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TM: Tshepo Moloji

GDV: Gille De Vlieg

Interview with Gille de Vlieg

TM: Today it's the 26th June 2011 (Twenty Six of June Two Thousand and Eleven). I'm with Gille de Vlieg in uMdloti Durban Tshepo Moloji for the Tembisa oral history and the photography project. Gille, thank you again for giving us this opportunity to interview you. As to start off... let's start off by you introducing yourself, who is Gille?

GDV: I started my life as Gill...Gillian Ruth Hemson and I stayed that way until I got married for the first time and then I became Gillian Ruth Millar and that marriage ended up in a divorce and I became Gillian Ruth de Vlieg but I became known as Gill and I now call myself gille and today it feels comfortable to be called gille.

TM: Just gille?

GDV: gille sometimes Gogo gille (laughs)

TM: Yes I like Gogo gille better (laughs), where were you born Gogo gille?

GDV: I was born in England in Plymouth on the twenty six of July 1940, and it was a very difficult time in England at that time, it was during what was called the Battle of Britain when England and the rest of the United Kingdom could have been taken over by the Germans, the Nazis in Germany, umm of course the battle of Britain's history is very well known, but in fact what's isn't so well known is that not very long after my birth the Germans actually were actually bombing the city which I was born because it was the centre of a Naval base it was where the Royal Navy had its base and in fact my grandfather had served in the Royal Navy and was serving the Navy during the second world war and an aunt of mine also was part of the WRENS who were the female branch of the Royal Navy.

TM: What you call them?

GDV: WRENS, so my background was... that time it was quite naval on my Mother's side anyway, and how I ended in South Africa was that my...the house where my parents and I were living was bombed eventually and we had to move out of that house and we moved to a little village called Newton Ferrers.

TM: Newton Ferrers?

GDV: Yes and which was where my grandparents actually had to...also had to move because their house had been bombed and after sometime in October 1942 (nineteen forty two), my father was asked by the civilian arm of the Royal Navy which is called the Admiralty to come out to South Africa to work on the Simonstown harbour, but my mother and I stayed in England and we only came to South Africa in February 1944 (nineteen forty four), after my parents had taken the decision that South Africa would be a good place to start a new life, because they have lost everything, the house, and then later they sent out their furniture on a ship but that also was sunk, so they had nothing (laughs) So my mother and I arrived...

TM: Because of the bombing?

GDV: Yes, because the boats were attacked - and we were very fortunate because we were the second convoy to come through the Mediterranean. We actually stopped, I think probably in Mombasa, and that's where I saw my first banana (laughs) which got me very excited so I was three and a half when I arrived in South Africa, and as I said recently at my mother's memorial service, I think it was the greatest gift they could have given me, was bringing me to South Africa because it's a country I've become very passionate about and feel very disconnected from whenever I'm not actually living here in South Africa.

TM: And then when you got here you went down to Simonstown...

GDV: No, in fact my father had been moved by that time to come and work on Navy installations here in Durban, in the Durban harbour, on Salis... what is called Salisbury Island, and we arrived in Durban at the very worst time to come to Durban, which was February 1944 (nineteen forty four) because it was a hottest and the most humid time of the year and remains that way even now. Ja, so we lived in the Durban North area for some time in a rented house, and that house still remains there today just as I remember it - it's incredible.

TM: Is it still there?

GDV: Ja and then we moved up my father, and then at the end of the war my father started his own firm of quantity surveyors, he was a Quantity Surveyor, and we lived in Wyebank, in one of those houses where you could look through the floorboards and see the ground underneath, it was built on stilts - you know that lifted up because of the white ants and then I went to the Kloof Primary school and then after sometime we moved to a property, that some land that my father had bought and he built a small house on it and then I went to...for my senior schooling I went to St. Mary's school in Kloof when it was a very terrible school.

TM: And why is that?

GDV: I think there were many reasons why it was so awful; they were very oppressive to girls. I think the Head Mistress had no understanding of how to look after teenage girls. I think the particular group that I was in, as well, we were all quite the rebellious bunch but also at that time Kloof was far away from Durban you know there weren't buses or unless you had your own car it wasn't easy to get to the area and...

TM: Which part of Durban?

GDV: This is in Kloof and I'm just thinking this is why they didn't get good teachers or dynamic teachers because you know it was a bit isolated ja, so I think that's one of the other reasons why the schooling wasn't that good, but my primary schooling I enjoyed it a lot. Ja and then from there I...my parents had moved up to Botha's Hill because my brother's went to Kearsney College, I have three younger brothers, but in July 1958 (nineteen fifty eight) I went nursing at Greys Hospital in Pietermaritzburg.

TM: In fifty eight?

GDV: Ja, and then when I left nursing, when I finished my Diploma I went to London and that's where I meet my first husband, who was a... he was a journalist and his first major assignment was actually working for an organisation called United Press which no longer exists, I think maybe Associated Press bought them out, and his assignment was actually to be sent to what was then, Elisabethville (now called Lumbumbashi) in Katanga province of the Belgium Congo, because the Belgium Congo had just become independent.

TM: What was his name?

GDV: His name was Iain Millar. And we were there for some months and it was the time when the United Nations' troops were there as well fighting Tshombe because Tshombe had declared UDI from the rest of the Congo and there was a certain Colonel Mobuto who actually (laughs) who also was fairly supportive of Tshombe at the time, but it was a very wild time.

TM: UDI, what does that stand for?

GDV: It was like... it was something like... Indepen... Undeclared something or other ... Independence (Unilateral Declaration of Independence) like Smith did later in Rhodesia in the same sort of thing. He seceded (broke away) from the rest of the Congo and of course Katanga was one of the wealthy provinces because it had so much copper. Ja - and I did in fact meet Tshombe at one stage and... ja...

TM: But let me ask this question before moving to Elizabethville, why London after fifty eight?

GDV: Well you know my parents had come from England and I until the day she died my mother, even though she had spent more time here in South Africa, still talked of England as home (laughs) and I also thought I could get...and at that Greys' Hospital was very well known as far as training nurses was concerned, and I knew that it would be very easy for me to get a job in London as a nurse and that's what I did do.

TM: Ohh you worked as...

GDV: I worked as a nurse, in London.

TM: Which hospital – Grey's Hospital?

GDV: Well I was trained at Greys' Hospital.

TM: Ohh in South Africa?

GDV: Yes in South Africa and then when I went over, I actually worked for nursing agency because you got more money that way, and but I didn't really like London very much, it was **very** cold. In fact, I was in London in November 1962 (nineteen sixty two) which was the last, what they call 'pea-soup fog' that they had in London. It was so thick that you couldn't actually see where you are going. It was, I recently confirmed that date, it's quite interesting that it was the last pea-soup fog that they

had in London, it was also caused by pollution, humidity and pollution, and anyway, so I was happy to go out, back to Africa again... and in fact I got married in Elizabethville (now called Lumbumbashi).

TM: In Elizabethville, then while Iain is working as a journalist, what are you doing then?

GDV: Well, I used to try and go around with him, because I didn't like getting left behind, I've always had this feeling that I want to go and see what's happening. And most of the time it was perfectly safe to do that and, and in fact it was advantage in a way, because there weren't many white English speaking woman in Elizabethville so it made liaison with the United Nations' troops very easy as well actually, because the people in charge of the United Nations' troops were from India, and of course they spoke English, and so it's made that relationship for Iain very easy, it gave him access sometimes when he might not have got access.

TM: I mean as you trekking along with him do you take part in whatever he was doing?

GDV: I was **very** naive you know and he was quite right-wing and you know I had no real understanding of what politics was about at all, I was just this person who had meet this guy and I thought he was amazing and highly intelligent, which he was, and I just thought it was the most marvellous exciting thing, you know, to be part of this situation because it was **the** news story of that particular time, and of course I meet all these interesting people. The United Nations' troops were made up of Ethiopians and the Indian troops, and then there were people from Algeria and also the Irish were there as well, so it was very fascinating.

TM: And how long did you stay

GDV: We didn't actually stay there very, very long because things came to a head when Tshombe, the Katangese troops and the United Nations, came – they had a fight, and in fact their fight started in the garden of the rented house where we were staying, and we had Gurkhas staying in the garden, Gurkhas who belonged to part of the Indian troops, and the one night they knocked on our door and they said to us we must turn out all the lights but leave the outside lights on, and so we sat all night while they were actually firing bazooka's at one another. And we were with another couple and the name of the other person...he was working for I'll think of it in a minute, another press agency, and his name was Denis Kiley, and Denis Kiley is of significance because he was one of the people who I later discovered,...he was working for Reuters he was one of the journalists who actually came from Johannesburg, and he was one of the very few people who discovered that women were refusing to take passes out in the North West around Zeerust, and he wrote about it and he comes, he is mentioned actually in the book that was written by a priest (Charles Hooper) on that particular resistance in that area. So... that I've found out very much later, but it was fascinating that there was this connection, because very much later I was also working in around the Zeerust area helping communities that were resisting being moved into the Bophuthatswana.

TM: But at a time when you were still at Katanga did you get news about what was happening in South Africa?

GDV: No, very little news about South Africa, you know it was very difficult just to get news on what was happening in Katanga, and we had some very interesting experiences because we used to go to

Zambia to get supplies as well, and there was just this very, very, very narrow road, the strip roads that you used to have in Rhodesia as well at one stage, where you would be travelling along through thick, thick, thick bush and on two cement strips and if a vehicle was coming the other way, you shared, and then you went off and you only had one strip (laughs). But it was also very interesting because at one section of that road that it widen out considerably, and Tshombe was using that as a place where he could land planes and bring in suppliers and things like that. You had to also..., as a journalist you had two passes, one for the Katangese and one for the United Nations, so you had to be careful that you presented the right one at a right time (laughs). So there were some hair-raising things that happened. But you know, and then I discovered that I was pregnant and also the whole United Nations/ Katangese thing flared up and unfortunately Iain hadn't done his homework. And he hadn't got a... hadn't found a way to get the information out to the United Press. He hadn't found a ham radio or something like that when the electricity was no longer available... telex, we used to use telex at that time, when that wasn't available because the Post Office was closed, you know he hadn't actually made sure that he had other methods of getting the news out, and so in fact he was fired from that job and we came to Johannesburg not knowing what was going to happen. Anyway fortunately enough...

TM: How did you get to Johannesburg?

GDV: We flew, we flew back. We had to fly in a small little plane from Elizabethville and then you and then you flew to... I think it was Ndola, and then from there you went to... because Ndola had mines.... and it still has mines.

TM: Which year is this?

GDV: This is early 1963 (nineteen sixty three).

TM: Sixty three

GDV: And then we, Iain was very lucky in that he got a job as a journalist on *The Star* in Johannesburg. And then I had my baby in June 1963 (nineteen sixty three). I had a little daughter, who is now quite a big daughter and...

TM: What's her name?

GDV: Ruth and I lived in Hillbrow, which I found very suffocating, because Iain would go off and, you know, do his work but he got into with a crowd that would enjoy drinking after they finished work....

TM: So when you got to Johannesburg you lived in Hillbrow, you got a flat?

GDV: Yes.

