

Mrs. Melitafa and Nombulelo Melitafa LRC Oral History Project 2 September 2008

Client

Interpreter: Rufus Poswa

Grahamstown

Int This is an interview with Mrs. Melitafa and Nombulelo (daughter of Mrs. Melitafa) and itâ\200\231s Tuesday, the 2" of September (2008). Mrs. Melitafa and Nombulelo, on SALS Foundation in the United States, we really want to thank you for agreeing to come and do this interview with us for the Legal Resources Centre.

RP Xhosa translation

MM Xhosa translation

Int I wondered whether I could ask you to talk a little bit about yourself, your background, where you were born and what the circumstances and what were some of the problems that made you seek help?

RP Xhosa translation

MM Xhosa translation

RP My problem was Nombulelo.

Int Okay...

MM Xhosa translation

RP She gets fits, terrible epilepsy...

MM Xhosa translation

RP I went to all sorts of different places, to which I was told or advised that they could help or that I could be helped, but those places could not help.

MM Xhosa translation

RP Black Sash...

MM

RP

Int

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

Xhosa translation

I approached the Black Sash and I was given a letter and I was informed to bring it here up to the Legal Resources Centre.

Okay...

Xhosa translation

Thatâ\200\231s where I felt relieved...

Xhosa translation

Because I could not fight the battle myself, for my kid, whose pension was taken away from...

Xhosa translation

At times like these, she would be in hospital and she wouldnâ\200\231t even know who I am.

Xhosa translation

When I came into the Legal Resources Centre, my problem was attended in such a manner, [ felt that they treated me, as their own mother.

Xhosa translation

This is where I was helped.

Xhosa translation

And [, I will always obey their rules, that is if an appointment is made with me, I have to pitch up and I do pitch up.

Xhosa translation

It was not easy...

Xhosa translation

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

NM

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

NM

Int

RP

I had already given up...

Xhosa translation

They were very patient and they also thought me to be patient because they would call me and ask me whether I have received it yet, I would say no and they would say, ok, we will call you again.

Xhosa translation

I donâ\200\231tâ\200\231 want to talk about the Black Sash and when I am here, I become really emotional, because I had already given up on my daughter...

Xhosa translation

They cancelled her grant and said that she was fit, able to work...and then she couldnâ\200\231t...

When was this, Rufus?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

My grant was taken from me in 1998

March

In March

And before that she was getting a grant?

Xhosa translation

Ja, before that I used to receive pension.

From what age?

Xhosa translation

NM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

NM

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

NM

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

Xhosa translation

She was still young. She was still young then, she canâ\200\231t even remember...

Xhosa translation

I gave birth to her and after a year, she never healed from...

Did she go to school?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Yes, I did go to school.

Xhosa translation

I left school when I was in the middle of doing Standard Six (Grade Eight) because sometimes, while in class, I would get an attack and sometimes I would be on my way home and I would get it in the middle of the road, which caused me to be all over the road. It was, I mean, it was quite dangerous for me to get it on the road, because you donâ\200\231t have control of where you are going to.

Okay. And since then has she stayed at home?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Yes, she stayed at home.

Right, okay. And there was a story that you told me, Rufus about how Mrs. Melitafa...

Melitafa, ja

Int

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

Melitafa received her cheque and she didnâ\200\231t cash it. Could you ask her to talk about what were the circumstances?

Xhosa translation

Okay, okay...

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

People from the Department of Welfare arrived at my home...

This was after she contacted the LRC?

Ja, this was after...

Xhosa translation

They had a cheque with them.

Xhosa translation

This is, this is the money we owe you for which youâ\200\231ve taken legal...

Action?

Action, ja, for ja.

Xhosa translation



I was asked to sign and I said no, I cannot sign.

Xhosa translation

They gave it to me and I accepted it.

The cheque?

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

I took the cheque...

Xhosa translation

I brought it straight here...

Xhosa translation

I could not take the cheque and go and cash it. Where was it all along? I had to bring it to people here to tell me what the cheque might be for...

Xhosa translation

I was advised here that if I wanted to change it, I could change it, you know but it could not, it could possibly not be in interest for myself. I said I will cash this cheque when you guys tell me to cash this cheque and that's how I cashed it.

That was a very brave decision. They needed the money. What was behind her decision, in her heart, what was important for her?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Although there was a desire because we didn't have food, a desire to cash the cheque, I felt that I should approach and talk to the people who helped me, before I cashed this cheque because I did not know, what was lying behind me being given the cheque.

