

UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

“VOICES OF RESISTANCE”

INTERVIEWEE: SUNNY VENKATRUTHNAM

INTERVIEWERS: M NTSODI & D SHONGWE

DATE: 16 JULY 2002

PLACE: DOCUMENTATION CENTRE
UDW

MN: Good morning and welcome to Westville [UDW]. This is the another interview in the Oral History [Project]. And today we are blessed with the presence of Professor Sunny Venkatruthnam. He is the head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Durban Westville. Professor Sunny, good morning and welcome.

SV: Morning.

MN: Professor Sunny to start with, if I may, would you se mind telling us about yourself, where you were born and when, and about your family, at large.

SV: I go along way back. I was born on the 27th July 1935. And I was born in Sea View, which was on the banks of the Umbilo River. A very rural kind of setting and growing up, you know, the world was, only the horizon, was very, very short. Stellawood Cemetery was my horizon. And we lived on the river-bank, and no running water, no electricity.

MN: What can you tell us about your family, your siblings?

SV: Oh, my family. I grew up in a huge family, you know, until very recently, we had I had nine sisters and three brothers. But then, life then, was sort of

communal. We had a lot of relatives living with us, you know, because they were unemployed or for some other reason. But I could remember distinctly, that at any one time, all the kids, all the boys slept in one room on the floor, about ten or fifteen of us.

And life was hard. We had no bedding except hessian bags, you know, rice bags, jute bags, as beds, built on the floor and to cover yourself. And funnily, you know, that really, later in my life, when I was detained, it helped me, because I had to tell myself, "Look, you lived in more difficult conditions, now you can survive this. You have survived all these years, and just make the best of it." So that brought me back, made me think that that the hard life that we went through, really helped us later on in life to realise that, look you know, this is something that you're making a sacrifice for, and it's worth doing it.

MN: Can you tell us a brief history of your parents, where they come from and how?

SV: My parents were first generation Indians, and both my parents were born in South Africa. My grandparents came from India in Bazakpatnam, and they were indentured labourers. My paternal grandparents, after their indenture, ten years or something, they went back to India and died there. But my paternal grandmother lived and died in South Africa and stayed here. She is from South India as well.

MV: What sort of a community did you grow into?

SV: It was, because it was a semi-rural area, everybody, my neighbours, my uncles and my neighbours and everybody else, I think people lived on roughly

10/15-acre plots of land, where they did market gardening, mostly. And bananas and fruit and all of that kind of stuff. My parents, originally, were flower sellers. They used to sell flowers at the Durban Central Cemetery. And then eventually my father became a peddler. You know, they have a bamboo stick and huge baskets; walk from Sea View into Victoria Street, buy the vegetables and fruit, and all of that. And walk back towards, that's about seven or eight kilometres or miles. Ya, and he did that for all his life until 1937 or something, when he bought a bakkie, for the first time. And then he used that to hawk fruit and vegetables amongst the whites. So life was very difficult for my parents. And I think, when I was growing up as a kid, I used to only see my father on a Sunday. Because he used to get up at two in the morning, to walk to the market, and only came back after sunset. So we only saw him on a Sunday morning, and that's it. So life was really hard. My parents, my mother also, I think, was carrying this huge basket on her head, my sisters did it, and life wasn't easy, it was really tough. And yet,, I think, my family, compared to my neighbours and my uncles living next to us, we were considered to be better off than them. Because, I think, especially my uncle; my uncle was an alcoholic, I remember, and always beating up my aunt and the children. And my parents never drank and so we were fortunate, in that sense, that we had a stable family and we didn't eat classy food. You know, I recall much later in life that we used to only have bread on a Sunday and the rest of the days, especially during the [Second] World War,

that we couldn't get rice. The only thing we ate then was barley, you know, the boiled barley, mealie rice, samp and that kind of stuff. So my parents lived frugally, but we didn't starve, we were well-fed but very frugal, simple rural diet. We had a lot of fruit and lots of vegetables; the only time you had meat, I think, was when you had visitors coming there and we had to kill a chicken or two. We used to look forward to visitors coming, otherwise meat was not on the diet, as it were.

MN: You also mentioned, still on your family, you mentioned that you have about nine siblings, where exactly would you be, I mean on the ladder, were you the first born?

SV: Where am I?

MN: Yes.

SV: Let's just count from the bottom up. I think I'm number six; we numbered nine sisters and three brothers, that's twelve plus my father adopted two children. You know, I think, they were his sister's children, and she died because of a snakebite or something, and they were brought up by my dad. And I didn't realise until I was about 21, 22-years old that they were not my brother and sister. It was amazing that they were so close, you know.

MN: Can you tell us about your educational background and if your family members...?

SV: Well, look, you know, Vino will tell you this; that our political history and our politicians since the 1960's onwards kept referring to the struggle as the apartheid struggle, you know. Only the Afrikaner was the bad guy. But you know, I was born in 1935 and I was not born in a Group Area, but yet there

were Group Areas, even then. So apartheid started about 400-years ago, not with the Afrikaner. I think, the Afrikaner only redefined and realigned it a bit more starkly, but I lived in a typical apartheid South Africa in 1935. It wasn't in 1948 that oppression started - very, very much earlier. And you know, we lived only amongst Indians. Came across very few Africans, yet they, if you came across them, they came in as labourers. I recall my father used to hire them occasionally, and the way he would go and choose a labourer is, only if he has got a patch on his pants. If he had a patch on his buttocks, he wouldn't hire him. I recall once asking why is that? He says: "No, the guy who has got a patch on his back is a guy who sits down and doesn't work. But the guy who's got a patch on his knee he's a good worker." But the strange thing was that although they didn't ill-treat Africans, they treated them as Kaffirs, in the worst sense of the word. That these people had no brains, they are on a lower level than even their domesticated animals, that's how they treated them. And we were always told that, you know, we Indians are far superior because we have 5000-years of civilisation behind us. The African is right at the bottom, the Coloured people are just drunks, you know. And the whites, of course, were the superior people and blah blah blah, and the only way they were able to explain the differences between all kinds of people is that, you know, in the Indian religion there is a thing called Karma. It's like fate, and we as young children were always told that you need to behave well, you need to be honest and truthful, and do your prayers

twice a day, don't steal, don't say bad things, listen to your parents and your teachers and your elders. And if you do all that, perhaps in your next life you will move up higher in the human race, you see. And I recall, and I remember this very clearly for myself; is that my ambition in life was that I'm going to be such a good boy that eventually in my next life I'll be a white person. That was my aim in life. And look, to be a white in South Africa, in those days, was really like living in heaven because these were the only people that lived in brick and mortar homes. And there were side streets, sidewalks, they had motor cars. Many of them, tarred roads, electricity, running water. I saw this and nobody could tell me that they were not superior to us. Because that, that's what I saw, and I see Indians below them, and the African right on the bottom they were the dregs of society.

So what I saw and what my parents told me about religion, about Karma and all that, didn't contradict, it fitted in. So the only explanation was that the African is right on the bottom because they did something terribly wrong in his last life. And therefore he is there. So similarly, they said that if I misbehave and do all kinds of things, in the next generation you will probably become an African, you see. So nobody wanted to do that, so you tried to be a good boy. And of course, my schooling in the early years was affected by World War Two. What our parents did, my parents had a farm in Cliffdale - about 200 acres or something. Farming cabbages and tomatoes and all of that, so they collected all the young boys, only the (males) boys

in the families, in the extended family, there were about six of us. And they sent us to the farm for two years, tending cattle and doing all kinds of things there. So when I came back after the war, I went to primary school again - it was about seven miles from home. We had to cross Umbilo River about three times, to get to school, Stella Hill. All that property is now bought off by Natal University because of the Group Areas [Ac]. And we were in totally Indian schools, Indian teachers, everything Indian. So the Bantu Education, well although it came in 1954, in 1935 we still had Bantu Education, you see. So we went through that, of course, the same old story that nothing progressive was taught. The same kind of sentiments and values that my parents and the community I lived in were, you know, propagated in schools as well, and got it in primary school. Those days, in standard six you wrote a public exam called Primary School Certificate. If you got that, I mean you know, it was like having your first university degree. And I think, I was the only one in my family who was allowed to go to high school. My parents couldn't afford to send children to the high school because they needed the labour. I don't think it was so much that my parents couldn't afford it, but they needed my sisters and my elder brothers to work, not in a factory, but in the hawking business, buying and selling fruit and vegetables. So I was the lucky one who went to high school. Went to Sastri College, that one there [pointing to a photograph]. It was the only high school in Durban, at that time, and I was lucky I got in there and it was quite a scramble to

get into high school in those days, because of space.

And we were lucky, and we got into Sastri College, spent from standard seven up until matric, got through matric. Same situation again - the only Indian teachers, only Indian students. We didn't come across whites or anything like that, no Africans either. And when I finished matric I decided to go to university, Natal University. But Natal University would not admit black people on their campuses. Right behind Sastri College, that building there, right behind it, they had an asbestos shed for a small library as big as this. And a room where we sat and met and then in the evening from eight o'clock, no six o'clock till eight o'clock, they had part time lectures. The same lecturers that came from Natal University used to lecture to us. And I think, for me, that was a turning point in my life, because up until then we were told that Kaffirs were just cattle thieves. And the same old, you know, attitudes about different people were pumped into us in high school, as well, because the History books referred to Indians as Coolies, Africans as Kaffirs, and Coloureds as something, some derogatory...[interruption]

MN: Boesmans.

SV: Hey?

MN: Boesmans

SV: Boesmans, ya, some very derogatory words, you see. So I registered at Natal University for a BA. And I remember the first lecture that I had to attend was History class. I walk in there, and to my absolute shock, I saw about ten African students in there. I couldn't believe it. I had to blink a few times,

because up until then I was told that Africans had nothing between the ears, you know, that, and I believed it because the Africans that I came across were the dregs of society, you know. So I was really shocked, and by the end of the first lecture I was even further shocked because these were the more articulate people in the class. And I recall going home late that night at about nine o'clock and telling my father: "Dad, I didn't use the word Kaffir, I'm becoming more enlightened now." I said, "there are Natives in my class room." All my father could say was: "Shut up and go and study." He couldn't explain this. I think he was also really shocked that there were Africans and at University level, he didn't understand that. And the people that came to, the African students that came to Natal, they came there because they couldn't go to Fort Hare or anything like that, you know, from the rural, mainly from Adam's College. I didn't know such a place, as Adam's College, existed. And it was then that it shocked me that; look, by then I think I was about 20/21-years old; that I was angry against my parents, my primary school teachers, my high school teachers, and everybody, about misleading me. And a bunch of us who also had similar experiences got together and said that we need to study history outside of the prescribed textbooks. And slowly, we began getting, gathering material and began studying. You know, study groups - we started study groups at Natal University, until eventually that study group became a student organisation - The Durban Students Union, and which was affiliated to the Unity Movement,

not the ANC. There was this huge tussle at Natal University between the Unity Movement People and NIC mainly, and the ANC. But eventually, the Durban Student Union began to grow because we recruited students mainly from high schools and throughout Natal, and by 1960/63 we were on the verge of forming a National Student Organisation. Because, at the moment, by 1963 the only National Student Organisation was the National Union of South African Students, that's NUSAS, which was liberal, English-speaking university students. They were so-called liberal, and the counterpart to that was the ASB, The Afrikaner Studente Bond, which was a Nationalist Party orientated student organisation, which drew students mainly from the Afrikaans University. So, we then decided we are going to form a progressive National Student Organisation. Because, already you had formed one in the Cape, called the Cape Peninsula Students Union, and here in Durban we had the Durban Students Union and we are now going to form a National Organisation. But, on the 1st of April, oh, I became a teacher. I taught at the M.L. SULTAN TECHNICAL COLLEGE. And the 1st of April 1963 was the day on which Indian Education was first introduced in South Africa. Bantu Education already in 1954, Indian Education in 1963, and Coloured Education and what was the White Education? I forgot what the White Education system was. But oh, Christian National Education, CNO. And I was teaching there at Sastri, I mean at M.L. Sultan, at that time, and on the 1st of April, the day they introduced Indian Education. And they introduced

it for the first time at M.L. Sultan, because up until then, M.L. Sultan was under the Union Education System. But M.L. Sultan was the first institution in South Africa, where Indian Education was first introduced. So we, before the 1st of April, we began riling students. I think about 4000 students joined the Durban Students Union by then already, and we were about three or four young teachers at M.L. Sultan Technicon, at that time. Myself, my wife, two of my colleagues, we were there - we were members of the DSU and we mobilised students. And, in high schools and primary schools, those days I think, the first fifteen minutes of every day, you had to have an assembly. We had to say the prayer and thank the Lord for all the bad things they are doing for you and all of that stuff, and you know. So we organised a boycott of the morning assembly, a fifteen-minute boycott. Immediately we did that, all of the students refused to go into the hall to attend this morning assembly. And the authorities immediately threw the students out of the college premises - they were in Centenary Road - standing outside because they locked the gates. Half an hour later, I was called downstairs into the principal's office and [he] said: "You are immediately suspended from teaching. Go upstairs collect your bag and chuck." So the 1st of April was the last day I taught, and a similar thing happened to Trees [Theresa, my wife] and my other two colleagues. My other two colleagues were fired on the spot because they were not on the permanent staff. So they could fire them. Trees was fired because she was not on the permanent staff; with

me, they had to suspend me. And a month or two later they had a trial at which I was found guilty of being responsible of being an instigator of the boycott and I was dismissed as a teacher.

MN: Can I have a break?

TAPE SWITCHED OFF

ON RESUMPTION

MN: Welcome back. Professor Sunny, you spoke about your political involvement, but I haven't asked you that when exactly can you say was your turning point in politics, where you realised this segregation and apartheid?

SV: Well you know, as I said, the first day of my lectures at Natal University, where I saw Africans in the class room, really traumatised me. And I think, it changed my outlook in life, but the process was not just immediately traumatic, but traumatic in the sense that I'd, as you know, I said earlier I was angry with people misleading us and all of that. But gradually, at Natal University I began, apart from the study groups that we were attending, I began associating mainly in the beginning with the liberals because I did sociology, as well. And Leo Cooper and all of these people, CK Hill and all of these people, they were whites you see, and they became friendly, very patronising, and I thought good; because for the first time in my life, a white didn't call me Sammy. You know, those days, whites instead of calling you Coolie they thought it they were doing you a big favour by calling you Sammy. And the women they would call Mary, you see. But and these guys called me Sunny and I hung out with

them a lot. There was a young sociology lecturer then, Margo Phillips, and we used to go out a lot together. She had a scooter - drove around sometimes, drew a lot of aggression from whites. Especially when you stopped at stop streets, what am I sitting and holding a white woman, you know. It was unthinkable. But anyway, slowly I began learning more about local and national politics, came across the Natal Indian Congress, that time. I was very attracted to them, virtually joined them, sold a lot of their newspapers, and all of that. Until one day MD Naidoo, I think, saved me. We were talking about ,you know, I was a frequent visitor with Phyllis and MD, at that time. And we were talking about things, and had talked about, you know knowledge was coming in so fast for me those days that I had to check quickly with other people, and all of that. And I talked about, you know, in that South Africa we need a revolution, nobody wins if there is no revolution, there has to be a bloody revolution. And MD, of course, said, no, and I told him what about the Bolshevik Revolution? He says, "No, that wasn't bloody." You know, again I went back to my high school and childhood. Here's a guy that I respected, and he is lying to me to say that there is, no it wasn't a bloody revolution. I left NIC then, and then we formally formed the DSU, and I then joined the Unity Movement. And I found the Unity Movement agreeable; I could understand what they're doing and it was clear there was no wishy-washyness, and that politics, the ten-point programme was clear. And in between, I became the secretary of the Non-

European section of Natal University. And we were invited by an International Student Organisation called International Union of Students, IUS. Already in 19, this was in 1958. That there are two student organisations - one is IUS, which was a left union and they had an ISC, International Student Conference, which was pro-west. And so that conference was going to be held in Beijing. So I was chosen by the Non-European students to attend this conference. I didn't get my ticket here, but the problem was that those days you didn't have a passport. So the way out - MD and all these guys helped me. J.N. Singh and all of them too, gave me a strategy about how to go there. So they asked me to apply for a travel document to India, which the Indian Immigration Office gives you. So I got that; it's an ordinary sheet of paper, blah blah blah, with your photograph on it, stamped to travel to India, ostensibly to study, you see. So I get to India. First time I am flying; Louis Botha Airport those days, entrance for black people was on the side. You had to go through a fence, you could never go through the main entrance. Anyway I get to India, another huge shock to me. You know, my parents visited India twice before that, and they would think that telling me all the great things about India, what a beautiful place and blah blah blah, you know. Very nationalistic, you see. I land at Bombay Airport. From the airport, of course, they put me up at the Taj Mahal. On the way to the airport, you saw the filth and drudgery and the human degradation, it just frightened me. Get into the Taj Mahal Hotel, on the sidewalks people are living

their lives, everything from procreation to everything. On the plane flying to India, there was a white woman; I think her husband was doing some work for the UN. He was at Bangalore, so both of us flew together to Taj Mahal. At the airport, oh ya, at the airport she was made to pay 2000 rupees because she was a white person, right? Indians didn't have to pay that penalty. All white South Africans had to pay that. And at the Taj Mahal, at the entrance, there's a sign: "South Africans and dogs not allowed." You see. Anyway we get in after she paid her 2000 rupees, stayed in the hotel and I didn't know that already my parents had sent a telegram or something to their relatives in South India, in Inkapale, in India. So after two days, two guys come up to fetch me to take me home. Home is South India, you see. Anyway I am in my hotel room, no I was in the dining room I think, and the people from the desk come to tell me that there are some people that want to see me. I said, "Well you can bring them in." They said no they can't bring them in. This is funny. Anyway they got these guys at the back entrance, you know, the kitchens and all over there. I looked at them I could understand now why they didn't want to let in. They looked scruffy, you know, no shirt, this loin cloth and a mat under the arm. So I insisted that they come in. I took them up to my room. The Taj Mahal is, you know, it's a fancy place, it's marble all over, bedroom, bathroom, everything is marble. So I take them in sit and talk. They said, well they told me who they were, that they have come to take me back home. So I tried telling them, my Telagu then wasn't that

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good because they, they speak, I don't know. I tried to tell them that look, I'm not about going home I'm going to Beijing, you see. They couldn't understand this and then they asked - my suite, it had foyer kind of thing, you know, like a lounge and bedroom, bathroom. So they tell me "is this all yours? Only you staying here?" I said ya. They rolled the mat out, they wanted to sleep there. I said, "No, you can't do that." I mean, you know hotels - they couldn't understand it. Tried to go and find them another hotel and put them up, but that was bad with India. Okay, when I went to India, I got special visas to fly into Rangoon from Rangoon into Hong Kong from Hong Kong hopped into China, you see. Conference was for six weeks, and I think that too was another turning point in my life because up until then socialism didn't quite appeal to me, you know. It was something that, call it realistic, it was just too - theoretically possible, but I didn't realise that, because going through India, you know, when you say that India, at that time I think, had about 5 to 600-million people. And nobody had to tell you that, there were so many people living there. You could actually see them, you could feel them, you know. You could feel those millions in the street. And India was a democracy, nothing has changed. The people are still living in the worst human conditions.

