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NN: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

TM: Tshepo Moloi

JL: Julius Lelaka

**Interview with Julius Lelaka**

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TM: We are starting now and don't worry about the language. We can use any language that you are comfortable with.

JL: Okay

TM: Okay. Let me start by saying that today is the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2010. We are with Mr. Lelaka at Ililiba section, in Tembisa. It's Tshepo Molozi and I'm with Nonhlanhla [Ngwenya]. We are going to talk about the history of Tembisa. Mr. Lelaka, let me take this time and thank you for giving us this chance to come to talk to you. We are glad and appreciate you for agreeing to meet with us on such a short notice and for giving us your time to come and interview you about the history of Tembisa. To start, Mr. Lelaka can you introduce yourself, and tell us where and when you were born?

JL: I'm Julius Lelaka and I was born in Tikkiline. It was in 1926 in June ... No, 1948

TM: On the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 1948?

JL: Yes. But my identity document says a different story

TM: Okay

JL: When we were in Tikkieline I was still young. All I can remember is that we moved from there to Edenvale, and they called it Dindela Edenvale Location, where it's Sebenza now. The location was there. I grew up there. But there were times where you'll find that for a year I was at me grandmother's place in Pietersburg before I attended school. Then I attended my primary school at Ebomini Primary School in Edenvale and I completed in 1964 when I went to high school. I attended high school at Pietersburg at Studio One(?)

TM: Oh, okay.

JL: And I completed in 1969. And from there I couldn't further my studies, because of the fact that my dad was sick. And the other thing is that, I'm sure you'll understand we were mixed ...

TM: By mixed. What do you mean?

JL: I mean that we were not divided into cultural races like baVhenda and so on. And in other close sections like Phelandaba the people there were living that way. You would find that in one yard there is ... they were mixing us in one yard. For instance, at my house there were two stands. There was one stand and it was at Roux Street. It was the Boers' place. It was dominated by Coloureds, but we did live there. And then we had another stand at Mosebedi Street 37, and the numbers were the same. So, there came a point - I was a bit grown up and clever - and I heard that we are moving. We were living according to the I.D. (i.e. Pass Book) and were a person works. If you were working under Germiston and living in Edenvale ... If an I.D. of an old man ... There was this old man who was working in Kempton Park. He was forced to come to Tembisa. Then when he worked in Germiston, he was forced

to go to Natalpruit. You see, the one we call Katlehong. And then when we came here [Thembisa] you see, my father wanted a bigger house. You see, when you're at Oakmoor Train Station, the first line [of houses] it were five-roomed house and very nice houses. You see, the thing is that those five rooms when the train was passing by it would seem as if people were living a nice life you. Do understand? Then, unfortunately, they said to my dad these houses were for Tsonga, Zulu, Venda-speaking people, and so on but not for Sotho-speaking people. Then it was that way. And he was promised that next time they built five room houses, he will get one.

TM: What was that section?

JL: It was Exubeni

TM: Oh, Exubeni

JL: Yes. And Exubeni is mainly Tsonga-speaking people. And Exubeni is next to Eqaleni. Eqaleni is Zulu. Then it was found that they said to my dad there is a house at Mashemong section next to Tembisa Train Station. The person that was living there ... People that were living there they were Tsonga-speaking, so they left the place. I don't know if the house was repossessed or they were taking them elsewhere. Then they gave us that house, you see. According to my belief, people who were living in that house that we were living in were misplaced, you see, because it was a Sotho-speaking side. And they were Tsonga-speaking people in the side of the Sotho-speaking area. And then when we got to Thembisa, we found that in Mqansa there were Zulu-speaking people there. And the schools. Do you understand? It was designed that each section must have a school, like in Mashemong there was a school called Mashemong Primary and Tsepisa. Those two schools catered for people who were speaking, I think, mainly Sepedi because Setswana was at Moriting. Then there was Sedibeng Primary and it catered only for Southern Sotho people but it ended at Standard Two. You see, that was a problem because after these children passed where would they go? By then the only school that was doing Sotho up to Standard Six was Siphwe at Sangweni. Then I couldn't finish schooling

TM: Oh!

JL: Because problem was that at Edenvale I was doing Southern Sotho. Then by the time we moved in '63 I was doing Standard Five it was difficult for me to study in Northern Sotho Standards Five and Six, because all along I was doing Southern Sotho. So, I was forced to travel from Thembisa to Edenvale. I was travelling by train from Thembisa Station up to Elandsfontein. Then from Elandsfontein there were buses that were going to Edenvale. So, it started [inaudible] there was SAI[?]. I was not buying a ticket with a full amount. Some times there was concession form for the scholars. And again a concession form that states where your dad worked. There was a three months ticket for first class. It was four rand something for the whole three months. And train tickets were valid for three months - for the whole

three months first class ticket. And I only had to carry bus fare. Alright from there when I finished high school I got a job at Isando.

TM: Before we go to work issues, let me take you back a bit to Tikkieline, that's where you were born. Where were your parents born?

JL: My parents were in Pietersburg

TM: Where about?

JL: My dad was from Kgamatlape. They call that place Mamehlale. Then my mother was from a place called Moletji. Also that one has a story, because I'm the third born at home and my older sister was born in Pietersburg. Between me and her there is a boy who passed. So, because my dad...

TM: When you say passed do you mean he...

JL: I mean he passed away. My dad once told me a story that it was a distance between his place and my mother's place. So, he went to see my grandfather. He said that he told people who were sitting at home that he was going to check on his wife if she's okay and then there were a bit of clouds. He was walking in the bushes for a long time, then the wind became strong and there were clouds. Then he heard funny sounds and when he looked he saw a person ... people were struck by lightning. And a person was flying. Do you understand?

TM: In the bushes?

JL: Yes. It was like they were stashing something for you to be blinded. If they send the lightning at you you're going to see the person that was flying. So, my dad said I left this person behind, meaning that this person was following him. It was like he was escorting him and he said to him go back and don't do what you wanted to do. And that person was hitting trees and he went back. And that's what led to my dad to leave Pietersburg.

