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### Interview with Rachel Rubin

Brandi Schaeffer

*Columbia College Chicago*

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1 **Transcription- Rachel Rubin of the Anti-Apartheid Movement**

2 **Brandi Schaeffer:** Okay. Testing. (noise of adjusting recorder) And I'll probably glance down at  
3 my phone periodically 'cause I keep my stop watch on here

4 **Rachel Rubin:** Okay

5 **BS:** Just to make sure we are- (police siren). I think I have everything. I just need to make sure  
6 this is picking up. (Recording stops). This is Brandi Schaeffer. I'm here with Dr. Rachel Rubin.  
7 It is the twentieth of April 2009 and we are in Hyde Park, Illinois. And you've been active, um,  
8 as far as anti-apartheid since 1992?

9 **RR:** No, before that. 1978.

10 **BS:** Yeah, seventy-eight. About when you were 19.

11 **RR:** Yeah.

12 **BS:** Okay. Where were you most active? In Chicago, or-

13 **RR:** I think probably in Chicago. You know I was active as a college student, but I was only in  
14 college for four years and then I, uh, came up to Chicago when I was in medical school near the  
15 end of medical school is when I started to become more active again in Chicago.

16 **BS:** Okay and you were born in 1958. Where were you born?

17 **RR:** At, uh, Michael Reese Hospital. We lived on the North Side at the time.

18 **BS:** I was born at the same hospital. Were you raised in Chicago?

19 **RR:** Yes. Through elementary school, then we moved to Evanston when I was starting high  
20 school.

21 **BS:** Where was your father born?

22 **RR:** Chicago.

23 **BS:** And your mother?

24 **RR:** My mother, interesting story, my mother was born in Jerusalem, in Palestine. But her father  
25 was here and, uh, my grandparents immigrated to the states from Europe, and my grandfather  
26 came here first and he had permanent residency status when he first got here. My grandmother  
27 did not she came on a visa. And they got married, they were engaged in Europe, came here got  
28 married. My grandmother then got pregnant and the INS refused to renew her visa one more time  
29 which was all that would've been required before my grandfather would've become eligible to

30 become a citizen. So my grandmother had to go to Palestine, to Jerusalem where her parents had  
31 emigrated from Europe, um, and that's where my mother was born. But by the time my mother  
32 was born, my grandfather had become a US citizen because he really had less than six months at  
33 the time my grandmother became pregnant. So then my grandmother and mother then returned  
34 and my mother was an infant back to the United States.

35 **BS:** How long does a visa last?

36 **RR:** Well, it depends. How long it lasted at that time I don't know. But it depends on what  
37 country you're coming from. I mean if you come, for example, from Southern Africa, like if you  
38 come from \_\_\_\_\_ to the United States its usually a three to six month visa that maybe they'll  
39 renew once with you just sort of asking, and after that you really have to become  
40 Polynesian (??)

41 **BS:** How many brothers and sisters do you have?

42 **RR:** I have one brother and one sister.

43 **BS:** Are you the eldest or the youngest?

44 **RR:** I'm a twin.

45 **BS:** Really?

46 **RR:** My brother and I are twins and we have a younger sister.

47 **BS:** Okay, well what is your earliest childhood memory?

48 **RR:** I don't know. What does these questions have to do with-?

49 **BS:** Well we try and take you back to the point where you can start remembering from when you  
50 started to be an activist so we try and take you back into your childhood a little bit and walk you  
51 forward into your activism.

52 **RR:** Well that I can maybe answer, but my earliest memory. I have some vague memory of  
53 being in my crib as a two year old or something and looking out and seeing this older relative  
54 who I think may have been my great grandmother who died soon thereafter that I never really  
55 knew. But I do have that vague memory.

56 **BS:** Okay. What's the earliest memory of your father?

57 **RR:** Um, I do remember one thing, when I was three I fell and cut my chin. I had to have  
58 stitches. So my parents took us to the hospital, me to the hospital and when we got back home I  
59 remember my father saying that he would lie down and take a nap with me. So I sort of  
60 remember him specifically wanting to do that for me as opposed to- My brother was always

61 around, so there was never this sort of alone time. So I remember that as sort of an affectionate  
62 memory of my father when I was very little.

63 **BS:** What is the earliest memory of your mother?

64 **RR:** I don't know. We were always with our mother.

65 **BS:** Right. So, it's like from birth?

66 **RR:** Yeah.

67 **BS:** Okay. What grammar school did you go to?

68 **RR:** I went to Nettelhorst Elementary School on the north side of Chicago.

69 **BS:** What do you remember most about the time when you were in grammar school?

70 **RR:** In terms of something that might relate to sort of the topic at hand, I was in elementary  
71 school in the sixties an early seventies and there was a lot of activism going on obviously in the  
72 city. My parents, or should I say my mother was involved in the civil rights struggle, and the  
73 kids, it would filter down to the kids and a couple things had happened in elementary school.  
74 One was that the school was very academically and ethnically segregated. There was a large  
75 Puerto Rican speaking population in the community that we lived in. That's no longer the case,  
76 the makeup of Lakeview, but that's what it was at the time. So maybe thirty forty percent of our  
77 school had kids whose parents were from Puerto Rico. And a lot of kid's first language was  
78 Spanish and they learned English when they went to school. (cat meows) And the school was  
79 very segregated in putting sort of the white middle class kids in the upper academic class 'cause  
80 there were three or usually three, three or four major class rooms per grade. It was a very big  
81 elementary school with maybe a thousand kids there or something. And so if you were from a  
82 more middle class family you would automatically sort of be put in the classroom where they  
83 would push you more academically and we had what was called homogeneous grouping in the  
84 school which meant you had one teacher that taught you everything. And this went through  
85 eighth grade, it's not just in the lowest grades where that's quite common, but all the way  
86 through eighth grade. And there would be sort of a middle group, and there'd be a low group.  
87 And a lot of the Puerto Rican kids would be in the middle or low group, and only if there was a  
88 kid who for whatever reason the teacher saw as being extremely bright would be put into the  
89 class where the majority of the white kids were. And so my my parents, my mom especially  
90 along with other parents from the community- White parents, Puerto Rican parents, there was a  
91 small African American population but not very much, very very small. And there if you were  
92 African American if you were middle class, you'd be in the upper class, and if you were working  
93 class, you would be with the Puerto Rican kids. It was very segregated. So the parents got  
94 together from sort of both sides of Halsted as we said. And they fought to change the

organization of the school and they did. (Stove or microwave begins to beep. Dr. Rubin gets up to silence the sound). Um and so I remember that struggle because I remember that there were some teachers and some administrators that didn't like it and there were some that were very very supportive and I had a teacher I think in fifth grade who uh, I-I got in trouble by, I got angry at a kid and I swore at the kid and I mean this happened all the time, but I just, she tripped me down the stairs and I swore at her. So the teacher got angry with me for using that language and told me I had to bring my mother in to school. And so I had, I was very very scared, I had to bring this note home and tell my mother. And my mother was not very upset about it, she just said where'd you learn the word, I said come on mom, you know whatever. And she realized immediately what was going on, and I didn't. And I came to school the next day with my mom and the principal was there as well and it was just so silly, you just tell a kid you just don't say that and maybe they miss their recess or something. And it was clearly to get back at my mother because she was agitating in the school is why and this teacher did not like what was going on. So later on my mother told me that indeed that was probably what was happening. Even the principal thought the whole thing was ridiculous and I do sort of remember that. And then there was another thing in elementary school around that time too is that the students actually organized a group and I was somewhat involved with them and I was maybe in fifth, sixth grade it was more of the seventh and eighth graders but um, there's a local community center, the Hull House that was about a block from my school and that's where we would do things after school, that's where you we learned how to swim, the had sewing classes and sports and we could do all kinds of things. And the students organized a group to promote um, equality and fight racism and I was somewhat involved with that and I remember we took buttons and we painted them. I mean it's not like now where you have these button makers who just make them. We painted them with different rainbow stripes to sort of illustrate that we're all together and all the same. So we did that in elementary school.

