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Name of Interviewer: Mr Tshabalala

Name of interviewee/s: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya & Tshepo Moloji

Name of translator (if any): Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

Name of transcriber: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

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NN: Nonhlanhla Ngwenya

TM: Tshepo Mabona

MT: Mambazo Tshabalala

NN: Today is the 26th of November 2010. We're at Endulwini, at number?

MT: 737

NN: At 737. We are with Mr Tshabalala to conduct an interview on behalf of SAHA (South African History Archive).

MT: Mmm ... my nickname is Bra Mambazo.

NN :(Laughs) Yes, we're with Bra Mambazo.

TM: Eh, *mkhulu* (grandpa) we would like to take this opportunity to thank you very much, for giving us your time.

MT: Yes. You see, the name Bra Mambazo I got it because of the music that I play. It's a nickname. At first I did not want it.

TM: Bra Mambazo?

MT: Yes, Bra Mambazo. And it suits me. You know where the name Bra Mambazo comes from? (sings). Yes, I got it from that song.

TM: Grandpa, what is a Mambazo?

MT: Mambazo is an exe.

TM: Oh!

MT: Mambazo is an exe.

TM: Where was grandpa born?

MT: At Springs, in Payneville at round 6.

TM: When was it grandpa - do you still remember?

MT: 1940, January 2.

TM: Who did you live with at Springs?

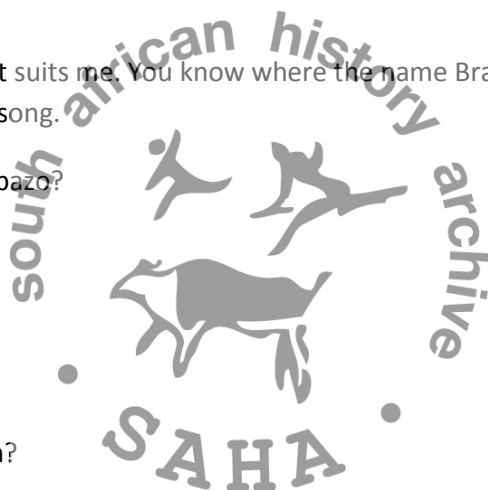
MT: I was living with my parent. Then I left Springs. When I left Springs I was still young. Then I moved to Alexandra to live with my aunt at 22 (Avenue).

TM: Yes, at the end of Alexandra.

MT: Yes, downtown, close to Jukskei.

TM: Yes.

MT: Yes, that's where I was living.



TM: How old were you when you moved - do you still remember grandpa?

MT: I was 12 years - 1952.

TM: What was the reason for you to move from Payneville?

MT: I was supposed to go and stay with my aunt because she did not have any kids to send to the shops. So I was the one available. While growing up in Alexandra I met Zef, and I loved that oldman. I was always at his place. I would say "Hey, Bra Zef ...". And he would say "Hey little boy, go to the shops and buy me atchar and fat cakes". After I had returned we would sit together and eat. He saw me long before that I love Pennywhistle. He said to me "Do you want to play it?" And I said yes. Then he said "I am going to start you at the very beginning." Do you know how he taught me?

TM: No

MT: You know that I can play with only one finger (plays the whistle). When I get to this part I have to saw this song. This *kle kle kle*. Yes, here it is (plays the whistle). It has come together now. Zef is up and I am playing the background here. You'd find him playing the high note. You could hear it from the mountains. And now I'm mixed with other guys. We were playing a different sound here in the background. Not because I'm playing alone but it's because ...

TM: Other band members?

MT: Which means there were three of us backgrounders, and four with Zef who was the leader in the front. Now all these sounds have to be different. We were not supposed to play the same thing. We're not supposed to say (plays whistle). Some have to say (plays whistle), so on and so on as the song keeps playing, because we were making a song now. We would not play the same thing. It had to be a different sound.

TM: Wow! Who was Zef?

MT: Nkabinde

TM: Zef Nkabinde

MT: He is [Simon] Mahlathini's brother.

TM: Did he have a group already, or was he a freelancer?

MT: No! He had a group already. I found them with everything.

TM: What did they call themselves - do you still remember?

MT: They were Makgona Tsothle (Capable of doing everything), because of Mahlathini. He was the one who was the lead singer. He was the one who fetched Zef in Newcastle. He used to sing at the weddings in Newcastle. So when this other boy who used to sing bass - he ended up playing saxophone - said he has a *bracate* (brother) in Newcastle who sings at the weddings; he could fit in the group, that's when Mahlathini left Newcastle and came to join our group.

TM: Oh, yes. When you got to Alexandra in '52 how was the place?

MT: It was very rough. It was the place where you had to stay awake. Alexandra is dangerous (laughs). You had to stay awake. Whether you were old or young you had to stay awake. And if they could send you to the shops you had to know which shop to go to. You knew that guys like to scout these shops. You would find them sitting at these shops. So you had to know which shop did your gang hang out, so you could be able to buy in that shop. Or else you would come back roughly beaten.

TM: How?

MT: They took the money. And if you were still a young boy they even beat you up with claps. They gave you lots of claps (laughs). You would get back home crying and full of mucus. They would ask you at home where was the money? And you would tell them that they took it. Who would go and fetch it? No one. Those people were gangsters. No one would go and confront them. Because I was a member of the Spoilers I had to go and buy in the Spoilers shop.

TM: How did you become a member of the spoilers, grandpa?

MT: Eh, *mfowethu* (my brother) I joined them because of the hard living conditions. My aunt didn't have any boys but only girls. And I was the only boy. So I had to go to the shops. I had to. So I realised that being a coward didn't help. There was this boy called Rider. He was already a Spoiler. So I decided to hook up with him and in that way I became a Spoiler.

TM: At that time where was the base of the Spoilers?

MT: The base of the Spoilers was at 19 [Avenue]. Most of the time ... And we also had a base at Phase ... Actually we had lots of bases. Because we had the one that was combined with the Bhacas.

TM: Oh! Right.

MT: The main aim of the Spoilers was to fight for the community. Most of the time it was protecting the community, because Msomi Gang were bullies. And Msomi Gang was not from there, but they were from Zimbabwe. They were *khalangas* (foreigners). The Msomi Gang was working together with the police; the ones who held top positions. Msomi Gang had guns, which they got from the police, because they did not use knives but guns. You would find Alac carrying a big gun.

TM: Really?

MT: Yes. You would find the whole squad at the taxi rank. When people got off the buses it was chaos.

TM: Did you also have a gang leader as the Spoilers?

MT: Yes, we did have, but not one. We had many. And we were using witchcraft, because without it we would never have survived.

TM: So did you have your own traditional healer that you were using?

