

Mandisa Solo

Facilitator: This is an interview with Mama Mandisa Solo we are in Tsakane the date is 3 April 2012, interview is done by Brown Maaba. Thanks for your time, you are welcome to speak any language you are comfortable with. Please give me a background of where you were born, family background, how you were raised and your schooling.

Respondent: My name is Mandisa Solo I was born in Cradock, I'm a grand daughter of Rev Thulani Calata who was once the general secretary of the ANC. I schooled in Cradock up to JC then which is now grade 9 or 10 not sure. But one of my teachers that I always talk about was Matthew Goniwe who taught me science. I remember very well when he was being arrested and released, arrested and released and we were actually at school that the system wanted to change him because of his influence politically in Cradock.

Because we grew up under the parenthood of our grandparents, there was a lot of emphasis on values, respect, *Ubuntu*, caring for others etc. , and I grew up with that. My mother and father were working in Brakpan. My father was a social worker in Baragwanath hospital, my mother was a mid wife in Brakpan old location. I think it was through her influence that I took up nursing. I trained at Bara and when I qualified I worked at Kalafong in Pretoria, that's where I started getting involved in worker struggles at Kalafong. We started joining a health union. But also I was influenced by my grandfather in politics and therefore I thought these teams were interlinked because it was all about feeling oppressed or working under oppressive rules. I participated in the worker struggle and also ultimately in the liberation struggle.

Though at the time that I became conscious about the struggle I was at Hilltown, Cape Town we were near Fort Hare and we were recruited by Black Consciousness members through Steve Biko, I remember he also addressed us in Hilltown, Cape Town when I was a student rep. We participated, because we were afraid we participated in their .., it was a church movement, I remember there was a church movement, we had debates

Facilitator: Black Theology?

Respondent: Black Theology and so we .., because we were leaders at Hilltown, we arranged those sessions on scriptural readings and camping and the background that I had because my grandfather was a priest.

Facilitator: Just to go back, as a child of Calata in Cradock, were you expected by the society to carry yourselves in a particular way?

Respondent: I guess yes. Because you know the gates were locked, we were taken to school by car, we went to church every Sunday, we had to participate in Sunday school activities, we wouldn't just play. Even my principal at secondary, who was the principal of Matthew Goniwe, used to say we are lean because we don't get oxygen we were always inside the house. We were lean and when it was time for all the students to go for TB tests, we wouldn't go, us as family we wouldn't go to those tests because we were very lean and we thought maybe we had TB. That's what our principal used to say, the reason we are hiding away from testing is because we don't get fresh air. We were always locked into the house. I guess they did expect that and they were actually holding us as

very important children. We wouldn't just be seen ..., maybe if there's somebody intimidating us , they would say because you are the grandchild of Calata, ANC secretary you know, whereas we were identified at school because of our diligence. I mean you know how teachers handle learners. A good teacher loves a good student, so they wouldn't take it that way, they would say you are identified because we are the grandchildren of Calata.

Facilitator: How long were you in Cradock, you did your primary school there?

Respondent: Yes in Cradock until JC, after JC I went to Hilltown for my Matric which I think was 1969

Facilitator: That was the time of the birth of BCM?

Respondent: Yes that is why at Hilltown we all joined BCM, and at home school holidays there was that collision that we'd be talking ANC and my grandfather used to talk to us politics. He always told us ..., and when I was doing Matric now I was brave enough to ask what is the difference between ANC and BCM, and in those years, I saw Steve Biko coming to Calata's house. Then I felt it means there's nothing wrong and they had a conversation which I was not part of and Matthew Goniwe joined them in the afternoon the same day.

Facilitator: so your grandfather was he for BCM or against?

Respondent: he said that now that the ANC is banished and there's some kind of lull, BCM would assist in conscientising people not to forget where we come from.

Facilitator: and the decision to send you to Hilltown was based on ..?

Respondent: Calata wanted every child to be learned, and it was very important that we should be safe because as a priest he would go to the farms and there would be nobody to take care of us, so the secondary school was like from here to Michaelshook, so there was no problem for us to learn. There was no high school in Cradock, that's another reason. All secondary schools ended at JC. So it's either you go to St Matthews for teaching, other grandchildren went for teaching and I chose to do Matric. So the nearest high school was Hilltown.

Facilitator: Your impression of Hilltown when you got there?

Respondent: I loved Hilltown, I loved the rural atmosphere and the focus, and surprisingly so, the hall had my father's photo and I felt good because he was a good rugby player and his brother also. So I felt this is telling me about my family history.

Facilitator: So you were in Hilltown for two years?

Respondent: yes for two years, standard 9 and 10

Facilitator: and you said you became a leader?

Respondent: I was a student representative at that time

Facilitator: Was that allowed to operate?

Respondent: At that time but within the parameters of ..., it was combined with the missionary approach, we had limitations, we didn't join politics, we wouldn't go out for political activities, we would go ..., that is why we joined Black Consciousness through black theology

Facilitator: were the authorities happy about that?

Respondent: yes because they were allowed to address us on weekends, we were allowed to go camping with them. But I guess they didn't know that the leadership was under Black Consciousness, I'm not sure how they introduced themselves.

