In Potchefstroom prior to 1958 the black and coloured people were located in a township outside the town, to the south, while the Indian and Chinese people and their business were located in an adjacent area about 3kms from the town centre. The law was that all black people had to carry passes (reference books) at all times and the police could enter any premises to check that black workers had passes, otherwise they were transported to jail. Some Indian people employed Black women as domestic workers. The children growing up in the Indian area would see how the police vans would come into their area. Demands were made for passes from only the black women. Usually these women would run from the police, and the police would run after them. The Indian children would watch to see if any black woman escaped the clutches of the police, urging her to run faster and being delighted if she disappeared and the police returned without her. At the time the children thought it was normal that the police vans came into the area on a regular basis to catch people.

After 1958 all the Blacks, Indians and Coloureds living 3km from the town centre were forcibly moved to the existing township of Ikageng for Blacks (the largest population group), Indians to Mohadin, Coloureds to Promosa in terms of the Group Areas Act. This new area was beyond the Potchefstroom Industria and 7km from town centre. The previous area was flattened making room for white occupancy.

When the child grew up, he had to leave his home in Potchefstroom to further his education as the Potchefstroom Indian school could only accommodate learners up to Std 8 (grade 10). He could not attend a white school or any other school in Potchefstroom because of the Group Areas Act. Nobody had to do anything to make him feel inferior or humiliated, the system did it.

Later this man was employed in Johannesburg during the 1970's, he was the section manager of a computer company, having about nine white workers in his section.

If the workers wanted to go for a meal (the computer companies worked 24/7) then he, as section manager, could not accompany them to the Whites Only restaurants in the area. He also remembers that during these years, he had to get a pass to travel through the Orange Free State, giving the assurance that he, as an Indian, would not seek overnight accommodation in the province. (He was travelling in a vehicle with three white people who did not require this documentation).

This was related by an educated professional man currently in his 60's. He grew up in a family that did not recognise colour, and still has affection for all races, language and religious groups in the country. He regrets the many missed opportunities during his youth when the Apartheid era was in place, but has a stoic attitude towards the past and hope for the future. He currently mixes with all race groups on an equal, as well as a leadership level.

He now runs a Bridge Club in Benoni with many white members of an average age of 65, all striving to play together in harmony.

White
Sixties
Gauteng

This was related to me by my father when I was about 11 years old.

During the 1950's there was a fall of rock from the hanging roof of tunnel in a gold mine at a near Roodepoort, West Rand.

A white miner was trapped underground. A black miner was in the area where the rock burst occurred and could have left the area and saved himself, which was what other black and white miners did at the time. At great personal risk, the black miner extricated the trapped white miner from the fallen rocks and carried him to the cage (lift in mineshaft) and both survived.

The Head Office of the Gold Mine held an Bravery Award Ceremony at the Gold Mine offices, where all the top management of the Johannesburg Head Office and the Gold Mine were present. The black miner received the highest bravery award. The white miner was also at the ceremony but refused to shake the hand of the man who saved his life when the black miner was subsequently congratulated by hand-shaking all round by the top management.

This was the most unexpected shocking display of ignorance and prejudice by the white miner with his refusal to act courteously to a man on whom his life had depended.

As my father worked on the gold mines his whole life, with transfers to other mines, I attended seven schools in several mining towns. Nothing was really permanent except my immediate family. When I attended Wits during the 1960's, the students of

Women's Residence participated in protests with Dr Thelma Henderson, Dean of Women's Residence. The police took photos of all of us. I saw white students returning to the university after having been detained in solitary confinement for 90 to 120 days. There have been injustices which were devastating. The white governments hounded ordinary people of all skin colours, and meted out terrible punishment and seemed to be all powerful.

I am very happy that all people are equal in South Africa now, as it should have been in the beginning. I presently have much more interaction with all kinds of people of different backgrounds.

N53

Male
White

The first apartheid memory that springs to mind is of a series of events at High School. This, incidentally, was for me, the epicenter of much own my own experience of apartheid racism. Two particular facets of this experience seem important: the obsessiveness with which blackness was tirelessly re-evoked in a setting where there were no black pupils, firstly. Secondly, how, this theme, the endless playing to and fro of white versus black values, came to be animated in the teasings, denigrations and exclusions that some students exerted on others.

The fascination with a kind of denigrated, objectified blackness was often evoked in bodily kinds of ways, in the repetitive games and gestures of adolescent boys. Certain facial expressions, affected accents, ways of talking, referring to others, played out this denigrated blackness, performed it. So, to mock a fellow student you repeated his words more slowly, in an affected 'African' kind of voice, to make him sound like he didn't know what he was talking about, as if we were stupid. That was enough – the mere evocation of a caricatured black voice speaking in English was sufficient to imply someone was unintelligent. Name calling – by using the prefix 'i', or using 'ngi-ngu' before someone's name, was enough to associate them with the racist values of blackness (incompetence, stupidity, inability, and so on). The boundaries of whiteness were also kept in place: I remember a few of the greek kids in my class had a difficult time of it; the texture of their hair, more wirey, curly and short, made them targets, as did the relative darkness of their skin – more easily likened to blackness than 'whiter' kids. There were also facial improvisations, flattening one's nose, spreading one's lips as wide as possible, making them as thick as possible, sufficed to mimic blackness. By doing this at the same time as mocking a fellow student – sometimes, oddly enough, affectionately (?), one would again set up the association of them as somehow black. In

short, a series of racist stereotypes and bodily evocations became part and parcel of the repetitive play of white adolescent boys, vital instruments in the ongoing in-group/out-group identity practices of who was cool and who wasn't.

These kinds of "playful" racisms integrated into the everyday activities of students were pretty much the norm. To me – rightly or wrongly – they didn't seem to be part of the same world of actual racist *physical* violence. There were some boys at the school who spoke of, and claimed to participate in 'kaffir-bashing'. Even then though, that seemed pathological, frightening, criminal. There didn't seem much by the way of fear expressed by those boys, although there was often recourse to the idea that black men were some how more hardy: thicker skulls, tougher bodies, more robust. If the prospect of playing rugby against Afrikaans boys was frightening – a sense there too of their being impervious to physical damage - the prospect of playing rugby against black guys was unthinkable. I am not sure I can disentwine this theme: the fragmentary memories of seeing black men in damaged states (stabbed in one instance, hit by a car in another), whereby they seemed to endure despite the attack – almost as if the racist assumption was that they were 'more body than spirit', and hence far tougher, stronger, and hence will endure. I think the assumption there was that there is less psychological damage experienced by way of the injury (its not really traumatic), or perhaps simply, a remarkable inability to identify with a black suffering body.

Returning to the scene of the high school: the oddity of the situation was that there were no black pupils, and very few black people present at the school. Although, even this suggestion belies the obvious fact that the school's cleaners – much maligned by the boys – who were obviously black, *were* present, and in some ways not seen, not viewed as of anywhere near the same status as the teachers (indeed, they possessed a lower status than the boys themselves). Why then the repetitive ongoing need to invoke blackness in the games and preoccupations of the students? Perhaps I over-play this in my memory – there were no doubt other preoccupations (the teachers of the school,

sex, sport), but for the most part those – OK with the exception perhaps of sex – were also realistic preoccupations (teachers, school-work, sporting activities). There was, I can only think, a kind of phantom evocation of a type of black other, in a constantly performed, interlocking set of stereotypes, that perhaps posed a threat (terrorism, communism, the overthrow of the country and other such fears of apartheid ideology), but that seemed to increase in importance (be it of a phobic sort, or of obessessive preoccupation) even though this black other – certainly in the sense of similar age black pupils – not there at all. There seemed to me a kind of ongoing need to invent the object that the racism was about.

