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Perhaps one should begin at the beginning. I cannot really say when it began - or how he came into our lives. Lets call him Bob. He soon ate lunch with us regularly. When we visited family in Verulam he was with us. He brought us baji/keera (herbs - Mbroho - umfino) He brought fresh double beans from the family garden (very special treat). Bob was unemployed but hung around the Congress offices ie Natal Branch of the ANC, South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) Natal Indian Congress (NIC), the New Age offices (previously Guardian). All these offices were situated in Lakhani Chambers in Savell Street, Durban.

When fund raising parties were organised at my flat Bob helped with the organisation in every aspect - a very willing help. He was so much a part of my home and our political world. When the messenger of the court called to attach our furniture, typewriters, cyclostyling machines at our offices for failure to pay monthly rent, it was he and others who removed the typewriters etc and sat on the fire escape till the messenger had gone. He kept us abreast of the happenings in the office. He religiously brought us any leaflet the offices issued. He told us of the police raids on the office. He told us who was arrested and where they were being held. He told us that Rowley Arenstein (as he always did) was attending to the detainees.

He was a favourite of my sons, Sahdhan and Sha and would keep them occupied while I cooked the evening meal. He would shop for us, and took racing bets for MD. Many was the time that he ran downstairs to buy a pint of milk when we had visitors. On Friday evenings, payday, when workers bought seev nuts and boondhi to take home, he would bring us a sixpenny packet of peanuts.

Bob was very poor. He had a lean and hungry look. He was never paid for the work he did in the offices. Perhaps they were given lunch money - puri patha was cheap at tickey and this was our usual meal with a cup of tea at Patels. He and others were always hungry and we gladly shared our meagre resources with them.

We did not know then, but we know now that he was MK and on the night he placed the bomb under the railway bridge near Berea station late one evening and was making his escape that we played bridge with Ebi. All evening Nathoo walked up and down the balcony of our eighth floor flat on Victoria Street. When we heard the explosion that shook our building it was Ebi who looked at his watch. I knew then that he knew about that bomb. Nathoo was asked to get off the balcony and to make tea. If the police raided we should be found at an ordinary game of bridge. We heard the bomb while we played.

*Kate
Liz
Julie
Mother
John
Helen
G.
May
Bill*

On the same evening at late Krish's flat in Himalaya House, as Gov entered the flat the explosion shook Himalaya House too and Gov said what a lovely welcome. When George came to check on Gov later, Gov congratulated him on the fine work. We did not know what all this meant. Only much later when the arrests took place did we know who the MK (Mkhonto WeSizwe) comrades were.

Detention

We had to feed in ~~prison~~ 27 ANC members on trial in the Ladysmith Trial, and 22 held in the Sabotage trial. For this latter trial we expected the Death penalty and my little friend was in the 2nd trial. They had beaten him to pulp and he had broken down. 19 persons broke down, only 3 Billy Nair, Riot Mkhwanazi and Ebi had not cracked despite horrible torture - so said a Special Branch fellow.

Their trial was in Pietermaritzburg, and their house attorney lived in Durban. They ~~were~~ ^{would} come to Durban to have consultations with him from time to time. The 'Aandag' story comes from this period.

On Sahdhan's 3rd birthday, we had decided there would be no party as his Dad had been detained as well. Earlier on the 4th April I had gone to the market and Daddy Naidoo head of a gang called Crimson League had asked me how the boys were coping. I told him we were running out of food. We could only manage bread and sour milk. He walked around the market and brought me some mince vegetables and rice. He sent a lad with me to carry the stuff to my flat. I made cartoons of food for all 49 and a few others. When we delivered the boxes with cartoons Bob was on the other side and shouted - Happy birthday Sahdhan.

It was very difficult to get food regularly for the boys especially MK comrades. The Sabotage Act had been promulgated and its terms put the fear of the devil into everyone. Today those who covort with the president, the commander of MK would not lift a finger to help in the early sixties. We were thrown out of their offices saying they ~~would~~ ^{would} not ~~donate~~ ^{donate} money because if detained we would ~~break down~~ and expose them.

Brenda Worthington, Rowley's bookkeeper not only had to find rent to pay for his office when he was detained, but also found food to feed all. She at no time stipulated that she would be prepared help ANC comrades only.

