

RANDALL, PETER, 13 December 2020, Johannesburg

Interviewer: Karen Hurt KH

Interviewee: Peter Randall PR

KH We are with Peter Randall in Bramley, Johannesburg on 13th December 2019. Doing an interview for the South African Banned Persons' Memorial Project. Cody van Wyk is our videographer and I'm Karen Hurt.

Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. Could you tell us about your early life, where you were born, where you grew up, the schools you went to.

PR Very conventional white child in the 30s and 40s. Went to Durban Prep and then to Kearsney College where I matriculated. Nothing remarkable about my thing there. I was not a good scholar. I was a good runner. I used to win the mile open and that sort of thing. But I had no consciousness of the realities of South Africa.

KH What suburbs did you grow up in?

PR Mostly in Overport in Durban and that's about it.

KH What are your most vivid memories of apartheid and how it impacted on you or other people's day to day life and activities?

PR At that age, primary school age?

KH Your first memories of apartheid.

PR Apartheid as such.

KH Well of discrimination, racial discrimination.

PR I was very aware of the fact that whites enjoyed privileges that blacks did not have. But I took that as the natural order of nature as it were. One grew up with all the ingrained prejudices, discrimination, inability to think outside the box.

For example, the idea of sharing a meal or sharing a toilet with a person of another race was just total anathema and this I got from my family as well as from, you know, the whole situation around us. So, my first real recognition of apartheid as a policy really came only after the defeat of Jan Smuts in 1948 and the introduction of the National Party and Dr Malan.

And then the systematic imposition of a rigid racial segregation policy. Trying to carry it through it's logical conclusion from birth to grave in place of the rather informal segregation policies that used to exist before then. So, this consciousness gradually dawned on me as the years passed. I remember for example, when I was a student in Maritzburg, leading a march to protest through the streets of Maritzburg. Not about apartheid or anything like that but about the Russian invasion of Hungary which in retrospect makes me feel somewhat embarrassed.

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But that showed a clear distinction between politics outside and politics inside. To me, it was all normal at that point really to have racial segregation. Normal, typical, white child's upbringing. Especially in Natal.

KH Yes, you were at university.

PR At the Natal Training College in Maritzburg.

KH Okay, thank you.

PR Yes and we trained as teachers and then taught in Natal for a couple years during which time, my consciousness began to develop rather.

KH Which schools did you teach at?

PR Oh God. I started Vryheid se Hoërskool where I was like a fish out of water, I really was. But it did help me enormously with my Afrikaans because I remember Alan Paton saying, to hear Afrikaans in Pietermaritzburg was as rare as a farmer speaking Eskimo.

KH (Laughs).

PR And so, at school we had absolutely no contact with Afrikaans speaking people or with Jews for that matter.

There was one Jew in our school, and he was hopelessly pilloried and mocked for being a Jew. Schtegor [unclear] you Jew. And certainly, Afrikaans was foreign to me, but I actually am half Afrikaans because my first consciousness of injustice and discrimination was when I ended up hating the British because what they had done to my family. My mother grew up in the kolonie, Jacobsdal of all places.

The town was ringed by British troops and they were very anxious to stop any collaboration between the townspeople and the Boer commandos out in the veld. And one night, my mother's brother was very ill, and they had a blackout. They weren't allowed to show any lights.

So, they lit a lantern to see to him and in the morning, a troop of Scottish soldiers arrived and said, you showed a light last night, you were signalling to the boers over there weren't you. So, this was denied but the, whoever he was, the lieutenant or sir said, you've got to go and make a statement to the magistrate.

So, my grandfather enspanned the little pony and trotted off and while he was gone, the soldiers arrived back with kerosene which they poured around the basement of the house and set fire to it. I remember my mother saying, who was about eight at that time, how she remembered she had her favourite doll upstairs in this house.

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So, she tried to get into the house to go and rescue the doll, which was now, the whole house was aflame. Only to be met by a big red-faced Scotsman coming out carrying a leg of mutton which he had purloined from the kitchen. And that sort of thing. And the suffering of my family, my mother's family during that time, led me to a keen sense of injustice and the evils of imperialism and so on.

