Jewish Museum
Biography Project

Zoom interview with Taffy Adler by Jonathan Ancer
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Please note: -. denotes an unfinished sentence (stops mid-sentence or interrupted)
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JA = Jonathan Ancer
TA = Taffy Adler

JA: I'd like to know a little it about your background: when did your parents arrive in South Africa? How did your family end up in South Africa?

TA: Just by way of background, Jonathan, there was quite an extensive interview in *Cutting Through The Mountain* – so that might have a lot of information on what we'll be going through. So, I know more about my father than my mother. Both came from Lithuania; I discovered they came from different sides of the country, and I had hoped to go visit their villages last year; it didn't happen. My father came from both a fairly religious but also a fairly radical family: radical in the sense that the older brothers or in fact all of them were very involved in the Yiddisher Arbiter Bund. And in fact the brother after whom I'm named, which was Tevya, was a communist and very active in the Russian army; the Russian army was a hot-bed of communist activity at the time. So, it's very possible that my grandfather came here and then went back to Lithuania. But route of my father was, he was brought out to marry someone who was already here, [Salona – 02:40 sounds like] and that didn't happen. And he came out and basically spent a bit of time working as a smous, he worked a little bit as a tailor – he was always in kind of entrepreneurial activity of some sort or another – which generally failed. He didn't have a happy life financially. He ran a dairy, he was a painter when I got to understand what he was doing, he was running a small delicatessens. And eventually he landed up working as a parking garage attendant, firstly at the City Council parking garages, and then finally before he retired, at Wits University. So, he was a kind of gatekeeper for a lot of students and staff in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

My mother seems to have come from a wealthier and cultured family. And so when she came she was able to do things like play the mandolin, and that sort of stuff. But I must say that other than that I don't know how she came and why she came; I don't know how they met – it's one of the big gaps in our family history. And I don't quite know how they met here either. I knew they did meet. They arrived here in about 1923, so just after the First World War. And the push-pull factors were obviously what was happening in the Lithuania and Russia at the time, as well as the fact that family links had been established in South Africa. The other fairly important influence was my aunt, Ray Harmel who actually to leave Lithuania because as a youngster she was caught distributing left-wing pamphlets, I assume Bund or Communist Party pamphlets. And when she arrived here she was a worker, she worked in the garment industry and she

went straight into trade union activity here; so she became a worker in the garment factories in Johannesburg at the time, and became quite influential in the Garment Workers' Union with Anna Cornelius and Solly Sachs, although she was on the opposite side of them. I don't know if you know those kind of schisms in the trade union movement – the communists and let's call them social democrats, had a different view of the world. The communists wanted to integrate the trade union movement and the social democrats, like Sachs and Cornelius, went with the legislation which allowed for separate unions, black and white unions, and the assumption that at some point they would come together.

So, that's how the parents came. And I think the family home was fairly typical in the sense that it was an intellectual home. We played chess, we listened to music, and we went to concerts. My father in his younger days used to go [indistinct 06:48] music, Yiddisher Arbiter Club which had the various activities going on; debating society, political activity. And we all went to university. My two siblings, my older brother who is [nine - unclear 07:10] years older than me; my sister who is two years older than me: so, in that sense I suppose we were a relatively typical story of moving from Bez Valley to now I'm in Melrose North, Sarah's in Adelaide and David's in Toronto.

JA: Was it a Jewish family in the sense that – I mean, I'm guessing that your father probably wasn't religious but I'm wondering if it was a traditional family, if you observed the holidays and you went to shul, if you were part of the Jewish community?

TA: A very different Jewish community. So, in fact, my father was an atheist and that's partly because his mother was incredibly religious. He went to a Yeshiva in Lithuania. [Rusein - sounds like 08:15] was village he was in. But he turned against it and I think partly because his mother ruled with an iron hand. So, we weren't religious and we didn't follow holidays, etcetera. But we were Jewish. The street that I lived in in Bez Valley, and even the street that we lived in Bertrams, had a number of Jewish families and we would walk up the street and go and spend time with them. So very much a kind of Yiddishkeit type of environment; we'd have Sunday lunches and we'd play klaberjass afterwards. So, in that sense a very Yiddish Jewish cultural family, but not a religious one.

