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INTERVIEW WITH MMAMODIKE LYDIA NTSALA

Dale McKinley (DM): Thank you for agreeing to talk with us. Just for the record, could you state your full name?

Mmamodike Lydia Ntsala (MN): My name is Mmamodike Lydia Ntsala

DM: What do you do here?

MN: I live here at Rammolutsi?

DM: And the work that you do?

MN: I am a temporary teacher, with ABET education.

DM: How long have you been living here in Rammolutsi?

MN: It's been a long. Since we arrived at this place (the house) it's been since 1994. But in Rammolutsi, since 1984.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): If you want, you don't have to speak in English, Bramage can translate.

MN: Alright

DM: Where were you born?

MN: I was born at the farm.

DM: Was that farm close by here?

MN: Yes.

DM: Were your parents working in the farm at that time?

MN: Yes, they were working at the farm.

DM: What were they doing at the farm?

MN: They were just labourers.

DM: How long did you stay at farm, how old were you when you left the farm?

MN: Since I was born in 1969 until 1984 when we came from the farm to here in

Rammolutsi. I was 15 years old.

DM: How was life like for you on the farm, growing up as a young child?

MN: It was enjoyable ... nice and enjoyable. Everything was free... because my parents were always there for me and they were working and living. The life was right..

DM: What kind of the house you lived in?

MN: It was 6 room house, it was big, it accommodated the whole family.

AV: Did you have water and electricity on the farm?

MN: No, we only had water, not electricity.

AV: Why did your family leave the farm in 1984?

MN: The farmer left the farm and went to Klerksdorp and left everyone there. So we decided to move out from the farm and come here.

DM: Did someone else take over the farm?

MN: Yes, someone else took over.

DM: And did they not want you to stay at the farm?

MN: They did want us to stay .. they choose my father, but he did not want to live there any longer because that new farmer was not for my parents, he did not treat them nicely as opposed to the previous owner.

AV: You must speak in Sotho if you want. When you say he wasn't treating your father well, what do you mean?

MN: The new farm owner was very harsh to our parents and he cut the things that the previous owner used to give to our parents. When it comes to the food, there was a limit of mealie-meal (e.g. an 80kg we must use for 2-3 months). My parents used to have lots of animals but the new owner told them they must sell them because there was no room for the workers animals.

AV: Where you at school then?

MN: Yes, I was at school here at Rammolutsi.

AV: Where was the farm?

MN: It was between Bothaville and Viljoenskroon.

DM: So how many km's is that away from here?

MN: It was about 15 to 20 kilometres.

AV: So did you use to travel from the farm to school here?

MN: No, our parents rented a room for us here.

DM: When you came to school here, were you in primary or secondary school?.

MN: I was in secondary school ... in 1984.

AV: So the primary school, you did on the farm ... a farm school?

MN: Yes.

DM: As an educator, tell us what was it was like going to that farm school as a young child. Tell us about the education?

MN: We used to be mixed with other classes, like grade 1, 2 and 3, all in the same class. We enjoyed it.

AV: How was the school when you came here to Rammolutsi?

MN: It was good and it was a big school. We did not share the classes. When it was Std. 6 it was only Std 6.

DM: Were you thinking already when you were young and going to school that you were going to improve on the parents generation in terms of the education they had received?

MN: The previous education was better than 'this' one. Because this new education is like a spoon feed ... before when you were educated you were something to the people. But now, you can be educated but you can be doing nothing.

AV: When you came to the school in Rammolutsi in 1984, were there any kind of political activity going on in the schools?

MN: No.

AV: Can you remember when it started?

MN: It was in 1986, when there were strikes.

AV: Do you remember anything about that time?

MN: Yes, the children and the members of the families, they were fighting.

AV: Were you involved at all?

MN: Yes, I've been involved ... they would take us out of the classes.

AV: Tell us the story about what happened at that time ... like you would tell your child one day.

MN: We were singing, running around in the streets. And there was a fight with the police. The students were burning the councillors houses and tyres in the roads and targeting bread trucks.

AV: Do you remember how it started?

MN: We just saw people coming from the streets and they just took us out of the classes ... that's when it started.

AV: And how did you feel?

MN: Because I was young at that time, I was very excited, because of the fighting and things that we were doing.

