Female
"Indian"
46 years
Academic
Originally from Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal
23/02/2009

Breaking out of a cocoon

My earliest active engagement with the injustice of racial segregation dates back to a series of events which took place in 1970 when I was 8 years old. Upon reflection, while the impact of apartheid was multifaceted, my family and social world managed it by a series of 'rationalisations' which I later understood in terms of the popular conception of 'slave mentality'.

Both my parent's grandparents hailed from indentured labourer stock, so my parents were a second generation born in South Africa. My grandfather completed an equivalent of a Grade 8 or standard 6 level of education and was employed by a White Optician, Mr. Allright. Although he worked at menial tasks initially before being elevated to a technician, in the eyes of his social world this was an important and unusual profession. When my father completed matric, he followed the same route. Mr. Allright looked after his worker, not by adequate compensation and employee benefits but by employing his first born son. My family were extremely loyal and patronising to Mr Allright and almost 'worshipped' them. As a young girl I recall my grandmother preparing 'special foods' to be delivered to the home of Mr. Allright. I often wondered why they did not fetch these meals as they owned a car, but instead my father had to travel by bus on a Sunday morning to make this delivery. My father and grandfather had acquired a wealth of skills through the practical training they received, so much so that Mr. Allright left the running of this practice to them for many years before his death. Such unquestioning obedience proved worthwhile as after the death Mr. Allright, my father managed to purchase all his equipment and set up a Dispensing practice of his own business. My paternal side of the family chose a path of least resistance and did not engage in politics. Their rationalisation was that the Nationalist government and White people in general were 'good' to Indians as they did not have to suffer the same

plight as ‘Blacks’. Indians had ‘good’ schools, council housing with running water etc. The other rationalisation and selected abstraction was the Gandhian philosophy of passive resistance.

My mother completed standard 8, the equivalent of grade 10, and was then recruited into teacher training. She graduated with a teaching diploma. At the age of 12 years she experienced the Durban Riots of 1949. The riots left harrowing and traumatic memories in her mind, as her family was torn apart, women from the neighbourhood were beaten and raped and men were beaten. This event shaped her thinking about ‘Black’ people being the enemy and Whites being the protectors than oppressors. Family discussions were apolitical and censored.

All this changed when I took an active interest in competitive swimming. I excelled at the sport and represented Natal at the inter-provincial swimming competition which took place in Port Elizabeth in that year. For the first time in my life I travelled outside Natal, without my parents. On route to P.E. we were not allowed to use the public ablution facilities at the petrol stations but instead had to be content going into the bush or waiting to get to a ‘non-White’ facility. At the opening and closing ceremonies of the Swimming championships, I heard speeches about sports administrators who were not allowed to attend these functions because they were banned or under House Arrest, I heard about other swimming bodies who enjoyed subsidies and facilities we were denied. When I got home I was very excited about all the new things I had learnt and decide to share this with my family. My parents were horrified and forbade me to discuss the matter again. They tried to stop my further participation in the sport, but were unsuccessful because my world revolved around swimming and I would have died before I gave it up. I also got some support from my dad’s cousin who taught me to withhold my attitudes, feelings and new political insights from family discussions.

A few months after the tournament, we went on a family picnic to the ‘Blacks only’ designated section of Umkomaas Beach. This was a treat; weeks of planning went into this event. The women awoke very early and prepared food for the day, while the men prepared their fishing gear the night before, the excitement was palpable. After lunch a group of

women and children decided to take a walk to collect shells. This was an important ritual as it was a treasured memento from the seaside trip. Instead of staying on the sand, I wondered off onto the shoreline. I was startled by 2 White men who were fishing; they called me a ‘coolie bitch’ and swore at me for contaminating their fishing spot with my black skin. I recall my mother rushing to my aid, but apologising to these racists instead of confronting them. I felt hurt and humiliated when my mother explained that I had broken the rules.

