

Delano Louw Constitutional Court Oral History Project

30th November 2011

Int This is an interview with Delano Louw and it's the 30th of November 2011. Delano, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the Constitutional Court Oral History project.

DL Sure, it's an honour.

Int Delano, I wondered whether we could start the interview, if you could talk about early childhood memories, where you were born, your family background, as well as where you went to school?

DL Okay. I was born in Helen Joseph Hospital. I live in Eldorado Park, a Coloured community.

Int Is that in Johannesburg?

DL Yes, it is in Johannesburg, yes.

Int And in terms of brothers and sisters and where you were placed in that...?

DL I have one brother, who is the eldest. I am the baby. My mama's baby. (Elicits laughter).

Int And in terms of growing up in what you call a Coloured township, what was your experience like?

DL It wasn't that bad, growing up in a Coloured community. We...sometimes we did have everything and sometimes, we didn't have but I think our parents did provide for us.

Int And in terms of school, what were some of your aspirations, did you know that this is what you were going to do, in terms of the legal field? What ideas did you have?

DL No, I was clueless. I loved history, so I think that is what I came here, to learn about the history...and the history of the judges and everything.

Int Right. In terms of...when you went to school, did you go...after school, what did you do?

DL After school, I didn't have after-classes, so normally, I used to just go play soccer and hang out with my friends.

Int Right, when you completed high school, what was the trajectory you took?

DL After, high school I was taking a Gap Year just for relaxing at home and then I was struggling to get work. I didn't go study but then I came...someone told me about the Constitutional Court that I must just come for an interview. That's where it all started.

Int Okay, and when you say you came for an interview, ...what did you come for an interview...?

DL I was...for a procurement officer. Just to do the furniture ordering and stationery and I just supposed to be here for three months. But after that, they moved me to the General Office, the Registrar's office and since, I am still here.

(Interview stops briefly and resumes on a new track)

Int Delano, we were talking about...the fact that someone had told you about getting a job at the Constitutional Court and you said it was for procurement. And you'd mentioned you'd done that only for three months....

DL Three months...

Int And then what happened?

DL After that, they said I must help out in the General Office and so I did a great job and I went for an interview for a permanent position.

Int Right, okay. And you mentioned to me that you started in 2004, is that right?

DL Ja....

Int And that was at the very beginning of this Court building...?

DL Right.

Int So, was that the time that the Court had just moved from Braampark to here, or had the Court already been...?

DL No, they had already moved from Braampark to here.

Int Right, okay. And in terms of the type of work you do now in the General Office, has that changed over the years or is it relatively the same?

DL It has changed over the years, ja.

Int Could you talk about some of the differences in duties from the time you started to now?

DL The duties is (are) increased immensely because we receive more cases. I started to create a case list for the judges, so I send it to them every Friday afternoon, so they can see what cases came, what filing, to...just to...also to...to make for them a duty report.

Int Right. Okay. And in terms of working at the Constitutional Court, what has your experience by and large been? Have there been...what have been the challenges and difficulties?

DL Well, the challenges I am facing at the Court, is where when people come to the General Office, I think people think...we can automatically just help them and because sometimes, they come with complaints, not cases. Then we prefer them to go to the Human Rights Commission, just to help them. That's the challenge. People coming to us for help, ja.

Int And how do they get through to Security to you? This is the ordinary public...you are speaking of...?

DL Ja, this is ordinary public, ja. I think they just come and...the people at the Security knows the people coming to us, ja.

Int Okay...

DL So, they will just say they need to speak to someone in the Registrar's Office or even they want to speak to the Chief Justice but the Security just let them come through to us, ja.

- Int Okay. So you said that most of the people...cases you actually have to refer onto the Human Rights Commission?
- DL Not, most of them. I am talking about people that comes... people who doesn't have money, or they come to us for assistance, ja.
- Int Right, so you refer to the Human Rights Commission...
- DL To the Human Rights Commission or Legal Aid Board, or the Wits Law Clinic, just to assist them, ja.
- Int Right and what are some of the other difficulties or challenges you have experienced both in the past and now?
- DL The past it was the people but I think now we trying to help them. We are trying our best because some guy in the...in the Office of the Chief Justice, Xolisani (Holland), he is also assisting with the people of the public to help us, ja.
- Int Right, so in terms of setting up a referral system?
- DL Yes
- Int Okay, and more generally in terms of the work you do, can you explain to us, what some of the things that come up for you in the General Office?
- DL Okay, what normally we do in the General Office, we receive applications that we do, we will distribute it to the judges and from there, the judges will read the papers, they will go to Conference. After that, they decided in Conference, either they will dismiss the case or take it down. They send directions or the order to us and we have to issue it to the parties, ja.
- Int And you mentioned to me, before the interview started, that you were actually the Registrar's Clerk.
- DL Ja
- Int And what does that entail specifically in terms of contacting judges...?

- DL The Registrar's Clerk works closely with the judges because judges will ask us to help them in getting a judgement from the Supreme Court or the High Court or the Magistrate's Court and just the small things, judges comes to us, ja.
- Int So, over the years, you have gotten to know different judges quite well?
- DL Ja.
- Int I wondered whether you talk about some of the judges you have worked with in terms of personalities and how you worked with them? The different demands and the different ways of working and the challenges of that?
- DL One of my favourite judges is Judge Kate O'Regan. She's really a sweet lady. You can go anytime to her office and she will make time for you and speak to you, and she will help you.
- Int And in terms of other judges you have worked for, because we are focusing on the first Bench, until 2009. So, Kate (O'Regan) is one of them. I wondered whether there are other people that you have memories of working with?
- DL Yes, there is. Judge Edwin Cameron, he is the same. You can also approach him anytime. Ja.
- Int Right.
- DL Judge Langa...
- Int Right. And in terms of working at the Court, what has that...more generally, what has that been like for you in terms of having good relationships with other people at the Court, just generally, workplace environment, how has that been for you?
- DL It has been good. Like I have a good relationship with the clerks as well because once they need something, they also come to me for assistance. And with the admin staff, the library staff, we all are having a good relationship because we all need each other.
- Int Right. It does sound like the General Office is the first port of call. It sounds like you are very, very busy. I wondered how you manage in terms of that pressure?

DL Well, you must just handle it. You take it day by day, ja.

Int In terms of future plans, do you have any plans to work elsewhere or do you see yourself at the Court? What are some of your plans?

DL Well, I love this place. Well, my heart says sometimes, you must see for different options, but I love this place. I think I will stay here for a while because I am now busy with my LLB.

Int Okay. At what point did you decide to study?

DL Well, from last year.

Int And are you doing it through UNISA?

DL Through UNISA, ja...

Int And how is it going?

DL It's going very good, ja.

Int Good. Do you have aspirations of practising as a lawyer?

DL Ja

Int Well, I have asked you a range of questions, Delano. I wondered there was something I may have neglected to ask you that you'd like to include in your oral history?

DL No.

Int Alright. Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it.

DL Pleasure.

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