DM: How much of that fight had to do with your own education as opposed to the councillors and the politics outside the school? Did you make any demands about your education when you were out on the streets?

MN: The main thing we were fighting for was freedom; we did not focus much on education because the teachers were teaching us well.

AV: How did this affect the actual schooling, did things go back to normal?

MN: No, the comrades were shot and some of the them died, that affected our classes so much that we spent a long time not going back into our classes.

AV: So when did you start going back to school?

MN: After a period of a month, we went back to school .. I can't remember clearly

DM: You said that the teachers were teaching you well. But many students at the time were saying ' Phansi Bantu education, Phansi!' So what was different here, why was it a good education?

MN: There was not that thing of Bantu education here .. it was just a normal education. The thing which was taking place then was corporal punishment ... to me though that was good, so we can focus on our education.

AV: What year did you finish school?

MN: In 1988, I passed matric.

AV: After the strike in 1986, did anything else happen in those two years?

MN: No, I went back to my parents on the farm after my matric.

AV: What were you doing when you went back to the farm?

MN: I was doing piece jobs at the farm, and in 1989, I got a baby. From 1990 I started attending an academy of learning in Klerksdorp where I learned typing..

AV: How did you afford it?

MN: My father was paying.

AV: In 1990's you know, Mandela gets released, people come back from Robben Island and things start changing. Do you remember if anything started changing for your life?

MN: In 1994, I started attending college in Sebokeng College for 3 years. I wanted to be something in South Africa, especially after we voted for the ANC and we were promised that we will get better jobs and everything else. So I completed my studies, and I had my certificate in teaching. But since I have my certificate and up until today, I am working as an ABET educator. I don't have the real job, so I don't see any real changes.

AV: Where was your child staying while you were studying?

MN: At home with my parents.

AV: Was it easy for them?

MN: Yes, even though my parents struggled to get everything the child needed, they managed

to assist me and my child. As grandparents, they played a large role in her growth.

AV: How was it for you having to leave your child with your mother?

MN: It was great. Because I knew she would raise my kid as she raised me, and she would give her the love she gave me.

AV: Did you miss her?

MN: Yes, a lot.

DM: During 1994 and 1997 when you were at the college ... as your parents were here in Rammolutsi, what were they doing?

MN: My father got a job in the municipality ... as a driver.

AV: And your mom?

MN: She was a domestic worker in town.

AV: Are they still doing that same work?

MN: My father died in 2001

AV: I'm sorry.

AV: And your mum?

MN: She is not working, she suffers from asthma. The whole family is depending on my salary and it is not enough for the family. It is me, my mother and my child.

AV: So it's three of you staying here?

MN: There are another two kids which are my brother's that are living with us in this house. My brother's first wife passed away, so my mum and my brother decided that the two kids must come and stay with us because my brother has a new wife.

AV: When your father came here and got the job, what happened to his animals?

MN: He left them with family relatives on the farms. The pigs, the cows ... we don't know whether they have eaten them up or what because they told my mother that those animals are dead. It's only four remaining.

DM: We've gone around the community and this is a nice house. Did your father build this house by himself?

MN: No, after he passed away I took the money which was paid by the municipality – I think it was about R48 000 or R49 000 - and invested it at the bank. When we fetched the money I planned for us to build this house. We then built this house.

AV: When you finished your studies, did you start applying for jobs?

MN: Yes, many applications.

AV: Where did you apply?

MN: Here at Rammolutsi, in North West, Gauteng, Free State and many other places.

AV: What did they tell you?

MN: I went to the interview in North West, but I don't know if I failed the interview or what.

DM: I want to go back a little bit. When your parents arrived here in Rammolutsi where did they stay?

MN: We built and lived in a shack.

DM: You lived in that for how many years?

MN: From 1994 when we arrived and we built this house in 2005, it's 10 years.

AV: So you built this house on top ... there was no RDP house ... you did not apply for an RDP house?

MN: My mother applied for the RDP house. Then one day at the church they were calling the names of those who qualified for the RDP houses and her name came out but there were no house for her. So we went to Mr Mokoena (the ward councillor) to ask how come my mother's name came out but she got no house, he told us that if your name was called, it does not mean that you have got the RDP house.

DM: Then obviously, you used your own money to build this place because you didn't want to wait any longer?

