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Lovemore and Doe was born in South Africa, near the border of what was then called Rhodesia. This was the 1970s. On one side of the border, there was apartheid, ruthlessly enforced by the regime.

And on the other side, a bloody and brutal civil war.

Lovemore witnessed and experienced plenty of violence as a child and as a teenager.

He left him angry and despondent, and with a poor idea of the value of his own life.

Unfortunately, a chance encounter with a security guard steered Lovemore into the local boxing gym.

And rather than channeling his anger into the fight, boxing taught him how to win by not being angry. It made him a world champion and it became Lovemore's ticket out of South Africa and into Australia.

And it also gave Lovemore some of the skills he still uses today as a lawyer in the Sydney suburb of Rockdale.

Lovemore has written a book about his life from the ring to the courtroom, and it's called Tough Love. Hi, Lovemore.

Hi, it's Alana Tobia.

Tell me about the town you grew up in in South Africa. Whereabouts it was in South Africa?

I was born in a small town called Messina, previously known as Messina.

It's right at the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe, on what's called the Limpopo province.

What did it look like in the country around? Can you describe what it was like for you as a kid?

Well, there was nothing special about it, particularly where I lived.

As you were back then during apartheid, black people were not allowed to live in towns or in the city.

So we lived in the outskirts. So I grew up exposed to poverty.

So and when I say poor, I mean, to an extent that, you know, there were days that go by without a meal or sometimes we just have one meal a day.

I come from a very big family. There were seven of us, but there were actually nine of us because when my dad met my mom,

he already had two children from his previous marriage. So there were nine children.

Nine children in the one home?

In the one home and we both lived in this little shack. Yeah, it was tough.

What did your family do, your father and your mother do, to support the family?

My father was, you know, he would do whatever he could to make a living for his children.

One of the things he did was fishing.

Eventually he also worked for the army as a mechanic, but he did a lot of different odd jobs that he could to feed the family.

My mom used to sell, you know, fruits and fish and stuff at the market.

When you say your dad did fishing, was that river fishing you're talking about?

That's river fishing, yes.

Like river fishing where crocodiles are?

Yes, you know, I actually tell you a story because I was the first boy in the family.

So that came with a lot of responsibilities and one of the responsibility was to help the family make a living.

[Transcript] Conversations / Lovemore's left hook

So one of the things I used to do was to help dad with fishing.

So I would sometimes go set up, you know, fishing nets, you know, in the Limpopo River, which was pretty much full of crocodiles.

And it really didn't bother me if crocodile was sitting about five, ten meters.

I was still jumping into the water.

Why?

I was made to believe that if you're a good person, the crocodiles won't touch you.

They won't do anything.

But over the years I've come to realize, you know, that there was just a lot of BS, you know.

Crocodiles aren't that discriminating, are they?

No, no.

And so, yeah, so the vendor people always believed that if you're a good person, the water guards will always protect you.

But a lot of people died.

I was just lucky not to have ended up as dinner for crocodiles.

So were you putting like these nets in the water while crocodiles were watching you?

Yeah, the crocodiles all over the place.

It's amazing, you know, what your mind can do.

If you're made to believe in something and you just believe in it, it works miracles.

And I believe, because I believed in everything they told me, that's why I'm still around today.

Now this was at a time since you were close to the border of Zimbabwe, which is then called Rhodesia.

Wasn't this when the civil war was going on between Ian Smith's colonial regime and the Zanu-Pief Party and all that?

And we were aware of that war going on on the other side of the border?

We were aware, but just to a certain extent, because the South African media during apartheid didn't want us to know more about what was happening in our neighboring countries.

But I got to know more about what was happening in Zimbabwe.

We eventually moved to Zimbabwe because I couldn't start school in South Africa.

My parents decided we were going to move to Zimbabwe, so I could start school.

My father was actually born in Zimbabwe, and he met my mom in South Africa.

We went to Zimbabwe in 1978, and at that time there was ongoing civil unrest in Zimbabwe.

Who were you staying with when you moved into Zimbabwe?

We were staying with my uncle, my father's younger brother.

Tell me what happened on this one night while you were there in that house?

I recall one night we were asleep and all of a sudden we got woken up, and then we were told we needed to pick up whatever we can and run.

Who told you that?

It was my mom and auntie. I didn't know what was going on,

but then the cousin of mine and myself, we had to stay behind, but all the other kids left.

And then I recall later on when I looked outside and I saw there was a big fire and a tree.

People were seated there. My father was also sitting there, and there were people carrying guns.

Turned out there were the Zanu-P.F. Gorillaz and...

Robert Mugabis.

