POST 60TH ANNIVERSARY
THE VOICE AND HEART OF THE COMMUNITY
1955-2015
CELEBRATING OUR 60 YEAR LEGACY

Journalists at Durban's Louis Botha Airport. In the background is the Air India 707. From the right: Marimuthu 'Subry' Govender, Puri Devjee, Niney Ruthnan and Kanthan Pillay.

How Post reporter tried to persuade 'killer gunman'

By Kanthan Pillay

I STOOD face-to-face with Nithia Pillay in the Gun Room of Game Discount World and tried to talk him away from where he was holding his hostage, Rani Moodley, at gunpoint.

But I failed.

I tried to persuade him to allow me to change places with his hostage and let her go, but he refused.

And when barely half-an-hour later the first gunshot shattered the air signalling the beginning of the end of Nithia's life, something inside me died as well.

For as I had stood facing the boy whom the Press has called a "killer gunman", I had hoped that his words: "They will never let me walk out of here alive" would be proved wrong.

And even as I rushed towards the store's gun room knowing full well the sight that would confront me — Nithia's body riddled with police bullets — I thought of his words: "I've got nothing to lose; nothing to live for . . ."

My final encounter with Nithia Pillay

"Hallo Nithia," I said.

"How-zit," he replied wa from side-to-side, never tak too far off the doorway.

"Do you remember me?" I

"Oh yes," he said, a ser smile on his face. "I rememb

"From where?" I asked.

"You bought me chaw night."

"Hey, you remembered!"

"You also bought me cho Daily News canteen," he sai

That shook me as I had t ten the incident to which I ring. It had taken place mo I had not remembered it as just a stranger off the street me he was hungry.

"Can we have a talk?" I a

"Sure."

"Can I come in there?"

He gave a start, his checking his guns and hosti "Stand there and talk," he sa

"What happened ?" I ask

"What do you mean ?"

"How did you get into When I saw you on Mond were okay?"

"They lied to me. I came here for a job and they lied to me, said they didn't have one."

"Is that all? I can fix up a job for you. Why don't you come out?"

"It's not only them . . . It's everyone else as well. They drive around in their expensive cars, blow money on video games, but when I ask them for a job or money for food, they give me a long story. I'm tired of it."

"Not everyone's like that."

"Do you know what it is like to walk through town, looking for any job, just to be able to work for myself, and no-one wanting to give me a chance?"

"Nobody just walks into a job Nithia. Not

'It's my business if I wanna jump . . .'

By Kanthan Pillay

AN UNKNOWN man was the unsung hero of a death-leap drama ten floors above Durban's Victoria Street this week.

While hundreds of morning shoppers gazed at the roof of Victoria Heights where a Durban youth stood threatening to jump to his death, the man — who said his name was Stanley — ran up ten flights of stairs to the

pers noticed a figure standing on the roof of the building brandishing a bottle and shouting.

And the person on the rooftop soon made it quite clear what he was doing there: "I'm going to jump. I'm tired of life."

While the supervisor of the building Mr R Naidoo hastily called the police and LifeLine, a group of reporters

# My front row seat to history

## Kanthan Pillay recalls...

AROUND the time of my 19th birthday in September 1980, I found myself, recently kicked out of the University of Durban-Westville in the aftermath of student protests, trying to work out what to do with the rest of the year.

My mother had let slip at one point that the news editor at **POST** was a former pupil of hers.

I asked her to take me along to meet him.

The offices on the 5th floor of the Daily News Building at 85 Field Street were filled with desks and typewriters (computers had not yet been introduced).

A haze of cigarette smoke hung over the office.

And sitting in the corner, at that stage still mostly clean-shaven, was a burly guy with a piercing glare, who quickly stubbed out his cigarette and pushed his ashtray away at the sight of my mother.

"Ma'am," he said with a bit of a bow and flourish as he stood up to greet her.

He then looked at me suspiciously.

"What are you looking at?" he said.

"You remind me of Peter Ustinov," I replied.

Kanthan Pillay then and now. His byline picture from 1983 and from 2013.

Clearly disarmed and chuffed at the same time, he gave a broad smile and indicated that I was now worthy enough to sit down.

It was my introduction to Farook Khan; to this day, one of the most engaging and entertaining figures the world of journalism has produced.

Farook had taken it upon himself to take a group of youngsters under his wing to teach them the basics of journalism.

They were Ismail Suder, Jameela Hoosen, and Rashida Dhooma.

I was to become the fourth.

The period that followed between 1980 and my departure from the country (and **POST**) during the State of Emergency in 1986 was, in hindsight, a front row seat to history in the making. Here are some of my personal highlights.

● In early 1981, South African mercenaries attempted a coup in the Seychelles.

Unsuccessful in their attempt, they hijacked an Air India Boeing 707 and used it as a getaway vehicle.

Puri Devjee (who later became chief photographer at **POST**) and I were first on the scene but were quickly diverted away by police.

The story made headlines around the world.

● In 1982, I helped pluck a would-be suicide jumper, Nithia Pillay, from the rooftop of Victoria Heights in Victoria Street.

Not long after, Nithia took a young woman hostage at the gun counter of Game in West Street.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to negotiate with him for the release of the woman.

Shortly afterward, the SAP reaction unit shot him dead.

● In 1983, I visited Zimbabwe for the first time and interviewed three prominent Indian South Africans in exile: Dr Kesavaloo Goonam, Justice Manival Moodley, and Govan Reddy.

● In 1984, I compiled a tabloid supplement on the 90th anniversary of the Natal Indian Congress.

On the day that the supplement was to be distributed, the Botha government declared a provincial State of Emergency.

**POST**'s lawyers said the supplement fell foul of the emergency regulations, so all copies were removed from the paper before the trucks started rolling.

It was distributed months later when the State of Emergency was briefly lifted.

I have had a truly remarkable career since my days at **POST**; none of which would have been possible without the lessons I learnt from Farook Khan; for which I am forever grateful.

**KANTHAN PILLAY**

Now MD of the Yired group of companies and Chief Executive of 99.2 YFM, writes in his personal capacity.

The tabloid supplement on the 90th anniversary of the Natal Indian Congress.