

**A**LF KUMALO retired in December to give himself time to work on the 10 books he has stored away amongst negatives collected during more than four decades of news and documentary photography. In South Africa, that's a long time to have been out there shooting pics, and conversations with the man reflect this. Strydom, Sobukwe, Biko, Mandela, Cassius Clay, Henry Cooper, Joe Matthews, Louis Armstrong, Martin Luther King, Winnie, Verwoerd — the names pepper the reminiscences.

Alf's father wanted him to be a barber, and bought him a pair of scissors to get him started. But Kumalo knew what he wanted to do — he was aware he thought in images. "Visual impact has always been important. Whenever I see something dramatic it remains in my head for a long, long time. I never went to see my parents, or my brothers, after they died. I get these

sharp images I know I'm not going to forget."

He started in 1950, in the time-honoured tradition, as a junior reporter assigned to courts on the *Bantu World*. Surprisingly, his first acquisition was not a camera, but an enlarger. "I was friends with a school-teacher who said he could print and I knew that when I got into photography, I wanted to get into it very seriously. I bought the enlarger for £35 thinking we'd make money out of it and I'd get the camera I wanted. But he double-crossed me, I never got a cent out of him. So I started with my cousin's old bellows camera.

"I took the enlarger back — I've still got it — and later managed to buy a 120 3¼ Beautyflex. I used Rolleiflex for a hell of long time, it was a strong camera. I've still got a Leica but the old rangefinder Nikon could shoot faster than any 35mm camera, the Leica couldn't compete. There were times people thought I shot without focusing but the Nikon had a split image wheel

on the rangefinder that made it very easy to shoot fast."

From *Bantu World* Alf moved to *Drum*, a position that saw him documenting not only township life of the 1950s and 1960s but also travelling to Europe and the United States. "I made friends with Mohammed Ali (Cassius Clay as he then was) in 1963 when he was in London to fight Henry Cooper. I was doing a long feature for *Drum* on Europe, the Berlin Wall had just been completed. I've still got good pics of that."

It was the failure of *Drum* in 1970 to send him on a promised trip to the United States to meet up again with Mohammed Ali, that saw Alf move on to the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail*. Alf made the trip, to cover the Ali/Fraser fight, and during this time met Louis Armstrong, photographing him the day before he died.

His work has been recognised for some time overseas. There have been a number of "honourable mentions" in the >



