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TSHEPO: Today is the 23rd of January 2011. I'm Tshepo Moloji. Im here with Mr and Mrs Mabena at Esther Park, Kempton Park. We are going to talk about the history of Tembisa. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you my elders for giving me this chance to talk to you about the history of Tembisa. Maybe if we could begin ... We could begin with you first, ntate (Mr Mabena).

MR MABENA: Yes

TSHEPO: Eh, you can introduce yourself: who is ntate Mabena and where were you born? Then you can take us through to how you ended up in Tembisa. Then we'll move on the 'me (Mrs Mabena).

MR MABENA: My name is Timothy Tono Mabena. I was born on the 31 December 1955 at a place called Garsfontein. Garsfontein is a place that has changed. There is still a part called Garsfontein. But the whole region is now called Centurion. At some stage ... When we were born it was called Verwoerd Park. We were removed from there in 1957. When we were removed from Garsfontein I believe I was 2 years old when we were taken to Tembisa. In Tembisa we were settled at a section called Mashimong. Because of the apartheid system in South Africa, my parents were AmaNdebele but when we arrived in Tembisa they were separated from the people we used to live with at Garsfontein. Some of whom were BaSotho. At the time they were called Bashoeshoe.

TSHEPO: Yes

MR MABENA: They were placed at a section called Sedibeng

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: Those who were Tsongas were placed at a section called Xubeni. Those who spoke Nguni – IsiZulu - were taken to Caleni and Mqantsa. Those were the first sections in 1960s. The section called Sedibeng ... Let me go back before 1960. When we arrived there, we lived in shacks. These shacks were built by the municipality. They built you a shack and a toilet, which had a bucket and allocate you a yard. That's the way it was ... (car passing by sound). Sedibeng, Mashimong, Mqantsa, Xubeni and Caleni began that way.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: They were sections made up of shacks and bucket toilets. In 1960 they built two houses in Sedibeng. They were called sample house. My father and other men on that day, I still remember after those houses had been completed, were called and told that on Monday and Tuesday, in according with those sections, they shouldn't go to work. They were supposed to go and view those houses. They were the first-four rooms which were built, and they were seeking their consent. That was very interesting during apartheid ... that during that time they were imposing things on people. They even called our fathers and mothers to ask them whether they love those houses. They said they loved them. At that stage, eh, in 1962 - on our arrival - there was a businessman in Tembisa who came from Edenvale at Dindela he was called Mr Thabethe. Mr Thabethe first built ... What's this - his shop at Caleni section next to the railway station, which was built during the time when we arrived in Tembisa. It was called Orkmor.

TSHEPO: Orkmor. I know it

MR MABENA: [Trains from] Orkmoor travelled from Pretoria to Joburg, but the residents of Tembisa could still get off at Orkmoor and go to their sections.

TSHEPO: Isn't Orkmoor near Sethokga hostel?

MR MABENA: Yes, Sethokga hostel. Yes, that's the station. And then the first shop in Tembisa was called Verwoerd Huis

TSHEPO: Mmm...

MRS MABENA: The one that belonged to Thabethe.

MR MABENA: Which was owned by Mr Thabethe. And then the second shop it was called Hlanganani. It was Mr Nhlapo's at Caleni section. In Mr Nhlapo's shop there was another part which was called the post office. We went there for the post.

TSHEPO: Oh! It was combined with the shop...

MR MABENA: Yes. And then the first school that was built in Tembisa was Marulane. That's where we all begun schooling in 1962.

MRS MABENA: In which section?

MR MABENA: Eh, in ...

TSHEPO: Xubeni?

MR MABENA: Xubeni. It was the first school in Xubeni. And then the second school was Sedibeng - Sedibeng Primary School. Today is called Sedibeng. After Sedibeng came Mashimong, and then Tshepisa

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: Tshepisa is a primary school. Yes, it's a primary school. Then came others like Thuthuka, and so on. And then in 1963 that's when they started building houses in mass in those sections, which were four-roomed. They were built with a brick called *Mampara*.

TSHEPO: (Laughing) what type of brick is that?

MR MABENA: Eh, it's a very rough brick. I would say it was second not first quality brick used in building houses at that stage. It meant that *mampara* brick was used only for building houses for black people, you see. In another language it was called second grade, because Thabethe's house and his shop were built using the first grade.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: So, you could see the difference. What they did at that time in 1963 they built five rooms near the railway, using face bricks so that when inside the train the impression would be [that] all the houses looked the same inside. Those were five-roomed houses. The first houses in Tembisa which were ... If you were using a train by then you would see strictly five rooms

which were nicely built, which meant that even though black people were removed from where they used to live they were now staying in beautiful five-roomed houses.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: So, I began schooling at Marulane. And then we were removed from Marulane to Sedibeng. [At] Sedibeng we studied Standard One up to Standard Two.

TSHEPO: Who were removed?

MR MABENA: Meaning?

TSHEPO: Which students were transferred?

MR MABENA: From where – Marulane?

TSHEPO: Yes, Marulane.

MR MABENA: Students which were transferred were those who did Sepedi. They were supposed to go to the BaPedi school. And by then they were mixed AmaZulu and BaPedi. Setswana was not there. XiTsonga was there, but there were very few XiTsonga-speaking people. Predominantly there were three languages in Tembisa. Yes, so we went to that school. Then in 1964 there was a further separation. A new school for BaTswana people was established (laughing). We were supposed to go there, because there was no Ndebele. We could not be classified again as BaSotho or AmaZulu. We were taken to a Setswana school. I learnt Setswana. The first Setswana primary school was, eh, Tlhakanang primary school. And then Sedibeng was still Basotho. Mashimong was ... What's this? It was Northern Sotho. And then Xubeni was XiTsonga and VhaVenda. And then what's this? Thuthuka was AmaZulu. And then, because we were Batswana we never had ... It was very interesting. I don't really remember where we came from, hence I told my mother - I remember what was happening to us - I told her we were renting and she took it literally. We were part of Tshepisa. It was a BaPedi-speaking school. So, we started as BaPedi. Very interesting in our schooling was the death of Verwoerd in 1966. Verwoerd was the Prime Minister of ... What's this? Of South Africa. He died. I'm sure we were in Standard Three when he died. And then that became ... Because immediately when the news were announced we were called to the school's assembly and the school was dismissed. We were told to go back home as the English Prime Minister had passed away.

TSHEPO: Oh, and you were told by the principal

MR MABENA: Yes, the principal. They told us go back to your homes. There's something very tragic in this country which has happened (laughing). You can come back tomorrow. The following day we were told how he died. There was this Tsafendas who stabbed him, and the country's mourning. There was no television then. On radio's we were advised every time to ask our parents after school to listen, to hear, about the progress of this Prime Minister.

TSHEPO: Which radio station did you listen to?

MR MABENA: All radio stations. There was IsiZulu, XiTshonga and Setswana, IsiXhosa. They are still there. It was the medium, eh ... communication which we received news and stories from. I think in 19 We completed primary school and went on to high school, eh in 1971.

TSHEPO: Which high school?

MR MABENA: Tembisa High. And then that was the only ... It's still the only high school in Tembisa. Yes, the first high school in Tembisa. We were going to start Form One both me and my wife, and that's where we met in 1971. They came from the Roman part of Dindela.

TSHEPO: Aha...

MR MABENA: That's where we met. And then ...

TSHEPO: Okay, I think this is the right time for us to involve 'me.

MR MABENA: Okay.

TSHEPO: 'Me, I'd like us to use the same method as the one we used with your husband, starting by telling us about your background and then we'll take it up to '71 when you guys met.

MRS MABENA: Alright. I was born in Edenvale Location. We moved here in Tembisa in 1967.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MRS MABENA: Yes. I was not part of ... We were not part of the beginning of Tembisa as my husband was. But the reason why we moved to Tembisa in 1967 was [because] my father in Edenvale was a municipal worker. He was a builder. Wherever there was something that needed to be built they would call him and other team members to do that. So, he had a choice to come to Tembisa and stay wherever he wanted. There were three house that they gave us to choose from. One was in Mthambeka, and one was in Esangweni - Esangweni section, number 13, and the other one was in Isitshama, number 249. They took him to see all those houses, 'cause he was a municipal worker and an old man. That's what I know. He didn't like Mthambeka. At Esangweni there was a huge rock inside the house - even today there are rocks in some of the few houses there.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MRS MABENA: Yes. If you can go there it's a problem.

TSHEPO: Where is Esangweni, if I may ask 'me?

MRS MABENA: Next to the rank.

TSHEPO: Oh, the taxi rank

MRS: Yes

TSHEPO: Alright.

MRS MABENA: At Esangweni section - so he didn't like that one. They moved ... They showed him the one at Setshama and fortunately he liked that one. So, we moved into that house in 1967. Then I was doing Standard Three, and we stayed there up to date. And my parents died in that house. As my husband is saying in '71 we moved after passing our Standard Six and went to Tembisa High school. That's where we met.

TSHEPO: Eh, before high school where did you start schooling?