I am also wondering as well, she was very brave, as well because they made her want to sign something. Did she know what that document was and why did she refuse to sign it?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

I could not sign for something I did not know and I thought that the people who assisted me, you know they should know. I should consult them first. I should talk to

them first before I cash the cheque.

Int

RP

MM

RP

NM

MM

RP

Int

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

Int

MM

So when she first came here with her daughter, who did she see and who helped her?  
It might have been you, Rufus?

No, it was not, it was not... Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Tembeka (Ngcukaitobi)

I have interviewed him...

Ja, they first met with Thabita (Qangule), assisted by Thabita (Qangule) first and then  
Tembeka (Ngcukaitobi) took over from Thabita (Qangule).

Right, and did they feel, since he was quite young, he was a Candidate Attorney, did  
they feel confident that he would be able to assist them properly?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

I put all my trust in all the people, you know, who were working in this office.  
Because even at the time, this case went to court, Nombulelo (Melitafa), was not  
herself, she was in...she was hospitalised, she was not aware what was going on,  
although, she was informed, she attended but she had no knowledge of what was  
going on. So the trust was there in everyone in the office.

And so when they came, they came in 199...

1998

They came here in 19987

Xhosa translation

RP

Int

NM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

Int

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

MM

Yes, 1998

Right and they saw Tabitha (Qangule) first and then they saw Tembeka (Ngukaitobi) and then how long...

Xhosa translation

Oh, they approached the LRC in 2000, because her grant was cancelled in 1998.

In those two years, what did they do?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

She was knocking on different doors, you know and she was even advised that she should join the toyi-toyi. You know the toyi-toyi?

Yes...

Ja, the march, protest. But she does not have the legs to run around and that's when she was referred to the Black Sash and she was referred here.

What does she, what do the two of you (refers to mother and daughter) think about why the grant was cancelled?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

I, I really cannot say why it was taken away because I don't understand why they would take a grant away from someone who, who is disabled, who cannot do anything for themselves.

What does Mrs. Melitafa say?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

Int

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

MM

I really cannot say. For me, it is my belief that they were killing her because that led her to starve and to get these epilepsy attacks because there was no food. So, I even prayed to God to take her because her living under those conditions was not good.

Xhosa translation

And it was difficult because I had to take medication and you don't take medication without food.

And so they went to Black Sash, Diakonia and then they came here?

They went to Black Sash and Black Sash gave them a letter and told them to come here?

Right, so in 2000, they came here, they saw Tabitha (Qangule) and Tembeka (Ngcukaitobi). How long did it take before they received any money?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

They came here in January and the first cheque they received was in August.

So, the cheque from the government, from the Department, did that come before August?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Ja, the first cheque was in August, but not the lump sum, not the back pay. The back pay we received in October, the 14 000...

Oh, the 14 000 right. And the government cheque that they went to Mrs. Melitafa and said to her, that they want her to drop the case, how much was that for?

Xhosa translation



Xhosa translation

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

Int

NM

RP

Int

RP

NM

MM

RP

NM

RP

NM

RP

10

That was the 14000 one because they did approach the LRC... Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

They came in with the first cheques, which were given to them in August and they came, they brought those cheques here...

That was the 1000...?

Ja, and they were informed that they could go and cash those cheques...

Right...

Xhosa translation

She had just finished washing because she was hungry at that time, and this 14 000 cheque came and people from the Department of Welfare arrived there and they said here, is your cheque because she was preparing to go to her uncle's house to get something to eat and now she was given those cheques. She took those cheques and she took it to her mother and her mother said you are taking it straight to the Legal Resources Centre.

So, when you got to the Legal Resources Centre, they wanted to fight the case, for how long...?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Oh, I see

NM

RP

NM

RP

RP

NM

RP

MM

NM

RP

NM

RP

NM

RP

Int

RP

MM

11

Xhosa translation

Oh, okay... Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

I mean, the dates might not be clear, because she received the one thousand cheque and she went to change it and thereafter she received a letter informing her that her grant has been cancelled. And then she brought the letter to the LRC in September and she was given....

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

And then again in September, but the cheque they brought in but the cheque they cashed in in October...

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

It happened again in 2004, in September when she, she was paid, she was informed by letter that her grant would be cancelled. And she brought the letter in here. She did not get payment for November?

Xhosa translation

In November she did not get payment but she brought the letter in here and in December, she received payment for both November and December.

