

KWAZULU-NATAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

JOHN MORRISON and SHONA WALLIS, of Natal Society Library, talk about

PAMELA REID, ex-NSL Council President and staff member of NSL

Interviewed by Mumsie Malinga, 30 March 1998

'I' signifies the interviewer, 'W' signifies Wallis, 'M' signifies Morrison.

I: Good morning Shona and John and I'd like you to tell me anything you know about Pamela Reid - begin with how and when you met her.

W: Right, I met Pam at a meeting - when I came down for the interview for this job. She was on the Council and because I had to be interviewed by the whole of the Council and that day she took me to lunch and at the time I was very impressed with her and from that day onwards we became very good friends. She brokored ? the impression that she was a very strong woman, with a very - how would you say? Not a hard skin - but she didn't mind taking knocks. But in actual fact, years afterwards when I got to know her better, I really found she was quite a soft person inside and she did get hurt and she used to get hurt very badly - but she would never let that show and she never let on that she was hurt. Her love for animals - she absolutely adored her animals - she had cats and dogs - I think most of her life - didn't she? I certainly - she had three poodles when I knew her and I looked after her house once when she went to Israel for a holiday and I looked after her animals and she used to 'phone me almost every night to find out how they were. (They speak at once)

M: And her bird watching..oh sorry.

W: And bird watching was part of our friendship - that's how we got - that's how I really got to know her - she started me on bird watching - she used to fetch me every Saturday and off we'd go to Albert Falls or to Tala Valley, or somewhere and we'd - she taught me a lot about birds and ? And that - and during those birdwatching years - that's how I got to know her because she gradually opened up and told me a lot of things ? about her life and what had happened to her and her family life and that's ? how I really got to know her. And then that's

1 where I really found her softness. She was ?

2 I: What do you know about her family life?

3 W: She, at time - she had a brother called John, whom I had actually met - and he was in
4 Johannesburg. Now I met John quite a few times and they were quite close. Her two sisters
5 I never met - unfortunately - until her funeral and as I say - she - there was some family
6 drama and she didn't talk about them very much.

7 I: How was she involved in the Library?

8 W: As a City Councillor she was voted onto the Library Council and from there she eventually
9 became President and I think you have the date there - ? She was responsible for opening this
10 Library in 1985? to all races - despite drama ? we ever had with the government, she was
11 also responsible, in 1967 to make ? clean idea - it was before it had to be a prescription
12 library - you had to pay to join and you had to pay to belong. And she encouraged the City
13 Council to take the library over - as a free city library in 1967. And I think most of this
14 library's greatness? was due to her and where it's got today is due to her efforts.

15 M: She used her influence on the City Council to get the City Council to pay for this big
16 building, at the time for a little city like 'Maritzburg - particularly a segregated city, this was
17 a huge building - now times have overtaken it and we actually need more space. But at that
18 time it was..

19 I: John perhaps you can talk about the - the - what's it called? ? That I don't know much of..

20 M: She was not a racist ?, extremely individualistic. I mean she believed in human rights, and
21 liberal democracy but she was more her own party in a sense. She didn't really fit in with
22 the team - she used teams and she used people for her own ends but even though she
23 nominally sort of called it the 'professor' ? party - she just used the Progressive Party
24 structures when she had to seek re-election, she'd ask Progressive Party people to rip ? her
25 posters, stick her posters, 'phone, canvass, do things for her but she never ever, from 1969
26 I never remember her actually doing any party-political stuff until just before she died when
27 she came in then as a Democratic Councillor. As a nominated Democratic Councillor. She -
28 the Democratic Party. She - I know she walked out of a Liberal Party meeting when Jack
29 Unterhalter came because she found that he was too - too liberal. I don't think she would

1 have found it too liberal for herself, but she found it too liberal for the way the voters were
2 and she found what he was saying just too threatening.

3 I: What do you mean by threatening?

4 M: That would have been in about 1963 - I just heard about this from Jack Unterhalter and then
5 I asked her, but she didn't - you know - didn't - she didn't like talking about things that made
6 her look, um, you know - put her in a bad light. But I know that - I think she stood for the
7 Provincial Council in - it was 1963, I think it was - or '64. Whenever the Provincial
8 elections were held and I know Colin Webb was her - one of her organisers and it was quite
9 interesting because they were one of the first people to use a record - because she ran a record
10 shop, she got a printout - you know they used to have seven singles - and they were little I.Ps.
11 And she got one of those made for her election campaign and distributed it over the whole
12 of the town - and Colin Webb read out the - the - you know, introduced her and all that. That
13 was - she was quite innovative but she got hammered in that election because of - I think
14 what had happened is that John Harris - it must have been after '64, because John Harris
15 would have bombed out the station. And all Liberal type organisations - including the
16 Progressive Party, were affected severely because of this bomb because all Liberals were
17 then seen as terrorists and whatever - so - support fell away. With Pam that was one of the
18 things where Pam burnt her fingers - because she didn't like losing and after that she didn't
19 really get close to at nntil as I say, just before the change came. But she also believed in
20 beautiful things and the arts and she was involved in the Philharmonic and the Library - she
21 knew Elisabeth Schwarzkopf? - she met her - she often used to names drop - also...

