Nelson Mandela's Warders

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Introduction

In over 27 years of incarceration, Nelson Mandela was exposed to many prison officials. The most regular exposure was to warders. Three of the warders claimed to have developed particularly close relationships with Mandela: James Gregory, Christo Brand, and Jack Swart. All three were close to Mandela in the sense that at various times they were given special duties in relation to him, they read his correspondence, sat in on his family visits, sometimes spoke to him during the day. All three continued to have contact with him after his release from prison. Who are these three men? How close to Mandela were they? What are their stories?

During the prison years Gregory and Brand called Mandela either Nelson or Mandela. He always referred to them as Mr Gregory and Mr Brand. Jack Swart, who was with Mandela for his final thirteen months at Victor Verster Prison, called him Mandela (as opposed to Nelson, out of deference to his age) until he was instructed by his commanding officers to use the honorific. As with Brand and Gregory, Mandela always referred to Swart as Mr Swart. Swart had no problem switching to the formal address. He suspected that Mandela had originated the request and, because he was simply doing a job, he obeyed.

Today, when referring to Mandela, both Brand and Swart call him by his surname without the honorific, and sometimes by his first name. Neither uses Madiba, the clan name by which Mandela prefers to be addressed. There is no telling what James Gregory would have called Mandela today because Gregory died of cancer in 2003. In his 1995 autobiography, *Goodbye Bafana*, Gregory calls him Nelson. As in: 'Good morning, Nelson, sleep well?' (p355) Or 'Well, Nelson, this is it, man. This is what you have waited for' (p355) – which was part of a reported conversation between the

two men as Mandela prepared to leave Victor Verster prison. This informality, this apparent friendliness, enhances the intimacy of the warder/prisoner relationship Gregory is at pains to create in his book.

In the last few years Brand has moved into the position of 'the guard who really was Mandela's friend', to quote a newspaper headline (*The Observer*, 20 May 2007). He does not turn down any media approaches to recount his experiences with Mandela during the prison years. For the most part his accounts remain flexible narratives, where the details change slightly with every telling even if, with each repetition, the core story has taken on a verisimilitude. The annals according to Christo Brand have become the yardstick. James Gregory's widow, Gloria Gregory, believes that Brand is trying to usurp the glory that was Gregory's.

Gregory was at work on establishing his relationship with Mandela prior to the publication of his book. In 1994 he told the journalist Benjamin Pogrund, '[Mandela] *always called me Mr Gregory and I addressed him as Nelson. When visitors came I would address him as Mr Mandela. After he was released he phoned me here at home and I said, "Hello, Mr Mandela," and he said, "Where does this mister suddenly come from? You call me Nelson as you always did." He now calls me James.'* (*The Independent*, 11 February 1994) There is more than a hint of claiming proprietary rights in Gregory's declaration: 'He now calls me James.'

Both Gregory with his book and Brand in his interviews have foregrounded their proximity to Mandela the prisoner. There were other prison officials in Mandela's orbit, particularly Major Marais in the last months, but these officials have made no claim to Mandela since he left Victor Verster. Nor, for that matter, has Jack Swart. He has spoken about his time with Mandela only infrequently and reluctantly. He has recently vowed never to do so

again. Swart tells a different story from the one told by Warrant Officer James Gregory. In fact he tells a contradictory story. If Major Marais would talk, his testimony would, in all likelihood, lend more weight to Swart's account. But Major Marais won't talk ...

In his 1994 interview with Benjamin Pogrund, Gregory established the way he was going to project himself. The article began with a handwritten card Mandela gave Gregory: 'The wonderful hours we spent together during the last two decades end today. But you will always be in my thoughts...' Pogrund's article continued: *Later that hot summer's day in the Cape, as the moment came for Mandela to walk out of Victor Verster prison, near Paarl, 'We shook hands and then he embraced me,' Gregory recalls. 'He said, "Goodbye, I'll see you again." I wasn't crying, neither was he, but he had tears in his eyes and so did I.'*

In many respects the Pogrund article was a template for Gregory's book: it set out the relationship between prisoner and jailer as open and friendly: *'When he was alone I used to go and sit with him in his cell for hours at a time,' says Gregory. 'We spoke about everything – his family, my family. But never politics, and never trying to convince me of his views.'* Despite the exclusion of politics from their conversation, Gregory told Pogrund, and wrote in his autobiography, that Mandela explained to him the formation and struggle of the African National Congress. Whether this contradiction should be ascribed to a lapse of memory or a semantic difference in the meaning of the word politics is a matter for conjecture. In the Pogrund article Gregory also positioned himself as the senior warder in charge of the Rivonians (as they were referred to) and mentioned a gangster's threat (one of many alluded to) to kill Mandela. Both these themes are prominent in Gregory's book.

In an important sense, Gregory's book is not his own work, as it was ghost written by a British journalist, Bob Graham. In 1994, Graham was sent to South Africa on assignment for *Today*, a tabloid newspaper which has since ceased publication. During the course of his time in the country, Graham met and interviewed James Gregory, as did many other journalists, including some French journalists, who may have been instrumental in the French publishing house Editions Robert Laffont acquiring rights to Gregory's story. Graham found the ex-warder's reminiscences compelling and within months he had expanded them into a book.

Establishing the precise nature of the relationships these three warders had with Mandela is challenging. Their claims address the central challenge of historiography: the authority of the storyteller. Mandela has commented cursorily on his relationships with them in his own autobiography, in his book *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself,* and in Anthony Sampson's *Mandela – The Authorised Biography*, but these comments are, understandably, in passing. Consequently, although Gregory's narrative stands in conflict with those of Brand and Swart, and although former prisoner Ahmed Kathrada has condemned Gregory's account, it is Gregory's word which dominates the internet. A simple Google search foregrounds his relationship with Mandela as a matter of record, and yet it is seriously flawed.

Jack Swart

The first of the warders to come into contact with Mandela was Jack Swart, in 1966.

Swart was born in 1947 in the west coast town of Darling, where his father ran two butcheries. His early childhood years were spent here, and here the

family would probably have remained had it not been for his mother's asthma. Proximity to the coast worsened her condition until her doctor recommended that she move to the dry central Karoo. The family duly relocated to the small town of Hanover, where Swart, at the age of six, started attending school. His father was employed on a farm but financially the family was struggling. Months went by while Swart senior tried to find work in a butchery. Eventually an opportunity arose in Beaufort West, some two hundred kilometres away, and again the family moved. But the restlessness continued and a few years later they relocated to Touws River. When Jack Swart was twelve years old, the family moved again, this time to the small dorp of Philadelphia, near Malmesbury. The following year Swart, the middle child of seven children, was sent to boarding school in Malmesbury where he completed three years at high school, leaving, at the age of seventeen to join the prison services. After his training at Kroonstad he was stationed at Robben Island.

For his first two years on the island, Swart had no contact with the prisoners. He stood guard, and lived within the island's hermetic world. A taciturn man, he will not be drawn to comment on his living conditions or his job. In fact Swart is a difficult man to interview. He resists elaboration and his comments are terse, devoid of any emotion. Even when he talks about his time with Mandela at Victor Verster, his tone of voice remains flat, almost dull. As far as he is concerned he was doing a job and he did it.

After his initial years on the Island Swart was eventually assigned to the nightshift at the cell block housing Nelson Mandela and the Rivonians. He would lock them up at four in the afternoon and patrol the corridor that ran down the middle of the cell block. 'They never chatted to you, and you weren't allowed to speak to them,' he recalls. To Swart these men were of little interest.

After five years Swart applied for a transfer. He was now in charge of transport but life on the island had become so monotonous that he was desperate for a change. As his five-year stint had well outstripped the obligatory two years that warders had to remain on the Island, he was told he could choose his next posting. He gave Malmesbury, Paarl and Worcester as his choices. The department told him there were no vacancies. He could choose anywhere else in the Western Cape. Anywhere, he replied, except Pollsmoor. He was immediately posted to Pollsmoor.

