

Mpho, born in Estcourt, KZN)

Im going to start by asking you what you remember and what you know (Im sure you don't remember a lot), about your first two years?

Im my first two years, I grew up with my Pause, my maternal grandmother,

Ok

So, I think I remember visits, um, my father would come visit, um, and my Mum, and also that there were, because my parents were not married, there were usually a lot of visits between the maternal side and the paternal side, my family.

So your other grandparents would visit as well?

The grandparents didn't visit each other but I would go.

Ok

So my father would also come and visit me at my mother's parents.

Ok. And where were you born?

I was born in Nongoma, KZN.

Ok, and that time that you were born, what were your Mom's circumstances.

Um, my Mom got me when she had passed her matric, and she soon became a teacher after that. So I was mostly raised by my grandmother. My mum and her mother um, laughs, had children at the same time.

Did they, really?

I have got an uncle who was born in March and I was born in April.

Ok, so effectively you grew up together,

Yes, so my grandmother kind of raised both of us. I remember my Mum, she says that in the early days she didn't have money and she didn't have ways of raising me and it helped, she says it helped that her mother had a baby at the same time as we shared um eh, things like um, baby stuff.

Yes

Me and my uncle shared it.

Tell me, is Nongoma a town?

No, Nongoma is rural, it is a small town in KZN, and then very.. traditional, cos that is where the Zulu King stays actually.

Ok, so it is the heart of Royal KZN. Ok. So you grew up, your Mom had you and then did you go straight to your Gran?

I was born in a hospital in Nongoma, and then I stayed in Nongoma all my young life.

Do you know if your Mom breastfed you at all.

I know she did.....um....

But you are not sure for how long.

No, Im just not sure for how long.

Ok. Your Mom then left and went to teachers college?

Um, she only... because she went straight to teaching after her matric, she only went to teachers college when I was..... pause, she probably went when I was four.

So she went straight from matric into being a teacher?

Ja, in those days teachers were able to do that. But no more.

So she breast fed for a while and then she went and taught, and your early years you remember mostly with your Gran, but there were lots of visits.

I don't have a lot of memories, eh, from, mostly the stuff I remember is from when I was four.

Ja

And what do you remember from when you were four?

Um, pause, well we, I had a huge yard and there were quite a... there were always a lot of kids around and... um.... During the day we will be with my grandmother, and other kids, um, I just remember, and we, I remember being with other children most of the time because we, its almost like all those days were sunny because we were always running around. Then I remember, I was five when, I was playing wit my friends and, a snake spat into my eyes.

Wow..

And I went blind for some time, eh, I was very panicked. But it seems that my grandmother was relaxed. I remember a lot of people coming to our house and discussing who was breastfeeding in the area. And later on a woman who was breastfeeding came and she sprayed her milk on my eyes, and I went to sleep and when I woke up I was fine.

That is really interesting.

Ja, I have that memory. I think I was five at that time because it was just before I started school, at that time.

So you started school at six?

Ja.

That is incredible, do you know what sort of snake it was?

No, it happened very fast, like me going blind, it happened immediately. I mean I saw the snake and then it spat into my eye. And I called for my grandmother and she came running and carried me into the house.

It must have been terrifying for you, a five year old boy to encounter a snake like that and have venom in your eye. There are a lot of snakes in rural KZN.

I have never heard of anyone else that has had that experience. I don't like snakes to this day.

So the uncle that was born a month before you, I imagine he must have been like a brother to you?

No not really. My mothers sister got a son as well, who was probably two years younger than us, two to three years younger than us, and I became closer to him because he was like my little brother.

So he was close to you?

Yes, also because we were the sons of the daughters.

Ok

So was there something there between you and your uncle, what is his name?

Vusi

Was there something there between you and Vusi because his mother was the person who was caring for you?

Um, What do you mean?

Do you think that there might have been a tension between you?

Um, Probably because we fought a lot, we fought a lot as children... we fought a lot. I mean he was only a month older than me, but we were different. He was more...pause I mean,,, I had more household responsibilities from an early age, I mean my grandmother trusted me. I mean, she would find it easier to say to me, "look after the rest of the kids while Im gone". Then as we grew older also, I was the one that was relied most of the time. Like... so my um... ja. We were different, we clashed a lot, we fought a lot. I was closer to Leli, who was my cousin.

The younger boy

Ja, ja. Also because um, you know, if you, when we were growing up there would be something like, if you were a boy, and um, you stay at your mothers parents place, at um, its its not such a cool thing. Um,

So it would be more usual to go to your father's family.

Ja, so from time to time there would be, if we had done something, there would be a comment like, you know, when are you going home, you know.

Oh really

Ja, so I think I was maybe more protective of him and closer to him, because we were the two boys that were not staying with our mothers.

Ok, so there was some sort of thing that you, if you did something naughty there might be some sort of threat almost, or just comment?

Just comment. I also felt more protective of him because when, for a long time, I mean I know my Dad, and I visited.. but he never, he never really, he only met his father when he was much older, my father came to visit and I would there during school holidays to my fathers place, and he never had that. Ja

So you had a bit more security perhaps, because you had that father bond. Mm, ja. Its interesting that your relationship with Vusi didn't really gel.

Ja, it is. It is only recently that I... my grandfather passed away recently and I gave Vusi a lift from Nongoma, he is now based in Joburg, and it is the longest hat we have been around each other in years, we just never got closer. My cousin passed away..

Sorry to hear that...

When we were in high school, so I sort of limited my visits to Nongoma after that.

Ok.

How would you describe the relationship between you and your Gran?

I mean I don't go to Nongoma a lot, but if Im going down I pass by and go and see her. I mean now we stay in Richards Bay, me my Mom and my younger siblings. But when I go there I go down to see her. Most of time we drop some products and... some groceries, ja.

Im thinking more though of when you were a little boy, of when you were under four years old.

Do you have a sense of the quality of that bond with her?

You see there were, we lived with my mothers sisters as well. It was quite a big family. So.. and also there were other kids, um, I think from an early ... ive never been a demanding child that needs eh, eh... let me think, what... nurturing. Ive always found myself in the position where I was helping my grandmother look after the other kids.

Ok, so it seems you became quite mature, cos it seems that she relied on your for help more than anyone else. So were you in the older group of kids? I mean, you and Vusi...?

Yes, but obviously she had older kids, sons and daughters that were much older.

Yes, I understand. So was Vusi's Dad the same Dad as those of the others?

Yes, the same Dad.

How many children were there?

There were 9 children.

Were there any children that came after Vusi

Yes

How many?

Just one, a daughter.

Ok. And so your aunts son, Leli, was your buddy through childhood, but you protected him and looked after him as well.

Yes.

So it sounds like you didn't have a lot of baby time?

Laughs...

It seems that you weren't babied a lot, you were quite self sufficient from early on.

Ja

So do remember how you felt, from early on, when your Mom and Dad would come and visit. Do you remember how you felt.

Well, I remember, one of the memories, from being a child, was crying and running after the car. I remember how my Mum would hide that she was leaving. I remember that I would catch on. I remember that it was always difficult, for her as well. She would make up some story, say she was going to the neighbours house and disappear from there. Because I always cried when she left. Ja

So it was very difficult for you when she would leave?

Ja. My mom got me when she was nineteen, she was, she was twenty. So she was young and the first born, and so.. ja

So that relationship with her, it was a fairly short time and she would then come and go. But clearly you knew that she was your Mom. There was no doubt in your mind about that.

Ja

Do you think the way you were and the way you behaved was different when they were around, or you went with them somewhere?

Probably, it was nice to have her around. But there were times when she was, especially when she was, when I was four or five, when she was in college, we spent a lot of time. When I went to school I knew how to write. When she came back, we would spend time with her teaching me, grade one stuff. She would teach me how to write and how to read. It was not always nice because other kids would be playing, and I would be busy with that, but I mean, I'm grateful that she would do that.

MM

Ja, and then from then on, I almost feel that both my mom and my grandmother would always treat me like I was much older than I was,

Right, ja

I mean..., almost like I was older than Vusi.

Yes, I'm getting that sense, that you grew up quickly, and you were quite self sufficient and reliable. Your Mom wanted to teach you extra things. At the same time you described having a lot of kids around too, and being with them a lot.

Yes, both my Mom and Dad were teachers. When I was younger, I thought I was going to be a teacher.

Did you?

Laughs, ja. Like my Mom would teach me stuff and then I would go and teach the younger kids.

That's amazing, so you had role models and you adopted a way of being that was like both your parents.

Ja, laughs

But they later discouraged me from being a teacher. laughs

Why do you think they discouraged you?

Well, it's a thankless qualification, a thankless job.

It doesn't give you enough back? Are they still teachers?

My mother is, but my father passed away a few years ago.

Sorry to hear that. You have had a few losses already.

But they were not together.

Oh really.

Ja, I mean, they were together till I was in grade four.

Ok.

Im aware we are jumping around a bit, but up until when you went to school at six, you were still with your Gran. Was there any time that you moved and went to your parents?

When I was in Grade 1 my Mum was doing her final year in college. She graduated and we both wanted to stay together at that time, because she um.. found a post still in Nongoma, but in a very rural Nongoma far from home. And she asked me if I would like to stay with her. So I went to stay with her.

Just you?

Ja. And then um, the following year I stayed with her again, but at a different school.

Ok, so you moved schools twice, you did grade one somewhere, then grade two at another school?

Yes, and then I felt like I needed my cousin and the rest of the people I grew up with and, and then, I remember, I had to choose after the holidays, end of grade 3 holidays, if I would still want to stay with my Mum, or not. So I chose to go back to stay with my um, my grandparents, and, ja.

And do you know how you managed at school during grade 2 and Grade 3, during those moves?
I was always a top student..

So you were always a very able student, even in those young years? Did the moves seem to impact on you?

No, I don't know, It was also always easier to make friends. I think if you are a teachers child it is always easier. Laughs

So you had a sort of an 'in' at school.

Ja, laughs

So you seem to have been quite well behaved at school, that may also have helped you.

Ja, I think so.

So at the end of Grade 3 you were missing them and you went back to stay with your cousin and your grandparents.

Ja

Do you remember anything about that change?

I remember regretting it.

Oh really. What is your sense of the reason for that?

Its different, um, I had been staying with my mum, getting you know, um.... I was in grade 3 but I remember when, you see we had like, things like.... Health education stuff, and I remember one of the things that the teachers would do is check, check if you had washed properly. I remember when I stayed with my Mom I would get back home, Oh they are going to be checking us tomorrow and my mom would make sure that I was scrubbed properly and combed properly. That kind of thing at my granny you would never get. My aunts were also at high school then, and they would also be waking up to go to school then too, and us kids would not get much attention like that.

Ok, so there was not a lot of individual nurturing at your Grans, it was much more that you had to get on with it yourself.

Ja. And also when I got back my bicycle broke,

Ok,

So you know....

So it was a bit disruptive and difficult, which you hadn't anticipated?

Yes, yes yes and then...

You missed your Mom maybe?

Yes, I did, I did. And the next year I wanted to go back and stay with her, um, but um, but she moved then. She moved from that school and she moved to a school closer, closer to my grandmothers, in town. And she stayed with us briefly, and then she met my step dad.

So your parents split up around that time? Was your Dad around at all when you were in grade 2 and grade 3?

My Dad, you know he would feature but he was not..

There all the time?

Ja, he would visit but he was not there all the time.

And the relationship with him?

Laughs... I mean our relationship went through a lot..... laughs, I mean when he passed away he was still my dad but we were not in touch. I mean I hadn't seen him for years and I heard he was sick, I went to see him at the hospital, and later on I went to bury him. So we were no longer, you know, we were no longer....

Ja.

And then your Mom met your step father around the time, after you had gone back...

She introduced me to my, my mother and my father broke up when I was in, ja, Grade 2.

Really

They probably broke up when I was in Grade 3.

Then there was less contact after that..?

Ja, my Mum met my step Dad towards the end of my Grade 4, and then, Grade 5 they, um, he had made it clear that he wants to marry her, and, also at the same time my, stutter, my step brother was born, when I was in Grade 4, ja.

Ok, and do you have memories of that time, because that sounds like an important time, another man coming into your Mom's life?

Ja (laughs), when I was in Grade 4 I was not staying with my Mum anymore, but she invited me to visit her for a weekend, because I was still able to take the bus and visit her.

Ok, ja

That is one of the things my Mum taught me at a young age, to use public transport for long distances, because I would go visit, from Grade 4, I had started visiting my father's family on my own.

Ok,

Cos they were no longer together, but she didn't want me to stop going there on school holidays.

Mm

I remember the first time I had to go and take a bus alone, she had bought a camera, so she was taking photos of me by the bus stop, and I had on a nice Pierre Cardin jersey, with six buttons and she was saying "you are dressed like an old man, so you can go on this trip on your own", cos I was scared.

She invited me to come for a weekend and she spoke to me, and she said, "we are going to have a visitor, somebody that she would like me to meet. She said "you know your father and I are no longer together, and she said to me that there was somebody else she had met, his name is Zama, and if you like you can call him Dad. And I then I met my step Dad, and he was really nice, he um, I even remember their first, what they were talking about when they were... when I was around them for the first time, um, um, they were discussing coffee, it was Ricoffy, there was an ad, there was the line "the fresh percolated taste". I think my Mum had asked what does percolated mean, and my Step Dad was explaining what it meant. I mean it wasn't a bad introduction into my life..

It wasn't too bad you mean?

Ja, he was more of a father than my actual father had been.

How was he when he met you?

Well... I think he was shy, in the way that adults that can feel uneasy around kids, but we, I mean he quickly became a father, you know.

He became an important part of your life. He made an effort to get to know and understand.

Ja.

Ja. Do you remember how you felt about the new relationship?

I was happy, I was happy for my Mum, because my father was often violent.

Ok

So, it was, there was a difference, I could see that my Mum was happy, so was happy. From when I was young I do remember my father being violent towards my Mum. So I trusted um, I trusted, eh MabuZama, I thought my Mum looked happy.

So it sounds like you were happy for your Mom and there was a sense of security, and no sense of danger.

Ja

And did he build a particular relationship with you?

Ja, um, we would spend time on our own, well obviously most of the time when we see each other my Mom was around, but he would always ask me what's going on, and how school was going. I didn't see them all that often, but soon enough I visited them quite often. He moved in and then my brother was born and I would go and visit. I started spending, cos my holidays had always belonged to my other family..

Your father's family?

ja

The first weekend after we closed, for some reason it seems like schools always closed on Thursday or Friday, so for that time until say Monday I would stay with them and then move on to my father's..

How was it when you went to your father's family?

There were more people in my father's family. There was more freedom in my father's family, more freedom, more.. I mean that's where I experienced the things, things like drinking and smoking, and staying out till late,

Mm, so there was a whole lot of freedom there that you didn't have..

Different worlds...

Ok,

There was always somebody new who was staying here, um...

Do you remember how you felt when you went there?

Sometimes a bit of a celebrity

You felt like a celebrity?

Well, ja. I was different from them. I was, and I always had new clothes, a hairstyle, cos my mom, when the school closes today, we would meet and she would take me to a hair salon and I would have my hair done, and she would buy me new clothes. I would always have holiday clothes. So when I go to my father's I would always have new clothes and this new hair style. I'm sure to those kids I looked like a pampered boy.

We both laugh

Right, Do you think they were envious of that?

Ja, because I mean, my clothes would get borrowed and things like that.

Oh, ok. And did you have any emotional bonds with your father's family?

I loved my grandfather, my grandmother, he is a, she is an easy going woman. She sold alcohol, she swears, um, as I said, they are different, I have never heard my maternal Grandma um saying a swear word. I mean um, she is dignified and my paternal grandmother is totally different, and everybody that side is swearing, there is vulgar language, lots of alcohol, Mm, so it was different, but you did love you paternal Gran?

Yes, and my aunts, I still, if I, most of the times I will pass by, especially December, Ill buy groceries for all these people. I start at my grand mtoehrs house and leave some groceries, and then drive another two hours to my fathers house, see my Granny, leave something and hten go and see the other two aunts and leave something, and then drive to Richards Bay. They have all become part of my um, life.

Your extended clan?

Ja. And Im thinking of my aunts, even my aunts from my fathers side, the aunts are usually not talking to each other. I mean even in situations like that iM still able to move between, they will know that Ive left something in their house and Im still going to visit the other one that they are not talking to. I think I also like that, that Im not part of the politics, Im free to go anywhere I please.

Mmm that's nice. Let me take stock now, what I must still ask you.

When you were with your Mom in Grade 2 and 3 and then you went back to your Gran, was there anything that made that change more bearable or more difficult for you?

More bearable?

Ja, or more difficult?

Ja. The first ... long pause, Um, std, grade 4,

You mentioned that your bicycle had broken and you had regretted going back..?

Ja, those were the things that had belonged to me, and I was sharing that bicylce with a whole lot of people. It had broken and it got fixed. I actually continued having not a very decent relationship with Vusi, we would often fight. I remember this one time, we were fighting and my grandfather was drunk, and he, my Mom was building a house for her parents, so that builders had left a can of paint (laughs), and Vusi punished me, and I took a brush and I pained him on his head. Laughs. Then my grandfather arrived and he hit me.

He gave you a hiding?

Yes, but only me.

I was upset. My grandmothers sisters stayed in another area close by, walking distance, so I went there, and I stayed with them for a few months because, um, I stayed there for a few a months, because I wasn't happy about how my grandfather had handled the whole thing. He had hit me with a stick and I had to go and see a Doctor.

Really, so it was a bad beating?

Yes, it was. I remember, when I would come visit, I would come at a time when he was not, when he was still at work. I remember this time, because my Mom was their first born, I remember this time, a family meeting was called, and I was asked to come back and stay wit them. I think, ja, I was in Grade 5 by that time. Ja, Grade 5. I was asked to come back and stay wiht them.

By who?

I think my Grandfather spoke more. My Mum and my Grandmother and one of the sisters was just sitting there. And my grandfather was just saying aht they miss me and I must come and stay there again.

He didn't say sorry?

No he did. You know when he died this year, he was a better man. My relationship with him had become much better. When I was younger he was a violent man. Ja.

Did he beat you often?

Not often, but you know, that was mostly because, when he was around you would disappear. When you would hear him shouting outside you would kind of like disappear.

So he was scary?

Ja. And I imagine that that incident where you and Vusi were fighting and you got badly beaten, that must have been a difficult experience?

It was, mainly because I mean, I don't think, for me it wasn't too much, but also how the other adults responded to it.

How as that?

People were angry, even my grandmothers sisters, who I went to stay with. When I arrived I didn't bring any clothes and the next day they went and fetched my stuff. They spoke to him and told him how wrong he was. So it was a, I think it was, if the adults were not shocked, I would have, at that time I wouldn't have been as much upset as I ended up being. But from a child's point of view, what upset me was that we were both fighting, and it was only me who got hit. So that way, ja, it highlighted, I told you that there had always been times when, when I was told, when are you going home, when are you going to your fathers house. It highlighted that you know. And um, to be honest... I mean..

That he had been favoured as the son?

Ja. I think here had been certain occasions where that would happen?

Like how?

Times when you would feel that he had been favoured as the son. Um, I think it did contribute a lot to my Moms decision later on in sending me to a boarding school in high school.

Oh, I see. So did you stay with your Grandparents, grade 4 and 5, up until the end of Grade 7?

Um, ja

And at the same time your Mom had had your step brother, did he stay with your Mom as well?
He was staying with my Mum and then he came and stayed with us briefly. Pause, I mean I partly raised my brother.

