

## **SIBONGILE MAWELA**

**Facilitator:** This is an interview with Ms Sibongile Mawela, we are in Kwa-Thema, the date is the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2012, and the interview is done by Brown Maaba. Mama please just give me your family background, how you were raised, just family background, schooling and how you ended up in the unions or the family so to speak.

**Respondent:** My full names are Mlebogeng Caroline Mawela, but I use Sibongile, that is the name I am known by. My parents are the late David Mawela and Clara Mawela. At home there is sixteen of us, twelve boys and four girls, I am the last born in the family. My father was a priest at AME here in Springs. We grew up in church but at the very same time the political influence was from my grandfather, although he was not very educated but he liked to buy newspapers and then read political articles only, he didn't care about other things, and that is the influence I received because I was close to my grandfather, Frans Mawela, my father's dad. As time went on it was clear that my mother was an activist although when she got married to a priest she decided to withdraw in being active in the ANC.

I went to school, when I finished school, I stayed at home and didn't work, and during that time it was the era of Jay Naidoo, the stay-aways and other things, I was involved in those things. I was involved in the buses strike in 1976, I was one of the people walked to town, chasing away buses, and it was round about April 1976.

**Facilitator:** So it was a buses strike for Springs?

**Respondent:** Yes it was a Springs only buses strike, PUTCO had raised up their fares, so we chased away the buses and used taxis. Rally

Cycle sponsored us with bicycles, the taxi fares went down during that time. My involvement started during that time, so this stayed with me, this came from my grandfather who used to read a lot about politics and would tell us stories. My father also used to tell us stories about politics, he loved history. When I started working, I got a job at the municipality, there was no union but they had something like an association, I would call it that, a group or association of workers. We asked why they didn't have a union, they said they only represent workers but do not strike, are not into the struggle, and don't do all these things that are done by unionists. We were not happy about that.

**Facilitator:** When did you start working at the municipality?

**Respondent:** I started in 1986. We were not happy about what was happening but we carried on for a few months with that association. When the struggle started heating up here in Kwa-Thema, when kids were being killed, barracks were burnt down, it was during that time, and the struggle was really hot at that time. We had that there was a meeting for Transport and General near the hostel, so there was a guy, he is an old man now, he went there to hear what was happening, he came back having joined Transport and General and that is how we also joined. We were registered under Transport and General for about two months then came SAMWU from Johannesburg, then we became SAMWU members. SAMWU is 21 years old this year, that means it 1986, that is they year I started working, SAMWU is twenty something this year, it wasn't long after I started working.

We joined SAMWU when we had problems at work, when we started the first shopstewards were people like Pule Malefane, do you know him?

**Facilitator:** Yes.

**Respondent:** That group of Pule Malefane was our first shopstewards, we had lots of problems at work, we started toyi toying, there were strikes for wages, working conditions, they also didn't want to sign an agreement with SAMWU, but we kept on striking, we also recruited so that at least there was many of us in SAMWU, that time it was still Kwa-Thema municipality, **(on the phone)**.

We carried on with SAMWU, striking, having those problems with wages, but the way SAMWU was operating, conditions started getting better, because at the municipality there was no way you can go on leave and get a thirteenth cheque, in fact you would get hired today and work for the whole month and only start getting paid on the second month, so SAMWU tried to fight against things like that.

I was once elected as a shopsteward although I don't remember which year it was, I served as a shopsteward for six years. From there I became a Deputy Chairperson, and then I was a Chairperson of SAMWU.

**Facilitator:** At local level?

**Respondent:** Yes at local level, I was a Chairperson for SAMWU trying to fight for the labour movement. Before I was a Chairperson there was a problem here, after national elections were held, I was working at a crèche, but it was under the municipality, the crèche was supposed to be privatized, the crèche was being paid for by the municipality, the food for the crèche paid for by the municipality, paid the staff as well. There was a committee and it didn't want to do anything, it had funds that I received from outside, so the municipality

said they cannot continue to support the crèches when they have funds from outside, it's better if they crèches are privatized. The crèches were privatized but we fought for the staff not to be privatized because there were benefits involved and there were no benefits on the other side. We then transferred to Springs, I worked there as a clerk, as I am still working as a clerk. That thing of the crèches was what boosted me to become a Chairperson, to be in the leadership of the union.