I decided that I wanted a bar mitzvah and so I went to the local shul in Observatory; we were staying in Bez Valley at the time. And I remember trying to have a Pesach ceremony once or twice [laughter in voice] but it wasn't very well received – they tolerated it but it didn't really work for them. And I think that's the kind of framework in my own family with my wife, Jill, we've kind of followed. So, as the kids got older, we felt a need to establish a cultural identity for them. So, we joined a reform shul because we couldn't handle the restrictions of the orthodox shuls. And we are supportive members; I don't think that we are God-fearing in that sense. In fact, I don't believe in God as such. But I certainly felt that it was necessary to give the kids the kind of grounding that I had in Jewish values – and certainly they have that, in my view.

JA: Growing up, because of the influences of your father and your aunt, it was political, you grew up kind of in a political family – is that fair to say?

TA: Very much so. My father was a confirmed communist, even in the wake of the Stalin revelations or the post-Stalin revelations, and he remained a confirmed

communist, as did my aunt who went into exile. My brother was a student activist and leader; he was a NUSAS vice-president. He was banned for his activity in the education field. So, then I became an SRC president and went on to become a trade unionist.

JA: Just to go back a little bit; how did you get involved in formal opposition politics? What were some of the influences, besides your father and your aunt that got you interested in politics and interested in specifically anti-apartheid politics?

TA: It was always there; that was the family milieu. So, if you take my aunt and that influence, her husband was Michael Harmel who was the secretary of the Communist Party. Some of the events that we went to were social gatherings at Bram Fischer's house or Rusty Bernstein's house. So, that was always there; it was never an issue, the inclination was always to be progressive. I think my more formal interaction was through my brother – so when he was involved in student politics, I would sometimes go to meetings with him. And when I came to university, it was just a natural movement; I got involved in what was then called the Human Rights Society, which was on the radical left of university politics. I became involved with NUSAS, I became the so-called chair; and then I became SRC president at a time when university students were one of the few major opposition voices and activity. So, in my SRC term or just before it, I led the last legal march in Johannesburg and the first illegal march in Johannesburg – and that was in a period of months. It was just a natural – it just happened; it was part of who we were.

JA: There was no particular turning point or defining moment where you decided, this is it, I'm going to get involved – it just was a natural progression.

TA: Ja, almost everything that I've done seems to have followed that pattern. So, I've been offered, I don't know if it's an opportunity but something has happened. So, the 1970 SRC elections, and there's an interesting little Jewish link to that. So I went to Habonim and I went to a couple of Habonim camps, partly because it was the Jewish milieu and partly because they offered a scholarship; we couldn't have afforded to go otherwise. And I made some very good friends in Habonim, and that carried through to university – and in fact, there were two instances where those strong links helped. So, the Habonim group on campus helped rally my votes for SRC president; so I became SRC president partly because of the Jewish vote, if you like. So the SRC election was September 1970. And I did pull the highest number of votes, but I decided to go in as vice-president because I thought I was just not right for president; and the then president was a guy called Rex Heinke, he was an American. And he was deported in 1971. At that time, it was January 1971 I was actually in an army camp out in Lens. And there was the demonstration at the airport where he was going to leave. And, again through my Jewish connections, I arranged that I would in a tracksuit run out of the camp on a run to get to the airport – and people picked me up and took me to the airport and brought me back, and then I ran back in in my tracksuit. And again, the guys who organised that were, I don't know if you want to call them the Jewish mafia, but certainly the guys who I had linked through Habonim. And going back to the point that I was making about how things presented themselves. So, Rex left, I became SRC president at a time when there was a major clampdown.

But further on, so after that year, I went to Sussex to do a master's degree, and I came back. I had already had links with the student groupings that had gone into the trade union movement; at that time they went in via the industrial aid societies, a kind of support institution rather than the unions proper, because this group of unions was quite nascent. And I had friends who had been doing that. And I came back and I started teaching at university; I taught at UCT and then went back to Wits. And then while I was there many of the trade union organisers were banned – that's how I became a trade union organiser to fill that gap. So, what I'm saying is those kinds of opportunities came up and I just moved into them. They weren't defining moments, if you like; they came away [recording breaks.]

