

Yunus Cajee

LRC Oral History Project

13<sup>th</sup> August 2008

Int This is an interview with Yunus Cajee and it's 13<sup>th</sup> of August (2008). Yunus, on behalf of SALS Foundation, we really want to thank you for setting this up and going to all this trouble and also very much taking the time to participate in the LRC Oral History Project. I wondered if we could start the interview if you could talk about your early childhood memories, growing up in South Africa, where you were born, etc, and what your experiences of apartheid were and where your sense of social justice and injustice developed?

YC Ok. I was actually born in Roodepoort, that's very near Johannesburg on the West Rand, in 1956, and I grew up there, my parents lived there, did my schooling there, primary schooling including my high school. And when I got to high school around about...in the sixties, in Roodepoort, we had a teacher by the name of Ahmed Timol, you should remember him; he was thrown off John Vorster Square, and he had come back from London and he was teaching at our school and he was our geography teacher. And also, he lived not very far away from where we lived, maybe about a hundred metres away, and he was very good friends with my dad and them, and when he came back from England he started teaching us geography and that's how I actually became aware of, you know, the political situation in South Africa. At the time, the ANC was banned, the only thing that we could do was, when the apartheid government celebrated their Republic Day, and that type of thing, you know, write slogans on school walls, and that type of thing. And, as a child, I remember my uncles being arrested and spending time in prison for...actually, they were caught red-handed, you know, putting slogans on walls. And that's how I became politically aware of the situation in South Africa. Then, it came about that the government at the time, removed the Indian community from Roodepoort and moved them to Azaadville, which was in no-man's land, and Ahmed Timol then came onto the scene, and being my history (?**geography**) teacher, and living very near, and virtually visiting us every day or second day, you know, at home, I became aware of the ANC and, at the time, then, being banned, we couldn't join the organisation, as such, but I was involved in a lot of community work at the time.

Int So, what sort of community work?

YC You know, with sports...involved with sports, with religious affairs, ja, and that type of thing, you know? And, we then, at the time, when Ahmed Timol used to write out, you know, send out leaflets to people, you know, my mom ran a commercial college in Johannesburg, at the time, and Ahmed Timol used to bring all the envelopes and that, there for typing, you know, which he then, obviously, used to send out with all material that he received from London. And, at the time when he got arrested, I remember...I remember that day very clearly, because it was a Friday...it was a Friday that he got arrested, and the last period on a Friday was our hist...our geography class, and he was very, sort of...how should I say...he was very quiet that day, you know, unlike him, he talked a lot in class, and that type of thing, and he mentioned a few things, you know, while we were there in class. And he said to us, he says: you know, when I die I'll become more famous than the president of the world, and I'm going to live for five hundred years. That's what he said to us, and that evening, obviously, he

got arrested, on the Friday evening, and subsequently, on the Saturday morning, I think at about four o'clock in the morning, there was this huge bang on our door. And there were, like, twenty Security Policemen that came into the house and, you know, searched our...the entire house and they went through my school books and, you know, trying to find anything. But, obviously, I never kept anything at home, so they didn't really find anything. They then took my mom away, you know, from home and they took her to the college and they took all the typewriters and everything away for forensic testing. And, you know, he said to us that he's going to live for five hundred years, and five days later he had died. And, you know, after he died, I mean, I became more active with the Transvaal Union Congress, at the time, because that was an organisation that was not banned, and for the Cape Congress Movement also we used to do a lot of typing of their letters, and all that type of thing. And, subsequently, in '72, I left for England to go and study, and I spent three years in England and I came back to South Africa.

Int And so, you came back around '76?

YC Yes, just before the '76's thing I came back to South Africa...

Int And you'd done an Undergrad in England?

YC I was supposed to have done, but I partied a lot, so the first year I did very well and then the (*laughs*) other two years I just partied, so, that fell away. I came back, I then started teaching in Johannesburg, at the commercial college that my mom ran, and, one of Mandela's daughters was also at the college at the time, so, I actually taught her.

Int Who was that?

YC Zinzi.

Int Ok.

YC And we used to teach commercial subjects, typing, shorthand, data processing, that type of thing. And then, as a child I always...my grandfather used to be on a farm very...between Ermelo...between Standerton and Volksrus, I have to go there, as a child, on holiday, and I always liked that type of life. And then, in 1980, I got married to my wife, she's originally from Piet Retief, and I was always looking for a place on a farm where I could go and live. And in '86 I found...somebody found this place for me, there was a German guy that was here and I came, and I liked the place and we subsequently, as a young couple with small kids that were not even at school, we had two kids at the time, and, I then moved to Driefontein in '86. But, when I got

to Driefontein, I think that's...at that time the forced removal of people, that was over already, the community had won the case already...

Int ...and Solomon (*Saul*) Mkhize had died?

YC ...had died already, he died in '83, so, I'd never met him in my life before. But, when I got here, the hardships of the people, the poverty, the ill treatment of farm workers in the area, that got to me. And immediately, when I got here, I started getting involved, you know, with community affairs, and that's how I then linked up with Legal Resources and TRAC, who were already working in the area. And, you know, at the time, I mean, up to '95, '96, obviously, there were no mobile 'phones at that time, and, I think, in the whole of Driefontein there were, I think, two telephones. And fortunately I had one telephone, and a chief, that was not actually a chief but was imposed by the government at the time, you know, to...on Driefontein, was the other telephone, you know, that had a telephone. And, so all, you know, whenever Legal Resources or TRAC needed to send messages to Driefontein, it would always come via me, telephonically, you know. So, that's how I started getting involved. And I worked especially with the farm workers, because in our area, one of the few areas in the country where we had labour tenants, you know, farm workers that worked on the farm without any pay, and the right they had was to live on the farm, you know, that was their payment that they got in lieu of working. And, you know, lots of problems, and you've got to remember that, I think, at the time maybe sixty or seventy percent of Driefontein was illiterate. They had no access to courts, to....but there were no police stations in the area, absolutely nothing, and I started working with them mainly, at first, with evictions. Farmers used to pack them up and go and drop them off on the side of main roads. At that time, Driefontein was...the roads were all gravel roads, you know, there were no tar roads like we have today. So very difficult getting here, especially in the rainy season, and that type of thing, you know, whichever direction you came from you had to travel twenty, thirty kilometres on gravel road. And I got involved in that, and that's how I got involved with the Legal Resources Centre and TRAC. And we had a wonderful relationship, you know, we actually became, I think, more like family than, you know, colleagues doing a certain amount of this thing. The people I've worked with, Geoff Budlender, Aninka (Claassens) a...at the time she wasn't married to Geoff, Ilse (Wilson), Moray (Hathorn) (Hathorn), and there were numerous others from TRAC that used to come with them. TRAC and Legal Resources basically worked as a team, TRAC used to come and do the ground-work, you know, and then, Legal Resources used to come and take it up legally then.

