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When the pages that make up this journal were returned to me after so many years I did not want to read them. I was afraid. There are memories you keep in a part of your brain; it is part of those things that hurt so much you do not want to remember. Getting it back after more than 40 years probed that particular part of the brain that had stored it.

I never thought I wanted to revisit those times. But at the same time I was glad that one could have a glimpse, a little peek through that window of darkness and relive those times for the sake of posterity, to be able to tell our children and grandchildren what we went through.

I was fearful to go through that again, afraid of hurting myself and hurting my children because in hindsight you cannot help but think, 'What did I do to my children?'

That is the truth; that was the physical experience. That was why I was so scared to revisit that period because seeing those pages of handwritten notes and diaries brought back that fateful day. My children, Zindzi and Zeni, were clinging to my skirt crying, 'Mummy, Mummy don't go.' It was about 2.30 or 3am and they were used to these knocks. The authorities would knock at the door, knock at the windows, kick the doors in and break the windows. But that day I knew I was going for a long period of time. So I went into prison against that background and I did not know whether the children would survive. I did not know where they were going to take them to because the police who arrested me never even asked me where they should take them. It was God's luck that at that age they remembered my elder sister's name. Zeni was ten years old and Zindzi was eight. I learnt after a month that they were actually with my elder sister.

I already had a bag. I always had this bag packed because the children were too young to bring me clothes in prison and I had been arrested so often. I was not

permitted to have an adult at home because I was under house arrest and speaking to me was tantamount to having leprosy – you were infecting yourself because you were bound to be arrested. So I ended up not communicating with people, trying to protect them. This even applied to my own family. I could not even take the children to my sister.

I did not know what my fate would be because we were part of an experiment – the first ever to be detained under Section 6 of the then Terrorism Act. They were using me as a barometer, a political barometer. If they could arrest this number one terrorist and number one terrorist's wife then they could measure the political heat in the country and how the country was going to react. After Madiba's arrest, he was in prison for life and I was this 'communist' who was continuing where others had left off. So arresting me was the highest point in their lives – they knew they had completely thwarted opposition to their nationalist government policies. I was aware that I was being used as a barometer to test the reaction of the country. If they could take his wife, when there was so much noise when he was arrested and jailed for life, what did the nationalists have to worry about thereafter? They were going to just sit back and rest and rule forever.

So I was arrested in that atmosphere and I knew my fate was in those people's hands and I knew no one would have the courage to open their mouth because apartheid meant murder in those days. If you dared oppose the nationalists, you were dead. Once this lawyer came to me at midnight to find out how I could help him leave the country. I was doing a lot of that in those days. The Security Branch happened to get this information and they detained him in John Vorster Square. The following day he was dead. That is how vicious apartheid was then – our lives were nothing.

When we arrived at Pretoria Central Prison, we were all held in a certain section of the prison. Then I was removed and placed on death row, in that cell with three doors – the grille door, then the actual prison door and then another grille door. The sound of that key when they opened the first door, the first grille door, was done in such a way that your heart missed a beat and it was such a shock. You had been all by yourself with dead silence for hours and hours and hours and suddenly there would be this K-AT-LA, K-A-T-L-A. That alone drove you beserk; that alone was meant to emphasise the fact that 'we are in control, not only of your being, but your soul as well and we can destroy it'. Solitary confinement is worse than hard labour. When you do hard labour you are with other prisoners, you can tolerate it because you all dig together, you communicate and you are alive. Solitary confinement is meant to kill you alive. It is the most vicious punishment that you could wish on your worst enemy.

You are imprisoned in this little cell. When you stretch your hands you touch the walls. You are reduced to a nobody, a non-value. It is like killing you alive. You are alive because you breathe. You are deprived of everything – your dignity, your everything.