TM: Oh

JL: He moved before the right time, meaning that that thing caused him to hate that place completely.

TM: Did he ever tell you how he got to Tikkieline?

JL: For him to be in Tikkieline, meaning that it was because of work related issues. When he left the rural areas he had connections about where he was going. Then it seems when he got here he started working in Germiston. It seems like there was a compound there and they lived there. By the time he thought of bringing his wife this side he had to look for work at Elandsfontein. He got some sort of transfer. Then I'm not sure between Elandsfontein and Kempton Park he was using a train or a bicycle, because at times people from the past were

using bicycles. That's when he left Tikkieline to Edenvale. He was close to where he worked and sometimes he would walk to work.

TM: So, it was not a long distance?

JL: No, it was not a long distance. Even by then people were not lazy to walk unlike now. Because now in your mind it's the fact that transport is available. But before it was easy for people to walk a return trip. They could even go to Johannesburg by foot.

TM: What were your parent's names?

JL: My mother's name was Johanna Raisibe

TM: Raisina

JL: Raisibe

TM: Raisibe, okay

JL: Raisibe Mmatlou Lelaka

TM: Okay

JL: Then my dad was Phinius Judas Lelaka. And then there is another one Pitsi - another Sotho name - but he didn't use it that much. It didn't appear on the I.D.

TM: So, in Tikkieline, as you mentioned that you had yards and you had two stands at home ...

JL: At Edenvale

TM: At Edenvale. Let's start at Tikkieline. If you can describe it, what kind of place was it?

JL: I don't remember Tikkieline. I was still young. That is why I say that I remember it when we were moving. But then I didn't see where we were going. And when we got there it was 26 Mosebedi Street. Then my dad rented at 26 Mosebedi Street, and bought the stand at 36. Do you understand me? And then after he had bought the stand at 36 then came the stand at Mokolube Street at 37, because that one was close to work. Then there was a time that my dad worked ... In his department they specialised with railway materials, then they were able to go for a long time. Then you would find that he came back after three months or so, but he made sure that we had everything.

TM: So, after he bought two stands at Mosebedi and Dikulube, did you have people who were renting these places?

JL: Yes, there were tenants. I didn't know that dad was operating the way he did. You would find that at times we would go and stay for two or three years at Dikulube Street and rent the one at Mosebedi Street. Then during the time we were there it was the time I was

growing up. Then I was also going to grow up in a Coloured area and he thought I would be corrupted. He sent me to the other place. I would say that was the reason we were moving.

TM: Had you been corrupted?

JL: No, it was the story that I would end up not behaving because coloured people are ... The thing is that my parents didn't really like Coloureds. And then they said if I'm close to the Coloured people I would misbehave, because they were the kind of people that fight, drink a lot, and all those things. But even so you would find that it's only few families. You know what they say "one rotten potato in the bag spoils the rest".

TM: So, in your family stands ... Let's take the one in Mosebedi, for instance. So the people who were renting the place, where were they from to show that you were mixed?

JL: In most of the time at my place you would find that if we were at Mosebedi ... There was a Sotho woman who stayed with a Pedi husband. It's like there was somebody who was in charge when we were not in the other stand. My dad didn't want careless people. He would take people that he knew that were responsible and people who would not mess up things, because you would find that the stand in Mosebedi it was about ... Then the houses were made out of zinc. Zinc houses are very old. They don't start today. And you would find that maybe there is an outside room, it was the one that was built with bricks. Then he didn't allow the fact that if he leaves this place, then he would have to divide it. If you were renting you were staying in the house. It was a five-roomed house. You would stay in it the way it was. Because if we were about to come back, he would have to open and when we left again he would have to close it again. Then it becomes a problem.

TM: So, it was the Sotho woman living with a Pedi man ...

JL: I don't know the story of Louw Street. The time they were renting it I wasn't even going there. But there was a person that was responsible, you see. Because there was a time that I wanted the document (i.e. title deed) for that stand only to find that the gentleman had passed on.

TM: The one that was responsible for that house?

JL: Yes. It was the time we moved. He was left behind. Then my dad didn't make follow-ups on that house, or maybe he sold that house in a way. But he wouldn't do anything without discussing it with my mother.

TM: Oh? Right. And then the people who were staying in the house were they paying rent?

JL: Yes

TM: Were there no tensions some times because they didn't want to pay their rent?

JL: No. Let me say that the woman we were living with it was more like she belonged to our family, or maybe a relative. They were living as relatives. So there were no such things.

TM: Oh, right. And then for you to be moved from Edenvale your dad had found a house here in Thembisa. So was it by force or people moved on their own will?

JL: No, it was ... It was there the government that said it were stands for [Dr Hendrik] Verwoerd. Then things got mixed up. That is point number one. So they moved us to divide us so that a Pedi-speaking person cannot live with a Zulu-speaking person. Do you understand? Not living with a Tsonga-speaking person, because when we got here we found that the sections, as I was explaining to you, that there is a Pedi section, Vendas who were mixed with Tsongas. There were the Southern Sotho-speaking. When you go to Sedibeng there were two-roomed houses and mostly they were occupied by them [Southern Sothos]. Let's say a larger part of Sedibeng it was dominated by Southern Sotho-speaking. And again at Tshepo, Tlamatlama and Maokeng mostly were people from Phelandaba, you see. So not that Edenvale were people not from one place. Then there were those from the Boers' famers and those people mostly were the ones that were moved here from Olifantsfontein. There was a township in Olifantsfontein and it was called KwaNtuthu and they were moved to - mostly they were from Elandsfontein and they placed them at Moriting section, you see. At Moriting there was a site called Malawi, because mostly people who were working at Olifantsfontein were Blyntires (i.e. they were from Blyntire, in Malawi).

TM: Oh! Are they still there?

JL: Yes, they are there

TM: They are still alive?

JL: They are still alive

TM: Here in Thembisa?

JL: Yes, here in Thembisa

TM: Can we get them if we go there?

JL: If we can go to Malawi, we can get them.