[Transcript] Conversations / Lovemore's left hook

Robert Mugabis, yeah, Gorillaz, and there were torture on people. They were abusing people. They were beating up people saying, if you don't vote for Robert Mugabi, this is what's going to happen. How old were you when you saw this? I would have been about eight. And for the first time, I witnessed things that I had to live with for a long time. I saw a man I knew as the local chief getting tortured. He eventually died. It's gruesome to explain some of the things that happened, but I also saw the chief's wife getting her tongue and lips chopped off. People were getting beaten up. Young female teenagers were getting raped. What about your father? Where was he in all of this? He was sitting there, and while we were sitting and watching this, my mom, one of my aunties came back and told my cousin and I that we needed to live as well. So we left, and then we came back with the group of other children the next day. When I came back, dad wasn't there, and then I later found out that dad was attacked with an axe. He almost died. The story is he was actually taken to hospital. By the time he got to the hospital, he was pronounced dead, so they put him in a mortuary and eventually later on when the nurses went on to put other dead bodies in the corpses in the mortuary, they heard him screaming, and that's when they took him out of the mortuary. So those are some of the things that I had to witness in Zimbabwe. It was really bad. That's an eight-year-old. What kind of an idea does that give you about? I don't know. The value of human life also. Look, at the time I felt like there was no value in my life. You know, you kind of get insensitized, and that's how I felt. You know, I felt like my life was worth nothing. And eventually when we decided to come back to South Africa a few years later, things were worse in South Africa because at the time the ANC was fighting hard to get rid of apartheid, and the former racist regime at the time was doing everything they could to stop us, including killing us, if they could. I recall during one of the protests, we were protesting against the government filling up our schools with white teachers at the time when blacks couldn't teach in white schools, and at the time where we felt we were forced on an educational system that wasn't assisting us, the Bantustan Educational System that was pretty much created to fail us as black people. So we were protesting. My friend and I, his name was Patu. I just didn't feel good about it that day. For some reason it's like I felt like something was going to happen. And yes, Patu got shot, and he died in my arms. I was 13 at the time, and Patu was only 12 years of age. Who was doing the shooting? The police. Just fighting to the crowd and kill the kid.

Just kill the kid. It was common.
So Patu was in the first one and was in the last one.
A lot of people died, a lot of kids died.
A lot of people were left with lifelong mental, psychological injuries.
I suspect that someone who has seen all that stuff by the time of 13,
I suppose it's really easy to conclude that that's the way of the world, that's what the world is like.
Is that what you thought the world was like?
Look, I think I'm a bit different when it comes to things like that.
I always believe in hope. I always had hope that things were going to change someday for the better.
I always had hope that we were someday going to get rid of the racist regime
and create a better South Africa.
And I think it also helped that we knew much about what was happening with people like Nelson
Mandela,
who stood up for the struggle, and we believed in what he was doing.
And I think that that helped me as a young kid then and gave me hope.
Things will change for the better.
So I didn't give up on life because of that.
Anything that happens in life happens for a reason, whether it's good or bad.
And I always believe, even if it's something bad, something good can always come out of it.
I look at my life, for example, I didn't start school until I was nine years of age.
And when I started school, I had to find a job so I could pay for my school uniforms, I could pay for
my school fees.
That did not stop me from pursuing my dreams.
I look at it today, I hold seven university degrees.
So I just believe the fact that I started school late encouraged me to study hard.
And it allowed me to epitomize the value of education.
I don't think it would do that if you didn't have hope.
I think if I had gone through that, I would have been very angry, though.
Very angry. Did you have that rage?
I was very angry when I was growing up.
I was a very, very, very angry young man.
And it had a lot to do with the environment where I grew up,
what I was exposed to as a child, coming from a very, very poor family
and having to witness all these atrocities and just the way the apartheid system was treating us.
I don't know if you know much about apartheid, but apartheid was pretty much about segregation.
It was an era of darkness in South Africa, in particular when it came to black people.
So that just created a lot of anger in me.
It wasn't right for me to feel like in my own country I was treated as a savage,
not being intellectual, the same as white people, only because I happened to be black.
The police system was created to police blacks while it saved whites.
The justice system looked different for black people as it did for whites.
So all those things just made me angry. So I was a very angry young man.
A friend of mine explained to me that apartheid was actually a form of totalitarianism.
It was an ideology that crept into every aspect of everyone's lives,