Flying to China, China is supposed to have had more people than India, the population is supposed to be bigger. At least by a good 2 to 300-million, you don't see anybody here. You don't see those millions in the streets or anywhere in China. The

place is absolutely clean. Went travelling around, you know, they gave me a car and a secretary and we could travel and drive anywhere we wanted to, when we were free. And I found the place absolutely clean, of course, I'm talking to people through an interpreter. Visited communes, people happy, everybody's got a smile on their face, everybody's clothed. The only problem was that they all wore the Mao suits so you couldn't make the difference between male and female. And because all the young people had their bob cut, and all of that. But you know, I see India got its independence two years before China, and here, there was China with more people. It had a poorer infrastructure, less industrialised than India, and yet these people, there is no hunger, nothing, absolutely clean. That's when I think, I began seeing the merits of socialism, and as the years went by, I became more and more convinced about socialism. So, that was another turning point in my life. And my return trip back home was another experience because I couldn't come back on the same route because there were some problems in Rangoon, at that time. So I couldn't fly that route. So they flew me back through Uzbekistan and Mongolia and through the Soviet Union into Moscow and from Moscow to New Delhi. Socialism in - I spent a couple of days in New Delhi, it was too cold I couldn't, not Delhi, I mean Moscow. It was extremely cold I couldn't put up with it, and the only thing, first time they convinced me to drink alcohol they gave me Vodka to drink, and stuff my clothes up with newspapers. Anyway I get out of Moscow, land in this huge

aeroplane, you know, the Aeroflot double-deckers. In a normal aeroplane you sit like this, and those Aeroflot's you had a table in the centre and you sat on an opposite sides, you know, it was like a lounge. Anyway, I land at Phalam airport in Delhi, they look at my travel document, they want 2 000 rupees. I said: "Why?" They said: "No, South Africans got to pay this penalty." I was telling you this, but I said: "I'm an Indian." They said: "Prove that you are an Indian." I said: "You've got to look at me." You know, then I missed my connecting flight to Delhi, Phalam is a military airport because these Aeroflot's couldn't land at the normal international airport. I missed my flight back to Delhi, so that's what from here to Johannesburg, same distance. Until about after two hours, I remembered I had my birth certificate in my bag, and on those birth certificates it's stamped "Protector of Indian Immigrants." So I showed the guy. Now he's deflated. They had to fly me on a military plane from Phalam airport to Delhi International. But the long and short of it was that this guy wanted a bribe that is what they were after. And I went to Delhi, back eventually to Bombay on my way back. On my way back, GR Naidoo's father was coming up from South Africa to visit his relatives in South India. So they sent me a telegram to meet this old man at Bombay docks. To go to the docks you've got to get a permit and all kinds of things. Eventually myself and another South African friend decided that we will go to the docks and help this old man to come, get him through Customs and Immigration and take him to his hotel

and all of that. So we go there, we meet the old man at the bottom of the ship and he ask me whether I can take some watches, do I have some watches on me, through customs. He isn't going to pay duty you see. I think he brought five watches for his relatives. I told him no, I've already have a watch on, I can't wear two watches. We'll pay the customs duty, it doesn't matter, you know, we'll explain that these are gifts for your relatives. So okay, he agreed very reluctantly, he didn't want to pay any duty, you see. So you know, they had these huge sheds and they have long tables with all these customs officials. They have got to go through from one side. So the first customs officer I meet, I tell him: "Look, this is my uncle he's come to India for the first time and he wants to meet with his roots in South India and he has brought some watches as gifts." So the fellow said: "Okay, give me 10 rupees." Loud! So I said, "Okay, give him his 10 rupees. I said: "What about all the other guys?" He said: "Don't worry, that fellow will ask too." So we went through that whole chain, 10 rupees every one of them. Open graft, and pick-pocketing in India - you know, we had this old man in the centre, my friend on one side, and I was on one side walking him now, to the hotel. And every now and then people are selling ballpens and pencils so he says: "No, I've got" he shows them. He has got a dozen pens in his pocket. He kept showing people, these vendors. After about the third time he says I've got, he looked, there is nothing there, man. And that old man thought that we had picked his pockets, because we were the only people standing

and walking, side by side. So anyway I got back to South Africa and finally made up my mind in 1958 that I'm going to cut all ties with the NIC and join the Unity Movement.

MN: While still there, Prof can you tell us briefly more about the Beijing Conference?

SV: Nothing much. The only problem, I think, I still remember how politically ignorant I was, and naïve. When they had this whole breakaway session on colonialism and all of that, I couldn't believe that South Africa was still colonial, you know. I was doing it from an academic point of view to say that we are not a colony, we just. Well, the long and short of it was that I don't think I benefited intellectually from that Conference because I wasn't adequately prepared for it. Except on an interpersonal level to understand the functioning and workings of socialism, that was it. But the conference itself, I don't think had any real impact on me. Apart from meeting Mao Tse-tung and Cho En Lai, and these guys. You know, they had a banquet, and we had to be introduced. And I remember Cho En Lai feeling my hair says: "you can't be from Africa." You know he didn't expect that there were Indians in South Africa, at that time.

MN: So when then you came back then, you left the NIC when was that?

SV: I left the NIC and joined the Unity Movement formally, and I've been with the Unity Movement since then, until now. Okay, I think, I need to talk to you a little bit about the Natal University. I think I said earlier that for black students they had this shed behind Sastri College. This shed, and

that's where we had the library and in the evenings had lectures in the Sastri College itself. The same lecturers that taught at Natal University, the one on the hill, came and taught us after six to eight [p.m.]. We wrote the same examinations, of course, the courses they offered us were limited. You can do law; you can do a general BA; or you can do a BCom; no science courses, nothing. I opted to do a BA and because I hoped to do teaching afterwards. We were not allowed to set foot on Natal University, white campus. We were barred from doing that; we were not allowed to wear the college tie or the uniform, no access to it. Come graduation, graduation was segregated: blacks on one side, whites were on one side, although we both sat for the same exam, getting the same degree. And Natal University, at that time, was controlled by the Liberals both in the big letter Liberal and the small letter liberal, because the principal was EJ Malherbe. He was an arch Liberal Party man. People on Senate, chairman of Senate was Alan Paton. People on council were people like Leo Cooper, CK Hill, and all the leading liberals of the Liberal Party were on the governing body of Natal University. And these were the people that saw it fit not to allow black people onto their campus. Because, during those years, there was no law on the statute which prevented white universities from accepting black students. It was only in 1959, the Extension of the University Education Act which formerly prevented black students from entering white universities and then...

END TAPE 1A

TAPE 1B

MN: Welcome back. Professor Sunny, you came back from Beijing a wiser man, a wiser young man.

SV: Well I think, I don't whether wiser, but I think on the [ideology] I did make profound decisions. Ideological shift to me, that was the important thing.

MN: You changed your political home?

SV: Ya. I did that because of ideology again.

MN: Yes. And you told us about the graduation. Can you tell us more about the graduation?

SV: Well look, I think students at Natal University the Non-European section, where for five six years before that were trying very hard to boycott graduation ceremonies. Many, many people used to graduate in absentia. You had to pay £3 penalty for that. But...

RECORDING INTERRUPTED
ON RESUMPTION

MN: But I'm back again. You were explaining the graduation, Professor Sunny.

SV: Yes, as I said that the students from the earlier years did try to boycott and force the University Management Administration to change its - in those days they used the word segregation, it wasn't apartheid. But that but they didn't relent, because they weren't able to organise a hundred percent boycott of graduation. It was only in 1959/1960, when the boycott became a real problem for the university. It was becoming very embarrassing, because already the Nationalist Party was in power, the white liberals were a bit uncomfortable because of the Extension of University Education Act, and

all of these things. So they were becoming sensitive to the boycott of the graduation ceremony.

And in 1960 I was supposed to be graduating that year, and I didn't, and I recall I came under tremendous pressure from the university authorities.

I was the secretary of the UN and the SRC, at that time, and they promised that no next year, we get - what they said they are going to do is that they'll mix the students black and white, you know alphabetically, they'll have them. But the parents

will be segregated. You know, that was a bigger insult to us and we really warmed the hearts of many of the black students those days, on that ground. They thought they were relenting and doing us a favour by mixing the students, but not the parents. So in 1960, we had a hundred percent

boycott of the graduation. The medical students, and students at Warwick Avenue. Also, I think that, tell you this that when they closed Sastri College their number was just before 1959 began to soar at Natal University, Non-European section. And I

think, when we had about 400 black students then they moved us to Lancers Road. They hired potato warehouses, separated by hessian bags, and that was that. So because I think students were becoming far

more militant because of the Unity Movement ideas were coming on, the NIC on the other hand, and it was a few years earlier the PAC was formed. So the

student body became a very political body very, very active, politically. Like so much in terms of political activism of the 1980's, and that kind of thing. But ideological debates were very, very

intense. And it was a very invigorating kind of

situation. And there was lots of common programmes or activities that student's across the board which the NIC, ANC or PAC, or Unity Movement, collaborated and joined. Now the classic one, of the Centenary celebrations of Natal University, they had this huge, I think it was a ballet or something at the Alhambra Theatre, there in the corner of Warwick Avenue and Berea Road. Those days black people cannot enter Alhambra Theatre. So they wouldn't allow us to attend that so we picketed that occasion and it was splashed in the papers and all of that, you see. So there were occasions where we would collaborate across political movements. Graduation we boycotted, you know, we collaborated, and in all of the instances we found were there was a substantial collaborative effort. The events that we were involved in succeeded. Like the graduation we won, eventually in 1961, open graduation. We refused to stand when the principal addressed you on the first day of the term, you know, you come, but only black students you see, we refused to stand. Until eventually, they didn't come to address us. So student militancy and activism, in that sense, began to develop, began to grow. But at the same time, I think at that moment, especially amongst the African students, was this huge tension between the newly-formed PAC and the ANC people. It became, sometimes, became very nasty, you know, not physical but almost physical, you know, in terms of debates and all of that, so that the ideological debate began to shift. It became more a party against party kind of thing. PAC versus ANC all of the time, even the activities

and all of that. It became, for the first time, I think, in South African politics at least the emergence of racism because the PAC at that time said PAC was for Africans, not for anybody else. Nobody else could join the PAC at that moment. So we fought them, we attacked them, but then also that was a reflection of what was going on within the ANC itself. You know the Sobukwes and all of those people who began to emerge; the Young Turks began to challenge the sort of compromising stance that the ANC was taking at that time. And they began to question like the Potato Boycott, for instance you know, where they demanded that people don't eat potatoes because farm labourers were being paid a pittance per day. They were demanding R2 a day as a wage. This was in 1960's, R2 a day that's all they were demanding. And whilst the Unity Movement, on the other hand, said "Well there has to be redistribution of land, we are not making piecemeal demands, because it's not going to work that way." But these were the debates that were going on, and of course, the PAC were becoming more militant at that time. They were really getting a lot of support in the rural areas. Deep rural areas, not in the cities and the Transkei and places like that, but in the deep rural areas and in the mine compounds, in the Transvaal and in the Free State. The PAC was beginning to make inroads because it was pandering to the base instincts of its membership, you know, on the question of race, and on the question of land, and they wanted land. So it appealed to the less informed people and the baser instinct of human beings. So that was beginning to

develop. Until 1962, the Unity Movement formed what was known as The African People's Democratic Union of Southern Africa. And we became very active trying to mobilise people, not on any particular issue apart from say the in the 1960's, ya early 1960's, they had this vigilante kind of a thing.

I don't know if you remember I don't what they called it but they, for the first time, they invited black people to form vigilante groups, largely by the state, hoping that they would get information about underground movement. Because by then, the ANC and the PAC were banned and went underground, already. And we were the only people - APDUSA was the only legal organisation, at that time, that was able to operate openly, and we fought against the vigilante thing, we won and that was good. In the late - oh, during that period, I was banned and house arrested. So life became fairly intolerable for me; couldn't get a job; tried a couple of times I was hired as a clerk, Sunlife Insurance; I don't know those guys. And it was a Canadian multi-national corporation. Immediately I was thrown out of teaching in 1963, ya, about then I think I was thrown out in April, somewhere around August/September there was this job advertised and I applied for it, as an insurance claims consultant for Sunlife Insurance. Now I need to say a little bit about why Sunlife was prepared to employ a black person, a person of colour.

MN: Before you do can I ask you this one? What event really led you to being banned is there any specific event or there...?

SV: Well my general activism, because I was addressing people in the suburbs, that was in all kinds of things that I was doing at that time. Pamphleteering; not mass meetings but house meetings mainly, that is what we were doing, especially in Indian townships and things like that.

MN: So it was a series of..?

SV: Sorry?

MN: It was a series of events that...?

SV: A whole series of things. I didn't realise that I was being monitored as much as I eventually found out, and was slapped with a banning order. I know it was signed by BJ Vorster. Ya, I still have copies of it at home. And, oh ya, during that time there was a British Prime Minister called Harold Macmillan, and it was a period when Africa was being decolonised. You had Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and all of these countries were decolonised. So Harold Macmillan came down to South Africa to tell the Afrikaner: "Look, you've got to change your ways. The winds of change are blowing from the North." That's his famous speech. And "You've got to change, otherwise you are going to be swept into the sea." You know the English are very good at their use of the language. It's a way of telling them, scrap your apartheid policy before a revolution takes place here. They wouldn't listen. But the corporate world began to take note of what he was saying and they were beginning to, very tentatively, so Sunlife Multinational took heed of Macmillan's message and agreed to hire me. Only black person on that floor and I think on the 13th or 14th floor of that building, corner of Esplanade and Broad Street.

I don't know somewhere around there. And the managing director was an obviously a foreigner, Canadian or English, he wasn't South African. So he meets me, offers me the job five times the salary that I was getting at the M.L. Sultan Technical College. And I was excited and I felt glad that I was kicked out of teaching for the first time. So then he tells me okay, they'll tell me when I can start work. Six weeks go I don't hear from these guys. So I call him and make an appointment to meet with him. So I go up and tell him, "Come on, you know it's six weeks now, what's the problem?" And then he tells me, look he says ,he's got five problems. I ask for what. One major problem was the elevators, the lifts in that building. There were only two lifts, one goods lift and the other for Europeans only. So he didn't know how to solve that problem. Then, on that floor there were toilets only for whites. Then he needed to get me a secretary who is going to interface between me and the white clients. I'm not allowed to talk to white clients. So I'll have to get a white secretary to talk to clients. And then the fourth one was: this was an open plan office, so then they had to build a partition, a corner for me, away from the rest of the white staff. So he says okay, he's is dealing with these things. I must just give him time, but in the meantime he says, "don't worry six weeks you're going to get paid, you will be paid." That made me very happy. I said okay this guy is dealing with it, and in the meantime I'm getting paid, getting a holiday before I start work. That's how I looked at it. Anyway another month goes by and he calls me

in and he says look he says he's solved the toilet problem; he's solved the office partitioning; he's solved the secretary; he got somebody who agreed to work with me, a young white woman. But he couldn't solve the lift problem. So he gave me a three months cheque and said "he can't have me." So that was the kind of South Africa that you had. Soon thereafter I, you know ,I get banned and I get house arrested in 1964. And I wasn't employed now, Trees is not employed, we have our first baby, things are becoming a bit bleak for us, and becoming, both of us were becoming very anxious. Similarly other pieces of work that I got with other insurance companies, temporary, get kicked out because the Security Police would harass the employers, you see. So we didn't work and I thought the only way to do this is to be self-employed. And I had no other trade apart from peddling fruit and vegetables and I didn't want to go back to do that, although my parents were still in that kind of business. They offered me a bakkie and to set me up and I said: "No I've been through that for twenty-five years of my life and I don't want to knock at the back door of a white man anymore." It was very humiliating, you know. Even when they bought the vegetable, you had to take the basket go to the back door and deliver it, not at the front door, and I don't want to be called Sammy. So I didn't take that option. Then there was a butcher shop that was being or run, down in Chatsworth, so I hired that at R80 or £80. I don't know what it was. R80, I think a month, rental.

MN: This was after your detention, how long was your detention by the way?

SV: No I wasn't in detention yet.

MN: House arrest?

SV: House arrest, five years

MN: Five years.

SV: It had to go up until 1969.

MN: So this venture, this business you are about to enter, was it after the period?

SV: No, in 1964, I was banned and house arrested. And in 1964, I hired this butcher shop and became a butcher for the next five years of my life. Chopping meat and selling meat. It was a horrible experience but nevertheless, I went through that and in 1969 my banning and house arrest expired and I immediately became active, visibly active, writing, addressing small meetings. And about, in 1970 1969/1970, I drove around the country re-establishing physical contact with comrades all over. Come back, the Unity Movement decided to open the - enter into armed struggle. They began recruiting guerilla freedom fighters in South Africa. We got involved in that until in 1970, we all got arrested, more than 200 of us.

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

MN: Welcome back again. Professor Sunny, still talking of politics, can you tell us more about the student politics during that time?

SV: Well I think earlier on I did say that the DSU had a very, very strong following in Natal. We had branches in Tongaat, Stanger, Dundee, Newcastle and Durban. And we were on the verge of forming

this National Student Organisation, but 1st April 1963, when we were expelled from the M.L. Sultan College and most of the local leadership of DSU were either banned, house arrested and all of that. That student organisation collapsed. But the interesting thing is that during that period I'm talking about 1963 onwards, for the next five years, a new student organisation began to emerge. It was called South African Student Organisation [SASO]. It was a black student organisation. Outside of the Unity Movement, outside of the Congresses. And I recall very clearly because it was at the height of, soon after the Schibusch Commission, where the state was going after NUSAS as a - they labelled NUSAS as a - I can't remember the exact word - but as a radical student organisation. They forced the university to change their own constitution, where previously, if NUSAS had a presence at Natal University another student organisation cannot operate there. It would, kind of closed shop operation, so the state forced all the liberal white universities to change those policies, where you now began to have Afrikaans ASB branches being set up at the liberal white universities. It was in that milieu, NUSAS was being seen as being progressive. Some of its older leadership joined a more radical Liberal Party kind of thing. You had the ARM coming into existence. Your Adrian Leftwicks' and all of those people. And it was during that time that SASO began to come up. And I remember Radio Bantu I think they used to call it, those days promoting SASO. And when SASO was being formed NUSAS was trying to take over. We

were invited to the first founding conference at Alan Taylor residence here in Wentworth. We went there and in the back room we see the NUSAS guys turning out. In those days they wouldn't have photocopiers, they had duplicating machines. They would be doing all of the stuff, and we had a row and I couldn't go there because I was banned but people like Gaby [Pillay] and Morgam [Moodliar] and all of them, went there. They had a fight with them and we walked out of it. But I think SASO eventually changed, its character changed. NUSAS wasn't able to break through, clearly, with SASO. But eventually I think, in the early seventies the whole character of SASO changed and with the formation of the BC [Black Consciousness] and the Saths Coopers, your Strinis, and Ashwin Trkamjees, all of the left-wing NIC youngsters took over this; that student organisation, and eventually became the BCM [Black Consciousness Movement], you see.

MN: Can you tell us about your - have you ever been detained, I mean during your struggle years, when was it?

