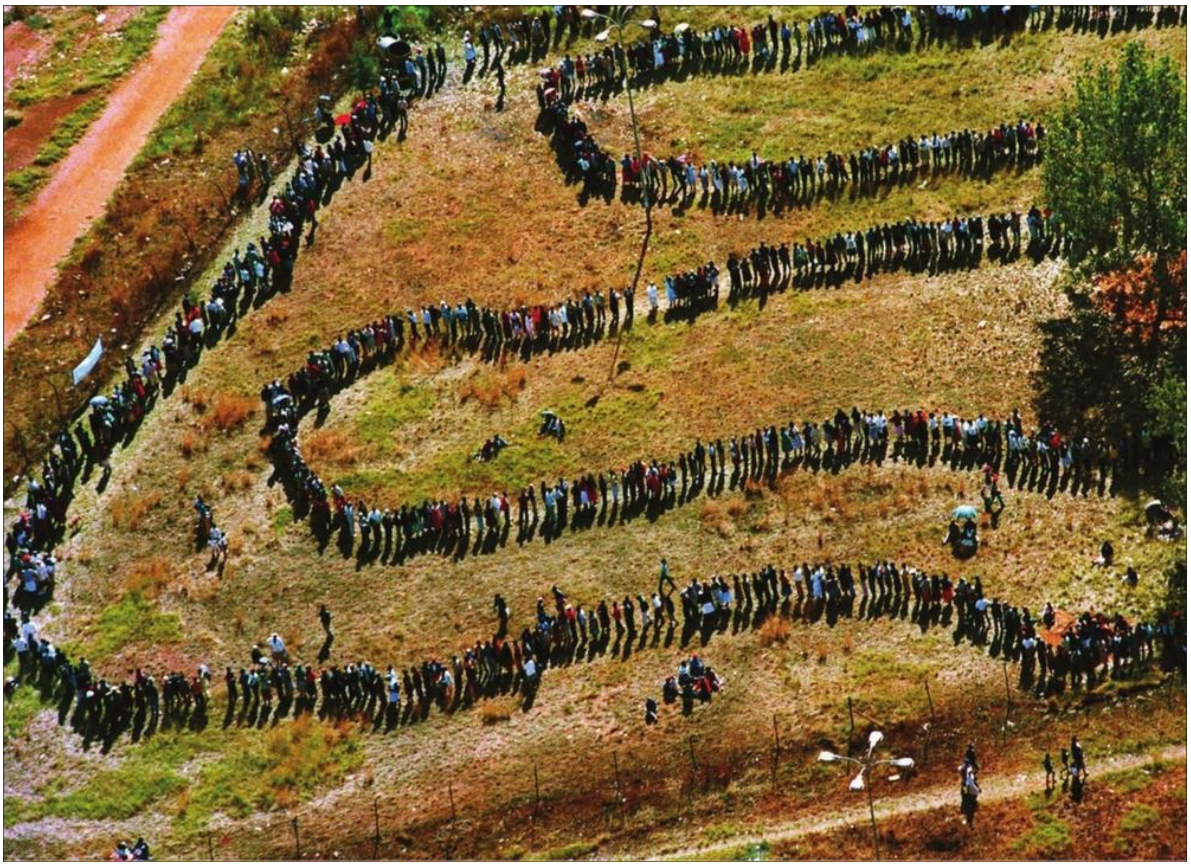
Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu stood proudly side by side to greet the crowds as free men.

© *AFP/Getty Images*



The day Mandela, my leader, became the country's leader. It was an incredibly proud moment for all of us. The man next to him is Thabo Mbeki, his Vice-President, and the son of his fellow prisoner.

© AFP/Getty Images



An incredibly powerful image of black voters queuing on 27 April 1994 in Soweto. Just a few years before scenes such as this were unimaginable.