Facilitator: And the education there was it still good at Hilltown?

Respondent: Very, we had Latin, I wish there was still Latin even today because it assisted us on having good English, I loved Latin, it was very good, we were still getting ..., then there were no ABC but there was S, M ..., you would have passed by M and you would have passed by S, school leaving, do you remember, Matric. We used to be one of the schools with good Matric results.

Facilitator: So what were your plans beyond Hilltown?

Respondent: I wanted to be a lawyer and remember at that time if you are a child of an ordinary person like a priest or a nurse you wouldn't get access to bursaries. So my second choice was social work.

I don't know what happened, my father in fact disappeared into thin air, he didn't take care of us at the time and my mother was supporting all the grandchildren of Calata. Calata had three daughters so each daughter, the other daughter had one child, stayed at Calata house, the other daughter had 6 children staying at Calata House and there were three of us, so we were then under the same roof. So my mother was educating all of us and the other sister was married. So my mother couldn't stretch herself for my education at Fort Hare so I would call it a consensus, the next thing was nursing.

Facilitator: so you went to nursing after that?

Respondent: Yes I went to Bara for nursing after Matric

Facilitator: You came straight to Bara?

Respondent: Yes, isn't it you wouldn't come to Jo'burg, it would be an incentive for passing Matric, so we were allowed further learning in Johannesburg.

Facilitator: but did you have networks in Johannesburg or you just ..?

Respondent: No I came to my mother at the old location Brakpan, I also had friends from the BCM because some were staying in Pretoria, some were staying in Soweto I remember. It's just that I don't know where in Soweto. So but I didn't know where they were staying but they got to know that I'm at Bara. I then opened a branch of BCM at Bara

Facilitator: a branch of BCM at Bara, really?

Respondent: Nursing students organisation

Facilitator: really

Respondent: Yes it would work with SASO but for nursing students

Facilitator: I've never heard of that?

Respondent: No it was never called that way but when they requested me to recruit, Sithulele and them, because we were students it will fall under SASO, student nurses

Facilitator: And your activities focussed on what?

Respondent: At that time we had to recruit nurses, take them to Black Consciousness, SASO conferences, workshops to understand the history of Black Consciousness and where we come, their vision in fact and participate also in the broader mother body Black Consciousness. Most of the time we were attending Heroe's Days, I remember when Tiro was killed there was a memorial session and we were also told about opening a worker's organisation.

Facilitator: but were all nurses into politics at Bara?

Respondent: Not all but we did have a branch, we were more than 100. I was actually earmarked by the Matron, she realised that I was bringing trouble, the system was called, I was reading a book called "Fire Is Time" -

it was my last year fortunately. So when the system arrived I had to hide the book. The senior Matron asked me about the book, I said to her you took the book. So the system said without evidence they cannot arrest me. The book was hidden behind the toilet, I went and got it back. I was told when I finish my training they will not employ me because I'm a government institution and you belong to organisations that want to overturn the government. So that's why I went to work at Kalafong Hospital in Atteridgeville.

Facilitator: but it's still a government institute?

Respondent: They didn't know about my background

Facilitator: I see so they couldn't hire you at Baragwanath?

Respondent: yes because I already had the case of the book

Facilitator: and you found your way to Pretoria

Respondent: Yes I applied in 1978 at Kalafong.

Facilitator: so the rest of the early 1970s you spent at Bara?

Respondent: Yes. I think Tiro was killed in 1972 in Botswana

Facilitator: Yes. Your impression of Kalafong when you got there?

Respondent: It was worse, there were a lot of discrimination, but because we are an only black ..(unclear), we could feel that with the doctors, I

could not take it with my Black Consciousness mentality. My senior sisters, because we were junior at that time, realised my political acumen and would try to allocate me to wards where there was a political doctors. Some doctors would come to work with patients, but there would be those who would be using black patients for their research. I was finally caught up, I was doing night shift in a children's ward, when the child's condition changed I called the doctor who was on call, he didn't arrive at that time, so I wrote a report and complained about this. I couldn't go off duty at 7 am, I was worried about handing over a critical child without getting the relevant assistance, as a sister you must give a report of the activities, what you did etc. So in the children's ward you cannot hand over without the intervention of a senior sister or doctor or something. So the doctors took rounds at 06:30 and they were in the midst of the doctor who was on call. I called the doctor aside and asked him before he takes rounds generally can you please start with that child, the child's condition has changed and that I am worried. The doctor had given me instructions by phone and I told him the child is not responding. Then he said "please don't annoy me, you're new, I can't take instructions from you, who are you, I'm taking rounds, I will see that child as I'm taking rounds" – then I said no doctor it's not about me wanting to instruct you, but it's about the criticality of the child. So he also wrote a report – in our exchange of words, politics came in, I can't remember what I said but maybe I said if it was a white child you would behave differently. I became very emotional. He reported me to the Matron and I was suspended until a certain date. On that particular date the Matron said to me I've listened to the story of the doctor, I got your report, my observation as the Matron is that you were rude to the doctor because at the time you were calling the doctor, the doctor was tired. That is why the doctor gave you instructions by phone. At the time the doctor came to

take rounds you were rude to the doctor and you started politicising and that is not allowed here. So I was suspended. Then later on she said I've got the report that you've been organising nurses for your things, your unions and politics, now I cannot keep you – I will keep you on one condition, you agree to meet with so and so. So I said who are those people, so she said come back tomorrow, so when I went back the following day I found the special branch. Then I was reminded that this is an institution of the government and if I want to stick around I must work for them. I then said no I can't work for you then I left the hospital.

