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Special Operations Unit Project

Interviews

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What drew you to become socially and later politically aware? Perhaps you can start a bit with your family upbringing? Were your parents progressive?

Well, my name is Heather Elizabeth, I was born Gray, and I am now Heather Wilkinson. My family ancestors are Scottish and English.

My parents came here in 1948 from the UK, to start a newly married life together after the Second World War. They had both been in the Navy, my father flew planes in the Naval Air Arm, and my mother worked on radio maintenance and repairs.

I was born in 1957, the youngest of three children. I have an older sister, Diana and my brother, Roger, was born between us. We were raised as middle class, privileged children. I didn't really want for anything. Then, in 1960, Sharpeville happened. I only know this in hindsight – I was only 3 years old – but at that point my parents were seriously considering leaving the country and going to live in Canada, and had actually sold their house. Then my father was offered a job here that, as he said, he couldn't refuse, so we stayed. He eventually became the Chairman of Companies, these were the subsidiary companies of Anglovaal, not the mining part, like I&J, SA Fine Worsteds, Consol Glass, Rainbow Chickens, and others. A part of his role was to improve failing companies, which he did to increase production of course, but also to introduce better conditions for the factory workers, mainly women – maternity leave and access to clinic care, I remember my mother saying. She was very proud of him. He also had to fire people, but he encouraged the people who stayed to do more than they imagined.

I once did a vac job working in the records department at Anglovaal head office. I came across the records of hundreds of mining accidents. I wondered even then how I might get this information out.

My father was conservative in his way of thinking – in the UK Tory sense, not the South Africa right wing National Party. He had high standards, but he always encouraged us to do anything we wanted basically – which has really made me who I am. His encouragement 'to do' was influential to the achievements of my sister and I as women.

My mother's influence was different. She was a stay at home mother, who sewed and cooked. She read a lot too. We were never expected to do that. I mean, not expected to be stay at home mothers. We were encouraged to pursue careers that would enable us to be financially independent.

Her father was a vicar in the north of England, and he went to teach theology at Peking University in the early '20's, where my mother was born. They went back to the UK when she was three or four. Her mother was a feminist and a teacher. My grandparents worked with poor people and my mother grew up in a socially aware environment, graduating in Social Work from the University of Liverpool. She passed this awareness to me. She was very active in Child Welfare. So she was involved with book sales, jumbles sales sometimes in our street. The money was donated. I remember her and her friends putting prices on the books and clothes.

My siblings are progressive and both read voraciously, so they are socially and politically aware. My sister is seven years older than me so I didn't have too much of a relationship with her in my early years. She and her friends were students around the time of the anti-war marches against the US war in Vietnam, and the 1968 student uprisings in Paris. I was 10 at that time but my awareness of global injustices and people's opposition and resistance was born. She left, to live in the UK in about 1979. Unknown to her, it was her and her husband's car left to us, which was used to do the Koeberg operation.

I got to know my brother as a person in my mid teens. I remember when he was conscripted, he went to the air force. At the time, he used to drive my father's old vintage Bentley. From the driver's seat, a screen on the back window with the Union Jack could be released down. Roger told me he drove out of Valhalla Airforce base with the screen down showing the Union Jack. I was deeply impressed by his cheek! A taste of the small resistances possible. He didn't leave SA. He and his wife ran a plant nursery and landscaping business for many years from near to Cape Point. They were certainly left wing and politically aware. I believe their main contribution was to teach skills and to pay their workers properly.

We all went to private schools. I went to St. Mary's School for Girls in Johannesburg. During the period of Lent, we had to knit squares for blankets

for the poor, and in high school we were expected to knit a child's jersey. This was my only social contribution in my school years.

My sense of rebellion started from about the age of thirteen against the prestige and snobbishness of the schools I attended. The other girls were very conscious and critical of what people wore. My close friend and I would dress in sloppy jeans and big baggy shirts and go bare foot as a statement to the social groups at school. Like hippies! It was anti-establishment from within the establishment. I was always on the periphery of the social group at school, even when younger. I was an observer. Academically, I was okay.

At home I was part of a group of boys also attending private schools. Some of them were Afrikaans. I remember arguing for the rights of women with them. They were my first introduction to male bigotry, racism and excessive booze. They all went into the army as required at the time. Many of them came back to civilian life brainwashed, called 'bosbevok' and 'bossies'. They were broken in the army. Abused and in turn made to abuse. I never met with them again after seeing them like that.

I was baptised as Anglican by my parents. My parents were fairly religious. We attended Sunday school. I was influenced by the bible stories, especially the loaves and fishes because it showed what sharing can do, and I guess ultimately, my belief in socialism. Jesus was a good socialist, in my view.

In my late teens I remember travelling in the car with my parents and the radio was on a church programme. The priest was pontificating about how we are all born as sinners. I remarked to my parents how negative this assumption is and that I am not a born sinner. Surely we were born to do good? This was especially relevant considering our living in an apartheid system which claimed to be based in Christian principles. How could you believe in Christianity looking at how people were being oppressed and brutalised in this country?! Plainly Christianity is not true, it's not true! Needless to say, I was never confirmed into the church.

Is this why I have always chosen to value honesty in people I meet? I learned in late life this is also not always valid. Some people do become bad or corrupt.

I was influenced in some ways by Jewish neighbours and friends at university. I knew about the Holocaust and the horror and cruelty of the Nazis. And I knew I could not just stand by as many did then in Germany.

As a family, because of the apartheid laws, we lived in an affluent white area, in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The only black people that we knew

were our 'servants', as they were called at that time. Our Nanny, Maggy Rangaka, lived with us from when I was two until I left home.

She was a no nonsense but loving woman, short and round. She had lots of friends in the neighbourhood who would come over to chat when she was ironing or cleaning the silver. When I asked her to teach me seTswana, she dismissed me, saying 'You can't learn my language it's too difficult.' Her family lived in Phokeng near to Rustenburg. Sometimes they came to stay with her, and once or twice, we visited her home. That was the situation – close but not too close on account of the laws, and as I realised later, class differences.

As children, we were free to walk, cycle, roller skate in the streets around our house. But we were sometimes witnesses to round-ups by the police of people who didn't have passes. People got thrown into the backs of the vans and you'd see some of them running away and falling over and the cops chasing them and hitting them. I think that was probably one of my first eye-openers to the horror going on here. I must've been probably all of ten.

There was a culture in the street. At lunch time a lot of the domestics would sit outside on the grassy verges and this would be when the police would come and ask for passes. In Cape Town, when I was in Std 8, I was attending Herschel (1972) at the time, and the family was living on a large property in Newlands. The gardener, who did not have a pass, was chased through my parent's house by the police. I observed all of this from inside the house. Ghastly. I can't remember if they caught him. But my father was so outraged by the attack on his privacy and the privacy of his home that he demanded the police responsible come in person to apologise to my mother – my father was not concerned about the gardener. I was impressed that he should make the cops accountable in a funny haha way. I was impressed that he made them grovel, caps in hand. It was immensely pleasing.

