

*An interview used in "Attacking the Heart of Apartheid: The ANC's MK Special Operations Unit" (Penguin, 2025), Yunus Carrim*

## **MK Special Operations Unit project**

### **Interviews**

#### **Patrick Chamusso**

**11 April 2018 and 2 November 2018 (telephonically)**

#### **Mbombela**

**Comrade Chamusso perhaps we could start with you telling us a bit about your personal life before you joined MK? Where were you born? A bit about your parents? How many brothers and sisters you have? Maybe a bit too about some of your experiences before you decided to become politically active?**

My father was Frans Chamusso, a Mozambican migrant, who was working at East Geduld Mine in Springs. He met my mother in 1948. They were not married, and he was staying in mine quarters. My mother, Betty Thibedi, was from Limpopo. My first brother is Robert and second brother is Mandu. My father worked in the mines. Father Dominic said he was involved in politics. But I don't know my father or what happened to him.

I was born in Penville, Springs in 1950. My mother took my two brothers and she left me in the hands of Father Dominic at the Roman Catholic Church at Penville in Springs. It was about 1973. She didn't want me to get into politics. I was the baby boy – I was the favourite son. She left. When I asked Father Dominic where's my mother, he couldn't tell me. Even my father, he didn't want me to know who he was. But Father Dominic knew everything about me, which he explained to me later when he came to visit me on Robben Island, and he told who was my father.

I was not interested in politics. I just started working as a painter.

I was just like Father Dominic's son because you know priests are not married and then he took me as his son. I used to be in the football team, I was good. I was always the captain of the team. I decided to go to Florida, to Father Dominic's cousin, Mary Hamman, and then I was staying there while I was painting houses.

Wrong time, wrong place, that's my life!

When I was buying a car in 1973 at the age of 23 at Sydenham Close, I had about R7000. That is what the car cost at that time. And when I told the people there I need that car, it was in the showroom, they looked at me and said 'how *kaffertjie* you want that car?' I said yes, I need that. They said no, no. They showed me a second-hand Valiant and Impala. I said no I'm not interested in those cars, I'm interested in the Peugeot. They said no, this is a new car, you can't afford it. I said who told you that I cannot afford it? They said, do you have money? I said yes, I have money. Where's your money? I said it's in the bank. Which bank? Nedbank. Bring the money here, we see if you really are interested in this.

I went to the bank and I told them I want to buy a car. I had about R8000. That time it was a lot of money for a black man to have. They gave me R7000 in a shoe box and then I went back to Sydney Close. I said here it is. They showed me the car. While they were showing me the car, they were phoning the police. They said there's a *kaffir* here who has got such an amount and he wants to buy a car. And they made me coffee with a mug, a big mug. Hot, so that I mustn't drink it fast you know, it was very hot.

As I was drinking with a piece of bread, these guys came in. They jumped on me and took me away. They beat me there first while I was at Sydney Close. They took me to Florida Police Station and they beat me, they beat me, they beat me. They throw me into a cell. They said it's about half past eleven now, we're going to lunch. When we come back you must tell us where did you get the money. I was bleeding. And then they came back with the Superintendent of the police station. They told him that they caught a *kaffir* with R7000. When Superintendent van Niekerk, looked at me, he said no, no I think I know this guy. Are you Patrick? I said, yes I am. He said, no, wait, guys I know this guy. He painted my house. They said '*maar waar kry hy die geld* (but where did he get the money), the other CID (police) were asking? Van Niekerk said, I will handle him.

They took a hosepipe and they washed me and van Niekerk took me to his office. I sat down with the handcuffs. Patrick, look at what they have done to you, just tell me the truth – where did you steal this? I said, no, I didn't steal. Remember, I painted your house and I painted your daughter's house and your uncle's that time – it was R120. I used to bank that money. He said are you sure that this is your money? I said, yes. Where's your bank book of your account? My bank account was kept at Mrs Hamman's where I used to stay. And I went to take my bank book. And also Mrs Hamman was wondering what happened and she came with the police. She said, no, this is a nice boy. They said, no, he has stolen the money. Mary Hamman said, no, I will come with you. I just want to verify this story. They went to the bank, they checked. That time there were no computers. They were checking when did I bank this

money, It was exactly R8000. The money was mine. Okay, they said, I didn't steal it.

And those guys they never apologised to me for beating me. Then Mary Hamman phoned Father Dominic as I was sick. He said let's go back to Springs. I said no, I will stay here, but I still need that car, but I won't buy it there. Mrs Hamman said, no let's go to Eloff Street, there's another Sydney Close there. After three weeks, when I was okay, we went to another branch and then we bought a Peugeot, brand new. We told the story about what happened in the branch in Florida. The owner was a Jew, he called the branch manager, he said your job is to take the money; it's not to call the police when a customer comes. You just sell the car. They said I came with a lot of money and then they were scared where did I steal it.

I bought the car. Mary Hamman drove the car to the house. I went to driving school in Florida. And in six months I got my licence.

And then it was good for me and I never worried about my mother or my father. I didn't even want to know where are they, even my brothers, because they just left me.

So, you see, wrong time, wrong place...

### **You first ran into the law when you were fourteen years old? Correct?**

Yes, when I went to a café. My mother was still with us. It was 1964, if I recall. She was working in a house near where my father used to work. I went to visit my mother from Father Dominic's and then she sent me to go and buy bread. As I didn't go to school, there were White and Black doors, and I couldn't read so I just went through the door for Whites. I was a very strong boy, very proud and I didn't want to be dominated by other races. But I wasn't involved in politics, I just didn't want to be dominated when we were playing soccer by Sothos, Shangaans, Zulus or Indians. I just wanted to be treated as equal. So then I went there and this man jumped over the counter and he beat me. *Kaffertjie* can't you see that this is not the entrance for you. I said, no, I can't read. He called the police.

About 10 o'clock I was put in the Springs cells. And two o'clock I was sentenced to two months and a R10 fine. I didn't have R10. And I asked the police to phone my mother. They said *nee ons het nie tyd vir daai (we don't have time for that)*. Five o'clock I was already sold to a farmer who comes to buy those prisoners. When one farmer, Mr Mann, came there, he said *ek soek daai kaffertjie (I want that 'kaffir')*. And then I was called aside, you are sold.

And then I went with him to Kendal. Kendal became my base when I came back from exile because I knew everything there.

And then I spent 1½ months there. Then Jackie, Mr Mann's son, who was playing soccer with me, he used to like me, asked me where do you come from? I said from Springs. And then his mother took me back home. Then my mother started crying. She said I didn't now that you were in prison. They said, no, we bought him, but as from today he is free. You can take your child, he was a very good boy. And also, if you want, he can come and work for us. She said, no, he cannot come and work for you.

**Now when you entered the 'Whites Only' part of the restaurant, was it a deliberate act of defiance or did you just not know?**

No, I didn't know. There were two doors. I just went through that one. I couldn't read or write. I didn't see any 'Whites Only' sign.

**Maybe because you looked so confident when you walked in and because, as you said earlier, you don't want anyone, whoever they are, to treat you badly, that man probably thought you did it defiantly?**

Yes, he thought so, but I wasn't defiant. I really didn't think about Blacks going through the other entrance. And it was in the White area and I saw other people, Whites, going in there, I just thought that this is the right door.

**You became a photographer. How did your interest in photography arise?**

While I am a painter, I buy a small camera so that I can take pictures. People in the Black areas, they didn't have a studio that time where they could take pictures. So I used to stand at Florida Station with some pictures, and I show it to people, I say, hey, I'm a photographer. Most of the people come from the rural areas. They want to send pictures home so their families can see them. That time a picture was about 50 to 60 cents. So, I used to make money doing that, if I don't have a painting job.

**Earlier you worked in the mines?**

Yes, I went to a mine to take a job, but I didn't like to go underground. Also, the way we were treated, I didn't like it. I thought maybe my father will come back to find me. I went to East Geduld and then I changed to Daggerfontein Mine, and I thought that maybe I can contact some of the relatives of my

father or anybody who knew him. My mother said I looked like my father. I thought maybe someone will recognise me.

But I didn't know that my father is dead. I worked there as a jumper checker and underground as a haulage driver. I worked about two or three years, but I left. I went back to my painting.



**You were arrested and deported to Mozambique later. Tell us about that.**

We were coming from Zeerust. It was near Nietverdiend, which is near the border of Botswana. That was in 1976 after all the boys ran to Botswana to exile. I went with my girlfriend to take pictures of her brother's wedding. And I was well dressed. On our coming back, here's a roadblock. Wrong place, wrong time again (laughter).