TM: Ah, that would be nice

JL: The Malawians ... Olifantsfontein was under the richest families, who were the stars of Africa. The Carlimans, you understand. So, the Carlimans at Olifantsfontein had firms and farms that belonged to the Carlimans, their daughters' husbands and it was the family riches. So, there were Blyntayers. The whites during the apartheid era liked those people because they were clean and loved white shirts, and so on. They were the people who were mostly working in the kitchen (i.e. domestic work). They were people who cooked mostly.



They were the ones doing the cooking. As I was saying that there was sort of an empire family. So they came in that way with special jobs for these people. Then again there was ... People who were from Modderfontein Titheng and Sangweni we knew it was some sort of a hostel. Because it housed people who were working mostly at Modderfontein only, those who had families and even so it were people who were doing some sort of special work. People who could afford houses, because the rest lived in the compounds.

TM: So, when you got here from Dindela where you were mixed and here you were divided. How was life like here?

JL: You know what? When we were growing up life was ... Sometimes it's like us boys you would find that if you go to a Zulu section they could even chase you away. There was that little fight. But you'd find that amongst old people it was different, because they knew each other from the life they were living before. People who were really divided were children

TM: What were you fighting for?

JL: That we are different races.

TM: Oh.

JL: And before we were fine with it – in all these sections. In Modderfontein there were compounds and you would find that it's very rare for people to say that this is a Venda location and so on. These people were working, because they would rather put them in departments than racial groups; that in a certain department we know where to find them, you see, for emergency because they were working shifts. So, that if somebody is sick they could be able to get a replacement. But when we got here they divided us, you see. Let's take Thembisa the other thing that people were talking about it was in 1964 the mayor of Germiston - because this place was under Germiston - they said Thembisa was supposed to be here for a short period of time and after that it was supposed to move.

TM: To where?

JL: You know, what these people did?

TM: Mmm...

JL: Mostly they took it that people who were in Thembisa were from Pietersburg – mostly. Then they've got houses in Lebowakgomo, from Thohoyandou, in Venda. The city of Germiston ... Do you understand? Then these houses became cheaper and some of the people went and bought them.

TM: Here in Tembisa?

JL: Yes, they went and bought them. And all to find out that some people see that ... Same for the ones in KwaNdebele. There were some who came back, because it was hard for



them. Because you'd find that you go to work at eight and at three you have to be in a bus on your way to work and you work in Johannesburg, but the bus drops you at Kaalfontein. Then you take a bus to work. Then you get back in the evening at eight, but you knocked off at three. So, you see that it was hard? Then there was a time in the seventies, you see, where the whites introduced a train that was from Pretoria and left at five and it went to Pietersburg. That train made sure that at one o'clock it is in Pietersburg. Not at half past seven in the evening or one o'clock in the morning. It was to encourage ... In a way they were proving to people that they could sleep at home.

TM: Did people buy the tickets?

JL: They did, but they found that the ones who bought houses ... There were people that I remember who bought houses in Lebowakgomo, and people thought that it was hard work. But if it was now the way transport it is now people who were standing in queues, I'm sure the ones who saved them they still got them.

TM: But the Germiston council was encouraging people that they've got houses for them to buy ... Or how did people found out about the houses?

JL: There was a method that ... They were encouraging people from the ... I'm sure that in the hostels there was a way. There was this story that if they demolished Thembisa, they were going to start with the hostels, then people left because there was a time where there ... The hostel that was well built was Ehlanzeni Hostel. It was built because of the Sporverg who were working at Elandsfontein, because there were many of them. Then the people from Castle Brewery, the firm. The firms before were booking the blocks. Then when Ehlanzeni was full, then they started to build the four-roomed houses at Temong and Makhulong, were converted into hostels.

TM: Oh, the four roomed houses?

JL: Yes, the four rooms. These four rooms were converted. I mean, these sections they were turned into hostels.

TM: Are they also divided into ethnic groups, or were they mixed groups?

JL: The hostels, as I've explained that it was according to the companies, because it was difficult to get a room in a hostel if you were not working and also you were getting it through work. There was a block at Ehlanzeni it was Block C and it was the Castle workers only

TM: Oh. Right. Were they mixed groups?

JL: Yes, they were. But they could divide themselves the way they liked. But they became one thing, because they get along from work

TM: Then you went to Pietersburg to do your high school there. You came back to work in Isando. How was the process of looking for a job, was it difficult or easy?

JL: It was difficult. I told you that as my dad was working in Germiston our I.D.'s were under Germiston. Do you understand? And when I got the job in Isando, they said we were going to transfer you but I was lucky. The first job that I got it was ... I forgot the name of the company. But it was making insecticide, you see. Only to find that I convince them and told them that they should give me the job, then I would find the transfer papers. They said I must go fetch ... There was supposed to be a Special, because there was a pass that showed that you were looking for a job. If you didn't have it and if they get you, they would say pass or Special. That's how we were living.

TM: Where would you get that Special?

JL: In the pass office. It was the Labour Department during that time. If you were not working you must go there and they would give you a Special. Then if it expires maybe you'd find that ... I forgot that it was seven or fourteen days. Because I was once arrested for that thing, only to find that I left it at work at Bishops. They found me here in the township and they asked me where is my Special? They said Pass? It was signed at the discharge. They signed it inside. They said Specia. Then I said I don't have it. Then they said get inside the van and there was no other way, you see.

TM: During the day or ...?

JL: Yes, during the day. The only thing that helped me was that when I arrived there there was this house that's where there was everything; library, municipal office, police station. And now it's used by the social workers. My girl, where do you stay?

NN: At Endulwini

JL: At Endulwini. You see where there is a whole fair

NN: Yes, at Kopanong

JL: At Kopanong there is a pink house there. There were social workers inside. That house truly speaking it belonged to the owner of the farm, where there is a Zion Christian Church (ZCC). It was the horse stable, and it also was used for lots of purposes. It worked as a recreation hall of the township. And it became a high school and other things until the Z.C.C. bought the place. Then in that pink house we were paying our rent. When they built new offices, which were burned and where today it is IKusasa High School, then when they built the new Rabasotho Hall it was when they moved the library and located it there. Then they converted it into the police station.