MT: Yes. And the other thing we were together with the Bhacas.

TM: Oh, yes

MT: The Bhaca people know witchcraft. I would come to you and you wouldn't see me. You would only feel when I stabbed you with a knife. So those old men from Msomi Gang it was not easy to get them. They stayed at twelve and had a basement. Their house was built in a very complicated way. They lived underground. You would come and you wouldn't find them. They used witchcraft, *spherephere*. Remember that they were Zimbabweans.

TM: Is *spherephere* traditional herbs?

MT: Yes, traditional herbs. They used it too much. The tuckshops ended up not operating anymore during month end. It was busy. They didn't want you to count the money while they there. They just wanted to come in and collect it. They expected it to be in the envelope, waiting for them. When they come you just handed them the money without saying a word and they'd leave. Not that you'd say a word.

TM: (Laughs) So did they also go to the shops that you were raiding?

MT: No. Because we didn't raid at the shops. In the afternoon we just chilled around. But in the evening you would find us in the shops. In the afternoon it was not easy to find us at the shops, because the police were all over the place.

TM: So when you were busy with the Spoilers did you still play music?

MT: I was still playing, but not like before. Because the old man I was playing with was not a gangster.

TM: Bra Zef?

MT: Yes, he was a very old man.

TM: So where did you play your music?

MT: We used to play in the community hall. Sometimes we would practice at his place, because it was a very big house. It was a stand. It was not a normal house that we were used to in Alexandra. And they had very big dining rooms.

TM: Oh, I see

MT: There was no electricity. These electric machines were not available. We used to play with our own *skomoro*

TM: So how long did you stay in Alexandra?

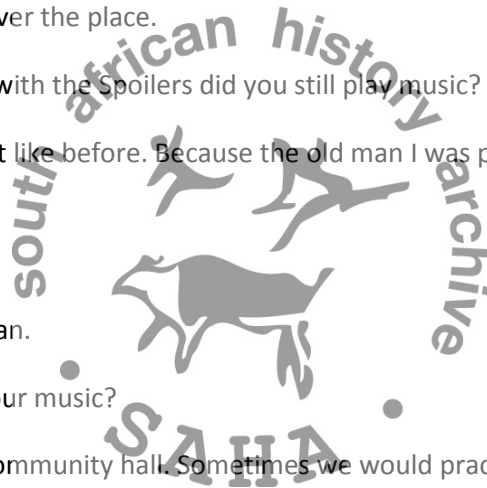
MT: I left Alexandra in 1960

TM: Where did you move to?

MT: I moved to Dindela.

TM: What was the reason for you to leave?

MT: Leaving Alexandra?



TM: Yes

MT: Eish, it's a long story. Reason why I left Alexandra *mfan'mdala* (young man), there was this boy I was coming from the fruit shop. My girlfriend of mine who was a nurse at Edenvale Hospital came to visit. So this boy - I'm from the fruit shop to buy my girlfriend some veggies. You know how we're supposed to treat ladies. As soon as I finished buying, when I got out I just saw a knife passing in front of my face going up. And I said a knife going up and I went back. When I got back he got the fruit and he even got me here ...

TM: In the stomach?

MT: Yes, my stomach (laughs). Hey, my girlfriend said 'You got stabbed'. And I said I saw him; and for real I did see him. Then he ran away. He knew me. He knew that one mistake it'd be slip off. All the intestines would be out. He ran away. And an old man took me to the clinic. At the clinic they took me to Edenvale. Then I took an ambulance to Edenvale Hospital. When I arrived at the hospital all to find that it was not a deep scar, but he nearly cut me deep here. You see?

TM: Mmm.

MT: Yes. Then they stitched me and applied some red ointment here, and wrapped me with their thing.

TM: Bandage?

MT: Yes. And they said the next coming ambulance you're going home. You have nothing. My girlfriend saw me red and I was wearing a cream white trouser, but it was red not cream white any more. The shirt and the top were torn. And my girlfriend asked 'And how? (laughs) ... And said we were at the shops and the bananas flew; we don't have them anymore. Nothing. I just kept quiet. [Moroka] Swallows and [Orlando] Pirates were playing at the stadium.

TM: There at 12th [Avenue]?

MT: Yes. I was with my friend. We supported Pirates. As we walking busy chatting and we were talking about girls and dating. I used to date a lot and liked it. As we were talking I saw that guy.

TM: The gangster?

MT: The one who wanted to [kill me]. He was walking alone - the one who wanted to kill me. I said to myself here was this guy and I didn't show my friend which mindset I was in. I said to him go and support Pirates since you were wearing their uniform: 'You're going to make the Swallows' supporters look at us differently (laughs). Go that side'. And he went. That guy as he entered the gate, Swallows was on this side and he sat. I said 'Oh, here he was but he didn't see me'. I entered the Swallows' side and sat close to the gate. I found space there. I was supporting Swallows as well. I was no longer a Pirates supporter. And the other thing I was wearing my clothes not a soccer jersey. And he went out. He just passed me there. He didn't see me. He passed. And I said here was the bastard. I said now everything was going down. Not that he must catch me off-guard. He was walking with his friend. I got went to them and said 'Taps.' He turned and I said to him 'Do you still see me?' And he said 'Eh ...' And he was about to take out his weapon, I hit him first in the face. He went on the other side confused and covered his face with blood. I hit him again, and left a big scar on his face. I don't know what happened with the knife; it got the eye and I saw an eye falling down and this was bad because I've got a bad record. I said 'No ways, this was bad. I must pack and go.'

You know that I left all my good things. My landlord got all my good stuff. I had very nice stuff. I just left everything and took my clothes only, because I had lots. I only left old clothes. I used a paperbag to carry them. Do you know how I got out?

TM: No

MT: You know Alexandra?

TM: Yes, I do.

MT: I left using 22 (Avenue). For me to go using the taxi route, no. And catch the buses and what, no. 22 and Lombard. Do you know Lombard?

TM: Yes

MT: Went behind Edenvale Hospital, and went to Dindela Township. And when I arrived at the taxi rank I sat down and took a deep breath.

TM: Were you walking?

MT: Yes, I was walking. And I bought food and I sat down and ate. And now I was going to the person ... I was going to a policeman. I had to have a plan to get in (laughs)

TM: (Laughs) who was this policeman?

MT: He was my aunt's child, and he was a policeman. And he was a sergeant. They knew that I was working and I wasn't. I was working my own mind. I knocked and when they answered it was me at the door carrying a paperbag. They kept quiet and looked at me and said "Why so late?" And I said that I left late. I was at Zef's. We were practising and now that I lost my job I thought that I should come this side and stay here in Dindela. I might find a job in Isando, because there were lots of firms.