TM: You got a flat?

GDV: Yes, and it was very difficult for me, I didn't feel particularly comfortable, we were living in the bachelor flat and I had this baby... and I didn't know how to...(sigh) it was just very difficult copying, you know there wasn't space for washing and... and... I was just very fortunate that Iain meet other

journalists who had very, very nice wives, and I used to meet them... we would have suppers together sometimes and they, the wives, and particular became my very good friends, and we still friends today, so they formed a very strong support system for me.

TM: But this time, in the early sixties when you got to Johannesburg, what was the sense of the place, coming from...?

GDV: Well... coming from...and also coming from Durban you know where things were quite.. English (laughs) and I mean Hillbrow just seemed a crazy place to me. And we used to go through to...our big treat was... well **my** big treat was actually to be able to go with these friends sometimes, to the very first Exclusive Books that there was in Hillbrow. And it was downstairs, and you could go in there and you could browse around and there would be nice music playing and so we would often spend our Sunday nights browsing around the Exclusive Books in Hillbrow. I do remember one Christmas actually buying a huge stack of books and I think it cost all of R30.00 (thirty Rand) (laughs)... which was very expensive for me at a time.

But my saviour at that particular time was the man who became my General Practitioner, a man called Dr. Guy Berry, and he lived in in Upper Houghton in an old, old tin house with a beautiful indigenous garden, and it wasn't popular in those days to have an indigenous garden. And he recognised my need for some space and some greenery, and he and his wife used to invite me to go and visit with them on Sunday afternoons, which was amazing for me. He became a bit like a..., he was very fatherly and he became a very strong father figure for me. He was lovely and his wife was also a Doctor, and she was very welcoming and so I look back on both of them, you know, with great gratitude to both of them, they were lovely.

So then we were in Hillbrow for some time ...we moved six times in one year (laughs) in Johannesburg! So, and then after some time I got pregnant again with another little baby, another little daughter, she was born in September 1964 (nineteen sixty four) and unfortunately not all was right with her, and she had been born with a bile duct that was blocked off, and even though she was operated on and it seem successful for a while, she eventually died when she was nine and a half months old so that was June 1965 (sixty five).

And around (at) that time we were living out at Halfway House, on a small holding. Ja, and again it was difficult for me because we had a kroncky old car that you had to climb underneath to get to start, and to use a fork to get the pins in the right place, to be able to get the starter motor to start (laughs) And it was also difficult for me because Iain was still working, I don't know if he was still working for the Star, but he moved on to work for a Public Relations firm, and I don't remember their name, but he started drinking very, very heavily and the downfall eventually came after we had actually been visiting his parents In what was still Salisbury (Harare) in Rhodesia, and it was not long after UDI (Dec 1985) and he was actually working for a Financial Newspaper at a time, and when we came back to Johannesburg he was told he was told that he was fired from that newspaper, and I was again pregnant and I went actually to go and see the editor because I wanted to understand what was happening, and he told me that Iain had told him that his mother had died in Salisbury, and that he had to stay on longer to bury her, well I mean she only died about ten years ago, so I started to realise that this person that I was married to was... he was lying and he was also...he was also

believing his own lies and life became incredibly difficult, he also became abusive, he was staying away from home very, very long periods, he was living in a fantasy world and I... for the very first time recognised that I was going to have to be responsible for my children. and eventually the crunch came when we had absolutely no money whatsoever. I had been hiding money into a bank account but even that had been drained dry, and at this time we were living in Berea, in a flat, and in the middle of the night there was very loud banging on the door, and I opened it up and a police reservist was standing there and he said if you want to know where your husband is, he's in John Vorster Square, so he's been arrested for drunken driving (laughs). So I didn't know what to do because I was then eight and half months pregnant and I had my daughter Ruth to look after, and she was two and a half. So I first went to gooh I found five cents, (sigh) and with that five cents I could make a telephone call to one of my friends, from a public phone, and they very kindly came to fetch me and lent me their car, and I went in to try to find my GP, but he wasn't in his rooms at the time... all the Doctors at that time by the way, used to (live) were in one street, in Johannesburg, well most of the Doctors and I'm trying to...it was Lister Street I think, which was an appropriate name because yes,.... (correction: it was Lister Building, in Jeppe Street), but I did go to the paediatrician who had been looking after my second daughter when she was alive, and I told him what had happened and he gave me five Rand and he said to me 'go and get some food for your child and I'm phoning your mother to come fetch you', because that was all I could actually do obviously I couldn't find a job at that time.

TM: Was it difficult to find a job then?

GDV: Well it wasn't because it was difficult, but I was eight and a half months pregnant so you know, it wasn't really an option, ja, (sigh) so I came back down to Botha's Hill in Natal and it was a very, very, very difficult time... my son was born at Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg and that was quite nice because there were lot of people who recognised me from having worked there before, even the woman who did the cleaning, they used to come in and say 'aai you're back' (laughs), so in a way it was like a home from home.

TM: You seem to be someone who left an impression on people (laughs) go to London..... still recognise you...

GDV: Ja I know....it was actually... ja... and it was also quite interesting because the other thing that happened was people started wondering who the father was, because **my** father would come, my brothers would come and visit, and then various doctors that I'd known at Grey's would also come and visit as well, but of course my husband, I had actually phoned his family and said to them, I have to go back to my mother and Iain is sitting in John Vorster Square, and if you want to bail him out, its fifty Rand and I don't have fifty Rand, and you have to come down and sort him out, and they never forgave me, well the mother never forgave me, I think the father might have... but ..um ja, they blamed it all on me. Ja, so unfortunately that was the end of that marriage, although there was an attempt at reconciliation a little bit later on, but he once again was still lying to me about the things that he was promising, so I realised there was no future in it..., ja, so I started nursing again and I ended up nursing at the intensive care unit at St Augustine's Hospital in Durban and stayed there for

quite some time (sigh)... it was incredibly difficult having two babies to look after and working, my mother did help out, but she was very resentful of having to do so and made my life very difficult.

TM: What sort of shifts were you working there?

GDV: Well I actually went onto night duty because I felt it was the easiest thing to do for the children.

TM: But hard for you.

GDV: But very, very hard for me you know, and I really I mean I had very little money my mother...

TM: How much were you earning there?

GDV: Ooh I can't really remember but I know it wasn't much, I mean for instance not long after that I remember keeping a record of my groceries and my groceries came to fifty five Rand in the month and that was eating meat every day, so you know I don't think I could have been earning more than two hundred Rand or something, and I had enormously...I was in an enormously responsible position because St Augustine's was a private hospital, there were no doctors on call because people had their own private doctors who attend to them, and yet I was looking after people who were heads of companies, who were lawyers, who were doctors themselves, you know, people in who had had heart attacks because of their stressful lives, quite honestly, and I had so much responsibility because I had to ...you know, whatever decision I made meant that they could live or die if there was a crisis, and yet I was...what I do know I was being paid less...than their most junior secretary in a firm, you know so it was...nurses have been paid badly... my very first salary was thirteen Pounds when I first went nursing, so nurses have been paid very badly from time immemorial. You know they've always played on... it's the type of person it's not the money, but I mean alright you get the right type of person so jolly well pay them what they are worth (laughs).

So I think that was also the beginning of my consciousness around how things were stacked against woman, and also just how badly the jobs that were available to woman, you know, how badly they were paid as well, and... it became highlighted the one time when I actually had to go and report my husband missing because in those days woman were always given they were given the children but you never got the legal guardianship of your child, that remained with the male, and so to be able to get legal guardianship of my children I had to go and report my husband missing, and then it was a process that had to eventually go to court, but what stands out in my mind is that I went to this police station and made this report, and this policeman who was quite an elderly person, looked at me and he said 'oh poor guy why don't you live him alone?' (laughs) and I became furious .

TM: You became furious?

GDV: ...well I was absolutely furious! and I actually said 'how dare you, you know, say these things to me, you don't even know what I've had to go through to try and maintain myself and my children and how dare you actually say why don't you live him alone! You know it's outrageous, I was really, really, really angry and it just highlighted to me once again, you know, that the attitudes towards woman and how damaging they were. Particularly anybody in authority, you were definitely regarded... even as a white woman in South Africa, you were regarded as a second class citizen.

TM: Before we move from St Augustine's you said something earlier that you rebellious, what did that come from?

GDV: Ja, ja aaaai...from a little child I've been...there was something in me that wanted to go and find out what's happening elsewhere. Before I left England I ran away from home three times. The first time my mother found me down some very steep steps next to a river which was a tidal river so it use to rise and I wanted to see what was happening you know. I can remember this... and then another time I climbed over a high fence... I've got some sense of remembering things over that it was a high gate it was a vague memory of doing that in my mind, and then some neighbour found me at the bus stop in this little village of Newton Ferrers, with a little suitcase and she said to me 'Gillian where are you going' apparently, so I am told....and I said 'I'm going to Plymouth, I'm going to see the sailors' (laughs) So I had it all organised you know, and I think the reason I liked the sailors was because lot of them came to the house and they always made a fuss with me, I think that was the problem... and certainly during that time my mother was in a very bad state, I think she might have had post-partum depression because I don't remember much loving from her, I do remember loving my grandmother...my mother's mother was a very loving person I do have good memories of her and sadly I never saw her again after I left England. So I grew up a child wanting to know more about life, and my parents actually were people who were very they saw themselves as Christian but their version of Christianity was very, very strict and everything was either black and white, there were no greys as far as they were concerned. We were bought up in the Methodist Church as it happened but it was really by chance although, they had been Church of England there were known in the United Kingdom and the nice thing about the Methodist Church is they like singing and they made good cakes...what else was there that was nice? (laughs)... and I enjoyed the singing and I enjoyed the cake. So ja, but I...yes with the strict schooling and also being a teenager in the fifties, if you ever look at the history of the fifties there was a time of huge oppression of woman because it was the time when they were trying... governments around the world were trying to get woman to go out of the factories and back into the home, because woman had participated in the war effort, and they had come out into the factories... and in fact there is a film on this, that was made by the Americans and the propaganda that went around this idea of getting woman back into the home, and that's when a lot of the home appliances started happening. If you look at the adverts you will see these woman standing and smiling saying my Frigidaire and my washing machine and you know all those things were to get woman back into the home again. But for teenagers it was a time of enormous restriction, you know, I was not given any outlet for my wildness, and I've had a wildness in me as long as I can remember. It's like something in me that resonates to certain music; it resonates when I see the landscapes of South Africa. I feel it's almost as if I want to sink myself into it. (laughs) I don't know if I should say this... but not long ago, about a year ago, I was driving in the Southern Cape with the friend of mine and just looking at this road stretching out and the mountains, and it was almost like I needed to feed a child (laughs) because my breasts were responding to the scenery. It was an incredible feeling - that's why I know this country is right for me (laughs) my body responds to it in every possible way (laughs)... and I love dancing, I've always loved dancing. And... it's something that hasn't been totally fulfilled in me as well, I think partly because I never had a partner perhaps, that felt exactly the same as me, I've meet people along the way, that allowed me to know that they sometimes felt that way too. So I think there was also part of what led

me in to wanting to know what's happening on the other side of South Africa from the white...South Africa. There was this desire to know and I mean it remains in me even now...I love learning about new things.

