Ilse Wilson **LRC Oral History Project** **15th July 2008**

Note: Partial Embargo until death or 2015

This interview transcript is substantially edited and certain excerpts are placed under embargo. The audio-recording will not be made available under the embargo.

Int This is an interview with Ilse Wilson and its the 15th July (2008). Ilse, thank you very much on behalf of the SALS Foundation for agreeing to be part of the LRC Oral History Project, we really appreciate it.

IW It's a pleasure.

Int I was wondering whether we could start the interview...if you could talk about your early childhood memories, growing up in South Africa, what were… some of the memories that you hold dear, or some of the memories that may not be that dear and also when do you think your sense of social justice and injustice developed?

IW Well, I grew up in a highly politicised family; I mean my...one of my earliest memories is learning to sing Nkosi Sikelele sitting in the sandpit, with my nanny, in fact. But my parents were both politically active from before my birth, so that was that's where it came from.

Int In terms of your parents…what sort of activity were they involved in? They'd obviously been banned, of course?

IW They were members of the Communist Party and even after it was banned, they were...continued to be members when it was re-formed underground. But my mother particularly, my mother's background was that...she was a...her mother was a missionary's daughter, they were not wealthy, but you never turned a beggar away, you always gave food. And it came from that sort of humanism really, this was her political involvement, and I'm not trying to say she was not a...didn't believe in communism, because she did, but, it was very much a caring for people, that's...that's where it came from.

Int And your parents' background in terms of what they did and how that might have influenced…?

IW Well, my father was Bram Fischer a lawyer, came from a very respectable Afrikaner family. When he was a young man everybody said that he could go far and he could be Chief Justice or Prime Minister, or whatever, but he chose to...another route.

Int Ok. And the type of law he did, was it political trials only?

IW In later years it was political trials, but he also had a very successful commercial practice. He was on a retainer from Anglo American for many years, he was an expert on water law, ya.

Int In terms of… the discourse at home, about people and what was happening in the country, was that from very early on?

IW Very much. Absolutely, right from the start.

Int What are some of your memories about discussions, etc?

IW It wasn't so much discussions, it was just a whole way of being when Moses Kotane came for dinner, he came for dinner, it was no different from Cecil Margo coming for dinner, except it was probably more relaxed when Moses (Kotane) came.

Int Ok.

IW It's just the way they lived, was that all people had rights and yes, obviously, we had domestic help, but it was just the way one treated all people you just...ya.

Int …and you grew up in Johannesburg?

IW Yes.

Int And then went to…in terms of schooling...?

IW Ya, I mean went to...obviously to 'whites only' schools and it was...it was difficult to lead the two lives, almost.

Int In what way exactly?

IW Well, I mean, I was in...still at school when my mother in 1960, was detained in that State of Emergency, what did the little white girls at my school know what this meant. My school friends would come home and find, as I say, usually Moses Kotane, but at weekends the house was open and we had one of the only swimming pools that people on the left could use...

Int Right.

IW ...and there was a continuous stream of people, all weekend, coming. I mean I still meet people, particularly Indians, or people of Indian...or whatever you want to call them, saying: I learnt to swim in your pool. So, it was very much open house, ya.

Int How did you…you say that it was difficult to, kind of, live these two worlds, how did you reconcile these two worlds, because...you went to an ‘all whites’ school and you lived a particular lifestyle, but then at the same time, as a young child, growing up in this home environment that’s open and people of colour were close friends...how did you reconcile the two in your mind, as such?

IW I suppose again my mother made it as easy for us as possible, she would give us...

Int This is you and your siblings?

IW Yes. She would give us, excuses or show us ways around it, she wouldn’t let us change our behaviour, to her friends and colleagues, but, **inaudible**, no, I think one just led separate lives, you had your school friends and your school life and you had your other life which...I was the conformist in the family and I never actually kicked against it, I always accepted that this was right.

Int The system?

IW No, no, what my parents were standing for.

Int Oh right…

IW I never sort of, ya...

Int Rebelled against...?

IW Rebelled against that.

Int In terms of…you mentioned that your mom was detained in the 1960s, was that the first time and for how long?

IW She was detained for three months that was the first detention without trial. So it was very scary, although with later...with what happened later, it was a picnic, I mean, they were kept...well, they were segregated obviously, but all the white women were kept together and, it was…and we could visit them and things like that. But, ya, my father had been arrested in ’46, in 1946, which I don’t remember, I was born in ’43, but that had been, sort of, gentlemen’s agreement, they ‘phoned him and said would he come down to Marshall Square and be arrested. That was the Mine Workers’ strike and the Central Committee (of the Communist Party) were all charged with him.

Int Right, ok. And you mentioned subsequently, that was…the three months detention was relatively easy, what happened subsequently?

IW Well, I mean, my father was then detained later, but very briefly and that's a whole other story, but I mean, detentions then became solitary confinement, torture and that sort of thing, within three years...four years.

Int …and how old were you when this was going on?

IW I was sixteen in...so I could visit my mother, in 1960. On my seventeenth birthday she had picked some violets in the prison yard and she pushed them through the grille.

Int Right, gosh. It's...it must have been very difficult for you in terms of…trying to make sense of this…the…separation from your mom?

IW Ya, as I say, I was quite, I was sixteen and I had to manage the house, because my sister who's older than me, was already away from home. Ya, I believe that one copes in situations and...

Int How do you think that influenced you, in terms of…the kind of work you wanted to do, or your sense of what needed to be done, and...do you think in that way it, in some ways honed you, it made you stronger, tougher?

IW Ya, I'm sure, ya. But, I mean, it...that was, it was all part of the process of growing up like that, that one coped, I mean, I was brought up that if the bus conductor didn't take your ticket, you tore it up yourself.

Int Ok.

IW I don't think I ever did that, but that was...that was what I was being taught, so that one...if one was given too much change in a shop, you went and gave it back.

Int Sure, sure.

IW My mother would…if she saw a fight, (*laughs*), she would always interfere, always assume, of course that the black man was...he was the victim. So that it was, ya, I was sort of...

Int I'm wondering, Ilse…once you'd finished your… schooling and then did you go on to university immediately?

IW Yes, yes.

Int And where did you go?

IW To Cape Town.

Int Right, ok. And the period you went to Cape Town...in terms of student politics etc, what was going on at the University of Cape Town?

IW We had an organisation called The Modern World Society, which I've only relatively recently learnt, because my sister was...she was there before me and she had been instrumental in setting this up, and in fact it was the Communist Party who'd had asked us to...had asked for it to be set up. But it was a very small, very left-wing group on campus, and if we worked together with the liberals, who had their own little group, we could actually sway the whole campus, which teaches you something about student politics. And ya, I was, I suppose in my third year at university when I also joined the Communist Party.

Int Ok.

IW I think the parents let me be approached in Cape Town, Albie Sachs actually...

Int Ok…

IW (*Laughs*)...recruited me and he would probably deny it, but he did. On Clifton Fourth Beach. (*Laughter*).

Int Right. Wonderful. And, so then did you...did you, in terms of the liberal organisation...student organisation…speaking of NUSAS in particular? Had NUSAS been formed at that time?