MRS MABENA: I was at Edenvale primary school.

TSHEPO: Aha

MRS MABENA: Yes, at Edenvale primary school. Fortunately in 1967 when we were moving to Tembisa, our school also moved to Tembisa.

TSHEPO: Oh, from Edenvale

MRS MABENA: We were the last people. As I said my father was given a choice as to when he wanted to move. Then in 1967 after they finished Tembisa we were also ... I mean, when they were done with Edenvale, then Edenvale primary school had to move to Tembisa as well. They built it at Welamlambo, where there's Welamlambo primary school. That's where we started school in Tembisa; the school from Edenvale which was built there. So, we completed our Standard Six at Welamlambo primary school. It was a combined school, where there was Sub A up to Standard Six, and all other languages were there. Yes, SeSotho, IsiZulu. We didn't have Setswana as well. It was just SeSotho and IsiZulu, and Shangaan(XiTsonga). Yes, those were the three [language]. Then we passed our Standard Six at Welamlambo and then we went to high school in Tembisa where we met with nate Mabena.

TSHEPO: By the way, what is your full name?

MRS MABENA: Matilda Vuyelwa Mabena.

TSHEPO: As you explained that you came from Edenvale for your dad to end up in Edenvale where was he originally from?

MRS MABENA: Eh, my dad's parents were living in Alexandra Township. Then my dad got a job in Edenvale. He bought his own site and moved from his home in Alexandra. Then he became independent in Edenvale. He bought his own site and built his own house there. He was then given a house by the municipality 'cause he was working for the municipality. So, they came from Alexandra, but I was born in Edenvale.

TSHEPO: And as you've just said he bought his own site and built. Could you explain the type of houses they were?

MRS MABENA: Okay. They were given *ditandi* (stands). Already there were houses built there. We had three different areas in Tembisa ... I mean in Edenvale. There was a place called a Coloured people's area: New stands for Coloureds. There were three-roomed house. It would be a kitchen – slightly bigger – combined with dining room and there were two bedrooms. That's where Coloured people lived where houses had already been established ... (phone ringing). And there was another place which is ... (phone still ringing) ... it was bigger in terms of sites and people were building for themselves. They had big yards in which they could accommodate many tenants just like in Alexandra. It was those types of places. They were issued with title deeds. They were given stands and people would built their own houses and have shacks around the main house, yes. And then my father also bought a place. Where we were staying it was a newly developed place, because there those two old ones. And then that one. Those yards were bigger. Even there people used to build for themselves. You build your house and

build rooms for tenants. So, they were called *boMastands* (Stand owners). We were called stand owners. We were the owners at home. So, that's the way the houses were in Edenvale.

TSHEPO: Oh, so as people were, like in the case of your husband in Garsfontein, were people also forcibly removed

MRS MABENA: Yes, it was forced removal, because we know that today. Today there's Sebenza where we were - Sebenza Industrial Area. We were moved because white people had bought those places to do ...

MR MABENA: Business

MRS MABENA: Business there. And we were moved and they brought us here in Tembisa. Tembisa was already established then. We all came to Tembisa. The first group of people from Dindela in Edenvale - Dindela as we used to call it - who were moved were taken to Mthambeka section. The majority: 90% of the people in Mthambeka are coming from Dindela. Then they placed others in different places (car passing sound). But that was the first one ... Not the first section. But I know the majority were taken there. And then there was Esangweni. Then Welamlambo

TSHEPO: Oh, so '71 that's when you started high school...

MR AND MRS MABENA: High school!

TSHEPO: How did you find the school because you were from higher primary?

MRS MABENA: Eh, when we met, my husband and I, at high school it had already moved from where it originated. Because it started as ...

MR MABENA: Prefabs.

MRS MABENA: The shop which my husband was talking about started as ... It was nearer Mr Thabethe's shop. So, it was just...

MR MABENA: Two rooms

MRS MABENA: Two rooms at first. But it was a high school which was there. Then when we went to Tembisa high school they had moved. It was moved from ...

MR MABENA: Yes, it was the second year.

MRS MABENA: From that place that was a two-roomed near Thabethe's shop. It was... How many classes were there? I think there were four classes.

MR MABENA: Eight

MRS MABENA: Eight?

MR MABENA: Eight classes. It's still there. You know, sometimes when we pass there we look at it and say...

MRS MABENA: We looked at it...

MR MABENA: And we would say original high school. The outer building is referred to as the high school, from Form One to Form Three ... Form Five

MRS MABENA: No, Form One to Form Three

MR MABENA: Oh, Form One to Form Three when we started. When we completed Form Three that's when Form Four began.

TSHEPO: Oh, they were adding.

MRS MABENA: Yes, they were adding the two classes: Form Four and Form Five.

TSHEPO: But now, because nate you explained that at some point in the '60s that's when they were dividing people ethnically. So, what happened when you reached high school because this was the only high school? How was the relationship because you were not used to being together?

MR MABENA: You know, relationships ... People are social beings. In those primary schools there were sports activities, music, athletics, eh, you name it. And competitions. We knew that in such a school in Tembisa so and so ran faster than all of us in athletics in the whole of Tembisa. We knew which school produced the best athletes. And with music we knew... There was one teacher called Idom. He was popular

TSHEPO: What did you call him?

MR MABENA: Idom. His surname was Idom. He was the best with music, yes.

TSHEPO: Is he still alive?

MR MABENA: No, he passed on

TSHEPO: Oh, he died. Shame.

MR MABENA: We knew that those who were taught by him and, eh There were primary schools' competitions - lower primaries and higher primaries. And then there was a trophy to be won. In that year they announced which school won. And then there was a term of athletics. When we reached high school we knew each other. And besides in the townships we belonged to soccer clubs. Those soccer clubs were mostly divided according to sections. That's how we socialised. We socialised through those things.

TSHEPO: Ah! So, this idea of differentiating people in terms of ethnic backgrounds didn't work.

MRS MABENA: It worked against them

MR MABENA: Yes, it worked against them because socially we were able to mix. You know, there were clubs in Tembisa which had comprised people from different ethnic groups. And there was communication. And that in itself ... You know, today we are proud of that, because we can speak all the languages. In that social cohesion a XiTsonga-speaking person was able to teach you XiTsonga and an IsiZulu-speaking person would teach you IsiZulu and you could

speak that language. We would communicate in all the languages. Yes, we were communicating using all the languages. That thing, you know, today we laugh at each other when we see others using other people's languages and we could relate

MRS MABENA: And in that area at high school I was amongst the those that could sing. I was amongst the best singers...

MR MABENA: She sings

TSHEPO: Is it?

MRS MABENA: Even at assembly when there was a song that needed a solo I was the one that lead. During our time at high school Matilda was the main ...

MRS MABENA: Who would sing. [I was] Matilda who sings.

TSHEPO: Oh! I mean, did you inherit music from home?

MRS MABENA: Yes, it was from my father. I took it from my dad. He was a preacher [and] at the same time he used to sing a lot.

TSHEPO: What was his name?

MRS MABENA: Mr Mabunga

TSHEPO: Oh, ntate Mabunga. What was the name of his church?

MRS MABENA: The Ethiopian church.

TM: So, when he moved from Dindela was he already a preacher?

MRS MABENA: Yes, he was already a preacher. But we never had an established church. He held his sermons at home

TSHEPO: At home?

MRS MABENA: Yes, at home.

MR MABENA: The same goes for me. My father's church was also Ethiopian.

TSHEPO: So, your father was also a preacher

MR MABENA: Yes, Ethiopian Catholic Church. They were independents and it was those people who revolted against the bigger ...

MRS MABENA: Bigger churches

MR MABENA: Bigger churches. So, at that stage they were told that if you wanted to be a preacher you had to go to school and study. And they were against it. So, they told themselves I

can be a preacher even if I didn't go and study at school. I'd find a way to learn the bible until I become a preacher. So, those were the independent churches.

TSHEPO: And still on the issue of churches can you explain the kind of atmosphere on Sundays when people came to church. How was it - what do you remember?

MR MABENA: You felt very holy spirit as a preacher's child. You didn't have to do wrong things. But for us Sunday was so wonderful because, number one, we ate a lovely meal.

TSHEPO: Mmm... what did you eat?

MR MABENA: (Laughing) Chicken and rice, and beetroot, and what we called desert: custard and jelly. And then the best clothes. On that day ... Sunday is still the most sociable day. After church was finished, like us boys, we would ask for money to go to the stadium to watch soccer, basketball. It's always soccer and basketball predominantly.

MRS MABENA: For Sundays it meant that I woke up in the morning as a girl. We were a family of four. It was my mom, my dad, me and my brother only. So, I would wake up in the morning, together with my mom, and clean the house because people were coming to gather at home. So' we'd clean and cook enough for everybody that would like to have lunch with us. That would mean a lot of work for me as a girl. But it was interesting. I got used to it. Yes, I was looking forward to it every Sunday.

TSHEPO: Is that so?

