

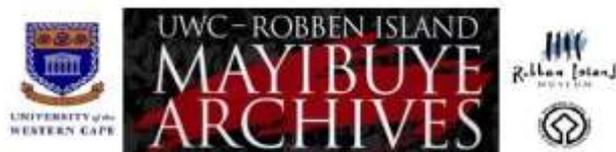
Ruth First Papers project

## Interview with Rica Hodgson part 3

An interview conducted by **Don Pinnock** c. 1992. Part of a series carried out at Grahamstown University and held at the UWC/Robben Island Mayibuye Archive.

Republished in 2012 by the Ruth First Papers Project

[www.ruthfirstpapers.org.uk](http://www.ruthfirstpapers.org.uk)



**RH:** ... ja, I can get this picture, there's this particular picture that you haven't seen.

**DP:** Oh don't worry, because I'll simply buy Vogue.

**RH:** No no ...

**DP:** I'm going to – anyway.

**RH:** Well, let me go and get it for you anyway. A very great – another woman that Ruth took a very great shine to in jail was Arthur Goldreich's wife Hazel, because she thought Hazel was very gutsy and they could talk to each other, somehow. And do you know the Bermans – Monty and Myrtle? You see, Ruth was at school with Myrtle, and they were both very brilliant and they were both rather bluestockingey ladies. They kept up this friendship right through life, but Myrtle started to go towards –

**DP:** She's a Trotskyist, isn't she?

**RH:** Well, I don't know. I wouldn't call her a Trotskyist, but she started to go towards PAC, and of course Ruth stayed staunch with the ANC, and then she went off to China, and so on. But they remained friends, and she must be somebody worth getting a look at Ruth at an earlier age.

**DP:** I've talked to her on the 'phone and I will be going to see her. But she seems to be – I don't know what she does, but she seems to be awfully busy.

**RH:** Oh yes, she's a very high-powered lady. She's got some tremendous job in the feminist field, training women for bank executives or something like that.

**DP:** [indistinct].

**RH:** No, that's alright. I'm sure – but a very nice couple, and we were very friendly with them, went to parties at their house as well. So did Ruth. They remained friends although there was always some kind of competition. I don't know if it came from Myrtle's side rather than Ruth's, you know, because Ruth was perhaps the more brilliant of the two, though they were both very brilliant.

**DP:** Was the competition head or looks?

**RH:** Head, I think. In looks they were much of a muchness. Myrtle's a rather plain, austere woman, not in any way a raving beauty, but a very nice woman. I'm remembering another occasion at Ruth's house when we had a very wonderful party. Do you know George Bizo?

**DP:** I just know him as a name.

**RH:** Right, well he was a great friend of theirs. He's a Greek, of course, and he hosted a party at their – he did the cooking. It was a whole sheep, which the Greeks do in a special way. You dig a hole in the ground and you make the fire there, and then you slit the sheep, take its insides out and all that and you put in all these herbs and oil and God knows what, and then you do it over a spit all day. And in the evening that was something just wonderful. Ruth always liked very good food – nice wine and so on. Good food. She didn't like anything that was ever cheap or nasty. She liked the theatre a lot.

**DP:** What did she go to? Do you know any of her favourites? I'm going to ask Joe these questions, but I'm sure you can –

**RH:** Oh no, it's better to ask Joe or the daughters. No, we didn't – we went to parties together, but we didn't really go to the theatre. I know she was a great theatre-goer. And cinema, she loved the cinema too. Good films, ja.

**DP:** What was her favourite colour?

**RH:** I mean at home she – I think she fancied royal blue and sharp greens. And she wore black quite a lot. She liked silver. She brought me a beautiful silver thing back from – Kenya? Nigeria? I can't remember. A huge silver thing like that that I used to wear on a chain. One just doesn't wear those things anymore, the pity is. Beautiful – I've still got it, of course; love it.

**DP:** I'm asking odd questions because these are the things I don't know. What sort of car did she drive?

**RH:** She always fancied French cars. They usually drove Citroens. That was her favourite car.

**DP:** So the film was quite accurate in that way?

**RH:** Yes, absolutely. She liked Citroens. She always drove a Citroen, that I remember. She liked French cars.

**DP:** The long ones –

**RH:** Ja, right. Absolutely. She had one here too, I remember. I'm almost certain she had a Citroen.

**DP:** Where did she go when she left South Africa? Did she ever talk about why she decided to come out? I suppose it was obvious – Joe was out.

