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MK Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

Greta Apelgren

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eThekwini (telephonically)

What were some of the influences on you as you grew up that made you more socially and politically aware? To what extent, if at all, did your parents, your siblings, your neighbours or school friends influence you? Tell us a bit also about your family.

My parents and whole family influenced me a lot. Both my parents were factory workers from the '40s I think, but certainly the '50s. My mother worked as a seamstress in a clothing factory in Clairwood and then worked her way up to be a machinist. My father first worked for Lever Bros. After that, for most of his life, he worked as a transport clerk in a mattress factory, then worked his way up to be a transport manager.

They were much influenced by the unions dominant in those industries. I think I learnt about communism from them. My mother only had a standard four education. She told me then about communism when I was still in primary school. What I read when I was at varsity was different, but, you see, what she said to me was her interpretation of what the union leaders were saying. But still, I realised it meant that you need an ideal society where everyone is equal. That was basically it.

So, these two were my main influences politically. My father also became involved in the soccer association as well as all the civic issues, like community centres. So this, I think, made me realise that some of us have to go forward to serve on structures like that, residents, ratepayers, youth and other

organisations. To develop your community, you can't sit and wait for the church to do it. You also can't wait for the government either.

So, my parents were definitely my most important influences politically. Then, of course, the church. The Catholic Church was exceptionally dominant then, not just in Wentworth at that time, but in Durban as a whole. Our priest was the now late Father Cyril Carey and there was also Archbishop Dennis Hurley. There was always a Catholic perspective of something similar to what, looking back now, the ANC was promoting, what socialism and communism were. We can't have a super-rich minority and a majority exceptionally poor.

I think that also brought home to me at an early age that everyone must have an equal opportunity. Once you get that into your head at primary school age – and we were in church very often – it stays with you for the rest of your life. Then, of course, the Group Areas Act threw a lot of people into this township. I mean it wasn't like a bush or forest, whatever, but it was totally undeveloped. The little bit of development here, was by the South African Naval Force and South African Police who were here to guard these major oil refineries from the harbour all the way right down to Isipingo.

So that disturbed a lot of us who had to get out of where we were living because of that Group Areas Act and then we were all thrown here in Wentworth in the south of Durban into an undeveloped area. People struggled to cope, they lost their jobs that were in the north of the city. Also, others too from the west – and when the Transkei became a homeland, a lot of the so-called Coloured people were driven out and they came here.

They had to leave virtually everything and come here where there was nowhere for them to stay except move into relatives' homes. So, they were very disrupted and that also affected us. Suddenly so-called Coloured people were seen as White people and sort of driven out of the Transkei. There were political parties for so-called Coloureds, but the Labour Party was dominant. They called themselves a Labour Party, but everyone knew it was a party for so-called Coloureds. Like the Minority Front and others for Indians. The national leader at that time was from Kimberley, a very dynamic Khoisan who had half European blood.

I went to a meeting of the Labour Party. My family and the whole neighbourhood were talking about it so I was determined to go hear what was going to be said. My brothers and sisters, the older ones, didn't want me to come with them because it was a very long walk, about five kilometres from where we lived. This Labour Party leader was saying things like you're all equal,

there's no such thing that White people are superior and so-called Coloureds and Blacks are inferior.

So that was amazing and especially for us mixed race people who still have both White and African relatives to worry about and we're stuck there in the middle. So he gave this picture in my eleven-year old mind of a perfect society where everyone is equal and the colour of your skin is utterly irrelevant and he was a very light skinned indigenous guy. Although he was not standing there claiming to be an indigenous leader, I learnt many years later that he had a strong Khoisan background. His name was Sonny Leon.

I went to the University of Western Cape (UWC) in 1976 which was for so-called Coloureds. In those days it was very difficult to get into the University of Durban-Westville, which was for Indians or the University of Natal, which was for Whites. You really had to have exceptional reasons to get into those universities and I already had a political profile throughout high school so I think when I applied they just didn't even bother to respond. I couldn't even get a bursary. I had to work for a year at OK Bazaars as a casual person, doing very low level work, but I was able to save money and get myself to varsity for the first year.

Then, while I was at UWC, fortunately a Child Welfare Agency gave me a bursary for years two and three. But remember, 1976 was a major political uprising in the country that also impacted on UWC. As soon as the June '76 uprisings turned into a bloodbath, UWC students organised a protest and campaign in solidarity.

I don't know how, but the Black Consciousness Movement was exceptionally powerful at the time. So, I was substantially conscientised by them. I experienced so much violence and tear gas from the riot police, which was totally unnecessary. But still, that was fine; but when they started firing live bullets at us, and you have to run with the bullets just whizzing over your head and you can hear the sound of them, you become more politically determined. Eventually over the years, including through all the township gang violence, you become desensitised to violence and blood and death. Anyway, being at university really influenced me politically.

I read that Jeanette, your younger sister, influenced you politically.

It would be the other way around. There's twelve of us children, and my elder brother lived with my father's parents in Greenwood Park, so eleven of us had to live in the house. Fortunately, my oldest sister, when she completed matric,

went to Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town to study nursing so that left us with ten.

We had a typical old township two-bedroom house. We had to sleep on the floor but you get used to that. Black Consciousness also took root in Wentworth. People like Jeanette and Eric were also heavily influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement and when they both went to university, Jeanette to Durban-Westville and Eric to Natal, I had finished varsity and came back home in '79, and they were already organising the youth. But organising them around social issues, spiritual church issues and bringing in Black Consciousness principles. That was very empowering, those principles.

Why did you choose social work as a career?

You know, my earliest ambition was to just be a secretary. For some reason I idolised women who were secretaries (laughter).

By the time I was in standard nine or so, I became more socially conscious about people's living conditions in the townships. And we started going to the informal settlements around the area in the early '70s. At the old Duranta Road that separates the Merebank and Wentworth townships, there were a few informal settlements called Tin Town. There was a lot of inter-marrying of so-called Coloureds and Indians there. We used to go there a lot because our friends lived there.

Seeing that inequality and poverty – I mean we were also from a working class family, but we didn't experience poverty to that depth – made me change my thinking and I decided to become a social worker. But then I found out that you need a university education for that. So, it became quite a struggle because my mother wanted me to just complete matric and get a job, get married, have children – as girls were meant to do then. We had a major conflict between us until I said I'll work for a year and take myself to university, you can't stop me from doing that.

Between the time that you came back to Wentworth from UWC and get approached by Robert to join MK, what are your social and political activities?

I was very involved. Fortunately for me, the Child Welfare Agency which gave me the bursary, employed me and set me to work right here in Wentworth. I was dealing mostly with social problems and with family problems. There was a lot of family counselling, a lot of interventions where we had to remove children because their parents were alcoholics or violent. I was also very

involved in the lives of middle class families here. The majority though were poor families. I saw human suffering and became much closer to it.

