

Int This is an interview with Ajax Boholo and it's the 15th of August (2008) on Friday. Ajax on behalf of SALS Foundation in the United States, we really want to thank you for taking the time and agreeing to participate in the LRC Oral History Project. I wondered if we could start the interview...if you could talk about your early childhood memories growing up in South Africa under apartheid, and where you think your sense of social justice and injustice developed?

AB Well, you know, I was obviously born in the township like any other, you know, African child. I was born in the North West Province...well, it's called the North West Province now, it used to be called the Transvaal, in a mining town called, you know, Klerksdorp. My parents...well I was basically raised by my grandparents...they lived in a mine...in the mining town. For me, you know, I think at the...this is 1968...I was born in '68, and, we experienced, you know, segregation and apartheid pretty much, you know. Time you were born...formative years...you've got to realise that, you know, something is clearly wrong in this society. Partly, I mean, being a mining town you knew that, you know, black people or Africans in particular, would, you know, would be the one...the ones toiling, you know, underground. Management was always, you know, exclusively white. If there was any sprinkle of, you know, management or any pretence of management, it was always, you know, a black person being a clerk in the mine, so, you know, for me that's when I...my sense of...the sense that something is clearly, you know, not ok in this country, you know, came from. I think anybody would tell you that...anybody who's worked in a mine would tell you that, you know. That was the heartbeat of apartheid in many ways, so, you know. I was raised there, in that environment in 19...when I was doing my grade eight. Well, you know, 1976 I was, I think in...I was doing what was called Sub B, yes, primary school, when the 1976 riots, you know, occurred. You know, and I remember my...I had a grandmother who was very much aware of, you know, political developments in the country, and by and large, you know, I...I started taking an interest in politics, you know, at a fairly young age through her. She was an avid, ferocious reader of the newspaper so, you know, after school she would sit me down and, you know, make me read newspaper articles. Half the time I didn't quite understand what was going on but, you know, 1977, when Steve Biko was killed, I was still fairly young...I must have been about, you know, seven or eight. Came back from school, and she was reading a newspaper article and I saw...I still remember, you know, I still remember the picture of Steve Biko at the back of, you know, that newspaper, and, you know, she asked me to read the article to her, and I did, and I started asking questions about, you know, who Steve Biko was, and, you know, she explained to me who Steve Biko was. She was from the Eastern Cape, my grandmother, so, you know, that's where most of, I think, most of the cadres of the Liberation Movement, you know, come from...by design or accident, that's what, you know. But that's...that experience...the death of Steven Biko for me was the beginning of...because she used to tell me, Steven Biko was...he was a liberation fighter, he's been killed by the apartheid forces etc, so I knew about apartheid, you know, at a fairly young age. And it was buttressed by what I was seeing around me, and, that's where my sense of, you know, I think social justice, you know, came from.

Int ...during the 1980s were you politically involved at all, while you were at school?

AB I became involved yes...in the 80s I was involved. In fact I was one of the guys that had to leave Klerksdorp, you know, because we were forever harassed by the cops. I was pretty much involved in, you know, the SRC at the time, you know, at school...junior secondary school at the time. We were taught (laughs)...we were taught by army officers at some point.

Int Really?