JA: Just to go back a little bit to your childhood. You grew up I suppose in a Jewish neighbourhood, Bertrams and Bez Valley – did you experience any anti-Semitism at all?

TA: Never. It was never an issue. It was never an issue at school; and the school had a very significant Jewish population, Cyrildene and Yeoville; not so much Bez Valley at the time. And even in the trade union movement, again, I personally have never experienced it.

JA: What school did you go to?

TA: Observatory East as a primary school, Bertrams Junior, then Observatory East, and then Athlone Boys; I matriculated in 1967.

JA: And any anti-Semitism in the army at all?

TA: No, never. Maybe I just didn't see it but it's never been an issue. I personally have always been warmly received and supported by unions, universities, school, even in government. So I personally never experienced it – and that's why I suppose I have view about how significant anti-Semitism is: I think sometimes we create it for ourselves. And that's not to belittle it, I mean, it's obviously a big issue and I don't want to belittle it at all. Let me just say that my own experience is that it hasn't been an issue for and my work, and I've always been able to exercise what I've been doing and what I believe in.

JA: Did the holocaust have any influence on your political development? A lot of the Jewish people that I've spoken to, they speak about how the holocaust influenced them to get involved – and I'm just wondering what impact that might have had on your consciousness at all.

TA: No, again, it wasn't in my world view. In Habonim the focus was very much international [indistinct 21:58], the people who were in my time, the kind of madrichim, were very expansive in their vision – so the kind of Sunday night evenings would be with guys like Ian Brodie and Charles van Onselyn and those kind of discussions. So there were big broad discussions. I was, and still am, [wry chuckle] I'm not a Zionist. I have modified my views on Israel; I've been to Israel twice and have great admiration for what has happened there. I don't know that it's going to be a lasting solution but that's a different issue. But I certainly am not a Zionist and I would always see myself -. In fact, I'm not a nationalist and even though I have infinity for what's happening for South Africa and being here, at this point I'd be associating politically with progressive groupings irrespective. There's a very interesting book which contains interviews -. That guy, who

was an Israeli, was convicted of an Israeli of spying – I think it was an atomic scientist of some sort. His daughter married a French sociologist, and they did interviews with Jewish activists in Europe in the Second World War, all of whom landed up in Israel because they had nowhere else to go after the holocaust. And the stories – they just were amazing people in terms of the kind of guerrilla activities that they did during the war. And the general sentiment is one of: we're not happy to be here but there was nowhere else to go. I wouldn't like to be in that kind of situation. And I understand that one might land up in Israel because it's the only place that's going to accept Jews without a problem.

So, the holocaust wasn't a major issue for me during my activist days. I'm more aware of it probably for two reasons. The one is just the nature of the atrocities, the extent of them. So, I've been Auschwitz, for example, the extent and the inhumanity that was possible in so-called civilized people. And then the intellectual and emotional impact that it had on people. So, and I read on issues like Jewish resistance to the Nazi onslaught and I find that fascinating, I find the fact that schools existed in ghettoes – that resistance occurred – I just find that fascinating – and power at that level of an education. That's a long story too.

JA: Can you tell us a little bit about your time in the trade union movement? How you got involved? You mentioned it briefly but how you got involved, what work you were doing and some of the things that you experienced?

TA: So, again, it was a kind of incremental development. So, as a student, the student movement started to get involved in union activity from the late 1960s and early 1970s – and so by the time I was SRC president or a NUSAS official, students particularly in Natal in Durban, with university academics, Rick Turner and Alec Irwin – we were starting to get involved in advice and support activities. And in Johannesburg we started something called the Industrial Aid Society. And, so I had a peripheral interaction with that in the early days. And when I came back I got more involved and I was teaching at Wits and Wits was the font of this kind of activity in downtown Johannesburg.

