

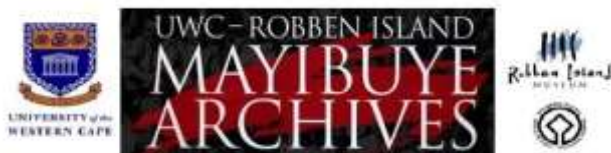
Ruth First Papers project

Interview with Rica Hodgson

An interview conducted by **Don Pinnock** c. 1992. Part of a series carried out at Grahamstown University and held at the UWC/Robben Island Mayibuye Archive.

Republished in 2012 by the Ruth First Papers Project

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RH: ... you'd like me to talk about Ruth?

DP: I'd like to know how you knew her: in what context, and what you were doing at that period. How the Jo'burg left operated. Those are the things that I don't have from writing.

RH: My memory is foul, but I'll try to start ... well, I married my husband when he was the national secretary of the Springbok Legion, and then I

DP: That would have been in the early 'forties?

RH: Ja. We were together in 1943, we married in '45. We were both married and we had to get divorces. And then I went to work for the Springbok Legion. I was in the army, in the airforce, actually, in Cape Town. I left to marry Jack and I started working in the Springbok Legion, I became a fundraiser. I'd been a nurse before that. It was a big jump for me! [laughs] Politically and in every other way. Then of course I started to move around in those circles and I became more politically active later, after the Springbok Legion wound up, which is what they did. Jack then became the first national secretary of the Congress of Democrats, and I moved over then to work for the Congress of Democrats. Then he was banned, and Cecil Williams who was the next secretary was banned, and then I became the secretary. Not because I fitted the role, but because there wasn't bloody anyone else at that time! And then I was banned, in 1954. In 1956 of course, my husband and Ruth and Joe were in the treason trial. I suppose around then I became closer to Ruth than I had been before. I didn't really – well, of course I knew her, because we'd both been in the Party. I worked in the Party office for a short time as well. But I wasn't really that close to Ruth until about '56. Then I got to know her well because I worked then for the Treason Trial Defence Fund, and then for the Defence and Aid Fund. That was from '61, when the treason trial fund wound up.

DP: There was a Reverend Pinnock in that, if I remember!

RH: Yes, you're related, aren't you?

DP: Cousin of mine. I never found out what happened to him.

RH: No, I don't know either. Somebody reminded me, actually; I had forgotten completely. I remembered Reverend Thompson but I didn't remember Pinnock. But I dare say he was, you know ... ja. When I first met Ruth I was totally overawed by her, and I think many people were. First of all, she was brilliant. I thought of her when I first met her as a bluestocking, and she wasn't very – she didn't care very much then. Her hair was very curly, she didn't use makeup, and she was dressed – she always dressed well, but she didn't care very much about – I didn't think she cared very much about how she looked. She didn't have a very good image of herself in those days as a woman. I mean, she always had it up there and she knew what she had up there. But she overawed me completely. I was terrified of her, and as I say, many people were. I spent many, many years subsequently defending Ruth to other friends, because I think I learned early on that she had great vulnerability. She was a very vulnerable woman, and she was a very shy woman, and she was a very private woman. She hid herself. Part of her image were those dark glasses she always wore, and that was a kind of a hiding behind. I remember one night we were going out to something, some do or other, and Ruth was getting dressed. I remember saying to her then, let me put some eyeshadow on you. And she was quite appalled, you know, but she let me do it and she liked the effect very much. And it wasn't long after that that Ruth came out, she then started to have her hair straightened and then I'm sure she was at the hairdresser twice a week at least, because she had that – Ethel de Kaiser

(name correct?) has got the same thing, you know, that hair must be straight, not curly. And then she became much more stylish in her clothes and her

DP: When was that change? In '56 or thereabouts?