And then, later, when I was about sixteen, my parents had gone out, and Maggie was going home for the weekend. The van to fetch her arrived late that Friday night, and she came to me and said she needed written permission because she'd be breaking the curfew after ten o'clock. And I thought, my God, this woman is like my mother but because of the law she needed permission from me, a child, because I was white and she was black! And this was a big jolt to me – and I thought what is going on here? This served to increase my awareness of the injustices in the country.

In 1970 we went as a family to the UK to meet cousins. My father actually went to Harvard Business School for that six months and I lived with my mother and grandmother in Carlisle. For a few months I attended a state

comprehensive school, which was my first introduction to working class kids and how they lived.

Then we came down to Cape Town when I was in Standard 8, to live for a couple of years, because of my father's work. That was in 1972, which was when the UCT (University of Cape Town) students were protesting for free education. And that was the time that my brother, Roger, was at UCT and it was the time when the cops chased students into St. George's Cathedral and dragged them out from behind the altar, which was, I mean, just abhorrent. It was the first time that I ever saw my brother really angry as well.

I completed my schooling back in Johannesburg but I've never been back. I was glad to leave. It's part of the anti-establishment attitude. At the end of matric, I cut my hair short and had it permed, as was the fashion, and took off by train with my best friend to Cape Town.



Heather Gray, 1976, Supplied

what Rodney and I later called 'jelly legs' from the fear.

So, we were done for the Riotous Assemblies Act, but all the women were put into one cell together in Roeland Street Prison and kept overnight. Oh, my word, then we gave them a hard time! We demanded our prescription medications, our contraceptives. Tampons (laughter).

Anyway, so we had to pay an admission of guilt fine. It was nothing really, except my father had to bail me out (laughter). I imagine I wasn't alone on that, being part of the wealthier, white UCT student body.

My boyfriend at the time was a student in politics and sociology from a privileged Jewish family. He said to me 'don't waste your time on student politics, just keep your head down, don't do any more because there may be more important opportunities in the future.' So I did as he said.

He was very active here as a photo journalist. I remember going with him once to film at Crossroads when the people's shacks were being bulldozed. This was like being an observer of another world that was only a few miles from my home. I remember the burning.

Then I went to study Speech Therapy, and in my fourth year I met Rodney.

What was your parents' response to their children being active in student politics?

Well, when my dad paid the admission of guilt fine for the Riotous Assemblies Act, I was living in Cape Town and my parents were back in Joburg. My dad visited and he said that he admired 'my commitment'. So, I was quite pleased about that. His response to Koeberg when it finally came out thirteen or fourteen years after the blasts and some 20 years later, was that I had been 'misguided'.

How did you meet Rodney?

I shared a house in Observatory with his ex sister-in-law and I got to know him through her. That must have been 1976, when Rodney had to go back into the army. He did his compulsory service about 10 years earlier, and he had evaded being called up for subsequent camps. But he was caught out, and he was sent to Angola. He has wonderful stories of his insubordination there, and creation of general havoc...including going AWOL (absent without official leave) in a stolen Unimog truck, dropping people off around Namibia, and finally crashing it alone into a culvert! He was badly injured but walked for help and was eventually in a military hospital for 3 months treatment. After much questioning, even by a priest, he persuaded them that the vehicle was not a marked one because his mission had been top secret and he couldn't talk about it! He was released.

In 1979 I moved to a house in Gardens. We were about twelve of us altogether with partners in the house. So, anyway, he ended up moving into the student house that I was living in.

We used to have these huge suppers, lots of debate and argument going on. And Rodney was working as a draughtsman at Koeberg at the time already,

and started to talk about how we could sabotage this place, and that we could do it on our own. And he talked about it to one of his engineering friends and they were talking about getting glass test tubes and putting nitro glycerine in them and then putting them in the pipes at the site. I am not sure what happened to the engineering friend, or what he may have thought at the time.

I told Rod to keep quiet and that we could make a plan. So that's when we decided that he would steal copies of the plans of Koeberg because he was part of the team drawing the pre-construction phase then – so they were still building it. He managed to get the plans copied, these were fat tomes – large bound copies. I think there were three of them.

I graduated in 1980 and we decided, well, let's go to Zimbabwe and seek our fortune, and also find the ANC.

I'd seen a couple of movies at the Cape Town Film Festival in those days, and one of the films was about some Dutch students during the war who realised that they could take out one of the senior German officers. And they watched him and they took him out. This was obviously hugely impressive to me, and I thought, I could do that if it comes to it.

I think that I was, inside of me, very outraged by what was happening and the merciless power that these bastards had. I think that was where I was coming from at the time.

Whose idea was it to steal the plans? Was it Rodney's or yours or you both sort of came to it together?

I can't really remember. Look, at the time I was very aware that in effect the government of the day were just a bunch of Nazis against whom world wars had been fought, and in which my parents, their families and friends had fought. Some of the government ministers had been either in prisoner of war camps, suspected of being Nazi sympathisers. It wasn't hard to see that history could repeat itself here. And then the potential sabotage of Koeberg came up. Here was a possibility to contribute in some way to their downfall.

I don't know what Rod says, you know he's a dreamer. Wonderful, wonderful ideas he had – after Koeberg there was the (Safari) truck (that brought in arms in large hidden compartments in a big truck that brought in tourists from Lusaka to South Africa. A documentary, *The Secret Safari*, was made on this (<http://youtu.be/foqURw31gmc>). Well, a lot of his ideas were doable.

I mean, Rodney showed nerve to get the copies of the plans, and we moved then to live in Zimbabwe.

Can you remember whether he suddenly told you, 'look, I've got the Koeberg plans', which you didn't know he was going to do just then, or did he tell you beforehand that he was getting it that day?

I can't remember.

It has been suggested that it was you who prompted him to get the plans. That correct or not?

I remember distinctly telling him to stop speaking about Koeberg to anyone and that we would do something meaningful, because what he was talking about was extremely dangerous. When the plans came, I honestly can't say, I was writing my final exams.

Did anybody else in the commune or anybody else know that Rodney was going to steal the plans or had stolen it?

Nobody knew, as far as I know. We always wondered about the guy who had copied them.

But that you were planning to sabotage Koeberg, would anybody else have known about that?

I don't think anybody. I mean, look, we were students, hot-headed students, talking hot-headed stuff so whether people suspected us directly, have put two and two together, I don't know.

I think only my brother and his wife suspected. I asked them recently about this and they confirmed that they worked it out, but said nothing, and when a few people asked, they dismissed them. Here is a quote from a recent email from him just before he died: 'I suppose the first I knew definitely was when the Cape Times came out on the Monday after in '82, but suspected before that, when you came back in '81 from Zim. It was obviously a Very Dangerous Thing To Know About! Apart from the SA 'intelligence' I was as concerned about the fuggin CIA and the French, who would have loved to kill you, frankly. Perhaps they still would, wounded pride and all.'

