

A I think part of my defensive..some of defensive tactics were to..a lot of the time I was interrogated in Cape Town and then in Pretoria and then taken back to Cape Town again and so forth.

So I actually spent quite a lot of time with Security Police in landrovers, being carried back and forth and..

Q Transported back?

A By Security Police and from C.T. to Pretoria and back again.

Q Where were you arrested?

A At home. I'd live with Lynn in Wynberg.

Q In the middle of..5 in the morning?

A No it wasn't. They'd arrested the Rabkins at about 5 in the morning. They were due to leave for England that day and they were obviously aware of that and got onto them.

And they didn't actually know who..they knew there was a third person in the cell but not sure who that third person was. And the Rabkins didn't divulge my name but they were able to, as they amassed further information from getting into their house and then working out where we had hidden our stuff, typewriters, gloves and things like this,

they were then, via other things, to track me down. Which happened at about 1 o'clock, then it took them several hours to get to me.

Then..I actually spotted them, surrounding the flat. I was coming home ~~for~~ lunch, from the university. I didn't go into the flats, actually just drove on past it. Then tried to work out what to do.

I was anxious - I thought oh well, they have got onto me clearly and I was going to be arrested. All along I had

A thought I was going to be the first one arrested in the cell because I had been raided by the police as a student and had a file and so forth...in fact a larger file than probably... I remember I was raided in about 1971, living with my mother in a flat and they came. The proverbial two/three o'clock in the morning.

Produced, came with two huge khaki files, marked Jeremy Patrick Cronin which they plonked down on the table and then proceeded to search the flat and I wasn't sure whether to be flattered or disbelieving at the (chuckling) size of these two files - I am quite sure that they had stuffed them, the melodrammatic effect of being able to plonk them down on the table. They had probably stuffed them with bits of empty paper just to give me a fright.

But that raid actually was immediately after Timol, agh, ?-timol and his cell had been arrested. And my name I guess, being back, was on the mailing list and they thought they had found the list of all the people in the underground movement or something. Meanwhile it was just a mailing list. Because they raided some three or four hundred houses that night all round SA.

Only later did one realise that Timol's cell had been cracked and that those raids had been connected to that.

So this was long before I had got active in that sort of way. The ripples of a similar kind of cell acting in that way had hit me.

And they spent about three hours in the flat. They took away the Penguin Book of Russian Verse and a few other books.

So I was aware that the police knew about me and had files on me which in any case would have been to be expected because I had been active in organisation on the campus. So I expected to get arrested first and through detection work actually they managed to get to the Rabkins first.

But when I saw them surrounding the flat I was convinced that they were onto me and that the Rabkins still had some lee way.

A We had various mechanisms for warning each other basically: I can say because the cops know about it now. The idea was the arrangement was to place an entry into the memorium column of the Cape Town newspapers. If I remember it was 'AFG Hemmingway with dearly departed father who died five years ago in SA, in memory.'

And that would be a warning signal to drop everything and go, fly.

I decided to go back to the flat and tell my wife that it looked like they were onto me; that I was going to try and get away and that she should place this warning thing in the newspaper.

There was a secret back...fire escape back entrance into the flat which I had decided I would use. They were surrounded, And I checked out and could see that I could probably get away with it. I did and I walked up the fire escape. It was a 6th floor flat and got into the flat without being seen but they were surrounding the flat outside.

What I didn't notice was that there was a front escalator instead of steps and I went up the back ones, - was that there was someone on the landing between the 5th and 6th floors watching the door. When I entered the flat from the back entrance, that person had picked up the sign and gone into the flat and started ringing the door and hammering etc.

Anyway I spoke to my wife very briefly and grabbed as much money as I could and waited for the knocking to subside, hoping that the person who was knocking - coz looking through the curtains I could see that the others were still waiting for me, a car to arrive from the university.

They had, one of the people at the university, the secretary was a police informer and just before I had left she had asked me, which I then rapidly put together, are you going home for lunch now and what time do you expect to leave etc and she had perpetually been asking questions of that kind.

A I was working in the politics Dept. which was not a great place to be. There was a lot of surveillance of myself going on and so I realised that they were expecting someone to arrive home at one.