RH: It was round about then, ja. That's my recollection, because I don't remember being very friendly ... I remember one action of hers before that struck me very much. She and Hilda Bernstein were organising – I think it must have been a peace conference, or a peace something, and neither of them were women who would be bothered with the detail of a conference, the feeding of the delegates – it was mainly African women – and the decorations of the hall ... all sorts of things that have to be done. But that was not their baby, you know, and they asked me to do it. For some reason I had time around then and I did it. And I think they were very happy with the results. Ruth bought me my very first bottle of really expensive perfume, and I've never forgotten that. Beautiful perfume, it was Guerlain. And she had that kind of touch; it was always very stylish, in the presents that she gave or whatever. Of course, she came from a well off background, as you know; her parents were never short of money. She had wonderful taste, different from anybody else. I mean, her curtains had to be blue and green, a combination that nobody else would dream of then. But it was marvelous! She would buy these wild paintings in Tanzania, these bright, brilliant things that nobody had ever seen before, and she had those all over her walls in London. Things like that. She had style and taste for good things, and she loved, for example – there were three things Ruth really loved. One of them was good shoes – she had difficult, long narrow feet, and she loved expensive Italian shoes. She loved expensive and good luggage. Luggage was a very important part of Ruth's life! [laughs] It had to be like that. And she always wore silk shirts. I know when I went to stay with her in Mozambique I said to her, but how can you wear those in this heat? No, she only wore silk shirts. She had a problem ... I think she had – what's goitre related to?

DP: Thyroid.

RH: Yes. Some thyroid problem. And there were periods in her life when she put on a lot of weight, and that troubled her tremendously. But I think it was controlled in the latter years that I knew her; certainly in the last twenty years it was controlled. But she worried very much about putting on weight.

DP: Did she actually put on weight in the 'fifties from time to time?

RH: Yes, she did. And she absolutely hated it. She was a very organised person. Now you would think a woman like that wouldn't really be able to run a home. You know, you think of brilliant women not being – but somehow she had the same style in her kitchen. The last years in England we always spent Christmas with them. My husband and I always went there on Christmas Day, and Ruth just had everything perfect, the ducks going in the oven with the cherries, and the oranges on the tray, the silver ... everything beautifully done. So she had a – well, I think intelligent people are organised, and not only organised, but – what's the word, capable. And then she was a great person for doing lists, you know; just do a list and everything would get done. When she went to write *The Barrel of a Gun*, she went to Africa and Joe was away. They had a flat here in London before they bought the house. Her mother and father were living somewhere else. She asked my husband and I to come and stay with the three girls. Shawn was then fourteen. And she drew me a list [laughs]. You draw a list and then abracadabra ... except of course it didn't! Nothing worked, really! I mean, she told me the oven does this, that and the other ... I remember one Sunday morning her mother – *War and Peace* was on, there was a special showing here, and she took me. We put on the oven, as per Ruth's instructions, and I did a roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, potatoes and apple pie.

The thing would take so long, we'd come back – and everything would be cooked as per the oven that you switch on and there's a timer [laughs]. We came home half an hour later, or maybe an hour later ... it was just a tragedy, that lunch! [laughs]. Anyway ...

DP: Why do you think she was so private? Because people – she doesn't sound that private and shy. People had different impressions of her.

RH: Because I think she was very shy. She didn't feel secure in many ways. That's why I was always defending her. I mean, my husband for example. You see, I think in a certain way Ruth de-balled men, and I think the reason she did was that she was much cleverer than most of them, than most of these political giants, who thought they were political giants. Now my husband was a particularly interesting and lovely man, but Ruth did something - she wasn't feminine enough in a certain way. Until he really got to know her in Swaziland during the emergency

DP: Was he with her?

RH: He escaped, yes, and in fact he brought her back secretly and took her to the hiding-place where she was in Jo'burg, where I went to meet her. She was underground then. And he got to love Ruth, and she got to love him, too, because he recognised all the things I'm telling you – her vulnerability. Before that, he thought oh, she's just this brilliant woman who pooh-poohs everybody and rides everybody down. I mean, she did that particularly I think to men, who feared her in a certain way. Times were different. People were different then, and women were different then. There wasn't the society now where a lot of the sexism is broken down. It was much more defined, you know. I don't think she did it on purpose. She didn't suffer fools, and she didn't suffer – if she didn't like anybody, usually for good reasons, not for trivial reasons. Ruth was not a trivial or a petty person. She was a big person. She didn't like people for good reason if they were liars or dishonest in any way, politically or in any other way. That was it. And you see, I admired that quality in her. My husband again – I quote him because it was his particular expression – an "unprincipled cordiality", he called it. He had it in a big way. And Ruth just simply – if she didn't like that person, she showed it. She had no way of not wearing her heart on her sleeve. It was always there and it was visible and it showed. If she didn't like you, that was it. And I think many people therefore resented her, because she didn't hide it. She was not a hypocrite.