So he was with you at your grandparents?

Ja, when he was young, when he was much younger he stayed with my my Mum, then he came and stayed with us.

Ok, how old was he then?

I think he was less than a year when he came to us

Ok.

Ja, he was my responsibility.

Ok, so you were in Grade 6 then?

No, I was in Grade 5.

And he was your responsibility to care for, altogether?

Because when I was in Grade, not all together, when I was in Grade um, 6, my grandmother went to um, night school

Ok, your Granny went to night school?

Ja, so I would have to come back from school and take over.

Right.

Until my aunts came back from their school, cos they were in high school, they studied in town, and they would come back home around six, and we came back around two.

So you looked after your brother, what is his name?

Bandile, he just turned 18 last week.

Ok, sjoe, so he is now 18. and I gather you were close to him all those years?

Ja, I was. Then he went and stayed permanently with my Mom and my step dad.

How old was he t hen?

Probably, um, when he was 3. They got a bigger place and, and then, ja.

How did you feel about him going back to your Mom and step Dad and you not going back to them?

Um, I don't know. By then, I mean, I was big. I never found it unfair.

You didn't, ok.

Ja

And if you think about it now, do you have feelings about it?

I actually think, um, because I had, I knew people who were born when their mothers were young and they later married, um, not to their fathers you know, I always thought I had it much better than most people I knew, I still feel like that, you know, when it comes to step parents I was lucky.

Mm

I had a, I had my Mum, I mean she didn't sort of dump me at my grandparents, you know like, I know people who were not acknowledged as, you know, their mother's son. So I feel like, in many ways like, I remember when I was in high school, um, when I was, I was this one incident, I wanted to experiment with dagga, and I left it in my bag, on top of our clothes lockers, and there was a random search and it was found in my bag. And because I had never, I didn't smoke and I didn't drink, I remember my step father sent my Mum, um, and, to school, and then, eh, when my Mum was there he called to talk to me, and he was asking what was going on, he was kind of Part of that process?

Yes

And he did seem to care?

Yes. In school holidays when I go visit them, he would take me to visit his, we would go together to visit his friends, and um, but he would say, you know, hey, you are on holiday, you cant b sitting in the house all the time, lets go somewhere. Sometimes we would go places where we would braai meat. Just remember, when we go home, your Mum will have cooked, and she will be upset if we both don't eat, so you must reserve some space.

We both laugh

So he was close. Is he still alive?

No, he passed away. A year after, no the same year as my cousin. My cousin passed away in April, just before my birthday, and then..

How did that happen?

A car accident, my uncle was driving. They were from a soccer match, my uncle was driving. And the same year, my step father died in the September.

How did he die?

He was in a car hi jacking. They shot him and took the car.

Traumatic losses. Bit losses for you.

Ja

And your Mom, now?

Um, my Mom, I think she is, um, my step father passed away over ten years ago now. And my Mum never remarried,

Didn't she. Ja

Now, she is staying with my siblings in Richards Bay

And after Bandile, did she have more children?

She had Palele, my sister, and then the last born is the twins.

Ok, so she has quite a few children.

Ja, my step Dad passed away before the twins first birthday, so they don't know him.

Wow, that is sad.

My sister and Bandile were both quite young too.

So she stayed and looked after them herself. And how is your relationship with your Mom?

Um, I mean, I guess Im not as close as other people are to their mothers, but um, I mean, we, talk often to each other. We, um, li mean Im not like, I don't have to call her every day, I can go for, two weeks without talking to them and its fine, for me. And then, but you know, they are special to me, my mother is special to me, but whats important for me is that I know that, you know, um, I think sometimes, Im more like a brother to her..

Ok, ja

Sometimes it feels like that.

How old is your Mom now?

She is turning 48 this year, Im 28.

Ok, she is still a part of your life.

I wonder, do you imagine yourself ever having children.

Not unless I get a partner who wants to adopt.

Ok. I wonder though, do you have feelings about children living with their Moms or their Grans?

Um, I think, I mean, grandparents love children and if they want to, if they want to stay with them its fine, but I would, um, if somebody wants to have a child I would, I recommend that, you know that they have a child that they want to stay with and raise. If they are not able to stay with the child all the time, they must still be part of their lives all the time. The child should know that they are free to move all the time between the parents and grandparents, and the child should know their parents are their parents.

Why do you think that?

I mean Im looking at it as, I mean Im looking at it, I happen to know a lot of people who grew up around, especially those who, were staying at their mothers parents, a lot of the kids in my area, they were, their mothers were not always around and, and they didn't know their fathers, and, and, so, and then I also went to a boarding school where I met a lot of people who didn't grow up wit their parents and um, I, I think theres more chances of those people having disruptions in their lives if they didn't grow up wit their parents. But there are a lot of grandparents out there who do a good job, a good parenting job.

Mm

The last born at my Moms, she has got a child, she got a child when she was sixteen. That child has been raised by my grand parents, and he is fine. I even feel like, when I look, cos his father is from the same area, and when I look at the kids, I m not always, I don't got here oten but my friend, my young aunts son, his father is my friends brother, so every time when I got there Ill pop by to see my friend. Ill look at the kids around there and Ill feel like you know, my cousin is better off being raised by my Granny.

It sounds like you are talking about the quality of the caregiving relationship.

Yes, but I, I think um, Im more away of this because growing up sometimes I would wish that I was staying with both my parents, but then I was forced to look around and even look at those who were growing with their parents, like my friend that Im mentioning now. He grew up in a house hold with his mother and his father, but there was another woman that the father was involved with, the father had two wives, and later on there was another woman. The mother and father were staying in the same yard, but it was like they were separate. For me is really about the quality.

We have come to the end now Mpho, and iM aware that we have talked about personal aspects of your history. I wonder if it has affected the way you are feeling now?

I don't know, there's nothing much much I would change, but you know, the way I grew up, um, I mean there were obviously certain things that could have been improved, but I'm also not blind to the, to how other people are, are, have been unfortunate in how they were raised, and things like that. Also I think I'm a very open minded person, tolerant and, um, I don't have a, ja, I think that's because I've had the experiences that I've had. And the way I've grown up, out of all the, cos it sounds like, first you are with the grandmother and then the mother, I still think I get a lot of good qualities, you know um, I just, were given to me by all the people that raised me.

Ja, these were factors that counted for you, there were lots of positive people around you?

Ja, I respect people which I think is something I learned from the people who raised me. But I'm saying there is a lot of good qualities that I'm grateful for, that I know I got from all this. But you know, um, when I was young I used to fantasise about, I wonder what it's like to have a mother and a father, and older siblings. I think I always wanted to have older siblings. Unfortunately I had to always be the oldest one.

Yes, you didn't have the experience of being a little kid and being looked after like you did for others.

Ja

You did a lot of caring for younger kids. It sounds like you are a very nurturing person.

Even now I wish I had older siblings. My friends have older siblings. It's like you know, I need to take my car for a service. If a friend is going to take their car for a service they will say "my brother is going to drop me there".

Ja, someone you can ask easily. Ja

Ja.

Would it be ok if I give you a call in a month's time to see how you feel. It might stir up some feelings for you. I know you have support in your life but if you do wish to talk again that would be fine.

Lebo (born 1981 in Aliwal North)

Ok Lebo, thanks again. Can you tell me the story of your early years, you may not remember detail but more what you know about your early years?

Specifically focusing on what?

Well, where you were born, who you were with, things you know about your babyhood, like did your Mom breastfeed, anything like that. How long were you with your Mom, those sort of details.

I was born in Aliwal North, that's in the Eastern Cape. When I was born, my Mum was still in the school, she was about to finish High school I think, or she was just finishing.. I can't remember, but she was still studying. But shortly after I was born, at some point she was force to go to work...ok... Now let me think back, I cant remember. I don't talk about this everyday and now, ja Sure, I understand that this is not on the top of your mind now.

Ok, I was born during that time, both my mother and father were still studying. They were in a boarding school away from home in kwakwa,

Ok

Do you know where that is?

Yes I do

I was actually raised by my grandparents, and..

Maternal or paternal?

No, maternal. Actually here were also issues between the grand parents from my fathers side and my mothers side. It seems that my grandfather didn't like them much you know, and he felt that he is more than capable of taking care of me, he doesn't really need any help from them.

Was this your maternal grandfather?

Yes

And he didn't want anything to do with them. He didn't really like them and he felt he is more than capable and what and what not.

Ok

Then I was raised as the last born, you know. They raised me as their own child, and their last child kind of thing. And ja, I had my uncle, that was still there, my youngest uncle was still at home and my other aunt.

Ok, how old were they?

Im not sure, but they were still not that old.

Were they kids or teenagers?

They were teenagers, cos my uncle was still going to high school, they were in their teenage years.

And they were both still in Aliwal North?

Yes, they were. The others had moved away from home. My oldest uncle had already started teaching and the other one was a policeman. And My mother was doing her studies, and the other ones were still at home.

Ok, and so you were much much younger than them..

Yes, I was much much younger than them. And basically my, both my grandmother and my grandfather were working,

Ok

So yes, there was, on the street where we lived there was this older woman who was looking after all the children, like all of us would go there.

Ok, like a day care type of thing?

Yes, she was like a day care but an informal one kind of thing, so I would be there during the day and in the afternoon when they come back from school or wherever they would fetch me.

Ok.

But then, we had so much family time with those people that sometimes I would even sleep over, you know, like, you feel like you belong there as you spend so much time there. So ja, basically that's that. And what else?

There are a few things I would like to ask? Do you know the details of when your Mom had you? Did she leave school for the last few months of her pregnancy, or did she carry on right till the end?

Ok, I don't think she carried on right until the end. I know she did leave school, but I'm not sure if she.. she.. she.. how long she was away. But I know, back in the days I understand you wouldn't go to school when you are pregnant and unmarried.

Right, ja

So, so it was those issues, but she stayed at home. But she didn't stay long, because she had to go back.

Do you know if she ever breastfed?

She tried, apparently the breastmilk made me sick. In fact none of us, I've got two brothers after me, they also, my mother didn't breastfeed because it made them sick as well. So we relied on formula. She did in the first few weeks and I was not taking that too well, and then she changed to the formula.

So you were one or two months old when she left to go back to school?

I'm not even sure how old was I when she left, all I know was that she did... at some point.. she did. Ok, when I was a bout five to six years my grandfather passed away. I'm not sure.... No, now I know. After I was born my mother didn't go back to school. She came to Joburg and worked as a domestic and then my... my grandfather passed away and then she went back to school and she finished a teaching diploma and she became a teacher.

Ok, so she took a break to work and then..

Ja, she worked and after my grandfather passed away she went back to school.

Ok, that's interesting. So, I suppose you grew up with a few people who were very important to you. Thinking back, who were your attachment figures?

I think my grandmother, for my grandmother I was like everything you know. I didn't even feel that maybe I missed my mother. I was happy when she was home but grandmother was there to fill that void so it wasn't a bit deal that my mother wasn't around all the time. I think the nice thing about the mother coming was all the nice things that you get, the new toys and all the nice things, and ja, that was nice.

So you knew that your biological Mom was special but your main bond was with your Grandmother.

I think, shortly.., around that time my other passed on, while I was still very young as well, The one who was living at home?

Ja, the one who was living at home with us, I was only living with my uncle, and he was now finishing his high school, and then he joined the policeforce. He went away for a long time for

training and what not, so I was the only one in the house, so it was just me in the house wit my grandparents.

And your memories, how early do you remember back to?

I remember back as early as... maybe 4 or so.

Ok

But then I have got bits and pieces of memories of back them. Because, I don't remember lots of things, but I remember the day when my aunt died, because we, it was just me and her in the house, and she was kneeding the bread, she was preparing to make the bread, and she just fell. I remember seeing her lying there and her hands had dough.. and for me that didn't mean anything. But luckily my older uncle was around, he was in town, he was on leave or something. Then around that time he walked in and found her. Then the next thing I remember there were lots of people, but to me, all of that iddnt mean anything at the time. I didn't realize what was going on. I don't even remember the funeral, I just remember that day only. So ja, that's how far I can remember. I think about 4 or so.

So how would you describe your relationship with your grandparents, and particularly your grandmother.

I think my relationship with my grandmother was very close, ja, we were just very close. I think she was the person that was more likely to understand me better than anybody else. Yes, she understood me very well.

So do you think she gave you all that you needed.

Ja, I think she did everything that a parent would do for a child.

Then as you grew, with your Gran and your Grandfather, and you also mentioned the house mother that you stayed with in the day, how was that relationship?

You know that relationship was very good. You know back then there was just this sense of community. They wouldn't make you feel that you were not their child. Every parent was like your parent. And now, this specific house mother was not.. not friends or whatever, but had a very good relationship with my great grandparents.

Ok

And now, before, ok, my great grandfather passed on and now my great grandmother told eh, my house mother t hat the housemother needs to look after the household of her son, which was now my grandfather. So she had this obligation to my great grandmother, that she would look after us, because she.. she.. looked after my parents as well, everybody at home, all my uncles and aunts, was somehow raised by her. So we somehow became a family. So they looked after me like their own. For me it was just like a continuation, because my mother was raised there, my uncles were raised there. We would sleep over there, we somehow became and adopted family.

It sounds nice..

It was nice, they would go out and see a tshirt and they would buy for you, they would see some toys and they would bring for you.... So it was very nice,

So are they still there?

No, no, shame, they passed on. This house mother had one daughter, only one child, she got divorced and she had only one daughter. She passed on and now her daughter passed on, now there is no one.

Shame

Ja, shame, they are gone.

So they were very special to you. It sounds like you had quite a few very important people around you, and you felt that those relationships really were good quality relationships.

Ja, they were.

And then as you grew, did you go through the whole of school in Aliwal North?

Yes, I finished my high school in Aliwal North.

Did you, so you lived with your grandparents always?

Yes, and then as I was about to leave, cos after I finished my matric, I wanted to go and study in Cape Town, so I was about to leave home anyway. But in that same year my Grandmother passed on. So instead of going to Cape Town I basically had to go to Bloemfontein. So I stayed with them and then I studied. But I also didn't stay with them much because I was in the res. So I would just visit some weekends and when the school closes.

So your parents stayed together, were they a couple from high school?

Ok, basically what happened was that my mother didn't get married to my father. Because of family issues and, and from what I gather their relationship was not that good.

Oh

It just happened that they happened to have a child at that time, but it was not your typical serious committed relationship kind of thing. Because my father has children that are older than me with other people, like with many other people. So I have many brothers and sisters that I don't know. Well, lots is one or two. Then my mother got married to someone else.

Ok, so what you talk about as your father is not your biological father. And they then had other children?

Yes, then they had, I've got two half brothers.

So how was your relationship with your mother as you grew, because you had had this very primary relationship with your grandmother?

Ja, my.. my relationship with my mother as I grew up, to me, how would I describe it, well at first when I was still very young, it was really a relationship like, I would be happy when she was there as she would always bring something nice with her. As I grew up, started to be difficult, act out and all those things, my mother and I used to fight a lot. She would then only come to reprimand, there would be no.. she would say you shouldn't be doing this, you shouldn't be doing that. That sort of thing. It has always been good, there has always been this mother and child thing going on but it wasn't that good as with my grandmother.

So this was about the time you were ten, or?

That was now, I think, around that time, because I think my mother, at that time, because she stayed for a long time not having another child, just me, until I think I was about 10, and she was not staying with us, she was working in Botsabelo in Bloemfontein. She was teaching there, and I was with my grandmother. So she would come every weekend but then when she come, she, she, she didn't nurture much, she was more reprimanding this and that and that. This must happen and that must happen, but I wouldn't talk to her that much, but we would talk and I would just say "ok". My grandmother would also talk but there was a whole lot of nurturing as well.

So with your mother there was the disciplining side but there wasn't an established bond?

No, not as I compare with my grandmother. Maybe from my side it was more like...I've got my grandmother, what do I need. So for me it was more like 'ok, be like that'.

Do you think you had a sense of her being your mother but not your mother?

Ahh, um, Ive never thought of it like that. But no, I think I had a sense of her being my mother, and being my mother. But then I thought, she is not my mother. Its just that, I wouldn't, I wouldn't, I think I was just used to my grandmothers parenting style, and you know, some of the things, the same approach that she uses with her pupils at school, she would apply that as well. For me, I was used to doing things a different way, and now she comes over weekends and everything must be.... You know that sort of thing. And for me to strike the balance, it was difficult, I was also set in my ways. I would think, I don't see anything wrong with this, and my grandmother was ok.

So that sounds like a period of tension between you and your mother?

Yes, I would say that there would be periods of tension.

Was there any resentment towards your mother for you not having been with her?

No, not at all

And rivalry with the children she had after you, was there any of that?

No, no. actually I was very happy to have children in the house. Because my brother, you know the one that comes after me. He also stayed with us and grandmother for a while.

Ok,

He only left to stay with my mother when he went to school, and the reason was that my grandmother was a bit older then, at that time. My mother just felt that it would be unfair for her to wake up early in the morning and wash him and make him a lunch box and all those things. But then I was able to do all that, she didn't even have to get up to do stuff for me, I would do it all myself and just go and say goodbye to her.

Ok

And do you know how old you were when he was born?

Yes, I was about 10

Ok, so then did he come when he was born to you and your grandmother?

Yes, when he was born we, my mother took the maternity leave and she was staying with us.

Ok

And and I used to enjoy when my mother was at home, as much as she was this.. what.. sometimes she would be a disciplinarian.. yes. But it was nice when my mother was home. Even when I was at school I would be anxious to get home, I want go home, I want to see my mother. I wouldn't even play outside like I usually do, just to be with her.

So there was something that pulled you, a yearning, that you wanted to be with her when she was there? Im curious, is it possible that there might have been a yearning for her when she wasn't there, because when she was there there was this pull to be with her.

Yes, what I really liked about her being around, as much as she was a disciplinarian, but there were somethings that I wouldn't have been able to do with my grandmother. There would be a nice change in it, she would cook nice food everyday, she would come up with interesting things, but my grandmother was a good cook as well, but it would be nice to eat other things as well.

So it was the variety?

Yes, she would really come with the variety, and it was good to get that.

In reflecting on your development, do you have a sense of any, of how it could have been if you had been with your Mom? Could it have been different.

Yes, I think I could have also turned out different. And Im actually very happy that I grew up wit my grandmother, because, looking at them now, there is a vast difference between the two. I just prefer the way that my grandmother was, the norms and values that she helped me...

And how would it have been different?

My grandmother, first of all, she was a very religious person, and she would always insist on, you need to build good relations with others, you need to build peace, she was just nice. She was, I don't know (laughs) if I can say, she was complementing my personality, or am I like I a social person because of what I have learnt from her. But my mother is a completely different person you know. She, she's not religious at all, and she would have grudges sometimes with colleagues, if someone did something to her she would be grumpy and she wouldn't talk to that person for a month and whatnot. And those are the things that my grandmother would discourage you know. And which are things that are so instilled in me that I wouldn't, even if something make me angry, I would make an effort to sort it out, you know, that kind of thing. Even if I wouldn't be friends wit that person but there wouldn't be that tension between us, because you did this to me last month.

It seems like you sensed a more gentle giving person in your grand mother, and a more brittle person in your mother. So it sounds like you are glad.

