

Averil Oliver

Averil was born in Wales and worked in the UK throughout the Second World War. She met a South African and married in 1947 and left the UK for South Africa in 1948. Both moved up to Rhodesia in 1950. They had children and she worked a little. She joined the BSAP in 1963 and also worked in the Prime Minister's office (where she met Brian). Averil joined the BSAP again in 1970. At some point she divorced and remarried Brian. Brian and Averil left Zimbabwe for the UK in 1982.

This is Dr Sue Onslow on 9th May 2008, interviewing Mrs Averil Oliver in North Cerney. Mrs Oliver, thank you very much indeed for talking to me, and for the amount of time your husband and you have given me this afternoon. Can you tell me, please, where were you born and why did you decide to emigrate to Rhodesia?

Well, Sue, it's lovely to meet you and I'm happy to talk to you. I was born in Cardiff in South Wales and worked in a shipping office right throughout the war. At the end of the war, everything was so drab and I met a man who had been brought up in South Africa and was very keen to go back; and he made it sound so nice and I thought what a wonderful idea. I was just dead keen to get out of England. At the time you know, everything was so... It went down so much at the end of the war and we'd worked so hard during the war that it sounded a wonderful idea. So we got married in the October and we managed to get a passage out to Durban in May 1948. Unfortunately, it wasn't really as wonderful as I had expected and I was not well at all. I had dreadful asthma in Durban and the Doctor said "oh it's a bad place. You should go up country" and I thought, we've only just arrived, we had no money. We'd just started work, but we worked for about a twelve month and then my husband's cousin had moved up to Rhodesia and he wrote down and said why don't you come up here? It's a lovely country; it's far enough away from the coast and everything else. So my husband was offered a job in Umtali and so we packed up in January 1950 and moved up to Rhodesia to Umtali. We had a couple of months in Umtali and then we were put out in the bush, living in a caravan and tent. I really felt as though I was pioneering, believe me. Water from the river to wash, and milk from native cows, you know, and that sort of thing. But it was a wonderful life. We never had a cold

It didn't dare! So what were your family links back in England? Did you keep close ties with the UK?

Oh yes I did, because my Mother and Father were still alive. I have two sisters and we've kept in touch all through the years. Funnily enough, I only discovered after my Mother died when I came back in 1985, that my Great-Grandfather had been involved in the Jameson raid

So you hadn't known about those connections?

I had no idea of my South African connections at all, which is such a pity because it would be nice to talk to my Father about it

So did your Father grow up in South Africa?

No, no, he was born and brought up here. By then his Grandmother, his Mother, and his Grandmother had moved back to England to Herne Bay area. So, he was always very reticent about his boyhood and that and in those days (00:03:44) children didn't ask parents - not like they do today. So I never really knew much about him.

But did your parents ever comment on your decision to move first to South Africa, and then to Rhodesia?

Not at all. Once they realised I was going, it seemed to be just one of those things

But, Averil, where did you regard as home?

Oh I think this country, Wales certainly. Wales, most definitely. I think growing up in Wales and going to school, we were very much taught to be Welsh and be proud of it in our young days. St David's Day was always a holiday and made much of and I think that stayed with me. In fact, I don't know what I'm doing in England now

So when your husband says "We felt Rhodesian", you really felt Welsh-Rhodesian? Is that what you're telling me?

No, I felt Rhodesian then but underneath I was Welsh. I adopted Rhodesia as my country and I felt very Rhodesian, a very loyal...

Were there many other people from Cardiff, from Wales, that you knew in Rhodesia?

No, none that I knew initially. They did have a strong Cambrian society which I didn't join. I joined the Sons of England Society because my husband was English, but I did meet in working met lots of people who'd come from Wales, various parts

So how soon did you start work when you arrived in Rhodesia?

We arrived in 50, I think from 53 through till, from 51 to 54 I did, I'd already had two children so I did odd little temporary jobs and that to be with the children more. I only actually started work proper when I joined the police in 1963, as a civilian you know

So what were your responsibilities? What was your position when you joined the police?