I worked in Springs, there were problems there as well after the first elections whereby they didn't want to release some posts, there was this other union, and the former association that existed when we started working there reformed itself to become a union called IMATU, representing whites. They said all the graded staff like us must join IMATU and not SAMWU because SAMWU was for uneducated people. We had to fight that because we didn't want to leave SAMWU, it didn't matter how they saw it or what they thought, we were members of SAMWU, Black and didn't want to join a union that we didn't know what it stands for, we were used to fight for things and win by striking and boycotting. So we had that opposition when we arrived in Springs, but eventually won that because they were putting this as a condition of service, that if you are a graded staff member you have to fall under IMATU, we ended up winning that fight. We had those problems at work in Springs, but now Springs and Kwa-Thema have merged. We had to a lot of problems to fight against, even issues of getting an agreement.

We then became Ekurhuleni after all the municipalities in East Rand were merged, as it is now. We still have problems with Ekurhuleni, they undermine the union, they don't take us seriously, especially when there are things that we want to address, I don't know whether

because they are from the political movement and we are from the labour movement and we almost all have the same activities.

**Facilitator:** You mentioned that your mother was an activist, was it something that she talked about her activism or is it something that you heard elsewhere; did that influence the kids somehow?

**Respondent:** She talked about it, in so much that my older brother was with her during the strike in Peinville, he was about three or four years, she was carrying him in her back, when the police started firing there was a lady who took him from her back and shielded him with her body, that is how he was saved, my mother got injured in the foot but was not shot. Those are some the stories she would tell us.

**Facilitator:** Did that influence the kids, yourself and others or you never paid attention.

**Respondent:** It did influence them somehow but they didn't belong to anything, I am only one who belongs to the ANC, it influenced me. There were relatives of ours that used to live here, during the 80s the special branch people always came to us looking for those kids. One day when they were searching, our house they found books of the organisation that my mother used to belong to called DAMASA, they started questioning her about it, what it did and its purpose because of the priests in other areas like Cape Town belonged to DAMASA, they were regarded as politicians and were arrested.

**Facilitator:** Your parents had sixteen children; did your father or both your parents manage to provide for all of you?

**Respondent:** My father managed, and it was not just the sixteen children, we lived with some of our Aunts and Uncles and other distant relatives.

**Facilitator:** Mainly because the Aunts and Uncles didn't have any children, or there were too many kids in the house therefore they can stay with you.

**Respondent:** They liked staying with us, my mother was very good with children, you would find the house full, even children of her friends would come and visit during the holidays, hence I told you about the special branch, there were many kids who live here with us and there were only two who were only two who were involved in COSAS, but some were detained for two or three days.

**Facilitator:** When you finished school in the seventies, what did you want to do with your life, or you took it as it came?

**Respondent:** I took it as it came because in South Africa you either became a teacher or a nurse, there was nothing else you could do, that is why I ended up working at the crèche. I managed to do correspondence on these courses at the crèche, when they started introducing Educare, I went there, and that is what helped me to get a job there. When was on my second year studying it, I had passed the first year and on the second year I got a job, although it was not my field but there was nothing I could do because in South Africa everything was closed, you had to be a teacher or a nurse if you were a female.

**Facilitator:** Just to go back a bit, you mentioned that in 1976 there was a PUTCO bus strike, were you working yet or you were still a student?

**Respondent:** No I was still a student.

**Facilitator:** How did you get involved in workers issues?

**Respondent:** I got involved because I was inquisitive all in all, because the person who was leading the strike was a guy who lived here in our area, the Great Hlaju (spelling?), so we knew him very well and we liked to sing and follow the comrades, that is how I was involved.

**Facilitator:** Did you have access literature on politics as youngsters at that time?

**Respondent:** No.

**Facilitator:** You started working in 1986 at the municipality, was there a reason why there was no union when you arrived there?

**Respondent:** There was no union.

**Facilitator:** What was the (unclear) of the workers?

**Respondent:** When we arrived, the municipality mostly hired older people, who were not interested in the strikes and other things, during Jay Naidoo's time, that's when we were very vibrant. So they were older people who didn't like that, firstly they didn't want to lose their jobs, they would tell you that unions make them lose their jobs, number two they would tell you that the situation they are in is alright for them, number three once there are unions there wont be any jobs available, jobs will be scarce because if you get fired you will never get another

job elsewhere because of the union, they wanted less headache, that was the reason.

