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TM: Tshepo Moloji

SS: Sello Robert Serote

### Interview with Sello Robert Seroe

TM: Today is the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2011. I'm in Thembisa. What is the name of this section?

SS: It's Kgatlamping.

TM: At Kgatlamping section, in Thembisa, in the East Rand. Ntate (Mr) Serote let me take this time to thank you for giving me this opportunity to come and talk to you and meet with you, because I have heard more about your name and finally I'm meeting you. To start, maybe you can introduce yourself by telling us who is Mr. Serote?

SS: My name is Sello Robert Serote. Truly, I was not born in Alexandra but I was born in Benoni, which is now Actonville. But then it was called Etwatwa. Not today's Etwatwa. But I arrived in Alexandra I think I was four or five years. I stayed with my uncle's family at 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Number 166. My uncle was Wally Serote's father. So we stayed there. Then I hadn't started attending school. After some time we then moved to 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue between Ruth and Roosevelt. And then from there we moved to stay at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Number 75 at my father's property. He had two properties: one at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Number 75, and the other one was at 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue but I don't remember [the number]. But it was between Hofmeyr and John Brand. So he had these two properties and, I think, because of that we were able to survive. Because my father at that time ... In fact, I don't know my dad as an able-bodied person as I was growing up, because he was paralysed one side. So he stayed there. And he died in 1958 when I was, I think, I was 15 or 16 somewhere there. Well, I worked in Alexandra ... Okay, I started attending school in Alexandra at Dr Knack Community School. After Standard 6 I went to Alexandra Secondary School. It was still at 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Number ... I think it was Number 6. This school was donated by Mabiletsa, the father of the Advocate. So I attended there Form 1, Form 2. When we were about to do Form 3 that's when they built a secondary school at 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue at [bus] rank. Yes, and today it's a police station. At first it was a rank and the school was close to it. Then from there I left - after Form 3 - and went to Orlando High, travelling from Alexandra to Orlando. It was quite tough. Yes, it was a little bit difficult going to school, because I had to be there at 8 o'clock. At 6 o'clock I was already there. Now I was mingling with the workers. The attitude of the elders towards children it wasn't good. But later on I understood that they weren't deliberate. It was the situation. Because we would all stand in the queue and some would be late. Then PUTCO (Public Utility Transport Corporation) used to have a bus for scholars but it left Alexandra at 7 [o'clock]. So I wouldn't make it to Orlando High on time. Hence I had to ride with the elders. So I would queue together with these elders and the queue was very long. Then as scholars we realised that if we stood in the queue we would not make it to school on time, so we would jump the queue and stand in front. So, when the bus drivers came they would say we're not going to take everyone in this queue. We would take those in the front and others would come and take the other passengers. Then we would leave first. But sometimes we would meet different drivers who would say I don't care whether you're late or not I'm taking the adults first. They're going to work. Forget that we were also that our trip was also just as important. From town we would take a train to Orlando.

TM: Were there no taxis that time?

SS: No, it was only PUTCO. Taxis were there but it were Sedans. You know, the small cars.

TM: Oh, the small ones?

SS: Yes, the small ones. But you wouldn't take it. It was a bit expensive. I think it was expensive than PUCTO. I think PUTCO then it was 4 pennies, which could be 3 cents today. Now we're paying ... If you were buying coupons each one cost 2 cents. Let me say 2 cents but otherwise it was 2 pennies. I think today it's 1 of half cent. So you were buying them in bundles. Every week you bought a bundle. So, some of the drivers were not taking them when you entered the bus and that was a bonus.

TM: You can still use it

SS: You can still use it, because it didn't have a date. I continued until somewhere in the middle of the year when my mother said 'It's too much. We can't make it anymore'. It was too expensive for her. And that's when I stayed with my uncle in Diepkloof. I started walking to school and then it was better. I would go to my mother on Fridays and come back on Monday. And in 1963 I left and came to work at the Alexandra Health Committee. I was a receptionist. Now I want to give you another background. During this period something happened. When I was attending school in Alexandra I had a cousin in Alexandra. He's there in the book about Alexandra (A History), Makubire. I'm related to [Harry] Makubire. His mother and my mother are sisters. He was attending school at Kilnerton. And there was this man ... What's his name? This man used to head the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). He is a church minister, Reverend ...

TM: Oh, Stanley Mogoba?

SS: Yes, Stanley Mogoba. He was teaching at Orlando ... No, at Kilnerton. So he taught politics to the students. Now my cousin picked them up and we ended up discussing them. And we saw that this is it. Then I was pro-ANC (African National Congress). I was just supporting it. I didn't have any facts about it. And he came in and gave me a flavour. Then I joined the PAC because I realised that he was talking sense.

TM: What was he saying when you were discussing?

SS: He was saying ... Mainly he was talking about the general problems that we were facing as the oppressed people and which almost everybody knew; that it was the ID (Identity Document) and the conditions that we were facing at school, and so on. And somehow he started to communicate with a certain guy who then referred him to people in Lesotho like Potlako Leballo. We communicated with Potlako Leballo. And Potlako Leballo then communicating with some other guys here who then recruited us. But they took him because he was the secretary. Then we had formed a unit already.

TM: Is that so?

SS: Yes, we had formed a unit.

TM: Of the PAC?

SS: Yes, of the PAC in Alexandra.

TM: Which year was this?

SS: Eh, sixty. It was before they banned political parties. Let me say it was in 1960 somewhere there. No, let me say it was '61.

TM: Was it after Sharpeville [massacre]?

SS: Yes, it was after Sharpeville because now I remember that because of the Sharpeville commemoration we almost got into trouble.

TM: What is the name of your cousin?

SS: Jeffrey Makubire. Now after we had started working, we then started recruiting as well as a unit. Oh, before that he went to Lesotho and they briefed him. He came back to brief us.

TM: He was from Lesotho?

SS: Yes. And he was highly impressed by Potlako Leballo. He told us that one thing about Potlako was that he could shoot. He saw a cat and shot it dead. I thought that this is what I wanted to do. So now the work was that we must prepare ourselves for war, because it was coming. We needed to organise and divide Alexandra into manageable area; and each area must have its own people. And we would have to oversee that. We did that. We got a lot of hooligans. We told them that they were busy beating up their parents and robbing people while the problem was there. They understood. Then we asked whether they knew how to use a knife. They said yes. We said to them 'Wait a minute. There were people that are supposed to be stabbed, but not children'. Hey, they went crazy. So, we continued like that. We had to keep records.

TM: Is that so?

SS: Yes. We had to keep records of the people.

TM: When you say records what do you mean?

SS: I mean names and where we recruited them, because there were many of them. And he [Jeffrey] was the secretary. We were about three, and there was another guy who is Jerry Malinga. He was living very close to Jeffrey in fact. Jeffrey was living at Number 100 in 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Malinga at Number 102. And I was living in 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. So I used to travel. We would do these things during weekends. And then at one time when we arrived there there were many people and real tough people, you know. In fact, it helped because now even the *tsotsis* knew us. They would just say 'Hey, *los* (leave them).

TM: Is that so?

SS: Yes. So it happened that when I was at school in '62 - I was doing Form 4 - Potlako Leballo said to Jeff "No, I have briefed you. So send other people". I was supposed to have gone to Lesotho to receive a briefing so that I could add on the one I have. Everything was arranged that on Friday I shouldn't go to school but I would travel to Lesotho before the introduction of passports. They told me that when I arrive there I would meet someone and receive that briefing over the weekend, and then I return. The problem was that how do I explain that to my mother? My mother was a very strict woman and didn't have time to waste.

TM: Really?

SS: Yes, she was a very strict woman. And now at Orlando High I had a PAC magazine. It was informative. It informed us about the political situation in Africa. You see, that Ben Bella was fighting this thing of... So we were able to get a sense of what was happening to us and what was it that we were supposed to do. And it was that time of Tunisia and Algeria, more especially Algeria because it was fighting against France. We read about those things. And we realised how cruel the Portuguese were in Mozambique and Angola. And the question was what were we going to do? And here in South Africa there was that thing that we were waiting for Moses. We argued that there was no Moses who was going to free us. We didn't want to put too much faith in the bible. We felt there was no such a thing; we had to do something.

TM: So who were the people that were waiting for Moses?

SS: It was the old people and others. Because now when you speak with the old people they would ask 'My son, what are you talking about, because the bible says that Moses would come back'. And you would tell him that he must forget about the bible. But later on we realised that these women and men have responsibilities and we were young people and even if we die very few people were going to suffer. So we began to understand that and we didn't have a way to handle old people. So we started to move in on the youth. On Friday ... No, let me say I had that book [PAC magazine] and I'm at school and the prefects were there. Students from Orlando always thought of themselves as very knowledgeable than others. And they would ask where did I come from and I would say Alex. Hey, it wasn't a nice combination.

TM: Oh, between you and the residence of...

SS: The residence of Orlando, because they had that thing that they were better than people from other townships and all those things. One day they noticed that I had something with me and they asked me what was I carrying? They said wait a minute, you look like the right parson.

TM: Were these students?

SS: Yes, these were students, and mainly the prefects. The ones we regarded as the top dogs of Orlando. They said 'Wait. Let's talk'. And they were saying you fit well with us. They were the ones who punished students who were late. When I was late they'd say you are not late. They'd take my books to my classroom. I found out late that even [Thamsanqa] Nkambule was a member of the PAC or he was sympathetic to it. That's why they were in the limelight at Orlando. So it started, and I also accumulated some power there. When I was walking around I walked knowing that I don't have any problems with the guys at school. I said to my newly found friends 'Gents, I'm going'. They asked me where I was going to. I said I'm going to meet Potlako. 'Wat (what)? Go and you'd come back'. When I was supposed to go on a Thursday Potlako was having a press conference in Lesotho that 'I'm attacking them and I have people'. The Boers became crazy and they attacked. They came over and informed me that I shouldn't travel to Lesotho anymore.

TM: Who came to you?

SS: Jeff, because now I was in Orlando and he was here in Alexandra. He was working that time and I was attending school at Orlando. He said that he didn't know where to go because Potlako Leballo ... It was a mess. And many people were arrested, because now we were exposed. Leballo had informed the media that if you go to Alexandra you would find my people, and so on.

TM: The press conference?

SS: Yes. But as we sat down and analysed it we realised that Potlako felt that something big was coming, so let me tell them at the press conference to be aware. That's how we saw it. Then we just abandoned the whole thing. I didn't go. And we waited. Jeff was arrested and we asked why. To find that along the line the Boers have Jeff's name. Because I was still attending school and he was working at the Edenvale Hospital - but the old hospital. Not this one ...

TM: Not the new one

SS: Yes. Because there is this one which was for whites only. And where there are trees I think now they have built something ... Yes, just there. There was a hospital that was for blacks at the Edenvale Hospital. So people from Alexandra were using that hospital. Jeff was working there. When he was there the Boers arrived. He was a nice person. They told him that they were looking for him and that's when he was detained. When they detained him it was Sunday and I was at home at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and that day I didn't sleep there because I could not sleep anywhere between 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Avenues. They picked him up and came with him to his place. The house was searched. Now Harry Makubiri was once a member of the ANC Youth League, but at this stage he was no longer active. He's the one who was telling us that we are playing around with the Boers. We said this guy is crazy and we ignored him. The police found the constitution of the ANC Youth League at Jeff's place.

TM: At home?

SS: Yes, at home. The Boers that time were not very sharp. So they took it and looked at it and threw it away because they were looking for the PAC. So, now they didn't find other things, or they thought that they were going to find people and things, or what, because that was a big house. There was shop in front. And I was from church and I thought that I should check on the guys and when I got there I saw people from that street. Because now they knew that I'm going there and they saw what had happened in the morning and knew that these two were involved and if this one was involved it means that even the other one was also involved. They were looking at me and I thought to myself why were these people looking at me? I carried on walking. And when I walked in they told me that they just left. I asked who? They told me that the police were there and they took Jeffrey. I thought 'Oh, my goodness !' And tomorrow I have to go to school. I didn't. We searched the house and we found a lot of PAC's stuff like the magazines. They didn't find them. We started burning them. He was detained. His sister went to visit him and he told her that she must tell me to come and see him.

TM: Where was he detained?

SS: I think it was somewhere in ... No, I will ask the sister.

TM: It's alright

SS: So I went there and he only wanted me for one thing - because when I went there I was wearing my school uniform - [he said] go to my place and you'd find a book that has all your names and when you find it see what you do with it. Now they wanted him to go and take all these things out. So he said I want that if we go there I must find that they were not there. I went there to dig them out and reported back to him. He said now if they could say that he must go and take them out he



would be glad to take them there (laughs). So we got used to it. During that incident we had already recruited Wally Serote.

TM: While you were still a unit?

SS: Yes, while we were still a unit. That's when we started to speak politics with Wally. He's like a year younger than me. We met, and you must know that now the whole family was talking politics even the uncle. And we were attending meetings at Mr. Ndlovu's house. He was the one who was leading us in Alexandra.

TM: In the PAC?

SS: Yes, in the PAC.

TM: Do you still remember Mr. Ndlovu's name?

SS: No, I don't remember his name. But he was at Number 70 and he had a shop there at Number 67, 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue. So we met there every Sunday and he was the one who was talking.

TM: What were you talking about with Mr. Ndlovu?

SS: Eh, he was briefing us what's happening with the PAC's progress; what was happening in the current political situation; and sometimes he would explain to us ... Because he was grown up so he understood politics and the PAC. He would explain what was happening about [JB] Vorster. He would repeat some of the things that we had read in that magazine. He had some materials with him. But we didn't spend much time with him, because they wanted him and they were looking for him high and low. He just disappeared.

TM: Did he go into exile?

SS: Yes, I think he went into exile. We were left with a certain old man who we ... You see, many people had ran away and it was quiet. Now this man returned from prison and they were no longer after him.

TM: Oh, Jeff?

SS: Yes, Jeff. He said 'Brother, I would die with you'. And when we were sitting as guys we would see that he cannot die for us but I can die for this man, because he is my cousin. You see, things like that. So we went on until at a certain time at home they thought if we remained like this we were not safe and they took us to Rustenburg to the farm owned by Jeff's father. And that was in 1963 ... Let me say mid-year. We stayed there for about 10 months. And after we had returned we had to go back again, because we were informed that the police were going to come back again [for us]. And that year we didn't attend school. And then I lost interest in school because now politics were hot.

TM: So what were you doing in Rustenburg?

SS: We were helping this man, because he had a farm. But it was a bit fun. He was quite rich and he was also telling us that ever since he had never worked for a white person and that we must wake up and do it for ourselves. So he had his political understanding. And he was very intelligent. I think he attended school up to Standard 2 but you wouldn't say. He had a lot of information. When we

were staying there he laughed at us, saying that he had heard that me and Potlako Leballo we wanted to fight. He didn't discourage us. But, you know, that laughter that says all was going to be well and we have tried. He would say that we have tried, but all was going to be well because it was life. But he was one person who would make you feel wanted and that you could be a useful person, but if you knew what to do and if you were not lazy. If you woke up and all sort of things to become a person; it didn't mean you had to work for the other person. Because if you were not working, you were seen as being lazy because you were not working for a white person. He wasn't part of that. He was quite a nice person. And he knew Africa like nobody's business. I think he spent lots of time in Cairo. He said he once won a dance competition. He told us a lot of things. He was very inspirational to me as a person. I choose him, Wally's father and my uncle - they were my role models. I used to sit there and listen to them talking about this and that. And honestly they helped me a lot. But they didn't know what I wanted from them, because I just went there. Then I left and when I got back I found a job at the Alexandra Health Committee. And Harry Makubire was the one who got me that job, because he was a social worker there. He spoke with those Boers and then I started working. At work I was with Harry and politics were very hot. I was working with this Boer and he was very possessive. He was a Sub-Accountant at Peri-Urban. It was still Peri-Urban and he was the Sub-Accountant. I started in 1963, and it was I think September. I worked there for about 17 years, and then I went to PUTCO and drove buses. I left PUTCO to work for an Insurance Company, Home Trust Life.

TM: Oh, Home Trust?