Int So TRAC would do...find out what the problems...?

YC ...problems are, you know, all that type of thing. And Legal Resources used to come, Aninka (Claassens), Ilse (Wilson) and them, used to come, basically, if I'm not mistaken, maybe once a month, for two or three days and hold legal clinics here. Where people with problems with ID documents, farm evictions, impounding of cattle by farmers, that type of thing, you know, they used to take all these matters up. And there was a need at the time, because the community couldn't afford attorneys. And the other thing was that, there were very few non-white attorneys at the time, most of the attorneys in the surrounding towns, Piet Retief, Volksrus, Ermelo, were all white Afrikaner, you know? The magistrates were all Afrikaner, the Police were all Afrikaner, you know, with a few black policemen. And it used to be very difficult,

you know, for people, because of the poverty levels, no employment, you know, so, it used to be a fantastic service that Legal Resources Centre used to offer. I remember them coming until about '95, after, you know, after the '94 democratic elections, and there's still, today, I mean, thirteen, fourteen years down the line from democracy, I think there's still need for them to come on a regular basis. Because we still, today, have problems as far as farm workers are concerned, you know, in the area, evictions still being done, impounding of cattle still being done. In fact, I had a case yesterday where the farmer wrote two...letters to two families, you know, to get rid of all the cattle from the farm. And for rural people, you know, that is their wealth, you know, their cattle, they have no other income. So, what they do is that somebody from the family works for the farmer, they have absolutely no income at all, so, they have cattle, and as the need arises, you know, if there's a funeral or a wedding, or whatever, they then sell cattle, you know, so they get a bit of money and that, which they can do these things with. And if the cattle are gone, you know, they sit with a problem because they have absolutely no income. What happens is that, you know, we've got families on the farms that have lived there forever, you know, from their great grandfather's time, living on that farm, the grandfath...the great grandparents, the grandparents, the parents are also buried on the farm, and these people have now become, you know, well past pensionable age, you know, I'm talking about people in their eighties. And with the AIDS endemic, you know, a lot of young people are dying with AIDS, and with the result you have maybe, you know, a family living on the farm where there's only the old man and the old lady left, they're probably in their eighties and they've got nobody to work on the farm, you know, for the farmer and the farmer then wants to evict them or else, you know, get rid of their cattle. So, that is a problem that we still encounter today. I mean, there's a case yesterday that I've got two reports of people, I'm just waiting for them to come through with the letters that they've received. You know, and we now...I try and work...fortunately I, you know, being a councillor for the ANC at the District Council level...

Int So you are currently a councillor?

YC Yes, at the District level, at the Gert Sibande District Council. So, I work, you know, through Department of Land Affairs and Agriculture, you know, to try and help these people with the problems with the farmers. So, there's still, you know, definitely a need...The problem with Department of Land Affairs is that, they have people that are at the offices, but they just don't have the experience and they don't have the legal, you know, background to actually take the matter any further. And sometimes, you know, six months or a year passes before they do anything against the farmers, and by that time the cattle are gone. The farmer's impounded the cattle and they're sold off and, you know, that type of thing.

Int Gosh!

YC So, there's still a great need, you know, for that...especially in this Piet Retief/Wakkerstroom area, these are one...and this area and the Northern Natal area, these are the two main areas where the labour tenants still exist. You know, we try and work with the Department of Labour, with regards to wages for farm workers, because, legally, they have to pay them a certain amount of wage. But what happens



now is that, if Department of Labour says that a thousand Rand a month is the minimum wage, they pay the thousand Rand to the worker, but, when the worker gets his envelope, for every cattle that the family owns on the farm, so much is deducted. So, at the end of every month, they come in with a minus amount, you know? So, there's minus two hundred or minus three hundred, so, over the year, they're probably owing the farmer three thousand or four thousand Rands, which they're never ever going to pay back because they just don't have the money. So, basically they're still working for nothing, you know. They still get a...working the other way around and still, you know, exploiting, real exploitation. You get young people that are in standard three and four, that are removed from school to go and work on the farms because the old people don't have anybody else to work on the farms. So we still have child labour, you know, going on in the area. So these are the types of things that we encounter, you know, in Driefontein, in the current time, in 2008.

Int So, if you get cases like these, now, who would you refer them to legally...for legal advice?

YC We go try and work with Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs, you know, they've opened...fortunately the minister was here a few years ago and we en...we, you know, encouraged her to open an office in Piet Retief, and three years ago they then opened an office. And my cousin, in fact, my wife's cousin is a Member of Parliament in Cape Town, of the National Assembly, he's from Piet Retief originally, well, he's from Piet Retief, living in Cape Town now.

Int And who is this?

YC Zunaid Kotwal.

Int Ok.

YC He was also involved with me in the eighties and nineties with exactly the same type of thing that I am doing, and then in '99 he went to Parliament. He got elected. And I work...try and work through his office, he's got a constituency office based in Piet Retief, so I work with him, you know? And then he takes the matter up for me, because he used to belong to the Portfolio Committee on Land Affairs and Agriculture in Parliament. So there was a good understanding and a good relationship between us, you know? But in...I must say, that in most of the cases, they've failed, you know, the Department of Land Affairs, and I think the main reason is, you know, they don't just have the know-how; they don't have the legal expertise to actually take these matters any further to court. I think what they do is that, they try and go and speak to the farmers and, you know, try and...

Int ...negotiate.

YC ...negotiate, but, at the end, nothing ever happens, you know? So, we have various cases where they've got involved but at the end, the farmer still gets his way. So, you know, there's still a need in the community. I understand, you know, after '94, funding for LRC has...from foreign governments, and that has, you know, they've cut down, so the...I mean, they have that problem as well.