**Patrick Chamusso, Sunday Independent**

When they looked, I had a corduroy jacket and dressed nice because I was from the wedding. The police looked at me, *kaffertjie*, come out, he said. I opened the boot. They suspected that I'm transporting people to the nearby border of Nietverdiend to Botswana. *Waar kom jy (Where are you coming from)?* I said, no, I come from the wedding. Are you sure about that? Yes. They asked my girlfriend. She said, yes, we have come from a wedding. And one of the policemen said, yes, there was a wedding nearby.

In the boot I had a bag and a camera and some films of photos I took to develop. Hey, they said, no, there's a lot of spools here, I'm helping the ANC to take people across the border to Botswana. But it not like that, nothing, nothing, I told them! And my car, by that time, I think it clocked about - it was still new, man - maybe not even 60 000. And they looked at the car.

They said, *nee meneer, waar kry jy die kar (Where did you get the car)?* I said, no, the car is mine. And *waar bly jy (Where do you stay)?* I said, I stay in Florida, you can confirm this from Mrs Hamman. And they didn't want to know that. They took me to the police station. *Nou jy sal die waarheid praat (Now you will talk the truth).* Which *waar praat* I must talk? Because I don't have any information I must give them. They are interested in ANC, PAC or whatever. And myself I'm not.

Were you involved in the uprising in Soweto? I said, no man, I was in Florida. I was beaten, beaten, brother! My jaw was broken. I lost my tooth. Your father, they asked? I told them. Your mother? I told them. They found that my mother, Betty Thibedi has run to exile and my two brothers. My brother, Robert died somewhere and my other brother, Mandu, died after in a riot on the mines. I only met my mother again after I came from Robben Island.

I didn't have a good life at all.

**You said you never went to school.**

No, I never went to school.

**When you were on Robben Island didn't you study?**

Jeff Radebe used to teach me. And Vijay Ramlakan. Also, Naughty Ngcobo from Durban. Actually, a lot of people from Durban, they used to like me.

**So, what happened at the roadblock?**

They took my camera on the spot, and I was put in prison, beaten and they went to develop all the spools that I took at the wedding. I took the bride to one of the mountains near the border. The police said, oh no, this is near the border. No, this is the intelligence of the ANC. I said which ANC you are talking about? They said on that route is where comrades used to cross the border.

I was beaten, beaten. And then they found that my mother is in exile. They said, okay, we are going to deport you. Which country do you want to go because you don't have an ID, you don't have anything. Do you want to go to Swaziland or Mozambique or where? I said wherever you want to deport me, wherever it suits you, but I'm none of what you are talking about. After four months they put me in a chain and on a train to Mozambique. The camera was never returned, my new car was never returned. I was angry. I became strong.

And there was a Black policeman who was escorting us, I asked him to let me go to the toilet. He unchained me. The policemen on the train were drinking. They were not worried about us. When we passed Springs, I jumped from the moving train. So, I never got deported to Mozambique.

**Did that policeman sort of aid you to escape or he just didn't do his job?...**

No, he didn't let me go. He didn't think that I would escape. He was drinking, and I could see he was getting drunk. And so, I took advantage.

**You certainly seemed to be determined, not to just give in to authority...**

Yes. I was beaten when I went to buy a car and now, I was beaten coming from the wedding and I lost my girlfriend because now she thinks that I'm a terrorist and I wasn't a terrorist. And I'm losing everything that I'm having, now I began to think maybe I better join the ANC one day. But I said, you know, I don't have any money now, I don't have anything. So, from there I went to Sasol to look for a job.

**How long were you detained for?**

Six months in Zeerust.

**So, what happened to your car?**

No, they took it. Mrs Hamman produced all the papers that I bought it and they said no I got the money from the ANC, we know that story. Even when I came back from Robben Island, I went there to get the car and they said, no, those people are no more there.

**Where's Mrs Hamman now? Is she alive? I could maybe speak with her?**

No, she died last August. I was very sad. Her daughter, Evelyn, gave me a lot of photos to remember her.

**So, you go to Sasol?**

Yes, I hear that Sasol are employing drivers.

They tested me, they know I'm a good driver and they said what else can you do? I said, no, I can play soccer. And then one Sunday, they tested me. Mr Hill, who was a General Manager of Sasol, he liked soccer. He came to see when I was playing. He said, no, employ this guy, this is good. So, I was employed as a lorry driver taking coal from the mine - and then in 1980 wrong time, wrong place (laughter).

**That's the theme of your life.**

Yes, that's the theme of my life. (MK Special Ops member) David Moisi and his friends, they came to Sasol.

**They owe you right (laughter)? Because of them you get arrested wrongly again...**

David knows. He always laughs at me. He said they did the job and I suffered. But we are very good buddies. Also, he helped me with my English on Robben Island. He motivated me on a lot of things.

**So, what happens on the night of 31 May/1 June 1980, the MK bombing of Sasol in Secunda?**

I went into Sasol, it was about half past nine at night, and then ten o'clock I went out. Boom the big explosion! Hey, it was locked, all the gates. And we were staying in the hostel and it was closed. No one can go out. The bosses and the police, they asked who went in and out for the last time that night, which driver? Everyone said Patrick. They thought that I had some people at the back, there were no cameras like now.

Oh, I was beaten okay. But I didn't know anything from the blast. Then after three months I was released, and Sasol said, no, they don't want me. They gave me my pay. I had a girlfriend near Middelburg. I also had a daughter. I went to give them money. I never told them where I'm going.

**Before we go on, can you describe a bit what it was like during that Sasol bombing? You said it was 'boom'? What else do you remember? What were your feelings? What did you think at the time?**

What I saw is that the world was ending. Yes. I thought maybe the sky is coming down because it shook everything around there and even the underground tunnels fell down. Even the conveyor belt where we used to take coal. And by that time, I was a foreman of the drivers. So, I used to go underground also. If the coal is not coming out, I said, hey, we need coal outside, man, what's going on there? I had this badge of Sasol.

That night we never slept. The place was full of police, dogs and everything. The people who came from the plant went into the hostel and it was locked. The nearby Secunda township, the whole army was there. They said no these people, they must not go anywhere. And then when we were interrogated...

When the explosion happened, I felt, good, they were paying for what they did to me.

**So, you knew it was the ANC?**

I didn't know.

**You didn't care who then?**

Yes. Whoever did – but they paid for what they have done to me, and they paid that my mother and my two brothers are not with me now. So that's good. And they paid for the way we were treated also. We were not treated like people. We were working but getting peanuts and you find young Whites come there and then get a job better than you and more pay.

**What do you think was the response of the other workers or you don't know?**

Hey, they hated me because they thought that it was me, because they heard that they have captured someone and even if was not from inside the ANC, he helped the terrorists. So, everyone was saying *hey hooo*, even those who were detained with me, they were released because they said I was the one who left last that night. Imagine that weight of anxiety of trouble on your shoulder, but you don't know anything about who did it. What would you think if they say, Carrim, like you have just come here to White River and the police said that there's a robbery and that you did that? And you never know anything about that? It really troubles you.

**But the management and police must have asked the workers who were the last people to come into the plant? And so, they said it was you?**

Yes, You record the number of trucks of coal you are taking - and then the police looked at that information.

**You were just doing your job in other words?**

Yes, I was on the nightshift.

**Wasn't there a trade union at Sasol that could have intervened on your behalf?**

They used to mobilise, even come to us, but I used to dodge them.

**You didn't become a member of the union?**

No.

**I like your word 'dodge'...**

(Laughter) I knew they were doing a good job, but I dodged them because I was a foreman – all the eyes were on me. Immediately you become involved in the union you are fired, and then I didn't want to lose my job and also, I have a child to worry about...But during the night I used to open *Radio Freedom*.

**You used to listen to *Radio Freedom*?**

Yes.

**Even though you were not a supporter of the ANC? Why?**

Yes. But I just liked to listen, that's all.

Really everyone hated me in Sasol, and actually they said they don't want me to be there again even when I was released. Everyone said, hey, take your things you bloody terrorist, go, go, go, take your things, go to your ANC, go, go!

**Even the workers that were in the progressive trade unions?**

Yes, because no one wanted to be getting involved into those things.

**So the workers didn't support you?...**

No. Even if they supported, that was underground. They didn't say it...

**But in the townships surely there was much more support for the attack?**

Yes, but I didn't go there.

**So, you don't know?**

Yes, I don't know what was going on in townships.

**So, then you explained to the police, look, but I'm not in the ANC, I went to deliver coal, there's proof I went to deliver coal. What did they say?**

No, they know that because you sign when you go there. My last load it was there, signed. The thing that put me in trouble, as I was a foreman, why did I relieve the other driver to go and sleep? I said I just relieved him because he came to me, he said we'll share our overtime, I'm tired, Chief, can you just get somebody else? I said, okay, I'll take over. And I went to collect coal there and

then came back and went to sleep. But then the police found that I changed with him, they said that I was plotting, putting terrorists in the truck. How did the terrorists know where the petrol tank was? They said I helped them. But the ANC people cut the fence from the other side because that side that time there was no electricity on the fence. Why did you relieve this man, they said? And you were the last and no other truck driver came in. So it fitted very well for them. You were helping them, they said.