AB Yes. We were taught by army officers at some point. I remember sitting in a class, and these guys would come in, and clearly, you know, we just figured something is...is not right here. I mean, the townships are becoming militarized...I think it was part of the state's initiative at the time, you know, to kill resistance at source, you know, and there was a strong focus on the youth at the time, that schools are becoming, you know, universities if you like, you know, for fermenting civil strife, so they used to call these white cops in and military officers. There's a time when (laughs)...I had a friend... he used to call me "The great preaching genocide". He didn't even know what that meant...I didn't either, I mean I didn't know what he meant by that, but I guess it was because I was very vocal in class about these social issues. So this one army officer picked up the name...I'd written it down, you know, in my Afrikaans...what do you call it, an exercise book. So he called me in, and said he wanted to take a drive with me, took me to Klerks...to Potchefstroom, a military camp. Kept asking me questions in the car, I mean, I was young, I wasn't really that, you know. Kept asking me questions about, you know, do I know the ANC? Are they actively involved, you know, in recruiting membership in the school? I said: No, I know nothing about that. I hear about the ANC, you know, I guess like everybody else, and they, you know, on the radio and TV, you know, I'm told they are terrorists...I'm not sure what, you know. He took me to the military camp, we spent a bit of time...they didn't do anything to me, they didn't assault me or anything, you know. Got some of his friends to come and, you know, have a chat with me. They asked me the same questions, you know: Am I involved in any, you know, structures...ANC structures in the townships? I said: I know nothing about the ANC, the existence, of ANC structures, in the township. If we protest, we protest about issues that affect us as students and, you know, nothing else. You obviously had to be very careful what you told them. They let me go, but then they started arresting, you know, some of us, and I decided then, you know, to move...leave the township; and I went to the Free State. The Free State...Qwa-Qwa at the time was a homeland. I think there were...the crack down was obviously more intense, you know, in the townships, so at the time you either went to exile or you went to some safe haven somewhere, you know, in the homelands. I went to Qwa-Qwa, studied there, did my matric and then went to university. University, I became a member of the South African Communist Party. In fact, you know, I was pretty much a leftist; I leaned so much to the left it wasn't funny. I think I was very angry then...extremely angry. So I was very active in the, you know, Student Representative Council at the University of Durban-Westville. The UDF at the time was, you know, very much involved in, you know, immobilising people against, you know, apartheid. They were very active, you know, so on campus, so, we were part of, you know, those structures. I also took Political Science as one of (laughs), sort of my Majors, it might be largely because I think, you know, the interest in for me in politics, started, like I said, you know, early childhood, up to, you know, university. I was appointed a tutor in the Political Science

department, did, you know, three years at the University of Durban-Westville...they wanted me to proceed with, you know, political studies, I said: No, thank you (laughs). You know, I'd rather focus on something...at least acquire professional, you know, qualification and then, you know, I was doing Law and Politics so, you know, I decided not to pursue the postgraduate degree in Politics. I'd rather, you know...

Int Do an LLB?

AB I'd rather, you know, opted for an LLB, ya. And, you know, Human Rights Law was a natural choice for me, you know, it was just a natural choice. You know, when I applied for Articles, I applied to the South African Human Rights Lawyers...that's what they were called at the time I think, and I...

Int And you did your...LLB at the University of...?

AB Durban-Westville, and then my LLB at the University of Natal...ya, the University of Natal.

Int Were you involved in Street Law projects or the Law Clinic at all?

AB I was involved in Street Law projects yes, yes. I was involved in Street Law projects at Natal University. We used to go out to the townships and, you know, teach kids about, you know, about the law of basic principles...the law etc; again, by choice. I mean it was just a sense that...I've always had the sense that, you know, if you empower people, they know their rights, you know, it helps them, I suppose, to assert them, when ordinarily they would just be bludgeoned into submission. So ya, I was involved in the Street Law projects. Joined the LRC, so, you know, when I joined the LRC...again, it had a very, very rich history, you know, of the struggle and Human Rights Law and...

Int Was it the Durban office you joined or the Johannesburg one?

AB No, I was...in the Johannesburg office, Pritchard Street, yes.

Int When you joined here who were your principals, what were your rotations? What sort of experience in Public Interest law did you get?

AB Principals? The first one was Trevor Bailey. Trevor focused largely on consumer matters, landlord and tenant, you know, especially, you know, in the agricultural holdings, and in the urban areas, where, you know, massive evictions were happening in the rural areas, without, you know, just arbitrary evictions, those are the sort of

cases that we used to do in the...in Johannesburg again, you know, there were a few cases that we did, you know, again, you know, against landlords that were either overcharging clients or just simply, you know, not following, you know, due process whenever they had to evict clients. I think I was with...I worked with Trevor for about six months, so we never really...we never did any court work with Trevor. Trevor never really...he was a Chamber lawyer, you know, he preferred to fight his battles over the phone or in meetings, etc. I then worked with Odette...was it Odette...

Int Geldenhuys?