MRS MABENA: Yes, 'cause there would be other kids that were of my age that would come. After eating we would play and discuss other things. So, it meant company for me. Because, as I'm saying, I had only one sibling who was my brother. Yes, I was always looking [forward to Sundays].

TSHEPO: But would you call it a norm that everyone went to church on Sundays or were other people going to other social ...

MR MABENA: Events?

TSHEPO: Events

MRS MABENA: There were other social ... The majority of the people were Christians. Most people went to church. But on Sunday, again, there was another social activity which was known as ...

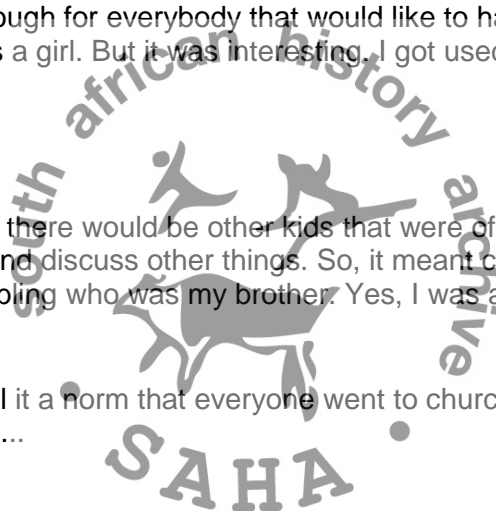
MR MABENA: Dinaka (Cultural dancing)

MRS MABENA: After church at about two we would gather at the ground where they played ...

MR MABENA: Baseball

MRS MABENA: Yes, baseball. Baseball sport was popular in Tembisa at that time - in the '70s. There were grounds next to a shop called ... Just opposite, eh, Tembisa Station ...

MR MABENA: Cheap Side?



TSHEPO: Oh, in that open space, where people are selling now?

MR MABENA: Yes

MRS MABENA: Yes

MR MABENA: Cheap Side Trading ... It's called Cheap Side Trading Store

MRS MABENA: Then afternoon we would go there to watch dinaka. They would compete. People from other hostels would come and from many other places. Then they would be there competing for whatever they would have betted.

TSHEPO: Wow!

MRS MABENA: That was our entertainment.

MR MABENA: Yes. Tilly there's another interesting [thing], which moved parallel with the intention of the apartheid and all its system. When Tembisa started, parallel to that they build a hostel, Sethokga. Sethokga was established for single men. Again they must work for 10 years living in Sethokga. After 10 years they would qualify to get houses. There was Section 10 (1) (A). Section 10 (1) (A) meant that you qualified. So, those living in the hostel didn't this Section. They had Section 10 (1) (B).

TSHEPO: Mmm...

MR MABENA: Meaning, they were still left with a few more years before gaining Section 10 (1) (A). And pass books (reference book) were huge. They were signed every month. My father's identity document was signed every month. If they found out that it was January and it had not been signed you could go to jail. If your boss forgot to sign it ... It was same with us at school. If you were over 18 you had to have an identity document. The principal was supposed to stamp it.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: Yes. He had to stamp it.

TSHEPO: For both boys and girls?

MRS MABENA: Boys and girls, yes.

MR MABENA: Yes. So, an identity [document] was also a mechanism used to control people. And those living in hostels and Tembisa. The intention of the apartheid system was, at a certain time, to turn the whole of Tembisa into a hostel. They started to establish those homeland [states], moving people away from Tembisa. Relocating them to places like Nkangala, Bophuthatswana, Transkei. So, their intention was ... And then even hostels were mushrooming. The first one was Sethokga. The second one was Makhulong. And ... What's this?

MRS MABENA: Vusimuzi, Temong, Seotloana.

MR MABENA: Seotloana. Where we used to live was also a hostel. And then Ethafeni. They were mushrooming.

MRS MABENA: Let us tell you about these hostels and how they were established. The biggest one made up of flats was Sethokga. It was huge. And then there was another one, Enhlanzeni. Enhlanzeni it's a big hostel. It's still there even today. It was the second one. And then followed Makhulong, Temong, Vusimuzi. Those were four-roomed houses.

MR MABENA: And Jiyane

MRS MABENA: And Jiyane. Yes, those were four-roomed houses. So, people would stay in there. They would be many in number.

MR MABENA: Sixteen in one four-roomed. Every room [accommodated] four, four

MRS MABENA: Was meant for four, but eventually it was overcrowded. You know, people would receive people who came from the rural places looking for jobs, and they would stay with them there. You would find from 20 to 22 people occupying one room. So bit by bit ...

TM: Were these hostels for men only or there hostels for women too?

MRS MABENA: Yes, just men. A woman would not be seen in a hostel. You would never see her in there. It was just men

TM: If I may ask, unlike in Alexandra where there are two hostels which look like Sethokga which accommodated women. These hostels, I mean, were very much controlled. When entering you had to produce whatever documentation to show who you were visiting and so forth. The four-roomed ones were they also controlled?

MR AND MRS MABENA: No

MRS MABENA: That was when they made a mistake to ...

MRS MABENA: That's where they made a mistake, because we'd tell you as to how we invaded [them]. Because today those four rooms are occupied by people. In fact, our comrades are living there. That's where they made a mistake. They were never fenced around and there was no control. When Inkatha started fighting people in the East Rand, you know, our base as the ANC (African National Congress) was Sethokga.

TM: Wow!

MRS MABENA: Whilst theirs was Vusimuzi, IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party). Now what we did as the ANC, and we were assisted by MK from outside - and there were lots of underground people who were working together with those members of MK who were deployed to come and destabilise hostels, particularly the ones which were IFP-base, so what we did was to go there and removed the people who lived in the hostel, with the help of MK and with the help of the inmates of Sethokga hostel, who were mainly AmaXhosa. Then they'd take people from the township to Sethokga and train them on how to shoot and to injure. And then they also gave them *Intelezi* (muti) to drink. Then you would find young men saying we are going to get *Intelezi* so that we could fight IFP. We managed to invade the small hostels and filled them with our own people. When we evicted people there'd be those who were guarding. MK was there guarding

that they shouldn't go back. The must all go to Vusimuzi. So, I'm saying they made a mistake by not controlling those four-roomed hostels. That's where we invaded. And those were our bases. Even the cadres from outside would come and hide in those for rooms, yes.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: Maybe the other thing ... Another mistake was Makhulong hostel. They themselves started evicting people, taking them to flat-like hostels and they gave them those four rooms. Now there was this Temong hostel. Temong hostel was our first base where we evicted the men who there. We said 'Go to the bigger hostels'. This is going to become family units. And then next hostel we targeted was Thafeni; we also evicted people there. And Vus'muzi to an extent. Well, strategically it beat us because we left it, like my wife is saying, next to Nhlanzeni hostel. But basically people had already occupied all the four-roomed houses. Like my wife is saying, they never had control. They only had control in the bigger hostels. What we call metro police now then were called the Black Jacks. Black Jacks guarded there. And they were demanding a permit when entering the hostel.

TSHEPO: How did you take people out of the small hostels to the bigger hostels for you to occupy them as your bases?

MR MABENA: By then I think ... Most what we call activities were in '86. We had what we called the Mandela Plan (M-PLAN). We established what we called street committees. Street committees had control over this. They had a register to say who was placed where, which family was placed where.

TSHEPO: Oh, so you'd literally take people's names down

MR MABENA: Yes, for control. During the time of the street committees you wouldn't enter Tembisa without people notifying me that there was such and such a car and the registration number. And then there would be people looking as to know what that car was doing here and its destination.

MRS MABENA: We were vigilant.

MR MABENA: Very vigilant.

MRS MABENA: We were also targeted 'cause they were doing the same. Police watched your every move. If you were an activist ... I don't know which year it was when Madelakufa was started ...

MR MABENA: Madelakufa was started ...in 1989.

MRS MABENA: Yes, '89

TSHEPO: What is Madelakufa?

MRS MABENA: Madelakufa is a shack settlement in Tembisa. People who we unfortunately could not offer accommodation in the small hostels, established their own place. They pointed it out ...

MR MABENA: Actually, it we pointed out. We started in ... By the way, what's section next to ...

MRS MABENA: Ndulwini?

MR MABENA: No.

MRS MABENA: The one next to Madelakufa?

MR MABENA: Yes

MRS MABENA: Its Ndulwin, Setshama ...

MR MABENA: Next to Setshama

MRS MABENA: Oh, mmm ... What's this? Eh, ...

MR MABENA: Qaqa

MRS MABENA: Yes, Qaqa.

MR MABENA: Yes, there was one Saturday, amongst ourselves there were builders and those who used to work for the municipality, we said we're going to demarcate yards for people. People like ntate Dladla.

MRS MABENA: And that was the ANC's move.

MR MABENA: Yes. We said come let's go and cut land for people. But the system found out about this plan. And when the system heard about it there was some sort of fighting with the system until ... I can't recall what exactly happened. But the people who didn't succeed then established Madelakufa

TSHEPO: Madelakufa, If I may ... As I was driving around Tembisa last time there's a cemetery and there's an informal settlement ...

