



Interviewed: Avis and Robbie Osher

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Theme: Politics and Apartheid

Interviewer: Lisa Newman

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(Avis)

In South Africa, like Robbie had mentioned earlier, there was separate everything. Black hospitals—black, brown, yellow, green, pink hospitals for everything. And then one of the things I did was I worked in mental health and I worked there a good while and then when I went back into occupational therapy after that I started teaching. And I taught so I was able to work and supervise in the different hospitals and it was a huge education. I mean, to see the hierarchy among black nurses [inaudible] compared to the lower nurse. Or the attitudes of black—there were very few black doctors—white doctors to black nurses and black senior staff. That was the biggest, was black senior staff to the subservient relevant staff. It was unbelievable. They were [inaudible] replaying what they had experienced. They were replaying because they were sort of lower than the whites, but then they had other people lower than them. You would imagine they'd be wholly compassionate. I couldn't believe that that's what was happening.

(Robbie)

There was also a...I should tell you there was also a black hospital in the middle of a black township called Baragwanath. And you can tell them about Baragwanath.

(Avis)

Oh. Well, Baragwanath was renowned for overseas surgeons, as well as obviously locals coming for special training. It was the best in the world for stab wounds, especially cerebral stab wounds. The violence was absolutely horrendous. So everyone was—nearly everyone in the hospitals were stab wounds—violence. And the black hospitals were very full. I remember the hospital beds were high metal...like over here they would call them cots. And then there'd be another mattress on the floor with another person underneath. Total overcrowding and very poor people. It was... And I remember working once with a paraplegic and in the book it said—I was a student and I'd never worked in physical OT—but the book said you have to see that they are independent at home. And I remember that they had such lousy wheel chairs and in the townships the streets had potholes in them and they had non-flowing water and you had to (inaudible) use the wheelchair to get themselves home up a remote hill when there was not even a straight street and then their houses had no running water. The bathtub was a galvanized oval basin on the floor. They couldn't transfer. They could never be independent, but I mean what you couldn't write up in your report was it's okay. They care for each other more than we care for each other. Because there'd be all kinds of friends that would bath them. You know? They were poor people that gathered together and looked after each other. They were close. Our nanny had lots of friends—more friends than me. You know? That's how people like that lived.

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