DP: Why do you think that men in particular – was she breaking down sexual stereotypes?

RH: Oh, very much so. Oh, very much. Ruth was a big feminist. Oh yes. I remember very well we went once to a womens' meeting here in England. It was a big public meeting, and – she didn't speak from the platform that night. Pity, because she was a brilliant speaker; brilliant. And somebody said from the platform that in the Soviet Union now, 75 percent of the doctors are women, and how they've broken down this, that and the other, you know. When it was time for people to get up from the floor to speak, Ruth got up and she said yes, it's all very true what you're saying about the Soviet Union, and it's true that women have gone a long way there, but you show me on that Praesidium with all those men in their double-breasted suits – where is a woman? [laughs] Then I'll say they've broken it down! And there was just – everybody gawking in the hall. Yes, she was a great feminist. I remember one night – that was the beginning of breaking my husband down in a certain way. He made some – look, my husband was ten years older than I was and he came from a very poor working-class family. He went to work when he was thirteen, and he went through the Depression in a terrible way. The things he did – he pegged for diamond-digging in Lichtenburg and he worked in a butcher's shop and Christ knows what – I mean, he really worked in the Depression as a young man. I'm trying to explain

his background; therefore, you'll understand that it wasn't easy. In the home there was no sexism with Jack. He cooked in the kitchen the same as I would – better than me, in fact, because when I married him I couldn't cook at all. He brought up our child, he did everything, which husbands of that particular – [interruption] Where was I?

DP: Jack and

RH: Ja, so Jack – I mean, I didn't think there was anything wrong about telling jokes about women in those days, and Jack made some joke. It was just about the rise of Womens' Lib. And Ruth laid into him! She laid into him. She lambasted him. She gave him such a tongue-lashing. He didn't know what he'd done, but the next day he went out and he bought Germaine Greer's book and he bought another book and he sat down – and Jack was a great reader – and he read them, and Jack never ever made another joke about women again. Ruth put him in his bloody place well and truly.

DP: Rica, what I'm trying to find out really are almost the daily rhythms of her life. I mean, I know that you people knew her pretty well socially. I've been looking through

RH: Look, she loved to let her hair down, she loved to party, she loved going out and enjoying herself. She loved holidays. I've got a copy of Vogue magazine in my car, just by the way, in which there is an interview with Shawn. Ruth would love to know she made the – Jesus, she would love that. Shawn got a very good interview, with pictures. In it is a little picture like that, where she, Joe, my husband, myself, the Buntings and Turoks were on holiday in Cape Town. It must have been perhaps just after they were acquitted in the treason trial, and we went to a very nice restaurant in Constantia. And it's a wonderful picture of Ruth, and there's another couple of lovely pictures of her in the thing, looking very stylish. The September Vogue. I've got it in the car, I'll show it to you. I'll get it in a minute. I meant to bring it in and I forgot.

DP: Because I've been looking through the newspapers and I think

RH: Look, I think Ruth had some affairs too; I'm sure she did. I went to Mozambique in 1970. No, no, sorry, in 1979. I went to Mozambique in 1978. I was on a special mission for the Defence and Aid Fund, who I worked for here. It was the Year of the Child, and I went to visit the camps in Africa. Mozambique was one of the paces I went to to visit a Zanu camp. So the next year a film team in Holland called VARA [spelling?] wanted to make a film of a Zanu childrens' camp. Every year in Holland they have a special month, a [indistinct], where they raise money for children. It used to be for deprived kids in Holland, but for many years they didn't need it, so they did it for other places. The director, a chap called Jan de Graaff, 'phoned – me up and said since I'd been there the year before, and they wanted to put the money through the Defence and Aid Fund for the childrens' camps in exile, political camps, liberation organisation camps – would I come with them to Mozambique? I said to them, I don't know anything about bloody filming! No, but because I had contacts, etcetera, they thought I would make it easier for them. So since the money was coming to us the organisation agreed that I go with them. And we arrived in Mozambique – [laughs] I don't know whether you've travelled much in the third world?

