

Rufus Poswa**LRC Oral History Project****2nd September 2008**

Int This is an interview with Rufus Poswa and it's Tuesday the 2nd of September (2008). Rufus, on behalf of SALS Foundation in the United States we really want to thank you for agreeing to participate in the LRC History Project.

RP You're welcome.

Int I wondered if you could start the interview if you could talk about your early childhood memories, growing up in South Africa under apartheid, and where you think your sense of social justice and injustice developed?

RP Well...early childhood. I was born in Grahamstown, born and bred here, and I started my early schooling at a school in the township called Ntsika, and I did that up until standard two. Standard three I started at Archie Mbolekwa, which is a higher primary school, but I mean, I was there at Archie for about one and a half year because, I mean, we started...after passing standard three I went to standard four, then the boycotts started. You know, we didn't go to school, we didn't write exams...before June that year, that was in 1980. So we ended up not writing exams. So we had to repeat standard four. But by then I knew a bit of Afrikaans and the coloured schools, I mean, were regular. I mean, kids did go to school.

Int So they didn't participate in the school boycotts?

RP They did not, especially at primary level. You know, the high school, which is the only high school – Mary Waters being the only high school here, I mean, some of them participated, like Mary Waters, but the lower primaries and higher primaries did not participate. So, in 1981 I went to a coloured school, which is Good Shepherd, here in Huntley Street in Grahamstown. Ya, I mean, my school years then were normal, you know, I went to school I passed standard four, I went to another school called George Dickerson, and I passed there standard five, and standard six; I went to Mary Waters to do standard seven. But, you know, because I was staying in the township my friends were there, you know of course I did have a few coloured friends whom I went to school with. I was not allowed...because, I mean, our school...going to school was sort of normal at the time, although I was at Mary Waters, they did not participate then. And my friends in the township would not allow me to write...

Int Exams.

RP Exams when I was in standard seven, you know, which is grade nine. And I had to repeat grade nine, but the following year when I repeated it, I stayed with a coloured family, where I did my grade nine up to grade twelve. Within that period, when I was at high school, we did participate, you know, we did have stay-outs, you know, from school, we did have our marches as well, you know. Ya, that was basically it. It was not easy to be honest, because kids can be sort of cruel. I was black, being the

only...or if there were any other blacks at Mary Waters, there could be one or two more, but not that I'm aware of, you know. Kids say sometimes mean things to each other, you know, I would hear from kids that what I was, you know, the word 'kaffir', come in. Maybe it's because I was still young then, you know...

(interruption – interview resumes...)

So that was it. And on completing school, having completed school, I went to, because I couldn't, they wouldn't allow me...accept me at this teachers' college, which is (inaudible), and for coloureds only. And I wasn't accepted. Not because I was black, I don't know the reason, I was just not accepted. So I started working after matriculating. And I worked for Shell Oil Company for about two years...I started '89. '92 they closed down because they were moving to PE, the depot here. And I decided to stay here. Then I started working for the (inaudible) department for about a year, then this vacancy with the LRC came up. And because I did not study further, after matriculating, so I thought...I saw this as an opportunity, you know, to study further. And the LRC at the time I joined them, which was in the first of September in 1993. At that time Clive Plasket was the director of this office with Gerald (Bloem), Brian Sephton, and Lex Mpati, just Mpati being the advocate of this office. Nomfundo (Somandi) was here, Sandy Stewart, all of them were here. And...I mean, they did encourage me to take up my studies further. But I had too much responsibilities, you know. And actually I started late, but at the time...and we did get assistance from the LRC where you would pay your fees and there you would be having passed they would reimburse you, you know. Which was very good because it's part of staff development, I mean, for us also to become attorneys if we feel like, or whatever you felt like doing. But I started late.

Int I'm wondering, going back to your early childhood, growing up in a black township but then going to school in coloured areas, as you say it was very difficult, but in terms of the disparity under apartheid, did you notice that there was a disparity, did you feel that in terms of privileges it was the same really, or the lack of privileges was the same?

RP It was not the same, you know, I mean, even the curriculum, it was not the same. What I was taught at...because I did standard four, twice I did it, I mean, I did something totally different when I joined the coloured school. It was different from what I was taught in the black school. So it was...I mean, coloureds were more privileged than blacks. That goes without saying.

Int And, so when you finished school, it was what, 199...?

RP When I matriculated, it was 1988.

Int '88, ok. And then after that, what happened?

RP Well I...because I wanted to study further I applied to (inaudible) Teacher's Training College, where I was not accepted. But what I wanted to do...I did that because I wanted to be with my friends, you know, the guys I went to school with. They all

went to **(inaudible)**. But when I did not become successful there, I sort of sat down and thought what I really wanted to do and because I love nature I applied to Cape Town to become a Nature Conservationist, and they didn't have vacancies either, but they gave me hope because they did send me pamphlets about wild animals and stuff, but...