TM: Where is Dindela when you're in Edenvale?

MT: When you're in Edenvale?

TM: Yes

MT: Edenvale is this side, close to Isando.

TM: Oh, Isando

MT: Yes, close to Isando. Close to Kelvin Power Station. Do you know Kelvin Power Station?

TM: Yes

MT: Then I told my uncle lies. And he said you did well to come this side rather than for you to stay that side and engage in theft. And I heard that you are a member of Spoilers Gang. I said 'Uncle, you know life. They force you to become a gangster. He said this was bullshit. Why didn't you come this side in the first place? Only to find out that [in Dindela] it was the same as in Alexandra. When I got to Dindela there were the Vultures

TM: At Dindela?

MT: Yes, there were the Vultures, the DMG, Basobha, and the Sevens, you see. And on the other hand, there were the Sika bopha.

TM: (Laughs) Sika bopha

MT: Now there was my uncle's brother, Fundi. He lived at Umfuyaneni, but he passed on. I said to him 'And now'. And he said 'I'm with the Deadline gangsters - (DMG). They fastened bandanas on the side and covered their one eye with them. I said this gang was full of kids (laughs). Some didn't have eyes; and some had been burnt with water.

TM: The DMG's?

MT: The DMG had an old man and thieves. I joined them, only to find that our leader is umZulu, the ones who wore big ear rings, uZwide ka maLandela. He lived at Dukathole Township.

TM: Oh, his surname was Zwide?

MT: I didn't know his surname. I only knew the name Zwide. Would you know a thief's surname? He drank traditional herbs and had red eyes. He was like a Mamba. They took me and showed me this other thief and said he was a champion.

TM: With stabbing?

MT: Yes. And I said 'Oh, my god! You could see for yourself that (laughs)... I don't know what had burned his mouth. It was red. The knives, you could choose for yourself. You didn't use yours. But you get them from Zwide.

TM: He threw them to you

MT: Yes. 'Come on guys fight'. I didn't have any quarrel with this person. We never exchanged words, but we had to fight. And you would stab each other.

TM: Wow!

MT: Yes. Not that you were in a ring to scare off each other. No. You didn't scare each other off. We fought.

TM: Where were you at that time?

MT: We were at, eh ... You see at Dindela there was a mountain next to Hosa. They called it Hosa. We were there at Hosa's place. There was a river coming from Kelvin Power Station, which manufactured electricity. You see, that river goes down and there was a level ground. We were there. They even smoked *dagga*.

TM: And he said 'Fight!'

MT: Yes. And we fought. So the thing is he didn't know me and I didn't know him. I was thin [and] not this big, like a Mamba. Do you know a Mamba? I was like a Mamba, *mfowethu* [my brother]? When he attacked me I moved and he'd see me behind him, and they clapped their hands.

TM: So they watching you

MT: Yes. I didn't want to stab him. He attacked me again and saw me behind him. In the end I said I want to remove his hat. He was wearing an Ayes. I said I am cutting it to pieces. I wanted to beat him, but not to hit him like this ... [demonstrates with his hand] because we were not allowed. Our gang did not kill. We just had to scare you so that the blood would come out and you would be able to go and stitch up; not the rough stabbing that would leave you crippled. I stabbed him in the head. I was hitting him only to find out that I'm stabbing him and I felt that it did hit him. The champion did feel the pain. He jumped and sat there touching his head and came back with blood. And the Tsonga went crazy. He was a Tsonga (laughs): 'You can't do such a thing'. And I said I would do it today. Hardluck. Do you know where I come from? I'm from Alexandra. And I said you came to the wrong place today. You would get what you wanted. He was wearing cross bands and I said I wanted to cut them and show him that I'm the master. When he attacked me again and I passed him and went that way he got used to the fact that I always go behind him. Then I came back and cut his cross bands and the trouser fell down (laughs) and I said 'No boy, who else? And they all went back saying I know my stuff. The other thing I didn't talk too much. After that I grabbed *dagga* and sat down and smoked. I still smoke even today. As I smoked I sat down and watched them. So the leader wanted me close to him now and said 'Who do you belong to?' I told him that I'm from Tshabalala and the Tshabalala people were dangerous. And he asked how. I said 'No, I'm from the "big pot" in Alexandra. I was a member of the Spoilers Gang'. And he said "Oh, yes. No wonder you're like this. You're very good.' And from then I was not taking any nonsense. They made me the best until I got arrested for stabbing people.

TM: While you were still in Dindela?

MT: Yes, I was still in Dindela. I was arrested and sent to Germiston, close to the lake.

TM: When were you arrested?

MT: I was arrested in 1963.

TM: Okay.

MT: 1963? Yes, 1963. And I stayed there and they wanted the people I was with. So the thing we didn't point out each other. So I went alone and got my sentence, then sent to Bethal.

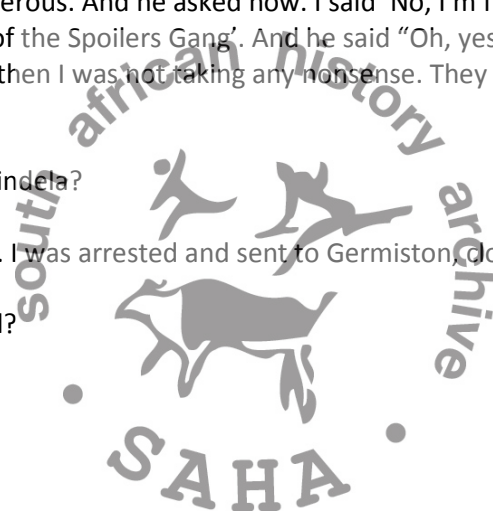
TM: On the potato [farms]?

MT: Oh, *mfan'ndala* (old boy). That was when I gave up being clever and I gave up theft and everything else, and became a very good boy and found a job at Isando.

TM: Where in Bethal were you - in jail or ...

MT: We were at jail and that jail ... whistles. You could just tell by their uniform. I noticed by their uniform when they fetched me from Germiston to that place. It was red because of the soil. You followed the truck from behind picking up potatoes. Like from here to KOP (Cloorkop) you bend all the way in the veld like sheep. Do you know sheep?

TM: Yes



MT: Their uniform was white like sheep. The police guard the place with horses and motorbikes. And there were these Ndebele men from that side. They stayed on that farm of Judas. They said they were Vryman. When you're from Johannesburg ...

TM: You were in deep trouble.

MT: They were Ndebele. They would say "These were the people who robbed us in Johannesburg (laughs)". And people from other places were much better. But when you were from here, they would say "These were the boys who robbed us in Johannesburg." And they would beat your chest with a sjambok. There was this thing called Nkundlwana. It goes there. You didn't have shoes. You were not wearing any shoes.

