

## MEMORIES OF DENEYS SCHREINER

by Nithaya Chetty

I SERVED on the students representative council (SRC) at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg (UNP) in 1983 and had many opportunities to interact with Professor Deneys Schreiner during that time. I was the Education Projects Officer. It was quite an activist SRC, with Cormac Cullinan, his sister Kerry, Yves Vanderhaghen and Martin Wittenberg also serving on the council.

One of the highlights for me was the Focus on Education Week I organised and Schreiner assisted me a great deal. The week brought Fatima Meer out to Pietermaritzburg for the first time after the lifting of her banning order, and at the age of 20 it felt surreal for me to be able to introduce her from the stage. We also had Alex Boraine (PFP) and Oscar Dhlomo (Inkatha) participate in the week. Schreiner specifically wrote to Dhlomo on my behalf. In those days, the postal services actually worked, and I was quite delighted that Dhlomo had quickly accepted our invitation. That was a wonderful time for me to meet all these influential people and Schreiner was very appreciative of my efforts.

I had designed a poster for the week on our home typewriter and had these printed someplace in town. I was re-

ally horrified one day when I returned home from the campus to find a person from the print shop sitting in our lounge talking to my dad and explaining why I should not get involved in politics. Those were the times, and it is important to recall that as a measure of how far we have come despite all the difficulties we continue to face today. Fortunately, I felt that I was in a safe place at UNP, able to continue with my activism in my own way without fear. I can say that it was people like Schreiner who helped create that environment for us to be able to speak up.

At the end of 1983, the SRC was treated to Sunday lunch at Schreiner's home, which I recall very vividly. He was a compassionate person and he struck me as someone who had a profound understanding that the times were changing.

This contribution was a response to the review of Graham Dominy, *The Man Behind the Beard: Deneys Schreiner, a South African Liberal Life* that appeared in *Natalia* 50 (2020), pp. 81–84.