After two weeks of guard duty at Pollsmoor, Swart volunteered for kitchen work. He would spend the next two decades in the kitchens of various prisons in the Western Cape, be trained as a chef, a butcher, a barman and a shopkeeper, and ended up as head of the mess, shop and bar at Victor Verster Prison in 1989. In fact he was in charge of overseeing all the prison kitchens in the district when Nelson Mandela was transferred to Victor Verster in December 1988.

'They [his superiors] came to me and told me I was going to be in charge of Mandela's house,' he recalls. 'They chose me because I was head of the mess and they could trust me. I was told I couldn't turn it down. At first I was not happy, I had this major appointment, and now it seemed as if I was being put on suspension. They told me that afterwards I would be looked after. But I wasn't happy. I didn't know for how long I'd have to do this job, but we all thought it would be for some time.'

Swart's duties included cooking for Mandela, buying the groceries and cleaning the house. Initially a prisoner was assigned to clean but 'then Nelson bought him tobacco and we couldn't have that, so that was the end of the cleaner'. Swart now took over the vacuum cleaning and the dusting. His

days began at seven in the morning when he arrived to make breakfast, and ended in the late afternoon. When Swart came in, Mandela, as he had done all his life, would have made his own bed and been through his exercise regime. For most of those thirteen months the days repeated one another and Swart found them quiet and, in his words, 'quite ordinary'. He showed his prisoner how to operate the washing machine as Mandela insisted on doing his own laundry. In the afternoon Swart made a meal which Mandela could heat up in the microwave later in the evening. By mutual agreement, they took turns in washing up the dishes, even though Swart had protested that it was part of his tasks.

Mandela supplies an addendum to this 'mutual agreement' in his book *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself* when he writes, [Swart] *was prepared to cook* and *wash the dishes. But ... I took it upon myself to break the tension and a possible resentment on his part that he has to serve a prisoner by cooking and then washing dishes and I offered to wash dishes and he refused. He says that is his task. I said, 'No, we must share it!' Although he insisted, and he was genuine, but I* forced *him, literally forced him, to allow me to do the dishes, and we established a very good relationship... A* really *nice chap, Warder Swart, a* very *good friend of mine...*(p253)

Swart's culinary skills became legendary, and Mandela's guests looked forward to meals at Victor Verster. A typical meal in winter would have soup as a starter, a fruit or fish cocktail in summer, followed by fish or meat. The ingredients would have been bought by Swart.

'There was a safe in the house which required two keys to open it. Nelson had one and the other was kept in the outside office. There was money in there or if there wasn't enough he had an account at First National Bank. I

would draw money from the account in Paarl. Sometimes I'd prepare meals and people wouldn't pitch up. I remember one instance where a famous boxer failed to arrive, and three times Brenda Fassie never kept her arrangement. When that happened Mandela would ask us – Gregory, Marais, and me – to eat with him. He hated to see food go to waste. Once he even had leftover tomato soup for breakfast. The first Xmas he was there he celebrated with Winnie and his daughters so I made food for them. The next Xmas was a big affair so I ordered food from the mess, cold meat and salads.

'My relationship with Mandela was easy. It was a bit strange in the beginning but soon it was just a job. When he got there he asked me if I was interested in politics, I told him no, and that was that. It was quite a formal relationship. When we talked it was about the weather, the mountain, my family. He was very easy, he never complained. He never got angry with me. But if he felt you got [the better of] him he wanted to get you back.'

One instance that Swart recalls concerns a bottle of sweet wine. At a lunchtime meeting with the minister of justice Kobie Coetsee at Pollsmoor, a bottle of riesling had been served. Mandela found the wine acidic and not to his taste. He instructed Swart to buy him something better to keep in stock. Swart bought Nederburg Special Late Harvest which met with Mandela's approval. On one occasion when Ismail Ayob, Dullah Omar and George Bizos came for lunch at Victor Verster, Mandela suggested that Swart serve the late harvest. Swart ventured that his guests wouldn't drink it.

'"But how can you know that? You don't know them," Mandela said to me. I said that that type of person doesn't drink that wine. He said, "But it's not cheap wine." I said, "No, it isn't about cheap, but they won't drink it." Then he said, "Okay, buy two bottles of wine. Buy a bottle of dry wine and a bottle of

that 'cheap' wine." I said to him, "Okay, then I'll bring it on a tray, but he mustn't say anything, I'll show it to Mr Bizos. Let him choose." When they sat down to eat I brought the two wines on a tray and Mr Bizos immediately took the dry wine.’

Afterwards, Mandela told Swart that he had been embarrassed by the incident. Swart knew that Mandela was joking and that he would want retribution. It duly came a week later. Mandela asked for brown rice, only to be told by Swart that there was no such thing. Mandela insisted. On his next shopping trip, Swart found brown rice. Mandela was victorious. Swart cooked the rice, declared it tasteless and said he wouldn’t cook it again. But Mandela enjoyed telling the story of how he’d educated his chef.

The good humour between the prisoner and the warder had begun at the outset of the Victor Verster months. Swart had recounted how they had met on Robben Island in the mid-1960s. At first he had ‘sort of guarded them, sat there with a firearm’ while they worked in the lime quarry. Later he had driven them by truck from the cells to the quarry.

‘They [Swart’s superiors] ordered me not to drive too slowly,’ Swart recalls. ‘I had to swerve and go fast over the bumps so that they [the prisoners] would not sit easily in the back. Then Mandela knocked on my window and said, what did I think I was doing, they were not bags of mielies. When I told him this story at Victor Verster he remembered and said, “Oh, you were the driver? I hope you are a better cook than you were a driver.” He was joking, he accepted what I said as a joke. He was easy going.’

Swart’s memories of the weekend Mandela was released are phlegmatic. On Friday 9 February 1990 he was told to prepare sandwiches as Mandela would be travelling to Johannesburg. He was unable to say goodbye

because he wasn't supposed to know that Mandela's release was imminent. He watched Mandela get into the car and be driven away for a meeting with State President FW de Klerk at Tuynhuis in Cape Town. 'I wasn't sad,' he recalls. For the rest of the day Swart went about his business, intending to return on the Saturday to clean up and to pack Mandela's possessions. The next morning, there was Mandela waiting for breakfast. 'Are you surprised to see me?' he asked Swart.

'He told me he wanted to go his way, not their way, and he had set the date for the Sunday. He was quite calm. I made him breakfast and after that he read the papers as he normally did. In the afternoon fourteen people arrived including Trevor Manuel and Dullah Omar. I didn't prepare him anything special for that Saturday evening, in fact he ate the food I'd prepared for his trip to Johannesburg. He didn't want to have it go to waste. On the Sunday he was unchanged. He had a nap early in the afternoon, despite the helicopters that had been overhead all morning. I remember he studied his speech in the little room. When he finally left the house he didn't say anything to me, he just touched me on my shoulder. After he'd gone I found his glasses and his speech and told Marais. Marais eventually got hold of Manuel but he said they had another copy of the speech.'

As the cavalcade drove away and the helicopters moved off, Swart and twelve men from the prisons department (including Marais and Gregory), national intelligence and the security branch were left at the house. They opened cans of beer, lit a braai and cooked meat and sausages supplied by the commanding officer. Swart remembers thinking that it was a relief that everything was over. By seven their braai was finished and the men went home, where Swart watched news clips of Mandela addressing the crowds on Cape Town's Grand Parade.