Through the eyes of **ALF**  
**KUMALO**

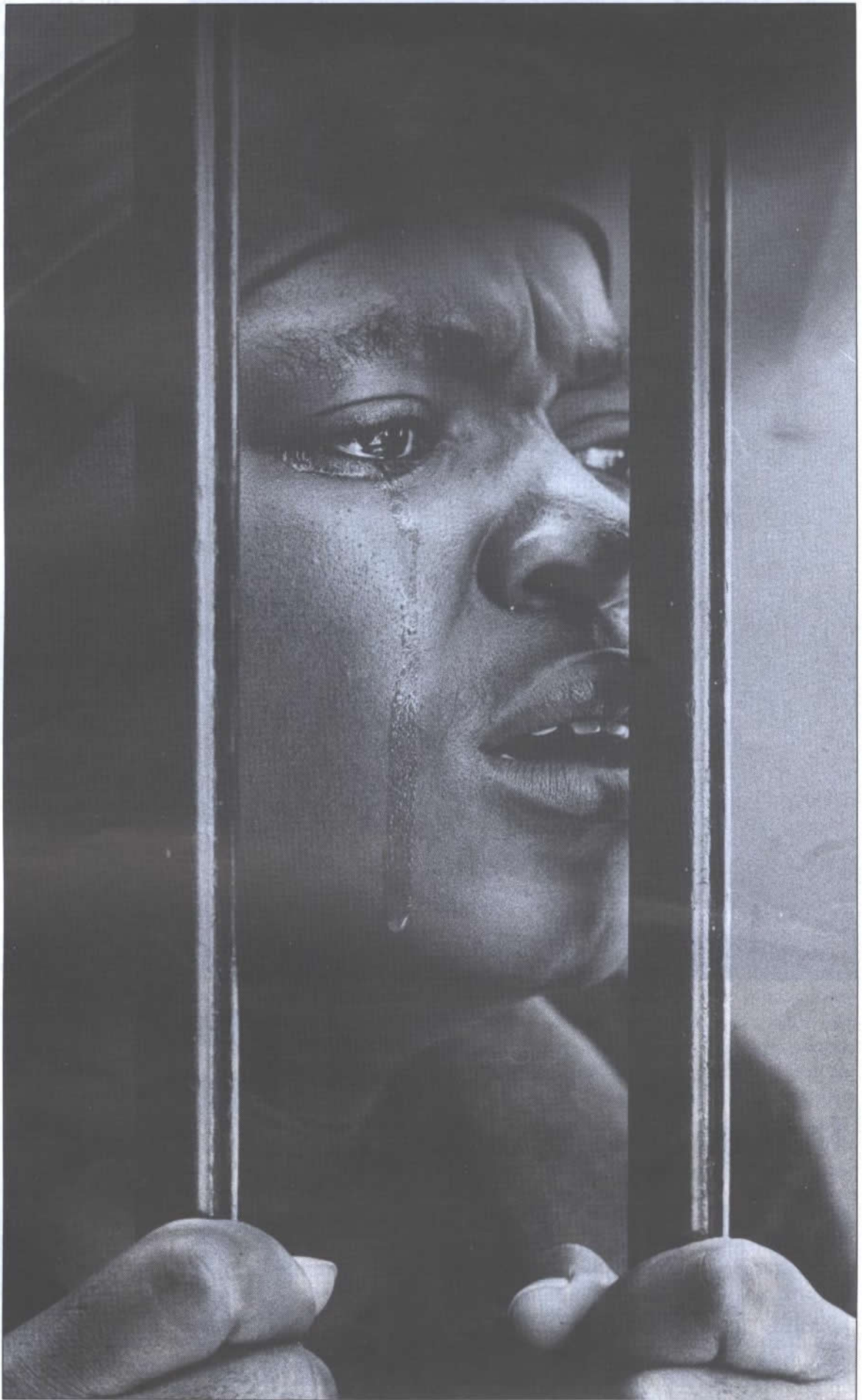
➤ World Press Photographer competition, he was asked to exhibit with Encyclopaedia Britannica as early as 1962, he's had, or been part of, shows in London and Paris.

But it wasn't all trips and good times. There have been several, almost mandatory, arrests and in 1987, while with *The Star*, his home was surrounded by eight Hippos as police searched "inside the ceiling" for AK47's and guerrillas. "They broke in so dramatically too. Like something they'd seen on film. They kicked the door until I opened it, I had to lift up my hands and say 'Don't shoot my wife' who was behind me, and they got into the passage, squatting, ready to shoot.

"The irony was that later that day I went in to work as usual and there were the police trying to arrest two guys outside *The Star*. I took some pics, they saw me, and chased me down into the basement. The two guys got away and so did I — they lost everything. The two stories, of the raid on my house and the attempted arrests, ran side-by-side in the paper. A busy day."

Alf's first book *Mandela: Echoes of an Era* was published by Penguin in 1990. But besides his books there's no chance of his hanging up his cameras next year. He still wants a shot of Mandela on April 27, to complete his chronicle of the man, who is also a personal friend. But even after that he'll keep shooting. "Even when I use a stick to walk I'll still take pictures. That's how much I'm in love with photography." ➤



