

Karen Roy-Guglielmi.
Inanda teacher, 1980-1985.
Interviewed in Vernon, Connecticut, 23 July 2009.

I'm interested to know how you came to work at Inanda Seminary—how you discovered the school.

I attended a workshop on overseas service, and there was a representative from the Board of World Ministries, from the United Church of Christ, as well as some other organizations. And I pursued two different things, one through the Mass Maritime Academy, to teach at American schools abroad, and another through the church. And as I had already been offered a job through the Mass Maritime Academy, I realized that I wanted my faith to be a part of why I went abroad to teach. I didn't just want to teach American kids, I had taught for ten years in the States and was needing a change. So I decided that I wanted faith to be a part of why I was going abroad, and so the church ultimately suggested South Africa, because Inanda needed a biology teacher at the time. So I said—at first I thought, oh my, South Africa, lions and tigers and bears, oh my, that was my first thought, and my sister said, go to a library, get some books about South Africa so you can find out more about it. So as I did more research about it on my own, I realized that South Africa was very much a first-world, third-world country. And that it wasn't going to be primitive. I know me. I found out I could have flush toilets, so I was a-go. That was—that was my minimum, I wanted at least a toilet. So I was accepted in June—gave my leave of absence—took a leave of absence, because I wasn't sure how this was going to work, and it was a little scary going seven thousand miles away from home—but the visa never came through. So, in September when I was supposed to have headed off to language school, there was no visa... March of 1980 was when I headed to South Africa, March 16th. And the girls had a ten-day break when I arrived. So I had ten days to learn physics, because I found out when I arrived that I was to be teaching physics—having never even taken a physics course... And it was a half year of physics principles and half a year of chemistry. So the ten days gave me a bit of a head start. Of course, when I first—I decided to do light as my first unit, and I wrote 'c-o-l-o-r' on the board, and the girls laughed, because of course, the American spelling. So I had to learn very quickly to adjust my spelling.

You never went to language school.

Never went to language school, so I was purely English. Learned a few phrases, you know, table manners, so I could greet people in the kitchen, anywhere, in Zulu. But because Inanda had English only Monday through Friday, it wasn't too big of a problem. But it would have been a good addition, had I been able to speak Zulu. But it was a good start, anyway. So I taught physical science, which was half physics, half chemistry, and biology, and general science to the first year kids, Standard Six. Actually I had Standard Seven. They had very little English. That was a bit of a challenge, but I'm a teacher, and so I just—I can look at faces and see blank looks and figure out if they were understanding or not. But because they had Monday through Friday, it didn't take me long, or didn't take the kids long, before they really assimilated and began following classes and understanding these funny Americans that didn't have accents that they were used to.

How many other Americans were on the staff?

When I was there, Carol Garn was there in math, and then she left a year after I arrived, and so she sold me her car, so I had a car the next year, which was nice... Todd and Anna... I was there just under five years, because I left in December of 1984. And then another couple, Dorinda and John—he was a physics teacher, college physics, from Wisconsin, and they had taken a year to come to Inanda.

Were you all appointed as missionaries?

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I was, and Carol Gunn was, and Todd and Anna were. John and Dorinda were volunteers. I was appointed by the Board for World Ministries, and my salary was paid through them. It fluctuated every month. It followed the value of the rand, so I never knew how much money I was getting, then three years into my term they set a minimum.

What do you remember of your students' backgrounds? Were most of them from the Durban area?

No, they were from all over. A lot of Xhosas, both from Johannesburg and a little farther south, a lot from even rural Zululand areas, and the Cape Town area. I remember them being from all over. Because Inanda was the place people wanted to send their girls for their education. They knew they would have a good education at Inanda. So parents did everything they possibly could to send their girls to Inanda.

Do you remember things parents said to you about why they had selected that school?

Well, because of the quality of education, because of the opportunities that they would have afterwards, because it would keep their daughters safe...

What do you remember about the school's relationship with the community surrounding Inanda? Was there much engagement with the surrounding area?