SS: Yes. And now it's ... I think it's still Home Trust. I worked there and I wasn't a good sales person but I became quite a lot of things because I gained a whole of skills to sell and talk to people, because they really trained us. I left it because the commission was not that well. And I went to the Brewery, the South African Breweries, as a driver. No, before that after I left Peri-Urban, I went to PUTCO and drove buses. And from there I went to the South African Breweries. It is the other way around. When I was at the South African Breweries I read a book ... I used to like reading even when I was at Peri-Urban. I read and some of the things I didn't understand like Philosophy but I would read. I read quite a lot of things because there was a time at the Health Committee, we were not fully engaged throughout the working day. So I used to take books and read them. But when people came I'd serve them. So I really gained quite a lot of things. I read quite a number of books. So while I was still there I saw something in salesmanship and all that. I read it. And when I was working for the Brewery I actually bought a book ... That chap actually shaped me, and he is from America. He's more religious but wrote about the power of positive thinking. I read that man and he's very well-known. But my memory is quite messing me up. I read that book and it was also referring to salesmanship. And that's when I joined the Insurance Company with that thinking. The job bored me and I left it. And after I left I went to do a Diploma in Management of South Africa, IPM (Institute of Personal Management). I got my diploma there. I went back to work selling insurance. But before I worked for Wold's Furniture shop, but I just spent 3 months. And that's where I met Greg's father.

TM: At the furniture shop.

SS: No, he was no longer working at World's Furnitures, but he was now working for Home Trust. I told him. When I saw him he was nice and smartly dressed. He asked me where I worked. I told him



and he said leave that nonsense and come work for an insurance company, and I will see how fun it is. I really enjoyed the two years I worked there, although we were poorer than when we walked in.

TM: What was his name?

SS: He's DB Thulare ... Oh, Bernard Thulare.

TM: Oh, Bernard Thulare.

SS: He was hot-headed. He used to say 'I'm a dirty bastard'. And indeed he was full of nonsense. Now I've forgotten what the D stood for in his name. So we went on. So when we started this thing I was concentrating on finishing with the IPM and my training. Then I joined World's Furnitures again, and this time as a training officer. When they asked me I told them that I once worked here ... No, before I went there I worked for Cullinan Holdings. It was still Cullinan Holdings. But now I think they've changed it. It's now Brickwork or something. They were making lots and lots types of bricks. One of the things that fascinated me was that they were making bricks that were used to build ships.

TM: Wow

SS: Very light. They used them to build the ship inside. Others like the ... [inaudible] stoves, they used those bricks to build it. When it became red hot on one side you could even hold it with your bare hands on the other side, because it didn't transfer the heat to you. So I worked there and that's when I was doing my Diploma. I spent about 4 years there. Then after 4 years they made me angry and it was the Boers who were very rude. But I had already set up a trade union there when I quit. I called a few guys there and told them that let's establish this thing and they organised it. The union did threaten Cullinan, and it was a very big firm there at Modderfontein. It was the biggest factory and very powerful. The workers would call meetings and tell the factory owners that this was what we were doing. Alright, then I left it to join World's Furnitures as a training officer this time. It was when my life began to take shape. I worked there for 12 years. I left them when the Boers were looking for me like nobody's business, because we were now messing up things. When I was doing all these things, because now I'm talking about work and coming back and talking about political understanding ... When I was in the Health Committee I worked there and I was running the switch board and doing other things. At the top [floor] there were Peri-Urban police in that double-storey building. At the bottom it was the financial department. And at the top they said it was the security and the police who were arresting people for permits. And after they had arrested them they were bringing them to the Health Office. The sad thing was that they were putting them in the cell that was our dairy when we were growing up.

TM: Were these police Special Branch?

SS: No, they belonged to the municipality. I would say that they belonged to the municipality because Peri-Urban was in charge of the township. So they had their own special place there and it had taken over all these other things, all the functions because Peri-Uban was introduced in Alexandra in 1958 when it was arresting the Msomi gang. And when it started to be cool, they started running the township. There was a township manager. I think the police were reporting to him. So he was there at the top. And I was next to the switch board. So, this Boer is asking for the [telephone] line and when he was asking for it they were two: it was requested by him and this other black guy. And I'm telling this guy that it was still procreative so I will call him. Now this man

does not finish and I also don't tell him that they were waiting for it because I had two lines, one was reserved for the Sub-Accountant and the other one was used by everybody. So I waited. All to find that this guy is going from one department to the next and he was checking who were using these things. And as he was entering the room that I was in it was the time that gentleman had put the phone down. And after he had put it down I was ringing for him and he enters and asked why I didn't bring the line to him. I told him that I was renewing it for him and he said he's from the department and no one was calling. I said no there is one in the department and he said to me there is no line don't tell me that nonsense. I was sitting like this and I told myself that I don't have time for this and I was typing and didn't care about him. Now the Chief Clerk that was there, just opposite my office, but that man was scared of whites.

TM: The Chief Clerk?

SS: Yes. And he was sitting there and seeing this Boer making noise. And this guy, I don't know him, he calls me and I said what. And he said 'What is the problem?' I told him that I don't have any problem. I'm just working. And as he was doing this the Sub-Accountant entered and this guy is in my office and also making noise for the people that I'm working with and he said "Sir, what's going on?"

TM: Is he also white?

SS: Yes, he was also white. His name was Kruger. And they were speaking in Afrikaans. Now he said 'Wait, get in my office'. And he entered and explained to him what had happened. I only heard the voices going up and I said that's nice and I like what's happening. I could hear he was asking him "whatever happened, couldn't you have waited for me. Couldn't you have phoned me to tell me that you're having a problem with my people?" Then this Boer responded "Well, I don't work like that and I don't bloody care what you say". Kruger then said "You should never put your foot in my department again. Yes, you can come but if there is something wrong come see me and we'll discuss it, and solve it. You shouldn't come in here to try and solve it by yourself". Then that Boer left. After he had left Kruger then calls me into his office. I had made a name (i.e. impressed) for myself toward this guy.

TM: Kruger?

SS: Yes. I knew his friends, their phone numbers. Whenever he wanted to call one of them he wouldn't even ask for their number. Before he even sat on his chair the phone would be ringing and I would be there handing the phone over to him. And some other times he would ask me to call other people and I would do that. And so he used to like me. And he would call me to request me to call up some of his friends. So, we worked well together. So, after he had called me into his office he asked me what was happening? I told him that that Boer was insisting that I should connect him to the phone while other people were using it. He asked me who was using the line. I said it was it was Kutumela. Kutumela was working there as a cashier and he was a very responsible man. I told him that after Kutumela had finished using the line I called him but he was already out of his office. He said that Boer was out of his mind. He then suggested that he needed to change the system. Now every call must come through to me and the person should give me the number they wanted and I'll connect them to that number. And the people who were calling from the department should do the same, but they should also inform me whether their calls were official or not. I liked that system. He

went away. In the evening, the following ... No, no before after. As I was sitting in my office before executed this system that Boer reported me to his superior. And his boss apparently asked "*waar is die kaffir?*" But his superior was not in the same building as us, but across the street from our offices, behind the Indian shops. Do you know them?

TM: Yes

SS: Yes. That's where he was based. So, this Boer went there to inform his boss that there was a *kaffir* that didn't want to listen. His boss told him to come and call me to come to his office. Instead, they sent another cool Afrikaner man to come to tell me that Swart was calling me. I said why is he calling me because I am working? And the guy who gives orders is not here, so I'm not going anywhere. When he returns he expects to receive all his massages. I told him that when Kruger comes back he must find me here. Then Selepe came out of his office and said 'No, Morena – that was the time when blacks used to call Afrikaners Morena (Lord) ... I think he was just scared to call him *baas*. He said 'Morena, I think this guy should come with you and when Kruger returns I'll explain everything to him. I turned around and said *wena oa tsoenya, man* (i.e. you are involving yourself in something that doesn't concern you).

TM: Oh, Mr. Selepe suggested that you should go?

SS: Yes. I have managed to convince this Boer and he was in agreement with me. Then I left with this Boer. I got inside his car. said I have He drove me to their offices. And when we arrived there I saw that Boer sitting in the chair ...

TM: They were waiting for you?

SS: Yes. It was only Boers there. I thought to myself 'this is a fight'. And that time I was still young. I think I was 19 or so. And their boss asked "Are you Robert?" and I said "yes, I am." Then he said "Oh, by the way, they informed me that you cannot communicate in Afrikaans". Yes, they used to call me '*n swart engels man* (A black English man). *Jy saal nooit Afrikaans maar jy vorstaan Afrikaans* (You'll never speak in Afrikaans, but you do understand it). He said I heard that whenever people speak to you in Afrikaans you respond in English. But the way they were talking Afrikaans, and I knew it, he said "Look, I am the Township Manager. Do you know this man – pointing the Boer I earlier had a quarrel with?" And I thought let me speak in Afrikaans. And I said *Ja, ek sien hom daar hy loop op and af* (Yes, I've seen him in our offices walking up and down). Then their boss said *Jy moen nie so praat nie* (You mustn't talk like that). He's the chief of the police *en jy kan nie se hy loop of and af*. I said I'm saying what I've seen. Then he said to me "Look, from now on when this man tells you to do anything you must do it". I said "Never. I'm not going to do it." And he said I will fire you. I said "No, you will never fire me, because when I was interviewed you were not part of the interview. You were not there. So you can't fire me. And you didn't employ me". And the other man said "This man is full of nonsense". And I said to myself let me not take too many fights. But I emphasised my point: "I will never do anything he tells me to do and I'm not joking. If he tells me to do something I won't do it. It's simple as that." And the Boers couldn't believe that this young boy is talking like this, and telling our boss that he won't do what he tells him to do. After that he said go. Our offices were not that far, I could have walked and it would've taken me about a minute. But because they had collected me by a car from my office, I thought they were going to take me back by a car. I stood outside their offices. I think after about ten minutes waiting there they realised that I was still

standing there. Then they said “No, this man is so stubborn”. I was delaying so that Kruger should return to the office and not find me there. I knew he would be angry. They drove me back to the office. They sent that guy whom I had an argument with to take me. He came out and said *Kom laat ons gaan*. I knew how he behaved. When he was driving, a black person was supposed to sit in the seat. I would normally see him when he was driving together with the black policemen. When he opened his door, I opened the front door and sat in the front seat. And when I looked at him he was “nice and messed up”. And he knew that if he could say that I should go and sit in the back I wouldn’t. So he drove me. And we got there, and as he was entering in the gate he had pulled up the hand-brake, I opened the door and got outside the car and walked up the stairs close to where they were parking their cars. I can still remember they used to park under a tree, and there were big windows. I was looking at him through the window. He just stood there and looked at me. I said to myself ‘Yes, I’ve got you’. And when I entered the office I found my boss waiting for me and he said ‘I heard that you had been summoned to the township manager’s office. Come and tell me what is happening?’ He asked what did they say? I said “They said I mustn’t listen to you, but listen to them.”

TM: You are changing the story now?

SS: Yes. And I said “He said I must not listen to you but him. But I told him that he didn’t hire me, so I won’t listen to him.” And he said they are rude. And he involved the Head Office, and it became a very big thing. And all those we were working with said “What are you doing to the Boers?” I said “Live it because I am putting them in their place, because you are scared of them.” I think I was the average of the people who were working there, because the person who was there for a long time I think he had worked there for seven years and I had been working there for two years. And I got there and told them that they have been there for a long time. It went on and they called the Accountant to come and solve this problem. And that Accountant interviewed me first and said “I think you are going to be a lawyer.” I said “It’s just that I don’t have money.” And he said “Yes. I have heard your story and you have lots of things.” I said “I don’t have anything against them.” And he said “I know, and they shouldn’t border you.”

TM: Really? It was a big thing.

SS: Yes, it became a big thing in a way that they ended up getting their own [telephone] line.

TM: Oh!

SS: They had their own line, and that’s how we solved the problem. I said to myself this is the fight that I have fought and I’m so proud of it. And the other people were asking me what is happening? And I said they were doing black and black, so I am doing white on white (laughs). But I was very happy about it. And from there I didn’t look back. I just continued. There were small fights in Johannesburg streets, and I was with Jeff and we were very crazy, but we didn’t take anything from anyone. And he didn’t tell me what to do, but we fought.

TM: Who were you fighting with?

SS: With the Boers.

TM: Oh, in town?

SS: Yes, we were fighting because that time people were angry and they didn't know what to do, and how to do it. So when they got a chance, they were doing it as a group. When the other Boers were fighting, they were calling each other and they would say "Let them fight". And when they try to interfere they would stop them. And there were Whites, I think, they were also fighting against them.

TM: What were they fighting for?

SS: Let me tell you the incident that I met, and I was with Jeff and this other guy, because we were in the PAC. So we were walking and we were on the pedestrian walk side. So when I was walking there was this guy who was a Boer. He came toward me and said move. And I walked slowly and said "Do you hear what this guy is saying?" And he (Jeff) said I can hear him. What is he saying? And I'm going to hurt him now. I said "No, I would see him when we get to the pavement, because there were cars here". When I turned I already had him in my arms and I said to him "Look here ... And Jeff said "They are going to arrest you". And I stopped. And now we were in the street close to the bus stop and that time it was for the Whites, because that time it was like that. And he said to me "I'm going to beat you up." And I said "You listen here, let me tell you one thing. Your father did that to my father and you can't do it to me, because my dad and your dad were at that level but not me. So forget it because I'm going to beat you up." And the Boers laughed. I think it was his friends that told him to stop and they went away. Now there were these kinds of things and they were started by the Boers. When they were walking in the street do not touch them, because if you touched them they would tell you that blacks are rude. And if they were beating you up they would live you there, or they would take you to the police station, because you were rude and stuff. So you could not win, because they would beat you and live you on the ground. And when the police arrive don't try to explain; you would end up in big trouble for nothing, because they were going to beat you and because that one didn't have a case. So they were going to beat you up and live you there and walk away. And you wouldn't know what had hit you. So avoid that you could beat a person and go. Johannesburg [Police] was starting to pick up on that, so the Boers realised that this is messing things up, because if you beat a person up and others who were there would gang up on you. So there was never a big fight. But it was those kinds of fights. My brother was involved in another fight. We used to enjoy fights. So he was in a fight on Friday after work. He was on his way home in his car. There was a side parking along the road. And when he tried to park his car a certain Boer blocked his way. It was at Commissioner Street, and there are four lanes and he wanted to park in one of the lanes but this Boer said 'No, you are not. *Ry weg jou*'.

TM: Was this not a cop?

SS: No. At the time every Boer could tell you what to do and you would do it. But if you were scared of him, just live him and go because he might injure you if you didn't. So then he did that. My brother switched the ignition of his car off. And this Boer came to his car and said *loop*. He said *Ek wil nie*. Then this Boer hit the window of his car. He then came out of his car. He says after I had come out of the car I realised that I'm against a very big giant. My brother is not a very big man. He came out and they fought. As they were fighting people made a circle and it was mixed, White people and Blacks, and they were curious on what was happening. He told me that that Boer hit and lost his balance and fell. But when he hit back the Boer didn't feel anything. He began to wonder whether he'd be able to deal with this man. He said I looked at this man and thought to himself that



there was something called karate, and today I am going to use it. My brother was a street fighter. He was always fighting. So as this Boer was coming towards him, he ran away and he followed him around his car. My brother then balanced on the bumper of his car and when this Boer was near he kicked him. And this Boer was wearing a white shirt, with white shoes. The shirt was dirty after the kick. Probably the Boer wondered how he was going to explain this to the madam (i.e. his wife). The Boer then tried to throttle his neck but missed, and that was the mistake. He said I managed to pull one of his fingers inside my mouth and I bit it. And when I looked at him he was begging me to leave him, saying *asseblief, loss my*.

