

# KATHY THE FOOD LOVER

**W** hoever knows Kathy knows that he loves food. Mince and peas, Biryani, ice cream and chocolate. Being in prison turned food into a fantasy as he and his colleagues were obliged to eat what was served them. Food was a site of struggle and often their only weapon used in various hunger strikes to press for better conditions. Food was not just limited, badly prepared and under-nourishing, it was racially discriminatory. Indian and Coloured prisoners were fed more and slightly better than black prisoners. The hurt Kathy felt over this discrimination is reflected in the title of the Indian version of his Memoirs called *No Bread for Mandela*.



**21 AUGUST 1929**  
Ahmed Mohammed Kathrada is born to Muhammed Kathrada in Scherers-Renke a small town about 300km from Johannesburg



As he wrote in his Memoirs:

**“** Indian and Coloured inmates were fed according to the prison department's D diet. Africans ate what was stipulated in the F diet. In the morning, the distinction lay in something as petty as the amount of sugar sprinkled on the porridge we all received. We also got a mug of soup and a mug of coffee, unsweetened. Everything was cold by the time it reached us, and some prisoners would mix their coffee with the porridge to try to make it more palatable.

For lunch, the Africans were given plain boiled meals and boiled turnips. Now raw turnip can be fairly tasty, but boiled, it is the most awful vegetable. Nevertheless, for months, if not years, those were the only vegetables we got. Indians and Coloureds were given mealie-rice or samp instead of whole mealies, and sometimes they would give us what they called peas, but were more likely lupins, and quite inedible. The third meal of the day was porridge and a mug of soup for the Africans, while Indians and Coloureds also got coffee and a chunk of bread, roughly spread with white margarine. Meat or fish was added to the mix three times a week, Africans getting less than Coloureds and Indians.

There was no bread for Africans, and how people missed that.

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**1938**  
Leaves Scherers-Renke for Johannesburg and attends school because there are no schools for Indians in his hometown



A bachelor all his life, Kathy learned how to cook for himself on a grillier which involved placing the food below the heat and waiting for it to cook. He did try his hand when more experienced cooks were whipping up a meal and occasionally he has cooked for guests. But as Kathy says, **“the food that I cook is only for prisoners”**.

He was well fed and cared for by Mrs Pahad and his Fordburg Aunties both while he was living in Johannesburg and when he was on trial, but the 'feasts' they sent him while he was inside were to fade into his imagination until he could again taste fare which was made with love.



**1941**  
Joins the Young Communist League



**1945-1946**  
Helps to form the Transvaal Indian Youth Congress and was later elected as Chairman

When they were finally allowed an unlimited supply of photographs they began to fill albums with the images sent behind the cold prison walls. In one of the photographs sent by Tommy Vassen from London, the friends' images were clouded by the incidental and innocent appearance of a spread they were about to enjoy. But it loomed large for Kathy:

**“** Here we are in prison for all these years, getting the same monotonous food, and you chaps send us a photograph of a Sunday meal where we can identify – which is an exaggeration of course, it's just to make them feel guilty – here's this thing, here's this thing, here's this thing. Maybe we did try to identify things. I don't know, but it's a weapon we can use.

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**1946**  
Leaves school to work for the Passive Resistance Council and serves his first jail sentence in Durban

