



Project name:	Zenzo Nkobi Photographic Archive
Date of interview:	August 12, 2011
Location of interview:	Toronto, Canada
Language/s of interview:	English
Length of interview:	29:43
Name of Interviewer:	Mary Ndlovu (MN)
Name of interviewee/s:	David Beer (DB)
Name of translator:	
Name of transcriber:	Mary Ndlovu
Notes on access and use:	
Audio file name/s of interview:	

## TRANSCRIPTION

Speaker	Dialogue
MN	<p>This is an interview with David Beer who has agreed to be interviewed as part of the Zenzo Nkobi Photographic Archive Project. He's being interviewed by Mary Ndlovu on behalf of the South African History Archive and the interview is taking place in Toronto Canada on August 12 2011.</p> <p>David, I think we can start this by asking you to explain how you as a Canadian happened to be in Zambia and how you got involved with ZAPU and the liberation struggle.</p>
DB	<p>Wow! I went to Zambia as a CUSO<sup>1</sup> volunteer in August of 1964. I was working with the Zambia Youth Service in Central Province at Broken Hill which is now called Kabwe. Within a year Rhodesia had declared UDI. I remember sitting at a local pub ten miles south of Broken Hill, with two Swedish friends who were working also at the Zambia Youth Service – we were building the place – and we actually took the afternoon off because we thought ... we heard on the BBC of course that there had been the declaration ... and we also heard that Harold Wilson said he would be sending jets and - to do something very serious about this. So we went to the bar because we thought well maybe we could watch the jets fly over central Zambia on their way to Rhodesia. Well we know what happened to that threat. But that was just a way of ... a story which highlights for me at that time as a</p>

<sup>1</sup> A Canadian organisation which original sent personnel to work in developing countries, but later became involved in project funding.



Speaker	Dialogue
	<p>young Canadian – I must have been about twenty-four – how close, how actual, how real the Rhodesian crisis and the liberation of Zimbabwe was to us who worked in Zambia next door. Of course there was then the closure of the border and Zambia became quite involved because of the blockade of oil etc etc.</p> <p>I think it was in July or August of 65 ... I had indeed met South Africans and Zimbabweans in Lusaka who were part of ANC and I presumed ZAPU ... but I remember meeting and joining with friends in a social dance in Makeni at the ANC place, for dances and beers and things like that. That was my very first time that I began to learn about ... through the stories of Zimbabweans and South Africans ... about the struggle in their country. It was later on when I became a CUSO field staff officer for Zambia in 1967 ... sorry 1969 ... that I began to formally have a relationship with ... with ZAPU, primarily with Edward Ndlovu who was the Director of Projects<sup>2</sup>. CUSO, my organisation, had projects with the liberation movements. They were ...</p>
MN	When did those projects begin, do you remember?
DB	Well I think they ... they started in ...
MN	Was it only when the refugees started coming in, in the mid to late 70`s
DB	Yes, yes I`m trying to remember – they were very small - they would be a gardening project, they would be ... maybe building a school, they were quite modest.
MN	But these were at the refugee camps
DB	<p>Yes, but I`m not even sure at that time, 69-74 ... and that`s my fuzzy memory ... I`m not even sure what there was of the so-called refugee camps. It was much later on in the late 70`s that there was quite a lot more activity, but in the late 69- early 70`s they were very small. We also ... CUSO also had projects with FRELIMO, ANC and SWAPO, ZAPU ... and to some extent with ZANU. ZANU didn`t have very much of a presence in Zambia at that time.</p> <p>So we ... we would raise funds in Canada through telling the stories of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and because of Edward Ndlovu`s connection with ... with Canada through family Edward often was in Canada and he could be hosted by the NGOs, trade unions, churches, on trips across the country and he would be telling the story of ... of Zimbabwe`s independence struggle. So we raised funds, CUSO did, also in collaboration with the churches like the United Church of Canada we were able to put together funds that came to Lusaka and went into the ... into the projects. Now we had proper project proposals out of the Director of Projects in Lusaka for ZAPU, those were the documents that we used in Canada to fund-raise.</p>
MN	So the ... ZAPU would develop a project proposal and hand it to CUSO, to you, and then you would take that and raise funds in Canada.
DB	Yes, from the Canadian people. In fact the CUSO office and ZAPU administrative offices