AB Yes, I worked with Odette Geldenhuys. Odette...well we did mostly I think a bit of labour work I know with Odette, and just general, you know, cases. I remember there was one against the municipality that we did. A child had drowned in a pool somewhere in the Vereeniging area...child drowned and, you know, we sued the council for negligence. You know, we were in the middle of that case when I think, you know, we had to settle, largely because of, you know...we didn't go to court then...we settled out of court...quantum was an issue and we, you know, thought: look, going to court, doesn't really make much sense, you know. If you look at case history, the amount...the quantum of damages that you are awarded in cases like this is very, you know, minimal, so...but that was one of the cases. There was...there was one...a child...a mother who'd lost a child during birth...this is obviously a long time ago so I have to try and...a mother who'd died...the child died of asphyxiation, I think the dad was the instructing, you know, attorney at the time; that's one of the cases that I really, really enjoyed, you know, working on...again, just a medical malpractice suit. Went to court...Mohamed (Navsa) and I did the case. It was interesting in the sense that, you know...you know, there was a lot of expert evidence, and it's quite interesting how it panned out in court (laughs). The magistrate...I just couldn't follow the arguments and he was getting all frustrated. You know, you were dealing at the time with Afrikaner magistrates who weren't really, you know, that au fait with the law, I don't think they were that well trained. I'm not sure what the situation is now, I think it's getting better, but you could tell that the magistrate was just...I think he had pre-judged the issues...he had, you know, he was angry that he couldn't quite, you know, follow the...and I remember Mohamed (Navsa) got so angry, you know, he actually asked him to (laughs)...to recuse himself.

Int My goodness, right.

AB Ya, asked him to recuse himself, so things got a little, you know, out of hand, and, you know. I was close to leaving the LRC I think at the time...was I? Yeah, I think so. Anyway, I worked on that case...I worked with Mahendra Chetty...Mahendra...we did mostly labour work, really enjoyed, you know, labour matters. Again, defending the underdog, you know, against whatever unscrupulous employers, that sort of thing. You asked me about my experience personally with them?

Int Sure... I'm wondering, like all organisations have dynamics and as a candidate attorney what were your particular experiences?...Did you feel you learned enough,

did you feel that there were racial issues, gender issues...what was your sense of what was going on at the time historically?

AB I think...I don't...gender-wise? I found the LRC to be quite progressive, I mean at the time, you had a lot of female, you know, attorneys in the office, and I think they were given more than, you know, adequate space to do, you know, whatever work they wanted to do. The top structure was very white, you know...Geoff Budlender at the time, Arthur Chaskalson, Felicia Kentridge, they were upstairs. I didn't really mind that much, I think largely because I understood, you know, that these are not, you know...they are here literally to, you know, create whatever little change they can create, you know, for the betterment of, you know, disadvantaged communities. So I didn't worry that much, but still, with hindsight I'm sure it could have been done differently, you know. They had obviously the power to, I suppose, raise funds, that sort of thing. Interpersonal relationship-wise, you know, we moved from (laughs)...I...we worked with Mohamed (Navsa). Mohamed was the...what did we call him then? The President or whatever, he headed the, you know, the office.

Int The Director...

AB He was a Director yes. Very, very intelligent obviously, you know. Very, very knowledgeable. Interpersonal skills-wise? I'm not sure if he was really that great (laughs).

Int Right.

AB No, he was very, very explosive, you know...he's very explosive. You know, the one thing that he used to say quite often is: You know what, this is a law firm, it's not a democracy, and that's it (laughter). There's no democracy in a law firm, end of story, you know, you do as you are told. So he had this, you know, attitude...I think he just treated every single candidate attorney like, you know, rubbish, you know. 'You know nothing about the law', that was his attitude, but it helped. I think in many...you know, when you look back his attitude was very crass...very, you know, he just didn't care, you know, (laughter) so you had to...you had to literally just find your own feet. When you spoke to him you had to know your story, otherwise you'd leave, you know, a consultation with him feeling like, you know, the worst idiot, you know, on earth. So he was the one person that I found...I...I liked him, but at the same time I just had this thing that, you know what, you know, you're good as an attorney...you are, I'm not sure if you're really that...if you really are a brilliant, you know, leader. I think I found him lacking in interpersonal skills. I remember there was a time when I had my own little experience also with him. I was sued when I was a candidate attorney by some other...