I'm putting that in a way that I would have never have thought of it in those days. Obviously, I was a little kid.

KH What period of time was that, more or less?

PR The events I'm talking about?

KH Yes.

PR 1890s into the end of the Boer War.

KH Was there a moment you can remember and talk to us about when the injustice of Apartheid made you feel compelled to start doing something?

PR It was a gradual process I think. I can remember incidents of brutal discrimination and brutality towards black people and I just knew that this was wrong.

KH Could you just unpack that a little bit to give an example or two.

PR I can remember once when an African, probably a rural African stepped off the pavement in the path of a car and the driver and his passengers squealed to a halt, got out and beat him up. Right there, in the street. As a little kid, I stood horrified by this.

So, there were several incidents like that and the clear discrimination against black people, simply because they were black. See, I don't particularly love all black people, I just love individuals sometimes. But it's the, I'm very conservative. Old fashioned.

I believe in old fashioned values like rule of law, justice, audi alteram partem, hear the other side, and fair dealings. And that's what motivated me much more than a desire for a non-racial society or anything high flown like that, which would have been an absolute unknown concept to me at the time I'm talking of, which is late teens, probably.

KH And what period of time would that have been?

PR Left school at 1952, so we're looking at the 50s, the late 50s. Middle and late 50s.

KH How did you become involved in political activity and political activity, not necessarily party politics, or anything? Just in challenging injustice.

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PR It was slow consciousness. Growth of a consciousness, partly through literature. I mean, *Cry, the Beloved Country* had a powerful effect on me. Meeting some blacks at a very human level and realising these are not monsters. I can share a cup with them without falling dead. And a slow desire to actually do something about it and not just protest about the Hungarian invasion.

And so, at college, Teacher's College, we had a lecturer called Peter Hunter, father of Rosemary Hunter in Joburg. He was very active, very radical as it were and I said to him one day, I want to do something. I don't want to just enjoy my whiteness and my privileges. And he said, come with me. And he put me in a car and took me to Sobantu Village near Maritzburg. And he took me there to meet teachers at the local school.

Mrs Gumede and others who had been forced to the National Party now to learn Afrikaans. And they struggled. They didn't have tutors, they didn't have Afrikaans books and my job was to try to help them learn Afrikaans so they would pass whatever tests the Department of Bantu Education was going to impose. And in turn they taught me a little bit of Zulu, most of which unfortunately I've lost.

So, that was a major turning point in my life, to actually meet black people at that level. And once we'd qualified as teachers, and I'd been teaching for a while in Vryheid. All-white school obviously, mostly Afrikaans medium and Isobel was on supply staff. What do they call it here? Relief staff, where you get sent to odd places.

KH And Isobel's your wife?

PR Isobel is my wife of 62 years.

KH Congratulations. Well done to both of you.

PR Thank you. She's got stamina.

KH Anyway, so you were both teaching, and you were saying your sense of seeing things as they were was accelerating at that time.

PR Oh, very much so. There was also a very fine doctor in Greytown at that time, that's Isobel's hometown and we both ended up teaching there because there was a family tragedy, which resulted in the death of her mother and then the death quite soon after than of her father. And there were two teenage girls left. And the idea was that we would get married, try, and get jobs in Greytown and help these kids grow up.

And the Natal Education Department was very good about finding posts for us there. The only post they had for me at the time was as special class teacher.

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Which was a bunch of absolutely thuggish young Afrikaners with cropped hair who could hardly speak a word of English. Almost non-educable and that was an interesting challenge to me. But I was also very conscious of the racial stratification.

Here was a small country town and the communities were absolutely segregated, and each community had its school. So, there was the Indian School, there were the township schools and then there were the white schools. And we thought, it would be a good idea to try to form a multiracial or non-racial, inter-racial teachers' group.

So, we extended invitations to teachers in...

KH Is this you and Isobel?