IW NUSAS was, oh yes, NUSAS was very much part of it. We were a little bit, what...nowadays I suppose we'd be called ultra-left. So, we would work with NUSAS, but not...we weren't sort of, heavy NUSAS members, in fact we were a bit critical because...I can't remember why.

Int NUSAS had the reputation certainly from certain quarters, of being this all-white student body...

IW Ya.

Int But of course…that split had occurred with Steve Biko in...

IW Well, that was much later.

Int Yes…

IW I'm talking early sixties.

Int Early sixties, right.

IW Ya...I was at university from '61.

Int Was Margie Marshall part of ...at NUSAS at that time?

IW She was.

Int Right and she was NUSAS president?

IW Ya.

Int Ok. I wonder whether you could talk a bit about…Margie Marshall and did you...did The Modern World Society, for example, work with her, what were the kind of, ideological differences really?

IW I'm not even sure any more. (*Laughs*). I think...ya. I mean, Margie (Marshall) was based here so we didn't...I didn't see a great deal of her because I was not involved in NUSAS, because as I said, I think it was just seen as it was liberal and it sold out a bit, ya, because it was well before (Steve) Biko; Biko was ten years later.

Int Yes, of course…

IW We were quite close to people like Fikile Bam, who also of course went through the LRC. But he was a student at UCT, (and part of the Unity Movement), who were all very critical of NUSAS.

Int Sure.

IW Ya.

Int What were some of the criticisms that you can remember that were very specific in terms of the politics of the day…?

IW Can't remember.

Int Ok. And so after university, what happened?

IW Well, in my...in ’64, I took four years over my degree, my mother died and my father was arrested...

Int Right…

IW ...the wheels fell off.

Int Right…

IW And everybody I’d ever worked with politically underground, was detained. I mean, if I weren’t my father’s daughter, I think they would have pointed fingers at me. (*Laughs*). I just think because...I don’t know why it was...

Int When your mom passed away, was that…through detention, or was that...?

IW No, no, it was terrible, my father led the Rivonia Trial.

Int Yes and he was working with Joel Joffe?

IW Ya.

Int I’ve interviewed Joel Joffe…

IW Ya. And he...and then they were coming down to Cape Town...the trial ended and the following day they were coming to Cape Town, partly for my birthday, and partly to consult with the trialists about whether they should go on appeal or not. And they had a car crash and my mother died in it.

Int Gosh…

IW And then...about two weeks later, that was mid June that she died, and about two weeks later, the mass arrests started, this is ’64 we’re talking about.

Int Right, and your dad was detained?

IW He was detained very briefly, for about three days, and then they let him out and then they went to other detainees and said: look, he’s talked, why don’t you talk? I don’t know why they behaved like that. And then...that was early July and by September he was re-arrested and charged. But as I say, everybody that I had worked with underground was detained.

Int And he was charged...?

IW Mm.

Int And so how many years…?

IW No, he was charged initially with being a member of the Communist Party and then he escaped bail, went underground, was charged with being a member of the High Command, got life, but died after nine years.

Int Right, in prison…

IW Well, they let him go to his brother's house which...but he was still a prisoner.

Int Right, ok, so it was house arrest?

IW It was, ya, but in Bloemfontein, they wouldn't let him come here because they said that...

Int And could you have access to him?

IW Only once he was at the house.

Int Right, ok. So that was…a very traumatic time, from '64 onwards?

IW Ya, those late sixties were very tough. Political organisations had been smashed; it was terribly difficult to have any contact with black comrades, because, the oppression was so severe. I've got my Security Branch...well, I've got my justice files, but because I kept applying for passports, there are a lot of Security Branch reports in that. It just...it just shows how much monitoring there was, I mean, 'phone calls, visits such and such a date, so and so 'phoned, so and so came to visit, they went to visit. So, it was very severe surveillance, it was...ya. So, ya, those were tough years.

Int Right. And had you trained to be a lawyer at that point?

IW In '65 I started doing law.

Int Ok.

IW I couldn't get Articles...that was before my father went underground, he walked with me around to every law firm to try and get Articles, but he was on trial and quite often the excuse was: we don't employ women.

Int Right…

IW Anyhow then he went underground, so you can imagine, it was even more difficult. Finally Werkmans, I mean, for...there was somebody there who was very sympathetic, and they employed me briefly. They actually wanted a secretary but they...a typist, but they could pay a clerk less, so they paid me R35.00 a month, or whatever it was.

Int So did you do an LLB then?

IW No, I gave up after that...then at the end of that year, when my father was arrested and it was quite clear that I'd been supporting him all the way through it...I was listed, in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act, and partly that, partly Werkmens had made me do debt-collecting, which is enough to turn anybody off the law.

Int Right.

IW I looked for something safe where I could probably get employment, so I did librarianship the next year, I did a postgraduate diploma, you could.

Int Mm. And then you started...did you start working elsewhere before you came to the LRC?

IW Yes, I worked at Wits; the public library wouldn't employ me.

Int Gosh…

IW They used the fact that it was a closed shop, that I would have to belong to the union, and in terms of my listing I couldn't belong to the union. But again, one can find an excuse, anyhow Wits finally...look it was the late sixties, it was boom years, people could walk into jobs. So, finally Wits employed me and I...no, they were good to me.

Int Right. And at what point did you make the transition... the LRC started in 1979, so, prior to that you'd been working at Wits?

IW I'd been working at Wits, then the children were born in '77 and '79, and when the second one was, sort of, two-ish...I...or a bit more, in fact, I needed something more to do, and Colleen Taylor...does this name come up in your interviews?

Int No…

IW Ask Cecilie (Palmer) about Colleen, Colleen Taylor was the first admin person at the LRC...

Int Oh, really...

IW ...and she really was extraordinarily efficient and set up things...she died some several...many years ago, but she was quite remarkable in her organisational ability, and she was a friend of mine, and she wanted me to work there. So she would come to me and tell me Arthur (Chaskalson) wanted me...I mean, I'd known Arthur (Chaskalson), obviously since the Rivonia Trial, and so I'd known them well all these years. And then she'd go to Arthur (Chaskalson) and tell him that I wanted to work there (*laughter*). I was doing some part time work at Wits, but for the SRC rather than for the library. Anyhow, the long and the short of it is that she finally...

Int ...got her way?

IW ...got her way, and I went to the LRC as a librarian.

Int Right. And those were the early days, so when did you start at the LRC?

IW That must have been about 80...ya, '82, '83.

Int Ok. So this is a very important time for the LRC because this is when they were really dealing with the Rikhoto Case, Tom Rikhoto and the Komani Case, I wonder whether you could talk a bit about that?

IW No, because I wasn't...I then left...

Int Oh, you did…

IW ...and went overseas for a couple of years, when those cases were being fought.

Int Right…

IW But then I came back in '86, and what had happened was that I had put somebody in my job to keep it for me when I came back, but she'd had to leave because it was a part-time job and she needed full-time work because her husband had been retrenched, and she'd passed it on to yet another person, and that person didn't realise it was my job. So when I came back, there wasn't actually a job for me, but Geoff (Budlender), who had actually stayed with us when he was separating from his first wife and (and I think felt obliged to re-employ me) he said: why don't you come and

see the people who come through the front door and assist them? The Hoek Street Clinic was still functioning...