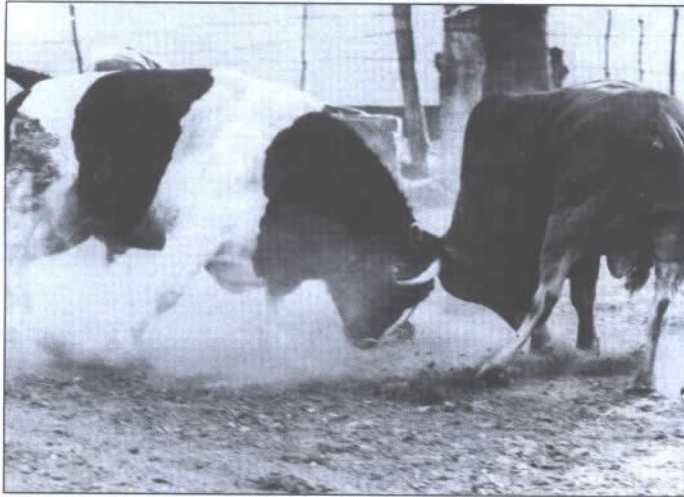


**"Where is my son?"**  
**Market Theatre**



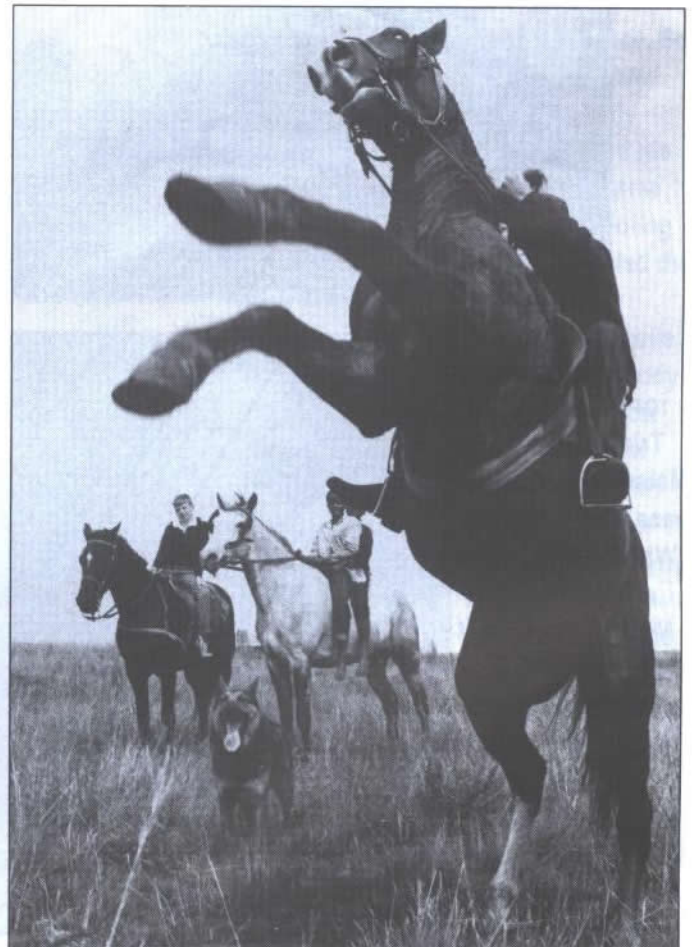
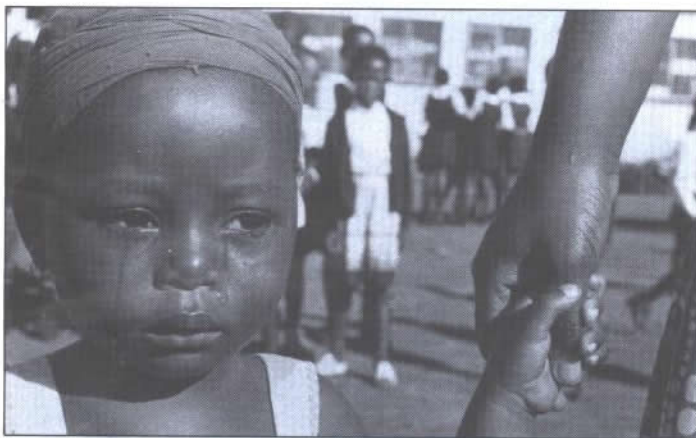
LEFT: Winnie Mandela being arrested in Soweto — 1980s