SV: Yes, much later, after I said you know when the Unity Movement decided to formally enter to the armed struggle. We began recruiting in Durban, in the Transkei, and all over. And in 1970 we got caught. We were detained. And by then already the Terrorism Act came into being. Under, in terms of Section 6 of the Terrorism Act, they could detain you for an indefinite period. Indefinite. I mean, and it happened; I think most of the deaths in detention and all of that took place under the Terrorism Act

because it gave the Security Police such immense powers, powers of life and death over detainees.

So I was arrested in, I think, on the 17th of February 1970, and I was a butcher then. Oh, by then I think because my banning order was expired I registered at Natal University to complete my LLB. I had one year to finish. And I also registered as an Article Clerk with Navi Pillay's office. And I recall that morning that - oh, we got wind, I think, that people were getting arrested in Cape Town. And we sent Gaby and Morgam down to Cape Town to find out what's going on, and another two colleagues from the Transkei. And I remember that morning that I went to the butcher shop, drove down into town. Now we had our offices in, I don't know, somewhere in Grey Street, no it was Queen, no it was Grey Street, our office there and Ene's buildings, is it? Ya, somewhere there, so I walk in there. As I walk into, towards the lift, I was grabbed by two Security Police. Carried, virtually, into the elevator, into the offices. They rifled through my offices, my desk, my drawers, I don't know what they were looking for. Didn't say a word, no questions asked, just searching, searching wildly. They wanted the key to the safe. Navi's, the safe key wasn't there. I said I don't have the key, only the lawyer has the key to our safe. Anyway they bundled me back and took me home. They did the same thing there at home, rifled through my, I think, we had a cabinet, every drawer. They couldn't pick up anything. Took me to the butcher shop, searched it again, up until then they wouldn't tell me what they're looking for. You know I had literature,

banned stuff, I remember, at home. I had the diary of Che Guevara, they took that away. And there was lots of other banned stuff. They didn't bother about it, really. And they took me back home and told me "Right, take your toiletries, we're detaining you." And that was it. You know, I still recall my little son. I think he was a year or a year and a half, Ravel, trying to cry and he wanted me to carry him and I couldn't do that, they wouldn't allow me. And here I am, taken to this place in Fisher Street. And interrogated, I think, for twenty-four hours non-stop. And eventually, taken, and bundled, and held in Durban North Police Station. Can I have a break?

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back, we were asking you about your experience when you were detained.

SV: Ya. I think I need to say something. Just before I was actually thrown into detention, I remember I was walking to my office; I was Articled - as in I don't know what you call them Articled Clerk, in an attorney's office. And as I was walking in they grabbed me in Grey Street, and took me into the lift, took me to the office, ransacked the office, found nothing.

DS: Sorry can we pause?

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

DS: We are back okay. Okay can we continue?

SV: Yes, and they searched the offices and then took me to my home. Searched my home took me to the butcher shop searched the butcher shop and just

took me to Fisher Street. Not a word saying nothing.

You know, they didn't even tell me what they were looking for. But they started then, interrogating me in Fisher Street. Started off by sitting, you know, made me sit, and fairly civil, in the beginning. And slowly they began pulling in the race card, you know, why you, as an Indian, are getting involved with these Kaffirs and then they went further to say that why am I involved with Kader Hassim? This guy is a Moslem and you are a Hindu, and this was Nayager, in the beginning. So they were trying to use race and religion and all kinds of things, to drive a wedge between myself and my comrades because by then they had already picked up Armstrong Madoda, Gaby Pillay, Morgam Moodliar and Nkosi. So there were five people they picked up, oh and Nina Hassim, Kader's wife.

DS: Oh okay.

SV: Ya and I said I know nothing about these things, you know, and that I was banned and I'm busy in the butcher shop. I am Articled now, and I'm not involved in any of this stuff. The day progressed. I think by midday, they made me stand on two bricks, and kept assaulting me, you know. Put up my arms, hitting me underneath. And then later in the day, I think they gave me two bricks to hold. I didn't mind that, in the first five minutes they were - it was nothing. I was a butcher, you see. I thought my arms were strong, and I felt okay, I'll pull through this. But I can tell you, after fifteen minutes, those bricks weighed like a ton, and they kept collapsing, and they kept hitting me underneath, the muscles there [pointing to his arms]. Then, I think, they

confronted me openly, to say that I financed the whole operation to recruit people in South Africa for the armed struggle. So I tried to argue back that the Unity Movement and APDUSA, at that stage, were against the armed struggle not in principle, but in terms of the practicalities of it. Because already, by that time, the ANC, APLA and all of these people were really struggling in terms of the armed struggle. You know, they couldn't come through because Zimbabwe, Rhodesia at that stage, wasn't freed. There was no way for them to come through, except perhaps through Maputo, but then you had Buthelezi in Zululand, and all of those problems. Logistically, it was not possible to wage an armed struggle without having a backup country or place where people can run back into. So that was our argument against the armed struggle. We didn't believe that blowing up pylons and railway bridges are going to really bring about a revolution in South Africa. That the position that we adopted, at that stage, was that we need to bring in political cadres into South Africa have them go outside the country. Training them and bring them back into the country and send them into the rural areas, because we couldn't do it. You know these people coming from outside and do the training of people in the country, and time will arrive when you have the countryside ready for an uprising. And then we would talk about the armed struggle in earnest; so that was the position I tried to lay out. And that was a fact, it wasn't misleading or anything like that and we felt pretty comfortable to talk about that. And anyway they wouldn't accept that and the beatings became

more severe, kicking and punching and all of that stuff went on until late at night I think very late. I don't know what time they dumped me into the car and put me into a police station cell, Durban North Police Station, I only realised that the next day. And you know, it's very difficult to explain your feelings then; because I've never been in jail before that and just to have the to hear the cell door clang and shut and three or four turns on that lock was, you know, it was absolute severance from life. I was in my thirties then and it was a very filthy cell. It had a bench, dirty toilet, two filthy blankets, they were so filthy you can stand them up on their sides you know. I didn't sleep I just sat on the bench and I cried. I really cried for my father my mother to come and save me from this thing, and I carried on and on, I think, until the early hours of the morning. And then tried to pull myself together, to say that look you just have to go through this and get strong. Okay then they bring you breakfast in the morning; porridge in a aluminium plate, you know. It was a plate that you could turn, use it either side it was smashed. You know, like those wheel caps that are run over - filthy. They give you coffee or tea in a mug, enamel mug, which had no enamel on it. So I couldn't drink it you know, it was just too bad. Anyway, they came and picked me up I think about six or seven in the morning, yanked me out, you are now manacled, fettered, dumped in a car. They closed the windows, you know, blocked them up so you don't know where you are. But I knew Durban well I knew Durban North as well I could make out where they are going. They went

down Blue Lagoon, you know that road. So back in detention and the interrogation starts in earnest. A whole series of things take place. You are beaten up, they throw you on the floor, they jump on you. You know just the punches and all of that were not too bad but when these guys, heavy guys they jumped on my chest, they burst my hernia. I got a burst hernia even up till now, and all kinds of things, you know, the beatings. I don't know when during that detention period they beat me up so badly that they damaged my ear. I don't have a middle ear anymore, there is a huge cavity in that ear. And therefore I tell people that, you know, I'm not going to participate in this Truth and Reconciliation and amnesty because to me, my torture is ever present. It's twenty-four hours a day; it reminds me because I can't hear clearly; my back, my hernia hurts, it's because I can never sleep on my back. I've got to sleep on my side all the time.

DS: Did your torture go to TRC?

SV: I didn't go there. I refused to participate in that because the whole idea of the TRC was to grant amnesty to the perpetrators of violence. And that, I couldn't accept. And my point is that it's too late for them to come and ask for pardon, you know. I'm not God; I'm not a Tutu. They can do it because they didn't get their backs kicked, you see they can be very generous with the granting pardons and amnesties, and all of that. But I don't think any person who was being tortured will freely and readily agree to forgive. I don't know if you guys saw that Carte Blanche film. You remember we showed it in the department. That was a classic

case, you know, where people just who were not even tortured but whose uncle or brother was tortured and he heard for the first time. You know, instinctively, you react by picking up a huge glass vase and bash that guy's head. That was a brilliant piece of filming, you know. It wasn't something that was planned, but it was a spontaneous kind of thing.

So that's the kind of feeling you have and I refused to do it, and they went on and on, and you see they had arrested people throughout South Africa, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Transkei, there were more than 200 people that they arrested and held in detention. And as the interrogation and torture goes on they would pick up what's going on what kind of information they're getting from people that I knew in Cape Town, Johannesburg and the Transkei. If there are any discrepancies in what I was saying, then the beatings become more severe. That "you are lying" you know, they kept asking me about meetings that took place in Cape Town in the sixties, you know, when you are in that state you can't remember clearly. And at the same time you don't want to divulge more than that is absolutely necessary: that's the big problem that you go through. That you'll give as much as is necessary without implicating other people. And I got a lot of beatings because of that. I had to protect Morgam, Gaby, Madoda and Armstrong. Those were the four people that I had to worry about. And it was bad and I stayed in detention for about five months in solitary confinement. No visits, no doctors. Magistrates, apparently used to come there, and the guy would be sitting and having tea with the

Security Police and he would walk by just sees you he doesn't talk to you. Only once I complained about the food and they got even more angry with me, and beat me up for nothing, just for that. But, I think at one stage, I don't know when, you know time you don't have control over time, you don't know the difference between day and night. I remember my whole body broke out in a rash. It must have been a psychological thing.

DS: Where were you by this time?

SV: I was in Durban in detention.

DS: Okay, one of the police stations?

SV: Durban North Police Station. That's why I was kept in Durban. And I somehow I think they got frightened about it. And they took me to a district surgeon in Durban. The guy seemed to be a nice guy and he kept asking me things and all of that and then prescribed medicines. I don't know what it was. And I was very suspicious of medicines and things that you get whilst you are in detention because we had this attitude towards district surgeons and their collusion with the police and all of that. So they didn't give all the medicines to me at one time. They were left in the charge office and every morning they would - oh no, in the evenings I think they used to give me two tablets or one, no one tablet plus something else some cream to rub. The cream I used but the tablets - I was scared to take them because I didn't know what they were. So there were cracks in the floor there I used to wrap them up in toilet paper and stuff them in there you see. And pretended that I had took them but it took a while to go but what had happened then was that

my youngest son was born, whilst I was in detention. And one thing they promised me to tell me whether Trees gave birth or not. So one morning they, or was it the evening, I think they come they open the peephole and say they told me "you have a son."

DS: Just like that?

SV: Just like that and walked out. Well when you are in detention you think you are very irrational sometimes. You know I thought look they told me that I have a son. They didn't tell me anything about Trees. And then I thought okay Trees must have died in childbirth and all of that kind of thing.

DS: So you got worried?

SV: Sorry?

DS: You got worried?

SV: I got you know, yes, terribly distraught, and cried and then I remembered these tablets. I took them out and I think I had about twenty of them by then. And fetched a mug of water and I was just about to take them. I wanted to commit suicide. And then I heard my daughter scream, "Daddy, don't do that," and I just dropped it. It wasn't real but I mean that's what went through my head. I heard her distinctly telling me "Daddy don't do that" and I dropped it. Then I pick up these tablets, they were Valium 10's. I would have gone if I had taken those things. So I owe my daughter my life. But that's how close you come to dying in detention because, I think, I don't know whether I said this earlier that if anybody gave me a choice: twenty years in prison or ten days in detention. Without batting an eyelid, I would take twenty years in prison because at least I

know at the end of twenty years I can come back home. In detention there is no certainty that you will come out of it alive. You know, the history of South African secret police's is really ridiculous. The few we hear about are the known cases but what about thousands they must have killed off and thrown in rivers especially in the rural areas. That's where they were absolutely brutal. And it went on and on until eventually they came to me and said, "Look, we want you to be a state witness." I was shocked out of my wits that they would come and ask me to become a state witness because I think during those days for anybody to become a state witness was a most ignominious thing. You know it was a terrible thing; I mean it's like patricide or matricide you know. So I wouldn't say a thing: I just kept quiet about it and I know that they were trying to be lenient with me, you know, offering to buy me cigarettes; and all of those things were taking place trying to prime me up. Until very much later, somewhere in June or somewhere around there, they came to me and said: "Right, we're taking you to Maritzburg." And I know that day was a very hot, hot day. There was a huge table for fourteen Security Police who were in charge of this case throughout the country. Swanepoel, remember that guy, a real monster of a chap. They put me at the bottom end of the table and had two heaters behind me, a long burning hot day. And then started telling me: "Right, these are your options: you give the evidence, we'll let off Nina Hassim, we won't charge her; we won't charge another person in Cape Town", and all of that. "We

may not even charge Moodley and Gaby Pillay, we might use them as witnesses." See, the whole strategy I knew that if I don't give evidence there is nobody to give, to you know, they won't have anybody against Armstrong and Madoda and Kader. That's how I looked at it. And I knew that Armstrong and Madoda and all of these guys won't give evidence you know that's, that's the kind of feeling you had with the old comrades. But then they just grabbed me took me into a shuttered room, beat me up terribly that day because I refused to give evidence. They took my testicles put it into a drawer and slammed it. I passed out. The next moment I regained consciousness was at the Pietermaritzburg Prison. I remember they took away my belt I had to hold my pants, and they gave me a bucket, a slop-pail I'm holding that and walking. And they didn't speak a word they just all the time they held me by the scruff of neck and walked me up. And when I got to the prison cells that was the best moment of my life in six months, because there I saw Kader and all the other comrades whom they charged. And at last I knew that I'm going to be charged and that I'm again with comrades and it was great because this was death row in Pietermaritzburg Prison. And you didn't have sealed doors it was all caged kind of thing - you can look across. And that was it, and then a week later we were formally charged.

END TAPE 1B

TAPE 2A: INTERVIEW HELD ON THE 8TH AUGUST 2002

DS: Prof Sunny, can you still remember the names of the policemen who tortured you?

SV: I think the person who was in charge of the operation against us in Durban was Captain Stadler and he was assisted by a guy called Wood, Lieutenant Wood. Du Toit was there, Captain Nayager, Benjamin, Perumal, or somebody else but there were a lot. And there were lots of Africans.

DS: Oh, security?

SV: I don't know the names.

DS: Okay.

SV: Security police, but guys that really were the biggest torturer's in my case were Benjamin, Nayager and Van Dyk. He was an ordinary constable. But he was, although Nayager was a Captain at that stage, he had to take instructions from Van Dyk, and they went on and on. And they were to me, Van Dyk and Nayager, were the biggest torturer's. The others would punch and kick, and you know, but these guys were really serious. They foul mouthed, you know, the things they said to you: that Trees will give birth in the cells there with me and how they were going to pull the baby out: it was too disgusting. But when they threw me into Pietermaritzburg Prison it was an immense relief and a week later we were charged. And for the first time I see we called for Navi [Pillay] as our attorney, and Trees was there, and Nina came in. And it was the most beautiful thing that could have happened to us. To be charged, at least the torture has come to an end. And that was it. The trial took about a year and a half. And they used 200 witnesses against us. You know, I thought that I

went through severe torture but when we met the people from the Transkei, then what happened to us was really minimal. Because the Transkei people; they arrested about 150 of them and set up a torture camp in a place called Kambati.

DS: Kambati.

SV: Ya, its in a forest: Kambati Forest, and what they did there was just pick up people. You know, these are poor peasants and we had a strong presence in the Transkei. We were fairly active and they just pick these people up bring them to the forest, no interrogation, nothing. Every one of those, without exception, they hung them up by their feet overnight.

DS: By their feet, meaning they would take their feet with their head's upside down?

SV: Hang them up in a tree and leave them there for the whole night. And then the next day they start beating them, no questions asked, nothing. No actual interrogation, they just beat these guys up. And up till today, you know, even in court we tried to prove that there was torture. Of course, the judge wouldn't hear of it: these are Pondo's, you know, with tribal thing. You have these tribal wars and that's how they got their scars on their backs. Two people died in Kambati, at that stage. One guy actually self-inflicted; he cut his wrist and died, and I remember the guy's name was Jakedi, and some horrible stories that they told us took place there. Ours was nothing. The people in the Transvaal were also brought down to Kambati Forest. What they did with them was in transit from Johannesburg to Kambati; they put pebbles in their shoes, and got

them to wear them and then made them stand. You know, it sounds innocuous things like, you know, pebbles, and you know try standing on pebbles for twenty-four hours or something. And what happens, the legs just blew up. And those were the days. Anyway the trial takes place we tried to bring in the question of torture - the judge wouldn't allow it. He says it's not relevant and didn't take place. We had a-trial-within-a-trial. But the saddest thing was when comrades gave evidence against you. I wouldn't have mind if they said the truth and went, you know, it would have been not too bad, because whilst I was in detention I could hear them cry, they were being beaten up as well. Very badly, you know, they cried. I could hear them. But when they came and gave evidence against me and Kader, it was false evidence. You know they said that we were recruiting for military training, which wasn't true, it was totally false. And anyway they gave evidence. There was only one guy, one youngster from Cape Town, that when he came into give evidence, he said that he was tortured. And he tried to speak the truth, and Swanepoel, in the presence of the judge, Swanepoel grabbed him by his belt and took him away, back into detention. Fortunately for me, both Gaby and Morgam refused to give evidence. And eventually they let them out; I think after a year or, I don't know, something. They stayed in detention, but eventually they let them out. And personally for me, you know, and my family: I tried to get my family to be non-racial and people like Armstrong and Nkosi used to visit me weekends with their families. And my parents used

to be surprised about these guys; they are not thugs, not rogues you know that's the perception they had about Africans. But when these two gave evidence against me, the thing turned around again. So you can't trust an African, that kind of an attitude. I said what about all the other Coloured's in Cape Town that gave evidence, you know, and all the people [who said] that my main role at that stage was raising the funds for this whole operation. And all the other people came and gave evidence but they told the truth that I came and I said and I did say what it was for. It was just for the Movement and they just gave it to me. And that's it. I said they gave evidence but that evidence didn't kill me, you know. Didn't hang me at all. But the point is that people, some gave evidence, some did not give evidence. But to my parents sadly Morgam and Gaby were the big heroes for them, and they perceived that as being because they are Indians. They were good comrades. Another two, because they were Africans, they were bad comrades; you can't trust them. So these are the things that reinforced perceptions, racism, and all of these things. And we need to understand this as well. So we get, eventually after eighteen months of trial suddenly, we get convicted. I got twelve years, I got charged with two counts six years each; and sentenced to hard labour, and all of that. After we were tried and convicted they made us cut our hair short.

DS: Your hair short?

SV: Ya.

DS: Okay.

SV: Moustaches, whoever had moustaches, were out. And it was so bizarre you know. People, you know, would for eighteen months, you couldn't recognise them because either the beard or the moustaches are taken out, and so who is this guy? You know, you really have to look and think who people were. It wasn't so bad with us but anyway we were put into a truck and given new clothes, prison outfit and driven to Leeukop.

DS: Leeukop?

SV: Pretoria.

DS: Okay.