**RH:** I think there was no question that she would follow Joe. You see, you got to a point where you were so bugged politically you couldn't do anything anymore. While you could still manage to do something you went on doing it, but when you were house-arrested and you were maybe under 24 hours – even 13 hours a day, you'd have to go to your job and you knew you were being watched. You'd have to come back and you were locked up. And Ruth was not a girl for being in a cage, and that was part of her problem in jail. I mean, I think I could ride that easier than Ruth, being confined – not for long, but I think for longer than that without cracking. I'm not sure, because I haven't been in that situation, but I didn't find it all that trying and terrifying being at home every single night. But I think it would have killed Ruth.

**DP:** Why? I mean, what made her not ...

**RH:** Well, she needed to go out and talk to people. You weren't allowed visitors. You see, my husband and I had a very special relationship, so – OK, I was under house arrest for about five months. That means every night I had Jack and my son and that was all, and nobody else. Well, I could survive that, but I don't know if Ruth could survive it. She needed to see people and mix with people and talk. Conversation was a big thing in her life, and going out to the theatre. I managed because Jack and I would sit and play chess. I don't know Ruth to ever play a game. You know, we could have a card game though we weren't much into cards, or Jack would make something to do with his hands, and even read. But there's a limit to how much reading you can do, you see. She didn't play games of any kind, so to be locked up for 24 hours I think – which was inevitable, really. And once Joe was going she saw –

**DP:** Only one way.

**RH:** Ja, it was only one way, then.

**DP:** Did she read a lot?

**RH:** Oh yes, she was a great reader. Vast – Jesus, that woman could – that was something I envied. That was the one thing about her I really envied. She'd just look at a bloody paper, she never read a book, she missed most of it, but she got the gist of it. Now I've never had that ability. I don't know if you've got it, but I think that's the greatest ability anybody can have. She could just skim like that. Oh yes, she was a great reader. [pause] Oh yes, I remember now the one thing I wanted – I was talking about that she related very well to young people. She came to Mazimbi once while I was there, and there was a young African woman there who was a poet. She'd come to me with her poetry, and I'm no critic. I read it, I liked some of it very much but I thought a lot of it was terribly sloppy. I wouldn't have been able to say if she was good or bad, quite honestly. I liked some of it. And I said to her, look, Ruth First is coming here. Get all your stuff together and I promise I'll try and get a meeting with her. Well, Ruth came, and the first thing we did was to arrange a meeting with the students where she could speak. And they went mad for her! You see, she never patronised anybody. It didn't matter their age or anything, she had none – she didn't understand that word, patronising. And she didn't speak down to anybody. Everybody was on that level, the same. And the students just went crazy for her, although she didn't exactly make her speech on the lower level, if you know what I mean. And she was very busy, she had a lot of work to do there. But anyway, I said to her, look Ruth, can you do this? Yes, she'll do it. She made a time, she found the time, and I brought this woman over. And I stayed for this meeting with this woman, and I think we spent at least an hour-and-a-half, it could have been two hours, I don't remember exactly – very critical, but very constructive. She showed her all the faults and weaknesses and sloppiness and this, that and the other, and she'd explain, and then she'd try to give her an idea of just how to put it together in a certain sequence, and she said do that and then come back to me with it, you see. Now this woman – she was young, she was quite a loner, she was a very attractive woman, and hadn't come to grips with anything. She wasn't really doing any work there, a place where everybody really had to work. She wasn't studying, she wasn't working, and she drank a lot. She had a weakness for booze. But she asked me if she could borrow my typewriter, and I must say for months she worked like hell, and she did everything in triplicate. I've got a copy of her poems at home, I must take them over to Ros and see now if there's anything she can do about them. But she really did take what Ruth said to heart. She never forgot Ruth. She really worked on those poems and she tidied them up. She had some sloppy South African expressions that you wouldn't use normally in ordinary poetry, or any poetry, and ... but Ruth found the time in a short and very busy schedule to give that of herself to somebody. I think that shows some special quality.

**DP:** An extraordinary picture comes across – I mean, here's somebody who terrified some people, and who made some people fall in love with her, inspired other people, some people just didn't like her – she had all these facets!

