

Roger Aylard
Inanda teacher, 1968-1973; principal, 1970-1973.
Interviewed via phone from California, 30 June 2009.

What did you do before serving at Inanda? What was your background and how did you come to the school?

I was a school principal in California, and I was in Hayward Unified School District, where I had started as vice-principal and then graduated to principal, and I was there about ten years in that district. I wanted to see some of the world, and I knew with five boys I was not going to be able to afford, you know, to do it unless I was employed somewhere. So I applied to the United Church Board for World Ministries, and I was sent first to Aleppo College, in Aleppo, Syria, a few days before the Six Day War broke out.

Was that a coeducational school?

Well, I knew very little about it, actually. It was just a college and I didn't really get a chance to learn too much more because of what happened. So in other words I was just starting my instruction, or put it this way, would have been starting my instruction for that situation, so I don't have any information about Aleppo College really. Though, anyway, because of that, and the principal of Inanda Seminary had decided to retire; she had been there a very lengthy time, and they wanted someone who was an experienced administrator to learn the ropes, and that's where I came in, I guess.

So you were obviously the first male head of school, and the first principal to have a family—and five children at that—living on the campus. How did your family fit in with the campus environment?

I think because of the boys—the girls were very interested in the boys.

How old were your sons when you came to Inanda?

Well, they became teenagers when we left; I think the youngest was seven when we came in, so that's about what I can remember right now. So anyway, as far as everything is concerned, they were probably a big help in terms of being well-received on campus. And a male in that role is a very difficult thing, yes, I had to be very careful about, you know, the maleness end of things.

And how did the parents feel about having a male principal? Did they dislike it, or did they prefer it, or did they feel strongly in any way?

I don't think they would have said too much; I mean, we had a Board, and the Board was watching very carefully over what happened, and I did repeat everything to the Board, so I did feel—at least I never got any feedback about it.

I've come across some newspaper articles about the selectivity of the school during your time there—the Daily News reported in 1971 that about 1500 students applied but only 90 were accepted at Inanda. That's a very high rate of selectivity for a high school at that time. During the years that you were principal, was it always that selective?

Right—our procedure was to go out into the communities and—in other words, there would be a lot of kids who wanted to get into the school. So we had all kinds of applications; it was wide open, and I think that was important. And what we wanted to do was to make sure that the few that we could take, that there was some chance of success, and this had mainly to do with their abilities, and their backgrounds. Could they cope with learning three languages at the very highest level and, you know, matriculate. We looked at their personalities to see how they would get along with ourselves and with others, so this was a very stringent screening process, and we felt it was essential that we weren't going to waste our very valuable places on students who had no chance of getting through it. And with Bantu Education it was a horrible situation, and it was not many of these students' faults that they were not prepared. In other words—I don't have in hand any of the questions we asked, but our role was definitely to do screening. I don't know about the facts of 1500, but it sounds like it definitely could have been. I don't know how we

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could have done 1500! It could have been that some of them were, when they applied by mail, were screened out—the fact that they couldn't write in English, or they couldn't respond or whatever.

In general, during the time that you were principal, what were the backgrounds of students at Inanda Seminary like? Were most of them from KwaZulu-Natal, or were they from other parts of the country? I know that there were a pretty significant number of girls from Johannesburg.

All right, they needed to be Zulu for one thing, and so they mainly came from the townships or from Zululand. We tried to do this widely, so that we had a representation from all areas of the Zulu nation.

Were they exclusively Zulu during the time you were there? Because I thought there were students from different groups too.

Well, there were some Xhosa probably, because of the Xhosas' tribal situation, but not many. They all had to learn as a third language, they had to learn Zulu, and that at the very highest level, as I had said. So they were Zulu, mainly.

What do you remember of their career ambitions? Did most of them go on to university when you were there?