I mean people might have suspected but they didn't say anything. They didn't compromise us.

My sister says she never suspected it was us and was astonished when it came out.

Whose idea exactly was it to take the plans to the ANC?

I think it was mine. I'd just graduated, it was the perfect opportunity to leave the country. Zimbabwe had just got independence in 1980. What an opportunity! And obviously we knew that there would be ANC people there, maybe operating, and that it wasn't as dangerous there as it was here. But how it all came to be, was so interesting. A student friend, Ian, an environmentalist – Save the Whales kind of chap – he said go stay with his friend Jackie Cahi in Harare. We camped in her garden for 6 weeks. Staying with her too was Desi Angelis, a Maths teacher who had worked in Lesotho. We told her about the plans. Not sure when she let us know that she had contact with the ANC.

I can't remember the details, but we were instructed to drop the plans through a window of a house in the dead of the night, it was all this cloak and dagger stuff, which we did, and celebrated afterwards. Hurrah, done our bit or so we thought.

We later found out that it was the home of Jeremy and Joan Brickhill, whom we were introduced to by Jackie and Desi.

Was your opposition to Koeberg both because of your anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid views?

Yes – and I'm still anti-nuclear.

I haven't actually said anything about our support for the anti-nuclear movement; well, it wasn't really a movement; there was Arnold Abramowitz and the organisation called Koeberg Alert. But I didn't go to their meetings because I had to keep my head down, but I felt very strongly about it. I think Rodney may have spoken with him.

Do you think the ANC sanctioned the Koeberg operation because they were also anti-nuclear or only because it advanced the armed struggle?

I think for the ANC Koeberg was, as Rodney used to call it, 'the plum of the establishment', it was going to be the regime's pride and joy so it was a perfect place to sabotage.

I cannot comment about the ANC's anti-nuclear opinion. Koeberg is now fully operational and the ANC government has plans to build more nuclear power stations. I would hope that significantly more attention is paid to sustainable energy sources.

I understand that when you knocked on the door of the Brickhills' house, they didn't answer, and so you found a toilet window that was open and you threw the plans through that. Or is that some legend?

We dropped them through a toilet window. I don't remember knocking on the door but I might have been so '*poeperig*' (scared) at the time, that's the only part I remember. I remember walking up to the back of a house. I only knew that the instruction was to enter through the back of this property and to drop them through the window. It was really dark as well, that's all I remember.

So what happens next?

Well, my impression was that we were handing over the plans that would be carried out by a 'crack MK unit'. That's what I thought. I think it was about six months later we got a call from Jeremy saying we must come to a meeting. And at that meeting, we were introduced to Mac Maharaj. I can't recall who else was there. Mac suggested we should carry out the job. He must have mentioned that the plans had been authenticated in the Soviet Union. At the time I don't recall thinking about the background checks on us.

Anyway, the long and short of it was we agreed to do it. It just seemed so obvious – because we had such a cover. We were whities and so who was going to suspect? A small problem was that even before we could carry out the operation, we'd have to make a story, a 'legend' for why we would now go back to South Africa. And Rodney would need to get work again on the site.

Mac's directive at the time was, 'okay, so you do it, and you, Heather, your job is to keep him on the straight and narrow'. My role was essentially as a buffer for Rodney, knowing that there was no way that I was going to get into Koeberg, but to be a confidant, to be a co-planner, and hopefully to try and keep him focussed.

Did Mac meet both of you or Rodney alone?

Both of us, but I don't know if he had met Rodney before.

How would Mac conclude that there was a need for such a companion? There were some comrades who did operations on their own. Why would Mac say you've got a role here to sort of play 'a calming influence,' as somebody described it. Why would Mac think Rodney needs such a companion instead of the second person being formally part of a two-person unit?

I don't know what kind of background checks they'd done on us. Rodney certainly had a colourful youth, and the issue of the drinking and going undercover sort of needed minding. I mean I'd minded him once and told him to shut his mouth, hadn't I?

When did you find out that the ANC suspected you of being apartheid agents? Did you know that they were initially suspicious?

No, I found out much later. I didn't think that, at the time we first met Mac. It was only much later in the UK there was a suspicion originally that we were an apartheid front and that Mac was actually bluffing us, which was pretty shit to hear about five years later. Anyway, we did the operation.

What training, if any, did you get for the operation?

We had several sessions of political education, lots of reading, we studied obviously the Freedom Charter, the Morogoro Conference documents, and had access to the writings in *Sechaba* and things like that, which Joan and them had. At the time she was running a radio programme on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation and we used to listen to that. It was a fifteen minute programme, basically a report from the ANC essentially, so we used to listen to that religiously.

So basically, ya, Jeremy scared the shit out of us, if they catch you, they'll fricking kill you. There's a book called *The Forest* (William Pomeroy, *The Forest: A Personal Record of the Huk Guerrilla Struggle in the Philippines*) that I remember, which was terrifying. We read things like *Bandiet* (by Hugh Lewin, Armed Resistance Movement leader who was imprisoned). And many others. It was for preparation should we ever be detained.

And then, of course in June 1982, they assassinated Ruth First (senior SACP leader). This gave added impetus to carry out the operation. I heard later that the regime thought the Koeberg sabotage was a retaliation for her murder.

You had to build a 'legend' for going back to South Africa. Do you recall that there was a birthday celebration for you the day before you came back?

I think it was a farewell party for both of us that may have coincided with my birthday. To wish us well and to mark the importance of going, we were awarded with badges, by Sekhuru, a Zimbabwean struggle veteran and mentor to Jeremy. I still have them, and a photo of me taken then.

Do you recall Rodney telling you anything about people having suspicions about why he and you were going back? That they didn't buy your 'legend'?

No. We said we were going back because we couldn't get money out of Zimbabwe to support Rodney's daughter, Kyla, from his first marriage, in South Africa. I said I was going to take a sabbatical to write a programme for teaching speech in a systematic way for children with hearing impairment and then perhaps go to England to work.

What work were you doing while you were in Zimbabwe?

I was working at a school for the deaf, I was the very first speech therapist and audiologist they'd had. It was called Loreto, run by the Dominican Sisters. It had previously been outside of Gweru and the school was caught in the crossfire during the war, and so they were moved into Harare into an orphanage. It was basically wall-to-wall children in that place.

How much later after Rodney comes back do you?

Rod left with the dogs and the loaded bakkie – I followed later because I had to still finish off at work.

He went around June. I came a bit later. So we found a house in Loader Street. It was quite ironic for us at the time because people had been forcibly removed from there. Anyway, we then got a house in Claremont.

By huge chance there was a position going at Koeberg so Rodney could do something called 'as-built drawings'. This was great because it allowed him access to anywhere he wanted on that site. This was now just 6 or 7 months before the power station was due to go on stream.

