

Jane Vilakazi

LRC Oral History Project

13th August 2008

Int This is an interview with Jane Vilakazi and it's the 13th of August. Jane on behalf of the SALS Foundation we really want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the LRC Oral History Project. I wondered whether we could start the interview...if you talk about your early childhood memories growing up in South Africa under apartheid and what were some of your challenges and difficulties?

JV Yes, my name is Jane, as you have said. You know life sometimes can be so amazing. You know when Beauty (Mkhize) was telling her story, I was also born in Sophia town and we were moved during 1959.

Int This was a forced removal?

JV Ja, it was a forced removals and then as, as you have seen, we are now together in Driefontein. My early childhood, I was born in a very poor family. My father was a Zimbabwean and my mother was a South African and they parted ways. I was brought up by my grandmother and it was so difficult. We may have ended up getting maintenance from Social Welfare, if I am remembering. Then, I grew up with a...and ended up my school with a Standard Eight but I lost my certificate and I couldn't get it back. I met a man around Jo'burg and he married me and came back to Driefontein. That's when...when I came it was 1979. And then I found that this problem of forced removals. Then I started to be involved with the community and we ended up with Sol Mkhize, who advised us that we should establish a Board that would stand for the rights of the Driefontein people. Geoff Budlender was the person who was more involved with land issues. He went with us all the way, giving us advice and you know, telling what has happened after maybe he was here. Then he will...he was very good, let me say that. Then we started to see now that people from around Driefontein, nearby farmers were evicted from the white farmers. Well, the Black Sash and LRC were there to help us. So now, because I was the only youngest one in the Board of Directors, I was elected to go to Johannesburg to be trained as a paralegal. Yes, so I was always going to Johannesburg for training sessions.

Int Who trained you in Johannesburg?

JV That time there was this Jake (Ellem Francis). I can't remember his surname. And the late sis Pinky (Madlala) was there. She was the one who was organising the sessions and then I ended up establishing with the Board of Directors, the Advice Centre. Then, there was this man, called (Lemont) Ntusini, which we worked with as paralegals.

Int Now, when you started this advice office, how did people come to know about it?

JV You know when it was these forced removals, LRC and Black Sash used to come and give us advice, as I have said. And then people knew about the lawyers who always

come and give us advice. Then that's when, they came with their problems too. That's when it came that we should establish the advice centre. Ilse (Wilson), if I can talk about Ilse?

Int Sure.

JV Ilse (Wilson) was a sister, was a mother to me, giving support, advice and she was the one who was assisting most of our clients on their cases, but there were students who were coming in and out. I can't remember all of them. Then Ilse managed to get us funds, to establish our centre, it was from Canadian Embassy. Then, we had salaries and we had office furnitures and all that stuff. Then, Ilse went away to Umvula Trust. Here we were struggling. Even now, I am still involved in advice centre, but not so much, because we don't have funds. I just help that person who had come and approached me to assist.

Int So people still come to the Advice Centre?

JV Ja, they do come but we don't have any money, we don't have resources to run our office. There are people who are trained to assist us; the Legal Aid Board, but they only come once in a month. Sometimes they say they come such a day then they won't. LRC was there for us on forced removals.

Int Also, you got to know people from the LRC quite well. You worked with Geoff Budlender, you knew Moray Hathorn. Could you talk about those people as well and anyone else from the LRC that you remember?

JV Yes, as I have said that Geoff (Budlender) was only focusing on land issues. On this advice he was not so much. Moray (Hathorn) used to come and Ilse (Wilson) and attend to our clients for two days in a month. They used to come once a week and they would attend to our clients. Then the others we would just talk about projects and so on. Moray (Hathorn) was a lawyer; he used to give us background, of what the cases, which he cannot handle. I remember one day, he was supposed...he went to the court at our magisterial court in Wakkerstroom. When he came back, there were children coming from school that is a bad memory. Moray (Hathorn) hit that child and that child died. It was very painful, we tried to explain to the family and if I am not mistaken, Moray (Hathorn) did assist to bury that child. Ja, it was a bad memory. But there were happy moments with them. Many as Mum (Beauty) Mkhize was saying, which after work we will sit at Ma Beauty's (Mkhize) house. Someone will cook and we will stay around the fire, if its cold and you know chat and laugh and all that stuff. Really I am missing them because as I have said, the Legal Aid Board doesn't come very often and as I am saying; our centre doesn't have any funds anymore. Its about three or four years now. We also now losing hope and people do not go to the office as often because, you know, sometimes, they get us, sometimes, they don't. That is our main problem but the centre is still there, running. But very poor.

- Int I asked Ma (Beauty) Mkhize this question. I wondered whether I could ask you the same question? Do you think now that apartheid has ended that life for people in this area has changed much?
- JV We are struggling and we experiencing unemployment and the food is going up, as I am sitting here, I only have two slice of bread at my home because I don't have...so, it is apartheid has been removed but there are still these some issues, which the government needs to look at it, especially here in the rural areas, because if you are saying you are working, you work only for the farm or in the forest, you have to wake up at 3am and come back home at 8(pm)and you don't see your children and at the end of the month, you only get 600 rands, which you cannot do anything about it.
- Int So, you feel that there is still a need for an organization like the Legal Resources to come here?
- JV Yes.
- Int Why are there problems with the Legal Aid Board?
- JV I don't know.
- Int What is the difference between the LRC and the Legal Aid Board?
- JV There is nothing different. It is because Legal Aid Board was established by government though it is an independent...
- Int Body?
- JV Body. I don't know maybe it is because it is far away from them. I am not sure, what it happening. I am not sure.
- Int Jane, you know you have told me a lot of things and I am wondering whether there are some things I haven't asked you, which you would like to talk about?
- JV TRAC, yes, TRAC. TRAC was very for us too. As I was saying we had neighbouring farm dwellers who had problems. TRAC was there for them. They were the ones who were assisting in farm eviction cases. And also we were trained by TRAC on some other Act, like Extension of Security, Tenure Security. Ja, they were there for farm evictions. And they are still if you have a case, but they are far now, they are in Nelspruit. If you have a case, you have a problem, how to contact them. Though we have their telephone but, you know they don't come very often to our places.

Int I wondered whether we could end the interview, if you could talk about a memory, that you have, that you feel is something you treasure about the LRC?

JV Okay, LRC, what can I say, LRC to where I am is because of LRC. I have been exposed to many things. LRC has made me a person because I know what to do, what not to do. LRC has made Driefontein community to stay in Driefontein. Without them, maybe we would be at Wangane or KwaZulu. So, LRC was the main, main pillar to our problems.

Int Jane I want to thank you very much for coming and participating in the interview and it was nice to meet you, as well.

JV Thanks.

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