TM: They converted the pink house?

JL: Yes. And it became the police station

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TM: Where the police station it is today or what?

JL: No. Explain to him. At the social whole fair

NN: Where the is a whole fair today

TM: Whereabouts?

NN: Close to the Z.C.C. opposite the Z.C.C.

TM: Oh, okay.

JL: Because it is still the same way it was before. What they changed is only the roof. You know, that it got burned?

NN: No, I didn't

JL: Yes, it got burned. And the other person you can get is the first librarian. Do you know Kutumela?

NN: Kutumela, Kutumela?

JL: Yes

NN: Yes, I do know him

JL: He was the first librarian in Thembisa

NN: He lives up the street

JL: Is he still there?

NN: He doesn't live there anymore. His house was sold

JL: I heard that he was renting somewhere, because I'm longing to see him. On that side he will give you all the information. He has the full information, not knowing if he's still there. Maybe some documents got lost, because his house was re-possessed, because he is the other parson that you can get every thing. The other person that you could've got the full information from is Japi Mokwevho, who just passed on recently. He was writing the history of Thembisa.

TM: I know Mr. Japi Mokwevho

JL: Now the younger brother I don't know if you can get hold of him, because he is a person that was busy writing the history of Thembisa.

TM: He was at *Tembisan*

JL: Yes, *Tembisan*



TM: Ag, shame

JL: Because even at *Tembisan* he had pensioned. Then he started ... There were things that he was doing here in the office and that thing of writing the history of Thembisa.

TM: Oh! So, they arrested you

JL: Yes

TM: Were they taking you to that office?

JL: Yes, they were taking us there. That time it was the police station, you see. Then, fortunately, I saw a door and it was opened and I walked out

TM: (Laughed) you walked out?

JL: Yes, I walked out and went home. There was this police guy who was transporting dockets, with a bicycle. His name was Stone and he was living at Moriting. I asked him to take me home. It was Friday when they arrested me. I was going to sleep at the police station on Friday (laughs). In the morning I wrote a letter. There was a pass office here at Gqagqa where there is a crèche today, it's now Dotted Ducks. It was a pass office. I wrote a letter to the person who was in charge and I told him that his people were arresting me, and you told me that I should go look for work at Germiston. And when I went to Germiston I saw metal firms (laughs). So, I couldn't, because there are firms here in Isando and there is plenty of work. I went there. There was this guy called Sibanyoni, who was working there as a clerk. When I got there I said - and there was an I.D. inside - I said to him "Sibanyoni, take this letter and give it to this white man". And he said to me "you are going to get yourself to be bitten up. What's this letter for?" And I said just give it to him and he did. He read it and said to Sibanyoni, "Call the man who wrote this letter. Call him to come here". I went and I was told that he used to beat people.

TM: That white man?

JL: Yes. I went to him. But I'm aware that if he does so ... When I got there, he said to me "Did you write this letter?"

TM: What language did you use to write the letter?

JL: I used Afrikaans. I said, yes. And he said I'll teach you a lesson and I kept quite. I don't even want to know what that means. And he put a stamp in it and he wrote something. And after that he said to me "Look here, go look for work though in Klerksdorp". And then wrote 'I'll teach you a lesson'. Do you understand? That 'I'll teach you a lesson' meant that I could go look for work that was the only thing. Because it was hard. And if they could catch you looking for job, they didn't arrest you. And when you found a job they were supposed to give you a form at the pass office for you to take to work and from work you take it back to

the pass office. Then if they didn't do that, then you would lose your job. Unless were you worked they could talk to them.

TM: But this long process can make a person to feel that there is no point to go look for a job and end up being a thug

JL: It was possible in that system of the I.D., meaning that in the I.D. department there was Section 10 (1)A up to 10 (1) D. 10 (1) A meant that you were a child born here and still you were restricted to certain areas. If you were a child born in Springs and when you arrived at Kempton Park you used another story. Do you understand? If you were going to Kempton Park you had to get another I.D.

TM: Oh?

JL: Yes. Then it was 10 (1) B; and they had their own stamps until 10 (1) D. Meaning that in 10 (1) D and C they were made by that documentation between you and the company

TM: What was yours?

JL: It was 10 (1) A

TM: You were a child born here?

JL: Yes, I was. But still I couldn't work here

TM: So, were you able to get a job after that?

JL: Yes, I did get a job

TM: Where did you get it?

JL: My first job ... I told you that I worked at Bochum S.A. I worked for three months doing all kinds of work. And I applied for... You see, International Correspondence School. I wanted to do management, you see

TM: Yes

JL: Then I got my correspondence with that company, you see

TM: Oh

JL: Then, again, I applied for work at Up John. It was a Pharmacist, and it was in Johannesburg. They replied at Up John, saying they were going to come on a certain date in Isando and I'm one of the people that they were going to employ on that date, you see. Then I was careless with that letter and somebody I was working with took it to that Boer I was not getting along with. And he called and said I'm not trustworthy and he trusted that I was going to be with them for a long time, but and on the other hand you were going to Bochum and on the other hand you were studying. Who's work do you want to take?

TM: (Laughs)

JL: I said, no. Just let me go. And we were at the reception then I called Caterpillar S.A. and they said come. I went and wrote an aptitude test. It was the time I worked for Premiers. Then Caterpillar S.A., I joined it on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April up to the 20<sup>th</sup> of May

TM: Which year was that?