DP: oh yes.

RH: Right! So we got there, and it was just all hell. We didn't get out of that bloody airport for about three hours. I kept 'phoning Pam de Santos, my friend, I couldn't get hold of her. Eventually I got her and she said Christ are you still there? I'll see that somebody comes to you immediately. And eventually after a hell of a long time they arrived. There was only a van big

enough to take one person and all the film gear, and the other three – that was the cameraman, and the sound man and me were left sitting on the bloody tarmac outside! They'd booked for the Polana Hotel from Holland. Well, after another hour of two he came back with the driver. The Polana Hotel knew nothing – they never received the telex, or God knows what – and he said Jesus Christ, we're in a real flea hole of a hotel ... well, I'm the sort of person that can more or less sleep anywhere, it doesn't bother me much. I mean, if you've been to jail, these things don't matter much. But when I saw that hotel and I saw the room - it was filthy! Filthy! I'm sure there were bugs crawling around. I said no, I'm sorry. I don't know what you boys do, I can't sleep in this hotel. I picked up the 'phone and I 'phoned Ruth, and in an instant she said I'm coming for you, just hang on. And this guy said to me, who did you 'phone? Ruth First, did you say? I said yes. He said Good God, you don't tell me I'm going to meet Ruth. Now he was a very attractive man, and he was, I suppose, at least ten years her junior. A very nice guy

DP: The Dutch guy?

RH: The Dutch guy. De Graaff. Who did you say?

DP: Frank.

RH: No, no, no, Frank is somebody else. Frank's a Swedish guy. No, no, de Graaff. And Ruth came for us and took us to her – she always had such a lovely place, always the style was just lovely. Well, she could afford it, you know. But it was lovely. And I remember we had a party, and this guy just fell for her hook, line and sinker! And of course she loved it! I'm not saying anything came of it; I'm sure there was never a minute's opportunity on that trip we were on for her to have an affair with Jan de Graaff, but I think it was possible. Jan de Graaff would certainly have been very interested! And I think – well, it was very flattering to any woman, a man ten years younger. He was a very lovely man. Men were attracted to Ruth on here, first what was here. And from then on nothing else mattered. She was beautiful in a certain way. If you looked at her features except for her eyes, and she had lovely hair – none of them were really beautiful. She didn't have good legs, she didn't exactly have a good, beautiful figure. Especially in those days when figures were something else again, you know! Those kinds of things mattered where they don't matter today, do you know what I mean? And she wore glasses. But once a man made it up here with Ruth, then they were gone. That was it. Do you see what I'm trying to say?

DP: Why do you think she was so insecure?

RH: Because I think she was not a pretty girl. She was not a beautiful girl. All girls – you see, today it's so much easier, having broken down a lot of those sexist aspects. It's so much easier for women to relate to men, it wasn't so easy then, you had to bloody well be beautiful to relate in some kind of a way. I think that was one of the reasons. I think because she was a shy girl. She wasn't sure of herself with men. Only later. Only later.

DP: What was Julius like?

RH: Oh, he was a sweet man. He was a sweet man, he was very sweet.

DP: How did she relate to him?

RH: [pause] Well, that's interesting. You see, her mother and her were very much alike.

DP: I've met Tilly.

