

Leonora De Souza-Zilwa Interview

TIME IN CODE	QUESTIONS	CONTENT	TIME OUT CODE
00:00:01:15	Can you please hold up the book and read Madiba's note?		00:00:17:20
00:00:18:00		This is the making of the Constitution, " <i>The Story of South Africa's Constitutional Assembly</i> " May 1994 to December 1996. It starts with a small snippet out of President Nelson Mandela's speech on 8 May 1996: " <i>The brief seconds when the majority of honourable members quietly ascended to the new basic law of the land have captured, in a fleeting moment, the centuries of history that South African people have endured in search of a better future. As one, you the representatives of the overwhelming majority of South Africans have given voice to the yearnings of millions. And so it has come to pass, that today South Africa undergoes her rebirth, cleansed of a horrible past, matured from a tentative beginning, and reaching out to the future with confidence.</i> "	00:01:24:15
00:01:28:15	Can you take us to the 8th of May. What was happening, where were you, how did you start the morning, and how were you feeling?		00:01:35:21
00:01:37:08		We had worked nearly right through the night to finalise the Constitution, so we were exhausted. But on that morning of 8 May there was an air of expectation, and there was a palpable feeling of happiness around. As with most of the Constitutional Assembly, we were living in a time of Camelot. You could sense that this was the beginning of something new; this was the beginning of a new chapter for us – for those of us who were a part of it, and hopefully for the citizens of South Africa. So, if you look at this, this picture says it all really. What you've got here is Madiba walking from Tuynhuys to the new assembly to adopt the Constitution. See how happy Cyril is over there, and even Zanele who was Thabo Mbeki's [the Deputy President] wife at that stage – you can see the excitement in her demeanour here too. So that day we had opened up Parliament to the people. There were school children and normal citizens, and they	00:03:57:20

		<p>were all lined up in the precinct of the Parliament. What would normally happen would be for Madiba to walk out of Tuynhuys and maybe go into Parliament. We had to convince him not to go out the front door, but to rather go through the back because there were so many people. The gallery was full! People in the chamber knew that something special was going to happen. On that day, it wasn't only the adoption of the Constitution, people's minds also changed. Thabo Mbeki did his "<i>I am an African</i>" speech, and it brought about an enlightenment in people's minds about accepting their African-ness no matter who they were. This was very much what the basis of it was – we were starting a new law for South Africans based on our African-ness and our oneness.</p>	
00:03:58:13	Where were you on that day? Take me through your responsibilities.		00:04:02:00
00:04:02:03		<p>I was the PR Officer. I was part of the protocol to get Madiba into the chamber and was also part of the media team which gathered all the speeches, took them to Tango Lamani and Enoch, and I think Katharine ... At that stage we were going to hand out the speeches, so I was a bit of everywhere. I was basically coordinating the event from a bigger picture also. We had planned it a few days earlier, and had set up what was going to happen. They'd go into chambers, say their speeches, and then come outside where there would be a mural which was the steps to democracy. This would then end the day. I think we ended up in the precincts, at 02:00 and we were back at about 04:30. We basically went home, cleaned up and went back. I think a lot of the Constitutional Assembly members did the same. The actual members and the staff looked fresh, but we weren't. We were exhausted and had worked right throughout that night. The one memory that I have, other than going to fetch Madiba and the happiness that was in Tuynhuys then, was the sense that this was a historic moment. There were a few times, but this was one of those times that it was history in the making. When we went to collect the speeches, one of the downtimes which was actually a bit upsetting</p>	00:08:29:18

		<p>for me was from all the speakers. We went to the Deputy President's speech writers and asked for the speech, to which they said 'No.' Leo and I asked what the meant, and they replied that he had written his own speech and that they had copies of what he had written and had to print it and give it to us. We were outside getting ready and everybody had taken their places inside. I was with Tango Lamani and another member of the media team, and as the President started speaking the tears started running down my face. Tango looked at me and said that it was a beautiful speech. I replied that it was an amazing speech, but what we realised is that the Deputy President had trumped all of our work ... All of this work and the focus of that day very much was on that speech, which was great but it was a bit of a bummer because it was like all the work and effort that we had put in and somebody had come in from the side. It's not a good thing to say, but I've said it and it does take away the glory. This was the magic about the whole process – it was about everybody participating even if they weren't a member of the Constitutional Assembly, even if they weren't a staff member. Every South African was given the opportunity to make their voice heard, and it was done in a real way before public participation wasn't the norm. It wasn't even understood, but the process ensured that we went into areas to go and get comment from people who really didn't have a voice before. We went into rural areas that you couldn't get into with normal transport. We got into those old flossy drones that dropped us close, and then we got into 4x4s with the members of Parliament and went into those areas and actually listened ... Those members of parliament sat there and listened. We went into Mpumalanga where a white woman who had never spoken to a member of parliament before gave her opinion of what was happening. The youth were well-represented among the members of parliament themselves, so it was really a very special time.</p>	
00:08:32:00	Can you tell us about how Arniston came about, and		00:08:42:03

