

**Palesa (Born 1983 in the Eastern Cape)**

Could you tell me about your first two years, what you know about them? Im sure you don't remember details

*I don't, I don't remember details. Actually for my first four years I don't remember.*

First four years you don't remember. Ok. Have you been told much about what happened in those years?

*I've never been told but as I grow up um, what I saw was what I know.*

Ok. What do you know about that time?

*I was born in the Eastern Cape. My mother was married and my father was too abusive to my mother, yes. And at that time my father was working in Rustenburg. My mother used to visit him there, um. She was visiting him, and we were two, me and my brother. My two older sisters were living with my grandmother. And then she took us with her to go to Rustenburg. And then at that time I was six years.*

Mm

Yes.

Up until then you lived in the EC with your mother?

Yes

Ok

*We went to Rustenburg; my father was involved with another girlfriend and my mother she didn't know about that. My Mother like, that's what she told me, she was observing her husband's behaviour because at times he was not happy at home or he was arriving late, without money. Then even if he got no money he would come and ask for food from my mother. Then um, you know one of the days he beat my mother up.*

Oh

*Ja, but not in front of us,*

Ok

*He took her to the, a nearby veld and then he was trying to slaughter her. But my mother overpowered my father, and then she managed to take the knife and then they came back. My mother came back and my father came, and then you know my mother was, her body was hurt.*

I can imagine. She had had a terrible time.

*My father was using a.... what is this thing they are using with the cattle?*

A Sjambok

*Ja.*

*He was using that to beat my mother. Her body was full of wounds. And then a neighbour organized a car to take my mother back home.*

To the Eastern Cape?

*Yes.*

*You know they were thinking... they were ignoring us. My mother was not in the state to be able to take us. At that time my father went out. He didn't know they were organizing transport to take my mother away. My father wanted to be with his girlfriend. You know, around 12 in the midday they managed to get a car and take my mother. She went home and we were left there, my younger brother and I. And then...*

It must have been a scary time?

*Yes, you know we didn't have a chance to ask what is happening because my mother was in such pain. And then...*

You were six then?

*Ja, I was six, I was six.*

*And then my mother went home and then we were left alone and my father came with the taxi to take us to his girlfriend. And then even if his girlfriend was nice, she was not our biological mother, and she had her own kids. It was a painful experience.*

I can imagine.

*While we were there it was the time for the girlfriend to go home, she was also from the Eastern Cape. And then she took us with her, with my father. And then, when we arrived home at the home town the girlfriend went to her home and my father had to take us with him to go home. When we got there my mother was not there. She was with my grandmother at home.*

And where was your grandmother's home?

*My Grannies home is also in EC but in a different town*

In a different town, o.K. you know how long you stayed with your father and his girlfriend

*Probably it was a year.*

So a quite a long time. You describe it as a painful time.

*Yes, it was. My father had to take us to his brother so that they can provide for us, and that stuff. Because what I saw is that my father noticed that his girlfriend doesn't love us, so he called his brother's wife to come and take us to her home. And we were staying there.*

So you stayed with your father and his girlfriend and then went to stay in another home?

*Yes, we did, and my father then went back to his girlfriend and we were left there. Yes, while we were staying there my brother fell ill, and then my father came and he take him away. I don't know to where.*

So this was in that year?

*Ja, it was in that year.*

*I was afraid to ask, where are you taking him now. I mean he abused my mother and now it's my brother. If you are treating his illness, why don't you treat him here and not take him away. There were those questions inside me.*

Mm

*And they went away to another town, that is what my father said to me. And I had to stay with his brother's wife.*

Mm

*She was abusing me, (laughs)*

*Ja, I started to the washing.*

Hand washing?

*Ja, at that age.*

You were made to work?

*Yes, her husband's clothes were for me to wash.*

Mm

*So I did that work and then...*

Did you go to school during that time?

*I was not going to school then.*

You could have been in Grade 1, or maybe grade 0?

*Ja, but instead I was doing house work and looking after her children, though I was I child myself. And then, um, my mother, at the end of that year, maybe December, I don't remember, my mother came with my aunty to fetch us cos she didn't know that my brother is not there.*

Ok, ja

*And then, she didn't let anyone know that she was coming because she was afraid of my father. They found me looking after these children. My mother took me away and we went to my Grandmothers house.*

So the time when your father took you to the EC and your mother was not there, she was with your Granny, did he then bring you back to Rustenburg?

*Like when they reached there, they had to separate; the girlfriend of my father had to go on her way. And my father took us to home. Yes.*

But when your mother came to fetch you, that was a different time?

Yes, that was a different time.

She did take you back to the EC. She found you there looking after the small children?

*Yes, she took me away. And when we got home they told me that my mother was working and had to leave us again so that she can put something on the table. Yes, I had to accept that.*

How old were you then?

*That time I was seven and my grandmother took me to school, to start Grade 1.*

Ok, so it was soon after you got back, and your mother had to leave.

Yes,

So you lost her twice.

*Yes, it was terribly painful for me because I really needed to be with her. Maybe to tell her, you know as a child, Me, I was too hyper, I was talkative. Laughs*

You were an engaged girl, you liked to talk and be with people.

Laughs

*I wanted to tell her what had happening to me in that period.*

*Yes, a very traumatic time.*

*Yes, I finally forgot that I had to tell her something because I was nice at home with my Granny and my older siblings.*

And you brother, where was he then?

*I don't know where he was, my father took him away. I don't know to where.*

Did he ever come back?

*No, but a report came back that he passed away.*

Oh.

*They killed him.*

Sjoe that must have been a lot for you to cope with.

*They killed him.*

*Even now I don't know where they did bury him. The only person that can answer that is my father. I don't know where he is now. My mother passed away in 2005, and I last saw my father in 2000. I don't even know where he is, I don't have any contact.*

So you heard that your brother passed away some years later, or sooner?

*No, they sent, my father sent his brother to go and tell us.*

Oh,

Yes

It was in 1990.

*1990, ok*

*And then we didn't go anywhere because my mother was afraid that he can even kill.*

She was afraid that your father would kill her if she went to look for him.

*He was very abusive. And I think, when I was four or five, he used to beat my mother in front of us. To see my mother crying, you know,*

Mm, it sounded like severe abuse, and in front of you, it must have been difficult.

Do you remember how you felt then and how that time was for you?

*You know I used to run to my mother, if he is starting an argument, that I knew that was leading him to beat my mother, even if my mother didn't say anything wrong, he would beat her. So I used to run to my mother and if like, I remember, she had a wound here. I used to help her when she was cleaning her wound. Mm. goes very quiet.*

*It was very very painful.*

*And after that, I was a teenage girl in 2000; we got a contact number for my father. And his friend gave us his contact numbers. I tried to contact him. And then, you know, an abusive man, he can turn to be kind sometimes.*

Mmm, he could be terrible or kind.

*He called me to go to Rustenburg; he said that he going to buy me this and that. You know I was a teenage girl. I thought, he is promising me a lot of things that my mother can't give me. And then I said to my grandmother, "You know Granny, I want to go to my father, he is promising this and that. I won't stay with him, I promise.*

*And then, my grandmother allowed me to go. I went there, then when I arrived there he bought me everything, even my first phone that I had. It was bought by him. And then, that time, I went to stay with his brother's wife, yes,*

Mm

The same lady that looked after you before?

*Not that one, that one was the wife of the old brother. I went to the younger brother's wife.*

Ok

*It was nice staying there, I don't want to lie, and it was nice. Then my father said, no, you can't continue staying here. That time I went there it was September holidays. So my father said that you can't continue staying there, you must come to me. And he was staying with another girlfriend. He was making me upset. I told him, you know what; you can't do whatever you did to my brother. Cos Im not sure if he didn't even sell him. But it was, it was like the chance to cough that out you know. It helped a way it was a way of healing me. To tell him to his face, his mistake. Maybe he felt I was not aware, but it helped to heal. He was very upset with me, he said, you look like your mother, even your mind, it works like your mother.*

Did he let you go?

*Yes, he let me go, he let me go. Though he didn't want me to go, he was upset. It was not nice for him to separate again.*

Mm, so he found it difficult when you left.

*Yes, but I had to go.*

So you were there for about 10 days?

*I was there, it was not even 10 days, it was seven days. He wanted me to stay with him, but I said no, I couldn't.*

You said to me that you had gone, when you got back to the Eastern Cape, when you were seven, you went with your mother, to your Granny, and you saw your older sisters, and you lived with your Granny. You said it was good.

*You know, my Granny was like my mother, though my mother was not there but she was...  
Your Granny took over being a Mom to you?*

Yes,  
So that was a special bond for you?

Yes.

You had been through a lot then, you had been through a lot at a very young age?

Yes.  
Do you think they realized how much you had been through?

*No, I grew up in a rural area, they don't know, if you aren't talking they don't ask you.*

So they carried on and you didn't say anything to you about what had happened.

Yes.

The people who were important to you when you were a very little girl, your Mom...?

*Yes, My Mom and my Gran. My Dad too, but he could be nice and he could be very cruel. He could be black, then turn to white. You could be confused, what is he up to?*

You just don't know.

*You know when a person hits your mother, you can even say, maybe he hates us, us children and our mother. You know when he turns to love you as a child, whets that for, he doesn't want our mother, how can he love us?*

Very difficult for a young child.

I suppose your brother was important to you as well?

*Too too much. I grew up with him.*

How old was he when he went away?

*He was five*

Just a year younger than you.

Yes.

So that was a very big loss to you?

*Yes (goes very quiet)*

So it was your Mother and your brother who were with you when you were under six. Your Granny wasn't part of your life at that time.

*No, my Granny wasn't there, I only knew her when I was seven. I was always with my mother, I only knew her when I was seven.*

You were always with your Mom as a young child.... Is that right?

Yes

And then you had this very difficult time when you were five, six seven, then you went to your Granny. How did you manage that time?

*It was not easy to cope, but then I had to, you know, I had to use my coping, like you know, to tell my mind that you know, my Grandmother is here for me, even if my mother is not here. Deep down I know that my mother loves me. She is away because she loves me; she is working because she wants to support me.*

So that is how you understood it. Do you remember how you liked school?

*I was enjoying it, laughs, I really enjoyed it. I wanted to be at school longer but I couldn't.*

So you went straight to school when you got back to the EC. You learnt ok, how was learning at school?

*I did well; I was very clever at school. I went to school there all the time, till Grade 12.*

So it sounds like you told yourself that everything was better, you were with your Granny, your mother was working because she loved you. In that way you were ok there.

*And you know, I was having that thought that even if she is away from me, she is going to come back. And you know, that time we were writing letters, there were no phones, especially in the rural areas. So my mother used to write us letters and we used to reply back. That was very nice for me because I had contact with her.*

Mm, wonderful, so she remained very present. And your older sisters, how were they?

*You know I had that gap, I didn't grow up with them, I grew up with my brother.*

Yes, so that loss has stayed with you?

*Yes, even now, it bothers me a lot. I keep thinking about it. I think I have to trace my father so I can find out, even my sisters, even my Granny; we want to know where did they bury him.*



I can appreciate that that is an unresolved loss for you. You think about it a lot.

*Yes, (speaks very softly). You know, my mother passed away, but I was there, I buried her, so I know that she has moved on.*

How did your mom die?

*My Mom died of natural causes.*

Ok, so she got ill?

*Yes, she got ill.*

SO that was five years ago? How old are you now Palesa?

*Im 27 now.*

So you were 22 when she died? And you were about 17 the last time you saw your father?

*Yes.*

Is your Granny still alive?

*Yes she is.*

And how is your relationship with her now?

You know my mother had other children after us, 3 more, with another man, and now they are with my Granny, and she has got very very stressed, my mother isn't there to support them financially any more. She hasn't coped well. They were born 1990, 1995 and 1997.