Anyway I then left the flat and as I made my way down the stairs, this cop had been hiding just round the corner, came out and started chasing me. Pursuit - laughs - pursuit down the fire escape. He was a big guy and reached over one of the bends and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and there was a bit of wrestling going on and he said he was a policeman and I said I don't believe you, although of course I did.

'Show me your police card' and he said 'sure', and he reached in and pulled out his revolver and put it up against my temple. He said 'that is my police card, you are under arrest.'

He was quite desperate; he couldn't get the other guys who were still scouting the horizon for the blue VW I was coming home in. But he eventually managed to attract their attention and ja, I was caught.

It was obviously an error to go back into the flat and I could myself..looking back..but its..perhaps I shouldn't give what could be construed as lending support to banned organisations but one should always not make rapid decisions in a situation like that.

I should have gone for a long drive, sat down and worked out carefully a plan of action, which I didn't do. I acted somewhat impulsively. With good intentions, but they don't count entirely.

So I was hauled in and the interrogation process began and so forth. In a way fortunately...Timol for instance I would guess had been killed literally under interrogation, because they were pumping him for information which he didn't even have or know.

Obviously they thought that this list that they had for eg. was for some underground network which it wasn't.

A So by the time they got to our cell, they...Raymond Sutner had been another cell doing the same thing. Caught. They had a much clearer picture of the modus apperandi etc. of the cells.

So there was plenty of threat in the interrogation process but I was not actually physically assaulted. I was kept standing and threatened that my wife would be beaten up; those kinds of things which are not very pleasant but...and which I had been well briefed about interrogation and expected.

Spaker VanWyk..Spyker..is a well known ..has been associated with several deaths in detention and was at that stage regarded as the butcher around, was the leading interrogator. Itself was fairly intimidating situ..and the cops were well aware of it and were using it and he interrogated me in a suit which had blood stains all down the front of it.

It was in a tiny, sound proofed compartment in Caledon Square in C.T. and he was playing with electrodes all the way through. I was well aware that detainees, many, had been tortured and electrocuted.

The...I played ignorant and stupid for about 24 hours hoping that, knowing that the Rabkins were due to leave and realised that they seemed to make quite a lot about me now; but hoping at least that they would get away not knowing in fact that they had been pulled in before me.

But slowly, after a while I realised that they, ^{in fact had} both of them as well in detention. And had a lot of information. So it was a pity that they had information but in terms of the actual interrogation situation, ^{it meant that} quite a lot of the heat was off me.

After about 24 hours I more or less confirmed my own involvement in the thing and it had become pretty pointless by that stage to deny it.

Ok, that lasted probably for about a couple of days. That initial interrogation. They then decided to take us up to Pretoria, not exactly sure why.

A But on the way up they seperated David, Sue and myself - we were taken up in seperate landrovers and cars. Sue was about 7 months pregnant at that stage. We had an over night stop on the way up and what they did, it was carefully orchestrated - they would stop for lunch or tea or whatever. At the different stops they would bring Sue and myself together for the first time or David and myself.

Give us some lunch..but sit around waiting to see what would come up in the communication between us. They didn't allow Sue and David to get together but precipitated me into the situation with one then the other.

I think by this stage, my..at first I was fairly quite strong and I was able to handle the interrogation quite well and was quite amused by the various techniques which I knew were going to come. Sort of hard guy then the soft guy offering me lunch and warning me that he really disapproved of Spyker Van Wyk; and the guy lost his temper often and just for my own sake he would like to advise me to cooperate with the guy etc

I knew that all of this kind of thing was coming. I fully expected to get punched up and beaten and probably electrocuted. I wasn't really looking forward to it but realised that that was probably going to happen.

Then after about 24 hours as I say I decided to make a limited statement which I did do. Then a huge wash of guilt overcame me and felt terrible that I had betrayed my comrades and speaking to others who had been through the same process, that is actually the dangerous moment.

Some people are incredibly brave and give the cops nothing or virtually nothing; the majority of people don't succeed in doing that. Succeed for a while then, often in total confusion or because they are deprived of sleep or whatever start saying things.

And the cops immediately move in on that and start making you you feel guilty - they know that you are operating under a code discipline and they move in on a small confession or concession

A and say the others aren't telling us that or whatever. A lot of the time they tell you the others are singing, to encourage you talk to and if you give them a little information, they say: ~~that is~~ interesting, so and so denies this and so you start thinking oh shit, you have really let down the others.