particularly of course black South Africans that affected who you could meet, where you lived, where you could travel to.
It affected almost every aspect of your life. How does that sound to you?
It did. I think that's the best description of it.
Because if you look at it in a black people, like I said earlier on, we couldn't live in the town or in the city.
We had to live in the outskirts which we call townships.
And black people had to carry these past books with them.
And eventually we were just segregated.
You look, every tribe was given a certain area.
Like the vendor people, my people, we ended up in what's called vendor land.
The Zulus ended up in Zulu land, the Tossis in Tossaland.
And this was more about division, dividing us.
And I think they purposely did it because if you divide people, you are always going to control them.
And they knew if we united as blacks irrespective of what tribe you came from, we were going to overcome the racist regime quicker than we did.
So they kept us separated.
It's horrific, but there's also something pathetic about it too at the same time.
To have to sort of hammer in those nails so hard to make this crap ideology work.
Did you want to get out? Did you really want to leave South Africa at that point?
Look, I dreamt of living in South Africa.
I wanted to live South Africa.
And I knew my only ticket out of South Africa was going to be through sports.
So when I was young, I tried all sorts of sports.
I tried soccer. I even played netball with girls.
I did everything because I just needed something to get me out of South Africa.
Something to get me out of apartheid South Africa.
Something to get me away from poverty.
But like you mentioned, this anger issue.
I had so much anger and that didn't help with most of the sports.
I was a good soccer player, but I didn't last long in the field because often I would be knocking people out instead of playing soccer.
I would be chasing another player instead of chasing the ball itself.
So each time somebody played...
That's not good for the game.
No, and I'm not proud of it.
So each time somebody played rough, I would turn around and knock them out.
And then I would get kicked out.
So I didn't last long in the field.
So it all happened one time.
We were playing against one of the local schools and this kid played rough.
And again, I knocked him out cold.
And they had to carry him out on a stretcher.

And then they had to get a security guard to escort me out of the field.
And I remember when he was walking me out, he said to me,
kid, I don't think soccer is for you.
I've been watching you.
I've been watching you.
You don't seem to last long in the field.
And he was right.
People used to blaze bats to see how long I was going to last in the field.
At one stage, they gave me a nickname, Mr. Red.
That's how often I got the red card.
So I remember he said to me, look, kid, I think you should try boxing.
Then I thought, wow, I've got nothing to lose.
So the next day, I went to a boxing gym.
What was this gym like?
It was at a copper mine.
So it was in a fancy looking.
It was a rundown gym.
But you know, it was all we had at the time.
The first time I got there, he said to me, look, we're going to have to work on your anger.
And I was thinking, why?
Why work on my anger?
This is boxing.
This is fighting.
I need to be angry to fight.
He said, no, OK, that's not how it works.
You know, boxing is scientific.
You need to have a clear mind if you're going to fight, you know, and perform well.
You know, boxing is like playing a game of chess.
You need to have that clear mind with you.
Who was this trainer?
His name was Divas, Divas Chira.
His nickname was Macaza, which means the cold one.
He used to knock them out and they, you know, knock them out cold.
So they started calling him Macaza, the cold one.
I had to learn the hard way.
So he put me inspiring against bigger boys.
And I kept getting beat up, you know, and he kept saying to me,
well, you've got to calm down.
And then eventually I started to calm down.
And I realized each time I calmed down, I would perform better.
You know, I would respond well to punches and I would perform well.
How did you ramp down your anger in your mind?
What was your way of not running into anger, stopping yourself
or not even getting angry in the first place?

Well, I guess it was a combination of many things.
One of them getting beat up every time I get angry.
And then I realized my boxing career is not going anyway.
You know, maybe I need to work on something different.
You know, you know, I think it's all coming...
What I'm saying to you is there's a bit of mental strength here,
surely, apart from just having that pounded in you.
I'm sure there's some kind of mental discipline.
You have to have some mental discipline.
Yes, it was.
You know, I had to tell myself, look, I love more.
It's not working. Try something else that's going to work.
So, you know, I tried to stay calm and it worked, you know.
And I'm grateful because not only did that improve my boxing career,
but it changed me as a person, you know,
and become this calm, collected person that I am today.
And I believe, I believe that had it not been for boxing,
I'll probably be dead today or locked up.
Because at the time, you know, growing up in South Africa,
at the time when, you know, pretty much every teenager
walked around with a gun or knife,
had I not changed my attitude, you know,
something terrible would have happened.
Because you were sort of making progress
with the way you have your self-control
and all that mental discipline as well,
did you love boxing then?
Did that teach you to love the sport?
I find in love with the sport right away
because I had so much anger in me
and I had so much aggression in me
and that was my way to deal with that aggression and anger.
Just getting in there, hitting the bag, hitting the pads,
doing all that heavy training, it disciplined me.
So tell me about the first proper amateur fight you had
against a world away from the gym you were training in.
It was one of those intra fights where whoever wins is going to go fight.
So we were going to compete against the army team.
So we were representing the local mine team.
And I was on a featherweight then,
which meant in a weight like 57 kilos.
But they didn't care back then,
they just matched you against anyone.
So my first fight I remember,

