

**Thandeka Dloti (née Zama).**  
**Inanda Seminary student, 1982-1986.**  
**Interviewed in Johannesburg, 2 June 2009.**

*So you were born in Pinetown.*

Born in Pinetown, grew up in Hammersdale, which is halfway between Durban and Maritzburg, and, *ja*, most of my family's still there. So how I came to know about the school—it was a well-known school, we just all knew about it. I didn't have any family that had gone there, but I just knew that was where I wanted to go to school. And I can remember crying in the kitchen in my house, you know, saying to my dad, 'That's where I want to go to school.' He said, 'But we can't afford the fees'; I said, 'Nooooo.' Anyway, he somehow made a plan and I got to go, *ja*.

*Was Dloti your maiden name?*

No, my maiden name was Zama, Z-A-M-A. So in the school records I'm known as that...

*What were your first impressions of the school? Do you remember your thoughts about going away to boarding school?*

I was excited, I was excited. I've always been very independent, and that's what I saw—it was an opportunity for me just to be myself, without the family—what you call it—that hovering-type feeling...

*What do you remember about the curriculum that was most influential for you? What teachers do you remember?*

I can remember my very first class teacher, she was very young—she was nineteen.

*She was nineteen? Wow.*

Miss Seary, when I was in Standard Six. She was just very vibey. She came to school on a bike from Durban... She was very easy to get along with. I don't know if it was her youth, her personality, her outlook. But it was just really amazing, and it made the transition from home to school much easier, because, you know, there were stricter ones, and if I had encountered those first it would have been more difficult. So she eased my transition.

*You began there in 1981?*

1982, *ja*. I was all of eleven years, turning twelve.

*What your impressions of attending a girls' school?*

I was—look—our school was very uncomplicated. Everyone knew everyone and we all got along. There were certainly special friendships, but it was a very easy-going environment, and I can say this with confidence—because I went from there to an all-boys school for post-matric, and boys—

*An all-boys school. You were the only girl there?*

I was one of two girls there, and four hundred boys.

*What school was this?*

Hilton College.

*I didn't know that girls could go there!*

Well, it was just for post-matric, and we were the fourth and fifth girls ever... So anyway, I went to the all-boys school and found those boys very easy. [She later notes that she grew up with four brothers.]

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But I've since found girl world very tricky. So what we had there, by girl-school standards, was a breeze. It was just so homely, and everyone knew everyone, and cared.

*What was your sense of the other students' backgrounds? Did it seem there was a diverse range of backgrounds in terms of where people were from, class?*

Absolutely, there absolutely was. But the school was a leveler, because it fairly—you know—*ja*, you could see the different wealth levels, but we were all in the same boat, we all had to eat the same food in the dining room, we wore the same school uniform. On weekends, you know, that was the time to splash out, and *ja*—there were certainly girls that had more money than others, but it wasn't in your face...

*What was the connection with the surrounding community? Was there much interaction between the school and Inanda?*

Not really, no.

*You were pretty much locked up on campus.*

We were, we were, *ja*. That's a good way of putting it. We knew what was around it, but we had nothing to do with the outside.

*And what was your sort of understanding about politics?*

Look, we all knew the leaders that the school had produced, so we were aware of that, and in terms of political awareness—it wasn't something that the school—it wasn't taken on at a school level. I suppose at an individual level, we all found a place and our place in the community, which is what politics is about, right. You know, we were—the school never took an active role to politicize us, but we all found things that drew our attention. It was the 1980s, and I always loved British pop music, and the station that played it was a sidekick of a London station, Capital Radio, and I was drawn to it, I just loved it. And also the reporting was uncensored, the news reporting. I don't know if you know, but there were a whole lot of homelands, South African homelands at the time, so they would broadcast out of the Transkei which was an independent homeland, so they could give unbiased, uncensored news.

*So how did you feel that Inanda prepared you for life after high school? Did you get a sense of a career that you wanted to pursue there?*

I definitely knew. And they were very supportive, you know. Whenever there were—we entered olympiads, we entered whatever was offered. I guess because the school was well-known, they would be approached whenever there were bursary opportunities, by the different companies that were offering the scholarships... That's how I was discovered for my scholarship... We were all exposed to the different companies that were offering the sponsorships, and it was up to us to pursue them further, and the school supported us fully. It was a treat to go for interviews and stay out of school, just out in the real world.