22 W: She relished a holiday - she went to the Edinburgh Festival - I think that's where she met -
23 she was always going across to the Edinburgh Festival and things like that -she spent her
24 money on music - she loved music.

25 W: She also - as you say - she ran a music store and in her own sort of way she produced the
26 commercial side of the culture which she put into the city - but there were all the other things
27 that were from the State - Local Government - but that was one - it was an excellent record
28 store. Going back - I'm just giving you this so you can maybe follow it up. She was
29 educated at school in the Dargyl - as far as I know - it was a Girls' School to teach women

- 1 agriculture.
- 2 M: I don't know what's happened to it - it's called - it was well-known - it begins with a 'B'.
- 3 I: Yes.
- 4 W: Sell or Sam Simpson ...
- 5 M: Yes, something like that - would be.
- 6 W: But that school eventually closed down but that probably was part of the reason she got
7 involved in studying pigs in ...
- 8 M: No, that's right - she went to Denmark and she worked on a pig farm there and studied pigs
9 on a piggery? and she had this agricultural degree - whatever it was - in - specialising in pigs.
- 10 W: I suppose the files ? would have all that stuff on training?
- 11 M: I think - did we get - did we get any of her personal files?
- 12 I: No, I...
- 13 M: You've got her CV?
- 14 I: Yes.
- 15 M: Yes, that would - that's the CV, that will give you those sort of qualifications that she got.
- 16 W: She believed in the Tatham, she was instrumental - with Lorna Ferguson - in moving - in
17 acquiring this old Supreme Court - converting it at great expense and moving that whole
18 collection across - from the upstairs part of the City Hall and that was a very, very significant
19 thing and it was Pam - to a large extent - you know Lorna used Pam's influence - I mean it
20 was a symbiotic thing - they worked together - but they - if she hadn't had Pam supporting
21 her it wouldn't have happened. Pam was also on NAPAC, Natal - (they speak at once)..
- 22 M: And also Umgeni Water Board.
- 23 I: Oh..
- 24 W: She also worked for the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- 25 I: How long did she go in there ??? you know?
- 26 M: When she retired from the City Council - she was Mayor - that's right and after her fourth
27 term - she was elected how many times? I can't remember - but that you can get from us as
28 we go along?? She would - she was given a job as Director of the Chamber of Commerce...
- 29 I: Really?

- 1 W: And she was there for two or three years and then she came and joined the Library as the
2 Music Curator and she ran the Music Library until she retired.
- 3 M: She also had quite a lot to do with her family business which was Reids Furnishers and Reid
4 Radio. But I don't know what happened - it was closed down? (They speak at once and
5 inaudibly in the background).
- 6 W: I think it was when her parents died- it closed down, and then John, because John wasn't
7 really interested enough to keep it going ? I think it fell apart. That's when he joined -
8 because he came in from ?? Something like that?
- 9 M: He joined an electronics radio type from the Bangloden? He used the Wedgewood relicca?
10 And then - it was an Anglo-Vaal company as far as I remember.
- 11 W: And he was on that one - ?? I remember that??
- 12 M: And oh, um, the Aurora Cricket Club - I meant to tell you about that? Did we bring that up
13 Shona?
- 14 W: No.
- 15 M: Um, no she - sbe didn't initiate it - Mike Hickson and people like that from Aurora - you can
16 speak to Mike Hickson about this - because he knew her very well - he's in the Economics
17 Department - but once they'd made the decision, Pam used her influence again as someone
18 called a formidable woman, and she was - once she had something that she wanted to do -
19 it happened. So Aurora without - I mean - the place was surrounded by Security Police and
20 whatever but it was a non-racial game. Pam says sbe used her influence to have the
21 swimming pools opened - she used her influence to have the buses opened - other towns it
22 took years and years - but 'Maritzburg in a funny sort of way was a trend setter largely
23 through Pam Reid and Mike Goolam - there were a couple of other people - and they just
24 thought it was ridiculous and insulting - you know they were the sort of people who made
25 those things happen.
- 26 I: It's a pity that the young Blaek people of today don't know her - the history of how these
27 people actually fought for freedom.. All those things - mm.
- 28 M: Even though they were sort of - they weren't significiant - you know in terms of how they
29 were like just individuals doing something - you know that was the - the decent thing about

