

Thuthula Balfour-Kaipa
Inanda Seminary student, 1976-1980.
Interviewed in Johannesburg, 29 May 2010.

So I'll just start out the interview asking when and where you were born, and what your maiden name was, and if you've changed your name since graduating.

I was born in the Eastern Cape, Transkei.

Okay.

And my maiden surname is Balfour, the maiden surname. Yeah. So I was married before, but I married a second time now, so I added the other surname.

Okay. And how did you come to attend Inanda Seminary? How did you find out about the school?

My mother, in fact I don't think my mother had intended that I go into boarding school the year that I went. You see, I had grown up fairly close to my brother... I think I was starting to develop and... she probably thought, 'This one must go to boarding school.' So she found, I think she just, it was word of mouth. She inquired about what's the best schools at that time that was the school people were sending their children to. That's how I got there.

So your mother liked that it was a girls' school? That was part of the appeal?

Uh, I don't know if she specifically wanted me to go to a girls' school. My brother went the following year to a mixed school. I don't know. So for me it was the question of, she said, you know, I need to go to the boarding school, and I went for the interviews and, it's fine!

Did you go to Cape Town to do interviews or just to Inanda Seminary?

No, it was to Inanda.

Were the interviews demanding? Did you find it stressful?

I guess, as far as you don't know what an interview is about. You never had an interview in your life and you had to speak English, which at that time already we were not speaking English at all. I mean the school I was in, it was, we did English and some of the subjects in English but it was rural, very rural, so even if you were supposed to be taught in English it would probably be mixed English. So in terms of stringing, you know, conversations in English that was just not it. [Laughs]

Yeah, it would be difficult.

Not part of my lifestyle. And even, I mean some of the girls you could see it. At home, I think their parents made them speak English, but at home we never spoke English... But then we were middle class already because my mother was a doctor.

Your mother was a doctor?

Yeah. She heard I think from the other doctors where they are taking their children. I think a few of those children were speaking English. I mean, my father was an Africanist, in a way so... So there were some people that thought it was more important for my child to speak English and probably my father didn't think. Like at some point, I mean, some children had English names. I know my father didn't want us to have any English names.

What did your father do? What was his profession?

He wanted to do law but he didn't finish... He worked as a messenger, but then he went into

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business.

Did your mother go to Fort Hare, or where did she train as a doctor?
Natal.

To Natal? That's quite early for a woman doctor.
She qualified in '68.

Okay, so she qualified while you were young.
Yeah, here weren't many at that time.

So what do you remember about staff members, other students, what stands out in your mind about sort of the campus environment and experience at Inanda?

I didn't have a problem with—you see I am a conformist, I conform, so I mean I never had a problem being at boarding school, but I imagine some people who were used to more freedom did not enjoy it that much. But anyway, looking back, one was really into studies. So I think Inanda probably did expand one's horizons in terms of studies because it had a library. And I developed an interest in things like astronomy and evolution so I would never have, if I hadn't gone there, I wouldn't have been exposed to those at an early age. And the teachers, they were varied. There were maybe about three teachers who stood out. One was Ms. Gunn who was doing the maths. And I only remember her name because she used an approach to maths which was an empowering one, because I only was in her class in Standard 8. So from Standard 6, there was this teacher was a maths graduate and I think he was a maths genius but couldn't teach maths.

What was his name?

Scones. Yeah, he was eager to talk to ones who were the natural maths, you know, geniuses. But in terms of teaching the rest of us I think it was difficult for him and so from about Standard 6, Standard 7, I thought well I'm a grade behind in maths, and I'm just going to have to accept that. But Ms. Gunn, she was using this Kumon type approach to teach maths. I don't know if you know Kumon: extra lessons in math, which was very repetitive and iterative, you know. My children did Kumon... it was how Ms. Gunn was approaching maths—repetition, repetition. And for people who are not natural maths people, you can be any person. So maths was one of the easiest subjects for me because of Ms. Gunn and the approach that she used, which I think is very useful for the average student who's not a maths genius. So that was one. And then there was Ms. Siphula who was physics.

What was her name? Ms. Siphuca. Was that S-I-P-U?

S-I-P-H-U-L-A... I think she was fairly balanced teacher not eccentric, like Sithole. Sithole was quite eccentric.