Facilitator: So the Matron accused you for organising the workers?

Respondent: At the time when I was suspended, she said she did some research and I was organising the nurses, I was going to political activities with the nurses because I wanted to conscientise them. She was not aware until she investigated.

Facilitator: which political activities because around 1978 ..(unclear) had been banned?

Respondent: Samora Machel died at this time, do you remember and before that there would be Heroe's Day's, we didn't miss Heroe's Days, 21 March 2012, and the June 16 – it was still fresh at the time. There was this SASO/BPC Trial

Facilitator: 1976/77

Respondent: You remember where Steve Biko came to attend ..(unclear), I was attending such things with the nurses because I wanted to expose them

Facilitator: really

Respondent: I was attending the trial, even the inquest. I got to know Steve even after joining Black Theology. When I came here I worked with Simangaliso Mkhathshwa, he said to me when I'm off, he was in Roman Bishop's Court, he was the secretary which was based in Pretoria. So when I was at Kalafong we would meet, he gave me a part time job as a researcher, researching black women's experiences in South Africa. So when I went to do research on women in the Eastern Cape, the arrangement was that I would go straight to his home. Then I met him the way we did. So when I was on leave at Kalafong, I would go and interview women, I actually Winnie in Brandfort – I don't know what Smangaliso did with the information but I ended up meeting Steve Biko because he would take me to those women. There were women from England, I can't remember why I had to interview them but I was using a template. So Steve Biko had a link with the women. That was the year he died, 1977. I think I was to come back and report.

Facilitator: At that time 1978 or so, was there a chance to organise a health worker's union?

Respondent: No you know at that time I don't think .., NEHAWU was not there, I think we were just a nursing group. In 1978 I was no longer a student, so we were attending SASO things. But there was no union for nurses. So we would go to Father Mkhathshwa's place, there was a

meeting of BC, and somewhere in Ga-Rankuwa there was this lady Deborah, she is no longer active. There were other guys, I forgot their names, we would attend SASO things.

Facilitator: so you were at Kalafong for how long?

Respondent: I didn't last long, I think I was there for two years, 1978 to 1979

Facilitator: Did some of the nurses get politically conscientised?

Respondent: Yes they did, they were members and even in their places, I remember I had a friend in Thembisa, we would be invited .., now as a qualified sister and it's in Atteridgeville. But Atteridgeville was full of social life than politics, which was a pity, too much vibe. There was a guy called Papi Moloto they were involved in politics but they left the country.

Facilitator: so there was just a handful of people and the rest went to vibe?

Respondent: Yoo

Facilitator: so what became of you after 1979?

Respondent: I came back, my brother then was in ..(unclear) – I tried to apply for nursing positions here in Brakpan, I went to stay with my mother at old location, I was ashamed to go back home, but my mother understood even though she was discouraging to be involved in politics. So I would do her errands and help her around. Ultimately I went to Van

Leer, they said they were looking for an Occupational Nurse even if you are not qualified, even if you are not qualified, if you have a nursing background. So I went for an interview, they told me that they are going to open a branch in Brakpan, now that I am staying in Brakpan they are going to need my services in 3 or 4 months time. So I kept on checking whether Van Leer had started or not and I was employed. That's when I started to be a shop steward.

Facilitator: At Van Leer in Brakpan?

Respondent: Ja and then because of my political attitude, I organised workers to join NACTU, National Council of Trade Unions under Mahlomola, Skosana, Cunningham, Tera Shaw who was the general secretary

Facilitator: but when you got there, there was no union at all?

Respondent: I don't know, I think the people were passive

Facilitator: so were they easy to organize?

Respondent: yes, they were easy

Facilitator: so they were willing to join the union?

Respondent: yes, they joined, all of us joined NACTU, because it was new, remember it's easy when it's new and they had this thing that you are better off you are learned, we are not educated and do not understand these things. I introduced them to reading as well, newspapers etc.

Facilitator: Ja, conscientise them

Respondent: Ja

Facilitator: Did you have access to other forms of literature, books ..?

Respondent: I was reading a lot, I used to give them, I remember I gave them, what's the first "A set to fire next time" that one was tip, I think I had books from Smangaliso, Father Mkhathshwa, because I know it's not "I write what I like" I think it was made available now, "Things Fall apart" and we used to discuss it. I think that is the book I liked to circulate so that people can have an idea that things will come and certain things will happen in the midst of things and we should have a way of addressing them when things are falling apart, I used to like them.

Facilitator: And the attitude of management towards the union?