Int And then how did you end up in the LRC? Did you see an advert or did you meet someone?

RP I saw an advert, someone alerted me that there was a vacancy, which I saw, and there was a guy here by the name of Jannie (Coltman) and he sort of told me about it, and Gerald Bloem, they sort of inspired me to apply and I came in for an interview.

Int And you'd known them from growing up in that environment.

RP I knew them, Jannie (Coltman), he was a senior, by the time I went to high school he was no longer there. Gerald (Bloem) was, I mean, socially I came across him socially because he was friends with the coloured people I used to stay with.

Int So you came as a paralegal, did you have training or did you get the training after that?

RP They...I did get training but afterwards. By the time I went for the training I already, I knew what to...

Int What you needed.

RP ...what I need to know, what I needed to do. Because they sort of trained me here, the guys who were here, they sort of showed me the ropes.

Int And then after...that you started the LRC 1993.

RP 1993, the 1st of September. But I did go for a paralegal training course in PE, which was done by NADEL. But I didn't learn much because I already knew, you know, I had an advantage of the other paralegals who were there.

Int So as part of your work did you have to implement, like for example, the sniff test, that Pretoria office where they tried to screen people who come in and see whether high impact cases, etc, or did you just have a different approach?

RP Well, ya, we did use that approach, the sniff approach, because I mean, Nomfundo (Somandi) who was a receptionist then, they would talk to her, you know, and if she was not certain then she would bring them to my office and, you know, and I would

look at the facts and see whether it was a matter we would be involved in. And of course I had so many attorneys, I had access to any of them, I could walk into their offices any time if they were not busy, you know, go to any one of them and tell them about the facts of the case and they would sort of guide me.

Int So in terms of the early days, so from 1993 onwards, what were some of the most common people...issues that were people were bringing, what were some of the common problems?

RP Back then we used to do quite a lot. When I joined there were still matters open, files open, about police assaults, you know, we acted a lot against the state, and just the usual, you know, dismissal, then we did that as well, we took labour matters as well. So, I mean, I specialised mostly in that field, labour, because I mean, because it's limited my involvement, I don't have right of appearance and all that, so I can take someone's matter to a certain level and then it's taken over by the attorney, you know, I'm working with those supervising me.

Int So at what stage did you then become involved in, for example, the pension cases, and could you talk a bit about those?

RP Pension cases, you know, doing the sniff test, because I didn't know much about it, I would just take a statement and the facts and put it on paper and discuss it with whoever was relevant. And in this instance Judge Clive Plasket, he was a director here, he was dealing with those type of matters. And that's how it started, and it sort of became big, it became massive, it became out of control, because there are thousands now, I mean, thousands and thousands of people we act for. And then he used to send me out; we didn't only concentrate here in Grahamstown, because at that time the PE office, LRC of PE, closed down...I think they closed down 1996, and we were the only office in the Eastern Cape. So it meant travelling quite far and spend time far from here out of town. Used to work at villages, at Alice, and all those places. It was myself and Clive (Plasket) who started it.

Int What was your experience of working with Clive (Plasket)?

RP It was super, it was super. Clive (Plasket), he had the ability to, you know, I used to learn not only how he did things but you sort of...he taught me as well, you know, even in terms of letter writing, you know, he taught me how. I mean, I would write...I mean, I wrote a few letters for Clive (Plasket), but having worked with him, I used to write letters exactly like him and the reason I say that, I would draft a letter and I would take it to him and he would proofread it and make changes where he needed to. But if you write about three letters for Clive (Plasket) and he has to proofread it, by the fourth letter, you write a letter which he will proofread and he will say, no, I don't have to make any changes. That was the kind of relationship, I mean, I respect him, I mean, I respect him highly.

Int So when you were...you started in 1993, by some time in that period the office underwent a lot of tensions, there were lots of tensions in the office. There were tensions about who was going to be National Director, there were sort of voting and all these things that different people talk about, and what was your experience of that period?

RP You know...that time, I wouldn't like to think about that time. But it was not...it did not have that much of an impact on me, but because I'm here and I'm observant and these are people I work with, you know, when I walk in you look at people's faces whom you work with, you know their faces, you can tell if someone's not in a good mood or, you know, something is bugging them, but my involvement was very minimal, you know, although I felt the impact, because it was not about National Director, it was about director of this office. My understanding is that Gerald (Bloem) was offered to be the director of this office, it is my understanding, you know, and he felt that he was not ready, and then Clive (Plasket) stood and he became director. But now Clive (Plasket)'s term after four years, comes to an end, either he can stand...or he can step down or he can stand formally to be elected. That's when it happened. I think that, I mean, because Gerald (Bloem) said he wasn't ready for this, when Clive (Plasket)'s term was coming to an end he sort of thought he was the more senior one to become the director and I think that's what he believed that he would be the director. I mean, these are things you sometimes discuss maybe at home and be excited about. And people came down here from Johannesburg and we were sort of interviewed...

