

A b. 1940.

JF And if you had to explain in a short way how you came to non racialism is this...I mean when you were growing up was there an acceptance of non racialism? Did you know people who worked in the '50s with whites and that was ok? If I asked a 20 year old and 25 or 30 year old they would probably talk about BC or gone through that period (yes right) and anti white and perhaps changing, perhaps not. Did you go through a period of being anti white and change or was your history different?

A Actually it was completely different, because (from the beginning of things I knew organisations that were with whites.)

JF Such as?

A Well, (such as the ANC, such as the S.A. Congress of Trade Unions. And I happened to be at a spot where such meetings were being held and I actually saw them playing an equal role and I have never known anything different actually.)

JF And what was your involvement? How did you come to work in the union movement?

A I worked ^{first for} in one year, ^{and} when I was looking to go to an institution up country but (in that period) I happened to have (some of the workers who wanted me to come to work as an organiser of the union. So I was torn between doing school to continue or taking the workers path but because I actually grew up in that atmosphere where meetings were held, where I stayed, fighting for better conditions and ~~better standard~~ of living, and a change of things, that became more attractive to me.

And in fact when I got into the whole thing I thought I was ^{only} going to do it for a while and after I want to (leave it. But it so happened that once we are with workers in particular, we automatically become a mother. And it is a situation where you feel (You become what?) more mothering to them. In a situation where (you feel that..you cannot be doing anything better.) If you get what I mean.

JF What, were you going to go to university or

A Not actually, (I was going to take up primary school teaching but)

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JF And had you been a worker in the factories or had experience as a worker?
Or was this when you were just leaving school or what?

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①

A Since I was 10 I grew up in a town. (When I was about 12 there was the defiance campaign and meetings were held near my place and things were very active at that time) so there was also children involvement in such things because...and in the speeches and talks that were going on there actually made us feel we were part of the whole thing and that whole thing was going to improve our situation.

JF What about the time you were 20?

A By the time I was 20 actually I knew nothing else.

JF But also those organisations had been crushed - gone underground.

A (Well, they have been crushed and they have gone underground but all the same) now (there)...^{the political organisations were} were things like the trade unions and that sort of...^{were} that remained a voice of the people) till it was actually crushed by the government but be...it ^(SACTU) collapsed as a result of a lot of pressures from the government and it only collapsed ^{but} for a period of about three years. Thereafter it was revived again, not as SACTU now but as the General Workers Union we have.)

JF Do you see General Workers Union as a revival of SACTU?

A I would say...they are actually in place of SACTU I would say.

JF When you said for years, you are talking about from when to when?

A From '69 to '72, '73; '69, '70, '71, (In '72 things started towards forming something for the workers and in '73 the ^{new} union was born.)

JF Out of what?

A (Out of ex trade unionists that were banned and house arrested and who actually felt that workers were defenceless.) And anyway they had not reached their goal. (Something has to take place in the line of helping workers organise. And how that was going to take place)...(nobody actually had the right pattern, so our beginning was starting it as a small advice bureau) which was basically there to get whatever ? cover to the people

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A and also trying to get for them whatever we could get and at that time things were...we had to be so cautious of another crush by the government. (That we even had to use the government works committees there.) That one actually attractive aspect in them, in that they were absolutely democratic.

(Workers were allowed to organise from the factory floors by electing a committee of their own and that committee was to go back to the workers to report on whatever matter was discussed with management. So that was our springboard and at that time as well, there was a survey done by ...a project done at University of Cape Town called the Wages Commission.

(Now the Wages Commission was also doing a survey on conditions of workers and we actually saw that as a roof and we needed a base which was actually getting workers organised and seeing to their day-to-day complaints. So we actually started the project with a lot of help from the Wages Commission which actually had white students.

And ever since then that's...the workers are...I am dealing with knew nothing else but that in fact..in our organisation the appreciation of a white skin working in, sacrificing for a black trade union struggle is so much that (most of the workers) like them. They would treat the whites with better care than the blacks because they feel they are more to be appreciated for the sacrifice they have made. Because actually working in a trade union organisation he is going a lot of steps below either, that type of thing.

JF Didn't you or other blacks question their motives? Didn't you wonder why these whites get involved with us?

A The thing is I have only known that to be happening and in the history of the whites being in the organisation they...I mean with a few exceptions of one who gaps to an organisation as a cover then they have actually played an equally important role and we trusted their roles as far as the objectives of the organisation.

Well, there are a few, were a few, as well as the, sometimes there are blacks who come to the organisation for the purposes of spying and things like that but we have never had that with the...I mean that has never been a thing with...about whites being in the organisation. Particular the young ones.

JF So you didn't in any way call them to account for themselves or query what they were doing and have them prove themselves? (Do you think a

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JF white would have to prove him or herself more than a black?)

