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INTERVIEW WITH NOMVULA PAULINA SEPTEMBER.

The translator: Start by telling us who you are and where are you from and the number?

Nomvula Paulina September (NPS): My name is Nomvula Paulina September, No 9885 Tshintsana street Zone 7b, Sebokeng.

Dale McKinley (DM): Ok, first Paulina thank you very much for agreeing to talk to us. We are going to start by just asking very general questions about your life in the past. Paullina where were you born?

NPS: I was born in Evaton, 1943.

DM: ... we understand that your husband passed. When did you get married? Do you have children?

NPS: Yes.

DM: How many?

NPS: I have 3 children.

DM: 3 children?

NPS: Yes.

DM: Are they all grown now or are they are all gone?

NPS: They have all grown up. Two of them have their own homes and the last one sometimes finds piece jobs.

DM: Ok Paulina you were born in 1943 in Evaton here. Tell us a little bit about what it was like growing up in this area in Sebokeng? What are some of the memories of your childhood? What do you remember most?

NPS: When I was growing up in Evaton at Nhlapo area, we didn't grow up like today's children. We played a lot of activities, even when parents call us it was very hard. But we were doing our domestic chores on time. We were respecting our parents a lot as compared to the children of today.

DM: And did you go to both primary and secondary school here?

NPS: I started in Evaton and then I did higher primary in Phomolong section. Because of financial problems my parents could not afford my education.

DM: When you were forced to leave school because of the financial difficulties, what did you do at that point?

NPS: My parents told me to look for a domestic job; we went to the kitchens to work.

DM: And how old were you then?

NPS: I was very young; I can't remember how old I was. The employers were teaching me how to do domestic job.

DM: Tell us how it was like doing domestic work, being a domestic worker at that point?

NPS: At first when I started it was very hard but I coped and thought of my father who wouldn't let us walk on the streets when we were growing up, but to do work.

DM: Were you treated well by the people that were your employers at that time?

NPS: They were not good at first but they changed as they saw my productivity. They realised my hard-working and rewarded it.

DM: How long were you a domestic worker, do you remember, how many years?

NPS: I think more than ten years if I am not mistaken.

DM: What caused you to move on, stopping being a domestic worker?

NPS: My employers moved to Cape Town.

DM: So once they moved and you stopped working there, what did you do?

NPS: I stayed at home and become a housewife.

DM: That's when you got married then?

NPS: I got married while I was working.

DM: Do you remember how old you were when you were married?

NPS: I can't remember.

DM: Did you stay in Evaton or did you move when you were married?

NPS: Yes, I was in zone 12 at my home.

DM: And your husband what was he doing, was he working?

NPS: Yes he was still working.

DM: What was he doing?

NPS: He was doing building blocks that were done at SAMANCOR.

DM: You met him was he working in SAMANCOR?

NPS: When we met he was working at ISCOR.

DM: And during that...I know it's hard to remember ... do you remember the time line when he started working for SAMANCOR, was it the 70s, 80s or when was that?

NPS: He started in 1986.

DM: By that time did you have children?

NPS: Yes.

DM: How many were they, you said you have 3?

NPS: I was having all of them 3.

DM: How was life then as a house wife and mother of 3 children - how was it for you?

NPS: There were some hardships in the family, but we managed to survive.

Ahmed Veriava (AV): What kind of hardships?

NPS: Money was the problem since my husband was earning less and the children on the other side have to go school.

AV: Is there anything that you wanted to do, something that you felt ... if I can do it could make you happy?

NPS: There was the need to help out. I didn't know what to do because of lack of money. I sold ice cream and sweet ices. As prices went up, then I quit.

AV: Not necessarily in relation to what she did but is there something you wanted to learn, such as sewing?

NPS: No, I didn't think of that.

DM: ...when you had 3 children ... in 1984, your husband was working ... what do you remember about the uprising here in the Vaal before 1994, was this a worrying time for you as a mother?

NPS: What had worried me is the children. I was very restless because I had to look for my kids to come home safe from school.

DM: And did anything ever happen to your children?

NPS: No one, only tear gassing.

DM: Ok, so Paulina when 1990 came, when the political changes started, when Mandela was released from prison ... how did that make you feel, at that point when things started moving in the country?

NPS: I didn't know what was going to happen ...

DM: Were you afraid of what was going to happen or you were looking forward to it?

NPS: There was no safety, because when the employer talks to the workers, they were always threatening people saying that if I fire you, Mandela will give you a job – things like that.

DM: So you were afraid for the security of your husband's job?

NPS: Yes.

DM: What did you feel at the time of the 1994 elections ... I am assuming you voted?
How did you feel?

NPS: I did vote. It was a time for the fear to be wiped away, looking at the people queuing for voting ... I was going to be free and thought things will change for the better..

DM: What specifically did you think was going to change?

NPS: I thought life will change to be better.

DM: Can you tell us specifically, what kinds of things did you want to see changing?

NPS: I thought my husband will work well without being retrenched at work, our children and us will find jobs and work well.

DM: By the time 1994 come, were your children grown up or how old were your children?

NPS: I can't remember well but they were young, but the older was looking for the job.

DM: So when things started to change and Mandela became the president ... How were things in your life and your family after 1994, after the elections had happened? Did life change?

NPS: We lived well even though we were facing some problems.

DM: What did change for you?

NPS:

DM: Let me try to help. Was there any change in terms of housing and the situation of the school, children going to school things like that?

NPS: At hospitals nothing has changed, when we are sick they do not check us, they ask us what is bothering us. They just give us medicines and say that it's because we are growing old and there is nothing they can do.