Int By Geoff Budlender?

RP Ya, Geoff (Budlender) was our National Director then. I'm not sure who...I think it was Geoff (Budlender) but, I mean, I'm speaking under correction of who did the interviews, but it was with all fairness, and the people had to vote. And some were for Gerald (Bloem), some were for Clive (Plasket). And it was not nice. They would have...we normally had our assessment meetings, assessing our work on a Friday afternoon from two o'clock, and we'd all sit here, I would sit with them, all the attorneys in, because they needed me to report back on the new matters which would come in that week, and they would sort of to prepare us for what to do for the next week, and it was all recorded and the minutes would be on the notice board, which was very good because it sort of, you knew it would be there, so you knew what to do, sort of, as a reminder. But now in these meetings there would be tension as well, you know. Ya, it was one of those moments you know. Ya, it was not nice.

Int Gosh. And then there were also problems around some people working extra...doing extra work, etc, were you aware of that?

RP People doing...?

Int When clients came in, that they would do the work privately as opposed to giving the work directly to the LRC, were you aware of this type of thing?

RP I was aware of one matter like that, I mean, I was not much into who was doing what, I was guided by them, so my knowledge of what they did was very limited. But I remember this one instance where a crime came in and they were arrested, or they were going to be arrested for dealing in dagga. And because we didn't do such matters, so the attorney which was available to talk to him or ask their advice was Jannie (Coltman)...I did phone next door but I couldn't get and these people...

Int ...This is Nettletons?

RP Ya, Nettleton. But my thing is, my approach is, if someone walks into my office with a problem, the first thing to do is to make that person feel that I care, because I do care about people, that's why I love doing what I'm doing, is to help people, and they were in such a state that I couldn't just refer them without being sure that they were going to be assisted. That's when I approached Jannie (Coltman) and asked him what I should do, and maybe he could see it in my face that I really wanted to help these people. He called them in and he said he would do it for them privately, in his private time. And that was it, that was my understanding that he was going to use his private time to do it, you know, and...a couple of weeks after I heard that Jannie (Coltman) was called in for some kind of a disciplinary hearing or...because he charged LRC clients, which was not entirely true, they did come to the LRC, not knowing that we don't deal in criminal matters, and it was sort of kind of him to...it helped them, one could see the relief on their faces when he...but the fact that they came here, maybe he would know because I don't do private work, I didn't do private work, maybe he knew that he should have set up an appointment with them privately outside here, but he didn't consult...it was not a consultation with them as in terms of consultation where I can say he used the LRC time. It was, he spoke to them, if it was for more than ten minutes that's a lot. And when they walked out, they appeared to be satisfied and everything was fine and I was actually shocked that they came back and they said that Jannie (Coltman) charged LRC clients. But I think there as well, to be honest, because of this tension of because there were now camps, you know, Clive (Plasket) on the other side, Gerald (Bloem) on the other side, you know, and there was also division at the front...

Int ...What do you mean division at the front?

RP The people, some would be for Clive (Plasket) and some would be for Gerald (Bloem).

Int You mean amongst the admin staff?

RP Amongst the admin staff. And the client must have come in and I think that's how it got to Clive (Plasket), I mean, I'm not suggesting it should have been hidden from him if he was Director. And when the client, I mean, he knew Jannie (Coltman) from here, he had to come here even to set up our appointments, but when they heard that he paid, that's why it went to Clive (Plasket). I'm not suggesting that it should have

been kept away from him, you know, I would say what I'm saying in front with a clear, clear conscience.

Int It must have been difficult for you because it seems to me that there were these camps, but you were friendly with Gerald (Bloem), you had socialised with him, you had been encouraged by Jannie (Coltman) to come here, and you also respected Clive (Plasket) as well.

RP Highly. And Brian (Sephton) was...you know, all of them, they were, you know, every one of them had their place in my heart. It was, ya, as I said, I don't like even to think about it because I was sitting right here where I'm sitting, and where you are sitting was Brian, Clive (Plasket) was sitting over there and Gerald (Bloem) was sitting here, Jannie (Coltman) I'm not sure, Jannie (Coltman) and Lex (Mpati). And when...they were not rude towards each other but the tone, maybe the tone of voice, which Gerald (Bloem) used to Clive (Plasket), Brian didn't like, you know, he said: no Gerald (Bloem) it's wrong of you to speak to Clive (Plasket) in that fashion or whatever and...and because he did his Articles under the supervision of Gerald (Bloem), Gerald (Bloem) felt again that the manner in which you are approaching me, you know, and tell me not to...the manner is not right, who are you to talk to me like that, you know, kind of a thing. And it's when I would feel like, you know, just sinking under the table and not be part of...I think I asked one of them to send me out because I didn't want to be in this...I respected all these guys, you know, I respected all of them...