I fought this guy, his name was Robert.
He had already been a national champion.
He worked at the mines.
He was an adult.
And how old were you?
I was 14.
He would have been about 24, 25.
So I was only a kid.
It was only three months after I started boxing.
So I had my first amateur fight,
three months into when I started boxing.
And were people taking bets?
People were taking bets that love was going to get killed.
Some people told me love might not,
you need to pull out of this fight.
My school teachers were concerned that I was going to get hit.
And you wouldn't have even been fully grown.
You're 14.
So what happened in the fight?
At that time, I really didn't care much about my life.
I think the system, the apartheid system,
had me so desensitized that I really didn't care much about my life.
I didn't care whether I was going to get hit or get killed.
But I knew this guy.
I knew he was underestimating me.
And I knew he was a womanizer.
And I knew he liked the drink.
So he took me lightly.
He just thought he was just going to walk all over me.
And that sort of gave me some sort of belief that I could be this guy.
When the fight started, he just walked straight up to me,
thinking he was just going to land that big punch and knock me out.
And for some reason, and I still ask myself how to this day,
I don't know why, but for some reason I just ducked and I closed my eyes.
I don't know why I closed my eyes.
But then I came back with a left hook.
I caught him flash on the chain and I dropped him.
It took him about, it took more than 10 minutes to revive him.
So you won with a knockout?
I won with a knockout.
And I'll be the first one to admit that it was a lucky punch.
But that lucky punch made me who I am today.
Because had I not won that fight,
I probably would have walked away from boxing.

[Transcript] Conversations / Lovemore's left hook

Then I remember the next day when I went to school,
everybody was talking about it, the school assembly,
the principal was talking about it.
So I became a star overnight.
People started talking about,
love is going to be the next big thing in boxing.
And that just made me want to continue fighting.
So that lucky punch made me who I am today.
How much did you like all this attention you were suddenly getting?
I loved it, I loved it.
All of a sudden this kid from Norway is getting all this attention.
And this kid that everybody thought was going to get killed,
did the impossible.
Tell me how that kind of sort of got you into some trouble
at the local supermarket there?
It did, look.
So eventually my boxing career picked up
and I did well as an amateur.
In fact, I went on to become
four times South African champion as an amateur
with the great record about 68 fights for 66 wins.
And I started becoming the Toko town.
There was a supermarket where we lived
and it was owned by a white man.
So he owned a supermarket where we used to go
and buy our groceries and stuff.
And he had a daughter who was about my age
and I recall every time I went there,
she would smile at me, she would be nice to me.
Sometimes she just let me walk away without paying
and I found it a bit strange but I thought,
hey, getting free groceries, why not?
So she liked you?
Yes, she did.
And I recall the black people that worked there
started telling me,
this girl is always talking about you.
This girl likes you, but you got to be careful
if the father finds out something bad is going to happen.
I never thought anything big about it.
So eventually the father found out
and I recall one night we were sleeping in the middle of the night,
the cops, the police just came, started kicking down our little shack
and I was dragged.

They took me to the cop station.
They wanted to hit me up with some trumped up charges.
Apparently I had sexually assaulted this girl.
I had nothing to do with it.
I've never, apart from talking to the girl,
nothing has ever happened between us.
And the good thing was the girl said,
she spoke up.
When they found out that this girl was going to speak up,
tell the truth that nothing ever happened,
they decided not to charge me,
but they decided to just lock me up.
So they took me to what place called Lutrihat,
which is about 90 kilometers from where I lived.
I was locked up for 90 days with no charge.
And the worst thing they did was they actually put me in an adult prison.
They probably thought I was going to get sexual abuse, tortured.
So back then they had a law where they could lock up
political activists up to 90 days without a charge.
But the law was getting abused and getting used to anyone they didn't like,
and I happened to be one of them.
So after the 90 days, they took me back to Messina, my hometown,
and I went before a magistrate on that day.
On that day, I get charged for stealing.
Apparently I stole candy from that supermarket.
So it went from sexual assault to spending time in prison
with no charge to stealing candy.
And then I get sentenced to six cuts,
which meant I had to get drugged to the police station that day
and get punished with a bamboo stick which drew blood.
So I wasn't getting punished for allegedly stealing candies.
I knew I was getting punished for flirting with a white girl
or for being liked by a white girl,
because they kept saying to me,
this is what you get when you mess with white girls.
They kept referring to me as a kefir, a kefir,
which was a very, very derogatory term that they use.
It's more similar to the N-Wed.
So they kept referring to me as a kefir when they were punishing me,
and I lost my cool.
I became the old love moe.
I just became angry, and I told them to go to F-Off.
And that was the worst mistake I made,
because following that, they almost killed me.