PR Yes, together. While living in Greytown looking after her sisters. Limited response shall we say. Black teachers by and large, so intimidated by Security Police and informers, very scared to associate with a group like that. As well as the practical problems of not being allowed out in the streets after nine o'clock, that

sort of thing. A couple of the Indian teachers joined up and we stayed friends with them for 50, 60 years until, at our age, everybody's beginning to die except us.

And that was a very useful exercise.

KH What did you use to do when you came together?

PR Talk. A good liberal talk shop. Nothing dramatic. But I was influenced by what I'd heard and read of Alan Paton and the Liberal Party. And we did try, stupidly, to create a Liberal Party branch in Greytown. And there was a teacher, Walter Saunders who's still alive, living in Jersey in the Channel, who was the chairman of the Natal Regional branch of the Liberal Party.

Now we're talking of the late 50s, early 60s and we were in touch and we tried to form a branch of the Liberal Party in Greytown against all the odds. I mean the intimidation of blacks. Very, very few people would be brave enough to actually sign up as members of the Liberal Party and I think that is when we first came to the attention of the Security Police.

There's no doubt that we were being, not necessarily investigated but we were being watched. And I think there were informers in whichever community, black, Indian, white and that didn't flourish.

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Those were stepping-stones as it were to a consciousness that, if you want to be a human being you've got to be involved in some form of resistance. Some form of attempt to bring about change. Anyway, that's jumping ahead.

KH Were any other members of your family active in the struggle against apartheid?

PR Not as active as I was. Certainly, tried always to be humane, sensible, civilised people without necessarily crossing the colour line as it were. That sort of thing.

KH You've spoken about Alan Paton's writing as being influential to you. Were there other people or a person who had a particular affect on you at that time, an influence. People you'd met.

PR Undoubtedly. I mentioned Walter Saunders, I mentioned Peter Hunter. Other members of the Liberal Party. Peter Brown who was chairman of the whatever, of the Liberal Party in the Natal region. And we actually, I think even when I was in Vryheid, we tried to form a branch of the Liberal Party believe or not. And I remember Peter Brown coming and trying to organise a meeting of people who would be interested in the Liberal Party. Total failure.

I can't remember more than two or three people pitching up at any of those, possibly two were informers.

KH In what year were you banned?

PR Banning came in 1977. Out of the blue. I was so surprised.

KH Could you just track from, you know, you were teaching in Vryheid and you were involved in trying to set up a branch of the Liberal Party. And then from there to the time you were banned what did you do?

PR Vryheid to Greytown where we married and looked after these kids. And then we took off for England. We always wanted to travel. It was like a right of passage for young white South Africans to travel. And we got extended leave from the Natal Education Department and went abroad, taught in England for two years. Got jobs almost immediately. It was also a pretty significant experience because in the school I was in, Broadfields Primary School in Harlow, Essex, Newtown.

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Which again was an interesting social and political experiment. Very mixed staffroom. We had a Singaporean, a couple of Africans, a couple of West Indians, a couple of English and a few colonials like myself. And it was an important and useful experience, taught in England for two years, travelled the Continent in a little old Bedford van. Nothing luxurious I promise you and eventually the department insisted on my coming back.

And as an attraction, offered me a lectureship at the same training college I'd been in. I had got a BA in the meanwhile by studying at home. A BA through UNISA by correspondence. And that qualified me as a lecturer at the training college. So, I did that for a year and a half and then I got sick of it for various reasons. One was the sheer bureaucracy of it, the other was living within this utterly segregated racial system.

And I then happened to see in the Natal Witness an advert for a post of assistant director of the Institute of Race Relations in Joburg, which is a foreign territory to me.

Anyway, I came up by train. Got interviewed by some rather fearsome old ladies and the director, Quintin Whyte, old British civil servant. Pipe puffing, golf playing member of the Rand Club, all that sort of thing who understand that the role of the institute was to create dialogue and that if we amassed enough facts and figures about apartheid, whites would change their ways. Futile hope.