TM: You walked bare footed?

MT: Ah, you were wearing a short pan and walked bare footed. And the short pan was made out of a sack. Even the shirt. There was dust. There was this thing which stung called Nkundlwana. While you were walking you would step on it it would sting you and you would just stand still, and say *iyoo*. They would lift you high. The Vryman would raffle you. They were used to the place and walked bare footed. They would say 'Let the line go, boy'. And I said I would hit you with a fist. You're still calling me boy, your shit. The stars would arrive, the ones who've been working there for a long time, they would come and hide you so that these people could find you. They would say go. So when you picked up potatoes - they differed in size. There was number 1,2,3,4,5 ...

TM: Potatoes?

MT: Yes. There were some ... You'd find that they have small potatoes ... And some would change the bags

TM: Oh, for the large ones

MT: Yes. The better people were the ones who picked up large potatoes, because the large potatoes were not that many like the small ones. You would find that there were small potatoes because they were all over the place and you had to pick them up and leave none behind.

TM: You stayed for 18 months there?

MT: Yes, 18 months. I was lucky. Before I could finish a white guy liked me, because I could speak Afrikaans - the big boss. He said I shouldn't be working there and he took me to stay at his place in Bethal, in the town.

TM: Really?

MT: Yes. As a criminal as I was. I stayed at his place and drove back with him in the morning. I carried his lunch, and I was no longer with the criminals. Now I was hanging out with the police, because if I could be with the other criminals they might turn against me. They might even eat the boss's lunch. I was there with the police. I didn't even eat the same food as the other criminals. Madam made me my own lunch.

TM: Okay.

MT: It was my lunch and the boss's lunch. During lunch time I ate my own lunch. So the Vryman wanted my food, because I ate the best food and they ate *pap* and spinach - bloody bastards. And they came and ate my lunch. I kept quiet and told *Oubaas*. I said '*Oubaas*, these people are eating my lunch'. But I told him when we were at home. And he said 'Is that so?' And I said yes. And said 'When the bell rings you must come sit with me here and we'll eat together'. The other thing I fetched my lunch at his office and put his first and he said sit down you no longer going there and I sat down. And when they looked at me they would say "Here are the Johannesburg people, you see what they do."

TM: You were staying with *Oubas* now (laughs)

MT: I was good, even with Afrikaans. At home he had a son who was a speed-cop (traffic officer) and the other one was a teacher, and the wife was a teacher. Ever thing was just fine.

TM: Who were they - their surname?

MT: They were called ... cant remember correctly, because that was a long time ago. I found good people and I thought that because he was a police man he was bad. It turned out that he was a good person. His child was driving a BMW motor-bike for the police. I used to wash that bike. They treated me very good and I no longer smoked *dagga*. But I smoked 30 *Stuyvesant*, and it was in my bag and everything else was in my bag. We were bathing with hot water unlike the ones who were using cold water to bath and soap. When you went to take a bath you lifted your hands up and got to the showers and bathed with cold water. The prison warden would be standing with a bucket of soap, throwing it at you and he didn't care if he threw it in your face – the soap. And it smelt very bad. And we didn't even dry ourselves, because we didn't even have face clothes.

TM: So after you've finished 18 months what happened next?

MT: I got out after finishing my 18 months and they gave me a train ticket and I took a train from Bethal. I left *Oubaas'* place very fat and healthy. Some white people are good. We just hated them. But they were not all the same. The son had bought me two pairs of shoes, and the sister gave me R200, and *Oubaas* gave me R400.

TM: That time it was a lot of money.

MT: It was a lot of money, and it was pounds not rands. And it was a lot of money. The daughter also gave me R200. I got a boost. I came back with lots of clothes. But the thing is that, you know, white people didn't buy the kind of clothes that we bought. They just bought from OK and so on. They just said 'Take, you worked well for us'. And I said thank you. They asked me if I didn't want to come and work for them. And I said 'No, I have to go see my mom. She didn't even know that I'm here'. And they didn't know where I was during that time. My brother, the one who was a police man, when I got arrested - police were bad people they would never be good in their lives - didn't even tell them at home that I had been arrested. He just kept quiet and said he was going to take out the *dagga* in me. When I got arrested and taken to Germiston he was the one who was driving the police van. Even after we had gotten out of the van, for him to just say take some cash for you to use, nothing. He just said "Get out dog (laughs)". He just turned his back on me in the last minutes. Then I realised that I was going to jail today. We arrived at the receptionist and they called us, and we went in, and out of our [private] clothes to the prisoners' uniform. I was in room 16. Prison is not a good place to be. I became worse and cruel. At the reception, the people who wrote what you had and so on, we got along very well. For instance, if you had R500 they just wrote down R200 and they left you with R300 to use inside. We used to share at 16. But we didn't beat you. We just turned you upside down

and said that you couldn't get in our cell if you didn't have cash. Don't tell us stories. We threatened to let you hit the floor with your head. And they would take out the money and gave it to us. You would come in eight or nine of you but you wouldn't come into our cell if you didn't have money. We shared with the receptionist. And the warders would pretend as if they had come to check up on us while knowing that they had come to collect their share of the money. We would buy *ikhekhe le qhimama or Indalavu*

TM: What is that now?

MT: It's a cake (jail bread). It's delicious. It has meat and everything, and it's made by people who cooked for us in prison. They knew how to cook. When we had those two types of bread we had the best food ever. And meat which we bought at the kitchen. And it was sheep meat. I got fat.

TM: So after you had joined the DMG where did you stay?

MT: I was still living with my uncle

TM: Did he know?

MT: Yes, he knew that I was a DMG, because his brother was also a DMG.

TM: But did you know that he didn't approve?

MT: No, he used his own room. We didn't share rooms. He was strict. And, you know, he is still alive and lives at Sivana section. He is full of shit. Just tell me who would take you to prison and doesn't tell anyone at the end of the day. He didn't even tell his mother. I was arrested in the town of Dindela, even to tell his mother that's her sister's child was going to prison. No, nothing.

TM: When you returned from Bethal where did you live?

MT: I went back to Dindela. But I didn't stay with them, because I rented a place for myself, just like I did in Alexandra. Lots of people rented their places in Dindela. I stayed there. I was not doing crime anymore. Lots of people from my gang were dead and some had been arrested. People were dying. You would find a man lying in the street, dead; and you would be asking yourself who killed that person. And you would know that it was the gangsters. Because my younger brother had amplifiers and where he played his music you would find the DMG gang. He was also part of the DMG's. So the Spoilers, the Vultures and the CPZ's wanted to come and take over our spot – where the DMG's were.