	where it was in the two-year process?		
00:08:42:08		<p>It was towards the end of the process. I think we had a few weeks left. It was on about 1 April when we went to Arniston, but just before that process I think they realised that they weren't going to meet their deadlines. There were serious deadlocks, so what happened was that a decision was made to find a venue. We had to keep the members of the Constitutional Assembly and key members together, and force them to break the deadlocks. So we took them to Arniston, which at that stage was Waenhuiskrans, an old military base which had been turned into a semi-recreational holiday place. We took them there and forced them to have intense negotiations. There was a pool table and a bar, so there was some downtime also, which was nice. There was some serious downtime which were really the icebreakers and helped to break the deadlocks. There was also times where had a bit of cabin fever, so I think it was Valli and Kader Asmal that walked from Waenhuiskrans into Arniston. The people of Arniston didn't know that these people were just around the corner in the negotiations, so there were members of Parliament going walking with security guards in front of and behind them. Remember that these were ministers and members of Parliament ... They walked a good few kilometres from Waenhuiskrans to Arniston. I will never forget this one guy who was watering his plants, and he looked up and saw these people walking past and he says: "Wife, wife come see this. All those people from TV are walking past here," It was as if even though we locked them up, they would do normal things like go for a walk. We usually put them in a vehicle and drove them back. We lost Johnny de Lange once though. We started with him but we didn't finish with him, and we couldn't find him anywhere. One of the members of Parliament suggested that there must be a pub close by, so we went back, and found him there! It was an intense period, and as much as they argued, and as much as they differed, they used to be able to enjoy each other's company in recreation too.</p>	00:11:27:13

Leonora De Souza-Zilwa Interview

00:11:28:01	What happened when Mandela arrived in Arniston and told everybody that they had to meet the deadline?		00:11:33:05
00:11:33:23		We had been informed that Madiba was coming, and that there was going to be some stern words that were going to be said. So in preparation for his arrival, we informed the venue and additional security measures were put in place. They venue painted the areas where they thought Madiba was going to walk, and got everything ready. Madiba walked in, greeted everybody, and told them why it was important that they meet the deadline. A lot of breakthroughs happened there. If you look at this, there are some pictures in this book ... Which is an amazing book that shows how exhausting that process in Arniston was ... Here you've got Cyril sleeping ... You've got someone talking to a National Party member to try and convince her that this is the time ... In the bar, Valli in the bar talking to Tony Leon. And then here, these are the areas this took place in Arniston ... This is the deadlock breaking room, also in Arniston.	00:12:59:03
00:12:59:06	Can you tell us about the urgency of that process, and how you and the rest of the team put your lives on hold for two years and did everything you could to meet this deadline?		00:13:19:10
00:13:19:23		Everything was about meeting deadlines, and everything had to happen within a certain space of time. We knew we had 17 months to finish everything. So, where today you set meetings and you can stop them and start again, you couldn't do that in those days. You had to push through because there were theme committees and deadlines had to be reached. So you saw the exhaustion of people who used to work through the night. It was real exhaustion. You'd also see the Chairman, Cyril Ramaphosa, continuously referring to time. As an example, the clock would say 02:45... Even in terms of when we took	00:15:28:10

		<p>a photo, he is going on time so we would have to keep in mind our time constraints. So, all the members of the Constitutional Assembly and staff didn't have lives. We had to work together, eat together, drink together, and party together. It was an intensive time where everybody had to do everything together. But what worked well was when they put the administration together, knowingly or unknowingly. They got people who were very strong-willed and very passionate people together from completely different backgrounds. These were people who could fight and laugh at the same time, and actually push things through ... So that was part of the magic that happened there. I think that had a lot to do with Marion and Hassen and Louisa's skills ... Whether they knew it or not, were skilled in pulling a team together that became really strong. It's just a pity that that team couldn't stay together and move into government with the experience that we'd gained there ... It's a really big pity.</p>	
00:15:29:00	Can you tell us about 10 December 1996, and preparing for that day?		00:15:32:00
00:15:32:05		<p>A lot of the administration had started winding down, and people had started to leave. So, there was a core of us left behind, and we had previously sent through a recommendation to the President that we thought it would be good for the Constitution to get promulgated in Sharpeville ... To make sure that we go and clean up and show our intent. That proposal went wherever it went ... We didn't get any feedback, and then there was a call from the Presidency to say that Madiba was going to sign the Constitution, and that he was going to Sharpeville. Our response was that it was too short a time ... I think it was two weeks or something like that ... That we had ... It was too short a time. Information came back to us that he was going to sign it there even if he had to take a table and put it there ... He was going to sign it there. We said that we were going to get this together, and we were going to pull it off together. So what we managed to do within about two weeks was go to the site where the Sharpeville massacre was, asked some children and local artists to pick up stones from the</p>	00:21:12:10