Int They're very...also the Johannesburg office in terms of staff, Moray (Hathorn)'s no longer there.

YC Ja, that's right. And, you know, but, like before, our homes are still open to them. You know, if they come, we still have place for them to live and, you know, there's no hotel still in Driefontein, so they're still welcome to live with us, you know, so they won't have that...those type of expenses, obviously, the travelling expense they'll have to pay themselves. But, we still have a very poor community, there's a mine that's opened in the area that's employing...not many people, they brought in most of the workers from KwaZulu-Natal.

Int What mine is this?

YC Kangra Mining, it's a coal mine. And they...in fact, in the early nineties, they used the Inkatha offices in Ulundi to recruit workers for them, because their philosophy was that Inkatha people didn't go on strike and they don't belong to COSATU and that type of thing, you know? So, there's still, you know, and they've...

Int ...and that continues till today?

YC Ja. But, subsequently we've had meetings with them and they've now just starting to employ, you know, local people, so, there is a bit of money in the community. But, generally, we're still a very poor, poor community.

Int Mm. How do people survive, is there some...any kind of social welfare system, is that effective?

YC You know, Driefontein itself, if you take the whole Piet Retief region, we have a large number of pensioners that earn social security pensions, it's the only place, I think, in the whole of the province where they pay pension over three days. You know, all other places, they pay one day, and Driefontein they come...the first three days of every...the first three working days of every month, they pay pensions here. And a lot of people survive on that...on that pension, that the old people receive.

Int Which is how much?

YC I think it's close to a thousand Rands a month now. And then you get the grants for children under seven years old, which is obviously going up to fourteen years, so, you know, you get those people that get an income. But, largely, they depend on the pension...pension money to survive. You know, the old people earn the pension...their great...most of them are the grandparents living with grandchildren, the children have gone away to work in the cities. They send a bit of money home, but, hardly any, you know, because their expenses are so high in the cities, and, you know, they're not qualified to do, you know, to warrant good salaries and that, you know, so, they get menial jobs and that, and whatever they do, they send a bit home. But, mostly people depend on old age pensions. And then we get people that are working in the plantations, you know the forestry plantations for Mondi and Sappi, and that type of thing. But, there also, the large companies...what happened was that after the labour laws came in, you know, the minimum wage type of thing, they stopped employing people. And what they do now is that they contract out, so they get a person from, example, Driefontein, and they say: right, we're giving you so many hectares of trees to cut, you hire your people, you do the job, we pay you per ton that you deliver to us.

Int Really?

YC Ya. And that's happening today. So, with the result, you know, you get exploitation from the other side now.

Int Sure, sure, it's a bit disingenuous...

YC Ja, that's right. So, you know, so they're out of the labour, this thing, they're not in that market any more, so they don't sit with labour problems then, there's no more minimum wage and that, to pay. So...and, I mean, these are huge...I mean, Mondi listed on the, I think, London Stock Exchange, or wherever, I mean, but, this is what they're doing.

Int And is that a legal...it's legally allowed?

YC It's legally allowed, ja, to contract out, I mean, there's nothing legally that stops you from doing it. We've tried taking it up, you know, to the level of Parliament with the Depart...with the Minister of Land Affairs and Agriculture at the time, but, nothing's been done about it as yet. You know, I don't know whether they can pass legislation to change that, I have no idea, you know, legally I wouldn't know. But, that happens, a lot of people work in the plantations, I mean, they leave at four o'clock in the morning for work, in open trucks at the back, they all toil in the sun all day, and by the time they get back home sometimes it's eight, nine o'clock at night, you know... They are still being exploited up till today.

Int Gosh. Yunus, I hear from different people that during the 1980s, in particular, you were tremendously involved with the ANC. I wondered whether you could talk a bit about that?

YC (Laughs). Ja, I was...I was involved very heavily with the ANC at the time, but, obviously, you know, at the time, the ANC was banned and we couldn't openly this thing, but, I worked with a lot of people, in those days, in the dark old days, as far as the ANC was concerned, we had...we had a major case in Piet Retief, Ebrahim Ebrahim, I don't know if you remember him?

Int Yes, I've met him...

YC Ja, he was actually kidnapped from Swaziland and brought to Piet Retief to stand trial, and at the time he was locked up in Piet Retief. That's when my membership, or so-called membership, of the ANC came out in the open, you know, to the communities around. We organised food for him three times a day, you know, breakfast, lunch and supper, which my...my in-laws are in Piet Retief, and they used to take food for him every day, you know, to make sure that he was fed, and all that. When Kessie Naidu, from Durban, did his case and when Kessie and them used to come they used to live with my in-laws in Piet Retief, and have meals, and everything there, you know? That's when, I think, the Afrikaners or...Piet Retief predominantly...we have a lot of German farmers, as well, you know, the Nazi Germans that ran away from Germany during the Second World War, there were a large concentration of them. And, after that time, we started receiving a lot of threats, you know, death threats, and that type of thing.

Int So, you and your family?

YC Me and my family, yes. And...but because we were involved in the struggle it never bothered me, you know, I said: to hell with it, you know, we just carry on, I mean, what we used to do. And we've had...we used to get the Umkhonto we Sizwe guys coming through, you know, the borders and that, and we used to hide them on farms in the area

*(An extract of this interview has been removed, as requested by the interviewee)....*

And these are the type of things that we did with the ANC. When the ANC got unbanned, I became very heavily involved, well, I'm still involved with the ANC. The whole Piet Retief region, I started...I mobilised all the communities and launched branches in all the different areas, you know, Piet Retief itself, Driefontein, all the surrounding areas, so very instrumental in getting that done, organising mass meetings, and that type of thing. And then, in...19...you know, the election time, my wife and I were both elected as Councillors for Driefontein. And, I think, you know, what...you know, as...being from the so-called minority in South Africa...

Int Sure...you mean the Indian minority?