In the '80s we began to do more community work. We realised that you won't be able to solve individual and family problems unless you deal with the community problems. If you solve those problems, then the families on their own will improve themselves, so to speak. I was very involved with the youth together with Jeanette and Eric, but by then she was also a practising social worker and Eric was a high school teacher.

We started church and social youth organisations. Of course, at that time the gang violence and the drug trade was at its worst. We used to call the township the killing fields because every weekend there was a funeral, mostly young guys were killed.

Then the UDF (United Democratic Front) started and I was involved in its campaigns. Then everything was getting banned. I think it was 1985. Even in civics, no one could do anything. Obviously, Umkhonto We Sizwe moved in, and that's how we got recruited.

As I understand it, Robert simply approached you to join him within a few hours to go somewhere without telling you where and what for - and you immediately agreed? That true? If so, why did you join him so readily?

That's correct. When the organisations were being stifled we couldn't do much, we still used to try and have social gatherings, like we're having a braaivleis. But we would discuss politics and what we're going to do in the current situation.

When Robert came on a Friday, I think it was about six or seven in the evening, he just explained briefly that he needed me to go with him, he did say Umkhonto We Sizwe had identified me. I was a bit nervous about it but at the same time I knew if I said no, I don't want to be part of MK, other women may also be nervous and say no - and you had to have some women there.

I felt that on my own, but I also later realised how important for practical reasons it was to have women in MK. It also helped as a cover to make our activities seem more innocent because women are not seen as guerrillas and the police are less suspicious about us.

Robert didn't say we're going to Botswana - he just said make sure together with your ID you've got your passport, I can't tell you anything, not even which country. We would be gone for almost a weekend. So, just pack clothes as if

you're going on a weekend holiday out of the country. He said he'll be back at ten that evening. I had about two hours to get ready.

You went into the armed struggle so readily. It wasn't as if every space for above ground activities was snuffed out. And you were also playing a very important role as a social worker in a very challenged township. So all of these progressive activities could get compromised? Is there anything else you want to say about why you joined the armed struggle beyond what you just said?

No. Remember we weren't able to continue with the campaigns because many organisations were banned. There was a long list of them, mainly linked to the UDF, the UCC (United Committee of Concern, a UDF affiliate) and youth organisations. Many key organisations were banned, and the leaders of other organisations were arrested or on the run and the organisations became very weak and ineffective. There was so much infiltration of informers into our structures. You could tell there were a lot of spies amongst us, so you couldn't do much and you could see the writing was on the wall.

We were being stopped from fighting politically and non-violently. When the knock of MK came on the door, a person had very little choice unless of course you wanted to give up and just continue with a social life and your work life.

At the same time, the international campaign of economic sanctions was intensifying and we were relying heavily on this to get White people to surrender. But we knew that would not be enough so you needed the armed struggle, although it probably had only a 25% impact on the fall of apartheid. We knew we had to use that to show White people that we are here and we're going to deal with you in the same violent way you deal with us. It was something that some of us knew we had to do.

How well did you know Robert at the time he approached you?

The McBride family lived just down the road, in the same street the Apelgren family lived. We virtually grew up in the same section of the township. Then their family moved to a bigger house, which was about two kilometres away. He was just another township boy and I just another township girl who grew up in the same section of the township, if I can put it like that.



Greta Apelgren, shortly after her release from prison in 1989

Where did your parents think you'd gone when you disappeared quickly to Botswana on your first trip?

No, we never used to tell them precisely where we were. We were going to a weekend function because we used to go on camping trips a lot on the weekends. We were constantly away from home so it was not unusual.

So what happens when you go off that night? Where do you go? What happens? What were your thoughts?

Well, I was anxious because I didn't know which country we were going to. Eventually, when we were coming into these very verkramppte (conservative) Afrikaner towns and you can see the signboards, and one of Mafikeng, I knew we were going to Botswana. Then I realised that MK was a highly secretive organisation because there were so many spies around. They were just ordinary people so you had to be careful not to ask too many questions.

We got to Gaborone very late at night. The next day we met two comrades, but again because of secrecy, I had to sit in the car and Robert met the comrades. They did come over to meet me and then had their private discussions. I understood that I couldn't be involved in knowing precisely what's happening, so if I'm arrested, I don't know much.

If both of us are arrested only Robert can say what really happened and I'll just be an ignorant idiot who can't verify what he said. So, I wasn't undermined that I wasn't being told exactly what we were doing. I just went with the flow and just endured all the anxiety because I didn't know what's really happening.

When you come back, what do you do?

When we were near Maritzburg, I think, Robert realised there's going to be some roadblocks. I was given a whole lot of tiny notes, rolled up exceptionally small, which I had to hide on my body. I was told I would be playing the role of a Commissar, an intelligence person. We needed to take information from Botswana to the comrades in Natal and the other way round. We also had to carry money to bring to the comrades here. People don't understand that an armed struggle requires a lot of money. They even think it's just picking up a

gun and shooting someone. It's far more complex than that, besides being expensive also.

As the trips went on I realised that we are carrying arms as well - and I also would not have known that if there wasn't a problem. On one particular trip, I had to help load these Kalashnikovs from the vehicle that the comrades brought into our vehicle. I thought whoa - so this is what we are carrying. Anyway, we used to carry it in such a way and wrap them up so that the sniffer dogs would never smell the chemical compounds that go into the limpet mines, as anything like that these dogs could pick up.

The guys at the Botswana side of the border posts don't search you at all – they don't even give a damn. All you must do is show your passport. But when you get to the South African side, those guys do search, but we would be clever and make sure we come towards the end of the day, maybe around three in the afternoon and they have a very dry heat there, it's exceptionally hot, so the guys would be tired and drowsy. And we would go when there's a lot of people so they don't have time to search properly.

How many trips did you make?

I think it was about six trips, at least one a month.

When you got to the other end, did any of the people you met give you their names? I think you also met Rashid at least once?

Most of the time Robert would meet them. We pretended to be holidaymakers. We usually stayed at motels, on the fringes of Gaborone. We didn't go into the posh hotels with casinos. Mostly Robert met African comrades. On two or three occasions, there was Rashid and another Indian guy.

Was the guy with Rashid, Hassen Ebrahim?

In fact, we met this other guy only when we had taken Gordon Webster and his girlfriend out of the country. The comrades came to the motel to take him to some specialist doctor who was going to operate on him. The fifth bullet was not taken out in Edendale hospital because it was located between his heart and his lungs.

When the comrades came to the motel it would be socialising, so people wouldn't think it's meetings to discuss politics. They would then leave to have their secret discussions elsewhere. The first time I saw Rashid I remember we were in the lounge of the motel self-catering unit, he was just talking casually,

briefly, finding out about things in the country and asking us questions about ourselves, more like he was doing a personal profile on us. Then on the second trip Robert and Rashid had a private meeting in the room with the door closed while I was in the lounge.