And when the unionists were active at the time, Gavin Anderson, Sipho Khubeka were banned, this must have been about 1976, I gave up my lecturing job and worked full-time in the Industrial Aid Society. And my role in the beginning was really about coordination and logistical support. So, for example, we established institutions that could that the leases in a Group Areas Act and run union activities because obviously blacks couldn't have leases in white areas. We did the fundraising. We set up links with the international agencies that were providing funding for union activities here. And then increasingly as the scope grew, we started to actually get involved in organising workers and negotiating with management. So, moving from the Industrial Aid Society, which was a workers' advice bureau, I generally moved into the coordinating bodies of the unions. In Natal they started something called the Trade Union Advisory Council, which was a coordinating body for: there was a metal union at the time, there was a garment workers union at the time; and we did a similar thing in Johannesburg, and I became the secretary of that. When we merged those two to become FOSATU which was the predecessor to COSATU, again, I became the then Transvaal regional secretary and education secretary nationally.

So, again, it was about managerial organising and logistics and funding – but increasingly getting involved in the growing union movements. So the Metal and Allied Workers' Union was growing, the Transport General Workers' Union was growing. And I started to do actual organising, meeting with workers, going to their meetings, starting to negotiate on behalf of workers as their representative to go to the shop stewards running shop steward courses, all those kind of things, because we were quite small and we were all Jack of all trades at that point in time.

A bit later when the unions became a lot more established and there had been quite a lot of consolidation – so, for example, the original FOSATU grouping when it was in the build-up to FOSATU, we started to link with two other strands in the union movement. The one was a very powerful and influential grouping of the coloured-led unions in Durban and or mainly Port Elizabeth, the National Union of the Automobile Workers', which interestingly enough, because you remember I talked about the split between the communists and the social democrats in the early days – so the automobile workers were an old tougher union; so they had a registered coloured union and an unregistered black union – but a very strong grouping. They organised and they had the first – the United Automobile Workers of South Africa, which was a black union, very strongly organised in Volkswagen. The first union as an unregistered union between the UAW and Volkswagen: So a strong militant, even though it came out of TUCSA. So we linked up with them, and then we linked up with another grouping which is mainly Transvaal-based, the [Urban Training Project [indistinct] 32:39] and formed FOSATU.

So as the unions grew, I then moved into become the Transvaal secretary of the National Union of Automobile Workers – because by that time the UAW and the coloured union, [MOROSA - sounds like 33:09], had merged to become [NAWU - sounds like]. And later on they merged with the Metal Workers' Union to become the current Metal Workers' Union of South Africa. So, by that point, again to cut a long story short, I became a full-time union organiser. I wasn't involved in the coordinating work anymore, although I retained an education post both in the union and in FOSATU; and coming out of that we organised a very successful FOSATU workers education programme; it was a 10-day programme which we ran, which basically provided leadership training to the various shop stewards.

JA: What was the security police and the government's response to the trade unions, and were you ever in any danger from the security police:

TA: Certainly the security police watched us very carefully and we had more protection than other institutions because as the union movement grew, so employers began to agree to start recognising and working with them. So, employers were opposed to police interference with their workforces because it meant an unstable workforce. And, increasingly unions were seen to be a force for acceptable negotiation; negotiation that you could channel. And also some employers, depending on the industry, were willing to accept that they had been massively underpaying and were willing to cut the super profits and just profit in order to pay a decent wage – so the idea of a living wage became quite commonplace and didn't bring the economy down as many people wanted to predict. So there was this kind of blanket of employer protection, and on occasions, for example, when things got really hot and I aware of the strikes, etcetera, I was aware that there was quite intense security police surveillance. Employers even

offered me a bed in their hospital section. So there were some very good relationships; they were cordial relationships. There was obviously the underlying tension all the time, but nonetheless, based on the fact that some progressive employers understood that unions were necessary, were part of contemporary capitalist society at that time. They recognised and supported it, and even worked on our behalf against the authorities.

So, we were always aware: there were times when -. I remember one particularly dramatic chase through Benoni. We had a Swedish guest with us, a visitor from the Swedish trade unions were very supportive. And there were these two cars pursuing me and foolish me, I thought I had lost them [chuckles]. We were with one of my black organising colleagues; and we managed to get the Alex and I thought I had lost them, and I dropped Aron in Alex township and scooted off – and the cops went after him and held him [laughter in voice] and we got away. So, in that sense you got a sense of black-white; white privilege there.