Male
'Coloured'
Walvis Bay/Uppington

Snippets from my life under apartheid

"Wie't die ertjies gebreek? Is weer julle kleurlinge. Julle breek mos alles/Who split the peas? It must be you coloureds. You break everything", said the white man known to nearly all black people as Baas Nico, "die koöperasieboer"/the cooperation manager, to roaring laughter of his fellow white friends, farmers of the area. I noticed the sneer of his mouth when I greeted him with my request:"Middag, meneer. My ma het my gestuur om 'n pakkie gebreekte ertjies te koop/Afternoon, sir. My mother sent me to buy a packet of split peas". At that moment of his sick joke, I, an 11 year old boy in 1979, understood why my father usually bought what we needed at the cooperation store, himself. He wanted to save us the routine humiliation meted out by Nico and his overweight farmer friends. Normally we were sent to the shop of Luckhoff, an Afrikaner, who treated us kindly. I understood then that Luckhoff treated us, the children of Piet and Bettie Nel, differently because we were better off than the rest of the members of the community. My father had steady employment as general foreman on the expanding grape-exporting farm of Kennedy, stable income from his growing of vegetables which my sister and I sold, harvesting grapes to dry as raisins, as well as from lucerne he sold to sheep farmers. On busy days Luckhoff normally asked my mother to help out at his shop. My sisters and I were used to calling Luckhoff "meneer" after our mother. My father addressed all white men as "baas" and the women as "miesies". However, Luckhoff was no saint. He allowed whites to enter the store unhindered. Blacks were made to stand outside and were only allowed to enter when he called. Usually he called:"Kom vyf/Enter five", which meant that only five black people had to

enter the store at his call. On paydays of the cooperation workers he would sometimes call:"Kom vyf; drie köoperasiekaffers en twee skoolkinders/Enter five; three cooperation kaffirs and two school children".

I am Willy Nel. I was born in Walvis Bay in 1968, moved to South Africa with my parents in 1974 and was then raised further on a predominantly coloured Congregational Church settlement called Bloemsmond in the Upington area of the Northern Cape. My forebears were Koranna women who married Baster men that, under orders of the British queen, fought the Boers at the Orange River in the latter part of the 19th century. The anecdote above gave a glimpse of how my childhood was affected by apartheid.

The Congregational Church school that I attended for my primary school education catered mainly for the Afrikaans speaking children of Bloemsmond. There were, however, also children from the neighbouring "Bloukroek" populated by isiXhosa, seTswana and Afrikaans speaking black African people. Our coloured school teachers, to their credit, treated us equally, irrespective of where we resided. Some actually talked politics with us. I remember mr Beukes, a UWC graduate, taking down the Republic's flag on Republic day in 1976, denouncing the apartheid government and promptly stopping the whole ceremonies of Republic day from that year on. So I actually have only my first school year memory of standing around the flagpole and singing Die Stem! We freely mixed and were friends with the children from the Bloukroek despite the racist stereotypes held by most of the adult inhabitants of Bloemsmond. Ironically the coloured people of Bloemsmond were just as dirt poor as the Bloukroek inhabitants, worked at the same cooperation and on the same farms and supported their shebeens over weekends. What gave the coloureds of my settlement their air of superiority over the people of the Bloukroek was their sense of being descendents of the original landowners from whom the Congregational Church bought the farm Bloemsmond during the great drought of the 1930's.

In my childhood I could not understand the reverence my father's friends had for him. He had just a standard 6 education and held a farm foreman job but his friends were nearly all better qualified than him, with a number of teachers counting him as their friend. We, his children, only saw him as the overworked father who burned his candle at both ends to provide for his family. He insisted on my mother, a qualified nurse albeit with standard 6, leaving her work when we moved from Namibia to South Africa so that she could oversee his farming activities on the land he inherited from his father. For Kennedy he worked from before we woke up until he came back shortly before our bedtime. Then he went to his labourer or to the land itself to see what was done and what needed to be done still. So we saw very little of him. Sometimes we wished we were the children of Kennedy with all their privileges. My father told us so much about them that it seemed as if he knew them better than us. December was the worst time for our family as my father had to rise at 2:00 in the mornings to be on the vineyards of Kennedy to organise the picking teams to harvest before the Northern Cape sun became too hot by 12:00. Then they packed the grapes until late at night to send it away to the overseas market as soon as possible. Maybe his friends admired him for working so hard on Kennedy's and his own lands, I don't know for sure. Maybe they knew earlier than I did that my father had a fighting spirit that saw him embarking on apartheid-buckling entrepreneurial activities since he left school. Or maybe they knew that his "baas"-saying worked to their advantage for getting discount on fruit and meat. What I became aware of through his narratives of his life is that he was involved in underground Swapo politics in Namibia and more than once narrowly escaped arrest.

My high school years in the coloured High School Oranjezicht in Keimoes was the continuing of my political education after the awareness created in primary school. My teachers were nearly all either educated at UWC or teacher training colleges in the Cape and Kimberley. Politics was freely discussed and soon I came to look at my world through other, less naïve eyes. The middle eighties was the time that PW Botha decided to allow coloureds and Indians their Houses of Representatives and Delegates in the so-

called tricameral parliament. The United Democratic Front was established in the same period. At my high school my standard eight year was a blur of protest action, paranoia about police surveillance and heated arguments with my father. My father was initially supportive of the Labour Party's decision to join the tricameral parliament in order to effect "change from within". I resisted his argument with vigour. It was a very troubled time in our family. Newstime was always the time we started our arguments because I consistently and loudly questioned the way the news was presented by the SABC. Most evenings it ended in my father accusing me of being "hardegat" and of undermining his authority. Invariably I accused him of bowing to the Boere, to which he always retorted:"Daai boer se geld sit kos in jou mond". We sort of started seeing eye to eye when he supported our church's stance against our ministers taking part in the tricameral parliament. Our minister, Rev. Andrew Julies, left the church to start his own denomination instead of stepping down from the pulpit. Julies went on to become a Minister of Education in the House of Representatives. My father reportedly told him in a church meeting that he (Julies) will forget about the community the moment he start enjoying the pampered life of an apartheid political office bearer. I always wondered if these fights also took place in other homes and got my answer when, in 2009, I had a conversation with a colleague who became a friend. This colleague grew up in the Eastern Cape and his life story had more or less the same kind of tension between him and his father.

In my matric year, 1986, I applied to UWC, got no answer before July (or ever) and then applied to University of Stellenbosch, who did respond with an acceptance letter. My going to Stellenbosch for four years remains one of the ironies of my politics-filled life. UWC seemed the more logical place to go to, given the influential UWC-trained history teacher I had, Jessie Strauss. My oldest sister also had a one year stint at UWC before teenage pregnancy cut short her study programme. My parents never pushed me into anything but I just knew that they expected me to go to university as I did fairly well at school. That was even though my second oldest sister was in Kimberley at the

Perseverance Teacher Training College doing her third year in 1987 when I embarked on my first year at Stellenbosch.