**But surely they saw that the fence was cut?**

Yes, but they said, no, the ANC didn't come in through there, they ran away through there.

**You brought them in and then they escaped through the fence?**

Yes. And also they found my finger prints from when I was arrested before for the car, at Nietverdiend, near the border of Botswana, that time when I was coming from the wedding, like I just told you. They said you must be a big fish man, you must know about this bombing (laughter).

**You know your life is captured by yourself very well – wrong place, wrong time!...**

And wrong people (laughter).

**Yes, and wrong people (laughter).**

And you will deny – but the police want to beat you to death. Then they went to search my bag. Nothing, no pamphlets or anything there. They didn't get anything. Some of the members of the union who were working underground were arrested in the township, but after that they were released. They were not charged because all the charges were carried by one man. That man is the man you are talking to now.

**How long did they interrogate and torture you for?**

About three months. The third day of my arrest – I was arrested on the 27 of October 1981 – around about 8am they beat me and made me stand for 3 days without sleeping – and on the third day a drug squad came from Pretoria as it was told that I was Joe's bodyguard and they injected me with the so called truth drugs, and they showed me pictures of comrades, but I said nothing.

**What happens after you get released?**

When I'm getting beaten I said that if I get out of here, I'll show them! They say I'm ANC but I'm not. I said to myself they made another mistake, now I'm going to go join the ANC. Even though I don't know where they are, I will find them. I thought of going through Botswana. I said no, it's Secunda, the best way, it's Mozambique.

**Did you tell your wife and other members of your family?**

No. I said I might be absent for some months. My former wife said, no, we only heard you were arrested when we saw it in the newspapers everywhere. They bought the *Sowetan*, it was there. She said it was mentioned that you are a terrorist, I'm living with a terrorist here, and please I don't want to stay with you.

I gave money to my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law was very supportive. And then when I was talking with my wife she called me aside and she said my wife doesn't know what is going on. If you have done that, you did well, my mother-in-law said. I said no, I didn't do it (laughter). The Boers are troubling me for nothing.

And I said grandma I will be out, take this money. It was about R400. Take care of my daughter. I'm looking for another job. She asked me where. I said no, I don't know where I will get that. She said don't go to the farmers. I said no, I won't go to the farmers. And then I took a taxi to Middelburg, then the Maputo train.



**Patrick Chamusso, Two Sisters**

**What did you use to cross the border?  
Did you have a valid passport?**

No. On me I had a bag and wore a tracksuit, written at the back "*Death rides a horse*" from the *Hang Ten*. Then at Komatipoort there was a lot of security and then I went with the people to the location until dark. Then in the dark you could see the fence, then I asked, hey man, did you hear about the terrorism in Sasol. He said, ya, we heard. But how do they go that side? He said, oh that's the fence man, they go there, they jump there and Frelimo's there, ANC is

there. Do you want to go there? I said no, no I don't want to be a terrorist.

Then I jumped the fence. I saw the Frelimo soldiers. Then I said I'm running away from South Africa, I want to join the ANC. I couldn't understand what they were saying. I was put with others into a jeep. We went to the headquarters in Maputo. I think the other people that jumped had recommendations from the underground or other structures and they were interrogated separately. Who are you? And then I told them. My big problem was that I mentioned I was working at Sasol and I was detained. The first person who came to see me was Willie Williams from the intelligence of the ANC.

That night they took me to Mashava prison. They used to come there and and interrogate me, they checked me. I told them. I think they went to Mrs Hamman. They verified. They thought I was a spy. I spent a year from 5 June until 5 May, then I was released to the ANC camp in Matola.

**Are you saying that the ANC in Maputo contacted comrades inside the country to check out your story including talking to Mrs Hamman?**

Yes.

**But Mrs Hamman was not politically aware?**

Yes, she wasn't...

**How could the comrades who went there be able to check with Mrs Hamman that you were politically okay?**

She wouldn't know. They just went there saying they are looking for the painter Patrick, and she said I disappeared and she read that I was a terrorist.

**Did she think you were a terrorist?**

No.

**Did she keep in touch with you while you were on the Island?**

Yes, she came, and also Mrs Mary Burton from the Black Sash.

**Why did Mrs Hamman keep in touch with you?**

Because I didn't have anyone to come and visit me. Father Dominc came as part of an SACC (South African Council of Churches) delegation.

**Okay, so back to Matola, what happens then?**

I was in the hands of the Commissar was Mpho.

**Those were their MK names. Do you know what their real names were?**

I don't know. Some of them were using their real names.

And then the first Saturday, came Moses Mabhida and a White person, Joe Slovo, to address the newly arrived comrades.

**How many of you were there?**

About twenty. And then as they were talking, really I was inspired by this man, Slovo, but I didn't trust him. He came with a Mazda 323, a yellow one.

**You remember that too?**

Yes. Actually, I nearly ran away from that camp because I said no here, this is not the ANC. This could be something else. Because in Matola someone was trying to recruit me. Can't we escape and then we go back to South Africa and then we work for the police force? I said, no, you go. Or maybe he was put by the ANC to bluff me? I said no, I want to join the ANC.

**Had he just crossed the border like you to join the ANC and now he's recruiting you to go back with him to the police? And if you wouldn't join him, did it also mean that you had no doubts about joining the ANC even though you spent so many months in detention?**

Yes. In that camp in Matola there was a lot of infiltration. But I was determined to join the ANC. When I believe in something, I believe in it. The Commissar gave me the name Ivan Thomas and he also told me not to trust anybody there.

I think the ANC did send comrades to Sasol to verify my story. They found that, yes, I was there and I was arrested. But they were still not sure, they thought that maybe the police bribed me to work for them. Maybe they felt why I always get released by the police?

When I wrote my biography for the ANC at the camp, Rashid said I mustn't mention about the prison I was in in Maputo, that they questioned me. I don't understand why Rashid said that, not even today.

**But why do you think Rashid said that to you, not to talk about your detention in Maputo?**

I don't know what was it. But when I asked the other comrades who's this Indian comrade, they said no he works with JS, he's a good comrade and all that.

But I had a question in my mind: why didn't Rashid want me to say anything about my detention by the Mozambicans in the biography I wrote for the ANC. I was detained for about a year.

**Maybe because it might look bad on the Mozambicans?**

I trusted Rashid because he came with Joe, but it's my life so I have to trust myself. That's why some of the things they told me to do, I didn't follow. I took my own routes and I didn't trust some of the people I had to contact in Swaziland before I went home.

**Okay. So what happens in Maputo?**

I joined the ANC on 5 May 1981.

There were some good ladies in the camp. I'm good to the ladies and I catch always the beautiful one. There was an empty swimming pool where I used to do attacking exercises. I used to see some of these ladies there.

Then one day I was called by Mpho. He said someone wants to see me. Then this White man comes in. When I looked at this guy (laughter), big ears and all (laughter), he was drinking a can of Coke. He gave me one. I had a doubt about drinking it. I thought maybe they drugged it and then when I drink it, they'll then take me back to South Africa. I opened the can. As his glass was empty, I poured some of my coke in his, and some in mine also. I said can we drink it now? He saw that, no, this guy is good...

**That you wanted him to drink some of the coke from your can first so you can be sure it's not got a drug in it?**

Yes. He said I know what you think...

Then he asked me what happened to my car, and checked my whole story. Then he asked me if I want to go to school. I said no.

**You said you didn't know who Slovo was when you had your first meeting with him and Mpho. But you said you first saw him when he came to give a talk with Mabhida? So if you didn't trust Joe Slovo, did you also think Moses Mabhida might be from apartheid security police too?**

No. Moses, I didn't.

**You only distrusted Slovo...**

Yes.

**For the reasons?**

Because of his colour.

**And the way he looks?**

And then the way he looks and...

**When you got released you told him all that?**

No, when I came from Angola I told him.

**He had a good laugh, did he?**

Yes.

**Okay, so you said you didn't want to go to school? Could you read and write a bit at that time?**

No.

**So who wrote your biography for the ANC? did you talk to somebody who wrote it?**

I just talked to Mpho and he wrote it down.

**So you said you didn't want to go to school?**

I said, no, I want to go to the army. Why do you want to go to army? I said I want to pay revenge. I told him the truth. I said to Mpho go out a little bit from the room. With my little English and Slovo's simple English I talked with him. He said, Patrick, we're not fighting for revenge, we are fighting to remove the

nuclear of apartheid. Not to go and revenge, go kill the Whites. Our aim here is to let them know who we are.

I started getting relieved now. You know how Joe looks, he's got big ears, big glasses, he's just like a Boer, like anyone from the Special Branch (laughter).