At that time, July to November 1982, he was meeting with Rashid – I can't remember, two or three meetings – in Swaziland. And we just had to lie our way through that. One weekend I actually hid in the house, Rod told everybody that we'd gone away, and I was literally alone in that house for the whole weekend creeping around with the curtains closed and the lights off (laughter). Really, that's how careful we were.

They discussed how we were going to do this thing. Part of the kit that Rodney had to get for work on the site were these workmen's boots with metal toe-caps. So he got two sizes too big and walked around with them stuffed with newspaper for about a week to see whether we might use Semtex in his shoes.

That was one of the ways. And then I think because it's very smelly, Rashid and Rod decided that's not going to work.

Once he was nearly shot by Rashid in Swaziland. I understand that Rod was so pissed that he didn't answer the door and Rashid thought it was a trap. Whether Rashid broke the door in and pulled his gun or what I don't know, but he didn't fire. I heard this from Rashid, I had no idea. It didn't surprise me though.

Did you go to any of the meetings Rodney had with Rashid?

No.

Did you meet Farouk (real name: Mohammed Timol) in Zimbabwe? Before or after the blast or both?

There was Farouk and his lovely wife. My memory! But it was after the blast. I went to Joburg and then to Harare while Rodney was getting out on his own through Swaziland.

How much of the plans to hit Koeberg did Rodney discuss with you?

He was feeding back to me every day, obviously. He would have access to the buildings so he was always looking for suitable sites, and we'd talk about that. We always had the radio on full blast, and when we looked at any plans, which we would put on the floor, we would pull the curtains. This was our training.

A lot of the discussion about what to use and what would be suitable went on between Rodney and Rashid, but the eventual idea was to use limpet mines. There were four limpet mines, and Rodney decided where to put them in Koeberg after discussing it with Rashid.

We were instructed as to where we should go to collect the four limpet mines. And, again, we had to do a whole lot of lying that we were going away for the night or whatever. Anyway, we did a straight drive from here to just outside of Bloemfontein and about ten kilometers from Bloemfontein, we were told there would be a culvert with a willow tree, walk ten paces and dig, which is what we did, and they were there. But they were too big for the wine boxes we brought to hide them in (laughter). We drove back to Cape Town and fortunately we were not stopped. I'm sure Rodney's told you about the holes that the dog dug in which we hid these things under our backyard.

Rodney cleaned them before and put them in plastic or whatever, because they're quite greasy. He also did a test, as I call it, to see what would happen if

he was arrested. The Koeberg building was being finished and cleaned, because it had to be absolutely clean, no dust, so the security was becoming tighter and tighter and the targets much more difficult to access.

A part of the place that had been closed off was the control room and so one Friday he took some Vodka in his bag with it sticking out a bit to see if he would be caught, quite a lot of it, and he was plainly pissed, and he walked into the control room. I don't know what he said there, but anyway he was arrested for having alcohol on the premises and was taken to the police station, I think, at Melkbosstrand (laughter). He proceeded to talk to the cops about the rugby and cricket and things that these guys do and they let him go (laughter).

I was ready on the doorstep with my passport. I thought he'd been caught, I'm out of here. Then he came back. It's quite a strange situation, being very much on the periphery like I was. So I wasn't really in control of anything; it was only his belief in me, I think. I mean, he could've told me to piss off, couldn't he? I don't think he ever would have as he was so reliant on me for support.

We had a little Renault 5, and he'd worked out a very quick way to unscrew the dashboard so that he could hide a limpet mine there and go through security without them noticing. He would then quickly unscrew it and get it into his bag between the two checkpoints. Then he would have it in his bag and put it in his drawer in his desk in his office and then place them on the targets. There was quite a lot of practising of this unscrewing, making sure that he had sufficient time between the two security areas in order to get the thing out. Part of the training that Rodney had in Swaziland was about working the detonators, I'm sure he can tell you about that.

You say the limpet mines were buried in your backyard. Weren't they buried in sand dunes on a beach?

Whether Rod did that or not, I can't remember. I never went with him. But at first, after he had cleaned and packaged them, we did put them in a huge hole the dog had dug under the backyard slab.

And you had a dog called Gaby?

Yes. The hole digger.

And your Renault was given by your brother-in-law?

Yes.

Did the ANC fund you because you went back into the country and you weren't employed?

No. I don't know who paid for the trips to Swaziland.

The ANC did.

I presume the trips were paid for, but no, I wasn't in it for the money anyway.

The ANC did subsidise people to survive.

Of course. But we were fortunate, seriously fortunate. And Rodney was working.

Do you know where the limpet mines were put?

I think there were two on the reactor heads, one on electric cabling to make a fire, and I don't know where the fourth one was put.

Do you know if he put them on the targets immediately or hid them somewhere on the plant before?

Ya, he had to do it in stages. This was amazing as they were closing off sections and gradually sealing the cabling conduits. So he would practice with his lunch box, about the size of a limpet mine, passing it through a hole from the outside then going around through the security check into the reactor head space, and then retrieve the lunch box from the inside. This is how he managed to put the two limpet mines on the reactor heads.

What was your reaction to Rodney getting tipsy on that occasion? Besides deciding you should leave the country?

Literally speaking, I packed my bag with everything, ready to go. I must have been very angry because he could have compromised us.

I was frequently giving Rodney dressings down. It was just another one, a more dangerous one this time (laughter). Well, what I think now is, was this a real plan? Did he really do it as a test to see what would happen or was he just pissed out of his mind on a Friday afternoon at work?

How long a gap between the day he got drunk and the operation occurs?

Not long. This was speedy stuff. I got back end of June and we carried out the bombings mid-December.

Did you at any time feel that you can't go through with it? Were you confident and determined or uneasy and anxious about it or maybe had all these feelings?

We were extremely cautious on every level and I thank the Brickhills for that, and their training of us. I don't believe that at any point I thought this can't go on. Never. I believed very much in what we were doing and that we could do it – and it was happening!... The anxiety of being caught? Definitely! Many people thought that the South African security were so hotshot – but they weren't in this case. But we were extra cautious because we thought they were. But I was not going to wait around to be caught because I assumed that they would find out who did it. There was no way I was going to entertain the idea of staying here any longer.

How do you respond to the view that your role was quite crucial in calming Rodney down, in being complementary to him, that you may have been indispensable to Rodney carrying out the operation?

I think it's accurate. You know, the term 'comrade soulmate', that's what I believed was my role. Keep him on the straight and narrow. He had to have somebody to bounce off ideas with rather than shouting his mouth off to others when he had been drinking in the pub.

This is a somewhat unusual role?

In a military context it is strange. But the whole situation was unusual. I had had no military training. But I could help get the job done. I guess I helped with a cover too – the young love birds tied up in each other and looking after the young step-daughter, dogs in the yard...

So Rodney bounced off you most of his ideas on how to do the operation with you?

Yes, 'This is what I'm going to do', 'What do you think?' And he told me of the discussions with Rashid in Swaziland.