I think ~~that~~ is probably the most dangerous moment because ^{with} a sense of demoralisation they open the gap more and more. And I felt, on the way up to Joberg I had given them a statement and I had implicated Sue actually and both David and Sue had been denying that she had been involved. I felt dreadful about - horrible.

We hadn't agreed actually how to...we had expected I would get caught - in talking through scenarios of how to answer and what to answer etc. hadn't really anticipated the flow of events very well.

So I felt...I remember travelling up in the landrover with Spyker actually it wasn't him it was another ~~two~~ cops and there were these heavy duty vehicles coming the other way; petrol lorries, I was between the two cops in leg irons but I had free hands or in cuffs, but I could have grabbed the steering wheel and taken us into them. I was feeling partly guilty and ja, a bit demoralised at that stage. And I thought that maybe the right action would be to take the landrover and two cops and myself into a petrol lorry and the score would be two one. Laughs.

But then I gradually began to build up some morale again partly by being a bit 'cheeky' to the cops, and taking some pride in what I had achieved when I had been working underground. Saying that I got caught but at least I had gone for two and half years and;

They would say things like your friends sent you in; now they are sitting happily in London which was bad joke knowing how desperate to come back those people were and how they had said goodbye to me with tears in their eyes when I had come back.

But in return I was able to feel some pride in the work that had been accomplished. But what particularly built my morale

A was that night when there was a stop over at various points for the three of us. It was in Hanover, a little Karroo town between Joberg and C.T.

They put me into the police cells there to spend the night but before that they took me for some drinks in the local hotel and by this stage in the afternoon they were being quite chatty and slightly more pleasant on the continuum of very unpleasant to extremely unpleasant they were, on the slightly better end of things.

They offered me a double brandy and then a second brandy double and I thought well it is going to be cold I may as well tonight and probably the last brandy I will ever see so I will accept the offer.

Then having chatted about family affairs and so on they said right you are going to sit for a long time you realise; probably ten years. So I said ja, sure I am in.

All along I hoped I wouldn't get caught although I expected ~~that~~ I probably would. They said: are you prepared to cooperate with us, because in the extent that you are we can let you go.

And with that..for a moment I was really demoralised; I mean shit, do they really think that is what I have come to and then in a second moment I exploded and said: bullshit, I don't know what the hell you think I am, I am not prepared to work with you bastards or whatever and that was it. End of story.

That strengthened me a lot: that ability to...there was never any doubt in my mind that I was..there was no way I was going to work with them but being able to do that and the anger that I felt at their supposition that I would even contemplate doing something like that was very good for me.

Ja, beyeond that things went much better, at a morale level.

Q Was there anything, again I keep pushing this point, with this morale question that you thought of blacks in the same position

Q Was there any white angle to it that...

A I think there was...I felt that that in a sense I was a bit on the line; that I was a white person, and that my commitments were to a broader struggle and that;

I was determined not to betray that struggle and would have felt, that symbolically as a white person it would have been dreadful to have done that apart from anything else.

For anyone to have done it but I was determined not to do that sort of thing.

Then while I was in Pretoria an interesting sort of white black dynamic - the SASO 12 or whatever were on trial - Sas Cooper and that lot, including some of the others like Terre of Lebo^{ta}; they were being held in the same local Pretoria prison that I was, as a detainee now, in solitary confinement.

And I would hear them - I knew they were on trial and hear the cops shouting at them, Cooper who ever; and at night tried to make contact with them. Got no joy whatsoever from those guys.

They were all in their black consciousness militancy, refused to shout back the whitie down there in the cells.

I have since spoken to Terra about that - we had some good laughs about inverse racism in Pretoria local station where he was - he doesn't remember the event but I do very well. But being basically...

Because they were shouting to each other; calling back and forth between their cells and I was desperate for some company. And shouted up to them in the hope of getting some cooperation and didn't.

Q Did that demoralise you?

A Not really - I didn't expect...I understood the dynamics and that particular grouping of people at that stage were quite rabidly anti white.

A Then we went on trial quite rapidly. Within two months of being arrested. It partly had to do with the fact that Sue Rabkin was now going on 8 months pregnant.