Then he said, if we train you for a few months in the army will you go back to Sasol or maybe somewhere elsewhere in South Africa to fight? I said actually I want to go back to Sasol. What you hit was the petrol depot. I want to hit the reactor and then Sasol is finished. Why do you want to do that, Slovo asked? I repeated what I said about revenge. He said stop, no revenge. Remember, we're not paying any revenge here.

Anyway, we discussed more and Slovo said I must go to the army for training, but I mustn't tell anybody about what I'm going to do after that. Even Mpho, I mustn't tell him. After two or three weeks I was taken to a camp in Angola. I gave a letter to Camp Commander from Slovo. I think it was about my special training.

During the night I was taken to another camp, Funda, about six kilometres away. The same letter that I gave to this Commander, it was given to the Commander of the other camp.

The next morning, I started training, running, shooting. I had a Commissar for politics. Different instructors for different things. I could see that they were giving me real special training. Joe kept his promise. I trusted him from there. I think after 2 months I was good at shooting – Makarovs, AKs, even R1s. Also, an AK with a wheel on the side. It's loading more bullets than the ordinary AK. I did enjoy my training. There was a guy there called George Buffalo, very strong. We did a lot of physical training together. Then I was called without being told beforehand. Take your bag, you are going.

**Did you have any Cubans Instructors?**

Yes. We used to talk through George Buffalo in Zulu, then George spoke to them in a little bit of broken Spanish and some English.

**Was the camp attacked by Unita when you were there?**

No.

**How many months did you spend there?**

Two months.

**So, you didn't get much time to interact with the others in the camp?**

No, I didn't. My day was so packed that even during the night they used to train me. They used to teach me about hand grenades. And crawling and using my gun and all other types of training. And limpet mines.

**And you had political education?**

Yes.

**You were trained with others?**

No, on my own.

**Would you have your meals on your own or with other comrades?**

With the other comrades.

**And you slept on your own?**

No, I slept with other comrades.

**Did you ever tell the other comrades what you were being trained for?**

No, we didn't talk about our backgrounds or our real names. We didn't talk too much about football. If you talk about about Pirates or Swallows or Kaizer Chiefs, comrades can know where you come from. They will trace you. You talk about Black Aces, they will know that, oh that one, he's from Mpumalanga. And as I was talking in Zulu and Sesotho and Shangaan and Pedi, so it was not easy for them to trace me.

At night, when we were sleeping, we used to talk about guns and what was most accurate, and how good the the AK and Russian guns were compared to Western guns.

**Did you meet meet Rashid at the camp?**

No. Rashid I saw in Maputo before I went to Angola and when I came back.

**Now what were the conditions like in the camp?**

I enjoyed being there. I was treated special. I was like a guest. I knew that I would leave at any time. The food was good. Other comrades used to take a turn cooking food, but I was excluded due to my special training.

**And did you sense any frustration amongst the comrades about wanting to go home and fight? Or were you not there long enough to get to know?**

I did get that. They wanted to come back and wipe out everything. Some of them were bored there. They knew that I'm a newcomer from home, so they wanted to talk about what the political atmosphere in the country was like. Had things changed? I said, no, the White man is still the White man.

**So, then you're called to suddenly pack your bags and go.**

But when I was packing my bag, George said let's go hunting.

**What would you hunt?**

Maybe buffalo, kudu, rabbits. Sometimes we would go to the river, we would throw hand grenades in to catch the fish.

**The environmentalists won't like that!**

(Laughter) Yes...

**When you get back to Maputo, what then?**

I was taught there were a lot of spies. Don't trust anyone. And my fear was that I might be captured and then taken back to South Africa. It is true there were spies because when I was arrested, I was told I was trained by who and when I left Maputo which airline I took from Zambia, and when did I leave the camp in Matola.

In Maputo I was taken to a Portuguese lady called Donna Edalela, she was a member of the Communist Party of Portugal. She said I'm going to teach you Portuguese. I stayed there. She was a very nice lady. It's where Joe came to visit me sometimes asking me how do I feel. I remember one time he brought a map of Sasol with someone, a black guy, I don't know who he was. He asked me to identify the reactor which I'm talking about, at the heart of Sasol. They brought an aerial photograph. And he asked me where did they bomb it the last time. I showed him. He then sent that black comrade out, he said how many comrades would you like to go with you? I said, no, the training that I got was good. I rather go alone.

He pulled his eyes. Why do you want to go alone? I said because there's a lot of spies around, I might be taking a spy who will sell me out. He laughed. He said no, you did get good training. Yes, there are, even where we are sitting. The lady that you are staying with, have you told her what you are going to do now, that you got training in Angola? I said no. Then Slovo went to ask the lady, Donna Edalela did he say anything to you, what his real name is and all. No, she said. Then Slovo and them approved, said I was good. She had a daughter, Dalisile, who also assisted with my training a bit.

**And Edalela's job was to merely give you a basic ability to speak Portuguese? That was her only role?**

Yes.

**How long did you spend there?**

I think two or three months.

**Why did you need to have Portuguese because you were going back home anyway?**

I had to fit in with the Mozambicans and not be too different. I had to learn greetings and other things in Portuguese. She also changed my clothes to fit to the environment there.



Patrick Chamusso, Two Sisters

**But you speak Shangaan fluently?**

Yes.

**And when you crossed the border you communicated with the Frelimo people – so?**

They spoke in Portuguese, but I spoke Shangaan...

**But they understood you?...**

Yes. But Joe wanted me to fit in more...

**So then as Joe checks with her, she says you didn't tell her who you are and where you came from and where you've just come from?...**

Yes. And then when Joe left, I did ask the lady what Joe said. She said Joe was asking me if you had told me your real name because you're not allowed to tell me. And she told me about the Communist Party in Portugal, how they dodge the police. She was also arrested in Portugal. She suffered also.

**What was she doing in Mozambique?**

Oh, I don't know, but she was in the house all the time. Her daughter was there, as I said.

And she trained me - how you can work with the enemy without letting the enemy know that you know that this is the enemy, and many other underground tricks. I respect that lady, even today, Donna Edalela. If it wasn't for her, I would be in Death Row like David (Moisi) and others.

**Can you remember two or three things that she told you?**

Yes, she taught me how to walk and fit in with people. Also to try to see if I'm being followed. If the enemy is following you, you don't just turn around and show the person that you know. You can even go and ask that same person the way to get somewhere. And she taught me that if it's a woman, you can also get to know her and even become her lover and try to get information. It's what I did in Swaziland otherwise I wouldn't have survived. She used to take me to the beach, and we even walked during the night. She said she wanted me to adjust to different situations and just fit in, not to look different from other people.

**What's next?**

Then Joe and Rashid came.

**This was the first time you met Rashid after you come back?**

No, he used to come to the ANC place in Matola.

**How many people were there in Matola?**

More than twenty.

**Have you met Comrade Donna Edalela since 1994?**

No.

**Is she alive?**

She might have died.

**Slovo paid a major role in encouraging you, what was Rashid's role?**

Rashid was very quiet. He was worried that I was going in alone. Maybe he wasn't sure about me. But he didn't want to tell me. He didn't say a lot to me.

Rashid said that I'll get my passport, a car and everything in Swaziland. I must meet with George. But I musn't tell him about the operation.

I jumped over the fence from Mozambique into Swaziland. Rashid went with me, then he went back to Maputo. Somebody took me into Swaziland. I didn't trust George. He was not careful, too relaxed, drinking, too much with the ladies.

I was told to pass the South African border at about two o'clock when they are changing shifts. I could smell a rat. Then I said no, how come George says that I must go through the border, but in my biography, I've told them that I've been arrested many times. They might have my picture there.

I also didn't trust Willie Williams, maybe he was a double agent?

I was staying with George and another comrade. I was given a Makarov. The next morning, I heard some Swazi ladies in another flat saying there's a new person in our flat and other things, and I got suspicious. But then I thought let me get to know them. I told one of them I was James Mabuza and George was my uncle. But I knew that she was a spy.

**How did you know?**

She had a pistol.

**Was it exposed?**

I saw a South African pistol in her purse. I talked to her a lot. She wanted to take me to lunch, but that's how comrades get kidnapped. I said no, can't you just buy something, we can eat it in the flat? She said she would come to my room. I said no, my uncle won't allow that. She asked what he was doing. I said he works for the government. I slept with her. First time I'm telling anybody this. And when she went to the bathroom, I checked, and I found that

she's not a Swazi, as she told me, she had a South African ID and her name was Ruth Matomela from Bloemfontein.

### **That's when you saw the pistol?**

Yes, but I didn't touch the pistol. Also, I was trained that if you've touched a bag, you must leave it like you found it. Maybe she was testing me. When she came out of the bathroom, she went to the bag and put her hand into it to measure if it's still the same.