*Was Mrs. Koza very involved in finding bursaries and that kind of thing for students?*

I was very proactive, I know, and she was supportive. We all were very proactive, and her role was to support.

*You went to Hilton after matric--where did you go from there?*

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I went to University of Cape Town. I did a B.Comm. in accounting... I qualified as a chartered accountant... Absolutely loved the work until my son was born... So that's where I am now.

*How old is your son now?*

Well, I've got two. Eldest will be eleven in July and the young one will be eight in August.

*And you've been involved with the school alumnae association since you graduated. When did you get involved with that?*

I think it was in about 2003 that a whole bunch of us found ourselves in Cape Town... putting together a bursary fund would be the way to go... It's amazing, because all of these things are just purely by word of mouth...

*What would you say, in general, Inanda's impact on your life was?*

I think the school gave us all opportunities, just to—you know, we all left there knowing what we wanted, whether we pursued it vigorously was another story, but I think we left there armed with confidence and skills...

*Would you say there were any negatives to your experience?*

My regret was that in our time, there was no organized sport... It was very much of an academic institution...

*You didn't play interschool sports at all.*

No. We had the odd thing against Ohlange or Adams College, but they were few and far between...

*What was your sense of how Inanda Seminary students were perceived by students at other schools?*

Well, we were seen as—what's the word—it's hard to say—it could be—the reactions varied. There were people that envied us. I mean, if I hadn't been able to go, I would have envied a girl who went there. There was that. There was the jealousy, that they see us as snobs. But the experience that came out of it—single-sex education is just hard—you come out of a single-sex environment very de-socialized. We came out knowing very little about boys, and boys come out knowing very little about girls. Unlike when you go through school and you all go through puberty together and all that.

*Did you get any sex education?*

We did. We still had the pregnancies and everything—we got that, we just weren't learning that on a day to day basis... [Wants to send her sons to all-male boarding schools, but she wants to avoid de-socializing them from girls.]

*What were other teachers that you remember?*

There was a Mr. Naidoo, who taught us English. He was amazing. Mrs. Dlamini who taught us biology... Miss Roy was American. She was our maths teacher.

*She's become a reverend since your time at Inanda.*

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Hmm. Malcolm Hewett, the accounting teacher. When I passed my board exam... he was so thrilled. There was Sithole, Mr. Sithole. He was a maths teacher, oh, he was a nutcase but he was good, he knew his subject.

*How was he a nutcase?*

He just was. He was very bright. I think under a different system he would have done quite well. I'm not saying that he didn't teach well, but I don't think teaching was his calling... He just believed that all our time should be spent on maths... He was unbelievably bright, even with languages.

*Mrs. Koza, what was your impression?*

I found her to be a bully, to be honest. She and I did not get along. I had her the entire time I was there, and I think that's how long she lasted. I had her the whole time, and she expelled a few people, and I think the only reason I never got expelled was my academic record was so strong, and she needed the marks to show the school was doing well. If I didn't have that going for me, I'd have been booted out of there.

*Why did she expel people?*

She was a bully, did I mention that? Because she could. I remember in Standard Nine, we'd been caught making a whole lot of noise after bedtime... We had to swap dormitories with the Standard Sixes or something. Two of the girls got expelled that night... There wasn't transparency... To this day I am just convinced she was a bully, and she did what she did because she could. I mean, she just had this fear--she could induce fear like you couldn't believe. She'd just step out of that office block on that veranda, and everybody would disappear from sight...

*There was a big emphasis on discipline, it seems.*

Oh, absolutely.

*There was still the language rule.*

Exactly.

*How did you feel about that?*

Look, it did us a lot of good, because I think—I look at kids who have had different experiences, and being forced to speak English for the five days made us more fluent... So I have no regret about that.

*Did you take Afrikaans?*

We did. The idea was that we would speak English or Afrikaans Monday through Friday, but who speaks Afrikaans in Durban? Afrikaans was always tricky.

