

I too drove with "Mandela"

by *Gavin Hayward*

I had to walk up the steps outside King Edward School about ten times, and each time pick up my own boyfriend (well, I thought he was for about 9 months!) who was obligingly propped up against the gatepost. I got to lines like, "OK, darling, shall we go and do it again?"

There were no lines given that HAD to be used, you see. We were simply dramatising interviews which had already been recorded. Interviews with guys who were in the gay scene in Johannesburg in the 50s and 60s, and in particular those who were into black guys. They had recorded how furtive it all was, and as a result Robert had to walk into a block of flats some metres behind me, pretending to be delivering the groceries, and the laundry...

We were filming "The Man Who Drove With Mandela", a documen-

tary about South Africa's first gay freedom fighter, Cecil Williams. The film, about the gay man whose chauffeur Mandela pretended to be in the 60's when he was on the run from the Apartheid regime, was researched and written by Mark Gevisser.

I am unaccustomed to being pushed around by bossy dykes, but on this film it was part of the territory. At least the sections we were involved in filming were made with an all-woman crew. (One exception - a very dishy soundman with a foreign name and accent...)

The director was Greta Schiller, probably best known for her documentary *Paris Was a Woman*, about the women who ran Paris when the men were away during WWII. Working on the Mandela movie gave me an opportunity to meet Greta, whom I found to be a well-informed, caring, focussed and interested person (despite nasturtiums I may have cast elsewhere on

this page!). I asked her why she had chosen to make this movie about Cecil Williams, and she said that she liked the theme of ordinary people whose actions were heroic.

Because this movie involved dramatisations, and Greta's experience is primarily with documentaries, Michelle Cranshaw had been appointed as the camerawoman. Michelle was the real one in the boots, I thought. She had worked on NYPD and sometimes sported the t-shirt.

I had been approached to provide suitably dishy black boys for the local filming, but then unexpectedly Robert Whitehead, who had played the part of Cecil Williams in a shoot in Ansteys Building, had to go off to Zimbabwe for the filming of some Italian soap he features in. Greta and Michelle (and maybe Mark) decided I could take his place: also middle aged and handsome, you

see. That was when we got to filming the whole afternoon in an vintage car in the dusty bush.

They had found a young Mandela-lookalike through a casting agency, and Joseph and I spent hours in that car. Do this, do that, drive, stop, come, go, hang your hand out. They had placed a diamond ring on my little finger, and I had to hang it out of the car in camp style while poor Joseph had to stop the car exactly where the women had set up the best lighting spot to glean from the diamond on my bejewelled hand and record it on celluloid.

I hear that shot is being used as a poster for the movie.

The film is being premiered in the South African Gay & Lesbian Film Festival which will be running during October/November in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town.

Go and see how I too drove with "Mandela".

On the set