Well, I went as a secretary to the officer in command of that particular police district which was one of the big districts in Salisbury

This is working for the BSAP?

Yes

Who was your boss?

(00:06:26) Well, I had several. He was classed the officer commanding province and I had several, because they did tours of duty and then moved round. So I worked first for Mr Sherriff, then Mr Jouning with various number 2s.

How long did they tend to stay in post? Was this a sort of two year posting and then they were moved on?

It seemed to vary. I mean, Mr Sherriff was there about two or three years and then Mr Jouning came and then he stayed right through, till '67 I think it was

So this was a position in Salisbury, was it a secretarial position?

Yes, purely secretarial

What was the security situation like in Salisbury in 1963/1964 that you recall?

I can remember lots of little incidents in the actual African townships but I didn't feel any.... Well, home seemed very secure. I wasn't really conscious of much 63/64. 65 when UDI was declared we became very security conscious but for a time everything went along very quietly as though nothing had happened

How long did you stay in that particular job?

Until 1967 and I moved to do a temporary job for six months in the Prime Minister's office as his Social Secretary which I loved. But I didn't want to do it permanently, so I went back to police when the six months were up. Then about four months later a permanent job came up in the Prime Minister's office on the business side, on the cabinet secretarial side, so I thought "ah, that's more for me"

So you weren't in charge of his diary any more?

No, I didn't like that side of it a bit. It was lovely, I met a lot of interesting people, visitors and that but no, it wasn't really my scene

So your second job in the Prime Minister's office: you say the business side, what exactly was that?

That was just as a secretary to the various cabinet secretaries which is how I met my husband, Brian really

Well, his comment was very interesting, talking about the security of the state question, on where business and evading sanctions fitted into that framework. Was that your sense at the time that this was part of the security of your country?

(00:09:19) Oh yes. Yes, one became very conscious of it by nature of the work one was doing

What was the nature of your work?

Well, as secretary to the...I typed all the cabinet, not the Cabinet Minutes but the cabinet committee minutes and that sort of thing you know and various things arising from that

So to do with sanctions, evasions, securing contracts on external markets, all of that? I remember looking at the South African archives that the Prime Minister decided all that information should be put together. Is that your recollection?

Sue, I've no idea what happened to all those records afterwards

That's a personal question

Sorry, I've no idea

So how long did you stay in that particular job?

Until 1970. later in 1970 and then I went back to police for a short time and then...

End of Tape

Part two talking to Mrs Averil Oliver

Mrs Oliver, you say that you went back to the BSAP in June of 1970?

That's right

Was that a voluntary move by you, or were you conscripted?

Well, it was just a change round in the office generally, but I must admit, I didn't settle very well back in police and I was there until the November 1970.

So you were in the BSAP June 1970 to November 1970, and then you became personal secretary to the secretary for defence?

That's right

In the BSAP what was the role of women? Was it principally as secretaries, as admin support staff? Were there any women who were in higher administrative positions?

Not really, not really at that stage. On the civilian side they were mainly just sort of secretaries, clerks and that type of thing. There wasn't a lot of civilians (00:01:25) in the Police and a lot of the other work was done by serving men and women. We had quite a few women in the police at the time

I'm talking to other members of the BSAP so I very much hope that I can interview some female members of the BSAP

Oh, that would be lovely, yes

Because I think that's a very necessary element. So you went to work as PS for the secretary of defence and who was that in 1970?

At the time it was Mr Tony Parker. He was a lovely man, he was permanent secretary for defence, I stayed with him until I moved back to the Prime Ministers office, into his other office in the May 1977

So you had something of a ringside seat then when the security situation started to deteriorate in Rhodesia?

Oh yes, I did. I did because the secretary of defence had the operation reports from all around the country, so he knew what was going on

So at that point then, the security of the country was the responsibility of the regular military, but they were reporting to the secretary of defence?