Blood was oozing all over, and I was chewing it. And after some time I heard him crying and I left him. Already there were people surrounding my brother's car, saying he must go to the police station and report what had happened before that Boer did that, and they were his witnesses. Some of these people got into his car. He said I didn't even know these people. Some of them were praising for knowing how to fight. They all went to the police station to report the case. As the police were taking his statement, that Boer arrived and said *Is jy weer?* And the police asked *wat?* And he said *Hy het my ge byt*. The Afrikaner police turned around and stopped taking my brother's statement and asked my brother *wat het jy gedoen by die baas?* He said 'But I have reported the incident'. Immediately the other people who had come with my brother in his car entered the police station and said we were his witnesses. The police said to my brother he must go. He left. And when he arrived at home ... The following day he went to consult a lawyer. The lawyer asked him what he wanted to do. He told the lawyer that he wasn't interested in going to court. I think that Boer had approached this lawyer to plead with him to drop the case. The lawyer advised his to drop the case on condition that he also drops his case. If he reinstates his case, you'd also reinstate yours against him. Those were the kinds of fights ... and those were more personal.

I think at that time that's when the ANC realised that people were angry, but they were not organised. They were ready to fight, but these were isolated and individual fights which were not making any sense and not taking anybody anywhere. So basically I'm trying to answer your question why were people fighting? I mean, you'd find that I was walking in the street and come across someone who'd refuse to give space to walk on. He'd shove me with his shoulder. You know, people were despising each other.

Politically it was a bit quite. That's the period when they had banned ... No, it was before Sharpeville ... What I'm talking about was before that, because Sharpeville happened and the government banned all the organisations. And it so happened that we were left without a political home. That's when we forgot about politics and started working. But there were some few directionless fights. But Wally [Serote] continued, and that's when [Steve] Biko appeared on the scene. Wally had a connection with them because he was a student. He met with Biko. By the way, which movement did Biko belong to?

TM: SASO?

SS: Eh... I wasn't part of it.

TM: South African Student Organisation.



SS Yes, I think so. So he went there, but he would come back to me. But he was more close to my younger brother. So they started to ... So Wally discovered...

TM: What's your younger brother's name?

SS: Gideon.

TM: Gideon

SS: Yes. They were close. So they were doing things together. So Wally was always an artist, so his things were moving from an art point of view. He was a writer as you know. He also had an interest in drama. So they would commemorate Sharpeville at some point. They would recite poems and all that. There was a quite number of them; and some of them ultimately skipped the country.

TM: Were you still in Alexandra?

SS: Yes, we were still in Alexandra. So time went on. That was the time when Peri-urban decided to remove people from Alexandra. Some were taken to Meadowlands. I survived, together with my family, because I was working for Peri-urban. It wasn't a serious issue. I mean, the police working for Peri-urban would meet people in the street and demand to see their permits: 'Where's your pass?'

TM: In the street?

SS: Yes, in the street. A Boer would come and demand your permit to stamp it. Then he'd inform you that you're no longer a resident of Alexandra: 'Go to such a place and report, they would give you a house. You do not qualify to reside in Alexandra anymore'. So, I was working with these police, so they wouldn't tell me anything and wouldn't ask me anything.

TM: When they were removing people were they removing according to the sections they lived in or was it a random thing?

SS: It was a random thing. It's like they were attacking. They would wait for people at the bus rank and when people got off the bus they would demand their Passes and start stamping them (demonstrating with his hands). I mean, at that stage houses were being built in Meadowlands, so that was the force part of the removals. Because where you were not qualified to be in Alexandra and immediately after they had stamped your Pass, they started to raid at night. If your Pass had their stamp and you were still in Alexandra they'd arrest you, because you did not qualify to be in Alexandra. In Alexandra, I'm sure you've heard people claiming that *ek is 'n bonafide*. That comes from the issue around Section 10.1 A. Those who were classified under Section 10.1 A used to call themselves bonafides of Alexandra. They'd be boasting for those who were not 10.1.As, especially those who fell under 10.1B, C. They'd say we originated in Alexandra. I think that thing still exists in Alexandra, but I'm not sure. That's how people left. They had no other choice or they'd be arrested, together with their families. And parallel to that, that was the time when the stand-owners were being forced to sell their properties, or they'd be expropriated. Our family's two properties were expropriated. They gave my mother R11 000. I mean, in the yard where we were staying there were eight rooms, in addition to our house. That's how we survived, because my mother wasn't working. So, we survived through the money the tenants paid for rent.

TM: Oh, rent

SS: Yes. But we reached a point where my mother felt she can't make it anymore. You know, when your children reach high school level it becomes very difficult. I mean, at we lived with our cousins; we were always full in the house. So, she couldn't afford really. But that was, I'm told, father's attitude: if you were our relative he wouldn't let you sleep in the street. He'd accommodate you. I mean, some of our relatives would come looking for employment and they'd stay with us.

TM: Where was your father originally from?

SS: He was from Middleburg, but he and my mother meet in Benoni; and they got married. But he was from Middleburg. You see in Middleburg there is a place called Bochabelo. Now people who resided at Bochabelo were from Sekhukhune. They were running away from ... You know the history. The Serotes arrived there with the missionaries, and they stayed there at Fort Marensky. And when we were growing up we were sure that we were part and parcel of the Ndebeles, Bantwane. Only to find that these people also drifted to that area. But we were originally from Sekhukhune. So I started investigating this history and found out that ... Actually, tomorrow I'm going to Tafelkop. I hear we have a property over there. And that's where my father came from.

TM: What was your father's name?

SS: Francis

TM: Oh, Francis

SS: Yes, that's his name.

TM: And your mother's name?

SS: Hilda Dipuo. And my father was Francis Sekgwakgwa. And the name of my last born, who is a boy, is Sekgwakgwa, and my first born is Dipuo. They are four. The ones that are here at home are Ratswale and Matswale, because they were named after my parents. So it went on like that. That's where we originated and came to live this side. To be honest, my political inclination started at home, even though my parents were not vocal. But they used to say 'Mandela is going to address a meet and we would attend'. People like Madzunya used to pass by our house announcing their meetings and we used to see them. I saw Madzunya personally. And others like Keable Pelo. He featured in Alexandra. I didn't know [Alfred] Nzo, but I can remember what happened during his period. He was once the chairperson of the Alexandra ANC branch. They were together with Richard Baloyi and many others. So the mood in Alexandra was like 'No, we don't have to be told'. Our fathers used to say 'Our have a freehold title you can't tell me anything'. Whether they understood the depth of that, but they were aware that they were in possession of a freehold title. Now my father in-law, my wife's father, was quick to hit with his stick. Whenever the Boers arrived at his place he tell them *die is my plek* (this is my place). He'd even threaten to hit them with his walking stick. Fortunately, his brother had a son. His son was one of the treason trialists of 1956, together with Mandela and others.

TM: What's the name of the son?

SS: Madipuo ... (calling his wife). I will get you the name. But his surname is Nthite. Oh, yes, it was Nthite Bapela. He left the country around the 1950s. This is my rough background. Then we moved to Thembisa.

TM: When did you move to Thembisa?

SS: Let me say 1970.

TM: How did you move from Alex to Thembisa?

SS: No I forcibly removed myself (laughs), if there's such a thing as self removal. Because I had just got married in 1969 and I was living at my parents' home with my wife and the first born. So my uncle, Wally's father, called me and said you have to find a good life for yourself, even if it meant you had to rent a place. Stay away from Alexandra. Then I told him that people were moving to Thembisa. And he discouraged me, saying Thembisa was crowded. And I said I'm going there. I offered myself to come here. And so we came to Thembisa. So when we arrived here I was given this house here and we fixed it. Man, they had only built the walls and installed the windows. There was no floor.

TM: Was it a four roomed house?

SS: Yes, it was a four roomed house. There was nothing on the floor. They had brushed the walls ... disturbed [I wanted to ask you what was Bapela's name? – talking to his wife]. It's Peter [Mr Serote's wife]. Yes, it's Peter ... [He was named after my father – Mr Serote's wife]. Peter left [the country] mane, many years ago. So, when his father heard I was also involved in politics he climbed on top of a roof of his house and took out a book and said 'You brother before he left he hid this book here. So take it because there's no other person that I can give it to'. It was about the history of South Africa. I think it was written by people who were trying to be neutral, because it gave me quite a number of things that you wouldn't find in other books. It was dealing with Hitler and what role he played, and how was South Africa connected to Hitler. You know, John Vorster and the Nazis. You know, John Vorster was mainly in the Nazi group. Then I started to understand, but it was long ago because although I had that book I was scared because I knew that when they (police) came to search I would be arrested. So when we got here I was working for PUTCO.

TM: The Alexandra branch?

SS: No. But the one in Edenvale, and we were servicing Thembisa and Alexandra. We stayed here and during this period there were no [electricity] lights and there was the bucket system, because when it was Sunday during the day, say at 1 o'clock, the buckets were taken out.

TM: On a Sunday?

SS: Yes. And you didn't know whether to close the door, because when you did that it was hot inside the house and when you left the door open it smelt bad. And we didn't have taps in the yard; meaning that between the yards there was a passage and they had installed the taps there. So four houses were sharing one tap. As time went on we installed a tap inside our yard and others did the same. But you'd find that most of the time they were not working, except here and there. But at that time we were paying rent only and not the services, because there were no meters for anything,

which meant you had to have two gates: one that led to the passage and the other one that led outside in front of the kitchen. But then, you know, the positive aspect of that passage was that it brought us together, because that was the middle ground. And when we wanted to meet we were meeting there.

TM: And most of the people who resided in this section ...

SS: They were from Alexandra

TM: Oh, Alexandra

SS: Yes. In fact, part of Mthambeka the people there came from Edenvale location. But here Umfuyaneni I think it's dominated by people who were from Alexandra. M'lonjaneni it was Alexandra. Ndayeni it was Alexandra, and Kgatlangping and Moedi and Difateng, Motheong. Others I'm not ... I think Difateng has a bit of mixture, because there are some people who were from Natalpruit. The people who settled in Sangweni were from Edenvale. And at Thiteng most the people there were from Edenvale. And also at Mpho and Lekaneng. And when you go into deep Thembisa most the people there were from Tikkieline. Some I don't know where they came from, but that's roughly the background of where the people came from. But mainly it was Alexandra. So when we got here, as the people of Alexandra, people from Dindela - apartheid had brainwashed our people - wanted to attack us and you must know that bus stop was located at Sangweni.

TM: Is that where it's a taxi rank now?

SS: Yes, that was PUTCO's bus stop. Buses from different areas, like Alexandra, stopped there to offload. Then later the hospital was built, then the buses would also go to the hospital to offload the passenger. They were using the road we called Mainline. It would pass Mangweni until it reached the hospital.

TM: Thembisa Hospital?

SS: Yes. The people of Thembisa then had an advantage to use a bus. so the bus that was going to Johannesburg was dominated by the people from Alexandra, and that's when the routes became many. Then I was working for PUTCO. So I was driving between Edenvale and Thembisa, and sometimes Alex. I was expelled from the company for stealing money (laughs).

TM: Before we come to that part. You said the people from Edenvale were attacking you

SS: Yes, they were attacking us when we got off at the bus station.

TM: Attacking people from Alexandra?

SS: Alexandra. So they forced us to group ourselves and say 'No to this thing. We were also staying here and have the right'. You see, when you got off from the bus in the evening you wouldn't walk alone. You had to wait for the others coming with the bus, and you'd walk as a group. And anybody who tried to attack us we would all beat him up. So that's how we started protecting ourselves. But it became worse at some point ... Here in Thembisa there was a principal called Leslie Makgothe. He was once a teacher at Thuto ke Matla. But he also taught in Alexandra. He's the one who influenced Wally Serote to write. He gave him the background and mentored him. So he gained quite a lot from

him. Wally, I think, started writing while in Form 3. He was teaching and encouraged. But then he moved to Thembisa, and he became a principal. Now his mother lived this side (pointing the neighbouring house). What annoyed the people who resided here and in Kgatlangping was that that old lady was raped and then they stuck a wood in her mouth. It became a big fight. Yes, people were cruel! As time went on people were slowly becoming politically conscientised. You know, now we having people's meetings. A meeting was called here and I attend that meeting. They wanted to form a branch of the Black People's Convention (BPC). So I went there.

TM: Who were these people that time?

SS: No, I didn't know. But there this man that I always saw who came to address us. But he wasn't close to me. I think he once attended at Wits [University]. If he wasn't the secretary, he was the president. No, he was not the president. But he was in the executive committee of the BPC. If I remember his name I'll tell, but he's probably someone that you know. ... [Disturbed – Mrs Serote speaking]. It so happened that I had attended that meeting with the man who lived in the house next to mine.

TM: Where was the meeting?

SS: It was in the Lutheran Church at Sangweni. And to me I thought it was the follow up of the things that I left in Alexandra. They talked in that meeting, and this man said let's go home. But nothing really came out of.

TM: But if you can still remember what were they talking about?

SS: No, they were actually basing their discussion on the fact that it was important that we have to form a branch here. They wanted to establish a branch. So they had called whoever they could lay their hands on and they were explaining what kind of an organisation is BPC and its background ... [Disturbed: Mrs Serote speaking] They wanted to establish a branch but nothing really came out of it, because I don't remember hearing that there was a branch of the BPC. But it was that time when people feared to venture into such things.

TM: How long was this after you had arrived in Thembisa?

SS: It could've been more than five years, because this area was already established. You see, for the past two or three years our lives were preoccupied by trying fixing where we were staying. Well, it depended on whether you had money. If you did it would be easier for you fix your house quickly. During that time there was no fence installed, so we had to do that ourselves. But it didn't make sense for you to start building a fence first. In my case, this young fellow (referring to his son) who just walked past us had just been born when we arrived. So I encouraged my wife to go and stay with her parents while I was still fixing the house. We would get soil from outside and bring inside the house to fix the house, you know, levelling the floor and after that buying cement to plaster. Fortunately I was still working for PUTCO, and I was stilling money to fix my house.

TM: So you used it to pay ...

SS: Yes. You see, when a passenger paid I wouldn't give him/her a ticket. Or I would give them a ticket but when they got off the bus I ask them to give me back the ticket. I'd stock those tickets and

when others boarded the bus I'd give them those tickets. But I didn't take all tickets because that they would've got me very fast so I had a connection with it would raise suspicions. And at that time I had a connection with a certain who was working for Peri-urban, but he was working in Department of Works. So he would steal cements and sell them to me. I used to buy... If I gave him R10 I knew I would receive 10 bags of cement. So, this (my neighbour), I think, I refused to lend him petrol. There was a time when there was no petrol. Say, you had bought petrol on Friday and at 7 o'clock in the evening all the petrol stations closed and they'd open again 7 o'clock the following morning.

TM: How

SS: Yes. It was that time when there was a serious shortage of petrol. So, on weekends people would be packed at the petrol stations. No, not on weekends, but on Thursday and Friday people would be packed at the petrol stations to fill up their cars before 7 o'clock. At 7 o'clock garages closed. It was the law. If the police found a garage opened after 7 the owners would be arrested. So, we would queue there like it's happening now in Zimbabwe. So he asked me for petrol – it was a weekend – saying that his car had stuck somewhere. I said 'No, let me come with you to tow your car'. He refused, and demanded that I lend him petrol that was in my car. I said 'The petrol in my car would only last me until I refill on Monday. But I'm prepared to tow your car back to your house. Then we can refill on Monday'. For him that was not good enough. That's what caused problems between us. He then informed the police that I was a politician. I was detained for two weeks.

TM: Really?

SS: Yes, the Boers came here and searched the house but they didn't find anything, although I had a bookcase full of books, one of which was titled 'What is Communism?' They didn't see it. Or maybe they could read or didn't know anything about communism. I also had the PAC magazines published by Staffrider. They detained me, but after two weeks they released.

TM: And where did they lock you up?

SS: At Bramley (Police Station). I can still remember I had flu, but I became better in the two weeks of detention. And remember they took me from my house and locked me up in a cemented cell.

TM: Did they charge you?

SS: No, they did not charge me. They just released me. My wife was miserable but she came to visit me. I was locked up in the same cell with common law criminals. They were asked me *En nou jy* why are in here? They thought I had been arrested for beating my wife. They said they were going to beat me up. But when they heard why I had been arrested they said 'Hey, hey we have been detained with a great person. He's an educated person (laughs). He's not a common-law criminal'. I was respected. Now they wanted to know more about the Boers. But I told them that it was police who said I was a politician and I didn't think so. But they insisted that I was. Well, I couldn't reveal everything because I had to be cautious. I wasn't sure if the police had planted their person in the cell. But the people I was detained with were quite impressed that I was detained with them. But all I wanted to do was to go back home. I was then informed that it was my neighbour who sold me out.

