

# Fareham man Chris Lubbe spent eight years as bodyguard to Nelson Mandela



IT WAS a chance meeting that resulted in one Hampshire man hired as a bodyguard for one of history's most iconic leaders.

Chris Lubbe has simply his height to thank for catching the eye of Nelson Mandela, who was so impressed by his stature that he offered him the job of protecting his life there and then.

For the next eight years the then freedom fighter from South Africa was the shadow of Mandela, always by his side, as the leader continued on his mission to unite a country.

Chris, who now lives in [Fareham](#), was one of 24 bodyguards who had the responsibility of protecting Mandela between 1990 and 1998.

Chris, who turned 53 on the same day that Mandela died, said: “There were many people who wanted him dead. “There was always the threat of the right wing who wanted him assassinated, which made the job very difficult.



Chris Lubbe - third

from left.

“Looking after him was most definitely a mission because he always wanted to shake everybody’s hands and kiss all the babies, which made our job very challenging because we had to make sure no harm came to him.

“It was always a worry.”

The death of 95-year-old Mandela on Thursday has been poignant for the dad-of-two, who is keen to celebrate the man who dedicated his life to peace and equality.

He added: “It has been extremely emotional actually because I got very, very close to him.

“I got to understand him, got to know what made him tick and now to think that he is no longer with us is a very sad thought.

“Thinking about the difficulties we faced back then brings it all flooding back and with that comes a lot of emotions.”

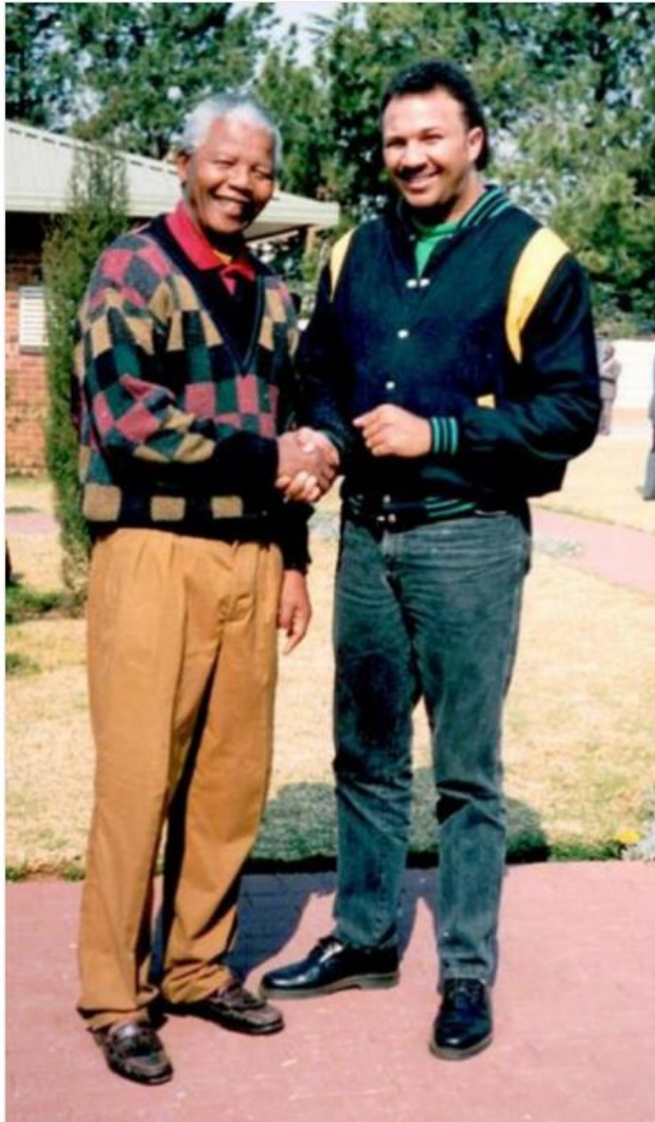
Chris first met Mandela in 1990, when he was organising a music concert for the African National Congress (ANC).

He was given the opportunity to explain to Mandela how the planning was going when he turned round and said “you are very tall. You would make a very good bodyguard. Would you like to come and work for me?”

Chris replied “yes I would like to” and within weeks he was part of Mandela’s protection unit, going with him to ensure his safety.

It was a job that would see him not only get to know the first black president of South Africa, but also meet the world’s dignitaries, including the Queen and Princess Diana.

Chris said: “The most important part of the job for me was just being with the man and learning from him, having the chance to understand what got him going and his vision for a South Africa where everyone would be free.



*Chris Lubbe with*

*Nelson Mandela*

“It was a critical time for South Africa when he was president and it was a very difficult time for him, with so many demands on him.

“As well as uniting a country he had to ensure people got the services they needed and came up with solution for the **education** problems, as well as giving people answers about their loved ones who went missing during apartheid.

“He was a person who cared about others, who made you feel very important when he spoke to you.

“He really loved children and would always target them on his visits, shaking their hands because he felt that they were important, they were the future.

“He also loved to dance and he used to do this dance, the Madiba Jive, which I will always remember.

“I have been blessed with such a great experience.”

Once Mandela announced his retirement, it was time for Chris to leave the political arena, having started fighting against apartheid when he was just a teenager.

Chris, who works part-time at Stoke Park Junior School, [Eastleigh](#), as well as being an ambassador for Unicef, said: “I got involved in [politics](#) at a very early age, born really out of the frustration of apartheid because of things that were happening to myself and those around me.

“We couldn’t become what we wanted to become because everything was separated. I wanted to be a pilot but was told I couldn’t because I wasn’t white and that really got to me.

“School was awful, we had no books and so I made the decision at an early stage to get involved in the ANC.

“Many many times I paid a high price for that, getting arrested, incarcerated and beaten but it wasn’t as high a price as Mandela had to pay.”

The last time Chris met with Mandela was in August 2007, when the statue of him was unveiled in Westminster.

From then, his health went downhill and the pair never reunited again as Mandela focused on spending time with his family.

“Hope, forgiveness, reconciliation and freedom are the lasting memories I have of Nelson Mandela,” said Chris.

“These are the things that just come to mind when you mention him.”