TM: And then St Augustine's, you worked up to when?

GDV: I have got dates... I've got this...I've got a time line!

TM: Prepared...prepared I like that.

GDV: Okay nineteen sis... December sixty eight I worked until April sixty nine and at a time there were nuns in that hospital as well working as nurses. And it gave me a very good understanding of Augustinian nuns, because there were some that were absolutely right to be there, and the others who shouldn't ever be nuns at all and one... the sister in charge of the intensive care was actually a really horrible person.

TM: What you mean?

GDV: Well she caused me to leave eventually...because what happened was, I was on night duty for long time and then it eventually was getting to me and I think I felt I wanted to stop, and... although those dates were not entirely accurate I'd been doing private nursing there as well before ja...and it was through that private nursing that they actually asked me to become part of the staff anyway. So I went into day duty and we were quite a happy little team in the intensity care unit and in fact there was a girl that I used to know from Grey's Hospital, although she was a bit younger than me, she was also working there and we had quite a bit of fun, but then all of a sudden this nun who was in charge of the intensive care unit, decided that we would have to start doing a couple of nights night duty every now and then, and I did that for a few times but it disrupted my children terribly, and so I was speaking about this to the rest of the woman who were working there and they said don't worry we'll just do extra night duties, because we single and doesn't make a difference to us - and when I took that to her, her response was to put me on permanent night duty. So I realised that I couldn't stay there and I just said if she is not going to listen to me then I'm going to have to leave, and I was very scared of saying that but in fact it was the right decision because the very next day some anaesthetists who also worked quite closely within the intensive care unit, came to me and offered me a job that was a day job and had no weekend work other than Saturday mornings, so I was very fortunate - but I just thought she was a real bitch (laughs) and she didn't ever do night duty and I thought that you know Christian duty might have been that she did my night duty for me, that would have been a better (laughs) buy she didn't see it that way.

TM: Alright, so now you left St Augustine to work somewhere else.

GDV: I started working for what was called the Durban Clinic. That's now become part of another clinic as well. But these were guys who... it was run by anaesthetists, day hospitals basically, small operations you know, where you didn't have to stay overnight although there were few that... maybe sometimes with tonsils, would stay overnight but ja it was day work. It was regular hours, it wasn't shift work and with slightly better pay so you know that although I had to fight for that as well because what I didn't realise, what this anaesthetist didn't tell me was that he expected me to be the

assistant matron, and I said to him but you never told me that when you employed me, and I said I've got enough responsibility raising my children and I don't want that responsibility. And he said then we have to cut your pay and I said no you won't (laughs) because I need that money (laughs).

TM: And he didn't?

GDV: And he didn't! So I was beginning to learn to stand up for myself.

And then sometimes early in the morning I used to go down to the yacht club where there were foreign yachts that used to come in and I just look at them and think ohh it would be wonderful to go out you know somewhere on a yacht, because I was feeling very restricted and very tied down, hardly any social life at all, and then by chance I met somebody who then introduced me to a family who were living on a yacht that had been made in Lamu in Kenya in the traditional style of how Arab dhows had been made on Lamu, and she was a big heavy boat and then on board one day...the first day that I went actually, was a South African guy called Rob de Vlieg, who I eventually married. And that's how I met Rob, and we started going out for a while, and then he went off with this family across to Rio on this yacht and I thought well that's the last I see of him because you know he is a single guy why should he come back to I was four years older than him...I am four years older than him, with a woman with two children. Anyway he went off then I started (laughs) seeing another guy who I thought I ought to go out with, in fact he proposed to me and I was thinking of accepting him, because he had money (laughs) and then Rob phoned and I told him that I was going to get engaged and he came back to South Africa with five Rand (laughs) So I thought oh dear! Anyway I choose a man without money but what Rob did for me was being a huge support in helping me raise the children and he eventually adopted them as well. I was very reluctant to give up my legal guardianship as you can imagine after having to fight for it so hard, but eventually I got to trust him enough to trust him to adopt them and become their legal guardian too. But also he took me into a world of yachting, of sailing, he had been sailing before in dinghies which used to race in Durban harbour and when he came back, we lived in Durban, and we wanted to sail and we were fortunate in being able to borrow a boat for a while, that we sailed and then we started winning races and...

TM: Oh so these were the competitions?

GDV: Yes, we would race every Saturday afternoon in Durban harbour at the Point Yacht Club, and I just loved it! I'd always wanted to sail, you know, but my family had ignored it because I was the girl, because my grandfather sailed and I thought it looked like a marvellous thing to do. So Rob and I became very good at sailing and we started winning championships and we moved from this one... we eventually bought this boat when we've got enough money and it actually led Rob into becoming a sail maker he made sails for these yachts, and that became his business and still it's his business, and then after being a while in Durban we decided to move to Johannesburg because Durban already had two sail makers and the yachting crowd wasn't a very big crowd you know not in South Africa, but we take...1973 we had a South African championships yachting championships here, but it was a big thing it was a big thing that the Nationalists did, I think it was called the South African Games, because it was not only for yachting it was for whole of other sports as well. I think to try and counter some of the cultural boycott or something, anyway some guys came out from England and sailed against us, in fact the world championship came out, the World Champion came out, he

was English he came out and sailed against us in the first week and he beat us, unfortunately we came second, but some other guys came out and the one guy was actually involved with a sail making firm in England, called Musto & Hyde and I persuaded Rob to go and talk to him to see if he couldn't link up with that group in England, and be their South African sail maker and in fact that did work out eventually. And they were very good and I'm still friends with that guy and his wife. So Rob went over to England and to learn their techniques and things and then came back and we decided that we would establish a loft in Johannesburg and it was in Jeppestown. So we went out in our little Beetle, towing a boat behind us, with all our worldly goods (laughs) which weren't very much and our children.

TM: And this is seventy...

GDV: This is early seventies, we started in January 1974. We started in Jeppe, Jeppestown, what is that long street in Jeppestown (John Page Drive)? And it was hard work! Fortunately I had come up before, when Rob was actually in England, I had come up to Johannesburg to find schooling and to find somewhere to stay, and we decided on the Craighall Park area in Johannesburg because we knew it was a good school and I went to that school, and funnily enough, I bumped into a daughter of a friend of mine at that school, and they wore the same uniform as my daughter was wearing at the school where she was in Hillcrest, so I knew it was the right school, and in fact Craighall Primary School was a very, very good school. So they went to school there, and I managed to find a flat just down the road from the school, so they could just walk to school which was very nice. Craighall Park. But you know, there's that part of the highway when you coming from Heidelberg and you...it's flat and you suddenly start seeing the skyline of Jo'burg, and we pulled off on the side of the road and looked at this lot, and thought are we going to make it in this big city because neither of us were big city people. Anyway we worked very hard; Rob has a talent for making sails. And I used to go in and work with him in the morning and sometimes helping him to sew, looking after the accounts, that sort of thing, then go home in the afternoon to be with the children, and make supper and often we would...I would take them back in to town, to carry on working until ten at night or something like that and they would start sleeping and then we would take them to bed. So it was a hard time we worked very, very hard and we really never knew for very many years if we were ever going to have enough money, but somehow there was always **just** enough! We were very lucky and the children were very happy and did well at Craighall Primary. Andrew became the Sportsman of the Year, Sports Boy I suppose it really is. At that school, it was a happy little school on the whole, and there was one very, bad teacher but there were some very good teachers.

TM: But during this period, seventy four, living in Craighall.... in terms of what was happening in black townships, are you aware?

GDV: You had some echoes of it, but I have to say that at that time I just put my head down and I was concentrating on surviving, you know on making this work for my husband, I had a very strong sense of a man needing to work in something that he loved and that's why I had encouraged Rob to go into sail making. I hadn't come to the understanding of what did a woman do (laughs) that was coming, but coming quite quickly because I was still really concentrating on the survival of my children and myself and getting, you know, Rob's business to work. And there was a lot of discomfort beginning to

happen but it really came about much stronger in 1976. I mean that really in a way was a big wake up call.

TM: What causes this discomfort?

GDV: Well I knew that I was living in an unequal society and I knew that it didn't resonate well with me, but I didn't see at that time, what I could do about it.

TM: What had you observed to cause discomfort?

GDV: Well you know, I had seen the way...growing up I mean I'd seen the way, we had domestic workers... ohh one thing I didn't mention to you is that when I was still in the Kloof area we had quite a big garden and we had a gardener and his name was Olden, that's what he called himself, I have a photograph of him, the most fine face, he taught me "Nkosi Sikelela" and that stayed with me for long, long time, forever in fact. So then, my youngest brothers are twins, and we had also had a young Indian girl who came to help look after them, and she became like a sister to me, but I also saw that she lived in the backrooms, you know none of this...and I was always told not to hang around back rooms (laughs) you know, but my brother actually is the one who became very politically involved as well and was banned, and detained and exiled - the whole story - he also, he and Olden used to love being together. He is five years younger than me, and so his experience was somewhat different from mine, I mean he was also very much taken up with being with the workers, because he became a trade unionist later as well.

TM: What's his name?

GDV: David Hemson. My life was very different. You know my goals were to find out what this boy/girl thing was all about. That was a very strong drive in my teenage years, and I wasn't supported in that at all by my parents. I did enjoy nursing; there was a call to do something for other people that was quite strong in me. And I suppose all of that you know started to... ohh sorry in 1960 at the time of Sharpeville, there was a very significant event that happened in my life, and it was only much later that I realised why it had happened the way it did. I was nursing at Grey's and we had a woman who was one of our lecturers, who was a Progressive Party person which was seen... I think the Progressive Party had started then. It was the one that came out of the United Party, you know, I think it was called the Progressive Party, and that was seen as being terribly left wing! Anyway, she told us a little bit about what had happened at Sharpeville, but the real exciting thing that happened was the American Navy came to Durban. And the first night they were given a civic reception in Pietermaritzburg, why - don't ask me, but anyway... The reason the American Navy came to Durban was to take away the Americans from South Africa in case there was an uprising. But I knew nothing about that. The American soldiers, sailors were coming to Pietermaritzburg town hall, city hall and the nurses were invited, so we went and we had a ball, and in the meantime all the guys that had been hanging around the nursing hostels were all called up to the army, and we ignored them totally, and had this fantastic time with all these Americans - so unfortunately that was my Sharpeville!

TM: Wow.

GDV: It was one of the exciting times of my life, but for all the wrong reasons! So 76 started...

TM: So but the lecturer what did she say to you?

GDV: She just said the whole lot of people had been shot, as far as I remember, and there was some sort of disapproval in her voice, but she did raise a sort of twinge of some sort of consciousness, in me. I remember thinking that it was brave of her to speak out because she was going against what was the 'normal' way of thinking, you know and I remember having some sort of extra respect for her because of that, but I still didn't understand what was happening - I was far too impressed with these American sailors! (laughs) But one was very good looking and he played jazz fantastically! (laughs) Oh dear! So come along seventy six and... because we had some staff working for us, and they were having difficulties coming in to work and so what we started doing was to take them home with us so they would sleep in our house at night, and then go in the morning. And then this one woman, a woman called Ann Lesetla, who was a very special woman actually. She is one of the... there have been some wonderful women in my life. She was one of them, and she kind of took on our family as... like one of hers and she's started telling me stories about what was happening.