TM: Who told you?



SS: The police.

TM: The ones who arrested you?

SS: Yes. They asked me "Do you know who is your enemy?" I said "I don't have a black person as the enemy." And they said "Somebody doesn't like you and he is the one who told us." They took out a letter for me to read, but hid the name of the sender. It was a *spook pos*, if you know what I'm talking about.

TM: Oh, he had written them a letter? I don't know what a *spook pos* is.

SS: Eh, by the way, what's the English word for it? Yes, fast mail. You see, if you sent that letter it has to be hand-delivered. They showed it to me. I said alright. I arrived at my house late in the evening. My family was surprised to see me walk in. But I told them there was no case. In the morning ... There was a door this side (pointing to the eastern side of the house). I knew when he was about to leave the house in the morning, so I stood at my door facing his house. As he was about to leave he saw me and he went back inside his house. We were quite close. I mean, he was also from Alexandria. So he started to distance himself. Well, time went on. Then one day I had a dream and in my dream [I was looking for my friends but they were not there all of them and I thought what am I going to do and it hit me that because they were not here, then I'm skipping the country] and that was my dream. I skipped the country, jumped fences. And when I got there they were all there in a camp. And I asked them why they are here? They said that they knew that I was going to come and that was the end of my dream. And I told Wally's younger brother - then Wally was in Botswana - and he laughed at me. He went to exile to inform Wally about my dream. Wally said they must call me and I must stop dreaming about these things "because he [referring to me] really wants to fight. So he must come here to join us. So I went there to link up with them.

TM: In Botswana?

SS: Yes, in Botswana.

TM: When was it?

SS: I think it was in 1980 - around that year.

TM: How did you go there?

SS: I left with his younger brother...

TM: Wally's younger brother?

SS: Yes

TM: What's his name?

SS: Thabo. Because he already knew how to get there, so I went there with him. And that was the first time I went there. I met up with Wally after many, many years, because he received a scholarship in America but he viaed through England and some European countries and that's where he met [Prof] Kgositsile, because Wally was at the university and Kgositsile told him to leave his studies there because he was going to teach him. That's how they became very close. He had a very

serious influence on Wally. But already Wally had some connection with some of the members of the ANC while he was still in the country. He called me to talk about that and that was the last time we spoke about that. But I was afraid. I think that dream was propelled by that discussion. When we met he said 'You're ready and there was no need to train you from scratch. Look, go and form a unit in Thembisa'.

TM: When you arrived in Botswana you met Wally and who else?

SS: He was the only one that I met there. We talked about these things, and he told me how the operation goes, how do we do it, to form a unity, what do you do, how many people are needed.

TM: What was he saying to you?

SS: To start with he said "Look, they told me about your dream and when I interpret it said you really wanted to fight." And I said yes, I do want to fight. And he said I know. For a very long time you've always been like this. Now it's a question of how do we do it. You can go back home and let's keep on communicating: give us the developments and we'll develop the operations as we move on. I said it's fine. He then started giving me the background that many people are scared of the ANC because they believe that the ANC is made up of people with horns and tails. That's what the government want them to believe. The ANC has always been there. He was giving me the background because he had a better understanding of the ANC. Then I came back and asked Thabo 'Where do we start?' He said 'Let the two of us start it, and he'd bring in another person'. We then give each MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe – The Spear of the Nation) names, which were false names. I can't remember his name, but mine was George. Time went on. I tried recruiting, but because I didn't have a good background so I missed out. We went on for a while without succeeding. Then Wally wanted to find out what was the problem. Then there was a time when I met another guy. During this period my background had become solid. And at this time schools children were fighting. So, a friend of mine who lives in Emfihlweni by the name of David ... [I'll get you his surname]. He was a member of a School Committee and he told me that there was a school that had called a parents-students' meeting. I said to him 'Just get out of that structure. Can you see what the students were doing and what was happening? You are going to get yourself killed'. He refused. I said 'Alright, I'd come with you'. And when we got there it was a mess. When the parents were talking students were all over the place...

TM: Which school was it?

SS: I don't know that school, but it's at Emfihlweni. So we entered. There was a certain man there whom I used to work with at the Brewery. You see, when I left the Brewery my younger brother found work there and became an Industrial Relations Officer. By then unions had not yet developed. Then the Brewery decided to allow the workers to form a union so that it could work with it. So, he was training shop stewards. So one of the people that he trained was a man called Mavuso and stayed at Emfihlweni. Now as the students were talking he stood up y were talking then this man stood up and raised his hand is he is a good speaker and he said "wait you students shut up because your elders are talking and you must listen" and the students went crazy and he – he's a good speaker. He said 'Hold on, students shut up. An adult is speaking now and you have to listen'. That made the students mad. He then said 'I know you want to go to Pretoria and you know what I mean by going to Pretoria'. They responded saying 'Yes'. He then said let me tell how to get to Pretoria.

You don't just walk to Pretoria. You'd get shot. The students kept quiet. He went on to say the people who are sitting here were not part of the system and they are trying to help all of us.

TM: Referring to the parents?

SS: Yes, he was referring to the committee. The people who were sitting were teachers and principals. He said "They were trying to ensure that you picked up the little you have. Let's make use of them so that we become better people. Because if these people can decided to drop everything where would that leave you?" He asked 'Do you know Rolihlahla?' Then the students were not aware of the Rolihlahla. He then said 'Do you see what I'm talking about? You don't even know your leader. I'm talking about Mandela.' The students screamed. And he said 'No, keep quiet'. Then he told the students to study. They grumbled and retorted 'You'd never make it to Pretoria'. But the students couldn't understand what he was telling them. He then said 'I'd like to request you to just listen to your teachers and you teachers come on and wake up. Can't you see what was happening? Now why do you react this? You're not helping, because these children want to go to Pretoria and you're stopping them. They would beat you up because they are more than you.' Finally, the students listened to him. He then told them to back to their homes and that when they come to school they shouldn't fight their teachers, because 'they're on your side. There are people that you can fight'. Then he turned and asked me 'hey, what's happening?' I said I don't think you can handle this issue.

TM: Mr. David.

SS: Masina is his surname.

TM: David Masina.

SS: I said you can't handle this situation. There are a lot of things that you need to understand. To save your soul, just resign from this committee and I'll explain. I then I took him to Botswana, but that was a big mistake on my part because I hadn't trained well. When we were in Botswana came and Indian comrade he then asked *Mohje lekula lifunani* (Now what does this Indian want here?). After our meeting some of the comrades called me to talk privately. They asked me 'Who is this person that you've brought with you? He's nowhere, man. He's not ready'. I said 'Alright, I'll drop him'. They said no don't drop him, but introduce him to a civic association. You must form a civic. He'll develop there (laughs)'. We used to do strange things ...

TM: Ntate, what route did use to get out of the country?

SS: We had passports. And we had a story. You always had to have a story for everything that you did linked to the struggle in case you were asked questions. You should have answers. 90% of the answers were true and the other 10% was a lie, so that if you were approached by an unsuspecting police officer he wouldn't be able to detect the lie and that's how you'd escape arrest.

TM: And this story do you formulate it first amongst yourselves?

SS: For example, if we were to travel by car I would the person that I'd be travelling with to wear a suite and to put on a tie and I'd be having a bible. And during this period I'd have left my beard unshaved. And when the police stopped us to ask where we were going I'd say we were going to a funeral. Already I'd be having the address of where were going. In case they decided to follow us,

the people living at the address we gave to the police would be able to confirm our visit. After telling the police that story they always let us go. But when we return we have to remember our story, because they might ask us again how the funeral went. So we should be able to respond. And then we would be carrying information. They would search the car but wouldn't find it, because we would have hidden it. Sometimes we would hide it inside the spare wheel. We would take out the air and put everything in and thereafter pump the tyre

TM: What are you putting in?

SS: The banned information that we were supposed to bring inside the country. The kind of information that people needed to read.

TM: What kind of material did you bring back from exile?

SS: For instance, Umsebenzi (The Worker), because it was banned. The guys in exile when they printed them they would make them very small and they would give us two or three, or four copies. And when we arrive we'd photocopy more copies. But if the police were to catch with one of those materials you were dead. They'd say you're a communist. I mean, you could be a member of any political party but not communists. So we'd hide the material in the spare wheel and when we arrive at the border gate we'd change wheels. We'd put on the wheel with the material and take out the other one. But then we'd drive very slowly so that the material doesn't roll and become damaged. After crossing the border gate we'd drive for about 15km then change the wheels again. Thereafter we'd travel on a normal speed. So that's how we moved on. During that period I found a little bit difficult to create a unit, but eventually I did.

TM: Who were the members of your unit after you've formed it?

SS: You've met Gezani. He is one of the guys I trained, his sister too. I got Greg Thulare, but I could not pull him in into the unit because he was already a known figure. So we couldn't work with the person like that. But his friend Kwatipa...

TM: Oh, I've heard about him.

SS: He spent most of his time in this house. Then I took him. And that's when we started forming a solid unit.

TM: Oh, you were identifying people that were not known

SS: Yes, but also those whom we could change.

TM: Eh, let me ask this question the other way around. How did you identify, let's say, Gezani?

SS: Let me respond like this. We started by forming ... Remember I already had the background that I wanted to form a unit. The next thing was to go to a place where I could find people that were suitable for this thing. So I went to ... After the civic association had been formed I associated myself with it. When it was formed it was called the Tembisa Residents Association (TRA), not the current one because there is a difference between the first one and the current one. The current was formed out of anger. That's where I met people like [Michael] Figo Madlala, Tilly Mabena. But each one of us was following his/her own direction. So we'd meet as a civic but different people were

involved in various activities, which some I don't even know about. But prior to this civic association (i.e. TRA) there was the Tembisa Civic Organisation, which was lead by Goba Ndlovu. When it was formed I was also present. But as time went on we concluded that Goba was moving in the direction which we found problematic. He was raising funds using the name of the Tembisa residence, but never reported what he did with the money. He'd hold discussions with the old councillors, arguing the question of rent without consultation with the people. I was part of that civic organisation. So time went on but the civic was not making progress. We then realised that this organisation was not growing. We asked ourselves: 'Where are going with this?' Then ten of us: it was me, [Lazarus] Mawela, [Greg] Malebo, I think; eh, other two guys from Emlonjaneni, Greg Thulare's father, eh, Masemola but now he is dead. Yes, we were about ten. We just said that this is not going anywhere. The best thing was for us to make it grow. So let's go out and organise the people. So the ten of us agreed that we were going to name ourselves the Organising Committee, and what we'd do we'd go from one section to the other and we'd allocate people sections around here. The idea was that people should move into these sections and look for people that they thought they could work with, talk to them about the need for a civic. And if that develops and they needed our help they'd have to call us and we'd back them up. That's how we met quite a number of people. The civic grew. But prior to that when the TRA was not yet formed we complained that Goba refused to give the constitution. We asked him to give us the constitution. He evaded our request. Then Amon Msane – that's the man I said he was the member of Legislature - when we met him he seemed to understand our concern. Then we started talking to him: 'Goba is our leader but we don't see what he's doing'. He then said he could give us a constitution, but it was not drawn by him. He copied the one that they were using in Soweto. I took it and summarised it. And thereafter I said let's go and ask Goba to come to our meeting to discuss issues so that we could grow this organisation. We made an appointment with Goba and he agreed. It was at the time when David Masina was beginning to understand things. So he offered us to meet in his house. It was a four-roomed house. When we arrived there we started discussing the constitution from clause 1 up to the last clause. We had arranged to meet at 7 o'clock with Goba but he didn't turn up for the meeting. I was chairing the Organising Committee. I said 'People we can't wait for Goba. Let's continue.' We started discussing issues. Deborah Marakalla was there as part of the students. Kwatipa was also there. A complaint was raised about the phrase 'black people'. But it wasn't clearly spelt out that this did not correspond with the politics of the ANC. The argument was that once we start using this phrase we'd alienate other people. Goba didn't want to change that – but remember he wasn't at the meeting. Later in the course of the meeting Goba arrived. That was his tactic. He said 'People, I've arrived. Can we start the meeting?' I said 'Just hold on. We're not going to start the meeting, because we've already started'. Then responded 'But I'm the president of the TCA. How do you run this meeting without me?' I said this meeting was called by us and not you. So we must chair the meeting. There was disagreement. Then I suggested that we should put this matter to a vote. Interestingly the votes for and against were equal. I then said "I as a chairperson I didn't vote, so I would come with the casting vote". That's how we defeated Goba. I continued to chair the meeting. I said "Goba, now that I'm chairing here is your constitution." He wanted to find out where I got it from. I told him that was immaterial. He pretended not to know this constitution. I then said "Wait a minute do you want to tell us that you don't know the constitution that you are using as the president?" An argument ensued, but then we decided to close the meeting because it was very late at night. It was around 9 o'clock and we had started at 7. I was the chair and my secretary had been sent by Goba to be part of the meeting. We were being spied and we didn't know (laughs).

TM: Who was the secretary?

SS: Hey, this man and he's still alive, staying at Emlonjaneni. What's his name? I forgot his name. But I'm sure it'll come to me later just Msane's name. After we had left Masina's house we were in the street, Goba said to this man "I didn't see you in the meeting". I kept quiet. He made an excuse that he was help up by something. Goba then said you know we meet on a daily basis. I thought to myself what does he mean when he says they meet on a daily basis. Does that mean that Goba knew exactly what we were discussing.

TM: Oh, he was part of the Organising committee

SS: Goba was not.

TM: I mean the other guy?

SS: Yes, and he was my secretary. Then Goba said to him "I want to see those minutes" and finished talking. I thought 'Oh, this man, every time we had a meeting, he takes our minutes to Goba'. I'm not bad-mouthing Goba, but he didn't like our discussion. I thought well, it's fine. Then I called all the other members of the Committee, except for the secretary. I said 'We're going to have a meeting within a meeting. Things are bad'. They asked what was wrong. I told them that this man (the secretary) this is what he does for Goba, so Goba was ahead of us. Whereas, we were trying to revive the organisation which he was leading. But if he's involved in such activities then he's not telling us the truth. Then someone in the meeting said I know Goba's political inclination. This man is a member of the Unity Movement. I said 'know wonder!' (banging the table). I did not know the Unity Movement. We started asking around about this Unity Movement. And someone said it's an organisation based in Cape Town. We decided that here in Thembisa we're not going to allow him to give us problems, unless he came out clean and said I'm a member of the Unity Movement and this was what I'm doing. There was nothing wrong about that. In anyways, then it was a bit difficult ... A question was then asked 'what are we going to do?' I said this was easy. Then next time we meet I, as the chairperson, would stand up and say I was resigning as the chairperson. Then I would ask whether there was anybody who wanted to volunteer to be the chairperson? And one of you should quickly stand up and volunteer and all of us would back you up. After that I would ask my secretary to do the same. They all agreed. I resigned and Lazy Mawela, who was a councillor, volunteered to become the chairperson. I turned to the secretary and said "Don't you think it's we should give others a chance?" He agreed to resign too. Someone else volunteered to be the secretary. I then said to the outgoing secretary 'With immediate effect, give our new secretary the book'. Now Goba lost his means of getting information about what we were doing. But we'd always inform him if we were going to have a meeting, and told him to come because people wanted to see him because he was our president.

TM: What were you discussing in the meetings that you were calling?