JL: It was 1970. I worked for a year. It was hard me and I did get along with the Boers. I would tell him that one day I'm going to beat you and you'd go and fetch your white police friends. I was at the graduation at Turfloop [University]. When I returned it was too late. Then he said "I'm going to beat you up". I said come here we are going to where I'm coming from now and he didn't want to. Then I went to the shops to get a bottle of whisky and came back drunk, and that's when I lost my job. They told me to come fetch my money and I went. From there I got another job at Isando, at Isando Steam and Plant. They hired me. But I never went to work ... No, when I left there I went to the Isando Steam and Plant, you see. I was supposed to go work as a person who controls the things, to make gas ... So, they tested me and I was okay. The problem was that I asked how much was the salary, you see and they said it's R16,50 per week. But I was getting more than R16,50, but with a difference of R1,50. Because at Bochum it was R18,00. I said to him tell me R16, 50 is for how many days ... No, what were my hours? He said from past eight to five. Okay, I didn't have a problem with the time. "And how many days were we going be working?" He said even on Saturdays, six days. I said to him this money is not enough, because it's for five days. Put more money for the sixth day. I was fighting for it to be R18, 00 but I was unsuccessful. So I said I can't. Then I went to Payson and they tested me. Glasson, I won't forget him. He was my CEO (Chief Executive Officer). They were the size of my yard. As I was looking I saw these things. I think it was past four ... No, it was two. Then they gave me an invoice. There was this person I was working with. Remember it was my first week and then I saw the invoice, and looking at it and I filled it in. Then the Boer that was fetching that stuff said "today's stuff is heavy". And I dropped it.

TM: You dropped it?

JL: Yes, I did. My body was shaking then I dropped it. But they replaced it. Then they looked at me and the other one left. He looked at me for a while. Then past four he said to me "You must come to work tomorrow". And I said "Serious?" Then he said yes. But I didn't go and that's when I got the job at Rodger Mines. When I arrived at Roost I was carrying my application form I found a Boer at the gate and said to him "They said I must give this letter to the Managing Director". Then he said that's impossible. I said to him it is possible. You say it's impossible and I say it's not, and they've sent me here. And he did the way I told him and I met the Managing Director. By then it was Mr. Verwoerd. He called me and asked "Do you have these qualifications?" I said yes. And he said he does not have a job for me and said "But I'm not going to loose you. In the meantime I've got a problem. They had a feeling

station in the firm. And said I don't know what's wrong with the petrol. The person who was working here was still busy with this problem. I said here there is no problem. I would be able to assist you and I worked. Then he gave me R20.

TM: A week?

JL: It was just money: R20 a week. I checked the dipstick and the petrol was where it was supposed to be. Only to find that the security guards were the ones who were stealing petrol. Lots of things just came out, you see. Then the representatives would fill in the petrol, you know. That's when you pour petrol it writes the kilometres. Then the kilometres would determine the kilometres that you should travel. And when it comes empty, and you didn't have the time to check the kilometres, because you're supposed to pour and record the kilometres. Only to find that these people were not recording the kilometres. I worked at Roost for many years. I'm sure that I worked there for 12 to 13 years.

TM: Oh, okay. But Mr. Lelaka, on the occasions that you were working one month, three months, and fighting with the workers, what caused you to not to tolerate the Boers?

JL: You know what, sometimes ... Let me say from high school most of my teachers were Boers. Do you understand? And these were Boers who were not behaving. You would find that they did this, because of the colour. When I attended high school people like Mathole Mothekga - he was my class mate

TM: Wow

JL: We would discuss politics [with people] like Dr Thindiza. Then only to find that these people were oppressing us. Then they would say hurtful things and they would also oppress the black teachers. A person would come with very high qualifications, then you would find that, maybe, just to get to him, they would give him the lowest classes like Form 1. And those were the lower grades for beginners. Because this thing happened to this other teacher called Eric Langa. That man where he was coming from he was teaching matric, and he was teaching Afrikaans. Just because the other Boer that belonged to their group and that Boer was supposed to come teach Afrikaans [in Standards] 9 and 10. When we asked what qualifications this person had to teach us - what his qualifications were? Then there were some people who ended up being victimised by the management, you see.

TM: The political topics that you discussed - what kind of topics were they?

JL: You know what? There were times where you would find that there were certain books in the library ... You would find this book 'Way to the Left', you see. Do remember 'Way To The Left'? That book was talking about the Rivonia Trial and so on. The likes of [Nelson] Mandela and the rest. Then the other thing there were people that were ... I grew up with people that were highly political, you see. The late Shabby Mahlangu. That man was political. So, I grew up under these kinds of things, you see. For instance, at high school



some times you would find that when we discussed ... When we got to a corner and we were discussing with the teachers, you would find that you felt that oppression that the a black person was feeling.

TM: With the teachers?

JL: Yes. Then you felt that this person ... It was like they were brain-washing you, because they didn't want you to expand. But they didn't bring the person that matches you. It was not like when you are a Zulu or Pedi-speaking person that didn't. The other person could not teach your language more than you. They would say that person is left behind.

TM: So, by the time you found another job in the '70s where exactly were you staying?

JL: I came to Thembisa in 1963. That means I went to high school, staying here in Thembisa. So, I was working while living in Thembisa.

TM: Where exactly were you living?

JL: At Mashemong

TM: At your parents' place?

JL: Yes, at my parents' place. I left home in 1994. The reason that made me move, I realised that it was a family house, you see. My younger sister had children and she is not working, you see. Then a thought came to my mind that you can't keep two women in one house. Because I am working, let me move out and leave her with the family.

TM: But that time Mr. Lelaka, in the 70s when you were working and earning money, what were you doing after work, during weekends here in Thembisa?

JL: You know, the thing ... Let me explain it this way. During those times it was after they started to operate shebeens for the people. There was a Lodge, you know, at Mqansa

TM: Oh, right

JL: At Mqansa where they've built something for the disabled. The Sedibeng bottlestore was there. Do you know the shops of Tata?

NN: Who?

JL: Tata's shops behind Sedibeng school. Yes, there was a Lodge Bar. Remember before black people were not permitted to buy 'English' beer. And, on the other hand, the shebeens were there but they were not that safe, because at time they could come and take you all

TM: The police?