TM: Where was she from?

GDV: She was from, living in Soweto - she eventually went to live in Qwaqwa. ja but unfortunately she passed on - but her daughter still works for my husband (my former husband). So, and... one thing that Rob and I also recognise was that weren't getting the truth, where weren't hearing the truth.

TM: From whom?

GDV: From SABC, on the radio and I think we had television, but I don't think we had television, but our friends did - and so we went out and got a radio that could get BBC. So we got a short wave radio, a special one, we spent a lot of money doing that - to try and get some of the alternative views, to try...

TM: So you had already discussed this?

GDV: Yes, yes, yes... and Rob was technically minded, so he quite liked this one, because it was kind of a special one, I can't remember the name now, but they were unusual radios. So we did get this thing, but life continue to continue, because you know there were still children to send to school and there was still food to have to get, a house to run...by this time we had...when did we move? Moved to our own house.... 1977. We've managed to buy our own house, July 1977 in Craighall Park as well. And I was still doing bookkeeping at Musto & Hyde, then.... *(pause in tape – closing door for holiday makers)* Are you OK?

TM: Ja... '77 you got a house, in Craighall Park?

GDV: Yes which started making me feel a bit more stable, but what it meant was that we had a bond to pay off and so that was kind of difficult.

TM: How big is the house?

GDV: The house was three bedrooms and a small kitchen almost as small as that one although later on we made it bigger.

TM: And where you were staying before?

GDV: We've been staying in a flat, which was one bedroom, mmm two bedrooms, one bedroom that could be divided into two almost like cubicles for the children, and there was no garage for Rob to work on the boats because he loved working on the boats and building boats.

TM: So live became much better?

GDV: So it was easier, I mean the idea also was that it also had a garden and Andrew could kick a football around in the garden and all that sort of thing. It was just easier.

TM: So '76 (seventy six) before you moved to the new house, there was an uprising, which I mean you get your employees coming home, what happens after that?

GDV: I just came back to carrying on for a while but now I'm, my consciousness is raised in a way, you know that little bit more as well and it still takes some time and then the next thing that really happens to me that really helped enormously was that in 1981 (nineteen eighty one), in May 1981 (nineteen eighty one) I do a course called 'I AM' and apparently some of it is still going on now.

TM: Where is this course?

GDV: In Johannesburg. And I had started to feel very uncomfortable with how woman were perceived. And I had started reading quite a lot of feminist literature, I had started saying to Rob that I didn't really wanted to work for him any longer, I had come to a realisation that marriage could be as much of a prostitution as being out on the streets if you had got married just for security.

TM: And this is what you get from reading literature now?

GDV: Books have always been my refuge and my information. So I've always been a great reader and I'm very thankful for that. So there was, while my **racial** consciousness wasn't coming to the fore, my **gender** consciousness definitely was because if all the inner qualities that I had experienced in my own life actually. And that was becoming very powerful. Then I do this course 'I AM', and it becomes very significant, it's the course that is a sort of a self-actualisation course, it helps you know who you are, and it works in a way through psychological... breaking you down psychologically in many ways. There is a lot of initial abuse. There is a lot of sleeplessness. There are various processes that you go through either by yourself or one on one, a lot of eye contact. And then right at the very end you go through a process which takes you almost down to the very core of who you are. And just before the very end I'd actually done a one on one process with another person where you had to sustain eye contact and we finished and we were waiting for the others to finish, and I sat back in my chair and this overwhelming feeling came over me and I suddenly said 'I'm actually a good person!' And it was only then that I realised my mother had implanted in me that I was bad and that had been my script all through my life up to now, that I was bad. Even now it still takes me time to actually recognise that I was good. When my daughter was out here earlier this year, I sat next to her

on the plane as we were going down to Cape Town, and I said to her you know 'I know I haven't been the mother that you think you would have liked, and I'm probably not the grandmother that you think you'd like for your children', I said, 'but I **am** a good person' so it's really only this year that I started really, really owning the fact that I'm a good person.

TM: This course, who is facilitating?

GDV: A guy called Pat somebody or other... I can find out his name.

TM: Was it a private person?

GDV: Yes, it was a private thing and a friend of mine had done it and she... a friend of mine whose husband had also been on the Star. So this is how these relationships carry on through your life... I did it with my son and I did it with her son and her daughter, and with a whole lot of other people too. And it was deeply significant because it really gave me permission to like myself. It gave me permission to start thinking. I was able to start looking at what might be valuable for me in my life, and not only for my children and my husband. And we were beginning to get to the stage where Rob's business was ticking over and he could actually manage without me, you know to get someone else to do his books. And I was starting to think by reading other now more political-type literature... André Brink... I still think I've got it here and things like that. You know I was starting to feel very uncomfortable in... as a white woman in South Africa, and the crunch came not long after... It was now the beginning of '82 (eight two) when I read... I think it was Rumours of Rain by André Brink, and I realised that although it was set as a novel what he was writing was true, that what he was saying of the Security Police was happening, and I went through a whole cathartic night. I said to Rob I'm not coming to bed, I'm going to sit here until I've decided what I'm doing. And I just sat there in the lounge and I was crying and crying, and just thinking... and it suddenly came to me that I can't just carry on crying, I started crying in '76, well I'd cried, but politically I started crying in '76, but now... I wasn't doing anything and so I came to this decision that now I needed to **do** something because otherwise the Nationalist Government would think that what they were doing was being done in my name. And I, as a white South African woman... I had to stand up and say **NO**, you're not going to do it any longer! And so I thought and I thought... I knew I wanted to join a women's organisation, and then I remembered the Black Sash standing alongside of the road with their placards, standing out in public saying what they didn't like we saw what they didn't like, very seldom saying what they did like because there was so much to say about what they didn't like. And I thought those woman are incredibly brave, and I need to go and join them, because then at least I can stand up in public and say what I don't like (laughs). So with a great deal of nervousness I found their... I was surprised actually to find their number in the telephone book, and I phoned them and I told them I wanted to join. And a very nice person said to me they would send me forms which they did, and I filled them in and then I was very excited, I was accepted into Black Sash. Now when did I get accepted into Black Sash? 1st February 1982 (nineteen eighty two) and I very quickly became assimilated into the Johannesburg Black Sash. Very quickly got on... I was almost immediately put onto the committee, very soon after that I became a vice-chairperson so... and I went in boots and all.

TM: But did you understand when you joined Black Sash, besides seeing them along the side of the road saying what they want or didn't agree with, did you understand their politics I mean what they were...?

GDV: I had no idea other than what I had seen on those placards. I had no idea other than that they were a woman's organisation and they stood on the side of the road I didn't know what their politics were. In fact Black Sash never really... it was an pro-human rights anti-apartheid organisation, and we embrace a very wild range of political opinion, I mean we had quite right wing PFP people, who were quite happy for their son's to go to the army for instance, two SACP people you know, so it was a huge spectrum and that never caused us a problem, it was actually fascinating because it never ever did. The only problem is that... the major problem that came up in Sash was: 1. Did we join the UDF or did we just support the UDF? That was a big debate, because Durban and Cape Town felt they wanted to join the UDF, and other areas felt that they want to be just supporters. We wanted to remain independent. We did not actually want to be subsumed into something. So that was the big debate. The other big debate was around violence, there were liberals within Sash who had long memories and a long history and they were very suspicious of communists. And so they came from a position that all violence is wrong, and they came from the liberal parties. And my sense... a lot of people who came onto personal contact with what was happening in townships, what was happening in rural areas, more on the ground, working type of people, less intellectual perhaps, I don't know... But anyway, my position I felt, I was in that second group, because my position came from a position of... I do strongly believe all violence is wrong and is not helpful necessarily to the type of society we are trying to create, but if I was subjected to what the people of the townships and in other places are being subjected to, I do not know how I would react. So I was trying to recognise the violence that was already in me and say I don't know, and that was the debate that happened.

TM: So after you joined Black Sash in February '82 (eighty two) at home you now had to attend meetings, what's happening?

GDV: Now I'm going to meetings... oooh... Now I'm going in boots and all, I'm like a sponge, shlooooo... I'm just sucking everything in you know. I started working in the Advice Office and there I was... you know that Advice Office was a fascinating place because, especially in Johannesburg, because you were having different stories of people coming from all over the country, but they were coming with one voice basically, and it was to try and get the right stamp in their passbooks, so we were dealing very much with the 10 (1a) situations, section 10 (1b) and 10 (1c) - writing out affidavits for people, trying to find documents that were going to support whatever we've written in the application... and when I looked back on it years later I suddenly thought... I mean I went into that Advice Office without questioning. And you know I was appalled at some of the stories that I've heard, but I was learning fast. And then I thought about it years later and I thought we were actually doing the government's work for them in a way. We were almost like a 'Home Affairs' in some ways, except that we were trying to assist where Home Affairs was trying to prevent. But the big advantage of doing that was that it gave us an understanding of what was happening in people's lives from their own mouths, without us having to theorise about it. So we weren't coming in from a theoretical position in our protest work, we were coming from a position of **knowing**, because we've heard from

the people that it was happening to - and I think that gave us enormous power, in Sash, because it gave us a power beyond our size and beyond the middle class/middle aged, basically middle aged woman, you know white woman. Because we really came from a position of **knowing** – even though we hadn't experienced it for ourselves, we had heard and we listened, so I mean the Sash Archives you know are a huge ground for understanding what apartheid was all about, because it has thousands upon thousands of statements of people lives, people from rural areas coming in trying to find a place in the city. And so that's was very significant for me - and then I joined what was called the Rural, the Removals Sub-Committee, which was the sub-committee that was working then in the rural areas; because via the Advice Office people had heard about the advice and some of these leaders had come in to the Advice Office and we had spoken to different people and told them about what was happening. And the one area that we were concentrating on was Driefontein.

TM: The Removal Sub-Committee within the Black Sash?