Int Right, that was with Morris Zimmerman…?

IW ...and Pinkie (Madlala) was doing that with...yes...Zim.

Int Zimmerman, yes.

IW Mr. Zim we used to call him. There's a book to be written just on Zim.

Int Do you want to talk a bit about that, about Zim and Pinkie (Madlala)?

IW Ya. Let me just finish why I got in. So then, ya, the idea was that I would screen the clients as they came in to see what was...what should go on to a lawyer and what...and I mean I really had to learn as I was going because the pensions and the UIF and the Workmen's Comp. and that kind of thing, I could then start handling myself. But, theoretically there was a lawyer who supervised me and he didn't actually, there wasn't a great deal of supervision. I can't remember when Hoek Street Clinic closed.

Int Around 1984, '85…

IW Ya, because I think I was already at the LRC and then...because then Pinkie (Madlala) came, Pinkie and Zim, who were the, sort of, mainstays of the...of the Hoek Street Clinic, came into the National...into the Jo'burg office. And, I mean, Zim (Morris Zimmerman) used to say he was working harder than he'd ever worked in private practice. He came to Arthur (Chaskalson) when Arthur (Chaskalson) set up...when they set up the LRC, and he said: this is work I want to do, I'll come, you don't have to pay me, I'll just come and work, it's what I've been wanting to do all my life.

Int Right.

IW And he was just absolutely remarkable, in his nurturing of the young lawyers, of the Fellows, I mean, if you speak to Mahomed (Navsa)...

Int Yes…

IW ...have you spoken to Mahomed (Navsa)?

Int I have, yes.

IW I mean, he loved Zim (Morris Zimmerman), and you could always go into Zim's office and shout and say: look, this is terrible what do I do about it? And he...he once said to me: I'm just pleased that there are young people who still have passion about things.

Int … he obviously understood the nature of public interest law and he…he wanted to engage and he was willing to do it pro bono. That to me indicates the kind of progressive thinking, but I'm just wondering, when you were there early on, did you have a sense that the legal fraternity actually understood what the Legal Resources was trying to do and was there support for it?

IW I didn't mix much with the legal fraternity.

Int Right, ok.

IW Although I do remember being very rude to somebody who had been a judge for many years, at a dinner party, (*laughter*), saying to him ...he was still a lawyer...

Int I hope it wasn't a Trustee? (*Laughs*).

IW No, it wasn't a Trustee, no, no, I've learnt to keep my tongue, with the Trustees (*laughs*), no, it was...trying to think of his name, but I...it escapes me at the moment...but it doesn't matter, it was, somebody...some respectable lawyer.

Int Right…

IW Ya, so I'm not sure that there was a huge amount of sympathy for the LRC. I think the point...the fact that it was Arthur (Chaskalson) made a big difference, if it had not had Arthur's (Chaskalson) gravitas there, I think it would have been much less successful.

Int You were there during Arthur Chaskalson's stewardship, I'm wondering whether you could talk a bit about that, what made Arthur Chaskalson…what made the LRC function in a particular way, under Arthur Chaskalson, do you think?

IW I think Arthur (Chaskalson) led by example.

Int Right. How would you describe him?

IW How would I describe him?

Int Yes…

IW Look, I saw only gentle, good Arthur (Chaskalson). I don't know if there's another side of him...

Int No, of course.

IW ...because...perhaps of a history. But, I remember we had mutual friends in Harare, and Hugh, wrote to Arthur (Chaskalson) and asked for some sheet music, or something, could Arthur (Chaskalson) see that it got…assuming that Arthur (Chaskalson) would send a secretary out to do it, but, he didn't, he went out and bought it himself, it's that kind of thing. He was so upright. This was a private matter, you didn't send your secretary out to go and buy something for a friend. I think the standards that were set in those days, of being absolutely thorough, you never cut corners just because your clients were poor and weren't paying you. And again, as I say, that was...well and Geoff (Budlender) also, but, this is how they worked and they expected everybody else to work like this, and in those early days that is exactly what happened. I mean, it would be hard work late at night; you never went into a case unprepared.

Int What about Felicia Kentridge…what was her role in the LRC, she was really part of the whole group that started the LRC?

IW She was, and I think she was more of a, sort of, PR person. She was very good at speaking to funders, that sort of thing, she...ya. My memory's not so good...but she didn't really, sort of, get involved in the cases as much as I...as I remember. I don't know if that's...

Int Sure…

IW ...the impression you get from elsewhere. I mean Colleen (Taylor) used to be very rude about her and say that she didn't like to use the loo after clients had used it, and things like that (*laughs*). Would come out and complain if the towels were dirty.

Int Right…

IW But I don't...I mean, I think that was just... Colleen (Taylor) was also a difficult person.

Int Right. So, you went abroad and then you came back and then you started working as a paralegal, and you'd had some legal training at…you'd worked at Werkmens and...

IW Ya, but very little.

Int Sure. At that point the LRC was really...the lines were long, from what I can gather, and people were coming in and it was a range of issues. The focus areas hadn't really

started, what were the types of cases that would come through the door and how did you evaluate them in terms of impact and high impact, etc?

IW Ya, I mean, one looked for cases that were a matter of law, of... other than just sort of administrative stuff. But I'm not sure that there were many that came through the door, that went on, obviously if I couldn't handle it, it would...it would need to go to somebody else, even if it was...and in the early days, we did a lot of the administrative stuff, I mean, we took on the Unemployment Insurance Fund and issues that one would...ya, we were...it was much more broadly spread so that one would deal with all these cases, I think...and later years after I left, I think they became much more picky and it had to...ya. But in those early days, and particularly the Hoek Street Clinic, you just...you helped everybody who came through the door.

Int Right. So…you stayed until 1993...?

IW Mm.

Int At what point did you start working with the Driefontein community?

IW I can't remember.

Int …was it…

IW But I could probably, I could find it out. What happened was that Ingrid de Villiers, as she was then, she changes her name regularly...

Int Ingrid Wlotzka?

IW Is that what she is now?

Int I am not sure…

IW She should just go back to Lewin, which was her maiden name. She is a lawyer and she was running the law clinic at...in Driefontein, and...

Int The law clinic, was that attached to the LRC? Was it part of the LRC?

IW Well, it wasn't a law clinic, I mean, it was...ya...

Int An advice centre?

IW An advice centre, really.

Int Right…

IW And, I think she was pregnant and so couldn't go, so the first time she just gave me all her files with meticulous notes in them, she was a very meticulous worker. And I just went out with Aninka (Classens) to be there...to talk through the files. Now I'd had obviously quite a lot of experience in administrative stuff and a lot of the Driefontein stuff was the run-of-the-mill stuff. That was already the...Land Claim had already been settled by the time I went.

Int Right….

IW So it was shortly after that.

Int Right, ok. Now, Aninka Classens did she work for the LRC…at all?