A higher percentage went to university from Inanda than any other school in the area; now there were several good Catholic schools in the area, but I still don't think they had the rating that we had. We had some excellent teachers, and we did not follow the 'syllabus,' in other words a rote memorization of the curriculum. What we did, it was, 'how did it get there'; the American system of research. In the library that Dumi Zondi put together—and the fact that we had newspapers was something!

Many women have mentioned that as an important part of their education, that they always felt connected to the outside world because they were reading the paper every day.

Now, I never had anyone tell me how we were accepted, in terms of the students and so on, other than through the Choralaires. That was a very good group that Darlene headed, and she did a very good job with it. I guess one year we came in second in an international choir contest, so I mean—and they're together today. Darlene has been back a number of times, and they still maintain a relationship.

I'll ask her about that. So the staff that were on campus during your time there—I've interviewed both of the Zondis, Carroll Jacobs, and Carohn Cornell—what was the overall staff environment like. It was a very diverse group of people, not only in terms of race, but also in terms of religion and other issues. How did everyone get on?

They got on fairly well; some of them because of their own personalities had problems, but as far as that was concerned we tried there to do a screening... We tried to get the best staff that we could that was available, and it was diverse. You know, everything from Afrikaners to Indians, you know, any race group. Yeah, it was unusual; in fact, we were known as the communist school.

Really—who called you a communist school?

These were the Afrikaner people who were involved in education. [Laughs.]

As far as relations with the state were concerned, I also came across something in the Inanda campus archives about the question of permits for staff members of different race groups to work at the school. There was some correspondence between you and a lawyer in 1969 about whether Inanda had to get these permits to have a multiracial staff. Carroll Jacobs said that because Inanda was American-operated and was under the United Church Board, you didn't need to have these permits. Is that how you remember it?

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I think that was how it was left. It was a mission school, and it was under those circumstances—it had to be secular, which was the other big thing, even though we had chapel and it was under, you know, the Congregational Church. I don't remember at all about that, because it didn't come up after that. When I was involved in the hiring—our hiring practices were open and, you know. When the inspectors would come in—we had multiracial tea at Stanwood always, and they had to have their own room separate from all the races [laughs], so what they thought of it I don't know, but at any rate—some of the inspectors were understanding, and they did realise what were doing when they found out how well things were going. And I know there are a number of Bantu Education articles against us; I don't know if you have any of those available...

I actually haven't seen them—these were letters written by government representatives?

Yes, Bantu Education representatives.

This matter of school inspectors—how frequently did school inspectors come? Did they tell you when they would be arriving, or did they make unscheduled visits?

It was every term, and they had to monitor the exams. So in other words, any time that there was an exam they had to be there, and then there were other times when they would come, pop in. But it was mostly, I think, on a schedule, I don't have any recollection much of that.

As far as overtly discussing politics—how much did staff and students talk about politics?

I think it was a free and open society there at Inanda, which was totally unusual in South Africa. And we were worried at one time that we had someone that was a mole, reporting to the government—that was Mr. Maree, after I left... It was either a rumor, started by students who didn't like Afrikaans, or—[laughs].

Were there any political groups amongst students on campus?

I wasn't aware of any so-called—no political things, no. When the girls decided at one time that they were not going to take their exams, that they were going to boycott the exams, I had Steve Biko come over and talk to them, and explain, you know, what we were about, and the fact that they would lose everything, the government would not allow them to take an exam, if they boycotted. That it was going to hurt them more than anything they could do to solve the problem of examinations in South Africa. So yeah, he talked them out of it.

What year was that?

I'm trying to think—he and Barney Pityana came together, it would have probably been in the 1970s I think. I wish I could remember all the facts of it, this has been forty years. But he took the kids up into the chapel, and really talked to them. You are truly aware of Steve Biko, I'm sure. So you know how he, you know, tried to fight apartheid all his life. So in terms of politics, yes. And now and again the Choralaires would sing for a political speech that Gatsha Buthelezi or some of the other people were giving, and I know we visited some of the banned people, Mrs. Gandhi, and we visited in Phoenix settlement before it was destroyed.