When eventually Bob was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment we were relieved that Judge Milne (Senior) did not let them have the full might of the law. Both Curnick Ndlovu and Billy Nair had the most severe sentence of 20 years and their date of release was the 28th February, 1984. Bob was due to be released on the 28th February, 1974. I think he was around 23 years when incarcerated.

Bob had not had much formal education. He certainly did not have a matriculation certificate, ie entrance to university. We were at pains to get Bob to study in prison.

He countered our requests with the fact that he was not an intellectual but merely a worker. At one stage I had requested money for studies, hoping thereby to force him to study. But all that happened was that his sister said that he was a lazy chap and did not want to study, and that I was asking for money for myself. The receipts from Robben Island proved her ~~incorrect~~. *wrong*.

We, Sahdhan and I took to writing to Bob in prison. When Sahdhan wrote to Bob it took for ever. Sahdhan would tell me what he wanted to tell Bob and I would have to spell the words for him, and at times show him how to write the alphabet. I can see his little bent body over the table writing. It took ages. He was learning to write and insisted on writing to a number of comrades on the Island. I was in turn punished with spelling. Later he helped Mrs Dorasamy who was unable to read and write. Sahdhan would write her letters for her. When he asked her to spell certain words and she could not, he called her stupid. He was ~~not aware~~ that she could not. How can a child understand that an elder, mother of 5 children not know how to spell.

By the time, Bob was due for release I was banned and house arrested and depending on whether the 28th February happened over the weekend he would be released on the Friday. I had arranged for Bob to be met by a journalist. The Minister of Justice Vorster/Pelser/Kruger, ~~all~~ said there were no political prisoners in jail - it was part of their propoganda. But there always were those including murderers who had one third remission of sentence and ~~these~~ ^{all} ~~these~~ politicians who did not. It was the politicians who served every day of their sentence. Bob had served 10 years to the day. Despite this fact the Justice Department showed scant regard for the judges integrity who heard the trial and imposed 'appropriate' sentences - many were executed - Vuyisile Mini, my friend and comrade haunts me daily. When politicians were released the Justice department imposed restriction orders whereby they determined where you worked, the area you lived and worked in if indeed you worked. I was a teacher and my orders forbade me ~~to~~ ^{to} teach or enter educational institutions. Mostly banning orders made sure you did not work. Punishment was endless if you held a political view not held by the racist ruling regime.

We were sure that Bob would be restricted. I would therefore not be allowed to speak to him. Nobody including his family did meet him. He went to a newspaper office from where he phoned me. When he said that he had not had his banning orders I asked my journalist friend to put Bob on a taxi to my office.

On his arrival in the office what cacaphony - so much noise and joy. Rita had the water boiling to serve tea on his arrival, but he went into my office saying he was wearing prison pants. The material was very coarse and was cutting him in the groin. Can I have an underpants please. Rita went down to Esquire a tailor shop on the ground floor of our office block and bought two underpants.

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I was turfed out of my private office while he put on his underpants. The newspapers came to interview him and while I knew this would invite banning orders he had to tell the world about comrades he had left behind. Bob was shocked by the lack of support for released and incarcerated politicians.

He thought that great international support was available to them. It was only a few of us in Durban including Cousin Poo (Poomoney Moodley) who cared for the Natal comrades.

The support that the ANC enjoys today was non-existent then. A trade unionist then, a minister today asked me not to interfere even though I had been instructed by the family of a detained trade unionist.

"These are trade unionists and when you attend to them you colour them with your politics," he chastised me.

Bob was duly banned, but we managed a visit to Verulam and Stanger before he was house arrested to Chatsworth. Bob never sat still. He made sure that he collected cash for comrades on the island, visited families and tried to obtain work himself in the restricted domain allowed him by his restriction orders. The dependants conference helped with cash but it was a paltry sum that ensured his dependance. Bob lost his mother while on the island and was dependant on his divorced sister who was having her own hell.

Soon after release after medical examination he was found to have ulcers. He was operated on at King Edward hospital and came into the office to show his scar. It was weeping. I phoned my matron sister to find out what could be done.

