



LEFT: Poster design produced at CAP Media Project for an exhibition of cartoons at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town.

Top & Borrow: Sketches of policemen, drawn while under arrest, 1988

Barred Birthday

After a five-year period of intense political activity, while teaching myself cartooning at the same time, I was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study at the School of Visual Arts in New York, Before I went, I had an exhibition at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, entitled Laughter in the Belly of the Beast. On the night after I took the exhibition down, we were woken up at 3:30 a.m. by security police who had come to detain me. They gave me a few minutes to pack a

bag, and while I was doing this, one of them walked around looking with great interest at all the artwork on the walls - the four of us who lived in the house were all artists. Later, when I was interrogated by this same policeman at

Pollsmoor Prison, his first question was. 'Why do you draw us as pies?' Without thinking, I replied: 'I draw what I see'.

One of the plainclothes policemen standing by was a nasty looking, heavily built individual by the name of Steenkamp, who had a reputation as a tough Special Branch cop. But we couldn't help laughing at his tie, which happened to be in the ANC colours - black and green with a gold-embossed design. He asked me what I was laughing at, but when I pointed out the significance of the colours of his tie, he was not amused. I realised he wasn't the kind of guy to get on the wrong side of. I did sketches of him, and the cop who interrogated me, in a little sketchbook that I had smuggled into prison in my underpants.

At Pollsmoor Prison I met the eight other people who'd been detained at the same time - most of them were fairly senior members of the UDF in the Western Cape. We were then split up into racial and gender groups, which meant that, as the only white male person in the group, I was now all by myself. I was taken to the white political prisoner section - political prisoners were kept apart from the other prisoners - put into a cell, then almost immediately taken for interrogation. After this I was held in solitary. From the cops' questions I learnt that, although they knew who I was, they had got me mixed up with another activist

in our area committee by the name of Isio Shapiro (his real name was also Jonathan). It became clear that all the other people who'd been detained were on the Mandela Birthday Committee, and had been organising events for the celebration of Madiba's 70th birthday. The only important member of that committee who had escaped detention was Jojo.

Madiba's 70th birthday was being celebrated worldwide. In London there was to be the enormous concert at in London truers was to be the chormous concert at Wembley Stadium, and at home activists wanted to organise as many celebrations as possible. The Birthday Committee members with whom I'd been detained included Ngconde Ballour, who later became the cabinet minister in charge of prisons; Bulelani Ngcuka, who later became the head honcho of the National Prosecuting Authority; Saleem Mowzer, who became a provincial cabinet minister; Zoli Malindi, who was the president of the UDF in the Western Cape: Omar Badsha, who later became the national archivist; and Rehana Rossouw, who later became the deputy editor of the Mail & Guardian. I've often thought back to the group of people with whom I've often thought back to the group of people with

whom I was detained and mused about how emblematic it was of the struggle as a whole. In the post apartheid period, activists who'd been joined by their single goal were pulled apart as different concerns pulled them in different directions. Our group later found themselves in government, media, law enforcement, academia and NGOs. Bulelani Ngcuka found himself in a position in which he was required to prosecute former comrades. He fell foul of powerful vested interests and was ousted in what was very much a political manoeuvre. As a cartoonist, I have over the years had something of a similar experience - of having to play the role of watchdog, keeping an eye on the activities of people who'd been comrades in the struggle.

Of those comrades who have moved into government, there are some who have held onto the principles and values of those early days. But, sadly, there are also many who have not

I was held in solitary for five days and then put into a cell next to Willie Hofmeyr, whom I knew well, and who later became head of the National Assets Forfeiture Unit. Knowing that I was now in the same prison as Nelson knowing that I was now in the Same prison as seison Mandela, closer to him than I'd over been, gave me a strange feeling. It also struck me that his birthday was in fact the very reason I'd been detained, even though my arrest had been the result of a mix-up. It made me feel more bonded to him than ever. So I decided to make a birthday card for him, although I knew that the chanc of actually getting it to him were very slim. I still had the little sketchbook that I'd smuggled in with me, and started making some sketches for the card. Of course at that time there were no photos of him, so it was hard to imagine what he looked like in reality. The sketches I came up with what he tooked like in reality. He sketches I came up will were based on early photos I'd seen of him as a young man. The best I could do was to try to remember those images and then to age him a bit. I played with the idea of a cake, which sort of evolved into the image of a multitiered South Africa, with Mandela in prison at the bottom and various bits of machinery, symbolising apartheid and its institutions, above him. I portrayed tremors arising from the combination of his influence and the popular movement that he led. These tremors would shake the foundations of the whole edifice and eventually topple it, but of course Mandela's foundation would remain strong. 's quite fascinating to look back on that vision now, in the light of everything that has happened since.

Willie Hofmeyr and I signed the finished card, and through a warder whom we look to be relatively sympathetic, we tried to get the card to Mandela. But it really didn't get very far. I think it was confiscated by the head of our section of the prison. Recently I made an attempt to locate the card, but it has truly disappeared. All There left are the rough drawings in my prison sketchbook. Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday was on the 18th July, 1988. We were released the following day. A couple of years later, after 'fd returned from studying in the USA, I bumped into Jojo Shapiro at a party.

'I've got a bone to pick with you', I said. 'You know the

cops detained me because they thought I was you.'

'Really?' he replied. 'That's very strange, because while

you were away they detained me because they thought I 'Okay.' I said. 'we're mits!





Top: Two pages from Zapiro's prison journal, 1988 BOTTOM: Cape Times news clipping, 1988

Nine city detainees freed after 11 days



FREE . . . Mr Omer Badaha Beftl, Mr Jonethan Shapiro and Ms Rehena R are holding a poster advertising Mr Shapiro's recent exhibition of care





Autobiographical comic strip produced while studying at the School of Visual Arts in New York, 1988