Oh yes, who in turn worked with the Joint Operations Command which was the air force and army generals as well

End of tape

Averil, you mentioned that you became the personal secretary of the secretary for defence, and you were starting to outline how the operations management of Rhodesia was conducted. I had said that you must have felt you had a ringside seat given your particular position?

Oh yes, I did at the time. I did feel that, very involved and very sort of interested in what was going on, concerned but...

Well you had in security terms a very, very sensitive job?

Oh yes I did

So could you discuss this with anybody else within the office or with you seeing the sort of material that was highly classified in security terms?

No, I never did. Perhaps Mr Parker himself would speak to me about the odd thing occasionally, but other than that I shut it out of my mind when I went (00:01:06) home because it wasn't the sort of thing you could talk about outside of the office really

But in general terms, what did you feel you were fighting for? Your husband mentioned that he felt you were fighting for a cause?

Yes I think we did. By then we were becoming more sort of Rhodesian in feeling, more Rhodesian loyalty because we were working for something that could be worth while. I think that would sort of sum it up really

So what were you working for? That you felt? What sort of society, what sort of country did you feel you were trying to build and to protect?

Oh I would say a country with more European, western standards that we were used to, plus trying to make it a more multi racial. You know, bringing on Africans because I had worked in the police with a lot of the African police themselves and Sergeants and they were all very good. You could rely on them. You'd be happy to trust them so I could perhaps see that expanding and making more of a multi racial country, but keeping the standards as we were used to really

When you say standards, what do you mean? That's a phrase I come across a lot in talking to Rhodesians or in the literature, what was it shorthand for?

Perhaps culturally, not that culture's the right word for it really. A way of doing things properly, ordered, a way of doing things properly and cleanliness, keeping streets clean, more of that type of thing really I think

So if you like, civic order so safe streets? law and order? Integrity, financial honesty, education?

Education, a big education, yes

So really a meritocracy, not a class based society but...?

Not a class based society, no, more...

So one where honesty, respect for law...?

Yes

But it could be said that those are also African standards?

The African standards in the rural areas where they are good. I think in some ways they're better than ours because there you have your extended family. There's no putting old people off into retirement homes and things like that, they all have their part in the scheme of things

(00:04:35) Family values, support within the community are very, very much African values too?

They are, yes they were definitely. Not too sure about now, but certainly I think they are in their own way even now but certainly then they were

So what did you feel you were fighting against?

Again I think, like Brian, against communism because we felt that, I don't quite know how to put this

End of tape

Mrs Oliver, how much do you feel that the war from say December 1972 helped to create and sustain a sense of Rhodesian patriotism, Rhodesian identity?

Oh enormously, enormously. I think up till then we'd all been Welsh or Scottish or Irish. We all had our little societies but then when we felt that we were all being attacked and the world was against us, then I think we did start to become Rhodesians and become proud of being Rhodesians.

Do you think there was anything else that helped to create you as a sense of a tight community? After all, you could say that the war was a negative force, anything positive?

No, except we were fighting for what we believed in really and I think everyone felt that. Those people who are still there in the country felt the same. You know, we were fighting for Rhodesia for a way of life, that was it really

How much did you feel at the time it was really a man's war? Your husband's commented about the sense of macho Rhodesia culture being encouraged by the call up, by volunteering for service?

Well, for me personally I felt a bit of a part of it because I was still in police reserve. I used to do duties at our local police station

What sort of duties?

Mainly charge office and phone. Just general charge office duties but I then was moved into what they call the BSAP 'A' reserve which we did all sorts of duties then at the main police station in Salisbury and we used to go out on patrol cars with the male police and detain prisoners. You know, just virtually what a normal police woman did, so I felt I was doing my bit as well

Were your friends also involved in this sort of police auxiliary work?

Well some of my friends were, yes, you know in their own way in various little police stations. I had a couple of good friends who also were in 'A' reserve (00:02:46) and did duty in main stations same time as I did. In fact I had one special friend and we used to be always on together because we had to go out in twos. They tried us once doing foot patrols round Salisbury on the Saturday morning. Oh, that was tiring!