Respondent: You know what, I think I was the only one who had Matric in Brakpan, being a small company, those whites, I think it was in the 1980s, there was a vibe .., things like consumer boycotts, they wanted people to assume that they are liberals, so they drew me to management and I became a Quality Controller instead of a nurse, which was a contradiction. So they didn't have a nurse and I assisted, also they didn't want to spend, I was doing first aid. So I became a quality controller. I think they drew me into their management so that they can get closer to me and get to know who I am and what I'm doing with the workers. They also didn't want to show us that they were against us. They agreed to the

monthly debits and they allowed our office to come and address us once a month

Facilitator: so you the recognition agreement they signed it?

Respondent: Yes they signed it.

Facilitator: so you became a shop steward, the first shop steward

Respondent: Yes as Van Leer Brakpan

Facilitator: But you were a woman leading old conservative men, was it easy?

Respondent: People just wanted to work, I don't know what was happening at that time, they had no interest whatsoever, even in ANC things but they would participate in consumer programmes and stay away, it didn't bother them that I'm a woman etc. What they were interested in was drinking, they felt they were working too hard and that meetings were going to take up a lot of their spare time. I think this is what the whites liked about black workers, that they will earn and just get drunk on their hard earned money. It was a cycle, they would work get drunk, come back and work for more money and get drunk again.

Facilitator: did you manage to get them out of that cycle?

Respondent: Ja, I know some woman who started studying, she is now working for the municipality in Springs, she studied IT and she says she is what she is today because of me.

Facilitator: I thought Van Leer was male dominated?

Respondent: Van Leer male .., but that time because it was small it had a bath manufacturing section and there were more women there, and then they introduced geysers, in Brakpan they ratio of men and women was equivalent, for instance you would have 45 women and 50 men because they were manufacturing baths, women were manufacturing the baths, they called it bath dressing.

Facilitator: did the women join the union, NACTU?

Respondent: Yes they all did, there was no FOSATU

Facilitator: So they never gave you problems that they have kids and things like that..?

Respondent: They wouldn't attend all meetings but they would attend when an official from outside the workplace wanted to address us. But going to meetings, workshops and/or seminars there would be a handful like 5 which we called a committee.

Facilitator: Other than NACTU was there another union at Van Leer?

Respondent: No it was just NACTU, there was no confusion, I think there was another one in Springs because Springs was long standing

Facilitator: How did you get contacts to NACTU?

Respondent: I think it's the political background. I realized that it is leaning more towards the vision of the BC. My brother was FOSATU and I got to know that it is linked to the ANC. I felt I wouldn't fit at FOSATU because of the attitude of the BC

Facilitator: so you were more into BCM ideology?

Respondent: Yes because I really still believe it has a place even currently because people are liberated but mentally .., they still would skip you in the queue and serve a white person. It worries me

Facilitator: Ja psychological oppression

Respondent: and they still can't stand up to their rights, if a white person comes and tells them off they would let them go. My son is an engineer, he is not earning the correct salary, he was supposed to be paid R15 000 a month, he was paid R3000 for a year. That was because he would stand up to Frans who addressed them as "hey" and he was labeled cheeky.

Facilitator: How was that one resolved?

Respondent: He did some research on how to resolve it, he was given advised .., he also approached Frans' senior and told him that he is given menial jobs to qualify the R3000, he is qualified quantity surveyor, so he eventually left them and he is getting the salary that he deserves. Now back to my problem, all the departments are led by black people and we are saying as South Africa there are scarce skills like engineers, and here are engineers, they are underpaid, they are treated like children, nobody

wants to listen to them and why then do you want children. If people can know that my son was paid R3000 with an Honors degree, do you think other people would want to register for engineering courses, and that's a government department that is doing that to a young boy, National Public Works. So I've been collecting newspaper cuttings of the corruption and I told him he is not going to grow in the Public Works, his bursary was from Public Works.

I'm trying to say that even now people are still mentally enslaved, with all the powers that we have, people don't understand

Facilitator: that we have the power

Respondent: they don't understand the mental liberation and how to use our power. My son was saying Frans was telling them that there's no budget and that they were junior, men and women who were senior to Frans had no background and had no interest in learning from the new black engineers. There was no progression in place, Frans was awaiting his son to come and take over from him, maybe it's the Sunset Clause.

Facilitator: It is long after Sunset Clause, we should be moving now, we should be moving honestly because transformation is being dragged, it's all over, in all the sectors. Anyway going back to the 1980s, at Van Leer, as shop steward, what were the heated shop floor issues that had to be attended to. The first one was protective clothing. I realized that they did not buy the prescribed relevant protective clothing relevant to the work because the fiber was itching for women, the boots/clothing bought by the company was not really protective, people were complaining about itching, then finally the correct boots were bought. The other problem

was overtime, they didn't want to pay overtime, it was a struggle, we fought for it. The other thing was salaries. When I arrived with my Matric and the exposure of working somewhere else, you would calculate how much you made a day, a week, a month and compare it with your salary, it was peanuts. This was happening in all the sectors. We fought for increases, we would do tools down until our grievances were heard.

We also fought for training, they would say (interruption – phone rang) – sorry about that.

Facilitator: so did they eventually provide training?

Respondent: yes I remember we trained on .., I requested that those that were working in the bath manufacturing section should be trained on first aid because the nurse as I told you would come once a week and sometimes as a quality controller I wouldn't be able to jump into a building person because I'm controlling a chain. I requested training for one male and one female. So they did first aid and another lady was taken to an IT course, Introduction to Computers, she didn't finish the course because the company said they cannot afford to pay for the fees anymore. The other one was sent for supervisory training.

