

Interviewed: Brenda and Colin Baskind
Oral History Clip Title: The Way Things Were
Theme: Politics and Apartheid
Interviewer: Lisa Newman
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(Brenda)

You know the apartment block had rooms upstairs for Nanny's.

(Colin)

Oh yeah

(Brenda)

They had their own places upstairs.

(Interviewer)

What were they like?

(Brenda)

Not great accommodation sadly to say. Not great accommodation. And it wasn't even better when we moved into our house, the nanny, you had like attached to your garage, there was a room with a shower and toilet

(Colin)

But cold water...no heated water.

(Colin)

And in Johannesburg even though the weather is pretty good, at night it is cold, it's zero at night. Maybe during the day, it is fifteen or twenty, and it can get cold and you can't get a hot shower. But either way that just shows the way things were that they didn't supply hot water in it, they just didn't.

(Interviewer)

This woman would have had a home in the township?

(Brenda)

Yeah, in the township or on the farm. Well our first nanny, actually she got knocked over by a bus, and she got killed. So that was a shock. But then we moved to our house, and our second nanny that came, we couldn't find a nanny for a long time, because they all heard that our nanny had got killed and it was sort of...they were suspicious or superstitious about coming to stay with us. This woman that came to me, Elizabeth, she was a funny woman, she said oh I've heard about what happened to you first nanny,

but she says, I'm not scared. And the first thing I said to her was, because I was a young woman, what did I know, I said to her Elizabeth, can you iron? Because we ironed everything, even underwear. And she went I'm a woman, do you think I don't know how to iron? And she took the job.

They used to put their beds on bricks, so they were high off the floor, because they believed that you know the *Tokoloshe* could come in, evil things, I don't know, so they kept their beds high off the floor. She was with us for twenty years, her and her family. You know, we had her sister come to work, she became part of our family, but she still had to sleep in that room at the back.

(Colin)

Yeah, and it wasn't just done, it was illegal. You know, maybe some part in the United States, that's the way it is. But this was illegal. You were not allowed. Simple. It's the same as stealing. Not allowed, it's against the law.

(Brenda)

To have her in your house.

(Colin)

She could not sleep in your house. Could not. Simple.

(Brenda)

We broke the law a lot of times because if we went on holiday we would take her with us, and she didn't want to stay in the accommodation for the maids because she said it was so disgusting. So we said you just stay with us. She was part of our family.

(Interviewer)

Her family was part of your family.

(Brenda)

Yes. There were quite a few sisters, and one sister worked for a friend of ours, Maria. And her sister Violet used to come to do the ironing and her little sister Mikey was still in school. And Mikey would come to us in the holidays and spend time with us and this Mikey is the one that had a baby out of wedlock. Which a lot of black women at sixteen had babies to prove their fertility or things that went with that. And we took that baby in so that Mikey could go back to school and we educated her and made sure she was well educated. So that's when that part came in.

(Interviewer)

How long did the baby and mother live with you? Well the mother went back to school, she couldn't go to a school in the suburbs where we were. She went back to her schools on the farms and she would come in the holidays to visit her baby and Elizabeth and I looked after that baby. But it became our baby, my baby. He was with us until he was four.