I have it that Rashid spoke to Jeanette once. Is that not correct?

She came with us on only one trip when we were travelling with Gordon for him and Robert to meet with comrades – this was before he was shot – and we had to have another woman with us so that it would look like two couples going there on holiday.

**Inside the country did you help with the dead letter boxes (DLBs)?
What did you do?**

Only on one occasion we assisted with that, and Jeanette went with us. Robert's father had those businesses at the end of the township, it looked like garages but they were workshops. They hid the arms there and then the next evening it was Jeanette, Robert, another comrade – I think it might have been Matthew (Lecordier) – and I went to Shongweni to bury the suitcases. We dropped the two of them off with the suitcases and the spades. It was buried in a forest-looking area, and you got there on a bit of a dirt road.

We had to keep driving around and come back to see if they're there. In those days there were no cell phones so you couldn't phone to say you're ready, come and pick us up. I think it took them about two hours to dig and bury the suitcases. We had to keep driving around and go back there every 30 minutes.

Robert took Jeanette to the Pine Street Parkade operation, is there anything you want to say about it? As I understand it, he said that it was a test for Jeanette to see how far she would go. But the bomb put there was a dummy, it was a false bomb that would not explode. Robert wanted to convey to the government that the ANC was everywhere and they needed to be more positive about the Commonwealth Eminent Persons' Group who were in South Africa to encourage negotiations between the government and the ANC and other liberation movements.

I was supposed to go with him at first, but in the morning, there was a crisis with one of the children of a family I was assisting. They had abandoned the child, and I had to attend to that. So I said to Jeanette, who was also a social worker, but at a different agency, can she please go with Robert, all she has to do is just drive the car?

Well, I didn't know where exactly they would be going because Robert would never give me the details, for security reasons. All she knew was that she would have to drop him off somewhere. He does what he needs to do and then she picks him up. It was like driving a drop-off and getaway car.

Jeanette would only have seen him carry a bag when he got into the car and would not have questioned him because she also knew the value of secrecy. Although he didn't include me in the planning of this incident, I think he would have done what he had to. The bomb was discovered by one of the parkade security guards who couldn't understand what this bag was doing there. I recall there was a lot of publicity and education being done at that time, explaining to people that if you see a parcel, how you should respond. Anyway, the guard called the police – and the bomb squad arrived with this massive weird-looking bomb disposal truck. I remember it was reported in the evening news that the bomb squad had actually detonated it.

But Robert has always said it was a dummy that was wired to look like a real bomb and had no detonating device. He said he was trying to make a point to the government to take the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group seriously and accept that it had to negotiate with the ANC by showing that the ANC was everywhere and MK could even be in a parkade in a big city in broad daylight.

Okay. Now to that spectacular rescue operation of Gordon from Edendale Hospital (in Pietermaritzburg). What happened, what was your role in it?

Gordon and another guy, Bheki Ngubane, were moving in a car loaded with weapons. I also heard that there may have been others there. They were driving a *skorokoro* (a dilapidated car) which broke down. So the police came – I don't know whether to help them or if they were just suspicious. It was on a normal tarred road going into the town. I don't know why the police wanted them to open the boot and if they didn't want to – because they had all the rifles and limpet mines there. Anyway, the guys got out and started running, but Gordon got shot five times and Bheki was shot and died. Bheki had grown up with Gordon.

One of Gordon's brother's girlfriend was a nurse at the Edendale Hospital and she saw him. She told us this is what's happening to him and that he was to be taken to Pretoria Central. Maybe she heard the police talking about it? So, they then planned to go in there and remove him because we knew they would either kill him along the way or when they got to Pretoria. They would definitely do something to him because he was one of the few so-called

Coloured guys that we knew of who went out of the country for full military training. So, he really knew about weapons and strategies.

Robert and his father did most of the strategising for the rescue. My role as usual was to drive the getaway car. And again, because of secrecy I didn't know everybody's role. I only knew my role because I had to drive the getaway car after Robert and the other guys would bring Gordon from the hospital, place him in my car where I had to wait under the bridge and I would drive him down to Durban. Welile Khumalo travelled in the bakkie with the other guys on their way to the hospital then he was dropped off near the bridge. Robert, his father, Matthew and Antonio (du Preez) went to the hospital to remove Gordon.

I parked under the bridge waiting for Robert and the guys to arrive with Gordon. Welile went just a short distance from the bridge to go and detonate the grenades. Things didn't work out with him - but the removal of Gordon from the hospital worked out. Never mind there were shootings there.

Welile was a very small built young guy at that time. He came and just knocked on the window of the car because he wanted to get in. I said okay, fine. I asked him what was he supposed to do with the grenades. He explained that he had to detonate them near the bridge when Robert arrived with Gordon to put him in my car, so as to distract the police from the change-over under the bridge. He explained that he was too scared to do it; and he had the two grenades in his hands. I told him to put them in the cubbyhole, so that anyone who passes by doesn't see them.

So we knew that if he was taken, the police would come swarming to the hospital from all angles. We had to have something to distract them, an explosion, which was Welile's responsibility.

Although it was at night and we parked under the bridge, there were floodlights. It was on a main road that links the Edendale township with the CBD. I've never seen traffic cops on duty at night – and this must have been about a quarter to nine on a Sunday evening – but there was one just two kilometres down the road, and he was pulling cars over.

I thought, oh no, that means we would have to pass that guy with Welile with the grenades and with Gordon in the car. Robert and them were going to offload Gordon and they had AK47 rifles. So we had to leave the site we were in. We didn't have a choice, we had to move. I waited for other cars coming down the road. Fortunately, it was a two-carriage way on our side.

I went onto the extreme right so this guy wouldn't pull us over because he's now busy with the cars in his lane. Anyway, we go and then we come back maybe about 10-15 minutes later and the traffic cop is still there. Then we had to go again. A load of cars came down on the left lane so I moved into the right lane to try and pass this traffic guy without being pulled over.

So Robert and them would not be able to stop, transfer Gordon to our car, and do all those things in front of this traffic cop just down the road. It would be ridiculous.

When we came back to the road where we supposed to wait, we could hear the sirens and saw police rushing towards the hospital side. It was at that point when I saw the police cars flying past, and Robert and them were still not coming with the bakkie with Gordon in it, that I then said to Welile we have to go to the back of the hospital where the bakkie would be. We had to see what was happening there, maybe we needed to help. So, when we get there, which is where the nurses' quarters are, all these nurses were jumping for joy and ululating and toyi-toying (a political protest dance). A lot of people gathered there and I thought they must have pulled this thing off successfully.

I said, Welile go out and ask any of the people, because it would appear strange that I, a Coloured girl, am talking to the people there. So just before he goes, I had to stop him because he was going with a grenade in his hand He put it in the cubbyhole.