Facilitator: Was exploitation an issue at Van Leer?

Respondent: No because it was a small company, we had two white managers and one lady administrator and one receptionist and a stock controller and the boss. So there was no discrimination, we didn't feel it because we were all black.

Facilitator: It seems to me health issues were not taken seriously?

Respondent: Not at all, to an extent that you would have to call a friend when you came out of first aid, we didn't even have a fully equipped first aid room, there was a room that was away from chemicals, and a small first aid box, sometimes there's no Panado in the first aid kit. At times we had to buy our own medication.

Facilitator: so these issues were never taken up?

Respondent: No they were not important to them, who are we, we are baboons

Facilitator: And racism at the workplace?

Respondent: do you know why I say it was not evident, it's because we are all blacks and they were in their upstairs offices, they would come down with a smile when there were new instructions, so we didn't feel the racist practices, we couldn't compare because white people were not working on the same level with us. We had black supervisors and black quality controllers. As a female I was earning less than the male quality controller and I fought for that and it was resolved.

Facilitator: Did you maybe go on strikes sometime?

Respondent: Maybe tools down for an hour, the manager would come and listen to us and correct whatever we wanted, we've never struck at Brakpan Van Leer.

Facilitator: from NACTU, did you receive training as a shop steward maybe?

Respondent: Yes NACTU trained us on how to run meetings, how to resolve conflict management on leadership and communication. I also requested training on how to recruit new members and to educate workers on the importance of unions. I also requested training on what I was doing, so NACTU sent me for quality control.

Facilitator: Any political activities outside the workplace?

Respondent: Ja I did attend, I continued with BC until I resigned .., I was recruited to work in the office of NACTU whilst I was at Van Leer Brakpan and I resigned in 1988

Facilitator: so you left Van Leer?

Respondent: I left Van Leer before 1988, I remember I gave birth in 1982, I went back, I think 1987 to join NACTU head office as an administrator

Facilitator: Your impression of the national office?

Respondent: Yes at Wanderers. As an administrator I was taking care of membership, I remember, making appointments for Mahlomola who was the deputy to Phira Shoye, who was the general secretary at the time, organizing seminars for workers, communication and .., organizing events, I would make bookings for hotels and flights. My senior, Nolly was in charge of the Women's Wing of NACTU, we had a gender office. I would

be asked by our affiliates to address them on contraceptives, women's role at the workplace, I did that a lot.

Facilitator: But then NACTU, could it afford or manage to compete with COSATU, firstly there was FOSATU and then COSATU?

Respondent: NACTU's problem I think was similar to BC, they were intellectuals, they didn't focus on numbers, I think it was like quality, there was a lot of discussions, of terms and the future, what would we do when we are liberated, AZANIA, there was a lot of intellectual discussions and I think they were good, it's a pity that democracy is about numbers.

Facilitator: so in other words NACTU was wrong by focusing on quality they should have focused on numbers?

Respondent: I think they should have done both

Facilitator: and other challenges that were faced by NACTU at the time?

Respondent: Except growing, other challenges was finance, the international world didn't give us a lot of money because they supported the ANC because they wanted to be recognized by the ANC. The ANC won the international world through OR Tambo because he was based there and highly respected. We actually all respected OR as NACTU because of the kind of work, he seemed a very honest man.

Facilitator: so was the issue of finance ever resolved in NACTU?

Respondent: It wasn't because the little money that they received was for salaries and few seminars and it affected mobilization programmes. For instance the density of the membership was in Gauteng compared to other provinces like Eastern Cape, we rarely heard about NACTU in the Eastern Cape

Facilitator: so there was no growth?

Respondent: and our leaders knew that the competition was tough.

Facilitator: Any internal squabbles maybe which could have crippled NACTU?

Respondent: During my stay at head office, they were not evident but I know Prosure was seen as a monopoliser, decision making, because I think he was not really monopolizing, he was the founder and you know when you have founded something you want to make sure that it doesn't die, you know what others do like it's happening now within the ANC, the founders like OR, Sisulu, Xalata, they wouldn't have loved to see the ANC as it is today, they would have defended it, but the successors are just doing their own thing. Sometimes these things cannot be avoided, things happen for different things at different times.

Facilitator: so for how long were you there?

Respondent: NACTU I was there until 1993 when I gave birth to my child

Facilitator: so you opted to leave?

Respondent: yes I went back to nursing. I got a steady boyfriend at NACTU, he felt that NACTU is dying I must go back to nursing because we must start a family. I then went back to nursing and I couldn't work in public hospitals because of my record. So I went to Parkland, private nursing.

Facilitator: So you left workers politics completely now?

Respondent: No I organized nurses to join NEHAWU at Parkland and the matron was angry, now it was now an ANC thing, NEHAWU

Facilitator: So was there NEHAWU AT Parkland before you came?