And when I went to get a picture for the passport, I wasn't happy that the photographer clicked too many times, and I asked George to get the negatives from him. But George said, ah no, he's a comrade, don't worry. And then he said tomorrow you are going. You will be having a Datsun Stanza. They packed everything into a side door in a hidden place. You must go through the border. Here's your passport, James Mabuza. I don't have to ask you where you go, but your limpet mines and the pistol is on the side. I said just like that? Yes, he said, and gave some money for petrol.

### **While you were out of the country, did you get any allowance for your daily needs?**

No. The first money that I had was when I was with Donna Edalela.

Anyway, George showed me everything about the car. I wanted an AK47 folding butt. Rashid told me we don't have that, but we will give you a Makarov. But I'm going for a big mission, it's only eight rounds in a Makarov, if we have any skirmish, you can't fight back with a Makarov.

George gave me phone number for Slovo in Maputo. He said I can phone him from a call box in South Africa.

I was told which garage to get petrol from in Swaziland. I wasn't allowed to make my own decision. I was suspicious of that guy at the garage, and after I left there, I looked in the mirror and a car was following me. I pulled the car away from the road near the border and went to a bush and took the explosives out and hid it there.

At the border they said, oh James Mabuza, where are you going? I said I'm going to Florida. I have a dry-cleaning business in Swaziland so some of my parts have broken, and you only get them in South Africa. Oh, they said, wait. On the other side you know who was there, Colonel Visser? You know who's Colonel Visser? The guy who arrested me in Sasol, who tortured me in Sasol for the whole three months. In that glass you can't see him, but he can see

you. This guy went to him with my passport, they said I must wait. I waited, very calm, I was well trained. But I can see that I'm in the hands of the enemy. But since I didn't have anything in the car, I didn't have any problem.

When he came back, he said I'll give you thirty days. And when I walked to the car there were police dogs that went exactly where the limpet mine and pistol were. I think they got a tip; I was sold out in Swaziland – because they went to look where it was. But I had removed them before I crossed the border. They thought that they were catching a big fish, but there was nothing there. That was not instruction of Rashid. That was not instruction of George. They said I must pass with those things. But I took my own initiative and used my own instinct. Then they went to check the number plate of the car.

**You had a Swazi number plate?**

No, South African. They went inside, they said we didn't find anything.

JS told me that it's important to take your own decisions and do your own thing. Don't depend on anybody. And it helped.

**What seems to be very consistent about you is your constant suspicion, about almost everybody and everything?**

Yes.

**Why then did you go to that garage in Swaziland if you were suspicious in the first place?**

No, I wanted to make sure that my suspicion, my instinct is true, and I found that it is. But you need to know who your enemy is and then you can work around this. I liked to work with somebody who thinks that I don't know his an enemy. That was part of my training.

**But your vehicle did have a dead letterbox?**

Yes.

**And the dogs are able to smell this?**

Yes.

**Even if it's a Dead Letter Box with nothing in it?**

Yes.

### **Now Visser is looking at you, how come he didn't recognise you?**

But they wanted to catch me with the explosives. Maybe they thought that I would get the explosives from inside the country, and they wanted to see who my contacts were and catch us when we were about to carry out the operation?

### **So they followed you?**

Yes. When I was arrested this time Colonel Visser told me that he was there at the border and they were surprised there were no explosives in the car.

And when they were searching, they put a detector under the car. I think you may see that in the movie. That's not fiction. That's true.

### **How did you know they did that?**

I stopped on the way to take everything out of the car and then I looked underneath the car. It was there, it's a small thing, round. I could see from my car mirror I was being followed. I said that's good. I like that. As long as I know they are following.

Anyway, I went to Vandyksdrift in Witbank where the coal mines are. I had a friend there called Zebra. Actually, he worked in Sasol also, and after the explosion he was detained and fired. After that they reinstated him. I trusted him. When I knocked on the door, hey man, is it you, we hear that you went to Mozambique? Who told you that? Oh, we heard, man. Those are rumours, man. We heard. I said no, I didn't go to Mozambique. He said don't worry, even if you went to Mozambique, I'm in also.

I said you are in in what? He said, no, I'm in in what the ANC does. Which ANC? He said, oh come on Patrick! I said, no, my name is not Patrick. I told him the truth and I showed my passport. I said I'm James Mabuza, don't ever call me Patrick. Are you still working in Sasol? He said yes. And then I asked what is going on. He said, hey there's big lights and big towers there now, the soldiers are there.

And I asked Zebra for his van. He said what for? I said don't ask me. I went to some shops. There were some ladies. I bought them some cool drinks. The police must be thinking what kind of a guerilla is this one. No man we think we had a mistake about this guy.

In the morning the police came to Zebra's area. There was a strip search of every house. They didn't start in the house where I was, they started somewhere in these houses.

And they took also the dogs to the car. I told Zebra that look these are my enemy, they are looking for me. Then he said why they don't arrest you. They don't arrest me because I don't have anything.

**Except possibly for using a false passport?**

Passport, but for that I'll get six to twelve months. But they they knew that I went for training, but they wanted to catch me using explosives. They were told by spies in the ANC that I was coming into the country.

I took the car with Zebra with Zebra's children. I went for shopping and then I dodged the police. I went to take my bag another place. I transported my things to Oggies near Kendal where there's a dump mine there. And from there you can go underground to Sasol. I put the bag of explosives and I came back.

**You had how many limpet mines were there?**

Five.

**And what else you had there?**

And one Makarov.

**That's all you had?**

Yes, that's all. They didn't give me even a hand grenade. That's why I was so suspicious.

**You thought you were being set up by comrades in Swaziland?**

Yes, I felt it was a set up. I did ask for hand grenades and other things, but they wouldn't give them to me. I said I'm going to blow up the place, like it or not, but I won't be sold out. I won't be caught like a chicken. In Kendal I went to stay in another house. A caravan was stationed across the road there and they were looking with binoculars at the house I was in.

**So, you were still driving the car that you crossed the border with?**

Yes.

**Knowing they're following you?**

Yes, knowing that they are following me.

**And they're tracking you?**

I didn't even take the track away. I used Zebra's van.

**How did you go to cross the border again to get your bag of explosives from the Swaziland side?**

I used Zebra's van. I parked it near the border, then I jumped over the fence and brought my things for the mission across the border into South Africa.

I don't want them to know that I knew that they were following me. I let them work and let me work too and then we will see who's better in the game. The caravan remained there. I asked some people when that caravan came there. They said it came since you were here, since yesterday. It confirmed my instinct. I phoned that phone number for JS and I told the person who answered that I have a patch – that is the code word which means somebody is following me.

I packed the car and went to a shop nearby. The police were concentrating on the car. I took a taxi to Evenda and then Secunda. Then I went to check everything, the final routine. When I came back the caravan was there. In the morning it was found that two white men were dead and their guns were taken. I don't know who took it. Maybe there was an MK unit in the area or maybe it was a robbery?

I removed the detector in the car and put it in a bucket of water. And then I drove to Kinross. I had my bag with the limpet mines and Makarov. I was ready that if any car follows me now, I will stop and go shoot them - because I was now tired of hide and seek.

I went to to one of mines in Secunda. I knew the area very well. Then I saw one of the security guys with his tag, I greeted him. Oh, do you want a job? I said no, I don't need a job, is the coal still coming from this mine? He said yes. I wanted to make sure that the belt was still working. I went to buy a Sasol working uniform, an overall, and a hat also. On my overall was written 'Sasol'. And then I went in and jumped on to the coal belt.

**What time would that have been?**

It was probably half past eight in the evening.

**But how did you get into the mine, on that belt?**

The belt is very long and they had a small fence and I just jumped over. I'm a soldier, man.

**Surely Sasol was taking precautions after the 1980 bombing?**

Yes, but they never thought that somebody will come in like that. They had towers with soldiers, they were looking for somebody who would come from outside with maybe a rocket launcher, not someone who will come through the coal mine in a conveyor belt into Sasol.

**Was this your original idea or did you discuss it with Slovo?**

No, this was my idea. I discussed it with Slovo and he agreed. Nobody else knew.

**Weren't you making Zebra vulnerable because you knew you were being followed, if you got caught on your mission, surely the police would have also arrested Zebra as your accomplice?**

When I was arrested, they went back to Zebra.

**So, it was unfair to him?**

Yes, it wasn't fair but there was no other place I could go. He was the only person I could trust to lend me a car and be loyal.

**Did he really know you wanted it for your underground activities?**

Yes, but he didn't know what for and what my mission was.

**And he was prepared to do it?**

He was prepared to do it. I talked to him...

**How long does it take from the time you get onto the conveyor belt to the time you get inside Sasol? And how did you hide in the coal?**

No, this belt is on the surface, not underground. I just climbed on it like you are getting a ride, like someone who's working there. And I was wearing the uniform so when people saw me, they just greeted me. I didn't have a bag by then. The limpet mines were under my uniform. The plant, it's about five to

seven kilometres wide and I didn't want to go where Moisi and them blew it because my agreement with JS was that I would hit the reactor, which would damage the whole plant and stop it working.