© Denis Farrell/PA Photos



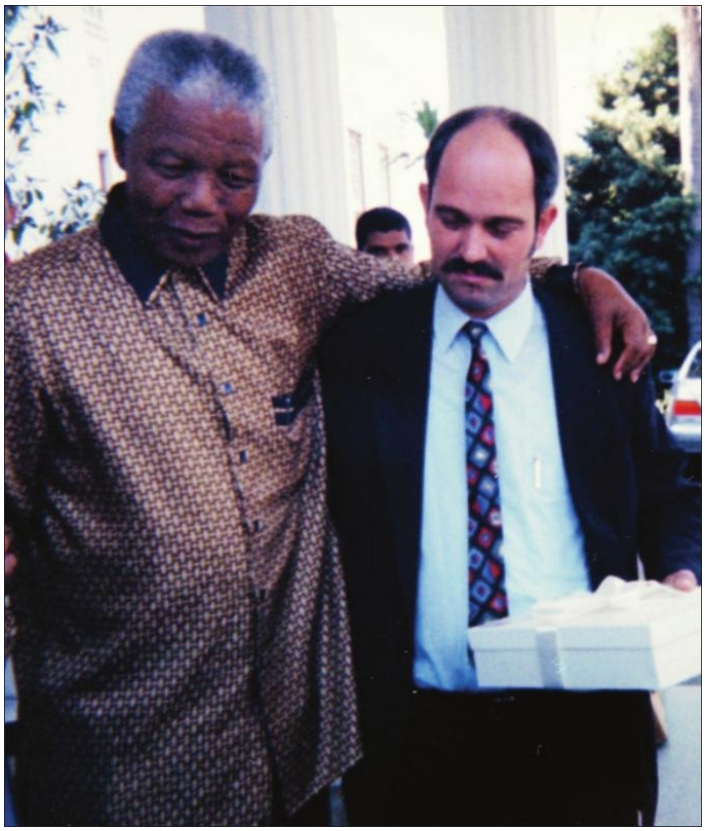
Here Walter Sisulu is on my right and Ahmed Kathrada, who is still a great friend to this day, is on my left. We were meeting to celebrate Mandela's 80th birthday.



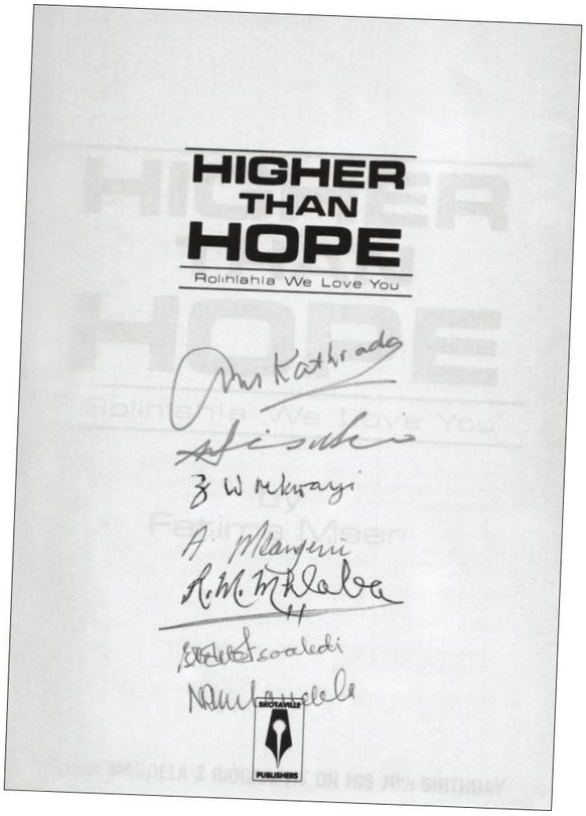
I am shaking hands with Swapo leader Toivo Ja Toivo in Namibia. Behind me is Swapo military commander Helao Shityuwete, who was also imprisoned on Robben Island. After release he wrote his memoirs Never *Follow the Wolf*.



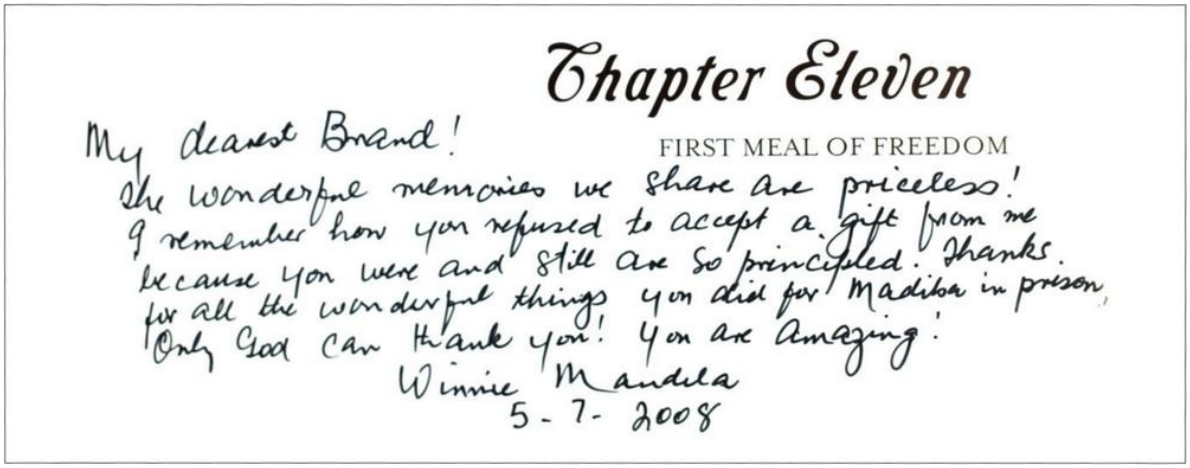
My wife and I are pictured here with Winnie Mandela, a woman I greatly admire, at the unveiling of a huge bronze statue of Mandela that was erected at the prison gates of Victor Verster, the spot where Mandela walked to freedom.