'The next morning when I opened the house, it was a bit strange thinking that Mandela wasn't there,' recalls Swart. 'I got in some women to clean the house, because I didn't clean it like a woman cleans. I think only long afterwards, after the election in 1994, when we got the invitations from Mandela to attend the first opening of parliament and the inauguration did I feel that it was real, that it was a helluva experience.'

Despite the prison department's promises to Swart that he would be promoted after his assignment with the special prisoner at Victor Verster, it took an intervention by Mandela to bring this about. In 1996, at the age of forty-nine, Swart took an early retirement package. Since then he has worked at a number of jobs: first as a bus driver for a school, then as a farm manager, and for the last four years as the dispatcher delivering medicines for a pharmacist.

'That other time with Mandela is long ago and it is over,' he says. 'I don't want to be included in it. It's over, gone.'

James Gregory

Of the three warders, James Gregory had the longest association with Mandela, spanning the period 1968-1990. Between 1975 and 1982 Gregory was based on the mainland while Mandela was on Robben Island, but during this time he continued to censor the letters sent and received by the political prisoners on Robben Island.

Gregory's autobiography, *Goodbye Bafana*, is the only source of Gregory's life. As has been noted his widow Gloria has not read the book but regards it as a true account. His ghost writer, Bob Graham, will not respond to queries

about the book’s veracity. However, the journalist Benjamin Pogrund conducted extended sessions interviewing Gregory for The Independent newspaper and Granada TV in 1994.

For The Independent interview Pogrund spent several days at Gregory’s home and ‘combed over the details.’ In an email he writes, ‘I liked him: he was as pleasant and friendly as I had found him to be during my previous contacts over the years. He was clearly a great admirer of Madiba. As friendly as he generally was, I kept finding that his emotions were not very deep and that this weakened his insights and descriptions. He had been a prison warder all those years and his personality was limited.’

Gregory wanted Pogrund to write a book about his relations with Mandela but Pogrund decided there was enough material for an article but not enough for a book. Sometime later Granada TV sent Pogrund to Cape Town to interview Gregory and again Pogrund came to the same conclusion. ‘My view of Gregory as a decent man with a genuine respect for Mandela was confirmed, as was my view about the lack of depth in the man.’ Granada TV decided against making a documentary.

When Pogrund later came across a copy of *Goodbye Bafana* in a London bookshop he riffled through it and soon dismissed it as containing ‘invention and patent untruths.’ In his email he comments, ‘Thoughts and feelings and conversations were attributed to Gregory which I knew had not been possible, given the nature of the man, and which had not happened. It was a tabloid product.’

It is from this book that basic information relating to Gregory’s life and some of his thoughts have been drawn.

Gregory was born in 1941 and spent his boyhood on a farm in KwaZulu. Here he befriended a Zulu boy called Bafana and together they played, hunted and fished in what was mostly a wild landscape. It was an idyllic time and Gregory soon became fluent in Zulu and at home in the kraals in the district.

When I stayed in the kraals I had no inkling of race, colour or politics. I never considered myself white or any friends black. We were just friends. In many ways, this upbringing was the foundation upon which friendship developed later. (p29)

Eventually he was sent to boarding school, a lonely and miserable little boy who felt abandoned by his parents because they couldn't or wouldn't make the drive to fetch him on weekends. Fortunately, there were always the holidays when he could return to his friend and the freedom of the veld. Until, that is, his father decided to sell the farm and move to a bigger property many hours drive away. Gregory was never to see Bafana again, but another Zulu boy literally stepped out of the bush on the new farm and befriended him. (p56) Like Swart, Gregory also attended a number of schools where he portrays himself as constantly a victim of abuse by his contemporaries. In 1961 he matriculated and joined the department of justice as a clerk. He found the work dull and moved to the traffic department before applying to the department of prisons in 1966. He was accepted, trained at Kroonstad, and posted to Robben Island.

Soon enough he was taken to B Section which housed Nelson Mandela and the other Rivonians.

He writes: *Inside the corridor the heat and smell hit me. Disinfectant, mixed with the unmistakable stench of sweating bodies and urine. The*

unforgettable smell of incarceration which was to remain with me for much of the next three decades. (p92)

Gradually Gregory began to realise that his prisoners were 'cultured people' (p117). He was drawn to Mandela and recorded that he was soon walking about the yard with him discussing the history of the ANC and the horrors of apartheid. On his days off he would visit Cape Town Library to get another perspective on Mandela's version of history. Here he also claimed to have read the Freedom Charter. This was unlikely as at the time – the late 1960s - the Freedom Charter was banned and only issued with special permission to accredited researchers. According to his book, he rounded off his research by reading the various apartheid acts.

Each time I went to the library I returned more angry than before, angry at being cheated by politicians who lied. (p122) A few pages on he writes, *I began to call Mandela by his first name, Nelson. It seemed less harsh if not friendly. Then, with a belief that we were no longer enemies, I began to accept him and his ANC comrades without actually realising it.* (p125)

Gregory continued as the main censor of the prisoners' letters, although he was becoming increasingly disenchanted with life on Robben Island. He applied for other postings in 1973 and 1974 and in mid-1975 threatened to resign if he was not transferred elsewhere. The department posted him to Pollsmoor but some nine months later wanted to send him back to Robben Island because the censors had resigned. A compromise was reached and Gregory was assigned to Roeland Street Prison from where he would handle the letters and visits to the island. He would now work daily in a small office on the quay where the island ferry docked, and occasionally visit the island to supervise a visit.

On his first return trip to the island he reported that he went to see Mandela. *He stood and held out his hand, his face beaming: 'Man, am I glad to see you. I heard you were coming back. We'd all like to extend a very warm welcome.'* (p188)

When the Rivonians were moved to Pollsmoor in 1982, Gregory was posted there too. He would later write that he oversaw Mandela's first contact visit with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and that he was present during the two bouts of hospitalisation that Mandela underwent for prostate cancer in 1985 and then for TB in 1988. Once his TB infection had cleared, Mandela was installed at Victor Verster Prison. Again Gregory went with him, his entire family moving into a house on the prison grounds.

It was here that a theme from Gregory's school days reasserted itself: Gregory as a victim of hostile and jealous antagonists.

He reported in his autobiography a series of incidents that he endured at the hands of his fellow warders. On one occasion, while walking the dog on a summer evening, someone hiding behind a hedge called him a 'kaffir boetie'. *I would look around and not see anyone. It happened every time I went out. Whenever I went I was greeted with silence. A walk through the residential area would usually be expected to lead to normal conversation. But I found mostly hostile looks and people who deliberately turned their back.* (p320)

Then the situation escalated to the edge of physical violence. One Saturday afternoon Gregory popped into the warders' club to buy a six-pack of beer. In his book he described a noisy 'typical bar-room scene' but the atmosphere changed the instant he stepped in, much like the sheriff stepping into a bar in a spaghetti western.

Several men spat loudly on the floor. From the back I could hear the words 'kaffir boetie' and 'nigger lover.' There was no bar [counter] *as such, just a small hatch where men queued to get their drinks before taking it to another part of the room. To one side of the line-up stood a major, van der Westhuizen. He had been drinking and he stood with a smirk on his face. Turning to his group of friends behind him he jerked his head in my direction and said, 'Here he is, the arse-licking Mandela man. Who wants to ask him any questions about what the nigger is going to do with our country? Eh, come on, let's find out.'*

Gregory ignored the jibe and ordered his beer. But the major continued, *'Nice tracksuit, Gregory. I suppose your old father down there gave it to you'* – referring to Mandela. This enraged Gregory and he grabbed the major around the throat while another officer tried to restrain him. *I hissed at van der Westhuizen. 'Listen, and listen carefully. My father has been dead for a long time now. If you have got anything to say to me or anyone about my job here we will talk about it, not in front of the commanding officer, but with the people in Pretoria. I'm sure they would like to hear your opinions. If you don't want to do that keep your cowardly mouth shut.'* (p322) Gregory then 'stormed out' and a short while later the prison's commanding officer came to apologise to him about the 'misunderstanding'.