YC ...Indian minority. I don't regard myself as a minority at all. But, you know, when...especially now, you know, with the politics going on in the ANC, you know, when they say: yes, the Indians are going to be side-lined and the coloureds are going to be side-lined, it's going to be only blacks, you know, that type of thing, I think people have to understand that...I've been in Driefontein from '86, we're the only Indian family that is here, the nearest to us are in Piet Retief, which is fifty kilom...fifty, sixty kilometres away, and, I've chaired the ANC branch for many, many years, I was elected Regional Chairperson of the ANC for the Piet Retief region. I was elected a Councillor, my wife...both my wife and I, were elected Councillors in '94. In '99 she didn't want to go back as a Councillor, I got elected in '99, 2005 elections I was re-ele...or, 2006 elections I was re-elected again. And I think people have to understand that...I was elected by black people, you know. So, this thing about being side-lined, I don't know where that comes in people's mentality, you know. Obviously if you regard yourself as a minority then, obviously, you'll have these fears, but, I don't have that fears, I mean, my kids play, I mean, all their friends are from here, you know, they hardly have any Indian friends, or white friends or coloured friends, because, I mean, their friends are all, you know, in Driefontein, we grew up here. And, you know, the life that...we did a lot of work in launching it...the provincial ANC, at the time, Mathews Phosa, when he came back from exile, I worked very closely with him, you know, launching branches and then getting the regions going and then the, you know, the provincial ANC. In '94 elections, I was actually offered to go to Parliament, you know, to become a candidate, but I declined at the time, I was still new in business, my kids were still very small, I couldn't leave them here, you know, on their own, and so, I declined. But I don't regret, I enjoy life here, it's quite nice.

Int Right, I can imagine. Clearly, you...you took great risks during the 1980s, because, as you know, it was the time...the height of repression, I'm sure, having known Ebrahim Ebrahim, you know that the amount of torture that goes on in detention. I'm just wondering, what was the motivation, if you had to look back on your life, where does the motivation come, for that kind of risk-taking, do you know?

YC I think more so, you know, in the city, I wasn't exposed to this type of exploitation and that. But, I think when I came here in '86, you know, I think that if I didn't get involved, I wouldn't have been human. You know, the suffering that people went through. You know, it's just my humanity that came out, type of thing, and the risks were always there, I mean, we've had raids by the army, when I've had over two hundred soldiers in this house, here.

Int Really?

YC Yes.

Int This is during the 1980s?

YC Yes.

Int Gosh!

YC You know, going through every...in fact, they took out every skirting on the...in the rooms everywhere, at that time I didn't have tiles, I had, you know, the wooden skirtings. And, you know, they used to come with flimsy excuses...no, we followed a truck from the Mozambique border that came here to your yard, and they offloaded AK47s, so we're looking for those guns. When did this happen? No, two days ago. You're coming two days later, in the middle of the night, coming to look, I mean, how can we hide the AK47 in this thing? You know, that type of thing, that's the type of harassment that we received. They tried to break in a few times, and this was done by the Kommandos, the farmers belonged to this army unit called the Kommandos. They tried to get people in here to come and harm us (inaudible) fortunately, I had dogs at the time. And, subsequently, I did find out that who was behind the whole thing, because one of the people that was sent here actually came to me and said: this is the farmer that did the thing.

Int So it was actually a farmer in the district?

YC A farmer in the area.

Int And what was his reason?

YC And I...we 'phoned him...I 'phoned him, in fact, my wife 'phoned him and said to him: we know that, you know, what you're trying to do, but just remember that you won't get very far, you know, with whatever you are trying to this thing. And he apologised on the 'phone then, you know...

Int Really?

YC He admitted that he...he said he'd sent these people, you know...

Int Gosh!

YC So, these are the types of this thing used to...I used to get Security Police every day, but every day, coming, but I kept nothing on the premises that would implicate me in anything, you know? So, I was very careful, as far as those things were concerned, you know, but, I don't know, it was...I am...my upbringing partly, my childhood coming up...growing up, you know? I think all those things played a great part. When I spent three years in London, I had good friends in the ANC at the time, Essop and Aziz Pahad are related to us, so, you know, there was family involvement. My in-laws in Piet Retief were quite involved at the time of Dr. Dadoo, and them, you know, so,



there is a history of involvement in the family. So, I think it was just natural and then, I mean, you see the exploitation and that, and you had to get involved, you know, never mind the risks, and the thing is, I had tremendous support from my wife as well, you know, she's not a typical Indian woman that would say: no, don't get involved, you know, you'll get hurt. Although, lots of people tried to dissuade me from getting involved, you know, in the eighties especially, you know? Even family...my family up in Johannesburg used to say: don't get involved, you know, you'll get hurt, and this. But, it was just something that you had to...it had to be done.

Int You know, I'm also wondering, when the LRC...you got here and the LRC had already been here, so 1986, what was the level of relationship with particular people, for example, Moray Hathorn, I understand that when Moray (Hathorn) came...Jane Vilakazi also mentioned this and Moray Hathorn did as well, he had an accident, was that around the same time?

YC Ja, it was after he got here. Moray (Hathorn) was actually going...he came here to Driefontein, the day before, he had to appear in court in a certain case that he was actually doing, I think it was one of the farm worker's cases, (inaudible) And driving down the gravel road, there's a very sharp bend, and as he took this bend there were a whole lot of school kids standing on the side of the road, and one of the kids ran across, there was absolutely nothing you could do, because it wasn't...it was a corrugated road, and if you applied brakes, your car just skids along, you know, till it comes to a stop, and he hit this child, and the child died. But, Moray (Hathorn) being Moray (Hathorn), you know, he's...I think he's the ultimate gentleman you can find, you know, very soft-spoken, you've met him so you should know about him...

Int Sure. But I want to hear on tape. (*Laughs*).

YC ...and he was absolutely, I mean, I don't even know what you...word to use, you know, that he'd actually killed a child. And Moray (Hathorn), then, I remember at the time, paid for the entire funeral, you know, all, from the coffin box, to the ox that they had to buy to slaughter to feed people, to...everything...he bore the cost of it. He 'phoned me and I remember I gave them money for the ox and the...we got the coffin box for them and everything was done. And, at the time, you must remember, that the police was still Afrikaners, the magistrates were Afrikaners, they then subsequently charged him for culpable homicide, which is very rare in an accident case, you know. When an accident happens, by law, they open a culpable homicide case, but normally, I mean, that thing...it gets worked on, but they took Moray (Hathorn) to court, you know, for that particular case. And I remember he came with two or three attorneys, they went to court and they came and they had lunch with me and they went back again to court, but ultimately he won the case, you know. Because, I mean, there was nothing...nothing he could do. But, he was absolutely devastated at the time, because he'd taken the life of...of a child, you know.