These incidents made me realise that the status quo as interpreted and practiced by my family network was equally oppressive. Thanks to my involvement in non-racial sport I was exposed to political discourses and community activism. By the time I had reached high school, my parents became more willing to engage with politics and started attending rallies and community meetings with me.

N22

Male
White
Gauteng
Forties

I was working at Unisa from about 1980 to 1987 in the maths dept. During this time there used to be employed in the Unisa library a Dutch woman whose name I've forgotten. She was an activist in her private life outside of the university set up and as I recall a member of the black sash. I vaguely remember that her activism had to do with protests against forced removals and issues of housing for migrants to the city. Anyway, this was a particularly repressive epoch and the government of the day arrested her for immediate deportation back to Holland. Certain lecturers at Unisa (myself included) were furious at the lack of support for her by the Unisa management and the meek unprotesting way in which they appeared to be accepting the government action in spite of the fact that this was a employee of many years who had committed no crimes whatsoever other than following the dictates of her conscience.

A few staff members were agitating for some sort of protest in the university but it appeared to be going nowhere. With the help of sympathetic staff and even head of School principally in the theology dept but also in history and other depts., I decided to launch a campaign to organize a public protest at the lack of action on the part of the University. These were dangerous times. So one had to be quite careful about what one did. With the help of the printing office we organized pamphlets for distribution to staff. It was too dangerous to openly distribute these. So with the help of theology, I drafted a latter to be distributed from their office to Heads of departments throughout the university requesting them to distribute these amongst all staff (there was no email then). This letter and follow up pamphlets protested at the impeding deportation of our colleague and set up a public meeting in one of the Unisa halls to voice our protest and allow staff some public outlet for their feelings.

What was quite interesting about this mode of distribution was that one could actually organize and carry it out, distribute the letters and pamphlets without the Unisa authorities (and possibly even the security branch) being able to locate the source of the organization and so stamp it out. Anyway we got to the point where we had set up the meeting and people had arrived in the hall. There was quite a large attendance when right at the outset of our protest meeting Michael Macnamara, then head of the philosophy department grabbed the microphone and convinced the meeting not to go ahead because of the personal risk to all the individuals present. Pathetic really, but more pathetic was my own personal inaction in not presenting a counter argument and going ahead anyway.

Shortly after this, I resigned from Unisa and joined Khanya College, a Sached University project, teaching first year maths to talented black students who would otherwise not have qualified to go to Wits. And the Dutch lady was deported back to Holland a week after her arrest.

N23

Thirties
Black

It was the year 1993, I was 8 years old and my family had just moved to a suburb in the east called Kensington. We had moved from Alexander Township, where we had been living all my life. I suppose my only interaction with white people before that point had been with my school teachers at the catholic school that I had attended from grade 1 to grade 2. They were all white females. I think there might also have been a couple of white kids in my classes, but I only have memories of black and coloured children, who formed majority. At the point of the incident it had already been two weeks since we moved into the neighbours yet, let alone their children. There were no kids playing around in the street, as we had become accustomed to in Alex. In the township, every child in your street was your friend or rival in a game of bati or umgusha. It just didn't seem right to us that little children should be cooped up in their homes and not even get the opportunity to make friends with their neighbours. So we made it a habit of ours, as all children do when they are in confined spaces, to chase each other around the house and around our little backyard, completely oblivious of our neighbours. On one such day, we were playing in our usual way, shouting, screaming and having fun, even though our mom had already told us to keep the noise levels down. While we were still carrying on like that we heard the door bell ring. Our mom went to answer, while we peered through the door to see who it was. It was a white man. I don't think he'd even had the decency to introduce himself to our mother before he proceeded to shout at her about the noise her children were making, I'm certain his rant included some profanities. He was saying such things as, "You should tell your kids to keep quiet", and "You should learn how to control your children". It was clear that according to this man we had disrupted the perfect peace that had existed before we got there. Of course our mom quickly moved to defend us. Eventually, the man realized that he was fighting a losing battle and left. I remember that we were all shocked and repulsed by his behaviour. We just didn't understand how a grown man could act in such an unbecoming manner carrying on like a mad person. Further, we'd never experienced such an altercation before, but we were very aware that it had a real racial element to it. We were convinced that he would not have reacted that way if we had been a white family, at least he might