And are those children still with your Granny?

*Yes*

So you have noticed your Granny getting very stressed.

*You know after my mother passed away she has lost a lot of weight, she is stressing. She even told me that she is stressing, even if she can get a job or something.*

How was she when you were little, did she stress then too?

*No, because my mother was supporting us. She would come home twice a year, at least.*

How was it during those times?

*You know, I was SO SO excited. For me it was like she couldn't go back at the end of the time.*

Where did she work?

*To Durban*

*And when she was going back we used to walk her to the taxi or bus, and when she left I used to cry, I used to cry.*

So you would walk all the way back from there crying?

*Yes, I used to cry myself to sleep. Laughs.*

Very sad for you, I can imagine.

And the three little ones, did they also battle when she would leave?

*By the time that she got the young one she used to come home any time, because she knew that the little ones needed her more. She used to come home maybe seven times a year.*

And how long did they stay with her before she left them with your Granny? And did she breast feed them?

*No she didn't because she was working. It was hard for her to breastfeed them and leave her child and go to work? She brought them straight back, after a month after they were born, and then my Granny looked after them. And we loved those babies! Laughs.*

Are you still close to them?

*Of course*

So you also helped to look after those three?

*Yes, it was SO nice. Laughs affectionately*

Silence...

Do you know if there was anything that made it easier or worse for you when your Mother left in Rustenburg and went to the Eastern Cape? Were there things that made it more difficult or easier to cope?

*It was very difficult. You know what I was thinking about, you know, my mother was very hurt, and who was going to tell me if she was going to be ok? Even my attitude to my father changed, I was scared. Maybe he was going to beat me or my brother up, we didn't know?*

So that was a very difficult time, nothing seemed to make it easier?

*No, nothing made it easier.*

And being taken by your uncle's wife?

*That was terrible. I didn't know who was going to look after us, what was going to happen, where we would be? Everyone was just leaving and going places.*

You had no sense of permanence or security. You must have been frightened?

*Too much.*

I can imagine, ja.

Um, I'm thinking about your relationship with your Mom, do you think your relationship with your mother was different because she left you, first from Rustenburg and then from the Eastern Cape. Do you think those separations changed your relationship?

*No. I knew that my mother loved me. It didn't change anything.*

So it was a very strong bond for you.

Yes.

I know about your brother, and how difficult his loss has been, I'm wondering about your relationships with your two older sisters and the three younger ones, how those relationships have impacted on your life?

*You know we are always united; we don't have such a thing that we are not same father; we don't have that at all. You know the way we are, we always united with each other. Whenever they want something, we give them. We know that there are no things that they will get if we are not providing.*

Ok, so your siblings are very important to you?

Yes. And the brother that you lost as well.

*He is very much in my heart.*

How do you think that your childhood has impacted on you as an adult?

*Because of the bad experiences?*

Yes.

*You know at times, you know, when I'm hearing things about celebrations, I do ask myself that maybe my father didn't want me, maybe I was not planned? That is one of the things that I think about. Ja, I, sometimes it does, I don't feel comforted when I'm with friends.*

So those feelings about your father do come up?

*Yes, I'm thinking that maybe if my father had wanted me I would have had a chance to go to varsity and get a degree. Only my mother was there. I'm very grateful to my mother, she did something that my father couldn't.*

So you are grateful to your mother but there is an issue about your father still there for you?

Yes.

I know that you are working at the shelter, what else are you doing?

*Im doing the training at Lefika. Last year I did social auxillary worker training. Now Im working at the shelter and they are paying for me to do the course here at Lefika. While Im there Im working as a security, because Im not yet placed in a position, they promised me that after Im finished the course they will place me in the organization. But then due to financial problems they haven't yet placed me at Usindiso.*

Is that likely to happen soon?

*I don't know when Im going to get t he certificate for my Social Auxillary Work?*

Where did you train?

*I trained in Jhb for social auxillary work.*

How long have you been here?

*For 2 years.*

What attracted you to come here, and leave the Eastern Cape?

*There are no opportunities there, I had to come here, JHB is full of opportunities. I came for those.*

How have you coped living in JHB? Do you have a support network?

*Like a told myself that I want to do something. I don't want to remain unemployed. That is now what I want. So I told myself, no no no, I have to do something.*

Where do you do security work?

*I work at the shelter as a security guard.*

Do you stay there too?

*No, Im renting a room.*

Do you have any emotional support in JHB? Do you have good friends around you?

*I do choose friends, I know what sort of friends I want?*

Did you come here all alone?

*I came here to my cousin's sister.*

Ok, so you did come to someone that you know. And do you belong to a church or any organizations, like a church?

*I do go to church, I do go. And they have got there services at the organization I work at.*

And how do you feel about having your own children, and being a Mom yourself?

*I do have children, two sons.*

Oh really.

Do they live with you?

*Yes, And Im so protective. I don't want what happened to me to happen to my children.  
And their Dad?*

*Their Dad, he separate, we are no longer together?*

How old are your boys?

*The first one is 7 and the young one is 4.*

So you brought them with you to JHb.

*No, I first came on my own and then when I got a job I went home to fetch them.,*

So they stay with you here. And how to you manage with them?

*I do have time to care for them, the older one is at school and the younger one is at crèche.*

You don't want them to have the same experiences as you?

*Yes, you know Im concerned about the young girls who are staying with boyfriends. You know I don't want that. That is not what I want. I don't want to fail with a boyfriend or something. Im too protective to them, when it comes to my children.*

I can imagine that. Is that linked to your own experiences?

Yes.

So it has had a big impact on your life in terms of the way you parent your own children.

*You know when someone is, if I was a boy, I would learn from how my father behaves to my mother. I do think about that, if I can get a boyfriend, maybe he can turn abusive, and maybe in front of my children, like my father was behaving.*

Do you have difficult feelings towards men because of your father?

*I do.*

Does it mean that your relationships with men now are more difficult?

*Yes, it does. That is why I'm saying that men can be nice and then at the same time they can be horrible. You will never know what the man is like. You can never know what he can turn to be.*

Ja, so you are worried about men in general, something you are not sure of, could he turn out abusive.

What happened with the father of your children.

*He wanted to go to work in Rustenburg.*

Rustenburg comes up again

*Yes, after he went to Rustenburg he didn't want to be supportive anymore.*

How long had you been a couple for?

*For maybe 8 yrs.*

A long time.

*Yes, a long time. But it wasn't abusive. Laughs.*

**Lerato (born 1982 in Polokwane)**

This participant cried throughout the interview but despite numerous offers to continue later she declined and insisted that we continue. She was very emotional and sniffed back her tears throughout the interview.

---

Could you tell me the story of your early life, I know you wouldn't remember the details of your early life, but maybe you have been told?

*You know when I was about five or six years old, my Mum used to leave me with this other old Granny. She was always drinking this traditional alcohol,*

Mm

*And then this lady, this Granny, she used to come with her boyfriend, and I remember one day like, when she was coming back from the .. it was like, I was asking myself, why does my Mum go with my other brothers and sisters, because I was always always alone with that Granny. And then, I never told anybody that, this Granny used to sleep with me. I didn't know what was going on by then. She would sleep with her boyfriend then after come to me and sleep with me. And I couldn't understand actually what was going on. Funnily enough, after I have started to do this therapy, they have automatically just come back. Lately I was writing about it, like, I was writing about it, at that age, this lady used to do that to me. At that age it was a confusion, of which I took it as a pattern that followed me in my life because everything that was going on in my family... My Mum never appreciated me. She was always you know, swearing at me, you know I never remembered my mother saying something good about me. She would swear, she would say bad things about me, a retarded somebody, slow learner somebody, you know, those kinds of bad words. By then, for me, I think, it hurt me much because all of the things were going on inside me. I couldn't be able to speak out about them. They were always inside, inside my heart, as you know, I was saying, it was surprising, it has just come up since I started this therapy. All these emotions you know, they come up. Even when I see that things don't go well for me in my life, you know this reputation is always following me. Since I have been abused, um, I've been abused from 5 years, as I can say, 5 to 6 yrs, sexually, and physically my father used to beat me and and in those kinds of issues that my sister was always after me, they would always come and blame me. They never sat and said to me, this is what you should do. I was always the one to be punished, they always beat me. They were doing all these bad things to me. You know when my father beats me, he just take everything, it doesn't mean...*

What do you mean, take anything?

*Anything that he came across, anything... I remember last incident, when I was doing matric in Orange Farm, and then there was this accident that happened. My sister when I was coming back from the school, and then my sister in law had a small baby, and then she said to me, Rose pls come help me with this baby, I need to take the washing outside. I went inside, and my sister came out and started shouting, as if I had been arguing, which I hadn't. She was an issue somebody, she starting making a fuss and an issue. My father was outside, he came, and didn't ask anything, my father took, I don't remember that thing, it was a very hard thing, it was a steel thing that he beated me with all over my body. I was running, I went to the other room, and I*

*fainted, and he was beating me. I was waking up, I was dizzy, and I was bleeding all over my body. When my mother came I explained it to her. Firstly she was on my side and then later she said that my father must beat me. There was this confusion around my life, that I lived with. And then tomorrow morning when I went to school my biology teacher asked me what was going on. He saw me quiet, and I was sitting at the table looking away. He called me and I went to his table. He asked me what was wrong. I just undressed my t-shirt, and he was very scared to see what was going on at the back of me. He asked me what happened and I explained everything to him. After school he went together with me to home. When we got there and he was asking my Mum why did my father do something like that, the reason that my Mum gave it to the teacher is that my father had too much stress, maybe he does something like that to take his stress out. My teacher said to me "lets take this matter up". I said "just leave it, God will be there to judge". That's what I told my teacher. The teacher said "are you going to leave it like this"? I knew, I was still you know, like in the home environment, it was going to be hard for me like, Im attending the case tog with my father, and no one is supporting me, so it was going to be.....*

So it felt too difficult?

*For me, yes, it was too difficult, living in the same environment and I just said everything was fine. And I was doing matric, while I was studying at night, sometimes my father would say "the candles are getting finished, you must stop now". And my Mum, when I was leaving late at school knowing that Im doing matric, when I explain everything to my Mum, my Mum would say that the Grade 12 that Im doing is the same as Sub A, so my sister cannot cook every day, I must cook too. If she was cooking at the weekend, I was cleaning and also cooking, just to replace those days. Sometimes when I had friends that would come, they would react somehow, and I wouldn't even feel comfortable. Sometimes I would do things by force, I must do this you know, and its up to them whether they treat me bad, but at the end of the day they would still treat me bad. My mother never liked me, she never liked me, looking back, my mother never said a positive thing about me, she always neglected me, she was never positive about me, she was always negative about me. I will never be someone in the next coming future. For her it was like when they were doing bad examples, they would use my name, those sort of things. For me it was very much difficult. Even sometimes, you get yourself involved in being in love, just to take some issues you know outside, like,*

Escape you mean?

*Yes, something like that.*

*I remember telling my boyfriend what happened, he said to me "is this man really your father"? I said "yes". He said I cant believe that someone would do that to his real daughter, no matter how angry he is.*

Do you still have the scars?

*Ja, no. I never had this thing that I must take photos.*

So you don't have the scars anymore?

*No, I don't. In 2003 or 2002, somewhere there, I was doing matric, that's when it happened.*



Lerato, I really appreciate you telling me your story, these are painful issues.

Can I ask you, where were you born?

*In Polokwane, Pietersburg*

Were you staying with your mother and father when you were born?

*Ja, its kinda confusing, because they say that my father was staying in Pretoria then, that he would come every end of the month. I am confused. I just remember everytime that I was mostly with this Granny. There was no one there. I would be with this Granny. My mind like, as it comes now, by then, where was my sisters and my brothers?*

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

*I have two brothers and two sisters?*

Are you the youngest?