Jack Swart doesn't believe this incident occurred. 'I wasn't in the club every day or weekend but I would have heard about something like that. Gregory used to like drinking, Carling Black Labels, he was there every night talking to us, and no one ever did that. No one ever said things like that.'

At the time, Gregory wrote, telephonic death threats had been made against Mandela. And he, too, had been targeted and told he would be shot down 'like a dog'. (p317) Consequently Gregory armed himself and was 'always

conscious of the possibility of being killed' off the prison grounds. (p323) Mandela also allegedly warned him. *Nelson knew about the firearms and the death threats. He was always very concerned for me. 'Mr Gregory, you have got to be careful out there. These people are serious, they play real games and they kill people.'* (p323) Gregory took comfort in having a plain-clothes policeman covering him when he was out and about. Although he doesn't say so, the risk must have been growing ever more alarming for him because Mandela would have to leave the prison for medical and dental consultations and he was being taken on sight-seeing drives. *I would not say I was living in fear,* Gregory wrote, *I was just fully prepared for the worst.* Fully prepared meant that *every evening as I went to bed I placed the handgun on the cupboard beside the bed, loaded and ready to fire. On the floor next to the bed was a fully-loaded shotgun.* (p324)

Swart was nonchalant about these threats. Yes, he admitted, they were armed whenever they left the prison grounds with Mandela, and, yes, this was for his protection as much as their own. There were times they walked down crowded pavements with Marais leading, Gregory close to Mandela, while he brought up the rear, but he never felt threatened or anxious. Nobody paid them the slightest heed. There were never any incidents. Mandela hadn't been seen in public for twenty-six years, no one was likely to recognise him. And especially not in Cape Town where he'd hardly been known during his politically active years anyhow. As far as Swart was concerned the precautions were no big deal.

'Whenever we went out,' says Swart, 'it was as a convoy: security police in unmarked cars in front and at the back, the National Intelligence Service in an unmarked car, usually the press was there too. We had more trouble getting away from the press than from anyone dangerous. Sometimes we wouldn't even go out because there were too many press waiting at the gate.

But usually we were out without anyone knowing. We drove around everywhere: across the Boland, up the west coast, around False Bay, even to Hermanus. Nelson also wanted to see Hout Bay so we went there and ate crayfish which he bought for us from his own pocket. Once when we were driving to Saldanha we past a field with a lot of melons on the veld. He asked me, 'What are those? I said it was kaffirwaatlemoen. He said, 'What!' He didn't like the word. He made this snorting sound when he was upset. He did this snort and then he kept quiet for a while. So I asked Gregory, 'Hey, tell me, what is kaffirwaatlemoen in English, a nice name, because the man is upset now!' He said to me, 'No, it stays kaffirwaatlemoen. It's just like that.' But Mandela wasn't cross for long and was soon asking us questions again.'

It was not long into the Victor Verster months when Gregory's son Brent died in a motor car accident. Brent Gregory had also joined the prison services and had been seconded to Victor Verster to handle Mandela's administrative matters. In response to this tragedy Mandela wrote a note quoted in Gregory's book: *I was deeply shocked to hear of the tragic death of your beloved son, Brent, and on behalf of myself and family I send you our sincerest sympathy. Few things are as painful as an invisible wound. But I hope you and your family will be comforted by the knowledge that Brent was loved and respected by almost all those who came into contact with him. Once again, our deepest condolences.* (p328)

Six days after the funeral Gregory returned to work and in his book described an intimate moment with Mandela as they walked in the garden. *[...] he began speaking to me. 'It has happened. It is a terrible thing. I am feeling for you ...* (p329) Then Mandela referred to the time his own son Thembi had died in a car accident in July 1969 and to the words Gregory had said to him, adding, '*Many people are saying the same things to you now. They care now*

as much as you did then. It is important you remember that they mean the words even though they cannot feel them.' (p330)

In *Goodbye Bafana* it was Gregory who brought Mandela this tragic news about Thembi and Gregory who the following day went to comfort his prisoner. *The next day I went to his cell again and I stood beside him. At first I wasn't sure if he even knew I was there. He just stood, his eyes fixed on the sky. 'If you want me to go, I shall,' I said. There was the merest shake of his head. 'No, stay,' he said. I continued, 'I can't tell you how deeply sorry I am because I don't know the depth of sorrow you are now feeling. I also have children, I have two boys but I can't even begin to pretend to know how you are hurting. Many people will come to you now and tell you how they understand how you are feelings. Those people are talking through their hats, but each of them genuinely feels for you without understanding'* (p144).

In Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Gregory is not mentioned in the passages dealing with Thembi's death. Instead Mandela remembered being called to the main office where he was handed a one-line telegram from his youngest son, Makgatho, informing him of the death.

It left a hole in my heart that can never be filled, Mandela wrote. *I returned to my cell and lay on my bed. I do not know how long I stayed there, but I did not emerge for dinner. Some of the men looked in, but I said nothing. Finally, Walter came to me and knelt beside my bed, and I handed him the telegram. He said nothing, but only held my hand. I do not know how long he remained with me. There is nothing that one man can say to another at such a time.* (p531)

Nor is there mention of Gregory's compassion in Sampson's biography. Which is strange as such a gesture by a prison warder at such a time would have made an impression. It is such discrepancies that raise questions about Gregory's intentions of centreing himself in Mandela's narrative.

Another such discrepancy occurs with Mandela's birthday that year, 18 July 1989. According to Jack Swart the day began with a small champagne breakfast in the dining room. Marais was present as were Gregory and Swart. Who came up with the celebratory idea is forgotten but Swart remembered that they all had a glass but didn't finish the bottle.

In Gregory's book this event had been transposed to his own birthday.

On my birthday, 7 November [1989]*, Swart, Major Marais and I walked in* [to Mandela's room] *with a tray for breakfast. Nelson looked up, a little surprised. He had been expecting his normal fishcakes, but I had planned something a little different, champagne. We four stood around the table swigging champagne, toasting the future.* (p346)

The lead up to this paragraph was equally important. Gregory wrote about the afternoons when he and Mandela would sit in the garden in the shade of a tree, reading. It was a bucolic picture he painted of the warder and prisoner *comfortable in one another's company, not pressured into having to make conversation. It was a relationship of which Nelson once remarked, 'We are similar in many ways. We can both dive deep into our own personalities to deal with our own thoughts and concerns, yet float on the surface and be available when need be to tend to one another.'* (p346)

It is this kind of introspection which Benjamin Pogrund believes was beyond Gregory's emotional range. More bluntly, Jack Swart regards Gregory's

account as ‘nonsense’. ‘The only champagne breakfast was on Nelson's birthday,’ he recalls. ‘Gregory has taken that event and changed it.’

The final chapters of Gregory’s book document further his friendly, even intimate, relationship with Mandela. They sat and read together, they talked together, they walked in the garden together. And then on the release day an event occurred that only Gregory has ever mentioned: a planned assassination of Mandela as he walked to freedom. Neither Mandela in his autobiography, nor Sampson in his biography believed this should be reported, nor has it been mentioned in other Mandela literature. It is, perhaps, fantasy although, predictably, Gregory is the man of the moment.

With half an hour to go Gregory is told that National Intelligence has received information from MI5 in Britain, that one of the armed guards lining the route to the gate is a hitman. How this problem was sorted out was left to Gregory, even though Marais was his senior officer.