TM: Where you played music what did you play for?

MT: We played for the stockvels, and we played amplifiers. And he used to be hired all over. One day we were playing at a certain place. It was big and owned by a certain woman. It was packed, and we were having fun until Msomi Gang arrived.

TM: At Dindela?

MT: As I turned out I saw Boston and I said Boston today is going to be rough. Only to find that Alec and the gang were at the back, and Pantsula just stood in the middle and shot the roof with a pumpgun and it opened a hole.

TM: In someone else's house (laughs)?

MT: Do you know what happened? People didn't see anything. They just passed through the wall. People are very strong. They just opened doors side by side (laughs). When the people saw the hole, they said 'Aha, such a big hole'. I'm telling you, my brother, things were hard. And I was wearing my florshem and I stumped into mud. I was so angry, because I was dressed to kill. It was in a river. I don't know how I slipped and stumped into the mud. Now I was smelling mud, because that mud was stinking (laughs). I went to my place, took a bath and washed the shoes before the mud could dry on my shoes. It was Alec. They took that woman's money because it was a very big place. That woman sold *mbamba* (homebrewed beer) – pineapple, and English beer. And that was not known very well. They took everything. Luckily, they didn't take the amplifier. They just left it there and it went off and it went off on its own (laughs). No one asked about the other. Even my brother, we met in the house. And his pants were turned to a skirt. He complained that his pants were very expensive. I said 'Who're you crying for?' He said they came from your hood and they were shit. I said 'Why didn't you tell them that they were shit, you only saying that when they were gone, acting angry wont help. They don't play. They shoot and they don't stab'.

TM: How long did you stay in Dindela?

MT: I came to Tembisa in 1972.

TM: What was the reason for you to move to Tembisa?

MT: Dindela was moving. It was the end of Dindela. And now it was just firms. My house was supposed to be in Umthambeka, but I was going to live close to my enemy and I talked to this woman only to find that we have an understanding. Then I moved to this house.

TM: Did you have to register to get a house?

MT: Yes, we did register, only to find that many of my enemies were at Umthambeka. And I thought that I didn't mind being at the end of the list, but I wont stay at Umthambeka, only to find that he didn't understand as a man.

TM: Who stayed at Umthambeka?

MT: My house was at Umthambeka

TM: I mean, who were your enemies?

MT: There were lots of them. The thing is that there were lots of us gangsters, and only to find that when we moved we didn't move the way we were.

TM: So when you got to Tembisa in 1972 how did you find it?

MT: This was not Tembisa. It Vukuzenzele (Wake up and do it you self). I don't know where they got the name Tembisa from. When we started Tembisa, it was only Ookmore and Khalambazo. So it was Vukuzenzele. When I arrived in Tembisa there were already houses in Isithama - and you were not born then. I arrived the same year as her father (referring to NN), and it was in 1972 when we got

here. I was from Dindela. But my hometown is Springs. My hometown still exists and is at KwaThema in Springs.

TM: So, your home is in KwaThema

MT: When the tornado started, it hit very hard in Paynville and many people died in Paynville. Many people say that horses were flying high and horse carriers.

TM: So that place in KwaThema is named after that tornado?

MT: Yes, it was named after that. And the people from that place, in Phumula, were the ones who were moved after the tornado storm. It was the first place after Paynville was destroyed. But now Paynville is still there and my brother's kid lives there, because we had a stand. They told us that if we wanted to go back to Paynville we can. But some took the money and didn't go back. But our stand was taken by my brother's kid.

TM: So when you arrived here in Tembisa did you look for a job, or what did you do?

MT: I was working. When I arrived here I was working at Parker Pen. We were manufacturing pens.

TM: Where is Parker Pen?

MT: It's in Isando.

TM: How was life in Tembisa?

MT: In Tembisa life was very much good I don't want to lie to you. Because I gave up everything and got married. I gave up the thug life, because now I was a father and a well-respected one; working and who wore nice clothes. With me I don't want to lie, I had nice clothes, even now. Well, I don't put myself down. And yes I was a good father.

TM: So were did the music thing come from now?

MT: It came after I was in Tembisa because I was in Bhooyoyo, with Dingane, Khweza, Mathalaza, Victor and two girls, I've forgotten their names. I was not using a pennywhistle, but I was singing and leading the girls.

TM: Songs like which ones?

MT: Songs like Phathaphatha, Mahlathini's song Khala ngiyabaleka (Cry I'm running away). Songs like that. Only to find that within Bhooyoyo I was supposed to sing using Mahlathini's voice, but only to find that my voice was burned by *dagga* long time ago. Then I took Victor and taught him the song that I had written. It was my song but I gave it to Victor to lead it, because his voice was still in a good state.

TM: What was that song?

MT: It goes like this *Shwele baba siyakhuleka*, and Victor was the bass singer saying *Shwele baba*. Even the girls were doing their own thing.

TM: Where did you perform?

MT: Here in Rabasotho Hall, we used to perform. And also in other places. We've been to Swaziland also and it was always packed. And we've been to lots of places which were out of our province.

TM: So you travelled

MT: Yes, we did with bra Kane from Entshonalanga. And then I left Bhooyoyo and joined another group. But it didn't go anywhere. You know how music is like. Because Kaiser was also the leader of Bhooyoyo and he played piano. He was just full of himself, and he was like that from Dindela. When you know a lot, it becomes a problem. Mkhize said 'Piss off. They're just full of shit, telling me and I said true that. Then we formed a new group. One bad day I was from Welamlambo to the group in Entshonalanga walking. When I got to Umthambeka I went to the shops in Entsonalanga where my group used to hand out. As I was walking there two thugs were chasing after each other and this guy that they were chasing after pushed me and they asked me if I was walking with him, and I said 'How could I be walking with him because I'm from a different direction to him?' They said to me 'You are also a thug'. Kane arrived and told them that I was not doing that anymore. I now play music.

TM: It was just a group of gangsters?

MT: Yes, it was a gang, because the gang from Dindela did not break away. And it was the Sevens Gang because their group did not die. I told Kane I saw them and the other one was my relative. I have a wound that was inflicted by my cousin here in my hand and I don't know how it happened. But somehow I managed to get away and threw the knife away. And I said to him what are you doing? He said you must watch where you're going, because you moving around with thugs. And I said I don't. I'm always alone. He then said we know that you are full of shit. We know you from the township. And I said 'You, my brother (laughs) ... Don't trust a person, my brother. Then bra Kane asked me if I was hurt and I told him that it's just a small cut, and I placed a plaster on it. Mkhize arrived and asked what was going on and I told him that I was on my way to look for you guys and that's when I got hurt. And we continued and went to practice. We practised 'till it was time to go, only to find that I still have a long way to go in order for me to get home. But I went and when I passed at Esangweni I saw four guys, but still I passed most of the guys that I knew lived in Esangweni, only to find that it were wrong thugs. They wanted money.