Xhosa translation

Ja

And I was going to ask you...it seems to me that by delaying to cash the cheque, the LRC was able to take on the case for more people, am I right?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

Nm

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

12

I cannot argue against what you are saying or what you believe, because I mean, these are the people, who are our voices when we were in trouble, you know, and if that is, whatâ\200\231s being said?

What I am saying is that it is possible that she helped so many other people by not chasing the cheque because in that way, the LRC was able to take on the case for so many other people.

Oh, Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Me myself, I think that I am grateful to the Black Sash and the Legal Resources Centre, because they are the people who helped and even now today, if I walk into the offices into the Department, they will have comments that she is going to take legal action against us.

laughter

Ja

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Even though, I do to their offices and enquire about the municipality grant and when it has to be renewed, you know and should they cancel it, I donâ\200\231t have a problem,

because I will approach the Legal Resources Centre.

(laughter) Sheâ\200\231s a force to be reckoned with...

Ja, definitely, ja, definitely.

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

13

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Ja, sheâ\200\231s making an example, if as a kid, you getting hiding from someone and you run an elderly and then you should not forget that you were helped by that person. And even the Legal Resources Centre, they were not fighting against them, they were teaching them the law.

It seems to me that she knows the law better even than the government...

(laughter) Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

And I did not attend school...

But at least she understands the rule of law.

Ja. Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Even at the High Court, when this case, when they were arguing, when they would break for tea, people from the Department would point at her and say, this is the woman who is taking legal action against us and I would just keep quiet and not answer them because, ja.

Did she feel disappointed that it is actually an ANC government that actually, has had the grant cancelled so many times and what does she think is the reason for that?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation



I was very disappointed because although it might be divided, some of them, might know how it feels like to be poor and some of them might not. So I was very, very much disappointed.

Has she referred other people to the Legal Resources Centre?

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

14

She still does that, she does that all the time.

Okay, if you could ask her...

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

I have sent a lot of people to the Legal Resources Centre and some of which I brought myself. This woman who also gets this epilepsy fits, sheâ\200\231s got deformed hands because she burnt herself and sheâ\200\231s burnt here (points to the body), iron burnt her e as well. But people, some people must just be patient, people must learn to be patient.

Yes, I am wondering whether either Mrs. Melitafa or Nombulelo would like to add anything before we end. Is there something we have neglected to ask them and they feel must be added to the interview?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

What I want to say, I donâ\200\231t know about Nombulelo...

Xhosa translation

I donâ\200\231t know about Nombubelo, but me myself, what I have to say is that, I am old, I am very old, I have got many years. I have lived for many years but, but I love this place...

The Legal Resources...

The Legal Resources Centre...

Xhosa translation

Even when I pray, [ am always at a point that I include the Legal Resources Centre, I put them in my prayer, in my prayers when I pray..., ja...

What about Nombulelo?

Xhosa translation

NM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

MM

RP

Int

RP

Int

RP

15

Xhosa translation

There is no other place that I would be more grateful to than the Legal Resources Centre, because as in today, I can get up and have something to eat and walk freely without any doubts that I might get an attack. Go fetch my medication, you know, but before then, my mother would ask me if I wanted something more to eat. I would tell her no, save that little bit for tomorrow, in order to have something tomorrow. And because of this place, I am very grateful.

You are pointing to the very nice picture of you and Sarah. You are also in a report, in a very famous report, I don't know if she knows that?

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

Ja, she's got a copy.

I want to actually thank them both very much for taking the time and coming in. They are both very remarkable people and they have made a difference in the lives of some many other people for their welfare grants.

Xhosa translation

Xhosa translation

That comes for me. She is grateful for the Legal Resources Centre, even this, myself now, says I don't get tired of people, I am patient with people, ja.

She's right. It is not an easy job.

Not at all. Not at all.

So thank you very, very much, I really appreciate it.

Xhosa translation

Mrs. Melitafa and Nombulelo Melitafa\200\224Name Index

Melitafa, Nombulelo, 7, 14 (constant reference to this person, as client)

Ngcukaitobi, Tembeka, 7, 8, 9

Qangule, Thabita, 7, 8, 9

## Legal Resources Centre Oral History Project

### PUBLISHER:

Publisher:- Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand  
Location:- Johannesburg

Â©2010

### LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. These digital records are digital copies of electronic documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

### DOCUMENT DETAILS:

Document ID:- AG3298-1-107

Document Title:- Mrs. Melitafa and daughter (clients) Interview  
Author:- Legal Resources Centre South Africa (LRC)  
Document Date:- 2008