But a very significant figure then was, oh Christ, Muriel Horrell, who every year published the Survey of Race Relations. Painstaking compendium of facts about South Africa, especially as it involved racial policies and so on. Very, very fine researcher and liberal.

But again, it became clear to me that facts and figures were not really going to change the situation and that more dramatic action was required. We're talking now of early 60s, no middle 60s. Yes, middle 60s. So, I stuck that out, became a pain in the arse to the old guard because I used to make rather inflammatory speeches about, it's time for action and whites must rise up against the injustice.

KH Were you affiliated to any organisation at this time and who was your audience for the speeches?

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PR I can't remember. I don't think we were affiliated. I wasn't affiliated to anything other than the Institute. The Liberal Party had gone defunct for obvious reasons. Because law made it illegal to have more than one race in a political party.

KH And the speeches?

PR

Just groups. Race Relations had branches and groups all over the place. I can remember doing a tour of the country, sounds very important. To meet with members of the institute and we talked facts and figures and how nasty the Afrikaners were and Apartheid. And it had to change while we sipped our champagne and so on.

So, eventually that made me tired and I think, also the old guard at the Institute were very tired of me. The young upstart without a proper Oxford background and all that shit. So, then I happened again to see an advert. No, I didn't see an advert. I was approached by Beyers Naude and John Rees. Beyers was leading the Christian Institute which the Race Relations Institute regarded a horror.

As young cheeky Afrikaners pushing their way into the limelight. And John Rees was the general secretary of the South African Council of Churches which represented all the mainline Christian denominations. And their theological commission had published a thing called *A Message to the People of South Africa*. Which was very theological and said apartheid was very nasty and very un-Christian and theologically unacceptable.

And of course, one of the immediate reactions was, so what? What are you going to do about it? Okay, so we must do something. We'll set up a project to find out what to do. So, they had no idea beyond just a project to implement the thinking and the findings of the *Message to the People of South Africa*. And they approached me. Would I, you know, come, and run this project. And that was it. Nothing. There was a budget. No office, no direction, no guidelines, no membership, or anything like that.

And it was left to me and I was lucky enough to meet with some extremely influential white academics, mostly. Laurie Schlemmer, John Dugard, Francis Wilson, and we put our heads together and we came up with the idea of SPROCAS. Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Societies.

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And the idea was to form six study commissions. Education, economics, politics, social relationships, law. Is that six? I don't know. And to invite good people to come and serve on these commissions where the idea would be to look at the *Message to the People of South Africa* and tease out the implications for this in practical terms. And we worked day and night. Very, very hard. Hardest I've ever worked in my life for about two or three years.

And six study commissions with some very eminent people. I mean, Denis Hurley was in the theological commission. A lot of very distinguished and good people. And then in the end this resulted in the publication of six study reports. *Education Beyond Apartheid. Power, Privilege and whatever. Apartheid and the Church*. And so on, which created quite a buzz at the time.

We're talking of the early 70s and to run these study groups, members were asked to produce study documents. Papers, which we'd then discuss and so on and finalise a report. Extracting from them what was good and synthesizing it into a report. So, these six reports were published, made quite an impact I must say.

I learnt later, from letters from Kobie Coetsee who became Minister of Justice after Jimmy Kruger and after Schlebusch. Then it was Kobie Coetsee and he's a very sensible, intelligent man. One of the things he said was, what changed his thinking was SPROCAS' reports and my final report which was called *A Taste of Power*. Where my main thesis was blacks have had a taste of power. Now they want the full hand as it were.

And that change was going to come, inevitably. But it would come not through violent revolution, hopefully. But through the interplay of internal forces and external pressures. Economic pressure and especially the sports boycott and so on. And internally, growing resistance. The growing rise of a labour movement amongst blacks which are being savagely repressed earlier.

KH And that period of the 1973 strikes was also part of this period of time that you're talking about.

PR Correct. Absolutely. Absolutely, yes.