**BS:** What high school did you go to?

**RR:** And then I went to Evanston High School.

**BS:** What was your most memorable high school memory?

**RR:** Um. I don't know. In high school I did a couple of main things that sort of kept me going other than school. I was involved in the stage crew. I was very active in the theater, I learned how to build sets and stuff and became a pretty decent sort of carpenter. And really enjoyed that and that took a lot of our time. But on the weekends I would go, and this is something that I actually started in elementary school when I was about twelve or thirteen. I would go to Jewel, uh, in fact in grade school it was A and P and in high school it was the Jewel food stores and we would picket to support the United Farm Workers that were trying to organize. It started out with the grape boycott, and my- I remember as a kid we couldn't drink, eat grapes because my mom was honoring the boycott so she wouldn't buy grapes and of course we loved grapes. And then

132 when I was in high school it was lettuce. So we would go and talk to people in front of the store  
133 and tell them not to shop there unless they brought union grown and picked produce. So that was  
134 sort of the way I sort of schizophrenic sort of way I split my time. Almost in a very artistic- and  
135 it's not like I sort of combined the two until later, until more in college. So I did sort of political  
136 stuff and I did things in the theater which I just loved. I'd do that sort of everyday after school  
137 everyday.

138 **BS:** So was Evanston High School like a vocational school where theater was a job field, I guess,  
139 that you practiced in, or-

140 **RR:** No. I mean Evanston High School, Evanston Township High School which is in a North  
141 suburb was a huge high school with about five thousand students in the school and it had  
142 everything. It had every A.P. class you can imagine, so it was very college prep, but it also had  
143 vocationally related things. But theater, just like the theater program, music program, and the art  
144 program, these were extracurricular that kids could engage in after school but it didn't  
145 necessarily have anything to do with career building. However there were several of my friends  
146 from high school that did end up becoming either actors or stage designers, uh, stage hands and  
147 building sets, scenic designers, lighting designers, because the program was just so so good. And  
148 we had resources 'cause it was a rich kind of- or it was an endowed enough high school that they  
149 can have all of these programs.

150 **BS:** Right. When did you have your first boyfriend?

151 **RR:** Um, fourteen.

152 **BS:** What was he like?

153 **RR:** Well he was sort of a dork. (laughs) That I'd have to say. Then I had, I had- He sort of  
154 pursued me and I'm not quite sure if I really liked him, but I sort of went along with it, but that  
155 was when I was a freshman in high school. But then when I was a junior in high school I had a  
156 boyfriend for a couple of years. He was a year older, he was a senior and he was in the theater  
157 also.

158 **BS:** Why did you go to the University of Illinois for undergrad?

159 **RR:** Well, I applied to a variety of schools and the reason I went to University of Illinois  
160 predominately was economic, because it was the best state school in the state of Illinois, and  
161 because it was an in state school, and my brother and I, having a twin brother we went to college  
162 at the exact same time and my parents had to all of a sudden pay two college tuitions and it was  
163 probably, maybe not to us, but certainly to our parents pretty clear that my brother and I, a little  
164 less so my sister would be going to graduate school as well. So my parents were willing to help

165 us as much as the could, obviously, in college so it was a way of also not building up a lot of  
 166 debt as an undergrad knowing as graduates we probably would, indeed have debt.

167 **BS:** What was your most outstanding memory in undergrad that lead you to your activism?

168 **RR:** Oh boy. Well it's not so much an individual memory, but the kind of community that I  
 169 became part of as an undergrad had sort of shaped my political view and analysis and ideology  
 170 for the rest of my life even though there were seeds of that before then because I had been active  
 171 in high school and even younger. Um, but I was part of an alternative program in college called  
 172 Unit One which was sort of a residential college. You could take- It was housed in the dorm that  
 173 I lived in, and at that time you had to live in the dorm for at least two years, now you don't, but  
 174 that's that way it was then. You had to, or until you had sophomore status in terms of credits  
 175 which I actually had at the end of my freshman year, but I stayed in the dorm for two years and  
 176 the basement of the dorm had been turned into classrooms and meeting areas, it had a ceramics  
 177 studio, photography studio, and places to meet and congregate. And through this program called  
 178 Unit One, you could take certain courses for elective credit, you couldn't get a degree through it,  
 179 but you could take certain courses, um, that some were cross listed as regular University classes,  
 180 some were very specific to Unit One, and anybody could take them, but people that lived in the  
 181 dorm were more likely to be part of the program. And as part of that I met and became part of a  
 182 collective of friends where at loosely where many of us still keep in touch, and some were more  
 183 active more closely and are still down in Champagne Urbana thirty years later and others, um,  
 184 have, like me, have sort of spread out, but we still amazingly keep in touch and we had a couple  
 185 of things that we did consistently. We would sort of put on little classes and teach each other  
 186 things, we read Marx, we talked about Marxism and socialism and communism and what that  
 187 meant and secondly we made connections to that in the arts. A lot of my friends ended up  
 188 becoming musicians and music composers, even though I'm not. And we put together a small  
 189 sort of performance group that were sort of the seeds of a more developed performance group  
 190 that is going on 'til today. Where they are much more professional, this is sort of much more sort  
 191 of amateur. But we would put together performances, theater that would, you know that we  
 192 composed ourselves and would perform them and they were ways of putting forth certain  
 193 political and societal ideas out there to the larger University community and others.

194 **BS:** So were the plays and different things you guys put on about apartheid? Were any of them  
 195 about apartheid?

196 **RR:** Not specifically about apartheid, but maybe about racism, about sexism, about building  
 197 movements and organizing and fighting for social change. And the basis of a lot of what we did  
 198 was to get people to imagine a world that doesn't yet exist, but it's a world that you desire. So  
 199 how do you picture a world that you desire, separate it from the constraints and the so called  
 200 feasibility question- can we really do that? Can we really get there? Instead let's imagine a world  
 201 that we really desire, and how do we build towards that. So that included breaking down racism

202 and barriers and getting rid of systems like apartheid. And on campus, even though many of us  
203 were very involved in this Unit One centered set of activities, but many of us also worked in  
204 more University wide groups and I was one of the first members of the Champagne Urbana  
205 Coalition against Apartheid, and that was when I think I was a sophomore, second year in  
206 college.

207 **BS:** Is that when you first, um, learned about apartheid?

208 **RR:** No, I learned about it high school.

209 **BS:** Okay. What prompted you to be active in apartheid, anti- apartheid movements versus other  
210 things that could've been going on?

211 **RR:** I was also involved in Central American Solidarity, but why specifically apartheid and  
212 ultimately the development, how that sort of blossomed into love of sub-Saharan Africa and  
213 support of liberation movements and such I think was that growing up when I did, I was sort of  
214 confronted with racism everyday, even though I was white and from a middle class family and  
215 had privileges and didn't have to deal with that, in some ways it still touched me. In part because  
216 I always had sort of a- especially in elementary school even more so than high school, high  
217 school things got a little more segregated in terms of our friends' groupings. So there was some  
218 cross fertilization ethnically and racially, but, um, in grade school especially I had several  
219 friends. One was a Mexican American, one was African American actually biracial, I'm thinking  
220 of my three best friends. The third was a Puerto Rican American. So the four of us, the three or  
221 four of us would always sort of hang out and so it was something that was always there and we  
222 would talk about it at the dinner table. So I guess it was always something that always part of my  
223 psyche. And also, it may be sort of a silly thing, but, its something that I do think about is people  
224 would a lot of times think I was Puerto Rican because I'm somewhat olive complected and I'd be  
225 walking down the hallway in school and a parent would come and start talking to me in Spanish,  
226 like wanting to know where the office was or something like that, and that would happen to me  
227 about once a month somebody would stop and assume. So that made me think, it made me think  
228 and try to put myself in somebody else's shoes because it made me think how were really are all  
229 the same on certain levels and nobody should be discriminated against period, but certainly not  
230 on the basis of one's physical characteristics of ethnic background. And being Jewish also I  
231 would occasionally have to deal with some anti -Semitism, not a lot, um, in the community I was  
232 in, it wasn't a Jewish neighborhood, it was open, you know, people didn't discriminate  
233 necessarily, but there were moments where things like that happened. So I think all those things  
234 sort of mish-moshed together and ultimately helped form my commitment by the time I was  
235 done with college especially because by the end of college I had sort of developed a more sort of  
236 political analysis, but my commitment to fight racism in particular, but to really fight for equality  
237 on many levels.