have had the propriety to speak to our mother as an adult, and not as if he was talking to an unruly child. I was a little weary after that, I didn't want him to come back, even though I was quite certain that our mom would be able to put him in his place. I remember that we felt the hatred of this man who didn't even know us. The incident definitely left me conscious of the fact that I was black child in a white neighbourhood. We were unwelcome and isolated.

My first experience of racism, that I can remember clearly, occurred when I was in high school. I was probably about 16 or 17 at the time. I started 'going out' with a boy of another race. At this age however, going out was not serious term, however the point was I had some sort of a relationship with a person of another race.

I will never forget the night I met this boy, my friend that was with me at the time said he was so nice etc. But when we got back to school my classmates all found out, I was suddenly met with a response that I was totally unfamiliar with. Some, not all, of the girls were quite judgmental about the fact that I was 'seeing' someone of a different race. Some of them quite clearly stated that it was strange or made comments like 'how could you find him attractive?' while others responded by saying, 'I have no problem with you doing it, but I wouldn't do it myself.' 'It', like going out with a boy was rare phenomenon.

I was totally shocked by their responses. I felt a mixture of emotions towards the situation. For starters I felt irritated and angry that my so- called friends could be so closed-minded and judgmental about something that I saw no problem with. To me he was just another boy. I also felt like I had done something wrong, and the worst feeling was guilt I felt when I though 'well maybe I should go out with someone else'. When I look back now I wonder if those girls would hold the same opinions today? It was uncommon at the time to see couples of mixed race, but now that is a socially acceptable and common thing, would they still be so judgmental?

This experience had an effect on me at the time as I hated myself for caring what my friends thought, especially when I knew that they were wrong to have such negative feelings towards my relationships has changed.

Female
Twenties
'Indian'
Gauteng

I was born in 1988 and was only six years old when South Africa became a democracy. Therefore, I have not witnessed or have any noteworthy memories of Apartheid South Africa. However, I have not had a few experiences of racism post-Apartheid. Additionally, the concept of race has been very apparent to me from a young age.

I was born and raised in Lenasia. A predominantly Indian area. At the age of eleven, in 1999, my parents moved me from a previously non-white school (which was predominantly Indian) to a former model C school. At the time the school was predominantly white. This move made me conscious of race and of the privileges of and disadvantages of belonging to a specific race. The new school I had moved to had a swimming pool, a cricket field a library and a hall. Whereas, all my previous school had was a sandy playing field. From this I immediately associated being white as being advantaged, wealthy and superior, and being black as being disadvantaged, poor and inferior. These associations established a racial hierarchy in my mind.

My most significant experience of racism occurred in my second year of high school (2002). Like the primary school I was moved to the school was an ex-model C, however, the school was more racial diverse than primary school. In high school my circle of friends was made up of only Indian girls (as I went to an all girls' school). One afternoon after school a group of us were sitting on a bench waiting to be picked up. We were confronted by a group of black girls. These girls mocked us for being Indian, told us we were not South African and that we should leave and go back to India. We were told that we did not belong to South Africa. This experience was significant to me as it challenged the racial hierarchy that I had established in my mind in primary school. According to this hierarchy black people should be submissive and would not explicitly confront Indian or white people.

After this incident I became aware of the hierarchy that I had established. I realized that not only white people were racist, but rather that racism worked in every direction. I also realized that my racial hierarchy was racist in itself, because I saw Indian people as superior as superior to black people and white people as superior as superior to both Indian and black people.

Now that I am consciously aware of how racism have developed personally and from this o am able to change those thoughts and beliefs. Therefore, the racist experience that I had was beneficial as it brought my attention to my own racist beliefs and by being aware of them I am able to change these thoughts and beliefs.