- 1 it - I mean they didn't - they didn't get credit for anything - because it would be White
2 society - people - they didn't like people like that - you know - in a lot of ways Pam got out?
3 or isolated as she did more and more in that - in that way. There is somebody you could
4 maybe get hold of - is Mrs Tennant - because she - she worked for Pam, ja.
- 5 I: At St Johns?
- 6 M: No, that's the mother - the daughter-in-law. Mrs Tennant lives in Durban but she might be
7 able to give you some stuff on Pam.
- 8 W: I think Michael Davies is - is - personally, politically, career-wise - because he knew Pam
9 so well - I would go to him first.
- 10 M: But I'd definitely go to Mike Hickson - because he lives round the corner from Pam and his
11 mother was a close friend.
- 12 J: And he's based within the Economics Department?
- 13 M: Economics Department, ja. Because his mother was in the Liberal Party with Pam when Pam
14 was a member of the Liberal Party and I think his mother left the country.
- 15 W: She rode horses quite a lot, that I remember. Good horsewoman.
- 16 I: And, was she married?
- 17 W: No.
- 18 I: Why not, do you know.
- 19 W: I do know she told me once on one of our birdwatching trips that she'd been engaged to a
20 fellow in the then Rhodesia, but something went wrong and the engagement was broken off
21 and she never married after that.
- 22 M: She couldn't stand feminists. She said women should just be strong like her - they didn't
23 need movements to be strong and she couldn't stand - certain women in this town who were -
24 always talking for women's rights because she said 'I don't need anyone to talk with me
25 because I've got those rights already - I took them when I was eighteen.' You know, she, she
26 spoke like that. Her - you know certain Black Sash women who would talk and she was
27 infuriated because she found it demeaning to women - that they had to talk like that because
28 she always said 'I have no trouble defeating all the men on the City Council,' you know 'I'm
29 superior.'

- 1 W: (They speak at once) Yes she didn't need that backup to get her where she was.
- 2 M: And she thought that people who needed that sort of thing were very weak?
- 3 W: I think she was quite right because all the women at the time when I was made librarian here
4 - there were only two women in the whole of South Africa, no three. There was myself, the
5 Durban Librarian and the Johannesburg Librarian - we were the only three women directors,
6 and I didn't get here by waving a wand? I got here by sheer hard work. And I think this is
7 perhaps why Pam and I got on so well.
- 8 I: No, I see. Didn't she have any problems with men?
- 9 W: No. She got on very well with men.
- 10 M: She actually got on very, very well with men, she, she actually liked male company.
- 11 W: She was a great one at parties, you'd find Pam surrounded by people laughing - she was
12 really great fun.
- 13 M: She was also very good with kids. When I went there, she loved it if I went and had a
14 whiskey. Now I'm not a big whiskey drinker, but I have to have a - and Pam was quite
15 approving and she always had the cheapest whiskey so don't have to ? (They laugh so what
16 is said is inaudible)...and if you ever went for supper you got sort of revolting food because
17 she lived on a smell of an oil rag so that she could travel and do things, and you know there
18 was sort of generosity on the one side and frugal on the other side.
- 19 W: She was frugal with herself, not with other people.
- 20 M: No.
- 21 W: You know she was a great character but a mix of - of emotion.
- 22 M: Can I tell them about how we teased her once - and it wasn't done maliciously at all and
23 someone wrote on her CV.. You know we were asking about what people's qualifications
24 were and then someone just wrote for fun - BA Pigs on her - she studied pigs - she went
25 absolutely berserk. She couldn't understand that we were just teasing her because she'd done
26 this course on pigs...
- 27 W: She had a sense of humour but only in one way - that didn't amuse her - she took that as a
28 personal insult.
- 29 M: Ja, just sort of like Queen Victoria - you know - not being amused - she really was absolutely