GDV: Yes within Black Sash, and my first assignment for that was to go to Driefontein to see who was going to go on the buses, because you know the Government used to send in buses and take people to go and see where they were going to be moved to. So I left here at three o'clock in the morning and drove all the way to Driefontein, not knowing how to get there really and not knowing what I was supposed to look for when I got there (laughs). But I did it - all by myself - so I didn't find much, but I did hear that the buses didn't come and they came later and took the Swati's to go this way (Kangwane) and the Zulu's to go to Babanango. Anyway, I came very involved with Driefontein and the sub-committee took Helen Suzman there and that's how eventually this vigil came about. Because we were very worried about Driefontein, they had the numbers on the doors, already waiting to be removed. It felt as if it was going to happen any minute. And the person who was our chairperson of the Johannesburg Sash at the time was called Jill Wentzel, and she said we had to come up with a plan to try and prevent Driefontein from being removed. So during that time I had spoken to a woman called Mrs Shongwe, and she had told me that in the 1912 prior to the 1913 Land Act, Pixley ka Seme had told everybody that they must try buy up much land as possible, and they had bought this area Driefontein along with the whole lot of other families and they had had to survive on bread and water to be able to find money to pay for the land. So I came home with that thought in my mind, and I just went to sleep and I just said, 'when I woke up in the morning I must have an idea'. So I had this idea that I would fast for a period on bread and water as a vehicle to draw attention to the plight of Driefontein. So I took this to the committee, and they thought about it and they said 'okay that's a good idea', and they said 'where?' So I said 'I think Khotso House' because we had offices there. It's a good place because there are a lot of people coming and going. And then Jill Wentzel was very good at... she knew a lot of people in Johannesburg, her husband was still living at the time and he was a very influential lawyer. So she drew in that she made up that programme where we got speakers in. We made... we had the photographs up and we got the Rand Daily Mail interested... had one of the Sash members Pat Tucker, whose husband was also Raymond Tucker, and she used her maiden name (Pat Schwartz). She was a journalist on the Rand Daily Mail, so she got the Rand Daily Mail very involved, and then we got the newspaper... UDF was lot of organising around the launch of UDF. So while... went to the necessarily have the township support or community support, other than the rural communities that we were working for/with it was mainly trying to conscientise white people to put pressure onto Government, because we also contacted all

the embassies and that sort of thing. We all did a lot of work. So she created this vehicle for this vigil to take place which was a five day vigil and I slept in the chapel. Every morning the South African Council of Churches would have their service they also would let their members know that this vigil was going on, you know. So it became a sort of a thing that grew itself and it had some very nice little things that happened. There was a Jewish member of Black Sash (Molly Sklaar) that used to rush in every morning with a fresh bagel that she made, from (laughs) that was my bread for the day and then there was an Afrikaans friend of my brother's who came in with spring water from his farm, and then like the staff at the Black Sash... the women who did the translations they decided they were... they came every now and then and came and sleep with me so I had the different person sleeping with me in the chapel that became stuff sharing and you know the whole process. And that then led me to meet up with Greg Thulare. Because I was...we were sitting around just talking then I heard these voices in this... You walked into Khotso house from the street and there was this lovely big dome in the reception area and there was a big wall hanging which was a South African Council of Churches wall hanging which had Kgotso, Peace, Uxolo... you know all that sort of thing on it, and a whole lot of patchwork. So it was a lovely place to... you know these photographs because you couldn't miss them. You walked in and there they were. And there were these three young men who I later learnt were from Tembisa and there had been a... because the UDF offices were upstairs as well and they had been to a meeting, some COSAS meeting I think, and then they had come down and they were looking at the photographs. So I went to them and I said to them 'do you know what you looking at'? They were mainly photographs from Pageview in fact, and so I started describing the photographs to them you know and why these photos were important to have them up. Then I gave them programmes and I invited them...

TM: Who had taken those photographs?

GDV: It was another photographer.

TM: Ohh it wasn't you?

GDV: No, I wasn't taking photographs by that time. He was a very well-known photographer in Johannesburg and he'd been very involved with... I should remember his name (Struan Robertson), I can get it! Anyway, so I gave them that programme and off they went. And then I think by about lunch time the next day we were getting ready for the speaker and I was seeing who was coming and encouraging people to come in to listen and that. And then I suddenly saw Greg sitting there and I said 'Oh! Have you come to listen to the speaker?' And then he looked at me and he said 'No I've come to speak to you!' (laughs) I thought 'Ohh! Very strange... why would he want to speak to me?' So anyway I said to him 'look I'm going to go and listen to the speaker' and he said 'don't worry I will come along and I will sit'. And after that we talked but I don't remember talking for long. Then the vigil carried on and we had various... you know these community leaders came, and it actually had quite a lot of publicity, and I do think it must have had some effect on the UDF and the slogans that they chose, you know, because I know that they had been... you know District Six in Cape Town and that sort of thing... But this **No More Forced Removals** became a BIG, big, big issue you know and I think having the vigil at that time was very significant, more significant than we perhaps even realised ourselves.

So the vigil happened and then I carried on, working still for Rob, working on some days at the Advice Office and when I was at the Advice Office, every now and then I would look up and see Greg sitting, waiting for me outside and I said 'ohh! okay' (laughs). I would just look at him and he would wave. I would carry on working and at lunch time I would go out and we would go buy something, takeaways, and we go sit in the Joubert Park because it was the only place we could sit and talk together. And he started telling me a little bit about COSAS... and so... because I'd also been thinking ... just before that I've been thinking... I know so much about these rural areas that we've been going into, but I don't know anything about the townships around Johannesburg, you know. So to me it seems amazing. So then suddenly this young man decides to tell me about some of the townships.

And funnily enough there's a little part that I didn't mention. That when I was still in Durban I had fostered a boy and the reason he is fairly significant is that his parents had been brought out to this country, because they were considered skilled, and the Nationalist Government was looking for skilled people, skilled **white** people to bring to South Africa so that they didn't have to skill black people. And there was a huge immigration drive to bringing these white people... And Ian's parents came from Scotland in an area not far from Glasgow which was a very deeply impoverished area where a lot of ship building had happened, which had virtually collapsed. But Ian's father was a draftsman, and so he had been brought out. But both his parents were alcoholics and all their children ended up in 'homes' of one sort or another, and this boy, Ian, had been in a Methodist 'home' and my mother had taken him and her sister out (for a visit) and something about this boy made me say to Rob 'I think we should foster this boy for a while'. So we did that. When we left Durban he didn't want to come with us to Johannesburg and so he stayed in Durban and all sort of things happened to him. But... then I heard that, when we were living in Johannesburg, that he had gone onto drugs. He moved up to Johannesburg with his parents, gone onto drugs, and had tried to kill somebody, and he was actually in the Cullinan prison. And the reason why it's interesting is because nobody in his family used to go and visit him. I was the only one that used to go and visit him, and he was declared a psychopath and they were putting him under psychological... they were experimenting on him psychologically actually. But as I drove to Cullinan I used to see Tembisa in the distance, and I used to (say) think 'I wonder what goes on in that township?'

And so there's all these little bits of my life you know that sort of came together by the time that I meet Greg. I thought but it's so fascinating because I always thought of Tembisa, you know, because I never... I didn't think about Soweto quite so much, but Tembisa... I used to see and think 'hey you know, (laughs) that's interesting'. So we started seeing each other every now and then whenever Greg came to town. I suppose he was skipping school, and it went on like that for a while and then suddenly he disappeared, I didn't see him anymore. He had given me his father's telephone number at some stage, but I thought 'oh well, he's just got tired' you know, and I just carried on with Black Sash and with the work that we were doing in the various rural areas.

But then on one of the occasions that we went out to Driefontein and Kwangema, because they are close to each other, I took this guy called Paul Weinberg with me, and it was then he asked if I didn't want to become a photographer. No he didn't, he actually asked if I wanted to join Afrapix. So I said I would think about it - because by now I was really getting tired of working for Rob. I'd told him I

wanted to leave and he wasn't paying any attention, and I said to Paul 'okay I will come work for Afrapix, but I'm not working as a secretary, I want to be a photographer.' (laughs).

TM: What did he say?

GDV: Yes, because I had started taking photographs.

TM: And before that.... sorry Gille.... for Black Sash, is it as a volunteer?

GDV: Yes, a volunteer. The only person who... people who were employed at that time were the translators. It was all volunteer, so that thing also became something very important for me but now I became part of this grouping of photographers called Afrapix and I knew very little about photography. I had a camera; I had a couple of lenses. Paul taught me how to process the film and Cedric Nunn taught me how to print (laughs) and that was it. And then Rob was kind enough to build me my own darkroom in the garage as well. So that was very nice, but he was kind of reluctant. He was trying to fit in with what I was doing - that's why his photographer is there with Saul (Mkhize)... But he came from the Netherlands where... which had been occupied by the Germans, and most of the people in the Netherlands during the occupation had felt that they need to keep their heads down and not say anything, and just survive, and that was his background. So he didn't understand why I wanted to put my head up and my hand up (laughs) and say... he kept saying 'why do you have to become involved'? You know and I said 'I'm sorry! It's just something in me that says I have to participate'. I had to do something. You know, it was very, very strong. I said it's like 'I can't not do it!' So it became a time of tension in the house. My daughter had already left home, and in fact when I looked back, I had delayed becoming politically active because my daughter was still at home, some reason, it was an unconscious thing. It was only much later when I realise I gave myself permission to start breaking free when she left home.

TM: She left home for what?

GDV: She went to go to University at Cape Town, but what I hadn't realised was my son actually didn't like me... not being at home (laughs). He always seemed very capable of looking after himself, but in fact he was a home body, and she was the one that wanted to go and explore... Anyway, so that was some unconscious thing that I had listened to in myself.

Ja, yes, so Greg disappeared, and there was one time when I actually phoned his father just to say, you know, I'd meet Greg and I just want to know was he still alright, and what's happening? and Deefa had spoken to me... I didn't realise, it was the first time I'd ever spoken to Deefa, that he loved speaking, and he went on for loong time (laughs). And he said no Greg is not here he is staying with his mother. I didn't quite understand what that meant (laughs), but I just said 'OK, well if you see him you can tell him that I phoned'. It was about six months that I didn't hear from him and I think what had happened to Greg... and I'm still not sure because I've spoken to him about it but he hasn't really confirmed... I think he went into a very deep depression because Brian Mazibuko had been assassinated and he was very close to Brian and I think he'd gone to stay with his mother to sort of just get over that and to lay low for a bit I think.

TM: But when you first meet him, I mean...second, third meeting, what was your sense?

GDV: My sense was that there was this **very** articulate young man and he used to dress in semi military style...

TM: Is that so?

GDV: Yees, you must see his photographs (laughs). You know he was very politically involved and very ardent, and I mean it was his enthusiasm and his passion I think that made me feel very interested in what he was saying, you know. And I felt very privileged as I say, as this white middle class, middle aged woman to be, you know... for this guy to find me interesting enough to spend this time with me you know and to help educate me basically! So I wasn't questioning at all.

Anyway then at one time we were having supper at home and the telephone went, and it was Greg, and this is the first time he'd contacted me after not being in contact, and he said he's coming to Jo'burg but he's off to East London because there's a COSAS conference down there. So I said 'well I don't think I can meet you' so he's like 'it's okay' and then he started phoning me from congress and I think 'why is he phoning me from congress?' (laughs) so... and then he said he's coming back at such and such a time and do you think you will be there? And I said 'I am going to be in town but I'm going to leave at five' you know, 'If you are not here then unfortunately I'm not going to meet you'. And of course the bus never came so I didn't hear for a while, and then he phoned again and then he started meeting up again, the same sort of thing. He would come to town and... but it was a little bit different, it was like ... he had... well... He'd pulled out, you know, out of his depression obviously, but there was something more about him that was like... I think he'd realised what he needed to do for himself. So we still had these conversations but...

TM: Is it still about student's politics?