So you objected and that was the last time you did that?

No, we didn't object. We said we'd try and if it was any help we'd do it - you know, walking the beat but that was tiring. No, I think we enjoyed it, we enjoyed it at the time

Most of it then was civilian, if you like?

Yes, it was all civilian really. On the fringes of the military

But from your job then though in the ministry of defence, it was very much national. So how much did you feel it was a total war, that the front line and home front were involved - in fact, much as it had been during the Second World War in England?

Oh I think yes, as the war progressed, one became increasingly conscious it was total war especially when it came to travelling. You couldn't travel say from Salisbury to Bulawayo except in convoy with an armed escort. So you wouldn't travel along those sort of roads on your own because you could be attacked. One became very conscious of a state of war

But it must have also become relatively normal to feel that sense of physical threat?

Well yes it did

You just got used to it?

You got used to it. It became a way of life

Was there any sense of personal threat, where you felt particularly vulnerable?

Not really, no, I don't think I did except once, only once that I really was rather scared. I was travelling down to Johannesburg, my Uncle had been taken ill and I went down by coach, and we should have had convoy from Salisbury to Bulawayo and then from Bulawayo down to the border. We were supposed to have a convoy but there wasn't, so we were one little coach all on our own with a police reserve little Land Rover with a gun on the back and an ordinary police Land Rover in front. We were way out from Bulawayo, out in the bush and there was an almighty crash in front and a terrible noise; the Land Rover

had hit a cow which had wandered across the road and slid into the ditch. This poor cow was on its back making the most dreadful noise; everyone in the coach woke up and said “what’s going on?” It really was scary and we had to shoot the cow and pull it off the road because it was too badly hurt and (00:05:54) the gunfire! Now that’s really going to draw attention, but it didn’t. But for that, that’s the only time I think I really felt a bit scared, a bit vulnerable

But otherwise, apart from that incident you felt generally safe? Did you differentiate between terrorists who you felt were attacking you, and black Rhodesians themselves?

Well yes, I don’t think I ever... we were so used to working with Rhodesians and having servants, milk boys, postman they all came round, you didn’t look on them as a threat. They were just doing their job, it was very much black, the ordinary blacks and Terrs, I think

So did you feel then the war from 72 onwards to 1980, was a civil war or did you think it was an externally provoked and funded war?

I think we thought it was externally invoked, but also becoming more civil as well. The Terrs were coming in and stirring up the local people as well and it was becoming more civil

So when do you remember feeling that Zimbabwean, if I use that word, nationalism was really a force increasingly to be reckoned with?

When? Oh not really sure, it sort of crept up on me

Do you recall a time when you felt “we have to accelerate political change. We have to speed up building up an African middle class”?

Do you know I don’t think I ever felt that afterwards. I was so involved in fighting the war that by then building up a middle class didn’t seem to matter. We had to win the war first, I think that was my personal attitude

How far from what you remember would you say that was also the attitude of your friends in your community: win the war first and then start to build the peace?

I think most of my own circle probably felt the same, although we didn’t really talk about it very much but I think possibly they did

So you didn’t talk about the security situation and fighting and...?

(Husband – Yes because we were all, everybody was the same so there was nothing to talk about)

Because it was a given?

Yes, unless someone close to you was killed or something had happened then you spoke about that particular incident but that was all really

So how do you recall the position of women in Rhodesian society in the Rhodesian war? You can be as polite or rude as you like

(00:09:27) Well I'm trying to put myself in the younger people... I mean, for myself I didn't feel everyone was being macho anything like that. I got used to working with men and I enjoyed it. In fact, I would rather work with men than with women quite frankly, from experience

Why's that?

You don't get any cattiness. You know, I had a wonderful time working at police and with the police women, but when I went into defence first and then in PM's office and both where they have a large registry of women. I thought oh I can't do with this

How many women that you remember were actually working of those that you knew? I mean, did you mostly know working women?