JL: Yes. you would find that some times on the weekends there was a time ... Or when we came back from work you would find that we would sit at the Lodge and we would be discussing. From there a person would decide whether he goes home or to the shebeen, that would be your decision. But that was our way of refreshing. Let's say that I'm living ... I had friends that were working in the bottlestore and at the Lodge. I was able to tell them to put aside two long toms so that they would be very cold. So that when I arrive from work I could relax. That was our way of living, you see. Sometimes it would be music. It was all about who you are hanging out with. From there it was soccer, and that was a major sport, you see.

TM: The Lodge or the Bars that were established at that time where were they situated?

JL: Tembisa it started one Lodge, one bottlestore. The first bottlestore it was ... It was making money. They compared it with the bottlestore in Chicago. The Chicago bottlestore was running day and night. And this one was running during the day only. There was competition to see who was number one this month, number two? The profit that the government was making out of that that's the reason it was able to send money to Lebowakgomo and other places. That place was making a lot of money. That place was always crowded

TM: Was it crowded?

JL: At the bottle store?

TM: Yes

JL: Yes. You know, when it was close to the festive season, construction companies would also be nearing closing. So, construction trucks would even come in to help the Castle [Larger] trucks to bring alcohol to the bottle store.

TM: What were they drinking and were children allowed in the bottlestore?

JL: By then there were no children. Children didn't care so much about alcohol. It was only the adults

TM: Women and men?

JL: Yes, women and men. Let me say in Thembisa there was this thing, eh ... Let me say the firms that were paying started here in Thembisa, at Isando you see then...

TM: Can we stop the tape a bit?

JL: Yes [the tape was put on pause as he was smoking]. Entertainment. There is something that I forgot. There were stockvels, only on weekends. First table you enter with six beers each. There were no big tables. It was like the six sitters. And there were no sofas yet. There

was 'fill up' the table. Then when the round was finished and if you still have the stamina to go to the next table, you go.

TM: Meaning that you were supposed to come with six beers in the first table?

JL: If a person has a stockvel, then we go there to support. It was a way to entertain yourself. It's music and everything that could make you happy, you see. You know that you save money for alcohol and a plate of food for later. After the first table was finished we go to the next table

TM: How much were you paying, let's say for the first table?

JL: Let's say for the first table, maybe, each comes with six beers. You'd find that maybe the person who's in charge he pops out a case of beers and a straight on top of the alcohol that you bought. And when people come and they'd find you in the first table, they'd join in on your alcohol until the first table was finished. And then the second table followed. Then the second table, say maybe, it's four beers each. Alcohol was 40 cent, but there was no money. It was very cheap: 30 cents a cot. So, six beers costs R1, 80. If you bought using a R5 you got change. Then after the second table it was the last table, and you would find that in the last table ... Now that lots of people were drunk and they were gone ... There was this one that I liked. It was for people like Mr. Mogungu. It was for the people who had money. Then those people would take a coffee table and put it close to the entrance. That coffee table they called it 'Minus One'. It had all kinds of alcohol, all assorted wine, whisky, beer and so on. Then you drank as much as you liked, because they knew that you wouldn't last (laughs).

TM: They called it 'minus one' (laughs)?

JL: It's 'minus one', you see. You wouldn't last. After a short period of time you were out. And they had cars. If you were too drunk they would take you home, you see. I didn't like brandy, so you would find that they were drinking cans. A person would be moving around, carrying a can. Then when that can becomes empty ... You wouldn't find empty bottles lying around. When it becomes empty ... It was their job. There comes a parson and found that you were drinking too much alcohol. You wouldn't see how much beer was consumed. You just drank according to your stomach. But if you go to 'minus one' you would feel joy.

TM: So Mr. Lelaka, as a supporter how much were you paying?

JL: As a supporter ... Sometimes you didn't drink. You could just go there and buy yourself a plate and eat, just for you to be around people, because you were talking about nice things. It could be soccer. And we would be talking also about music, because what we were doing most of the time ... If we didn't have commitment, it was every Saturday morning when we started working. We would wake up and go to the shops. It's either you were buying shoes or a record, you see.

TM: Okay

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JL: You were supposed to be up to date. Always know how much things cost. That was your duty

TM: What kind of clothes were you wearing during those days, the shoes?

JL: Eh, florshem. Jerseys were pringle. Eh, suits were Husband. They differed

TM: So, when you were going to the stockvel, what would you wear?

JL: When you went to the stockvel, you were supposed to show off so that the girls could see you.

TM: Did they also come?

JL: Yes. But you would look for your type. At the stockvel mainly it was not to get bored, you see. Each person went there with a mission. But me and my group, we were went there so that we could not be bored

TM: What kind of music were you playing that time?

JL: Music?

TM: Yes

JL: Eh, mbaqanga and Jazz. That was the type of music that was number one

TM: Who were your favourites Jazz artists?

JL: It was Sonny Sticks, John Coltrane. I still even have it

TM: You still have it?

JL: Yes, John Coltrane

TM: And then football? You told us that it was number one in terms of entertainment. Which soccer clubs were popular?

JL: Let's take it like this. I'm from Dindela and Dindela came with Bay United. Then Roy Valley. Phelandaba also came with clubs that were theirs. Clubs that became strong were from here like Tshepo Home Stars, you see. Because when we talk of Tshepo Home Stars, because somebody came and found those boys from Tshepo and Tlamatlama. There was talent, you see. So he grouped them together and it became a very strong club that nearly reached PSL (Professional Soccer League). So there was only one problem, because people from Soweto called us stupid because if you were a bit clever they would take you. So there were clubs like Thembisa Black Pirates. Again it was boys from, mostly from Eqaleni, Khalambazo. Then that club pushed, but it ended up in the top. There was a new club - two of them - that were formed by tycoons of Thembisa. There was Moloji. He formed Thembisa... Real Thembisa. He took the players from the existing clubs just because he had

money, you see. It also went to the top but died when it got to the top. The other one was Roy Valley. It was also formed by Moloi. And this one was Moloi and ...Who is this person from Sedibeng? I forgot the name. These clubs emerged from the existing players and became strong. Again during that time management ... There was no management, because you would find that there were no coaches and so on. The person that was in charge of the club we used to call him 'President'.