And so a classmate and I travelled by railway bus, in the very full third class, with a near empty first class of whites. Our parents could not afford to take us to university. I had the princely sum of R300 in my pocket, half of the R600 my father got from selling his tractor. My sister at college had to go to Perseverance at the same time and my father could not get an overdraft or a loan from his bank. The white man he sold the tractor to, knew exactly in what predicament my father was but nevertheless brought down the price of the tractor which was worth nearly three times the amount settled for. He profited from a black man desperate to provide for the higher education of his children. The money was to pay for my registration fees and I was supposed to live of the change, R40, until my father could send me something when he mowed lucerne to sell in 4 weeks' time. Although I applied for the House of Representatives bursary, I had not received an answer by the time I left (eventually at registration I paid a lesser sum because I was told I got the bursary, and so lived off the change for the whole first term and the Easter holiday until my father harvested grapes and sold the raisins to send me something). I knew the bursary was apartheid money from a source I despised but it offered me a chance I otherwise would not have gotten anywhere else. Ironic? I think it is the story of many educated black South Africans from the apartheid years. When I met other black African students from the Transkei and Namibia who also studied with apartheid government bursaries, the irony was even more pronounced.

When I started visiting my friends at UWC I was invariably attacked for having the audacity to visit them on their black university whilst enjoying the "privileges" of studying at the white institution. A feature of our arguments was that, despite the copious amounts of beer from "Little House on the Prairy", the lair of the notorious mr Big, a well-known Cape hustler, we never fought. Our arguments almost always ended with us, the Stellenbosch boys, asking our trump question: "If we're so wrong studying

at the white Stellenbosch, how right are you in acceding to apartheid demands to remain in your Group Areas/segregated education designated black university?". The Bush boys would have no answer and we would switch to our common political enemy, apartheid, in our joint understanding that there was little to gain from denigrating each other because of our different levels of complicity in apartheid.

Back to my trip to Stellenbosch. We disembarked the bus at Cape Town station where we were received by another classmate, who was much more familiar with the Cape. He and his aunt took us to a restaurant (for the first time in my life) and bought us foaming coffee (cappucino, also a first). Then they put us on the right train to Stellenbosch. At Stellenbosch station a taxi driver laughed off the hostel names we cited and dropped us where he said black students stayed. It was a residence newly completed with some workers putting finishing touches here and there. My classmate and I asked the first student we met where our hostels were. We were told that this was the residence for black students and that the names we ticked off on our application forms were null and void. There we were, black students in a new black residence which was part of a group of three residences, two old houses and this new residence. Gold Fields SA, the mining giant built the residence, also called Gold Fields, with blocks named after its various mines, e.g. Deelkraal, Venterspos, etc. Caltex SA also started a residence building on the same premises, into which I moved in my second year. In my first year we had a white couple as house parents who really didn't like our "politicking", as they called it, because they couldn't understand why we did not adequately show our gratitude for the privilege of living in a brand new residence whilst white students lived in old residences! Our house parents loved it when we agreed to trips to oom Mike Horn. Now, oom Mike and his wife was an Afrikaner couple trying to be good to the black students. Their house was the first white house I entered as a guest and in which I was allowed to walk around, use the toilet and bake pancakes in the kitchen. Even if their actions and words were patronising, oom Mike and his wife were kind. Their hospitality made me realise that some whites elicited less racist reactions in me than others.

In my second year our first house parents were gone and prof Willie Esterhuyse and his wife became our house parents. That was the beginning of another journey of political exploration because prof Willie regaled us with his personal recollections of his meetings with ANC exiled leaders, notably Thabo Mbeki. He always joked that he hoped Thabo and leaders of his calibre would live long enough to enjoy the fruits of democracy since they smoked so much! When first years complained to prof Willie about our late night discussions and drinking sessions he would reprimand the first years for not going to sleep earlier. Then he would summon us and we'd have sherry and soup and talk politics.

I joined the Black Students' Organisation of Stellenbosch (BSOS) within weeks of my arrival. Eventually I served on the executive from my second year onwards until BSOS disbanded and reformed with the National Union of SA Students (NUSAS) branch into a SA National Students Congress (SANSCO, later to become SASCO) branch in 1990. My joining of BSOS started as a general confusion people had with my name, Willy Nel, and the name of a past student, Willie Nel, who founded BSOS two years previously. In a sense my very name dragged me into this Black Consciousness-inspired formation. My sense of the inherent injustice of having my choice of residence discarded by a mighty regime compelled me to look for a political outlet. BSOS provided me with the analytical tools to understand my blackness in a white world and, most importantly, how to negotiate the obstacles of threatening infringements on my political freedom. I could not but be part of BSOS' planning and execution of protest actions against the segregationist policies and practices at Stellenbosch. We assumed NUSAS a useful ally; them being white, mostly privileged and connected to a national network of branches at other white universities. So we held joint planning, ran joint meetings and protests. We found it odd that there were always a covert and overt police presence at the sites of our protest actions when we arrived. However,among us, the close group of BSOS and NUSAS leaders, we could not pinpoint how information was leaked as all of us seemed

above reproach. That was until a NUSAS comrade was outed as an impimpi when his history at UCT was exposed. All of us were very relieved that he was named and shamed. For a while we planned and executed actions at which police only arrived after being notified by authorities. After a while, things went back to "normal", namely we plan and on the day of the action there were helicopters, people with cameras, cars with aerials on the boot and awkward looking fake students with Parabellum shoes. This time no impimpi was found. To my shame I suspected a fellow black student from Namibia who acquired belongings out of my league; sound system, Walkman, latest records, etc. Our efforts paid off in my second year when university management dropped their separate residence policy. Most black students remained at Gold Fields and Caltex as we had formed a community by then and strategically we could pursue our politics better from there by inviting Hein Willemse from UWC, Moulana Faried Essack and others for meetings.

In the mid-90's, when I was already teaching, the truth broke. Mark Behr, the NUSAS branch chair in my time, made it known in a newspaper article covering his release of his novel, "Die Reuk van Appels"/The Smell of Apples, that he was a police informer in his student days. The sense of betrayal and abuse I felt when I read that was so real as if I was still an activist student member of BSOS. Imagine: we sat in the same rooms, late at night, sharing food and drink, at Gold Fields or in dingy white-inhabited flats in town; planning and discussing. On campus we met the NUSAS comrades as like-minded people who happened to be white. During protest actions broken up by flight-footed policemen and their dogs, we looked after each other; indicating fleeing routes, pretending to be part of a shopping crowd. When arrests were made of invariably white comrades, we first joked with them through the sieve of the police vans that they were too stupid and clumsy, then we organised with lecturers and lawyers to get them released. When my parents in Bloemsmond received a letter warning them that my political activities were under surveillance and that my studies could be terminated, white and black comrades comforted me with words of advice. Part of the advice was that I should consider

skipping the country. Never did we suspect Mark Behr. As a prejudicial heterosexual male student I rather took part in jokes where we gossiped about Mark's feminine mannerisms. Only to find out in the 90's that he was an impimpi. That hurt and still hurts because I still think that he would never have brought out the truth if it did not give him the sensation and publicity for his novel. What would have happened to me if I tried to skip the country according to the plan? Would I have been arrested? Would I have been traced to see the route and contacts I made along the way? Would I have landed in an ANC camp only to be framed as an informer by Imbokodo? Who knows?