GDV: It was quite a lot about things in his life, and in Tembisa, and... but that time he brought me this tape, and it was Oliver Tambo's tape, his address to the ANC from exile. So he said to me 'can't we go somewhere, I want you to listen to this', so we went... There's that place on a high hill, but you can see the northern suburbs quite nicely, but there's this place you can pull off on the side of the road (Munro Drive). So we went there and pulled off on the side of the road and Greg slept and I listened to Oliver Tambo, and it went on and on and on and I thought 'why does he want me to listen to all of this?' (laughs) Then shortly after that he asked me to come with him to Tembisa and that's when I first went.

TM: What was your reaction?

GDV: I thought... I was very keen to go. I wanted to go and see, you know, and I thought well this guy knows his way around. So I wasn't nervous actually, because I mean I trusted him... And that's when I started going in...

TM: I mean your first impression of Tembisa.

GDV: Ummm.

TM: This is eighty four?

GDV: Yes, well it's quite different now of course. There wasn't the same amount of cars on the road and there was this long... I mean there's just this little shabby notice saying it was a Cul de Sac, you mustn't... It was a Bantu area and you mustn't go in and all that stuff. And there is this long road passed this farm which is now houses, and then... until you got into the outskirts of Tembisa and the petrol station shortly after the Kentucky. And I was really interested you know because it was beyond something... I had seen a little bit because I've been to this place where people had been moved near Ladysmith, so I sort of seen something of that juxtaposition of the houses, but not a township-township and I almost just absorbing, it was trying...

TM: In Botshabelo?

GDV: To Ladysmith?

TM: Yes.

GDV: Ummm Ekuvukeni.

TM: Ohh Ekuvukeni.

GDV: Yes, yes I went there with Saul. Actually I meet Saul there I went with some...

TM: Saul Mkhize?

GDV: Yes, it's another little story on the side, (laughs) because that was also an important occasion place for me too. So ja, I mean it was just very interesting to me, to know, to see how people live and I don't remember having any particular thoughts. I think I was just trying to not think, and just to get impressions and let Greg guide me and to try and see with his eyes, in a way.

TM: So as you driving along, he is explaining to you?

GDV: He's telling me where various things are and where he wants me to go. And then it started being that I used to go in and fetch people to come and stay in my house at night if they felt they were not able to sleep at home.

TM: Who are these people?

GDV: Well... it was mostly the people that were really close to Greg. So I remember all their names, but certainly Tshepo Mphuti was one of them and then Reuben is another one. And at one stage there were about six of them and they used to just sleep in the lounge, you know getting supper and they would just sleep in the lounge...

TM: How was the first time like, I mean, in your house?

GDV: Well, I had to get used to the way they eat of course! (laughs)

TM: How did they eat?

GDV: I knew they wanted **lots** of food (laughs). I think just the difference you know, I mean Reuben always said it's not a meal if he didn't have bread (laughs). I don't know, it was all part of this new experience and my family were quite good about it. I don't think Andrew liked it so much, he was the one that wasn't so happy, well actually both the males...

TM: I mean they are invading their space.

GDV: Yes totally, totally... Anyway, they were always very nice. But the one night I think is very significant, because of... basically because of politics now as well. As I said they all used to sleep in the lounge, and then one night I woke up at about three o'clock in the morning, and our bedrooms were more at the back and there was a little narrow passage were you go through to the lounge, and I hear all these voices in the lounge and I certainly went through and I quietly opened the door and they were all sitting round in a circle with a book and they were sitting and discussing this book, and I said 'what you doing?' And they said 'ohh we just discussing' obviously some "subversive" type book but... And this made a huge impression on me. I thought 'oh this is amazing because here are these guys, they all school children basically, and yet this is so important to them that they are sitting and having this discussion at three o'clock in the morning'.

TM: Did they ever tell you what they were discussing?

GDV: No... but you know, there was obviously some communist thing I would imagine and to me that was deeply significant because, you know, when you hear the political discussion nowadays, from the youth league and even from COSAS, you know, I just feel that they don't have that political understanding that the COSAS of then had, or that certainly the guys I meet at COSAS, and certainly the ones that were dedicated to COSAS. You know they really wanted to find out; they really wanted to come from a sense of knowing, from what they had read or from what they had heard at that time...

TM: Why do you think Greg invited you to Tembisa?

GDV: It's still puzzles me today, in a way, but Greg has an amazing ability to 'suss' people out very quickly. He has his own way of thinking I think, but it's like... he meets someone and he has a sense of who they are, who they **really** are very fast. And I suppose that leads to a lot decision-making that may or may not be correct, but somehow I said to him the one time, you know, but 'why?'... He said 'but you must know '(laughs). I didn't know what it was, there is something in... He obviously sensed something in me that wanted to know more... He seemed to trust me from the moment he meet me and I'm not sure why that was, at all.

TM: That's interesting and now you're moving to Tembisa with Greg, he's showing you around... The people that you were meeting, the comrades... young comrades, I mean, how did they respond, what were their reactions?

GDV: Well I think Greg, because he was the organiser of COSAS in Tembisa, so I think because **he** was introducing me to them I think they immediately took it as I was someone that they could relate to... you know, or someone they could talk to...

TM: How did he introduce you to them?

GDV: I can't really remember other than Comrade Gille' or 'Comrade'. But the other big thing that happened was I was working in my dark room, sometime in the eighties and I've got photographs... So it's '84, and I suddenly had a feeling that I **had** to go to Tembisa, and I phoned Debra because she was working at this union office at that time in Tembisa, and I said to her 'I've got this feeling that something is happening in Tembisa and I've got to come'. And she said 'okay, well meet me at the traffic lights' (on the western side of Tembisa), you know the only traffic lights were near that Roman Catholic Church....

TM: Yes, Moya church.

GDV: Yes at Moya church ja, those were the only ones at that time, and so I knew where to meet her and then I went... She wasn't there, and so I waited on the opposite side of the traffic lights, and behind me I suddenly saw this stream of students coming from a school there, and going up the road behind me. And then Debra all of a sudden came, and I said 'what's happening, what's happening?' and she said 'no, no, no the students are boycotting and they're marching'. So I said 'I want to go and see, I want to see' and I had my cameras with me and we went, we went behind, and people were saying 'go back, go back' as soon as they saw a white face and then they would say 'go back, go back'....

TM: Chasing you away, wow....?

GDV: Yes, you know, trying to protect me. They said the students are going... and Debra was saying 'carry on, carry on' and we came to the edge, the back of the march, and there was guy, this tall guy, who stood around me and picked up a stone and was about to throw it and Debra leapt out of the car saying 'no, no, no, she's a comrade!' And he came to me and started talking to me, and this was a guy called Tackey Boy who became, who became an 'Askari' later on and who Greg has reconciled back into the fold... and ja...

TM: Is Tackey Boy still alive?

GDV: Yes... and... I did see him later, but that was when he was an Askari... But I didn't speak to him at that time, but I haven't seen him subsequent to '94. So, you know, that was the big introduction, and then the word passed down that Gille was at the back and Greg came and we started speaking and he said 'no, you can't go through you have to go around', and then went around and we saw the police and then Debra started taking me around to where they had burnt some schools and Greg had burnt his aunt's house, because she was a councillor. I've got photographs of her burnt house... So I was beginning to that... It was more than just knowing it... It was like a sense of you know something was happening and I need to go and...so...

TM: And I'm sure now some of the members of the community...

GDV: Now they were starting to get used to me, and as I say. I used to go around with Debra quite a bit in her area. So people started seeing me in Tembisa. They started recognising my car... and I suppose...

TM: I'm sorry you were driving then?

GDV: I was driving a white VW station wagon, which became very useful because the one time (laughs)... it was used as a hearse.

TM: Tell us about that...

GDV: What happened was that people used to start telling me about public meeting and about funerals and they would expect me to come now and take photographs okay. So one time we got to this Zniko cinema, and the body hadn't arrived and apparently the reason the body hadn't arrived was because it had been taken to the house for the night vigil but the hearse hadn't arrived to take it from the house to Zniko. So then they came to me and said would you please be able to use your car, so we went to the house...

TM: Who is asking you?

GDV: The comrades, and then we went to the house and I can probably tell you whose funeral it was from the photographs (Elias Mpande's funeral). So we went to the house and they brought the coffin out and we put it in the car, and so... (laughs)

TM: You are driving?

GDV: Yes, me driving, solemnly and slowly.

TM: And the photographs that you were taking in Tembisa, during this period, where do they end up?

GDV: Well sometimes, you see I was also interested in people's lives, so sometimes it wasn't like highly political photographs. They were photographs of women hanging up washing in the back yards and that type of thing, or a woman washing a floor, and that also feed into various other non-governmental organisation's (NGO's) programmes. So they would go into the files at Afrapix, and then people would come to Afrapix and they would look through the files and choose photographs, but what also....

TM: People who?

GDV: ...who needed photographs, like people from different organisations, NGO's. But we would also make up... once a month we would come together as Afrapix all together in Johannesburg, and we would say okay who has what photographs? And then we would send out packages overseas as well including Mayibuye, of photographs that we felt could be used internationally, you know, against apartheid. So **we** paid for that, photographs had been used in various organisations, because we were very seldom got paid, certainly not from Mayibuye anyway. So, I mean we really understood that we weren't apolitical at all, we **were** political and we were very anti-apartheid and that was very much my reason for going into photography. It was really through the work that I had been doing in Sash, made me feel that I wanted to record this in some sort of way so that people in later years couldn't say well we didn't know, because there are the photographs... We can show....

TM: Earlier on you showed something interesting the permission in Tembisa, tell me about that.

GDV: Well at that time white people were not allowed into a black township, because we were living separately, and unless you had a job as a police person, mainly men of course at that time, or if you were employed by... What was that thing that used to look after the townships?

TM: Councils?

GDV: No, it was before the Councils.

TM: Ohh the Board.

GDV: Yes, you know they were... they were white people... the Administration Boards, that's it. The Administration Boards, I mean there would be white people working for that, and they were allowed in, but if you wanted to go into township you were supposed to get a permit. And I thought I would just test this out. I went along to the Board and said I was coming in to take photographs for Anglo American, which was a little bit of a lie, but although I had been doing some work for one of the wives of one of the Oppenheims which was actually totally different from what I was doing in Tembisa, but still I felt it would do, and so I was actually given a permit (laughs) and used it for about a year or so and then it expired.

TM: After a year... and then you'd get...

GDV: And then I used to just go in and out but anyway until July... until June '86, because in June '86 Greg left the country. His house had been attacked and it was generally felt that if he carried on living in Tembisa he **was** going to be killed. And a lot of the people that I met... I felt that... gradually more and more of them were disappearing and I felt that...

TM: Disappearing in sense of leaving the country or...?

GDV: Ja, sigh, I just wasn't seeing them around anymore, and I felt a lot of the time it was fairly reluctant. And I certainly know Greg didn't really... he wasn't thrilled at the idea of going into exile. It wasn't something that he really, really wanted.

TM: Did he talk to you about it?