During Mrs. Koza's time, she tried to establish some scholarships for local girls. So I think as, during my five years there, there probably were a few more local girls. Shandu—Pastor Shandu—would come and do services on a Sunday. But not too much. The girls were really restricted to campus. Those fence gates were closed.

It was around that time that the fences were installed.

Before I got there. Before I got there. So that really created a separation between the girls and the community, I think, although many of the—well, I think most of the people who cooked the meals, took care of the facilities, they were all local.

The time that you were there was obviously very politically tumultuous. I'm sure a lot changed between the time you arrived and when you left.

Well, I think it didn't really change as much until after I left. But the last two years, during that June holiday that commemorated the bloodbath in Johannesburg, you did not leave the campus. And I think it was in my third year that there was a bus burned at Inanda on that day. So there was fomenting unrest and uneasiness... I do remember at one point coming home by myself, right at the point where the tarred road ended and the dirt road began... There was a blockade of police stopping people, and the policeman looked in the car and saw this white person driving, and said, 'What are you doing out here?' And I said, 'I live here.' Mistake—I could tell by the look on his face that I made a mistake in saying that. And that's the one thing, you know, about being in South Africa—I'd never been afraid of police before. But I was—I had anxiety, particularly on that day, and he grilled me, I backed up and said, 'I teach at a mission school,' had to show him my passport and so on.

Were the students politically active, as far as you knew?

Pretty focused on studying. When they were home, they were probably a little more politically active, because I can remember kids talking about things when they had been home, but while they were on campus, again—that fence really created an environment of

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seclusion and focus. And Mrs. K. would have exerted a pretty strong direction for them to cool it.

So tell me about Mrs. Koza.

Hmm.

She's been described in many different ways.

Very controlling woman. But loved having people at her beck and call, and especially having whites at her beck and call. So I was the blue-eyed girl for awhile, and she would get me to drive her into town instead of having Mr. Ndlovu drive her, and he was the driver. And I would drive her wherever she wanted to go—it was great, I got off campus... She was also very gracious with the opportunities that she tried to expose you to—me to. And I think other people that were there during my time. I attended the American Consulate for a dinner one time, because she invited me. There are things I never would have done, but she took the time to educate me, and enjoyed the role of educating me. Very savvy and naive at the same time. She wasn't the best administrator, because she would criticize everyone with a broad blanket—so it got wearing...

Some of the students do remember her being a role model—very proper, polished.

Oh, absolutely. Powerful, polished. She really had a presence about her. Savvy, I said—she always looked the part. Always. Even when she was receiving people at her bedside, which she did frequently because she had bronchitis and asthma... She was a very powerful influence. Of course, she was educated long before apartheid. So there was a worldliness about her experience and exposure that brought good things to Inanda.

And she had been at Inanda before apartheid as well.

Yes.

Did she or other staff members invoke the school's history a lot? Was that something that students were very conscious of?

Yes. Mrs. K. was also a very strong person of faith. So, as I was looking through, I have pictures of her in her Methodist red shirt and black skirt... and so she invoked the history, particularly from that perspective, from its founding as a mission—as it evolved into a more educationally focused—not for Africans, but for higher quality education for women. I think that she knew that Inanda had been influential in her life and she wanted it to be influential for everyone who crossed those gates. That was clear.

What do you remember students wanting to do as careers?

Doctors. Doctors, engineers, nurses—I think three of my kids went to Smith College.

I interviewed Siphokazi Koyana...

... I think that the kids knew that whatever they wanted to do, they could possibly do, because they were at Inanda. It was going to get them shots into university—they were going to have a better opportunities.

And by the time you were there, some students were going to historically white universities—UCT, Natal...

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And, see, because I was there for just five years, those kids I had in Standard Six my first year, they were only two years into university by the time I left... I know they still couldn't get into white medical schools then...

What were social activities—life on the campus? What did students do outside of class?

Braided hair. They were always braiding hair. There were sports, after school sports, because Angie—she was so-called coloured—lived on campus and was the PE teacher. The girls did homework. Aside from study hall from six to nine at night, a lot of girls did homework in the afternoons. They worked hard. Once I had experienced Inanda, I knew that I would never come home and teach here.