RH: You've met Tilly, yes. Very much alike. Both very tough and very intellectual and very definite and this, that and the other. Julius was sweet and soft and not very – you wouldn't call him an intellectual giant. Far from it. But he was a nice, kind man. I think she was very fond of him and I think she had a very high regard for him. Certainly she was very upset when he died. That I know because she came here with Joe, and they were having problems with kids then; Robin was having other problems and Shawn and her always had these problems. Because by then Robin was already living with Andy. And she needed a place. Their house was let, and Tilly's flat was below their house. She didn't want to move in with Tilly, she needed to be alone with her kids. So I moved out of my flat and gave them my flat for two weeks. I saw quite a bit of her during that two weeks, and she was very, very cut up about Julius's death. Tilly of course just admired and adored her. So did Julius, I mean, they both did

DP: Tilly seemed to have done much of the mothering of the children?

RH: Oh yes, she did. She did. And that was certainly very important – well, obviously. Ruth needed that crutch because she had all these important things to do, as you saw in the film, and even after. I mean, here – I remember when she went off to do this thing, I stayed with the kids for ... how long? It was quite a long period, some six weeks, maybe, or something like that. She told me when she left Shawn was going to be fourteen and she can have a birthday party and she can invite twenty kids to the flat. OK. So comes the day of the party, number one, Shawn doesn't want the two younger ones there, they've got to go off and stay with Tilly [laughs]. Number two, no food. You don't have food at parties. No food, no drink, nothing. OK. You're having a party with no food, nothing. So I come home from work and Tilly's organised crisps and peanuts or something, beer and cider! And I was quite annoyed about that. I said I thought they were too bloody young at fourteen. Ag, Tilly said, come on Rica, don't be square! It's not like you! OK, on your own head be it. Well, Jack and I decided to take the two younger kids off to a show and then drop them at Tilly's by eleven, we'd be home by eleven. Twelve o'clock we decided the party would be over. It's enough at fourteen, and Shawn was a young fourteen, she wasn't an old fourteen. She wasn't like this kid you've just seen here, who's never been fourteen! [laughs] Never been young. Anyway, we get home and open the door and I couldn't believe what I saw! The place was just chocabloc! Chocabloc! Jack said – I didn't notice, but he said he thought he saw such a sigh of relief on Shawn's face! [laughs] And all ages – they must have gone up to twentyfive, never mind fourteen. It was my first experience of a party in this country, you see. We started to walk up the stairs, the bedrooms were upstairs, and the kids – the language! I mean, I'm no prude, but my goodness, I thought that two old people walking up the stairs would have a little more ... [laughs] not on your life! The language was something else. We got upstairs into Ruth's bedroom where we were sleeping, and the bed looked well-used by then! [roars with laughter] Everything had been opened. Now Ruth didn't lock a thing away. She had beautiful jewelry, not – again, everything was, you know, Ruth liked silver. She didn't like gold. She had lovely things, and they would be real. And lovely perfume. I could see the bedroom, bathroom, everything had been opened, looked at, pulled out, examined, perfumes everywhere – I thought oh shit, I hope all her, I mean I didn't have an inventory, I don't know what she had there. One mother had 'phoned me during the day to say will the party be supervised? I said well, I don't know what you mean by supervision, but we're coming home at eleven and the party will be over by twelve. She said, that's alright. She said, you see my daughter said she's – she's Shawn's best friend, she's sleeping over. I said OK, that's fine. Don't worry. So the next thing I hear a door locking across – there were three bedrooms beyond no, two bedrooms, the two youngest ones slept in one and Shawn had her own bedroom. And I said to my husband, Christ, I can't have a locked bedroom door with fourteen-year-olds! I'd better go and

investigate. I felt terrible. I knocked on the door tentatively, and it was this girl whose mother had 'phoned, a very lovely girl, and she opened the door and she had five boys in there! And I said to her, listen darling, what you do at home is your business, but here, just don't lock any doors. I want to know what's happening [much laughter]. Anyway, come twelve o'clock Jack went down and read the riot act and said goodbye to everybody. And there were twelve girls left! I said, what are you all doing here? They said, we can't get home. Now you can't chuck out twelve young girls. So I said, what about your parents? Oh, our parents, they know we're sleeping over. But it was only one 'phone call that I'd had. So I said OK – I mean it was a comfortable lounge and a nice thick carpet and big couches and chairs – you can all sleep downstairs or upstairs. No, we'll all sleep downstairs. OK. Alright, I said, goodnight! Have a good night. Oh my God – next thing I hear boy's voices downstairs! [laughs] So Jack went down, quite angry by now, and he was very tired. My husband was a very sick man and he wanted to sleep. He was very rude to the boys. He said he was pulling them out from behind curtains, from the balcony, under furniture and so on. He chucked them out – he said he kicked one guy right out the place ... [tape skids] ... wonderful parties. Absolutely wonderful parties; we had wonderful food and we had masses of booze, and wonderful music, and we danced like hell – they were mixed parties of course, all of them. They were just wonderful. And quite a couple of them I remember at Ruth's place. At least two, if not three I remember at her house. Even 'fifties.