N26

Gender: Female
Age: Twenties
Region: Gauteng

My first experience of racism occurred when I was about 5 years old. After I was born my parents moved my family to Botswana where we lived for five years. In Botswana I was raised in an environment where race was a concept I did not know existed. I went to a playschool where all my friends were black and my domestic worker (Doris) was like a second mother to me. I had never drawn boundaries on the grounds of race and was truly 'colour-blind'. We returned to South Africa so that my sister and I could be educated without having to attend boarding school. Doris, being a part of our family has agreed to come with us to South Africa and see whether she would want to stay with us or move back home to Botswana.

On our journey home my parents decided to take us on a little holiday via the coast, as I had never seen the sea before (neither had Doris). I can't remember exactly but I think we stopped over in Durban and stayed in a little hotel. I recall that Doris was not allowed to stay in our room with us but thought little of it at the time. We stayed there for just under a week and spent most of our days at the beach where Doris and I were equally fascinated by the ocean. I remember people looking at my family strangely when Doris was with us but when I asked my mother why she dismissed my question and I carried on like a normal 5 year old not thinking much of it at all. One day we decided to go to Milky Lane as it was very hot and my sister and I were nagging for ice creams. This was the first day in my life that I realized people weren't all the same and equal in the eyes of the world. We all entered the restaurant and sat down, all I could think about was what I was going to order. After a long time we had still not received any service and my sad became almost nervous. He asked a waiter if he could take our order and the waiter just ignored us. We all still sat there debating what would be good on the menu. A few minutes later a who I assume was the manager came up to us and said that he wouldn't serve us if 'she' was with us and that they don't serve 'her kind'. He said she had to leave and wait outside while we ate. My father was quiet for a while and then just got up and told us that it was time to go and that we

were not going to eat there. Doris said that she didn't mind waiting outside but my dad had made up his mind and we left.

We all got back in the car, drove to a café close by where we got ice creams and ate together on the side of the road. My parents were quiet for a long time and didn't say much at all. I remember Doris just saying to my sister and I that things were different in this country and you have to accept it and that when we got back to Johannesburg we could eat all the ice creams we wanted together at home. Nothing was said about the rest of the drive but when we got back to the hotel my father sat my sister and I down and tried to explain to us the intricacies of the system of Apartheid. He explained that in South Africa people didn't like the black people and thought they were different to us. He also made the point that we should not change how we think and always remember that we are equal no matter what anyone says. He then went on to tell us that the school we were going to would be a private school one where black people were allowed and once again told us that our job was to make sure we treated everyone around us the same.

After that experience at the Milky Lane I guess a lot changed within me. I have always remembered it and as have matured I have questioned more and more how that made Doris feel. Was she embarrassed or just disgusted? Why did she accept it so freely and what did that do to her perception of who she was? I remember asking my mom shortly after it happened if I was a bad person because I was white/ I think that it made me question my identity and the role of colour in discrimination. When I think back on it I feel pity not only for Doris but for my parents as well. They were helpless and could not fight for her, they could not demand that the manager serve us and could not change things for Doris; I often wondered how that made them feel.

Needless to say Doris came with us back to Johannesburg and helped us set up house. she only stayed for a month and then asked my dad to take her back to Botswana, which he did. We visited Botswana every 6 months for 3 years after that while my dad still had business up there and saw Doris every time. Even when we speak of our time in Botswana now, my family always refers to it as the friendly place where everyone is smiling and equal. I hope that South Africa can have the same sentiment for me.

N27

Female
White
Mid-twenties

When I was younger I grew up in the very Afrikaans community of Vereeniging. My first experiences of racism occurred when I was at school in Junior Primary. I attended a “white” school. In accordance with Apartheid policy no coloureds or blacks were admitted to the school. What is particularly poignant about this is that I only questioned this year later, at the time it was for the norm!

