

Interview: Paddy Kearney

Q So when and where were you born?

A I was born in Peitermaritzberg in 1942.

Q And what kind of background?

A My parents were both SA, from C.T. but of their parents two were from Ireland and two from here but of Irish descent. So quite strong Irish Catholic background.

Q And were they political?

A I heard a great deal chiefly from my grandfather on my father's side, who was very anti British, with a kind of typical Irish attitude, lets say. But I heard very little about SA. There wasn't much discussion about the situation in SA, but chiefly of injustices that have been carried out against Irish people over the centuries and it was quite a long perspective that was being spoken about.

Q Did you have any particular sense about what being a white S African meant or was there not a big issue about that?


A It really wasn't a big issue until my eldest brother went to university in Peitermaritzberg and he began to come back with questioning attitudes and that I think had a very big influence on me.

Q And was there an awareness of blacks in your home?

A Yes. Chiefly of, obviously of domestic workers and people who came to do laundry and that kind of thing. And I was aware that my mother in particular was very concerned in a strange way for equality. She was someone who didn't like people to win prizes; if she was ever organising a contest she wanted to make sure that everybody got a prize. And that I think was quite an influence on my thinking.

Q And then was it not till university that ^{you got} more aware of the issues?

A Yes. Yes.

Q Was that at Maritzberg?


A Yes, I studied one year through UNISA, in Maritzburg

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A but the other two at the university in Natal.

Q What did you study?

A I studied oddly enough, my majors were Afrikaans and Nederlands and Biblical Studies. But I was supposed to be a teacher at that stage and I was supposed to be going to teach Afrikaans.

Q When you say suppose, did politics creep in?

A No, I just wasn't very keen to teach Afrikaans. It's one of the most boring subjects on the curriculum and students hate it and so. The reason why I was interested in doing it is the course had a lot of literature in it and at that time there was a group of poets called the 'Sester Hous', who were making something of a break through and it looked as though they were going to have a more profound effect on Afrikaner thinking than they actually did. It wasn't quite the liberalising influence one had hoped for.

Q That is interesting that you would have looked to Afrikaans rebels rather than English speaking in the literature. I mean how did the Afri..and certainly Pietermaritzberg is not a very Afrikaans place.

A No, it isn't, no.

Q Was that a rebellion thing, or what was that, intrigue? Or what?

A Intrigued, yes and people were saying to me you should study Afrikaans. What, ja, my father was a civil servant and he had suffered a lot because he had to learn Afrikaans and had to compete against Afrikaans speaking officials so he more or less drummed into all of us, I suppose he expected we were all going to be civil servants or something, we should all learn Afrikaans. So he coached us a lot. I was quite good at it. I guess that was one of the reasons why.

And then one heard a lot about these, this group of poets and...

Q Who was that group? Was that Breytenbach, Brink or..

A Brink, yes, ja, I am trying to think of..there was a lso Adam Small in C.T. then and even people like Opperman, was quite a significant person at that time. But the promise wasn't realised actually. Ja.

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Q Was there anything in those early days that you read that especially impressed you or made you get involved?

A Again, I think in a kind of oblique way - I went to a Catholic School - I was ten years in one particular school..Ok can we interrupt...

End of tape.