**Facilitator:** When the union started, did it bring a change or light to the lives of the elderly people.

**Respondent:** It did bring change because truly speaking, the supervisor, the person who was a principal at that time, used to get about R105.00 in 1976, and we as people who had just arrived got around R40 or R50, I don't remember clearly. The money was increased to about from about R50 or R75 and our first increment was around R380, they started getting paid around R500 and something, that is when they started seeing that this union works, although others didn't want to become members, they saw that there was light at the end. The conditions at work were getting better and they were able to speak for themselves, there was nothing they could say before, being females and were headed by a white man who didn't even know how to write his name, didn't know how to speak English. Van Aart was just a person but there was nothing they could say to him, if he spoke then that was that, and they were more educated than him, but were led by an illiterate person. As time went on and they saw that we were fighting for what we believed in, there were three of us; they also started getting courage to approach him.

**Facilitator:** Where was the crèche based?

**Respondent:** Cutters.

**Facilitator:** Oh that big crèche.

**Respondent:** Yes that big one.



**Facilitator:** That is actually my crèche because it comes from Peinville.

**Respondent:** Yes it comes from Peinville. Can you see how educated Mrs. Tledi is, but his boss didn't even know how to write.

**Facilitator:** That is shocking, and this person is leading people.

**Respondent:** He is a leader, Mrs. Tledi and others worked in this place a long time ago and it closed down, then it was opened when we joined, they knew how to read and write but their boss didn't know anything.

**Facilitator:** Where would a shopsteward be based at crèche or outside the crèche, I am trying to see because you were based in Cutters and but this is SAMWU as a whole?

**Respondent:** Shopstewards were based at Civic Centre.

**Facilitator:** So grievances would go to them.

**Respondent:** Yes they went to them.

**Facilitator:** What kind of grievances because you may have had special grievances because you are running different department, a crèche which is something different from the general workers?

**Respondent:** The way the union worked, we found that our work is a different from other, it's a special job, they needed to treat everything differently, so our grievances were different that the general ones, even the form we used to fill for grievances was not the same, they were very different.

**Facilitator:** And your problems and challenges as well were different?

**Respondent:** They were different?

**Facilitator:** But did the shopstewards have an understanding that this is a different sector although under SAMWU?

**Respondent:** What happened was that the shopstewards called the older women, both principals and the women who were qualified for this job, sat down with the shopstewards and explained the whole history about the crèches and how things work, then that is when the shopstewards were able to solve our grievances and how to negotiate some of our problems in a proper manner.

**Facilitator:** The participation of women in SAMWU here in Springs, how would you rate it?

**Respondent:** When we started we were very few women especially when it came to elections, they refused to be elected as shopstewards, we were very few but now the union is strong because of women.

**Facilitator:** So when it started what was the problem with women, why were they refusing to participate, and now the picture has changed?

**Respondent:** You know that before if you are a woman, everything had to start at home, if the husband was not involved where he worked, you as the wife could not participate. The other thing as women, after we come back from work, we still have to work again at home, cook, look after the children, do washing, they said meetings and other union activities would limit their time with their families, that was the reason.

**Facilitator:** Then today what is the reason they participate?

**Respondent:** Today I don't know, I don't want to speculate but now they are very strong in SAMWU, let alone those of us who always loved it, but now even those who didn't want to get involved, now are very strong.

**Facilitator:** And the working conditions, I am going back to the crèche issue, before you left to join in the offices, how were the working conditions.

**Respondent:** The working conditions were bad, we used to start work at 7am and finish at 4.30pm and if there are kids who have not been picked up yet, either you take them home with you or you stay at crèche and wait, that was the first difficult thing about that job. The other thing we worked without any protection.

**Facilitator:** Let me pretend as if I don't understand what you are talking about, what kind of protection were you expecting?

**Respondent:** Protection as in, we are all females and maybe the man who looks after the place only arrives for night duty and during the day there was no one guarding, we worked without any protection, and the fact that we came in early and left for home late, we were working round about 9 to 10 hours, and the conditions were that if there is a child left in your class you have to wait and everyone else will go home and leave you with these kids. The other thing was that if you were sick, you had to go to work because they would tell you that the kids cannot suffer, unless it's the doctor that insists that you must stay at home.