And partly to do with the fact that the Rabkins were British subjects and there was quite a lot of international pressure on the sytem to charge or release us.

Thirdly to do with the fact that they didn't have too much to difficulty charging us because we had been involved in activities that were clearly illegal in their terms.

But above all they were quite anxious to turn into a bit of a show trial and to demonstrate that there were white communists behind the June 16 uprisings; the old story that blacks are contented till whites come along, white politicians with their own motivations and who stir up an otherwise black contented grouping.

There was a lot of publicity surrounding the trial which we weren't so aware of at the time because we were somewhat cut off from it but there was a lot of this kind, especially in the Afrikaans press, of aura surrounding the trial - that here are the arch white fiends behind the thing; the white agitators etc.

So they were quite keen to bring us to trial quite rapidly..

Q What is the term?

Opstokers

A Opstukkes, ja. Moscows agents and that sort of thing. It was quite nice in a way that we got brought to trial quickly because that long haul of solitary confinement, interrogation, and sitting around in no mans land which happens to a lot of detainees is an awful situation and;

it was at a psychological level good to be brought to trial. I think that also what was important was that they were actually able to use the trial and I am fairly convinced that politically they actually lost that round.

Looking back on it probably our major propaganda - we were a

A propoganda cell - our major achievement was not all the pamphlets we had been bringing out beforehand, although those were important but the actual trial itself.

Because the very reverse started to happen, that first of all it was a nice trial from our point of view in some senses; in that we went into the trial in tact as a cell. None of us were prepared to give state evidence and we all went in proud of what we had done, and not in the least apologetic about that.

Both David and I made statements from the dock which got wide publicity locally and internationally indicating this sort of thing. It might be quite interesting if you could track down the statement because it does talk about...

looking back on it now I would like to rewrite it a little in some respects, but talking a bit about a white and growing up in the society etc. I don't know who would...I probably could find you a copy and make a photostat.

And David also did a very nice statement.

It received a lot of coverage ~~probably~~ ^{partly} because we were whites obviously the press picks that up: partly because Sue was pregnant. So there were a whole lot of not so...terribly political kinds of things, motivations for carrying it but it was extremely well carried, particularly our statements and what we had done and so forth.

Also quotations because the cops were quoting various chunks of pamphlets that we had produced and again this meant that the pamphlets were recycled and probably going to gain a wider readership than they had previously.

But since then...since I was in jail and subsequently since coming out, speaking to a lot of people, comrades around now, black comrades who were BC in their outlook and their attitude; they remember the trial very well and it....

many of them say to me that it began to make them think that

A it just wasn't a straight black white struggle and that whites too were prepared to go to jail. In fact the prosecution called for the death sentence to be applied against David and myself; or at least for the judge to consider the death sentence in this case, it was a very serious crime we had committed.

We indicated that if need be we would be prepared to take on the supreme penalty. That clearly impressed a lot of young black people who had been rabily BC at the time.

I mean it didn't in itself produce convariance clearly but it was part of the process and quite a number of people I have spoken to have actually remembered the trial and remember it having that sort of impact on them; making them think a little more clearly about the situation and

what really stunned and surprised to see that there were white people who were prepared to make that kind of commitment.

In a subsequent trial in 1977 there were a trial-various people including a comrade who is now on the UDF exec. in Western C Cape with me: M Qumbela; Were on trial for recruiting people and sending them overseas for training.

Part of the evidence that was lead in that trial was that they had discussed in their cell meetings our trial and the statements that we had given and so forth from the dock and that the elder people who were alleged or shown to have been involved in this recruiting and so on, were said to have used this as evidence that the struggle was not just a black white struggle.

And I have heard through the gr...perhaps I shouldn't; but I gather that people in the camps in Angola and so on, some of them have also said similar things - laughs - that ~~its~~ the trial had made them realise that it wasn't just a black white thing.

But also that it was an ANC trial which was important at that stage as well because in that sense it was fortunate we were white and perhaps a trial of black comrades who had been ANC operatives in 76 would have shown that ANC had been active

A and mainly a black organisation.

But even so the fact that here was a record of organised underground activity going over almost four years in the case of the Rabkins, showed younger people who had been thrown out by the 76 uprisings that there was a senior organisation around which had strategy and tactics etc, having been operating in the field.

So from that angle as well it was possibly important. Ja.