TM: Was it was late?

MT: Yes, it was because it was past 10. I was going to Welamlambo, and I had to cross a river. And by the look of things they wanted me to go and cross the river but my ancestors said no take the other way. And there was my friend from Dindela by the name of Jafter, and he was a Pedi and he was very ugly, black and tall. I went to him and told him that there were guys who wanted to rob me. He offered to accompany me, and took his gun. Then I asked 'Who was going to accompany you back?' He said 'Don't worry if anything happens you're going to hear the sound of a gun shot'. And his mother said '*Tsamaya le ena* (Go with him), they wont do any harm to him'. Then we went and crossed the railway line. When I crossed there were others. What a bad luck (laughs): 'If these ones were from here in Welamlambo I would know them'. Only to find that they were from Sivana section. Do you know Sivana, the Shangaan's place? And I thought to myself that here we go now. I thought I have to run and I said to myself no I won't run. There was a house in that street and I pretended that I was calling someone that I knew and they saw that I was not alone, they passed

me. They said we're going to get you. My brother, this thing (story) is long. Now I'm old and I have my own house. And my child - that girl - that was here now, she went to that school (pointing).

NN: Endulwini?

MT: Yes. And the boy was a bit grown up. I fathered a 'cowboy', because he was also a thug. My boy was never killed, but he killed himself with a gun; and the intestine was all over the place.

TM: Was he also part of a gang?

MT: He was not part of any gang, because he was very young. He was born in 1960. So he was not a gangster. But he was hijacking cars, robbing people money and robbing trucks. He killed himself. And even today we don't know why he killed himself. Or maybe it was because of shares. You know that boys deal with money. He was a very good boy. Even his place it was beautiful, because you could see what he was working for. Even though he was naughty, but you could see what he was working for. So he ended up killing himself. I had only two kids; and now I'm left with one. But now I'm raising my granddaughter because, you know, fathers don't support their children. We raise them and when they're all grown up they come and say my baby, my baby. Your baby? Where did you leave her because she's all grown up? Would you agree if your dad comes to your life at this age your in? You were raised by your grandparents, your mom working as a domestic worker and living in poverty. Would you agree if it were you?

TM: No, that's being unfair

MT: It is. Because if he was part of your life your standard would have improved. Do you know how much domestic workers earn? It's less. There is no money. And that time they were earning 2 Pound 10. And now that is like R4.

TM: So when you were singing at Rabasotho, were you competing with other groups?

MT: Yes, we were. And now all the groups that we competed with have all vanished. All those boys are dead. There was Hlanganani group at Khalambazo. It was also hot. There were many groups, because we went to Springs, Brakpan. And at Brakpan that's where I saw things, because we left Phelandaba for Brakpan when vocalists were still singing.

TM: Were you still in Bhoyoyo?

MT: No, it was another vocalists group from Phelandaba. Vocalists were singing and we were with Tracer, Snox. There were many of us. I was still living in Dindela, but associating with people from Phelandaba. They sang, but I was not because I was a substitute. Those boys hired a band from Brakpan so that it could help them play while they were on break. And those people knew that this bang couldn't play. It started, and it was the first time I saw someone with big feet (laughs),

TM: How big?

MT: Very big. You see, a stage (laughs) ... You know that when you sing you sing on top of the stage. So under the stage it was a house. And this guy lived under the stage. Only to find that this guy was the leader of some gang, which I didn't know. And he was the boss. They wore khaki clothes and

sneakers. But he didn't wear any, because he had big feet. I said to myself this one is just a giant, with feet like these. A person this big? No way

TM: So he walked bare footed?

MT: Yes, he didn't have a size. You could tell that his feet didn't know any shoes. So I watched him, and I said to myself when he comes back he must not find me here. And his hands were too big. Then I saw him beating this other dude with only one clap. Then I saw this dude crying.

TM: Which one - the ones who were singing?

MT: Not the singers. But the ones from the band. He beat them up with claps, and the fat one fell. And I thought if he brought down the fat one then what about the rest (laughs). And they broke their instruments. You see, the base it just broke on the spot. And I thought if I had remained home I would've never seen such things. And then they called the next band to come and perform.

TM: So the group that was beaten got off the stage?

MT: The other group went on to sing. But now they sang to their best ability, because they had witnessed what they did to the other group (laughs). There was no break. They were singing one way, and they did their best. They played till seven in the morning. That was when they told them that they could go. They complained that we came from Johannesburg with the kind of a band and we ignored a good band there in Brakpan.

TM: So were you paying to get in?

MT: Yes, they were paying to get in. And it was 2 Pounds. A Pound is R2, right?

TM: Yes, it's R2.

MT: Yes, a pound at that time it was a lot of money. And in our times if you had a pound you were very rich. You could even get bread for only a tikkie. A tikkie was like three cents. And when you were buying soup at a tuck shop, you were only paying five cents. When you bought bread at a shop you would get free soup, so that you could be able to eat it with that bread, because they were doing it for the people who were not working. In the past things were good, because you could get sugar for only three cents. It was almost free, because you could get a shirt for only seven cents.

TM: So things were good?

MT: Yes, they were good. No wonder we didn't have any cash in the past. There was none. I started working at an early age, working part time and I would be paid only 50 cents a month. It was hard.

TM: What kind of work?

MT: I worked at the shops as a packer. We used to get jobs because you would work in the woods, calling people to come and buy fire woods. There was nothing you could do, because you needed cash and you would be arrested for loitering.

TM: Were you arrested?

MT: By the cops. There were passages in townships like Alexandra and Dindela, and boys would call out 'dry cleaning' (i.e. police raid), because you were not working, you were busy loitering in the streets. People weren't happy that they had 'dry cleans' that came to them. When they (the police) saw you they would just say "Yes, baba. Dry clean. *Woza sibone baba* (come let's see)" and they would ask you to take out all the relevant documents, and ask where you were working, because you came from the house. And they would take your passbook. You wouldn't run away, because where would you get your passbook. The police were using bicycles for transport; and they did not carry guns. It was just a *donkiepier* (baton) only, leading you from the front. And they would be having your passbook.

TM: You'd be queuing?

MT: Yes, in line. And you would follow them. If you ran where would you go without a passbook? And if you were working, every month end they had to sign for you. If you were attending school they had to sign also. And if they could find that your school permit was not signed, you would be arrested. As a worker if your passbook was not signed, you would also get arrested. And if you were working late, you had to have a night special.