Int Really?

AB Yes. Sued by this candidate attorney...agh, this other attorney in Durban (laughs), so Mohamed (Navsa) was laughing, you know, about it. This guy was...Mohamed (Navsa)...I'm saying Mohamed was just laughing about it...all that...I had a friend...I don't know maybe this is...?

Int Sure, you can edit it...

AB Maybe, I'll just...yeah. I had a friend that I was at university...that I went to university with...we were quite close. They had just separated with, you know, the husband, but the husband somehow thought that I was having an affair with her. So there I, you know...hits me with summonses (laughter). So he hits me with summonses and I'm thinking: What the hell is this all about, you know. Being sued for *contumelia* and it was loss of affection...*alienation of affection and contumelia*. So, you know, working for the LRC at the time, I mean, you know, Arthur Chaskalson...the...I don't know how to call it...?

Int The atmosphere?

AB The atmosphere was just not, you know...you couldn't just go to anybody and say: You know, I have this, you know, (laughs) this thing happening...can I get, you know. Remember, the one...the one time when Mohamed (Navsa) actually bothered to even (laughs), you know, assist with this, because I was a bit rattled, you know, you know. You...here you are trying to focus on your work and...he brought in, you know, when I was preparing for trial...brought a bunch of, you know, case law...just dropped them on my desk (laughs), and said: There you go, you know, and whenever you...whenever I felt a bit, you know, just out of sorts and angry he would say to me, you know: What do you expect, pity! (laughter) Some pity? Now this is the interesting...I wake up each morning, whenever, you know...I've been in business now for quite a while, and you go through peaks in trials, you know, that's the one thing that's...that has...that stuck in my mind. Whenever I feel like, oh no, I feel overwhelmed, I always say to myself: What do you expect, pity! (laughter) Seriously, I mean I say that all the time and I just, you know...you know what, this world is not for, you know, it's a tough world and, you know. That's...that was the one...the other thing that I learned from the LRC...Moray (Hathorn) used to say it too: It's a tough world, sorry, you know, just have to, you know. They didn't allow...but it was...if it was any other person, I suppose it could, you know, it could kill you, if you don't, I suppose, use it to really stir yourself up, you know, and turn it into, you know, positive energy. There was just this attitude that, you know, this is a law firm...professional, totally professional, your business outside this is your business, end of story. But I think most companies in South Africa at the time were like that, it's only fairly recently that, you know, employers are beginning to realise the value of, I think, you know, understanding that human beings are human beings, they're not just, you know, programmed. You don't switch on and become, you know, this robot when you get to work, you will always bring hang-ups, things will always happen to you sometimes that impact on...the LRC simply did not have that, and, you know, that was my honest opinion, in hindsight, when I looked at it, I thought: Ok, something could be done differently here. I mean huge, big companies now have Employee

Assistance programs, it's part of, you know, the organisational culture, it's changed, you know, completely. Who else...who else did I work with?

Int So, you know, in terms of...you do your candidate attorneyship and then what happens? Did you want to stay on or did you want to move on?

AB Stay on...?

Int At the LRC?

AB At the LRC, no. Largely, I mean the LRC wasn't paying much at the time. I think I was just eager to, you know, buy myself a car...didn't have a car so, you know, I thought: Ok, you know. I needed to, you know, move on a bit. Try and improve myself economically, so I went...I joined Highveld Steel in their Labour Department. I did, you know, their Labour Matters, etc, but before I knew it, six months down the line they moved me to International Trade, so, again, if you were to ask me about the value of the LRC I think I would have...I had been toughened up at the time, you know. When I went to Highveld, and I knew that they had never seen, you know, an African like this...that was my sense, you know, it's a...this is 1995 just after, you know, you have...

Int Elections?