**RH:** Well, I think she started off terrorising people before she realised that men loved her for herself. I'm trying to – I don't quite know how to come to this point. I was one of the classic pretty girls with the classic beautiful figure, you know – never short of men around me all the time. And it's quite strange that I came to be such a close friend of Ruth's. We were completely different in that sense. And I've always thought that perhaps I understood her better than a lot of other women because I recognised that she was in many ways a lonely person, and that she lacked this – I just knew that there was always a guy somewhere around, you know. Ruth didn't have that for a long time, I think, until she realised that men loved her for whatever

reason. And then I think she became quite a lot softer and mellower. Maybe, say, from the 'seventies. From then on.

**DP:** But women were scared of her as well!

**RH:** Oh, women were terrified of her, but I'm saying one of the reasons women were terrified of Ruth – a different reason – was because she didn't suffer fools and she didn't suffer any dishonesty and if she didn't like people then that was it, she didn't like them. And she would say so. She was bloody rude in her saying. She didn't have this "unprincipled cordiality". Most of us are terrible hypocrites, we hide it all the time. [tape skids]

**DP:** A many-sided person!

**RH:** You see, I'm sure a lot of people wouldn't agree with me, because I think very highly of the quality of love, and love in a person's life, and I don't think many people would think in the terms I'm thinking, but I always thought about Ruth that she lacked this self-confidence. She didn't have a feeling that people loved her, you know? And when she realised they did, then she loved them back so much. Know what I mean?

**DP:** [indistinct]. Did you know Ismael Neer?

**RH:** Oh, very well, yes. You know all the gossip, don't you?

**DP:** [indistinct], but then I went to talk to Ismael because he was at university with her.

**RH:** And very much in love with her. I'm sure he –

**DP:** – and then he said well, we were lovers for four years.

**RH:** Ja, during the treason trial.

**DP:** And during the treason trial?

**RH:** Well, everybody thought so.

**DP:** They must have made a very good-looking couple.

**RH:** Oh yes. I don't think it was really a secret. It was such a difficult period, that treason trial. So many people – not in the case with Ruth and Joe, but with many others, I mean the husband was there and the wife was there, or vice-versa.

**DP:** Still today; they're great relationships!

**RH:** Ja, but ... I know him well. I know his wife very well, too. She's just written that book.

**DP:** On Nelson.

**RH:** On Nelson, ja.

**DP:** No, I had a long chat to Ismael. I get the sense that she felt very let down when he wouldn't marry her.

**RH:** Well you see, I never ever discussed those personal things with Ruth. It's strange, but I never did. I don't know if Ruth really discussed her personal life with anybody, maybe, outside of her husband.

**DP:** I'm bringing it up only because you were talking about her relationship to men. You know, a very soft father, a very long affair which doesn't happen in the end – I'm trying to understand why her relationship to men was quite rough, initially. Quite tough, or part of the –

**RH:** Well, what you're saying might have a bearing on it. I didn't know that, but it's quite possible. You see, I never ever thought, really and truly, that her and Joe married with great love between them. It was a marriage where they admired each other's minds, intellects. Ruth – I always thought Ruth was more in love with Joe than Joe was with her at the time of marriage. A lot of people said at the time that Joe married her for her money, which I never believed because Joe was doing very well at that time. But I mean that's the sort of gossip that you might well hear. And Joe certainly had his affairs, he was never – not. But I mean, OK, it was also the time. I suppose men also thought it was the smart thing to do. And Ruth knew that Joe had affairs. And I think maybe when she started to have affairs that was partly –

**DP:** In retaliation.

**RH:** – Yes, which often happens in a relationship, that if you can do it then I'm going to do it. You hurt me, I'm going to hurt you rather. That situation.

**DP:** Sad, really.

**RH:** I don't know. I'm guessing, you know. But one thing I do know, however her marriage was they were big enough to feel that whatever was between them – and intellectually, certainly, they had the hugest respect for one another – and that kept them together. Joe said to me laughingly the other day about his new marriage – well anyway Rica, he said, I'm often away and that helps a marriage. And I think that did help in their marriage too. My marriage would have cracked up if we were away from each other that often, because we were the people who needed to be together. But I think very often a marriage survives, particularly with two very complex people. Especially one like Ruth who was much more complicated than Joe. Joe is much more of an open book than Ruth is.