Yes, I am very glad. And sometimes I wish that, my other siblings were rather rasied by my grandmother. Because, they also do have some conflict with my mother. My mother has never changed, has always been the way I told you. Its just that as her children we understand and we find ways to tolerate her. Her being difficult... ja, and and, I think her way of nurturing, my mother will buy us things, she will give us money, that's how she will nurture. She will give things you know, she wouldn't be your typical nurturing, emotional, ver nurturing person. So even if I were to call her and say Ive got a problem and what and whatnot, she wouldn't really probe more as to what the problem is, and what sort of support I need. She will be just too quick, if anything, I mention anything about finance or anything, she would say "ok, Ill see how much I give you" you know. Or something like that. Sometimes, with my grandmother it would be, my grandmother would also assist, but then my grandmother would also be more like "oh..whats happening, how did.."... you know.. and you are feeling supported you know. And my grandmother, if maybe you mentioned something, something you are dealing with, difficult, or something like that, she would make a follow up, she would call you and ask..

That's nice

Yes, and my mother doesn't. Maybe she feels that she cannot handle those emotions, or something like that. Maybe she just gives you the resources and then you sort yourself out, or something like that.

Mmm

And with the insight that I have got, she is too afraid to... to... to.. to allow you to bring all these things out so she would rather not to get involved. But then she will talk sometimes, but she is mostly gonna be very, um.. I wouldn't even say strategic... for her, if you've got a problem, ok, how are you going to solve it, do you need money, do you need this, do you need that, take this... to sort it out.

She focuses on solutions, not process.

Ja, she is more like that.

That's interesting. So your sense is that if you had been raised by your mother you wouldn't have had the same emotional grounding.

Ja, and Im also glad that my mother didn't get married to my father.

Really

Ja, no, I am. I think Im better off. I like my father, but the choices that he is making in life, and the kind of lifestyle that he leads, where.., s getting a bit better now, I think cos he is older, so he is a bit more of a family man than he used to be. So..

Do you keep regular contact with him?

Yes, he did, he would come and see me often, and he used to buy me stuff, and I would like that. Sometimes what my mother can't do, and my grandmother can't do, then I know I would go to my father and he would do it for me. So it was like I've got my bread buttered on both sides.. if I don't get my way this side, or I don't get what I want, I just call my father or I go to his place and tell him what I need, and he will do something. Or I would go to my mother and one of them would come through.

So you had quite a well resourced childhood by the sounds of it?

Ja I did.

Do you remain in contact with your father?

Um, Ja, we keep in contact quite a lot, we call each other quite a lot. And at some point I also attended a school that, where my father was, he is also a teacher.

Ok

Ja, I attended there for one years. When I was there it was also nice in the sense that, I wouldn't have to, if there was a school trip or anything was needed at school I didn't even have to worry because automatically my father would then just sort it out. If they say we are going there and this is the transport cost and whatnot, I wouldn't even have to borrow anyone about it because automatically my father will then come through and sort it out.

Ok, so that was nice.

Ja it was.

So, in terms of actual separations, um, the early separation from your mother, when she left when you were an infant, I imagine you don't have a sense of that, from what you have told me.

No

Were there any other separations, like when your Grandmother died, or when you left to go to school, or to your mother, how was that?

Actually I didn't leave my grandmother, she had passed on by that time, and ja, she just passed on, and for me to go and stay with my mother, it took me about a year to actually move in with them.

Really

Yes, after my grandmother passed on, I stayed on my own in my Grandmothers house, (Laughs) I keep thinking about it now, and its funny, but anyway. I think my grandmother raised me to be very independent, and she trusted me wit money, she trusted me with lots of things, she trusted me with money.. When I was a bit older, like when I was in high school and so, she would give me the opportunity to go to the supermarket and buy some groceries, and from there I would learn to be responsible, that ok, I cannot buy these shirts when we don't have money for meat, and those sorts of thing. She would monitor those things and she would take me when she went out as well, and so that was a nice outing, cos after buying the groceries we would go to a restaurant and buy something to eat, so that was a nice outing. I think in many ways she taught me to be responsible, she would give me money, and she would tell me that this was my allowance for such and such a period, so during that time you don't come and bother me for anything. So I would learn to manage my own finances, and to manage lots of other things you know. So ja, she taught me to be responsible so even after she passed on I didn't feel like my whole world had shattered, cos I felt like I could still manage you know. At that point I just felt I don't really want to move in with my mother at that point, and my mother was understanding as well because after the funeral she did ask me if I wanted to come now or do I want to come later, and I said, no, Im just fine.

How old were you then?

I think I was about 18.

Ok, so you were almost an adult.

Ja

I think I was about 18. and then I stayed on my own and I managed the finances and paid the telephone bills and the electricity, buy groceries. Everything was ok, everything was under control.

Were you in a state of grief when your grandmother died?

Ah, when my grandmother died, like I say I'm very religious, and my grandmother was very religious, and for me it was like, for my grandmother, I know she was old and I know she was sick, she had the esophageal cancer, and for a very long time she was sick. When she passed on, yes I did feel the pain and whatnot, but I had that peace in my heart. I just felt that peace that ok my grandmother is not here, but um, I was more grateful than anything you know. I was very grateful for all the time that I was with her, I was very grateful for all the things that she did for me. And I don't know, I just had this overwhelming sense of being grateful more than grieving, you know what I mean. And I was just, because I look at myself, even back then, that my grandmother nurtured me to be the kind of person that I am. And even when she passed on, even in my heart I was just overwhelmed, I was grateful that my grandmother was with me all that time, and for all the things that she gave me. I never really felt that my world has fallen apart and whatnot. And I was comforted by the fact that I am a Christian, and she was also a Christian. And in my heart, I didn't have that sense of now where is she, what is happening with her? I had a sense that as Christians there is life, and which my grandmother also believed in you know. And, and on the day that she passed on, I left in the morning, went to church, and I came back, she passed on. And I didn't get a sense that she was so sick on that day, because, um, as I was moving, going out of the house, oh ok, I went from my bedroom, I said bye to her, and as I was about to get out the kitchen door, I needed to say goodbye again, and then I went to her bedroom and I sang her a hymn, there was a hymn that I wanted to sing to her, and then I went to church. For some reason I felt very sad in the church, I didn't know why. I felt very very very sad, and people could see that I felt sad, but I couldn't put my finger on it, why was I feeling so sad. And then when I went home my grandmother had passed on.

Sjoe

And ja, my uncle was there, actually what happened, my uncle's wife came to see my grandmother, and apparently she had collapsed in the house, and then they called the ambulance and she didn't make it, and they took her to the funeral home, and when I got there, there was people, there was whole lots of activity, and I didn't understand what was happening. And then they told me, and when they told me I didn't go hysterical or anything, I was like, "oh ok". I did shed a tear but it's not like I became hysterical or anything.

Mm, there was a calmer sadness.

Ja, it was a calmer sadness.

Sure, I understand. And then a year later you went to live in Bloemfontein with your mother and step father than your step brothers. And how was that adjustment for you, I imagine it was an adjustment, and you were in Res.

During that time I was at home, I didn't study, I didn't go to school, I didn't do anything, I was just home.

What was happening for you?

But by, during that time, I was not sure what I want to study, and there was also issues with finances, because my grandmother used to do everything for me. Now that my grandmother was not there, only then my mother realized that she didn't do any financial provision for me to study further. Now I was home then for that year.

Ok

At first then it was not so nice, but then along the way I enjoyed being at home, I cleared my mine. Then during that time I didn't know what to study I did some bridging programme at the university, I remember I did psychology and sociology and that sort of thing, just to get into the groove of studying and that sort of thing. And then I was staying with them, it was quite an adjustment, because I was used to being on my own, doing what I thought needed to be done at that time. But then my mother and I, I think my mother to an extent understands me a lot, so I didn't feel my whole life has changed. It was just for me to realize that there were other people in the house. For me it had been that if I was hungry I would just go to the kitchen and make myself food and eat. Now there is a house full of people, for me to say, hey, I'm making food, does anyone else want to eat. It was just that sort of thing.

Are you saying it was a practical adjustment?

Yes, it was a practical adjustment, but emotionally I used to see them often, they used to visit almost once a month, they would visit and we would talk.

Was it just your mother who visited?

No, I was my mother and the family. Ja, they used to visit as well. So emotionally, I was very used to them, it was just on practical things, that now, on Saturday morning there's this huge laundry being done, and I'm not used to that. It was just my small laundry and my small dishes, now it's a whole lot.

And your relationships with your two half brothers, how was that?

I think our relationship has always been a good one, we have a good relationship, they look up to me, and they relate to me well, and ja.

And so then you studied the next year?

Yes, I studied the year, the first year that I studied I was home, I was travelling to and from Varsity, and then the following year I moved to Varsity completely, and I would come home some weekends, but I would always come home holidays.

What degree did you do?

I did B Soc in social work.

Ok. And tell me, what is your view, if you were to have your own children, how you feel about, you know, raising them yourself, or having your mother look after them? How would that be.

If I were to have my own children, I would stay with my own children.

You would.

Ja, I would stay with my own children.

What do you think informs that feeling

I think, Laughs like I said, I was happy to be with my grandmother, my mother would be happy to look after my children and to raise them, but then again I think I would prefer to use my own parenting skills, and I think, I don't know, I just think, I don't know, I just think, I wouldn't want someone else to raise my children, unless I had my own children. I would still trust my mother to look after my children and to raise them.

Ok

Unless I had a serious reason, I would rather do it myself.

Ok. So that is interesting. You seem to feel that quite strongly.

Ja

Well that is it, I have completed asking you all my questions. If it's ok I would like to call you in a month's time, as I'd like to know some of the thoughts that have come up that have been triggered by this conversation, just to see whether, how you have felt.

I think I'm fine with that. Just one thing I can share with you; after my grandmother passed on, I think about a week or so, something happened, I'm gonna tell you now. There was an issue with my uncle, there was something that my uncle said to me that that I didn't like. And now what

made it more painful for me, when my grandmother was around, I would go and tell her and we would talk about it. But that day, I remember it was a Sunday evening, I can't remember exactly what the situation was, but it was something that I would have told my grandmother. I was walking in the street and I just burst into tears. I was walking and walking and I realized that if my grandmother was there we would have talked about it and it wouldn't have been a big deal. I realized that no one else would have understood it like my grandmother would have. And I just cried.

It sounds like the realization was very painful then, plus the argument.

Ja, it wouldn't help, I could call my mother but it wouldn't feel the same.

It wouldn't help so much?

No, it wouldn't. Then I cried. I really really cried. I remember while, during that whole thing., my mother phoned me, I told her what happened and all that, but after that, I continued crying, not about what happened but the fact that my grandmother was not there to talk to, and it broke my heart you know.

So your Grandmother really was your sounding board. You seemed to agree on things and have a real understanding.

Ja, shame my Grand mother.

And is your Mom still in Bloemfontein.

She is, she is still in Bloemfontein.

How is that relationship?

We speak to each other almost everyday.

Ok, so you have regular contact.

Yes, we speak to each other everyday, sometimes more than once. We talk about everything, what is happening in her life. How was it at work, and all that sort of thing. She tells me everything.

It sounds like you may be her confidante?

Laughs. You know what, despite her being her, she has always seen me as her confidante. Things that she wouldn't tell other people she would tell me. She counts on me for many things. She counts on me for many many things. She becomes vulnerable with me.

She feels the therapist in you?

Yes, but even before that, ja. My mother as much as sometimes I would be very frustrated with her, but she always counted on me for many many things.

Do you think that had an impact on your childhood, the way she would count on you?

I think she would count on me in ways that were appropriate for my age. She wouldn't really tell me things that were appropriate. It would be things that I could handle at that time. She would tell me things that frustrate her, this and this and that.

So she saw something in you, that she could talk to.

Ja

So she may find you a person who is very easy to talk to.

Ja, she thinks that I'm a better child than the other children.

Does she?

Ja, but my brothers are very very different from me. Ja, I think I tend to be a bit sensitive, and that, they are just hard core boys, who, ja, so my mother can relate to that. And in many ways she compares them to me a lot, like Lebo didn't do this and he didn't do that. So I tell her, "you need to realize that they are not the same as me".

How do they relate to that?

They are ok with me, they don't take it a bad way, for them, they just say "see it your way".

Where are they now?

The youngest is home with my parents, the other one, in June he came, he is with me. Ja, he is studying.

He is studying here in Jhb?

Ja, I think it is nice to have him around. I was reluctant at first, to have him with me, but it is ok. It was my own anxieties, as the first born, I always have this sense of responsibility, like a parent. I mean he is ten years younger than me, and I thought I don't want to be a parent, or a big brother, but so far so good.

So when did he come?

It was at the end of April, a couple of months already but it is going ok. I had to get used to it.

It sounds like you only lived with him for a relatively short period of time.

Yes, you are right.

Ok, well thanks Lebo, that was really interesting.

Tshepo (Born 1979 in Limpopo Province)

Ok, we are recording. Thank you again Tshepo for your time. I have got a set of questions that I will ask you, just to give you a sense, I'm really interested in your experiences as you remember them, I'm aware that some of the information about your early years you may not remember, so you may be drawing on what you have been told about yourself as a very young child. You might remember things that make you feel upset, or not, it's sometimes hard to predict. So if you do feel uncomfortable you can tell me you don't want to answer anything. There aren't in fact any intrusive questions, but it is sensitive material. It could make you feel vulnerable.

Ok

So, where were you born?

Mm, I'm now in my 30s, I'm 30 yrs old, I was born in a rural area, a tribal authority. It's called Gamashashane. Mashashane is the chief, and under him are many different villages. This is all under Limpopo province. That is where I was born and stayed up to my matric year. I stayed there all the years, I only came here to Jhb for university, that was in 1998.

Ok, and what did you study?

I studied pharmacy.

Ok, and you work for Pfizer. And you are a pharmacist? What part of the field do you work in?

I'm in um, I mean I've been moving around really. I enjoyed industry the most, but at the same time it's always one of those difficult things, I think I enjoy serving and I find that my primary calling serving. I have found that I have fitted more in an area that is doing scientific research, we are doing drug discovery, because in that way I still feel helpful. I think I've got that desire within me to always help somebody. I remember when I finished university I went to a place where no one wanted to go. There wasn't a pharmacist there for five or six years before I arrived. They had wanted to roll out this ARV programme, when I got there there were only eight patients on, and when I left there were one thousand two hundred patients put on ARVs.

Sjoe

Ja, to me that was satisfying to see. I mean I've seen adults weighing 30kg and then we put them on the programme, some we lost but others made it. I mean when you see someone coming weighing 30 kg and you see them going up to 60, it is personally satisfying. For me that is something that is very personally fulfilling. I mean my life I feel that I have done what I was meant to do.

Was that Comm service?

Ja, that was Comm service but I stayed even a year after comm. Service. Simply because there was a need. At the time I was living, people came to a room where I was working from, it was a little room across from the pharmacy, it was a little dispensary dealing only with the ARV's. I mean in our culture men don't cry, you could call it that. I mean it is seen as, it is not a usual scene to see a man crying, but when I was leaving men came to my office, they said "so are you leaving us". They were crying because they were so sad to see that I was leaving because I was very very helpful to them.

That's very meaningful.

For me that's the essence of what working in the health field is all about. I mean if I work in industry I want to get to the core of things, in drug development and drug discovery..... (talks about his drug trials and the process they follow for a few minutes).

So Im going to go back to Limpopo Province and your childhood. You were born in 1980?

No 1979

And when you were born, were you first, second born?

Yes, I was actually first born. There were three of us, all boys and Im the first of the lot.

And the situation with your parents at the time you were born? They were living there, or working somewhere else?

I mean obviously at the time I was born I do not recall a lot of things. But my mother had me when she was she still young, cos I do recall that in the years, the 80s, I mean she used to drop me at school, she was obviously at that time going to high school, and I was in primary school.

Do you know how old she was when you were born?

I think she was 16, I think there is a sixteen year gap between us.

Ok, so your Mother was very young. And your father, is he the same father as your two brothers?

I do know for a fact, the youngest next brother was born in 85, so Im not sure, because you know what, my family situation is a little bit different. I never knew my father, up until up to now. He was alive up until sometime this year, this year in February. His family came to tell us that he had passed away but that was three weeks after he was buried. But I mean I ve been living all my life without knowing my father. The family isutaiont that I grew under never, for me I never really had a need to go and find him to find out who he is, to find my identity, because I felt like I belonged the ____ family. I mean normally you take the fathers surname but for me, I took my mothers surname. I mean he wasn't around, they had me when they were still young, they weren't married. My brother was born two years after me, and the other one was about six or seven years later. My self and my borther who comes after me, I do know for a fact that we had the same father, but the third born Im definatley not sure. I mean Im really not sure. I would have seen my father then, but because my mother was not married we never really got to meet him.

Sure

If I did I don't recall anything. I mean I don't recall his face or anything.

Did your mother ever talk about him to you?

No, actually not. I mean when he died my mother had to go home for this traditional cleansing things. I don't know what they do there, I don't know how they do it, but she had to go there in order to be cleansed. It is a traditional thing that they do, they may give her things to drink or what, I don't know. It's a procedure that gets done, because otherwise, our people have got a belief, that if a man dies, its usually if it is in a marriage situation, but even if people had children together obviously the hope would be that they would get married. So our people have got a belief that if the husband dies the woman has to be treated, or if a man loses his wife he also has to undergo that treatment, a traditional cleansing thing, otherwise they believe that whoever is left behind will follow.

Ok

So they do that to prevent..

To protect..?

Ja, to protect.

Ok

So of course it goes with a persons belief. Because these things were imposed on us, we were told, its think people don't want to risk.. if people tell you that this is how things are done, then you follow the same, you know.

Sure, and you worry about what might happen if you don't.

But I mean Ive also seen people where, people who were not married, and Ive seen this myself, where a person before marriage situation, if the boyfriend dies, and then this person gets another boyfriend, something happens to that boyfriend. I mean I know a person lost two boyfriends, not close to each other, everybody that that lady finds, something terrible happens.

Ok

It's a reality you know. I think it goes with a level of belief that a person has.

I respect that, people's beliefs are important.

And what do you know about yourself in your first two years of life? Did your grandmother raise you or did your mother raise you?

I mean you know the family situation that I was under, it was my grandfather, my grandfather took pure role of a father to me. Because I was first born in my family, everybody else was his child, so they called him Baba. Nobody, nobody taught me that he was grandfather, so I adopted this and called him father. So my brothers followed this and did the same. So it was my grandfather and my grandmother, my mother was first born, my aunt came after her and then

my uncle. My mother gave birth to the three of us and my grandfather took the role of father to the three of us. And my aunt had two children as well, also not married, so all of us were under this big family. So and, I mean, back then, my grandmother looked after all of us.

Ok

Because our parents were young, at that time they were still going to school. I don't remember much of my mother in my early years,

Don't you?

I don't remember much except the time that we used to go to school, and then the time that she was up in Jhb, and the time that she used to bring us clothes and food, you know groceries,

Sure

When she came home, that was probably once in every three or four months.

Ok

Ok, so you grew up, you were essentially the first born of the second lot of children.

Yes

Are there any stories about you as a baby? Were you a peaceful baby?

I think I was a peaceful baby, I feel proud, in fact, even in my life I think I chose the right path. I mean in my village, where I came from, things were different then, now of course there have been developments now. I was the first person, you know out of all the boys I grew up with I was the first to go to university and be a graduate, and I mean, others from my class went to colleges, to Technikons, but to get to a university degree level, I am the only person in the village.

Did you work really hard at school?

I think I worked did work very hard, I think I was among the brightest children at the school. Because I do remember when I was at my first year at school, when I was five years they took me to play in this drama. You know the schools used to compete. And I do remember playing the role of a child in this drama, I didn't know the story at that time..

Oh really. But you could remember all the words?