I went into the office. I could see Nelson strolling with his family in the garden, showing them the flowers he had taken pride in tending and the vegetables he had grown. I gave an order to the main control. ‘This is Warrant Officer Gregory. I want every person along the road to the gate, including all guards, totally disarmed. I also want every officer, up to and including generals and their bodyguards, disarmed.’ There was a stunned silence at the other end. Back came a captain, Joubert was his name. ‘Uh, ja, Gregory, what are you playing at, man?’ ‘Captain, this is an order for your people, and if it is not carried out now, then Nelson Mandela is not being released. And that will mean there will be many embarrassed prison department people who will have a lot of explaining to do. So, to repeat, I want everyone disarmed. Do I make myself clear? Now do it. I have the authority of the minister, so move, man.’ (p366ff)

Having given his order, Gregory turned to wish his prisoner well.

He looked directly into my eyes and I could see the tears. He let go of my hand and grabbed me by the shoulders and embraced me. I hugged him back. We did not move and all around us people stood still not wishing to break us. ... At that moment I knew in my heart this man was going to lead my country and I bowed my head slightly and said, 'Thank you, sir.' (p368)

Gregory was sent on an officer's training course shortly after Mandela's release as he'd been promised and was duly promoted to the rank of lieutenant. He returned to work at Pollsmoor but took an early retirement package in 1993 at the age of fifty-one. The following year he spent time with Bob Graham writing what would become *Goodbye Bafana*. Graham had rented an apartment overlooking Hout Bay and the Sentinel and the two men worked there for three months. It is unknown how Gregory responded to the criticism his book received on publication in South Africa where it was soon dismissed as largely a fabrication.

In 2003, Gregory, who spent his retirement reading thrillers by such writers as Jeffrey Archer, Sidney Sheldon, John le Carre and Frederick Forsyth, suffered another death in the family: his second son, Zane, died in a speedboat accident on the Vaal River. Gregory was devastated. 'No father should lose both his sons,' he told his wife, Gloria. Shortly afterwards he contracted cancer and died six months later.

Christo Brand

The last and the youngest of the three warders to be involved closely with Nelson Mandela and the Rivonians was Christo Brand. An innovative, energetic man, he is both charming and forthright, a storyteller more concerned to tell a good story than to consider his own role in the events he relays. Like Swart and Gregory he has the ability to compartmentalise his life: what happened at the prison stayed at the prison. The man who went home to his family never talked about what he'd witnessed or how he'd handled incidents behind the iron gates at Robben Island or Pollsmoor. At home he was husband and father.

Brand was nineteen years old when he arrived at Robben Island in 1978. The crossing had been rough, he had spent most of the time vomiting over the side of the ferry. He stood on the quay of the small harbour under a grey bleak sky on a grey bleak winter afternoon. He was cold, tired, wary. A kind of hell was in store for him and the other new recruits.

After his training at Kroonstad, Brand had asked for Pollsmoor. He wasn't unhappy at being posted to Robben Island because at least he was close to home. He knew that to land up on Robben Island was equivalent to being sent to jail. No one volunteered to go there. To be assigned to Robben Island was a form of punishment. A warder who had been there twelve years told him: 'The only way to leave here is resign or die.'

Brand was born in 1960 in Johannesburg some months before the family moved to the dorp of Rawsonville in the winelands of the Western Cape where his father had acquired a job as a farm foreman. In 1964 the family relocated to a farm near the seaside hamlet of Stanford and the following year Brand began his education at a farm school.

'It doesn't matter the weather, I had to walk a long way each morning to catch the school bus,' recalls Brand. 'Chocolate would go with me. Chocolate was a black man who just turned up at the farm one day and helped my father. I don't know what his real name was. He would help out on the farm and he would help my mother in the house. Money was so bad that we didn't have meat to eat. For supper we would have roast potatoes, butternut and pumpkin with bread crumb stuffing and peas. It was not so bad. It was only later in Cape Town when my friends taught me to braai that I got a taste for boerewors and biltong. After supper my father would take out his violin and Chocolate would get his guitar and they would play together. Then one day Chocolate disappeared. I still don't know what happened to him. Perhaps he got arrested for not having a pass [an identity document which authorised the holder's presence in an area]. But we never saw him again.'

In 1972, Brand's father fell ill with pneumonia and the family left the farm to stay with his brother in the Cape Town suburb of Parow. For a year they lived in a single room in the backyard until his father got a job on the railways and the family moved to Ruyterwacht, a suburb reserved for white railway workers. The Brands bought the house, and Christo Brand still lives there today.

During his high school years, the enterprising Brand spent his free time making money. 'My family was poor so they couldn't give me pocket money,' he says, 'so I had to find some ways to get money.' He fixed bicycles and sold them, he worked for a builder on weekends learning to lay bricks, plaster and even the rudiments of electrical installations. When the builder's house was complete, Brand went door-to-door selling stainless steel products and doilies. He acquired enough money to buy a broken-down 50cc motorbike which he fixed and eventually sold. The money went into buying a rust-

bucket Ford Cortina for R250, which Brand likewise fixed, both the bodywork and the engine.

In 1978 he matriculated and rather than undergo compulsory national service, he signed up with the department of prisons.

‘In 1977, a friend, we were very close, was killed on the border,’ Brand recalls. ‘He left school in standard eight and joined the military. I felt terrible when I heard about his death. I didn’t want to be killed in this war. Then my nephew was put in prison for not doing his military service so I looked for alternatives: the police or the prison service.’

His six-months training at Kroonstad was modelled on military lines: drilling, physical training (PT), weapons training, lectures on first aid and criminal law. After three months the recruits were given experience in the toughest sections of Kroonstad prison.

‘Sometimes late at night we would be taken to search the prisoners. For me it was just a job to teargas them, or set the dogs on them. I saw a prisoner grab a warder, take off his watch and swallow it. Sometimes the warders would get the prisoners to attack us to toughen us up. You see this guy with tattoos spit at you, swear at you, you’re afraid even though you’re in a group. Kroonstad broke you down, and then the Island broke us down again. They were brutal to us.’

Brand’s first night on the Island was harrowing. The new recruits were assembled in a hall and made to serve wine to the sergeants and the old timers. If they spilt anything they were whipped. They were forced to drink seawater and liquor. Eventually they were piled into a bakkie and driven to the farthest end of the island. From there they had to push the bakkie back

to the village. It was dark and raining. At some point Brand and a colleague managed to hide under some bushes. Cold and wet, exhausted, they spent the night there.

Life for Brand settled down after the initiation. In fact, he soon felt that life on the Island was a bit like life on the farm. Safe, with open space and fresh air. He bought an old car for R35 so he could easily access the fishing spots on the farthest reaches of the island. But apart from rock fishing he would also use a small boat to fish in deeper waters where he trapped lobster and dived for perlemoen. And every evening he would exercise by jogging the eleven kilometres round the island. But despite his interests he felt the island was a prison. He could escape to the mainland to see his family and girlfriend every second weekend but otherwise he was isolated.

After a few months Brand was told he would not be working with normal prisoners but with men jailed for rape and murder. Men who had killed for no reason. He was taken across to Section B where the Rivonians were incarcerated.

'When I came in I see prisoners standing up greeting us, these old guys. I never heard of Mandela. I look at these old guys but they've got no tattoos, no 28s, 26s. I go through the cells, then I talk to this sergeant and say are you not afraid of them, and he says, no, man, they won't harm you, they're relaxed, they're here for life. I say, who have they killed. He says, no man, they're terrorists, they're killing our people on the borders. I said, okay, these are the guys who killed my friend on the border. He said, no, they didn't kill anyone, they are in for high treason and terrorism. These guys tried to overthrow the government. He told me a little about the Rivonia trial. But this meant nothing to me. Just another terrorist sitting in prison.'