**DP:** When you left – now this has nothing to do with Ruth at all - did Jack have lots of papers and documents and stuff that he's put somewhere safe?

**RH:** No. No.

**DP:** Really – that's a good [indistinct]!

**RH:** I've got those three bound copies of Fighting Talk. I've got a few things, but not much. There was very little. We weren't collectors. Well, of course, mostly they took our bloody stuff away! In the bottom of Grey's Buildings or whatever it's called now, in John Vorster Square. I said that once to Aucamp when he called me out for an interrogation when we were in detention. And he said listen, Mrs Hodgson, I know all about Marxism. I said, so you should, you've got my husband's bloody library! [laughs]

**DP:** – Piet Beyleveld was asked by the Special Branch to catalogue their holdings.

**RH:** Really? Bastard! I worked for him once; that's another thing I did round the treason trial. Well, in COD of course I worked with him. But he and his wife had this business, you know. She was a very strange woman, she was as hard as nails when it came to money and business, but she was a soft little flowery type who couldn't do anything. Couldn't drive a car,

couldn't put in an electric thingy – nothing, you know. And when he was in the treason trial, at the beginning they were doing the recording at the court –

**DP:** That was her job, wasn't it?

**RH:** That was her job. And I was asked by the comrades to please go in and help Stella to keep the business going. To drive the car and to do whatever I could do to help, you see. It must have again been between my bans and jobs, you know. But I could do it, so I did. I worked with Piet in the sense that he used to come in after the trial and then come to work. Now, I'm not good with machines. I can drive a car and I can do a lot of things, but I'm hopeless with machines, I don't understand them. I'm terrified of them! But I'm willing to learn if I can be taught, you see! Now they were having a case in Springs, I think it was. It was an insolvency case, and I had to take the advocate, the barrister, and do the recording for the whole court. And I was terrified at the thought! I'd never done this before. And Piet was teaching me how to use the machine. I had to put button-hole microphones on them all. And he was very impatient – a nail-biter, you know, and he was a pacer. I said Piet, you must be slow and careful with me, you know; I've never done this before and I want to be sure that I'm going to come back with the bloody recording. Oh come on! It's easy! When the green light goes on you know everything's OK. Fine. I drove sixty miles, I took this old gentleman – I can't remember his name – who tried to touch me up on the way, it cost sixty pounds (his thing) alone, and we got there and it was a very charming young magistrate helping me and putting the buttonholes on everyone. Then he said OK, and I said OK, and I switched on and the green light came on! I put the things over my ears and I couldn't hear a bloody word, but Piet had said if the green light came on everything's OK! I went back without a recording. Now I regret I didn't do it to all the others! Nothing, I had to start from scratch. Sixty pounds, everything went down the drain. I had to do the whole thing over again! [laughs] I came back without a word.

**DP:** Why do you think he turned state witness?

**RH:** Why? Because he was having an affair with a woman, and they had the flat next door – the Special Branch.

**DP:** To him?

**RH:** No. This woman had a flat, and the Special Branch got into the flat next door with the help of the owner of the flat, and they put a two-way mirror in and a microphone and they got everything. They got the fact that Piet was having an affair. And they threatened him that they would tell his wife, and Piet cracked immediately. He didn't get one punch out of the Special Branch.

**DP:** Who was the woman?

**RH:** No, that I'm not prepared to tell you. No, of course I know who the woman is –

**DP:** Don't tell me you had access to recording equipment!

**RH:** Ja. Ja. I remember going with him to – was it Durban? When he was doing, when he was running for parliament. I went and helped him. I can't remember exactly the details. Oh – we went to the first Congress of the People, meeting Chief Lutuli and so on. That's right, that's when we went up there.

**DP:** At Kliptown?

**RH:** No no, in Stanger. The first meeting before the Congress of the People.

**DP:** Were you at Kliptown?

**RH:** Well, Hilda Bernstein and I were both banned by then. I did the food for Kliptown. I collected the food and organised it –

**DP:** [indistinct]

**RH:** No I didn't, actually! [laughs]. But I could have. But Hilda and I were determined to see it and we went to – there was an Indian who had a house adjoining, and all the coal for the house was banked up against that wall. Hilda was highly pregnant at the time, but we both climbed up just to glimpse this – and then this Indian got very worried, saying the Special Branch were driving around, so we left. But we did actually see it, although we couldn't be there.