He then goes to check and comes back saying 'they have gone, everything worked out fine'. So we leave now because everything has worked out. But then I looked at my petrol gauge and I had very little petrol. A small insignificant thing like that caused me to go to the nearest garage, a short distance from the hospital and there was a whole lot of police there at the garage (laughter). We were panicking because of the two grenades. I'm thinking, my God, they'll recognise I'm a so-called Coloured and he's Black and get suspicious. But they didn't give a damn. They were too busy talking about this terrible thing that happened and they were all so agitated. We just drove calmly back onto the road leading out of Edendale into the CBD.

Do you recall having said in a previous interview that on the way back to Durban Welile suggested that he throw the grenades at cars you passed, driven by White people?

We were on the national road to Durban and Welile gets brave now and wants to throw the grenades at two cars with White people. So, I tell him no, we have to do what we're told. We were not asked to do that. So, I'm going to

drive on and then we'll go on the side of the road where you can see if it's just dense bushes and a bit forest-looking, and you can then throw them there, but you're not going to pull the pin, just throw them and they won't detonate, just so we can get rid of them. So, that's what was done.

Now to Magoo's. What happened there? How did you see it then and what are your reflections on it since then?

I think it was a few days before 16 June 1986. There was a major banning of organisations. The police were busy rounding up all the comrades in the townships. Jeanette and Eric were arrested. They came to my parents' home as they wanted me as well, and, of course, I wasn't there. They didn't know where I was. I was in Johannesburg at the time, coming back from Botswana.

Because the country was constantly in a state of tension and the police were everywhere with roadblocks and constant arrests, when we were on our way back from Botswana, I used to always phone home from Johannesburg or Pietermaritzburg to just find out if everything was okay, was it safe, what was happening in the area. I would always do that kind of check in. My mother told me that Eric and Jeanette were arrested. 'Many police came here to the house with rifles to arrest you and, fortunately, you were not here so wherever you are, don't come back home,' she said.

But we had to come back into the township so we came in not driving fast, not to attract attention. I was dropped off at my granny's place because that's an area where there's a lot of crime and the police struggle with it, and they don't easily go in there. I was in hiding at the time that Robert and Matthew were planning the Magoo's. Eventually Robert did come to visit me.

He came and said 'we need your sister, Jeanette's, car'. He said 'we need two cars so I need to take you there so you can make the arrangements'. Those were the days of landline telephones, but my granny didn't have one. I can't recall how I got the message to my mother because I knew Robert couldn't go straight there as he wasn't comfortable to go to my family and tell them Greta said she needs the car.

She got the message that at a certain time on Saturday I would be coming and she had to make sure that the car was ready. Robert told me the reason why we were going into town with two cars was because he was given an instruction that for this 16th June anniversary he had to do something. So obviously he wouldn't tell me precisely what it was, even though I was trustworthy. I said we'll do whatever has to be done. I'll make sure the car's there when you come pick me up in the evening and we will go straight to

where you want. You can drop me off at my family's and I'll just go in to get the keys.

That was a big risk, because I was on the run and they could've been watching the house – but we had to do it. My mother made sure that my brother put the car on the road so it was ready for me. All I had to do was just get out of Robert's car, go to Jeanette's car parked in the street, my brother gave me the keys and I drove off. It was very difficult for us to meet and plan this thing. At any rate we never ever used to plan things as a group – we weren't a social club. Robert would do it on his own or together with Webster, but now Webster was already in Botswana undergoing treatment.

So, by the time we got to my parents' place, got the car and drove off, everything was already planned. I don't think Matthew also knew precisely what was going to happen.

If I think of the Edendale hospital rescue, we weren't all involved in the planning. But we did all sit in one room and then we were told you're positioned there, like that, and you there. So, you could see it was well planned, but each one would only know that you had to do this or that. You would see the pattern of who's passing the baton on to who.

Anyway, so we drove into the Durban city centre slowly, so as not to attract any attention. There was a lot of uncertainty from Robert as to what exactly we were going to do and where exactly and how we were going to do it. He did say that the car was going to be left in a particular place for another comrade who was supposed to collect it. When I say particular, I don't mean Magoo's Bar at the Parade Hotel because it didn't seem to me he knew precisely where we should leave this car.

He didn't say what precisely was going to happen, but my common sense told me it was something dangerous. Part of this had to do with 16th June, and we had to do whatever it is. Eventually we landed up between this Parkade Hotel, in which the Magoo's Bar was, and another building, a very narrow passageway, then there's another hotel, I don't know what it was called. There was this parking right on the corner of that little lane facing the Marine Parade.

I was sitting there in Jeanette's car and I'm reserving the parking place, but I'm also going to be the one driving us back home. It took quite a while for them to come – more than half an hour. And there were a lot of White men around, because, remember, these were mostly Whites-only hotels. And some of these guys came up to me thinking I'm a prostitute.

When Robert and Matthew came, I had to move out so they could park there, then I drove into the next lane. They parked the car and walked slowly in front of the hotel. Everything we did, we'd make sure we don't act suspicious, rushing, running and being nervous. No matter how you're feeling you will still try to be calm, walk slowly and just be an ordinary person although we were doing extraordinary things. They come to the car and got in quietly then I drive off very slowly.

We were supposed to drive home but Robert works it out that there's no way we can go home the normal way because there are likely to be roadblocks. We've got nothing in the car that would cause a problem except me being on the run.

I can't recall the exact route we ended up taking but we went under the bridge near the Greyville race course, and eventually we were on Stellawood Road, where the graveyard is. We were on a hill so we were able to see the lights of the CBD. It was at night. Listening to the bits and pieces Robert was saying to Matthew, I'm very sure now that he had detonated a car bomb. At the end of the day regardless of how much I knew precisely what was going to happen, there's no way I would have stopped it.

I remember one of the judges putting this question to our senior advocate during the hearing – Greta, at the point that she finally knew what was happening, why didn't she do a citizen's arrest (laughter). But I was a freedom fighter! I was in Umkhonto We Sizwe, so I had to do what had to be done regardless of what I knew or didn't know.

Robert asked Matthew in the car, where's the pin? I didn't understand these things, that the pin had to be pulled for the bomb to be detonated. You know, sometimes it doesn't help to be too rational and too logical because what you're doing is already an emotional thing and it is intended to have an emotional impact.

We eventually get home. I was dropped off at my granny's place and I remained in hiding. The reason why we started to panic a few days later was because the Minister of Police said on TV that they discovered that the car used for the bomb was actually stolen and the chassis number had been scraped off. They struggled to trace the car but eventually they did. It was very clever on their part considering the evidence of the original owner was removed.

The police learnt that the stolen car was sold by a car dealership in Clairwood to somebody who paid cash for it – but the dealer would've described Robert. We would have to leave the country; there was no way we could continue with

our activities. We couldn't leave the country immediately, we first went to Joburg. When we had just got there, we were told that more comrades had been arrested and these guys tipped off Derek (McBride) that he was next, but no one knew exactly when they were going to come for him. So, we had to drive at top speed back to Durban, tired as we were, to pick him up.