AB ...Just after Elections, so we went, you know. Black man in the boardroom, you know, pretty much unheard of. Black man, who could stand up and, you know, address, you know, issues...unheard of. So my career tended to just be, you know...I was doing labour work and all of a sudden, just after, you know, wage negotiations, the managing director who happened to be my Alumna...I don't know if that played any role in...ya, decided: look, we'd rather have you, you know, in marketing. You know, we want to train you. Just get into marketing, it's exciting, there's, you know, international exposure, you'll get to travel...this and that. I agreed, so I moved, you know. The training was quite, you know, onerous. I had to, you know, spend a lot of the time in the plant getting to understand, you know, the business, just the production process, etc, and then moved into, you know, sales afterwards. I think I caught a bug then, you know, I suddenly realised that, you know, there is...there is a big part of me that is very entrepreneurial. So, you know, after that I...after a while though I left...two years down the line, or just under two years. Came back to Johannesburg, I think I was missing, you know, the life in Johannesburg. Came back to Jo'burg...worked for Sasol...I headed the Contracts Department at Sasol, so again I worked very closely with, you know, Sasol Oil in the marketing department etc. They also moved me to trading (laughs), you know, in a space of...I never applied for any of these jobs, so I guess I tended to realise, you know, sometimes you've got to play the hand that destiny deals you and don't, you know...some people see strengths in you that you probably don't see sometimes in yourself. Whereas when you're a lawyer you think lawyer, lawyer ya; so went into trading. I ran the trading department at Sasol Oil for four years, you know. I...my job was to basically find business in Sub

Saharan Africa...create opportunities. We were supplying, you know, governments at the time, so I'd go negotiate contracts, you know, lobby for business in the Congo, in Zimbabwe, in Mozambique, you know. Four years, and I decided maybe it's time to just start something on my own, but I was...it was prompted by something that I, you know, an opportunity that I saw. I think the company wasn't treating its clients very well, so...I saw a lot of clients...clients that I had, you know, gone out, found, serviced, but because we were supplying surplus products to them, you know, the company didn't really care much about them. So when ever there's a shortage, if the refinery shuts down for example, you know, the first casualty is, you know, my client, and I thought: Hang on a second. Why don't we, you know...I proposed alternatives that rather, you know, let's do something different here. You know, sustainability of supplies is obviously important for these guys, why don't you out-source this department, I'll run it as a separate business unit, you know, I can do arbitrage. You will have the first port of call, I mean, you know, as a supplier but, you know, I will have leeway. If there's a shortage of products then I can go to, you know, the competition...only then. They looked at the proposal and they thought: Ah, this guy just wants to make money for himself. Turned it down, and I decided to resign and start a business on my own. So I started my own business and...

Int This is Baholo Holdings?

AB No, this is...that was Hayford Traders. I don't...that's just one of the businesses that I ya...I started Hayford Traders. It's an oil...as an oil marketing or trading company, you know. I was...I basically acted as an intermediate, did the same thing that I was doing at Sasol but differently, you know, with all the...I'd go out to various oil marketing companies and source products from them on the client's behalf. I would, you know, monitor the movement of the product, make sure that it's delivered. That's always been my core business over the years. There's a lot of law involved obviously, just in terms of, you know, I suppose contracts, you know, customs and excise regulations that you have to comply with...ya, so it's been exciting.

Int I'm sure. Now in terms of Public Interest Law, the LRC as you know is...since 1994, has experienced funding issues like all Public Interest law organisations, NGOs, etc. I'm wondering what your sense is of the fact that it's really finding it very difficult to ...to attract young lawyers, particularly young black lawyers because as soon as they qualify, corporate law firms snap them up?

AB Ya...I sense of funding? It's a challenge, you know. I was just saying to Cecilie: I can imagine, I mean, you know, after '94, obviously landscape...political landscape changed. Government is more...is at least perceived to be, you know, leaning more towards, you know, the dis...favouring the disadvantaged, etc. I think...let me combine what you're saying with relevance. The relevance for the LRC...because I think you have to make the case for relevance before you talk funding. Relevance...the LRC I think is still relevant, they are government organs. I mean the Human Rights Commission, your Public Protectors Office, etc...But they...for as long as they are sponsored by the state, you know, their partiality will always be compromised. These are political appointees that are, you know...so for me, I mean an organisation that is, you know, totally independent of government must be relevant, and that's where I see,