Int That must have been a terrible time, so when did that sort of tensions, how did they change? People left, what were some of the changes that happened after that? I mean, I know at some point Mark (Euijen) Euijen came in, and Johan (Roos) Roos was here as well.

RP People left. People left. Gerald (Bloem), I don't know, I'm not certain whether Gerald (Bloem) was still here when Mark (Euijen) started, but obviously, obviously Mark (Euijen) knew about the tension, you know, he knew about the tension, I mean...ya, he was the only person I don't work nicely with.

Int Mark (Euijen)?

RP Ya.

Int What were some of the difficulties? He was not the National Director?

RP No, he was Regional Director.

Int Regional, sorry, Regional Director.

RP No, as I said, me and Clive (Plasket) we used to work in Alice and all those places, I had to go out there and get people to reapply...

Int For their pensions.

RP For their pensions on this particular day, but there was Pushpa Naidu from Durban, but she was in this office, she used to be here, and I had one client left and this client was not in Alice, this client is living in a little village, the last village before you get the pass to Hogsback, on your way to Hogsback, and I received a call from Pushpa (Naidu) that I had to come back immediately because I had to go to Bisho and serve papers in Bisho. So what I did I took the client...I went to fetch the client, I took the client to where they were supposed to apply, and because I was concerned about the time, I left them there, I made sure that they would be assisted, and I left them, I gave them my own money to get back to the village where they were staying, and I came all the way back to Grahamstown, being under the impression that Mark (Euijen) and Pushpa...Pushpa wouldn't just call me because Mark (Euijen) took over Clive (Plasket)'s practice so I was working along with Mark (Euijen), and so I was under the impression that Pushpa and Mark (Euijen) discussed it for me to come back. So I came back, picked up the documents, went through to Bisho. I came back that evening around about seven thirty, eight o'clock, so I went to Mark (Euijen)'s house and gave a report back that I've done what I was supposed to do, but there was only this one client, I did not sit in and witness her being assisted but I took her to the place and the people said they would. And he was not very pleased with that, you know, and I think that's where our relationship started deteriorating because he used language which I thought was not acceptable, you know, to me because I mean...

Int You mean, he swore.

RP He swore, you know, 'f' word and kind of stuff. And then I...I'm very sensitive, you know, I get hurt very easily by...you know, I know, I try, I mean, I would try to go home and think about whether I could have done things differently, you know, maybe I'm the one who upset you and look at things from your point of view. And but before long my phone rang and it was Mark (Euijen) and he apologised because he when I was there he told me to get out, 'f' out there and do and see...ensure that...and I felt that it was not my fault, because them as attorneys they should have discussed it. Pushpa knew I was in Alice, you know, she knew I was in Alice, she must have discussed it with Mark (Euijen), that was my understanding, and then I got to ask them whether they discussed it, you know, I just felt that I was...what was said and how I was treated was wrong. Everyone would have felt that the way I did. And so I went out there again the next morning and I did it, but that was the beginning, you know, we just did not see eye to eye, and we sort of...he would humiliate me here in front of people, you know. And the funny thing is, him being director, you know, him being an advocate or him being an attorney, I respect the guy, but I respect the guy because I look at him, as white as he is, and I was looking at him as an older brother, like I look at all the others because I never felt that Clive (Plasket) was white, I never felt that Brian (Sephton) was white, you know, or I needed...no-one discriminated against, anyone made me feel that way, and I'm not making him a bad person, he can be a very good person, he can be very fair, but I think he's one of those he cannot

control his temper, you know, he's got mood swings. Ya, our relationship was not good at all. I could...I mean, I'm sure...I'm not going to use the word 'I could' as if I'm not certain, there were mistakes I made, but not to be given such...or to be treated in such a way. Ya, because we were on top of each other this one time because I had to take someone to PE, an intern, Dr. Tshirwa, from Malawi, she visited us, which I was supposed to go to the airport, I was supposed to take her on a Saturday morning. She said her flight was at twelve, so I thought, no, we would leave here at 9:30...no, at 10:30, because it's an hour to PE, but you sort of give yourself thirty minutes should you have a blowout or something. And lucky for me, I was here not at 10:30 but I was here at ten, and he came in, and me and Dr. Tshirwa we made arrangements that we would leave at this time, so I was here and I tried to phone Dr. Tshirwa but her phone was engaged and he happened to walk in, he used that language again: what the...what are you doing here, can't one give you something and you do it right? That's a nice way of saying, good morning to someone. And I said to him, I know that I'm supposed to take Dr. Tshirwa too, but her flight is at twelve, so we said...he told me, no, her flight is at eleven. I said, no, she said to me her flight is at twelve. And he did not believe me and the swearing started again, we were almost on top of each other right here at the back, and...but I went to the car and I drove to the front, and he went to her, and he said to her...and I said to here, you said to me, we agreed on eleven. Now she didn't know, because he used his tone and he was angry, and he could see the woman...and I left, but because I had to remain in PE and wait for Johan (Roos) to come back...