TM: 'Presser'

JL: Yes, if 'Presser'. And there was witchcraft, meaning that they were winning through witchcraft. And the Z.C.C. also had a club

TM: The church?

JL: Yes

TM: And which one were you supporting?

JL: Truly speaking, I was supporting Bay United because people who were playing for it were people that I attended school with them at Edenvale

TM: So Bay United, if it were playing against a strong club how was the atmosphere like?

JL: You see, today football is not the same as football in the past. People went to the ground and they went for fun and to watch individual skills, you understand. If your club was defeated we were shouting and you would find that we were watching the person who was the playmaker. Let's take Bay United. There was, eh, Manax. We called him Manax. He was ... We called him Ten-Ten. If the ball got to Ten-Ten the goalkeeper was not able to keep it. He was doing that since from school. During that time there was no future. But if it were now most of the players would have been playing professionally.

TM: Are there some who are still around that I can talk to?

JL: Yes

TM: I would be happy to meet with them

JL: You see, like next to the school where I work, if you can look at those people and look the way they played soccer and find them as they are now, you will be surprised. Just next to that school. They are there.

TM: I would love to meet one of them.

JL: The same players who were playing for Tshepo Home Stars. Like Inch. You wouldn't pass through that guy, because he was tall. He would just take the ball from you just like that and that was the Inch.

TM: And during those times, in the '70s -it was the time when Black Consciousness started, and again the start of the student uprisings in '76. What is it that you remember about that period?

JL: You know what? During that time I remember the day during June 16 I was still working at Roost. And it was a tall building. When we looked at Alexandra it was a ball of fire. We were able to see Alexandra from Roost. What we did we told the management ... By then I was part of the Liaison Committee. I told him what was happening, because they've already heard on the radios what was happening. He said we must knock-off. I just forget which day was it. When we came via ... We already heard that also in Thembisa. We came via Ehlanzeni Hostel. You know at Zniko?

NN: Yes

JL: On that side there were no houses. You remember there was nothing. What is that section? Vusumuzi was not there. When we took that corner there were two cops

TM: Were these young cops?

JL: No, old people. When we reached the robots ... You see the robots at Mangweni before you enter the bridge? The person who was transporting us was staying at Mowedi. I said to him "You know what? Just drop us here, we will walk. Just go back". You could see that there was change. There was smoke all over. And he went back. Then I walked. Just can't remember who I was with. When we were about to cross the railway line we saw a helicopter flying all over. You see the old ticket office? It was outside but now they had destroyed it. In that place there were gun shots. I asked myself, and my place was just over there, was I going to make it? Then we crossed the railway line after the place that I said there was a Lodge. There were white people carrying guns. I just stood there, because there was no way to run. Then I thought these people won't shoot at me. There was a helicopter. What did I do? Alright before I passed, the door of the bottlestore was opened, you know. The bullets - they were shooting there. And that time the door was opened and they also burned that place

TM: Bottlestore?

JL: Yes, bullets that they were shooting there. You could tell that people were dying. Then I went ... Do you know Sedibeng Primary? There were those who were at the bottlestore and they killed lots of people there; people who liked alcohol. Then the first ones were able to loot alcohol. And the second group was hurt, because there was this woman who was full of blood, because bottles broke and they were shooting. And there was this other gentleman ... eish, I saw that person blowing up. He got beaten. It seems like he was from the bottlestore. Then from there I walked toward home, because it was the second house from the corner. I entered so that they could see that I'm safe. Then I stood outside. When I was outside people came in a car, carrying bottles. Before they got to Tsepisa, a hippo was

already there and they were shooting teargas. That power disappeared. Some came and brought the beers to us. I was with that guy Shavi Mahlangu. That's the day when the houses exploded. Do you understand? Then the following day I went to Lekaneng in a taxi. Do know that open space at Ndulwini where there is Multi-Purpose? There was a big truck which was sealed. It was picking up peoples' corpses. That truck was loaded with corpses. And the number of people who died up to now I don't believe that the statistics they are giving are correct, because many people died on 16 June.

TM: But did you manage to go back to work?

JL: It took days because it was toward weekend, and we were able to go back to work. But only to find that thing had destroyed everything. And nothing could be fixed, you see.

TM: So, there were changes?

JL: Yes

TM: What kind?

JL: You know what? Let me take it from the white's side. Margarita had hatred and fear, you understand. Then Margarita saw the picture where it was leading, you see. That is why this thing needed ... If you remember P.W. Botha was being shielded. Do you get me? I remember I was reading the *Daily Mail* the following day. They were talking about it and it was the first time they talked that people died for beer. Do you get me?

TM: Yes

JL: Then only to find that the Boers started it from the back. There was Donges and Voster. Donges was the Minister of Finance in the past then. There was B.J. Vorster was the Minister of Justice that time. Then the vote was won by Donges to be a person who was supposed to take over the country. But they took him as the *Verligte*. Then there comes B.J. Vorster. He also came with his stories like Detente.

TM: Yes

JL: Kenneth with Detente

TM: I'm not sure

JL: I think it was him, B.J. Vorster

TM: What did they say about Detente?

JL: Detente was for us to talk on conditions. They wanted to release people from Robben Island but with conditions that were suitable to them

TM: That's Botha



JL: What?

TM: That was P.W. Botha

JL: No. They also tried it. When they said Detente it was to go talk to people who were on Robben Island. There was the one of a train. What was it that train at Victoria Falls? There was a train that they conducted meetings on. They didn't want to get out with the news. Do you understand? Then all of them, Botha saw it. So during Botha's ruling Margarita was still dominating. That is why they were able to put him in power. After they put him in power De Klerk ... These people were educated well. Some were not. They saw that they were going to die, so the best thing let's release this person unconditionally

TM: Mr. Mandela?

JL: Yes, let's release Mandela unconditionally

TM: The other thing that you mentioned about the '70s is that they burned halls. Now where did you entertain yourselves?