I shall relate two experiences I had at the school, as I believe they are along a similar vein and highlight related issues. The first experience occurred one day at break when the teachers and school staff elected to teach us what to do if “terrorists” with guns and bombs ever attacked the school. We were told to hide under desks and instructed on how to leopard crawl across the playground. At the same time this way was scary – why would people want to hurt us? Of course the terrorists were made out to be black men – as were all dangerous persons. In fact this was never doubted – it was a given. It only occurred to me much much later how warped this exercise had been. We were quite literally taught to fear blacks; they were painted as this enemy which as children I feel we believed uncategorically. It has occurred to me how bizarre it was that black school children who were being attacked in schools – not whites like me.

The second experience was about a year later when the first black children were admitted to the school. There was a huge palaver surrounding this! I distinctly remember how many children were kept at home on the day (or even week) they first arrived. Where parents were having kittens over what this would mean for their children’s education. Again it was only a year later that I took full cognizance of what was behind the events.

These experiences – along with others like them – have further reinforced how obscure apartheid and its policies were. I feel that, overall, they have increased my empathy with

persons marginalised by apartheid and engendered disrespect for Afrikanerism and apartheid.

N28

Male
White
Twenties

I am a twenty-four year old white male, who grew up in the dying stages of apartheid. I did not grow up in an overly political home and my parents never expressed any sentiments that could be regarded as racist. Looking back on the period, it is hard for me to recall any 'serious' or direct incidents of racism that I experienced or encountered..
However, when I thought about the task at hand, a rhyme came to mind, that I remember hearing, possibly from my older brother first or from a friend. I do not remember the time-period exactly, but I was a young child at the time, so it was most likely to have been in the early 90's.

The rhyme went as follows: "My name is Mandela, I'm a monkey like you, I live in Soweto, in toilet number two." This is obviously a very innocuous, petty form of racism, and cannot be seriously considered an experience of racism, especially in light of the sufferings and brutality of the past. However, I feel that it does encapsulate of most of my peers.

The fact that this is a nonsense children's rhyme shows easily insulting racial identities and stereotypes where circulated at the time. In the instance, it becomes clear to me that petty racism was very much part of daily life in South Africa, even in the late-apartheid period, and was circulated even amongst the children who would come to form the new young-adults in the post-apartheid period. I think that this shows a great deal about apartheid society and how easy it was for people's consciousnesses to be injected with racialised ways of thinking, vestiges of which we are still living with today.

At the same time, this memory captures my experience of apartheid well as it illustrates the sheer between distance between my experience of this system and way if life and that of other members of the population. The fact that this is the only memory of that I can recall shows how insulated and distanced I was growing up and how being white and privileged

provided one with a blanket of comfort that is far-removed from the reality of the time and the reality that a great number of my contemporaries would have grown up with.

I remember the images that were invoked at the time when I first heard this rhyme and how Soweto came to appear in my mind as this vast expanse of toilets and shacks. It was conjured up as a place that was so alien to my world, and this was more or less the case. Again, growing up as a privileged young white male my experience of the time is vastly different to that majority. I was a in a bubble and this made what was happening in the rest of the country seem very far-away, almost unreal. It was certainly easy to regard it as part of another reality. Most sadly, it was easy to expand this experience of the historical, political and economic climate of the time to the people of this country as well. For not only was Soweto a strange, far-away place, so too where people lived there. In my youth, black people appeared as maids and gardeners, and like Soweto, did not really seem to be part of the world I was living in. this is why that rhyme was so easy to repeat and probably why I was able to recall it even today.

This encapsulates my experience of racism during the short period of apartheid that I lived through, as it shows how effective the system was at reproducing ideas of racial difference and keeping the population apart. As I was able to grow up in isolation and protection millions of people suffered, struggled and perpetuated a system of cruelty. My world captures what I feel was my experience of the time rather aptly.

