

KATHY THE DRIVER

As with everything else in his life and political career, Kathy began driving at a young age. It was behind the wheel of his father's black Oldsmobile that he was taught to drive at the age of 11.

When he finally took his driver's licence test in the rural town of Schweizer-Reneke, 18 years after he had been delivered, to a Gujarati-speaking Muslim family by Ouma Oosthuizen, a family friend, he still looked younger than he was meant to be. He looked so young that despite knowing both him and his family the examiner accused him of trying to sneak in too young. Kathy had returned to his home town to achieve this badge of freedom, a good decade since he had left, forced to move to Johannesburg through the lack of schools for Indian children in Schweizer-

Wenched from his family, he had to move to Johannesburg, where he found another family, politics. Loved and cared for by his aunt, his second mother, Aminabai Pahad, and his "Fordsburg Aunts" Aunty Rangee Vassen and Aunty Vengetty Pillay and Aunty Kissie, Reddy, he moved quickly along the trajectory dug out in his emotional landscape from his non-racial upbringing. The easy mixing at home and the way apartheid had ripped him from his family had forged in him an indelible knowledge that racial segregation was wrong.

As it drove him from home it drove him, inspired by the work of Communist leader Dr Yusuf Dadoo, into the Young Communist League where a measure of non-racialism attracted him. This political zeal, and a newly-acquired driver's licence gave this young activist extra appeal.

Leaving school in 1946 to work full-time in the offices of the Passive Resistance Council, he drove the office car. Once he drove Errol Shanley into dangerous territory during the so-called 'Indian-African' riots in Cato Manor, exposing the young man to a terrifying experience of violence.

“He went into this house and I saw a crowd of people coming, armed with sticks and so forth. Now, they wouldn't necessarily have attacked me but at that time you looked at everything with suspicion. So I just hid under the steering wheel and so forth and they passed me.”

He later drove Molvi Cachalia to the area where he was collecting evidence to prove an allegation that whites were involved in fomenting the violence. The government Commission of Enquiry set into the attacks refused to accept the cross-examination of witnesses, rendering the evidence useless.

Just less than ten years after his arrival in Johannesburg and his one-month prison sentence for his involvement in the Passive

Resistance campaign, Kathy met Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ismail Meer and JIN Singh – they helped to shape his political involvement in so profound a way that altered his life forever.

In 1962 he drove Moses Kotane to Durban to see Chief Albert Lutuli and to Basotholand (later Lesotho) to fetch a substantial amount of money, needed to bribe someone to spring Madiba from jail in 1962 – but that plan failed.

“There was the other side to him which people also don't know – the first occasion when I was asked to drive him, we had to leave at six o'clock, that's one thing, for punctuality, there was no one to beat him. If one is five minutes late, he's gone.”

Kathy famously drove a British journalist to a secret venue where he filmed Madiba in the now famous black and white clip in which Madiba, in his staccato voice announces the reason for the turn by the African National Congress to the armed struggle. Blessed with a hopeless sense of direction, Kathy drove the man this way and that until they finally reached the venue.



1961: The 'Kew' house of Yusuf

“This man said 'look Mr Mandela, before we start this interview I just was to compliment you on your security'. He didn't know I was lost, he thought I was trying to set the police off the trail.”

But one of his favourite stories about being stopped by police while driving was when he and Moses Kotane were stopped as they were entering Alexandra Township. After resigning themselves to a certain night in prison, they were pleasantly surprised when the sergeant revealed his intention: He recognised the 'TR' number plate as coming from his own home-town of Schweizer-Reneke and just stopped for a chat – because he was homesick.

Despite Kathy's sacrifice and 26 years in jail, when he was released on 15 October 1989, he found South Africa had changed. The one main road system had mushroomed into on and off ramps, multiple lanes, seatbelts and hazard lights. He was comfortable driving around Lenasia but once he tried to drive to the city, his hero status was no protection on the road.

“Before I even reached the city – the taxis, they gave me hell because I was driving slowly. And they intimidate, they hoot, they shout and swear and all that. It was the last time I drove. I just gave up.”

1961 – 1962
Becomes one of the earliest recruits of Umkhonto We Sizwe (UkU), and serves on the Johannesburg Regional Command for a brief spell



1962
Becomes secretary of the Free Mandela Committee when Mandela is arrested in Aug. Placed under House Arrest

1963
Instructed by the South African Communist Party to go to 'background', vacates Flat 713 Khofed House and moves to Liliesleaf Farm

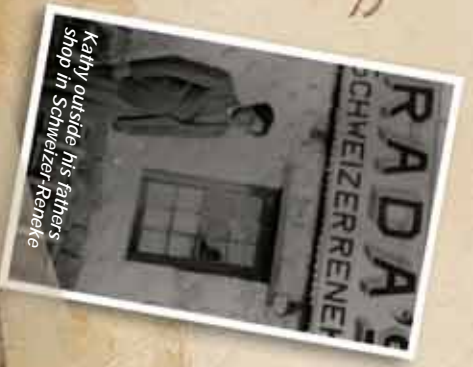


1963 - 1964
Arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment in Robben Island together with Mandela, Sisulu, Ouma Goldie, Ray Ellen Mofoket and Andrew Mlangeni.

1964 - 1989
Served sentence on Robben Island and Polismoor Prison



Dadoo and Kotane



Kathy outside his fathers shop in Schweizer-Reneke