Unlike Gregory, whose first impression of the cells summons up the stereotypical odour of urine and sweat and disinfectant, Brand experienced polish and freshness. 'I see how disciplined they are with their studies, with polishing, not like a criminal prison which is dirty, here everything is in place. In their cells it was fresh, it was a clean place not that bad smell.'

Brand's experience with the Rivonians began with Andrew Mlangeni who greeted him in Afrikaans, much to Brand's surprise both at the gesture and the choice of language. But greetings, and discussions about letters and visits were the only contact he had with the prisoners. Orders strictly forbade any fraternising. Brand first encountered Nelson Mandela when he escorted him to the visitor's centre, a distance of about three hundred metres. While they walked, Mandela asked him about his parents, his origins, his family. He suggested he should study further so that he could advance himself. And when they returned to B Section, Mandela asked Brand to take greetings to his parents.

'I couldn't understand why he thought I should take greetings from a prisoner to them,' recalls Brand. 'I thought this was very strange, that he should worry about me.'

A few months later Brand started working in the censor office and his contact with the Rivonians increased. Letters were a point of contention. Prisoners could only receive a specific number of letters monthly, but had to acknowledge receipt of each letter they received – even those over the quota. These the prisoner had to sign off in a register although he was not allowed to read them. The prisoner also had to acknowledge receipt of letters that had not been approved by the censors. These letters would be docked from the quota. Failure to comply with this system could result in the prisoner being barred from sending or receiving letters. In Brand's words,

'That was a rule from the censor's office and we used it to punish them.' Sometimes letters simply disappeared into the maws of the security branch. Sometimes the warders burnt the letters. This usually happened if the prisoner's letter file became too bulky. For example, almost all the correspondence Mandela received for his birthday in 1979 – 'boxes full' - Brand fed into a boiler that heated the water in the single quarters. As he puts it: 'I burnt lots of letters in my life on Robben Island.' However, in his more lenient moments Brand would call a prisoner into the censor office and give him thirty minutes to read letters that fell outside the quota. Or he would give the prisoner a précis of the letter before destroying it.

Brand also supervised visits, and here he was equally strict. Prisoner and visitor sat in cubicles on opposite sides of two thick panes of glass that were about the size of a person's head. A metal panel was inserted between the glass panes at the end of the session. During the visit, prisoner and visitor talked to one another through a phone linkage with Brand listening in. He could switch off the system the moment he heard something he didn't like. And he did a couple of times with Mandela, warning him to stick to subjects related to family matters. Mandela never argued. Visits were for thirty minutes and at the end of that time Brand would switch off the phone and slide the metal panel into place. 'I would give them a warning that there was five minutes left and then klaar,' says Brand. 'Sometimes they didn't even have time to say goodbye. Nobody ever argued. Sometimes Mandela would take his alarm clock into the visiting box so he could watch the time himself. He knew we were governed by the rules.'

Although Brand strenuously observed the rules, even confiscating sweets that Priscilla Jana, one of Mandela's legal representatives, had given him during a consultation, he did bend in 1980. Madikizela-Mandela arrived for a visit having smuggled in a grandchild – then a baby – under the blankets

she'd wrapped around herself as protection against the winter cold. Brand told her to leave the child in the waiting room while she saw Mandela. But she told Mandela the baby was there and he asked Brand if he could see the child. Brand refused, as did his senior officer, fearing that they would lose their jobs. Then without letting Madikizela-Mandela know, Brand contrived a way to satisfy Mandela. 'I gave him the baby,' recalls Brand, 'he had tears in his eyes while he held her, then after a few minutes I took her from him and returned her to Madikizela-Mandela. She didn't know what had happened. Mandela never told anyone about this. When we walked back to the prison section he told me how important the moment was to touch something small.'

After his two years on Robben Island, Brand applied for transfer. Working with the political prisoners was easy but he wanted to get away from the Island. As often as he applied, he was refused. In March 1982 he married and again applied for a transfer. Again he was refused. And then, unexpectedly, while he was on honeymoon he was told his transfer had been granted and he was to report to Pollsmoor. A few days later four of the Rivonians – Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Raymond Mhlaba and Andrew Mlangeni were transferred to Pollsmoor. A couple of months later Ahmed Kathrada joined them.

Brand believes that his experience in the censor office, in handling prisoner visits and study-related matters and in his dealings with National Intelligence probably influenced the prison department's decision to place him at Pollsmoor. As conditions were now more relaxed than they had been on the Island, he had more contact with the Rivonians, especially Mandela, who was given permission to create a vegetable garden on the prison's roof top. But despite the more relaxed circumstances, Brand was still wary. He knew the cells were bugged and he was wary about indulging in conversations.

‘Everywhere was bugged,’ recalls Brand. ‘The cells, the visiting rooms, the telephones. Even at home my phone was bugged. Once Mandela asked to use a private office with his lawyer and the head of the prison let him use his office, but that was also bugged. Sometimes National Intelligence would put a bug onto me. They told me to ask Mandela some questions. Once it was about what he would do if Winnie got another man. He said he would respect that. Then when [President P W] Botha wanted to offer him indemnity [a conditional release] I had to ask him what he would say. I would give Mandela a warning that I was bugged. I told him if I show you my ears then you know I am bugged. I never carried a bug that he didn’t know about. So when I asked [about the release] he told the government what he wanted them to hear. Everything was recorded, even the legal conversations. Then every week we would phone National Intelligence and the Security Police and tell them a box of “wielle” was ready for them.’

Brand had closer contact with Mandela now. He worked with him in what Mandela called his ‘garden in the sky’, and was usually part of the contingent that took Mandela on medical visits and scenic drives. These drives Mandela regarded as the prisons department’s way of integrating him back into society. They even included a visit to Brand’s house, where Mandela was introduced to Brand’s wife. Brand also remembers taking Mandela across the road from the prison to walk among the vines on the Steenberg wine farm (now a golf estate).

‘Mandela was worried that the farmer would shoot us if we picked grapes,’ recalls Brand. ‘But I told him no it was okay, I’d fixed it up, he could pick a few. Another time we walked around Pollsmoor near the dam. There were some children fishing there. He went and talked to them. Afterwards he said he was worried that they might drown.’

Of course Brand was not solely in charge of the Rivonians. There was also James Gregory who although also a warrant officer had a higher ranking within that category than Brand. Overseeing them was a Captain Swart who, according to Brand, placed the full responsibility in their hands. The relationship between Brand and Gregory was terse but not unfriendly. In both men's accounts of the Pollsmoor years, they centre themselves in the narrative. In 1982 Gregory had badly injured his knee. He stayed home on crutches for six weeks, but was eager to return to Pollsmoor and the preparations being made there for the arrival of Mandela and other Rivonians from Robben Island. Apparently he was privy to them, indeed, by his account these preparations were even dependent on Gregory's health!

I knew from various calls with [Brigadier] *Munro that a date had still not been decided for the move for Nelson and the three others. We still did not even know who the other three were to be. At one stage I was told that the whole transfer had been delayed by my fall and injury. I returned to work at the start of March, still unable to walk without the aid of the crutches.* (p196)

While Gregory was anticipating the event, Brand was suddenly thrust into it and ordered to Cape Town harbour to pick up his charges. Once he had delivered them to Pollsmoor he was told he was to oversee Mandela's section. According to Brand, a hobbled Gregory spent most of this time in the office.

