

Mikateko Khangala
12th January 2012

Constitutional Court Oral History Project

Int This is an interview with Mikateko Khangala and it's the 12th of January 2012. Mikateko thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the Constitutional Court Oral History Project. We really appreciate it.

MK Thank you for having me.

Int I wondered whether we could start in terms of your early childhood memories, where you were born, a bit about your family background and what were the circumstances that you grew up in in South Africa?

MK I grew up in Limpopo in a village in Venda. I stayed there for the first twelve years, after that I moved to another town there in Limpopo. I studied there from primary until Matric. Yes, I am from a family of two, my sister and I. I grew up staying with my grandmother in a village, yes.

Int And where were your parents?

MK My parents were staying in another town, yes.

Int Okay and what was the reason for keeping you in the rural area? Was it difficult? What were the circumstances?

MK My grandmother was a cripple, so they wanted me to...they wanted us to assist her with her daily activities. She couldn't do walk, that's the reason.

Int Right, and how did you manage caring for your grandmother being a child? What were the difficulties for you?

MK It was very difficult because we stayed in a village. We didn't have a toilet, you know. We didn't have water. We used to go fetch water; we used to come back clean. We didn't have a helper. We grew up poor.

Int Right. And what was your relationship like with your grandmother?

MK Ahh, she was a very good grandmother. Yes, she used to tell us stories, yes; we used to have lots of fun with her.

Int In terms of apartheid, how do you think that might have affected you and your family?

MK It affected us in many ways because; you know growing up, you know, without food, without electricity, without water, it was not that easy, yeah. So poverty affected us in many ways, Remember going to a class without food, or maybe thinking you won't have supper, because of the problem. I think it affected towards my studies.

Int Really...

MK Yes because when I compare my studies in primary and high school are different.

Int Did you do better in high school?

MK Yes, I did better in high school than primary.

Int That's interesting and then at the age of twelve, you moved to live with your parents?

MK No, in fact they took my to boarding school, because my grandmother passed away.

Int Oh, okay...

MK I went to boarding school but it was much much better there because I didn't have to come to (means from) school and clean. I didn't have to go fetch water. Everything was there, so life became easy.

Int What were your plans and ambitions when you were at boarding school? For when you finished school?

MK My dream was to go to study in Cape Town, which happened.

Int Oh, really, tell me about that?

MK Yes, I went to study in Cape Town. It was my first time to be in an aeroplane that was nice. It was also the first time to go to the sea; it was nice.

Int And what year was this, when you left for Cape Town?

MK It was 1994, 1994.

Int Right, so a lot of changes happened.

MK Yes.

Int And in 1994, did you study at....which university did you attend?

MK University of the Western Cape.

Int Right and tell me what you studied and what your ambitions were....?

MK I studied Library and Information Science and unfortunately I wanted to study for a degree but I didn't qualify because of my Matric results. They were not that good, so I qualified for a diploma, which I studied and completed. After that I went for the degree, yes.

Int And in terms of (coughs), in terms of Library Science...why Library Science in particular?

MK Ahh, I don't know but I think I liked...working with books, you know. I think I just liked books. I became interested in them.

Int Is this love for books something that you developed much earlier on?

MK Yes, at high school when I was doing great, I think I was Standard Eight by then. We went to a career exhibition. So, they explained to us about different careers. Then I was interested in libraries.

Int Right. And in terms of studying library science, did you think about where you would like to work and what work you would like to do?

MK Yes. I wanted to work for the SABC Library. Ja, I don't know why but I just wanted to work for the SABC.

Int Interesting.

MK And after that I went there to volunteer but unfortunately, there were no posts but I did work for six months before I came here.

Int And what was your experience like at the SABC?

MK It was good. I learned a lot because I was fresh from varsity. It's the place where I learned everything about the library.

Int And after that where did you go?

MK After the SABC, I saw an advert here.

Int At the Court?

MK Yes, at the Court and I decided to apply for it and I was successful.

Int So, from 1994 to 2004 when you started, what did you do? You studied....

MK I got married, I got divorced by then. I had a baby by then.

Int Okay, so a lot of life events. So, after your internship at the SABC, this was the first real job?

MK Yes, this was the first real job. I started here in 2004, in April, as an intern again. It was a contract of one year. Then I made sure that I'll have to work very hard. Then I worked very hard, I was fortunate, there were posts. I applied here for a librarian, permanent one. I managed to get a position. After that, they promoted me to a different department because I was working hard, I believe so as a reference librarian. Then, after that I was asked to, asked to, what you call it, to work as an Assistant Director.