Ja, I think I was picked because I was, I was, I was a little bit brighter. But as well, the level of education that we received as small children, I mean I could have been becoming a genius or something. Laughs

I mean I went to a school but we were not taught things that we were meant to learn.

Mm

I mean even up to matric level, I did my matric and didn't do so well, and I went to what was supposed to be a teachers college..

Ok

Straight after matric. I do remember one instance where the lecturers at the college, it was sponsored by some European Union thing, we were not supposed to pay for anything, we were meant free education and only pay R180 per term for the boarding house, because it was far away from home. Previously it was used as a police training college, you know there was no village nearby. So I went there and we were given a maths assignment and there was one sum I couldn't do. So I went to my former school to ask my teacher if he could solve it, and he couldn't. So he referred me to another teacher who couldn't do it, and they referred me to a teacher at a primary school. She couldn't do it and they finally referred me to another teacher at another school and that guy solved that problem. And to me, it told me something. I mean how come these teachers, after I got the solution it looked simple to me.

Mm

I started to ask myself, how come this person couldn't work it out. After you work it out after someone showed you it looked like a simple math's problem that could be solved. BUT I mean there were a lot of things that we didn't cover. I mean I do remember sitting with this exam paper in my matric year and some of the things were not covered during the year.

Mm. DO you remember how you felt about that?

Ja, you feel bad, you fee like this was just a total waste of time for you, for if you had had a better school things could be different.

Mm

I mean you cant blame anyone

It was Apartheid

I mean during those days, people, I mean us, me even myself, people expected that when you finished matric you would go to a certain college. I think that that's were this problem came, there were too many teachers. The way the system was designed was that black people would not have access to other career paths, except teaching or being a policeman..

Or nursing.

Ja, Nursing too.

I think I had this thing from being small, I mean we didn't watch TV because we didn't have. But from looking at things, looking at, probably I came across pamphlets, because I cant tell you how I came across being a pharmacist, but I can tell you for a fact that I wanted to be a Medical Doctor.

Oh, Ok

And I was so determined, and I consider myself, if I go back to the question you asked me earlier, whether I was a bright kid. From when I was small I had always been different.

Ok

I had never, I mean many boys in the village, the way they would socialize would be to go to a nearby village and look for girls, and experiment with drinking and smoking and things. But to me, those things were not of interest to me, um, part of it was influenced by my family, my family was the type of family that believed in the fact that a black persons bank, that's what my

great grandmother used to say (slight laugh), a black persons bank is not like the usual bank, it is the family's possessions, of crops and cattle. My family wasn't rich, we didn't have money but in the village we were considered rich. I mean we had this big yard where we had all sorts of fruit trees. I mean we had many peach trees, we had paw paws, mangoes and we used to just farm, we lived by, just, everything we were getting we were getting from our farm. We never used to buy tomatoes or onions.

Ok, so your family lived off your own land, and did you sell you produce too?

Yes we did sell.

Were you able to generate income from that.

Yes, we did generate, we were farming mielies. Cos I mean our staple food is maize and, and we used to just collect, I mean we would make 70 bags, some of that we would sell to a milling company. Some we would exchange for mielie meal.

Was your whole family involved in this?

Yes, my whole family was involved. I mean, the family was big actually, I mean the family that Im speaking about was just my immediate family, but there was another ___ family, my great great grandfathers brother. They had mules. If anyone died everyone would inherit. So we had horses, mules, cattle. We used to use those for working. And I mean, I mean then, during the times of working it was really, I mean my brothers came after, they were not really involved. It was myself and my uncle, my uncle was two years older than me, we grew up together. Then there was another cousin, all of we grew up doing these things.

Ok

I remember in my matric year I used to go, because it was still expected that you know, education was seen as the last thing, it didn't come first. So I still had to go and fetch the cattle before I could study.

OK

So that's how things w3ere, that's how I consider it bad, because we didn't really get education as providing a future for us, but still, I mean, I managed to survive, but all my other brothers didn't actually.

Were you close to them?

No, we were actually very close, and we played together. Although we never really played because my family didn't allow us to play as children. They actually made us work.

Ok

Because of all the horses, mules and donkeys, people in the village didn't have those. I mean it was a norm, everyone in the village was farming, we had a place where the village was, then there was another huge piece of land where everybody had a section where they were planting their crops. Every year people competed in how, in seeing how many bags you could bring of mielies, you know.

Ok, so there was a big community drive to generate food.

Yes, if you didn't go, you feel left behind, so everybody wanted to do it, because of other people were doing it.

Ok, so it generated a bit of competition.

Yes. But then because people didn't have the means to do that, because we, I mean we were using donkey or mule drawn carts, which people didn't have, so they would hire us, and they would pay us like R10 or R30. and we didn't have water in the village, we had to fetch from far away places, so we were working constantly.

Even very young children worked?

Yes.

Im wondering, as a young child, it seems that you were involved in working for your family, but as very young child, say prior to five, do you know what you were doing?

No, I don't think that prior to five we doing that, it was probably in the ages of 12 I would think. I mean if you look at my thumb, this thumb was chopped when I was five. If you look at my thumbs were the same, but one time we couldn't, my uncles couldn't find the mules and horses and we had to fetch, what was it, I think it was fire wood from the forest. They couldn't find the mules so they used the cattle, you know, the oxen,

Yes.

Yes, and because we didn't have anything to control them, and these things just walked over everything. I don't know what it was but these oxen just walked over a little gully and this screw on the cart chopped my thumb off. I do know that I was in my first year of school, because I remember I was five. That year in December I was in hospital, because I remember the gifts, receiving presents for the first time. Somebody, whoever it was brought us presents in the hospital, and then the following year I went back to school. I remember feeling odd, I didn't know where I belonged, the classes I used to go to, and we would have had to move to the next class, but because I was so young I didn't know that you had to transition to the next level.

So you had already started school at five?

Yes, this accident happened towards the end of the year, and then when I went back to school the next year I was a bit confused.

I do remember, at that stage I was five, but I wasn't working, I was an extra.

Do you remember who your main carer was, like when you got hurt, who would you run to? Who would be the first person you would go to?

My mother was there actually, I do remember her wrapping cloth around my thumb, which she probably cut from her dress. I remember her wrapping it on my thumb and finding the other piece of thumb, and they then rushed me to hospital.

Ok

Ja, I do remember that. Was it properly put back?

No, they just stiched it up, they didn't put it back. I mean the town was 44km away, and we were far away in the forest. So somebody had to run back home and get somebody to, because they hired this bakkie, during those days there was no phones or taxis. There was only a bus in the early morning, for people who were going to work. So if you missed this bus you couldn't go to town, so they had to get, there was this old man who had this old old bakkie so they hired him and they carried me me to the hospital.

Did your mother go with you?

Yes, she did, but I remember that they dropped me at the hospital and left me there. And I do remember crying that they were leaving me there, and then...

Mm, Ok, so your Mom actually was around during your first five years, was she at school then?

I think she was, she was going to school then, but I mean school was until two o'clock and then she will be back at home.

Do you know if she breast fed you?

Mm, no...I don't know

You aren't sure?

NO, but I was told that she did breastfeed me.

Ok. I wonder then, did your mother and your grandparents all play a big role in bringing you up?

Ja, definitely, but my mother and I were extremely close. We have been very very close.

Your Mom and you were close?

Ja, we were. Somehow things worked out, I mean she works up here in Westcliff at the Ridge school as an administrator.

Ok

I mean the way it happened, to me it was like being her child again, because when I came up here to JHB, it was after I'd been to that college after matric, so the end of that year, I did my matric in 1996, and then the whole of 97 I was in the college, and at the end of that year I came up to her here to Joburg.

Ok

And by some miracle I happened to walk from Westcliff and I found myself at Wits.

Ok

And I applied to this university, when I was in matric in 96 I applied to each and every university in South Africa for medicine, I applied for UWC, to Durban Westville, Medunsa, for Wits, I mean for all of them.

To med school?

Yes, because, I just happened to find myself at the Wits medical school, I walked in and I went to their administration office, or admissions office, and I asked them about the application I had made the previous year.

Ok

And then the lady there, who was the faculty officer, there was this certain lady called Mrs Richardson, I probably wouldn't remember her face, but Ill...

But you will always remember Mrs Richardson

No, I wont!! And there was this other one called Jeanette Mabanga, you know I explained to them that I made an application but I couldn't make it to university and they, this lady, Jeanette Mabanga, she said to me "your registration is ready, it is waiting for you". She said "we can register you any time". I said "even now"? She said "yes, even now. So I said "lets go for it". She sent me to get a student card and everywhere, and then I was registered.

It was at the beginning of the year?

Yes, fortunately. And my mother saw me coming back with all of this. Wits was known as this expensive university, I mean before that my mother was working at Shoprite Checkers as a cashier, so she couldn't have afforded to take me to University. She said to me, what have you done, how are we going to pay for this. I mean she was saying that we couldn't afford to pay for university fees. I said, no, we'll see. What those ladies did, they sent me to the financial aid office, and then I made an application for a study loan, and you know, Im still paying that back to this day.

Both laugh

I guess that's all right!

Ja, laughs

But I mean, then, then I got into it. Should I have not done that, then I would probably have be nobody now. I don't know what I would be doing today. In fact when I think about it I..., cos I don't know what type of person I would be. When I think about it I....

What an extraordinary story. You make it sound like some sort of chance that you went there, perhaps like part of you wanted to be there and another part wasn't aware where you were heading?.

Yes it was, but you know, I really wanted to be at the university. That thing had been within me really, from a very young age. And I can not even tell you what inspired me, but I wanted to see myself educated, but that is different to what many other kids believed in. they believe that once you finish matric you go to Johannesburg and you look for work.

Yes. That was the pattern that people believed that you follow? But for you it always felt different?

Ja, because many people were thinking that once you have got matric then you look for work, which could be..., back in those days people were hired to do 'on the job' training, that's what people used to believe in. But I believed, I always wanted to be a Doctor. I mean my grandfather then said to me, look you've got, he asked me how long it took and I said about 6 or 7 years. And that was in my matric year. He said to "me take something that will take you three years", and make way for your brothers. I mean he worked at the SAB, breweries, and so, to me that was fair. And then I accepted that.

Ok

And then I said "ok Ill do a 4 year degree", and I applied for Pharmacy as my first choice. And then something, then, I don't know what to call it, something happened, which to everybody was a shock, but to me it was a shock the most. My grandfather had said to me that year, in my matric year, he said to me "if you pass well Im going to do something great for you". And the

following year, it was the 3rd, it was a Friday, in 96, he was here, he was here in Gauteng and we were back there. The 3rd the results came out, you know they publish them in the newspapers. But in the local newspaper, which would be the Limpopo one. So he was here, then on the 4th he died.

He died?

Ja, so on the 3rd the results came out and on the 4th he died

Oh no.

Ja, for me it was like Oops.

That must have been terrible for you.

Ja, it was. He was the bread winner, there was nobody else working. Because my mother only got a job afterwards. But somehow things took care of themselves. Because before then, he was working and providing for the whole family.

Sjoe

Then after he died my mother got a job. Its almost as if he was opening the way for her to get a job.

Mm, Ok, so that must have been a terrible emotional loss for you.

That to me was quite severe, really. Because this was the man that to me, inspired, I mean, had a lot of inspiration, he was the man I was looking up to, and he was the man I was hoping he was going to take me to where I wanted to go. And...

Was that always the case? Did you always look up to him?

Ja, no, Ive always looked up to him. But at the same time Ive always been aware that in life you have got choices to make. I mean there wasn't anyone guiding me, somehow I think I was a miracle child. I mean there wasn't anyone coaching me, saying this is how life should be.

Mm, so, you felt, I mean he was the person you looked up to. It sounds like you loved him very much.

Ja, certainly

But you didn't feel like you got guidance, its like everyone accepted that there was a certain way everyone went but you have a vision that was outside of the norm.

Yes, definitely. Because I mean, the thing with him was that he was supportive.

Ja

He knew, and in fact I think he knew that something great was going to happen to me. And even, even within the family, that's what I was saying, I think I was the brightest kid, cos my uncles, my great uncles, used to treat me different to any other child.

Oh really. Tell me about that?

They didn't want any, I mean as boys, if you sat with them they would chase you away. They would say, go and play with other children.

Mm

That's how we were taught, life was not so, you were not really treated as a child, it was a little bit harsh.

Mm

I mean if my other uncles found children with the ____, I mean they would beat you just for playing. The expectation was that was that you should be with the cattle or be on the donkey cart fetching water or firewood or be in the fields working with crops you know.

A real work ethic?

Ja, you had to be working, you cant be playing. And that's how it has always been. I mean other children were given a break on Sunday, so Sunday was a special day, people were allowed to go watch a soccer match or to play.

Mm. So if you were found playing you could get beaten?

Ja, they will beat you up and tell you to go away or something.

Mm. But they would let you stay with them?

With me, they would let me stay with them. And when we were sitting, if I saw a box with something written, I would try to read everything. I would try to read everything, and they would actually correct me.

Mm

And that's how I learned. If I saw a bottle of mayonnaise, I would try to read everything. And that's how I think I learned.

Somehow they noticed that?

Ja, somehow they noticed that. And I think I was a child who.... But also, they would, I mean I do remember they used to smoke... what do you call... dagga. They probably were using me, but as a child I didn't see it. So as a child they would send me to go and get this for them. If they were to go and get it they could get caught by the police, but for me, no one would see it because I was a child.

MM

But it things that you see after you have grown up.

Mm, you realize in retrospect. Mm

I wanted to go back a bit, you said that your mother was around actually, for those early years, you said you were very close to your Mom in those years, and she hadn't left for Joburg yet, so would your mother have been your main attachment figure, the person you loved the most?

I think I loved her the most. There has always been this special connection with her. I mean I do remember, even when she came home, when she was in Joburg, she would give us money when she leaves. Even when I was in the college in 1997, if she gave me a R20, I wouldn't spend it. It felt special to me that it was from her. I do remember that I used to hold on to things that were from her and not want to get rid of them.

Do you remember how old you were when she came to Joburg?

It would have been in, probably in, 1986 or so?

So you were about 7 or so?

Ja

Do you remember that time? I mean you remember the time when your thumb got cut, you remember that quite clearly, do you remember her leaving?

I don't remember the point at which we parted, but I do remember that at some stage we were not seeing her. But I mean my grandmother used to tell us that she has gone to look for a job.

And what was your relationship with your grandmother like?

It was great. I mean my grandmother was, I mean, instilling values into us and keeping the house in order. I mean my grandfather who was supposed to be the head of the family, he wasn't there. He was only providing.

He was in Johannesburg earning and supporting the family. Ja

But my grandmother was there really. And a lot of things that I know today I learned from her. I mean hoeing, and this is how we plant these things, these are really basic skills.

And was she the person that said that your bank is your crops?

No, that was my great grand mother, my grandfathers mother.

Ok. And your grandmother taught you a lot of things. Did you feel her love?

Yes, definitely. My family was very close. And its only now that we are a bit broken apart. And my aunt, my aunt who came after my mother, my aunt is here, so everyone is scattered around. Even my own brothers. My one brother is with my mother, he is a policeman. My other brother,

he is with me, he has come to visit but he lives with my aunt in Diepsloot. But there is this feeling that we are scattered. We don't see each other a lot, as you would have expected.

So Im going back to when you were about 5-10 years old. Your mother left in that time, your grandmother cared for you. You were going to school but you were also working for the family.

Ja, you know, although, you don't really, I mean, Its probably because Im older, and its probably in retrospect, I think those things kept me, I mean kept us as boys, from being mischievous. But really, you know, earlier on I said it's really about the choices that one make in life. Because if I look at myself and my uncles, I look at my cousins and my brothers, its totally different people. Even though we were brought up under a certain regime, all of them didn't get to university, its just me. My brother tried, I mean the one who comes after me, he got to a Technical college, and he got to the point where he failed one course. He tried again, he failed, he tried again, he failed, and then he just gave up. And then three or four years ago when I was in the Eastern Cape, I heard that he was at the Police Training College.

Ok

But the point that IM trying to make is that because the family brought us up in a particular way, for me, Im grateful actually. At that time, to some extent I felt a pain. How come my family is like this? How come other children are playing but we are not allowed to play? We always had to be in on the hide-out, we had to be on the run all the time.

Mm, ok

Um, but we felt jealous, and we felt that our family was not... and everybody in the village knew that you know. Ah, um, you know. If one time we didn't bring the cattle home, then my great grandfather, who was the brother to my great grandfather, if we don't bring the cattle home he would tell us "tomorrow you are not going to school, you are going to look for those cattle". Eh, you know, that's how they valued the livestock. And everybody knew it in the village. Every night there would be a child crying in our family. And sometimes they were beating us for nothing.

Did you get lots of hidings?

Yes, we did. Other times we used to.. other times we used to sleep outside, or other times they would beat you for things that happened five days ago. And because my mother wasn't there, sometimes I felt like, if she was here, things would be different. At the same time I knew that women didn't have a say. Cos even my grandmother didn't have a say, she would know where we were hiding, she would give us food and give us a blanket...

But she wouldn't tell the men where you were?

Yes, she wouldn't. She wouldn't tell them where we were. I mean she was showing us that she loved us. But she couldn't tell them what to do. Cos back then in the 80s there was not equality between men and women.

Do you think that has changed?

I think it has, it has changed a lot. But I think it comes with education and the exposure that we have got now. But as well, the men that I'm talking about grew older, I grew older and today my uncles look after me. I mean they look at me and they respect me.

Mm

And it is the same people that I feared back then.

Did you fear them a lot?

Yes, I feared them a lot, I mean those guys could just beat you, really.

Are those the same guys that would send you to buy dagga?

No, they were different. The thing with us, you know with us, when you grow up, there were many of them. And any of them had the right to discipline you. If someone was meant to do something and they didn't do it, then they have the right to intervene, and their way was just to use a whip and beat you or beat you up.

It sounds harsh

Ja, it was harsh, very harsh. And you didn't have a choice as a child. And you know, a lot of things we never talked about it. That's how it was, and even myself, and I never got to ask my mother. Even today I feel embarrassed to go and ask her things. I can't even start the topic, about my father, or about girls or about anything like that.

Is it difficult to talk to her about those sorts of things?

Ja, it almost sounds paradoxical, I mean we are very close, but I mean, certain things we just don't talk about. And I think it is because we didn't talk about these things earlier.

Mm

To me it doesn't seem right to start, to want to bring these things up now.

It feels awkward.

Ja, it feels awkward. And to me I feel like I've grown to be apart from those things. I mean I remember when the news came that my biological father had died, which was three weeks after he was buried, I didn't feel a need to even, you know, even if I knew I don't think I would have gone to his funeral.

You don't seem to have felt any connection?

No, I didn't have any connection. To me it sounds like, it sounds angry when I say it. But to me, it's not angry. But I didn't want to get involved in things that I didn't get involved in earlier. Um

It sounds like you did have a meaningful father in your grandfather.

My grandfather was the greatest. I mean I do remember telling him that I wanted takkies like this, he wouldn't buy those for me. He told me that he would buy anything for me that was to do with school or church. Hence I grew up going to church. In fact that's even how I got to St Francis. I mean his older brother was back at home. He used to work on the mine but he was already old and he had come back home. He was looking after the cattle and it was our job. So his brother, the older brother, he used to be a deacon at the church. Every Sunday they would

wake me up. I mean they liked me so much. He was farming and he would give us tomatoes, cabbage,, everything, all of the vegetables. He would call me, . _____, he always used to call me _____. And he would always give me things and I would take them to my father. And everything he would give he would only give through me.