Female
White
Forties

There was no single 'big moment' of heroic realization – rather a very small, even insignificant experience. I remember being about seven or eight years old, in 1968. Something large was being delivered at our house – could it have been furniture, or building materials? After the truck had been in our driveway some time, with three men unloading stuff from the back, my mother asked me to take out something to drink. It was summer and very hot. There was no 'nanny' around, to do this – perhaps it was a Thursday afternoon – the traditional ''day off' for female domestic workers. My mother was lying down, I think - ill perhaps, or simply tired – and I was anxious about getting it right.

I had watched my mother and our nanny setting out trays with drinks or tea countless times before. So I put on the kettle, found the tray, a tray cloth, the cups and saucers, the silver teaspoons and sugar bowl, the teapot and milk jug covered in a pattern delicate roses. At this point, my mother came into the kitchen. I could see her becoming inexplicably angry as she looked at the tea tray, laden with the 'best' china. "Don't be ridiculous!" she may have said – or words to this effect.

It took a short while for me to realize what I had done wrong. The men outside were not family, or friends. They were not 'like us'. Of the five men, three were black. Black people did not ever come into our house as visitors; nor were they offered tea out of the special rose-covered cups. But even the two white men, who leant against the front of the trucks, smoking and chatting to one another while the black men unloaded, were not 'like us'. They wore shorts, socks and sandals, checked shirts stretched over large stomachs. They spoke a different Afrikaans to what we spoke at home – rougher, more guttural perhaps. They watched the black men in the hot sun through narrowed eyes. I could call them 'meneer'.

The black men looked like all black men, to me. They wore dirt-coloured overalls; they bent wordlessly to their task, their faces covered in a sheen of sweat. I did not know how to

speak to them – I did not know their names. I could not call them ‘meneer’; certainly not ‘oom’ – what then? Best to pretend they were not there.

I was faced with a dilemma. Clearly, the china and the tray cloth had to be abandoned. The easiest option was the bright orange bottle of Oros from the grocery cupboard. What troubled me was how to present the drinks to the men outside. I looked at the glasses in shining rows on the shelf. These glasses were for us – the family, the friends who came to play tennis on Sundays, or to swim in the pool in summer. No black person ever used these glasses – not even our nanny, who washed those glasses every day and packed them in the cupboard shelves. It would be all right for the two white men outside to use these glasses.

In the cupboard below the sink was a set of mugs. They were bright red, and made of tin. These were the mugs used by the nanny and the gardener. These were the mugs that could be given to the black men unloading the truck.

Unexpectedly, suddenly, I was flooded with a sense of acute shame. I did not want to set out two glasses (for the white men) and tin mugs for the blacks. I couldn’t face the moment when I would have to set down the tray, on a stone table in the garden – and would see their faces looking at the tray, so clearly mapped out and divided – tin mugs one side; glasses the other.

I imagine I bit my nails (a habit in those days). Then I made my decision. I took out five tin mugs. I poured and mixed the Oros. I picked up the tray (minus tray cloth) and walked out, feet like lead, gingerly balancing everything – eyes down. I felt deeply self-conscious. I was no longer ignorant – I felt implicated: I thought about the nannies and gardeners who congregated on pavements of white suburbs on Sundays; about how, at school, we stood up politely when a teacher came into the class, but not when the cleaner came in; about the lines of people (all black) who waited for the rare ‘black’ busses on Oxford road, while we roared past in our car, to school, to town. Later, I thought about the polite white boy on the train to Cape Town who had said ‘naand, Oom’ to the man who brought the bedding, and got a ‘klap’ from his mother. Suddenly all these things were connected to the mugs and

glasses in our kitchen – the glasses up on a high shelf, the mugs below the sink. And at this moment I felt, at a visceral level, my whiteness and what that might mean.

At the truck, the men looked up as I put down the tray. The two white men began to laugh. Not pleasant laughter – there was an undertone of something offended, resentful, antagonistic, even, in the way they looked at me and at the mugs. They mocked, spoke half-angrily to one another. They did not touch the mugs – "Kaffer-goed". I could not look at them; nor could I look at the silent black men as they drank. I fled. I can still feel the way in which my childhood self burned with shame, humiliation and guilt.