But there were a lot of people there. And our agreement with Rashid, JS is that nobody must die because we are fighting for the workers and the workers will support us if we do the explosion properly. So, I put one limpet mine on the water tank. I set it for fifteen minutes. I wanted it to explode while I'm still at the plant so that when people start running, I will go for the reactor. Once the water tank exploded people started running to the gate. I went to the reactor. I managed to put another limpet mine on the reactor. There were big lights switched on now, it was like daylight, and the place was full of cars of security people.

I put another limpet mine on the water pipe so that they couldn't get chemical water to extinguish the reactor. And then I ran back with the other people.

My miscalculation was that I didn't know that as soon as the water tank explodes the security guys came immediately onto the plant and rushed to the reactor.

I got back in Evenda where my car was and went to Witbank. There were so many police cars and ambulances rushing towards Sasol. Nobody was checking cars leaving from Sasol.

I then went to Transalloys in Witbank, which was supplying Sasol with electricity. I put two limpet mines on the power station there. They went off.

I only now had my Makarov.

**So you put the one limpet mine on the water tank at Sasol...**

Yes. The reason was to let people get out because we're not allowed to harm people.

**And you timed it to go off fifteen minutes later?**

Yes.

**And then you put the other limpet mine on the reactor?**

Yes.

**Now they discovered that before it explodes?**

Yes, they discovered that.

**How many minutes was the timer for on the reactor?**

About twenty to twenty-five minutes.

**On reflection now, did you think maybe if you made it fifteen minutes rather than twenty, twenty-five it may have succeeded?**

Yes, it would have succeeded. But I thought I should give time for the people to evacuate. My mission was that no one must die.

**On reflection, did you think you should've reduced the time or not? Or you think...**

No, I think twenty to twenty-five minutes was right as it would give people enough time to be out by then.

**So, in other words there was nothing you could have done to have stopped them from finding the limpet mine at the reactor?**

I didn't know that the police would work out that the explosion at the water tank was to make them go so that I can target the reactor. They also rushed to the reactor. I think they were expecting an attack on Sasol, but they didn't know when it would happen. The police later told me that they knew the ANC would come to hit the reactor, that's the main target, not the tank

**And what about the third limpet mine - on the water pipe? What happened to that? Was it also discovered before it exploded?**

No, it exploded. The water pipe was linked to the water tank. The timer was shorter for that so both the water tank and water pipe explosions would take place before the reactor exploded.

**And after you left Sasol, you put two limpet mines on an electricity substation?**

Yes, in Witbank, about a hundred kilometres from Sasol.

**On the actual operation within Sasol did you discuss with Slovo where exactly you'd put the limpet mines in Sasol?**

Yes, we did. But not the water pipe bomb. That I decided.

**Was it part of the plan to also put the remaining limpet mines on the other targets?**

No. I took my own initiative. I had these two extra limpet mines, so I used them.

**Do you know that there are comrades who feel that you became vulnerable to being arrested because of these unplanned operations? But you're saying you only carried out two other operations?**

Why should I be arrested with stuff on me? I don't want to be caught with it. Why should I give the arms to the enemy? And a lot of comrades used to be caught with arms, explosives and cash. It goes to the enemy and gets used to kill other comrades. Why should I do that? I said here's a power station that provides electricity to Witbank. Why can't I blow it up? And I also hit Transalloy which was supplying Sasol. Even if they catch me, I'll have nothing on me. Even if they take me to court, what are they going to charge me with?



Photos related to the movie *Catch a Fire*, 2006



**So did you know that Slovo used to call you 'Hotstuff'?**

And Mac too.

**Why 'Hotstuff'?**

When I met Slovo after I came out of Robben Island, he called me 'Hotstuff'. I said why you call me 'Hotstuff'? He said, no, man, you were incredible, you were doing such hot stuff, and I'm sorry we didn't give you the AK, grenades and other things. But you were very hot. You took the initiative to do other missions, which others didn't do like that.

**What was the effect of the power station bombing?**

It was very successful. The place went dead, even far from Witbank. It took them 3 months for them to repair it.

**And that happened like within the space of an hour or so after the Sasol bombing?**

Yes

**But did it take them three months for even industry to get going again?**

They used generators.

**So how did you get caught?**

You know, I missed my daughter. I was foolish. My mistake was to try to go and see her. My wife and I had separated. My plan was to take my daughter to Mozambique. But there was a roadblock. I was travelling very fast and I tried to turn around. I was in the Stanza, it was a very light car, and the car rolled over three times. I got out and ran but was shot in the leg by the police.

**Why would they suspect you? Simply because you're driving so fast?**

I think the police in the whole of the Eastern Transvaal were notified to look out for a Stanza.

**How would they have known you were driving a Stanza?**

At the border. And they were following me for lot of the time, as I said.

I was shot through the door of the car in my leg. I could feel the bullet with my finger, it hit the bone.

**So what happens then?**

Then I realised I couldn't go to my daughter as I will be putting her at risk. I was on my way to Oshoek but got caught on the fourth day, in the morning. My leg, I couldn't go anymore. Actually, when the car rolled over, the passport and the Makarov fell out and the police made copies of my photo and distributed it all over, also by using a helicopter.

**Were they dropping pamphlets?**

Yes. Some people said, hey, we know where he stays. They knew where my daughter stayed. They went there and I wasn't there. I was on my way near Loskop Dam. It was raining by that time. And the police had dogs. I was trained and I knew that if you have dogs following you, you have to cross over water.

So, on the fourth day I got to my girlfriend's place near Middelburg. But the police had gone to my former wife, and she told them if Patrick is injured, he might have gone to his girlfriend near Middelburg.

**How long did you walk for before you got to Middelburg? And weren't you in pain?**

Yes, it was very painful. I walked about eighty or ninety kilometres. I was very young and strong then. and I also I did survival training in Angola.

A farmer told the police he saw somebody running on the farm, but he didn't hand me over. It was my ex-wife that sent the police to that farm, where my girlfriend's father had a house.

**But for somebody so security conscious, why would you go to the one place that they are likely to trace you to – your girlfriend?**

My leg was wounded, and I thought that she would help me to remove the bullet.

**Despite your injury you managed to walk for 80 to 90 kilometres. How did you manage?**

When things get bad, you have to go beyond your training, your capacity. I just exploded every strength that I had. And I was sure that if I could reach Komatipoort, I would call Donna Edadela and she would come and pick me up and I was safe. But I couldn't make it.

**So basically, you were arrested because you went to see your daughter?**

Yes.

**If it were not for that you would've gotten away?**

Yes.

**So, what happens after you are arrested?**

I was taken to Middelburg Police Station. They stripped me of everything. Colonel Visser, Colonel McIntyre came, and the military and other security people from Pretoria. Well, well, they said, if you were working for us, you would be the richest man in the world today. I said no way. Visser said I was there, behind the glass when you stamped your passport at the border. Where were your weapons?

I said my limpet mines were already in Sasol. I didn't want to tell him the truth otherwise they would go and pick up Zebra. Zebra would get sentenced also. When did you realise the detector? No, I realised the detector. What about those white two soldiers who died at the caravan? I said I don't know anything about that. Where are their guns? I said you can see I don't have them. I said I didn't know that they were after me. Colonel Visser said we put those people behind you, but we found them dead, two white people dead.

Then they insisted that I have the guns and where did I hide them? I told them maybe another unit went there. I said that Slovo was is a very clever man. He couldn't put a man like me to do this big Sasol operation without sending a tail, so maybe another unit did that or somebody else who saw this caravan in the location.

**When you got released did you ask Slovo whether he knew who attacked the caravan?**

No, I didn't think about that.

**So, what happens? They torture you?**

Yes. I was arrested on 27 of October 1981. My first interrogation started at 8 o'clock in the morning and it lasted about 30 hours. It was very painful torture and endless beating, and they came in groups one after the other. And on the third day a drug squad came from Pretoria as it was told that I was Joe's bodyguard and they injected me with the so-called truth drugs and showing me pictures of comrades, but I was well prepared and didn't give them anything.

**What did they really want because you were a one-man show? There was little they could get from you...**

They didn't know that I was a one-man show. They were used to catching units of two to five people. They wanted to know who kept the explosives. To them I didn't admit that I went with a conveyer belt.

**Were you charged for the killing of these two people?**

Yes. But they dropped those charges.

**Because there was no evidence?**

Yes. They took me to the place where the caravan was, and they told me to point at the place and they took pictures. I said why must I point? They said, no, just point there.

**And then they said you were pointing to where you killed them?**

Yes, but I told them they are wrong. My makarov still had eight rounds, what did I kill them with?