He sounds really nice

Ja, those men were great, really. I do remember this one, his brother, the older brother. He, I used to go with him... somehow there was this rivalry between... you see my grandfather was the last born in the family,

Right

He had an older brother and the eldest brother. The two of them, the eldest and the middle one, there was something that he had against the middle one.

Ok

So there was not great friendship between the two of them. SO now, my grandfather was in Johannesburg and the two was in Pietersburg. So, the middle brother was overseeing everything, and this was the one who would beat us, every night, or almost every night.

He used to beat you every night?

Ja, he did Almost every night, all of us, all of us boys, even his own two sons. They were the same age. He was just that type of a person.

He sounds cruel

Mm, he was cruel. I mean my brother who comes after me has got two scratches of where he was, the horses, there had to be one boy in front of them to hold them, and these things were powerful and they would just run too fast, and somebody had to be in front of them to lead them. One day they ran away and dragged him through a fence and almost cut his head right off. He has these two massive keloid scars on his neck now. And that is how rough things were. But then, but I was just trying to say, the eldest grandfather, he was the grandfather to all of them, he was so special. I think he had an influence on all of them and my granny too. The church influenced my personality a lot, I mean I was brought up in a Christian way. I mean Im grateful for that. Through that I was able to abstain from a lot of things that could have pulled me astray.

Mm Ok. When you say you were able to abstain, I wonder, was it an effortful abstinence?

No, it was not, there was no effort at all.

Ok.

To me it was because I was having this certain belief, I lived it you know.

Ok

That's what I was saying, in contrast to other boys who used to go drinking and smoking and going looking for girls, I never did those. I never played football with them, or soccer. I never really.. but it was not an effort, to me it felt right. It felt like this is the right way.

It sounds like when you were younger there was a part of you that wished you could play with other kids outside of your family. But maybe as you got older there wasn't the drive or the attraction to go out and play with the others.

I think as well you know, it could be, a lot of times we were punished, so we were doing things out of fear you know. You know, you knew that you had to do this, because if you didn't you are going to get beaten.

Mm

But because you are forced, it is not nice and you know that there is other ways. It feels like you are being forced to work and the alternative to that is go and play with other kids. And you don't enjoy that and your heart desires you could be there. I think what we were longing for was just the freedom to do things we wanted to do.

And so there wasn't that freedom for you when you were young. It sounds like you, with some members of your family you earned a certain respect and freedom as time went on.

No definitely, the sense of respect now comes with the sort of things that they start to see in me. In my village, at that age, I think I was 23 or 24, here they see me driving a car. They start to see that this is a working person and they start to look at you differently.

Ok, so that respect came through your work...?

Ja, you earn it through.. I think its material things, and the fact that you look bigger. You start to reason with them.

Yes, you are autonomous now.

Yes, I think I am completely autonomous.

It sounds like you did enjoy a relationship with your mother, and she left when you were six, which was obviously a difficult thing for you but you don't really remember the detail. It seems like her visits meant a lot to you and you would hold on to all the things she gave you.

Ja

And then you were with your Grandmother and your grandfather would come back to visit too. What do you remember about his visits home? How you felt.

I mean with him, you know in the village we didn't have electricity then, and at night time we used to just fear.. we used to just fear the unknown. When you are sitting and it is quiet and night time, there you hear sounds of donkeys, you hear dogs barking and from the far far distance you hear hyenas. And if they send you outside, I mean most of the things were outside, say the firewood, and they ask you to collect.. cos we didn't have toilets outside the house, and you wouldn't go outside at night cos we would fear snakes. So we use to bring a bucket for Grannies and things. So if they send you outside to fetch things... they didn't have one big house, there were lots of huts, so they would send you to fetch salt from one little hut. But you were scared because it was night time. And as a child you get told you mustn't be out at night, so you fear that strangers will take you away, and so, when he was around, for me, I felt this sense of security. I didn't, I didn't fear things when he was around.

That's interesting

And when he was around he, we knew we would have good things, we would have meat, we would have good food, because he used to bring that.

And how often did he come?

Whew, it was seldom, I'd say it was about ... 3 times a year, really.

Ok, so you would wait long long times.

So in a year, I know he used to do it every year in August. He would come home, he would take his leave then, in August, and that would be the month that he would come and be with us you know, for some time. And I mean I do remember, my grandfather when he came home, he was that type of a person who had a routine, unlike my mother. When my mother came home, she used to leave on a Sunday afternoon. He, he used to come home and leave on a Monday. I think he used to work night shifts, and he used to come home when he knew he was going to work on Monday night. So those memories I still have. I remember I used to walk with him to the taxi station, and then he will give me a R2 or a R5. It was nothing but it was something to me. Laughs

Was it only you who would walk with him to the taxi?

Ja, it was just me. I was very very close, because...

More than your older uncle, his son?

Yes. My older uncle, for some reason he is not a.., he is not a person who you could classify as normal now. Back in the 80's he had some mental dis.. Some mental disease. He is not someone who you would classify as normal today. Because he stopped school in std 1 or std 2, because he couldn't cope.

Ok

He was that type of a person. I do remember that he used to wake up and, in the middle of the night, hearing voices. He used to be talking to somebody, he would be responding and walking out the door. And my grand mother used to have to go and run after him because there was a fear that he could get lost.

Ok, so he was actually ill from very young?

Yes.

And now, how is he now?

Now, it's almost as if it was something spiritual. Sometime, they took him to a spiritual healer, and they said that one of the ancestors was complaining that there was something to do with the name of our grandfather. So they changed his name to adopt a mar.. it would be maternal, so he took my grandmother's father's name, then things changed.

Ok

He became a bit normal, but because he left school, he is not a person who is able to write and read but he is able to comprehend information if you speak to him. I mean today he is a normal person but because he did not go to school he..

Ok, so he lost time learning

Ja, it was then too late. And we didn't have exposure to adult schools and things, so he didn't get to go to school.

Ok.

Ok, so my mother, we are very very close. And the reason I was saying that things somehow worked out. When I came to university I lived with her here

At the Ridge?

Ja, at the Ridge she had a room, that room was used as a kitchen, a bedroom, a sitting room, you know

Like a general room

Ja, but it was just for her. And when I came I didn't have a place to live. And she couldn't afford to pay rental for me. So for me, it was like being a child to her again.

That's interesting.

So somehow it made me, you know connect more with her.

Ok

Because I came to a point where, I mean I was living with my mother, I was proud of that actually,

Mm

And in fact, getting to.., I mean I knew her and I knew that she loved me,

But you hadn't lived with her since you were six.

No, but because I knew that this one was my mother, I think that knowledge gives you that special bonding really.

Mm. That was really important to you.

Ja, it was good, it was actually good that I spent those years with her.

And was she very nurturing to you during that time?

My mother was really, she was the type of person who would sacrifice anything for me. And I mean, even, that's why, even today, I respect her so much. She would even go barefoot, but she would make sure that I have got things. She couldn't afford to pay for my university education but even so, wherever she could she made sure... she committed herself.

That is amazing.

Ja I mean, there were a lot of things... She used to take me.. like every weekend she would take me to Cresta Mall. That was the first, those were the things, when I first came here, Cresta and

Randburg were the first places that I knew. Even down here, she and we used to walk down here together, around here.

It's a lovely area. What were your impressions when you came here, of life in Johannesburg?

Oh no, I mean, it was really a great thing, it was the type of life that I wanted to live.

MM

And especially this area. This area actually, Parkview, Westcliff, I have a lot of attachment really to it. I mean I live out in Northriding area, but I still come to church here because to me it feels home.

Mm, your comfortable place!

I still have some plates and spoons, and I actually, you can put all my things together, and I still remember some spoons and a kettle, and I kept those things. And the church here, people used to call me, I used to live with her and then one year I left to go and live in the University Res, when I got a bursary. And when I was moving people brought things for me, because I was going to start a new life. I needed a kettle, a stove, a two plate, and an iron. And people brought those things. And to me, that was what life should be like, and I still remember the people that donated those things.

Really kind and giving people

*Yes, so that's why this place has got the... I feel really close really. The thing is, houses are really expensive here, they have got like six figures and all. Both laugh
But I think it is worth it anyway.*

And now, in terms of your own little boy now, your first born son, it sounds like a very special time for you and your wife. I wonder, what sort of wishes do you have for your child?

You know from, I've received this comment, if not compliment from, I would say, hundreds and thousands of people, and I don't exaggerate, that you are going to make a great father. Simply because I have got a love for children. You know I love babies and somehow, babies, it's just that we don't understand, but they do communicate.

Mm

And certain things babies do in us that we don't see, or we are not able to communicate back or they are not able to say to us what they want. But I do know that, you know, if you play with a little baby and.., they can look at you and not respond, or they can smile.

Mm

]To me, when I see that, a little baby smiling at me. And like even when I work at Dischem, some parents will come with their babies. The parent will be trying to do something with their baby but the baby will be staring at me and smiling. In life really, if a baby smiles at you, I really is extremely special.

Mm, so you really love babies.

So I love to hold them and thing. People are saying that I've been good with other people's babies. But I do know that I waited, I waited for the right person,

mm

And I waited for the right moment. Like now I feel like I'm able to provide for my child, I've got my own house, I've got a car so that I can take them wherever they need to go, unlike, um I mean

maybe many people, especially in the Black communities, people didn't plan, they didn't think that the child will be sick one day and they would have to take them to the clinic, and how do you take them, are you going to be running around? I mean I've seen babies that are burnt, with coffee or whatever, and they have to go and wait for a taxi or whatever. You really don't want that.. But I mean, a lot of things, I've just looked and observed from people and this is not what I want

So you waited to find the right partner and situation for yourself.

Ja

I think babies are really very important, so my son is really somebody that, I mean my life, I've always known that I wanted a baby. It didn't matter if it was a boy or a girl, it wouldn't matter.

Do you think you will have more children?

Yes, I would love to have more. But of course it is something you have to negotiate with your partner. Laughs

You have to negotiate, I mean the world is not what it was, I mean I read a lot about the environment and what is going to happen in the next 25 years. It doesn't look too bright really. I watched this video, it's called, I don't know if it is true or not I don't know. It's called the Inconvenient Truth. I don't know if it's true but it was really interesting. But what I do know for a fact is that the climates have changed..... I'm a little bit sensitive or not, but I don't want my children to suffer, really. But I'm not going to let my children be spoiled. I'm going to teach them the right way. I mean I didn't have an open relationship in terms of talking with my mother. I mean I don't blame my mother, in terms of how the system was, I mean I was a boy, and the way the system was, you are not supposed to discuss with your mother, you were not supposed to discuss with women.

So are you saying you won't follow those things, with your own children and your own wife.

And what's your view about your children's emotional needs, for their development?

I think, I'm grateful that I was a child at the time that I was, I was exposed to childhood in the years that I was, there was childhood in the 90's and there is childhood now in the 2000[s]. But I do know that it is a big challenge to be a parent as there is a lot that children are exposed to. Where I live, in Cosmos City, just recently I went to a squatter camp to take some men that I had hired, I was building a house for my mother in Pietersburg,

Ok

And, that place is a, it's a disgrace when you look at that place, that people live here, but you would not believe the cars that are going in and out of this place. Lots of all the smart cars. Then I ask myself but Why is it that people are coming here. .

I asked these guys and they said that there are a lot of drug people, Nigerians who are selling drugs. and there are kids who are given drugs, introduced to it once by these people. . I mean I do know as a pharmacist that there are some drugs that are addictive immediately, and those things are scary for me. When I look at situations like this, I mean there was that story on the news that there were those people who were racing and they made an accident and they hit children by the side of the road. And it makes me think actually, it made me think, I do not want, when I look at the crashes that are on the main busy roads, I don't want my children to go to those schools. When you look at the fact that, I mean I have heard of situations where kids were stabbed at school... I mean those things make you worried. I mean, with my child, I do know that I am protective, and I think rightfully so. I don't know what would happen if something happened to my child and I heard that somebody did something to my child..

Yes, that doesn't bear thinking about.

Yes, to me, he's a person I would protect no matter what.

He is a lucky boy.

So we have come to the end.

Short chat with him offering me opportunity to call him again. Suggests he may have gone into a lot of detail and missed the point of what the question was that I was asking. I thank him for his time and sharing his experiences.

Then he says:

Ja, you know, I mean ja, that's true, some of these things, some of the details have made me sad. There's a sad thought behind it, you know. You know, when you think about, sometimes when you go through suffering, you think things could have been better. I mean, for me I've got two brothers. I mean, the brother I was telling you about, and I felt such pain for him. For me to watch, I mean I was at the university at that time. I mean to watch him making these applications, buying newspapers, making applications, circling things. I mean I saw these reply letters, most of them were rejecting. I mean to me, it was like, my mother's child is trying. That thing really hurt me. I mean he is trying very hard. I mean he used to buy newspapers every Wednesday. Its not something that you can blame anyone, but the fact that he was trying and he wasn't getting anywhere.

It is terribly disillusioning.

Ja

How is he now

He is ok, but he is wanting to get out of the police. Goes on about bribery and temptations for police men.

Recording stopped at 8 minutes, battery out. I didn't notice till right at the end of the interview.

Vusi originally said that he doesn't know if he is a good subject for my research because his mother gave him up because she was spoilt. He said she had five children from different fathers and so it doesn't really fit into a typical Apartheid childhood.

Just going back to what you said in introduction, you said that your Mom had five children, and your perception was that she was a bit spoilt?

Laughs

So true, well, you know, I think that its, when I grew up I think at about the age of um, 8,9, 10,11, 12, I realized that I was somehow different. All the other kids had a mother figure that, that they had someone they could refer to as mother. For me, I had my grandmother, who I called Mum, and my father also didn't really play an active role in my upbringing. I only knew about him when..., just before he passed on, just before I was 14. So as I was growing up, and I got to a later stage, I started asking questions. Cos I could see that, you know, normal families have a father figure and a mother figure, and all the families have more or less the same structure. And I needed to understand why, and (coughs) everybody tip toed around the subject because they thought I was too young. And Eventually my grandmother told to me that I, you know, should really get to a stage when I stop asking that questions. Because she was irresponsible, she gave me up as a baby when I was eight days old, and that was it. The subject was never explored. Little did I know that my mother lived in the, more or less the same area, in the neighbourhood. And I saw her sometimes, she was just one of those woman who would be overly interested in you, she would want to say Hi and all that. And I was a very shy child, and some part of me believed that she was one of those people who would want to maybe abduct me. Laughs slightly. SO I just, I really never really liked her a lot.

So that was a big concern, about who she was? Had you never met her?

No no no no, I met her at a very late stage. What had happened is, I had, when I was in std 1 I think I had a brother, one of my brothers was in my same class. I didn't know that we were related, but he knew. So when he called me brother it took my by surprise. So that was it. And as I grew up, my school was a very small community, so you end up interacting with people of many kinds. And there was a girl who unfortunately died as well, um she was sort of like my cousin on my mothers side, and she took me to my mothers home at some stage, and I could see that everyone was just so happy to see me, but I, I was just not really familiar with these people.

So you weren't aware of who they were?

No, I was not aware of who they were to me, were they related to me or anything. Um, so it was just one of those things, when I went there, I didn't like it you know. When you go and visit people and they are so excited, and they are sort of like taking you as one of them, and you are not even aware of that factor. So um, I grew up in that stage where, you know; different people had to take care of me. Where one year I would be with my aunt and then I would be with my

uncle. That sort of brought a lot of confusion into my life. So as I matriculated, I put myself through my matric as well

Did you?

Ja, by selling the home brew beer (laughs)

And then after that, you know, found a job, and then sort of like worked my my way through. And then in, I think it's about one or two years ago, I watched a movie, it was like long lost son and mother, and you know, they were uniting. And I just thought you know what, I would be very sad for me to die, it would be very sad for me to die and it would be very sad for me to die without actually knowing who my mother is, and actually getting to know and understand her side of the story, what actually led her to do what she did. I do understand that a lot of fathers don't actually play an active role in, you know, in the black culture. Um They don't really play an active role in the upbringing of the children. So I thought, Ok, with the father I can understand but with the mother, there should really be a story behind. And um, my partner encouraged me to go and just find out who she is, and why she... you know she.... So I started to do my little investigation and I found out who she were and where she stays. So I called her and said, Let's meet and talk. Help me to understand so that I can be free. Cos I thought I had a lot of heavy weight on my shoulders.

Emotionally?

Emotionally yes, it was a bit draining. So I went to her, I sat with her, and I just, I.. sort of like gave her a quick background of where I came from. And you know, I need to determine her actions at the time. What really did happen? She said that the family on my father's side were really not very fond of her, and she wanted to have a relationship with me at a very tender age, but it just really never happened.

What was a tender age?

Um, for her, A tender age for her, it was at that stage, immediately after she dropped me off, she wanted to see me you know, after a couple of months or so. But my family never gave her that opportunity.

Your Grandmother?

Yes

Can I just ask you to go back, you mentioned to me that you Mother had you and at eight days old she dropped you with your father's mother. Was she still in a relationship with your father?

I don't think that relationship was rosy, it was one of those relationships where, it was two people meeting very young and um, well, they were not that young (laughs) they already had a couple of kids. So

Did they have children before you?

Ja, my father ha before me. My father had one child, Godfrey, which is, um well I don't even know Godfrey's mother, but he lives in the vicinity of where I live. And My mother had four kid. So I mean, I was sort of like the last born.

So were there any other children from your mother and your biological father?

Well I know that they are, actually, they are all from different fathers.

Ok

Ja, they are all from different fathers you know. You know, she was a bit hectic. Laughs

So your Mother dropped you off with your paternal grandmother, but that relationship was strained. It was eight days, do you know if your father was involved in that decision?

I don't think so, because what happened at the late stage, when I was introduced to her, I just thought, this story just doesn't really, it has a lot of you know, gaps you know. She suggested that I speak to her aunt, who lives in Pretoria, who helped me understand what actually happened at the time.

Was that your father's sister?

No, it was my mother's sister. She said that my mother gave birth to me and as she came back there was really no support from the fathers side and she got a bit gatvol and she started to go and drop me off there. She thought there would be more support for me there.

Recording stopped there.

From memory

Shortly after Vusi was taken to his paternal grandmother in the Krugersdorp area his father wrapped him up in plastic bags and took him outside and put him in a big water pipe. He was seen doing this by an older cousin, a girl of about 8 at the time. She noticed what was happening and rescued him and took him back to his grandmother. When Vusi spoke of this he said that his father had tried to kill him, but in a hesitant way. He later spoke of a lot of anger and resentment towards his father, but said that he had tried to let it go as he was becoming too bitter. He had met up with a psychic woman on a train who told him that he had too much anger and pain in him and must let it go. So he feels that he did try to let it go then.

Vusi described a lot of conflict in his father's family about him, that various aunts and uncles wanted him and there was a court case that ultimately settled the custody issue. His grandmother was granted custody of him. He said he thinks that he stayed with her till he was about two and then he went to stay with Dineo, his aunt. She was recently married and had a young son who was much the same age as him. He stayed with Dineo and her husband until he was eight. He described Dineo as very caring towards him. She would sit with him and his cousin every day after school and would ask them about their home work and their school day. She would ask them if they understood everything at school and did they need help. She was caring and Vusi felt that she and her husband were the closest that he got to real parents. In fact he said that he always lied to people when they asked him who his parents were, that they were

his parents. He said that teachers would ask him who his real parents were and he always felt ashamed that he didn't know.