No big drama, then. Only an ordinary, invisible moment. There are other, later memories that would have made a more interesting, dramatic narrative, which would have allowed me to represent myself in an alluringly heroic role. Mugs and glasses – a prosaic way to be born into a consciousness of whiteness and blackness, and begin to make the connections with other half-mysterious, but thoroughly normalized practices in my world. As an adult, looking back, I wonder about the mugs and glasses – at my tiny rebellion – the refusal to create a map of difference on the tea tray. Big and small questions: I wonder about the choice of tin mugs – why did I not choose the glasses, instead? The rebellion was a compromise, too. How do such tiny, incremental moments and decisions shape what one becomes? In my case, perhaps this marked the beginning of many other (often misguided; often doomed) little rebellions and transgressions against the things that divide us. Was the apartheid born in kitchen cupboards, in safe domestic spaces, in safe white suburbs, as important as the 'grand Apartheid' of the history books? The tin mugs were thrown out or lost long ago. A pity, perhaps – they are so trendy, now.

Female
Indian
Forties

My earliest significant memories of racism are of two intertwined experiences; which became entangled in my childhood dreams. They occurred during 1973 when I was between 4.5 and 5 years old. I lived with my widowed mother in Clairwood, a suburb of Durban situated south of the city and designated as an 'Indian Residential Area'. Also living in our home during that period were Razia, my cousin who 'boarded' with us as her parents lived in a rural area with few schooling opportunities; and Thandi, the daughter of a childhood friend of my mother, who had come to Durban to look for employment a few months previously. My mother had promised Thandi's mum that she would keep an eye on Thandi; and during the succeeding years Thandi spent many weekends with us and also the periods between different jobs. At the time of this memory, Thandi was already established as an extended family member in our home in a similar manner to Razia; though I recall (and my mother corroborates this) that Thandi would voluntarily efface herself when we had other visitors.

The arrival of Thandi awakened a consciousness of the brutality of 'Blackjacks'; local police officers who demanded entry into our home in the early mornings and also late at night to investigate whether anyone of other race groups lived in the house, as this contravened the apartheid laws. Thandi, who was in her late teens, was as terrified of the Blackjacks as I was. My mother notes that the Blackjacks had often awakened us before Thandi came to stay, but I have no recollection of this. On the first occasion I can recall, they dragged Thandi out of bed and physically assaulted her with batons. They also fined my mother a substantial amount of money – I cannot recall whether this was a formal 'fine' or some type of bribe, but I do recall a threat to imprison Thandi and my mother if the 'fine' was not paid immediately. In subsequent incidents, Thandi hid in a cupboard and on one particular occasion escaped detection by jumping from the balcony of our first-floor flat onto the next-door balcony. This latter incident placed her in danger of breaking a limb, had she fallen the several feet from the balcony to the roof of the ground floor.

The immediate impact of these Blackjack visits was that I began to have regular nightmares about them. Thandi laid much store by these dreams, and as she usually left early in the morning when she stayed with us, would often wake me at dawn to ascertain whether it was safe for her to leave the house. If I'd had a nightmare, she would hide instead; and still claims that my dreams prevented her from being 'caught' by the Blackjacks.

The second of my experiences occurred on a Saturday morning a few months later. My mother had taken me shopping in Durban that morning, followed by a trip to the Municipal Library at the Durban City Hall. Early in the day, we had had to make a considerable detour from Smith Street (where the stores were White-owned) to Victoria Street (where the stores were Indian-owned) as I needed to use the bathroom. As a precocious reader, I had read all the books for my age-group and older that were available in the 'non-White' section of the Children's Library; which was separated from the 'White' section by a cage-like wire mesh. The frustration of seeing what to me was a vast array of shiny, unattainable new books in the forbidden White section, came to a head on that particular Saturday. Until then, I had swallowed the explanation that only White children were allowed to use that section. Similarly, as a child inured to the artificial vagaries of Apartheid, I had accepted that I could not sit on certain park benches, that I had to use a different entrance at the doctor's rooms and that I had to suppress the desire to urinate until we reached a designated non-White toilet.