IW No, she was working for TRAC, which was a branch of the Black Sash.

Int Sure… and so you really were representing the LRC?

IW Ya.

Int And then in terms of legal counsel, was that Moray Hathorn at that point or was it someone else?

IW Moray (Hathorn) came later.

Int Ok.

IW I can't remember who did it initially. Because I started with Paul Pretorius and Karel Tip and Charlie (Nupen) were still there, so...

Int Right…

IW And I don't remember them ever being involved in Driefontein. Geoff (Budlender) was probably...

Int Yes, I think it was…

IW ...involved, in those early days.

Int Sure, because he gave his files to Moray Hathorn, so it probably was Geoff (Budlender), yes.

IW Yes, ya.

Int Can you talk a bit about Driefontein and the type of work that was going on, and what were some of the difficulties, issues, etc?

IW I must tell you about my first visit there. So, we get there and we stay with Beauty Mkhize. Now, I'm an urban girl so this was all new to me. Aninka's (Classens) not a morning person but by half past five in the morning, I can already hear people, and the house is surrounded by people who have come...because at that stage we worked actually in Beauty's (Mkhize's) home.

Int You were operating from there?

IW Ya. So, I mean, it was extraordinary, but anyhow we then...we spent two days initially, seeing people, and going through their files, and then, this is just a nice little aside, and this was my first...I hadn't met...known Aninka (Classens) before then. And then when we finished working she said: oh, well, by the way, I'm staying in Driefontein, so you just take my car, we were in her car, and find your way back, and you turn left and right and whatever, but she said: be careful because if you go wrong, there are quite a lot of land mines on the roads around here. So of course, on my way home, I go wrong immediately and I'm finding myself on all these dirt roads, (*laughs*).

Int Gosh…

IW Anyhow, so then Ingrid (de Villiers), as I say, was pregnant and I...so I started going regularly and just managing the cases because they were all...well...ninety-five percent were run of the mill stuff. No, ninety percent. But then there were all these hideous labour tenant cases, and that's really when Moray (Hathorn) started getting involved in this stuff, where people were being evicted.

Int By the farmers…?

IW By the farmers, and by the big…the timber companies.

Int I'm also wondering Ilse, because, it wasn't just the cases...about Driefontein, there were some serious political undercurrents and things happening because of political affiliation?

IW There were, but we all, I mean, we were quite good at keeping the legal work we were doing, as clean as possible. And in fact, in later years, we learnt about much more political activity that was happening there, than we were aware of at the time. I mean, people were coming in...MK guys were coming in across the border and...

Int Moray Hathorn mentioned someone who was like a father figure to him, was actually an MK person, or housed people…

IW Baba Zwane or, ya, but Zwane was in fact in Amsterdam. That's right we used to do two days, so we'd go to Amsterdam and then we'd go to Driefontein.

Int Right…

IW Um, ya, but I mean, I, fairly recently met a young man who said he'd come across the border and he used to play soccer with….a very nice man called Amin Cajee...no, not Amin, Yusuf.

Int Yusuf Cajee and his wife.

IW And his wife, who were, I think ANC operatives.

Int Right…

IW Very supportive of the community, if ever we needed something, we could 'phone them.

Int What were some of the difficulties about being in Driefontein? What were some of the challenges as such, because it seems to me that…from my interview with Moray Hathorn, that there had...there was a lot going on there?

IW Ya, look, I mean, the...legally it was this problem of the labour tenants, which I am sure Moray's (Hathorn's) told you about. Although I remember the first case...did he tell you about the Sheepmore case?. The magistrate's court was a room in a, sort of, police station about this size, so there was no space for observers, and these guys were charged with trespassing...and I can't remember what...and Moray (Hathorn) went in, in his batman outfit, I think the magistrate was so completely confused that he said: yes, yes, whatever you want (*Laughter*). And negotiating with the timber companies, because they were really awful, I mean, they would kick people off the land, and... trying to keep people on the land, I mean, that was the big issue, was trying to keep people on the land and keep some of their cattle.

Int What are some of your memories of working with Geoff (Budlender), for example, in the early days, before Moray (Hathorn) took over?

IW You see, I don't really remember that. What I think Ingrid (de Villiers) did the, sort of, legal stuff, initially.

Int Right.

IW And you see, very often, once it went to the lawyer, then I was left out of it.

Int Right, ok. But…you were really the first person, the port of call...

IW Ya, mm.

Int ...and I'm wondering, in terms of the cases, do you have memories of specific cases that were really horrific or that you felt the LRC would make a difference in, and in fact did?

IW Look, I think we made a huge difference in ordinary people's smallish concerns. I mean, I...by the end, I had set up a system where I could 'phone...I could 'phone a bank in Piet Retief and say: has my client's money come into the bank account? Because they knew that it would cost the client too much to go and check for themselves, and they would tell me.

Int Right…

IW I mean, they shouldn't be telling me.

Int Right, exactly.

IW And yes, the Unemployment Insurance people...I got to know all the people that I needed to, so I had very good relations with them and would, would just call them and say, what's happening here? So, yes, I mean, to get a Workmen's Comp. claim or Unemployment Insurance for a couple of thousand rand for somebody, in the greater scheme of things isn't important, but for those people, it made a huge difference.

Int Right...

IW And just the fact that they knew what their rights were and that it was...so it was very much part of Driefontein, people saying: here we are, we're staying here, we've won the battle to stay, and this is part of our struggle. There were a group of elders and they would have meetings which ninety percent of which I didn't understand because it was all in Zulu, but ya, I mean, they saw it as an extension of their struggle. But, I was sort of a minor cog.

Int You say that Ilse, but that's not according to everyone else I've interviewed, because your name comes up quite a bit…in interviews with other people in terms of the work that you did, and the dedication that you actually applied to it....you were at a time at the LRC which was…really under Arthur (Chaskalson) and then Geoff (Budlender), and I wondered whether that in fact made a difference, because, in fact, you could see all these cases, that isn't the case any more. The LRC *has* really specialised …due to funding.

IW Ya, I mean it might... and I think they also felt that they needed to specialise, the Driefontein thing was a, sort of, historic hand-over from the struggle to remain on the land, and then we gave support, and I think because Geoff (Budlender) had been so involved in that struggle, he was happy to give this support. And the labour tenant stuff was an important part of the work that we did, and so you needed to be able to get that, although we had people in both Driefontein, and (Baba) Zwane in Amsterdam who would bring us cases, I mean, who were familiar enough with what needed to be done.

Int Sure. You mentioned Beauty Mkhize….I was told to ask you more about Beauty Mkhize and her role and how she might have helped you?

IW Well she was, we used to stay with her…

Int Right…

IW She was very much part of that group of village elders, village leaders, I'm not quite sure... they were probably an ANC cell, they never told us that but they were the leaders who made decisions about what happened in the community, and she was really there because her husband had been a community leader and then, he was shot by the police, and that was the turning point in their battle for staying.

Int Really…

IW Mm.

Int Ok, and is that the point at which LRC became involved?