MR MABENA: It's Madelakufa Two. Yes, there's a complex in ...

MRS MABENA: Have you ever been to the shopping centre near Tembisa? At the municipality

TSHEPO: Yes

MR MABENA: Next to it

MRS MABENA: There are some RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses nearby

TSHEPO: Which side?

MR MABENA: At Thembi's shop, near Pick 'n Pay

TSHEPO: Oh, Thembi

MRS MABENA: Yes, there are houses facing Thembi

TSHEPO: Oh, that's Madelakufa

MRS MABENA: That's Madelakufa. We started there

MR MABENA: Original, yes

MRS MABEN: That's where we started

TSHEPO: Oh, so there's one and two

MR MABENA: The one next to the cemetery is two.

TSHEPO: Alright. Okay. Let me take you back a little. You were in high school during the '70s. We spoke about music. We spoke about sports. What other activities did you participate in?

MR MABENA: It was debates. They were more school-controlled. And then there was also what we called SCM, Student Christian Movement. Every Friday there would be some preachers coming there. And to some extent there were some students who really took that very seriously amongst us.

TSHEPO: What do you mean took it seriously?

MR MABENA: They attended all services. Some of us dropped and we would be like these [things] were for white people. They just wanted to confuse us. Today we're talking about some of those who participated in the SCM mostly are preachers today

TSHEPO: Is that so?

MR MABENA: Yes. They took it upon themselves and ...

TSHEPO: Who are some of those, for example?

MR MABENA: Mabuza. We call him Mgidiza. What's that place where Panyaza lives? It's Midrand. I've forgotten others

MRS MABENA: Ezekiel.

TSHEPO: And the preachers who came to your school were they from the township or from outside?

MR MABENA: Mostly they were white people. It was very rare to find a black person coming to preach to us.

MRS MABENA: It was Pastor Naude

TSHEPO: Beyers?

MRS MABENA: No

MR MABENA: No. The other Naude.

MRS MABENA: He was ...

MR MABENA: Popular

MRS MABENA: Popular and regular. He used to come on Fridays. And he would preach and then sing.

TSHEPO: If you could take us back a little concerning their services, can you tell us what they used to preach about

MRS MABENA: Well, normally...

MR MABENA: It was more of obedience and your normal service. But, you see, when you don't have an interest in something you can even forget what it was.

MRS MABENA: But you are right in saying it was obedience, because they were stressing the fact that we were students we should listen to our teachers and do our work, because that's what God wants. That we should listen to our elders. But there was another activity... There was a group of people from Alexandra who stayed at ... Mostly were staying in the section we called Lifateng. They came to us one Saturday and established a social club. A social club where we were taught how to play chess and ...

MR MABENA: Reading

MRS MABENA: We read.

MR MABENA: Drama

MRS MABENA: And we would discuss current issues.

MR MABENA: Politics.

MRS MABENA: We were still in high [school] and they had passed that level. Others were at tertiary. We saw them as ...

MR MABENA: The cream

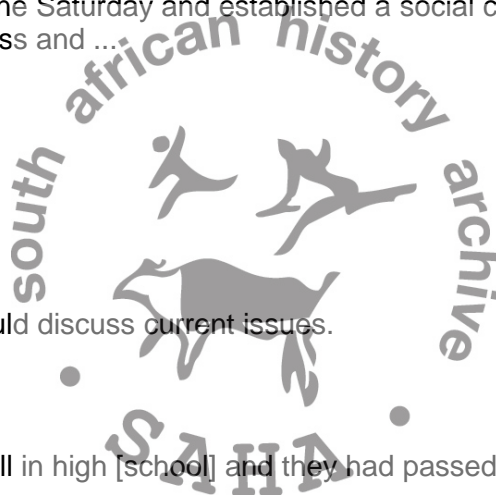
MRS MABENA: The cream. But, you know, they came to us and taught us these things, After we passed our matric we felt that they were training us. But mostly, eh ... Some of them were already involved in the Black Consciousness Movement. So, they were doing that having a programme of the BPC (Black People's Convention).

TSHEPO: Who were some of these members you can still remember from that group?

MR MABENA: Thami Mnyele

MRS MABENA: Yes

MR MABENA: Thami Mnyele, James Moleya. Ralph Mothiba.



TSHEPO: The former principal?

MR MABENA: Yes.

TSHEPO: Is that so?

MR MABENA: Yes, yes. The other one Obed Raphala. He passed away. Mazizi Mbuce. And what's this, eh

MRS MABENA: Mike ...

MR MABENA: Mike Mthembu

MRS MABENA: Those were the people that opened our eyes a lot.

TSHEPO: Then the group which they taught and were interacting with how was it constituted - did they identify you or anyone could come?

MRS MABENA: Yes, anyone could come. But they started with a few. I was amongst those who were identified. As I'm saying they had their own programme that we didn't know: political programme.

TSHEPO: So, where did you meet?

MRS MABENA: Different houses

MR MABENA: Different houses.

MRS MABENA: But most of the time it was at Thami's home. But then Mabena will continue to tell you about ... Because girls wouldn't stay until late, you see. But they would stay there and sometimes drink. And listen to Thami's music.

TSHEPO: Wow!

MRS MABENA: So, they would just identify us. I don't know how did they that. But boys and girls. And tennis ... Others would go and play tennis. They even taught how to play tennis. Thami was playing tennis

TSHEPO: Wow!

MR MABENA: Maybe you've heard of the name Brian Mazibuko.

TM: Yes

MR MABENA: He, too. That's when we recruited him.

MRS MABENA: During our era.

MR MABENA: He was recruited at Thami Mnye's. There's a guy ... he's a doctor now. His name is Philemon Tshabalala. We taught him. Firstly, we taught him chess ... eh, Brian. We

were the ones who taught him. We introduced him to chess and at that stage if you've qualified they would invite advanced people [who could play chess]. I still remember the person I used to play against was Dr Tlhakula, because I used to beat the youngsters. And then they introduced us you know to jazz. And then we stayed overnight [at] Thami Mnyele's. By then Thami was working as an artist. He introduced us to a lot of jazz artists. But at the same time ...

TSHEPO: Such as?

MR MABENA: People like Abdullah Ibrahim, Duke Ellington, Jackson ... Eh, what's this [person's name?].

MRS MABENA: Hugh Masekela

MR MABENA: Hugh Masekela. People like Johnson, Herbie Hancock. And that was it. But when you qualified, depending on how they had been assessing you, they'd allow you to open up a certain branch, but continue to link up with them.

TSHEPO: Oh!

MR MABENA: We were allowed to establish the Young Ambassadors Youth Alive.

TSHEPO: When you say we, it yourself and who?

MR MABENA: That was called Young Ambassadors Youth Alive. [We] recruit[ed] other people we could get. But ultimately it became known that we belonged to the Black People's Convention.

TSHEPO: Ah! How was the Young Ambassadors Youth Alive established - how did you recruit?

MR MABENA: At my home, just like at my wife's home, there was a church which was held in a shack built in the yard. So, after church on Sunday we would practice choir. And the other thing that was very interesting was that you should be well-dressed. And you should look like an American, and you should start talking in English.

TSHEPO: (Laughs)

MR MABENA: Yes

MRS MABENA: What they stressed was neatness

MR MABENA: Neatness, yes. And ...

MRS MABENA: And punctuality. If you have a meeting at two o'clock all of you should be there at two.

MR MABENA: Yes

MRS MABENA: Yes, they were teaching us those things.

MR MABENA: Punctuality and neatness. And also the question of language, English. And, you know, some sort of debates and some struggle books - just a little.

MRS MABENA: We were not introduced to the whole concept hurriedly

MR MABENA: Just a topic and read about it, and debate about it amongst yourself - consciousness that you are black and you must be proud to be black, and that a white person is not superior to you. They did that just a little. Not much.

MRS MABENA: And amongst those who developed quickly was Brian Mazibuko.

MR MABENA: Yes

MRS MABENA: And at school he was a leader in 1976. Yes, amongst he was the one who was leading. So, from this very group they realised that this one was very intelligent they took him out of the group and introduced him to politics.

MR MABENA: So, you'd be picked out. So, there was some disorganisation after Thami [Mnye] had left. Thami left around 1976. Yes, he left in '76.

TSHEPO: Disorganisation within the group?

MR MABENA: Yes. Because already there was this thing ... the police began to take people to jail.

TSHEPO: The initial group, Thami's group, did it have a name like yours?

MR MABENA: No, no, no. It was just a social group.

MRS MABENA: Especially, [it catered for] the children who were in high school those who wanted to socialise. We were bored. Mostly there wasn't lots of sporting activities. Tennis was there ...

MR MABENA: Table tennis was there.

MRS MABENA: Yes, there was a tennis court in Tembisa at Mqansa. It was the only one

MR MABENA: And cricket to some extent.

MRS MABENA: Yes

MR MABENA: People like Titus [played cricket]

MRS MABENA: Yes. And that other ... What do you call it?