**Facilitator:** Did you take those things forward to SAMWU?

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Facilitator:** How did they view them because a crèche as we said before it's a different industry?

**Respondent:** Yes it's a different industry but when SAMWU viewed it there were changes because the first one of the sick notes, SAMWU said that its useless for the workers to come to work when they are sick because if they come to work sick they will be a problem just as a child as well, she will not be able to do her work properly, lets say I have a serious flu, the kids will end up sick as well because we worked with food, bathing children and all those things, so the children will end up sick as well. So that is how SAMWU put it to them, and they sort of understood. The protection issue, we said that criminals don't know that we do not take fees here, people pay in the office, and they think we are like all other crèches where money is handed in the crèche. So we had a situation where the principal was attacked twice, so SAMWU took it from there that there should be a guard during the day because the employers didn't see why there should be a guard during the day when there are people inside, they argued that they don't have money to finance having a guard, until there were people attacking and demanding money, that is when they saw why SAMWU was asking for guards during the day.

**Facilitator:** So that did change?

**Respondent:** Yes it did change.

**Facilitator:** Issues around maternity leave and other benefits, did you have those things?

**Respondent:** I wouldn't know about before, but after as I said before, when we arrived SAMWU also started operating, we had maternity leave although the leave was very funny, we had to be at home for only one month, but when they tell us about before, there is another lady who worked with us, she is still alive, she would tell us that they would work until they give birth and then immediately after a month come back to work. We did have maternity leave.

**Facilitator:** Overtime it became better, is it from one month to six months now?

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Facilitator:** You were a shopsteward while you were still at the crèche or when you had moved already?

**Respondent:** I started at crèche to be a shopsteward.

**Facilitator:** And when you left you were still a shopsteward?

**Respondent:** Still a shopsteward.

**Facilitator:** What were the expectations from the workers and did you manage to fulfill what needed to be fulfilled?

**Respondent:** Yes I can some became better because that time we managed to fight the divide between unqualified and semi-qualified teachers. Also cleaners were treated so badly like they were not

working in the same environment as us, when I became a shopsteward we tried to highlight that there is no teacher without a cleaner, there is no crèche without a cleaner, in fact everywhere cleaners are so important than us as teachers because a child needs to be in a clean environment, eat in a clean place and play in a clean place, so whose first, the cleaners. We ended up sorting those things, even the uniform we wore was different, when you enter the place you could see the difference, but we tried with other shopstewards to make sure that all of us are the same because we worked in the same environment, although they are cleaners it's important for them and for us that they are in that environment, we achieved that.

The other thing we achieved that time was that, in the kitchen there were only two people, they had a lot of work between the two of them they had to do breakfast, lunch and snack, we found things this way but we tried that at least they should increase staff in all divisions, we achieved that. We also achieved on the side of working conditions, to change the working times, if it happens that there's a child that hasn't been collected, it should be just the class teacher that has to wait, but the staff of the whole wing should wait in order to help each other. The other thing we changed was there was no teacher ratio, you would find 100 children for 1 teacher, so we managed to change that as well hence they hired more teachers, luckily the course was widely available, other started teaching and finished the course while already teaching. The other thing we achieved was the sick leave, as I had mentioned before.

**Facilitator:** Just as a side bench, were the parents aware of the dynamics you faced as the teachers or they only came to drop their kids and come back to complain.

**Respondent:** Some were aware and some we not, because there was this thing with them asking why we didn't work until late, we would tell them that we also have families, they would tell us that they are working, who is supposed to stay with their kids, others wanted us to work even on weekends. There was even a complaint that why are we hiring girls and not old ladies, they were used to old ladies taking care of their kids but now we were there three girls and coming with our unionists caps, and we involved ourselves in many things that are happening outside and we knew how things are supposed to work and because they were also benefiting at this and that at work.