At least I am still here to tell my story. And I am still here to try and juggle not to forget but not to reproduce my apartheid past.

N55

Female
'white'
Age 50

As a working class white girl growing up in South Wales in the 1960s almost everyone I encountered looked pretty much like me. One major exception was the family doctor – Dr Jansen – who originated from the West Indies. In those days medical Doctors were one step removed from God and Dr Jansen was no exception – he was held in extremely high regard by my parents. So even though it was quite a journey to get to Dr Jansen – we had to negotiate 3 different bus routes and in winter with a sick child that could not have been much fun for my mother - Dr Jansen was *our* doctor and worth the effort.

I was about 13 when I next got to know a person whose features were markedly different to mine, when a new girl joined my class of 28 girls in the local girl's grammar school. The child of what would be called a 'mixed marriage' in South Africa, Catherine had been sent to live with her British grandparents after a tragic accident killing her parents. In apartheid categories I think Catherine would be classified as 'coloured'. Marked by tragedy, her arrival in my extremely parochial classroom injected a rare taste of the world beyond. In the early 1970s overseas holidays and international travel were not on the agenda of most working class families, although that was to change rapidly. I remember my envy just 2 or 3 years later when one or two school friends started holidaying in Majorca and Benidorm – destinations far beyond the aspirations of my family. My first overseas trip was in 1977 when I left high school and worked on a Kibbutz in Israel for a year. My second, just after my marriage 3 years later, began with a one way ticket to Cape Town, where I have lived since 1980.

We arrived in a cold, wet and windy Cape Town in June 1980. Married for just 3 months, we were already beginning to settle into routines of conflict that hovered around chronic, increasingly flared up into acute, and finally ended 2 years later in divorce. But

in 1980 we had not yet acknowledged our mistake and were excited about our South African future. Our departure from Britain was in large part the result of a collaborative head hunting exercise between the South African State and a South African subsidiary of my husband's (and my) employer. The job prospects in South Wales were not good in the late 1970s. The major employers had been the coal mines and the steel works and both were cutting back or closing down. The chemical company we worked for had already cut back on employees and we all knew that more job cuts were likely, that the long term plan was to close the factory. In contrast the South African head hunters painted a picture of South Africa as a place of limitless opportunity for young skilled workers, where living standards were the envy of the world. Every home had a swimming pool and every pool was bathed in sunshine. If we seized this once in a lifetime opportunity then we'd have the use of a car and be housed at their expense for up to 2 months. All our relocation costs would be met, we could take advantage of the Financial Rand which effectively increased our savings by 50% and - the cherry on top – we'd qualify for free Afrikaans lessons. All the young married couples in the factory were eligible for this chance of a lifetime, and so arrangements were set in motion for us – and several other young couples - to leave for Cape Town. Arriving in the middle of winter, my husband started work almost immediately while I remained in the plush Southern Suburbs hotel that was our home for 2 months. I had expected to swiftly find a job but – another indication of my naivety – I did not have a work permit. And it was quite a struggle to obtain one. When an exception was eventually made I obtained a job packing shelves for a South African chain store. I worked there for almost 10 years before resigning, cashing in my pension and registering for a BA at UCT in 1989.

I knew nothing about apartheid when I left Wales in 1980 and had not learned a great deal in the decade before I enrolled at UCT. I didn't understand the racialised rules of this new society and in the immediate months after my arrival I frequently experienced my encounters with apartheid as disempowering. At the chain store for example, at lunch time, I sat at the 'wrong' table until I was 'corrected'. Unable to drive, I'd caught

buses and trains everywhere in Wales but my mobility was seriously compromised after locals warned me against using public transport in Cape Town. I learned something from my colleagues at the chain store – especially when a black man was appointed into a senior position over white employees in the mid 1980s. But his elevation simultaneously contradicted other things I'd learned. It wasn't until I entered university that I began to understand something about the systemic violence that permeated the lives of every South African, black and white. While I might have grown to adulthood physically in Wales, it was as a mature student in a South African university that I experienced intellectual growth.

In contrast to the chain store where my interactions with colleagues and customers were largely predictable and superficial, at university I was exposed to an enormous range of different kinds of people where critical debate was the order of the day. As I worked my way through my undergraduate curriculum I was exposed to feminist thinking for the first time, to the ideas of Karl Marx, to the revisionist historians of South Africa. And as I began to acquire the skills of critical thinking I began to understand that the head hunting exercise a decade earlier had represented a last ditch attempt by the apartheid regime to shift the demographics around race. If back street abortions and the forced sterilisation of black women was one side of the coin the other was the luring of young fertile white couples to South Africa to produce the next generation of white supremacists. I had struggled to get a work permit I realised, precisely because my 'work' had been to breed. I began to understand that apartheid had profoundly damaged the very people it supposedly sought to benefit. While the material wealth enjoyed by white South Africans might cushion the impact of the systemic violence of apartheid it did not let us off scot free and I began to understand we were each paying a heavy price for the unearned privileges we enjoyed, not the least of which was ignorance. In the early 1990s I shared a house with 4 people in the late 20s and early 30s. One morning I arrived in the kitchen and saw one of my housemates with the

newspaper. ‘The armed struggle is over’ declared the headlines. ‘Great news! The armed struggle is over!’ I said. ‘What armed struggle?’ she asked.

Male
Indian-South African
Forties
Academic
Originally from Kwazulu-Natal & Western Cape [now in USA]

Apartheid Narrative

It was during the mid-eighties and I was easing into my role of being a parent and a spouse. Lynette – my wife; my daughter Tamarah- who was less than a year old; and I were travelling from Cape Town to Durban. I moved to Cape Town from Durban in the late seventies and was a student at the University of the Western Cape. It would be customary each year to make the two day sojourn to my place of birth. This particular journey was however different in the sense that I was heading to KZN with a different agenda. The nats had recently announced a national referendum that would breathe life into the short lived tri-cameral parliamentary system. My role was to return to Chatsworth to assist the revitalized Natal Indian Congress in mobilizing folks of Indian ancestry to vote no in the referendum.

The N1 cuts a diagonal path across the country—the shortest distance between Gatesville and Chatsworth but not as scenic as the Garden Route. Colesberg was the overnight stop usually at the Merino Inn – a few kilometers left off the N1. When I first began this journey in the seventies, the N1 went directly into Bloemfontein and one had to make sure to take the correct exits to begin the change in direction eastwards toward KZN or Natal as it was known then. It was a relief for more reasons than one when the N1 by-passed Bloemfontein.