**So, you get sentenced to Robben Island for 24 years?**

Yes.

**On Robben Island who came to visit you apart from Mrs Hamman and Mary Burton?**

Father Dominic came as part of an SACC (South African Council of Churches) delegation to visit all the prisoners and then he saw me as part of all the prisoners. Mary Burton also came with Lindi Themba from Soweto. Mary asked her to come. But I didn't know her. When I got released, she took me to Soweto, but I didn't like her. I went back to the suburb and stayed with Mary Hamman. The first week I came out from prison, I went to look for a job. I didn't go and cry for attention. No, I started to look for myself.

Although being on Robben Island was painful what really really hurt me was my ex-wife came to testify against me. When she walked to the box, I could hear her shoes, *koh, koh, koh*, and then her testimony was stronger than the others because she said that I once told her that I'll kill all the whites. And now there were those two whites who were killed in the caravan. But I never said such a thing to her. She was the mother of my child, but she didn't know me very well. So, my lawyer asked her if she knew my other name and she said she didn't. The police promised to give her R80 000 for the testimony. You know how much they gave her? Eight rand to take a taxi home.

**So she decided to give evidence against you partly because she was offered money?**

And actually, they told her that even in Swaziland I had a wife and she was already very angry with me.

**So, she was bitter?**

Yes, yes. They brainwashed her that Patrick now is in the ANC, he won't care for you. That's why even when he was injured, he didn't come to you, he went to his other girlfriend.

**Have you forgiven her now?**

Why should I hold a grudge against her? She didn't send me there. I've forgiven her. Even when my daughter was about to get married, the thing that made me cross is that she said we must go and sit with another man to discuss *lobola*. I said I don't want to sit with with the man that you have and discuss the affairs of my daughter. This is my daughter. She said, no, she wants that man there. I said okay, you discuss the lobola without me. They settled it. I said, okay, forget about it.

**Has she apologised to you for what she said in court?**

No. But what made me happy is that her mother arranged with her relative, Connie, that whatever happened when Patrick comes out of jail you must marry him. And then I was married to her, and we have three girls.

And then it didn't work out because she couldn't go home to visit her mother or her sisters and I couldn't go there. I didn't like it when she visited her brothers, and I couldn't go with her to visit her mother because my ex-wife would be there. Then they discussed the matter and decided she must leave me.

She didn't divorce me through fighting. We were from Los Angeles, I used to travel with her with for the movie (*Catch a Fire, based on Chamusso's life*) premiere. Her grandmother liked me. But my wife said she can't take pressure from her mother, but she won't take anything from me. She said thank you so much for giving gave me a nice life. She said you also showed me the world. And she agreed that I should take custody of the children. She spoke about all the good things and reminded me that we met on Valentine's Day. And we also got divorced on Valentine's Day again.

**How many years were you together?**

Fourteen.

**And your children are how old?**

My daughters are 21 and 20, and my son is 16 years old.

And she never said that she won't come here and won't call my children. She saw that she hurt me by saying that she's leaving me.

**Has your first daughter forgiven her mother for appearing in court against you?**

I think so.

**Do you see her?**

No, I don't see her.

**But you actually got detained because you went to look for her...**

Yes, but she doesn't care now. But one day she will care. I think also what made her cross was that I was travelling around with the movie with my wife and not her mother. But I told her that her mother was not in my life anymore so I couldn't go around with her.

**So what was it like being on Robben Island?**

I was given 24 hours. When I got there Govan Mbeki was in the reception centre with a white hat.

**But he was in a different section from you?**

Yes, but he was in the reception. I think he might have been there on purpose to meet new prisoners and to see that they don't get treated badly. I was 32 - how am I going to handle 24 years? People used to tease me. Even David Moisi, he used to say everyone here has got about fifteen years but you, man, got 24. How did you do that? He said they will go out of prison but, *wena*, you'll be stuck here. And your father is from Mozambique, they might deport you. So, everyone on Robben Island used to tease me.

I used to act stories on the stage. Sometimes I would put on a trial, I would talk to comrades about their trial and then I would stage it. I also did Dr Ramlakan's, Jeff Radebe's and Sbu Ndebele's trials. Comrade Jeff taught me how to read.

When we heard about the ANC's unbanning comrades teased me that they will be leaving but I have too many years still left to serve so I will have to remain behind.

Every Friday we used to get letters from outside, the others, but not me.

**So you learnt to read in prison?**

Yes.

**You didn't do any studies?**

No.

**So, at the moment are you able to read fully?**

Yes.

**And you can write?**

Yes.

**You'd never ever been to school?**

No, I never sat behind a desk.

**But Gwala and Mbeki get released in 1987 - so didn't you begin to anticipate you're going to get released?**

Yes.

**So, the day you are released, how do you feel? What happened? How soon before do they tell you?**

Three days before my birthday.

When they called comrades to be released, they called my number so that I can go to the reception. And when I reached the reception they said, ah no Chamusso, you are not going now.

Then a warder came with a letter for my release. Phew, I thought at last I'm going out. At last. I didn't believe him, but on that day the comrades lifted me on their shoulders. At four o'clock I was in the boat. And Trevor Manuel met us

at the harbour. Some comrades from the "Call of Islam," who were friends of Ahmed Timol, came and they took me to their house. I stayed there for 3 days

I was asked to fly to Johannesburg. I said I want to go by train. I said I want to buy my own ticket, give me the money, I will set my own date to go, no one will know when I'm going. They said but you are free now, man, don't worry about the security issues. I was supposed to go to Lindi Mthembu in Soweto. She wanted to organise a welcome for me. But I knew that I'm a wanted man, and I was concerned that somebody might target me. I couldn't just trust the Boers. So, I didn't go there.

**Do you still feel insecure? You feel somebody from the previous apartheid regime might target you?**

Yes, I still take precautions. I know maybe others don't. But maybe our training was very different. Some comrades who were in the camp, their mind is on money and drinking, and it's sad.

**In Johannesburg, you go to Shell House?**

Yes.

**What happened there?**

They said you want to see Mandela. I said no, I want to see Comrade Slovo. Does he know you, they asked? When they opened the door, he was sitting, when he saw me, he immediately got up and I was so impressed. I was so happy. He said sit down. He said how is everything, Hotstuff? We were both in tears. But we had made it!

That meeting I had with Slovo, it was like a son meeting a father. We were hugging and so happy and everyone there at Shell House who saw us they wondered who is this guy, why is Slovo getting up for him and hugging him. It was very emotional.

I'm so impressed, he said, no one pulled off a mission like yours alone, and you were right about going alone, but how did you go to the border? I explained and he said, very good. Then he revealed that when I first got to Maputo, they thought I was a spy.

**So, when did you meet Madiba?**

The same day. Slovo asked him to meet me. I met him many times after that.

Fatima Hajaig came that day too and she said if I want, I could work at the Islamic Trust. Other comrades came with food and all. Come and take this, come and do that. But I didn't want to depend on anybody.

**That's unusual for somebody just released from the Island without any assets...**

I went to Roodepoort to work. Then I went to Comrade Fatima and accepted the other job. We were distributing food to an orphanage in Soweto. I also learned that Rashid came from Roodepoort. I met the Dadabhais. They gave me a flat to stay there without me paying rent and other support as well.

**After your job at the Islamic Trust what did you do?**

I got married. I started selling radios, cellphones and blankets. I was the first black man in Kriel to buy a house in 1993 in town for R80 000.

**When did you start the Two Sisters Orphanage and why?**

Two Sisters was launched in 1995 when I realised that many people were dying of HIV and Aids just like flies. I then decided that I should try to help them.

**Is it true that Slovo offered you a job in the Intelligence Department?**

Yes. But I didn't want to work in the state. And I didn't want to be with the apartheid spies.

**And you used your pension to start the orphanage?**

Yes.

**How is the orphanage doing?**

I never went to the government ask for funds. The money that I got from the movie I put into the orphanage but now it's running out. Support from overseas is also going down. So, I might close it.

**It's said that when you thought you'd get the death sentence while facing trial, you decided that if that didn't happen, you would give back something to people on your release?**

They told me on 6 December, it'll be 24 years. Go and join Mandela, the police said. It was a big sigh of relief. But I said when I come out from prison, I want

to work in the community and give back to people. I don't like this thing about me-me all the time. It's what's happening now. There's nothing collective now. And Slovo was there for the collective, the Communist Party was there for the collective. But today everyone is there for himself.

**Did you join the Communist Party?**

No.

**Are you a particularly religious person?**

Yes.

**Is that a motivating factor in your commitment?**

Yes. I'm a Muslim. My name really is Abdul Rashid Chamusso

**When did you convert to Islam?**

On Robben Island.

**Why?**

We used to clean the cemetery of the Malaysians who came there long ago. And then I met Achmat Cassiem from *Qibla*. And he explained to me about militant Islam.