GDV: Yes, we did. I mean we spoke about it together as well as with another guy who was working for some lawyers and we did feel that you know the likelihood was that he would be killed. He'd been detained so many times. He was very fortunate that... Well the one time he was detained in my presence, although the police didn't find me fortunately. I was actually in his father's house, and there were a whole lot of comrades who were sitting and who were in and around the house, and I was sitting and chatting to Greg. And Gertrude, Deefa's wife was preparing food, and I had Debra's daughter Makgomo with me. And because they used to like to ride in my car, and all of a sudden the comrades just shot out and there was a cousin, a female cousin of Greg's going like... and she was screaming and Greg suddenly realised that the police are coming. And I said what is going on and he said 'no the police are coming' and I went and hid behind a door in the bedroom with Makgomo. And Greg just sat there, because he knew they were coming for him. And I just, you know, I felt he was so

incredibly brave, because he just sat there in the lounge and allowed them to arrest him. And I asked him about it later and he said well they would have found all the other guys if they hadn't arrest me, they would have chased after them. And as the police walked in they said 'are you Greg Thulare?' and he said 'yes I am' and they said 'well you are going to suffer because we've been looking for you for a long time' and they left unfortunately without searching the rest of the house. I was shaking and fortunately they had a telephone and I had the numbers of a lawyer and I phoned and he was a lawyer who was very happy to push the boundaries as far as he could.

TM: Who was that?

GDV: I will give you his name (Graham Dyson). He eventually ended up in Norway unfortunately, but anyway... And I phoned him and he said 'what's happened?' And I told him, and I could hardly speak, and I said 'I think they have taken him to Tembisa Police Station'. And as they walked into Tembisa station he was phoning them and he said 'I've heard that you have threaten this guy if you touch one hair of his body I'm taking you to court', and so Greg was fortunate in that he was never tortured.

TM: You seem to be some kind of a resource.

GDV: I was... I think I was in many different ways, and in ways that sometimes I didn't understand. And one of those ways was... I think that the young males in particular often used to take me to their mothers, and I think... I only came to understand very much later, that it was probably as to try and help to explain to the parents why they weren't at school. Because the parents obviously wanted their children in school, they've been saving and working so that their children could get an education. And here these children were refusing to be in the schools and they were running around the streets, and they really often didn't understand it. So sometimes I was used as this older woman, who could have been their mother, in another life, to go and speak to their mothers to try and help them to try and make their mothers understand.

TM: And did the mothers understand?

GDV: Not always, and some... In fact Tackey Boy's mother blamed me for what happened to her son and I thought she was quite antagonistic to me. But there was another occasion which was a very moving story in many ways. I was at home in Craighall Park and all of a sudden Peter (Bophela), who now lives with Greg... He also became an Askari... There was a knock on the door and there was Peter and I invited him in and he had tea and he just talked and he didn't say very much and... But he had told me before he'd been one of the guys that had also come to the house before... at night...

TM: Yes, to sleep over?

GDV: Yes, to sleep over. And he told me that his mother worked up the road as a domestic worker, and then he just left. And then I started hearing rumours that he wasn't around Tembisa anymore and I realised that... ohh he said he'd been up to visit his mother, okay. And then I realised that it would had been his way of coming to say goodbye to me without saying goodbye. And then some days later there was another knock on the door and I opened it and this woman was standing there and she introduced herself as his mother, Peter's mother. So I also invited her in and gave her some tea and she said to me 'where is Peter?' and I said 'I don't know.' And then she asked... she said 'but

are you sure you don't know?' and I said 'no but I'm only thinking, I've been hearing these stories, and I'm not sure, but I've been hearing these stories that he isn't here in South Africa,' and she looked at me and she said 'but he didn't take his pass!' and I looked at her and I said 'but where he has gone he doesn't need his pass' and she sat back and she just looked and she thought, and then she said 'ohh I see'. Then she understood what had happened.

TM: Ohh that must have been moving.

GDV: Yes, it was a very moving time and it...

TM: But, but Gille now you have young people... I mean obviously in the media it's all over the case that townships are burning now, and you have young people coming to your house, in the neighbourhood. How life is like... I mean how are people treating you?

GDV: Well the neighbourhood didn't matter quite so much because you know, sigh, in the suburbs we live very separate lives on the whole. Unless you happen to get friendly with your neighbour by chance maybe... There was something that happened a little bit later, but where it really hurt me a lot was... You know I've mentioned earlier that I've been sailing and we were also been sailing in a place called Rietvlei, which is between Johannesburg and Pretoria, and we've been sailing for that club and winning national championships and you know bringing the name of the club in. And those people cut me out, they didn't want to talk to me.

TM: Why?

GDV: There were lots of sexist, racist remarks made around braais and that sort of thing. You know, so that I would hear them and then it actually made me really stop sailing to some extent, although my relationship with Rob was also disintegration at the same time. But I felt that was quite sad, you know that no one really... I made people, you know... I started recognising... My presence made people uncomfortable, and so that's why Black Sash and also Afrapix and also just being in the great family of 'Com' (Comrade) you know, was very important because this was a place where you did feel accepted... you know.

TM: Exactly, yes, ja.

GDV: And I think that's what I'm now... I've just been mourning... with the death of Albertina too... was recognising that that time is no longer, you know, that that's all gone. So, ja, a little bit later I came to hear that there was some young men who were renting the house next door and apparently the Security Police had come to them. But they only told me after I was detained that they (the Security Police) had been actually watching the house, because we were down... And then there was a river at the bottom of the garden, just outside the garden, and they've been watching from the other side and to see what was happening. And I don't know what the Security Police thought I was doing, you know. I think maybe they thought that I was gun running or something, but that wasn't something that ever occurred to me or I would not have been willing to do. Actually I told you what I actually thought about guns... It was really getting lawyers for people that needed them, being a presence in the township, being a presence at various trials... just trying to allow people to know that

not all whites were the ones that they saw normally in the township. You know that there were some people who didn't approve or appreciate the way things were in South Africa...

TM: Did you feel at some point that there were others who were taking advantage of you?

GDV: There is always a little request for money of course (laughs) that always came up you know, but I also recognise that they were fair about that because they would say 'we haven't got taxi money' and they would ask for the exact amount of taxi money you know. They wouldn't ask for a lot more than the taxi money, so I felt in a kind of a way that it was actually fair you know that sort of thing. Every now and then you will get somebody that would sneak in and tell you a tall story and then... but it was usually somebody that I hadn't known before you know, that maybe just saw what was happening and made assumptions about certain things and you know, that this is the soft touch, but it was very seldom the people that I knew quite well.

TM: And then the detention, how does that come about?

GDV: Well in... as I said that Greg went into exile in June '86 and that was... it was very difficult you know, because I knew that things would never be quite the same again.

TM: But why?

GDV: ...well because he played such a pivotal part in my life and we had become very close and you know it was not easy to think him going to exile at all. And there was this other thing, that he had this son Thabang, and when he knew he was going to go into exile he asked if I would look after Thabang and I said I didn't think I could because they hadn't been... As far as I knew there hadn't been any discussion in the family and because Greg and the mother didn't live together in fact they weren't partners at that time, although the mother did go into exile with Greg. I'm never quite sure why she did because I've never seen her at meetings and something... but she became part of Amandla.

TM: Ohh the ANC dancing group?

GDV: Yes, and then Greg's father also decided to go into exile the same time as Greg as well, and Gertrude went as well. So you know... and I felt uncomfortable to look after the child without knowing that the grandparents in particular were going to be alright with it. Because I knew... I'd met the mother's mother and I liked her very much... No I **hadn't** met the mother's mother sorry... I had... but I knew Catherine (Thulare), and I just felt that it wasn't right for me just to take the child, certainly without the mother's consent, so it got left. And then Thabang went to stay with the mother's mother and then I was detained and very shortly after which was the State of Emergency, the June '86 State of Emergency, I had gone actually to... Tsakane (actually Duduza), was it Tsakane? is Tsakane near Kwa Thema?

TM: Yes.

...because there was a family there, Vusi... What was his name? (Mashabane)... And his sister I knew very well..., that... he had been in Modderbee (Prison) and I somehow or other... I went to... I can't

remember why I went, but I went to go and warn him that a State of Emergency was about to be declared (laughs). He went into hiding, he didn't get arrested, but I did! (laughs)

TM: Well done Gille! (laughs)

GDV: So at night... at twelve o'clock at night there's big banging on the door, and so I go and then there are these four security policemen, three males and a female, and it was Lieutenant Colonel, I think it was, and I thought 'ooh, I must be very special!' (laughs) He introduced himself and then there were these guys... I always called them 'the tight jeans and takkies' running shoes brigade, you know, those guys, the 'cool' characters... full of testosterone and agro... Anyway, they were the champing at the bit, to raided this woman's house and they had a reason and they said that they were detaining me under Section 14 (Section 50) I think it was, which I knew was only fourteen days, fourteen... fifteen... Anyway, I thought 'that's not so bad, it's only fourteen days' because the State of Emergency hadn't been announced, it was made retrospective the day after. Anyway they went through the whole house; fortunately I had hidden some things in a place where they never found them.

TM: What were those things?

GDV: It was like diaries and things like that, mainly stuff that I felt might incriminate other people you know, some of my photographs, my passport... So I was very proud that they didn't find those, because they really searched, they did about a four hour search.

Andrew nearly got clouted because he also was scared I think, and scared for his mother. He had some white powder, I think... He was doing medicine at the time and I think it was something like sucrose or something... And one of the 'running... tight jeans' guys picked it up and said 'what's this, what's this?' and Andrew looked and said 'DRUGS of course!' Trying to be like tough, and the guy nearly hit him and the Lt Colonel had to come in...

And there is something so odd that happens, okay... So they're raiding the whole house. The cupboards are getting torn apart and that sort of thing, he goes around.... there was an attachment to this (indicating a book shelf) and he goes around the back and there are all my sailing medals that I had hung on the back of it, and he looks at this and he whistles and he said 'shoof... who do these medals all belong to?' And I said 'they are mine'. He said 'you've got all these sailing medals?' I say 'ja, I'm a national champion in two classes!' (laughs) So he's says to me 'whoo!' and later on... and then the whole atmosphere changes. Anyway they say... he comes to me after this... After all this looking for everything, he comes to me and says 'now Mrs de Vlieg I'm afraid to say I have to take you with me' (both laugh). So I'm allowed to go and pack some things, so I put in a bible that had little sketches in it, it was called the Good News Bible that had little line drawings, because I knew you were allowed a Bible. And I thought 'I've got to have something to read'. So you know, so we get into the car... and this female says to me 'you better take warm because it's really, really cold in the cells', and so I said 'okay thank you' and we're taken to John Vorster Square. But on the way I noticed that the boot is up. They hadn't closed the boot and I tapped the driver on the shoulder and say 'Excuse me, but your boot's up!'. (laughs) 'Oh' he says, so they were obviously 'hyper' too.

So we get to John Vorster Square and there is a lot of activity, because, you know, everybody's been raided basically and this guy takes me to his office, this Lt Colonel and he sits me down and there's this long wait. And then he comes back and he says 'now Mrs de Vlieg, I want to know, are you happy?' And I said 'what you mean am I happy? I'm sitting here in the middle of the night in John Vorster Square, freezing cold, and you ask me if I happy?' (laughs) So he said 'ohh, oh, oh I'm sorry that we had to do this to you, by the way, he said, do you know that I sail?' (both laugh)

TM: Finally.