**DP:** Ruth and Rusty were running the planning committee – in fact, between them one gets the sense that much of the Freedom Charter was their work.

**RH:** I think more Rusty's than Ruth, actually. Rusty's style.

**DP:** Even the Call? The Call is one of the most amazing bits of political poetry around!

**RH:** Right. Yes. Hilda was a wonderful person in jail. Absolutely wonderful. She's got a wonderful memory and she's got a lovely voice, so she remembered all the poems, she recited poetry to us, she sang all these workers' – because, of course, she's English; she's not South African born. And so she knew all these workers' songs, Joe Hill and what–what–what–what. And she wrote wonderful poetry in jail, funny poetry that had us in hysterics, about the day–to–day things – the smell of the cabbage and the blocked–up lavatory and so on!

**DP:** Weren't those written up in a little book that was published? Because I've got from Sadie – I found a book of poems of women who were inside in the 1960's.

**RH:** I'd like to get those poems if they are around. I didn't know they were, I don't know whether Hilda ever got them out ... she also did wonderful sketches in jail. A lot of them were taken away, but there was this one woman who had her baby in jail, and there were no facilities for babies in jail, I mean, if the matron was kind she would try and sneak some food in, because the women breast–fed, sometimes until the baby was four years old! And Hilda did this sketch which I've never forgotten of this women bathing this baby in a little tin, and the baby was so fat it didn't really fit in to the tin! [laughs] I've never forgotten that picture she drew.

**DP:** It was confiscated, I suppose?

**RH:** Yes.

**DP:** I'll send you those poems. I don't know whether they are poems from when you were in. But there's one that has all the names of the women who were in, so you can recognise it from that. There are little word–sketches about each person.

**RH:** Because my most treasured possession – I had a birthday in jail. We were separated, as you know, after we went on hunger strike. Twelve of us were taken to Nylstroom and I was amongst them. And on my birthday in 1960 they gave me a book of poems – like this – with all their names in. So I was mad about poetry! [laughs]

**DP:** Which you still have?

**RH:** Yes, I still have it. Of course, Hilda was a wonderful – of course, jail was the sort of place that you learned to love someone. If you learn to love someone in jail you love them forever, and if you learned to hate them in jail, you hate them, because it was so confined and everything was – there's a spotlight on you, or a telescope or whatever.

**DP:** At least two-thirds of my friends – we were calculating, my wife and I, the other day – have been to jail!

**RH:** [laughs] So what else about Ruth can I tell you?

**DP:** A very comprehensive picture has emerged here – it's really one of the nicest snapshots of the person, rather than the journalist or the politician.

**RH:** Mmm. Ja, well I suppose I was more a friend in that sense rather than in a journalistic or ... though we were often in meetings together. Did a lot of work together. But not – yes, I think more on the level of friendship.

**DP:** Was there a feeling that the state was about to capitulate and the Congress forces were about to win, ever? The Defiance Campaign certainly had that feeling about it.

**RH:** I didn't have that feeling.

**DP:** Ever?

**RH:** No. I don't think so. I mean, always there was that optimistic thing that it was going to – I mean, so optimistic was I when I started work here for the Defence and Aid Fund, and they said to me when I started that you have to pay so much to social security towards your pension. You have two rates, a higher and a lower. Pension! I said. You must be mad! I'm not going to be here for my pension. Me? So I paid on the lower rate. Do you know what my British pension is? I've worked for the Defence and Aid Fund for seventeen years and one pound ninety-two a week is what I get! [laughs].

**DP:** You should have paid on the higher rate!

**RH:** Well, of course! And also, you see, what else was against me was that my husband was never on green stamps. I mean, he never ostensibly worked.

**DP:** What did he do when he came over here? Worked for the movement?

**RH:** Yes. I mean, Jack was a professional revolutionary. He wouldn't be called – "Refugee! I'm a political exile!" you know. And never owned a thing in his life and wouldn't own anything. I mean, I only bought my flat after he died. Revolutionaries must just be able to take their suitcases and go – they mustn't own anything or be attached to anything. He was a real communist in every sense of the word.

**DP:** This is a bit obscure – how did he take the twentieth congress of the Communist Party when Khrushchev stood up and denounced Stalin? It must have been very difficult for people outside the Soviet Union.