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So again, I can't mention all the people that had a profound effect on me. I mean, I remember Douwes Dekker of the labour movement and so on. Eddie Webster, a sociologist at WITS and that sort of thing. So, that would have taken us to the 70s. But we were also generating a lot of documents and people began to see that SPROCAS was not just a study project, it was also a publishing venture. So, people began to submit stuff to us, and we began to selectively publish them.

Out of that grew Ravan Press. Raven, R A for Randall. V A for van Zyl. And N for Beyers Naude. The original directors. And the idea was to continue this kind of publishing because there was a clear need for a publishing house in South Africa that would publish this. This was a period in the early, middle, early to middle 70s of the emergence of some fairly radical publishers in South Africa.

David Philip, Ad Donker, short-lived Skotaville, Ravan Press and we published some notable books including the first novel by JM Coetzee who tried every publisher in the United States, Britain, and South Africa and found no takers. And finally, in desperation, wrote to SPROCAS (laughs).

And I still remember a neat little letter saying, so I enclose herewith manuscript of my novel, *Dusklands*. If this is not acceptable, please return it in enclosed envelope. I read it and thought, this is a work of genius. So, we published *Dusklands*. We published other first novels by various people. Stephen Gray, Pieter Wilhelm, Chabani Manganyi, and so on.

A couple of them made a big impact. One for example, was *Cry Rage*. A collection of poems by James, what was he? James Matthews. And Gladys Thomas, poets living in Cape Town. And soon of course, the reaction began. The banning of books, the banning of individuals and therefore anything that quoted them had to be redacted or banned or whatever. Destroyed.

And then the prosecutions. We were prosecuted several times under the, well I suppose, Suppression of Communism Act or Internal Security Act for quoting banned people. We had some fairly ludicrous court cases against us. Where the

Security Police couldn't establish who the publisher was. Was it Ravan Press, was it SPROCAS, was it this unknown communist conspiracy or what?

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And the magistrates had to throw them out in the end. All this had a terrible effect on Ravan's finances. We couldn't sell books, most publishers wouldn't touch them. We had Fanny Klenerman down in the centre of Joburg who bravely in Vanguard Booksellers published our, sorry, sold our stuff. Exclusive to a certain extent. The rest just shied away, and they would subject, that we discovered later. Subjected to pressure by the Security Police who would examine what was on display and so on.

And then put pressure on the booksellers not to distribute our stuff. We tried to establish a book selling network in Soweto for example. Also failed. So, in the end, Ravan was in a very powerless situation.

KH Could you talk about your banning order now. At what point did that come in?

PR Yes. Soon after that. I was obviously becoming noted as a nasty publisher who published anti-apartheid stuff and so on. But at the same time, with my very difficult personal financial situation, I accepted a part time job at Wits. Thank God.

KH University.

PR Wits University in the Faculty of Education. An administrative job, called temporary organiser of teaching practice because each trainee student teacher had to go out into schools for a while. That was the teaching practice and you needed someone to organise it. Be in touch with schools, be in touch with students and bring the two together. And I was doing this.

One morning, I woke up turned the radio on and got the news that several people had been banned. Beyers, all the Christian Institute people. Beyers Naude, Theo Kotze, Cedric Mason, David Russell and one or two others. I thought, oh thank God I'm out of it. Because I had really deliberately pulled back.

And I was not involved in politics. I had never, ever advocated violence as a way of ending the situation. And I went to work and about ten o'clock, knock on the door. A bunch of six thugs from the Security Police.

KH On education campus?

PR In the education building at Wits. Including I think Craig Williamson, who was one of them. And they served a banning notice on me which meant I had to immediately leave the campus. I went to the dean and said, I'm terribly sorry but I've got to go.

He said, oh my God, we've never had one of these before. And so, I went home. I gather there was a bit of a debate at Wits.

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Should we support this guy? He's not a permanent member of staff. He's a nuisance and others on principle said no, we've got to support him. And they did. For six months, Wits paid a salary while I sat at home fiddling my thumbs, fiddling in the garden and so on.