GDV: And I said 'really? Where do you sail?' So we are having this chat! And he said 'I'm sorry I've got to ask you to have your finger prints taken.' So we go and have the finger prints taken and they say 'you can go wash' and I see the towel is black so I think 'ohh they've got a lot of people in here tonight!' (laughs) So then after they done that they say 'okay now we're taking you...' And so I don't know where they're taking us, and there was another young woman that gets put in with me. I sort of knew her a little bit but not a lot, mainly from End Conscription Campaign and some other thing, maybe Christian Youth or something... I had seen her around, anyway. I'm holding her..., she's a lot younger than me. I'm holding her hand and trying to comfort her, and we get taken to Hillbrow police station, because apparently the jails are full.

TM: Wow. So it was a total sweep...?

GDV: Ja, no, it was a big sweep. So we get put into separate cells and in my cell is a woman already... who'd been arrested for shop lifting. She'd stolen some prunes because the man she lived with liked prunes. I just felt it was such a... and her arm is broken... so he probably beat her up as well. And she was so worried about me and... we had to... there was only one bed so we had to try and share this bed, and then she said... because we were really cold... and so she said 'I think you better come and lie next to me' and she said 'lie on this side because otherwise this arm that was in plaster might hurt you' and she was really sweet. You know because I wasn't sure you know if there were microphones in the cells, because I don't know... what was going on... Anyway, the next day I said to her 'do you think you can remember a telephone number?' and so she remembered Rob's number at work and then she did phone him, because I knew she was going out, because she had to go to court and then get bail and that sort of thing...

So after that I was on my own except for one night, when a woman was arrested in the night and she got put into my cell. And I was very worried about her because she started opening the basin and she started opening the taps, and I thought 'oh my God, the cell is going to get flooded!' By this time I was very possessive about my cell. I'd cleaned it, it was shining bright, I didn't want anyone messing with my cell thank you! (laughs) But she was quite an elderly woman and her story was also very sad because she used to get lonely and she would drink and she would say her family never came to visit her and that sort of thing...

TM: And the cells are separated in terms of racial...?

GDV: Yes, yes very much so. But the only time you had contact with anyone else was the prisoners, the short term prisoners, like those arrested for trespassing... something like that or awaiting trial...

They would bring your food in in the morning. And gradually I think it got to be known that these two women weren't criminals they were 'political', because these guys' attitude towards you was very respectful. You know there was usually a white policeman who would come in with them and then these guys would bring the food in. I mean they had scars down their faces and one eye (laughs) and that sort of thing... these people that lived out in the streets... But they suddenly seem to become conscious of something being different about you, and in fact, when the two of us were eventually released, these guys were standing out in the outside courtyard that the cells would lead out onto, they're standing in the last of the sun, because it was winter sun, smoking their cigarettes before being locked up for the night. And when they saw that we were being released they actually clapped! So there were amazing little interactions you know, even in the cells.

TM: So how long did you spend, how long did they keep you there?

GDV: Thirty seven days. Do you want me to send you my little story about it? I can send it, because I did write it down. I actually did a tape of it and then I wrote it.

TM: That would be great, wow. So after detention did you continue or what?

GDV: At that time Rob and I had actually separated, but he was very good when I was in detention because as I say he got... he at least found out where I was by this phone call, and then he came to the police station and pretended that I had to sign his company cheques. So that was a way of him seeing me, and then he was able to bring in some clothes. I mean one of the interesting things about being in the Hillbrow police station was that the police there were very used to just having, you know, vagrants, or drunks or 'short term' people and they didn't understand what it meant to have political prisoners, so they often gave us privileges that we weren't entitled to.

TM: Oh! Like what?

GDV: Well, for instance, we were allowed to sit outside of our cells in the sun sometimes, you know, until the security police found out and then said no we weren't supposed to interact with one another, you know. So there were a lot of these little things you know that they didn't ... And this young one police woman also said to me 'when are you going to be released? Haven't you gone to court yet?' And I said 'I have no idea' I said 'you ask the security police when I'm going to be...'

TM: So you didn't get charged there?

GDV: No, nobody was ever charged. You know, you were never charged, you never knew... I still to this day don't know why they arrested me. I mean they came to question me but... I still think that the Tembisa police thought one thing, told the security police to arrest me, but they hadn't actually communicated **why** (laughs).

TM: But when they questioned you, what did they ask?

GDV: They asked me about Black Sash, and I was only too happy, because I said 'I don't understand why you have to detain me to ask me about Black Sash. You could walk into the Black Sash office any day and anybody would answer that question!'

TM: And your interaction with Tembisa, did it continue after that?

GDV: No, then it actually took a bit of a back seat for a while you know. I tried to go in... somebody invited me to a wedding and then I thought okay I'm going to try and see if I can't get permission to go to this wedding, but they turned me down.

TM: Wow.

GDV: Because I actually had...

TM: Who was this, was it the council?

GDV: No, no... it was the police this time because they were now totally in control. And also, I had interactions with the high up policeman in Springs, where Greg is now, (laughs) I'd gone you know, there were all these Tembisa guys in Modderbee. I'd actually gone to ask if they couldn't carry on with their studies. And so I'd seen this guy, who was the Colonel (Brigadier) in charge of all of East Rand, and so he knew about me already as well, and so he had the Tembisa guy with him... You know one of the things about these police security cops, they always made sure that they were at least two or three of them if not more, while there was usually only one of you. They were really scared of you, you know.

TM: Wow. I didn't know that.

GDV: Yes. (laughs) Anyway it was quite funny because I think when they came to question me, as I say, I don't really think they knew what they were doing quite honestly, they were just to go and question... and they asked about Black Sash... and I mean, you must read the other account because it has some funny little incidents.

TM: I'd love to hear that. But I mean looking at Tembisa today... I mean you were there late last year, what were your impressions on Tembisa now, compared to the one in the past?

GDV: Well you know apart from the all the extra traffic, there are extra traffic lights as well, and there are now tarred roads and I see there is a nice library... and... I still see so much of what is the same, you know. There is still... people haven't got proper places still for their rubbish, and we still have water running in the streets... we still have a lot of the same houses that I knew that haven't really been changed, you know either than maybe the people that are in them have changed them for themselves. Yes there are some RDP houses. Yes, Tembisa is double the size that it was when I first went in obviously because I mean... because now Ivory Park is big as Tembisa. You know there are all those differences.

I went back again in... I started going in again in '89 actually and I started taking a lot of... I've got a lot of photographs then of all the informal houses that were being begun in Tembisa, you know because it was after influx control had been lifted. And that actually created a huge difference in Tembisa - lifting that influx control. Because up 'til then my sense of Tembisa had been that... in spite of all the tensions and the fights and all the discords that there was in the township, you know, and people knew who people were, they knew who the hostel-dwellers were, they knew who the

shopkeepers were, they knew who the priests were, they knew who went to what church, they knew who the gangsters were and they knew who the comrades were. There was that sense of a township knowing who people were and where their allegiances lay, the moment influx control happened.... and I never used to lock my car when I went into Tembisa, never (laughs) because I knew it was safe! Later when I went in to... in '89 already, I actually spent the night at Reuben's house the one night, and he had parked his car next to the house and his car was broken into. Now that never would've happened earlier! So already there was a different thing happening, people were starting not to know who people were because of this huge pouring in of people from all over everywhere.

TM: And '89 when you went back to Tembisa, now who is guiding you?

GDV: It was more Reuben by that time. Ja, ja. Because he helped me go to these... you know because I also... at this stage... because before you were invited to a meeting so you took photographs, you didn't ask anybody 'can I take your photograph?' In fact people used to come to you saying 'can you take my photograph?' So... and at the funerals it was the same sort of thing... and now people who were having to build their houses day in day out, you know, and dismantle them in the morning and build them at night... that was more sensitive I always felt, because these people hadn't invited you so I needed someone to help me get across my request to take photographs and explain, you know, why I was interested in doing it, you know, I mean... and to get their permission, so that Reuben was very helpful.

TM: And this was still for Afrapix?

GDV: It was still for Afrapix but it was also very personal, everything you did for Afrapix was personal but you shared, you know, so everybody had their own personal interests, but we just shared photographs, it was a collective, you know really. It really it wasn't like Afrapix told you to do this.... sometimes they did, sometimes there's this job that came up and who wants it? You know... but mostly it was driven by your own desires to take things and it was nearly always focused on the political side of South Africa, in one way or another.

TM: And what would you say were your one or two most memorable moments in Tembisa?

GDV: Well I think of one which made me realise my position in Tembisa a little bit, was the one time when there was this meeting again at Zniko and I can't remember particularly which one it was, but... you know how people move in and out of meetings - they don't always just stay and listen to the speaker. So I'd been taking some photographs and then I went outside and I was just standing in the sun to see who was outside. And this guy comes up to me and he seems to be aggressive and he said 'who are you and why do you think you can just come here and take photographs?' you see... so I start talking to him saying 'I've often been here in Tembisa...' and then but the comrades around had heard this and they then came to the two of us and they started saying 'who are you? why is it that you can come to Tembisa and you don't even know who gille is?' (laughs) and it started getting quite nasty and Greg had to actually come and mediate and he took this guy around the corner and spoke to him. And it turned out that this poor guy actually lived in Tembisa buy he was at school somewhere outside of Tembisa, I think one of the Technikons or something and he'd happen to be in Tembisa to come to this public meeting and so he was trying to show...(laughs) and that's when I sort

of realised and thought 'ohh my word...', but then I also I did realise that my presence can be dangerous to other people quite unconsciously you know so from very earlier on I did understand that even my intensions of going into Tembisa, even though I had been **requested** to go into Tembisa and my intensions of what I did there were... what I felt were good intensions, the waves that I caused could have bad consequences, and I had to be as careful as I could be, you know, of that happening.

TM: Eighty two 'till, I mean, South Africa is liberated, do you have any regrets for having playing the part?

GDV: NEVER, never, not at all! I wish in a way I had become a lot more conscious earlier, I don't think I could have done it, you know fortunately even on my own now it gives you a lot of time to think (laughs) and I was just thinking the other day about my life because it's what you do as you older, and I was actually thinking that I don't think I could have... When I look back at the decisions I've made in my life you know the one of going to London and meeting my first husband and all that sort of thing, the one of meeting Rob, and eventually choosing him and not the other guy, given what I knew then and the character that I had then, I don't think I could have made other choices, you know... And certainly I look back at the time that I became politically involved as a VERY, very important aspect of my life, as I mean obviously... because I've had children and that sort of thing and I have grandchildren and they are incredible valuable to me, I remain very politically attuned and I'm very thankful that I had that period when I meet so many people who taught me so much - not only the women at Black Sash... some of them had the most amazing minds and getting incredible insights, but to those guys that were in COSAS and to the women as well, you know, just opening up and allowing me to see how things were. It's an experience that I would always be so thankful and so grateful for.

TM: Gille thank you very much I've had a very wonderful interview with you. I would like to stay long and talk, by the way what happened to your vehicle?

GDV: I think I sold it eventually... I don't remember what I got after that... I think I sold it to Reuben, I gave it to Reuben! You must ask him when you talk to him.

TM: Alright thank you.