238 **BS:** Right. How did you become involved in the movement?

239 **RR:** Well in college there was this organization, you know, that was a student group that we  
 240 formed. And we protested on the quad and we sat in at the chancellor's office trying to get the  
 241 University to divest and eventually the University of Illinois did divest, but that was actually  
 242 when I was- after I was out of medical school, in fact in residency, and, um I was in public health  
 243 school, I was in residency at University of Illinois in Chicago, and I went and I and I testified at a  
 244 board of trustees meeting in Chicago, many years later and soon after that particular board of  
 245 trustees meeting they did go to divest because the pressure had been going on now for ten years  
 246 or so and they finally did divest.

247 **BS:** What kind of group, institution, or coalition did you work with or were a part of besides the,  
 248 um, Champagne Urbana Coalition against Apartheid?

249 **RR:** In Chicago it was mainly starting out with what we called CIDSa, the uh, Committee for  
 250 Illinois Divestment from South Africa and after a lot of the divestment started to really happen in  
 251 terms of corporations divesting, universities divesting, we morphed into what we called  
 252 CCISSA, C-C-I-S-S-A, which is the Chicago, uh, Area Committee on Solidarity with Southern  
 253 Africa, and so that's what I- the two- were basically the same organization, and that's what I  
 254 worked with through- I guess it started in eighty-three and I joined in eighty-four and stayed with  
 255 it until

256 **BS:** Okay. What was your role in the movement or in any of these organizations?

257 **RR:** Well, you know I started out as a member and became active fairly quickly and would go  
 258 out and do speaking, and, uh, would organize demonstrations, we did marches. I was very, you  
 259 know, ultimately, eventually I became one of the core people in the organization, you know,  
 260 organizing. And ultimately I became the co-chair of the organization with Basil Clooney, he and  
 261 I were co-chairs, um, he's African American, I was white and that was part of our coalition also  
 262 was to have a multiracial coalition. And then I also, because when I was a resident in- after I  
 263 finished medical school, and I was doing my residency I was president of my union of house  
 264 staff residents at Cook County Hospital so I was a labor activist on that level, and I then became  
 265 CCISSA's representative to the Illinois Labor Network Against Apartheid, so I actually sat on  
 266 their \_\_\_\_\_ (??) committee.

267 **BS:** What were your responsibilities as the chair and co-chair?

268 **RR:** Oh, God. I don't remember, uh, you know I would have to organize and lead meetings, go  
 269 and do talks, you know help, be sort of one of the main organizers, be the spokesperson for the  
 270 organization along with Basil, and along with other people who weren't officially officers. Carol  
 271 Thompson, who you may have heard of, who was also part of our group that I don't know if she  
 272 was ever officially an officer, I think she was secretary, but she did a lot of the grunt work. And

273 so she may not have been a co-chair, but in essence she was because we had a very small type  
274 group with a lot of people who were less involved, but still very supportive.

275 **BS:** Now you were co-chair of the Coalition, the Champagne Urbana Coalition of apartheid?

276 **RR:** No. not in college. This was in-

277 **BS:** In your residency.

278 **RR:** That's right. Well, and even after that when I was an attending physician. So even once I  
279 finished my residency.

280 **BS:** What liberation movement did you support that was in South Africa?

281 **RR:** The ANC

282 **BS:** That one I would pretty much think so, 'cause that was the largest one. What national or  
283 international organizations or groups did you work with or support?

284 **RR:** Um, oh. Well there were a bunch of national organizations that we worked with. There was  
285 the, um, I'm trying to remember what they were called now. Um... we were very much linked  
286 with this organization in New York that was a more sort of national network. Oh I can't  
287 remember what they're called. If you told me the name I could remember, but I don't. I'd have to  
288 think about it, um-

289 **BS:** There were tons of organizations everywhere. As I was doing my research I couldn't  
290 remember all of them.

291 **RR:** Right, but this was one of the bigger ones. Well there was a Washington office on Africa,  
292 the WOA in Washington, D.C. and there was, right, and there was the American Committee on  
293 Africa, ACOA. So those I guess too were the two that I most looked to, but indeed there were  
294 many many organizations and we had coalitions with a variety of organizations in other  
295 communities. That were, that were similar, obviously to what we were doing.

296 **BS:** Why, um, these main two and not others?

297 **RR:** Um, because I think that they were ANC supported, they had a broad reach, were willing to  
298 work in a coalition with a variety of communities, they were not too sectarian. And then there  
299 was also another organization too, the Mozambique Support Network which came to be a little  
300 bit later as we started to branch out and start to make connections between the apartheid struggle  
301 in South Africa and the liberation in neighboring countries. Even those that had got their  
302 liberation to further their their projects and their work and their newly liberated countries.

303 **BS:** Tell me about any conflicts of tensions amongst, um, anti apartheid activists that you  
304 worked with?

305 **RR:** Well, there was certainly in Chicago a couple of other groups that, one in particular, I don't  
306 know what it was called but they were very Black Nationalists oriented, and did not want to  
307 work with non, uh, Black, non African American based communities, even to the point of being  
308 somewhat hostile towards what we did, and would label, for example, CIDSa or CCISSA as  
309 being a White organization because we had a fairly equal number of African Americans and  
310 Whites who were active and who were also in the leadership. And it was never more White than  
311 Black, um but that was the perception and that was sort of the kind of divisiveness that  
312 sometimes happened, not consistently, but would sometimes happen with some of the leaders in  
313 one or two of these other formations and that was a bit frustrating.

314 **BS:** It had to be because you guys are working towards the same goal supposedly.

315 **RR:** That's right. That's right.

316 **BS:** So, what city were you most active in?

317 **RR:** Well, in Chicago 'cause that's where I lived most of the time.

318 **BS:** What were you thinking when you embarked on your first activity as an anti apartheid act-  
319 activist?

320 **RR:** Well I remember in college, the one I can remember is indeed where we did set up a sit in  
321 outside of the chancellor's office. I mean we went into the chancellor's office and a couple of  
322 people locked themselves in. I didn't do that, but I was out in the hallway. Most of us were sort  
323 of out in the hallway and the university police came and tried to kick us out and I didn't get  
324 arrested, um, that was sort of later on, I think, during the evening for the people who had sort of  
325 locked themselves in, but I remember that being pretty seminal, and I remember after that having  
326 rallies on sort of the quad area with hundreds of people, I mean not thousands and thousands  
327 which you might see in European universities and such, but still a pretty big presence for a  
328 relatively- I wouldn't say that U of I was conservative, it was very diverse. So it had a lot of  
329 conservative people, but also a lot of radical and pretty progressive folks. But to still be on a  
330 campus that was known for being progressive and to bring people out was pretty amazing and  
331 pretty, probably pretty impressionable.

332 **BS:** Was that the only-

333 **RR:** (inaudible)

334 **BS:** Yeah, go ahead. (Dr. Rubin goes to get water). What's your kitten's name? He's like hey I  
335 want some attention. (Giggles)

336 **RR:** Yeah, her name's Wendy from Peter Pan.

337 **BS:** Wendy. (Giggles) Now you spoke about, um, when the school security cam while you guys  
338 were doing your sit in, was that the only time that you had any run-ins with law enforcement?

339 **RR:** No, it's not. But I have to say that I've never been arrested. Its come close a couple of  
340 times, especially when I was in medical school in residency and going to demonstrations, so that  
341 was a little later, even after college. I had a medical license that was given to me, that I had to  
342 apply for through the state of Illinois and I was thinking, well if I get arrested I might lose my  
343 medical license. And I had this sort of thought that maybe it shouldn't be me that gets arrested  
344 where it may affect my job and my livelihood, 'cause in the long run that's probably not a good  
345 thing. But sure, I was at many demonstrations where there, uh, where there were police there  
346 who were less than charitable, shall I say.