KH What legislation were you banned under?

PR Internal Security.

KH And were you given any reasons for why you were banned?

PR Yes.

KH What were they.

PR The banning order says, whereas I, James Thomas Kruger am satisfied that you engage or have engaged in activities calculated to endanger the safety of the state, I now therefore, forbid you from doing this, that and the other. Okay. And as a banned person, you're allowed to ask the minister for the reasons.

So, I wrote and asked him why had this action been taken against me. There came a reply in due course.

I am satisfied, parrot repetition. That's as far as I got.

KH When the Security Police came on campus, what did they say to you? Or did they just hand you the banning order?

PR I can't remember. I think it was a fairly facetious remark about here, we've got a nice letter for you.

KH So, why do you think you were banned?

PR I think I was caught up in the aftermath of the banning of the Christian Institute and the people of the Institute. Because I'd been very active through SPROCAS in Christian Institute affairs and to a lesser extent, Council of Churches. And by then, reports were being compiled about me. Some said I was an atheist communist. Others said he's just mabuling [unclear] workhorse, he's not one of the leading figures of the struggle. Others said, there was one marvellous thing about, he engages in subversive activity of the most sophisticated kind.

I thought oh.

KH Can I put that on my CV.

PR That's as much as I remember but I had to go home and I had to report to the dean of the faculty that I'm no longer permitted to be on campus and as I say, Wits paid me a salary for six months.

KH What were the conditions of your banning order?

PR It was a standard five-year banning order. One, not to leave the magisterial district without permission. And when you asked what is the magisterial district, they said well ask your lawyer. Literally.

Then, there was prohibition on attending any gatherings, which generally was understood as more than one other person. So, we did abide by that. Most banned people we knew, and we knew a lot used to meet others but very often take evasive action if necessary. Because we were under surveillance, no question about it, there was often a car.

KH Where were you living at the time?

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PR That time, we were in Westcliff, Johannesburg.

KH And you were saying that generally there was a car.

PR Not generally, but occasionally, a car, clearly just parked on the pavement outside, clearly listening. When I finally got round to reading all the reports and things on me, which I did only last week. I was amazed at the extent to which the state had tried to find evidence against a minor person like myself.

And this unbelievable waste of state resources and so on, to keep tabs on me.

KH So, they had listening equipment?

PR Oh yes. Yes. And I became aware of that very soon.

KH Do you have any other reflections from so recently reading through those Security Police reports?

PR Yes, it brings stuff back and one thing I do wonder about is who snitched on me. You know, because of op delicate inlighting. We have delicate information which we're not going to reveal the source which presumably be friends and others. Or colleagues who were acting for the Security Police. Making notes about what I had to say and so on.

Especially if they thought it was of a subversive nature.

KH What impact did the banning order have on your personal life? Your recreation time, your relationships, your social life?

PR Obviously a pretty profound one. I couldn't go to any parties and that sort of thing. I wondered sometimes. All banned people I knew, all broke their banning orders constantly. Cos Desmond and others.

But the effect on the family was very profound. Isobel has written a little thing to give to you.

KH Thank you.

PR Sketching some of the powerful effect the banning order had on our kids and on her and on our lives and on our incomes and all that kind of thing.

KH Could you talk about that a little bit more? The profound impact, could you describe some of those impacts. What you could or couldn't do as a family. Or strains.

PR Well we couldn't just go on holiday in a normal sort of way. You had to ask for permission to go and usually you were refused. We discovered subsequently, the system. We had to apply to the Chief Magistrate who would then act simply as a messenger boy and pass it onto the Minister. The Minister would then send it back to head of BOSS and to the Security Police. And said, I want a report on this, and I want a recommendation.

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And from the very beginning, there was a division between the two. BOSS nearly always said.

KH The Bureau of State Security?