This was a very funny moment when we surprised Mandela in Pretoria with his Pantene birthday gift. Just to the left of the picture is a big cardboard cut-out of a Pantene bottle, and I have three bottles in the box I am holding.



The copy of *Higher Than Hope* that all of the Rivonians signed in prison and gave to me for safe-keeping.



Chapter Eleven

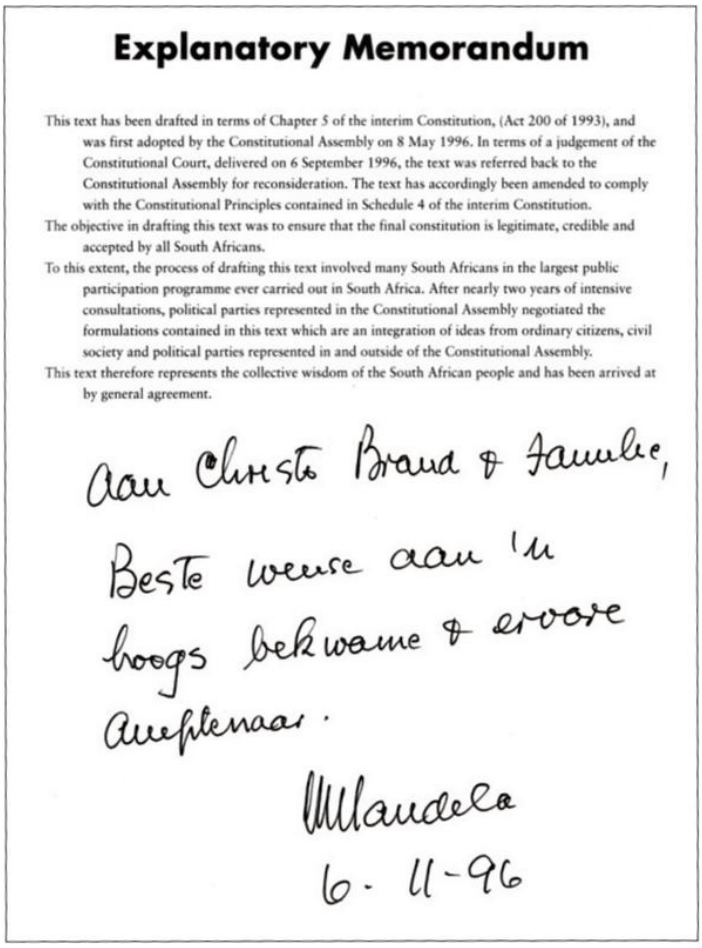
My dearest Brand!

FIRST MEAL OF FREEDOM

The wonderful memories we share are priceless!
I remember how you refused to accept a gift from me
because you were and still are so principled. Thanks.
for all the wonderful things you did for Madiba in prison,
Only God can thank you! You are Amazing!

Winnie Mandela
5-7-2008

Winnie's kind note to me referencing the time that I secretly took Mandela's granddaughter in to see him.



Explanatory Memorandum

This text has been drafted in terms of Chapter 5 of the interim Constitution, (Act 200 of 1993), and was first adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996. In terms of a judgement of the Constitutional Court, delivered on 6 September 1996, the text was referred back to the Constitutional Assembly for reconsideration. The text has accordingly been amended to comply with the Constitutional Principles contained in Schedule 4 of the interim Constitution.

The objective in drafting this text was to ensure that the final constitution is legitimate, credible and accepted by all South Africans.