Vusi said that when he was eight he was told that his grandmother was sick and needed someone to look after her. He was told that he would be the one. He said he was devastated by that and in turmoil, but he had to go. I asked about what caring for her involved and Vusi said it was really to call someone if there was a problem. He said that his grandmother was always blind, and she became deaf as well. He described her as always making an effort to give him nice food, she would always scrape together what she could and there was always food available for him. But he said although he called her mom there was never a really close bond between them. There were also lots of cousins that would come to the house but they always had a mother at home and he never did. He said he was very aware of that.

Vusi described being told in times of conflict in the family about what his father did to him, trying to kill him when he was a baby. He heard from cousins. He also sort of knew that his father was his father but he was never told directly till just before he died. But when he was about 9 he asked his father for money to buy a pencil. His father was abusive to him and refused, but sent him to buy him a beer. On his way back from buying the beer he tripped and fell and cut open his hand. It was the first time he ever saw raw flesh and it was sore and he was scared. His father was so abusive towards him because of the lost beer, he never did give him any sympathy about his injury, or money for a pencil. Vusi said that his father drank and smoked a lot and got sick. He said he got TB and died from that. He said that he was pleased when his father died, good riddance was what he felt.

Vusi provided very sketchy details about his childhood, his memory for dates frequently was contradictory. He seemed to be unsure of what happened when.

He describes going back to his grandmother and from that time, about 8 or 9 yrs, he had no guidance. He said that he made some stupid mistakes and when I asked about those he said that he had changed subjects at school many times and chosen the wrong subjects and that he had no one to advise him, or watch over him. He felt he was irresponsible and his friends have regularly had to rescue him from himself. He didn't seem to want to give examples, every time he went near to that topic he would move off it. Vusi did say that he had built up a great deal of debt and he is slowly paying it back. He wants to own his own place and buy his own car, which as a training coordinator at a big company should be within his reach. Vusi talked about how his friends are sometimes therapist to him and he would rather that they just be friends, and this confuses him and makes him distance himself from them. He particularly talked about his one friend who is in the psychology field and how he has insight into Vusi's life which makes Vusi feel vulnerable. He would rather not be therapised by friends. I suggested that Vusi may consider a therapy relationship as one in which he could derive some benefit, in particular through having a consistently interested and caring person to help him make sense of things. He said he has been in therapy twice but both times he found it difficult to talk about his early life.

Vusi said that he has really tried to create a relationship with his mother in the last years. He bought her a cell phone but she gave it away to one of her relatives who sold it and used the money to buy alcohol. He said that that upset him a lot. He bought her another phone and air time and would like to send her money regularly but doesn't. He feels that she is unlikely to visit him, she declined when he invited her before. He said he feels ashamed of his home now which

is just a room at the back of someone's house near to work. He would love to have his own home but he has to pay off debt before he can get to that.

I asked about Vusi's relationship with Dineo, the aunt that he lived with between 2-8 years. He said that she is always kind to him and interested in him when she sees him but doesn't call him or make contact with him. He said that she was very young when she took him on, only about 19, and that was too young he said, for her to take so much responsibility.

Vusi said that he has thought about adopting an orphan but he worries that he would either abuse the child or over indulge it. He can't work out which approach he would adopt, but he is sure that he would not be able to raise a child due to his own experiences.

Vusi provided a great deal of in-depth personal material in a way that suggested he was almost talking about another person, or a part of himself that was out of reach to himself. He regularly used terms like being emotionally distraught and falling to pieces when reflecting on his childhood, but he was not overtly emotional in the interview. He said at the end of the interview that he had found it very helpful to talk to me and had realized a lot about himself.

He spoke quite vaguely about his experiences, seeming to skirt around the very painful aspects. His hesitancy when referring to his father trying to kill him when he was a tiny infant came up three times, he found it hard to say the words. He didn't seem to have any emotional connection to his father at all. He seems to feel very let down by his mother.

Vusi's grandmother died when he was 18 and following that there was a great deal of family conflict about who would inherit the family home. Ultimately an uncle of his moved in and took over the house, but it seems that the family fell apart at that time. He does seem to have some contact with family but it is sporadic and not containing.

The last 4 minutes were spent discussing therapy... and Vusi telling me about the benefit of talking today.

I would urge you consider the therapy idea, because it would allow you to keep your friendships as friendships, and then have a relationship with a therapist that would help you to build up

I have seen a psychologist or two, you know, and it has really helped me in a way.

MM

But then, it would be easier for my mother to go and see a psychologist, but then how would I address it with her?

It wouldn't be for her, I'm not sure that you could ask her to do that, it would be more for you, that you could get some of the mothering that you missed out on from a long-term therapy relationship, an opportunity for you to get support and deep understanding, because that seems to be what you are telling me that you have missed out on.

Yes, I'll definitely consider that.

Gave details of EC to Vusi.

Please let me know if you to talk further as you have spoken about very painful things today....

But you know what, I think that talking about it has really helped me a great deal, because there was a stage where I fabricated a whole lot of aspects of my life, and I just didn't want my friends to know about my childhood. I would tell them about Dineo, where I had a wonderful family. And then when people asked me about my family I would just say that it was fine. I got to a stage where I would lie about my childhood because it was a bit depressing. But as I grew up I realized that lying to people is not going to help, because as you speak about your life story it actually changes other peoples life. You get people who, for instance, had the very same scenario happening with the father, and I would give them a synopsis of my situation, and this is what I did with my mother and father, so consider yourself blessed to have your mother in your life, instead of focusing on all the negative aspects...

I went back and interviewed Vusi again 5 days later.

Talked about reason for another interview, lost recording...

So, I'm aware that you spoke about very painful things, but you have said to me on the phone that you have been absolutely fine after the interview, but I thought it's important that we talk again, and also record your real voice!! Both laugh.

The first question I have for you, at the beginning of our interview on Monday, you said something about having a lot of different changes of caregiver, you moved from aunts to uncles, and that didn't come up later, you talked about Dineo and your grandmother. I wanted to ask you about that, did it feel like you moved a lot, from one caregiver to another?

You know, it was, it was, you know, when you feel like you don't belong, um and you know it is very strange that I can remember vividly when I was growing up, that I felt like, as much as I was living with my grandmother and I called her mother, um because um, all her children called her mothers. But you know we called our parents sisters, you know it actually normally happens in our culture. In as much as she was my primary caregiver and I moved and I lived with Dineo and I went and lived back with her, it was just one of those things when you know that you.. there is something different about you. You are not like all the other kids, there is that another element missing in your life. And in as much as you go to your mother and call her mum, but you knew that there was somebody that was supposed to be there that you could call the actual parent.

Ok, you felt that you were aware of that lack?

Yes, I was sort of like somehow aware, as much as these people are playing the parental role, or the motherly role, they were not really my biological parents.

That possibly linked to your later decision to try to find your real mother?

Ja, that's a, because this feeling was always with me, from growing up and being a child, I always, at the back of my mind, I really sort of like despise my mother at some stage. As I grew up I learned to forgive her and I actually wanted to connect to her.

Mm

I mean we are all walking around with different stories, and I just thought that probably she had a story that she could have shared with me. You know she she, she must have grown through, maybe probably a traumatic experience in her life, that's how I defined it, that led to her making that decision. Because we make decisions based on the circumstances that we are going through you know.

Mm

And as much as we, I knew that there was a rationale behind that, it didn't really justify her actions,

Mm

But you know. Um, Ultimately I thought that forgiving her was the best thing I could do, not for her but for myself,

For yourself?

Its, its, its like weight lifted off my shoulders.

And did it help to speak to her? I know you said that she referred you to her sister, and that she hadn't been able to really give you information.

Ja, somewhat, it actually helped and sometimes when I visit her I could see that she does love me. Um, probably a lot of things actually went down during our childhood, during my childhood, and um, it is just one of those things, we could try to, you know, create that relationship, but because it was really never there, its something that would not actually, um, you know, ever happen. And you know what is funny thing, I called her, no she called me, which is very strange, because she never calls me..

Ok

I told her that I am actually moving to one place to another, downsizing as part of my cost saving strategy. And She called to find out how that did go. cos I made a commitment that I would at least try to call her at least once a week, to find out how she is, say on a Monday. Like how was the weekend, what did she do?

So this is current?

Yes, it is current. I know she goes to the church on the weekend, most of the time during the week she would sit and watch tv, because she is not employed currently.

Ok

Ja

Long sigh,

Ja, so maybe, maybe I must just give her a chance you know. Maybe I must just give her a chance and at least she is trying to make it work.

Mm. When did she call you?

I think, I think, Im actually so bad at this, the day before yesterday.

This week

Laughs happily, Ja, this week. It was after our interview. Ja, I think it was Tuesday, no it was Wednesday. And I said I would call her back later that day and unfortunately I have been a very bad child (laughs), I haven't. Ill have to call her back, just call her and recap.

Do you think there is part of you that didn't call her back because maybe you are cross with her, especially after talking in our interview?

No, not really, not really. I just got busy.

Mm

I just got busy but you know, the only time that I remembered that my mom called and I said I would call her back and I haven't, was yesterday in the afternoon, when I was going home, I was like Shucks, there is something, I knew that there is something that I forgot, but it is not because of... I think that you know with most of the people that got to be around me when I was a child, it is actually a bit quicker, its actually a bit easier for me to call them. I know that they would call me and get to the point and get it over and done with. I would call them and just sort of like touch base, but, it was, I didn't really prioritize it, I don't know why but, I just didn't.

Maybe it is more awkward with her, because you don't have that long relationship..?

Ja

You know, in terms of ease. It is more like a difficult thing?

Ja, probably that's why. But I will call her back and return her call, to keep in touch and give her feedback..

But you say it felt special, that she made the effort and did enquire how things are going for you. It did, you know, it's a strange thing, my other aunt, the one who was supposed to go.. who gave me the whole history of her childhood. She is the one who'd be very consistent, I think

education plays a major role in her life, I mean she was a teacher, and I don't think my mother had that educational background. If ever I tell her anything about what is going on at my work, my drivers licence, the fact that I'm looking for a new job. She would call and ask, how did the licence go, how did the exam go?

She is the relative on your mother's side?

Yes, she is the relative on the other side

And you didn't know her before you looked for your mother.

I didn't

She sounds like a significant person.

Ja, like I say, education shapes us. They are two different people completely, because she is a bit modern in a way, and she is a pause, sadly, you know what is the sad thing, she doesn't have kids, she doesn't have kids, she actually adopted one of my, she actually raised one of my mother's children. Cos at some stage, my other brother, Lulu, I don't think I mentioned him before, in the other interview. I think my mother raised him for a certain period of time, from what I've heard, because there were sort of other kids, and my aunt was living by herself, she doesn't have biological kids. She said, bring him over and I will look after him. They have that sort of relationship, like mother and child.

Was he quite young?

He was young, but not that young. I don't know the grades, he was in Std 1, no he was going to Sub A, grade 1 now. Probably, as much as I was raised by my father's side, she also wanted to play that role and be the aunt that everybody loves and adores.

And maybe she was aware, because of her education, that your Mom hadn't managed to be such a consistent Mom.

I don't understand how can two people raised by the same parents, have such different personalities you know?

You mentioned to me that you thought that your mother was very spoiled, I wondered if you meant spoiled indulged, or spoiled through life experience?

I think she was, unlike you know, in certain senses you will have a family in which everyone is given responsibilities, and then there is the other child, probably the last born, I don't know where she falls in the family bracket, but there is the one who will always be in trouble, and the parents will be slightly protective of her...

So you have a sense of your Mom perhaps not having had such an easy time, having had difficulties and perhaps having exceptions made for her?

I think there were just too many exceptions made for her. My aunt said that, what were her exact words....? She said that they let her get away with murder most of the time. She was allowed to have kids at any time. But when my mother tells me her side of the story she says that she felt slightly neglected. She mentions stories of her parents making her do certain things that a child her age shouldn't be doing. Other children will be playing but she will be the one that is supposed to go and buy stuff very far, go and get water from very far places. She was actually expected to work at a very early age, at very early stages of her life. They actually tired to make a shop, they would sell sweets and mielies, and most of those responsibilities will be assigned with her. The other kids would go and play with other kids and.. there are just two sides of the story and I'm just not sure what the real one is?

Ok, but there is a sense of your Mom probably having a hard time. From her and her sister, they are both saying there were difficulties?

Ja, but maybe she is telling the truth, maybe she is not telling the truth, that she didn't have it easy as a child, so she had lots of kids. Probably she tired to find love somewhere else and she ended up having all these kids that that she couldn't look after.

Ja

And going back to you ____, your understanding of your Mom is important, as it informs your understanding of yourself, but I'm most interested in you. When your Mom left you with your paternal grandmother, you were eight days old, you wouldn't remember it, but do you remember being aware of having been left?

You know, adults talk, and they are not really aware of what they are saying then. But immediately I heard bits and pieces of stories from my siblings and other family members, I felt a bit angry, I felt a bit frustrated, and I just remember feeling very resentful towards, towards her, and just wondering, you know, what kind of a mother would leave a child at such a tender age. You know eight days is just too... too young. And you know then, to make matters worse, when I heard that my father was actually trying to actually kill me in a way, by dumping me in some dump, it actually made matters even worse. I said ok fine, I do understand when mother is actually doing this, she was probably going through stuff, but what my father was trying to do did make matters worse. So even though I was part of the family, I was surrounded by cousins and nephews and nieces, part of me always felt like the unwanted child, you know. And I tried to, you know when you look at yourself in the mirror, and you don't really really love yourself, and you have got that hatred for yourself, you are asking yourself, what is it, you know, how, could you be so bad that both your parents didn't want you?

Mm

And then the, the the, (pause) part of it that actually made matters feel even worse is when you are shipped from one family to another, and somehow you get to stage when you actually think, the problem doesn't lie with my parents, maybe it's not, the problem doesn't really lie with my parents, maybe it's me. So at some stages you ask yourself, maybe it is actually to do with me. But as I grew and I went to school, I just... told myself that I would work so hard. I think there was this book that I read; you know, it was about this child, it was one of those books at school, and my mother, my grandmother, she knew the book or she heard about the book, and she understood it word for word. And she always said, she always referred me experience, I think when I was growing up I was, I think at a later stage she always referred my experience to that book. There was this child, it was actually about an orphan, she got thrown away by her mother and then she got adopted by other parents, and then she grew up in that family,

Mm

And um, when he he he, (pause), when he grew up, um, he bought the mother the house and did a whole lot of things you know, for the mother

For the mother that rejected him?

The mother that rejected him. I'm not too sure what message she conveying, but maybe she was saying that you could grow up being raised by different people, um but then, when you grow up and you become successful, you shouldn't really forget about the people that really added value to your life. I don't really understand the objective of telling me this story, but maybe she was saying that yes, your mother rejected you, but you don't really have to, you don't really have to be resentful in a way. I'm not really too sure what message that she was trying to convey there...

What message was she giving you?

Ja, but you couldn't really forget about the people that meant something.

The quality of that relationship, it sounds like she was there, but it was, it was a bit of a mixed relationship? Is that an accurate perception?

Ja, Well, um, its, you know sigh, um.. Sometimes we listen to our grandparents and sometimes we don't. But I just felt like she went through like, like any other human being, she went through emotional stages, where she, um, maybe she felt that what she did by actually fighting for my custody and getting it, was not the best thing that she should have done then. I don't know, that's just my perception. And because she would have instances in which she would be a bit, a bit, resentful, about the fact that my mother did that and that. There were instances where she would tell me these stories. So I think that she went through different emotional stages, where she felt like, maybe she shouldn't really have done that. Maybe she should have just let the mother be part of my life then. From what I hear from my mother, that she tried to um... to,...go and visit me,

Mm

And you, you know bring me stuff, and she doesn't know if those things actually ever reach me. And when she tried to actually visit me at some stage, there was just that animosity, it was very unpleasant, and she felt like, (pause) I will sense it, and it was just like that different atmosphere, and that is why she actually stopped doing it.

Ok

So from what I hear she actually tried to, but then that's her side of the story, but you don't get to hear this from my aunt.

And from your Grtan, I mean you are saying that there was ambivalence, she fought for you, she fought, she went to court,

Ja, she went to court and fought for my custody, and she fortunately got it. And she sort of took me as one of her own her own children, so I was practically her child.

But in a way you are saying that was something that you sensed, that she would go up and down, that she would have different emotional stages, that you would get messages you were not sure you understood, from stories. I suppose she may have been battling herself. As you say, she may have wondered if she did the right thing. Ja

You said that when you were about 8 you had to go back and look after her, and by that time she was blind and deaf.

Ja

Had she been disabled when you were younger?

When I was younger she was going through exactly the same. Nothing has really changed from the time that she has actually adopted me as one of her own, but she was not coping at some certain stage and she felt that giving me to Dineo was a better option, when I was about 6 or 7.

You mentioned that you were about 2 when you went to Dineo.

I was actually very young. Oh God. They took me to Dineo, but it was a back and forth arrangement. As much as it was a back and forth thing, but the time when I moved permanently to Dineo I was about 5 or 6. So I feel like I was always with my grandmother until I was 5 or 6. You would find that I was with Dineo during the week and at the weekend I was with her. Most of the kids used to go to my Gran over the weekend, and it felt like actually being raised by her at that stage. So when I was six and I went to Dineo, I stayed with them for quite some time, I think I went back to my Grandmother when I was going to Std 3,

Mm

no, std 1 actually, so it was just like a couple of years. But I feel like the reason why I was taken back, even though it was, if I think about it, it was sugar coated around the fact that I need to go and look after my Gran. Dineo's husband was not entirely happy about having a child that is not his in the household, and um, and um, taking care of somebody else's child. They had a child now, we sort of grew up like brother and sister. And I think those were the emotions that surrounded me being taken back to my grandmother. But I think it was just somehow sugar coated.

You say, ja, you are saying that, at the beginning of our interview today, you were saying that there was a feeling of being unwanted, being a child who didn't have a mother, so there was a lot of feeling of being sent to and fro, and not being sure of where you belonged. But it seems that you felt like you felt you belonged the most was at your grand mother?

I actually felt that I belonged more the most at my grandmother. Dineo really really played that motherly role, Like I said, she would do what every mother would do for a child you know, give you food and clothing when you needed it. And she would actually go through my books when I came back from school, and just basically showing that everything was running smoothly. And she used to try to would actually want me to strive and succeed and be position 1. You know you would have no 31, she wanted me to get to stage where I was always position 1. That's where I learned the sense of always striving to be no 1. Like I said previously, she was a bit torn when I was taken away from her, but it was during the time when she... she was a bit torn and when I went to my grandmother, but as I went to, and I stayed with my gran, we stayed for a couple of years, I think until, (pause, thinking), until I was sort of like a teenager, and unfortunately my father passed on at some stage, and I was 14 then. And then my, what else, and then, and then my grandmother passed on. And that is when I went to live with my cousin who saved me when my father threw me away.

Ok

And it was in Kagiso, because it is two different townships.

Mm

And I still went to school, and I had the opportunity to interact with Dineo though, because I would get home and do the normal chores, you know, clean, do what I had to do, you know. And probably maybe study for a bit. Then I would go and visit her. Or if there was no food in the house I would actually go to her house and she would actually make it a point that I've got food, and she would actually make sure I've got what I need.

Ok, so she could resume her caring role, day to day. Do you remember how old you were when your grandmother died?

I don't know, I think I was 16 or 17. I was 14 when my father died, I remember that very well.

Do you remember how you felt around that time?