They started kicking me.
They bruised my ribs.
They broke my left arm.
They chipped my front tooth.
But the worst thing they did was they got a dog
and they said a dog on me.
It almost bit off my eye.
Often people see this guy under my right eye
and think it's from boxing.
Now, this is a dog bite.
It almost took off my eye.
And look, after this incident,
when I was recovering in hospital,
I recall thinking to myself,
now, this is wrong.
I need to do something about this.
I need to fight for justice one day.
That's when I decided that someday
I was going to become a lawyer or a political activist
and fight for justice for others.
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So you said you were brought before the police
to be caned with this bamboo cane
and then they kicked you and assaulted you
and sent a dog upon you.
So you were recruited not long after this
into the army boxing team?
What was that like for you to enter the army
of this regime you were now opposed to?
Was that strange?
It was.
The thing is, my father worked for the army as a mechanic.
He kept saying to me,
you've got to join the army.
You could make a living,
but I didn't believe in the system then.
I said, no.
Why join the army so I can kill my own people?
Would it offer you some protection joining the army in those days?
It would be a lot harder for police to pick you up

and cane you and kick you half to death
if you've got a uniform on?
Honestly, it didn't really matter as long as you're black.
The black policemen or the military
were getting any best treatment.
As long as you're black, they didn't care.
They were happy to use you to fight their fights,
but you're still rated as a savage.
So once you were brought in,
what was your commandant like?
I think you could say,
even though Partite was about segregation,
some white people saw things differently.
Some white people believed in equality
and treated people with respect.
And that was the thing that I saw with the commandant.
He told me a lot more.
He was happy to see me join the army team
and he kept telling me a lot more.
You've got so much talent
and I believe you could become something big one day
if you keep your head straight and focused.
So he was a great man.
He didn't see color in me.
He just saw talent.
Someone who could have a great future in boxing.
Were you able to fight internationally at that stage?
I couldn't because at the time South Africa
was banned from international competition
because of Partite.
And up to this day, I saw film.
If there's something that I really regret,
I'm not having that opportunity to fight internationally
because I believe I could have won gold in the Olympics.
I believe I had what it took to perform at an international level
and win gold at the Olympics.
But that was taken away from me.
It's funny, those sanctions were effective
in persuading the regime.
It had to change.
But it is pretty funny though,
you're a victim of a Partite at one end
and the sanctions aren't helping you either.
It is.

It's funny, the world works in a very strange way.
So how well were you doing on the Amateur Circuit
in South Africa at that time?
I did well.
I went on to become four times South African champion.
I had a very impressive record.
We're not talking like a fight every three months
when you were on that circuit.
How often were you fighting?
How irregular?
How quickly would these matches turn?
It was happening pretty quick.
And sometimes you would fight three times a day.
Three times a day?
Yes.
How can anyone do that?
Well, when we fought for the provincial titles
or the national titles,
there were so many people coming from different provinces
and you all come together,
you've got to eliminate each other.
So there's so many fighters.
And sometimes you had to fight three times a day
to eliminate each other.
Right, it's like a tournament then.
Yes.
But I suppose most of those fights would be pretty quick.
With you in the ring?
Well, it's funny.
When I was in Amateur, all I thought about
was I just wanted to knock people out.
That was my way of fighting.
But, you know, you can't have that style
in professional boxing
because you're not going to knock everybody out.
So if you don't knock them out, what's going to happen?
So you need to be able to box
and use power if you can.
But if that doesn't work,
you've got to have something to fall back on.
You've got to use a different style.
Meanwhile, in the late 80s,
the Pata regime started to dismantle itself.
Mandela was released from prison.