**RH:** It was difficult for my husband. He had a great admiration for Stalin. He said Stalin had [indistinct] Harry Schultz [name correct?] and he also played a big role. Jack was a great anti-fascist and he thought that Stalin did the most to change the events of the last war.

**DP:** Because I asked Issie Heymann that question and he said it was absolutely shattering. He couldn't believe it!

**RH:** No, Jack wouldn't believe it. I have no doubt that he had rows with Ruth on that score [laughs]. No, he was a Stalinist, my husband [laughs merrily].

**DP:** Well, I mean that goes for all the main Party people. The South African Party –

**RH:** Yes ... some of them less so than others. Jack was a hard-liner! [pause] I think it's too hot in here. I closed the window because there was a ...

**DP:** Should I climb up?

**RH:** Yes, if you will ... [furniture sounds]

**DP:** ... people who were fighting for liberation who were in this awfully compromising position of being white and actually better-off and living in circumstances which must have made it slightly awkward ideologically. Being a South African white and on the left is remarkably difficult.

**RH:** Very difficult. I mean, we were always poor, Jack and I. I came from a wealthy background but we were always poor. We lived in two-roomed flats, or three-roomed flats at best, and struggled like hell to make ends meet. But even at that we had a servant. Well, I mean I couldn't have worked without a nanny. It just wasn't on, was it? And you did feel it, you know, because you knew it was the wrong thing to do.

**DP:** I think we have exactly the same problem now. We have this fairly large house in an incredibly poor town, 60% unemployment, and it doesn't feel good!

**RH:** Where do you live?

**DP:** In Grahamstown.

**RH:** Grahamstown! I love Grahamstown. I went through there only once with an Indian from Port Elizabeth on my way to – no, not on my way to anywhere. We just went through Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth. I was on a mission of work, I was collecting money for the treason trial fund then. I went to PE and then he took me to Grahamstown, we did a collection in Grahamstown. That's right – I've never forgotten this, actually, it was Divali [spelling?] and we arrived – he was a Moslem and it was Divali Day which he didn't know, being a Moslem, and I didn't know. And we arrived at the main – the rich Indian, you always went to the number one Indian first, and all these little girls came in with these gorgeous pigtails with all the coloured things, and everybody was so well-dressed. I thought, what the hell are they all dressed up for? And then it transpired it was Divali. It was like coming to you on Christmas Day! Jesus, we wanted to turn tail and flee, but there we were miles from anywhere – we were going to stay over in Grahamstown that night, and they said would we please come and join them at the Divali. They had a big hall with the tables set with all the sweetmeats and cooldrink and what have you, and we came, and there was everybody there, all these children beautifully turned out, all the Hindus there – and I must speak! I mean, what a bloody honour, you know! And they gave us money.

**DP:** So you had to speak on why you were raising money at Divali?

**RH:** Yes. I mean, you could only do that amongst Indians. I mean, the Indians were the backbone of our movement in South Africa in those days.

**DP:** That seems to be where most of the funding came from?

**RH:** Well, I won't say most of it, but a hell of a large percentage of it, yes. There's not an Indian home, almost, shop, that I haven't been into the length and breadth of the country, you know, collecting funds. I know the Indian communities very well and I've such a high regard for their culture, for their – I mean, although so many of them argued with me – listen, when the African gets in he's going to kick me into the sea the same way he's going to kick you! [laughs] I had to argue against that all the time. They gave money, nonetheless, and in the hardest times. I mean, when you couldn't put your face anywhere amongst whites but the Indians were always there to help.

**DP:** Because the ANC was always broke, and New Age was always running appeals – I don't know how anybody got it together, financially!

**RH:** Oh, we did all sorts of things! When I said I worked for New Age I actually never really worked for New Age, but towards the end of my time in South Africa, Ivan Schermbrucker was the money guy for New Age and I was working for the Defence and Aid Fund then. And it was becoming more and more difficult to be able to mount collections, so Ivan and I joined forces – his car, New Age car, and he and I – because it was impossible for a white woman to go, I could only go when I went on an Indian collection either with Yusuf Dadoo or with Maulvi Cachalia or Yusuf Cachalia – with somebody, you see. Then Ivan and I towards the end used to go together and we used to collect jointly for New Age and the Defence and Aid Fund and split the difference. That's what actually happened. That's the last – when I was collecting for New Age.