IW Ya, well, they became involved in the land struggle, in the struggle to keep them there, I mean Geoff (Budlender) was very much involved in that, he was always said that…sadly saw (Saul)Mkhize who was the man who was shot; probably his death was what...

Int Turned it around…

IW ...turned it. All this...a lot of circumstances around why the government...they also, sort of decided, it's enough now, trying to get rid of black spots.

Int I'm curious because you've had this very strong political leanings and background and you were listed, and the kind of work you did had political undertones, there's no doubt about it, but...I wonder how you...did you continue your activism in particular ways, or...?

IW Not hugely, I mean, what one could, one did. I was a bit too obvious to be a safe house, although people used the house at the time. In the early days before the children came and we would go out for work, Joe Gqabi, John Nkademeng, Eli Weinberg, all had keys to the house and they would come here during the day when there was nobody here, have their meetings in the garden here. I mean, these are...but...ya, and, so that...

Int I'm wondering...

IW Mm, not hugely active politically after that, ya.

Int So by 1993, what was the decision for you to leave, what happened?

IW I was getting burnout, somebody would come through the door and I'd think: I actually don't care about your problem, I don't want to hear your problem.

Int Right.

IW And that's what social workers do, you see, I mean we would sometimes see up to a hundred people in Driefontein. But even...and then, I would go...once a month to Driefontein but I would also still be doing...seeing people in Jo'burg, I mean, obviously much less. And ya...I just got tired of peoples' problems and also...

The ensuing portion of the interview (3 paragraph) was removed upon the interviewee's request.

Int Right. Do you think that was a racial kind of sense or was it because there had been this kind of grouping…and there were these tensions...between different people, do you think that you were then placed...positioned in a particular category?

IW Ya, I think Mahomed (Navsa) did see things in black and white terms. I, I think when he first came and there was that clique of Charlie (Nupen) and Paul (Pretorius) and...who was the third one?

Int Karel (Tip).

IW Karel (Tip)

Int The NUSAS group…

IW The NUSAS group, ya. That it was quite difficult for Mahomed (Navsa) to break into that. Ya, and he did...

Int But you weren't part of the NUSAS group at all?

IW No, I wasn't, but I was Arthur's (Chaskalson's) friend and Geoff's (Budlender's) friend.

Int Right, ok. So what were some of the tensions in the Johannesburg office at the time that you were there?

IW Well, there were those tensions, Mahomed (Navsa) with a chip on his shoulder, I don't know if you understand what it was like to be black, which is true, I didn't but, I did understand what it was like to have them knock on the door at midnight, 4 am…and that, that wasn't only towards me.

Int He was generally extremely hard on the black Fellows. I wondered whether you got a sense of that?

IW He...I think he saw himself as following in Arthur's (Chaskalson's) footsteps of setting high standards.

Int Right.

IW I mean, is this the black Fellows who tell you that he was hard on them?

Int I think both groups do.

IW Um, so, I don't...I mean, I think that that's where it came from, that he actually...he cared deeply; he wanted black Fellows to succeed.

Int Oh, they do say that. Yes, of course.

IW So that, yes, he would then say, the red pencil almost came through stuff that was written, I mean, ya. But that was not malicious, that was to try and get them to...

Int Become better lawyers.

IW Become better lawyers, ya.

Int Right. So, you left in 1993 and then…you said partly because of...?

IW It was '94.

Int ...you said partly it was because Mahomed (Navsa) had become Director?

IW No, he was...as I said I'd lasted the four years and it was almost as if I don't want to give him the satisfaction of chasing me away.

Int Right, right.

IW So, Thandi (Orleyn) had already taken over from him and I got on very well with Thandi (Orleyn), and, I mean, I...I would not have minded working under Thandi (Orleyn), but somebody just approached me and offered me something else, so, as I said...it was much more the...that I knew I had actually burnt out on this job. And not being a lawyer, meant that you could never take it...

Int ...to another level?

IW ...to another level...

Int Right.

IW So as soon as it got interesting, you've got to hand it over.

Int That must have been frustrating? Because I'm sure there's a concern at some level for what happens to the client ultimately?

IW Ya, but, it was perhaps my own lethargy, there was nothing to stop me doing a law degree later on, I could even...being listed, I could have practised as an attorney, I think, I don't think...I think it was only...no, I could have practised as an advocate, but I mean, I also don't, I don't have it in me to be a lawyer, I'm not a...

Int ….Arthur (Chaskalson) strikes me as a very cautious man and yet he didn't really mind the fact that you were listed?

IW He loved Bram (Fischer).

Int Right.

IW And because I came in as a librarian, which is also quite a safe, sort of thing to do. And there were big advantages in not being a lawyer, I mean, this again might have to be edited out. When I think of Aninka (Classens) and I sitting there doing affidavits that we probably knew were not true, (*laughter*) helping people out with what age they were, so that they could get pensions. We sat and wrote out these affidavits in longhand with...I mean, it was before laptops, and so you'd write an affidavit out in longhand with carbon paper that I was born, I was so old at the time of Hitler's war, we had all these Black Sash with this wonderful form of dates so that you knew that the Rindepest was so and so, the great 'flu, the this, the that, so that you could date people. We'd do these affidavits and get people pensions.

Int Ok, right. So you...you left at a very interesting time in the history of the country as well? Where did you go thereafter?

IW I went into an organisation that I still do some work for, called the Mvula Trust, which deals in water and sanitation. I mean, there's no knowledge of anything that...again you see this is nepotism...the man who was directing it was a Director, was a friend of mine, he just came to me and he said: I know you understand rural people, because I'd now been working in Driefontein for all these years, why don't you come...

Int Well, he was right. (*Laughs*).

IW ...do a bit of training...Ya, look I think, you must find somewhere there's an article called: "The Lawyer and the Field Worker", which was written before Geoff (Budlender) and Aninka (Classens) got together and separated and got together again, when they worked together. And it just describes how well they worked, I mean, Aninka, I don't think has ever read Paolo Freire, but she works in that way. Has an extraordinary ability to listen to people, to hear people, to get things out of people, um, really remarkably so, and I learnt from her. I learnt, how one can get stories, that one doesn't need to...And the contrast was so stark with...somebody like Odette Geldenhuys, I don't know if you...

Int I've met her…

IW Met her, but she...lovely person, caring...she took over from Moray (Hathorn) in Driefontein at one stage, but she was a lawyer, she cross-examined people and got far less out of them than Aninka (Classens) did. Aninka (Classens) of course is also a very good linguist, so she could do it all in Zulu.

Int Right…

IW And, so ya, we...I learnt a huge amount there, and loved going there, and loved being there and being accepted, and I mean, there were times we did all sorts of things. There was a wonderful time...we went to the shebeen, I don't know why we went to the shebeen, with Beauty (Mkhize). And everybody there insisted on buying us a drink, and by the time we'd finished (*laughs*), and... Beauty (Mkhize) was also...sometimes we'd have this huge meal and sometimes we'd have no food at all.

Int Right…

IW But...

Int It sounds like you immersed yourself in that kind of…

IW Absolutely, and then Aninka (Classens) left and I was left on my own there. Well, I used to take the Fellows down.

Int Do you remember the Fellows in particular?