How could you help because you didn't know the Koeberg plant nor did you have his technical background?

I had an idea from studying the plans, for sure. Rodney explained, given the plans, possible options for the blasts. I served as sounding board, to ask questions and as an extra set of eyes.

Did he discuss the actual steps and the dates when he would take the limpet mines in?

Yes. I was sitting at home all this time – so I wanted to know what was happening.

Can you remember if there were any differences between you on any aspect of the planning, and if so, what were these?

For placing the stuff, no, not really. I mean for me, the urgency to do the job was huge because if there was going to be uranium on site, I was out. That was the only thing that I thought I would never ever be able to live with – a radioactive accident, so it would have to happen before that. And I warned him. I said I'd be out if it didn't happen by then.

What if there was to be loss of life of people at the plant?

Yes, there were the two conditions. He can't go ahead if it was loaded with uranium. And the blast must take place on a weekend in the early hours of the morning to minimise the risk of people being around.

But you knew that however meticulous the planning, there could be casualties, even deaths?

Oh yes, ultimately, but I believed at the time that we had to make sure that there wouldn't be. And also it was ANC policy at that time to sabotage installations without taking life. We took precautions by changing the date of the blast to be on the weekend. It would have been obvious to set the blast to be on 16 December (MK day and a public holiday). In spite of this we decided to do set the detonators to go off on the weekend on the 18th. Rodney left his job officially on the Friday, after placing the limpet mines and setting the detonators during the week. There was a farewell party for him too. The legend was that he was leaving to join me in England.

But still somebody at the plant could have died?

I don't think that really entered my head in the direct way you ask. After it was decided that the blasts will happen over a weekend, that was ok for me.

So had there been a loss of life, would you today feel that you shouldn't have gone ahead with the operation?

No. We would've. We should've.

Why do you say that?

God it's easy to say in hindsight! Because it was so strategic, it was such an important installation, and at the time also we were trying to send the message that MK could get into places like this. Gees, that is a really interesting question. I've never properly considered loss of life as a result of the explosions. But if it had happened, it would've been worth it, I'm afraid to say. God that sounds awful, but it's true. Casualties are a part of war, and the armed struggle was a war against apartheid.

So when around the time of the blast do you leave the country?

I left a week before. I went through Joburg because a friend was getting married so it gave a part of the 'legend', and that we were leaving the country.

Who do you tell you're leaving the country?

My parents, my family. They didn't know why. I said I was going to work in England – that's what they wanted me to do all the time. And that I was going to Zimbabwe first to say goodbye to my friends.

Do you have any communication over the phone with Rodney in the period between your leaving and the operation being finalised?

I don't really remember. There were no cell phones then. I remember speaking to Rodney when he was safely in Maputo after the blast.

If you didn't decide on a code between you, probably you didn't contact each other during the week of the operation?

Not that I remember, but whether he remembers that... I remember now we did have a code to communicate with Rashid. His codename was AB. I sent a telegram to him about something, I think, I had to send it through the post office, I think. So scary I can't remember.

So how did you first get to know the operation was successful?

I read it in the Zimbabwean Sunday newspapers. It stated that there had been four separate blasts at the Koeberg Nuclear plant all detonating in succession, at different times.

Did he discuss his exit plans beforehand?

Yes. I knew that he would leave by the Swaziland border and that his sister in Joburg would transport him there.

She asked him if it was criminal or political and that was all. Another friend in Cape Town had bought him a bicycle and the air ticket from Cape Town to Joburg helping his escape.

So how long from the time of the blast did you connect with him?

The blast happened on the 18th, the Saturday. I left Harare to meet him in Maputo on Christmas Day. A week? Later, he told me that in Swaziland after the operation he had called the number given, but it was always engaged – he didn't know that was the ring tone! So it took a while for him to make contact there.

Who went with you from Harare to Maputo if anyone?

You remind me now of Farouk and his wife. Maybe it was them.

You remember being on the plane with Farouk's wife?

Yes, somebody accompanied me. You're right. You know it was so bloody scary at the time that I don't remember. It was Farouk's wife? So she came with me? I remember someone on the flight. This jogged my memory. It was a woman. I trusted her.

That's what I've been told. How were you doing while waiting in Zimbabwe to reconnect with Rodney?

It was a big-time party period. Before Christmas. Several South African friends were in Zimbabwe at the time. There was a celebration, with Joan and Jeremy, that it was done. But the people at the party didn't know what we were really celebrating. I remember the pride, and trying to keep it in. But the Brickhills were very much into parties. So I had a good cover.

It's been said you were very anxious, maybe even distraught, when you were in Zimbabwe?...

Well, that explains why I don't remember too much.

Can you remember why you would be so anxious? I mean, the operation was successful, Rodney was in Maputo, what did you fear?

Maybe that we could still be caught. I don't know. What was I fearful of? It was a whole new life opening for me...We had just committed a huge but highly secret act of sabotage – surely we would be sought out by apartheid agents?

I think it was the lies too, I don't know, I was lying through my teeth to family and friends.

You wanted to go to England anyway?

Yes, we were going anyway. I was going to work as a Speech Therapist. It gave Rodney a legend for leaving to follow me – and I could work.

Did you feel abandoned by the ANC?

I don't remember it being an issue at the time. Our air tickets had been paid for by the ANC. I expected no kudos or glory from this. I'm not sure how long it was before we had contact with the ANC in England.

I was told you felt abandoned and were lost about what was going to happen next and somebody was sent to reassure you? Farouk's wife was also asked to reach out to you?

Yes, maybe.

Who receives you at the airport in Maputo?

We entered the airport through a side door, and didn't take my passport through the customs control. Rodney was there obviously and somebody from the ANC. I think Farouk was at the airport.

I only met Rashid and Joe (Slovo) later. We were accommodated in a flat and I think they might've been there when we arrived. This is part of the reason that I did not feel abandoned. As these people was part of the top command of MK. I trusted them.

So how was it reconnecting with Rod?

Obviously, relief, celebratory, and very excited to finally meet Rashid and Joe Slovo. I mean, wow! They were both together, I just have this picture in my head of them sitting comfortably in that flat. And we were treated; we went to an open-air concert to see Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela playing live together. Oh my God, I mean that made it all worth it (laughter)!

And the most wonderful thing was that everybody was sober. Alcohol just wasn't an issue in that country; it was fabulous. I remember eating chicken and rice at a restaurant, I think with Rashid. I remember swimming, the water was so warm and it was bloody hot there, well, it was December. And going up or down in the lift of the flats, Rodney saying 'Do you know who that is?' and of course there was Albie Sachs. Whoo! So it was a lot of excitement, I think, but still we were on the periphery for our own security and that of others.

Do you recall what Slovo said to you about the operation?

No, I'm embarrassed... I hope somebody else does. Maybe Rodney....

Did you meet Oliver Tambo when you were in Maputo?