And in 1994, Mandela was the last elected president of the new Democratic South Africa.
Do you remember that time
and where were you on election night
when Mandela became president?
I actually remember that like yesterday.
In fact, I remember leading up to the elections,
a lot of things happened.
And I remember what used to be called
the Africana of Vierstan Bevyachen, the AWB.
They were like the KKK in South Africa.
They were opposing these elections
and they were killing people.
They were like a terrorist organization.
So it caused a lot of problems
prior to the election.
And apart from that,
we also had black-on-black violence,
particular between the African National Congress members
and the Incata Freedom fighters
who were led by Mongol Suhtibu Talizi.
And a lot of people died,
especially in the hostels where black people lived
and in the taxi rangs.
A lot of killings happened.
So I do remember that election.
When it eventually took place,
it was like a dream come true.
Mandela got elected
and that predicted civil war just didn't happen.
It just didn't happen.
Look, I think one of the reasons it didn't happen
was because of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
that was put in place
that allowed people to come forward
and talk about what happened.
It allowed people to forgive each other.
It allowed people to know about what happened
to their loved ones during the struggle.
And that in itself,
I think it helped stop a possible civil war.
How about the figure of Mandela himself
and his statesman-like abilities?
He was a great man.

You know, I think there is never going to be another Nelson Mandela in South Africa. And it's really sad when I look at the current situation in South Africa. I look at all that hard work he's put in place, all those sacrifices that are going down the drain because all the leaders that I've taken over since he stepped down from office, they pretty much destroyed the country. All that hard work that we fought for is going down the drain. If you remember, the idea was during the political struggle, the idea was that once South Africa became a democratic country, it would become a South Africa for all to live in harmony, in peace. And people would share the wealth, there would be an equal distribution of national resources. But you look at it now, that's not what's happening. The country is falling apart because of corruption, pronism, elitism, you name it. It makes me sad just thinking about what's happening currently in South Africa. So not long after the part I'd ended and Mandela was elected, you made your first trip to Australia. What brought you to Newcastle of all places in New South Wales? I was lucky, I got offered a fight. In fact, it's funny how it came about a guy who's actually my best friend today who was a former South African who moved to Australia and went into the garment business. He became very successful. He got approached by Skychannel and Costa Zoo's team. They asked him if he could promote one of Costa Zoo's fights when Zoo was fighting Roger Mayweather.

So he said, look, yeah, I'll put the fight on
on the proviso that you put
two South Africans on the card.
So I happened to be one of those South Africans.
And I recall it was like
a dream come true when I finally
got the opportunity to fight in Australia.
But I remember before I left,
I did my research about Australia.
I needed to find out where I was going.
What did you read?
One of the things that I found out was,
Australia used to have a keep
Australia-wide policy.
So I thought to myself, oh, it looks like
I'm going to another South African.
And what was the reality when she got off the plane?
Look, I remember when I got off the plane,
the reception that I got,
the treatment that I got made me fall in love with this country.
People didn't see a black man.
People saw a human being,
and they treated me like a human being.
And that's what made me fall in love with this country.
And I remember telling myself,
you know what, I'm moving to Australia
to live permanently.
After that fight, I went back to South Africa
and I told my family, I'm moving to Australia.
And they were like, oh, have you done your research?
I was like, yeah, I did.
You haven't seen what I've seen.
I'm going back to Australia.
They were like, they're going to send you back on a boat.
I said no.
You know, kind of as an asylum seeker, no.
And today, I don't regret making that move.
It was the best move I ever made
coming to this beautiful country
that provided me with so many opportunities.
It allowed me to prove
to so many people that
no matter where you come from,
no matter what you've been exposed to,

if you are given an opportunity
and you take advantage of that opportunity,
you will always excel in life.
So Australia provided me with those opportunities
to be who I am today.
That's why today, I like to give back to the community.
In particular, I do a lot of pro bono work
for Indigenous people.
I also serve as a reserve in the Australian Army.
I'm an infantry soldier.
That gives me an opportunity to give back to the community
because if there are floods out there,
I'm out there helping people.
If there are fires out there, I'm out there helping people.
For me, I feel in life,
you know, you have to serve
something greater than yourself.
How was your boxing career going once you moved here?
Did it take off after that?
It wasn't that easy.
I had some difficulties with promoters,
but I did well, you know.
Remember, I came through what used to be called
a distinguished talent visa,
and I had to show that I had distinguished talent.
So you had to win?
You had to win to stay?
Yes.
So I wasn't fighting just to make money.
There's something about Hunger Games about all this, isn't there?
You've got to win a fight to stay in Australia.
I had to show distinguished talent.
That means I had to knock people out.
That's tough, Lovemore.
It was tough, but look, I won some good fights.
I got ranked.
I had issues with the promoters at some stage.
So it wasn't easy, you know.
But I kept my cool,
and eventually I got my permanent residency.
Then I tell the promoter,
you gave me a world title, or I'm not doing what you want.
I had to stop fighting for almost 14 months.
At the time, I was ranked number 2 WBC

