



Interviewed: Avis and Robbie Osher

Oral History Clip Title: What We Left Behind

Theme: Leaving

Interviewer: Lisa Newman

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(Avis)

You weren't allowed to take money out of South Africa. There were financial restrictions. All our young daughters'—at that point teenage daughters—friends I went on these trips for us. [inaudible] where we paid for the airplane tickets. They'd stay with a relative and then deposit it. So they had to go to London because we had friends in London that could meet them and take the money. And that would go into our bank in London. It was quite a *schlep* to carry money—get money out.

(Robbie)

And also the currency in South Africa, called the rand, wasn't very strong so if you had to convert it to Canadian dollars there was a big loss. And if you—I don't know if we should talk about it but we can. [laughs] If you wanted to take money out, you know, and people were taking, you had to pay a commission—ten per cent—so you were losing ten per cent and the currency loss. So, it was also not an easy thing to see your money being eroded in that way.

(Avis)

One of the things that was affected is that we stayed in a pretty simple house. We were never— [inaudible] In retrospect, the housing market there I understand is up a lot, but we stayed in the same house because we were leaving and we were leaving and it was silly. Because when we left, we got nothing for our house. We got as much money as I could carry in my handbag.

(Robbie)

And it took us nine months to sell the house at the time. Because we were selling the house at a very unstable time. It was in 1990, and it was a transition from the apartheid government to the ANC so there were people who were very, you know, didn't know what to do, whether to immigrate or to stay. So the people who bought at the time took advantage of the bargains that were on the market, especially with us.

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(Robbie)
We brought a lot.

(Avis)
We brought a lot.

(Robbie)
We brought a container. We had to leave a lot behind, as Avis has said. [inaudible] we gave a lot away. When we came here, I remember bringing, what was it? How many bottles of Chivas Regal?

(Avis)
I don't know—cases.

(Robbie)
Cases of Chivas Regal whiskey. But it disappeared. It disappeared. But we brought a lot. And we moved into a very small—First of all, we stayed in our apartment and then we moved to where we are present, but a small townhouse. Well, you've seen it. Prior to that our house in South Africa was about 4,000 square feet and we moved into something that was 1,700 square feet. And there were a lot of things that we had to give away. And we also brought a lot of African art that we thought—This was very good African art. We had a very good source in South Africa, who supplied us prior to leaving South Africa and we've still got some of it.

(Avis)
At that time, Susan, our daughter, our youngest daughter, was doing... I don't know she did a crazy undergrad. She did it in science and art. And she was doing physiology and history of art. So I joined her. And I was doing history of art and one of the things was African art. And I became totally absorbed with African art, like this necklace, and so decided that's how we're going to *schlep* money. And I bought a fortune of African art—sculptures, very valuable. And, what's it called? The Designer's Walk. We had a table to the Designer's Walk. Whatever it cost—I think it was about 35,000 rand, which was worth not much in South Africa—it became \$35,000. It was our start. It was a good thing.

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