**Facilitator:** Did you receive training as shopstewards?

**Respondent:** Yes.

**Facilitator:** What kind, was it effective?

**Respondent:** Very effective, shopstewards training opens up your mind, you learn a lot about the municipality and you end up having a lot of knowledge more than the manager who has been there for maybe six months, and when he comes telling you that he is a manager, you know that he is supposed to do this and that. In the municipality you might be in the same building but in different divisions, I want to make an example about where I am. Here I work for the municipal court, there is security, housing and if you are a manger there you will tell yourself that everyone who is there reports to you, but the municipality doesn't work that way, when they hire you as a manager they tell you that you will be deployed in a certain place but when they meet us doing our own things they tell you that they are a manager. But the municipality educates us, we are sent to learn, the only problem is that other people are ignorant, we know that this

person is a manager only for security and that is where his power lies, and if he is in housing he has nothing to do with us, we have our own managers. The municipality shopsteward training is excellent, it's just other people are not serious about what they do, they are just content on being called a shopsteward, I for one became a shopsteward because I loved it and I get satisfaction when I see the difference we are trying to make.

**Facilitator:** Within SAMWU from the side of men, was there no attitude, you know that we are men we cannot be told to what to do, you were even young then.

**Respondent:** There were those who would say things like that, especially when I was still a Chairperson, and you know that we deal with people from the rural areas, they would say they cannot be told what to do by a woman, but the people that I worked with and with the background from home, I was able, even now they still respect me, I also respect them. They still use me even now although I am no longer a shopsteward, let's say maybe the person doesn't get along with their shopsteward or something, they come to me for advice. There were people like that but the people that I worked with were able to encourage me and made me tolerate such things.

**Facilitator:** Why did you leave the crèche for the offices?

**Respondent:** It was the time they were privatizing the crèches, we didn't want to leave the crèche but it was the situation that made us leave. As I said, the parents didn't understand the way we worked, that's one, they didn't want to understand that when the municipality does this, they should do that, they received funding from the Department but they don't want to do anything with that money, they



wanted the municipality to buy toys, food and pay staff and then in turn want to control the staff, so the municipality would tell them that this is my staff. They went to the municipality to complain about why we don't work late, so the municipality told them that there is no policy that states that they can work late or night shifts, they were told that only traffic, security and ambulances work night shifts. This is things like these that pushed the municipality, it's the parents committee that came with the option of privatizing. They thought that we would stay just because this was our career, the municipality said its fine if you have decided to stand on your own, the building still belongs to the municipality, the only thing that is theirs is operations, and they also still use the water supply from the municipality. The municipality said it was up to us to decide what we wanted to do, so we had meetings and called other advisers as well as organizers, we saw that if we carry on working here we would be shooting ourselves in the foot, one our salaries were very high and we would have to go back to earning R600, I mean move from getting R4000 and go back to getting R600, so we decided to leave. I was part of the negotiations for deployment and I was also the last one to be deployed because I wanted to make sure that everyone had been deployed properly. In this deployment it was own choice, they gave us a list of vacant positions, people chose where they wanted to go. They had a position reserved for me but I saw that they just wanted to shut me up, so I decided to choose where I am now.

**Facilitator:** What position did they have for you?

**Respondent:** They wanted me to go to Parks as a clerk, during that time at Parks in Springs there were no ladies as clerks, there were only men, and it was a high position because the white man that I told you about who was not educated had left and another white man was

heading the department, he was the one that we did the deployment with and when he told me that he wanted me to come work with him, so I thought it's not a good idea because if I complained about anything he would tell me to cool it because he gave me a very high position, so I chose to come where I am. Where I am there was no Black person, there was one who worked as a cashier but not in the office I am in, they didn't expect that they will get a Black person, in so much that we argued about it, they came with a lot of excuses, they talked about a dark room and that you needed to have glasses, I told them that that's exactly where I want to go because they didn't want me there. After I started there, I paved the way for others, now there are a lot of Black people.

**Facilitator:** Why did you insist on going to that division?

**Respondent:** Just, I had the paper and the position was there and I felt like going to that department, when I enquired about it I was told how they work and what they do, I was also told about the people that were there, I said that is exactly where I am going.