(1) A Let me think. I think working with people actually produces better results than a person saying..that you ^{must} prove yourself there; how do you prove yourself there? If anybody say I would like or any white comes to say I would like to come to the trade union. For instance if he/she were to tell us he/she was coming from the UCT, and a student or a young lecturer, they would understand but if perhaps if he is known by certain people that we know (I don't just say we accept anybody.) Now the history of universities is actually producing more progressive people and even university days actually you get people in their best. So you don't question them much from university.

But clearly if they come with people you know. But we wouldn't just take anybody who is comes to work here. (If we don't know him) and (he must have his credentials) or ^{ap}proved by certain people that we know, whose line we accept, before he could be accepted.)

JF Have you ever been detained or...?

A Yes, I have.

JF When was that?

A In 1976

JF For how long?

A For 4 months.

JF Which month were you picked up?

A The September and I was released in December.

JF And there weren't other times than that?

A Well, I was picked up for questioning and just raids just to be actually picked up to stay in jail of that period.

JF Why do you think you were picked up?

A I thought...in fact I didn't know why I was picked up. Because I had

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A been going around for a long time that I thought I must be regarded as a stupid female enough not to be detained but when I actually gave...when I was actually feeling that I cannot be detained, in fact I was beginning to think that I am not important or what I am doing is not important enough to warrant detention and in fact all the questions that I was asked when I used to be picked up by the Special Branch indicated that they didn't think I was the person but there were people behind me and they were ever interested in such people, which in fact they never got.

So I thought I was not important for them to warrant any arrests but I suppose they thought well if a person could be moved around for so long even if we cannot have anything concrete, about him or her there must be something that makes her, you know stick on in...because I earned that with no charge. A lot of suspicions about I were not a member of the ANC not a member of PAC, not what, what, what. But there was nothing concrete. But I thought they were doing so because they felt no it is too long; it made....either too stupid or too cunning.

JF (Do you ever feel that whites have) a..(more protection than blacks, that they are less likely to get picked up?)

A I don't...well, I don't think that they have got more protection, but I think the tendency is actually feeling that they ..(the government is hoping for their change all the time, That even if they are detained they don't get the real bad treatment) from the beginning, (that^a black gets,) because I suppose if they get what the blacks exactly get in detention for eg. not to say there is anything to protect themselves that they do, but for instance if I am detained I would sleep on a mat as I slept on a mat. But if a white is detained he would sleep on a mattress. So I think the motive of the government is that they hate them for what they are doing, but in case, if they treat them exactly like blacks, then they feel we have got nothing to lose and then...just...I don't know how to put it. But they try to be different at times.

AF (Do you resent that?) Do you think that agh these whites have more protection than me, they won't get beat up, they won't get detained, they won't have trouble like am? Because I am black?

A (No, not at all. They...it ends up trouble but in different...its just having^{black} tea in a cup and black tea in a mug.) Black tea that is not sweet in a cup and in a mug. But (all the same it is black tea.) Whether the poison is in a cup or in a mug but all the same is poison. They are not

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A actually..in fact I have no hatred. That is ~~the~~ impression I get but when I am interogated they are more hated for what they are doing, but the one thing if for eg. the police know that they would shoot let me say Daves and kill him, they know that the whole university would actually see how wrong they are and in fact that would be more organisation of whites against them. Whereas with the blacks they feel there is nothing much to lose. Now with the whites they feel they would lose a vote if they do to them what they do to us.

① JF (Do you ever) find that the police in any way let you (feel that they thought whites were agitating behind the union?) (yes, yes, yes) Could you tell me the story that shows that? *the police*

A Well, *(Yes, from* the interogations, the questioning that I used to get, *when I was detained)* In fact I was the first one to start the union to being appointed by people, and *(they)* actually *(didn't think of the people who actually said the union must be formed,* They all thought it was a university move, a band of communists that were wanting to take over and that were using me for this.

JF Why do you think they picked something like that?

A *(Because we were working together,* *black and white,* *we* started the union together, you know.

JF What do, this is the big quetsion, *(what do you think the role of whites should be,* in the S.A. struggle? How would you specifically explain it or do you articulate it? Just the general question what would the role of whites be? *(What are they best able to do to help the struggle?)*

A *(Fighting both the bosses and the government as they do, and also getting more whites eyes open on the issue of the country's situation.)*

JF Is that something seperate from being in the union? I mean how are they going to get, if they are working in the union, how are they going to get more whites open? Or do you think other people should go and others in groups go and open whites eyes?

A There are many ways even if they work in the union - *(I can tell you during the big strike in 1980 when there was a big mixed strike, there were shocking results about whites support with eating of white meat.)* The boycott - *(Red)* white *(Red)* meat was boycotted because because 800 mixed strikers were thrown out and there was a shocking response from the appeals we made to the white community about the fact that *(red)* white meat shouldn't be eaten.

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A Actually one of the ways, in fact I know of some people who never eat red meat, white, from that period.

JF But was that because they just sat ^{away} far, and looked at what the union was doing or was that because whites came to their communitits and conscientised them.