IW Dunstan. Dunstan (Mlambo –now a senior judge)..and we got there terribly late the one night when we were going there and got stuck in the mud, and I just got out and left the car, and we walked to Beauty's (Mkhize's) house and we got there and I said

I...and Beauty (Mkhize) and Dunstan (Mlambo) said: no, no, we can't leave the car, so they went and found the car and pushed it out of the mud while I sat in Beauty's (Mkhize's) house, I was finished (*laughs*), I think we'd worked the full day in Amsterdam first. Shirley Walsh...Welsh...Walsh...

Int That name…

IW ...who then ran the Wits Law Clinic, the rural...they had a rural law clinic.

Int Right. And she worked at the LRC as a Fellow?

IW She worked at the LRC as a Fellow.

Int Right.

IW I'm trying to think...I mean...a lot of them came. Ya, so...but those are the two that really stick out in my mind.

Int When you were working as a paralegal at the Legal Resources Centre, what was your relationship with Black Sash, I know Aninka (Classens) came through TRAC, but in terms of people like Sheena Duncan etc, the Black Sash office?

IW The Black Sash office, Sheena (Duncan) wasn't actually in the office at the time, I don't think. I'm trying to think who was there.

Int I know she was there earlier on, during the Komani ...

IW No, no, I mean, we worked very closely with them and with the Johannesburg advice office, was that what it was called?

Int Legal Aid…

IW Where Goldblatt...what's her first name...Lily (Goldblatt) worked there. So we would refer cases to each other, we would take advice from each other, we would...ya...I can't help this person, can you? All the time, all the time. We would never do stuff that wasn't public interest, so if we got somebody who had a reasonable gripe against another individual we would send them up to the Johannesburg advice centre, I think the Black Sash did those. So that...ya...no, no...very, very cordial relations with them both.

Int Right.

IW And I mean, there was also...I'm just one...sort of...wasn't an incident but it was the time, after Rikhoto, we got this flood of people...

Int Section Ten.

IW The Section Tens, I don't know if you've heard those stories where they'd come on a Thursday, and it was just when word processors were first invented, and we had this room about this size with these huge machines, and we would sit typing 'my name is...and it was usual a Venda name...I'm permanently resident in bed 236, Hostel Five. And then we would send them off to the pass office to get their 10 1b stamps.

Int Those must have made just enormous differences in people's lives?

IW Ya, ya. But I mean, it was...it was this awfulness of saying: I'm permanently resident...and then there was this woman, Mary Hope who came and helped us, she was a volunteer, an English woman, and she would come on Thursdays and help. And one day, she gave the wrong ID book to the wrong man, and they would come and we'd say: here, take this letter and here's your pass, go to the pass office and...And we realised that she'd given the wrong book, and Mahomed (Navsa) and I ran and the pass office was right at the other end of town, because we thought that he might think that this... he'd been given a new identity, he was going to get there and what's he going to say? (*Laughs*). Anyhow he'd had the sense to look and see it wasn't his book, and came back.

Int Good for him. (*Laughs*).

IW But, ya, I mean, it was...it was a sausage machine, but it made a difference to people.

Int Absolutely… one of the legacies of the LRC, is that quite early on, the approach that they took, even though they did do…Mr. Zim (Zimmerman) and the office as well, look at the ordinary person that came through the door, there was this test case approach that had been adopted from the US, and just those two rulings, Rikhoto and Komani, and then there were additional, but those alone, made such a huge impact.

IW Ya, ya.

Int I'm wondering, give that you have some legal training and certainly you have a legal background, I'm wondering, Ilse, if…under apartheid, parliament was supreme, did you ever feel that the law could be used to actually challenge apartheid effectively. For example the Rikhoto case, it could have...parliament could have overturned a victory like that, but it didn't. What's your sense of what was going on?

IW Goodness me, I've never thought of that.

Int Mm. Also...by 1989, change was starting to happen… influx control was dying away, etc, what was your sense, did you have a sense, given your political background, that things were changing and that there would come this end of apartheid, or was it...or did it really surprise you?

IW It happened much more quickly than I imagined. We had a wonderful opportunity of going to Cuba in 1989...it's a long story...in '88 I'd gone with my friend, Sheila; I'd said if I get a passport...our passports were only valid for Europe.

Int Right.

IW And then in '88 we got passports valid for the rest of the world, and we...I'd said to my friend, whose mother was in exile, I would come with her to see her, so, we set off to go and see Violet Weinberg in exile and we passed through Lusaka because that's the only way you get to the Dar on a South African passport, the ANC has to see you through, and we sit with Ray Alexander, and...the long and the short is that she organises a trip for me to Cuba.

Int So via Dar es Salaam?

IW No, this is not immediately...

Int Oh, after …

IW No, she says: would you like to go to Cuba? I say: I would kill to go to Cuba. Anyhow, at the end of the conversation she says: what about Tim (Wilson)? I said: well, Tim (Wilson) will divorce me if I go to Cuba without him, but it's worth it. (*Laughter*). Anyhow, the long and the short is a year later, we get a message saying: come to Harare in a week's time. And we get to Cuba via Luanda where we get stuck for thirty-six hours in the airport, which is a nightmare in itself, and then we get counted out, it's the Cuban soldiers going back from Angola, who had fought at Cuito Cuanavale. So, we think there's still two soldiers left in Angola because we were ticked out by the UN. Anyhow, we get to Cuba, and this is now September '89, and FW's just come into power, and as part of the deal we obviously have to talk to the Institute...African Asian Institute or something, and they ask us how we feel about change and we say: no, it's...he's coming from the military, he's the same as the rest, it's not going to make a difference. And two months later, they were starting to release people. So, we were...I suppose because...partly because of what we were still both seeing...

Int Absolutely…

IW ...on the ground, the change wasn't hitting the poor people of Driefontein or, ok, maybe a miner, resident in bed 27 is secure there, but, I mean, what a security.

Int Right. So, but you also were listed, but you were allowed to travel by then?

IW Ya.

Int So that had fallen away at some stage?

IW Well the listing didn't stop...the passport and the listing didn't...

Int ...coincide...?

IW ...didn't necessarily coincide.

Int Right. And so when change happened?

IW I mean, that's another story about Arthur (Chaskalson), and we hear these rumours now on...what was it...when did he make his speech about unbanning organisations?

Int I'm not sure.

IW And Arthur (Chaskalson) quietly...so we're hearing these rumours and Vesta (Smith) is running around looking for a radio (*laughter*), and Arthur (Chaskalson) just quietly goes out and buys a newspaper, he doesn't send anybody, he goes out and buys the newspaper.

Int This is February?

IW This is February...February 2, wasn't it February 2?

Int Ya, February, the 2nd 1990.

IW Ya. And comes back and finds us all clustered around Vesta's (Smith's) radio, Vesta (Smith) and I are hugging each other and weeping. (*Laughs*).

Int What a memory.

IW Ya, I mean, you've spoken to Vesta (Smith)?

Int Ma Vesta (Smith), yes, I've interviewed her.

IW But, again, it's the modesty of just quietly going and doing it yourself…

Int And you left by 1993?