Int Johan Roos?

RP Johan (Roos) Roos, to come back that afternoon, when Johan (Roos) arrived, on his arrival, when we were driving back, he asked me what had happened, you know...about what, you and Mark (Euijen)? So he knew about Mark (Euijen) without me telling him. But he told me that Mark (Euijen) felt that, on that particular day, because I never stood up against him, he sort of believed that I was telling the truth, so me being quiet, you know, but that's my personality. If you swear at me, if you are mad at me, and I feel that you are not supposed to, I sort of gave you a chance, I will walk away from you and I will think about it, I will think about whether I could have done things differently, or reason for you acting in the way you do, you know, and think it out, and I will approach you the next day and tell you that I think you are wrong by doing so and so, because the reason I did it was because of A B and C. Reasonable, I mean, I'm trying to be, you know, as much as I can. But we did not have a relationship, a good one. I would say to him...I don't like to be booked off sick, I'm not feeling well, I'm just going to the doctor, I need to let you know, not for you to ask where I am, you know. And you would get: I'm not running slave camp here, you know, if you're sick just go to the doctor! That's the type but I...and there was a good person behind that voice as well, because he used to be fair when it came to certain things. Not...when I'm saying fair, I'm not talking about things which favoured me, but general. But on the other hand, me and Johan (Roos), we had a splendid relationship because he then became director, and me and him were working together very nice, you know, I was his eyes, I would drive him, our relationship became so strong that...not only relationship, the trust as well, because he would send me out to attend meetings on his behalf, and sometimes in certain meetings he would be...he would praise me on my way back and ask me, how did you manage to do that,

because there would be a deadlock at times and I would chip in because I knew about his matters. In his presence as well, I would chip in and I would say something which would sort of be a lifesaver at the end of the day, and he used to give me credit for that, you know, it was very nice working with him. So it was not all bad; it was good, there would be bad patches.

Int And then when Johan (Roos) Roos left, what happened then? Who took over?

RP Johan (Roos) Roos left and Sarah (Sephton) became director.

Int And she's been director ever since.

RP She's been director ever since, ya.

Int And what's been your experience now of the office under Sarah (Sephton)'s directorship?

RP We get along, we get along well. You can talk to her, you can talk to her about anything, or her door is always open, but there are times she's busy. But our relationship it didn't start when she became...she joined the LRC. Our relationship started when she was still a student, because she was still a student when I started here and she would come to her brother – Brian Sephton was her brother, and she would visit her brother, you know, and that's when we started knowing each other. So we sort of had a relationship, a good friendly relationship when she started here.

Int So since Sarah (Sephton) started which was what 2000 and...what was it?

RP I can't remember.

Int Right. So it's been a while now, what are some of the changes that have undergone in the office. Are you still getting lots of clients? Are you finding that there's less clients? What's been the changes in the office since you started, from '93 onwards?

RP Since I started, and now...that's a tricky one. Ok, that question is a bit difficult, because when I started here the scope of the work we were doing was quite broad, you know, we were doing lots and lots of things, you know, and there were many of us here. Brian (Sephton) would do land, Gerald (Bloem) would do his own labour, Clive (Plasket), Jannie (Coltman), they would do all different things, but now, I mean, there's only a few of us, and the kind of work we do we had to sort of restructure what to do. We don't deal in police matters anymore, you know.

Int Damages claims.

RP Damages claims, we don't do that anymore. Labour matters we refer to the Department of Labour. We had a meeting with the Department of Labour, you know, Black Sash, the Rhodes Legal Aid Clinic, discussing who was doing what, in order to know which matter to refer to whom. That's the kind of relationship. Now clients still do come in, you know, and for me it will not be easy to say...but it's not as much, clients don't come in as much as they used to, there aren't as many...

Int Why do you think that is?

RP Because of this...I mean, this sort of structure, we sort of are focused on certain matters, we do refer, whereas in the old days we would almost take on any matter, I mean, we had the manpower here, you know. Ya, and I think that's it. People do come in and what makes it difficult for me is because I see them. I'm not the only one who sees them now, Skumuso helps me, who's the... attorney, they help me to see clients coming in through the front door. So I still do, and there are people who would...there's a link between my name and the LRC, because people would come, they would want me, not eighty, not ninety percent, but a hundred percent of the coloured community, when they come here they will ask for me, and if I'm not available on that day...I tried to talk to people regarding that, I mean, labour issues there are time frames, and you know, you might wait for me, I might be working out of town for a couple of days, and you might wait for me, you know...you know, you might be out of time as a result thereof. So see anyone. If you come to the office and I'm not there, talk to someone who is there, you know. But people still insist on seeing me.

