

Interviewed: Shirley and Hilton Silberg

Oral History Clip Title: I Carried A Gun

Theme: Ties To Southern Africa

Interviewer: Naomi Raichyk

Date: 3 Sep. 2015

Oral History Number: AC 419

(Hilton)

A few years later—no, more than a few years later. Mark was sixteen.

(Shirley)

Yeah.

(Hilton)

So it was like 1986. My brother had visited my mom and said, “You’d better go see your mother. She’s really sick.” Well, she wasn’t sick. She was just getting old and sometimes old people don’t get out of their pyjamas. And we rushed back, my son and I—my oldest. And I was very uncomfortable. We left early. I was very uncomfortable in South Africa. I was walking along Durban Beachfront ’cause my parents were now living there. With Mark—and Mark’s a big boy. He could have protected me against anybody...even though he was sixteen. I was videoing to show Shirley what the place looked like. And I heard these feet running behind me and I actually got such a fright I just dropped into like [sic] not a fetal position but...And it was just a guy running for a bus. And I’m like, “No, I’ve had enough.” So I went to my parents and I’m like, “Ma, you’re okay. You see us every couple of years in Canada. We’re gone.” And we just [sic] I was very (inaudible) What made it more uncomfortable was it was just before a long weekend in Durban and they were expecting an influx of tons and tons of people, which always happened. And on every third corner was a army combat vehicle. It’s like [sic] it’s called a Buffalo, that if you blow it up it doesn’t blow up. And I’m like, “Are you kidding me? I’m going to be here on a long weekend when they’ve got army vehicles and police out? I’m gone.” And seeing the guns and all that again. I carried a gun when I was there. That was one of the happiest days of my life when I sold my gun. And seeing guns and putting my child in there. I just said, “We’re going,” and we left early. And I have no desire to every go back.

(Shirley)

That was it.

(Hilton)

That was it. So...

(Shirley)

But it was really funny. When we took the kids...back (inaudible) that time we'd gone to London and gone back. His dad had taken [sic] had wanted to take us all to a game reserve.

(Hilton)

[laughs]

(Shirley)

So you have nothing to do and you drive around in a car and you see all the lions and tigers and things. And—Well, first of all, the van he rented did not have car seats. It did not have seatbelts. It had nothing. So... And he was driving like a lunatic 'cause heaven forbid you drive slowly, a black person may attack you. 'Cause they were just really frightened now of anybody black. And so I was sitting like this (extends arms in both directions) holding my children down in the back of the car.

(Hilton)

[makes bouncing motion] Bouncing along.

(Shirley)

Bouncing around like a crazy person. And we get to the game reserve and we have this little cottage, which came with a cook. Cook was a black guy who came and barbequed for us. I'd brought my children up not to see colour so this was like their nanny at home. This was someone who was cooking for us. So they were standing, talking to him and they're all very small—What? Seven, eight, nine?

(Hilton)

Yeah. [laughs]

(Shirley)

And I've got a picture of my daughter standing [sic] all my kids with this guy—his name was Absalom—with his arm around my children.

(Hilton)

Hugging Maxine.

(Shirley)

And my in-laws—

(Hilton)

—went ballistic.



(Shirley)

—just freaked. They wanted to pack us up and go home. And I couldn't explain to them that my children see a man. They see a man. They don't see what you see. They see a man who's making them food.

Don't—

(Hilton)

He's nice to them.

(Shirley)

—change that. Yeah.

OJASALP.ORG