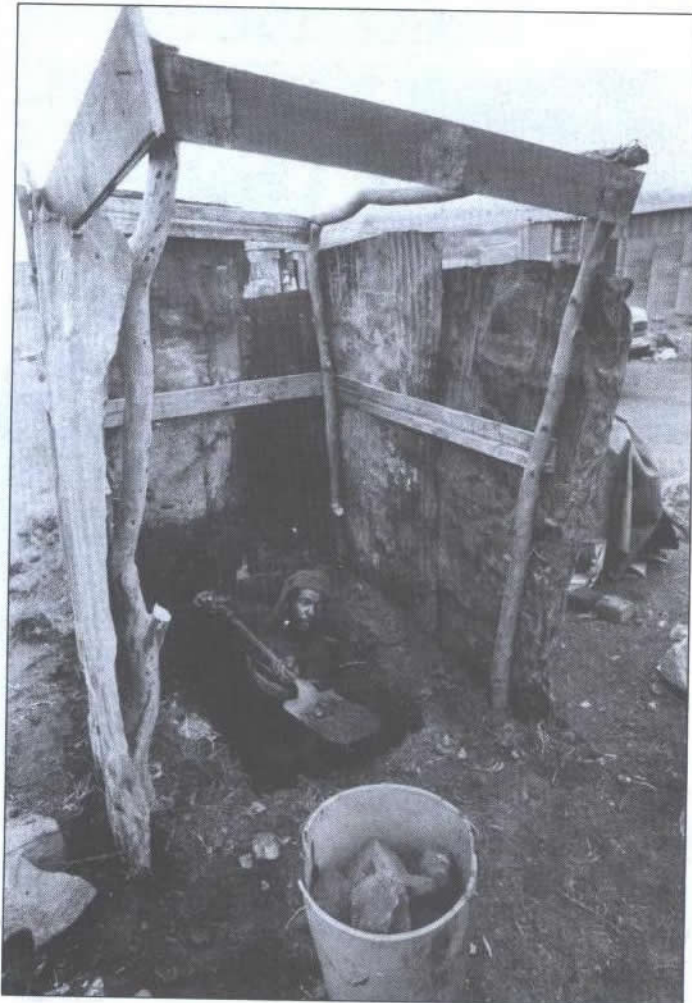
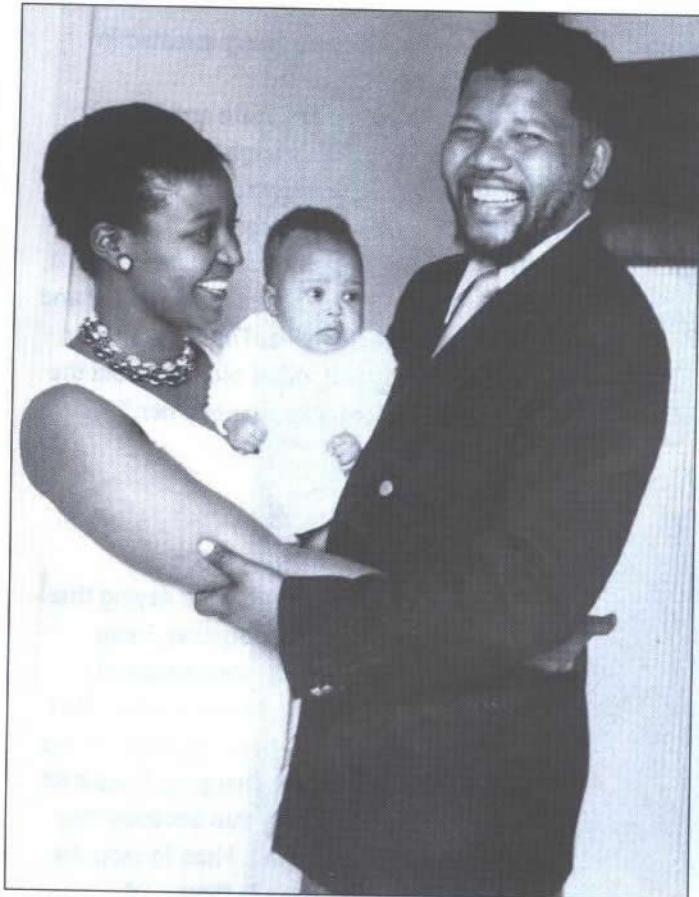
“The whole press was there and nobody got a shot. I took it through a window from across the road using a zoom. This was during the state of emergency. *The Star* couldn't publish it of course. *Life* wanted it, but I refused, I didn't trust their contact and he wanted the negative. *The Sunday Star* took a chance with other pictures from the sequence before they grabbed her.”



