



Interviewed: Shirley and Hilton Silber
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(Hilton)

My dad was this odd guy where he was as racist as anybody else because that's what it was. He didn't know anything else. He was brought up there. But he was emphatically principled and fair in everything. So there was this paradox where he would be actually abusing the servants, but God forbid I said to the servant something rude, I'd get a clop. You know what I mean? It was like he always taught if you're dealing with the servants—and even though my parents didn't have financial wherewithal, they had two servants, we had a man and a woman working for us—if you wanted a cup of tea—'cause you didn't make your own cup of tea—you didn't say, "Gladness, give me tea." You said "Gladness," who was my nanny, "Gladness, please would you mind making me a cup of tea?" Meanwhile, my dad could screaming and ranting and raving and whatever. So there was this absolute paradox. I think that's sort of what taught me the...reason why there was no way I could live there. Once we'd seen how the other world lives—I'd go back to the fact there was no television. 'Cause you didn't see how the other world lived. Books were all censored. Newspapers were censored. The movies you all saw were censored. Half of them didn't even come into the country. We actually had a [sic] when we were still in university in pharmacy school, we had a Sunday night, clandestine—which a lot of people did—movie club, where you'd rent this massive, old projector and show these movies that were banned. And you did run the risk of being arrested. You know? Luckily, we never were, but we'd go to someone's house, take out little folding chairs, and set it up in their living room and watch this movie. And it wasn't sexually explicit. It was like political movies. It was stuff that wasn't allowed. And Shirley and I, at some stage, got involved in black theatre—not acting but going to it. And we'd be the only white people in the whole audience. And thinking back, we were stupid 'cause we could probably be arrested 'cause we were in a black area. We weren't allowed there at certain hours. And we saw all these wonderful plays that actually shaped some of our changes in South Africa. But yeah, I don't think politically it affected me. You were always scared. You were always worried the police were listening. To the day my parents died, and they'd been in Canada twelve years, they still didn't talk about anything confidential or financial or anything over the telephone. They still were too scared to talk over the telephone. You didn't say anything to anybody. So you were always nervous. I guess it did shape you [sic] us politically, but I had an idyllic childhood. It didn't bother me, you know, at all.

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