*No, the youngest is the one who was born in 86?*

86, ok. Is that a brother or a sister?

*A sister, but she is married*

Did she stay with you?

*No.*

Which was the sister who was screaming at you, in the story you told me earlier?

*That is my older sister. The older sister was always having issues towards me. She was always having issues, like sometimes I would ask myself, are these people really, you know, my, the same blood as me because I would feel pain I would never share it with someone. You know, this thing it happened, I even got used to it, that things would happen in this house and I would be the one to get blamed.*

Tell me about the Granny in Polokwane. For how long were you with her?

*I cant remember clearly, but the thing that I remember is that they left me with hre.*

So you were with your family originally?

*Yes*

For how long?

*Im not sure, I was still very very young. Funnily enough you know, this thing, these memories, they come.*

Do you know if you Mum ever breast fed you?

*I don't know.*

Is your mother still alive?

*Yes, she is but she is not ok. She was sick. Last time she came where I was staying and then she went back/. She was sick. When she was sick like that I said to her I would go there and take her to my church, for her, for them to give her some prayers. Because at my church there is a church and also a clinic. You can go to the clinic and also be at church. I told her that is the only place that I would be comfortable to be with her. When I said that to her her sister was also there, her sister started to shout at me. They said that these days I am teaching my mother the church.*

They were rude to you?

*Too many politics. That is why I always ask myself, where do I belong. They never supported me in anything. You know I grew up and I tried hard for me to settle my life, whether..*

It sounds like you have had to work so hard to take care of yourself.

*Yes, very hard. You know, even now, Im not staying with my daughter. When my mother was sick, when the older sister of mine, she was very very sick, she couldn't even do anything for herself. When we close at the work, I went home, I took care of my sister, I did all these good things for her.*

Your older sister

Yes

*Even when I was here at Alex, I was buying things and taking them to her. I would try, I would try, I would try my level best. Even though I knew she didn't love me.. I still tried...*

It sounds like you have been very hungry for their love?

*Yes, it didn't matter how much I tried, they still wouldn't, they were always saying negative things about me. It ried and tried and there was a point when my sister was now worse. When my sister went home she was very worse. She nearly died, she was very worse in the way that she was sick. Of which I didn't know that my sister was HIV, so like I took care of her of which, like, the thing that surprised me, that's when like I was like busy, I would take care of my sister, my sister would sit there in the chair tog with my Mum. My sister would have too much blood on her, on the bed that she was using. Remember that Im there to take care of that person, they must also tell me what is the problem with her. I was asking, what did the Doctor tell you? They would tell me lies. When I look at my sister, something would just tell me that she was HIV, but they wouldn't tell me. I could see that when I was washing my sister, their eyes, like to me, I would even be scared, why do these people look at me like devils. I had that feeling owards them. That person wasn't my mother anymore, that person isn't my sister anymore. They would still be negative, politics. I told my sister, you know, you are sick, you should concentrate on your illness. For you to live for your daughter, concentrate on your life, on your illness, ask for forgiveness from God on your life. That is what I told them, but they didn't like it, they didn't like it that I told them what to do. It was very hard for me. I remember one day, I was like, I would go home with this trolley bag, my sister would say to me that I must buy that bag for her daughter. It was now like a competition. My sister would always want good things for her. I knew my Mum when she was working, she would buy things for my sister, but when I asked for things I would be told that my sister was an old lady and needed to look pretty. But I am young so I don't need things. I only got things at Christmas, during the year I wouldn't get anything. It doesn't mater that I don't have things. That is how I was treated.*

How old were you when you left your Granny in POlokwane and went to your family?

*You know it is kind of confusing me because when I was like there, I was very very small and automatically when we grew up, that is when they took us from Polokwane to Alexander to my Mum. She was living there with her sister.*

So you are not sure how old you were?

No

You mentioned that when you were about five you were with your Granny and she was abusing you.

*She wasn't my Granny, she was just a nanny granny. She was never a blood relative of mine.*

She wasn't a blood relative?

No.

You mother never told you why she left you with the Granny and took the other children?

*No, that is why Im confused. When Im alone Im asking myself why I was left. The way they were treating me then and still treating me now. You know its bad, these people, they never cared for me.*

*You know my Mum, she said one day, you must come and take these kids of yours, Im sick and tired. That's when the father of my daughter went home, and he said to me, they have some work to do, you know, these cultural things, and he went to Pietersburg to take our daughter, that was my Mum then, he took the daughter to KZN and then I said...*

Your daughter?

*Yes, My daughter. Then I said to him he must leave my daughter there as I knew what was going on in my home place. Like...*

How old is your daughter?

*My daughter is five years.*

Five, ok

*My daughter is five.*

Did you ever have her with you.

*Ja, like sometimes, in the holidays. But I struggle because financially Im struggling, im not working. Im staying wit some other people of which, they still treat me, they treatme me somehow.. they treat me bad. This thing is a pattern, it keeps following me, following me...*

Are you still involved with the father of your daughter?

*No, we have broken up. We have broken up, when, when my daughter was, I think when she was three.*

Mm

*2004, 2005, ja, I think we broke up in 2005 or 2006. But she was coming, I wasn't sure about it. But I just said that I must just concentrate in my life, and go there... and I must take this life, see what I can do, see if I struggle. If it means that I have to clean, you know the stuff of other people, Ill do that.*

So what work are you doing?

*Right now Im a teacher assistant. I work with the autistic kids. I work on the First floor.*

Ok, so you work in this building?

Yes

And you come here for therapy to Lefika?

Yes.

And how long have you been aware of how emotionally upset you are?

*Since I started the course. You know for me, with this course, it was like, um, it was like, you know, God was saying I must, it is a way for me to take out the feelings. I don't think that if it wasn't for this therapy, things would happen. But now, I when you are inside that session, you know your mind, everything comes out, and you deal with the material, and you feel different kinds of emotions.*

So its very powerful for you?

*Yes. So when I moved there, because we were from Alexandra and then we moved to Orange Farm, then we stay together there as a family. That is where the beatings were taking place, that was in Orange Farm. Even when I was in Alexander, my father he would beat me. Even when I was playing with my younger sister, I play with her and something goes wrong and she cries, they wont come and ask, they would just beat me with a belt. I remember when I ran out, I was wearing a top and only a pantie, I ran out because my father was beating me. I rand out and then I stayed outside, the window, on a balcony. For some time I stayed there and then I went back inside and put on my school uniform and went to school where I was attending primary school.*

Mm. I wonder if your father beat your brothers and sisters too?

*No, I never saw him beat anyone of my brothers or sisters, except me, except me.*

Is he still alive?

*Yes, he is still alive. He went home because he was sick but now he is better. When he was better my sister got sick, and eventually she got better. Now it is my mother who is sick. My mother, she is the one that is sick. I wanted to go there to see what is going on, but I don't feel comfortable in that house. I just, my heart just doesn't allow me and I can't force it. I told my mother I would hire a car and then I would take her to church. That was the time that I told them that and they shouted at me, and am I the one that would teach them about the church. By then I was feeling pity that she was sick, as much as like I want to see her and she wants to see me. I will be better for her and for me if I take her to the treatment, because I feel very much supported and very much loved when I'm at the church. That's why I wanted to take her there. But that is when she handed the phone to her sister and they shouted at me and shouted at me. Then they dropped the phone into my ears. From then on I never called my mother.*

How long ago is that?

*It has been maybe 4 or maybe 5 months (counts very slowly). Somewhere, January or February. Because I called, I remember, it's just that there are these issues, they happen like this, when you say this then something happens again. Because from Organge Farm I went to stay with my aunty at Highlands North but I was very disappointed lately that, you know I had this relationship with a guy, and of which it was a decent relationship that I never, you know I never, I didn't know actually?*

*This is a guy I met after, I stayed four years after I broke up with the father of my child. I thought let me settle myself first and then a relationship will come after I'm settled. And then I had, my aunties granny was sick, she was at Polokwane, she had a stroke. She came here, I stayed somewhere in Savoy, during the weekends I went there to help to bath her. Then and there I thought I was helping my aunty with her mother. Then after that the Granny passed away. When she passed away, when she was sick, there was this true love towards everybody, that support that was given to everyone. We were always positive. I remember when the granny passed away she said to us that we are all going to get married. That is how she was feeling, she was telling us that but she was also crying. But she was telling us that we will all get married and that all these illnesses will be healed. Also that good things will come. And then she said that, um, the noise and the politics and the issues are something that is not allowed, that is what she told us. Then she passed away. When she passed away we went to Polokwane to bury her. I remember it was Friday night and we were busy washing up. We were washing up the plates and the pots. While I was there there was this guy, the one that I met, and not knowing that he was my Grannies like grand grand something...*

Oh a relative?

*Yes, but I didn't know. He was interested in me. There was this thing, I was also interested in him, as much as I was in pain I was also interested in him. And then we made an appointment for when we could see each other. We sorted out arrangements for after the funeral. He gave me his contact numbers, and then I gave him mine. Then finally he called me and then said that we will meet during December in Midrand, at his brother's place. And then during December my daughter was here, you know I struggled a lot financially and for me it was hard, for me to go to him. You can see that the first time you meet a person, and you don't have money,. Something like that, when I looked at my purse, I saw I had money to take the transport to go and come*

back. By then we were closed. When I went to his place it was, for me to go there it was very difficult because my cousin, the one I'm staying with, they were smsing each other, her and my aunty. They were discussing me through the phone and sms'es. They were taking my persona stuff, you know things between me and this guy, they were discussing together. Then when this guy calls my cousin will say "Lerato seriously, are you going there, my mother won't allow it". Then at the end of the day I would ask myself, I'm an adult, who are they to control me? So I ask myself, this abuse, it is a repetition that is following me, because I'm a person, I can't speak out. Things are eating me inside. I just look at a person, I don't like arguing, I don't like issues, they just make me tired. So I kept quiet, I kept doing what I was doing and she would say these bad things, that I don't know that guy, that I would see for myself. They were wishing me bad things, they were wishing this relationship all the negative things. And then when they were discussing, like I would finish talking, or she would finish talking, then her mother would call. When her mother called (you know she is a community worker and a psychologist) and she just gave the phone and she just insulted me on the phone. She said to me, you know, what kind of a person am I, my intention is to go around the relatives to sleep with anybody that I want. You know she insulted me. You know she undressed me. She said that my intention is to go around the relatives and to sleep with anyone, that I would be going around seducing people. Funnily enough I was strong to handle what she said to me. I was just hearing her talking to me and then when she was finished, she said "you are not going anywhere". She was fighting me, she was calling relatives and contacting people who know me and this guy just to destroy. Of which I said, I've been struggling since I'm young, now I think maybe I've found the right person. That is what I was telling myself, I had that thing inside me, I was strong enough to handle what she was insulting me. Those things that she said, they were all insults. Then she asked me to hand the phone to her daughter. Then her daughter will carry on saying, "seriously Lerato, are you going"? It's like we were doing competition with them. Those people are their relatives, they don't want me to go there. They hurt me so much and I never trusted them, everytime I look at them, every time I look at them automatically those things just come back. I try not to respond, I pretend it doesn't matter to me but, I remember them, I don't want to remember but they just automatically come back. Then I just say, why these bad things are just happening to me.

It's been a lot for you to handle.