Int Yes. On another note, Moray (Hathorn) says very nice things about you and it seems to me that you developed a very good relationship with Moray (Hathorn)?

YC With Moray (Hathorn), with Aninka (Claassens), with...er...

Int Ilse (Wilson).

YC ...with Ilse (Wilson), especially with the three of them. Geoff (Budlender) later in time, never came very often to Driefontein, it was the three of them that used to come, and this was like home for them. You know, and we felt very comfortable with them. Ilse (Wilson) would 'phone the day before to say...my wife's name is Mashuda and everybody calls her Mash. Mash, we're coming tomorrow and we're having lunch with you and we're having supper with you. Ok, Ilse (Wilson), what do you want to eat? You know that thing you make, that thing, what's it called...Indian...this thing...It's called curry kedgerree, you know, the rice with the sour milk thing, with the yellow thing? She used to love that. You know the rice with the sour milk, that's what we want to eat, you know (*Laughter*). So it used to be a standing joke, Ilse (Wilson) is coming, you have to make curry kedgerree for Ilse (Wilson), you know (*Laughter*). And they used to go in the mornings, do their, you know, at the advice centre, the whole day, come...then come through in the evenings and sit till the wee hours of the morning, you know, with Beauty (Mkhize) and Beauty (Mkhize)'s son, and talk and...They used to stay at Beauty (Mkhize)'s place before I got here, so they felt it not right for them to come and stay here, but lots of times they stayed over here as well, you know, especially Moray (Hathorn). Moray (Hathorn) stayed a lot with us, and even subsequently, now, a few years ago, he 'phoned one day, he had to come to Piet Retief for something and he came and he spent the night with us, so...

Int That's nice.

YC ...we became more like family than...than, you know, colleagues doing work.

Int And so, when they used to come here for two or three days a month, was the advice centre in Piet Retief, or...?

YC No, in Driefontein.

Int In Driefontein, right.

YC In Driefontein, yes, at the high school where Beauty (Mkhize)'s late husband got shot, it's right there next to...next to there. We had a little office there, it was a corrugated office that was there, but, subsequently, we built a proper, you know, brick building, and that stuff.

- Int From what I can understand, Jane says that office continues, but, there isn't any funding for it?
- YC There is absolutely no funding for it. We've got volunteers that work at the office, that help people with IDs and, you know, just the basics, type of thing, but it's all volunteers, you know, no major cases, and that.
- Int So, the funding that came, did that come through the LRC or did it come separately?
- YC Through the LRC and through TRAC, the two.
- Int Right. And then at what point did it just stop?
- YC Just after the '94 elections. I think '95, '96, maybe '97, not too sure, but around about that time after the '94 elections.
- Int So they stopped coming as well?
- YC They stopped coming as well.
- Int And what was the reason that was given to you and others in the community?
- YC You know, lack of funding, lack of donors from overseas, because I suppose the governments felt that, you know, you've got democracy now, you must fund yourself. And I know, you know, that that is a major...major problem with NGOs in South Africa at the moment, you know, the funding. You know, we used to get...we used to get a 'phone call from Ilse (Wilson) or from Aninka (Claassens), we're bringing twenty journalists to Driefontein tomorrow, will you please organise lunch for us? (*Laughs*). You know, so, we used to do all that, and it was a pleasure doing it, you know.
- Int Sure, sure.
- YC They've come with people from Oxfam, from England, that spent two, three nights with us here. They've come with people from...from Israel from...what are they called...what is that organisation...the left wing Israeli organisation...
- Int Part of the Peace Movement?

YC Ja, that's right. They came here, and that was very strange, because I think when they came, they didn't know who we were, and I remember very clearly, it was a husband and a wife, and they had a little baby with them. And they came in the morning and then they went, obviously they went off to the, you know, the advice centre, and in the evening when they came for supper, they walked in and I think they saw the Islamic friends on the wall, I think that's only that they realised that we're Muslim. And, all of a sudden, you know, the husband and her both went totally still, quiet, for the rest of the evening.

Int Really?

YC Yes.

Int Gosh!

YC And they didn't say much and then the next morning, while they were having breakfast, you know, the wife, the woman said to my wife that, you know, we're from Israel, but we belong to the other side, you know, of the Jewish, this thing, the Peace Movement. Mash said: no, it doesn't matter, you know, it doesn't bother us at all, I mean, you're welcome, I mean, any time. And then we became good friends with them.

Int Right.

YC Then we had these people from Oxfam that came, and...we used to meet lots of people. Then they brought a reporter from the Washington Post, Lynne Duke, she was a bureau chief...Johannesburg bureau chief for the Washington Post. She came and she spent two weeks with us, then subsequently, after they left, she came back on her own to do a story on Driefontein. And, you know, the amazing thing I...was, that here you have these lawyers that are highly qualified, you know, from Geoff Budlender, I mean, you know the history. When they came to Driefontein, I was the only one that had electricity in Driefontein, and the only reason for that was, before I got here, there was a white farmer that was here, so they had given him electricity, so, I took over from him. But, they stayed with Beauty (Mkhize), no running water, no water from the tap, no electricity, you know, totally different from...in these mud houses, and they lived there very happily and very comfortably, you know. They used to...in the mornings when you wanted to wash, you had to take up...go and get water from the river, alright somebody used to bring the water for them, but you then had to go and put it on a stove to...on a wooden stove to heat up, light a fire first, warm your water and then come in and wash, you know, that type of thing. And you had these highly qualified people that were living like that, you know, for the two or three days they used to spend in Driefontein. Then, subsequently, they started staying with us here, you know, but, I still take my hat off to them, they've done a lot for the community of Driefontein. I mean, if it wasn't for Aninka (Claassens), for Geoff (Budlender) and

them, I don't think Driefontein would have existed. Because the morning that Geoff (Budlender) and them won the case...

Int This is the Forced Removals case?

YC Ja.

Int Before you came...

YC Before I came. The Department of...what was it called at that time...Department...they used to call it Department of Community Development, or something, government department, the trucks were here already to load people to take them away.

Int Yes...