347 **BS:** The personal computer was introduced in 1978, how did that effect communications for anti  
348 apartheid activists?

349 **RR:** Well its true that that's when personal computers came out, and going to University of  
350 Illinois that developed a lot of computer systems, IBM and worked with them and such, so I  
351 became quite conversant with computers and I was math major so I took computer science  
352 classes and actually had to use the computer a little bit for school. But that was still quite unusual  
353 for about another ten years or more.

354 **BS:** So it didn't affect any type of-

355 **RR:** No because we didn't even have email on a regular basis until probably the early nineties.  
356 And I remember in the early eighties when I was in residency I would use computers all the time  
357 at the hospital for this and that, but to use it for everyday communication between individuals,  
358 no. You'd use it more for word processing, 'cause it made word processing, typing so much  
359 easier in terms of you didn't have to use a regular typewriter. I mean even in college, I had to use  
360 a typewriter to type my papers. Because yea there were computers, but they were too expensive  
361 for people to have their own computers. And then with just a matter of four or five years, by the  
362 time I was in residency then people were starting to get computers. But they were not used, you  
363 know it was the web and internet yet, so it wasn't nearly as useful as it is now for  
364 communication. When I went overseas, by that time I did have an email address and people- not  
365 a lot of people had email, but it was a way that I could communicate back home if we could get a  
366 phone line because it was always done through phone modems.

367 **BS:** Yeah, that slow dial-up. How did your father feel about you deciding to be an activist in the  
368 anti apartheid movement?

369 **RR:** Oh I think that both my parents were very supportive. I think that my parents, especially my  
370 dad, I think were pretty nervous when I went to Mozambique because they were a little worried  
371 that something may happen, but I think that they were very supportive.

372 **BS:** Who do you think supported you just that little bit more?

373 **RR:** Oh, probably my mom, you know.

374 **BS:** When did you start being- oh no. I read in your bio form about Linda Murray, how did she  
375 influence you?

376 **RR:** Well, um, yeah and that question was really hard to answer because there were a lot of  
377 people that influence my life. I was just trying to think, well pick somebody. I don't know if you  
378 know Linda Murray-

379 **BS:** I don't.

380 **RR:** -But she is a physician also trained in occupational medicine and internal medicine like  
381 myself who was sort of a mentor older than I am, African American woman, very very active  
382 politically within public health and anti racism work, anti apartheid work, all of that. And I met  
383 her when I was a resident, she was living at that time in Canada, but her family was in Chicago,  
384 and so I met her through mutual friends and she would also come by the hospital and  
385 occasionally give lectures when she was in town when I was a resident and in training and  
386 ultimately she moved back to Chicago and became part of the circle of friends that I have here  
387 now. But I think she's so smart, incredibly bright, and has a very clear analysis. Whenever I hear  
388 her speak its like she's saying things right on exactly the way I want to hear them said, and um, I  
389 think that she in terms of somebody who's a friend that probably influenced my development as  
390 an adult.

391 **BS:** Why did you decide to go to grad school right after undergrad school?

392 **RR:** I wouldn't have minded taking some time off, but what could I have done with an  
393 undergraduate degree in math, in fact I was tutoring undergraduate minority students, um for a  
394 while after that, but I would've had to get a low wage job. And when I graduated college it was  
395 1980, who was elected in 1980? Do you know?

396 **BS:** Reagan

397 **RR:** Ronald Reagan. And the economy was pretty bad, maybe not as bad as it is now, but it was  
398 very very rough. And in the summer of 1981 was the only summer I had off in medical school,  
399 and that summer I didn't want to live at home, I didn't want to come back to Chicago and live at  
400 home. I moved back down to Urbana, and I didn't want to ask my parents for any money because  
401 they wanted me to come home, and it would have been cheaper for me to be at home even if I

couldn't find much of a job. There were basically no jobs, so what I did was I worked that summer for Illinois Public Action Council which was a door-to-door canvassing/ lobbying organization that would raise money to support a lobbyist in Springfield to fight to lower our utility rates and to fight against nuclear power and stuff, and really good things except that they would treat you pretty poorly as a worker. We would have to-they would- I would have to get to work at about two o'clock in the afternoon and we'd have some sort of little meeting, and then we'd get in these cars and go to some Central Illinois town, grab a bite to eat, and I didn't have money to buy McDonalds, I would bring a sack lunch. And then we would go door-to-door asking donations in these relatively impoverished or small town communities, and we would have to bring in a certain amount of money or they would fire you. So what I did was, since I was pretty good at getting money, and we would do that from say four to eight in the afternoon or five to nine in the evening and I- if I reached my quota at like eight o'clock, I would stop. Because I just, you know. So I kept the job, and I did that for about a month and a half, and I had about a month to go before going back to school, and I just couldn't take it anymore. And also I took my bicycle to and from where we would have to meet, and I was living in this house with four guys, friends of mine, and we would all want to share the food, but I would have to take food and put it aside and say don't eat it because these were young guys, you know were all twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two years old and they would eat whatever was there, right. So I mean I was really scraping by, so then I got a job working as a cashier at a Ford Motor dealership for the rest of the summer, and I lied to get that job, I said I wasn't going back to school, I was sort of this lost soul, I didn't know what I wanted to do and dadadada. But of course I did go back to school and I realized I better go back to school because what was I gonna do, to get a- you know I really didn't have the skills to get a decent paying job.

**BS:** Is that the same reason you went on to med school?

**RR:** Well actually that's when I went to med school, right after undergrad because it was- and that was only illustrated by- well that was in med school that- that's when I had that pretty crazy summer.

**BS:** What do you remember- (clears throat) what do you remember most about the program that you studied in med school?

**RR:** Well medical school is pretty standard anywhere you go, its not that you get to pick and choose what you do, and I have to say I was pretty miserable. I hated medical school especially the first two years which was being in a classroom. It was a lot of memorization and it wasn't much thinking involved. So they changed the curriculum a little bit in medical school, at least the method of learning. Um, and then the last two years I did enjoy because we were- doing clinical work, we were in the hospital, we were seeing patients.

437 **BS:** What, um, how did you manage going to grad school, being an activist, and trying to make  
438 ends meet?

439 **RR:** Well, in medical school I didn't work, I didn't have a job. I \_\_\_\_\_ (??) college because  
440 it was just too much work and I had loans and that pretty typical. Medical students- some  
441 medical students work, but a lot of them do not. And it because it's, uh, I mean you take loans  
442 out, so I had a lot of student loans from medical school. My parents were able to help me a little  
443 bit, but I got some scholarships and the rest were loans, so financially that's how I supported  
444 myself. And how I did activism work, it was they way I sort of kept sane.

445 **BS:** It was the work versus play thing.

446 **RR:** Right. What were you thinking when you first went to Mozambique?

447 **BS:** Well the reason I- or a reason- the main reason maybe I went to Mozambique was that as  
448 part of my anti apartheid work, and part of our group also looking beyond the borders of South  
449 Africa, and looking at Angola and Mozambique and Zimbabwe and Botswana and Usutu and  
450 Swazi and looking at the whole region and learning about that, um, I became very supportive and  
451 excited about the kind of society and country that they were trying to build in Mozambique. And  
452 I knew that once I finished my residency, which was four years additional after medical school  
453 that I wanted to go work in Southern Africa and Mozambique looked to me like a place where I  
454 would want to go a be what they would call their co-operant. Which is like a comrade, somebody  
455 who came there out of a sense of solidarity and so that's what I did. And it took a couple of years  
456 once I was out of medical school to find a way of going where I could be funded to go. And by  
457 that time, it was 1990 and then Mandela was released in ninety. And then finally in ninety-two  
458 apartheid was crushed, it was over. But when I first went to Mozambique, it was still, I mean we  
459 knew we can see the end in sight, maybe, so just before I left for Mozambique is when Mandela  
460 was released so there was this big party, it was fantastic and then I was gone for a couple of  
461 years, but being in the region- and I didn't get to South Africa 'til a month before I left  
462 Mozambique to come back to the United States because I didn't even try while I was there, and  
463 probably couldn't even get a visa until apartheid was really abolished to be able to really get into  
464 South Africa, even though we were this close to it.

