

Project name: Alternative History Project
Date of interview: 2007-09-13
Location of interview: Sebokeng, Gauteng
Language of interview: Zulu
Name of Interviewer/s: Dale McKinley & Ahmed Veriava
Name of Interviewee/s: Lineman Jonas Dyonase
Name of translator: Joseph Matutoane
Name of transcriber: Moses Moremi
Audio file name: AHP_SEB_DyonaseLinemanJonas_20070913

INTERVIEW WITH LINEMAN JONAS DYONASE.

Dale Mckinley (DM): Ok first thank you very much for agreeing to talk with us today. For the record so that we can capture it - can you state your full name and where you live here?

Lineman Jonas (LJ): My name is Lineman. I live in Siqelo, Meyerton.

DM: We need a full name?

LJ: Lineman Jonas from Meyerton.

DM: Ok Lineman. Were you born in Meyerton?

LJ: No, I was born in the Eastern Cape.

DM: Aaa you are coming from the Eastern Cape?

LJ: Yes.

DM: When did you move here (and) ... how old were you?

LJ: I was 24 years.

DM: 24 years ago?

The interpreter: He was 24 years old.

DM: Where is home in the Eastern Cape where is your home area?

LJ: In Quamagu.

DM: Ok and why did you move from when you were ... why did you come up to the Vaal area?

LJ: I was looking for a job.

DM: And were you successful, did you manage to get work?

LJ: Yes, I got the job the moment I arrived here.

DM: And what kind of work was that?

LJ: It was a job at the firm called SAMANCOR.

DM: What kind of job did you do at SAMANCOR?

LJ: I was a labourer, working on the kind of mixing all sorts of metals.

DM: Ok and how did you find that work? Did you like it or was it a very kind of unsafe work?

LJ: I can't say it was good or right because I experienced some pains over my head through down my legs and which was from the heat and I have reported it to the management and they listened to me.

DM: When you saying they listened to your complaint, what happened what did they do, did they take you to another department?

LJ: They removed me to a cooler place because they saw my legs were having cons (?).

DM: Sorry I should have asked you before ... what year is it that you started to work at SAMANCOR?

LJ: I started to work in 74.

DM: 1974?

LJ: November.

DM: And you were at that point ... were you single or married or did you have a family?

LJ: I was just starting life.

DM: So you were still a single man there? Where were you living when you started working for SAMANCOR?

LJ: When I came here it was through contract and I was staying at the hostel within the firm.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): And how often did you go home to the Eastern Cape?

LJ: I was going home after a year when the transport was available.

AV: And how long would you stay at home in the Eastern Cape?

LJ: I was resting for 4 weeks.

AV: And then what made you move down from the Eastern Cape to Gauteng permanently?

LJ: I saw that poverty is mounting so I thought here is better to stay.

AV: Ok and was your family still staying up in the Eastern Cape when you moved to Gauteng or did your family move with you?

LJ: I left them back home.

AV: Ok, What year was that?

DM: 1974.

AV: No that's when he started working what year did he move here to the Vaal permanently from the Eastern Cape?

The interpreter: He said the same year.

DM: Tell us a little bit about your work at SAMANCOR from 1974 ... when did you stop working at SAMANCOR?

LJ: I started in 74 and stopped in 2001.

DM: 26 years that you were working there?

LJ: Yes.

DM: Tell us a little bit about after in the 1980s in particular, what was it like there? Did you join the union ... were there lots of struggles in the work place?

LJ: I was a member of the union.

DM: Do you remember any of the strikes or any of those?

LJ: Life was not that good, there was a lot of strikes and we were sometimes getting fired and later be recalled again.

DM: You said earlier that that you came as a contract labourer? Did you become a permanent at some point?

LJ: Yes I ended up being a permanent staff.

DM: How long did that take from the time you became permanent?

LJ: It was around 87.

DM: 1987?

LJ: Yes.

DM: So just tell us when did you change from your single life? Did you get married and start your family? When was that?

LJ: I married in 1976 I started my family there.

DM: And how many children do you now have?

LJ: I have two children.

DM: How old are they?

LJ: The first one was born in 1977 and the second one was born in 1980.

AV: And where were you staying when you got married?

LJ: My wife was in the Eastern Cape and I was still staying at the firm.

AV: Ok and your wife when did she came to Gauteng?

LJ: She never came here in Gauteng. She stayed at home.

AV: Are you still married?

LJ: No, she left me after I was unemployed.

AV: Is she still at the Eastern Cape?

LJ: Yes, she is still in the Eastern Cape.

AV: And your children?

LJ: She took them along.

DM: Ok so I was just going to ask you when things began to change in 1990 when the political changes begin to happen and Mandela was released ... you know these things ... did it change your life at all? What did you think at that time (and) what were you expecting that is going to happen?

LJ: I would say life has changed a little better even at the work place it is no longer like before.

DM: And what was better ... how does it become better?

LJ: The attitude at work changed, we were not rushed.

DM: And what about your working conditions and your pay?

LJ: The money never changed but the work has really changed because they put the machines where it used to work 10 people but now it is only two.

DM: Ok, so lots of people were getting laid off?