<sup>2</sup> In fact in 1969 Ndlovu was not Director of Projects. He assumed that position later on in the mid 70`s



Speaker	Dialogue
	were working very closely and later on in the later 70` s there were bigger projects at Victory Camp and other places.
MN	OK since you`ve mentioned Victory Camp, did you actually visit Victory Camp?
DB	Oh yes
MN	There`s a photograph here [1A-42-15]
DB	I recognize all those girls ... my goodness! ... it was a very ... I think there was 7,000 women and girls up into the late 70`s and yes we would go and ... and people who came to Lusaka from Canadian NGOs and churches ... through Edward`s office we would arrange for visits so they could actually go and see the clothing project, the education project, the different projects.
MN	So this is ... this is the clothing factory. Is this the type of project you would be supporting. [2A-04-23]
DB	Precisely. It wasn`t just CUSO. It would be other ... other NGOs ... Oxfam Canada. I can`t remember exactly which ones because we had a portfolio of probably six or seven projects that the Director of Projects submitted.
MN	So possibly something like this, a school ...
DB	Yes, education materials, sewing machines, that kind of thing. Where again as I said these were not huge things but they were very important for the young people at the camp but also important for us as Canadians in solidarity with the Zimbabwean struggle to be able to show Canadians what their money was going to and what was the story behind those projects.
MN	Did you have any problem convincing people that the money was really going to refugees and not going to military? Was there any worry that maybe money was being diverted into the military?
DB	I ... I don`t think that the first thought of the people who were donating to CUSO and Oxfam and the churches was that the money was going anywhere but the project. There was a right wing view in Canada – the press and some academics - who would always say that CUSO and the NGOs and churches were funding terrorism, but nobody believed - from members of parliament to others - that the Canadian funds were going for military purposes....anybody serious.
MN	What about government? Did you have support from government?
DB	Yah. At that time there was no transfer of funds from government. We did have a relationship with CIDA <sup>3</sup> – CUSO did - as Oxfam and the churches were - we could get matching grants for so much money that was raised from the Canadian people. In the case of Zimbabwe, the government did not match grants. Only in the case of SWAPO that there was some matching because there was a United Nations recognition of SWAPO in Namibia. It was much much later under the Trudeau government with Mitchell Sharp that as foreign minister he announced - and it must have been in the late 70`s of course - that

<sup>3</sup> Canadian International Development Agency – a government department



Speaker	Dialogue
	Canada would match monies for NGOs for Zimbabwean projects for refugees or exiles, but that was pretty late in the game. Even... even the NGOs, the trade unions, the Canadian Labour Congress and churches ... were very instrumental in bringing Joshua Nkomo to Canada in 1977. He indeed did meet with senior government officials. Again it was not very public what the Canadian government's relationship was with ZAPU or ZANU for that matter, but there was again no large support from government until Sharp made that announcement and we were able to get some matching grants from CIDA
MN	What specifically ... for refugee projects
DB	Oh yes and education in Canada about what was happening in Zimbabwe. CUSO had its overseas project work and of course volunteers working in different countries but it also had in Canada a development education department which at one point I was the head of in 1974-5, and we were funded through grants from CIDA and CUSO for Southern Africa had much of ... what we were doing in education across Canada had to do with the liberation struggle in Southern Africa
MN	And what was your thrust then, to persuade the Canadian people that this was an authentic struggle and that it should be supported?
DB	Yah, there was two ... there was that – support the struggle, the legitimate struggle of the people against racism and fascism in Rhodesia, against apartheid in South Africa, against Portuguese colonialism and war in Angola and Mozambique and then eventually in Zimbabwe as well. But also to put pressure on the Canadian government to act much more assertively in support of the people of Zimbabwe or the people of Namibia, South Africa and the about-to-be Mozambique and Angola. So it had a two pronged thing. It had a political import ... that we were trying to convince the Canadian government to do more in support of the people's liberation and also to raise money for our projects and so it was a concerted effort with the other NGOs and churches of Canada.
MN	So it was churches, trade unions and other NGOs working together.
DB	Yes, definitely. And because CUSO had a base, a field office, a full-fledged field office in Lusaka in Zambia, CUSO ... that CUSO office had a separate field staff officer for liberation support. There was a CUSO field officer for Zambia but we also had a separate liberation support officer, and that person was dealing with other NGOs including European NGOs who saw that office as a conduit for funds that would go to liberation support projects in the frontline states. Because our staff were able to visit the very projects that the Belgian Red Cross or Oxfam UK etc were providing money, and so the CUSO office acted as an arbiter for those projects and of course our people were visiting the camps and visiting the projects and writing ... writing the reports.
MN	So it wasn't just you who visited them, it was other CUSO officers who were able to visit the projects and see this type of project in progress.
DB	Yes, and when a Norwegian or a Belgian NGO visitor came, they would come to us and then more often than not we might go and see Edward Ndlovu and then he would arrange for the visit to the particular project. So CUSO was acting very closely, because we were one of the few of any northern NGOs that had an office in Lusaka to deliver support to the