Despite having worked together since 1979, the first mention of Christo Brand in Gregory's autobiography is in February 1983 when Mandela is admitted to Woodstock Hospital for two minor procedures to remove an ingrown toenail and a cyst behind his ear. Once again Gregory occupies the pivotal position in the narrative:

At the Woodstock Hospital, a small provincial unit, I arranged to have a constant armed guard on the medical wing, not just armed prison warders but also police and security guards. One of the prison warders, a young officer, Christo Brand, was dressed in surgical gown and smock to go into the operating theatre...(p243)

Part of Gregory's bid to become the major narrator of the warders' experiences with the Rivonians depended on his establishing himself as the officer in charge. Yet it was highly unlikely that a warrant officer would have had sole responsibility for the country's most important political prisoner. As Benjamin Pogrund comments in his email: 'I thought I had got to as much truth and detail as was possible with him – except in one sphere, that of security. I was puzzled that here was the man put in charge of the country's number one prisoner and yet he had only warrant officer rank. I would have expected more promotion over time. I had the earlier background of dealing with Robert Sobukwe on Robben Island [Pogrund wrote a biography of Sobukwe called *How Can Man Die Better: Robert Sobukwe and Apartheid*]: there was then a chief warder immediately in charge of him with a captain with fuller responsibility. There was a particular aspect which I failed to get to the bottom of: Madiba had told me of a time when for a while he had not received any letters from Madikizela-Mandela and the warder handling security used to taunt him about this, saying Madikizela-Mandela had ditched him. However, Madikizela-Mandela was visiting and told him she had written. Madiba complained and an investigation turned up a bunch of letters from Madikizela-Mandela in the security warder's desk. Gregory said he did not know about this which left me a bit puzzled.'

The incident, according to Brand, concerned a Sergeant Fourie. Fourie was given to seeing conspiracies where none existed and would burn letters if he thought they contained coded messages. If he found photographs of children

showing the peace sign he would destroy both photograph and letter. He was also not above practical jokes such as holding back letters from Madikizela-Mandela to Mandela. Or in an instance where a prisoner wrote letters to a wife and a girlfriend he would swop the letters around. As these incidents occurred in 1979 when Gregory was working from an office at the harbour, he was clearly not the officer in charge of the prisoners.

References to Brand occur in two more instances in Gregory's narrative: the first was to order him to buy a particular brand of shampoo for Mandela; the second was to admonish him for neglecting to report that Mandela was ill.

The first instance regarding the shampoo has become a much-told story. Mandela asks for Blue Pantene shampoo only to be told it is unavailable. He threatens to have Helen Suzman mention in parliament that his requests are being denied, and Brand is sent out to scour Cape Town for the product. In Gregory's version he orders Brand to find the shampoo; in Brand's version he is despatched by Brigadier Munro, the commanding officer, which seems more likely.

The second incident concerns the prelude to Mandela being admitted to hospital with TB. In his biography Sampson reports that Mandela vomited during a visit from his lawyer Ismail Ayob who summoned Gregory who arrived to find Mandela shaky on his feet, sweating, and concerned about the mess on the floor. A few days later he was examined by a doctor and taken to Tygerberg Hospital.

Gregory's account is more dramatic and occurs a week after the Ayob visit:

...Brand called me and said Nelson had not eaten for two days. I was furious: I should have been told the moment he refused one meal. Brand

was contrite. 'Ah, ja, I should also have told you that he has not been exercising and has spent most of the past two days in bed.' 'Brand, you know that's not the way we agreed this should be run. I need to know immediately anything is wrong.' I went to see Nelson straight away. I knew he was ill from the moment I went into his room. His face had a yellow tinge and his eyes were set deep. (p288ff)

Gregory also mentions that he was on hand at the medical examination at Tygerberg and that Mandela asked him to fill in the admittance forms.

I looked at them and saw they required details of his entire history. I knew it all and asked Nelson if I should complete them. He turned his head and smiled. 'Please fill it in as my next of kin; you're almost that anyway.' (p290)

Brand's account concurs with Sampson's except in one detail - that it was not Gregory who was summoned by Ayob but Brand himself. In fact at the time Brand believes that Gregory was not even part of the Mandela warder contingent having been replaced by Piet Zaayman,who was appointed as head of security in 1985. Strangely, although Sampson disparages Gregory's book in his biography, in this instance he relies on it for details.

Although Brand saw Mandela at Constantiaberg Hospital on a daily basis while he was recuperating, his contact was to become infrequent during the Victor Verster months. Now Gregory was reinstated, probably because of his language skills, under Major Marais to oversee Mandela. Brand remained at Pollsmoor but would occasionally drive to Victor Verster when post had accumulated for Mandela. 'Mandela would always ask to greet me and I would say hello,' says Brand, 'but I was too worried to talk too much to him because everything was bugged.'

Brand remained at Pollsmoor after the political prisoners had been released. In a way he was sad to see them go, but also happy that they were reunited with their families. His life was to change dramatically as his duties were now with common convicts and their death threats and belligerence. In at least one case a warder previously assigned to the political prisoners found that he could not contend with hardened convicts. He suffered a mental breakdown and was discharged. Indeed, the coterie of warders that had supervised the political prisoners had been 'protected' from the reality in the crowded cells. Brand stayed on until 1994, when he left for a job in a private security company. This was short-lived, as - with a reference from Mandela – he was recruited to work in the administration of the Constitutional Assembly. When the latter was dissolved, he found employment on Robben Island, running the shop. He still works there.

In 2005, Brand's son Riaan was killed in a motor car accident when his vehicle was side-swiped in a hit and run early one Sunday morning. Ahmed Kathrada attended the funeral, and, from Mozambique, Mandela sent his condolences. Brand sprinkled his son's ashes on Robben Island. At the time Riaan, a construction diver, was working on an extension to the Island's harbour wall.

Mandela's Perspective

While all three warders have spoken to the media about their time with the Rivonians, and Mandela in particular, during their years of incarceration, only James Gregory has produced a book. In 1995 Gregory's autobiography, *Goodbye Bafana*, was published in the Commonwealth countries and France. The book was distributed in the United States by its publisher BCA, an imprint of Headline. The following year it appeared in a Headline

paperback edition with the copyright assigned to the French publishers, Editions Robert Laffont.

Of course, what made Gregory's autobiography so compelling from a publishing point of view was his relationship with Nelson Mandela, at that stage only five years out of prison, and one year into his presidency. As is evident above, detailed in these pages was an extraordinary relationship: that of warder and prisoner. And of how the warder who initially regarded his prisoner as a terrorist who should be hanged, came to change his mind. Twelve years later this story would be filmed under the same title, and again the world would wonder at the poignant bond between the two men. By then Gregory had died, and Mandela was gradually retiring from the public stage.

In 1995, the floodgates on the Mandela publishing industry had yet to open. Mandela's own autobiography had appeared the previous year and there were a handful of photographic books as well as accounts of his life by Fatima Meer (*Higher Than Hope*) and Mary Benson (*Nelson Mandela: The Man and the Movement*). So Gregory's book came at the right time, and it presented a unique portrait of the man who had been locked up for twenty-seven years. A man Gregory had known for twenty-two of those years.

But, in many respects, Gregory's version of his relationship with Mandela sat at odds with the way Mandela wrote of the warder. Indeed, Gregory featured on three occasions only in *Long Walk to Freedom* and although on each occasion Mandela wrote warmly of him, it hardly suggested the intimate talks and moments that Gregory presented in his book. Especially as contact with the prisoners was strongly disapproved of by the authorities. As has been stated, warders were under strict orders to go no further than greeting prisoners. Certainly in the Island years, it is highly unlikely that Gregory would have been able to spend the time with Mandela that he claims.

Indeed, Mandela wrote in *Long Walk to Freedom* that he did not know Gregory very well on the island. This would hardly have been the case had he spent hours recounting the history of the ANC.

As far as Jack Swart is concerned, most of Gregory's account of Mandela's time in Victor Verster, he estimates sixty per cent, is 'nonsense'. '[At Victor Verster] Major Marais was the man in charge. He was the one who had tea with Mandela and talked to Mandela. Gregory and me we were both warrant officers. Gregory put himself in the major's place, in my place, in [Christo] Brand's place. The stories in his book are nonsense. He told me it wasn't him that put it that way but the writer [Bob Graham]. But he would have read it before it was published. He would have known it was not true.'