I was detained once, but that that was when I was at a meeting in Bophuthatswana – because we were organising BMW workers. And, so I spent a couple of days in a cell in Mafikeng and luckily my extensive legal contact got me out and the case was dropped. And then there was a period, and I'm not remembering the time, but when there was a big clampdown, and I went into hiding for two or three weeks. But I was never subject to the kind of treatment that many others were. I was never in solitary confinement, and I was never treated in the way that some detainees were treated – so in that sense I was lucky.

JA: The 1970s and the 1980s was a time of huge repression. Did you ever feel that the liberation movement would triumph? What was the political atmosphere like? And were you optimistic about achieving democracy?

TA: It operated at a couple of levels for us. The union movement was successful in its own limited focus. So, the late 1970s to the early 1980s were tough and difficult and dangerous in that sense; people did get killed, people did get detained and I was fortunate that I wasn't one of them. But from the early 1980s onwards, you started to see progress in the union field. And that obviously gave you a sense of success, of achievement. There were changes in legislation; we were starting to get decent agreements and the union movement started to be recognised as a serious force. I think then as the political temperature started to increase, there were some of the unions, and [indistinct 41:14] wasn't one of them, who started to make contact underground with the ANC and or the PAC.

And so there were linkages but we tried to protect the union movement, or I think the majority view in the FOSATU, early COSATU days, was that we shouldn't succumb to nationalist political leadership – and there was a whole big debate about that [indistinct 41:56]. From about 1986 onwards, and then I started to move out of the unions, you start to see a very strong political influence via people who had very strong links to the ANC, and in hindsight you can now see that it was Erwin, it was Ramaphosa, it was Naidoo – the guys who went into the first cabinet. And so COSATU, while retaining its shop floor base and some unions were stronger than others, it started to move much more into the political arena. And by that time I was moving into other activities.

JA: There were quite a number of Jewish activists in this generation. Did you have any particular bond with them, and did you ever discuss your Jewishness at all?

TA: No. No to both, in the sense that the Jewish activists actually took opposing views at certain times: so, for example, Judy Favish and Dave Lewis in Cape Town were supporting the idea of a general workers union as opposed to industrial workers unions. And that was a Cape Town line, as opposed to the Jewish unionist who were in Gauteng, Transvaal at the time – myself, Bernie Faneroff, amongst others, who were taking an industrial union line. So, we were opposing viewpoints at that point in time. And, so, neither did the issue of our Jewish identity [laughter in voice] nor the issue of a common political view come through. And people were just too busy with their own -. They were specifically South African unionist first where that kind of just didn't come up.

You were aware, there's no doubt that you were aware of a Jewish identity. I used to go and visit trade unionists who had been banned or who had been detained and come out of prison – and there's no doubt that there was a kind of ease, a familiarity there. And the Jewishness didn't really even happen – so, for example, a university friend of mine was Denis Hirson, Jewish. His father Baruch Hirson, was in jail for I think nine or 10 years on a sabotage charge. And we were activists in the human rights society together. The Jewish element didn't really come up. It had to do with fraternal links, strong family links, strong relationship links.

So there's another little story: Baruch came out of jail when I was student, and he was about to go into exile with his family. And I was asked to go and help him shop for clothes. So, we walked around Bree Street and Eloff Street trying to find clothes that fitted him, because he was very think at that point in time. And we got to I think the store was Barnes in Bree Street. We went into the store and Baruch in desperation said to the guy, "Look, I've been in jail for nine years, I don't know what I want; you tell me." The guy selected some stuff and Baruch went off to the changing room to try them on. [laughter in voice] The salesman said to me, "My brother was also in jail – what was he in for?" [chuckles] So, a kind of fraternal link between former jail birds, but, I would select clothes in a clothing store.

JA: What was the attitude of the broader Jewish community and the Jewish leadership to your activism, if you experienced anything at all?

TA: Well, no, they were not happy about it, and generally actively against. Again I didn't experience it directly but they certainly were not present when -. So, for example, if you were trying to organise a communal, a religious response, it would be hard work to get particularly the orthodox Jewish community to support. I think at a personal level my family were supportive, I didn't really know people who weren't. We generally felt that the Jewish community wasn't supportive; was complicit by its silence. But for me it wasn't a big issue – we did what we did irrespective of that.