SV: And when we got there; Leeukop is a beautiful prison from the outside. We were really happy to get there because Pietermatitzburg Prison was a dungeon. It was death row; we were living in a filthy, dirty, horrible prison, one of these old prisons you see. And it was really bad. When we saw Leeukop: beautiful, you know, face-brick buildings, beautiful gardens outside, and all of that. Anyway, we get into reception, take off your clothes, because those clothes apparently have to go back to Pietermaritzburg. Then they made us walk naked four floors down. The deeper we got, the colder and more slimy and dingy it became. For about two hours we were without clothes. In prison one of the conditions is that once you enter a prison you have to be examined by a medical doctor. Whether you are fit to serve your sentence. So there's a doctor sitting there at a table, stethoscope hanging round his neck, not where it should have been. Talking to other warders there, and you are supposed to file and he has got his stethoscope out

like that doesn't touch you. And you walk past, so he certifies you fit. Go through that; they make you bend and see whether you are smuggling things and all of that. And then they issued us with clothes, short pants and a half-sleeved shirt filthy. They were full of chicken shit, it was really, really horrible. Anyway we wore that and then they eventually take took us right down to the cell. It was an isolation kind of a cell; it was a cell about three quarters of this and half the size. And put three other people there. N.T. Naicker was there, so that gave us hope. So at least there was a face that we recognized, and there was another person there that was on his way out from Robben Island, Lolo. So that was great. So they put seventeen of us; there were two other criminal or common law prisoners, in there as well. And they put seventeen of us in that cell and it was so crowded that you had to sleep on your side. And if you wanted to turn the whole seventeen had to turn. There was no room you can't lie on your back. And this mat and a blanket each, and this is in July, it's cold, Leeukop is a very cold place. We were locked up for more than twenty-three and a half hours a day in that cell.

Two slop-pails in front; they would bring breakfast about five in the morning. We can hear them clang, clang, clang, stacked outside. We had - only opened the outside door, this steel-plated door, at about seven o'clock, and pass you your porridge. They were able to pass the porridge sideways because it was now congealed and cold so you ate your porridge both from the underneath and from the top. Because a lot of it was stuck on the bottom as well

so you ate that and they gave you some kind of coffee, and that was your breakfast. You were let out about ten o'clock; given half an hour to empty your slop-pails and have a shower, an open shower in winter, fine spray, you know. It was cold; if it was a hard open spray you can take it, but when you have a fine spray, it's horrible. There was no face-cloth: they gave us a dish-cloth, cut into four pieces, and they gave that to us. The food in Leeukop was really, really terrible. I think they deliberately put in barrel loads of stone, sand, muck in the food - it was almost inedible. No meat, once they gave meat it was rotten meat. We complained, and the officer commanding comes there and threatened us that they will put us on spare diet for complaining. I said, "Look, I'm a butcher. I know my meat." Because one of the practices in a common law prison - and we saw this in Pietermaritzburg, as well - one the trustees you know, the common law prisoners, collects the meat and sells so the prisoners really don't get anything. If you have got money you buy meat and you can buy anything perhaps in prison. And we found the food really horrible in terms of cleanliness and all of that. The same thing: porridge in the morning; mealie rice for lunch; and mealie rice again for supper.

DS: So while you were there were your parents able to visit you?

SV: No, no visiting.

DS: No visiting, even though you were charged and convicted?

SV: Ya. We were not graded yet, you see.

DS: Okay.

SV: Once they grade you, then you are entitled to either one visit or two visits, or whatever it is. So none of that took place. We were there for about three months in Leeukop; and the clothes was the thing that really got us; that once a week they give you a change of clothes and it not your own, so you don't do your own washing; somebody else does it but they give you filthy clothes all the time. And it was really bad, no shoes.

DS: Barefoot. You were bare feet?

SV: Ya, and it was bad. But anyway, after about three months, they called us out one day on a Sunday about twelve o'clock or something, loaded us up into a bakkie, back of a bakkie and only left Leeukop at about four o'clock. We didn't have lunch, we had we couldn't even go to the toilet. Of course, we were manacled to one another, handcuffed and manacled in pairs.

DS: Can we pause? Professor Sunny, what was the state of your health by this time?

SV: I think my health was generally good except that, by then, my ears, my middle ear was gone - they had to take that out. I had crushed genitals and a burst hernia. Otherwise, I think, for the one and a half years that we were in Pietermaritzburg, we had good food because we were allowed to get food from home. And the families and people in Maritzburg really fed us so we were really fattened when we left Pietermaritzburg Prison. So we got in fairly good shape, except the physical things that we went through, you know. What I am trying to say is, we didn't get sick even in Leeukop. Except your colds and coughs and all of that; otherwise we were in

fairly good nick. And I think that helped us as well for that journey from Pretoria to Cape Town. They did a nonstop drive in the dead of winter, dead of winter through the Karoo. They wouldn't stop for us to go to the bathroom or toilet or anything. Most of us, if not all us, peed in our pants. The only warm place on the back of that bakkie was the axle rungs, you know - the crown wheel, there is a little bit of warmth, we used to put our hand there and we used to take turns to get to that place. Anyway look, we were pretty excited that going to Robben Island; we were going to be living amongst comrades; and very romantic ideas of Robben Island because Lolo told us what was happening. Anyway we get to Robben Island and got out of the boat, no before we get onto the boat they took us...

[interruption]

DS: What year was that?

SV: 1972.

DS: 1972.

SV: Ya. They stopped in a prison somewhere in Durbanville or somewhere, they gave us breakfast there, around, it was about five in the morning. It was hot porridge, no spoons, you had to use your fingers and you have to sit out in the yard. No jackets, no nothing, no jerseys, and they gave us half an hour. We couldn't eat it because it was too hot we couldn't put even our fingers in it. Anyway we got back; they just loaded us back and took us to the docks and put us on this boat and made us walk into the hold. You were not allowed to sit on top and that hold was used to transport pigs and all kinds of rubbish: stinky, stinky place. And I know

it, it was almost impossible for people to walk down that because you are manacled and handcuffed. You know you have to do it sideways. You know, we were younger, relatively, we had old people there in 70's and 75's, how they scrambled down that we don't know. Anyway, we get down there and I think the only thing that really kept us going was we are going to get to Robben Island. And we are going meet comrades there again. And get off the boat, still manacled, walked. I remember the first warder we saw as we were coming into the reception was the guy with no [nose] bridge. He looked grotesque. He was a white warder, with a number of prisoners around him. That gave us a bit of shock because we began thinking that Robben Island was a leper colony and was this guy a victim of leprosy or anything like that. But ironically that guy, we used to call him 'Puzamandla', Robinson was his name. He was the kindest warder on Robben Island and we all began to like him eventually. But you know, this is once again - appearances really are terrible things you know, you adopt an attitude immediately you see this guy. And he was also white. He was one of those old Englishmen who was on the Island; worked on the leper colony; for some reason they just kept him on. And he used to be in charge of the gardening team. Anyway we get into reception again they take away these filthy clothes that you came in. Now we get clean new clothes for Robben Island. Indians got long pants, a shirt; a jacket; a hat. You got shoes; you were given socks; and you were given a jersey. That was your outfit. And the Africans were given the same things except that

they didn't get shoes, they got sandals and they were given a cap, you see.

DS: They were given a cap?

SV: Cap.

DS: And the Indians a hat?

SV: Ya, and Coloureds the hats. So we didn't know the dynamics of Robben Island, even Lolo didn't tell us about these things. So anyway we get into, march us to a section of the prison called E section and a surprise for us on the outside in the yard there was, somebody wrote in huge letters "Welcome ABDUSA." So news had already got to them you know. This was fantastic thing about prison; that somehow they get information what's happening. And nobody was there no prisoners were there, at that stage; because it was during the day now and we walk in, and thrilled with this cell they put us in, the cell that could hold about 250 people. Normally, it was a plain open blank cell they gave us two blankets; plus a mat; and there were toilets, you know it was an en-suite; sinks - it was glistening, it was beautiful compared to Leeukop and Pietermaritzburg - that was filthy. No sloppails here. Anyway surprise, surprise, lunchtime they brought food for us; they had a dining room as well, and food comes and it was clinically clean. I remember: it was mealie rice and beans, you know dried beans boiled. It was so clean compared to what we had been through at Leeukop, that we just gulped, and immediately spat it out because it was bitter. They cooked the food on Robben Island in brak water, it's bitter, bitter water. The same thing; we all ran to the sinks to drink water there.

DS: It was bitter?

SV: No there the water is plain salt water right from the sea, because seaweed and all those things to come out. Only later, did they gave us a litre of brak water per day. That's your drinking water. And what happened with that water is that within a few days you were running to the toilet every thirty minutes, because I think of the salt content. You just can't sleep, everybody is getting up and going to the toilet, going to the toilet. You spend half the night, really, going to the toilet. Anyway that afternoon the guys from that section; now there are other people; there were about 12 ANC people. Umkonto people in one cell, and there were about 60 SWAPO people in another cell. And all told we were 30 in our group; in a separate cell but we had a common dining room. It was a H-type arrangement, you know, four cells; they used one as a dining room. And of course everybody welcomed us. It was great; we didn't know anybody; except we knew about the Umkonto people because the trial was in Natal, Maritzburg. These were the people that were sold by Buthelezi. Buthelezi was the one who pimped on them and they got caught. And only last week I read that one of the guys died, Mpanza: last week I think he died, yes. And anyway we got on well. We found that we couldn't communicate really, with the Namibians, because they don't speak English. They can speak a bit of Afrikaans, but they could hardly speak English. But the most beautiful people that I have come across; and the stories they tell you and the trials that they went through, you know, in the fight against the South

Africans. Imagine these are real peasants from almost a Stone Age era, you know, trying to shoot down helicopters with bows and arrows, who still made fire rubbing two sticks, they still did it; and they were pretty good at it. You know, carving with stone. So what we did in the beginning was that we went out chopping wood for the warders; cut big pieces of wood into small pieces; break them, you know, like you buy wood for barbecues, and that kind of thing - that's what we were doing. That was lovely; we went out into the bush chopping these Port Jackson Willows; it was fun because you went right into the bush and all of that. But then they found that we were trying to hold literacy classes for the Namibians and for the people in our section who were totally illiterate in English, right? So they stopped taking us into the bush to chop wood. They brought us into the section itself; brought stones a five-pound hammer; you sit there and break stones. That was really devastating because, you know, you got to sit there and break stones from eight in the morning till four in the afternoon. And the warder just comes and kicks it out, it was useless, I mean it was not put to any use, and we went on doing that. Anyway, we still continued holding classes outside because we had stone and we used to use stone to write on, slate, and we did that and when a warder was not too bad he would turn a blind eye to it. But we had nasty warders who would catch you and take you into solitary confinement. He'll say, "Three meals." Now three meals doesn't mean that you are going to get three meals - it meant that you missed

three consecutive meals. They took you and put into, in prison language they call it Koelkoet right.

DS: Koelkoet?

SV: Ya.

DS: Okay I've heard of that

SV: You have heard of that. They put you into isolation, take away all your blankets everything, put you in there and no food, three meals - you miss breakfast, supper, lunch, you miss those you come back that's three meals.

DS: Can I get clarity on Koelkoet too. Is it like, what do you call it - like it's built like it's short, basically.

SV: No, no, no.

DS: Oh, okay.

SV: It was an identical cell to the single cell, ya.

DS: Oh okay.

SV: Except that it was a section of a prison where - you know Robben Island is an island, and when the tide comes in you can actually pick up enough water from the walls and have a good wash. It was damp, that side of the island was very, very wet. Although it was part of the single cell; the same horseshoe complex that wing; because it's slightly lower it was always damp. Anyway I had about three meals; I don't know for what - the warder doesn't like your face in the morning, he'll say three meals and they march you off into solitary confinement. And you do your three meals - this was going on; others also went through the same problem until we got really fed up about these warders shouting at us. No recreation; not allowing you to mix with one another during the weekends; Saturdays and

Sundays we didn't work; so we were sort of fed up about this and we decided that we are going to write a - oh, the other thing I think I need to tell you is that in prisons throughout South Africa, on a Sunday morning they have an inspection. Where you stand to attention and in front of your rolled blanket and your handkerchief in front, they also give you a khaki handkerchief. So I never used it because we had to have this for inspection you see so you stand there to attention. And if you want to make any request, you make the request. Then they'll allow you give you a piece of paper, fullscap paper, you put it down in writing and then give it back to them on Monday. And then that thing goes to the Officer Commanding who then decides whether to accede to your request or whatever the request is, whether you want to see a dentist or have your eyes tested or whatever, as long as you have a complaint, okay? That was the procedure. So we decided that - no what they did before that was they took away all our privileges, all our writing material, books that we had, novels that we had, or whatever, everything, pencils, paper, pens, and everything - they took away from us. And we wanted to write this petition - we can't ask them for paper because they wouldn't give it to us. So what we did was, we found a cement bag that flew over the fence. We grabbed that, we washed it out properly, cut it neatly and we didn't have a pencil, so somebody somehow smuggled a pencil that size, really that size, we wrote out a petition demanding to be treated as political prisoner's in terms of the Geneva Convention. We demanded a copy of prison

regulations; we demanded the right to study; proper recreation facilities; the quality of food; visits; access to library. The general section had a library - we wanted access to that. And we complained about the nature of our work; the tedium and all of that. And then we gave on this, one Sunday morning inspection, we handed - we got all the prisoners to sign, sign this petition and we gave it to the Officer Commanding. They just took it; they didn't say anything, and went off. I think I need to backtrack here, I think I lost events okay.

DS: Okay it's fine.

SV: The section that we were in was called the Terrorist Section. All people tried and charged and convicted under the Terrorism Act were put into that section. Therefore it was SWAPO people first; the Umkonto people were the second; we were the third lot of people that were charged and convicted under the Terrorism Act. So that section was called the Terries, we were the Terries.

DS: The Terries.

SV: Ya, and the warders also saw us as people that raped their mothers and sisters and killed their babies, you know, that we were real terrorists. So it wasn't a nice attitude that they had towards us, really raw, rough, crude, all the time swearing at us. And it was during that time that when we were teaching these people to read and write that they took away all these privileges; smoking cigarettes, nothing allowed. And one Sunday morning, I remember sitting there in the passage and a warder, the same guy this guy without a bridge, Puzamandla, comes and tells me, "The church is here." I said, "Church,

what church?" He says, "the Anglican Church. You see, it was a practice every Sunday; either the Methodist or the Roman Catholics or Dutch Reformed or whoever, comes there and hold services in the section. So he told me it was the Anglican Church and I said, "Anglican Church? I didn't know Anglican Church comes here because I thought only the Dutch Reformed Church comes here." I said, I'm playing on his English background, you see. He says, no, the Anglican Church comes there, he goes to it and blah blah blah. I tell him I'm an Anglican you know but I left my Bible in the storeroom. Okay, he says he'll open the storeroom. He takes out his keys; opens the storeroom; and I pick out my book: The Complete Works of Shakespeare. I take it out and show it to him then, look there's the Bible by William Shakespeare. So he let me have it, so I took it to my cell and we were celebrating. Now this is before other things happened, before the petition, now we have got this book. The problem is how do we hide it because there is nothing it's a bare room, you see, we didn't even have cupboards, nothing. And I don't know whether you want to see the book I've brought it along.

DS: It's, it's fine. Can I see the book. Can we pause?

SV: So what I did was that, again providentially, it was Deepavali time, and my parents sent me greeting cards. These are your typical Deepavali greeting cards. So I took those cards, cut them up and pasted the photographs on this [book] and we used porridge to stick it up. It's the way it is since I had it on Robben Island. And I openly left this on the shelf,

not shelf but on the window-sill, right behind my bed. They would come and ask me "what's that?" And they would ask, "what's this?" And I said, "It's my Bible." The one thing of the Afrikaner is that, there are two things he's scared of: his God and his Bible, and a lawyer. They are very scared of a lawyer. So I had this, they did not touch it. I've had this with me all the way through, and eventually, okay I'll come back to the petition. Gave the petition in, [they] took it Monday morning at about four or five in morning clang, clang, clang open the gate, "Kader Hassim and Sunny roll up your toiletries and all of that, out." They took us out from there took us straight into solitary confinement. The places where you serve your Koelkoet. Took us in there and locked us up. And told us that we are going to be held in solitary confinement on spare diet for an indefinite period. Now spare diet on Robben Island meant that you will get [only] twenty five percent of your normal diet. No exercise you are locked up twenty-three and a half-hours a day. You will only be let out to empty your slop-pail and have a wash and get back into your cell. During the day they took away your blankets and your mat so you stood on this cold and damp floor all the time, no place to sit. Except, the only place you could sit is on your slop-pail, we used to call it ballie, right. We sat on the ballie all the time.

DS: Did they give you the reasons why they?

SV: No, no reasons.

DS: No reasons.

SV: No reasons. They thought that it was Kader and I that were the instigators and they just locked us up. Again the Gods were good with us. I think you know, it was soon thereafter, after about five weeks, Navi [Pillay] came to interview us because they wanted to go and appeal against the conviction. So she came to take instructions from us, but I think Morgam and Navi came, and we were able to tell them that we were held in isolation; in solitary confinement; and blah, blah,blah, and it was very difficult to convey all of this to them. Because there were warders sitting and listening, and sat in that room where we were interviewed. It was bugged but we were able to write and do all kinds of things and tell them. And when they got back to Durban they brought an urgent application. My wife, Theresa, and Nina [Hassim] brought an urgent application in the Supreme Court of Cape Town to release us from solitary confinement and give reasons and all of these things, you see. Anyway, that set another motion, where, because Navi and them were practising in Natal, they couldn't represent us in Cape Town so they had to get another set of lawyers in Cape Town to interview us and take instructions. So we were getting a lot of contact with the outside world again, and of course, then the prison authorities and the Minister of Justice, Prisons and Justice, I think, opposed it. And these people were very good the set of lawyers that we had, Richmond and somebody. Although they didn't do very many political trials, they were really professional and good. And Dullah Omar also came there to interview us. And eventually, they forced them to give them

copies of our petition, the original, not to us - they had to make it available in the trial itself. So the trial did take place; so the judge, called Justice Diemont, who presided at that application hearing, and they had to produce the petition that we drew up they had to then try to justify why they had to put us into solitary confinement, which they couldn't. It was illegal, because in terms of their own prison laws, they weren't supposed to do that. They were supposed to have an administrative trial before they could punish prisoners. You see that never happened on Robben Island, up until then. They would just say three meals or lock people up for three months or four months or sometimes, lashes, you see, that was the practice. Until we demanded in that petition; we also said we needed to have a trial, we needed to have access to lawyers before they can find us guilty of any infringement of prison rules. And when that hearing took place the judge granted us all our requests. Except he said, that some of the things that we claimed were rights; he said they were not really rights, but they were privileges. But he, in our case, said he sees no reason why I wanted to study law; finish my LLB; I had three courses or something to do, and they said no.

DS: You can't.

SV: Ya.

DS: Okay.

SV: Similarly, there were others, if you have one degree you can't do another degree. That was their law. But the judge ruled against all of that; said no, we must be allowed to study and there must, you know - he was good. And he chastised the Commander at

Robben Island for all of that. It was a tremendous victory, immediate release from solitary confinement. And they didn't take us back to our comrades in E section, they took us out of the solitary confinement and brought us into the single cells. That is where all the elite of Robben Island were held. There were thirty of them. So we were brought into the single cells.

DS: Can you remember their names?