Respondent: I need to mention that before I went back to nursing, Head Office had deployed me to open office, a regional office of NACTU in Springs. There my experience was that it's not easy to work in silos, I made relationships with COSATU in Springs, and then I started learning a lot about ANC at the time and my brother at that time was in and out of jail, the police were also in and out of NACTU and NACTU was not happy, Black Consciousness sent me to Paris to raise funds BC Women's Wing which was called Imbeleko, the president then was Meterant, I met BC people who had now turned ANC in exile in Paris, Bokwe Mafuna. We used to meet underground, so they informed me that they are now affiliated to ANC, they assisted me and also told me that NACTU is not progressive, perhaps I should leave NACTU and be in the office of BCM and work hard, etc. So when I came back with the funds I then focused on Black Consciousness, this was in 1990.

Facilitator: Your offices in Springs, you opened them in 1993?

Respondent: No they transferred me in 1990, I left them in 1993

Facilitator: The circumstances, was it easy to run an office and to set it up?

Respondent: I think I have strengths in communication, organizing, it wasn't as difficult as Pirashore thought, he was actually impressed with me. The office was busy, you don't open an administration office only, we are a workers' organization, you must have another office for the regional organizer, in the same block you must have an office for a recruiter, the organizer would work with shop stewards. The recruiter would go out and get new members to the factories. So I organized that office with an organizer and then there were other organizers who were employed. So the office was vibrant. We had a good relationship with COSATU office which was in the other street not far from me and so we used to attend meetings in order to get exposure. We also agreed to work together in terms of helping each other with worker problems. We supported each other. I think this is the time the ANC accepted me, I was not yet a member.

Facilitator: But you mentioned that this angered NACTU/COSATU relationship?

Respondent: Yes they didn't like it and I was no more taken seriously. I remember I would write reports and go and attend regional meetings at head office, my issues were not resolved, the rental was not paid regularly, that is why I left.

Facilitator: Did you manage to recruit, did you leave some legacy?

Respondent: I did, our offices were vibrant, we held workshops, workers would come to our office. I think that is why the ANC recruited me.

Facilitator: And then you joined the hospital?

Respondent: Yes I went back to nursing, I now had children, my steady boyfriend encouraged me to go back to nursing, this was in 1992/93 at Parkland Clinic. I didn't want to be shop steward, I was training somebody else. The problem was there was no union. Like there was animosity between me and NACTU, I felt I wouldn't be able to organize nurses for NACTU because I felt that NEHAWU would be fine and I had a good relationship with ANC members. So we joined NEHAWU, NEHAWU came to Parkland, we worked very well together. The Matron realized that she must comply and everything went well, but you know they were in a hurry for me to leave Springs Park Lane.

Facilitator: How long were you there?

Respondent: I was there until 2006, that is the longest place I worked at, 10 years.

Facilitator: What were your highlights ..., you were a NEHAWU shop steward there?

Respondent: Yes I was NEHAWU shop steward, we gained a lot of membership, I was looked upon when there were problems, to an extent

that we didn't even involve NEHAWU officials now. I would be their reps in their cases. I was the boss and when I left they all cried.

Facilitator: What were the highlights of your stay there?

Respondent: That's when I felt racism, it was like we were not in the New South Africa, they didn't recognize anything on black leadership. The Nursing Council, even now is still dominated by whites, the Nursing Association would take whites to development training overseas. Doctors had an attitude for black nurses. The bulk of the patients were white, so they would want to embarrass us in front of the patients. They would make you feel that you as blacks have won politically but economically you depend of us. So it was a problem for me because I wouldn't allow such things to just pass, I would take them, and this was known, doctors would think twice before talking to me. The nice part about it was that most doctors were not into politics and they preferred qualified sisters – so I might have been a nerve for the Matron but I was the “darling” of the doctors. The hospital management could not handle this. Most of the doctors preferred to work with me and asked me not to allow the senior sister to change me. I had a good relationship with the surgical doctors and the children's wards. Personally I didn't like the medical ward, so I focused on this. And most nurses did not like the wards that I preferred because they are generally very busy wards. So the doctors wouldn't be rude to me and the nurses I am working with because they also knew I would take the matter up with the Matron and the Superintendent. Gradually the Superintendent knew how to treat me and the others and did not harass. There was a lot of oppression for the cleaning staff. They were not allowed to join NEHAWU because they said they were not nurses. They joined some other different union, General Worker's

something and they wouldn't allow me to represent them in disciplinary hearings. In Kalafong .., even with nurses, and sisters who were afraid of standing up for their rights. Our government introduced Developmental Programmes at the workplace, the programmes were compulsory. So in Kalafong they would choose whites and coloureds

Facilitator: is this at Kalafong or Parklands?

Respondent: Springs Parkland they would choose whites and coloureds, their bars would improve. I was told that I am a problem. I was never sent out for any training. So I started focusing in educational issues. My children started going to school. I studied Community Development in Education, but there was a lot of oppression.

The reason I stayed there was that they had standards. You wouldn't just nurse or do a procedure for the sake of finishing it. I believed, with the mentality of BC, I believed in being thorough for the benefit of all, the patient to be satisfied and the nurse to feel fulfilled.

Facilitator: Were any of the problems that you found there, racism, discrimination, suppression were they resolved by the time you left?