Yes I think I did. Most of the people in our area seemed to work. There were some with younger families who didn't work but the vast majority, I think, worked in those days

I'm just trying to think of your recollections of the women's contribution to the fighting. In what ways? What different areas in which women contributed?

(Husband – Well, manning the communications and police stations outside)

And on the farms and that they all did their duties, what else did women do? I'm just trying to think

(Husband – Well, farmers' wives ran their farms while the husbands were away on army/police duties. They were tremendous and the women, remember that poor Mrs Smith? She was on duty when the news of contact came over - 2 blokes dead, one was her own son. She went through all the motions, she did all the right things and then she fainted afterwards. In the communications, in the area of communications they were very responsible, very good)

And the younger women, I think, who had boyfriends or young husbands who were in the forces and that and doing call ups and that sort of thing. There was a big moment: you know that song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon"? Well, outside the Drill Hall in Salisbury there were some gorgeous great big old oak trees and there were always yellow ribbons round them, I think. That was the younger one's contribution because otherwise they worked in offices and things like that

So it was only later that you came to see it really as a civil war, as a rising African nationalism?

Yes, definitely

When did you feel that it was inevitable that there was going to be a transition to black majority rule? How did you feel about that?

(00:12:50)

Apprehensive at first. I'm just trying to think because in 1979 I went to...

May 1978 to May 1979, you were on the executive council

That was when the executive council known as Zimbabwe/Rhodesia was formed, and that was when I went to work for the Reverend Sithole. Then they had the elections and Muzorewa's government came in, and I worked for this little Minister of local government (Walter Mtinkulu). Sithole was very nice, very affable but he wasn't really interested; he was more interested in writing his books really. I used to see him perhaps once or twice a week for cabinet meetings and that was it. Mtinkulu I liked; he was more interested in doing a good job, finding out what went on and so I quite liked him and then of course Lancaster House cropped up and the elections and all that. And then when I heard that Mugabe had got in then I was apprehensive because all along he'd been a bogeyman. Really it seemed to be his guerrillas who did all the intimidation and the dreadful beatings and that of their own people in the thing, so then I was apprehensive but thought "Well, you've got to give it a try" so we stayed at independence.

(Husband – at the independence celebrations, we sat in the balcony immediately above Mugabe and Prince Charles when the...)

So you were in Rufaro football stadium?

We were in the football stadium that night, yes

So were you affected by the tear gas that they let off outside to dispel the crowds outside?

No, we were high enough and it sort of drifted away. We were lucky

(Husband - you could see it drifting over the other side of the ground. The wind took it that way)

But, yes, we saw that

(Husband - I felt quite cold and emotionless...)

Yes I think I did. It was just... it was an occasion and we were there, but it didn't mean a lot at the time

So you and your husband left Zimbabwe, as it then, was in 1982?

Yes

Did you come straight back to this country or did you go down to South Africa first?

(00:15:56) No, we came straight back here. We'd already thought about South Africa and while the Cape attracted us because it's so lovely. We were looking a little beyond that, particularly with Brian's health, you know, having had the heart attack so we thought we'd be more sensible to come back here

And how did you find Britain?

Well it was still home, but I didn't like it. I didn't like the way things were changing here, but we decided and we thought "Well, we've just got to make the best of it now and make the most of here"

So you came back in 1982? Well, that was just after the Falklands War so this is the era of Mrs Thatcher?

Yes

So I'm thinking you must have felt very different from your fellow British citizens?

Well yes, one does. I think living abroad changes you. It broadens your whole outlook and we were used to people in Rhodesia, friends, families dropping in on their way through and expect a bed for the night. It was just an accepted thing. You loved to see them and waved them on their way. Of course here particularly when we had a little mobile home just down the road here, when we first came back and people used to look so shocked at us because we had family dropping in and cousins and things. You know, we didn't keep to a set routine as everyone here seems to do as I grew up with really - you know, you get up, have breakfast you clean your house...

So you weren't out scrubbing your doorstep?

No! So yes, one does feel different

So do you still feel Rhodesian?