This particular trip had more twists and turns. I was also a student at UNISA –reading for English and Sociology. As a typical student, assignments were left to the last minute. I

completed the English assignment by putting the finishing touches during the overnight stop in Colesberg. I had to have the envelope post marked the next day or else it would not have been considered in the final grade. Since I did not have much confidence in the post office in Colesberg I decided that mailing it in Bloemfontein was the best option. This took me off the N1 into Bloemfontein—which is about 220 kilometers from Colesberg. We drove into Bloemfontein and found a post office across from a petrol station. Lynette remarked that it was a good time to change and feed Tamarah. I filled the car with petrol and then pulled into the parking lot. I reached into my bag in the back seat fished out the assignment and proceed to leave the car as Lynette began to go through the rituals of a baby change and feed. I was about to cross the street when I heard this booming voice behind me. The words that resonate with me to this day is 'hey coolie' 'fokken' and 'pakeer' which I quickly realized was being directed at me and was certainly not in appreciation for my having just filled up my tank with petrol with my hard earned 'student'rands. The person continued shouting in afrikaans and he could be likened to an enraged bull except that he turned redder as he got closer. Here I was –about 50 kilograms, wiry and it was clear who would end up coming off second best against an individual who was not only angry but who also had packed a body mass presumably from boerewors and perhaps rugby. Through his clenched teeth I realized what he was saying –'you coolie you are not welcome in the Vrystaat' even though it was clear to him that a child was being sustained in the confines of a car in the parking lot during his tirade. Or perhaps this child was a seen as a threat to the Afrikaner bastions of supremacy in this region of my country of birth. I got into the car and hurried off—a baby half changed and half fed. I was quickly reminded what individuals of Indian ancestry have endured in the Orange Free State – not allowed to be present for more than 24 hours and heaven forbid starting a business or taking up residence in the Afrikaner holy land.

This retrospective excursion of documenting this experience has distinctly a different meaning for me now than it had about 25 years ago. I now have the luxury of maturity

and the insulation of intellectual speculation. I recall as I violently pushed that little Toyota towards the Drakensberg my reactions then were visceral. In reflection I would say that anger and rage was the predominant. This was I think in part the fuel that energized my actions in Chatsworth. The radical flame continued to burn even stronger. I know that my lack tolerance for those who were in support of the tri-cameral system, especially the older generation, may have been counter-productive. I know that I took chances that if intercepted- I may have joined the ranks of the fallen who had paid the ultimate price. Today as I look back at what was a chance encounter-which I had the privilege of being previously insulated from- I am filled more with disappointment than anger. Disappointment of what could have been—disappointment at missed chances between fellow South Africans. Not only between the Afrikaner and 'Indians' but with other South Africans, including those who actively involved in the struggle. During all of this I was reminded about race and the collective experiences of the pockets of homogeneity that apartheid created. I knew that in Chatsworth I was completed accepted into the fold of the struggle. But in the Western Cape , I do not believe that I enjoyed the same level of acceptance which I know now is an artefact of apartheid's legacy of pitting us against each other and the notion that one group had it worse than the other. The experience in Bloemfontein reminded me then and even now of the qualitative common thread that runs through the experiences of the marginalized and oppressed and yet it took eons to harness this power of oneness. And for Tamarah and for many of the generations that follow it is these narratives that ought to remind them that it is the experiences of those who went before that provides the vantage point that they now have.

Pumla
African
Western Cape

There was something profoundly healing about the "Facing the Archives" conference. Sitting in the air plane flying back home, I thought about what it was that was healing for me. It was my ability to *speak* and to feel that I was heard; to connect with the silenced stories and stories of silence – silence not so much by choice, it seems, but by pressure of circumstances. It was healing to listen to those who spoke truthfully about what was wrong in the past, acknowledging that the past continues to seep through in very subtle ways. The mutual respect and validation of – "my voice counts" and "her opinion matters." That restored my sense of self, my sense of identity as part of a community of others.

Perhaps an important moment for me came when I saw part of my story about my father on the Powerpoint screen during one of the sessions at the conference. My story was in the hands of a skilled interpreter of narratives, it had been resurrected from potential stagnation in a – lifeless? – internet portal, and had come alive right in that room. For a moment, I felt my father in the room with me, and we were together co-constructing a narrative about our experiences: his, a life of exclusion and denial of opportunities, and mine, a life of open opportunities where I feel I have to make myself invisible in order to be included.

I felt I missed my father more on that plane than I have for a long time. "The Lord will strengthen your heart my child," I hear him telling me. "*Thixo ungasisusi isandla sakho ebantwaneni bam*" (Lord, don't take your hand away from my children), I hear his voice in the many prayers we had in the small chapel he and my mother built in our home. I remember the painful emotional aspects of his telling about his arrival in Cape Town without a *dompass,* getting a "piece job" that a homeboy had organised for him at "the docks," and working until his hands were battered by the cold storage stuff they had to off-load from the ships.

As the plane lands, touching home ground, I wondered why I needed to attend this conference, the "Facing the Archives" conference. For me, the "facing" part of the conference was as if I was facing the people who have the power to decide my professional future, who, no matter how much I try to stick to the rules and measure up to the standards used to judge my peers, those with power can just as effectively change the rules, so that it doesn't matter what I do, there will be something *else* that I still have to sort out in order to actually measure up according to the new rules that now apply….

I needed to do it for me personally in order to deal with the deep pain I feel about the power others have to diminish my sense of worth, to punch "my bubble", so to speak, since it won't burst on its own. Attending the conference was an important journey for me and a cathartic experience. Just feeling the connection with others was extremely affirming. I have felt the isolation that comes with questioning authority in an environment where fear and silence rule – fear of being victimised, and silence because: what's the point?

What was most validating was the rigor of the scholarly engagement with the stories that people had shared for the Archive. The various discussions helped me process my experiences somehow. They gave me tools for processing my own journey, drawing my attention to important lessons that one might learn – no, that *I* might learn – from the way my story is connected to others' stories and the opportunities presented by these connections. This has given me impetus for a new narrative: I refuse to be silenced.

24 June 2009

N58

Black and African
Woman
36 years old

Although I work and speak about race in my work and life all the time, writing this piece has offered more challenges than I could have anticipated. What I relate below is not necessarily the first time I encountered racism. It is even possible to read my narrative as somewhat obliquely addressing the questions at hand since there are no 'big' confrontations between Black and white. Nonetheless, I chose these disjointed 'rememberings' because they were a large part of my – and other people's – 'everyday'.

At the end of 1981 I have just finished Standard 2 at Lovedale Primary School, which is also unofficially called Tyhume Primary. Like most people and places I know, my school had two names: an English one and another one in isiXhosa. Mine is not the only primary school in my town. The white school in the middle of the town is called Alice Primary, and there is a coloured primary school in Hillcrest, the 'coloured' township up on the hill. There are several other black schools in the villages around the town, but I barely ever think about these.

Only white children go to Alice Primary and only black children attend Lovedale. The principal at Hillcrest routinely allows a limited number of black children to register at his school. Sometimes they have to pretend to be 'coloured', or to have a 'coloured' family member. All the black girls that go to Hillcrest have to use their English names in school, even though most Alice residents speak isiXhosa, unless they have just moved here. This is all just the way things are. *It is only much later that I realise that most white people in South Africa do not speak an African language.*

At the end of the year school assembly, we stand in the scorching heat as one of the teachers reminds us of the momentous occasion in two days. We need no reminding because there has been a buzz about it for quite some time, and we may be children, but we are well aware of where all the adults stand on the issue at hand. Although not entirely sure what it means for our lives, I know that the day after my ninth birthday, without moving house, I will suddenly live in a new country. This country is called 'the Ciskei'. Some teachers inform us with barely contained excitement that from then on, we will no longer be just ourselves, but 'amaCiskei amahle' (literally: beautiful Ciskeians).