PR The Bureau of State Security, laat him maar gaan. Do more damage to South Africa's image if you don't let him go. This was when they were referring particularly to the Frankfurt Book Fair. I was invited year after year after year to the Frankfurt Book Fair. I had to apply to the Minister for permission to go. I had to apply to the Minister of the Interior for the return of my passport which had been confiscated in 1972. And I had to apply to somebody else. But there were three or four state departments involved.

I mean the waste that the cumbersome bureaucracy, appalling.

KH And you have children at this time.

PR We had kids yes.

KH Was there any particular impact on them and on Isobel as a result of your banning? Could you talk about that a little bit?

PR Yes well Isobel has written about it and she felt it more directly and more personally than I did. Because I could just sit and sulk or whatever I was doing but she had to face the family and their relationships.

KH Were they supportive or not supportive?

PR Our family? Our immediate family, oh very supportive, yes. But I think it's left marks of trauma.

David who was then about, what was he four? Seven. Oh Christ. Rick Turner, whose book we had published, had been shot through his front door and our advice was, protect yourself. We lived in rambling, old, colonial style house. Very easy for intruders or sneak attackers and so on. And the advice was, put a steel plate behind the front door so you can't be shot through it. And you've got a bow window in your bedroom, put steel shutters.

So, we used to laboriously do this every night and I think it had a pretty profound effect on the kids. David, seven, actually got a ball of string. Isobel describes this in her little memorandum to you and tried to protect the house by tying string around things and so on.

Our daughter Leigh, who was eight at the time.

KH [Unclear] friends.

PR No, I can't say that. I think on the whole, friends took it as this is part of the South African way of life as it were. You step out of line, you become critical of the government and you get punished. And it's not necessarily that you are a criminal or anything.

KH And you have another daughter. How old was she at the time?

PR Sue was 12, 13.

IR She took it really badly.

PR Took it really badly. She in fact got profound depression and had to be admitted to Tara a couple of times. Opted out of school and finally finished her school only by extremely valiantly enrolling for matric by correspondence and so on and subsequently...

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KH And the impact of the banning order financially?

PR Well yes, it would have been quite serious because I remember at that time, I had been earning R300 a month from Ravan and when I was appointed to Wits in a very junior administrative position, my salary shot up to something like R5 000 a year or a month or something. But I mean, it was astronomical.

And now suddenly to have that threatened but no real resources or anything. But Isobel went on teaching, she taught throughout this period and on the whole, didn't suffer any adverse nastiness I think, from her colleagues. Because, English speaking, fairly liberal community. Again, accepted that this was a fact of life under an apartheid government.

KH From the time of your banning order until now, could you leap-frog us through some of the...

PR Well, that's a long period isn't it?

KH Yes.

PR Late 70s until wherever we are now. 2019. Oh dear.

KH Did you stay in publishing? Did you stay in education?

PR No, I couldn't.

KH I mean after your banning orders.

PR No, I whined all the time to the ministers. Saying, you know, you've prevented me from carrying out the two professions that I've been working in. Publishing and teaching. He wasn't moved by that. But obviously I kept an interest. Ravan used me underground as it were. People would arrive mysteriously with brown packets and those manuscripts which I had to read and give recommendations on.

I had been a very active book reviewer for the *Rand Daily Mail*, and I went on doing that. And all these reviews now appeared under Isobel's name. Wherever you could, you nibbled away at the edges of this rigid system.

KH And when your banning order had expired, what did you go on to do?

PR It expired in 1981 through Kobie Coetsee. They cut it short by six months. And while I was being banned and working. I was allowed to go back to Wits after six months and I continued as temporary organiser of teaching practice. And then they advertised it as coordinator of teaching and whatever. So, I applied for that, got that. And I was using the time fruitfully to study for a masters which I finally got.

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And I had to choose an innocuous topic. I did it by research, not by course work. So, I chose the history of the South Africa private schools. Well, that's not going to irritate them. And in fact, I was quite critical of the South African private schools with their racial policies and so on. As in the Catholics. The Catholics were the first to open their schools, 1970s. I did a masters, applied for a lectureship, got that. Finally became a lecturer assistant, associate professor. Finally, a professor. And even for a short...