MR MABENA: Baseball?

MRS MABENA: Baseball. So, others would just go and listen to music. Most of the time we'd listen to music at Thami's and late discussions.

MR MABENA: Mostly late discussions

MRS MABENA: You'd develop so that whenever there were debates at school you'd have at least listened to other people talking.

TSHEPO: The debates at school - what type of topics were they?

MR MABENA: Ah, they were just debates which ... I'll remember them. But they were lousy

TSHEPO: But they were not political?

MR MABENA: No, no.

MRS MABENA: No, they weren't.

MR MABENA: Not political

TSHEPO: And during the social gatherings at Thami's what were you discussing?

MR MABENA: Those were political to some extent.

MRS MABENA: Mmm, like the day-to-day things: why white people didn't carry passbooks but we carry them? Like why were they special?

MR MABENA: Forced removals. Special [permits].

MRS MABENA: Those type of things. You know, they would assess us in terms of how we reasoned regarding the way our parents were treated; and why did we attend such schools and in town why was it different?

TSHEPO: But then what did that do to you especially?

MRS MABENA: They made you aware of the conditions. Yes, they made you aware to say these conditions were not the same.

MR MABENA: You know, because for us at the time - in 1974 - there was a special trip to Turfloop [University]. We were going to meet with SASCO (South African Student Congress Organisation). No, it wasn't SASCO. It was a student movement.

TSHEPO: SASO (South African Student Organisation).

MR MABENA: To meet with SASO and engage in some discussions.

TSHEPO: Who went to Turfloop?

MR MABENA: Eh, by then we were in Form Four.

TSHEPO: Oh, it was a school's trip.

MR MABENA: It was treated as a school trip, but it was a political trip.

TSHEPO: Who organised it?

MR MABENA: It was organised by Mr Poo, our teacher. And then on the letter it was written that they were going to show us that when we passed matric ...

MRS MABENA: Career choices.

MR MABENA: During the day it was career [guidance]. At night ... But still it was clandestine. Because I still remember I was picked up with a guy called Walter Moloi, so that we could go and meet with the other students. They told us about Black Consciousness. I remember we received the first material – reading material - in 1974; and they told us not to show it to other people. So, when Walter finished reading it he gave it to me, and we would discuss.

TSHEPO: But then, I mean, as children who come from solid religious background did you take these discussions back home as well?

MRS MABENA: No

MR MABENA: They had already assessed the type of parents we had. They'd say don't you dare.

TSHEPO: Your parents were they...

MRS MABENA: They were strict and they were old

MR MABENA: People

MRS MABENA: And they never wanted that type of thing. Especially me. My father was working for ...

MR MABENA: The system

MRS MABENA: For the system. So, I'd have contributed to him losing his job, because I'd be criticising white people and saying his boss was bad while he was feeding me.

TSHEPO: Mmm ... You raised the issue that after Thami had left there disorganisation. What was happening?

MR MABENA: What happened was we began to become suspicious of each other, because other people were picked up [arrested] and others were not.

TSHEPO: Okay, by the police

MR MABENA: By the police. Then we started to realise that there were some problems. Why wasn't so and so picked up? But at the same time there were clever people who consolidated and said as a unit this shouldn't be happening. If there was an *impimpi* (sell-out) we'd be able to detect it in your group.

TSHEPO: Which group was disorganised – the Young Ambassadors?

MR MABENA: No, young Ambassadors was still intact but the feeder body, which was the BPC.

TSHEPO: And amongst those who were in the feeder body who were arrested?

MR MADEBA: The first person to be arrested was James Moleya. And the second one was myself. You know, as a youngster then I chose to be become the secretary of the BPC. After James Moleya's arrest it was Mike Mthembu. And after Mike Mthembu it was Mazizi Mbuce. And the police started harassing a number of guys. And when we went to Steve Biko's funeral all of us were arrested. We were in a bus. At that stage I think there was no relaxation, because if it was now we wouldn't have been arrested. We sat at Motheong and drank ...

TSHEPO: Beers?

MR MABENA: Yes. One of our things was socialising. And they would tell you that if you didn't drink you were not a politician.

TSHEPO: Laughs. This is interesting.

MR MABENA: Very interesting. Even your hair. You had to have an afro hair. I was interested in finding my photos, because in one of the photos I have huge hair. It was sort of a disguise because we were marching. I hope I'll find them. Most of us had afros and we were marching. After we had left Motheong – at James Moleya's house – in a full bus and when we arrived at Mthambeka, where today there's a Kentucky [Fried Chicken] ... Then it was only two ways: going to Kempton Park and coming back from Kempton Park. There were the police. There was singing and defiance, because some of us had been drinking. One of our members who was there is today a General, Tumi Siboni. It's very interesting when I'm with him and reminding him about this incident [laughs] Tumi and others were responsible for our arrest [laughs]. They were asking: 'Biko had been killed, what's wrong with you guys?' The bus had been granted a permit to travel to that funeral. Oh, no, that system was very cruel. They (police) said okay we understand you but on the way you mind have an accident.

TSHEPO: Was that their reasoning?

MR MABENA: Yes. So, we want to see your passbooks. [whistles] they found all the people they were looking for. We were all in the bus. They'd say 'You're Mabena, you're so and so'. They said let's go. The only people who'd remain were those who had their passbooks. There were three or four people who their passbooks with them. Amongst them was Oupa Kgatle. We agreed that we should go to the police station and we'd negotiate when we get there. But that's where the trouble started. Tumi Siboni was busy smoking and filling the room with smoke. He was drunk. I can't remember whether it was Tumi or someone else who then said 'If Botha could die would you like if we did this to you?' Hey, he made the boers mad. They locked all of us up. We had dedicated comrades and we knew each other. Oupa was driving Mazizi Mbuce's car he rounded up all the comrades and they brought our passbooks to the police station. We were released Saturday afternoon. Then there was no television. We heard over the radio that Steve Biko was buried at 3 o'clock. Then we were released.

TSHEPO: So, that trip never happened.

MR MABENA: That trip never happened. But after that that's when trouble started.

TSHEPO: What sort of trouble?

MR MABENA: Interrogation, harassment. Some comrades left the country. People like Lebona Mosia – he's now the spokesperson of the Mpumalanga [government].

MRS MABENA: By then I wasn't very active. I was a nurse at Baragwanath Hospital.

TSHEPO: Is that so?

MRS MABENA: Yes. Then I started getting involved. I was recruited by a friend, Frieda Shaba. Then we started building ANC Women's League in Tembisa. We didn't call it ANCWL because the ANCWL was banned then. We called our organisation Women's Group. Then women weren't interested in politics. They were interested in other things. So, we'd organise them and invite them to a meeting to inform them about the things they were interested in. There was a person that was coming from exile – one of the cadres who were working underground – who was knowledgeable in making candles. We'd say to these women on such and such a day you must come to our meeting there'd be someone to show us how to make candles. We'd say to them 'Most of us were not employed and therefore we need to supplement our husbands' income by becoming involved in many other things'. So, we'd invite these women and this person would come to demonstrate to us how to make candles. The women developed an interest in this and attend the meeting. In the course of candle making we'd introduce politics indirectly. And the next time they came to the meeting we'd discuss health issues. We'd inform them about pap-smear. We'd get a doctor as well to our meetings to inform these women. So, they became interested in the Women's Group, because it educated them in many things: health-wise and those who were interested in sewing and vegetable gardening. We'd train them on how to manufacture manure. But at the same time we were gradually introducing political issues.

TSHEPO: Such as?

MRS MABENA: The first one, which was a huge problem in Tembisa, was the bucket system. So, we capitalised on it. We'd say to these women 'Look, when the men who were taking out the buckets from the toilets would spill them on the ground and sometimes even in the yard, and you as the mothers would have to clean after them. We also have to clean the buckets after they've emptied them. So, really this wasn't healthy'. That was our strong point to encourage many women to associate themselves with the Women's Group. Well, some later realised that this was a political organisation but they stuck with us. Then there were the apartheid government's councillors such as ntate (Mr) More. So, in one of our meetings we discussed that we had had enough with the buckets; our children were becoming sick because of these buckets. The women supported us. We then agreed that on such and such a day we were going to carry the buckets, full as they were, and we're going to spill them at More's place. He had ...

MR MABENA: At Mothiba's.

MRS MABENA: Yes, we took them to Mothiba's place. Mothiba was one of the councillors. Mothiba had a shop. We argued that we were supporting him by buying at his shop and he had become very rich; he was living in a house which had electricity and had a functioning sewerage system. We decided to take the buckets to Mothiba's place. Women came in numbers. We were led in that march by comrade Zodwa Mofokeng – the late Zodwa Mofokeng. We went to Mothiba's place and when we arrived there Zodwa addressed us. When the police arrived we had already spilled the buckets and some we had thrown them inside his shop. We, as leaders, were aware that the police would start looking for us ran away quickly. Not long the police identified the women who led the Women's Group. That's when the police started to harass us.