No, I didn't, Rodney did shortly after he arrived, before I got there. I understand it was a very emotional, but celebratory meeting. They both cried.

What did you make, to the extent that you can remember, of Mozambique at the time under Frelimo? Was there anything that struck you about where Mozambique seemed to be at the time and what it was like?

I remember people doing exercises in the park, and units of Frelimo soldiers in training, running, to be fit. People seemed to be very disciplined, but poor. I mean, the country was defending itself against the South Africans and the war with Renamo. The foodstuffs in the flat were all from the Soviet Union. So, my impression at the time was that it was just recovering from being thoroughly exploited.

Do you recall having supper with Farouk and his wife?

Jeeppers! I'm feeling so disrespectful. Really? I can't remember. It may be because I was too anxious and that this was 40 years ago.

How long do you spend in Mozambique before you leave for London?

I think it was New Year's. My sister took us from the airport to stay with her in Chiswick. We then went to my friends, who lived in a squat house in West London.

How did you feel about the ANC not being there to give you support?

I wasn't expecting anything. That's the long and short of it.

But later we did meet Aziz (Pahad) at the Barbican centre every couple of weeks. I remember doing this whole circling thing around the bookshop with Joe, pretending not to know each other, but actually checking that none of us was being followed and meeting only after that. Joe was there some of the times. Aziz came to us once when we had moved to Suffolk countryside.

So what did you discuss with Slovo and Aziz?

I think some of it was a further debriefing of Koeberg, but, more important, some possible new operations.

There was also Laurence (Harris) from the British Communist Party. He was helping us with more political education and reading, and we would go down to his place in London at least once a month.

So you wanted to continue working with the ANC?

Yes, I think so. Why not? I was not prepared to be active in the ANC if it involved coming back to this country but there was certainly a possibility of continuing underground work and planning from outside South Africa.

I can't remember exactly when the idea came up of moving weapons through the Safari truck but it must have been discussed with Joe, Aziz and Mac. It must've been pretty soon after we arrived because we already had the truck ready and up and going by January 1987.

So how did you survive financially?

Because I was a British citizen, I could get a job, which I did. I worked as a Speech and Language Therapist in East Suffolk. Rodney wasn't, and we got legally married at the end of 1983 so that he could get a job and have some rights. In the beginning he worked in a local pub in Woodbridge, Suffolk.

Was the legal marriage mainly for practical reasons

Yes, it was the sole reason, except now I have two beautiful children.

Did you get any financial support from the ANC when you first got there?

Yes, we had no money. I would've had some money from my parents. But the ANC gave Rodney some money



Heather Gray with Rodney Wilkinson, England, 1983, Supplied

Were you anxious at all while in the UK that the apartheid security agents might trace the Koeberg blast to you and Rodney?

I am routinely anxious, I'm not so bad anymore, but at that time I was very anxious. Yes we were careful. Watching your back becomes a habit. We never mentioned anything nuclear or political. Often, people there assumed we were right wing South Africans and spoke their bigoted minds. We encouraged it – have your enemies close – and one time there was a guy who claimed he had been a mercenary with Mad Mike Hoare in the Congo!

We were so well trained and were so careful, that we never, even in Zimbabwe, had much contact with other people. I mean, we kept very much to ourselves. And the same

happened when we were in the UK.

There was an anti-apartheid march when PW came to London in June 1984 and Thatcher gave him a 21-gun salute! Anyway, so we weren't really allowed to be out there and we were aware that there'd be cameras and the whole thing. So we ran from one end of the crowd to the other, weaving in and out along the edges in case we were seen. This was to get some of the feel of the movement against apartheid. This was the pre-truck period.

But about wanting to do more. In the time we were living in Suffolk, Rodney was constantly working on ideas and drawings for further sabotage in South Africa. Some of these ideas were really wacky with varied inspirations. In Woodbridge, there was a model boat pond where people played with very fancy radio control yachts. Also, in the UK duck hunting tradition, floating decoy ducks are used. We knew that on the hill behind the Simonstown Naval Harbour people flew radio control airplanes. So the idea was that limpet mines

could be placed under decoy ducks or seagulls and controlled by radio into the naval docks to sabotage the South African navy. These seemed like crazy ideas.

It ended up with plans to transport weapons into South Africa using land rovers or safari trucks.

Do you know where that idea came from of transporting arms through the safari truck for tourists?

Rodney. Joe and Mac must have had input.

Do you know anything about Rodney initially proposing the idea of transporting arms through Land Rovers?

We met Mannie Brown (ANC veteran) and his wife, Babette. So whether the truck idea actually came from them or another source I don't know...

So you don't know for sure whether it was Rodney's idea or not?

No, I don't, for absolutely surely, but it could certainly be Rodney, especially the idea of using Land Rovers because I remember now his drawings of Land Rovers.

But the drawings of how the whole inside was going to be constructed, that absolutely, without a doubt, was his work. We also contributed to the construction of the safari truck. It was a Bedford truck with nothing but the cab and the flat base. The compartments, seats, roof all needed to be constructed by us. Mannie Brown's son helped with the welding of the iron frame structure. I helped to source the materials needed, like for the canopy and seats, and for the boxes which fitted into the hidden compartments. The boxes eventually would be packed with weapons in Lusaka. They had to be made for ease of carrying once unloaded. I helped with screwing the woodwork together – hundreds and hundreds of screws! This was what we did at New Years' eve of 1986/87. This was some weeks after losing our first-born child. For the fitting out, the truck was parked in a barn in the Suffolk countryside.

Well, his role on the trucks, unlike in the Koeberg operation, has not been acknowledged in the interviews I've done so far.

Yes. Nobody knows about the truck that much.

The truck is now exhibited at the Rivonia museum. Do you think Rodney should be acknowledged more?

I mean as soon as it was all done, the truck was sent from Felixstowe for shipping to Dar es Salam, and we never saw it again until he showed it to the kids probably in the mid 1990s. It was another top secret we had for years.

Amy remembers some sort of scrap yard, truck yard. Being quite young at the time she was not aware of the importance of the truck, but remembers Rodney pulling out the poles in the seats to show them the hidden compartments.

I haven't seen the exhibit but it is wonderful to know that the truck project has been recognised and will be seen by many as part of our history.

Apart from your discussions with Rodney, did you play any practical role in the ANC when in the UK?

No, because it would have been a potential security risk. But still we were discussing plans for further sabotage and ultimately transportation of weapons. I helped with that.

I was the sole breadwinner, I was getting on with my life, I guess, until the Brickhills were blown up. That happened in 1988. This renewed my horror of the apartheid regime and the urgency to hit them hard.

When the ANC and other organisations were unbanned, how did you feel? Did you by then feel settled in the UK or did you want to come back?

No, I wanted to come back. Oh my God, it's so sweet and prissy there. We missed South Africa badly. The music, the rough edges. So no, we certainly missed being here.