But positively enough, I was positive enough to handle and I was able to go. Then this guy, when I went to this guy I was telling him "they don't want us to be involved" and then he says to me "you know we love each other, where do they get involved, you know, it's between you and me and we are both adults". We both know what we want. And what I can give to you they cannot give to you, and what you can give to me they cannot give to me. And then when this guy calls my cousin will always sms her mother, whenever we communicate, whatever we do. And then when I was thinking that they would stay, I would leave my daughter there, and then I saw, if the situation is like this let me just take my daughter to Kempton Park where my brother is. I drop my daughter at Kempton Park to my brother's place, and I explain to my brother that there is this guy that I met and that I am going to meet this guy, you know. Then I went there, the guy, I went to the guy's place, to his brother's place at Midrand.

And then you know, funny enough, it was like you know nothing happened. I never told him anything, I pretended nothing happened. I just told myself you know what, it's been a long time since I've been depressed, I've never I never I never had any happiness in my life. Maybe this is a chance when I will receive happiness. And you know, even though people want to destroy that, let me

*just be strong. And I was strong enough, to tell you the truth Francesca, I was very happy with this guy, I was very happy to see him, and he was very happy to see me. You know, it was like all the blessings, like, it was very special. And what came to my mind, I said, you know, since that I was taking care of my granny, and I never had this thought that, maybe she is sick, she will give me her sicknesses, you know I don't think negative things. And as she said one two three, I remember she said to me that I need a man who understands me. I used to tell her my problems. Sometimes she couldn't talk but she would lift up her thumb, she was saying to me, its fine, it will come. Im telling you Francesca, I never had happiness, I wondered, if happiness like this? It was the first time I was experiencing the happiness with this gbuy. I stayed there, it was the 31<sup>st</sup>, we celebrated new years eve together, and 12 o clock I was with him, and the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, we came back on the 4<sup>th</sup>. When we came back on the 4<sup>th</sup>, from his brothers place, my aunt called my fiance's brother, she said he must tell Rose that she must come home because her daughter needs her. Then I was surprised because I left my daughter with my brother in Kempton Park you know. It was like they were researching where, actually, where I was. Maybe they thought I didn't tell this guy that I had a child. You know they just, they just, they wanted something to destroy my love, to cause trouble together with this guy, like maybe we would separate. The other thing, like ive experienced that's when they called his brother, when his brother came to us I was in the room with my fiancé, he knocked and he gave my fiancé the phone, and it was my aunt, she wanted to talk to me. I refused, there was nothing for me to talk to her about. If I had taken the phone then she was going to insult me. Like I was saying, people they just talk what they feel, they don't think how it is going to react, I am talking about a psychologist who is a community worker. I just think, what is this person telling other people outside, she is treating me this way, she has treated me that way, she wishes me bad luck in this life. She doesn't want my love to succeed. She is doing competition of some sort, I don't know. She has her own car, she has her own, you know houses and I have nothing. I still try, to to organize my life, but as soon as they can see im trying to be lifted up they want something to to to..*

They want something to smack you down....?

*They want something to smack me down, and then, after all, he didn't give me the phone. She called again and she thought I was going to talk to her, and I refused again. Then you know what they did, they said that they were going to come there. Fortunately enough we were about to go back, I was about to leave and my boyfriend was ab9out to go back to Pretoria/Hammanskraal, that is where he lives. And the other things that I saw that was killing them, this guy is a Doctor, for me it was like, this poor thing, who is she to meet this kind of guy. Cos I remember like, when I was with my aunty, she was like, why didn't you meet this kind of guy. The guy that maybe you cant compare maybe with that one. She would always want me down. For her when she was telling me that, and I said to myself, to my aunt its all about match making, you know, of which to me it was about what I felt inside, and what that guy felt inside, you see. Because when he came to me, he came and approached me and he told me that he loved me. And I told him I loved him too, of which they didn't like it,. They wanted to destroy it. You know, they went there with my uncle Victor. You know my aunties name is Connie Moybela, and this guy is also Moyabelo, me Im Meso, Moyobela is my mothers name. It is a very very distant relatively, and I didn't even know him. They just wanted to cause trouble. I was very very hard for me. I just said to myself, I need to be strong. If I want things to be positive I must just be strong. I just want what is going to make me happy. That's exactly what I did, they went that side with my uncle, it was like a competition, that you know, she, since she is having good money and good houses and*

*good cars, when she talks people will listen because she is... that's how I take it, as I'm nothing, and she wants to destroy whatever good thing that, you know (coughs)*

*Whatever good thing that I want to have. They went there, they bad mouthed me, they influenced the brother of the guy. He never said anything but I could see. They bad mouthed me, they talked bad things about me, about my family. Like the issues, like the issues I was telling you about, of course they told them everything there, you know they told them everything. For that guy, when he looked at me, he can just say ah, this lady, she comes from this kind of a family, you know, what about her. You know, so, you know, they went there to destroy my life, they went there to destroy my life, but at the end of the day, I just told myself, if this relationship was meant to be, God is there to bless it, no one will destroy it. It was so hard like that, they tried to influence it. I could see the 2<sup>nd</sup> time I went there, I could see. The brother was ok but I couldn't be that free, the way that I was the first time. You know, he wants me to go and visit him the 2<sup>nd</sup> time. He went to Midrand from Pretoria, I went there too, to meet him. But I wasn't that free the second time, they went there and talked bad things, all about bad things about me. For me it was very hard, for me it was very painful, for me it was very hurtful that there was no one that I could, you know, talk to about it. Cos everybody just turned their backs against me, they talked bad things about me. When they are together they talk bad things about me, they want to destroy me, so when they are together they support each other, they all want me down, they all want to depress me, they want to see me begging. And after that, after that, my aunty will, maybe after a long time, when I see her, she would say to me "where is this boyfriend of yours, she would ask me with pride. She would ask me with pride. I would ask myself, what is it that they think we have broken up. They wanted to do follow ups, whether if I'm still together with the guy.*

Are you still living with your cousin?

*Yes I am living with my cousin.*

So do you still see your aunty?

*Ja, sometimes. Sometimes she will come. And guess what, they went to my fiance's home at Hammanskraal. Of course they went there, they also went there and they talk bad things about me. Of which, when I see it, maybe like my sister was sick, maybe they even mentioned that maybe I was sick. Something like that, maybe something like that so that we could be separated. I mean you can imagine, they went to his father and his mother who are living there, and she is my aunt. They just caused trouble, they just went there to cause trouble about my name. At the end of the day, then they also cause trouble to him. Cos I remember when I was trying to call him up, he wasn't the one I know, but at the end of the day, I said like, you know, he is a grown up somebody, he knows what he wants. Finally he will see the truth. I was always talking to my God and I told... That is the only person I was communicating with. There is nobody who was giving me support, except him, That is the only person, when I have troubles, I would kneel down and I would say to him 'what happened to my love?' even to this issue, I just, I talked. When I had finished I felt relieved. I told him and then he will see how he sorts things. Then, when he was like that, I would keep on sending him sms's. I loved him, and I showed him how much I appreciated having him. That is when I could see that he was coming back to me. He was sending me sms's. When that happens I could see that my cousin doesn't like it. When I look her face she automatically changes. Maybe she doesn't see it, when I look at her she just changes. When I look at my cousin her faces just changes.*



Are you still involved with him?

*Yes, it is still on but I still live with my cousin so sometimes I don't feel comfortable to bring him to our place. Those terrible thing that they did. I don't know what they could do, it is killing them badly that we are both still involved. My cousin had a boyfriend and when he come she was very happy. And when her boyfriend was not there she would be moody. And what is my boyfriend comes, how is she going to react. I don't feel comfortable, this man he want to come to my place, he wanted to come so desperately. And he was wondering that maybe I don't want him to come because Im having an affair, of I was blocking him because.... This site, it ws very too much fire. I think when you talk very bad things, you are taking this fire, you know they wanted to know the follow ups about us. That is exactly what came to mind, what is that they want from us, what is it that they will do if they find that we are still together. So there was too much emotion, that were just going around in me, that you know. I don't know, every time when I try to receive happiness somewhere, there are people that are there who want to try to break it. I never thought that even today, that I would call that guy, or sms him, or that guy calls me or communicate together. I can tell you know, I ended seeing him early February... I cant let him come this side...*

Did you break it up with him?

*No, we are not. Its just that he is there and lam here, I am not that organized. The other things is that I am working but financially I am not ok. There is no one to tell that I have these debts, no one is helping me. Like I grew up struggling alone, struggling struggling struggling, even as Im struggling now. I don't even have...*

It sounds like security is very important, and the therapy. Is the therapy a new thing?

Yes,

It sounds like the therapy is very important. It sounds like there is a lot for you to w work through. That you have identified patterns in your life, and that there are only a few safe places, like church.

*Yes, the church is very important. That is why Im saying, as much as she is making fire, she is phoning relatives all over the world. Their mission was to break this, but they are not more powerful than my God. I say, I trust in this man. Whatever they do, I write it in my journal book, and then I kneel down and I talk to this man. I was his intention,, my God can see that there is too much that I have been through. I don't have anyone to talk to, that is when I got this bursary, that's when Im doing this counseling. I could see that there were too much things that were going on from my childhood, and this thing is now helping me, cos I would ask myself questions, am I not deserve to be happy, am I not deserve to get good things. This guy is the only thing that they are fighting for, its not because he is a relative, they fight for this because he is a Doctor, and they fight for this because who am I? They press me down.*

It sounds like you are realizing a lot of things about your family and yourself, through therapy, in a helpful but painful way. I hope that through your therapy that you are able to get yourself into

a position where you feel safe and you can then conduct your relationships in the way that you want to. That seems very important.

*Because even now IM still praying that, even the accommodation, I could find accommodations but the problem with me is financial. Just need my own accommodation where, you know like, I do my own stuff you know, with myself, you know, where I would just have a peace of mind. There has been too much things that have been going on. I jnust need a quiet place where I can get myself organized. Now Im with her, but she is taking me stuff, the thing that you , the things that... sometimes when are ladies, this is ladies talk, immediately when I am finished she sms's her mother. Just because I fought with my mother, I have no one to take care of me. Everybody has this jealousy. I just thought, let me be quiet and talk to my God.*

Do you have friendships?

Like close friends?

Yes

*I don't have friends, because like..... I don't have close friends. Even now I pray to my god to have my own accommodation. I pray to god, is this pattern that I have, is this from my childhood, now look at my life, my daughter is staying far away from me. This is not my intention. But the situation is forcing me. The other thing, last year when I took my daughter from KzN, my plans were that I would stay with my daughter together with them. But when this incident happened, that they were influencing and didn't want me in this relationship. I just thought,. If they do that, how are they going to treat me in front of my daughter. I just said to myself, this is the situation and I got used to it, but I don't want my daughter to be affected, I don't want my daughter to be traumatized. Let me take my daughter to her home, because that is her home, until I have a place where I can take my daughter, and live with my daughter, and spend quality time with my daughter. Where I know that I can check her homework, where I can arrange for her to go to school, where I can fetch her after work, and take her home. That is my goal right now, and I know that my God is gong to make it possible for me.*

You are going to work towards that...

*Yes, Im going to work towards that, and I always tell myself that even though it is hard, even though it is difficult, when I look back, where I cam from, then I said to myself, look where I am now. From here it is just a matter of time when I reach where I am going. It is no longer far, I just need patience, and I need to be strong, I need to be strong for that child. I really want her to have me, to have a truly love from me, and support from me as a mother. I want my daughter to be happy, I want to see my daughter, for her to be blose to me. Hwen they do this bad tstuff on top of me, and I have my own issues to deal with, and they keep on adding, keep on adding, keep on adding. If I wasn't strong enough and my God wasn't helping, I would just think, let me just take my life. But because of my God I know that good things are coming..*

You have hope

*Yes, I have this hope that one day I will be in my house and I will be driving my own car. I will be telling my daughter stories of where I come from, where I will be then.*

Interview wrapped up there, participant's phone rang...