TSHEPO: Wow!

MRS MABENA: Yes. And some of us were even arrested.

MR MABENA: Yes. Maybe the other interesting part for that march to take shape my politics and my wife's politics interlinked, because then I was involved in the [Tembisa] Tembisa Association.

TSHEPO: I've heard about it.

MR MABENA: Yes, TRA (Tembisa Residents' Association). The intention was to co-ordinate the [boycott of] the buckets. But then there was something called Master Plan, which was introduced by More. What it meant was that we were paying for electricity which we didn't have. And how we got that information nobody knows 'till to this day. But we received that information and the analysis of our receipts that stated we were actually paying for rent, electricity but we didn't have it. Then they installed Apollo [lights] – the big lights. But still we lacked electricity.

TSHEPO: How much were you paying for the non-existent electricity?

MR MABENA: I think it was R75 monthly. On the receipt it read that we were paying for the Master Plan. The way the system explained Master Plan was that they were building infrastructure so that we could receive electricity. So, we started challenging it. In challenging it that's when we met the likes of Rev Maphethu. When we were challenging this system, we would use them as the priests. Because by then people like Rev Maphethu were not a threat to the system. But they had already been recruited as part of the underground units of the ANC. But we wouldn't say it upfront. That's how our activities interlinked. Then we organised the first march to protest against lack of electricity, the bucket system. And that march was led by me, Rev Maphethu, Rev ... Was it Rev Berry?

MRS MABENA: Yes.

MR MABENA: Yes, a white guy.

TSHEPO: Berry who?

MR MABENA: I've forgotten. But I'm sure Rev Maphethu knows him. At that stage, Gille [de Vlieg] we were together with in Tembisa. She would ask us questions – just like you're doing now. At some stage comrades started asking 'What is Gille's role, she's a white person and we're fighting whites?' We'd say 'No, no.' Then there were Democrats. You used to call them Democrats. She was one of the Democrats. She was sympathetic to our ...

MRS MABENA: Our course.

TSHEPO: I'd like to take you back to the issue of the TRA. But before then I'd like to ask 'me a question. You said you were recruited by 'me Frieda. What did she say when she approached you?

MRS MABENA: You know, Frieda was my childhood friend. She was the first to be recruited. So, she didn't approach me directly. Instead, she would give tasks to do. She would have a programme of what needed to be done. She knew that I was brave and could talk to women. She didn't come out directly and say 'Now I'm recruiting you for the ANC. No'. But the tasks that she asked me to do ... For example, when women were supposed to meet maybe in Johannesburg I would go ... well, she'd ask me to go that meeting. There'd be money but I wouldn't know where it came from. She'd say '*Hamba uyogibela sizozama imali*' (You should go. We'd try to find money for you). I realised late when she informed me that 'You started a

long time ago. You were in my unit underground'. Then we had FETRAW (Federation of Transvaal Women). We in Tembisa affiliated with FETRAW, and we were amongst the biggest group. We had organised. Like I'm saying this thing about the bucket [system] and the little things like health, gardening really organised women. I was also amongst the first committee members together with Winnie Mandela, Nomvula [Mokonyane] ...

TSHEPO: Which committee?

MRS MABENA: FETRAW's. Doctor [Gwen] Ramokgopa. I was in that executive together with them. That was the first executive.

TSHEPO: When did you form the Women's Group in Tembisa?

MRS MABENA: I think it was in 19...

MR MABENA: 1981.

MRS MABENA: Yes, before we got married. We got married in 1983.

TSHEPO: And TRA, nate, how did you form it?

MR MABENA: There was an organisation which my wife belonged to called, eh ... Goba's organisation. What was it called? Eh, TCA (Tembisa Civic Association).

TSHEPO: Goba Ndlovu?

MR MABENA: Yes. I think our commanders underground perceived it just as a tool. Besides it was very clear that the people who were leading it were not on the ANC's side politically. Then they said you must now start what we called civic association. I and Paul Maseko were given a task to start recruiting people. But at the same time Maseko was then the chairman of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), as a worker. And most of COSATU's affiliates already knew about this thing and said we must start a civic organisation, but a civic organisation that would draw a lot of shop stewards. Then we had a plan but no direction, because then we were focusing on consumer boycotts and what-have-you. So, the directive was that this was a civic matter: 'You must deal with the 'bread and butter' issues' like rent, electricity, bucket system'. Then how do you do that? Maseko and I were given the task to establish what we called Sectional Committees. So, all the 52 sections should have a committee and those committees would constitute what came to be called Tembisa Residents' Association. So, we rounded up. But then we realised that we lacked manpower. So we had to recruit other comrades, like Ali Tleane. We recruited Ali Tleane and we started working with them. Ali was the deputy president and Maseko was the president, and I was the secretary. We rounded up 52 sections. We divide the work. Maybe on Sunday we would do three sectional committees until all sections had committees. Then we called all these committees to a bigger meeting and we established the TRA. Our Educational Officer was Amon Msane. Then there was Lazarus Mawela, Greg Malebo. And obviously we formed street committees. And at that stage, you cannot believe it, in Tembisa there was no crime. It was zero! If you were to learn about crime it'd be police officers have fought at the police station. But then they began to pollute the situation. We then experienced internal family problems. Some were manageable, but others weren't. Some were beyond what we were doing as a civic association. But at the same we were also advancing a rent boycott. We boycotted rent and also called for a bond boycott,

because then there were bond houses. I think we started the rent boycott around 1984. And 1986 was a bad year because all of us were picked up [and locked up] until 1989.

TSHEPO: Oh, during the State of Emergency.

MR MABENA: State of Emergency. Those were the activities we were involved in. And when we were released we were given strict conditions. We were ordered to sign [at the police station] three times a day. What was interesting is that in 1986 we were arrested together with my wife. We were arrested on the same day.

MRS MABENA: They came to our house at 2 in the morning and left at 6.

MR MABENA: They were searching. They searched everything from 2 until 6 – and it was just one room.

MRS MABENA: I was then expelled from work as a nurse.

TSHEPO: Wow!

MRS MABENA: Yes. Because I was then taking too long to go to work. I think some of my colleagues who lived in Tembisa knew about my activities. I know other matrons knew about them. I was then expelled from work.

MR MABENA: And what was interesting when the police came to arrest us, I was then employed at a firm called Robo at Isando and I was a shop steward. After I had been arrested other shop stewards fought that I should receive my salary while I was in detention. Do you still remember people like Dan Kgasake (laughs). So, even though my wife had been expelled from work we could still survive. Those shop stewards fought.

MRS MABENA: I didn't stay long in detention, but Mabena did. I ended in Kempton Park, Sparton.

MR MABENA: They took her back home.

MRS MABENA: They took me back after a day. Mabena was transferred to Modder Bee [Prison].

MR MABENA: I joined people like Isaac Ncaphayi, Maseko – and a number of comrades. There were many of us at Modder Bee. One of them wasm Louis Mnguni. He's our ambassador in Guinea.

MRS MABENA: The reason why I didn't stay long in detention it was because they were not sure about my role. They made me to write explaining what I was doing.

TSHEPO: So, they asked you about your activities?

MRS MABENA: Yes: 'what is your involvement in the Women's Group?' They couldn't link it directly to the ANC, because of the activities we were involved in. So, they ended up thinking they were just wasting their time [on me]. They couldn't get the gist of it because they hadn't found anything tangible from us.

TSHEPO: Did they beat you?

MRS MABENA: Yes, they beat me. I can still remember from 6 – I can't exactly when they released me. I think it was around 3 – they made me write on many pages. They were beating while I was writing. But when they looked at what I had written they found that I was involved in a Women's Group and they decided that it was only focused on women's issues and not political. They couldn't find anything on us. We didn't keep our materials in our houses. Our neighbour was Dr Rikhotso. We stored our material at Doctor Rikhotso's place, because we felt that it was safe there. Materials such as t-shirts, books we'd take them to Dr Rikhotso's surgery.

TSHEPO: You mentioned cadres from exile who came to train you in skills like candle making ...

MRS MABENA: By then Frieda who recruited me was already operating underground. So, she was the one who had contact with these cadres. Sometimes she'd disappear and go to Zimbabwe. When she returns she'd be having a programme. They would come as women to recruit us, using the same programme, and informed us that they were working for the ANC and that they wanted to recruit more women indirectly. So, it were women cadres who came here to train women in various skills but at the same beginning to politicise them.

TSHEPO: And the women you invited to your meetings to recruit were they married women or youngsters?

MRS MABENA: It were married women and some young women like those who were members of the youth league. Yes, they would, and some would even encourage their mothers to come to our meetings. At the time I was already married, so I'd invite some of my neighbours. They would come and listen to the issues being discussed, because many of them were unemployed. So, we'd invite all the women. And the younger women really helped us in doing that; they recruited their mothers.

TSHEPO: Now that you were heavily involved in politics, and in your case nate [Mabena] you were even detained in the late 1970s, your fathers were church ministers. How did your parents respond to your activism?