SV: Ya. All of the big names: Nelson, Kathrada, Govan Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, Mac Maharaj, Billy Nair, Lallo Chiba, Raymond Nhlaba, all of them all of the more popularly known Robben Islanders. We were put in with them. It is the first time I meet Nelson Mandela and all of them. We were pretty awestruck about it. The fact that we are now going to spend the rest of our time with these big guns, political guns. But one thing I must say about Nelson and all of these people; they had the kind of humility that was very, very surprising, except one or two of the younger ones were arrogant. But overall, all of them they were very, very humble and very warm and you know they really took care of us in the beginning, welcomed us, and put us through the ropes, and the culture in the single cells was also one of open camaraderie. Nobody treated one above the other, even Mandela was on the same level as the other Umkhonto youngsters who came into that section. That I found very good, nobody were treated...

DS: Unequal.

SV: Ya, you know, there was no deference to anybody, but that was really wonderful and good. But again we found that the treatment of political prisoners in

the single cells was totally different from the kind of treatment that we got in the E-section. There, we were treated like animals; here, the warders treated people in the single cells with a lot of deference. First time we got cigarettes, we got tobacco, and oh, it was real like going into a camp. But again, what we found there was the same pattern of differentiation in clothes in food.

DS: According to race?

SV: Ya, food according to race - your diet was different.

Africans got porridge in the morning; no sugar; a bit of powdered milk no, no they didn't get powdered milk just porridge, plain. Indians and Coloureds got the same porridge and a little bit of powdered milk and a tablespoon of sugar. For lunch Indians got mealie rice. Africans got you know these white mealies that you plant, just boiled, this hard brown mealies, they just boil it give it, nothing else with it. No liquids; no vegetables; nothing. For supper they used to Indians used to get mealie rice, and a slice of bread, thick brown bread and a lump of vegetables and the Africans, as well. No bread for the Africans, the Africans get bread once a week on a Saturday a slice of bread, and a lump of vegetables, tasteless thing, but the only thing about Robben Island food, it was clean. If pumpkins were in season, the whole pumpkin is boiled - just grab a lump and throw it in there. Boiled brinjals - you know, have you ever tasted boiled brinjals? Carrots, huge carrots, that size, you had it for three months in a row. You passed carrot water. No seriously, I'm not lying. Beetroot, they would give you. If you're eating beetroot, you know eating

beetroot for a couple of months. They probably get this from the prison farm or something, whatever is in season they would give you that. So, but beautifully, in the single cells what they did was there were about seven or eight non-Africans so we used to cut the bread into pieces and rotate.

MN: Okay can we pause?

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

MN: We are now resuming our talk with Professor Sunny.
Professor Sunny, welcome back.

SV: Thank you.

MN: Sir, you were talking about last time we paused, when you were talking about the life inside Robben Island and you were telling us about the bread incident. Can you please recap on that?

SV: Yes I think what I was trying to say there that the prison regulations in South Africa was absolutely racial. Even with clothing, diet, the kind of medical treatment you get, and all of that. So but I think when we got to the single cells we saw some kind of active demonstration by the political prisoners in single cells against this diet and clothing thing. Because when I was in the Terrorist Section I wore my hat, and didn't think too much about it. But when we got to the single cells the guys said, "No, we don't wear these hats we all wear these cloth caps. And we share everything", and that's how the bread and all of that come in. But I think what had happened, although the treatment in the single cells was far better because I think the warder's were afraid of the senior people in the single cells. There was palpable evidence of deference that they

showed to people in the single cells compared to the kind of treatment that we had in the Terrorist Section. Because there, they were rude, uncivil, uncouth, and cruel to us. But the same warder's in the single cells treated us like - you know very civilly and some of them were very friendly and all of that. But that was the big dynamic change between the attitudes of prison warder's towards prisoner's in other sections to attitude of prison warder's to prisoner's in the single cells. So we found that quite amazing. And I think when we got there to the single cells the major spokesperson, or the only spokesperson for the whole prison was Nelson Mandela. When visitors came up there or a representation had to made, it was Nelson Mandela who would go and make these representations on behalf of all prisoners. And we also found that when we got there that they had a prison committee called ULUNDI and I think its significant because they chose ULUNDI because somehow they had this idea that ULUNDI is going to liberate South Africa. They had a lot of faith and hope in Buthelezi, you see. You know, this is what I - they didn't say this, but this is what I'm making of it. That they called this ULUNDI, and on this ULUNDI they had one representative from each of the political organisations that were in the single cells. So there was the ANC, PAC, APDUSA, there was the YCC and the Liberal Party yes, and SWAPO. So we had six people sitting on ULUNDI and up until then, I think, each of the organisations sent in their representative. This was supposed to be an underground, secret, prison organisation. And

whatever ULUNDI decided or agreed upon was eventually filtered out to rest of the prison. And ULUNDI, in other words, was a supreme prisoner's organisation. So each organisation would send in a representative on a yearly basis. So you became your organisation's representative. Up until then I think Nelson was the selected as a chairperson of ULUNDI. After my first year I was elected, not first year, second year I think, I was elected chairperson of ULUNDI and Nelson was under me so I always brag about it, that Nelson was under me in Robben Island for two years, two consecutive years I was chairman of ULUNDI. And then we began changing the dynamics about how we approach the prison authority. No more, we went there, you know, Nelson doing the bargaining and talking, we went there making demands. Of course, we were heartened by the Supreme Court's decision. Where they agreed with a lot of our demands; lots of our statements regarding what our rights; and what our privileges; and things like that. So we gained a lot of – we felt empowered by this decision. And we began doing a lot of things. For the first thing, I think what we did that up until then, we had to wash clothes in seawater. And you can't use soap in seawater it doesn't saponify. So we demanded that we wanted cold water Omo, we got it. Then we said we want them to install a geyser, hot water, to have a shower. We got that, eventually. We then demanded that we wanted doors on the toilets. Up until then toilets, there were no doors on toilets. You sat, you know, in general view and there were lots of things like that we demanded. We demanded

that we needed to have outside recreation, we wanted to play football. Prior to that, they wouldn't allow us to play soccer because they wouldn't take us out of our single cells. We were able to persuade them to build a tennis-set court to start with. We started the tennis-set court - that was a big debate in the single cells. There was a lot of opposition. Because what had happened prior to that, there was this like a quadrangle in the centre of the single cells. You may have seen pictures of them, where people were breaking stones and that used to be left open with gravel. And everyday people would clean that, roll that pull wire over it to freshen it up. And they didn't want to give up that space. Eventually, I think, it took us months of debate, persuasion, and because originally we wanted to build a tennis court in there, but they refused, you know, the majority of the inmates. So we compromised, we said we will have a tennis-set court, and we built that ourselves. I designed it; organised it; dug up the stones and rocks. So if you go to Robben Island, you see that tennis court, the original tennis-set court, is still there. And then later on, we were able to get them to agree to build a full size tennis court, and that was another huge advance as far as single cells people were concerned, because at least now we had a physical sport.

MN: What year was that, sorry. In what year was that?

SV: Sorry, somewhere around 1975/1974, I don't know, somewhere around there. But we did that. We were able to do that, and I think later on, when members of the BCM came into our section we began to develop even more robustly, in terms of prison life,

prison activities. But I think a very curious thing happened to us when the BCM group, you know the 1974 group, first came in. They put them into a section opposite us in the single cells U- section. And we could see them, but now and then we could hear them as well. But eventually, they sent us messages, you know, to me at least, at that stage. They appeared as a bunch of arrogant little twits, you see. And they were arrogant, compared. You know, when we went there, the Nelson Mandelas and all taught us to be ultra-radical, right? And when the Saths' and the Strinis' and all of these guys came in, to me, they appeared to be way out of sync with what Robben Island is, and how you should think politically. Well they came, you know, these were the young people, you know, new generation of people that South Africa is throwing up, and they sent us notes and messages to say that their role is to bring together all of the political movements together. And Lenin and Trotsky and Marx must be thrown into the dustbins of history. You know this whole black consciousness politics of it, right. Well, we said okay you guys, come and we will see what happens. But coincidentally, soon thereafter, there was in 1976, uprising right, and up until then the creed on Robben Island was that if I came to Robben Island and they knew that I was an ABDUSAN they would all together welcome, what the general section or the single cells collectively, they would welcome you and tell you what the, not the rules, but what our lifestyle is there. And how we should go about doing things, but then they will hand you over to your organisation and tell you

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straight that you are under their discipline totally. So it was great it worked right up until 1977/78. I think, beginning of 1978 it worked well. But, at the same time, until then the prison population on Robben Island was dropping I think it dropped to close to a 1000 or something. And the balances in terms of movements the PAC had more people in prison on Robben Island at that stage, than the ANC. It was a complete change in dynamics and balances of forces. So when these young people, the 1976 people came in, look most of the 1976 people, I'm not saying all, were politically untrained people. You know, it was a spontaneous revolution. A lot of them were just ordinary bystanders and got picked up and they got minimum five years sentence. I met a lot of these fellows they were 11, 12-year-old kids. They said they didn't know what was going on. They would watch someone stoning a bus and they were grabbed and charged for a political offence and landed on Robben Island, minimum five years they got, right. So when they got there - but the point is that we all knew that these were part of the BCM group. You know, because the BCM was the one that was responsible for the 1976 thing. Either directly or indirectly because I think they gave the leadership to it, right.

RECORDING INTERRUPTED

ON RESUMPTION

MN: Welcome back. Professor you were talking about the - you mentioned the coming of the BCM and their radicalism, but you were also touching on the June 16th uprisings. In your opinion, or your opinion of

the inmates at Robben Island, who were initiates or how was the 1976 uprisings perceived?

SV: Well look, all of us on Robben Island were not aware that 1976 took place. And we were not aware of the events leading up to 1976 and thereafter. The only time we knew about it a bit about it was when the BCM, the 1974 group came in, the FRELIMO group, we called them. When they came in, we began hearing about this, and to us, and I think this was accepted in the single cells, nobody challenged the notion or understanding that 1976 was a result of the activities of the BCM. That people involved in 1976 uprising were young people; were BCM orientated people; and the ANC, PAC and none of the other Movements had any influence or anything to do with 1976. I think nobody challenged that. But the composition of the people that came on the Island was a different thing now, because probably 95 percent of people the 1976 people who came onto the Island didn't know about the BCM, either. And as I said it was a spontaneous revolution. These were young kids, just picked up, and they landed there. But in terms of the Protocol of previous years one would have put them with the BCM. But the sad thing happened. For the first time, I think, when the BCM people or the 1976's came onto the Island, that Protocol wasn't followed. As soon as those young people landed on the Island, both the PAC and ANC began openly recruiting the youngsters. Poaching, recruiting, grabbing them, sometimes physically bribing them to join their Movements. And these young people didn't know what the hell is going on. This wasn't in the single cells but in the

general section. Until eventually, things became so rough, that the prison authorities began to separate groups the ANC, PAC and all of that. And in early 1978 it became so rough that for the first time physical violence broke out on Robben Island between prisoners. Stabbings, they actually stabbed the Officer Commanding of Robben Island, at that time, Captain Harding or something. You know it never happened previously, and so that was that. But when during that period they brought the FRELIMO group into the single cells, that's when we met Aubrey Mokoape and all that group, Strini and Saths and I forget all the other people. And they came, and it was great for us because for the first time even in the single cells, the balance of forces no longer were the ANC. The majority in the single cells, it was PAC; APDUSA; the Neville Alexander Group; and the BCM group were now on the top. So I think we made a big impression in that sense, that our values, our philosophies began to emerge, because I think, organically, the four of us got together. The only people that were on one side were there, was only one SWAPO guy, in the single cells, one Liberal Party person, and the rest were ANC. So for the first time we found all of the others not ganging, but organically getting together, we began to agree on a number of things as a group. And tensions were beginning to emerge because the ANC saw a ganging-up as it were against them. But I think we played it quite well without the intention of ganging-up or taking sides or anything like that. And began organising events in the single cells. You know we had play-acting; play-reading;

organised major sports events at the end of the year.

And the reading of news, we made it general, because up until then it was either the ANC or the PAC people who had the contacts with the general section, who would monopolise reading. I still remember Strini Moodley used to be our radio announcer. Radio Makema they used to call it. And he used to make radio announcements, reading out news, whilst the warders were asleep and so there was a lot of closeness, I think, was beginning to develop. But at the same time I think, the old guard began to fear what the young people were thinking and doing, and the so-called arrogance of the young people. And but I think, very quickly this attitude of the FRELIMO group that we got to throw away the Lenin and the Trotsky's into the dust heaps of history. They changed very quickly. And I think they also began to recognise that they just can't bring the different Movements together without having an ideological base on which you can bring them to. I think that was one of the major problems of the BCM they didn't have a firm ideological base for themselves except talking about Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness where, is it within the Socialist camp or Nationalist camp or where or even in the Socialist camp. Is it Stalinist or so-called Trotsky's, or where are you? But I think for the first time the FRELIMO group met with people that they couldn't challenge very well. You know the masters as it were, because look, that group of people did not meet a politically developed leadership in South Africa. There was this huge vacuum up until that time. And they were denied

that privilege and opportunity to meet and challenge ideas. It's no weakness of theirs, it's in a sense a fault of the old leadership that there wasn't a second layer to take over, you know. They were doing it on an ad-hoc basis, and all of that. But I think, slowly they began to realise and understand the deep ideological rifts between the different political Movements. And in that sense, I think, people like Neville Alexander and the APDUSA people and PAC was ideologically, weakly-represented on the Island. Their leadership was relatively weak. It is no fault again of theirs, because their leadership was dispersed all over the country and that reflected itself even amongst the exiles in Africa. There was lots of in-fighting amongst themselves and so that also reflected on Robben Island. So there was that vacuum with them, and I think slowly the FRELIMO people began to develop an identity, identifying with intellectually, at least, without agreeing on any strategic plans about how Movements ought to function. But I think, intellectually they began to challenge and to interact with other people, which was good. And I think it helped them a lot. And it helped us to understand how young people were thinking. And to sort of shift gear as it were, and for us APDUSA, it was good because we felt that we are being weighed down by the old guard that was on Robben Island. You know, we couldn't rock the boat very much - we had to be very careful because you are living with these people 24-hours a day and one of the things that - I speak for myself, I decided on Robben Island I'm not going to have political

fights with anyone. I'm going to argue, I'll debate and do all that, but you know the kind of political fights that you have outside where you swear one another and that kind of political activities, I decided I'm not going to do, and in a sense it helped me. I was very sensitive to other peoples' political views, ideas, I wouldn't want to insult their views you know. The ANC people always thought Mahatma Gandhi was a great guy, which I didn't think. But I wouldn't insult Mahatma Gandhi in their presence, you know, that kind of sensitivity. I suddenly developed on Robben Island, before that I was terribly insensitive and rude about many things.

But I think it has helped me a lot, that it tempered me when I went to the Island. And in the end by the time I got out I think, I didn't make any bad friends in the single cells and I lived comfortably, emotionally with them. So in that sense it has helped me. So where do I go from there? The other big thing used to happen on the Island is that once a year the International Red Cross used to visit Robben Island and interview us either individually, or the chairman of ULUNDI would lead a whole list of problems that we have. And the ICRC was a source of great news for us because these guys, they sort of surreptitiously used to pass on news about what's happening not only in South Africa, but the rest of the world. And they in turn would eventually go to tell the Minister of Justice what we felt and how we did things and what we thought of what was going on. They also helped in bringing about minor changes for us on the Island in terms of privileges, perhaps. When they were there, they

would organise better coffee for us. You know the coffee on Robben Island was made out of burnt mealies, burnt white mealies. They would crush it and make coffee and give it to you. You wouldn't taste anything more bitter than that. So that, and I think, when we got to the single cells we began to deal with the quality of food. Because I think I told you that they would give you a whole pumpkin, a break a chunk and throw it into your plate. That was how vegetables were served. And the soup was bitter because it was made out of, boiled in brak water. So eventually, we got the prison authorities to agree with the assistance of the Red Cross to allow them, they used to get only the common law prisoners to do the food preparation on Robben Island. And what we did was, we said we would want to be involved in the preparation of food. So get people from the general section to work in the kitchen, take out the common law prisoners, because what they were doing the common law prisoners is that there were rations. You know they would say 20 grams or 150 grams of meat or fish or whatever, it is supposed to be allocated for each prisoner. We barely smelt that stuff, if we came across meat - a bit of fat or bones. So we raised this as conditions became more appropriate through ULUNDI; through the Red Cross people; and we agreed eventually that they would employ kitchen staff from the general section. They would do the cooking and they would then cook food in tap water, I mean fresh water from the mainland - bussing or bringing tankers of water for cooking. And life became so different and some of the people there may have been Indians, I

don't know, even got them to give them masalas, so the fish they would fry in masala once a week. And the sized-pieces became so much bigger, and the quality became better, because for the first time you got prisoners, political prisoners, cooking for themselves. So that when the chicken was served you got a fairly decent piece of chicken. Nobody was stealing anymore. That was the problem previously the common law prisoners were stealing probably three-quarters of the food and selling amongst their own common law prisoners. And that is a common practice in common law prisons throughout South Africa. You read about it in the Jali Commission and all of that. So that was the other thing I think was a great achievement.

MN: You have spoken about the physical recruitment of 1976 students or those who came in during that period. Did that impact on you in any way in the mutual respect among the political organisations inside did it create any...?

SV: Oh yes it was at a time when I was just about leaving Robben Island. I remember I came back here I had to talk to the ANC people here about it. Because what was beginning to happen, was that there was this physical violence between ANC, PAC, some of the BCM people and some of the young people resisted being drawn either to the PAC or BC, whichever, you know. That's the idea of being coerced physically or otherwise into a Movement, was not acceptable to them. But what had happened as a result the relationships between the different Movements in the general section, became absolutely tense. And it became physical as

well between them. Because that's where the recruitment and all that was taking place. In the single cells we took up the position that we could revert back to the old Protocol kind of thing, where we would welcome everybody. But I think a lot of the organisations in the single cells really paid lip service to it. They said one thing but they got their own people in the general section to recruit. The PAC, ANC were doing it openly because there were APDUSAN'S in the general section who communicated with us and told us this is what was going on. They tried to mediate, but it became too physical and they decided they are going to keep away from this conflict. And that was it, and of course the authorities stepped in and made use of it to divide this wedge. So much so that, just before I'd left, they or I think there was six months or a year before I left there was this huge conspiracy to have Nelson Mandela released into the Transkei. The Mantanzimas would take care of him because by then Transkei got it's independence. So there was lots of negotiations going on. George Mantanzima visited Robben Island a couple of times and it was becoming a bit uncomfortable. I think Nelson - look I may be terribly wrong, doing him a lot of injustice. But he was thinking about the idea - look, people being in prison for 20-odd years want to taste freedom, right? A little bit of it, whatever shape or form. And I think at that stage, Nelson was biting at the idea, not totally accepting. But when it filtered out to us: the PAC, BC and APDUSA to an extent began demanding a discussion of this, and then the general section the ANC people

were also drawn into it. For the first time, we were able to get representatives from the general section to meet with us in the single cells - first time on Robben Island. Where this was discussed and it was agreed that Nelson won't meet with George Mantanzima alone. It would be Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and Govan Mbeki. Three will do. But that created a big - they went back and reported this to the general section there, the young people in the ANC mainly, in the general section almost revolted. And they put a stop to it. So that meeting didn't take place: that idea of being released into the custody of the Mantanzimas. Mantanzima was Nelson Mandela's uncle, you see. If you see them and look at them, physically there is a lot of resemblance between them. So that was put paid to and that's about it really on the Island.