LJ: Yes those made other people to be retrenched because there were 10 people working there but after they put the machines they had to cut the number down to 2.

AV: I'm trying to understand ... where you were at that time when you came from the Eastern Cape in 74. You were staying in the hostel right? When did you ever leave the hostel or like in 1994 were you still staying in the hostel?

LJ: After freedom I came out of the hostel to rent a room here at the location.

AV: Ok what year did you started renting in the township?

LJ: I can't remember exactly.

AV: Maybe 1980s?

LJ: It was there in 88, 85.

DM: So when you moved to the townships in the 1980s here to this to place, Sebokeng right?

LJ: I rented in Evaton.

DM: He came to Evaton first?

LJ: Yes.

DM: So how did you find moving from the hostel to Evaton in the time where there was a lot of things going on in this community ... 1984/85 ... lots of struggles, the things that were happening here in the 1980s?

LJ: I wanted it to happen; I was also part of the struggle.

DM: And did you get into trouble for doing that at that time?

LJ: No.

AV: When you are saying you were part of the struggle how did you express that? I mean what were the things that you would do even before that ... how did you get involved in the struggle in the Vaal?

LJ: The struggle was against going around carrying Dom Pass, if the police see you in Sebokeng or if they see you in Vanderbiljpark you would be arrested and asked what are you doing there because you are not staying there, all of those kinds of segregations and we were also against the government systems.

AV: Ok and how ... were you part of any organisation here?

LJ: I was part of the labour movement, NUMSA.

DM: What do you remember for yourself after 1994 when the elections happened, when things changed (and) democracy came?

LJ: I remember the freedom of movement started to be there even if it was at night without been ruled and there no more the carrying of Dom Passes.

DM: Do you remember about voting on 27 April 1994, do you remember that day?

LJ: It was a wonderful day because we were voting for the first time and we were voting for freedom and better living conditions and indeed we got our freedom.

DM: Ok, when you are saying freedom were you seeing freedom ahead ... what did you expect that was going to mean to you besides not having to carry a pass?

LJ: What I was expected was that maybe our salaries would be different from before but that never happened it remained like that.

DM: At that time were you still working at SAMANCOR, were you making a living that you were satisfied with?

LJ: I was happy because we were getting the same salaries as we were all working the same thing.

DM: So you could get what you needed with what you were earning?

LJ: Yes.

DM: And just to get back a little bit to SAMANCOR and the work ... you mentioned that previously that you asked them to change your job and you were moved. Did you ever talk to other workers there about health and safety? What did you think of your situation or did you start feeling ill at all?

LJ: Yes, we talked about the effect of the place and our health.

DM: What was for yourself ... what were you feeling, what kind of effects?

LJ: I was affected in the ears and even now I can't hear from the distance. I even went to the clinic to clean my ears but it didn't get better.

DM: And when did you retrenched?

LJ: We were retrenched in 2001.

DM: Was it part of the large-scale part of people being laid off at the same time?

LJ: We were many that were retrenched.

DM: And did they give you any reasons ...?

LJ: We were told that there was no work and other departments were shut down.

DM: Did you believe that? Is that what you thought was it?

LJ: At first I thought they were joking but I believed when they started closing down.

DM: How long ... what was the notification?

LJ: It was a 1 month notice.

DM: One-month notification.

LJ: Yes.

DM: And what was your package did you receive a retrenchment package?

LJ: It wasn't that much. It was around R48 000.

AV: Is that after tax?

LJ: Yes after tax.

DM: Ok and so when you were laid off I imagine that was quite a lot, you were working for 26 years in the same place ... what I'm just trying to get a sense of is how that made him feel about what the future was holding?

LJ: I complained about that money because it was very little and it finished early.

DM: What did you have to use that money for ... what kinds of things?

LJ: It's just finished for my children.

AV: Before you were retrenched how much were you earning?

LJ: It was R2 000 a month.

DM: When did you come ...you said previously that you moved to Evaton ... when did you actually move to this house here in Sebokeng, what year?

Interpreter: Point of correction. This house is not his ... he still lives in Meyerton.

DM: So you have gone back to Meyerton?

LJ: Yes.

DM: When did that happen? When did you move back because you were living in Evaton before?

Interpreter: Around 2003.

LJ: No it was around '99.

DM: Ok and where are you staying? What is the place there in Meyerton since '99 -what kind of place?

LJ: It was shacks but now there is RDP houses.

DM: Is it an RDP house now?

LJ: Yes.

AV: And is it your house?

LJ: Is for someone I am staying with and in the books it is registered by her name?

AV: So are you paying the rent still?

LJ: No I don't pay rent it's for someone - I made her my wife because the first one left me. We had two children but the other one passed away but we are left with grandchildren.

AV: When did you get married again?

LJ: 1981.

DM: That was a second marriage?

The interpreter: Yes.

DM: So you have got 2 wives?

LJ: Yes.

AV: And then after you got married ... I'm sorry after you got retrenched ... what did you do then?

LJ: I started a Tuck Shop, selling sugar, selling 2,5 mealies and little things for the children to help feed my family.