That Saturday morning, aggrieved that I could find no interesting books to borrow and unbearably tormented by the dozens of potential treasures just out of my reach on the other side of the library, the sight of a young Chinese girl going into the 'White' area was the straw that broke this camel's back.

During this period, South Africans of Chinese (mainly Taiwanese) origin, were granted 'Other Asian' status by the Apartheid government, giving them access to several of the privileges enjoyed by Whites of European origin, including access to the White library facilities. To my child's mind, however, the little Chinese girl was definitely *NOT WHITE* – she had long, straight black hair (as I did), and her skin was not the pink hue that I associated with White

people. So, I promptly threw a mega-tantrum, probably in the misguided belief that this would gain me access to the Aladdin's Cave. Drumming my heels on the (dirty) floor; shouting and crying 'She's not White! How come she can go in there?'; and generally making a spectacle of myself; I embarrassed my mother sufficiently that she threatened to 'call the Blackjacks to take me away'.

While the threat worked to arrest my tantrum, and we eventually took the bus home and away from the scene of my misdemeanor, the events of that Saturday continued to surface in my dreams. The Blackjack nightmares became inextricably intertwined with related scenes. In some the Blackjacks were called because I had not been able to suppress the urge to urinate while in a White-owned store. In other dreams they came and took me away because I had somehow gained access to the White section of the library and was gorging on forbidden books. Sometimes Thandi was in the library with me, leaping from one high shelf to another, or cramming me into the little cupboard below the librarians' counter in an attempt to evade capture. There were innumerable variations on the theme; and according to my mother, occasional blackjack nightmares continued into my adolescence, eventually stopping at around age 12.

The combined impact of these experiences was to establish an early awareness of the injustice inherent in the apartheid system, in that it forced me to realize that social relationships were proscribed on the basis of race. I had an instinctive understanding of the 'wrongness' of it all, particularly the use of official power as illustrated through police brutality. Perhaps crucially for my future career path in education, it also engendered a deep and abiding outrage that something as necessary to intellectual development as access to books and information, was restricted to privileged groups. The combination of these memories has probably had a profound influence on my work both in education and in the human rights sphere; culminating in my current involvement in human rights education.

The impact on my self-image and my personal relationships has also been considerable. I retain an illogical antipathy to uniformed personnel, especially male officers of a large build. This continues to manifest as extreme agitation when I'm pulled over by traffic police or subjected to security searches at airports and is at odds with my normal persona of strength

and high self-confidence. In the past, my friendships and family relationships have been coloured by a tendency to interpret joking remarks or actions as having discriminatory overtones; a tendency exacerbated by the reactions of some family members when my mother adopted two children of Zulu ethnicity in the late 1980s. I'm instinctively overprotective towards and oversensitive about my sisters, and do try to moderate my reactions, but occasionally have difficulty doing so.

When working for a large South African think-tank, 10 years into the post-apartheid era, I interpreted its lack of Black research staff as due to a racial bias. In retrospect, there may have been other reasons, and I acknowledge the need to remain objective in such cases. Perhaps my instinctive partiality for the underdog, whether in sports or politics or any other field, can also be traced back to early experiences of 'unfairness'. To this day, perceived injustice, whether encountered in my professional or personal life, has the power to move me emotionally and my reactions tend towards a leveling of the playing field. My nieces, nephews and numerous godchildren have all learnt that a hard-luck story can generally be turned to their advantage in my presence! Despite the occasional financial, emotional and energy costs of being a 'soft touch' in this sense; I trust that my early experiences have not made me bitter or resentful and often remind myself that my experiences were by no means as debilitating as the injustices suffered by my African peers. On the contrary, I hope instead that they have engendered in me a strong sense of social justice.

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