you know, obviously the relevance of, you know, institutions like the LRC. I personally have had experiences with the Public Protector's Office for example. I mean, you know, I've been looking for opportunities, for example, in the junior mining sector, and I've had government office officials, and this is...this happens on a very large scale, you know. You'd present a proposal...you'd do all the legwork spadework, you know, one of them will take it and, you know, they would just frustrate you and then (laughs) take it, you know, literally just steal an idea and run with it. So they...I mean, you are obviously...you...the government still has enormous capacity, especially this government for arbitrary action, despite the fact that there are laws in place that are, you know, intended to hold it accountable. Not many people know about, you know, these pieces of legislation that they can, you know, evoke for example, to assert their rights...promotion for access to justice, you know, those sort of things. There isn't a lot of legal education, for example, that happens, you know, in the communities. If there is anything, it's a pamphlet here and there, you know, but... you know, I do not know of any other organisation that had...that did what the LRC did when we were, you know; part of the work, I mean I suppose the Human Rights Council would be handling but, I mean, there two recent events where, you know (laughs), the ANC...Cosatu Secretary General and Julius Malema, the ANC Youth League got involved in, just for me demonstrates that it's probably a toothless body. I think it is toothless, largely because they know they have to toe the line again, they have political masters! You need an organisation that does not have political masters, you know, to operate in that...in this space, to curb abuses and excesses of government. I mean, I think it's just common knowledge now that politicians get into office to advance, you know, their own selfish interests. Divisions currently within the ANC...again, a question of a struggle for resources! You have a government that has...delivery is crippled right now, but there is no...I'm sure there's a lot of people that are wronged. I mean if you just look at people that are waiting for houses to be delivered, but who is operating in those spaces? If the LRC for example had funding, you know what I mean, these are the sort of issues that could easily be taken up, but you need, you know, an organisation obviously that is well resourced to go out and, you know, handle cases like this. There's been delivery but it's been hampered, largely by, you know, internal squabbles within, you know, government. The Eastern Cape, you know, funds are being returned back to government because they can't be spent. There's...rights are being violated left, right and centre but you do not have, you know, a strong enough organisation! But I think for me that's...there's so much...so much to do, you know, (laughs) so for, you know, if...it...I think it's easy to make a case for the relevance of the LRC. I suppose it needs, you know, ambassadors to go out and just say, you know: We live these experiences; we see it happen every day. And, you know, take on one or two cases and say, you know: We use them as test cases too, you know. So ya, where the funds are going to come from...?

Int I'm wondering, I've asked you a range of questions, I'm wondering whether there's something I've neglected to ask you which you feel ought to be included as part of your LRC Oral History Interview?

AB Don't know? (laughter)

Int The final thing is...sorry you were going to say...?

AB No, it's...I mean I was just trying to think if there is anything.

Int Right. ...I wondered whether we could end the interview...if you could talk about a particular memory, whether it's working with Mohamed (Navsa), a particular client, whether it's with Moray, or Odette, that...something that you feel embodies the experience of what it meant to be a candidate attorney at the LRC and...that really, something that you treasure? As you've said...you gave me a perfect example of Mohamed's (Navsa), you know, mantra (laughter) but I was wondering whether there was anything else in particular?