Mmm, strange enough, pause, it actually mixed emotions. Because before my grandmother died, she started, I didn't know that then because I was very young, she started losing the sense of her mind. She started going back to when she was young. Poelple explained ot me that as people grow old their minds go back to what they were as a child. I really loved my Grandmother, but I then started to feel a bit resentful. She used to think that we were bewitching her.

Ok, so she was suspicious?

Ja. I didn't feel like she loved me as much as she used to as when I was a child. And you know, she would ask me to do certain things, like the normal home routines, and I would do them, and still, you would get to a stage when everything I do is not enough. And I started becoming very resentful. And I felt like she really started loving the other kids, the other cousins, those that were not really involved in her life, because I was really with her most of the time. That time I had to clean the house, look after her, cook for her and make her tea. And she would get very upset when I was not at home, and I felt I was missing part of my childhood. As much as I did my best, she was not... entirely... you know... grateful. So I was sort of like, I really loved her, and when she passed on I was sad, but a part of me felt guilty that I was sort of like relieved, that she was going to go and rest.

Ja, it sounds like it was hard at the end?

Ja, I just said to myself, I would always say to people that if there was any time that I could have back in my life, it would be the last day, and actually get to talk to her. And I understand what she was going through then. So that I could actually like relieve that.

Ok, I understand

Were there any siblings, cousins, that actually stood out as being really important people for you as you grew up?

Naomi, who is Dineo's child, is a girl, well we grew up like brother and sister, so, those, she played.. I mean we still talk now. Laughs.. I never thought she would get married at such a tender age. I thought she would go to college and get a diploma, and then get married. I thought she would do that. She is one year younger than me. I was a bit upset, she got, she went to school, she didn't finish school, she got pregnant, she got married to... I always imagined her to be married to someone who is you know, acting at very high level.

Mm

And she just picked up... just the guy next door. And I was not hoping that for her. And she played a very positive role in my life, and there was that cousin of mine, Lesegwa

The one who was your saviour really ?

Ja, she was my saviour really. She also played a major role in my life in the sense of, when I was in high school, I think that she was working then, as much as I was actually paying for my school fees, and certain things, when she comes, being the nurse that she was, she would actually want to know, what is happening, what is it that you need? What is it that I can give you that can make your life easier?

She sounds like she is very caring?

Yes, she is very caring, I think that is one... that is her nature. And I feel that she also got me into financial troubles. Tone increases, Laughs loudly and anxiously.

Oh really?

After I matriculated, I started working and earning money, she bought pots, I know it's something very tedious, and she used my name to buy pots. As much as you understand that she saved you, and when I was in matric she asked you if you were fine, and she bought me my first watch.

Ok

And when I matriculated she asked me, what is it that I can buy you. I said, I don't know. She said she will buy me a watch, a special kind, that was the best thing then, because she wanted me to always be on time.

ok

I don't know where she got that from, but time is always something that has been very precious for her. So she got me a watch and I was very happy. So when she said, buy me pots, she said, her name was not the best in the credit bureau, she tried to look after everybody and then she got into trouble. You know nobody really guides us in our culture about money. So it was that her name was not the best in the credit bureau. So she asked for my name, and then she didn't pay for those pots. They were very expensive pots, laughs....they were very expensive about R8000 or so, and then I didn't really earn enough money and I couldn't pay them, and it was handed to the credit bureau. And that is why I'm trying to sort out my life.

Are you still sorting out those debts?

No, fortunately. When I first started to work for ____, they put a garnishee order on my pay slip, I was mad as hell. I went to the pay roll officer and I said, I want to take care of this. I don't want to suffer. With that on my pay slip I couldn't get credit, I couldn't get whatever. She messed up my life for a while, but I have forgiven her....laughs....

It seems like you were upset about that. Was your relationship with her affected by that?

No, I think she is adorable. If there is a funeral, it's one of her weaknesses, if there is a funeral and there is no money, I mean our family is not one of the most rich, it was grandmother having a lot of kids, and after having a lot of kids she managed to actually, what do you call it, look after them, all of them, by herself, or with the grandfather who was not very helpful. But she managed to use her pension money to look after those kids. I really honestly do not know how she managed to look after all those kids, and I was an extra to all those kids. I'm losing my train of thought... what was I saying?

You were telling me about your cousin.

Ok, yes. My grandmother had all those kids, and most of them were unable to look after their kids and then my grandmother then looked after them. Most of them didn't go to school, my uncles and whatever, they didn't go to school so that they not really very educated.

Did that include your father?

Yes, that included my father. So Motsega is the only one, if there is a funeral in the family, she would come up with the way to come up with money to look after everything. That's why, I thought, as much as she has done that, and I see it as being very wrong, however, she comes thorough when she is supposed to come thorough. And I think that somehow that got her in the financial mess.

Ok, so Motsega and Naomi were your main siblings, who mean a lot to you. Do you still have contact with them both?

Yes, I do. They sometimes still visit me sometimes. They are the only two cousins who still visit me, strange enough now that I think about it. When they visit I will cook for them and buy them

cooldrinks. They love spending quality time with me. I feel like they are proud of me, given my circumstances as a child, I didn't really... I didn't let my circumstances as a child affect me. I managed to get a job as a waiter, then a secretarial job, now this. Yes, I should have studied. Laughs.

Motsega is the first person in the family to have matriculated. She went to the college and got her nursing qualification. Then there was ---, the identical twin sister of Dineo, she matriculated, and then Mostega matriculated. That was the big thing, I thought if she can do it then I can do it. Then it was me and then it was a couple of others. I really want the next generation to, um, study, Yes, get an education

Yes, they must get an education, it means a lot to me.

So did you get this job through your experience?

Yes, it was through my experience. Most of the time I got into a lot of stages, I was thrown into the deep end, and I work very hard.

You are very articulate too, you speak very well.

Thank you. This week, I'm going through emotional things, but this week I feel like there is really no meaning to this job.

So are you looking for other work?

Ja. I think it is one of those things that you are given a lot of... these... responsibilities. I was told about my responsibilities but they said if I come up with any creative ideas I must come to them and they can see what we can get off the ground. So I am dealing with managing directors and high people. But it doesn't have the meaning. I mean it is the training department and I wanted to have a major impact. Like in today's society education is very very important. When I was thrown into this job, I thought that I would be able to, at least if I can work a way for 25 % of the people here to be studying, or working towards new qualifications, you know, that would be very meaningful.

Yes, that does sound meaningful.

And that's why I said, let me downsize, I mean, Dineo and her sister, she is working somewhere but she is really not earning much. I think with the younger generation, with the kids that are coming after me, as much as they are going to school, there is not much of a succession plan. So I thought that I would take just a few under my wing, and then pay for their tertiary education, or apply for loans for them. So from my generation on, we shouldn't have um, the same sort of problems that we had as children growing up.

It sounds like you are trying to give to them what you didn't get?

Yes, so true, so true.

One of the other questions I wanted to ask you is sort of relate to that, to Dineo and Motshego, were there any other people that stand out for you, teachers or people in the community that stand out, as people who stand out, who helped you or supported you.

There is also Geneilwe, she is Dineo's twin, um, she..., I think at the late stages, at the period when my grandmother was going through that sickly phase, I mean she matriculated and met some other guy who she was hoping to get married to, it was just one of those things that just never worked out. I mean they started a business together, and managed to take it from that level to a higher level. Unfortunately things didn't work out between the two of them, and so she came back home. And she played that role that Dineo used to play when I was younger. It was that period when my mother, my grandmother was just about to pass on. She said a lot of important things. She would say a lot of things that would change my life, but she didn't know it at the time. I used to love to watch a lot of soap operas. She used to say that those people you are watching have got somewhere; they have studied hard and finished school. So if you want to be like those people you must study hard.

Ok, so you found that very motivating.

Ja. So those were the people. And at school, we had two teachers, there was Mistress____, why do they call them Mistress, it is so old fashioned. (Laughs loudly) Then there was Mr Kok, he was the woodwork teacher. Mistress____ was my English teacher. She was one of those teachers, God bless her, she would actually go out of her way to sit with the kids after school who she thought didn't understand. She would actually sit with those kids and give them an extra lesson. Or if she thought that you were just a bit of a high flyer, she would give extra work, on top of the normal work, she would give you extra work.

Extension work?

Yes, its actually very sad that she never mentored me until matric. I think it was std 8 and 9, then in matric I got an extra teacher. She encouraged me to read a lot, and speak in a certain way, you know, formally. And then Mr Kok was one of the teachers who believed in us. You know he believed that every child, I mean he was the only white teacher in a black school

Ok

You know he was the only one teacher in a black school, and I just felt like his teaching was. Oh well, he had a lot of confidence in me.. laughs. I think a year or two after matric he took my note book and he actually made copies for all the kids.... Laughs

That's wonderful.

He actually made copies for all the kids, and if the curriculum didn't change, he would actually use that. He used my book as an example and said to them if you can master that you will go far. And he had more of a personal touch, more than anything else as well.

Your father figure, was there any man who stood out. You mentioned Mr Kok, but I wonder if there was any man in your family who stood out as a father figure for you, or a role model.

No, not in my family. But at school he stood out, he took a father role at school. I think that is why I have a very strange relationship with men. Its just one of those dysfunctional relationships with men. I relate much better to women. Men have a very strange way of relating and I just feel like.... Whew, there is no one no one no one, those were the only two people of value.

And in terms of you having been told these stories in the family, about what your father did? I wonder, are you pleased you know?

You know what, Im actually, Im very pleased I know. Because In the past I was thinking that, you know, what you don't know wont hurt you, but in this instance it actually proved to be what I know, what I know actually happened in the past actually helped me in the sense of trying to find myself. And when I, and when certain things happen in my life, where Ive got this erratic personality, when I could do these things, that Im just very jumpy and uncertain, that I, at least I know that you know, part of my childhood had..., had a lot to do with it. You know the kids at school who had a mother figure and a father figure in their lives, whether the father was long dead, or not there, those kids who had a stable mother figure turned out to be slightly more stable, more stable than I am.

Mm

This has actually helped me to understand myself, and and and..., I have tried not to be too hard on myself.

That makes sense.

End of interview. Thanked participant and closed.

Thenjiwe (Born 1975 in Welkom)

Well thank you very much for your time, I really appreciate you making it available. And I'm aware that some of the questions that I want to ask you are from a period of your life that you may not have any memory of yourself. So the first question relates to your first two years. What you have been told and what you know. For instance, starting at the beginning, when were you born, where were you born, and the circumstances at the time you were born?

Ok, I was born in Welkom, Free State, in hospital, and um, I am told that I stayed with my parents for a couple of months, when I was eight months, then I went back to the Eastern Cape to stay with my grandmother, ah... who's the mother to my mother.

Ok, your maternal grandmother. Ja.

And I have no recollection of any of that, and they said I was eight months, and I grew up there, and um, for me there was nothing strange with that cos most of us, my brothers, I'm from a big family, we all um, were raised by our grandparents.

Ok, so, what year were you born?

In 1975

75, ok. So you were born, and then at eight months, do you know if you were breast fed in that time?

I have no information about that?

Ok. So there aren't stories about you were as a baby, like were you a peaceful baby, or a colicky baby? Have you been told anything about that?

You know I've picked that up since I've had my own children, and they would say, you know your son is more like you when you were younger. But back then there never used to be anything major that would be, you know, um, um, said in terms of my childhood, or maybe I never really took notice of that.

Mm Ok. Ja. So um, so where do you come in the family? You say there are quite a few children in your family?

Like what do you mean?

Like are you first born, second born?

I'm sixth born, there are eight of us.

So was it the same Dad for all eight of you?

Ja, we are all from the same father and the same mother.

Ok, so are your parents still living together, in Welkom?

Ja, they are still living together. They are pensioners and they are still living together.

Ok. So your parents had you and then you went, was it the same for your siblings, being born and then taken later?

Im not really sure, I know some were even born in the Eastern Cape and left in the Eastern Cape.

Ok, I see. But it was with most of us, it is only with my younger, the two that are coming after me, they were raised in Welkom, because my grandparents were now older.

Oh, I see

But the older ones of us, some of them would even be born in the Eastern Cape and left there. You know my father was a mine worker and they were staying in hostels, so there were not allowed to stay with their families. Until such time as he earned a, was promoted and became an official. Now the mine can give them houses so they can stay with their families.

Ok

Till even then, most of us were in the Eastern Cape, ja, except the younger ones.

And whereabouts in the Eastern Cape was it?

In Umtata.

In Umtata, ok. So you schooled there?

I schooled there and stayed with the grandmother from the mothers side, but some of us stayed, me and my brother and my other sister and my other brother stayed with my grandmother on the mothers side, but some of my other sisters stayed with my granny on my fathers side.

Ok. Was there any sense of how the decision was made, who went to your mothers mother or your fathers mother. Was there any way that that got decided, which grandmother?

You know, I guess it depended where my mother was at that particular time.

Ok

My particular story was that my mother was going back to Welkom from visiting her parents. And her mother begged her to leave me with her, cos she knew that my mother was also working at that particular time. But for my other brothers and sisters, you would find that my mother gave birth in my fathers home, so she would leave the baby there and go home.

What sort of work did your mother do?

My mother started working at the canteen. You know the mining communities back then, you know the mine officials, they would build houses for for mine officials, and they would have, sort of, like, what would you call them, sort of security villages. They would have their own shops, their own swimming pools and tennis courts and halls. And my mother was working in the canteen, when she started for that mining community.

Ok

And then she ended up, from there she went to work, still in the mine, but doing administration in the shafts.

Do you know how old your Mom was when you were born?

Laughs. I don't but Im sure we could calculate that!

Im sure we could calculate that!

I was born 75 and my mother was born 1940.

1940, ok. So you were the sixth born. And um, the first born, do you know what year?

The first born is 1963.

63, ok. And were the gaps between your siblings fairly regular?

Ja, and then the gap between me and my brother, the one I come after, he was born 1970 and Im born 1975.

Ok there were some bigger gaps.

Ja, there were some bigger gaps. There is a sister who comes after me is 77, and the brother after her is 88. There are some other closer gaps, like 67 and 69.

Ok, so the first born in 1963 and the last born 1988. So a long period of time.

Ja.

So you went to your maternal grandmother, and when you went there, which of your other siblings was already there?

My brother, the one that I come after. Ok, he was there, but there others who had already left. How we were raised was that we would stay with my grandmother till we were in, what would you call it? Standard 7. Then you would go to boarding school and then university. Some of my other sisters had already left. My brother was in about standard 7 when I developed an understanding. Then he left and he left me there and I carried on. Then my sister's children joined me.

Ok, so there were a whole lot of children there. And what do you remember, from the time you started to realize what was going on. What is your sense of your relationship with you grandmother?

I knew my grandmother as my mother actually, until such time as I was.. I guess I was old.. and I was told that this is not your mother, this is your grandmother. In fact no one told me, or someone told me.. I don't know how I found out. I used to call my grandmother mama, and I used to call my mother Mama as well/, but I knew my grandmother as my mother. I use to call my grandmother Mama and she did everything for me. But my mother and father were supporting me as well, they were sending money and clothes and everything. But in terms of being there, it was my grandmother who was there for me.

And how would you describe that relationship with your grandmother? And now you are a mother yourself so you have a very recent sense of the bond between a child and their primary caregiver?

Well I think I took it for granted then, until she passed away.

Mm

Ah, you know, when I started to be, ah, you know, um, you know at that age when you understand things. I initially didn't understand why I had to stay with her and not with my parents,

Mm

And I actually didn't appreciate that. And I would always compare myself with my younger sister, my younger sister because my younger sister was staying with my parents. We are close and we are almost the same age, cos she is two years younger than me. But then when she passed away and I started to have my own children, then I saw that it is not about that.

Mm

Then I realized that my parents also cared about me as much as they care about my other sister. So, ja.

It sounds like there was some sensitivity though, for you as a child, that your younger sister got to be with them but you didn't.

Yes there was that, there was that, until I got my own children. Then I saw how my parents are wit my own children, and I think that is the only thing that opened my mind that they are not treating me any different to my sister. But if it was not for that, maybe I would still be believing that. That they preferred my sister to me.

That is very interesting. I imagine it is a long period that you felt that. It sounds like right up until the last few years. Did that cause some jealousy between you and your sister?

You know it is very strange, because we have always been very close with my sister. When she comes, sometimes it would be me that is coming to Welkom to visit everybody there, and sometimes it would be her that is going down. Sometimes we would have cousins there, and should anything happen, like fights as children, I would always protect her and she would always protect me as well. So we were very very close.

So there was that bond when you were together.

But I always had that thing, when it comes to my parents, my mother, I would always have that thing that they preferred her to me. But with her, there weren't any, actually she is my closest..., even today. She is more like a friend to me today. Ja

And would you ask your parents about that, and speak to them and ask them?

I have actually raised that several times, I think. You know when you maybe they are shouting at you and you are lashing out at them, you know "you don't want me" or something like that. Or "you prefer that one to me".

So there was a sense of pain about that. IT was the place you would go in anger and hurt.

Ja

And how did they respond?

You know, they would always assure me that it is not like that. That they did that with all their children, well, with almost all their children, that they didn't single me out. That it was about the environment and their work at that particular time because they had so many children. So they decided to leave us with their parents so that they can come and work and it was much easier for them to do that,

Mm

To leave us with our grandparents. For me, it didn't make sense then, it didn't make sense then. But it only made sense when I got my own children and I had to leave my son with them, and you know, they gave my son everything, and all the thing hat I couldn't, cos I was not with my son, because... I realized that there is no way that these people could have been you know, different.

That's interesting, cos really it was leaving your own child with them...

Ja, because they, they, when I got my son, it was immediately after I finished university.

Mm

And my mother asked me to, and, and by then I had to come back and look for a job. You know when you come back from university, and then I worked, then I fell pregnant, then I had to stop working

Ok

Then I went home and I got my baby. And my mother asked me to leave my baby cos I didn't have a stable job. So she asked me ot leave my son with him so that I can come and look for a job in Johannesburg, you know. Ja

Mm

And it's a pithy that my son now, is the one who is rebelling against me and saying why did I leave him with my parents?

Really.

How old is he now?

He is 10

She laughs out loud.

So he is feeling the same.

He is feeling the same. I left him with my parents so I could come and look for a job. Then I got his sisters, from his father still. Then I stayed, as I couldn't take both of them, it would have been too much for my mother, my mother was a bit old by then. So it would have been too much for my mother, so I stayed with the other one, the younger one. And I left him at home till at least he was five. Then when he was five my baby girl went and joined him. So the five years that he didn't stay with me, he still brings it up today. He says you preferred my sister to me, my sister is your favourite child. Actually it is one of the challenges that I face today.

Really, interesting. And I so, I assume he was five when your little girl went and stayed there, so even in those early years, of three to five he was already expressing this?

No no, he is saying it, um, he is saying it more now, I think after, from seven years onwards.

Ok, he is saying it in retrospect almost. Ja

Like even today, Im staying with both of them, but should we fight he would say, you took me to your mother because you didn't want me.

Mm

You preferred my sister, you see, even now, you are preferring my sister. Even today he is saying that.

And you are finding it challenging?

I find it very difficult but at the same time I've decided that it is not helpful for me to spend my life defending myself, rather I show him that I care as much about him as much as I care about his sister. But he needs to understand that they are different people with different, you know, personalities. And I also have that thing, I guess I'm very conventional, that he is a boy and he needs to protect his sister no matter what. That's one of the things I'm trying to instill in him, that you need to protect your sister. You cannot be fighting with your sisters, you must protect your sister. And I say to her that she must respect her brother. But they are really close in age and it's not that easy for them to respect each other.