It would not be comparable.

Not be comparable. Not at all. The kids wanted to learn—but they used to look forward to Saturday night movies. It was interesting, again—they could come in at Standard Six or Nine—their English was not as good. Early on in the year, the girls would ask me to stop the movie. This was very early on South African television... their experience of watching a show and it fading out and fading into another location, totally went over their heads... They loved to have their photos taken. I have tons of photos, because they just loved to have their pictures taken...

The religious life then seemed really strong...

Yeah. And part of that was Ann and Malcolm Hewer... they started an afternoon kind of gathering for kids who wanted to sing, praise, learn about Scripture—Youth for Christ was one of the afternoon activities.

What do you think was the most important, most distinctive offering of Inanda?

Well, there really were not other institutions for a quality high school education. So if South African young women were going to go to public high school, they were not going to have access—we at least had a microscope. We had a lab. I dissected with them... In physics and chemistry, same thing, we had equipment, a building that was called the lab, that was just not available anywhere else. And the English learning. The fact that English was forced on them Monday through Friday, it forced them to really learn English, so—the boarding environment developed bonds between these girls that just wouldn't have happened in their home environments. I'm not aware of any other institution that was comparable in that time.

Do you—what do you think of the single-sex aspect of Inanda? Do you think it was good for the students?

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I still think single-sex education is a good thing. All sorts of research is showing that even in colleges... And I think in the environment, you were able to keep them at arm's length from distractions... Not completely. They loved to have dances... [We go through her very extensive photo albums.]

How do you think Inanda was able to survive to be this very unusual school in apartheid South Africa?

I think the church support was pivotal. Because it wasn't government based, it was private, so it could set its own rules. And I think it was—the interracial [staff] environment—which Mrs. K. really tried to promote, even more—in don't know in years previous how many Indians or so-called coloureds were present, but during the time I was there it was very diverse, very

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multiracial, kind of a melting pot if you will, of all kinds of people. Inanda gave liberal whites in South Africa a way to make a difference. Mrs. K. sometimes drove them away, just because she—

It's interesting, because some of the white South Africans who came earlier did so not because of the school's religious aspects, but because of its political role.

Right. Even for the white South Africans when I was there, that was true. They were liberal politically, and therefore wanted to make a statement and participate in something that was going to make a difference. But as I said Mrs. K., being who she was—people got tired of the drama. And the low pay... I only got one-third of what I received teaching in Granby, Mass [a low-paying rural district]... While we had a multiracial staff, conversations were still pretty superficial, and focused around the kids, our students, more than anything... There was still something very unique and powerful about being there... I think that Inanda was an influence on everyone who was there. It completely changed my life because I came back and went to seminary and became a pastor.

And that was inspired by your time at Inanda Seminary.

Absolutely. My life direction changed—not entirely, because I'm still a teacher, and I still teach about life. Just a different side of life. And I think that that is true for everyone who was—the black teachers were thrilled to be a part of giving a better education to some black students. Everybody else, for a wide variety of political reasons, wanted the same thing... It was transformative.

You said you had mentioned Inanda in one of your sermons recently.

... I still—it's been twenty-five years since I left Inanda—and I still—my husband and I were doing some exercise out of a book... and it asked about the most influential time in your life. And—Inanda. My years in South Africa were probably the most influential piece of my life. And my husband didn't realize how much of an influence... I still come back to things that I experienced there, memories or life lessons.

What do you think was the most important lesson that you learned there?

I think I got to know God there. I mean, I went, with that as my intention. I remember Reverend Marcus, who was the Secretary then, asked me why I wanted to go to Inanda. And I said, 'I want to get to know God better.' And he said, 'Well, you want to teach young women, give them a better opportunity...' Three times he corrected me—and I finally caught on and said 'yes, I want to do that too.' Developing my own faith was a piece of why I wanted to go to South Africa to teach. And I guess because I'd only ever taught one black student, never really had any black friends, I guess, learning to appreciate another culture and to look at things from someone else's perspective... and learning that people are people the world over.