The making of *Long Walk to Freedom*

- December 1975 in Robben Island Prison, Ahmed Kathrada suggests that Nelson Mandela write his autobiography and for Mac Maharaj to smuggle it from prison out on his scheduled release in 1976. The idea was that the book could be published in time for Mandela's 60th birthday on 18 July 1978.

- The project is agreed to. People involved are: Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada, Walter Sisulu, Laloo Chiba and Mac Maharaj. Mandela informs the High Organ (a structure set up by the B Section prisoners to organise themselves). B Section is the wing of the single cells where these prisoners are kept.

- January 1976 Mandela starts writing through the night. He writes about 10 pages each night and hands them over to the others for correction and comment. He works without the previous pages for reference or continuity.

- Mandela and Maharaj use health and other excuses to stay away from work at the quarry where the prisoners are made to dig lime. They use the day to discuss issues that have arisen in the comments.

- During the writing process each person hides the part he is working with as best he could.

- The corrected manuscript pages are given to Mac Maharaj and Laloo Chiba to transcribe into tiny handwriting.

- The full manuscript is reduced to about 60 pages.

- April 1976 Mandela finishes writing.

- The version in small handwriting is hidden in a secret compartment in a prison bench which had been constructed around 1969.

- The original handwritten version is hidden in a library around the corner from B Section. This is done secretly through the use of a set of keys constructed by a fellow prisoner. They open the wing and the cell in which the library is housed.

- Chiba and Maharaj construct a file in which Maharaj kept maps from the Bureau of Statistics for his university studies. The manuscript is hidden in the covers. Other material for smuggling out is hidden in the covers of hardcover notebooks.

- The original manuscript in Mandela's handwriting is buried in plastic cocoa containers in the garden next to B Section. Maharaj is not informed of this in case he is caught with the manuscript and made to talk.

- October 1976 Maharaj is transferred from Robben Island without notice. The authorities agree to let Kathrada and Chiba pack up his study material (including the album) for him to take with him.

- Late November 1976 Maharaj ends up at Durban Central Prison after having been transferred to various prisons around the country.

- 17 December 1976 Maharaj is released from prison and is placed under a five-year house arrest order at a bachelor flat in Merewent occupied by his brother.

- Maharaj, with the assistance of Phyllis Naidoo, gets a person who is not politically involved to take the album to an 'Indian' friend in London who then gives it to Rusty Bernstein.

- 2 July 1977 Maharaj breaks his house arrest order and secretly leaves South Africa.

- Early August 1977 Maharaj reaches Lusaka in Zambia.

- Maharaj reports to Oliver Tambo and informs him of the autobiography and tells him Mandela and Sisulu asked him to give one copy to Tambo and one to Yusuf Dadoo, and that the final version for publication must be approved by Tambo.

- August 1977 Tambo sends Maharaj to London to have the manuscript transcribed

- Tambo and Dadoo arrange for Sue Rabkin to type the manuscript while Maharaj deciphers and reads out the text to her. The typescript (in double spacing) is about 600 pages.

- Maharaj sends a coded message to Kathrada on Robben Island informing him that the text has reached its destination.

- Late 1977 the authorities on Robben Island discover the buried original manuscript when workers dig up part of the garden to make a wall in B Section.

- The prison authorities commission a handwriting expert to pronounce on the different handwritings that appear on the manuscript. The expert reports the handwriting of Mandela, Kathrada, Sisulu and Maharaj.

- Mid-January 1978 the transcription of the manuscript is completed. Four copies are made: one each for Tambo, Dadoo and Maharaj, with the fourth kept as a reserve.

- The text of the smuggled version is left with Rabkin for safekeeping. Maharaj believes she had it stored in a vault at Lloyds Bank in London but all searches have failed to locate it. Only a few pages survive with

Maharaj who intends to hand them to the Nelson Mandela Foudation for its archives.

- In 1978 General Jannie Roux, then Deputy Commissioner of Prisons, informs Mandela, Kathrada and Sisulu that their study privileges are being revoked for the rest of their imprisonment as they had abused them by working on the manuscript. No action is taken against Maharaj because he is already outside South Africa.

- In 1978 Maharaj meets Dadoo and Joe Slovo about the manuscript. Slovo is concerned about several aspects of the text.

- Later Maharaj raises the matter with Tambo who says he has given a copy to Ruth First and suggests that Maharaj discuss it with her.

- Maharaj meets First and Slovo in Maputo, Mozambique. Issues remain unresolved.

- In the late 1970s or early 1980s Maharaj acquires a computer and gets Garth Strachan, then the administrative secretary in the Internal Reconstruction & Political Department of the ANC, to have the manuscript captured electronically and copied on floppy disks.

- In 1980 Mandela, Sisulu and Kathrada have their study privileges restored.

- In 1991 Maharaj gives the set of floppy disks to Mandela.

- Several South African authors are engaged on the possibility of assisting in reworking and updating the manuscript for publication. None are found to be suitable.

- After an introduction by Mandela's friend Fatima Meer, her nephew Iqbal Meer, a London-based lawyer, secures a publisher, Little Brown.

- Little Brown introduces the American Richard Stengel to Mandela and they work together on completing the book in 1992 and 1993.

- On 14 December 1994 *Long Walk to Freedom* is launched

- In 2008 Iqbal Meer gives the Nelson Mandela Foundation the electronic copy of the manuscript which Stengel worked from. The Foundation subsequently makes it available online.