A I think because whites came and conscientised them in their communities. It is easier for them to conscientise others.

JF So if you hear about these groups; like UDF have whites getting involved and conscientising their own people you think that is a useful thing or do you think they should all come to unions and work in unions?

A Wherever they fit because we can't all come to unions. Because for instance we can't have more than 20 people working in unions but we can have 2 million people supporting unions if you get my point.

JF So do you think, how do you think they are going to support unions? What would be the way whites would learn to support the union?

A For instance there are things like the rising of prices, the rising of bus fares, the food stuffs and things like that. Those things it hurt more on the workers than they do with the other part of the white community. (Now for instance if boycotts take place on such things,) on things that rise, for eg. (if we boycott them together,) that (boycotting in the white community as well, those things cannot have any market.) → to p. 9

1 And for instance if the butter goes up, the price goes up, or fresh milk well, most of the blacks are having their tea without milk, so it's actually milk is gradually becoming a luxury now, for most homes. If blacks perhaps boycotted it will help the effects of you could have..if whites suburbs, who could afford to give children two glasses of milk a day, could boycott that milk.

JF And how would they know to boycott and to help the unions? What or who is going to get them aware of the struggle?

A That is why I say that would be extended duty of the whites to actually appeal to them on such things.

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JF their own areas?

A Both. You see the thing is they have got a bigger role because in blacks they are quite accepted but they have an easier role with conscientising the whites than it is for blacks to conscientise the whites.

JF And when you say there is only 30 jobs, you mean in the whole country for whites in the unions? (.....) You mean 30 jobs in this union for whites?

A No I don't think three jobs, I don't say that - what I am trying to say such as the GWU, in..if it would need...um,,would be talking about people who could be officials of the unions. Now we are..whether with blacks or whites, we cannot have ten thousand supporters working as officials of the union but we could have supporters doing other things. That is what I mean.

JF So I guess the last thing is you don't feel like you have to go through any process of becoming..overcoming racism against whites or prejudice against whites; just was very natural for you? Were there any periods in your childhood where you grew up being anti white and changed?

A No. You could have a personality different to somebody white and actually not like that person. But even so that's the solution of the country... the aim of this country's having every racial group. You... treat their ..just like you have for that person is..in the same way as you treat a dislike you have about a neighbour, you stay with in a location. It does not necessarily mean that because one is accepted the non racial policy that there will be people here he disagrees with.

JF Ja sure.

A Or people he or she dislikes, not as whites but as persons.

JF But you yourself didn't go through a period where you grew to see that whites were decent and part of the struggle, but you just knew it from your childhood? (mmm) Did you have parents who worked in SACTU or were ANC members or anything legal or why did you have that understanding?

A Yes my parents had white friends as well. The organisation that had whites with whites and (what kind of whites were they?) Well, from political parties.

JF What liberals

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JF What Liberals, were they?

A Yes, Liberals.

JF Congress of Democrats or what?

A Liberals, yes.

JF What did your parents do? What work were they doing?

A My parents were both teachers by profession. But my father worked as a clerk and my mother taught for a few years and became a housewife.

JF And when the ANC was legal were they members?

A No they were not members of the ANC.

JF Were they supporters?

A Well, they were in a movement called the Liberal Party that my father was a member.

JF Your father was a Liberal Party member?

A Yes.

JF Oooohhhh. And do you remember people who he worked with or what it was like?

A There was a Mr. Gibson who is now at the University of Cape Town, I believe. There was a Mr. Hughes and a Mr. Alders and Mr...some people who have left now.

JF Why did they join the Liberal Party, Did they join that instead of the ANC?

A Well, I suppose they had friends in that area.

JF Did they do that because they were opposed to the ANC or because...

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JF And I'm still unclear as to how you went from being trained as a teacher?

A Me? (ja) I didn't actually.

JF I mean how did you get into the union? What were you actually doing? If the union started in the early '70s, you were about thirty...

A No, actually in the '60s. (Doing what?) In the union organising.

JF What was your union?

A SACTU. And it actually collapsed in, at the end of 1969. And '70 there was nothing going on; '71 and in '72 things started again.

JF (Were there any whites you worked with in SACTU?)

A (Yes,) there were whites in that.

JF Are there any names of the people then who worked in SACTU now working?

A Ah, in the offices there were whites at the time when I got in were actually banned. But (there were people) that had ties (like Ray Alexander (Simons) and a number of people but from the background rather.

JF Did you know Ray Alexander?

A Yes, I have known him. And people like Alby Sax^{ie chs}.

JF Alby Sax.

A Ya, he was our lawyer at the time.

JF So exposure to those people, did that strengthen your feeling about whites having a proper place in the struggle?

A Yes, I mean Ray's work, (nobody can actually play the role he played, you know.) You...we can try hard but you can never reach Ray's standard of work.) I don't think she knows me very much but I know her very well coz I have actually seen her in playing the role. And people like Liz Abrahams, you know Liz Abrahams?