I think I do really, Welsh down at the bottom, I do feel Rhodesian really

Did you stay in close touch with your Welsh family all the time you were in Rhodesia?

Oh yes, I mean my Mum and Dad used to write and then I came over and saw them a couple of times on holiday, and kept in touch with my two sisters, not so much with cousins and things. But I used to hear all the news of them from my sisters who would write. And then we all met up at various times after we came back

When the war was heating up, were your family back here urging you to return, to get out, to leave?

No I don't think they realised, you know, what was going on out there
(00:19:00)

Well, it was pretty well reported in the British press

But, no, I don't think I ever had any pleas from my parents to come back: "It's dangerous out there", anything like that. They just accepted things as they were

(Husband – probably because we gave the impression that we were managing fine)

And of course you couldn't write and say much of what was going on anyway and so we just...

Why not?

(Husband – well, because we knew more than most people did)

And once the elections were over and Mugabe was installed, well, there wasn't a great deal to write about initially anyway

I can ask both of you because you were intimately involved in the whole question of state security in its various forms in Rhodesia, how closely were all the newspapers managed? I know that PK Van Der Byl in his position as minister of information was very keen to make sure that a certain line was projected and pursued through the press. Would you agree that that was wholeheartedly successful?

(Husband – No, not really. The Rhodesia Herald in general adopted the tone of the average Rhodesian reader who was white and middle class and in general they supported the government. But if there was something to criticise, then it was criticised and ministers would be displeased, exactly the same as ministers here. But in other respects, Van Der Byl adopted the official line, particularly in the African areas: they did try to influence newspapers which circulated there, mainly by means of what was a government newspaper. I've forgotten its name now but it gave the government line...)

I'm thinking of the Herald, Bulawayo Chronicle but I don't know the name of the African paper...

(Husband – no, within the township, within the African townships and they were printed in Shona and English and presumably in Ndebele down Matabeleland and that sort. That was nothing but a propaganda newspaper that sought to give the government line all the way along: conceal bad news, give good news)

How about radio: was there the same propaganda bent put out by RBS?

(Husband – I don't know much about this side of it)

(00:22:35) **I'm just asking you whether you remember because when we listen say to the BBC now, part of us are saying "well, we are relying on it as a source of information" but then on certain news stories you start to question, you think "wait a minute, what's coming out here? How truthful is that report?"**

(Husband – yes, I take your meaning. I think the RBC on the whole was pretty factual and independent. As far as I recall the government had no hand in who was to be chairman of the RBC. I can't even recall whether the RBC was a state institution or a... I've got an idea it was)

It was taken over at UDI

(Husband – yes I think it was, that's right, taken over but still autonomous, a sense of editorial independence, even the government certainly was always pressurising the press and the RBC to...)

Well, that's propaganda, both overt and covert to feed a line. Do you remember how important do you think was music - be it pop (rock) music or popular music in helping to create and sustain popular culture to keep Rhodesia going?

(Husband – Well, a lot of the songs that were current which were popular among black and white were. They came from the African music halls and a lot of the tunes and the words were adapted to army vocabulary for instance. But I must confess we were still in the realms of Mozart and Beethoven)

You weren't tuning in every day?

(Husband – we weren't, no)

But what about your children? You mentioned your son and your daughter?

(Husband – my son couldn't tell you one note from another, nor my daughter for that matter)

My son and daughter were into the Beatles and Cliff Richard and the Shadows. That's all they were really interested in

Now I'm just thinking about what helps build a culture, what helps support it? If it's newspapers, if it's music, if it's books, if it's the war?

(Husband – well, among the young people of course it was the schools they went to. There are still tremendous bonds in the Rhodesian world wide

magazine which we get; we still get meetings of the Roosevelt school form 6 of 1975 or whatever and that sort of thing, pretty much in the American style)

So, oh right, that was current in Rhodesia at the time of having class reunions?

(00:26:22) (Husband – yes and when people went into the forces, particularly the men there was quite of a lot of, you know, “what school did you go to?” Guinea Fowl, ah bloody Guinea Fowl...)