**Facilitator:** Were you well received or did you have challenges because you had a background of unions?

**Respondent:** Yes the challenges were worse because when I arrived there I saw that the white people from HR had painted me, I really felt that they were waiting for me that they were in charge there, but I had to fight for myself so that everything be normal. I was charged once when I got there for making noise, I cannot talk soft and when I laugh it is usually loud, I was told I was disturbing them, I asked them how, they said other people are working here and so on, they said they were charging me, they filed a charge sheet. I was with the shopsteward

and I told them that I was a Black person and from the crèches, so I am used to noise, and as black people we speak in gestures, we use all our body parts when we speak, when we laugh we should be felt that we are laughing and when angry we should be seen that we are angry, so as a Black person there is no way that I can change that. So they came with another one that, I learnt Afrikaans I did tell you, from 1975 going back to you had no choice but to learn Afrikaans. So when I got there they were all speaking in Afrikaans, I told them that I didn't know the language, even today they believe I don't know Afrikaans. So one day a white person comes, we were working with the public, he spoke in Afrikaans and I spoke English, we argued with this man, he asked me what I was doing in that office if I am not educated and don't know Afrikaans, you could see that he was told about me, he said don't I know that, that was an Afrikaans area, we argued and the unionist in me came rushing, so they charged me for that, telling me that the customer is always right, I told them that the way he spoke to me was discriminating, and it's not my fault that I didn't learn Afrikaans because you know what happened in the townships. Now the person who headed that department started seeing my point of view and saw that what they were doing was not right. So one day we were in a staff meeting and told them that everyone was there to work and we should treat each other with respect, he said a person still carrying the past with them must just take their bags and go because this person is not going anywhere, she is here to work, that's when things started getting better and relationships were getting better, after those two charges.

The other thing that they charged me for was, at that time I was a Chairperson of the union, if you were a unionist you struggled especially if you had a position, but the environment started to change because Du Toit saw that this was not the right thing do.

**Facilitator:** The conditions today in that department?

**Respondent:** Although it's not 100% but it's much more better, because even though they sometimes come with their things that are out of order, we can talk to them and make them see, the other thing is that white women were made to work there, they were oppressed as we were, but theirs was not evident because they were white, they were never fortunate enough to know the laws of the municipality, because now when they talk I would say let's bring the municipality policy and see what it says. Things are better, not 100% but better, they are enjoying the noise they were charging me for now, and if it's quiet they ask each other where I am.

**Facilitator:** Did things change with post-1994 in that department?

**Respondent:** Not exactly, it was very difficult in that department, there was still a lot of Apartheid in that department. Since 1994 there is only one Black person there who became a senior, and he got the position forcefully because he was related with a councilor, otherwise there is no Black senior there.

**Facilitator:** It's all white people?

**Respondent:** Yes, all white people.

**Facilitator:** And SAMWU, is there no fight they can put up against such practices.

**Respondent:** They are fighting it but you know but there is this thing sometimes that when you are mixed as Blacks and Whites, you find

there is a lot of jealousy that is involved. SAMWU tried to fight the issue there but there's still a problem, the other thing is that our department is a sub-division of a lot of departments, municipal court, traffic, EMPD, community safety, a lot of departments, if it was a department of its own we would be able to fight it. It is better now in other towns, but Springs is the only one that doesn't have a Black senior, and preferably work is give white people, for instance if a new computer or chair arrives it goes to a white person, I ended up getting mad, demanded these things, (unclear), things started getting better. Even now sometimes when they are distributing furniture, they keep giving white people first but at least they consider Black people now.

**Facilitator:** How did you end up as a Chairperson of SAMWU here in Springs, is it because there were no strong man (jokes)?

**Respondent:** I don't know because at that time there were only two women shopstewards, we were only two, I don't know how it happened that way.

**Facilitator:** When you look back, what were your achievements as a Chairperson (unclear) in Springs?

**Respondent:** I will respond on the era before it became Ekurhuleni, the conditions of Springs and Kwa-Thema were not the same, in Springs it was bad, we had to force them in order for them to agree, maybe that is why when we were deployed my name was already there, fortunately the shopstewards who were there at that time, Pule and others had already left, one of them was working at HR and was able to get us information, we would strategise on how we were going to handle things, we used to be in meetings with a lot of men and you know men can be arrogant, our strategy was to start heating things up

after they think they have an upper hand on us, then they would get angry and when we get to the agreement they would be so angry and just sign the agreement, white people are easy, once they get angry they will sign in haste.