Int It must also be difficult for you because of the focus areas and specialisation, you have to refer people, so you turn people away, I mean, that must be a difficulty for you as well because you're not sure where they're going to get help and if they're going to get help.

RP No, with regard to that, I mean, when we sat down it was well planned because before I refer someone to...I mean, I would phone that office or you know, before I refer them. I would sometimes give them a business card, and I would tell them as well, you know, in case I don't follow up on your matter, because it's not with me, you can come in if you feel that nothing is happening, so that I can do what's necessary and ask of the office I referred you to how far your matter is and if you feel that you don't have the power to do so, I can do. So we sort of do follow up.

Int From your perspective this office is really known for its social welfare cases. I mean, of course you've taken on some very other interesting cases, but you associated with the social pensions. What was your sense of how the LRC functioned, was it effective, did it help people, what were some of the rewarding stories and experiences you had doing that kind of work?

RP Roxsana, you get that all the time, you know, you'd get in a place like this, you get that all the time. Grahamstown is not very big; not that small either, but because it's not big, it does not necessarily mean you know everyone, you know. But I would be

in a traditional ceremony, you know, everyone's welcome, and those you would find someone whom the face might be familiar with a face but you don't know of all the matters, I don't know all the matters I've done, but you get someone who will just come and thank me or come shake my hand and telling people how I helped them. So it did have a huge impact, you know, what we did, you know, helping, and these are people who feel that they can now speak out, you know about injustice being done to them. Like Mrs Melitafa, she can speak out. And you do get people who are outspoken about how they feel and I mean, many of them, not only on me but for the LRC as well, for this office, it meant quite a lot, because even the Black Sash, although they do inquire from the department regarding people's pension letters, at the end of the day, the Black Sash will send it here, if they feel, because they don't have attorneys, they can't take matters to court, so they will work with something and at the end of the day they will refer it here either to me or I will just pass it on, or see what I can do. This office is well known, I mean, it has done tremendous work, it has done good work all these years, you know. And the good thing about it is the fact that although there were those moments where the office would be divided, but I don't think there was a single time where clients felt that way. Clients were always put ahead, their needs and everything. Never was there anything in this office where a client felt that this office was divided. Ya, it was something which was internal.

Int I'm also wondering, now, what are the predominant issues that come through the door currently?

RP It's still...I mean, there are still pensions, I do go out, I go out quite a lot to assist, but now Cathy and Kim, under the supervision of Sarah (Sephton)...

Int Cathy and Kim are?

RP Cathy is the secretary, and Kim is the intern from overseas, from Canada. They are doing it under the supervision of Sarah (Sephton), but because I know the township and I know how to get hold of the clients, if something needs to be said or they need to be called in, I would be involved, but mainly they do the queries, you know, the patient queries and they also...which is actually very good because I'm sensing that there is some kind of good working relationship between themselves, even Cathy, because she talks to certain people and there's some kind of good communication level amongst them. They're doing a good job.

Int I'm also wondering, what's your sense of...when the pensions case started, it was at a time when the ANC government was coming into power, and the LRC had always had a history of being against the apartheid government, but now it had to then take cases against an ANC led government. What were some of the difficulties around that and do you think that the government now has complied a lot with those orders?

RP When we started, you know, as I already said previously, I used to work out of town, I mean, I used to work in...but in Alice there was an ANC constituency office there, that's where we would arrange and meet with our clients. We got our first clients through that office, but it became difficult in that I had to go out now to all these

villages around Alice, because the guy whom I was working with...I've forgotten his name...he was dismissed, you know, but the word which went around is that he supported us, the LRC, to bring down, you know, the ANC. So that's a good question. But we were not acting against the ANC, we were acting against government, you know...

Int ...For the people.

RP For the people. And the ANC was in power and they sort of felt that we...even Mrs Melitafa, ANC people went to her when she was offered a cheque, which she brought to us.

Int She was offered a cheque?

RP Ja, she was offered a cheque, you know, so that this matter could be settled out of court, but she came to us and she said, she wouldn't change it. We said to her, no, you can change it, but we would be happy if you did not. We did not persuade her. It would be in her interest and everyone else who was involved, because it was now a class action. Everyone involved, because it would affect all the...

Int Everyone. So she didn't cash her cheque at all?

RP No, she did not.

Int That's remarkable.

RP I mean, it's been fun. I have grown here and I'm still learning, you know, I still need to study, because...I don't know. I don't know about my future.

Int What are some of your concerns? You've been here fifteen years.

RP Now I've been here fifteen years, but when I completed my thirteenth year, that, I mean...I was not...how do I put this, was I not happy, I was shocked, I was...you know...I know this organisation, I know how it operates and I respect it, I love it, I have sort of dedicated, if I have to say my life, I will say that for what it has taught...I mean, it has taught me, my beliefs...it has...but after thirteen years to be given a letter, you know, saying that, you will be...you are retrenched...