DM: As a mother with children, how did you think about your children in the schools, did you think things will change your children?

NPS: At schools, we thought things will change maybe better than before but nothing changed.

DM: Like you said you didn't go to school because your parents could not afford to pay ... were you glad that your children were able to go to school? What did you think about the quality of the education?

NPS: I thought that because even though I did not get better education, my children were lucky.

DM: What was the reality? In other words, after 1994, do you think post-1994 education is better?

NPS: Yes, it has changed a lot.

DM: When your children came back from school, what were they telling you about the school?

NPS: They learn through English whereas in school I was being taught in my vernacular (Zulu) language.

DM: After 1990 up to 1994, what changes did you notice in the community? Specifically things like infrastructure, water and electricity you know things like that?

NPS: In relation to water and roads system nothing has changed.

DM: You were living in the next Zone ... when did you move into this house?

NPS: We left Evaton in 1970.

DM: Is this the same house?

NPS: No, there was another house that we were staying, in Basothong. But we lost it because we could not afford to pay rent, after losing that one and then we came to this house.

AV: Was this a council house as well?

NPS: Yes it was a council house.

DM: When did you take ownership of this house?

NPS: After 10 years of renting the house automatically it becomes yours.

DM: In the 1990s your husband was still working in SAMANCOR - what did your husband tell you about his job in SAMANCOR?

NPS: He was telling me that they were working hard, and the conditions of work they were very bad.

DM: Ok when your husband came back from work did you notice anything about his health yourself ... that things were not going well?

NPS: Yes, he would tell me he is tired.

DM: When was the first time that you realising that your husband was very sick and getting poisoned?

NPS: I can't remember exactly but I think it was in 1999, he started to show up that he was not feeling well, he was complaining about headaches.

DM: How did that make you feel .. when your husband started getting sick?

NPS: It was hurting and I felt very sorry for him.

DM: So Paulina you said you felt very sorry for your husband - did you try to do something to deal with his situation?

NPS: We tried to go to the clinic, after that he had headache and complaining about his eyes. He was always having tears in his eyes. But he was not showing that he is sick since

he could go to work. As he started with headache and then his eyes he couldn't show that he is sick

DM: When you took him to the clinic what did they tell you was the problem?

NPS: They did not tell me the problem. But I took him to the doctor and the doctor told me that my husband is badly sick and he is close to losing his mind\memory and then I should always guard him. He had sores. He would complain about his burning chest. One night he got up and went to the toilet and when he returned he was developing stroke symptoms on his mouth. He was not aware that his mouth was swollen. Then I took him to the clinic and they gave us a letter to take him to the hospital. Then they took him to the X-ray and they gave him tablets and said that he will be fine, his mouth will be fine. Then after a week his mouth was back to normal. In 2000, his situation was very bad, he couldn't walk long distances and he was always sitting down, failing to bend his feet. He started failing to take care of himself and he was always sleeping as he was always tired. He was getting worse day by day. During the night I slept with a 5 litre bucket to help him as a toilet. One time he told me there is something in his mouth. He was starting to lose his sound\voice, his voice was too low. It was very hard to really hear what he was saying. I took him to the doctor and the doctor gave him the tablets. After coming back from the doctor, he started vomiting dark blood. I remember he told me that he had something in his mouth and I took my hand and pulled something from his mouth. We went back to the clinic and they gave him pills and when we came back he vomited black clots of blood from the mouth and nose.

DM: During this entire time, when your husband was sick wasn't it possible for him to stay in the hospital ...?

NPS: They would just check him and send him home.

DM: And you told the nurses and doctors what was happening, as you told us?

NPS: I did and took some samples of blood with me to the hospital but they did not even look at it.

DM: At this time I imagine he had to stop working? How long did it take him to leave work?

NPS: In 2000...let me say in 2000 he was already retrenched, he was already out of work\ retrenched but when he started to be sick he was still working.

DM: With many of the other workers at the same time?

NPS: Yes.

DM: Paulina I know it must be difficult to talk about this ... how long after that your husband died?

NPS: He died in 2003.

DM: After 2 years at home?

NPS: He was sick and then he will pretend as if he was not sick.

DM: And he passed away in 2003. During 2001-2003, did SAMANCOR or any of the government organisations help you to take care of your husband?

NPS: No.

DM: How did you survive during that time because he wasn't working anymore?

NPS: I was just trying and one of my children was working.

DM: Did your husband get the retrenchment package from SAMANCOR?

NPS: Yes, he got the money but the money was very less but I don't know how much.

DM: Since the loss of your husband in 2003, how have you being surviving for the last 3-4 years by yourself?

NPS: I survive with the pension money.

AV: So do you receive pension from the government?

NPS: Yes.

DM: And do you also get assistance from your children?

NPS: Yes, they are helping

DM: Do you stay here by yourself or is there anyone here living with you?

NPS: Yes, I am alone and my child.

DM: I know you have the backyard, is there someone else living in your backyard?

NPS: No, I have put my tools, ceilings and my pots.

DM: And we are just coming to the end Paulina. Right at the beginning you said after 1994 you were hoping that things will get better, now 13 years on now in 2007 when you look back over the last 13 years, what do you think about? Not just herself but the bigger picture ... you said you wanted things to change and we heard of your experience ... What do you think has changed and what do you think has not changed?

NPS: Before 1994, there was no freedom; we were denied access to a lot of things. Things have changed - the state gives money to the poor. Pregnant women get money even though they are not working. They now have maternity leave which you get paid for even if you don't work.

DM: Ok, one last thing, is there anything Paulina that you want to say, something that we haven't asked you in the questions or you haven't told us, that you wanted to say?

NPS:....

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