		<p>area, put it together, and set up a monument there. We actually managed to pull off a very big event with all members of Parliament, international dignitaries who were there witness it with the people of Sharpeville, and thousands and thousands of people. It was one of the biggest events that I've actually been part of, and we did it, we met that deadline! There were a lot of hiccups on the day though, and it was quite organic the way the event unfolded. One of the things was that we expected Madiba to arrive in a chopper and then get into a car and drive to Sharpeville, unveil the monument, greet some of the people ... Well some of the victims and families of the Sharpeville massacre would be there ... He'd greet them and then he would go with them to the stadium which was just down the road. So when Madiba's helicopter landed, he steps out and he is not alone, he's with Helen Suzman. So we thought that we could sort it out, but there's one thing we didn't take into consideration ... The helicopter landed right next to a crèche with children. We had deadlines and Madiba and children ... And Helen Suzman. They went to see the children and started chatting to them. It was me, Mary, the photographer Ruth Motau, and Sarah. We tried to get them into the car because time was passing, and Madiba was greeting each child and introducing them to Helen Suzman, asking them if they knew her. He was telling them that she was just as important as he was. Eventually, we put them in the car and off we go. We then realised that we were supposed to be in the front because we should be receiving him when he gets there. The convoy starts moving, they're in a dual carriageway this way and we're behind. There's oncoming traffic, way so we decided to take a risk. We're in the car, I'm driving, and the convoy is going that way, so we move over into oncoming traffic. The security tell us to move because we're not allowed to pass the convoy, and eventually they tell us to get off the road. The traffic officer's car starts coming towards us, but we go straight through and get there ahead of Madiba. As Madiba gets out of the car, he points at us because he saw what we did to get everything going while he greeted everybody. It was very moving when he unveiled that</p>	
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		monument, because it was real. It wasn't one of these gaudy monuments, it was children and a local artist that did it. Hugh Masekela came to perform for us, and Jimmy Dlodlu was a young guitar player, and they all performed for free. They entertained the crowd while we were arriving. It was a very hot day. Madiba comes up to do his speech ... We've also got the Military Defense Force a few kilometres away. I'm standing with the General, so after Madiba's speech the helicopters will be coming with the flag which they were still promoting. When Madiba speaks, the one thing you know is that he puts his glasses down and his speech down, and then he's going to speak at his own time and at his own pace. We had planned that it was going to be two minutes that he's spoke, and then the helicopters would come. As we start to hear the helicopters, we thought he'd finished taking off his glasses and putting them down and starting to speak ... And while he's speaking, the helicopters are coming. I go to the General and say, "Please can't you stop them." He replies, "Lady, there is no reverse on a helicopter. I'm sorry, but we have to let them pass." Madiba acknowledged it, and continued with his speech. He then signed the Constitution with Cyril on the stage. Mary, the speaker, was also with him on the stage. After that, we did everything we had to do ... It was a great event.	
00:21:13:00	Can you tell us about receiving that package from Nelson Mandela, and the wrapping up of everything?		00:21:18:10
00:21:18:23		I'm still not sure exactly how I got into the Constitutional Assembly. I know that I submitted my CV for some government job somewhere because I'd been a reporter for a very small newspaper, <i>De Echo</i> , on the highveld, and had done some work with a few ANC [African National Congress] members. I wasn't very politically active, and I can't say that I was part of the struggle or anything like that. I actually had a very white life, and just after the elections in 1994 I moved back to Fourways and was going to start my life there. I received a call and was told that I'd been shortlisted for the Constitutional Assembly. I	00:26:19:07