**Sibongile (born 1984 in Umtata)**

So you were born 10 years before Apartheid finished?

*Ja*

Could you tell me what you know about your first two years of life?

*Um, ok, fine. My mother was a student when she gave birth to me, so she had to go back to school and finish, so my grand mother and my aunt, my mothers sister, took care of me, until, I don't know, forever.. I was my grandmother's daughter.*

So you were always with her?

*Yes, and my aunt, until my mother finished school. Then I was with my mother, my grandmother and my aunt, those three.*

Ok, so that makes it very interesting, how that was for you?

*It makes you very responsible, because you are not staying with your mother, you are not staying with you own mother. You are staying wit your cousins and you aunts and other children, but you are not the only ones. It was nice, I enjoyed that. I don't know how it was gonna be if I was with my mother and father. Cos my mother fell pregnant at a younger stage..*

How old was she then?

*I think she was 20.*

And what was she studying?

*She was still in high school.*

Ok,

*And they were both students, my father was also a atudent at high school. Since, you know my mother was still a virgin at that time, she fell pregnant first time, so my father just ran away, he probably didn't know that she was pregnant. Because it was their last year, they both moved, just go back home.*

So you have never known your father?

*No Ive never*

Have you ever met him?

*Yes, I know him. My mother tried to look for him but it was too late, He passed away*

Oh really, Im so sorry to hear that.

*So I went to his family,*

Ok, And where was that?

*Cries.... Long pause*

F: Its painful for you .... (gives tissues)

I imagine how sad that must have been for you..

*I was about to see him, like tomorrow, but he passed away tonight.*

Just one day?

*Ja, so I saw him in a coffin, so I don't really really know him. I cant say much about him...*

Mm

Pause ...Was that long ago?

*Ja, it was, but it always touches me.. it was 95.*

Mmm

*It was such a profound and painful experience for you.... for it to be so close to you seeing him. I was so looking forward to seeing him.. but then ja. He was sick. But then his parents took care of me....*

Did they?

*Yes, shame, they did, until my grandfather passed away in 1991. Now Im left with my grand mother from my fathers side, and my half brother, my fathers son, he was not my mothers son.*

And were you born?

*I was born in Eastern Cape, Umtata. My father is also from the same town but from another location. The same place.*

Your Mom and Dad were at school together

*Ja, in Butterworth*

So they were together at school. Were they in a relationship?

*That time, I don't know if it was a serious relationship, but the fact that I was born, it was serious*

Yes, I understand

So he then disappeared for a while after she got pregnant?

*Mm, but then I asked her, cos I was asking myself, why is he not looking for me and all that My mother told me that she tried to write to him to tell him that she was pregnant, but I don't know whether he got the letter or if he ignored it. So I don't know what happened. Then we found out that he got married to someone else. Then my half brother was born in 1990, so ja.*

So he was born 1990, five years younger than you?

*At some point I became angry, I don't know if he tried or if he didn't care?*

You also don't really know if he even knew about you?

*Ja, the most thing that makes me angry is the fact that my mother had to drop out of school to raise me, and he continued to study and got married, and all that....*

You are very aware of what happened for you mother

*Mm*

*Cos you can imagine at that time it was such an embarrassment to be pregnant, your parents and all that. So they, his, my grandfather treated my mother like badly, cos he was disappointed.*

Ok

*So I feel like if he came forward and apologized or.. as Xhosa people there are some money that you have to pay,*

The Lobola

*No, to apologize. If he did that things were gonna be better.*

They would have been better for your Mom, or in the family?

*For my Mom, for my Mom, and for me.*

In what sort of way? Im interested to understand that?

*I was going to grow up with a father, even if they weren't married, I ws going to know my father.*

Ok, I understand. So that really does stand out as a very painful and difficult for thing that makes you angry.

Cries

Angry for yourself and angry for your mother too, cos it meant that she didn't study further.

*Ja, she suffered.*

Did she suffer because of the shame, and your grandfather's anger

*Because of the shame and because she felt like, ok fine, I disappointed my family, now I have to go, and find a job and work hard. And she had to take care of her siblings and me on the other*

*side. She was the first born, and I think if I wasn't born, I'm not saying I'm a mistake, ok, I am a mistake, but here I am now. But I think if I hadn't have been born then my mother would have been far, she would have finished school. But she didn't manage to continue.*

Ja, mm. Has your Mother spoken about that over the years?

*No, I think she still had, she didn't want to blame him, but then I was forcing her to blame him for everything..*

Ok, so you were very aware...

*I was saying, like why are you defending him? No, he didn't know, I know him, and I was like, No, I just don't believe you. You mustn't defend him, whether he passed away or not, what he did was wrong, full stop. I don't know whether he, she still loves him, I don't know.*

Mm, maybe there was some loyalty and love for him. It sounds like you have really been affected by what happened for your self, and for her, and about him?

*Especially for her, cos I cant say IM, I didn't have food I didn't have clothes because he wasn't there. He wasn't there but I managed to grow up. Like my mothers sisters were always there to support. But then what makes me angry is the fact that he left my mother like that.*

Mm

And at you were already starting to grow inside her when he left?

Yes

That would have been 1984. What grade was your Mom in then?

*I think Grade 12*

Did she finish her matric?

*Mm, she did*

So she did finish her matric and then she went off to work. And were you born in Butterworth?

*No, in Umtata.*

How long was your mother with you for after you were born?

*I think she was with me for a month.*

A month

*Yes, because the time, um, I remember I used to call my aunt Mom, because my Mom left me at a very young stage to go back to school, and it thought that my aunt is my Mom, until she told me that that your mother is this one.. and so I didn't care that she was not my mother, I didn't become disappointed, I was so attached to my aunt, even now I'm attached to her more than anyone?*

More than anyone, ok. Are you aware of whether your Mom breastfed at all?

*No, I don't think so, no I think she did and left..*

Ok, so she did for a bit and then she went back to school. And then you went on a bottle?

*Yes, I did.*

And did you aunt have any other children?

*Yes, she did, but after me, her kids are younger than me. So you were the first born in a way.*

Your aunt is like your Mom and you weren't aware that she wasn't your Mom as you grew up. I'm sure you don't remember the first two years, but did your aunt or your Granny tell you about how you were as a little girl?

*Ja, laughs, they used to tell me that I used to cry a lot, a lot, I used to cry a lot. I used to, um, sick for love. I used to cry for my Granny, especially for both of them. At that time my aunt finished for school and she didn't have money for university for that year and she didn't have anything to do except looking after me for that year. So they use to take turns, today its my Granny tomorrow its my aunt, looking after me.*

Do you think maybe you cried because of that?

No, I don't think so, I think maybe I was just a crying baby, some babies are like that?

Ok

And any other stories that they told you?

*I used to do everything that my grandmother used to do, like, my grandmother used to do this when she was frustrated, I used to do the same thing, I used to do the same thing, exactly like her.*

You copied what she did. And do you have sense of who your main bond was with, your aunt or your Granny?

*I think it was the same.*

You mentioned earlier that you weren't the only one, then you said that you were the first born and then your aunt had her own children. I wonder how it was for you when your aunt had her own children?

*I was happy because nothing really changed. I was always the first born of her, so nothing really changed, I was just happy that there were new babies at home, a new baby was coming.*

How old were you when they came?

*The first one came in 1987.*

So you were two?

*Yes, I used to play with her but I don't remember much, and the last one was born in 1991, that one I remember, I helped to raise her and I was seven at that time. I used to take care of her, and even now, she is here, and she is my sister, we do everything together.*

Ok, so she also moved to Joburg. Ok

So we've talked about the people who were important in your life, it was your aunt and your Granny, and are they still the important people?

*My grandmother passed away,*

Oh really, when was that?

*1990*

So that was when you were 10, that must have been a big loss for you.

*It was also very painful, now I'm left with my aunt and my father's mother.*

And your own mother?

*She passed away in 2008.*

So you have had a lot of losses to deal with?

Mm, silence, cries

These memories are upsetting, this interview is stirring up a lot of feelings that are making your upset. Maybe we can talk about you having some counseling to talk more?...

When you found out that Nombelelo wasn't your Mom, do you know how old you were then?

*I think I was six or seven, somewhere then?*

Do you remember that time when you were told, do you have memories of that time?

*Not really, cos she was working, she was working somewhere else. She used to come and take me with her, I was so attached and so,*

Attached to?

*To my aunt. I lost that feeling for my mother because she left me early, but my Mom told me that Nombelelo is not my mother, that she is my aunt. Maybe it was jealousy, I don't know, because parents do that sometimes, they feel like I am losing my baby, let me tell her that I am her mother. But I didn't care, I thought ok, you are my mother, but she is my mother too, I have three mothers, my grand mother, you and my aunt.*

And when she came to visit, do you remember how you felt about her?

*My mother?*

Yes, I imagine you didn't know her so well, she wasn't there such a lot.

*She was in boarding school so sometimes she use dot come back home. You know, kids don't care much, they care about the people that they are with all the time. So she was always there but I didn't, it didn't click in my mind that she might be my mother. I loved her though, but..*

*It wasn't such a big thing.*

She used to come and fetch you later, and take you places?

No,

Ok, but she told you when you were about six or seven that she was your real Mom, but you don't remember feeling anything about that.

*I wasn't angry or anything.*

And as the years went on, how did the relationship with your Mom develop?

*It developed in a funny way. I was staying with my aunt, ne. I stayed with my aunt for, for almost all my life. Because I was with my cousin, the younger one, I was always with the younger one, and my aunt realized that we clicked, so she took me to stay with her, when I was in primary, std 5, 6 and 7.*

So Nombelelo realized the bond between you and your cousin and when she left she took you with her?

Yes

So you moved away when you were about 12,

*Yes. My Grandmother has passed away in 96, and then my aunt took me and my cousin, because she was working somewhere else and we had been wit my grandmother. Now that she had passed away, she decided to take both of us to stay with her. So it was always like that.*

So you went there?

*So me and my cousin used to visit my mother, she was working at that time.*

Where was your mother working then?

*She was in Umtata, and later she moved to King Williamstown. I was old then. I was about 17 then. My aunt then moved to Saudi Arabia to work, she is still working there.. So now, we had to move and stay with my Mum. That is when I developed a relationship with her.*

Were you 15 or 16?

*Yes, 15 or 16, somewhere there.*

Was that difficult for you, when your aunt left?

*It was. Yes, it was, it was. Because I was so so so attached. I was so frustrated, but then she promised that um, Im always coming back, I will come back and will call.*

And has she done that?

Yes.

So that was a big loss for you when she left.

Ja.

So you went to your Mom, and I suppose that was a new relationship of living with her. So you and your cousin went, your two cousins?

*No, my first cousin, the one who was born in 1987, she um, her father took her when she was very young. So we never had a relationship with her. It was always me and the younger one. Even now, we are not staying with her, she stays with the family on her father's side.*

*So I moved in with my mother and my cousin. So we are staying with my mother, and then my younger brother from my fathers side, he came and stayed with us.*

Your half brother?

*Ja, my half brother.*



Ok.

*So we grew up together, the two of us. I helped my mother to raise these two, the one was born 90, the other 91, so they were the same age.*

Same age, ok

*It wasn't easy, because you know, you aren't used to her rules, you are used to the other ones rules. But as time goes, you realize, ok well I can handle her, I know how to handle her ways, I know she doesn't like this, I know she doesn't like that.*

Mm

*So we became close close, closer and closer.*

You did become really close to her. And what did it mean to you, the way you became close?

*Yes, it did, is how I found out that Im doing this because, I inherited it from you, I didn't know that you also have this and that, you know.*

So you discovered so many similar features.

Ja

They felt genetic to you?