Speaker	Dialogue
	liberation movements.
MN	That's interesting, did you ever see this type of thing with the ...where the girls had built these pits for defense [4A-93-05]
DB	Yes, yes, again it would ... it was because we were going in and out to meet the staff that were dealing with the project, we didn't have a tour of the place but we knew over there was where the bomb shelters were and of course when Rhodesian jets hit Victory and hit Freedom Camp we ... we knew about it, we saw the wounded being brought in to the University Teaching Hospital along the main road of Lusaka, the Cairo Rd, many of the Canadians who were there went to donate blood immediately for the assistance of those who had been wounded by the Rhodesian bombs. So again you can see our life was intertwined a bit with our friends from Zimbabwe even though we were based in Zambia.
MN	But did you visit any camps other than Victory Camp?
DB	I went to the farm.
MN	Freedom Camp?
DB	Yes, because we had a piggery project and we had ... I don't, didn't ... so I went to that camp. I can't remember going there and seeing all kinds of people doing this or that. It was again specifically to the project.
MN	To the project. And you didn't visit JZ, the boys' camp
DB	I don't recall that I did myself.
MN	Well there weren't very many foreign visitors there, most of them were at ... went to ... were taken to Victory Camp
DB	Yah I definitely didn't go to Mkushi.
MN	No, so you were in Lusaka at the time of the Commonwealth Conference in 1979. Can you ... here there is a picture of various officials being taken to Victory Camp at that time apparently, with the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, but I think there were lots of other people that visited at the time. Can you tell us something about that? [2A-10-14]
DB	Well, we ... we saw the Commonwealth Conference right in our lap in Lusaka as an opportunity to inform and educate primarily the large Canadian press delegation. There were fifty journalists, and it was a new Prime Minister Joe Clark and Flora McDonald his foreign minister. So we had arranged with ZAPU to get journalists to come to Victory Camp. Again, it wasn't our specific task of escorting or anything like that – that was all organized by ZAPU or maybe ministry of something – Zambia officials as well. So we also were involved in trying to get the Minister of External Affairs Flora McDonald to go to the Camp and she did do that. It wasn't because of CUSO but she was very keen to visit the camp, Victory Camp, see all the women and the girls and they were absolutely thrilled to see her. Edward Ndlovu introduced her at ... in the big covered hall, and there were thousands of young women and girls and they were welcoming her with wonderful songs and salutes to this woman foreign minister and Flora ... Flora McDonald was tremendous, she was very excited and she welcomed them all to come to Canada at some point ... and that's another story.