End of tape side A

Side B

Q It was an experience. ^{what} Do you think you left it feeling being sentenced and going inside; what did you find there...who did you find there when you came...different generations?

A Ja, that was quite an interesting thing. Some earlier discussions that we have had, I have talked about some of the difficulty I have had in making contact with the 50s and 60s by way of people who have been through those experiences with experiencing .

Arriving in jail, apart from the very brief and clandestine contacts that I had had, even when I was outside the country, going to jail was my first contact now with people who been in the struggle and closer contact, personal contact with people who had been in the struggle.

In one case since the mid 30s and that was Dave Kitson. The other person who was around still, older person, when I arrived in 76 was Dennis Goldberg. The other people were Raymond Sutner, Alex Mumbaris, Shaun Hosey and John Matthews and then Dave Rabkin who I was with . Those were the initial group of people and then Tony Holiday soon after that joined us.

It was, I think the most interesting thing for me was that generational..that wave of difference in generations , present in the prison. There are a lot of things one could say about that.

Q What...

A Well, ok let's think of one...the first thing that I found interesting was that both Kitson and Goldberg were both engineers by trade|training whereas the white left that I was accustomed to had all been..and there was John Matthews who ^{had been} was a lowly white collar worker but from a blue collar background. That marked that generation as being a little different.

It might have had to do with the fact that they were, those who were left in prison were the engineers that they had got more serious sentences because of their technical abilities and expertise during the period of the first MK campaigns.

But speaking to them also it was clear that their conversion to the party, CP, socialism and so forth, particularly in the case of Dave Kitson, was occured because of and not in spite of the fact that he was an engineer. Because that was the period, the 30s period, of heroic construction of socialism in the Soviet Union. And at a time when the capitalist world was in crisis.

So that was quite interesting - a very different kind of path to a socialist commitment for a white person. In my time it was the white left tended to be people coming out of sociology courses and politics courses. It was a more ideological, theoretical conversion.

Obviously in Dave Kitson's case it was that too but the nature of the ideological conversions was very different. But ja.. I would like to go on but like to not spend too much time on that.

Q Ja.

A The other interesting thing was that there were two, Alex Hosey and Mambaris who had come in, who were not South Africans and out of internationalist duty; had offered their service to the ANC and had come in on short missions.

A That reflected also a problem in the early 70s. There are tasks, underground tasks, then more than now, that whites were better equipped, better able to perform.

Not because of any inherent superiority but because of things like having passports, the ability of going to banks with travellers cheques, the ability to move around more freely. And the kind of...well [when I was involved with the propaganda unit one had to buy lots of things; one had to go into post offices and transfer lots of money and do things of that kind; the logistics of that work and it would have been very difficult for an African person particularly to do it.

And the fact that there were some comrades who were not... who had offered their services and been seconded by other international or outside organisations indicated one, that the flow of South African whites recruited into the liberation movement had been quite low at one point. Probably the late 60s, early 70s.

But it was also the fantastic international commitment on the part of those two comrades to have come out. I would have...it was quite difficult for ^{them}~~me~~ to be in prison.

Obviously they were treated warmly as great comrades but the rest of us were South Africans and a lot of our time was spent in talking about SA and home etc and the food we were eating and interactions with the warders and so on were at *least* facilitated by the fact that we could speak Afrikaans. For those comrades that experience was probably much harder.

So one really admired them for the contribution they had made.

You are talking about white and blacks. Maybe I could get into it via ^{an} ideosyncratic angle which is the poetry angle which also then would link up with the question following.

Right at the beginning of the interview I talked about when I first went to university and had been keen to write lyrical poetry and was writing lyrical poetry and then got more and more politically involved and politically aware and that set up a whole sort of psychological blockage for me.

A Trying to relate the lyrical bent and inclinations on the one hand to the political duty and commitment to SA - how can you write love poems in a situation where...tens of thousandss of people are being denationalised and forced in to bantustans and so on.

I didn't really resolve that problem at all. Aesthetically, emotionally or whatever...and being in prison actually became facilita...one doesn't actually want to give undue credit to the Prisons Dept. in any respect but in a curious but probably understandable way, being in prison and a sort of minor victim of apartheid, which I was; I was a minor victim,

I say minor first of all because my sentence was very small relative - 7 years is a long time but minute compared with what some other people serve. When I arrived the comrades in Pretoria prison said how long have you got and I said 7 years, hanging my head, feeling a bit sorry for myself and they said: It is a parking ticket, you will only be here long enough to dirty the dishes before you go out and of course that was very true.