Yeah, I've heard that and he was fairly politically involved too. I don't know what he is doing today but he sounds like a very interesting person... And was Baba Zondi still there when you came?

Oh yea, Baba Zondi. And then he left and there was Mrs. Koza. Who I must say, I also interact with her now afterwards, because of her daughter, they are in Pretoria.

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Yeah, I interviewed her in Pretoria last year.

And her daughter, I got to be friends with her afterwards. I didn't know her at Inanda, actually. But looking back Ms. Koza was quite—there's people who are calm in situations. Ms. Koza was not a calming influence. So I remember during her time there was a strike.

Wasn't there a strike when Mr. Lewis was asked to leave? That was in 1979, as Mr. Lewis was principal before Mrs. Koza.

Yeah, there was a strike even when Mrs. Koza was there, because I was in my last year, it was 1980... And maybe it wasn't a full-blown strike. Because what happened was, I had gone to London for the London Science Week and when I came back, of course even before then, there was just this general disquiet and people wanting to defy Mrs. Koza, so when I came back I think it was like now people had decided they were going to have some sort of strike... So the plan was we wouldn't go into the chapel from the dining room, we wouldn't go into chapel and we would just go to the films, something like that. And when I came back it was quite close to the exams and probably looking back I was a conservative student anyways so the idea of a strike you know I didn't support and I was also fairly, how can I put it now, stubborn.

Yeah. [Laughs]

I think other people would see it as stubborn so I didn't necessarily do things because other people do them you know, because if other people say they want to go to the films and don't want to go to the chapel you're still obliged to go to, everyone. But I didn't have that type of mentality. If I was the only one who goes to chapel, I would go and I don't have a problem.

Do you remember, what was the strike about? Do you know what the students were trying to get out of the strike?

I suspect it could have been around things like rules.

Yeah, because Mrs. Koza was very strict.

I think what happened was I and a few friends said we would go to chapel, and we went, and after some time there was some hesitancy so the strike sort of fizzled out... But in the end there wasn't an all-out strike, which I think happened about a few—when was the strike you say?

There, I think there had been a strike in 1979, when Maurice Lewis was asked to leave, there was some student unrest then. I've seen in some of the sources but I don't know. Some of these things might have been exaggerated.

A year or two later there were—people were expelled. With us, no one was expelled. So in terms of the students, we were a varied bunch, and I think one ended up just knowing your classmates, because there were about 3 classes for each fall, and then there were maybe about 20 or 25 in each class so one ended up knowing one's sort of circle. I think there was a sort of an elitist group.

An elitist group you said?

I think there was an elitist group. And I know because I ended up in my dormitory...

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Yeah. [Laughs] So why were they in the elitist group? Just because they were more popular among the students or because they had more money, or because of where they came from, or was it their academic performance—

I think it was more who people's parents were.

Who people's parents were. Yeah?

I think so. Because none of those people were, you know, some rural child whose parents are uneducated, which is why I say it was more about you know the people whose parents were lecturers.

Right.

And doctors and lawyers.

Right. Do you remember anything else about student politics, student political consciousness?

Yeah. Because when we arrived, I remember, it was '76. And we used to have the reading of the newspapers as one of the tasks on Friday in chapel, so you could hear what was happening, and there would be guests speakers like Tutu and—

Tutu was a speaker there?

Yeah. And all of these other politically-oriented people.

I never heard that before. Do you remember when Desmond Tutu went? Was it earlier in your time there or later?

Yeah, and I remember one of the group of University of Natal students coming. And I remember because Natal University was very political.

Yeah, I've heard that earlier on in the 1970s that Steve Biko came to Inanda, and Barney Pityana, and other people who had been affiliated with the school.

And I remember Tshepo Motsepe, she is now married to Cyril Ramaphosa.

Okay.

She was a medical student there. When I went to medical school, she was there already. I remember very well seeing her she made an impression on me. I just remember that.

And did they come to speak at chapel too? Did they come to visit?

I think they came to speak to some of the speakers like Tutu. Let's say Tutu was there, then I mean the general public there was interested.

Yeah, did you feel that the staff members were sort of tacitly supportive of students being politically aware or did they discourage political activity? I know there was some ambivalence around that at different times.