		<p>asked what the Constitutional Assembly was. They invited me to go to an interview in Cape Town. I thought that it would be a trip to Cape Town because perhaps it was for them to tick off that they'd interviewed me. On my way there, I did some research on the Constitutional Assembly and the importance of it, and I started learning things that I didn't know about what the group had to do. I started to get a bit nervous on the plane to Cape Town, and once I was there I went into an interview room with Marion Sparg who conducted the interview, and Enoch Sithole who was the Head of Media also interviewed me. I thought that it was an okay interview ... not too bad. I got back on the plane and started drinking copious amounts of gin and tonic, while saying to myself that I was never going to get this job, but that it was fine. I didn't hear anything for a while, and two weeks later I receive a call asking me if I could be in Cape Town in a week's time. At the time, I was working for a very corporate company. I asked myself if I was going to do it, and how I was going to do it. They asked if I had a car, to which I replied that I did. They suggested that I put it on the railway and pack my things as it would only be for a few months. My reply was: "What the hell, let's do this." I put my Uno on the train and took my bags to Cape Town. I arrived at these very dingy little offices where I was to report for duty. No one really knows where I'm supposed to go, and they're all (including Hassen) looking at me like they don't really know what to do with me. I then realised that they hadn't really planned my job – I was the PR Officer. They eventually showed me to my office, which was like a cupboard. There was a small cupboard and desk, and no windows. I remember thinking that I was young and that I was going to do this. During the process you start experiencing life and why this change is so important, and you start interacting with people from different backgrounds, races, political perspectives ... And then the magic happens. Your mind opens up, and your heart opens up, and you start realising what these endless possibilities are that we have as South Africans. The whole process was a fantastic experience of all these people who knew the urgency and the importance of the work</p>	
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00:26:19:10	What are the three Ps?		00:26:20:08
00:26:22:10		<p>There was no Red Bull in those days that could give you a kick. So you had to rely on what we gave to everyone every morning. We lined up the glasses, poured the Berocca into the glasses, and everybody came and drank it. These were members of Parliament, and you had to give them proper food, and you had to give them sustenance. Parliament's bar closed at 21:00, and that bar was an important channel into opening conversations. The one night we realised that we were going to have to pull an all-nighter, so Fazela says to me that the bar is closed, and here's a thousand bucks. In those days, a thousand bucks was a lot, so I asked her what I should do. She said that I needed to find alcohol. It was 23:00, and I wasn't sure where I was going to find alcohol. She suggested that there must be a stash</p>	00:28:13:08

Leonora De Souza-Zilwa Interview

		spot somewhere. So I get into my Uno with the money, and I ask the service officer where the closest township is. It was in Langa, so we go there as there must be a tavern or a shebeen that's still open. All the shebeens were closed though because it was 23:30 by then, so eventually the service officer suggests that there's a guy who has a shebeen. We knock on the door, and he greets us. There's me, a white woman standing in Langa with someone else, cash in hand saying that we want something. He says no. I tell him that I just want alcohol, and he eventually agrees. We bought all the alcohol, rushed back, and set it out so that when people wanted to relax, they could. Everybody had their specific tonic that they needed, and we had it there. On day, we sat through until about 02:00 or 03:00.	
00:28:28:00	What does the Constitution mean to you? What is your emotional reflection on the document, having been instrumental in the constitution-making process?		00:28:45:16
00:28:47:00		On a personal level, this document has been a roadmap to me because it has allowed me to live the life which I have now. Before the process started, it wouldn't have been able to do that. I married my Xhosa husband, I've got my Nikiwe, I've got my Siyamthanda, and I've got my brother who is married to his husband. This document has allowed all of that to happen ... Before we would have been jailed for all of those things that I just told you about. This document has really set me free as a South African to be able to live my life the way I want to, and have the blended family that I'm blessed with today.	00:29:40:16
00:30:13:20 Final thoughts		It was a time when we lived and walked amongst giants and legends. I don't think we appreciated what they've left us, and how difficult it was for them to negotiate when there were so many challenges and risks faced by South Africans. I don't think that today ... Particularly the youth ... If they can just appreciate the endless possibilities of war, of civil unrest, of violence, and of all the challenges that they faced, and within the timeframe that they had to negotiate this ... I do	00:31:31:20

Leonora De Souza-Zilwa Interview

		believe that they set a good basis for it. The Constitution, though, isn't something that has to be cast in stone. As society changes, and as our needs develop, which they do. I think that we have to revisit it. The only thing that I ask is that it gets revisited with the same decorum, open-mindedness, and openheartedness as this process was.	
00:31:31:23	Were you involved in the translation process of the Constitution?		00:31:35:05
00:31:35:11		I'm quite dyslexic, so what I did was to become the slapstick. I was very involved in the media department which was key. This was the media in terms of the new media that was introduced. We broke mindsets, so, for example, when we started there was none of this type of media that had happened. The billboards: government would never have gone and spoken on billboards, and there would have never been these bold statements and bold communication that went out ... The phone ends all of that that didn't happen. Before this process, communication from government was very controlled, and it wasn't as open as what this process made it to be. I also think that there was a lot of moulds that this process broke in terms of what was accepted.	00:32:39:10