Some had been there for 13 years and when I left some, two of them, Kitson and Goldberg, were still inside. In other prisons Pollsmor and Robben Island they are still there many of them.

But also even inside prison as a white or perhaps as a political prisoner because I think the conditions of political prisoners have improved a little as a result of international campaigns and domestic campaigns. At least you have three meals; they are not terribly pleasant but you do have three meals. You have a roof over your head - it is all too solid; you can't get out through it but it is a roof over your head in a sense ...a disadvantage but in some senses obviously also a little bit better than some people find themselves outside of prison in SA.

But nevertheless as a minor victim of apartheid the kind of personal subjective experiences that I was having, which related to my kind of lyrical concerns were now not^{un-}related to the wider social dimensions of SA. And had a political dimension

A to them as well.

Ok, good luck with the thing. (Thank you)

And six months after the sentence my wife died, Anne Marie, my first wife. And at that stage particularly the poetry became enormously important for me.

Because outside with a bereavement or something like that one has a whole series of social rituals - funerals etc. - which enable you to express the bereavement but in a structured socialised form. When you are in prison something like that becomes quite problematic because...

Well there are 2 immediate dangers confronting you: either an excessive dwelling in the problem or alternately, which often happens in prison as well is a kind of total blankness which refuses to admit that anything of that kind ^{has} happened.

Clearly both are dangerous. You don't have too many alternative resources in prison other than your own strength and the support that you get from comrades and they too are living difficult lives so that you can't unduly depend upon them.

And for me particularly at that stage...I began to write poetry almost immediately on getting into prison. Composing in my head; I didn't always have access to paper and pens.

And looking back the poetry was a way for me of doing those two things. On the one hand working through and talking about that bereavement but also trying to discipline it and give it some structure so that it wasn't just moping and getting more and more maudlin and wrapped up in it. But eventually use aesthetic means to discipline it and give it a structure and also to talk, to socialise it; more to a hypothetical audience in the first instance than an immediate audience. Although I was showing it to one or two comrades inside, like David, the poetry.

A Other black white things - perhaps we can talk very briefly about...when I got into prison in 76 the political prisoners there...first of all it was a very tiny community.

It is a problem that women political prisoners have in SA as well. That black males tend not to have so badly or although they do depending; they have now shifted quite a lot of prisoners out of Robben Island for instance.

But the larger you are in terms of numbers it does just increase the horizons of your world leading to information flow back and forth. Someone will be getting a letter once a week or a visit or something and that just increases...people will be coming in or going out. But whites, political prisoners, females more than males, but males as well, they are not a huge turnover, not a huge community so-

the fact that you are under the apartheid regime even in prison, segregated from your comrades, your black comrades did mean that you live in a tiny world and that was exacerbated by the fact that the prison authorities denied any ~~access~~ access to news of any kind - papers, radio broadcasts, even most magazines were banned. We had a couple - Fair Lady and Farmers Weekly and Readers Digest and Darling - THE ONLY magazines allowed and they were shredded to bits by the censors; what he managed to cut out of Fair Lady or Darling I don't know,

We found out subsequently, it was things like Jimmy Carter modelling his latest suit and we were not meant to know that Carter was President of the US.

So one came into a situation where people were radically deprived of any sense of what was going on outside. And we were pumped dry, David and I, when we arrived coz we came fresh from the 76 uprisings etc and the comrades didn't really believe what we had to tell them.

But in the ensuing years it became quite important to try by all means to get hold, access, get access to news of any kind and quite a lot of imagination and ingenuity went into that.

One can talk about it now because for one the Prisons Dept.

A detected it several times. And also that situation has changed, perhaps not for all time because nothing is guaranteed in prison; no priveleges are guaranteed.

Political prisoners are now getting uncensored SA newspapers.

But we used to spend quite a lot of time trying to smuggle papers in and the black prisoners were our main access so there was quite a lot of working solidarity between white and black prisoners in Pretoria Maximum Security.