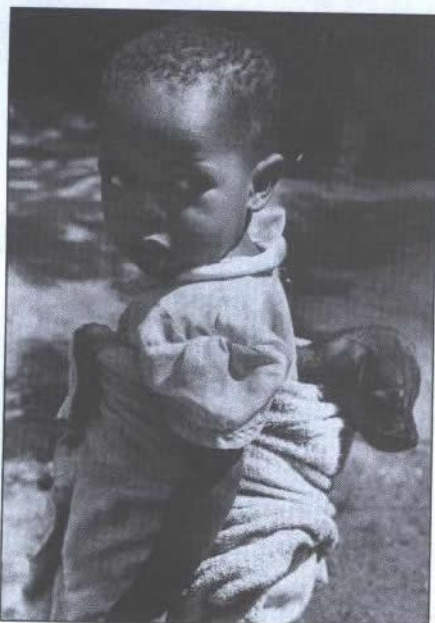
LEFT: Bulls in the kraal — 1960s

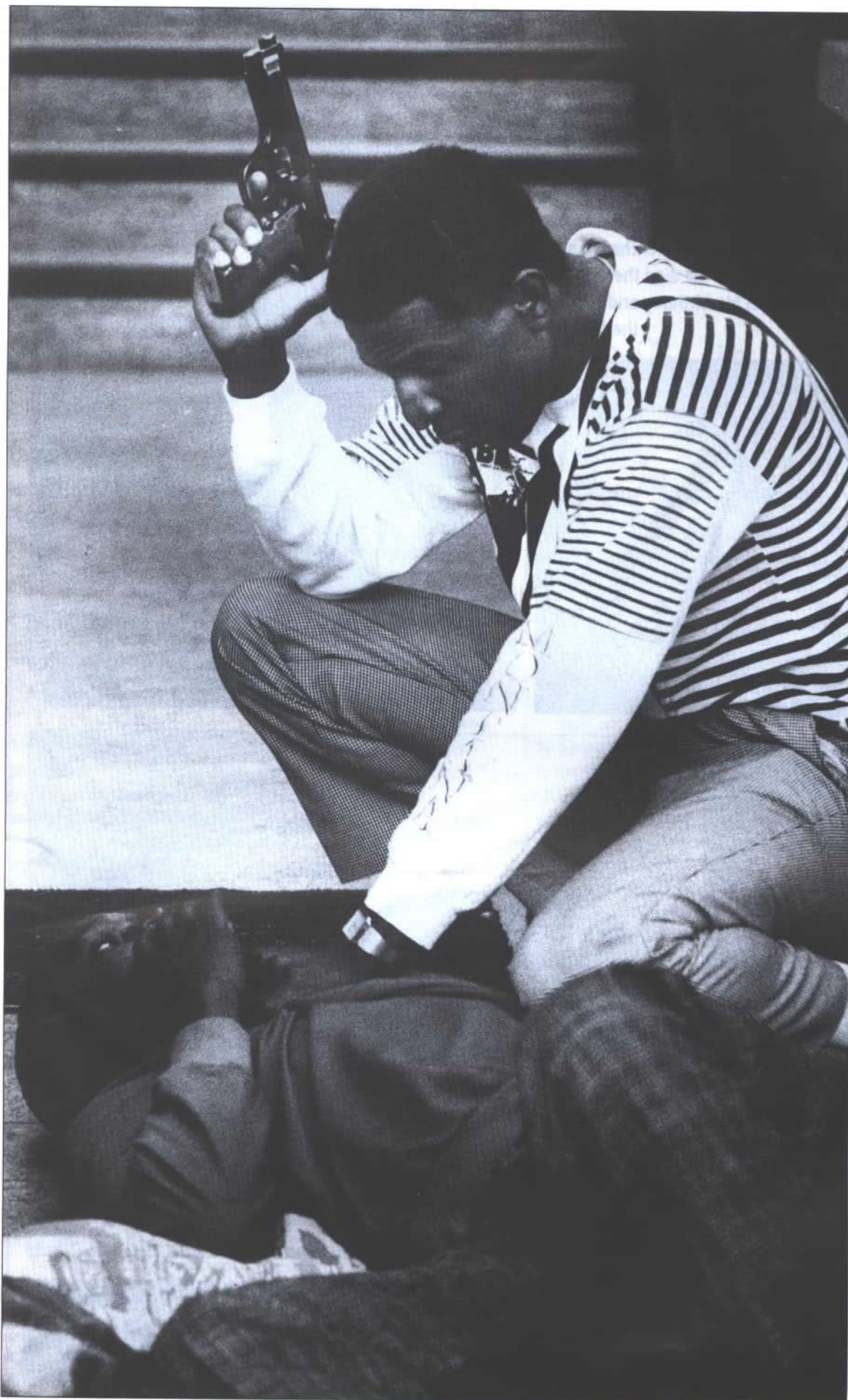
“This shot was inspired by the saying that you can't put two bulls together. I saw these two bulls in separate kraals and I saw they were craving for each other. So I got the farmer to put them together. As the one bull went in it was charging. I had a lot of fun and worry taking this because they were injuring each other. I had to stop the fight by throwing sand at them — it worked, funny enough.”