MR MABENA: No, thank God my father had long passed away in the '80s.

MRS MABENA: Yes, they knew but ...

MR MABENA: By 1977 they had already accepted that there was nothing they could do. Yes, they had accepted and supported us.

TSHEPO: In 1976 during the student uprisings were you still at school?

MR MABENA: No, I had already completed. By then I was student, studying to become a medical technician at Thembisa Hospital. But we could also assist, because we still had a link with the students. This happened a year after we had left school. So, we were aware of what was happening.

TSHEPO: How did you assist them?

MR MABENA: We assisted them by giving them money and at the hospital ... At the time I was training at the hospital, so we'd look the less severe cases [of injury] and made sure that that person skipped the country.

MRS MABENA: It was first year at Baragwanath as a student. So, I was a little *dom* (dim) and working at the theatre. We'd see many people being brought to the hospital. As students we were just working. We were training.

TSHEPO: Then '83 you decided to tie the knot. What can you tell me about your wedding – how was a wedding in the location?

MRS MABENA: My father was very sick then. So, it was decided that it wasn't going to be a big wedding. We just went to the church and signed. After that we went back to my home to celebrate as a family.

MR MABENA: *Hoa hlabiswa* (slaughtering an animal to appease the ancestors).

MRS MABENA: Yes, *hoa hlabiswa*. The two families celebrated.

MR MABENA: Together with some friends.

MRS MABENA: It wasn't a big wedding because my dad wasn't well. He had cancer.

TSHEPO: But by then you were involved with some of the people who were active in politics. Were they also at your wedding? Actually I'm asking about the vibe.

MR MABENA: The vibe ... Well, then we were activists. I remember then we had agreed that we shouldn't go overboard, because at any time we could be detained. I think six months after our wedding we found a new place to live. It was an open stand, and in that stand that's where the whole thing took place. Most of the cadres who are now Generals, some are working for the National Intelligence, some are in the South African National Defence Force, some are spokespersons [in government] ... Thabo Mbeki's spokesperson was groomed in my *mkhukhu* (shack). Bheki ...

TSHEPO: Oh, Khumalo.

MR MABENA: Yes (laughs).

MRS MABENA: Then he was still attending school.

MR MABENA: Yes, they were at high school.

MRS MABENA: We got that site very cheaply.

TSHEPO: Oh, you used to buy sites.

MRS MABENA: Yes, and they were very cheap. I refused to go ... [inaudible]. I suggested that we should purchase the site and build a shack and as time went on we'd be able to build a house there. That's where we were used to harbour ...

MR MABENA: Everyone.

MRS MABENA: Some people would come to our place very late at night to carry out their operations inside the country. That's where I can say we started working seriously. We were risking, because the *boers* were also looking for us. And harbouring someone from exile it was even riskier, but we didn't mind. It was just life for us. We were prepared to die. If we died it was fine. I mean, at the time the *boers* had already harassed us a lot.

MR MABENA: '83 and '84, and '85 those were the years which ... Eh, the earliest that we had been sleeping in that house was around 2 mid-night.

MRS MABENA: There would be discussions, planning.

MR MABENA: If there was a place that had to be attacked by the cadres from outside, ours was the first house they would come to. They would relax and have tea, and discuss and receive reports about the progress.

TSHEPO: Is your house still there?

MR MABENA: Yes, it's there but we turned into a garage, because ultimately what happened was that Dr [Rikhotso] moved out of his surgery and house and we bought his house. So, we owned two stands and houses.

TSHEPO: But the structure is it still there?

MR MABENA: We demolished the shack and built a garage, and the garage is still there. That's the garage we were arrested in.

TSHEPO: It would be nice to have a photograph of that garage, because it has an interesting story.

TSHEPO: But then nstate how did you transcend or move away from Black Consciousness to ANC's politics, which many people calls 'Charterist'?

MR MABENA: It was a process, people don't understand this thing. You see, Black Consciousness was to prepare us. It was more of knowing the basics, with an understanding that we were moving elsewhere. Just imagine Thami [Mnyele] was then ANC and our base was Black Consciousness Movement. And it's very difficult to explain to people. I'll give you my biography and you'll see this transition. We knew in terms of engaging that there would come a time when we'd have to change. And this is the line that we had been following.

MRS MABENA: 'Me, '86 you detained for a day and returned home but your husband and other activists were locked up for a very long time. What was happening in the township in terms of political activism?

MRS MABENA: We continued, still organising women, working for the ANC. On a personal level I had to go and look for work. I found work with Dr Anderson, who had a surgery in Hilbrow [Johannesburg]. And later Dr Anderson assisted me, because when the police were looking for us we would flee the township and hide ourselves at his place. He stayed in Edenvale. I worked for Dr Anderson and at some point I decided to leave. In 2000 when the local government was introduced we were both elected as councillors. Well, I continued after Mabena had been detained. I used to go to the prison to visit him. But they had a strategy of falling sick and they

would be taken to hospital. So, we'd have a chance to see them at the hospital, and we'd have a contact with them.

MR MABENA: But we were also giving Lusaka [ANC's headquarters in exile] reports through the hospital. There was a year when we organised a hunger strike for about 30 days. We were the people who had always linked with the outside world and the media. We had a [nursing] sister who was working at Natal-Spruit Hospital ...

MRS MABENA: Didi.

MR MABENA: Yes, Sister Didi.

MRS MABENA: Didi Shongweni.

MR MABENA: Yes, Didi Shongweni.

MRS MABENA: Her role was to exaggerate the patients' reports to create an impression that they were far from being well. So that they could stay in hospital for extra two or three days. So, we had an interesting link with her. If there was anything that we wanted to smuggle into the hospital for the detainees we would give it to Didi and she would know what to do with it.

MR MABENA: And we would deal with it when we returned to prison (laughs).

MRS MABENA: She was the Sister in charge in their ward.

TSHEPO: There are quite a number of people who played an important role in the struggle ...

MRS MABENA: Yes.

TSHEPO: And yet they're not acknowledged.

MR MABENA: You know, the interesting part was that when we were admitted at hospital we had what we called 'Heroes Admission' at Natal-Spruit Hospital. There would be a lot of comrades there to see us. We liked that. They would chain us – and we also wanted them to chain us – and we would wear suits. And people were interested in knowing why we were in chains yet we were wearing suits. They'd ask: 'What's happening?' And that's some received the message. Natal-Spruit Hospital was our base.

TSHEPO: But then 'me your husband was away, although he received a salary from his work as mentioned earlier, how was life without him at home?

MRS MABENA: It was terrible. But I wouldn't be lonely because comrades would come and we'd sit there as we'd usually do, and discuss issues. Like I'm saying we just continued. We have one child, a son. And sometimes I would be lonely. But I wouldn't feel it because there were comrades who were with me all the time. They console me. And I was receiving money. So we didn't starve. My worry was what would happen to him while in detention? Will he come back? And whether he'd come back the same? So, we used to visit them in prison on specific days, but we had to get a permission first. You couldn't just go and visit them in prison. To visit him I had to get permission.

TSHEPO: From whom?

MR MABENA: Police station. The permission stated when you were allowed to visit him ...

MR MABENA: And for how long.

MRS MABENA: We were not allowed to visit them frequently. If I visited him this month I would only be allowed to visit him again the following month.

TSHEPO: Oh, so it was once a month.

MR and MRS MABENA: Yes.

TSHEPO: And over the period of your lives in the struggle, '94 we get freedom after the elections. Do you think there were changes, particularly in relation to your struggle in Thembisa?

MR MABENA: Yes. Thembisa wouldn't have had electricity during apartheid. The bucket system would have continued. Now we have reasonable rent. At the time people didn't have houses. Today we have what is called the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme), but we started it a long time ago. We encouraged people to go to the offices to have their names written in the housing lists, so that they could finally receive houses. There are many changes. Today Thembisa has tarred roads – the whole of Thembisa. You see, the results of our struggle did come immediately. But today we're benefitting from it. You see, today people might claim that they are responsible for these changes, but it was us.

MRS MABENA: We participated in schools as well. The SGBs (School Governing Body) were introduced by us. We were in schools and we were in hospitals.

MR MABENA: We had Hospital Boards.

MRS MABENA: Yes, we were involved. Although these were not formalised then, but we'd participate and have a say in schools. We'd irritate the principals; make appointments to discuss issues which the community was not happy with. So, we were actually representing the community. And in hospitals as well.

MR MABENA: We were also involved in what we called Peace Committees. We established Peace Committees which consisted of all political organisations. We also attended training in negotiations skills during the height of the riots. We would go to the University of Cape Town [to study] conflict management. Those are some of the trainings we attended. Whilst we were involved in these activities the ANC catered for us to acquire some skills; how to handle various situations. And most of the things which were happening in Thembisa, you know, ntate Maphathu was one of our pillars. For example, if there was a funeral and we had assessed the situation we would go to ntate Maphethu and say *Ntate Maphethu ho nale lefu le so so* (Mr Maphethu, there's a funeral of such and such) could you ...