Do you remember anyone else who would come and speak with the students?

[Alan] Paton was a sponsor of a couple of students over time, at the school, and he would come to our 'At Home' as a speaker... and of course Edgar Brookes was the one who hired me, or interviewed me and so on, and he was the first so-called 'senator' to the Zulus. And so we had quite a few patriots, and people

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who disliked apartheid, who would come and speak to the students. So your question about, you know, political situation, yes, we were fully aware of it, discussed it, had people that were fully aware of the problems and we did not hide it or cover it up or anything. Now, we were on the mainline—in essence, my phone was tapped—we were on the magistrate's line so that they, you know, could listen in to any conversation.

You mentioned Gatsha Buthelezi. His daughters went to Inanda when you were a principal, yes? Did all his daughters go there?

Two of them—after, another one, I don't know.

What was his role in fundraising and management for the school? He seemed to be pretty involved.

Well, because of KwaZulu, and because of his daughters—he did try to get some money for us. His role was supportive, totally supportive... Having him as an 'in' at the time—now, among the Zulus, he was not always looked upon in a favorable light, because of the fact that he was involved with the South African government, but it's very difficult in a situation like that. And as far as I was concerned he was most helpful.

I know that the school had a lot of difficulties with money, water, sanitation and those sorts of things when you were principal. How did the school raise funds to support itself during that time? It seems that it was quite difficult.

Well, we hired a fundraiser, let's see, what was her name, I can't remember her name now. But she went all over and got a lot of money from the German churches. And, you know, really actually bailed us out. So I think that was probably what finally made it possible—when I was sent to Inanda, I was really told, 'Make it viable or close it down.' It was just too valuable and viable a place not to continue, you know. The South African churches, however, I feel were not really supportive. The South African Congregational Church, I don't know whether it was political or not; I have often felt that it was.

When you came to Inanda, who told you to make it viable or close it down?

These were in essence Edgar Brookes and United Church Board, whoever I talked to, that's what I was told. But that was the idea, that was the concept.

I know that during the end of your time at the school, the school considered getting some support from KwaZulu, and from the Department of Education and Culture there. Did that ever come to fruition during your time there? Were you getting any money from KwaZulu?

I think that at about the time I left, there was supposed to be something, but I don't recall that we ever really finalized anything in my day. I know that we had tried, and that Buthelezi was really helpful, really, in that. I think it was in the application stage or something when I left in '73. I think that, best as I recall.

You ended up leaving Inanda because you were denied residence permits, is that right?

That's right. In other words, it was because we had overstayed our work permit. It was a work permit, was what it was...

Do you think that that was due to a government suspicion of Americans being at Inanda Seminary, or other factors?

Yes, they didn't like people helping Africans, and I think that had something to do with it. I had it looked into, and the only statement they would make was that some clerk had done it, and that was the way it was going to be. Nobody would take responsibility for it... One of the members of the Board looked into

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it, and said, 'No, there's nothing you have done that caused you to be kicked out,' but I know that that's the way we felt. I was away in Pretoria, working on the post-secondary secretarial school, and I was trying to get permits and permission to open that, and I was looking through books, and that kind of thing, and that's where I was called, 'Oh, you're from that Communist school.' [Laughs.] Yeah. So, while I was there, Darlene was interviewed by, I can't remember which paper now, and she felt that we were being kicked out, and that's what she said, which angered them. [Laughs.]

This was a South African paper?

I can't remember if it was the *Rand* or what. If I have clippings, I might just send them to you...

So then after you left, were you able to come back to South Africa? Did you visit the school again?

No, I have not. Darlene has. She's had a real close contact with those students who've been in the Choralaires... I have been in other places too, I don't usually go back. And that's really the story. Now, I still have contacts, I'm in contact with my former secretary in Cape Town, Carroll Jacobs...