Now there weren't black prisoners in our prison but we were basically given the task of cleaning etc. in the prison but of course they didn't allow us anywhere near the censors office and the commanding officers office and things like that because we would have done what I did when I was held in Spyker VanWyks office for a while. I went through his draws to see what I could find while the guy guarding me was asleep.

So they had to bring in a squad of black cleaners to clean the offices on a daily basis. That enabled us to have contact with the guys coming in to the prison. Not through talking to them because that was virtually impossible and they were always ca .

But a whole complicated sign language exists in prison which took us some time to understand. But the common law prisoners the so called criminal prisoners have this very complex vocabulary. Unfortunately the Dictionary of Sign Language doesn't include signs for the kinds of needs that political prisoners have, mainly newspapers.

And it took a long time for us to establish what we actually wanted. On one occassion there were guys, this was not the same operation but getting it from the cleaners but there was also building of a new prison complex over a couple of high walls outside our yard and there were prisoners up on scaffold who we could see and signal to and we asked them what they wanted and they came back with the proverbial sign in fact, that is the one article that has the whole series of signs for

A it but it was basically tobacco which is of course the currency in the prison.

We indicated that that would be fine and we would be sending them some. This was during an exercise period where we were walking round and round like one sees in movies how prisoners are supposed to exercise. There were guards on catwalks and so on. So we had to watch and wait for a moment when they were not alert and we got a signal from the guys on the scaffold that they were ready to receive and we waited and waited and indicated that we were about to throw and threw a packet of tobacco over the wall and they gave us the signal back, thumbs up to say they had got it.

Then they asked us with the shrug of the shoulder, lifting of hands and open palms, what did we want. We indicated like this flapping our hands that we were interested in newspaper; they said fine, they understood what we wanted and indicated that they were ready^{to} throw; we waited for the right moment and indicated when we were ready, ok throw and it was lobbed over and landed safely in the yard.

Hurriedly picked it up so the centry wouldn't see and we opened it up and it was one of those horrid little photo comics - it was Capt. Kaprivi on border duty or whatever and we appreciated the sentiment but indicated that wasn't quite what we had in mind. We wanted a big one not one of these little ones. They understood.

Now normally newspapers are reasonably prized inside prison coz they can be used to roll up cigarettes and - laughs - so we were reasonably scared that we would get smalls or something. But finally we managed to get a newspaper out of that particular contact.

But we also had similar signalling systems going with the cleaners who would come in and we had various dead drops where we would leave tobacco for them and in exchange we would get newspapers from them.

A No, that is a nice, ja. They did actually and..coz we were quite well known in Pretoria that we were politicals. We once got a lovely message in the dead letter drop because occassionally they would have other needs as well. Like postage stamps or something that we were reluctant to do. Like sometimes that they would request medicines and things like this which we were unhappy to do, because heavens knows - they would say they had an upset stomach but we weren't sure that what we would prescribe would be right.

But that indicated that they were not getting adequate medical treatment at all.

On one occassion we got a lovely message saying 'Heroes of the struggle, Amandla Awethu, we salute you in the name of the struggle to liberate SA, please send more tobacco.' Laughs. And we felt what, I must say, they got an extra ration of tobacco beyond what the exchange of newspapers justify.

It was also rather ironical because the original contacts between white settlers and blacks were of course bata trades as well, what...where the whites were also trading tobacco and mirros and beads; the proverbial mirrors and beads with the black indigenious inhabitants.

Well here again we were back in the early days of settler colonialism, trading tobacco by getting a much more sophisticated product back in return.

Q But it was predicated on the understanding that you had nothing to do with the white warders; that you were a toatlly different kind of...

A Oh entirely. Ja, there was a lot of solidarity and a lot of warning for us. I mean in the ^{some of} early signs that we didn't understand too clearly...I have got a poem about that from a slightly different experience: It is called Moto ka which means a person is a person because of other people.

A Ja, it is about my experiences when I was in solitary confinement and I was totally alone. I had a contact with a black common law prisoner who was polishing a door handle.

We had basically a signalling contact. I didn't too clearly understand those signals the time the poem was written but... like the two antennai wiggling is the sign that you are being watched by the warders - that is a kind of badge sign which goes up to the forehead as an indication that it is a warder around or whatever.