*Ja, we were like, we were so look alike*

You look alike as well

*Ja, the smile, the voice (laughs) I would think, this person speaks exactly like me. (laughs)*

*And when we were going together, maybe we were going to do the shopping, people would think maybe we were sisters. When people see me, they would talk to me and I would say, Im not the person you think I am.*

You were so so similar

*Yes, I developed something from her.*

It was during these years that you built up these feelings about your father and how that affected your Moms life. That does sound like a special thing. But it wasn't easy in the beginning but you actually got very close to her. And how did your Mom die?

*She was sick, she had TB. So she was admitted lot of times, she was so sick and she ended up dying.*

And you were how old then?

*2008, I was 23*

So you built up this relationship with her over five or six years and then she died.

Yes

That must have been difficult, it sounds like you did build a good relationship with her.

*I did. The time she was sick, because IM her only child, I don't count the half brother cos he was still young. She was in King Williamstown that time, I was in PMB at my aunts place, I was staying there, I was studying, I was my aunts place. She was sick and she was staying alone. So I asked her to come and stay so that I could look after her. That relationship was building up you know.*

Ok, so you lived in PMB for a while, while you were studying there.

That was an HR course?

*Ja, it was a two year course, then I came here*

Are you interning here?

*Yes, Im finishing my 4<sup>th</sup> year at UJ, and Im interning here.*

What are you studying?

*Im doing visual arts?*

Ok, that's interesting. So you left HR behind?

*No, that was a two year course only and I was doing it because I couldn't afford to come here. But my aunt said that because she is in Saudi Arabia she can afford to pay for my degree and she is paying for me.*

That is very nice

*She said I must go back and do what I like, cos I know you like art more than what you are doing,. But finish it because it may help you another time. But I know you like art.*

So you are busy at UJ with your 4<sup>th</sup> year. You are nearly finished?

*Ja*

Ok

And you are doing your internship here at Lefika. Do you want to work in the therapeutic field?

*Yes, that is why I chose to do my internship here. I cant find jobs for us, whether you work in a gallery, but at the beginning of the year they came with a brochure about art therapy. The first day I came here I thought I would find kids. I love kids. I don't have any at home, but I love kids. I chose it because of that. For me it is sort of counseling, cos I have classes on Wednesdays, where you talk about your feelings. So in a way it is helping me and Im learning.*

MM. And has it opened up a lot inside of you about your own life?

*Ja, but sometimes you don't feel like it... because you are scared that you might cry. Its difficult, you hide some feelings.*

Mm, I notice how close to the surface these feelings are.

*Yes they are very close.*

Do you think that is because of being at Lefika?

*Ja*

Or would they be close to the surface anyway

*No, because, but it is the same thing, because my work is so personal, at school. Everytime I get to talk about it I become emotional. It is even worse here, because they allow you talk, you express whatever you feel at that time.*

So it is coming up and out. Im wondering how you feel about all the emotions that are coming out. Does it feel helpful, or difficult?

*Its helpful but it difficult at some stage, it is difficult, you don't always want to cry. Sometimes you talk about nice things, as a person, in your life you don't always have painful things, there are nice things that happened in your life, but the nice ones are covered by the emotional, the painful ones.*

Have you thought at all about whether you want to be in therapy, to talk about this?

*Ja, I spoke to Hayley last week, and she suggested that I see an um, psychologist.*

Ok.

Would you like me to put you on the list at Wits, at the Emthonjeni Centre.

*Ja*

It would be between R5 and R80, so it is very affordable, and it could carry on for about 18 months.

*Ok, that will be nice.*

Ok, I will make enquiries about that and get in touch with you on that.

Im wondering about the separations from your aunt and your Granny and your Mom, were there any things that made it bearable, like other people in your family?

*I was always, like surrounded by, um people. Loving people, like my uncles, they were always there, (sniffs loudly), because I was the first grandchild. They still love me, they always loved me, even though their sister is no longer here.*

You had a very loving family

*And a supportive family*

And your cousin is also very important. She is the one who is very close to you?

*She is very close, she is like a sister. I tend to forget that she is not my biological sister. Because we are staying together, we are sharing holidays, because my aunt is outside, and my other aunt is in Kokstad, and we are staying in my mother's house together.*

Where is your mother's house?

*It is in King Williamstown*

Ok, So you go there together during the holidays? How do you think your experiences have impacted on how you may be with your own children. Have you thought about that?

*Yes, I always think about that. My kids, when I have kids I don't want them to.. I want them to live with me and their father, I want the person to marry me first, before I have kids. Because um, everyone in my family, even my aunt, they are not married. The father ran away, my other aunt is not married, the father ran away. And my aunt is having a son and the mother is not part of the son, the growth of the son. I don't want that. For them, what is important for them, that I can afford to take my child to school, I don't need him, if he doesn't need me I don't need him too. I don't want that. If he doesn't want me I won't beg him to stay, but I hope that he will see the need for him to be there for his child. I don't want them to grow without a father. Because what I always ask them is, you guys all grew up with a mother and a father, but it seems as though you don't care whether we have a father. We are a lot of cousins without fathers.*

You are thinking about your own mother and your aunt, why they let that happen.

*They didn't have control, I just don't get it.*

You just don't get it

*No, I don't.. I don't want a baby without marriage. If it happens, marry me, why not. I can't raise alone. I might afford to raise a child alone, but emotionally, that baby needs him. Even if you don't support financially, be there emotionally.*

Are you in a relationship?

*I am*

And how is that?

*It is very nice. He is a loving person.*

It sounds like you have a sense that men leave?

*Mm they do (strong emphasis)*

Around babies or anyway?

*Around babies, but even without babies, they leave most of the time. I tend to be harsh, I tend to, um, to use my experiences on him, like when we have an argument, um I, I don't beg. I tell him, if you want to leave, leave. I'm used to that. People leave, just go. If you are wrong you are wrong. I use my past experiences, my father left, why don't you go.*

So your father not being there affects you a lot. How does he cope with that?

*He will wait for me to calm down and then he will tell me that he doesn't like this and that..*

*And when he tells me what to do, I tell him, you are not my father. I don't know my father and I don't expect you to be my father. He says that, you know when we argue, you always tell me that I'm not your father. I don't want to be your father. I say I don't want anyone to control me, to take his part, just want to live my life. Because I'm used to, for me it's like, like my my my my, my aunt's boyfriend, when um, he told me to do something, I feel like I can't do that. Laughs. You can't tell me to do anything. Because I'm not used to a father figure. Except my uncles, and my uncles are like my friends, and they don't tell us to go anything. They don't make rules in the house, they are like my cousins. So I don't want anyone to control me. I I I can take it when a female shouts at me and tells me that this is wrong. But it is a different story when a man tells me..*

You haven't had any male authority figures in your life. I imagine it is a complication in your relationships.

*Yes. As a result my boyfriend suffers when my aunt is back. I tend to forget about him and focus on her.*

How long have you and your boyfriend been together now?

*It is five years now*

So it really is a long relationship.

We have come to the end. I have really appreciated you sharing your story. I know it has been quite emotional for you.

*Sorry for that*

No, I think it is, in a way it is good because it means, it is such a core personal experience that you have been talking about, so I suppose if you hadn't been upset, it may have been strange,

*Ja*

But I realize that it has cost you. You may well feel emotionally very tender in the next few days. So go gentle.

*Yes I will.*

Tried to call 4 times in the four weeks after the interview.

I did give Sibongile all the contact numbers for Wits Emthonjeni Centre in the interview just in case I couldn't get hold of her.

**Pumi (born 1981 in Rustenburg)**

Ok, so Pumi, thank you very much

Ok

Tell me, tell me about your first two years, what you know about them?

*What shall I tell you?*

Like where you were born?

*I don't remember anything.*

Im sure you don't remember but perhaps your parents have told you about your early years?... where you were born, how long your Mom stayed with you, and the details of your early life...

*I was born in Rustenburg; it was then called Baputotswane,*

Yes

*Cos my mom is Tswana and my Dad is from Venda*

OK

*I don't know, they probably met in Joburg but I was born in Bop, and then, um, with the grandmother, before my parents were married.*

So you were born when they were still a couple, before they married?

*Yes, I was born before my parents were married. Cos like, when I was growing up, I was living with my grandparents. I was told that, when I started to grow up, when I was starting to grow up, my grandfather died, but I don't remember that. I was told that I was his favourite grandchild.*

Oh really

*Yes, that's what I was told, but I don't remember. And my Mom had to leave us with my grand mother.*

That was your Mom's Mom

Yes

*And I ve seen pictures of when I was with my grandmother. Otherwise I don't remember anything. I remember that we moved to Joburg, I was still young but I have bits and pieces.*

Bits of memory

*Laughs, yes but I don't remember everything.*

So you were born in Bop, and your mother was there. I wonder, do you know how long your Mom stayed with you after you were born?

*Later, from what she told me, it was later. From what she told me, she started working there when I was young, and I was looked after by my Granny during the day. Then at night she was with me. Then it was only later when she came to work in Joburg, I was two or three. She left me and my little brother, who was a few months old,*

So are you and your brother are about two years apart in age?

*I was about 3 when he was born.*

So it was early in his life when she came to work in Joburg. Do you know if she breastfed?

*Laughs, Im not sure about those, Im sure she did. I mean most... most people didn't have money back in the days to buy baby milk. Most of them did breastfeed, so I think she probably did.*

So somewhere about the time that you were three she left you and came to work...

*To work in Joburg*

So your relationship with your Granny was already strong if she was looking after you during the day?

*Ja, she only looked after us when I was that small.. Cos later on, my Dad was Venda. A few months after my brother was born they got married, a traditional thing, and then we were, we had to go and live in Venda*

Ok

*With my other granny.*

Ok, so you had a change then. So first your Mom left, you were three when your Mom left, and when did you go to Venda?

*It was before I was six, probably five..*

Im sticking with your Granny because Id like to know what you remember about that relationship with your Granny, your Mom's Mom.

*I mean, I liked her a lot, I loved her a lot. I remember, when we went there to visit I would always look forward to going there.*

So she was a very important person to you?

*She was*

So you would always look forward to going there?

*Who would you say was your primary caregiver, your Granny or your Mom?*

*Do you mean before or after?*

Up until the time you went to Venda?

*I think it would be my Granny, I mean my Mom provided financially but she was always there for us.*

Ok, so your Granny was your primary caregiver. Then sometime around the time you were four or five you went to Venda to live with your Dad's family?

*It is very blurry, in those times, cos I remember, there was a point that I came to live in Joburg, I think I came to live in Joburg for a few years and then that's when I was taken to Venda, to meet my other family, and then I came back. But then I went back when I was about six because I was ready for school. I went there permanently to start school.*

Ok, and what do you remember about that time, going to Venda and starting school?

*I remember when I first went there I didn't go with my Mom, I went with my aunt. I cant really say anything cos I was young, but ok, it was a bit different because my Mom wasn't there and I was going to a different place.*

It sounds like it was, maybe scary?

*Not scary, but I didn't want to be staying there with people that I didn't know.*

So there was a whole unfamiliar part of it?

*Ja*

And how did you manage to settle at school, how did it go?

*Around the community there were kids my age you know, you get to play with the kids and learn the language. I was speaking Tswana, and I had to learn the language, and get to know my Granny. I remember, back in the day she used to drink so she was a bit scary.*

Ok, so initially you weren't sure of her?

*She was scary. They used to call her, whenever kids were naughty in the community, they would call her name and kids would behave, so she was (laughs)...*

She was a bit scary? She sounds like she was a bit scary?

*She was scary, I was also a bit scared of her (laughs) Ja*

*But I got ...*

Was your brother with you

*Ja, we both went*

How was he, how did he cope?