SS: Civic matters. At that time Thembisa was in tatters. We were using the bucket system, there was no water, crime rate was increasing – people were killing each other, the passages were a big problem, although there were also a solution, but people were chased in those passages. And they were facing the houses' front gates, so we were confronted by dead people everyday in the morning when we woke up. We were really not safe. There were no street lights. And the streets, iyoo, were



just one big mess. I mean, refuse was removed but Thembisa was still dirty. So, we were pushing for such things to be attended. We would inform the people to take note of such things. We knew that at some point they would start asking 'Why was this situation continuing?' Then we would say it's a political situation that was perpetuating this situation: 'This is what apartheid means'. Then people started saying 'but no this was not correct'. The time went on and then we realised that people were beginning to understand the political situation we said now that we have organised we should expose Goba for what he is. Malebo was there. Then in Thembisa we had what we called Progressive Organisations' meetings (laughs). Tilly (Mabena) must have told about this. So we would call meetings which were only attended by progressive organisations. I mean, when the situation was really bad we take decisions in those meetings about the way forward. Tilly was actively involved in what used to be called FEDTRAW (Federation of Transvaal Women), but in essence it was the Woman's League. So they came from that angle and we were coming from the civic. Some came from students; some from the workers' unions, people like Mahlangu when he was still the local chairperson of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions).

TM: Which Mahlangu?

SS: Mahlangu the former mayor.

TM: Really?

SS: Yes, Isaac Mahlangu. Then he was working at the South African Breweries. He is an artisan by training. So he was involved in COSATU. In fact, he was identified by my younger brother, who came and said 'There was a guy who was quite brilliant and as a shop steward he was quite sharp'. I think then COSATU also identified him and developed him. He then became involved in politics. He was the leader of COSATU Local then, so we would meet with him, together [Michael] Madlala, who was an organiser of a certain trade union.

TM: SAAWU (South African Allied Workers Union)?

SS: Yes, SAAWU. So we'd meet and talk, then take a decision, arguing 'Look how Thembisa was. But we have a leader of a civic who was interested in other things. He was embezzling funds. Then we would ask what do we do?' Then came Greg Thulare and Kwatipa and said 'Ntate Serote, let's form a new civic organisation, because that man was not leading us in the right direction'. We asked how? They explained. I refused and said we can't do that. We can't divide the people of Thembisa into two big camps. We can't afford that. Then a question was asked 'Then what do we do?' We agreed to call in a few people to discuss a strategy. So we met and decided to ... We agreed that we couldn't do anything if the community lacked the knowledge where we wanted to take it. We said let's inform the community about the TCA and as they were discussing it we should raise the problems arising within it. People would respond and would determine which direction it was taking. Then we could take a decision based on what we get from the people's comments – I'm coming to the point made by my wife earlier.

TM: So where did you meet with the community?

SS: Do you know Modise's church is at Sangweni?

TM: Yes

SS: It was a bioscope (cinema). Then owner of that bioscope understood us. When we asked him to allow us to use his venue for a community meeting he would agree.

TM: What was that bioscope called?

SS: It was Nepo cinema. No, no Mathole. Just a minute, Mathole was ... [Madipuo – calling his wife. Which one was Mathole, these cinemas are confusing me? Mathole was in Lifateng. What was the one in Sangweni called? It was Nepo]. Yes, we used to meet at Nepo. During this period I was working for Well's Furniture. I travelled a lot, conducting training in other shops. So during the week I didn't have time. So, it was Sunday and we were planning. But before we called a bigger meeting, we met at the old KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken). Yes, it used belong to a certain man called Tuba. He agreed for us to meet in his store. He even supplied us with KFC and we ate. After the meeting we left.

TM: Was this meeting only attended by the committee?

SS: No. It was me, Greg and some of the students. I said to them I'd make an arrangement with the UDF (United Democratic Front) - then I was working in Johannesburg – for it to print posters for us, because we wanted to call a community meeting. I knew that the UDF would do that for us. The UDF agreed, but we were supposed to go there and help the printers print them. We agreed that that would happen on Monday and on Thursday they should have completed the task. In fact, they were supposed to have brought the posters back to the township on Wednesday. The meeting was set to take place on Sunday. But by Wednesday they should be ready for distribution. I then said 'Greg on Tuesday you go and visit Goba to ask a community meeting and he make sure he agrees. He must be present. But he must not know about this [planning] meeting. When he asked 'but who's calling to inform the people. Tell him not to worry; we'd do that. But you should emphasise that the community demanded to see him and talk to him'. Indeed, he agreed to come to the meeting. On Thursday morning ... When Greg and others were busy persuading Goba to come to the meeting on Sunday, Kwatipa and others were distributing the posters in the township, informing the community that there was going to be a meeting on Sunday. I think when he woke up the following day he realised that these people were talking to me and already the planned meeting was in an advanced stage and I had agreed to attend. When I arrived in Thembisa on Friday I was informed that I was going to chair that meeting. I tried to resist, but they insisted.

TM: Who was telling you this?

SS: The committee. It was no longer that Organising Committee. There were other people who had joined us. Remember we were now organising a bigger thing. Members of other organisations such as FEDTRAW were involved. I agreed to chair the meeting. We went to Nepo and it was fully packed. During that period Popo [Molefe] and Terror [Lekota] were leading figures within the UDF. They were invited to come and explain to the people about the boer's (i.e. government) Municipal Act. Popo and Terror agreed to come. During this period they had not yet arrested them and ultimately appeared in the Delmas [Trial]. I think they also contacted Amanda Kwadi, who, I think, was the president of FEDTRAW. She also came to the meeting. She came wearing the ANC's uniform and she didn't hide it. Popo and Terror were also there. It was becoming a very, very serious meeting. On that day it was [Archbishop Desmond] Tutu's birthday. So, we placed a cloth informing the people that today it was Tutu's birthday. Amanda Kwadi called up a certain woman named MaHleza – Hleza

is her surname – to address the women in that meeting. So, you can see that our programme was heavy. Popo came up to address the community – I was with Figo [Madlala] on the stage. After Popo Lekota followed, and he explained what the boers meant when they created the councillors in the townships. By so doing, he was inciting the people. When he finished ...

TM: What was he saying about the councillors?

SS: You know, Lekota is dramatic. He said “To be a councillor you had to have R200 in your pocket and a big tummy. Popo and I, because we’re thin, can’t be councillors; and we don’t R200. But we don’t understand why do you have to have R200 to be a councillor. But what we know is that your role as a councillor is to assist the South African government to do what it has always been doing in a better way and in a more settled way. They say you should councillors in Thembisa. But then how do you run a council when there’s no money to run that council in Thembisa? This is a government organisation, which is expecting to accrue money. And in most cases, organisations such as this one accrue money through taxation. Who are they supposed to tax here? Go to Kempton Park, there are firms there that they could tax. The idea to bring this organisation in our townships is to find a way of removing us from here without too much effort. Then they claim that we have our own government. But in reality we don’t. I mean, you can judge for yourselves there’s nothing that the councillors were doing for us. Absolutely nothing. And the only way to accrue funds was by increasing rent’. That incensed the community. After addressing the community Lekota and Popo left. Remember they were wanted by the police. Amanda Kwadi spoke about women and the struggle. She said if women didn’t play their role in the struggle ... She said people were fighting out there and the women of Thembisa should joined FEDTRAW and other women. Ma-Hleza also spoke about her history; that she was once arrested with Winnie Mandela. At this point the community went wild in the meeting. The students, on the other hand, were impressed about the proceedings. At the end, we informed the community that all we wanted to do was to give you a little bit of the background. I then said we’re now moving to the real reason we called this meeting. Here we have Tembisa Civic Organisation. We have asked Goba Ndloyu, as the president of the organisation, to come. But I have just received a message that Goba Ndloyu says he can’t come, but he has sent his deputy - and I can see his deputy is present. So now I’m going to request him to tell us what have they, as a civic, done. At this meeting we had planted our own people who were working ... For example, David Masina was working for a company in which Goba had requested money to the tune of R13000. David said he’d raise that issue, because his company informed them about this. So we wanted to know what happened to the money. But in reality we wanted the community to remove him as the president of the civic. So that we could come up with a new structure. We then said we’d call this man to explain to us all what they’ve done and after that we’d discuss the way forward. The community shouted that he must come forward. We asked for a song to welcome him to the stage. Someone started a song and this man stood up. Do you know what he did?

TM: No

SS: He walked out.

TM: Oh, the deputy?

SS: Yes.

TM: Who was Goba Ndlovu's deputy that time?

SS: I don't remember his name [but maybe those are some of the names that'll come to me at a later stage]. I can still remember when he stood up I was standing with [sounds like Msane] and I said 'Look at this man he's leaving'. And his response 'This is going to cause troubles. What should we do?' I said 'Let the people continue singing'. Someone suggested that we should inform the meeting that he has left. We refused and said no they'd kill him. Let him go, then we'd inform the meeting. Amidst this confusion there was a certain man who worked with Msane. He now lives in Olifantsfontein. He has guts. He came to me and said he wanted to address the people. I asked him if he was sure. And he said yes. I said 'I know you can act crazy sometimes but please don't incite people'. He said don't worry and just trust me. He came up to the stage and started attacking Goba. He finished him.

TM: What did he say about him?

SS: He said Goba doesn't listen and he was in his executive and, therefore, he wasn't talking about something he didn't know anything about. He went and said the reason Goba decided not to attend this meeting it was because he knows what has done. He was afraid that if he came here and you started asking him questions he wouldn't be in a position to respond. We heard that he had requested funding in certain companies. But when we questioned him about that he wasn't able to answer us adequately. Even today we do not know what happened to that money. The community shouldn't therefore associate me and Goba's activities. Msane, myself and others sit in the executive but the man that had just left the meeting together with Goba know what happened to that money. After his address I then addressed the meeting and said 'People you've heard for yourself everything that we wanted you to know. Now the matter was in your hands and not ours. What must be done? Then came a response we didn't expect. The meeting said 'Stayaway tomorrow'. It was on Sunday. I was dumbfounded. I failed to respond. That was when I realised Figo's capabilities. He said give me the microphone. The people were now on their feet and angry. I mean, they had listened to Popo and Lekota's address and now they were beginning to understand the political situation. I'm certain they thought 'No, it seems that everyone who comes to lead us just want to fool around with us'. Figo responded by saying 'In Thembisa we're used to stayaways. So it wouldn't be a big deal to observe it. But a stayaway had to be organised. It needed time'. You know, the venue was very full to the extent that other people were standing outside. Then Figo said 'Now look the venue was full of people but in reality the people here were just a small fraction of the whole population of Thembisa. We have a small number of people to take such a decision. So give us some time then we'd respond to your demand after Easter and give you the way forward.

TM: Which year was this meeting held?

SS: It should be in 1984 or 1983, I think. Yes, between 1983 and 1984 – just around there. And during that time people were very emotional and beginning to be angry. And during this period I was visiting Botswana to report on the progress. And the people in Botswana would 'Yes, now the community was on the right track'.

TM: How many times were you supposed to report?

SS: As and when, because if it could be a routine I would be picked up. It shouldn't be a routine. When the people in Botswana felt there was something that they needed to know they'd let me know.

TM: How did they let you know?

SS: They'd call. We had our own way of communicating (laughs): you don't speak to a person for more than two minutes, because within two minutes they could locate you and arrest you. But if you could communicate for two minutes or less and hang up then it might be difficult for them to locate you. And after making a call you had move away from that point.

TM: Oh, so you were using the public phones?

SS: Yes. You had move away from that point. We were using codes to communicate if using a private phone. I had access to phones because I was moving from one shop to another, and I would make calls.

TM: But then who is your contact – was it still ntate Wally?

SS: By that time ... You must remember that in 1985 that's when the South African government attacked Gaborone. In fact, we became disconnected with Botswana after that onslaught. Everybody left except Wally. Who is the former Deputy Commissioner of the police? Eh, his light in complexion

TM: A short guy?

SS: Yes

TM: Timothy

SS: Tim

TM: I know. His got big eyes.

SS: He was living in Botswana. He also left. They all left, leaving Wally behind. He refused to go

TM: Williams

SS: Tim Williams. In fact, when we went to Botswana we used to live with them in the same house. Wally said 'I'm not going'. I said to him you'd get killed. He said he was holding the fort. After a long time we found him. This was after I had left South Africa for Botswana looking for them but couldn't find anyone. I had to come back home.

TM: Were the houses they were staying in vacant, or they were then occupied by other people?

SS: It was like today I've brought you here to meet with me and you would think that this was my house and I'm staying. But only to find that I don't live here; I have requested to use this house for our meeting. So that next time you think of coming with the police you wouldn't find me here. But I'd give you the impression that I lived here. So, you wouldn't know where exactly they lived. So what they did they used to volunteer ... You see, in Botswana there were lots of expatriates so now and then they'd leave for England and they'd look for people who could remain behind guarding

their houses. Now our comrades would volunteer to look after these houses when the owners were not there. So, it was in those houses where we met. That was one of the reasons I couldn't find them until we finally met again here in Thembisa. It was myself, Madlala, Sekgele Mogale. His sister was the wife to Thami Mnyele. After Thami was killed ... She was the second wife; they lived together at Ndayeni. So ... Wait, I discussing ... Some times I get lost

TM: No, no, you were still discussing the meeting at Nepo cinema.

SS: Alright. Yes, Nepo cinema. Okay, Figo Madlala was able to fix that issue in that meeting. The meeting ended and people left the venue. But we then asked for volunteers to run this [new] organisation. Many people came forward and we took down their names. Obviously the demand for a stayaway didn't make sense to us, but we couldn't dismiss it and said those who called for it were crazy. After we were the ones who had asked the community to give us the direction, so we couldn't then just dismiss their suggestions. We decided to ignore that demand and argued that we were not responsible to call a stayaway, because a stayaway was work-related. So COSATU should call a stayaway. We felt we couldn't call a stayaway without COSATU's knowledge, because should problems arise because of this stayaway then we'd call on COSATU to come and intervene but without having all the necessary information. We believed it was a long process to call a stayaway. Right we left that issue. when we walked out of the venue the two guys that we were together with in the Organising Committee just came over to me and said 'Serote, you are a bastard. We'd never trust you again'. In said 'tough luck'. That's how the Tembisa [Civic] Organisation fell. We then started organising for the Tembisa Residents Association. We sat down together and said we must start a new organisation, because the old one was not making any progress. Its leader was fighting everybody, including the likes of Tutu. I mean, you couldn't say Tutu was ... In fact, Tutu just came in as a leader and said 'The people of God, can we please move in this direction'. We always suspected that he was a member of a political organisation, but nobody was ever sure. There were also leaders of the UDF, and you couldn't say UDF was a political party. But they were running the whole thing [i.e. campaigns].

TM: Who's the UDF person you were referring to?

SS: Who's this man from the Cape? He was a reverend...

TM: [Allan] Boesak?

SS: Boesak. You couldn't say Boesak was a political person, but he spoke about the day-to-day issues and the Boers couldn't respond, you see. They just suspect as we also suspected. Then how do you then Boesak is a political person, because he was dealing civic matters. So we also decided to participate through a civic. We then formed the Tembisa Residents' Association (TRA), and I became the first president. And you should know that I was also busy working underground. When I went to report to [Thabang] Makwetla in Botswana he asked what was I doing. And ordered me to resign from that position, because that's not what I was supposed to be doing. But he added that if I wanted to continue being involved in that position I wasn't going to be working with them anymore. He said this was because they didn't want someone who was high profiled: 'If you're high profiled we're going to have a problem, because, you know, you'd be held before you knew. They'd (police) pick you up". So I had to go and resign.



TM: Oh, as the president?

SS: Yes. Do you know Mthofi, who is now the spokesperson for the Energy [Department of Energy and Minerals]?

TM: Oh, Bheki...