MN: Yes.

DM: After you graduated from the college and got the certificate. Was it a certificate of teaching? What exactly did that qualify you to do?

MN: Yes, It was a J. P. - Junior Primary teacher.

DM: You said you applied elsewhere. What about primary schools here in your own community?

MN: Yes, I have applied and applied. At one of the schools I went to an interview ... one of the teachers at that school went on maternity leave – for about 4 months. So I told my supervisor that I was going to teach there and my supervisor said fine but that I must secure my ABET job. But as time went on, my supervisor told me that if I'm out, I am out. So I decided to leave the primary school and go back to the ABET job.

DM: When did you get the ABET job, what year was that when you secured that work?

MN: Since 1999.

DM: Tell us a little bit about the ABET work ... is it a separate institution, with one of the schools ... how does it work?

MN: It is an adult school. We get paid the salaries from the government, but they pay us according to the hours we have worked

DM: How many people on average are attending that school?

MN: In my class there are 20. But when it is winter they don't come ... maybe 10-15.

AV: Do you teach all the same subjects that they teach in school.

MN: We teach those people who never went to school at all. It is like educating a child from grade zero. The people I am teaching are the victims of apartheid ... they have never been to school, so they can't write ...

DM: What is the average age of your students at that school?

MN: In my class I have old people, mostly the pensioners. The school allows people from the age of 19 upwards but my youngest student is in their 40s.

DM: How many hours a day do you teach, is it 5 days a week .. how often do you meet as a class and how long does it go?

MN: I do 6 hours per week,

DM: And what time is the class?

MN: From 3 – 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

DM: How do you find that work for you?

MN: At the ABET schools here there is a big problem. We don't have material at school so we make a plan ourselves to get the materials. I get information from the library.

DM: Are you provided with text books or other materials from the government?

MN: We have never had textbooks. Only this year we got exercise books. We organise ourselves for the books for our students.

DM: So there's no textbook that you have ... you make up your own course?

MN: Yes.

AV: You say you get paid on the hour ... so you get paid for six hours a week. Do you get paid at all for the preparation that you do before you go into the class?

MN: No, we only get paid for the time we spent teaching.

AV: How much time do you spend preparing for the class, every week that you're not paid for?

MN: It takes 2 hours to prepare every day. I prepare lesson plans and other things.

AV: You work under contract? What is the nature of the agreement you work under?

MN: We work under contract. They say it is from January to December, but on holidays they don't pay us, in December they don't pay us.

AV: Are the ABET teachers integrated at all into the union system? So, are you organised by maybe SADTU or other unions working in schools?

MN: We always represented our problems to SADTU, but they did not help us. So we try ourselves, as teachers of ABET, to form our own forum to represent ABET.

AV: Tell us about this forum ... is it just for the teachers in Rammolutsi or is it broader?

MN: It is broader, for all the educators of ABET in Free State ... we meet and talk.

AV: As the forum, what are the main grievances that you around the way that ABET is structured for teachers?

MN: In our ABET forum we are fighting for our rights like UIF, pension funds. Like if a teacher dies, then she must get paid from government to support the funeral and her family. We want government to register us a permanent teachers

DM: Do you have any relation with the permanent primary or secondary teachers?

MN: We don't have a good relationship between the full-time teachers and us. We use the premises of one of the primary schools. The thing that hurts us is that the full-time teachers look down on us because we earn a very little salary.

DM: If you are comfortable saying so, how much do get as an ABET teacher?

MN: Per hour it is R137.45

DM: Is anything taken out of that in terms of taxes ...?

MN: They are taxing us but now it is better than before. Before, they were taking a lot and then bring it back again to us. So now they are just taking R45 a month for tax..

AV: If you can estimate ... how much would you get paid for the whole month?

MN: It is R3 700 per month.

DM: Tell us little bit about the classroom. You have some that are in their 60s and 70s here in Rammolutsi ... do you find that there is a lot of interest in the ABET for a lot of people and that they are very disciplined even as older students in attending the school?

MN: Yes, they enjoy school it very much and they are disciplined.

AV: Obviously, you've got students that you enjoy teaching ... If you had a choice, would you rather be teaching ABET or the primary?

MN: I would love to teach at primary, because I love the young children with all of my heart. I'd rather work at the primary..

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