*I think he was ok because (sigh) he was still very small, I think he was like.. when I was six he probably was like three, and I was always around so he was ok.*

So you were an important person for him?

*Ja*

I wonder if his presence gave you support or was it that you were giving him support?

*Even he, back, when I go back home, it was just us, I didn't have anyone else..*

So he was very important to you?

*Ja, when I go play with other kids, but when I got home at night it was him, I would play with my little brother.*

Is he still an important part of your life?

*Yes, he is still important to me, he is my brother.*

You got through the adjustment of your Dads Mom together?

*Ja*

*We went there to my Dads Mom with my Mom, she took us to help us get adapted there.*

How long did she stay there with you?

*I wouldn't know because when I started school she wasn't there, like, my my Dads brothers wife took me to my first day of school, my Mom wasn't around. I think she just stayed a few months, till I had adapted, and I had learned some of the language.*

So there was a sense that you would need some time to adapt?

*Ja, there was.*

Im thinking that starting school is quite a major thing for a little girl or boy. I wonder how it was for you?

*I think I was a bit shy at school, and it wasn't so great. I mean I wasn't doing so great at school, for the first few years, like Grade 1 and 2. I think I was a bit slow.*

It was difficult for you at school?

*Ja*

And you have a sense that there might have been some relation between your school adjustment and your living arrangements?

*I think so because back in the days, my Dads family wasn't waell off and my Mom's family was better, because I was from a better family to a worse family.*

Financially there was a bit of a difference?

*Financially there was a big difference. I didn't get to eat what I used to eat..*

So there was a change in your diet, and the environment..

*And the buildings too, back in the day there was all those round houses, back in Rustenburg there were nice houses, in Venda it was like poor.*



Mm

*And you look at other families, they were well off, and we were from this poor family.*

Were there cultural things; was that the reason why you went?

*Ja, cos apparently, my mom cant be married and her kids staying at her house, the kids had to go and live at her in laws. But these days they don't really follow it, but back int eh days the rules were very strict, so we had to go.*

And how do you think your parents felt about that, was it something that they ever spoke about?

*Not really, I think, I mean they didn't, they didn't really know that, they didn't really understand that the adjustment would be difficult, like that we needed to adjust...*

Although they did seem to know that, as your Mom did go with you to help you adjust? There must have been some awareness

*Maybe, ja probably. Yes, but they, Im sure if I can explain... I don't think that they did understand because I didn't understand myself, they might have affected me but I wouldn't have known what was affecting me at school, why am I failing, why am I like this. I am sure that they couldn't have picked that up.*

So they didn't seem to pick that up?

*No, they didn't*

And your Granny, your Dad's mother, did she seem to pick up anything?

*Um my dad, these people, like they are so, what can I say, like those old people, like they are not educated so they cant really...*

They didn't seem to have the insight?

*They didn't think about that, I was only if you could be fed and have a place to sleep, they didn't see all the other things around it, the little things, as long as you fed and you have a place to crash, that's all that counted.*

That's all that counted. Did your relationship with that Granny develop ever, was there ever a good relationship?

*It was ok, but I wouldn't call it good.*

It wasn't ever an intimate bond of love?

*It just just ok, she was putting us up, but it was never more than that. It never got to the point where I would tell her stuff.*

Ok, and how long did you stay there for?

*Venda, schu, I stayed my whole life... ok, not really my whole life, but I attended my whole primary school there.*

So it was about six years till when you were at the end of primary school

*Ja, and then I attended high school there, I started high school, I did the whole of grade 8 there.*

So you were there for about 7 years

Ja

Do you have any sense of why you moved at the end of Grade 8 back to Joburg?

*Ok, back in the days, at that time my Dad got to be better off, with him working, he got a, back in the days, he had a nice job, and his boss was pushing him to buy a house, and he wasn't allowed back in the days, as he was working in Fourways, and he was not allowed to buy in Randburg. So he preferred us to stay in Venda and him and my Mom rented out a room in Randburg, him and my mom, and we would only come for holidays to visit. Then in 94, that's when we permanently moved to Joburg, he bought a house in Randburg, and we permanently moved.*

How did you feel about that move?

*It was so exciting, it was always exciting when we came to visit them. SO it was very nice, when we were told that we had to permanently move here, it was nice.*

Ok, I can imagine how nice that was.

So you were about 14 and your brother was about 10 or 11. That was at the beginning of your Grade 9 year.

*Ja, he was still in primary.*

You had said that having your brother around in the Venda years was very very important?

*Ja, when when, where was I now, my other sister was born..*

Oh really, so you had another sibling,

*Actually there are four of us, and my sister had come and stay with us too. My sister was born in 1988.*

*And then there was another baby after that too. There was also my aunt, they asked my Moms younger sister to come and live with us, to attend to us in Venda, so that at least... my Gran was old you know.*

*Ja but my aunt only stayed with us for a few years.*

Oh, ok.

*Ja she was at high school in Venda to be with us but then she finished school there and left.*

SO there was perhaps a sense that your Gran wasn't able to cope, she was old and it would be difficult for her.

*Yes, I think my Mom wanted us to be around somebody young. Yes, in 90, just before we moved to Joburg in 93 my youngest brother was born and he didn't get to go to Venda.*

So he didn't go to Venda, he was still young..

*Yes, he didn't go to Venda, he was too young.*

How do you feel about his experience in comparison to yours?

*I don't really mind, it was quite an experience, at least I have something to tell (laughs)*

So your experience was very different.

*Yes, he has been here his whole life.*

So how was it adjusting back to life in Joburg? At 14, you were then a teenager, adjusting back into your parent's house, new rules, new school, new everything?

*It was exciting but it was a bit.. ok it was exciting but it was different, different friends..*

A bit of an adjustment again?

*Ja, and this time you can actually feel it cos you are older compared to being young.*

Yes, you were a lot older. How were you coping at school then?

*I went back to being quiet again, cos I wasn't used to people, pause, and I didn't have many friends, only a few friends, but as the year went I got to be ok..*

It sounds like you are quite resilient, that you coped ok?

*I think you have to be, it's the only way.*

Sure, so your moves contributed to you being resilient, or you were resilient before?

*I think it contributed, to being young and not being with my parents. I mean I didn't have much of a choice.*

What do you think the things were about you, and about your life that helped you through these two big adjustments?

*Ok, when, I think my parents. I knew they were there, I mean they tried with us, and understood, even though I mean, they tried to come back as often as they can. Back in the days when they didn't have a car it was very difficult. I mean they didn't have a car, it was a lot..*

You felt their love?

*Yes, they were really trying. And ja, for the fact that the minute they had a house they got us back.*

Before they could even breathe they had you back.

*Ja, laughs, ja, they bought a house the previous year September and in December they told us they we were coming for good.*

Mm, Ja. And how is your relationship with your Mom and Dad?

*Its ok, laughs, ok, these days we were fighting a lot because of our differences...*

The adjustment to you being a teenager and then back with them?

*No, otherwise, when I came back as a teenager we were fine, we were very fine. It was later that we fought. Ja we have fought a lot.*

What sort of things have you fought about?

*Laughs, no, just me moving. Like my Dad, cos I stayed with them for a long time and Im only moving this year. I thought that now I can do whatever I want and my dad doesn't like that, he wants to treat me like a kid.*

So he battles with your independence.

*Ja, he does. Laughs.*

And I wonder about when you have children, how you would feel about them to their Granny?

*Wow, I would want to raise my own kids, I wouldn't send them anywhere.*

So it sounds like there was something about being sent away that had an impact on you?

*If I would have a child I would rather struggle with my kid than send them away, I'd make sure I was living with them.*

Ok, so you feel strongly about that. How do you feel things should be for children as they grow?

*Just the love and the support. I just don't think other people would love you as much as your parents, support you and be there for you as their parent would. I don't think that they can. Just the understanding. Other people would just feed you and clothe you but, sometimes you just wanna be held, or*

An intimate emotional connection?

*You don't ever feel that with other people.*

Sure

*So with your parents around I think it helps a lot. When I have children I will raise them myself.*

**Lulu (Born 1983, born in JHB, taken to Estcourt at 6 months)**

Again Lulu, thank you for your time.

Could you tell me what you know about your first two years?

*Ok, My first two years, um, well I was living wit my Granny in Estcourt, right, sort of like a coloured area, right, its not like, it was like really old houses. Im not sure if my Gran was the first person to live there but it was like these old old houses and there was so many of us. It was me and a couple of my cousins and their aunties, and my Gran as well. She was maybe like, I guess the head of the family. And then um, my cousins were staying with their parents as well, under the same roof. So I was like the only one who didn't have their mother there with me. All I remember really was like rejection like a whole lot of rejection and trying to fit in. Obviously they could see that I was trying and they used to take advantage of that.*

How did they take advantage?

*In a way like, like they know that there is no one to back you up, and Gran is not always there and whatever, she has gone somewhere, wherever, and then they like make you do all the cleaning, and those kinds of things. Also always teasing, and those kind of things.*

Were you the youngest?

*No, not really.*

Just going back Lulu, what year were you born?

*1983*

And where were you born Lulu?

*I was born here in Johannesburg and when I was six months my mom had to take me back home because she also had to try to see what she can do, and stuff, and um, she was staying with my Dad, and my Dad was working for Uncle Robert, and that is how our relationship with K's family began. My Dad was working for Uncle Robert, my Mom was working somewhere else, it was in the same street as Uncle Roberts house in Northcliffe. So Every time I used to visit over the holidays, I stayed wit my Gran from six months, so we used to come and visit and stuff when I started going to school and those kinds of things. I twas me and my borhters, my borther was ten years older than me.*

Was he also growing up with you?

*No he was actually on the farm, and he actually had it worse?*

*Ok, I stayed in a coloured area, which was in the town, but not like nice town, like very weird town, sort of like, um, in the coloured area, sort of like shacks, those sorts of houses. And my brother was living in the farms with my other Gran.*

Was that your Dad's?

*No, My Mom's um, we shared the same Mom, we don't share the same Dad. And my Mom, its my Mom's aunty, sort of, cos my Mom's Mom passed away. So I cant say that I know my real Gran. She passed away a while, and my Dad's mother I never met. My Dad was from Zimbabwe. So um,*

So your brother lived with an other Gran and you lived wit your Mothers aunt who was like your Gran.

*Ja*

So you were there from six months, and before that you were with your Mom. And do you know if your Mom breastfed?

*She did.*

So she breastfed for six months, and then you were started on the bottle when you went to your Gran. And has anyone ever told you how you were when you went there as a baby, whether there were any difficulties for you?

*Apparently I was very shy, ja, I wasn't like (laughs) I am now. (laughs) Now Im really happy, Im kind of overboard, Im really happy and I try not to let things affect me. Cries, coughs... silence.*

I can imagine that this is upsetting for you, difficult things to talk about for you.

Silence for a while.

Thinking back to when you were a little baby does bring up many painful feelings for you...

*Ja it does.*

*I think that is maybe why Im so very happy now because Im trying to make up for all those bad times.*

You were very little then, and as you grew up you felt that you had been taken advantage of..

*Yes, I always had to fight, when I started staying here in JHB, that is when I was in Grade 2, apparently there was one time when I came here, Uncle Robert said I was in a very bad state, Uncle Robert said that this child needs to stay here, I was filled with sores, and all of that, just very unhealthy.*

You had sores everywhere, do you think that you were undernourished?

*Yes, I was. Uncle Robert used to help out, at school I would get decent food because Uncle Robert would send catering stuff to school every month.*

He was really concerned about you?

*Very much*

And your Dad was working for Uncle Robert but your Mom was somewhere else?

*Eventually my Mom was working for Uncle Robert too..*

What did they do for Uncle Robert?

*My Dad was working in the garden and my Mom was working in the house.*

Ok

Do you know how you felt about leaving your Gran and all the other children?

