My greatest wish would be first of all to recognize, today we are 50 years old, we are nowhere near to what we aimed for our dispensate, non-racial, non-sexist South Africa. There are tens of thousands living in poverty, unemployment, without homes, without amenities. Alright we have done quite a bit as far as housing goes, as far as electricty goes, sanitation, nothing to ignore, it’s substantial. But a lot more has to be done. What has happened now of course is that so many avenues are open and my greatest wish would be that young people must take the opportunity to study to equip themselves better so that they can serve, they can take up the professions.

Every profession is now open. More and people are now being given scholarships so that we not only see this in every profession that are open to them so that they can then not just see their professions to better, not only themselves and their families, but the community – South Africa. And it is only in that way that one day future generations will see what we were dreaming of one day. So that would be my greatest wish that there would be no more hunger, there’ll be no children without proper clothing, food, bicyclization, everything. That is a society that we wish will come in, in the years to come. Today there are more and more opportunities more assistance, and people should take advantage of that is to that goes with what I am saying, what my wish is for the future.

- Kathy, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of his release from prison.

Ahmed Mohamed Kathrada (or ‘Kathy’ as he is popularly known) was born in 1929 to Indian immigrants in a rural town in South Africa. It was during a period of racism and oppression of human rights in that country. Kathy was only 12 when he began a life of tireless activism for non-racialism and democracy. He was arrested several times and, along with eight friends and fellow activists including Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, he was sentenced to life imprisonment at the famous Rivonia Trial. He spent 26 years in prison, 18 of which were on Robben Island.

Kathy was released from prison in 1989 and, in 1994, is the new democratic South African government, he was elected to the South African Parliament and served as President Mandela’s Parliamentary Counselor. Kathy is the recipient of numerous national and international awards, is a prolific author, and, while in prison, earned four university degrees.

Kathy’s exemplary leadership continues to inspire South Africans and others around the world to work for freedom, non-racialism, and democracy.

This exhibition was originally developed on the occasion of Kathy’s 80th birthday by the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation and the Nelson Mandela Museum. This U. S. version was produced by the University of Kentucky and Michigan State University. The exhibition provides insights into ‘Kathy’ the individual and honors his commitment to non-racialism and democracy.
KATHY THE
GALLANT

With his film star good looks and charm, the young Kathy was not immune to attraction of young women. While he started exploring relationships while still at school, his life was marked by two loves. The first was Sylvia Naame, a comrade in the Communist Party whom he met in Cape Town, during the relaxation between his second and third banning orders. The second is Barbara Hogan, who was released from prison shortly before Mandela in 1990. Kathy met her soon thereafter and it was on the plane journey during Mandela’s first trip to England after his release that this new relationship would blossom. Kathy and Barbara remain life partners to this day.

KATHY THE
FOOD LOVER

Whoever knows Kathy knows that he loves food. Mince and peas, briyani, ice cream and chocolate, and especially chocolate-covered dried cherries from his Michigan friends. In prison being told food into a fantasy as he and his colleagues were obliged to eat whatever was served to them. Food was a site of struggle for Kathy and others in prison where they used various hunger strikes to press for better conditions. Food was not just limited, badly prepared and under-nourishing, it was racially discriminatory. Indian and Colored prisoners were fed more and slightly better than black prisoners. The hurt Kathy felt over this discrimination is reflected in the title of the Indian and U.S. press for better conditions. Food was not just limited, badly prepared and under-nourishing, it was

KATHY THE
RECORD KEEPER

Kathy the political activist became Kathy the record-keeper when he was told that he would spend the rest of his life in prison. Forced, through prison restrictions, which included that he may only write and receive one letter of 500 words each, every six months, only to family, Kathy began making copies of each letter he wrote. When he was released from prison in 1989, he came out with 900 carbon copies of letters and all his incoming mail.

KATHY THE
CELEBRITY

After Madiba (Mr. Mandela, fondly known by his clan name) was elected president of South Africa on May 9, 1994, he asked Kathy to be his Parliamentary Counselor. Along with the job came a sharing of some of the demands written on Madiba from celebrities, presidents and royalty placed on Madiba from celebrities, presidents and royalty. Along with the job came a sharing of some of the demands written on Madiba from celebrities, presidents and royalty. Along with the job came a sharing of some of the demands written on Madiba from celebrities, presidents and royalty.

KATHY THE
DRIVER

As with everything else in his life and political career, Kathy began driving at a young age. He was behind the wheel of his father’s black Oldsmobile that he was taught to drive at the age of 11. He was 16 when he got his license, and in 1946 drove the Passive Resistance Council office car where he began working full-time. Thereafter his driving skills were utilized often, and Kathy was asked to drive one leader or another to some or other event. In 1962, he drove Moses Kotane to Durban to see Chief Albert Luthuli and a British journalist to a secret venue where he filmed Madiba announcing the reason for the turn by the African National Congress to the armed struggle.

KATHY THE
PEOPLE’S HISTORIAN

Kathy and his colleagues always had in mind that one day someone would record the history of the liberation movement. While still in prison Kathy assisted Madiba in the creation of the foundation manuscript of Madiba’s autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom. Kathy and Walter Sisulu wrote comments on Madiba’s first drafts and his final version was transcribed into tiny handwriting by Laila Chiba and Marc Mathara. After the prison authorities found this draft, their handwriting, buried in canisters on the prison grounds, Kathy and the others were punished by the warders; they lost the privilege of pursuing studies for four years.

KATHY THE
CHILDREN’S MAN

His free life cut short at the age of 33, when he was arrested in the raid on Liliesleaf (a farm in the Johannesburg area where he and other political activists were hiding on July 11, 1963), meant the end of any hope of a normal life for Kathy and certainly the end of the possibility of fatherhood. Although he and his colleagues expected the death sentence, they were sentenced to life imprisonment less than a year later. The most severe deprivation of all in prison, according to Kathy, was the deprivation of children. Children under 16 were not allowed to visit. Kathy and his colleagues began yearning for the sound of them.