465 **BS:** How did you fund your trip to Mozambique?

466 **RR:** I- there was this organization, that's still around today, but in a different formation. It's  
467 called the Mozambique Health Committee. It was started by activists who mainly worked out of  
468 the University of Washington in Seattle, and they had worked out a funding scheme where they  
469 had set up a project in Villa Manica, which is this town in Manica Province in Mozambique. And  
470 they- for the first year of their project, they were able to fund through grants and some aid from  
471 UNICEF as well to send a doctor and an epidemiologist. So at the end of that first year that  
472 doctor and epidemiologist who were in this town decided not to remain with this project. In fact

473 the physicians stayed there and the students consulting with sort of non-governmental  
 474 organizations, and I'm really glad she stayed, she's now a very good friend, has remained a good  
 475 friend, and the epidemiologist went elsewhere. They then needed replacements for them. So I got  
 476 hired at a sort of good timing to be the physician, so I was in this small town, or this- oh not so  
 477 small- the whole Villa Manica was responsible for a district, it was sort of the center of a district,  
 478 which is sort of like a county, and it was about a hundred thousand people, or two hundred  
 479 thousand maybe even. And I was the only doctor, and it was funded through this organization in  
 480 Seattle partly and through UNICEF and also the Mozambican Ministry of Health. So I was hired  
 481 by the Ministry of Health, by the government and I got a small Mozambican salary combined  
 482 with UNICEF paid me a U-S dollar salary that was nothing that I would get paid here, but most  
 483 of that money went into the bank here, and I didn't use much of that money to live on, a little bit.  
 484 And so, um, car and things like that were supported through the committee in Seattle.

485 **BS:** Okay, now my little battery is going dead, so I'm going to put it on the charger. (Recording  
 486 stops, then resumes) Alrighty, we are back on. Now you said that you were the only doctor in a  
 487 town with about a hundred thousand people?

488 **RR:** Well, the district. The town itself was much smaller, but I was responsible for the entire  
 489 district, which was like being in charge of a county, as the only physician.

490 **BS:** How was that?

491 **RR:** (lets out a small giggle) At first it was pretty daunting, pretty scary. The Mozambicans just  
 492 didn't have enough doctors and I'd have to say when I left Mozambique the best thing that  
 493 could've happened when I left Mozambique was that I was replaced indeed by a Mozambican  
 494 physician, but they had a whole variety and level of para-professionals, people who are  
 495 medically trained who have different levels of knowledge, so they had technicals, is what they  
 496 called them, like technicians and ajunts (??) –agents, and then they had nurses, and they had  
 497 midwife nurses and regular nurses and each of these levels from the technical on down had a  
 498 certain level of medical knowledge and a lot of them in the sort of outlying areas of the district  
 499 would work independently. They would have sometimes just a nurse at a health post. The bigger  
 500 health posts in some of the larger towns that were smaller than ours, but were somewhat larger  
 501 or, uh- might have an agent, and the technical- we had a technical at my little hospital and he was  
 502 the senior administrator of the hospital so in some ways he was my boss administratively, but I  
 503 was the head of the medical part. So he who was the technical with one of the agents, so the three  
 504 of us would trade off covering the emergency room like every third night, or something you  
 505 know, throughout the year. And they would work independently, but if they had trouble, then of  
 506 course they would call me.

507 **BS:** What was the first thing you did when you arrived in Mozambique?



508 **RR:** Well, the first thing I did is I went to Maputo, the capitol, and I spent about a week or so  
 509 there to just sort of get oriented and I stayed with a guy from UNICEF. And I had to do some  
 510 paperwork at the ministry of health and I saw the big central hospital that they had there, they  
 511 had several hospitals, but the big major sort of national hospital there and sort of got a sense of  
 512 what things were like, and how difficult things were going to be. And then I got flown to, um a  
 513 town called Chimoio which is like the provincial capitol of the province that I was in. And the  
 514 province's name was Manica and the town I was ultimately living in was Villa Manica. At first I  
 515 went to this city, small city called Chimoio, which had a provincial hospital, so they had sort of  
 516 the referral hospital there and that hospital had surgery and had a small intensive care unit,  
 517 although they didn't have ventilators to put people on or anything like that. And I spent about- I  
 518 think it was a month, maybe there- four or five weeks there sort of orienting and learning some  
 519 things because, you know, I'm not an obstetrician so I spent some time in obstetrics to sort of  
 520 brush up on some obstetrics and some gynecologic things. I am an internist and I'm a specialist  
 521 in occupational environmental medicine. So I took care a lot of the internal medicine patients  
 522 while I was there, but got more oriented to pediatrics, more oriented into the emergency room  
 523 there, more oriented to obstetrics and gynecology. And then they sent me out to the district  
 524 hospital.

525 **BS:** Long road. You're good 'cause I don't know if I would be able to do all of this. Now when I  
 526 was first staring this project and reading some things, we were introduced to some t-shirts that  
 527 had different liberation sayings on them, and someone- actually I do believe it was Prexy told us  
 528 that you had something to do with the t-shirts designs-

529 **RR:** Not with the designs, but I donated a lot of the t-shirts to the archives 'cause I had piles of  
 530 them.

531 **BS:** Okay, that's what it was.

532 **RR:** Yeah I had piles of them.

533 **BS:** I liked a lot of them, they're moving or something. It's something artistically about them-

534 **RR:** Well they are and I kept a few, but I figured these should be someplace 'cause I'm not  
 535 gonna wear 'em again.

536 **BS:** Right. Which one did you like the most, or it brought back the most memories?

537 **RR:** Well I don't know I'd have to remember and see. Well there was one- oh I remember one, I  
 538 think I gave- I handed it in, was uh, "South African Steel Steals our Jobs". And there was a steel  
 539 beam that was sort of like the no symbol right over the symbol of South Africa or something, or  
 540 of apartheid. And I think Ora Shuub (??), who was another one of \_\_\_\_\_ (??), I think she  
 541 may have designed that, I have some vague memory of that.

542 **BS:** You were into theater and things early on in your life, how were you influenced artistically  
 543 by the anti- apartheid movement?

544 **RR:** Well, the music, and the dance, and the South African theater as well- South African  
 545 playwrights, and South African literature is wonderful, much of it. And Athol Fugard, the South  
 546 African playwright, his plays are wonderful, and um, I read a variety of authors, and I love South  
 547 African music, much of it. The traditional music as well as the contemporary music, I mean one  
 548 of my- he's White, but one of my favorite South African musicians is Johnny Clegg, but he's not  
 549 producing music anymore, he's not producing records anymore, or recording which is too bad.  
 550 But in the, uh, eighties and nineties, he sort of had this mixed group of White and Black South  
 551 African Zulu mainly, its still wonderful music and I still listen to it on my iPod when I'm  
 552 exercising (giggles). But more traditional music just from all over Africa, um, Cesária Évora  
 553 who is this wonderful wonderful singer from, um, Cape Verde. You know and Mozambican  
 554 music too is really interesting, it's hard to come by.

555 **BS:** What's the difference between South African music and Mozambican music?

556 **RR:** Well, it- some of it will sound very much the same, some not, but it depends on what sort of  
 557 ethnic group is influencing when it comes out in terms of traditional music because, you know in  
 558 Mozambique, there's Zulu and Soto etcetera etcetera. Well in Mozambique there are actually  
 559 thirteen separate different groupings, so it- also Mozambique was influenced by the Portuguese,  
 560 while South Africa had much more influence from, you know the Dutch and English.

561 **BS:** Right. How did your husband feel about you being active?

562 **RR:** Well we didn't meet until a little bit later, but my husband is the older brother of Anne  
 563 Evans who I lived with in Mozambique-

564 **BS:** Oh, so that's how you and Anne Evans met-

565 **RR:** Yeah, so we were close friends and now were also sisters-in-law.

566 **BS:** That's great. Um what- In your opinion, what group did you seeing being the most  
 567 instrumental in the movement?

568 **RR:** You mean here?

569 **BS:** Here or in Africa.

570 **RR:** Well the ANC obviously and PAC also, but-

571 **BS:** What about here?