- 1 furious and you know it wasn't done with any malice - nobody hated her or anything like that
2 - but she couldn't see that and there were certain other instances where she fought with
3 people - her closest friend - she couldn't break through and say..
- 4 W: But John, they always stuck to her - right through in life - her best friend - Pauline..
- 5 M: Hildebray?
- 6 W: Hildebray - yes - she died? Or is she still in ..?
- 7 M: Yes, she died.
- 8 W: Yes, that was a love-hate relationship for thirty or forty years.
- 9 I: Oh really?
- 10 W: But she was her closest friend, but as I say - she fought with people and with Lorna and
11 always her best friends - her really closest friends - hut they never deserted her.
- 12 M: There was another woman - May English? I don't know her - I've just often heard her talk
13 about her - I think ? English..
- 14 W: She was so amazed - before Pam became Mayor, her husband had ?
- 15 W: I remember May English because I met her here when I first came here
- 16 W: And Pam's other Mayor was a woman called Mrs Peattie...the Mayoress...
- 17 M: Oh, Carol Peattie.
- 18 W: And Pam fell out with her and sort of - I can't remember the details but she sort of then
19 didn't want her to be her Mayoress, you know because Pam, because she was the Mayor, she
20 needed a woman to do her - you know -
- 21 I: Oh, yes, yes.
- 22 W: And who was the lady that she eventually - I think she's also since died because that lady,
23 woman came with us when we went to America. I went to America with Pam, from the
24 Library, we were sent to a conference - Pam and I, to Montreal, to Canada, not to America -
25 but we travelled through America and this lady who subsequently became her Mayoress -
26 Elizabeth Harkness - and she was also a tough cookie! (She laughs) And Pam and she fought
27 quite a lot in that holiday - which made it a little bit awkward.
- 28 M: Ja, Pam fought a lot that's one thing you - I mean...
- 29 W: But that was her character and that's why she got where she got.

- 1 M: But she - she - forgave immediately - I mean she'd fight like hell and then...
- 2 W:the next minute it was over - she never bore a grudge - except with her family and that I
3 don't really want to speak about because Michael would be able to - he might say 'Look -
4 don't talk about it - because it's private.' Because she was a very private person.
- 5 I: Mmm, Okay, that's fine. Was she religious?
- 6 M: Religion - I don't think so, no, I know she was a member of the Anglican Church - what's
7 it called?
- 8 W: She, she she..
- 9 M: She had - she did have a belief because she - and her wonderful love of nature - and animals -
10 you know - and she was very (Wallace speaks as well and what he says is inaudible) - she
11 was very soft when it came to animals and nature and ..
- 12 M: But it was a religious ...
- 13 W: She fought hard in this city to stop the Council taking over that lovely area by ..
- 14 M: Bisley Nature Reserve was it?
- 15 W: No, just round the sewerage farm.
- 16 M: Oh, Darvall.
- 17 W: - they wanted to take that over or do something with it - she fought hard to stop that because
18 it's a wonderful nature reserve and there are so many birds there - she fought hard for that
19 wetlands in the Town Bush Road - next to Cascades..
- 20 M: Allerton Laboratory..
- 21 W: There were wetlands there and there are so few wetlands left in the world and people don't
22 understand what can happen when you lose your wetlands and your birds and your nature -
23 if those go - your health, your life can go as well and she fought hard to stop a big developer
24 coming in there and developing.
- 25 M: Shona, going back to the religious thing - she wasn't traditionally religious - but she was
26 religious - but her sister - I remember she was quite disparaging of her sister - but I think her
27 sister married a religious person.
- 28 W: Married a minister.
- 29 M: Ja and she spoke disparagingly to me about them because of their sort of - what she saw as

- 1 like narrow, ways of seeing things in a religious context but it could have been for other
2 reasons but you..
- 3 W: No it was for other reasons because she'd had an argument...
- 4 M: No, but she didn't mention the religious side, if you see what I mean, but I'm saying there
5 might have been a fight and then she just used the religious...
- 6 W: She did, she did, Mmmm
- 7 M: Ja, because she wasn't traditionally religious - she used to get cross with people who were
8 sort of like goody, goody religious - she was a funny woman - she was very very goody,
9 goody herself, proper - you know she didn't match proper normal behavior..
- 10 W: No, she was a woman of integrity - she never told lies - she was never deceitful - you know -
11 she - that was something that she would not tolerate.
- 12 M: There was one Democratic Party MP who became an IFP chap and she said he - didn't tell
13 her the truth - or lies - or something - I don't know - I don't know if I should tell you things
14 because I don't want to get into trouble.
- 15 I: No, no it's fine - maybe I won't - decide when I'm writing - I will...
- 16 M: This was Mike Tarr, and she said Mike Tarr lied to her about something - I can't remember
17 what it was - so she absolutely cut Mike Tarr dead after that evening - he was - as far as she
18 was concerned, she was finished with Mike Tarr. I don't know what he did.
- 19 W: Anybody that lied to her ...
- 20 M: ..or anything like that, you know..
- 21 W: - honesty, in her words - hefits - anybody that was dishonest she could not tolerate.
- 22 I: But did she go to Church - was she a church-goer?
- 23 W: No, I think she went to Church when she was Mayor because the Dean of the Cathedral was
24 her choice as the City -what do you call them - each Mayor has them..
- 25 M: City Chaplains..
- 26 W: The City Chaplain and I think you know she rarely went to Church because that was her???I
27 think that's all.
- 28 I: And the memories???
- 29 W: Did I have her - did I cherish?? I think that like John said the City? having this scheme -