SS: Yes, Bheki Khumalo we were together when we formed the TRA. Well, the situation continued ... Oh, I resigned, but they refused to accept [my resignation]. That's when ... You see, when I was the president the secretary was Tim Mabhena. So, after the situation got out of hand ... Remember we had left the other civic and formed the TRA, which were now concentrating on. We had a committee and we were calling meetings. We established sectional committees. Sectional committees ensured that street committees were established; that was one of the functions. Street committees were linked to the sectional committees. And the sectional committees ... For instance, in this area [Kgatlangping] we had divided it into four sections and each one had a block committee. So we had four people who were responsible for the block committees. And the street committees, according to their numbers, each had a chairperson. So there was a close link. And later on when as we were continuing, COSATU raised a concern that we were organised but we didn't have a higher structure that could hold the whole thing [together]. So they suggested to Mahlangu that he must propose such a structure. Mahlangu came to brief us. So we divided the entire Tembisa into fourteen areas. I chaired this area. By the way, what did we call this area? I've forgotten. But I chaired this area. Mahlangu chaired the area where he was staying, and so did others. In all there were fourteen areas. We felt that now Tembisa was organised. You know, here in Tembisa we didn't experience many casualties because of the struggle. This was because one of our aims was that we should move forward with a minimal number of casualties as possible, especially amongst the 'ordinary' people. If there were to be casualties, we felt they should be at least amongst the leadership. We believed that most of the 'ordinary' by then hadn't yet really understood what we were all about. We knew that ultimately they'd reach the level where they'd be able to understand. But we couldn't risk people like that. Otherwise if they got scared, then we'd not move anywhere. We then agreed that if there was going to be a stay-away, we informed the UDF and COSATU that they shouldn't give many boxes of pamphlets. We needed only fourteen. I remember they called me in and said 'here are the boxes for Tembisa'. I said 'No, I only want fourteen'. When I arrived I called a meeting – the fourteen leaders – and I gave each one a copy; we discussed it. After the meeting each one of them returned to his/her section and he/she would photocopy only ten copies and had them to the ten people he/she would be working with, and they'd discuss the pamphlet. After that they'd go to the street committees and speak to the chairpersons. But the chairpersons of the street committees were not given the copy of the pamphlet. They were just briefed verbally. The chairperson would not call a meeting but inform his/her neighbour, and the neighbour would pass on the message to his/her neighbour, and so on. This was done quietly. This was done so that the message didn't reach the police station. By the time when we wake up in the morning ... One of the things that we emphasised to the people was that if it was a stay-away it should be that. People should stay in their homes. They shouldn't venture to go to the streets, because the boers were frustrated and when they found you in the street they'd kill you. And when they enter into your yard inform them that you know nothing about the stay-away. The father should say you're on leave or you were sick. The mother you tell them that you were unemployed. The children are home because when they tried to go to school they found that there were no taxis. Just busy yourselves with house chores. And

when they ask about your neighbour inform them that you didn't know them and you were not in speaking terms with them. We told them the residents that the activists would patrol the streets, because we knew how to react to the boers. We'd tell them anything. If they meet us at night and ask where we come from we'd say we're from working, doing nightshift.

TM: You were organised?

SS: Highly. That's there weren't many casualties here. So we organised one stay-away (laughs). This was after some mineworkers had died, I think, in Ermelo. Do you know the boers from Isando and Kempton Park only realised around ten [in the morning] that people weren't coming to work. Isando went crazy - the Boers there got mad - because it's an industrial area. When they called they were told that the people from Tembisa were not at work. I'm told they called ... But their complaint was discussed in parliament: 'to say here's an industrial but it's standstill because there were no workers to work'. When the parliamentarians wanted to find out what was the problem, the boers in Isando and Kempton angrily wanted to find answers from them, because they were the ones running the country. They argued that they've heard that people were fighting because they were dissatisfied but didn't know why. And they as business people wanted to know what was happening. A police helicopter flew over Tembisa and carrying a flyer hurling insults at the people of Tembisa. I mean, they didn't know what was happening. The police couldn't find anyone in the streets. People were staying in their homes. When the police went into the people's yards to ask what was happening, everybody didn't know. But everyone was at home. They felt that the people were lying to them. A big misunderstanding developed between the business people and the politician in parliament. Parliamentarians asked COSATU about the stay-away and COSATU said 'We know nothing about it. You better go and find out in Tembisa'. Yes, boers came to Tembisa to insult us, saying *dis kak wat angaan hierso* (it's utter shit what's going on here). Now there was another issue that we had to handle. The following day during this time of the day (around 4 o'clock) we realised that there were some people who had gone to work. Now the youth came and demanded to punish all those who had gone to work. We were in a meeting called by the youth. It said 'You said we must go door-to-door informing people not to go to work, but some have gone to work. Those who had stayed at home were complaining to us that some of the people had gone to work, and what are you going to do about that'. We felt that this was a dangerous issue. I remember we were called by people like [Lazarus] Mawela to come and listen to the youth. They youth were adamant that they were going to punish all those who went to work. Some of the people in the meeting tried to reason with them to say that was not the way to do things. But they youth refused to budge. So I had to come and said 'Not that we agree with these people, because we understand that we asked you to do it. So let's agree to disagree and close this meeting'. After people had left the meeting, we called the youth and said 'go and punish them but you must be very careful. We don't want you to get arrested. And those people shouldn't be able to identify who beat them'. So we suggested to them that they shouldn't go to the main roads, where the buses and taxis travelled. We said they should waylay them in the small streets leading into the township in the evening and punish them for going to work. You know, I was sitting in my house and I could hear people screaming and crying. My wife asked me to go out and check, I said we shouldn't involve ourselves in issues that didn't concern us. Many people were punished. Some came to complain to me and I told them that even though we understood that they had to go to work, but sometimes they had to comply with the community's decisions. One day on my way to a meeting to report about the progress I met a certain gentleman who stopped to inform me that he had been assaulted by a young man. He said 'This boy beat even though I didn't go to

work'. I think that boy punished by mistake. I invited that boy to come and see me and asked him why did he punish that man? He said 'No, you see when we talked this man nicely he told us nonsense, then we beat him'. I asked if he had gone to work? The boy said he didn't know. I assured the boy that I would solve this issue. I went to see this man and apologised on behalf of this boy and said he made a mistake. And said to them man 'but you also didn't respond well to this boy's question, that's why he acted the way he did. Next time listen to them and respond well'.

TM: What were they beating them with?

SS: Anything. A sjambok, a belt, a stick. But we made it clear that when they punished them they shouldn't use steel or knobkerries, or anything that might cause them injury. We said they should beat them just to make them understand.

TM: Now in Botswana who were communicating with? I heard you talking ... mentioning Makwetla?

SS: Yes, at that level we were now reporting to Thabang Makwetla. Now during that time my unit had developed.

TM: How?

SS: Because I was now operating with people who understood the political situation. They understood the aims of the underground movement. They understand the four pillars of the struggle, because I had taken them to meet Makwetla. He trained them over the weekend. And he told them that now they were members of MK even if they were ... He said you're now a registered members of MK. So you would do as MK does. One of the things he said was that we should be ready inside the country because they were going to send in trained soldiers "and you will work with them and show them what to do. Technically they know what to do, but socially they didn't. So you are going to do. And they'd follow your programmes and not theirs, because they don't know anything. You know what the people want, where are the problems, what to do and how to do it. They'd respond. And politically they were quite sharp. You should advice them in terms of political directions: who was a threat and who wasn't. That's who these guys came here. We were now beginning to become a solid unit and I was commanding it.

TM: How many were you now?

SS: There were five of us. It was me, my wife, and these other three guys.

TM: Was Mama (Mrs Serote) is part of the unity?

SS: Yes.

TM: Is that so?

SS: [Laughs] You see, when I went to Botswana I would take her with me, and the children. So we were just an innocent family travelling to Botswana. When we arrived there she'd go to her people and I'd go to mine. We'd meet when we had finished our tasks. The children would go ... Fortunately we had relatives in Botswana where we would drop them off with – the children also understood. When we were done we'd fetch them and return home.

TM: So it was you, your wife ... By the way, what's Mama's name?

SS: Francina.

TM: And who else was in the unit?

SS: It was "Guy", Thabo, Steven, me. Oh, and there was a certain guy called Letselebe.

TM: Who?

SS: David Letselebe. Now each one of us had a unit. David Letselebe was responsible for propaganda. He was suppose to create a propaganda unit. "Guy" liked guns (laughs), and Steven was responsible for intelligence. My wife was in communication. That was a solid unit – that was a commanding unit, and I was overall.

TM: So this commanding unity was...

SS: What happens was that the one responsible for intelligence would form an Intelligence unit. And each one amongst us would their unit. We were told that because communication was sensitive, the person responsible for it should not forma unit, but work alone. The person responsible for guns was to form his unit. I don't know if you've ever heard that here in Tembisa there was a Transvaal Suicide Squad? Those guys were in that unit. Yes, I'll tell you about the Transvaal Suicide Squad. I was reporting directly to Thabang Makwetla. But he also wanted to meet these people to train them. But he said he'd train one-by-one in their positions.

TM: So you were taking them to ... Did they all have passports?

SS: Yes, they had passports. But because they were underground people were not supposed to know what they were doing. They'd just go. If they had free time, we'd send to spend a week in Botswana. After receiving training they'd come back. But they had to have a good reason why they wanted to spend the whole week in Botswana. We'd work it out before they go and they'd be fine. On their return they'd have to brief us about what took place over there. So, the units do not find themselves encroaching in each other's tasks. Then we'd understand what each of us was doing. That's how the units expanded. I had one of the biggest units. We had something like – but it expanded after I had left - about forty something.

TM: The whole of Tembisa?

SS: Remember I didn't even have to know that there was another unity, because I was responsible for mine. If the units were increasing it was alright, and it was not of anybody's concern. And they'd make sure that when going out to engage in missions the units do not encroach on each other's turf. You see, when it was my unit's turn to operate other units would stay put and vice versa.

TM: I mean, travelling to Botswana involved costs who was funding you?

SS: The ANC was funding. When we returned from Botswana we'd be having money. When I send you outside I gave you money. It was the ANC's money. On the other side, the ANC would give you money to travel back home. They also gave us lots and lots of ammunition. We had a very, very strong link. And they were so passionate about our freedom. And you'd wonder how come a person

who lives so far away cared about our freedom. And then you had to understand their political understanding; that of [Vladimir] Lenin, and all those things. And when you go back you realise these things. Because America feared that if this thing could be broken there were many things that it couldn't predict.

TM: And the Transvaal Suicide Squad ...

SS: Now, because everybody was in place, so Makwetla says ... But prior to that Gezani [Ndlovu] came here. But he was not in my unit. He was in another unit. He and members of his unit decided to go to Botswana. And when they got there they said they wanted to return home. But they were informed that you don't just come here. I think it was because they didn't know them. So they gave them a task. They told them to return to South Africa and when they arrive in Tembisa they'd find weapons: 'Just go and somebody would come and give weapons'. But when you arrive there you must sit down and identify a target, which its destruction would benefit the community. You shouldn't attack a target because you had a quarrel with the owner at a shebeen. You should identify maybe the police. But you must be very careful. Now because they were students they returned and identified the members of the SAP who were troubling the students. Remember that although the black police worked with the white police, but the white police would inform the students after they had arrested them that the black police were the ones who tipped them. So the students would try to reason with the black police and the latter would insult them and even divulge secretive information about the students, you know, *die eine ek ken waar hy bly* (this one I know where he lives). So students used to talk about such incidents and that's how the news reached our units. So the units would investigate some of the police who lived in the township: where they stayed, when they knocked off from work, and so on. And most importantly where they slept in the house? And how far was his bed from the window? Now Gezani and his unit identified [Lucas] Mothibe, who was the Mayor in Tembisa. They also identified another man who was staying in that section next to the [train] station...

TM: Which station?

SS: Limindlela. You see, on the other side it's Difateng. When you cross to the other side there are new bond houses. He was living there. I understand some people were sent to him to request him to resign from the government institutions, because they were suppressing people. He refused. They left him like that and went back to report that he was not willing to budge. That's why Gezani and his unit identified Mothibe and this man. It was Gezani and another person called Leeuw, who now works for the Metro Police.

TM: Weren't they brothers?

SS: Not really brothers, but they were very close. [John Maile] Leeuw was the brother to another activist. He'll feature later in my talk.

TM: Okay. I've heard about the Leeuw brothers.

SS: So when they came to me ... Okay, at the time they were staying Mr. Thulare's place (Greg's father). But now I couldn't involve Greg's father in the underground movement, because he talked a lot. He couldn't keep a secret. And that exercise needed someone who could keep a secret. So I could not. He was the right person to work within a civic. So that if it happens that he's arrested then



he could tell the police that he was fighting for civic matters, like a hole in the street. It made sense. I don't think he was aware that I was operating underground. Even his son, Greg, but at a later stage Greg suspected that nstate Serote was into something and he doesn't involve me, but involved my friend. His friend didn't tell anything.

TM: Oh, Kwatipa?

SS: Yes, Kwatipa. Well, Kwatipa informed me that Greg was very angry about this. I said leave him alone because we are saving him, because if could come in he'd die. I mean, we might have to run away before we die and he'd be picked up. There was no boer that didn't know him. He was the chairperson of COSAS in Tembisa. They knew as a rough person. He had been detained many a times. So we couldn't put him underground. Because when he moved in this direction everybody followed him. So we left him out. So these guys came to me and said 'We want to upgrade our fighting tactics'. Remember then we were using petrol bombs. They said they were told in Botswana by Makwetla we had to upgrade the war now.

TM: So you received the briefing from Botswana

SS: Yes. They said almost anybody knows how to make a petrol bomb. Our task was to introduce the people to the war and now they know what it is, and many of them are prepared to participate in it. We want to introduce hand-grenades now: 'Go and form a unit or take part of your unit we're launching a Transvaal Suicide Squad. It has to hit seriously. So I came back and the unit started hitting, and they did that on the weekend. On Sunday I took Kwatipa and we went to Pretoria. Do you know what I'm going to do?

TM: No.

SS: I was going to make a call from a public phone. I was going to call a newspaper, I think it was *Sowetan*, to say "Look, I'm a member of the Transvaal Suicide Squad. We've number so and so. Can you go and check?" They asked who are you? I hung up. I had given him the addresses and everything. So he must go and check. So after reporting about this incident, the people [in Botswana] would read the newspaper and would see that it's done. They'd know that the details would follow later, but the mission we agreed upon is done. So we reported via the newspapers. We'd inform the newspaper and they'd report the incidents, and the people in Botswana would buy the newspapers and read. Sometimes we'd notify them say, for example, read *Sunday Times* page 15. Then they'd know what we're talking about and they'd read. And when we visit them then they'd ask us to elaborate about the missions, what happened. They needed all the details. After all they also had to report to Lusaka. That's why Oliver Tambo would stand there and he say "We've hit in Tembisa; we've hit in Springs, and so on. [These tasks are carried out] by our people. They are in the country. And the people would be surprised how the hell does he know? So that's the war. Newspapers reported about the unit called the Transvaal Suicide Squad. So people were shocked. In fact, some of the heard the hand-grenade explosion. It was two o'clock ... No, it was one o'clock on Saturday. I was sitting here at home with my wife. Debra [Marakalala and others] called us.

TM: Oh, they already knew

SS: No, they didn't know. It took many people a long time to know exactly what was happening. I can still remember at one o'clock it exploded. And another one went off. We switched off our lights,



because we were afraid that the boers might question us to say ‘when the explosion went off your house were lights on what did you hear (laughs)? So we switched off the lights and slept. At nine in the morning Kwatipa was in my house – he used to be punctual. He said after you’ve finished doing whatever you’re doing at nine I’d be waiting for you. At five minutes to nine he was entering my yard. He really kept time. Then we left to report the incident to *Sowetan* and *Sowetan* would report about it unaware that it’s being used. The guys on the other side would pick up the story and they’d call wanting to know when we could meet. When we meet we’d give them the details about what had happened. They’d take the details and pass them to Lusaka. I think the people n Lusaka suggested that these people need trained personnel and they can handle it. So they sent some people over here. But when they arrived here I had already left the country, because things were becoming very hard for me.

TM: When you say you had already left where did you go to?

SS: I went to Botswana.

TM: Were you in exile now?

SS: The whole family left.

TM: When did you leave...

SS: This fellow who passed us here just now grew up in Tanzania.

TM: Oh!

SS: Yes, they attended school in Tanzania.

TM: When did you leave South Africa?

SS: It was ‘85.

TM: ‘85 that’s when you left?

SS: Yes.

TM: How did that come about – what happened?

SS: Okay. I sent out my children first. This was after Thulare’s house was attacked. The boers were looking for Greg Thulare. They wanted to kill him. But already Greg had realised this. That attack ... That’s when we realised that a four-roomed house was nothing. I think it was a military decision planner, because when they attacked there would be no place to hide. You see, a four-roomed house is like this: there’s a window, a door, a wall, another door comes connects from one of the rooms, linking with the kitchen, and straight from the kitchen there was another door, there was another window in the kitchen and close to it was the bedroom window. So boers stood next to each window and shot across inside the house. So if you were to run from one room to another one of the bullets would definitely hit you.