Our younger daughter was born in December 1990. Mandela was freed, and so in May 1991 we packed up and brought the two babies back to South Africa.

We weren't sure of how we would be received. The Koeberg operation continued to be a secret. So we were nervously excited.

We came to my parent's place in Johannesburg and then we had to decide whether we go to Zimbabwe or to Cape Town. We went up to Zimbabwe for a while, but there was a nasty vibe there, seriously, you know after eight, nine years of independence, it was the first sort of racist attitudes that I'd ever had from black people and, you know, youngsters checking you out, that kind of thing. We had a three-year-old and a one-year-old, so headed back to South

Africa. Cape Town was not going to be suitable, so we ended up in Knysna with Rod's mum.

What did you do there? Did you get a job as a speech therapist?

I started my own very small practice there and did a whole lot of bartering for my children's pre-school education. I gave some music and movement classes and I got free schooling for my children because Rodney wasn't working. You talk about us being abandoned? That's when I felt it.

Were you received by the Returnees Committee in any way?

No.

Did you feel cheated off about that?

I wasn't cheated off. Those kinds of things actually don't bother me. At that time, I wasn't expecting anything as far as I can remember.

But Rod was not working, I was earning a pittance, and we were building a house on that pittance, and at that time the local ANC party structures, which were just coming out and getting organised, had no money. There was money maybe for fuel or so. I understood that at the time. I'm not sure how much my parents helped me at that point because they were very disapproving of Rodney. He was drinking excessively at that time and I'd actually told my parents I can't stand it any more.

It was another scary time. We were on an AWB hit list – a slip of paper had been put into our post box. But Rodney was just not there physically or mentally for his young children or me. He was active in helping to establish the ANC office in the Southern Cape. And Chris Hani was assassinated.

The situation at home and fear for my own and my young daughters safety just got progressively worse from there and so then when the first democratic elections were coming in 1994, I said I've done my duty in keeping Rod on the straight and narrow, now I'm out.

How do you know it was AWB?

There were about thirty to forty other people in Knysna and Plettenberg who had received these slips of paper, including women in the Black Sash. Ask Rod what it said, something about AWB and our names being on an AWB hitlist.

I forget which number we were on the list. That ghastly little man, Tienie Groenewald, military right wing, had come to speak in the Knysna Town Hall and the Town Hall was guarded all around by these men with weapons. This was at the end of our street. He had definite links with the AWB and other right wing organisations. And, yes, that scared me.

So, having reached the end of my struggle role and marriage with Rodney, I came to live in Cape Town in March 1994.

What do you think the overall significance of the Koeberg operation was?

I think that at the time it sent a very strong message to the regime, and I like to believe that it gave a lot of people hope. Hearing people talk about it after the fact, I see that for many it really did raise people's hopes that perhaps the regime could be crushed. I've only heard one direct comment of the significance of the Safari truck. It was a doctor who was working in Northern Kwazulu Natal and they were regularly being attacked and harassed by the security forces and some of these weapons from the truck, they received for their protection. The Koeberg blast cost the regime a huge expense. Koeberg was hugely prestigious to the regime. The successful sabotage was for the armed struggle, as Rodney says, 'a plum job'.

This operation was part of MK's Special Ops division, did you know anything about the specific role of Special Ops at the time of the Koeberg blast?

I didn't know anything about it. I probably only learned after the fact that the Koeberg blast was part of Special Ops.

Why did Rodney and you come out, so to speak, and speak to the *Mail and Guardian*. At least he did.

We had met in London with Calvin (Riaz Salojee, involved in MK's Ordnance division based in Harare) and Muff (Anderson, involved in MK's Ordnance division based in Harare). Calvin was involved with helping with the truck and I think eventually with the loading. I don't know whether it's true but Muff put the wind up people to cast suspicion on Rodney as an apartheid spy, and spread the rumour that the blasts at Koeberg had never happened! I learned later that they, whoever they were, were after him and, presumably, me. She, or they, was told to back off as we were known to Joe Slovo and other commanders.

Why do you think she was involved?

Rodney told me these things and more about his interactions with her later.

So therefore she was involved?

She was mistaken. She made a potentially dangerous mistake. Simple as that. Perhaps twice over. With the original rumour and now this. When the *Mail and Guardian* story came out, it must've been about '98ish, it was because Rodney was having drinks with Muff and Riaan Malan, and she let the ball slip, as far as I know. I heard this from Rodney. Rian started trying to put two and two together about who had done Koeberg. Rian wanted a story. And so Muff apparently said, 'well, he's closer than you think'. Oh man, a six year old could've worked that out. 'Oh, it's you,' Rian said, to Rodney! Muff's response let the 'secret' out.

Now from what I had known about Riaan Malan and his *My Traitor's Heart* book, I didn't trust him. I don't know why now, but I didn't. And so basically the cat was out of the bag, and so now in order to avoid civil proceedings against us we had to apply for amnesty. It wasn't anything that we anticipated at the time. It had been a secret until then. It's what happened. I then contacted my journalist friend again and I said look this is what's happened, Rian Malan is wanting to write the story – over my dead body! Who would he recommend? So he suggested to speak to Dave Beresford.

I think that David and Rodney sat down over a couple of whiskeys and made this story into a joke. I was mortified and horrified when I saw that M&G article. It made him look like a complete idiot – 'a swashbuckling cavalier' as a friend said – and me as a tag-along, so I was not impressed at all. It rankles me to this day that this is the story that's out there.

Do you remember that there were some strange incidents, in the months before the blasts, like a fire breaking out in Koeberg and some people breaking into Koeberg? Tambo issued a statement that the ANC was behind the fire because he thought it was Rodney's work?

That's what we learnt afterwards, not while we were there – and it wasn't us.

Did you know they had a special government Security Council meeting after the operation and PW turned up as the Minister of Defence to inspect the blast?

No.

A commentator noted that it was 'one of the most spectacular acts of sabotage against the NP government' – which I think is true. He said it was 'one of the most audacious acts of sabotage ever carried out by one man.' Of course, the woman's role is not mentioned. And yet, he noted, 'the TRC devoted just fourteen words to this episode in South African history in its seven volume final report.' Any comment?

A part of the role of TRC was to provide amnesty for political acts against the regime, so that civil proceedings could not be brought. We received indemnity for the sabotage of Koeberg in May 1999. My application and acceptance is separate from Rodney's and I am named. I don't believe the TRC was about glorification for anyone. As for a woman's role, no mention is typical, but remember behind every successful man there must be a strong woman. I was that woman.

Here's another comment in an article: 'Even the ANC showed reluctance when evoking the glories of the struggle so as not to make that much out of the day when one of their own bombed the Koeberg nuclear plant.... It seems almost as if it's too shocked by the sheer audacity of the operation to acknowledge the act.' Comment?

It was certainly audacious. But why would the ANC be shocked if it was something that was organised by the commanders of MK? I do sometimes wonder if the ANC has preferred not to highlight the work of white people in the struggle.