TM: So they didn't want you in the street at night?

MT: No. Like in town there was a machine that used to wail at night. You must know that you were in trouble and had to be careful where you went. Because if you saw a car you had to hide yourself. If you saw two trucks you knew that it was the police, only to find that it was just people like you. The only reason that would make you go to town was to see ladies, who were working as domestic workers. They knew that we were coming. But in order for you to get there you were supposed to go late and wait at the shops to buy time and the cops would be looking at you, saying that you were there to sleep in the town (laughs) and we're going to get him. And sometimes you'd find that these ladies made you do things. Because there was this one time I was dating this lady and she was working at the other house where a policeman lived. I asked myself what was this lady trying to do? She was putting me in a policeman's house. Because you could see a policeman's hat, which meant that he was not at work.

TM: He wouldn't go without his hat.

MT: No, he wouldn't. Do you think she found me when she got back? I even left her a little note saying that I was there but the problem was that there was a policeman living in this house. When we met she swore at me, telling me that I was a coward. And I told her that she was crazy. She wanted me to get arrested for trespassing, because he was going to arrest me if he found me there at night. The whites knew that the only person they would find at night was a security guard. She asked me why I didn't come and I told her that I did come and why she didn't lock the door. She said it was because she knew that I was coming. And I said 'You are lying. You only did that so that I could be arrested'. And that's when we broke up. Dating can put you into lot of trouble. Because I was a ladies' man some of the girls that I was dating I can't even remember them, because I had more than 40 girls that I dated. And some of them I only proposed and after that was it. I would never see them again. There was this one time I met this lady at Tembisa Hospital. She was a nurse - because I loved nurses. I could see that she was looking at me and she greeted me and asked if I was Mlahleni. I said yes. And she said do you still remember when I was with you. And I said to myself she is crazy,

because I didn't recognise her 'till she reminded me. And I said 'Oh, yes. The thing is that I did not recognise who you are'. And she said you don't get old. I said 'I am old. What do you mean when you say I don't get old? And I said the very same thing to her. But it was a lie, because she was very old.

TM: So she called you Mlahleni?

MT: Yes, it's a name I got from home. And the English one is John. The name Mambazo, I got because I didn't want it. So you know that if you don't want a name for a long time it sticks to you.

TM: So as life went on in Tembisa from '72, Tembisa changed, as you see it ...

MT: Tembisa is changing, my brother, because more especially in music. Because now there are a lot of boys who play music and kwaito, you see, because Tembisa is now under kwaito. And the guys we were playing with in Bhoyoyo, only two are still alive. And they're now play gospel music.

TM: Are they still here in Tembisa?

MT: Yes. The other one lives here. And the other one lives in Ivory Park. They are still alive. The other one plays a guitar and the other one plays a bass guitar. And they are now born-again. They play in church. What do you call this church here - they wear white hats?

NN: Postol (Apostles)

MT: Yes, Postol. And the other ones that were with me are all dead. Bra Ben who was the best in saxophone; Tracer who sang Alto; Lazarus from Khalambazo, who played tenor sax, which was very lovely; and Mek, who played a keyboard he was also good. Now we don't meet, because of Mgungu who is my in-law.

TM: Where is he?

MT: He is at Maokeng. He is still alive. But he has eyes problem. He used to play a trumpet, keyboard and an organ. He has experience. They are the ones who are left from my group.

TM: Which one, Bhoyoyo?

MT: No, the old one

TM: What did they call it?

MT: I forgot the name, because it was an English name. You know that we are not educated. This band that I was playing with it had too many educated people. They were students.

TM: Who, Mgungu?

MT: Yes, them. Boston was playing bass, and he even went to school for it in Johannesburg. Also Lassie. He went to school for the tenor. And the one who didn't go to school for music was Mgungu, because her mom was playing piano.

TM: Her mom?

MT: Yes, he received his piano skills from her mom. He is my brother. And Tracer was just like me, because he played penny-whistle and saxophone.

TM: So where did this group play?

MT: It was not well-formed, because we were busy forming the group. We were supposed to go and record

TM: Record?

MT: We were supposed to go and record. So Bra Ben ... It's hard in music, because there was this group from Daveyton. They were playing for this group in Benoni, and that group was very hot. I forgot its name. It was hot, and it had many records. So Bra Ben ... We were practising so that we could be able to go and record, then Ben ran away to Sancane in Daveyton. And we thought he was knocking off late, because he was an inspector at PUTCO. Only to find that after he knocked off he went to Daveyton. And we heard that our song which was not released. How come it was on radio? We called him, but there was no answer. He was stupid and went to Amos, only to find that Amos knew our stuff. He said to him let 'Me play you this track?' He was sure that Amos didn't know our song. Amos came to tell us that we must watch out for this guy, because he was not good. And we asked why. And he said that our song was playing in his car.

TM: So he had recorded it already?

MT: Yes, they had recorded it already. Because Tracer was close to Ben, he stole the cassette from his car and brought it to us, so that we could listen to it, only to find that it was our song.

TM: Your song?

MT: Yes. He looked for the cassette, but couldn't find it. He then came to Tracer and said 'I left you in my car and the cassette is lost. Where is it? Tracer said 'I have the right to take it, because it's ours'. We asked him how the other group was doing and he just got tongue tight. And that's how our group died.

TM: What was the title of the song?

MT: It was a band, and a heavy one (plays the song). When we played it with a saxophone, it sounded good, because a saxophone has got many functions.

TM: And that was the end of it?

MT: Even now it still plays on radios. I can still hear it playing. Do you know how much did he earn for that track, as stupid as he is?

TM: With this track?

MT: Only R50. And the guy from Soncaka got money for that track

TM: Is Bra Ben still alive?

MT: No, he died. And when he died, the saxophone that he was using was not his. And I only got the news now, because the guy who borrowed Ben the saxophone says that at that time he was not playing, that is why he borrowed him the instrument. And I said just because I was playing with him doesn't mean I know, because he is dead. The wife is also dead, even his son. But you can go and try his daughter. But I don't know if she is going to give it to you. But the thing is that they're going to ask how it got to him, because now the child knows that it belonged to her dad.

TM: So was that the end of music for you, or did you continue with it?

MT: There was this other guy who is now a police officer here at Rabasotho. And this guy who played keyboard and I joined these other guys but they couldn't sing, and I left them because they would make people beat us up.

TM: What kind of music?

