

Revisited: Nelson Mandela's bodyguard tells his remarkable story to Newbury Park schoolchildren

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Chris Lubbe visited Oaks Park High School in October as part of a Black History Month presentation

After fighting the apartheid system in South Africa and working as Nelson Mandela's bodyguard for eight years, Chris Lubbe now spends his time inspiring others.

To mark Black History Month, Chris visited Oak Park High School in Oaks Lane, Newbury Park, in October to talk to students about his life as a freedom fighter.

Chris hopes that by listening to his life story and words of wisdom, the students he visits will learn to take advantage of their opportunities in life.

He told the Recorder: "I don't like to call myself a motivational speaker, because I don't jump around and shout.

"It's about getting children to understand they should take advantage of the education system they have here in England."

Chris says he is inspired by the "very positive" reaction he gets from children.

"The response is so amazing," he said. "At one school a child told me he never took his education seriously, but that after hearing me talk about my life, he was going to change his attitude."

Born in the rural South African town of Port St John's, Chris moved to Durban at an early age, where he was subjected to the racism of the apartheid system.

He says one moment had a profound effect on him and convinced him to become a freedom fighter, and he risked his life by joining the banned African National Conference (ANC), taking part in peaceful protests.

He said: "I was eight years old and going to town on the bus with my mother.

"She started to feel ill and the driver helped us off the bus, but the only seat available was a white-only seat.

"I made her sit in it, but two policemen came and threw her off the seat, and she hit her head on the ground. I thought she was going to die.

"People were walking by but not one white person challenged the policemen."

As a member of the ANC Chris was beaten up numerous times and subjected to solitary confinement in prison, where he was handcuffed and put under a shower for seven days.

But his message is clear: "We must take the high road as people. Many don't know how to deal with anger and frustration, but it must be channelled."

He says working with Mandela taught him a lot about forgiveness.

They met shortly after Mandela's release from prison in 1990, and Chris worked as his bodyguard.

He said: "People can learn a lot from great men like Nelson Mandela. He once told me, 'unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies'."

After arriving in England in 2003, Chris now divides his time between homes in Hampshire and South Africa.

•For information about how to book a visit from Chris, go to www.chrislubbe.co.uk.