I cannot recall his many visits to my office but remember the last just before he went into exile in December, 1976. I gave him R5.00 to buy himself a shirt for Xmas. He left and later came back with 2 large containers of orange juice and said -

GIVE IT TO THE COMRADES IN THE TRIAL (HARRY GWALA'S) I CAN ALWAYS BUY A SHIRT. THEIR NEED IS GREATER THAN MINE.

That was Bob, as generous as the day was long. He was gone with his operation scar not healed and a few days later we found out that he was safe in Maputo. Until that happened you have no idea what sleepless nights I endured. It was knowledge and stress that could not be shared but had to be borne alone.

In July 1977 when the unit I was involved in, came a cropper I had to flee into exile in Lesotho, leaving my three children with their Dad with whom I shared access and custody. He promptly sought custody of my daughter until he was stopped by the ANC. The children all 3, Sahdhan, Sha and Sukhthi were sent to London on Sha's 15th birthday on the 31st July, 1977. It was a week of hell having to cope with my week old exile, the custody application and have the children sent away.

MD had made application for passports for the children. I recall Sahdhan asking me to give MD Sukhthi's passport and

promising that he would not send Suks away unless he had my consent. The boys said they wanted to go to their Aunts in the UK. I could have stopped them but they assured me they wanted to go. I did not trust MD's application for Sukhthi's passport. I knew he had made application for an exit permit and had help from J.N. Reddy of the South African Indian Council fame. In November 1977 unable to secure an exit permit he fled into exile with William Khanyile.

Bob and I shared the exigencies of exile. Whenever he came to Lesotho he stayed with me. His initial MK activities were without formal training, now in exile he was sent for training and told me of crawling on his stomach for 24 hours. What about the scar. It has healed he assured me. There were no hotel bill for the ANC. Whenever I went to Maputo we enjoyed a meal together. In food strapped Maputo he had become adept at knowing how to obtain it. He would stand in the bread queue and bring us precious paaaw for breakfast. His marriage to a comrade (her name evades me now) did not last and after the birth of their child they were divorced. Bob shared his pain with me.

In Maseru I used to get up at 4am, and make roti and curry for my comrades in Maputo and despatch it with comrades who were travelling out. I had notes from Ronnie and Sue telling how they enjoyed the food and thanking me profusely. Then I had a note from Moses Mabhida telling me not to send any food as it was forgotten in the boot of ~~the~~ car and it had rotted. No more.

By September 1983 the borders with SA were closed - all 12 borders and Lesotho was starving. The boers threatened to kill me if I had not left Lesotho by Saturday 9/9/83. Reluctantly I left hoping that the oxygen held at the border will be allowed into Lesotho to save some patient from death. I met Bob in Maputo and both Ebi (I had not seen since 1963) and Bob were a great comfort.

After a little while in Zambia, I got a job in the Law department. Once I established a home and following the Nkomati Accord, ~~following~~ ^{after} Samora's sojourn in Britain where he received red carpet treatment. He returned ~~with~~ ⁱⁿ British made uniforms. This ~~spell~~ ^{acting} ~~able~~ ^{Asst}. The ANC was kicked out of Maputo. A skeleton staff remained. Bob was one of them. However they were soon kicked out from Mozambique.

We saw them once or twice in Harare until he was sent to Amsterdam as our Chief Representative. He took care of my daughter during the women's conference. We returned home to South Africa in the 90's and he married a new bride whom I feel was threatened by our long relationship. When I asked if they were going to Joseph Ndluli's funeral, she said they were not going. I got a ride with some American friends to the funeral and found Bob and his wife there. Both avoided my scrutiny and hid behind some of their companions and avoided us.



Xmas 1995 I called him with a view to apologizing and calling off the vendetta that kept us apart, but his wife refused to let me talk to Bob.

That hurt but not as much as a recent acquaintance of Bob telling me when I asked if he had seen Bob. No he replied but I had his Xmas card. There was no card for us ! We regularly sent him cards when no one else did to Robben Island. He has regular employment now and has two flats and his wife works if it suits her. He earns enough for both. And yes he has no need of us now.

What do you think ? I have not heard his story. Perhaps he resents my inability to walk, my lack of transport and my dependence on him. I dont know.