Why do you take Jeanette's car to Magoo's? You didn't have a car at that moment?

No, my car was severely ruined from all the UDF work we used to do. It would not have even made it to Pietermaritzburg. It was a real *skorokoro*.

Looking back at Magoo's, how do you feel about it now?

When we were preparing our case, the prosecutor had to hand over evidence that they had. It was where the two legal teams share information with each other. They gave us the medical records of all the people who were injured and the three women who died in the attack. There were about 73 people who were injured in those two bars – the Magoo's Bar and the Why Not Bar. Looking at the medical records, I was amazed – most of them were ex-soldiers, ex-policemen, and former and current security policemen. Two of the security police officers who were interrogating me at C.R. Swart Square were shouting at me, saying they were parked in a car behind the Parade Hotel having drinks before entering their favourite nightclub when the bomb exploded, rocking their car violently. They were angry with me because they could have died that night if they did not delay by drinking their own cheaper alcohol in their car before entering Magoo's Bar. Then I realised what was said by Robert, that he had to do something for 16th June - it had to be taken as close as possible to the security forces. The majority of the victims were those guys.

Even when the victims were testifying at the Pietermaritzburg High Court, they had to introduce themselves, say their names, the prosecutors were always obsessed with people's professions. So they always had to say I'm a sergeant in the South African Police and I'm retired constable so and so. Even some of the victims who came to testify about the injuries and the impact of the bombing on their lives said they were from the security forces.

The target was not a hotel to hurt White people – it was to attack the security forces in particular who used the two bars in that hotel as their regular off-duty entertainment site. But everyone looks at the three women who unfortunately died, because they were not working in the security forces. I think it was sad that they died. These women were from the White residential areas close by there.

But it's not only those women who died, it's also at the Edendale hospital – there was a shootout between our comrades and two policemen on duty. There were two of their civilian friends who remained in the hospital after visiting hours. No one could have anticipated that. And it was so unfortunate because they were sitting in the passage which was so narrow that the velocity of the bullets coming from the policemen and our comrades in such a closed environment caused one of those bullets to ricochet right through one of these visitor's head. I think it was in through his ear out through his neck. So, the death of that guy – although we were acquitted of that because they couldn't prove from which gun the bullet came that killed him – we also have to express our remorse about that.

The day after the Magoo's bombing, your extended family at your granny's house read about it, and they were outraged by this bombing – that correct?

Yes. They didn't know that we were involved. It was on TV and over the radio. My granny didn't have a TV then. So she said, oh, someone was reporting on the radio that a White man was seen running from the scene of the bomb blast. You know, she said 'even if Black people put that bomb there, a White man must have told him to do it'. Why do you think a White man instructed them, I asked. 'Because Black people are not bad, it's always White people who influence them', she said. I thought that was an amazing way to say it.

When she did find out it was you, did you ever speak to her after that, or hear from your mother or father about what she felt about what her granddaughter had done?

It was only when we were released from prison that they were able to talk to us. We were able to explain to them and they understood and accepted why it was done. And what the objective was. I think what my granny and my family initially thought was it was just reckless people being inconsiderate to people who were having fun, people who were drinking and having a nice time.

You've been quoted on Robert's state of mind when you returned with him from Botswana just before the Magoo's operation? Do you want to say anything about that?

In early June 1986, we were travelling back to Durban from Botswana. In Gaborone, he had a private meeting with Rashid behind closed doors. On the journey home, Robert was unusually quiet and pensive; he wasn't his usual jovial and talkative self. I eventually asked him what was worrying him. It was

then that he responded, saying Rashid instructed him to do something for 16th June as a political response during the state of emergency at that time.

You said in a previous interview that after the operation in Johannesburg, Robert was crying a lot and you had become more dominant in the partnership. That correct?

After the June 16th bombing operation, he seemed to suffer from depression when we were leaving Durban to Johannesburg to wait there until the comrades would allow us to come into exile with them. It was that state of uncertainty and I think newspaper cuttings of the ten-year old girl, the daughter of one of the women who died, that seemed to bring about an emotional response from him.

No, I wasn't dominant in the partnership. It was difficult to be dominant with Robert, he is a very confident person. I can socialise or work with anybody, and he is a very dominant, aggressive person. I just accommodated him as he was the Commander of the unit, although there were times when I would say I don't think I have to agree with this or I don't think he should have his own way on this one - and I'd simply tell him and walk away. Maybe he regarded that as dominant because he was sinking into a depression and then I had to make some of the decisions relevant to our day to day life while on the run. He cried a lot. He won't remember. He was crying when I wasn't around and when I would come in, he wouldn't notice I'm there seeing him crying - you know like a person who is substantially depressed, it's like they are crying because of a post-traumatic experience, so their tears are uncontrollable if I can put I like that.

According to my information, Robert, Matthew and Antonio carried out three operations in one night, 21 June 1986. I think it was the Mobil oil pipeline in Wentworth, the vegetable oil tank in Jacobs and in the city centre area. Do you know about that? Why weren't you a part of that?

I'm not sure about the timing when they were done, but, remember, I was in hiding after Magoo's. Our Special Operations unit had other members whom we did not know of except where a group of comrades had to undertake an operation, for example, the rescue operation of Gordon Webster. So, we would not know what was being planned and implemented by the unit. As I recall it, we were always together in Johannesburg. I cannot recall him going back to Durban to do any further operations.

It's said that on one trip you took notes on the electricity substations all along the Durban to Joburg N3 route?

It was the other way around. We were driving from Johannesburg down to Durban, Robert asked me to record all the electrical substations along that route from Johannesburg. But I stopped when we got to Ladysmith because it was now getting dark and I couldn't write any more.

Did the police find what you had done?

Yes. I recorded it on our return from our last trip to Botswana in early June 1986. Unfortunately, I had it in my handbag and the police found it when we went to Nigel to get the car fixed. I had never thought of taking it out of my bag and hiding it somewhere. In fact, it didn't have a heading or anything. It just recorded, for example, 60 kilometres from this sign post there is an electrical substation. I'm not sure how when they found these notes they discovered that I was recording it for economic sabotage or anything like that because I tried to say I was just bored.

Did they use that as evidence against you?

Yes, just for those notes alone they charged me with treason. But eventually the court said, no, because they couldn't prove that I really intended it for economic sabotage. They said it does appear to be some contribution I was making to an intelligence function. So, I was convicted to a lesser charge of an Internal Security Act violation.

Why did you spend so many weeks in Joburg especially when both of you were so vulnerable?

Yes, you see we had to wait for instructions. We kept phoning the comrades in Gaborone and they kept saying it's not safe for us to cross the border, even though we could have crossed the border legally with our passports. They said that the security police and SADF were so active in Gaborone, so they kept blocking us from coming through.