YC You know, that's how far it came. And, I mean, this chief that they imposed on the community, was never a chief, they just brought him and said: here's...he's the chief, now, officially recognised by the government, and he was for the...this thing, you know? So, subsequently, then, you know, there were lots of problems between the ANC and the IFP at the time, then. Because of our close proximity to KwaZulu-Natal, you know, we're not very far away from them. So, we had a lot of animosity between the IFP and the...this thing, you know, we've had a lot of death threats from the IFP as well.

Int Does that continue, or...?

YC Not any more, no, they're a dying breed now, so that hasn't...In fact, at one time, just prior to '94, before the elections, Beauty (Mkhize) and I both had death threats from the AWB, and subsequently, Amnesty International wrote letters to the Minister of Justice or Minister of Police, whatever he was called at the time, and they then sent, you know, the ANC then sent body guards for us, to Driefontein.

Int Really?

YC Yes. Because that's how serious the threats were.

Int My goodness!

YC You know, they used to...this army used to come in and cut the...my telephone wires, you know, so we had no contact with the outside world at all.

Int And this continued even when apartheid was formally ended in the 1990's?

YC Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, right up to '94 elections, this thing carried on, I mean, Mandela had been here in '93, he spent a day with us here, and the week before he came, we had the same...I had a army raid by over two hundred policemen. That's the time there was a bit of friction between LRC and the ANC at the time. The ANC wasn't in government at the time, but, what happened is that, when that army raid took place, I think I 'phoned Aninka (Claassens)...no, I didn't 'phone her, I'm lying now, because they had cut our telephone wires, but we had an old man here by the name of old man Ndlangamandla (Zeblon), he worked very heavily with...he...subsequently passed away about two years ago, he worked very closely with Aninka (Claassens) and them, he was old, I think he was in...already at that time he was in his eighties...

Int And his name, sorry, again...?

YC Old man. Ndlangamandla (Zeblon) Nkulu Ndlangamandla. And he used to ride a motor bike. He was instrumental in the potato boycotts in Bethal with Gert Sibande in the fifties. He was actually from Bethal and then he moved to Driefontein. And he then went from here to Piet Retief to actually go and 'phone Aninka (Claassens) to tell her what had happened. Aninka (Claassens) and them subsequently then got hold of whoever, you know, in Johannesburg, and pressure was put on the police to investigate the, you know, the raid that we had, it was an illegal raid that took place. Because all of them had faces painted black with balaclavas so you couldn't identify any person in there, you know.

Int And who was it, really?

YC It was a Kommando unit, subsequently found out.

Int So it's part of these...what the TRC revealed...

YC That's right.

Int ...the death squads, etc.

YC That's it. You know, and there was a bit of this thing, because Aninka (Claassens) and them took it up and the ANC felt, no, they should take it up with government at the



time, so there was a bit of animosity between the ANC and LRC at the time. But, then Derek Hanekom was at the...

Int Land Affairs?

YC Ja, at the ANC Land desk, so, then he...this thing, you know, sorted the whole thing out between LRC and the ANC at the time. So, you know, all these types of things, we have some wonderful memories of...in fact, my son got married last year, he invited all of them to the wedding. Aninka (Claassens) couldn't make it because Geoff's (Budlender) mother died, I think passed away just a few days before that, but Ilse (Wilson) and the others actually came to Piet Retief for...

Int Moray (Hathorn) as well?

YC Moray (Hathorn) didn't come, no, he didn't come.

Int So it was Ilse (Wilson), here?

YC Ja, Ilse (Wilson) was here with Josie Adler. Josie Adler did a lot of work in Driefontein as far as running crèches were concerned. She also worked very closely with Ilse (Wilson) and them, and she established this organisation called Bambanani Crèches. She also got funding from foreign governments, from the Swedish government, from the Dutch government, and they set up thirteen crèches in Driefontein, you know, for small kids. And these women used to work, you know, teach at the...they used to take them...took them away for training and they used to get a minimum salary but, you know, at least it was some income for these women that were running the crèches, and that also carried on until about '96, '97 when the...you know, when the funding stopped from the foreign governments.

Int So that's no longer continuing?

YC That's no longer continuing, so, you know, we've gone forward and we've gone backward as well, you know, in certain ways.

Int Ja, absolutely. Yunus, in terms of, in a post apartheid context, the LRC is an organisation by virtue of the fact that it's a Public Interest Law organisation, it has...its mandate is to take on cases, even if it's against government, but, as you know, in a post apartheid context, the lines become blurred, during apartheid your enemy was very clear, but, in a post apartheid context, it seems to me that it's very difficult in a way, because LRC has had a long history and then it has to then take on cases against an ANC government. What's your sense of that, do you think that's a valid thing to do?

YC I think it's valid, it's very valid. I mean, you know...I belong to the ANC, I'm a councillor with the ANC, but, I mean, there are things that go wrong. I mean, in any government in the world, you know, you can't...you don't have...there's no such a thing as a perfect government, I mean, otherwise you'd be living in Utopia. You understand? So, there are lots of areas where government has gone wrong, they've made wrong policy decisions, you know, at the top, and lots of these have to be challenged and unfortunately, I mean, the LRC has to...it's an organisation like the LRC that has to take these matters up. You know, so there are flaws, I mean, and you...you know, I wish them well, you know, that where the flaws are, whether...if those can be rectified, I think it would be wonderful.

Int Right. What do you think are like the key areas of Public Interest Law that need to be addressed, for example, in this area, you've mentioned the labour tenants and the continuous exploitation of farm workers, but, more generally, in South Africa, what do you...is your sense of how the LRC can be most helpful?

YC You know, in our areas completely different dynamics to urban areas, you know, we being totally rural, these are the...these are the areas of our concern.

Int What are the areas...in this area, what do you think needs to be taken up as strong legal Public Interest issues?

YC Labour tenant issues, you know, farm evictions, impounding of cattle, child labour, you know, which is major, this thing. I've...basically that's the area that they have...in this area where they could really come in and help quite a bit.

Int I know that you've set up these interviews today with Beauty (Mkhize) and Jane (Vilakazi), and it seems to me that you still share very close friendships with them, and I wondered whether you could talk about how that's developed over the years?

YC Beauty (Mkhize), you must remember, after her late...Saul (Mkhize) passed away in 1983, she lived here with a son...with her son that's blinded in one eye, that was tortured and he got blind.