MT: No. You see, you can't play Babsie [Mlaneni's] songs if you don't know them. Same goes with the Soul Brothers' songs. You can't. And the language didn't also allow them, because they were Pedi-speaking people. And I said we're going to get beaten up here, telling this other dude. Only to find that he also felt the same. And the instruments that we were playing with belonged to that police officer. This guy took his people from Pietersburg to come and play. I don't know whether they thought that we were playing *diaka* (a Pedi cultural dance music). I played saxophone, but most of the time I played pennywhistle, because saxophone is hurts me. So these people played guitars. And I had to give them my Intro, so that they could follow it. But still it was just the same, because it didn't add up. And I told them that its supposed to be B flat. But they put it on C and it did not add up. So the sound that is made by C was not the same as the sound that was made by B (plays the sound for us). And this guy who set the guitar did his own thing. We played opposite the grave-yard, at some place. And we were playing for a wedding. And I saw weird things again. I just stayed in the car, because I did not see what we were there to do. Because these people we were trying to put them on the note, but they just did their own thing. When we were ready to go this woman stopped us and told the two of us to play. She stopped the rest. And this guy I was with changed the keyboard to play a guitar sound, because now even the drums were dead. We played. The people enjoyed our music. And this woman called us and paid us, and said she was not going to pay the others because they couldn't play.

TM: How much did you get to play for weddings?

MT: It all depended on how much you charged them and the time you played for. Because you couldn't play right through, because of the disturbances that you were going to come across when you're going to play. You see how weddings were. So we couldn't really charge them much, because we didn't play for a long time, because they went for pictures, ate and the pastor would want them. So the wedding is different from the hall.

TM: So how much for the hall?

MT: It cost too much, round about R20 000.

TM: So did you share it as a group?

MT: Yes, we shares it, because it wouldn't be right. Immediately after playing we shared it. Unless we were under someone, then that person would be the one who took the money and paid us.

TM: But you shared it if you were not under someone?

MT: Yes. But if we had a boss that meant all the instruments were his. We just came to play, and that's all. So the money had to go to him, and he'd be the one who paid us. And it went according to an instrument.

TM: So how much did you get for the penny-whistle?

MT: It was the one that was paying a lot of money, because I would even get like R50 000. But it all depended on how you had worked, and the size of the hall. Just like within Makgonatsohle Band, we were getting paid because we were divided into groups and we were taking turns when we played. So we were getting paid lots of money. Just like this track (plays the whistle) ...

TM: What is it called?

MT: I don't know, but it's not an old song. And it was played by Mango Groove.

TM: Mango Groove?

MT: Yes, Mango Groove. And this guy who plays this song I used to play with him, that's Mango Groove. I played with that guy and now he is very rich. I don't know how many times he went overseas. He's boosted by the Dollar, and it made him rich. He got lucky, because Mango Groove has whites in the group, more especially the ladies. You know that when whites do things it goes according to the plan. But he doesn't play anymore and he is still rich. He has businesses: trucks. It's a transport business. He has his own drivers. So he doesn't work

TM: They make money for him.

MT: His wife is a manager. He drives a Jaguar.

TM: Where can we find *ubaba* Gungu?

MT: At his place in Maokeng

TM: Do you know the place Nhlanhla?

NN: I do know Maokeng, but I don't know the place

MT: When you get off at the church that belongs to uncle Johannes. Do you know Masombuka's church?

NN: Yes

MT: You see the street that goes down?

NN: Yes

MT: You pass that church. It's the second house from the corner, and it's a big house, build with brown bricks.

NN: The first street?

MT: Yes, that street. There is a petrol garage at the corner

TM: When you curve?

MT: Yes. There is a big house that side. Even now you can find him. He is at home. Just tell him that you have been sent by me, then he would understand. Lassie is at Khalambazo. You will also find him at home. He was the one who was playing tenor. If you can go there, you will find the whole information. Lassie played; and he played for many groups, more especially in Alexandra. He played for Ntemi.

TM: Piliso?

MT: Yes. He was top in music. He played with Zakes Nkosi

TM: at 10th [Avenue]?

MT: Yes. You see, that one played with Mpanza. Do you know Mpanza from Alexandra? He played with them. But he didn't play with Limu, because he played with me. Even Spokes played with me

TM: Mashiyane?

MT: Yes. That one has more experience than me.

TM: Where about in Khalambazo?

MT: In Ecaleni section. You see the petrol garage in Khalambazo, but it's closed now ...

NN: The one in front...

MT: Yes, that one. When you get off at the garage, that house, it's beautiful. It's not like these four-roomed houses. It's a nice house, built with brown bricks. When you're there, you just ask where does Lassie live. Do you get what I'm saying?

NN: Yes, we get off at the garage

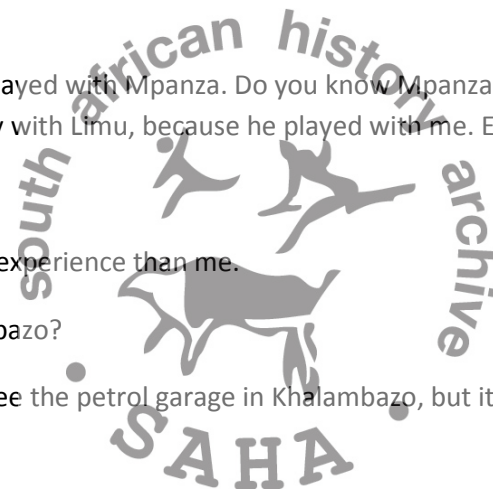
MT: Yes. And the street you're going to take it's going up. You look for the nice house and when you see kids playing just ask them where does 'Brothers' live. It's just that I forgot his surname.

TM: But we will find him

MT: Yes. He is the best person, because you will find more information from him

TM: Okay

MT: Yes. Because Bra Ben passed away. And the other good person lives in the same street as Lassie, and he is my relative.



TM: Do you mean Mek?

MT: Yes, Mek. That one also knows more about music.

TM: So they live in the same street

MT: Yes, they live in the same street, and they are the only ones who are still alive: Mgungu, Lassie, Mek, and me.

TM: We're going to try and get hold of them

MT: Yes. They are the ones who are left now. So in these two you would get little of information, because Mgungu sang for Tip Top. He grew up in music, even Lassie. Gap and Malick have passed on and they were the vocalists. There are just lot of them. Tembisa had many musicians. And it still has, but the problem is that we are very low on standard.

TM: They are not exposed?

MT: Yes. We don't have sponsors. The only thing that is killing us is the sponsor, because we don't have any.

TM: Let us thank you for your time and the information that you have given us. It will be of great help, because now people will know that we have this kind of music in Tembisa.

MT: Let me play you a song. Open up that thing ...

NN: It's still on

MT: This song that I'm going to play it's called uMgungundlovu (plays the pennywhistle). Thank you!

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