Int Is that what happened to you?

RP Ya, ya...I received a retrenchment letter.

Int From whom?

RP From an acting director. Sarah (Sephton) was not here, Sarah (Sephton) was on leave, she was on sabbatical, and Musa although he was not pleased to do it, it came at the time...it must have been discussed before...

Int ...At national level.

RP ...by Exco, you know, with Sarah (Sephton) and them...but Musa had to serve the letter, he was not happy about it but it's something he had to do. and so we were given retrenchment letter, so I was without a job for a month...it does not make sense to me...for a month. But because it's something which sort of haunted me, I do not understand because here...ok, the Pretoria office closed down, they were going to close down, and some of their stuff was taken to Johannesburg. But Cape Town is the biggest office, and no...there were people who were served with letters but retrenchments did not occur. Durban, no-one was retrenched. And here I was, you know...now the reason for the retrenchment was that the LRC did not have money. That I do understand, I accepted that, that's why I accepted the letter, you know. But now then one would hear stories. I thought to myself, why is there no-one retrenched in these big offices because they say support staff is too much. Here we have...we had me as a paralegal, Nomfundo (Somandi) as the administrator, Ethel, receptionist. Cathy as a typist. Ethel as a cleaner/messenger. And then we had Sarah (Sephton), we had Tabitha Qangule, Mzu and there were guys who left. But when we were retrenched those guys were still here, there were three attorneys, that it was: Mzu, it was Musa, it was Sarah (Sephton). Support staff for them, they need me, they need an administrator, they need a receptionist. There were three of us retrenched.

Int Was it Nomfundo (Somandi)?

RP With the exception of Nomfundo (Somandi). Cathy was retrenched recently. It was me Ethel and Beauty who were retrenched. And because I was not happy, because as I already said, I believed in this organisation. Even this year when I took the Exco members back to PE, because all of them, big guns, I was driving them, where I happened to ask: why were people retrenched? Why were we retrenched? They told me that it's to downsize because there's too many support staff. So I asked them, what about Cape Town, Durban? Now then it became clear to me that, now, you as the director you had to motivate, you had to give reasons, why people in your office should not be retrenched. And there, you know, there, that's where it sort of, when you'd ask me, because I'm not certain who did not...

Int ...Motivate on your behalf.

RP Motivate on our behalf. Now whether it was Musa or whether it was...but I think consultation started with Sarah (Sephton), so it's...you know, there are two stories here and I'm independent, I can think myself. How do I...what about the trust we've built for all these years, you know, for me to be told, or for someone I've built a relationship with, to tell that, ok, we can do away with Rufus, we can do away with so

and so and so and so. Because that's what it boils down to, because they didn't feel the need for us to remain in this organisation.

Int And since then, what are some of your concerns? Are you concerned that you might lose your job?

RP Ya, you know, one is on the outlook you know, I don't know...I'm being given a contract which is renewed, going to be renewed now again. I can't do anything.

Int Is it a one year contract?

RP Ya, I'm supposed to renew it again now. And I can't grow, you know...I can't get to things, I can't make decisions, I'm limited. There are things I cannot do. I cannot buy myself a house, you know. I know, it's not the LRC...because the money they gave me, helped for my...in my provident fund, took that money and I settled my mother's house. Because my sister and them are staying there. If I don't pay it they'll be kicked out, they'll be in the street, and they are my responsibility. For the time being they're not employed, so I had to. So it's not like...I did benefit in that house, now it belongs to the family, it's a family house, but I can't get to things of my own, you know. Those are the down whatever issues with me and this...the trust now which I've built up for these years, and it's not easy. Ya, it's sad, but it's just not easy. I'm not saying I would turn against this organisation for any reason, but the trust, you know, it makes one think of what they've taught you, and looking at people's rights. And you can't help it, we are all human, we can't help it with being that we are looking at people's rights, but your rights are being trampled on, and they just protect themselves legally and they just do things legally, but morally, you should feel it here, you know. Because when I wake up in the morning, I feel like being here. I will work here, I will go out...to me it doesn't matter, I'm constantly on the road, it has...I mean, I've thought about it, I might die, accidents occur, something might happen to me while I'm on the road, but I mean, I am proud of even if I have proved, I mean, I'll die proud, because I'll die doing what I love and I feel it's right.

Int Rufus, I've asked you a range of questions, I'm wondering whether there's something I've neglected to ask you, which you feel ought to be included as part of your Oral History interview?

