



Interviewed: Karrie Weinstock
Oral History Clip Title: Triangle of Hope
Theme: Ties To Southern Africa
Interviewer: Lisa Newman
Date: 11 Jul. 2016
Oral History Number: AC 535

(Karrie)

I met Peter Oliver, who you may know is a philanthropist and a very successful restaurateur in Toronto. And he and I, not knowing it at the time, were at the identical event in Toronto when the Reismans had Nelson Mandela to their home at the time he was given the Freedom of the City by the City of Toronto. They had an event and they invited former South Africans to attend. So Peter was there because he is a well-known philanthropist and businessman. I was there because the Branksome Hall choir had been invited to sing the South African national anthem there. So we were in the same room. We didn't know each other, but we both heard Nelson Mandela say to this gathering of South Africans expats, "Your country needs you. You have been out of the country for so long. I understand why." He did not pass judgment on us but he said, "What are you going to do for South Africa now?" And that truly resonated for Peter Oliver and he went back to the part of South Africa in the Eastern Cape where he had been to an independent school, St. Andrew's College. And he went and spoke to the headmaster there and he said, "I'm looking for an opportunity in South Africa." And he said, "Funny you should say that. There is a small school in the rural areas in the Eastern Cape in Queenstown that has just been started and some of the faculty from St. Andrew's College are helping with it. Maybe they could use your help." And Peter Oliver drove for two hours into rural eastern Transvaal and walked into this tiny school and he said, his words, "When I walked into that building I felt that God was in that building." And he felt that he found the opportunity. And the school was called "The Get Ahead Project School." And it was just a small warehouse with just about nothing in it and these few dedicated teachers who were trying to give an independent school education...a very low-fee paying independent school education to a small gathering of children. And he came back to Toronto and he mobilized his fundraising efforts and his buddies and he said, "We have to build this school into something." And it is now a flourishing independent school with 1,200 students. He built a second school in another very impoverished area 35 kilometres outside of Queenstown in an area called Whittlesea. And combined [sic] this is one of the most amazing independent schools you will ever visit. So, Peter Oliver came to Branksome Hall and he said, "I have a dream" that we will have what he called "a triangle of hope" that independent school students in Toronto's privileged independent school community, where his children were at school, would connect with a public school in downtown Toronto in a high needs area and then connect with the Get Ahead School in Queenstown. This was an amazingly creative vision [draws a triangle shape with her hands]. And he spoke to Karen Jurjevich and me. He knew that I was South African. And I said, "That's amazing." And Karen said to me, "Karrie, fly there and see what this is all about. Maybe we could send students

OJASALP.ORG



there.” So I did. I went there and I remember phoning her once I had driven to the school and to Whittlesea. I got on my cell phone and I said, “Karen, we have found the most amazing opportunity both for our girls and for the students at the Get Ahead Project School and for our local public school in St. Jamestown.”

OJASALP.ORG