MRS MABENA: He had contacts.

MR MABENA: Yes, he had contacts.

MRS MABENA: Internationally.

MR MABENA: Yes, internationally. I remember there was a funeral during the height of the struggle, so the police didn't want to release the corpses. They would even dictate how many people were allowed to attend a funeral. There were about five young boys [who had died]. It took us three weeks [to negotiate their release]. When we were supposed to bury them – ntate Maphethu was there – the police arrived and said 'No, there are too many people attending this funeral'. Now because they thought we were too many we were not supposed to bury. So, the funeral was supposed to be postponed so that we could get necessary permits, stating how many people would be attending the funeral. An argument ensued: they would grant a permit to bury but the number of people attending went beyond the stipulated number. We'd ask them 'how did you determine that the number of people who came to funeral was more than the one stipulated in the permit, because (laughs)?

TSHEPO: In 1990 the ANC and other liberation movements were unbanned. Now all along you were supporting the ANC but clandestinely. So, what happened after ...

MR MABENA: That's the transition I was telling you about. TRA and all of us , after 1990, we were together with ntate Maseko and Ali Tleana were briefed by the ANC.

TSHEPO: Who [in the ANC]?

MR MABENA: At that stage who came to brief us? It was Jackson Mthembu and some other comrades. I think ...

MRS MABENA: Thabang ...

MR MABENA: Thabang Makwetla.

MRS MABENA: He was of the comrades who were deployed to Thembisa.

MR MABENA: And Joel Netshitenzhe. Yes, they came to brief us at TRA.

MRS MABENA: And that time we as Women' Group we changed and said we're ANC Women's League (ANCWL), and we formed the branch of the ANC in Thembisa. As big as Thembisa was there was only one branch. And Andrew Maphethu became the first chairperson of that ANC branch and I was the secretary.

MR MABENA: The deputy chairperson was Mathole Motshega.

TSHEPO: Is it?

MR MABENA: Yes.

MRS MABENA: We were in that first executive of the ANC branch in Thembisa.

MR MABENA: And the rest of us our role was to recruit. We were given cards. I think it was R5 a card. I think I lost some of them. We were the signatories. When you joined the ANC I would sign the card that you have indeed joined. We recruited many people. And then we went and elected the first executive: Andrew Maphethu, Mathole Motshega, Matilda Mabena. Who was your deputy?

MRS MABENA: It was Chili Magagula.

MR MABENA: And Roger Pikane was the treasurer.

MRS MABENA: We also formed the ANCWL's branch too.

TSHEPO: So in 2000 you were elected to become councillors.

MRS MABENA: Yes.

MR MABENA: I was a Ward councillor for Ward 9 – where church of ntate Maphethu's is.

MRS MABENA: I was a PR (Proportional Representative) councillor.

TSHEPO: Wow! It's been a long journey.

MR and MRS MABENA: Yes, it's been long.

MR MABENA: I think our photographs will strengthen our story. I think we'll be able to tell you when was each photo taken and what was happening.

TSHEPO: Yes. This was a good start. Its consolidated ...

MRS MABENA: The story is somehow haphazard, but I'm sure you'll be able to write it in a chronological way.

TSHEPO: Yes. Thank you very much. This was really interesting. I also get a sense that the struggle was led by 'ordinary' people.

MRS MABENA: Yes. It wasn't only the doctors ...

MR MABENA: Or professors

MRS MABENA: Everybody.

MR MABENA: We drew our strength from 'ordinary' people.

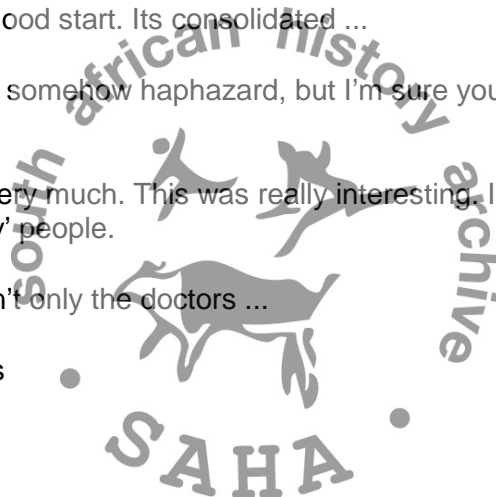
MRS MABENA: Something that we did not cover is the issue of gangsterism.

TSHEPO: Yes. By the way, is 'me Frieda still around?

MR and MRS MABENA: She passed away.

MR MABENA: Gangsterism started in 1974. There was a gang at Mthambeka called Top 7 (laughs). The Top 7s used to fight against another called ... What was that gang, Tilly? They used to fight for girlfriends, robbing people. They even had boundaries which demarcated the area where each gang was allowed to rob people. At high school we decided that this must stop.

TSHEPO: As students?



MR MABENA: As students. Because in that year I think there was a student that was stabbed with a knife. And that sparked the whole thing to the extent that we were stopped by teachers not to confront these gangs. They argued that the police would deal with them. We had decided at school that we were going to march out of school and go and look for them. We knew where they lived.

TSHEPO: Was these gangs made up of older people or younger people?

MR MABENA: They were young people. Some of them were drop-outs from school. In some of the gangs there were guys from Alexandra after the removals in Alexandra. Some of these guys we knew that so and so was doing Form 1 last year but was now a gangster. It was the Top 7 and who else?

MRS MABENA: Makwaitos.

MR MABENA: Makwaitos. They used to harass people using trains. They would harass people commuting by trains especially if there was a [football] match at Orlando stadium. When we were going to Orlando stadium they would demand money from us. Even when we came back home. But as students of 1974 and 1975 we suppressed them.

TSHEPO: How did you suppress them?

MR MABENA: We would hunt one of their members and beat him, and we'd warn him strongly. I can still remember one of the guys we caught was Stanley Mdhuli from Mthambeka. The other thing that helped us to annihilate the gangs was that whilst they were gangsters they used to like soccer. When the high schools played they would come and a message would make rounds that one of the gangsters was in attendance and we'd 'solve' him there.

TSHEPO: How did you differentiate between the Top 7s and Kwaitos?

MR MABENA: It was through the sections. We knew in which section resided the Top 7s and the same applied to the Kwaitos. I mean, we also had information. For example, we knew who Tilly and Mabena had befriended. But we never knew how many people belonged to these gangs. But we knew who were the 'cream' of each gang and their boss.

TSHEPO: But as students for you to finally take the decision to hunt down these gangs, despite the fact that they had stabbed one of the students, what was the role of the police?

MR MABENA: At the time I think the system operated in a strange way. When they had money it meant nothing.

TSHEPO: Who?

MR MABENA: The police. If a gangster had money for the police it meant nothing.

MRS MABENA: The gangster's case would just disappear. They victimised the students.

MR MABENA: You see, among our other activities in the ANC we also used criminals which were known by the police. We would hide in their places and received money from them. Because we knew they were friends with the police. The police would go to house of a criminal, knowing very well that gangster sold marijuana. When they arrive he would give them money

and a straight of liquor. And that would absolve him from being perceived as a criminal. But we political activists were seen as criminals. So, we used those criminals. So, some of these criminals would go even to the police station to visit a certain sergeant (laughs).

MRS MABENA: But Thembisa wasn't heavily tortured by criminals and gangsters for a long time, because we were able to suppress these early on. And the comrades ...

MR MABENA: Around 1987 there was what was called Calvin Klein gangs. But it was not ... It was comrades fighting each other. Calvin Klein is [clothing] label. It was Calvin Klein and who? But the Thembisa Youth Congress (TEYCO), which is today known as the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) contained them. But to some extent other comrades, through their activities in Thembisa, produced what we called the Toaster [gang].

TSHEPO: I've heard about the Toaster gang.

MR MABENA: The Toaster gang was precisely the comrades who were part of the Self Defence Units (SDUs), who knew how to use guns. They started terrorising people. They would break in into people's properties and hijacked. And the system used them. After breaking the law they would hide in the hostel, which was under the control of Inkatha. There they would also receive ammunition.

TSHEPO: Which hostel?

MR MABENA: Vus'muzi. But the Toasters were not just merely gangsters in the true definition of gangsterism. It was a politically-driven thing.

TSHEPO: Yes, I remember quite a number of gangs mushroomed during this period.

MR MABENA: Yes.

TSHEPO: Finally, this question just came to me as you were speaking. In 1974 and 1975 there was a student organisation called SASM (South African Student Movement). In Thembisa did you have SASM, or any other student formation?

MR MABENA: No. In Thembisa we didn't have any student formation.

TSHEPO: On that note I'd like to thank you. If there are further questions after we had transcript the interview I'll call and if you're available maybe we could have another interview. And hopefully by then we would have been able to take photographs of some of the places you mentioned in the interview. I'll also love to go to your house in Thembisa to see the garage because it has a story drawing from what you said in the interview.

MRS MABENA: Yeas. People like Mthofi comes from that place.

MR MABENA: Yes, Bheki Khumalo.

TSHEPO: Thank you.

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