Speaker	Dialogue
	<p>The press who were covering the Commonwealth Conference was all of different shades of political stripes and there were ... there were some right-wing Canadian journalists who were out to try and prove that Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU were terrorists, and there was an incident where one of the reporters from the Toronto <i>Telegram</i> failed to get on the bus to go to Victory Camp and he trumped up a story that somehow or other I as the CUSO field officer somehow prevented his going to the camp - which was ridiculous - and editorials in the <i>Telegram</i> and also, a bit more surprisingly in the Toronto <i>Globe and Mail</i> which was a more central ...centrist type of newspaper, liberal, also in a derogatory way referred to Canadian NGOs giving funds to terrorists or people who had taken up arms against Smith. It just gave you a reality check for Canada because there were many people who ... in Canada who were either sympathetic to the white Rhodesians, to the Smith government and were also supportive of apartheid South Africa but they also saw ZAPU and ZANU as military communist threats and that was their line and ...</p>
MN	Cold War politics
DB	<p>Exactly. And of course when this guy from the Toronto <i>Telegram</i> wrote a completely erroneous story then there was quite a lot of controversy in Canada about CUSO, about Canadian NGOs and about David Beer ...from Newmarket Ontario!</p>
MN	But then of course it did all resolve itself and ...
DB	<p>By the end of that year, it was quite exciting and CUSO was formally invited to Zimbabwe Independence by the then ZANU PF government and I represented CUSO at that weekend which was really quite incredible. CUSO and the churches ... we were part of world-wide groupings of civil society organizations that had supported the Zimbabwean people and when I went to Salisbury as it was called and I went to get my credentials to go to the stadium on Independence eve night, there I was with the Polish solidarity front and the western European NGOs and we were all lining up getting our papers. As it turned out I also went to the press office and said that I was from the CUSO Bulletin which was a publication of CUSO and there was of course the Rhodesian white civil servants of the Ministry of Information who were handing out these credentials which was a bit of an ironic twist, and this guy he didn't have a clue what ... what CUSO was but I had made up a letter and I brought the CUSO Bulletin etc and he gave me a press tag or whatever and I was able to go to the ceremony that night with two credentials. If I was going to be recognized by one I thought I could try the other.</p>
MN	<p>So looking back on it now you must feel that you played a significant role in educating the west and getting support for ... political support and material support for ZAPU and the liberation struggle in general.</p>
DB	<p>Yes, I think it was an important part of CUSO which was identifying why is it that we are working overseas, why are Canadians working overseas. We weren't just sending teachers or nurses, which in itself was important – there were thousands of Canadians that went overseas – but in the theatres of conflict, whether it was during the Vietnam war or in Southern Africa or in Central America, Nicaragua etc. There were CUSO people working on the borders or next door to the countries in conflict. And there was no way that we</p>



Speaker	Dialogue
	<p>could dismiss that as irrelevant or “Oh no that’s political, we’re not supposed to be involved in that” ... so in those countries where we were around the world, where CUSO people were working, it was a political act with a small “p” that we said we are for freedom of Zimbabweans, economic freedom, democracy, the right to good health, etc, we are for that and we are against racism and fascism and militarism. So when we were accused of being political it wasn’t very difficult for us to say why we are involved in this struggle, and I had myself made a number of trips back to Canada as a CUSO staff and our information and our development departments would send me across the country to speak about ... yes about Canadians going to Zambia or other countries in the frontline states, but also to speak about CUSO’s support to the liberation struggle.</p>
MN	<p>OK Any other comments you wanted to make, or we end there.</p>
DB	<p>Well I think that what was telling for many Canadians who met South Africans, Zimbabweans, Namibians, Mozambicanos, Angolanos, in exile was that we began to learn their story and began to make friendships and these were people from countries that we were not living in, we were not allowed to go there, and when those countries became independent CUSO and other Canadian NGOs that had been involved ... we were there in the first years of rehabilitation and it was precisely because of the solidarity that we had built up before independence during those trying times, and I think that was a very significant result of those small little projects – a gardening project, a typewriters or sewing machine project to the refugee camps years before they became independent. And that goes from the support to FRELIMO, to ANC to ZAPU and ZANU so that I think is part of the story ... that it wasn’t just a flash in the pan, it wasn’t just a charity – you give money and then you walk away. We were there for years later and so many of our comrades were so happy to see us at home. When I first crossed the border into a free Zimbabwe and I went to Bulawayo, I was referred to as our friend from Lusaka, and that was all that was needed. And I would be hugged, somebody would buy me a beer and it was remarkable in the western suburbs or wherever it was around Salisbury - it was still called. And that was so fulfilling to have that ... they were so happy to see somebody who had assisted in their long struggle for freedom.</p>
MN	<p>Thanks very much, thank you David for telling us all this experience, thank you.</p>



Speaker	Dialogue