JA: And as you became increasingly involved and active – I know your parents would have been supportive, but what did they think of your ratcheting up your activism and potentially putting yourself in danger? Your family and your parents, how did they respond?

TA: My father supported, my mother cautious. They really weren't in a position to do much more. They were used to it, and particularly my aunt's involvement. But by then I was out of the house. And one wasn't really talking through the nature of the debates and tactics, etcetera, weren't something they could have participated or influenced. So, they were just supportive.

JA: And your aunt, did she go into exile?

TA: During my activist days she was already in exile. I got quite close to her when I was studying at Sussex. She was aging; she was doing what she did here which was to make dresses and garments, and then she was a carer for more elderly people. But she was quite active in the ANC in exile. So she would go into the office and do things like sort newspapers and [send mail – unclear], that kind of [indistinct 51:12]. [laughter in voice] But she also had links with former members of both the trade union movement and the Party, of course the ANC. So, every now and again I would go with her to see a friend, etcetera, and that was quite interesting; and certainly they were still involved in many of the old disputes that occurred in the South African Communist Party, about Russia, about trade unions, about the ANC, about the nationalist struggle – all of that stuff. So that was fun and I got very close to her; I was very sad when she passed away.

JA: And your siblings – you mentioned your brother was actively involved; did he continue his activism?

TA: Oh ja. I suppose the big change in 1994 was when you became a development activist or you stayed an oppositional activist. So, my brother moved in education and his wife, Josie, was very active in groups like detainee education and with the Guardian and the Black Sash. So, Dave set up and ran something called [Carit - sounds like 53:03] College. He then set up the [indistinct] IEB and ran that for a while. So he remained in education and he became quite influential at a senior government level, at a policy level. Josie became probably the foremost – so she was very involved in Black Sash work around removals and dealing with homelessness. And I think she became probably the foremost urban management practitioner in a Hillbrow type environment. So, yes, they remained involved. My sister was never an activist; she got married and she was always supportive but she was never an activist; she became a teacher and then moved to Australia 30 years ago.

And then my trajectory also changed post-1994 in the sense that I moved out of – I had already been out of union activity but I started to get involved through a union [indistinct 54:38], so the same sort of story where after I left the unions in 1986–1987, I worked essentially. I suppose you could call me as a consultant for different unions, and I was involved in the Metal Workers Union as their advisor on pension benefits, or benefits generally. And we were working on the assumption, [on the proposal - unclear 55:06] that benefit funds, pension funds should be used more socially in productive investment. And we got a proposal from the then Urban Foundation to set up a land investment trust – and together with the union I negotiated with the Metal Industry Group Pension Fund to make an investment; it was R 50 million at the time into the Land Investment Trust, the LIT, with the condition, and I knew nothing about housing at the time: the condition was that I move across as the manager of this new institution. So, again, it's a kind of opportunity that arose and that started my involvement in housing.

That was about 1991 and that led in 1994 to me being asked to set up the Johannesburg Housing Company, which was a socialing company funded primarily by the European Union at the time. And the JHC still exists; it's probably the most successful social housing company – I was there for 15 years. It's got about 3000 units, financially it works, it makes money. And then from there I was asked by the then minister of housing, Sisulu, to set up a government institution called the Housing Development Agency. So these kinds of things were opportunities that came up.

JA: And what are you doing at the moment?

TA: I'm doing a couple of things. About 20 years ago we set up something called the Inner City Housing Upgrading Trust together with Gerald Leissner who was a very strong influence. So that's an interesting relationship; if there was ever a mentor around it would have been Gerald, who as you know, was very active in the Jewish community; he was the president of the Board of Deputies but a very progressive man – and we didn't ever talk politics in that sense but Gerald worked quite strongly to get involved in urban management in the city regeneration. And we worked together from the early 1990s onwards; he was on the Johannesburg Housing Committee Board, and we set up this thing called the Inner City Housing Upgrading Trust which morphed over a period to something called the Trust Urban Housing Finance, which is a niche in the city upgrading financial institution; it currently has a book of probably about R 3 billion. And it's become a major institution. I'm involved in the director of that and its various activities.