**DP:** Where was that? In Johannesburg?

**RH:** In Johannesburg, but we'd go out of Johannesburg. Where I was nearly arrested was in Schweizer–Reneke. That was in '61.

**DP:** Was that because it was banned? Or were you –

**RH:** Well, it was actually very funny. Schweizer–Reneke, if you may remember in the media – you probably do – was the first town to ever fall under the axe of the – it's a bit draughty [indistinct – window being closed] – Act. And the Indians were having a terrible time there. They were boycotted by the Afrikaners. So it was a bitter – that's the town Kathrada comes from. So Ivan and I went there to collect. There was this group of families called Dikachi [name correct?] who had always been very sympathetic. They were businessmen. And they took us out – well, I'll cut a long story short for you, but we had a feeling that one of the persons who had come collecting with us was not OK, you know. And that feeling developed as we came back from our collection late at night. We were stopped on the road by the youngsters who said the Special Branch were waiting at Dikachi's house. So we decided not to go there and sleep, we'd go to a hotel. And this guy said no, not at all, you must come and sleep at my place. Well, we went to his place, and we weren't happy about the set-up. He disappeared, which we didn't like, and then came back and said he'd been out to get cigarettes. Well, where you'd get cigarettes at one o'clock in the morning in Schweizer -Reneke, I don't know!

**DP:** Was he an Indian?

**RH:** Yes. Ivan and I decided to leave and go to the local hotel. And in the morning when Ivan was settling the bill, I said don't look now but the Special Branch are waiting at your car. And

he said, oh, you people who've been in jail, you make me sick! You just see Special Branch everywhere! So we get to the car and they say, Mrs Hodgson? Please come to the prison with us! Well, what for? Never mind. They're entitled to keep us for 48 hours. It was a Friday. So the commandant or whoever was in charge was not there, he was on holiday. But he hadn't gone away, he was spending his holiday at home in Schweizer–Reneke, and they were waiting to contact him to come. So they put us in a funny little room with a big old–fashioned stove, and we sat and we sat. The door wasn't locked. And eventually I said, well, this is bloody nonsense! I'm going to see what's going on. I'm not sitting here for ever. They must tell us what we're here for. So I went around and found this copper paging through the Government Gazette trying to find what they could keep us on, you see! And I said look, this is all bloody nonsense, I want to be put through to my lawyer. I'm not staying. No no no, just wait for the Commissioner. Well, then we heard great screeching of brakes and the Commissioner arrives. Right, wants to search us. Well, I had a receipt book – our collection was over, by the way – and everybody in the receipt book was either a friend or a very good friend, it just depended on how much they'd given me! [laughs] And he was furious! There wasn't one name in the book, and he flung it right across the room at me. Nearly hit me on the head! And then they went out and searched the car. It was an old New Age car, and in the pocket of the door, shoved down below, was one of these pamphlets, years old! Ah, that's what they had us on. Banned literature!

**DP:** Was it by that stage banned, or did –

**RH:** Oh, long banned! Long banned! Anyway, they must have thought about it or spoken to their lawyers quickly or something. Thought it wasn't crucial enough, and they let us go. Can you imagine spending time in jail in Schweizer–Reneke, of all places! [laughs]. Ruth was very courageous when she went out – you know, I don't really know her then, when she did that pamphlet. It must have been a terribly courageous thing to do, to go in ...

**DP:** She went with Scott.

**RH:** Well, she went with this chap, um ... Sibande. His daughter-in-law's staying with me at the moment.

**DP:** He died last year. The "Lion of the North".

**RH:** Ja, that's right ... no, the "Lion of the East", actually. There was someone else who was the lion of the north. maybe he was called either, I'm not sure, because it was north–east, wasn't it?

**DP:** Ja, she must have risked lynching on those farms.

**RH:** Absolutely! She was very courageous. But so many of our people were. I mean, look at black women today. They amaze me all the time. Well, not really – I expect it from them. They are like that, very courageous.

**DP:** Do you know Amy Thornton? Did you hear she's been released?

**RH:** Yes. She's out, I know. I was very happy, I did the mark–up today. It was in one of the South African papers. Yes, I'm delighted she's out. I was worried about her. Her daughter wrote a wonderful letter to a friend of mine, Margaret.

**DP:** She was ...

[end of side three]