TM: What was the reason for the boers to look for him so highly?

SS: Greg?

TM: Yes

SS: They no longer wanted to tolerate him, because whenever he'd be arrested he'd be quickly discharged. And they didn't understand how. I can still remember he was once arrested and ... You must remember that we used to communicate with some of the comrades who had been arrested in prison. One of them would claim to be sick and they'd take him to Baragwanath [Hospital]. He'd ask us to notify his family that he was at Baragwanath. We'd accompany his family to visit this sick person. He'd then inform us about what the boers were planning. He'd tell who they were looking for and so on. You know, when the boers were interrogating activists they'd tell them who they were looking for. I remember he said to me that the boers informed him that they didn't know me well or my activities. So I could stick around. So, the boers were accusing Greg of creating the unrest in the township. We heard about this. And Elsie, [Debora] Marakalala's sister, heard about this and informed others that they must ensure that the evidence - she was young I think 16 or 17 and attending at a secondary - against [Greg] Thulare fails. [She said] "He was going to court on a certain day and that day we must burn properties like never experienced. They had tipped Greg's lawyer about their plan, that when the court resumes we'd start the unrest. During the court's proceedings Greg's lawyer said 'Excuse me magistrate, I know this court is accusing my client that he was causing unrests in Tembisa and he has been behind bars for about three weeks, I don't know whether you've heard about what was happening now in Tembisa? The magistrate said no. He said I've just received information that Tembisa was burning as we speak. 'Now I don't understand how can you accuse my client for the unrest?' That's when the boers decided that they should kill him. When they couldn't pin you down they'd kill you. To them it was easy just to decide and say 'go and kill that man'.

TM: So after they had attacked Greg's house that's when you decided...

SS: When I looked I thought I have four small children and the day they decide to come for me they're were definitely going to get my children. I said no. Wally [Serote] asked if I wanted to take my children out? I said yes. He made arrangements. I took them all out. The youngest was seven years old and the oldest was seventeen. I took them to Botswana. And from Botswana we went to Lusaka. And from there we went to Tanzania, where they attended school. I said t myself now we can fight. So we started fighting. And we were able to form other units. We had a phone here at home. When I went to work and the situation became tense in the township my wife would call me to notify me not to try and come home. 'The situation was bad. I myself have left the house'. Then I was working for ...[inaudible] and would spend a week there, so I wouldn't know what was happening. So before I came home I had to phone so that she could brief about what was happening. Our area didn't experience many incidents. So I would tell her to walk around the township to make sure that it was safe to come home. Yes, we took the children out of the country instead to risking their lives here. Here we were in a bib, big mess. Indeed, they left and went to attend school there. We'd visit them in Tanzania. We were one of the first group to have left the country to go to Tanzania to visit our children. We returned home without being detected (laughs).

TM: Where were they attending in Tanzania, Somafco (Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College)?

SS: Somafco. So they spent lots of time at Somafco. As time went on the 'war' was intensifying. I remember a some point when people were now taking over. You see, when the people were angry

they would mobilise themselves and not discuss issues with anyone. They were now the leadership. So we would tell the civic about this development and say 'run with these people otherwise we wouldn't see what you were doing'. We in the underground ... We said 'Don't worry. Just listen to what they're saying. When they complain about the police station, just plan to bomb the police station. When they complain about something else, just plan to mess that thing up. You see, when they're planning to go in a certain direction try and remove the obstacles so that they could pass'. I remember even Wally and others in exile asked 'How do you achieve such things?' I said 'but you have to be there to know what to do'. Wally said "You know, this is scaring me now". And he's a trained soldier. But it's fine, because this was one war ... You know, the war of liberation it's always unique with every country, because the dynamics and the factors are not the same. Even in South Africa when you go to Natal it's another thing. But we were able to look at it broadly to say this is where we want to go. And people will do what they want to do as long as they receive a certain amount of guidance. We must teach them that when the Boers start shooting they must all get down on the ground and not run away, because when they were on the ground there would be less [casualties]. Again we have to train them about guns. Do you see what we did? Everybody now knew how to shoot and now they're robbing us.

TM: Exactly. So, finally, when does the decision for you to leave come?

SS: Now the decision to leave ... We were in Botswana and planning this thing to say people back in the country were looking for weapons. They sent in people who trained them on how to use hand-grenades and AKs. Those people returned to Botswana. Then we said 'now that the people have been trained give them weapons'. They said 'Weapons, Chief, you must get a courier. You shouldn't hide that courier and hide from him/her about what you were involved in. We're not using people but working with people. So the courier must know what is it they were doing so that he/she can plan. If that person doesn't want to do it it's fine'. So I found a certain guy who lived here. He was scared but they said he'd get used to be scared but they said he'd get used to the idea. Initially, he'd take message for us across [to Botswana], because I was instructed not to do it again because my passports ... (laughs). They said you'd be arrested. Lose that passport and apply for another one. By then I had already sent in an application for a new passport. Our comrades in Botswana gave me a map, but warned me not to get involved. They said I should delegate this task to people who'd be responsible for collecting weapons from Botswana and storing them in South Africa. They must report to me. They said if I wanted to see these people I could, but preferably I shouldn't. So my wife and myself returned and I invited the core group and briefed it and emphasised that none of us must be involved. The argument was: 'Fine, we'd no fetch the weapons but we must go and see where they're stored, so that if these people face difficulties we could advice them what to do, because they may not be as experienced as we are'. I said that's fine. It was myself, my wife and the other two guys: Kwatipa and Steven. At that I had been given a brand new vehicle by my company, an Opel. We left here at five in the morning, going to Magaliesburg. They had stored the weapons in Magaliesburg. The information we had was that when we reach a certain in Magaliesburg we should drive for so many kilometres, then there would be a sign where we'd have to turn left, and when we arrive at a certain point we must turn right, then we should walk so many steps, then make a right-about turn and walk three steps, then we'd be standing on top of the weapons. We did that. Now we arrived there in the morning round about eight. It was straight road, a provincial road. Now along the road there were cement chairs; that was one of their landmarks. So we stopped alongside one of those chairs and I asked who was going to go there? The two guys said we'd go. We had read the

map and left it home. What we had done was to write down figures so that if anybody could pick that information up they'd only find figures, either addresses or figures adding or subtracting. The two guys took those figures with them. I told them to wait for a while. My wife and I went to a butchery to buy meat. When we returned we made fire and cooked the meat. So anybody who passed there would see that we were cooking meat. But things were happening there. Those guys left to look for the weapons. They returned and said they couldn't find the spot. I said you better find it. They left again and finally they found the spot where the weapons had been hidden. They called me to come and see, because they said I had to take a very serious decision. I went there and found that the people who were storing these weapons didn't dig a deep hole. I was worried that anybody could see and pick them up. I said 'Guys, are you prepared to die?' They said yes. I told them to dig up, we were taking all these weapons with us. I recall that we drove close to one and half hours back to Tembisa and anything could have happened. We didn't plan or do anything. They dug and we took the weapons back home with us.

TM: What kind of weapons were they?

SS: It were hand-grenades – 90 of them. There were also makarovs in there. You know, at the time we didn't even know and didn't have time to open. We just took everything and put it in the car and left. But we looked like a family. We drove ... [inaudible – dog barking] When we entered Krugersdorp ... You must know that we were on the lookout for [police] roadblocks. I then said 'people we don't have a plan but we must start to think. If the police stopped us what are we going to do?' The two guys said it's easy 'we'd claim that these things belong to us. You just gave us a lift. You don't anything. So that you go and find help for us'. Because if the boers arrested you and the UDF or any other prominent organisation was not made aware ... These organisation should be able to mention that there are certain people who had been arrested, so you're safe wherever you'd be. The boers could do whatever they want with you but you'd be safe. Your family would know that you've been arrested. I asked these guys if they were sure, and it shouldn't be the other way around. I said 'you should say you don't know anything about these weapons and I'd take the blame, because I'm the overall commander and it's my responsibility'. They refused, arguing that if you're arrested other people would not be able to work: 'even if we're not there the work would continue'. I said 'okay, that's fine'. We drove and when we reached Krugersdorp - we were not far from home now – when we stopped at the robots a police vehicle stopped next to us (laughs). After it had stopped I said to everyone on the car not to look at these police: 'you keep on talking'. I then said the two guys at the back should talk facing each other so that one of them would see and know what was happening. I said 'I'd tease them as if to challenge them to a race and when they fall for it I'd let them outrace me to make them feel happy, and then we'd be able to travel safely back home (laughs)'. I started raving my car (making the sound) and the boer driver read my mind. As I was raving my car I was watching the robots. When the robots turned green I accelerated and the boer accelerated and went past my car in full speed. I pretended as I was following him in high speed as well. We were happy to see their car disappear. Then we drove along and didn't come across any roadblock. I said thanks God. Now we still had one hurdle, at the hospital. You see, when driving into Tembisa you can't easily see the hospital until you're close to it. And when you finally can see the hospital but you can't see on the other side of it. The road wasn't straight. We had to know these streets: which one was straight and which one was not. We then wondered what to do. In such instances, the IsiZulu-speaking people usually say *gwinya itshe* (swallow a stone). We drove past the hospital and there was nothing (i.e. roadblock). We entered Tembisa. When we stopped in

front my house's gate we sighed in relief – all of us. We opened the gate and locked it up again immediately. We unloaded the materials. When we looked what was inside we were shocked. There were many guns and we were expecting only 12. So we had to take a decision about what to do. But we had been trained how to dig a hole where we'd hide them. We used plastic containers – the big ones we used to store water in – and we put some of the weapons inside them and closed them. I kept a makarov in the house. There is a place – not far from here – it was a dumping site, where people dumped ashes. That's where we dug a hole and hid them. I remember when we were digging there Tracy Chapman's song was playing. It was a weekend. Yes, Tracy Chapman's song was playing in some of the shebeens in the vicinity. You know, every time I hear Tracy Chapman's song I say this song reminds me of terrible times (laughs). But I like her, because she reminds me of these things. Yes, Tracy kept on singing. The other artist whose songs were playing is this guy who was murdered recently. What's his name? The one who was singing reggae ...

TM: Lucky Dube?

SS: Yes, Lucky Dube's songs were also playing there. I thought some people were enjoying themselves whereas we were busy. Well, it's one of those things. After hiding the weapons, we then started planning: 'we'd ask each other what's your responsibility?' After planning we dug out the weapons. We took few out first and gave them to one unit – to the leader to the leader of the unit. We instructed the leader to hide them and not to let even one member of his unit know that he had weapons. We said when you're ready you could take them out and distribute them amongst the members of the unit: 'but do not inform them where you found them'. That's when people started hearing explosions in Tembisa. I heard that at that time we were the only highly active unit. Some of the units were not so active. I recruited mad people, who didn't mind, they'd just throw hand-grenades and they'd explode. We caused chaos in Tembisa. But prior to that before we came up with that plan, one of the stay-away ... Remember we were no longer involved in calling for stay-aways. We were soldiers now. COSATU was responsible for stay-aways. When COSATU called a stay-away we'd help guard our people in case the boers tried something. We'd attack them. Now a stay-away was called after a student was killed. We were together with Figo [Madlala], Sekgele, and other people. As we were sitting I asked 'are you sure this stay-away would be successful today? Because if it's not successful people would not have confidence in us. It has to be successful'. They said they have communicated the stay-away to the taxis and the buses ...

TM: Who were you talking to?

SS: With Madlala and others. We were at the graveyard. It was on Sunday and the stay-away was planned for the following day. But we had to ensure that ... I think Tim Mabena was also there. They asked what we should do then? I said "I'm bothered by the hostel, because it was too close to the station. And the inmates would just walk and take a train, taking them to work. And coming back they'd do the same'. They said 'then what should we do?' I said we must prevent the train from reaching the station. How? I said 'at three o'clock we should go there and roll a big stone onto the rail track

TM: Three o'clock when?

SS: In the morning. Monday morning. So that when the train comes in the morning the driver would see it and stops. Remember that the train left the station at four in the morning. So, it would have to



stop and those people would not have transport. We'd have cut them off. They all agreed that it was a good idea. But then a question was asked: 'who would do it?' I said no. Sekgele said I have strong young boys and girls who could do it. We then agreed that it would be Sekgele's responsibility to arrange everything. We disbanded. He called his group and briefed them. He told them that there was a loophole that had to be closed. And this group had to do it. The group said no problem. That's where Elsie comes in, Debra's sister. She was part of that. And there was another boy called Tekkie boy ...

TM: Tekkie (or Tacky boy) who?

SS: Tekkie boy.

TM: Oh, I've heard about him.

SS: yes. He was part of that. He came...

TM: Was he part of Sekgele's unit?

SS: No. He was just picked him ... Actually I don't know whether he was part of Sekgele's unit or not, because he wouldn't have told us. He told us that he'd get people [to do the job]. After briefing them they said it's okay, it would be done. But after that I think these young people thought these old man was crazy; we're going to let the train enter the station. Once inside the station we'd close it in in the station. We waited and we heard the sound of the train. When the train reached the station, these young people rolled in the big stone onto the tracks. Then pelted the train with petrol bombs (making sound). When the driver of the train went to the other end of the train he met Elsie, a 17-year old, hey, she chased with a knife in her hand. The driver ran away. The youngsters remained behind and burned that train.

TM: Oh, so that's the train that was burned?

SS: Correct. And that's where it's started. I was sitting here at home ... Remember that it took time before it could burn. At around eleven o'clock the smog started showing in the air. Even the people didn't hear that the train hooted – it hooted once and it stopped. People were wondering what had happened. I heard someone saying the train was burning. I said Oh, my goodness what have these children done? Some people said we should go and observe. I refused to go. I knew that I that came up with the idea and look now what had happened. I was to hear about it in Botswana some years later ... No, no, we were in Moscow. Wally said 'There's this girl [Elsie]. Do you know this girl? I said yes I do. He said 'that child frightened me about the things she used to do. What exactly did you do in Tembisa? I said we were fighting. He then said you must be careful when fighting. If we let young girls and boys get into this. What adults are we bringing up?' I responded 'How do I say they shouldn't do it? Because adults complain that I have a child and have this and that'. At least these young people are not yet committed'. He said 'no, she frightened me the way she was relating the event about the train'. Now I remembered. And I asked Wally did she say, because when she left the country she didn't say anything to me. After that incident it became very difficult for them in Tembisa. I then took Leeuw and said we should leave the country. I said I have a car and I know where we should cross to the other side. I took Leeuw and Gezani.



TM: Oh, they were about to cross now?

SS: Yes. Well, they knew where to cross and when we arrived there they crossed. No, they told me that they were travelling by train, but it happened that one of them returned. It later turned out that Leeuw had used all the money to go back to exile. He didn't have money anymore. So, I volunteered to transport him. When I went to fetch him he was with Elsie, his girlfriend. I asked him 'where is she going? Did you tell her about the plan?' He said yes. I realised that there was no way she was staying behind. We all left.

TM: Okay, so that's how she left?

SS: Yes, she left. You know, when she saw the fence she held on to me and said 'ntate Serote, I am not going anymore'. I said to her 'You are crazy. You are not going anywhere, but you jump'. She was beginning to see reality. Because all along it wasn't real, real, but now it. She jumped the fence.

TM: Where did they jump [the fence]?

SS: At Makgo something ... You see, when you're travelling towards Mafikeng ... Makgobistad. Yes, Makgobistad. I was seeing that place for the first time. I told them to jump the fence. They jumped. You know, her last words were *Ntate Serote, to bonana beng* [Mr Serote, when are we going to see each other again?] I said "I don't know, I just don't. We may not see each other again. I don't know. You know the situation we're in'. She said yes, I know. I told her to go. They left. I think I saw her ten years later. She was grown up woman and married. Then she was the MEC (Member of the Executive Committee). Oh, after she had left her mother said to Debra – Debra was the older sister - "You sent my child away. You should have left'. They fought. Debra came to my house to inform me. I said to her 'Leave your mother, she is angry and she can't cope'. She was very angry.