To this extent, the process of drafting this text involved many South Africans in the largest public participation programme ever carried out in South Africa. After nearly two years of intensive consultations, political parties represented in the Constitutional Assembly negotiated the formulations contained in this text which are an integration of ideas from ordinary citizens, civil society and political parties represented in and outside of the Constitutional Assembly.

This text therefore represents the collective wisdom of the South African people and has been arrived at by general agreement.

Aan Christo Brand & Familie,

Beste wense aan 'n
hoogs bekwame & ervare
medewerker.

NMandela
6-11-96

I believe that this is the first copy of the new Constitution to have the President's signature on it. It reads, in Afrikaans, 'To Christo Brand and his family. Best wishes to a very able civil servant.'



My eldest son, Riaan, in full diving kit in a quarry.



This was undoubtedly the saddest period of my life. My wife and I, Heinrich (next to us in the sunglasses), my mother (far left) and Riaan’s friends are on our way to Robben Island to scatter Riaan’s ashes. The kind note that Mandela wrote to Riaan to encourage him. Riaan treasured it.



10-03-2000

NELSON MANDELA

Dear Riaan,

I am told that you are now 16 years old. Congratulations! If you work hard you are likely to rise and become one of the most important leaders of our Country. Always remember that.

Sincerely.

Uncle Nelson.

(Mandela)
Birkhofs court
Cape Town

The kind note that Mandela wrote to Riaan to encourage him. Riaan treasured it.



When the Obamas visited Robben Island, Kathy was their tour guide.



Ahmed Kathrada was one of Nelson Mandela's closest colleagues. They went through a great deal together in prison. You can see how close they are by how comfortable they are with each other, leaning in to share a secret.



He also spoke at the emotional church service held in memory of Nelson Mandela at the Nelson Mandela Foundation on 8 December 2013.

© *Getty Images and Mark Skinner*

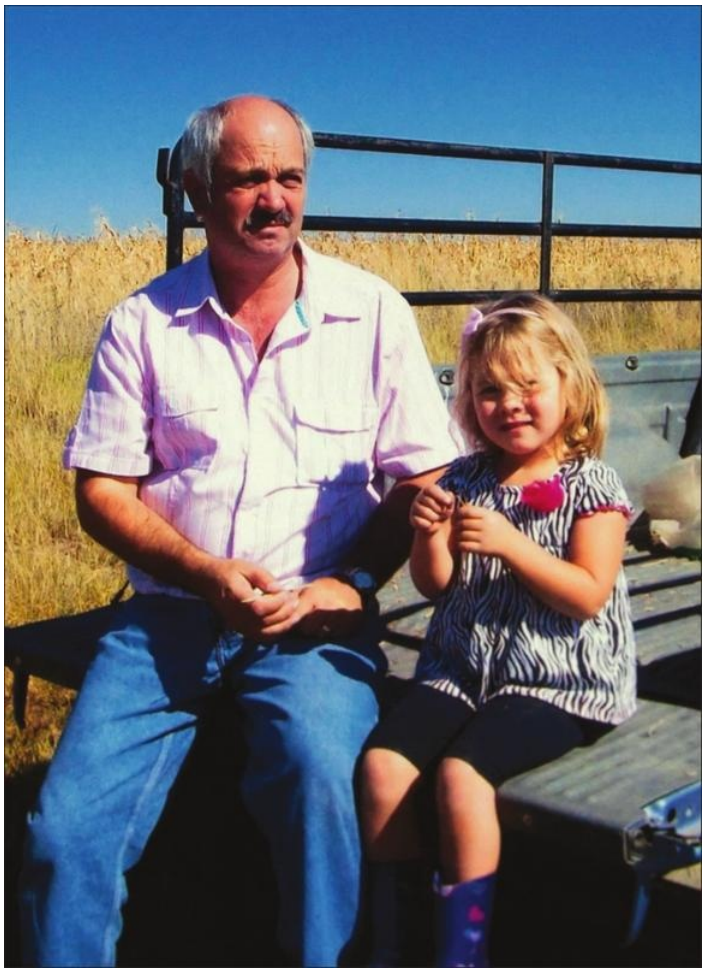


It was a sad occasion when I travelled to Qunu in December 2013 to be at Nelson Mandela’s funeral. It was overwhelming to see the reactions from around the world to the news of his death.

© Alinka Echeverria, 2013



A recent family portrait taken in my old parents’ home in Ruyterwaght, where we live today.



I spend as much time as I am able with my granddaughter Mia, now aged five.

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