My parents have no time for this kind of nonsense and say it repeatedly. So, my younger sister and I shuttle between these two strange adult worlds where some teachers beam when they say "Ciskei" and our parents are angered by the mere mention of the word. Among my parents' circles, nobody uses the words 'Ciskei' and 'Transkei'. Everybody says 'Eastern Cape'. *It will be only post-1994 that some of us, their children, will speak about 'the former Ciskei', in the same way that many other Black people will suddenly*

say 'so called coloured', having refused to even use the scare quotes before. One of my friends will continue to come up with 'South Eastern Cape', 'West Eastern Cape' and so forth, rather than pronounce the homeland words. They will continue to be unsayable to me too, but in a democratic country, I will choose to use proximity to cities and big towns to designate specific Eastern Cape locations.

Daddy explains to us over and over again that there is no such thing as 'the Ciskei'. As far as my parents are concerned, the Sebe brothers, 'the Ciskei' independence talk and performance, the government in Bisho, and the blue ID and passport documents are part of a crazy apartheid plot to make us stupid by treating us as if we already are. My mother calls anyone associated with 'the Ciskei' business a papegaai, her ultimate swear word. My father uses the more common 'puppet'. Other friends of theirs use 'stooge' and so forth. As a child I do not know that these labels can be applied beyond things to do with apartheid. I am not even immediately aware that they are English and Afrikaans nouns. For my sisters and I, 'istuji', 'ipaparhayi' and 'iphapheth' are just synonyms for 'stupid Black person'. In our house stupidity is the worst thing imaginable.

Hard as I look when I wake up on the 4th December 1981, I cannot not see the difference between this and every other day. Disappointed by the absence of peculiarity, my sister and I go back to our usual games and prepare for the bi-annual trip to visit my Nkgono in Matatiele and to fetch our older sister for the Christmas holidays. This time on the Kei bridge, there are three flags, three different kinds of uniforms for the sour faced men behind the counters who stand ready to stamp our parents' passports. The white ones are in the 'Republic' section of the border, the proper South African section, and everybody knows that flag. On the Ciskei flag two 'powdered blue' triangles threaten to squash the indwe bird (blue crane) in the middle. My little sister and I like to say 'powdered blue' or 'royal blue' or 'baby blue' since our baby brother arrived eight months ago. We think qualifying our blues and pinks makes us grown up, big sisters, like our real big sister who knows everything. The Transkei flag looks like Neapolitan ice cream, except there is a green strip instead of a pink one. We don't know big English words like 'Neapolitan' but many know the ice cream, and the food coloured sponge cake that also comes in three colours. These are summer and party foods. And an ice cream flag goes with summer.

Some of our cousins *like* living in 'the Transkei' and boast about 'imbumba yeminyama' which my younger sister and I mistake for a tongue twister. They say it is a Xhosa phrase, but we don't believe them because we speak isiXhosa and they mainly seSotho, so musty have something wrong. Maybe it is something else, but we cannot figure out what. Our older sister, whose seSotho is better than her Xhosa, chooses this as her first occasion for ignorance.

N59

Male
White
Mid Thirties

When I was 13 years old, early in 1989, I attended a "bridge-building" camp in the Cape Point Nature Reserve. It was organized by Eskom, an attempt to expose white and black youths, the sons and daughters of Eskom employees, to one another. I don't remember much of the group discussions we had in the mornings, just that words like "apartheid" and "police" were used frequently: these were things that young black and coloured kids were confronted with at a time when my biggest concern was my maths teacher's wrath on a Monday morning. Their lives were clearly too harsh. Mine, clearly, was too sheltered and unnatural.

But it is not this that made the biggest impression on me. I grew up in a home where the "black peril" and "communism" were certainly feared, and "one-man-one-vote" dreaded, but where the daily humiliations of petty racism was condemned and where we as children were taught never to use racial pejoratives or be disrespectful to anyone, regardless of race. So I was aware that there was something rotten in the state of South Africa, and that a change was a-gonna come. Besides, by that time I had started reading André Brink and Breyten Breytenbach, so something of an early political consciousness was developing in me. What those young people on the camp said just vivified what I had heard at family braais and read in Brink's *Looking on Darkness*.

But highbrow authors could not compete with *The Cosby Show*. My mother used to say, if black people could be like the Cosbys, then sure, they can stay next to us and be our friends! But *my* eyes were trained on the erotic force that was Denise Huxtable, the feisty teenage daughter in the show. How many young, white South African males of that time can seriously claim never to have fantasised about Denise?! The inevitability of adolescent lust for Denise destroyed the logic, and the obsession, of apartheid on a weekly basis. The government had no idea what they had unleashed in the minds of a million horny young white boys!

So back to the Eskom camp. I had my eye on a young coloured woman, probably about two years older than me. She was tall, her legs shone like polished wood and I could not take my eyes off her cheery breasts. The guys I shared a bungalow with played cards at night, smoked cigarettes and spoke about her in admiring but fairly disrespectful ways. I was too timid to join in, but I was thinking similar thoughts.

There was an old baboon that hovered around the camp. I think it had been kicked out of its pack, and it was dangerous. One afternoon it slipped into the hall where we had our meetings, probably looking for food, and became quite aggressive when the caretaker tried to chase it out. They had to alert the park officials, and soon a guy with a rifle arrived. We kids were taken to the beach, and from there we couldn't even hear the shot. We just heard later that the baboon put on quite a fight, that there was blood all over the hall, but that it had been killed.

It was at the beach that the girl I had been eyeing came to stand behind me. We were all standing in a group listening to one of the caretakers talking about some aspect of the fauna and flora, or about the history of False Bay, and she pushed up against me. At first I thought she

bumped up against me accidently, but minutes passed and not once did she pull back. I felt her breasts against my back and my arm like a persistent vibration. We did not say a word; when the group dispersed, I merely gave her a sheepish look, scuttled off. I had no idea how to flirt, or how to communicate desire and sexual intent. I was lost for words, lost for action. I spent years completing the story in my head: it would end with a stolen kiss, at other times with me caressing her breasts in the dark while the others played cards inside, or sometimes with us having sex in her bungalow or down at the beach, and frequently with me taking the train from Brackenfell to Bellville South to visit and hang out with her at the Sanlam Centre or N1 City.

This incident is not where I first became aware of race, racism and apartheid, but in no other personal experience before this were issues of race so vividly accentuated and at the same time so thoroughly demystified. After all, what was it more than just another teenage fantasy?

Male
White
Mid Thirties

A black man in blue overalls - the ‘standard issue’ uniform of black labourers - was walking towards me as I left a cafe. The cafe was just across the road from a from a public toilet, essentially a black man's toilet, built of sand-coloured brick, an intimidating, squalid little building where I never saw any whites go. The toilet was opposite a bottle store, which, in later years, I would frequent, as a kind of 'below the radar' place were I could buy liquor whilst still underage. Black men would buy milk stout beer there, a type of beer (castle milk stout) somehow marked apart - black man's beer. Even that was an upmarket product compared to that perfect marker of difference, 'leopard beer' I think it was called, a very cheap mass-produced beer which seemed perhaps to be a more traditional form of beer, bottled in large plastic (pink coloured?) containers. It looked toxic, too under-marketed, I would never drink that - you only bought that, presumably, if you had no other choice.