572 **RR:** Here, well I think the American Committee on Africa, I mean nationally, um- I mean I think  
573 in Chicago, I think our group was quite influential, but there were a lot of other student groups  
574 that were involved and the different communities, uh the different campuses and stuff.

575 **BS:** Okay, now you went to South Africa a month before you came back to the states?

576 **RR:** Right so that was in May of 1992.

577 **BS:** Did you get to see any of the passbook activities going on?

578 **RR:** No no no no no, that was all gone because this was after apartheid was really abolished so  
579 um, but, um- and I've been back there a couple of times since after I'd come back to the states to  
580 live, but the remnants of apartheid was still there because those people were still living in  
581 townships, the people hadn't become mobile enough to move out of, you know- and not that this  
582 didn't happen much either because if you don't have the money, you cant buy a nice house in the  
583 middle of Johannesburg, but when I was there we could go around and see and do anything and  
584 uh- You know but I was also sick at that time, so I didn't get to see very much on that trip. I got  
585 sick a month before I had to come back-

586 **BS:** Oh that sucks.

587 **RR:** Yeah that was too bad.

588 **BS:** Um, in your eyes how is apartheid the same as slavery?

589 **RR:** I'm not sure I see it as the same as slavery. I see apartheid as a system of segregation and  
590 oppression, and where- I would say with slavery where I do make some parallels is is that-  
591 especially the Black South Africans that were living as servants in the- you know on White farms  
592 especially. How they were treated, even though they might have been paid a wage, they were  
593 treated I think even worse than slaves because they weren't even necessarily fed and clothed, or  
594 maybe they were, but they were treated, you know with violence and, um, extreme oppression  
595 which I think is probably on the scale of slavery, but it was not the- it was not that they were  
596 owned, its not that they were considered property. If anything under apartheid, I think Blacks  
597 were considered by many Whites as less than property as disposable. We use you for your labor,  
598 and then your disposable, its okay if you die of silicosis, as long as he's in the mines. We don't  
599 have to clean up the mines, we don't have to make the air safer, we don't have to give you  
600 respirators, we don't have to do all of that because once you die, there's always somebody to  
601 take your place. While with slaves, that's your property, you don't want the slave to die because  
602 that gives you a certain wealth, that's part of your wealth. You know, so if anything I found  
603 apartheid to be- not that I wanna say one is worse than the other, but its uh- to me the oppression  
604 was just as intense.

605 **BS:** What impact- (clears throat) excuse me, what impact did the assassination of Martin Luther  
606 King have on the anti- apartheid movement, or did it?

607 **RR:** Well the anti-apartheid movement was quite young at that time, and I was still- I was what-  
608 ten years old at that time. And I think that it probably provided some galvanizing, or got people-  
609 I mean people were already involved with King and Malcolm X and other leaders in the Black  
610 community to fight racism in this country, but I think that King and Malcolm X maybe even  
611 more so had an international view and they made connections to struggles elsewhere, so I could  
612 imagine, not remembering from that time, that Dr. King's death would've galvanized the  
613 movement in terms of furthering that agenda of saying that people's oppression here is connected  
614 to the oppression there and that the struggles are not the same, but they should be linked.

615 **BS:** Um, were you around for the Soweto Uprising? [shakes head yes] So what do you remember  
616 most?

617 **RR:** What do I remember? I do remember, and I do remember seeing pictures of it, I was in high  
618 school. I do remember seeing think on the TV about it, and being affected by it. I think that that's  
619 probably around the time that I even learned what the word apartheid was and what it meant.

620 **BS:** So it- teaching you what it was and what it meant is how it affected you?

621 **RR:** Yeah.

622 **BS:** Okay. What US president was most instrumental in the fight against apartheid?

623 **RR:** (chewing of crunchy chips) Probably the president that was most receptive was probably  
624 President Carter at that time.

625 **BS:** What president helped keep apartheid alive?

626 **RR:** Oh Reagan. (giggles)

627 **BS:** (giggles) I was just thinking that. How, how did he keep it alive?

628 **RR:** He fought sanctions, um he fought against the boycotts, he did not want any change in the  
629 sort of business as usual in terms of world economic community.

630 **BS:** Um, I guess that answers my next question which was what was Ronald Reagan's most  
631 significant move against banning apartheid?

632 **RR:** Well, he fought against sanctions and the divestment movement was building at the time he  
633 was president.

634 **BS:** Right. How did George H.W. Bush react to apartheid?

635 **RR:** I think it was sort of a, um, I think we saw the demise at that point under his regime- under  
636 his presidency. But he was not necessarily supportive.

637 **BS:** How were you directly involved with divestment?

638 **RR:** Well that was sort of the first sort of campaigns that I was involved with as an activist  
639 against apartheid was in divestment campaigns, especially on college campuses, on my own  
640 campus and after.

641 **BS:** During my research, I did read that churches, um, universities and state legislations were the  
642 first to divest.

643 **RR:** Right.

644 **BS:** Why- how does this compare to your experience. I'm sorry- they were quicker to divest than  
645 corporations, how does this compare with your experience? Like did you have the same-?

646 **RR:** Oh yeah.

647 **BS:** Why?

648 **RR:** Well, I mean universities, in particular are more likely to be swayed by the community.  
649 Private corporations, I mean at the other end, um and also churches too, you know churches tried  
650 to- especially around that time, and I think this is tied into the Central American work that I was  
651 also somewhat involved with, is that there's this whole idea of liberation theology. And I think  
652 that most churches, even churches that are quite conservative will have social justice formations  
653 within their churches and this was the sort of issue of the day, or one of them along with Central  
654 American solidarity, and so churches I could see doing that. Private corporations, their interest is  
655 to make a profit, and they want the gold out of South Africa, and they want the diamonds out of  
656 South Africa and they don't want to disrupt what they consider to be a well oiled production  
657 process that's going on there, and so it was not in their economic interests to end apartheid until  
658 the struggle became so fierce that the country became ungovernable, and the companies then  
659 were beginning to suffer because they couldn't turn profits anymore.

660 **BS:** Um, how did things change- how did you notice the change after Congress passed the anti-  
661 apartheid act in 1986?

662 **RR:** Well that's where, for example our group, our formation, our- sort of went from CIDS to  
663 CCISSA, we realized we needed to look more now beyond divestment sanctions as strategies to  
664 end apartheid, and need to be more broad and encompassing in terms of our strategies and ways  
665 of, um- agitating to end the most racist system in the world.

666 **BS:** Where were you when Nelson Mandela was freed?

667 **RR:** I was here in Chicago, and what I was doing at that moment, I don't know. I just remember  
 668 screaming and just being really happy. And then we had this party at uh- our organization helped  
 669 put together a party with folks at Malcolm X College and it was- we were just, you know  
 670 dancing and screaming and just you know.

671 **BS:** Was there a song or a dance that stood out to you-

672 **RR:** Well we were singing "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika", and you know we these folks- these  
 673 Americans trying to dance South African style, but not quite doing it. (giggles) And we had our  
 674 South African friends here in Chicago.

675 **BS:** Right. What role did religion play for you in the apartheid struggle?