Int He was tortured?

YC Yes.

Int By the police?

YC By the Security Police, they actually shocked him with those welding things that one of the...took him to a panel beater in Piet Retief, and he lost his eye. And she had absolutely no income whatsoever, she didn't work, she didn't qualify for a old age pension, which was very meagre at the time. And we became...up to today, I still treat Beauty (Mkhize) as my mother, you know, we have a mother and son relationship, although my mother is still alive in Johannesburg. But, I still have a mother and son relationship, and my wife has a daughter-in-law, mother-in-law relationship with Beauty (Mkhize). You know, I can walk into her house at any time and she's welcome here at any time, she knows that. Fortunately, you know, I could provide her with a lot of things that, you know, financially, that otherwise she wouldn't have been able to get. I've...you know, the...then she started working for TRAC at the advice office, and she got a certain amount of income, and then in '94, fortunately, you know, the ANC at the time...when Mathew Phosa was Premier, the first sergeant-at-arms at the legislature, they took Beauty (Mkhize) and made her sergeant-at-arms, so she got a regular income.

Int Really?

YC Yes. And she worked there from '94 until two years ago when she was at retirement age and she retired. And she has a good pension fund from government that she receives on a monthly basis...

Int ...oh, that's good,...

YC ...and she bought a house in Nelspruit when she moved there, which I helped her with the deposit and that type of...which she subsequently paid me back for, you know. And that house is fully paid, so she's collecting a rental income from, you know, that home that she's got. She's...financially, not well off, but, very comfortable, you know...

Int ...that's good...

YC ...is that...this thing. And, with Jane (Vilakazi), in '94, there were four councillors from Driefontein and she was one of them, one of four. So, we worked very closely until '95, at least, the local government election, until 2000, and then she didn't come back onto council. She lives right across the road from me, so she's basically my neighbour, you know. Her son works for me at the store here and we keep in...well, with Beauty (Mkhize) I'm virtually in touch with her every day by telephone to find out if she's ok, and, you know, that type of thing. We get on very, very well, very close relationship.

Int That's wonderful. Yunus, I've asked you a range of questions, I'm wondering if there's something I've neglected to ask you which you feel ought to be included as part of your LRC Oral History interview?

YC Er...

Int It can be about anything. (*Laughs*).

YC I can't really think of anything, offhand, now, you know? But, just it was wonderful working with the calibre of people that, you know, that worked for the LRC at the time. Subsequently we've lost touch with a lot of them, although we still speak to Aninka (Claassens), to Ilse (Wilson)...Moray (Hathorn) I haven't spoken to...well, I've spoken to him after he left LRC, he came to spend a few days with us after...when he was here in Piet Retief, I haven't spoken to him for a long time. In fact, I tried 'phoning him two or three months ago to find out how he is, but, I just couldn't get...I 'phoned...he was...

Int ...he's at Webber Wentzel.

YC Webber Wentzel, I 'phoned Webber Wentzel and they didn't put me through to him, I can't understand why. And I just never followed up, but I spoke to Aninka (Claassens) recently. Ilse (Wilson), I keep in touch with her. So we have a very close relationship with all of them.

Int That's wonderful.

YC Yeah.

Int In order to end the interview, I was wondering whether there's a particular memory you have, and I know you have many, but, of the LRC people, Beauty (Mkhize), or a particular case that you felt was very...kind of embodied what the LRC does and it's a memory that you might treasure, whether it's interaction with them or a particular case that they addressed?

YC You know lots of interesting cases that took place, I think Beauty (Mkhize) mentioned this Yende old man, his name was Sergeant Nyande, he wasn't a police official but his name is Sergeant Nyande, and that old man was probably in his nineties when the farmer came one day and...came with a truck, loaded all his possessions and dumped him about forty kilometres away from Driefontein, on the side of the road.

Int My goodness...

YC He could barely walk, he used to walk with a walking stick, very, very slowly, and the old man, the amount of guts that he showed, you know, he...the next morning...he

slept in the veld that night with his family, with his wife and them, and the next morning, I don't know how, God alone knows how, he managed to find somebody that loaded all his stuff and he came back into the house here.

Int Really?

YC Onto the farm. Yes. And he lived there and the LRC then took up that case and he won the right to live there. He subsequently died, but his family are still living on the farm.

Int That is incredible!

YC You know, it was amazing, I mean, this old man, you had to see him. And then there was a case of...I remember an old man, not very far from here, also on a farm, who at the time was ninety four years old. His wife had died, all his kids had died, he had no grandchildren, he was sole alone. And the old man, at ninety four, the farmer tried to evict him; this was just before the '94 elections. And he came to me, and he said to me: look, this is what has happened, here is the letter that I've received that I've got to move from the farm. And, I mean, looking at a rural ninety year old African person, he...you know, that brought tears to my eyes, because he said to me, you know: I've...in all my ninety four years, I haven't seen a town, I haven't seen Piet...I don't even know what Piet Retief looks like, I don't even know what Ermelo looks like, you know, I've lived here, I've never been off this farm, my father is buried there, my grandfather is buried on the farm. So, he's ninety four, his father...so, probably a hundred and fifty, two hundred years on...you know...in this...on that farm. And he says: they're now trying to evict me. I then...before I got hold of LRC, I tried to 'phone the farmer and speak to him, you know? I said to him: look, I mean, the old man has no family, he's all alone, he's ninety four years old, I mean, how many years is he going to live? And, I mean, if he dies, I mean, obviously there's no family of his that's going to live on the farm. And the farmer just wouldn't, you know, budge on the issue.

Int Yes...

YC And then I 'phoned this thing, and Moray (Hathorn) got involved and subsequently then the farmer...he lived on the farm till the day that he died. You know, I don't know where did they expect this old man of ninety four years old to go, when he's never been out of that farm, you know, maybe he's been to the neighbouring farm, but, he's never seen a town in his life. He says: I haven't seen a tar road in my life, you know. And this was like in '92, '93. You know these...this type of thing, and then, another old man, also a very old man, his children had all died, he was left with the old lady, farmer came and impounded, I think, thirty two of his cattle, took it away and sold them at an auction.

Int That's theft...

