In the 1980s, the University of Cape Town’s social anthropology department was predominantly oriented by an ‘exposé’ style of critical scholarship. The enemy was the apartheid state, the ethical imperative was clear and a combative metaphor for doing research motivated the department. Andrew David Spiegel, known affectionately as ‘Mugsy’ by his students and colleagues, has been a central, if understated, figure of this history and helped to frame the theoretical charge of a generation of students looking to counter apartheid from ‘inside’. In a series of interviews between the senior professor and one of his students – Jessica Dickson – Spiegel offers a unique perspective from the centre of anthropology’s recent history in South Africa.

JESSICA L. DICKSON is a doctoral student in African Studies at Harvard University.

ANDREW D. SPIEGEL retires from the University of Cape Town, South Africa, at the end of 2014.