676 **RR:** Not much for me. Uh, I am Jewish and, uh born and raised relatively observant, but I have  
 677 not been that way since I've been quite a young adult, um, and however when I was doing anti-  
 678 apartheid work, I would go and speak to synagogues and to Jewish groups fairly frequently and I  
 679 felt that because I was a Jew I could have a cache in talking about the connections between Israel  
 680 and South Africa. And they were quite intense, even within the labor run government, with the  
 681 labor run party as well as the labor movement in Israel. I remember at one point, um, Prexy and  
 682 I, who also is somebody who I do admire and didn't put on my list but certainly within the  
 683 context of this work, he influenced a lot of us. But he and I a lot of times would go out like a tag  
 684 team, and he and I went to this park (??) and the Histadrut, which is the labor federation in Israel,  
 685 had sponsored a group of Black South Africans to come to Israel to learn- not about labor  
 686 organizing, but to do something related to- yeah labor organizing and such. And- but these were  
 687 hand picked Blacks that the White apartheid regime had picked to go. These were not freedom  
 688 fighters, or the liberation struggle people, you know these were people that had been co-opted,  
 689 otherwise they wouldn't have been allowed to go to Israel. And um, so I talked a little bit about  
 690 that and I also talked about Israel, it being pretty well known, but all sort of under the table, but  
 691 Israel was helping South Africa develop nuclear capabilities. So I talked about those particular  
 692 kinds of issues there and it was at the meeting of a- the Jewish Women's Group, it's called  
 693 Hadassah and they're all over the country and stuff affiliated with different synagogues, and I  
 694 thought the topic(??) went pretty well, there were several, though quite pointed comments.  
 695 People in the audience were upset because they thought I was trashing Israel and I was saying  
 696 that regardless of my being a Jew, that doesn't mean I support Israel unconditionally, and if they  
 697 are helping show up(??) the apartheid regime, then I don't support that. And I got this letter in  
 698 the mail that was so awful, you know, calling me this self hating Jew, and uh- so on that level  
 699 that probably sort of how I dealt with religion and I do not say that the Jewish community as a  
 700 whole believe that. I would say as a whole, the Jewish community was very strong in fighting  
 701 apartheid and very active, and a lot of synagogues were quite activist, but when it came time to  
 702 talking about the relationship between Israel and South Africa, it was always a very sticky issue.

703 **BS:** Was that a personal letter that you received?

704 **RR:** Yes.

705 **BS:** Oh, Lord. How did- (cat meows [jumps on table, Dr. Rubin removes her]; giggles) Hi  
706 Wendy! How did books and pamphlets that you read influence you?

707 **RR:** Oh, you should just look at my shelf and I have- If you wanna stop this I'll show you my  
708 books, but I have over there, at least several- two or three rows of books on Africa, and I thought  
709 it was important to read and to be as conversant as possible, and with CCISSA we had little  
710 study groups, we would read together and we would discuss things, and what I think kept me  
711 with that- working with the group and us becoming and developing as an organization is that we  
712 kinda shared ideology and analysis and we talked about that and we developed that. And it  
713 wasn't just- we're doing this because it's right.

714 **BS:** It was something bigger. What was African Liberation Day like for you?

715 **RR:** Um- that's interesting. I'm not quite sure how to put myself within that.

716 **BS:** Where were you on African Liberation Day?

717 **RR:** I don't even remember. I don't even remember. Where was I? When was the exact date?  
718 \_\_\_\_\_(??)

719 **BS:** Oh, I meant to write it down, I didn't write it down. I do believe it was- no that was  
720 something else. I apologize, I don't have it-

721 **RR:** Well we'll find out. [pulls out PDA device]

722 **BS:** Okay. What was the most memorable conference or protest that you were involved in?

723 **RR:** Um- protest, I don't know, there were so many, um but certainly the bigger ones I think  
724 close to the time Mandela was freed, and then the late eighties they were quite active spirited in  
725 front of the South African Consulate, and blocking off the streets. But I went to many  
726 conferences and conferences all over. There was one conference I went to, I think it was in 1992,  
727 right when I got ready to come back from Mozambique, and it was sort of a post apartheid  
728 conference, and it was amazing because there were South Africans, there were Whites, Black,  
729 and so called colored South Africans that I thought was fantastic. And I remember the spirit, at  
730 least of that particular, uh, conference.

731 **BS:** What was it like to see people getting arrested at those protests?

732 **RR:** Well, I mean I didn't- I remember one- you know usually it wasn't people trying to get  
 733 arrested, it was because the police were being intolerant of someone wanting to cross the street.  
 734 But sometime also, frankly people who were being a little bit stupid, I mean you don't need to  
 735 get arrested. Some people were- individuals were personally provoking the police so they would  
 736 get arrested. It's not like in South Africa where people were being beaten by the police and killed  
 737 by the police. Here it was more, you know people were arrested just because of the  
 738 demonstration, it was usually because they were not staying within the lines they were supposed  
 739 to stay in, and still you shouldn't be arrested for that, but it happens. But where I thought it was  
 740 more significant was when, you know like Anne Evans would tell you, she locked herself in the  
 741 South African Consulate, and the police had to break in to get her out, and they actually broke  
 742 her finger or broke her hand to do that, and that was- you know that I mean is making a  
 743 statement. And usually when these kinds of things- I think where it works best is where it's  
 744 planned. You strategically determine what you're gonna do, and how you're going to do it and  
 745 knowing that there might be arrests and that's part of it, and that's like where you see these well  
 746 known people or politicians getting arrested because that's what will get the media attention. But  
 747 if some Joe that nobody knows that gets arrested, it doesn't always do a whole lot.

748 **BS:** What message did the media convey to you about anti-apartheid?

749 **RR:** Well at first the media was very, uh, not very reflective about it. I wouldn't say against- not  
 750 so much supporting apartheid, but instead just talking about the crazies on the street. I mean the  
 751 typical kind of thing. They would choose a sound bite, or choose to write a story about the  
 752 person that got arrested instead of talking about the issues. And that certainly was always the  
 753 struggle with the media, to get a story out there that would talk about the issues and to talk about  
 754 what apartheid was.

755 **BS:** Were there any programs- maybe some public television programs, or public radio programs  
 756 that did talk about the apartheid-

757 **RR:** Yes there were. There were various specials, especially close to the time when Mandela was  
 758 freed, especially when he was moved to Jo'Burg from Robben Island and was put in sort of this  
 759 compound, um that's actually when he had tuberculosis, recovering from TB, um- there were  
 760 documentaries about him and there was more and more on the TV and television and radio as  
 761 time went on.

762 **BS:** How did Desmond Tutu influence you?

763 **RR:** I've always had a lot of respect for Desmond Tutu. I always thought he was a bit moderate  
 764 but within the context in which he was working in terms of pushing the churches. I mean really,  
 765 uh- someone who is at the very least incredibly, um- spirited, ethical and to be respected for his-



766 his- certainly for his commitment, obviously, but for his ability to maintain his views and not  
767 compromise, really to be a real ethical and moral center for the movement.

768 **BS:** Is that the way in which he may have influenced you?

769 **RR:** Yeah. I'm not sure he influenced me as much as others.

770 **BS:** Others such as?

771 **RR:** Um- oh Steve Biko, some of the trade union leaders like um- leaders of Cosatu. I think they  
772 may have had- because they were a little more militant.

773 **BS:** How did Steve Biko's death affect you?

774 **RR:** Oh tremendous. From the very beginning, they were saying, oh you know he killed himself,  
775 and you're like oh yeah right. We knew from the beginning he had been- he was yet another  
776 young leader who was murdered by the apartheid regime.

777 **BS:** What celebrities were prominent?

778 **RR:** Oh, Harry Belafonte, um- Arthur Ashe, oh many many- a lot of singers. I mean of course  
779 South Africans like Miriam Mikaba and Meema Sikalah (??), but in terms of non-African  
780 personalities, they were, uh, oh I don't know a lot.

781 **BS:** What was, um, the campaign for Mandela's presidency like?

782 **RR:** Oh, everybody was sort of thrilled. I did not go as an election observer to South African  
783 elections, I went two years later for the multi-party elections in Mozambique, but, um in hearing  
784 the reports from friends that did go, I mean just amazing. We had here the campaign posters and  
785 the new flag, and it was very sort of thrilling especially talking to my South African friends who  
786 could vote for the first time, you know. To talk for Faneca (??) who was gonna go to the  
787 Consulate and actually get to vote, you know, that was very very very exciting.

788 **BS:** Well looking back, what did you learn from being in the anti-apartheid movement?

789 **RR:** Um- How, I think to struggle and to fight for liberation and freedom and for a better society  
790 is that to do that with a multi racial coalition and to help build a multi racial society is much  
791 richer than to try and sort of do it in your own little box. And also the legacy of apartheid, and  
792 the overthrowing of apartheid is also a way we helped fight racism in this country, and it furthers  
793 the anti-racism struggle here. So that's one thing I learned.

794 **BS:** What would you have done differently in your activism?