Now there is a lot of this sort of covert communication of this kind - hold on, I can't talk to you now, I'll talk later from the prison. It was well understood that we were not part of the system at all.

But also of course within prison there's a lot of shopping of a ~~lot~~ other prisoners; a lot of people acting as informants and so forth. But it was well understood that we were a unified body as a group of political prisoners.

It was something that the warders marvelled at as well when we were inside. They kept saying in our locker room we can't leave our things lying around, the other warders, a packet of cigarettes, the other warders steal them, but you guys who we are supposed to be guarding; there would be a pen lying around or a book or whatever, and knowing...you know it was one of the many ironies with being a political prisoners..

The moral calibre of the political prisoners was infinitely higher on the admission of the warders themselves, than theirs.

Q Knowing that you would steal from each other or from the warders?

A Yes, that we wouldn't steal from each other or...depending on what the warder had left behind. Laughs.

Q Just to move on. The whole thing of the poetry, did the politicisation of that..why you chose to write about John Matthews.

Q How you wrote in prison, how you smuggled it out, if you memorised it, that kind of thing. You can answer whatever.

A Ja. At first when I was obviously in solitary confinement and so on, theoretically you are meant to have a bit of paper and a pen, so you can write complaints to the commanding officer.

Once or twice I had such articles, but by and large I didn't so in so far as I was beginning to write poetry it was in the head.

Then as a sentenced prisoner in Pretoria poetry was actually, for some reason, reasons which I understand, (poetry), - I do not approve of - poetry was explicitly not allowed to be written in prison, except on the condition, and that was something that came in with Breytenbach, that the poetry be submitted on a regular basis, once a fortnight, to the authorities for safe keeping and scrutiny.

It was not something that I was prepared to do. So as I said earlier, it is hard to compose with a vague notion of who, the kind of readership one might eventually achieve is going to be. I think I was completely unable to write it if my first and initial readership was going to be Capt. Schnepfel or .. but apart from that I was just not going to go with that so

I did write and wrote poetry right through the sentence and I am not someone who can really write poetry really successfully in the head. So I did need to write it down and play around with it and so forth and also show some of the others, which was a useful thing to do.

But if it was found it was confiscated; so I used to try and hide extra copies all around my cell and I am sure in Central Pretoria, every now and again when they carry out searches of cells they are finding little scraps of scribbled poems all over the place.

In order to get the poetry out, I had to commit them to memory and basically bring them out in that form. So that I had it

A in order to work on it and change and reform it etc. I was using paper but oto actually get it out it had to come out in my head.

Q Did you have to smuggle paper or were you allowed to have it?

A No I was allowed to have paper, ja.

Q But you had to keep it coz if they saw it was a poem they would confiscate it?

A Ja.

Q And why, of all the interesting and unique individuals there did you, were you so taken with John Matthews?

A Well..

Q What were you trying to do with it, why write about him?

A It is hard to find a single motivation for that. But in the first instance, we were working, for the first 3 and half years of my sentence, until there was an escape - the escape

was traced back or at least the warders seemed to think, to the woodwork shop which lead to the closing of that shop.

For 3 and half years prior to that, in the course of my sentence, I was working seven hours a day in the woodwork shop and we would share benches and I happened to be on John's bench.

We got to be very close - we were there for many hours for 3 and half years together and I suppose perhaps the primary motivation was a sense...he was an extremely ordinary person.

He is an extremely ordinary person, very shy about himself; very diffident about what he had done; regarding himself very much as a sort of foot soldier in the struggle.

He had given a life time to that struggle and in some ways

A he was also exceptional in the prison at the time I arrived. There had been other people of a similar kind of background to him involved in the struggle in the 1950s coming from the white community but in my time it was no longer the case.

I think that we are going to see John Matthews again; people of that kind coming once more into the ranks of the struggle from the white community.

But in the period of my conversion in the struggle it was a much more intellectual kind of path that was really the one feasible one I would guess.

So for me John was a bit of a rarity. I had not met a white from a working class background in the struggle who was not at all an intellectual. That was very important I think and

why, one of the major reasons why I did want to write about John. To show there is a kind...you have a question lined up, coming towards the end. There is an illusion that all whites in the struggle are intellectuals and have a critical role to play or something like that and John was just so totally different from any of that kind of..

Q What might that say...I don't mean to totally ah...

End of tape.