Greta Apelgren, Bryan Rostron

As explained, Derek was also wanted by the police and we were forced to go at high risk back to Durban to fetch him. Fortunately, we said he must get someone to come and drop him off in the city centre because the risk would be substantially high for us to come right into the township. Robert wasn't yet on the run. We picked Derek up and decided to go to Botswana the next morning regardless of those comrades who were taking so long to

give us permission to come over. There was that break-in in the car, which was totally unexpected, so we had to fix the car, and it took us so long to get someone to fix it.

Is it true that you were more reluctant than Robert to leave the country and that this also delayed things?

I wasn't prepared to go and live in exile, and I wasn't prepared to give up the struggle inside the country. So, I said I would drop the two of you off there. We agreed that I would come back as a normal holidaymaker.

We also had to go to Derek's brother's place in Nigel to get somebody to fix the car – and that's where we got arrested that night.

How did the police trace you in Nigel?

We were hiding there, we had to sleep over there because we were relying on someone to fix the window. The person did do it. But the thing is that there was a guy who came there to visit, he was in his 30's and Robert and his father had a private discussion with him. He was actually very shady, uncomfortable, nervous.

But also in the afternoon, we were just driving around to kill time until it got dark. In Nigel there's a major military intelligence centre. We were driving around there. I'm not sure why Robert wanted to do that. Maybe he was thinking of it as a possible target for MK? There were soldiers and military cars on that road so I think they got suspicious as to why was this car in an area which was mostly for the military.

This road passes alongside a Nigel township and also continues until it comes to this major military building. I think there was a dead end and there were gates which you couldn't go past. We weren't taking photos or anything, we

were just looking at it and spending quite a bit of time there. I think that made them suspicious, so they traced the car.

But we don't know for sure how they knew that it was me who was on the run or Robert who was driving the car. We have no definitive way of knowing how the police knew we were there. At five the next morning a whole army came to arrest just us three people (laughter). It was quite amazing. So many snipers sitting on the house tops across the road from the house where we were in!

When there was a knock, Robert opened the door - and he saw the police and riot squad with massive rifles. He had the courage to close the door on their faces and lock it.

When I saw we were going to be arrested, I quickly kicked my bag under the sofa because it had my passport and those notes. When they arrested me there was nothing on me.

According to what I picked up, you phoned your family whose phone may have been tapped or Robert phoned Doris, his mother, and their phone was tapped?

I didn't phone my family since I was being sought by the police and I could not expose where I was. Derek and Robert phoned Doris because they were anxious as to how she was coping because both father and son were not there, and her health was not good. I'm not sure where the two sisters were. But they were concerned about the family.

Did you phone your parents from Nigel?

No, there was no need to phone them. They knew I was on the run. The last time I sent them a message was through somebody else to arrange to collect Jeanette's car, as I explained, because I couldn't phone from my granny's house as she didn't have a phone. So once that was sorted, I remained in hiding with her.

Then when Robert said to me shortly after the Magoo's bombing, look, we have to get out of Durban I said okay, well, we'll have to go so I can tell my sister what personal items she must fetch for me from my parents' home where I was still living because we were to move to Johannesburg. At that point, the police still didn't know where I was in hiding and that I had now moved right there at my sister's place just a short distance from my mother's place. They'd traced the car used for the car bomb, but they hadn't traced Robert to it. There was no link yet.

Why do you feel it may be the suspicious person you referred to or your being near a military site the day before that gave you away rather than a telephone call?

You see, there's just no way any of us knowing precisely what gave the police the idea to arrest us in Nigel because, you know, when they arrested us they didn't know who we were, even when they took us to the Springs police station to like sign us in and take our fingerprints, they had no clue. Judging by the questions they were putting to us and the comments they were making, we could tell that they didn't know who they were arresting. They didn't know our names or where exactly we were from.

You get arrested, you get taken to Durban, then?

So they brought us down and then handed us over to the Durban police at Harrismith. And then they kept us at Westville overnight and took us down to CR Swart (Security Police headquarters in Durban). When we got there, there was major interrogation and torture. We were taken to the thirteenth floor of that CR Swart Square.

I remember hearing all the men screaming because there were a lot of comrades who were arrested for different things at that time. You could hear a lot of these White Afrikaner men screaming at people and you could hear the men screaming because of physical pain.

As I'm walking down the corridors it was terrible hearing these screams, also because I know I'm going into one of these rooms and will be tortured. But throughout the torture they inflicted on me, I just told myself I'm not going to cry and that I damn well will not scream.

Unfortunately, I was taken into a room and interrogated by a whole group of senior policemen. They all introduced themselves, which made me more anxious. I thought, my God, I'm being interrogated by all of them - one woman standing with her back against the wall. About seven of them were interrogating and screaming at me.

Do you want to say anything about the torture they inflicted on you?

It was so many years ago, it's not so traumatic now, and it's easier to talk about it. Among the things they did to me was strangling me with their hands, and they used a normal plastic bag from one of the supermarkets over my head to suffocate me. Somewhere in my mind, I knew that they would not

leave it for longer than three minutes as without oxygen a person could go into a coma or die.

What made the torture scary was that they got carried away, these guys, because the one would hold my hands behind my back and the other would put the plastic bag over and tighten it. The first time I didn't know what to do. Then the second time I thought, no, I will breathe in a lot of air, as much as I can, so when he tightens it over my head, I'm left with what air I have – and I'll let it out and then I'll breathe it back in.

I think they must've left it on several times close to the three minutes because I would just pass out. When I passed out, I fell – my body just dropped to the floor – and that took them by surprise, so he let go of the packet and they picked me up. I was very disorientated. Then I thought, bugger these guys – I almost did the three minutes. I still said, no, I'm not cooperating, you know, like I'm punishing them.

Did you ever break down in any way?

No, I refused. I was very strategic. I wasn't standing there keeping quiet because I knew this would only agitate them more, so I told them the opposite of what the other comrades had told them. These were all Afrikaner guys and I didn't know what their education level was, but I could tell these men are thinking in a very straight line. They were unable to put all the pieces of the puzzle together in a holistic way.

I would use that to convince myself I'm more intelligent than they are. I would look at how they were rationalising things and then I would confuse them by telling them part of the story that's not entirely true. They couldn't work it out that I'm the one who's lying and I used that a lot. When they were screaming at me and carrying on and not giving me a chance even to answer them, then I would just pray silently.

I also had to bunny hop. This part really hurt me though. They realised that I can endure pain, so for physical pain they made me lay on the floor face down and do all kinds of exercises. They forced me to do press-ups where I had to lift my body up from the floor with ten fingers and then reduced it from ten fingers to three fingers. I wasn't fit, and the problem was I couldn't lower myself physically down and suspend – you had to suspend yourself just a few centimetres from the floor. And I would just drop myself and my knees were getting bruised and ached terribly.