Alongside the bottle store was a little bicycle repair shop, grubby and uncared for, where I was continually going to have punctures fixed. Next to it was a greasy pie shop, likewise unclean, smelly. This row of shops, along with the 'African toilet', which always smelt bad and whose walls seemed stained with piss, was a kind of infra-zone, a grey-area that somehow existed below (but within) the norms of a white suburb. The man who ran the bicycle shop was a tiny Greek man – “very Greek” we would have said - perhaps like the cafe owner across the road (or perhaps Portuguese), a racial designation that didn't matter all that much as long as one understood that it was one degree apart, at the edge of the degree-by-degree differentiation of white from black. Low income whites made for something of a difficult-to-place category. It would be only later that I would be introduced to 'poor whites', pointed out to me by my mother in Vrededorp, Johannesburg. They seemed more socially distant, more anxiety provoking even than blacks. Failed, inbred people, that was the unspoken sentiment. In later years I would be exposed to a series of black and white photographs taken of poor rural whites across South Africa; the photographer's agenda was clear enough, to make the case that the less-than-white-whites were a kind of inbred, anachronistic monstrosity. In that respect, the images worked - they convinced me.

This dusty, ‘underclass’ bunch of shops was a place I went often. The bus that dropped me home from school stopped - its final stop - only a little way away, and I was constantly needing to get my bicycle fixed. The toilet was scary - I always wondered what it looked like on the inside of those brick walls - there was no imagined interior, just a hanging question. No sense that I would not be allowed in - a bit like a white kid catching a black taxi, received with bemusement and maybe a little suppressed anger, but not prohibition - it was just that this was a black man's place. I was frightened, a little disturbed, I guess, of their 'rights' to be there. I was always too young, too small, too innocent, not man enough (not black man enough?) to go in there. There was also an open-air barber nearby: a black man with a generator, playing township music on a radio that hung from a tree alongside the buzz of his clippers. Later, after Paul Simon's Graceland, that kind of music would sound more homely – ‘less black’ I suppose - and it would become apparent that it was deeply familiar, even comforting. Later yet I would become aware of how I missed scenes like this, these sounds, these black men in whatever it was they did in

minimal social spaces like this, and whose lives and mine were both oceans apart but still overlapping, enmeshed. The question that sometimes presented itself to my mind but that went always unvoiced was whether I would ever get my hair cut there or at a place like this; whether it would even be possible, whether these were different clippers for different hair ("peppercorns" was the word used to describe black hair); or that this was ridiculous because such unhygienic conditions - dirty clippers, unclean scissors - would simply never be an option.

The barber often had that other cultural item of wonder - the African comb, that is, a comb with bigger gaps than normal between its long teeth. I had one as a teenager, it helped as a way of spiking up your gelled hair. The oddity of this item, especially if worn in someone's hair (worse yet somehow, if the teeth were all made of metal) was that it worked, it was more appropriate for that different kind of hair. There were often bits of black hair scattered around this ungrassy, dusty section of ground that I crossed between my bus-stop and home. These little 'scalped' bits and squares of 'peppercorn' hair – which manifested themselves as throwaway tokens of worthlessness, of lives that didn't matter, bodily scraps that connoted moral inferiority, a closeness to thingness - seemed always so different to my own.

He came towards me, heading into the cafe, in his blue overall. This was always a bit of an anxious moment, where one needed to obey the right rules of disinterest, to maintain a measured distance, nothing by way of confrontation. A kind of professional distance, in short, suitable for interactions with those who worked for you. I only realized afterwards what had happened. He had moved his hand awkwardly, putting something away, obscuring something. His overalls had been open all the way down to the waist, open too low, and he had tucked himself back in. This was the first time I had ever seen (but had not seen, because it was black), a black penis. That question, never quite resolved, had come back once or twice after glimpses of black men in pornography: how could they not have a pink head, a pink *glans*, how could *that* flesh be black too? A question which seemed to suppose that actually, as when you saw a black man's, a black woman's hands, the less dark side, their palms, their fingernails, *there* bodily difference was minimal. The lightened areas, fingernails, that zone of the body closest to pink, to pale, those places could have been the opening possibility, the anxiety-deflating proof that ('they'), black people, seemed similar - similar but different too, no doubt - that there was a kind of reassuring, common-denominator similarity. That those parts of the body were more absent than present became the proof of difference. As a boy at school said, a Jewish boy who loved movies, and who I'd always assumed to be more progressive, 'liberal' than me: "Remember, Whoopi Goldberg's gums are black".

Woman
White
Teacher
Gauteng
Forties

From a teacher's notebook

One of my students is called Ongopotse. His name resonates with something deep in my soul. Perhaps this is because it sounds like Afrikaans- Sotho – Zulu- Tswana – English rolled into one or perhaps because unlike so many other students, he has no Westernised European name for the convenience of those not adept at pronouncing African words. I love his name, it feels like poetry as it rolls off my tongue. Ongopotse conjures up images of my childhood mentor Mrs. Marupeng, something in his name and face reminds me of her.

Mrs. Marupeng was my substitute mother during the many long hours that my own mother was at work. It is difficult to explain the relationship between a black female domestic worker and a white child in apartheid South Africa. We were both separated out of necessity from our biological family and so a bond developed between our two fractured hearts. Mrs. Marupeng was not only fractured by the pain of separation but by the desolation of her own childhood. The poverty in her family meant that she was unable to attend school and she never learnt to read or write. For a woman of remarkable courage and high intelligence her illiteracy was so painful that she bandaged it up as one would an unsightly festering wound. When letters arrived from her children the bandage was ripped off., either my sisters or I would have to read her letters out to her with our clumsy attempts at Tswana.

Mrs. Marupeng quite literally slapped me out of my white South African miasma that is not to say she slapped me often. Only once in fact and my cheeks still burn when I think of it. Not from the memory of the sting but from my shame. I will never forget that look on her face when I announced that a "boy" had come to visit her. I was ten years old and I used the racist patois of those around me. When she saw the man at the gate she slapped me across the face. "How dare a child call a man a boy?"

How indeed? That slap woke me out of a whitewashed dream and enabled me from then on to have a greater understanding and sensitivity to the South African nightmare. One of many invaluable lessons she taught me. From Mrs. Marupeng I learnt about pride, dignity and courage in the face of tumultuous circumstance. Now the very name Ongopotse makes me digress and takes me to far and distant corners of my heart…

Recently I gave the class a project they had to design a collage on any aspect of South African culture. Onkgopotse's collage was written with a sense of pride and belonging. Sometimes my enthusiasm and excitement overwhelm me and I get carried away, as I did when I marked his project. I wrote his name out many times just for the lyrical sound it produced when I re- read my own comments. "Your name is like poetry- I love the sound of it" and other excessive expletives poured from my red ink. I never think that students show these comments to their classmates- very naïve and somewhat foolish. The learner behind Ongopotse was not impressed. He laughed and shouted out "Do you even know what his name means?"