AV: Ok the tuck shop do you run it outside the house or are you staying now in Meyerton?

LJ: I started it right here, in this yard but I have a room in front of the house.

DM: What kinds of things do you sell in your Tuck Shop?

LJ: Tin fish, mealie meal, tea and the basic groceries.

DM: How has that gone? If you opened up after you retrenchment that's about 6/7 years now ... how is the business?

LJ: I can say it's better than sitting doing nothing because I can't go to bed on an empty stomach.

DM: So the Tuck Shop allows you to have some income?

LJ: Yes it's helping so that we can't go on an empty stomach and the children can have clothes.

DM: So it's expanded, it's grown since you have opened it?

LJ: Yes it is better than before, it has expanded because at first I was selling fruit and vegetables, cabbage, spinach from the market and I decided to leave it because they were bringing little income. With this one it's better.

DM: Let me ask you ...as a small businessman running a tuck shop what's your mark up? In other words the amount that you buy for and the amount that you sell for ... just out of interest?

LJ: On profit I can say maybe I bought at around R100 it's the same because some times what I bought around R100 profit is 45% and then days are not the same.

AV: If you can estimate, how much ... like all the stuff in your tuck-shop ... how much it would be if you sold all of it? I mean if you worked out how much you bought that stuff for about how much will it be?

LJ: When I had a full stock I could say it's around R5 000.

AV: And every month how much are you able ...how much would you make for your house and for your family from selling stuff at the tuck-shop every month?

LJ: I would say around R20 000.

AV: You are making R20 000 a month from the shop?

The interpreter: He is estimating everything so everybody depend on him for school fees every month I make sure I pay.

LJ: My child every month is R100 and the 2 grandchildren depend on me they don't have their father, their mother is still young and she is not working and my child doesn't work (so) I pay school fees every month and when they go to school they had to have lunch money.

DM: I think we need to be very clear because if someone is making R20 000 a month that means you are wealthy. R20 000 a month is a lot. I just wanted to know to make it clear ... is it R2000 or R20 000 because we are recording this? If we get the wrong information we need to know and also whether or not that is gross sales? In other words if you sell R20 000 worth of what you are taking for yourself?

AV: Do you still have to buy stock on top of these R20 000?

LJ: No, I'm saying R20 000 a year.

DM: R20 000 per year?

LJ: Yes.

DM: Ok all right we thought R20 000 per month. I was saying if you are making R20 000 a month you are doing very well for yourself.

AV: So about R20 000 a year and if you had a choice between maybe getting a job at SAMANCOR again and keeping the tuck shop which would you take?

LJ: I can't go back to work because I have already started this work.

DM: So do you quite like it?

LJ: Yes I like it because it is my only source of income because going back at work I will loose it again and be left doomed without knowing what to do.

DM: I wanted to ask you out of interest, because we haven't found out about this yet ...Do you have to charge VAT on what you are selling? Are you a VAT vendor? In other words, do you charge and have to pay this to the tax man?

LJ: No, I don't pay it.

DM: Nothing like that?

The interpreter: Yes.

DM: But you pay VAT when you buy yourself?

LJ: Yes I do pay.

DM: So where you are now with your situation ... when you look at the next few years what do you see? Do you see the tuck-shop growing, the business growing making a bigger business?

LJ: When I look forward I think things will be better.

AV: Do you have any relationship with maybe other small businesses. corporate agencies or maybe the kinds of business forums within this area?

LJ: Yes, there is someone who had boost me, someone who helped me by giving me stock to start but after I made his money I returned it back. But when I experience problems I go back to him and ask for the advice and he would tell me do this and that.

AV: And how do you know this gentleman?

LJ: I was working with him at the firm then he retired before me to start his business.

AV: And did you find that this kind of network from your old workers from SAMANCOR, others that have been retrenched as well ... that there has been a kind of support for you more generally outside of your business?

LJ: Yes we are happy and we love each other.

DM: I want to ask you ... in your tuck shop do many people come to your tuck shop asking you for free food because they can't afford it?

LJ: They do come but I give them credit if they can't afford because they are working at the contract. I give them food to eat so that they could not go to bed on an empty stomach.

DM: So you give people things on credit?

LJ: Yes I give credit to those that I know.

AV: As a business man what is your biggest challenge ... the things that are most difficult for you in running a small business?

LJ: The difficulty that I experienced is the roofers because these people steal a lot.

AV: Do you find that a lot of people who would be given credit sometimes don't pay?

LJ: No, they are not that much but because when you come for credit I hold one of your items then you'll get them when you pay.

DM: I wanted to ask you ... you said you are looking forward to the future as someone, as a business man in your community. Do you think that the rest of the community is doing well, the other people there? Do you see a good situation with basic services and people being able to make a living for themselves?

LJ: What I have realised as a businessman is that this community loves me and I also love them, and I am looking forward for this community who is so caring and loving that they can do well in the future.

AV: Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven't asked you?

LJ: I would like ideas about how small businessman like me I can develop my business, I don't know were to go for help.

DM: I am not a businessman unfortunately I am an academic. If I know someone who can help I could help.

AV: There are some kind of small business agencies...

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