RP ...No...you've asked me almost everything...my relationship with the admin staff...now that's super, you know, that's...I mean, my relationship with everyone in this organisation, you know...I have a good relationship, you know, with them all. no-one...I mean, sometimes...I mean, I am human, I am offended at times, but...it does not really, really happen. There are things said by someone who you might take offence to, but sometimes just for the sake of peace, you keep quiet, and sometimes people are driven by anger when they say things, so...and who are they supposed to argue with because we spend most of our time together in this office, so we sort of become more like brother and sister or cousins or something, because we know each other so...ya...

Int The other thing that I wanted to ask you, you've worked in the front lines with clients, I'm wondering whether there's a particular memory you have of working with a client or a case that you feel is very rewarding, and is symbolic of the kind of work the LRC as a public interest law organisation does?

RP There are many that, there are many...

Int I'm sure.

RP ...but ya...when Thobani was here, we went to Master Mjoleni. They had their interview. Master Mjoleni, he would have taught me if I remained in the black schools. And he walked in here as well. His house was about to be sold, and I intervened on his behalf and I spoke to the bank, we reached an agreement, we came to terms, you know, (inaudible)...but what touched me is the letter he wrote, he wrote a letter to the LRC, addressed to the director, I don't know what happened to that letter. Not only...he did make mention that I helped him, you know, describing the manner I assisted him. I can't remember the exact words. But those are things, you know...those are things which get to you, and you know, make you feel that you make a difference in, you know, in the community. And then not only this, this community, you know, I've felt that way a lot of times in the way I would assist people and people would not forget that you assisted them. You know, people made me feel, you know, really, really, Roxsana, I love what I do and I love working for this organisation. And people appreciate and they show their sense of appreciation in many ways, and that makes one feel really good. So I can't say there's a specific, because I've been in many, you know, even land matters, I've been involved with Mr Mani who was faced with eviction from this farm, Sidbury, which has become now a game reserve. Mr Makoba, of his land, and when his farm was handed over to him it was such a joy to be part of that. There are lots and lots of memories.

Int And also you've worked with so many different people in this office from '93 till now, I'm wondering if there's a particular memory you have working with anyone in particular, whom you've really enjoyed working with, you've mentioned working with Clive (Plasket) whom you've enjoyed working with, Johan (Roos, but I'm just wondering whether there's a memory of someone, whether it was driving with them, or talking to them about something that you really treasure as part of your LRC experience?

RP Ya, there again it wouldn't be one, as I already made mention of Clive (Plasket). I was also close to Gerald (Bloem), because labour matters I did with Gerald (Bloem), you know, he guided me. I used to feel very, very good of myself on these assessment meetings on Fridays when I would be sitting here, and then giving report back on the work I've done and sitting here with four cheques for clients I've received from employers. And Clive (Plasket) would be the one who would sort of (*claps hands*)...

Int ...Clap.

RP Ya, applause and it was nice working with him. With Gerald (Bloem), you know, with Johan (Roos), he made me...I know that I'm not an attorney, but the kind of trust he sort of...he invested in me, you know, and he was like an older brother. Now I think that's where the difference comes in between him and Mark (Euijen), or between them and Mark (Euijen), because my...sort of thought I respected that the attorney or...but Mark (Euijen), as white as he is, he's older than me, and I was obedient because he knew more. And he was director, I did not fear his directorship, but I respected him because he was older, that's how I was brought up, he was older than I was, and he knew more, I could learn from him, but the manner which he did it, it was just not...it was (inaudible) but I mean, as I said, there is goodness in him, I'm not badmouthing, I don't hate him or anything, I don't want people to get that impression that I hate, but we just did not see eye to eye, we did not go together. And you cannot expect to be working well with everyone in such a huge organisation. Even Brian (Sephton), Sarah (Sephton)'s brother, I mean, he would have meetings, you know, under a tree, in the Karoo, it's hot there, and it felt good because those people needed me, needed it, you know. So it's a lot, it's a lot.

Int Rufus, I want to really thank you, it was nice to meet you and thank you very much for a very interesting interview.

RP I hope so, thank you.

Rufus Poswa–Name Index

Bloem, Gerald, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 16, 17
 Budlender, Geoff, 5
 Coltman, Jannie, 3, 6, 7, 10
 Euijen, Mark, 7, 8, 9, 17
 Mani, Mr. 16
 Makoba, Mr. 16
 Melitafa, Mrs., 12, 13
 Mpati, Lex, 2, 7
 Naidu, Pushpa, 8
 Plasket, Clive, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 16
 Qangule, Tabitha, 14
 Roos, Johan, 7, 9, 10, 16, 17
 Sephton, Brian, 2, 7, 8, 10, 17
 Sephton, Sarah, 10, 12, 14, 17
 Somandi, Nomfundo, 3, 14
 Stewart, Sandy, 2
 Tshirwa, Dr., 9
Beauty, 14
Cathy, 12, 14
Ethel, 14
Kim, 12
Master Mjoleni, 16
Musa, 14
Mzu, 14
Thobani, 16

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