My own wound was exposed. I stood there, motionless, unable to disguise that I am bereft in my knowledge of Tswana. When I regained my composure the voice that I replied in belonged to Mrs. Marupeng. "I do not know what it means but I like the sound of it".
"His name means Reminder- to remind someone of something"- the learner spat these words out as if the meaning of the name would detract from my passion for the sound of it.

Reflecting on the events in my classroom then and even now Onkgoptse's name stirs me up all over again of course his name means reminder. He reminds me of painful days not that long gone, and he reminds me, as do all students of the optimism for our future made possible by their very presence in the classroom. Onkgopotse reminds me of blue skies and thunderous tears from the heavens, the colours of the highveld in summer but especially in winter, the people of South Africa- the glorious mixture of Afrikaans- Sotho- Zulu- Xhosa- S'pedi-Tswana- Ndebele- of the richness of diversity and the pain of separation. I am reminded of dompasses and yellow police vans- humiliation and suffering of an ignorant ten year old educated by a slap in the face. Ongopotse reminds me of where we have come from. He and his classmates remind

me that the road ahead is full of hope for a healthier and more stable South Africa. Ongopotse, Ongopotse we all need a little Reminder every now and again.

School Days:

Primary school was a dark place for me. Separate entrances for boys and girls. Lining up outside and marching into class. Young white soldiers readied for battle. Shoulders back, bright eyed into that hungry dark mouth where we were swallowed whole and spat out on the other side. School was an exercise in alienation. A breaking down of anything that challenged the system in any way. For boys a preparation for conscription. For girls a preparation for conscription into marriage. Sewing and knitting high on the agenda. Drawing neatly and cutting out pictures a definite sign of the worthiness of a mind worth moulding. I was an unwilling conscript. I hated those dark walls of control. As if the very architecture was designed to suck the life force out of me. I couldn't move my legs or swing my arms with the required coordination. My hair was big and curly. It simply refused to succumb to the powers that would have me all neatly turned out. That hair was like the antennae of my being. I tried everything I could to disguise it. From a young age I whirled it at night. A painful process that involved long hair pins and much pulling to get the desired effect. I thought that if I could just look even a little like the other girls. If I could just flatten those unruly curls then I would feel more connected to that place. My thoughts would be less subversive and I would be able to march in time. Perhaps I would be able to understand what the teachers were saying to me and why I had to be there. In the second grade I was so desperate that one afternoon I found a blade lying in the bottom of a box of toys. I don't recall what went through my mind. It was an impulsive act. I raised the blade to my forehead and began to slice off my curls. When I finally looked in the mirror the effect was devastating. Looking something like Curly from the three stooges- bald on top with curls sticking out the sides. My hair had been severed unevenly along the top. I refused to go back to school until the hair had grown back. At first my family laughed at my antics. My mother supported my position being a school refuser herself. She betrayed me in the letter to the schoolteacher. I had instructed her to concoct some major illness but the teacher looked at me curiously and asked what had happened to my hair. I had never thought my mother capable of treachery. What had she written in that letter? "My daughter had an accident with a razor blade

and was unable to return to school until she had a more reasonable growth." Perhaps she made that old lawnmower joke. Or was it the sheep shearing one? My heart burned at the notion that my own mother could betray me to the authorities. I had learnt something new and deeply wounding about my mother. I never spoke to her about that letter. Come to think of it the letter may not have been the thing that exposed my clumsy efforts with the blade.

My main survival trick at school was to be quiet and hope that no one would notice me. In this way I could pretend to be like everyone else. I would only get caught out if I were asked a question. I never answered just lowered my eyes and made my voice sound so small no one could understand what I was saying. The teacher hurriedly moved on to the next participant. In this way and for many years teachers never seemed to notice me. This was a relief. The knitting and sewing stuff I handed over to my mother. It was never noticed that I sat quietly in those classes not doing anything. Perhaps I was so adept at blending in that they never even saw me. Certainly that was what I was hoping for. At the end of each term I would produce the required dress or knitting at school. My mother was always disappointed with her grade. I don't think she ever got higher than a C average. Perhaps the teacher never really examined the work closely because it was attached to a name they hardly recognised. Grades were not something I thought about much. They seemed a bit like having straight hair. The pain and effort not really worth it and I seriously doubted that I could ever achieve either.

If school was an experience of melting into the slimy walls not to be noticed then life at home was its exact opposite. My family were warm, crazy eccentric folk. Our house buzzed with an electricity sparked off by my parents continual sparring. They were Seinfeld funny, Mad Magazine funny, Cracked funny and sad funny. During those internecine wars the only safe place was my bedroom. The other rooms reverberated with anger, pain and deep seated resentment. Underlying it all was my father's inability to provide. My mother had to work from the time I was two years old. She hated leaving me at that tender age. Her workday kept her away from me all day and when she returned wearily in the evening she would have to supervise the three-course meal my father insisted was his due. His resentment at her resentment could always be summoned from deep within those cooking pots. At the drop of a fork or knife my father could be relied upon to find fault with my mother's cooking. Too salty, not salty enough, undercooked, over cooked, meat too tough. Occasionally just perfect …the way his mother used to make it.

This being the highest accolade and a continual reminder that there had once been another female in his life who satisfied his emotional and culinary needs.

Nonetheless mealtimes at our home were an experience. If you weren't there you truly missed out. My parents would trade insults generally in a humorous way. My older sisters would recount their day's activities. I would observe and participate every now and again. Mostly I remember the delicious food. I had what could at best be described as a healthy appetite. My father and I were usually the first at the table and the last to leave. Our places were sacred- no one ever dare sit in our special seats. We never varied this arrangement. My father sat at one end of the table- my mother opposite him. Two opponents facing each other. My middle sister sat on my father's right and my older sister on his left. My mother of course sat next to me. I was strategically placed to remind my father that his failings had taken her away from me at a critical juncture in my life. I had no memory of my mother leaving me. The abandonment being buried deep in my subconscious. My mother would tell me every other night about how cruel this separation had been for the both of us. If she would not have gone on about it I would have been none the wiser until my therapist would bring it to the fore some 20 years later.

Frequently we had dinner guests. They were usually interesting and would have had to have a strong presence and a great sense of humour to come back for more.
If visitors came for coffee in the evening, my father had a favourite trick. Once tea or coffee had been offered and the guest had made their choice my father would say, "Would you like a large cup or a small cup?"

Something in my father's manner of asking implied a challenge and generally people succumbed and asked for the "large cup".

"Are you sure you want the large cup?" my father would ask.

Suggesting that they were way too puny to cope with the large cup. The more emphatic the guest became the deeper they walked into his trap. My father would wink and despatch one of us to make the tea. We knew the code and the routine. The large cup was a ruse that amused him and us no end. The "large cup" was a cup and saucer the size of a child's potty. It took a

litre of water to half fill it. Generally people thought this very funny. Every now and again some smart Alec would not react at all and would attempt to drink the contents. We thought this even funnier.

My father loved a good prank. He was a frustrated actor. A large man weighing in at 350 pounds and all of six feet. Harvey loved eating, laughing, his three daughters and I suspect not withstanding the verbal abuse, he loved his wife. If only she would not continually remind him of his failures.

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