And Prince Edward was the pink elephants

How about sport, that other great bond building...?

(Husband – Rhodesians were very, very... a great deal of sport, sport was very important to their lives, for men and women and they were good. When I first went out there, half the South African rugby team came from one small village called Inyazura; they were local farmers, that sort of thing. But you could say Rhodesians were sport mad: of course they had the climate for it, lovely)

And it was very much part of the school curriculum of course then and they went back to school in the afternoons for rugby, cricket, swimming the lot and it was compulsory I mean

That’s almost a public school education

(Husband – it was similar to, that’s right. Yes but I had the great honour, I always regarded it as an honour then and I still do: in 1956 I was on the Mashonaland athletics and cycling board, and I organised the first interracial sports athletics meeting. It was held at your local school Roosevelt)

No, Belvedere?

(Husband – no it was the secondary school)

Mabelreign

(Husband – Mabelreign, yes that’s right, it was held there and half way through the afternoon the rain came down! But it was the first multi racial sports meeting and I felt very proud about it; thereafter all the athletics meetings were like that)

You’re painting very much an image that although it was total war, war was also incidental, it was peripheral to everyday life?

(Husband – oh yes, I mean people carried on with their lives)

This is the paradox that we need to remember

(Husband – that’s right and in those lives gradually, gradually increasingly Africans came to join in. If we’d been given another fifteen years I’d have said we’d have got to not necessarily one man one vote, but we’d have got to a stage of complete social integration including housing if we’d been given another fifteen years. What would have happened on the political side I don’t (00:29:58) know, but on the social side virtually complete integration except for those who didn’t want to integrate)

So this Oral History project after all which is called “why did you fight?” It wasn’t just you were fighting against communism, you were fighting for a Rhodesian cultured way of life, your version of a Rhodesian cultured way of life?

(Husband – oh yes. Well let’s put it this way, that was growing with it, I don’t think it was that nobody stood up and said “white Rhodesian way of life where we all join in sports meetings and we all go to restaurants and that sort of thing, these things just happened gradually. The restaurants were open to everybody and swimming baths eventually, and I don’t think terrorists helped the situation that way at all)

Thank you because you’ve presented a much more complex picture than sometime features in the British popular memory ...

(Husband – oh yes, I think it was complex but at the same time it kind of grew naturally, but encouraged by government legislation which banned first of all on the railways, banned... when I first went there it was whites only in first class, coloureds and Asians in second class, Africans in third class. That was real South African style, but it wasn’t long before all that changed too)

Just as my last question to you both, how far can looking back it be seen as an attempt at nation-building?

Oh definitely, yes I think that was a sort of our ideal. We did feel as a nation certainly

(Husband – we were a nation but what brought it about was UDI and the war helped it along)

Your husband has intervened, so is it more a story of the men than the women?

(Husband – I’m sorry! But would you agree with that?)

Well I would agree with that. Yes I would, it was a lovely dream, an ideal, something to work for

(Husband – not that we ever had time to sit around and dream about it. We were always too busy, but at the back of it all that’s what was...)

Which is why we stayed and got on with it

(Husband – sure you had a hard core element who would never have wanted to integrate with blacks. Certainly you had them, same as you’ve got those mad people in South Africa. Those - those what were they? Who went riding around on horses...)

(00:33:19)

Oh you’re thinking of Eugene Terreblanche and the AWB

(Husband – Terreblanche and his crowd, yes. Sure, we had the Terreblanche types but half of them went into Selous Scouts anyway, where they could work off their aggression and I think in many cases realised what a good soldier in arms a trained African was because they really did, the bonding there it was fantastic to see. It really was. But no, we had extreme right wingers. What tickled me pink was to see that Willie Irvine (Minister of Housing): he actually became a short lived member of one of Robert Mugabe’s cabinets

Short lived, as you say. Anyway, I mustn’t take up any more of your time but Mr and Mrs Oliver thank you very, very much indeed

Sue, it’s been a pleasure

End of interview