YC Ja, it's theft, but, I mean, at that time, you must remember, the magistrates and all were Afrikaner, they belonged to the same social clubs as the farmers, so there was absolutely nothing you could do. And then Moray (Hathorn) got involved and he actually won the case and they had to replace all those cattle of his, you know? Subsequently, after '94, when things like this used to happen, we had a very...our MEC for Safety and Security was a very brazen fellow, you know, not scared of anything, I think he was from the old school, he was like a gangster, type of thing, you know.

Int What was his name?

YC Steve Mabona, he was MEC for Safety and Security, and during the '94 elections I worked very closely with him because he was deployed to the Piet Retief area. So, we became very good friends. And whenever, at that time, when, you know, when these things happened, when farmers impounded cattle, I used to 'phone Steve directly and tell him: Steve, look, this is what has happened. He used to send a crack team of policemen from Nelspruit from their provincial office, they used to go straight to wherever the cattle are impounded, take those cattle out and bring them back to the farm labourer. So, it was, you know, quick, things were getting done very quickly. Because over and above impounding the cattle, all your cattle are gone, you're still now...the labour tenant, or the farm worker, still had to pay for the transport for the cattle.

Int Right...

YC You know, so, I mean, the cattle were gone, they had no money, and they still had to pay a couple of thousand Rands, they used to charge them I think three or four hundreds Rands per head of cattle. So there were thirty four cattle, you're look at twelve, thirteen thousand Rands for transport costs. You know, so these are the type of things, you know, that stand out where I think even, you know, there was...you must remember, there was a lot of animosity between people living in Driefontein and farm workers, towards whites generally. But, then, with Ilse (Wilson) and Aninka (Claassens) and Moray (Hathorn) and them coming to Driefontein, they saw the other side of, you know, if they...we didn't come into contact...if they didn't come into contact with the...people like this, you know, their...this thing...conception of people would have been that, you know, all whites are the same. So, it changed a lot of views in, you know, about...

Int ...white people.

YC ...white people, you know, forgiveness, and all that, that no, there are some, you know, good...especially, I think, what amazed them most was the fact that here are lawyers that can stand in front of a magistrate or a judge, and they still sleep with us



and they eat with us and they do everything with us, you know? And I think that, you know, opened the minds of people...people locally.

Int Right...

YC You know, so it was amazing, I mean, the work that they did and even, you know, just a handful of people can change views of thousands of people, you know, just by the humanitarian work that they do.

Int Sure.

YC So...

Int Yunus, you are truly one of...if you don't mind me saying so...truly one of the unsung heroes of the struggle, and as Moray (Hathorn) said, I had to interview you, so I'm really grateful for the opportunity, thank you so much.

YC It's my pleasure.

Int (*Interview continues*). You were saying you remember something?

YC I remember something. When Mandela came here in '92, he arrived by helicopter and we had a public meeting at the school grounds and then he came here for lunch. And Mandela had to do an interview with the BBC that day, BBC radio, a live interview, and it was set, I think, for three o'clock, South African time. And, you know, with Mandela coming to Driefontein, the whole world wanted to meet him, so I had lots of family and that, that came from Johannesburg, the uncles and aunts and cousins and everybody (*laughter*) that came the day before, and they all spent the night here, and we put mattresses down, and everybody slept. Next morning everybody's in a hurry, because Mandela is arriving, and we took everything and we dumped it in...you know the little office that I have here, we dumped all the bedding and everything in there. And the morning of Mandela arriving here the soldiers decide to cut the telephone wires...

Int Gosh!

YC ...no mobiles 'phones at the time. So, fortunately, just before that, I think, a few weeks before that, because they'd cut the telephone wires numerous times, and we had no contact with the outside world at all, so I got...it was like...it was not actually a mobile 'phone but it was like a two-way radio that...and not even like a two-way radio, you actually had to...you got onto it and then you get through to the company in

Newcastle, and they then connect you to anywhere in the world on the telephone. So, Mandela now had to do the interview and he says: telephone. We said: no telephone. He says: no, I've got...I have to. You know, and that old man is very, this thing...meticulous with time, you know. I have to do the interview. I said to him: Madiba, we've got this thing here, are you prepared to do it on that, I can...we can connect you somehow. And now, I've got to take him through to the office, and all the bedding and everything is lying there. And my wife started panicking: what's he going to say, you know (*laughs*), how can (*inaudible*), it's just that...and this old man, as cool and calm, went through, and they did his interview on a two-way radio with BBC live...

Int     Amazing!

YC     ...from Driefontein.

Int     Yes! (*Laughter*).

YC     You know it's those certain things that just stick in your mind. Aninka (Claassens) and...I think it was Aninka (Claassens) and Ilse (Wilson), the one day were coming to Driefontein and they decided they're coming through Standerton, Volksrus, there's a gravel road which is much longer than the one you took...this road that you took now, is only twenty five...it used to be gravel until a year ago, it only got tarred recently. They decided to come this way. And I remember a farmer chased them, because they used to come in this particular LRC's car, and the farmers knew the number plate and everything of this car, because they used to see it here in Driefontein, and they chased them, I don't know for how many kilometres and I think Aninka (Claassens) was driving or Ilse (Wilson), one of the two. And they came here, I mean, they're white, but when they got here they were whiter than white, you know, they were in such shock, this farmer chased them right up to about a kilometre from here. You know, and...I mean, this is...these are the things that they went through, you know, to get to Driefontein. I don't know if they remember that incident, but, they came here actually white, white, white with the eyes, you know, just this big.

Int     I will perk Aninka (Claassens)'s memory.

YC     Memory...ja, just find out from her.

Int     Sure.

YC     But, we really tremend...we still in...now and then we talk about the old days and say we have to get all of them together one day, to bring them down to Driefontein and, you know...

Int That'll be a good interview, you should really have a tape recorder. (*Laughs*).

YC Yeah, that would be...ja. And Beauty (Mkhize)...I...in fact I...we spoke to her a few weeks ago about it, and she said to me: no, let my house get built. Because she's busy building her own house. So, she said: let my house get ready so we'll have an excuse to call them. I said: we don't need your house to be ready, if they...we'll have it here. We'll keep in touch with them and try and organise one as soon as possible.

Int That sounds lovely. (*Laughs*). Thank you very much, Yunus.

YC Ok.

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