For one substation bombing Jeanette drove the car. She later became a state witness. According to reports, you forgave and defended her. Is that correct?

I don't recall her driving a car as a drop-off and pick-up for any sub-station operation. No one asked me to forgive Jeanette or not. Our parents were eventually able to visit us when we were formally charged and taken to Westville prison awaiting trial. My brother told me that Jeanette had suffered a nervous breakdown while she was in an isolation cell in a Port Shepstone prison. But we don't know if there was any evidence of this, or if they gave her a truth serum that made her hallucinate – it was some drug that made her feel she was losing her mind. She was emotionally not fit or strong enough to testify and it took her years to recover from that trauma of being in the Port Shepstone prison.

There's no way I could not forgive her. And the same with Matthew. Matthew came to see me as soon as I was released from prison to apologise to me. I said no, he doesn't have to.

How many years did you spend in prison?

Only two and a half years. I was sentenced to nine years but the judge softened it by making most of it a suspended sentence.

What do you think the impact of the operations you did was on the mass struggles that were taking place in Wentworth and elsewhere in Durban?

Most political activities were banned, so there were not so many mass struggles especially after the state of emergency. Those who came home after they were arrested went into hiding. I think the prisons were quite full here in Durban and all the comrades they'd arrested, they took them as far away as the Transvaal and other areas, and when they came back, they couldn't do much political activity because the police were watching them. I think they were also psychologically messed up.

When Wentworth went into a blackout after the bombing of electrical substations, do you think this increased the community's support for the ANC or alienated them?

Yes, there was a real dual effect. A lot of us landed up at the substation because it exploded once. People went to see where it was and whilst they were standing there, the second and third explosions took place. A lot of the

people were jumping for joy and shouting viva ANC. But I think maybe half of the township was really upset. Within a few days, the electricity was back on. No one's house was damaged by the vibrations. The flames did not damage any of the homes that were reasonably close to it and no one got hurt.

When you were separating the two units, one to be led by Gordon and the other by Robert, you went to a fancy restaurant with them and Jeanette and you dressed up formally? Gordon referred to it as the 'last supper'? Do you recall that?

I don't recall us doing that as a 'last supper'. The only time we ate together at a restaurant was when we were in Botswana and had travelled there as a foursome in one car. I recall Robert taking over as our unit Commander after we handed Gordon over to our comrades in Gaborone for medical treatment.

Did you know you were part of a specific unit within MK known as Special Ops?

No. I only discovered it when we were released - and then I was quite surprised. I heard from a comrade of mine who was in Mozambique responsible for moving weapons from there into South Africa. He said you know you guys were one of three Special Operations units. I didn't know if he was telling the truth or not, but I know that when we were in Gaborone and had already handed over Gordon Webster to the other comrades to go for medical treatment, we couldn't come back into the country immediately.

The SADF bombed some kind of a hotel shopping centre in Gaborone, so we had to go further into Botswana. We went to Francistown for about two weeks. Anyway, before we moved, we had to move out of the motel to a safe house where other comrades were in Gaborone. That was really interesting for me because we met some young comrades the same age as Robert and I.

One of them said that they had been involved in the attack on the SADF Military Headquarters in Pretoria or it may have been the Church Street, Pretoria South African Airforce bombing. You know, it was amazing to have met these comrades because you look at them and think, wow, poor things, they are as young as we are, and just look what they did. And we hadn't done Magoo's yet. That was a very good experience for me just to listen to them and just considering the life we were having to lead. They were living in a safe house, which is a horrible thing.

You and Robert had drifted apart. He then gets involved with Paula Leyden and she gets very involved, with the family and others, in the

campaign to commute his death sentence. I couldn't find anything referring to your role in the campaign?

The only role I played was in delaying the death sentence because we had this court case against one of the major newspapers in KZN for criminal injury. I was bringing something against this media house and had to consult with Robert so we were constantly saying that there is a need for him in this court case.



Greta Apelgren recently, supplied

Which year did you stand for elections but didn't, unfortunately, make it?

The first 1994 national elections.

What was your reaction when the community in Wentworth didn't vote for the ANC?

I was on duty at the largest voting station for ward 68, and that ward was very problematic, it had so-called Coloureds, Indians and Blacks from the Jacobs hostel.

There was a false belief that the Blacks were mostly ANC, when in fact they were mostly IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party). It also had parts of the White area, the Bluff, which was NNP (New National Party) – later changed to the DA (Democratic Alliance), and also there were a lot of White men bringing in truckloads of young black men saying it's their workers who live in the informal settlements nearby.

I said, no, there's no informal settlements here. So, we had constant problems and then we had to take the risk that maybe because they're Black they would vote ANC. So, it was shocking when there was a big win for the NNP and IFP voters.

Do you want to say anything about your TRC experience?

I think the first hearing was very traumatic for me because I think I wasn't ready. I had to talk about the torture - well not about the security police, which was easier to deal with – but the torture in the prison once I was sentenced. When I talk about that part of living in the basement of Klerksdorp prison, it's so traumatic that I can't help reliving it and then screaming. It takes me months to push back the memories. I avoid talking about that part.

I had to face the amnesty hearings and that was also a bit of a problem because it meant again reliving that part of imprisonment in that basement.

But I think the hearings were very important because the public could understand that those of us who took up the armed struggle and the above ground struggles suffered so much in the prisons.

Do you want to say anything about the relationship between Robert and Gordon?

The two seem to have met while they were both studying to become teachers at the training college. Then Gordon took himself out of the country through Botswana for training. He was so determined to join MK. When he came back he linked up with Robert. By then, the two knew each other and were able to trust each other and work well together.

Do you know of any pact between Gordon and Robert that if either of them got arrested the other would come to release him?

Yes, there was definitely that pact that they would move heaven and earth to rescue each other. So, that's why also we had to rescue Gordon from Edendale Hospital.

Who told you about this pact?

Robert.

Robert is quoted as saying that it was a great honour and a great responsibility for him not to let Gordon down... And each tried to rescue the other in different circumstances and ended up in prison for that. Gordon even came back from exile to try to rescue Robert who with you and others had rescued him earlier. It was quite remarkable, this friendship. Although some other comrades in other units felt a similar bond, I haven't come across anything in MK like this. Is there anything you want to say about their special relationship?

I'll definitely agree it was special. When I used to see the two of them together you could see that Gordon was the Commander, you know he commanded Robert in such a good way. He had the added advantage of having had the military training – he was fully trained theoretically and practically. You could see that Robert respected him because he was a professional freedom fighter. He was learning a great deal from Gordon. Gordon looks very humble, he keeps himself invisible, if you like, you almost won't notice him, but he was a professional freedom fighter. He was a very strategic military thinker and unapologetic about the armed struggle that had to happen absolutely. His

commitment to it was very deep. I think that's what gave the two of them that courage. They were never nervous or anxious.