IW ’94.

Int ’94. But, Arthur (Chaskalson) had left by then?

IW Arthur (Chaskalson) had left by then, yes.

Int From what I can gather from other people, the dilemma that presented itself for the LRC was that it had very much supported the ANC in its own way, because it was…aligned to the anti-apartheid movement, etc, there was this dilemma of an ANC government coming into power. I’m wondering what your understanding was of how the LRC would operate from then on?

IW Look, I think, it was easy to operate in opposition.

Int Exactly yes…

IW Yes, it is much more difficult when a democratic government comes in, to be fighting them, and I think the LRC’s actually done quite a good job in adapting to this. But, ya, and I think that that’s also due to, sort of, very good foundations that have been set by Arthur (Chaskalson) and Geoff (Budlender). But, you see, I left just at the time it was changing and not because of that, but because of...ya, really burn out, I suppose...

Int You… went on to do a similar type of job, in a way, you did deal with rural people and…?

IW Ya, it was a much more positive job, I mean, you...had I had that opportunity when I was twenty-five, I...with hindsight, that’s where...development work...and particular the early days, at Mvula before, I mean, they’ve now legislated so much and there’s so much bloody red tape. But when we first started putting water into rural communities, we’d put money into their bank accounts, they ran...they ran the...

Int ...the local community.

IW ...the local community. So it was lovely stuff to do.

Int What’s changed?

IW It’s now municipal responsibility.

Int Ok.

IW And municipalities are very jealous of their rights and responsibilities and they don't want village committees to be...seen to be in control, which is very sad because, municipalities have got hundreds of villages, why not use the local community structures to manage it? Teach somebody in the village to learn to manage the pump and become pump operators, but they're employed by the…by the municipality, rather have them responsible to some kind of village structure.

Int And is that because of an ANC-based approach, or is that just generally, how...?

IW I don't think it's that the ANC has thought through, as far as that, I think it's... one of the problems with the new government is that we...they're trying to have perfect policies and perfect systems, and we spend all our energy on that instead of just actually getting on and...

Int ...and getting things done.

IW ...getting things done. Um, I think the whole training field with these SETAs and the NQF has been disastrous for people actually getting trained in this country.

Int So what impact does all of this have then on civil society? Because the funding, from what I can gather, is going straight to government.

IW No, civil society's smashed, we're trying...what's interesting is that in water, there's been a lot of EU funding which has gone to government, but twenty percent is supposed to go through civil society, and we're battling...they use Mvula because we are an NGO and they're trying to use us, to bring other civil society…a bit belated because it should have been happening all along.

Int Sure.

IW But, your civil society...and then because of the clumsiness of processes, you don't get paid, you can't expect some little civil society organisation to work and not be reimbursed for what they've spent. So, that there's no understanding that if you're working with poor organisations, you've got to support them. So that's one of the big things. Also all the tender procedures, I mean even Mvula, which is a very big organisation and has a good reputation. We don't have shareholders, we're not a company, so we lose points, our BEE points because...ya, we could put out our Trustees, but that doesn't help, they want to know who our shareholders are, we don't have shareholders. So it's those sort of things, and I think...I think the ANC government has emasculated civil society by also saying: we'll provide. This is our...we must provide water, I mean, initially we had people digging trenches, providing labour, sweat equity, that kind of thing, it doesn't happen any more. But where we did that, those systems are up and running and being managed.

Int Sure, right. Did you not have any relief when Ronnie Kasrils was in charge?

IW Well we'd had Kader (Asmal) before that.

Int That's right.

IW Ronnie (Kasrils) was good in that he knew what he didn't know.

Int Right.

IW Um…

Int But… is there in any way, access to government to say: 'why aren't we involving village communities', exactly what you're saying?

IW We've tried, you see what happened now is that national government says: well, it's not our responsibility, it's now municipal responsibility. There's a lot of passing of the buck, there's also a lot of not wanting to make decisions, I think that's the really sad thing. Also, is that when people make mistakes, instead of saying: there's a mistake, first of all instead of admitting there's a mistake, number one problem in this country, and saying: let's learn from it and put it right. We've kind of paralysed people so they don't make decisions...

Int ...they don't want to make mistakes...

IW ...they don't want to make mistakes, so it's easier not to do anything.

Int Right.

IW And that's a huge problem. (*Are you getting cold, should I bring a heater?)*

Int (*No, I'm fine. Thank you)*

IW (*Are you alright?)*

Int (*Better now. How about you?)*

IW (*No I'm alright.*)

Int I've come to South Africa and found that the Constitutional Court judges are called counter revolutionaries and a previous Fellow of the LRC, John Hlophe has...

IW ...was he a Fellow?

Int Yes.

IW I didn't know that.

Int ... he's made…accusations about…what's your sense of...the areas of concern...what's your sense of what's going on?

IW Huge areas of concern, I mean, again it comes back to this, nobody actually admitting that he's made a mistake, I mean, (Gwede) Mantashe is now saying he didn't say counter revolutionary, but actually they caught it on tape, and so he should say: look, ya, maybe I shouldn't have used those words, that's not what I meant, this is what I meant. But nobody ever does that. And I think his outburst is perhaps the most worrying. If it were to run its course, then let it happen, but, we don't. I mean, I also am grateful that Arthur's (Chaskalson) not there any more, I think it's good that it's two black judges, at the top, who could neither be faulted, I wouldn't have thought, although I've seen (Gwede) Mantashe is now saying that (Pius) Langa accepted an award from ((Thabo) Mbeki, and therefore he's not unbiased. Ya, so, I mean, I think that (John) Hlophe has got away with as much as he has got away with, is sad, they should have the whole Oasis thing, should have been dealt with.

Int Why do you think it wasn't dealt with?

IW I don't know. I think (Pius) Langa cast the deciding vote. But we don't deal with things, and people do get away with all sorts of things. As I understand it Dullah Omar had stopped being Minister of Justice long before the whole Oasis thing came, so it was not a reasonable excuse.

Int And the excuse was that Dullah (Omar)...had passed away, so one can't ask him?

IW Yes, but that Dullah (Omar) had given permission, verbal permission.

Int Right…

IW Which actually...and if they can let him gracefully get out of this, he's not far off for time, I don't think.

Int John Hlophe?

IW Hlophe, mm. Or he's not far off fifteen years, and once you've served fifteen years, you can get your full pay.

Int Right.

IW But it is worrying, it is...it...

Int In this context of the concerns, how do you think...what do you think is the concern for the LRC, as a public interest law organisation that's independent of government, and that's willing to take on government?

IW I'm not sure that this bears directly on that, I mean, they've taken stuff to the Constitutional Court and had, I think, probably fair...

Int ...judgments...?

IW ...I'm sure they'd have fair judgments, TAC and Grootboom were…but it's the enforcement of the judgement which...

Int ...exactly...

IW …seems, that maybe there's a gap that needs to be filled.

Int But do you get a sense that the LRC might have to tread very cautiously in taking on government, in this kind of environment, I suppose that's the context?

IW I would be sad if it did, and I...I mean, I think they've always been very cautious about taking on cases that there really is a moral core, there's not been careless litigation from the LRC...