Int Really...at the Library?

MK Yes, yes.

Int When did that happen?

MK I think that was 2008. I acted for about a year.

Int Right, okay...

MK Then after that, the post came, came out again. Then I went for the interview and managed to get it.

Int So, now you are the Assistant Director in the Reference section of the Library. Could you talk about... 2004 was an exciting year because this was a new building, the Court had moved here... I wondered whether you could talk about the library and how, how you helped contribute to make the library what it is?

MK Okay. How did I make...

Int How did you contribute to the Library?

MK I worked very hard. I used to ask lots of questions when I did not understand. Whatever task that I was given, I used to make sure that I do it very well, you know. It was like that. It was all about hard work.

Int Right. I am wondering since 2004 to now, what have been some of the challenges in your job working in the library?

MK I think it is supervision, working with people who it was a learning experience. More especially, I was faced with the challenge to supervise my peers, people who used to be my friends, colleagues. Now, I have to tell them what to do, it was a great challenge. But with communication and understanding each other....

Int Have there been any difficulties, in your job in the library? Have there been any tensions?

MK Yes, there have been more especially with the users.

Int Okay.

MK But we managed to resolve them.

Int What are some of the tensions?

MK People come to the library, you know, the library, we don't open for everyone. People from the public, they just come in. They say this is the Constitutional Court Library, they have their rights, it is our Constitutional rights to use the library (laughs). When you try to, to explain to them that we have got rules.

Yes, it is the Constitutional Court Library but we have rules to follow. They don't understand, they start shouting, wanting to meet the Manager of the Court, things like that, it happens often.

Int Why do you think there is closed access to the public. In some ways, it sounds right, doesn't it, that it is a Constitutional Court and it is a Constitutional Library and they have a right to use the library. What are the restrictions on usage?

MK Unfortunately the library, it was not designed for the public, as such. But we have like...different people who are allowed to use the library. So we cannot just allow everybody. The main focus is for the judge and the law clerks, then the rest will follow.

Int I am also curious, in terms of working within the library and working within the rest of the Court, the administrative side of the Court, what your relationship has been? What were the difficulties? Are there funding difficulties? Are there difficulties with management?

MK In terms of the library, we don't experience problems.

Int You have been here a long time and its curious that people...I wonder what your relationship is with the judges? How much interaction do you have with the judges?

MK We have a very good relationship with the judges. Anything they need from the library, they know, we are always there for them. They are our first priority.

Int Right, I wonder whether you could talk a bit about... from 2004 some of the judges you have met and what your experience has been about working with the judges and the law clerks?

MK Some of the judges use the library often. In fact, they don't come like directly to the library, they send their law....their researchers...

Int Law clerks...

MK Yes. But whenever they have queries, they send us emails, they phone or they come visit in the library and we gladly assist them.

Int Who are your favourite judges?

MK All of them (laughs)

Int What about the Chief Justices in the past, when you...might have met (Justice) Arthur Chaskalson, (Justice) Pius Langa, did you meet any of the...?

MK I met Chief Justice Ngcobo.

Int Right and what was your experience of working with him?

MK It was very nice. He was strict but he was good.

Int Right.

MK He didn't want...like if you ask something from him (means the other way around)...and take too long to respond. When he asks something, you know, we need to hurry. Things like that...

Int In terms of working at the Court and the Library, are there things that could be done differently, improved, etc?

MK Er...so far, everything is fine.

Int Do you see yourself remaining in the Library for a long time.

MK I think so. I am still enjoying for now.

Int Right.

MK I don't know in five years to come. But now I am fine.

Int What does it mean to you to work at the Constitutional Court?

MK No, it means a lot because this is the highest (court). It is an honour to work here because it is the highest court in the land.

Int Right. Why do you think it is an honour to work here?

MK Because we work with honourable people. People respect this court a lot

Int Right. Mikateko, I wondered whether there were any issues that you would like to talk about in terms of your work, the kinds of things that you do, some of the interesting things that have happened in the Court?

MK I don't have anything (laughs).

Int You don't have anything. Okay. I have asked you a range of questions, is there anything that you would like to add?

MK No, I think I am okay.

Int Alright. Well, thank you very much.

MK Thank you very much.

Collection Number: AG3368

CONSTITUTIONAL COURT TRUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Location:- **Johannesburg**

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