TOP RIGHT: Treason Trial — “Advocate Maisels had won the case for the trialists. What I like is where the fist ends, at the *Nie Blankes* sign, it adds to the pic. They loved the guy so much, there was no race involved, he was just a human being who had done a good job and they hoisted him up.”





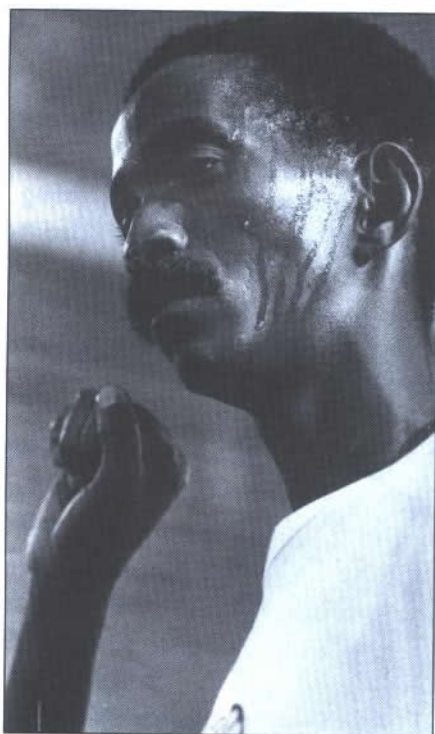
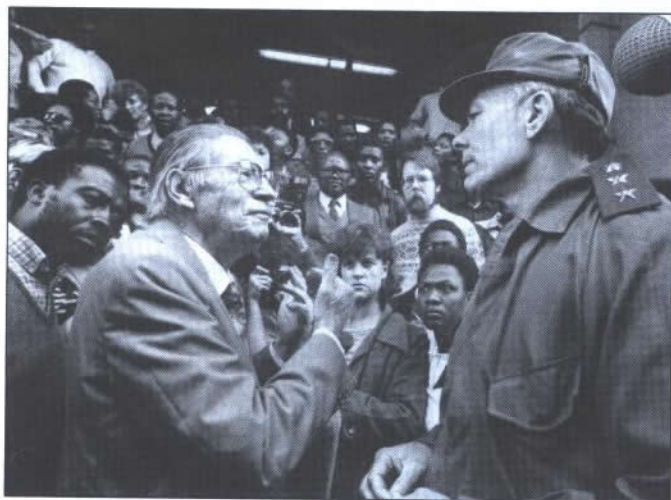
Police arrest of boy  
“The editor was unhappy with me over this shot. My fear was that the policeman would come and kill me so I refused to let it be published. The one editor said: ‘Gosh, it looks like Miami Vice.’ The sequence does look as if it is not real. I saw this gunman taking the boy into a shop. When they got there they *plakked* him down, sort of throttled him, pointed the gun right at his face. So I took some shots and somebody inside spotted me so this guy came rushing out toting his gun. I pulled the film out of my cameras and gave them to somebody I didn’t even know and that person disappeared with my cameras. For 20 minutes I was trying to condition myself to the fact that the cameras had gone and all of a sudden this guy appeared and said: ‘Hey please take your things I’m going now.’ I could’ve kissed the guy!”

**RIGHT: Worker with battered hat**

"We were passing. It was midday and the sun was so hot. His employer was scolding him even as I was taking the shot. He was a contract worker. Unfortunately I never got back to him."

**BOTTOM RIGHT: Louis Armstrong**

"I went to the Joe Fraser/Mohammed Ali fight. I freelanced and stayed in the States for seven months. I'd seen Armstrong the day before he died — he died the day after his birthday. I'd taken shots on his birthday and covered the funeral."



**“ Even when I use a stick to walk I’ll still take pictures. That’s how much I’m in love with photography. ” — ALF KUMALO**