Gregory appears for the first time in *Long Walk to Freedom* shortly after Mandela has been moved from Robben Island to Pollsmoor. Mandela writes, *It was far easier for my wife and family to get to Pollsmoor than to Robben Island, and this made a tremendous difference. The supervision of visits also became more humane. Often, Winnie's visits were overseen by Warrant Officer James Gregory, who had been a censor on Robben Island. I had not know him terribly well, but he knew us, because he had been responsible for reviewing our incoming and outgoing mail.*

At Pollsmoor I got to know Gregory better and found him a welcome contrast to the typical warder. He was polished and soft-spoken, and treated Winnie with courtesy and deference. Instead of barking, "Time up!" he would say, "Mrs Mandela, you have five more minutes."(p614)

A page later he adds, *In May 1984, I found some consolation that seemed to make up for all the discomforts. On a scheduled visit from Winnie, Zeni and her youngest daughter, I was escorted by Warrant Officer Gregory who,*

instead of taking me to the normal visiting area, ushered me into a separate room where there was only a small table, and no dividers of any kind. He very softly said to me that the authorities had made a change. That day was the beginning of what were known as 'contact' visits.

He then went outside to see my wife and daughter and asked to speak to Winnie privately. Winnie actually got a fright when Gregory took her aside, thinking that I was perhaps ill. But Gregory escorted her around the door and before either of us knew it, we were in the same room and in each other's arms. (p615-616)

However, there is evidence of a terse incident between Gregory and Mandela, certainly an incident that is not recorded in Gregory's book. This occurs on 17 June 1986 and concerns a letter to Mandela that has gone missing. In the book of his personal archive, *Nelson Mandela: Conversations with Myself*, Mandela writes (and this is the only time he mentions Gregory): *W/O Gregory informs me in arrogant manner that the letter he misplaced is gone and that there is absolutely nothing he can do about it. He also states that nobody whatever his position can threaten him.* The following day he notes: *Had discussion with Maj Van Sittert re W/O Gregory. Major promises to take up matter as soon as W/O Gregory is available.* (p297ff)

While it would be unwise to read too much into these statements, Gregory is presented as arrogant, self-important and defensive when charged with 'misplacing' a letter. Defensive, possibly, because as Christo Brand has observed, it was commonplace during Gregory's term as censor for letters to go missing and, in fact, be destroyed. Gregory's tone, as reported by Mandela, is certainly at a great many removes from the genial sycophant of *Goodbye Bafana*. Here is an angry man, a man who does not like being challenged by a prisoner even if that prisoner is one of the most important

figures in the country. Mandela's second note speaks to Gregory's position as a lower ranking officer subject to censure from above, a situation Gregory seldom acknowledges in his book. Indeed, for the most part he is intent on portraying himself as the man in charge of and responsible for Mandela. Yet this could not be and clearly was not the case.

As his fellow warrant officers Swart and Brand have both alleged, Gregory frequently usurped the experiences of others in his narrative. The journalist Benjamin Pogrund has also alluded to this. One of the most glaring instances of this 'appropriation' concerns Mandela's first supervised outing.

One day before Christmas [1986] *Lieutenant Colonel Gawie Marx, the deputy commander of Pollsmoor, wandered by my cell after breakfast and said quite casually, 'Mandela would you like to see the city?'* Mandela uncertain what was afoot, nevertheless was in no mind to turn it down. They drove into the city and Mandela remarks about how 'riveting' it was to watch ordinary people going about their lives. Then they stop at 'a small shop in a quiet street' and Colonel Marx goes in to buy cold drinks. *...he disappeared inside the shop. I sat there alone. For the first few moments I did not think about my situation, but as the seconds ticked away, I became more and more agitated. For the first time in twenty-two years, I was out in the world and unguarded.* (p633)

The point here is that Mandela is alone with Marx, neither Gregory nor Brand are present. The colonel took him on other excursions but soon, Mandela reports, 'more junior officers were permitted to take me around.' (p634)

One of these trips was made with Gregory and Brand to Langebaan. Gregory uses this trip to suggest that it was Mandela's first excursion and that he (Gregory) was solely in charge. Not only solely in charge, in charge

at the instruction of the minister of justice. It is highly unlikely that the minister (who died in 2000) would have placed this responsibility in the hands of a warrant officer.

Gregory writes, *The shackles were being more than loosened when I was told by Kobie Coetsee, Minister of Justice, that we should take Nelson on a number of discreet visits around the countryside – wherever he wished to go. The Minister took me to one side. 'Greg, if Mr Mandela wishes to be taken anywhere within reason, then you don't need anyone's permission. I've given you carte blanche to go anywhere, anytime you wish. All I ask is that you make the proper arrangements and ensure safety and security are number one priorities. The order was, in many ways, simply unbelievable. Here we were with a man who was now considered the most high profile prisoner in the world, and yet I was being told to take him out anytime, anywhere he wished. I knew there would not be a problem – not with Nelson. But the entire concept was incredible: a prisoner being taken on day trips.* (p277)

Gregory's final appearance in *Long Walk to Freedom* comes as Mandela prepares to leave Victor Verster. In this passage he also mentions Brand and Swart. *There were dozens of people at the house, and the entire scene took on the aspect of a celebration. Warrant Officer Swart prepared a final meal for all of us and I thanked him not only for the food he had provided for the last two years but also the companionship. I embraced him warmly. In the years that he had looked after me from Pollsmoor to Victor Verster, we had never discussed politics, but our bond was an unspoken one and I would miss his soothing presence. Men like Swart, Gregory and Warrant Officer Brand reinforced my belief in the essential humanity even of those who had kept me behind bars for the previous twenty-seven and a half years.* (p672)

It is consistent with Mandela's statement that he didn't know Gregory well while he was on Robben Island that the Island is not included in the years 'he had looked after me'. And yet, for Gregory, those Island years were the most significant as those were the years he changed his political ideas let alone his attitude towards the Rivonians. And all because of his lengthy discussions with Mandela.

Although Gregory's book has never been reprinted, not even with the release of the movie in 2007, the nature of the internet means that Gregory's story is high up the Google lists. The accusations that Gregory had exaggerated his friendship with Mandela or 'reworked' certain incidents did not deter the producers and the director of the movie. By then Anthony Sampson's authoritative biography had appeared dismissing Gregory's distortions. Sampson wrote: *In December 1966 a new warder, James Gregory, arrived on the island. He had been brought up as a child among Zulus, and spoke Zulu and Xhosa fluently. He was later to achieve fame through his much-promoted book* Goodbye Bafana*, which described conversations with his famous prisoner. In fact Mandela had not known Gregory very well, but, as he put it, 'he knew us, because he had been responsible for reviewing our incoming and outgoing mail.' In his book Gregory presented himself as a naive country boy who was surprised to find the prisoners far better educated than himself, and soon recognised Mandela as a real leader, 'the perfect gentleman'. But the warders who became genuine friends of the prisoners, like Christo Brand, were very suspicious of Gregory; and the prisoners were always aware that Gregory was spying on them, eavesdropping on visitors and intercepting mail, as part of the intelligence system of the Security Branch.* (pg217)

Later, Sampson writes, *Many ex-Robben Islanders balked at* [Mandela's] *more extreme acts of forgiveness... And they were baffled by his leniency*

towards his former jailer James Gregory when he published his book Goodbye Bafana, *promoted with the help of a letter from Mandela thanking him for the 'wonderful hours that we spent together'. Gregory had 'hallucinated' in many of his accounts, Mandela said privately, and Gregory himself admitted that he had used 'author's licence'; more seriously, he had abused his role by disclosing confidential personal details.* (p523)

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