JL: Let's look at this thing from the beginning. I said when we got to Thembisa it was the time when we were happy that we've got alcohol. So the barras (beer halls) were more. The first bara was the one at Thabethe's place. Then the one in Tshepo. Even at Mqansa there was a Bara, you see. They made sure they were all over. The student uprisings were a wake up call that we were busy drinking and now you no longer thinking. That's the thing that made the whites to think that if we give them alcohol, they would love it and things would be okay. So it was found that alcohol was brain-washing us. You see, the problem was that whenever you did something there was a gap of people who didn't know where they stood. They were breaking into the bottle stores, stealing alcohol. To them it was a party. But still even when it's a party everything was destroyed, so that nothing could be replaced. Because if you didn't destroy it ... Because if you wanted to recover you were supposed to destroy things, you see. Then you would pay attention fast. So June 16 made the whole world to see. Mostly concerning the story of Hector Pieterse, who was the first person to be shot. The press was too much outside for the South African government. It's the one that worked, you see.

TM: Not long after that, eh, then they started to come with the reforms to change the system; introducing the issues of the Liaison Committees.

TM: Can you tell us about how did it come about and where were you working during that time?

JL: When the Liaison Committee was introduced I was still at Roost. Because sometimes when people elect you, maybe, they have a trust in you; that this person could represent us, you see. The first time when they chose the first Liaison Committee I said I can't, my work put pressure on me. So the time that they chose me I was looking at many of things, you

see. Because whites were assisted by the firm to buy these kinds of things. Then when a person wanted money and so on ... When a black person borrows money and so on they would tell him stories. Those were some of the things that I thought of. For instance, if you borrowed money I went there and told them about the salary advance, you see. Or sometimes a person wanted R50 and he earned R200 a month that person qualified for a salary advance. Unlike for him to go and borrow it from somewhere. If he was working, he should get it because he worked for those days. Again the housing system. I came up with a plan but when I left they were not hundred percent operational. They were operating when I already left, you see. It ended up being the best. Then there was another story that my company was from Switzerland, you see. The thing we believed that they were doing ... It's that Switzerland gave people R10 across board. And when it arrived here they suppressed it, you see. That they can't give us that amount. But they would give us R5 instead of R10. The old system in the company I found out that in the top hierarchy there was supposed to be a South African in the top management that was trustworthy to Margarita. And in most cases they were placing them at the ... Let me say the managing director, which is now Human Resources today, meaning if that person is in that position he stays there for a very long time, you see. They would do whatever they could to keep it like that. Because even the person on top management was given rules. Because there was a time where I said in my team that we should find out how much does the ticket of a train, bus, plane costs. And there was this general manager that had arrived and he told us that his office was open for everybody we should use it while it's still open, you see. We did all those things and we told him that we wanted R20 across board, because you gave us increase and it was in April. You gave us an increment in December. After you gave us an increment things have increased again. And that guy said that we must tell his secretary to draft us a letter and then fax it to Switzerland. He didn't tell them that it was the managing director and said that man must not know and they faxed it. When it came back it said that they must give us an increase of R20. They called us first, you see...

TM: The Liaison Committee?

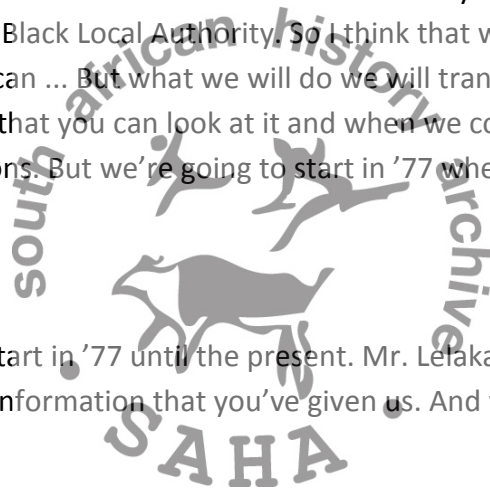
JL: Yes, and told us that our request has been accepted. The best thing was to call that guy when they called him he found us there and they told him that thing has passed. Then there was a friction. Then came other news that they wanted to throw us a party. They always threw us year-end parties, you see. Then they decided that in that year it was Friday we were going to knock-off at 12 o'clock and you'd get a plate of food and two cans of beer. If you drink cold drink you would get two cans of cold drinks. And if you were drinking beer you would get two cans of beer. And in the store-room there was a fridge. I was the one taking care of it and it was full of alcohol. We told them that we have a concern. Then they came. Every one was at that meeting, you see. I told them that, you know what, I'm not satisfied about what is happening here. There were lots of beers in the fridge and you would come back and get drunk in the evening, so on that day of the party for us it's a normal working day with the cans of beer and cold drinks and the plate of food. They would call

their families and they would eat. That thing made them to think. Then they made a big party in the firm and that was my last party, because the following year I was not there. From there it happened that if we were at the meetings we were supposed to be in the boardroom, you see. And the meetings were supposed to be in the afternoon at 1 o'clock, you see. So that when we were done talking, we could also drink beers that they were also drinking. There was a Ball club. A football team from the firm. When the meeting was over we would walk out carrying beers and food. That's when they go to play soccer. They could enjoy themselves after the soccer match, you see. And it was the company's responsibility to offer transport and all these things, you see. But I couldn't enjoy all these things for a long time, you see. Because I was leaving the company. I stayed for a year and that's when I joined Steal and Co., you see.

TM: Mr. Lelaka, because now I realise that time is against us. It's about two hours since we started the interview and we are still in the '70s. We haven't reached the '80s and the '90s. If we can stop it here when you left Roost. When we come back we can start it there, because we still want to ask about the issues of the community council, because it was the start of the strikes and the Black Local Authority. So I think that we would ask to meet up with you again so that we can ... But what we will do we will transcribe this interview and give you the transcript. So that you can look at it and when we come back again we know that we have other questions. But we're going to start in '77 when you were ... In which year did you leave Roost?

JL: I left in '82

TM: Yes. We are going to start in '77 until the present. Mr. Lelaka, we would like to thank you for your time and the information that you've given us. And you started it from the very beginning...



-----End of Interview-----