MN: So the meeting didn't take place?

SV: That didn't take place. And I think the person who was terribly, terribly relieved was Govan Mbeki. Because he was opposed to the idea because he's the left within the ANC you see, and because we ragged him a lot about it. 'Ya, you're going to meet a Bantustan Leader.' You see, Govan Mbeki and the left-wing in the ANC, were close, much closer to us although they were Stalinists, but we were still on the left of the Nationalist group. So we had fun at that time. And I think about four or five months before I left I got this complete works of Shakespeare, which I sent around and asked each one of them to choose a line or a paragraph that they can, or want to identify with. And it took about almost two months for it to make its rounds. And

everybody chose a line or a paragraph and autographed it for me.

MN: Was it only on single cells only?

SV: Only single cells I didn't have access to the general.

MN: So everybody's signature...?

SV: Everybody signed, ya, you know. I have got a whole list of people that signed. You know Kader Hassim, Billy Nair, Walter Sisulu, Seake, Mobs Sikana, JB Busani, Govan Mbeki, Wilton Mkwai that's the guy somebody said lost his eye. You know I met him about four months ago, his eye is terribly intact. Mac Maharaj, Joe Kabe, Bengu, Kathrada, Nelson Mandela, Andrew Msondo, Lalloo Chiba, Andrew Mlageni, Eddie Daniels, Michael Dingakakis, Saths Cooper, Strini Moodley, Frank Anthony, Justice Mpunza, who died three weeks ago. Essop, Mohamed Essop, Neville Alexander, Cholo, Mhlaba, all of these people chose different lines. I can show you some of the lines that they chose. Any particular line, autograph that you would like to see?

MN: Govan Mbeki.

SV: He chose passage in Twelfth Night page 349 let me show it to you. Ya, this is Govan Mbeki. December 1977, he signed this and he told me that he always quoted this passage:

"If music be the food of love play on,
Give me excess of it..." blah, blah, blah.

That was his favourite passage because I asked him to mark it he said no that whole passage is his favourite, okay, who else?

MN: And Nelson?

SV: Nelson - Julius Caesar page 980. Nelson chose lines

from Julius Caesar. He autographed this on the 16th December 1977. And the lines he chose were Caesar's words:

"Cowards die many times before their deaths,
The valiant never taste of death but once,
For all the wonders that I have yet heard,
It seems to be more strain that men should fear,
Seeing that death a necessary end will come when it will come."

Okay.

MN: And lastly can - [interruption]

SV: Okay, Kathrada I think is close by here. Oh, Andrew Masondo, this guy's a brigadier in the army now. He chose a passage again from Julius Caesar this is from Anthony and the passage he chose was:

"Oh pardon me thou bleeding piece of earth that I am meek and gentle with these butchers, Thou art the ruins of the noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times; Woe to the end that shed this costly blood, Over thy wounds now do I prophesy which like dumb mouths do hope there will be lips to beg the voice and utterance of my tongue."

But, you know, looking at this passage I think it's well chosen by Andrew Masondo because he was involved in that Quattro camp, and here he is talking about a similar thing. This is the way the man was thinking. And Anthony was now going to seek revenge over Caesar's murderers, and that's him.

MN: You have also spoken about the committee, the ULUNDI committee, and when the BCM guys came in, you said they were more, you viewed them to be radical. Did they take, did they join this ULUNDI committee or did they have any reservations?

SV: Well look, they would have joined but I had left by then.

MN: Oh you had left by then?

SV: I left in 1978. And I left when I was still chairman of ULUNDI. After I left they would have elected somebody else.

MN: But the different treatment of different races was it still practised?

SV: Oh yes, in theory yes. But we didn't accept the differentiation. You know, we still continued with the bread-breaking; and sharing of the milk; and the sugar; and the clothes; and all of that. But I think one of the other significant breakthroughs that we made, was that for the first time we were allowed, just a year before I left, that they allowed, they supplied us with underwear, right, and shorts, boxer shorts. And allowed us to buy articles of clothing, ostensibly for sporting events.

MN: Was that across the board?

SV: Like tennis shirts and shorts and tennis shoes and all of that kind of thing. Which they never did previously but you know these are the incremental gains that we made on Robben island. But I think for me, personally, the biggest gain that I made was up until then, and up until the time that I had left, people who left the single cells before me, [the authorities] they would call them a couple of months, perhaps a couple of weeks, perhaps, you

don't know when they are going to take you away from Robben Island. They would say, Vino, they want you in the office. So you go, you don't know what it is that they are calling you to the front office and open the big gate clang, clang. And nobody worried, because people were being called often for all kinds of things. And you would go only for you not to see your comrades or say anything to them. That would be the last time you would have known that he was gone, you see. And that's how they did it. They just called you and.

MN: No farewells?

SV: No farewells, nothing. And then they would send somebody to go and pick up all your belongings; personal belongings; and pack you up; and off you went. You know; they would send you to Leeukop or somewhere and spend your time there and before you were actually released. And then they would send you to the nearest prison to where you lived, you know, your hometown. If you lived in the Transkei, they would send you probably to East London and from there release you to the Transkei. So what I did was that I, when I was chairman of ULUNDI, I challenged not only the Officer Commanding on Robben Island, but the overall National Prisons person, Brigadier Aucamp. He was the big guy who was in charge of only political prisoners. And he was a real pig of a human being. He was your counterpart to - what's this guy in Special Branch, not Steenkamp the rooinek, I forget anyway. This guy was just the replica of that guy. And he was brutal, cruel, and I was called one side and we knew that he was on the Island. And as

chairman of ULUNDI I requested a meeting with him and the Officer Commanding, and I said that – look, I wasn't aggressive, and I talked with them like an elder, you see. I tell them look ,you know, I find this practice of just snatching people away from the sections and then they disappear, we don't say anything. It doesn't leave a good taste, we begin to hate the prisons department for the way they treat us in that respect. I said: "what's the problem with telling us that, okay you are going to leave Robben Island on X date. Give us a few moments to at least say goodbye to our comrades. You know, we spent many, many years together." Oh, Aucamp says: "no if we do that..." then the reason why he said: "we don't tell you in advance is that you will now start taking down messages for the people outside." I tell him" "Brigadier, you know we are not that stupid. People know that I am going to be discharged on the 6th of April. People have already given me their messages one year ago, and I've got it in there. So it's stupid, because if you are going to tell me in an hour's time or thirty minutes time that I am going to be taken away from Robben Island, can you imagine thirty people or forty people queuing up to give me messages, you think that's practicable?" I talked to them in that strain, you see. They kept quiet they shook their heads and told me to go. But when I was taken away from Robben Island, they gave me two hours. The Officer Commander came down to see me in the morning, as soon as the cells opened and said: "Sunny, you are going to be taken away from the Island today. You need to say your farewells to all

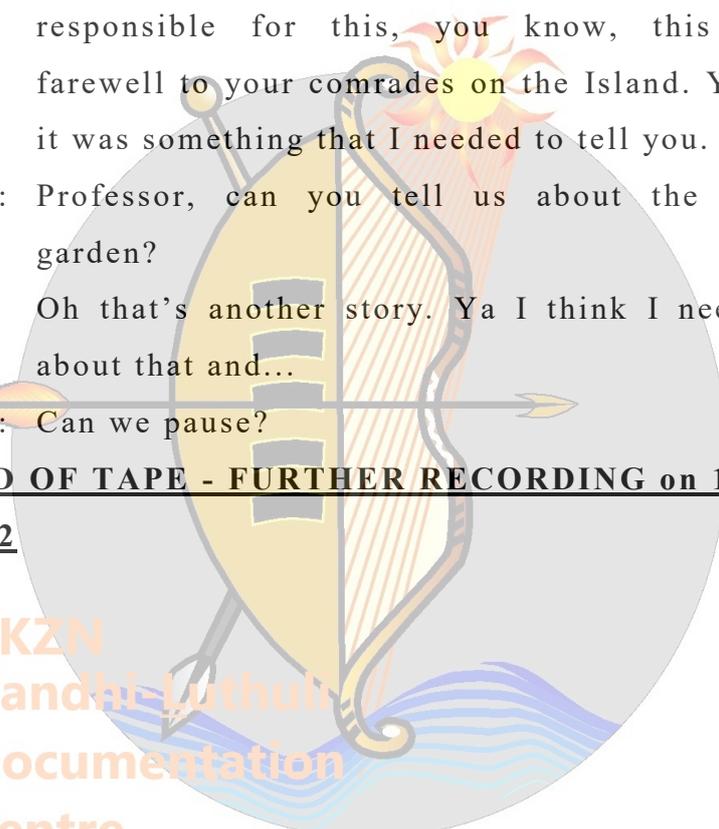
your comrades." But it was so - you know, humane way to say leave Robben Island. I felt good, it was sad because you know have to go through the pain of saying goodbye. But it was good but by the time Kader and two years later when Kader and them left Robben Island they were able, they allowed them to go the general section and say goodbye to the comrades there. So whatever the gains we made, we made incrementally, but I feel personally responsible for this, you know, this personal farewell to your comrades on the Island. You know, it was something that I needed to tell you.

MN: Professor, can you tell us about the vegetable garden?

SV: Oh that's another story. Ya I think I need to talk about that and...

MN: Can we pause?

END OF TAPE - FURTHER RECORDING on 14 August 2002



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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
“VOICES OF RESISTANCE”

INTERVIEWEE: S VENKATRUTHNAM
INTERVIEWER: M NTSODI
DATE: 14 AUGUST 2002
PLACE: DURBAN WESTVILLE

MN: Welcome back. Professor Sunny, welcome back you were just telling us about the vegetable garden.

SV: Oh ya there is a little story behind the vegetable garden and how we came about establishing one on the Island. Because up until then, there wasn't a single shrub in the section that we were held in. And prior to that what was happening on the Island was that the only people that were offered any kind of religious services were the mainstream Christian church. You know the Dutch Reformed, the Anglican, the Methodist, and those kind of people. When we got there, we thought, no we are going to be smart about this and demand that we want to have a Hindu priest coming to attend to our religious needs. The idea being, look I'm being quite frank here about it, we hoped that if they send us a Indian priest we will be able to talk to him in the vernacular and extract news of what's happening outside. So eventually they agreed that we can have a Hindu priest coming to us, but the problem was to identify a Hindu priest. So we got hold of Trees, and that was my wife, to look around to find if there are any Hindu priests who are able to come over and

talk to us. And she found one guy, I think he was 'Divine Life' or 'Ramakrishna', I don't know. I know his name was Mr Govender. A fairly elderly man, and he agreed to come over once a month and through him we also got him to organise Deepavali parcels for us. You know, sweetmeats, and nuts, and all that kind of, you know, all the traditional dishes they have for Deepavali, only for the people that attend his services. So suddenly we found that - there were only five Indians in single cells - suddenly we had about thirty people who were now following Hinduism very, very - including Nelson, and many others Toivo [Ya Toivo - SWAPO] and Eddie Daniels and everybody else. And we ended up collecting something like thirty parcels per year, there was Vino and Trees and everybody out here used to buy the stuff, pack it up into packets, and ship it down to Cape Town, and this old man would bring it to us. It was great. You know, we shared it equally although we didn't have enough each, a packet for each person, but we counted the nuts and sev and everything shared very, very equally. And during that time I think the first visit that he [Mr Govender, the priest] made to Robben Island - he was a Tamilian you see, and the only Tamilian in our section at that time was Billy Nair, so we told Billy, "Billy you better talk to this guy in Tamil. You know, whilst you are praying try and ask him what is going on and then we will know." So it went on, went on so Billy was saying something and after the service was over we said Billy, we all gathered around Billy "what did he say, what did he say?" Billy was bullshitting us [laughs] because

Billy had forgotten his Tamil and didn't approach this old man for news, you see. Until one day after many visits I think we got him, and I knew that people coming to the Island usually carry a newspaper, and they came on a Sunday. So quietly I think I took him away to my cell to show him something photographs of the children, and other guys came and carried his bag. He used to come with a briefcase, they walked into the diningroom opened his bag stole the newspaper. So we did some terrible things. But that old man didn't complain. He kept quiet about it and it was during one of these visits that we told him "Look Mr Govender, please bring us some dried chillies. So he asked us why we wanted it. I said, "We want to plant chillies", so he brought us three dried chillies. And with that we started a chillie garden. We got permission to do it from the Officer Commanding. By then, there was almost, we could get almost anything within reason, you know what I mean, and they would give it to us. Because we began developing a relationship and proving to them that this would be useful for your administration because you are going to have a more contented prison population and they bought that idea. And slowly also, I think, the type of prison officials we got after the interdict were different. They were sending people who were more intelligent people, who were thinking type of prison official. Not like the old guys we used to call the Bongolos and all of that, who were just stupid, raw idiots. But this type of people were more amenable to discussion, you know, within reason they would agree to a lot of things. I know, at one stage, they

even allowed me to buy a clock. Because I was studying I was doing B.Com Accounting and some of my exercises I had, I had to do in a certain time you know, ten minutes or twenty minutes and I said "look how do I do this? I don't have a clock" and clocks were banned on Robben Island. And I was able to get a clock and then subsequently Kader got one, and then Billy got one we had three clocks, eventually ,in the cells so that was great. And I think slowly we got a garden going, and the problem is that Robben Island is just plain white sea sand. When we went out to the lime quarry, we had to pick up the droppings, dry droppings of ostriches. Pick that up, try and collect compost from under the trees nearby, carry it in our pockets and slowly we changed the texture of that sea sand and grew chillies. And I had never seen chillies grow and flourish the way they did. It was Chiba, Kader and I were the people that were in charge of the garden. Eventually, Nelson joined us when we started planting tomatoes and other vegetables in the garden. And we had so much chillies, you know, those apple boxes - we used to pick about three apple boxes full per week. And we used to supply it to the general section and everywhere. Tomatoes we used to, eventually planted and we planted them and experimented doing this long stem tomatoes. We had time on our hands, and we had all this ostrich muck that we collected and they really flourished and it was great. I remember once looking at these tomatoes, you know, we would inspect every leaf and all of that. We found a small, what do you call it, chameleon. We saw this

chameleon, used to visit it every morning, and then suddenly after a month or so we found about thirty little chameleons that size. And the guys used to actually catch flies, kill flies and come and feed the chameleons. It was wonderful you know, how close we got to nature and that kind of thing. Ya, I think that being in the single cells really brought people very, very much together. It was across political lines you know. We all had the same uniforms, same clothes if I showed it to you, you wouldn't know the one from the other. But when people hung their clothes on the line to dry, we were able to say whose pants those were, whose shirts they were. There were no identification just by the form that the pants took we were able to say this belongs to Nelson, that belongs to Neville or whatever. Similarly with our eating dishes they were all aluminium Dixie's, right, no markings on them, but when we were serving our food, we were able to say this belongs to A B or C. I don't know how, but it happened. But that's how close one gets when you are in prison together for a long time. And I recall you know, I think everybody after they came out of a visit everybody were down, it depressed you. And people knew that you were depressed, and they would rally around you, talk to you and hang around you for a while and lift your spirits without being invited, without being ordered, you know, it wasn't even contrived. So those are some of the beautiful things I remember of about the comrades on the Island, that's across political lines.

MN: How many visits were you allowed?

SV: Sorry?

MN: How many visits were you allowed?

SV: You were allowed what, I think one visit a month - I can't remember. But my wife was here in Durban she wasn't even able to - not able to ya, afford to visit me twice a year, ya. It was very expensive and to travel all the way, it was -you had to fly down. And I think Trees did well she used set up some kind of a prison kind of committee in Durban, used to call it Monies for the Prisoners, especially the Transkeins. Collect food for them; collect clothes for the families; and raise money for the families to visit the people on the Island. And only then we began to understand that the people that we were trying to teach to read and write on stone, by the time we left the prison they were able to send out letters to their families. And I could imagine the joy and things that the families must have had seeing a letter written by people who were totally illiterate, in terms of English, at least. And they were writing letters and they were writing letters now in Xhosa, not in English they were taught, eventually, in the general section to write in Xhosa. And old men 70/80-year- old men, now writing letters for the first time, clear letters apparently. I didn't see them but they were great, that was super.

MN: The contact wasn't allowed was it? I mean during the visit - the contact?

SV: No contact visit during visiting times. You know, the glass pigeonhole and there was a telephone on your side, telephone on the visitor's side, there were two telephones on the visitor's side. One, the what do you call the guy? the prison warder, right and if

you were talking something out of turn, you were only allowed to speak in English or Zulu or Xhosa. In my case it would have been English. We couldn't speak any of the vernacular languages. If he heard you say anything about what's happening in prison he would just cut you off and cancel the visit. I think once Trees took out a diary and was writing down something, they grabbed the diary and threatened to lock her up, and all of that. But those were small dramas, but otherwise you got used to the idea of talking to somebody you can see, you know this distance. You know talking through a telephone it was terrible. So I think that and the thing that really depressed you when the visit was over it was only a thirty minute visit, you know, that's it.

MN: Can we go back a bit that is one thing that you once mentioned that the perception that your parents had of African people were more emphasised - I mean they had this negative thing and they were more in when you were betrayed during your trial it was more instilled in them, did that feeling pass through to your I mean your immediate family, that is your wife?

SV: No I don't think so because my wife and my children - I don't think were racist at all. And in any event I think after we were arrested, the security police made sure that a lot of people that were close to us as friends, my relatives didn't come anywhere near me. Even when I was out of prison you know. Before I went to prison I didn't have a close relationship with my family. My brothers and sisters would pop in once in six

months or something but it was never a close relationship that was a relative totally no. But after we were arrested, I think the security police, and this is what disappointed me a lot, is that a lot of my friends, close friends, who were visiting friends, you know, once a week twice a week, go twice a month kind of visitors, stopped coming to visit Trees. And that really made it very lonely, left out. There were a handful of people like Navi and Gaby and the Vinos and [there were] people that really were terribly, terribly afraid to be even associated with anybody that was recognised as a political person. And it became really difficult and I think this is where I need to mention that when I was on the Island I also noticed a perceptible change towards prison authorities towards me. But I couldn't quite work out why. At one stage I was worried whether they were not trying to buy me off or anything like that. But I had to rule it out because they wouldn't take those chances. But later on I think I need to tell you, I'll come up with that thing later. That eventually I leave Robben Island and six weeks before my release date they drive me up to Leeukop Prison, the same place where we started off again, put me into a single cell for six weeks alone, but no harassment. The food was just as bad, and all those conditions were bad. And fortunately it was warmer this time it was April. And so it wasn't freezing waters so I think about four days before date of release, I was driven down by a lieutenant they gave me civvie clothes. And I wasn't handcuffed this time. I sat with this lieutenant somebody, I don't know, drove down

from Pretoria down to Durban. On the way I think, we stopped somewhere in Greytown or somewhere and they saw me in civilians and walking with this guy and a lot of warders there, black warders, in the admin department they saw me they saluted me they thought I was a big prison official. They eventually brought me coffee; milk coffee; cup and saucer; sugar separate; oh, oh I drank it. Then they realised that no man this guy is just a bloody prisoner, a bandiet. [laughs] But their attitude changed so quickly, they gave me filthy looks after that. But anyway I had my coffee and you know it was the first time I had decent coffee, with milk and sugar and all of that. And we drove down to Durban Central, put into a cell. It was great. Now you can shower even in cold water in Durban. And I could see outside from my prison cell I could see BP Centre that big sign, and after three days I was released. I was sent clothes from home, dressed like a civilian. But before I stepped out of prison, the security police came in and served me with five years banning and house arrest orders. So that when I arrived home I wasn't able to receive all the people that were waiting to receive me, because that would have been an infringement of the banning orders. So the only people that I was able to sit and have lunch with that day was my mum and dad and Trees and my children. And there were lots of people outside, standing. I should have brought pictures of that, but I've got it - you can have them I'll show it to you, newspaper photographs, of all of that.