Respondent: Not really. Some but not much because even now when I phone my friends they would say Matron is taking rounds, and I would say you are using a landline, how can she be sure you are speaking to a friend, it could a doctor you are speaking to. The mindset, they were always worried. There was a lot of oppression and over working. You were made to run. There's a lot of oppression there up to today, they say it's better but I don't know how. I remember that our salaries were

different from white and coloured nurses and when I complained about that, NEHAWU couldn't take it any further, it was left unresolved – they would add a little bit of money to our salaries. The matron was fed up with me, I would come to work with no stockings and when she asked me why I would say I don't have enough money and that I'm waiting for my next salary. I would then be given an increase on my own. Sometimes I would be late because I didn't have a car, most taxis didn't want to go through Parklands, so I would arrive late and when she asked me why I'm late I would say I had to make breakfast for my children first. She said you must employ a helper and I asked her how am I going to pay her with, she would add more money. So I fought my battles quietly with the BC mentality.

So we participated in many of the COSATU programmes. The stay aways, and tools down for an hour even at Parkland. We respected that we are nurses and that we should not do it regularly – our office would be informed timeously. When Raditsela died we were in the forefront of organizing a stay away for his burial. I think I was still in Van Leer. That is how far I went with worker struggles.

Facilitator: Looking back what were your highlights at Van Leer?

Respondent: My highlights, I was promoted at Van Leer, I was first an ordinary labourer, even though I was promised the nursing position, I was told they are still organizing that thing. So I would assist in the bathroom section. After three months a position was advertised, we were told we can apply and I applied and got the post as a Quality Controller, both at bathroom and geyser sections. In six months I was promoted as an overall senior quality controller, I was excited about that. Also that I managed to

win the acceptance of members to belong to a union because at the time companies were reluctant to sign agreements and organize the debits. Getting the company to debit union subscriptions on salaries was an achievement. The link up with NACTU .., I was eventually recruited to work at NACTU head office. That was something to be proud of.

Facilitator: Did you have benefits as workers at Van Leef?

Respondent: No I don't remember, did we have pension I did, I remember I got a lump sum which I used to extent my mother's house. This is my mother's house. My husband was killed for political reasons in Soweto. So my family asked me to come back home to look after our home.

Facilitator: At Van Leer, maternity issues and other benefits..?

Respondent: There was, we fought for them, it was tough, remember those women .., they came with those women from Springs, and when we joined NACTU we realized that some of these things were not practiced practically. People will be told go to maternity and come back and they would come back without having received UIF maternity money. We fought until it was done. I know there was pension, there was UIF, through our struggles maternity was introduced. (interruption)

Facilitator: why did you leave Parkland?

Respondent: Ja I felt tired, my feet were sore, the money was little and I wanted to be on my own. I also didn't have time for my children, we were working odd hours, you know nursing is 12 hours, so those were the

three reasons. My feet were sore, the salary was not enough and I thought it's time to be on my own.

Facilitator: How did you hope to survive then?

Respondent: When I was at Springs Parkland, I was elected School Governing Body member at Michael's ..(unclear), I think that was 1998 and I worked with the Department of Education. I then registered with UNISA wanting to understand, nursing can make one stereotyped. I became interested in understanding the new curriculum OBE because I wanted to assist my babies. We were taught from Calata house that you can't get liberated without education. So I felt under educated, I felt that I should have been maybe a matron or lawyer and work normal hours, and I didn't want the same thing happen to my children. So my working closely with the Department of Education through the School Governing Body made me realize that it's important that I must assist my kids and I must be part of their learning and their growing up and the more I'm at Parkland the more I do not know what is going on with the homework. When I come back home at 8 I have to bathe them and take them to bed. I wake up at 6 and leave them at crèche. I felt I should leave nursing. Your question was what was I hoping to live on

Facilitator: yes

Respondent: Yes at the time I had links with the Department of Education. After the elections the MEC of education became the MEC of Public Works in Gauteng and because we were assisting him with policies and functionality of schools through educational summits and encouraging the community to take the education of their children seriously and

participate, education improved and results were good, OBE was difficult but loved, we made a difference, it created a young child who is able to research, presentation, - OBE has three elements which contributed to the children's education; critical thinking unlike parrot work. So we trained on all those things. So when the MEC of Education became MEC of Public Works, he encouraged me to register a company and I tendered for maintaining highways in Sedibeng for 3 years and was extended to 5 years. I was the project manager of the tender. It kept me going for 5 years.

Facilitator: and subsequently?