**Facilitator:** And the downside of it, things that let you down maybe?

**Respondent:** There are a lot of things, the fact that I was a shopsteward made me unpopular to other people, especially those who were supervisors of Black people oppressing people, and those who were friends with the supervisors, you know how it is at work, there are those who are favorites, you find that there's a case I have to defend, I don't know how it would happen but as a shopsteward I never lost a case, even now that I am not a shopsteward anymore, once they call and ask me to handle a case, I will take it and will not lose it, it's not that I am very clever because I also sometimes ask myself after a case, how we won it. So these kinds of things made me unpopular with other people, especially in politics there are people who will look for anything to discredit someone, but I never failed, I am still active even today, I am still involved with SAMWU in everything.

I stopped being a shopsteward when we were at the municipality, there were a lot of people, nurses, clerks and others who were under me, so they wanted to establish an association or something because they said SAMWU doesn't represent those who are educated, they only represent those who are uneducated, they had a lot of their own problems there in high positions, when they try to defend themselves they would fail, and would have to come down to us. It was a young lady who decided to call on all the educated people with degrees to join her in this idea, they were our members and they called us, it was three of us who went to answer that call, it was me, the deputy and

secretary, when we arrive there, as I said I don't know how things happen sometimes, but they said they were still members of SAMWU but they wanted to establish an association because they felt that we don't know other things that affect them because they work professionally. Luckily I had the SAMWU constitution, I paged the constitution and quoted it, told them if they want to established something like that they will have to leave SAMWU, we cannot allow something like that. Then there was a lot of hatred towards me and they managed to convince others that I was not fit for the position I had. That association of their never materials, we made sure that we guard it, even though they had removed us from our positions, until today, it never materials.

**Facilitator:** When you look back was it worth it to be involved in unions or you had too much stress?

**Respondent:** Both, you stress but you achieve something, especially people who were not really involved in the union matters, who are just members, they achieve a lot of things, but to be involved and participate like I did is a lot of stress.

**Facilitator:** So people achieved what you couldn't achieve, better positions and so on?

**Respondent:** Yes better positions, I couldn't, but I am enjoying what I am doing here, I get a salary, I didn't become a shopsteward and help people because I wanted to climb the ladder and have a high position, no, I am fine where I am. Even now if I am not at work, we start work at 8am but I am always here at 7.30am, you have to discipline yourself especially if you know that you are involved in union matters, there's a lot of things they can trap you with. We start at 8am,

once ten or fifteen minutes go by without seeing me they phone to find out where I am, people go for two to three hours not known where they are, but I can never do that, I report each and every time, when I go out I tell them all the time. Last week there was a funeral of a lady we have been in the union with for a long time, just to prepare for her memorial service, they ask me whether its work related or what, they just want to victimize me, I asked them where this person worked, they said she worked here and I told them that she is not my friend, she and I are bound by the union and they know that, how can they ask me if its work related, she works here, not my relative and not my friend, but other people go out as they please, as long as they report, they are free to go, but if it's me I have to explain everything, if there's a document I have to put it down even today, because of the way I participate in the unions. I don't even care if whether its roads or waste that is fighting with management, once I am told there is a meeting in town hall, I am there to support them.

**Facilitator:** Is there anything that is important maybe, and that should have been part of this interview?

**Respondent:** It's just that you made me remember a lot of things, what's important is that I still remember where I started, you know sometimes when you haven't been part of a place for such a long time, you sometimes forget, but I am glad I still remember. At least you helped me, I just came from stress, I told you I was knocking off at 1pm but I had a worker from Brakpan who wanted to talk to me, I had to sit and listen to him until 1.20pm, and I couldn't say I have to go somewhere, I heard from this tone of voice on the phone that he had a problem, I listened to him and when I left I had that stress. Now as I was speaking to you I could feel the stress going away, the stress Vusi gave me by telling me his problems where he works, as I said if they



consult me I don't say no, I agree to help them, I am very acquainted with Vusi, he worked here at Kwa-Thema, so from 12.50 I was speaking to him on the phone up until 1.20pm, so at least I managed to forget Vusi's stress, so maybe I will only remember it again when I go back to work on Wednesday, I will ask to meet him in the morning.

**Facilitator:** Thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it.

**Respondent:** Thank you.

**END.**

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