*Were there other extracurricular events you were involved with?*

There was a choir, but my voice wouldn't go anywhere near there. And the other thing that was active was the Student Christian Movement, but that was pretty much it...

*Do you remember any student strikes when you were there?*

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There was one when I was in Standard Nine, or matric. I think it was in 1985. There was a major one where we ended up having to close the school. I had—a lot of girls that had matriculated had gone to the University of Natal, the medical school, and I went to spend the night with a friend's older sister, just to get out of there and get somewhere close by as soon as possible, and then I proceeded to go home after that. That was the only one that merited school closure.

*What was that about?*

It wasn't a strike from the school side, I think there was just a lot of unrest in 1985—it would have been UDF-related, and I think they were closing in on the school. The school just felt they couldn't protect us, we were a bunch of girls, they couldn't protect us, and the best thing was to send us home. Inanda had just become a hotspot. And I think that's what it was about. So we got some extra time at home, I didn't complain...

*Were any Inanda students involved with the UDF?*

Not that I was aware of. But I think that I was a nerd when I was at school. I've since found out that, you know, there were girls that used to have—there was a girl that arrived with a trunk full of booze... And there was a core group that would get together and drink, and others would come by invitation. I never got invited. I found this out after school. I never took it personally [laughs]. But you see, if there was a political movement—I think I was seen—I had my eye on the ball, I mean, I wanted to get out of school and get qualified and just get out of there. I knew what I wanted. I'm not saying that others didn't. But I realize, if there's one thing I do, it's focus. I can focus. Like right now I'm building my house, and that's what I'm doing.

*That sounded very hectic from your email.*

*Ja.* So, I can focus. And so, *ja.* I don't think anyone would have had much luck coopting me out of my studies, *ja.* So if there were, I would not have known.

*It seems that most students were focused on getting their matric and getting their careers, that kind of thing.*

Absolutely. And getting good marks. Exactly. And it's—it's good to be that focused, but I just think it could have been better balanced, we could have added better stuff to it. I'm focused on my building now, but I found a friend who, you know, I play golf with, and it doesn't matter how hectic I am with my building—we've got our golf dates, and I honor them. And she'll say, 'Ah, I'm just so busy,' and I'll say, 'Listen. Barack Obama has a body like that—imagine how busy he must be. I'm sorry, if he can do it, we have no excuse.' [Laughing.]

*So it seems most Inanda girls from your generation went to schools like UCT, University of Natal. You were among some of the first African students that were at these institutions--I mean, in the 1980s, they were still pretty white-dominated, weren't they?*

Oh, were they? By the time I got there, there were a fair number of black students. I wouldn't say we were the first.

*So you didn't feel that it was difficult.*

Hmm, no. And it was great that I had friends from Hilton, I had friends from Inanda.

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*Is there anything else you want to emphasize about your time at the school, since?*

I'm trying to think if I have been back since I left, and I don't think I have. I may have been once, many years ago... I would love to see it now, it sounds like they have so much going on... I hear good things, you know. The students that we sponsor, there are two at UCT, and I've always made the point, you know, I still spend my holidays in Cape Town. Last year was just kind of chaotic because I was not there at the same time as them, ja... I didn't see them last year. And I thought, I've just got to make a point, when I go now in August, that I just touch base and see how they're doing. Because they're away from home still... When you have that kind of relationship with them, you do take on kind of a maternal role... I hear about their school experiences and it's very interesting, because it's just very different from what I've experienced...

*You sponsor two girls a year? [Through ISAWeC]*

Well, we started with one--for some reason, we just hadn't got our act together, and we got to organize the scholarship quite late... Last year we took a giant leap of faith and decided to take on a younger girl in Grade 8 and see her through... What I'd like to do next year when our Grade 9 gets to Grade 10 is to take on another Grade 8... Now we have a solid bank of reliable people [as sponsors]. You've met Hixonia surely... She's my banker, you know. If all else fails, you know, I can say to her, 'Ahh, I'm short,' and we can make a plan.

*She seems like she's been very involved in working with Inanda.*

Very, very... She's been absolutely amazing.

*Thank you very much for meeting with me.*

[We discuss my general dissertation topic and progress a bit, and the interview ends.]