TM: Mmm ... it was causing problems in the families

SS: Yes, that's what the struggle did when it came to the last man, if I may say so, families fought. Eish, Debra's mother was very angry. We came to realise that this was serious. And Debra was frustrated. At that time she had a child. We went to the UDF and said 'We have a problem'.

TM: Who did you meet at the UDF?

SS: I didn't go actually. She was with Pat Thwala – you must have heard about him. He was working with Debra's mother. He told me *name ngithe ngikhuluma nalomama, hayi akawubambi mshini* (I've tried to talking to this woman but she refuses to undersand). He then said 'If you can we could go to the UDF [offices] to state our problem, or go to the [South African] Council of Churches and state our problem'. They agreed. Pat and others went to Debra's mother and requested to talk to her about her child, Elsie. Hey, she became agitated. They informed that her child was in Tanzania ... No, she was in England. They said to her we have a return ticket for you. You'd have to take a flight to go and visit your child. She wants to talk to you. Do you who she met?

TM: No.

SS: She found Oliver Tambo waiting for her. Tambo had been briefed that the woman was troublesome. But Oliver Tambo said 'No, I'll deal with her'. He said to her 'You child, unfortunately, woke up this morning – she's a soldier and I don't control the soldiers – the organisation responsible

for soldiers took her and said she'd be back next week. There was no way to communicate this to you. If we could we'd have postponed our meeting. But let's sit down. Tambo started lecturing her. Finally, Mrs Marakalala became aware of what was happening and said 'No, I'm fighting people that I was not supposed to be fighting'. I can still remember how she used to demand her child from Debra. But she turned and apologised to her and said 'Sorry for doing this to you. I wasn't aware'. She asked what she wanted and pleaded with her to sleep at home. But Debra told her she can't sleep at home. Then Debra's mother said to Debra 'You should know that you and I are not enemies and Elsie is fine where she is. I didn't see her but was told she was alright. I was with Tambo'. That brought back happiness at home.

TM: Wow, struggle ...

SS: It was tough. So she became okay and went back to work. But after she returned to work she started boasting 'I'm ANC'. She was reprimanded, and told that this might cause the lives of many people. She was advised to work and keep quiet, and to listen to what the children were saying. Debra also went to Tanzania. And when she arrived in Tanzania she found my children attending school there. We were also anxious. When she returned she told us that she saw our children, and others whom I had help cross into exile. I helped many people to cross until Makwetla said 'Why are you busy doing the job that's not yours?' I said these don't want to die. Makwetla and others said it's none of your business. This is war. If you continue like this you'd even forget what you're supposed to be doing. 'Let these people be. There are people who are responsible for this kind of work'. They said just concentrate on your responsibilities. I said it's fine. Well, we went on. And when I went to Botswana to report I was told to leave everything and I should stop coming to Botswana: 'You must stay in Tembisa and we'd sent people over there to bring you your materials. We don't want to see you here again'. There were two – well I can't remember which one came first – but there two scenes. One, Greg's father – after his house had been attacked. His whole house was riddled with bullets. It's a pity he's no longer alive, but he was one guy that I would have said go and talk to him.

TM: We interviewed his wife.

SS: Oh, you interviewed her. She once insulted me before she understood what was happening. But when they arrived in Lusaka they understood my role and then came back. Alright. So after that about eight people came ... No, before that. There was Ms Hleza...Do you know here?

TM: I heard about her. I haven't met her.

SS: She passed away. She used to live at Mlonjaneni. Ms Hleza's daughter's husband and Greg's younger brother were involved in killing and burning the old councillors. They were arrested. When we read the evidence against them in the newspaper we concluded that they were going to be sentenced to death. When I thought about it I said to myself 'But this is not fair. Both these people are very close to me, especially Greg's younger brother'. I called my younger brother and said to him 'Hey, there's trouble here. Thulare's family is in trouble. There is this young boy called Jimmy. He is arrested with together with another boy, who is the boyfriend of Ms Hleza's child, and Ms Hleza fought for the struggle. We cannot just live them like that. Now there's nothing we could do for the one who was in prison. But the other one had been released on free bail, in the care of the mother [Ms Thulare]. She was young then. We heard that the boy was back. We went to visit him. She informed us that her son was supposed to report to the police station three times a day. There was

no way we could make him skip the country. He was reporting at 8 in the morning, at 12 midday, and in the afternoon. We felt we couldn't do it. Then I said 'Alright, this was how we were going to plan. We'd call Greg's mother – she was a nurse at Mkhathini. We said to her she must request leave from work, paid or unpaid for two weeks - because they are going to kill your family. Greg's father had ran away and went to Botlokwa. The police had heard that he was in Botlokwa and was sleeping on the mountain, but the people around that place were not aware. When it became dark in the evening he went up the mountain to sleep and early in the morning he came down and stayed in the house. So people thought he was sleeping in the house. I said in the long run, you know how boers were they'd work it out, they'd find him and we'd be very sorry if we didn't do anything about this situation. We agreed that the whole family must leave the house. Then Greg had fled the country. We went to Greg's mother and said to her 'you must request leave from work and inform them that you'd be back after two weeks. After you've received confirmation for your leave you take this boy with you to the police station. When you enter the yard of the police station you must swear at him and scream at him, and do other things to draw the attention of the police. You must slap and pull him'. And we told the boy that he must keep quiet. He should succumb to whatever his mother would be doing to him. We said 'the aim is that when you start talking the police must listen and agree to what you'd be telling them (laughs). Indeed, they went to the police station and she did exactly as we suggested, screamed and slapped around her son in front of the police. The police intervened and stopped her. They asked her what was the problem? She said 'He's a problem. He's a com-tsotsi that you had arrested and now he's reported to you three times a day and I don't have time for him. I employed and I have been forced to ask for leave at work to find a way to assist him. I want to take him to the Eastern Cape in the rural areas. Maybe while there he'd cool down'. The boers thought that maybe this could held. After all it'd be one troublemaker off their hands. They agreed with her. She then turned around and asked 'Now if I leave with him where would he report?' The boers then asked if she had any suggestions. She said where I'm going there's a police station not far from where we would be staying. The police agreed and said that they were aware of that police station. She then requested the police that in the coming two days he shouldn't report because they would be using a bus to go to the Eastern Cape: 'When we arrive I'd personally take to the police station to report'. The police said no problem. They returned and informed us about what happened. We said alright, in those two days we'd help you skip the country: 'Within two days you're supposed to be in Botswana. When the police realise what's going on they shouldn't be able to find you.' I called my younger brother and said 'Look for that young man and help him to cross the border. They'd meet on the other side'. We co-ordinated everything with Makwetla – Pat [Twala] had already left the country then. I said to Makwetla 'Chief, I'm sending out such and such people. I have given the boy's father money and when he arrives in Gaborone he'd book in a hotel. You'd meet him in morning. The other two would follow'. My younger brother transported him to Lobatse where he found another transport to take him into Botswana. We helped the mother and son to flee the country. The mother had a passport, so we agreed she'd use it to cross into Botswana. We asked her if her daughter – she was very young then – was in her passports. She said no. We suggested that she should register in her passport. I then asked her to give me her passport and I wrote the daughter's name in the passport and signed it as if I was an immigration officer. I said if they ask you who signed this passport you must tell that you didn't know: 'I took my daughter to the immigration office and that's where they included her name in my passport'.

TM: So that how they were able to pass?

SS: Yes. We informed them that when they reach a certain area they should take a taxi – there was a place called - Kalamazoo – ‘and you must alight the taxi at Kalamazoo’. They would find you there. It was about 50 kilometres [to the border post]. They left. When they arrived there they were told to walk over some stairs and cross into Botswana and in Botswana they should look out for a blue school: ‘you must go there’. They were also told that when they arrive there, whether they saw the people who were directing them or not, they must raise their hands. Then we’d know that you’re safe. We drove this boy to the border post of Botswana. We told him that he should also take a taxi to Kalamazoo and that’s where he’d meet his mother. After we had dropped him off we drove into Botswana, pretending as if we had nothing to do with these people. After two hours we entered in to Botswana and we found them together. We took them and drove with them. But before that we had told them that they should pretend as if they were hitch hiking for a lift. They should pretend that they didn’t know us. We said to them before you enter into the car you must first come to the driver’s side and pretend to be talking to the driver. Everyone should see that you were asking for a lift. We’d in the car we’d pretend as if we didn’t want to give you a lift but in the end we’d say, grudgingly, ‘okay, let’s go’. You must remember that we weren’t sure who was watching us. After they had entered inside the car we drove to Gaborone. When we got there we said ‘Pat, there are your people. You must check them we’re leaving’. That was our day’s work, since five in the morning.

TM: Oh, that’s how they left?

SS: Yes. After a week I received a phone call saying ‘Eh, Serote, we have all the people here but the old man isn’t here. We don’t where he is. You must come and help us’. So I had to go to Botswana again. And when I got there I asked what was happening? Well, we took my car went to look for him. They asked which route did he use? We couldn’t trace him. It was on Sunday and told those guys that I was going to work the following day, you’d continue looking for him. I left and came back home. When I arrived at home I informed my wife that Greg’s father was nowhere to be found and nobody knew where he was. And the family was becoming worried. On Wednesday I received a call to inform me that they have found him. I said thanks God.

TM: In Botswana?

SS: Yes, in Botswana. What happened was that there was confusion with time. He also ran out of money to pay the hotel. We learnt later that after he ran out of money and couldn’t find anyone he knew he became very angry and he was waiting at the train station in Gaborone ... You see, that train station looked similar to the Kempton Park station today. So, when he arrived there he met a certain lady and informed her about his problem. That lady then offered him a place to sleep at her home. He stayed there until our comrades in Botswana finally found him. I understand that he was very, very angry. He thought that he was left alone deliberately. The comrades asked him to calm down and rest, but he instead took a phone and called the South African Breweries to inform them that he was in Botswana. My younger brother picked this up quickly and told me that this person was letting out secretes. I said I can’t go to Botswana but instructed him to tell the comrades there to remove him from Botswana as quickly as possible. I sent my wife to Botswana to where they were staying. My goodness! I was told that when she arrived the comrades asked her if she was tired and when she said yes, they suggested that she should take a bath. They told me that they were trying to absorb what she was going to tell them. They had food and then asked her what she wanted to tell

them. She said 'I've been sent by my man'. They were surprised and said 'But we thought he couldn't talk. Where is he?' She said he's okay. They asked her what is he saying? She said 'he had heard that this man (Greg's father) was phoning South Africa and people would know [his whereabouts]'. The comrades were surprised to hear about this. They bid her farewell and safe journey back to South Africa. When she returned I asked her if she passed on the message and she said yes. Then she told me that as we're speaking they were taking him to Lusaka. From Lusaka they relocated him to Angola. I met them in Lusaka, where he had created problems. I was called in to talk to him. I spoke to him, telling him that in Tembisa they were speaking highly of him. I also said I heard that you were experiencing problems but could you please try to calm He said 'You must tell the people of Tembisa that I'm grateful and okay'. I returned to Tembisa. It was heavy.

TM: Yes, it was. It's a long history. But what I'll do - because I think that I'll have to come back again to do a follow-up interview ...

SS: Yes, to close gaps, right?

TM: Yes. I'll definitely have to come back...

SS: I earlier mentioned something about a train. The name I had forgotten is Pat Thwala.

TM: Pat Thwala. By the way, what did you say about him?

SS: I said there was Sekgale and ...

TM: What about the train?

SS: He was one of the people who I discussed with the plan to sabotage the train.

TM: Yes.

SS: It was Pat Thwala. I hope that you'd remember.

TM: Yes, I will. The information is also recorded. Before we finish I wanted to ask you this question: when you left Alex Secondary School to go to Orlando High what was the reason?

SS: In Alexandra there was no high school except for the Roman Catholic Church. And this school didn't have enough teachers. Even then not many students went to that school. I think they only had about ... In their matric, I think, they had about four or five students. So, I felt that studying at Roma wouldn't be good for me. You know, when there are very few students you can't tap on each others' ... So I went to Orlando. So I stayed there ... You know, at the time the Boers used to, initially, build schools up to Standard Six so that people must not go further. As time went by the school went up to secondary. That's why the JC (Junior Certificate) was popular at the time. When you reached JC you knew you had done it. So, to do matric we had to go outside.

TM: The other question I wanted to ask is about the transition the PAC's politics, which were militant and action-orientated to ANC's ...

SS: Which were ... Alright. It was because of that dream, as I said. Because after that dream I went to Wally (Serote). We discussed this thing, and he said 'Hey! I also started in the PAC. I had a problem with the [Freedom] Charter. I didn't agree with the Charter. I have the experienced it. The PAC



outside [i.e. in exile] is not really working according to the way people were expecting it to. They're going to schools and doing all sorts of other things. It's fine. But what about the fight at home? Because people don't have the direction; we need to assist them, so that they could understand. And in the meantime, we (the ANC) also send people to school. But you cannot concentrate on that only, because people are not going to be liberated by going to school. We have to balance the whole thing'. He started giving me a whole lot of materials and I started reading. Then you say just hold a minute and you begin to remember people like [Nelson] Mandela, Ruth First, Madzunya – Madzunya then had changed to the PAC – but all these people to frequent my home. Then you begin to think about what made the whole [thing] split. You begin to look at that. And then you say which way is better? 'No, PAC can wait. I'll follow this one'. In fact, I almost went out [of the country] as a member of the PAC. That confirmed my ... You see, when I took my children out of the country, taking them to Tanzania, the members of the PAC who had left when I saw them in the camps they were complaining that the PAC was not treating them well. I think from what I heard – although it wasn't confirmed – was that the ordinary people who went out were not properly taken care of. Only a few people received proper treatment. I mean, they'd come to the ANC camps to complain that they didn't even have perfumes; food was coming but like it, which means their marketing internationally was also not up to good standard. Because in reality it wasn't the ANC which was funding, but the international community, which was convinced by the leadership of the ANC because that it is necessary and things began to come in and filtered down people.

TM: And then ... Eh, Gille deVlieg, a white woman, came to the township in the mid-eighties and the situation was tense already in the townships. What was your take when you saw her?

SS: Eh, in actual fact Gille deVlieg's contact was Greg Thulare. She came with Greg. As a matter of fact, one time people believed that Gille deVlieg and Greg were in love. They complained that this was nonsense, but anyway let's concentrate on what we're doing. Now because Thulare knew me and treated me like his father, because I was his father's friend .. I knew Greg when he was still very young. I said to him "Thulare, man, what is wrong with this woman?" And he said there was nothing wrong. I asked him if he had heard about people were saying about him and this woman. He said 'yes, I have. But it's not true. Gille de Vlieg is here to take photos but she'll not sell us out. She's with us. And there are many things which she has already helped me with'. I said 'alright, it's fine'. We accepted her in that way. I remember that I'd always try to hide myself so that she couldn't take a photo of me. Well, if I didn't she'd be able to take a photo of me. One of the issues we had with her was that she took photos but we didn't know what where they ended. She didn't bring back to us to view them. But Gille knew that created a negative impression, but she continued. Sometimes she'd bring food along and would offer us. At the time I was operating underground so I decided to reclude myself from a situation I didn't understand. Now in Botswana even when they knew that they had someone working within us doing some mission they wouldn't divulge that information. They'd say 'if you don't trust stay away from that person'. Even if they were aware that that person could be trusted but they'd say stay away from that person. They were trying to help the both of you, because you were not supposed to meet. They'd say 'well, we've heard about that person but we don't know him/her'. I remember I once asked Wally about the UDF. I said 'the UDF as an organisation is it connect to the ANC?' He said a lot of people say so, but I don't have the evidence. He was lying! He knew very well that it was (laughs). We only discovered later. But then he later said 'Well, if you had known then the UDF would have been in trouble, because the Boers were trying to kill but didn't know how to do it'. There were so many things.



TM: Ntate Serote, thank you very much.

SS: Eish, I can talk hey

TM: For four hours straight.

SS: I don't even know whether I've covered what you wanted ...

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