A further comment in an article: 'While the ANC won the propaganda war in this instance, the South African government suffered a humiliating political and economic blow. At the time the cost of the damage was estimated at four hundred to five hundred million Rands and the commissioning of the plant was delayed by eighteen months.' Any comments?

Amandla!

Another: 'The surgical efficiency of the operation proved so embarrassing to the white minority regime, security sources claimed it had to be done by an outside team of professional saboteurs.' Comment?

We did it. We did it. Very carefully. And from the inside.

Ian McGrae, an Eskom official, stated that their investigation also showed a possible link to the German terror group, the Baader Meinhof Gang.

Hahaha! Oh really?!

It was a stunning operation by global standards let alone South African standards, says another commentator....

Yes! And that there was no loss of life. I mean that's the real bonus.

What about this comment? The authorities of Koeberg have since made the extraordinary claim that they not only anticipated the attack but had pinpointed the date. This is what they're saying. In a book on the history of the plant, a former executive, Paul Seamark, is quoted as saying 'We knew the ANC would not target Koeberg once nuclear fuel was there and that they would try to attack at a time which would ensure the least loss of life. We even pinpointed 16 December 1982, which was a public holiday as the likely date.' Any comment?

Nonsense. This is easy to say after the fact. And if they had known, why didn't they do something about it? He is covering for himself. It was an enormous breach of the security of the plant. There had been no vetting process of Rodney's background... he can explain that.

What's your response to the comment by somebody that it was an operation born out of chance? Meaning that you suddenly turned up to the ANC and you handed to them this operation on a plate, it was not part of their Special Ops plans. It's Rodney and you that did everything. All that Rashid and Slovo did was guide you.

I agree. Maybe it was a chance for the movement and it was a chance for us to do something wonderful. But we were very cautious and careful in the details of the planning. Right time, right place, right motivation and right cover. We trusted the guidance of Rashid. We trusted the guidance of the Brickhills. Even if it was chance, we could only have done it together.

Waldo Stumpf, the Chief Executive Officer of the Atomic Energy Corporation said that the significance of the operation is that the South African government was getting anxious at the time over security in the country and it was exacerbated by Portugal's withdrawal from its colonies in Southern Africa and the uncertainties about the true intentions of the Warsaw Pact countries and especially

by the Soviet Union in the light of their openly declared expansionist policies in Southern Africa. This soon converted to a nuclear laager through the transformation of the country's nuclear energy into a nuclear weapons programme and a nuclear deterrence strategy approved in April '78 by then Prime Minister John Vorster. You think that's accurate?

Yes. It was not just about nuclear energy – uranium – it was plutonium, and that's why as a student I was anti-nuclear. It was bombs they were planning to make or were making. There were nuclear tests that happened in the Kalahari and there was one off the coast.

Did you know the Koeberg operation was called Operation Mac by the ANC?

I did at some point, heaven alone knows how.

Do you know what the most amazing thing for me out of all this is? It's the people that I met and the honour to have met them. There's a guy that we knew in Knysna who went into local government and he used to come to visit me quite a lot in the late '90s in Cape Town, and he came one day with about five young men packed in the car to have some tea or whatever. And they came in singing – and it was the first time I had ever been honoured by the people for doing this. And the funny thing was I ended up working with one of these guys at the hospital on some committee and he was the union rep and he came up to me one day, and he says, 'You know, Heather, when I was younger, we went to see a woman in Lakeside, she looked just like you'. I said 'because it was me' (laughter)! Those are the things that matter. I mean I met Joe Slovo!

There's also this comment in an article from what seems to me to be a right wing person: that Rodney is nervous, insisting on a seat near the door of the Mugg & Bean restaurant in a Southern Pretoria shopping mall ordering a beer before lunch, rushing from the table at one point to calm himself with a cigarette by a window. By the end of his two hour interview with a foreign reporter, meaning himself, he says the sunburnt citrus farmer holds out his trembling hands. He says Rodney said he didn't shake at the time but any thought about what he did now causes him to shake. Any comment about that?

I'll second that, the shakes. It's only now that I can actually talk about Koeberg without trembling. I still get sweaty even now. At the time, we called it 'jelly knees'. You know, when your legs shake because you are so fearful? We had to try control it. Especially Rodney when carrying and placing the limpet mines.

If we were caught, torture and death was certain. So the memory of the fear, it doesn't wear off, and if Rodney knew that this guy was a right winger, no wonder he was shaking.

Actually, he suspected the guy was CIA?

Oh, my, God that's even worse!

And this comment? 'Part of the Koeberg operation is the tale of a disillusioned frustrated white couple wanting to strike back at an unjust authoritarian society being driven by a brutalising military machine.' Comment?

Nonsense. Absolutely not true. I wasn't disillusioned or frustrated. I was at the beginning of my adult life, with huge opportunities. Certainly, we had strong feelings against the regime and the ongoing brutality and murder. The sabotage of Koeberg presented itself as an opportunity for us to contribute to the struggle against apartheid. Our circumstances allowed us to do just that.

He says he came to the conclusion that Rodney's weaknesses were compensated by Heather, particularly Rodney's proneness to get nervous.

Is this guy a psychologist? I would not describe Rodney as 'nervous'.

Several of the pieces present Rodney as a somewhat nervous person, as a most unlikely saboteur, as almost not having the personality for it. Not that apartheid didn't drive others similar to him into the underground struggle...

It could be argued that neither of us were likely saboteurs, given our backgrounds. He was somebody who tested the boundaries all the time. It could be that his lengthy training as a fencer taught him the skill of strategy along with huge speed and discipline in the sport. But he wasn't afraid to break the rules or the law. Not afraid to be daring.

Given the significance of the Koeberg operation, do you think it has been given enough attention in the public domain since 1994?

Well plainly, it hasn't been given a great deal of attention. I think part of it is because it was unseen, it wasn't spectacular like SASOL. And, that there is this kind of rumour about whether it actually happened or were we just making it all up?

I hate to think that it's because we are 'whities'. And perhaps the ANC was embarrassed? I hope this is not true. The apartheid regime would have played it down, with little press coverage. Remember the laws prohibiting news and publications were draconian. I recall vaguely going to the newspaper archives in London. Perhaps Rodney remembers what we found?

Also, it was a top secret, for 13 years, until when Muff Anderson led Rian Malan to work out who did it. So only after the *Mail and Guardian* article by Beresford, which I found laughable, and the submission to the TRC some 15 years later, was the operation made public.

Perhaps it has been downplayed because the nuclear issue is so contentious? Or it's because we were out of the blue. We came out of the blue but we were able to do something fantastically significant for the armed struggle!

The plan to record MK Special Ops in a book will be important to help inform and remind people of what is in fact really recent South African history. To record the memories and stories, serves to pay tribute to all who contributed to the armed struggle, big or small; to acknowledge their hardships and sacrifices at the time, but most importantly to salute their daring and their bravery.