AB There was. There's one case that we...I personally handled for a client called Mr. Masonga, I'll never forget that gentleman. A finance house...one of the finance houses, you know, had illegally, unlawfully dispossessed or repossessed his car and they did not comply with the law, at the time it was, I think, the Credit Act? Things have changed, you know. They repossessed his car...he only had four months...he was four months in arrears, basically to pay off the instalment. So we took the case on, I argued it in court, and he was just a remarkable, you know, client to represent. I mean he...he brought in a lot of energy, you know, (laughs) and I remember as I was, you know, as I was leading evidence...there was an interpreter obviously, he couldn't, you know, speak English, a typical case that happens, and the interpreter was pretty much, you know, leaning in our favour so he would doctor, you know, statements as, you know. If I, you know, if questions are put to the client and the answers are not really, you know, good ones, the interpreter would, you know, just doctor, you know. So that was the one case...we had a ruling in our favour. We had a ruling in our favour and it was for me just, you know, one of those cases that I thought, you know, that changed somebody's life. He paid a car for four years, you know, you lose a job, you know, you make arrangements with the financial institutions, you know, they send...they just send, you know, bouncers just to, you know, collect the car without, you know, following due process. That was the one case, but it also...and I suppose this is what happens still, it demonstrated to me just how...how easily people's rights can be violated even in court when you, you know, a client is illiterate. He can't follow proceedings, he relies on, you know, an interpreter, you know, to...I mean, you can imagine if things were turned around...if he...if he had a...exactly. If things were turned around and the prosec...the interpreter wasn't really, you know, he could easily have just...the things he was saying in court at the time, half the time were just, you know, he was angry, and, he would for example say to the magistrate: Who the..? (laughs). You know, he would say to the prosec...to the interpreter: Ask him who he thinks he is? You know, those sort of things, and the guy was (laughs), you know, statements like: I have, you know, I've already answered that question. How many times do you expect me to answer that question? Those are the sort of things that he would say, you know, in his own language, but the interpreter would not, you know, obviously convey those, you know, so it was in a way...in a sense refreshing that, you know, some of the things can not (laughs)...you can, you know, I suppose cushion them but it could easily go the other way also, you know what I'm saying? I mean if the interpreter had just conveyed the messages as, you know, they were communicated, I...he could easily have lost, you know, the case. So representing clients like those was exciting, it was interesting...was interesting.

Int that's great. That's fantastic. I'm wondering if there's any other memory you have, before we end?

AB There's a...I think we had a good team, you know, I think we had a good team at the time; we had a brilliant team of lawyers. I think I learned personally, you know, the value of professionalism, I think the value of respecting...respect for human, you know, other human beings. We were not...we could not, you know, act...you couldn't have a...what do you call it?

Int Chip on your shoulder...

AB Chip on your shoulder, it was a very humbling experience. And that humility I think helps, humility helps, you know, wherever you go. The capacity to just, you know, look at human beings for what they are. And I think, it's an unconscious...things that...these are little, soft issues...soft things that impact on, so whatever you do, you know, I think in life you sort of, you know, you are much more sober. Because I used to look at other candidate attorneys who worked for corporate law firms, there was just a distinct sense of, you know, there was always an...the sense that, you know, they had chips on their shoulder, and I don't know if, you know, that sort of attitude...?

Int So the LRC prepared you differently?

AB I think it prepared me differently. It prepared me...and that's why I think, I mean I...when I got into the corporate world it was easy for me to be, you know, to be moved, to deal with people, you know. Because I think they...that sense that, you know, you are able to get things out of people without, you know, necessarily being all, you know. The one thing for example that made Highveld appoint me, you know, in their marketing and sales department, just after the wage negotiations. I was very much a part of...I was...I facilitated, you know, negotiations at the time between the employer and, you know, and the union, so I would...the union would open up, you know, to me. I mean at the time relationships were very adversarial, but they would open up, you know. The ability I think, to just be you, and...and I'd worked with...it helped because I had worked with, you know, employees before, you know, maybe not a...on...not on such a...on a scale that large but, the lessons, you know, in soft human, you know, relations, it helps...it always helps. If there's anything that I learned I suppose it's one of those...humility.

Int That's great.

AB Humility.

Int Ajax, thank you for a most enjoyable interview...it was really nice to meet you.

AB You're welcome, it was nice talking to you, thank you.

Ajax Baholo –Name Index

Bailey, Trevor, 3

Budlender, Geoff, 5

Chakalson, Arthur, 5, 6

Chetty, Mahendra, 4

Geldenhuys, Odette, 4

Hathorn, Moray, 6

Kentridge, Felicia, 5

Malema, Julius, 9

Navsa, Mohamed, 4, 5, 6, 10

Cases:

Masonga – repossession, 10

Medical Malpractice – Asphyxiation, 4

Vereeniging Council –Negligence, 4

Legal Resources Centre Oral History Project

PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand

Location:- Johannesburg

©2010

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.

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. These digital records are digital copies of electronic documents 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.

DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- AG3298-1-005

Document Title:- Ajax Baholo Adams Interview

Author:- Legal Resources Centre South Africa (LRC)

Document Date:- 2008