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with the number 1 ranking vacant.
So technically I was the number 1 leading contender for the title.
But the title was just changing hands while I was sitting there not getting a shot.
So eventually I had to be inactive for 14 months.
I lost my ranking number 2 in the world to nowhere in the world.
But that gave me an opportunity to go study.
I realized, well, I got 14 months before the contract runs out.
What do I do with these 14 months?
That's when I decided to go to university and enroll.
So something good came out of that bad situation.
When you're preparing for a fight mentally,
do you preview that fight in your mind
long before you get into the ring?
By the time I step into the ring,
I've probably fought my opponent a thousand times already in my mind.
It becomes my daily focus.
I've already won and lost the fight so many times.
Mentally, you have to focus.
You have to think about the fight and always tell people
you have to stay focused and always tell people
you have to be nervous going into a fight
because if you're not nervous, you're either on drugs or something.
Because if you're not nervous, that means you're underestimating your opponent.
And that's the last thing you want to do.
You don't underestimate your opponent. That's when you get knocked out.
So the fact that you're nervous means you're not taking your opponent lightly
and you are aware of what could happen.
There's a possibility things might not go your way
and there's a possibility that things might go your way.
So you're taking the fight seriously.
So if you rehearse that fight in your head again and again and again
and you're winning and you're losing and you're winning and you're losing
and you're doing it again and again and I'm presuming you're doing this while
you're running, while you're lying in bed, while you're in the shower,
while you're doing all kinds of things.
Does that mean when the match comes,
you've seen it already before, you've seen it all before,
whatever that your opponent is going to do?
It means by the time I step into the ring, I'm prepared.
I'm ready for anything.
There is nothing I don't expect to see coming from my opponent.
So I expect everything that's going to, is going to dish out
or I expect that to happen.
And I found, like I said, you know, I've lost and won the fight

so many times mentally.

But by the time I step into the ring, I'm ready to win.

It's a good thing to have that fight play out in your head

leading into the fight because it prepares you for it.

Lee Sayles told me once her dad was a military man, an army man

and he used to live by the slogan which was

prior preparation prevents piss-poor performance.

That was his, that was his slogan.

Your slogan too, you like that?

I like that.

That was the five or six peas, I can't tell how many peas there are.

How do you think about yourself in comparison to your opponent in a fight?

You have to believe in yourself.

You have to believe you're better than yourself

and you have to do things differently and better than yourself.

So one of the things I used to do is, you know, I used to go run midnight

when everybody's sleeping.

Mentally I tell myself, wow, my opponent is sleeping, I'm training.

So your alarm would go off and you would wake up?

I'd wake up and go run.

At midnight?

At midnight.

Mentally just gave me this advantage that I feel like,

okay, while he's sleeping, I'm doing something.

Okay, so I used to train about six hours a day,

which meant, you know, I would break it to two hours in the morning,

two hours in the afternoon, two hours in the evening.

So I felt I had to do more.

It was like, you know, it was my, it was my profession, it was my job.

Like you go to work nine to five, I had to do, you know, the six hour training.

So it made me feel I was doing something.

I had to do something better than my opponent.

So you've done all that?

I've done all that.

And then there's the match and you stand there in the ring

and you do that thing where you touch gloves and you look at the opponent.

Do you look at him?

I actually used to look through my opponent.

Through him?

Yes.

You know, I'll be looking at him.

I won't even see his eyes.

I'm looking through him and I'm thinking, I just want to smash that face.

So he's just an obstacle then?

He's just an obstacle that's standing on my way.
And he's not scary?
He's not scared of me.
I'm not scared of him.
So at the peak of your career as you were saying, you took this period off to study.
You studied journalism at first?
Yes.
And then law?
Yes.
So what happened was I enrolled in a communication degree.
I wanted to pursue journalism.
I remember I wrote an assignment.
I had to do an essay.
And one of my lecturers, she read it and she said to me,
Lovemore, I think you should consider, you know, law or politics.
Because I wrote this paper about South Africa.
I wrote about the unequal distribution of national resources in South Africa.
And she said, you should definitely consider law or politics.
It's like she read my mind.
That's something I always wanted to do.
And the following year I enrolled into a double degree in communications and law.
I think a lot of Australians grew up thinking democracy and rule of law is normal.
And it is normal in Australia.
Someone like you and other migrants come to Australia who in their other lives didn't know
democracy and rule of law.
They can have a very different view on how normal it is to live under those conditions.
Do you have a view on all of that?
I do.
And you're right.
Growing up in South Africa, the rule of law which is supposed to be sacrosanct doesn't exist at all.
And those in power are the law unto themselves.
And I think growing up in a country like Australia with so many opportunities where democracy does
apply,
people don't really appreciate what they have.
Someone that's come from South Africa like myself was exposed to apartheid.
People like me, we tend to appreciate this country more than the people that were born here
because they don't realize how lucky they are.
And I can say that even with my children that were born here, I always tell them,
I don't think you guys really, really appreciate what you have because you haven't been exposed to
what I've been exposed to.
You don't see how lucky you are.
Maybe that's the gift you give your kids.
Do you ever, someone like you, can you ever really lose the sense that at any moment you might be
arrested?