From what Robert has said it seems like he felt there was almost like a predestination for the role that he played, that he was born to be a guerrilla? He said 'I had found my vocation ... There was satisfaction – at last, I'm here, like a rich man when he gets his first million ... Joining MK, knowing I'll really be part of the struggle against the horrible system of apartheid, that for me was my first million. I felt very comfortable, very relaxed in what I was doing...This is what I had been waiting for. I felt no nerves, no butterflies ... This was made for me. I was born for it.'

No, he was just another friendly township boy – carefree but determined to have a teaching career, as did both his parents. He was academically a high performer at Bechet Teacher Training College. I think the only seriousness was when his parents left teaching and started their own business. I think they had to really work hard to create that business. Robert had to help them after he came back from college daily. He didn't have much of a personal or social life. I think also the extreme poverty in our township and the extreme gang violence may have impacted on him psychologically and politically. Maybe that took him on that path to be a freedom fighter.

You and Robert drifted apart. Is there anything you want to say about that?

I came out of prison before him and I visited him once in prison, but he was very angry with me because I had brought messages for him from some of the comrades in the self-defence units in Durban. And next we were having this court case and preparing for it. It was to delay the execution. I think being on Death Row for quite a while and the way those prison guards would taunt him a lot changed him a bit.

Other comrades who were also on Death Row didn't understand him so they also used to torment and frustrate him. It's so much harder to be there on Death Row. I saw pictures of cells long after this Death Row thing came to an end. It looked like isolation cells. I think psychologically it was very difficult to live there knowing they're coming any day to march you to the gallows.

He says that you were had quite an unflappable manner, you could be like a stone. Did you know that?

Yes, he used to call me the stone or the dragon (laughter).

Why the dragon?

You see, because I don't cry easily. I knew I could fight and defend myself and I knew it was important as an MK freedom fighter to be humble. You had to be able to move amongst people without them seeing you. You should be invisible. I would make an effort not to show fear when we had to carry out operations or when we saw the police or road-blocks.

You were also known as Zarah Nakardien after 1994 and converted to Islam. Anything you want to say about?

After a four-year relationship, my partner and I decided to get married, but neither of us was willing to surrender our religious commitments in favour of the other's religion. I eventually agreed to convert to his religion. After our separation, I reverted to my original name.

How do you feel comrades from MK have been treated since 1994?

I think the treatment is not bad, it's just that there's a lot of people who are not MK freedom fighters who messed up all the programmes for them. Because there are so many good programmes for the military veterans but you have to be a genuine military veteran. You have comrades who were heading the self-defence units and they claim the status of MK cadres. They want to qualify for those benefits and when they're told, no, you can't because you must have served time in prison for MK activities or been in MK, including in the military camps in exile, they fight back. You find that there's a lot of blocking by those comrades, including occupying RDP houses at the Cornubia Project which were built for low income families. The MK leadership constantly changed the goal posts, demanding 80 square metre houses which are larger than the norm of 50 square metres for military veterans, and in one province they wanted them fully furnished.

So what work did you do after you're released from prison? And since 1994?

When Jeanette and I were released from prison, we were fired from our jobs - I was fired from a child welfare society and she was fired from the then government department, the House of Representatives. The Durban Indian Child Welfare Society took both of us in, they had the guts to do it. So, from my release in February 1989, I worked there. Khorshed Ginwala, (ANC veteran) Frene Ginwala's sister, was the chairperson of the Board of Management of the

Durban Indian Child Welfare Society and I worked there for seven years before I got a job in government in December 1995. I was the Head of Department (HoD) for Social Development in Kimberley.

When did you move back to Durban?

When I returned to Kimberley after the TRC Amnesty hearings in Durban in October 1999, a so-called Coloured woman who came from the New National Party took over as the MEC for Social Welfare and she wouldn't accept that her HoD is a so-called convicted terrorist. She was very conservative. I was transferred to the Office of the Premier in December 1999. I resigned from the Office of the Premier and returned to Durban in early 2003.

But surely as an HoD you would have had a contract for a fixed number of years? Did you serve your contract before she asked you to leave?

No, in those days we weren't on contract, we were actually permanent.

So, how did she get rid of you?

She told the Premier that she can't work with me because she believed I was a sinner (laughter), hence my transfer to the Office of the Premier.

Wasn't (ANC leader) Manne Dipico the Premier at that time?

Yes, what he did was to transfer me to the same level in his office to run the RDP (Reconstruction and Development) programme. The RDP programme was just about closing, so they converted it to a Premier's Discretionary Fund for development projects. I was there for a while until that got closed down. I decided that I'd rather resign and go back home because I'd been working away from Durban for such a long time.

So, I came back home just for a year and then my comrades in Kimberley called me back. Then I was in a post as a Director in the Eastern Cape working in the office of the Premier doing social policy. I was there only for one year and then moved to the Eastern Cape Department of Health to be executive support to the HoD there. So in all, I was five years in the Eastern Cape and then I moved back to the Northern Cape to be HoD for Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs.

Where are you now?

Well my last job was here in KZN – I was Head of the Department for Human Settlements from May 2013 to April 2018. I served the full five-year contract there. I was having a huge fight at the time with the DG of the Province, who was trying to get me to refund a company which was owned allegedly by a friend of the Premier at that time. This company bought the tender from some scammers not knowing it was a scam. I asked where must I get R2 million to refund people who entered into a scam? I mean these guys are experienced contractors, they must have seen it was a scam. So she tried her best to bully me and I said no, I'm sorry I don't fall under your authority, I'm under the authority of the MEC, Premier and the Minister of Human Settlements.

When I left, I started a business on management training and am running a conference centre.

About South Africa now, where do you think we are?

It's very painful the way it is now, not just the corruption itself, but the fact that if we really wanted to, we could take back all this wealth that's stolen and put the culprits through all the normal legal processes and get it back – but it doesn't happen. I think what really distresses me is the membership of the ANC – it looks like more than 50% are people who don't appreciate the constitution of the ANC or the country. They don't appreciate what we've fought for.

I mean just to have equality or to have non-racialism – you find in KZN, you have to put up with some young Black people who are so racist towards other communities. They really think we fought only for them, and the Black youth must have it all. Most of the corruption is carried out by people, from what I've seen, in that age group of, say, 29 to 45.

You know the greatest beneficiaries of all this corruption are White construction companies. We see it when it's time to make payments to who the money is going to. Hundreds of millions per annum to these guys.

If you knew then in your period in MK what South Africa and our movement would have turned out to be, would you still have done what you did?

I always say that if I had known and could have foreseen that we would reach a point in the history of our country, where the youth that we sacrificed our lives for would not take this country forward and make it a beautiful country for everybody, I would not have got involved in politics, and not the armed struggle. I would have got married, had children and just lived a fairy tale life, honestly.