Int Absolutely.

IW ...I don't think. And one just hopes that there are enough people at the LRC who will be prepared to do that. I know that one of the problems (Thabo) Mbeki has with Geoff (Budlender) is that he's taken on cases, I think always through the...they've been through the LRC...although it's also been the TAC which hasn't endeared him to The Boss. But that seems to be a thing about Geoff (Budlender), rather than about the LRC. I'm not in the know enough now to know what the attitude...

Int Speaking of…how much contact do you have with the LRC, if at all?

IW Very little, almost none.

Int Do you miss it?

IW I enjoyed it very much...

Int ...while you were there?

IW ...I did, while I was there.

Int Well your work certainly lives on, because your name...I've been wanting to meet you for a long time…because your name always, always comes up in interviews, so, that's the legacy you leave.

IW I'm surprised about that because...ya and Pinkie (Madlala)...Pinkie didn't ever travel to Driefontein and she bore the brunt of it and she did a lot of the consumer stuff, I didn't do the consumer stuff.

Int Sure…

IW And then there was Richard Mojapelo, I mean, that was also something that, I think I helped a bit with. It was very sad, he was the messenger, and he used to interpret for me, and then he also became a paralegal and that was just a very nice progression for him.

Int Sure…

IW And he stayed on after I left. But I think I left...by the time I left we were already drawing out of Driefontein. We had decided that they needed to manage on their own.

Int ...from what I can gather, there's always been this tension between the everyday person who comes off the street, this need to specialise and have focus areas, and the LRC's very much gone down that latter route probably because of funding and other concerns towards the specialisation routes, the focus areas. Social welfare, refugees, land, they don't do labour any more…but the queues aren't there any more, there aren't those queues of people there anymore and so...and...ninety-five percent of their cases get referred away. Having worked in the context that you did, do... you have concerns about that, do you think that's necessary or do you think that they could actually accommodate the everyday cases…?

IW Look, it's a decision that needs to be taken, somebody needs to accommodate the everyday. I don't know...is the Black Sash Advice Office still functioning?

Int Yes I think so, from what I can gather.

IW You know...

Int But they don't litigate.

IW Ya, but they can then pass on.

Int Sure.

IW Well, I don't know what the relationship is, as I said it used to be really very close. And Geoff (Budlender) always said that Sheena (Duncan), with no legal training, could interpret statutes better than anybody else.

Int Oh yes, that's right…

IW Well, I think there is a place for it...and I mean, from someone aside , I don't know if there are any of the other advice offices functioning…

Int That's why I'm asking the question.

IW Mkhabela, and his wife Bongi, who's...I can't remember if she's done something... there were advices offices, which were also, of course, covers for other political activity.

Int Right…

IW So that there were regional advice offices all around Gauteng...

Int Right...

IW ...but that the LRC would support, particularly on the East Rand, which is where Mahomed (Navsa) came from. And they were they were vital both in assisting people, but it was...it was part of the political struggle, those particularly, were very much part of...

Int That's definitely the sense I get and that's why I asked, because it seems to me that it's…there's the Wits Law Clinic now, which does good work apparently, it's really unknown where people are going and what their actual outcome options are?

IW Ya.

Int Um…

IW But, you see, that's also...it's part of this, a bit like the water stuff that I was talking about, it's part of community organisations falling apart because there's not support, there…

Int I wonder where you think that the blame can be attached, is it international funding or is it government or is it a bit of both?

IW Or it's where people move to maybe if you were running an advice office you're now, an ANC branch chairperson who's got other aspirations.

Int Right, ok.

IW I mean, I think the funding, there is a problem with the funding, it's gone through **inaudible** red tape, and so on, and so on. And also with this feeling that does come from the ANC, is that we are the elected representatives, speak to your ward counsellor, the ward counsellor must be responsible, not some little upstart village community.

Int Right…

IW And that's very worrisome because if it's then seen that that is also a way to some position of power, I don't know. I just hope that there will be some sort of movement within the ANC now probably on Kader's (Asmal's) lead, I'm not sure that he's the appropriate person to lead it, but this kind of thing, is...where is our morality?

Int Absolutely. Before the interview started, you, remarked and I marvelled as well, about the number of people who've emerged from the LRC and taken on key positions, particularly in the judiciary...

IW Ya.

Int What do you attribute that to?

IW Well, I think they got very good training, I think that, as I say, the standard was very high, that was set there, but perhaps it's also the people who chose to come to the LRC, that you came there because you were an activist, or...ya.

Int Right. Well…now it seems that there's concerns because the LRC's unable to compete with major law firms, such as Webber Wentzel, and attract young black lawyers in particular…what's your sense of that, have you heard anything about that?

IW No, I mean I know that they're battling to keep lawyers, I don't know now what their salaries are like but if you're in a commercial firm you can earn a fortune.

Int Right…

IW And one doesn't want people at the LRC to be there because of the good salaries, but…

Int Sure, of course.

IW ...it does become an issue.

Int Ilse, I've asked you a range of questions, perhaps exhaustingly so, I'm wondering if there's anything I've neglected to ask you which you think really ought to be part of your Oral History?

IW I don't think there's any...I mean that's LRC-related stuff, I don't think I've got such a good memory. (*Interruption*).

Int We're nearing the end of the interview...

IW Good. (*Laughter*).

Int I'm sure you're relieved. I was wondering whether…you could share some memories of clients or even particular people you've worked with, you've mentioned Aninka and Arthur that you treasure, as part of your experience at the LRC?

IW I think it was the people who we worked with in Driefontein. There was an old man called Mancile who was practically blind, but who would come and help me interpret, I mean, I, all those years, could not manage without an interpreter. Mtuzini who was the local priest who also came and helped us and became very competent in sorting out cases. Old man Ndlangamandla, who Aninka (Classens) and I went to visit about two years ago, who was an old comrade, also from the community, very much one of the leading people in the community, and once we gave him a lift back to Jo'burg and he started...he didn't know I was Bram's (Fischer's) daughter until that trip, in fact, and then he told us he'd been one of the potato farmers. I don't know if the history of the potato boycott in the fifties?

Int Oh…

IW Ruth First, who was a journalist, went and discovered that the potato farmers were keeping their workers from the prison, as well as the ordinary workers, sort of, locked up in appalling conditions, and she exposed them and Ndlangamandla told us how

they'd hidden her during the day and then at night they would bring her out to interview the people.

Int Gosh…

IW So those were, it was working with the people, not so much the clients, from my point of view, but the people...and (Baba) Zwane was just a most extraordinary man, and if you've got an hour extra to talk to Aninka (Classens) about Zwane's stories, because, I mean, he just cared, he cared so much about what he was doing and did it just so extraordinarily well, just looked after people and to be taken into these people's lives...

Int Sure.

IW ...with such love and such acceptance and it was quite extraordinary, it was quite extraordinary.

Int Thank you so much, Ilse, I really, really appreciate you taking the time...

IW No, that's ok.

Int ...and just racking your memory...(*Laughter*)

IW I've got a very...*(Interview ends)*

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