

Forgiving Apartheid

In 1945, Rita¹ was born to a black father and a white mother in Cape Town, South Africa. District 6, the neighborhood she lived in, was a multiracial, multireligious community. That is, until 1966, when the apartheid government, whose goal was to separate and segregate its citizens by race, declared the neighborhood white and then proceeded to bulldoze the homes of more than 60,000 residents.

Rita's father died in the early 1960s, a death that was ultimately a blessing to her family in the cruel world of apartheid. A mixed-race marriage violated apartheid immorality laws, and her family would have been separated forcibly had he lived. During the campaign to bulldoze District 6, Rita's mother stood strong against those who would force her from her home. But in 1981, Rita's mother was told the house would be bulldozed, whether or not she was inside. The

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very day after she moved, Rita's mother died, another victim to apartheid.

After all that she suffered under the apartheid regime, losing both of her parents and her home, Rita was consumed by a hate so strong that she wanted to strangle her oppressors. Over the span of decades, Rita learned to let go of the

hatred that gripped her. As she learned to forgive, Rita felt the dark emotional burden lift. It took years, but Rita put herself on the path to becoming better not bitter, transforming all she had experienced into an opportunity to grow.²



1 District Six Museum staff members, personal interviews with Peter Rea, Cape Town, South Africa, July 2016.

2 Rea, P., Stoller, J. and Kolp, A. (2018). *Exception to the Rule: The Surprising Science of Character-Based Culture, Engagement, and Performance*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education, pp. 196-197.