795 **RR:** Oh I don't know. Maybe be more militant, I don't know.

796 **BS:** Why more militant?

797 **RR:** Because there were other people that were willing to make certain sacrifices, I guess that I  
798 didn't.

799 **BS:** For instance that um, license

800 **RR:** Yeah, or maybe risk my job. I mean people might say that would be foolish anyway, but-  
801 you know just- I mean everybody could always say that they always could've worked harder and  
802 I didn't that's true. You always think you should work harder and even now in trying to be an  
803 activist, having an eight-year-old, and working, and getting older, and doing all of those things.  
804 It's much harder to do all of those things and I wish I were twenty again and I had the energy to  
805 do that.

806 **BS:** What are you being active in now?

807 **RR:** I've been working, most recently with a group called the Arab-Jewish Partnership for  
808 Justice and Peace in the Middle East, and um, you know I also do stuff related to public health.

809 **BS:** How did your activism against apartheid change you?

810 **RR:** Well, I think that it certainly broadened my life, I mean if I hadn't been involved on anti-  
811 apartheid work, I wouldn't have gone to Africa, I wouldn't have gone to work in Mozambique  
812 for two years and that was uh, you know a life changing event and I'll never be the same. It  
813 became a second home, I still have contacts there, and its- it'll always be a part of me and that's  
814 something that I never would've had without it.

815 **BS:** Looking back, um, at the movement and your activism, what are you most proud of?

816 **RR:** Um- well I think I'm proud in the sense of being part of a collective where we actually  
817 helped overthrow an oppressive system.

818 **BS:** Mhm. If you had the chance to just go back in life to any point in time, what other events  
819 would you have been active in?

820 **RR:** Maybe more active in Central American solidarity, and I was, some- especially with the  
821 committee in support of the people of El Salvador, CISPES and Nicaragua, I went to Nicaragua  
822 briefly, um- I would just be more- making more connections between different struggles around  
823 the world and trying to work in ways to bring those closer together.

824 **BS:** What was your best memory of the anti-apartheid movement?

825 **RR:** Oh, just the camaraderie, I think, and the working together and the excitement and  
826 challenges and you feel like you're not doing this alone and you're really with people and were  
827 building a movement.

828 **BS:** What about your worse memories?

829 **RR:** Oh- you know when ten people show up to a demonstration (giggles), or the occasional  
830 divisiveness or in fighting (??) that occurred amongst different communities that were working  
831 for the same thing.

832 **BS:** How often do thoughts or memories about the movement cross your mind?

833 **RR:** (chewing of crunchy chips) Oh I don't know here and there. I mean its sort of part of my  
834 psyche, I think-

835 **BS:** What are those memories like or about?

836 **RR:** Well I think usually- I think where they come in most is let's say I'm working with this  
837 other group that I'm working with now around Middle eastern peace, if were planning an event  
838 or we want to do something, I'll think back. Well how did we do it there? How does that  
839 connect? And how can we use some things from that, you know, so in that sense.

840 **BS:** You said it was hard to have an eight-year-old and try to be active, what do you want your  
841 child to know most about the anti-apartheid movement, or your child's generation?

842 **RR:** To know that people can organize and fight and make things better for all of us.

843 **BS:** Is she socially aware of-

844 **RR:** Oh very much so, and the school she goes to they talk about things all the time. I don't  
845 know if she's learned about apartheid per se yet in school, but certainly about civil rights and the  
846 civil rights movement in the sixties and-

847 **BS:** What advice would you give someone my age that sees an issue that they want to be  
848 involved in but, don't really know how?

849 **RR:** Don't give up. If there's a group that you want to be part of, that has an issue that you're  
850 interested in and- whether it's around community organizing or international solidarity or all of  
851 those things. If you go into a group that's already formed, admittedly people already- a lot of  
852 these people already know each other, but that doesn't mean that they don't want new members,  
853 the always do. People- just like people are people, you have to learn how to get to know each  
854 other and become comfortable with each other, so I would say just don't give up. And being

855 young, you bring a certain energy even if you don't have the same years of knowledge and  
 856 people might think you're naïve and you're not naïve. You're strong, and- young people are  
 857 strong and energetic and I think you need to learn to listen, but I think that it's very very  
 858 important to bring young people into all kinds of struggles and movements because that's how  
 859 we succeed, how we move on.

860 **BS:** How do your colleagues react when they find out you were involved in such a controversial  
 861 movement or even being involved with the Central American-

862 **RR:** Well, it depends, I mean when I worked at Cook County Hospital full time, there were a lot  
 863 of like minded people there. Being a public hospital it sort of attracts a certain group of people.  
 864 But where I work now it's a little more mixed in terms of people's attitudes, but I mean just for  
 865 example I was really quite surprised in a good way- I thought where I was working now people  
 866 are much more conservative on the whole, but I tell you everybody was so excited about Barack  
 867 Obama. You know, the White medical assistant who lives out in the far suburbs whose kids go  
 868 to, you know suburban schools, along with the Mexican American radiology tech. You know its  
 869 like everybody was so excited and it didn't matter who you were or what background, I mean- so  
 870 you know, you can't judge a book by its cover to be really cliché, but people were supportive.  
 871 People I think are a little surprised occasionally when it comes out that I had been involved in  
 872 something. It's always, oh really because I don't let on that I'm sort of as left as I am even aside  
 873 from anti-apartheid work and uh- but you know people take it in stride. I'm not- I don't  
 874 proselytize, I don't go out there and just you know. But you know if I see something- if I see  
 875 somebody saying something that I think is racist or is on the verge, I'll say something, you know,  
 876 I will.

877 **BS:** That's good. What does your daughter know about your involvement?

878 **RR:** (chewing on crunchy chips) She knows- I mean she certainly knows that I've lived in  
 879 Mozambique, um, she knows that I was involved with things, but I'm not sure that I've sat down  
 880 and talked about apartheid per se as a historical period, but she certainly knows that I have been  
 881 very vocal in struggling against oppression an racism and she's been- she's eight and probably  
 882 has been to a dozen demonstrations, you know in her lifetime 'cause I take her all the time.

883 **BS:** What questions does she ask about-?

884 **RR:** Well you know, the typical child naïve atave (??), its sort of sweet and so insightful at the  
 885 same time. She'll say well, why do people have to do that to each other?

886 **BS:** What friends besides Anne Evans do you still have that were active with you?

887 **RR:** Oh, um- I mean there are a lot of people, I mean I could list names, but- but there are a lot  
888 of people.

889 **BS:** Yeah. Did you lose anybody- did anyone pass on that was really close to you from the  
890 movement?

891 **RR:** Um, well certainly someone that I met during the movement just died a couple of days ago,  
892 and that's um Lucille Grand who was the mother of Otis Cunningham and that's Lisa Brock's  
893 mother-in-law that just died. And Lucille I've known through anti-apartheid work, she was a  
894 member of Trinity United Church of Christ, um and an artist and for years and years I knew her  
895 through probably Otis and then Lisa, but she is certainly somebody who recently- who I connect  
896 to that.

897 **BS:** What memories do you have of her during the movement?

898 **RR:** Oh, always being very out there, also dressing very colorfully, um she would make things  
899 that she would sell, she would have ANC on it-

900 **BS:** Just a festive lady. What opportunities are there now, besides coming out of the Middle East,  
901 what opportunities are there to be active?

902 **RR:** Well you just look around. A lot of community based work that needs to be done, and  
903 national stuff, national movements for single parent health care, for health care for all which is  
904 something that's very close to my heart, um- trying to push the environmental movement to be  
905 more radical, um not just to be tree huggers or save the birds, but to actually make connections  
906 between that and something called Environmental Racism which is talking about landfills that  
907 are situated in communities of color or impoverished communities of color and to talk about that  
908 and to try and clean up those, um areas. So making again connections between struggles and you  
909 know right now with global climate change, I think there's great opportunities for linking that  
910 environmental movement to more social justice based elements of that.

911 **BS:** Okay. Well we're done, it's been great. Yeah sigh of relief, it's the end. I thank you so  
912 much. Um I did, um when you were talking about your daughter learning about civil rights-  
913 (recording ends)