DP: What would you do? Dance?

RH: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely! Now when I said I didn't know Ruth well before, of course I knew her from the city hall steps in the 'forties. The Communist Party meetings on the steps.

DP: Tell me what she would do there?

RH: She was a speaker. She was always a speaker, I was a spectator.

DP: What sort of subjects would she speak on?

RH: Well, I mean, then it was the antifascist thing, you know, because the fascists were coming ... the Nationalist Party were coming up into power then. I'm talking before '48 now. And the Brown Shirts, and the Black Shirts, and the police, we were always having – I mean, I used to go – I remember being pregnant and going and thinking, Christ, I hope they don't injure me. I used to take a long hatpin. That was my weapon! But the fist-fighting was terrible, dreadful. And of course I remember this particular thing, when the Nationalists, when Malan was having this huge meeting in the city hall and the Springbok Legion organised this thing, they had a banner across Loveday Street where you had to come under, which said 'Traitors' Gate', and it came right over where you have ... and the Springbok Legion stopped that meeting and then Malan and them had to crawl out the back door. So they took their revenge on us. I remember those meetings. I was terrified every Sunday night I went to a meeting, I was terrified out of my mind. But I went.

DP: What time did they start?

RH: I can't remember if it was seven or eight. I'm inclined to think eight but it could have been seven, I don't remember. There were fights and ... I have one wonderful memory of this [laughs] he was a big, burly chap, he was a Yugoslav who was in the army in South Africa. I was in the audience and I was watching him, and I saw him pick up this chap, and this chap was screaming blue murder and I couldn't imagine why! Of course bloody Sven [name correct?] was squeezing him where it hurts most! And I remember all sorts of things, like a guy

with a Guardian hitting somebody over the head and the guy went down – it was a bottle wrapped in the Guardian! I remember those sort of things. And Ruth was always one of the speakers there. Unruffled, you know; she would always go straight ahead and speak, I think mainly on Communist Party policy and against fascism.

DP: In the 'forties when she was speaking on the city hall steps, was she considered very central to the party at that stage? She was in the Young Communist League at that stage, wasn't she?

RH: I think so. I think so, yes. No, I would have thought so. I have a vague recollection of her going off to a youth conference in Hungary or something. That I remember. And Tilly went off, her mother, in 19 – was it '51? To China? I think it was '51 that Tilly went to China. She brought me back the most wonderful piece of jade.

DP: What sort of music did you listen to? Odd question, but I mean what sort of music did you dance to?

RH: Kwela music, mainly; you know, I was the secretary of the King Kong Committee, amongst other things. That was another thing I was involved in. yes, kwela music, mainly.

DP: And how was it played at the parties? Live, or

RH: No, it was on records. I would imagine tapes were not on then, but I think records, mainly.

DP: And who came to those parties?

RH: Well, I mean I remember the whole treason trial coming to those parties, and their wives and friends and others and so on. And of course every year – for many years my husband and I went to Cape Town on holiday in December. Sometimes Ruth and Joe were there. The Buntings had a New Year's party every New Year's Eve at their house when everybody who was anyone in the movement was there. I mean, there were usually a couple of hundred people. And they were just the most fantastic – I mean, we used to stay with the Buntings, so I remember very well. Brian is a fanatic about cleaning up after a party, and I remember at five o'clock in the morning cleaning a window! [laughs] And I used to make the soup for those parties, or something like that.

DP: What would Ruth – or your group, really, do at weekends? These are the places that I don't know about. I mean, what would you do on Sundays?