Are there any other things that you want to highlight about your time there? What seems to be sort of distinctive or important about Inanda Seminary?

Well, for one thing, the work done there was not a fluke. I mean, these students went on to hold offices throughout South Africa—doctors, lawyers, whatever. And, I mean, in great numbers. They had the highest rate of college, or university, attendance in I think any private school in South Africa. And certainly of the Bantu Education schools. And so, I feel that my time there, and the work that we tried to do there, and the fundraising we tried to do, and the upgrading of the buildings at the time, was really a worthy task, and I am very pleased with the fact that I was able to offer something there. I don't think my work there was in vain.

Do you feel that you were able to do more because you were an American, in terms of relations with the government and such, or do you think it was more difficult to operate a school as an American in South Africa?

I think because of the close relationship that we had with the Consulate General in Durban, it was a help that I was an American—I think it might have been a great help, actually. I know they had a number of principals following me, that were locals, that were not as successful, probably partly because of that, I don't know... Of course, they would have been closer to the people than we were...

Were there any criticisms of the institution that you had when you were there, as far as—

Yes, there was. You mentioned the colonial end of things. Many of the missionaries at the time, I felt, were typical of religious people who want to impose all of their ideas upon somebody else. There were some people there that really understood the culture and respected the culture, where the people were coming from; others did not. And I felt a lot of them were working for their own ends. I stated, 'I'm working myself out of a job,' and that was the attitude I had, that I wasn't going to be there forever anyway, regardless, even though I was kicked out after five, some years, I probably wouldn't have gone back myself. I don't know what Darlene would have done, but I felt I had done my job. And I made sure that Dumi, who was the first Zulu to hold that position as principal, was principal. And I felt that it had to be under local control at that point. The thing that I was concerned about was the local—this could get into political stuff, I suppose—the local church did not, the Congregational Church as I saw it, did not support the school the way it should have, the way it was supposed to.

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And why do you think that was? Do you think it was too expensive? Or it didn't seem important?

I think part of it was money, and partly I think it was political. Whites in the Congregational Church.

Political in what way? Influences within the Congregational Church? Do you think the church was afraid to offend the government?

I think all of the above. And I can't answer the question because these people were raised in apartheid, and a lot of them had their own—people who worked for them, laborers and so on—some of them paid a living wage, others did not. That was my feeling. My feeling was that we did not get the support.

How religious was life on campus at that time? You don't seem to be stressing—people I've talked to from earlier years talked about a really strong Christian influence pervading everything about school life.

I am not a religious-type person, I guess, that's what you have to say. And my own views were that my religion or my beliefs are my beliefs, and I'm not out proselytizing [laughs]. So my—you know, it was intended that this was a secular school, believe it or not, I mean, that's the way the South African government allowed it to continue still. I mean, it was the last non-white Protestant school allowed to exist in South Africa. And we had to—

By secular you mean that students from all different religious backgrounds were admitted there?

That's right. Same with staff.

The Catholic schools, I believe, you had to claim to be Catholic to attend. So that was a different category. More broadly, why do you believe Inanda Seminary was able to remain open during Bantu Education when Adams closed, when Ohlange was taken over—when all the other schools were more or less taken over by the state?

[Quickly replies] It was a girls' school.

Do you think that's what it was?

Yeah. In other words, girls weren't that important in the eyes of the male chauvenist pigs in the South African government. I really think that was a big part of it. And not only that, but they had some strong administration. Really strong people. Not that Adams and all these others didn't—but Adams was really overtly political. I mean, Buthelezi attended there, and some others, you know. So I think the history of those schools was basically radical to the South African government...

You knew Lavinia Scott—what do you remember of her?

Fantastic woman, really, she worked day and night... She was very intellectual, she had a doctorate from Yale, just a very, very fine person, and was well-thought of. She would have worked herself to death had she not left. I had nothing but respect for that lady, she was something else.