Respondent: subsequently I opened another company to train school governing bodies because I gained a lot of experience and the course that I took with Unisa gave me more insight. So I registered a company that trains School Governing Bodies. The Department of Education gave me a lot of jobs until recently the funding goes straight to Matthew Goniwe's School of Governance and Leadership. By the way when I was in the SGB with the same MEC we agreed on building the institution. So when it was launched Cradock was invited and the family of Matthew Goniwe was invited and then it was proof that I do come from Cradock and Matthew was my teacher. So I made a mark with the Department of Education, there's a photograph of me at Matthew Goniwe's school with two other teachers. I also critiqued training manuals from Matthew Goniwe to train school governing bodies, that is how I got the experience to open my own company, I developed my own copies. I closed gaps on the manuals and they became more relevant. The manuals were formulated in 2005 and my company was registered in 2007. I gained a lot of respect from the Department of Education. When Kader Asmal

came here there was a feud between PASO and COSAS, when PASO was taking children out of schools, I was the Chairperson of Ekurhuleni Local Education and Training Unit which was the only one that was functional and respected, so Kader would say where's Mandisa and everybody would be angry. I made a mark, all the districts in Gauteng respect me, the district directors they all know me. Parents around here respect me, I organized a June 16 commemoration for learners and it was addressed by Mangena when he was the Deputy Minister. Beeld kept on asking me whether people would come, they came, the crèche is run by the ANC, and I was already ANC member. Beeld was here, they covered the story, it was very emotional and Rusty was programme director, I have the newspaper cutting. It was reported the same day, SABC was in attendance. Parents still want me to call them to talk about education. I feel I have outgrown and want to give space for the new generation.

Facilitator: what is your focus today, what are you up to?

Respondent: Currently, Matthew Goniwe called me two weeks back, they want my services, they have a new CEO they want the founder members, the new CEO wanted to put a face to a name, he has been told about us, we went there for interviews. We are going to be their core facilitators. I had training as a facilitator, I've also facilitated for the ANC. My focus now is to make schools more functional and motivate parents to assist the learners. I also do other things, I'm from work, I'm sub contracting waste removal. So every morning I must check my trunk is being cleaned, are the workers there and the litter people and come back and read and plan and prepare for the schools that are calling me. Even now, I think the weekend of the 21st I'm training in Wattville on school governance. They've just been elected, they don't want to wait for

Matthew Goniwe because all the money for school governing training are directed to Matthew Goniwe School of Governance and Leadership, so they want to train me on their roles, the immediate roles because 90% I know. So I've been called, I've agreed in principle – I will go to the school and understand what they want. So that's where I am now.

I am also doing quality auditing for computer school labs?? – I am doing that on a part time basis, I love working with schools because I go there for other things and intervene where necessary. I've been busy with a district now to form small community committees to stand at gates especially at secondary schools in order to find out what is the problem. The number of late comers is gradually decreasing and I'm feeling good.

Facilitator: So was it worth it to be in unions, did it pay off?

Respondent: It did, it taught me leadership, communication and exposed me also to life beyond liberation, how to handle issues at the workplace, in your area, it did a lot of work. By the way union mentality was Steve Biko's brainchild it was just not driven by him.

Facilitator: Okay, anything else that you think is important that we did not discuss?

Respondent: so far I'm worried about the education system, the system is wrong not the schools. I always tell them in our ANC meetings if only we could realize that we are oppressed by an education system that was meant to keep us as servants, so that our focus is on how do we change the Department of Education with its employees and staff. If I was in authority I wouldn't change the Minister of Education every five years, I

would want the Minister to review his/her progress and agree to the weaknesses and built on them for another 10 years. I compare that with Zimbabwe and Uganda, they are poorer than us but their education system is so strong. My worry is the children, the way they are taught, with the changing of Ministers changing the curriculum, we are going to produce a nation of half educated citizens. How is a half educated parent going to encourage his/her children. We are going back to the previous era unaware. You compare the children who are privileged to study in town to those in the township – white schools focus on quality learning for the learners. For instance when OBE was introduced, our teachers stopped allowing learners to read out they said it is not done anymore. This caused us to be the lowest in literature, it's worse with Maths. If only the Minister of Education was not changed every now and again maybe there will be a difference in the children that we are educating. We are experiencing a lot of drop outs, they are not stupid, it's the system that makes the children fail. One year they pass with symbols, then the next time they pass with 1,2,3, 4 - where are we taking the nation to?

Facilitator: It's tough

Respondent: We try to contribute at ANC policy conferences, but it's not easy. I attended a policy conference at Galagher Estate, national, and somebody introduced me and said you are not taking care of Calata's grandchildren. I can't go about telling people that I am Calata's family, people must be identified for their skills and used to contribute in building a better nation but unfortunately it's not done. I am worried. The education system will make the ANC face another revolution. I told them at a policy conference. Parents need to wake up because if they don't

we will be raising an angry nation. Uganda and Zimbabwe irrespective of the poverty they are educated. If they are to come into our country they will survive. Now we are infested with Somalis they are running tuck shops in the township. Calata's family does not buy in town we bought in the township. That is how we were brought up, people don't understand that, these little things

Facilitator: they count

Respondent: so we still have a long way. We can't sit down and say what can we do, the little things will make a difference. I am also trying to get bursaries through embassies. I got two bursaries for two kids who live in the shebeen down the road from Dr Ntsholo, the other one has a B Comm and the other one is a teacher. They are so proud of me. One day I was at SANCO a shack burnt, people said I spoke and said something, at the end of the day the parents say I gave them clothes for the family. One of the children is studying analytical chemistry, I organized clothes for this child even though I don't remember when. I wish we could all help and make a difference.

Facilitator: Thank you, let me release you, that was wonderful

Respondent: It was a long story, I hope you will get what you want. I also forgot to tell you I opened a crèche, which was swallowed by Early Childhood Development, they are allocated a school.

END

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