**Are you a practising Muslim at the moment?**

Yes.

**And your children?**

No.

**How did you end up here in Mpumalanga?**

It's quite an interesting story. When I came back from Robben Island I was staying in Dadabhais flat in Bekker Street in Johannesburg. I also had a few friends among the Indian people. There were a lot of sex workers during the night in Hillbrow and sometimes I used to ask them why do you sell your body. Where do you come from? They said they are from Mpumalanga. Some of them died there – in Hillbrow. I was working on an Islamic project with Mr Mohammed in Commissioner Street. And some of them we had to bring to

Mpumalanga to be buried. And then I moved here. Some of my comrades who came from Robben Island were from Mpumalanga. So, I came here. Also, after our release from Robben Island, it was not safe, and after the killing of one of my best friends, Comrade, Willies Skiti in Soweto, I moved to Witbank. There too I used to work to help sex workers. Actually, I wanted to do good for people, to change the lives of people.

**Did you think the movie (*Catch a Fire*) that was made of your experience was reasonably accurate or did it exaggerate your life a bit to make it more interesting for the movie audiences?**

One half of it is what I liked, but half of it not. They didn't put the police chasing me in the movie, and I was chased for three days with a bullet in my leg. They also left out the interrogation and my time on Robben Island. The actor I thought should play my role was Denzil Washington, but I was told that he's very expensive. Cuba Gooding Junior also. But Derek Luke was okay.

**The film was nominated for some awards? Did it win any?**

No, because it was in the time of Bush. A political movie like *Catch a Fire* was not acceptable. But they liked *Tsotsi* because that's a crime movie and they gave them an award. That's what I was told.

**You visited various cities for the launch of the movie. Which city or cities did you most like and why?**

I liked Los Angeles. It's not crowded like New York, which has too many people, too many big buildings, you have to queue for everything, you can't do things quickly.

I went to Japan after the Tsunami to set up an orphanage there. I went with my three children. I didn't like Sushi and all these things. But other things were very nice. You won't see any paper on the streets. It's so clean. Not like here.

**Who invited you?**

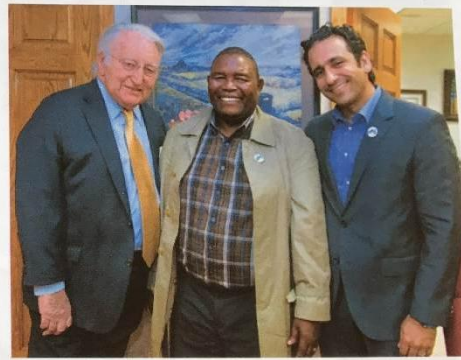
One of the people from *Rooibos Tea*. They export the tea to Japan. They made donations to my *Two Sisters* orphanage, and they asked me to go to Japan to talk to them about orphanages as they were forming new ones there after the *tsunami*.

**How long were you there for?**

About two or three weeks.



College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific alumnus Habib Sadeghi, DO '00, far right, brought Patrick Chamusso, second from right, to Western University of Health Sciences for a visit and tour Thursday, Feb. 13, 2014. Jeff Keating, executive director of public affairs & marketing, left, led the tour. Katie Fisher, DO '83, assistant professor of internal medicine at COMP-Northwest in Lebanon, Ore. second from left and Susan Mackintosh, DO '92, associate dean for academic affairs in COMP, middle, and others also met with Chamusso. (Jeff Malet, WesternU)



Philip Pumerantz, PhD, founding president of WesternU, Patrick Chamusso, and College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific alumnus Habib Sadeghi, DO '00, at Western University of Health Sciences Thursday, Feb. 13, 2014. (Jeff Malet, WesternU)

### **Patrick Chamusso, out of the country**

### **The sense I have is that of all the people you interacted with, Joe Slovo stands out for you. Why is that?**

You see, there's one man who did the most for me, that's Joe Slovo. He changed my whole life, the way I see things. He's the best.

I trusted him. And he never lied to me. And I never lied to him too. He said we are infiltrated. Rashid didn't tell me about this.

Even Rashid, he didn't trust me.

### **Why? Did Rashid think you were a spy? Or is it that he thought you can't do the job?**

He thought I can't do the job. But maybe he was thinking that I'm a spy.

I didn't talk much with Rashid. I invited him to the *Catch A Fire* movie in Joburg.

### **What else about Joe Slovo?**

Joe Slovo was a remarkable man and if he and and Chris Hani lived, we wouldn't have the crisis we are having today.

### **Do you want to say anything else about Rashid?**

Yes, Rashid is a good Commander but since we came back, he does not see us. We thought he dumped us also.

### **So, what do you think about the present situation in the country?**

I fought for something else. But what can I do? Many of the people in the top jobs, they didn't do much when the ANC was banned. And we who fought for the liberation of South Africa, have been neglected. If you see how many MK people are living, it's just not right. I am much better than the others, but there are too many people who need to be helped.

I still see our women where I live carrying water, which hurts me. I still see our children pass matric but get no jobs while for White people it's not like that. And you go to any bank; you ask for loans they give you a very hard time compared to Whites who are in the same position.

And our own brothers, I'm not insulting them, but they're acting like monkeys. These comrades dumped us. Even the Premier (David Mabuza) now and the former Premier here in Mpumalanga (Mathews Phosa) who claims to have been a Commander in Maputo, when he sees me he pretends like he's talking over the phone. And sometimes he says go and buy anything you want, I'll pay. But I don't want that.

You can't even talk to them, your own comrades, because they are on high. They have money. They drive expensive cars. They have security. But MK comrades get about R6 000 pensions? They won't live with that.

I feel very bad that I spent my time fighting for the good and the good didn't come.

I've done my part. I'm retired. If I could have a small farm to bring my goats, there and sit waiting to die. I don't care about money; I don't care about anything. I don't ask a lot.

**That's hardly anything....and to think what you and your comrades gave to the struggle...**

Yes.

**Is it true that you met Visser by chance one day? Can you describe what happened?**

Yes, I was going to Witbank before the Machadodorp Machasdorp toll gate. It was 1998. I met Colonel Visser. He had a puncture. And it was raining. But when they arrested me, I was thin, so he didn't recognise me now. He had a small jack, but he had a big bakkie.

When I told my wife this is the man who tortured me, she said we should go, she was frightened. I said no. I said *Meneer* do you need help? He said ja, I

have two punctures, but I have only one spare and Machadodorp is very far. I said okay, can I take you there, you fix your tyre? He went with me and then fixed his car. And then he said okay, let's go to my house in Witbank, I'll give you some money because you used your petrol.

My wife said, Patrick, please, maybe he's going to pull out a gun. I said relax, this guy doesn't know who I am. And then when we reached his place, he said come inside. Truly speaking, I was scared. I said no, you go with my wife, and he gave her R50 for petrol. I said to my wife she must ask for his phone number. When I reached home, I phoned him. I think he was still in the force. I said I'm the one who helped you with the tyre. He said, oh, you also have a problem, I can come and help you. I said no, do you know who I am? He said no. I helped you with your tyres, but you didn't even ask me my name. But I know you. You are Colonel Visser from Middelburg Police Station. He said ja. I said how's Colonel McIntyre? He said how do you know him? I said my name is Patrick Chamusso. He said, oh, that terrorist from Slovo!...

### **He still called you a terrorist?**

I said yes. But it's a new era now, you must come and have lunch with me, he said. That's why I didn't send you to the death sentence. I said I would come next week. I went to his house and had a gun also for my protection. But the house, was empty. Even the neighbour, didn't know where he went. He's guilty because of what? But me, I've forgiven him.

### **As we draw to a close, can you say how you see the relationship between the armed struggle and the mass struggle?**

I agreed with the MK approach. We had to have the armed struggle linked to the mass struggle. And by the time I came back into the country, the people were accepting the armed struggle more. And we were not fighting the Whites, we didn't want to remove them like the PAC.

### **What were some of the strengths and weaknesses of the operation you waged against Sasol?**

Well, they couldn't believe that we could attack Sasol again and we undermined them.

### **Your suspicious nature? Do you think it's part of who you are, mainly sort of instinctive or is it mainly because of the training you got as a guerilla?**

I had the best instructors.

**But you were deeply suspicious of many people even before you started your training, from what I hear from you? And you were trained quite briefly. So maybe it's both then, instinct and training that explain your suspicious nature?**

Yes.

**For somebody who had just brief training, you were very sophisticated in your operation?**

The thing is that I had this hatred for apartheid and I had to do something.

**You were very determined?**

Even Colonel Visser said they captured many people in the ANC, but he never captured anybody like me.

**You say you owe a lot to your excellent instructors. But maybe their role was mainly to bring out the potential you had anyway?**

You want to say that I was a born fighter? Well, I was pushed into this.