Oh yes.

Look, again, when I look at things like that, they made me a strong person.

There was a time where every time I would see a police car, I would shake, thinking they're coming for me.

If I saw the police working, I think they're coming for me.

But having lived here for all these years and having studied law, having had to deal with the police, and honestly, I respect the police. I respect what they do.

Even though I'm a criminal defense lawyer, I still respect what they do.

I often have this argument with other lawyers.

They'll be saying things like, oh, there's freaking police. There's freaking police.

And I always say, well, if it wasn't for these freaking police, you wouldn't have a job.

Can you believe who yourself say this?

I mean, it's a different country.

I know.

It's a hell of a thing.

But it's just the way they treat you.

They treat you with respect. You've got to treat them with respect.

I think that's how it should be.

So you left South Africa to escape one cliché and you've arrived here

and now you are another cliché, which is the overachieving migrant to Australia.

Did you say seven degrees? Seven degrees and diplomas?

Yes.

What are they in?

Law, communication, human rights, politics, you name it.

So what's next for you?

What's next for me?

I'm heading back to South Africa.

In fact, I'm even considered running as an independent candidate in the next general elections.

Like I said earlier on, I'm deeply concerned and worried about the current situation in South Africa.

Things are not getting any better.

We're heading towards 30 years since South Africa had its first democratic elections and things are not getting any better.

What about in the town you grew up in?

Is there anything better there than they were?

Things are worse.

It's said to say that the economy is worse than it was during apartheid.

People can move freely but you need more than just moving freely.

People need jobs with better paying wages.

The crime rate is outrageous.

Part of the reason is because people don't have jobs.

The educational system is so terrible.

You need to educate people. You need to create jobs for people.

You need to get rid of corruption.

The worst thing that ever happened for South Africa was the creation of the black economic

empowerment.

The idea behind it was laudable because it was about black participation in the economy which blacks were denied during apartheid.

But it ended up creating what I call an avalanche of corruption, cronism, elitism because those in power are only using it to their advantage.

They're the only ones who are gaining from this black economic empowerment whereas the ordinary person is suffering.

Think of it this way.

Thirty years since the first democratic elections, the basic needs of people are so not met.

People are still having to rely on the bucket sanitation system.

There's a shortage of electricity. There's a shortage of water.

It shouldn't be like that because South Africa is a rich country.

It's a rich mineral resources.

If the country was governed properly, the ordinary people's basic needs should be met.

I always say this. I think the problem with Africa, not just South Africa.

Africa in general is that Africa is not poor.

Africa is poor because it's been poorly governed.

I think the biggest mistake that Africans make is they seem to think the liberators or the freedom fighters should be the ones running the country.

I don't agree with that because the majority of them are not qualified to run the country.

They run the country down the drain.

Look at the history of South Africa. You look at people like Zuma.

He destroyed the country.

The guy had a year five education and then you had him running the country.

A couple of years ago you wrote a memoir called Tough Love

and I wonder what that was like for you to write that

and to see the end result, to see your long journey from that little town

where you're putting out fishing nets in the crocodile stream river to where you are today.

Look, it wasn't easy putting the book together

because I had to relive what I went through.

But in a way I'm grateful that I did it.

Often they say if you fear something you should face up to it

and I found writing the book was therapeutic

because I had to go through all the trauma.

It took me more than five years to put the book together.

A book which I could have written in three months to six months

but what I would do is I would write and often I would trigger some memories

and I would be depressed for a while

and then I would put it away sometimes for about nine months or a year

and then I would go back and write it again

and eventually I managed to finish the book.

But like I said, I'm glad I did it

because I used to have a lot of nightmares

because of what I experienced

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all the atrocities that I experienced growing up in South Africa.
Do you stick with those nightmares?
In particular when I see things happening in Africa
or when I see the civil wars
like what's currently happening now in Israel and Palestine
I see things like that, they kind of trigger what I saw growing up as a child
but it's not as bad as before I put the book together.
That's a hell of a story, Lovemore.
Thank you very much for sharing it.
It's a pleasure.
You've been listening to a podcast of Conversations with Richard Fidler.
For more Conversations interviews please go to the website
abc.net.au.