MN: What do think was the idea was the reason behind the idea of not releasing you direct but having to spend some time in Leeukop? Even though it was the procedure but what do you think was the reason?

SV: I don't know. Look, ninety percent of the things that the prison administration did didn't make sense. I think it was some of this Aucamp's sense of, you know, to punish you because it was painful to be separated from your comrades that you spent many years with. And then put into six weeks of isolation, and then the anxiety of coming back home you needed to have company around it. I would have felt so much nicer if they took me straight from Cape Town and drove me back to Durban or something like that. It was a very painful six weeks because you had nothing to do, you are sitting in your cell, and no smokes, nothing there you see. And I didn't even have this book with me because all my personal belongings they put in a bag and stored it away. And so I had nothing to do, just twiddle my toes the whole day. It was a long, long six weeks. There was nobody to talk with, nothing.

MN: Did the family expect you, did they now you were being released?

SV: Yes. One thing you are certain of when you are convicted as a political prisoner is that if it is ten years, you knew on x date you are coming out, to the date, there is no remission, nothing. They will release you on that date, finished. So there was that certainty about being a prisoner, unlike being in detention, you see that's the difference. Okay, I think I need to talk to you about my feelings and things when I landed home. You know, I left home

when my daughter was what? about eight years old or something like that and we were very close. And I come back home, I think, the biggest shock, surprise, I don't know what you want to call it was meeting my son for the first time - he was nine years old. And he just didn't understand this thing about father and all of that you know. He didn't grow up with a father in the house it was just Trees and the three kids. And of course, there was an old lady that worked for us at that time, Mrs Govender, who acted as a grandmother to them. She was a great source of support for the children. So I had a long lunch with my mother and dad and then they had to leave and then I saw my lounge full of greeting cards you know, strung across. Oh, the other big surprise for me was that when I was brought back I was brought back to a different home. When I was arrested, I was arrested in my home in Impala Drive, which I had sold during, just about the time that I was arrested. And this new home Trees built after I was in prison, so I come to this new home; new family; because everybody is new except Trees; even the children were different. They were grownup and all of that. So there was lots of excitement, lots of newness to me coming out. And then I noticed these greeting cards. I kept quiet about it, then late in the evening talking with Trees, with a lot of envy and jealousy I asked her who were these cards from, because you know we were not greeting card people. You know if we received four greeting cards for Christmas or Deepavali it was great. And we were not in the habit of sending out these things, so where did all

these friends come from? Then Trees began relating to me about Amnesty International. She says all these cards are from overseas, they are from the different chapters of Amnesty International who sent greeting welcome cards and all of that because they knew the date of my release and all of that. Look, I heard about Amnesty International in a very vague sense before I went to prison, and I think I knew that Amnesty International was a proscribed organisation and that's it. That is as much as I knew about Amnesty International. But then Trees tells me that soon after my arrest and conviction, Amnesty International adopted me as a prisoner of conscience. And they sent out thousands of letters to the Officer Commanding demanding my release, enquiring about my welfare and my health, and all of that, and these are the people she told me that sent these greeting cards. But more importantly for her, and for me I think that they were a source of immense support during my absence. Because as I said earlier, that most of my friends and everybody, not out of choice, but because of the harassment from the security police kept away from Trees and she was terribly, terribly isolated. And Amnesty International gave her that reason to survive and exist and she did a lot of things through them. They sent I think clothing and all kinds of things, so ya, so Amnesty International is great in that sense. But I think I am grateful to them for having saved my family for me whilst I was away, that's how I look at it. So that when I eventually got to the [United] States I was able to repay a bit of that, but it's a long way from where we are.

MN: So now, when you got out, you got this five-year ban and how was - [interruption]

SV: And house arrest.

MN: and house arrest. How did you go through? Did you serve it all or was it lifted?

SV: I served my full five years. I served five years house arrest, banning order before I went to prison. So in other words with me, I spent 22-years in virtual imprisonment.

MN: You were released in 1978?

SV: 1979.

MN: 1979. So you served - less five years, so when the eighties started you were idle in the house, or were you?

SV: When? After I came back from prison? Well look the problem with the house arrest was that, you know, I think the same system before I went into prison, I wasn't able to receive visitors. But I think the biggest and the most onerous thing, was that you couldn't leave your magisterial district, and I wasn't allowed to even within the magisterial district to enter into any group area other than white, that was cruel. So what the hell am I going to do in a white group area? You know, I couldn't go to Indian Group areas; African; Coloured; even if it was within the magisterial district. And I couldn't leave Mobeni Heights and Mobeni Heights is a small township about 300 homes, 2 shops in there, that's about all. And if you wanted employment you had to get out of Mobeni Heights, which I couldn't. Until eventually I was able to travel into central Durban but not allowed to cross into the Indian group area, but Trees office's used

to be in Albert Street. I was able to walk up to the centre line but not cross over. It was ridiculous, but that went on for a while until Navi Pillay applied to have me employed as a clerk in her office, and they granted me that. So I was allowed to go and work in their offices in Albert Street, but nowhere else. I walked right across Albert Street into the white area and back home and they were very strict they wouldn't relent on the hours because I had to be indoors by six. In those days I used to use a bus. And the bus used to take an interminable time. You know if you finished office at five o'clock, there was a problem getting home by six because it was peak period. They wouldn't budge off that. They said, "No, you stick by your rules." And it became painful for me - the second five years, because here I have two young kids that before my return home, Trees, over the weekend, was able to take them to the beach to the park and all of these places. But when I came back it meant that Trees won't leave me alone at home and which meant that they, too, sort of became house arrested with me. And I think one of the kids especially, the second child, Ravel, began to develop some kind of a resentment towards me. For two reasons I think (a) he was an outdoor guy - he wanted to go visiting; he wanted to go play ball in the street; and ride a bicycle; and do all kinds of things which I couldn't join them in, you see. And more importantly, I think when I was away he shared the bedroom with Trees, shared the bed with Trees, so when I returned home, he had to give up his Mummy's side, you see. But I began to sense some

kind of reaction from him because of that, and it took him many years for him to get over that. And yet Nolan, on the other hand, the youngest one that I met for the first time, I remember the next morning after I got up from bed I was in the bathroom, shaving, he runs up to his mother and says "mummy, mummy, that man is cutting his face." I could have cried. When you know, when your child refers to you as "that man" because they didn't understand the concept idea of father. But as the months and years began to grow, Nolan would not leave me, he was sticking to me like a tick, always hanging over me. You know sometimes I used to push him away, "Please Nolan, leave me alone, man." But up until now Nolan used to stick with me like a tick. A funny reaction from different people and that was it. So I was with Navi Pillay and Company for some years, and I did a lot of corporate work, I did a lot of work for Mobil, at that time. You know, doing lease agreements for them for their garages and all of that. And then there was one petrol station in Isipingo Beach that they were trying to flog for some years, and nobody was prepared to take it. And so Mobil asked me, "See if you can find a buyer for this thing, man." So one day I broke banking orders, drove into Isipingo Beach - it was an Indian group area. I looked at this thing. It was a rundown kind of gas station, but right across the gas station were playing fields and within a hundred yards, was the beach. And above the gas station there was a three-bedroom flat, so I gave it a lot of thought and I said, "Okay, let me think about this and see whether I can't take over this gas station."

Talked to Trees, she agreed but we needed to put up capital, you know, to buy the gas and all of that. So we sold our home for a song in Mobeni Heights and invested that money in the gas station. It was a very poor gas station in the sense that I think they were selling something like 60 000 litres a month, which is nothing. But the prospects of me having the kids playing in the field across me, I can see them, they can ride bicycles there, so it was ideal. So we took over the gas station. The first year it was great; people knew me; it was the time of tricameral parliament. And it was just about time when my banning orders expired in 1984 and I became politically active again, every car that came in there said "don't vote" stuck on. And business improved three, fourfold, we were selling something like 250 000 litres a month now because the people in Isipingo beach really gave me support, and the workers in Prospecton, because they knew me now, you see. And it was great, and I would have loved being a petrol attendant for the rest of my life, you know, you are in the forecourt; talking to people; interacting with them. I felt it was great. But when the tricameral thing came in, I became active, posters all over the gas station, Mobil stepped in, they didn't like this. They gave me one month's notice to get out. It was only then that I understood that the General Manager of Mobil in Durban was part of the South African Army. They used to go into Namibia on shooting expeditions every month. Not shooting animals, shooting SWAPO people. And those are the type of people that I had to deal with. Gave me one month to get out. By then I had

invested so much of my money in there, I couldn't recover any of it. Really I think I invested about 60 000. 60 000 in 1982 was a lot of rands. But I think I only recovered about 6/R7 000, when I had to close it up. That's all I could recover because all the fixtures, fittings, and you know all of that, I just lost out. And I did up my apartment on top you know, fully carpeted and built in cupboards, and all of that. Anyway, I was down in the dumps both spiritually and economically, and I still remember my kids asking, "you know dad we don't have a home to live in, anymore." I could have killed myself that day. But anyway I rented out another house in Isipingo Hills. We moved in there and again, providentially, I was offered a fellowship at Columbia University. And they came down and spoke to me and, oh no, I think, before I sold the garage when I closed up the garage and I was unbanned, I then visited the United States. Navi was there and John Samuels was there, they invited me over. I stayed there for about four of five months and met a lot of people at Columbia University and all kinds of people and it was the height of the anti-South African campaign, you know, disinvestment campaign. So activity was very, very high at that time. I think it was largely as a result that's when we met Tom Karris and all of these people. And when I got home they didn't want me to come back home they said, "you must stay here" they will get me this and I said: "I don't know. I left my family behind there. I have a duty to them." So I came back said goodbye to America and got back I think within two weeks, no three weeks, somebody from the

States came down and told me about this scholarship at Columbia University. I said scholarship, you know it's ages since I've studied formally at a university, although I had just completed my B.Com on Robben Island and all of that. Anyway I said: "I agree providing you get scholarships for my two children." By then my daughter was married so I had a responsibility to my two sons. They were in standard seven and eight, at that stage. They said "no problem." I was eventually informed that my children were granted scholarships to Riverdale Country School. That's the school where the Kennedys and all of these people attended, one of these posh bourgeois private schools in New York, you see. So I leave South Africa with just two suitcases, and I couldn't even afford to buy a regular suitcase, I got cardboard boxes. And I bought leather straps, and we had six of them, two for each. To the States you are allowed two bags, you see. So we dumped all our belongings in there, and off we went to the United States. And, but they were great, the people met us took us to their private home first and the next day we would go to Columbia University did all the preliminary affairs, and then they told me to go and look at some apartments that they offered me. So we chose one right opposite the University, across the street and that was great. Kids of course, had to travel by subway to Riverdale, which was just pretty far. But Columbia University was great for me. It was an experience - I became very actively involved on speaking campaigns mainly for Amnesty International platforms. Because I did it because I

felt I owed it to them, but I did it on South African politics, what's going on. I think when in the eighties we knew more of what's going on in South Africa than the South Africans themselves. Because the media here was terribly gagged, but the American press and the media were able to show what's going on, you know, the eighties were pretty volatile here, you see. And it helped us and it was tremendous especially from the younger generation the kind of support you got from them was really, really great. And it made me survive, you know, felt useful being out there in the States and all of that. Then towards this, I did a Masters programme there at Columbia University and finished that, and at the end of that period, Amnesty International invited me to co-produce a rock concert it was called Human Rights Now, which went around the world, to 28 cities. All the big names in rock I must tell you this crazy thing about rock music. Rock music and I were never friends, to me it was a bunch of noise. So once I was on the West Coast, I think it was San Francisco, Amnesty International called me - they fly me out from some backtown in San Francisco and say I'm required to attend a concert. Now to me a concert is like a philharmonic you know, orchestral kind of music, you know that was my idea of a concert. Then they drive me to this place and it is called Cow Palace I said "Cow Palace, what an odd name." But as I walk in I see candles, everybody's holding candles. You know this is a symbol of Amnesty International, you see. And I look around carefully, I see most of them were young people, you know normally the concerts that I

attended here in City Hall and things there, all doddering old people, you know. And then I'm taken backstage I'm introduced to people called Sting, Ten Thousand Maniacs, Peter Paul and Mary, and all kinds, Peter Gabriel. Anyway, all kinds of people - didn't make sense to me, but they were very nice and all of that. And the concert started and my insides began to shake because it's so loud. It was rock music, but they were great musicians - Peter Gabriel and Sting and all of them. Only then, I began to take in, to listen the actual words that they began to sing. So I come back to New York and casually tell my sons "Hey, you know what, I went to a rock concert." They look at me said: "You went to a rock concert?" Because I am the one that's always turning the volume down at home. After a while they asked me "Who played there?" I remember that's the word they used, I said: "I don't know, somebody Bono and Sting and ya, Peter Gabriel and Ten Thousand Maniacs" and I rattled off some of the names. Both these guys, with the mouths open, eyes popped out, they looked at me. They couldn't believe that I had met these people, you see. They said: "Did you meet them?" I said "Ya I met them backstage." "Didn't you take autographs?" I said: "No, I don't know who these creatures are." "Did you enjoy it?" I said "no I did not." So then they had, this was called Conspiracy of Hope Concerts that they were running in the United States, Amnesty International. Well the next one was going to be held at the Giants Stadium, in New Jersey. This was a 75 000-seater stadium. Of course, my whole family now is invited and we are

sitting in the dignitaries box and we sit with all the artists. We met everybody you know, Mohammed Ali, and all the film stars, Sigourney Weaver and you name them we met them. And my kids were, they couldn't believe their eyes that they were going to go and get autographs and sitting at the same table having lunch and dinner and all of that. So in that sense I think, the kids really thought that this was payback time and Daddy did it for them, only that concert. But then when they finished their high school, they had choices in colleges to attend because they were offered a lot of scholarships, everything free, I didn't have to pay a penny because they were good soccerites, you see. And everybody wanted them because of their soccer. And these private colleges have got a lot of money, and they gave them, and each one of them, chose. One chose to go to Oberlon College, Ravel. Nolan left it to me to choose a college for him. So I chose a college in Minnesota called McAlister, and he was very happy with it, so happy that he didn't come back home. He married a person from Minnesota and he is happily married and has a child there now. So he was very happy. But when these Human Rights Concerts started it went round the world. After it went round the continent it came to the United States. The first one was in Philadelphia, again the Giants Stadium in Philadelphia, another 80 000 seats. So I called the children to come and attend this.

MN: Can we pause Sir?

END OF TAPE

ON RESUMPTION B SIDE

MN: We are back.

SV: Well, these concerts started I think the first concert was in London. I was able to travel by then, all over the world, I was travelling. I remember I used to travel to London twice a week, because I was one of the producers. The head office of Amnesty International was in London. I used to travel to London, all over the world I travelled overnight kind of things, before the actual concerts. But when the concerts started it started off in London. We had two Boeing 747's; one for the equipment and the gaffers and all of those; and the other for the artists and all of us. Some of the people that took part in that concert were I know, Sting, who else? Peter Gabriel, Bruce Springsteen what's that woman?

MN: Bono?

SV: Bono, a whole lot of them I forget them by now. But anyway there were whole wonderful bunch of people, Youssen D'or from Senegal.

MN: Harry Belefonté?

SV: Harry Belefonté came to a concert in New Jersey. He was invited too, there was, Miriam Makebe was there, but not on the tour, no these were rock, mainly rock people. But the only rock person, non-rock person who was Joan Baez, she is a country singer. And we spent many hours together because I think Joan Baez and I could relate a lot because of our age, I think and not liking loud music, ya, so that was great. That concert was really super for us. We ended up in Los Angeles in the end. There were three concerts in the United States, two in Canada, so we did all that. But I must say that the concert experience wasn't a great experience because

somehow (a) it's too noisy, too loud. And there is this huge ego thing that runs with these artists, not themselves personally but the security people around them, you know, they treat these people like Gods or Goddesses or whatever. And you couldn't get ten metres close to them except that people like us were okay we had our credentials and we could do it. But the way they treated other people. We had a huge problem in Delhi, where at one stage, Bruce Springsteen's security people were running the security system, right. In Delhi they became so rude to the public in the concert itself we had to fire the whole lot of them. And said "no, in future we do security not Bruce Springsteen's security camp." They were really rude, you know. There was an occasion in London once, when the Chairperson of Amnesty International, coming to sit at the table, at the head table, Bruce Springsteen is there I am sitting there and others. And she came in a few minutes later and she walked up to the table - she knows it's her table and all that. The guy pushed her out, man, this was Bruce Springsteens security - they were big burly guys. And they had that ego; I think it was, Bruce is a simple guy, you know, but his men are real terrible guys they were like CIA type, you know. So that's it, I think. I finished my masters, did this and then the problem arose. Oh, eventually my wife and my daughter came up there, and she studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology and they were all hoping that I'm going to stay over. And the Americans were also putting a lot of pressure on me not to go back to South Africa and, but personal experience in America drove me

back to South Africa apart from my political reasons to come back. You know, I knew a lot of people in America, on a personal level, and I recall once, one of the people that took care of us when we went there, were the Newetts. And I remember I was at Yale, for one summer, doing research and this girl called me from London to say Sunny, my grandma, ya my grandmother died. So I said, oh shit! You know I had to come from Yale, drive down to New York. I phoned Trees, I told Trees this old lady died, you know, we got - we are Indians now, you see, and these were Jews, you know. Our customs says that when you hear somebody died you attend that funeral. You don't get invited to a funeral, for the African it is the same thing, alright. So I drive down six hours I think; from Yale to New York; pick up Trees; rush to this funeral. It was at a Chapel, we go in there, there are only the five members of the family there. The father, his wife, with whom he had separated, and his three children. All grownup, I mean adults. Nobody else. They were sitting there chatting away as if spending an afternoon together as a family anyway. So I said "Oh God, we made a mistake we are not supposed to be here." But anyway we sat through the service. It took fifteen minutes, everyone shook hands with one another and each of them buzzed off on there own. I'm driving back home, I tell Trees, "You know what, this is not acceptable, let's go and see this old man. You know his mother was just cremated let's go and drive up and see him." It was about an hour's drive. And we drove up there, and Americans don't leave doors open. They are so security conscious,

the way we have become here now. That going to his apartment, the door is open, we walk in there, we see this guy with his hand on his table, head in his hands, and when he saw us he just jumped for joy and hugged us. You know his own children didn't turn up there to be with him. I remember telling Trees after we left there that "I don't want to die in this country." You know. And a few months later I think, an old lady that we used to see in the same street that we lived in, for a while we didn't see her. So what happened to this old lady? Because they have routines you know. At three o'clock she will be crossing her lawn with a walking stick. We didn't see this old lady for some time, what happened? Then we learnt that she died in her apartment, rotted there for a week, until the stench alerted the neighbours. You know that convinced me I am not staying in this place, you know. The great thing in South Africa, both with Africans and Indians is that when there is a funeral people rally even if your neighbours are your enemies they come together and console you and there is some kind of solidarity. Not in the States, their culture is totally different. They carry their independence and space to the extreme. And I came back to South African again; with two empty bags; no place to stay; I stay with relatives. And Mala Singh persuaded me to come and teach on a part-time basis, in political science. And I'm still there, on that basis, that's the end.