- 1 watching birds with Pat on my lap? and three dogs listening to Beethoven.
- 2 M: Or anecdote about people - and she was quite good - she'd like this - loosen up - quite a
3 hooligan sometimes when she was drinking. But always very proper - she'd sit there
4 blowing smoke rings for children and saying 'Oh balls!' (They all laugh) If people said
5 anything - you know - that was - she didn't use four-letter words but she'd tell a guy that one.
6 I remember Mike Willim saying - years ago 'I just find Pam a bit much - she said "balls" in
7 front of me.'
- 8 W: I think her sense of humour I cherish - we had the same sort of sense of humour..
- 9 M: ... and her intellect..
- 10 W: And her ? she would - and read...
- 11 M: Pat McKenzie who was the Secretary here before me said that for our Council meetings
12 which we have once a month, Pam Reid would come in - she wouldn't have read anything -
13 you know the minutes or whatever - she'd walk in - she'd have everything in her head she
14 would have known from the previous meeting then at the end of the meeting she'd just tuck
15 all her ...
- 16 W: ??minutes - she didn't need them...
- 17 I: She had a very good memory..
- 18 W: She had eye ? and a photographic memory because she was saying in the City Council she
19 didn't need to refer to anything in these thick things they had - she knew exactly where it was
20 - she was the most fantastic Chairman - she could run a meeting and finish it and cut all the
21 nonsense without ..
- 22 M: ..offending people..
- 23 W: offending people - without - they were able to say their say - but she never allowed a meeting
24 to ramble on...
- 25 M: But if she didn't like you - ooh - at the meeting you were - irritating her or whatever, she was
26 merciless.
- 27 W: She liked people to speak clearly and be clear cut.
- 28 M: Like she -...
- 29 W: She had such tremendous ? herself and so she ..

- 1 M: She spoke about people who were the fools - you know - like she couldn't stand Mrs
2 Alderight...
- 3 W: I think you ought to leave names out of it - don't mention names because that's not important
4 - what I think we're trying to get is a picture of her. She was very strong.
- 5 M: Well, I've seen men having to talk to her and they were scared - when they had to deal with
6 a policy issue or something like that.
- 7 W: At the actual city council meeting..
- 8 M: And various other things - if you had to go and sort Pam out - she was prepared.
- 9 W: What I liked about Pam and I was directing her and I had to go to a council meeting - she
10 made me feel that I was someone important - whereas if I had walked into that city council -
11 they had a certain protocol of how you sit and the men were quite prepared to put me right
12 at the back - when I walked in - she would say - Mrs Wallis - you come up to the front and
13 you sit just below where the Mayor sits - that's where you sit.' And she insisted on this man
14 - and that made you realise that she wasn't going to allow any woman to be sat on by men
15 in that sort of situation. Alright, I think we've..
- 16 M: I can't think of anything else. I mean sure there is stuff but...
- 17 W: It'll come to mind...
- 18 M: Speak to Mrs Webb, Fleur Webb, because she was quite close to ..
- 19 W: Pam..
- 20 M: You know they used to come and visit her in the old days in 'Maritzburg - I think she'd be
21 a good person.
- 22 W: I think go to ? Houst, got to ?
- 23 M: Hickson.
- 24 W: Hickson, go to Fleur, and I think they were close to her. I was close to her in a different way
25 from these people because I only knew her from 1980 onwards and I was close to her from
26 my work here and through the friendship which developed - but we found in each other that
27 we admired - and through birdwatching and our love of animals so that's how we developed
28 a friendship.
- 29 M: And Michael Davies - Pam was sort of his mentor when he got onto the City Council - you

1 know she...

2 W: ..helped him?

3 M: Ja, and they were very close friends..

4 W: ?? And his wife Marlene.. Okay?

5 I: Thank you very much.

6 M: Pleasure.

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8 The tape is switched off. There is nothing more on this side.

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