I left the HDA to become the project manager of a big development that Wits is involved in, on land that it's owned for a hundred years and it's not been able to develop it, just north of Alex on the Marlboro Station called Frankenwald. And that's probably my main activity. And then I chair the ApexHi Charitable Trust which is something that again Gerald and I set up. And that dispersed about R 100 million over a 10-year period to various charitable activities. And I sit on the boards of again two listed companies that Gerald set up; one is the Arrowhead Property Fund, which is a commercial [indistinct 59:35], and the other is Induplace Properties which has a residential [route - unclear 59:40] – so I sit on both those boards – I chair the one. So, that's what I'm doing.

JA: Also when I was doing some research I see that there's something called the Taffy Cup. [both chuckle].

TA: Yes. The Taffy Cup is a -. So, when we set up the Johannesburg Housing Company, clearly we had to do something about the kids that were in the buildings because we're talking about high-rise buildings with very limited play space. So, we did two things: The Taffy Cup specifically was a soccer league for the kids in the buildings. And once a year – so they have the weekly matches but once a year they ran an inter-building, because the other matches are between people that try and join leagues that are run for Johannesburg. Once a year there's an inter-building activity which has grown in time. It used to be just soccer but now it's both boys and girls soccer and netball for both boys and girls for that as well. And, it was named the Taffy Cup. [laughter in voice] So it's an annual event which is anything between 300 and 600 kids who come together. They now have it in a park in downtown Johannesburg just off Mandela Bridge. And it's a lovely event. So that's what the Taffy Cup is.

Two of the significant offshoots of the Johannesburg Housing Company – firstly the way it operates, I think is significant because it really is a professional [audio breaks up 1:01:39] operation. So [audio breaks up] community [indistinct 1:01:51] involvement in it. But, two offshoots of it, the first was the community development subsidiary which is called [Makalong Phala - spelling unconfirmed], it means greener pastures, and Makalong is involved in the social development of people in the buildings. And so they run sporting activities, they run aftercare centres, afterschool centres, they run women's groups and men's groups. They have an elderly group for doing exercises. And they run campaigns like budgeting activities; they try and support – obviously the rental collections – those sorts of things. So that was one offshoot, and I think it's probably unique amongst the social housing institutions in the country.

And the second thing was an urban management association in a high-rise environment. Again I forget the date, but we started something called the Ikaya Association which operates in Hillbrow, and was really the forerunner for the residential improvement districts, mainly concentrating on urban management [indistinct 1:01:14] security. There are some sporting activities, etcetera. And there are a number of them around the Johannesburg inner-city; I'm not sure about others.

JA: You started off talking at the beginning about your relationship with Judaism today, saying you wanted to give your children a cultural identity. Could you talk a little bit more about that? You mentioned that you joined a reform shul – are you active in the community? I'm curious to know a little bit more about that.

TA: So certainly we're on it actively and consciously to get involved in Jewish religious activities, not that they were from a religious point of view but so we would have Pesach seders are new and Rosh Hashanah seders we'd have family. For a while my wife's family, which is much more traditional orthodox, would be running those, but now they're all overseas. So when they left we started to do it ourselves and we've now got very few family left in South Africa; but that are here, we tend to have a seder and people come and we what is necessary. And the kids now modify the service in such a way that it's appropriate for their children and our grandchildren; we now have three.

So, from that point of view we've always been aware of trying to emphasise just what it is to be Jewish from a values point of view. I think our children have got that; my son is involved in a leadership academy, an Africa-wide leadership academy which operates out of Honeydew. And my daughter was involved originally in setting up the Equal Education in Cape Town, and that was in fact set up by a whole range of Jewish activists from Habonim; Doron Isaacs, Michelle was there and a couple of others whose names I don't remember, but essentially very significantly Jewish leadership of Equal Education, setting it up and getting it going in the first couple of years.