RH: Well, I was a great swimmer and a great sports-person, myself. And we went – Hilda Bernstein, for example, had a swimming-pool, lots of other friends of ours had swimming-pools. No, not lots, but some others had pools. And certainly for me going for a swim on Sunday was – I've got a sun cancer which is the fault of all that! [laughs]. I've had several operations, plastic and so on, and my nose is – it's from here! [laughs] Ruth wasn't such an outdoor type. I don't know what Ruth did very much at weekends, but we sometimes had picnics. Yes, she loved a picnic, I remember that. And she always said food tasted so much better in the open air. When we came to London I remember we first – the four of us, with – I think Sylvester Steyn was one who came with us, and his new girlfriend who he's now married to, and the Bermans, I think may have been there – we went to somewhere on the river and we had a – she loved picnics, yes. And always very elegant food and wine. She had goats' cheese – you had to eat goats' cheese with pears, or apples, I can't remember. But that was Ruth. Beautiful, and always very elegant. We would decide beforehand who would bring which

food, you know, I would do this and she would do that. Yes, she loved picnics. She wasn't a great outdoor girl or sportsperson but she did come to some of those weekend swimming-club

DP: Was she considered a bit of a workaholic?

RH: Oh yes. Oh yes, she is [sic]. Look, when I stayed with her in Mozambique – because I didn't carry on with that story. I stayed with her in her flat and the men stayed on in this grotty hotel till we could go up to this camp in Tete Province. She gave me Olive Schreiner to read in manuscript form, and every morning at six o'clock she was at that typewriter.

DP: What was she writing then?

RH: She was doing the Olive Schreiner thing, finishing it. And she would be typing like hell. And then she would rush off to work, and every lunchtime she came home with somebody – she had a working lunch at home. It wasn't chat, it wasn't social, it was a working lunch. She brought somebody back from Frelimo or whatever. She had a manservant then in Mozambique. She loved salads, Ruth – there were some lovely salads, with a little something. It was always very elegant and small and lovely. Nice food – nice bit of cheese, nice bit of this and that.

DP: Was she like that in the 1950's as well?

RH: She was always like that. I mean, Ruth was always working like hell. Have you met Wolfie yet, by the way?

DP: I'm going to meet him on Friday.

RH: Oh well, he'll tell you a lovely story, which I won't tell you because it's his special story about Ruth. So I won't mention that one.

DP: Perhaps he'll forget.

RH: No, he won't. I'm sure he won't. I don't want to spoil it for him. He's a bit deaf, by the way; he doesn't know it or he doesn't admit to it, so you'd better talk up a bit. Um ... was she like that in the 'fifties, was she always working ... yes, she was always working. Always working.

DP: Well, she produced a huge number of stories for the Guardian. I can't believe how many stories.

RH: She worked like hell, and of course, if you've got a – look, if you're a me, and you've got to sit down and write something, it can take you three hours. But Ruth could do that, no doubt, in twenty minutes or half-an-hour. She was brilliant. And she had the capacity and she had the knowledge and she had the vocabulary – she had everything. And she had the memory. I mean, everything was – she nearly got me in bloody jail once! [laughs] But it's not her fault.

DP: How was that?

RH: Oh, it's another story, really. It doesn't really relate to Ruth. It only relates to her pamphlet on the potato farm.

DP: Bethel?

RH: The Bethel scandal, ja. But it's not really related to her. It's just her pamphlet that nearly got me into trouble! [laughs].

DP: How was she considered in the movement? As a journalist, or as an activist – how was she conceived of?

RH: Oh, she was considered as a politician first and a journalist second. Certainly. Ja, I would have thought so.

DP: But if she was considered a politician, what organisations was she focussing on?

RH: The Communist Party.

DP: Mainly; so that was her key organisation?

RH: Yes.

DP: And she didn't – yes, she was also a member of COD. Yes. I don't know how active she was in COD, I don't know if she saw COD as her primary – youth. I mean, for a long time she was in the YCL, and Ruth was never a woman – in quotes, if you know what I mean. Womens' organisations

[end of side one]