MN: What year was it when you came back?

SV: 1990.

MN: 1990.

SV: But I also sensed before 1990 that something is happening in South Africa. Because somewhere in 1986/87, I was doing international human rights. It was a seminar kind of thing run by a guy called Louis Henken, who is the guru in human rights and all of that kind of stuff. So there were about fourteen of us in that seminar group, and we had to choose, you don't write exams, you present a paper and all of that. So you had to go him and tell him right okay I want to write a paper on X Y and Z. Then he tells me in class, "Sunny, you don't have to decide what you are going to do. Come and see me in my office." I go there; he says; very nice you know; very patronisingly nice; and he tells me that he wants me to write a paper on the New Constitution for South Africa. So I said okay, let me think about it. So I went back the next week I go and tell him: "you know Prof, the New Constitution of South Africa mustn't be written outside South Africa, it must be written in South Africa, by the South Africans." I think for the first time he began to see me, of course - ya I think so, that's what it did, and he became very cold toward me and he asked me "what do you want to write on?" I said I want to write on the United Nations instruments: the two conventions, and the dynamics of those two conventions. Because he, I think half his book on human rights is on those two conventions, you see. So I wrote a 40-page paper, I think, the first ten pages I went, I lashed out against him, you see. I attacked him and he reluctantly gave me an A, ya.

MN: So you came back and what which month was it if you remember?

SV: I came back in January.

MN: In January. So you came back in January and in two months time political prisoners were being released, but in two months time Nelson Mandela was released, so what was going on?

SV: Well that confirmed my beliefs because you know by 1990, by the time I had left, I had been hearing these Groote Schuur minutes and all this. Nelson being released from Robben Island and taken to Pollsmoor, and the others eventually joined. And you know this is something that we openly debated on Robben Island when we were there, that how stupid the Afrikaner was, by putting all of us together, so that apart from giving moral sustenance to one another we also developed politically together. That if I was a ruler at that time; I would have put people in different places; isolate them; break down any kind of solidarity; and that's precisely what they did eventually. But they did it for a different reason because they released, took Nelson out of Robben Island, put him in Pollsmoor because they would have access to him and break Nelson down. And then get the others, but at the same time the international politics at the time ,was the collapse of the Soviet Union, right. And the West were no longer obliged to support PW Botha, at that time. So deals were made outside South Africa for the release of Nelson and everybody else. 1994 did not take place because of what happened in Kempton Park. 1994 was decided by Washington. They decided that this is what is going to happen.

The proposals put in 1992/93 at Kempton Park were proposals that both the IMF and Washington put forward. This is the deal: "you are going to have the TRC; you are going to compromise; you are going to throw your Freedom Charter down the toilet. You are going to share power; you know the GNU and all of that came in and of course, the ANC unashamedly accepted. And for that we feel terribly - look I wasn't ANC person but I didn't expect the depth of the sell out. That is my biggest problem.

MN: In the same breath I was going to ask you Prof, what do you think made the National Party relent?

SV: Because the West was no longer going to support them. Because the only people that supported the National Party at that time was the Western powers. They propped up, [then] they pulled the plug, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

MN: What's your view or what was your view on the CODESA, the talks?

SV: We didn't participate. I think a lot of people who were involved in politics for a long, long time refused to participate in CODESA because we saw the sell out that was taking place. The deals that were being struck and you know I don't know whether by design or what Kempton Park is a World Trade Centre, isn't it? So there was wheeling and dealing in the Trade Centre. They changed the name quickly to Kempton Park. It was Trade Centre.

MN: What is it specifically that you are against in the CODESA, was it the composition or was it?

SV: No, the whole idea that you are being offered liberation or whatever you want to call it, on totally different terms from what you were struggling for

2/300 years. You know, you wanted land; you wanted redistribution of wealth; you wanted free education; health and whatever, and whatever. These were the major pillars of all the movements. And none of these things were accepted and you embraced the yesterday's oppressors as your fellow brethren you know. That was, I am not saying that we must entertain revenge or anything, but I think they just went so far with the result that yesterday's Communist Party people are today's biggest capitalist. You know, your Cyril Ramaposas'; your Mac Maharaj's; your Terror Lekotas to an extent; the other big mining guy, what's his name.

MN: Sexwale?

SV: Tokyo. All of these people; all of them; have become big. Of course, they do all of this in the name of black empowerment, you know, which is a lot of rubbish - it is just black elite, which switched ideologies just like that, just for money. And it's very, very sad.

MN: I know you are not in the ANC; but as a distant observer; what do think made them relent or made them give up all what they fought for considering the suffering they've endured?

SV: Two things: one is power. I think they were hungry for power. The other thing was that the guerilla war had no chance of succeeding, especially with the fall of the Soviet Union. So that option really wasn't there, and when this possibility of sharing power came up, they grabbed it with two hands, at whatever cost. They didn't kick and fight over a number of issues, they agreed to all of them virtually.

MN: The general opinion is that they got the political power but they don't have economic power, do you go along?

SV: Oh yes! It's what happened in the rest of Africa you know, they got flag independence, and that's it, no economic. Look, you can see what's happening today even in South Africa with the way they are spending money. The way they are moving. You know, South Africa I think, was the only country in the whole wide world that accepted and implemented structural adjustment programmes without the IMF/World Bank formally asking them to implement the first country. Only because it was IMF/World Bank that drafted the RDP and GEAR, eventually. South Africa has every component of structural adjustment programme they have implemented. Therefore today, they have cut back on social spending. Social spending is health; housing; roads; schools; education; all of these. You know some of the things that the people want I mean these are the basic things for about 40 million of South African people, this is what they want. You know if you look at the statistics in South Africa, the per capita income and the GDP of the people is lower today than it was in 1972. The gap between the rich and the poor is like living in different continents. There are a handful of black people, the black elite who are way, way ahead, and in fact you know, I was talking to a bunch of people the other day. Even the white corporate world is embarrassed by the lifestyles of their fellow black brethren in the corporate world. The way these people are flaunting. Look, Tony Blair doesn't have his

personal aeroplane. Govan Mbeki buys himself for five hundred...[interruption]

MN: Thabo.

SV: Thabo Mbeki. I'm sorry Thabo Mbeki - for 500-odd million. Why? People are starving; they don't have any money to eat; there is famine in South Africa they are not talking about it. You go to the Northern Provinces and all of these people are starving. People at UDW can't afford fees to attend lectures. And you get a Ramashala who pays herself 1½-million a year as a salary, almost. I mean these are the black elite that are unscrupulous you know. They think that they are entitled because for 300-years they have been deprived of access to luxury and money and all of that. They are grabbing it any which way they can, and they are doing it unashamedly you know. And the white corporate world is embarrassed by this. Although they were the ones who seduced them you know, they, the white corporate world doesn't flaunt its wealth, you know, but these guys flaunt it. So that's where we are.

MN: How do you see, do you see any remedy?

SV: I think the only solution is that the struggle hasn't started yet. We have to start virtually from the beginnings again. I think the only difference now is that possibly we have space, that's the only difference. I feel free that I can get up and go where I want to go. I can say what I am saying here today, but I wasn't able to say this ten, twenty years ago that's the only difference. But you know okay, we've got the right to vote, we've got the right to free speech blah, blah, blah. But we don't have the

right to free education; no free medicine; no free housing or anything like that which is the crux of democracy. If you don't have that, to have the right to vote is meaningless. You can't eat a vote; you can't shelter under a vote, you see. Freedom means the basic conditions of life need to be addressed, and I'm not saying that everybody must live in beautiful homes, but you know the other day; oh I constantly drive up and down the country these days, and I see these RDP homes. We always derided the Boers for the matchboxes that they built for us in the townships, if you look at those matchboxes they are palaces compared to the RDP homes. These are little things with a small window and that's all. And people have to pay for these.

The Boers didn't make them pay, they charged them rent, but this is a shame - the little hovel that they built for the people. You know, you don't have to go far - you go past the Marianhill Toll; if you stop there one day, just stop and look on the right, look at these RDP homes. The window is not bigger than those block photographs, nothing, that's all it has; and a door in the front; and a round toilet in the back somewhere. And I don't think that was what we struggled for. I don't think so.

MN: The voice from the poor, some of the poor people, is that it was better during the apartheid than it is now, and the only difference is that back then they didn't have a voice, they didn't have a platform to voice their concerns on.

SV: You see, there the answer has to be yes and no. You know, in the old days people carried the dompass; and if you don't know what dompass was

and the problems; that people went through with the compass; it's a different experience. Ya, now they don't have that. So the change, it's better now that you don't have that because look, I grew up during that period when people by the thousand used to be snatched from the streets; thrown into the back of a police van shunted off to prisons. And eventually, into work forces on the farms, and all over like that. It was just slavery in a different name. So in that sense it's great, but in many other ways it's really terrible because today you have got to pay for your education. Right? You have got to pay for your health; transport costs are exorbitant; a whole host of things are different. You can't save; people starve; you look at all - I don't call them informal housing, that's an euphemism for slums. You look at people living under cardboard and plastic, and then you begin to understand why the levels of crime are so high. I mean nobody condones crime. But I think one needs to understand what drives many people to commit - I'm not talking about the big syndicates; the people that hold up banks and the people that hold up SVB; and all of those the white-collar crime and all of that. You know, in fact white-collar crime is greater now than it has ever been before. And people involved in white-collar crime are not black people. Only now, slowly black people are getting in, stupidly, but it's conducted by mainly the white people. And there you are talking about billions not the 2/3 000 that the common law criminals catch you for, steal, you know, mug you, and all that. The only difference I think now is that crime in South Africa has a taken a qualitative

change. I'm probably being very subjective about this because my brother was shot two weeks ago, and after taking his money. But that seems to be the pattern these days, that people are being robbed and then shot and killed - that seems to be a pattern more and more these days, which didn't exist previously. If it's plain robbery I can relate that to socioeconomic conditions, but the killing of people after they have taken the money is something that I can't explain really.

MN: Can you paint a picture of the South Africa you were struggling for, and how different it is from now because you have just described what it is now. But can you paint a picture of the South Africa you pictured?

SV: Well the South Africa that we struggled for I think is embodied mainly in the Freedom Charter; the Ten Point Programme; the PAC documents; it's everything, but what it is at the moment. It is a country, a freedom where there had to be some kind of an egalitarianism, although a lot of us began to argue whether a socialist society could be built immediately after a revolution. The problem was that revolution - can it happen in South Africa? When would it take place? But I think everybody, across the political spectrum, the minimum they expected to have was some kind of an egalitarian society, no extremes of the conditions and that is what was missing.

MN: Coming back, personally when you were reunited with your daughter did you - [interruption]

SV: Sorry?

MN: I'm saying when you came back after your imprisonment did you ever tell you daughter about the incident where she saved your life in prison, when you were about to commit suicide?

SV: No I don't talk about my torture, all of that. I think the only time she heard about it when she saw these tapes that I made for UDW 300. I didn't even tell Trees. We don't, you know look: in all my years on Robben Island almost everybody were tortured, right. There was only one political prisoner, a SWAPO guy who would just drop his pants and show us how he was shot and disfigured, nobody else talked about it. It's not easy, it's not comfortable, we didn't do it, nobody.

MN: Looking back at your life your political life and all, is there anything you can pinpoint and say if you had a chance you could do it again right, that you feel you have done wrong, is there anything at all which you feel you have done wrong?

SV: No. I think whatever I did, even during my student movement days, I think it's difficult to say whether you can do that again, whether it was wrong. But I think given the period, given the time, I think I did absolutely correctly. Similarly, during my time with APDUSA and all of that. I don't think I would have done anything differently within that context, within that period and all of that. Now you can't transpose times, right, given those times and I think, but I think for me the best thing that I ever did was when I refused to become a state witness. To me, I think that saved me; it wasn't a big debate that I put up with; but the point is that the temptation was there; the offer was made. And I could have easily, you

know, through some quirk of my thinking to say that look I'll have my family and forget about prison and come back home. But sometimes, I sigh in relief that I didn't make that decision you know. I don't know what would have happened to me if I became a state witness, you know. Because I am telling you, in those days, and you can ask Vito, that people's attitude towards state witnesses was really one of ostracism. They became totally ostracized. Some people were even eliminated, like these two close comrades of mine, Armstrong and Madoda. They are out; we don't know where they are; what they are doing; they are nowhere near the people that they were associated with previously. These guys were in their thirties - for thirty years of your life you had a relationship with a bunch of people, or more than a bunch of people. And suddenly you become a state witness you: are rejected by your close comrades. But, what about society around you? They also reject you because people had a very strong sense of integrity and morality in those days. Now it's different but in those days it was very, very strong. Because I know when I came back from prison the security police went around to my neighbourhood and asked them to keep an eye on me; who is coming in; do I go out and all of that. But you know what, each one of them in their own quiet way, would come and tell me "look this is what the cops have come and told me to do", and all of that, you know. You really felt great those days that you had the people behind you, the people supported you, you see. But things have changed since, you know, in the eighties there were lots of sell outs,

and you know, with comrades or freedom fighters became torturers you know. The people that killed the Griffiths [couple] were in the political movement, you know. That kind of thing never happened in the, up until the seventies and things like that. Very, very seldom would you have a impimpi, there was a kind of morality. I think I was telling you about you know, when I was teaching at the M.L. Sultan Technical College, I used to live at the Himalaya House. And in the bottom there was this, not Salot gang, Crimson League operators. And these guys were the criminals of the day, but very posh, I mean and all of that, but they supported you and helped you along. So you had a different kind of relationship with people. Because they too, saw their salvation in the political struggle and wherever they could help, they would help you. But today's crime gangs will kill you off.

MN: Professor can you briefly tell me about your opinions on the TRC, very briefly if you can?

SV: I did not support the TRC - I was asked to come and do it. Tell them what happened and all of that, but I objected to it in principle. That you cannot get truth from your oppressor; and two, I will not reconcile with my oppressor. I am not asking for revenge, but I will not reconcile. So those two things, just truth and reconciliation were part of the deal, so that black people won't kill off the whites in South Africa, that's it. That's the long and crude way of putting it. Because if people were given half the chance they would attack whites on a racial - I'm not saying it would have been right, but that was the mood of the people. Because if you remember

during the CODESA talks, there was Boipatong, do you think the people in Boipatong today will say "come on brothers let's embrace one another?" Let's say forget about the children that are lost; and mothers that are lost; and all of that, you think? They are human beings. They won't forget it, so in principle and otherwise, I reject TRC. It's part of the machinations of Washington; and the churches: they used Tutu. You know, the other very significant thing is that when Nelson was released from prison, he stayed with Tutu the first day, not with his [family]. Tutu was never his political comrade, right? Then he leaves to the Transvaal - it wasn't Gauteng then - he flies in a plane provided for by Anglo-American. And he stayed in the Transvaal, in Johannesburg, with Bobby Godsell and that crowd, not even with Winnie, not even with his people. So what I am saying is that before Nelson was released there was a whole network of people that were working on them and arranged his life and that's how he behaved, subsequently. You know, he didn't even go to his comrades, can you believe that? You normally, when you come out at least you come back to your comrades, you know these are your people that you would want to embrace. And come out; and because Wally was released before him he wouldn't go to Wally; he wouldn't go to Soweto. Goes and stays with his - they were not his friends. But those were the people that got him out of prison and made the deal. These were the dealmakers of South Africa.

MN: Professor, are you bitter?

SV: I am bitter, I am bitter. I don't deny that. I think I'm bitter that so many years of struggle seem to have gone down the drain; and we only hope that we can start it again. But it is going to be such a slow process because I think by the eighties we had reached such a great momentum in the struggle. And if we carried on at that pace we would have had - wouldn't have to trade our souls the way we did in Kempton Park. We wouldn't have had to spawn this creature GNU, you know, and the people would have been in power, not the whole motley crowd of people.

MN: Professor, in your spare time now, on a lighter note, besides being a Professor and a head of a department, what do you do to relax, what are your hobbies?

SV: I love gardening, rose gardening, so I spend a lot of my time rose gardening.

MN: And music-wise?

SV: No.

MN: You don't listen to music?

SV: I listen to music, but I don't play music, I can't play music.

MN: I mean your favourite music, what kind of music?

SV: I like Indian classical, mainly, and I like country music, western style.

MN: And who is your favourite author or writer?

SV: Something with Shakespeare.

MN: You are not reading anything else, there is nothing?

SV: I mean, if you ask me the greatest, I still think I love Shakespeare. But I still like a lot of things that Arundhati Roy is writing these days, so I read a lot of hers.

MN: If somebody could ask you and say what would you recommend, what do you recommend?

SV: To read?

MN: The authors, yes.

SV: Well, I think I would first need to know what the person's interest is. And you see this is what happens when you become an academic, that you become too precise about what you recommend and all of that.

MN: Can you briefly tell me something that I almost forgot. What is your opinion about this African Unity thing?

SV: African Union?

MN: Yes, African Union.

SV: I think it's just a useless, futile self-serving exercise.

MN: And the NEPAD?

SV: Well NEPAD is just the same, NEPAD is nothing but a structural adjustment programme. NEPAD was not planned, discussed, devised by South Africans or the Africans, it was done in Washington.

MN: And what's your opinion about, or what was your reaction to the Ngema song?

SV: It was sad that Ngema had to come out with that song at this point in time. Look a lot of things Ngema is singing about in that song are true, a lot, not absolutely, not a hundred percent, but a lot of the things are true. A lot of it has to do with perceptions, you know. You can't say all Indians are shopkeepers and all of that. You know oppressors. But at the same time, Ngema needs to understand, and realize, and admit that there are racists amongst the Africans themselves; there are racists amongst

Indians; whites; all over. So there isn't - racism is not the monopoly of any one particular racial group. And my disappointment with the Ngemas is that they have a role to play if they want to contribute to the development and improvement of society, they should do something positive. His song was a negative thing, really, it has negative repercussions, that's the problem with that. I'm not denying that a lot of what he is saying is true because there is still a whole lot of racism. You talk to students; you talk to ordinary people; there's lots of racism, none of them - and I don't blame a lot of people because the positions they take up is as a result of their own experiences in life, you see. How did they come in contact with other races. You know, for three hundred years we have been separated from one another? You walk on this campus for the past ten-odd years - this is supposed to be an open campus, right, you guys have been here on this campus for five, six years now. Do you see Africans and Indian students arm in arm; walking and sitting together; and talking? You don't. You see now this is a problem that I have with management and all of that. What are they doing to bring people together? You know sometimes you've got to do this: you've got to engineer these things with a purpose in mind. Because although we have had our freedom now almost ten years, people still live in their [townships] : Lamontville, the Kwa Mashus, the Chatsworths and Reservoir Hills, there is very little interaction amongst people. They go to segregated schools; they come here; still not knowing their

fellow brethren; so the function is do something about that.

MN: Professor, I thank you very much for coming, and thank you again.

SV: Thank you. You are welcome.

INTERVIEW ENDS