KH Was all of this at?

PR At Wits.

KH At Wits?

PR Yes. While working in the Education Department. My field, because I'd published a history of the private schools, I was now regarded as an educational historian. So, part of my job was to do the history component of the teachers' courses.

I even spent a year as dean of Faculty of Education. Not that I knew what the hell I was doing. But I enjoyed that. Retired from Wits, which was compulsory in those days at the age of 60, which would have been 1995. I was asked to stay on for a while, as a part time dog about the place, so I did. Left there.

Isobel went on teaching and once the banning order was lifting, I then whined enough to get my passport back and we took off for England where quite a large section of my family and her family had emigrated years before. Her brother had become a very well-known, extremely wealthy OBE, Order of the British Empire, as an inventor. He invented various things. He also designed cars, like the Lotus Elan and he ended up in a big mansion in Jersey and drank himself to death.

England was like second home obviously. And since I've retired, we've regularly gone to the UK. I was sensible enough to have a grandmother born in 1850 in London and that was technically enough to qualify me for a what do you call it? An ancestry visa. And the stupid chap in the British Commission in Pretoria said, did you know your grandmother well? I said, well I was very small, she did die in 1900.

Anyway, so I got the ancestry visa, went to England and I had by then, deliberately withdrawn from any kind of political activity as such. I thought the contribution that puny whites, especially liberals like me can make is insignificant.

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And that the forces of change are going to happen, whether we like it or not. I once went to a, I was invited to give a talk at, God, I don't know. Ohio State or, no, Penn State. And quite a big crowd gathered, and I was giving this, what was seen as a hopelessly optimistic view. I said, change is coming.

By now PW Botha had had his stroke and FW de Klerk had been installed as president. And he'd been saying things. Like, we're going to release Mandela, blah, blah, blah. And I think, these are extremely positive developments. And one thing the Afrikaner is, hy's konsekwent. If he says he'll do it, he'll do it if he possibly can.

And I was under heavy attack from some of the black South African academics in the audience.

KH What did they say?

PR They said, no, no we don't trust these people and by implication, we don't trust you (laughs). One accepts that. And of course, that in the end is what happened. And I don't think that people like de Klerk and Kobie Coetsee and Pik Botha have had enough recognition for the role they played. I mean if we'd been left with some

old fart like PW Botha standing up against the forces of history, the results could have been absolutely catastrophic for this country.

KH Looking back on your past and knowing what you do now, is there anything you might have done differently?

PR I can't answer that really. It depends on so many factors. I mean I could really, without deliberately doing so, simply have carried on as a conventional white South African until I was forced to change. I mean, it's marvellous to find so many white South Africans who never believed in apartheid. Just as you can find so many Germans who would never believed in Nazism.

This is what happens when post facto justification.

KH Would you have a message for young people in South Africa today or in the world?

PR As if young people would listen to me. A message would be, keep the faith.

KH What is the faith?

PR The faith is to have some confidence in the future, to keep trying to do what you can. In your personal relationships, to be as decent and honest and upright as you can. To oppose blatant injustice and discrimination when you see it and so on.

KH Just one last question linked to your publishing life. Ravan Press was a significant publisher of voices we couldn't generally have access to, and it was a very significant publishing house.

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Just a quick reflection now on publishing in South Africa. The kinds of books that we can now buy and so on.

PR I'm really not in touch. I really have not tried to keep in touch. I just read what I read in the newspapers about new books coming out and at my age, I don't want to get too heavily sort of sleepy over heavy tomes and so on. The last book I read, dear God, I can't remember.

Isobel reads to me because I'm not a very good reader. And we tend to go for good autobiographical stuff.

UF What about Zapiro?

PR Zapiro yes. But I don't read Zapiro, I look at Zapiro.

KH Peter, we'd like to thank you very much for this time with you and also to Isobel, your partner, for just being part of the conversation and preparation.

PR It's a pleasure. Thank you.

Transcribed by Way with Words

Checked by Paula Ensor

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