And now Michelle is involved in the non-profit arm which is called Naspers Labs which she's involved in, in computer innovation centres in township areas. So, from a values point of view, I think they have that value system, which is very much the best of Jewish values and obviously humanitarian values as well. We have an interesting situation: my one daughter-in-law is Hindu – they are accommodating, both. So, they got married in both. And, again, [laughter in voice] this is another example of how the organised community is not very helpful. So, when they got married, the Hindu community priest

and [indistinct] were very happy to put us in both the Jewish and the Hindu ceremony. The South African religious establishment, firstly, if you're either refused or was unable to help because of the rules of the Beth Din. So, we had to in fact import a friend from England to come and marry them according to the Jewish religion. They were both lovely ceremonies and outcome the civil ceremony is the one that counts. But, the grandchildren come to us and visit and we go there. It's not a big issue at all, we just handle it. We're an international family and that's great.

JA: What is your opinion of South Africa today?

TA: [chuckles] Ogh. On this day it's a very [laughter in voice] different question to ask.

JA: These questions were written before the whole Caronavirus erupted. Just politically speaking, are you encouraged or discouraged about the country's future?

TA: [thinking pause] If we think back to my description of how the unions developed in an environment which was politically hostile and seemed terrible – so you have these bubbles of activity where good things happen. I think we're in a similar situation now – so the macro environment, not only in South Africa but internationally is problematic. And I don't know how any of us are going to get out of it at the macro level. But on the micro level, the stuff that all of us seem to be doing, works, whether it's me doing stuff in Braamfontein, which is also what I'm involved in; or my wife working with her students and the international organisations, or my daughter in Naspers Labs, or my son in the school that he's involved in, or my daughter-in-law in the practice that she's involved in. Or any of our friends – the activities that they're personally involved in seem to be okay and seem to be going somewhere and is providing them with general levels of satisfaction, even if they battle with the odds around the big macro issues. So, that level, were fine and that's how we'll work for a while. How the macro environment is going to work out, I really don't know; I'm just not wise enough and perhaps it's wise not to go there because I have no idea how what's going to happen.

JA: You mentioned that maybe you'd have to go to Israel, but do you feel pessimistic about the future, or are you feeling encouraged by the new broom that's promising to sweep the country clean?

TA: I wouldn't see Israel as a solution; I think they've got as many problems with their following. In fact, [laughter in voice] we're better off with our president than they are over there, in my view. And I think the location of Israel in the Middle East promises for long-term difficulties. So, I don't envisage moving on. But I really don't have a way of saying anything more than that.

JA: If you look back at your time in the opposition politics and the trade union movement, how did the experience shape you?

TA: My own view is that I've had an amazingly productive and fulfilled life. So looking backwards, in my case I'm fortunate to say they've all had happy endings. And they have certainly allowed me to grow dramatically. So the kind of inputs that I'm able to make in my various organisations at this point in time, I think are a result of that really massive exposure. If you think about it: so I grew up in a relatively poor environment in

Johannesburg's eastern suburbs. I went to a roughish school, Athlone. I was part of oppositional politics at the idealistic student level. I got to understand how to negotiate and grow in a fairly constrained environment with political choices that had to be political and organisational choices. And one of the things I tend to emphasise in all of my interactions, is what's the view, what keeps you together? And in that sense I think my organisational career, and if I look back at the organisations that still exist that I've been involved in setting up, because you married that [audio break up 1:14:24] with the organisational view; someone's always paid attention to how it could actually work, where do you get the money you need as a resource? What kind of operational activities and policies and processes do you need? And that comes from building unions; it comes from building the Johannesburg Housing Company.

So, I've had a fairly extensive interaction with a whole range of communities, from poor rural communities through to workers' communities in the townships, through to dealing with the Oppenheimers. I flew in a jet with Harry Oppenheimer to Malawi. I've spoken to a whole range of people and I've spoken to presidents and cabinet ministers. And I got exposure not only to the NGO sector; I've landed up at times [in Davos - unclear 1:15:37] [indistinct] and lands up [Davos – unclear]. I've managed to be involved in relatively successful and I got exposure to the NGO sector, the for-profit sector, and understood the power of capital. It was really a study, it took 15 years in the JSE to build up portfolio of 2000 units, it took us six months to do that in a listed property company: so the understanding of how capital works. So all of those thing make me feel that I've lived a good life and that I'm able to make a contribution from building all those experiences together.

JA: Great, thank you so much, Taffy, I really appreciate your time. Post-Corona, I intend to come to Johannesburg and it would be great to meet you and have a cup of coffee.

[END]