*Oh, I was very very happy. I still remember the day. Um, I went to one of the rooms and one of my aunts was sitting there. I was really like really happy and my aunt said something like, Ja, we are going see you back.. I was like very young at the time, I remember her words, she said "ja, we are going to see you back here in a few months as a child we have to look after", whatever whatever whatever... You know. So I was just stunned, ok, whatever that means, type of thing you know. But when I think about it now its like, you know, very, they had very abusive language and stuff. And also very abusive ways, as well.*

Did they used to punish you?

*Ja, lots of punishments, and also like physical abuse as well. I was always getting beaten up you know?*

By the aunties or the Grannie or ?..

*By the aunties and the other children as well. They all used to fight for nothing. The fights would always be between Lulu and whoever.*

So you were often involved in fights?

*Yes, it wasn't a happy experience, Im not going to lie to you. It was very terrible you know. It was very terrible you know, it was bad.*

Mm, if I think about it developmentally, you were there from six months to six or seven years, when you came to Johannesburg Those are important years and I can see that it has made you upset to just think about it. I can imagine that those were very scary years?

*Ja they were. And my Dad also didn't make it very simple as well, just when I thought Mommy Daddy yes, I can have a normal life, YES, I used to dream of eating jam and bread (laughs), because that was my happy meal type of thing you know. So it was like, at least Im going to eat jam and bread every day now. I was just so so happy. And then my Dad decides to leave.*

Really

*So Grade 2 I come and we have this bond all year. He fetches me from school every day, he drops me off at school, it was just like a normal whatever you know. We all use dto get home round about five or something, I was at aftercare cos he had to like work. He used to come and fetch me at the place in the afternoon, we basically had a bond you know. You know, I don't know if you know this road, but from Blairgowrie, we used to walk that long road, cos I think we use to get dropped off at the Randburg taxi rank,*

Ok

*and we used to walk that long road, so you know how much bonding must been done that whole long time.*

Just you and your Dad

*Ja, just me and my Dad. Then one Friday he decides to drop me off at school as usual and then um, he just didn't come back.*

And no one fetched you?

*My Mom had to fetch me, like later on in the evening, so.*

Oh shame, Im sorry to hear that.

*Im actually getting over it now, Ive actually, Im coming to terms with it this year only, after all this long time. I haven't been able to speak about my Dad without crying.*

Did he literally just disappear?

*He just literally disappeared. He left me with a.. those days there was a five rand note, he left me with a five rand note, so Im thinking Party, and its Friday you know. Im sure I was buying everone everything, and myself as well. Little did I know that was the last time I was seeing him.*

And You have never heard from him again?

*I have never heard from him him again. He is still alive because I am still in contact with one of his sons,*

Ok, from another relationship?

Yes

Ok, was it the brother from the farm?

*No, it wasn't that brother; it was a brother from my Dad. Anyway, its not like I get any sense about him.*

You really don't know what happened there?

*No I don't.*

And how did your Mom cope then?

*Oh then Um, that's when, sort of like when our relationship started not being cool, because of the questions I used to ask, like not getting any answers, and then I started becoming rebellious, because I wasn't getting any answers. It just didn't make sense you know. And ja....*

*My relationship with my Mom has always been mostly good and she tried in her way, I actually understand like everything we have been through together, because I can imagine from her side how it must have been for her, in her whole entire life, not to have her mother, cos when she was two her mother passed away. I can imagine from her side..*

She suffered a big loss then, when she was two..

*Yes, I can imagine from her side. At least I had her and she's also just trying in her way that she knows best, to show support, you know what I mean. Even though her love for me became a bit, I cant say too much, but it became a bit weird. Because now she didn't want me to be in a relationship wit this guy that Im in a relationship with, and she also didn't want my brother to be in a relationship withb the girl that he is in a relationship with. She is just over protective, no one was good enough for us.*

She really struggled to let go..

*Ja, she did*

So that caused complications in your relationship with your Mom. It sounds like you are understanding towards your Moms point of view. How was it for you when she was over protective?

*It was a bit irritating you know, but after like a while you know, we like just thinking about stuff, you know, cos I know where we come from together, me and my Mom, and you know..*

How old is your Mom now?

*She is fifty, Ill let you know now.... Thinks... fifty....she should be turning 56*

Ok, So she is still young really. She seemed to retire early?

*Ja, cos there were just too many complications and stuff, during that period of her being... you know?*

Ja.

Did your Mom and Dad know about what was happening to you during those first six years?

*Yes yes, my Mom did know very well, cos she used to see me and stuff, when she used to come over and when I was around here in Joburg as well. So she knew very well. Um, But I doubt that there would have ever, there would be that I must maybe come out here.*

Was that up to Uncle Robert when it happened?

*Yes, Uncle Robert made it happen. Cos I mean, Ive seen my brother, he stayed there up until he finished matric. So he didn't come up here, so I think the same thing would have happened to me, and I think my life would have been down.*

What has happened to him?

*Well, luckily enough, he managed to to eventually pass matric. Cos he also got very abused, you know. I don't know what happened but, I don't know if it was matric o0r std 9 or std 8, he just kept on failing and failing and failing. Then my Mom built her first house on the farm. Then he had his own peace of mind, and then he could pass matric.*

So he did make it eventually?

*Ja, he did.*

*Ja, he now has his own house, um in the South, in Naturena, and Uncle Robert, when he passed matric, helped him to get a job at Nedbank. So now he works at Nedbank.*

So he has done well, once he got through school. So he is ten years older than you?

So, then, you know, Im going back to when you came to Johannesburg, and it was a year later that your Dad disappeared? And that then led to a lot of friction between you and your Mom. She was obviously distressed and you were asking questions,

*Ja, it wasn't cool at all, you know.*

And did your school work suffer during that time?

*Um (pause), well, lets say I could have done better you know. Ja. I actually used to just pass. Then in std 7 I failed because that is when I was starting to hang around with just whoever I thought loved me. Friends wise. So those were actually not so cool people. Ja, so anyway I failed,*



*and then um, I passed um, the following year. And then I went to Std 8, std 9 and std 10 During those times I was sort of like, um, a rebellious child you know. I was always in trouble, always in trouble. I was in trouble at school cos I was smoking in the bathroom, and um, you know, I actually didn't even like smoking but then I eventually jus started smoking because I was hanging around with smokers.*

So those were quite unhappy times I would think. You were looking for love? Do you link that to your early experiences?

*Ja, silence... so I've always just been looking for love, all the time, all the time.. all the time. And sometimes people took advantage you know.*

Do you feel you are still looking for love in the same way?

*I feel like I.. um.. pauses, I am still looking for love but now um, I can say that I know better, you know. I know who I need to hang around with, and I know who I need to not hang around with, and I know what's wrong and I know what's right.*

Mm

*Because of all those experiences I've been through and stuff, and being hurt and stuff. I actually don't regret anything you know, cos I can say that I've sort of come out of this rollercoaster you know. Im not saying that IM cool now or anything, but at least I've learned so much stuff.*

So you have been able to grow and learn and develop through the difficult things.

*Ja, ja*

So, the years, I mean it sounds like the years, it sounds like there was one idyllic year with your Mom and Dad and then things changed and it was a big disappointment and a really big difficulty. Then right up through high school things were difficult. And your relationship with your Mom during that time?

*Oh my Mom, my relationship with my Mom, it was ok, it wasn't great. I could never like speak to her about anything because I feel like I couldn't trust her. Up until this day I feel like I cant trust her. Because its my Mom, then I like turn a blind eye, because like whatever, just whatever, this is my Mom you know. So I tell her stuff but I cant like open up to her like you know fully..*

So does it feel like she doesn't fully understand what was going on for you?

*Ja.*

MM

*At the time that we were supposed to bond and everything, and I was supposed to trust her, that didn't happen, you know, during my teenage years, and whatever?*

I wonder why, I mean did she seem on a different wavelength to you?

*Mm, she did. I actually was closer to my friend's moms at the time.*

Ja, sure.

And what, the thing that made your separation from your Mom and your Dad bearable, when you were seven, or eight? Were there any factors that made it bearable, was there anyone in your life who helped?

*Yes, of course, of course. I can say that throughout everything it was just Uncle Robert that helped me. He has helped me with so much (cries for some time)*

So he has been a stable loving person in your life. Pause while Lulu cries.....

It seems like he has been a Dad to you and maybe you wish that he had been your Dad?

*Yes, I do.*

*There has never been anyone in my life who has shown me so so much life. And even if I have made mistakes he has been there for me. Cries....*

Ja.

pause

And it sounds like he is very close to your daughter too?

*Ja, continues to cry....*

Pause

There seem to be some complicated feelings, Uncle Robert is so special to you...

*I always like think, what if he wasn't around, where would I have ended up, just those feelings and thoughts make me feel, I just question, how come I was so lucky, just those sort of things....*

*Just um... silence*

It sounds like the thought of 'what if he hadn't been there' is a big thing for you?

*It is, because I know that I wouldn't be where I am today, you know, so.... Sighs.... Just thinking about it....*

He has been so generous and kind to you.

What did you do after school?

*After school I went to Boston College. And then I wanted to just specialize in radio and stuff, I was staying wit my Mom. My Mom was actually working for these other German people who were very abusive and stuff. They were just crazy.*

When was that?

*That was, when was that...., um, ...*

After school?

*That was like in high school*

*So she wasn't with Uncle Robert, she has never stayed wit Uncle Robert on his property or anything, because my dad was working for Uncle Robert, but he was actually staying at Mrs Green's house, this other lady. Then when she left the house, she sold it and then the German people took over, and then they also took over my Mom as well. And they were thinking that they were also going to get my Dad but my Dad never came back.*

Ok

*So anyway, um.....cries, pause.... Ja*

So they were abusive and horrible towards you and your Mom?

*Ja to me and my Mom. They actually didn't want me to be there.*

*My Mom said ok, so where is she going to go?*

Your Mom had to protect you against them?

*Ja, ... pause, I literally had to hide when I was coming in so htat they couldnt see me so they couldn't get pissed off. And the guy was always in the garden or the garage. And when you passed the garage, that was the way to our room. So that didn't help me to feel accepted at all.*

That is not a good feeling

*Cos I was always running and hiding*

So that was another really difficult time?

*Ja*

So you never actually lived at Uncle Robert, you were either at the Green's or the horrible German's?

*Ja*

And your brother, are you close to him now?

*Ja, we are close. But he also has his life and his own way of living, and I have also got my life and my own way of living.*

So does it feel like you have different ways of being?

*Ja.*

I wonder, because you were together as young children, you shared some difficult times but not together. In your early years you didn't seem to have anyone there to look after you. Then you lost your Dad, and you were with your Mom and that has been complicated in some ways, so Uncle Robert has been your stable caring figure.

*Ja, still crying on and off*

I wonder, have you ever been in therapy Lulu?

*Yes, I have. I had six lessons. Uncle Robert used to take me there. It was nice. I went to see her in Sandton.*

So you went to see her through your work EAP?

*Yes, I only got six lessons.*

We then talk about her going back to see same therapist again.

We briefly discussed the vulnerable feelings and her intention to go back to therapy.

*Then she says, I will use this to my advantage, because I have actually learnt a whole lot more about myself today.*

## COLLECTION NO: AG3275

---

### APARTHEID ARCHIVES PROJECT

#### **PUBLISHER:**

*Publisher:-* Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand

*Location:-* Johannesburg

©2011

#### **LEGAL NOTICES:**

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Copyright Clearance:** Copyright for photographs is held by Cedric Nunn, the originating photographer. Copyright for documents and papers is held by the original author of the paper.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While digital records are derivatives of electronic digital documents and photographs and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

---