Ok, so there is a sense of sensitivity, for you then and for your boy now.

Yes, there is.

Um, so I'm going back again to your grandmother, you called her Mama, you called your own mother Mama when you saw her, but your grandmother was your real day to day Mom. And how would you describe that relationship, the quality of it and the feeling of it?

It was one of the best ever,

Mm

And she did it like, I took for granted back then, because I, I was so much focused in me not staying with my parents, then, ah, you know, must I say, welcoming the attention I was getting from her. But she did everything; I remember at one stage where I, I blackmailed her, if I can call it like that, blackmail. I said, ah, you buy me a watch, if you don't buy me a watch it means that you don't love me. And mind you, she was a pensioner, and she came with the watch the next day. And I took that watch and I gave it to my boyfriend the next day. I only realize now, that I'm older, you know that was so unfair of me. She did everything she could for me.

Do you think she was sensitive to your feelings about not being with your mother?

She was, her protectiveness was. You know, when my sister comes, if she has got two oranges, for instance, ne, she would give me, she would hide one (laughs loudly), and if she has got sweets I would get more sweets than anyone. And I was always that beautiful one. But I guess I didn't appreciate those things because for me it was, 'why am I not in Welkom'?

Do you see yourself having been in pain in those years, that may have spoilt your ability to receive your grandmothers love?

I wouldn't say I was in pain, but I would say, um, because she spoilt me, to an extent that when I got to my Dad, or at home in Welkom, and you find that my home is very strict, I would actually prefer my sister to come down to Umtata, because she would spoil us there.

You had it easier with your grandmother?

Yes, I had it easier with my grandmother than it would have been with my father, cos my father was very very strict. And even though it was like that, the fact that I was not with my parents, it was not, I didn't quite understand it. But I wouldn't say it was traumatizing me or anything, I think I would feel it most when I am with my sister. Maybe she has got something new that I don't have. And it would come up, how come she has got that and you didn't buy me that, you know what I mean, and not to say every time...

Ok. So your Gran spoiled you and she would indulge your wishes and buy things for you?

Ja, she would go all out for me, she was not rich or anything.

Mm

But she made sure that we always have food, together with my cousins, with the little money that she had. And my parents were not earning a lot of money as well, and they had a lot of children, and most of them were at university, and you find that one is going to university after another,

MM

So we were not having a luxurious life,

MM

So in most cases you would find that my grandmother would have to fend for us. You would find that my parents had more than one child at university, and the other one is going the following year, or two of them are at university at the same time. So you would find that my grandmother would have to... you never felt that they've got financial problems or anything like that, because my grandmother always make sure that...

She made a plan

She made a plan, we had food everyday, we eat what we want to eat.

Ja

And we've got a home you know, we go to church, and we do all those things.

So did it feel like a stable and safe place for you emotionally?

Yes, it was. It was actually. It was. But I just feel now that Im older that I didn't appreciate it as much as I should have, I didn't appreciate it as much as I should have, you know what I mean?

Ja. When you look at it as an adult, the demands of raising a child and all that...

Yes, I know what you mean.

I was just being ungrateful.

Ja, a different lens as an adult.

And how was school for you. I assume you went to school up to standard 7 in Umtata, then to boarding school?

My schooling was, in Umtata I was staying in the rural areas, so up to std 7 it was in the rural areas, it was just a normal school, no computers or anything like that, just a school. You wake up in the morning, go to school, and... reading, and come back and blah blah blah. But when I did my std 7, we didn't have some of the teachers for Std 7, and by then it was external examiners. So I didn't pass very well but I was top 10 in my class, regardless of the fact that we didn't have our maths and science teachers, because of the situation in rural areas.

Mm

So then my father then decided, you know my father is the type of a person who wanted all of us to have education, no matter what.

Mm

So he would basically force you to go to school, and if you don't want to go to school, if you rebel, he will force you and make it a point that you go to school. So he was not happy with my results. I got what you call EE back then, because of the circumstances in my school back then, in fact all of us who got EE were the top 10 in the class, the rest all failed, cos we didn't have teachers. So my father then decided that this is no school, and he took me, he said I cannot, he was very much interested that I do maths, because most of us at home don't have maths. So he said no, I would not like you to proceed and go to high school, eh with that symbol, so I want you to go and stay now, so I moved to the suburbs and stayed with my aunt for a year, where I was repeating Std 7 so that I can improve my maths.

So how was that transition for you?

Eh, I think that was one of my first lessons to realize that my grandmother actually gave me everything and more than anyone else could have, ou know what I mean. Because you know, um, you find that my aunt is the, is married, ok, and um, and the family for my aunt wouldn't be as accepting, the family for the husband wouldn't be as accepting as my aunt would be. And she always had to defend me, and she said her parents are giving money so that she can stay here.

She had to advocate for you?

Ja, and I knew that with my grandmother, no one had to explain.

So did you feel uncomfortable?

Very much uncomfortable actually. She did everything that she could but there was a 3rd family, it was not just her, it was the the family, the mother of her husband, who she was married to.

Ok

So that's where I started to feel that my grandmother actually, that's my home. There's nothing better than that.

So given that feeling, that was uncomfortable, how did you manage cos you were under a lot of pressure to up your marks and...?

Um, Well eh, I think as much as I was under that pressure, but I was also still very naïve, because I had her children who were very close.

Mm

So, even with her, my aunt, she tried by all means to make sure that I don't feel all those things that were happening with her in-laws and everything. So my focus was not really on what the mother in law was saying, it was more on the relationship that I had with my cousins.

And did you have a good relationship with your cousins?

I had a very good relationship with.., I had a very good relationship my cousins.

Mm

So I didn't...., I would feel it when people were talking about it really.

Mm

And I, there there there, the mother in law, the mother in law to the aunt never came to me and said that I shouldn't be here, but I heard it when my parents were talking about it. So I never really felt it.

Ok

I never really felt it, ja.

Mm

So that's how I got to know about it. Ja.

Ok, ja

But the relationship I had with my cousins and my aunt as well, she doesn't really treat me any differently.

Mm

So they were careful about that, and your close bond with your cousins...

But the moment I heard that there are things like those., then it started, I started feeling that., making that comparison that, the moment the schools are closed I would rush and go to my grandmother. Cos it was still in Umtata but I was in suburbs.

So you wanted to get back to her, to the comfort and what was familiar.

Exactly, ja.

So then after that year of repeating Std 7, then you went on to boarding school?

And I went to boarding school in St Johns, um, and, basically, so once you go to boarding school, its more like that's your exit from my grandmother's home. Cos you got to boarding school and when school closes you go straight to Welkom.

Ok, So that was it?

Ja, that was it for me. And now she was left alone in Eastern Cape and because of age we had to bring her and join us in Welkom.

In Welkom?

Ja, in Welkom. But even then I was not with her you know, I was at University, but she was with my parents at home.

Ok. So the end of your first std 7 was the end of your day to day life with your granny?

Ja, that was the end because even when I with my aunt I wouldn't always go the rural areas, I would sometimes to go Welkom, from my aunts house in Southernwood I would come straight to Welkom.

Ja, ok. So there was quite a lot of transition for you, and change in your life. Then you went to St Johns. And during those years, who were the people you would look to for support?

From when? From St Johns.

Well, I suppose from the time you left and went to your aunt, and then you left your aunt and went to St Johns...?

My Grandmother, cos um... ja, my grandmother. Cos even when I was in St Johns and its not holidays, like you know for weekend, Ill always go and visit my grandmother.

Mm, ok, she would be the person you would call if you needed to talk or you wanted.

She would be the person that I would visit, she would be the person that I would visit, only if it is not school holidays. But then if it is school holidays then I would go to Welkom to my parents.

Were you able to talk to your grandmother about difficult things? Like as a teenager, would you be able to tell her your difficulties?

Not really, there were never any difficulties. There were never any difficulties, back then there were never things that I saw as difficulties, lets put it like that.

Ok, so you didn't confide in her?

Maybe I would, she knew, (laughs), strange enough she would also support me, she would say "your mother is always preferring the one that she is staying with", you know.

(high pitched laugh)

Your grandmother would actually say that? (I say in slightly amused tone, to match her anxious laughter).

Ja, it was like, ok. "Ja you know, I know your mother, she always prefers that one", wah wah wah.

She fed into that feeling?

To protect me you know, to protect me and say, you know you have a home here.

Perhaps also, 'You are mine'

But there weren't any, you know, I don't know...

Its more..., I was thinking more about., like if you had a fight with your friend, or you were disappointed by someone, who would you tell? That kind of thing.

No one.... My younger sister. My younger sister is the one that I, you know, when I started having boyfriends, or sleeping with boyfriends, getting into relationships basically. That's the person that I would talk to about, when I was at boarding school and I was experiencing all these things that teenagers experience. I would tell her all the things that happened.

Ok

But in our family and in our culture you wouldn't dare to go and talk to your father or your mother about a boyfriend. It is only now that Im older that I would go and say Mummy, this is my boyfriend. I guess now they have seen it all. I wouldnt dare.

Laughs

With my younger sister, she is the one. Whatever experience I had in my high school life, because that is where I was exposed to those things. Like girls drinking and having to make decisions. I would confide going to parties. I would say hey, this is what is happening, this is what we are doing. (said in conspiratorial way)

Sure. And she didn't go to St Johns?

No, she didn't go to St Johns, she went to school in Welkom. She didn't go to boarding school like us.

Ja

She was staying at home.

And how is her relationship with your mother?

Hey, she is very protective towards my mother. I think she is protective of my mother more than all of us at home. Now that we adults, you find that I don't have money, even though I am working. I would go home and ask my parents cos I know that they have money. And my sister doesn't allow those things, cos she doesn't have a child. She is very independent, she doesn't know what it feels like not o have money. She doesn't see the sense of going, even if she doesn't have money, she wont go to my parents, she would rather come and push me, and say, hey, give me money. If I don't she would give me crap and say hey, why don't you have money, you should always have money left. So she is very open, our relationship is very open. She is one person who is very open, if I do crap, she will tell me. If I don't like her boyfriend, I will telll her, shew, I don't like that one. But if Im stuck, I know I can go to her, and she knows if she is stuck she can come to me.

Its interesting that you have such a close bond with her, above your other siblings, given the difference, and the way you felt about that difference.

Ja, I Don't know how it turned out like that. I guess it might be because of the age as well, and because she was always, you know, there, as well.

Sounds like she wanted to be connected with you as well?

Ja, she was always you know, like for instance if there was something that I was not happy about with my mother, she would come in and defend me. I guess it started there.

Mm

She was always on my side. And she would say 'no, you shouldn't do that you know'. And if she had something she would always keep something for me. And from there, we grew up very much close.

So it sounds like, in fact, your grandmother and your sister are very very important people in your life.

Yes, very very important. And it is a great pity that (sobs) my grandmother has passed away. Suddenly bursts into tears. Battles with it, looks shamed. Says she didn't want to cry.

Ja

That loss has been a big loss for you hey

Mm

She cries

Sniffs loudly. Says *Ja*

Mm, ja, these things touch on painful things. Mm

Ja, like I said, like I wish I could just have done more for him you know. But I never had that chance

Mm

You are sitting with all those feelings, there are things that you wish you could have said to her. I understand that. Mm

Do you think about it a lot?

Ja I do.

Mm

Look she passed away a long time ago, but I still, you know...

You still hold her very dear

Ja

Mm

Ja

Sorry, I didn't mean to cry

No, I understand, you didn't plan to but these things happen. We are talking about very tender issues for you.

Ja

Ja

So, ja, you can say that now my sister, she is the person that is there you know.

Not that my family don't care or anything, my family cares a lot, ja, but..

But in terms of intimate love bonds, your sister is it for you. *Ja*

And is she around, is she in Joburg?

Ja, she is actually coming through this afternoon.

So it might be a good time to see her. Will you tell her about this conversation you have had with me.

No. She knows about it, she is Johanna's friend. She knows about it. She is the one who approached me and asked me if I would be comfortable to speak to you. She is Johanna's friend and she also worked at ICAS as well. And I said 'ja, I don't see any problem'

So she is aware that there are some painful feelings for you about this?

No, we never really talk about that that. The things is, um, she knows how I felt about my grandmother and um, she know how I feel about her, and I know how she feels about me, but I don't think she knows that Im still, you know, um, very much attached to my grandmother. That I have maybe feelings or unresolved things, that I would love to have told my grandmother. I don't think she knows that.

She doesn't know about that, ok.

It sounds like she is also in the psychological field too?

She is.

Is she a psychologist?

She is. She knows how important my grand mother is.

So I suppose maybe she has thought about it, but you don't talk about it.

Ja, when we talk, we talk about how she used to do things. Its like, now you are probing my emotions, something like that.

Ok, so this is different.

Ja, we just joke about what she would have liked, or what she would have said. You know, I don't have to be deep about that.

I understand, ja.

Ja

Sniffs loudly.

Um, im just looking at my questions now, to take stock.

I want to ask you about your children now. You have told me some of the issues and challenges with your boy, the earlier time when your daughter was with you but he wasn't. You have mentioned to me that you trying to get him to protect her and her to respect him.

Ja

Do you feel that, that is the way to go, is that how you will carry on dealing with it?

I think, um, what I try and do all the time is assure him, that he is important, that I love him as much as I love his sister. And that he is no different from his sister. And that I do all the time, every day.

Ok

I do, even if I shout at him because he did something wrong, you know.

Mm

But I will still assure him that it is not about me not caring,

Mm

But it is because what he did that is not right.

Mm

You know.

Ok, so you are very careful about that.

Ja. I am very assuring to him. Sometimes you would find that, eh, he has got a bit of a temper, we would fight, and after that I would let him cry and then be angry with me. And he would come back and we would hug, I would say to him "you see sweetie, you shouldn't do that, but Im sorry ne". and then...

You are very sensitive to his feelings?

I am. Actually my younger sister said he actually gets away with everything. That's how she observes it. She would say, 'you let ___ get away with everything'. But that's not how I see it.

Mm, Do you think you are extra sensitive to his feelings in a different way, because you relate?

If I do that, Im doing it, um, what do you call it, is it...?

Unconsciously?

Ja, if I do that. Like what I said, my sister said that the other time, that you let ___ get away with everything. And as far as I know Im actually very tough, actually Im not tough, Im not a tough person, that's what my sister says, but Im not seeing it. You know what I mean, cos Im involved. You are right in it.

Ja, I always try and assure him because I don't want him to rebel and go and do funny things. I know kids, like my cousins, they rebel because they think their mother doesn't love them, and then they go and do crazy things. And I wouldn't like that to happen to any of my children.

Ok.

And how is your little girl doing?

My little girl, she is doing extremely well. She is extremely stubborn, but she is a loving person. You know, they are growing up.. they protect each other already. You know, if I hit the one, or give the one a hiding, the other one will come in and say, Just leave my brother alone, she is very cheeky. Or Mummy, just leave my sister alone, you know. So they are very protective of each other, which is what I want. I want them to grow up very close, like I am with their sister.

Ok, sure. And is their Dad around?

Yes, their Dad is around but we are not staying with him. He is very much involved in their lives, I can say our lives.

Mm. You and him are not a couple anymore?

No, we are not a couple, but he comes, he supports them, he is very involved in terms of what school they are going to, what they eat, what is wrong, so he may not be with us, but even in the house, we know what it is that he likes, we know what it is that he doesn't like. So we know what to do when he is coming.

We both laugh. So its like he is there.

Yes, its like he is there. So if they are doing something that he would not like, I would say, Im going to tell your Daddy. So he is very much involved in their lie. Like with school, they were wit my parents, they were both with my parents, cos the school there was cheaper. But I took them last year, cos my son was starting to show signs, he was rebelling, he was getting very spoilt, I didn't like his behaviour. So I decided to take them, they can come and stay with me, so I can show him, set boundaries, so he can learn what is wrong and what is right. So with my parents, what ever he wants he can get.

So he was there and he was getting rebellious, so that is why you brought him here.

So you brought them both back.

Ja

How have they adjusted to the change?

Initially it was very difficult for them, because you know, not for major things, but you know mostly, but at home, you know, my Dad has got a car, they are spoilt, if they want to go to friends they get dropped off. And also, they had made a lot of friends in Welkom, because they had been there from Grade 1, until grade 3, grade 4. They knew that they could just ask Daddy and he would take them to their activities.

Mm

And this side they would find their mother who doesn't have a car, who is renting from one place to another. I was renting a bachelor, but because they came I had to look for a bigger place. At home there was more security for them, they were secure. There was no problem for them; they could do a lot of activities. Like here, my daughter cannot do ballet; I would have to take her to another school until I can sort myself out with a car. At the beginning it was hard for them but now they are ok, they have adjusted very well.

Ok

Cos I just tell them that now we have got a bigger space now, I just have to sort out the car issue, then you can go. My son is a sports person, he is very talented in cricket and stuff like that, and he wants to go to the Academy and stuff like that. I have said no, I have got to get a car for you to be able to do those things. So they are in the middle of adjusting. Again, we didn't exactly plan it, to bring them this side.

You hadn't set it all up before.

Ja, exactly, it just happened. Ok, they were visiting me holidays, and in June I decided that ____ behaviour was.. I was not happy with it, and I said, no, I want to take him.

And you and their Dad had already split up by then?

Ja And the school too, it was a last minute thing.

SO where did you end up sending them?

To I R Griffiths.

I hear it is a good school?

Yes, I guess it depends on the teacher. My sons class Im not so happy with, they always don't have homework. But then my girl's teacher, she is excellent. But it's a good school, its well resourced.

So was ___ born 2000?

No, he was born 99, she was born 2000.

They are close in age, that must have been hectic for you then?

Well I didn't feel it then, because I left ___ with my mother.

From birth?

Yes, from birth, so I didn't exactly feel it that much.

So do you think he has got an attachment to you, a bon, enough of a bond with you as a Mom, or does he see your Mom as Mom?

My mother. You know he can do anything for my mother,

Mm

But for me, it takes some work. He is now, now t hat I am staying with him, I think.. um you know there was a time when you could see that he doesn't care at all, it doesn't hurt me. But now that he is staying with me, he is coming around. He knows that that is my mother. When he starts with Granny..., I say, hey, I am your mother. But I don't want to..., he must love my mother because my mother raised him, but at the end of the day I'm his mother. He is coming around, but before just everything was Gogo, Gogo, Gogo.

We both laugh

We have come to the end, I've asked you everything. How are you feeling?

Well Im surprised that I cried, but I guess these are things I don't often speak about. But it was not intrusive.

These are painful things, and you may well feel raw, so go gently.

It was like... Im talking about my family, there is nothing more important to me than my family...

Well I've been very interested in hearing your story.

So what is your take?

My take? Around you?

Ja

Well I think these are very deep things, your primary bond, your bond with the person who raised you are very strong. I think your experience as a child has had an impact, so it adds sensitivity as well as complexity around your relationship with you own little boy. So it cant be easy for you to be dealing wit this. And dealing with how to best manage. So it must be quite challenging, and it seems like you are thinking about it, and trying your best.

Mm

And if you think that, um, you know, if things don't go, if there hitches along the way, and there might be around adolescence, around that period, especially with you as a single mom, when he is a teenager, you might need some assistance.

That is the reason why I took them. I picked up that there might be some issues, so I wanted to prepare him, and myself, so by the time he reaches that stage, that we are at a... you know. And

I also wanted them to be able to relate to me about everything that is happening in their life, be it good, be it bad, be it a secret, I must be the first person they tell. Its more than a mother, its my friend. You know we joke around, we can talk about everything.....
Then she spoke about a project at work.....

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