The time I was there we could see the political awareness. They don't want us to grow up. I remember that year, 1976, the Traskei became independent, and you know I was quite embarrassed because I was in this institution where—if for instance I was in another institution it would have been, 'yeah, we're independent' but for me it was, 'This independence is the fake

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independence,' so it wasn't anything to be proud of. But I must say that... my sister was there from 1978... and by the time we left I thought the values were changing in terms of that political awareness. They were becoming more religious. There were some teachers who had come from America and I can't remember now, I can't remember their names, but I remember my sister ended up being almost this born-again person and there were quite a number of students who were getting into this, and you know I'm an atheist, so you know I wasn't happy about that.

Yeah, I've noticed that disjuncture as well... It does seem like the earlier students were more political and some of the later ones were more religious, and I don't know whether it was the times that they were living in, that politics seemed more frightening in the eighties. I don't know. Or just the influence of the teachers?
I guess it was these people can come and now you have like a whole generation of people who are becoming religious instead of you know being concerned about what they can do for the country.

Yeah. Right.

But I never really did anything. I was politically aware, but I was not seriously politically active.

Yeah. Were any of your classmates you remember politically active during high school, or not so much, or after they graduated?

It's not that they were active but there were some who left. Their parents were politically active, to the extent that they had to go into exile. Like there is a friend who is in the US, I mean they went to the US in around 1978 and she's supposed to come back for a visit in July.

What is her name?

Nono.

Nono, Nono. Never heard that name before. It's a pretty name.

They're on Facebook. I found them on Facebook. I checked it last year after all that time

Yeah I went on Inanda's Facebook group and I met a couple of people through that. Seemed like a good idea. Not like I was infiltrating it. So when you were a student at Inanda did you know that you wanted to be a doctor? Did you go into school knowing that?

I think at that time there was not much that black people could do. You could be a doctor, lawyer, do econ.? You know at that time there were maybe two people in our class who did econ., people did not know about it. I think there were two people. People did not understand engineering, it was just totally foreign, and I mean if it was foreign for males how much more foreign for females... So there wasn't much and I think it is a question of other clever people ended up doing that sort of thing. And in fact in our class I think there was a biggest class of doctors. And I think if it were in the environment now, of options, one would have done. I remember once I was joking that I wanted to be a professor in genetics. Either that or astronomy which I was once interested in, or science. I'll say I probably would have done science. But you know science didn't have a big future. A lot of people did nursing, or wanted to teach, because there weren't really scientists at that time.

So would you say that most of your classmates from 1980 became doctors or lawyers or went into other

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professions like that, as opposed to teaching and nursing, and the sort of older professions?

I think the ones that got good marks, how many did all of, Louisa did well. Oh what happened at that time when we came out MEDUNSA had just been established.

Right.

So it meant there was more capacity because earlier on there was just Natal as the black medical university and that university accepted one or two people, so with MEDUNSA it meant that the intake could be higher and there were a whole lot more paramedical. So I found out that actually a lot of people who did medicine, they did paramedical... A whole lot of medically-related subjects. There are some nurses. I'm sure teachers there are.

It seems that in the fifties and sixties the best students would be nurses and then other students would be teachers. Those were the only professions at that time.

Those were the professions that were available.

Did you go to MEDUNSA or U Natal?

Natal. I think I went here because of my mother....

How did you feel that Inanda prepared you for that school? Did you feel well-prepared?

I think the issue of boys was a problem and I probably survived in the extreme in that I could keep away from boys and have them as friends. I'm saying that is extreme because it's probably not normal, because if one had grown up in a mixed school I'm sure one could have had relationships with boys, so for me it was very much like, keep away from them for quite some time. And that's quite the opposite of what some people did where they really went wild when they left school.

Yeah I've heard that. I've heard extremes.

Yeah. I've seen what some of the schools do now. They have brother schools, you know like Milton and St. Anne's and then there are socials and people meet far more.

So you didn't do that?

No, not for Inanda—seeing boys was like *sho*, hardly ever. So I think that didn't really prepare us well for real life.

[Tape recorder cuts out: We discuss when elite families at Inanda began to leave the school. She recalled some of her friends—like her, children of doctors in the Transkei—abandoning Inanda first, for a white Catholic school in Pietermaritzburg, in the early 1980s. She explained simply: 'At that time, we only had cold water. That was a very important feature really, which must not be forgotten, because it determined who went there.']